

# Europe Thirty Years after 1989

*Transformations of Values, Memory, and Identity*

*Edited by*

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# From Ideology of Culture to Cultural Critique: *Kultūros barai* Journal and the Changing Roles of Lithuanian Intellectuals (1989–2019)

*Almantas Samalavičius*

## 1 Introduction

The aim of this essay is to analyze how the roles and responsibilities of intellectuals have shifted since 1989 when Lithuania set out on the road to freedom and broke away from the Soviet Union that had occupied and eventually colonized the country in 1939 using the secret Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, and again at the end of WWII in 1945 under the pretext of “liberation”. The focus is on the journal *Kultūros barai* [Domains of Culture], a monthly publication with a lengthy publishing history. This journal has contributed significantly to the making of public space for intellectual issues and debates since the spectacular fall of the Soviet regime in the Baltics and East-Central Europe.

Intellectuals have always been important in the cultural and political contexts of East-Central Europe. Lithuania is no exception. The enduring importance of Eastern European intellectuals is verified by their ambiguous situation, controversies, and moral choices under Communist regimes (Konrad and Shelenyi, 1979; Milosz, 1991; Bauman, 1989) and the changing roles they had to perform after the fall of totalitarianism and experience of post-Communist transformations (Bozoki, 1998; King and Shelenyi, 2004; Samalavičius, 2007; Bradan and Dushakine, 2010). Journals have been extremely important for East-Central European intellectuals not only as tools for dissemination of ideas and opinions, but also because periodicals allowed them to communicate with both their peers and larger layers of their societies.

The role of various publications in giving voices to dissenting intellectuals is well known: the well-researched *samizdat* tradition in East-Central Europe has played its part in exchanges between intellectuals and their audiences under Communism as well as its subsequent avatars in the region (Saunders, 1974; Kovacz and Labov, 2013). In addition to *samizdat* publications, however, there were some important official journals supervised and controlled by the authorities that, nevertheless, contributed to establishing a certain level of

intellectual culture in the era when control and censorship prevailed. Their role in reshaping the intellectual culture in various countries deserves a closer scrutiny.

*Kultūros barai* journal seems to make a perfect case for this kind of analysis. The journal was founded in the year 1965 and was considered to be an important cultural periodical during the Soviet period. Moreover, it became the largest and leading cultural journal reflecting on society, and culture and its values after the epochal rupture in 1989 when the Iron Curtain of Communism fell down. By timely reconsidering the journal's structure, contents, and a new profile, the editors of *Kultūros Barai* reshaped the journal into an open forum for the most essential discussions on culture and society.

As a consequence, its aspirations, tone and goals have shifted from constructing and disseminating an ideology of culture to consolidating cultural criticism. By reflecting on the development of the journal and focusing on some of its most important publications, the chapter attempts to analyze how the values and identities of intellectuals shifted from disseminating cultural ideology to the practice of critical analysis.

## 2 *Kultūros barai* in European Public Space

*Kultūros barai* is generally known as one of the oldest and largest (in terms of circulation) cultural journals in Lithuania. Unlike most cultural periodicals of this kind that mostly lost their previous readership after the post-Communist social shift in the early 1990s, the journal managed to secure a strikingly large circulation and its current print run is no less than 2700 copies. Established in a period when Eastern European societies cherished some short-term hopes about the possibility of “socialism with a human face”, it eventually developed into one of the most important cultural publications of Lithuania's era of Soviet dependence and post-Soviet-dependence period. In a few years after the fall of Soviet power, *Kultūros barai* underwent significant changes and acquired a European intellectual format.

The journal's European profile and the level of its intellectual contents attracted the attention of *Eurozine* – the association and network of European cultural journals. *Kultūros barai* journal was invited to join this pan-European organization and became an official partner of the *Eurozine* network on January 10th, 2003, after rigorous, peer-review expertise. Since then, the journal has been actively participating in the activities of this association by contributing a large number of analytical, political, and cultural essays to its website, taking part in its annual meeting and also co-organizing a memorable meeting of

European cultural journals under the title “European Histories” in Vilnius, Lithuania on May 8–10, 2009.

