

A scholarly journal and news magazine. May 2017. Vol. X:1-2.
From the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES), Södertörn University.

Hungarian
researchers
on the CEU

BALTIC WORLDS

balticworlds.com

Special section: Bakhtinian Theory

The postcolonial
& postsocialist
perspective

Sweden's
indigenous
people,
the Sami:

Telling their own story

also in this issue

Illustration: Tomas Colbengtson

MACEDONIAN ART / e-ESTONIA / BORDERING POMERANIA / FATHERHOOD IN RUSSIA / BELARUS PROTESTS

editorial

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 Michael 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 1600s, it is shown that the culture of opposites can also result in violence: ridicule can transform to brutality. Viktoriya Sukovata in her turn investigates the Ukrainian TV comedies. Carnivalization 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 can permit differences to thrive, to encounter each other in a belief that there are values that endure and can be created by building bridges,

not walls. It is precisely that dialogue that Central European University (CEU) has in fact been able to create – the very CEU that now has been a target of the Hungarian government’s attempt to silence and shut down free speech, free thought, and transnational academic exchange. Perhaps it is fear that should be combated the most, in this upside-down world, in order to find balance and negotiate a culture strong enough to encompass oppositions?

MEANWHILE, *Baltic Worlds* will continue to contribute to the publication of multidisciplinary research within and about our expanded, transborder, post-1989 Europe. In this rich double issue, we offer a cavalcade of topics: the fight against repression by the Nordic Sami indigenous population; models for sustainable food production; analysis of e-Estonia’s faith in a digital order; Belarusian protest movements; and much more. *Baltic Worlds* takes pleasure in this rich, chaotic mixture of subjects and narrative voices and hopes to nurture new perspectives and approaches. ❌

Ninna Mörner

in this issue



Sweden is stepping out of the colonial closet

“ Art, theater, film, and music — we use them more and more to increase the knowledge of our Sami culture, of our history, of our pain.

Page 4



Fatherly emotions in Soviet Russia

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.

Page 20



feature

4 **Breaking the silence.** The Sami and Sweden’s colonial past. *Påhl Ruin*

peer-reviewed articles

11 **Resistance in Macedonia.** Subversiveness in the visual arts. *Tihomir Topuzovski*

32 **The story of e-Estonia.** The discourses behind the idea. *Rene Mäe*

essays

20 **Fatherhood in Soviet Russia.** Emotions and role models. *Helene Carlbäck*

100 **Borders on the move.** Change and conflict in Pomerania. *Thomas Lundén*

#IstandwithCEU

30 **A common dream.** Revoked solidarity. *Andrea Petö*

31 **Power concentration cannot remain.** Evoked selfcritic. *Péter Balogh*

commentaries

91 **Sharing food.** Lessons learned from Eastern Europe. *Natalya Yakusheva*

93 **Protests in Belarus.** Minsk fear to go Kiev. *Ulyana Kaposhka & Matthew Kott*

96 **Anti-nuclear movements.** A reflection on the time aspect. *Ekaterina Tarasova*

98 **Disinformation from Kremlin.** Perspectives on the scale. *Maksym Kyiak*

128 **Russian historian arrested.** A call for awareness. *Kaa Eneberg*

story

110 **Muslims in the Soviet Petrograd-Leningrad.** Portraits on varying fates. *Renat Bekkin*

reviews

114 **An innovative guidebook to St. Petersburg.** *Yulia Gradskova*

116 **Serfdom in Russia 150 years later.** *Maxim Grigoriev*

117 **Imagining the Åland Islands.** *Francesco Zavatti*

120 **The Belarusian Maidan.** *Sofie Bedford*

123 **Russian literature since 1991.** *Tora Lane*

conference report

126 **Geopolitical themes in Post-Soviet science fiction literature.** *Kåre Johan Mjør*

misc.

90 **Up-coming workshop on Bakhtin.**

125 **Election Coverage.** Turkmenistan & Macedonia

special section

Bakhtinian theory: The postcolonial & postsocialist perspective

Guest editors: *Yulia Gradskova & Paromita Chakrabarti*

46 **Introduction.** *Yulia Gradskova & Paromita Chakrabarti*

interview

48 **A Discussion on the Bakhtin circle.** *Yulia Gradskova & Paromita Chakrabarti*

peer-reviewed articles

57 **Ukrainian popular culture.** *Viktoriya Sukovata*

66 **The grotesque body in Indian comic tradition.** *Rajni Mujral*

73 **Witchhunt in northern Sweden.** *Per-Arne Bodin*

82 **Crisis of the responsible Word.** *Paromita Chakrabarti*



PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLES have undergone a double-blind peer review by at least two independent specialists. A peer-reviewed article published in *Baltic Worlds* generates one publication point for the authors and their institutions in the Norwegian bibliometric register (DHB). *BW* is an Open Access Journal and all content is freely available without charge to the user or his/her institution. More information is available on our website.

colophon

Baltic Worlds is published by the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEEES) at Södertörn University, Sweden.

Editor-in-chief

Ninna Mörner

Publisher

Joakim Ekman

Scholarly advisory council

Thomas Andrén, Södertörn University; Sari Autio-Sarasmö, Aleksanteri Institute, Helsinki; Sofie Bedford, UCRS, Uppsala University; Michael Gentile, Helsinki University; Markus Huss (chair), Södertörn University; Katarina Leppänen, CERGU, University of Gothenburg; Thomas Lundén, CBEEES; Kazimierz Musiał, University of Gdańsk; Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, Centre for European Studies, Lund University

Corresponding members

Aija Lulle, University of Latvia; Michael North, Ernst Moritz Arndt University Greifswald; Andrzej Nowak, Jagiellonian University, Kraków; Andrea Petö, Central European University, Budapest; Jens E. Olesen, Ernst-Moritz-Arndt University, Greifswald; Olga Schihalejev, Tartu University.

Copyediting/proofreading

Tony Crawford, Semantix AB; Brian Manning Delaney, English Proper; Bridget Schäfer

Layout

Sara Bergfors, Lena Fredriksson, Serpentin Media

Illustrators

Tomas Colbengtson, Katrin Stenmark, Karin Sunvisson, Ragni Svensson, Moa Thelander

Subscription

Sofia Barlind

Printed by

Elanders Sverige AB
Printed: ISSN 2000-2955
Online: ISSN 2001-7308

Contact Baltic Worlds

bw.editor@sh.se

“SWEDEN IS STEPPING OUT OF THE COLONIAL CLOSET”

by Pål Ruin

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 120,000 people. How can we explain this success?

It is a cinematic masterpiece and would have won a big audience even without the Sami plot. And it describes – in a skillful way – universal truths about combatting prejudice. But I believe that the success of the film also has to do with the awakening of the Swedish people: How could we have treated this people so badly? And why didn’t we know more about these atrocities?

“It has to do with the Swedish self-image,” says Åsa Össbo, Research Coordinator at the Vaartoe – 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.”

The 20th century abuses against the Sami have not been a secret – so why wasn’t a film like *Sami Blood* created 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 Össbo. “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 Vaartoe – Centre for Sami Research at Umeå University is one of the parties involved.

“But it’s more difficult than in countries such as Canada or Australia,” says Åsa Össbo. “First, the colonization in Sweden was a much longer process, going back to the 17th century; it’s



Under det heliga fjället "Atoe" [Under the holy mountain "Atoe"], artwork by Sami artist Tomas Colbengtson.

difficult to know where to start. Second, in Sweden we have not experienced what’s been called ‘saltwater colonialism’, meaning the colonizers travelled over the oceans with the aim of conquering lands. In Sweden it has been a more subtle and slow process of domination.”

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 dogsledding 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



The first official Sami flag was recognized and inaugurated on August 15, 1986, by the 13th Nordic Sami Conference in Åre, Sweden.

Gradually deprived of their dignity and livelihood. The subtle process of domination is hard to revise.



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.

But arguably the church’s most painful atrocity, with repercussions to this very day, is the crucial help delivered by local priests to the State Institute for Racial Biology. The researchers from the institute in Uppsala measured the heads and the bodies of Sami people – and the local priests, knowing the Sami, provided them with the right individuals. In the film *Sami Blood* the most powerful scene is when the main character, the young girl Elle Marja, is forced to take off her clothes and stand naked in front of the photographer while being measured. The director gave the camera shutter the sound of gun shots.

These academic experiments, which mainly occurred in the 1930s, still affect the view of researchers among older Sami people, reveals Åsa Össbo. “We in the research community have

a bad reputation: we need to work in close cooperation with the Sami institutions to gain their trust”.

If the older Sami generation often chooses to remain silent and forget the past, a different development can be seen among many in the younger generation, people who want to connect to their roots.

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 Sami, but she never taught Helena’s mother the language – so Helena does not speak it. “But now I am very tempted to start taking lessons. My grandmother still has her Sami grammar books; I might use them when I start.”

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.”

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 news to me. Salming was one of the first Swedish professional players in the NHL, be-

coming a legend in the Toronto Maple Leaves. 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 joik at the popular Eurovision qualification festival and Maxida Mårak has combined her successful music career with a clear political message. But the best example is probably Sofia Jannok, 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”, alluding 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 Jannok 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 Jannok who mixes the joik 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-

Sápmi – one people, four countries

- The number of Sami people in Sweden today, counting those with at least one parent of Sami heritage, is somewhere between 45,000 and 60,000. The number 20,000 is often cited, but it is not based on current research. The total number of Sami, including those in Norway, Finland, and Russia, is over 100,000.
- It has been stated by researchers that a people with a clear identity, the future Sami people, was living in northern Scandinavia as early as 1000 B. C. The first written documents mentioning the Sami date from the year 98 A.D.
- The Sami lived by reindeer herding, hunting, gathering, and fishing. New sources of income are handicrafts, tourism, media, art, and music. Today there are Sami working in most vocational fields.
- There are 51 Sami villages in Sweden. And there are Sami pre-schools and schools in five places: Karesuando, Kiruna, Gällivare, Jokkmokk, and Tärnaby.
- The Sami language is a Finno-Ugrian language. There are about ten different varieties of Sami, and whether some of them are separate languages or just dialects is subject to debate. But the difference between Northern Sami and Southern Sami is as great as that between Swedish and Icelandic. About 23,000 people speak Sami today, including about 7,000 in Sweden. The majority speak northern Sami, which has been least exposed to assimilation.

Sources: *Samer.se*, *Vaartoe* – Centre for Sami Research, *The Nordic Museum*.



370 million people identify themselves – among them the Sami – as indigenous people.

“THE SWEDISH STATE DEPRIVED US OF OUR LANDS, WATERS, LANGUAGE, RELIGION, IDENTITY, RIGHT OF SELF-DETERMINATION AND ABILITY TO FULLY PURSUE OUR TRADITIONAL LIVELIHOOD.”



Dave Archambault II, chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, in conversation with the Sami artists Sofia Jannok, Inger Biret Kvernmo Gaup, and Sara Marielle Gaup Beaska during their visit to the Standing Rock Sioux reservation in North Dakota.

ation between our indigenous peoples for many years, but lately it's been growing. And even more importantly, the knowledge of this cooperation is spreading outside of the Sami community."

Among Swedes who criticize the Sami people for pushing their rights, you can hear the argument that the Sami actually aren't an indigenous people, since they haven't lived in Sweden for thousands of years. But according to the official UN definition of indigenous peoples, the critics have it wrong, claims the researcher Åsa Össbo: "You don't need to have roots going back to the very first people that inhabited the area, but going back to the people who lived there when the state boundaries were formed. And you need to have protected your cultural bonds with this people to be called an indigenous people."

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-

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 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.



The Swedish Sami parliament (Sametinget) has an electorate of about 9000 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.

ish Sami when it comes to fighting for their rights. The Norwegian Sami got their parliament (1989) before the Swedish Sami (1993), 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 169 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 (Sametinget) has an electorate of about 8000 individuals, and has currently eight parties represented in the body. But it has very little say against the government: it is formally an authority subordinate to the government in both Sweden and Finland, dependent on the rules and the regulations handed down by the central government. The Norwegian Sami parliament has somewhat more independence when it comes to the use of resources. And it has developed a closer cooperation with local and regional authorities than in the case of Sweden. "There are even municipalities in Norway where the Sami are the majority, which gives their voices power on the local level. In Sweden there is no such municipality," says Ragnhild Nilsson, a researcher in political science at Stockholm University and an expert on cooperation between the Nordic Sami populations.

The Swedish Sami often highlight the role of the Sami in Norway when discussing the matter with the Swedish state. Yet another difference between the countries is that the ordinary

parties in the Norwegian parliament also are represented in the Sami parliament, which contributes to putting the issues on the national agenda. In Sweden, on the other hand, all parties in the Sami parliament are Sami parties. However, the Norwegian Sami influence should not be overestimated, argues Ragnhild Nilsson: "The government has no wish to give the Sami full authority over crucial decisions that affect the Sami interests, such as extracting new ore deposits or developing new power plants."

The stronger role of the Sami parliament in Norway has also led to a stronger trust in it. The difference between the two countries is dramatic, according to new research from Stockholm University: among the Norwegian Sami, 49 percent have "high or very high confidence" in their own parliament, compared with 16 percent in the Swedish case. "The Swedish Sami voters want more self-determination and are disappointed with the Sami parliament which can't give them that", says Ragnhild Nilsson.

A clear illustration of this occurred during the discussion at the Swedish Film Institute in May, where the panel also talked about the elections to the Sami parliament which took place later that month. When discussing the role of the parliament, the representative Ulf Bergdahl of the party "The Sami" stood up and declared, "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 also conflicts of interest between the Sami population and the non-Sami, especially when it comes to the growing number of vehicles used by those living in the area and those visiting Sápmi. There are more snowmobiles than ever 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 Sami 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 it over, and if a Lapp (condescending word for a Sami) is there I will run him over too, so that we can keep the time schedule."

Other comments were less violent, such as "you damned Lapps are just living on welfare and you are against all development".

A court case that has led to a lot of anger and hatred is the Gir-

jas Sami village case. Last year, the District Court in Gällivare decided in favor of the Sami village and declared that Girjas has the sole hunting and fishing rights to its land, based on the principle of "urminnes hävd" [prescription of time immemorial]. The court found that the Sami have been living, hunting and fishing on the land in question for at least 1,000 years.

The verdict was praised by the Sami and by indigenous peoples in other countries, but led to very strong reactions by non-Sami in the region. The head of the Sami village, Matti Berg, was threatened with death by angry hunters. The Chancellor of Justice has decided to appeal the verdict, since it can become a precedent. The chancellor argues that the state owns the land and must therefore also have the hunting and fishing rights in the area. The proceedings in the higher court starts in November this year – which risks new tensions.

It is problematic when the question of Sami influence and Sami historic rights end up in courts instead of being discussed on a political level, argue several experts. One high state official tells *Baltic Worlds*, in confidence that she has brought up the issue among senior politicians and with different ministries – but gotten very little response. The issue is so complex, and politically sensitive that the politicians and the ministries pass the hot potato among themselves. "The state has not taken responsibility in trying to solve this conflict of interest," she says. "Sometimes the state supports the side of the Sami, sometimes they are on the side of other interests – but there is no overall strategy."

Ulf Mörkenstam, professor of political science at Stockholm University, has done extensive research on Sami issues. He agrees that this is a problem: "The Swedish parliament and the government must eventually decide and define what they mean by self-determination for the Sami people. Today it is very vague. And the interest in discussing the issue is low".

It is a bit paradoxical, he says, since he can see a growing interest in Sami issues among his students, and a growing interest among the general population. One wish that has been repeated by Sami representatives, is that the government at least should consult the Sami community before making decisions which effect the Sami. Today such consultations appear on a rather ad hoc basis. A discussion about formalizing such a consultation is underway.

What complicates the matter even further, is that the Sami interests clash with one another too. There is no such thing as "a Sami position" on an issue. There have been court cases where Sami representatives have been on the side of the landowners in disputes with Sami villages. Inter-Sami tensions are of different kinds, but a common dispute is between reindeer-herders and non-reindeer herders. In some cases, the animosity includes tragic family stories in which fathers or grandfathers once were forced to leave the relatively rich life as reindeer herders and

"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."

“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.’”

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 herders 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 indigenous people in this country, 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 *CO2lonialnation*. The discussion started with a showing of the famous speech by the Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd 2008 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, but we have 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’”.

The play that they are performing is based on voices not heard before. In preparation, they travelled around Sápmi listening to the stories of people who in many cases had kept their secrets to themselves. The playwright and therapist Ana Yrsa Fallenius conducted some of the interviews: “Many of these people have a lack of identity, they feel ashamed of who they are, their identity has been defined by others, they feel inferior.

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 Berg, 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 Siviken 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”.

Páhl Ruin, freelance writer, currently based in Sweden.



Muohta (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.

PHOTO: VANCO DZAMBASKI

SUBVERSIVE ARTISTIC PRACTICES VISUALIZING RESISTENCE IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

by Tihomir Topuzovski

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.

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.¹ According to Ingram “artistic practices are not

just a form of resistance, refusal and critique, but contributor to political and spatial transformation,”² where artists interact with the geopolitical context. They are involved in the political circumstances, reacting and seeking changes. In conditions of opposition, therefore, art becomes subversive of the existing social order, undermining 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?³ The study focuses on practices that represent a completely different approach to artistic action, aimed 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 order⁴ or subverts it. This insistence on rejection or subversion incorporates the affirmative statement that art has an autonomous power of resistance⁵ embodied in various visual practices which are “being ever more called upon to provide both insight into politics itself and the stimuli for social change”.⁶ In the acts of “subversion and transgression [actors] crossed the contemporary borders of art and overthrew various binary and hierarchical oppositions”⁷ 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 instrumentalized 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 are powerful societal forces that influence culture. In such situations, artists have developed innovative practices and responses to the ongoing situation that are characterized by subversiveness.

I argue that the subversiveness of artistic practices is an important object of study whose investigation brings new insights into art. In this article, I consider the theoretical discussion on interpreting subversiveness and also focus on the contextualization of subversiveness within the field of artistic action, in order to interpret the tendencies of these practices in the case of the Republic of Macedonia 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 organize my argument as follows: I start by analyzing subversiveness from its political connotations to its articulation in art.



The monument to citizens of Skopje shot by the so-called fascists on November 13, 1944 (left). Erection of the improvised cardboard monument (right).

Here the aim is to provide theoretical background to the empirical analysis, in which I focus on a more explicit grounding of subversiveness, describing and explaining agents, principles, and forms of action. Taking these dimensions into account, I apply this discussion in the context of the Republic of Macedonia within which I identify and analyze forms of subversiveness. One particular aspect of the analysis offered here is that there is little discussion of these practices in the spatial context of this country. Finally, I examine wider lessons that can be drawn from subversiveness in art and what these practices have achieved in the case of the Republic of Macedonia.

In addition to the diversity of literature surveyed, the empirical analysis was carried out in Skopje, Republic of Macedonia. Data was collected via semi structured and structured interviews, archival research and visual methods. Interviews were conducted with art historians, custodians, curators, artists, politicians, writers and activists (the names of interviewees have been withheld upon request because of the dangerous political situation in the Republic of Macedonia). This data was coupled with secondary sources such as newspaper articles, art magazines and official websites.

Rethinking artistic practices subversively

Subversiveness is commonly defined as opposition to the existing power balance, authorities and social order. However it should be noted that “Subversion has no universally accepted definition”.⁸ Explanations of subversiveness indicate that, through subversive practices, various social, political and ideological demands are put forward.⁹ These acts have a clear inten-

tion against an existing social model and its norms. As noted by Levy, “Sovversivismo was a politically nomadic movement, according to Gramsci.” He explains that “subversive chiefs used a radical stance as a form of blackmail against the ruling political class, because at the decisive moment these chiefs invariably threw their lot in with the forces of order.”¹⁰ Subversiveness involves rejection or destabilization of the existing order, its obliteration and destruction or changes to the existing hierarchy. The model of these practices, as a constituent part of all anti systemic movements, can be traced back to the 1848 revolution in France, where “a proletarian-based political group made a serious attempt to achieve political power and legitimize workers’ power”¹¹ in opposition to the institutional order. These practices are critically or theoretically founded or represent practical activities undertaken to erode the existing order.¹²

As a historical example of subversive activities, Levy points out that the terms *sovversivo* and *sovversivismo* (subversive and subversion) were first used by intellectual and artistic circles in Italy in 1914, 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.¹³ 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 culture of ‘sovversivismo’”¹⁴ created in conditions of deficiency, the instrumentalization of institutions, a weak ethical and political culture, a wrecked civil sector and an environment unable to satisfy the basic demands of individuals and groups in the 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.”¹⁵ 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 activity close to the notion of politics.¹⁶ These artistic practices are intertwined with political and activist movements and they oppose what Rancière¹⁷ identifies as consensus, “the main enemy of artistic creativity as well as of political creativity... that is, inscription within given roles, possibilities, and competencies” which passivize the role of artistic action. Instrumentalized acts always support the preservation of existing systems in which, as noted by de Certeau, everyday practices depend on a vast ensemble of procedures.¹⁸ In this context, the role of the artist is instrumentalized or “Today, the artist could be defined simply as a professional fulfilling a certain role in the general framework of

“SUBVERSIVENESS INVOLVES REJECTION OR DESTABILIZATION OF THE EXISTING ORDER, ITS OBLITERATION AND DESTRUCTION OR CHANGES TO THE EXISTING HIERARCHY.”

the art world,”¹⁹ placed in a system of organizations, authorities, faceless agents, rules and protocols. The ultimate consequence of such activity is that the horizon of possibilities, as described by Bourdieu,²⁰ is closed, followed by adaptation to the dominant position in inevitable dependency.

However, subversive practitioners intend to take additional steps opposing such an arrangement. Thus, any artistic project which aims at creating a better society must take account of the instrumentalization of institutions in order to create what might be a new possibility through the transgression of existing criteria. This can be considered as calculated damage that questions a society’s prevailing value system.²¹ In this respect, using this approach re-examines the boundaries “between what is supposed to be normal and what is supposed to be subversive, between what is supposed to be active, and therefore political, and what is supposed to be passive or distant, and therefore apolitical.”²² What follows is the repoliticization of the artists they refer to and the analysis of “socio-political processes, related to the transformation of the system”²³ paying attention to social conditions, problems and challenges.

Examining these possibilities in the context of artistic actions and the creation of subversive agents, it is of paramount importance to note that this concerns not only the artist or artists, but also a large number of those working in the field of culture. This can be illustrated by the example of the Russian collective “What Is to Be Done” (Chto delat), which is a network of poets, artists, philosophers, critics, design artists and writers who act as a collective.²⁴ Their horizontal networking and interaction strengthens the organizational capacity of various groups

and increases the efficiency and synergy of these agents in their multidisciplinary democratic struggle. The ultimate consequence should be to unify different types of struggle,²⁵ such as social, urban, ecological, antiauthoritarian, antiinstitutional, feminist and antiracist, as well that of sexually marginalized groups.

The implementation of subversive practices embodies another aspect. The artists’ engagement with the problems cited above presupposes certain ethical principles on the part of the participants. They try to change “living conditions in economically underdeveloped areas, raise ecological concerns, offer access to culture and education for the populations of poor countries and regions, attract attention to the plight of illegal immigrants, improve the conditions of people working in art institutions”,²⁶ as well as addressing issues of discrimination, freedom of speech and economic inequality. In the final instance, their agreeing to act upon these problems can be defined as a reaction to “the increasing collapse of the modern social state ‘and an effort’ to replace the social state and NGOs that for various reasons cannot or will not fulfil their role.”²⁷ Thus these practices are most commonly undertaken by the underprivi-



PHOTO: VANCO DZAMBASKI

Protest of the association AJDE.

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 commitment to its transformation” which are “united 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 crux 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 often employ forms of radical activism, affecting public spaces such as squares, streets and crossroads, aimed at getting publicity and, more importantly, at influencing the public sphere by involving the public in existing problems and challenges. Furthermore, artists remove distanced observers from their safe position, pulling them into a game of affects. In many cases, forms of subversiveness “generate the effect of absurdity and parody”,³⁰ humor and incisive irony.³¹ Such forms of subversiveness can be illustrated with the example of artists in the “Occupy” movement. They occupied cultural institutions such as museums at the onset of the movement “Occupy Wall Street” because these institutions were seen as stimulators of social and economic inequality.³² On this basis then, the focus of subversive practices in art is not separated from a given societal context, but inherently arises from the existing political and social relations, which are relations of power.

The spatial context

In approaching these kinds of artistic practices this study focuses specifically on the Republic of Macedonia, which has been marked by a transition accompanied by radical reforms in every

stratum of society.³³ These rapid changes are having a serious effect on the distribution of income and wealth, the restoration of the market system, and the growing income gap: all factors that have brought issues of inequality³⁴ and rising poverty levels throughout the country. The changes have resulted in problems of social inclusion and social cohesion of different class, gender and minority groups and their access to social provision. Mirroring the pattern 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 structural quality in building the new system. Reconstruction 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, named 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 “retooling 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, the silencing of dissent and accusations of abuse of power by the governing party”³⁵ and “manipulation of independent institutions”.³⁶ 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.³⁷ 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”.³⁸ 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, monuments and architecture, pushing it to the level of idolatry 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. Highly ceremonial, it is heavily oriented towards reconstruction of a national identity³⁹ as a part of postsocialist material culture.⁴⁰ 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”⁴¹ 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.⁴² 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 fulfilling a certain role in the enactment of state cultural policies and practices relating to the discourse of existing authorities.⁴³ With the exception of some independent artistic productions, artists in the Republic of Macedonia are included 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 VMRO DPMNE’s political narrative.⁴⁴ This is evident in the case of the project “Skopje 2014” which stands for the reconstruction of national identity as well as the re-representation of Macedonian history, realized in the capital city. The project started in 2010 and involves museums, buildings, and monuments inspired by the past. It is actually a project dedicated to strengthening national identity through neoclassical and baroque architecture and sculptures.⁴⁵ The project illustrates a crucial element of the way in which cultural production is instrumentalized by the political establishment and governmental politics in the Republic of Macedonia.

We turn now 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 hyperpatriotism 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”.⁴⁶ This requires applied effort on all levels of social relations and practices in order to discover 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

“NATIONALISTIC ART IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA USUALLY CELEBRATES PROCLAIMED ESSENCES OF A NATIONAL AND ROMANTICIST SPIRIT.”

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,”⁴⁷ 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 initiatives 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 principles for different practices, where “in the sphere of action of what has been preformulated as artists and critics’ competence, the foundation and the improvement of the ethical principles should be of pivotal importance”.⁴⁸ As an illustration 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 repoliticizing artistic practices with the participation 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”⁴⁹, which indeed distills 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.”⁵⁰ This implies that “political subversion presupposes cognitive subversion”⁵¹ 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”.⁵²

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 commonly 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, 2010. 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.

ON ANOTHER OCCASION, this group 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 several buildings 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 official explanation, was to liberate homophobic Skopje. This confirms the position that art uses subversive strategies that appropriate cultural space, while “artists break through the semantic sphere by means of decontextualization and re-contextualization of signs”.⁵³

Regarding LGBT rights in the Republic of Macedonia, another action was aimed at blocking the normal functioning of the institution of the public prosecutor. Provoked by an act of violence that members of this community suffered from unknown perpetrators and the lack of any legal resolution of the case, a group consisting of human rights activists, members of the LGBT community and their supporters, and artists held a peaceful protest in front of the office of the public prosecution or Office of the Republic of Macedonia, underscoring the inefficiency of institutions and the lack of political will to resolve the cases of violence against this group in Macedonia. The blockade of this institution interrupted its normal functioning, making this action exceptionally successful. The protest included a performance which

consisted of symbolically placing “corpses” in plastic bags in front of the public prosecution office with the aim of exposing the attitude of the official authorities towards the LGBT community.

In a different context, a group of citizens consisting of artists, activists, and cultural workers initiated an action that was aimed at reminding 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 was intended to confront the revisionist iconography 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 AJDE, 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 underlining their unequivocal demands that the Ministry of Health should be held accountable for causing the death of a nine-year-old girl by negligence and incompetence.

Furthermore, members of the group “Ajde”, seated on chairs, held a protest performance in 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 the artists’ involvement in civil movements and initiatives, so that their artistic ideas might help increase the visibility of the action and add creative momentum to help convince the public and the authorities to correct their erroneous policies.⁵⁴

FINALLY, ALL THESE attempts were summarized in the “Colorful Revolution”, where neo-classical and baroque facades of public buildings were colored and other artistic activities carried out, actions that were subversive with regard to the existing political order in the Republic of Macedonia and thus contributed to political change in the country. The artists 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”.⁵⁵ It is astonishing how artis-

tic 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 the official politics in the Republic of Macedonia which, according to the actors of these practices, run

contrary to rather than promoting justice and liberty in a democratically equal society. 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”.⁵⁶ Even here, they can be seen as the actualization and concretization of Gramsci’s “series of negations”.⁵⁷ They represented a vision for redefining and repoliticizing 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.⁵⁸ In order to make 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 fencing, the replacement of street signs with stickers, and the improvised cardboard monument, mobilized participants in the struggle to oppose official government policies aimed at recoding the identity of citizens in the Republic of Macedonia. The performance in front of the public prosecution office is part of the struggle of groups suffering sexual discrimination and this particular protest was against the institutions failing to sanction an act of violence perpetrated against members of this community. The protest in front of the Ministry of Health can be defined as social struggle against dysfunctional institutions whose incompetence led to the loss of a human life. Another important action of this group was the performance staged in front of the public broadcaster MRT and the demands that it be returned to the citizens. Finally, actions that were part of Colorful Revolution are an example of artistic involvement through using paint-filled balloons against government buildings and monuments that represent current politics in Republic of Macedonia. In this political performance, a lot of people out on the streets were involved in



“Colorful Revolution” protest in Skopje.

PHOTO: VANCO DZAMBASKI

this act of using artistic means in the struggle for democracy.⁵⁹ At a more fundamental level, all these practices, each of which makes a particular contribution, embodied the principles, forms and agency of subversiveness I have discussed.

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. Allying these subjects through groupings of initiatives, discussions, political activists, and individuals with cultural and artistic affinities involves different approaches and various degrees of horizontal organization.⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹ They represent the possibility of stimulating “the daily struggles of the workers themselves, their coordinated acts of resistance, insubordination and subversion of the relations of domination in the workplace and in society at large.”⁶² 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 and appropriate strategies for authentic action.

CONSEQUENTLY, SUBVERSIVE practices might be the only engaged and significant attitudes under present circumstances in the Republic of Macedonia. The vision of these actions sees the artistic, that is to say, “the creative, political and mediatic fields” as “intrinsically linked”, so that “contemporary cultural practices point toward a new, better society in which art has merged with lived experience.”⁶³ The outcomes of these practices can be two-fold: first, they are involved in the specific context; and second, they are part of a wider process of concretizing subversiveness in the field of art.

Conclusion

Subversive practices in art consist of radical forms of transgression 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 highlights the complex and ever-shifting relationships between artistic practices and 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 changes and transformations it had undergone in past decade, coupled with the political crisis. Recent cases of subversive practices in art in the country offered characteristics to the core of my argument. The study clarified that the instrumentalization of cultural institutions in the country generates the need for different actions against erroneous and unjust policies, especially in cases where they are reinforced by complex political circumstances and accusations of abuse of power by the governing party. In investigating these acts in the Republic of Macedonia as a research area, subversiveness was detected as set up in a given political context where several important practices were portrayed as a confirmation of performative politics which extend political struggle. This is basically a result of the ever more complicated day-to-day political situation and the impossibility of acting effectively in other ways. The acts demonstrate the ways in which individuals and groups engage in civil movements and initiatives by using the means of artists. and can be considered as a possible strategy of authentic action for the future. I showed

how these practices merge in the interface of social and political change. These findings suggest in the most general sense that socio-political contexts make it possible for different artistic practices to interact in public spaces.

This study found that subversiveness can be modified and can contain new explanatory implications and connotations in the field of art. Consequently, subversion is perceived as an important activity in the political arena, offering a significant engagement with burning social questions and problems. These practices gain meaning and importance not only due to the resistance or critical positions they offer. They are important above all because they expand the space of the possible in terms of visualizing new initiatives and forms of creativity. This article discussed the possibility of renewing different art affiliations, since art today is totally usurped or interrupted by its instrumentalization, that is to say, interrupted with regards to the history of subversive practices and the idea of visual arts as an anti-systemic and social movement. The implications of the study lie in the possibility of these findings being applied to other geographical 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. ✖

Tihomir Topuzovski received his doctoral degree from the University of Birmingham UK and was 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

- Jacques Rancière, “Art of the Possible: Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey in conversation with Jacques Rancière,” *Artforum* 45 (2007): 256–269.
- Alan R. Ingram, “Making Geopolitics Otherwise: Artistic Interventions in Global Political Space,” *The Geographical Journal* 177, no. 3 (2011): 218–222.
- Brian B. Holmes, *Escape the Overcode: Activist Art in the Control Society* (Zagreb and Eindhoven: WHW/Van Abbemuseum, 2009).
- Gene Ray, “Toward a Critical Art Theory”, in *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique*, ed. G. Raunig and G. Ray (London: Mayfly, 2009), 79.
- Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 12.
- Anthony Downey, “Towards a Politics of (Relational) Aesthetics”, *Third Text* 21, no. 3 (2007): 267–275.
- Bożenna Stokłosa, “Trickster: Mythical Deity, Archetype and Figure of a Creator”, in *Trickster Strategies in the Artists' and Curatorial Practice*, ed. Anna Markowska (Toruń: Polish Institute of World Art Studies and Tako Publishing House, 2013), 27.
- William Rosenau, “Subversion and Insurgency”, *Rand Counterinsurgency Study Occasional Paper* 2 (2007), 4.
- Carl Levy, “‘Sovversivismo’: The Radical Political Culture of Otherness in Liberal Italy,” *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 12:2 (2007): 147–161.
- Ibid, 148–49.

- Immanuel Wallerstein, “Antisystemic Movements: History and Dilemmas,” in *Transforming the Revolution*, ed. S. Amin, G. Arrighi, A. Gunder Frank, and I. Wallerstein (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), 16.
- S. A. Chambers and T. Carver, *Judith Butler and Political Theory: Troubling Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).
- Carl Levy, “‘Sovversivismo’”.
- Ibid, 149.
- Immanuel Wallerstein, “Antisystemic Movements”, 36.
- Jacques Rancière, “Art of the Possible”.
- Ibid, 263.
- Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Randall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
- Boris Groys “The Weak Universalism”, *e-flux*, accessed April 2013, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/15/61294/the-weak-universalism/>.
- Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Harvard University Press 1984)
- Martinez Francisco, “Beautiful Transgressions: Thinking the Flaneur in Late-modern Societies”, in *Hopeless Youth!* ed. Francisco Martinez and Pille Runnel (Tartu: Eesti Rahva Muuseum [Estonian National Museum] 2016), 422.
- Jacques Rancière, “Art of the Possible”, 266.
- Irina Gavrash, “Subversive strategies in contemporary Russian art ” in *Trickster Strategies in the Artists' and Curatorial Practice* ed. Anna Markowska (Polish Institute of World Art Studies & Tako Publishing House Toruń, 2013), 77.
- Glover Michael, “Chto Delat? What Is to Be Done? ICA, London”, *Independent*, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/reviews/cho-to-delat-what-is-to-be-done-ica-london-2086845.html>, accessed May 20, 2012.
- E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, (London: Verso, 2001).
- Boris Groys, “On Art Activism,” *e-flux*, Accessed September 9, 2014, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-art-activism/>.
- Ibid.
- Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, (London: Continuum, 2010), 142; 176.
- Ibid., 134.
- Irina Gavrash, “Subversive Strategies in Contemporary Russian Art”, in *Trickster Strategies in the Artists' and Curatorial Practice*, ed. Anna Markowska (Toruń: Polish Institute of World Art Studies & Tako Publishing House, 2013), 78.
- Irina Hasnaş Hubbard, “Curatorial Performances: Looking for Trickster Curators in Museums in Romania”, in *Trickster Strategies in the Artists' and Curatorial Practice*, ed. Anna Markowska (Toruń: Polish Institute of World Art Studies & Tako Publishing House, 2013), 200.
- “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!”, *Occupymuseums*, <http://occupymuseums.org/>, accessed September 2014.
- J. Pickles and A. Smith, *Theorising transition: the political economy of post-Communist transformations*, (London: Rutledge, 1998).
- M. Simai (2006), *Poverty and Inequality in Eastern Europe and the CIS Transition Economies*. DESA, Working Paper No. 17. ST/ESA/2006/DWP/17.
- Matthew Brunwasser, “Concerns Grow About Authoritarianism in Macedonia”, *The New York Times*, accessed June 18, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/14/world/europe/concerns-grow-about-authoritarianism-in-macedonia.html>.

- Andrew MacDowall, “Fears for Macedonia’s Fragile Democracy Amid ‘Coup’ and Wiretap Claims”, *The Guardian*, accessed May 28, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/27/fears-macedonias-fragile-democracy-amid-coup-wiretap-claims>.
- Common Media Pressing Issues in Six SEE Countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia*, ed. Ana Hećimović and Iva Milanović-Litre (Zagreb: Partnership for Social Development, 2014), 31.
- Author’s interview with a member of political party.
- Author’s interview with a writer.
- Krisztina Fehérváry, *Politics in Color and Concrete: Socialist Materialities and the Middle Class in Hungary*, (Indiana University Press, 2013)
- G. Deleuze and F. A. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
- Author’s interview with a political activist.
- M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.
- Author’s interview with a writer.
- Author’s interview with an art historian.
- Ibid.
- Author’s interview with a cultural theorist.
- Author’s interview with an art historian.
- Iskra Geshoska, “10 minuti protest”, accessed June 15, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnWfgODOoEA>.
- Author’s interview with an art historian and theoretician
- Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1982), 127–128.
- John Stuart Mill, “A Few Observations on the French Revolution (1833)”, in J. S. Mill, *Dissertations and Discussions*, vol. 1 (London: John W. Parker, 1859), 56–57.
- Gavrash, “Subversive Strategies”, 77.
- Author’s interview with an artist.
- Author’s interview with an artist and political activist.
- Kerstin Jacobsson, ed., *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).
- Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 273.
- Rancière, *Dissensus*.
- Author’s interview with a member of political party.
- Jeffrey Juris, “A New Way of Doing Politics? Global Justice Movements and the Cultural Logic of Networking”, *Recherches sociologiques et anthropologiques*, accessed January 2, 2015, <http://rsa.revues.org/521>.
- M. Hardt and A. Negri *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 99.
- Ibid, 80.
- Irmgard Emmelhainz, “Art and the Cultural Turn: Farewell to Committed, Autonomous Art?” *e-flux Journal* 42 (2013), accessed May 2015, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-and-the-cultural-turn-farewell-to-committed-autonomous-art/>.



The photos show authentic fathers in the Soviet Union from the 1950s to the 1970s. (These are not the fathers mentioned in the text.)



PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK



FATHERLY EMOTIONS

IN SOVIET RUSSIA

by Helene Carlback

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 North 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,¹ 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.² 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 influen-

tial 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.³

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”.⁴

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.”⁵ After Stalin's

“A RENEWED INTEREST IN ISSUES OF EDUCATION IN SOVIET SOCIETY BROUGHT TOPICS OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND THE CONCEPT OF PERSONALITY BACK TO THE PUBLIC AGENDA.”



death in 1953, the Soviet leadership condemned the centralized totalitarian system and the terror of the Stalin era. State welfare systems were expanded and at the same time the notion of private life was rehabilitated to a certain extent.⁶ A renewed interest in issues of education in Soviet society brought topics of child development and the concept of personality back to the public agenda.⁷ A certain relaxation took place after the previously strict control of what matters could be exposed in the mass media, such as criticism of various aspects of everyday life in society. A modest opening towards authentic public opinion started in the 1960s,⁸ even if this “semipublic domain” retained unclear demarcation lines between private and public life all through the Soviet times.⁹

This period also witnessed a revival of a public interest in promoting pro-marriage and nuclear family norms. New legislation at the end of the 1960s contained clearer procedural rules for marrying and divorcing and material regulations on support payments for children after divorce.¹⁰ Family values and domestic comfort increasingly occupied people’s minds from the 1960s onwards.¹¹ This decade can be regarded as the point when, for the first time, public demands were made on men to be present in the family and more involved and engaged in their role as fathers.¹²

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 practices 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”¹³ as that 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 work on my study by considering international, mainly English-speaking and North European historiography of fatherhood and masculinities, with a focus on the 20th century.¹⁴ Here, dominant ideal images of masculinity are identified as an ability to maintain self-control and control of emotions, will power, honesty, 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

“THIS DECADE CAN BE REGARDED AS THE POINT WHEN, FOR THE FIRST TIME, PUBLIC DEMANDS WERE MADE ON MEN TO BE PRESENT IN THE FAMILY AND MORE INVOLVED AND ENGAGED IN THEIR ROLE AS FATHERS.”

– is emphasized in emotion studies.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ Scholars of the history of emotions point to the existence of a “growing emotional informality in a context that continues to insist on a great deal of self-control”.¹⁸

MASCULINITIES AND FATHERHOOD in Russian history is an understudied topic in comparison to the situation in Western countries. However, a few studies have been undertaken on fatherhood in Soviet times.¹⁹ In these, a fatherhood model is outlined and described as a family regime with marginalized fathers, replaced by a liaison of working mothers supported by the Soviet state, e.g. with extensive day care facilities, and extended motherhood through grandmothers. One of the studies claims that “in practice, the mother took sole responsibility for all parts of the children’s upbringing, often together with her mother”.²⁰ To me this appeared to be an exaggerated and overgeneralized conclusion; to challenge its overall validity, I decided to go deeper into fatherhood discourse and practice in late Soviet Russia by studying printed matter from the time and by talking to men about their remembered fatherhood. My main printed source is the Russian monthly magazine *Sem’ia i shkola. Zhurnal dlia roditelei*, [Family and the school. A magazine for parents], for the period 1960–1990. The magazine was probably used in the same way as advice books for parents. Without having facts about the readership of the magazine, I would guess that a large proportion of its audience had a higher education, and that most of the readers were women. If women were the main recipients of the messages, this probably affected the way the articles were written. Ralph LaRossa has discussed this fact with regards to images of fatherhood in US postwar magazines. I will return to how we can deal with the fact that few men read the paper, yet we still can see similar ideas and ideals expressed both in the magazine and by the fathers themselves.

Let me address a potential problem of using an open printed

source from a state socialist country: Considering the heavy censorship of the Soviet media and the blatant ways in which the Soviet state used the media to convey its propaganda, the usefulness of a source such as a Soviet magazine for depicting public discourse can be questioned. Nonetheless, my earlier readings of various popular publications from the mid-1950s and later suggest that a considerable range of opinions were published concerning issues in people’s everyday life.²¹ These included, for example,



The Russian monthly magazine *Sem’ia i shkola: Zhurnal dlia roditelei*, [Family and the school. A magazine for parents].

demands for the right to divorce, complaints on the difficult situation of single mothers, discussions of gender roles, and criticism of men’s poor performance in household chores and child care. Issues of sexuality, on the other hand, are conspicuously absent; the language of the articles of the magazine *Sem’ia i shkola* was rather prudish up to the late 1980s.²² Also, very few references to discourses or practices in foreign countries are made, except for a few emanating from other East European socialist countries. Only in the very late years of the Soviet 1980s were European founders of theories on psychological relations between children and their parents, such as Sigmund Freud and Erich Fromm, mentioned and talked about.²³

FROM MY READING of the relevant articles in *Sem’ia i shkola* 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. We interviewed eleven men aged between 50–75, all married and, with one exception,²⁴ all living in St Petersburg. The social status of the informants stretches from lower middle class with 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 and a half hours.

I cannot, of course claim to show a representative picture with such a limited number of interviews. Still, I do believe that my results will contribute to a more diversified picture of Soviet Russian fatherhood. The fact that all the informants live in an urban environment should be stressed. I am not aware of studies that 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 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”.²⁵

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 should 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. This has 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 groundbreaking 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 of the discourse on marriage and family specifically. I also approach the texts and structure them with the help of the theoretical 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”. Below, I present some outcomes from my interviews put into a framework of these contemporary official/public Soviet Russian ideal images, and compare my results with outcomes from research on Western fatherhood.

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

Most Soviet Russian men were present as fathers. No career ladders to climb. No bar stools to occupy.

done, both of us, just as it felt natural [...] we dealt with what needed to be done in that moment.”²⁶

When we asked the men for more detail about who had done what at home, we got the expected answer that they had mended 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 we were 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 rather simple explanation emerges: 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 simultaneously.²⁷ Also, to sweep and scrub the floors was a practice that lasted longer in Russia than in the richer countries in the West; the vacuum cleaner appeared later in Soviet Russian homes. All through the 1970s, they were expensive and rather difficult to get in the open consumer market.

