

SOCIAL MEMORY, IDENTITY AND NARRATIVES OF DECLINE IN A LITHUANIAN NUCLEAR PLANT COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

This article¹ analyses how the inhabitants of Visaginas construct their past and present. The first part of the article presents the ways the informants talked of the period 1970s-1980s, i.e. when they came to Lithuania, to the construction site of Visaginas (Sniechkus) and the nuclear power plant. The second part of the article discusses how the informants described their and the community's social, economic situation in the post-Soviet period. The author discusses why the informants tend to construct the Soviet and post-Soviet periods in particular ways and provides parallels with other anthropological works. The article is based on data collected during ethnographic fieldwork conducted by the author in Visaginas in 2000-2004.

KEY WORDS: socio-cultural anthropology, memory, decline, uncertainty, identity, ethnic groups, Ignalina nuclear power plant.

ANOTACIJA

Šiame straipsnyje analizuojama, kaip Visagino miesto gyventojai konstruoja savo ir miesto praeitį bei dabartį. Pirmojoje straipsnio dalyje apžvelgiama, kaip informantai kalba apie XX a. 8–9-ąjį dešimtmečius, t. y. laikotarpį, kai jie atvyko į Lietuvą, į Visagino (tuometinio Sniečkaus) ir atominės elektrinės statybas. Antrojoje straipsnio dalyje aptariama, kokios pagrindinės temos išryškėja informantams kalbant apie jų asmeninę ir Visagino miesto bendruomenės socialinę, ekonominę situaciją posovietiniu laikotarpiu. Autorė diskutuoja, kodėl informantai vienaip ar kitaip konstruoja vėlyvojo sovietmečio ir posovietmečio laikotarpį, aptariamos paralelės su kitose posovietinės erdvės bendruomenėse atliktais antropologiniais tyrimėjimais. Straipsnio šaltiniai – autorės lauko tyrimų metu 2000–2004 m. surinkta medžiaga.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: sociokultūrinė antropologija, atmintis, nuosmukis, socialinis netikrumas (uncertainty), tapatumas, etninės grupės, Ignalinos atominė elektrinė.

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Introduction

The construction works of the Ignalina nuclear power plant were started in the 1970s. According to historians, the decision to build a nuclear power plant in the northeast Lithuania was made by central authorities of the Soviet Union. As people still remember, construction workers and engineers from different places of the Soviet Union came to this site, which was called *vsesojuznaja udarnaja komsomolskaja stroika* (vanguard construction works by the Comsomol). A substantial number of the original construction workers stayed in Lithuania and settled in the neighbouring town, housing plant employees a few kilometres from the nuclear power plant. In the Soviet period,

¹ This paper is a slightly revised version of a chapter of the author's doctoral dissertation, which was defended and published at the Department of Social Anthropology, Lund University in 2005 (see Sliavaite, Kristina (2005) *From Pioneers to Target Group: Social Change, Ethnicity and Memory in a Lithuanian Nuclear Power Plant Community*. Lund Monographs in Social Anthropology 16. Lund University). By "nuclear power plant community" the author refers to the general community of Visaginas town – as fieldwork revealed, in the eyes of local people, the Ignalina nuclear power plant and the nearby town of Visaginas are seen as one interdependent unit and is so treated in this paper.

this town of plant employees and their families was called Sniechkus. In the post-Soviet period it was renamed Visaginas. Presently, the population of Visaginas is around 30,000 and the majority of inhabitants are Russians by nationality². The plant started to operate in the 1980s. The first reactor of the Ignalina nuclear power plant ceased operation on the 31st of December 2004. The second reactor was decommissioned at the end of 2009³.

Algirdas Kavaliauskas notes that the specialization of Visaginas was initially planned as electrical energy production and this resulted in the low diversification of the town's industry⁴. In 1999, the nuclear power plant employed 5,108 persons⁵. Ninety-nine (or even more) percent of plant employees reside in Visaginas⁶. According to monitor data of 2002⁷, 86 percent of the companies in Visaginas predicted that their financial situation would worsen in the event of the Ignalina nuclear power plant closure⁸. During the fieldwork, most of my informants, even those who were not employed at the plant, argued that they are economically and socially dependent on the functioning of the plant. The Ignalina nuclear power plant is thus an important guarantor of the economic and social welfare of the local population. At present there are new discussions and projects to build a new, modern nuclear power plant to replace the closed one. This project could unite the Baltic States and Poland, and is considered as a kind of guarantee of energy independence of these countries⁹.

Anthropologist Kajsa Ekholm Friedman argued for the importance of studying societies in decline or in social crisis¹⁰. During the fieldwork in Visaginas, from August 2000 to the beginning of 2004, it was evident that the plant, built during the Soviet period would be closed. At that time, however, there were no real projects of construction of a new modern plant in the place of closed one as there are now. This paper aims at analysing how informants, inhabitants of Visaginas, construct their past and present. How do they construct their lives in Soviet Lithuania? How are post-Soviet social, economic transformations evaluated and why in this particular way? Paul Connerton argues that our experiences of the present are shaped by the model of the past we construct, and, vice versa¹¹. I do not consider my informants' narratives as "objective" historical accounts. As argued by Elizabeth Tonkin, people's recollections are shaped by their particular life histories and the

² Lietuvos statistikos departamentas. Gyventojai pagal lytį, amžių, tautybę ir tikybą. Surašymas 2001 / Population by Sex, Age, Ethnicity and Religion. Population Census 2001. Vilnius: Lietuvos statistikos departamentas, 2002, p. 166; KAVALIAUSKAS, Algirdas. *Visaginas (1975 – 1999)*. Vilnius: Jandrija, 1999, p. 59.

³ On the history of the town and the plant, see: KAVALIAUSKAS, A. (...), 1999; KAVALIAUSKAS, Algirdas. *Visaginas. Istorijos fragmentai (1972 – 2002)*. Vilnius: Jandrija, 2003.

⁴ KAVALIAUSKAS, A. (...), 1999, p. 218–219.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

⁶ KAVALIAUSKAS, A. (...), 2003, p. 314.

⁷ In 2002 the researchers from the Institute of Geology and Geography (Lithuania) along with the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania monitored the social and economic situation in the region of the Ignalina nuclear power plant, which includes Zarasai and Ignalina regions and the municipality of Visaginas. See: BAUBINAS, Ričardas; BURNEIKA, Donatas; DAUGIRDAS, Vidmantas; KRIAUCIŪNAS, Edis & RIBOKAS, Gintaras. *Ignalinos AE regiono socialinis ekonominis monitoringas – 2002 m.* Socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministerija, Geologijos ir geografijos institutas, Regioninės geografijos sektorius, 2002. Available at: http://www.ukmin.lt/files/energetika/branduoline_energetika/monitoringo_ataskaita_2002.doc (accessed on 2005 01 15).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁹ See, for example: GRIZIBAUSKIENĖ, Eugenija. Naujoji elektrinė – ekonominės nepriklausomybės vardan. *Veidas*, vol. 46, p. 38–40, 2006.

¹⁰ EKHOLOM FRIEDMAN, Kajsa. *Catastrophe and Creation: The Transformation of an African Culture*. Chur, Paris: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991, p. xi.

