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## **The geopolitics of provincialism and the political economy of the Orient in post-EU Lithuania**

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We all are others, and others are we.  
Gundega Repše *Apocrypha of Shadows* (1992: 39).

Intellectuals and politicians and many scholars of post-socialist Eastern Europe have been involved in translation; translation of Soviet totalitarianism into Western democracy, of centrally planned economy into market economy, local ways of association into civil society and the like. They have also been exploring the inadequacies of translation and self-translation as metaphors and analytical concepts like “uncertain transition,” “path dependency,” “corruption,” or “populism” show. Just to give one example, in recent study *Baltic Postcolonialism* (Kelertas 2006), the first systematic attempt to conceptualize Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia as postcolonial countries,<sup>1</sup> some authors argue that the Baltic people cannot escape their backwardness and inferiority, and continually engage in self-colonization (see, e.g., Kirss 2006, Salumets 2006, Kelertas 2006a). Possible new identities within Europe and the EU are either the ones of provincials, pathetic barbarians, or the exotic new “Easterners.” The EU is a new colonial empire in which the Balts are newly colonized, again hybrid, powerless, mimicking the colonizers, and suffering.

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<sup>1</sup> The book is a collection of articles by literary critics, philosophers and a linguist. Most of the authors are from the émigré diaspora and Western educated.

This paper introduces the concept of the geopolitics of provincialism to define East-oriented identity politics in post-EU Lithuania. It brings in the East, the newly rediscovered Orient, as a space and a geopolitical category. Here the East is neither a source nor a sign of powerlessness and backwardness, nor uncertainty, populism, and corruption, but a resource and sign of power, progress, and profit. I ask how East-oriented identities are produced in political and economic fields and analyze two cases: (1) the marketing of “Soviet” sausages which emerged in the food market in 2001 and proved highly popular and very profitable for several meat packing companies; and (2) G. Beresnevičius’s political thought in his book “Making Empire” (2003), which is the first systematic intellectual attempt to think of Lithuania’s East-oriented policy and identity.

Although the “Soviet” sausage and “Making Empire” projects propose different geopolitical and historical visions, they both share East-oriented versions of the “nation” of citizens or consumers. I argue that these examples constitute an alternative to West-oriented identities and ideologies which informed the liberation movement against the Soviet Union and later integration to the EU and NATO. They are also indicative of the emerging new national ideology which appropriates the now positively defined “East” as its key symbol.

### **The case of “Soviet” sausages**

The “Soviet” (*Tarybinės*) sausage industry in Lithuania was started by “Samsonas Co.Ltd.” in 1998. The company’s profits skyrocketed after it began to produce “Soviet” brands (LAFPMRA 2005), which in 2005 constituted more than 50 percent of all meat production by “Samsonas.”<sup>2</sup> In 2005 the company’s meat processing capacity was 700 tons of meat monthly (LAFPMRA 2005) or about three hundred fifty tons of meat for the “Soviet” brands. Taking into account that such capacity persists and knowing that there are about three and a half million inhabitants in Lithuania, one can estimate that an average Lithuanian citizen consumes at least 1.2 kilograms or 5.5 pounds of “Soviet”-labeled meat products per year.

“Samsonas’s” was awarded diplomas and medals for its “Soviet” production in a number of national competitions and fairs. The Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists

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<sup>2</sup> Personal communication with Rimas Frizinskas, the director for commerce of “Samsonas” and an employee of the meat-packing plant “Kauno mėsos kombinatas” in Soviet times. August 2005.

recognized “Soviet Doctor’s sausage” (“Tarybinė daktariška”) as “The Product of the Year 2001,” “Soviet Milk sausages” (“Tarybinės pieniškos”) as “The Product of the Year 2001” (a diploma), and “Soviet salami” (“Tarybinis saliamis”) as “The Product of the Year 2002” (a diploma), smoked “Soviet sausage” as “The Product of the Year 2004” (a gold medal), and smoked “Soviet hunter” sausages as “The Product of the Year 2005” (a gold medal).

