The Sami—telling their own story
Special section: Bakhtinian Theory
The postcolonial & postsocialist perspective

Sweden’s indigenous people, the Sami:
Telling their own story

also in this issue
Macedonian Art / e-Estonia / Bordering Pomerania / Fatherhood in Russia / Belarus Protests
The culture of opposites

In this issue, we devote a special section to Bakhtinian theory. A culture in which tensions between opposites can be dissolved by laughter, comedy, and the staging of roles, reversing “we” and “them” in order to create chaos, and finally resulting in new order: this is a simple description of the theories of the Russian twentieth-century thinker Mikhail Bakhtin concerning the importance of a dialogue in which the relation between opposing poles creates new meaning, using such means as laughter. In Per-Arne Bodin’s article on the witch trials in Northern Sweden during the sixteenth century, he describes how the culture of opposites can also result in violence: ridicule can transform to brutality. Viktoria Sukovata in her turn investigates the Ukrainian TV comedies, Canned valuation is a way to negotiate, she argues. It is a tool to dissolve the differences between the actors of the shows and the political elite.

It strikes me that Bakhtinian theory can be applied right here and now, in this time of increasing polarization, when antidemocratic forces are dividing Europe and the values that have been borne by Europe has borne since the Enlightenment, and when the antidemocratic forces seek to sow distrust between groups to create antagonism, chaos, fear, and collapse, in order to appear themselves as the speakers of truth, the keepers of order, with the right to single out scapegoats and make decisions that are contrary to, or change, constitutions established democratically.

Dialogue is too often absent — a dialogue that might nurture new perspectives and approaches.

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Sweden’s indigenous people, the Sami, have struggled for years to get more attention. With little result. But now something is happening.

The spectacular success of the Swedish film *Sami Blood* says something about this topic in the Swedish consciousness in 2017. The film portrays an old Sami woman who returns to her Sami village for the funeral of her sister. She is somewhat of an outcast since she left her family some 60 years back when she got sickened by the discrimination against the Sami people. The film lets us travel in time to the painful years when she realizes that being a Sami person means that you are inferior, that you are weighed and measured like an animal, and that your chances of getting an education is almost equal to zero.

The distributor of the film did not really believe in it, saw it as a “problem film” which very few Swedes would pay money to see. Hence it initially opened only at six small cinemas in the country. The distributor believed that the film would be seen by a total of 6,000 people – but after five weeks it had been seen by 20,000 people. How can we explain this success?

It is a cinematic masterpiece and would have won a big audience decades ago? “It is difficult to say, but I guess that a generation needed to pass before people really had the wish to dig into this, it has been too painful for so many,” says Åsa Ossbo. “Those who are victims want to get away from that epithet; by raising the issue they would again be victims. And of course, someone has to describe it in a way that affects us.”

The film has been awarded several international prizes and the director, Amanda Kernell, has been confronted with many questions. One of them has been repeated several times, she told the audience during a panel discussion at the Swedish Film Institute in early May: “They ask me how such a terrible treatment of a people was possible in Sweden, a leading country when it comes to the protection of human rights. It’s a good question.”

At the showing of the film at the Toronto Film Festival, the minister in charge of issues concerning indigenous people was present. Canada has come rather far in this area: the other year the country presented the results of its Truth and Reconciliation Commission. “Several times people have asked me how far we in Sweden have come in our work with such a commission,” said Amanda Kernell. “Well, I have to answer that we have barely started.”

Actually, initial discussions on the possibility to create such a commission are taking place. The Vaarote – Centre for Sami Research at Umeå University is one of the parties involved.

“It has to do with the Swedish self-image,” says Åsa Ossbo, Research Coordinator at the Vaarote – Centre for Sami Research at Umeå University. “Colonialism is nothing that you connect with Sweden. People have a hard time realizing that there are similarities in the treatment of Sami people and the treatment of indigenous people around the world. But things are happening now, Sweden is about to step out of the colonial closet.”

**A colonial past**

The Nordic Museum in Stockholm has a permanent exhibition on Sami history and culture on the fourth floor. At the ticket counter I ask about interest in the exhibition.

“During the tourist season we get many foreign visitors,” the lady tells me. “I have talked with several Australian tourists who are fascinated by the similarities with the history of their own indigenous people.”

In the exhibition I read about mountain tourism, which emerged the 19th century and has done much to shape the rest of the country’s – and the world’s – perceptions of the Sami. When the Swedish Tourist Society was founded in 1885, Lapland was the prime attraction. The Sami, in their colourful clothes, were something different, something exotic.

To some extent this is still the case: in the latest edition of Lonely Planet’s book on Sweden (2015), the whole cover is Sami clothing. “Don’t miss the chance to learn about this unique group of people: spend a night or two in a Sami reindeer camp or take a dog sledding tour,” writes the world famous guide book. But the book also has a section in which it describes the ill treatment of “the only indigenous people in Europe.”

At the Nordic Museum, a quotation from Victoria Harnesk, a former head of the Sami Association in Stockholm, summarizes it boldly: “We Sami suffered not a bloody genocide but a kind of cultural genocide, a soft genocide, carried out by veiled yet efficient means, as the Swedish state deprived us of our lands, waters, language, religion, identity, right of self-determination, and ability to fully pursue our traditional livelihood.”

Apart from the state authorities, the main culprit in this
Images from the Swedish film Sami Blood.

Drama was the Swedish church. And the church has come further than the state in addressing its guilt. In the spring of 2017, it published the final results of five years of work, pinpointing in a white paper the actions that led to so much suffering.

“It’s time to make up with Sweden’s colonial past”, wrote the archbishop Antje Jackelén in an op-ed article in the major Swedish daily Dagens Nyheter. “The church played a major part in the atrocities”.

The church highlights abuses that most Swedes are unaware of. It writes that the church christened the Sami by violent means: one horrifying example is of a man who was burned alive after insisting on addressing his own gods as a last means of trying to awaken his drowned daughter. Furthermore, the church took land from Sami by force, starting in the 17th century and continuing into the 20th century. The church also changed the names of Sami people against their will, giving for example the name “Per” to several members of one family. And the church plundered graves to find skulls and bones that they could measure, and even traded remains with other nations.

The Sami identity today

A large number of people with Sami roots live in Stockholm and now there is a growing demand for Sami speakers who are prepared to give evening lessons. You see such advertisements in the social media, and recently one of the biggest adult education institutions was looking for Sami teachers.

Through Facebook I came into contact with Helena Terstad, a university student in Stockholm writing an essay about how Sami people are presented in marketing. Her grandmother is a part of her identity. Her grandmother has not told her much, but she has become more aware of the fact that the Sami culture is a part of her identity. Her grandmother has not told her much, but she has described how she carried a knife since the metal protected her from the mythological creatures living under the rocks. “I can’t recall that I learned anything about the Sami culture or history at school. It’s a bit strange.”

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Manifesting a Sami identity outside of reindeer husbandry was fairly unusual during the latter part of the 20th century. When conducting research for this article, I bumped into the fact that one of my childhood heroes from the 1970s, the ice hockey player Börje Salming, was a Sami. It was new to me. Salming was one of the first Swedish professional players in the NHL, becoming a legend in the Toronto Maple Leafs. Recently during a trip to Canada I met a dedicated Toronto fan my age and asked if she knew about his indigenous background. It came as a total surprise to her – so this was definitely nothing that Salming marketed as a part of his public identity.

These days the situation has changed, at least within show business. In the last couple of years more young Sami artists have appeared on stage, displaying Sami culture with pride and self-confidence. Jon Henrik Fjellgren has performed a traditional jok at the popular Eurovision qualification festival and Maxiá Márååå has combined her successful music career with a clear political message. But the best example is probably Sofia Jammok, a singer and an activist. Recently Sweden’s public service television ran a 90-minute documentary about her. She expresses views that have rarely been heard before on the national scene: “The survival of Sápmi is everything to me. My home country is not Sweden, it is Sápmi. In Sweden I am still a stranger.”

One of her most popular songs is “We are still here”, alighting to the Sami people in Sweden. During a concert in the northern coastal city of Skellefteå, which is part of Sápmi, she speaks Sami and asks the audience how many understand her. Around ten answer.

The TV team follows her to Minneapolis, where she meets a native American from the Anishinabe people. She is struck by the feeling that she is not alone: “We are so few in Sápmi, but if I count in all these people, there are so many of us!”

Sofia Jammok and other young activists have also inspired older Sami who suddenly feel that their messages are being spread more than before. The artist and Sami activist Tomas Colbengtson can sense a growing interest among galleries in displaying his work: “Art, theater, film, and music – we use it more and more to increase the knowledge of our Sami culture, of our history, of our pain. It has become somewhat of a weapon for us. The young generation is brave in the way that they mix old Sami traditions with modern cultural phenomena, like Sofia Jammok who mixes the jok with techno and jazz.”

Later this year, Tomas Colbengtson is going to Japan for a conference on the rights of the Japanese Ainu people, the Inuits of Greenland and the Sami population. “We have had such cooper-
The time to expose Sweden’s colonial past has come. Is the next step an apology?

**Growing interest in indigenous issues**

The international interest in the Sami history has long been extensive, especially in other countries with indigenous peoples. It is illuminating that the English Wikipedia text about the Sami people is double the length of the corresponding page in Swedish. The “UN Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples” (UNDRIP) of 2007 was a boost for the Swed-Sami population. The UN also has a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which is yet another sign that these issues have gained greater international importance since the turn of the century.

**A Nordic issue**

The Swedish Sami have of course cooperated extensively over the years with the Sami organizations in Norway and Finland (and to a lesser degree with the smallest Sami population, that in Northeastern Russia).

The Norwegian Sami have come a bit further than the Swed-Sami when it comes to fighting for their rights. The Norwegian Sami got their parliament (1989) before the Swedish Sami (1991), and the Sami parliament in Norway has more money and somewhat more power than the one in Sweden. As early as 1990 the Norwegian government ratified the ILO 89 convention on the rights of indigenous peoples, whereas the Swedish government still hasn’t done so – with the argument that a ratification is not compatible with current Swedish law. Furthermore, the Norwegian government recognized the Sami population in its constitution many years ago. This did not happen in Sweden until 2010. As for the Finnish Sami, their rights are guaranteed in the constitution – but in real life, their rights are somewhat less clear than in the Swedish case. Unlike Sami in Sweden, the Finnish Sami have no exclusive rights to reindeer husbandry. A majority of the reindeer herders in Finland are actually non-Sami. And the Finnish Sami parliament is as weak as the Swedish.

The Swedish Sami parliament (Sámegígar) has an electorate of about 8000 individuals, and has currently eight parties represented in the body. The 31 members of the Sami Parliament Plenary Assembly are chosen through general elections every fourth year.

**Parties in the Sami parliament**

The Sami parliament (Sámegígar) has an electorate of about 9000 individuals and has currently eight parties represented in the body. Today, all parties in the Sami parliament are Sami parties. However, the Norwegian Sami parliament could perhaps be a model for the one in Sweden. Today, there are differences between the two countries is dramatic, according to new research from Stockholm University, where the panel also talked about the elections to the Sami parliament, which took place last month. When discussing the role of the parliament, the representative for the party “The Sami” stood up and declared that the Sami parliament is an illusion, it’s just a tool for the government, a way to control us and spread the image that the Sami people have some kind of influence. We only get to deal with some school, language and culture issues. I would rather close it down and establish an institution that gives us real influence.

**Conflicts in Sápmi**

There are not only conflicts between the Sami population and the state, there are internal conflicts as well. According to Nyberg, the conflicts are of different kinds. There are some snowmobiles than are too fast, and it has become more common for skiers to reach the mountains by helicopter, which in turn leads to more noise and growing problems for the reindeer herders. The public radio station recently initiated a project trying to get a picture of the attitudes towards Sami people. The radio station got many answers, some of them scary. Sami people have heard such comments as “Save a wolf, shoot a Sami”. And one listener described how a bus driver told passengers over the loudspeaker that “if I find a reindeer blocking the road I will run over it”. That’s not the way to solve such problems.

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**The Sami parliament is an illusion: it’s just a tool for the government, a way to control us and spread the image that the Sami people have some kind of influence.**

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ended up in the cities on low incomes, longing for a life that was long gone. There are also tensions and diverging interests between reindeer-herding Sami and fishing and hunting Sami, and between North Sami and South Sami.

The state has a very big responsibility for the frictions, during the last century the state decided who was a true Sami, who should keep up reindeer husbandry and who shouldn’t. The state created the divisions by giving rights to the reindeer herd but denying rights to the fishing and hunting Sami. The Sami without reindeer were supposed to become as Swedish as possible, forgetting their roots and their language.

Waiting for an official apology

An illustration that the Sami issue has gained a growing interest is the fact that the Sami organization in Stockholm, with support from the authorities, organized a week of Sami issues in May in connection with the elections to the Sami parliament. Such weeks with Sami themes have occurred several times in other cities, especially in the north, but never before in Stockholm. “We want to show the people in the capital that we have an issue… something that many are unaware of”, said Inge Frisk, the head of the Sami association in Stockholm. One of the events during the week was a discussion on Sami rights in connection with a guest performance by the Giron Sámi Teáhter playing COÜionisatión. The discussion started with a showing of the famous speech by the Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd addressed to the aborigines. His words touched a nation: “This is a blemished chapter in our history… we inflicted wounds, we took children from their communities. To the fathers and the mothers, to the sisters and the brothers, we say: sorry…”

No such apology has been heard in Sweden. The director of the Sami Theater, Åsa Simma, told the audience that she thinks it will happen: “We are not there yet, and this week started the journey in that direction. I learned something from the Canadians, who have come further than we. They have said that “before the healing can happen, the wounds have to be exposed”.

It leads to silence, a silence travelling down the generations. The postcolonial trauma is being inherited. Many of those we have spoken to have felt a relief that someone finally wanted to listen to their stories.

The team also conducted interviews with health officials, getting confirmation of a fact that many are aware of: that mental illness is more widespread in the Sami community and that the number of suicides are higher in this group — especially among men.

In the Northern city of Kiruna, where many inhabitants make their living working in the mine, they heard tragic stories of Sami working underground but in disguise. “The mine took their livelihood away since this was an area where their reindeer used to graze,” says Åsa Simma. “Now they need to work at least part-time, often at night, in the mine to make a living. But they don’t want to talk about it.”

The head of the Girjas Sami village, Matti Irgen, also participated in the discussion before the play: “My defense attorney told me at the beginning of the trial that I should not see this as a political issue, but as a purely judicial issue. But some weeks into the hearings, he turned to me and said: Matti, you were right, this is very political.”

The psychologist Anne Stiviken at a Norwegian national center dealing with health issues collaborated with the ensemble. The center is helping Sami people not only in Norway, but also in Sweden and Finland. “We witness how people have become depressed by the loss of their language, the loss of their identity. Some of them have hesitated to seek care in the ordinary health service, they are afraid of not being understood.”

A dark side effect of their despair is a high rate of alcohol abuse and several cases of sexual assault within the Sami community, an issue that is extremely sensitive.

In the audience of about 80 people, a woman raises her hand during the question-and-answer session, and it is sensitive moment: “My name is Carmen Blanco. I am also a representative of a harassed indigenous people, the Quechua in Peru. I have lived many years in Sweden and I have known that you Sami are here, but I have not heard you. I have been alone in my grief. But not anymore. I cried when I saw the film Sami Blood: it could have been a story about my mother and my grandmother.”

Professor Pål Rumi, freelance writer, currently based in Sweden.

Muonta (Snow), silver brooch by Erika Huuva. A contemporary take on a traditional sami brooch.

Protest in front of the Public Prosecution Office building in Skopje.

SUBVERSIVE ARTISTIC PRACTICES VISUALIZING RESISTANCE IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

by Tihomir Topuzovski

Research on subversiveness in the visual arts is concerned with opposition to the existing social order and attempts to achieve changes through engaged forms of action. Subversive practices in art are intertwined with forms of action that undermine the establishment’s institutional system. The practitioners attempt an opposition to and transgression of existing social norms and situations and initiate demands for change. In this context, the relation between these practices and politics presupposes that art, in one way or another, can help expand political action and participation, using artistic modes of presentation and practice that are intended to increase awareness and stimulate or provoke political action. According to Ingram “artistic practices are not

abstract

The article discusses subversiveness in visual arts and how its practitioners oppose, transgress and seek changes in the existing social order. This art often employs forms of activism which affect public spaces, such as squares, streets and crossroads, aimed at involving the public in existing societal problems and challenges. The focus is on the recent events in the Republic of Macedonia where artists are intervening in the social and political conditions. Identifying these practices in the Republic of Macedonia contributes to wider debates that highlight engaged forms of artistic actions.

KEYWORDS: Subversiveness, artistic practices, re-politicization, Republic of Macedonia.
just a form of resistance, refusal and critique, but contributor to political and spatial transformation, as other artists interact with the geopolitical context. They are involved in the political circumstances, reacting and seeking solutions. In other words, opposition, therefore, art becomes subversive of the existing social order, underwriting the normal and legitimate, aimed at transforming the existing situation. This raises the question: What can subversive art accomplish in the political arena? And what are its limits? The study focuses on practices that represent a completely different approach to artistic action, aiming at achieving changes to the problems emerging for artists and citizens in their current situation as well as the manner in which any given art opposes the given order or subverts it. This insistence on rejection or subversion incorporates the affirmative statement that art has an autonomous power of resistance *embodied* in various visual practices which are “being more called upon to provide both insight into politics itself and the stimuli for social change.” In the acts of “subversion and transgression [actors] crossed the contemporary borders of art and overturned various binary and hierarchical oppositions” established within social systems and create new situations.

**THIS ARTICLE FOCUSES** in particular on recent events in the Republic of Macedonia where artists are intervening in the political context. These artistic practices relate to the political crisis in the Republic of Macedonia which evolved from problems with democracy, including an institutionalized state in the service of the ruling party, media under government control, rigged elections, and a scandal over the illegal wiretapping of citizens by the government. These political circumstances in the Republic of Macedonia have been described as a transition to authoritarianism, or “the transformation of the state into an authoritarian regime and the consolidation of the political order of the current regime,” and it is characterized by the existence of a multiparty system and institutions, “an environment un-ethical and political culture, a wrecked systemic movement, can be traced back to the 1989 revolution in France, where “a proletarian-based political group made a serious attempt to achieve political power and legitimize workers’ power” in opposition to the institutional order. These practices are critically or theoretically defined or represented practical activities intended to erode the existing order.

As a historical example of subversive activities, Levine points out that the mass struggle in Italy against fascism and sovietization (subversion and subversion) were first used by intellectual and artistic circles in Italy in 1934, but also by the police, clerks and government agencies, when describing the activities of anarchists, socialists, republicans and all other opponents of the monarchy and the political establishment of the time. This refers to the different backgrounds and imperatives of lower-status groups within society. Thus, much of “the Left in particular, and Italian politics in general, runs the Gramscian argument, was a product of the notion of politics.” He explains that “subversive chiefs used to achieve the wide revelation of an existing social model and its norms. As noted by Gramsci, everyday practices depend on a vast ensemble of lower-status groups within society. In their anti systemic tendencies, “the masses who mobilized to transform the world expected that, once movements came to power, they would enjoy freedom and equality — if not in perfect measure, at least to a greater degree than previously.” In other words, it appears that the practitioners intend to go a step further toward principles and visions for a better society.

**TURNING NOW TO** the context of culture, it is worth beginning with the point that subversive practices in art exist as art activity close to the interpretive boundaries where they provide continual impulses and political demands. The article provides an important opportunity to advance the understanding of how subversiveness in the visual arts relates to political dynamics in the Republic of Macedonia.

While this article has a conceptual and an empirical focus, I consider the theoretical discussion on interpretive boundaries where they provide continual impulses and political demands. The article provides an important opportunity to advance the understanding of how subversiveness in the visual arts relates to political dynamics in the Republic of Macedonia.

What is the function of art, if not to be subversive and challenging? Quasirur.
leged living in conditions of social, identity-based, ethnic and racial segregation and exclusion. Consequently, the principles of these practices aim “to produce a new perception of the world, and therefore create a commit... zostały unity no longer by the abstract forms of the law, but by the bonds of lived experience”28 Through these acts artists come close to an understanding of their paradigmatic role linked to the context of social problems. At the same time this new faith in the political capacity of art has assumed many forms that are often divergent, and in some cases even conflicting.29 These art practices have employed forms of radical activism, affecting public spaces such as squares, and minority groups and their access to social provision. Mitigating the patterns displayed in most of the former socialist countries, the resurgence of nationalism in the Republic of Macedonia was a key agent in the transformation and became a factor of cultural quality in building the new system. In constructions of the national identity accompanied the establishment of the Republic of Macedonia in 1991. However, in the decade 2006–2016 under the leadership of a conservative, nationalistic party, VMRO–DPMNE (the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity), the country has been characterized by some aspects of authoritarianism. There is a distinctive concern that “resolving of this small nation’s – a Balkan brand of hyper-patriotism accompanied by the trumpeting of Macedonia’s ancient roots – is raising concerns internationally about growing authoritarianism and the silencing of dissent and accusations of abuse of power by the governing party”30 and “manipulation of independent institutions”.31 Macedonia’s fragile democracy is further hampered by the absence of a free press. In the past decade, owners of Macedonian media have deliberately shifted their political allegiances, constantly depending on the ruling political party and the government’s effective purchase of support through media advertising.32 A member of an opposition political party acknowledged this in my interview, pointing out that “those who declined to consent were shut down, jailed or severely financially strained through libel charges”.33 Under these circumstances the problems with the fragile democracy and human rights in the country are being aggravated. The leading conservative, nationalistic party in the Republic of Macedonia views culture as a possible means of creating collective memories, patriotic motifs, slogans and symbols, monar...mentals and architecture, pushing it to the level of idolatrie in an attempt to reconstruct the historical narrative and establish it meaningfully in the present. Picking up on this, nationalistic art in the Republic of Macedonia usually celebrates proclaimed essences of a national and romanticist spirit.34 A political and social arrangement is the atmosphere of reconstruction of a national identity35 as a part of postsocialist material culture.36 In this case, the geopolitical instrumentalization of culture has always been related to the local and regional establishment, which instrumentalizes art to sustain these systems. This can be explained, in the phrase “apparatus of capture”37 coined by Deleuze and Guattari, as a geophilosophy of power consisting of the geographical instrumentalization of cultural activities through numerous programs and projects, as well as through networking, documenting and supporting various activities, political goals and programs. In the context of culture, and art in the Republic of Macedonia, the instrumentalization can be found in particular schemes where most of the practices are affiliated with governmental programs and strategies. These practices can be understood in the context of various actions, operations and techniques with a political background, attended and financed by the centers of power. Cultural institutions and organizations are profoundly influenced by the political establishment in the country and they adapt their program in accordance with the official political dynamic. In this way the role of the artist in the Republic of Macedonia is instrumentalized. The artist can simply be defined as a professional occupation of what has been preformulated as artists and critics’ possible influence on the discourse of existing authorities.38 With the exception of some independent artistic productions, artists in the Republic of Macedonia find themselves in institutional structures and programs. The purpose of the majority of newly built museums, exhibitions, and cultural events promoted is to achieve materialization of the conservative party programs and strategies. These programs are affiliated with governmental policies and practices relating to the discourse of existing authorities.39 With the exception of some independent artistic productions, artists in the Republic of Macedonia find themselves in institutional structures and programs. The purpose of the majority of newly built museums, exhibitions, and cultural events promoted is to achieve materialization of the conservative party programs and strategies. These programs are affiliated with governmental policies and practices relating to the discourse of existing authorities.40 These projects illustrate a crucial element of the cultural political life, to support new movements that would stimulate the emergence of new ethics and mobilize new initiatives.

**Language constitutes a unique Sprachraum, which might be needed to create a unique Raum.**

We now turn to evidence of some subversive artistic practices in the Republic of Macedonia that relate to the breakdown of the previous system and the emergence of authoritarianism and hyperpartisanism embodied in new models of social and political order in this country. This situation poses a challenge to artists who aspire to contemplate new agendas and practices in relation to the overall social and political arrangement. It involves the articulation of a different form of action that is not institutionalized and will serve as a call for social change. In line with this aim, “the artist needs to establish a new attitude, based on radical democratic policy that would call for articulation of different levels of strategy”.41 This requires applied effort on all levels of social relations and practices to create new forms of political life, to support new movements that would stimulate the emergence of new ethics and mobilize new initiatives.

**Aiming to develop a vision for social change**

In considering subversive practices in the Republic of Macedonia, it is important to start by identifying subversiveness on the Macedonian art scene by “the manner in which artists are organized, the situations in which they perform and present themselves, the relations they build, maintain, avoid or break among themselves”,42 as well as the stances they take. Various subversive practices can be identified in Macedonia, generated by day-to-day political circumstances, as well as by the ever more present intention in other countries of the region to produce different artistic strategies.

Many debates and structures have been undertaken with the aim of developing a vision for social change. These attempts can be defined as unclassified and their goal was to contemplate the possibility of a different political engagement. They emphasize the principle of aiming for differentiation against action of what has been preformulated as artists and critics’ competence, the foundation and the improvement of the ethical principles should be pivotal importance”.43 An example of this, I would refer to the project called “10-minute Protest”, initiated by myself and realized on May 15, 2014 in the CAC gallery in Skopje, followed by a discussion about redefining and replacing artistic practice in Macedonia. Artworks of activists, cultural workers, politicians and columnists. Protest slogans were exhibited as part of the project. The main aim of the project was that protest should be seen as a means of artistic action. The discussion itself produced the opinion that this is not “the time for negotiation, but for confrontation because we are living in a state of siege”, which indeed distils the artists’ position towards different forms of action. The project laid out the existing situation and opened the prospect of providing preconditions, perhaps even an actual possibility, for action. It illustrates cognitive subversion, as does the observation that in certain cases “we
can sense that efforts are being made to draft a certain strategy of negation, a program for foundation of subversiveness. “This implies that “political subversion presupposes cognitive subversion” or a change in the vision of the world that would later be embodied in a series of actions. The idea is supported by Mill’s view on the French Revolution, that “the subversion of established institutions is merely one consequence of the previous subversions of established opinions.”

It was found that several artists, in interaction with individuals and groups, had taken initiatives that can be deemed subversive, mostly in reaction to the current situation in the Republic of Macedonia. These actions have most often been organized as civil initiatives. I will start with the intervention provoked by the government plans to erect the statue of the “Warrior on a Horse” and performed by an informal group on February 4, 2013. The intervention consisted of writing graffiti on the metal safety fencing of the monument construction site in downtown Skopje, an action almost immediately interrupted by a police intervention. The police asked the participants for their ID and they were accused of a misdemeanor against public hygiene because they were writing graffiti on a public building. The metal fencing was repainted the following day.

Another option intervened by placing stickers to replace the street name signs in Skopje. The wording of all the stickers was identical: Boulevard of Lesbian Revolution. These inscriptions were placed on signs on several streets in the center of the city on November 12, 2013. This action was provoked by the decision of city authorities to rename many streets throughout Skopje. The new names of the streets were a result of the revision of national history by the government of the Republic of Macedonia. The motivation behind this subversive act, according to the group, was to reveal the homophobia of the city. This confirms the position that art uses subversive strategies to remind the public of the removed monument commemorating the death of nine people shot by the so-called fascists on the morning of November 13, 1944 in revenge for the partisan attacks upon the liberation of the city. The group erected an improvised cardboard copy of the missing monument (see image) at its original site by the Stone Bridge in Skopje. The monument was removed the very same day, soon after it had been erected. This event is to be seen as the first step toward the refiguration of the projects for new monuments in Skopje supported by the Ministry of Culture.

Another initiative, combining a public protest and a performance, was organized by the association ADE, a platform for civil politics, with the participation of several artists and cultural workers. The performance took place on February 19, 2015 in front of the Ministry of Health and the participants wore white masks and dark clothes, symbolically unmasking their unequivocal demands that the Ministry of Health should be held accountable for the death of a nine-year-old girl by negligence and incompetence.

Furthermore, members of the group “Ade” sat on chairs at the front of the public broadcaster MRT and demanded it be returned to the citizens. They publicly appealed to MRT that it should be a public service of the citizens, not a government propaganda service. This action was realized on November 9, 2014 and in the words of the artists themselves, it was a testimony to the necessity of political change in the country. The actions involved in this protest hold that the coloring, seen as an artistic practice, is intertwined with activist forms of action that undermine the institutional and corrupt system in the Republic of Macedonia. This is summarized in the statement that “from an artistic point of view, painting buildings and monuments in downtown Skopje is authentic phenomenon for the country, where art becomes a tool for achieving political change.” It is astonishing how artistic means – paint – became a weapon for achieving social and political goals in Macedonia’s Colorful Revolution.

Practices create political stance

The cases selected in this study do not exhaust all the practices undertaken in the Republic of Macedonia. They were chosen because they illustrate different forms, imperatives and motivations. All these practices were characterized by subversiveness against existing cultural politics in the Republic of Macedonia which, according to the authors of these practices, run contrary to rather promoting justice and liberty in a democratic equally social. The activities were realized as nomadic actions outside of the established institutions. They opposed the existing centers of power in the Republic of Macedonia through the occupation of various public spaces, issuing a series of social and political demands. Moreover, these practices can be considered as urban grassroots mobilization and as “a new phase in the development of postsocialist civil societies.”

In other words, they can be seen as the actualization and concretization of Gramsci’s “series of negations.” They represented a vision for redefining and placing the role of the artist, as well as a refusal of the existing norms and criteria that instrumentalize artistic practices, thus creating the possibility of arriving at a political stance.

In this context, these practices efficient and to achieve certain goals, the artists forgo privileged positions and transgress institutional lines of the Republic of Macedonia. The practices discussed here, such as the graffiti on the fence in front of the MRT or the cardboard stickers with graffiti, and the improvised cardboard monument, mobilized participants in the struggle to oppose official government policies aimed at re-coloring the space by means of decontextualization and re-contextualization of symbols.

The actions described above involved different profiles of participants and in that sense it is fair to claim that they outline the agent of subversiveness which presupposes-space of interaction through various forms and principles. All these practices through groupings of initiatives, discussions, political activists, and individuals with cultural and artistic affiliates involves different approaches and various degrees of horizontal organization.

Furthermore, discussing the agent of subversiveness of these artistic practices establishes the possibility of a more general subject, that is, citizens who strive to achieve social change. The agent of change can be identified through a combination of individuals and groupings that exist separately. Implicitly, this illustrates how the agent consists of a multitude, and hence is composed of a social subject whose difference cannot be reduced to sameness, a difference that remains different. They represent the possibility of stimulating “the daily struggles of the workers and poor without a political center of resistance and subordination and subversion of the relations of domination in the workplace and in society at large.”

Each of these struggles unfolded separately as an independent entity, raising the question and the challenge of how they could be unified in the Republic of Macedonia.

Looking at this issue, it can be seen that a certain level of partial association has occurred over some political and social issues, but above all, over ethical principles. The social engagement of the cultural subject, the visual artist, should be encouraged and supported and the ethical autonomy of the artist in the space of public interest should be seen as the key issue of these actions. The principles of freedom of speech or freedom of choice or the struggle against economic inequality, unemployment and poverty, environmental protection and reduction
of pollution can all help in unifying different individuals and groups, whose radical stance includes total negation of the unjust social, cultural, political and economic context of the Republic of Macedonia. These practices demonstrate significant gains in the struggle against cultural and political contexts that are undergoing political processes of transformation.