¹¹ CONNERTON, Paul. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 2.

context of the interview¹². What is important is that these narratives of the past are closely linked with the informant's identity¹³ and, therefore, examination of my informants' representations of the past also entails an examination of their group identity.

The first part of the article presents the ways the informants constructed the late Soviet period. I will analyse how informants were talking of the period 1970s-1980s (mainly of the years 1975-1988), i.e. when they came to Lithuania, to the construction of Visaginas (Sniechkus) and the plant. I will present how informants conceptualized their motivations to come to Lithuania, the ways they depicted construction work of the plant and the town, how they perceive themselves and their colleagues back then. In the second part of the paper, I will sum up the main themes informants touched on when describing their and the community's social, economic situation in the post-Soviet period. In the concluding part of the paper, I will discuss some parallels between the situation of people in Visaginas and the Copperbelt mineworkers in Zambia, studied by James Ferguson¹⁴.

It is not surprising that the way people construct their past (and particularly Soviet past) is a popular object of investigation among social scientists¹⁵. A number of studies revealed that certain groups of population in different countries express nostalgia for the Soviet past or for some of its elements¹⁶. Oral history is an important source of investigation for historians: Algirdas Kavaliauskas, in his study of history of Visaginas and Ignalina nuclear power plant, uses people's biographical memories, and many of them provide information on severe conditions during construction and the hard work building the town and the plant¹⁷.

The Lithuanian anthropologist Neringa Klumbytė, in her study of how people in three villages in Lithuania, as well as some city dwellers, construct past and present, argues that the post-Soviet period is often perceived by her informants as social and individual regression, a decline, while the late Soviet period is linked with welfare¹⁸. Referring to the post-Soviet period, people in the villages mentioned to Klumbytė destruction of buildings, moral degeneration, injustice, unemployment, poverty, begging children, alcoholism, crime, other negative social phenomena, while late Soviet period was related with progress and social and economic security¹⁹. Neringa Klumbytė

¹² TONKIN, Elizabeth. *Narrating our Past: The Social Construction of Oral History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 3.

¹³ FENTRESS, James & WICKHAM, Chris. *Social Memory*. Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1992, p. 7.

¹⁴ See: FERGUSON, James. *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999.

¹⁵ See, for example: KRUKAUSKIENĖ, Eugenija; ŠUTINIENĖ, Irena; TRINKŪNIENĖ, Inija & VOSYLIŪTĖ, Anelė. *Socialinė atmintis: minėjimai ir užmaršty*. Vilnius: Socialinių tyrimų institutas, Eugrimas, 2003.

¹⁶ See: BERDAHL, Daphne. *Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999; KIDECKEL, David A. *Getting By in Postsocialist Romania: Labor, the Body and Working-Class Culture*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008; KLUMBYTĖ, Neringa. *Dabarties istorijos paraščių žmonės: atsiminimai apie sovietmetį ir kasdienybės patirtys kaimo bendruomenėse*. *Politologija*, 2004, vol. 3(35), p. 63–84; KLUMBYTĖ, Neringa. *Ethnography of Voting: Nostalgia, Subjectivity, and Popular Politics in Post-Socialist Lithuania*. Ph.D. dissertation. Department of Anthropology, University of Pittsburgh, 2006; KLUMBYTĖ, Neringa. *Post-Soviet Publics and Nostalgia for Soviet Times*. In: Ingo W. Schröder & Asta Vonderau (eds.). *Changing Economies and Changing Identities in Postsocialist Eastern Europe*. Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia. Berlin: LIT, 2008, p. 27–45; LANKAUSKAS, Gediminas. *Apie sensorinę socializmo atmintį*. *Lietuvos etnologija: Socialinės antropologijos ir etnologijos studijos*. *Lithuanian Ethnology: Studies in Social Anthropology and Ethnology*, 2006, vol. 6(15), p. 47–71; RIES, Nancy. *Russian Talk: Culture & Conversation during Perestroika*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997; YURCHAK, Alexei. *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006; etc.

¹⁷ See: KAVALIAUSKAS, A. (...), 2003.

¹⁸ KLUMBYTĖ, N. (...) 2004; for more, see: KLUMBYTĖ, N. (...) 2006.

¹⁹ See: KLUMBYTĖ, N. (...) 2004.

argues that the ways her informants constructed the Soviet past and talked of the post-Soviet period are shaped by changes in their social status, present social marginalization and argues that there is a dialectical relationship between past and present²⁰. According to Neringa Klumbytė, “the memories are comments on the post-socialist changes and personal experiences of post-socialism”²¹. The ways people talked of Soviet and post-Soviet realities in villages studied by Klumbytė, empirical examples they were giving to the researcher to ground their arguments, were in many aspects very similar to the ways people in Visaginas were telling me their narratives.

Lithuanian sociologists Natalija Kasatkina and Tadas Leončikas, in their analysis of some interviews with Visaginas inhabitants, argue that the period in the past is considered by their informants as the best period in the history of Visaginas²², while the decision to decommission the Ignalina nuclear power plant is perceived as one of “critical moments”²³ and is related to the rise of a number of unwelcome social phenomena in the town as well as loss of former social security²⁴. Kasatkina and Leončikas argue that the survey conducted by them in 2001-2002 demonstrates that Russians in Lithuania tend to assess their personal social status as getting worse during last decade²⁵. Kasatkina and Leončikas explain these attitudes of worsening personal social status by change of status of Russians (from national majority in the Soviet Union to minority in post-Soviet Lithuania), sense of social insecurity²⁶ and social marginalization²⁷.

I fully agree with the statements of these authors; however, I will suggest some other related interpretations of why my informants constructed Soviet and post-Soviet periods in the ways they did. The empirical data of this paper comes from ethnographic fieldwork which I conducted in Visaginas from August 2000 to the beginning of 2004, before the actual closure of the first reactor of the plant. The main body of data was collected between August 2000 and December 2002. In 2003, and at the beginning of 2004, some additional data was collected²⁸. Altogether, during doctoral fieldwork I conducted more than 50 in-depth open-ended interviews with people of different age (from 18 to 80 years old). In this paper, however, I rely only on part of my doctoral fieldwork material. Here I analyze only interviews with informants who lived a substantial part of their lives under the Soviet system. The youngest informants I refer to in this paper, at the time of fieldwork, were in their forties. However, the majority of them were in their 50s and 60s, and, most of them came to Lithuania to construct Visaginas and the Ignalina nuclear power plant. Most of the interviews were audio-taped. The majority of my informants were Russians by nationality and the majority of interviews were conducted in the Russian language. The informants I refer to in this paper were of different educational backgrounds, different professions, many of them were already retired. During the fieldwork period, I worked at one of the local NGOs as a volunteer. My work at the NGO, participation at some public and private events in the community, also supplied me with rich empirical data. In order to protect the identity of informants, I do not use in paper real names or family names of my informants.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 64–66.

²¹ Ibid, p. 83.

²² KASATKINA, Natalija & LEONČIKAS, Tadas. *Lietuvos etninių grupių adaptacija: kontekstas ir eiga*. Vilnius: Eugrimas, 2003, p. 183.

²³ Ibid, p. 185.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 186.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 224–225.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 113–115.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 136.