At the end of 2002 “Vilniaus mėsos kombinatas Ltd.,” another meat-packing company, also started to produce “Soviet” brand sausages.<sup>3</sup> However, since “Samsonas” was the legal owner of the trademarks for the “Soviet” sausages (the “Soviet Doctor’s sausage” and the “Soviet Milk sausages” at that time), “Vilniaus mėsos kombinatas” had to change the name of its products. After negotiations “Vilniaus mėsos kombinatas” renamed its products to “Tarnybinis,” semantically different (it means “related to work, service”), however, phonetically and graphically a very similar word to “Tarybinis” (“Soviet”). “Samsonas,” objecting to the choice of “Tarnybinis,” brought “Vilniaus mėsos kombinatas” to court for unfair competition and the violation of trademark ownership rights.<sup>4</sup> The Appellate Court decision of May, 2004 prohibited “Vilniaus mėsa,” the company who took over “Vilniaus mėsos kombinatas” production and brands, from using “Tarnybinis” in commercial activity. “Vilniaus mėsa” changed the name to “Tradicinis” (“Traditional”). The company moved its “Soviet” brand market to Latvia where it is a rightful seller of “Soviet” sausages (they use the native Latvian term “Padomju” and Russian “Советская” for “Soviet”). Thus, symbolic markets utilizing “Soviet” also proliferate outside Lithuania.<sup>5</sup> Used in Lithuania, Latvia, and elsewhere “Soviet” products symbolically reunite consumers in the former Soviet space.

According to “Samsonas,” “Soviet” meat products mean a resolute search for quality and a return to the natural.<sup>6</sup> Rimgailė Vaitkienė, the former director of marketing for the company “Samsonas,” claimed that in Soviet times sausages were made without meat substitutes (*mėsos pakaitalai*); therefore, they were more natural and more delicious.<sup>7</sup> She also

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<sup>3</sup> In 2004 “Atria OYJ,” the Finnish company, bought 100% of “Vilniaus mėsos kombinatas” shares and established “Vilniaus mėsa.” Currently, “Vilniaus mėsa” has more than ten percent of the market share for meat products in Lithuania and produces about 200 brands of sausages and other meat products. “Samsonas” is a growing company which produces over 100 brands of sausages and other meat products.

<sup>4</sup> Vilnius *District* Court. Case No. 3K-3-461.

<sup>5</sup> They label not only sausages, but also other products, such as bread or dumplings. In Lithuania there are also Soviet dumplings (*Tarybiniai koldūnai*), Soviet calzone (*Tarybiniai čeburekai*), and Soviet bread (*Tarybinė duona*).

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.litfood-fair.com/samsonas/index.php?page=3>. Accessed on 06/13/2006.

<sup>7</sup> See: [http://www.takas.lt/pr/archyvas/?st=1&msg\\_id=440](http://www.takas.lt/pr/archyvas/?st=1&msg_id=440). Accessed on 02/13/2005.

thought that this factor was much more important to customers than the negative connotation of “Soviet.” Similarly, “Vilniaus mėsa’s” webpage, introducing its “Soviet” sausages sold in Latvia argues that the brand name does not mean a return to the Soviet system. It is a reminder about what was best in Soviet times, when no meat substitutes, such as soy, were used for meat products.<sup>8</sup> The extravagance of late Soviet times, saved for children, the sick, offered to guests, and served at dinner, birthday, and even on wedding tables,<sup>9</sup> now had to become a prosaic necessity.

Neither the recipes, nor the technology used to produce “Samsonas’s” “Soviet” sausages are “Soviet.” “Vilniaus mėsos kombinatas” and later its successor “Vilniaus mėsa” related their “Soviet” brands to the Soviet standard *GOST (Государственные стандарты СССР) 23670-79* common throughout the USSR. However, since “Vilniaus mėsa” does not sell its “Soviet” brands in Lithuania, ideas about authenticity do not proliferate there. In Lithuania the relation of “Soviet” sausages to Soviet times is triggered by the name “Soviet.” Many people associate *post*-Soviet “Soviet” sausages with Soviet time sausages.<sup>10</sup>

“Soviet” sausages engage people not only through taste and desire, but also aesthetically. Unlike sausages in Soviet times (which usually were sold unpackaged by weight), “Soviet” sausages have been nicely and individually packed with red stars, hammers and sickles or a smiling girl wearing a red scarf or happy well-dressed men, the images and symbols of the Soviet era.<sup>11</sup> Excessive and elaborate packaging makes these Soviet smiles

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<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.vilniausmesa.lt>. Accessed on 06/13/2006.