The key-note speakers at the event were Czech-born writer, academic and founder of *Lettre International*, Antonin Liehm, and the renowned Yale historian Timothy Snyder. The opening event of this meeting was hosted in Lithuania’s presidential palace, and the then-president, Valdas Adamkus, gave an impressive welcoming speech to more than one hundred European editors as well as to the invited intellectuals and academics who attended the 22nd European meeting of cultural journals in Lithuania’s capital city, Vilnius.

Among many other things, the meeting happened to be a turning point in the intellectual biography of Timothy Snyder, who rose to international fame after his essay “Holocaust: The Ignored Reality”. This important essay was published in the *New York Review of Books* just a couple of months after he delivered it as a key-note lecture in Vilnius to the members of the *Eurozine* network. In his memorable key-note address, Timothy Snyder exposed the neglected aspects of the Holocaust, arguing that Auschwitz – a symbol of Jewish genocide during WWII – in fact marginalizes the fates of non-Western European Jews, who were murdered in other and far larger Nazi death factories.

He further drew parallels between Nazi and Soviet regimes as mass killing performed by both, and containing a certain evilly rational background, the theory that Snyder later elaborated in his book, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*. He insisted that the ideology that legitimized extermination of human beings was also linked to a vision of economic development that was rationally combined with mass killings. The essay of Timothy Snyder was eventually translated into Lithuanian and published in a book that contained papers and discussions presented in the 22nd meeting of European cultural journals (Fredriksson and Samalavičius, 2010). Beyond any doubt, it provided ample food for thought to Lithuanian historians and intellectuals reflecting on the burdensome legacy of both of these bloody regimes in Lithuania, especially having in mind the historic stain of Lithuanian participation in the Holocaust as well as the historic honor for those Lithuanians who took part in saving Jews.

The partnership with *Eurozine* turned out to be mutually beneficial. Via *Eurozine*’s online website, *Kultūros barai* reached an international audience and a number of Lithuanian authors transmitted their ideas and political positions to their peers all over Europe and beyond. These numerous essays penned by Lithuanian authors – cultural, literary and art critics, philosophers, historians, sociologists, linguists etc. – being now available in English as well as in some other languages, raises the awareness about important insights that are born on the fringes of “the other Europe”. Because of the multilingual *Eurozine*’s

website, the European readers for the last two decades have been getting a better understanding of cultural developments in Lithuania and the true pulse of its intellectual life along with its public debates.

On the other hand, the Lithuanian readers and contributors to the journal have been provided access to the European public space where important and timely discussions are going on. Those authors who contributed their essays to [www.eurozine.com](http://www.eurozine.com) had an opportunity to circulate their ideas wider than they perhaps initially expected. Some of these writings were also translated into many European languages and published in other partner journals of *Eurozine's* network. No less than 200 essays contributed by the authors of *Kultūros barai* are available on Eurozine's website in English, German, French, as well as in Lithuanian.

The essay "The Non-Efficient Citizen" by the editor of this volume was translated not only into English, but also into Slovenian and Bulgarian (Kavaliauskas 2008). His academic conversations with Catalanian intellectuals touched Catalanian independence and cultural identity issues (Arenas, Arrufat, Kavaliauskas, 2017). He also conducted an important conversation with Tatiana Zhurzhenko on Ukraine (Zhurzhenko, Kavaliauskas, 2013). Kavaliauskas also paid special interest to Bulgaria and its place on the European map (Ditchev, Kavaliauskas, 2010). These conversations often cover inconvenient, yet pressing political issues that deal with geopolitics, regional identity, and the traumatic historical past. The conversation with Boris Kapustin on Russia and post-Communist transformations is translated into English and Russian (Kapustin, Kavaliauskas 2011), whereas the conversation with Iyaylo Ditchev is translated into English and Hungarian (but strangely not into Bulgarian).

Other essays by Lithuanian authors also received attention on the *Eurozine* website, e.g. on Lithuanian identity (Kuzmickas, 2015) as well as on the renowned Lithuanian theatre director Eimuntas Nekrošius and Lithuania's theatre culture (Vasiliauskas, 2018). Also the theme of uncertain future of the Lithuanian language became an important contribution to *Eurozine* (Subačius, 2013).

