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Unemployment and Solidarity
in Post-Communism - Negotiating Meanings
between the West and the Past

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Abstract

Research into living in former communist, neo-capitalist countries identifies what could be called a 'post-communist paradox of desolidarisation' - i.e. persistent egalitarian values coincide with low levels of involvement in solidary activities. Unemployment, introduced during the process of mainstreaming these societies towards a Western model of economy and society, is one of the more recent phenomena that establishes new social categories and redefines the relations between the individual, the 'other' (here: the unemployed) and the state. On the basis of a young Lithuanian between education and work and how he negotiates old and new shares of knowledge related to work and unemployment, the paper argues that undefined relations between potential strangers within this triangle account for some of the enigma of post-communist non-solidarity.

Keywords

post-communism, unemployment, solidarity, Lithuania, values, knowledge, socialisation biography, youth, generation

Introduction

'East Central European transformations take place in the dual context, or cognitive frame of reference, of the 'West' and 'the past,' Offe (1996: 230) wrote programmatically some ten years ago to describe the fundamentally different starting conditions for the development of political economies in post-socialist countries. A few years later, it seems that images of the future of social cohesion within the extended West in Europe need a shift in perspective towards the 'East', and what has become of it. There is concern that the 'post-communist solidarity crisis' (Outhwaite/Ray 2005: chapter 3) might be a critical, perhaps contagious feature of the altogether more than vague European social model. One particular research-indicated phenomenon that I want to introduce and discuss in this paper could be called 'post-communist paradox of desolidarisation' - i.e. the coincidence of persistently egalitarian values with low levels of involvement in solidary activities. This paper strives to contribute to a refined understanding of post-communist solidarity dilemmas faced by people living in former communist countries confronted with the new phenomenon of mass unemployment.

More and more evidence is produced that exhibits the challenge of living in former communist neo-capitalist countries, and the ambivalence of findings shows the complexity of the matter. Generalisations across contextual varieties seem obvious but might be as inappropriate as the transfer of Western research tools, concepts and interests. What further complicates research into an issue like solidarity is the fact that, despite the many claims established, nobody knows what it is. The notion of solidarity is hardly consolidated; it can mean everything from being a social a priori to being a good reason for redistributive taxation and welfare.¹ From my point of view the issue of solidarity first of all represents one of the ways of synthesising the general question of chances, beyond individual freedom and dis/advantage, to moral as well as material integration due to standards shared by members of a community.

The paper discusses the constitution of post-communist (local) solidarities with regard to the new but fundamental threat of mass unemployment attached to the, from now on, capitalist organisation of work in the 'new West'. Focusing on the establishment of an image of the recent and frequent 'figure of the unemployed', the paper looks for the kind and sources of knowledge about unemployment and the unemployed that might nurture being suspicious of 'the other'. The notion of 'knowledge' applied is that of everyday life suggested by Berger/Luckmann (1967); it is contextual, taken-for-granted and action-relevant. For the purpose of this paper I conceptualise solidarity indirectly as being constituted from below by the performance of activities by members of a certain community by virtue of their 'knowledge' about what makes a full member of society. The constitution of knowledge is what I will observe here.

I do this on the basis of one interview with a young man from Lithuania, a context where the societal transformation has been most radical. The interview is part of a qualitative research project exploring the 'new meanings' of work and unemployment from the perspective of young people in transition to working life.² Through the eyes of a young person, this case provides the opportunity to, on the one hand, complement the dimension of intergenerational transfer of knowledge about 'the past' by the second 'cognitive frame of reference' of 'the West' (Offe; see above), both represented by significant family members. On the other hand,

¹ See for example Baldwin (1990), Crow (2002); Brunkhorst (2005); Fiegle (2003); Mau (2003), Stjernø (2005).

² The research was carried out in the frame of a PhD-project at the European University Institute in Florence. The interviewees were Lithuanian native speakers; the interviews were collected in the year 2004 and translated into English.

it should allow the observation of how these two perspectives come together in work- and unemployment-related criteria of a young 'post-socialist EU citizen' for organising the social space and establishing images of 'outsiders' in the new society.

In order to contextualise this case discussion I first develop, on the basis of three different approaches, a research perspective on the basis of the post-communist paradox of desolidarisation characterising the solidarity triangle of the mutual relations between individuals, 'the other' and the state. The presence of essentially unknown social figures like that of the unemployed, a result of the mainstreaming of society and its institutions along Western standards, could be in the background of this paradox. In a second step I take a brief look at work-related changes in the context of societal transformation towards market economy. Finally, I introduce and discuss one young man from Lithuania, and the way he negotiates meanings of work and unemployment.

1 The post-communist paradox of desolidarisation and beyond

Findings of survey research on the one hand, and civil society research in post-communist societies on the other provide an ambivalent picture and allow identifying what could be called a 'post-communist paradox of desolidarisation'. Survey research indicates a generally higher level of sensitivity to and rejection of forms of injustice among citizens of former communist countries than among those of the European West. Also public opinion neither converges in a linear way towards Western standards, nor is this strongly facilitated by values of 'the younger generation' (e.g. Arts et al. 2003). Research into civil society development, on the other hand, shows that this does not correspond to a high level of people's involvement in civil society organisations.³ On the contrary, the readiness to participate in forms of common activity for the sake also of some more or less non-specific 'other' is weak. Howard (2003), for instance, studies civil society development in East Germany and Russia and finds that (a) people are tired of any form of commitment to collective activities and membership in voluntary organisations; (b) their expectations and hopes during post-communism are frustrated and disappointed by the slowness of their societies' change towards the better; (c) their social relations suffer from the changing preconditions of socialising under post-communist conditions.