<sup>9</sup> Other meat dishes, such as steak, were more appropriate meals at birthday parties and more so at weddings. H. Martirosian reports that after the Soviets built a sausage factory in Armenia in the 1950s, Soviet-style sausages suddenly became fashionable and were even served as a delicacy at weddings. But, Martirosian continues, “the fad faded quickly. It was purely a phenomenon of the 1950s” (see Toomre 1997:208). Interviewees from Lithuania remembered serving sausages for special occasions in late Soviet times.

<sup>10</sup>Such associations are confirmed by other sources. Linguists who conducted evaluations of the term “Tarybinis” (“Soviet”) for the Court, also argued that the term “Soviet” (*tarybinė, tarybinės*) could invoke associations with Soviet period products, with recipes or technologies used in Soviet times. Various surveys also confirmed that many people associated “Samsonas’s” “Soviet” brands with Soviet times. According to the advertisement and image company “Serna” survey of June 20–25, 2003 in the five biggest cities of Lithuania (they interviewed 25–50 year old people), 45.6 percent of respondents associated “Soviet Milk Sausages” and “Soviet Doctor’s Sausage” with Soviet period products, 35.2 percent had no associations. According to the “Sprinter” representative survey of November 24–29, 2003, consumers of the “Soviet” brands associated the name *Tarybiniai* (“Soviet”) with Soviet times (20 percent), quality products (16 percent), and delicious sausages (14 percent). See Vilnius *District Court*. Case No. 3K-3-461.

<sup>11</sup> Packaging with stars, hammers and sickles was discontinued in the last years. Packaging with icons displaying men and women was started in 2005. From 2001 to 2005 it was predominantly the name “Soviet” which attracted consumers’ attention.

shine in the literal and metaphorical sense.<sup>12</sup> Smiling, happy, and healthy-looking men and women, staring at the consumer from the packages of the “Soviet” brands, do not remind of Stalinist horrors, but of Soviet-state fashioned (even if never delivered to the majority of the population) optimism and happiness (cf. Fitzpatrick 1999, Kotkin 1995, Grant 1995, Gronow 1993). Images of people are signs of youth, beauty, energy, fitness, romance, and enjoyment. They promise pleasurable positive involvement in an aesthetic post-Soviet community. Positive involvement with the Soviet past reproduces visions of the present. Production and consumption of “Soviet” sausages re-create the world which people would have liked to have lived in in Soviet times or would like to live in the present.

The market provides alternatives to official political history by decontextualizing and reinventing the key political symbol “Soviet.” “Soviet” sausages are stripped of their original context of an economy of scarcity or the horrors of the Soviet regime, of associations with the orientalist imaginings of “Soviet” as “foreign,” “oppressive,” “inferior,” and “backward.”<sup>13</sup> They largely recall a time that never existed (see also Berdahl 1999 on Germany) and food that only a minority tasted.<sup>14</sup> They re-create the past as well as the present by associating “Soviet” with quality, luxury, nativeness, goodness, happiness, and naturalness. The market also rearticulates the symbolic geography of the “East,” where all things “Soviet” are traditionally located, and the “West,” the common synonym of “Europe,” to produce a post-socialist moment as “Soviet” and “European.” Marketing and consumption of “Soviet” sausages do not subvert the international and national discourse on “Soviet” and “Europe” or “East” and “West.” However, they bring to life an alternative to the existing symbolic regimes of the new post-Soviet European states as well as a new

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<sup>12</sup> See Gerald Creed (2002) for discussion of Bulgarian views of foreign food packaging.