Conclusion

Subversive practices in art consist of radical forms of transgressions of established social and political norms through a form of resistance, protest and creativity visualized in public spaces. These practices in art take very different forms depending on the spatial and political contexts of the activities as those contexts are crucial in understanding them. Practicing such acts includes various forms of acting in order to increase public awareness of existing social problems and to initiate changes. This work high lights the complex and ever-shifting relationships between artistic, political and social contexts and challenges. This was the initial approach whereby some of the modes of action employed by the artists were identified.

The study discussed theoretical aspects of subversiveness through the lens of an agent, principles and forms of action and their contribution to the ways in which artistic practices intervene in political contexts and disrupt spatial structures. On this topic, the study continued by identifying these practices within the context of the Republic of Macedonia. Using the Republic of Macedonia for case analysis was productive because of the radical political change and undergone in past decade, coupled with the political crisis. Recent cases of subversive practices in art in the country offered characteristics to the core and political contexts that are undergoing political processes of transformation in different circumstances. Establishing new cases and insights of subversiveness in art will contribute to the contemporary debate regarding creativity and accomplishments of these acts.

Theorist Topuzovski received his doctoral degree from the University of Birmingham in 2013 and has a guest researcher at the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies, Södertörn University.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments.

References

12. “We occupy museums to reclaim space for meaningful culture by and for the 99%: art and culture are the soul of the commons. art is not a luxury!”, accessed September 2014.
14. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
23. Author’s interview with an artist.
In a world where the 20th century East-West geopolitical, social, and cultural divide has strongly influenced our minds, it seems appropriate to ask whether or not fatherhood in Soviet Russia—emotions, ideal images, and practices—also differed from the English-speaking countries in Europe and Northern America or Northern European countries, that is, the parts of the world referred to as the “West.” I would agree that such a difference exists in regard to the first three or four decades after the Russian revolution. Norms of marriage, family, and fatherhood at that time lost much of their traditional and prerevolutionary appeal due to legislation and politics after the Russian revolution simplifying divorce procedures to a degree that made Soviet Russia look like no Western country of the time. Men and women were free to leave their partners for new ones without officially divorcing and remarrying. Also, women were granted the right to free abortion, and in order to obtain child allowance, mothers with children born out of wedlock had the right to identify the alleged father, sometimes more than one, without serious judicial procedures being undertaken. All this weakened the connection between the biological father and his children. The vast migration movement characterizing the Soviet 1930s and ’40s was another factor that loosened family ties. Peasants deprived of their land and other groups of people, such as national minorities, were evacuated, exiled, interned in camps, or executed. An extensive mobilization of the work force took place towards newly erected factories or sites where vast raw resources were being extracted. The nuclear family model that characterizes the Western ideal and practices became a somewhat redundant phenomenon in early Soviet Russia. In this connection, we should also take into consideration the legacy of the East European family pattern. Tight connections between generations can be traced back in history with the institution of fatherhood—weak in comparison to the pater familias tradition that was influential in, for example, German or French family norms. The East European pattern is characterized by extended peasant families with generational power relations—that is, the young couple normally lives with the husband’s family, where the elder generation is in a position of power.

In post-revolutionary Russia, important parts of the upbringing of children were often transferred to collective or public institutions such as schools, pioneer camps, daycare centers, and orphanages, or to members of an extended family, such as the grandparents’ generation or other relatives, and to neighbors in the collective housing arrangements in which several families shared apartments. The enormous loss of Russian men of fertile age in World War II also played a part in making the invisibility of fathers permanent; the men were absent in the most concrete sense. To use a concept from scholars of emotion studies, we might say that the Soviet Russian interwar period contained special “emotional regimes.”

However, my study focuses on a period of three decades (1960–1990) starting fifteen years after World War II. The 1960s have a significant place in Soviet Russian history as a turning point from a political regime that had been based since the 1920s on mobilization and increasingly on repression and coercion; at certain times on mass terror. Let me quote Mikhail Petrovich, 58, one of the men I interviewed for my study, who talks about the 1960s, expressing a fairly widespread opinion: “Now, look at a picture from that time. You will see men with their hair boldly brushed back from their foreheads. They look like free men.” After Stalin’s ...
Some words on sources and methods

These are the main questions that have guided me through my study. What form did public official discourses and attitudes to fatherhood take in the late socialist decades in Soviet Russia? Do the narratives of the informants I talked to about their remembered experience of being fathers coincide with these discourses? Or do we find other attitudes when we talk to men about their remembered experiences of fatherhood? Also, do the public discourses differ from dominant fatherhood ideals in the West in the same period, or could they be regarded as belonging to the same kind of “emotional regime”? As found in Western countries? Finally, to detect possible changes from the preceding early Soviet socialism to the late socialist decades or what is sometimes referred to as actually existing socialism, I decided to look at Soviet Russian fatherhood from an intergenerational perspective by talking to my informants about memories of their fathers.

I started my work on my study by considering international, many English-speaking and North European historiography of fatherhood used with a focus on the 20th century. Here, dominant ideal images of masculinity are identified as an ability to maintain self-control and control of emotions, will power, honor, endurance, and a capacity to work hard. A distance from emotions, or a certain degree of reluctance to talk about emotions concerning love and close relations, during the century—or at least up to its final decades—is emphasized in emotion studies. At the same time, men’s dependence on family is believed to have increased in a world of growing routinization of work and a decreased self-fulfillment through professional endeavors. However, scholars warn against depicting strict linear models of family transformation, when in fact changes in parenting “have been neither uniform nor routinely predictable”. In other words, the cultural ideal of fatherhood was in flux during the 20th century. Scholars of the history of emotions point to the existence of a “growing emotional information” in a context that continues to insist on a great deal of self-control.

MASCULINITIES AND FATHERHOOD

In Russian history is an under-studied topic in comparison to the situation in Western countries. However, a few studies have been undertaken on fatherhood in Soviet times. In these, a fatherhood model is outlined and described as a patriarchal one or marital regulation in support of public discourses, this probably affected the way the articles were written.

FROM MY READING of the relevant articles in Sem’ia i škol’ (Sem’ia i škola) I pinpointed a few prominent facets of fatherhood ideals that helped me formulate questions to my informants, to explore their memory of being fathers and their views of what an ideal father should look like. The interviews showed men aged between 50–75, all married and, with one exception, living in St Petersburg. The social status of the informants stretches from lower middle class to secondary, vocational education to middle class, with higher education. The selection of informants was made basically via acquaintances of a Russian sociologist, who acted as a co-interviewer with me. The interviews are semi-structured, in-depth conversations lasting for one and a half to two hours and a half. I cannot, of course claim to show a representative picture with such a limited number of interviews. Still, I believe that my results can contribute to a more detailed picture of the official and non-official cultural image of Russian fatherhood. The fact that all the informants live in an urban environment is strongly stressed. I am not aware of studies which have been made on Soviet fatherhood in rural areas, but I did interview a Russian born colleague, 36 years, nowadays located at a university in Finland. He told me the story of his grand grandparents and their experience of being parents in a remote village in Siberia, stating that this was a very patriarchal world when it comes to family relations, adding: “Well it still is”.

I am aware of the problem of talking about things that happened thirty to fifty years ago. I assumed that the men I talked to were influenced by today’s different attitudes to fatherhood and family. Still, it turned out that questions of the type “What would a good father be like?” didn’t appear to be among the issues that many of them had reflected on. This was in contrast to other subjects that were up for discussion in our conversations.

All the interviews started with me asking the men to talk about their life in retrospect. Some topics they seemed to have recounted on several occasions. These produced narratives that have probably been modified and negotiated through their lifetimes, such as stories about World War II, political and social changes taking place after Stalin’s death, or equally ground-breaking events and processes during perestroika in the late 1980’s under Gorbachev’s regime.

In my study, I interpret my sources by applying my overall knowledge of Soviet Russian society of the time and of public discourse in general, as well as the discourse on marriage and family specifically. I also approach the texts and structure them both, in an attempt of the concepts mentioned above, which I extracted from literature written in the last twenty-five years on European and North American masculinity and fatherhood in modern times.

Fatherhood in late Soviet Russia: Specific in cultural and emotional terms?

The most frequent ideal images I found in the magazine were “the present and involved father”, “the father as an educator and role model”, and “the father as the head of the family”. Present and involved fathers

To get a better understanding of the degree to which the informants regarded themselves as having been present and involved fathers, we asked them about the division of labor in regard to child care and household chores. A typical answer we got was that no specific division of labor had been practiced within the family. As one of the informants stated, “We did what had to be
To shop in Soviet Russia was like hunting: first you track down the meat, and then you wait patiently.  

When we asked the men for more detail about who had done what at home, we got the expected answer that they had mend- ed the electric wiring, taken care of plumbing and carpentry and various sorts of repairs. Cooking, cleaning, and laundry seem to have been mostly taken care of by the women. But this was also told by almost all the informants that they had “mopped the floors”. This might seem surprising at first, but at a second glance a difference is noticeable: Soviet apartments were often equipped with wooden floors, often an old fashioned and simple type of parquet floor with a porous surface. The cleaning of the floors demanded the hard work of scrubbing and sometimes subsequent waxing. I laughed with one of the men when he told me how he had lashed a scrubber to each of his feet and then “skated” over the floors. “Just like Pippi Longstocking,” we burst out simul- taneously.

Ich, 62, told us about the severe scarcity of everyday products in Soviet Russia with household work and child care. There was an extensive public day care sector, at least in urban areas, but everyday life was still time-consuming. So the grandparents’ generation was an important piece in the complicated life puzzle that emerged when Soviet women took on paid work outside the home, several decades earlier than their Western sisters. Lack of housing, forcing genera- tions to live together, made the phenom- enon of extended families last longer in Soviet Russian times, even though legisla- tion and public policy encouraged nuclear family models.

Conversations about being a present and involved father brought us to the topic of being emotionally involved. We asked the men about their recollections of emotions from the moment when their child or children were born. Here we got very differ- ent answers, spanning from surprised reactions such as “What kind of question is that? I was just listening to the radio.” to the more careful, measured response “I just didn’t experience any certain reactions whatsoever.” Well, a child was being born. Just like the leaves burst out and the snow is melting [...] just like a natural thing” to an elaborate answer you should be an authority or a playful pal to your kids. Pietr Aleksandrovich, who had children in the 1960s, used to spend a lot of time with his sons when they were small, going fishing, playing with railway models, teaching them how to mend the electrical system at home, etc. This was confirmed by one of his sons whom we talked to afterwards. However, when we asked our informants what good fatherhood meant to them, he didn’t talk about the playful father as an ideal. Instead he stressed the guiding role of the father as the most important. The magazine Sem’ia i shkola talks about the need for fathers to devote time to their children and to play with them, however when giving advice, it stressed that “when fathers feel like their son’s pal, this has given rise to a comparative perspective, fatherhood in Western societies, especially after World War II, is seen to have been formed from a caretaker to a father-compass relation within the family where the man serves as ‘chief pal’.” From my research, feeling that the Soviet Russian fatherhood ideal, even if necessarily not the practice, was stricter in this regard, emphasizing not too much of a companion, “He mustn’t lose sight of the need to lead and guide his children.”

The father as role model and educator

A discourse that emerged strongly in Sem’ia i shkola in the mid-1970s is the importance of the father as a role-model, especially to his sons: “The father ought to be a role-model to his son, helping him to develop true male characteristics, such as courage, restraint and generosity.” When we asked the men if they thought fathers should have an educating function, they often had to think for a minute or two. “Well [...] you see [...] a man is a man [...] he works a lot. He should devote his efforts towards his child to making him or her competitive in life.” One infor- mant said, while another claimed that the father should be like a teacher and supervisor when the child was small or young, but “when it has grown up you should be a friend.” Again, the an- swers reveal the advice in Sem’ia i shkola. The ideal image of the father as the educator and the one who guides the child in educa- tional choices and moral behavior is firmly conveyed to the readers: “A father can help his child to choose a profession and to prepare in a proper way for their professional future life, not only from a technical but also from a moral point of view.”

When we asked whether the informants had read advice liter- ature of the 1960s and 1970s, most of the men had read at least one title, and some had even read several. The main questions that we asked about the reading of these books was: “What kind of literature did you have on fatherhood when you were a man?” and “What do you think these recommendations had to do with your fatherhood?”

“ACCORDING TO TIME-BUDGET STUDIES FROM THE 1960S AND 1970S, SOVIET RUSSIAN MEN IN URBAN AREAS SPENT ABOUT HALF OF THE TIME THAT WOMEN DID ON HOUSEHOLD OBLIGATIONS.”
formants had been working during Gorbatchev’s perestroika pe-
riod in the late 1980s, when the introduction of market economy elements, such as “cooperatives” encouraged small business which in fact were private enterprises, sometimes turned job-oppor-
tunities upside down, allowing women to earn more than their spouses. These were not less active in their answers. Why should there be a main breadwinner in the family [...] a stupid idea,” or “I don’t know who of us earned the most — does it matter?” If we look again at studies on Western fatherhood we find another picture in this respect: the American historian Peter Stearns confirms that few men would claim to be the boss in their household. Still, Stearns says, a few would regard their wives as a “junior partner” in the family when it came to “big decisions.”

To sum up the conversation, we had with our informants on how a good father should perform, I would say that their ideals closely resembled what was put forward in the magazine Sem’ia i shkola. On the question what the practice had been, how the men perceived their own fatherhood, in many Western countries starting in the 1970s there is a specific Eastern phenomenon in modern times is somewhat

When we compare some of the attitudes in Soviet Russia to the ones in the contemporary West, we find a picture that makes the East-West divide in fatherhood discourse and practice look exaggerated: in both worlds, women took the lion’s share of household work and child care duties. In our talks with the informants, we find they mostly cherished the ideal of a father who was firm in conduct with his children, they mostly said that both parents had worked a lot: “Mom and Dad didn’t spend much time with us because they were busy making a living”, “We never really thought that way” or “No, I was very independ-

cent.” Piotr Olegovich, 62, said: “I had this feeling that the idea of fatherhood existed up [...], I had a lot of freedom.” Thus we get a picture of families in which neither parent was very controlling or present. In this context, the phrase “the role of the surrounding society, including school, in upholding discipline and the task of education” may not be so relevant since parents didn’t devote much time to me [...] but the teachers were demanding and very strict.”

Still, the men asserted that their fathers had been role models to them, even if they hadn’t been that much physically pres-
ent. Several of the informants told us they had chosen the same profession as their fathers. “Yes, my father was a role model to me; as I got older [...], I also wanted to become a sailor”, “I even wanted to be an astronaut.” Several of the informants, then, had a picture of men who didn’t admit or recognize that they had missed or longed for their fathers. Still, they claim that their fathers had been their role models in life and this was connected to the way they themselves saw their fathers.

In our talks with the informants we often got a picture of stereotypical image of their fathers that was formed by the culture and sometimes reinforced via the “gaze of the public”. Fatherhood is considered as the other half of the Russian family. For our informants looking for an East-West difference in the perception of fatherhood one could see the “absent” father as a Western cultural construction in which grief has been reinforced by cherishing a nuclear family model and by influences from postmodern thinking that was banned during most of the Soviet period.

Concluding remarks

Does fatherhood in late Soviet Russia differ in a decisive way from Western fatherhood? Was the father marginalized and the mother the one who solely took responsibility for all parts of the child rearing, as some scholars assert when they outline the Soviet “model of fatherhood”? I would say this is too broad a gen-

eralization. My studies point to fathers who were present and in-

volved. However, it should be stressed that my informants are all married fathers. The case with divorced and other single fathers might look different, with men not willing to pay support for their children, not prepared to take upon themselves shared custody, but instead abandoning their children from a first mar-

riage to the advantage of children in a subsequent marriage.

To what extent extended family has remained a spe-
cial feature of Russian society? If we turned to the so-called “absent” father, this would make one think of a father figure. However, our interviews confirm that there is a feeling of lack and pain for not having to get to know their fathers and therefore having missed a role model in life. However, the informants Thomas Johansson interviewed men in their thirties to fifties about their fathers, interviews resulted in stories filled with a sense of loss and pain for not having gotten to know their fathers and therefore having missed a role model in life. However, Johansson concludes, the image of the absent father is to a certain extent a stereotype hiding a real father who is often still remembered, the feeling of incompleteness is something that may possibly be seen in the East as well.

Child abuse in Russia is something we hear little about. One might wonder why? The sociologist Thomas Johansson interviewed men in their thirties to fifties about their fathers, interviews resulted in stories filled with a sense of loss and pain for not having gotten to know their fathers and therefore having missed a role model in life. However, Johansson concludes, the image of the absent father is to a certain extent a stereotype hiding a real father who is often still remembered, the feeling of incompleteness is something that may possibly be seen in the East as well.

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in myself. It was made in a café in St. Petersburg by my Russian colleague, so I just had the recorded sound file to work on. Every time their conversation touches upon his divorce and the separa-
tion from his first daughter, his voice changes. Now and then one can sense tears in his voice and occasionally there are long silences.

Both the stories of our informants and the printed texts are permeated by beliefs in gender roles due to biological differ-
ences. The underlying assumption of men and women being dif-
f erent is present in virtually all the texts in the magazine Sem’ia i
shkola. Some authors state that the roles of fathers and mothers
are determined both by nature and by society, but most often
they lean more heavily towards biological explanations, stating
that “motherly feelings are inherent, while fatherly emotions are
acquired” and that the female psyche is more emotional, while
men have “inherent drive to move away from the hearth”.

The informants often talk in similar ways: “The mother is the
most important person during the child’s first years,” or “Mothr
ers are softer than fathers.” One man said that his daughters
“naturally” had closer relations to their mother: “I don’t care
when they start whispering to each other, I go watch football on
TV instead. I have nothing to contribute to their talks,” Mikhail
Grigorievich said.

We also talked to our informants about their fathers, and
we heard them saying unanimously that their fathers had been
too occupied with work to be able to be present and involved
in family life. This confirms the picture of the earlier period of
Soviet Russia when men were supposed to engage considerably more in collective, formal chores, such as work, than in private family
matters. Still, our men did not express negative feelings about
the emotional fatherhood in late Soviet Russia.

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1. Efforts have been made to estimate the extent to which that right was used: see e.g. Anatoly Vylko, Demograficheskoe mnenie o Rossi: 1900–2000 (Moscow: Novoe izdavlenie, 2004), 104–105.


13. Port Oglizhkovna lives in Penez.


16. The famous Swedish author of children’s books, Astrid Lindgren, was already well known and loved by both children and adults during the Soviet period in Russia. Pippi Longstocking is the strong, independent and unattractive character of several Soviet books. Helene Carlberg, interview with E. Ivanova, 2015.

17. Olegovich was the only one of our informants who did not live in St. Petersburg, but in Perm in the Urals.


I n the 1980s, when I was in my early twenties, living and studying in communist Hungary, there was a blue and white pin that was cool to wear. That was the pin of the Danube circle (Duna Köri), the independent, oppositional circle founded in 1984 to fight against the planned dam on the Danube.

Wearing this pin was not without political risks in the 1980s, but it was definitely ‘cool’. When I first saw the pin being sold in the coffee shop of the university I immediately asked him where he got it, trying not to look very suspicious in asking, as I was sure the police also wanted to get that piece of information too.

History repeats itself in a strange way. In April 2017, the Hungarian government passed with extraordinary speed the Lex CEU which makes it impossible for CEU to operate in Hungary. The amendment to the higher education law requires, besides other clauses, that curriculum, hiring faculty, and recruitment be regulated directly by the Hungarian and US governments. The changes impose political control over one of the success institutions of European higher education. CEU was founded in 1991 to fight for freedom and to stand against such policing of ideas. From the beginning of its existence, CEU was public on 28 March, 2017, resistance started. The resistance, which also included producing a blue pin, as blue is the official color, and white was the color of the opposition parties. The pin was handed out there. Second, in spite of the overwhelming support, it is not necessarily safe to wear that pin in public. One of our graduates was recently hit in the face, and the pin he was wearing was torn off his sweater. Another student while studying in the suburbs was astonished to see that an elderly man took out a pencil and started to draw the pin he was wearing on his chest. These stories show that the fight for freedom is a continuous fight. Freedom was the most important guiding principle of CEU’s founders in 1991. Those founders were Péter Hanák, Miklós Vásárhelyi, and György Litvántos, to name only those who are no longer with us. Those founders personally experienced direct political control and the policing of their ideas. The same freedom of thought is at stake now with the new higher education law which threatens the very existence of CEU.

As in the case of the Danube Circle, international support and contacts proved crucial to stop the construction of the dam, they are also crucial in the case of CEU. It is enough to look at all our alumni in the 15 countries where CEU students come from to study in Budapest, or the hundreds of international letters of support we have received, to see that the whole world is watching, helping, and supporting the resistance. From Pécs to Szeged, from Cambridge to Cluj or Singapore, our graduates are sending CEU letters and organizing protests. Several important Hungarian conservative intellectuals and state institutions have already expressed solidarity with CEU, such as the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

CEU’s mission statement declares its basic principles as the principles of open society. The Hungarian government communicated that these values are dividing Hungary or other nations of Europe along party lines. They are wrong. It is clear that the universal values of liberty and democracy are at stake. If we are looking for models and allies, we look to Delhi, Johannesburg, London, and Berlin – whose struggles inspire us in our defense of academic freedom. CEU wants to become free, successful, and open to the world. This is a struggle that must be connected with solidarity and social justice.

In 1989, we had a common dream. The founders of CEU, politicians, including PM Orbán, had a common dream and that dream was that we would build a free and successful country where not party apparatchiks, but academics would decide who can study at a university, and what institution can call itself a university. A country where you do not need to wear a pin, but if you choose to do so, you do not meet violence and anger on the streets. This Lex CEU is the betrayal of our common dream, and the eighties are being betrayed by Fidesz. They forget, but those who are wearing the blue “I stand with CEU” pin do not. And they are definitely more numerous than we were back in 1984. At least that can give us hope for the future.

Andrea Pető
Professor, CEU, corresponding member of the editorial council of Baltic Worlds

THE BLUE AND WHITE PIN THAT MATTERS

The whole world is watching, helping, and supporting the resistance. The instruction from the administration.) By the end of April more than 10,000 pins were handed out there. Second, in spite of the overwhelming support, it is not necessarily safe to wear that pin in public. One of our graduates was recently hit in the face, and the pin he was wearing was torn off his sweater. Another student while studying in the suburbs was astonished to see that an elderly man took out a pencil and started to draw the pin he was wearing on his chest. These stories show that the fight for freedom is a continuous fight. Freedom was the most important guiding principle of CEU’s founders in 1991. Those founders were Péter Hanák, Miklós Vásárhelyi, and György Litvántos, to name only those who are no longer with us. Those founders personally experienced direct political control and the policing of their ideas. The same freedom of thought is at stake now with the new higher education law which threatens the very existence of CEU.

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CEU’S FATE A SYMBOL OF WHAT WENT WRONG

In Hungary and Central and Eastern Europe

M any of us have been shocked by the Hungarian government’s intention to close CEU. However, it was not such a hasty decision as it appeared. Changing the laws on higher education and on organizations founded from foreign sources has for a while been on the hidden agenda. Interestingly enough, a number of influential members of the Fidesz government opposed Lex CEU (as it was soon called) at an early stage. Members including the Minister of Human Resources, the State Secretary for Higher Education, and even the party’s vice-president. It may recall historic times – or purely reflect ancient power-exercising tactics – that in the end it was the Minister of Human Resources who had to work out the technical details of the new legislation.

Either way, the Hungarian government has been bashing George Soros for weeks before announcign Lex CEU. In February, the Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán said that “[i]nternational organizations operating in Hungary and calling themselves ‘non-governmental’ – though in fact attempting to influence Hungarian politics while representing the interests of global capital with paid activists using money from abroad – must be made accountable and transparent.” Implicitly calling for legislation like that in Russia. Orbán added that “[o]ver the past twenty years we have tolerated the existence of these organizations, but their behavior in relation to migration is the final straw.”

For months, Hungarian public media have been more and more explicitly conveying the message that George Soros is largely to blame for “the migrants” and that NGOs supported by him cooperate with human smugglers in North Africa.

AS AN INFLUENTIAL American financier with roots in Budapest, Soros makes a particularly welcome enemy representing global domination in Hungary but also beyond. While it is true that several mayors across Central and Eastern Europe have invited CEU should it have to leave Hungary, there is at least as much opposition against such a move, for instance, in Slovakia and in the North Republic. In the midst of its huge and long-lasting domestic political crisis, Macedonia in particular has seen the rise of an anti-Soros movement, which is critical of academic freedom but also directed against Hungarian public media.

In Hungary, the amount of protest to the announcement of Lex CEU was probably underestimated by the government, yet one relatively unexpected feature was that even a number of influential conservative public figures went against the prime minister and showed their support for CEU. This is particularly important in a society in which mobility is seen as a major desideratum.

At the same time, one of the most surprising yet interesting commentaries came from Robert Braun, a leading researcher at the Vienna Institute for Advanced Studies and professor at the Lander Business School. Up until 2005, Braun also held strategic positions as advisor to the prime ministers of the Hungarian socialist government, but he is now looking more critically at his and others’ roles in shaping the country. According to Braun, CEU has created a Western elite power ghetto, which he sees as justified but carrying huge risks. Whereas the institution’s teaching and research achievements are unquestionable, CEU has also become a symbol of the failures of integration and Westernization: a few have succeeded, the majority has not; those inside have research funding, an ideal working environment, etc. Braun reminds us that symbols can be destroyed even if they carry great value.

In the end, the dramatic fate of CEU has shown us at least three important things. One, power concentration in Hungary may now be at its peak, but is unlikely to remain so for long, due to growing protest from within. Second, large-scale bottom-up mobilization is not dead in Hungary. Last and not least, a dramatic event such as this has the side effect of delivering a message to other countries, past and present, on the socially diverging effects of Westernization and transformation in Central and Eastern Europe.

Péter Balogh
Postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for Regional Studies, CERS-HAS.

references
underdeveloped, post-Soviet transition state into e-Estonia, an advanced digital society. As the Estonian historian Aro Velmet suggests, the notion of Estonia as an e-state has paved the way for a particular kind of digital patriotism in which Estonia’s digital solutions, such as “e-voting, e-prescription and e-residency” are common terms not only among engineers but work as symbols that people use generally to express feelings of pride in their country”.

**DURING THE CURRENT decade, the term e-Estonia has been used as a basis for (or a way to justify) various governmental and quasi-governmental initiatives and projects. It has started to appear in a variety of new policy papers, plans, and programs, as organizational bodies that consciously, explicitly, and deliberately exploit the signifier e-Estonia. For example, the “e-Estonia show room”, established in 2011, is presented as a place where “global policy makers, political leaders, corporate executives, investors and international media” become acquainted with the “success story of e-Estonia”. As one of the booklets associated with the showroom puts it, this success story of e-Estonia is the story of “one of the most advanced e-societies in the world […] that grew out of a partnership between a forward thinking government, a proactive ICT sector and a switched-on, tech savvy population”. From there on, the Estonian government founded the “e-Estonia council” as its Strategy Unit (in 2014), the Estonian PR guru Daniel Vaarik published the “White Paper on Estonia’s Digital Ideology” (in 2015), and an Estonian PR firm called Callisto Group published “The plan for developing and enhancing the international image of e-Estonia, 2017–2019” (2016), commissioned by the Ministry of Economy and Communications. These initiatives and papers not only describe what e-Estonia is but also propose a variety of activities (conscious media planning, academic research) to develop and promote the idea of e-Estonia.

In this essay, I do not aim to offer additional support for or discredit the claims made by those policy analysts, journalists, government officials, e-government managers, and the like who propose (or assume) that e-Estonia is just a neutral, accurate, and convenient term to grasp a variety of different projects and solutions in the field of e-government and e-democracy. Instead, I will explore the discursive dimension behind Estonian e-government projects and trace the evolution of discursive practice that constitutes the e-Estonia discourse. It offers a discourse-theoretical reading of e-Estonia in terms of different types of discursive logics, and critically explains the particular discursive practices that constitute the e-Estonia discourse. This essay is an attempt to develop and promote the idea of e-Estonia.

The structure of the paper is as follows: First, I will offer a general overview of the issues, projects and initiatives that concern the keywords such as e-government and e-democracy. Second, I will schematically outline the ontological premises, theoretical concepts, and methodological considerations of discourse theory. Third, I will focus on the different signifying logics that have made the e-Estonia discourse possible. Finally, I will look at e-Estonia as a name that may open up e-Estonia’s political dimension.

**From e-government to e-democracy and back**

E-government seems to be one of the most common nodal points that has allowed national leaders, policymakers, policy analysts, and public management experts to link together a variety of e-solutions (e.g. e-voting, e-taxation, e-school) that have been developed and implemented in Estonia from the early 2000s on. In other words, there are a number of e-government researchers who regard Estonia as the pioneering state in the field of e-gov- ernment. There are also some policy researchers who question this assumption by tracing and analyzing actual policies and policymaking attempts in the fields of information and communication technology and information society in Estonia.

For example, Meelis Kitsing argues that even by the early 2000s there was no clearly formulated “grand strategy” behind Estonian e-government projects. Quite the contrary: “spending on ICT remained modest from 1995–2003, in comparison to other countries”. Moreover, the timeline of Estonia’s e-government-specific legislation was in line with that of other Eastern European states such as Slovakia or Latvia. Furthermore, the “Tiger’s Leap” project that is considered to be one of the landmarks in the digitalization of public institutions in the 1990s should be seen as a “basic provision of public goods”, not as an exercise in “advanced digital society”.

Meelis Kitsing argues that the Estonian e-government projects resulted from the deliberate “early investment in ICT, accompanied by the necessary reforms”. Instead, it would be more accurate to describe Estonian e-government projects as a “success without strategy”. Namely, what has been successful is the creation of the “impression that Estonian e-government is the result of a grand strategy and deliberate action by rational policy-makers”.

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**THE STORY OF e-Estonia A DISCOURSE-THEORETICAL APPROACH**

**by Rene Mäe**

Over the last two decades “e-Estonia” has appeared as one of the most popular terms to capture Estonia’s achievements in the fields of public administration, digital technology and e-governmment. e-Estonia has become a shorthand label widely used by national leaders, IT gurus, diplomats, and digital technology enthusiasts alike to evoke Estonia’s success in the digitalization of its public institutions through the implementation of particular e-solutions. Especially over the current decade, e-Estonia has become a signifier of Estonia’s success and gradually acquired a powerful narrative dimension. The e-Estonia story circulates around the local and international media, e-government conferences, and various PR events. In this narrative, Estonia, after regaining its national independence in 1991, has successfully transformed itself from an advanced digital society, post-Soviet transition state into e-Estonia, an advanced digital society. As the Estonian historian Aro Velmet suggests, the notion of Estonia as an e-state has paved the way for a particular kind of digital patriotism in which Estonia’s digital solutions, such as “e-voting, e-prescription and e-residency” are common terms not only among engineers but work as symbols that people use generally to express feelings of pride in their country”.

**ABSTRACT**

This paper traces the emergence of various digital technology-driven policy ideas in Estonia during the last two decades. The article is specifically concerned with the idea of e-Estonia, a signifier that is widely used as shorthand to denote Estonia’s success in developing digital solutions in government, public management, business, education, etc. The paper analyzes the idea of e-Estonia to disclose, contextualize, and critically explain the particular discursive practices that constitute the e-Estonia discourse. It offers a discourse-theoretical reading of e-Estonia in terms of different types of discursive logics, and particularly the paper argues for the importance of recognizing what is at stake in the act of naming e-Estonia.