The last element points towards a more fundamental transformation of interpersonal relations: People increasingly focus on personal lives and withdraw from each other for reasons of survival or available alternatives. Money, now representing 'real value' and revealing its distinguishing power, has a 'newly prominent and destructive role' (ibid: 135) with regard to relations between people and within families. Social inequalities and polarisation have both increased dramatically and become visible. Interpersonal relations in the workplace are transformed, for instance by the increased fluctuation of people, the introduction of unusual formality codes between colleagues at work and by the deconstruction of the workplace as a platform for establishing friendship relations and for meeting friends.

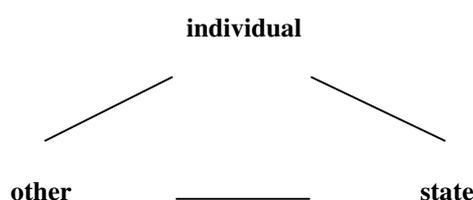
Research of this kind penetrates into the deeper layers of the eroding preconditions of social bonding in post-communist contexts. Sennett (1998) does something similar for the contemporary capitalist West concluding that the social bond is at risk due to an apparent decline in mutual dependence. In view of findings like those above I would tentatively argue, with a similar conclusion though, that in former communist and now capitalist contexts the social bond is at risk exactly due to the *introduction* of mutual dependence. Before, the state

³ For a recent suggestion of civil society as a potential third arena of solidarity, beside market and state, see Muenkler (2004).

mediated interpersonal relationships. Besides, people were equally replaceable (as labour force); but they were not replaced for this did not make sense within the logic of a socialist economy of shortage.⁴ Thus, Sennett's conclusion with regard to the erosive effect of 'shame about dependence' (ibid.: 141) might apply as well to the post-communist condition, but with opposite signs.

Altogether the rebuilding of civil society *qua* solidarity needs to consider the very fact that 'the socialist state was programmatically an individualizer trying to break all other kinds of social relations', as Peter Wagner (1994: 102) notes against the mainstream. Now that this state is gone, mutuality has become a prerequisite of the common. To put it differently, the revaluated relationship between the individual and the 'other' complements the weakened relationship between the individual and the state; together they establish a relational triangle (see Figure 1). Searching for a definition of the 'other' has become part of coming to terms with the sudden possibility *and* necessity of intra-society relations. This process seems most difficult, and might yield the most painful outcome, where the features of the 'other' are radically new, like in the case of the 'unemployed', or, to take another example, the immigrant, as soon as s/he will have arrived.⁵

Figure 1 - Triangle of (non-)solidarity



Taken together, the findings of the two research approaches introduced above point to a contradiction - persistent solidarity in attitudes/values coincides with weak solidarity in action. As a third type of research beside survey and civil society research, biographical research into the societal transformation towards market economy provides some answers to this puzzle. It does this by confronting individual trajectories of non/solidary action with the trajectory of public non/solidarity (i.e. welfare). Yet, as discussed below, the shifting balance within the relational triangle is neglected. For instance, Struck (2003) reports from a study into coping and decision making within the life course among adults under the 'new conditions' of 'individualised market economy' in Eastern Germany.⁶ He concludes that the observable 'signs of desolidarisation' among the respondents are not due to the mere loss of an over-protective state or deficient socialisation (ibid. 212).⁷ They rather have their roots in the fact that a 'willingness to succeed', where it is observed among individuals as having survived throughout the societal transformation, does not have 'counterparts at the level of the social system' (ibid. 221). Against the background of one of the research interests the study finds, for instance, that 'habitual dispositions' (Bourdieu et al.) remained stable beyond societal

⁴ To be sure, there were other ways to signal her unworthiness to a person.

⁵ For a taste of 'welfare state xenophobia' (solidarity violence?) in the shape of skinhead violence in the unified Germany see for example Ostow (1995). For a hint that this concern is not implausible see paragraph 140 of the interview discussed below.

⁶ The reference publication for the study is Sackmann et al. (2000).

⁷ This latter argument is, for instance, put forward by Sztompka (1996). Arguing strongly normative he identifies a 'cultural lag' between institutional transformation and cultural resources: it is for this 'incongruence of institutional and cultural levels', that a whole generation of people socialised in the old system would be at once devalued.

transformation but trigger different and pragmatic patterns of behaviour, here, towards occupational security. Disappointed expectations towards an equally stable continuation of state responsibilities for citizens' welfare, on the other hand, thwart the actual individual readiness to solidary action. On the basis of these findings, one could hypothesise that the, due to different pressures of immediacy, asynchronous trajectories of individual versus public action through the transformation do not facilitate the activation of the still available notions of good life and moral behaviour.

This research manages to transcend and bring light to some of the paradox surrounding post-communist non-solidarity. Yet it argues first of all on the level of the individual-state relation and neglects the above-indicated fundamental shift within societal relationships and the necessary revision of images of the 'other' as an additional dimension. Thus, an alternative but non-exclusive, rather complementary hypothesis, and this is the one I want to follow up throughout the rest of the paper, adds the dimension of knowledge about the 'other' to the puzzle partly solved above: Desolidarisation might actually have some of its roots in the confusion, *qua* lack of knowledge, about the possible beneficiaries of articulations of solidarity within the triangle individual-other-state. It might be for this knowledge gap with regard to societal groups finally depending on support (e.g. the unemployed) that, as the above biographical research finds, state action is awaited, but in the end perceived as inadequate. Concretely, and with regard to post-socialist transformations in the world of work one could assume: in order to be able to act upon him/her as companion or outsider, the contemporary figure of the unemployed might still need to be constituted as well as related knowledge consolidated.