An answer that surprised me more was that the men had done quite a lot of shopping for the family. We got interesting insights into sometimes adventurous undertakings in a market landscape with scarce resources. In Soviet Russia where the consumer goods sector was underdeveloped in comparison to the production sector (especially heavy industry), to go shopping often meant to go “hunting” for food or other domestic utensils. Piotr Olegovich, 62, told us about the severe scarcity of everyday products in the late 1980s, during Gorbachev’s perestroika regime. “There was virtually nothing one could get hold of [...] But we didn’t think of it as a disaster, it was merely a fact [...] You just had to deal with the situation ... Work it out [...] use your connections. For example, in the city where we lived²⁸ there was no furniture, but still, you had to search, to catch the moment. No big deal: Go solve the problem, we told ourselves. To get hold of things was like going hunting.”²⁹

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. However, activities devoted to child care were more evenly distributed between the parents, in comparison to laundry, cooking, and houseclean-



“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.”

ing.³⁰ An impression I got from talking to my informants was that they spent most of their out-of-work time at home, something that is confirmed by the time-budget studies: the most popular reported leisure activities of the urban population in Soviet Russia, at least in the 1960s and ’70s, were reading newspapers, books, and magazines and listening to the radio.³¹

In literature on Western fatherhood and masculinity, we likewise find assertions that women at the time were in charge of the overall planning of household chores and child care, while men showed few signs of wanting to take the initiative in day-to-day activities in this area.³²

WHEN WE TALKED TO our informants about sharing household and child care duties, we often found that the grandmothers were included. Eight out of the eleven informants had lived together with members of the elder generation when the children were small. Grandmothers played a prominent part in helping families in Soviet Russia with household work and child care.³³ 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.³⁴ Lack of housing, forcing generations to live together, made the phenomenon of extended families last longer in Soviet Russian times, even though legislation and family 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 different answers, spanning from surprised reactions such as “What kind of question is that? [...] I just had the usual feelings!”³⁵ or “I didn’t experience any certain reflexes whatsoever [...] Well, a child was being born. Just like the leaves burst out and the snow is melting [...] just like a natural thing”³⁶

to an elaborate story starting with the words “At the first moment I was so afraid of losing hold of the baby [...] I mustn’t drop her, I mustn’t drop her, I told myself [...] But then I lay down with her on the bed and she started to snooze and soon I was asleep. We were lying like that on the bed for half an hour or so.”³⁷

In the end, after having talked about intimate fatherly emotions, we had a

mix of stories about remembered strong emotions when the first child was born on the one hand, and narratives about the need for a man to show a certain degree of emotional self-restraint towards children on the other. “I was quite straightforward with my sons, no coddling”,³⁸ one father said, and another, “I didn’t kiss or hug my daughters [...] no real need for that [...] you must control your behavior as a dad.”³⁹ The notion of the father as a *man in control of his emotions* also lurks in quite a few of the texts in the magazine *Sem’ia i shkola*: “Naturally, a father, like any other human being, can feel very different emotions for his children, including anger, but on these occasions, he has to master himself and not let his children see him lose control.”⁴⁰ Another article brings up the positive aspect of a present and engaged father, however, with a warning not to be too close, not too much of a companion: “It is a good thing when children see how their father regularly takes part in their upbringing. But there is no reason to go to the other extreme [...] a father shouldn’t show an overwhelming amount of love for his children.”⁴¹

In this connection, I tried to find advice that pointed to the risk of male violence within the family. The existence of a rather high rate of alcohol consumption among male adults, especially from the 1970s onwards, was rarely touched upon in *Sem’ia i shkola*. One author writes in rather stilted language about how his lifelong experience of being a teacher had taught him that the right to be demanding and severe comes from natural fatherly authority: “He is the wisest and the most knowledgeable of all grownups that the child knows”. But then the author cautiously warns against severity being transformed into cruelty and brutality: “That must never happen”.⁴² A necessary balance between austerity and rough treatment is prescribed in some of the articles, without bringing up the problem of drinking.

The informants who expressed themselves in the most emotional way about their memories of their child’s birth were the youngest ones, or those who had children in the 1980s. Andrei Leonidovich, 60, talked about himself as being more emotional as a parent than his wife but characterized this quality as being not a proper male trait: “I am like a mother, I don’t know if that is [...] if it is because that is how I am as a person.”⁴³ For a comparative perspective we might look to a study on American fathers concluding that men who took primary responsibility for child-rearing often thought of themselves as “male mothers.”⁴⁴

When we talked about emotions towards children and various ways of being close to them, by playing with them or guiding them in professional or study choices, we sensed a wavering opinion on whether you should be an authority or a playful pal to your kids. Piotr Alexandrovich, 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 informant about what good fatherhood meant to him, he didn’t talk about the playful father as an ideal. Instead he stressed the guiding role of the father as the most important.⁴⁵ 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” things had gone too far.⁴⁶ For a comparative perspective, fatherhood in Western societies, especially after World War II, is seen to have transformed from a more authoritarian to a father-companion relation within the family where the man serves as “chief pal”.⁴⁷ From my study it seems that the Soviet Russian fatherhood ideal, even if not necessarily the practice, was stricter in this regard, emphasizing that the father should not to 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”.⁴⁸ 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,”⁴⁹ one informant 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.”⁵⁰ Again, the answers recall the advice in *Sem’ia i shkola*. The ideal image of the father as the *educator* and the one who guides the child in educational choices and moral behavior is firmly conveyed to the reader: “A father can help his child to choose a profession and to prepare in a proper way for their future professional life, not only from a technical but also from a moral point of view.”⁵¹

When we asked whether the informants had read advice literature on child rearing, they all rejected the idea, often assuring us that this was not needed, since it was a natural thing to bring up children: “My wife read *Sem’ia i shkola* and Benjamin Spock,⁵² but this kind of literature never had any influence on me.”⁵³ The notion of the *father as an educator* was highly regarded, but we may doubt to what extent the ideals were put into practice.

The father as head of the family

Most of the informants said explicitly that they had been the leader of the family. None of them, however, connected being the *head of the family* with being the *main breadwinner*. In Soviet Russia at the time, women earned on average 70 percent of what men did,⁵⁴ and most of the informants were quite firm in stating the necessity of being the main breadwinner for a man’s self-esteem: “If the woman earns more money, what mission does a man then really have?” one of them said,⁵⁵ and another claimed it important for the father to be the main breadwinner, otherwise people would “look down on him.”⁵⁶ Some of the in-

To shop in Soviet Russia was like hunting: first you track down the meat, and then you wait patiently.

formants had been working during Gorbachev's perestroika period in the late 1980s, when the introduction of market economy elements, such as "cooperatively" owned small business which in fact were private enterprises, sometimes turned job opportunities upside down, allowing women to earn more than their spouses. These men were less affirmative in their answers: "Why should there be a main breadwinner in the family [...] a stupid idea",⁵⁷ or "I don't know who of us earned the most – does it matter?"⁵⁸ 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".⁵⁹

To sum up the conversation, we had with our informants on how a good father should perform, I would say that their ideals closely resemble what was put forward in the magazine *Sem'ia i shkola*. On the question what the practice had been, how the informants had spent their time, it was obvious that a clear majority had been away from home more than their wives. Most often, this fact was explained by the need to work. Still, men seem to have spent large parts of their leisure time at home, thus being *present fathers* – sometimes "distant present", sometimes "involved present" fathers.

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 being firmer in conduct with his children than the mother. He should avoid being too much of a pal and aim to be more of a *moral guide*. In research into Western fatherhood of the time, the idea of father as the pal in the family is more prominent.

The willingness of the informants to claim that they had been the head of family also differs from contemporary Western attitudes, where men wouldn't – at least openly – state they were the boss of the family. However, whether the Soviet Russian fathers acted as head of the family is not clear. We could not really find this out in our interviews. We had plans to interview the mothers; this project, however, turned out to be impossible, for various reasons. The Russian sociologist Sergey Kukhterin, who has also interviewed fathers, claims it is obvious that the real head of family was the woman.⁶⁰ However, the fact that men earned more money than women might of course have made them feel like leaders, even if my informants were not prepared to connect being the main bread-



winner with having a leading role; instead they referred to having possessed moral qualities that made them the suitable head of family.

Change in Soviet Russian fatherhood: An inter-generational perspective

To find out how practices and ideals of Soviet Russian fatherhood changed from the earlier Soviet times to the 1960s and later, we decided to talk to our men about their memories of their own fathers. In their narratives, they often came back to how occupied the fathers had been by work. Actually, most of them said about both parents that they had worked a lot: "Mom and Dad didn't spend much time with us because they were working all the time."⁶¹ Or: "I don't remember much of a commitment from either of my parents."⁶² Another informant said: "I had a lot of freedom when I was a kid [...] there was [...] well [...] like [...] no upbringing",⁶³ and one said that all the kids played outside their parents' surveillance.⁶⁴ Piotr Alexandrovich, whose father died in World War II, even praised the fact that he grew up fatherless.⁶⁵

These answers fit well into the picture of earlier, postrevolutionary periods of Soviet Russia that I presented in the beginning of my essay. This was a society oriented towards collectivism

rather than a private, nuclear family life. We then asked our informants if they could recollect feelings of grief at not having seen much of their fathers: Had they not longed for their dads to be there to spend time with them? In their answers, we could not detect feelings of loss. Instead we heard things like "I never thought that way"⁶⁶ or "No, I was very independent."⁶⁷ Piotr Olegovich, 62, said: "I had this feeling that no one was bringing me up [...] we had a lot of freedom."⁶⁸ Thus we get a picture of families in which neither parent was very controlling or present. In this connection, Georgii Davidovich, 75, underlined the role of the surrounding society, including school, in upholding discipline and the task of education: "My parents didn't devote much time to me [...] but the teachers were demanding and very skilled."⁶⁹

Still, the men asserted that their fathers had been *role models* to them, even if they hadn't been that much *physically* present. 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", Oleg Pavlovich, 81, said.⁷⁰ Judging from the interviews, then, we get 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 choice of studies or profession. In the 1990s, the Swedish

sociologist Thomas Johansson interviewed men in their thirties to fifties about their fathers, interviews resulting in stories filled with a sense of lack and pain for not having to go to know their fathers and therefore having missed a role model in life.⁷¹ However, Johansson concludes, the image of the absent father is to a certain extent a stereotype hiding a real father who has often stimulated his son's search for knowledge. Men today sometimes get stuck in a stereotypical image of their fathers that was formed by the culture and sometimes reinforced via the "gaze of the mother". The father is constructed as the "Other".⁷² Thus, in 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 psychoanalytical thinking that was banned during most of the Soviet period.⁷³

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 generalization. My study points to fathers who were present and involved. However, it should be stressed that my informants are all married fathers. The case with divorced and other single fathers might look quite 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 marriage to the advantage of children in a subsequent marriage.

To what extent extended motherhood has remained a specifically Eastern phenomenon in modern times is somewhat doubtful. In comparison to experience in Western countries, it is more of a question of when: Grandmothers were already an indispensable asset in Soviet Russia in the interwar period, while they have come to play a similarly important role, together with grandfathers, in many Western countries starting in the 1970s and 1980s, with a high proportion of women working outside the home.⁷⁴ Still, in the period I have studied, the grandmother generation in Soviet Russia did play an outstanding role, relieving the family, and primarily the women, from a heavy double burden of wage labor and household chores. This fact has led to scholars of Soviet Russia terming men "unnecessary", "superfluous", and even "unwanted" in the families. My interviews do not give this simplified picture. Men did spend quite some time at home and some of them devoted quite a lot of time to their children, while some did not, referring to the need to be at work. The work factor as a stated reason for not having participated in child care of course differed between our informants. Georgii Davidovich, 75, had travelled abroad a lot, having supervised installations of hydrotechnical equipment in various Third World countries such as Pakistan, Vietnam, and Cuba in the 1970s and

1980s. He was the only one of our men who stated that, to him, work had always been more important than family. Still, he talked with pride about his daughter, who today is a high-ranking manager in big business, and you could sense that he felt he had influenced her in her choice of career.⁷⁵

Thus, we get a diverse picture that may possibly be similar in the East and the West. If we generalize, however, our interviews confirm that men were less involved in household chores and child care labor, but more present in the latter.

NOW, DID THE STORIES about the remembered practices of fatherhood coincide with the discourses in the magazine *Sem'ia i shkola*? Both yes and no would be my answer. Before we jump to conclusions on this matter we should ask ourselves whether men read magazines like *Sem'ia i shkola*.

I have already quoted an informant who explicitly said he didn't read advice-giving books or magazines. In fact, only one of our informants said he had read *Sem'ia i shkola*.⁷⁶ Several said their wives had read it, but they themselves didn't feel they had needed that: "Stupid advice", or "I never felt the necessity, I used my brain and my heart instead," were some of the commentaries we got. Still, I would claim that the content of the advice reflected a dominant public discourse of the time. In the case of the magazine *Sem'ia i shkola*, we can imagine a chain of influence that looked like this: Quite a few women, especially from the middle class, read the magazine and probably influenced their spouses, talking about various points of advice to parents. Teachers too most probably read the magazine as part of their professional duties. According to my interviews, women visited parents' evenings organized by schools. Here various kinds of advice were conveyed by teachers to the mothers, who in their turn, passed the message on their spouses.

With regard to the ideal of a man as being in control of his emotions, the informants talked about the necessity of showing a certain restraint in their emotional behavior towards the children. A man was expected to exert self-control. Still, they shared stories with us about remembered close and intimate feelings towards their newborn children and sometimes feelings of guilt for not having been sufficiently present and involved as fathers.



One of the stories conveys especially strong feelings of guilt: Piotr Olegovich, 62, divorced his first wife when his youngest daughter was eight, and during the interview he expressed frustration and sorrow about this part of his life. The reason for the divorce was that he had met another woman whom he describes as the love of his life. This was the only interview that I didn't take part

“THE INFORMANTS TALKED ABOUT THE NECESSITY OF SHOWING A CERTAIN RESTRAINT IN THEIR EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR TOWARDS THE CHILDREN.”

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 separation from his first daughter, his voice changes. Now and then one can sense tears in his voice and occasionally there are long silences.⁷⁷

BOTH THE STORIES of our informants and the printed texts are permeated by beliefs in gender roles due to biological differences. The underlying assumption of men and women being different 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”⁷⁸ and that the female psyche is more emotional, while men have an “inherent drive to move away from the hearth”.⁷⁹ The informants often talk in similar ways: “The mother is the most important person during the child’s first years,”⁸⁰ or “Mothers are softer than fathers”.⁸¹ 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.”⁸² Mikhail Grigorevich, 75, said. “When the son is four or five years the father becomes important to him as a model of what a man should be [...] but also important to the daughter because the more a father is a loving father, the more the daughter feels this, she is more sensitive than a boy”.⁸³

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 fathers. This confirms the picture of the earlier period of Soviet Russia when men were supposed to engage considerably more in collective, societal chores, such as work, than in private family matters. Still, our men did not express negative feelings about this fact, no special emotions of loss. This has made me think of the notion of “absent fathers” as a partly socially constructed phenomenon. And it leads us to the question whether the “emotional regime” of fatherhood in late Soviet Russia does not fundamentally resemble that of the West. ❌

Helene Carlbäck, PhD, associate professor of history, Södertörn University, Sweden.

references

- Efforts have been made to estimate the extent to which that right was used: see e.g. Andrei Vishnevskii, *Demograficheskaia modernizatsiia Rossii: 1900–2000* (Moscow: Novoe izdatel'stvo, 2006), 104–105.
- Wendy Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development and Social Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Helene Carlbäck, “Tracing the Roots of Early Soviet Russian Family Laws,” in *Gender Transitions in Russia and Eastern Europe*, ed. Ilidko Asztalos Morell et al. (Stockholm: Gondolin, 2005), 69–84.
- Peter Laslett, “Family and Household as Work Group and Kin Group: Areas of Traditional Europe Compared,” in *Family Forms in Historic Europe*, ed. D. R. Wall, J. Robin, and P. Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 513–563.
- Jan Plamper, “The History of Emotions: Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns”, *History and Theory* 49 (May 2010), 244.
- M. Petrovich, interview with H. Carlbäck and E. Ivanova, 2015.
- Elena Zhidkova, “Family, Divorce, and Comrades’ Courts: Soviet Family and Public Organizations During the Thaw,” in *And They Lived Happily Ever After: Norms and Everyday Practices of Family and Parenthood in Russia and Central Europe*, ed. Helene Carlbäck et al. (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2012).
- Deborah Field, *Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev’s Russia* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 47–64.
- Elena Zubkova, *Russia After the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945–1957* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 191–201.
- Anna Rotkirch, *The Man Question: Loves and Lives in Late 20th Century Russia*, dissertation, University of Helsinki, 2000, xiii.
- Lapidus, *Women*, 239.
- Vladimir Schlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- For studies on single mothers and “fatherless” children, see: Helene Carlbäck, “Lone Motherhood in Soviet Russia in the Mid-20th Century: In a European Context,” in *And They Lived Happily*, ed. Carlbäck et al., 25–46; Helene Carlbäck, “Lone Mothers and Fatherless Children: Public Discourse on Marriage and Family Law,” in *Soviet State and Society under Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. Melanie Ilic et al. (London: Routledge, 2009), 86–103.
- For a discussion on the use of the concepts of “emotional regime” and “emotional community”, see Plamper, “The History of Emotions”, 253; 255–257.
- For a bibliography and a historiographical analysis of works on “Western” (primarily British and American) fatherhood in the first half of the 20th century, see Laura King, *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, c. 1914–1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 4–8. For Scandinavian studies on masculinity and fatherhood in the Northern countries, see Joergen Lorentzen et al., eds., *Män i Norden: manlighet och modernitet 1840–1940* [Men in the northern countries: masculinity and modernity, 1840–1890] (Möklinta, Sweden: Gidlund, 2006).
- Susan J. Matt, “Current Emotional Research in History: Or Doing History from the Outside Out”, *Emotion Review* 3, no. 1 (2011), 121.
- Peter Stearns, *Be a Man! Males in Modern Society* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1990), 147.
- Scott Coltrane and Ross D. Parke, *Reinventing Fatherhood: Toward an Historical Understanding of Continuity and Change in Men’s Family Lives* (Philadelphia, PA: National Center on Fathers and Families, WP-8-12A, December 1998), 7.

- Peter Stearns, “History of Emotions: Issues of Change and Impact”, in *Handbook on Emotions*, 3rd ed., ed. Michael Lewis et al. (New York: Guilford Press, 2008), 24.
- See e.g. Sergey Kukhterin, “Fathers and Patriarchs in Communist and Post-Communist Russia”, in *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, ed. Sarah Ashwin (London: Routledge, 2000), 71–89; Zhanna Chernova, “Model’ ‘sovetskogo’ otsovstva: Diskursivnye predpisania” [The model of “Soviet” fatherhood: discursive regulations], in *Rossiiskii gendernyi poriadok: sotsiologicheskii podkhod* [Russian gender order: a sociological approach], ed. Elena Zdravomyslova (St. Petersburg: Evropejskij universitet, 2007), 138–168; Johnny Rodin and Pelle Åberg, “Fatherhood Across Space and Time: Russia in Perspective,” *Baltic Worlds* 4, no. 3–4 (2013), 21–28.
- Rodin and Åberg, “Fatherhood Across Space and Time”, 26.
- Helene Carlbäck, “Wives or Workers? Women’s Position in the Labour Force and in Domestic Life in Sweden and Russia during the 1960s,” in *Gender, Equality and Difference During and After State Socialism*, ed. Rebecca Kay (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
- Sexology (with the focus on sexopathology) only emerged in the late 1960s.
- See e.g. *Sem'ia i shkola. Zhurnal dlia roditelei*, 1990, no. 5, 39–41, no. 6, 30–33.
- Piotr Olegovich lives in Perm.
- Ivan Viktorovich, interview with Helene Carlbäck, Helsinki, May 2016.
- Petrovich, interview with E. Ivanova, 2016.
- 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 creative main character of several of her books. M Petrovich, Interview with H. Carlbäck and E. Ivanova, 2015.
- Olegovich was the only one of our informants who did not live in St Petersburg, but in Perm in the Urals.
- Olegovich, interview with E. Ivanova, 2016.
- Jiri Zuzanek, *Work and Leisure in the Soviet Union: A Time-budget Analysis* (New York: Praeger, 1980), 81.
- Zuzanek, *Work*, 90–93.
- Stearns, *Be a Man*, 162.
- One of the informants had lived with his family far away from his relatives when his children were growing up, and he told about changing and washing diapers all the time when the children were small. He never used to talk about this, however, he told us.
- Rotkirch, *The Man Question*, 120–21.
- Grigorevich, interview with H. Carlbäck and E. Ivanova, 2015.
- Olegovich, interview with E. Ivanova, 2016.
- Petrovich, interview with E. Ivanova, 2015.
- Aleksandrovich, interview with H. Carlbäck, 2015.
- Davidovich, interview with H. Carlbäck and E. Ivanova, 2015.
- Sem'ia i shkola* 1961, no. 8, 7–9.
- Sem'ia i shkola* 1974, no. 2, 6–7.
- Sem'ia i shkola* 1979, no. 2, 17–21.
- Leonidovich, interview with H. Carlbäck, 2016.
- Stearns, *Be a Man*, 165.
- Aleksandrovich, interview with H. Carlbäck and E. Ivanova, 2015
- Sem'ia i shkola* 1974, no. 2, 6–7.
- Stearns, *Be a Man*, 164–165.
- Sem'ia i shkola* 1982, no. 3, 23–24.

- Davidovich, interview with H. Carlbäck and E. Ivanova, 2015.
- Grigorevich, interview with H. Carlbäck, 2015.
- Sem'ia i shkola* 1961, no. 8, 7–9.
- To my knowledge, Benjamin Spock’s book was one of the few if not the only Western advice book on child rearing in Soviet Russia.
- Petrovich, interview with E. Ivanova, 2016.
- Lapidus, *Women*, 193.
- Aleksandrovich, interview with H. Carlbäck and E. Ivanova, 2015.
- Leonidovich, interview with H. Carlbäck and E. Ivanova, 2016.
- Andreyevich, interview with H. Carlbäck and E. Ivanova, 2016.
- Alekseyevich, interview with H. Carlbäck, 2016
- Stearns, *Be a Man*, 159–160.
- Kukhterin, *Fathers*, 84–85.
- Olegovich, interview with E. Ivanova, 2016.
- Davidovich, interview with H. Carlbäck and E. Ivanova, 2015.
- Olegovich, interview with E. Ivanova, 2016.
- Pavlovich, interview with H. Carlbäck and E. Ivanova, 2015.
- Aleksandrovich, interview with H. Carlbäck and E. Ivanova, 2015.
- Ivanovich, interview with H. Carlbäck and E. Ivanova, 2016.
- Petrovich, interview with E. Ivanova, 2016.
- Olegovich, interview with E. Ivanova, 2016.
- Davidovich, interview with H. Carlbäck and E. Ivanova, 2015.
- Pavlovich, interview with H. Carlbäck and E. Ivanova, 2016.
- Thomas Johansson, “Pappor och deras pappor” [Dads and their dads], in *Rädd att falla: Studier i manlighet* [Afraid of falling: studies on masculinity], ed. Claes Ekenstam (Stockholm: Gidlund, 1998), 329.
- Johansson, “Pappor”, 319.
- Rotkirch, *The Man Question*, 142.
- Stearns, *Be a Man*, 161.
- Davidovich, interview with H. Carlbäck and E. Ivanova, 2015.
- Grigorevich, interview with H. Carlbäck and E. Ivanova, 2015.
- Olegovich, interview with E. Ivanova, 2016.
- Sem'ia i shkola* 1982, no. 3, 23–24.
- Sem'ia i shkola* 1989, no. 3, 38–38.
- Andreyevich, interview with H. Carlbäck and E. Ivanova, 2016.
- Aleksandrovich, interview with H. Carlbäck and E. Ivanova, 2015
- Pavlovich, interview with H. Carlbäck and E. Ivanova, 2015.
- Grigorevich, interview with H. Carlbäck and E. Ivanova, 2015.



THE BLUE AND WHITE PIN THAT MATTERS

In the 1980s, when I was in my early twenties, living and studying in communist Hungary, there was a blue and white pin which was cool to wear. That was the pin of the Danube circle (Duna Kör), 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 saw a colleague wearing it 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 secret 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 minute the proposal became public on 28 March, 2017, resistance started. The resistance, which also included producing a blue pin, as blue is the official CEU color, with the slogan, written in white in two languages, "I stand with CEU". The story of this pin very much resembles the story of the pin of my political socialization in the 1980s.

FIRST, IT IS COOL now again to wear that pin. People shout at you with a wide smile from the other side of the street, repeating the slogan "Free Country, Free University", or "I stand with CEU". Or they just ask you openly, even on the street, where they could get a pin. Luckily this is not classified information at the moment, as at the reception at the newly renovated campus of CEU in Budapest each person is given two pins. (Do not ask me why two, and not one or three, but that is the



The whole world is watching, helping and supporting the resistance.

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 a bar, and the pin he was wearing was torn off his sweater. Another student while standing in the subway was astonished to see that an elderly man took out a pencil and started to rewrite 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 Litvánó, 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 117 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 their 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 Orban, had a common dream back then. That dream was that we would build a free and successful country where not party apparatchiks, but academics 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 hopes of 1989 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*.

PHOTO: PÉTER BALOGH

Street view outside the university during the protests against Lex CEU.



CEU'S FATE A SYMBOL OF WHAT WENT WRONG in Hungary and Central and Eastern Europe

Many 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 cofunded from foreign sources has for a while been on the hidden agenda.¹ 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 announcing 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",² 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 Hungary³ 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 Slovakia⁴ and the Czech Republic.⁵ In the midst of its huge and long-lasting domestic political crisis, Macedonia in particular has seen the rise of an anti-Soros movement,⁶ vividly reported on by Hungarian public media.

In Hungary, the amount of protest to follow 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.⁷ This is particularly important in a society as ideologically divided as Hungary.

At the same time, one of the most surprising yet interesting commentaries came from Róbert Braun, a leading researcher at the Vienna Institute for Advanced Studies and professor at the Lauder 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.⁸ 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 some critical self-reflection by elites, 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

- <http://diepresse.com/home/ausland/aussenpolitik/5200909/UniGesetz-spaltet-OrbanPartei?from=suche.intern.portal>
- <http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/the-representatives-of-global-capital-must-be-made-accountable>
- <http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2017-04/ungarn-orban-soros-ceu-universitaet>
- <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20502211/slovakia-does-not-want-soros-uni.html>
- <http://zpravy.e15.cz/domaci/udalosti/sorosova-univerzita-se-do-prahy-stehovat-nehce-1330910>
- <https://spectator.org/macedonia-to-george-soros-and-usaid-go-away/>
- http://mandiner.hu/cikk/20170416_kiraly_miklos_valasz_orban_viktornak_avagy_miért_tiltakoznak_a_professzorok
- http://hvg.hu/itthon/20170403_bun_es_hiba_ceu_braun



THE STORY OF e-ESTONIA

by Rene Mäe

A DISCOURSE-THEORETICAL APPROACH

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'. Finally, 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, postsocialism, nation branding, discourse theory.

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-government. 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

underdeveloped, post-Soviet transition state into e-Estonia, an advanced digital society.¹ As the Estonian historian Aro Velvet 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".²

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 showroom", 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".³ 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".⁴ From there on, the Estonian government founded the "e-Estonia council" as its Strategy Unit⁵ (in 2014); the Estonian PR guru Daniel Vaarik published the "White Paper on Estonia's Digital Ideology"⁶ (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"⁷ (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 concentrate on various discourses that have made this particular notion (and story) of e-Estonia possible in the first place. I will explore these questions by taking a discourse-theoretical approach and following three relatively general research questions: what is "e-Estonia" as an object of discourse-theoretical research; how did the signifier "e-Estonia" emerge and why does it continue to persist, even after almost two decades since its "invention"?

More precisely, I will follow the premises of poststructuralist or political⁸ discourse theory as Ernesto Laclau (and Chantal Mouffe) have developed it.⁹ While Laclau's work deals with

questions of (political) philosophy, Marxism, hegemony theory, and poststructuralism in a rather general manner, I will mostly (but not exclusively) draw on reformulations and refinements of Laclauian poststructuralist discourse theory as they have appeared in the works of Laclau's students, associates, and followers.¹⁰

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-schools) that have been developed and implemented in Estonia from the early 2000s on. In other words, there are a number of e-government

researchers¹¹ who regard Estonia as the pioneering state in the field of e-government. 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 proj-

ects. Quite the contrary: "spending on ICT remained modest from 1995–2003, in comparison to other countries".¹² Moreover, the timeline of Estonia's e-government-specific legislation was in line with that of other Eastern European countries such as Slovakia or Latvia. Furthermore, the "Tiger's Leap"¹³ 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" in the form of IT rather than genuine technological innovation.¹⁴ Kitsing's research does not seem to confirm that the success of Estonia's e-government projects resulted from the deliberate "early investment in ICT, accompanied by the necessary reforms".¹⁵ Instead, it would be more accurate to describe Estonian e-government projects as a "success without strategy".¹⁶ 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 policymakers".¹⁷

**"THERE ARE
A NUMBER OF
e-GOVERNMENT
RESEARCHERS WHO
REGARD ESTONIA
AS THE PIONEERING
STATE IN THE FIELD OF
e-GOVERNMENT."**



The simplifying accounts that conceive Estonian e-government projects as a conscious strategy of Estonian national leaders or government officials¹⁸ also tend to overlook 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. For example, even the cornerstone of Estonia's e-government projects, the 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 1996.¹⁹ 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".²⁰ Thus, in the late 1990s the discourse of e-government became a valuable currency among national leaders and provided politicians a convenient way "to show themselves as a force of progress, while political forces on the left showed reluctance and skepticism towards e-government".²¹ It is important to acknowledge that the late 1990s were not only a time when Estonia anticipated joining the European Union, but also the time when the EU itself started to take an interest in the globally spreading buzzword "e-government".²²

Another, related, term that also emerged in Estonia in the early 2000s is *e-democracy*. This term is clearly much more ambiguous than e-government since it moves toward politically loaded concepts such as "empowerment", "participation" and "decision-making" rather than "efficiency", "mobility" and "flexibility". So from 2000 on, various platforms for practicing e-democracy were set up in Estonia²³ as a kind of an expansion, or a more democratic form of e-government. By now, most of these platforms for practicing e-democracy have been shut down. Moreover, the very term e-democracy has largely disappeared from public discourse altogether. As Fredrika Björklund notes, although "democracy" was an important concept in Estonian information society policy documents in the 1990s, it was later replaced with the notion of a "citizen-centered society".²⁴ For her, this terminological change reflects a shift in which "[t]he citizen as a political agent has been pushed aside and replaced by the apolitical individual".²⁵

Aro Velmet has also observed the gradual depoliticization of the subjects of the Estonian e-state. Whereas the notions of e-government and democracy revolved around empowerment and transparency in the early 2000s, the current Estonian e-state can be more adequately grasped with the metaphor of a "huge app-store".²⁶ The Estonian e-state, he argues, reduces citizens to individual consumers whose main task is to use the solutions developed by engineers and public officials rather than pro-

viding a political space where discussions can be held on how problems are raised and solutions proposed in the first place.²⁷ Thus he claims that it is not democratic participation or empowerment that the Estonian e-state is concerned with. Rather it is the emerging digital economy, the potential of e-solutions to enhance entrepreneurship, attract foreign capital and a highly qualified workforce, and to build up Estonia's international image as an advanced digital society.

IN CONCLUSION, then, the research that specifically concentrates on issues of e-government or e-democracy as such is valuable for different reasons. For example, tracing *actual* policymaking practices contextualizes these practices within certain social and political debates and helps to problematize some of the more popular (and overly optimistic and deterministic) interpretations of policy development. In this essay, however, I do not want to frame e-Estonia as strictly an e-government project. Nor do I want to concentrate on the political aspects of e-democracy, even though it has proved to be a valuable research object for discourse-theoretical research.²⁸ Rather, I am interested in the ways in which e-government and e-democracy have become more commonly articulated as elements of the e-Estonia discourse, rather than the other way around.

Before moving closer to a discourse-theoretical analysis of the idea and story of e-Estonia, I need to lay some theoretical and methodological groundwork. 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.

What is discourse theory?

Firstly, the concept of discourse in poststructuralist discourse theory is formulated in *ontological* rather than empirical (or ontic) terms. The engagement with "ontological rather than just the epistemological and methodological aspects of interpretation, analysis and critique"²⁹ is also one of the most distinctive aspects of a discourse-theoretical approach. Following from these premises we can define discourse as "a *relational* system of *signifying practices* that is produced through historical and *ultimately political* interventions and provides a *contingent horizon* of any meaningful object".³⁰ Since discourse is defined as a system of signifying practices, it involves much more than only verbal and written text. For discourse theorists, text and discourse are not strictly linguistic phenomena; rather, they tend to involve a wide range of data such as "policy statements, speeches, images, statues, signs and monuments"³¹ in their research projects. Although discourse theory uses a number of linguistic categories (e.g. signifier and signified, paradigm and syntagm), they "cease



[...] to be merely regional categories of a linguistics conceived in a narrow sense".³² One of the reasons why these linguistic categories have found their way into discourse theory is that it places central importance on rhetoric, or more precisely, "the constitutive character of rhetoric"³³ in social and political practices.

Second, when discourse theorists analyze particular discourses, they are interested in the "conditions of possibility" of those discourses, rather than connecting or reducing discursive practices to some presupposed extra-discursive entity (e.g. society or economy). They presume that "whilst objects clearly 'exist' independently of any particular discourse, their meaning and significance for situated subjects – and how they are engaged with – depends on [...] discursive *articulations*".³⁴ Or, to put it differently, every discourse is the result of an articulatory practice that creates "a relation among elements such that their identity is modified".³⁵ Hence, we can say that the concept (and practice) of articulation is virtually synonymous with discourse. Both of these concepts are essential to how discourse theory understands the social production of meaning. In other words, since discourse theory presumes that no social (discursive) practice is "governed by any underlying metaphysical principle or ground"³⁶ it treats all discourses as incomplete and partial. Specifically, particular discourses are considered as *historically specific* attempts to create "nodal points that partially fix meaning"³⁷ and "arrest the flow of differences" in the discursive field.³⁸ This discursive field, in turn, is conceived as "a theoretical horizon within which the being of objects is constituted".³⁹

Third, poststructuralist discourse theory is also "a species of critical theory" and is thus interested not only in interpretation and characterization of discourses but in their *critique* as well.⁴⁰ The critical aspect is also reflected in the central position that concepts such as "hegemony" and "the political" assume in a discourse-theoretical framework. Since discourse theory presumes that there is no *necessary* connection between certain objects, processes, and practices that a particular discourse articulates, it also asks why it still happens that often "one signifier rather than another assumes in different circumstances that signifying function".⁴¹ To answer that question, Laclau and other poststructuralist discourse theorists have turned to the concept of hegemony as a way to conceive "the never-concluded attempts to produce a fixation, to which there will always be a threat".⁴² In other words, the concept of hegemony points to the presumption that there is *always* something that is *excluded* from a particular discourse. It follows that discourse theory asserts "the primacy of the political over the social"⁴³ by presupposing that every social order and practice "arises as a political construction that involves the exclusion of certain possibilities".⁴⁴

WHILE IT IS PRECISELY the premise about "the primacy of the political" that has provoked some of the most crucial (ontological) debates among discourse theorists and political philosophers, I do not have the space, nor do I see the need to open up these de-

bates here. Instead, I will now move closer to analytical and theoretical concepts that have been developed in discourse theory for conducting concrete empirical discourse analyses. Following from the premise that all practices are *signifying* practices that "are located within a field of discursive social relations",⁴⁵ Jason Glynos and David Howarth have aimed to point out and elaborate the different types of signifying practices. They understand these different types of signifying practices in terms of different (signifying) *logics*.

The logics of critical explanation in discourse theory

To define the concept of *logic*, Glynos and Howarth turn to the notion of family resemblances and language games as understood by Ludwig Wittgenstein. Hence, they propose that no concept cannot be defined only in abstract terms but needs to take into account the different ways it is used in practice as well.⁴⁶ Rather than proposing a correct/incorrect definition of a logic, they define it by what it is not. First, the concept of a logic does not involve "the formal analysis of propositions in order to determine their validity or truth-value"; nor is it a causal law; nor is it "synonymous with tendencies that are conceived as weak or 'soft' laws".⁴⁷

As a theoretical concept, logic primarily concerns the interpretation, explanation, and critique of *discursive practices*, rather than the logic of some extra-discursive entities such as "social structures" or "causal mechanisms".⁴⁸ This concept of logic, however, is firmly grounded in discourse theory's underlying social ontology that distinguishes four dimensions of social reality. Whereas the *social dimension* concerns the ways in which "subjects are absorbed in their practices", the *political dimension* refers to the ways in which social relations are challenged "in the name of a principle or ideal" and, as a result, existing social relations become dislocated. The *ideological dimension* concerns "that aspect of social relations in which subjects are complicit in concealing the radical contingency of social relations" and the *ethical dimension*, in contrast, aims to capture the attentiveness of subjects to this radical contingency.⁴⁹ Since these dimensions are formulated on the ontological level, they "are always to some degree present in any particular practice or regime".⁵⁰ As a way to capture 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 *fantasmatic logics* that have "a role to play in articulating a complete explanatory account"⁵¹ of a practice or a regime of practices.

First, social logics allow us to characterize, describe and discern the "rules and norms" that govern a certain discursive practice⁵² and to "capture those aspects that make it tick".⁵³ Second, political logics offer a way to "explore how social practices are instituted, contested, and defended"⁵⁴ through two particular political 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 complex-



Images from the Estonian tourist board, promoting a digitalized lifestyle in e-Estonia.

ity”.⁵⁵ Equivential 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”.⁵⁶ Equivential 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.⁵⁷ In equivential chains, however, the difference between discursive 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 complicit in concealing or covering over the radical contingency of social relations”.⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹

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 certain representation of a particular issue. That is simply because discourse theorists do not “assume the prior existence of a particular structure, agent or object”.⁶⁰ Rather than studying particular issues and representations, discourse theorists try to critically explain what makes particular representations “possible in the first place”.⁶¹ 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”.⁶²

In the remaining part of the article I will try to offer a sche-

matic 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?⁶³ I will try to answer these questions in terms of social, political, and fantasmatic 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.⁶⁴ 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”.⁶⁵ As it appears, the “e” in Estonia means a lot more

“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’.”

than just “electronic” – it refers to “The Epic Story of the e-State”⁶⁶ 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 promoters – national leaders, government officials and PR gurus – have presented these stories at various conferences on e-government, public management, and digital technology both locally⁶⁷ and internationally.⁶⁸ Furthermore, e-Estonia has even been the theme of a party: in 2016 the technology conference Slush was opened with the “Enter e-Estonia” theme party, fea-

turing “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.⁶⁹ On closer observation, one cannot

fail to notice the similarities that e-Estonia shares with the practice of nation branding.

THE TERM NATION branding emerged most powerfully after the end of the Cold War with the demand for “nations to redefine and reposition themselves within the master narrative of globalization”.⁷⁰ 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.⁷¹ 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 hermeneutic, 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”.⁷² Moreover, as nation branding practitioners see nation brands as a “benign form of national consciousness”,⁷³ 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”.⁷⁴ 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”.⁷⁵ 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”.⁷⁶ 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”⁷⁷ and to cultivate the roles of the “brand ambassador, brand champion, brand exemplar, or brand carrier” among its citizens.⁷⁸

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 inter-

changeably refers to Estonia as “the digital society”,⁷⁹ a “digitalized nation”,⁸⁰ and a country that is “run like a start-up”⁸¹ or offered as a “service”.⁸² 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 situating 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”.⁸³ 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 Revolution⁸⁴ 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".⁸⁵

The core idea of e-Residency is to "offer every world citizen a government-issued digital identity"⁸⁶ by which they can "enjoy the government and business services that Estonia has developed since the 1990s".⁸⁷ These include the opportunity to establish a company online, online banking services, 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"⁸⁸ that challenges "traditional notions of residency, citizenship, territoriality, and globalization".⁸⁹ As the information materials on e-Residency put it, the project has been developed "for the new e-Estonian – a new kind of digital and global citizen".⁹⁰

In addition to the open call for potential e-residents, however, the status of an e-resident has also been offered as a gift from the Estonian government to "outstanding people" (e.g. Angela Merkel) during their visits to Estonia, or during Estonian national leaders visits abroad.⁹¹ Since the international media regularly follow the doings of diplomats, national leaders, and IT entrepreneurs, the e-Residency project has clearly played an important role in establishing the signifier e-Estonia in the international media.⁹² The first e-Resident was actually a journalist – namely, Edward Lucas, who covers Russia and Eastern Europe for *The Economist* and publicly regards himself as a close friend of Toomas Hendrik Ilves, the former President of Estonia.

e-Estonia: Always already a former Soviet republic

On the home page of the e-Estonia website⁹³ one is still greeted by the former president of Estonia, Toomas Hendrik Ilves. While Ilves has undoubtedly been Estonia's most vocal advocate of the empowering role of digital technology in public administration, entrepreneurship, and education during his presidency, it also appears that the very term e-Estonia is his invention.

Ilves served as president of Estonia from 2006 to 2016, but he had also previously served as minister of foreign affairs.⁹⁴ So it was in 2000, when Ilves as minister of foreign affairs used the term e-Estonia in the title of his speech *e-Estonia and the New Europe*, held at the London School of Economics. As Ilves put it then: "I chose e-Estonia as a title simply because in the most dynamic area of growth, Estonia far outstrips Western Europe".⁹⁵ He argued that, by comparing the relevant statistical data on Internet use, computer owners, and online banking, one can easily observe that Estonia is unjustifiably "a country still called pejoratively a 'former Soviet republic'", and added that, "with the emergence of new technologies and the new economy, the iconic vision of a backward, corrupt Eastern Europe, dismal and grey requires iconoclasm".⁹⁶ As he himself remarks, in using the term e-Estonia, he meant to make a reference to the recently launched eEurope initiative of the EU. The aim of eEurope was

to "ensure the European Union fully benefits for generations to come from the changes the Information Society is bringing".⁹⁷

A few months prior to Ilves's speech in London, the Government Office of the Republic of Estonia had launched its "e-government project".⁹⁸ The first step of the project was a launch of the information system of government sessions (called the "e-cabinet"). As the press notice put it back then, this system was developed as "a first step towards e-government" that "will eliminate the need to produce 55 copies of document bundles, each with a height of 10–20 cm".⁹⁹ From the very beginning, news about this project started to appear in the foreign media, laying the first founding elements of the notion of Estonia as an advanced e-state.¹⁰⁰

A year later the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (with Ilves as Minister) started to publish a section titled e-Estonia in its publication called "Glance at the Mirror".¹⁰¹ The e-Estonia section appeared side by side with others such as "Foreign Investments" and "Tourism". All of them were essentially selections of quotes and headlines compiled from the foreign press. The excerpts in the e-Estonia section praised the recently launched (and the world's first) e-government system, and the high proportion of Internet users compared not only to post-Soviet and Eastern European countries but to Western countries as well.

Despite the number of e-services, e-solutions, and devices that have followed the first Estonian e-government program in 2000,¹⁰² the term e-Estonia is now more widely used than ever. It regularly appears in the articles of media outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* and *Wired* that propose that Estonia is "the world's most advanced digital society",¹⁰³ "the new European start-up hub"¹⁰⁴ or "one of the most tech-savvy countries on earth".¹⁰⁵ While it was almost two decades ago that Ilves argued for the dismantling of the widespread prejudices that perceived post-Soviet, Eastern European, and non-EU states as corrupt 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, this new version assumes that Estonia has already become e-Estonia, *despite* its Soviet past. This presumption is well illustrated by the question that is put forth on the e-Estonia website: "How did a small, post-Soviet nation transform itself into a global leader in e-solutions?"¹⁰⁶

e-Estonia and post socialism as transition

The heroic overcoming of its "post-Soviet" image or past that e-Estonia appears to represent is pervasive not only in the locally produced promotional materials on e-Estonia¹⁰⁷ but can be observed widely throughout international media coverage.¹⁰⁸ What I call the "logic of postsocialist transition" is one of the main social logics that help us to grasp what makes the e-Estonia discourse tick. The notion of post socialist, transition as such, however, involves a number of relatively strong assumptions about the ways in which social and political change takes place.