**KEYWORDS:** Estonia, e-Estonia, e-government, post-socialism, nation branding, discourse theory.
The discourses that account of Estonian e-government projects as a conscious strategy of Estonian national leaders or government officials. As such, we also need to bear in mind the fact that some of the most important digitalization projects in the early 2000s grew out of close cooperation between commercial enterprises and state institutions. Or, for example, the cornerstone of Estonia's electronic ID card, introduced in 2002, was a result of a coincidental interaction between banks and government, inspired by Internet banking services that had already been launched by Estonian banks in 1996. While commercial enterprises such as banks initiated digitalization projects to cut costs and increase competitiveness, the Estonian right-wing political leaders of the 1990s saw digital technology as a tool for “creating a minimal and efficient state.”

Thus, in the late 1990s, the discourse of e-government became a valuable tool for “creating a minimal and efficient state” and government, inspired by Internet banking services that developed by engineers and public officials rather than political decision-makers. As a first step, therefore, I will elaborate on the ontological premises of discourse theory and define its main theoretical concepts that allow us to formulate the more precise aims of the analysis.

The discourses of discourse theory are formulated on the ontological level, they “are always to some extent Marxist, they are directed at capturing those four dimensions in empirical research, Glynos and Howarth distinguish between three types of explanatory logics. In other words, as theoretical concepts, it is the social logics, political logics and fantomatic logics that have “a role to play in accounting for a complete explanatory account” of a practice or a regime of practices.

First, social logics allow us to characterize, describe and discuss the “rules and norms” that govern a certain discursive practice and “to capture those aspects of it that make it tick.” Second, political logics offer a way to “explore how social practices are constituted, contested and defined.” Third, fantomatic logics — the “logic of equivalence” and “logic of difference.” As Laclau and Mouffe put it, “the logic of equivalence is a logic of the simplification of political space, while the logic of difference is a logic of its expansion and increasing complexity.”
"Equivalential and differential logics allow us to consider whether a discourse constructs identities either through ‘common-negative’, threat or enemy” or “through non-adversarial, ‘positive’ differences.” Equivalential and differential logics are always present in every discursive articulation because all meaning and identity is “discursively constructed through chains of equivalence” that relationally sort and link different signs. In equivalential chains, however, the difference between discourse elements is necessarily undermined or ignored in order to form relations of equivalence between various objects, practices, and processes. Third, fantasmatic logics point to the “ideological dimension” by analyzing the ways in which “subjects are implicit in concealing or covering over the radical contingency of social relations.” Fantasmatic logics most often appear through a fantasmatic narrative that “promises a fullness-to-come once a named or implied obstacle is overcome” while it points to the terrible consequences that can follow if subjects do not subscribe to a discourse.

Following from these definitions, it becomes easier to understand why one shouldn’t expect from discourse theorists that they simply provide a detailed description of a particular phenomenon. That is simply because discourse theorists do not “assure the prior existence of a particular structure, agent or object.” Rather than studying particular issues and representations, discourse theorists try to critically explain what makes particular representations “possible in the first place.” Furthermore, they try to make the phenomena under investigation “intelligible both for the subjects involved in the activity studied and for the subjects who are studying the phenomena.”

In the remaining part of the article I will try to offer a schematic discourse-theoretical reading of e-Estonia. I will follow general questions such as: How can we characterize e-Estonia as a discourse or discursive practice? Where did it come from and how was it formed? How and why is its sustained? How could we evaluate and criticize e-Estonia as a discursive formation? I will try to answer these questions in terms of social, political, and fantastmatic logics.

**Branding e-Estonia**

In recent years, the story of e-Estonia has been promoted through various materials, mostly published by Enterprise Estonia, as well as through other initiatives funded by EAS. In e-Estonia, bureaucracy has become “a thing of the past”. In e-Estonia, one can easily cast a “ballot from the comfort of your living room”. As it appears, the “e” in Estonia means a lot more than just “electronic” – it refers to “The Epic Story of the e-State” that is also “empowering”, “easy”, “efficient”, “economical”, and “engaging”. It is precisely these kinds of figures and pompous slogans that have also found their way into the public presentations of various advocates of e-Estonia. These promotors – national leaders, government officials and PR gurus – have presented these stories at various conferences on e-government, public management, and digital technology both locally and internationally. Furthermore, e-Estonia has even been the theme of a party: in 2016 the technology conference Slush was opened with the “E-Estonia” theme party, featuring “the brightest tech companies and the best cuisine from Estonia and the most exciting music from both sides of the Gulf of Finland”, opened with a speech by Estonia’s newly elected president, Kersti Kaljulaid. On closer observation, one cannot fail to notice the similarities that e-Estonia shares with the practice of nation branding.

**The Termination**

Nation branding emerged most powerfully after the end of the Cold War with the demand for “nations to redefine and repose themselves within the master narrative of globalization.” Alongside the post-1989 geopolitical changes, nation branding agencies, consultancies, and experts started to emerge. By now, the idea that a nation is something that can and should be branded has established itself as a common premise for a practice of communicating, commodifying, and marketing the nation to and throughout the world. At the same time when post-communist nation states had their “identity struggles” and tried to forget the “shameful” past and pin down their new and desired identities in the East/West hermeneutics, discourses of nation branding provided many effective methods to do that. In other words, it helped Eastern European nation-states to “intertwine nationalism with globalization.” Moreover, as nation branding practitioners see nation brands as a “benign form of national consciousness”, it provided Eastern European nation-states an effective way to articulate the category of the nation with the new, globalized world, without the more radical expressions of nationalism.

One way to concisely define nation branding is to conceive it as a “particular form of national consciousness” that is produced at the intersection of “the nation” and the “tools, techniques, and expertise from the world of corporate brand management”. Alternatively, we can approach it as a result of a transnational “culture of circulation” that produces a particular type of understanding of the nation as a competitive, contemporary and commodifiable entity rather than – or in addition to – a sovereign nation state. Nation branding, then, represents a transformative change in the imagining of nations whereby theories and concepts from PR, marketing, and branding intertwine with or replace “core political concepts such as citizenship, national sovereignty and democracy.” Nation branding experts have also suggested that the most successful nation branding projects are the ones that manage to influence citizens to “perform attitudes and behaviors that are compatible with the brand strategy” and to cultivate the roles of the “brand ambassador, brand champion, brand exemplar, or brand carrier” among its citizens.

Even though e-Estonia is not explicitly framed as a nation branding project, many of its aspects seem to correspond to the established definitions and categories used by nation branding researchers. Building on the different elements of nation branding discourse outlined above, I suggest that we bring these elements together under the more general notion of the “logics of nation branding”. First of all, the signifier e-Estonia allows the obscuring of different social categories. Namely, it interchangably refers to Estonia as “the digital society”, “a ‘digital nation”,’ and a country that is “run like a start-up” or offered as a “service.” Second, the “logics of nation branding” also help to grasp how the e-Estonia discourse depends on the production of a variety of new, distinctive subjects (e-Estonians, e-Residents), the devices they use (the ID card), and the practices (e-voting, digital signing) they engage in. Third, e-Estonia necessarily involves the straitening of these various social categories (nation, society, country) and subject-positions in a global context. This aspect of the “logics of nation branding” can be more clearly exemplified by one of the most recent initiatives of e-Estonia: the e-Residency project.

**e-Estonians and e-Residents**

While the e-Residency project is framed as another project of e-Estonia, it also appears to be one of the most “revolutionary” among them by being presented as “a step towards fulfilling Estonia’s aspirations of pioneering the first borderless e-society.” Since the e-Residency project has become a kind of a revolutionary story inside the success story of e-Estonia, it is interesting to...
observe how it seamlessly allows the bringing together of two totally disparate events, the Estonian Singing Revolution and the launch of the World Wide Web. As one of the stories at the e-Residency blog puts it: it is the year 1991 to which Estonia’s “re-birth as a digital nation can be traced back.”

The discourse of “citizenship” offers citizen a global world citizen a government-issued digital identity” by which they can “enjoy the government and business services that Estonia has developed since the 1990s.” These include a number of opportunities: a company online, online banking, tax declarations, and the digital signing of documents. The developers and promoters of the e-residency project have conceived it as “a sort of governmental start-up” by which “will eliminate the need to physically travel to the ‘e-cabinet’.” As the press notice put it back then, this system was developed as “a first step towards e-government”.

A year later the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (with Ilves as Minister) started to publish a section titled e-Estonia in its publication called “Glasnost and More”.” The e-Estonia section appeared side by side with others such as “Foreign Investments” and “Tourism.” All of these was essentially selections of quotes and headlines compiled from the foreign press. The excerpts in the e-Estonia section praised the recently launched “e-cabinet.” As the press notice put it back then, this system was developed as “a first step towards e-government”.

The political impact of the e-Estonia narrative has been immense. When Estonia was a small former Soviet republic, “the label ‘former Soviet republic’ that he claimed had been “pejoratively” applied to Estonia. It seems that the particular signifier e-Estonia appears to serve as an effective way to argue against “[p]reconceptions that form views of the present day ‘Eastern Europe’”, mostly because it allowed emphasis on those aspects of Estonia’s technological and economic development that did not confirm or justify the stereotype of a backward post-Soviet state.

What I would like to do in this last section of the article is to explore the political dimension of the e-Estonia discourse. The political dimension, as I pointed out above, concerns the dislocation of existing social relations in the “name of a post-Soviet past”. It was almost two decades ago that Ilves argued for the dismantling of the widespread prejudices that perceived post-Soviet Estonia as backward and underdeveloped, it is still this very same post-Soviet image that continues to play a crucial role in the currently circulating e-Estonia story. In its new version, however, the post-Soviet image is something that has been successfully left behind — in other words, as long as Estonia is e-Estonia, its post-Soviet past can even help it to defend itself in situations of cyber war. Furthermore, as the e-Estonia website tells us, it was in 2007 when Estonia “really took off” that was the year that Estonia became “the first nation in history to successfully defend itself against a large-scale cyber attack.”

Specifically, the term transition pushes one to conceive post-socialism as an intermediate period between the collapse of communism and the introduction of capitalism. In studies of post-socialism the idea of one-way transition has been criticized widely on different grounds. One of the central objections is that the information society, and the spatial and the temporal by “reducing geographical diversity to a lagging temporality” and represents a particular region as being “on a journey somewhere”.

In other words, the idea of post-socialism is comfortably fit into a framework of modernization theory that starts from the premise that “there is a direction to history”, “that direction can be known”, “we actually know it”, and “that direction of history leads toward, and points to, the ‘West’. From a discourse-theoretical perspective, this notion of ‘transition’ has become negatively conceived as the “nodal point” in an explanatory framework that not only structures and standardizes empirical data but has “turned into a historico-" graphical signifier, which encompasses a defined period after the fall of communism.”

This simplified notion of post-socialist transition treats it as a “structured system composed of various social experiences and political strategies, which naturalizes and universalizes the continuant power structures that are taking place and will take place in the future of post-socialist countries.” In one of its reviews of the book “The Myth of the Post-Soviet Past: How the Story of Estonia was Produced and Promoted in the West”, the London-based academic Timur Groisman states that “the e-Estonian story is one of a particular name becomes “the ground” for a particular discourse”. The logic of empty signifiers can be expressed in three points: “they signify the universal”, “they provide a name for the chain of equivalences” and “they keep the name in the world.”

Hence, the empty signifier can be characterized by a political logic that privileges “the dimension of equivalence to the point that its differential nature is almost entirely obliterated.” An empty signifier exemplifies the “discursive presence of its own limits” — as it tries to escape the relational and differential nature of signification, which means that where a particular name becomes “the ground” for a particular discourse, a name that becomes “detached from its particular meaning in order to provide an empty space that can be filled with universal meanings.”
precisely an empty signifier that has provided an “empty space” for universal meanings. First, in contrast with e-democracy and e-government, the signifier e-Estonia might seem relatively limited due to its reference to a past event, a nation, or a national community. However, following from the discussion in the first part of the essay, I think it is more accurate to conc...
Estonia, 2011; Rosina and Rökk, “E-Estonia: E-Governance in Practice.”


Glynn and Howarth, Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory, 8.


Ibid., 14.


Ibid., 16.

Ibid., 17.


Introduction: Bakhtin and the postcolonial & postsocialist perspective

The 10th International Bakhtin conference was held at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm on July 23 to 27, 2014. Titled “Bakhtin as Praxis: Academic Production, Artistic Practice, Political Activism,” it brought together several hundred researchers from across the globe. The discussions at the conference revealed the enduring relevance of “the ideas of what is known as the Bakhtin Circle” not only in the field of literary criticism, but also in a variety of other disciplines of the social sciences and humanities. The keynote speakers included Professors Caryl Emerson, Augusto Ponzo, Sergei Bocharov, and Galin Tihanov.

Some of the deliberations at the conference clearly emphasized the need to reexamine Bakhtinian categories through the lens of postcolonial and postsocialist concerns. Thus, this special section of Baltic Worlds is the result of the separate call for papers on “Bakhtinian Theory in Postcolonial and Postsocialist Perspective” launched in the fall of 2015. The call for papers invited further reflection on the Bakhtinian legacy.

This special section is important in the context of a furiously changing and increasingly polarized world. Bakhtinian concepts have proven time and again to be productive in explaining the ways in which social, political, and cultural forces intersect and affect each other, particularly during periods of transition. Such transitions could include colonial struggles for independence, the right to self-determination of oppressed populations, the introduction of the state and its system of governance, large scale migrations, and communal conflicts.

Suitably developed and modified, Bakhtinian ideas have the potential to expand and enrich our understanding and analyses of contemporary political movements and social transformations. Bakhtin’s work describes certain important facets of the operation of authority and violence in culture and the ways in which such forces may be opposed and undermined. The critical traction of categories such as dialogism and carnival derives from this analysis, but such categories are often employed in a mechanical fashion or too loosely. Instead, Bakhtinian ideas need to be specified and developed in order to realize their potential for postcolonial and postsocialist studies, providing a starting point for the development of critical categories suitable for certain types of analysis. This, however, requires that the ideas be examined and possibly revised or even rejected. What is required is a critical engagement with Bakhtinian ideas, rather than oversimplified or irrelevant applications of the concepts, in order to critique the structures of oppression, expose the multiply layered nodes of communication, and transcend the narrow national traditions that we are bound by or struggle to escape.

This special section of the Baltic Worlds is an attempt to present some of the many topics discussed at the conference. At the same time, it is a bid to follow Bakhtinian theory: in particular, his understanding of the processes of thought, speech acts, and communication. The editors invited contributors to explore the complexities of the postcolonial and postsocialist space by using Bakhtinian ideas and theories as a critical starting point for the development of an adequate methodology.

The theme this special section – “Bakhtian theory in postcolonial and postsocialist perspective” – is a recognition of the popularity of the Bakhtinian perspective across the world and an opportunity to contribute to a current discussion on similarities and differences between the postcolonial and the postsocialist. As editors of this section, we represent two areas of inquiry: postcolonial and postsocialist studies. Our coming together on this is symbolic of shared cross-cultural communication. In Bakhtinian terms, this transnational, transcontinental effort brings together two varied perspectives through multiple voices in representative of what scholars would define as dialogism.

This special section starts with a roundtable discussion of the Bakhtinian legacy by the leading specialists in the field. We interviewed Professors Ken Hirschkop, Craig Brandt, Caryl Emerson, Lakshmi Bandlamudi, and Galin Tihanov. The interview questions focused on the way Bakhtin and his influence permeate our readings of the postcolonial and postsocialist, his enduring legacy, and how his theories can be applied to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of our immediate history and contemporary life. The full-length articles in this special section include contributions by Viksitra Sukovata, Paromita Chakrabarti, Rajni Mujral, and Per-Arne Bodin. In one way or another, all the contributors deal with Bakhtinian theory and, at the same time, discuss the complexities of the postcolonial and/or postsocialist space.

The article by Sukovata titled “Ukrainian Popular Culture in the Context of M. Bakhtin’s Philosophy of Laughter and Postcolonial Perspective” is a study of Ukrainian popular culture explored through the lens of the Bakhtinian theory of laughter. In particular, Sukovata explores carnivalesque elements of popular talk shows and articulates an approach in the context of anticolonial protest against Soviet/Russian cultural domination. Stressing the important role of laughter for the return of dignity in the situation of postcolonial insecurity and cultural hybridity, she also states therapeutic functions of laughter as a part of the multiculturalism of Ukrainian society.

Chakrabarti’s “Crisis of the Responsible World: Bakhtin, Dialogism and the Postcolonial Memoir” reconsiders notions of narrative liminality and interpretive dialogism in the reading of the postcolonial memoir, juxtaposing the postcolonial in-betweenness of critical discourse with Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea of hybridized, colloquial and hidden dialogicality, the postcolonial memoir can be read as the self’s mapping of a paradigm shift in contemporary times. Chakrabarti undertakes a Bakhtinian analysis of the South Asian-American diasporic writer Meena Alex- andra, and the revised 2003 version. Simulating them as centripetal and centrifugal texts that operate in synchronicity and in constantly shifting moments of utterance, her study cautions us to take account of the painful unreliability of the authorial and narrative voices, the collision of history and memory, the deeply ambiguous contours of language and discursive representa- tion, and the limits of the postcolonial hybrid self.

Mujral’s “The Grotesque Body in Indian Comic Tradition: An Aesthetic of Transgression” engages with the role of the grotesque body in constituting the site of the comic and carnivalesque in Indian comic tradition. She aims to explore the comic tradition in Indian Sanskrit literature by studying Haryanvi. She elaborates on how the distorted, deformed, and diseased body institute the carnivalesque discursively.

Finally, the article “Witchhunt in Northern Sweden: A Bakhtinian Approach” by Bodin deals with the Swedish history of the witch trials in Angermanland, Northern Sweden in the 17th century. Using a Bakhtinian approach, but also Sergi Averintsev’s ideas on connections between laughter and fear, Bodin attempts to answer the question about the reasons for witch trials. Exploring the relationships between laughter and the reverse culture, Bodin comes to the conclusion that these relationships can be very complex while the reverse culture might be connected to violence and fear, not only to laughter.

Yulia Gradskova Paromita Chakrabarti

Guest editors: Yulia Gradskova & Paromita Chakrabarti
Illustration: Nrgt Svensson

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A discussion on the Bakhtin Circle

by Yulia Gradskova & Paromita Chakrabarti

In what ways do you think the ideas developed by members of the group known as the Bakhtin Circle could prove useful for theorizing postcolonial and cultural practices of what might be called ‘postsocialism’?

KEN HIRSCHKOP: "Probably the most immediate and obvious application is the use of Bakhtin's theory for discussing 'the language question' in postcolonial nations. For many countries, there are pressing issues regarding the need for a national language or lingua franca and questions about how to deal with the legacy of a colonizer's language. Bakhtin's discussions of the 'unified language' and his discussions of multilingualism, polyphony, etc., could be useful."

CRAIG BRANDIST: "First of all, the idea of 'postsocialism' suggests that some sort of socialism actually existed in the Stalinist and post-Stalinist states, which is, I think, unanswerable. The fact that the former rulers of these states called them 'socialist' did not make them so any more than Cambodia became democratic when the Khmer Rouge renamed it Democratic Kampuchea. Whatever their ideological clothing, those states were organized and operated as single economic units competing militarily with the Western bloc. The economic dynamic was a mere variant of capitalism, as is clear by the way the rulers simply shifted assets from their public to their private 'pockets' as the post-Stalinist states transformed themselves from the above in 1989–91. If, by 'postsocialist' one considers the states of the former USSR which were locked into a Russian-dominated empire from the end of the 1920s, or the East European states that were merely subject to Soviet imperial domination rather than direct colonialism, then it makes more sense to speak about such relationships using the same terms as for any state subject to colonialism and imperialism."

"Certainly the dynamics of semiotic and ideological struggles theorized in Voloshinov's Marxism and the Philosophy of Language and in Bakhtin's works on the novel can serve as good starting points for analyzing the struggle to contest and overcome the continuing effects of cultural domination in the postcolonial world. They have some considerable advantages over some of the politically debilitating approaches based on poststructuralism and postmodern theories, which dissolve agency in a web of signification. They can only be starting points, however, since this question is not easy for me to answer. Bakhtin was an unusual thinker in being completely at home in the terminology and value-systems of abstract German philosophy, from Kant through Schelling to the 20th-century phenomenologists, and yet he remained a 'particularist,' a personalist who investigated transcendent reality and respected, but did not share, the materialist convictions of his Marxist colleagues. Postcolonialist and poststructuralist thought, emerging as both did from global exploitation systems that subsumed the individual, is deeply and properly engaged with the dignity of the human subject. Bakhtin held the human subject to be less an entity with rights than a threshold, a meeting place of multiple consciousnesses, and an unknowable entity best approached 'aphoristically,' a being designed not to be fully cognized. These are tricky concepts to politicize, but Bakhtin was not a political thinker. His ideas can, of course, be utilized by those who are!"

The Bakhtin Circle was a 20th-century school of Russian thought which centered on the work of Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895–1975). The circle addressed philosophically the social and cultural issues posed by the Russian Revolution and its degeneration into the Stalin dictatorship. Their work focused on the centrality of significance in social life generally and in artistic creation in particular, examining the way in which language registered the conflicts between social groups. The key views of the circle are that linguistic expression is essentially dialogic, formed in the process of social interaction, and that this leads to the interaction of different social values being registered in terms of recontextualization of the speech of others. While the ruling stratum tries to post a single discourse as exemplary, the subordinate classes are inclined to subvert this monologic closure. In the sphere of literature, poetry and epicis represent the centripetal forces within the cultural arena, whereas the novel is the structurally elaborated expression of popular ideology, the radical criticism of society. Members of the circle included Matvei Isaievich Kagan (1889–1937), Pavel Nikolaievich Medvedev (1891–1938), Lev Vasilevich Pumpanikh (1891–1940), Ivan Ivanovich Solntsev (1902–1944), Valentin Nikolaevich Volosinov (1905–1936), and others.
LAKSHMI BANDLAMUDI: “I would like to address this question based on the premise that colonial experiences and postcolonial remembrances are as incredibly diverse as any living culture, and any unified sense of ‘ism’ is not necessarily compatible with the Bakhtinian world. Even with my limited knowledge of socialism and postsocialism, I would guess that they never existed in some clearly defined form. Bakhtin’s unorthodox thinking did not exactly entertain any form of unified ‘ism’, instead it concentrated on dialogic encounters between competing ‘isms’. Therefore the key words in your question are ‘cultural practice’ that are bound to be open-ended and ambiguous.

KERI HIRSCHKOP: If we consider the work of the Circle as a whole then it seems to me that we are provided with a number of useful approaches to how the ruling ideology functions in trying to close down alternative understandings. Bakhtin arrived at this idea not without help from the Russian Formalists, notably Shklovsky and Tynianov. Bakhtin’s work thus holds significant potential to invigorate debates in postcolonialism, modernism, and poststructuralism. "Bakhtin’s work has developed powerful tools that allow us to address cultural hybridity and to cast the history of marginal genres and cultural forms as evolving towards domination: the story of the novel itself is a cultural practice that are bound to be open-ended and ambiguous."

LAKSHMI BANDLAMUDI: “Bakhtin had very little to say about social and political movements and did not necessarily embark on a journey to rid the world of exploitation. For him, jumping onto the bandwagon of social movements and shouting political slogans was the easy part, but to cede your territory and make room for the different other as an equal partner in a dialogue requires humility, patience, and respect, and this was Bakhtin’s main concern. He discovered the potential for liberation, self-discovery, and dignity, not in mass social movements (not that he said anything overtly against them), but in the I am not like you, but I like you approach to human interactions. ‘I am not like you, but I like you’ approach to human interactions. "Bakhtin argues that a modern form of writing and prose can ‘represent’ the discourses it portrays quite well. The monologic worldview conveniently freezes these fluid concepts simply to exert control, and Bakhtinian categories enable us to expose the built-in rigidity in single-voiced authoritarian worldviews. “In this sense, there is a lot of work to do to supplement and revise Bakhtinian categories to make them effective in these kinds of analyses. Also, we need to ensure that questions of economic structures and forces play a full role in our analyses, for they are largely missing from Bakhtinian analysis. Without this, it is difficult to see how questions of immigration can properly be addressed, but once they do appear, then questions of authoritative conceptions about ‘alien’ social groups and how they might be challenged may be aided by employing certain Bakhtinian categories.”

CAROL EMERSON: “In the most personalist (that is, not institutionalized) ways Bakhtin would counsel us to find an opportunity for creative/dialogic understanding of self/culture and history. The exposure of the cultural codes is bound to generate some anxiety and instead of responding dialogically to this unsettling feeling, what we often witness is the dominance of monologic impulses. The long term residents want to return to presumed notions of ‘nativism’ and ‘original son of the soil’, while the new immigrants resort to fantasies of ‘imaginary homelands’ and ‘romantic pasts’ and both groups fail to respond to the dialogic potential. Sadly we have been witnessing this trend across Europe and the USA, and other parts of the world. "While there is no distinct political theory, the analytical categories he suggests to make sense of a dynamic pluralistic world aid us in challenging notions of what constitutes ‘original’, ‘alien’, ‘ancient’, and ‘modern’. The monologic worldview conveniently freezes these fluid concepts simply to exert control, and Bakhtinian categories enable us to expose the built-in rigidity in single-voiced authoritarian worldviews.”

MIKHAIL BAHTIN (1895–1975) was a Russian philosopher and literary critic. Although he was active in literary and aesthetic debates of the 1920s in the Soviet Union, he was long unknown in Russia and was first “rediscovered” by Western scholars in the 1960s. Indeed, in December 1929, Bakhtin was arrested for “anti-Soviet activity”, and sentenced to five years in a labor camp. His work was not published until the 1960s. In this study Bakhtin explored the specific Bakhtin’s work in the social, political and cultural contexts of the period.

Bakhtin is best known for his seminal work in the field of postcolonial theory, a field that was only really developed in the 1970s. Bakhtin’s work has had a profound influence on the development of postcolonial theory, and his ideas have been instrumental in the development of a number of other fields, including cultural studies, literary theory, and political science.

Bakhtin’s work has been widely praised for its originality and its ability to challenge traditional views of literature. His ideas have been influential in the development of a number of different theories, including postmodernism, poststructuralism, and deconstruction. Bakhtin is often seen as a key figure in the development of postcolonial theory, and his work has been widely studied and discussed by scholars in a variety of different fields.

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"Bakhtin’s work has developed powerful tools that allow us to address cultural hybridity and to cast the history of marginal genres and cultural forms as evolving towards domination: the story of the novel itself is a cultural practice that are bound to be open-ended and ambiguous."
“Especially in his early work, Bakhtin is marvelously seminal on the question of otherness, and what it actually means to accept the Other.”

KEN HIRSCHKOP: “Matters are more complicated than the question implies; plenty of Russians did not think of themselves as, for the first instance, European. Furthermore, there is a very substantial difference between Russian literary forms and those contemporary with them in, say, France or England. So think ‘Eurocentric’ implies something more cohesive than is the case with Bakhtin. That said, his reference points, intellectually, he absolutely is in Germany and Russia. Perhaps more significantly, his historical sense depends entirely on a very classic version of European history: ancient Greece and Rome, Middle Ages, Renaissance, modernity. That is a serious problem, in my view, for Europeans as well as non-Europeans.”

CRAIG BRANDSTEDT: “There are at least two ways in which a thinker might be considered Eurocentric. One might be to say a thinker is rooted in, and most familiar with, European culture and so approaches another culture from that position; another is to treat European culture as a standard or yardstick with which to judge the other culture. Only the second version is a significant problem. The first version, if properly understood and acknowledged, may facilitate valuable real and analyses. Bakhtin is a Eurocentric thinker only in the first sense: his published works are rooted in European philosophy and focus upon European culture, with few excursions into non-European culture. He was, however, professor of world literature in Saransk, and so discussed non-European literature as part of a program of pedagogy. He does not appear to have felt confident to publish in the area. The main issue is perhaps methodological – does Bakhtin seek to judge the novel, for instance, as the achievement of a specifically European social process or culture? It would appear not. It is treated as a form that arises in human culture at a specific point, related to the rise of national languages, or the expression of permanent critical and decentralizing forces in culture more generally. The works in which he does venture into non-European areas suggest he was viewed as a 'universal' thinker, in Bakhtinian terms. He was a great enthusiast of the Socratic method, in Bakhtinian terms, and was acquainted with other than European culture. It was not that he did not think of other cultures; it was that he did not think of other cultures as part of a program of pedagogy. He does not appear to have felt confident to publish in the area. The main issue is perhaps methodological – does Bakhtin seek to judge the novel, for instance, as the achievement of a specifically European social process or culture? It would appear not. It is treated as a form that arises in human culture at a specific point, related to the rise of national languages, or the expression of permanent critical and decentralizing forces in culture more generally. The works in which he does venture into non-European areas suggest he was viewed as a 'universal' thinker, in Bakhtinian terms. He was a great enthusiast of the Socratic method, in Bakhtinian terms, and was acquainted with other than European culture. It was not that he did not think of other cultures; it was that he did not think of other cultures as part of a program of pedagogy. He does not appear to have felt confident to publish in the area. The main issue is perhaps methodological – does Bakhtin seek to judge the novel, for instance, as the achievement of a specifically European social process or culture? It would appear not. It is treated as a form that arises in human culture at a specific point, related to the rise of national languages, or the expression of permanent critical and decentralizing forces in culture more generally. The works in which he does venture into non-European areas suggest he was viewed as a ‘universal’ thinker, that is, he assumed that what is common to human mind was applicable to most other bodies and minds. But, at base, the idea of dialogue and heteroglossia are pluralizing ideas, centrifugal in spirit rather than centralizing. So no, he is not blindly or dogmatically Eurocentric. Of course he is not to blame for having been born in Europe (or at the Eastern fringe of it). It is the task of thinkers from other cultures to cosmopolitanize when applying his thought.”

LAKSHMI BANDALURU: “Bakhtin’s ideas are certainly rooted in European philosophy and literary works, but that does not make him an Eurocentric thinker as applied to all cultural areas. Bakhtin is a Romantic thinker as applied to a particular philosophy, or political practice as a measuring rod to assess other philosophies, texts or cultural practices, was antithetical to Bakhtinian thought. He insisted on dialogicality between competing ideas and ideals. Any thinker is grounded in the cultural ethos of their times, but that does not mean their ideas cannot have a broader appeal. Tagore, Aurobindo and other Indian intellectuals are grounded in the Indian intellectual tradition, and yet we cannot characterize them as Indo-centric as their works also have a universal appeal. Unlike Aurobindo, who had immense familiarity with Western philosophies and mythologies, and hence was able to engage in comparative analysis, Bakhtin does not appear to be familiar with non-Western literature in a deep sense and hence we do not see any references to them in his works. The content of Bakhtin’s works clearly show the European imprint, but the categories of thought and analysis cross cultural and disciplinary boundaries. Since he never engaged in the exercise of ranking cultures, we could say that he is a de-centered thinker and therefore it would be unfair to brand him as an Eurocentric thinker.”