### 3 The Origins and Challenges of the "Singing Revolution"

*Kultūros barai* monthly was established in 1965 during the period of dependence by a small group of Lithuanian intellectuals (including the philosopher and would-be politician, one of the leaders of the *Sąjūdis* movement, Romualdas Ozolas) who cherished hopes about the possibility of "Socialism with a human face" and who were trying to shape the vision of a new kind of cultural

journal during the so called “Khrushchev’s Thaw”. However, in that same year, the first issue of the journal was immediately attacked by the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party.

Under the orders of the political establishment, Emilija Kulakauskienė – its first (and female!) editor in chief was fired after just several months in the office and was replaced by a supposedly more loyal person – the novelist and journalist Aleksas Baltrūnas, who turned out to be also somewhat too liberal for the authorities and was forced to resign in 1972. Finally, after the succession of two more editors, who served short-term periods without any significant contribution to the journal’s profile, Vilhelmas Chadzevičius was appointed to be the journal’s editor in chief and stayed in the office from 1968 until early 1992. Then, he was replaced by the renowned philologist and linguist Bronys Savukynas.

Savukynas proved to be the journal’s *elan vital* during the two post-Soviet decades. After Savukynas passed away in 2008, the editorial duties were taken up by Laima Kanopkienė, former deputy editor, who continues the journal’s tradition of intellectual debates and critical inquiry into cultural, social, and political issues.

When Gorbachev famously announced an era of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, the general climate of Lithuanian cultural publishing was stagnate and gloomy. Few believed that a newly appointed Soviet functionary was indeed implementing a program of changes that finally ended the Cold War; however, a couple of literary publications caught up with the challenging atmosphere of *glasnost*. The literary monthly *Pergalė* [Victory] (that later was renamed and today is known as *Metai* [Years]) responded to the persistent plea for more openness and reconsideration of the Soviet history initiated by Gorbachev with several ground-breaking texts, like the Gulag memoirs titled “Lithuanians by the Laptev’s Sea” by Dalia Grinkevičiūtė (published in the Spring, 1988) and a novel titled “Memoirs of a Young Man” by Ričardas Gavelis (published the following year, 1989).

Other periodicals soon followed: the leading literary weekly *Literatūra ir menas* [Literature and art] (published by the Writers’ Union together with *Pergalė*) began publishing critical reflections on social and cultural issues. *Kultūros barai* eventually joined the route taken by these pioneering publications. During these transitory years, the journal expanded its readership through reprinting the formerly forbidden history of Lithuania, edited shortly before the Soviet occupation in 1940 by Adolfas Šapoka. It was serialized and re-published in *Kultūros barai*. It was done together with some other material, which contributed to the journal’s sky-rocketing circulation, reaching more than 70 000 on the eve of the Singing Revolution.



A crucial turn in *Kultūros barai* policy came when the journal published a declaration “A Road Towards Sovereignty” (the more exact word “freedom” was still largely avoided during that period). The document signed by the editors and editorial board members of the journal reflected upon the topical, political, and social changes going on in Lithuania. It was a highly explicit statement announcing that the journal welcomes and supports the route taken by the national reform movement *Sąjūdis*, and is not going to change its course even under possible pressure from the Soviet authorities.

Among many other things, the declaration said that “For the first time after many years we can openly say what we think, we can defend our beliefs, openly discuss and reflect not only on technologies and natural causality, but also on social justice, democracy, and religion, and to inquire into the history of our country, to analyze its current condition, and to join action defending Lithuania’s sovereignty. We are starting to recover human and national dignity”. (*Kelias į suverenitetą*, 1989: 2) The authors of the declaration concluded that “our land belongs only to us, and the Lithuanians together with people of other nationalities residing in Lithuania have the right to a sovereign state like all other nations of the world” (*Kelias į suverenitetą*, 1989: 3). This bold and timely declaration made it clear that the journal was going to support Lithuania’s struggle toward independence. Many contributors of the journal made efforts to further articulate ideas of freedom and the importance of epochal social and political change.