2 Changing notions of work and the advent of the unemployed

The breakdown of communism and the 'catching-up' (e.g. Zapf 1994) of many former communist societies with Western standards brought an end to the socialist policy of full employment, where the state's commitment to providing jobs for everybody went hand in hand with the citizens' obligation to work. Starting from the 'complete elimination of unemployment' announced by Soviet leaders in the autumn of the year 1930 (Davis 1986), and the criminalisation of quitting a job without the employer's permission in the Soviet Union ten years later in view of the coming war (Filtzer 1986), the world of work in the communist half of Europe remained characterised for decades by what Baxandall (2000, 2004) in his study of Hungary identifies as a 'communist taboo against unemployment' in ideological, economic and political terms. Once established, the system's achievement of full employment had the status of an irreversible 'acquired right' of the worker (Kornai 1992: 210) within the socialist ideology. Economically, unemployment did not exist, at least officially.⁸ And politically the policy of unemployment was maintained as officials, leaders and workers could equally benefit from supporting the norm against unemployment.

Like in so many other areas the official line did not fully match the reality and 'unemployment', according to a Western understanding of people changing jobs or a mismatch between jobs and jobseekers, did in fact exist in the Soviet Union, and in socialist countries in general. However, unemployment was banned from public discourse, its scope was not 'measured' and institutions of unemployment like labour exchanges or unemployment registration were not established. Instead, people outside work were clearly identified – i.e.

⁸ Unemployment was 'negligible in scale' (Kornai 1992: 530); the exception was Yugoslavia (Woodward 1995).

non-participation in work was either considered a temporary interruption of work due to good (i.e. mostly private) reasons, or it was associated with social outcasts and even criminalised.⁹

After the collapse of communist regimes unemployment was one of the side effects of the prescribed 'shock therapy' of economic reform that intensified the social policy difficulties associated with the transition to a market economy (e.g. Standing 2002, Ferge 2001). The low level of social benefits together with a massive decline in employment and the emergence of the new phenomenon of mass unemployment undermined the traditional expectations of citizens towards the state. As unemployment, its meaning and experience, have become part of this new arrangement between state and citizens, the meaning of (formal) employment in the life course changed (Kohli 1986, Leisering/Leibfried 1999). Employment has remained a 'key access point to social benefits', as Deacon (2000: 147) describes it for the socialist system; but the connotation changed and the necessary efforts to enter and to remain a gainfully employed insider have become incomparably higher within a capitalist context.

Lithuania is one of the countries that, after the collapse of the Soviet Union some 15 years ago, entered a societal and economic transformation that brought them closer to the Western European model of economy and society and in the year 2004 into the European Union. The Lithuanian march to the West covered a long distance, or: to be precise, Lithuania was among those who went furthest. A recent report of the World Bank (2005) with the title 'Doing business in 2005: Removing obstacles to growth' announces that Lithuania, together with Slovakia, 'broke into the list of the 20 economies with the best business conditions as measured in this year's report' (ibid.: 2). However, liberalisation throws its shadow, and some of its adverse effects are work-related: A statistics of the EUROSTAT (Bardone/Guio 2005) assessing the poverty risk of employed and unemployed people shows that in Lithuania, as well as Slovakia, more than 40% of the population beyond the age of 15 at risk of poverty are actually employed. The average of the EU15 is 26%.¹⁰

In the meantime new definitions of 'right/good' or just 'appropriate/tolerable' behaviour with regard to employment are negotiated in the frame of the newly introduced institution of labour exchange. Beside its function as an interface between labour supply and demand, it has, as Juska/Pozzuto (2004) criticise, become a bureaucratic institution reproducing rituals of supervision, discipline and control. Based on an ethnographic study of both labour exchange clients and practices in Lithuania, the authors argue that the labour exchange has become a crucial player in the new, post-soviet establishment of patterns of exclusion and marginalisation by operating with the moralising distinction between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' unemployed/poor. With little impact on the actual situation of unemployment, the labour exchange involves the unemployed into a continuous 'search for non-existing jobs' in order to assure their (moral) eligibility for benefits.

Altogether it could be assumed that the messages young people in the 'new West' get to assess the transforming meanings of formal employment and unemployment are ambivalent. On the one hand and according to the given opportunity structures, formal employment is defined as only one option for survival; and formal unemployment does not necessarily equate to actually being out of work. On the other hand, the individual orientation towards successful employment performance and continuous contribution to the social security system has become a new 'requirement' for both the reproduction of the system and individual well-being. Recent policy-driven changes in the assessment of this orientation among young

⁹ A view on the practical side of the work obligation and the difficulties to get hold of parasites is provided by Granick (1988: 23-28).

¹⁰ Altogether the number of in-work poor in the EU 25 amounts to 14 million people.

people have contributed to increase the contradictory character of youth transitions to work (Reiter/Craig 2005). The advent of the figure of the unemployed to the 'new West' is framed by these tensions characterising the re-definition of the role of work in the life course and by the struggle with regard to the constitution of what can be called 'socially recognised contribution to social reproduction' (Honneth 2002: 54).¹¹

Young people hold a particularly delicate position in this process of knowledge renewal as it is largely up to them to negotiate 'old' meanings and to carry them further into the new society. This is a common but usually gradual process. In the case of post-communist transformations to capitalism the devaluation of knowledge represented by the parents' and the grandparents' generation can be expected to be more profound. However, while the (legal) framework of institutions together with official discourses might be changed within very short time periods, the socially available patterns of interpretations together with the moral readjustment of the people to the new circumstances cannot. What Srubar (1998: 131), referring to Parsons, calls 'latency of values', is operating in the background with a certain stabilising or at least decelerating effect. Representatives of the old system, whether perceived as such or not, will still be around for some time, both physically as well as in terms of ideas. The particular case presented in the next part can be read as an illustration of this struggle.