GALIN TIANHOU: “This is an excellent question. The short answer is, actually, no. Yes, Bakhtin appears to be relying on a Western canon to validate his theories; the Rabelais book begins with a comparison of Rabelais with Voltaire, Shakespeare, Gervants, etc. But, in truth, Bakhtin is more interested in the literature and culture of premodern-
nity, the time when Europe is not yet a dominant force, before the continent begins to see itself as the center of the world. Bakhtin is thus actually a thinker much more fascinated by the subterranean cultural deposits of folklore, of minor discourses, of ancient genres, of anonymous masses – all of which long predate European culture of the age of modernity (beginning roughly with the Renaissance), which is the only dominant European culture we know. Even Rabelais’ novel interests him for its more traditional, pre-modern, folklore-based layers. Bakhtin is a flight away from Eurocentrism, not by writing on non-European cultures, but by writing on pre-European cultures, on cultures that occupy the old shared territory of folklore, of epic narratives, before Europe even begins to emerge as an entity on the cultural and political map of the world: his is an anti-Eurocentric journey not in space, but in time. His contemporary, Nikolai Marr, of whom Bakhtin thought highly, did something similar in his work on semantic paleontology.

Critics have noted that categories such as dialogism and carnival are often employed in a mechanical fashion or too loosely. How can this problem be avoided by scholars coming from outside Europe?

KEN HIRSCHKOP: "I’m not sure what one can do besides read the texts carefully and note their ambiguities. Always bear in mind that ‘dialogism’ is found in novels, not in everyday dialogue – don’t equate the two."

CRAIG BRANDIST: "I think the main thing is to be historically rigorous when seeking to apply categories and concepts to specific cultural phenomena. One of the things that tempts researchers to apply the categories too loosely is that Bakhtin developed his concepts in analyses of cultural forms with too little attention to the institutional structures into which those forms were integrated at a ‘molecular’ level, as if were. An assessment of the validity of such concepts requires an assessment of the institutional foundations of the European phenomena Bakhtin was seeking to address, and that of the non-European phenomenon to be considered. The other side of historical rigor is to have an awareness of the historical background of Bakhtinian ideas themselves, how they have developed from specific ways of understanding the world and the assumptions on which they are based. This enables one better to understand their potential and limitations in application as well as their capacities for combination with other ideas that might lead to analytical tools becoming better adapted to their objects. So it is not simply about adopting and applying ideas and analytical categories, but their customization to suit the historically-determinate nature of the object of analysis."

CARYL EMERSON: "A good but difficult question. Be more precise in the use of concepts. Every time people converse is not an instance of dialogue; every time a rogue, fool, or clown commits a prank on the public square he is not enacting a culture of laughter. Dialogue begins as a listening practice and carnival begins with absence of fear of death. For Bakhtin, both dialogue and carnival were technical terms relating both to social practices and to spiritual attitudes. My experience has been that ancient non-Western cultures, especially those that have not undergone rigorous colonial enlightenment or forced atheistic ideologies, are wonderfully situated to grasp the essentials of Bakhtin, whereas materialist cultures are somewhat handicapped."

LAKSHMI BANDLAMUDI: "Dialogue and carnival are deep-rooted philosophical concepts. A simple conversation is not a dialogue and language filled with profanities and grotesque body images does not constitute dialogue. Dialogue is grounded in ontological realities and epistemological necessities and it is also a call for fulfilling ethical obligations with emotional sensitivity towards the other. Often, scholars engage more with Bakhtin’s later works that are relatively more accessible, without a deeper engagement with his early works that are philosophically deep and dense, and that leads to mechanical applications. ‘Carnival is an essential part of the dialogic world, for it catalyzes new beginnings and keeps the system open-ended. It outsidersness is an essential part of aesthetic consciousness, a permissive merger into the collective in an essential element of artistic intellectual consciousness, and togen in the world. Ancient cultures lived in a tradition that has a rich carnivalesque tradition (for example Ninda Stuti – accusatory praises), are well suited to bring greater clarity and add a new dimension to the Bakhtin/Rabelaisian world, and I am eagerly looking forward to such contributions. Carnival is both physical and metaphysical and ignoring either element results in loose applications."

GALIN TIANHO: “This is also a problem for scholars from Europe; they often tend to work with these concepts as if they had no boundaries of whose validity accrues independently of a particular historical and cultural context. It seems to me that the best way to resist this is to always ask oneself the question about the limits of Bakhtinian theory, the limits of its applicability: try to contextualize his categories and see how much a different cultural context would allow them to do; try to confront his theory with your own cultural history and your own aesthetic formations, and see how far it goes before it needs reworking, supplementing, qualifying.”

How might Bakhtinian ideas be developed or revised better to suit analyses of non-Western cultures?

KEN HIRSCHKOP: "Bakhtin’s tools are fairly flexible: I’m not sure they need much rejiggling to be useful in the analysis of materials outside Europe and North America. But ‘narrative’ and ‘dialogue’ are universal in their scope. Though though the analytical categories are universal, in Bakhtin’s work each analytical category has a normative sense built into it (there are more and less dialogic forms of dialogue, more and less chronotopic forms of narrative) and these could be a useful tool. An entire society will place the same value on parody and irony that Bakhtin does and not every society will think that the history of folklore, rites, and epic narratives, before Europe even begins to emerge as an entity on the cultural and political map of the world: his is an anti-Eurocentric journey not in space, but in time. The Bakhtinian conceptual framework may be carried forward in these encounters, but only as an impulse."

CRAIG BRANDIST: “Again, I think that historical and institutional specificity is important here. Countries like India with a range of literary languages clearly do not fit easily into Bakhtin’s model of the novel as being linked to the rise of a unitary language that becomes socially stratified. Whether varieties of literary narrative in non-Western traditions can really be assumed to fit Bakhtin’s characterization of the epic and the novel is surely open to serious question. That does not exclude the probability that one may find a significant number of areas where the analysis does indeed fit. Perhaps it is more productive to regard Bakhtin’s work as raising questions and opening avenues of research rather than providing some definitive set of categories that can be applied unproblematically. There are good reasons why the categories of analysis of literary texts vary across cultures, and one needs to take proper account of this in evaluating the usefulness of Bakhtinian categories. It may well be that considering the approaches together and scrutinizing their philosophical bases will allow the development of more adequate categories for analyzing literary phenomena.”

CARYL EMERSON: “Such adaptation is already being done very successfully. Lakshmi Bandlamudi’s 2013 book from Routledge, Difference, Dialogue and Development: A Bakhtinian World is one illuminating example, as was the recent International Bakhtin Symposium in India.”

LAKSHMI BANDLAMUDI: “Bakhtin’s ideas have already traveled far and wide and the very fact that international Bakhtin conferences have been held in so many parts of the world is proof of the wide appeal. Convening the Bakhtin Conference in India in 2013 was my attempt to initiate Bakhtin Studies in India, and I sincerely believe, given the cultural composition and intellectual traditions in India, that the country has the potential to contribute immensely to dialogic studies. "In addition to my work on The Muhuhihrutu, I have been engaged in comparative analysis between Bakhtin and the Sanskrit grammarian Bharthari, and I find their dialogic encounters, even after crossing cultural spaces and historical times, to be incredibly valuable and exciting. Theoretically, concepts are not templates to be applied mechanically; they need to be deployed with great consideration to basic realities.”

GALIN TIANHO: “I think this question is partly answered in my response to the previous question. But there is also the whole issue of how one can develop Bakhtinian theory. In a sense, by staging the encounters I outlined when answering the previous question; but also by developing a concep
tual apparatus that responds to new global developments. I recently had a doctoral student from São Paulo who was examining Bakhtin’s theory of discursive genres, and what happens to it in Brazil in the age of Facebook, Twitter, and other social media. Or think of India and its powerful ancient literary tradition. Bakhtin’s major opposition, between novel and epic – which to him is also an opposition between the dialogical and the monological – would not necessarily be as relevant in Sanskrit. It is only the repertoire of characters in the literary works that remains truly carnivalesque. The Bakhtinian conceptual framework may be carried forward in these encounters, but only as an impulse.”

What do you think about the development of Bakhtin’s ideas and research about Bakhtin in Russia today?

KEN HIRSCHKOP: “The most important development is the publication of the Bakhtin Sociantsuchimnie [Collected works], which means we finally have a reliable and fairly comprehensive edition of Bakhtin’s texts. There has been some excellent philosophical commentary on Bakhtin’s work as a direct consequence. I still find that much Russian commentary is mortgaged to an unsustainable vision of Bakhtin as a religious philosopher forced on his chosen path. But younger Russian commentators are also taking a role, and their view tends to be quite different.”

“Bakhtin’s ideas have already traveled far and the very fact that international Bakhtin conferences have been held in so many parts of the world is proof of the wide appeal.”
CRAIG BRANDSTÄDT: “Now all the volumes of Bakhtin’s Collected Works have been published, one hopes there will be a rather more rigorous approach to Bakhtin’s ideas in Russia than was typical in the preceding period. The haphazard way in which Bakhtin’s works were published, along with their selective adoption for ideological deployment, did not make a relatively dispassionate approach to the ideas easy in Russia. There are people from specific disciplines who have been interested in Bakhtinian ideas, have made creative use of them, and have produced valuable work. Unfortunately, however, with some significant exceptions, much of what became known as Bakhtinology led to readings that were skewed by extrinsic agendas. Unfortunately the Collected Works were not entirely free of this, and the lengthy, detailed and in many respects valuable commentaries tend to read Bakhtin’s work into a preconceived narrative framework. In some cases they also divide Bakhtin’s works into ‘canonical’ and ‘deuterocanonical’ texts, which allows the interpreter to disregard inconvenient textual evidence by consigning that evidence to the latter. I was relieved that the so-called ‘disputed texts’ were not included in Bakhtin’s Collected Works, for I believe publication of the works of the ‘Circle’ is a quite different project.”

Much of the ‘Bakhtinological’ reception has also tended to reduce the dialogues and exchanges within the Circle to a pedagogical relationship in which Bakhtin enlightened his followers, or argued with those who did not accept his wisdom. I have always found this monological arrangement not only to be unlikely, but also fundamentally incompatible with Bakhtin’s own philosophical outlook. The result is that the contributions of many participants remain either undeveloped or developed with little reference to the Circle. Thus work on Novich and Tahanovskii has tended to be carried out by historians of Oriental Studies and they have been largely left untouched by those focused on Bakhtinian ideas. Similarly, where Voloshinov and Medvedev were not simply treated as Bakhtin’s ventriloquist dummies, their works have rarely been related to the other circles of intellectuals to which they belonged and their distinct perspectives thereby inadequately discerned. Given the access Russian scholars have to archival materials, it is disappointing this research has largely been left to foreign researchers. Fortunately, as the ideological battles of the 1990s fade and younger Russian scholars come onto the scene, there have been signs of differently focused studies appearing.

“As far as Bakhtin’s own work is concerned, however, I do not think the situation will change fundamentally until Bakhtin’s archive has been systematically catalogued and made available to all researchers. One hopes this is not a too distant prospect. It is a pity that the personal archive of Voloshinov appears to have been lost, while those of Medvedev and Tahanovskii disappeared when they were each arrested and shot during the Stalinist repressions of the late 1930s. Fortunately there are some holdings in institutional archives that give us some information about these significant scholars. I look forward to seeing how the field will develop.”

GALIN TΩΛAKΟ: “Russia has seen all the ebbs and flows of the Bakhtin industry over the last quarter of a century — and not just seen but also played a part in shaping them, at first in a rather reluctant dialogue with the West, later on in ways that have been much more open and constructive. In Russia, as in other parts of the world, Bakhtin is now a classic, enjoying the status of someone people quote without necessarily having read him.”

NOTE: The questions where sent to the interviewee by e-mail during the autumn 2016 and collected and edited thereafter.

In the context of Bakhtin’s philosophy of laughter and the postcolonial perspective: Ukrainian popular culture

by Viktoriya Sukovata

abstract

The paper is a study of the Ukrainian popular culture based on the material of the Ukrainian TV comedy shows which emerged after 1991. They are: Maski Show, Gentlemen Show, Verka Serduchka, Fajna Ukraina, Vatra and Evening Kvartal. These TV shows have not been investigated by Western, nor Ukrainian scholars. The Ukrainian TV comedy shows are examined in the context of Bakhtin’s theory of carnivalesque and of the ideas of the Australian Slavic scholar M. Paleyshyn, who has elaborated the concepts anticolonialism and postcolonialism in relation to contemporary Ukrainian culture.

KEY WORDS: Ukrainian TV comedy shows, Ukrainian popular culture, postcolonial culture, carnivale.
tendency – the object and style of mockery, of laughter – can say a lot about relations between authorities and civil society, and about the possibility of criticism of the state. In addition, my study will introduce cultural colonialism as a category currently under-represented in the humanities in Europe.

I examine Ukrainian comedy shows within the theoretical framework of Bakhtin’s notion of the carnival, which has never been applied to this type of material. I contend that the study of Ukrainian comedy, when conducted in a Bakhtinian framework, sheds light on elements of culture and society that otherwise might remain unnoticed. Such an approach first developed in the work of Ken Hirschkop, in which Bakhtin’s ideas were applied to this type of material. I argue that the study of comedy can demonstrate the development of the cultural postmodernist polyphony of many cultural voices (as described by Bakhtin). In my work I will try to analyze the contemporary TV comedies in Ukraine in terms of Pavlyshyn’s discourse on postcolonialism and Bakhtin’s theory of polyphony and carnival.

High professional status only after recognition in Moscow and in Russia. Some films in the series had titles suggesting they were part of a propaganda mouthpiece, the Eastern Bloc’s “antirevolutionary” (“remonstrative”) discourse, which was presented as the parody of the canonical Soviet comedies. The first and the most prominent post-Soviet Ukrainian project was the “Post-Soviet Comedy”, which attempted to deconstruct Soviet propaganda clichés and artistic stereotypes. The first Ukrainian comedies developed his notion of cultural colonialism as a binary system only as a collaboration with the authorities (the colonial type of colonialism). In my work I will try to analyze the contemporary TV comedies in Ukraine in terms of Pavlyshyn’s discourse on postcolonialism and Bakhtin’s theory of polyphony and carnival. The Gentleman Show was sometimes devoted to political themes, but more often to family, gender, and national minorities’ issues. The Gentleman Show was sometimes devoted to political themes, but more often to family, gender, and national minorities’ issues. The Gentleman Show was sometimes devoted to political themes, but more often to family, gender, and national minorities’ issues.
The post-Soviet period.

The Soviet period, and this canon was used and transformed in the Western Other. Thus, it was a “permissible” laughter in the Siberia camps for five years merely because they related an unemployed man named Buls who ends up in a lavish home and changes his male clothes for female ones to play the role of a rich lady from Brazil. The man plays the role of a middle-aged femme fatale and attracts two men. The Soviet period’s educational broadcast, and scientific institutes had their own KVN teams. KVN had several competitive leagues (like football teams) among cities and regional clubs, and many contemporary humor shows and presenters in Ukraine and Russia came out of the KVN shows. Many popular writers of the late Soviet time, moved to the more tolerant, postcolonial and post-Stalinist era were originally from KVN teams. Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, former Soviet citizens living in Israel, the US, Germany, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan continue this competition of witness as an international project.

Because erudition, a demonstration of high intelligence, and an ironic attitude to the reigning social and political clichés was central to the KVN culture. It meant that the KVN produced a “Soviet” type of laughter that could be used in the service of the Soviet state in their professional functions as among people who more or less associated themselves with the Soviet culture to a new representative of normativity. It should be remembered that Ukraine has always been a country with a high percentage of Jews, especially in big cities such as Odessa, Kharkiv, Kiev, Dnepropetrovsk, and Donetsk, where Jews traditionally played a significant role in cultural, scientific, and artistic life. The Gentleman Show and Yiddish culture in the post-Soviet period.

The KVN was one of very few Soviet TV comedy shows. KVN was established not as a marginal culture, but as the subject of laughter, thus elevating the culture to a new level of normativity. It should be remembered that Ukraine has always been a country with a high percentage of Jews, especially in big cities such as Odessa, Kharkiv, Kiev, Dnepropetrovsk, and Donetsk, where Jews played an important role in cultural, scientific, and artistic life. The Gentleman Show and Yiddish culture in the post-Soviet period.

“THE UKRAINIAN GENTLEMAN SHOW CONSTRUCTED ITS HUMOR ON THE INTERSECTION OF THE JEWISH-UKRAINIAN-RUSSIAN COMEDIC TRADITIONS.”

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or as an ethnographic stylization, contemporary Ukrainian pop culture tries to find new sources of national identity, which have strict writing and pronunciation rules, surzhik, as a non-native mixture of both, can be considered a more liberal way of speaking, closer to folk consciousness: surzhik has thus lost the derogatory connotations instilled by the Soviet schools for decades, and come to be regarded as a local version of regional speech. Internet communication without grammatical rules and mutations has also altered perceptions of surzhik.

On the one hand, the use of surzhik on stage still induce laughter (especially among educated Ukrainians). Yet on the other hand, surzhik is heard everywhere on Ukrainian TV and it is perceived as a transgression of Soviet imperial normativity, as a symbol of a new cultural identity in the Ukrainian mass consciousness starting at the turn of the century, especially during the Maidan protests of 2004–2005, in which some political parties presented surzhik-speaking people as the “true Ukrainians”. The transgressive character of Verka Serduchka's image manifests itself at the level of psychology as well: the majority of people fear loneliness, or looking provincial, at some subconscious level. Verka Serduchka brings these human fears to the surface on the stage, making them not only even funnier, but making them funnier. Yet, even the audience is half the task of the comedian, and the other half is the performance itself. The comic situations arise from collisions between the urban-Russian-speaking community and the provincial, surzhik native. On the one hand, Vital’ka recalls characters of the Soviet Russian writer M. Zoshchenko (1898–1958), who used to write his works from point of view of a greedy, provincial, and uneducated person. Yet on the other hand, Vital’ka is presented as a source of sexual energy and Ukrainian provincial Vitality, while the city intellectuals look like toneless people, and vanish into the background. I would submit that Vital’ka reflects many qualities of Ukrainian postcolonial culture, of the early post-Soviet period when many people fled from the villages to the big cities (especially Kyiv). The newcomers had no intention of living in the province as post-Soviet culture: they kept their provincial way of life and thinking. But in Ukraine, the countryside is seen as a source of a middle-class and cultural identity, between urban culture and poor, between asceticism and mass, between the comic and the serious, between the aesthetic and realism, and between the object and subject. In this sense, Vital’ka is a kitsch figure, a kitsch symbol, a kitsch person, and an image of a little provincial town against the background of urban society, which is a kitsch society, a kitsch culture, a kitsch economy, and a kitsch politics.

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THE COMIC SITUATIONS ARISE FROM THE COLLISIONS BETWEEN THE URBAN-RUSSIAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY AND THE PROVINCIAL SURZHIK NATIVE.

Some of the comic situations arise from the collisions between the urban-Russian-speaking community and the provincial surzhik native. For example, Vital’ka is a kitsch symbol, a kitsch person, and an image of a little provincial town against the background of urban society, which is a kitsch society, a kitsch culture, a kitsch economy, and a kitsch politics.

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Two more Ukrainian shows involving the use of surzhik are Vital’ka (this is the diminutive form of the masculine name Vitaly) and Faina Ukraina (The good Ukraine). They build upon the aesthetic and humorous innovations of Verka Serduchka, the aesthetics of surzhik, travesty, and cross-dressing, and demonstrate the comic element of visual kitsch. Vital’ka has been a popular show since 2012 and can be understood as a combination of the popular TV show Our Russia and the comedy show Hyperka. Vital’ka does not make any open references to Mr. Bean, but the similarities can be reconstructed from the main character in Vital’ka (played by Garik Bircha): he is a strange young man, who has an ability to use expressive facial mimicry, who is not socialized and continually gets into ridiculous situations. Here, the similarities with Mr. Bean, end for the British show focuses on the British cultural stereotypes and the inability of the hero to adapt to these cultural norms, whereas the Ukrainian Vital’ka is an aggressive young man who is interested in sex only.

Another feature of Vital’ka is that Vital’ka speaks only in surzhik, while all other characters speak in standard Russian or Ukrainian. Yet on the other hand, Vital’ka is presented as a source of sexual energy and Ukrainian provincial Vitality, while the city intellectuals look like toneless people, and vanish into the background. I would submit that Vital’ka reflects many qualities of Ukrainian postcolonial culture, of the early post-Soviet period when many people fled from the villages to the big cities (especially Kyiv). The newcomers had no intention of living in the province as post-Soviet culture: they kept their provincial way of life and thinking. But in Ukraine, the countryside is seen as a source of a middle-class and cultural identity, between urban culture and poor, between asceticism and mass, between the comic and the serious, between the aesthetic and realism, and between the object and subject. In this sense, Vital’ka is a kitsch figure, a kitsch symbol, a kitsch person, and an image of a little provincial town against the background of urban society, which is a kitsch society, a kitsch culture, a kitsch economy, and a kitsch politics.

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I have analyzed the most interesting and popular Ukrainian comedies after the first decade of the 2000s: The Gentleman Show and Evening Kvartal. This choice was based on the fact that these two television shows created a carnival atmosphere during its performance.

Take Evening Kvartal to be a postcolonial and postmodern phenomenon in Ukraine, one that mixes various forms of ironic, playful, and grotesque laughter and resistant function as well: if an individual or social group is subjected to power, then laughter is a tool to free itself from the power and to change the overall political or social situation in society, then laughter becomes the only tool to manifest an opposition towards the government. For this reason, the most popular Ukrainian comedies manifested an identification with audiences of contemporary “multiple” Ukrainian identity. Typically, Evening Kvartal mocked both the excessive pathos of anticolonial nationalism and the imperial ambitions found in post-Soviet societies. The/authors of Evening Kvartal tend to articulate the folk skepticism towards both the ruling party and its opposition, and, in their parodies, actively used events from the post-Soviet context: the political and social hierarchies. For this reason, Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of the carnivalesque is the most appropriate to use in analyzing the contradictions of the post-Soviet Ukrainian society and the culture of laughter and comedy.

Viktorya Sukovata, PhD and Doctor habilitata in Cultural Theory and Philosophical Anthropology.

Acknowledgments:
This research paper was presented in part at the International Interdisciplinary conference “Balkhant as Praxic: Academic Production, Artistic Practice, Political Action” [Stichtokholm, Sweden, July 24–27, 2014] in which participated thanks to the grant from the Swedish Institute. I express my sincere gratitude to the administration of the Swedish Institute for their support of my studies.

References:

The grotesque body in Indian comic tradition

An aesthetics of transgression

by Rajni Mujral

Bharata, Indian dramatist, who wrote the foundational text on performance, Nātyashāstra (500 BC), identifies hāsya, (the comic), as emerging from srngāra (love) in a low-mimetic mode. He identifies deformed body as one of the vihāras (the cause) of hāsya. Bakhtin, too, locates the source of transgression and renewal in the grotesque body. The significant question is of the necessity of returning to a tradition of transgressive laughter. Prahasana, a genre from Sanskrit tradition which can be translated as farce, is such a genre with transgressive potential; it transgresses the prevalent hierarchical structures through presenting the image of the laughing body. This kind of gesture is akin to the dynamics of postcolonial aesthetics: transgressing and thereby transfiguring. The aim is to locate the transgressive zone that transforms and transfigures various structures in and through the physiological. The zone is that of the pornographic. Therefore, the need to bring these traditions in contact, to provide a better understanding of the tradition of grotesque in relation to the genre of prahasana.

The body has been the primary locus to put forward this: each culture has its own cultural forms and variants to express resistance. Thus, it is interesting to explore and observe the recurrent use of body as a trope to express resistance, across different traditions. On the one hand, Bharata theorized the role of body in debunking the oppressive structures. On the other hand, Bakhtin too emphasizes on the role of body in his elaboration of the notion of carnivalesque. For Bakhtin, the laughing body became a metaphor for resistance and rejuvenation. Bharata identified body, especially deformed, disfigured, non-conforming body as one of the various sources of laughter.

Hāsa and prahasana: The power of laughter

In Nātyashāstra, Bharata identifies the origin of hāsya (the comic) in the imitation of the bodily emotions of a higher order. Body is central for the comic or the semblance of the comic. It gains more potential for transgression when this suffix of abhāsa is attached to it, otherwise, it is mimicked, it no longer remains in the comic or the semblance of the comic. It gains more potential for transgression when this suffix of abhāsa is attached to it, otherwise, it is mimicked, it no longer remains in the comic or the semblance of the comic.

ITS TRANSGRESSIVE POTENTIAL IS EVIDENT ACROSS OTHER ASPECTS3: laughter which exists out of the shackles. The classification manual of performance stipulates that only base characters can laugh out loud, while the higher ones can only smile. Hence what Bakhtin identifies as a loud festive laughter (smiel) is in itself a transgression of taboos. Further, it can be noted that what Bakhtin identifies as carnivalescistic laughter is fun damentally a destabilizing force. He argues that “Carnivalescistic laughter...is a gesture toward something higher—toward a shift of authorities and truths, a shift of world orders. Laughter embraces both poles of change, with crisis itself.”

Not only the transgressive, but the comic also is a point of convergence. Bakhtin notes that “the comic is a literary form which is composited of the aesthetic, savours), according to Abhinavagupta. As he affirms in the Abhinavabakthi, all the rasas are constituents of hāsa— a meeting point, a melting point, as it were, an instance of carnivalescistic. F. M. Cornford arrives at a similar conclusion by a different trajectory: in his study “The Ritual Origins of Comedy”, locating the origin of the comedy in connection with Dionysian ritual, he associates comedy with a sense of victory over everything inimical to human beings. He relates it to laughter tracing its two ramifications whereby he links it with ridicule on the one hand, and with mirth or joy on the other, with positive spirit. In this second sense, he says that the subversive spirit of carnivalesque is passed off as “celebration of life”. Though other emotions do evoke laughter, laughter when evoked by the carnivalesque and rejuvenates. It is what Bakhtin calls as “festive laughter”, “the hāsa which is at the heart of prahasana. Since laughter revives and rejuvenates, it becomes indispensable to carnival. Further, carnivalesque subversion is carried over in the garb of laughter, a garb that body wears.

laughter.2

laughing body is the body in the in-between space that redelineates the body it inhabits by denuding it of its cultural, symbolic, and carnivalesque discursively. Further, it can be noted that what Bakhtin identifies as carnivalescistic laughter is fundamentally a destabilizing force. He argues that “Carnivalescistic laughter...is a gesture toward something higher—toward a shift of authorities and truths, a shift of world orders. Laughter embraces both poles of change, with crisis itself.”

laughter. The Dionysiac spirit is the spirit of the comic. Without going much into the analysis of symbolism, yet recognizing its function in the symbolic realm, it is significant to notice that prahasana, as a comic genre, is a genre that personifies the transgressive function. Transgression! is at the very core of the genre, the transgression of hierarchical order founded on pure-mime binaries among others. The genre is a re-emergence of that transgressive function. Worship, an act and an enactment that effects carnivalescistic which otherwise is not possible outside that symbol. Symbolism emerges in a society that constitutes itself in terms of a series of negations— in the form of taboos, social, religious and symbolic prohibitions. Further, these taboos form the order due to their binding force. This is the source of the genre’s vitality. Reversal of order is the first phase of this genre, smoothly followed by the violation of negation and its celebration as an opening up of possibilities. This reversal is exactly what Bakhtin calls the carnivalescistic, topsy-turvy: what exists outside this frame gets suspended in it. By its very structure, the comic is closely linked to transgression, and its axis is from sacred to profane. It is in this movement, that reversal takes place, and this reversal which at one level is incongruent, is the source of comic. To return to Bharata after Abhinavagupta, when srngāra is mimicked, it no longer remains in the realm of the sacred, but slips into the profane, the slip being inbuilt into the act of mimicking itself (which Homi Bhabha studiously notes in a different context), it gives rise to hāsa or hāsyaabhāsa: the comic or the semblance of the comic. It gains more potential for transgression when this suffix of abhāsa is attached to it, since always it can distinguish itself from the real, although it is an effect of and in a way constitutes, the real. This fictionality is a crucial element since prahasana always reprises a staged event.

Bakhtin’s notion of the grotesque body as the basis of carnivalescistic imagery3 underscores his insistence on body for the festive laughter. It is the body that laughs and after laughter, rejuvenates. Though the comedy has been cultural-specific, the grotesque body, termed variously as incongruent, distorted etc., has remained as an inevitable source of the comic. As Bakhtin says, “The boundless, it occurs of grotesque imagery within time and space extends to all languages, all literatures, and the entire system of gesticulation.”

How is it that the genre of prahasana effects what characterizes the carnivalesque? One of the ways is to see transgression as the basis of carnivalesque, but transgression alone is not enough. Hāsya/hāsa (the comic/the laughter) is integral to it for its renewal, essential to destroy and to restore. The genre is transgressive in terms of its themes, in its engagement with the various taboos— for instance, those of sacredness and sexuality. It challenges the hierarchical structures of transgression.

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TOPSY-TURVYING: CARNIVALESQUE

THIS REVERSAL IS EXACTLY WHAT BAKHTIN CALLS CARNIVALESCOUS, TOPSY-TURVYING: WHAT EXISTS OUTSIDE THIS FRAME GETS SUSPENDED WITHIN IT.”