Specifically, the term transition pushes one to conceive post-socialism as an intermediate period between the collapse of communism and a decisive move towards capitalism. In studies of postsocialism the idea of a one-way transition has been criticized widely on different grounds.¹⁰⁹ One of the central objections to this "transition" concerns the way this concept collapses the spatial and the temporal by "reducing geographical diversity to a lagging temporality" and represents a particular region as being "on a journey somewhere".¹¹⁰ In other words, the idea of postsocialist transition fits comfortably 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'".¹¹¹

From a discourse-theoretical perspective, this notion of "transition" can be conceived as the "nodal point" in an explanatory framework that not only "structures and standardizes empirical data" but has "turned into a historiographical signifier, which encompasses a defined period after the fall of communism".¹¹² This simplified notion of post socialist transition treats it as a "sutured structure composed of various social experiences and political strategies, which naturalizes and universalizes the contingent power struggles that are taking place and will take place in the future of post-socialist countries".¹¹³

In our case, the "logic of transition" helps the discourse of e-Estonia to take the focus away from (and normalize) the contingent power struggles that have lain behind the emergence of the e-Estonia project. Even more importantly, the logic of transition, by intersecting with the logics of nation branding, gives rise to a fantasmatic narrative in which Estonia's local political struggles, historical burdens, and international image-related concerns are best overcome with the help of digital technology, e-services, and e-solutions. In other words, as long as Estonia is e-Estonia, a technologically advanced e-state or e-society, there is no obstacle that cannot be overcome.

Moreover, the fantasmatic narrative seems to assume that e-Estonia's various, innovative, revolutionary e-solutions not only help the nation, society, or country to effectively solve its social and political problems, but can even help it to defend itself in situations of cyber war.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, as the e-Estonia website tells us, it was in 2007 when e-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".¹¹⁵

e-Estonia: An empty signifier?

As I demonstrated above, it is the social logics of post socialist transition and nation branding that allow us to characterize the signifying logics that govern the e-Estonia discourse. In other

words, these are the main logics that make the e-Estonia discourse tick. In tracing the history of the signifier e-Estonia we also observed that President Ilves initially used the term to argue *against* the label "former Soviet republic" that he claimed had been "pejoratively" applied to Estonia. It seems that the particular signifier e-Estonia appeared then as an effective antidote against "[p]ast preconceptions that form views of the present day 'Eastern Europe'",¹¹⁶ 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 principle or ideal".¹¹⁷ I propose that the concept of the "empty signifier" as proposed by Laclau allows us to explore the political dimension of e-Estonia as a name. An empty signifier, together with the concept of the floating signifier, belongs to the category of a "general equivalent". For Laclau, "general equivalents" appear in the process whereby "the body of one particularity assumes a function of universal representation".¹¹⁸ Both empty and floating signifiers offer necessary closure for discourses. By acting

as nodal points, they have a central role to play in the formation, maintenance, and contestation of hegemonic projects. While floating signifiers are characterized by their multiple and contrasting meanings in hegemonic discourses, it is the empty signifiers that point to the constitutive power of *naming* in political practice.

MOST SIMPLY DEFINED, an empty signifier is "a signifier without a signified",¹¹⁹ a "name or a symbol of a lack"¹²⁰ that emerges when political actors "struggle to represent a specific sense of fullness and common good".¹²¹ 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 equivalential chain sequence *indefinitely open*".¹²² 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".¹²³ An empty signifier exemplifies "the discursive presence of its own limits"¹²⁴ as it tries to escape the relational and differential nature of signification. We can recognize empty signifiers where a particular name becomes "the ground" for a particular discourse,¹²⁵ a name that becomes "detached from its *particular meaning* in order to provide an empty space that can be filled with *universal meanings*".¹²⁶ It seems that e-Estonia, as a name, is

"IT MIGHT BE MORE ACCURATE TO ARGUE THAT, IF THIS POST-SOVIET PAST WERE SOMEHOW COMPLETELY SUPPRESSED, THE STORY OF e-ESTONIA WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE IN THE FIRST PLACE."



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 particular nation state or a national community.

However, following from the discussion in the first part of the essay, I think it is more accurate to conceive e-government and e-democracy as floating signifiers that were in play among public discourses and competing political projects in the 1990s. If this is the case, then e-Estonia, as it interchangeably refers to nation state or society, appears to be working for the *general interest* of the Estonian society or nation.

Second, as we also showed above, e-Estonia has produced a variety of e-subjects, e-practices, and e-institutions. Moreover, e-Estonia remains open to new subjects and practices. As the e-Estonia website declares: “Even with all of Estonia’s successes, this by no means is the end of the e-Estonia story. It’s only the beginning”.¹²⁷ In other words, the equivalential chain that e-Estonia signifies seems to be open indefinitely. However, it also appears that what these subjects, practices, and institutions have in common is only their reference to e-Estonia – i.e., they are made *equivalent* with the universal claims, ideals, and principles of e-Estonia.

Third, even if Estonia is represented as e-Estonia, a “global leader in e-solutions”, it cannot escape its recent postsocialist or post-Soviet past. However, it might be more accurate to argue that if this post-Soviet past were somehow completely suppressed, the story of e-Estonia would not be possible in the first place. For it is on this generalized notion of a post-Soviet past that the success story of e-Estonia has been built. As Taavi Kotka, one of the visionaries behind the e-Residency project, has put it: “After separating from the Soviet Union, Estonia had to start with a clean slate and, as history has shown, a clean slate is the best surface on which to create innovation”.¹²⁸ A similar notion appears in the “White Paper on Estonia’s Digital Ideology”.¹²⁹ This text, produced by Daniel Vaarik, an Estonian PR guru and a former member of Toomas Hendrik Ilves’s think tank, proposes a number of recommendations in the form of “pathfinder stories”. These stories appear as narrative templates that Estonia should follow to introduce and present itself to “the world”. Drawing on this “digital ideology”, Vaarik has given presentations about e-Estonia’s story at various events.¹³⁰ As he puts it in one of his presentations, “suddenly we realized that information technology helps us to show something from our country that is not post-Soviet but future-related [...] Estonia realized that it can get away from a post-Soviet space by starting communication about IT, by doing everything it can, by doing IT reforms”.¹³¹

In sum, then, e-Estonia as an empty signifier provides a basis


for a variety of existing and emergent hegemonic projects that represent themselves as the ones that are ultimately able to lead the Estonian nation state, society, or country towards a bright future that is yet to come.

Conclusion

My main aim in this article was to outline a discourse-theoretical framework that allows an alternative reading of the various assumptions, hopes, and promises that make the e-Estonia story possible. First, I discussed the policy research that departs from the concepts of “e-government” and “e-democracy” and analyzes relevant policymaking practices in Estonia from the mid-1990s on. Second, I suggested that, while e-Estonia could be analyzed as an example of an e-government project, we would fail to grasp how it is possible that e-government has become part of e-Estonia, not the other way around. Third, after introducing the ontological premises and defining the key terms of poststructuralist discourse theory, I turned to the logics approach, which that investigates social practices in terms of different types of signifying, or discursive “logics”. Fourth, by following these logics, I offered a discourse-theoretical reading of the notion of e-Estonia.

By pointing out the particular texts where the signifier e-Estonia appears, as well as paying attention to the distinctive forms in which it represented, I turned to the research field of nation branding. I then articulated various concepts and definitions from the field of nation branding research to name the “logic of nation branding”. In order to show how the e-Estonia discourse could be characterized through this “logic of nation branding” I discussed the recent e-Residency project. I then considered the concept of “post socialist transition” and formulated the social “logic of transition” as concept to the way in which the e-Estonia story is pervasively a success story of a former, underdeveloped, post-Soviet state. Also I showed that the term e-Estonia was coined by Foreign Minister Toomas Hendrik Ilves as early as 2000, and appeared much more powerfully in the mid-2000s when Ilves became president of Estonia. Finally, by drawing on the concept of the empty signifier, I showed that it is the name e-Estonia that is to be seen as what has constituted the space where the notion of Estonia as an advanced e-state or e-society could emerge in the first place.

Finally, I want to emphasize that this article should be considered exploratory. My main aim was to find theoretically grounded ways to offer an alternative reading of the success story that runs throughout the general idea of e-Estonia as well as particular manifestations of this idea. From the discourse-theoretical framework that I presented, this success narrative appears primarily to disclose the hegemonic practices that have constituted e-Estonia. If we add the label “hegemonic” to particular

discourses, it allows us to describe a situation whereby “through acts of identification, subjects have come to forget the contingency of a particular articulation and have accepted it and its elements as necessary or natural”.¹³² This forgetting is clearly what seems to occur with the hegemonic discourse of e-Estonia. Moreover, one faces a serious difficulty if one wants to establish what kind of phenomenon e-Estonia is solely on the basis of policy documents, promotional materials, and media coverage: is it a nation branding project, an imaginary digital nation, an actually existing digital society with its digital infrastructure, a response to the assumed forces of globalization, or a combination of all of these? As I hope to have shown in this paper, a poststructuralist discourse-theoretical approach presents a convincing as well as a constructive way forward in this situation, because it not only asks about the conditions of possibility of particular discourses but does so with a clearly articulated ontological, theoretical, and methodological framework. 

Rene Mäe, PhD candidate in sociology, School of Governance, Law, and Society, Tallinn University.

Acknowledgments

This article was supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund. I would also like to express my gratitude to two anonymous reviewers for their critical and constructive feedback on an earlier version of this article.

References

- For examples from different international media outlets, see: Andrew Keen, “E-Stonia: Country Using Technology to Rebrand Itself as the Anti-Russia,” *The Guardian*, April 21, 2016, accessed December 3, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/21/e-stonia-country-using-technology-to-rebrand-itself-as-the-anti-russia>; Tim Mansel, “How Estonia Became E-Stonia,” *BBC News*, May 16, 2013, accessed December 3, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-22317297>; Mark Scott, “Estonians Embrace Life in a Digital World,” *The New York Times*, October 8, 2014, accessed December 3, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/09/business/international/estonians-embrace-life-in-a-digital-world.html>. For locally produced reports and promotional documents on e-Estonia, see: Sandra Roosna and Raul Rikk, “E-Estonia: E-Governance in Practice” (Tallinn: e-Governance Academy, 2016); Enterprise Estonia, “E-Estonia: The Future Is Now” (Tallinn, 2015), 8, accessed November 5, 2016, https://issuu.com/eas-estonia/docs/e-estonia_thefutureisnow; “e-Estonia.com: The Digital Society” (main page), Estonian ICT Export Cluster, accessed December 3, 2016, <https://www.e-estonia.com/>. For local and international conference presentations on e-Estonia, see: Daniel Vaarik, “Escaping E-Narnia: Estonia’s New Digital Ideology,” *Business Seminar: Estonia; Where Stuff Happens First* (Tallinn, 2015), accessed December 3, 2016, <https://vimeo.com/album/3482303/video/133571756>; Daniel Vaarik, “The Secret Sauce of E-Stonia,” *LOGIN* (Vilnius, 2016), accessed December 3, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jsA-E-yA7bY>; Siim Sikkut, “21st Century State: Building e-Estonia,” *Digital Leaders Annual Summit* (Luxembourg, 2017), accessed February 22, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWSvjSuVtG8>; Taavi Kotka, “Putting the ‘E’ in Estonia,” *NASSCOM Product Conclave* (Bangalore, 2015), accessed December 3, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iHRnEjBkCY>.

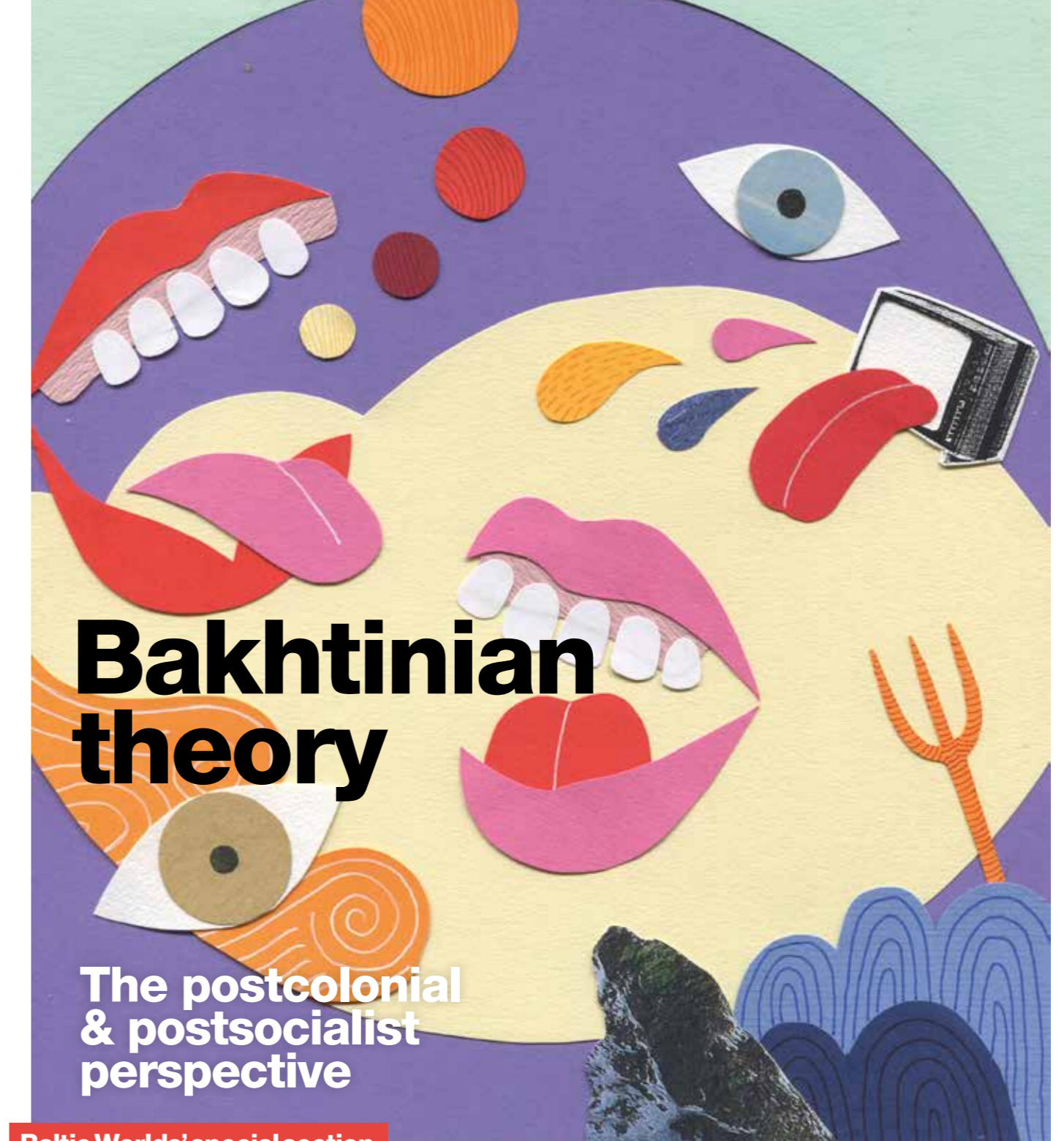
- Aro Velmet, “E-Kodanikud Ja E-Tarbijad: Kaks Lugu 21. Sajandi Eestlusest” [E-citizens and e-consumers: Two tales of Estonian nationhood in the 21st century], *Vikerkaar*, no. 10–11 (2015): 147.
- Estonian ICT Export Cluster, “E-Estonia Showroom,” accessed December 15, 2016, <https://e-estonia.com/e-estonia-showroom/>.
- Enterprise Estonia, “E-Estonia: The Future Is Now”.
- The aim of the E-Estonia council is to direct the “development of Estonian digital society and e-governance, especially the implementation of national digital agenda”. Government Office, Republic of Estonia, “E-Estonia Council”, accessed December 10, <https://riigikantselei.ee/en/supporting-government/e-Estonia-council>.
- Daniel Vaarik, “Where Stuff Happens First: White Paper on Estonia’s Digital Ideology” (Tallinn, 2015), accessed December 3, 2016, https://www.mkm.ee/sites/default/files/digitalideology_final.pdf.
- Callisto Group OÜ, “E-Eesti Rahvusvahelise Maine Edendamise Tegevuskava 2017–2019” [The plan for developing and enhancing the international image of e-Estonia, 2017–2019] (Tallinn: State Information Systems Agency, 2016), accessed February 20, https://www.ria.ee/public/toetuskeem/eEesti_maine/e-Eesti_rahvusvahelise_maine_edendamise_tegevuskava_2017-2019.pdf.
- Jason Glynos et al., “Discourse Analysis: Varieties and Methods,” *ERSC National Centre for Research Methods Review*, 2009, 7–13.
- Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Second (London, New York: Verso, 2001); Ernesto Laclau, “Ideology and Post-Marxism,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 11, no. 2 (2006): 103–14.
- E.g. Jason Glynos and David Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007); David Howarth, “Power, Discourse, and Policy: Articulating a Hegemony Approach to Critical Policy Studies,” *Critical Policy Studies* 3 (2009): 309–35; David Howarth and Yannis Stavrakakis, “Introducing Discourse Theory and Political Analysis,” in *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies, and Social Change*, ed. Yannis Stavrakakis, David Howarth, and Aletta Norval (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 1–23; David Howarth and Jacob Torfing, *Discourse Theory in European Politics: Identity, Policy and Governance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
- For example, see Marc Ernsdorff and Adriana Berbec, “Estonia: The Short Road to E-Government and E-Democracy,” in *E-Government in Europe: Re-Bootting the State*, ed. Paul G. Nixon and Koutrakou N. Vassiliki (London: Routledge, 2007), 180; Tarmo Kalvet, “Innovation: A Factor Explaining E-Government Success in Estonia,” *Electronic Government, an International Journal* 9 (2012): 142–157; Erin Dian Dumbacher, “Internet Development as Political Comparative Advantage: Estonia in International Organizations,” in *Internet, Politics, Policy 2010: An Impact Assessment Conference at Oxford University*, 2010, 1–16, accessed December 3, 2016, <http://ipp.oii.ox.ac.uk/2010/programme-2010/track-2-intersection/panel-2f-the-internet-and-the-nation/dumbacher-internet-development-as>.
- Meelis Kitsing, “Success Without Strategy: E-Government Development in Estonia,” *Policy and Internet* 3 (2011): 6.
- For a thorough consideration of the Tiger’s Leap program, see: Pille Runnel, Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, and Kristina Reinsalu, “The Estonian Tiger Leap from Post-Communism to the Information Society: From Policy to Practice,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 40 (2009): 29–51.
- Kitsing, “Success Without Strategy,” 6.
- Marc Ernsdorff and Adriana Berbec, “Estonia: The Short Road to E-Government and E-Democracy,” 180.
- Kitsing, “Success Without Strategy”.
- Ibid.*, 15.
- Ivar Tallo, “What Does Not Meet The Eye: E-Services For Everyone,” *Life in*

- Estonia*, 2013; Roosna and Rikk, “E-Estonia: E-Governance in Practice.”
- 19 Kitsing, “Success Without Strategy,” 18.
- 20 Hille Hinsberg, Magnus Jonsson, and Martin Karlsson, “E-Participation Policy in Estonia,” *Citizen Centric E-Participation: A Trilateral Collaboration for Democratic Innovation. Case Studies on E-Participation Policy: Sweden, Estonia and Iceland* (Tallinn: Praxis Center for Policy Studies, 2013), 22.
- 21 Kitsing, “Success Without Strategy,” 6.
- 22 Commission of the European Communities, “eEurope: An Information Society For All; Communication on a Commission Initiative for the Special European Council of Lisbon, 23 and 24 March” (1999), accessed December 3, 2016, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/BG/ALL/?uri=URISERV:l24221>; Victor Bekkers and Vincent Homburg, “The Myths of E-Government: Looking Beyond the Assumptions of a New and Better Government,” *The Information Society* 23 (2007): 373–82.
- 23 For an overview of these platforms, see Hinsberg, Jonsson, and Karlsson, “E-Participation Policy in Estonia”; Ernsdorff and Berbec, “Estonia: The Short Road to E-Government and E-Democracy”; Roosna and Rikk, “E-Estonia: E-Governance in Practice,” 80–81.
- 24 Fredrika Björklund, “E-Government and Moral Citizenship: The Case of Estonia,” *Citizenship Studies* 20 (2016): 921.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 922.
- 26 Velmet, “E-Kodanikud Ja E-Tarbijad: Kaks Lugu 21. Sajandi Eestlusest,” 146.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 Lincoln Dahlberg, “Re-Constructing Digital Democracy: An Outline of Four ‘Positions,’” *New Media and Society* 13 (2011): 855–72.
- 29 Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory*, 103.
- 30 Jacob Torfing, “Discourse Theory: Achievements, Arguments, and Challenges,” in *Discourse Theory in European Politics: Identity, Policy, Governance*, ed. David Howarth and Jacob Torfing (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 8.
- 31 Katharina T. Paul, “Discourse Analysis: An Exploration of Methodological Issues and a Call for Methodological Courage in the Field of Policy Analysis,” *Critical Policy Studies* 3 (2009): 241.
- 32 Laclau, “Ideology and Post-Marxism,” 106.
- 33 David Howarth and Steven Griggs, “Poststructuralist Discourse Theory and Critical Policy Studies: Interests, Identities and Policy Change,” in *Handbook of Critical Policy Studies*, ed. Frank Fischer et al. (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2015), 111.
- 34 Glynos et al., “Discourse Analysis: Varieties and Methods,” 8.
- 35 Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 105.
- 36 Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory*, 179.
- 37 Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 113.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 112.
- 39 David Howarth and Yannis Stavrakakis, “Introducing Discourse Theory and Political Analysis,” 3.
- 40 Glynos et al., “Discourse Analysis: Varieties and Methods,” 9.
- 41 Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (London, New York: Verso, 2007), 40.
- 42 Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen, *Discursive Analytical Strategies: Understanding Foucault, Koselleck, Laclau, Luhmann* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2003), 55.
- 43 Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London, New York: Verso, 1990), 33.
- 44 Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory*, 125.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 109.
- 46 As Laclau and Mouffe have explained, the distinction between meaning and practice is only an *analytical* distinction: “The use of a term is an act—in that sense it forms part of pragmatics; on the other hand, the meaning is only constituted in the contexts of actual use of the term: in that sense its semantics is entirely dependent upon its pragmatics, from which it can be separated—if at all—only analytically. That is to say, in our terminology, every identity or discursive object is constituted in the context of an action.” Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, “Post-Marxism without Apologies,” *New Left Review* 1, 166 (1987): 83.
- 47 Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory*, 135.
- 48 The “logics approach” developed by Glynos and Howarth grows out of their dissatisfaction with the two of the most prominent alternatives to positivist social science: the “causal law paradigm”, which explains social reality in terms of “causal mechanisms” (e.g. critical realists, neo-positivists), and exclusively hermeneutic explanations that focus on “contextualized self-interpretations” (Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory*, 212.) By developing their particular understanding of “a logic” or “logics” as elements of explanation, they try to avoid both the “universalizing” as well as “particularistic” tendencies in the social science explanations represented by these two approaches (*ibid.*, 135).
- 49 Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory*, 112–113.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 51 *Ibid.*
- 52 David Howarth, “Power, Discourse, and Policy: Articulating a Hegemony Approach to Critical Policy Studies,” *Critical Policy Studies* 3 (2009): 325.
- 53 Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory*, 135.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 133.
- 55 Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 130.
- 56 Jules Townshend, “Laclau and Mouffe’s Hegemonic Project: The Story so Far,” *Political Studies* 52 (2004): 271.
- 57 Marianne Jørgensen and Louise J. Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London: Sage, 2002), 43.
- 58 Howarth and Griggs, “Poststructuralist Policy Analysis: Discourse, Hegemony, and Critical Explanation,” 331.
- 59 Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory*, 147.
- 60 Lincoln Dahlberg and Sean Phelan, “Discourse Theory and Critical Media Politics: An Introduction,” in *Discourse Theory and Critical Media Politics*, ed. Lincoln Dahlberg and Sean Phelan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 13.
- 61 *Ibid.*
- 62 Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory*, 230.
- 63 cf. David Howarth and Steven Griggs, “Poststructuralist Policy Analysis: Discourse, Hegemony, and Critical Explanation,” in *The Argumentative Turn Revisited: Public Policy as Communicative Practice*, ed. Frank Fischer and Herbert Gottweis (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 324.
- 64 “Established in 2000, Enterprise Estonia (EAS) promotes business and regional policy in Estonia and is one of the largest institutions within the national support system for entrepreneurship by providing financial assistance, counselling, cooperation opportunities and training for entrepreneurs, research institutions, the public and non-profit sectors” (Enterprise Estonia, “About”, accessed December 3, 2016, <http://www.eas.ee/eas/?lang=en>). At the moment, almost all of the annual budget (100 to 150 million euros) of EAS consists of the European Union Structural Funds that EAS implements in Estonia. For example, it allocates financial support to Estonian businesses as well as organizing trainings and consultations.
- 65 Enterprise Estonia, “E-Estonia: The Future Is Now”.
- 66 Anna Piperal, “E-Estonia: The Epic Story of the E-State,” *Estonian ICT Demo Center*, https://www.dropbox.com/s/0e3r8ni3syiohcz/e-Estonia_the%20Epic.pdf?dl=0, accessed February 3, 2016.
- 67 “Business Seminar: Estonia - Where Stuff Happens First”, *Estonian Investment Agency*, December 1, 2016, <http://www.investinestonia.com/en/about-estonia/news/article/993-estonia-where-things-happen-first>; “Visioonikonverents: Millist e-Eestit me e-Euroopas tahame?” [Vision conference: What kind of e-Estonia do we want in e-Europe?], accessed November 13, 2016, <https://www.digikonverents.ee/>.
- 68 See e.g. Siim Sikkut, “21st Century State: Building e-Estonia”; Taavi Kotka, “Putting the ‘E’ in Estonia”; Kaspar Korjus, “e-Residency: Experimenting Worldwide Digital Inclusion,” *TEDxGeneva*, May 3, 2016, accessed December 1, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOFTG3PSUag>; Daniel Vaarik, “The Secret Sauce of E-Stonia”; Anna Piperal, “e-Estonia: Redefining Governance, Simplifying Business,” *Socitm Spring Conference* (London 2016), accessed January 3, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LpC8R-EaW4>.
- 69 Ingrid Kohtla, “Estonian President Kersti Kaljulaid to Open the Official Slush Opening Party by Enter E-Estonia,” *Slush*, 2016, accessed December 1, 2016, <http://www.slush.org/news/estonian-president-kersti-kaljulaid-open-official-slush-opening-party-enter-e-estonia/>.
- 70 Sue Curry Jansen, “Designer Nations: Neo-Liberal Nation Branding; Brand Estonia,” *Social Identities* 14 (2008): 121.
- 71 Zala Volcic and Mark Andrejevic, eds., *Commercial Nationalism: Selling the Nation and Nationalizing the Sell*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Magdalena Kania-Lundholm, “Nation in Market Times: Connecting the National and the Commercial. A Research Overview,” *Sociology Compass* 8 (2014): 603–13.
- 72 Nadia Kaneva, “Nation Branding in Post-Communist Europe: Identities, Markets, and Democracy,” in *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the “New” Europe*, ed. Nadia Kaneva (London; New York: Routledge, 2012), 6.
- 73 Melissa Aronczyk, “‘Living the Brand’: Nationality, Globality and the Identity Strategies of Nation Branding Consultants,” *International Journal of Communication* 2 (2008): 55.
- 74 Melissa Aronczyk, *Branding the Nation: The Global Business of National Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15.
- 75 Katja Valaskivi, *Cool Nations: Media and the Social Imaginary of the Branded Country* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), 3.
- 76 *Ibid.*
- 77 Aronczyk, *Branding the Nation*, 76.
- 78 *Ibid.*, 76–77.
- 79 Enterprise Estonia, “E-Estonia: The Future Is Now.”
- 80 Taavi Kotka, Carlos Ivan Vargás Álvarez del Castillo, and Kaspar Korjus, “Estonian E-Residency: Benefits, Risk and Lessons Learned,” 7.
- 81 “Estonia – Running a Country Like a Start-Up,” Estonian ICT Export Cluster, accessed September 21, 2016, <https://e-Estonia.com/estonia-running-a-country-like-a-start-up/>.
- 82 Taavi Kotka, “Country as a Service: Estonia’s New Model,” *Computerworld*, May 18, 2016, accessed December 3, 2016, <http://www.computerworld.com/article/3071209/digital-transformation/country-as-a-service-estonia-s-new-model.html>.
- 83 “Estonia opens e-Residency to the World,” Estonian ICT Export Cluster, accessed September 21, 2016, <https://e-estonia.com/estonia-opens-e-residency-to-the-world/>.
- 84 In contrast to many other former Soviet states, Estonia’s struggle for independence in the late 1980s and early 1990s was a peaceful and non-violent process that is most often called the “Singing Revolution”. As the introduction of the documentary *The Singing Revolution* puts it: “Most people don’t think about singing when they think about revolution. But song was the weapon of choice when Estonian sought to free themselves from decades of Soviet occupation” (“About the film: The Singing Revolution,” accessed December 12, 2016, <https://singingrevolution.com/about-the-film>).
- 85 “A Lot of Digital Nomads Love Estonia. Here’s Why the Feeling Is Mutual,” *E-Residency Blog*, December 27, 2016, accessed December 30, 2017, <https://medium.com/e-residency-blog/a-lot-of-digital-nomads-love-estonia-heres-why-the-feeling-is-mutual-78afd191f6a8#.1f6loybfn>.
- 86 “Estonian E-Residency,” Estonian ICT Export Cluster, n.d., accessed January 3, 2017, <https://e-Estonia.com/e-residents/about/>.
- 87 *Ibid.*
- 88 Kotka, del Castillo, and Korjus, “Estonian E-Residency,” 4.
- 89 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 90 Enterprise Estonia, “E-Estonia: The Future Is Now”.
- 91 For a list of e-residents, see “10 Notable People Who Are E-Residents of Estonia”, LeapIN Blog, October 11, 2016, accessed December 3, 2016, <https://blog.leapin.eu/10-notable-people-who-are-e-residents-of-estonia-c3b7cdc3c7d6>.
- 92 Mark Scott, “Estonians Embrace Life in a Digital World”; Ben Hammersley, “Why You Should Be an E-Resident of Estonia,” *Wired Magazine*, 2015, <http://www.wired.co.uk/magazine/archive/2015/07/features/estonia-e-resident/viewall>; Matthew Reynolds, “‘Land Is So Yesterday’: E-Residents and ‘Digital Embassies’ Could Replace Country Borders,” *Wired Security*, 2016.
- 93 “e-Estonia.com: The Digital Society,” Estonian ICT Export Cluster, n.d., accessed January 3, 2017, <https://www.e-estonia.com/>.
- 94 Toomas Hendrik Ilves was Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia from 1996 to 1998 and again from 1999 to 2002.
- 95 Toomas Hendrik Ilves, “E-Estonia and the New Europe,” October 25, 2000, accessed February 10, 2017, <http://www.vm.ee/et/node/42610>.
- 96 Toomas Hendrik Ilves, *E-Estonia and the New Europe* (London: Eesti Välisministeerium, 2000).
- 97 Commission of the European Communities, “eEurope: An Information Society For All; Communication on a Commission Initiative for the Special European Council of Lisbon, 23 and 24 March.”
- 98 Riigikantselei [Government Office, Republic of Estonia], “Riigikantselei Alustas E-Valitsuse Projekti” [The Government Office has launched the e-government project], 2000, <https://riigikantselei.ee/et/uudised/riigikantselei-alustas-e-valitsuse-projekti>.
- 99 *Ibid.*
- 100 Interestingly, it was also in 2000 that the Estonian Parliament declared the right to Internet access a human right. See: Nicholas Jackson, “United Nations Declares Internet Access a Basic Human Right,” *The Atlantic*, June 3, 2011, accessed December 3, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2011/06/united-nations-declares-internet-access-a-basic-human-right/239911/>.
- 101 See Eesti Välisministeerium [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Estonia], “Pilk Peeglisse: Glance at the Mirror,” 2001, accessed December 3, 2016, http://www.vm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/web-static/234/PILK_2001.PDF; Eesti Välisministeerium [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Estonia], “Pilk Peeglisse: Glance at the Mirror,”

- 2002, accessed December 3, 2016, <http://www.vm.ee/et/uudised/pilk-peeplisse-2002>. While this publication continued to be published until 2008, the chapter “e-Estonia” only appeared in the 2001 and 2002 issues. All of the issues of the “Pilk Peeplisse: Glance at the Mirror” can be downloaded from <http://www.vm.ee/et/uudised/pilk-peeplisse-2008>.
- 102 For an overview of these e-solutions, see “Components for Digital Society,” Estonian ICT Export Cluster, accessed January 3, 2017, <https://e-estonia.com/components/>.
- 103 Apolitical, “Inside the World’s Most Advanced Digital Society – and What It’s Doing Next,” *The Huffington Post*, July 7, 2016, accessed December 3, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/apolitical/inside-the-worlds-most-advanced_b_10856718.html.
- 104 Monty Munford, “Is Estonia the New European Startup Hub?” *The Telegraph*, April 9, 2016, accessed December 5, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/2016/04/09/is-estonia-the-new-european-startup-hub/>.
- 105 Jake Horowitz, “The Unexpected Story of How This Tiny Country Became the Most Tech-Savvy on Earth,” *Mic*, June 19, 2016, accessed December 3, 2016, <https://mic.com/articles/146542/the-unexpected-story-of-how-this-tiny-country-became-the-most-tech-savvy-on-earth#.pLZOtoQmF>.
- 106 “How We Got There: Estonia’s Road to a Digital Society,” Estonian ICT Export Cluster, accessed December 3, 2016, <https://e-estonia.com/the-story/how-we-got-there/>.
- 107 For example, see “Toolkit,” Estonian ICT Export Cluster, accessed December 6, 2016, <https://e-estonia.com/toolkit/>.
- 108 For example, see Tim Mansel, “How Estonia Became E-Stonia”; Jake Horowitz, “The Unexpected Story of How This Tiny Country Became the Most Tech-Savvy on Earth”; Andrew Keen, “E-Stonia: Country Using Technology to Rebrand Itself as the Anti-Russia”; Mark Scott, “Estonians Embrace Life in a Digital World”; Hammersley, “Why You Should Be an E-Resident of Estonia”; Reynolds, “‘Land Is So Yesterday’: E-Residents and ‘Digital Embassies’ Could Replace Country Borders.”
- 109 Michal Buchowski, “The Specter of Orientalism in Europe: From Exotic Other to Stigmatized Brother,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 79 (2006): 463–82; Manduhai Buyandelgeriyin, “Post-Post-Transition Theories: Walking on Multiple Paths,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 37 (2008); Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery, eds., *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999); Narcis Tulbure, “Introduction to Special Issue: Global Socialisms and Postsocialisms,” *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 27 (2009): 2–18.
- 110 Alison Stenning and Kathrin Hörschelmann, “History, Geography and Difference in the Post-Socialist World: Or, Do We Still Need Post-Socialism?” *Antipode* 40 (2008): 320–21.
- 111 Agnes Gagyi and Gergő Pulay, “An Incapacity to See Ourselves as Part of the Whole World, and the Efforts to See Ourselves as Part of Europe. An Interview with Jozef Böröcz on Post-Socialist ‘transition’, EU-Accession, and a Potential Left Perspective in East-Central Europe,” 2012, 1, accessed December 3, 2016, http://media.wix.com/ugd/87303d_obf752d9957a48f38f26231c42e705e5.pdf.
- 112 Kristian Petrov, “The Concept of Transition in Transition,” *Baltic Worlds* 1 (2014): 36.
- 113 Atila Lukić and Gordan Maslov, “‘Did Somebody Say ‘Transition’?’ A Critical Intervention into the Use of a Notion,” *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 13 (2014): 203.
- 114 “How We Got There: Estonia’s Road to a Digital Society,” Estonian ICT Export Cluster; “Turning Around the 2007 Cyber Attack: Lessons from Estonia,” Estonian ICT Export Cluster, September 16, 2013, accessed December 3, 2016, <https://e-estonia.com/turning-around-2007-cyber-attack-lessons-estonia/>.
- 115 “How We Got There: Estonia’s Road to a Digital Society,” Estonian ICT Export Cluster.
- 116 Ilves, “E-Estonia and the New Europe.”
- 117 Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory*, 112–113.
- 118 Ernesto Laclau, “Constructing Universality,” in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, ed. Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek (London; New York: Verso, 2000), 303.
- 119 Laclau, *Emancipation(s)*, 36.
- 120 *Ibid.*, 63.
- 121 Joscha Wullweber, “Global Politics and Empty Signifiers: The Political Construction of High Technology,” *Critical Policy Studies* 9 (2014): 82.
- 122 Dirk Nabers, *A Poststructuralist Discourse Theory of Global Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 117.
- 123 Laclau, *Emancipation(s)*, 39.
- 124 Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (London, New York: Verso, 2007), 36.
- 125 Ernesto Laclau, “Ideology and Post-Marxism,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 11 (2006): 109.
- 126 Wullweber, “Global Politics and Empty Signifiers: The Political Construction of High Technology,” 82.
- 127 “How We Got There: Estonia’s Road to a Digital Society,” Estonian ICT Export Cluster.
- 128 Taavi Kotka, “Estonia as an Engineer’s Dream,” *Life in Estonia* (Tallinn, 2013).
- 129 Daniel Vaarik, “Where Stuff Happens First: White Paper on Estonia’s Digital Ideology” (Tallinn, 2015), accessed December 3, 2016, https://www.mkm.ee/sites/default/files/digitalideology_final.pdf.
- 130 Daniel Vaarik, “Escaping E-Narnia: Estonia’s New Digital Ideology”; Daniel Vaarik, “The Secret Sauce of E-Stonia.”
- 131 *Ibid.*
- 132 Karen West, “Articulating Discursive and Materialist Conceptions of Practice in the Logics Approach to Critical Policy Analysis,” *Critical Policy Studies* 5 (2011): 418.

BALTIC WORLDS

balticworlds.com



Bakhtinian theory

The postcolonial & postsocialist perspective

Baltic Worlds' special section

Introduction: Bakhtin and the postcolonial & postsocialist perspective

The 15th 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 Ponzio, 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 disintegration of the state and its system of governance, large scale migration, and the rise in racial, ethnic, 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 reverential applications of the concepts, in order to critique the structures of oppression, expose the multilayered nodes of contact that we have with each other and with ourselves, 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,

“THIS SPECIAL SECTION IS IMPORTANT IN THE CONTEXT OF A FURIOUSLY CHANGING AND INCREASINGLY POLARIZED WORLD.”

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 – “Bakhtinian 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, transcultural effort of bringing together two varied perspectives through multiple voices is representative of what scholars would define as dialogism.

The special section starts with a roundtable discussion of the Bakhtinian legacy by the leading specialists in the field. We interviewed Professors Ken Hirschkop, Craig Brandist, 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 Viktoriya 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 artistic performances 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 postsocialist 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 Word: Bakhtin, Dialogism and the Postcolonial Memoir” reconsiders notions of narrative liminality and interruptive dialogism in the reading of the postcolonial memoir. Juxtaposing the postcolonial in-betweenness of critical discourse with Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea of hybridized, collusive 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 Alexander’s 1993 *Fault Lines: A Memoir* and the revised 2003 version. Situating them as centripetal and centrifugal texts that operate in simultaneity 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 representation, 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 Hasyarnava. 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 Ångermanland, Northern Sweden in the 17th century. Using a Bakhtinian approach, but also Sergei 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 Gradszkova
Paromita Chakrabarti**

literature

Mikhail Bakhtin, *Tvorchestvo François Rabelais i narodnaia kultura Srednevekovia i Renessansa*. Moscow, 1990. Published in English as: *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky, Bloomington, IN, 1984.

Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery, “Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War”, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 51, no. 1 (2009), 6–34.

Chioni David Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?”, in *PLMA*, 116, no. 11 (2001), 111–128.



contents

interview

48 A Discussion on the Bakhtin circle

peer-review articles

- 57 Ukrainian popular culture: In the context of Bakhtin’s philosophy of laughter and the postcolonial perspective, *Viktoriya Sukovata*
- 66 The grotesque body in Indian comic tradition: An aesthetic of transgression, *Rajni Mujral*
- 73 Witchhunt in northern Sweden: A Bakhtinian approach, *Per-Arne Bodin*
- 82 Crisis of the responsible word: Bakhtin, dialogism and the postcolonial memoir, *Paromita Chakrabarti*
- 90 Up-coming workshop

A discussion on the Bakhtin Circle

by Yulia Gradskova & Paromita Chakrabarti

Paromita Chakrabarti and Yulia Gradskova discuss the Bakhtin Circle with five experts in the field: Caryl Emerson, university professor emeritus of Slavic languages and literatures, Princeton University; Lakshmi Bandlamudi, professor of psychology at LaGuardia Community College, City University of New York; Ken Hirschkop, professor of English at the University of Waterloo, Ontario; Craig Brandist, professor of cultural theory and intellectual history and director of the Bakhtin Centre, at the University of Sheffield; and Galin Tihanov, the George Steiner professor of comparative literature at Queen Mary University of London.

In what ways do you think the ideas developed by members of the group known as the Bakhtin Circle could prove useful for theorizing postcolonialism 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 multilingualness, polyglossia, 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, unsupportable. 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 any adequate consideration of linguistic, ideological, and wider cultural struggles requires a sustained institutional analysis that relates cultural phenomena to their underpinnings in socio-economic structures and dynamics. The works of the Circle do not really help us here, and in some respects the attempts to maintain a strict methodological division between the natural and human sciences, which pervades Bakhtin's work in particular, makes this task more difficult. Contemporary philosophy of science clearly reveals the conduct of the natural sciences to be based on dialogic interaction as much as the human sciences. We therefore need to be prepared to supplement and revise what are now called 'Bakhtinian' ideas if we are to make much headway here, for only this would allow us to build on ideas like dialogism, heteroglossia (*raznorechie*), novelization, and so on, in ways that would lead to an illuminating approach to the cultures of societies and communities that have been, and in many cases continue to be, particularly badly affected by colonialism and imperialism."

"One other issue is the fact that the critique of the entanglement of Western scholarship about the 'Orient' which, after a number of metamorphoses, led to postcolonial theory itself, was something that has its roots in the political and intellectual arenas of Russia in what we might call the revolutionary period (1900–1933). Members and



associates of the 'Circle' participated in these arenas: two members or associates of the Circle, Nikolai Konrad and Mikhail Tubianskii, participated in the development of critical scholarship of Asian cultures. If we are to develop 'Bakhtinian' ideas in ways that would be enlightening for postcolonial critiques, then we need to consider these dimensions of 'Bakhtinian' theory in a rather more sustained way than has been typical until now."

CARYL EMERSON: "I confess that I have never understood what it means to 'theorize' something – especially when that thing is another abstraction or -ism – so 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 postsocialist 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 'apophatically,' 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 production 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 reaccentuation of the speech of others. While the ruling stratum tries to posit a single discourse as exemplary, the subordinate classes are inclined to subvert this *monologic* closure. In the sphere of literature, poetry and epics represent the centripetal forces within the cultural arena, whereas the novel is the structurally elaborated expression of popular *Ideologiekritik*, the radical criticism of society. Members of the circle included Matvei Isaevich Kagan (1889–1937), Pavel Nikolaevich Medvedev (1891–1938); Lev Vasilievich Pumpianskii (1891–1940), Ivan Ivanovich Sollertinskii (1902–1944), Valentin Nikolaevich Voloshinov (1895–1936), 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 practices* that are bound to be open-ended and ambiguous.

“Ashis Nandy rightly said that the colonized subjects, particularly in the Indian scene, relate to the colonizer as an ‘intimate enemy’ – capturing the mixture of emotions: desire and discord and accommodation and rejection coexist as multi-voiced entities. This heteroglossic nature of reality lends itself well to Bakhtinian interpretation. However, the ideas of the Bakhtin Circle cannot and must not be extended in a mechanical fashion to the post-colonial world. For instance, the epic/novel distinction breaks down in ancient cultures like India, yet at the same time we cannot assume a merger between the epic and the novel either. What we see in the Indian scene is alternating processes of novelization and canonization in interpreting epic texts, because they are living, open-ended texts. Furthermore, multiple temporalities coexist in the culture and the heterochronous reality is captured in the popular expression that epic texts in India are as modern as they are ancient. Time stretches into the ancient as much as it moves into the future, and these interesting chronotopic motifs are demonstrated in my work *Dialogics of Self, the Mahabharata and Culture: The History of Understanding and Understanding of History* (Anthem Press, 2010).

“The analytical tools provided by Bakhtin – genres and chronotopes – are incredibly sharp and have enormous explanatory capability. Surely they must be applied with a great deal of care and caution and sensitivity to the specifics of basic realities of cultural life. Bakhtin himself would have demanded this kind of critical application rather than the mechanical wholesale embrace of his ideas. Such a critical extension of Bakhtinian categories would not only illuminate the complexities of postcolonial experiences, but also show some loopholes to release cultures from the trappings of postcoloniality.”

