

A quarterly scholarly journal and news magazine. September 2013. Vol. VI:2.  
From the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES)  
Södertörn University, Stockholm

# BALTIC WORLD

A Jewish story.  
Summers in Pärnu

Vikings  
and ethnic  
identity  
revisited

balticworlds.com

Corporate raiding  
in post-Soviet Russia

German Nazis  
go green

Historical memory  
in Bulgaria

## Many enter – few get out

Overcrowded prisons in the Baltic states

also in this issue

Illustration: Karin Sunvisson

SHIPWRECK FROM 1564 / WATER WASTE CUT / RUSSIAN DESIGN UNKNOWN / SOVIET DEPORTATIONS / SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN POLAND



## Former West. Before the fall of the wall

**FORMER WEST** is a formidable recent manifestation of total art, a grand initiative that addresses the global geopolitical present. This program of conferences, exhibitions, and research publications proposes that contemporary conditions are best understood from the vantage point of the year 1989. The Berlin Wall was torn down, and in the territorial confusion that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, the withering community of no longer socialist states became known by a paradoxical nickname: "the former East". In response to this spatiotemporal absurdity, the Slovenian art theorist Igor Zabel wittily turned the tables to look at "the former West". Without a serious socialist rival, the substance of capitalist democratic culture has proved difficult to identify. And although Europe celebrates its official unity, its common cultural identity has yet to be formulated. A project like FORMER WEST is evidently a good way to do that – in the eyes of EU bureaucrats. Accordingly, "the former West" has been institutionalized in the form of this EU-funded academic research cum public cultural project, initiated by the curators Maria Hlavajová and Kathrin Rhomberg at BAK – basis voor actuele kunst in Utrecht. The project began in 2008 and ends in 2014.

A six-year project involving hundreds of people searching for the "present" or the "new" in the "former" is a massive



FORMER WEST took place at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin.

undertaking. For a full week, March 18–24, 2013, participants were soaked in Documents, Constellations, Prospects – a largely performative mix of theory and practice.

What fruits the critical approach to the culture of contemporary global capitalism will bear remains to be seen. The "former" appeared, in the arranged contrast between informal learning platform and formal university education, as a sad affirmation of the neoliberal capitalist conditions for cultural production that the project set out to criticize.

Further information on FORMER WEST: Documents, Constellations, Prospects, Berlin, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, March 18–24, 2013 is found at [www.formerwest.org](http://www.formerwest.org). ✕

**CHARLOTTE BYDLER**

Note: A longer version of this article can be found at [balticworlds.com](http://balticworlds.com).

## Special section on food and agriculture



**THE NEXT ISSUE** includes a special section with the theme Contemporary Challenges in Food & Agriculture. The guest editor of this section will be Paulina Rytönen, associate professor of economic history, and head of the undergraduate subject area at Södertörn University known as "meal sciences".

### Why have a section on this particular theme?

"Food is a basic condition for human life; therefore food and food production are at the center of attention of national states. The debate on food encompasses a wide number of topics."

### How has this theme been addressed in Baltic Worlds' area of focus?

"In the Baltic Sea region and the Eastern European countries, the dynamics of the agro-food system and the concerns in public debate vary considerably across countries, partly due to historical factors, the structure of the food sector, and local and national traditions. For those that are members of the EU, the implementation of EU legislation matters. Some countries have rediscovered the value of their food heritage and are actively promoting the production and consumption of artisan food, while others promote the industrialization of the agro-food sector and the consumption of industrially processed food. In sum, there are countless experiences that vary from country to country." ✕

Note: 2014:2 will also include a special section on the theme Russian Culture and Modernization. The guest editor for this section will be Sanna Turoma, Aleksanteri Institute, Helsinki.

## The CERES network has ended – CBEES will form a new network

**THE NORDIC NETWORK** on Choices, Resources and Encounters in Russia and other European Post-Socialist States (CERES) was funded by Nordforsk from September 2010 until the end of August 2013. The CERES network was the third Nordic network in a row coordinated by the Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki. The previous networks focused more on research training, whereas CERES introduced a wider arena of collaboration. Its main aim was to strengthen the Nordic perspective into research on Russia and the other European post-socialist states. Focusing on three main themes in Russia and post-socialist states – choices, resources, and encounters – the network supported the enhancement of Nordic expertise in the field.

**THE MAIN MEANS** to promote Nordic academic expertise on Russia and Eastern Europe was workshop funding, striving to create new projects and networks connected



The workshop Gender and Post-Soviet Discourses was funded by CERES.

with the three focus themes of the network. During the three years, the network funded 14 workshops with more than 300 participants with aid totaling more than 30,000 euros in all Nordic countries.

Other activities, such as seminars, research training events, and conferences, reached hundreds more participants. The network also organized research training seminars and summer schools. Mobility and the dissemin-

ation of information were an integral part of the network's activities.

As a result of the network, several new networks and project ideas emerged, which means that the reinforcement of our joint Nordic perspective in the field of Russian and East European studies will continue. Due to the long tradition of Nordic networks and positive experiences of the CERES network, the planning to continue the network in the future has already begun. The Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES) at Södertörn University has taken on the coordinator's role in the new network. Monica Hammer, CBEES, is the project leader for the formation of a new Nordic network. ✕

**SARI AUTIO-SARASMO**

## colophon

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## contents



## features

**Hostile takeover.** Private ownership at risk in Russia. **4**

**Hard to cut recidivism.** Criminal corrections in the Baltic countries. **9**

## reports

**Reduced water waste.** Environmental awareness in St. Petersburg. **20**

**Maritime archaeology.** Investigating the wreck of the Mars from 1564. **22**

**Soviet deportations.** Towards a transnational understanding. **44**

**Research out of fashion.** Design institute in Moscow closes after 50 years. **56**

## essays

**Far-right ecologists.** Analysis of narratives and practices. **13**

**Vikings as transmigrant people.** A new approach to hybrid artifacts. **24**

**Seaports in the Baltic states.** A comparison of governance models. **29**

**National history as a fairy tale.** A study of Bulgarian historical memory. **33**

## stories

**Happy summers in Estonia.** Russian Jewish memoirs. **41**

**Victims and perpetrators.** Different tales in the Baltic countries. **47**

## reviews

Nordic narratives of the Second World War. **51**

Cooperatives and the social question. **52**

## commentary

**Civil society in Poland.** Grassroots mobilizations for better housing. **54**

## Contemporary challenges & comfort zones

Ilya Viktorov shows, in an article on corporate raiding in post-socialist Russia, how entire companies are illegally transferred to new owners from one day to the next. The hijacking can affect small businesses, but also large financial institutions, and even schools and hospitals housed in attractive buildings. The roots of weak private ownership rights can be found partly in the way in which the privatization process was carried out, but much remains to be researched. Viktorov suggests that using interviews with figures in the Russian business world would provide a considerable amount of information for future research on Russian corporate raiding, a phenomenon still largely unknown in the West.

In one of the peer-reviewed scholarly articles in this issue, Madeleine Hurd and Steffen Werther examine neo-Nazis' increased interest in issues involving the environment and nature, and scrutinize their reasoning about commodification and globalization.

In a feature article, Pål Ruin reports from Vilnius that the three Baltic states top EU statistics on the proportion of the population behind bars. Part of the explanation, he discovers, is the long sentences and high rate of recidivism seen in the area. An enduring legacy from the Soviet era is another part of the explanation.

**THIS ISSUE ALSO** takes up aspects of the region's history and the varying perspectives one can have on it. Evelina Kelbecheva presents a study of how different ethnic groups in Bulgaria view their country's history. The common narrative, she finds, is like a mythical tale that has little to do with the actual course of events.

Eglė Rindzevičiūtė reports from a conference on how deportations under Stalin are retold by different groups of Balts. Might there be a common history to tell after all, she asks? Yes, for those who made the deportations happen, the perspective was usually the same, regardless of the group to which the deportees belonged.

**IN A LATVIAN VILLAGE**, Gostini, there is an entirely different story to experience – the story of a crime that cannot be atoned for. In the 1930s, the majority of the city's population was Jewish. In 1941, the local authorities, on their own initiative, shot all the Jews in the city to death. "Shooting a town to death" is one of two gripping stories by the author Peter Handberg.

Yet another perspective on the Baltic region is given by professor of literature Maxim Shrayder. Russian intellectual Jews traveled in the summers during the 1970s to Pärnu, Estonia, to talk about poetry, swim, and simply hang out. In his deeply personal account of the refuge that was created by the Russian Jews in Estonia during the summers, Shrayder describes the unique atmosphere that prevailed there. "Pärnu was the summer comfort zone of our childhood." ✕

# CORPORATE RAIDING IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA

Hostile takeovers and company captures have been an everyday reality in the post-Soviet Russian economy. A new research agenda is needed to understand whether private property is worth anything in contemporary Russia.

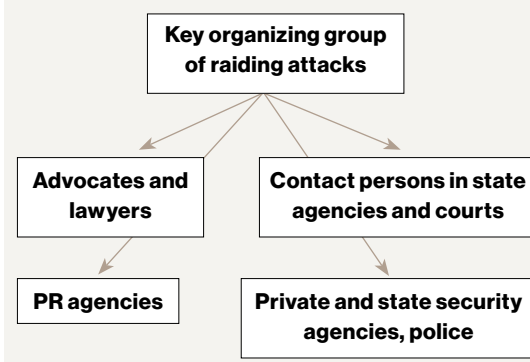
by **Ilya Viktorov**

## What is post-Soviet corporate raiding?

This phenomenon is called *reiderstvo* in Russian, a term which is derived from the English word “raiding”.<sup>1</sup> A typical hostile takeover is based on the manipulation of weak legal institutions and the use of extralegal practices with the active involvement of courts, private and state security services, and corrupt government officials. Any entrepreneur in the country is a potential victim of groups that organize “raids” against both large and small companies. According to some estimates, about 60,000 cases of *reiderstvo* took place in Russia each year during the 2000s, and only a fraction of these cases led to legal prosecution.<sup>2</sup>

Corporate raiding in Russia has its historic roots in the initial process of privatization of state-owned assets in the 1990s, when the first hostile takeovers were characterized by a high degree of criminal violence. Since that period, however, the methods of raiders have grown much more sophisticated and elaborate. Not criminals, but highly educated lawyers, advocates, accountants, judges, investigators, court enforcement officers, and journalists have been the typical participants in raiding groups. A raiding network is created by a particular group which coordinates a raiding attack, provides financial support to all participants, and finally appears as the main beneficiary of a hostile takeover (see Figure 1). The spread of *reiderstvo* entails

**Figure 1.**  
Corporate raiding (*reiderstvo*)



Source: author's research

profoundly negative consequences for Russia. It undermines the development of a market economy and the stability of its formal institutions, makes property rights insecure, and leads to failed investments and capital flight from the country. It is not possible to understand the Russian economy and the way it has been working during the last two decades without doing research on corporate raiding, or *reiderstvo*, as an institutional phenomenon. The presence of *reiderstvo* practices is central to the question of what went wrong with the Russian post-Soviet economic reform and why market capitalism with well-performing formal

institutions, not least private property, failed to be established in Russia.

**THE ORGANIZATION OF A hostile takeover** as shown in Figure 1 is actually an oversimplification, since a greater variety of actors can participate in the process. For example, ecological organizations in the form of “independent” NGOs may appear as a blackmail tool in launching a raid against a particular industrial enterprise. Fire-prevention and tax-collecting authorities as well as sanitary services and private banks may contribute to the process of a hostile takeover. To make the issue more complicated, raiding can be based on real corporate practice abuses, in some cases crimes, committed by entrepreneurs who are selected as victims of corporate raiding. That happened during one of the most famous *reiderstvo* cases, the hostile takeover of the company Evroset in 2008. The kidnapping of a mid-level Evroset manager, arranged by the company’s top managers in 2003 after the mid-level manager had stolen from the company, was used as a pretext to start a lawsuit against Evroset’s owner. The owner was finally forced to sell his business to persons affiliated with the raiding group at a discount price and later emigrated to the UK. The unclear origins of ownership rights emanating from the shadow privatization of the 1990s also provides a rich source of pretexts to organize *reiderstvo* attacks against Russian businessmen.





A sequence from the Russian director Vadim Abdrashitov's film *Magnetic Storms*. The film was released in 2003 and echoed the nightmarish reality that Russian industrial monotowns faced during the 1990s.

## Reiderstvo in public debate and research

The problem is well known and broadly debated in Russia, from regional media and NGOs up to the top of the Russian business community and bureaucracy. On several occasions, the negative impact of *reiderstvo* on business in Russia was officially acknowledged and condemned by President Putin and Prime Minister Medvedev. Even Russian mass culture has reacted to the escalation of *reiderstvo*, with popular detective novels and films devoted to this topic.<sup>3</sup> *Reiderstvo* is not unique to Russia, and is equally common in most parts of the post-Soviet territory. In Ukraine and Kazakhstan, the Russian term *reiderstvo* is applied in public discourse to similar corporate raiding practices. This fact is an essential one, since it demonstrates that *reiderstvo* originated in particular policies of economic reform and privatization chosen by the majority of post-Soviet states in the early 1990s. The Baltic countries and Belarus can be viewed as notable exceptions to the broad spreading of corporate raiding practices, although *reiderstvo* is not completely absent from these countries either.

**THE SPREAD OF** corporate raiding in Russia has resulted in numerous publications in the Russian media. In addition to journalistic reports, there is a body of academic and quasi-academic studies in Russia devoted

to *reiderstvo*. Most books published on the topic are written by lawyers and criminologists, and are not of high analytical quality. Works of this type usually include empirical examples of company captures and give practical advice for entrepreneurs, the judiciary, and state authorities to “improve” legislation against corporate raiding. Notably, there is little research on the topic in the English-language literature. The only two examples that specifically deal with *reiderstvo* as a phenomenon are a short research paper written by the political scientist Alexander Settles<sup>4</sup> and a short description of a few pages in the sociologist Alena Ledeneva’s recently published book on the Russian *sistema*.<sup>5</sup> Both of these texts briefly identify the problem and describe the main methods employed by Russian raiders. However, they are not based on primary sources and do not provide a sufficiently detailed account of *reiderstvo* to explain its origin in post-Soviet reality. The lack of research in English specifically dedicated to *reiderstvo* is surprising.

## The evolution of *reiderstvo*: preliminary remarks

What we know so far about the development of *reiderstvo* throughout the post-Soviet transformation is a preliminary outline. The process of the initial nomenklatura privatization during and after the collapse of the Soviet system in the late 1980s and early 1990s is

relatively well documented.<sup>6</sup> But it is still unclear under what circumstances, and why, this initial stage of privatization evolved into the next wave of ownership redistribution with a broad criminal presence in the middle and late 1990s. The spread of criminality in the Russian economy during the 1990s is well highlighted by previous research.<sup>7</sup> Yet there is still no recent study available to identify the specific historic conditions that resulted in the first violent stage of corporate raiding and to separate the first *reiderstvo* cases from other forms of criminal activity. Above all, the primary concern of criminals was to take control over cash flows with a short-term perspective rather than to secure long-term ownership over former state enterprises. To what extent were criminal circles used in this violent stage of corporate raiding by other actors, such as former party officials or future oligarchs, and to what extent did the criminals appear as an independent force? Both practices actually happened, and a wide geographical variation between regions was observed, but we still cannot provide a comprehensive answer to this question. In the 1990s, the term *reiderstvo* was not in broad use. The term “black raiding” (*chernoe reiderstvo*) denotes mainly violent criminal methods in company takeovers. However, it seems to be a later construction, invented in the 2000s to be applied retrospectively to the reality of the 1990s.

The next stage of *reiderstvo* was connected with the use of bankruptcy law as a specific takeover in-

*Reiderstvo*, both real and alleged, has been a reality in Russian everyday life. Three posters hang at the entrance to a newly closed shopping mall in central Moscow with the following text: "Attention, Muscovites! A pretend remodeling is in progress. Be careful! A raiding attack is going on here: a raiding capture of Tverskoi shopping mall."

Photo: Ilja Viktorov



strument between 1998 and 2002. This practice has been well investigated by previous research.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, neither Volkov nor Adachi provides a definite answer to why this wave of ownership redistribution arose. More importantly, they do not view it as a subsequent stage in the evolution that *reiderstvo* practices underwent during these years. Volkov for example connects this wave of ownership redistribution to the central authorities' attempts to strengthen control over the executive branch of state power in Russia's regions, not least after the accession of Vladimir Putin to presidential power in 2000. As the criminal groups of the 1990s disappeared from the scene, their niche as providers of security and guarantors of economic transactions was taken over by special police, the FSB (Federal Security Service), and state prosecutors. Company owners who resisted could easily be accused of economic crimes and possibly imprisoned. At the same time, Volkov points out that these networks of state representatives were mobilized by private business groups. The latter were still the main organizers of enterprise takeovers between 1998 and 2002.

**THE DECADE AFTER** Putin's accession to power in 2000 witnessed a culmination of *reiderstvo* practices: hostile takeovers acquired a much greater degree of variety and sophistication. No "improvements" in the bankruptcy legislation proved effective: hostile take-

overs only increased and intensified even though the bankruptcy procedure ceased to be used as a primary means. The *reiderstvo* practices affected all levels of economic activity in Russia, from the largest oligarch groups – the Yukos case being the most famous example – down to small and medium-sized enterprises.<sup>9</sup> It was during this time that the term *reiderstvo* found broad acceptance in Russian popular media discourse and in everyday language. This wave of what could be called "gray" corporate raiding started in Moscow in the early 2000s,<sup>10</sup> and then spread to the rest of Russia. In contrast to the mainly criminal "black raiding" of the 1990s, legal and quasi-legal procedures of corporate raiding were employed in the 2000s. A typical case of *reiderstvo* in this period would not be a result of the spectacular violent storming of industrial locations by groups of private enforcement agencies of unclear origin. Instead, a hostile takeover would be mandated in a court decision by a corrupt judge based on falsified documentation, and enforced by official police forces, all in accordance with official judicial procedure. A judgment on a corporate property transition might be based on records of shares falsified by a real or fake registrar. It might also be based on non-payment of a real or invented bank loan by the victim, the owner of a company under attack. The entire process of a hostile takeover could now take place in public, with broad coverage in the media, controlled and mobilized by the raiding group. Only the best pro-

fessionals in each particular sphere are involved in a carefully planned and successful raiding attack.

### **Reiderstvo and its victims**

Small and medium-size enterprises have also been victims of raids. Not only the economic activity of these firms themselves, but also the commercial properties they own attract raiders. Agricultural lands are also widely targeted in *reiderstvo* practices, especially in the Moscow region. Public organizations with limited budget financing, such as schools, universities, hospitals, museums, and theatres, can also fall prey to raiding groups. This is because such institutions may be physically located in attractive properties inherited from the Soviet past. Using connections with corrupt decision-makers in public administration, raiders may organize the takeover of such properties by closing a public institution and then transferring its premises to a specially created private firm. In the largest Russian cities, particularly in Moscow, even private persons can become targets of raids since the value of their housing can be high enough to make "residential raiding" (*kvartirnoe reiderstvo*) profitable. The same quasi-legal practices employed in company takeovers are used in "residential raiding", though on a smaller scale. This is an additional reason why "corporate raiding" is not an adequate translation of the word *re-*

**How common is it that raided companies are raided again, and have yet another new owner?**





*iderstvo* in English. Post-Soviet *reiderstvo* practices are not exclusively confined to the sphere of corporate abuse, but can affect any economic agent or private person who possesses property of substantial market value.

A raiding attack may lead to different outcomes for an entrepreneur who becomes a target of *reiderstvo*. Usually, resistance is deemed to be futile since each raiding group has connections with corrupt officials in police, state security, and investigative agencies which either support or act as the real organizers of a company capture.<sup>11</sup> In rare cases, the victim can repel an attack by using the same quasi-legal methods and contacts among corrupt officials and judges. In other cases, the owner of a company may achieve a compromise by selling the company at a discounted price, well below its real market value. Although hardly any comprehensive statistics

on *reiderstvo* practices are available, this seems to be the most common outcome. Alternatively, a businessman may be imprisoned during the prosecution process. Such a businessman may ultimately be freed, or even win an appeal in a higher court. Nevertheless, the owner's absence from the business provides an opportunity for a provisional administration to strip the company of all its assets. This provisional administration would naturally be a part of the raiding group. In rare cases the businessman may commit suicide or otherwise die in prison. Such deaths have usually received publicity in the Russian media, yet with no apparent practical consequences for the organizers of raiding attacks.

## Reiderstvo and informal networks

Why did *reiderstvo* become so widespread in Russia in the 2000s? A hypothesis concerning the causes and persistence of corporate raiding in Russia was put forward by two analysts from the Russian journal *Expert*, Alexandr Privalov and Alexandr Volkov.<sup>12</sup> They claim that the main raiding groups were organized and controlled by high officials from the regional branches of the FSB (Federal Security Service) who are the real beneficiaries of the largest hostile takeovers after 2000. This explains why only a fraction of all raiding cases were investigated by prosecutors and just a

handful of raiders were sentenced in courts.<sup>13</sup> No empirical support for this thesis is provided.

Since 2011, a new analytical concept of the Russian network state, centered on informal power networks in Russian business and politics, can contribute to our understanding of post-Soviet corporate raiding. Although the concept does not deal with the phenomenon of *reiderstvo* specifically, it shows how the power networks merged with new business elites to use property relations and wealth to consolidate their position. The concept's main point is that informal groups, or networks, infiltrate formal authorities at all levels, in effect merging with the Russian post-Soviet state, to maintain full control over key decisions and to proliferate in the most lucrative industries and branches of the economy.<sup>14</sup> Compared to the 1990s, some major changes occurred in the 2000s with regard to particular types of networks. Oligarch groups led by rich businessmen and networks of criminal origin, although powerful during the 1990s, lost influence during the 2000s. Instead, new networks with connections to Putin's bureaucracy, especially with origins in former St. Petersburg security services, advanced in the 2000s.<sup>15</sup>

It remains to be investigated how the activities of these informal networks are related to the spread of "gray" and "white" *reiderstvo* practices in the 2000s. Such an investigation is not possible without studying primary sources. In general, the Russian business press potentially constitutes a valuable source for the study of post-Soviet economic history, and encompasses a great variety of materials devoted to corporate raiding practices. Thus, the material on this topic is abundant; at the same time, this abundance creates difficulties of selection and representativeness. Some of the material available is quite credible and informative: as an example of a serious approach, see the interview with the Russian lawyer Alexandr Rappoport in which he briefly describes typical raiding practices and how they evolved during the 2000s.<sup>16</sup> However, some articles on specific cases of *reiderstvo* in the daily press may be biased.<sup>17</sup> In extreme cases, these materials may have been created by raiding groups as a part of a takeover process.

## Interviews as an indispensable source on post-Soviet reality

To compensate for the drawbacks of published sources, interviews with people who witnessed or experienced *reiderstvo* can be used in research on *reiderstvo* practices. Because of the sensitivity of the issue, interviews with leading organizers of raids will be rare, although not completely impossible. I experienced myself how an interview with a person previously involved in corporate raiding can give a completely new perspective on *reiderstvo*. While interviewing financiers in Moscow for my research project on the Russian financial market, I encountered an interviewee who temporarily lost his job in the financial sector after the 1998 crisis.<sup>18</sup> To escape unemployment, the respondent had participated in a raiding operation against an aluminum plant owner in Siberia in 2000. That particular company capture was organized by a famous oligarch with close connections to the former president Yeltsin's family. The victim was a criminal leader who had taken control of the plant during the

1990s privatization. Numerous details of the operation, which became highly profitable for the oligarch, were told. More importantly, *reiderstvo* as a practice appeared as a very complex issue rather than as a simple corruption practice.<sup>19</sup> It became hard to see a difference between the "victim" and the "predator". At any rate, it was apparent that the criminal leader, who had allegedly committed a long list of crimes in the 1990s, was inappropriate as the owner of an industrial giant with thousands of employees. From the point of corporate governance, the outcome of this particular *reiderstvo* case hardly made matters worse for the company concerned. Today, the same oligarch continues to control the plant, which has been one of the main assets in his portfolio.

**THE USE OF PRIMARY** sources, especially interviews, would help to clarify our understanding not only of *reiderstvo*, but also of how post-Soviet business works in reality. This is especially true in regard to the Russian regions in the 2000s. Most regional businesses are not market entities acting in a competitive environment. Instead, these structures are closely affiliated with governors and controlled by relatives, friends, and trusted associates of high officials, who are the real beneficiaries of nominally private companies. After the Beslan hostage crisis of 2004, the federal authorities were able to remove previously independent regional leaders, replacing them with officials controlled by rival informal power networks inside Putin's administration, or by oligarch groups. Each such removal shook to the ground the quasi-market-oriented business structure of a particular region. Since 2004, this happened in the republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, twice in the Sverdlovsk region, and four times in the Irkutsk region. The most spectacular case was the defeat of the Moscow group in 2010, when the previous mayor was dismissed after almost two decades in office, to be replaced by a Putin appointee. What do the *reiderstvo* practices contribute to this process of ownership redistribution on the regional level? Under what circumstances does it make sense for a businessman affiliated with a previous administration to resist the loss of his business? Under what circumstances does he (or she, as in the case of the former Moscow mayor's wife) give up and accept replacement by other agents affiliated with a new administration? To what extent do the practices of "black raiding" survive in some Russian regions? We cannot yet provide empirically supported answers to these questions, only opinions and impressions gained from reading the biased Russian press. In other words, the main theoretical gain of such an investigation would be to understand whether private property is worth anything in contemporary Russia, and what rules, formal and informal, define the limits of private property as an institution in post-Soviet reality.

**TO SUM UP THIS** overview, I would like to discuss a preliminary hypothesis that would explain the persistence of *reiderstvo* practices. It is apparent that they are rooted in ineffective and weak formal institutions in post-Soviet Russia. Private property, as a key formal institution for the emerging market economy, is not supported by the available institutional framework; the state as an effective third-party enforcement agency and independent judiciary is very weak. This



Another sequence from the film *Magnetic Storms* (2003).

creates the conditions for a greater discrepancy between the officially existing formal institutions and the economic reality, with a strong presence of informal institutions, networks, and practices. The particular forms of *reiderstvo* that existed and evolved throughout the first two post-Soviet decades depended on the prevailing type of informal network in each historic period. In the 1990s, mostly networks of former Soviet enterprise directors, oligarchs, and groups of criminal origin were active. These were supplanted by networks with connections to security services and state apparatus in the 2000s. This hypothesis needs to be proven on the basis of empirical research and the analysis of primary sources such as interviews.

**FINALLY, READERS MAY GET** the impression that the *reiderstvo* practices of the 2000s make any economic transformation of Russia towards improved rules and well-functioning formal institutions unachievable, at least in the near future. This may be true to a certain degree. Still, I would claim that the situation is actually not as bad as it seems. Whatever apparent abuse of formal rules and property rights the spread of “gray” and “white” *reiderstvo* entails, these practices in the 2000s already represent a kind of improvement compared to the 1990s. At that time, the shadow privatization led quickly to the spread of violent crime that was a by-product of the first wave of ownership redistribution throughout Russia. A considerable part of the male population was involved in that wave of criminal redistribution. Considering the extent of the violence and killing, that initial wave of “black raiding” was comparable in some respects to a civil war, and affected most of Russia’s industrially developed regions. Fortunately, this nightmare of the 1990s is now past, and ownership redistribution today is mainly conducted in a manner less violent, although by no means appealing. ✖

## references

- 1 Although the definition of *reiderstvo* is etymologically derived from the English word “raiding”, there is no English equivalent that would provide an adequate translation. Both “corporate raiding” and “hostile takeover” are not defined precisely enough to grasp the complexity of the Russian phenomenon. I will therefore use the Russian term *reiderstvo* alongside the more conventional term “corporate raiding” throughout the text.
- 2 Alexandr Privalov and Alexandr Volkov, “Rassuzhdenie o reiderstve po metode barona Kiuv’e” [Discourse on *reiderstvo* using the method of Baron Cuvier], in *Expert*, no. 18 (2007), p. 59. All numbers on *reiderstvo* are no more than estimates. For comparison, Alena Ledeneva refers to 70,000 raids a year (Alena Ledeneva, *Can Russia Modernise? Sistema, Power Networks and Informal Governance*, Cambridge 2013, p. 19).
- 3 The most popular case of such crime literature is the novel *Raider*, written by the Russian celebrity lawyer Pavel Astakhov. The book was followed by a film version which was widely screened in Russian cinemas, and broadcast on TV in 2010. The first violent stage of *reiderstvo* was reflected in the earlier film *Magnetic Storms*, directed by the famous Russian filmmaker Vadim Abdrashitov in 2003. The film was inspired by real events that took place in industrial “monotowns”, or company towns, in the Urals during the 1990s. At that time, a part of the male population perpetrated violent acts during the ownership redistribution of plants, usually in exchange for some form of payment. These workers supported competing groups vying to take control of the plants that were the main employers in such monotowns. While the film did demonstrate rather high artistic qualities compared to crime thrillers such as *Raider*, it remained unknown to a broader Russian audience.
- 4 Alexander Settles, “Evolving Corruption: Hostile Takeovers, Corporate Raiding, and Company Capture in Russia”, 2009-08-31, accessed 2013-06-09, <http://www.cipe.org/publications/fs/pdf/083109.pdf>.
- 5 Alena Ledeneva, *op. cit.*, pp. 188–194.
- 6 Steven Solnick, *Stealing the State: Control and Collapse in Soviet Institutions*, Cambridge, Mass., 1998, and Alexandr Bim, “Ownership and Control of Russian Enterprises and Strategies of Shareholders”, in *Communist Economies and Economic Transformation* 8, no. 4 (1996).
- 7 Federico Varese, *The Russian Mafia: Private Protection in a New Market Economy*, Oxford 2001, and Vadim Volkov, *Violent Entrepreneurs: The Use of Force in the Making of Russian Capitalism*, Ithaca & London 2002.
- 8 See Vadim Volkov, “Hostile Enterprise Takeovers: Russia’s Economy in 1998–2002”, in *Review of Central and East European Law* 29, no. 4 (2004), and Yuko Adachi, *Building Big Business in Russia: The Impact of Informal Corporate Governance Practices*, London 2010.
- 9 The Yukos affair did include a number of components that would make it an example of carefully planned corporate raid. One was its culmination in a takeover of Yukos’s main assets by a fake company, Baikalinvestgrup, and the subsequent transfer of those assets to the state-controlled company Rosneft. However, the Yukos affair was primarily a matter of Russian high politics and should not be viewed as a typical *reiderstvo* case. Still, by adopting some basic *reiderstvo* practices, it certainly revealed the main trend of ownership redistribution which affected Russian business during Putin’s first two terms as president.
- 10 On how the Russian State Investigative Committee defines “black”, “gray”, and “white” *reiderstvo*, see the interview with a senior inspector of the Committee: Expert-TV, “Reiderstvo v Rossii: Interviu s Georgiem Smirnovym, starshim inspektorom Sledstvennogo komiteta Rossiiskoi Federatsii” [Reiderstvo in Russia: Interview with Georgii Smirnov, the Chief Inspector at the Russian State Investigative Committee], 2012-06-21, accessed 2013-06-09, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBiLGADanpU>. For a more academic approach to these three terms, see Tat’iana Ostiakova, *Reiderstvo v sovremennoi Rossii: Osobennosti reiderstva kak sotsial’no-ekonomicheskoi deiatel’nosti* [Reiderstvo in contemporary Russia: Peculiarities of *Reiderstvo* as social and economic activity], Moscow 2010.
- 11 Expert-TV, “Problema reiderstva v Rossii: Interviu s Yanoi Yakovlevoi, predsedelem nekommercheskogo partniorstva ‘Biznes-Solidarnost’” [The problem of *Reiderstvo* in Russia: Interview with Yana Yakovleva, the Chair of the non-commercial partnership Business Solidarity], 2011-10-10, accessed 2013-06-09, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5za-HkWG4Tc>.
- 12 *Expert* is a Russian counterpart to the British *The Economist*. It is claimed that *Expert*’s editors depend on and enjoy financial support from some influential officials in Putin’s administration. Nevertheless, *Expert* is one of the few serious Russian business journals that publish analytical materials of rather high quality. Some of its materials may indeed be preordered by state authorities or sponsored by private business groups.
- 13 Alexandr Privalov and Alexandr Volkov, *op. cit.*; Vadim Volkov, “Kommercheskie seti silovikov” [The *Siloviki*’s commercial networks], 2011-10-07, accessed 2013-06-09, <http://www.forbes.ru/ekonomika/vlast/74879-kommercheskie-seti-silovikov>. Compare with Vadim Volkov’s recent research on the commercial activities of security services (Vadim Volkov, *Silovoe predprinimatel’stvo, XXI vek: Ekonomiko-sotsiologicheskii analiz* [The entrepreneurship of force, 20<sup>th</sup> century: Economic and sociological analysis], St. Petersburg 2012, pp. 310–341).
- 14 Olga Kryshatanovskaya and Stephen White, “The Formation of Russia’s Network Directorate”, in Vadim Kononenko & Arkady Moshes (eds.), *Russia as a Network State: What Works in Russia when State Institutions Do Not?* Basingstoke, Hamp., 2011.
- 15 Anton Oleinik, *Vlast’ i rynek: Sistema social’no-ekonomicheskogo gospodstva v Rossii “nulevykh” godov* [Power and the market: The system of social and economic domination in Russia during the 2000s], Moscow 2011, pp. 286–287; Vadim Volkov, *Silovoye predprinimatel’stvo: XXI vek*, St. Petersburg 2012, pp. 293–309.
- 16 Alexandr Rappoport, “Reiderstvo v Rossii” [Reiderstvo in Russia], 2009-09-20, accessed 2013-06-09, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hdIH3k6ed4>.
- 17 That is why I would object to Ledeneva’s reliance on interviews with the advocate Pavel Astakhov as a source to describe raiding practices. Astakhov chose *reiderstvo* as one of his fields of specialization to strengthen his status as a celebrity in the Russian media. Meanwhile, Astakhov, who himself has a past in security services, had a highly controversial profile as an advocate in the 1990s. In recent years he has distinguished himself as an activist in a number of pro-Putin political movements. His latest official appointment as Russia’s children’s rights ombudsman is also controversial.
- 18 The glimpse into the post-Soviet business reality uncovered during this interview was one source of inspiration for writing this text.
- 19 It was actually the criminal leader, not the oligarch, who enjoyed popular support in the region during this *reiderstvo* case. The oligarch was perceived as an outsider coming to the region to grab property. Although the former owner was briefly arrested and finally lost control of the plant, he continued his political career and still serves as a member of the regional legislative assembly. The outcome of this *reiderstvo* case is quite common, if not banal, in post-Soviet Russia; similar examples can be found in other regions. Those criminal leaders who survived the 1990s strive today to distance themselves from their dark past to assume the image of respectable businessmen with legal economic activities.