<sup>13</sup> According to the *Modern Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language Soviet (Tarybinis (-ė))* means “Belonging to the Soviet rule or state. For example, Soviet regime.” (*Dabartinės lietuvių kalbos žodynas* 2000:831). The “foreignness” of “Soviet” is embedded in the language. In the 1990s linguists tactically decided to promote the borrowing “Soviet” (*sovietinis*) rather than a Lithuanian derivative, thus, a native term for “Soviet” (*tarybinis*) for communication in public spaces. While many other borrowings have been skimmed from standard Lithuanian, *sovietinis* was given the privilege to float in speaking and writing, thus, to be foreign and to mean it. Some people say that those who use the native term *tarybinis* for “Soviet” show their benevolence to the Soviet times (see also Klumbytė 2006a).

<sup>14</sup> Although many think they did, in late Soviet times many people did not consume sausages “without meat substitutes.” The Soviet-time food situation began to stagnate in the 1970s when Leonid Brezhnev was the leader of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. All the Soviet republics were requested to economize on meat; therefore, various meat substitutes were used for sausages with the exception of the premium brands, distributed in special stores for special citizens like the nomenclature, World War II veterans, and mothers with large families.

geopolitical vision of a community of consumers. Many of those who were dissatisfied with the former Soviet state and many things “Soviet” that it signified, appropriate “Soviet,” reconcile it with the European present, and reclaim their subjectivity through voluntary consumer choice (cf. Özyürek 2004).

### **G. Beresnevičius’s book “Making Empire” (2003)**

Gintaras Beresnevičius (1961-2006) was a well-known Lithuanian cultural leader, scholar, professor, writer, and journalist. His major field of interest was religion, especially religion of the ancient Balts. His book “Making Empire. An Outline of Lithuanian Ideology: The Geopolitics of the European Union and Lithuania in the First Half of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” was written before the referendum for Lithuania’s membership in the EU in 2003. Beresnevičius claimed that by joining the EU and NATO “we are losing statehood and independence” (p.41) and that “there is nothing to celebrate” (p.41). However, he did not see any other alternative (p.41). For him integration into these structures was an opportunity and a mandate to East-oriented imperialism, which he introduces in “Making Empire.” According to Beresnevičius, Lithuanians do not have to be submissive and miserable, they have to take over the power in the EU.

The first part of “Making Empire” introduces Lithuania as an imperial country and its people as the people of empire (p.13). The imagined empire is the territory of Lithuania’s Grand Duchy in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, namely, present-day Ukraine, Belarus, and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia (p.5). This territory is “our territory,” which “can and has to be controlled by Lithuania, approximately to the rivers of the Don and the Volga” (p.8), according to Beresnevičius.

The author argues that the major present-day problems derive from the fact that Lithuanian imperialism is suppressed. “We are above the others and, therefore, many of our everyday misfortunes derive from the loss of empire” (p.13). Lithuanians commit crimes, unite into mafias, engage in corruption, drown in alcoholism or commit suicide because they cannot express their imperial warrior personality. Beresnevičius claims that Lithuanians are “the descendants of imperialist leaders and Crimea, Kiev, the steppes of Ukraine, Smolensk, Novgorod, the Black Sea and Curonia (Kuršas) are “the territories where our thoughts, ideological stereotypes and real politics intertwine” (p.8). To resolve current problems and

secure the future Lithuanians have to think imperialist and to become political and economic leaders in that area (p.5).

Beresnevičius's "Making Empire" is in contrast to the pessimism and cynicism overarching other intellectual thought in Lithuania. A well-known historian E. Gudavičius (2004) recently argued that Lithuanians are the last pagans and the last beggars. Present-day poverty, according to Gudavičius, is the heritage of our backward history. Although Beresnevičius does not deny the problematic social, political, and economic situation, provinciality for him is a source of power and vitality. The author calls Lithuanians "barbarians" and their empire the successful barbarian empire defined by "unlimited freedom when compared to Eastern and Western absolutism" in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (p.13).