Keywords: Bakhtin, carnival, prahasana.
in a playful manner, questioning the established boundaries and brings revival through comic effect. The comic effect produced thus strikes a hopeful note, opening a possibility for change, for transformation. The society is constituted by negations, and the positive spirit of laughter and the carnivalesque moves into the negated field of the body, and this new transformation structure of bodily consciousness. The unfamiliar territory—a territory beyond the socially constructed body. Further, grotesque is one of the effects of moving into the territory. These elements are in a constant process of transformation or prakṛti perception of the composition of the human body: it identifies the significant metaphor through its unfinalized disposition, thus bringing revival through comic effect. The comic effect produced is like an assembly (the first act of the play); the first act of the play, the meeting in the brothel sets the stage for the topsy-turvy-ness. The grotesque here is the resultant act is titled, “The Decision of the Assembly” (at which people keep coming in and express their desires: it is an assemblage of amorous confessions and expressions. People from different spheres of life—a king, a doctor, a soldier, a priest, an ascetic and a barber—create a carnivalesque second life, in which the body aspect is venerated. The element binding them together is the body or specifically the desire inherent in the body. Body is the most immediate thing to everyone. It becomes grotesque in the transition from the unfamiliar to the familiar. A binary is created between the old and the young body, representing desire and the pursuit of desire. The incident occasioned at a brothel is itself transgressive, as it is outside the norms of the society. The prahāsa presents a quality that a visit to a brothel is usually stigmatized. Bodily desire brings everyone onto a single plane and it is in the pursuit of bodily desire that the grotesque emerges. This pursuit creates a possibility of transgressing the social norms and constraints and thus invites the grotesque. The grotesque figures in the ceremony of marriage in which the young harlot is married off to the old man, and the old harlot is married to the young man. The situation is all the more comic when finally the priest takes both the women as his for conducting the wedding ceremony. The whole situation turns out to be comically grotesque. In the pursuit of desire, irrespective of its materialization, the body in the play has crossed the boundary, and the pleasure of crossing it, transgresses the grotesque. Deviation from the societal norms evokes the feeling of horror or disgust along with happiness. The prahāsa evokes laughter; laughter here signifies a kind of humor but also grotesque laughter which ridicules and disdains. There is a “co-presence of the ludicrous with the monstrous, the disgusting or the horrifying”. The desire in the Brahmin’s case, to discriminate and to possess the younger prostitute is pushed to the limit when they start abusing each other. The desire in the old man to possess the young prostitute seems bizarre, but the way it is manifested, in the abusive language he uses, numerously and in an elaborate manner, is ridiculous. It sees the transition from the bizarre to the familiar: the bizarre desire evolves into a familiar drive. There is a change in the nature of subjectivity whereby the desiring subject ceases to be the object of desire; it is not the desire that initiates the transition from the bizarre to the familiar—It is the body that is the reason for the upside down. The grotesque is revealed in this transition, which occurs along various juxtapositions: the young and the old, the healthy and the sick. Old age and sickness are the tropes which prahāsa employs to figure the grotesque. The body desired by both the young and old male bodies is the young female body and it has been contrasted with the body of the old male body which has lived and enjoyed. It is not the ascetic body, constrained and regulated. The sagging body invokes the memory of indulgence, of transgression. The body in the prahāsa which laughs and enjoys sexual pleasures. Even the ascetic body is occupied in bodily indulgences here. At one point, a character in the prahāsa raises a question about the possibility of a release of emotions in the life of an ascetic. And the answer he gives is that the release can be obtained by indulging in feasting and body pleasures. In every dialogue, there is an implied rhetoric which opposes the social structures and transgresses the boundaries through a recourse to bodily pleasure. Social norms regulate sexual behaviors to control and discipline the subjects. Thus, the prahāsa presents the recourse to body, to sexual pleasures as the pramāra move towards transgression. The spirit of transgression is upheld as supreme where the desire for the wives of other men is endorsed, when the brothel is endorsed; it is the pursuit of desire that is upheld, through the laughing bodies. Social strictures negate the ambiva- lent nature of the body and present it as a heterogeneous entity: it is not the same entity. But, the body is a heterogeneous entity: various elements co-exist and transform each other under the flexible garb. This ambivalent and heterogeneous nature

**Hāsyārnava:**

_Hāsyārnava_ begins by invoking Lord Siva and Parvati as if it is following the convention. The play between the sacred and profane begins here, setting the stage for the consequent emergence of the carnivalesque: the benediction sets the tone of the play—of the presence of the erotic and comic elements in the prahāsa, of the inversion of the power structures and the appeal to the physiological:

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_Bodily Desire Brings everyone on a single Plane in the Pursuit of Bodily Desire that the grotesque Emerges._

_The visitor to the brothel is described in the following lines: “The body of the king has crossed the boundary, and the pleasure of crossing it, transgresses the grotesque. Deviation from the societal norms evokes the feeling of horror or disgust along with happiness. The prahāsa evokes laughter; laughter here signifies a kind of humor but also grotesque laughter which ridicules and disdains. There is a ‘co-presence of the ludicrous with the monstrous, the disgusting or the horrifying’...”_
the unfamiliar, takes it beyond the fearful strictures. This unfamiliarity is unfamiliar to the dominant, but this compiles with the nature of the human body: heterogeneous, chaotic, and unruly. The body identifies with this nature and laughs. The transgressive act can be discerned in the laughing body. It laughs off the strictures, which has suggested in the discovery of the codes and a celebration of the dynamism of human body. Carnival laughter is a festive laughter, a laughter of the communal body, which brings about the grotesque. Here we are identifying laughter as ambivalent, as inherent in the body: renewing by smiting body in a subjective state, by bringing human beings closer to their nature. It is the mimicry of the dominant discourses, in a realistic manner: a corporeal reaction to the masked body. Thus, laughter is a physical gesture, a sonic outburst which shatters the illusion of a controlled, regulated, mechanical being and expresses its chaotic dynamic nature. It is transgressive as it is the deployment of the nature of the human beings: that is, the desire for transgression, and a threshold to rapture.

Somatic agency: Of rapture and transgression

Rapture is a state that shatters the mask of composure, desire being its driving force. As Nietzsche says, “in the Dionysian rapture there is nothing of the reasonable or irresponsible.” Bakhtin too recognises it and says that “carnival has worked out an entire language of symbolic concretely sensuous forms.” When transferred to the symbolic, it is the sensuous image that catches the carnivalesque spirit, or in Bakhtin’s terms, in “a language of artistic images that has something in common with its concretely sensuous nature”[2] and thus to accommodate the carnivalesque. Its effect can be apprehended by experiencing the pain of the grotesque and is generated after the act of transgression which witnesses the shattering of shackles. Nietzsche identifies rapture as “the condition of performance”[3] in which the desire for transgression, and a threshold to rapture is the pursuit of the inherent nature of the human beings: that is, the desire for transgression, and a threshold to rapture.

The site where both male and female bodies interact in their inherent impulse to pursue desire and to transgress is what generates rapture in HāsyaKavī. The desire grasps the other as itself and is depicted as the desire of the other. The body feels the pain when its desires are not fulfilled. The gaze-giving eye follows the desired other. The other body too is to be experienced physiologically, not as an outside object but as a part of the body: “What generates rapture in a person is something which arises despite expectation, despite capture when all the other feelings get intermingled with this overpowering desire. It takes over the other impulses. In the rapture, when it compels us, it hampers us. We begin or introduce ourselves as belonging to a certain pre-defined social status and strictures related to them, yet the desire for the young woman dominates them and they transgress their professional roles. They are the powerful heroes who did not necessarily have any assemblage to discuss the affairs of the state, is amazed at the beauty of the woman. The police chief narrating his deeds forgets about the stately matters when the young woman makes fun of him. The Brahmin forgets his rites and customary roles, and desires to possess the woman. Many leave the assembly realizing that they don’t have a chance. The desire to release in the physiological realm. That is when it generates the rapture which Nietzsche talks about: the enhancement and intermingling of all the impulses. This can be seen further in the way the members of the assembly describe the young woman. The king prizes her body in an amorous style wrapped in grandiosity. The priest compares her to a lotus flower, and says that even the gods cannot ignore her. The police chief says once while making love he mistook the red lacquer on the woman’s feet for blood from fighting. The student kisses the woman’s feet for blood from fighting. The student kisses the woman when he gets exasperated with his own persistent desire. The priest laughs off the norms. The laughter is a mockery of nature of the human body: heterogeneous, chaotic, and unruly.

This is the form of an act of transgression. Body plays a significant role in the discourse of the transgressive. The grotesque undermines the discourse that sees reason as worthy of desire. The Other as “exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness” which are “generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style.”[4]

Conclusion

As Heidegger has noted, “the aesthetic state is rapture.”[5] Combination of these two modes is the return to the somatic. Thus the Other becomes significant in the aesthetic realm that actively participates in the somatic. The grotesque is the “carnivalization of literature.”[6] It is an act of transposition of carnival into the language of literature. The central concern of this transposition is the grotesque imagery, the figure of an open-nosed, de-formed, de-ceased body, a body that detests foreclosure. The genre of prahasana that is part of the comic tradition in India is also an enactment of such defiance.

Rani Mujral is working as Lecturer in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Thapar University, Patiala, India.

references

1. Northrop Frye classifies fictions by the hero’s power of action. One of those five modes he identifies is the low mimetic mode. In this mode, “[i] f a superior neither to other men nor to his environment, the hero is one of us, we respond to a same of his common humanity, and demand from the work the probability that we find in our social world.” This gives us the hero of the low mimetic mode, of reality and of realistic fiction. “High” and “low” have no connotations of comparative value. Frye also identifies the element of irony as integral to this mode due to the lack of metrical effect. Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays, ed. Robert D. Dentan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 21–49.

2. Reading the text from the 14th century has relevance in postcolonial context as well. One of the basic propositions that postcolonial studies rely upon is that the emergence of the modern is through the medium of literature, that is, in the eschatology of imitation. In imitation, the text winks at the prevalent structures and seduces readers through them. Such an appropriation, with an element of ambivalence imbedded in it, does not negate any of the prevailing structures rather adapts those structures and thus transforms their nature. Such rapture is built into the modes of Hāsya and the carnivalesque. Therefore, the reading of the text from 14th century India brings out the relevance of such appropriations that occurs in similar ways across the centuries.

3. Few works in this genre from the Middle Ages can be cited here: Rodham’s Harṣeṣugjaṇa, Sundharakāda’s Latalekote, Vatava’s Kṛṣṇāloka. Kṛṣṇāloka was the most immediate source and medium for transgression. The desire to release in the physiological realm. That is when it generates the rapture which Nietzsche talks about: the enhancement and intermingling of all the impulses. This can be seen further in the way the members of the assembly describe the young woman. The king prizes her body in an amorous style wrapped in grandiosity. The priest compares her to a lotus flower, and says that even the gods cannot ignore her. The police chief says once while making love he mistook the red lacquer on the woman’s feet for blood from fighting. The student kisses the woman’s feet for blood from fighting. The student kisses the woman when he gets exasperated with his own persistent desire. The priest laughs off the norms. The laughter is a mockery of nature of the human body: heterogeneous, chaotic, and unruly.
Witchhunt in northern Sweden

A Bakhtinian approach

by Per-Arne Bodin

Abstract

The Russian Byzantinist Sergey Averintsev writes in a critical article about laughter in Bakhtin's interpretation of popular medieval culture that Bakhtin makes laughter too absolute and that he was wrong in maintaining that it has nothing to do with violence. I apply the reasonings of both authors to a historical phenomenon: the witch trial in Sweden, focusing on one precise geographical place. There seem to be many factors behind the witch trials, but their cultural manifestations demonstrate the qualities of reverse or criminal culture although without having laughter as their main feature, and including violence as a main element.

Key words: Witchcraft, micro-history, Bakhtin, reverse culture, anthropology

In an article from 1992 titled “Bakhtin, Laughter, and Christian Culture”, the Russian Byzantinist Sergey Averintsev discusses the role of laughter in Bakhtin's interpretation of popular medieval culture. Averintsev puts forward two main criticisms of Bakhtin. First, he argues that Bakhtin makes laughter in the Middle Ages into a category too far-reaching and too absolute, and, second, that Bakhtin was wrong in maintaining that laughter has nothing to do with violence. It is the following passage from Bakhtin's book on Rabelais to which he particularly objects:

Thus, distrust of the serious tone and confidence in the truth of laughter had a spontaneous, elemental
character. It was understood that fear never lurks behind laughter (which does not build stakes) and that hypocrisy and lies never laugh but wear a serious mask. Laughter created no dogmas and could not become authoritarian; it did not convey fear but a feeling of strength. It was linked with the procuring act, with birth, resurrection, fertility power in relation to the life-giving and death-defying power. Laughter was also related to food and drink and the people’s earthly immortality, and finally it was related to the future of things to come and was to be clear to the birds and for them. Seriousness was therefore elementally distrusted, while trust was placed in festive laughter.

Drawing examples both from Ivan the Terrible and from Mus-so-lini, Averintsev maintains that this is fundamentally incorrect. Fear can lurk behind laughter and laughter can create dogmas and be related to authoritarian violence. The carnivalesque culture of the European Middle Ages as outlined by Bakhtin is also called into question in another article by Averintsev from 1992. “Bakhtin i tsarskoj vitseznovenie k smeshkam” [Bakhtin and the Russian relation to laughter]. Here, Averintsev points out, for example, that it is wrong to juxtapose the Russian phenomenon of “foolishness in Christ” – known as jarrsdov in the Russian Orthodox tradition – with the culture of laughter, as did the followers of Bakhtin, Likhachev, and Panchenko in their classic book on holy foolishness. Jarrsdov is, in fact, an instance of cultural reversal, but it is not connected to laughter in any clear-cut way. Laughter is in fact unambiguously linked with sin in the Orthodox tradition. As a whole, these two articles attack some of the fundamental ideas of Bakhtin’s cultural philosophy. Averintsev was of course not the first to criticize Bakhtin’s use of carnival and Orthodox tradition. But first let me provide some background. The witch trials are mainly by people coming to the community from the outside, or in the village. The memory culture around the witches is created today, and no word of them was uttered when I was growing up in the village. The memory culture around the witches is created mainly by people coming to the community from the outside, or as a part of modern tourist events.

Background

But first let me provide some background. The witch trials are an example of the crisis in the Middle Ages, not of the 16th and 17th centuries. They haunted Sweden as late as 1699–1672. Such trials had been carried out earlier, but they were the result of a crisis of the Middle Ages as a whole. Mikhail Bakhtin and the consequences of his theory[3] that carnival had a strong didactic element and was not closely connected to laughter as Bakhtin believes.[1]

One historical survey, however, that Bakhtin’s paradigm can in point of fact help characterize accurately – the foregoing critical comments notwithstanding – is the witch trials in Sweden.

The reason for the paradigm’s utility here is that Bakhtin’s notion of a reverse culture, whatever its shortcomings, nonetheless sheds considerable light on expressions of popular culture in the premodern West, which Bakhtin himself acknowledged that he could not demonstrate. On the basis of one particular case, I would like to show how a popular reverse and premodern culture, as defined by Bakhtin, can function. I will make use of the introductory chapter of Bakhtin’s book Rabelais and his World, where he gives a very thorough and profound account of the carnivalesque culture. What can be noted in my material is the close connection between the reverse culture and violence – precisely something that Bakhtin denies. The fundamental issue of the relation between official culture and reverse culture in a Bakhtinian paradigm will be raised. I would like to take one concrete case of witch trials as an example and study it in relation to Bakhtin’s theory, including the criticism voiced against Bakhtin, primarily the criticism developed by Aventinov. It is my belief that this procedure will have some bearing on the very complex phenomenon of witchcraft. I will take as my example the witch trials in the third-quarter of the 17th century in a small Swedish parish, Botéa, located on the north side of Ångerman River, in Daleh, 300 kilometers north of Stockholm. I have a personal relationship to Botéa, for I hail from that parish, and it is thus even noted as my place of birth in my passport. Two of my ancestors were summoned to the condemned, my ancestress Anna who was accused of being a witch, and her son Daniel, accused of having played the fiddle at the dance on Blåkulla, the place of legend where witches were said to meet. The reason for the choice of geography is on the one hand personal and not by itself particularly scientifically warranted; on the other hand, however, my knowledge of the region is of importance in understanding the toponyms mentioned and the landscape where it all took place. From my personal experience, I can also add that the witchcraft trials are never mentioned by the local inhabitants today, and no word of them was uttered when I was growing up in the village. The memory culture around the witches is created mainly by people coming to the community from the outside, or as a part of modern tourist events.

The historical facts

In 1674–1675, a specially appointed Witchcraft Commission convened on several occasions in Botéa. The commission was appointed by the king and consisted of 25 members, a rather large size for 18th-century Sweden. The commission was appointed by the governor of the province of Västernorrland, Carl Larsson Sparre, but among the appointees were two professors at Uppsala University, both of whom would later become presidents of the university: the jurist Olaus Åkerlof and the theologian Samuel Sparr. The paradigm was represented by lay judges. The commission also toured other parts of Norrland.

The commission of Botéa, Nils Stenkelius – also a former student of Uppsala University – acted as investigator and prosecutor. The commission held the status of the Court of Appeal, given that the lower court was not mandated to impose the death penalty, and the number of cases was very large – hence the very unusual procedure of a traveling court. The court convened from early in the morning until late in the evening, sometimes from seven o’clock in the morning to nine o’clock at night, according to the court’s report to the king.

The study of a single location and some specific individuals will provide a detailed perspective on the witch trials in Sweden – what Carlo Ginzburg would call a micro-history. In this micro-history one may discern the discursive mechanisms of witchcraft and the functioning of reverse culture. Can we gain some understanding of the mechanisms of this complex and ambiguous phenomenon by studying this rather limited geographic area?

Thirteen people, twelve women and one man, were subpoenaed to appear before the commission, which convened in Sundby, a farm where my uncle and aunt lived when I was a child. Much of the recorded proceedings has been preserved, and will constitute the source material for this survey. The protocols contain primarily records of the questioning of witnesses – in many cases simply the witnesses’ answers – and also the verdicts. There are indications that the testimony might have been obtained by torture in only a few cases, although it has been shown that torture was widely used during the witch trials in general in Sweden. The courts made use of special shackles called klumpar, “jumps.” The protocols indicate that almost the entire population of the villages was examined, if not in the capacity of accused, as witnesses, or in some other capacity. Reading through these protocols is a fascinating experience, and presents us with a number of very difficult questions and enigmas.

One difficult question, which I will have to leave unanswered, is why the penalties in this particular location were relatively mild. Only two of the accused were sentenced to death. On the south side of the river, on the other hand, 71 persons were executed. They were all beheaded on the same day in 1675, on the border where three parishes meet. Their bodies were then burned, which was the regular form of execution for witches in Sweden. Stories are still told about the problems with getting the fire to burn because of all the blood flooding the terrain. There is a memorial stone raised there now. The
Life in Blåkulla

What is told in the protocols appears to fit Bakhtin’s notion of carnival culture almost seamlessly, closely duplicating its revelatory, yet without the element of laughter. The events at Blåkulla are literally a form of reverse behavior which questions the hierarchies of the established church and the secular power. Actions that would otherwise seem strange become more understandable when subjected to a structural cultural interpretation within the Bakhtinian paradigm. For example, the customary roles of old and young in the power structure determined by age are reversed: almost all the witnesses are children, some as young as three, and their credibility is never questioned in the protocols. It is children, and almost exclusively children, who raise the serious allegations, which are almost always directed against adults, especially against women. In his notes for the book on Rabelais, Bakhtin makes a distinction between era in which parents kill their children and times when children kill their parents:

There are periods when children oppress and kill their fathers (the Renaissance, our time) and epochs, when, on the contrary, fathers oppress and kill their children (all authoritarian epochs). 6

The former is a revolutionary epoch, the latter an authoritarian one. The time and the events discussed here certainly belong to the first group; the children’s testimonies are more or less the cause of the death of the fathers – or, rather, the mothers. The commission and the authorities are using the children as a means to their own ends, but the prominent role of the children, and their testimony granted to them, are nevertheless astounding. One gets the impression of a terrible revenge on the part of the children acted out on the grown ups, with the children serving as the executor. The chairman of the commission perceived the prominent role of children in Blåkulla as a new phenomenon in witchcraft; but this was in fact untrue: the same stories of children being taken by witches to witch hunts are concordant in their testimonies. They would claim that a neighbor woman or a female relative had repeatedly brought them to Blåkulla at night. They would also testify about feats in Blåkulla, where the accused woman would turn into stones, coins as gifts in Blåkulla, but the coins are also other expressions of abundance. A teenage boy had sung two hymns to drive him away. Kerstin claims afterwards that Satan is present under the table (“bolar under bordet”), sometimes referred to in phrases such as “to make the shame” or “to lift her shift”, or “she has been on top of Satan and did what is ugly”. Another account even mentions two positions: “Sometimes she lies on the top sometimes she is on the top of her”. Yet another account is of the same sort: “Marit lies together with a handsome man under the table and files at the chains”. Only in one case does the intercourse with the Devil result in children:

She has had intercourse with the evil one and every month borne him a child who was boiled in grease. 7

The children ride to Blåkulla on a cow or a heifer, sometimes not on the back but on the stomach. They also often ride to Blåkulla on different men. There is a very open and obvious sexual motif which, according to Bakhtin, is central to the folk culture of laughter. I once more quote Bakhtin’s definition of laughter culture:

To degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the world, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth. 8

The children are not themselves described as sexually active and are not abused, but they witness the sexual acts and give testimony about them in front of the parish priest and the commission. Blåkulla is depicted as a carnival world of ubiquitous abundance and sex. If one takes into account that these testimonies were made in a court of 25 men, the telling of these accounts can be seen as part of a very peculiar form of voyeurism on the part of the judges, a voyeurism not pertaining to any reality but to listening to the witnesses’ stories. There is no protection against evil in the world portrayed in the protocols. The housewife Kerstin attests that she is present in the courtroom during the hearing, and the court decides to sing two hymns to drive him away. Kerstin claims afterwards that Satan shut her ears so she could hardly hear any of the song. She also couldn’t see it in her own eyes because of her making voyages to Blåkulla. “For her mother, Blåkulla was the only heaven she knew, and because she loved her children she wanted to keep them there.” 9 She also married Satan in Blåkulla, and she noticed that he was wearing red boots. During the wedding party she was treated to dog meat. When the mother was summoned she replied to the allegations that she knew nothing about them. Kerstin spat at her

charges were the same on both sides of the river, but the outcome differed completely. Another and similar question is why witchcraft raged so fiercely in some parts of the country, not just in Jämtland but also in Dalecarlia and in Stockholm. There is a strange sort of randomness in the seventeenth-century epidemic of witchcraft in Sweden. Perhaps it would be possible to apply a sociological perspective to find an explanation, as was done by Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum in their book Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft maintaining that social mobility was suspicious and was a key-factor in the trials. There is a strange sort of randomness in the seventeenth-century epidemic of witchcraft in Sweden. Perhaps it would be possible to apply a sociological perspective to find an explanation, as was done by Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum in their book Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft maintaining that social mobility was suspicious and was a key-factor in the trials.

The abundance of food is always stressed, but contrary to the usual ones for the women, what is

“THE CULTURE DESCRIBED BY BAKHTIN HAD A DIFFERENT ONTOLOGICAL STATUS FROM THAT OF BLÅKULLA: IT EXISTED IN SOME REAL FASHION.”

and my ancestor is, as mentioned, accused of having regularly played the fiddle to accompany the dancers. The women also file at the Devil’s shadles in order to set him free – really an incred-ible accusation, but serious in every way. Almost all testimonies mention that the accused women “ fornicate with the Devil under the table” (“bolar under bordet”), sometimes referred to in phrases such as “to make the shame” or “to lift her shift”, or “she has been on top of Satan and did what is ugly”. Another account even mentions two positions: “Sometimes she lies on the top sometimes she is on the top of her”. Yet another account is of the same sort: “Marit lies together with a handsome man under the table and files at the chains”. Only in one case does the intercourse with the Devil result in children:

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and said that Satan was sitting on her mother’s shoulder in the building where the commission was assembled. She also con-
essed that she had been renamed in Blåkulla and got the name of Saul. This is one of the most highly detailed episodes of the entire record of the court’s proceedings. Kerstin was sentenced to death and beheaded at the execution place in Boteå.

The children are renamed, usually in a ceremony where the Devil takes a drop of blood from them. One boy is renamed “Devil-Pe”. Other names are “Snake-Neck” and “Devil-Take-Me”. A girl may even be given a man’s name, as in the case of “Saul”. The children also get married in Blåkulla. A young boy from my home village Undrom with the name of Per, for exam-
ple, is married to a cat, who is even mentioned by name in the protocols. Her name was “Gray” (“Grå”) and the cat’s owner Karin lived in the neighboring village. “The girls too get married, but upon the marriage ceremony their husbands are turned into objects — one turns into a log. The girl Aninka, eight years, testi-
fied that the housewife Margaret milked from Anders in Önspar a barrel of milk — that is more than one hundred liters — and then made cheese from it. The whole thing is laughable in its grotesque horror, but this is from today’s perspective. The excesses are comparable to those portrayed in Kabelais. Bakhtin uses the term “grotesque realism” to describe these phenomena. Small insignificant details, such as the testimony of one of the children that a witch counts eggs in Blåkulla, is juxtaposed with the horri-
fible fact that she has intercourse with Satan. We also get a fairly good description of the Devil’s appearance in this testimony:

Kerstin cooks sausages, drinks, dances, files at the chains. Takes the hand of Satan and Satan sticks out his three, two, or perhaps two and a half. Kerstin cooks sausages, drinks, dances, files at the chains. The Devil also playing some sort of instrument — with his tail

depicted is a sort of hell as described by Rakhitin as a part of the reversed world. “Hell is a banquet and a gay carnival, the cross-
two of cultures”. In this case Rakhitin also admits that vio-

lence exists in this carnival hell. The very existence of the com-
misson seems to have triggered an intense desire to tell these

and a comparison of the names and the villages with the last remnants of a medieval Catholic worldview. Many women

of the commission, the boy Lars from Blåkulla, age 10, testifies against the housewife Margareta, followed by the chil-

dren’s stories. These stories are never questioned, and the wit-
nesses are never cross-examined. The only modification of the testimonies made in the protocols is a shift from the first person singular to the third person: an original “I saw” is changed to

ness exists in this carnival hell. The very existence of the com-
misson seems to have triggered an intense desire to tell these

instinct that has been suggested is collective poisoning by ergot in the grain. Ergot is a fungus that produces a toxin that causes
dizziness and cramps, often in the form of epidemics. A fourth explanation is that the church used the witch trials to combat the last remnants of a medieval Catholic worldview. Many women

In the reverse world, the pow-
erless acquire power and create an alternative world which still

This fact is at odds with the carnival world of Bakhtin. Still, the

devil’s role in Blåkulla is not very prominent; rather, the frenzied

activity is mainly carried out by the children.

The execution site in Boteå. The sentence against the author’s ancestress.

The children in Blåkulla are especially busy reading books. After the conclusion of the commission’s work, the

Let us now return to our line of argument in explaining the

phenomena. Aztetzov poses the question: Must folklore always be associated with laughter, or could it instead be the

quality of reversal which is most important? The stories of witch-

charges are devoted to ordinary household chores with which the

child witnesses would have been familiar from their own homes.

EXPLANATIONS AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The key question is how to account for the ferocity of the witch

trials. One explanation that has been put forward is that this

was a case of mass psychosis, resulting in a ruthless and quite

literate “witchhunt”, little different from what sometimes can be

encountered today. Another explanation is that the trials were

a final manifestation of the “dark” Middle Ages. A third explana-

tion that has been suggested is collective poisoning by ergot in

the grain. Ergot is a fungus that produces a toxin that causes
dizziness and cramps, often in the form of epidemics. A fourth explanation is that the trials were elections. One of the charges leveled

to Ginzburg speaks of a pagan Diana cult still extant from antiquity that was defeated

in Bakhtin-era as a form of cure, as magic formulas. Ginzburg speaks of a

discipline that has been suggested is collective poisoning by ergot in the grain. Ergot is a fungus that produces a toxin that causes
dizziness and cramps, often in the form of epidemics. A fourth explanation is that the trials were elections. One of the charges leveled

to Ginzburg speaks of a pagan Diana cult still extant from antiquity that was defeated

in Blåkulla. The 13-year-old boy Per tells the commission about a

girl with a gazeau-who had taught him to read. “Reading” has two senses in the protocols: the reading of books and the

recitation of spells, often in order to cure some ailment. Also,

writing is demonic in the world of Blåkulla. The Devil takes blood

from the children and uses it as ink to write in a book. This is the

only writing taking place in Blåkulla; otherwise, the only writing

performed is that of the commission in the protocols.

The demonic powers take over one of the most disciplined

institutions of the secular and ecclesiastical powers: the

schools. After the conclusion of the commission’s work, the

chairman, Sparre, writes a report to the king where he makes

mention of the fact that the Devil runs a school in Blåkulla.

It is surprising that the children’s stories are taken seriously

and written down, their absurdity apparently disregarded. The

protocols contain page upon page of the children’s nearly identi-

cal testimonies, grouped under each accused. The chair of the

prosecutor or of the court is not represented. Rather, everything

is worded along the lines of “The boy Lars from Sånga, age 10,”
testifies against the housewife Margareta,” followed by the chil-

dren’s stories. These stories are never questioned, and the wit-
nesses are never cross-examined. The only modification of the

testimonies made in the protocols is a shift from the first person

singular to the third person: an original “I saw” is changed to

yet more reversing behavior can be identified. The carnival world

is one ruled by different laws than our own. It is for example

possible to be in both places, in Blåkulla and in this world, si-
multaneously. Time also has a different character and can be

prolonged arbitrarily. Children sometimes testified that they

were brought to Blåkulla twice during the same night. Descrip-
tions of how the children exit their houses are rare, but it is
certainly never through the door; it may be through the window

or through an opening in the wall. The witches can transform

themselves into whatever they want: one teenager testifies that

a woman accused of being a witch had tormented him by sitting

on his neck, some time in the form of a fly.

Some of the children are rewritten in Blåkulla; for example, the

phrase “Woe be me!” is used to wish someone a good day or good

health. This inversion also applies to such phenomena as the
destruction of food (instead of its preservation), the attempts to

release the Evil One (instead of chaining him), and the substitu-
tion of curses and spells in books for the word of God. According
to one witness, one of the accused women used to stand on her

head in Blåkulla, and did the same in church. All these practices

reverse normal behavior, and are therefore demonic. Also,

gender is inverted: a girl may bear a man’s name in Blåkulla, and a

man can, as mentioned, be made to produce milk. At the same

time, most of the descriptions of the women’s activities in Blåkül-

la are devoted to ordinary household chores with which the

child witnesses would have been familiar from their own homes.

The sentence against the author’s ancestress.

THE DEMONIC POWERS TAKE OVER ONE OF THE MOST DISCIPLINED INSTITUTIONS OF THE SECULAR AND ECCLESIASTICAL POWERS: THE SCHOOLS.

INSTITUTIONS OF ECCLESIASTICAL POWERS TAKE

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THE DEMONIC POWERS TAKE OVER ONE OF THE MOST DISCIPLINED INSTITUTIONS OF THE SECULAR AND ECCLESIASTICAL POWERS: THE SCHOOLS.
The phenomenon of witch hunting

Let me return to the question raised by Averintsev in relation to the Russian Middle Ages. The protocols do indeed depict a reverse culture, but no one laughs in the world depicted in the trials. The modern reader will find them absurd and grotesque. In witchcraft, the church and the secular power saw the reverse culture in general, that is, the recalling or reviving of the old ways and the old culture, as the use to which it is put in the Boteå witch trials — both by the people themselves and by the commission — is undoubtedly evil. Perhaps it is not a question of laughter at all, but rather of a parodic reverse culture lacking the element of laughter both on behalf of the authorities and the “witches.” Averintsev notes that, in Russian medieval culture, only the Devil laughs. Reading the protocols of the witch trials today, one may very well get the impression that this was a show staged by the Devil — not the fantasy Devil of Blàkulla, but the real one — in order to “make fun” of the poor people in the villages of Ängermanland and to the witch commission that recorded all this rubbish and even sentenced people to death by beheading. Drawing on our material, we may conclude that laughter as such is not essential to popular culture, but rather to the reversal in relation to official high culture.

The process of reversal always entails a complex relationship to power. It functions at once as a parody of the official culture: the bookish culture, usually important to remember that the lay judges taken from among the peasantry appear to have been very important to Bakhtin. It can in fact be connected with different kinds of violence, although violence almost never appears in the contexts discussed by Bakhtin. Violence is widespread in both high and low culture, and in this case the secular and ecclesiastical powers usurp and annihilate the folk culture.

And what was the outcome for my ancestor and her son? As may be surmised from the fact that I am able to write this article, it went fairly well. My ancestor denied the charges and was in the end sentenced only to penance, whereas her son was acquitted completely — despite the gruesome allegations leveled against them both. Twelve children had testified against Anna, stating that she had had intercourse with Satan in Blåkulla. Her answer to the court was denial of all rumors of witchcraft:

The housewife Anna was asked if she had heard whether someone in the parish was known for witchcraft or for bringing children to the evil one. She answered: no.

Per Arne Bodin is professor of Slavic literature at Stockholm University.
Crisis of the responsible word

Bakhtin, dialogism & the postcolonial memoir

by Paromita Chakrabarti

“... What I have forgotten is what I have written: a rag of words wrapped around a shard of recollection. A book with torn ends visible.”