# CRIMINAL CORRECTIONS IN THE BALTIC COUNTRIES: THE SOVIET LEGACY PERSISTS

The Baltic countries have a larger percentage of people in prison than any other EU member state. The reason? A persistent Soviet legacy that decrees criminals should be locked up.

by **Påhl Ruin**

**T**hat so many Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians are imprisoned is not due to extremely high criminality; several other European countries report more per capita crimes. No, the prisons are so crowded mainly because the Baltic countries, to an unusually great degree, resort to custodial sentences instead of fines or probation. Another reason is that people sent to prison are still being given unusually long sentences, albeit slightly shorter than those given in the 1990s.

A number of problems arise when this culture of the administration of justice is combined with stingy allocation of resources to the corrections system including overcrowded prisons, severely neglected upkeep, and inadequately trained personnel, all of which contribute to a high rate of recidivism.

Across much of Europe, countries have begun successfully reducing recidivism in recent years, but that is not the case in Lithuania and Latvia, where the figures remain relatively high. This is costly for the countries in both human and economic terms. International studies have shown that repeat offenders may cost society about one million euros, on average, over their lifetime. Reducing recidivism is thus more than a humanitarian goal: it can also yield large economic gains.

**BUT THIS IS NO** easy task. Even though a great many methods have been tried over the years, it is difficult to say which are the most effective: local conditions vary tremendously. It is easier to identify the conditions that are not conducive to reducing recidivism. One such condition is crowded and outmoded prisons, which are still the norm across much of the corrections systems in Latvia and Lithuania. The situation is somewhat better in Estonia.

In this article, I will concentrate mainly on Lithuania, where a new law took effect earlier this year that makes it much easier for courts to impose probation-



Lukiškės Prison in central Vilnius was built in 1904. The prison is infamous for the massacres of World War II, and for the torture that has occurred within its walls over the years. Today the prison is run-down, and will be closed 2017.

ary sentences. Tauras Rutkunas, an expert at the Ministry of Justice in Vilnius, sighs when I mention the new law. “Very few prosecutors and courts have thus far taken advantage of this law, even though we know probationary sentences lead to fewer repeat offenses. Unfortunately, a lot of people in the justice system are still laboring under the notion that prison sentences must be imposed in almost all situations.

“Politicians and courts do realize of course that the costs of the corrections system would be reduced if we had fewer people in prison. But many are reluctant to fly in the face of public opinion, which demands long prison sentences.”

**ANTANAS LAURINENAS**, an adviser to the Director General of the Prison Department, concurs. “When inmates are released early for good behavior, people are outraged. They want ‘criminals to stay in prison, period!’ But we cannot have so many people imprisoned!”

Professor of social sciences Dmitri Usik at Mykolas Romeris University in Vilnius relates that this opinion, that all criminals should be kept locked up, is commonly held within all social strata:

“I hear the same opinion from highly educated people here at the university. This Soviet legacy is deeply embedded in our psyche and it is probably going to take a long time to change. I recently read about a prosecutor who was seeking a five-year sentence for illegal possession of a firearm. It was simply a hunting rifle. Utterly absurd! The person had not committed a crime with the weapon. Luckily, the court saw fit to impose a custodial sentence of only 20 hours.”

Dmitri Usik was one of the advisers when the new law concerning more lenient sentencing was drafted. He is unhappy with how the politicians justified the changes in the law.

“The minister of justice and other high-level politicians have done too little to convince prosecutors and

**That a high percentage of criminals are locked up appears not to mean that fewer crimes are being committed. So what's the point?**

courts of the importance of reducing the number of imprisoned citizens. They have not gone out and defended the new law and presented arguments for how it should be applied.”

The prosecutor general, on the other hand, seems to have understood the scope of the problem: last spring, he made a public appeal for more lenient sentencing. He also spoke in favor of yet another change of the penal code in order to reduce the prison population. Previous measures of that kind have also produced results: the Lithuanian authorities had reduced the prison population from 15,000 in the 1990s to below 8,000 by 2008. The effect of the law was that sentences for minor crimes were reduced and increasing numbers of inmates were granted early release. But toward the end of 2008, the financial crisis struck and the job market nosedived. It became difficult even for people without a criminal record to get a job and nigh on impossible for ex-convicts. This was a causal factor that led many of them to reoffend. The prison population rose again and now stands at approximately 10,000.

The Lithuanian corrections system is thus facing huge challenges. Most of the country’s ten prisons still have cells that may house up to 20 inmates. Since 150–200 prisoners share toilets in the corridors, they can easily access each other’s cells, which gives rise to conflicts. Lithuanian prisoners have an average of three square meters of living space, which is below the minimum recommended by the Council of Europe. Women and youth have slightly more space. Tauras Rutkunas at the Ministry of Justice says, “We know it is far too crowded. If we do not reduce the number of custodial sentences, we will never fix the problem. We cannot afford to build new prisons or carry out renovations to the extent needed to reduce the overcrowding.”

Antanas Laurinėnas of the Prison Department adds, “With the current prison population, we would need to build twice as many prisons to eliminate all the cells in which 16–20 prisoners are now crowded. And that is impossible, of course. Accordingly, we must reduce the total number of prisoners.”

**A LIFE SENTENCE IN LITHUANIA** means precisely that: the convict remains in prison for the rest of his or her natural life. Since the abolition of the death penalty in the mid-1990s – a decision a large percentage of Lithuanians opposed – a life sentence is the harshest possible punishment. It is likely to be some time before public opinion becomes favorable towards early release of the 100 or so individuals who are serving life sentences in Lithuanian prisons.

The high recidivism rate is another cause of overcrowded prisons. There are numerous reasons why so many people reoffend, including inadequate rehabilitation prior to release and the absence of close ties with family and friends outside the prison walls. One measure that has shown good results in other countries is the establishment of open prisons, institutions where inmates are allowed to leave on day release but must return at night. When release is imminent, the transition to freedom is not as drastic as if the inmate had been confined for the entire sentence. Lithuania has one such open prison and hopes to be able to establish more. In the Nordic countries, prisoners who have exhibited good behavior may be transferred from



Here is a picture of an internee in the juvenile detention center in Kaunas, taken by the English NGO Art Saves Lives, which ran a project in 2012 that encouraged artistic creation in Lithuanian prisons.

closed to open institutions, an approach that is not yet permitted in Lithuania. Tauras Rutkunas believes increasing the number of open prisons is one of the solutions: “But is public opinion ready for more convicts to be free during the day and only be locked up at night? Not yet, I fear – but hopefully in the future.”

The public is also skeptical of electronic monitoring for conditionally released convicts, a sanction that recently became possible in Lithuania. The Latvians are also considering introducing electronic monitoring and are well aware that criticism is to be expected. In Lithuania only about 30 people so far have been fitted with electronic ankle tags, considerably fewer than proponents had hoped: again, this is a consequence of powerful forces in the justice system that want to see most offenders behind bars.

The historical background of crowding so many prisoners into small spaces in the Baltic countries is a deliberate strategy dating from the Soviet era. Prisons were meant to resemble the labor camps established in Siberia, where people lived in large, common spaces and work was the sole focus. There were no plans for helping people prepare for life on the outside.

Conditions in the country’s prisons thus deteriorated during the Soviet occupation. Just a few blocks away from Tauras Rutkunas’s office at the Ministry of Justice in central Vilnius lies the Lukiškės Prison, which was built during the Tsarist era – and is still in use. “For a long time, it was one of our better prisons, since it had cells for 3–4 inmates. But it is now extremely run-down and is expected to be closed within the next few years,” Rutkunas says.

One effect of the substandard Soviet corrections system is thus that a hundred-year-old prison with almost a thousand inmates, including several murderers serving life sentences, is still in operation only a hop, skip, and jump away from Gediminas Avenue, Vil-

nius’s answer to the Champs-Élysées. Walking around the city, I met a young woman who was about to enter a building diagonally across the street from the barbed-wired walls of the prison. “A prison is a perfect neighbor. It is nice and quiet here even though I live in the center of town! A prison is much better than a hotel or bar,” she says with a smile.

One can only imagine what a losing proposition it is for the city and the state to have a prison at this lucrative address. It was ultramodern when it was built in 1904, with central heating and the latest technology for water and sewage systems. Today, everything is outmoded and the ventilation is substandard. A journalist colleague who was recently shown around the prison was there when the Internet connection suddenly went down – whereupon the warden burst out, “Oh no, the rats have chewed through the wires again!”

Like most prisons in the country, Lukiškės also lacks a modern alarm system, which means an unusually high percentage of the staff are occupied with direct monitoring of the prisoners. “Most of our prisons have eight watchtowers with five people assigned to them who take turns doing guard duty around the clock,” says Antanas Laurinėnas of the Prison Department. “That means 40 people per prison who could be working with social rehabilitation instead, if only we could afford new alarms!”

**THERE WERE ESSENTIALLY** no personnel with medical or social qualifications during the Soviet era. Things are better now, but on average there is still only one person working with social rehabilitation for every 50–60 prisoners – compared to one such staff member for every 5–10 prisoners in neighboring countries like Sweden and Norway. The shortage of psychologists is particularly severe in Lithuanian prisons.





The dormitory before renovation.



The interrogation room before renovation.



The dormitory after renovation.



Now, after the renovation, there is a separate social area with animals in order to make the environment more pleasant.



In addition, there is a crying need for training initiatives for existing personnel. Development assistance from Norway and the EU has funded additional training for many employees, both on site in Lithuania and on study trips to neighboring countries. Taurus Rutkunas explains:

“It is a matter of changing the employees’ point of view. This is not a huge problem among young and new employees. But the Soviet perspective persists among middle-aged and older employees: the disparaging attitudes towards the inmates, the refusal to see them as individuals, but only as a herd of prisoners who are there to serve their time and nothing more. Yes, attitudes are changing – but slowly.”

**I WENT TO THE YOUTH PRISON** in Kaunas, where development assistance from Scandinavia has provided both new premises and further training for employees. Corrections officer Ina Dikčiene is one of those who has attended a course in Sweden:

“We learned a lot about attitudes towards the inmates. Here, we have been bad at seeing them as individuals with unique needs and circumstances. We used to treat everyone the same way and we just gave them orders, no two ways about it. I’ve started to think differently and I see the whole person, listen more to each and every one. They are citizens who are hopefully only here temporarily, not hopeless cases. This new perspective has also made my job much more interesting and rewarding.”

With more employees who have learned the latest methods of social rehabilitation, opportunities are increasing for these young people, ages 14–21, to reintegrate successfully in society after they serve their time. The conditions for this were also improved by extensive renovation of the prison buildings. “The young people behave better in the new premises; they

demonstrate greater respect for one another,” says prison warden Markas Tokarevas. “Environments can shape people and we have seen absolute proof of that here.”

It was the Norwegian government that stepped in – within the framework of the country’s EES Grants awarded to 15 different EU member states – and paid 85 percent of the roughly 1.8 million euros that the renovations cost during the period of 2007–2010. The people in charge of the prison had been begging for these renovations for many years, but the Lithuanian government had determined that there was no room in the budget.

I am shown shocking pictures from 2007 of cells where young people had been forced to spend several years of their lives – bare walls with peeling paint, bunk beds on the verge of collapse, broken furniture, and toilets so filthy and worn out that the inmates must have been reluctant to use them. Back then, 20–30 young people lived in the same dormitory where bullying and harassment were rife. The warden related how the young inmates subjected each other to various punishments. One common prank was “the bicycle”, when matches were put between the toes of a sleeping inmate and then lit. The victim, of course, began violently pumping his or her legs. “We haven’t had any incidents of ‘the bicycle’ since 2010,” says the warden proudly.

**THE NORWEGIAN MONEY** has also been spent to improve medical care. Many of the young offenders come from dysfunctional environments of neglect and abuse. They may arrive in prison with any number of health problems: tuberculosis, serious rashes, severe toothache, or other painful conditions. “In the past, we doled out the same kind of pain medicine for all conditions. They are now given good medical care instead.”

I am offered a tour of the prison and shown the neat and clean corridors and the nicely furnished rooms, each housing 2–4 inmates. One 19-year-old inmate, let’s call him Mantas, comes sauntering along in a tracksuit. He is among the teenage convicts who also experienced the olden days, before the renovations. “My room was so cold,” Mantas says. “The wind came straight through and ice formed on the inside of the window. It was never quiet at night and it was awful when you had to go to the toilet. It stank so bad.”

#### How did that make you feel?

“I was angry. I was angry pretty much all the time. I didn’t understand how they could lock me up in an environment like that.”

#### And how do you feel now?

“It doesn’t feel okay to be here now either. It sucks to be locked up. But now they treat me with respect, they didn’t before.”

At age 16, Mantas, extremely drunk, got into a fight with an acquaintance of the same age. The fight got out of control and ended with the death of his friend. Mantas was sentenced to nine years, the first five to be spent in the youth prison. “If he were to leave us full of bitterness and hatred, there is every indication that he would reoffend once he had served the final years of his sentence,” says the warden. “His chances of returning to a law-abiding life are now improving.”

In response to a direct question, the warden concedes that without the Norwegian money, the situation would have been the same today as in 2007. The major initiative was carried out at the same time the national economy collapsed as a consequence of the financial crisis; if not for the Norwegian grant, things might even have been worse today than in 2007. The abysmal conditions before the renovations were also hard on the employees. The roof leaked and indoor temperatures dropped as low as 11 degrees in the winter. And everywhere, the premises were in terrible condition. “Obviously, the dreadful work environment did nothing to improve treatment of the inmates.”

Funds from Norway and the EU have also been used to finance something they call a “social integration facility”, which is a separate building across the street where young offenders with a history of good behavior can move when their release date approaches. We walk through the premises where bedrooms, the gym, work premises, and the kitchen all have a pleasant, homelike feel. The young people learn how to live ordinary lives here and they go on field trips to farms and factories to learn more about the job market. “It is fantastic to see how the young people develop for the better when they are allowed to stay here,” says social worker Edita Simonavičiūtė. “We need many more institutions of this kind here in Lithuania.”

Norwegian money has also been used to renovate a couple of other prisons. Further initiatives are now being planned for additional Norwegian grants in the next few years. Why has the Norwegian government chosen to focus on the corrections systems in Lithuania and Latvia? “After several fact-finding trips, we understood that the needs were vast and that relatively little EU funding had been allocated to the corrections systems in these countries,” says Harald Føsker at the Norwegian Ministry of Justice.

Several countries that have acceded to the Schengen agreement have observed a marked increase in the number of crimes committed by foreign nationals. Under the principle of free movement, it is not only jobseekers who are moving across borders – criminals are moving too. Norway is among the most severely impacted countries in Western Europe: in the spring of 2013, 34 percent of all prisoners in the country were foreign nationals, an increase from 13 percent in 2000. The government hopes that increasing numbers will be able to serve their sentences in their home countries. Norway has transferred 13–14 prisoners per year to Lithuania in recent years. “Now that we are in a position to help improve conditions, we are also prepared to send more people back,” says Harald Føsker. “But this is not only a matter of what we want to do; it also involves a legal process on the Lithuanian and Latvian sides that tends to take a long time.”

ALTHOUGH ONLY A FEW YEARS have gone by since the major Norwegian initiative to improve the youth prison in Kaunas, a reduction in the recidivism rate has already been observed among youth who have been confined in the renovated premises. Unfortunately, no such positive development has yet been seen at the Vilnius Correctional House, where about 600 adults are serving their sentences. This prison as well – which is located just outside the old city center – was able to say goodbye to a worn-out building a few years ago, only to move into a former mental hospital, whose premises could not be adapted to the needs of the prison. As many as 12 prisoners still have to share a single cell. Warden Česlovas Jocius throws his hands up in despair at the question of how many repeat offenders are found in the prison population. “Every one of the inmates in one of our blocks of 494 prisoners has previous convictions, eight convictions on average. In our other block, which holds 121 convicted local and state officials, half are first-time offenders.”

He admits that it can sometimes feel hopeless when they just come back, over and over again.

“We tell them we don’t want to see them here again. And most of them answer by telling our guards they are absolutely not going to return, they are sure they will be able to manage life outside the walls. But once they are out there, if they are lucky enough to find a job at all, they soon realize the minimum wage of a thousand litas (a little over 300 euros) a month won’t take them very far. And so they start thieving again after a few weeks.

“But we have had inmates who have not returned, of course. We have asked a few of them to come back and tell the other prisoners how they can organize their lives so they don’t reoffend. I believe these discussions have been very meaningful.”

THERE ARE ALSO organizations that help ex-convicts start a new life, organizations that even come to the prison and meet with the inmates. But these organizations have relatively few active members, since Lithuania essentially lacks a tradition of voluntary work, and they have also had to work for a long time with zero support from the government. However, since the new probation law took effect last year, a law whose main purpose is to reduce the number of custodial sentences, these organizations have begun to receive a certain measure of state aid.

The prison has among other things an art studio and a woodworking shop. When I am being shown around, an inmate approaches me of his own accord in the prison yard and proudly shows off a beautiful oil painting. The prison has a need for many more activities of that kind to keep the prisoners occupied and prepare them for life after prison. Other prisons may have bakeries and various kinds of workshops, but there are no such facilities here. “Only 120 out of 600 prisoners work while they are in prison. We cannot afford to help any more than that.”

The situation is not much better at other prisons. The researcher Dmitri Usik states that one third of all prisoners are not in work or study. “If we cannot offer them any meaningful occupation, we should not put them in prison! People who have nothing to do while they are in prison are much more likely to reoffend.”

There are glowing exceptions at Vilnius Correctional House, stories about ex-convicts who have not reoffended and prisoners who put the work experience gained in prison to good use: a couple of the guys who learned joinery have started their own business which has been going beautifully for five or six years now. And the company has already hired other ex-convicts. But it is still difficult for ex-cons to get jobs, even though the Lithuanian economy has recovered since the financial crisis. “People who have been in prison have a very hard time getting a job. It is a huge challenge to persuade employers to change how they look at these people,” says Antanas Laurinėnas at the Prison Department.

Laurinėnas also worked with the Lithuanian prison system during the Soviet era. When liberation came some 20 years ago, he hoped for rapid changes for the better in all social sectors, including the corrections system. But such was not to be. Like so many of his countrymen, he has been forced to admit that his hopes for the future were too grand: that there was far too little money to implement all of the urgently needed reforms in society. Budget appropriations to the prisons were cut by 20 percent during the 2008–2010 financial crisis and are only now beginning to approach the 2007 level.

“We have absolutely taken a number of steps forward since 1991. Remember that Russia for example has almost twice as many prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants. But progress is still depressingly slow. The corrections system has proved to be one of the social institutions that has been the most difficult to change since the fall of the Soviet Union. Law-abiding people say that criminals must take personal responsibility for changing their lifestyles, that they must change their attitudes toward society. And I agree. But the law-abiding must also change their own attitudes and stop looking down on offenders. And give them a second chance.” ✖



Illustration: Karin Sunvisson

Table 1. Incarceration rates of European countries

European countries with more than 100 prisoners per 100 000 inhabitants (highest prison population rate):

Russian Federation	546
Georgia	541
Azerbaijan	417
Ukraine	348
Latvia	316
Lithuania	311
Estonia	253
Czech Republic	221
Montenegro	214
Poland	211
Slovakian Republic	199
Moldova	178
Hungary	174
Turkey	172
Albania	168
Spain	158 (Catalonia 144)
UK	152 (Scotland 157)
Bulgaria	151
Serbia	151
Malta	144
Romania	139
FYRO Macedonia	122
Croatia	115
France	111
Greece	110
Cyprus	108
Belgium	107
Austria	104

All European countries excluded from the list above have fewer than 100 prisoners per 100,000 habitants. In red: non-EU European countries.

Source: Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics SPACE 1 — 2011.



# NATURE, THE VOLK, AND THE HEIMAT

The narratives and practices of the far-right ecologist  
by **Madeleine Hurd** & **Steffen Werther**

In this article, we wish to describe the worldviews that underlie far-right environmentalism. It is our contention that far-right environmentalism addresses two problems often identified as key obstacles to modern environmental practice and consciousness. The first is inherent in the commodification of nature, encouraged both by capitalism and by the espousal of “sustainable development”. This commodification reduces nature to an instrument, a good to be consumed (more or less wisely). Humans, meanwhile, are defined solely as rational actors, well divorced from nature. Such definitions not only betray

a pernicious human-nature divide; they also make it very difficult to tap human sentiments of belonging and codependence on nature, both key, ecocritics argue, to effective environmentalism. Second, the abstract commodification of nature has been paralleled by the universal rationalism that is held, ideally, to dominate discourse in the political sphere. Useful though such discourse is, it does – as feminists and minorities have pointed out – delegitimize discourses based on the local, particular, emotional, and aesthetic. Unfortunately, ecocritics maintain, environmental change requires just such bottom-up, practice-based,

emotional discourses. For environmentalism to work, they argue, locals’ sense of place, of inhabitancy – ownership of nature and land, embedded in use and emotion – must be brought into political play. The challenge thus is to both the dominant market, and the dominant public sphere.<sup>1</sup>

**TO DISCUSS THIS** challenge through an analysis of neo-Nazi environmentalism might seem a bit odd. Indeed, the mere idea of a neo-Nazi environmental platform raises many eyebrows. Surely such environmentalism can reflect nothing more than cynical vote-fishing?

Maybe; yet scholars note the continued prominence of environmentalist planks on many European far-right websites. German journalists and anti-fascist groups complain of the ways in which the far-right parties use ecology and animal rights to piggyback into local and national politics; left-wing publicists spend time uncovering ecological publications, anti-pollution movements, and branches of organic farming that are, in fact, fronts for neo-Nazi activity.<sup>2</sup> Far-right environmentalism is, evidently, politically useful, and, it seems, here to stay.

A perusal of far-right websites affirms this. Far-right environmentalism is, moreover, couched in emotional, localized, and practice-based rhetoric. The Sweden-Democrats list “Environment and Energy” and “Animal Protection” among their ten most important issues; they “see humans as part of nature, and acknowledge that we are altogether dependent on nature in order to continue our existence on earth”. Not only food, water, and air, but “the qualities of beauty that are embedded in nature” are needed to “fulfill our spiritual needs and make possible a high quality of life”; the party calls for the development of nuclear power, a lower tax on electricity, and measures to curtail Baltic Sea pollution. The Norwegian Progress Party calls for protection of “*allemannsretten*”,<sup>3</sup> nature reserves, and “protection through use”, as well as a “responsible and sensible” plan to reduce emissions and combat global warming. France’s *Bloc Identitaire* pledges to protect “the national” against “transnationalists” who seek not only to “dominate and sacrifice peoples” but “organize the pillage of the planet” – “taking us right into a wall, towards catastrophes without precedent”. Their “Ecology as a Response to the Capitalist Devastation” advocates the husbandry of resources and increased respect for biodiversity. The French *Mouvement national républicain* offers about ten pages under the tab “Environment”, with planks ranging from renewable energy and animal protection to opposition to genetically modified food – all part of the protection of “the natural and, equally, the cultural and architectural environment”, that is, “the wealth of France” – which has “too long been sacrificed on the altar of economic productivity and the pursuit of immediate profits”. The British National Party proclaims itself “this nation’s only true Green party which has policies that will actually save the environment”. It is “fully conscious of the urgent need to combat all real pollutants in the environment” and recommends “environmentally friendly policies” including public transportation, the “banning of ritual slaughter of animals”, reform of factory livestock farming and the switch to organic fuels. Meanwhile, the Belgian *Démocratie Nationale* (formerly the *Front National*) has “Environment” as point nine of a ten-point program. It tells us that the “citizens of the industrialized world” must take responsibility for climate change, damage to marine biodiversity and water quality, and threats to public health; the party calls for increased recycling, reforms in agriculture, reduction in public and household consumption of water, and special polluter taxes.<sup>4</sup>

**FAR-RIGHT ENVIRONMENTALISM** is thus both passionate and prominent. German, British, and French far-right websites and publications call on readers to protect their respective peoples and homelands by political

means and direct action against – for instance – toxic waste, nuclear power, long-distance food transports, international food concerns, genetically manipulated plants, carbon emissions, and industrial cruelty to animals. Unsurprisingly, these ecological recommendations are made to tie into deeper far-right concerns. There are, for instance, plans to pass such laws against those responsible for these horrors: the soulless (Jewish?) international destroyer who sees places as abstract, profit-bearing entities, and the aliens who, having overpopulated and ruined their own homelands, are now flooding into ours. A slight scratching at the surface shows, indeed, how environmentalism is operationalized on behalf of far-right, xenophobic, and racist ideals.

How does this work? Jonathan Olsen published a seminal study of German econationalism in 1990; Mukul Sharma’s recent book dedicates a chapter to a Europe-wide overview.<sup>5</sup> Both show how environmentalism can reinforce far-right and authoritarian tendencies. Olsen argues plausibly that the neo-Nazis claim to protect a homeland in open opposition to international capitalism’s profitable abstraction of land into quantifiable, exchangeable “space”. We wish to deepen this insight, moreover, by looking at how the far right seeks to ground environmentalist love of place in gendered, everyday life-world practices. When this happens, it furnishes additional emotional underpinnings for biodeterminist, xenophobic thinking.

The call for a communal sense of usufruct and ownership of place is, ironically enough, also central to left-wing environmentalist scholarship. Nor are environmentalist scholars oblivious to the exclusionary dangers inherent in such sentiments. Let us first unravel this paradox.

### Universalist space and inhabitancy: an environmentalist dilemma

Charles Taylor has postulated Europe’s modern social imaginary as fundamentally individualistic, a triumph of the Enlightenment’s concept of polite society and public sphere. Instead of hierarchies, otherworldly moral purpose, and/or the guidance of eternal cosmic forms, the ideal society is a beneficial composite of individual wills, anthropocentric, self-interested, civil, and peaceful. The liberation implicit in globalization depends on such imaginaries – as Arjun Appadurai argues, when describing how the global reach of media vastly expands individuals’ ability to imagine differently placed alternatives, and thus poses a fundamental challenge to locally entrenched social and gender hierarchies.<sup>6</sup> This image of society is, today, triumphant; it is the social imaginary that lies behind the global reach of industrial and finance capitalism,



Extreme-right-wing youth cleaning a public park in Gardelegen on their “National

while its universalist and individualistic ideals further movements worldwide for free trade, democratization, human rights, and feminism.

This abstract universalism prompted the reinvention of land and place that allowed resource-rich Europeans to master both near and far-off environments and humans. Enlightenment individualization was accompanied by strict private property laws, in the interests both of efficient taxation and of economic improvement. The commodification of land was joined with abstract mapping practices that allowed the representation of places to be separated from locals’ uses and experiences. This divorce, environmentalist historians argue, divided land from local experiences of usage and movement, rendering it accessible, instead, to imperialist and capitalist objectification, categorization and quantification. Ursula Heise has strongly condemned such worldwide systems of commodification as divorcing space from locals’ daily interactions with nature. The result – nature quantified according to abstract profit calculations, flattened to an abstract mass on maps – is (in Heise’s phrase) an “endocytic spacelessness”, in which there is “no longer any other than mankind, no outside outside” humans.<sup>7</sup>





have argued, has increasingly penetrated into both the public, i.e. political, and private, or life-world, spheres. The main producers of use-value in the industrial world have indeed been identified as women in the home – that is, in the family's life-world. Those who critique the nature-human divide and the loss of human inhabitancy can thus, like social democrats and (as we shall see) the far right, use the home and family as a counter-ideal and imaginary.<sup>11</sup>

Environmentalists thus see commodification as a fundamental problem when it comes to the human-nature relationship. They call for a reintroduction of a sense of inhabitancy, underpinned by communal usufruct and a revaluation of embodied experiences of time and place (and thus nature). But here they run into a problem. Inhabitancy can be exclusionary.

**A SENSE OF** ownership of land, of inhabitancy, can be risky, as the analyses of grass-roots “not in my backyard” activism demonstrate. The right to speak for a territory, to declare ownership and responsibility, is, arguably, justified through a collective memory (often re-invented) of collective inhabitancy, that is, a history of experience and usage. One group defines *its* practices – and the practices of its ancestors – as definitional for a given place. These practices, when enshrined in a certain narrative as *the* history of the place, become a means of excluding alternative practices, alternative histories, and alternative groups. Doreen Massey, in her analyses of the exclusionary and rival claims to public places and “natural” environ-

ments, describes the resulting product as “envelopes of space-time”.<sup>12</sup> Mukul Sharma's *Green and Saffron* gives telling examples of how such “envelopes” might work in the case of ecological activism. Some Indian activists invoke historical claims concerning a lost, pre-colonial era of ecological balance – to return to which requires authoritarian rule, strict enforcement of Hindu practices, and/or a revalorization of the caste system. The creation of nature reserves has been similarly underpinned: those who rope off such reserves postulate a pre-human history of “natural harmony”. The history of the humans who have lived and worked within the territory is disregarded; they are restricted or expelled.<sup>13</sup>

**THE GREATER** THE elaboration of a specific history of human-nature interaction, the stronger the claims made concerning that place's proper present, and its future. This allows the espousal of environmentalism by both left and right – as shown by the dual loyalties of militant ecologists of the 1970s. As Jonathan Olsen puts it, both left- and right-wing environmentalists oppose the “homogenizing globalism that turns place into space and home into nowhere in particular”.<sup>14</sup> Both thus celebrate inhabitancy, in opposition to the

This change affected the experiences of local humans as well. Local space, as Anthony Giddens points out, was linked to local time; unsurprisingly, representations of universal space necessitated the representation of universal time – time divorced from the sunrises and sunsets, seasons and cycles of local space. Governance of the world could be planned and executed only with the help of the “entrainment” made possible by a common time of clocks ticking together in progressive time. Giddens has seen this as part of the replacement of face-to-face interaction and space-time experience with modern national and global systems. Only abstract space-time could allow the modern human's necessary trust in unseen experts and institutions, the informed “risk society” which increasingly replaces the moving-through-the-day, bodily experienced relations of locally bounded place-time. Universal time, finally, helps order the world into the linear narrative of economic growth, as ordered by the invisible hands of benign capitalist competition.<sup>8</sup>

The Western imaginary, as described here, has its serious critics. Many point to the knowledge system's pro-masculine, pro-Western, anthropocentric, pro-colonial, and pro-capitalist implications. Feminists

and minorities have faulted its marginalization of collective and “private sphere” experiences. Fascists and, more recently, xenophobic nationalists argue for a hierarchical scale of unique, place and race-based community values. Further, they join environmentalists in critiquing both its abstraction of place, its denial of communal usufruct, and its dismissal of emotional and sensory experiences, all of which divide humans from nature.