²⁸ For more, see: SLIAVAITE, Kristina. *From Pioneers to Target Group: Social Change, Ethnicity and Memory in a Lithuanian Nuclear Power Plant Community*. Lund: Lund Monographs in Social Anthropology, No. 16, 2005.

I. Constructing the Soviet period

Motivations of (im)migration to Lithuania

Algirdas Kavaliauskas has explained the influx of people from other parts of the Soviet Union to the construction site in northeast Lithuania as a result of a lack of local specialists and for political reasons attributed to the central authorities in Moscow²⁹. The people involved in the construction works of the plant and the town were mainly those who moved from other parts of the Soviet Union³⁰. According to Algirdas Kavaliauskas, part of the immigrants were so called “children of *Sredmash*”³¹, i.e. those who were under the rule of a special ministry, worked in the secret nuclear and other industry sectors of the economy and were directed to the construction works in Lithuania³². Kavaliauskas names different people’s motivations of coming to the construction site in Lithuania³³.

Based on my interview data, it is possible to name a few main factors behind (im)migration to the construction site in north-eastern Lithuania. One group of informants said that they were officially sent by the Ministry of *Sredmash*³⁴. Some informants said that they were sent to the construction site after graduating from institutions of professional or higher education. A few informants said that their main motivation to come to the construction site in Lithuania was their personal will to serve the motherland (Soviet Union). Important were also social-economic factors: people were willing to come to Lithuania or other Soviet republics of *Pribaltika* (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) due to relatively high living standards there in comparison with some other regions of the former Soviet Union. However, all these factors should be perceived as interrelated. This can be seen with some examples from informants own recollections.

Irina is a Russian woman over 60 years old, who came from Russia in 1970s when her husband was sent to work in Lithuania by the Ministry of *Sredmash*. They both occupied high positions as engineers and kept in close contact with regional Comsomol leaders in Lithuania. She remembers the way her family immigrated to Lithuania as following:

My husband came there in 1974. He got a directive [*napravlenie*] from Sverdlovsk. There [in Sverdlovsk], in fact, the construction works were coming to an end. And he went to Moscow to obtain a directive. It was suggested that he goes to a place near Moscow or here, in Lithuania, to the construction works of the biggest nuclear power plant in the world. This promised good prospects and he decided to choose Lithuania. [...] And in December I decided to come there, to look around. [...] We were driving, and the fields were green, such a beauty! I was thinking – oh God, what a place!

Irina’s husband was employed at the construction project in Sverdlovsk. The works were being completed there and the authorities in Moscow offered him a job in Lithuania, or he could join some construction project near Moscow. He chose Lithuania, since he considered this an opportu-

²⁹ KAVALIAUSKAS, A. (...) 1999, p. 61–62.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ KAVALIAUSKAS, A. (...) 2003, p. 44.

³² Ibid, p. 43–48.

³³ Ibid, p. 46–48.

³⁴ More on this ministry and its role see: KAVALIAUSKAS, A. (...) 2003.

nity that could open new possibilities: the Ignalina nuclear power plant was considered a site of key importance. Irina romanticizes about her first visit to the Lithuanian site: it is presented as a visit to some exceptionally beautiful place where you can see green meadows even in December. Later in the interview, she romanticizes her first encounter with local people, whom she called *aboriginals* (*aborigeny*). She presents local people as open, friendly and tells that life there was calm.

The construction of the Ignalina nuclear power plant was highly ideologized in Soviet times. As informants remember, the construction of the plant was presented in the mass media as very useful for the country, as the construction of the largest nuclear power plant in the world, and as an example of the greatness of the peaceful use of nuclear power. The construction works were presented as an outcome of great friendship among the Soviet nations. According to Kavaliauskas, the construction works of the Ignalina nuclear power plant were often compared by people with other famous building works like the Bajkal Amur railway (BAM) in the former Soviet Union³⁵. Therefore, it is not surprising that a few informants argued that their main motivation to come to the site was their devotion to the country (the Soviet Union).

Aleksandr is a healthy and very active pensioner in his 80s. Aleksandr shows piles of photos he made since his arrival to Lithuania. Aleksandr said that this construction site was announced as *vsesojuznaja udarnaja komsomolskaja stroika* (vanguard construction works by the Comsomol). According to Aleksandr, he became interested in the site when he first heard about it on the radio and was inspired to join it. He was in his 60s then and lived far away, in Siberia. According to Aleksandr:

You see, information was spread by TV and radio that a nuclear power plant was going to be built there and those who were keen to devote their labour for the motherland, those were eager to come there. So they knew that the nuclear power plant was going to be built. I was working in Siberia, in T [name of the town], and I also heard about it. And if they start the construction of the nuclear power plant that means that it will be interesting to see the start of the works. That's why people came; nobody cared that there were no flats, nothing.

Aleksandr indicated that his obligations and love for the motherland (the Soviet Union) and interest "to see the start of the works" were the main reasons why he left Siberia and moved to the construction site of the nuclear power plant and the town in Lithuania. From my point of view, Aleksandr repeats the ideological statements of Soviet times when a person's life was considered successful if it was perceived as useful for the country (the Soviet Union). Some other informants proudly showed me certificates issued during Soviet times. I was also shown, again with evident pride, official presents (*nagroždenija*) that had to prove the importance of their work at the construction site. Once I witnessed a scene where an old woman brought a small statue of Lenin to one of the local non-governmental organizations. She asked them to accept it as charity. She believed that somebody could want it and she did not have children to leave her property. The statue of Lenin was still of deep value to her.

On the other hand, many informants recalled that the image of Lithuania and other Baltic republics (*Pribaltika*) as an economically and socially relatively well developed region of the Soviet Union, was important in shaping their motivations to come to this construction site. Tamara, a Russian woman in her 40s, recalls that in her childhood she collected chocolate boxes with pictures of

³⁵ Ibid, p. 47.

different places in the Baltic republics, and from an early age, she dreamt of moving to the Baltic region. She identified *Pribaltika* as an economically and culturally developed region of the Soviet Union. According to many informants, they were eager to settle down in any republic of *Pribaltika*. The opportunity to come to the north-eastern part of Lithuania, to the construction works, was the opportunity they had been looking for.

Angela is a Russian woman in her 40s. Her family includes her husband and two children: a teenager daughter and an adult son. They moved from Russia to a small town of Lithuania in 1980s, seeking economic and social security. Angela remembers the realization of her wish to move to *Pribaltika* as follows:

When I was still studying at school, I went to *Pribaltika* [the Baltic States]. And already in school I wished to move to *Pribaltika*. That's why when we got a flat, we at once were aiming to change it. [...] You know, now it is funny even to remember, but when I came to Lithuania and went to a shop, I did not believe my own eyes, because there was such a supply! Even if people were saying that in those times the life was bad, but in Russia it was really bad. I was so used to buying everything in big quantities and there [in Lithuania] when I came in I started to take everything in big quantities – cheese, sweet milk. And my husband told me – do not take so much, there you'll always find these things. And I was thinking – how would he know, maybe I will come tomorrow and find nothing. I needed much time to get used to it and not have people to laugh at me.