3 Negotiating meanings of work and unemployment – the example of Saulius

Saulius¹² is one of the respondents in a qualitative study exploring the 'new meanings' of work and unemployment from the perspective of young people in transition to working life. He belongs to the group of young people in 'linear transitions'; they are mostly still in education and, like the majority of young people, 'on track'. Saulius is a 16-year-old student in the last, the 10th year of compulsory education. He is 'on track' in the sense that there is no indication for him to drop out of school; his environment is supportive and at least until finishing upper secondary education his plans are set. Saulius is an interesting case for many reasons. It is for his family relations that he seems to be most suitable to illustrate, not explain, how new meanings are established between different worlds and their representation. In short, when his parents, both with university education, divorced some 10 years ago, his mother left to work in the USA. As she did not want him to live with his father, Saulius, their only child, moved away from the capital Vilnius, to a small town to stay with his maternal grandparents, both retired.

His family relations might be considered exceptional and, thus, not 'common' enough. However, the fact that his parents divorced during the mid 1990s and that one of them went abroad for work to maintain the family back home, was, and still is, a very common phenomenon; even if the one who left was the mother. In general, knowing somebody working abroad, siblings, friends etc, is not exceptional. Yet, the closeness of the contact to his grandparents, especially his grandmother, is probably above average and might make him an extraordinary case. However, it is exactly this exaggeration that allows the reconstruction of what I want to call the *dialogue with the past* represented by his grandmother. His mother, who returns to Lithuania from her work in the restaurant of a cruise ship for one or two months every year and then stays together with him in the same room, is the second significant reference person. She is his main partner in his *dialogue with the West*.

¹¹ For an assessment of the concept of recognition in Honneth's version in the context of research into changing meanings of work in post-communist contexts see Reiter (2005).

¹² 'Saulius' is the pseudonym of his choice.

The discussion of the material in terms of *dialogues* is 'analytic' and metaphorical; it follows Offe's (1996) suggestion to study post-communist transformations in the dual 'cognitive frame of reference and comparison, of 'the West' and 'the past' (ibid.: 230). Obviously, these are imagined dialogues, heuristic tools here, without exclusive character: Neither can knowledge constitution be reduced to a transfer between family members; this would underestimate its complexity. Nor does knowledge originate only *from* the West or the past; this would question the availability of knowledge in the very place. This spatial and temporal *present* needs to be considered as the primary arena of meaning negotiation and frame of reference of both acting and time structuring.¹³ Yet, putting an emphasis on the significance of family members seems appropriate in this very case: Saulius himself stresses the importance of this intergenerational transfer of knowledge for the constitution of his, and people's opinion in general (150; see below).¹⁴

With regard to the issue of unemployment, the second forum of knowledge, i.e. the dialogue with his mother, seems less relevant; at least in terms of a direct influence on his opinion as it is determined mostly by what he can observe in his immediate environment. Unemployment is here and now; what is abroad is his mother and her successful career. However, his mother's experiences and what he learns from communicating with her about the new world of work in the 'West' are part of the make up of his becoming professional persona.

I will therefore first take a brief look at what Saulius thinks about the world of work and the requirements of success, as well as, implicitly, failure. In a second step this needs to be confronted with his image of the unemployed. The conclusion is that the world of work, like his mother in the West, is closer to him than the world of unemployment and his grandmother, who is a source of knowledge from which he tends to dissociate himself.

The dialogue with the West

His mother is Saulius's role model of success in the Western world of work; a world that he generally describes as demanding and hostile – *'I wouldn't like to go to America. My mum has told me terrible things, terrible people are there, they require a lot, that is why I don't like it. People are better in Lithuania, more sincere, not spoilt yet [he is laughing].'* (118) His mother left after divorcing his father, and over the years she worked her way up from being a waitress to the position of a restaurant manager on a cruise ship.¹⁵ Although Saulius obviously misses her he recognises her accomplishment. In fact, he cannot even visit her because she needs to make sacrifices with regard to her private life – *'She doesn't work on the continent, she is on the ship all the time, so she doesn't have a permanent place to live, that is, she has a cabin'* (122). He understands that she sustains him financially and that, in spite of her promises, she will probably not come back *'because here there is no work for her'* (124) that would be equally well-paid.

The idea of (labour) mobility is something he easily integrates into his own life plan. In view of his family's plans to move back to the capital Vilnius where he grew up as a child, he demonstrates his willingness to change place, as he expects this to be a natural feature of working life – *'But somehow I want to change the environment, because I think one needs..., because anyway, as one will go through life, anyway, you will change workplaces. So I need to get used to that.'* (24)

¹³ Cf. Reiter (2003) for youth's biographical time structuring.

¹⁴ Here and in the following numbers after quotations refer to paragraphs in the interview.

¹⁵ It seems important to note that Saulius never claims that the cruise ship actually sails under an American flag; however, his generalisations address 'America'.