**FOR ENVIRONMENTALISTS,** THE modern imaginary is problematic in that it alienates people not only from each other, but from their surroundings. Where one is, is immaterial; the practices that tie one to a particular time-space, with its actors and actants – the sense of inhabitancy – disappear.<sup>9</sup> The environment, the land, is alienated, and can be dealt with like any other commodity. The new individual is detached from place, in free-floating human subjectivity – in what Giddens has termed a process of “disembedding”. Or, as David Deudney summarizes it, “who-ness” is, today, divorced from “here-ness”.<sup>10</sup>

One can also see nature's commodification as part of the general shift from use-value to commodity-value. Commodification, as Jürgen Habermas and others

Photo: Christian Jungeblodt

Cleaning Day” (Nationaler Säuberungstag), 2005-10-22.





Humans are and remain part of nature! Cover of an NPD flyer describing the party's environmental policy.



Protection of the environment is protection of the Heimat! This NPD slogan is popular at all levels of the party, as well as among independent extremists.



inhuman and unnatural exploitative practices of international capitalism.

But this does not mean that right and left environmentalism are identical. The right has a particular, biodeterminist definition of inhabitancy. Its ideologies reinforce the emotional tie of people and territory by pseudo-scientific biological determinism that holds peoples to have interacted with local nature over thousands of years, and thus formed both their nature and their own collective being. This, as Olsen shows, means believing that all people are “the expression of an ‘eco-niche’, the places, nations, and cultures to which they naturally belong”. Each *Volk* is held to be unique – and “the most natural thing on earth”.<sup>15</sup> This means that the far-right myth holds that each separate people has developed both biomass and culture in fundamental interaction with the land and animals surrounding them. This means that if (say) Germans are to survive as a people, they must protect German nature and land. It also means that only Germans belong on that land. Or, to turn directly to a German neo-Nazi website (2008):

**A people have, naturally belonging to them, their ancestral earth. This includes forests, rivers, meads, lakes, and much more – the landscape itself, in which our forefathers moved and lived – still in harmony with it. The fate of *Volk* and earth are chained to each other. [...] To cut through this band is, in the long run, to destroy the basis of existence of a *Volk* – unless it wants to join the parasitical *Nomadentum* that [lives on] other host peoples, hosts such as the German people, with their [German] honor, history, and pride.<sup>16</sup>**

Thus far, we follow Olsen's argument. But we go further. We argue that everyday gendered practices, as espoused by both environmentalists and neo-Nazis, can anchor this sentiment in new emotional ways. Let us proceed to our case history, to see how this might happen.

## Our case history: the National Democratic Party of Germany

The National Democratic Party of Germany (*Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschland* – NPD) has, at the time of writing, about 6000 members. It is the strongest nationalist party in Germany. Although it did not

garner more than 1.5% of the vote in the 2009 federal elections, it has gained around 350 seats in state elections, and achieved, twice running, the 5% of votes in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Sachsen needed to gain representation in those states' legislatures. Its great strengths are local; in some communities, the NPD can count on a steady 20% of the vote.<sup>17</sup>

The NPD has, perhaps, the most eloquent environmentalist statement of any of Europe's neo-Nazis. Protection of the environment, the NPD program holds, is protection of the *Heimat*.

**An intact nature is the foundation of our future! National policy is environmental policy. The lack of ecologically responsible policy threatens every *Volk* in its substance! Economic interests must come second to protection of nature. Man is part of nature. Nature, therefore, is not simply the ‘*Umwelt*’ of humans, but the *Mitwelt*.<sup>18</sup>**

How is this rhetoric developed? Let us go to Bavaria, via the website [www.npd-bayern.de](http://www.npd-bayern.de). One is first, perhaps, struck by the prominence of nature imagery. On Jan. 26, 2013, the homepage has a background image of wheat fields and woods, overwritten with “Protect the *Heimat*”. Links lead to pages with pictures of border posts, hands resting on euro bills and coins, soldiers and youths – as well as “Protect the *Heimat*” lettered against pictures of a field amid forest and mountains, a snow-covered mountain range, a tree-surrounded log cabin, and wheat fields ripening under a blue sky – and the shadows of nuclear reactor towers. The NPD thus joins other far-right parties in playing on nostalgic, kitschy images of “our” countryside. This landscape is, it seems, threatened. Indeed, threats loom darkly throughout both text and imagery. Scrolling down, one finds articles protesting housing for asylum-seekers, complaining that low prices are “exterminating” German dairy farmers, exposing the profit-mongering underlying the Winter Olympics and the luxurious state benefits offered immigrants, and – in “What Jewish Roots?” – attacking the idea that the Germans' *Leitbild* was Jewish-rooted Christianity. One finds, finally, a poster protesting cruelty to animals: “Bavaria must not become the Orient!”; a diatribe against Muslim and Jewish slaughter practices. Warnings continue in the environmental information presented under the website's “Umwelt” link. Readers are called upon to oppose the dangers of atomic energy, genetically modified crops, the environmental policies

of the CSU, and the extinction of the German people.<sup>19</sup>

It is all connected. The supposed fact that environmental protection is protection of the *Heimat* is demonstrated both by the embedding of environmentalist messages in articles decrying the ill effects of international capitalism and immigration, and by grand narratives that make environmentalist concerns naturally xenophobic. Let us summarize a pair of fairly typical narratives of this sort, taken from the same website.

**OUR STORY BEGINS** with the NPD's condemnation of genetically modified crops. Is *Genmais* (genetically modified corn; literally: “gene-corn”), the website asks, to be sown on “our *Heimat* land”? Germany's politicians had

functioned as doormen for the profit-hungry machinations of the gene-monopolists from the US. In collaboration with the EU, and without asking the *Volk*, transgenic technology was brought into our *Heimat* through the back door. [...] Germany must be declared a genetic-engineering-free zone! If the *Amis* want to poison themselves with genetically modified food, that's their affair – we will never allow it.<sup>20</sup>

The same website warns, in “No to Genetically Modified Corn!”, that genetically modified plants are being allowed to establish themselves as experimental plantations. This both “contaminates” the surroundings and allows the German government to argue, in the future, that genetically modified corn should be accepted because there was already so much of it in Germany. The author continues:

Parallels to immigration are obtrusively obvious. From guest workers (who after all return home) to the Land of Immigrants. If one had asked the Germans thirty or thirty-five years ago whether they wanted to have, in the future, fifteen million foreigners in their country, they would have defended themselves with hands and feet and possibly the ballot. Bit by bit, the Federal Republic has been made into the reception camp for all [the world's] troublesome and encumbered. The Germans are faced with a fait accompli, they are not asked any more – we are, now, a Land of Immigrants.<sup>21</sup>



Left: A healthy diet instead of "Gene-Food"! Genetic engineering – no thanks! Cover of an NPD flyer (Bavarian section).

Right: Animal protection is protection of the Heimat! Vote for the NPD on September 22! Campaign poster for the German federal elections of 2013 (NPD Facebook page).

The author's description of international companies' genetically modified food invasion thus segues into a denunciation of immigration: both will denaturalize Germany. And what is Germany? The *Heimat* – and its *Volk*. Here we have a second NPD trope. The German *Volk* – which has evolved to its present level by dint of eons of natural selection – is "also" an endangered species. The article "Become a *Völker*-Conservationist!" notes expert warnings against the mass extinction of plant and animals.<sup>22</sup>

**This is of course very depressing, especially in the view of nationalists. What, however, are the causes? The main evil is without doubt the relentlessly thorough commercialization of all fields of life, unto the most far-off corner of the earth. Those responsible are those dogooders, Liberalists and internationalists who are now complaining about the result of their own actions.**

These were the people who were promoting "limitless free trade", calling for ever more motorways for heavy transport of animals, mineral water, and vegetables – so that "a few tens of thousands of profiteers can make big money off this insanity. [...] But the greatest threat to our world has its headquarters on the US East Coast, with willing vassals in Western countries." And instead of combating this, the Greens and their ilk were busy making Germany a Land of Immigrants. What about the extinction of peoples?

**What is less well known [...] is that every year on average three languages die out. These were certainly small peoples who thereby lost the last vestige of their ethnic identity. They were subjected to the expansionist pressure of other *Völker*, were no longer able to know their own traditions, sing their own songs, live according to their own habits and customs, save their *Heimat* for their children, prevent the immigration of foreigners into it.**

But this "irreplaceable loss in the heritage of creation does not trouble these internationalist corrupters of *Völker*". Just as every animal species has a right to survival, so does every *Volk*, no matter how great or how small. Every people has the right to refuse im-



Bavaria must not become the Orient! Illustration accompanying an article posted on Bavarian NPD website. Protests against cruelty to animals are often used as a cover for islamophobic and anti-Semitic sentiments.

migration and to "insist on the maintenance of their ethnic identity, which is, after all, the precondition for national solidarity. [...] Support the NPD – protection of the *Heimat* is protection of the environment."<sup>23</sup>

## From grand narrative to everyday practice

These are some of the framing myths invoked by eco-nationalists; they fit well into the grand narratives described by Olsen and others. This type of political, public-sphere environmentalism presupposes a "German" sense of inhabitancy. The sense of inhabitancy is further anchored, however, we argue, by appealing to practices in the "private", non-commodified sphere (according to neo-Nazi ideology, the natural sphere of women). This takes right-wing ideology beyond the sidewalk activism, demonstrations, and political practices that are the focus of much neo-Nazi practice and discourse, into the practices of "caring", that is, those of family, home, health, and nutrition; to the practice of familial or feminine traditions; and, in a more ironic twist, to practices of domestic consumption. Neo-Nazi advocacy of "environmental" practices in these spheres, we argue, sets out to create emotional links between right-wing narratives and the highly valorized private sphere. Let us look at how the NPD attempts to connect its biodeterminist environmentalism with far-right celebrations of women, health, family, and tradition.

Websites provide a good deal of material, but we can also turn to material published in traditional media. There is, for instance, the environmentalist magazine *Umwelt & Aktiv*, a supposedly apolitical journal that, nonetheless, reproduces the NPD's environmentalist rhetoric (down to a word-for-word, if unattributed, reproduction of the NPD's environmentalist program). Unsurprisingly: as German journalists have pointed out, one *Umwelt & Aktiv* editor has been an NPD candidate in state parliamentary elections, while the pseudonym of another, "Laura Horn", hides the wife of an NPD functionary.<sup>25</sup> How might this publication represent the supposedly overlapping worlds of ecology and neo-Nazi ideology?

*Umwelt & Aktiv* offers a fine mixture of articles, ranging from cozy to combative. One issue features

three pages devoted to health food (while attacking today's fast food, stress, and "enduring anger", as well as the UN's *Codex Alimentarius*, which "threatens the food of all nations"). There is a piece on the "Portable Box of Vegetables" – one can get produce from "*heimisch* gardens", to the benefit of "our health and the health of our children". Other articles attack the imperialist ambitions of the US food concern *Monsanto*. Germans could, instead, make their own honey, as an article on renting beehives points out. The "Plea for the Good Old Compost Heap" joins the beehive promoter in decrying mass production, this time of garden soil. Soil commercialization has involved the "systematic annihilation" of "millions of microorganisms"; home composting will give these creatures back their "*Heimat und Lebensraum*". *Lebensraum* is also the concern of the author of "The Ancestral Guardian Tree: A Dying Breed?" This Germanic tradition of planting a "guardian tree" (*Schutzbaum*) should be revived, not only out of respect for tradition and nature, but to give (German) birds their *Lebensraum*. On the same note, the gardener is advised to eschew the foreign rhododendron in favor of native German flowering bushes. The former is host to only a handful of insects; the latter feed both birds and hundreds of native German insects.<sup>26</sup>

This is all sandwiched between grander stories – articles attacking Christianity, Judaism, and Islam for indifference to nature, preferring a "way of thinking" rooted "in the Germanic", when land was treated as common property and when eagles, horses and deer, "old trees and flowering bushes" were loved and respected.<sup>27</sup> Articles on the bison's "return home" to Western Europe and on over-fishing are followed by that popular neo-Nazi topic, overpopulation: "Flourishing landscapes through suicide of the Volk?". To be sure, the author writes, environmental destruction is caused by overpopulation; but the Germans cannot be called on to limit births. There are too few of them already; and every *Volk* has an equal right to existence. Germans must be careful; they face the risk of "spiritual" death, the forerunner to biological death.<sup>28</sup>

Or let us turn to the magazine's website. Again, political polemics are interlaced with homely articles: "Cancer-Promoting Elements in Coca-Cola?", "Asiatic Ladybugs on the March Again" (a cannibalistic sort

**Is their main concern really the well-being of cows? Rather sheer propaganda?**





Asian ladybugs on the rise! Screenshot of an article on the *Umwelt & Aktiv* website.

that threatens the *heimische* with extermination), an exposé of the false claims made for supermarket “bio-bags”, and, on a grander plane, a call to refuse taxes that fund nuclear power. The obligatory polemics against “gene food” are complemented by articles exalting (German) nature. An article on “Herbal Wisdom” goes through various herbs and their healing powers, as used “by our ancestors”; the call to use herbs is complemented by descriptions of how to celebrate, and brightly-illustrated advertisements for, non-Christian family and community festivals such as a pagan Candlemas or the “Germanic Yule Festival”.<sup>29</sup>

Such familial exhortations appear on NPD websites, as well. So do images of children. Blonde girls are, indeed, standard illustrations for NPD pamphlets and advertisements, in particular for open-air festivals. Such children are, implicitly, purely German, to be kept safe from foreign pollution, pedophiles, and practices. It is children who are to be protected against transgenic food, who are to inherit “our beautiful German nature”; indeed, an *Umwelt & Aktiv* article decrying “Kevinismus” advocates giving children more “Germanic” names (such as “Adolf, Adolph”, translated as “noble wolf”). German children are to be protected against all foreign biomass, especially by protecting them from all foreign culture.

Such arguments allow the far right to invest familiar, domestic, everyday concerns with eco-nationalist urgency. Environmental degradation is tied to immigration and international capitalism; right-wing environmentalism spans the private, local worlds of loving usufruct. Endowing the shopping bag, insect, and vegetable with neo-Nazi meaning gives ultra-nationalism an “in” that more traditional neo-Nazi ideology and activity lack.

**GENDER PLAYS A ROLE** here. Much is tied to, and reinforces, the nationalist idealization and delimitation of the ideal woman.<sup>30</sup> Here, again, environmentalism and neo-Nazi ideology make a fruitful marriage. Environmentalism, when defined as a matter of food, supermarket purchasing, gardening, herbal medicines, protecting children, and celebrating the seasons, addresses itself directly to women’s domestic concerns. It also exalts them. It is women who are to take care of our return to true (pagan) traditions and festivals – as “Frauen für Deutschland”, the web portal of the *Ring nationaler Frauen* emphasizes in calling women to celebrate *Faschingszeit*, whose traditions, “much older than Christianity”, derive from a Swedish runic image and/or a rite of fertility.<sup>31</sup> Women as domestic consum-



Samples of *Umwelt & Aktiv*.

ers are similarly addressed. Unsurprisingly, far-right websites also feature online shopping. The NPD’s website advertises and will ship flags, T-shirts, stickers and badges, displaying, say, the Iron Cross, the German Eagle, or “the stolen *Heimat*”.<sup>32</sup> There are other websites, however, which seem directed towards women. In 2011, the *Umwelt & Aktiv* website advertised small wooden figures (ravens, Viking ships) and a new-age cookbook, *Kettle Hearth Fire*, with “recipes to celebrate the festivals of seasonal changes”. This shop has now, it seems, been out-sourced to the website *Kind und Natur* (run by Bente Strauch, a former *Umwelt & Aktiv* collaborator and a leading member of the now banned *Heimatreue Deutsche Jugend* – here, again, German journalists have done the detective work). There, interested shoppers can still buy “pretty and useful” things such as window stickers of Viking ships, windmills, dwarves, and ducks; wholesome cookbooks (and books warning against the “lies and deception” of the food industry), the *Encyclopedia of Edible Wild Plants*, “advice to parents” concerning the dangers of vaccination, and the like. These are female-directed things that can, as *Umwelt & Aktiv* articles show, be both linked to ecology and framed as a specifically far-right concern. Ecology helps the far right penetrate the world of familial practice.

It does so on one more plane. Tying neo-Nazi ecological practices to the woman’s sphere furthers the reification of the woman and the home. The female domestic sphere is, arguably, key to what neo-Nazis claim to be protecting: the unspoiled, unalienated heart, the essence of the *Heimat*. Gisela Ecker discusses the concept of the *Heimat*, which, she finds, is weighted with emotionally charged images of joyous childhood. Male activists protecting the environment, and thus the *Heimat*, are protecting the eternally sacred, sunny and joyous world of childhood, presided over by the German maiden and mother.<sup>33</sup>

**UNDISTURBED GERMAN** nature, that of childhood, is thus equated with the harmony of childhood. Nostalgia for a natural past that never was, complete with the invention of a history of environmentally sound practices, is projected both onto one’s own person and onto family, and thence onto the people as a whole. Or is it? Toraulf Straud argues that “eco-Nazis”



“Hands off our children”: Images of (and threatened) girls are standard in NPD propaganda (see Facebook page).

do not see nature as “soft, harmonious and idyllic, but as brutal and merciless”. They anthropomorphize nature – or,

rather, project “masculine traits” onto it.<sup>34</sup> This would, of course, provide a basis for activism; eco-soldiers must fight against the “bad” nature that comes from abroad (in the form of immigrants, and ladybugs). But it seems that this “bad” (and implicitly male) nature has its “good” (female) counterpart: that produced through the lens of environmentalist *Heimat* nostalgia. This allows an alternative, softening, emotional nature – the love and joy of the small-scale, pastoral existence, which Raymond Williams describes as the modern West’s nostalgia for an imaginary, unalienated childhood.<sup>35</sup> This long-ago childhood is projected onto the *Volk* as a whole. Pagan ancestors (whose festivals we strive to recreate, whose children’s names we should respect, whose dishes we would like to cook) had a noble and loving relationship to nature. Our past determines our future, as embodied by our blonde girl-children, whose smiling faces compel us to strive to re-create this relationship. The entire neo-Nazi argument, in fact, solves the environmentalist challenge of engaging people in place through an invented history of communal usufruct, anchored with positive emotions in nature-friendly, everyday, use-value production – both of which attribute intrinsic value to nature. The problem is, of course, that the environmentalism produced is inhuman. ✕

Note: All essays are scholarly articles and have been peer-reviewed by specialists under the supervision of Baltic Worlds’ editorial advisory board.

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- 1 We would like to thank the Baltic Sea Foundation for the grant that made research on this topic possible. The ecocritical literature is vast. For key concepts see e.g. A. Naess, “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary”, *Inquiry* 16 (1973); Daniel Deudney, “Ground Identity: Nature, Place and Space in Nationalism”, *The Return of Culture and Identity to International Relations Theory*, Y. Lapid & F. Kratochwil (eds.), New York 1995; U. K. Heise, “Local Rock and Global Plastic: World Ecology and the Experience of Place”, *Comparative Literature Studies* 41, no. 1 (2004); J. Jacobs, “Earth Honoring: Western Desires and Indigenous Knowledge”, A. Bluten and G. Rose (eds.) *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and postcolonial Geographies*,





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propaganda (NPD



Herbal mixtures versus pharmaceutical madness. Screenshot of the NPD women's organization's website.



Banner of the Umwelt & Aktiv webshop.

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# WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT IN ST. PETERSBURG: PROGRESS, BUT NOT ENOUGH

by **Ann-Louise Martin**

**LIFE USED TO BE SIMPLE** for the people of Leningrad. Water came out of the tap, hot and abundant – and it was free. It drained out of the bathtubs and the sinks and disappeared into the Gulf – and it didn't cost anything either. Per-capita water consumption in Leningrad was twice that of the neighboring country of Sweden. At the time, Finland was watching the innermost bubble of contaminated water in the Gulf of Finland expand, with increasing alarm. The Finns had a considerably greater understanding of how eutrophic wastewater was impacting water quality in the Baltic Sea.

Things started to move after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1992. Outside Leningrad and the Soviet Union, the coastal nations surrounding the Baltic had drafted and adopted the Helsinki Convention on the environmental protection of the Baltic Sea, under the leadership of HELCOM. At the 1990 summit in Ronneby, the parties resolved that the pace of the work should be increased and drafted the Baltic Comprehensive Environmental Action Program. That was in 1992, the same year Russia rose again from the ashes of the Soviet Union.

The goal was not yet attained; the program had to be approved by all parties. In addition, there were now more coastal nations that had to ratify the agreement. By 1994, the EU, Germany, Latvia, and Sweden had signed on. They were joined the next year by Finland and Estonia, followed by Denmark in 1996, Lithuania in 1997, and finally, in November of 1999, Poland and Russia.

## Enlightenment about substandard treatment

The time had come for Felix Karmazinov to enter the scene. Since 1987, he had been the head of the

inefficient and uncompleted Vodokanal wastewater treatment plant in Leningrad. The technology was substandard; one could call the entire plant a sieve, because there was no other treatment to speak of. In an interview with *Helsingin Sanomat* in August 2010, Karmazinov related that, before the Helsinki Convention, he had never heard of nutritive salts or how they were connected to algae bloom. Up to that point, he told the newspaper, they had relied entirely on the water flow of the Neva River being sufficient to treat the wastewater.

But once the new environmental awareness had begun to seep through, even Karmazinov woke up. And when he did, he was wide awake and serious. He suddenly emerged as a leading advocate of this newfangled idea demanded by the outside world – the first effective wastewater treatment plant for St. Petersburg, a metropolis that was home to several million people.

**THE INITIAL CONTACTS** were made in 1990 when HELCOM noted the importance of treating wastewater to remove the nutritive salts phosphorus and nitrogen. These substances caused massive algae blooms, particularly of cyanobacteria (or blue-green algae as they were previously called). Techniques for this treatment stage had been perfected long ago and now they needed to be implemented in a treatment plant. This was to be Russia's first plant to include chemical treatment and precipitation of phosphorus, as well as biological treatment of phosphorus and nitrogen. The techniques and necessary technology were found in Finland and Sweden. It also turned out that parts of the useless and half-finished treatment plant, then called the southwestern plant, could be used. Construction of the treatment plant had begun 30 years ago when the city was called Leningrad, a place that

stank of filthy water and waste in the sewers and along the shoreline. In 1978, construction of a reservoir also began outside the city at Kronstad, where all wastewater would be collected in gigantic basin. Three treatment plants were planned in addition, but the funds dried up and the end result was one half-finished plant. Thirty years later, in the 1990s, this partially built southwestern treatment plant was to become useful again.

## Financing and partnership

For the work to get started, the financing had to be in order – the prime ministers of surrounding countries immediately stepped in. The Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson and Paavo Lipponen of Finland lobbied energetically in Brussels to acquire funds to treat the discharges from St. Petersburg. In the end, the EU and the Nordic Investment Bank, NIB, allocated funds to the project. Sweden, Finland, and Denmark contributed via their state development assistance authorities. Sida, the Swedish International Development Agency, allocated 100 million Swedish Crowns (10 million euros), conditional upon matching funds from FINIDA, the Finnish Department for International Development Cooperation. Companies and other private financial backers were also activated, including NCC and Skanska in Sweden and YIT and the Juha Nurminen Foundation in Finland. The final cost of the project was 189 million euros. One should not forget that the investments in the treatment plant also brought export revenue and jobs to the neighboring countries of Finland and Sweden. The materials and technology were to be sourced from the partner countries. The project resulted in orders to Finnish companies, for example, to the tune of 30 million euros.



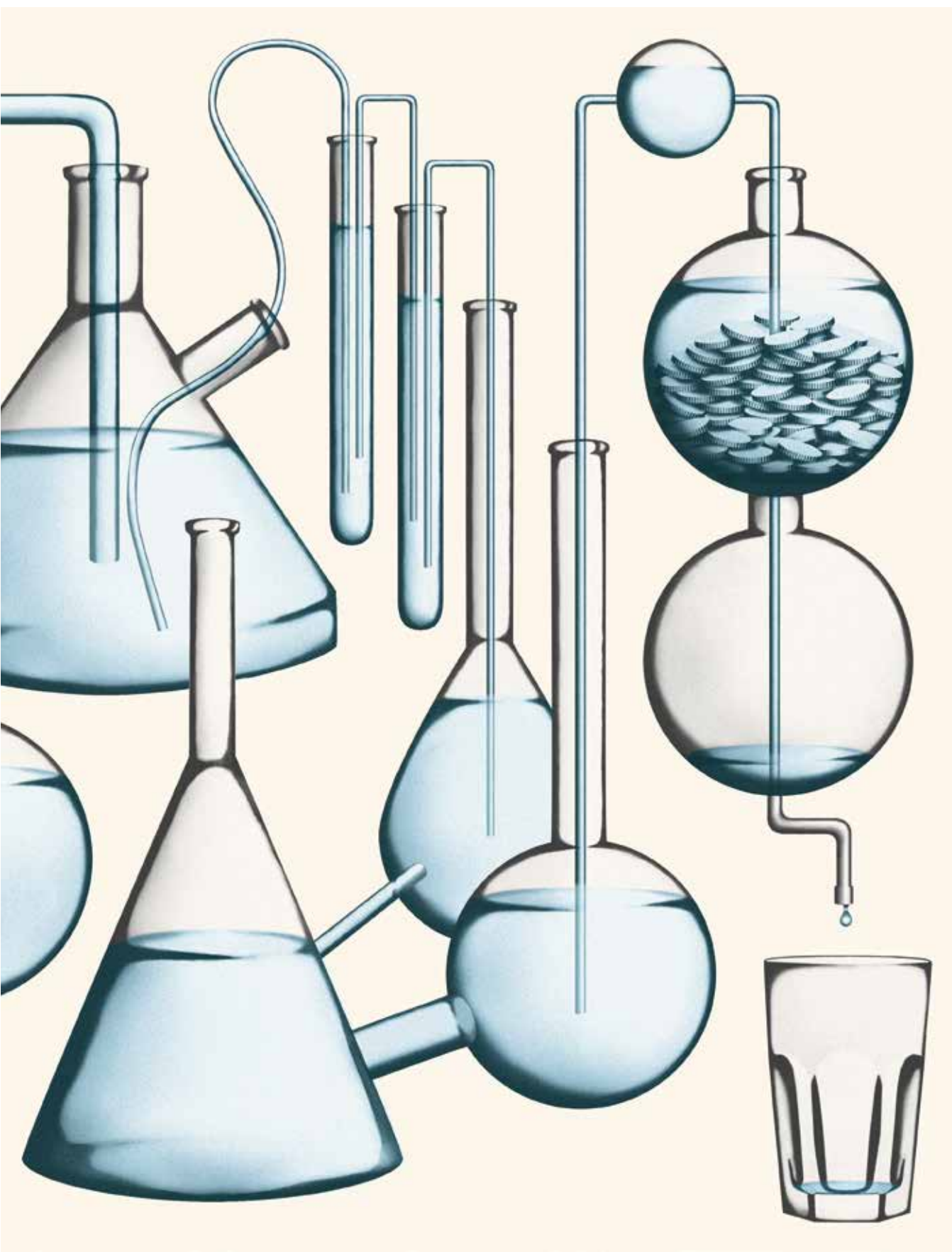


Illustration: Karin Sunvisson

Construction began in 2003 and the first working plant was ready only two years later. It still did not receive wastewater from any more than 700,000 of the city's population of five million, but the quality of treatment was entirely consistent with HELCOM directives.

**AND THUS, THERE** was a treatment plant. But more plants were needed and those that already existed had to be improved. The city's northern treatment plant was operating, for example, but it was not entirely effective. Essential infrastructural changes were also

required, such as connecting sewers through the city to pipe the water. That does not sound like much, but it requires a tunnel system deeper and bigger than the city's subway system.

The reservoir, on which construction had begun in 1978 but had never really been finished, came under consideration again as a flood protection system for St. Petersburg. The Neva is a mightily flowing river, and its delta, where the city is built, frequently overflows its banks. A control system and protection from the water from both directions was required and this costly and complex endeavor began in 2003.

Treatment plants, infrastructure, flood protection: all of this was accomplished, but there was more on the agenda. A social and awareness-raising initiative was also required. The people of St. Petersburg had to stop wasting water! The means to the end was to charge for consumption, and water meters were installed – a complete novelty. Whether due to financial incentives or environmental awareness, water consumption per person and per day declined from 300–400 liters to 70 – half as much as the neighboring country of Sweden.

**NUMEROUS STAKEHOLDERS** have been involved since the project commenced. Many have contributed funds, others have contributed more environmental activism than money, and then there are those who are very good at rustling up the cash.

NIB praised the St. Petersburg project as an example of an unusually successful Nordic partnership. And Felix Karmazinov got his reward in 2005 when the first stage of the project was finished. In August of that year, he was given the Swedish Baltic Sea Water Award.

## Greater environmental awareness

Today, 95 percent of St. Petersburg's wastewater is treated to remove phosphorus to an acceptable level. Remaining challenges are environmentally toxic solid waste and sludge, for which incineration has been deemed the best solution. That may be open to discussion, but almost anything would be better than the waste dumps that were formerly pushed beyond capacity.

The city's current project for 2013 is refurbishment of the public toilets. That might seem like a trivial problem, but estimates are that it will take until 2015 to provide enough privies for the people of St. Petersburg. An estimate of the costs for the waste treatment company Vodokanal has been made – and the result is that it will cost 20 rubles to use the toilet. There are however exemp-

tions for certain categories of people: small children, former concentration camp prisoners, Heroes of the Soviet Union, people with disabilities, victims of political oppression, war veterans, conscripts, and many more. The Russian control systems seem to be alive and well. . . .

**NONETHELESS, THE** educational initiatives in the city with regard to water consumption have also spilled over to the next generation. There is not a school class in St. Petersburg that has not gone on a field trip to Vodokanal's new World of Water Museum, inspected

algae through a microscope, and written essays on the importance of an efficient wastewater treatment system.

And these days, you can actually drink the tap water in the city! In the past, tourists were strongly advised against drinking the water and tourist guides even recommended that people make sure their hotels had their own filter systems for hot water. The unfiltered water that flowed out of the taps was a color somewhere between orange and brown. But that was then. Today, the piped-in water has been treated and the water is potable.

## Massive agricultural and industrial discharges

Should we be content, then? Unfortunately, no. Vodokanal, the finished treatment plant in St. Petersburg, is a true success story. But not so very far away in the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, a wastewater treatment plant was also planned in 1999. Here as well, money poured in from every direction: from the NIB, the European Development Bank and the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership, as well as Swedish Sida and the Danish Ministry of the Environment, names that were also attached to the successful project in St. Petersburg. The difference is that, in Kaliningrad, what happened was precisely nothing. The project was never realized. Today about 300 metric tons of phosphorus are discharged from Kaliningrad every year. By way of comparison, the total treated discharges of the entire country of Sweden amount to 400 metric tons of phosphorus – and for Finland, the figure is about 150 metric tons per year.

**AND IT IS** still the case that the worst problems of the Baltic Sea with regard to nutritive salts – phosphates and nitrates – are unrelated to urban discharges. A HELCOM report from last year describes a single source, a fertilizer factory in the city of Kingisepp on the Luga River, from which untreated and unreported discharges flow into the Gulf of Finland, just north of Narva. The factory discharges 1,000 metric tons of phosphorus per year. By comparison, St. Petersburg produces about 630 metric tons. Unfortunately, because the fertilizer factory is a high political priority, the targets established by HELCOM and Vodokanal for discharges to the Gulf of Finland are ignored in practice.

The truly serious problems are not the defined discharges, but the many times larger and much vaguer covert discharges from barns and stables, livestock farms, and crop farms along the entire eastern shore of the Baltic. The vast mass production of pigs, chickens, and cows taking place there in the name of cheap food is the biggest challenge for affluent countries. Buying unreasonably cheap food is like doing business with a fence: we should know something does not add up. We must be willing to spend money – for waste treatment and food – to protect environmental values. ❌

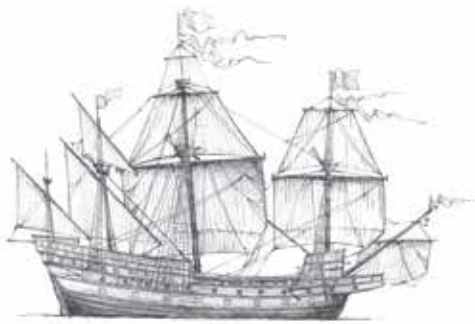


Divers on the sunken battlefield of 1564.



The unique *Falkon* is taken ashore.

Photo: Ingemar Lundgren/Ocean Discovery



What *Mars* might have looked like.

Illustration: Niklas Eriksson/MARIS

# THE WRE

## Maritime archaeological investigation

In the summer of 2011, after many years of searching, divers from Ocean Discovery in Västervik found the wreck of Erik XIV's legendary flagship *Mars*. The find was made at a depth of 70 meters, about 12 nautical miles southeast of Böda on northern Öland.

The gigantic ship *Mars* was built at Björkenäs north of Kalmar. When she was launched, she was bigger than any vessel that had ever sailed the Baltic Sea. She went down practically brand new on May 31, 1564, after a fierce battle against a fleet from Denmark and Lübeck. A fire broke out after she had been boarded by soldiers from Lübeck, and she exploded. The result today is a well-preserved marine battlefield, with burnt timber, cannon, and a variety of objects spread out on the Baltic seabed.