Angela said that since her school years she wished to move to and live permanently in any of the Baltic Republics (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia). She remembers her first impressions of Lithuania: relatively good supply in the shops, relatively high economic development. *Pribaltika* was equated by Angela with better economic and a social condition of living, and this was her main motive to (im)migrate to Lithuania. These motivations were mentioned by other informants as well. So the reasons given by my informants for (im)migrating to Lithuania in order to work on the construction of the plant ranged from devotion to the motherland (the Soviet Union) to the search of a higher quality of life³⁶.

“Life was burning there”: narratives of rapid development of Visaginas in the Soviet period

The narratives about construction works of Visaginas and the plant, told by different informants with slight differences in details, is reminiscent of some legends. According to informants, it was the beginning of something truly magnificent. Yuri is a businessman, a Russian, who came to the construction works of Visaginas and the plant in the early 1980s. He remembers the construction works of the town and plant as follows:

The years up to 1991 were the best years of my life and these were also the best years for Visaginas. Visaginas was a closed town, therefore not everybody could move there. I do not mean that the inhabitants were somehow special people, but that people who came there were recommended by the Comsomol, for example. Therefore a criminal could not live there. [...] Here, in Visaginas, we had a period of highly developed socialism, a stage that everybody wanted to achieve – here we had it! And the Comsomol was working, it did many things, and now nothing is

³⁶ For comparison, see: KAVALIUSKAS, A. (...) 2003.

being done. [...] I had to start my service in the army and was sent to Lithuania, to Dukstas. I was very glad – I was thinking that in Lithuania I will have good living conditions. I came to Dukstas – and everybody was living in those temporary barracks, all builders. We called Dukstas Shanghai back then [laughs]. [When I came] I wanted to see the town and was told just to stop any car on the road. And it was true – I just stopped a car and the driver brought me to town – we had some kind of camaraderie [*obscnost*]. I went to Visaginas and here everything was built anew, the houses were white, there was a forest, I liked it very much. We were enthusiastic, it was the birth of a new place. Life was burning even at night – the cars were constantly changing even at night at the place I was working. The people were young – 25-30 years old. [...] During the first days when I came, the cultural center “Draugyste” was opened. I got a flat – new, all painted. When my wife came, she was pregnant. The first night we were in an empty flat, however next day we brought new furniture. In V [name of the town in Russia] people could kill each other for a flat, and here we got a new flat at once! Here we had construction works led by Comsomol and these works were very similar to BAM [Baikal-Amur railway][...] All people were together. Even the second secretary of the Comsomol could unload the lorry if needed. [...] And the kindergartens were built so well, with pools! Every child can swim here. And the teachers are wonderful! It is such good fortune that you meet such good people during your life!

During interview informants often criticized such realities of the Soviet system as economic shortages. However, Yuri said:

... here, in Visaginas, we had a period of highly developed socialism, a stage that everybody wanted to achieve.

Yuri and many other informants mostly depicted their struggle to construct the town of Visaginas and the plant with enthusiasm, devotion, and motivation. These years were characterized as “the birth of a new place”, the start of something wonderful. In informants’ eyes, it was a movement up: as things became more civilized – from temporary wooden barracks to newly painted flats, cultural centres rose from marshes and forests; there were newly built roads, houses, streets, and of course the largest nuclear power plant in the world. The progress in individual lives was seen as parallel with the development of the town: people were getting newly painted flats, the women were giving birth to children.

Irina, a Russian woman over 60 years old, depicted the past as one of constant and rapid growth: houses, shops, hospitals were going up. She argues that this was partly due to the special status of the construction site: as it was in Europe and the largest such plant in the world, the attention it received also ensured that supplies were abundant and delivered on time:

The second house was going up ... and then the third house. Houses built of bricks were going up. So the houses were being built simultaneously [with the nuclear power plant]. The Ministry of Sredmash paid special attention to these construction works. First of all, it was the biggest nuclear power plant in the world. The town is in Europe. We had ideal supplies due to all the attention. We got everything ... everything. We had no need for anything; we got all the needed material. If there is some need, we had just to call and everything we needed was sent. However, there were demands as well. We did not know the word “no.” We did not know the phrase “did not do it in

time.” We had to do everything in time, and with the highest quality of work. Everything was built simultaneously – living houses, shop, hospital, everything.

Many informants perceived their work at the construction site as of highest importance for the development of the motherland (the Soviet Union) and as an important stage in their personal lives and careers. Valia is a Russian woman over 60 years old. She lives alone, her husband died some years ago. She retired a few years ago. Valia depicts her career during the Soviet period as one of rapid upward mobility and perceives herself as devoted to the needs of the collective. Valia said:

I have to tell, maybe it is because I was young, when I started to work in our construction group, of course, it was difficult [...] we had a small bookshelf, very small room [...] and we worked in such conditions for 2 years. We experienced much! [laughs] The rats were jumping on us, there were mice, the house was just temporary, and so the wind was blowing through the holes. But anyway it was interesting! I worked there for some time and said to my chief [...] that I needed something more [more important work]. [...] [here] you go to work and know that people are waiting for me! When you know your importance, it means much! Workers are waiting for me, everybody waits!

Further in the interview Valia remembers the difficult work conditions at the construction site. However, she argues that every day she was going to the work site “as to a festival.” Valia said:

Valia: You know, Kristina, you cannot imagine this. When the time came to complete this work it was autumn time, almost winter. It was very rainy. However, we had to fix everything [...] There was water, puddles everywhere around, we were going by bus, excavations everywhere. Sometimes you missed your bus and went [to the construction site] by railway. You have gumboots and go on foot [to your work place] [laughs]. Once my acquaintance got stuck in a puddle. They were taking her out of it by a crane! And you know, it [the conditions] seemed o.k. for us.

K.S.: Didn't you wish to get finished with all this?

Valia: No, absolutely no. Every day we were going to work as to a festival.

During one of our meetings Irina showed me some private photo albums of her family. In one of the photo albums were selected only photos of the town and the plant, photos of different buildings and how they were changing in years. Small notes, references to the years or poetry were written below some photos. In this way she had wished to show the history of the town, to document the way it was changing, growing and to be able to return any moment to the past. Irina also read me a poem written to her husband by some friends of her family. It was written in the Soviet times and emphasizes the importance of the work her husband had done and was doing. The main motive of the poem was that the construction works carried out by a man is also a monument for him, these constructions were seen as making him immortal: the poem states that he is a man who worked much during his life, he is a man who overcame all hindrances and built farms, roads, and the plant, his work is seen everywhere.

The informants usually described themselves as devoted to the country (the Soviet Union), led through life by high ideals, and as if they did not pay attention to everyday difficulties. Such epithets as – *oderzimije* (devoted), *entuziasm* (enthusiasm) – were commonly used when referring to those times in the past and those people (including oneself). The prevailing image of one's self

was that of heroes who worked hard and who built the biggest nuclear power plant in the world. The people who (im)migrated to Lithuania during the initial phase of the construction works from distant places of the Soviet Union were described as capable of withstanding hard work and overcoming severe hardships: they left big cities with modern conveniences and came to a place in Lithuania covered by forests and marshes.

Anthropologist Vieda Skultans, in her analysis of Latvian narratives, argued that:

... narrators attempt to compensate for biographical disruption by restoring unity and coherence to narrated lives. The breakdown of the everyday structures of living creates a need to reconstitute meaning in story telling³⁷.