Meena Alexander

The principle of dialogue that dominates Bakhtin’s central essay on the novel has huge implications for literary theory. The weaving together of philosophical and literary concerns constitutes a certain kind of dialogism that challenges the frontiers of the knowing world and the unknowable spirit. This meditation on the relation between what an author can directly address in the knowing world and the unknowable spirit. This meditation on the relation between what an author can directly address in the knowing world and the unknowable spirit. This meditation on the relation between what an author can directly address in the knowing world and the unknowable spirit. This meditation on the relation between what an author can directly address in the knowing world and the unknowable spirit. This meditation on the relation between what an author can directly address in the knowing world and the unknowable spirit. This meditation on the relation between what an author can directly address in the knowing world and the unknowable spirit. This meditation on the relation between what an author can directly address in the knowing world and the unknowable spirit. This meditation on the relation between what an author can directly address in the knowing world and the unknowable...
The former obsolete as, an indication of a new kind of writing. He bration. Bakhtin sees this supplanting of the dominant authorial ideas of a fluid, questionable narrator who replaces the author as points out that Dostoevsky’s work is “symptomatic of a profound (1929) clearly and writing memory Crisis of authorship, dialogism

with a diasporic angst that embodies the trauma of dislocation and fragmentation. Alexander’s gendered and racialized subjectivity and her conversations “physically articulates the whole issue of self-disclosure as it plays into postcolonial culture is a difficult one, but it may be more attractive to women because of the possibilities it offers of inventing a space for oneself.” In the same interview she observes “I think this focus on the self is very peculiar to the culture of North America, and generally, so is the desire to create ‘autobiography’. A constant attempt to vindify what one thinks of as identity by redefining it could be read as a very American project. The interest in postcoloniality […] and about looking at one’s self is also part of the current wave of the culture.” By writing a memoir Alexander is doing a very American thing and yet by choosing to write a memoir instead of an autobiog- raphy she is redeeming what being American might mean for her. Concurrently, the memoirs give her the space to explore the pressures of being a postcolonial woman, living and writing in America. Most importantly, by choosing to write a memoir twice over, Alexander pushes against the boundaries of the text, proving open the dark memories of abuse sustained in silence and placed in the gap between forgetting and remembering.

Writing about the trauma of sexual abuse by her beloved Ilya, in the coda to the 1993 memoir, “The Book of Childhood” and in the coda to the 2003 memoir, “The Book of Childhood” Alexander uses both the texts to reveal her own struggle with the parameters of her relationship with the Tiruvella home and her own relationship with her body. Battling to come to terms with the fact that she had not only left a significant place in the gap between forgetting and remembering.

Alexander’s memory is filled with repressed or half-remembered stories told in fragments with the haunting image of the earth’s surface cause fault lines that create a shift or transform boundaries, an extremely signifi- cant external dislocation can displace the repressed memories, mak- ing it easier for her to access her memory gap by suddenly filling it up with the forgotten time. Alexander’s writing occupies a space between layers of loss and the imagined gaps. Most importantly, by choosing to write a memoir twice over, Alexander pushes against the boundaries of the text, proving open the dark memories of abuse sustained in silence and placed in the gap between forgetting and remembering.

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Body memory: Home, belonging and postcolonial dislocations

In the 1993 memoir Alexander begins with the question: “Where did I come from? Who was I? Where did I come from? What do I look like? Who am I? Where was I born?” This is the beginning of a saga, a geolog- ogy search for her origins, and realising the ambiguity of beginnings, Alexander is tormented by issues of belonging and roots. By the time she writes the memoir in 2001, she is a woman broken by multiple migrations who now needs to write about the nature of memory and rep- resentation.

In the chapter “Dark Mirror” Alexander confesses: “My aim is not to cross out what I first wrote but to deepen our understanding of it, even to the point of overturning one of the most cherished figures I created.” With her 2001 edition of Fault Lines, Alexander has written a postcolonial commentary, that a text compels to keep, in order to tell itself. For her, the memory gap closes on itself, facilitating a revelation and re-covery of memories that remained hidden in the blank spaces between writing and consciousness. I am using the term memory gap to indicate a slip in accessing a certain period of time in the life of the individual. Borrowing the term from the field of computer science which means “a gulf in access time, capacity and cost of computer storage technologies between fast, expen- sive, main-storage devices and slow, high capacity, inexpensive secondary-storage devices,” I want to show how certain amount of time in the life span of the individual is not available to secondary memory (embedded in the body and perhaps avail- able only on recall through repetition or trauma) although there might be an uncomfortable resemblance of it in the primary memory (part of the brain that holds information for reasoning and com- prehension and is available in the form of active recall). But this lapse in time in the ability to access that time is not permanent. Just like the movements of the earth’s surface cause fault lines that create a shift or transform boundaries, an extremely signifi- cant external dislocation can displace the repressed memories, mak- ing it easier for her to access her memory gap by suddenly filling it up with the forgotten time. Alexander’s writing occupies a space between layers of loss and the imagined gaps. Most importantly, by choosing to write a memoir twice over, Alexander pushes against the boundaries of the text, proving open the dark memories of abuse sustained in silence and placed in the gap between forgetting and remembering.

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to remember, to connect nothing with nothing. Going back to the mother and her mother’s mother and to all the mothers who came before them, Alexander searches for the maternal home that holds the promise of safely ensconcing her and making her whole. Unfortunately, her search for the original, primary, maternal home draws her only to the “darkness of the Tiruvella house where did the beds belong and coiled verandas: the shelter of memory.”2 The darkness of the Tiruvella house holds a terrible secret, which it disclosed will crack open the neat layers of silence that protect the family from splintering. The coiled verandas, a meandering maze complicate the search for truth and access to the past. Although she is aware of the powers of recall, she is also certain that.

The house of memory is fragile; made up in the mind’s space. Even what I remember best, I am forced to admit; it has flashed up for me in the face of present danger, at the tail end of the century, where everything is to be elaborated, spelt out, precariously reconstructed. And there is little sanctity in remembrance.

By linking the present danger at the tail end of the century with the dangers of sexual violation, Alexander attests to the ways in which personal histories are always related to larger global histories. The terror attacks of 9/11, national trauma and the subsequent increase in racial and ethnic profiling in the United States and in a lot of countries in the global North, incidents of violence in America trigger the recovery of a personal trauma. The private self gets inextricably linked with the public history of the nation, intersecting the personal with the political and “initiating a complex inter-related process of evaluating the self with respect to the greater history.”21 Alexander becomes a commentator of the times whose embedded and relational self is inherit. She goes on to say, “I could not conceive life without Ilya. I drew nourishment from him as a young thing from an older being groomed with time”, and even as a grown-up woman many years after his death, Alexander’s connection to the Tiruvella house is embedded in her being through the fluid and intimate longing she feels for Ilya. As the writing starts flowing out of her body, she marks the fault lines of memory, an ambivalent way of remembering things. The loving, nurturing, enabling figure of Ilya begins to break up into something else, hinting at trouble under the surface.

In the early chapters of the 2003 version, Ilya remains the central figure in her imagination and in her discourse. He is the one who teaches her about her family roots and her culture and provides her with a sense of belonging to a nation and to its history. She goes on to say, “I cannot conceive life without Ilya. I drew nourishment from him as a young thing from an older being groomed with time”, and even as a grown-up woman many years after his death, Alexander’s connection to the Tiruvella house is embedded in her being through the fluid and intimate longing she feels for Ilya. As the writing starts flowing out of her body, she marks the fault lines of memory, an ambivalent way of remembering things. The loving, nurturing, enabling figure of Ilya begins to break up into something else, hinting at trouble under the surface.

At the beginning of “Kafka”, Alexander talks about “two sorts of memory; two opposing ways of being embedded in the past. The first makes whirls of skin and flesh [...]. A life embedded in a life, and that in another life, another and another. [...] The other one is memory imprinted on her in bits and pieces of the present body, that it renders the past suspect, cowardly, baseless”.24 The first type of memory is the external “legitimate memory” and the second kind is the “deep memory.” Hypenetered and contradicted by the location of the body from which one speaks and the self that one speaks of, Alexander’s subjectivity is represented through conflict and contradiction. In 1993, her memoir uses the “holy ground” of skin and flesh of memory to paint Ilya, tracing him in her body, the blood and in the bloodstream of the Tiruvella clan. In 2003, the bits and pieces of script that were enfolded in forgetfulness begin to emerge, filled by the “burning present, cut by existential terror.”25 Alexander places her previously “touchless” history “on a fault line, and turning her postcolonial identity into an arbitrary and contingent thing.”26 Revealing the memory points to the transmutation that takes place in the case of memories and to how memories become gazed and gartered with time. In her own words, it was impossible to feel at home with all those memories as they sat layered in the recesses of her mind, making her breathless and restive. This feeling of discomfort, of not being able to inhabit her own body and the pain of homelessness is not because Alexander did not have a home but because she had too many “to count, to describe, to just write” like there were rooms after rooms that made a maze out of the Tiruvella house of her childhood, Alexander’s memory too becomes her tremendous maze. This incision of alienation and homelessness can be negotiated only if she writes her abuse into language, confronting rather than concealing. “Write in fragility, the fragile will save you”27 she notes after reading Djerassi’s book. The first part contains an important discourse through which Alexander attempts to make sense of herself and her multiple dislocations. Her memoir thus does not follow any chronological order instead it is bound in other cartographic divisions. It moves from her childhood memories to present circumstances, to lyrical explorations of history, geography even etymology of the words she is using or source images she is encountering. Stories about her childhood get morphed into a her awakening of class consciousness in Khartoum, Sudan, and then get transported into a story told in India about being too shy to talk to Westerners, sentences get juxtaposed with each other to give the impression of continuity but concealing the crack of the faulty grammar. Her sentences come out gnarled and wraped in time and in stone that carries the dead weight of shame, always threatening her with consequences that might be violent and fatal. The stone, as referred to in “The Stone-Eating Girl”, is a mark of extreme violence that has been committed on the female body. It is also the symbol of a sister secret that haunts Alexander even while she is in Manhattan, and most importantly it stands for shame, for guilt of having trespassed, for being pernicious - shameless. In 1993 when she wrote the memoir her mouth was filled with these stones, swallow her belly, hurting her, knotting her up as each sentence that she tries to utter is a coiled-up stone, coughing her writing in gaps, in hiccups.

This silence prompts her to question her own writing and her role as a memoirist:

What foundations did my house stand on? What sort of architect was I if the lowest beams were shredded? If the stones were moulder, fit to fall apart. Was that the way they had to be sealed away? The bottom of the well make her feel like a man digging. [...] I must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter....”28 Like the man who digs, turns over soil and scatters it, Alexander writes her self into the soil of her past in order to disclose, diggare, and disperse the trauma of childhood abuse. Troubled by her gradual awareness that she has left out something important of her own personal universe, Alexander needs to write once again. Later in the memoir Alexander tellsingly describes the way the Tiruvella ancestral home with its teak and brass fixtures, is torn down to construct a new residence with modern conveniences. This act of burning what was old in order to make way for the new is symbolic of the rebuilding and restoring that she does by writing into memory the interior of the house that remained hidden behind the fixtures, the gloss and the order. This rebuilding of the house by unearthing the traces of the “interior” is what Walter Benjamin alludes to as “the ashy of art”, “where to dwell means to leave traces. In the interior of the house is the hole that is a place for the thing, the thing that has happened and what got left out is to acknowledge that “zone of radical lubricity.” It is in this zone that things come together and shape themselves and come togeth er in a fiery muteness wherein the possibility of translation is directly linked to the author’s ability to transpor the violent unenvisaged and the
sharp jaggedness of the self and its past. Alexander talks about this zone as a place where we go to when words fail us, “where a terrible and continuous memory wells up” and which can be found only when one falls through the door into the dark gap.43

Falling through the memory gap, picking up the memoir to put together the missing pieces, particularly in 1991, after the massacre of Muslims in Gujarat in 1990 and on reading Tjeerds Fantasia, Alexander confuses, “My aim is not to cross out what I wrote, but to deepen that writing, dig under it, even to the point of overturning one of the most cherished figures I created.” The 1993 memoir hides its secret carefully wherein the reader may have a sense of discomfort but is not able to grasp why. This faint unease gets explained only in the revised edition when she talks of her abuse and imagines telling her father who would understand also hoping that the reader would understand: “Appa, Ilya hurt me sexually when I was a child. I could not bear to remember.”44

Thus, that moment of separation on the railway platform when Ilya sees them off on to their journey to Sudan is crucial to Alexander’s narrative of her subjectivity. It is here that for the first time she feels disjointed, fractured and displaced. Throughout her life this sense of separation and dislocation gets reinforced by simultaneous returning and leaving, threatening her sense of location and defying the unified consciousness of time and memory. The cycle of discontinuous journeys that we see in Alexander’s memory is a reminder that dislocation and split subjectivity may occur not only through physical deterritorialization, but can also result from psychic and emotional rupture.

Conclusion

Meena Alexander’s Fault Lines is an attempt to rebut a fractured life in the discursive space of literature by giving voice to deep memory. Fault Lines is a text that finds its sole at the site of many transit: it is a story told by a writer who wants to make sense of her past; it is an account of a postcolonial migrant writer’s decentered subjectivity; it is a text that points to the unreliability of memory and language; it is a memoir that explodes a fiercely guarded secret and reveals the violence that lurks in the darkness and elsewhere. It is a story that supports the weight of a life yet tethers on the fault lines of personal history.

Alexander does not give into the pitfalls of lame nostalgia but uses her memory of the sexual abuse and her ability to recall them after a decade, points to the faulty reconstruction of her subjectivity and destroys the very foundations of her subjectivity and restores the very processes of representation and the ambiguity of what is under; but also disrupts it by inserting convincing and are open to shifting loyalties.45

Although Alexander’s writing is able to effectively recover the past, turning her into a subject who is able to live with the fractures, the way she operates between the two kinds of memory opens up its subjectivity to profound historical disruption.46 Her discourses of the past and her ability to recall them after a decade, points to the faulty nature of representation and the ambiguity of what is understood as truth. For Alexander who is “cracked by multiple migracies” and confesses to being a “faultmass”, the intrusion of repressed memories into the space of desired memories shakes up the very foundations of her subjectivity and destroys the very nature of her voice. She is the teller of Ilya’s “tall figure standing in the sunlight”47 with tears on his face, are powerfully wroth in the 1993 memoir; but in the 2003 edition this image is replaced with a new one: Alexander writes her pieces in her past, she reclaim the stories that remained untold and caution us to the faulty nature of her voice. The Bakhtinian sense, can be read as a restorative and recuperative text. By writing back to the 1993 presentation of a Homeland”: Meena Alexander’s Fault Lines (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996) 47, 2. 


12 Brandist, The Bakhtin Circle, 55.

13 The idea of peril and danger of contact zones is taken from Mary Lois Pratt’s Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturalism (1992). She argues that “autobiography, transcultrue, critique, collaboration, Bhabhian hybridity, post-colonial, democentricity and language dialogue, vernacular expression”, along with “miscomprehension, incomprehension, dead letters, unread masterpieces, absolute historicity of meaning, serve as both ‘art’ and the perils of contact zones.”

14 241.

15 I am using the term memory gap from the field of computer science. All indices used in relation to this concept are mine.


19 Alexander, Fault Lines, 2.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.


24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., 229.

31 Ibid., 236.

32 Ibid., 241.

33 Ibid., 246.

34 Ibid.

35 Roberta Calverton in “Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recovering Trauma, Re-establishing the Self” cites Charlie Delbo who gives an example of “deep memory”: “I feel it again, through my whole body, which becomes a block of pain, and I feel deaths seeming, I feel myself die […] the cry awakens me, and I emerge from the nightmare, exhausted, I say to everything for everything to return to normal […] I become myself again, the one you know, who can speak to you of Auschwitz without showing any signs of sadness or emotion.” New Literary History, 20:no.1(1989): 127.

36 Alexander, Fault Lines, 259.

37 Ibid., 227.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid., 230.

40 Ibid., 259.

41 Dutt-Ballardach, The Postcolonial Citizen, 44.

42 Alexander, Fault Lines, 2.

43 Ibid., 3.

44 Ibid., 53.


46 Ibid., 65.


48 In Bakhtin’s The Dialectic Imagination discourse is dual voiced, where one voice deliberately expresses and enforces the other. Intentional hybridization of discourse is inherently dialogic: two points of view are set against each other, separate and unmixed. (University of Texas Press, 1986), 59.

49 “FAULT LINES USE OF MEMORY AS WORK, IN THE BAKHTINIAN SENSE CAN BE READ AS A RESTORATIVE AND RECONSTRUCTIVE TEXT.”

References


5 Alexander, Fault Lines.


7 Alexander, Fault Lines.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., 229.

10 Homi Bhabha’s theory of postcolonial diasporic hybridity and the third space is a space of enunciation and negotiation in his book The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994).

11 Ibid., 20.

12 Ibid., 21.

13 Ibid., 24.

14 Ibid., 242.


17 Conclusion

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Fault Lines

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Alexander, Fault Lines, 2.

Ibid.

Jalal, 36.

Alexander, Fault Lines, 264.

Ibid., 242.

Ibid., 229.
Further discussion on the expansion of Bakhtinian ideas

OCTOBER 4, 2017 there will be a workshop, “Bakhtinian Theory, Postcolonial and Postsocialist Perspective”, organized by the Institute of Contemporary History at the School of Historical and Contemporary Studies and the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES), Södertörn University. The workshop is a follow up to the publication of this special section in Baltic Worlds. Which in turn is a follow-up of the 15th International Bakhtin Conference “Bakhtin’s Praxis: Academic Production, Artistic Practice, Political Activism” (July 2014, Stockholm).

The workshop participants will be asked to continue the discussion that was started in this special section. Questions include (among others): How can Bakhtinian ideas expand and enrich our understanding and analyses of contemporary political movements and social transformations? And How might Bakhtinian ideas be developed or revised better to suit analyses of non-Western cultures?

The programme for this full day workshop will be announced at Baltic Worlds’ web site.

IN SEARCH OF SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

FOR those of us, who grew up in Eastern Europe or Russia, having a dacha, a small plot of land used for recreation and gardening, was an essential part of our upbringing. The vegetables produced there are used to supplement the family’s diet, and on a wider scale, the dacha is a significant part of people’s everyday practices allowing them to escape the hectic urban life, socialize, and connect with nature. Other locally grown vegetables come from relatives in the countryside, whom urban dwellers visit during summer and help on their plots, receiving vegetables and dairy products in return.

Thus, sharing food among relatives, friends, and colleagues have been a common practice in Eastern Europe for several decades. During socialism it helped people gain access to fresh vegetables which were constantly scarce in the state-regulated system. In the turbulent years of the 1990s, home grown food helped to sustain family diets and became an important source of livelihood in many post-socialist countries, following the population’s impoverishment due to economic shock. Currently, home-grown vegetables are often seen as a way to receive higher quality food compared to that in the supermarket.

Shortcomings of global food production

Food is a basic human need essential for survival. Consequently, various practices of food production and exchange were part of human societies from early on. In modern capitalist societies, the market acts as a primary arena for food exchange, and food often travels hundreds and even thousands of kilometers to reach consumers who can afford to pay a price for it. The traditional, local ways of food production have ceased to exist in many parts of the world, and while the overall efficiency of food production has increased, making it possible to satisfy some of the growing demand for food, the inequality of food distribution remains one of the most acute global problems. This skewed distribution enables consumers in the “Global North” countries to find fresh mangoes year round in their supermarkets, while many in the “Global South” still face food scarcity and malnourishment.

Thus, the current global food system has many socioeconomic and environmental downsides. Small farms, a critical source of income, employment, and food for billions of people in developing countries, are facing increasing difficulties to continue operation since they have to compete for land and resources with large farms that are better able to access global markets. Shortcomings of food production and distribution systems lead to uneven patterns. It is estimated that around 10% of the world’s population is undernourished, whereas 30% of the food produced worldwide is wasted.4 In environmental terms, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that the global food system is responsible for about one-fifth of greenhouse gas emissions significantly, contributing to climate change. At the same time, climate change influences the environment, and consequently agricultural production already faces decreasing yields of major crops and will continue to do so in the future.4 The social and environmental issues associated with food production and distribution make aims to achieve sustainable food systems central to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a catalog of new global objectives that will shape national development plans for the years ahead. Reducing food loss during production and harvesting in the developed countries, and reducing food waste in developed countries, along with exploring alternatives for increasing production and consumption of locally grown food, can significantly contribute to achieving more sustainable food systems. This commentary looks at existing examples of alternative food production and exchange food for billions in Eastern Europe.

Non-commercial practices draw attention

These alternative, non-commercial practices of food production and exchange have drawn research attention to better understand local, societal and environmental implications of such practices in Eastern Europe and beyond. Petr Jehlička, together with several colleagues, has conducted comprehensive studies of home-grown food and sharing practices in the Czech Republic and Poland that shed light on the extent of such practices in Eastern Europe. The authors conclude that sharing home-grown food is a widespread, environmentally
and socially significant practice in these countries. For example, the non-market sources of food, especially fruits, vegetables, potatoes, and eggs produced by households or received as gifts amounted to about 40% of the total consumption by households or received as gifts.\textsuperscript{7} Around 64% of such households shared at least a small portion of the produced food, whereas about 15% of all surveyed households in Czechia shared at least one-tenth of their food, irrespective of their access to land or food production.\textsuperscript{8}

\textbf{Learning a lesson?}

This winter, due to unusually cold weather in Southern Europe, consumers in Northern Europe unexpectedly found empty shelves in their supermarkets that lacked the familiar supply of fresh tomatoes, spinach, lettuce, and other vegetables. This became yet another reminder of the vulnerability of the global food system to which consumers all over the world need to adapt in the future. Thus, the adaptation of food production and consumption practices needs to take place on the global scale if we are to achieve sustainable development goals and more sustainable food systems. The examples of “quiet sustainability” practices well established in Eastern Europe can be used to inspire and provide practical insights on maintaining robust systems of local food production and exchange occurring in Europe. Such practices might be encouraged and supported by policy as available solutions already contributing to achieving sustainability goals.

\textbf{References}

2. Ibid.
4. IFPRI.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid. and Smith and Jehlicka.
8. Ibid.

\textbf{Natalya Yakusheva}

PhD in Environmental Studies, Soberton University
tions during Stalin’s Great Purge in the 1930s. This protest was not the first of its kind, over the years, the remnants of such Soviet-era mass graves have repeatedly prompted controversy in independent Belarus. Zianon Pazniak, the founder of the Belarus National Front and Lukashenka’s bitter foe, was the first to speak about the NKVD mass murders at Kurapaty, as early as the 1980s. He managed to get his story into exile in 1996. Lukashenka’s administration – whose historical policies, unlike those of the nationalist opposition, tend to glorify the Soviet era in Belarus – continually denied the historical importance of the place, and even advocated baseless anti-Russian conspiracy theories for the killings. Protesters at Kurapaty have always had connections to Belarusian opposition, blaming the Lukashenka regime for corruption and historical amnesia. The authorities, on the other hand, remained indignant to repeated vandalisation of the memorial site and police opposition disputes. There was little hope for alternative, independent investigations. The annual Freedom Day rally would turn violent, little did they expect that arrested demonstrators would not be charged with political offences. In contrast to the severe repressions that followed the protests in 2010 and 2011, those arrested at the Minsk rally received only administrative fines. This may be a subtle hint that Lukashenka might still be willing to continue his balancing act between the EU and Russia. A Belarusian Maidan? This last point brings us back to the regime’s reaction to the protests. As mentioned, Lukashenka was willing to acknowledge, at least in part, the increasingly obvious failures of his government. In a return to the offices of the human rights NGO Via- zi-nska. In this context, the “anti-parasite law” would not only help refit state coffers, but would also be a way to exterminate creeping private firms not working in state-owned companies: the true incomes of such individuals are difficult to determine, often masking the risk with the unreported money could be used to fund underground political activity.


delivering on his side of the bargain. Thus the people increasingly see that they need not uphold their side of the deal any more. The worsening economic situation also reflects structural shifts that most other post-Soviet states experienced much earlier and much more drastically. At first, the Lukashenka system of paternalistic state capitalism, buoyed by cheap energy from Russia, shielded Be- larus from the traumatic “shock therapy” reforms advocated by neoliberal advisers to neighboring governments. Instead of hurried privatizations that promoted asset stripping and oligarchic crony capi- talism, Lukashenka maintained state ownership of Soviet-era enterprises in key sectors of the Belarusian economy. Over time, however, these underper- forming state enterprises, while still dominant, increasingly lost workers to both the grey economy – symptomatic of a stagnating post-Soviet labor market – and to new industries that grew up completely outside the old spheres of state ownership, like the globally competitive Belarusian IT sector. In this context, the “anti-parasite law” would not only help refit state coffers, but would also be a way to exterminate creeping private firms not working in state-owned companies: the true incomes of such individuals are difficult to determine, often masking the risk with the unreported money could be used to fund underground political activity.

Even considering the lack of fear expressed by demonstrators, however, civil society has not sought to escalate the pro- tests per se against Lukashenka’s regime. Civil society in Belarus is still too weak, and the regime, while gradually losing strength, is still too much in control of the police to quash dissent with relative ease. Nevertheless, Lukashenka has raised the specter of a threatened coup against him. In an interview on March 2, he hinted at the possibility of security services arresting members of the far-right White Legion and the nationalist Young Front, accusing them of planning a armed putch on Freedom Day. Despite the coup preparations, the state has not released any cache of armed extremists, including machine guns and grenades, and parachernalia of the Ukrainian pro-fascist volunteer combat unit, Azov Battalions. While the White

Legion is a paramilitary group previously accused of terrorism in connection with attacks in Minsk in 2008 that also could have targeted Lukashenka, the fact that the group had been crushed by the se- cret service and the police was a serious indication of their highly improbable culprits to overthrow the government of Belarus in 2017. One explanation for this is that Lu- kashenka sought to forestall a potential Maidan situation in Minsk by conjuring up a nightmarish scenario based on the nar- rative of Euromaidan as a “fascist coup” familiar to Belarusians from the Russian media. This narrative blames the woes of the Belarusian society on the modernisation project of the regime. The suggestion is that the semi-legitimate protests against socio-economic problems in Belarus can similarly be subverted by political extremists, “a fascist junta” like that in Crimea and Donbas. Lukashenka would thus have the opportunity to offer the people a new social contract. However, instead of a positive deal offering prosperity in return for radical reforms, as one man rule, this time he would offer a hard bargain based on scorched earth, suggesting that the choice was between his rule or fascist forces destroy- ing the country, or between Euromaidan and con- tinuing strongman could be trusted to keep the fascists behind bars. That the protests failed to gain moment- um after Freedom Day meant that Lukashenka never actually had to present his one-man social contract to the people for consideration. Yet the elaborate work that went into preparing a way of discred- iting the demonstrations, rather than be- seeing as mere calls to showcase Yanukovych’s mistake of coming down too forcefully on people with sincere grievances and thereby invit- ing the regime to react with such brutality, that the case of political landscape in authoritarian Be- larus is in the process of shifting in direc- tions that are difficult to predict. **Ulyana Kaposhka Matthew Kott**

Ulyana Kaposhka, intern at the Centre for Russian and European Studies, Uppsala University and Matthew Kott, PhD in history, Centre for Russian and European Studies, Uppsala University.

**references**


2. Freedom Day is an unofficial commemoration on March 25 to mark the proclamation of the short-lived Belarusian People’s Republic on this date in 1918. It is organized by various opposition groups on Freedom Day in protest against Alyaksandr Lukashenka and his regime. Demonstrators often display the red and white flag of the Belarusian People’s Republic, which was also the post-Soviet flag of Belarus until Lukashenka replaced it with more of the red and white flag. 


5. “Ulyana Kaposhka, intern at the Centre for Russian and European Studies, Uppsala University and Matthew Kott, PhD in history, Centre for Russian and European Studies, Uppsala University.”

6. E.g., Yuras Karmanau, “More than 100 people have been detained since the capital of Belarus forced the government to scrap new requirements for small private businesses that they say impose unfair burdens on them”, US News & World Report website, February 28, 2016, accessed April 20, 2017.
RELECTING ON CONTINUITY IN ANTI-NUCLEAR MOVEMENTS

Nuclear energy is one of the most debated issues. The emergence of anti-nuclear movements therefore comes as no surprise. Interestingly, anti-nuclear movements of today seem to have different discourses and action repertoires than the anti-nuclear movements in the 1980s and 1990s. This raises the question as to what extent the social mobilizations are related to each other. Shall these mobilizations be considered as parts of the same movement or as two different movements? Is there a continuity between the recent and the past anti-nuclear movements?

Anti-nuclear movements are social movements whose history begins in the mid-twentieth century. The peak of anti-nuclear mobilization occurred in the 1980s and 1990s when anti-nuclear movements appeared in many places around the globe. Later, in the 1990s and early 2000s, anti-nuclear movements diminished due to a number of political, economic, and social issues. One simple reason for this is that some governments decided to freeze their nuclear energy development programs. In the recent period, from 2000 onwards, anti-nuclear movements have been revitalized in a number of countries, including Russia (with ambitious plans to build more nuclear reactors), Poland (which has decided to build a first nuclear power plant) and Sweden (which lifted the ban on building new nuclear reactors, allowing replacement of old reactors with new ones). The anti-nuclear mobilizations in these countries are reactions to the changes in nuclear energy policies.

The action repertoires of these movements seem to be shaped differently than before. They do not organize mass national campaigns. Street actions such as demonstrations and other kind of conventional, confrontational actions in the big cities do not seem to be taking place. Discourses on nuclear energy have also changed. The focus of the current nuclear energy discourses is on climate change, economics, and energy security. The varying circumstances and action repertoires of recent anti-nuclear movements, in comparison with those of the past, raise the question, what is the relation between these two periods of anti-nuclear mobilizations?

APPROACHING THE QUESTION Theoretically, it is important to note that there are analytical concepts that explain continuity in social movements. These are cycles of contention or waves of collective action. Both of these concepts deal with the same process. Cycles of contention is a stricter concept (cyclical development implies repetitious cycles) while waves of collective action is softer (waves can be of different size and intensity). Tarrow argues that social movements develop in cycles, like other social organizations and institutions. According to this understanding, it is possible to consider two periods of anti-nuclear mobilization as two cycles of contention, or rather waves of collective action. Both of these concepts deal with the same process. Cycles of contention is a stricter concept (cyclical development implies repetitious cycles) while waves of collective action is softer (waves can be of different size and intensity). Tarrow argues that social movements develop in cycles, like other social organizations and institutions. According to this understanding, it is possible to consider two periods of anti-nuclear mobilization as two cycles of contention, or rather waves of collective action. Even if, following Tarrow’s idea on cycles of contention, it is still unclear whether a movement with continuous conflict between challengers and authorities (where authorities can be replaced by countermovements). In the case of anti-nuclear movements in Russia, Poland, and Sweden, it is evident that the conflict between advocates and opponents of nuclear energy is still present in the current period from 2000 on. Hence it is possible to conclude that there is a continuity in the movements. That is also observed in some of the interviews with the activists. At the same time, how we see the connection between two periods of anti-nuclear movements depends on what we aim to do with this knowledge. In a strict sense, there is a continuity between the two periods since the conflict over nuclear energy is still in place. But if we want to dwell on this continuity further and analyse it in greater detail, we first need to set the boundaries of applicability of the concepts of cycles of contention and waves of collective action.

Ekaterina Tarasova

Since we have not provided a clear conclusion on continuity of anti-nuclear movements, it is possible to consider two periods of anti-nuclear mobilizations. For them it is the same movement. The activists were asked whether they see a difference between the past and present anti-nuclear movements. They are aware and keep in contact with the activists who have experience of anti-nuclear campaigns and new ones joining the movements in the recent stage seem to have slightly different perceptions about continuity in the movements. The former sometimes thought that the point of research interest is the previous campaigns, as those were more significant in numbers than the recent ones. For instance, I was sometimes advised to talk to activists who had been active in the past, although further scrutiny demonstrated that they had not been active in the recent campaigns. The activists were asked whether they see a difference between the past and present anti-nuclear movements. They are aware and keep in contact with the activists who have experience of anti-nuclear campaigns and new ones joining the movements in the recent stage seem to have slightly different perceptions about continuity in the movements. The former sometimes thought that the point of research interest is the previous campaigns, as those were more significant in numbers than the recent ones. For instance, I was sometimes advised to talk to activists who had been active in the past, although further scrutiny demonstrated that they had not been active in the recent campaigns. The activists were asked whether they see a difference between the past and present anti-nuclear movements. They are aware and keep in contact with the activists who have experience of anti-nuclear campaigns and new ones joining the movements in the recent stage seem to have slightly different perceptions about continuity in the movements.