An archaeological investigation of the wreck was begun last summer, and in July 2013, this work con-



One of the 120 cannons of the *Mars*.  
Photo: Tomasz Stachura/Ocean Discovery



Photo: Tomasz Stachura/Ocean Discovery



Deep-sea divers and the research vessel.

Photo: Johan Rönnby

# WRECK OF THE *MARS* (1564)

ions of a sunken battlefield

tinued. This year's exploration of the *Mars* has been one of the biggest marine archaeological expeditions in the world, involving five survey vessels and over 40 people. The work has been carried out by international deep divers and with the help of underwater robots and multibeam sonar. A 3D scan of the wreck using BlueView sonar imaging has also been started, and this data is to be combined with the very detailed photo mosaic made in 2012. To brighten the total darkness at 70 meters under the Baltic Sea, a lighting rig strong enough to illuminate a small athletic field was hung ten feet above the wreck.

**THE SCIENTIFIC OBJECTIVE** of the 2013 phase was to try to reconstruct a cross-section of the battle space. To this end, a selection of ship timbers were salvaged for detailed documentation on the surface.

In addition to the timbers, the team salvaged two of the *Mars*'s 120 bronze guns. A small unique rail gun weighing about 150 kg, called a *falkon*, and the two ends of an exploded 3-meter-long field gun, called a *fältslanga*, were brought up. Many of the *Mars*'s guns probably exploded, as this one was, because of the fierce heat on board minutes before the ship went down. The long-range *fältslanga* is an immediate part of the battlefield situation in which the *Mars* went down, and its analysis will help to reconstruct the environment and the fighting aboard the ship. Finally, a gun carriage was salvaged. It has large, spoked wheels and a rough protruding axle.

The wreck of the *Mars* presents an opportunity to study an exceptionally well-preserved maritime battlefield and thus to reflect on war generally and on human behavior in relation to it.

How this first generation of big warships was built is also almost completely unknown, and the documentation of the wreck and the salvaged objects provide new and unique knowledge of this process.

**THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK** on the *Mars* is a part of a multidisciplinary research project at Södertörn University called Ships at War: Early Modern Maritime Battlefields in the Baltic. The study is a collaboration between MARIS at Södertörn University, the National Defense College, and the private companies Ocean Discovery, Deep Sea Production, and Marin Mätteknik (MMT). During the study, an international television documentary is being made about the archaeological work. 

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# VIKINGS AS TRANSMIGRANT PEOPLE

## A NEW APPROACH TO HYBRID ARTIFACTS

by **Lina Håkansdotter**  
illustration **Ragni Svensson**

Archaeological research concerning “the Eastern routes of the Vikings” has, on several occasions, had political overtones. Both from historical sources and from archaeological evidence, it is a well-known fact that Scandinavians in Eastern Europe in the late Iron Age and early Middle Ages took on such roles as traders, colonizers, and mercenaries. The question of the origin of Kievan Rus’, the embryo of the Russian Empire – and to what extent Vikings and Slavs were instrumental in its foundation – has been debated for more than two centuries. Archaeological research tends to place considerable emphasis on linking certain ethnic groups with certain archaeological material. The discussion about where and when Scandinavians, Slavs, or Finno-Ugric tribes were active in early urbanization and state formation in Eastern Europe is a good example of that endeavor.

The wish to identify certain artifacts with certain ethnic groups has led to a stereotypical use of ethnic concepts like Viking, Slav, and Rus.<sup>1</sup> But is it really possible to discern ethnicity in the archaeological material?

In cultural encounters, it might not always have been important to uphold ethnic boundaries. There is the possibility that people moving from one place to another sought to take on new roles or belong to new groups. In this article, I suggest that migrating people can take on a new, transmigrant identity that allows them to keep in touch with both an old and a new ethnic identity. I also argue that we should take a fresh look at the archaeological artifacts that were described as “hybrid” as early as 1914.<sup>2</sup>

### Background

The “Viking Age”, which usually refers to the late eighth to mid-eleventh centuries in Northern Europe, is popularly associated with wild Norsemen raiding and trading in both Western and Eastern Europe. In fact, trading contacts had already existed across the Baltic Sea and further along the Eastern European river routes since the sixth century or possibly even earlier,<sup>3</sup> and were intensified in the Viking Age. Archaeological evidence suggests that groups of people from Northern Europe, mainly from Eastern Sweden and Gotland, sometimes settled down and colonized areas along the coasts of the Baltic Sea and river routes in present-day Russia and Ukraine.<sup>4</sup>

Viking Age Scandinavians in Eastern Europe and the Near East are often referred to as Varangians (Greek: *varangoi*, Russian: *variagi*) or simply as *Rus*. Those are the terms used in historic sources which can be more or less easily identified as referring to people from Scandinavia. However, it is far from easy to establish exactly what is meant by those terms. I will examine some examples below.

Archaeological research on the Eastern route of the Vikings has been presented in a large number of publications. There is a great body of research concerning trading routes, ethnicity, burial material, and the foundation of various trading locations. The 1990s saw several collaborative research projects between archaeologists from Scandinavia and the post-Soviet republics, which resulted in a number of exhibitions and joint publications, such as *The Viking Heritage: A Dialogue Between Cultures*.<sup>5</sup>

However, many earlier works seem to take concepts like Vikings, Varangians, Rus’, and Slavs for granted, even though it is not easy to define who they were. Several excellent presentations<sup>6</sup> of artifacts, archaeological sites, and historical sources concerning Viking Age contacts between Scandinavia and Eastern Europe lack a deeper analysis of what ethnicity really is and how it is related to the origin of artifacts.

There is no way of telling how an individual’s identity changes, but the material objects surrounding migrating people are bound to change. Historical sources suggest that Kievan Rus’ was founded by a people called Rhos, understood to be Scandinavians. I think that the idea that Kievan Rus’ started as a multi-ethnic society, marked by generations of migration and trading contacts, needs to be explored much further than it has been so far in archaeological research.<sup>7</sup>

### Written sources

Attacks by Norsemen against Constantinople, as well as various Western European cities, are examples of events that often were dramatic enough to be written down in contemporary chronicles. There are several accounts of interaction across the Baltic Sea and the Eastern European river routes, as well as encounters between what seem to have been Scandinavians and people from the Frankish, Byzantine, and Arabian empires.<sup>8</sup> However, peaceful cultural encounters might not always have been recorded by chroniclers. The first meeting between two cultures often passes unmentioned in written sources. Nor does it always leave





physical traces in the form of archaeological evidence.

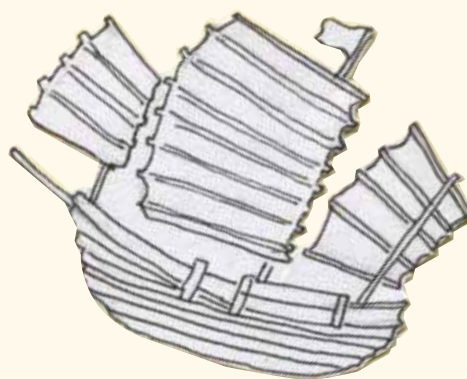
A people called Rhos is mentioned in the Frankish *Annals of St. Bertin* in 839 AD<sup>9</sup> and several times during the ninth and tenth centuries in Byzantine sources.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, *Rus'* is the term generally used in Arabic sources to refer to what seem to have been Scandinavians. Ibn Fadlan's account of *Rus'* in the city of Bulgar on the Volga in the year 922 is perhaps the best-known example,<sup>11</sup> but there are several other Arabic sources that mention *Rus'*.<sup>12</sup>

The term Varangians is used in a slightly different way, apparently to denote a professional and not only an ethnic identity.<sup>13</sup> Byzantine sources mention several sieges of Constantinople by *Rus'* armies, often followed by peace treaties. But Byzantine emperors were also known to recruit soldiers among neighboring peoples, usually those of the Caucasus and Black Sea regions. Among recruits from more distant places, alongside Normans and Franks, were *Rus'* soldiers, first mentioned as serving in the Byzantine army in 912 AD. From 988 AD on, sources such as the famous scribe Michael Psellos mention the Varangian Guard, then serving as the personal guard of the Byzantine emperor. According to the military historian Georgios Theotikos, there is a distinction between individual *Rus'* soldiers, recruited one by one as mercenaries, and the Varangian Guard, which served as a unit.<sup>14</sup>

There are also Arabic sources, as well as a Georgian one, that mention Varangians. In an Arabic text by al-Masudi, the difference between *Rus'* and Varangian societies is that there are men, women, and children among the *Rus'*, while the Varangians are a people consisting only of men. There is also a chronological difference: older Arabic records more often speak of *Rus'*, while from tenth century on the word *warank*, Varangians, predominates.<sup>15</sup> A Georgian eleventh-century source contains an account of how a group of 3000 *variagi* traveled up the river Rioni to meet with the Georgian king – an event that has been compared to a similar story in the Icelandic saga of Ingvar the Far-Traveled.<sup>16</sup>

When it comes to historical sources concerning *Rus'* and Varangians, however, it is safe to say that the Russian Primary Chronicle is the most frequently quoted. The chronicle was written by the monk Nestor in twelfth-century Kiev, and tells the story of how the Kievan *Rus'* empire came to be. The famous account of the “calling of the Varangians”<sup>17</sup> describes how Kievan *Rus'* was founded with the help of “recruited” men from across the sea, called *Rus'*. The name *Rus'* is believed to derive from the Finnish word for Sweden, *Ruotsi*, although that word has also been said to denote the place Roslagen, on the east coast of present-day Sweden. In 862 AD, Rurik, his two brothers, and their entourage were called from their home to settle in what is now Russia in three different locations that later became urbanized trading centers. The Rurikid dynasty is believed to have ruled Russia all the way up to the sixteenth-century tsar Ivan the Terrible, and ended with the death of Ivan's son.

Since these events were recorded in Kiev as late as the twelfth century, we obviously need to be critical of the sources. It is possible that the tale in the chronicle



reflects not one but several encounters, and a process of interaction rather than a single event. The first few encounters between seafarers from Scandinavia and local inhabitants in what was to become *Rus'* were probably more complex than what is described in early written sources, which means that we also need to consider a greater complexity in the relations between artifacts and ethnicity.

So far, we can conclude that both “*Rus'*” and “Varangians” signify people coming from one place and moving to, sometimes even settling in, another place – sometimes associated with specific roles such as warriors or princely retinue, sometimes representing a complete community on the move. Both the self-experienced and the ascribed ethnic identities may have changed along the way.

## The archaeological material

When archaeologists discuss ethnicity and artifacts, one of the most fundamental questions is that of how encounters and interaction are reflected in the archaeological material. The most obvious evidence of encounters in this case is trade-related objects, such as coins and weights, and prestigious commodities such as fur and amber. Arabic silver coins called *dirhams* seem to have spread through Eastern and Northern Europe mainly during the ninth and tenth centuries, and have been found in a large number of hoards in early Viking Age settlements such as Rurikovo Gorodische and Staraya Ladoga, Russia; Kiev, Ukraine; Birka, Köpingsvik; and on Gotland, Sweden. Staraya Ladoga in Northern Russia, one of the earliest Viking Age trading settlements in the Baltic region, has been pointed out in particular as a center of the silver trade. Furs from Northern Europe appear to have been a much sought-after commodity in Southern and Eastern Europe, as was amber.<sup>18</sup>

However, objects related to long-distance trade traveled both ways. Arabic coins, pottery, and costume details of Oriental style and origin have been found in Scandinavia, and indicate that the contacts were social and not only economic. The bulk of this material is believed to have been brought not only via Kievan *Rus'*, but also from more distant areas in Near and Central Asia via the Eastern European river routes.<sup>19</sup>

The most widely discussed archaeological material in the literature on the Eastern route of the Vikings is, perhaps, burial material. On several locations along the Eastern European river routes, such as the Dnepr and the Volga, Viking Age burial fields have been excavated, revealing burials of a kind that is significant

for Scandinavia both in their topographic settings and in the funerary gifts found. This is thought to be the strongest evidence for Scandinavian settlements in Eastern Europe, but, interestingly, the single most distinct ethnic trait seems to be details of the female costume.

According to data published in 1997, around 400 brooches, bracelets, and pendants of Scandinavian type have been found in Eastern Europe, mainly in tenth-century contexts. Oval brooches were among the most common types, together with round, trefoil and penannular brooches.<sup>20</sup> Oval brooches are often seen as a kind of trademark of the female costume in Viking Age Scandinavia, and are often accorded significance as both an ethnic and a gender trait. After Scandinavia, the greatest number of oval brooches has been found in Russia, with fewer examples in the Baltic Area. Because Slavic and Finno-Ugric women wore different costumes than Scandinavian women, the oval brooches are often seen as proof of ethnicity.<sup>21</sup> Correct though this may be, this assumption leads to the idea of an entire Scandinavian culture being present wherever oval brooches are found. The Ukrainian archaeologist Fedir Androshchuk has pointed out that the understanding of the role of Scandinavians in the founding of *Rus'* sometimes is based on the presence of female costume ornaments more than anything else,<sup>22</sup> and his Russian colleague Vladimir Petrukhin writes that “among Russian archaeologists there is a joke that it was Varangian women who founded the Russian State”.<sup>23</sup> In a similar way, temple rings, traditionally worn by Slavic women, are seen as a certain proof of the presence of a Slavic culture.<sup>24</sup>

Here we are at risk of falling into a circular reasoning: if oval brooches were worn by Scandinavian women, then the oval brooches were a Scandinavian costume detail, and if women wore oval brooches, they were Scandinavian. The same circular reasoning could confirm that temple rings were worn by Slavic women and therefore the temple rings were Slavic. I find it remarkable that female costume details seem to be treated more often than not as reliable ethnic markers.

Another category of artifacts that is often given a strong ethnic significance is Thor's hammer rings. Miniature Thor's hammers have been found on several occasions in Russia, while less often in the Baltic area. In Scandinavia, these objects are almost exclusively found in the Mälär Valley in Eastern Sweden and on the island of Åland in the Baltic Sea, a fact that puts these regions in a special connection with the Russian locations.<sup>25</sup> Thor's hammer rings, found in both burial and settlement contexts, are often given a purely ethnic value due to their strong Scandinavian mythological symbolism. At the same time, such objects are usually not seen as carrying any economic or aesthetic value.<sup>26</sup> This interpretation seems to be made despite the possibility that Thor's hammers and other originally symbolic objects can be either traded for economic value, or given a new symbolic meaning in a new location.

In all, archaeological evidence suggests intensified trade between Scandinavia and the Baltic and Eastern European regions in the eighth and ninth centuries, and the Swedish archaeologist Charlotta Hillerdal comments on the interregional character of the settlements along the Baltic coast and in Eastern Europe:





The general opinion among archaeologists is that the Scandinavian settlers of the Russian towns rather quickly were assimilated into the local population.<sup>27</sup>

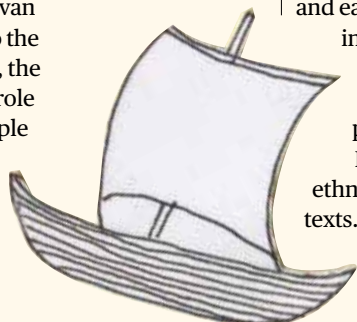
## Locations and settlements

In the early Viking Age, towns<sup>28</sup> had already existed for a couple of centuries in the Roman, Frankish, and English parts of Europe. And although urbanism spread north to Scandinavia, the vast majority of the population still lived in rural areas. Even in the Middle Ages, as little as 10% of Scandinavia's population lived in towns. Nonetheless, towns were important for trade and economy, and they acted as an arena for political development.<sup>29</sup>

Interestingly, a transition between an older and a younger "phase" can be observed in several Viking Age trading settlements. The earliest urban settlements, such as Ribe, Denmark, and Birka, Sweden, seem to have been abandoned quickly after a few centuries of intense activity. This is sometimes explained as due to "natural causes" or regional coincidences, but the archaeological material doesn't always support this. There are indications of several urbanization processes going on during the tenth century, followed by several reestablishments from an older to a newer location. The transition between early urban settlements such as Birka and Sigtuna, in Eastern Sweden, Rurikovo Gorodische and Novgorod on the River Volkhov, Gnezdovo and Smolensk on the River Dnepr, Russia, and Shestovitsa and Chernigov, Ukraine, might correspond to the contemporary transitions further west, from the Northern European settlement of Upåkra to Lund in Scania, Sweden, from Hedeby to Slesvig in Denmark (now Germany), and from Kaupang to Tønsberg in southeastern Norway. We need to bear in mind that all those settlements and early cities aren't identical, but there are clear parallels in the way several Viking Age settlements lost many of their inhabitants in favor of a new urban location in the same region.

Many researchers seek an explanation in the process of Christianization.<sup>30</sup> Hillerdal and her Norwegian colleague Dagfinn Skre favor this theory and suggest that the reestablishment of a city was ideologically necessary because the identity of an older urban center wasn't always convertible to the new power structure that came with the Church.<sup>31</sup> The relatively autonomous Viking Age settlements needed to be reestablished in order to be deinstitutionalized. In this process, I believe that the ethnic identities of both groups and individuals alike, as well as the political and religious situation, might have undergone a change.

Kiev is an exception. When St. Vladimir introduced Christianity to Kievan Rus' in 988 AD (according to the Russian Primary Chronicle), the city had already played the role of an urban center for a couple of decades. There never seems to have been a transition between an earlier and a later settlement in the Kiev region,



and the city probably served as one of the major trading centers in the region when it took on the role of a political and religious center, in close relation to Byzantium.<sup>32</sup>

So, what of the Vikings and their role in the process of urbanization in Eastern Europe? Should we even call them Vikings, or Varangians, or Rus', or nothing at all, since they clearly seem to have been not one, but several groups undergoing a change in ethnic identity?

## Theories of ethnicity

The nature of ethnicity in the various theories in the ethnicity discourse ranges from an effect of historic or political development to a universal cultural phenomenon. No one in recent anthropological discourse, however, seems to go so far as to call ethnicity an inert part of human nature. A popular way of explaining ethnicity seems to be as a psychosocial phenomenon. This theory explains ethnicity as a collective experience, ready to strengthen the boundaries of the ethnic group in times of conflict. In times of peace, when trade and political contacts with other groups are more strategically rewarding, the ethnic boundary is weakened to allow more intense interaction with other groups.<sup>33</sup>

One classic point of departure for discussions of the problem of ethnicity and ethnic boundaries is the analysis of Fredrik Barth.<sup>34</sup> Barth describes a classic anthropological definition of ethnicity, which focuses on self-supporting populations with common values and a notion of "we". Barth emphasizes the maintenance of ethnic boundaries rather than the internal dynamics of an ethnic group. Despite the superficial similarities, ethnicity, he stresses, is not identical to culture. There is a crucial distinction between experienced ethnicity and observable cultural differences.

Ethnic categories are thus arenas of communication, with differing content in different socio-cultural systems. What Barth doesn't focus on, on the other hand, are situations in which the ethnic group chooses *not* to maintain its boundaries, and he doesn't give much attention to what processes of interaction and assimilation do to an ethnic group. Barth seems to presuppose that ethnic groups always *want* to maintain their boundaries, while I see a need to examine those situations when individuals or groups chose to cross an ethnic boundary.

After more than 40 years, Barth still has a strong influence on the discourse of ethnicity among archaeologists. I find that, as Charlotta Hillerdal points out,<sup>35</sup> the reason ethnicity is so difficult to discuss is that we try to turn a subjective experience into objective categories. It is hard not to fall back into talking about ethnic groups in the same way mostly Western scholars talked about cultures and tribes in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is also crucial to keep in mind that, even though ethnic affiliation may be a dynamic and ever-changing experience, it can be deeply and strongly felt, sometimes persisting through many generations.

Neil Price<sup>36</sup> is one of many scholars who discuss ethnicity, with reference to Barth, in Viking Age contexts. The Viking Age, Price argues, should have been at least as complex and ethnically diverse as our own time, and he emphasizes the proba-

bility that ethnic groups existed not only on a regional level, but also on a local level and among families. Ethnicity has two sides: a self-experienced identity and an ascribed one. The latter is sometimes forgotten, but just as important to include when discussing prehistoric and early historic situations. Many of the ethnic categories used in early Frankish, Byzantine, and Arabic written sources, as well as the Russian Primary Chronicle, are in fact ascribed ethnicities, and tell us nothing about all the ethnic group identities that might have existed on a local level. Likewise, present-day archaeologists tend to put large-scale ethnic labels such as Slavic and Scandinavian on groups of artifacts, and in doing so learn nothing about the self-experienced ethnicity of the artifacts' long-dead owners.

An emigrant, an individual who has left a familiar environment to settle down in a new place, might often be seen as rootless and isolated, but isn't necessarily so, according to the Swedish archaeologist Kerstin Cassel, who puts forward the concept of transmigration. Transmigration indicates the process by which a migrating individual is able to connect to a new environment without losing touch with the old one. The new identity is able to take shape in the space between the old and the new. Cassel also argues that the idea that a people can be identified based on its material culture in a certain territory is a modern concept, rooted more in the nineteenth-century formation of nation-states than in our knowledge of prehistory. There is nothing natural about sharp ethnic or cultural borders, unless they are created out of a certain situation.<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, the analysis of cultural encounters always must start with the question of what was most important for the groups involved. Was ethnicity an important thing to stress in the encounter? Was it more advantageous to maintain or to conceal the ethnic boundary? Might the ethnic boundary have been more important for the surrounding people than for the group itself?

## Hybrid artifacts

"Hybrid" archaeological artifacts have been hotly debated ever since the Swedish archaeologist Ture J. Arne (1879–1965) noticed them and took them as proof of the presence of second and third-generation Viking colonizers.<sup>38</sup> Artifacts in Eastern Europe that seem to bear a Scandinavian style, but display stylistic errors or "incorrect" variations, have been seen as indicators of migrants' efforts to copy their ancestors' ethnic patterns.<sup>39</sup> A number of funerary finds from a burial field near Staraya Ladoga might be an example: objects identified as female brooches of typical Scandinavian design seem to have been made with "peculiarities in their manufacture and use" which lead us to suspect that they "were made by local craftsmen".<sup>40</sup> Yet others have classed them as purely Scandinavian objects after all,<sup>41</sup> or completely discarded the concept of hybridity.<sup>42</sup> Judging from the literature I have been able to go through so far, it is difficult to find specific examples of hybrid artifacts.

No one denies that certain objects clearly must have been produced somewhere else and brought to the site where they are eventually found. In this sense, Scandinavian artifacts in Russia are correctly called

Scandinavian. Yet such “Scandinavian” material is in fact found in Eastern Europe and not in Scandinavia. In this category, we may place not only artifacts that clearly must have come from Northern Europe, but also those “hybrid”, “second-generation” versions of jewelry or other artifacts. The Scandinavian material is at risk of being lifted out of its local context and highlighted in order to stress the intensity of Viking colonization in Eastern Europe. For someone not familiar with the material culture that is considered local, it becomes very difficult to estimate the significance of the Scandinavian traits.

I therefore find it important for future research to further examine the “hybrid” artifacts, not only by relying on how they are described in earlier research, but through new analyses of archaeological collections in museums throughout Northern and Eastern Europe.

It is indisputable that objects can be traded, stolen, sold, and handed down through generations until their ethnic, cultural, or symbolic value is no longer as easy to define as archaeologists sometimes like to think. Furthermore, it is vital to stress that certain categories of archaeological material cannot be immediately connected with certain ethnic groups or language communities. The empirical material is, first and foremost, a set of objects linkable to a certain geographical location, while the categories Scandinavian, Slavic, and Finno-Ugric are perceived categories, and display large internal variations. The wish to ethnically classify everything found in the Viking Age trading locations has, in my opinion, led archaeologists to neglect the fact that material in those ethnic categories displays not only similarities but also frequent variations. In earlier research, there has rarely been any room for acknowledging differences and variations within those presupposed ethnic categories, or to “allow the culture to be just Rus”, as Charlotte Hillerdal aptly puts it.<sup>43</sup>

The correlation between archaeological material and the owner’s or user’s ethnic identity certainly exists, but it is not as clear or simple as one might believe. The concept of *transmigrant people* helps us keep in mind that people moving from one place to another are neither lost in their new environment, nor stuck in their old ethnic identity. In future research concerning Viking Age trading contacts, I call for renewed attention to hybrid artifacts, and for awareness of and tolerance for variations within presupposed ethnic categories. ❌

Note: All essays are scholarly articles and have been peer-reviewed by specialists under the supervision of Baltic Worlds’ editorial advisory board.

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by **Valters Bolevics**  
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# GOVERNANCE MODELS OF BALTIC PORT AUTHORITIES

**T**he seaports of the Baltic states have played an essential role in the social and economic activities of the region since ancient times, as the inhabitants of the region have been concentrated in coastal areas, and ports formed the core trading centers. Harbors have served and strengthened their positions as focal points for the industrial, transportation, and distribution activities that support each country's economy. Ports are not only quays for loading and unloading cargo, but assets of national importance, enabling a range of other essential industries to operate. The industries that ports make possible can be split into three broad types: first, those that use ships to access the sea or to service their facilities at sea; second, those which rely heavily on imports of bulky raw materials or exports of finished goods; and third, those which depend on the natural or historic heritage associated with the coastline, ports, or shipping.

Today the shipping industry is a crucial part of the transportation infrastructure, and benefits the economy by enhancing competition and raising productivity. There are 27 ports in Estonia, 10 in Latvia and only one in Lithuania. The sector is very diverse, ranging from major all-purpose ports such as Tallinn, Riga, Ventspils, and Klaipeda to smaller ports that cater primarily to local traffic or to specific sectors, such as fishing or leisure, the latter consisting mainly of sailing and tourism. The role of each port is influenced by many factors, including its physical attributes, especially size and nautical accessibility. Ships continue to be built bigger and bigger, particularly for long-distance routes, and the increasing size limits their maneuverability. Another major influence is location relative to major shipping routes, to inland freight transportation networks, and to passenger destinations. Industries that rely heavily on imports of bulk raw materials or export markets also influence ports near major industrial or urban areas. For smaller ports focused on recreation, proximity to a piece of attractive coastline, flora or fauna, or a heritage site is also influential.

The present article presents the results of a synthesis of the literature on port authority governance models worldwide. Our aim is to make a comparative analysis of existing governance models in four major seaports in the Baltic states – Tallinn, Estonia;



Ships in the port of Tallinn.

Klaipeda, Lithuania; and Riga and Ventspils, Latvia – to identify key challenges and propose possible solutions for sustainable port authority governance. The synthesis of the literature encompasses the governance, functions, and competitiveness of port authorities, and the results include an evaluation of the existing legislative framework in each of the major Baltic states' seaports. The research is based on bibliometric tools and publicly available quantitative and qualitative information on Baltic port authorities' governance models and their efficiency and management. We have given special attention to prior research dealing with the role of port authorities, port economics, policy and management, the clustering of activities in ports, land use developments in port regions, studies of port authorities' performance, and market structures in ports. Research papers on port engineering, terminal equipment, waterfront development, port history, terminal operations management, terminal layout, and other technical developments were not analyzed due to distinct differences from the present field of research.

From an empirical standpoint, the scope was narrowed to the governance of port authorities in the principal seaports in the Baltic states: Tallinn, Klaipeda, Riga, and Ventspils. In all, 53 articles on ports authority governance and management were analyzed and four ports examined.

## General characteristics

In the Baltic states, port authorities share responsibility with national and municipal governments for the development of basic port and harbor infrastructure facilities: waterways, anchorages, breakwaters, quay walls and port traffic facilities for public use. In Klaipeda, a share of the costs of port construction and maintenance is borne by the Lithuanian national government under state budget allotments and other port funds. In Tallinn, Riga and Ventspils, port construction and maintenance costs are borne only by the port authority. National government ministries take a leading role in the nationwide development of ports and the transportation and logistics industry in general, and are responsible for the bulk of large-scale construction of basic public facilities. Article 87(1) of the European Union treaty on seaports prohibits any aid by a Member State or through any form of state resources that distorts or threatens to distort competition by favoring certain undertakings or the production of certain goods, insofar as it affects trade between Member States. However, the treaty permits state aid to public undertakings and undertakings charged with providing services of general economic interest. Member States generally consider they have a right and duty to facilitate and finance port development projects for reasons of economic strategy, as in the case of the Lithuanian port of Klaipeda, which is positioned as a seaport of national strategic importance and receives state budget allotments.

Port management and ownership structures vary widely between states, ranging from fully state-owned ports in Tallinn and Klaipeda to port authorities jointly governed by the municipality and the state in Ventspils and Riga (see table 1). In our research, we aim to analyze whether the governance models of the major port authorities in the Baltic states meet the objectives of effective asset utilization policy.

**PORTS ARE VIEWED** as a core responsibility of national and regional development. They are specifically planned as a strategic means of regional development, and constructed and administered accordingly. Ports function not only as mere marine transportation terminals, but also incorporate a multitude of other functions, including those related to industry, distribution,

Photo: Oceot/Wikimedia Commons

housing, and recreation. The Law on Ports, which governs the management and administration of ports, stipulates that ports be managed by port management bodies, i.e. port authorities. In addition, in accordance with the European Union treaty, the laws on ports in the Baltic states forbid port authorities to interfere with private ventures or to conduct any business that competes with the private sector. In the course of managing and operating the port, they also forbid making any prejudicial distinctions in their treatment of persons or entities connected with the port. Systematic guarantees of operation by the private sector are thought to provide greater efficiency than direct operation by local governments.

The port authorities of the major ports in the Baltic states are proprietary-type organizations. In addition to building, maintaining, and managing port facilities, including navigation channels, breakwaters, quay walls, and other basic facilities, the port authorities formulate policies for basic development plans in consideration of the development of the inland regions. The port's functional facilities are leased to the private sector under the management of the port authority, and actual operations – port transport, storage, transport on land, etc. – are entrusted to the private sector in accordance with the relevant laws and regulations.

Port authorities levy charges in the form of port dues and fees for use of port facilities. These fees are determined on a cost-accounting basis and fixed by the port authorities in regulations. Port dues are levied on all vessels in exchange for the use of the port as a whole; the port authorities levy these dues in accordance with enacted law. Port dues may be calculated and assessed based on the expenses necessary for managing the water area, the port's land facilities, and port development facilities. Port dues vary both between the different Baltic states and between ports within a state.

Economic impact of seaports

Major seaports not only affect the regional economy, but also significantly increase national GDP through three channels of economic impact: direct, indirect, and induced. According to Hegeland,<sup>1</sup> the direct impact is the economic activity and jobs generated by the ports themselves. The direct impact of ports on the Baltic states' economy consists of the employment they create, their contribution to GDP, and the taxes their employees and constituent firms pay. These occur at the port. This activity causes a ripple effect in the rest of the economy, stimulating output and employment in other industries. The indirect impact captures the effect ports have on activity and jobs in their supply chain. These effects occur predominately through ports' purchases of goods and services from many parts of the national economy. This spending generates output, profits, and employment in the sup-

Table 1: Baltic states port authorities (PAs)

Country	Port	PA Owner	PA Legal Form
Estonia	Tallinn	State	State enterprise, LLC
Latvia	Riga and Ventspils	Self-owned	Established by the city council, under the supervision of the Ministry of Transportation
Lithuania	Klaipeda	State	State enterprise, LLC

Source: authors' research

pliers, whose own spending on inputs creates second-round effects. The induced impact of ports comprises the effects of salaries paid to staff at ports and in their supply chains on the rest of the economy through consumer spending: employees spend their salaries at retail and leisure outlets, purchasing imported and domestically produced goods. These effects typically occur close to where those employees live, but there are also second-round effects in the supply chains of retailers and leisure outlets. To the extent that the ports sector increases employment and economic activity at other firms, both in its supply chain and from induced spending, it also increases tax contributions, locally and nationally.

According to Hegeland's theory of the multiplier effects of economic contributions, we can assess the indirect effects multiplier, which shows the impact on the supply chain resulting from the port sector's purchases of inputs, by adding the direct and indirect effects and dividing the sum by the direct effects. To evaluate the induced effects multiplier, which shows the additional impact of spending by those who derive their incomes from the direct and indirect effects of the port sector, we add the direct, indirect, and induced effects, and divide the sum by the direct effects (see table 2).