According to Skultans, in the Latvian case “the concept of destiny” was often employed by her informants who experienced exile and other forcible disruptions of their lives³⁸. Contrary to this, in the narratives of majority of my informants, who can be treated as representatives of the Soviet colonial power, one would hardly hear any reference to destiny. In their memories of Soviet times the narrators presented themselves as the masters of their own life course.

Alternative voices: “everything was destroyed”

Contrary to the discussed constructions of the past presented by the majority of the informants who lived substantial part of their lives under Soviet system, some informants constructed the past of the town differently. A version of the history of the town and the plant told by a Lithuanian informant, a participant at the construction works, stands in many aspects at variance with the narratives I heard from the majority of the informants, Soviet period (im)migrants. Jonas, a 72 years old Lithuanian man, who was one of the few local people involved in the construction works from the very beginning, describes the construction works as follows:

Jonas: ... you see, everything was destroyed. The roads were made and small rivers died. And our work was to cut the forest and to make fire of it – we behaved as “real owners” [with irony, meaning that it was in opposite way]!

K.S.: Did you have to plant a new forest afterwards?

Jonas: We had just to cut it. We were cutting and that’s all.

K.S.: There were people of different nationalities? What language did you speak?

Jonas: Of course Russian. It happened that you meet a Lithuanian and speak in Russian, only later you start to understand that he is also a Lithuanian. [...] They [the Russians] were telling us – *sesiolik, sesiolik* [a Lithuanian word, sixteen] – didn’t you learn to speak in Russian? And now they have to learn Lithuanian. You see, how everything has changed!

[...]

Jonas: I remember, an autumn, in the forest, it is cold, if you make a fire, the soldiers who were working at the constructions come to it from all the corners. You see, even if fire wood is lying somewhere besides, they would never take it and put on the fire themselves! No, they just sit until the fire is over and then look for some other place where somebody has already made a fire.

³⁷ SKULTANS, Vieda. *The Testimony of Lives: Narrative and Memory in post-Soviet Latvia*. London and New York: Routledge, 1998, p. 26.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 47–66.

An informant describes how the construction works of the plant and the settlement destroyed nature: forests were cut down; rivers were dammed to make roads. This was not interpreted as a victory of human intelligence and industry over the nature, nor as a sign of modernization but, rather, as an action against nature. During interview Jonas described the construction works as being difficult and argues that he participated in them just because he received a good salary, which was incomparably better than the wage he was receiving in the collective farm where he was previously employed. The construction workers were not perceived as heroes by Jonas, but as ordinary human beings, with ordinary human failings. Besides, Jonas emphasized, that they came from other parts of the Soviet Union and did not have a specific relation to Lithuania; they did not have the attitude of a “real owner”.

II. Narratives of decline in the post-Soviet period

“Everything falls apart”

One evening during the winter, I was walking home in Visaginas together with a Russian woman in her 40s. She stated that the town was built in the wrong place – on the marshes and in the middle of a forest – and this from the very start damned the town and its inhabitants to a “bad fate.” For many of my informants, this “bad fate” is equated with the post-Soviet social and economic difficulties and the Ignalina nuclear power plant closure.

The post-Soviet period was often related by my informants with a general economic and social decline³⁹. The signs of this process of decline were argued to be first visible on the body of the town. Passing through the streets of the town you can see some half built multi-story buildings that were started at the end of the Soviet period in the late 1980s, but never finished. These were referred to by the informants as visible signs of the economic decline that occurred during the post-Soviet period. Walking with Valia through the streets of the town I was shown the first street, the first house, the first square. She was one of the construction workers who came at the very start of the construction works and can tell in detail the history of almost any building. She can tell which brigade was working there, whether they had any difficulties with construction material, whether they managed to complete a building in time, and more. Valia emphasized the growth and development of the town which, according to her, was characteristic of the Soviet period. Not completed houses, empty buildings with broken windows served for her as symbols of the post-Soviet decline. Valia explained how the unfinished, destroyed buildings hurt her heart and filled her eyes with tears.

Describing their experience at the initial phase of the construction works the informants used such words as “*nacialos razvaracivatsia*” (started to go on), “*vsio nacinalos*” (everything started), etc. Contrary to this, referring to the post-Soviet changes some informants used such words as “*russitsia*” (collapsing, falling apart)⁴⁰.

Yuri is a successful businessman in his 40s. He moved to Visaginas in 1980s. Yuri argued:

³⁹ For comparison, see: KLUMBYTĖ, N. (...) 2004; RIES, N. (...) 1997; etc.

⁴⁰ Compare with: RIES, N. (...) 1997.

Earlier the paths in the forest for the running were lighted, and now they are dark. Everything falls apart [*russitsia*]. You know, one path was simply stolen! Do you know how they repair these paths now? Simply make it narrower, take away a line of tiles – that’s all!

Yuri compares the Soviet and the post-Soviet period. He describes the body of town in the post-Soviet period as falling apart (*russitsia*). In his eyes, the problems are related not just with economic decline, but with the change in people’s attitudes towards their environment – they do not take care of Visaginas as much as did *pervostroiteli* (the first builders).

The informants also described what they referred to as the “moral degeneration” of the population in the post-Soviet period⁴¹. They cited such phenomena as drug addiction and alcoholism, increase in abandoned children, and the rise of crime. I argue that this is partly related with the changes in what is now publicly visible and what was hidden (but still present) during Soviet times: some negative phenomena were not visible publicly in the Soviet period and therefore perceived by some informants as absent then. Socially dysfunctional families, abandoned children, violence in families, begging children were cited by older informants as the main signs of economic decline and moral degeneration in the post-Soviet period. These phenomena were believed as being absent in the Soviet period.

Unemployment and poverty

Soviet authorities claimed that there was no unemployment in Soviet society. Therefore unemployment is commonly related with the post-Soviet period. In 2001, 2,472 unemployed persons were formally registered in Visaginas and this constituted 15 percent of the local labour force⁴². Informants in Visaginas remember the first unemployment wave in post-Soviet period when factory which produced construction materials was closed due to the cessation of construction of the third reactor of the plant.

Unemployment was perceived as a mark of the post-Soviet period by the majority of the informants and it was associated with the general economic decline⁴³. The plant decommissioning was perceived as making the situation unpredictable and much worse. Unemployment and low incomes were related to poverty. Low incomes were described by many informants as characteristic of the majority of Visaginas’ inhabitants, who are not employed at the plant. Svetlana, a Russian woman in her late 60s, moved to Visaginas from Russia in the 1990s. Her daughter had earlier settled in Visaginas, and Svetlana wished to live closer to her daughter and grandchildren. They all belong to the most disadvantaged social group: her daughter has been unemployed for a considerable period of time, as well as the daughter’s husband. Svetlana and her husband are pensioners. Svetlana compared the present economic situation of her family to that after the Second World War. According to her, the life they are condemned to lead is unbearable:

We came to settle together with our daughter two years ago [in 1998] from Kuban. [...] My daughter came here in 1983 – they were living well then. They had a job, everything was all

⁴¹ For comparison, see: KLUMBYTĖ, N. (...) 2004; RIES, N. (...) 1997; etc.