#### 4 Cultural Ideology and Political Upheaval

Consequently, the journal’s scope broadened to include most of the topical issues of the day, including discussions on cultural heritage, badly neglected during the Soviet decades, as well as debates on ecology. Some authors reflecting upon ecological protest movements in Lithuania on the eve of 1990 and the critical state of affairs in this field, attempted to relate these issues to questions about the legacy and future of the nation as such. For example, Jonas Tauginas emphasized that the expanding ecological movement in Lithuania had no common theory or strategy, as well as no tactical approach and was mainly chaotic in its character. Typical of many authors insisting on the need of a social and political shift, Tauginas somewhat romantically appealed to Lithuania’s historical roots, claiming that in the old days Lithuanians had a harmonious relationship with nature. He referred to the writings of the philosopher Antanas Maceina and to the research of the renowned American-Lithuanian archeologist Marija Gimbutas. According to the latter, the Earth was considered

to be the Big Mother by the ancient Balts. The Earth for the ancient Lithuanian tribes of the Balts was “saint, pure and just” (Tauginas, 1989: 5).

Seizing the importance of the moment, the journal's editors gave timely attention to historical issues, especially to the themes related to Lithuania's 20th century history and a need to reconsider the official historical narrative of the Soviet era. A round-table discussion that was organized by the journal in 1989 featured academic historians, who confirmed the necessity of rewriting Lithuania's history. For example, one of the participants of this discussion, historian Liudas Truska, insisted that the modern period of Lithuania's history needed to be “completely rewritten”. Another participant went even further by acknowledging that everything in Lithuania's history “should be rewritten”; he also reflected on the importance of public historical discourse – i.e. publications in cultural journals, weeklies, and other popular press had a considerable impact on “restoring the historical memory of the nation”. Another publication in the same issue of the journal, targeted the secret Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. The author of the essay, historian Vytautas Žalys, commenting on the content of the secret Nazi Germany and Communist Soviet Union agreement in 1939, argued that there was substantial evidence that while signing this pact, Stalin and Hitler “divided between themselves the sovereign states and condemned them to destruction” (Žalys, 1989: 11).

Other issues strongly related to history, were discussed by the journal's contributors. Historian Ingė Lukšaitė mused on the importance of bringing cultural history to the educational programs of high schools. According to Lukšaitė, history should be understood more broadly, and historical studies extended beyond agrarian society and culture so that this revised approach would “help to model our contemporary culture, to make less mistakes when confronted by the tasks to modernize life without losing oneself – sustaining ethnicity” (Lukšaitė, 1989: 5).

Ethnologist Kazys Grigas emphasized the importance of linguistic memory and folklore for national consciousness. He claimed that if properly used, linguistic memory and folklore legacy can help to educate contemporary national consciousness (Grigas, 1989: 53). Sociologist Algimantas Valantiejus, distancing himself from metaphors and liquid discourse, typical to many writers of the period, attempted to discuss the idea of a nation from a sociological perspective (Valantiejus, 1990). American-Lithuanian sociologist Vytautas Kavolis also offered a well-balanced view of a nation and national identity (Kavolis, 1992).

Speaking in more general terms, many contributors during this early transitional period from dependence to independence wrote about “national consciousness”, “spiritual values”, “national school” and “national education”,

“ethnic traditions” and the like. Reflections on ethnic culture persisted for several years, and were provided by ethnographers and ethnologists, philosophers, writers and poets. Issue no 6, 1989, featured several articles that confronted the urgent issues of ethnic culture. Some of the topics were examined by renowned Lithuanian poet and former member of the editorial staff of *Kultūros barai*, Marcelijus Martinaitis, who claimed that the Soviet regime used folklore for its ideological purposes, establishing official, professional groups to perform quasi-folkloric songs and dances, the aim of which was to glorify the Communist party and its establishment, but that these Sovietized forms had nothing to do with the authentic folkloric traditions.

According to Martinaitis, neither culture, nor nation itself is contained by any rigid forms. “Culture lives when it is regularly recreated. <...>We have to prepare to become members of the nation and of the world”, – insisted Martinaitis (Martinaitis, 1989: 4).