The functional environment

A port, according to Notteboom's definition,<sup>2</sup> is a land area with maritime and hinterland access that has developed into a logistics and industrial center and plays an important role in global industrial and logistics networks. Notteboom's definition focuses on the role of the port in logistics networks and the port's important role in global industrial networks. However, we cannot neglect ports' contribution to the regional economy, in the Baltic states and other regions worldwide, where cargo is transferred between several nations, yet without representing a global economic zone or participating directly in the whole world's industrial and logistics



Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Cranes in the port of Riga.

networks. Using Porter's five forces model of strategic management insights, we may say that a port is a dedicated land area with maritime and hinterland access where a diverse set of economic activities occur, and has a port authority with the legal right to act as a land manager with corporate responsibility for the port's efficient, effective, and safe development. Port authorities tend to function as either landlord, regulator, or operator,<sup>3</sup> depending on their legal status.<sup>4</sup>

Port authorities as landlord

The port authorities in the Baltic states analyzed here perform the functions of landlords, which include the management and development of the port's land, with consideration for nautical access, international safety standards, and port infrastructure. The landlord function of port authorities has been defined in keeping with the literature on port governance models.<sup>5</sup> Strategically, the major seaports in the Baltic states and their port authorities act as triggers for national infrastructure development plans, such as railway and road network expansion, giving due consideration to social responsibility and the environment. Notteboom<sup>6</sup> and Winkelmans<sup>7</sup> focus on the logistics of ports and how port authorities should act in this challenging environment, stipulating that port authorities must be able to respond to fast-changing market needs, and see networking as a central prerequisite for port authority competitiveness. Chloumoudis and Pallis<sup>8</sup> on the other hand develop a "smart port authority" concept, in which the port authority takes responsibility for improving interconnectivity and interoperability among port users.

Port authorities' mixed duties

The regulatory function of a port authority is a mixture of duties such as ensuring environmental protection, the safety and security of ships and cargo operations in the port, and compliance with applicable laws and regulations in the pertinent fields.<sup>9</sup> The regulatory function is likely to be performed by the port authority in cooperation with the local or national government. The regulatory function is an outdated approach to port authority governance that would involve conflicts of interest and violation of European Union treaties, and is not found at any of the Baltic states' seaports.

Table 2: Economic contribution multiplier effects

Indirect effects multiplier = (direct effects + indirect effects) / direct effects

Induced effects multiplier = (direct effects + indirect effects + induced effects) / direct effects

Source: Hegeland, *Multiplier Theory*



A port authority functioning as an operator provides port services such as the transfer of goods and passengers, and nautical and ancillary services. Port authorities in the Baltic states, and a large proportion of port authorities in the European Union, function as operators or as landlords.<sup>10</sup> After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ensuing changes in the economy and in the transportation sector have followed the worldwide trend towards port devolution or port reform strategies.<sup>11</sup> The privatization of the operational functions of ports, such as cargo handling, storage, and so on, has changed port authorities in the Baltic states from the operator to the landlord type, although they continue to provide nautical services and ship and passenger security and safety services.

## The institutional framework

Competition among ports in the Baltic states encompasses competition for hinterland access and competition for national infrastructure development projects, and is impacted by competition in the established market and by the political situation. Ports do not compete directly as individual entities; rather, it is the performance of a complete infrastructure chain that determines the user's port of choice.<sup>12</sup> The port's performance is linked to nautical accessibility, cargo handling facilities, the efficiency of terminal operators, and the overall industrial and logistics chain. In recent decades, the logistics of the port chains and hinterland access have played a major role in port authorities' allocation of resources to development projects, as well as in motivating port user companies to invest constantly in facilities to improve the terminals' cargo throughput.

The institutional positions of port authorities in the Baltic states have changed due to port governance decentralization, often simply called port reform.<sup>13</sup> Reforms of the landlord and regulatory functions of ports is usually a matter of corporatization, commercialization, or some degree of privatization of operations – mainly cargo handling – while the actual management of the ports remains in public hands. These models are aimed at making public port authorities act on commercial criteria and respond to changing market conditions.<sup>14</sup> Corporatization introduces professional management structures and amounts to a shift from public administration organizations to autonomous companies owned by the public sector, but with accounting procedures and legal requirements similar to those of private-sector companies, and with very limited direct government control. In commercialization, government retains control of the port organization, but in a businesslike environment with some management autonomy and accountability.<sup>15</sup>

The seaports of Tallinn, Estonia, and Klaipeda, Lithuania, where the port lands, port waters and port infrastructure are state property (see table 3) and the port authority has the right to rent port lands for the purposes of port activities, prove more efficient than the port authorities of Riga and Ventspils, Latvia, where the dry portion of a port's territory may be the property of the state, the municipality, or another legal entity or natural person. Although the port authority is a state enterprise established by a decree of the government, its primary asset is its land, and the infrastructure is operated by the right of trusteeship, pursuant to the laws

**Table 3:**

Institutional frameworks of major port authorities (PA) in the Baltic states

	Tallinn, Estonia	Riga, Latvia	Ventspils, Latvia	Klaipeda, Lithuania
<b>PA owner</b>	State	Self	Self	State
<b>PA legal form</b>	LLC, state enterprise	Public body under municipal and national control	Public body under municipal and national control	LLC, state enterprise
<b>PA port funds, state budget allotments</b>	No	No	No	Yes
<b>Owner of port land area</b>	State	National or local government, or other legal or natural person	National or local government, or other legal or natural person	State
<b>Owner of port water area</b>	State	State	State	State
<b>Quayside owner</b>	State	National or local government, or other legal or natural person	National or local government, or other legal or natural person	State
<b>Operations, cargo handling</b>	Private	Private	Private	Private
<b>Corporatized PA</b>	Yes	N/A	N/A	No
<b>Commercialized PA</b>	No	N/A	N/A	Yes

Source: authors' research



Air view of the Lithuanian port of Klaipeda.

and by-laws regulating its operations. Because the port authorities' income flows come from land rents and port dues, a port authority with more land in trust gains financially by accommodating more companies and maximizing its rent.

The estimated annual revenues and expenditures of the Klaipeda and Tallinn port authorities are approved by one ministry: in Lithuania this is the Ministry of Transportation and Communications, in Estonia it is the Ministry of Communications and Economic Affairs. This gives the port authority greater flexibility and financial autonomy to respond effectively to market conditions and port users' needs. Under existing legislation in Latvia, port authorities use their financial resources in accordance with the principles of nonprofit organizations, and any expenditure above fifty thousand lati must be approved by a port board, whose eight members include four officials from the local government and four from various ministries. As a result, any major development plan in the ports of Latvia must be approved by board members who are at the same time members of the ruling political parties or persons directly nominated by the competent minister. This would tend to limit financial autonomy and favor political influence, an imperfect situation that would appear to put port authorities in a weak and uncertain position.<sup>16</sup>

According to the European Commission's "Assessment of the 2013 National Reform Program and Convergence Program for Latvia", efficiency gains could be made in the Latvian ports in particular. The European Commission emphasizes that the quality of governance observed in the biggest Latvian ports and the government's tools for achieving greater efficiency seem inadequate.<sup>17</sup> The World Bank has been invited to conduct a comprehensive study on the biggest ports' competitiveness, governance, and return on investment.

Because port authorities increasingly need to develop their facilities to face the challenges of the dynamic market they operate in, governance reform or a retreat from direct government involvement is crucial for port authorities to obtain the strong and independent position necessary to meet the challenges of the logistics sector and the social environment. Port management reform is motivated by reasons of economic efficiency, with the objective of reinforcing the port authority as an entity that reconciles private and public interests.<sup>18</sup> According to Brooks,<sup>19</sup> a port governance system that is fragmented between municipal and national political opponents does not allow ports to sustain long-term investment plans and does not allow port authorities to act as efficiently and effectively as possible. Following this theory, we may argue that the degree of fragmentation in the governance model also makes a difference. A scenario of equal shares, i.e. a governance model in which municipal and national interests are equally represented, would definitely not lead to sustainable port development, especially if the municipal and national representatives on the port authority board are political opponents. A good example is the port of Rotterdam, which has evolved from a traditional municipal port to one in which the city owns a 66.7% share and the Dutch state a 33.3% share.<sup>20</sup> Most port authorities in the European Union have gone through a process of devolution towards corporatization or commercialization, and most of

them are governed by specific legislation and have a separate legal form, or operate as limited liability companies. Corporatization is seen to prevail here over commercialization. The official legal status of the port authority does not reveal its actual degree of autonomy: the fact that many port authorities declare that they enjoy only partial financial autonomy, and that several indicate that their board of directors includes political appointees, seems to suggest that the process of corporatization has not led to the desired degree of financial autonomy, while political influence deserves further investigation.<sup>21</sup>

Port authorities in the Baltic states have gone through a process of corporatization, as in the Estonian port of Tallinn, or of commercialization, as in the Lithuanian port of Klaipeda. These processes are not yet complete, and a high degree of direct government involvement is still visible. Port management reform is essential in order to obtain a strong and independent political and financial position. As a model of such financial independence, the Port of Tallinn, which consists of five harbors around Estonia – Muuga Harbor, Tallinn Old City Harbor, Paljassaare Harbor, Paldiski South Harbor, and Saaremaa Harbor – is a joint-stock company whose shares are owned entirely by the State of Estonia. A landlord-type port, the Port of Tallinn operates under the same business laws as any other private company in Estonia: it receives no subsidies from the state; on the contrary, the port pays yearly dividends to the state as its shareholder. From the point of view of financial independence, management reform here has achieved its goals. Empirical evidence shows, however, that the political sector remains responsible for the port functions, as the company's supervisory board consists of eight members, of whom four are appointed by the Minister of Communications and Economic Affairs and the other four by the Minister of Finance. While this does not necessarily imply that all members of the supervisory board are ministry officials or politicians, the existing legislation offers enough influence over decision-making. The procedure for selecting supervisory board members should therefore be revised to meet the criteria of port authority independence.

The Lithuanian port of Klaipeda has followed a commercialization path, and its port authority functions as a landlord. Nevertheless, the present law governing the Klaipeda seaport stipulates that port funds may include state budget allotments, which is in conflict with the relevant European Union treaties. Port authorities, whether they are in public or private ownership, are subject to the provisions of the EC Treaty, under which states may not grant aid, refuse access, discriminate between customers, or otherwise act unilaterally.<sup>22</sup> The Klaipeda port authority is owned by the state of Lithuania and governed similarly to how the port of Tallinn is governed: it meets the criterion of financial independence, since its annual revenue and expenditure estimates are approved by the Minister of Transportation and Communications. The board of the port of Klaipeda is made up of representatives of the Ministry of Transportation and Communications, the Klaipeda county administration, the city of Klaipeda, the port authority, port users, and their associations and institutions. There are distinct differences between the Tallinn and Klaipeda port authorities' board member selection processes: strategically

speaking, the port of Klaipeda has a more effective governance structure because of the involvement of all parties, which ensures that development plans fit port users' needs, which are addressed in round-table brainstorming.

Riga and Ventspils are major seaports and trading hubs in Latvia. Both of their port authorities are institutions established by the city councils under the supervision of the Ministry of Transportation. The highest decision-making body in both ports is the board of the port, which is managed by eight board members, of whom four are representatives of the municipality and four from various ministries. This empirical evidence suggests that the governance system in the two seaports follows neither the corporatization nor the commercialization path, and that the ports are subject to the direct influence of municipal and national politicians. National and municipal cooperation is no reason why the present system should be reassessed: it is rather a benefit than an obstacle. However, in comparison with the industry practice in port devolution, it makes the ports both financially and politically dependent. Everett<sup>23</sup> comments that inadequate legislative frameworks frustrate statutory corporations such as ports by making them unable to operate as commercially oriented and market-driven businesses, and unable to operate independently of political and bureaucratic control.

## Conclusions

This study has described governance models of the port authorities of major seaports in the Baltic states, and the fundamental differences between them. From the ports' perspective, the goal is to reinforce sustainable development to meet the objectives of commercially effective management. From the perspective of the port authorities, the goal is to efficiently manage the primary assets – land and infrastructure – by trusteeship, to cover investment and port development costs, and in the cases of Lithuania and Estonia, to pay yearly dividends to the shareholders.

In relation to global industry trends and empirical evidence on the governance of port authorities, the port authorities should improve their economic attractiveness and establish their political and financial autonomy. Because each port in this study has its own unique character and political heritage, a single governance system to fit all of them should not be recommended. In this paper, we have rather evaluated the present situation and analyzed the existing governance systems in comparison with the best industry practices conducive to the financial and direct political independence of port authorities from states and cities.

Future studies might benefit by using the logical framework of Per Ewing and Lars Samuelsson<sup>24</sup> to structure the types of different actions and organizations operating in the various ports by activity centers, cost centers, profit centers, and investment centers. Classic profitability analysis from financial management theory might also be applied. ✖

Note: All essays are scholarly articles and have been peer-reviewed by specialists under the supervision of Baltic Worlds' editorial advisory board.

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# NATIONAL HISTORY AS A FAIRY TALE

## A STUDY OF BULGARIAN HISTORICAL MEMORY

by **Evelina Kelbecheva** illustration **Karin Sunvisson**

The study of collective historical memory<sup>1</sup> is pivotal for understanding the present configuration of a society. The construction of a memory – or a forgetting – of specific historic places, events, and protagonists, which we shall call the realms or topoi of history, indicates social tendencies, for these topoi are the sources both of the society's self-confidence and of deficiencies of that self-confidence. People's choices of their own realms of history can reveal underlying social attitudes, and demonstrate important political and socio-psychological tendencies as well.

The results of the present study, the first of its kind in Bulgaria, demonstrate the scope of the historical memory of Bulgarian citizens. The work reveals how consolidated and coherent the historical memory of the majority group is, and at the same time how fragmented the memories of the minority groups can be. The factors that determined these discrepancies reveal the relation between the historical memories and the cultural inclinations of contemporary Bulgarian citizens.

The aim of the research project<sup>2</sup> was to identify the places, the events, and the persons (protagonists, actors) in history which are formative for the con-

temporary identity of Bulgarian citizens today. We have tried to answer the question whether there exists a single coherent and normative "grand historical narrative" of Bulgarian national identity, and if so, how it functions; or whether there are diverse narratives in circulation among the various social, ethnic, and religious groups, corresponding to their own value systems.

**THE STUDY EMPHASIZES** the memories of the most numerous linguistic, ethnic, and religious minority groups. The stratified random sample for them is larger than for the majority group of ethnic Bulgarians. We interviewed 1009 people, including 575 Eastern Orthodox Bulgarians, 152 Turks, 111 Roma, 94 Bulgarian Muslims, and many other smaller minority groups: Russians, Armenians, Jews, Greeks, Vlachs, etc. The aim is to understand to what extent these minority groups relate to the "Bulgarian" past as "their own", and to what extent they project the past of their group as pivotal for Bulgaria's past. Is there a "boom of minority memories",<sup>3</sup> or do tendencies towards integration fabricate a new memory of its own kind by mimicry? It is precisely the choice of what to include in historical memory that outlines the parameters and

reveals the strength of tendencies towards integration.

Last but not least, my personal goal was to explain the reasons behind contemporary Bulgarian citizens' specific "choice of history".

In a questionnaire, the respondents were asked to name the most important place, person, and event in history, and to state where they learned about those facts. If the Bulgarian historical memory has been able to produce a coherent narrative, it should be illustrated by the respondents' answers to these open questions.<sup>4</sup>

### Memory or memories?

The principal tendencies found by our research project can be summarized as follows:

- A few common topics were predominant among the responses.
- A high proportion of individual responses were dispersed; that is, they named realms of memory that were not common to a large group of respondents.
- Places, persons, and events from or related to national history were predominant.

- Places, persons, and events related to wars, revolutions, and politics in general predominated over those of intellectual, artistic, or spiritual importance.
- The realms that the respondents indicated as the most important ones are:
- Mount Shipka (26.9%)<sup>5</sup>
- Vasil Levski (32.4%)<sup>6</sup>
- Bulgaria's liberation from the Ottoman Empire in 1878 (34.4%)

The frequency with which these three leading realms were mentioned is 16 to 30 percentage points higher than that of the next most common response in the given category.

The concentration of these leading realms in one tiny chronological period and in one typological area in the majority of the responses could be interpreted as a crucial condition for the construction of a grand historical narrative.

However, the sum of the frequencies of dispersed answers that were given by over 3% of respondents is overwhelmingly high – over 50%. This could cast doubt on the existence of a grand national narrative altogether.

**THERE IS ANOTHER** question: whether this asymmetrical dispersion of answers is evidence of a postmodern mosaic memory (in the sense of Nora's study), or whether it indicates that a coherent (consensus) national memory has yet to be constructed.

The answers given by diverse minority groups are strikingly similar to the answers given by the majority group. Mount Shipka, Levski, and the Liberation are frequently named among almost all minority groups. In fact, although these three leading realms receive only half as many endorsements among minority groups as among the majority, they are still the predominant topoi.

Among the most numerous minority groups – Turks, Roma, and Bulgarian Muslims – the only exception is the Turks. The realm of memory they chose most frequently (15.1%) was the ancient sanctuary of Perperikon, located near Kardzhali, one of the Bulgarian towns with the highest proportion of ethnic Turks among its population. This fact indicates clearly that their local history was much more important for them than the national history. Still, Levski and the Liberation remain the realms named most often.

The preferences among Roma closely follow those of the majority group. If we exclude Muslim Roma (also called Turkish Roma), then the majority of the Roma responses refer to Bulgaria, Todor Zhivkov<sup>7</sup> and communism.

It is surprising that Muslims of both Bulgarian and Turkish ethnicity chose emblematic realms of memory associated with the climax of the struggle against the Ottoman Empire for national liberation. Many of them explained that they chose Levski because he fought, not against the Muslims, but against the Ottoman Empire, which they perceived as “evil”. Muslims also indicated the Liberation, which ended the rule of the same “evil” empire. None of the respondents referred to the famous declaration by Levski that in the future “pure and sacred” republic, all would have equal rights – Christians and Muslims, Bulgarians and Turks, etc.

One might think that the majority of these cases represent a certain mimicry: the respondents gave answers that they thought we the researchers would know and expect, and that would please us. Some were quite explicit in their explanations: “Isn't that the answer you wanted to hear?” Another fact that should be mentioned is a growing tendency (in comparison with previous periods, when we have done research focused on them) of groups, especially the Turks, to encapsulate themselves and to refuse to communicate.<sup>8</sup>

Minority groups much more rarely chose specific topoi of their own. The only such example is Kemal Ataturk among the Turks (10.5%), but even he is second to Todor Zhivkov (12.5%). We should not forget that Zhivkov was the architect of the infamous “Regenerative Process”, the policy of forced assimilation that was to annihilate

the identity of Turks in Bulgaria, which eventually led to the exodus of 350,000 Turks in 1989. The almost unanimous approval of Zhivkov and communism – especially among Muslims<sup>9</sup> – is another surprising finding. The percentage of answers expressing approval for the communist dictator is almost the same as the percentage of the answers that referred to the trauma of the “Regenerative Process”.

**THERE IS A CLEAR** tendency: the leading realms predominate over the combined dispersed answers only among the majority group, the Orthodox Christians. Thus there is a consensus of memory only among the majority.

If a national grand historical narrative is identifiable only among the Eastern Orthodox Bulgarians, while the minority groups have much more dispersed realms of memory, this raises the question whether the dispersed answers are evidence of a disintegrated memory or of a postmodern memory, or whether they reflect the group's level of integration. A closely related question is whether Bulgarian society lacks an institutional center, a classic instrument of modernization which would be responsible for forming tendencies of identity and integration.<sup>10</sup>

## Generators of memory

All the classic generators of memory – educational institutions, the family, media, literature, informal Internet circles – construct or invent memory by specific mechanisms. Their study provides us with information about the relations between the different realms of memory (places, events, and protagonists) and the diverse mechanisms of construction of memory.

The fourth question in the survey form, after the questions about the respondent's preferred place, event, and protagonist in history, asked about the source of the respondent's knowledge. The majority

answered “school”, “history”, or “textbooks”: together these accounted for 53.5% of the responses. “Old people”, “my own experience”, “I was there”, “born there”, etc., made up another 28.9%. Answers that mentioned media, Internet, literature, and cinema totaled 6.3%. This indicates that the most powerful generators of memory are the classic mechanisms of compulsory general education. Let us remember “the monopoly of the diploma”, in Ernst Gellner's words,<sup>11</sup> as the most instrumental factor in the “invention” of

the nation. Second to education are the pre-modern mechanisms: individual, family, and “clan” experience. The postmodern generators of memory still play only a modest role in Bulgaria.

The memory of the most important topoi – Shipka, Levski, and the Liberation – is overwhelmingly generated by school education. Media and personal experiences are the least

frequently mentioned generators of memory in these cases.

Education also plays a leading role in the memory formation of the Roma minority. The answers given by Roma who went to school (predominantly older people) correspond to the answers given by the majority of the Bulgarians and the Turks: Shipka, Levski, and the Liberation. Again, these answers may be influenced by mimicry. Among the younger people, who, unfortunately, are much less educated, the answers are extraordinarily diverse: important places ranged from “church” to “the public bath”; historic persons ranged from “God” to “my children”; events ranged from “the destruction of the Twin Towers” to “my friend's engagement party”.

The results clearly indicate that the most important source of historical knowledge or memory is school education, textbooks, and history lessons. These sources are indicated much more frequently than the media, family (or “elders”), and personal experience.

**FEWER THAN 3%** of the respondents named Ivan Vazov,<sup>12</sup> despite the fact that Vazov is the demiurge who initiated the pantheon of historic figures of the Bulgarian National Revival. His works fixed the heroic images of the freedom fighters for Bulgarian national liberation, primarily Levski and Botev,<sup>13</sup> closely followed by the Opalchenzi, the Bulgarian volunteers at the Battle of Shipka. The pantheon created by Ivan Vazov was later sanctioned by the system of national celebrations, state festivities, and numerous monuments.

Still, the pivotal question remains, why history textbooks (and school education in general) are capable of creating identity, and why they determine people's own choices of historical topoi. One of the most valuable explanations of the “canonical” character of history textbooks in Bulgaria is the predominant essentialistic model of thinking: “Essentialism is one of the safest and most comfortable harbors for the human

## “THE MOST IMPORTANT SOURCE OF HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE OR MEMORY IS SCHOOL EDUCATION, TEXTBOOKS, AND HISTORY LESSONS.”





mind. . . . In relation with myth-making, essentialistic thinking represents a functional fantasy which creates nationalistic fictions in order to secure national solidarity".<sup>14</sup> Thus, history textbooks can be regarded as canonical texts with a clear "missionary character", and as fundamental narratives for Bulgarian history. It is also clear that history textbooks are deeply influenced by the dominant political and ideological goals of the state: only few textbooks have been revised since the fall of communism over 20 years ago, and the nationalistic discourse is still predominant. As a rule, the sacred figures of the Bulgarian national pantheon established at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century have remained "untouchable" to both historiography and the mass media.

## The making of the Grand National Narrative

We can trace the process of the making of the grand national narrative in two directions:

- By the chronology of the realms of memory;
- By the taxonomy of the realms of memory: wars and revolutions, state and politics, religion and culture.

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL** distribution of the answers shows how, in Ernst Renan's words, "Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation".

The following table divides the three realms of memory into chronological periods:<sup>15</sup>

**Table 1:** The chronology of the three realms of memory

	Anti- quity	Middle Ages	Ottoman Period	Revolu- tionary Decade (1867– 1878)	Third Bulgarian Kingdom	Commu- nist Period (1944– 1989)	Post- Com- munism
<b>Places</b>	14.7%	24.1%	0.6%	38.8%	3.4%	2.2%	1.8%
<b>Person- alities</b>	5.2%	22.5%	0.9%	50.4%	11.8%	5.7%	2.4%
<b>Events</b>	4.3%	12.9%	0.9%	40.8%	14.8%	8.4%	13.9%

Source: author's research

This chronological analysis of the responses reveals the following tendencies:

Events from prehistory and antiquity are largely absent from Bulgarian memory, according to the answers given to us by representatives of all different groups. Antiquity was represented by a place in 14.7% of the responses, by a person in 5.2%, and by an event in 4.3%. Perperikon, a newly rediscovered majestic fortress and allegedly a Dionysian sanctuary near the town of Kardzhali, was the only place associated with Classical antiquity mentioned in the responses.<sup>16</sup> Practically all other places mentioned referred to the Middle Ages or the Revival Period. The fact that 2% of the Bulgarians questioned mentioned Jerusalem is an exception that proves the rule.

**THE RESPONSES TO** the question about the most important historic person also indicate that antiquity is totally absent from the Bulgarian historical memory. Biblical or Christian figures were also rare. Answers naming

Christ as the most important historical figure were minimal: 5% of Bulgarians and 7% of Roma. The latter apparently belong to various Protestant denominations, which have only recently proliferated among the Roma.

Every historical narrative about the "Bulgarian lands",<sup>17</sup> as absurd as it may sound, starts with prehistory and Thracian antiquity (the second and first millennia BC). The most commonly named realm associated with prehistory is the "oldest gold treasure in the world", which dates from 4560–4450 BC, the Aeneolithic Age. It was discovered accidentally in 1972 near the city of Varna on the Black Sea, and includes the oldest known gold artifacts. The narrative continues with a description of the major archeological findings up to the Thracian civilization, which has a different status. The major idea is that historical development follows an uninterrupted line that ultimately leads to the emergence of the Thracian civilization – a concept that is quite problematic, like any autochthonic theory of national genesis.

The Thracian period is perceived as a prologue to Bulgarian history. But since when? Have the Thracians always been understood as an organic, inseparable part of the Bulgarians, who have only been present in the Balkans since the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD? In the mid-1970s, the leading Bulgarian Byzantologist Dimiter Angelov published his work *Formation of the Bulgarian Nation*, in which the holy trinity of Bulgarian ethnogenesis appeared for the first time: Angelov called Thracians, Slavs, and Bulgarians the "three components of the Bulgarian nation".<sup>18</sup>

The appearance of Angelov's volume and its

prompt incorporation in the history textbooks is closely linked to another new wave in Bulgarian archeology and history, the study of the Thracian past, which was institutionalized with the founding of the Institute for Thracian Studies in the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences under the leadership of Alexander Fol.<sup>19</sup> Thus the wholesale inclusion of Thracian anti-

quity in the grand narrative of Bulgarian history has a precise date: the early 1970s.

We are faced here with a small paradox: despite the huge propaganda efforts that surrounded each and every one of the discoveries concerned with Thracian antiquity, especially during its "golden decade" from 1970 to 1980 (and another in the past 10 years), despite the triumph of the exhibitions of "Thracian Gold" around the world, despite the dozens of forums organized in Bulgaria and abroad, Thracian history and culture were present only sporadically in the responses to our survey.

**IN COMPARING THE** attitudes and the preferences of the interviewees, we are also struck by another phenomenon. The dominant tendency is a kind of obsession with the past, first with the Revival period, and second with the Middle Ages, but almost without references to antiquity. Our results clearly indicate that the nucleus around which contemporary Bulgarians'

historical self-image has been built was shaped during the Revival period. And it is nationalistic, anti-Turkish, pro-Russian, hero-worshipping, and apologetic of its own past.

The most numerous answers (38.8% of the places mentioned, 50.4% of persons, and 40.8% of events) refer to the last decade of the Revival period. The climax of the national liberation movement in Bulgaria between 1868 and 1876 thus stands alone as a period of towering importance in the national history. Although by date this decade could be considered part of the Ottoman period, the Revival period, or both, it has been interpreted as a period in its own right in order to form the contours of the grand national narrative, because it is the decade when that narrative was first outlined.

The second most numerous topoi are those associated with the Middle Ages. This epoch is personified first by Tsar Simeon (891–927),<sup>20</sup> who is remembered in connection with the "Golden Age of the first Slavic literature", and second by Khan Asparuh (681–701), who founded the Bulgarian state in 681. The places mentioned as the most important realms of memory, Pliska, Preslav, and Veliko Tarnovo, are the capitals of the First (681–1018) and Second (1186–1393) Bulgarian Kingdoms. Medieval places were named by 24.1% of the respondents, medieval persons by 22.5%, and events of the Middle Ages by 12.9%. These results indicate that the Middle Ages are persistent in the historical memory in the form of monuments and a few outstanding figures, rather than as historical events or processes. All of these realms of memory can be traced back to the great "History of the Bulgarian Slavs" by Father Paisii,<sup>21</sup> the foundation of Bulgarian national identity since the National Revival period.

These responses show that the most sustainable ideological and national myths of the Bulgarian grand narrative are still in effect. These myths can be considered both as evidence of weakness and as compensation of this weakness.<sup>22</sup>

**WE MAY ALSO** interpret this fixation on the past as a kind of a social neurosis in which the society looks back and exaggerates its past glory to escape from the unsolvable problems of the present.

The answers given by Bulgarian citizens of all ethnic and religious groups generally exclude the Ottoman period as a historical realm of memory. Places related to the Ottoman period were named by 0.6% of the respondents, persons by 0.9%, and events by 0.9%. The respondents may be avoiding a traumatic and unpleasant memory, and replacing it in their consciousness with more pleasant ones.

Thus the "dark centuries under the yoke of slavery" are not associated in the common memory with specific places, persons, and events; there is no concrete remembrance and no chronology of the events. The inglorious period is compensated for by the towering importance attached to realms of memory related to the Late Revival and the peak of the National Revolutionary Movement against the Ottoman Empire. Paradoxically, Ottoman rule is generally perceived as the most tragic and fatal phenomenon of Bulgarian history, in spite of its almost total omission here. What is more, Ottoman rule is invoked as the cause of almost all the failures and vices of Bulgaria's contemporary social and political life.



The knowledge of the general public, formed by traditional textbooks and a snowball of media, preserves the conviction that the Bulgarians were enslaved for five centuries by the Sultan, that the *devşirme*<sup>23</sup> took a million Bulgarian children as Janissaries, that the Bulgarian people carried on a permanent and heroic struggle against the invaders, that the Ottoman policy was to convert every Bulgarian to Islam, and that this process was accompanied by horrible atrocities. In these representations of history, the victim syndrome mingles with the desire for self-glorification or hero-worship.

The canonical historiographic representation of Ottoman rule, once created during the Revival Period in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, has remained unaltered in the popular consciousness. Even attempts at relatively modest changes in terminology and in the assessment of the period are either rejected or immediately misused for campaigns aimed at “defending the Bulgarians and the Fatherland”. Despite the significant achievements of modern Bulgarian historiography, the canon of victimhood and hero-worship is still reproduced.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, only few attempts have been made to infuse the new achievements of Ottoman historiography into the grand national narrative.

**THE PROBLEM REMAINS** that almost all other historical myths and contradictions can be discussed in a calm, academic manner except the Ottoman and the communist period. The artificially fueled fire against contemporary “revisionist historians” reflects the “national instinct”, which will not allow an academic reassessment of the period between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In distinct contrast to the previous period, Bulgarians perceive the Bulgarian Revival as a founding myth of the Bulgarian nation. The Bulgarian Revival has always been spoken of with an optimistic pathos, again in contrast to the previous “ages of darkness and violence”. The whole period is marked by a special holiness, and the leaders of national movements have been made institutions and worshipped as heroes at the altar of the nation. It is impossible for Bulgarian historians to be neutral on issues con-

cerning the Bulgarian Revival period, and hence for academic discourse to dominate over nationalistic excitement. Liberal attitudes cannot prevail over nationalistic mentality.<sup>25</sup> This may be one of the most logical explanations why more than one third of the responses to our questions centered on the national revolutionary movement, which is perceived as the most heroic chapter – and an episode with a happy ending – in Bulgarian history.

My hypothesis is that contemporary Bulgarian historical memory is based, not on modern historiography and the achievements of scholarship, but on the fairy tale motif, deeply rooted in the consciousness of Bulgarians, of the heroic collision between the forces of Good and Evil, represented by the Bulgarians and the Turks, and the happy redemption from “slavery” with the help of Russia. That is why Mount Shipka is the most important historic site for Bulgarians, and the Liberation the most important event.

It is interesting to interpret the responses that show Bulgarians’ attitudes towards the historical memory of the Third Bulgarian Kingdom, or the “Bourgeois period” (1878–1944). Only 3.4% of those interviewed named a “most important historical place” associated with this period. The Third Kingdom supplied 11.8% of respondents’ most important persons, and 14.8% of respondents named an event in this period. The prevalence of events among the realms of memory associated with bourgeois Bulgaria is related to another trend indicated by the research: namely, the fixation on violent historical events, like wars and revolutions. These account for 57.7% of all the events named, while only 26% refer to politics and state institutions. The same trend is seen in the most important persons named. In general, about 80% of the answers are connected with war, violence, or politics, while about 20% are related to religion, culture, nature, or other spheres.