THE EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENT of continuity in anti-nuclear movements does not have to rest on activists’ perceptions, but can be undertaken by a researcher. Social movements are primarily defined by a continuous conflict between challengers and authorities (where authorities can be

3 Tarasova, “Anti-nuclear Movements in Discursive and Political Contexts: Between Expert Voices and Local Protest” (thesis)
COUNTERING THE KREMLIN’S DISINFORMATION

Disinformation tools are not something unique or new and have been in use for a long time. But now we are living in times when information became a weapon. The annexation of Crimea, and the wars in Donbas and in Syria have shown that information plays a significant role. Such role was also mentioned in the Miliary Doctrine of the Russian Federation, issued in December 2014. In December 2016 a Doctrine of Information Security was signed by the Russian president Vladimir Putin, attributing an important status to information technologies in international conflicts.

The roots of modern Russia’s disinformation can be traced at least to Soviet times and the Cold War. But whereas during the Cold War the Iron Curtain constituted a boundary between domestic and foreign audiences, division is much more complex. What we are observing now is the use of experience gained during that period combined with modern information technology. Russian spending on TV broadcasting abroad has increased significantly in recent years. During the Soviet era there were no such capabilities and no modern TV channels, but now broadcasting is one of Russia’s weapons. Interestingly although the war against Georgia in 2008 was focused more on the demonstration of Russia’s military power, it has triggered an upgrade of the Kremlin’s propaganda techniques, especially in regard to the Internet, where Russia failed. After 2008 the Russian authorities began to pay more attention to informational warfare and to their propaganda capacities. Since the war in Georgia, Russia’s whole concept of foreign TV broadcasting has changed significantly.

Russian foreign media such as Sputnik and RT serve as an “alternative” source of information abroad and efficiently use conspiracy theories and anti-US, anti-EU or antigermans sentiments. One of the main narratives of the Kremlin’s disinformation is blaming the West for the events in revolutions in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan in 2000-2005 and during the “Arab Spring”. Symptomatically in October 2016 the pro-Kremlin journalist Dmitri Kiselev, speaking on one of the Russian TV channels even named the events that took place in Hungary in 1956 “a first color revolution” led by Americans.

Russian disinformation uses cultural, linguistic and ethnic weaknesses effectively. But, at the same time, it also exploits the weaknesses of such democratic principles as freedom of speech, pluralism and equality of opinions. Moreover, the Kremlin’s disinformation is also very avidly used as an additional tool and a “dark side” of Russian diplomacy.

We do well to make a distinction in the Kremlin’s disinformation between foreign and domestic audience but in terms of different zones. The first zone is a domestic audience in Russia. Kremlin uses disinformation to preserve its regime and to prevent revolutionary actions on the streets of Moscow and St. Petersburg. The second zone consists of some Eastern European countries like Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus to some extent. The next zone is represented with the Baltic countries the fourth and fifth zones are Central and Western Europe. Though the number of such zones does not end with the countries mentioned, I will dwell upon the Eastern European and Baltic countries as those that have suffered most from the Kremlin’s disinformation.

Much has been said about the Baltic countries as Russia’s next target after Ukraine. Nevertheless, disinformation against Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania started much earlier than the annexation of Crimea. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union the Baltic countries have been perceived as a part of Russian geopolitcal interests. Even from the beginning of the 2000s it was obvious that the Kremlin would oppose the integration of those countries into the EU and NATO. The Baltic countries were portrayed by Russian media as xenophobic, hostile and totally different from the rest of Europe. But now broadcasting is one of Russia’s foreign and domestic audience but in terms of different zones.

The annexation of Crimea has a Russian ethnic minority, although its numbers in Lithuania are smaller than in Latvia and Estonia. But the best known use of disinformation and of ethnic Russians in the Baltic’s was witnessed in Estonia in 2007 during the so-called “Bronze Night”. On April 20 and 21, 2007 the country faced two of the most tragic days in its modern history, after the memorial to the Soviet Army was relocated from the centre of Tallinn to the military cemetery. It should be mentioned that there are a fundamentally different perceptions of Soviet soldiers in Estonia. For ethnic Russians they have always been liberators, while Estonians generally see them as occupiers.

At the beginning of the 2000s the Bronze Soldier became an important symbol of unity for ethnic Russians living in Estonia. Every year on May 9, they gathered in front of the monument to commemorate the victory of the Soviet Union over Nazi Germany. The relocation provoked riots in the centre of Tallinn accompanied by cyber attacks against Estonian government agencies and by diplomatic pressure from Russian Federation. The Kremlin’s propaganda portrayed Estonians as fascists, discriminating against Russians. Protestors who took part in the riots breaking shop windows and looting, were labeled “peaceful demonstrators” by Russian TV. Luckily, the Estonian authorities managed to cope with those protests and did not allow them to turn into something even more terrifying. But still the scale of the riots, the huge disinformation campaign and the cyber attacks against Estonia demonstrate that Russian propaganda is not a new phenomenon. Even from the beginning of the 2000s it was obvious that the Kremlin would oppose the integration of those countries into the EU and NATO. The Baltic countries were portrayed by Russian media as xenophobic, hostile and totally different from the rest of Europe. But now broadcasting is one of Russia’s foreign and domestic audience but in terms of different zones.

The use of disinformation in Estonia was expected to be emulated in 2017 by another Baltic country – Latvia. About one third of Latvia’s 2 million inhabitants identify themselves as ethnic Russians. Due to the Estonian example among other reasons the launch of a Russian-speaking TV channel in Latvia is being postponed and most likely will not happen in 2017.

Lithuania does not have as large a Russian ethnic minority as the other two Baltic states. But it has a large and strong Polish minority, which is often used as a tool of disinformation against Lithuania, portraying it as oppressive towards the Polish speaking minority. Moreover this Baltic state is described by Russian disinformation as non-Western and closer to Russia. According to the Eastern European countries, we notice the same narrative used by the Kremlin’s disinformation: the countries are portrayed as not sovereign and belonging to the “Russian world”. For example, Belarus today is subject to an extremely strong influence by Russian media. In 2010 Belarus experienced a huge disinformation campaign against its president Alyaksandr Lukashenka in the form of a documentary movie. The Godfather – made by the Russian TV channel NTV. On December 10, 2016 the Ministry of Information of Belarus admitted that the number of news reports from Russia portraying the country as non-sovereign and lacking its own culture and language had significantly increased during recent months. Another Eastern European country, Moldova is also influenced by Russian media. It is often described as a powerless and poor country, manipulated by the West. Right before the presidential elections in Moldova in 2016 Pavel Filip, the Moldovan prime minister, called on the West in an interview in the US newspaper The Hill to help his country fight against disinformation. During that election campaign, the pro-European candidate Maia Sandu was labeled mostly by Russian media as totally dependent on the West.

Maksym Kiyak
Postdoctoral researcher and co-founder of the NGO Global Ukrains.
“Geopolitics is the discipline concerning the state as a geographical organism or entity in space: that is, the state as land, territory, domain (grund), or most penetratively, realm. Being a political science it has a steady focus on the statal entity and seeks to contribute to the understanding of the nature or essence (väsen) of the state, while political geography studies the earth as a domicile for human societies, in relation to the other qualities of the earth.”

Boundaries have seen a remarkable renaissance recently. Yet there is a dearth of studies covering longer spans of time, and informed by a comprehensive theoretical approach. In spite of a hundred years of consistency of the inner Scandinavian borders, transboundary relations and interaction have changed considerably. Areas east of the Baltic Sea have been spatially divided and redefined with disastrous consequences in the form of subjugation, expulsion, and even extermination. This is also true of the southern part of the Baltic Sea. Over the centuries, its shores and their hinterlands have undergone a number of territorial changes and political regulations. From being a duchy in the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, Pomerania has been divided, redefined, amalgamated, and put under Hanzeatic, Swedish, Danish, Brandenburgian-Prussian, German, Soviet, and Polish supremacy. In the 20th century the area underwent four radical changes in geopolitical governance – in 1918, 1933, 1945, and 1989. These geopolitical changes, in turn, have had an impact on the living conditions of the population and their relations to the world beyond the boundaries set by the rulers.

Geography was defined by Torsten Hägerstrand as "the study of struggles for power over the entry of entities and events into space and time." Hägerstrand was interested in how different objects, regulations, and people found (or did not find) locations in a spacetime of changing accessibility. This study focuses on three aspects of the geography of Pomerania: the definition of the area, in terms of bordering and containment; its governance, particularly in relation to the third aspect; its demography, in terms of the religious and ethnic groups which were allowed in or expelled from the area. Because of innovations in governance and culture taking place in the area, changes in religion and ethnic allegiance also occurred. My intention is to focus on how the changing external and internal boundaries of Pomerania and their various forms of governance reflect openness, osmosis, confinement and, expulsion in relation to domestic and immigrant populations. Examples will be taken from different time periods and different parts of the contested region; I will draw principally upon existing research literature.

Pomerania: Defined and colonized

Pomerania is a relatively unequivocal concept: the Baltic Sea coast east of Rostock and west of Gdańsk and the area some tens of kilometers inland to the south. Politically it can be defined as a number of Pomeranian duchies, the outer boundaries of which have been relatively stable over many centuries, including the island of Rügen, which at times was a separate political
Announcement of the Treaty of Westphalia on the Steps of Osnabrück City Hall by Leonard Gey, 1880.

The Protestant reformation was finally established in the area as a political territory of Pomerania seems to date back to circa 13th and 14th centuries. The ethnic structure of Pomerania was changing during that time, and it became Germanized through the arrival of religious refugees, Mennonite settlers from the Netherlands, Germany (Rügen from Roskilde, Denmark) and there was an increase of Catholics. The whole area of Vorpommern was never fully integrated into the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, and the Danish and Prussian regents changed representation on an annual basis at the German Diets. The boundary included contacts with Sweden but also an international (or Baltic) entity. Most conflicts concerned fishing and fish vending rights, but during the whole period of Danish reign the Danish attempts to secure an absolutist state power met with resistance from the powerful families and merchants in the region and regional and local administration. The Danish attempts to secure an absolutist state power met with resistance from the powerful families and merchants in the region and local administration. The Danish attempts to secure an absolutist state power met with resistance from the powerful families and merchants in the region and local administration.

The Dutchy of Pommern-Stettin and Pommern-Wolgast, which had ceased to exist as semi independent entities with the death of the dynasty in 1637. The entire area was put under the Swedish Crown irrespective of the reigning dynasty, and remained part of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation and under German law. The exact delimitation of Swedish and Brandenburgian Pomerania was bitterly disputed, and was finally determined by agreement on May 4, 1653, at the “Stettiner Rezess”. For the first time, Brandenburg took over the Baltic Sea east of Wolin. Formally, the duchy of Hinterpommern was founded in 1654 with the Elector of Brandenburg as duke, and a diet in Stargard decided on a constitution. In spite of Brandenburgian attacks and incursions into Swedish Pomerania, Swedish control lasted until 1679 war, when all of Swedish Pomerania except Stralsund was occupied. Under the Treaty of St. Germain-en-Laye in 1679, Sweden had to leave some territories on the right (eastern) bank of the Oder, including the town of Greifenhagen, now Gryfino. The new border ran between Gartz on the left bank and the southern outskirts of Stettin.

In Swedish Pomeraanian Pomerania the local currency would be kept, but the old division of Pomerania, going back to 1524/21, into the duchies of Wolgast and Stettin, remained, to the extent that each had separate currencies. Not until 1690 did Swedish Pomerania accept the Leipziger Fuld, a silver standard, which was accepted by the neighboring states. A few years earlier, Swedish Pomeraanian Pomerania invited the first Jews as merchants with the right to use currency (gold and silver), but the local bourgeoisie, which resented Calvinists and Catholics, managed to convince the government to expel all Jews in 1700. Swedish Pomeraanian Pomerania was subject to Swedish military law, and was under the command of the governor general. The external finances, customs duties, and the administration of lands and forests were under the control of the Swedish government. Application of customs duties was, at least at times, administered by Stockholm, and the customs at Wolgast, in particular, were especially remunerative, given the ship traffic on the Oder and the river Peene. Postal communications included contacts with Sweden but also an international (or inter-ducal) line connecting Danzig with Hamburg through four postal offices established increasingly hegemonic, and the shipsyard at Brandenburg engaged in shipping on the Oder and Warthe rivers, which would have put them in competition with Brandenburg.

The colonization process during the 13th and 14th centuries changed the ethnic structure of Pomerania. The population became Germanized through immigration and assimilation. Around 1350 there were still Slavic speakers in eastern Pomerania as evidenced by permission from the bishop of Köslin in 1356 against speaking “Wendish”. The Protestant reformation was finally confirmed in 1535, when it was declared a Landeskirche, its administrative territory covering the whole Duchy. One of the things the Reformation brought about was that the most important fisheries came under ducale control, which had major political and economic consequences. The Church and also the nearby cities had a large income from fishing on the Stettiner Haff. Their rights were, however, with the town of Stettin and the towns of the Peene. Postal communication included contacts with Sweden but also an international (or inter-ducal) line connecting Danzig with Hamburg through four postal offices established increasingly hegemonic, and the shipsyard at Brandenburg engaged in shipping on the Oder and Warthe rivers, which would have put them in competition with Brandenburg.

Westphalian Pomerania

In the treaty of Westphalia at Osnabrück, 1648, Sweden received the whole of Vorpommern “forever”, including the island of Rügen, plus certain areas of Hinterpommern with the towns of Ahldamm, Gollnow, and Cammin, the island of Wolin, and the area around the Stettiner Haff with the city of Stettin, which became the administrative capital. The main area consisted of the two duchies, those of Pommern-Stettin and Pommern-Wolgast, which had ceased to exist as semi independent entities with the death of the dynasty in 1637. The entire area was put under the Swedish Crown irrespective of the reigning dynasty, and remained part of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation and under German law. The exact delimitation of Swedish and Brandenburgian Pomerania was bitterly disputed, and was finally determined by agreement on May 4, 1653, at the “Stettiner Rezess”. For the first time, Brandenburg took over the Baltic Sea east of Wolin. Formally, the duchy of Hinterpommern was founded in 1654 with the Elector of Brandenburg as duke, and a diet in Stargard decided on a constitution.

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The Dutchy of Pommern-Stettin (1372—1441), the Duchy of Pommern-Demmin (circa 1170—1264), the Duchy of Pommern-Stolp (1308/72—1459), the Duchy of Pommern-Bütow (1529—1679), the Duchy of Pommern-Wolgast (1295—1474/5, 1532/41—1626/27, 1525—1478) including Rügen. The Duchy of Pommern-Stolp (1308/72—1459)

THE EXTERNAL FINANCES, CUSTOMS DUTIES, AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF LANDS AND FORESTS WERE UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE SWEDISH GOVERNMENT.

In Pomerania one can find the whole of Europe, history and all, compressed and comprehensible.
Mecklenburg reached an agreement in 1873 that divided the
empted from taxation and military conscription. Prussia and
were immigrants to Prussia.23
estimates the total number of settlers at 36,000, 70% of whom
estates of Central and Eastern Pomerania with manpower, and
19th century was
One curious exception from the territorial stability during the
administrative partition of Pomerania remained, including,
and most regulations were adapted to Prussian legislation, but
edict allowing Jews by concession and under strict regulation to
Stockholm to hire “Israelites”, which was granted, in spite of
settled, and when a royal mint was established in the capital
number increased to around 2000 in 1875.27
1847, and the regulations were followed strictly. The first Jews in
Consequently, formerly Swedish Pomerania was not included
40,000 immigrants at the outbreak of World War I. The newcom-
ian Galizia (mostly Ukrainians), reaching a peak of around
Warsaw, was lost to Poland, which built Gdynia in order to avoid Stettin as an
outlet. Swinemünde was linked to the Sea route through the Swinemünde and the Western
Poland was reestablished, and as a consequence an international
aircraft production site at Barth also included a concentration
camp. There was also a prisoner-of-war camp at Barth with Al-
led soldiers divided into Anglo-American and Soviet depart-
ments. In November 1944 around 150 Hungarian Jews were
brought there to work, and until the end of the war younger pris-
soners were brought to Barth to speed up production. When the
soviet troops were approached by the Pomeranian police, the prisoners were
forced to leave, those unable to walk were shot, and others died or were shot during the retreat.29
The final months of the war affected Pomerania more than many other parts of Northern Germany. While the Western Al-
lies bombed the military and industrial target of Stettin, Swinemün-
de, and Pölitz, the Soviet army advanced on land and, to some degree, on and under water, meeting desperate defense by the
Nazi German army. Civilians fleeing from East Prussia, Dan-
zig, and Hinterpommern were interwoven with the retreating and advancing armies. In Pomerania, Stettin and Swinemünde
became centers to which the refugees had to pass on their way
westwards. From the evacuated concentration camp Stuhoff, near Danzig, prisoners were sent on death marches through
Hinterpommern, carefully divided into Jews and others. Some people were able to get to Rügen, Denmark, and Kiel, but many
died of starvation, exposure to the elements, the Allied bomb-
ings of Stettin and Swinemünde, and simply by being murdered.
A new border is established: Oder-Neisse – a rule with exceptions
Excerpt from the Potsdam Agreement of August 1, 1945:
The three Heads of Government agree that, pending the final determi-
ation of Poland’s western frontier, the former German territories east of a line running from the Baltic Sea immediately west of Swinemünde, and thence along the Oder River to the north of the
western Neisse River and along the Western Neisse to
the Czechoslovak frontier, that shall be under the adminis-
tration of the Polish State and for such purposes should not be considered as part of the Soviet zone of occu-
pation in Germany.
In an explanation to the Potsdam Agreement, the land boundary was defined as a straight line from the church in Altefurther on Use-
dom to the middle of the bridge across the Western Oder, three kilometers west of Greifswald (Polish: Gryfino), but in reality the boundary had to be modified in relation to the terrain. At meetings in Greifswald and Schwerin on
September 20–21, the boundary was redrawn between the villages of Altwarge and Nowe Warpno (Polish: Nowe Warpno). The change was to be effective starting October 4. The
former municipal center of Pölitz
Phantom pains that never heal. Will the parts ever be reunited again? Likely not.
Szczerin was a bone of contention between Poland and the USSR. One of the last transports of workers back to Germany was captured by Polish border soldiers on Stettiner Haff and robbed of their belongings before being allowed to continue.

The great expulsion

After the provisional Soviet and Polish take over of the area, an expulsion of Germans started. The Polish army pushed around 110,000 people out of Hinterpommern but was temporarily stopped by the Soviets who were in need of German manpower. The Potsdam Agreement contains a chapter regulating the expulsion:

§ XIII. Orderly Transfers of German Populations

The Conference reached the following agreement on the removal of Germans from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary:–

The three Governments, having considered the question in all its aspects, recognize that the transfer to Germany of Polish populations or elements thereof, remaining in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, will have to be undertaken. They agree that any transfers that take place should be effected in an orderly and humane manner.

On November 25, the Allied Control Commission (ACC) agreed with Poland and Czechoslovakia that the evacuation should be carried out between the evacuation state and receiving zones in occupied Germany. The British Zone would receive 1.5 million people from “Polish Regained Territories”, the Soviet Zone 2.75 million from Czechoslovakia and Poland. The transfer was to start within 10 days in the beginning of the winter. Between November 20 and December 21 another approximately 200,000 persons were expelled via Szczerin.40

The ACC appointed an expert group to handle the expulsion but also the repatriation of slave labor from Germany.41 After many controversies, tribulations, and atrocities during the expulsion, an agreement was reached on February 14 between Great Britain and Poland called Operation Swallow about sea transport between Szczerin and Labich in the British Zone of 1000 persons per day and train transport of 2500 persons per day from Szczerin to Bad Segeberg through the Soviet Zone. Poland would provide trains, food, and guards.42 Between February 1946 and October 1947, another 700,000 Germans were expelled from the area under the Operation Swallow according to a quota system. Specialists were saved for last, while those viewed as worthless were expelled first.43 The deportees were mostly old people and women, only 8% were men of working age; no babies remained. Szczerin would serve as an operational center, but a capacity of 2500 did not suffice, given that 8000 arrived every day, many of them in very bad shape. On their way back from Lübeck to Szczerin, the ships carried Polish workers, probably slave laborers.44

On the receiving side of the new border, the British administration of northwestern Germany, including the mainly agrarian and unscathed Schleswig-Holstein, was badly prepared for the reception of hundreds of thousands of people. Deutsche Arbeitsfront, Schleswig-Holstein, was badly prepared for the influx of refugees, not only through Operation Swallow but also “transit” refugees via the Soviet Zone and residents from the SBZ.45 In a short time, the population of Schleswig Holstein, receiving refugees from Pomorania, Danzig, and East Prussia, increased by 67% causing a partial conversion of the resident population into a kind of Danish identity, and even resulted in requests for a boundary revision that would cede Southern Schleswig to Denmark. In Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, part of the SBZ, refugees made up 43% of the population in 1949, coming mostly from Hinterpommern and East Prussia, and some were allotted agricultural land until 1950, but the settlement scheme was badly run and many abandoned it before collectivization. Szczerin also became a hub for Polish Jews returning from the Soviet Union and for further transport to Palestine.46

The Polish resettlement of “recovered territories” involved severe problems. Many “colonizers” went west with the intention of plundering and then returning to Warsaw to sell the spoils. In the formerly ethnically mixed areas of Hinterpommern, autocratic Poles complained that only 25% of the land would remain to them while new settlers would get the rest, many of whom did not know how to manage land. During Nazi rule many ethnic Poles and Kashubians tried to be classed as Germans on the Volksliste; now they tried to regain their former ethnicity. Some of these half-Germanized farm laborers and farmers, came from the central parts of Poland, the remainder consisting of people from the East or repatriates.47

The great expulsion

The most remarkable territorial anomaly was the Pölitz exclave with thousands of Germans just a few kilometers from Szczerin. The exclave had German control, existing from October 4, 1945, to September 28, 1946, stretching from Ziegenort (Trzebież) to Stolzenhagen on the Swino and the area of the old spa. In 1958, the spa area was opened to visitors, making it one of Poland’s most important health resorts, but until 1957 Polish citizens needed a special visa to visit the islands of Wolin and the Polish part of Usedom. After an agreement in October 1991, the Russian troops withdrew to Kaliningrad in December 1992.

“Closed border between “brother nations”

With the reestablishment of a Polish state and the creation of a Soviet Occupation Zone, transformed in 1949 into the German Democratic Republic, a border was established between two territories under the protection of the Soviet Union, with Soviet military in both of them. The German side was first called Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, but in 1947 the Soviet military administration ordered the Landesregierung to use the word “Vorpommern” for the whole area, and the word “Vorpommern” was in practice forbidden until around 1985, and the Länder were abolished on the meager sandy soils of Pomerania. From the destroyed towns of central Poland, there came young men, some of whom later brought wives from home. From Western Europe there came prisoners of war (ethnic Poles from German territories) plus a group of emigrants from Germany, France, Belgium, and some other countries. But conspicuously few expatriates chose to colonize the new areas, and, in particular, the miners and steelworkers from Lothringia and Silesia had problems assimilating, while the relatively few workers from Germany conserved their ethnicity better, some of them settling in Szczerin. After the Ukrainian uprising in southeastern Poland in 1947, it was decided in “Operation W” to displace the ethnically Ukrainian population and resettle them in a different part of the new territories. In the Szczecin area, an official of the population came from the central parts of Poland, the remainder consisting of people from the East or repatriates.48

The Soviet base at Szczecin comprised the larger part of the seaport, the old and new fortifications on both sides of the Swino and the area of the old spa. In 1958, the spa area was opened to visitors, making it one of Poland’s most important health resorts, but until 1957 Polish citizens needed a special visa to visit the islands of Wolin and the Polish part of Usedom. After an agreement in October 1991, the Russian troops withdrew to Kaliningrad in December 1992.
in the GDR in 1972. The border was determined and formally recognized in an agreement between Poland and the GDR on July 6, 1970. In 1990, the former eastern suburbs of Görlitz were reunited with Germany. But from the first demarcation in 1945 to late 1946, there were “Poles” (with small and powerless minorities of Jews, Kashubs, and Catholics) on both sides, as well as “Germans” on one side and “Russians” (containing Ukrainians and Byelorussians) on the other.

Some of the legal consequences of this demarcation resulted in the creation of two states with a closed border, which had repercussions on the German-Polish border area as well. Some border crossings were opened after the fall of the Berlin Wall, but passports were required for entry into both countries, with exceptions permitted for such as emergencies and visits with personal invitation. In 1989, in the fall of the Berlin Wall, the border was opened to those with passports.

Poland gets a new neighbor

A Polish-German border agreement was signed on November 14, 1990, but border crossings were not opened, as passports were still required for travel, not because it was because the border of the Schengen Area. A treaty on cooperation was signed on June 17, 1989. When Poland entered the EU on May 1, 2004, border controls were softened and coordinated into a single one-step border station. As a consequence, Germany regulated the import of Polish cattle, which increased the demand for German cattle and westward migration, and the proximity of the Szczechowice area increased the demand for German cattle and westward migration. There is little social and institutional division sharp. However, with the “western drift” on both sides, the German side is being partially emptied and to some extent filled with Polish immigrants, an effect of push and pull factors. But the cultural and institutional factors in the demography of the area have been the area, and unintended geopolitics of the states involved.

Thomas Lundin is professor emeritus of human geography at the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies at Södertörn University.

Conclusion

This study focuses on three aspects of the geography of Pomeraṇia: the definition of the area, in terms of borders and containment, its governance, particularly in relation to the third aspect, its demography, in terms of which religious and ethnic groups were allowed in or expelled from the area. In the long history of Pomeraṇia, the area has been characterized by religious and ethnic change, which has been a central issue. The area is known for its cultural and linguistic diversity, as well as its rich history of migration and settlement.

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16 Dieter Crammig, Mit der Eisenbahn von Berlin nach Stettin, Stralsund, Szczecin und Danzig (Berlin: E. Beck Verlag, 1925), 164—462.
20 Buchholz, „Das deutsche Pomern”, 148—149, 148—149. In this paper, we use the term “German-Polish” to refer to the area where Germans and Poles have lived side by side, which is the focus of this study.
22 Andreas Önnerfors, Svenska Pommern: Kulturmöten och identifikation (Malmö: Elanders, 2010), 107—109, 110—112.
Nowadays, Islam in the Soviet Union is a topic that kindles researchers' interest both in Russia and in the West. In addition to studies of state policy on Islam and Muslims, research is conducted on Islamic institutions, including informal ones, that functioned in some regions of the country during Soviet times. It appears that studying the history and forms of Islam's existence in the USSR is important because among other reasons this period is not so far away from us. Many religious leaders of Muslim congregations and heads of Muslim religious organizations in different cities across the former USSR grew up and graduated from university during Soviet times. That time seems long past in view of the fact that most witnesses of that epoch, ordinary people who lived during that time and took part in the day-to-day religious practices in different regions of the Soviet Union (including Leningrad) from 1920 to the 1970s, are already gone. Unfortunately, of the sources of informa-
Frozen in one short moment long time ago. Are they all gone now? Is this all that is left?

“Unfortunately, of the sources of information created by Muslims themselves, capturing some moments of everyday religious life in Leningrad, very few have survived.”

FIRST OF ALL, there are a few letters. Keeping a diary was a rare practice among Leningrad Muslims then, and those that have survived can be counted on the fingers of one hand. A considerable amount of primary sources comprises various materials, dossiers, and cases produced by Soviet governmental bodies whose task was to monitor the activity of believers. Under these circumstances, the materials that captured the everyday life of Muslims in the Soviet Union (primarily from personal archives of Leningrad citizens) were the most important and in some cases the exclusive source of information for my research. It is necessary to note here that any photograph that has come down to us from a personal archive needs a competent narrator, without whom the image imprinted on the film will be a dead artifact of the past, a fragment of an unknown destiny.

HOWEVER, IN MOST cases, the owners of photo albums (children and grandchildren of Muslims from Petrograd/Leningrad) were not able to give us substantial explanations of the photos—either because they did not have the information or because, for various reasons, they did not want to give it. The latter case concerns those whose relatives were victims of Stalin’s repressions. My interest in the bygone cases of their relatives caused apprehension and even fear. Fortunately, a large number of images contain inscriptions on the back. However, this category of explanatory notes often failed to provide sufficient information to reconstruct the history behind the picture.

It was impossible to find out the names of all of the people depicted in the photographs that were at my disposal. However, one thing is certain: the majority of them were Tatars, representatives of various subgroups of the Tatar ethnic group living in St. Petersburg (children and grandchildren of Muslims from Petrograd/Leningrad). Here I have chosen only a few photos to describe the varying fates of Muslims who lived in Soviet Petrograd/Leningrad.

Estimation of collected sadaakah on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr (1975). Photographer: D.I. Ishakov (courtesy of the State Museum of the History of Religion, St. Petersburg). Sadaakah’s voluntary aims in Islam, the amount of which, in contrast to zakat, is not regulated. The ‘twenty’, the community council of the mosque whose mandate included administrative and economic issues related to the functioning of the mosque, was responsible for collecting and distributing sadaakah. In Soviet times, sadaakah actually replaced zakat. Sadaakah was also collected by unofficial mutakaff (i.e., those not serving at a mosque), for whom it was often the main source of income.

A funeral meal with the participation of the imam-khatib of the Leningrad Cathedral Mosque, Hafiz Mahmutov (mid-1970s). Photographer unknown (M.H. Mahmutov’s family archive). Of great interest are photographs that depict Muslim rituals: name giving (isem kushi), marriage (nikah), the burial, etc., conducted on the initiative of the Muslim Leningraders. The funeral theme prevails among the rituals depicted in the surviving images. Loss common are photographs in which the rituals of name giving and marriage are recorded. This is due to the fact that these rituals concerned mainly young people, most of whom were already far away from Islamic traditions.

Ritual ablutions before prayer (wudu) performed by the patients of the military infirmary for Taurida Muslims in Tsarskoye Selo (from the magazine Tsarskokselskij rayon osoboi evakuatsionnyi punkt, 1945). During the First World War an infirmary for Taurida Muslims was located in Tsarskoye Selo. It opened on December 13, 1914, thanks to funds provided by some Muslims from the Crimean peninsula. The infirmary, comprising a hundred beds was located in a building that formed part of the barracks of the Curassier Regiment’s Life Guards. It received seriously injured patients who arrived on hospital trains at Tsarskoye Selo—mostly Muslims who spoke practically no Russian and needed care from doctors and staff who spoke Turkish. The need to practice Islamic rituals was another reason for the creation of a specialized hospital for Muslims. There was a carpeted prayer room in the hospital.

A Tatar boy from Petrograd (first half of 1910s). Photographer unknown (family archive of R. I. Bekkin). Throughout the history of St. Petersburg’s Muslim community, Tatars represented the majority of its population. According to data for 1910, 7,300 Tatars lived in St. Petersburg, comprising about 0.4 percent of the city’s residents.