GALIN TIHANOV: “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 story of reversal; it is the story of a genre that ascends from being an underdog of cultural history to a ‘colonizer’ of literature, as Bakhtin puts it (interesting that he should be speaking in those terms), a genre that takes over and permeates all other literary genres. 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, even now as postcolonial theory moves to a phase where it is more interested in postcolonial ecology, cultural transfers, and other ‘softer’ issues. As for postsocialism, I am less confident that Bakhtin has much to contribute here. The Rabelais book is, of course, full of suggestions as to the power of the masses to question and subvert official ideology; but the Rabelais book is also a celebration of a quasitotalitarian collective body, which I believe is an idea that is difficult to defend in the present climate, in which postsocialist theory and practice still remember the lessons of poststructuralism.”

How can Bakhtinian ideas expand and enrich our understanding and analyses of contemporary political movements and social transformations? Please also consider the discourse about immigration in Europe and the US.

KEN HIRSCHKOP: “Bakhtin argues that a modern form of writing and prose can ‘represent’ the discourses it portrays in a distinctively historical way: one that ironizes their claims, contextualizes their use, and endows them with a kind of force they might otherwise not have. This should alert us to the importance of irony and parody in our political discourse and the dangers of certain kinds of moralizing and ‘proclamatory’ discourse. There is a lesson here for the Left, which often regards irony and ‘contextualized’ discourse as a sign of weakness or political backsliding.

“It’s usually impossible to simply line up a style of discourse, with a political position, but in the case of anti-immigrant discourse we might have an exception. Can hostility to immigrants be ironic or ‘dialogic’? I don’t think so.”

CRAIG BRANDIST: “If we consider the work of the Circle as a whole then it seems to me that we are provided with some very useful approaches to how the ruling ideology functions in trying to close down alternative understandings of socio-political categories and the ways in which this can be resisted and ultimately overcome. Of course contested categories like ‘development’, ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ are central to this type of analysis. I also think that the centrality of the utterance rather than the sign allows us to understand the role of the social agent in socio-political life in ways that the poststructuralist approach fails to do so. I also think it allows us to analyze how ideological forms emerge in social interaction and conflict rather better than the Foucauldian notions of governance and

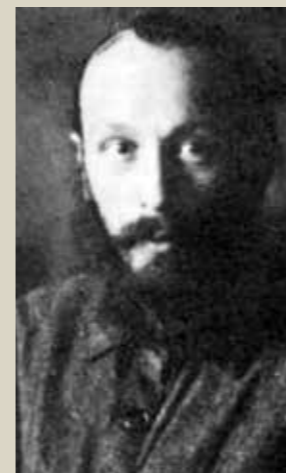
discourse do. But, once again, we come up against the lack of a developed political theory in Bakhtinian thought, and the way in which institutional questions are relegated in importance behind rather abstract ethical principles. In this sense, there is a lot of work to do to supplement and revise Bakhtinian 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.”

CARYL EMERSON: “In the most personalist (that is, not institutionalized) ways. Bakhtin would counsel us to find ethnic and cultural difference interesting and self-enriching, not alienating or threatening. Through his cluster of values and images known as the carnivalesque, he would urge us not to be selfish repositories of material goods or even of fixed ideas but rather to be ‘transit points’ open to all manner of change—and yet never to shirk committing to a position and accepting the consequences. On the current refugee and immigration crises, the best Bakhtinian ideas to keep in mind are his mature writings on the humanities, a true refuge of comparative studies, which by their very nature require a constant infusion of difference.”

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.

“Therefore encounters with different others was a necessary condition for a deeper understanding of self and other. When a culture encounters other cultures, many hidden aspects of each culture are revealed and that creates 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 with respect to immigration 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 in Bakhtinian thought, 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 BAKHTIN (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 escaped being sent to the Gulag only thanks to friends’ support. Bakhtin spent the years 1928–1934 in exile in Kazakhstan and taught in Saransk University in Russia from 1936 to the early 1960s. He also worked as a school-teacher for a time.

In his research on Fyodor Dostoevsky’s works (1929), Bakhtin developed the ideas of dialogue as an immanent form of speaking, writing, and self-perception. Bakhtin was also one of the first to

explore the impossibility of neutrality of language by drawing attention to the importance of context. But Bakhtin’s most famous work is probably his study of the 16th-century French writer François Rabelais (*Rabelais and Folk Culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, finished in 1940, but published only in 1965). In this study Bakhtin explored specifics of Renaissance literature and focused on laughter as a specific form of the perception of the world (*mirosozertsanie*), a form of truth about history and about humans. It was in the work on Rabelais that Bakhtin also explored the special role of the carnival as a social institution. This study Bakhtin defended 1946 as his doctoral dissertation in the Institute of World Literature, Moscow.

GALIN TIHANOV: “Especially in his early work, Bakhtin is marvelously seminal on the question of otherness, and what it actually means to accept the Other. We need to remember, perhaps, that he begins as a thinker motivated by problems of ethics: What is at stake in the process of creative writing? What does ‘ethical’ creative writing entail? How can the writer shape his/her hero (the Other), without intrusion and without depriving the Other of otherness? The whole notion of dialogue in the Dostoevsky book comes as a response to this earlier set of questions which Bakhtin asks in his long essay ‘Author and Hero’. Equally, the early Bakhtin is vividly interested in the idea of boundaries; he sees them as porous and yet not entirely fluid. Bakhtin’s work could help us rethink Derrida’s notion of hospitality and, indeed, most of the literature that has appeared in the wake of the revival of cosmopolitanism in the last 15 years or so, and with this also the problems of exile and migration (his brother, Nikolai, was himself an exile in France, later an émigré in England). As for social and political movements, we have to be cautious not to uproot Bakhtin too much from his own intellectual home: after all, he was writing as a thinker who was pondering questions of ethics and cultural theory, not of political philosophy per se. The early Bakhtin is, of course, an inspiration for democrats (dialogue; polyphony), but the later Bakhtin, particularly with the Rabelais book, retreats into a corporative vision of solidarity without an underlying liberal belief in the autonomy of the individual, without a dialogue with, or respect for the private world of, the individual.”

Bakhtin’s work deals almost exclusively with European literary forms. Do you think it would be fair to regard Bakhtin as a Eurocentric thinker?

KEN HIRSCHKOP: “Matters are more complicated than the question implies; plenty of Russians did not think of themselves as, in 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 I think ‘Eurocentric’ implies something more cohesive than is the case with Bakhtin. That said, his reference points, intellectually, lie almost exclusively in Germany and Russia. Perhaps more significantly, his historical sense depends entirely on a very classical 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 BRANDIST: “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 against 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 research and analyses. Bakhtin is a Eurocentric thinker only in the first sense: his published works are rooted in European philosophy and focused upon European culture, with few excursions into non-European cultures. 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 viewed this process as applicable to all cultures, and there is no clear indication that he tried to erect any hierarchy of cultures. Genres and ‘chronotopes’ appear to correspond to modes of human thinking that flourish in certain, poorly defined, historical conditions. This is probably due to the influence of contemporary forms of Soviet cultural theory that were critical of Eurocentric (in the second sense) approaches to language and culture.”

CARYL EMERSON: “This is a poorly-posed question, in my view, especially since ‘Eurocentric’ is often perceived to be a term of abuse. Bakhtin (much like Yuri Lotman and his Tartu School semioticians a generation later) thought with the material accessible to the intellectual pool of their eras. Not every mind can embrace every culture knowledgeably, nor from its native point of view. Bakhtin, like many Russian and German thinkers (including Hegel, Freud, Leo Tolstoy and Lotman) tended to be a ‘universalizer,’ that is, he assumed that what occurred to his body and mind was applicable to most other bodies and minds. But, at base the ideas 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.”

“Especially in his early work, Bakhtin is marvelously seminal on the question of otherness, and what it actually means to accept the Other.”



LAKSHMI BANDLAMUDI is professor of psychology in LaGuardia Community College, City University of New York. She works with the Bakhtinian/Vygotskian framework to explore questions about dialogic consciousness and socio-historical epistemology. Her works include *Difference, Dialogue and Development in the Bakhtinian World* (Routledge 2015), *The Dialogics of Self, the Mahabharata and Culture*, *The History of Understanding and Understanding of History* (Anthem Press, 2010) and a travelogue *Movements with the Cosmic Dancer, On Pilgrimage to Kailash Manasarovar* (2006).



CARYL EMERSON is A. Watson Armour III university professor of Slavic languages and literatures, emerita, Princeton University. She is the author of several books, among which are *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford University Press, 1990, with Gary Saul Morson), *The Cambridge Introduction to Russian Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2008) and *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (Princeton University Press, 1997). Professor Emerson’s books and articles about Russian literature and Bakhtin have been translated into several languages, including Chinese and Portuguese.



KEN HIRSCHKOP is associate professor of English language and literature, University of Waterloo, Canada. He was born in New York and wrote his doctoral dissertation on theory of language by Mikhail Bakhtin at the University of Southampton. Professor Hirschkop published widely on cultural and literary theory and modern philosophy of language. Among his publications are the books *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* (co-edited with David Shepherd: Manchester University Press, 1989) and *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic for Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 1999).



CRAIG BRANDIST is professor of cultural theory and intellectual history and the director of the Bakhtin Centre. He has published widely on Russian literature, intellectual history, and critical thought, including *Carnival Culture and the Soviet Modernist Novel* (1996), *The Bakhtin Circle: Philosophy, Culture and Politics* (2002), *The Dimensions of Hegemony: Language, Culture and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (2016; ed. with David Shepherd and Galin Tihanov), *The Bakhtin Circle: In the Master’s Absence* (2004), and *Politics and the Theory of Language in the USSR 1917–1938* (ed. with Katya Chown; 2010). He is currently working on a book about Antonio Gramsci’s time in the USSR (1922–1925), and on a new monograph about the critique of Indo-European philology in Revolutionary Russia.



GALIN TIHANOV is the George Steiner Professor of Comparative Literature at Queen Mary University of London. He was previously professor of comparative literature and intellectual history and founding codirector of the Research Institute for Cosmopolitan Cultures at the University of Manchester. His research focus is: cosmopolitanism, exile, and transnationalism. His publications include four books and nine edited volumes, as well as over a hundred articles on German, Russian, French, and Central European intellectual and cultural history and literary theory.

LAKSHMI BANDLAMUDI: “Bakhtin’s ideas are certainly rooted in European philosophy and literary works, but that does not make him a Eurocentric thinker in a pejorative sense. Using one particular philosophy, or text or cultural 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 were grounded in the Indian intellectual traditions, 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 a Eurocentric thinker.”

GALIN TIHANOV: “This is an excellent question. The short answer is, actually, no. Yes, Bakhtin appears to be relying on a Western canon to validate his theses; the Rabelais book begins with a comparison of Rabelais with Voltaire, Shakespeare, Cervantes, etc. But, in truth, Bakhtin is more interested in the literature and culture of premoder-

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 verbal masses – all of which long predates European culture of the age of modernity (beginning roughly with the Renaissance), which is the only dominant European culture we know. Even Rabelais' s 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, 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. 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 it were. An assessment of the validity of such concepts requires an assessment of the institutional foundations of the European phenomenon 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 skeptical enlightenments 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 carnival. 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 application."

"Carnival is an essential part of the dialogic world, for it catalyzes new beginnings and keeps the system open-ended. If outsidership is an essential part of aesthetic consciousness, a periodic merger into the collective is an essential part of carnivalized consciousness, and together they keep the dialogue alive. Ancient cultures like India 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 application."

GALIN TIHANOV: "This is also a problem for scholars from Europe; they often tend to work with these concepts as if they were monoliths 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 rejigging to be useful in the analysis of materials outside Europe and North America. Both 'narrative' and 'dialogue' are universal in their scope. But 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 limiting. Not every society will place the same value on parody and irony that Bakhtin does and not every society will think that the historical chronotope as Bakhtin describes it is the proper way to represent change and development. What will be interesting is to see how a different sense of what a chronotope ought to be affects the core of the analytical category itself."

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 2015 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 Mahabharata*, I have been engaged in comparative analysis between Bakhtin and the Sanskrit grammarian Bhartrhari, and I find their dialogic encounters, even after crossing cultural spaces and historical times, to be incredibly valuable and exciting. Theoretical concepts are not some templates to be applied mechanically; they need to be deployed with great consideration to basic realities."

GALIN TIHANOV: "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 conceptual 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 quite work to explain the repertoire of genres in the literature written in Sanskrit. It is only through productive confrontations with other cultural constellations that a theory can be tested, modified, and developed. The impulse emanating from Bakhtin's 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 *Sobranie sochinenie* [Collected works], which means we finally have a reliable and fairly comprehensive edition of Bakhtin's texts. There has been some excellent philological 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 off 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 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."

CRAIG BRANDIST: “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 employment, 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 *Bakhtinologiia* 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 Konrad and Tubianskii has tended to be carried out by historians of Oriental Studies and they have been left largely 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 Tubianskii 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.”

CARYL EMERSON: “The completion of the *Collected Works* in 2014 was an important event, since the Bakhtinian corpus emerged in a random, piecemeal way (the translations too). Very good work is being done in Russia, most of it applied or syncretic. But Bakhtin, post-boom and post-fad, is now a *classic*. His theories can be criticized and re-integrated into a tradition in a cooler, more scholarly fashion, without awe but with attention to his sources of inspiration. Such a maturation of the field,

which sees Bakhtin the Thinker as a product of his own time, happened to Russian Formalism and is beginning to happen with the Lotman School. This is welcome news.”

GALIN TIHANOV: “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. A classic in the sense that the terminology, the categories, are by now deeply engrained in the vocabulary of literary scholarship, to the extent that the name of their author is no longer even worth mentioning. (Very few thinkers enjoy such status; in philosophy and the social sciences, and in cultural theory, Marx, Nietzsche, Foucault, and Derrida come to mind.) This is, of course, a double-edged sword, for a theory only lives as long as it is in motion and changes in the hands of its practitioners. It is in this context that we should also see the invaluable edition of Bakhtin’s *Collected Works*, which was completed a few years ago in Moscow. This edition is a veritable monument of scholarship, something generations of Bakhtin scholars will benefit from.” x

By Paromita Chakrabarti, associate professor of English and director of global research initiatives at H.R. College, University of Mumbai, and Yulia Gradszkova, associate professor at the Institute of Contemporary History, Södertörn University.

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

“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.”



In the context of Bakhtin’s philosophy of laughter & 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 Ukrajna*, *Vital’ka*, 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 carnival and of the ideas of the Australian Slavic scholar M. Pavlyshyn who has elaborated the concepts anticolonialism and postcolonialism in relation to contemporary Ukrainian culture.

KEY WORDS: Ukrainian TV comedy shows, Ukrainian popular culture, postsocialist culture, postcolonial culture, carnival.

The purpose of my study is to investigate the most vivid phenomenon of Ukrainian popular culture that emerged after Ukrainian independence in 1991: television comedies. In contrast to post-Soviet Ukrainian literature, which has been the subject of numerous studies over the last twenty years,¹ Ukrainian comedy shows have not been subjected to focused scholarly analysis.² Contemporary Ukrainian popular culture, especially the TV comedies, remains almost unknown outside the country, despite the fact that they are fascinating phenomena that reflect the tone of public sentiment to a great degree. The other important reason to investigate Ukrainian television comedies is that public comedy in any soci-



The Gentleman Show was sometimes devoted to political themes, but more often to family, gender, and national minorities' issues.

ety – 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 and national source material 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's 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 considered not to be philosophy so much as a pragmatic way to understand cultural politics in society and the "aesthetics of democracy".³ In my study I use the most suitable concepts of Bakhtin's theory: *carnival*,⁴ which develops the idea ideas of a grotesque collective body as a symbol of the anti-norm and eccentric behavior in a carnival space-time, the *carnival chronotope*, where carnival members try to "familiarize" the space of communication; the concept of *laughter culture*,⁵ designates the phenomenon in which "bottom" and "top" of culture change places, reversing the hierarchies of everyday life.

FINALLY, MY AIM is to focus attention on the cultural transformations that occurred in Ukrainian popular culture during the

two decades after Ukrainian independence, analyzing these transformations as part of a postsocialist or postcolonial culture. The phrase postcolonial culture has many definitions, to be sure, but I suggest that the most fruitful use of the term, which I will follow here, was proposed by the Australian scholar in Ukrainian studies Marko Pavlyshyn, who defined it and related terms specifically in relation to Ukrainian culture. He noted that if "socialist culture" can be characterized as a culture which was under the pressure of the (Soviet) state and which had to be a part of a propaganda mouthpiece, the Ukrainian postsocialist culture of the 1990s was to become more depended on commercial market⁶ than on political ideology.

Other oppositions – colonial vs. anticolonial or postcolonial – were contextualized by Pavlyshyn in relation to Ukrainian literature and writers' public activity in the 20th century. Pavlyshyn developed his notion of cultural colonialism from E. Said's and H. Bhabha's concepts and explained it relative to Soviet and post-Soviet Ukrainian culture. Soviet cultural politics quasinated the unequal relations between a metropolitan center and a colonial periphery as universally applicable, where the culture which was created in the center (Moscow) was considered to be "normative" and "exemplary", and where national artists (or writers) could gain a

high professional status only after recognition in Moscow and in Russian language journals and publishing houses. The Russian language was considered to be the language of "cultural norm", and all "national" languages were indirectly presented as "marginal", or "additional", or "provincial". Despite the fact that the Soviet culture produced a large number of movies, TV shows, and books with the participation of the all Soviet nations and in some cases, ethnicity was emphasized as a sign of Soviet internationalism or multiculturalism, the "ethnographism" in Soviet and Russian mass culture was a kind of "cultural exoticism" because it presented a "cultural contrast" to the "norm".

Pavlyshyn argues that all anticolonial (i.e. nationalism-oriented) strategies in Soviet or post-Soviet Ukraine were consolidated by the use of the rhetoric of *rebellion* against the Soviet empire and the Russian-oriented norms. But a problem was that the anticolonialism strategy of the former political opposition in Soviet or post-Soviet culture was seen as a subconscious desire to usurp the place of the official normative power, to put its own cultural values in place of the former colonial canon, and to dictate its own values exclusively, reversing the previous rule.⁷ Newcomers, previously excluded from the process of literary canon-making, became introduced in canon.⁸ Anticolonialism as the necessary cultural alternative is an unproductive strategy for Ukrainian society because it does not account for the significant cultural, religious, and lingual diversity in Ukraine;

the "anticolonial protest" took as a basic position that Ukraine is a politically, lingual, and culturally homogeneous society. In reality, different parts of Ukraine for many centuries belonged to different states and different cultures, resulting in a different systems of political and cultural values: while Lviv and Galicia had been traditionally oriented on Warsaw and Vienna as the centers of empire Moscow as a cultural center was attractive for the eastern and south Ukrainian regions. Postcolonialism is therefore a much more productive cultural strategy than anticolonialism, because postcolonialism in Ukraine means integration of all regional cultural strategies and of the voices of all national and cultural representatives. Pavlyshyn believes that postcolonialism in Ukraine marks a step away from the "romanticism" of anticolonial protests towards a "pragmatism" based on the multicultural reality of post-Soviet Ukraine.⁹ Postcolonialism refuses to consider culture in a binary system only as a collaboration with the authorities (the colonial type of relation) or as a liberation from them (anticolonial).¹⁰ Postcolonialism 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.

Tendencies in comedy in early post-Soviet Ukrainian culture

Ukrainian comedy shows emerged in the early 1990s, when the importance of commercial television culture as a realm of entertainment and a space for free experimentation was on the rise. The first shows, created immediately after the collapse of the USSR, manifest a strong desire to deconstruct Soviet propaganda clichés and artistic stereotypes. The first Ukrainian comedies drew upon the Soviet comedic traditions, to be sure, but they underwent an ironic reworking. The Ukrainian comedic culture of the 1990s blended the comic elements of the socialist comedic traditions with the postsocialist commercial culture, as well as the Ukrainian "anticolonial" ("remonstrative") discourse, which was presented as the parody of the canonical Soviet comedies.

The first and the most prominent post-Soviet Ukrainian project of the 1990s went on air as the *Maski Show* (in English, "Show of masks"), led by Georgiy Deliev with his comic troupe from Ukrainian Odessa. The series was released in 1991 and lasted until 2006. Some films in the series had titles suggesting they contained traditional socialist plots, such as *Maski in the kolkhoz* (1998), *Maski at the Red partisans* (1998), and *Maski in the army* (1993), but they parodied the typical scenes of the Soviet classic films of the 1960s to 1980s, with which the post-Soviet audience would have been very familiar. More than 58 films were shot and they were shown in every post-Soviet space, including Ukraine and Russia.

"ACCORDING TO BAKHTIN, THE CARNIVAL IS A SYSTEM OF PRODUCING NEW SUBJECTIVITIES THAT DO NOT BELONG IN THE REALM OF 'NORMALCY'."

The basic genre of the *Maski* entailed parodying Soviet artistic and political identities, to point of absurdity and the grotesqueness. The accentuated provincialism of the characters was used to great comic effect, and was an integral part of the show. However, a detailed analysis of the *Maski* can demonstrate not only political parody but a complex mix of traditions of clowning, gestures of silent cinema, and Italian *commedia dell'arte*. The comedic effect was a result of situations with elements of the gag, ridiculous physical appearances, and the vulgar manners of

the characters. The artists of the show depicted the same social or psychological stereotypes in all episodes of the series (for example, "Poor scholar", "Provincial", "Fat man", "Sex vamp"). These characters acted in accordance with their social temperament and the expectations of spectators, and displayed the carnivalesque blend of Ukrainian burlesque images and global pop culture ("Sex vamp", "Poor scholar"). I believe that laughing at the plots and characters of the *Maski* had obvious therapeutic functions in the extreme social and political chaos of the post-

Soviet societies of the 1990s.

Many of the *Maski* characters were presented with ridiculous, deformed bodies (too big, too fat, too sexual) that can be understood as the Bakhtinian "grotesque body" of carnival subjectivity. According to Bakhtin, the carnival is a system of producing new subjectivities that do not belong in the realm of "normalcy"; the *Maski* evoke what is a clear example of carnivalesque laughter, because they mix the norms of Soviet culture and the antinormalcy of post-Soviet subjectivity. I consider the *Maski* to be a phenomenon of postsocialist culture, which developed into something more commercial, politically independent, and, in its orientation towards the Soviet canons, more ironic. The spectators of the *Maski* can get aesthetic pleasure at two different levels: those with a Soviet past can enjoy the bright irony and deconstruction of the canonical Soviet genres, and a Western audience who never experienced Soviet culture in any significant way can take pleasure from the carnival plots and grotesque appearance of the characters.

Another popular Ukrainian comedy of the 1990s was *The Gentleman Show*. It emerged in Odessa as well, which was recognized as the unofficial "capital of humor" during the Soviet period. *The Gentleman Show* was a TV comedy program created by the former participants of KVN at Odessa State University. "KVN" is an abbreviation that means "Club of playful and witty people" (Russian: *Klub veseluh i nahodchivuh*). It was an enormously popular Soviet TV show in which participants from different Soviet universities matched wittiness, bright mottos, erudition, and dramatic performances. KVN has existed since 1961, and has attracted millions of viewers. Amid the monotonous Soviet everyday life with a huge number of official events and extremely limited entertainment possibilities, the KVN show

was one of very few Soviet TV comedy shows. KVN was established in the late Khrushchev thaw, a period of liberal changes in the USSR, when Stalinist repressions had ended and totalitarian censorship waned. During Stalin's rule, a person could be sent to the Siberia camps for five years merely because they related an unfortunate anecdote, and that is why even very light and nonpolitical KVN jokes were experienced as fresh air by the Soviet viewership in the post-Stalinist epoch. During the 1960s and '70s, KVN was understood as part of the joyful and creative student life; many Soviet universities 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 Russia and Ukraine came out of the KVN shows. Many popular writers of satire of the late Soviet and post-Soviet eras 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 wittiness as an international project.

BECAUSE erudition, a demonstration of high intelligence, and an ironic attitude to the reigning social and political clichés was an essential part of the scientific life and the image of an intellectual in the Soviet Union, the KVN show was especially popular among the Soviet technical and creative intelligentsia, as well as among people who more or less associated themselves with the opposition to Soviet officialdom. KVN created, not precisely a satirical, but rather a very ironic type of laughter and the Soviet government allowed the KVN players such laughter. In the official culture this was understood to mean that young KVN competitors were not criticizing Soviet rule, but were simply demonstrating, as it were, their creative potential, which would be used in the service of the Soviet state in their professional future. It meant that the KVN produced a "Soviet" type of laughter and a socialist critique of weak points in the Soviet life from the standpoint of "a loyal Soviet subject", but not from any other standpoint – such as that of people who found themselves in opposition to the Soviet regime (the "anti-Soviet Other"), or those who found themselves outside the Soviet society (for example, the Western Other). Thus, it was a "permissible" laughter in the Soviet period, and this canon was used and transformed in the post-Soviet period.

The popular team from Ukraine, the "Odessa Gentlemen's Club", established a very fashionable, humorous show after winning many KVN competitions over the course of several years, and the participants of the Odessa team started their own independent show in the beginning of the 1990s. The sketches of *The Gentleman Show* were devoted sometimes to political themes, but much more to family, gender, and national minorities' issues. The Ukrainian *Gentleman Show* constructed its

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

humor on the intersection of the Jewish, Ukrainian, Russian comedic traditions because prerevolutionary, and Soviet Odessa was a very multicultural city with a strong accent on traditional Yiddish culture, including food, family relations, and music, in the Russian-Ukrainian surroundings, as presented in the postrevolutionary stories by Isaac Babel, Ilya Ilf, and Evgeny Petrov.¹¹ Solidarity with a national or minority subject became a principal point of view in the post-Soviet Ukrainian laughter of the middle 1990s, and it was a tradition from the Soviet under-

ground culture. The famous Soviet dissident writers P. Vayl' and A. Genis wrote that the "philosemitism of the Soviet intelligentsia of the 1960s was a particular case of identification with a representative of a national minority, not a national majority [...] because it was an opportunity to be on the side of a victim, but not an authority"¹² An ironic look from a (Jewish) periphery at the Soviet subjectivity offered more opportunities for humorous understanding of the absurd sides of the life. Jewish and Yiddish culture in the post-Soviet *Gentleman Show* was presented not as

a marginal culture, but as the subject of laughter, thus elevating the 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, Kharkov, Kiev, Dnepropetrovsk, and Donetsk, where Jews traditionally played a significant role in cultural, scientific, and artistic life. *The Gentleman Show* legitimized Jewishness not only as a cultural norm in the post-Soviet Ukrainian culture, but all ethnic minorities as a subject, not an object, of laughter. And it was not just a returning to Babel's traditions, but the creation of a space where representatives of different ethnic minorities move from a periphery to a cultural center. It meant that the minority subject, who was marked as the "provincial" and "ethnographic" body in the Soviet time, moved to the more tolerant, postcolonial and multinational chronotope which combined several different tendencies: socialist critique, postsocialist satire, and commercial entertainment at the same time. Where the colonial culture was constructed upon the opposition between the "imperial center" and the "colonial periphery", the anticolonial culture tried to inverse them, but postcolonial laughter adapted all existing cultural and ideological positions present in Ukrainian culture after independence.

Carnivalization in Ukrainian comedies after the 2000s

The show by the Ukrainian artist Andrei Danilko in the character of Verka Serduchka can be considered a fundamentally new phase in Ukrainian comedic culture, and a perfect example of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque. An identity, at once double and carnivalesque, of a new character was presented first at the simple level of a name: "Verka" is a female Russian name in a vulgar

pronunciation, and "Serduchka" is similar to a Ukrainian street nickname. This hybridization of the name can be considered a symbol of the transgressive subjectivity formed in Ukraine in the late 1990s.

The first performances of Andrei Danilko as the stage persona Verka Serduchka on Ukrainian TV was in 1997 in the comedic *SV show*. Verka Serduchka cut an image of the provincial, vulgar, but kind, friendly, and witty train conductor whose statements quickly became well known. The show had a principally "performative" character because many sketches by Danilko/Serduchka were improvised and depended on dialogue with other participants. We can thus say that the show *Verka Serduchka* uses several national comedic traditions: the Ukrainian tradition of burlesque, and the Western variety of the same – drag shows – and Soviet cross-dressing. Although burlesque is typical not only in the Ukrainian tradition,¹³ it is presented in the Ukrainian classic literature as a genre, and it was first used in Ivan Kotlyarevsky's "Aeneid" (1798–1820), an extremely popular Ukrainian burlesque poem which was built as the parody deconstruction of the classical *Aeneid* by Virgil, with a strong Ukrainian Cossack coloration. Kotlyarevsky was a successful Russian officer from an aristocratic East Ukrainian family and the first well-known Ukrainian writer in the Russian empire to use the "Malorussian" (contemporary Ukrainian) language in his literary works, and he gained great popularity because of his humorous and vivid style. He frequently used details from Ukrainian peasant life as symbols of the "bucolic" Ukrainian past. And he was the first to include Ukrainian "provincialism" and carnival as a cultural myth about Ukraine in the Russian cultural sphere.¹⁴ The combination of the comic elements with the fantastic ones, as well as the lyrical and ironic elements in the Ukrainian burlesque traditions, was also taken up by Danilko in the creation of the visual and speech images of his representations of Verka Serduchka.

The new (for Ukrainian comedies) feature was the emphasis on cross-dressing and queer motifs, as a male artist, Danilko, was portraying himself as a single coquette, not young, not old, with accented female sexuality. Some Western scholars have argued that queer motifs existed even in the Ukrainian literature of the 19th century,¹⁵ but they were hidden because queer images were not permitted

in Soviet literature, cinema, or theater. Queer motifs existed in the early 1920s, and they emerged in the liberal Soviet 1970s. The first Soviet popular film to use cross-dressing was *Hello, I am Charley's Aunt* (1975), based on the English play *Charley's Aunt* by Brandon Thomas and performed by a cast of admired Soviet actors, with A. Kalyagin in a leading role. The plot revolved around an unemployed man named Bubs 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 who believe in the constructed female image more than in "natural women". This movie was shot in the style of silent movies of the 1920s with many comic situations which could be compared to the famous American drag movies such as *Viktor-Viktoria*, *Tootsie*, and *Some Like It Hot*. This Soviet movie became the source of many visual and verbal quotations in the post-Soviet period.

DANILKO USED the popular Soviet tradition of cross-dressing and interfused it with the Ukrainian burlesque style. Verka Serduchka's cross-dressing represents, in my view, not Judith Butler's concept of queerness¹⁶ as a principal refusal of "normativity", but more the Bakhtinian idea of carnival as a deconstruction of cultural hierarchies and traditional oppositions (male and female, urban and provincial, normative and marginal). The visual style of Verka Serduchka is exceptionalism and interruption of normality in the Rabelaisian style, because her visual style gravitates towards a considerable and grotesque enlargement of everything, all life pleasures: in particular, it is an accent on the abnormally gigantic bust of Verka Serduchka, too massive and bright bijouterie, the love of shiny spangles. However, this grotesque enlargement of physicality and the zest for life of Verka Serduchka can be considered self-irony under the rubric of her own "Rabelaisianism", a quality of post-Soviet Ukrainianness: the excessiveness of Verka Serduchka can be seen as symbolization of consumerist appetites of the young Ukrainian nation for everything that glitters, and for everything that can mark the post-Soviet Ukrainian culture as distinct from the Ukrainian Soviet tradition, even if the accent on such differences results in apparent ridiculous and provincial qualities. The various cultural and linguistic traditions enter into carnivalesque dialogue within the very image of Verka Serduchka, who is, at same time, a transgressive¹⁷ and hybrid¹⁸ subjectivity.

The carnivalesque style of total parody was used in many images of Verka Serduchka: in particular, Andrei Danilko in the role of Verka Serduchka was



Andrei Danilko in the stage persona Verka Serduchka.



The *Evening Kvartal* TV show.

chosen to represent Ukraine at Eurovision in Helsinki in 2007, and he/she secured second place. In a New Year's celebration performance Verka Serduchka appeared in a small red dress and makeup in the style of the American sex icon Marilyn Monroe. In that image, Andrei Danilko presented the figure of a grotesque Ukrainian woman simulating the famous American actress in the same way done in the American drag movie *Some Like It Hot*, an actress who is an enduring pop culture symbol. Danilko constructed a parody of a parody by displaying the Ukrainian provincial woman who herself is the parody of the stereotypes from popular culture. Verka Serduchka creates a carnival polyphony with multiple reversals within the body of just one performer. This amounts to an effective kitsch parody of the kitsch nature of popular culture itself.

ANOTHER IMPORTANT ASPECT is connected to Serduchka's manner of speaking, which is a comical "surzhik", that is, a mixture of Russian and Ukrainian literary languages, and which has been identified in Soviet linguistics as a low (street) form of a literary (normative) speech. However, it must be noted that a significant proportion of non-urban Ukrainians have been speaking different versions of surzhik and that surzhik, is in fact a native way of speaking for many who are not well-educated in Ukraine, and in southern Russia as well. The American scholar Lada Bilaniuk has defined, several categories of surzhik, including: an "urbanized version of rural speech"; a mix of rural dialects; and a "speech culture of cultural bilinguals".¹⁹ Bilaniuk holds that surzhik is not only a language, but also part of the national culture and identity. But the status of surzhik has been reconceptualized in the post-Soviet situation: if the traditional (normative) culture saw surzhik as a variant of a cultural kitsch used by the uneducated,

or as an ethnographic stylization, contemporary Ukrainian pop culture tries to find new sources of national identity that are its own, and surzhik takes on a new meaning. In contrast to the normative Ukrainian and Russian languages, which have strict writing and pronunciation rules, surzhik, as a nonliterate 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 regulations 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 larger than life, at the same time mocking them, and so allows the audience an opportunity for catharsis by laughing with Verka Serduchka. I believe that Verka Serduchka presents a transgender and transnational body of the new post-Soviet and postcolonial Ukrainian culture which has a transitive nature because it lies between center and periphery, between Ukrainian and Russian cultures, between masculine and feminine, between ideals of high culture and the realities of mass consciousness, and it makes her a typical example of the carnival culture.

The Verka Serduchka Show has reflected, since the two-thousand aughts, the different needs of the Ukrainian audience – the postcolonial laughter and the post-Soviet laughter that combine the multifaceted nature of the opposition to the Soviet past, and to the Ukrainian present, in which the new postsocialist TV advertising reflects bourgeois well-being. Verka Serduchka is the product not only of popular culture and parody, but at the same time she is a kitsch person and an image of a little provincial person in a cold world in the humanistic perspective of Gogol's and Chekhov's laughter through tears. And this humanistic perspective of Verka Serduchka made her attractive to different audiences.

TWO MORE UKRAINIAN shows involving the use of surzhik are *Vital'ka* (this is the diminutive form of the masculine name Vi-

taly) 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 a Ukrainian *Mr. Bean* and a light version of *The Benny Hill Show*. *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, making heavy use of 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 and behave like cultured urbanites. 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 accepting the urban culture: they kept their provincial way of life and thinking. But in Ukraine, the countryside is seen in some political and cultural discourses as a source of new national identity because it corresponds with the anticolonial strategy in which the rural periphery can supersede urban and imperial normativity.

Faina Ukraina is a popular Ukrainian comic sketch show with many episodes which was shown on the New Channel from 2008 to 2010. *Faina Ukraina* was created by the Ukrainian artists Sergei Molochnyy and Andrei Prytoola. Initially, the program was conceived as the Ukrainian analogue of the Russian sketch show *Our Russia* and the British *Little Britain*. This show demonstrates the carnival chronotope of the Ukrainian postcolonial society in that two male actors play all male and female roles and depict the multicultural consciousness of Ukrainians from different social levels and regions. *Faina Ukraina* calls to mind the burlesque traditions of Kotlyarevsky and Gogol. The characters of this satirical and humorous show were "ordinary Ukrainians" from different social and professional groups: office managers, middle-level journalists, single, middle-aged women in searches of a rich partner, stupid officers,

provincial scientists, and even Ukrainian cosmonauts who never made it to space. The comic couple Anton and Marichka from a provincial town are characters from Ukrainian urban folklore; other characters of the sketches came from different sources, in particular from Soviet student jokes about professors and students; some characters parody famous American shows such as *Doctor House*. The combination of visual cross-dressing and a mix of many cultural voices has an obviously carnivalesque character: carnival is described by Bakhtin as a time in which anything is possible. In my opinion, the difference between *Faina Ukraina* and *Vital'ka* is that, while *Vital'ka* highlights both ironic and positive elements of Ukrainian provincialism, *Faina Ukraina* used provincialism and surzhik as the objects of laughter.

The political carnival show *Evening Kvartal*

Finally, the most popular Ukrainian comedy has been *Evening Kvartal* (first aired in 2005), devoted mostly to current political themes. The artists and authors behind *Evening Kvartal* came from the Ukrainian KVN, and created their own, original project which had no analogue in the post-Soviet comic chronotope. The genre of *Evening Kvartal* is close to the genre of political variété: it combines vivid entertainment, artistry, and a strong orientation towards political events. The structure of *Evening Kvartal* includes a large number of parodies on well-known Ukrainian and foreign politicians and popstars, brave and remonstrative songs about the contemporary situation in the country, cabaret, and sarcastic monologues on topics of the day. What is unique about

Evening Kvartal is that all its actors play roles of specific political officials of the highest rank (Ukrainian presidents, vice-presidents, their political opponents, and so on), presenting them and their political debates as quarrels between neighbors or members of a family, mixing political and sexual intrigues, or depicting political struggle as a fight for sexual dominance. The most frequent targets of the ironic comic sketches have been: corruption in the Ukrainian state and police; the low level of Ukrainian army and hospital funding; the greed and incompetence of Ukrainian politi-

cians; the penetration of the Ukrainian rustic culture into the city along with the establishment of provincialism as a new national idea; and the ignorance and vanity of certain media figures and many other prominent people.

The uniqueness of *Evening Kvartal* was its carnivalesque performativity: although most Russian and Western European politicians ignore comedies, between 2007 and 2012, many Ukrainian politicians tried, paradoxically, to use the popularity of *Evening Kvartal* to improve their own ratings: despite the openly satirical focus of the show, many representatives of the Ukrainian political establishment often visited premieres of *Evening Kvartal*. For example, mayor of Kyiv, Leonid Chernovezky

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

(2006–2012), often sat in the front row of the auditorium even when *Evening Kvartal* presented very spiteful parodies on the mayor himself. When the actor playing the mayor appeared on the stage, Chernovetsky stood up and gave a bow to the auditorium with a smile. Another famous Ukrainian politician, Uriy Luzenko, was often seated among spectators, and the master of ceremonies would then offer ironic questions in his direction. Thus, *Evening Kvartal*, created a true carnival space in which the distance between the highest officials and ordinary people was erased and the politicians became objects of laughter.

LET ME BRIEFLY list other details about *Evening Kvartal*: first, it contained very quick artistic and emotional reactions to the most widely discussed political and social events (following the old Russian saying “news comes in the newspaper in the morning, and should be reflected in the evening couplet”); second, the criticism of authorities was presented from the position of ordinary Ukrainian citizens and their street conversations; finally, presentations of folk opinion on stage created a significant feeling of moral and emotional satisfaction for much of the Ukrainian audience. By conserving a quasi-neutral political position for a long time, *Evening Kvartal* attracted the sympathy of a large part of the audience. The humorous form of expression allowed *Evening Kvartal* to touch on serious topics in a playful style, and mixture of high, official and low, folksy points of view created a carnival atmosphere during its performances.

I take *Evening Kvartal* to be a postcolonial and postmodern phenomenon in Ukraine, one that mixes various forms of ironic, playful, and deconstructive laughter and reflects a contemporary “multiple”²⁰ Ukrainian identity. Typically, *Evening Kvartal* mocked both the excessive paths of anticolonial nationalistic protests 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 contemporary Ukrainian life, as well as from the contemporary Russian and even American and Western European public discussions, and created a feeling of the audience’s involvement in a global, multicultural, postcolonial, and postmodern world that was liked by both the Ukrainian intelligentsia and ordinary people.

Conclusion

I have analyzed the most interesting and popular Ukrainian television comedy shows, and can now summarize some key observations. The 1990s was a period of sharp critique of Soviet values and cultural norms in Ukraine, with the result that the majority of Ukrainian comedy shows were centered on two basic themes: the mockery of Soviet ideals and official norms, and the inclusion in the Ukrainian cultural space of the voices of people

from groups that had been marginalized in the Soviet period. For example, *The Gentleman Show* can be considered the first post-Soviet comedy show in which a Jewish theme in general, and also the specific cultural elements that constituted contributions to the national life, were articulated in an explicit way – not from the margins, but from a cultural core. Another feature of early Ukrainian comedy shows was that the object of the laughter was, as a rule, the Soviet past, though not the post-Soviet national euphoria that followed independence. It can be seen as a manifestation of the anticolonial ideology that the new ruling groups tried to replace the idea of “Sovietness” by the idea of “nationality”.

The first decade of the 21st century in Ukraine can be characterized as fundamentally involving active searches for a founding national idea. These searches took several forms: the Maidan protests (2004–2005); heated ideological discussions about the value of the Soviet past; and the status of an official state language. All these topics were reflected in the new Ukrainian shows after the two-thousand-aughts, which joined political critique with entertainment. In a situation where many Ukrainians felt the government ignored their views, the public comedies took on the role of a spokesperson, expressing the opinion of the people in witty and artistic forms (in particular, *Evening Kvartal* in 2006–2012).

Political satire and parodies became integral parts of the Ukrainian comedies after the first decade of the century, and this meant that comedy in Ukraine has not only an entertainment function, but also a therapeutic and resistant function as well: if an individual or social group is subjected to social or political injustice, and is

powerless 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, most of the popular Ukrainian shows manifest an identification with audience’s attitudes about the authorities. Grotesque, burlesque, and eccentric parodies are used widely in Ukrainian pop culture to accentuate the absurdity of many political or social situations in contemporary Ukrainian society, and can restore the feeling of dignity to the audience.

It seems obvious that the most popular Ukrainian comedies of recent years (such as *Verka Serdushka*, *Faina Ukraina*, and *Evening Kvartal*) would manifest the hybrid character of the post-Soviet identity as a result of the contradictions within Ukrainian cultural and political thinking itself: this thinking seeks to stand in opposition to the former Soviet and the contemporary Russian cultural traditions, yet, in the meantime, it focuses on traditions that are attractive and unbearable at the same time, traditions from a Russian culture that plays a role of a symbolic normative Other, whose opinion still remains very important for Ukrainian self-identity.

The same situation existed on the public level the in 1990s

and 2000s: the post-Soviet audience in Ukraine and Russia had no significant differences in their objects of ridicule and many Russian TV comedy programs were broadcast on Ukrainian TV, and conversely the majority of the Ukrainian comedy shows sought to gain entrance to the Russian TV channels. Hence many Ukrainian comedy projects took into account the interests of both Ukrainian and Russian spectators, and the common language of the shows was Russian, with the inclusion of occasional Ukrainian words or surzhik, which were understandable to a majority of the Russian-speaking audience. Such a situation can be interpreted in postcolonial terms as a display of multicultural, transitive, and internally contradictory cultural identity.