The most important event in this period is the Second World War, mentioned by 5% of the respondents, followed by national unification,<sup>26</sup> 3.4%; the most important person is Stefan Stambolov<sup>27</sup> according to 3.5% of those interviewed. The predominance of these answers is an indication that the change in some history textbooks and the extraordinary media commitment to the national unification and the leading role of Stefan Stambolov have influenced the shaping of historical memory in regard to the building of the Third Bulgarian Kingdom. Until twenty years

ago, the name of Stefan Stambolov was almost taboo in Bulgarian historiography, and that taboo was hardly broken in the 1980s. One should not underestimate the establishment of Unification Day as an official holiday in Bulgaria in 1995. It is noteworthy, however, that the other similar topos, the Bulgarian declaration of independence<sup>28</sup> in 1908, is weakly represented in the answers to our inquiry (0.5%), in spite of the fact that this date also was proclaimed an official holiday in Bulgaria, and in spite of the vast media campaign for the celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bulgaria’s inde-

pendence. One possible reason for the almost total absence of Bulgaria’s independence as a historic realm is the waning popularity of Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha,<sup>29</sup> the major initiator of the commemoration of this event. On the other hand, the declaration of independence was a formal act of Bulgarian foreign policy. It is not explicitly related to important and heroic events; that is, it is not included in the fairy tale version of the country’s past. Nor are the Balkan War and the First World War.

Because there is neither a grand narrative nor a fairy tale of the communist period, there is neither a traumatic nor a heroic memory of it. Only 2.2% of respondents indicated a most important historical place associated with the communist era; 5.7% of the persons named were from this period; and 8.4% of events. The last result is strongly influenced by the fact that 15.1% of respondents in the Turkish minority and 11.1% of the Bulgarian Muslim respondents indicated the “Regenerative Process” as the most important event.

Communism was named as the most important historical event by 1.8% of the Roma respondents, the highest percentage of any minority group that named a given event during the whole study.

Communism is absent as a memory realm for the majority of ethnic Bulgarians. The absence of such a reflection disparages and domesticates the memory of communism, reducing it to the popular, anecdotal, day-to-day experience. That also explains why Todor Zhivkov remains the principal realm of memory of this period, and not the sinister People’s Tribunal<sup>30</sup> or the concentration camps. Zhivkov was named in 4.6% of the responses on historic persons, and in 12.5% of responses from members of the Turkish minority and 4.5% of those from Roma respondents.

**TOPOI REFERRING TO** the postcommunist period are very few, making up 1.8% of the places named overall, 2.4% of persons, and 13.9% of the events. The most frequently named topos is the fall of communism (also indicated as “Democracy” or “10 November, 1989”), which was named as the most important event by 3.6% of the ethnic Bulgarian respondents, 13.8% of the Turks, 5.4% of the Roma, and 14.4% of the Bulgarian Muslims.

## “ALMOST ALL OTHER HISTORICAL MYTHS AND CONTRADICTIONS CAN BE DISCUSSED IN A CALM, ACADEMIC MANNER EXCEPT THE OTTOMAN AND THE COMMUNIST PERIOD.”



The absence of the communist period as a general memory in the majority of the answers to our inquiry raises a number of historiographic as well as legal and socio-psychological problems. The most numerous responses related to this period refer either to the beginning of the communist period on September 9, 1944<sup>31</sup> (and thus more broadly to World War II), or to its end in 1989. But the essential characteristics of communism as a historical era – a mono-party totalitarian regime, unlimited violence, political terror, and ubiquitous propaganda – are not found in the answers to our questionnaire. An exception is the persecution of Muslim communities in Bulgaria, and the “Regenerative Process” in particular, which was naturally mentioned by members of Muslim minorities. How this fact is to be explained?

**THE PRESENT STUDY** indicates that there is no grand narrative about the communist period, nor a consensus on what it was in essence; and that the Bulgarian audience has no interest, desire, or curiosity, much less a need for catharsis, regarding this period.

The major reason for this huge blank spot in the Bulgarian historical memory is most likely the lack of historiography regarding these issues that has prevailed until recently. This vacuum reflects directly on the textbooks and on those institutions that are responsible for revising the textbooks in use before 1989. Some of the revised postcommunist textbooks show an attempt to introduce an academic tone regarding the Ottoman period, yet the communist period is still untouched by historical reassessment.

The concentration camps in Bulgaria that closed as late as 1962 are assessed no differently than the repressive communist system. Immediately after the fall of communism on November 10, 1989, a few modest volumes of memoirs of people who had survived communist concentration camps and prisons appeared, but not a single one of these stories has found its way into any of the new history textbooks.

The first serious historiography on communism has only appeared in recent years, treating the period broadly, including its economic, financial, political, and cultural aspects.<sup>32</sup>

**THE BIG QUESTION**, however, is why Bulgarians in general are reticent to focus their attention on communism. Is it due to skillfully managed media policies that slowly, gradually, and inevitably neglect the subject of communism in Bulgaria, or it is the “original sin”, the failure to revise history textbooks? Is it due to the age, fatigue, and disappointment of the generation that lived through this period, or is it a misunderstood “Bulgarian tolerance” that will again squander the chance for a historical and social assessment of our recent past?

The chronology of the realms also illuminates the major role that schools play in imposing memory. The anti-Ottoman National Revolutionary Movement and the Middle Ages, which are intensely represented in the school curriculum, are the periods best remembered. Conversely, the Ottoman period and the communist period (not to mention postcommunism), which teachers rarely touch upon, are consigned to oblivion. And while the communist and postcommunist periods are at least present in personal and family experience, the historical memory of Ottoman

rule has faded. It remains only as source of traumatic memory, as it was studied during the communist period. In this case, the “adults” mentioned by our respondents as the sources of memory are not eyewitnesses or contemporaries, but the generations raised with the grand narrative myth, “The Turks massacred and raped us for five centuries.”

## Taxonomy of the realms of memory

We classed the places, personalities, and events that dominate historical memory by general types, including heroic and traumatic, related to wars and revolutions, related to state institutions and politics, related to culture in general, and global and national topoi.

This classification contains a great degree of relativity, as it is difficult to precisely differentiate realms associated with violence and the loss of human lives from those classed in the field of politics. Often acts that seem to be “purely” political, or even of a spiritual character, such as the conversion of Bulgarians to Christianity, are accompanied by the loss of human lives, and many actors have alternated peaceful actions with violence. It is not easy to differentiate topoi in the area of spirituality and culture because one and the same person can be a revolutionary and an artist simultaneously (Botev is the most popular example, but by no means the only one). In spite of such ambiguity, we attempted to analyze the responses by taxonomy as shown below:

A more general classification, such as political vs. spiritual, would be simpler, yet still not free of ambiguity.

**Table 2:** Taxonomy of responses

	<b>Wars, revolutions, violence</b>	<b>State institutions, politics</b>	<b>Religion, science, culture</b>	<b>Other (nature, lifestyle, economics, sports)</b>
<b>Places</b>	39.9%	21.2%	22.9%	13.1%
<b>Personalities</b>	45.5%	37.4%	13.4%	1.8%
<b>Events</b>	57.7%	25.5%	9.2%	3.1%

Source: author's research

We separated wars and revolutions from state institutions and politics in order to make a deeper distinction between memory related to “legitimate violence” and memory of violence in general. A different issue is that revolutions and even wars (the Russian-Turkish War of 1877–1878 in particular) were not interpreted by most respondents as “violence”, but as “striving to establish justice”. Regardless of the various classifications that we could apply, the field of spirituality in the broadest sense, encompassing religion, science, and culture, will always lag behind politics and violence in general.

It is evident that spirituality (at least at the present moment) is not the most essential sphere for the Bulgarian historical memory. The realms of memory most often named are mainly related to violent, coercive turning points in national (or, less frequently, global or local) history.<sup>33</sup>

This “preference” begins to appear understandable when we compare the answers to our questions about

memory generators. Among those whose memory is fed predominantly by lessons at school, 59.5% mentioned topoi associated with wars, revolutions, and violence, and 13.9% mentioned topoi related to religion and culture. Among those who named textbooks as a source, 54.6% mentioned wars and revolutions, and 13.5% mentioned spiritual topoi in the broad sense. Cultural memories in particular are generated to a greater degree by the media (51.8%) and fiction (51.5%). Personal impressions are also a source of memory in the field of spirituality (51.8% of such responses were coupled with the source “I was there” – probably in reference mainly to archaeological sites).

In addition, in spite of the high degree of ambiguity in the classification of realms on the scale from the heroic to the traumatic, we come to the inevitable conclusion, also reached by other studies,<sup>34</sup> that the Bulgarian national memory (national in the French sense of a political nation) adamantly gives priority to the heroic. Trauma is more likely to be repressed and forgotten rather than identified as a national code. This observation provides further support for the concept of the perception of Bulgarian history as a fairy tale.

A large proportion of responses evidently refer to realms of national history. This is true not only of responses by members of the Bulgarian majority, but also of minorities’ responses. That is to say, the realms of memory associated with a Bulgarian national grand narrative or fairy tale are also a major historic center among minority groups in Bulgaria.

A conspicuous gap is the paucity of universal and global topoi in the historical memory of the interview subjects. Only about 16% of the “most important historical places” mentioned go beyond the boundaries of Bulgarian national history. The proportion of non-Bulgarians among the historical persons named is about the same. About 27% of respondents indicated events outside Bulgarian history as most important.

The results seem to be logical, as the questions were open, yet it became clear that most people instinctively choose national topoi as the most important landmarks of their historical identity. Few answers reflect global thinking in a historical perspective. This shows once again that realms of memory that have become integral parts of Bulgarians’ subjective self-identification are a direct result of the proliferation of the grand narrative or fairy tale of national history.

## The Grand Narrative as a fairy tale

If the textbook is the classic, concentrated, most commonly accessible form of the national grand narrative, then why are more than one third of Bulgarian citizens fixated on the historical memory of the late Bulgarian Revival and the Liberation War?

According to one line of reasoning, the success of the textbook grand narrative would depend on its turning into a fairy tale. “Exactly as the Fairy Tale tellers in pre-script and pre-literature societies, history textbooks are charged with the duty to transmit to the generations to come what the elders (their predecessors) thought about what the youngsters should know of their own culture and their societies.”<sup>35</sup> We have seen how powerful the history textbook is for the construction of public knowledge about history in Bul-



garia. And the analogy between textbooks and fairy tales does not end here.

In addition, history is perceived by the majority of the people almost as a sacred knowledge, which cannot be subjected to analysis or discussion, let alone criticism. In this sense, the historians – especially those who create textbooks – have a special legitimacy and influence. The responsibility for the construction of public knowledge is above all theirs – up to the point where their influence is overshadowed by the invasion of what we may call parahistory. Parahistory is the domain of populist and manipulative variation of historiography, which is easy to understand, to obtain, and to “swallow”, and which as a rule is dominated by a strong nationalistic self-glorifying discourse, and projects the successful and happy ending of historical events. This domain of public knowledge is extremely well proliferated by all media, and is well received because of its “therapeutic” effect on society. Parahistory was especially prevalent during the first decades after the fall of communism, when Bulgarians suffered all kinds of hardship during the “transitional period”.

Last but not least, the few nonconformist historians speak a highly sophisticated academic language that alienates the public from academic historiography and further facilitates the victorious march of parahistory for mass consumption.

Thus, the ground has already been laid for a specific reception of history in Bulgaria.

**AT THE SAME TIME**, the infantilization of today’s society is well known.<sup>36</sup> The same process is also visible in the incredible influence of Hollywood’s movie clichés, in which “the happy ending” is a mandatory recipe for success, on mass consciousness all over the world. This type of narrative recalls the good old fairy tale in which, after a long and unequal battle between the forces of Good and Evil, Good wins in the end. Hence, it is no surprise that the fairy tale, the model followed when the narrative of Bulgarian history originated, is still so attractive today.

There is no other period of Bulgarian history that is told as a tale of the victory of Good over Evil, with a happy ending, besides the one of the National Revolutionary Movement and the Bulgarian Liberation in 1878.

The prologue to this narrative also includes all the elements of the folklore fairy tale. (Bulgarian folklore also includes strong and expressive songs on this subject.) The historical narrative created later follows, step by step, the logic and the structure of the fairy tale: in dark times of bloody battles (“under the Turkish yoke”) between Good (the Bulgarians) and Evil (the Turks), there appeared heroes (*haiduti*, revolutionaries, freedom fighters) whose selfless bravery led to victory. All possible obstacles to the victory of Good – the cruelty of the Turks, the “enslavement” of the Bulgar-

ians, the “blood levy”, the massacres – are also present. Everything works out in the end, just as it does in fairy tales. In our case, the happy ending is the Liberation, forged by the joint efforts of Russians and Bulgarians, which is why the topos of Mount Shipka is the most popular one registered in our inquiry. Besides being essentialistic, this narrative is completely in the spirit of fairy tales with its immortal heroes, battles, trials, and final victory.

This also explains why an almost cryptogenic, folkloric, clearly pre-modern form of historical self-image dominates the way a huge proportion of Bulgarian citizens, including members of minority groups, perceive the most important realms of their history.<sup>37</sup>

Neither a Grand Narrative nor a Great Fairy Tale has been generated to date for other periods of Bulgarian history. For the period of Antiquity only isolated archaeological monuments are presented; for the Middle Ages, narratives are concentrated around the establishment of the state and the Golden Age during the rule of Simeon and the capitals of the two Bulgarian states, but even these are not frequently chosen topoi. This is because the two medieval Bulgarian kingdoms end with the destruction of the state and the imposition of foreign rule. The Grand Narrative cannot become a Great Fairy Tale because it lacks the initial primary component: the happy ending. The same logic can be traced in the formation of the narrative for the period 1878–1944 (the Third Bulgarian Kingdom), where many victories are overshadowed in the historical perspective by the unfortunate endings of World War I and World War II.

If the Grand Narrative and the Great Fairy Tale of the “Ottoman Yoke” and the liberation from it are intertwined and mutually complementary (thus creating the most sustainable space for memory of Bulgarians), communist propaganda has so reinforced a falsified memory of the communist period, 1944–1989, that the fragmentary efforts to correct it have regrettably been futile.

For the communist period, a variety of contradictory narratives exist,

but the tendency to obscure the memory of conflicts, terror, and the economic and financial crimes of the political elite is prevalent. The absence of clearly defined Good and Evil roles also attenuates the memory of communism as a historical period.<sup>38</sup>

**THIS MEMORY IS** sharply opposed to the memory of the Ottoman period. Thus the two most traumatic realms of memory for Bulgarians – Ottoman rule and communism – are dislocated in symmetrically opposed ways. Let us not forget that it was during communism



that the traumatic memory of the “Turkish Yoke” was recreated in even darker tones.

The Grand Narrative on communism has not yet emerged because there is no consensus in present-day society on the historical assessment of this period. The latest academic historiography – in the absence of broad social debate and a genuine interest on behalf of the media – still cannot correct the distorted reflection of the historical memory of that time. Almost half a century of our recent history presents no realm of memory for the vast majority of Bulgarians.

If we consider again the problem of Bulgarian historical memory as formed by a Great Fairy Tale, it becomes obvious that there exists neither a Grand Narrative nor a Great Fairy Tale about communism. If historiography is to be blamed for the lack of a coherent narrative, then the lack of a fairy tale must be explained by the lack of clarity about who is good and who is evil, who is fighting whom, who punishes whom and for what – and ultimately, about whether the ending is happy or sad. The fairy tale is still far off and unlikely to be written. But will the new generations of Bulgarians need more fairy tales? ✖

Note: All essays are scholarly articles and have been peer-reviewed by specialists under the supervision of Baltic Worlds’ editorial advisory board.

## references

- 1 I am using the term “memory” here only for convenience, since the discussion of its inadequacy is a subject for another study. Instead of “historical memory”, I would rather use “constructed public knowledge”. For me, “memory” is a personal cognitive and emotional process, rather than a collectively formed consensus. In addition to this consideration, the study presented here has shown clearly that respondents named local *topoi* of memory as a result of direct, practical experience rather than education and propaganda.
- 2 The research project “Topoi of Historical Memory”, carried out from October 2009 to June 2010, and expanded among the Muslim minorities from October 2010 to January 2011, is a joint project of the New Bulgarian University (NBU) and the

- American University in Bulgaria (AUBG). The methodology used was complex, and included standardized and non-standardized interviews, observations, and life stories. The stratified random sample (1009 people) is representative by gender, age, and social status, yet its emphasis is on the minorities. Director of the project: Evgenia Ivanova. Participants: Evelina Kelbecheva, Ivan Evtimov, Dmitrii Varzonovzev. Students from the Department of Political Sciences of the NBU and the History Program at AUBG also took part in the fieldwork and the discussions. The results of the survey and the discussion were published in Bulgarian in the volume *Minalo nesvarchvachto* [Unending past], Sofia 2011.
- 3 Pierre Nora, "Svetovnniat vuzhod na pametta" [The global rise of memory], in: *Okolo Pierre Nora: Mesta na pamet i konstruirane na nastoyashteto* [Around Pierre Nora: Realms of memory and the construction of the present], Sofia 2004, p. 29.
  - 4 The core methodology of the research consisted in questions that did not specify periods or geographical or cultural areas, nor contain any hints about Bulgarian, European, or world history. These entirely open questions allowed the respondents to answer in accordance with their own priorities, so that we were able to analyze the times and places in which their preferred historical realms were situated. The intentional absence of examples prevented the danger of the researchers' influencing the construction of a uniform narrative. Thus, we were able to record our respondents' first spontaneous reaction.
  - 5 Shipka Pass is the site of the most decisive battle of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 (also called the War of Liberation), fought in August 1877, where the Bulgarian Volunteer Corps (Opalchenzi) alongside Russian troops won the day against far superior numbers commanded by Suleiman Pasha.
  - 6 The most venerated Bulgarian historical figure, called the "Apostle of Freedom", Levski organized the Internal Revolutionary Organization for national liberation from the Ottoman Empire. He was hanged in 1873. For a detailed analysis of the cult of Levski in Bulgaria (in Bulgarian), see Maria Todorova, *Zhivijat Arkhiv na Vasil Levski* [The Living Archive of Vasil Levski], Sofia 2010.
  - 7 Todor Zhivkov was the longest-serving leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party and national government. He came to power in 1956 and was deposed in November 1989.
  - 8 The explanation for this dismal finding has yet to be found. Most probably, the withdrawal is due to the nationalistic rhetoric instrumentalized by most political parties as propaganda against the Movement for Rights and Freedom (DPS), which is popular among Turks in Bulgaria.
  - 9 In the majority group, nostalgia for the communist period becomes more and more evident especially during an economic crisis: most acutely in 1990–1993, and again in 1997–1998. Nevertheless, Todor Zhivkov received much less support in this group than among the minority groups. It is apparent that the economic crisis, which struck the regions populated most densely by Muslim minorities, became the prime factor for the choice of memory about what was good and what was bad during communism.
  - 10 Evgenia Ivanova, "Consensuses of Bulgarian National Memory", in *Minalo nesvarchvachto* [Unending past], Sofia 2011, pp. 3–9.
  - 11 Ernst Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford 1997, p. 50.
  - 12 The most popular and productive Bulgarian poet and writer (1850–1921), called the patriarch of Bulgarian literature.
  - 13 A famous poet, anarchist revolutionary, and hero of the last phase of the National Revolutionary Movement against the Ottoman Empire, killed on June 2, 1876.
  - 14 Murat Belge, "Essentialism", in Murat Belge & Jale Parla (eds.), *Balkan Literatures in the Era of Nationalism*, Istanbul 2009, p. 15.
  - 15 The sum of percentages is far from 100% because some answers were classed as neutral or ambiguous.
  - 16 More than 15% of the population in the Kardzhali region are Turks, and 5% of them indicated Perperikon as a topos of memory. The proportions of Bulgarians and Turks who named this as the most important place are almost equal at about 5%.
  - 17 Bulgarians, or Proto-Bulgarians, did not settle in the Balkan Peninsula until the sixth century AD, and founded the First Bulgarian State in 681.
  - 18 Dimitar Angelov, *Formation of the Bulgarian Nation* [Obrazuvane na bulgarskata narodnost], Sofia 1973.
  - 19 Professor of Ancient History at Sofia University, Deputy Minister of Culture (1971–1981), Minister of Education (1981–1989). During the communist period Fol was the founder of the major educational and cultural program called "1300 Years of Bulgaria", sponsored by the Minister of Culture at the time, Ljudmila Zhivkova (the daughter of Todor Zhivkov). The program presented a new wave of nationalistic propaganda.
  - 20 Simeon I is considered the greatest Bulgarian medieval ruler, having greatly enlarged the territory of Bulgaria, fought successfully against Constantinople, and built the centers of the earliest Bulgarian (and hence the first Slavic) literature and education.
  - 21 A monk at Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos, the "Holy Mountain" on Halkidiki Peninsula in northern Greece. His history, completed in 1762, is commonly considered to mark the beginning of the Bulgarian Revival period.
  - 22 Schoppflin, George, *Nations, Identity, Power: The New Politics of Europe*, London, 2000, p. 92.
  - 23 The infamous "blood levy" which lasted for 160 years. Every four years, young Christian boys were taken away from their families and trained to become Janissaries, the elite corps of the Ottoman army.
  - 24 Evgenia Ivanova, *Izobretianiavane na pamet i zabrava: "Padnaloto tzarstvo" i "posledniiat vladetel" v nazonalnata pamet na Sarbi i Bulgari* [The invention of memory and oblivion: "Fallen Kingdom" and "the last ruler" in the national memory of Serbia and Bulgaria], Sofia 2009.
  - 25 Rumén Daskalov, "Die Wiedergeburt als bulgarischer Nationalmythos", in Martina Baleva & Ulf Brunnbauer (eds.), *Batak als bulgarischer Erinnerungsort*, Sofia 2009, pp. 84–98.
  - 26 The Principality of Bulgaria (with its capital in Sofia) was united with Eastern Rumelia (with its capital in Plovdiv, or Filibe) by Bulgarian elites and the people in September 1885. This was the first breach of the Berlin Congress resolutions of June 1878.
  - 27 Founding father of the modern Bulgarian state, revolutionary, Chair of the National Assembly and prime minister, assassinated in 1894. Stambolov was regarded as a fervent anti-Russian and turned Bulgaria towards the West. His name was banned during communism.
  - 28 The formal act rejecting Bulgaria's vassalage under the Ottoman Empire, and claiming the title *Tzarstvo* for Bulgaria and *Tzar* for Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha.
  - 29 Tsar of Bulgaria (1943–1946), exiled in Spain, prime minister of Bulgaria (2002–2006).
  - 30 Initiated by the Fatherland Front government dominated by the communists in 1944–1945. The 2618 death sentences issued by the People's Tribunal and 1046 resulting executions virtually eliminated Bulgaria's previous political and cultural elites. For comparison, the Nuremberg Tribunal issued death sentences against 12 out of 24 defendants; seven people were executed out of 28 defendants before the Far East Military Tribunal; during the purges in Hungary, 476 people were sentenced to death, and in Slovakia five. See R. Daskalov, *Ot Stambolov do Zhivkov: Golemite sporove za novata Bulgarska istoriia* [From Stambolov to Zhivkov: the great debates about the new Bulgarian history], Sofia 2009, p. 398.
  - 31 The date of the coup d'état which imposed the government of the Fatherland Front, with the Bulgarian Communist Party playing a leading role, after the invasion of the Soviet Army.
  - 32 This new historiography became possible thanks to the new Institute for Studies of the Recent Past (ISRP), established in 2005, which relies on authors born after the middle of the twentieth century. The exceptionally valuable studies of the ISRP are not distributed widely enough, which raises the question as to their ability to influence a mass audience in Bulgaria and to initiate a debate and create new knowledge of this period. So far, we are not aware of any findings or assessments by the institute's authors that have been included in textbooks or school literature, nor of any discussion on the new archival discoveries outside the periodic conferences organized by the institute.
  - 33 Evgenia Ivanova, op. cit., Sofia 2011, pp. 14–16.
  - 34 Evgenia Ivanova, op. cit., Sofia 2009.
  - 35 Volker Berghahn & Hanna Schissler (eds.), *Perceptions of History: International Textbook Research on Britain, Germany, and the United States*, Oxford 1987, p. 141.
  - 36 See Sven Hillenkamp, *Das Ende der Liebe*, Stuttgart 2009.
  - 37 Evelina Kelbecheva, "Kakvo da, kakvo ne: The Present of the Bulgarian Historical Memory", in *Minalo nesvarchvachto* [Unending past], Sofia 2011, pp. 35–57.
  - 38 There are numerous reasons for this, but the principal reason is the very skillful substitution of the narrative on communism by a certain communist and postcommunist elite that dominates the public space and disrupts the channels of knowledge and the assessment of contemporary Bulgarian history. And ultimately, non-communist circles have not succeeded in providing a sound and coherent strategy for studying this period, nor for disseminating knowledge about it in Bulgarian society.





# DUNES OF HAPPINESS

## FIFTEEN SUMMERS IN ESTONIA

**E**stonia, the source of my happiest childhood memories. . . . Between the ages of

five and twenty I spent fifteen summers, a total of three or four years, in Estonia. Pärnu, the resort where we summered, sits on the west coast of Estonia, a two-hour drive from Tallinn. Pärnu owes its historical reputation to the three-mile strand, the mud baths, and its microclimate, steady and mild, curative for anxious city types with high blood pressure, raw nerves, and pallid faces. Still the vacation capital of Estonia today, Pärnu flourished

during the interlude of Estonian independence before World War II. Then came the Soviet annexation in 1940, the Nazi occupation, and finally the Soviet “liberation”, which lasted until 1991. Many streets were given Soviet names, like Nõukogude (Soviet Street; since renamed), but the town retained much of its character. In the 1960s and early 1970s, Pärnu became the object of summer pilgrimages by the intelligentsia from Soviet cities. When my parents and I first came to Pärnu in 1972 – after having tried rotten-apricot-smelling Sebastopol and shashlyk-greasy Sochi – we were smitten by Estonia’s culture. Years of Soviet rule couldn’t take either the northern European breeding or the memories of independence out of the local Estonian population. Such notions as work ethic, public interest, privacy, and efficiency were as natural to them as they were alien to much of the Soviet population. Going to Estonia for the first time was like going abroad.



The author with Ekaterina (Katya) Tsarapkina in the Shrayers' Zhiguli. Pärnu, ca. 1980. Courtesy of the author.

During my fifteen vacations in Pärnu, I made no more than half a dozen acquaintances among the Estonians. There were minor exceptions: the stylish librarian at the children’s library; the saintly Evald Mikus, whose studio apartment we rented for ten summers in a row; the drab-cheeked Estonian woman who let me dig for trout worms in her kitchen garden. And there was one grand exception: the Estonian artist Jüri Arrak and his family, who became our family’s close friends. For years, my parents and I would return to Pärnu and see the same faces of the local Estonians at the grocery stores, the cafés, the telegraph office. We greeted them in Estonian – *tere* (“hello”) or *tervist* (“health”); they replied curtly, and never in Russian. An invisible wall separated the “Russians” from the Estonians. The “Russians” included the local non-Estonian residents and us, the summerfolk. As Russians, we were, by default, part of the greater occupational force; as Jews, we were fellow victims of Russian – and

Soviet – imperial domination. While the Estonian landlords, postal workers, waiters, and sales clerks weren’t especially friendly to vacationers, they treated us a thousand times better than people working in any Soviet office or establishment outside Estonia would. To those tired of being watched and supervised, the sensation of inscrutability was liberating.

I said “intelligentsia”, but I should have said “Jewish intelligentsia”. In those days, perhaps two-thirds of Pärnu’s summer population were Jewish. First hundreds, then thousands of Jewish parents from across the Soviet Union brought their progeny to Pärnu in the 1960s and early 1970s. It was a remarkable environment. Summer after summer, Russian-speaking Jewish kids who had known each other since early childhood would congregate on the beach, play charades, or go to movies together. While in Pärnu, our parents put aside perennial concerns about antisemitism. There were certainly non-Jewish parents and

Maxim D. Shrayer was born in Moscow in 1967 into a writer’s family. He emigrated to the United States in 1987. A professor at Boston College and a bilingual writer and translator, Shrayer is the author of ten books. Shrayer’s *Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature* won a 2007 National Jewish Book Award, and in 2012 he received a Guggenheim Fellowship.



children among the vacationers – Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Armenian, Uzbek. But the Jewish element prevailed. One of the summer jokes from the late 1970s went like this: In retaliation for the establishment of a new Jewish settlement on the West Bank, the PLO detonated a bomb . . . in Pärnu. During the rest of the year, when we were not in Estonia, Jewish kids experienced one form or another of prejudicial treatment. But within the summer Pärnu community, being Jewish was both “cool” and “hip”. Pärnu was the summer comfort zone of our childhood.

The odor of the old Hanseatic League still hangs under the vault of Pärnu’s dilapidated town gate where we occasionally played. We spent most of our time at the beach or in the seaside parks with secluded benches, inside the wooden orchestra shell when it rained, on the tennis and badminton courts when it didn’t, and regardless of the weather, at the main playground with its squeaky merry-go-rounds and sagging swings. Inspired by the East German-Yugoslavian Westerns starring the debonair Gojko Mitić, we were mad about Mohegan warriors. But I also recall a period when my Pärnu friends and I became fascinated with seafaring Hanseatic merchants, with Lübeck and The Hague, with Brabant cuffs and wooden clogs, and also with what we heard from our parents about Pushkin’s great-grandfather, the “Blackamoor of Peter the Great”, who had spent some time in Pärnu (Pernov) in the 1730s.

In addition to the surviving gable-roofed buildings, Pärnu prides itself on its late 1920s and 1930s architecture, including the Mud Baths Clinic, the Kursaal, and Rannahotell, a local gem of Functionalism.

To a visiting Western European, the town would have a familiar appearance, a little like Ostend, Binz, Harlingen, Cuxhaven, Sopot, Palanga, Jurmala, and other North Sea and Baltic Sea coastal resorts. But to me and to my childhood friends, there is nothing like Pärnu anywhere in the world. In our memories of those summers, we dwell in the kind of happiness that is beyond the reach of language – especially an adopted language.

Throughout my pre-college years, I used to go to Estonia for two, sometimes three months. My parents would ship me off soon after my birthday in early June, and usually joined me in July. For the first two

## “IN OUR MEMORIES OF THOSE SUMMERS, WE DWELL IN THE KIND OF HAPPINESS THAT IS BEYOND THE REACH OF LANGUAGE.”

summers we rented an old cottage on the other side of the Riga Highway, a long walk from the beach across the bowels of Pärnu, where the streets smelled of burning coal and raspberries. The cottage belonged to Luule, an Estonian woman who later married a Finn and moved across the gulf. She charged a token rent, but the house had no gas or running water and swarmed with mice and silverfish. Every morning Grandmother Anna Mikhailovna and I would walk to the beach past the town market, with its pickle jars, bunches of scallions, heaps of ornate lettuce, mounds of black, red, and yellow currants, sugar snap peas, and early summer apples (including the aromatic variety the locals called “Fox’s Nose”). Along the way we recited Russian poetry, mainly from the repertoire of nineteenth-century lyric by Pushkin, Lermontov, Tyutchev, Nikitin, Nekrasov, and Fet, but also the twentieth-century poet Esenin, whose bluesy lamentations infected me with a nostalgia for the destroyed pastoral.

Coming to Pärnu year after year from 1972 to 1986, one got to know a whole community of peers, as well as their siblings, parents, and extended families. The core of our Pärnu *kompaniia* was formed around 1975, when we were seven or eight. On days deemed unfit for going to the beach, the adults would hide from the newspaper-flapping northern winds behind the protective wall of the concrete parapet that separates the beach from the seaside park and Rannahotell. The grownups, among them the art historian Boris Bernshtein and his wife, the pianist Frida Bernshtein, the musicologists Yuzef Kon and Olga (Lyalya) Bochkaryova, the violinist Anatoly Reznikovsky, and the pianist Marina Trey, placed their chaise lounges in concentric

circles and spent the mornings reading, smoking, and discussing politics and the arts.

**In loud whispers** they talked about Brodsky, Nabokov, Neizvestny, Sakharov, Solzhenitsyn, and other forbidden subjects. The kids would brave the chilly wind and play in the shallow water. During the rest of the year, some of us lived in different cities, but in Pärnu, we were inseparable. Many of our parents congregated in the same spot at the beach and gathered at night for little soirées where they told racy jokes and consumed large quantities of Cinzano Bianco, available in Soviet liquor stores in the mid-1970s. In the evenings our folks took turns hosting suppers or after-suppers, at which Estonian-made rowanberry wine and Benedictine liqueur were abundantly consumed. The kids were served rhubarb juice, and the fare included smoked herring, smoked cheese with caraway seeds, and red currant tarts. We dreaded the end of August.

I treasure my Estonian memories because in them I never feel alone among my peers. I met my two closest friends, Maxim Mussel and Katya Tsarapkina, in Pärnu in the early 1970s. My father and Katya’s mother are the same age and grew up in adjacent buildings in Lesnoe, a neighborhood of the working-class Vyborg district in Leningrad. When I first met Katya’s mother, Inga Kogan, she had the bluest of cornflower-blue eyes. A movie buff, she married a man four years her junior, a tall and dapper chemical engineer and former water polo player. Katya is forty-seven as I prepare these lines for publication, and to this day she insists that her father represents the gold standard of male beauty, as Dr. Freud smiles down on her from his heavenly clinic. Both Katya’s grandfathers were Jewish, both her grandmothers non-Jewish, and Katya looks most like her West Slavic ancestors. From her father she inherited his slenderness and long legs, from her mother the enchanted half-smile of an absinthe drinker. The melancholy of her shtetl ancestors dwells in Katya’s eyes and on her brow. Having studied classical ballet from an early age, Katya still possesses a lilting gait.

