

The Vanishing of “Ordinary Soviet People” and Socialist Forgetting on the Green Bridge of Vilnius, Lithuania

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Following the demise of socialism in Lithuania in the early 1990s, the removal of statues commemorating Soviet ideologues, Red Army generals, and Party apparatchiks became an important strategy for erasing the memory of the Marxist-Leninist past, seen by many as shameful and dehumanizing. Countless effigies depicting Communist leaders were unceremoniously toppled and hauled out of public view as jubilant crowds cheered on. Untouched in this massive campaign of national forgetting were the statues of the Green Bridge, a Stalinist structure built in 1952 and located in downtown Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. Portraying “ordinary Soviet people”—youthful workers, collective farmers, soldiers, and intelligentsia—these statues towered on the bridge for more than a quarter-century after socialism’s collapse until they were dismantled by the municipal government in the summer of 2015.

Using data collected through ethnographic fieldwork, in this paper I will reflect on why the “ordinary Soviet people” of the Green Bridge inhabited the cityscape of postsocialist Vilnius for as long as they did. I will propose that these statues outlasted other socialist effigies because many Lithuanians, especially those who lived their adult lives under Communist rule (1940- 1991), viewed them not so much as enduring reminders of state-sponsored Marxist-Leninist propaganda but as “nostalgic” representations of their biographical past as Soviet subjects. Further, I will discuss how the delayed de-Sovietization of the Green Bridge became implicated in intergenerational debates regarding the social value of remembering the nation’s Communist history and heritage. As well, the paper will consider the ways in which the momentous changes on this iconic bridge animated moral deliberations concerning not only Lithuania’s socialist past but also its “capitalist” present and future.