In the second part of the book Beresnevičius outlines the rationale, ideology and action for empire-making. Among his propositions are the founding of a Lithuanian army which would provide meaningful involvement for currently suffering "warriors." This army would defend European Union interests in the East and provide security for the EU's eastern borders. Another empire-making strategy would be a peaceful influence through cultural, social, political and economic exchange, and the creation of a common zone of values and ideals.

Empire-making is a national and European project. The empire would create a safe space for cooperation and business (p.15) and a zone of Lithuanian influence (p.16). Making the empire would provide goals, identity, and power. It would be a way to escape provinciality and extinction (p.16), and to become an important medium between the EU and other countries whose differences in mentality Europe cannot internalize (p.15). It would extend Europe to the East (p.15) and give European civilization the impulse toward a real life (p.15).

Beresnevičius's recent death at the hands of some of his barbarians (he is assumed to have been killed or left to die by the police in a drunken state, although the police deny this) gave the book its second life. In memory of Beresnevičius, the geopolitical visions of the state inspired by "Making Empire" were given attention in various forums, intellectual circles and commemorative events. "Making Empire" was publicly discussed by representatives from the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry, the Institute for Civil Society, the Center for Strategic Studies or the prestigious Institute of International Relations and Political Science at Vilnius University (the publisher of the book) and the School of Political Science and Diplomacy at

Vytautas Magnus University. Beresnevičius posthumously was awarded the prestigious national scholarly prize for his work on religion and mythology.

### **The geopolitics of provincialism**

József Böröcz (2006) recently argued that the geopolitics of Europe can be defined by the rule of European goodness and the rule of European difference. *The rule of European goodness* posits as real a European normative superiority that is unambiguously benign and makes a historical truth claim that cannot be empirically true (p.125). According to *the rule of European difference* this goodness is distributed unevenly. This “uneven distribution of goodness can be mapped on the west-east, north-south, and/or northwest-southeast axes, or the west-centric-periphery structure, of the continent of Europe, so that locations in the eastern, southern, south-western, and/or simply peripheral parts are marred by the insufficiency, absence, or opposite of goodness” (p.129-130). Böröcz claims that “goodness, an essentially ‘European’ quality, is found in its highest empirical density in western (northern, north-western, or west-central) Europe” (p.130). Beresnevičius’s geopolitical thinking resonates with Böröcz’s ideas. Beresnevičius argues that “from the center (read: “Western Europe”) the periphery looks demonic” (p.29); “We are a province with low economic performance, corruption, and mafia” (p.310); “We know Western arrogance and irony directed towards us— this is the expression of their horror” (p.32).

By introducing the concept of *the geopolitics of provincialism*, which in my case defines the East-oriented projects of “Soviet” sausages and “Making Empire,” I argue that European goodness can be circumscribed at its periphery. The geopolitics of provincialism posits the alternative topos of goodness in which the province assumes centrality. Beresnevičius argued that “we will escape provinciality and become the leader of the region” (p.71). For him “The periphery is always the reservoir of power and rebirth” (p.32). Similarly, “Soviet” sausage producers bring the delegitimized and peripheralized Soviet tastes and identities to the fore. Both projects are alternative national ideologies arising in response to the unequal distribution of goodness and difference in the EU and transgressing some central European values like Western Europe’s normative superiority and the ideology of transnationalism. In the geopolitics of provincialism, Europe does not equal normative goodness anymore.

Normative goodness is projected on the other topos, in my case, on the East and East-related semiotic space.

Unlike Beresnevičius, “Soviet” sausage producers do not speak about provinciality. Nevertheless, “Soviet” sausages could also be considered an example of the geopolitics of provincialism. “Western” or European goodness, circulating in the market in the form of new products, which are imported or produced using new technologies and food ideologies, is circumscribed by “Soviet” sausages.<sup>15</sup> “Soviet” sausages link goodness to the officially discredited Soviet past, to the reimagined “East,” which is a topos of nature and good health, authenticity and tradition. Consumers of “Soviet” brands claim that “Soviet” sausages are *like* the sausages in Soviet times; i.e., natural, healthful, and integral to their bodies. They are not used to or do not like the “foreign” ones produced with meat substitutes and “in a new fashion” (see Klumbyte 2006b). “Soviet” sausages elevate the Soviet past to the level of tradition. They reinforce consumer difference from Western Europeans by giving centrality and authority to the imaginings, tastes, and desires of recreated Soviet times.