The poet’s position coincided with the ideas of the philosopher Krescencijus Stoškus, who argued that the society of progress – i.e. of the Soviet Union that exalted technical and scientific progress – has finally encountered “not even a dead-end, but found itself on the abyss” (Stoškus, 1989: 6). According to the philosopher, the blind search for novelty was now “being replaced by a simple wish to stay alive” and since nations like the Lithuanian nation have been on the verge of extinction for several centuries, Lithuanians find no contradiction to appeal to tradition, because it was tradition that kept this nation alive and performed the functions of self-defense.

This position was shared by a renowned Lithuanian researcher of mythology, Norbertas Vėlius, who in the same issue acknowledged the importance of ethnic culture to the Lithuanian nation and suggested that because it is an inexhaustible phenomenon that survives through time, “ethnic culture is nothing else but perfect creation” (Vėlius, 1989: 10), further insisting that it should be a source and resource of national values and national dignity as well as the background for professional culture. Literary scholar Viktorija Daujotytė, claimed that “Lithuanian culture, especially literature, was formed as the most distinct form of Lithuanian self-defense and a way of spiritual consolidation” (Daujotytė, 1990: 2).

Back in those days, many contributors to the journal were very much concerned with the the concept of a nation and how a nation state came into being. This persistent interest is hardly surprising since Lithuania was deprived of its independence with the Soviet occupation in 1940 which ended a brief period of interwar independence that had lasted from 1918 to 1940.

The other important issue was the fate of the Lithuanian language. Marcelijus Martinaitis, a regular contributor to the journal and public debates during

these years of change, reflected on how the Lithuanian language was marginalized during the Soviet era's attempts to introduce bilingualism in the Soviet Lithuania – a project that was finally not implemented. However, the administration language in Russian and the obligatory Russian language at schools, and the predominant Russian TV had its say. The death of a language to Martinaitis, so redolent of Subačius essay in *Eurozine* in the 21st century referring to this never-ending concern, was equal to the death of a nation (Subačius, 2013). "Extinction of even the smallest nation is no less catastrophic as the extinction of a vegetation or animal species, the degradation of its genetic fund. When nations are dying, a part of humanity dies" (Martinaitis, 1990: 15).

The period between 1988–1991 was generally marked with a somewhat exalted belief in the healing power of independence and the unlimited potential of society to create new institutions successfully. Such categories and concepts as "nation", "national culture" or "ethnic culture" were taken for granted and remained almost undisputed. However, after a short period of self-inflicted illusions and shared visions, more sober, more critical attitudes toward Lithuanian society and its future were offered by intellectuals and academics contributing to the journal. Last but not least, the emphasis on the need of critical reflection, rather than continuing or eschewing altogether popular nationalist ideology, was a result of the shift in the journal's policies largely due to changes in its leadership.

## 5 Timely Transformation: Criticism Takes Command

Bronys Savukynas – a well-known linguist and philologist (among many other things an author of an etymological dictionary of Lithuanian names), and translator (notably from German), joined the staff of *Kultūros barai* in 1970 and was responsible for copy-editing. However, he soon became an informal leader among the journal's younger editors to whom he extended expertise advice beyond linguistic issues.

After taking over the journal's contents and management in 1991 as editor in chief, Savukynas largely reshaped the journal, significantly reorganizing its structure and giving more room not only to historical themes but also to immediate cultural and social issues. More attention than ever before was given to international and European dimensions: the journal regularly published its overview of cultural developments in Europe and elsewhere in addition to its primary focus on national cultural issues.

In restructuring the journal's profile, Bronys Savukynas worked closely with Lithuanian émigré sociologist Vytautas Kavolis (1930–1996), who taught at

Dickinson College in the USA for several decades and chaired an Association of Comparative Civilizations. Their regular correspondence and exchange of ideas as well as the editor in chief's ability to secure a large circle of contributors, coming from a dozen disciplines, contributed to the journal's remarkable intellectual growth. The journal acquired a scholarly character during the period when Bronys Savukynas acted as the journal's editor in chief. Since then, *Kultūros barai* has become a venerable public scholarly journal open to academic discussions and exchange of opinions, publishing not only critical reviews and opinions, but also academic and research articles that could well be published in peer-reviewed publications.