Carnival became an essential part of not only the Ukrainian culture of laughter but also post-Soviet Ukrainian literature and even political life. Carnival in the laughter chronotope obviously has a postcolonial character because of the incorporation of the anticolonial pathos, and also Soviet satire, Jewish anecdotes, West European cabaret, Russian comedies, American travesty shows, and Ukrainian burlesque tradition. The specificity of Ukrainian comedies reflects the evolution of the Ukrainian struggle between anticolonial and postcolonial searches for national cultural identity. The carnival as a space of play and transgression occupies a significant place in the comedy culture of Ukraine, and the most popular shows deliberately use “carnivalization” as a tool to dissolve the differences between the stage actors and the audience, as well as between the actors of the shows and the political elite, the political decision makers. Carnivalization is a way to deontologize ideology (in the sense of Roland Barthes) as the artificial design of the political statements and the social hierarchies. For this reason, Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory is the most appropriate to use in analyzing the contradictions of the post-Soviet Ukrainian society and the culture of laughter and comedy. ✕

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

Acknowledgements:

This research paper was presented in part at the International Interdisciplinary conference “Bakhtin as Praxis: Academic Production, Artistic Practice, Political Activism” (Stockholm, Sweden, July 24–27, 2014) in which I participated thanks to a grant by the Swedish Institute. I express my sincere gratitude to the administration of the Swedish Institute for their support of my studies.

references

- 1 Marko Pavlyshyn, “Andrukhovych’s Secret: The Return Of Colonial Resignation”, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 48 no. 2, 21–36; Tamara Hundorova, *Tranzutna kultura: Sumpotmu postkolonialnoi travmu* [Transit culture: Symptoms of the postcolonial trauma] (Kyiv, 2013); Vitaly Chernetsky, “The Trope of Displacement and Identity Construction in Postcolonial Ukrainian Fiction,” *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, 27, no. 1 (2002).
- 2 The Ukrainian TV shows have been partly studied in a few papers: Marta Dyczok, “Ukraine’s Media in the Context of Global Cultural Convergence”, *Demokratyzatsiya*, 22 no. 2 (2014), 231–254; Viktoriya Sukovata, “Gendernaya politika reklamy na postsovetskom televidenii” [Gender politics of advertising in post-Soviet TV] *Sociologicheskie issledovaniya* [Sociological journal] (2004), no. 2, 65–70.
- 3 Ken Hirschkop, *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic for Democracy* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999).
- 4 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009).
- 5 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics. Translation from Russian*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 1984).
- 6 Marko Pavlyshyn, *Kanon ta ikonostas* [Kanon and ikonostasis] (Kyiv: Chas, 1997), 230–231.
- 7 M. Pavlyshyn, *Kanon ta ikonostas* [Kanon and ikonostasis] (Kyiv: Chas, 1997), 227–228.
- 8 Marko Pavlyshyn, “Literary Canons And National Identities In Contemporary Ukraine” *Canadian American Slavic Studies*, 2005, 40 no. 1, 5–19.
- 9 Pavlyshyn, *Kanon ta ikonostas*, 229–232.
- 10 Pavlyshyn, *Kanon ta ikonostas*, 214–215.
- 11 Alice Stone Nakhimovsky, *Russian-Jewish Literature and Identity: Jabotinsky, Babel, Grossman, Galich, Roziner, Markish* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).
- 12 Petr Vayl’ and Aleksandr Genis, 60s: *Mir sovetskogo cheloveka* [60s: The world of the Soviet person] (Moscow, 1996), 285.
- 13 Jane Briggeman, *Burlesque: A Living History* (Albany, GA: Bear Manor Media, 2009).
- 14 Marko Pavlyshyn, “Ritorika i politika v Eneidi Kotlyarevskogo” [Rhetorics and politics in the “Eneid” by Kotlyarevsky] *Syhasnist* [Modernity], 1994, no. 4 ; George Grabovich, “Semantika kotlyarevshinu” [Semantics of Kotlyarevsky’s views] *History of Ukrainian literature* (Kyiv, 1997).
- 15 Simon Karlinsky, *The Sexual Labyrinth by Nikolay Gogol* (The University of Chicago Press, London and London, 1976).
- 16 Judith Butler, “Lacan, Rivjer i strategii maskarada” [Lacan, Riviere and strategies of masquerade] in *Gendernaja teorija iiskysstvo*. [Gender theory and art] (Moscow: Rosspen, 2005), 422–441.
- 17 Niall Richardson, *Transgressive Bodies: Representations in Film and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2016).
- 18 Tariq Modood and Pnina Werbner, *Debating Cultural Hybridity*. (Zed Books, 1997); García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).
- 19 Lada Bilaniuk, *Contested Tongues: Language Politics and Cultural Correction in Ukraine* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).
- 20 Paul Spickard, *Multiple Identities: Migrants, Ethnicity, and Membership*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013).

The grotesque body in Indian comic tradition

An aesthetics of transgression

by Rajni Mujral

Bharata, Indian theatrologist, who wrote the foundational text on performance, *Nāṭyashāstra* (500 CE), identifies *hāsya*, (the comic), as emerging from *srngāra* (love) in a low-mimetic mode.¹ He identifies deformed body as one of the *vibhāvas* (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 text from 14th century. It is an endeavour to re-trace the tradition; re-turning to a tradition of transgressive laughter.² *Prahasana*, a genre from Sanskrit tradition³ 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 strictures *in and through* the physiological. The zone is of the corporeal grotesque. Therefore, the need to bring these traditions in contact, to provide a better understanding of the tradition of grotesque in relation to in the genre of *prahasana*.

The basic proposition the paper wishes to put forward is 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, 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 laugh-

ter, of the low-mimetic with subversive potential. Body through its nature of becomingness, disrupts the strictures that make it a cultural artifact. It resists fixity, and through laughter and through its disfiguration debunks the strictures that layer the oppressive normative frame over the body, affecting it into a cultural artifact. The comic here emerges in the arena of the physiological and the body becomes a mode to embody the feeling of “rapture” in Nietzschean sense. It is pertinent to look at bodily desire here and how desire pushes the body to the state of rapture, thereby ensuing comic and grotesque in the process. The attempt here is to bring two traditions together to look at the notion of grotesque and the role body plays in its figuration.

Hāsa and prahasana: The power of laughter

In *Nāṭyashāstra*, Bharata identifies the origin of *hāsya* (the comic) in the imitation of *srngāra* (love): according to him, the comic is for love just like the pathetic is to valor. He draws an analogy between them and identifies how they come out as imitations of the bodily emotions of a higher order. Body is central for the discourse of *Nāṭyashāstra*. It is the body that enacts (*abhinaya*) and elicits emotions (*rasa*, the aesthetic savour) as well. Thus the comic emerges as a bodily manifestation in imitation of love in a low-mimetic mode. In his commentary on *Nāṭyashāstra*,

Abhinavagupta in the 10th century elaborates it further, arguing that imitations of other emotions are capable of eliciting the comic as well. Thus he acknowledges the power of laughter, *hāsa*, and the scope of the comic, *hāsya*. *Prahasana* is a genre for which *hāsa* is central: etymologically *prahasana* is derived from the root *hāsa*, 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. Transgression⁴ is at the very core of the genre, the transgression of hierarchical order founded on pure/impure binaries among others. The genre is a re-enactment of transgressive function in the symbolic mode, an act and an enactment that effects carnivalesque which otherwise is not possible outside that symbolism. It 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 carnivalesque, topsy-turvy: what exists outside this frame gets suspended within 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 incongruity, 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 studies in a different context⁵), it gives rise to *hāsya* or *hāsyabhāsa*: 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 (re)presents a *staged* event.

ITS TRANSGRESSIVE potential is evident among other aspects:⁶ in laughter being put within the shackles. The classical manual of performance stipulates that only base characters can laugh out loud, while the higher ones can only smile.⁷ Hence what Bakhtin identifies as a loud festive laughter (*smekh*)⁸ is in itself a transgression since it is a violation of taboos. Further, it can be noted that what Bakhtin identifies as carnivalistic laughter is fundamentally a destabilizing force. He argues that “Carnivalistic laughter... is directed toward something higher- toward a shift of authorities and truths, a shift of world orders. Laughter embraces both poles of change, with *crisis* itself”.⁹

Not only the transgressive, but the comic is also a point of convergence of all the *rasas* (the aesthetic savours), according to Abhinavagupta. As he affirms in the *Abhinavabhāratī*, all the *rasas* are components of *hāsya*— a meeting point, a melting point as it were, an instance of carnivalesque. 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 on the other, with positive spirit. In this second sense, he says that the subversive spirit of carnival is passed off as “celebration of life”.¹⁰

Though other emotions do evoke laughter, laughter when evoked by the comic mood revives and rejuvenates. It is what Bakhtin calls as “festive laughter”,¹¹ 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.

Laughing body and the question of subjectivity

Bakhtin's idea of the carnivalesque originates from popular culture, from a public event. It is a structure within a structure: larger structure being the hierarchical order and carnival creates a new structure that renegotiates and reverses its own basis. The scope of such an eventfulness might not be radical in nature, however, by positioning itself on the borderline, it reveals scope for a new structure, not by a complete overthrow of what was already there, but by a reversal of the existing order. The reversal occurs by employing and making use of the existing parameters, *tacitly*. Its positioning itself is subversive; denying any binary logic, it is rather suggestive of a spectrum where the nature of the event is to be taken into consideration over a continuum. Its refusal to be part of a category through its positioning at the borderline could depict its potential as radical yet its partaking in the hierarchical structure becomes an overt depiction of its rare possibility of any radical overthrow. However, it may be limited temporally, it gives a scope for renegotiation. I am hereby arguing that it can be located in the space of the in-between. The laughing body is the body in the in-between space that redefines the boundaries by destabilizing the structures.

“Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque body as the basis of carnival imagery”¹² underlines his insistence on body for the festive laughter. It is the body that laughs and after laughter, rejuvenates. Though the comedy has been culture-specific, the grotesque body, termed variously as incongruent, distorted etc.,¹³ has remained as an inevitable source of the comic. As Bakhtin says, “Th[e] boundless ocean of grotesque bodily imagery within time and space extends to all languages, all literatures, and the entire system of gesticulation”.¹⁴

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 revive. 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

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

abstract

The paper examines the comic in relation to the figuration of the grotesque body in Sanskrit tradition in India. It is pursued with two objectives: firstly, to explore bodily figurations in the Indian comic tradition, and, further, to enquire the parallel elaboration of Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque that celebrates the laughing body. A reading of a 14th century Indian text *Hāsyārṇava* provides the ground for the elucidation. The paper elaborates on how the “distorted, deformed and diseased” body which Bharata refers to, the “grotesque body”¹⁵ as Bakhtin says, institutes *hāsya* and carnivalesque discursively. The bodily desire pursued is pushed to the limits, resulting in rapture through a transgressive act.

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 trajectory. The space no longer remains the exclusive domain of the official and is no longer fixed. This movement of transgressing and bringing the taboo into the social, problematizes both the categories and such process of categorization. The result is topsy-turvy-ness. The grotesque here is the resultant factor: the outcome of an attempt to transgress the rigid and dominant social strictures. The body becomes a significant trope to bring out the grotesqueness. The nature of the human body is opposite to the inflexible strictures. A significant amount of attention is, therefore, paid to controlling the human body, to controlling human actions, to establishing a particular kind of bodily behavior; any digression from that behavior is termed taboo. Bakhtin stresses on the open and flexible nature of the human body.¹⁵ One way to oppose the authoritative forces is to bring the flexible open nature of the body in force. Body here becomes a significant metaphor through its unfinalized disposition, thus laughs and thereby reappropriates the prevalent structures and thus redefines itself. Hence, laughter transgresses and transforms the existing parameters. The driving force behind the grotesque too is inherent in human nature, or rather the human body. Further, grotesque is one of the effects of moving into the unfamiliar territory— a territory beyond the socially constructed bodily consciousness.¹⁶ The *Samkhya* tradition, the enumerationist school of Indian philosophical thought, has a similar conception of the composition of the human body: it identifies the transformation of five different elements resulting in the *prakṛti* or *pradhana* the “dynamic psycho-physical material substance”. The body which is made of these five elements is not a static entity. These elements are in a constant process of transformation and that is how the human body is produced.¹⁷ The inherent nature of the human body is dynamism and continuity. Bakhtin too emphasizes the dynamic nature of the body. For him, it always is in the act of becoming.¹⁸ The strictures constantly try to turn it into a static object. The laughing body which is at the center of Bakhtin’s study is dynamic; it transgresses and moves beyond the straitjacketing of cultural norms and laughs and opens up. It is in a constant process of taking the world in, through the bodily acts of inhaling, eating and defecating. The body becomes part of the cosmos and viceversa. The Ayurvedic tradition describes bodily nature same as the material universe because of the five great elements. The body is an extension or part of the cosmos. And it has the same renewing nature as the universe.¹⁹

Social strictures negate the ambivalent nature of the body and present it as a harmonized and homogenous entity. But, the body is a heterogeneous entity: various elements co-exist and transform each other under the fleshly garb. This ambivalent and heterogeneous nature

of the body is what gives it a dynamic status and creates a space for the grotesque: it is a subjective²⁰ position, not the object of actions; rather, the actions proceed from here. Laughter is a way of asserting its essential subjective condition.

How these issues of subjectivity and reappropriation come forth in the comic tradition of *prahasana* can be further elucidated by looking at the text of *Hāsyaṛnava*, a Sanskrit *prahasana* from the 14th century.

Hāsyaṛnava: In the world of grotesquerie

Hāsyaṛnava begins by invoking Lord Siva and Parvati as if it is following the convention. The play between the sacred and profane starts 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 *prahasana*, of the inversion of the power structures and the appeal to the physiological:

The thick mixture of sandal paste washed down by the flow of sweat from fatigue at the embrace of vine-like arms, the words of love broken by heaving sighs, the lips bitten in love dalliance, the eyes revealing the delight²¹

This complex of images codifies the pathway of transgression through the carnivalesque which explains the formulation that the article brings forth: the initial erasure of the boundaries of sacred and profane and their reversal,²² an intervention of desire, its pursuit, the transgression and the final state of rapture. This forms the frame for the subsequent narrative.

King Anayasindhu (“Ocean of Misrule”) organizes a meeting in a brothel to discuss the matters of the kingdom he rules.²³ The guard had informed the king that the people in the state have been following the laws. At the family level, husbands are being faithful to their wives. There have been no instances of theft either. The king expresses his concern at this situation and arranges a meeting in the brothel with his advisors. The setting of the meeting in the brothel sets the stage for the topsy-turvyness that characterizes the *prahasana* and evokes laughter. It presents the situation during the festive spring-time or the time when the power structures have been unsettled. The situation gives a glimpse of a carnival world where everything is turned upside down. The dress, the ornaments, and other rituals are reversed and given an entirely different role.²⁴

The visit to the brothel is described in terms of a pilgrimage. Upon entering the brothel, the king says that he has obtained the merits of a hundred pilgrimages.²⁵ There is an implied pun on the ritual of going to different temples. It is a forced move from sacred to profane; for the king, indulgence in the bodily pleasures is the primary con-

cern. The *prahasana* states that, instead of going to various temples for seeking god or virtue, he seeks worldly delights. Further more, in the description of a woman’s body as a pond, every sacred ritual is brought down to the level of the physiological. The element of eros latent in zealous devotion is made manifest here. It is a different realm parallel to the sacred one. This also is the realm of the body.

THE GATHERING of the *prahasana* is like an assembly (the first act is titled, “The Decision of the Assembly”²⁶) 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 bodily 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, since it is outside the norms of the society. The *prahasana* highlights 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 away as his fee for conducting the wedding ceremony. The whole situation turns out to be comically grotesque.

In the pursuit of desire, irrespective of its materialization, the feeling that one has crossed the boundary, and the pleasure of crossing it, *transfigures* the grotesque. Deviation from the societal norms evokes the feeling of horror or disgust along with happiness. The *prahasana* evokes laughter; laughter here signifies not only comic, but also grotesque laughter. It horrifies and disgusts. There is a “*co-presence* of the ludicrous with the monstrous, the disgusting or the horrifying”.²⁷ The desire in the teacher and the student 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, in his preparation to physically mutilate his student, one 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 function in pursuit of gratification, and the gratification seems rather to be constituting the desiring subject: the sensuous drive constitutes the desiring body irrespective of societal constraints of age, gender, rank or profession; irrespective of whether the body is young or old. The young female body of Mṛgāṅkalekhā (“Moon’s-Crescent”)²⁸ under the male gaze turns into the site of desire that initiates the transition from the bizarre to the famil-

iar. 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 *prahasana* 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 sagging old female body. The old body is the 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 *prahasana* is the body which laughs and enjoys sexual pleasures. Even the ascetic body is occupied in bodily indulgences here. At one point, a character in the *prahasana* 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.²⁹ In every dialogue, there is an implied rhetoric which opposes the social strictures and transgresses them through a recourse to bodily pleasure. Social norms regulate sexual behaviors to control and discipline the subjects. Thus, the *prahasana* presents the recourse to body, to sexual pleasures as the primal move towards transgression. The spirit of transgression is upheld as supreme where the desire for the wives of other men is endorsed, visiting the brothels is encouraged. It is the pursuit of desire that is upheld, through the laughing bodies.

HUMOR SUBVERTS and creates a possibility of renewal of all the oppressive social strictures. The laughter noticeable in the *prahasana* is the laughter of Mṛgāṅkalekhā, Bandhura’s daughter. Her initial response is a smile when an aged person expresses his desires for her body.³⁰ This is the smile of repulsion, a very civilized response but it turns into a grotesque laughter when at later point everybody presents in the assembly expresses the same desire. When Vishavabhandā (“The-Rascal-of-the-World”) talks about crossing “the sea of love” for her, she smiles.³¹ She smiles at the old worn-out body of the Brahmin. When she is dismissive of the desiring gazes, her mother scolds her for showing disrespect to the Brahmin. She is virtually reduced to a corpse, a body-object lying bare in front of the poutouring of lust around her. Thus, when there is no scope for overt resistance, laughter provides her with a possibility of subversion and so she laughs and mocks: she says, blessed is the student who is going to learn and blessed is his wife too.³² Her *hāsa* subverts and renews at the same time. She laughs at the remedies the doctor suggests and at Ranajambhūka’s (“Coward-of-the-Battles”, the police chief in the text) narration of his adventurous deed of killing a bee.³³ Her response begins with a smile and grows into loud laughter as a response to the Brahmin’s lecherous remarks, the doctor’s remedies and the police chief’s adventures. Mṛgāṅkalekhā realizes that she cannot raise her voice here because of her status as a prostitute’s daughter. Hence, she resorts to the subversive mode of laughter. The doctor leaves the assembly when she laughs at his remedies, saying that he can’t stay there as he is being made fun of by a whore.³⁴

The laughing body moves beyond the status of an object and moves onto the tabooed state. The act of trespassing takes it to

**“BODILY DESIRE
BRINGS EVERYONE
ON A SINGLE PLANE
AND IT IS IN THE
PURSUIT OF BODILY
DESIRE THAT
THE GROTESQUE
EMERGES.”**

the unfamiliar, takes it beyond the fearful strictures. This unfamiliar is unfamiliar to the dominant, but this complies 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, it laughs off the norms. The laughter is a mockery 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 situating 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 bodies. Thus, laughter is a physical gesture, a sonoric outburst which shatters the illusion of a controlled, regulated, mechanical being and expresses its chaotic dynamic nature. It is transgressive as it is the pursuit of the inherent 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 sexuality and voluptuousness”.³⁵ Bakhtin too recognizes it and says that “carnival has worked out an entire languages of symbolic concretely sensuous forms”.³⁶ When transferred to the symbolic, it is the sensuous image that catches the carnivalistic spirit, or in Bakhtin's terms, in “a language of artistic images that has something in common with its concretely sensuous nature”³⁷ and thus able to accommodate the carnivalesque. Its effect can be apprehended as a state of rapture, a condition that is gained after the act of transgression which witnesses the shattering of shackles. Nietzsche identifies rapture as “the condition of pleasure” which is also “an exalted feeling of power” in which “the sensation of space and time are altered”.³⁸ This alteration is effected by transfiguration which often takes the form of transgression; when it is accompanied by the comic, it effects the carnivalesque.

IT IS THE FORM that makes space for rapture. As Heidegger says, “Form founds the realm in which rapture as such becomes possible”.³⁹ Thus the trans-forming force is at the same time “form engendering force”⁴⁰ as well. The function of rapture coming after the act of transgression should be understood in such a site of transfiguration.

The site where both male and female bodies interact in their inherent impulse to pursue desire and to transgress is what generates rapture in *Hāsyaṛnava*. The desire governs the other impulses; it is manifested in the physiological. The body acts in its own way. The gazing body feels the pain when its desires are not fulfilled. The gazing 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: as something which arouses desire and gratifies. It engenders rapture when all the other feelings get intermingled with this overpowering desire. It takes over the other impulses. In the *prahasana*, those who come to the assembly, begin or introduce themselves as belonging to a certain profession or sect signifying the status and strictures related to them, yet the desire for the young woman dominates them and they transgress their professional codes. The king, who had supposedly organized the assembly 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 seeks 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 praises 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 young woman when he gets exasperated with his own persistence in following her.

The desire leads to transgression inducing the state of rapture. Georges Bataille describes transgression not as some rational external act or event but as an “inner experience”: as experiencing beyond the rational. It is going beyond the “set” and “fixed” and exploring the slipperiness of fixity. The rational/irrational is decided by cultural discourse. But the feelings of fear and pleasure are not such readily available categories and are never so intensely experienced unless one transgresses. The inhibitions are experienced by those who transgress; otherwise they remain discursive categories. As Bataille emphasizes, “fascination and desire” compel the transgression.⁴¹ The need to transgress is not a need as such; it is an intense impulse, an urge to pursue the desire: desire for pleasure— that which rejuvenates. The act of transgression is an act of pleasure.⁴²

Body plays a significant role in the discourse of the transgression. The grotesque undermines the discourse that sees reason

as the only language of critique.⁴³ Corporeal centrality emerges from the need for a “return to somatic symbols” for transgression.⁴⁴ The attempt to transgress is the return to the somatic. The body becomes the most immediate source and medium for transgression.

The body in the *prahasana* depicted as worthy of desire is the young body; it evokes desire and unravels its pursuit of gratification in terms of what Bakhtin calls “exaggeration, hyperbolism,

excessiveness” which are “generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style”.⁴⁵

Conclusion

As Heidegger has noted, “the aesthetic state is rapture”.⁴⁶ Indian comic tradition attempts to bring forth such a state, while configuring an image of the body. In exploring the comic genre of *prahasana*, this discussion has tried to sketch out a trajectory from desire to rapture in the aesthetic realm that actively participates in constituting the carnivalesque discursively. For Bakhtin it is “carnivalization of literature”.⁴⁷ 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, de-formed, de-ceased body, a body that defies foreclosure. The genre of *prahasana* that is part of the comic tradition in India is also an enactment of such defiance. ✕

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

references

- 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 superior neither to other men nor to his environment, the hero is one of us, we respond to a sense of his common humanity, and demand from the poet the same canons of probability that we find in our own experience”. This gives us the hero of the low mimetic mode, of most comedy 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 moralizing effect. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. Robert D. Denham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), 31–49.
- Reading the text from the 14th century has relevance in postcolonial context as well. One of the basic propositions that postcolonial studies rely on is the mode of reappropriation through mimicry: that is, creative imitation. In imitating, the text winks at the prevalent structures and seeks renewal through them. Such a re-appropriation, with an element of ambivalence innate in it, does not out-right deny the prevalent structures, rather adapts those structures and thus transforms their nature. Such reappropriation 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.
- A few works in this genre from the Middle Ages can be listed here: Bodhayana's *Bhagavajjukya*, Sankhadhara's *Latakamelaka*, Vatsaraja's *Hasyacudamani*.
- The text subtly refers to the caste structure in premodern India. It emerges in setting the context for *prahasana*. It is based on the reversal of the hierarchy and it is intricately woven into the text. Each instance is a reversal of the established structure. Reading these reversals gives a glimpse into the caste-based structure of the society. It begins with the act of naming the characters. In another such instance, two wanderers are looking for food. One of them suggests that they should go to the courtesan Bandhura's house. The other inquires about her caste. On learning that: “Even an untouchable won't drink water at her house”, he agrees to go to her house for a meal (*Hāsyaṛnava*, 284). The entire set-up of *prahasana* is built on the reversal of the established order. The

references to transgression in this paper do not focus on the issue of class and caste, however.

- Bhabha describes mimicry as the “ironic compromise” between the homogenizing impulse to dominate and the pressure from below to change. Mimicry is characterized by an “excess”, thus evolving into an ambivalent discourse. It produces the simultaneous effects of familiarity and difference. This articulation of double effects further adds to the indeterminacy as the object it tries to mimic is also in a state of denial. The process of denial of a certain object has an effect in mimicry. It is significant that the effect emerges when that same object is in the state of denial, therefore, it appropriates at one level and on another level, it denies. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994), 122. This discourse of re-appropriation becomes significant in the postcolonial context; further more, with regard to the genre of *prahasana*, it reveals how this genre functions along the lines of renegotiation, often throwing up reversals. The notion of the carnivalesque too is based upon such a playful reversal Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.
- Switching languages – between Prakrit and Sanskrit, two of the widely circulated languages from ancient India is another way, in terms of dramatic technique, where *prahasana* effects transgression: the characters identified as belonging to the lower social strata occasionally speak in Sanskrit within this genre, which was against the sanctions of classical norms. Thus language, which is also an indicator of social status in the hierarchically ordered society, functioned as a milieu where power structures operate. By executing such a code-switching function, the genre effects the role reversal.
- Bharata, *The Nātyashāstra*, trans. Manmohan Ghosh (Calcutta: The Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1950), Book VI, 54–59.
- Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 95.
- Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. and ed. Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 127.
- F. M. Cornford, “The Ritual Origins of Comedy”, in *Comedy: Developments in Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 9.
- Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 95.
- Viachelsav Ivanov, “Dialogue and Carnival”, in *Bakhtin: Carnival and Other Subjects; Selected Papers from the Fifth International Bakhtin Conference University of Manchester*, July 1991, ed. David Shepherd. (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1993), 8.
- Cf. Bharata, *Nātyashāstra*; Abhinavagupta, *Abhinavabhāratī*; Henry Bergson, “Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic”, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (London: Blackmask, 2002), accessed February 2014, <https://archive.org/details/laughteranessay00berggoog>.
- Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 319.
- Bakhtin stresses this often, for instance when he says the grotesque body is “not impenetrable but open” (339); “It is never finished, never completed” (317). It is very clear when he says, “Thus the artistic logic of the grotesque images ignore the closed, smooth, and impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices, only that which leads beyond body's limited space or into body's depths” (317–318). *Rabelais and His World*, 317–318, 339.
- Richard Shusterman's remarks on bodily consciousness are relevant to the discussion here. He discusses the inherent desire for transcendence in human beings (Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Aesthetics* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), 35. He gives the example of different activities like dieting and body building for a culturally pleasing body and how these contribute to producing a “normal” body. The conflict is between the social artifact and the inherent desire to transcend the impositions.

“THE SITE WHERE BOTH MALE AND FEMALE BODIES INTERACT IN THEIR INHERENT IMPULSE TO PURSUE THE DESIRE AND TO TRANSGRESS IS WHAT GENERATES RAPTURE IN HĀSYĀRNAVA.”

- 17 Viktoria Lyssenko, "The Human Body Composition in Statics and Dynamics: Ayurveda and the Philosophical Schools of Vaishika and Samkhya", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32, no. 1 (2004): 35.
- 18 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 317.
- 19 Lyssenko, "The Human Body", 31.
- 20 Shusterman, while trying to formulate the notion of "body consciousness", refers to Merleau-Ponty's notion of bodily intentionality which grants the body a kind of subjectivity. Shusterman, *Body Consciousness*, 60.
- 21 *Häsyrnava*, 265.
- 22 The frames getting topsy-turvy is significant throughout; mainly in terms of public-private, sacred-profane, blessing-cursing: theatrical inversion of the outer world making the entire text of the *prahasana* itself grotesque-bodied— with excess, protrusion, regeneration— is significant. This is the textual performance of transgression, which is quite often transfiguration: a trans-figur(e)-ation of the values and orders of the everyday world.
- 23 *Häsyrnava*, 268–269.
- 24 *Häsyrnava*, 265, 267.
- 25 *Häsyrnava*, 269.
- 26 *Häsyrnava*, 266, 283.
- 27 Philip Thomson, *The Grotesque* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1972), 14.
- 28 Her name can be literally translated as "Moon's-Crescent". She is usually referred to as the Moon-faced One in the text. Moon recurs as a metaphor throughout the text. Other female characters are also described in terms of moon and its phases to refer to their youth and bodily appearance. The text has various references linking the moon to images like "beautiful bowl", "billows of foam", or "umbrella" (*Häsyrnava*, 282). In the first image, it is linked to the round bowl that holds together the drink of immortality. Gods drink the moon in another reference. These references equate the female with the sense of pleasure and the recurrent use of the metaphor objectify the female to the state of inaction. It is through laughter that she acts and breaks through the image of inactivity.
- 29 *Häsyrnava*, 286.
- 30 *Häsyrnava*, 271.
- 31 *Häsyrnava*, 271.
- 32 *Häsyrnava*, 273.
- 33 *Häsyrnava*, 276.
- 34 *Häsyrnava*, 277.
- 35 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kauffmann (New York: Vintage, 1968), 799.
- 36 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's*, 122.
- 37 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's*, 122.
- 38 Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 800.
- 39 Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, vol. 1: The Will to Power as Art* (New York: Harper One, 1991), 119.
- 40 Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 115.
- 41 Quoted in Ruth Penfold-Mounce, *Celebrity Culture and Crime: The Joy of Transgression* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 4–6.
- 42 Quoted in Penfold-Mounce, *Celebrity Culture and Crime*, 4–6.
- 43 Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, eds., *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986), 43.
- 44 Stallybrass and White, *Politics*, 26.
- 45 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 303.
- 46 Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 108.
- 47 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's*, 122.

The Mora witch trial, depicted in this German illustration from 1670, took place in 1669. It is the most internationally famous Swedish witch trial, and the first mass execution during the great Swedish witchhunt of 1668–1676.



Witchhunt in northern Sweden

A Bakhtinian approach

by Per-Arne Bodin

abstract

The Russian Byzantinist Sergei 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 reasoning of both authors on a historical phenomenon: the witch trials 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 carnival, culture although without having laughter as their main feature, and including violence as a main element.

KEY WORDS: Witchcraft, micro-history, Bakhtin, reverse culture, Averintsev.

In an article from 1992 titled "Bakhtin, Laughter, and Christian Culture", the Russian Byzantinist Sergei 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 procreating act, with birth, renewal, fertility, abundance. 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 clear the way for them. Seriousness was therefore elementally distrusted, while trust was placed in festive laughter.²

Drawing examples both from Ivan the Terrible and from Mussolini, Averintsev maintains that this is fundamentally incorrect. Fear *can* lurk behind laughter and laughter *can* create dogmas and be related to authoritarian violence. The carnival culture of the European Middle Ages as outlined by Bakhtin is also called into question in another article by Averintsev from 1992, "Bakhtin i russkoe otnoshenie k smekhu" [Bakhtin and the Russian relation to laughter].³ Here, Averintsev points out, for example, that it is wrong to juxtapose the Russian phenomenon of "foolishness in Christ" – known as *Iurodstvo* 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.⁴ *Iurodstvo* is, to be sure, 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 fundamentals of Bakhtin's cultural philosophy. Averintsev was of course not the first to criticize Bakhtin's use of carnival and his notion of "laughter culture". Dietz-Rüdiger Moser maintains in his 1990 article "Lachkultur des Mittelalters? Michail Bakhtin und die Folgen seiner Theorie" ["A Medieval culture of laughter? Mikhail Bakhtin and the consequences of his theory"] that carnival had a strong didactic element and was not as closely connected to laughter as Bakhtin believes.⁵

One historical phenomenon, 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 era. One of my tasks will be to demonstrate this. 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 definition of this "other" culture. What can be noted in my material is the close connection between the reverse culture and violence – precisely something that Bakhtin denies. The

“FEAR CAN LURK BEHIND LAUGHTER AND LAUGHTER CAN CREATE DOGMAS AND BE RELATED TO AUTHORITARIAN VIOLENCE.”

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 Averintsev. It is my belief is that this procedure will have some explanatory power in relation to 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, Boteå, located on the north side of Ångerman River, in Ådalen, 500 kilometers north of Stockholm. I have a personal relationship to Boteå, 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 commission, 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 toponymies 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.

Background

But first let me provide some background. The witch trials are not, as might be believed, characteristic of the Middle Ages, but of the 16th and 17th centuries. They haunted Sweden as late as 1669–1677. Such trials had been carried out earlier, but they were rather few in number and death penalties were rare. Before 1669, the existence of a *maleficium*, evidence that some injury had been inflicted on a person by the accused, was necessary for conviction.⁶ This was not the case in the years that I will address here, when about 150 women and some men were executed in the province of Norrland alone. They were sentenced to death because they were convicted of being witches and having taken children to Blåkulla, where they engaged in a variety of activities consistent with witchcraft. The epidemic began in Dalecarlia, then spread to Ångermanland and ended in Stockholm. The parish priests acted both as interrogators and prosecutors. The proceeding was called an "inquisition" in the documents from the time. In 1676, one of the witnesses in Stockholm was denounced, after which the trials were resumed – though now directed

against the witnesses. Some of the witnesses were killed in secret and some were prosecuted. Very soon the whole affair was put to an end, as demonstrated in a recent publication by Marie Lennerstrand and Linda Oja from 2006, *Livet går vidare: Älvdalen och Rättvik efter de stora häxprocesserna 1668–1671*

[Life goes on: Älvdalen and Rättvik after the great witch trials of 1668–1671]. Indeed, a short time after the trials ended, the families who had given testimony against each other intermarried.⁷

THE SUBJECT OF WITCHCRAFT is much studied in Sweden, as it is in many other countries. To write a survey of existing studies in the field would be an act of hubris. This is noted by Stephen A. Mitchell in his *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages*, but he nonetheless gives an impressive *Stand der Forschung* in his book.⁸ Yuri Lotman attempts to inscribe the phenomenon in a broader sociological phenomenon of fear.⁹ I might also mention the historian Carlo Ginzburg's book *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*¹⁰, a fairly new study of the phenomenon from the point of view of micro-history. Ginzburg's thesis is that the so-called witches' Sabbaths were the residue of a heathen cult. He begins his book with a survey of studies of this subject and different explanations of the phenomenon in European scholarship. In the Swedish context, one ought first and foremost to mention the seminal study by the jurist Bengt Ankarloo, *Trolldomsprocesser i Sverige*¹¹ [Witchcraft trials in Sweden], published in 1971.

The historical facts

In 1674–1675, a specially appointed Witchcraft Commission convened on several occasions in Boteå.¹² The commission was appointed by the king and consisted of 25 members, a rather large size for a court. It was chaired 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 Åkerman and the theologian Samuel Skunck. The peasantry was represented by lay judges. The commission also toured other parts of Norrland.

The vicar of Boteå, Nils Sternelius – 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 Swe-



The governor of the province of Västernorrland, Carl Larsson Sparre, was chairman of the Witchcraft Commission.



The two classic manuals on witch-hunting were *Malleus Maleficarum* [The hammer of witches] by Jacob Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer, and *De la démonomanie des sorciers* [On the demon-mania of the sorcerers] by Jean Bodin.



den – 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*, "lumps". The protocols indicate that almost the entire population of the villages was involved, either 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



Illustration from the book *Saducismus Triumphatus*, 1682.

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 Ångermanland, 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 uniting the victims.¹³

I will here proceed to demonstrate that almost all of the categories used in Bakhtin's description of the reversed carnival laughter culture show up in the description of Blåkulla:

We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the "inside out" (à l'envers), of the "turnabout", of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings. A second life, a second world of folk culture is thus constructed; it is to a certain extent a parody of the extracarnival life, a "world inside out." We must stress, however, that the carnival is far distant from the negative and formal parody of modern times. Folk humor denies, but it revives and renews at the same time. Bare negation is completely alien to folk culture.¹⁴

I must at the same time stress that Bakhtin, to my knowledge, never discusses or analyses witchcraft as such in his works. I thus apply a Bakhtinian concept to an area beyond the scope of Bakhtin's material.

Life in Blåkulla

What is told in the protocols appears to fit Bakhtin's notion of carnival culture almost seamlessly, closely duplicating its *reversal*, 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 powers. 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 eras 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).¹⁵

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 and their 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 the authority granted their testimonies, 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 commission 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 convents are found in testimonies from continental Europe. It is however indisputable that the role of the children is extremely important in the witchcraft and witch trials investigated here.

The children were often unanimous 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 feasts in Blåkulla, where the accused woman would cook, stuff sausages, chop cabbage, milk cows, churn butter, sweep, carry water, and carry out the used dishwater as well as make candles for the Evil One. The women perform everyday tasks with which the children are familiar from home, only with a different beneficiary: not the husband, the children and the household, but the Devil and the coven. The main tasks are the usual ones for the women, what is *reversed* is the beneficiary, place, and time. The chores are many, and the children's stories imply a certain division of labor among the different women. The abundance of food is always stressed, but contrary to the protocols of witch trials in other parts of Sweden, the food is sel-

dom transformed into something unappetizing or sickening. The protocols describing manners in Blåkulla give the impression of the eating habits of a rich peasant family. At the same time, the meals differ significantly: they are wild and sumptuous feasts celebrated at night with carnivalesque frenzy. I would like to use the words employed by Bakhtin in relation to laughter culture: "a brimming-over abundance" that includes an abundance of all carnal pleasures: food, drink, and sex.

The feasts are not connected to any special holiday, they take place every night; but the time of the first journey is almost always related to a public holiday – the tours to Blåkulla, for example, began at Christmas.

Daytime is almost never depicted in the accounts of Blåkulla, only night – another reversal. Almost every night sees the celebration of a feast of abundance, or a carnival, in Bakhtin's language. The feast is one of the most important components in his characterization of the premodern (or Medieval and Renaissance, in his terms) popular culture. Blåkulla forms another world and another life, to continue quoting Bakhtin:

And these forms of protocol and ritual based on laughter and consecrated by tradition existed in the countries of medieval Europe; they were sharply distinct from the serious official, ecclesiastical, feudal, and political cult forms and ceremonials. They offered a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations; they built a second world and a second life outside officialdom, a world in which all medieval people participated more or less, in which they lived during a given time of the year.¹⁶

The difference, and an important one at that, is that the culture described by Bakhtin had a different ontological status from that of Blåkulla: it existed in some real fashion. Both cultures, however, conceptualize a parallel existence. The problem with Bakhtin, both in his book on Rabelais and in his book on Dostoevsky, lies not in his findings of different kinds of reverse culture – he is quite consistent there – but in his wish to ideologize this reverse culture as a sphere of freedom. Blåkulla forms a reverse culture in all respects, but the reversal has little to do with freedom.

There are additional examples in the witnesses' accounts of the abundance existing in Blåkulla: the witches throw corn into the fire, thus destroying food – a particularly egregious crime in a society where crop failure and famine occurred often. There are also other expressions of abundance. A teenage boy had been promised a horse with a saddle and pistols. It must have been a purely wishful dream on his part. Most children also received gold coins as gifts in Blåkulla, but the coins then turned into stones.

IN ADDITION TO the everyday tasks listed above, the women are involved in evil doings: women are dancing,

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 shackles in order to set him free – really an incredible 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 he is on the top of her". Yet another testimony of the same sort: "Märit 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 into grease.¹⁷

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 body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth.¹⁸

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 obscenities 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 Satan 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 states that it is her own mother who induced her to begin 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."¹⁹ 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

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

and said that Satan was sitting on her mother's shoulder in the building where the commission was assembled. She also confessed 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-Per". 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 example, 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.²⁰ The girls too get married, but upon the marriage ceremony their husbands are turned into objects – one turns into a log. The girl Annika, eight years, testified that the housewife Margaret milked from Anders in Östpara 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 Rabelais. 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 horrible 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 tongue, which is hairy as a hairy skin patch. He has horns in his skull.²¹

The Devil is also playing some sort of instrument – with his tail or his rump, instead of with his hands and mouth.

The reader of the protocols also gets a fairly good impression of the dress code in Blåkulla. The colors of the participants' dresses are mentioned. Anna's daughter Kerstin wears a white shift, while the other children have beautiful shifts in bright colors, or striped shifts.

The children in Blåkulla are especially busy reading books. Satan has his own library there, which is also portrayed in accordance with the principle of reversal: the children do not read the catechism or "Our Father", but books full of curses or inverted prayers such as "Our Father, which art not in heaven" – a phenomenon in medieval culture known to us as "parodia sacra." Almost every witness specifies an exact number of books read in Blåkulla: two, three, or perhaps two and a half. Sometimes, the children resume their reading on following visits, and the protocol can run as follows: "he is reading his fourth book [in Blåkulla]". The books are full of curses or "contain all that is

ugly". "The boy Lars in the village Sânga said that he had read five books full of curses on everything on earth except on the magpie." Another child's testimony indicates that both the magpie and the bumblebee are exceptions in that they are not cursed in the books. From the perspective of the contemporary reader, the witnesses would appear to be making fun of the proceedings by the absurdity of their testimonies.

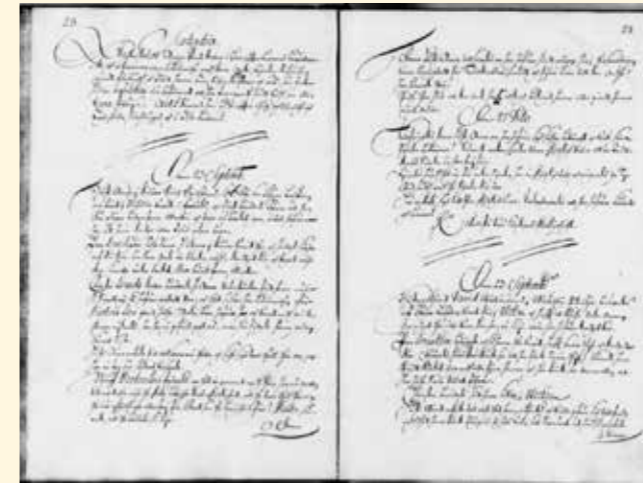
BLÅKULLA FUNCTIONS AS a school for those who are not literate. Kerstin, who is ten, says that she read five books, first spelled her way through them word by word and then learned how to read prayer curses on her own. One of the charges leveled against the adults is that they assisted with the reading practice in Blåkulla. The 13-year-old boy Per tells the commission about a girl with a gauze-hood 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 particular 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 identical testimonies, grouped under each accused. The voice of the prosecutor or of the court is not represented. Rather, everything is worded along the lines of "The boy Lars from Sânga, age 10, testifies against the housewife Margaret", followed by the children's stories. These stories are never questioned, and the witnesses 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 "She saw". This, together with the precise indication of the place names and dates, makes the protocols particularly frightening. Almost every village known to me from my childhood is mentioned, and a comparison of the names and the villages with the population register from these years shows that the majority of homes in the area were involved.

Some of the children also assign an exact geographical position to Blåkulla, locating it on a field in the village Utnäs belonging to the neighboring parish Styrnäs; but since the world of the carnival – again, according to Bakhtin – is mostly extraterritorial, no one knows for certain where and in what way it exists. Blåkulla is the antithesis of heaven, a church where the Devil either has the role of a priest or of a god. The world

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



The sentence against the author's ancestress.

depicted is a sort of hell as described by Bakhtin as a part of the reversed world: "Hell is a banquet and a gay carnival, the crossroads of two cultures".²² In this case Bakhtin also admits that violence exists in this carnival hell. The very existence of the commission seems to have triggered an intense desire to tell these stories; many of the children connect their first visit to Blåkulla to the arrival of the commission. In the reverse world, the powerless acquire power and create an alternative world which still contains some sort of hierarchy, only with the Devil at the top. 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 women.

YET MORE REVERSE 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, simultaneously. 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. Descriptions 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, sometimes in the form of a fly.

Even the greetings are reverted in Blåkulla; for example, the phrase "Woe is 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 substitution 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



The execution site in Boteå.

time, most of the descriptions of the women's activities in Blåkulla 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 frenzy 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 literal "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 explanation 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 still knew the old Catholic prayers by heart and used them in particular situations, for example to treat various diseases. The witch trials did in fact partly revolve around "wise women", women who would read various prayers from the older, Catholic era as a form of cure, as magic formulas. Ginzburg speaks of a pagan Diana cult still extant from antiquity that was defeated by the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. He also returns to the ergot theory and suggests that ergot was consciously used in the local communities as a drug, producing hallucinations much like those produced by LSD.²³

Let us now return to our line of argument in explaining the phenomenon. Averintsev poses the question: Must folk culture always be associated with laughter, or could it instead be the quality of reversal which is most important? The stories of witchcraft are not funny in themselves, despite the fact that many features may appear so to a modern reader, who naturally views them from an entirely different perspective.

Almost all characteristics of reverse cultures, in the Bakhtinian sense, are present: abundance of food, sex, a night world,

renaming and so on. The seventeenth-century situation, when hierarchical culture comes to dominate Western European civilization, is less well explicated in Bakhtin. In our micro-case we can observe this very process. The popular culture represented by the children and “witches” is taken over by the two authoritarian powers of church and state (the death sentences were always proclaimed both in the name of the state and the church). That, according to Sergei Averintsev, is also what happens with this sort of popular culture, although he does not refer to witchcraft in particular.

Aaron Gurevich, one of Russia’s most famous medieval historians, has also placed the witch trials in this context. He argues that the two forces claiming a monopoly on ideology – the church (the Protestant Reformation or the Catholic Counter-Reformation) and the absolute monarchy – destroyed an entire folk culture:

In witchcraft, the church and the secular power saw the embodiment of all the characteristics of the popular worldview and the corresponding practice, which was fundamentally at odds with the ideological monopoly to which the church and the absolute state of 16th and 17th centuries laid claim.²⁴

And further:

It was no longer a case of balancing one tradition with another – of the previous ambivalent “dialogue-conflict”, only conflict remained.²⁵

There had always existed a practice of accusations and counter-accusations of witchcraft among the people in the villages, but they had been dealt with by the local communities. Violence was a common feature of these communities, and it is also a constituent of “low culture”. In the seventeenth-century situation, these manifestations of folk culture suddenly became an issue for the state apparatus and the central church administration. The “equal” relationship between high and low culture ceased to exist as the authoritarian culture absorbed and annihilated the folk culture.