### **The post-Soviet East**

The “East” and “Easternness” are the post-Soviet artifacts, given a semiotic “substance” and credibility by post-Soviet entrepreneurs and intellectuals.<sup>16</sup> In the case of “Soviet” sausages the recreated Soviet tradition is natural, modern, and prestigious. Many consumers of “Soviet” sausages also remember the Soviet past as a time and space of harmony, happiness, security, social solidarity, and personal welfare. The Eastern tradition is a projection of the ideal self and ideal society and history onto the recent past.

In the case of “Making Empire” the East is a frontier for political, economic, and sociocultural expansion. It is emptied of contemporary culture and post-15<sup>th</sup> century history. Time is contracted in visions of “Making Empire.” It does not flow the usual way like in historical narratives through events, conquests, transitions, and sociocultural changes. It is

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<sup>15</sup> See Buechler and Buechler (1999) on opposition to capitalist hegemony through taste in post-socialist Germany.

<sup>16</sup> See also Boyer (2001) on branding “East” Germany.

the cyclical time of a myth. “Making Empire” produces a chronotope with the time and space of a common mythic belonging in the East. This commonality is the one of mythic codes and historical memory.

“Making Empire” invites to westernize the East. By reconquering the Eastern frontier Lithuania will expand and preserve aging Europe and build a geopolitical buffer zone. It will carve out a space for Europe among the growing or decaying empires, such as the U.S.A., Russia, China, or India. The EU also recognizes “Making Empire” as the EU/Western project of the East. At the Festival of Europe 2003 organized by the European Movement “Making Empire” was nominated as Lithuania’s “Contribution of the Year for Europe.”<sup>17</sup>

“Soviet” sausages are also a “Western” project of the East. They domesticate the West to imbue the East-oriented ideology with West-related goodness. The producers claim that “Soviet” sausages are produced using “mature Western technologies.”<sup>18</sup> “Technology,” a marketing tool, associates sausages with progress, prestige, success, and the West. Thus, “Soviet” sausages appeal to both Soviet-linked tastes and sentiments *and* West-oriented desires and imaginaries.

“Making Empire” provides the images of the national community, sets the goals for national action, and embraces national history and sentiments. Therefore, it can be considered an example of a new East-oriented nationalism. This national East-oriented community may or may not read “Making Empire,” as Anderson (1983) may have it. According to Beresnevičius, it will emerge through common interests and action.

Unlike “Making Empire” which invokes a nation through mythological, religious and geopolitical codes and articulates nation and imagination that does not exist yet, the “Soviet” sausages project a national community of consumers, defined by common experience of the Soviet past. As the company’s profit and “Soviet” sausages popularity show, the “Soviet” sausage community has been easy to invent.<sup>19</sup> However, not all consumers have participated in this invention.

Recognition and misrecognition of “Soviet” sausages have depended on the political values which have been attached to them or subtracted from them. Producers market them

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<sup>17</sup> [http://www.europeanmovement.org/downloads/Brochure\\_9Mai\\_EN\\_B.pdf](http://www.europeanmovement.org/downloads/Brochure_9Mai_EN_B.pdf). Accessed on 04/04/2007.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.litfood-fair.com/samsonas/index.php?page=3>. Accessed on 06/13/2006.