On the other hand, as an editor, Savukynas was highly impressed by such legendary publications as the journal *Kultura*, published in Polish in Paris by renowned intellectual Jerzy Giedroic. Savukynas received copies of the Parisian Polish journal regularly. Nevertheless, he was shaping *Kultūros barai* as a journal with intellectual aspirations in its own right, rooted in and reflecting on Lithuanian culture rather than a bleak copy of some famous Western European periodicals, but, needless to say, first-hand knowledge of *Kultura* and some other scholarly journals that he was regularly reading, strengthened his own vision of what an intellectual monthly was all about.

When Bronys Savukynas took the lead, the journal's profile was strengthened by critical reconsiderations of its thematic repertoire. Savukynas – a liberal linguist and no less liberal yet demanding editor – welcomed critical voices and often took efforts himself to trigger discussions on a variety of cultural issues. He welcomed round-table debates on various topics with participants representing different opinions. These regular discussions were usually held in the office of the journal. Eventually the discussions would be published in a forthcoming issue.

He was also quite able in recruiting prospective young authors as contributors to the journal. At the time, a young philosopher and cultural critic, Leonidas Donskis (1962–2016), became a regular contributor to the journal, publishing more than a dozen essays within a few years. He established his reputation as a public intellectual and took an active part in discussions, often initiating new issues for public scrutiny. In the 1990s, Donskis became an advocate of an open society, at the same time acknowledging some limits to its conceptualization.

Donskis argued that the “concepts of open society and open culture can successfully become mythologisations if they are not incorporated into a critical context. Not a single society is free from ideology <...> More than that – in reality there is no paradigmatically open societies absolutely free from power and protectionism, ruled exclusively by market and competition in the same

way as paradigmatically open culture does not exist". (Donskis, 1992:10:11). Yet for Donskis, this acknowledgment does not mean that the culture should remain closed. On the contrary, a conscious and mature culture should seek to become open and inclusive of elements that enrich it, instead of restricting and reducing its content and forms. This means that culture as well as its individuals enter into a dialogue with each other and this dialogue constantly evolves.

In another article, titled "*Kultūra likimo ir pasirinkimo visuomenėse*" [Culture in the Societies of Fate and Choice], Donskis offered his critique of ideology. According to the author, who cited the French sociologist and anthropologist Louis Dumont, "Ideology is a closed sum of beliefs, values and ideals. Ideology always functions as closed system of values, dominating toward the reality itself. Generally, ideology always means a domination of principle over fact, domination of idea over reality, domination of word over idea, that is domination of language over thinking and meaning" (Donskis, 1992:3:3).

In some other articles published even earlier than these two, Donskis argued for an open society and open culture, placing himself among intellectual debates about Lithuania's mediating role between the West (Western Europe) and the East (Russia and the project of Eurasia), discussed by philosopher Stasys Šalkauskis after WWI in his influential essay "*Sur le Confin de Deux Mondes*" originally published in French. In his article, Donskis provided a critique of "Baltophilia" or "Balto-centrism", which he described as a tradition of monadic cultural vision that could be compared to "national fundamentalism" (Donskis, 1990:9:2). Rejection of a nationalist perspective and persistent appeals to a model of society and culture labelled as "open", made Donskis largely unpopular among the older intellectuals, who would refuse to agree with his interpretation of cultural nationalism. The opponents took some of his categories such as e.g. "ethnic fundamentalism" or "national fundamentalism" as an unjustifiable offense, rather than an intellectual challenge that required an adequate response.