⁴² Lietuvos statistikos departamentas. Gyventojų užimtumas. Employment. Lietuvos gyventojų ir būstų surašymas 2001. Vilnius: Lietuvos statistikos departamentas, 2003, p. 43.

⁴³ For comparison, see: KLUMBYTĖ, N. (...) 2004, etc.

right. She was working at some normal state-owned sewing factory. The factory was closed around 1991. [...] We get a pension of five hundred Litas for two persons. Two hundred Litas we pay for different services and three hundred is left for us. Sometimes we would have just enough to buy a loaf of bread [...] We did not have a childhood – it was during the war. Then, still young, we started to work, but we could not buy anything – everything was obtained through *blat* [via social connections]. And now this [...] When we came here to visit our daughter, we liked everything here – people were friendly, there were things to buy in the public shops [...] All those at the top of power [*verxuski*] are responsible for this. [...] During the war we were eating grass and now we almost have to eat the grass again. [...] If you collect mushrooms, you need also butter, potatoes, if you do not have this, you will not be able to eat those mushrooms.

Svetlana complains of social and economic situation of her family. According to Svetlana, her daughter does not have a job. Svetlana and her husband get small pensions that they share with their children. The money is not sufficient – at the end of month they have to count every bite of bread. According to her, all those at the top of the power (*verxuski*) are responsible for Svetlana's and her family present social, economic situation. Later during the interview, Svetlana argues that the social and economic difficulties of simple people is a result of the disintegration of the Soviet Union:

Now everyone thinks just about oneself. Of course, it was much better before [in the Soviet Union]. When [the Soviet Union] started to break up, people started to think just of one-selves... Lithuania was in the Soviet Union, why did it break up? Who have built this town? Lithuanians were not able to build such a town and the plant alone. Never in their lives! When there were 16 republics, we were helping each other ... we had everything then...if we get together again, then we could start live again.

Vitalii is a Russian man over 60 years old. He is one of those who came at the very start of construction works of the plant and the town. He is retired and receives a small pension from the state. When we met in summer of 2000, he was anxious to make sure that the repairs to his car, damaged in an accident, were paid for by the young man responsible for the accident. Vitalii trusted the young man's promise that he would fix the car and therefore he did not call the police when the accident happened. However, the young guy just disappeared for a couple of days. Vitalii relates this event to the moral degeneration of the population, particularly the youth, in the post-Soviet period – according to him, “you cannot trust people's promises anymore.” Vitalii perceives the post-Soviet period as one of decline. According to him, during Soviet times everybody had a job. Now many people cannot find a job even if they are looking for years, and anybody can become unemployed at any moment. In his eyes, the downward mobility of his children is proof of a general societal decline. According to Vitalii, his daughter was the chief dispatcher earlier. Now, in the post-Soviet period, after the bankruptcy of the institution where she had been employed, she has become a washing lady at a school. His grandson returned from service in the Lithuanian army, but he is also unemployed. Vitalii argues that during Soviet times it was inconceivable that a man could not find a job after he had fulfilled his obligation to the state. Vitalii argues:

K.S.: Did everybody have a job [in the Soviet time]?

Vitalii: Yes, absolutely everybody. You asked of the future of the town – I think that the town does not have one [a future]. Maybe I am wrong. But I think that according to how everything goes around me. I do not see any indication that something good is going to happen. I do not see anything. I have children, grandchildren. [...] My daughter is a washing lady at school. And she worked as a chief dispatcher at the base [*baza*] before the base collapsed [*razvalilas*]. Everything closed down thereafter and she also had to go back to school. My grandson served in the army, he came back with a citation – now he is a year without a job.

A number of informants perceived the post-Soviet period as the period when they and their families have to refuse many things they could previously afford. Angela is a Russian woman in her 40s. Her family consists of her, her husband and their two children. They moved from Russia to a small Lithuanian town in the 1980s. Later they moved to Visaginas to live with their fellow Russians. Her family lives on the salary of her husband, who expressed his satisfaction that he is employed at a company that is not going to be affected by the plant closure and so he is sure of his future employment. Angela said that during Soviet times they could afford such “luxuries” as, for example, a summer rest near the Baltic sea. She complains that now this is impossible for their family has to survive on the wages of her husband. Angela said:

Of course, it is annoying. You remember that earlier you could go to Palanga [health resort in Lithuania, near the Baltic Sea]. I love Palanga so much! It seems to me that it is the place I love the most in Lithuania. [...] But what to do – anyway, it is not the most important thing [...] Anyway, to have a rest somewhere is a luxury. You can live without it. But when you think that your child is a gifted pupil and that before could get her a good education and now you cannot give it to her, that you do not have money for it, this is what I am most upset about.

Angela argues that she can survive without a summer vacation near the sea, but she is most anxious about whether they will be able to pay for her daughter’s studies at university for she perceives this as her chance for the future.

Alternative voices

The majority of my informants of older generation in Visaginas constructed the post-Soviet period as a decline⁴⁴. However, contrary to the narratives depicting the post-Soviet period as a decline or a rupture of development, some informants presented different attitudes on socio-economic changes in the post-Soviet period, to the future of the town and its population. They saw development instead of decline, freedom and the right to choose instead of narrowed possibilities.

One such informant is the already quoted Jonas, a Lithuanian man in his early 70s. Jonas does not agree with the opinion that the economy is declining in the post-Soviet period. To Jonas the social and economic difficulties, the poverty encountered by individuals is not evidence of a general decline of Lithuania’s economy, but is a result of individual failings:

⁴⁴ For comparison, see: KLUMBYTĖ, N. (...) 2004, etc.

You see, people are talking that there were collective farms, people had jobs [and now the fields are empty, the farming is in decline][...] I get angry when I hear on the radio that people in the villages do not have work. There is enough work in the villages from the morning till the evening! There is no work just if you are a drunkard or an idler.

Later in the interview, Jonas describes his economic situation in the post-Soviet period as good. According to Jonas, in the Soviet period one could get some goods just by *blat*, i.e. exploiting personal social relations. He interprets this as a form of humiliation and an injury to human dignity. Jonas relates the post-Soviet period with development: the shops are full of goods, he does not need anyone's protections to get some stuff to buy, his pension is enough for the things he needs. Jonas argues that for him it is the most important that Lithuania regained its independence: in his eyes, political changes related with the independence of Lithuania are more important than some social and economic difficulties.

Boris is a Russian man, a local businessman. I interviewed him at his office in Visaginas and the office, his appearance pointed that he is a successful local entrepreneur. He does not think that the current situation is that of a decline. He believes that the most important priority is to change local people's way of thinking about their present and future situation. Boris said:

I am a constructor myself. In 1990 I was told – you are a good fellow, sign this paper [a document about resign] since you will be dismissed anyway. I understood that there will be 14,000, 20,000, 35,000 such people like me [...] I started a new business. [...] The most important thing is to make people understand now that in five years the plant is going to be closed [...] This is not a tragedy. [...] I think that people must understand – this is not a tragedy, but a new start.

Boris is one of those “optimists” who managed to adapt to the social, economic transformations, find a new place in the world and perceives himself as a master of his own life in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods.