I find it difficult to write about close friends in connection with our past, as it forces me to put closure



Rannahotell, Pärnu, Estonia. Postcard, ca. 1938. Courtesy of the author.

Members of the Jewish-Russian intelligentsia congregating on the Pärnu beach. Three men in a circle: Efim Lifshits, Yuzef Kon (face blocked), Vladimir Tsarapkin; in the chaise lounge: Emilia Shrayer. Courtesy of Emilia Shrayer and David Shrayer-Petrov.



## “AFTER ESTONIA’S WHITE BEACHES, SOFT COLORS, AND UNDERSTATED ELEGANCE, THE ARRIVAL IN MOSCOW LEFT ME WITH A GNAWING SENSATION OF ENTRAPMENT.”

to our story. Instead I close my eyes to give them rest, and I see our white Zhiguli sedan parked on the roadside. We have just returned to Pärnu from a blessed Estonian forest. We have been picking bilberries, wild raspberries, and forest mushrooms. Fatigued after several hours of work, Katya is sitting in the back seat by the window, her long arms locked in a perfect geometrical figure. She squints at the camera as though all of the world’s allure and surprise have been concentrated in her face. Images like that one forbid closure, as does my Estonian childhood.

**By 1983** Maxim Mussel had become my best male friend. Katya and I had both known him for a long time as one of the founding members of the Pärnu Jewish Mohegans. Now one of Russia’s leading authorities on brand management, he is still remembered by the Pärnu kids as “Max Krolik”, Max the Rabbit. He earned his nickname because as an eight- and nine-year-old he had retainers on his teeth and sported gold-framed round glasses. This combination evoked an association with Rabbit in Milne’s *Winnie the Pooh*. Max Krolik, or Krol for short, looked the most intellectual among us and was usually seen with a book in hand. I envied him his spectacles, associating them with mental prowess and refinement. As a youth he was unathletic, oversensitive. A streak of Slavic blood flowed in his veins, calming his explosive self the way a peaceful Russian river cools a hot summer landscape. Maxim’s origins call for a brief digression because of the way they illustrate the workings of mixed marriages in my former homeland. Before World War II, Maxim’s maternal grandfather, Israel Abolits, married a woman whose first name and patronymic, Olympiada Nikitichna, made one think of a merchant’s wife in a nineteenth-century Russian vaudeville show. He loved his Lipa breathlessly all his life, and she, too, adored her Izya, an engineering professor. Maxim’s parents divorced when he was in his teens and led their own lives, and I mainly remember my young friend summering with his grandparents. His grandfather had an old-fashioned professorial briefcase the size of a small pig, and he used to carry it with him to the beach, to the park, and to the public baths he frequented. Folded newspapers jutted out of its half-

zipped compartments like giraffe necks. Even on hot days, Maxim’s Russian grandmother went around the resort in dark floral dresses with a shawl wrapped around her shoulders.

Maxim was a tireless reader of any foreign fiction he could find in translation. In high school he was the only person I knew who had actually finished Proust and Musil. He was the first to have discovered Julio Cortázar and Pär Lagerkvist, and he also put me onto Hermann Hesse. I remember the two of us walking along the Pärnu beach and trying to figure out how to play the glass bead game.

Our lives have been joined together, forming a charmed triangle of friendship. Each of us is as different as can be from the other two. Katya is phlegmatic, sometimes unstoppable. She’s also boundlessly generous. Although Maxim is given to moments of apathy and cynicism, he is a gentle soul, which is a rare quality in men. In our three-way dynamics, I tend to be the decider, and in my egocentrism I can sometimes be an overbearing friend. It’s been twenty-six years since I left the Soviet Union, and to this day I miss the presence of Maxim and Katya in my daily life. We make every effort to see each other – in St. Petersburg or Moscow, in Milan, in Marbella, in Boston. Three times we have met in Pärnu for summertime reunions. When we get together, putting aside our families, spouses and children, countries, formed habits and tempered predilections, time drops its shackles. Forever fifteen, we find each other on the amber alley that takes us to the seaside amusement park and

the art nouveau mansion of the former casino. Katya runs ahead of us, always slightly en pointe. I’m next, clutching badminton rackets. Max, his chest acting up in the pine-infused air, lags behind. Under his arm he clutches a Russian translation of Remarque’s *Three Comrades*. “Look, boys,” Katya turns her head and waves her arms, “Look, they’ve fixed the Ferris wheel. Please let’s go up!”

In some ways, I miss Estonia and Pärnu more than I miss Russia and my old home in Moscow. I realize now that our summer visits, between 1972 and 1987, were a release, especially during our refusenik years, when our family lived in limbo and my parents were persecuted. The Estonian vacations gave us a temporary escape from an oppressive Soviet reality. A month in Estonia, away from Moscow’s officialdom, charged us with enough spirit and energy to last a whole year.

Before returning to Moscow by night train, we used to stop in Tallinn for a day or two. This was one of our annual rituals of parting with summer and Estonia. While our parents shopped for Estonian-made clothes and household goods that had the semblance of things Western, the kids roamed around Vyshgorod (Upper Town), Tallinn’s medieval center. We loved to stand on the castle’s observation landings, whence one could take in the entire port and the steely semicircle of the Baltic Sea. Ecstatic, we mouthed the quaint names of the castle towers: Fat Margarita, Long Hermann. Parents treated us to delectable sandwiches with anchovies and hard-boiled egg, and also to cheese pastries and chicory-flavored coffee.

**After Estonia’s** white beaches, soft colors, and understated elegance, the arrival in Moscow left me with a gnawing sensation of entrapment. The rainy season would have already begun in central Russia. Waddling Moscow buses would greet us with splashes of cold mud. And one more acute sensation on returning to Moscow from Estonia: watermelons. The watermelons would arrive from the south around the end of August or early September. Street corners and areas in front of food stores would be filled up with cagelike metal containers full of watermelons. People marched in place in front of the large containers, choosing watermelons, sniffing them, tugging at their twisted piggish stems, tapping them like doctors giving an abdominal exam. Emotions ran wild and people would get into fights over watermelons. Women would lean over dirty edges of the metal containers to reach for watermelons, and boys would peer at their underwear and garter belts. Streams of rancid pink juice flowed down pavements and mixed with the Stygian waters of the city streets. “Moscow again,” I used to think, refusing to forget Estonia. “Now it’s ten more months before we go back to Pärnu.” ❌

**maxim d. shrayer**

The excerpt was adapted from the author’s coming book *Leaving Russia: A Jewish Story*. Copyright © 2013 by Maxim D. Shrayer.



The author with his parents, Emilia Shrayer and David Shrayer-Petrov, visiting Panga Rehe, the summer home of the Estonian artist Jüri Arrak. Summer 1977. Courtesy of the author.

The author with Maxim Mussel. Pärnu, August 1986. Courtesy of the author.

## Towards a transnational history of Soviet deportations. Which aspects of the past remain unknown?

Since the late 1980s, historical accounts of Soviet deportations from the Baltic states have been hugely influential in the domestic and foreign policies of these countries. Writing about this difficult, painful, and multifaceted past is like a terrible game of dominos in which the bits and pieces of the Soviet occupation, the Holocaust, and the postwar resistance are joggled and assembled in various ways in memoirs and professional historical texts, but also crystallized in monuments and museums. More than two decades later, we can now turn back and ask which types of stories about the Soviet deportations circulated in the public sphere and which aspects of this past remain blank areas on the map of our knowledge. It was precisely this need to revise history that was the rationale for an international seminar, *Past Continuous in the Baltic States: The Memory and the Trauma of a Difficult Past*, held at Sciences Po in Paris on May 24, 2013.

**FIRST OF ALL**, a quick look at the professional historiography and official policy documents reveals a prominent emphasis on the Soviet deportations as central to the construction of national identity in the three Baltic states. This phenomenon has been addressed extensively in the scholarship and has generated widely divergent interpretations. Simplifying a bit, one might suggest that scholars native to the Baltic states tend to understand the public uses of the narratives of deportations as a useful resource, and to approach them as a solid ground for constructing the national identity of the citizens of the Baltic states. Through the experience of Soviet deportations, whether direct or narrated, the citizens of the Baltic states would acquire the ability to define themselves as both innocent victims and heroic survivors, and in this way to distance themselves from Russia, both personally and politically. This constructive role of the Soviet deportations is often interpreted skeptically by other scholars, who point out that the accounts of deportations become the basis of competitive martyrological discourses, which in turn reinforce ethnocentric views. Representatives of the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian



Photos courtesy of the Museum of Genocide Victims, Lithuania.

ethnic majorities, they argue, seem to monopolize discourse about the experiences of Soviet deportations and use it, sometimes unnecessarily, to assert the vulnerability of these ethnic majorities.

These two different approaches soon clash. Westerners are accused of indifference and double standards in evaluating Soviet crimes. The Baltic side is criticized for promoting blind ethnocentrism and for failing to acknowledge non-majority ethnic and religious groups' parallel experiences of Soviet deportations.

The seminar *Past Continuous* in the Baltic States attempted to resolve this confrontation by widening critical and empirical approaches to the history of deportations. Timothy Snyder stated in his recent book *Bloodlands* that Eastern Europeans had no choice but to synchronize the histories of Nazi Holocaust and the Soviet crimes. In reality, however, synchronizing communism and Nazism is an incredibly complex task, and is contested by many. For social and political reasons, the articulation of the consequences of the Nazi and communist regimes is often compartmentalized. Books are shelved in different store sections, monuments are placed in different squares, and objects end up in different museums.

This compartmentalization not only separates the stories of the religious, ethnic, and social groups in a given country, but also fails to engage with the

stories of other countries. I wondered which Lithuanian museum might teach one, for example, about the Soviet deportations from Estonia, Latvia, or Poland. Are there any studies, not to mention exhibitions, about the role that deportations from Lithuania played in the history of the Gulag?

**PERHAPS THE MOST** striking absence in the existing research is the Soviet deportations of the Jews. A researcher at EHESS, Marta Craveri, emphasized that writing a history about the Jews who were deported from Poland and the Baltic states was fraught with difficulties. First of all, in a French context, the word "déportation" has taken on a specific meaning because it has been used to describe only the Nazi deportations, and is hence closely associated with the Holocaust. Second, the geographical paths of the Jews who were deported from the Baltic states took different directions. Craveri pointed out that the majority of the deported Baltic Jews did not try to return to the Baltic Sea area; instead, they headed southwest, crossing Central Asia and Iran, hoping to reach either Israel or the United States. On how many of the existing maps of Soviet deportations, one may ask, are these Jewish routes marked? Finally, those Jews who were lucky enough to survive and escape from the Soviet Union did not rush to publish their memoirs; perhaps they were reluctant



to compete with Holocaust testimonies. Although pertinent studies are completely lacking, a doctoral student at the Sorbonne, Akvilė Grigoravičiūtė, noted that there are memoirs published in Yiddish. Where a lack of outside attention and the silence of the victims converge, the blank areas on our map of history emerge and grow. As time runs by, it will become increasingly difficult to fill in these lacunae.

Mass demonstrations aimed at bringing the Soviet deportations to light took place in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in the late 1980s; however, I am not aware of any comparative studies of these events. It would be interesting to find out more about how these public performances related to local cultural traditions: one would expect to find significant differences between the theatrical Catholic culture of Lithuania, where the returned remains of deportees were carried in processions down the streets of the Old Town of Vilnius and the religious ceremonies of reburial were attended by throngs of people, and the Protestant traditions of Estonia and Latvia. It would also be interesting to examine which social groups took the initiative and were active in commemorating the deportations in the various countries.

The role of the media also deserves special attention. A study of discourses about the Soviet deportations in the Latvian media, conducted by a doctoral





Photo: Eglė Rindzevičiūtė



The Museum of Occupation at the Ninth Fort.

student at Latvia University, Olga Procevska, revealed that the commemoration of the Soviet deportations and the Holocaust tended to be arranged by different organizations, and were almost never synchronized. Furthermore, the communities that organized those commemorations paid almost no attention to deportations of the Roma. Indeed, it seems that the narratives about deportations are instrumentalized for the purposes of national politics. According to Procevska, cultural strategies could be discerned in the way the histories of Soviet deportations and the Holocaust were embedded in contemporary Latvian society. The history of the Holocaust in Latvia, for example, was framed as a lesson about the universal humanist values of good citizenship. The history of Soviet deportations, however, was framed as part of the foundation of Latvian sovereignty, a proof of the necessity of a Latvian state in order to ensure the security of Latvians.

**THE AUTHOR OF** the present text presented her study of exhibitions on the Soviet deportations in three Lithuanian museums: the Museum of Genocide Victims in Vilnius, the Open Air Museum of Lithuanian Everyday Life, and the Ninth Fort Museum in Kaunas. A common feature of these exhibitions is that, just as in the Latvian case, the story of Soviet deportations is subordinated to a narrative of Lithuanian sovereignty.

On my visit to the Ninth Fort Museum in 2011, neither a catalogue nor a description of the exhibitions was available. The only explicit guidance provided, the captions of the exhibits, punctuated the exhibition halls with references to exceptional political events: the first Soviet occupation, deportations, NKVD terror, the Holocaust, the second Soviet occupation, and again, deportations.

The character of this rudimentary narrative is understandable, because the museum is dedicated to the history of occupations. However, the Ninth Fort Museum also holds arguably the largest exhibition about the Soviet deportations from Lithuania. It would be natural to expect a wider contextualization of the history of Soviet deportations from Lithuania, relating it to the Gulag, deportations from other Eastern European countries, and perhaps a history of deportation as a generic technique of political struggle. Both the Museum of Genocide Victims and the Ninth Fort Museum display some textual information that not only ethnic Lithuanians, but also Jews and other ethnic groups were deported. Furthermore, while the Ninth Fort Museum exhibits a surprisingly large number of photographs of Jewish deportees, the material culture of the deported Jews is not represented. A part of the exposition at the Museum of Genocide Victims is devoted to the everyday life of deportees, particularly the role of Catholicism and Christian

values in raising children. It remains unclear whether there were any significant differences in material culture and ways of life among the Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Roma, and atheist groups of Lithuanian deportees.

**A YURT BUILT** by the community of deportees at the Laptev Sea in the Lithuanian Open Air Museum is a considerably different museum object. Unlike the museums of the Genocide Victims and the Ninth Fort, the yurt does not seek to assemble a fully-fledged narrative of Soviet deportations. According to its creators, it is intended to commemorate and recall the experiences of one particular group of deportees, those who were displaced to the archipelago of the Laptev Sea. This yurt, a striking monument to the community spirit of that particular group of deportees, features mainly Christian narratives of suffering.

Should these museum exhibitions be understood as an expression of a hegemonic, state-sanctioned, Lithuanian ethnocentric nationalism? Has this narrative also captivated the imagination of the majority of Lithu-

anians? The answer is not so simple. First, according to sociological studies<sup>1</sup>, attributing importance to deportations as a means of constructing national identity strongly depends on how the question is posed. A repeated survey in which respondents were asked to list the most important recent historic events has shown that the Soviet deportations were less often mentioned as a highly important historic event than independence, EU membership, or the Second World War. Moreover, Soviet deportations were mentioned as a highly important historical event less often in the 2006 survey than in the 1989 survey. The youngest cohort (14–19 years) was the least inclined to attribute great historical importance to the deportations. It is also interesting that the results obtained from the Russian speakers surveyed with regard to the deportations did not differ significantly from those of Lithuanian speakers. This suggests that statements about the hegemonic character of the deportations narrative in Lithuanian ethnic identity-building should not disregard the situations, contexts, and groups in relation

to which an ethnocentric narrative on deportations takes on a hegemonic position.

The museums, which are fundamentally oriented towards material

Photo courtesy of the Museum of Genocide Victims, Lithuania.



## Continued.

# Towards a transnational history of Soviet deportations

culture and heritage, form a specific milieu for articulating narratives about the deportations. Let me explain. For example, the Museum of Genocide Victims states on its website that the major part of its collection pertaining to the deportations has been acquired thanks to donations from the deportees. It should also be recalled that the Museum of Genocide Victims, the deportations exposition at the Ninth Museum, and the yurt were organized on the initiative of the Lithuanian Union of Political Prisoners and Deportees. Donations are a major source for these museums, whose means of conducting systematic and research-based collecting are severely limited due to an almost complete absence of appropriate funding from the Ministry of Culture. Given the shortage of such state funding, it is not surprising that the expositions in these museums are overwhelmed with conservative cultural references to Catholicism and ethnic Lithuanian practices, reflecting the preferences of their generous, but perhaps not particularly scholarly donors. It is not because of centrist state pressure, but rather the opposite, because of the lack of state financial support, that these particular types of narratives tend to prevail in the exhibitions in these Lithuanian museums. One could go as far as to suggest that it suits the state government very well that these grass-root initiatives to compile and articulate the history of Soviet deportations from Lithuania end up taking on this form.

The exhibitions about deportations in the Lithuanian museums are like memoirs in this way. The narratives of the interwar elites and Catholic communities spiral on into the future. The apparent bias becomes entrenched because other types of donors, finding the installed narratives alienating, would not rush to donate examples of their material culture to these museums. As long as transnational and pluralist



Part of the Open Air Museum, Rumsiskes.

academic research is absent, I am afraid these exhibitions will stay as they are: compartmentalized, fragmented, and marginal.

**THIS WOULD BE** a great loss, because the history of Soviet deportations is rich in both universal and very local meanings. A Lithuanian historian, Violeta Davoliūtė, suggested a very intriguing idea, saying that one of the factors that stimulated such a strong reception of the stories of deportees among the inhabitants of Lithuania in the late 1980s was the previous three decades of speedy urbanization in the country. The number of urban inhabitants in Lithuania approached the number of rural inhabitants in the mid-1960s, and exceeded it in the 1980s. The inhabitants of Lithuanian towns were not “deported” from their villages, of course. However, because the new city dwellers were dislocated, a feeling of loss of roots was familiar to them. The deportees’ stories about their longing for the motherland resonated with the city dwellers’ nostalgia for a pre-industrial countryside, especially because many of the deportees came from rural areas. The notion of a return to Lithuania from the Russian North and Far East echoed that of a return from the city to the farmstead.

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the deportees’ memoirs in the revision of the history of deportations, especially since the memoirs were collected in different ways in the different

countries. The director of the Estonian War Museum, Toomas Hioo, underlined the importance of the Estonian Heritage Association, established in 1988. According to Hioo, young people did not consider this association to be as boring as the Popular Front. One of its key attractions was active engagement with history through the collection of memoir materials in expeditions to the countryside. It is interesting that, just as in Lithuania, the memoirs of Estonian deportees were collected by a grass-roots movement, driven by amateurs. In spite of official statements about the importance of the deportations, this movement received no significant state support. This, Hioo noted, was inevitably reflected in the widely varying quality of the material collected. Like Lithuania, Estonia lacks a systematic professional historiography and public articulation of the Soviet deportations. Of great help here, seminar participants argued, would be not only international cooperation, but also a search for new theoretical perspectives which would overcome the limitations of internal politicking.

The seminar chair, the distinguished historian Alain Blum (EHESS), a specialist in Soviet demography, emphasized the need to move on to transnational studies of deportations. According to Blum, the Soviet regime hardly sought to deport Estonians, Latvians, or Lithuanians as ethnic nations. Instead, they saw the deportees as the elite and prosperous classes of the Baltic region. It is therefore ahistorical, Blum suggested, to compare the numbers of deportees from different East European countries. A good example of the denationalization of such numbers is offered by the Poles who had settled in western Ukraine, and were consequently de-

ported not as Poles, but as Ukrainians. Blum did not argue against studies seeking to establish reliable numbers of deportees. His point was rather that politicizing these numbers by incorporating them into an ethnocentric narrative is an effect of a specific nationalist historiography. This is not always the wrong strategy, but it is a strategy that leaves many questions unasked and unanswered.

The most important insight Blum offered was that the transnational history of deportations should not stop with the return of the deportees. Perhaps the most painful and controversial studies await the scholar who turns his or her attention to the deportees’ lives after their return to their home countries, where many met with further repression, discrimination, or indifference. The history of the deportations is indeed still going on, and its discovery is fundamental for free and liberal societies in the Baltic Sea region. ✕

eglė rindzevičiūtė

Note: The organizers, Una Bergmane, Philippe Perchoc, and Eglė Rindzevičiūtė, gratefully acknowledge the generous financial support of the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian embassies in Paris, which, together with the institutional assistance of the Center for International Studies (CERI) at Sciences Po, made this discussion possible. The seminar was part of the series *Autour de la Baltique* at CERI.

## reference

- 1 Irena Šutinienė, “Socialinė atmintis ir šiuolaikinė lietuvių tautinė tapatybė”, In *Lietuvos etnologija*, 8 vol 17, 2008, pp. 31–55.



Photo courtesy of The Museum of Genocide Victims, Lithuania.

**All those people feeling that life is taking place somewhere else. Towards a transnational understanding?**





The 14<sup>th</sup> of June is Flag Day in the Baltic republics. On that day in 1941, shortly before the German invasion of the Soviet Union, thousands of people were deported to Siberia.

Many never returned; others, shadows of their former selves, did. No actual “crime” was required to be sent away: a denunciation or an arbitrary statute sufficed to put a name on the list and help fill the quota for loading onto the railroad cars and shipping off.

Svajone’s father was one of those deported in the 1950s, when he was still a boy of fifteen. He and some friends had published a rudimentary, mimeographed newspaper at school, called *Savas Kampas*, “Our Little Corner”. It featured comic strips, basketball results, school gossip, and crossword puzzles, but also articles on various topics like “Swallow a Frog and Become Invincible”, or “Your Greatest Wishes – Within Limits, Of Course.” There was no overtly political content in any of it, but considering the paranoia of the secret service about what might be hidden between the lines – hiding messages between the lines is a highly sophisticated technique in many totalitarian states – the newspaper, especially by virtue of the articles on general topics, was classified as anti-Soviet activity. Svajone’s father was expelled from the school along with the others on the editorial team. Soon after, they were deported. When he returned to Lithuania seven years later, it proved impossible for him to get a job. Eventually he was forced to return to his place of exile

in Siberia – a by no means unusual phenomenon.

Later that evening, at a rundown hotel on the coast, Paulius talked about his experiences in the Russian army.

From a Soviet-Baltic perspective, remembering life as a conscript was like prodding a tumor, not knowing whether it was malignant. But things started changing at the end of the 1980s. Many Lithuanians began refusing to report for military service. The police tried to locate them, but they managed to evade the authorities. Paulius related that suddenly, people might be picked up at home, at school, or at work for various “aid and assistance assignments”, as they were called. This was a sort of “deportation light” with unknown goals and unspeakable consequences: people were forcibly requisitioned and sent wherever they were needed at the time, for clean-up and other mass labor operations, for instance.

It happened to Paulius on a spring day in 1986. Three strange men rang the doorbell. Svajone answered the door. They wanted to talk to Paulius Stanikas. She told them she did not know where he was. Could they come in? No, preferably not; she was home alone. They had a document with them. He had to complete the form at once and report to such and such a place by such and such a time. Otherwise, there would be consequences. They would be back soon.

The grapevine had already warned Paulius about what was going on. He was hiding, in the apartment

for the moment (and heard how Svajone lied to save his skin). Now he had to try to get out to the countryside without being arrested on the street the minute he left the building.

From such and such a place at such and such a time – people had warned him via the grapevine – transports left for the wrecked nuclear power plant in Chernobyl. Information in the Soviet media was sparse, but people relied more on Voice of America. And if it was not that dangerous, why did they need so many people?

**The men came** back that same night. Evasion could cost him dearly, they said. Svajone handed back the document, unsigned. She did not know where he was. He was 24 years old and out on the town a lot with his buddies, she said. But he was still lying hidden in the apartment; he had not dared leave in case it was being watched, which in all probability it was.

A few months later, some of the Lithuanian contingent began to return. Many eventually lost their hair; others became lethargic, sickly, nervous, unable to eat. Paulius still saw them around town sometimes. The accident continued wreaking its havoc in many of their bodies. Some had had arms and legs amputated. Many died – he found out – and others simply disappeared, as if they were dead too. Maybe they were.

Young and middle-aged men were forcibly recruit-

ed in many cities in the Baltic countries in the same way at the time, contingents that after their homecoming were steadily decimated over the years by sicknesses that defied diagnosis – and by death.

**By chance, I arrived** in Ukmergė, Lithuania, the day the city's Chernobyl veterans were commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the accident with a party at the city hotel. There were actually only a handful of the veterans left, and of those who participated in the emergency clean-up, only one was left, Antonas. I was thinking I would exchange a few words with him, but he was no longer "talkable", as the hotel owner put it. The mood of the party had changed. The volume was turned up again and the sound rattled the windowpanes. The dancers looked like staggering specters in a dance of death. Figures slumped on chairs here and there in the hotel dining room – the veterans themselves and their invited families and friends. In their drunkenness, they all seemed inclined to sleep the night away. Antonas had already passed out on a sofa.

"It's just as well," said one of his fellow veterans, who was relatively comprehensible despite slurred words. "His angst washes over the guests and makes them uncontrollable. There were nine of us at the last anniversary meeting, now we're down to five. But we all drink more every time.

"His work was probably more dangerous, but we were all hurt. You know – primitive tools to dig with and basic protective clothing, unaware of the dangers of radiation. But still, it was 1986, not the time of the pyramids in Egypt.

"We dug and we shoveled and as time went by, one digger after the other succumbed. At first, they tried to use robots to clear the most radiation-damaged places around the reactor. But it soon proved they could not withstand the high radiation; they broke and stopped working. So instead they sent in people, so-called biorobots. They could only stay in for brief periods, when they performed just one little task, like shoveling away a bit of pipe or rubble from a roof, and then they had to get out again. They were dressed in heavy hazard suits, but most, if not all, suffered radiation injuries. Sure, some are still alive, but they're sick, and nobody knows how it will affect future generations, if they were able to have kids, that is.

"Others were already dead. Antonas, well, he broods about why he in particular survived. Yes, he also has various illnesses, but despite everything, he is alive! But instead of being happy about the second chance he got – from biorobot to disability pensioner: it is still a step forward, a step few were able to take – instead of being happy, he broods and drowns the second chance in a bottle. It was the disaster of our lives. It changed more than you think. It was an event that will cast a long shadow, for many, many years. Nature knows it too, since we have all been dead for years. But that's enough from me, thanks." The man abruptly ended his story and went off to load his compatriots into the waiting taxis. ✕

Note: Excerpt from the book *Kärleksgraven: baltiska resor* [The tomb of love: Baltic journeys] by Peter Handberg, Stockholm, 2008.



by **Peter Handberg**

# SHO TOWN TO

**T**he Daugava River is a mythical place in Latvian folk legend, perhaps because its dark, broad current cuts the country in two. "The wind blows the sea into Daugava", writes the poet Imants Ziedonis; a breath of the "big, wide world" can be felt even in remote, inland backwaters. On *Ligo*, Midsummer Night, sailors set fire to worn-out dories and push them onto the black river like burning rafts.

Roughly in the middle of the country, the Daugava takes one of its sudden doglegs. Here, a community





Illustration: Moa Thelander

# SHOOTING A TO DEATH

was built at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century around a ferry station and a stage. It quickly grew into a small town, Gostiņi – or Glasmakken, Dankere, or Trentelberg, as it was called in several other languages. It was a small place, a shtetl, for Gostiņi is one of three Latvian towns where the majority of the population in the 1930s was Jewish. In the summer of 1941, that suddenly changed.

So, what happened in Gostiņi? I was looking for answers to that question when I stepped off the bus on a late summer's day and walked the dusty main road

toward the former shtetl. Was there anyone left who could tell me? The man on the bus thought not. "That's all been forgotten a long time ago," he said dismissively. And yet he still launched into a well-practiced apologia about the goodness of the Latvian people. So, perhaps all was not forgotten? When I showed him an old and tattered primer in Hebrew, scribbled with notes in the margin and underlined here and there – purchased at an antique dealer's in Daugavpils, whose large Jewish population, almost fifty percent a hundred years ago, was wiped out in World War II – he joked in a way that is not unusual here: "That boy never got to learn the alphabet. He has been dead and buried for sixty years."

On the surface, Gostiņi has not changed much since the war. One main street lined with simple stone houses, a few shops, a post office, a hairdresser, a café. Low-slung wooden houses along the side streets. This is where the Jews lived. In recent years, many Romani have moved in. Expressionless children's faces peek out from behind curtains. As in many other Latvian towns, there is something ominous in the air, as if the massacre was about to be repeated. Or perhaps I am just imagining things. Things are quiet here, as if we are in the calm after the storm. A middle-aged woman comes along, riding her bike on the dirt road.

She knows nothing about the massacre, she says, but points at a house where one of the older townspeople lives.

Mrs. Inta Trokša was sixteen when the Jews of the town were murdered. She remembers the events well. She has thought about them her entire life. One of the survivors used to live in the house she lives in now, a woman by the name of Visostska Bune who managed to flee to Russia and returned to Riga after the war. She used to visit her hometown, Gostiņi, once in

a while – one of the few of Gostiņi's Jews who could still do so, according to Mrs. Trokša. When she came, Visostska wandered up and down the streets, hesitantly. Stopped in front of each and every house. Made a few strange movements as if she were beckoning someone. And then she went into her "own" house – invited for tea by Mrs. Trokša – and stared unseeingly, eternally, into every nook and cranny of the house; it seemed as if she was trying to grasp a thread of the past she could wind into a ball and take back with her. She sat this way, unspeaking, for as long as an hour. And then she went her way, giving a sad smile to Ms. Trokša, and five years – or ten – would pass before she showed up again. She always came back.

**A few weeks** after Midsummer of 1941, the local authorities ordered the Jews of Gostiņi to gather in the town square. Latvian "self-defense" groups went out and combed every corner of the town looking for "absconders" and evaders. Eventually, they stood there, every man, woman and child, guarded by the quasi-civil defense troops organized voluntarily by Latvians, without intervention by the German Army. As Mrs. Trokša remembers it, there was never a German presence in Gostiņi during the war. "I never saw a German uniform here."

The man who began to speak before the assembled Jewish congregation was not unknown to them, although really, everybody knew almost everybody else in this town. His name was Peteris Reinfelds and he was the principal of the town school and commander of the self-defense group. Oddly enough, he had begun his professional career in 1926 as a teacher at the Jewish school in Gostiņi. Now he stood before many of his former pupils and their parents and children, speaking in the same pedantic tone of voice he had once learned at the institute. He promised them work, but actually, this was the first step of the planned mass murder.

And so he could not resist conveying to them his political convictions: "The Jews have acted against the Latvian people," he said, "and they are to blame for the deportations of Latvians during the Soviet occupation. Now they must be punished. But as you can surely understand, it is a lenient punishment."

"Jewish guilt" was, however, one of the usual arguments which had no basis in fact. A review of Soviet deportation lists from Latvia will show, as previously pointed out, that compared to Latvians, a higher percentage of deportees were Jewish. And in this special case, one can add that no one at all – Jewish or Latvian – had been deported from Gostiņi. For good and ill, the town had ended up off the beaten track.

**Thus far in** our conversation, Mrs. Trokša's neighbors agreed. They also lived in formerly Jewish homes. Once upon a time, Jews lived in every house on Lika Street. Just across the street in the low, brown wooden house lived a family who ran a butcher's shop in the rude, tacked-on shed. The Silbermanns (some of them must surely have survived?) lived a little further down the street, and then there were the Stauffersteigs, who had two children, such beautiful children.

After the war, a dark brown-black house down the street was occupied by one of the perpetrators,

a man who remarkably enough seems to have escaped punishment, or at least to have served no more than a brief sentence. Many of the criminals were sentenced to death after the end of the war. This man, by the name of Ogrins, lived in his victims' house until 1992, when he died of a heart attack. Often – especially when he was drunk, and he was frequently in that state – he would wax loquacious and start gabbing about the old days. People asked him how he could have participated in such a heinous massacre. How could he do something like that? He waved it all away in his slurred, drunken voice: “It was nothing. It was easy. Just pull the trigger.”

Ms. Trokša tells about another one of the perpetrators who had tried to rape her after a school dance before the war. He was a real thug who liked to play with guns in his youth. Later, he was able to use them against living people. Then she tells me about a Latvian exile who returned to Gostiņi a few years ago and anxiously wandered through the town without speaking to a living soul or even making his presence known. But she recognized him. He was one of those who had herded away the Jews, weapon in hand. The stories come one after the other. Lika Street echoes with the names of the quick and the dead, shards of history. I try to put them in some kind of order, but the names slip away from my pen.