Though other authors who joined the discussions about Lithuania's cultural model and intellectual aspirations that often resurfaced in various forms during the first post-Soviet decade, did not share his somewhat exaggerated view that "ethnic fundamentalism" was entrenched in Lithuania's culture, the dominant ethno-centric cultural concepts were regularly challenged by writers and intellectuals, who were dissatisfied with exalted views of culture and musings about the "inherent spirituality" of Lithuanian culture. Contrary to such a critique of "inherent spirituality", professor Viktorija Daujotytė in one of her essays published in *Kultūros barai* claimed that "We live in the period of the death of ideas. We are trying to mitigate the situation by saying: the crisis of

ideas. We don't even feel when our thoughts and actions are shackled by the idea of crisis ... Where there are no big ideas, small caricatures of big ideas come into being and finally a big idea – one of crisis – emerges" (Daujotytė, 1994:3). Her essay was typical of the period when some vague and fluid categories were not even questioned.

## 6 Intellectuals Scrutinized by Themselves

Discussions of the peculiarities of post-Communist society, social and cultural transition as well as ambiguities of the rising elites, were often addressed in the first post-Soviet decade. Generally, the roles of intellectuals were taken seriously, not only in Lithuania but in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe as well, especially during the national upheaval in 1989 and the years of transition when local intellectual elites were supposed to provide some guidance to a society facing inevitable change.

A well-known and provocative novelist and short story writer Ričardas Gavelis (1950–2002) targeted such timely issues as the post-Communist transition and provincialism of Lithuanian culture. He addressed these issues in a couple of essays published in the period of 1992 and 1996. In his essay "*Brandaus dilettantizmo epocha*" [The Epoch of Mature Dilettantism] Gavelis discussed the roots of Lithuania's failure to mature as a society and concluded that they are to be found in pre-war Lithuania when the state structures and cultural institutions were established hastily by people who had will and ambitions, but lacked education and expertise. The professional culture that came into being before WWII was eventually dismantled, as most qualified professionals and intellectuals were forced to choose exile. The others ended up in Siberia.

An anti-professional ethos ascended in the years of transition since the Soviet system did not produce large quantities of experts. Those tiny numbers that it did, became suspects because of their roles and functions under the previous regime, and thus, dilettantism got into full swing. "The experience of the world, however, allows one to formulate an interesting hypothesis. It suggests that dilettantism like any other radioactive material has a certain critical mass. When this mass is exceeded, the process goes beyond any control – and a chain reaction comes into being. And then the explosion happens". (Gavelis, 1992: 3). What will eventually come into being after the explosion remains only to be seen, claimed the writer, insightfully diagnosing the problem that was to burden Lithuanian society years to come.

Gavelis likewise had little hope for the post-Communist society to educate an influential elite of professionals and intellectuals with adequate roles and

identities. “The post-totalitarian crowd always looks for leaders who can take it out of a universal swamp. It is a feature of a crowd in each and every post-Communist country”, argued Gavelis in a lengthy essay, “*Tamsioji šviesuomenė arba elito gimdymo kančios*” [Uneducated Intelligentsia or a Painful Birth of the Elite] (1996–11:5). And yet, the Lithuanian “crowd” is peculiar in this sense, because it “only craves for such a leader or experts, but does not make any single attempt to locate them”. This inability to act was due to the anti-intellectual tradition, deeply rooted in Lithuanian culture.

“Intelligent ideas and reason itself has no market”, Gavelis further insisted, and warned that this anti-intellectualism is bound to generate a dangerous consequence: the absence of a historical future. Disgusted with the “post-totalitarian crowd”, he had a skeptical attitude towards Lithuanian intellectuals, who in his opinion were equally short-sighted and lacked the ability to explore the long-term consequences of their activity. Generally, he had strong reservations about further developments of post-Communist society, especially, the Lithuanian one.

Leonidas Donskis was also highly critical toward Lithuanian intellectuals, albeit for different reasons. According to Donskis, there were two “cultures” in transitory Lithuanian society that were in opposition to each other – the tradition of the intelligentsia and that of the emerging class of intellectuals. He saw both of these groups burdened by their own ills: the members of the intelligentsia claiming their right to the notion of a “nation”, a “homeland”, a “Lithuanian language”, etc., whereas these notions were plagued by their inherent inclination toward preaching and moralizing. The second group were intellectuals whom he saw distancing themselves from their society and proselytizing their “Western” attitudes, but at the same time having no deeper social affinities than an interest to sell their discourse for the Western market (Donskis, 1995:14).