The expression of his readiness to adapt to anticipated requirements of the new world of work at the end of this passage (i.e. mobility) is not unique. He gives the impression of an attentive observer with broad 'knowledge'; and throughout the whole interview Saulius keeps associating his plans, priorities and perspective with expectations of this kind.

Referring to his mother's stories about working in the USA as well as to job advertisements that he read here, he understands that what counts these days in CVs, job interviews and recommendation letters is '*experience, experience*' (84, 92). Experiences might be the '*foundation for the future*' (92), be it for the price of '*working for nothing*' (84) in the beginning. Another reason why it has become so difficult to find a job is the fact that many well-educated people compete for the same jobs but only the '*the best ones are chosen*' (110). His reply to the question whether he intends to study is:

Of course I do. How can I do without studies [he is laughing]? One is not hired to clean streets without having studied these days [he is laughing.]. Studies are necessary. In general, a person studies all his life. (72)

He strives for '*good education*' and when he thinks about all the '*dumb people*' in the USA, which his mother mentioned to him, he feels the obligation to become educated and smart, in order '*not to be the only one stupid among many clever people*' in '*a small country like Lithuania*', where '*it is possible to get good education*' (74). What counts is education as such, not the track one has completed; especially the knowledge of languages will be important in the European Union.

He knows that education has become a minimum job requirement and that specialisation and professional skills need to be constantly updated. Asked whether a career would be important for him when he starts working he exactly emphasises virtues like flexibility, ('natural') ambition and lifelong learning:

Of course it is important. You would not work in one position for the whole life. It is necessary to climb the career ladder and try to achieve the top, because anyway, those people who are bosses, anyway they leave one day and someone has to take their position. So this is how everything is always moving forwards. I also hope to always move forwards like this. Of course, career is important. One needs to put much effort and to study all life. To study in order to climb the next step of the career ladder. (203)

Finally, he learned that, apart from education or simply communicative slickness, 'contacts', acquaintances and friends, can be essential for success. Furthermore having contacts is most powerful as a complementary feature - for talented or intelligent people who '*have a couple of contacts (...) everything is fine, life is put in order*' (128). Saulius seems to deal with his 'contacts', friends mostly, very consciously. He collects and leaves them on the way – very early in the interview he says, '*I combed out my friends*' (12) as interests and priorities changed in the course of time. Many of his friends are older, about five years (106), and he has more in common with them than with his peers (34); he likes to attend and play theatre, he is interested in art and '*chooses*' his friends accordingly (42). Reflecting on what is important about work he illustrates his understanding of how contacts operate:

Most important, it seems to me, is making new contacts, getting acquainted. Because anyway, in the future, when you live, these contacts become very useful. Because sometimes when you need some help or some favour, contacts are important. And in general, nowadays, if you listen to people, it seems that it is impossible to get anywhere without contacts. (104)

The dialogue with the Past

His grandmother is Saulius' strongest and most present link to the past and he refers to her throughout the interview. She is an ambivalent source of knowledge, which he rejects in principle but appreciates when alternative interpretations are not available. Saulius describes his grandmother as '*too conservative*' (154), and unlike his parents, who let him find his way,

she can be very straight about her '*stupid wishes*' (172) for his career. When she says things like: '*I would like you to be a doctor,*' he would just '*laugh at her, and that's it, nothing else*' (172). This is also how he would, sometimes to her embarrassment, stop her from telling stories about how it used to be '*when (she) was young*' (183).¹⁶

Saulius' assessment of unemployment and unemployed people in Lithuania is a complex articulation tying together many associations. I restrict my discussion to three main issues relevant for the present paper; they are interwoven but analytically separated here: a) unemployment and the unemployed, b) the assumed role of the state, and c) the general as well his own opinion about the unemployed.¹⁷

(a) Although Saulius recognises the problem of job shortage as well as the state's responsibility in this respect, he does not accept unemployed people who do not even try to find a job but instead appear to exploit the system of welfare by, for instance, living on child benefits. He is convinced that work can be found with the appropriate attitude. He repeatedly calls unemployed people '*lazybones*' and dissociates himself explicitly from them – '*I don't support such people. I somehow do not like such people*' (132). Asked for his opinion about unemployment and its reasons he answers:

Hmm. (3) (These) people are lazybones [he is laughing]. This is the first reason. In fact, those who want, can surely find a job. It is not that, 'Look, there is no work and altogether what I ...', if (one is) in some village, 'I came here and cannot find a job.' You have to look for it, the one who looks for, that one does find it. If you will lie on a couch with a glass of brandy [he is laughing], life will surely not get better because of that. The state, of course, cannot create work for everybody but for many. If you cannot find a job, so what, you can go abroad. I don't think that it is absolutely impossible to get a job. Of course, it is possible. But sometimes people are very demanding and lazybones, exactly those, who do not have (work). They think that it is much easier to live on the state's pocket by making themselves lots of children, that it is much easier than to work, like all normal people. (130)

Saulius' general image of the unemployed is associated with idleness, reluctance to take chances and a form of social parasitism outside societal normality. They represent discouraged citizens who complain but would not articulate this in democratic participation (140). Furthermore, unemployment goes hand in hand with alcoholism, and most of the unemployed he knows are, in fact, drinking (144) - '*and employers do not want such people*' (142). He has little sympathy for them in general and does not consider them '*common people like others, but simply without job*' (144). The only exception, and this indicates the possibility to alternative behaviour of the unemployed, he can think of is his aunt's husband who actually '*does something*' (146), like taking care of their piece of (formerly collective) garden. Nevertheless, the general image of the unemployed is that of filth and stink associated with a '*shabby home*' (146), or that of '*asocial families who do not take care of anything*' (140). Referring to his aunt's husband he says:

And her husband even though he drinks, anyway he does something, at least this is good. Because there are such (people) who don't do anything. It is absolutely terrible. Shabby home. These social workers, when they enter there, it makes them wrinkle their nose. It is terrible. Or like they show on TV, let's say, so many famous people are forgotten, disabled, it is terrible. The state doesn't take care properly. It is still young as a state, it doesn't take care of all yet. That is why people are cheerless and disappointed with life sometimes (146).