**After the school** principal's solemn speech, the Jews were confined in the town synagogue and a nearby, cordoned-off ghetto. An eighteen-year-old girl, Ms. Trokša tells me, managed to slip out of the synagogue on the first day to buy a loaf of bread; perhaps she did not realize the danger. She was shot to death on the street by one of the civil defense men.

The neighbors' son and his girlfriend have now joined the discussion on Lika Street. They show me around the town. The place down by the river where the ghetto lay for one hot summer month. The water flows rapidly here; on the other side, the shore looks like a wavering mirage in the afternoon light. But there was no chance of escape. The ghetto was surrounded by barbed wire and watched by several armed guards.

We drive out to the Jewish cemetery in Gostiņi. And to the Kakisi forest ten kilometers away, where the massacre happened. Mrs. Trokša has never forgotten the day the Jews of Gostiņi walked away for the last

time. The first columns moved out at five-thirty in the morning on the 31<sup>st</sup> of July. The people who were too old and sick to walk were transported in trucks. She was up early, as usual, to milk the cows. The rest of the town slept.

Everything was quiet. Here and there, a faint clattering, shuffling footsteps. The occasional, shouted command. She also believed the deportation meant a work transfer, not death.

An old woman on a farm near the site of the massacre is deaf and cannot hear my questions. A dog barks angrily at her feet, but her son says she cannot hear that either. But he has not forgotten her stories. And now she reads his lips as he recounts them and nods heavily, melancholy in her eyes. “The shooting that day in July,” she says suddenly, “went on from early in the morning until late at night. We who lived nearby, we hid in our houses. It was dreadful. Later, people from the district were forced to fill the mass graves and remove any trace of what had happened.”

Meyer Meler at the Jewish Museum of Riga confirms in most respects the depictions as they were related to me in Gostiņi. The museum also serves as a documentary center for the history of Latvian Jews in Latvia, and specifically with regard to Gostiņi, he is able to flesh out the events with several frightening details. There are eyewitness accounts as well as transcripts of interrogations of the perpetrators. Principal Reinfelds was sentenced to death, but still had enough time to write his autobiography in prison, in which he describes the screams and wailing and “distorted faces” of the victims in detail. He personally held one of the executioners' weapons, even though as the commander he was hardly obliged to do so. Meler also tells me about two Jewish brothers who managed to escape. One was captured and killed, but the other remained in hiding for the rest of the war and survived.

**Viktor Arajs and** his thirty-man strong band of murderers arrived at the Kakisi forest that morning in their blue bus. The rounded-up Jews and the civil defense troops from Gostiņi were already there.

After half a day of shooting, Arajs's men were tired and handed their weapons to the local militia, including Ogrins, who resumed the slaughter. The victims were not only Jews from Gostiņi. Columns of prisoners had also been sent from the cities of Krustpils and Plavinas to this lonely place in the woods, where a lone owl is now desolately hooting. The front line of shooters knelt and aimed for the heart. Behind them, another line stood and aimed for the head, Principal Reinfelds related under interrogation. When one row of people had been mowed down, the next row was lined up at the brink of the mass grave. Excavations in the 1950s have shown that almost 2,000 people were shot to death here. Judging by the bits of clothing found, some of the victims were from Western European countries.

Other documents show that the German Wehrmacht did not issue orders for Latvian self-defense units to be established in Gostiņi until September 1941. By that time, de facto self-defense units had existed since June of the same year! The massacre in Kakisi was organized by the Latvian police authority in Krustpils, which had been in contact with the Arajs Kommando long before then. The confiscation of all Jewish property in Gostiņi was locally organized and the property locally sold. In October, a German Feldwebel reported on the situation in Gostiņi: “They shot all the Jews so they could steal their assets.”

**Meyer Meler is** cautious when he talks about decision paths in the mass murder. It has often been difficult to establish the chain of command and assign culpability in the massacres. There are no written documents, he emphasizes. Nor does the Latvian-American historian Andrew Ezergailis discuss the issue in any detail in his comprehensive study of the Latvian Holocaust. Nevertheless, I cannot help wondering about the extent to which the Latvian administration was complicit in providing information about technical census questions, requisitioning of vehicles, using police authority, and so on, especially before the German bureaucracy took control of the country. A killing shot is more than a killing shot: many decisions are made along the way and many minute steps taken, as the historian Raul Hilberg once wrote.

Dusk had begun to fall before I left Gostiņi. I would have liked to ask a few questions, but I ended up mired deep in the memories of people, the memories they carried with them always and which they now shared, as if to unburden themselves.

They also shared their food with me, their mundane concerns, and their worries about the future. Gostiņi was no longer a town. It has been incorporated as a deprived district of Plavinas where unemployment is high and the economy stagnant. When they shot the Jews, they also shot the town to death. Life had become still and desolate, even compared to the Soviet era. Nothing happened here. Not even the main road passes through Gostiņi anymore – it has been diverted a few miles outside the community. The big event of the summer had been a few Swedish Vikings skinny-dipping in the river.

One last time, they wanted to show me the mighty Daugava. Three of the four Latvian provinces meet here where the river bends: Courland, Latgallia, Semigallia. Many people have stood here over the course of centuries and dreamed their way to far-flung parts. Once there was a stage here along with an inn; later, there was the ghetto. Now, there is nothing but rusty scrap and rubble scattered in the knee-high grass. The horizon glows, shimmering phosphorus white; the soft, glittering water seems to be flowing straight into outer space. The riverbanks are heavy and dark, eternal colossi of sorts that the water flows mutely, almost respectfully, past. An aged hand picks a brilliant yellow chanterelle and holds it aloft. “This”, says Ms. Trokša cheerfully, “is what we call a Jew mushroom in Gostiņi. It was the only mushroom the Jews ate.” ✕

Note: Excerpt from the book *Kārleksgraven: baltiska resor*. [The tomb of love: Baltic journeys] by Peter Handberg, Stockholm, 2008.

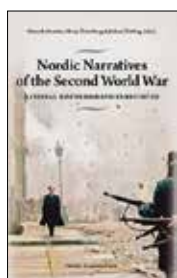




## Continuation war or war of revenge? Guilt and morality

Henrik Stenius, Mirja Österberg, and Johan Östling (eds.)  
**Nordic Narratives of the Second World War: National Historiographies Revisited**

Lund 2011:  
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173 pages



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In a binational master's course that I taught with a colleague in Venice last year, one of the Swedish students wrote in the draft of her seminar paper that "in Sweden the shame of our Nazi past" makes the treatment of stereotypes and historical myths a sensitive topic. I was, to put it mildly, surprised. How could an intelligent student who had successfully completed her Swedish schooling with a high school diploma and a bachelor's degree possess such a conception of history? Evidently, the ready assumption of collective responsibility for a National Socialist history and the assumption of National Socialist guilt was the result of a politics of historiography practiced in the previous decade and a half. To avoid any possible confusion among her Italian classmates (and to counteract that of the Swedish students), in my discussion of the paper I pointed out that fascism never got beyond outsider status in Swedish society and politics.

THE ANTHOLOGY EDITED by Henrik Stenius, Mirja Österberg, and Johan Östling, *Nordic Narratives of the Second World War: National Historiographies Revisited*, is about getting rid of the idealized picture of the time of the Second World War as it became accepted in postwar Europe. Central protagonists of the prevailing point of view were the resistance as spearhead of the general will of the people, and their governments, who were doing what they could, more or less skillfully, with the limited elbowroom that existed. After 1989, a discourse began that called for self-criticism and questioned the moral integrity of this way of looking at things, at least in Western Europe. The change in perspective was long overdue. Yet, as the example of the Swedish student shows, and as the volume under discussion here at various points suggests, the baby was frequently thrown out with the bathwater.

Guilt is "in" – and is easy to come by for those born after the Nazi era. At the same time, confessing guilt and preaching a higher morality seems to make many things attainable: in Sweden since the mid-1990s, Prime Minister Göran Persson has demonstrated how initiating Holocaust propaganda and a project to investigate the involvement of his own country in National Socialism could furnish a power politician who was not very popular domestically

with the moral capital of a "good person", and in foreign policy raise him to the rank of a statesman of international stature. The chapter on Sweden does not look closely at the political metabolism of the new morality and therefore expresses surprise that Persson, at a later date and under different political conditions, suddenly intoned once again the traditional Song of Songs of Swedish neutrality during the Second World War. Another example of how this asynchronous and to a great extent painless "self-criticism" can be utilized is Danish prime minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen. Currently the General Secretary of NATO, he secured legitimacy for his militaristic foreign policy at the side of the United States in Iraq in 2004 with a verbal frontal attack on Danish maneuvering in the Second World War. In his chapter on Denmark, Uffe Østergård interprets this as a "populist turnabout" and overlooks the fact that the generalized narrative of resistance of the postwar era at that time was itself pure populism. What he might have accomplished would have been a historicization of populist perspectives on the Second World War. Instead, he – the only author in the volume under discussion who is caught up in the traditional version of history – repeats the well-worn patriotic narrative of history. The statement that the rescue of the Danish Jews could be attributed both to the people's will to resist and to the government's collaboration policy is followed by the explanation, "The policy of accommodation made it possible to delay the German action to such an extent that the will to resist in Denmark as well as the rest of Europe had increased" – which is a circular argument. Nor is Østergård's failure to provide an independent analysis compensated for by his quoting Rasmussen and the Danish historian Hans Kirchhoff, each over several pages. Instead of an unformed overview and platitudes of the type wherein "some Danish self-praise is justified", one would have expected from the former director of the Copenhagen Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies a thoughtful approach and clarification of his own role in his country's politics of history, a role that still needs to be reappraised.

As is so often the case in anthologies, articles of varying quality appear side by side; the central theme set by the editors is addressed in different ways. Even



Illustration: Katrin Stenmark

more than the title of the volume, the editors' introductory essay focuses on the paradigm change in the national narrative about the Second World War after 1989. The "moral turnabout" in the way the Second World War is viewed and the focus on the Holocaust after the end of the Cold War is interpreted as an "Americentric" point of view with limited shelf life. At the same time, the editors' relief at the rebuke of the traditional patriotic interpretation of the Second World War seems to be so great that the current narratives about the political and moral lapses of that time are scarcely subjected to any further critical questioning. On the contrary, characterizing this "turnabout" as universalist and democratic, they make it appear, to be more than a simple antithesis of postwar historiography. The challenge would seem to lie in looking at current trends in writing about and interpreting the history of the Second World War critically, without falling back, like Østergård, into an apologia of the outmoded history myths of the postwar era.

HENRIK MEINANDER'S chapter on Finland is instructive in this regard. In his essay, which examines the complexity of the

## Continued. Continuation war or war of revenge?

Finnish political-historiographical situation, the topics of a Finnish military campaign, separate from the German war, of Finland as driftwood propelled by events determined by the major powers, and of Finland as a skillfully guided rowboat, are discussed with scientific detachment. It is noteworthy that in Finland there are nationalistic and anti-Soviet parallels to post-1989 Baltic and Eastern European discourses (and also corresponding parallels in the way experiences were interpreted nationally during the Second World War). However, in the past decade in particular Finnish historians have taken a closer look at their country's connections to the Third Reich – a development that Meinander misses in other Eastern European countries. The problem that he sees in current Finnish historiography is that it is in danger of exhausting itself in disparate microstudies that lose sight of the Second World War in its totality. This might suggest that the fashionable American-Western European fixation on the Holocaust could signify a similar limitation. In this respect, Meinander talks about universalism only indirectly, as something that is absent. In fact, he sees the necessary deconstruction of the national history narrative of the Second World War leading to disconnected academic fragments of history. Certainly, this conclusion might also have its origin in the fact that the coming generation of Finnish historians has not yet been radical enough in its actions: in the past 70 years, representatives of every scientific and political hue were able to use (and also apply internationally) the illusory concept “continuation war” for the Finnish-Soviet confrontation in the years 1941–1944 without being offered or asking for alternative terms. Now that the separate-war thesis has been scientifically discarded, the Finnish fraternity of historians faces its second great challenge: the replacement of the chauvinistic and excusatory term “continuation war” (in which, if we look at it closely, the separate-war thesis is preserved) with the more appropriate term “revenge war”. Not until it frees its national vocabulary from its grand delusion can Finnish historiography completely regain its integrity.

AS GUÐMUNDUR HÁLFÐANARSON shows in his chapter, “The Beloved War”, Iceland, which was occupied by the Allies for strategic reasons, was a special case that profited economically and politically from the Second World War. Icelandic historiography on the war is nevertheless limited, as the war's role as promoter of the country's independence does not fit into the national self-image. Equally interesting is Synne Correll's essay on the completely different case of Norway: despite a series of controversies about the Second World War in the 1980s and '90s, he diagnoses a national conception of history that continues to hold sway today. It would have been desirable to continue the study into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but unfortunately, this has not come to pass.

Finally, the case of Sweden is analyzed in Johan Östling's essay on the rise and fall of the interpretative framework “small-state realism”. This is a term borrowed from the field of international relations, a term of insightful suggestiveness, one that could have been

used in reference to the other Nordic countries, in which case – depending on the country's geopolitical situation – it would have meant something different. Typical for Sweden is the smooth transition from small-state realism to “small-state idealism”, an eventuality that derives from its peripheral geopolitical situation and the neutrality it ultimately maintained. The moral turn-about in Swedish historiography about the Second World War in the 1990s was important and necessary, yet, it seems to me, less hegemonic and at the same time more problematic than is made clear in Östling's perspective.

THE FINAL CHAPTER of the volume, “Nordic Foundation Myths after 1945: A European Context”, was written by Bo Stråth. In it, “European” is understood exclusively as Western European: Germany in particular, but also France and Italy, are cited as typical examples. It remains questionable to what extent the German metaphor for 1945, “Zero Hour”, can be applied to other countries and other times (namely 1989). The merit of the essay, however, lies in the fact that it steers the reader's attention away from historical discontinuities and toward longer-lasting, uninterrupted intellectual processes. In doing so, Stråth transforms Germany from a country frequently designated as a special case whose path was determined by various political, social, and economic factors to a model that “stands for an alternative view to those who discern sharp divides and interruptions of historical flows in 1945 or around 1990”. To this extent, Stråth shows that the assertion of a “zero hour” is misleading, even for Germany.

All in all, *Nordic Narratives of the Second World War* offers an important introduction to the relevant historical narratives in the Nordic countries. It will surely stimulate much discussion. ✕

**norbert götz**

## Consumer and producer Different legacies in No

Cooperatives for consumers and producers belong to a category of ideas devised by educated and traveled middle-class reformers and intended for the poor. Enlightened social reformers played a significant role in the social history of the period from 1880 to the Second World War, advocating hygiene, education, temperance, and better housing for the poor.

Liberal notions of self-help have sometimes been considered as part of the middle class education of the “masses”, and thus top-down. They have been contrasted with socialist emancipation from a grassroots level. This top-down vs. bottom-up template is overly simplified.

Cooperatives today have lost their luster in commercial competition, and so we tend to forget the immense significance cooperative ideas had a hundred years ago. They were not only tools for self-help and for adapting family farms to the market economy, as in the Nordic countries. In the large empires of the houses of Romanov and Habsburg, they also served as instruments of national independence, ethnic conflict, and even explicit anti-Semitism (as Jews were often middlemen). In the contentious atmosphere of interwar Central Europe, cooperatives were promoted as the third way between capitalist and socialist economy. Even today, cooperation draws some interest as an alternative economic model when few alternatives exist.

IN THE LAST DECADE, a number of anthologies have been rediscovering this phenomenon, particularly in East-Central Europe. (See titles below.) These tend to be exploratory parallel case studies conveying the importance and some common features of cooperatives, but lacking a common theoretical framework and hence falling short of systematic comparison. The present anthology by Mary Hilson, Pirjo Markkola, and Ann-Catrin Östman fits well into this picture.

The collection focuses on Northern and Eastern European cases, and interestingly, it brings together both consumer and producer cooperatives. Since consumer cooperatives often catered to the working class, whereas producer cooperatives gathered farmers, the joint treatment also highlights relationships between worker and peasant organizations at an important

**Mary Hilson, Pirjo Markkola and Ann-Catrin Östman (eds.)**  
**Co-operatives and the Social Question: The Co-operative Movement in Northern and Eastern Europe (1880–1950)**

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Welsh Academic Press  
226 pages





## er cooperatives. rthern and Eastern Europe

juncture. Efforts to join consumer and producer cooperatives in common central organizations were made regularly, and proved difficult. Working-class organizations were normally parts of socialist or social democratic networks, whereas the farmers' dairy, meat, and grain cooperatives were closely linked to the peasant parties. The common cooperative organizations had to concentrate on economic and technical issues and leave holistic, ideological, and to some extent educational agendas behind if cooperation was to be smooth. Often this did not succeed. Still, a difference appears: in the Nordic countries, peasants and workers made compromises even if they were difficult to reach and sometimes short-lived, whereas in East-Central Europe, such compromises did not work.

**KATARINA FRIBERG**, in her chapter on the union of Swedish cooperatives *Kooperativa Förbundet*, is the only one to actually define "the social question" referred to in the book's title as pauperism, unemployment, drunkenness, poor health, housing, and women's rights. She remarks that the social question in Sweden moved from rural to industrial areas during the nineteenth century. The shift also meant that the cooperative retail movement was more oriented towards different shades of socialism, both reformist and revolutionary, than the earlier mixed-class cooperation had been. Working-class orientation did not preclude ideas about a new society organized along cooperative lines, a Cooperative Republic, finally solving the conflict between capital and labor. This vision, built on a holistic understanding and using the cooperatives as a means toward the solution of the social question, did not prevail, however. In Sweden, pragmatic organizers took over. Friberg explains the turn towards pragmatism in organizational terms: the central union consisted of representatives of cooperative societies, not social reformers. Thus economic and practical problems, the interests of members, were at the focus of the organization.

Pellervo in Finland on the other hand was an organization for spreading cooperative ideas and visions, not a central federation. It was created by the conservative Hannes Gebhard, who tried to win over prominent men in society for his organization. He explicitly rejected the Danish tradition of grassroots organization, allegedly because the Finnish peasantry had not reached the level of education of the Danes. Pellervo had an ambiguous relationship to the consumer cooperation organized among industrial workers, associated with the social democratic labor movement. Still, the contacts became close, as Mary Hilson explains in personal terms: Gebhard's wife was working with the Women's Cooperative Guild, which promoted consumer cooperatives. It was a difficult collaboration due to the ideological differences between agrarians and social democrats in a society heading towards civil war. During the war, the alliance broke up, but, interestingly, the depression of 1929–1932 brought reconciliation between the consumer and producer cooperatives, encouraged by other Nordic cooperative organizations. The ability of agrarian and labor

organizations to cooperate made for political stability in the economic crisis, writes Mary Hilson. In Finland, such cooperation was far from easy. The extreme right-wing Lapua movement had gained public support and was increasingly using violent methods in the crisis. When agrarian members of parliament officially took a stance against these methods, the influence of the movement started to decrease. Thus, against heavy odds, the cooperative movement was part of a political turn in Finland towards the Nordic model.

The ability to make compromises and oppose undemocratic methods stood in contrast to the other new republics of East-Central Europe where violent movements increased in the 1930s. Hungarian intellectuals advocated a Finnish-style development, along with its cooperative model, as an example for Hungary, writes Katalin Miklossy. In East-Central Europe, however, the agrarian movements explicitly acted as a bulwark against socialism, and the intellectuals' ideas did not catch on. This may have been due to the weakness of the working class relative to the peasantry, to the vicinity of Soviet communism making socialist tendencies seem more dangerous, or simply to a more conflict-ridden social environment. The inability to reach difficult compromises was even more evident on the political level (with the exception of Czechoslovakia, which is not included in this anthology). In addition, as Johan Eellend and Piotr Wawrzeniuk show, nationalism was a more important issue for the cooperatives in Estonia and Galicia than it was in Finland.

**IT THUS SEEMS** as if the relationship between consumer and producer cooperatives, as worker and peasant organizations, constituted a crucial difference between Northern and Eastern Europe. The ability to find compromises between workers and farmers was at the core of the Nordic model of equality, democracy and stability, and the cooperative movement, extremely strong among the farmers and strong enough among consumers, actively contributed to it. The consumer cooperatives are less prominent in the chapters about East-Central Europe, where agrarians were vehemently opposed to all kinds of socialism. This difference between Northern and Eastern Europe seems

more significant than the top-down-versus-bottom-up model, which fits neither the Estonian nor the Swedish case very well.

**THE ARTICLES ARE** interesting and reveal a little-known landscape. The general attempt to look at the entire cooperative spectrum is particularly worthwhile. The anthology also includes a gender perspective, and raises important questions about morality and economics. The lack of a common core shows in the introductory chapter, which is rather confusing and contains a great many disparate themes. In this respect, it mirrors the development of cooperatives, which in their most popular period functioned as receptacles for all kinds of ideas, but it does not really orient the reader. The combination of consumer and producer cooperatives in one volume should inspire deeper studies. The comparison between Northern and Eastern Europe is difficult to make, but the Finnish experience works as a neat bridge, combining historical legacies from both regions. ✕

**anu mai köll**

Reading recommended by Anu Mai Köll:

Torsten Lorenz (ed.), *Cooperatives in Ethnic Conflicts: Eastern Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century* [sic], Berlin 2006: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag.

Dietmar Müller & Angela Harre (eds.), *Transforming Rural Societies: Agrarian Property and Agrarianism in East Central Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Jahrbuch für Geschichte des ländlichen Raumes, Innsbruck 2010: Studienverlag.

Helga Schultz & Angela Harre (eds.), *Bauerngesellschaften auf dem Weg in die Moderne: Agrarismus in Ostmitteleuropa 1880 bis 1960*, Wiesbaden 2010: Harrassowitz.

Piotr Wawrzeniuk (ed.), *Societal Change and Ideological Formation among the Rural Population of the Baltic Area 1880—1939*, Studia Baltica II:2, Huddinge 2008: Södertörn University.

Anthony Webster et al. (eds.), *The Hidden Alternative: Co-operative Values, Past, Present, Future*, Tokyo 2012: United Nations University Press.



**Anu Mai Köll**

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# GRASSROOTS MOBILIZATIONS DO OCCUR IN POST-SOCIALIST CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society in post-socialist countries, understood as the part of society that consists of organizations and individuals in the public space between the state and the family, has been described for two decades now as weak and incapable of mobilizing ordinary citizens. Several scientific studies have documented its development since the collapse of the socialist system, and usually depict it either as something artificially created with the help of models and economic support imported from abroad, or as collective activity mostly limited to the familiar sphere of close friends and family. These weaknesses are often explained with reference to the socialist past, when the experience of organizing was associated with instructions and restrictions imposed from above.

However, the picture these studies paint is not quite complete. First, the vast majority of these studies concentrate on very formal organizations (read: non-governmental organizations), and miss the more informal (or not yet formalized) kind of collective activity. Second, models imported from studies in the Western democracies are often applied to the post-socialist societies, where they fail to capture the particularities of the post-socialist or national context. There is, for example, a tendency to assess the state of civil society by such indicators as membership-based organizations or the number of protest events. These tools are too blunt for the purpose, and miss important nuances of the activism that prevails in post-socialist settings.

IN MAY 2013, an international conference was held at Södertörn University and CBEES on the topic of urban grassroots activism in Central and Eastern Europe. Interest in the conference among international scholars and activists was great, and the participants' contributions documented the widespread forms of activism in post-socialist spaces. The examples from countries such as Poland, Ukraine, Serbia, Croatia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Lithuania all show the vibrant activity among self-organized citizens in these countries – activity that is not always

formal, and not dependent on the support of foreign organizational models or financing.

Poland is an interesting case, as its civil society is considered weak despite grand achievements with the emergence and successes of the Solidarity movement in overthrowing the socialist system at the end of the 1980s. Polish civil society is described in the literature as initially having had a boom in citizens' activities after the collapse of the old system, then taking an increasingly passive role up until today. I would like to argue that the description as "passive" does not reflect the full picture of what is going on in the field of collective action among the citizens of Poland, and especially among those organizing on housing, land use planning, and tenants' issues. Since the early 2000s, a number of local mobilizations have been created and been active in the field, becoming a source of inspiration to others, but also a source of opposition to land use practices, housing policies and urban planning in several Polish cities. Most activists start their activity with reference to the immediate locality in which their issues arise, such as their place of residence, and gradually extend their aims from the initial scope of their apartment, the building and the street they live in, or the square they visit daily, to influence housing and land use policy at the local and national levels, and issues of social justice and human rights in their country of residence. What makes such movements even more interesting to study is the grassroots character of their activity, which would not be expected to be prevalent in the context of a weak and passive post-socialist civil society.

In the case of the Polish tenants' movement, the sparks of collective mobilization are often to be found in the difficult situations of low-income households living in municipal or re-privatized housing. There are several acute problems in the field of housing in Poland, of which housing shortages and substandard conditions are the most severe. The privatization and insufficient new construction of municipal housing, combined with an aging population and



Illustration: Ragni Svensson

increasing socioeconomic polarization, add fuel to the problems of tenants in Poland. At the same time, the tough housing situation, the tenants' socioeconomic position, and their lack of resources for action are further reasons why tenants' mobilizations might not be expected to occur in Poland. But they do. The first organization dealing with tenants' issues was founded in 1989, and today there are about 40 such organizations in the country. The Polish tenants' movement is still quite small, partly due to the country's structure of low political opportunity, and partly due to the dominant negative discourse on tenants as "bums", "lazy", "pathological", and "to blame for their own situation". For these obvious reasons, tenants' activity in the field is limited to smaller groups. However, the tenants' movement in Poland has had some considerable successes during the past five years, and has been able, since the foundation of the first formal organization in 1989, not only to endure, but to broaden its activities. Other examples of the activity of the tenants' movement come from Warsaw, where tenants' or-

ganizations have initiated dialogue with city authorities and in 2012 established the "Tenants' Round Tables", a series of meetings where tenants can influence the city's decision-making processes on housing policy. Another example is to be found in Cracow, where the struggle for tenants' influence in decision-making resulted in the Housing Round Table organized in 2011 by the city council.

**TENANTS' GROUPS** in various Polish cities have also succeeded in forming short and long-term alliances with influential actors not only in the field of housing and urban planning, but also with other groups with similar ideological positions. Cooperation between some of these groups has resulted in pressure on local governments that has been difficult to ignore, and also in a widening of some of the movements' demands. The most recent success on the part of tenants in Poznań was the extraordinary support that a group of tenants of a re-privatized tenement house received from the city in a conflict with the new owners. The successful defense of tenants' rights in this case was a result of



recurrent media coverage, ranging over a year, and of support from other tenants, anarchists, squatters, and various other groups and organizations all over Poland.

Reaching out to government and working together with politicians has also become a strategy for some tenants' organizations, and indicates a re-framing of tenants' issues into broader demands. Some tenants' organizations work closely with political parties, although such initiatives are still quite rare in Poland. In April 2013, a bill to amend the law protecting the rights of tenants was presented during a press conference by a tenants' organization together with two members of the Polish parliament. Such collaboration attracts media attention and gives weaker partners access to some political and symbolic resources. These kinds of initiatives have changed the character of the tenants' movement by re-articulating and broadening both the means and the goals of tenant activism.

**IN A DIFFICULT POLITICAL** climate, and in a society in which trust is low and organizational activity is associated with compulsion, collective action may seem an intricate undertaking. The case of the Polish tenants' movement contradicts the conventional view of post-socialist societies as passive and dominated by socialist legacies. Despite the difficult climate, these types of activities have endured and broadened their scope. Neither the lack of resources nor the negative and stereotypical representations of tenants, which obstruct the mobilization of large numbers of active members, have discouraged or deterred the activists. The struggle continues. ✕

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## about baltic worlds

**BALTIC WORLDS** is published by Södertörn University, and contributes to the dissemination of knowledge about the geographic area of the Baltic region, Eastern Europe and Russia — the countries, history, cultures, and social development of the area. The journal is read by subscribers in approximately fifty countries. Baltic Worlds contains peer-reviewed articles as well as other types of text, including even poetry. Baltic Worlds is Open Access on the web. The journal's website has a special Election Coverage section.

## Design institute VNIITE closes its doors

**V**NIITE, once the world's largest institute of design research, ceased to exist on June 14, 2013. The event passed entirely without notice by the international press, so it would be reasonable to ask why anyone should care about it now. The answer is simple: the reason for this lack of reaction is that design from the Soviet Union is virtually unknown in the outside world and even in Russia itself.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, Russia's manufacturing industries have lurched from one crisis to another. Demand for domestic goods has declined despite trade barriers on imports. A BMW is the obvious choice over a Lada any day, and after decades of problems with the Lada – continuous engine breakdowns, no warranties, and no spare parts – this choice is not difficult to understand. Dmitry Azrikan, VNIITE's erstwhile star designer who emigrated to Chicago in 1992, says, "It's a wonder that they've managed to maintain the life support for twenty years."

Russia's problems are enormous; it is hard to know where to begin when describing them. The country is home to more than four hundred "monotowns" dependent on a single industry, many of which began as work camps that became permanent over time. The cement and aluminum plant in Pikalevo, outside St. Petersburg, was shut down in 2008, leaving an entire town unemployed. When the town's heating and water were shut off, the protesters were criminalized. How are we to understand what is happening in a design perspective?

**THE FIRST STEP** is to shift our focus. *Design* is not about just any goods, but rather goods manufactured from a user's point of view. VNIITE, the institute for engineering aesthetics – as "design" was referred to behind the Iron Curtain – wanted to produce goods that satisfied the basic needs of *all* people. Designed utilitarian goods were to be considered a measure of the population's well being. The USSR had an unparalleled system for realizing that aim: the centrally planned economy.

The Russian acronym VNIITE means, in translation, the All-Union Research Institute of Technical Aesthetics. It was conceived as a marriage of engineering and aesthetics. Intellectual abilities and sensitivity were to be respected rather than viewed as problems. The sensitivity of a person's fingertips and the sense of smell – everything was to be developed in harmony with the efficiency of machines. In other words: in the man-machine constellation, the value of man was becoming greater.

VNIITE made prototypes that were user-friendly not only to the perfect human being, but also to the imperfect. This was genuine design! Products would be designed not just for the superhumanly strong technology nerd, but also for the old geezer with painfully arthritic hands. Given the well-deserved poor reputation of the USSR, it would seem next to impossible for something like VNIITE to have existed in such a technocratic state – a dictators' dictatorship – since both dictatorships and technocracies are characterized by total indifference to human suffering.

VNIITE's message was therefore a huge thing in a country with an archipelago of factories with locked doors keeping in their cheap labor, with their millions of disenfranchised Ivan Denisoviches surrounded by barbed wire and barking dogs. The meaning of all this hard labor could also be questioned. What was manufactured and why? What could be the point of manufacturing a mountain of ugly, clumsy shoes – and those only for left feet! Those who questioned

were punished; those who remained silent and compliant were favored.

Against this background, the fact that an institution was set up in the center of power to investigate the "other side" is something of a miracle. Of course, it was also the only one of its kind. I certainly do not know of anything like it, standing on the side of "the little guy" in the midst of this dictatorship of technocracy where technical solutions were the answer to everything and the human factor was seen mainly as a problem.

Remarkably, VNIITE was funded by the government. Granted, in return it was expected to modernize the country's industrial machinery, to bring its tractors, radios, and machine tools up to a presentable level, and to organize respectable trade shows demonstrating products sufficiently up-to-date not to be ridiculed at international exhibitions. However, in addition to the plagiarism, industrial espionage, and superficially fashionable styling that characterized much of Soviet-Russian industrial art, VNIITE did much more. It produced a slew of amusing and intriguing prototypes: the small and environmentally sound car known as "the Ant" (*Muravei*); a well-designed recycling system for the 180,000 inhabitants of the Moldavian city of Beltsy; a smart bread-distribution system in Minsk; and much more. These projects were ahead of their time even by Western standards.

VNIITE's model was the aeronautics industry: not one kilo extra and no unnecessary junk. This industry created useful products within the framework of a centrally planned economy. However, the proposed innovations required fundamental changes, for which there was not enough political will until perestroika.

**WHEN GORBACHEV** launched his reforms, the "pre-perestroika" of the 1960s was the model. In the 1960s, extensive reforms had been introduced to an economy that had hitherto been carefully planned. VNIITE was a part of those reforms.

VNIITE's founding director, Yuri Soloviev, was highly qualified as the designer of the ingenious third-class rail car currently used on Russian railways. After serving as director of VNIITE from 1962 to 1988, he became a member of the Congress of the People's Deputies, occupying the chair beside the civil rights fighter Sakharov. He was also involved in the enormous design center planned for the Arbat quarter in the center of Moscow, and he and Boris Yeltsin shook hands on the deal.

I made a phone call to Yuri Borisovich in Moscow to ask for a comment. "Unfortunately our country has no industry to speak of," he said. "We have no project orders. Management has no insight into the most fundamental issues. That is all I have to say." ❌

margareta tillberg



VNIITE prototype of a taxi of the future. VNIITE 1964.