<sup>19</sup> On cultural marketing and making of people through marketing and consumption see Dávila 2001, Mazzarella 2005, Boyer 2001.

as “politically innocent.” In their representations sausages are about a bare life and pure taste (which was “better” in Soviet times). Some consumers who voice their dissatisfaction with “Soviet” brands group “Soviet” sausages with other things “Soviet,” such as the Soviet state, deportations, oppression, communism, and the KGB and refuse to buy “Soviet” sausages. However, many others buy “Soviet” sausages and integrate them into their meaningful worlds and biographies. These consumers also reproduce post-Soviet “Soviet” imaginaries in their communication. Last summer I spotted sausages which, although originally called “Town’s people sausages,” produced by the company “Runeda,” were relabeled as “Soviet” by a salesclerk at the market. When I asked why there is a “Soviet” label if the sausages are not “Soviet,” the salesclerk told to me that she relabeled the sausages because they are very good and delicious like in Soviet times. The elderly woman standing beside me in line reminded me out loud that “we ate our fill under the *kacapai* (Russians, derogatory)” bringing onto the stage the post-socialist drama—the subjective hunger of the present and remembered fullness and goodness of the past “under the Russians.” The “Soviet” on “Town’s people sausages” indexed this goodness and was a symbol for connection and communication.

Both the “Making Empire” and the “Soviet” sausage projects are critical of post-socialism. The past and the future in “Making Empire” is defined by power, expansion, success, recognition, freedom, and authority. The present is the one of social decay. The “Soviet” sausage past is the one of authenticity, naturalness, health, competence, harmony, and gastronomic indulgence. It is a critique of the present: of bad taste, poor quality, foreign products as well as of post-Soviet transitions in general.<sup>20</sup> Dalia, a coat room employee in her 40s from the city of Kaunas, who remembered the Soviet period as “the better” and was critical of post-socialism, spoke to me:

Meat does not look nice in shops [at present]. One sausage is brown (*ruda*), another also, until you find something. Well, there is a variety, but, well, all those sausages are... Earlier [in Soviet times] there were few, you went to a shop, you bought it. Now you search and search and all of them look suspicious. Once I bought a rosy one. I think there were some kind of colorings added (*dažu pridėta*). Earlier a sausage was a sausage, you knew that you are eating meat, well, maybe there was some starch in it, anyway. I don’t know... There were times, there were good times then [she smiles].

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<sup>20</sup> I argue elsewhere (Klumbyte 2006b) that gastronomic and sensory critique is part of an individual’s negativity toward post-socialism and his or her subalternity.

As if engaging in a dialogue with others who have a different opinion, the woman added: “They say we ate bones. No, we ate meat all the time. We didn’t eat bones. Really.” Her mother sighed in agreement: “The best *šoninė* (a type of bacon, *Keiserfleisch*) was two rubles.”

Both projects are also alternatives to West-oriented identity politics and ideologies. The embodied Western gaze of themselves and their lives defined by incompetence as neoliberal citizens-consumers and as “inadequate” translations is resisted by self-dignifying narratives about the East. Looking at the East people are possessed with power, wealth, recognition, and authority, rather than dispossessed (cf. Humphrey 2002) of property, opportunities, neoliberal personalities (see Dunn 2004) and post-socialist common sense.

### **A portrait of the “Soviet” sausages consumer**

Dalia worked for a small salary. Her family lived with her parents in a small two room and a kitchen apartment. In Soviet times she was a sock sorter in a factory. She lost her job after privatization and restructuring of this factory. She thought it was much easier and happier in Soviet times and did not expect her life to improve in the European Union. In agreement to political campaign rhetoric before the referendum for Lithuania’s membership in the EU in 2004, she believed that maybe life was going to improve for her children.

Dalia as well as many other underemployed or unemployed and the pensioners from rural or urban areas tend to speak about the late Soviet period food situation positively. In her case the shortages of Soviet times are insignificant compared to present shortages of money, subjective hunger (cf. Caldwell 2004) and suppression of desires. She claims that “there are goods, but there is no money” and minimizes her market participation (see Creed 2002). Pensioners who live on their meager pensions or the unemployed can rarely buy sausages, which only seldom were “thrown out” (*išmesdavo*); i.e., put out for purchase, in Soviet times.