¹⁶ Dissociation through laughter might be an important general pattern of young people's dealing with the communist past, which could be further investigated. Zaslavsky (1982: 15, reference Fn 24) discusses the revival of a fascination for Stalin's radical communism among young people in the late 1970s and quotes the Russian author Analoi Levitin-Krasnov as having 'described the mood of Soviet young people as a "profound disillusionment with the idea of communism, in which three former generations had faith. The young neither fight against communism, argue against it, nor curse it; something much worse has happened to communism: they laugh at it."'

¹⁷ See Appendix for the full representation of the relevant interview passage (paragraphs 129 to 150).

(b) In the final part of this last quotation (146) Saulius articulates a variation of the disappointment of people in post-communist countries with the state's taking responsibility similar to that described by Struck (2003; see above). Saulius identifies the insufficient state support as the reason for people's general dissatisfaction. However, he considers this to be a temporary problem associated with a 'young' state. Within the frame of the whole passage related to work and unemployment this statement has the status of a conclusion based on related accounts made before.

Saulius indicates that there is a state responsibility with regard to unemployment but it is necessarily limited; and there is the risk of abuse (130). He supports the idea of paying unemployment benefits because there are people who simply could not live otherwise, for instance 'people without education' or those with less requested qualifications (134). On the other hand, he trusts in public support on the municipal level and refers to offers for voluntary work that should be accepted (134, 136). However, he considers benefits too low ('a person wouldn't survive', 136), and is upset with the low level of retirement pensions. The state's inadequate answer to a life of hard work is a case of mis-recognition in the sense of Honneth (1995); again, it is considered a temporary problem.

(...) And the pensions, altogether, are not more than mockery [he is laughing]. A person works hard for all his life and then gets some pennies, and is not able to live on them. But Lithuania is a growing state, everything will be fine in the future. (136)

Apart from 'ridiculous pensions' (138) Saulius laments the poor compensation of health expenditures and doubts the state's readiness to take responsibility for education despite its actual benefits from a capable labour force (138). Altogether, the state responsibility for coordinating institutionalised forms of solidarity like pensions, health provision, education and, in fact, job creation is not put into question.

c) The other level of possible support for unemployed is that of the potentially sympathetic individual within the generally indifferent or even hostile social environment. 'Pity' (148) is the people's general attitude towards the kind of unemployed he has in mind. The example is a woman in manifest misery who, distinguished by a 'swollen face' (150) from drinking, successfully approaches his grandmother for a pittance. Saulius adapts this attitude of pity for some, especially the long-term, unemployed. Furthermore, he assesses them against his own situation on the basis of what could be called a 'reflexive sense of equity'; they are less lucky and live less well than he:

(...) And especially those who haven't become unemployed recently, but those who have not found a job for a long time, so I feel pity for these people most of all, that they are not lucky in life that they cannot live well and have all that, what, let's say, I have. (...) (150)

Nevertheless, his final assessment takes him back to where he started - the unemployed are the kind of 'lazybones' (150) described before. He is not alone with this opinion and explicitly acknowledges the strong influence of other people, especially grandparents or parents. Reflecting upon the people's general opinion he says:

How do they look at them (the unemployed, H.R.)? First of all they call them lazybones, like I do, [he is laughing], I also agree with their opinion. Maybe they made us get used to the idea that they are lazybones, those people. So they think the same like I do. Always people think the same way adults do, their grandparents or parents. (150)

Unemployment between Past and West

The world of work beyond his context, associated with his mother working in the West, appear to be closer and more real and relevant to Saulius than the present world of unemployment surrounding him, associated with his grandmother, who represents a source of

distant knowledge. Saulius' *dialogue with the West* is about getting work, keeping it and moving upwards within; and it is not unlikely that these have become the most important features of work in the 'new West'. Partly corresponding to his mother's experiences he establishes a perspective that is necessarily forward-, future-oriented; work is ahead of him, and now is when he needs to get prepared (i.e. first part of tripartite life course). Good education and the right contacts, important criteria of social mobility already in the old system, are complemented by other requirements like the primary investment of 'working for nothing', mobility, flexibility and the willingness to continuous learning. All this facilitates upward mobility, which is a built-in feature of both the system of work as well as individual striving. Finally, work and career - in the example of his mother working on a ship somewhat remote from reality - go hand in hand with sacrifices with regard to private life. The role of companions, friends and acquaintances originally, has become either, that of 'contacts', a pool of favours, or, that of competitors in the race for good jobs. Saulius seems to have learned and understood this part of life extraordinarily quickly and the availability of a close and 'successful' representative of the new world of work certainly contributed to it. However, he is not establishing a link between the transformation of people's personalities towards individualised life course runners and the image of 'terrible people' that his mother provides in her account of contemporary 'America'.