Two Tatar women from Petrograd (first half of the 1910s). Photographer unknown (family archive of R. I. Bekkin).
An innovative guidebook to St. Petersburg. Breaking through the invisibility of Muslim history and culture


S t. Petersburg has always been one of the most popular Russian cities for tourists. The inhabitants of different parts of Russia and thousands of foreign tourists come annually to visit the former tsar’s “sofa” – the Hermitage – as well as to enjoy the canals, museums, shops and, not least, the magnificent cathedrals. Known as the “cradle of the Russian empire”, St. Petersburg at the present period nowaday is the city, that was once usually presented to tourists as the capital of the Russian Empire and “the most European” of Russian cities.

The guidebook under review, however, surprises its readers with a quite different story about the city. Instead of the usual stories, it invites us to visit the city’s main historic mosque (whose construction was started in 1901 and finished after the revolution), to see the wines where Muscovites philosophers, poets, politicians and historians lived or those they visited. The guidebook also commemorates places connected to the memory of strong moments of Russian imperial rule, such as Imam Shamil, the Caucasian religious leader, politician, and hero of the Caucasian war (who visited St. Petersburg in 1859), or Batyrsha, leader of the 8th century Tatar Bashkir uprising against Russian colonization.

Tourists following this guide through the streets of St. Petersburg, or just doing a virtual tour while reading the book, can learn a lot about the contradictory history of this imperial city and the life of Muslim subjects of the empire in St. Petersburg and its surround ings. The guidebook consists of quite detailed and well illustrated descriptions of shops, graveyards, restaurants, and places for religious celebrations and charitable activities that played important role in the life of the Muslim population of the city. The guidebook genre does not require precise explanation of all the historical facts or complete references to historical sources (some stories can be presented as historical anecdotes), but in most cases, the authors carefully provide the sources of quotations and dates. For additional information, most of the names of important historical personalities are accompanied by short biographies and references to the sources of information. In the case of the most cases, the authors carefully provide the sources of quotations and dates. In addition, the 1920s and 1930s, for example, were the years when many could declare themselves to be supporters of the (abolished) system of power. At the same time, as my own research shows, even the new Soviet people were frequently reminded of their origins, including their belonging to the “backward nations”, as many Muslim nations were called by the Bolshevik center. How was Muslim identity preserved, displayed and dealt with during the Soviet years?

Another particularly important topic for discussion would be the ethno-religious changes between “old Muslim” inhabitants of St. Petersburg and “new” migrants from the Muslim parts of the country during the late socialist period? And what about students and visitors from the “Third world” Muslim countries?

Such a book, probably due to its aim of discussing life of Muslims and not Islam in St. Petersburg, the guidebook does not give much information about Islamic religious institutions per se, neither the celebrations nor the everyday life of Muslims in a city dominated by Orthodox churches and cathedrals. Paradoxically, the influential jihad movement – also known as the Islamic modernism of the early 20th century – is practically absent from the book. Obviously, one guidebook cannot include descriptions of all the ethnic groups from the Russian Empire/Soviet Union or of the other groups that lived in St. Petersburg and who had some connection with the city. At the same time, some visitors or groups such as Central Asians (with exception of the Emir of Bukhara’s visit), Arabs or Africans – seem to be rather invisible, while the description of the relationships between different groups of Muslims sometimes lacks a critical approach. One of the most remarkable cases is the description of the atmosphere of Muslim life in “African village” (386—389) that were opened in St. Petersburg by a Tatar merchant, Habibulla Yalyshev in the early 1900s. The African village seems to have been a typical colonial representation of the time, where the “Other”, the “sav-age” (in this case the Somalis), was the object of the gaze of the “cultured Russian European”. The fact that the organizer of such a “human zoo” was a Tatar obviously does not make it a less racist enterprise than those organized by British, French or Russian entrepreneurs.

CONCLUDING MY SHORT REVIEW, I want to stress again the importance of such a publication in helping to break through the “invisibility” of St. Petersburg’s Muslim history and culture and in doing it in such an innovative way. This important project of alternative history – the history of Muslim St. Petersburg – can be developed further in different directions. In addition to the above mentioned description of Soviet St. Petersburg, the geographical structure of the guidebook could be complemented by short thematic and chronological overviews explaining the role of the general changes in imperial politics and towards the Muslims, the most important developments in Muslim society inside and outside the Russian empire as well as comparing similarities and differences in the observation of national and religious traditions by different inhabitants of St. Petersburg who could be defined as “Muslim”. On the other hand, the project could sharpen its critique of imperial politics and pay more attention to St. Petersburg’s special place in the Russian Empire. St. Petersburg was the city from which several million Muslims were governed, but also exploited, humiliated and dominated.

Yulia Gradskova
Associate professor of history at the Institute for Contemporary Studies, Södertörn University

references


Serfdom in Russia 150 years later. Structures live on

A Peasant Leaving His Landlord on 27th Day in Autumn, Yuryev Day, painting by Sergei V. Ivanov, 1908.

Serfdom, or crepostnoye pravo, was abolished 156 years ago in Russia by Alexander II. The nineteenth-century Russian liberal and socialist thinker Alexander Herzen spoke of this system as a kind of internal colonialism. Unlike the US and Western Europe, where the master–slave relation often can along ethnic lines and thus resulted in different ways of dealing with the past, depending on the ethnic group, the master–slave relation in Russia was class-based, essentially feudal. The land belonged to the aristocracy and the peasants belonged to the land. When these peasants were freed (“remancipated”), the resulting conflict involved class more than ethnicity.

When the Russian intellectual organ NLO (New Literary Observer), in an extensive double issue on slavery, recently thematicized this historical chapter it did so from a variety of perspectives, ranging from articles on how slavery is represented in Soviet film to its presence in French and American history. But the big question in all of this is: How has this historical phenomenon, its roots in the earlier history of the country, the societal consequences of slave ownership exists nationally, among both whites and blacks.

The process is visible also in France. As Polina Kuzmicheva shows, since the turn of the millennium there have been clear attempts in the country to integrate this “painful and shameful” chapter into the country’s history. In 2001, a law was adopted that declared slavery to be a crime against humanity, and since 2006 the victims of slavery have had a day of remembrance (May 10). At the same time, a conversation is taking place about how to “revitalize memory” and write a more nuanced history than the francocentric one—how, then, to include more perspectives than those based on the idea of France as a civilizing, enlightening force.

THE SAME CAN hardly be said of Russia, and this is the fundamental difference. The emancipation was not abolished, but rather became increasingly complicated, says Jan Levecenko, a professor at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow. “The eerie silence” that prevailed during the mass murders of the Bolshevik Revolution, he claims, is broken today only “by the dictatorial silence”. There is no current consensus, even within homogeneous social groups, nor is there an “everyday language” for talking about the darker chapters of the national history, especially those structures that secretly made these darker chapters possible. Attempts to return to slavery, instead of to the peasant commons in which many 19th-century Russian socialists had placed their hopes? The NLO’s double issue on slavery spans several centuries and countries, and of course offers, as usual, more questions than answers. But it suggests undeniably that there is a systematic, direct relationship between how different people viewed the Russian revolution, and what kind of society it created in turn often becomes, publicly, questions about the leaders’ personalities, or empty clichés about the soul of the Russian people.

In what way did serfdom affect the Russian Revolution, both in terms of the alternative type of power possessed by the peasant class and in the problematic relationship of the Soviet powers to the land-owning peasants? To what degree was collectivization a return to slavery, instead of to the peasant commons in which many 19th-century Russian socialists had placed their hopes?

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Today, the Russian intelligentsia, from academics to opinion journalists, has become engalagued in personal battles and is rarely able to reach out to anyone other than the small clique of the initiated. At the same time, the state-run media are interested in nothing other than an image of the country as stable and steady. To admit mistakes or crimes in the country’s past means, as it does in all remigmatic regimes, to appear inconsistent and weak. The conversation is conducted by a marginalized core of academics, under pressure from both the state and the flight of intellectuals to foreign countries.

FOR THE ORDINARY RUSSIAN, the 150th anniversary of the abolition of serfdom passed more or less unnoticed. The same will most likely not be able to be said of the big upcoming 100th anniversary of the Bolshevik coup, which already is being celebrated in various ways. Here, from literature to the alternative press, there is an attempt to bring meaning to the past and reflect on contemporary impurities of the coup. Olga Shtavnikova’s significant novel 2017, where the revolution is staged in a kind of historical carnival of memory by dressed-up masses, and then gets out of control and becomes an actual revolt, is once again relevant this year. But at the same time it is as if the revolution, just as in the novel, took place in a void: questions about what kind of society it was that led to it and what kind of society it created in turn often become, publicly, questions about the leaders’ personalities, or empty clichés about the soul of the Russian people.

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Imagining the Åland Islands. A Sea of Peace


The Åland Islands have often inspired visions of peace. In a speech given in Åland’s capital Mariehamn in 1992, the Finnish president Urho Kekkonen praised the demilitarized status of the archipelago; he considered that it should have been taken as a model for the creation of more such disarmament zones in Europe. Troubled watershed with Soviet Union during the Cold War, the Baltic Sea was at the same time a space for both fears of war and expectations of a durable peace. Åland played a pivotal role in imaging the Baltic: in other words, it was the model of the idealized space of peace projects which proposed to establish a Nordic nuclear-weapon free zone.

Nevertheless, Åland retains its role as a model even after the end of the world-scale confrontation, since its example is “more of a way of thinking than a model”: with these words, former Finnish prime minister Harry Holkeri described the case of Åland Islands at the 55th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, pointing to it as an example of peaceful governance. This peaceful governance is constituted by a number of international agreements which provide the islands with a demilitarized, autonomous, and neutral status, and with rules on respecting the cultural and linguistic rights of its population. This is how Deborah Paci’s most recent monograph assesses the Åland Islands: The Archipelago of Peace.
Continued. Imagining the Åland Islands

Land. The study focuses mainly on the timespan from the 19th century to the Paris treaty of 1947, but also provides an outline of Åland’s history between the 16th and 21st centuries.

Paci’s contribution elucidates how the islands’ image has been historically constructed, shaped and modified in successive stages by the international context that has conditioned both Åland’s political status and its self-perception. The monograph is in fact focused on four main concepts by which the archipelago’s identity has been built during the last few centuries: Åland as a maritime, autonomous, demilitarized and neutral archipelago (chapter 3).

ÅLAND’S INSULAR geography has been the determining factor of its maritime commerce and the consequent development of successful local naval entrepreneurship. Local cultural identity discourse has also been constructed discourses of Malta and Corsica, Åland’s insular identity started to imagine itself as a specific group distinct from the Swedes, the Finns, and the other Swedish-speaking communities present in Finland. Åland’s self-representation in the 20th century includes trust in its ability to obtain international status of the archipelago.

In Åland there are 20,000 islands and 6,700 of them have names.

For Åland and for the Baltic Sea was possible without agreement with the Entente (1914–1918) another narrator of the Åland Islands’ vicissitudes in the troubled second half of the thirties was Armando Ottaviano Koch, the Italian envoy in Helsinki. Åland once more became the focus of international attention after 1936 because of the feared expansionism of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Koch reported the vision of Åland by the diplomats of liberal and fascist Italy in Stockholm and Helsinki, and contribute to the presentation of the complex picture that the archipelago had in the most troubled times of contemporaneous history. Among the narrators of Åland’s image that Paci refers to is, for example, Francesco Tommasini, the Italian envoy in Stockholm who in 1918 informed the foreign minister about the Åland population’s separatist aspirations, and referred to the consequent request made by the Swedish government that Italy support the separatist cause, in order not to put Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim, the regent of Finland, in a difficult position. According to Tommasini, Sweden hoped for a military airport on Åland. Once Sweden and Finland had signed the 1939 Protocol of Stockholm on the defense of Åland in case of military attack, the Western regional powers agreed; Koch considered that the concept of Nordic defense was a qualitative jump from the “localized neutrality” (p. 119) prescribed by the League of Nations. Once the maps of the future war started to be drawn in the spring of 1939, the neutrality of the Baltic was considered positive by Germany and Italy, but the Soviet Union objected because of the presence of some fortifications.

After the war, the autonomy of Åland in democratic Finland allowed the start of a process of nation-building and identity-making. In this regard, one of the figures recalled in The Archipelago of Peace is the Estonian archaeologist Marts Dreijer, who considered the local laws and international law to be the unique supports of Åland’s vital interests in the face of larger nations. Considering Åland as a small nation, he invested much energy in providing the islands with an autonomous law (which he wrote and which was approved by the Finnish parliament in 1951) and on the building of Åland as a cultural hembygd (Heimat) which he embedded in children’s fairy-tales. The Cold War era was reflected to some extent in Dreijer’s work of nation-building; he was convinced that the battle against the East was one of the historical missions of the people of Åland. As in every nation-building process worthy of respect, the archipelago was redefined as the easternmost
The Belarusian Maidan. A new social movement

Vasil Navumau, The Belarusian Maidan in 2006: A New Social Movement Approach to the Tent Camp Protest in Minsk

In the 2006 Belarus presidential election the incumbent, Aleksandr Lukashenka, not unexpectedly, won a crushing victory over the candidate from the United Democratic Forces in a vote declared “not free and fair” by a majority of international observers. While none of this indicated anything out of the ordinary, both local and international spectators were astonished by the fact that protests against the election results gathered over 10,000 people, the largest rally against the regime in many years. Even more surprisingly, inspired by recent events in Ukraine, activists set up a tent camp on October Square in Minsk, with a daily average of 150—200 participants. Despite pressure from the authorities, the camp lasted five days before armed antiterror police forcibly dispersed it. In the aftermath police detained at least 500 people on charges of taking part in illegal actions.2

The main message of Navumau’s highly interesting book is that it is not adequate to interpret the 2006 tent camp protest in Minsk as just a “failed Belarusian Maidan”. Rather than a protest aimed at overthrowing the corrupt regime, as was the case with the “color revolutions” in neighboring Ukraine and Georgia, the tent camp is, in his view, better understood as a Belarusian version of a new social movement. That is, it was a protest that instead of demanding social changes from above should be understood as a process of identity formation and as a group of social actors struggling to define history. The protesters, he notes, did not focus simply on discrediting the current regime but used innovative cultural strategies to encourage their fellow citizens to reflect on conventional knowledge about the state’s and the authorities’ ideological legitimacy. Navumau further argues that the camp became a watershed in Belarusian protest history by showing that traditional opposition actions and methods were not the only game in town. Moreover, after 2006 “Ploshcha”[Belarusian for “square”] became a widely used metaphor as the only possible way to end the authoritarian rule. While I agree with the book’s conclusion that at the time the tent camp protest was something inherently unique for Belarus, I will discuss below what I find less straightforward – whether and to what extent the events in Minsk can be seen as a watershed in the country’s protest history.

NAVUMAU’S BOOK STARTS WITH AN outline of popular protests in Belarus during the period 1985—2006. His analysis is separated into types and techniques of actions, organizers, participants and public response and provides an extensive overview of how collective action has developed in this milieu from the end of the Soviet period through the first 15 years of independence, a study of great value to anyone interested in this topic. In addition to this outline, the author gives a comprehensive literature review, including a majority of Belarusian sources that makes it particularly significant for those of us interested in the topic and the context who do not speak the language. Navumau’s outline also highlights a trend in the development of Belarusian collective activism that is extremely important for furthering our understanding of the current situation—the move towards the “romanticization of protest.” In the late Soviet period and the early days of independence the population in general was keen to participate in various protest actions. Popular protests peaked in 1996, when Lukashenka orchestrated a referendum on a radically rewritten constitution that increased and consolidated his presidential powers, but from 1997 onwards, both the protest activities and the actors appear to have become to a certain extent institutionalized. Since then activities have mainly been limited to a set repertoire including only “traditional” actions, the actors being limited to representatives of the major opposition parties, or movements.

One highly important observation in this regard is that the traditional actions organized by the “traditional opposition” became increasingly ritualized and symbolic, as is also the case with the “battle with the regime, which in turn contributed to the negative image of “opposition” and “their protests” among the general population. In this sense, according to Navumau, the tent camp was different as “...inhabitants of the tent camp undermined the routine practices of protest deployed by the opposition” (p. 99).

Navumau argues the tent camp was unique. “Speaking in Minsk’s terms”, he writes “it was the symbol of the transformation of Belarusian society in that it gradually emancipated itself from the influence of the large-scale project of nativist national identity, as suggested by the opposition” (p. 177). The Tent Camp’s uniqueness in Belarusian collective action history is, he notes, illustrated by a number of facts. First, the protesters were not the usual suspects (e.g. the traditional opposition parties like Belarus National Front, United Civic Party or the Social Democrats) but students, politically active youth, intellectuals and metropolitans from very different segments of society that did not belong to a single political force. Second, actions were spontaneous and not planned, unlike the “institutionalized” public rallies. Third, the participants did not express any common political goals and did not accept representation by established political “opposition” leaders. Finally, during and after the break-up of the protest the participants continued their political initiatives in different constellations, using flash mobs for example. According to Navumau, this led to the birth of a new type of collective action donors/implmenters who became reliant on a preferred group of trusted recipients. This did little to inspire new approaches to achieving change. Instead it cemented a “professionalized opposition core” seemingly with a monopoly over fighting a losing battle with the regime, which in turn contributed to the negative image of “opposition” and “their protests” among the general population. In this sense, according to Navumau, the tent camp was different as “inhabitants of the tent camp undermined the routine practices of protest deployed by the opposition” (p. 99).

References


The past is part of the future

The volume Russian Literature since 1991, edited by Evgeny Dobrenko and Mark Lipovetsky and published in 2015, takes the form of a "compendium of modern scholarship on post-Soviet Russian literature" as the flyleaf tells us. And certainly, it comprises an impressive collection of scholars and articles with sharp, intelligent and poignant analyses of the development of post-Soviet Russian literature, with great emphasis on the past. Although the scope of the book is Russian literature from 1991 until today, it is the relation to the Soviet past, or the afterness of contemporary Russian literature in its transition period, that dominates the larger part of the articles. Elliot Borenstein aptly summarizes a ghastly feature of Russian contemporary writing when he asserts that Russian literature gives voice to an anxiety between dystopia and apocalypse, meaning at the same time post-pocalypptic and preapocalyptic, based on an uncertainty not only as to whether the past is in the future or the future in the past, but also as to the question where to place the ideological signs in this confusion of history and time.

The book is certainly a compilation of many fine and interesting contributions in the fields of contemporary Russian literature. There are no subheadings, but the articles nevertheless seem to follow an order. The theme of the first part is the Soviet legacy in positive and negative terms, with contributions by Evgeny Dobrenko and Sergey Oushakine. This part aligns well with the following articles by Kevin P. Flatt, Elliot Borenstein, Aleksandr Etkind and Ilya Kalinin, where the political aspect of "the relation to history", meaning not only Soviet history, but also Russian history before and after the Soviet Union, constitutes a common thread.

Alongside the references

1. Estimates range between 10,000 and 35,000, according to Korchinoy (2000).
4. The exception is certain stubborn opposition politicians who refuse to let the idea go.
Continued.

Russian Literature since 1991

of the cumbersome and heavy reality of socialist realism. Yet, although Borenstein opens a certain historical perspective on the genre and Oushakine astutely claims that “the familiar ways of the ideological critique of the past have been utterly exhausted” it would have been interesting to have a deeper analysis of the transformations of postmodern Russian literature and genres over time, and also an analysis of its repetitions, or perhaps even of the possible exhaustion of this literature and its devices. There is a strong case for arguing that a different post-Soviet Russian literature has emerged from around 2005 onwards, among prominent writers such as Roman Sinench and Yuri Buida, both absent in this volume. They both develop a different understanding and configuration of the past in a different form of writing, where the legacy of the Soviet past in reality and literature appears hybrid in a different way. The focus in these works is not on excoriating the Soviet past, but on realizing its inevitable, tragic, dark, but also sometimes touching forms of continuity under a different ideological system, without therefore expressing longing or a turn to nostalgia. What is more, there is no discussion of the difficulty of forming and discussing any representative Russian literature of the 1990s, of the comprehensive cultural and historical disaster that this volume fails to discuss in any depth is a highly important and influential institution of continuity. A facade or not, are not equally prominent. Another example is when discussing the old question of continuity or discontinuity in recent Russian history. As it stands now, the book appears largely to confirm the post-Soviet Russian.

The anthology would have profited greatly from thematizing and problematizing its own rather contingent theoretical take on the question of post-Soviet literature’s relation to the Soviet past, but on realizing its inevitable, tragic, dark, but also sometimes touching forms of continuity under a different ideological system, without therefore expressing longing or a turn to nostalgia. What is more, there is no discussion of the difficulty of forming and discussing any representative Russian literature of the 1990s, of the comprehensive cultural and historical disaster that this volume fails to discuss in any depth is a highly important and influential institution of continuity. A facade or not, are not equally prominent. Another example is when discussing the old question of continuity or discontinuity in recent Russian history. As it stands now, the book appears largely to confirm the post-Soviet Russian.

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of the images of the present and the past in the capitalist order of new forms of consciousness, of the present as a way of imagining the future and the past lives on in the future of Russia. As it stands now, the book appears largely to confirm the post-Soviet Russian文学 remains of this past, whereas its relation to the contemporary literature mainly in its relation to the past in the form of opposition. Instead, Russian literature appears in this volume to be mostly at odds with its Soviet past and the remains of this past, whereas its relation to the development of the Soviet cultural institutions and cultural practices, and it makes a strong case for pop literature. It argues somewhat awkwardly in the introduction that the volume certainly contains "enormous popularity of Akunin's novels among the intelligentsia and others", whereas Akunin clearly shows that the interests of the intelligentsia were varied, if you can speak of the intelligentsia at all after the Soviet Union. What is more, a highly important and influential institution of continuity that this volume fails to discuss in any depth is that of the literary prizes, perhaps because it only mentions in passing the question how political changes affect the economic conditions for writing and for being a public person. It would be interesting to at least pose the question in a dispassionate way if literature, as we know it, does not really end with the Soviet Union, because perhaps nowhere can literature again acquire the role or anti-role that it had at the apex of Solzhenitsyn’s or Brodsky’s fame.

TO CONCLUDE, the volume certainly contains valuable contributions to our understanding of contemporary post-Soviet literature, but the picture it gives could be more complete and representative of Russian literature since 1991 not solely as a way of dealing with the past, but also as a form of coming to terms with the fact that the past was not simply a past and therefore not only offers itself as legacy, return or the object of nostalgia, but that it also is a present, albeit in a complicated and world that keeps working but with different ideological signs. In Lampedusa’s masterpiece The Leopard, the young Tancredi says to Prince Salina that he ought to join the revolutionaries, because you must “change all in order to preserve all”. This phrase catches well the difficulty of thinking change in literal terms, when change can be a means of preserving power. It also invites us to an understanding of how the future that we embody lived in the past of the Soviet system, and how the past lives on in the future of Russian literature and society not only as ideological but also as everyday life.

Tora Lane

Project researcher and associate professor of literature, Södertörn University

Macedonia. A deeply divided country

The newly elected president of Macedon- ia, Zoran Zaev, has a complex situation to untangle, notes Jessica Giandomenico. PhD in political science at Uppsala Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies in a commentary on the presidential elections in Mace- donia: “After five months of struggling and political crisis following the general elections in December 2016, Macedonia is finally getting a government in May 17. The four consecutive early elections were supposed to be a fresh restart and a means to overcome a longer period of deepening political crisis. But the election was rather the opposite: the govern- ment party lost the elections and have ever since done their utmost to prevent having power. Although a government is formed and is possible to proceed with other issues, the situation is tense and the country is deeply divided. The national- ists have proven that they are willing to take to violence, while the former opposition supporters have shown that they also are willing to take to the streets if need be.”

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Turkmenistan. A facade of pluralism

On February 12, 2017, the president of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, won a predict- ably handsome presidential election victory with a margin of 97.7% and an impressive turnout of 97.28%. At first sight it might seem like just another Soviet-style election, with a solitary contender predestined to win a plebiscitary type contest, comments Donnacha O’Bealchan, Director of Research at the School of Law and Government, Dublin City University and Abel Polese, Research Fellow at the School of Law and Govern- ment, Dublin City University. During this election, however, the Turkmen political elite constructed a facade of pluralism by running an unprecedent- ed nine candidates representing three political parties.

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SCIENCE FICTION AND THE LOSS OF BORDERS

Science Fiction is mostly regarded as fun and entertainment. In Uppsala, group of renowned international scholars recently came together because they think that it is more than mere entertain ment. At least this is the case in today’s Russia. The conference “Russian World” and other Imaginary Space: (Geo) Political Themes in Post-Soviet Science Fiction was hosted by Uppsala Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies (UCRS) in March 2017, and was organized by Mikhail Sudkov (UCRS) and Per-Arne Bodin (Stockholm University).

During these two days, the participants showed us how Russian science fiction, fantasy literature and utopian narratives may tell us something important about post-soviet political culture. For instance, this kind of literature is remarkable often concerned with Russia’s borders, its enemies and its wider sphere of influence – ideas that in recent times have found their way into political thought and even been put into practice. Fantastic literature, regardless of its artistic quality, thus gives us a broader understanding of Russian geopolitical imagination, often centered on concepts such as the “Russian World,” “Russian civilization” and “Eurasia.”

At stake in such narratives, in other words, is the protection of Russian territoriality – understood not so much as the current borders of the Russian Federation, but as the territory of the former Soviet Union. In contemporary Russian mass literature we find an obsession with both territorial loss (Maria Galina’s paper) and with new Eurasian integration (Irina Kotkina). This obsession with borders and territory, the participants agreed, reflects a trauma connected with the collapse of the Soviet empire.

Several papers gave new and fascinating insight into literature many academ ically untrained or at least so is assumed), but perhaps they should? Two other important and closely connected features of this literature is their indulgence in alternative history and their recurrent instrumentalization of history. Some papers demonstrated, more specifically, how the battle for Crimea as Russian land has been an urgent matter also in fantasy literature (Matthias Schwartz, Martins Ågren). So has the Russian revolution as literature, which cel ebrates its hundredth anniversary this year (Go Kosholm).

While many presenters talked about “pulp fiction” – the notion of “trash lit erature” was also in frequent use during the conference – others devoted their papers to writers who produce literature of high quality, while reflecting on similar themes. An author who figured in several papers (by Mark Lipovetsky and others) was Vladimir Sorokin, whose dystopic novels portray various Russia’s post-socialist culture studies.

Per-Arne Bodin
Professor of Slavic literatures at Stockholm University. His main interests are Russian literature, Russian poetry, Russian cultural history (especially the importance of the Russian Orthodox tradition) and Polish literature after the Second World War.

Helene Carlbäck
Associate professor of history at the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies at Södertörn University. Research interests: Soviet Russian history and literature, family and marriage politics and practices.

Käre Johan Mijer
Researcher of Russian intellectual history at the Uppsala Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Uppsala University.

Péter Balogh
His focus is on geopolitical narratives in Hungary and Central and Eastern Europe. Postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for Regional Studies (IRES) in Hungary, where he is currently analyzing how and why the notion of “Central Europe” has been changing over the past several years.

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PhD in political science from Stockholm University. Researcher at the Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Uppsala University (UCRS) and affiliated with the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul. Her main focus is on the concept of “opposition” in electoral authoritarian states.

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RUSSIAN HISTORIAN ARRESTED

Jurij Dmitriev, a 61-years-old Russian historian, who has devoted half his lifetime to finding and verifying the identity of victims of the Great Terror of 1937-1938, was arrested in his home in Petrozavodsk, the capital of the Karelian Republic in Russia, on December 13, 2016. Dmitriev is also the leader of the Memorial society in Karelia. This human rights movement has recently been labeled a hostile “foreign agent”, along with a total of 145 different NGOs. Several offices of the Memorial society have been ransacked by the authorities and forced to close down in recent years.

Dmitriev was unexpectedly apprehended in his home and taken to a local prison without the opportunity to contact his family. The criminal investigation was said at the time to require two months, but was recently prolonged. No new end date has been specified. The highly respected historian was charged with spreading child pornography over the Internet. The charges were based on a photo in his computer showing his daughter and his granddaughter, 11 years old, nude in the bathroom. Some days before the arrest the family had received anonymous telephone calls. Their home was also burglarized.

Sergei Krivenko, a board member of the International Memorial Society, dismiss the charges as absurd. He considers the accusations against Dmitriev mainly an attack against the Memorial organization. Colleagues and friends familiar with Dmitriev’s dedicated work have demonstrated, protesting the arrest with quiet picket lines along Lenin Prospect, the main street cutting through the city center. They were quickly dispersed by the police with rough warnings. Local news media controlled by the government have not reported the incidents.

DMITRIEV’S UNTIRING WORK to honor and rehabilitate the victims of the Terror took shape in two main burial areas in Karelia. The first one, Sandarmoh, was finished in 1997, a last resting place for many thousands of victims of 57 nationalities. The first remains buried there were those of a thousand Ukrainian prisoners murdered in the Solovki camp in the Northern Solovetski Islands, Lenin’s first Gulag camp. Ever since, people from all over Russia and from abroad have been gathering at Sandarmoh the first weekend of August to honor the victims. Some nations, such as Finland, which lost ten thousands of people in the Terror, have been represented at the ceremony by diplomats. The second burial area that Dmitriev initiated is Krasnii Bor (the Red Forest) near Petrozavodsk, which has mainly received the remains of victims killed in the area.

In recent years, political tension has followed several changes of the top leadership in Karelia. The republic bordering Finland and the European Union covers a wide area extending north of St. Petersburg to the Northern oblasts of Murmansk and Arkhangelsk. Dmitriev started his work in the beginning of the 1990s in a very different political climate just after the collapse of the Soviet Union. With a background in medical studies in Leningrad, he worked as an assistant to the Duma member Ivan Tiuchin. After Tiuchin’s death, Dmitriev took over the responsibility for the research work and the excavation of gravesites. Dmitriev quickly became a frequent visitor to the state archives in Petrozavodsk, controlled by the secret police (FSB; formerly NKVD). His enthusiasm attracted followers among politicians, historians, and students. Young military personnel volunteered their services in the heavy digging work. Similar work was being performed in other areas of the Soviet Union. Books of “martyriology” listing the names of terror victims were published, and most of all, important networks of cooperating historians were established. Dmitriev has produced several books listing the names of the victims. In the beginning, even names of NKVD personnel responsible for torture and killings were published, which caused turmoil. Dmitriev didn’t reveal the names of the executioners.

DIFFERENT REMNANTS – shoes, buttons, rusty mugs, combs – found in the mass graves were exhibited in a small cellar room in central Petrozovsk, on Lenin Prospect. Ordinary people who had been silenced or had never talked about their lost family members started coming there asking for help to trace them. Dmitriev did his utmost to help people, free of charge. The arrangement in the cellar was very discreet, but it obviously also attracted people hostile to Dmitriev’s work. Keeping a low personal profile, he never even mentioned these problems.

I met Dmitriev in 1998, a year after the opening of the Sandarmoh cemetery where families were putting up wooden memorial crosses over the remains of their loved ones. He was quickly willing to help me find documentation of Swedish citizens who had disappeared during the Terror. They were a small group of probably 1000 individuals mixed with the Finns and Canadian and US emigrants arriving in the early 1930s. Our research cooperation soon turned into driving around Karelia in his old car, which we did for many years. He took me to visit gravesites, released Gulag prisoners in small villages, museums and, most, importantly local archives.

Kaa Eneberg
Author of three books on Swedish emigrants to Karelia who disappeared during the Terror.