JUDGING FROM the example of witch trials examined here, folk culture does not seem to have the autonomous status vis-à-vis the official culture that Bakhtin asserts. As mentioned, it is important to remember that the lay judges taken from among the peasantry appear to have been very proactive in the trials, frequently demanding death sentences. However, as Bakhtin often notes in his book on Rabelais, the 17th century is a time of transition, when the popular laughter culture is weakened and the hierarchical culture increases in strength. In our case, the full confrontation between the two cultures results in the destruction of the reverse culture by the hierarchical culture, which employs

“THE TESTIMONIES SEEM TO CONTAIN ALL THE TRAITS ASSOCIATED WITH THE BAKHTINIAN LAUGHTER CULTURE, BUT WITHOUT LAUGHTER AS THEIR MAIN FEATURE.”

a huge number of the inhabitants of the parish for this purpose. Ankarloo describes “the interplay between genuine folklore and official ideology” as characteristic of the time.

Witch trials are thus not primarily a medieval phenomenon, but one connected to the Renaissance and the Reformation. The two classic manuals on witch-hunting were published as late as in 1487 (*Malleus Maleficarum* [The hammer of witches] by Jacob Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer) and 1580 (*De la démonomanie des sorciers* [On the demon-mania of the sorcerers] by Jean Bodin), in other words in the generations before and after Rabelais.

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. Laughter and the reverse culture in general do not have the revitalizing or renewing function so important in Bakhtin. Reverse culture may in certain instances be regarded as funny, as it relates to the folk humor of the premodern era, but 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 Blåkulla, but the real one – in order to “make fun” of the poor people in the villages of Ångermanland and 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 and as a means of negotiating power with the official culture: the bookish culture, usually important for disciplining people, is subverted into the special school in Blåkulla. The power over sexuality and name-giving is similarly contested.

There seem to be many factors behind the witch trials, but their cultural manifestations demonstrate the qualities of reverse culture: abundance of food, sex, renaming, and dehierarchization. The testimonies seem to contain all the traits associated with the Bakhtinian laughter culture, but without laughter as their main feature. The Russian scholars quoted here – Bakhtin, Averintsev, and Gurevich – as well as our analyses on the basis of their works, make the phenomenon of the witch trials more understandable from a scientific perspective, but the witch trials still remain enigmatic. Why would a local so-

ciety occupied with having enough food to eat for the day want to annihilate itself, and with such fervor?

LET ME SUMMARIZE.

1. The characteristics of reverse culture seem very salient in this minisociety. Bakhtin’s framework appears to work very well and have great explanatory power.
2. The relation between the reverse culture and laughter seems to be much more complicated and ambiguous than one would conclude from its presentation in Bakhtin. It can in fact be connected with different kinds of violence, although violence almost never appears in the contexts discussed by Bakhtin.
3. Violence is widespread in both high and low culture. Averintsev calls Bakhtin’s relation to laughter “utopian”, and I agree with this assessment.
4. There is a complex interrelationship between the high and low cultures, and in this case the secular and ecclesiastical powers usurp and annihilate the folk culture.

And what was the outcome for my ancestress and her son? As may be surmised from the fact that I am able to write this article, it went fairly well. My ancestress 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 fornicated 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 literatures at Stockholm University.

references

- 1 Sergei Averintsev, “Bakhtin, Laughter and Christian Culture”, trans. Leonid Livak, Alexandar Mihailovic, and Vadim Liapunov, in *Bakhtin and Religion: A Feeling for Faith*, ed. Susan M. Felch and Paul J. Contino (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000) 79–95 [Russian original: Sergei Averintsev, “Bakhtin, smekh, khristianskaia kul’tura”, in *M. M. Bakhhtin kak filosof* (Moscow: Nauka, 1992), 7–19.]
- 2 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 95.
- 3 S. S. Averintsev, “Bakhtin i russkoe otnoshenie k smekhu”, in *Ot mifa k literature: Sbornik v chest’ 75-letia E. M. Meletinskogo*, ed. Elena Sergeevna Novik, Sergei Iur’evich Nekliudov, and Eleazar Moiseevich Meletinskii (Moscow: Rossiiskii universitet, 1993), 341–345.
- 4 Dmitrii Sergeevich Likhachev, Natal’ia Vladimirovna Ponyrko, and Aleksandr Mikhailovich Panchenko, *Smekh v drevnei Rusi* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1984).
- 5 Dietz-Rüdiger Moser, “Lachkultur des Mittelalters: Michael Bachtin and die Folgen seiner Theorie,” *Euphorion* 84 (1990): 89–111.
- 6 Bengt Ankarloo, *Trolldomsprocesserna i Sverige* (Stockholm: Lunds Universitet, 1971).
- 7 Marie Lennerstrand and Linda Oja, *Livet går vidare: Älvdalen och Rättvik efter de stora häxprocesserna 1668–1671* (Hedemora: Gidlund, 2006).
- 8 Stephen A. Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 1–15.
- 9 Iu. Lotman, “Okhota za ved’mami: Semiotika strakha”, *Trudy po znakovym sistemam* 26 (1998): 61–82.
- 10 Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches’ Sabbath* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1990).
- 11 Ankarloo, *Trolldomsprocesserna i Sverige*.
- 12 Ankarloo, *Trolldomsprocesserna i Sverige*, 113–214.
- 13 Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).
- 14 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 11.
- 15 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Sobranie sochinenii* [Collected works], vol. 4, 69.
- 16 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 56.
- 17 Swedish National Archives, Stockholm, *Kommissorialrätt i Västernorrland angående trolldomsväsendet* [Legislation in the Western North district concerning sorcery], vol. 1, 1674–1675 – SE/RA/310183/1 (1674–1675), 2.
- 18 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 21.
- 19 Landsarkivet i Härnösand, Södra Ångermanlands domsagas arkiv 1661–1912. Domböcker och protokoll [The Provincial Archives of Härnösand. The Juridical District of Southern Ångermanland. Judgement Books and Protocols before 1948]. A. I. Domböcker före 1948. A. I. a. Domböcker vid ordinarie ting [Judgement Books from Regular Court Sessions], vol. 1 – SE/HLA/1040102/A/A I a/1, 10.
- 20 Ibid., 6.
- 21 Ibid., 66.
- 22 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 301.
- 23 Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 303–304.
- 24 Aron Iakovlevich Gurevich, *Srednevekovi mir: kul’tura bezmolstvuiushchego bol’shinstva* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1990), 374.
- 25 Aron Iakovlevich Gurevich, *Izbrannye trudy*, vol. 2: *Srednevekovi mir* (Moscow and St. Petersburg: Universitetskaia kniga, 1999), 522.

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

Mikhail Bakhtin's works² in contemporary times have aroused a lot of interest and had significant influence on a variety of fields and disciplines, postcolonial studies being one of them. Bakhtin's theory of speech genres, his work on the philosophy of language and his theory of the novel have marked very important developments in humanities and social sciences. “Bakhtinian” concepts such as dialogism, heteroglossia, and carnival have acquired tremendous critical valence in postcolonial literary and cultural studies and their applications are sometimes bewilderingly multiple and varied. Bakhtin's work on chronotopes and genre among others can be used very fruitfully in engaging with the human subject who is positioned at the threshold of multiple consciousness and has a fractious relationship with language and culture. Bakhtinian categories can be used productively to raise questions about language, genre, and culture rather than provide definite answers to the conditions of contemporary reality.

In this paper I use Bakhtin's concept of dialogism,³ to analyze how the authorial voice is fractured by the presence of competing voices internalized by the author. These voices present alternate systems of meaning facilitating new modes of self-reflexivity. I use Bakhtin's dialogism in the sense of an ideology critique to study the way postcolonial memoirs threaten grand narratives of autobiographies, challenge the authority of any sin-

gular way of knowing, and question the absolute sovereign self by showing it to be both contradictory and contingent. Postcolonial memoirs in their own haunting way seek to revisit and retell, in all their literariness, the life writings of contemporary authors who meditate upon the rapidly changing cultural and political configurations of our times. These memoirs present a contemporary portrait of the self that is situated along the fault lines of history, geography, and imagination. The consciousness of the postcolonial self as a product of the history of empire and of resistance to it, can be most productively seen in the memoir genre.

THIS PAPER WILL ALSO reconsider notions of narrative liminality and interruptive dialogism in the reading of the postcolonial memoir. Juxtaposing the postcolonial in-betweenness of critical discourse with Bakhtin's idea of hybridized, collusive and hidden dialogicality; the postcolonial memoir can be read as the self's mapping of a paradigm shift in contemporary times i.e.: from memory as passive remembrance of the past, to “memory as work”⁴. The postcolonial memoir constructs itself as a genre

that is constantly searching, digging, and writing the past. Bakhtin's conception of the dialogic can play a useful role in understanding the ways in which postcolonial memoirs become a site of contestation and endless re-negotiation. Pointing to the crisis of authorship and the narrative plurality within a single text, Bakhtin's idea of the simultaneous presence of competing voices lends itself quite productively to analyze the postcolonial memoir as a struggle with authorial representation, narrative self-consciousness and intersubjective interactions.

abstract

Juxtaposing the postcolonial in-betweenness of critical discourse with Bakhtin's idea of hybridized, collusive and hidden dialogicality, the postcolonial memoir can be read as the self's mapping of a paradigm shift in contemporary times. The postcolonial memoirs become a site of contested, unsettling and endless renegotiations. I shall read South Asian-American diasporic writer Meena Alexander's 1993 *Fault Lines: A Memoir* and the revised 2003 version as dialogic texts. Alexander's memoirs engage, contest and alter each other to disrupt the possibility of singular meanings and absolute truth. Instead, the texts offer a conflicting and incommensurate idea of the past and a fractured yet intensely interconnected vision of the present.

KEY WORDS: Bakhtin; dialogic; postcolonial memoir; language; representation; diaspora.



ILLUSTRATION: KATRIN STENMARK

The principle of dialogue that dominates Bakhtin's central essays 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 language and that which is repressed and remains implicit is what makes Bakhtin's concept of dialogism so significant for understanding memory and the politics of forgetting.

Meena Alexander and the postcolonial memoir

In order to illustrate the idea of the postcolonial memoir as a discursive embodiment of a multilayered yet fractured consciousness, I shall read the two editions of the South Asian-American diasporic writer Meena Alexander's *Fault Lines: A Memoir*,⁵ first published in 1993 and then revised and republished in 2003 as dialogic texts. Meena Alexander is one of the most important contemporary Indian-American writers of the South Asian di-

aspora. Her poems, novels and memoirs have been widely read and anthologized. In addition to her acclaimed poetry, Meena Alexander's memoirs and novels have also received enormous critical interest. She has lived on four continents and her life is marked by multiple passages across continents and borders. With a literary career spanning three decades, Alexander's writing has generated sufficient scholarly interest.

Fault Lines: A Memoir represents the complexities associated with the diasporic experience. The text situates the female diasporic body as a location of endless marking. Alexander talks about the ways she has been continuously marked as a “South Asian woman”, a “Third World woman”, “a female of color”, a “postcolonial writer”, an “Asian-American feminist”. All terms attempting to box her in finite, graspable categories; while ignoring the reality of multiple fractures, multiple migrations, that have fragmented her and made it impossible to name, comprehend, or contain her within any kind of boundaries. Alexander's works exhibit a transnational diasporic sensibility that refuses discursive categorization and instead negotiate a hybrid, fluid,

shifting, and hyphenated identity. All her works are profoundly influenced by the numerous ways in which she has experienced mobility, displacement and relocation and the multiple ways in which she has continuously negotiated complex intersections of cultures, languages, race, gender and history. Her perpetual search for home and her painful awareness of the impossibility of claiming any stable, single, fixed home; marks her writing with a diasporic angst that embodies the trauma of dislocation and fragmentation. Alexander's gendered and racialized subjectivity and her yearning for "physical, imaginative and spiritual space"⁶ are articulated and represented in her works.

What is particularly interesting is the way the memoirs alter our understanding of the past when they are read together. Alexander left an extremely significant part of her past out of the 1993 publication. She adds a new chapter on sexual abuse by her maternal grandfather in the revised edition turning the figure of her beloved grandfather Ilya into someone who broke her trust and victimized her as a child. After September 11, 2001, Alexander felt compelled to write about her abuse and name her abuser and therefore needed to revise the memoir. As readers when we read the 1993 memoir after having come to know about the terrible secret that Alexander had not spoken about we realize that the text did contain, hidden in its silences and omissions, clues about the abuse that took place within the confines of the Tiruvella. The memoirs now read as a palimpsest. Each edition appears fundamentally different in the light of the other.

The texts offer a conflicting and incommensurate idea of the past and a fractured yet intensely interconnected vision of the present. Both the editions testify to the multilayered nature of consciousness through the workings of memory and language. Alexander uses both the texts to reveal her own struggle with what is allowed to be remembered and what one is compelled to forget. Alexander's memoirs engage, contest and alter each other to disrupt the possibility of singular meanings and absolute truth by rewriting and writing over a single text twice. In doing that she is able to break up the discourse of silence and unlock the dark, painful past that was carefully concealed. The memoirs testify to the presence of multiple voices that keep pushing against each other to resist the authority and autonomy of any single authorial voice. In this sense, the memoirs become dialogic, facilitating the articulation of a hybrid, diasporic sensibility that destabilizes narratives of singular origin and absolute identities.

Crisis of authorship, dialogism and writing memory

Mikhail Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* (1929) clearly points out that Dostoevsky's work is "symptomatic of a profound crisis of authorship and of the utterance in general."⁷ Bakhtin's ideas of a fluid, questionable narrator who replaces the author as seen most prominently in Dostoevsky's novels is cause for celebration. Bakhtin sees this supplanting of the dominant authorial discourse by a free-flowing, relativized narrative which renders the former obsolete as, an indication of a new kind of writing. He goes so far as to assert that this new writing is a mark of progres-

sive democratic culture and irreducible pluralism. This is not to say that Bakhtin considers Dostoevsky's works simply as celebrations of social dialogue; rather what he sees in his writings is the ability of the author to find his or her "unique and unrepeatable place in relation to the characters ... without imposing a causal and deterministic logic on them."⁸ This allows the emergence of varied perspectives, a relativity of points of view and the presence of multiple voices in the text.

For Bakhtin the presence of multiple voices inside as well as outside the self generates conversation which is articulated through language. This multiplicity of contesting voices is dialogism. As an antidote to monologism, dialogism decenters authoritarian discourses to generate the idea of difference, of plurality, of talking back. Dialogism according to Mikhail Bakhtin would provide opportunities of renewal, regeneration, and offer multiplicity of meanings. Discourse in the Bakhtinian sense would hence incorporate messy communication such as cross-talking or writing over; thus hinting at the very Janus-like nature of utterance. According to Bakhtin there is no dialogism if there is no response. Every utterance becomes interpolated only through the articulation of a response. It is in this Janus-like utterance that context gets defined and new social realities get formed.

DIALOGISM BEGINS as a listening practice. Alexander's will to listen to her inner voice, to engage with it rigorously, crossing cultural and historical time to put it down as record, to archive it for the future are examples of how the impulse towards dialogism is present in postcolonial aesthetic practices. Alexander's 2003 *Fault Lines* talks back to the 1993 version and cuts through the authorial voice of the past to do the retelling. This latter version contradicts the earlier version and offers an alternate reality through intrusions, responses, objections, pauses and narratorial intervention. In the Bakhtinian sense, her writing of the 2003 memoir is evidently an example of "dialogized heteroglossia" that cross-talks in multiple tongues: literally in Malayalam, Hindi, Tamil, Arabic, French, and English and metaphorically to the 1991 memoir in conflicting voices that hide as well as reveal, continue as well as disrupt and concede as well as interrogates. A close reading of both the works shows how Alexander is able to create a fountain-head of composites that threaten to open the floodgates of memory, dislodge boundaries of literature and narration, and signal the upheavals and "perils" of contact zone⁹ which are social spaces where culture, language, race and class, meet, clash and grapple together in a violent tussle of power. Meena Alexander's memoir becomes the contact zone where past memories and present realities meet to open up a third space of negotiation and enunciation¹⁰, articulating how ethnic identities in a multicultural and multi-racial America clash with postcolonial identities of resistance and autonomy, and how hybrid diasporic contestations wrestle with transnational feminist collaboration. In this light 1991 the *Fault Lines: A Memoir* and the 2003 revised version can be read as competing centripetal and centrifugal texts that operate in simultaneity and in constantly shifting moments of utterance; cautioning us about the painful

unreliability of history and memory, and the deeply ambiguous contours of language and discursive representation.

Writing a memoir offers Alexander a mode to unravel her past and a strategy to deal with the pain of multiple dislocations and the trauma of fractured identity. Responding to Deepika Bahri and Mary Vasudeva in an interview, Alexander points out how "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."¹¹ 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 vivify what one thinks of as identity by redefining one's self is 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."¹² By writing a memoir Alexander is doing a very American thing and yet by choosing to write a memoir instead of an autobiography she is redefining 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, prying open the dark memories of abuse sutured 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 talking about shame in "The Stone Eating Girl" changes the parameters of her relationship with the Tiruvella home and her own relationship with her body. Battling to come to terms with the realization that she had not only left a significant part of her childhood out of her writing but had also failed to remember, betrayed by her own memory – Alexander laments – "A woman who did not know herself, how could I have written a book on my life and thought it true?"¹³ It is only by writing the coda after the tragedy of 9/11 and by reading Assia Djebar's *Fantasia*, a story told in fragments with the haunting image of a severed hand, that she is able to fill in the blank spaces of her memory. Alexander's memory is filled with repressed or half-remembered stories from her past that are sometimes invented and at other times unpacked in order to ensure narrative flow and to make sense of her private tribulations and the psychological contradictions of living as a diasporic transnational in the U.S. In a way, the genre of memoir makes it possible for the discursive formation of identity in Alexander and writing it brings to the forefront contentious issues of postcolonial memory and belonging. Her writing points to the contradictory and arbitrary nature of private memory which in turn is reflective of the fragmented and fractured space of the postcolonial nation-state and the violent disjunctions of the metropole. In other words, *Fault Lines* preoccupation with remembrance and forgetting, trauma and exclusion, raises significant questions

"THE PRINCIPLE OF DIALOGUE THAT DOMINATES BAKHTIN'S CENTRAL ESSAYS ON THE NOVEL HAS HUGE IMPLICATIONS FOR LITERARY THEORY."

about the nature of memory and representation.

In the chapter "Dark Mirror" Alexander confesses: "My aim is not to cross out what I first wrote but to deepen that writing, dig under it, even to the point of overturning one of the most cherished figures I created."¹⁴ With her 2003 edition of *Fault Lines*, Alexander acknowledges the silences

that a text conspires to keep, in order to tell itself. For her, the *memory gap*¹⁵ closes on itself, facilitating a reclamation and recovery 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, expensive, main-storage devices and slow, high capacity, inexpensive secondary-storage devices",¹⁶ 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 available only on recall through repetition or trauma) although there might be an uncomfortable remnant of it in the *primary memory* (part of the brain that holds information for reasoning and comprehension and is available in the form of active recall). But this lapse or fault 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 significant external event can dislodge the repressed memories, making them surface and claim ground, closing the memory gap by suddenly filling it up with the forgotten time.

Alexander's writing occupies a space between layers of loss and mined in gaps: of memory, of home, of language, of family, of location, of identity. It is marked by the urgency of breaking free and leaving. Loss becomes an important feature of migrant subjectivity and leads to a serious deficiency or lack in Alexander's attempts at self-construction and self-definition. In an interview with Susie Tharu she says, "I write because I don't know what I am."¹⁷ Attempting to reconstruct her subjectivity through a recovery of her childhood and a mapping of her several dislocations, Alexander enters her own narrative as a fractured and "self-declared deficient subject who has been traumatized, by her multiple migrations, sexual abuse and forgetfulness;"¹⁸ and needs to make up memory in order to reconstruct her fractured subjectivity and reclaim her past.

Body memory: Home, belonging and postcolonial dislocations

In the 1993 memoir Alexander begins with the question: "Where did I come from? How did I become what I am?"¹⁹ Doing a genealogical search for her origins, and realizing the ambiguity of beginnings, Alexander is tormented by issues of belonging and roots. By the time she rewrites the memoir in 2003, she is a woman broken by multiple migrations who now needs to write

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 with its cool bedrooms and coiled verandas: the shelter of memory."²⁰ The darkness of the Tiruvella house holds a terrible secret, which if 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, is what 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.²¹

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 interrelational process of evaluating the self with respect to the greater history."²² Alexander becomes a commentator of the times whose embedded and relational self is hinged upon the unstable hyphenations with people, community, places and events.

Recognizing how memory touches upon the questions of dislocation, identity, nationalism, and power, Alexander forces herself to ask in the section "Writing in Fragments", "How could I not have known what happened to me?" She then answers:

The short answer is of course I knew. I simply could not bear to remember. I picked through any books I could find on trauma theory. I taught myself to accept that there is knowledge that is too much for the nervous system to bear, that disappears underground, but sparks up through fault lines. [...]

As I remembered Ilya, as I wrote him into being, I saw the child that I was, the child who set herself the harsh task of forgetting. To learn to forget is as hard as to learn to remember.

The girl child and the woman flow together. Will the hand that was cut off become part of my body again? How slowly I pick up the *qalam*.²³

Writing her way into the home of her past, pushed by the image of the severed hand in Djébar's *Fantasia*, she jolts the reader into a shock. The reader is shocked not because she remembered but because she forgot. The other reason why it is doubly difficult to deal with the omission of the abuse is her representation of her grandfather in the 1993 memoir:

Almost seventy by the time I was born, he [Ilya] was well established as an intellectual and community leader [...] I began to accept his place in the world around him, his public power. I loved him more than I have ever loved anyone in my life – in that intensity that childhood brings.²⁴

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 could not conceive life without Ilya. I drew nourishment from him as a young thing might from an older being gnarled with time",²⁵ 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 "Katha", Alexander talks about "two sorts of memories; two opposing ways of being towards the past. The first makes whorls of skin and flesh [...]. A life embedded in a life, and that in another life, another and another. [...] The other kind of memory comes to her in "bits and pieces of the present, it renders the past suspect, cowardly, baseless".²⁶ The first type of memory is the external "legitimate memory" and the second kind is the "deep memory." Hyphenated 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 1933, her memoir used the whorls of skin and flesh of memory to paint Ilya, tracing him in her blood and in the bloodstream of the Tiruvella clan. In 2003, the bits and pieces of scrap that were enfolded in forgetfulness begin to emerge, filled by the "burning present, cut by existential choices," placing her previously told childhood history on a fault line, and turning her postcolonial identity into an arbitrary and contingent thing.²⁷

Rewriting the memoir points to the transmutation that takes place in the case of memories and to how memories become gnarled and garbled 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."²⁸ Just like there were rooms after rooms that made a maze out of the Tiruvella house of her childhood, Alexander's memory too causes her tremendous unease. This sense of alienation and homelessness can be negotiated only if she writes her abuse into language, confronting rather than concealing. "*Write in fragments, the fragments will save you*"²⁹ she notes after reading Djébar's book. Fragments become an important discursive tool through which Alexander attempts to make sense of herself and her multiple dislocations. Her memoir thus does not follow any chronological order, nor does it remain bound in one language, or maintain 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 wrapped 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 sinister secret that haunts Alexander even while she is in Manhattan, and most importantly it stands for shame, for guilt of having trespassed, for being *perachathe* – shameless. In 1993 when she wrote the memoir her mouth was filled with these stones, swelling her belly, hurting her, knotting her up as each sentence that she tries to utter is a coiled-up stone, couching her writing in gaps and silence.

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 mouldering, fit to fall apart. What was the worth of words? [...] I was tormented by the feeling that I had written a memoir that was not true.³⁰

By remembering her abuse and the consequent shame, Alexander invokes the powers of the stone-eating girl to overcome the silence that her body was trapped in. With the slow awakening of her hidden past, haunted by the image of the severed "hand of mutilation and of memory",³¹ Alexander acknowledges the violence that fractured her body and splintered her self. She writes: "I learnt again that the body remembers when consciousness is numbed, that there is an instinctual truth of the body all the laws of the world combined cannot legislate away."³² Grandfather Ilya and the memory of abuse are registered not in her consciousness but fused

into her mind as one indivisible flesh. This kind of remembrance which is embodied points to a conflicting, oppositional consciousness. The socially constructed external memory of Ilya marks him as the nurturing, loving grandfather while the deep memory hides him and the heinous act that he perpetrated by this act of fusion. Deep memory according to Charlotte Delbo is "the persistence of the past in its own perpetual present,"³³ memory that runs through Alexander's memoirs and her body like an undercurrent whose force is palpable yet cannot be seen. The external memory and the deep memory gets superimposed holding Alexander's body and her writing to ransom, pushing her through the layers of loss and pulling her to the spaces of desire.

IN ALEXANDER'S CASE, memory is activated through the stimuli of an equally traumatic public event. Confronting the memories of sexual abuse for the first time, not after her father's or her grandfather's death, but in 2001 in the national and collective trauma of 9/11 and its aftermath, Alexander's individual narrative of trauma splits open the "dark mirror" and [tears] open the skin of memory;³⁴ making her write the memoir once again. Rewriting the book of remembrance and scratching the wounds open she begins to approach her past with the sense of discovery. Invoking Walter Benjamin whom she quotes in the preface to the section divider for "The Book of Childhood" she justifies her attempts to re-open her memoir in order to complete it: "He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging ... He must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter..."³⁵ 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, disgorge, and disperse the trauma of childhood abuse.

Troubled by her gradual awareness that she has left out something very important in her memoir, Alexander realizes that she needs to write once again. Later in the memoir Alexander tellingly describes the way the Tiruvella ancestral home with its teak and brass fixtures, is torn down to construct a new residence with modern conveniences. The metaphor of tearing down the old in order to make way for the new is symbolic of the rebuilding and restoring that she does by writing into memory the interiors 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 asylum of art", "where to dwell means to leave traces. In the

interior these are accentuated".³⁶ According to Alexander, re-writing the memoir by accentuating the traces of what had happened and what got left out is to acknowledge that "zone of radical illiteracy." It is in this zone that trauma and shame come together in a fiery muteness wherein the possibility of translation is directly linked to the author's ability to transport the violent unevenness and the

**"FAULT LINES
PREOCCUPATION WITH
REMEMBRANCE AND
FORGETTING, TRAUMA
AND EXCLUSION,
RAISES SIGNIFICANT
QUESTIONS ABOUT THE
NATURE OF MEMORY
AND REPRESENTATION."**

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 counter-memory wells up” and which can be found only when one falls through the door into the dark gap.³⁷

Falling through the memory gap, picking up the memoir to put together the missing pieces, particularly after 9/11, after the massacre of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 and on reading Djébar’s *Fantasia*, Alexander confesses, “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.”³⁸ As she confronts the truth in the discursive space of the memoir, she wonders what really fractured her and what defines her subjectivity. Is it the material facts of her many border crossings and her multiple dislocations or is it the betrayal and violation she experienced at the hands of the one she had most loved and most trusted, her beloved maternal grandfather? For Alexander there is no easy answer. Just as her transoceanic journeys took her from nation to nation, from culture to culture, from languages to languages; her journey from the dark chambers of secret shame to the white pages of imagination lit up by the sharp sunlight of disclosure takes her from trauma to healing. Her experiences of migrant dislocation and the trauma of private violation are intricately linked with each other to create a self that is dangerously split and deeply fractured, turning her into a subject who lives on the fault lines of a dark indigo body.

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 her “subjectivity to profound historical disruption.”³⁹ Her disclosure of forgetting crucial experiences from 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 a subject who is “cracked by multiple migrations”⁴⁰ and confesses to being a “faultmass”,⁴¹ 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 belonging. On one hand, the memories of Ilya’s “tall figure standing in the sunlight”⁴² with tears on his face, are powerfully wrought in the 1993 memoir, but in the 2003 edition this image of Ilya is broken into pieces, as Alexander writes her abuse in order to retrace spaces of unimaginable loss and unspeakable violence. The memory of Ilya seeing them off at the railway station signifies her deep, spiritual bond with him, and the moment of separation is symbolic of radical loss. This image of separation haunts her throughout her life and in the 1993 memoir she explains it thus: “That moment of parting from Ilya, repeated time and again as we returned to Tiruvella, only to leave again, became my trope of loss.”⁴³ Without reading the 2003 memoir it is impossible to figure out how the trope of loss could be anything but a symbol of dislocation, homelessness and migration. In fact the 1993 memoir conceals the possibil-

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

ity of alternate readings by first recounting how looking back at that moment of leaving she felt at that very instant that her “life split, then doubled itself, in a terrible concupiscence.”⁴⁴ 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.”⁴⁵

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 migrant 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 discontinuity that we see in Alexander’s migrancy 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 rebuild a fractured life in the discursive space of literature by giving voice to deep memory. *Fault Lines* is a text that finds its place at the site of many transits: 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 homes and inside people; but above all it is a narrative that supports the weight of a life yet tethers on the fault lines of personal history.

Using deep memory to draw up the unremembered past, Alexander does not give into the pitfalls of lame nostalgia but instead, creatively constructs a future that offers her the possibility of a negotiation with her fractured subjectivity and provides her the space to participate in her own healing. *Fault Lines* use of memory as work, in the Bakhtinian sense, can be read as a restorative and recuperative text. By writing back to the 1993 version in 2003, Alexander is able to make sense of the past, reclaim the stories that remained untold and caution us to the deeply ambiguous and inconclusive nature of all representation. In Bakhtinian terms, *Fault Lines* (1993 and 2003) points to “intentional hybridization,”⁴⁶ bringing the two versions in contact with each other without offering the possibility of any final resolution. The readers are free to choose the versions they find

convincing and are open to shifting loyalties. Playing with continuity, Alexander keeps writing the same story twice over; but also disrupts it by inserting her memory of the sexual abuse and challenging the very foundations of the earlier memoir. Thus, *Fault Lines* is both continuous as well as discontinu-

ous. By opposing one value system over the other, Alexander destabilizes the authorial subject in the first edition while making the post-authorial narrator of the 2003 version an unreliable one.

Interestingly, what *Fault Lines* (1993 and 2003) does is to question the very nature of writing, memory and language. It shows how the remembering subject and the writing subject in spite of being one, is still a dialectical synthesis of antithetical forces, entangled with and shot through within the possibility and the inevitability of another memory, another voice, another language and another point of view. ✕

Paromita Chakrabarti, 2010–2011 Fulbright Nehru research Fellow, department of English, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, and associate professor, Department of English, H.R. College, University of Mumbai, India.

references

- 1 Meena Alexander, *Fault Lines: A Memoir* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1993, 2003), 3.
- 2 Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 60–102.
- 3 Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin, TX: The University of Texas Press, 1981).
- 4 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
- 5 Alexander, *Fault Lines*.
- 6 Lavinia Dhingra Shankar, “Postcolonial Diasporics ‘Writing in Search of a Homeland’: Meena Alexander’s *Manhattan Music*, *Fault Lines* and *The Shock of Arrival*” *Routledge Literature Interpretation Theory*, 12, no 3 (2001): 305.
- 7 Craig Brandist, *The Bakhtin Circle: Philosophy, Culture and Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 91.
- 8 Brandist, *The Bakhtin Circle*, 95.
- 9 The idea of peril and danger of contact zones is taken from Mary Louis Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992). She argues that “autoethnography, transculturation, critique, collaboration, bilingualism, mediation, parody, denunciation, imaginary dialogue, vernacular expression”, along with “miscomprehension, incomprehension, dead letters, unread masterpieces, absolute heterogeneity of meaning,” serve as both “arts” and the perils of contact zones.
- 10 Homi Bhabha’s theory of postcolonial diasporic hybridity and the third space of enunciation and negotiation in his book *The Location of Culture* refers to a liminal space critical of essential identities and original culture. It is a space that is fraught with the complexities of translation of language and disruption of narratives. According to Bhabha the third space is a space of possibility where new forms of cultural practices, meaning and identities emerge by virtue of contestations and clashes with old and limited forms of existing categories of being and belonging, (London: Routledge, 1994).
- 11 Deepika Bahri and Mary Vasudeva, eds., *Between the Lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996) 47.
- 12 Bahri, 36.
- 13 Alexander, *Fault Lines*, 214.
- 14 Ibid., 229.

- 15 I am using the term *memory gap* from the field of computer science. All italics used in relation to this concept are mine.
- 16 McGraw-Hill Dictionary of Scientific & Technical Terms, 6 E. S.v. “memory gap.” Retrieved May 11 2017 from <http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/memory+gap>
- 17 Susie Tharu, “Almost Literally Making Ground: A Conversation With Meena Alexander” in *Chandrabhaga: A Magazine of World Writing* 7. (summer, 1982): 74.
- 18 Reshmi Dutt-Ballerstadt, *The Postcolonial Citizen: The Intellectual Migrant* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 29.
- 19 Alexander, *Fault Lines*, 2.
- 20 Ibid., 3.
- 21 Ibid., 3.
- 22 Aparajita De, “Making Meanings, Suturing Contradictions: An Analysis of *Fault Lines*” in *Mapping Subjectivities: The Cultural Poetics of Mobility and Identity in South Asian Diasporic Literature*, (PhD diss., University of West Virginia, 2009), 136.
- 23 Alexander, *Fault Lines*, 242.
- 24 Ibid., 52.
- 25 Ibid., 36.
- 26 Ibid., 29–30.
- 27 Ibid., 34.
- 28 Ibid., 51.
- 29 Ibid., 237.
- 30 Ibid., 241.
- 31 Ibid., 236.
- 32 Ibid., 242.
- 33 Roberta Culberston in “Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-establishing the Self” cites Charlotte 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 death seizing me, I feel myself die [...] the cry awakens me, and I emerge from the nightmare, exhausted. It takes days 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 distress or emotion.” *New Literary History*, 26: no. 1 (1995): 170.
- 34 Alexander, *Fault Lines*, 229.
- 35 Ibid., 227.
- 36 Ibid., 260.
- 37 Ibid., 260.
- 38 Ibid., 229.
- 39 Dutt-Ballerstadt, *The Postcolonial Citizen*, 44.
- 40 Alexander, *Fault Lines*, 2.
- 41 Ibid., 3.
- 42 Ibid., 63.
- 43 Ibid., 63.
- 44 Ibid., 63.
- 45 Ibid., 241.
- 46 In Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic Imagination* discourse is double-voiced, where one voice deliberately exposes and ironizes the other. Intentional hybridization of discourse is inherently dialogic as two points of view are set against each other, separate and unmixed. (University of Texas Press, 1981), 360.



From the 15th Bakhtin Conference: Julia Hayes inflated balloons show the Bakhtin's theories of meaning in praxis.

Workshop. Further discussion on the expansion of Bakhtinian ideas

SAVE THE DATE:

October 4, 2017, Room MA796 at Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES), Södertörn University.

TO PARTICIPATE:

Send an e-mail to Yulia Gradskova, yulia.gradskova@sh.se

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 as 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



Urban garden in Russia.

PHOTO: PETER SIGRIST

consequently agricultural production already faces decreasing yields of major crops and will continue to do so in the future.⁴

THESE 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 developing 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 found in Eastern Europe.

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.¹ 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.² 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.³ At the same time, climate change influences the environment, and

Non-commercial practices draw attention

These alternative, non-commercial practices of food production and exchange have drawn research attention to better understand possible societal and environmental implications of such practices in Eastern Europe and beyond. Petr Jehlička, together with several colleagues,⁵ 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 of households growing their own food.⁶ Around 64% of such households shared at least a small portion of the produced food, whereas about 14% of all surveyed households in Czechia shared at least one-tenth of their food, irrespective of their access to land or food production.⁷ Authors suggest that these practices contribute to social cohesion, and that many of those who share food are motivated by a sense of equality and a desire to help others and to contribute to social justice. Besides, most food exchanges occur face-to-face, helping to support social networks and trust. In terms of environmental impact, home-grown food production is not directly motivated by sustainability concerns. However, Jehlička and colleagues suggest that most of the home-grown food in the Czech Republic and Poland is consistent with organic certification criteria and, among other things, does not use chemical fertilizers and reduces food waste. Furthermore, home-grown food has lower CO₂ emissions as it often relies on manual labor and is consumed locally. Thus, the authors conclude that home-grown food contributes to sustainability by outcome rather than intention. Overall, the authors suggest that between 35% and 60% of the population in Central Eastern Europe grow some of their food, whereas this proportion is only 10% in Western Europe.⁸

Jehlička and colleagues acknowledge that informal food practices in postsocialist societies are often framed in negative terms as part of an informal economy not “appropriate” for developed societies, since these practices are associated with poverty and coping strategies typical of the societies of the “Global South”. Evidently, the authors disagree with such framing and propose viewing beneficial environmental and social outcomes of informal food practices as contributions to “quiet sustainability”: namely, practices that do not directly or indirectly relate to market transactions and are not directly

linked to sustainability goals by their practitioners, but nevertheless present examples of appealing, socially inclusive, rooted and therefore unforced forms of sustainability.⁹ This positive view of informal food practices in Eastern Europe suggests that some of their components can enhance both scientific and practical knowledge on alternative food systems suitable to the “Global North”.

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.

The trends of increasing interest, especially on the part of young people, in gardening and urban gardening are recorded worldwide, with various factors motivating them to produce their own food. More and more people are interested in health and wellness issues and want high quality food, and home gardening provides such an alternative. Others are motivated to contribute to sustainability efforts and prefer to eat locally produced food. However, for many, growing their own food has become a coping strategy to overcome hardships of the economic crisis. With influx of young people, home gardening becomes a growing field in the digital sphere and spurs further technological developments, including gardening apps giving tips, websites

where people offer their surplus yields, and gardening robots that people can assemble and program themselves. It is fair to assume that growing digitalization will play a greater role in the future of home-grown food production and exchange, and can provide interesting twists for informal food practices in Eastern Europe, expanding alternative networks in scale and reach. ✖

Natalya Yakusheva

PhD in Environmental Studies,
Södertörn University.

references

- 1 *Global Food Policy Report* (Washington: International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), 2016), <http://dx.doi.org/10.2499/9780896295827>.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 *FAO Statistical Pocket Book: World Food and Agriculture* (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2015).
- 4 IFPRI.
- 5 Petr Jehlička and Petr Daněk, *Rendering the Actually Existing Sharing Economy Visible: Home Grown Food and the Pleasure of Sharing*, paper presented at the CBEES Advanced Seminar Series, Stockholm, April 3, 2017; Joe Smith and Petr Jehlička, “Quiet Sustainability: Fertile Lessons from Europe’s Productive Gardeners”, *Journal of Rural Studies* 32: 148–157.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Smith and Jehlička.
- 9 Ibid.

BELARUS’S “ANGRY” PROTESTS: STILL WATERS RUN DEEP

In February and March 2017, the Belarusian authorities were confronted with a prolonged groundswell of grassroots protest activity in several parts of the country. Sparked by declining living standards and the unpopular “anti-parasite law” that taxed the unemployed, the sustained protests eventually forced the authoritarian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka to take the unusual step of suspending Presidential Decree no. 3 “On the Prevention of Social Dependency”, as the law is officially known.¹

On March 25, annually commemorated as “Freedom Day” by the Belarusian opposition,² hundreds of angry citizens took to the streets of the capital, Minsk. The day before, the police had already detained some opposition leaders, hoping the planned demonstration would not materialize due to lack of leadership; little did the authorities expect to see hundreds of people marching along Minsk’s largest avenue, heedless of the crackdown on the traditional political opponents of the regime. The response of law enforcement agencies to demonstrators – who, unexpectedly, no longer seemed to fear the probable threat of repressive measures – was brutal, raising questions as to whether this kind of violent overreaction was necessary or even productive.

What triggered this unusual turn of events in a country often perceived as a stable dictatorship with few real threats to Lukashenka’s quarter-century grip on power? Was there a possibility that the March 25 rally would spur major civil unrest akin to the “Colored Revolutions” or the more recent Maidan in Ukraine?

A new culture of protest

The annual Freedom Day rally in Minsk this year was just the tip of an iceberg, revealing unusual protest dynamics hardly seen on the surface. Since February, protests against Decree no. 3 had taken place in several larger cities such as Homel, Vitsebsk, and Brest, as well as in some rural



The president of Belarus, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, signing documents following Union State Supreme State Council meeting.

areas. In some places, these were the largest protests seen since 2010–2011, or even since the more turbulent 1990s. The “anti-parasite law” – promulgated in 2015, but with effects only being felt now – exacerbated widespread dissatisfaction with the economic situation that has been growing worse over the preceding months. Reminiscent of the Soviet-era crusade against social parasitism (*tuneyadstvo*), Decree no. 3 most adversely affected the unemployed, the underemployed and families with already unstable or low incomes. Under the law, anyone who failed to pay at least a certain amount of income tax within 183 working days is charged with a hefty fine.³ Not only was this law divorced from the deteriorating economic realities of the country, it was criticized as being socially regressive, effectively criminalizing poverty. It also ran counter to the trend towards a less heavy-handed authoritarianism adopted by Lukashenka since the “uneventful” presidential elections of 2015 and the resulting suspension of EU sanctions against his regime.

Confronted with the street protests, Lukashenka chose to suspend (but not

abolish) the “anti-parasite law”. Commenting on the situation, he blamed local authorities for “an awful implementation of the law”.⁴ Following the same line of argument, he explained to his Council of Ministers that “among those 200–500 people protesting”, few were real “parasites”, but instead were people offended by being sent a tax invoice by mistake.⁵ Not only was this rhetorical maneuver an attempt to downplay the size of the unrest; he also implied that anger at some kinds of failings was acceptable, as long as it was not deemed political protest – and if it was not aimed at him personally, but at incompetence much lower down in the system. Indeed, 2016 had already seen some limited protests in Belarus about social and economic issues that did not prompt the customary brutal repression by the state.⁶

OVERSHADOWED by the “anti-parasite law” rallies, another protest movement had grown up on the outskirts of Minsk. About 200 people protested against planned construction work at Kurapaty, a memorial the site of NKVD mass execu-

tions during Stalin's Great Purge in the 1930s. This protest was not the first of its kind; over the years, the remains 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 1988. After Pazniak was forced 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 theories blaming Nazi Germany 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 indifferent to repeated vandalism of the memorial site and property ownership disputes. There was little hope the protests this spring would succeed, since the property developer was politically well-connected. Nevertheless, after two weeks of protests, the construction company withdrew from the memorial territory.⁷

Both these cases represent significant mobilizations of civil society against arbitrary policies of Lukashenka's leadership. Few of the rare protest actions against Belarus's authoritarian system have been as successful as these two. Not only did protests achieve their goals, if perhaps only temporarily, but they also reveal important changes in power dynamics in Belarus.

FIRST, THESE 2017 PROTESTS were not about political freedoms and liberties, but socio-economic issues like economic fairness and cronyistic corruption. Waves of mass protests clearly were a result of the deteriorating economy and poor living standards. Costs of energy, long heavily subsidized, are rising as Belarus no longer enjoys as preferential relations with Russia as before. Many in Belarus consider the idea of taxing "parasites" – about 470,000 people – to be a quick fix to cover shortfalls in the state budget.⁸

Second, protest is no longer about the established political opposition, but about broad swathes of society expressing pent-up dissatisfaction. Rallies across the country have shown that ordinary citizens managed to outmaneuver the opposition parties in delivering their message to the authorities. Not only did the political opposition lack resources to support protests in rural areas, it also experienced serious coordination issues when it came to speaking with one voice – as if nothing had been learned from the fractious infighting of the previous years, which in no small part helps delegitimize the opposition in public opinion.

Third, although many anticipated that 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.

WHEN LOOKING AT THE demography of protests, a few things must be considered. In February and March, both young and old took to the streets of Belarus's cities. Somewhat surprisingly, the number of elderly protesters was higher than ever. Arrested and beaten by the police, some of these told journalists that they "had had enough".⁹ There was both despair and hope, hand in hand, they said, on the streets of Minsk. Protesters were not afraid of the police and the authorities, since "people have nothing to lose and nothing to fear".¹⁰

The social contract: Failure to deliver

The social contract between Lukashenka and the citizenry was that the people agreed to let him have unrestricted political control, and he would provide them with ever better standards of living. For about 15 years, this anti-democratic, but apparently mutually satisfactory agreement seemed to work. Since around 2010, however, Lukashenka has no longer been

delivering on his side of the bargain. Thus the people increasingly see that they need not uphold their side of the deal any more either.