Discussion

This paper aims at investigating how informants in Visaginas, who had lived a substantial part of their lives under the Soviet regime, construct their past and present and what these constructs reveal of their identities. The ethnographic fieldwork was conducted by the author in 2000-2004. We have seen that the narratives of the majority of the informants contained common selected themes: great construction works of Visaginas and the plant in the 1970s – 1980s, severe living and working conditions, and the industriousness of the people⁴⁵. According to informants, as a result of their hard work and devotion, this area of Lithuania was modernized: the roads, town and the nuclear power plant were built. In this way informants construct themselves and others as a specific group of people, elite of heroic builders.

We have seen that informants have different versions of the Soviet and the post-Soviet periods. Two main versions can be discerned. One of them, constructed by the majority of the older generation informants in Visaginas, depicts the late Soviet period as one of rapid development, modernization, and the upward mobility of individuals. The post-Soviet period is constructed as a rupture

⁴⁵ See, also, for example, people's memories in: KAVALIAUSKAS, A. (...) 2003.

of this path and related to economic and social decline. The alternative version, suggested by a few informants, relates the post-Soviet period, with its economic development and opening of new possibilities to individuals, and restoration of independence of Lithuania, with freedom. Different segments of the Visaginas population therefore have different memories of the past: the realities of the past and the present, as well as future aspirations, constructed by them diverge in many ways. However, the majority of informants of the older generation idealized the social, and economic situation in the late Soviet period and related post-Soviet period with a social and economic decline. In this context, it is important to note that, according to the researcher A. Kavaliauskas, in 1998, living standards of part of Visaginas inhabitants (mostly plant employees) were considerably higher in comparison with surrounding areas⁴⁶. A number of studies⁴⁷ revealed that certain groups of the population, in different countries of post-Soviet space, express nostalgia for Soviet past or for some of its elements. Different researchers give various explanations of this phenomenon.

Alexei Yurchak aims at reconstructing people's everyday lives in late Soviet period and criticizes the assumptions that Soviet citizens were passive recipients of Communist ideology and values and perceives people as active agents who supplied their own meanings (that not necessarily corresponded with official ones) to their participation at different socialist rituals in late Soviet period⁴⁸. However, I would argue that for many of my informants, who had lived most of their lives under the Soviet regime, the construction works of Visaginas, the development of town, the growth of its population, and the construction of the nuclear power plant symbolize the realization of the Soviet project of development, industrialization and urbanization. Many informants constructed themselves as part of this project, as both its implementers and its bearers.

Anthropologist James Ferguson argues that “the myth of modernization was never only an academic myth”⁴⁹, that for common people it “gives form to an understanding of the world”⁵⁰ and that its failure does have important consequences on people's lives⁵¹. Ferguson studies what happens when “the myth of modernization”⁵² fails and how people in Copperbelt, Zambia experience decline⁵³. Ferguson argues that “Zambia's recent crisis is not only an economic crisis but a crisis of meaning, in which the way that people are able to understand their experience and to imbue it with significance and dignity has (for many) been dramatically eroded. Yet people are never passive in the face of such changes; mineworkers on the Copperbelt today are struggling to make sense of their experience, and to find new ways of conceptualizing the broad social and economic changes that rock their lives”⁵⁴.

Like the Copperbelt in Zambia, Visaginas was once in a process of development when suddenly this process was stopped. Ferguson's study inspired me to look closer at the influence of projects and ideologies of modernization, development, industrialization, and the “building of Communist society” on people's lives and the consequences of the devaluation of such ideologies.

⁴⁶ KAVALIAUSKAS, A. (...) 1999, p. 261.

⁴⁷ See, for example: BERDAHL, D. (...) 1999; KIDECKEL, D. (...) 2008; KLUMBYTĖ, N. (...) 2004; KLUMBYTĖ, N. (...) 2006; KLUMBYTĖ, N. (...) 2008; LANKAUSKAS, G. (...) 2006; RIES, N. (...) 1997; YURCHAK, A. (...) 2006; etc.

⁴⁸ See: YURCHAK, A. (...) 2006.

⁴⁹ FERGUSON, J. (...) 1999, p. 14.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

As the interview data reveal, for some of the informants of the older generation the ideas of progress, development, growth, devoting oneself to the needs of the motherland (the Soviet Union) and the collective, were integral elements of their worldview and supplied their lives with meaning and significance. Suddenly, due to structural changes, this ideological construct is devalued: the product of their own hands, the plant, is to be closed, the growth of the town where they have lived their lives is stopped, the ideology they (or some of them) believed in is not affirmed publicly in the new political collective in which they find themselves. David Kideckel pointed that in order to understand the present social situation of working class⁵⁵ in Eastern and Central Europe it is necessary to take into account the changes in ideology on the working class⁵⁶. According to Kideckel, “the meaning of the workers’ lives and concerns are dismissed and the very category ‘worker’ or ‘industrial worker’ is made almost invisible in public discourse”⁵⁷.

The world is changing fast and people in Visaginas are trying to explain it. They cannot control the present anymore. But at least, in their personal narratives, they can control the past. The informants construct themselves as heroes who made rapid progress possible; due to their hard work, a modern living standard was achieved. The coherence of the state (Soviet Union) policy in supporting the project of modernization and the special attention that was paid to its carriers is frequently invoked by these older generation informants. The fact that in independent Lithuania the “carriers of civilization” are not as valued as they were under the Soviet system, that the meaning of their work is questioned or devalued by the very decommissioning of the Ignalina nuclear power plant, compels some informants to construct the present as a period of decline. Therefore, to a certain degree the “modernization myth”⁵⁸ is still affirmed and not denied, the lack of support for the modernization project and its carriers is seen as resulting in a decline.

To understand these attitudes from a different perspective it is worth mentioning the results of a survey carried out by the Lithuanian researchers Natalija Kasatkina and Tadas Leončikas in Lithuania in 2001 – 2002⁵⁹. The researchers asked their respondents to assess the change in their personal social status during the last ten years. According to Kasatkina and Leončikas, “The largest share of Lithuanians thinks their personal situation has improved. Russians have the opposite opinion. This opinion among Russians is noticeable in all of the towns and allows us to conclude that social status and the issue of recognition rather than formal political rights is a barrier to the successful adaptation of the Russians. [...] The prevailing sense of social insecurity may be one of the basic indicators of the stumbling integration of minorities”⁶⁰.

Feelings of unpredictability and uncertainty pervaded people’s lives in Visaginas during the time of my fieldwork in August 2000 to the beginning of 2004⁶¹. Plant decommissioning could mean that you are fired; your stable income is not guaranteed anymore, you might have to leave the

⁵⁵ However, I do not consider all my informants as representatives of working class – many of them are engineers, technicians, i.e. high level educated professionals.

⁵⁶ See: KIDECKEL, David A. The Unmaking of an East-Central European Working Class. In: Chris M. Hann (ed.). *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies and Practices in Eurasia*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 114–132. More on Soviet ideology see, for example: HOHNEN, Pernille. Gariūnų marginalizacija: turgaus kultūrinė antropologija. *Lietuvos etnologija. Socialinės antropologijos ir etnologijos studijos. Lithuanian Ethnology: Studies in Social Anthropology and Ethnology*, 2001, vol. 1(10), p. 63–83; KIDECKEL, D. (...) 2008; KLUMBYTĖ, N. (...) 2006; etc.