Other Lithuanian contributors to such debates on post-Communist society and the roles of intellectuals, commented on how post-Communist intellectuals could restore their fading reputation and what directions the social critique provided by them could take. Back in 1996, cultural criticism embracing post-Colonialism together with post-Communist studies was advocated in order to deepen and expand the sociopolitical analysis of the intellectuals without falling into a stale narrative full of complaints about the loss of short-lived status or of their occasionally successful ways to power (Samalavičius, 1996).

Throughout the Soviet period, most intellectuals chose legal ways of resistance, avoiding open opposition to the totalitarian regime, but such a format inevitably set limits to public reasoning and free expression (Samalavičius, 1995: 63–64). These peculiar circumstances contributed to a somewhat obscure



understanding of the role (as well as realistic possibilities) of intellectuals in Lithuania during the first post-dependence decade in the 1990s and had an even more lasting effect. Some of these insights seem to have been durable and were revisited on several occasions (Samalavičius, 2002).

Even though cultural and social criticism eventually took stronger roots in Lithuanian culture, there were new factors setting limits to the performative roles of intellectuals, since many of them chose to focus on their academic careers and on academic publishing rather than public discussions with their inherent inconveniences and occasional controversies. Neglecting some of the pressing issues, like, for example, the need of restructuring universities and other institutions of higher education in the public sphere, finally had cultural and social consequences. Quite interestingly, *Kultūros barai* was the only cultural journal in the country regularly discussing problems and issues in and around higher education in the public sphere over almost three decades (Kubilius 1990; Nekrašas, 1995; Vengris, 2000; Aleksandravičius, 2000; Samalavičius, 2000, 2019; Daujotis, 2004; Ščavinskas, 2017).

Though this chapter does not aim to give an overview and discuss all the important themes that were covered by the contributors to *Kultūros barai*, it can be noted that some of them have been provoking important discussions as well as provoking an exchange of political values regarding a complex history, like for example, the painful issue of collaboration with the Soviets during the years of dependence (Wittig-Marcinkevičiūtė, 2004; Klumbys, 2004). On the other hand, a number of important problems approached by some intellectuals were unfortunately by-passed, and this might be one of the symptoms of conformism that took various shapes in post-Communist Lithuania (Samalavičius, 2004). Symptoms of conformism still continue in a parallel with the brave and independent voices of social critics.

## 7 Conclusion

Due to such complex publishing history and circulation, the timely revised structure, form and contents, *Kultūros barai* emerged as the leading Lithuanian cultural journal immediately after 1990 and maintained its intellectual format during the three turbulent decades of independence. During the social transition, the journal provided a platform for intellectuals to exchange opinions on the most essential and enduring social, cultural and/or political issues.

Previously the journal was largely a tool for disseminating cultural ideology built around various concepts like “nation”, “national culture”, “ethnicity”,

“ethnic culture”, “spiritual values” and the like, typically characteristic of progressive members of the Lithuanian intelligentsia that backed Gorbachev reforms before the fall of the Communist regime; however, the journal gradually adopted more reflective, more critical strategies by triggering debates and discussions on a number of socially and culturally important issues. It must be admitted that critically minded intellectuals and writers had started to question Communist ideologically “ready-made” certainties even before the social change of 1990; however, it was in post-Soviet period that the journal established its intellectual format and performed its role in creating a public space open to critical reflections on society and its culture.

The authors, who come not only from Lithuania, but also from the Lithuanian diaspora in other countries, regularly question state policies and controversial historical “truth”. For several decades the journal continues to provide space for critical exchanges, bold visions. Remaining a non-partisan publication, it is committed to openness, (self)reflexivity and dissenting views. It can be added, that the journal contributed to the change of the self-perception and responsibilities of Lithuanian intellectuals. If some of them used to present themselves as self-appointed spokesmen for the nation state or for the entire nation in the name of its salvation, today most of them have retreated to less imposing, but the more realistic roles of well-informed experts, persistent social observers, and often insightful cultural critics.

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