The worsening economic situation also reflects structural shifts that most other post-Soviet societies experienced much earlier and much more drastically. At first, the Lukashenka system of paternalistic state capitalism, buoyed by cheap energy from Russia, shielded Belarus from the traumatic "shock therapy" reforms advocated by neoliberal advisers to neighboring governments. Instead of hurried privatizations that promoted asset stripping and oligarchic crony capitalism, Lukashenka maintained unified state ownership of Soviet-era enterprises in key sectors of the Belarusian economy. Over time, however, these underperforming 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.¹¹ In this context, the "anti-parasite law" would not only help refill state coffers, but would also be a way to exert economic control over those not working in state-owned companies: the true incomes of such individuals are difficult for the state to assess properly, with the risk that unreported money could be used to fund underground political activity.

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 to deliver economic growth, prosperity, and welfare – as long as the criticism was not aimed at him personally. Hence the partial climbdowns, like the suspension of Decree no. 3 that had supposedly been mismanaged at the local level, or the moratorium on construction by a shady developer at Kurapaty.

This behavior, which could be considered mainly sops to calm agitated public opinion, belies a deeper fear of a mass up-

rising. Lukashenka does not want to end up like Viktor Yanukovich – or, worse, like Nicolae Ceaușescu. At the same time, he is also currently isolated internationally. Ironically, thanks to his previously deft geopolitical fence-sitting since the Ukraine crisis, both the EU and Russia are at present lukewarm partners, both largely content to let Lukashenka solve his own problems, which are not deemed overly serious from an outside perspective.

Lukashenka, however, appears uneasy. The evidence of this is in the crack-downs that, while not directly aimed at the ordinary citizens protesting in the street, targeted symbolically significant elements in civil society. Aside from the various opposition political figures routinely detained before or during protests, among those arrested were journalists, poets, and members of a non-state theatre company, i.e. persons not on the public payroll and who had the potential to influence public opinion. (This recalls the key role of independent journalists like Mustafa Nayyem in mobilizing mass participation in the early Euromaidan movement in Ukraine.) Furthermore, the offices of the human rights NGO *Vi-asna* were raided and its staff arrested, as a gesture that pinpointed civil society organizations as a perceived threat to the regime.

EVEN CONSIDERING THE LACK of fear expressed by demonstrators, however, civil society has not sought to escalate the protests to a mass uprising against Lukashenka's rule. Civil society in Belarus is still too weak, and the regime, while gradually losing ground, remains strong enough to quash dissent with relative efficacy. Nevertheless, Lukashenka has raised the specter of a threatened coup against him. In a bizarre spectacle, on March 23 the security services arrested members of the far-right White Legion and the nationalist Young Front, accusing them of planning an armed putsch on Freedom Day. As evidence of the coup preparations, the state authorities presented a cache of seized weapons, including machine guns and grenades, and paraphernalia of the Ukrainian pro-fascist volunteer combat unit, Azov Battalion.¹² While the White

Legion is a paramilitary group previously accused of terrorism in connection with bombings in Minsk in 2008 that also could have targeted Lukashenka, the fact that the group had been crushed by the security services a decade ago made them highly improbable culprits to overthrow the government of Belarus in 2017.

ONE EXPLANATION for this is that Lukashenka sought to forestall a potential Maidan situation in Minsk by conjuring up a nightmare scenario based on the narrative of Euromaidan as a "fascist coup" familiar to Belarusians from the Russian media. This narrative blames the woes of Ukraine today – political chaos, economic collapse, and a conflict destroying both individual lives and the wealth of the nation – on the fact that what started as a civic protest movement was hijacked by extremist ultranationalist elements. The White Legion – whose links to the Ukrainian far right were part of their original story, predating any alleged contacts with Azov – thus provide a useful bridge between the past and the present for a similar discourse in Belarus. The suggestion is that the semi-legitimate protests against socio-economic problems in Belarus could similarly be subverted by power-hungry extremists. A "fascist junta" like the one in Kyiv, if successful, would drag Belarus into chaos and strife, probably prompting Russian military intervention 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 acceding to his one-man rule, this time he would offer a hard bargain based on scaremongering, asserting that the choice was between his rule or fascists destroying the country, and that only he as continuing strongman could be trusted to keep the fascists behind bars.

That the protests failed to gain momentum after Freedom Day meant that Lukashenka never actually had to present such a new deal to the people of Belarus for consideration. Yet the elaborate work that went into preparing a way of discrediting the demonstrations, rather than being seen as making Yanukovich's mistake

of coming down too forcefully on people with sincere grievances and thereby inviting a righteous backlash, suggests that the political landscape in authoritarian Belarus is in the process of shifting in directions 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 Eurasian Studies, Uppsala University.

references

- 1 Dekret No 3 Prezidenta Respubliki Belarus' o preduprezhdenii sotsial'nogo izhdvenchestva, Official Internet Portal of the President of the Republic of Belarus, April 2, 2015, accessed April 20, 2017, <http://president.gov.by/uploads/documents/3decree.pdf>.
- 2 Freedom Day is an unofficial commemoration on March 25 to mark the proclamation of the short-lived Belarusian People's Republic on this day in 1918. An annual demonstration is arranged by 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 one more reminiscent of the Byelorussian SSR in 1995.
- 3 Dekret No 3.
- 4 "Soveshchaniye o problemakh i perspektivakh razvitiya belorusskoy nauki", Official Internet Portal of the President of the Republic of Belarus, April 7, 2017, accessed April 20, 2017, http://www.president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/coveschanie-o-problemakh-i-perspektivax-razvitija-belorusskoj-nauki-15964/.
- 5 "Soveshchaniye ob aktual'nykh voprosakh razvitiya Belarusi", Official Internet Portal of the President of the Republic of Belarus, March 9, 2017, accessed April 20, 2017, http://www.president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/soveschanie-ob-aktualnyx-voprosax-razvitija-belarusi-15736/.
- 6 E.g., Yuras Karmanau, "More than 500 people have marched through the capital of Belarus to demand that the government scrap new requirements for small private businessmen that they say impose an unfair burden on them", *US News & World Report* website, February 28, 2016, accessed April 20, 2017,

<https://www.usnews.com/news/business/articles/2016-02-28/hundreds-protest-in-belarus-in-support-of-small-businessmen>.

- 7 Tat'yana Mel'nichuk, "Kuropaty: komu prinadlezhit 'rasstrel'nyy les'?", BBC Russkaya sluzhba, March 6, 2017, accessed April 20, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/russian/features-39157249>.
- 8 Artem Shraybman, "Novoye kachestvo protesta: Pochemu belorusy nachali vykhodit na ulitsy", Carnegie Moscow Center website, March 2, 2017, accessed April 20, 2017, <http://carnegie.ru/commentary/?fa=68119>.
- 9 "Stariki-razboyniki", *Belorusskiy partizan* website, April 4, 2017, accessed April 20, 2017, <http://www.belaruspartisan.org/politic/375798/>.
- 10 Shraybman, "Novoye kachestvo protesta".
- 11 Cf. "Belarus 2.0: Tech's Bright Spot in a Struggling Economy", Euronews website, March 31, 2016, accessed April 20, 2017, <http://www.euronews.com/2016/03/31/belarus-20-tech-s-bright-spot-in-a-struggling-economy>.
- 12 "Belarusian investigators reveal White Legion's plans for March 25 protest", Belarusian television channel CTV website, n.d. [March 23, 2017], accessed April 20, 2017, <http://en.ctv.by/en/1490344828-belarusian-investigators-reveal-white-legions-plans-for-march-25-protest>.



Popular campaign against nuclear energy and nuclear weapons demonstrating in Sergels Torg [Sergel's Square], Stockholm, in 2009. PHOTO: KLIMATUPPLYSNINGEN.SE

REFLECTING 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 '90s. This raises the question in what regard they are connected and how they relate to each other. Shall these mobilizations be considered as parts of the same movements or as two different ones? 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-twenty century. The peak of anti-nuclear mobilization occurred in the 1980s and 1990s when anti-nuclear movements appeared in many places around the globe.¹ 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 was the fact that some governments decided to freeze their nuclear energy development programs. In the recent period, from 2005 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.² The varying circumstances and action repertoires of the recent anti-nuclear movements, in comparison with those of the past, raise the question, what is the relation between these mobilizations in two different periods?

APPROACHING THIS QUESTION theoretically, it is important to note that there are analytical concepts that explain continuity in social movements. These are cycles of contention³ 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 are softer (waves can be of different size and intensity). Tarrow argues that social movements develop in cycles, like other social organizations and institutions.⁴ 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 actions, since the movements in these two periods do not look alike. Tarrow acknowledges that, in a new cycle of contention, movements may rise with innovative forms of contention. Even if, following Tarrow's idea on cycles of contention, it is still unclear whether a movement with a changed action repertoire, rhetoric adjusted to public discourses, and possible changes in its structure should be considered the same movement – as is the case with recent anti-nuclear movements. Even if the concepts of cycles of contention or waves of collective action can be applied to two periods of anti-nuclear movements, the movements probably have changed so much that continuity between them could not be found.

This brings us to the necessity of reflecting further about a line beyond which a movement has to be seen as a different movement. It appears unproductive to always consider a social movement as the same movement simply because acts in the same domain since this could imply a potential overstretching of the concepts

of cycles of contention and waves of collective action.

According to Giugni and Grasso, the concept of social movement is more empirical than analytical.⁵ So the issue of continuity in anti-nuclear movements could be approached empirically. In my recently defended PhD thesis on anti-nuclear movements in Russia, Poland, and Sweden,⁶ representatives of environmental NGOs and local anti-nuclear groups were interviewed. A number of observations could be made on the basis of these interviews and on the process of conducting interviews and finding new respondents by the snowballing technique.

Activists who took part in previous 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 the recent anti-nuclear mobilizations. The frequent answer was that they do not really see much difference between the past and present mobilizations. For them it is the same movement. This was not the case with the activists who were engaged in the recent period. They are aware and keep in contact with the activists who have experience of anti-nuclear movements in the past, but they do not make such an explicit statement about the continuity of the anti-nuclear movements. Therefore, the interviews have not provided a clear conclusion on continuity of anti-nuclear 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

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 2005 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 analyze it in greater detail, we first need to set the boundaries of application of the concepts of cycles of contention and waves of collective action. ❌

Ekaterina Tarasova

PhD in political science from Södertörn University.

references

- 1 Wolfgang Rüdiger, *Anti-nuclear Movements: a World Survey of Opposition to Nuclear Energy* (Harlow: Longman, 1990).
- 2 Ekaterina Tarasova, "Anti-nuclear Movements in Discursive and Political Contexts: Between Expert Voices and Local Protests" (PhD dissertation, Södertörn University, 2017); Tuula Teräväinen, Markku Lehtonen, and Mari Martiskainen, "Climate Change, Energy Security, and Risk: Debating Nuclear New Build in Finland, France and the UK," *Energy Policy* 39 (2009): 6, 3434–3442.
- 3 Sidney Tarrow, *Struggle, Politics and Reform: Collective Action, Social Movements, and Cycles of Protest*, Occasional Paper no. 2, Western Societies Program, Center for International Studies (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1989).
- 4 Tarrow, *Struggle, Politics and Reform*.
- 5 Marco Giugni and Maria T. Grasso, "Environmental Movements in Advanced Industrial Democracies: Heterogeneity, Transformation, and Institutionalization," *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 40 (2015), 337–361.
- 6 Tarasova, *Antinuclear Movements*.

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 Military 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 complicated. 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 need to reach Western audiences, 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 antimigrants 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 2003-2005 and during the "Arab Spring". Symptomatically in October 2016 the pro-Kremlin journalist Dmitri Kisseliov, 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, plurality and equality of opinions. Moreover, the Kremlin's disinformation is also quite vividly 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 audiences 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 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 geopolitical 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. Each of the Baltic countries 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 26 and 27, 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 memorial 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 preparations began much earlier. Even now almost ten years later the "Bronze Soldier" is still a very sensitive page in modern Estonian history and is often invoked in domestic political debates. A significant countermeasure against disinformation in Estonia was made in September 2015 when a national Russian-language TV channel ETV+ was launched. Debates about such a TV channel appeared right after Estonia regained its independence in 1991. ETV+ was created as a public broadcasting channel, and is funded by Estonian government. So far it is not as effective as it was intended to be and is not very popular among Russians in Estonia. The experience of such a Russian-language TV channel 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 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 Russian culture. Looking at 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



Bronze Statue Of Red Army Soldier by Vicenc Makovsky. Tribute to liberators of Brno created in 1955.

PHOTO: JAROSLAV A. POLAK / FLICKR/CREATIVE COMMONS

by Russian media. In 2010 Belarus experienced a huge disinformation campaign against its president Aliaksandr Lukashenko 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 argued 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.

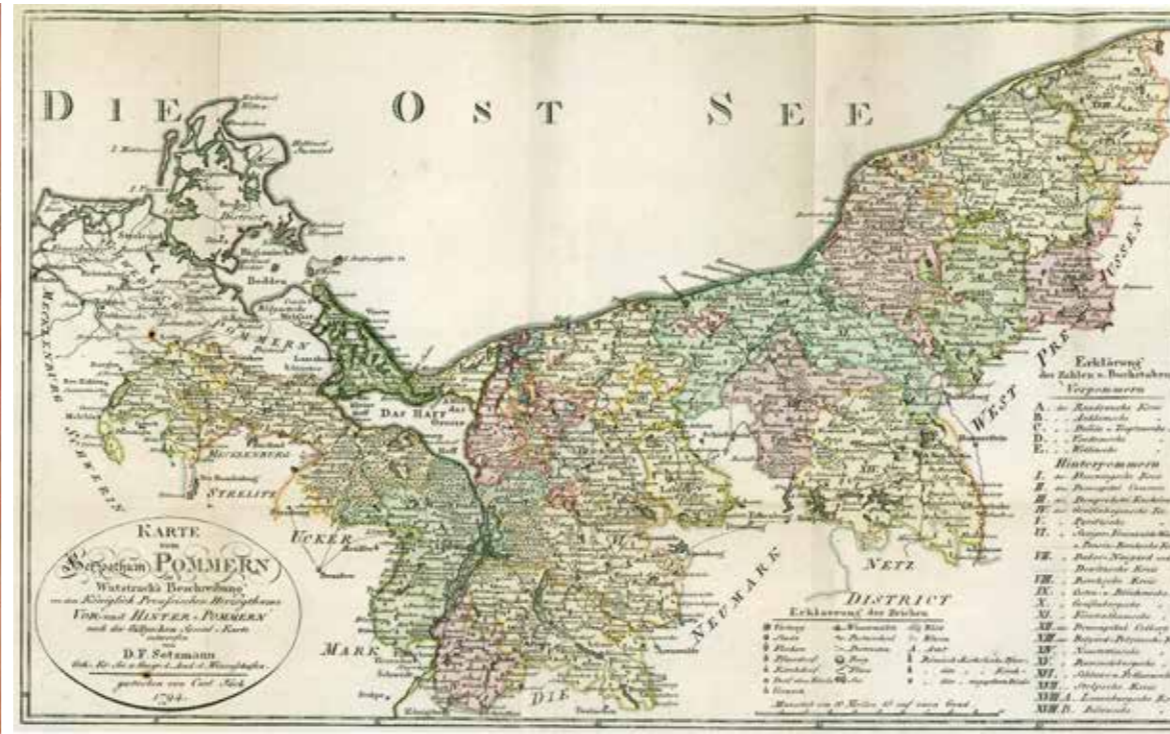
A narrative of a dependence on the West and of lack of sovereignty was also used against Ukraine. It should be said that unlike Belarus, Moldova or the Baltic countries disinformation for Ukraine is connected with war and with lots of casualties. The Ukrainian case is also unique, in being the first time in modern history that a horizontally organized Ukrainian civil society had to fight the Kremlin's vertically structured propaganda machine. As the information war progressed, a country with no real experience in counterpropaganda and with limited financial capacities had to learn how to fight back literally from square one. Nowadays Ukraine is doing better in fighting disinformation than it was in 2014, but still it lacks the

capability to fight it in annexed Crimea and in temporarily occupied territories of Donbas, and to spread its messages in Western countries.

The use of disinformation has become a new reality and countering it is an important task not just for Eastern Europe and the Baltic countries, but for the whole West. Still, straight and aggressive counterpropaganda measures would not work, not only because they do not correspond with democratic values and will turn those states into so many more propagandists, but also because it is ineffective from a strategic perspective. And what is still more important is focusing on own weaknesses, strengthening civil society and educating critically thinking people. Until that has been assured, fighting against disinformation will be tilting against windmills.

Maksym Kyiak

Postdoctoral researcher and cofounder of the NGO Global Ukraine.



Pomerania in 1688, 1794, and 1905.

BOUNDARY-DEFINING AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSGRESSION IN A

GEOPOLITICALLY CONTESTED REGION

by Thomas Lundén

BORDERING POMERANIA

“Geopolitics is the discipline concerning the state as a geographical organism or entity in space: that is, the state as land, territory, domain (*gebiet*), or most pregnantly, 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.”¹

Border studies 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.² 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 Hanseatic, 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 1989.³ 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*”.⁴ 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.⁵

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 Leonhard Gey, 1880.

entity. But over this time span the area has been subject to very different geopolitical influences, often resulting in abrupt and profound impacts on its population, and partitionings into entities under fundamentally different regimes. The first evidence of a political territory of Pomerania seems to date back to circa 1170. Pomerania was at that time sparsely populated by Slavic-speaking tribes, and the Polish duke Boleslaw took control of it. Simultaneously the area was being Christianized from southern Germany (Rügen from Roskilde, Denmark) and there was an influx of Germanic-speaking settlers from the west. Political and religious refugees, Mennonite settlers from the Netherlands, colonized the wetlands of eastern Pomerania. Politically, the Pomeranian territories had the following names and durations up to the extinction of the Gryf (Griffen) dynasty in 1637:⁶

- The Principality of Rügen (1168–1325), a Danish fief under local rulers.
- The Duchy of Pommern-Barth (1372–1451).
- The Duchy of Pommern-Demmin (circa 1170–1264).
- The Duchy of Pommern-Stettin (circa 1170/1295–1464, 1532/41–1625/37).
- The Duchy of Pommern-Wolgast (1295–1474/8, 1532/41–1625/37) (1325–1478) including Rügen.
- The Duchy of Pommern-Stolp (1368/72–1459)

THE COLONIZATION PROCESS during the 13th and 14th centuries changed the ethnic structure of Pomerania. The population became Germanized through immigration and assimilation. Around 1500 there were still Slavic speakers in eastern Pomerania as evidenced by a prohibition in the council of Köslin in 1516 against speaking “Wendish”.⁷ The Protestant reformation was finally confirmed in 1535, when it was declared

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

a *Landeskirche*, its administrative territory covering the whole Duchy.⁸ One of the things the Reformation brought about was that the extremely important fisheries came under ducal control, which had major political and economic consequences. The Church and also the nearby cities had had a large income from fishing on the Stettiner Haff. Their rights were, however, withdrawn by the duke, and fisheries were reorganized both fiscally and legally.⁹ The Reformation also caused problems vis-à-vis neighboring Poland, which was formally ecumenical but had an increasingly hegemonic Catholicism, but both states were interested in shipping on the Oder and Warthe rivers, which would have put them in competition with Brandenburg.¹⁰

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 Altdamm, Gollnow, and Cammin, the island of Wollin, 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.¹¹ 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 now reached the Baltic Sea east of Wollin. 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 would last until the 1674–1679 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 Polish Gryfino.¹² The new border ran between Gartz on the left bank and the southern outskirts of Stettin.

In Swedish Pomerania, local currencies would be kept, but the old division of Pomerania, going back to 1532/41, 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 Fuß*, a silver standard, which was accepted by the neighboring states.¹³ A few years earlier, Swedish 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 1700.¹⁴

Swedish 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. Collection of customs duties was, at least at times, administered by Stockholm, and the customs at Wolgast, in particular, were especially remunerative, given the ships passing the town on the River Peene.¹⁵ Postal communication included contacts with Sweden but also an international (or inter-ducial) line connecting Danzig with Hamburg through four postal offices in Swedish Pomerania. In 1698, Sweden and Brandenburg agreed to recognize their respective postal privileges and to regulate postal traffic across their border, with Stettin as the exchange center.¹⁶

AS A RESULT OF the Great Northern War (1700–1721), part of Swedish Pomerania was put under Danish administration from 1715 until, in effect, 1721, while the rest was administered by Prussia. The Danish reign was imposed on the territory through the steering and surveillance functions of the regional administration, the legitimizing and registration power of the ecclesiastical administration, and military repression. The Danish attempts to secure an absolutist state power met with resistance from the traditional power structure and conflict between the estates and between regional and local administration.¹⁷ While Denmark appointed a local “government” in Stralsund, Prussia annexed its area to the administration of Pomerania with its capital in Stargard, since Stettin was under sequester from the Swedish reign. The whole area belonged to 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 between the two areas was defined by the rivers Recknitz and Peene, which created problems, since the towns of Anklam and Demmin had fields on the Danish side, and in the case of Anklam, Prussia even claimed the right to the bridge across the river to the suburb of Peenedamm and its ravelin. To Wolgast, located where the customs at the Peene River were usually collected, the agreement between Denmark and Prussia meant a cessation of tolls, but during the whole period of Danish reign there were conflicts with Prussia about customs and illegal trade. On the whole the relations between the two governing states are described by Meier as bad.¹⁸

Towards the western neighbor, Mecklenburg-Schwerin there were also boundary-related problems concerning customs duties, land ownership, illegal crossings of Jews and Roma, as well as the escape of Swedish prisoners of war from Danish Pomerania. The few Jews living in Swedish Pomerania were expelled (with a few exceptions) while Roma were included under the prohibition of vagrancy.¹⁹

While Denmark lost the area, Sweden, in the Treaty of Stockholm in 1720, regained north-

western Pomerania but lost a considerable part of its former territory: Prussia gained Stettin, the islands of Usedom and Wollin, and all of Pomerania south of the River Peene that had already been annexed. The towns of Demmin and Anklam thus went to Prussia, with the small Anklam suburb of Peenedamm remaining on the Swedish side of the Peene.²⁰ Both states had the right to the river, but there would soon be new controversies about the bridge Prussia took over as part of its fortifications, in spite of Sweden’s claims. All merchants lived in the Prussian part, while skippers, carpenters, and the shipyards remained on the Swedish side. Most conflicts concerned fishing and fish vending rights, and negotiations were held in the Dutch mill at Peenedamm. Prussian and Swedish border guards stood just a few steps from each other, and even in times of war civilians could pass without hindrance.²¹

The internal Pomeranian border between Swedish and Prussian territories led to illegal trade nightly across the Oder and the Peene. By gaining Stettin and, in 1745, opening a canal outlet to the Baltic at Swinemünde, Prussia deprived Sweden of much of the customs income from shipping from the Oder through Wolgast and the Peene. The illegal border trade that had benefited from differences in prices and availability now turned to Mecklenburg.²²

WHEN STETTIN BECAME PART of the Prussian empire, the area was opened to Calvinists, particularly French Huguenots, who in 1721 had been given privileges to settle, as they had done already in the Brandenburg Pomeranian towns of Stargard, Kolberg, and Stolp in 1687–1689. The larger colonization schemes in the wetlands mostly attracted Protestants from Pfalz (Palatinate), but under the enlightened monarch Frederick the Great, even Catholics were allowed to settle north of Pasewalk. There were



This drawing of Anklam and its suburb of Peenedamm was made in 1758 by Georg Hendrik Barfot of the Swedish navy. Before and after the war, the Peene River was the boundary between Anklam in Prussia and Peenedamm in Swedish Pomerania. By permission from Timmermansorden, Stockholm.



Prussia, 1688–1740.

Prussian uniforms in the 19th century.

several waves of settlement with different goals, the first beginning in 1747 in the Oderbruch wetlands but extending into Pomerania near Stettin, one in 1772 aimed at helping the large estates of Central and Eastern Pomerania with manpower, and another in 1780–1786 mainly consisting of small farmers. Szultka estimates the total number of settlers at 36,000, 70% of whom were immigrants to Prussia.²³

In Prussian Pomerania the number of Jews was kept track of and restricted. Only one Jew, engaged in the import of kosher wine, was allowed to live in Stettin; others were only allowed as day visitors. In all of Prussian Pomerania there were 25–100 Jewish families, and they were not allowed to increase their numbers (the net result of births, deaths, and immigration emigration had to be neutral, at most). In Swedish Pomerania the attitude was even more negative, but a few Jewish families had settled, and when a royal mint was established in the capital Stralsund in 1757, the administration asked for permission from Stockholm to hire “Israelites”, which was granted, in spite of opposition from the Pomeranian clergy and the bourgeoisie. In 1777, the governor general, in the name of the king, issued an edict allowing Jews by concession and under strict regulation to settle and trade in the duchy. Ten years later the Jewish congregation had about 150 members, slightly less than the number of Catholics, which mostly consisted of members of the garrison.²⁴

Pomerania under Prussian rule

On October 23, 1815, Swedish Pomerania was annexed to Prussia, and most regulations were adapted to Prussian legislation, but the administrative partition of Pomerania remained, including, until 1874, the boundary between Anklam and Peenedamm. One curious exception from the territorial stability during the 19th century was *Rittergut Wolde* near Stavenhagen which, due to a centuries-old conflict between the duchies of Mecklenburg-Schwerin and Pomerania, was a self-governing enclave exempted from taxation and military conscription. Prussia and Mecklenburg reached an agreement in 1873 that divided the

area, thus slightly enlarging the province of Pomerania.²⁵ That the inner German boundaries were a hindrance to development is shown by the fact that a direct railway line between Berlin and Stralsund (both in Prussia) was long delayed because it would cut through the duchy of Mecklenburg-Strelitz and its capital Neustrelitz, causing problems with administration, customs duties, etc. Not until the German unification of 1871 and the subjugation of the duchies could the project be implemented. The line opened in 1878.²⁶

In an edict of 1812, the Jews of Prussia were given citizens’ rights – with certain exceptions, one being that the provisions were not applicable to territories recently annexed to Prussia. Consequently, formerly Swedish Pomerania was not included and this exception was in force until the Prussian Jews Law of 1847, and the regulations were followed strictly. The first Jews in Stettin arrived shortly after 1812, and in Prussian Pomerania the number increased to around 2000 in 1875.²⁷

German unification in 1871 meant a further “peripherization” of Pomerania as a territorial entity. A demographic increase, resulting mainly from Stettin’s industrial growth, masks two streams of agrarian exodus, one through Stettin Harbor towards North America (until this traffic was diverted to Bremen and Hamburg in 1896), and one westward towards the rapidly industrializing areas of western Germany. The lack of seasonal agricultural labor in 1890 forced the authorities to open the borders to neighboring Tsarist Poland (mostly ethnic Poles) and Habsburgian Galizia (mostly Ukrainians), reaching a peak of around 40,000 immigrants at the outbreak of World War I. The newcomers were forbidden to take industrial jobs in the towns.²⁸

Pomerania in a new geopolitical situation: 1919–1939

The aftermath of World War I changed the geopolitical situation of Pomerania. The introduction of democracy through the Weimar constitution created a new system of governance, but the local administration of Pomerania was reluctant and recalcitrant.²⁹

Poland was reestablished, and as a consequence an international border was delineated in the east and southeast. Part of Silesia was lost to Poland, which built Gdynia in order to avoid Stettin as an outlet. Swinemünde became the hub of the *Seediens Ostpreussen*, a shipping service linking the mainland with the exclave of Ostpreussen and the Free Town of Danzig. A railway line though Stettin linked the same territories by sealed wagons through the Polish Corridor, and a motorway was secretly planned through the Corridor.³⁰

Hitler’s *Machtübernahme* in 1933 can be seen as a return to a pre-Weimar situation of Prussian authority, but it soon turned into a very different kind of governance, merging domestic and trans-border policy into authoritarian geopolitics.³¹

With the Nazi takeover, the rather small Jewish population of Pomerania, circa 6000, was step by step deprived of all citizens’ rights, and some managed to leave the Reich. In 1938, after the Anschluss of Austria, the 2400 Jews of Stettin had to take care of 700 Austrian Jews until these were transported yet again.³²

The Nazi German armament had a great impact on Pomerania. In 1937, the industrial conglomerate IG Farben was ordered to build a *Hydrierwerk*, a hydrogenation plant at Pölitz that would make aviation fuel out of coal from Silesia. In the years to follow, the plant would have disastrous consequences for the local population and for the territorial division of the area.³³

World War II: Pomerania overrun

Nazi Germany’s invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, and the secret Molotov-Ribbentrop pact included schemes of forced resettlement of populations on a vast scale. Evacuation camps were built in Stettin and Swinemünde.³⁴ Pomerania seems to have been the first area of Nazi Germany to start the deportation of Jews. On February 11, 1940, around 1200 Stettin Jews were deported under extremely brutal conditions to Lublin in occupied Poland. One reason seems to have been a perceived need to find accommodation for the workers at the Pölitz plant.³⁵ Stettin also served as a hub in the transportation of Jews from Nazi-occupied countries. On October 30, 1942, the troop transport ship D/S Donau arrived in Stettin with 302 men, 188 women, and 42 children, all Norwegian Jews, for further transport to Auschwitz. Six men survived.³⁶

In the war years that followed, the agrarian and remote Hinterpommern was used for the evacuation of civilians from the Ruhr and Berlin areas destroyed by Allied bombing. Forced labor was also recruited from Poland; some of these people were transported to farms on Rügen and in the Stralsund area where they were joined by other slave laborers from Italy, France, and Ukraine.³⁷

Even before the outbreak of the war, the concentration camps in Pomerania were placed at military establishments. The Peenemünde complex used forced labor, concentration camp prisoners, and even prisoners of war.³⁸ The air base and

aircraft production site at Barth also included a concentration camp. There was also a prisoner-of-war camp at Barth with Allied soldiers divided into Anglo-American and Soviet departments. In November 1944 around 150 Hungarian Jews were brought there to work, and until the end of the war younger prisoners were brought to Barth to speed up production. When the Soviet troops were approaching in April 1945, the prisoners were forced to leave, those unable to walk were shot, and others died or were shot during the retreat.³⁹

The final months of the war affected Pomerania more than many other parts of Northern Germany. While the Western Allies bombed the military and industrial target of Stettin, Swinemünde, 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, Danzig, and Hinterpommern were interspersed 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 Stuthoff, 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 bombings of Stettin and Swinemünde, or 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 determination of Poland’s western frontier, the former German territories east of a line running from the Baltic Sea immediately west of Swinamunde, and thence along the Oder River to the confluence of the western Neisse River and along the Western Neisse to the Czechoslovak frontier ... shall be under the administration of the Polish State and for such purposes should not be considered as part of the Soviet zone of occupation in Germany.

Potsdam Agreement VIII: B

In an explanation to the Potsdam Agreement, the land boundary was defined as a straight line from the church in Ahlbeck on Usedom to the middle of the bridge across the Western Oder, three kilometers west of Greifenhagen (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 Altwarp and Neuwarp (Polish: Nowe Warpno). The change was to be effective starting October 4. The former municipal center of Pölitz

“WHEN THE SOVIET TROOPS WERE APPROACHING IN APRIL 1945, THE PRISONERS WERE FORCED TO LEAVE, THOSE UNABLE TO WALK WERE SHOT, AND OTHERS DIED OR WERE SHOT DURING THE RETREAT.”



Marking the new Polish-German border on the Oder River in 1945.

was replaced by Löcknitz, and the Kreis Usedom-Wollin, losing Swinemünde, had to move its administration to the insignificant resort of Bansin. A railway crossing the new boundary was deleted from the plan.⁴⁰ A further change of land was decided in the Treaty of Zgorzelec between Poland and the GDR, on June 6, 1950, giving Poland land at Ahlbeck in order to include the waterworks of Wolgastsee serving Świnoujście, and giving the GDR a piece of land of equal size towards the coast. Until the beginning of 1951, the Polish town was thus served with water from the GDR, involving difficulties of a financial, technical, legal, and security nature.⁴¹

The most remarkable territorial anomaly was the Pölitz enclave of the Soviet Occupation Zone (occupied, or directly under Soviet control), existing from October 4, 1945, to September 28, 1946, stretching from Ziegenort (Trzebież) to Stolzenhagen (Stołczyn), along the lower Oder, about seven kilometers wide, and separated from Germany by a slice of Polish territory 12 to 13 kilometers wide. It included eight parishes (*Gemeinden*) and was exempted from Polish administration and put directly under provisional administration by the Soviet Union. The intention was to dismantle the important Hydrierwerk without intervention from the Polish authorities. The enclave had German mayors belonging to the two recognized political parties, KPD and SPD. Telephone, telegraph, and postal connections were attached to Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. But most connections on land with Germany were impossible, since the Polish authorities required visas that were rarely given, and people were even robbed of their papers. Workers were recruited by force from Wolgast and shipped on dirty barges to Pölitz, working under severe conditions. The existence of a Soviet-German enclave with thousands of Germans just a few kilometers from

“THE EXISTENCE OF A SOVIET-GERMAN EXCLAVE WITH THOUSANDS OF GERMANS JUST A FEW KILOMETERS FROM SZCZECIN WAS A BONE OF CONTENTION BETWEEN POLAND AND THE USSR.”



Refugees trail, eastern Germany 1945.

Szczecin 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.⁴²

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 German 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.⁴³

On November 21, 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 290,000 persons were expelled via Szczecin.⁴⁴

The ACC appointed an executive group to handle the expulsion but also the repatriation of slave labor from Germany.⁴⁵ 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 Szczecin and Lübeck in the British Zone of 1000 persons per day and train transport of 1520 persons per day from Szczecin to Bad Segeberg through the Soviet Zone. Poland would provide trains, food, and guards.⁴⁶ Between February 1946 and October 1947, another 760,000 Germans were expelled from the area under Operation Swallow according to a quota system. Specialists were saved for last, while those viewed as worthless were expelled first.⁴⁷ The deportees were mostly old people and women, only 8% were men of working age; no babies remained. Szczecin 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 Szczecin, the ships carried Polish workers, probably slave laborers.⁴⁸

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 influx of refugees, not only through Operation Swallow but also “transit” refugees via the Soviet Zone and residents from the SBZ.⁴⁹ In a short time, the population of Schleswig-Holstein, receiving refugees from Pomerania, 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. Szczecin also became a hub for Polish Jews returning from the Soviet Union and for further transport to Palestine.⁵⁰

The Polish resettlement of “recovered territories”⁵¹ 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, autochthonous 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 Kashubs 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 had served in the Prussian army or even in the *Wehrmacht*.⁵²

After the first years of turmoil, the situation in the new Polish areas began to stabilize. From the areas lost in the east, there came families – sometimes a whole village. Used to traditional small farms on the fertile black soils, they now had to become accustomed to technically more advanced systems of cultivation

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 reemigrants 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 Szczecin. After the Ukrainian uprising in southeastern Poland in 1947, it was decided in “Operation W” to disperse the ethnically Ukrainian population and resettle them in a different part of the new territories. In the Szczecin area, around 65% of the population came from the central parts of Poland, the remainder consisting of people from the East or repatriates.⁵³

The Soviet base at Świnoujście comprised the larger part of the seaport, the old and new fortifications on both sides of the Świno 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 Uznam. After an agreement in October 1991, the Russian troops withdrew to Kaliningrad in December.⁵⁴

A 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 “Mecklenburg” for the whole area, and the word “Vorpommern” was in practice forbidden until around 1985, and the Länder were abolished



Grotewohl (l.) and Cyrankiewicz walking to the Zgorzelec community center to sign the border treaty on July 6, 1950.

To cross a border is to create a relation. The movement becomes a link between two places.

in the GDR in 1952.⁵⁵ The border was determined and formally recognized in an agreement between Poland and the GDR on July 6, 1950, in Zgorzelec, the former eastern suburb of Görlitz.⁵⁶ But from the first demarcation in 1945 to late 1946, there were visa requirements for people crossing the border, except for the German population being expelled westwards. After that, until 1972, the border was closed to “ordinary residents in the border zone”. Then it was opened to residents with identification cards, resulting in marked daily cross-border movements mainly for shopping purposes, which led to a new closure in 1980, with exceptions permitted for such things as emergencies and visits up on personal invitation. In 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the border was opened to those with passports.⁵⁷

Poland gets a new neighbor

A Polish-German border agreement was signed on November 14, 1990. The border opened in 1991, but passports were still required because it was the boundary of the Schengen Area. A treaty on cooperation was signed on June 17.⁵⁸

When Poland entered the EU on May 1, 2004, border controls were softened and coordinated into a simple one-step border station.⁵⁹ As a consequence, Germany regulated the import of Polish manpower for a seven-year period. On December 21, 2007, Poland joined the Schengen Agreement, formal controls on the border were ended, and several old local roads crossing the border were opened.

In spite of its openness, the border between Poland and Germany in Pomerania is part of one of the sharpest boundaries in Europe in terms of ethnicity, language, and religion. Border crossings are mostly instrumental, relating to differences in the supply and prices of goods and services.⁶⁰ There is little social interaction between population groups across the border, with one exception: the settlement of Polish citizens in the villages and small towns on the German side, due to the availability of relatively cheap and good housing (partly because of depopulation and westward migration⁶¹), and the proximity of the Szczecin job market.⁶²

Conclusion

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 which religious and ethnic groups were allowed in or expelled from the area. In the long history of Pomerania, groups in the area also changed religion or ethnicity. Slavic-speaking populations were assimilated into “Germanness” both in medieval times and during Prussian jurisdiction, while Jews, defined by religion or by descent, under the same Prussian rule, were accepted and eventually integrated into society until, with the dictatorship of National Socialism, they were defined as aliens and expelled or exterminated. Finally, with the preliminary Oder-Neisse agreement, a territorial redefinition resulted in a giant redistribution of the population, an ethnic cleansing leading to a sharp ethnic divide between “Germans” on one side and “Poles” (with small and powerless minorities of Jews, Kashubs,

Belarusians, and Ukrainians) on the other. Many of the Polish Jews returning eventually left for Palestine/Israel or the US. A further complication was the factual division of Germany into two states with a closed border, which had repercussions on the German-Polish border area as well.

Some of these changes were the result of decisions made by political leaders in Berlin, Stockholm, Paris, Warsaw, and Moscow and at meetings of major powers. In other cases, changes took place through a slow, often intergenerational shift of allegiance. Obviously, social theories on migration only apply to a small extent. With the increasing openness of the German-Polish border since 1989, it is no longer the border on the ground but the border in the mind that keeps the Pomeranian state territorial division sharp. However, with the “western drift” on both sides, the German side is being partially emptied and to some extent refilled with Polish immigrants, an effect of *push and pull* factors. But in the long history of Pomerania, the most important factors in the demography of the area have been the intended and unintended geopolitics of the states involved. ✖

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

references

- Quotation translated by Thomas Lundén. Rudolf Kjellén, *Staten som lijsform* (Stockholm: Gebers, 1916), 39.
- Thomas Lundén, “A Turnover in Border Relations: Sweden and its Neighbors in a 100-Year Perspective,” in *Boundaries Revisited: Conceptual Turn in European Border Practices*, ed. Tomasz Brańska and Jarosław Jańczak (Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2015), 35–49.
- Bert Becker and Kyra T. Inachin (eds.), *Pommern zwischen Zäsur und Kontinuität 1918 1933 1945* 1989, (Schwerin: Thomas Helms Verlag, 1999).
- Torsten Hägerstrand, “Den geografiska traditionens kärnområde”, in *Svensk Geografisk Årsbok* 1983, 38–43, 43.
- For a more detailed historical regional geography of Pomerania, see Thomas Lundén, *Pommern ett gränsfall i tid och rum*, Slavica Lundensis, 27, (Lund: Lund University, 2016).
- Jan M. Piskorski, “Der Staat der ersten Greifenherzöge (bis 1220)”, 35–57, and Jan M. Piskorski, “Die Epoche der großen Umbrüche (bis 1368)”, in *Pommern im Wandel der Zeiten*, ed. Jan M. Piskorski (Szczecin: Zamek Książąt Pomorskich, 1999), 59–95.
- Piskorski, “Die Epoche”, 91–92.
- <http://www.kirche-mv.de/fileadmin/PEK-Downloadtexte/PommKirchengeschichte.pdf>.
- Haik Thomas Porada, “The Golden Age Of Pomerania: The Organization Of Late Medieval And Early Modern Fishing On The Southern Baltic Coast” *Baltic Worlds* (2014) no. 2–3, 92–98.
- Bogdan Wachowiak, “Das vereinigte Herzogtum Pommern (bis 1648)”, in *Pommern im Wandel der Zeiten*, ed. Jan M. Piskorski (Szczecin: Zamek Książąt Pomorskich, 1999), 129–171, 144.
- Buchholz, Werner 1999: “Das schwedische Pommern”, 171 in *Pommern im Wandel der Zeiten*, ed. Jan M. Piskorski (Szczecin: Zamek Książąt Pomorskich, 1999) 173–195 , 173–174, Torbjörn Eng; *Det svenska väldet – ett konglomerat av uttrycksformer och begrepp från Vasa till Bernadotte*, (Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, 2001), 181; Jens E. Olesen, “Brücke nach Europa. Schwedisch-Pommern 1630–1815”, in *Baltic Worlds*, 2009:2, no. 1: 22–26.