On the other hand, Saulius' account of unemployment and unemployed people evolves out of a *dialogue with the Past*, while a connection between the issue of unemployment and what he knows about the West remains implicit. The unemployed he can think of are either, redundant, old or ill-qualified; or, they are miserable and reluctant to work. For them getting and keeping work under the new conditions is necessarily problematic given the presumed lack of necessary basic personal qualities. According to Saulius the state is not released from its life course responsibilities; education, job availability and creation, post-work pensions, and the citizens' survival still are part of the state's solidarity burden that it can hardly carry. State support is described as remedial and requires voluntary involvement; it offers but a minimal contribution to the re-establishment of a person's 'status of worth'. The social environment, on the other hand, is characterised by a basic suspicion towards this exaggerated figure of the unemployed; it is overcome by occasional 'sympathy', to use a general term. Suspicion seems to reflect the common attitude, and sympathy is not unconditional but still needs the moment of attention as well as comparison and 'discrimination' in the sense of the establishment of difference. While a sense of equity is in principle evident also from Saulius' account the question is whether, and in which direction on this hollow public and private ground, stable and reasonable criteria for an assessment of unemployed people will crystallise.

Conclusion

The two perspectives into the past and into the possible becoming of post-communist societies, which I suggested for analytic purposes, produce largely inconsistent accounts. While the dialogue with the West overtakes reality and advances larger-than-life expectations, the dialogue with the past lags behind and gets stuck in outdated stereotypes with regard to both unemployed people as societal outcasts as well as the role of the state as a responsible one. The reality of mass unemployment, working poor, poverty and societal polarisation is somewhere in between; but it remains a blank field inasmuch as appropriate patterns of interpretation are unavailable. The case of Saulius illustrates the current struggle for a consolidation of knowledge about unemployed people by negotiating and confronting available and inconsistent claims. As one representative of young people in former communist countries, particularly sensitive filters of knowledge one could assume, he needs

to make sense of what could be rephrased in terms of 'convergent vs. path-dependent knowledge shares'.

The stereotypical figure of the contemporary unemployed seems anachronistic within the post-communist context. S/he has features known from the Soviet ideology: an idle, asocial alcoholic trying to exploit meagre state benefits. 'Real' victims of the (labour) market – for instance, the elderly, the ill-qualified – are perceived as exceptions. Given the scope of the unemployment problem such an exaggerated image of the unemployed is unreal and inadequate. It certainly describes one feature of the post-communist social landscape, but it is inappropriate for a general representation of market-induced mass unemployment.

A rapid knowledge turnover in the 'new West' cannot be expected; habitual knowledge is still in place and continues to be reproduced. Furthermore, it will be crucial to observe, in which direction the balance within the solidarity triangle individual-other-state will further develop due to the new representatives of the state like institutions of un/employment management and their criteria of inclusion/exclusion. Undefined relations between potential strangers within this triangle, however, seem to account for some of the enigma of post-communist non-solidarity.

Generalising beyond the case, one could assume that, for the time being, the non-action of both the state and the individual are in principle legitimised by a biased representation of the unemployed, by the establishment of boundaries around them, and by the strong and largely inappropriate dissociation from them. On this ground it seems unlikely that solidarity among people could grow and that it could be based on a persistent basic attitude of supportiveness within a community of shared realities and values. Rather is the circle of solidarity temporarily extended in order to embrace those who manage to catch the attention of the insiders.

Finally, in the direction of youth research into post-communism it can be argued that this knowledge dilemma adds to the generally increasingly contingent character of youth transitions that equally affect young people in other 'Western' societies.¹⁸ In post-communist contexts traditional socialising agents lost some of their competence due to the abrupt breakdown of the system and the related de-valuation of knowledge. Here, the significance of biographical and 'self-socialisation' (Hoerning/Alheit 1995; Heinz 2002) extends towards the topography of societal positions.

¹⁸ See for example Fuchs (1983), Buchmann (1989), Chisholm/Hurrelmann (1995), Furlong/Carmel (1997), Du Bois-Reymond (1998), Shanahan (2000), Leccardi (2005).

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Appendix – Interview Saulius, paragraphs 129 to 150