Dalia claimed not to have experienced denigration in Soviet-time food lines nor to have felt oppressed or have resisted the Soviet order of things. She recalled a happier social and individual life (cf. Burrell 2003 on Poland, Paxson 2005 on Russia) when she had things to put on the table at parties, which are seldom given today, or when she got her beloved

hunter sausages (*medžiotojų dešrelės*) “from under the counter” (*iš po stalo*, i.e., using *blat* relations (see Ledeneva 1998)). The “better times” were times with full tables and full stomachs. At present emptier tables and stomachs is a daily reminder of a changed social position in post-socialist society as well as of marginalization and powerlessness.

For people like Dalia consumption of “Soviet” sausages creates a space for social and individual reconciliation (cf. Battaglia 1995) as well as for continuity of a social self and social history. This is why “Soviet” sausages, even if expensive, make a difference on her dinner table. Like in *kula* exchange in Gawa, where shells and men are reciprocally agents of each other’s value definition (see Munn 1986), buying a “Soviet” sausage, even if only one, is a statement about one’s value (as well as a judgment about the value of a “Soviet” sausage). Even if nostalgias are different (different people long for different goodness), the radiance of the Soviet past creates a space for the “Soviet” sausage renaissance and the revival of the East.

### **A frame for “Making Empire” people**

Even if written in a popular way, “Making Empire” has not been discussed outside intellectual circles and the political sphere. Even in these spaces it is perceived as an intellectual provocation, since many find it hard to reconcile the Eastern imperialism of the 15<sup>th</sup> century with Lithuania’s post-EU foreign policy priorities (even if they overlap geographically). Beresnevičius’s language of empire cannot easily be integrated with the post-Soviet vocabulary of rights, multiculturalism, and democratic pluralism. Furthermore, V.Savukynas, a journalist, argues that Beresnevičius was well-aware that concepts like “Lithuanian nature” (and one can add: mentality, geotectonic plates, shared personality traits) are not used in scholarship anymore (and in politics as well). However, Beresnevičius did use them on purpose (Savukynas 2006). Was it a way to make “Making Empire” more appealing to a wider readership? A way to create a new ideological language of identity? To connect to ostensibly existing national sentiments? The ironic style of the book itself indexes the author’s distance from any other visions of the nation and the state, his belief and disbelief in his own metanarrative, his pretense at something essential and substantial and, at the same time, inconclusive (the subtitle is “An *Outline* of Lithuanian Ideology,” emphasis added).

However, the book cannot be dismissed as trivial. It sums up elitist and popular sentiments about the state, nation, and the everyday. It addresses the sentiments of incompleteness, inadequacy, provinciality and subalternity in the EU. It gives a shape to concerns about identity, nationhood, and statehood. It also provides a platform for widespread euroskepticism. It explains, in its own peculiar way, why Lithuanians are unhappy and commit suicides as well as other instances of social decay. It outlines the state's domestic and foreign policy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As I argued, the semiotic universe recreated in "Making Empire" and "Soviet" sausage projects largely overlap. They can be grouped with nostalgia for the past, which, according to Mitja Velikonja in the new millennium descended across the former socialist region as the iron curtain once did,<sup>21</sup> and so-called populist sentiments (see Klumbyte 2006a) which variously critique the neoliberal present and which are often dismissed as accidental and trivial, as inadequacies of West-oriented translations. In my perspective to dismiss these processes as inconsequential is to neglect emerging power, authority, pretension, meaning, and value circulation which increasingly define post-Soviet social and political history.

In Lithuania West-oriented nationalism was important in defining identity in opposition to the Eastern history in the Soviet Union as well as justifying secession from the USSR and later integration into Western structures, namely, the EU and NATO. The East-oriented national ideologies are essential for domesticating and transgressing the provincial status in the EU as well as subalternization following from this status. These are positive, future-looking and alternative modernity projects. They assume the position of power, authority, and competence. The newly redefined East, having features of both, the Orient and the Occident (see Said 1995, Todorova 1994, Wolff 1994, Carrier 1992) is at the epicenter of this imagination.

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<sup>21</sup> Maria Todorova in her opening address at the conference devoted to post-communist nostalgia at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (April 7–8, 2006) cited Mitja Velikonja's words about descending nostalgia. For a discussion of post-communist nostalgia see Todorova, Maria 2006 "From Utopia to Propaganda and Back."

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