- Zygmunt Szultka, “Das brandenburgisch-preußische Pommern”, in *Pommern im Wandel der Zeiten*, ed. Jan M. Piskorski (Szczecin: Zamek Książąt Pomorskich, 1999), 197–224, 198–201, 203–5.
- Joachim Krüger, “Die Reformen des schwedisch-pommerschen Münzwesens nach 1681”, in *Innovationen im Schwedischen Großreich: eine Darstellung anhand von Fallstudien*, ed. Christoph Schmelz & Jana Zimdars, ed., (Hamburg : Kovač, 2009), 98–118,113–114.
- Wolfgang Wilhelmus, *Juden in Vorpommern , Beiträge zur Geschichte Mecklenburg-Vorpommerns no. 8* (Schwerin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2007), 11.
- Maciej Jędrusik, “Usedom/Uznam:The political Economy of Divided Islands” In *Unified Geographies, Multiple Politics*, ed. Godfrey Baldacchino, (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 137–156, 139.
- Heiko Droste, “The Terms of Royal Service: Post Servants’ Finances, c. 1700 in *Connecting the Baltic Area: The Swedish Postal System in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Heiko Droste, Södertörn Studies in History 9 (Stockholm: Södertörn Academic Studies, 2011), 123–174, 129; Örjan Simonson, “Seventeenth-Century virtual communities: Postal services And Corresponding Networks in the Swedish Empire”, *Ajalooline ajakiri* (2009): 3–4, 383–424, 418.
- Joachim Krüger, “Wolgast in der Asche: Ausgewählte Quellen zur Lustration der Stadt in der Dänenzeit (1715–1721)”, University of Greifswald: Publikationen des Lehrstuhls für Nordische Geschichte, 8, 53–66; Martin Meier, *Vorpommern nördlich der Peene unter dänischer Verwaltung 1715 bis 1721: Aufbau einer Verwaltung und Herrschaftssicherung in einem eroberten Gebiet*, (Munich: R. Oldenbourg 2008), 40, 293–303.
- Meier, “*Vorpommern nördlich der Peene*”, 269–282; Joachim Krüger, “Ein Abriß über die Dänenzeit Vorpommerns zwischen 1715 und 1721” in *Die Demminer Kolloquien zur Geschichte Vorpommern, Ausgewählte Beiträge 1995–2011*, ed. Henning Rischer und Dirk Schleiner (Greifswald: Sardellus, 2012), 153–166, Joachim Krüger, “Pommern in der dänisch-schwedischen-preußischen Zeit (1715–1815)“, in *Geschichte Pommerns im Überblick*, ed. Joachim Wächter, (Greifswald: Sardellus, 2014) 75–97, 77.
- Meier, “*Vorpommern nördlich der Peene*”, 268, 229.
- Buchholz, “Das schwedische Pommern”, 186–188; Szultka, “Das brandenburgisch-preußische Pommern”, 207–208; Joachim Wächter, “Grenzen und Verwaltungsgebiete Schwedisch-Vorpommerns 1806 und ihre weitere Entwicklung”, in *Geographische und historische Beiträge zur Landeskunde Pommerns*, ed. Ivo Asmus, Haik Thomas Porada and Dirk Schleiner, (Schwerin: Thomas Helms Verlag, 1998), 281–287, 281–282.
- Ralf Gross, “Die Grenzlage Anklams 1715–1815”, in *Geographische und historische Beiträge zur Landeskunde Pommerns*. ed. Ivo Asmus, Haik Thomas Porada and Dirk Schleiner (Schwerin: Thomas Helms Verlag, 1998), 276–280, 277.
- Andreas Önnersfors, *Svenska Pommern: Kulturmöten och identifikation 1720–1815* (Lund: Ugglan, 2003), 474; Joachim Krüger, “Der Zoll-, Not- und Lotsenhafen Grünschwade: eine schwedisch-preußische Problemzone am Peenestrom”, in *Gemeinsamt Bekannte: Schweden und Deutschland in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Ivo Asmus, Heiko Droste and Jens E. Olesen (Münster: Lit, 2003), 306–316.
- Zygmunt Szultka, “Die friderizianische Kolonisation Preußisch-Pommerns (1740–1786)”, *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropaforschung*, 55, no. 2, (2006): 159–193, Französische Reformierte Kirche zu Stettin” (“Francuska Gmina Zreformowanego Kościoła w Szczecinie”, <http://www.bkge.de/archiv-stettin.php?register=503>; “*Katholiken in Vorpommern*”, <http://www.kath-vorpommern.de/info/geschichte-alle.rtf>.
- Önnersfors *Svenska Pommern* 361, Wilhelmus, *Juden in Vorpommern* 16–17, 23.
- Friedrich Ratzel, *Politische Geographie* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1903) 560 note 1.
- Dieter Crusenick, *Mit der Eisenbahn von Berlin nach Stettin, Stralsund,*

- Sassnitz und Rügen in historischen Ansichten* (Berlin: Verlag B. Neddermayer, 2007) 70, Rudi Buchweitz and Rudi Dobbert, Wolfhardt Noack, *Eisenbahndirektionen Stettin, Pasewalk und Greifswald 1851–1990* (Berlin: Verlag B. Neddermeyer, 2007), 103–104.
- Janusz Mieczkowski, :“Zur Geschichte der Juden in Pommern”, TransOdra Online <http://www.transodra-online.net/de/node/1418>; Wilhelmus, *Juden in Vorpommern*, 28–50.
 - Edward Włodarczyk, “Krisenzeit: Pommern in der Weimarer Republik (bis 1933)”, in *Pommern im Wandel der Zeiten*, ed. Jan M. Piskorski (Szczecin: Zamek Książąt Pomorskich, 1999), 283–303, 269–70.
 - Becker and Inachin, *Pommern zwischen Zäsur und Kontinuität*, 67–68.
 - Buchweitz et al., *Eisenbahndirektionen Stettin*, 45, Detlef Kirchner, “Die Oder: Lebensader für Stettin”, in *Der Hafen Stettin und seine Hafenbahn*, ed. Detlef Kirchner (Lübeck: Historischer Arbeitskreis Stettin, 2009), 5–30; Karl Lärmer: *Autobahnbau in Deutschland 1933 bis 1945*, (Berlin: AkademieVerlag, 1975), 103–134.
 - Becker and Inachin, Pommern zwischen Zäsur und Kontinuität*, 127
 - Wilhelmus, *Juden in Vorpommern*, 91.
 - Bogdan Frankiewicz, *Aus der Geschichte von Pölit und Umgebung*, <https://lazowski.szczecin.art.pl/police/historia-de.htm>.
 - Jan M. Piskorski, *Die Verjagten: Flucht und Vertreibung in Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Siedler, 2013), 120.
 - Jan M. Piskorski, “Pommern, Das Land, seine Menschen, seine Geschichte (anstelle einer Einleitung)”, in *Pommern im Wandel der Zeiten*, ed. Jan M. Piskorski (Szczecin: Zamek Książąt Pomorskich, 1999), 5–12, 9; Hans-Werner Rautenberg, “Zeit der großen Hoffnungen und der Niederlage: Pommern im Dritten Reich (bis 1945)” in *Pommern im Wandel der Zeiten*, ed. Jan M. Piskorski (Szczecin: Zamek Książąt Pomorskich, 1999), 305–339, 378; Helmut Müssener and Wolfgang Wilhelmus, *Stettin Lublin Stockholm Elsa Meyring: Aus dem Leben einer deutschen Nichtarierin im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert* ., 2nd ed. (Rostock: Ingo Koch Verlag, 2014), 90.
 - http://www.hlsenteret.no/kunnskapsbasen/folkemord/folkemord-under-nazismen/holocaust/norge/reisen_med_donau.html.
 - http://www.dokumentationszentrum-prora.de/seiten_deutsch/zarb.html.
 - Mats Burström, “Raketbas i ruin väcker tankar om tidens flykt”, Svenska Dagbladet , June 13, 2004, 8.
 - Bohdan Arct, *Prisoner of War: My Secret Journal* (Exeter:Webb and Bower, 1988; Wilhelmus, *Juden in Vorpommern*, 104.
 - Bernd Aischmann, *Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, die Stadt Stettin ausgenommen: Eine zeitgeschichtliche Betrachtung* (Schwerin: Thomas Helms Verlag, 2008), 175–188.
 - Alina Hutnikiewicz, “Das polnische Pommern”, in *Pommern im Wandel der Zeiten*, ed. Jan M. Piskorski (Szczecin: Zamek Książąt Pomorskich, 1999), 385–389, 369–421; Jędrusik, “Usedom/Uznam”, 142–143.
 - Aischmann, *Mecklenburg-Vorpommern*, 135–149; Frankiewicz, *Aus der Geschichte von Pölitz*.
 - http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=2985; Andreas Kossert, *Kalte Heimat: Die Geschichte der deutschen Vertriebenen nach 1945*, (Munich: Siedler, 2008) , 31.
 - Hutnikiewicz, “Das polnische Pommern”, 380–383.
 - Ray M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane : The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 108–119.
 - Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 160–162; Thomas Darnstädt and Klaus Wiegrefe, “Massenflucht nach Plan: eine teuflische Lösung”, in *Spiegel Special* no. 2, 2002. <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/spiegelspecial/d22937249.html>.
 - Hutnikiewicz, “Das polnische Pommern”, 380–383
 - Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 172–179; Kirchner, “Die Oder”, 26.

- 49 Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 304–308.
- 50 Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, 201; Heike Amos, *Die Vertriebenenpolitik der SED 1949 bis 1990*, (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009), 15, Mieczkowski “Zur Geschichte der Juden in Pommern”.
- 51 The history and historiography of the Polish narrative about the territories annexed by Poland from Germany at the end of World War II are described and analyzed in Marta Grzechnik, “‘Recovering’ Territories: The Use of History in the Integration of the New Polish Western Borderland after World War II”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, (2017): 1-25, DOI: 10.1080/09668136.2017.1297386.
- 52 Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 272–76; Z. Anthony Kruszewski, *The Oder-Neisse Boundary and Poland’s Modernization: The Socioeconomic and Political Impact*, (New York: Praeger, 1972), 155–156.
- 53 Kruszewski, *The Oder-Neisse*, 57–64, 120–127.
- 54 Jędrusik, “Usedom/Uznam”, 144.
- 55 Norbert Buske, *Pommern Territorialstaat und Landesteil von Preussen*, (Schwerin: Thomas Helms Verlag, 1997), 81–82.
- 56 *Görlitzer Abkommen*, Politisches Archiv, MfAAV-180, 181, 182.
- 57 Katarzyna Stokłosa, *Grenzstädte in Ostmitteleuropa: Guben und Gubin 1945 bis 1995*, Frankfurter Studien zur Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte Ostmitteleuropas vol. 9 (Berlin: BWV, 2003), K. Stokłosa, “Two Sides Of The Border and one Regional Identity: The Identity Problem in The German-Polish and Ukrainian-Slovak Border Regions” in *Crossing The Border: Boundary Relations in a Changing Europe*, ed. Thomas Lundén (Huddinge: Södertörn University College, 2006), 117–134.
- 58 Elżbieta Opilowska, “The Europeanization of the German-Polish Borderlands”, in *European Border Regions in Comparison: Overcoming Nationalistic Aspects or Re-Nationalization?* ed. Katarzyna Stokłosa and Gerhard Besier (New York and Abington: Routledge, 2014), 275–285.
- 59 Alexandra Schwell, “Boundaries In Border Police Cooperation: The Case Of The German-Polish Border”, in *Borderland identities: Territory And Belonging in North, Central and East Europe*, ed. Madeleine Hurd, (Huddinge: Södertörn University College, 2006), 255–288.
- 60 Thomas Lundén and Péter Balogh, “Trans-Boundary Movements: The Case of the Polish-German Land Border”, in *Cultural Diversity as a Source of Integration and Alienation: Nations, Regions, Organisations* (Szczecin: Uniwersytet Szczeciński, 2011), 33–47.
- 61 Helmut Klüter, “Wüstungen in Vorpommern: gestern, heute und morgen”, *Siedlungsforschung: Archäologie-Geschichte-Geographie* 22 (2004): 159–175.
- 62 Péter Balogh, “Sleeping Abroad but Working at Home: Cross-Border Residential Mobility Between Transnationalism and (Re)Bordering”, *Geografiska Annaler* Ser. B., 2013:95, no.2, 189–204.



Congregation of the Leningrad Cathedral Mosque (1955). Photographer unknown (family archive of M. H. Mahmutova). In 1940 the Leningrad Cathedral Mosque was closed. A warehouse of Lengorzdrav was located in the mosque building until 1949. Then, at the request of the director of the State Hermitage, I. O. Orbeli (1887–1961), the use of the building was altered to accommodate the Hermitage collections of Central Asian art. In 1956, the mosque was opened to worshippers. The reason was a foreign policy factor. As a rule, any visit by delegations from Muslim countries to Leningrad included a visit to the Leningrad Cathedral Mosque. The first foreign head of state to visit the mosque after its opening was the president of Indonesia, A. Sukarno.

ISLAM IN THE SOVIET UNION

A CASE STUDY OF LENINGRAD

by Renat Bekkin

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-

tion 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/Petrograd/Leningrad. Here I have chosen only a few photos to describe the varying fates of Muslims who lived in Soviet Petrograd/Leningrad. ❌

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



Vail Saparov, a leader of the Muslim congregation in Luga, with his sons Arif (left) and Mirsaid (right), (Luga, Petrograd governorate, 1918). Photographer unknown (family archive of I. M. Saparov). Vail Saparov was killed by anarchists in 1919 when he defended the mosque located in his house. Arif Saparov (1912–1973) later became a famous Soviet writer and journalist.



A funeral meal with the participation of the imam-khatib of the Leningrad Cathedral Mosque, Hafiz Mahmutov (mid-1970s). Photographer unknown (M.H. Mahmutova's family archive). Of great interest are photographs that depict Muslim rituals: name giving (*isem kushu*), 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. Less 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 from Islamic traditions.



Estimation of collected sadakah on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr (1975). Photographer: D.I. Ishakov (courtesy of the State Museum of the History of Religion, St. Petersburg). Sadakah is voluntary alms 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 sadakah. In Soviet times, sadakah actually replaced zakat. Sadakah was also collected by unofficial mullahs (i.e. those not serving at a mosque), for whom it was often the main source of income.



Ritual ablutions before prayer (*wudu*) performed by the patients of the military infirmary for Taurida Muslims in Tsarskoye Selo (from the magazine *Tsarskosel'skiy raiyon i osobiy evakuatsionnyy punkt*, 1915). 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 Cuirassier 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.



Tatar boy from Petrograd (first half of the 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

Renat Bekkin and Almira Tagirdzhanova, Musulmanskii St. Peterburg. Istoricheskii putevoditel.

[Muslim St. Petersburg: Historical Guidebook; The Life of Muslims in St. Petersburg and Its Suburbs] Renat Bekkin and Almira Tagirdzhanova. Moscow and St. Petersburg, 2016, 639 pages.

St. 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 palace – the Hermitage – as well as to enjoy the canals, museums, shops and, not least, the magnificent cathedrals. Known as the “cradle of the revolution” during the Soviet period, nowadays the city is 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 sites, it invites us to visit the city's main historic mosque (whose construction was started in 1913 and finished after the revolution) and indicates houses where Muslim philosophers, poets, politicians and historians lived or those they visited. The guidebook also commemorates places connected to the memory of strong opponents 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 18th 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 surroundings. 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 a brief glossary explaining specific terms of Islamic tradition and Muslim culture is placed at the end.

All these features makes this guidebook a very special publication that could be described as a combination of biographical dictionary, itineraries and popular history reader, reviewing and subverting the well-established historical narrative on St. Petersburg from the perspective of Muslim, primarily Tatar, minority.

Such a publication requires a lot of innovation and obviously poses many challenges. In the following, I will discuss those that seem to me particularly important.

Some of the problems are closely connected to the guidebook as a genre. While the geographical organization of the material (by districts or itineraries) facilitates walks through the city, it makes it more difficult to understand the place that Muslims had in the city's history during the different periods of its development. Although several names, like that of the Tatar writer Musa Jalil (1906–1944), or Gataulla Bayazitov, the religious thinker of the late 19th – early 20th centuries, appear in the book quite fre-

quently, it is not easy to distinguish how the life of Tatars in the city in the late 19th century was different from that in the 1930s, for example. One suggestion might be to complement the geographical organization of the information with a short general overview on historical changes: number of Muslim inhabitants, their status and patterns of everyday life in the city.

HOWEVER, SOME OTHER obvious problems of the book are of a more conceptual kind. One of them is connected to the dilemma of naming and composing such an alternative guidebook: what is “Muslim St. Petersburg”; whose history should be included and why?

The authors make it clear at the beginning of the book that they wanted to avoid a purely ethnic focus – Tatars were among the first inhabitants of the city and constituted the biggest group of its Muslim inhabitants during most of its history – and the guidebook's title invites us into a “Muslim St. Petersburg”. At the same time, the authors themselves note (p. 19) that while the term “Muslim” in the title has a cultural, rather than a purely religious meaning, it is not always easy to separate the religious component from the simple identification with the ethnic culture of the various predominantly Muslim nations.

The problem of hybridity and ambivalence in connection to the identities of those included in the book requires even more reflection, in my opinion. This problem has been thoroughly explored in postcolonial studies¹ and many parts of the book dealing with the historical personalities and institutions of the imperial period would benefit from these perspectives, such as the depiction of Kutlu-Muhammed Tevkelev – colonel in the Russian imperial army, a participant in the Russian-Turkish war 1877–78 and the head of the Muslim fraction in the state Duma from 1906 (107–108), or the section on the Caucasian Squadron, founded in St. Petersburg in 1828. The Squadron offered some of the nobility from the Caucasian mountains the chance to become part of the imperial elite (153–158). However, the Squadron can be also described as complicit in politics of imperial domination, including fighting against the Polish uprising of 1830. The most ambivalent historical personality discussed in the guidebook is probably Dimitrie Cantemir (1673–1723), a

Moldovan Orthodox ruler of Crimean Tatar lineage, a nobleman, writer, translator and Orientalist, who spent several of his younger years as a hostage (later envoy) in Istanbul. Cantemir was one of those who contributed to the establishment of the Russian control over Moldova. He also became a part of the Russian nobility.

The authors of the guidebook decided to end their story in the 1930s, mostly ignoring the most contradictory, but also extremely rich, period in the history of St. Petersburg's “Muslim minority”. Was this because of the problematic issue of defining and including or excluding historical institutions and personalities? Although the authors give a short overview of Soviet and post-Soviet developments at the end of the guidebook – including Muslim workers getting several days of official leave during the Muslim holidays up to the mid-1930s, prayers at the Muslim cemetery while mosques were closed down, post war celebrations of the summer festival, Sabantuy, and the national revival under perestroika – the period after the 1930s still seems to require much more attention. The 1920s and 1930s, for example, were the years when many could declare themselves to be supporters of the new (atheist) 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 issue of Soviet repressions against Tatar and Muslim intellectuals during the Great Terror. It would be also interesting to read about the urban geography of the Soviet cultural revolution, to explore the destinies of Muslims during the siege (1941–1944) and to read about postwar students from Central Asian and Caucasian republics and their life in the city. How were the relations 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's” Muslim countries?

On the other hand, 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 Jadid movement – also known as the Islamic modernism of the early 20th century² is practically absent from the book.

Obviously, one guidebook cannot include descriptions of all the ethnic groups from the Russian Empire/Soviet Union or foreign countries who can be seen as Muslims 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 amusement park and “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 establishment of the time, where the “Other”, the “savage” (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 general changes in imperial politics towards the Muslims, the most important developments in Muslim society inside and outside the Russian empire as well as continuities, similarities and differences in the observation of national and religious traditions by different inhabitants of St. Petersburg who could be defined as “Muslims”. 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, the place 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

- 1 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (Routledge, 1994); Anne McClintok, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in Colonial Context* (London, 1995).
- 2 Charles Kurzman, *Modernist Islam, 1840–1940, A Source Book* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Serfdom in Russia 150 years later. Structures live on

Novoe
literaturnoe
obozenie
(NLO)

[New Literary
Observer]
(2016) no. 5–6.



A Peasant Leaving His Landlord on 27s Day in Autumn, Yuriev 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 ran 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 (“emancipated”), 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 thematized 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 of course: How has this historical fact, on the one hand, been handled by Russian society, and, on the other hand, continued to exert a hidden influence on the Russian view of humanity, power relations, democratic reforms? And what is the difference between the way this heritage is handled in Russia and the way it is handled in countries such as the US and France?

DESPITE SUCH FUNDAMENTAL differences, the historian Peter Kolchin, one of the contributors to the issue, holds that the former slaves in every one of these countries, without exception, remained on the lowest rungs of the social ladder. Emancipation did not immediately lead to equality, but rather to poverty, misery, and oppression. This fundamental similarity should of course not be forgotten, yet there are large differences of degree. Ron Eyerman, a professor at Yale, says that slavery has, in the form of a cultural trauma, laid the foundation for a variety of cultural identities. In the United States, says Eyerman, slavery is

“inscribed in the very landscape”. He traces racial as well as gender conflicts back to the phenomenon of slavery. Like Habermas, he sees modernity – which, despite slogans of equality for all, did not immediately abolish slavery, but rather in some cases even led to national expansionism – as an unfinished project, an ongoing struggle for liberation whose progress is slow and hard-won. Criticizing modernity for slavery is like criticizing the doctor because you got sick.

Numerous views are possible about how all this happened – and is still happening – in the US, but what cannot be disputed is that a clear attempt to think through the far-reaching societal consequences of slave ownership exists nationally, among both whites and blacks.

The same 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 “revolutionize memory” and write a more nuanced history than the francocentric one – that is, how to include more perspectives than those based on the notion of France as a civilizing, enlightening force.

THE SAME CAN hardly be said of Russia, and this is the fundamental difference. Discrimination was not abolished, but rather became increasingly complicated, says Jan Levchenko, 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 these days only to “settle accounts”. 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 in the 1980s to discuss Stalin’s regime, including its roots in the earlier history of the country, quickly devolved into a general dispute concerning the Soviet Union’s collapse, and the public eventually stopped paying attention.

Today, the Russian intelligentsia, from academics to opinion journalists, has become entangled 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 semifascist 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 implications of the coup. Olga Slavnikova’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.

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 communes 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 each other 150 years ago and how they look at each other today. Herzen would probably have been surprised at how little has changed since his day in the Russian relationship between power and the individual. It is symptomatic that his own memoir – of the struggle for peasant emancipation and against abuse of power by the tsars – remains such a modern read today. ✕

Maxim Grigoriev

Translator, freelance critic and author of novels.

Imagining the Åland Islands. A sea of peace

Deborah
Paci,
L’archipelago
della pace:
Le isole
Åland e il
Baltico (XIX-
XXI secolo)

[The Archipelago of
Peace: The
Åland Islands
and the Baltic
Sea (19th-21st
centuries)],
Milan: Unicopli,
2016;
236 pages.

The Åland Islands have often inspired visions of peace. In a speech given in Åland’s capital Mariehamn in 1967, 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 imagining the Baltic: in other words, it was the model of reference for the many – failed – late Cold War projects which proposed to establish a Nordic nuclear-weapon-free zone.

Nevertheless, Åland retained its role as a model even after the end of the world-scale confrontation, since its example is “more 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 governance¹ 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*.

DEBORAH PACI IS A postdoctoral researcher at Ca’ Foscari University, Venice. *The Archipelago of Peace* is her contribution to the international project “Spaces of Expectations: Mental Mapping and Historical Imagination in the Baltic Sea and Mediterranean Region”, directed by Norbert Götz (Södertörns University) and Rolf Petri (Ca’ Foscari University Venice) and financed by The Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies (*Östersjöstiftelsen*). The book is published in Italy by Unicopli Publishing in collaboration with the C. M. Lericci Foundation in the series *Library of Contemporary History* (directed by Bruna Bianchi, Bruno Bongiovanni, and Giovanna Procacci). It presents an overview of the 19th to 21st-century history of Åland, narrating the destiny of the archipelago as it passed from Sweden to Russia and from Russia to Fin-

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 the 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 1).

ÅLAND'S INSULAR geography has been the determinant in originating its maritime commerce and the consequent development of successful local naval entrepreneurship. Local cultural institutions like the Navigation Museum and the Åland Nautical Club have contributed to supporting the maritime character of Ålandish identity with several exhibitions, publications and public events since the mid-19th century. Paci is an expert on questions of insularity and maritime identities, having previously published a monograph demonstrating that two Mediterranean islands, Corsica and Malta, remained indifferent to the annexation propaganda of fascist Italy because of their strong insular cultures.² In a similar way to the insular discourses of Malta and Corsica, Åland's insular identity discourse has also been constructed in defense of the population's rights as a consequence of foreign domination and of the international status of the archipelago.

For centuries, the Åland people, culturally and linguistically Swedish, represented themselves as victims of a cruel destiny which had given the archipelago to foreign powers. In 1921, once Åland had obtained autonomy after a League of Nations resolution, the self-representation changed: the former Swedish minority 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 rights by democratic and pacific means.

In the last decade of the Cold War, local politicians and intellectuals started to propose the idea that the defense of autonomy implied the

conservation of the demilitarised and neutral status of Åland. "The spirit of Åland" was an expression coined in the eighties to indicate that the local community's struggle towards regional peace with respect for minority rights was part of the local insular identity. With the coining of the expression "the island of peace" by the local social democrats in the mid-eighties, the local identity was successfully cleansed of any nuance of nationalism and irredentism, which remain as a historical memory of the post-First-World-War period (chapter 4) and of the years preceding the Second World War, a time in which the neutral status of the islands and the rights of their inhabitants were temporarily overturned by the compulsory military conscription instituted in Finland in 1938 and by the installation of an anti-aircraft battery (in June 1940) that violated the demilitarized status of the archipelago.

Paci's monograph offers a useful guide to Åland's political history and identity, and is provided with a formidable Scandinavian and international bibliography comprising publications in English, French, and Italian. In her study visits to Åland, Paci has in fact retrieved an impressive number of volumes published from the 19th century up to the present day and conserved in the library of Mariehamn and in the library and archives of the parliament. Paci was assisted by the most recent research on Åland, published by the Åland Peace Research Centre, and by the guidance of one of the most active makers of the local "peaceful" identity, Barbro Sundback.

WHILE THE MONOGRAPH is certainly worth translating into English for its richness and clarity – aspects which also make the book accessible to the general public – a specific reason why Scandinavian and Baltic scholars should make use of this publication is the impressive number of archival sources that Paci has used to corroborate her narrative. Those sources, conserved at the Diplomatic Historical Archive (Archivio Storico Diplomatico) in Rome, report 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 contemporary 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 at the League of Nations in the name of the principle of self-determination. Tommasini instead suggested that Rome request the Swedish government to cease its support for 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 the fall of Mannerheim and the subsequent takeover of a "radical-socialist government" that would have made annexation by Sweden possible; but the envoy suggested that Rome should state loud and clear that no plan



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 (87–90).

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 tension that emerged between Finland and the Soviet Union when in 1936, the Finnish government considered a new air route between Western Europe and Leningrad with a stopover in Helsinki; the Soviet Union, not informed of the news, read this as a possible attempt to build 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 "ocalized neutrality" (p. 153) 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 Matts 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

part of the Vikings' territories and Saltvik (in Åland) was found to be the center of the Vikings' activities (in opposition to the traditional account which considers the Vikings' capital to be the island of Björkö in Lake Mälaren). Local institutions and associations invested financially in Dreijer's project. From the mid-eighties to the present day, in no less troublesome times, local institutions expend considerable effort in presenting Åland as an archipelago of peace – since peace is considered to be the only solution that can guarantee rights to its population.

TO CONCLUDE, Paci's work does not indulge in Åland's nation or identity-building as Dreijer did: her monograph is a valuable historical analysis that faithfully presents the many voices which, directly or indirectly, helped to indicate autonomy, demilitarization, and neutrality as the only significant instruments to defend Åland's insularity. ✖

Francesco Zavatti

PhD in history and postdoctoral researcher on transnational East European and Scandinavian Cold War history.

references

- 1 Harri Holkeri, "Autonomy - An Alternative to Secession? A Seminar on the Åland Islands as an Example for Peaceful Governance", 55th session of the United Nations General Assembly, 15 March 2001, <http://www.un.org/ga/president/55/speech/aland.htm>.
- 2 Deborah Paci, *Corsica Fatal, Malta baluardo di romanità: L'irredentismo fascista nel mare nostrum (1922–1942)* (Florence and Milan: Le Monnier-Mondadori Education, 2015).

**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**

Polish Studies in Culture, Nations and Politics, vol. 5, edited by Joanna Kurczewska and Yasuko Shibata, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2016, 260 pages.

In the 2006 Belarusian 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 10,000¹ 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 antiriot 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 actors 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 how "Ploshcha" 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 phenomenon. 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 "routinization 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 as these collective actions organized by the "traditional opposition" became increasingly ritualized and symbolic they consequently became irrelevant for the general population. Although it is likely that the harsher stance of the authorities after 1996 contributed to discouraging anyone not directly linked to the opposition actors from participating (being an open regime critic was not great for career opportunities etc.), it seems the foundation for the routine-like character of the protest is the fact that street actions mainly became a tool for the opposition to get the attention of Western countries. "Witnessing the rapid decline of mass activity", Navumau writes, "opposition leaders addressed their speeches to the international community rather than to their typical Belarusian audience" (p. 65). In an unpublished article Vinatier and Pikulik³ explain this as a result of international actors' continuing attempts to create democracy in this seemingly "hopeless" context. Democracy promotion efforts created a system of interdependency between opposition actors who became dependent on foreign funding to continue their work and



Opposition "Tent town". Minsk, Belarus 2006.

PHOTO: ALEXEILENKO

donors/implementers 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 at the oppositional rallies" (p. 193).

NAVUMAU ARGUES THE TENT CAMP was unique. "Speaking in Melucci'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. 167). 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

Continued.
The Belarusian Maidan

– focused on cultural rather than political forms of resistance and heavily relying on online channels for mobilization, communication and strategizing, which were both novel features for protests in the Belarusian context.

While not disagreeing with the above I instinctively feel the need to be careful when talking about the tent camp as a watershed, and especially in a n entirely positive way. “Although their protest seemed to be a losing battle from the very beginning, it proved to have a great symbolic meaning in the long run. The protesters helped others to banish fear; they believed and proved that solidarity and collaboration were not empty words” (p. 209), Navumau concludes. Even though it “failed” (or, as Navumau notes, never intended) overthrow the government, the protest raised the expectations among people in general and among those actively resisting the regime in particular, that “revolutionary change” was possible. “Street struggle” and “Ploshcha” became mainstreamed into the “traditional opposition’s” rhetoric and, as stated in the book, an important feature in a majority of opposition candidates’ campaigns in the 2010 presidential elections. Hence, in the aftermath of Lukashenka’s fourth reelection, the opposition candidates again managed to rally thousands of people to protest the official results, but this time it ended in a complete tragedy. Protests were even more brutally scattered and hundreds arrested, including seven of the nine presidential candidates.

The above was tremendously traumatic for everyone who had gotten their hopes up which, in my view, is a watershed. What was not achieved is generally seen as having been the “last chance” for political change. It is no exaggeration to say the era of democratic revolutions seems to be over. Today “creating a Ploshcha” only comes up in discussions as something no longer possible.⁴ “Failing” to overthrow the government contributed to making the opposition lose respect in the eyes of a severely disillusioned population that appears to have lost hope and settled into political apathy. The parade of color revolutions made the government more repressive and pre-emptive, further limiting the space for opposition-mindedness. This has been amplified by a “Maidan-effect” as Lukashenka is using events in Ukraine to show how “ugly” such popular revolts can get. As a result, today opposition actors are almost completely marginalized in Belarus. To a certain extent this has led to an ongoing reevaluation of mobilization strategies, but in most cases it contributed to making “routinization” of protests the norm.

NAVUMAU’S BOOK MAKES a significant contribution to the study of protest in Belarus, and to the general understanding of democratic resistance in authoritarian states. I personally especially applaud his ambition to problematize the “color revolution” literature that has taken to describing the tent camp simply as a “failed” example of such a revolt.⁵ The book is well written and easy to read. As it is an adaptation of a doctoral dissertation the inclusion of a long, and in parts quite complicated, theoretical

and conceptual discussion is understandable. To my mind the book would however have benefited from more explicitly links between this and the empirical part. In particular the connection between, and the effects of, combining “virtual protests” and reality could have been more elaborated. This would have been particularly interesting given that the use of online methods, which according to Navumau contributed to the uniqueness and impact of the 2006 protest, today sadly appears to have become part of a protest routine and is perceived by the population as yet another conventional (inefficient) tool used by the “traditional opposition”.

The topicality of Navumau’s book is highlighted by the surprising wave of grass-roots socioeconomic protests, which have started across Belarus in 2017 (while the review was being finalized). However, the authorities’ harsh response, as well as the extremely aggressive crackdown on the organized opposition’s traditional “Freedom Day” rally in Minsk on March 25, indicates that concessions from the state leadership and any changes to the political status quo are still highly unlikely. ❌

Sofie Bedford

PhD in political science and researcher at the Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Uppsala University.

references

- 1 Estimates range between 10,000 and 35,000, according to Korosteleva (2009).
- 2 Valerie J. Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Post-Communist Countries* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Elena Korosteleva, Was There a Quiet Revolution? Belarus After the 2006 Presidential Election, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 25 no. 2–3 (2009): 324–346; David R. Marples, “Color Revolutions: The Belarus Case.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 39 no. 3 (2006): 351–364.
- 3 Laurent Vinatier and Alexei Pikulik. “Democracy Promotion Derailed: Belarusian Deadlock?” (unpublished manuscript, 2016).
- 4 The exception is certain stubborn opposition politicians who refuse to let the idea go.
- 5 Bunce and Wolchik; Ustina Markus, “Belarus.” *The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics*, ed. Donnacha Ó Beacháin and Abel Polese (New York, USA: Routledge, 2010).

Russian Literature since 1991.
The past is part of the future

Russian Literature since 1991

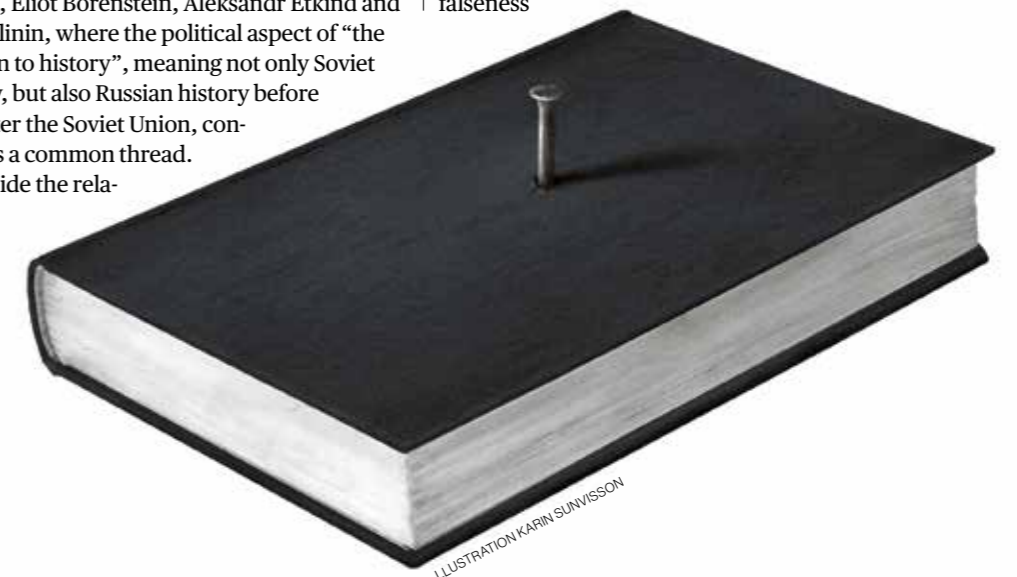
Eds. Evgeny Dobrenko and Mark Lipovetsky
Cambridge University Press, 2015
320 pages.

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 *post*. 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. Eliot 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-apocalyptic 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 VOLUME INDEED COVERS many aspects and 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 Serguei Oushakine. This part aligns well with the following articles by Kevin F. Platt, Eliot 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 rela-

tion to the past, there is another dominant theme, namely the upsurge of popular literature in the 1990s, and the attraction that it exerted on “well-known” writers. This theme conjoins the subsequent series of chapters by Mark Lipovetsky, Helena Goscilo and Marina Balina, which analyze genres between “mainstream and minority literature”. The last section is more disparate and contains readings of the minor genres of poetry and drama, with eminent contributions by Catherine Ciepela, Stephanie Sandler, Ilya Kukulin and Boris Wolfson. Yet here too the focus is on the relationship to the past and the re construction or deconstruction of the post-Soviet subject. For instance, both Ciepela and Sandler discuss lyrical treatments of how the Soviet past speaks and in particular, to which lyrical self it speaks.

Although there are many fine and interesting contributions in themselves, questions arise during reading concerning what this compendium as a whole adds to our understanding of *Russian Literature since 1991* and whether it really encompasses the dynamics of this literature in its contemporary development as a whole. A certain literature and certain writers that have for a long time constituted a canon in scholarly readings of post-Soviet literature are dominant in this volume, namely the genre of Russian dystopia or anti-utopia in the works of Sorokin, Tolstaya and Pelevin. In other words, this volume is another example of how contemporary Russian literature is largely read through the prism of postmodernism, already established in the early 1990s by Mikhail Epstein and elaborated by one of the editors of the volume, Lipovetsky, in several studies. Since Russian postmodernism is interpreted as the turn to popular literature and fantasy, focusing on the means of debunking the myths, false representations and utopia of socialist ideological representation, these works represent typical examples. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian literature undoubtedly performed a widespread turn to popular literature and fantasy, allowing for a free and phantasmagoric or even hallucinatory play with the falseness



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 postmodernist 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 postsocialist Russian literature has emerged from around 2005 onwards, among established writers such as Roman Senchin and Yuri Buyda, 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 exorcising the Soviet past, but on realizing its inevitable, tragic, dark, but also sometimes touching forms of continuation 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 today, due to the variety and to the large number of writers with a single strong novel.

AS MENTIONED, this volume focuses on the relationship to the Soviet past, and an interesting question that this volume poses is that of the possibility or impossibility of distinguishing the Russian present from the Soviet past. As the introduction states, this is the question that guides the second editor, Evgeny Dobrenko, in his article, and it is framed as follows: “The question of post-Soviet literature’s relationship to the Soviet cultural legacy is extremely important, since this is essentially the question of how far post-Soviet diverges from Soviet models of culture, history, progress, and so forth – does it transcend them, or does it remain prisoner of them?” (p. 14) In posing the question thus, Dobrenko examines Russian contemporary literature mainly in its relation to the past in the form of opposition. Indeed, 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

problems of contemporary Russia, whether to blame Soviet Russia or not, are not equally prominent. Another example is when Lipovetsky argues that “the postmodernist novel”, that is, the mainstream works of Sorokin and Pelevin, was able to “give rise to new intellectual models that suggest alternative versions of social, historical and epistemological consciousness.” Yet what Lipovetsky shows is primarily how they are open for new forms of relating to a present understanding of the past, and not to what extent they allow us to see beyond the ideological content of the images of the present and the past in the capitalist order of post-Soviet Russia.

The anthology would have profited greatly from thematizing and problematizing its own rather contingent theoretical take on the old question of continuity or discontinuity in recent Russian history. As it stands now, the book appears largely to confirm the Yeltsin myth of a fundamental break with Soviet society and culture in the 1990s with firstly, the introduction of a free literature and mass media, a “complete lack of censorship”, and secondly the hope of a good relationship between intelligentsia and state power, despite the increasing economic deprivation of both the people and the intelligentsia, and a return to the Soviet era with Vladimir Putin. This historical scheme is conceptualized in the anthology as the transition from Culture One to Culture Two, according to Papernyi’s theories. It is indisputable that Putin’s accession to power came to mean a substantial change, but still the conceptualization of this change could be further debated. The problem is that although there of course was an almost unfathomable break that led to the fall of a communist system, there were also many ways for the past to live on during the time of Yeltsin’s presidency, not only in the minds of people, ideology, hierarchies, corruption, education, but also in the very structures of society and power. Indeed, the question of how we understand the 1990s also determines our understanding of the 2000s, and, if we dig even further, since we understand the 1990s almost exclusively in relation to the historical (Soviet) past, of course, how we understand the Soviet past determines our understanding of the 1990s.

THE MAIN CLAIM of my review of this book is that what we need today is a critique of the critique of Soviet system, not because the critique of the Soviet system was wrong, but because this critique also makes claims about novelty and transformation that need critical scrutiny. For instance, in this volume, the introduction establishes that the changing conditions for literature during the post-Soviet transition period assigned to writers the double task of deconstructing the Soviet past and illustrating that there is a new Russian literature, a literature that does not end with “Solzhenitsyn and Brodsky”, as they write. The book does not, however, stop to reflect on the notion of intelligentsia, and to what extent it really survived the fall of the Soviet Union. Indeed, in this volume, the new cultural institutions, cultural exchanges, and mainstream literature appear as saviors after the

devastation 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 there was an “enormous popularity of Akunin’s novels among the intelligentsia and others”, whereas Akunin’s reception among the intelligentsia was varied, if you can speak of the intelligentsia at all after the Soviet Union. What is more, a highly important and influential institution 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 persona. 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 complex. We may also look at 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 capitalist form, that is, a 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 liberal times, 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 ideology, but also as everyday life. ✖

Tora Lane

Project researcher and associate professor of literature, Södertörn University.

Baltic Worlds runs an election coverage, commenting elections and referendum in the area from Baltic Sea Region to Balkan and Caucasus, covering Central and Eastern Europe and Russia as well. Since 2010 elections in 25 countries have been commented.


Turkmenistan. A facade of pluralism

 On February 12, 2017, the president of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, won a predictably 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, comment Donnacha Ó Beacháin, Director of Research at the School of Law and Government, Dublin City University and Abel Polese, Research Fellow at the School of Law and Government, Dublin City University: During this election, however, the Turkmen political elite constructed a facade of pluralism by running an unprecedented nine candidates representing three political parties. *Read the full report on balticworlds.com*



An image of Turkmenistan’s president Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow, on display outside the national horse-racing ground in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan.

Macedonia. A deeply divided country

 The newly elected president of Macedonia, 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 election in Macedonia: “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 effect was rather the opposite: the governing party lost the elections and have ever since done their utmost to prevent handing over power.

“Although a government is formed and it is possible to proceed with other issues, the situation is tense and the country is deeply divided. The nationalists 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 needed.

Read the full report on balticworlds.com

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 entertainment. 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 Suslov (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 remarkably often concerned with Russia's borders, its enemies and its wider sphere of influence – ideas that in recent times have flourished in Russian 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 territory – understood not so much as the current borders of the Russian Federation, 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 academics usually do not read (or at least so it

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, Mattias Ågren). So has the Russian revolution, which celebrates its hundredth anniversary this year (Go Koshino)

WHILE MANY PRESENTERS talked about "pulp fiction" – the notion of "trash literature" 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 of the future in a subtle and stylistically complex language.

In order to contextualize contemporary Russian fantastic literature, the conference also included papers on a broader range of themes, such as conservative thought and art (Edith Clowes, Maria Engström, Mikhail Suslov), Russian-speaking communities outside Russia (Lara Ryazanova-Clarke), and the thematization in literature of Russian language as an ideology (Ingunn Lunde, Per-Arne Bodin). The organizers are currently working on a collective monograph based on the papers presented at the conference. ✕

Kåre Johan Mjør

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

contributors

Péter Balogh



His focus is on geopolitical narratives in Hungary and Central and Eastern Europe. Postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for Regional Studies, CERS-HAS, where he is critically analyzing how and why the notion of "Central Europe" has been changing over the past several years.

Sofie Bedford



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.

Renat Bekkin



PhD in economics from the Institute for African Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences. Dr. Bekkin is currently a PhD candidate at Södertörn University. His thesis investigates Christian-Muslim relations in Russia, with a focus on the interaction between Christian and Muslim religious organizations.

Per-Arne Bodin



Professor of Slavic literatures at Stockholm University. His main research interests are 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 of family, and marriage politics and practices.

Paromita Chakrabarti



Associate professor of English and Director of Global Research Initiatives at H R. College, University of Mumbai. Her research areas include diasporas, Marxist cultural studies and postcolonial studies, gender, ethnicity, and race.

Kaa Eneberg



Journalist at the Finnish Institute for International Affairs, the Finnish daily *Hufvudstadsbladet* and the Swedish daily, *Dagens Nyheter*. Since retirement, author of three books about Swedish emigration in the 1930s to the Soviet Union, and recognized for her research and reports.

Yulia Gradskova



Associate professor at the Institute of Contemporary History, Södertörn University. Research interest: decolonial approach, gender studies, particularly "women of the East", postsocialist culture studies.

Maxim Grigoriev



Born in Moscow and raised in Stockholm. He has studied comparative literature at Södertörn University and worked as a translator of Russian literature and as a freelance critic and novelist. His prize-winning collection of short stories *Städer* [Cities] appeared in 2014.

Ulyana Kaposhka



MA in international and European relations from Linköping University, Sweden. Currently an intern at the Centre for Russian and European Studies, Uppsala University, where she works in the project "Building Sustainable Opposition in Electoral Authoritarian Regimes" (2015-2017).

Matthew Kott



PhD in history, Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Uppsala University. Coordinator of Romani studies at the Hugo Valentin Centre, Uppsala University. Reviews editor, *Journal of Baltic Studies*. Affiliated with the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia.

Makysm Kyiak



PhD, worked at various academic and governmental institutions in Ukraine and abroad. Co-Founder of the Global Ukraine INGO, a world-wide network of global leaders. He is also working now on postdoctoral research on information society and its influence on religion.

Tora Lane



Project researcher at the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES) and the Department of Culture and Education at Södertörn University. Currently working on the project "Man Builds and Gets Destroyed: Aesthetics of the Sublime in Soviet Russian Literature".

Thomas Lundén



Professor emeritus of human geography, CBEES, Södertörn University, with a focus on border studies and minorities.

Rene Mäe



Currently completing his PhD in sociology at Tallinn University. Visiting PhD student at the University of Tartu and Ivane Javakishvili Tbilisi State University. He has taught courses on cultural sociology and sociological research methods at Tallinn University and the Estonian Academy of Arts.

Rajni Mujral



Lecturer in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Thapar University, Patiala, India. She has published on Salman Rushdie, Meena Alexander, and in the fields of the carnival, the grotesque, and disability.

Kåre Johan Mjør



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

Andrea Pető



Professor at the Department of Gender Studies at Central European University and Doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. President of the Gender and Women's History section of the Hungarian Historical Association and the Feminist Section of the Hungarian Sociological Association. Awarded the Officer's Cross Order of Merit of the Republic of Hungary in 2005 and the Bolyai Prize of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 2006.

Påhl Ruin



Freelance writer, moved back to Stockholm in September after five years in Vilnius. He has reported for Swedish publications from Tokyo and Vienna and worked for several years in Stockholm.

Viktoriya Sukovata



PhD and doctor habilitata in cultural theory, professor of theory of culture and philosophy in the Science Department, Kharkiv National Karazin University, Ukraine. Focus: visual arts and gender studies, the Cold War, Soviet and post-Soviet cultural studies.

Ekaterina Tarasova



Ekaterina Tarasova is a PhD in political science. She currently teaches at Södertörn University and Stockholm University. Her PhD thesis was about recent antinuclear movements in Russia, Poland and Sweden.

Tihomir Topuzovski



He received his doctoral degree from the University of Birmingham. He is currently collaborating on research looking at the politicization of space and artistic practices displaying a new understanding of temporary urbanism.

Natalya Yakusheva



Graduated from BEEGS and the School of Natural Sciences, Technology and Environmental Studies, Södertörn University in May 2017, with a thesis in environmental studies titled "Parks, Policies and People: Nature Conservation Governance in Post-Socialist EU Countries".

Francesco Zavatti



PhD in history from the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES) and the Department of Historical and Contemporary Studies, Södertörn University. Researching transnational East European and Scandinavian Cold War history, now with grants from the Fund for Danish-Swedish Cooperation (Fondet for Dansk-Svensk Samarbejde) and from Åke Wiberg Foundation (Åke Wibergs Stiftelse).

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



Jurij Dmitriev, historian devoted to identifying victims of the Great Terror.

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 Petrozavodsk, 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.