⁵⁷ KIDECKEL, D. (...) 2002, p. 122.

⁵⁸ FERGUSON, J. (...) 1999, p. 13.

⁵⁹ See: KASATKINA, N. & LEONČIKAS, T. (...) 2003.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 224–225.

⁶¹ For comparison see also: FERGUSON, J. (...) 1999.

town or even the country to settle in a new place, your children would have no opportunity to get a proper education due to minimized economic possibilities. It was evident that there are a number of social, economic problems people in Visaginas were confronting and coping with⁶² and this contributed to their negative evaluations of the post-Soviet situation as a decline.

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⁶² See, for example: BAUBINAS, Ričardas. Visagino miesto praeitis, būklė ir perspektyvos. In: Beinorienė Vanda (ed.) *Pamoka. Sistema. Analizė. Straipsnių rinkinys*: Visaginas: Visagino 'Atgimimo' gimnazija, Visagino miesto savivaldybė, Lietuvos filosofijos ir sociologijos institutas, Geografijos institutas, Daugpilio pedagoginio universiteto Latgalos tyrimų institutas, 2000, p. 35–46; BAUBINAS, R.; BURNEIKA, D.; DAUGIRDAS, V.; KRIAUCIŪNAS, E. & RIBOKAS, G. (...) 2002; etc.

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SOCIALINĖ ATMINTIS, TAPATUMAS IR PASAKOJIMAI APIE NUOSMUKĮ VISAGINO MIESTO BENDRUOMENĖJE

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S a n t r a u k a

Ignalinos atominės elektrinės statybos darbai buvo pradėti praėjusio amžiaus 8-ojo dešimtmečio viduryje. Visagino gyventojai straipsnio autorei pasakojo, kaip statybininkai, inžinieriai ir kiti specialistai iš skirtingų Sovietų Sąjungos vietovių vyko į Lietuvą, į atominės elektrinės ir su ja susijusio miesto Sniečkaus (dabar – Visagino) statybas. Daugelis atvykusiųjų liko gyventi savo pačių pastatytame mieste, skirtame gyventi atominės elektrinės darbuotojams ir jų šeimoms. Lietuvos statistikos departamento duomenimis, 2001 m. dauguma Visagino gyventojų buvo rusų tautybės. Pirmasis atominės elektrinės reaktorius baigė dirbti 2004 m., antrasis – 2009 m. gruodžio 31 d. Autoriai pateikia išsamius duomenis ir pabrėžia glaudžias sąsajas tarp Ignalinos atominės elektrinės funkcionavimo ir Visagino miesto gyventojų socialinės, ekonominės situacijos.

Šio straipsnio šaltinius sudaro autorės 2000 m. rugpjūčio mėn. – 2004 m. pradžioje etnografinių lauko tyrimų metu Visagine surinkta medžiaga. Lauko tyrimų metu buvo atlikta daugiau kaip 50 giluminių interviu su įvairaus amžiaus informantais (nuo 18 iki 80 metų amžiaus), tačiau šiame straipsnyje analizuojama tik dalis surinktos medžiagos – analizuojami interviu tik su vyresnio amžiaus informantais, kurie didžiąją dalį savo gyvenimo nugyveno sovietmečiu. Buvo kalbėta su įvairių tautybių žmonėmis, tačiau absoliuti dauguma informantų – rusų tautybės Visagino gyventojai. Svarbus šaltinis – stebėjimo ar stebėjimo dalyvaujant metodais užfiksuota etnografija, taip pat ir vizualinė medžiaga.

Autorė analizuoja, kaip jos informantai, Visagino gyventojai, konstruoja savo ir miesto bendruomenės praeitį ir dabartį. Pirmoji straipsnio dalis analizuoja, kaip informantai pasakoja apie sovietmetį, apie XX a. 8–9-ąjį dešimtmečius, kai jie atvyko į atominės elektrinės ir jos darbuotojų gyvenvietės statybas Lietuvoje. Antroji straipsnio dalis analizuoja pagrindines temas, kurios išryškėjo informantų pasakojimuose apie jų ir miesto bendruomenės gyvenimą posovietmečiu. Interviu medžiaga atskleidė, jog išryškėja skirtingi praeities ir dabarties konstruktai ir skirtingi žmonės skirtingai mato ir vertina vėlyvąjį sovietmetį ir posovietmetį. Tačiau galima teigti, kad dauguma vyresnės kartos informantų Visagine idealizavo socialinę, ekonominę situaciją XX a. 8–9-uoju dešimtmečiais, kalbėjo apie to meto ekonominį augimą, raidą, o posovietmetį siejo su socialiniu ir ekonominiu nuosmukiu. Autorė parodo paraleles tarp Visagino miesto gyventojų pasakojimų apie

sovietmetį ir posovietmetį su kitose posovietinės erdvės vietovėse atliktais tyrinėjimais. Daugelis studijų atskleidė, jog kai kurios socialinės grupės posovietinėje erdvėje jaučia nostalgiją tam tikriems socialinio, ekonominio gyvenimo sovietmečiu aspektams, ir autoriai pateikia įvairius šio reiškinio paaiškinimus.

Antropologo Jameso Fergusono 1999 m. studija apie kalnakasių patiriamą ekonominį nuosmukį Copperbelto regione, Zambijoje, paskatino autorę padiskutuoti, kokią įtaką sovietinė modernizacijos, industrializacijos, urbanizacijos, „komunizmo statybos“ ideologija ir jos devalvavimas turi ja tikėjusių žmonių gyvenimams. Nors sovietinio laikotarpio rekonstravimas yra problemiškas metodologiškai, tačiau autorės lauko tyrimų medžiaga leistų teigti, kad Ignalinos atominės elektrinės statybų darbai, miesto raida, spartus miesto ir jo gyventojų augimas, reliatyvi gerovė daugeliui vyresnės kartos pateikėjų Visagine simbolizavo sovietinio modernizacijos, industrializacijos, urbanizacijos projekto sėkmę. Dalis informantų praeityje tapatinosi su šiuo projektu, siejo su juo savo gyvenimo prasmę ir sėkmę, jautėsi jo įgyvendintojais. Posovietmečiu sovietinis modernizacijos, „komunizmo statybos“ ideologinis konstruktas žlunga, jis yra devalvuojamas, nuvertinamas viešojoje erdvėje. Visagino senųjų gyventojų rankų darbo rezultatas – Ignalinos atominė elektrinė – uždaroma, spartus miesto augimas sustoja. Dalis informantų, kurie sovietmečiu jautėsi „civilizacijos nešėjais“, atsidavusiais tėvynei (Sovietų Sąjungai), posovietmečiu nebėra tokie reikšmingi. Autorės nuomone, tai taip pat turi įtakos, jog dalis vyresnės kartos informantų Visagine posovietmetį siejo su nuosmukiu.

Straipsnio autorės teigimu, lauko tyrimų Visagine metu žmonių gyvenimai buvo persmelkti netikrumo dėl ateities, neapibrėžtumo jausmo. Akivaizdu, jog Visagino gyventojai susiduria su ekonominėmis, socialinėmis problemomis, ir tai tiesiogiai veikia jų pasakojimus apie posovietinį laikotarpį.