- 129 **Interviewer:** Ok, now, look, regarding this work theme, but something a bit different, when there's no work. In fact there are many unemployed in Lithuania, unemployment is high, and what do you think, what could be the reasons for that?
- 130 **Saulius:** Hmm. (3) (These) people are lazybones [he is laughing]. This is the first reason. In fact, those who want, can surely find a job. It is not that, 'Look, there is no work and altogether what I ...', if (one is) in some village, 'I came here and cannot find a job.' You have to look for it, the one who looks for, that one does find it. If you will lie on a couch with a glass of brandy [he is laughing], life will surely not get better because of that. The state, of course, cannot create work for everybody but for many. If you cannot find a job, so what, you can go abroad. I don't think that it is absolutely impossible to get a job. Of course, it is possible. But sometimes people are very demanding and lazybones, exactly those, who do not have (work). They think that it is much easier to live on the state's pocket by making themselves lots of children, that it is much easier than to work, like all normal people.
- 131 **I:** when they get all kinds of benefits ...
- 132 **S:** Yeh, but I don't support such people. I somehow do not like such people.
- 133 **I:** What about the unemployed? Let's say, those benefits that they get, what do you think, there is this state support, the state benefit. What do you think?
- 134 **S:** My reaction to benefits ... Hmm, of course, benefits are necessary, because how can a person live otherwise? But, let's say, painters are people, it is difficult for them to find a job according to their qualification. To draw some posters for companies does not make sense. Then really, I do understand that such people are unemployed. Or, let's say, people without education, well, volunteers can work at the municipality. The municipality itself will help, here in X (town) it does support, for example that XXX of XXX [company of the mayor] of X (town), why not. What did you ask, what am I talking here about [he is laughing]?
- 135 **I:** Support...
- 136 **S:** Ayh, support. Well that is the state's support. 'At the municipality, go to work as, let's say, as a volunteer, they will really help you.' I don't think that the municipality would remain indifferent and wouldn't help. But benefits are too small in my opinion, a person wouldn't survive. And the pensions, altogether, are not more than mockery [he is laughing]. A person works hard for all his life and then gets some pennies, and is not able to live on them. But Lithuania is a growing state, everything will be fine in the future.
- 137 **I:** What do you think the state should take care of? Could you think now, what else the state should give to a person, how should it help?
- 138 **S:** Health care, it really should ... Well health care in our state is normal, well, but regarding the compensated medicine I don't know anything in detail, but, as far as I have heard, half of the people do not get it, that is bad, because the elderly have ridiculous pensions and their medicine is not compensated, so this is a real mockery, this is terrible. I think that the state should compensate medicine for all those old, elderly people who cannot afford to buy it. And the state, in my opinion, has to take care of a young person and education has to be free for everyone. Well, let's say, not everyone, all people, but, let's say, those who are talented and those who entered universities, that they didn't have to pay all that money to get education, because it is not them who need it, but the state needs people who could work. When you think like this...
- 139 **I:** And a person, does he have any duties towards the state? What should a person...?
- 140 **S:** A person? His labour force, of course. And a person has to fulfil his duties, for example, to vote. I don't understand those who do not go to vote and then rail against the authorities: 'We elected the one who shouldn't have been elected'. 'So why do you sit on your couch then? Lift your ass and go to vote.' This is some kind of nonsense when they sit at home and laze and they shout with their mouths open wide, 'Not this one and not that one!' So this is also a duty, to vote. Then, what else, other duties? It seems to me that it is a duty to raise children for the state, because, for example, like the population is decreasing in Lithuania now. It is terrible, what may happen in many, many years. If there was no

Lithuania, then all kinds of black people would overrun it, so I think it would not be too much fun [he is laughing]. That is why I think that every person has to leave one person instead of himself, at least one. What else...? What other duties can be there? (3) To create nice environment [he is laughing]. Not to leave untidy things around your house, so that it was nice in Lithuania, so that people came and remembered that here, people live really nicely, they don't idle, but they work. For example, those unemployed, people in the country, let's say, and also some of my relatives, they do not work. But if you think about it, if you come to their (collective) garden and *well*, it doesn't look like he would be unemployed. *Well*, everything is nicely fixed, all the surroundings. So he works there. And for me it is, for example, pleasing. And sometimes there are asocial families who do not take care of anything, they do not look after their children, but some other unemployed manage very well. It means that people can live in another way. That's it. It is a duty to live tidily [he is laughing].

141 **I:** We also talked that your relatives do not work. So I would like to come back to the unemployed namely. Do you know any unemployed people? What kind of people are they and why don't they work?

142 **S:** Yes. My godfather, so he is the husband of my aunt, so he doesn't work, I think that he doesn't work. He doesn't work, because he likes drinking, that's why...and employers do not want such people. And his qualification is something like crane operator [he is laughing] or something like this. I think, people like that are not too much wanted these days. Whereas constructors, so here in X (town) and everywhere else, they are wanted, but he, somehow either he didn't know his job well or something like that, but he doesn't have a job.

143 **I:** Who else do you know, from your neighbours, or your classmates' parents or relatives?

144 **S:** Most of the unemployed whom I know, most of them are unemployed because they hmm... they drink alcohol, that's why, the majority... I do not know such people who do not have a job and are common people like the others, but simply without jobs. I do not know such people, I think. The majority of those who do not have jobs, drink. But there is one exception, my aunt's husband... Ayh, no, my godmother, it seems to me, she has a job, yes, she works. But anyway they do very well.

145 **I:** Ayh, the ones with the collective gardens...

146 **S:** Yeh. And her husband even though he drinks, anyway he does something, at least this is good. Because there are such (people) who don't do anything. It is absolutely terrible. Shabby home. These social workers, when they enter there, it makes them wrinkle their nose. It is terrible. Or like they show on TV, let's say, so many famous people are forgotten, disabled, it is terrible. The state doesn't take care properly. It is still young as a state, it doesn't take care of all yet. That is why people are cheerless and disappointed with life sometimes.

147 **I:** And what do you think, maybe you encountered (them), how do the people around treat these unemployed?

148 **S:** How do they treat them? They feel pity for them.

149 **I:** Pity?

150 **S:** Yeh, for example, earlier, now not anymore, a woman would come to my grandma, you can see from her swollen face that she drinks a lot. She asks for two Litas (i.e. 0,6 EUR) and my grandma gives them to her, she really feels sorry for her. And especially those who haven't become unemployed recently, but those who have not found a job for a long time, so I feel pity for these people most of all, that they are not lucky in life that they cannot live well and have all that, what, let's say, I have. Other people, for example, my family members, well, I don't know ... Because I do not live with my parents, I live with my grandparents, my both grandparents are pensioners. Thanks god they get good pensions, more or less, compared to others. So, are they considered to be unemployed? But they are retired people. How do they look at them (the unemployed, H.R.)? First of all they call them lazybones, like I do, [he is laughing], I also agree with their opinion. Maybe they made us get used to the idea that they are lazybones, those people. So they think the same like I do. Always people think the same way adults do, their grandparents or parents.