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Personal diaries on the Russian Revolution

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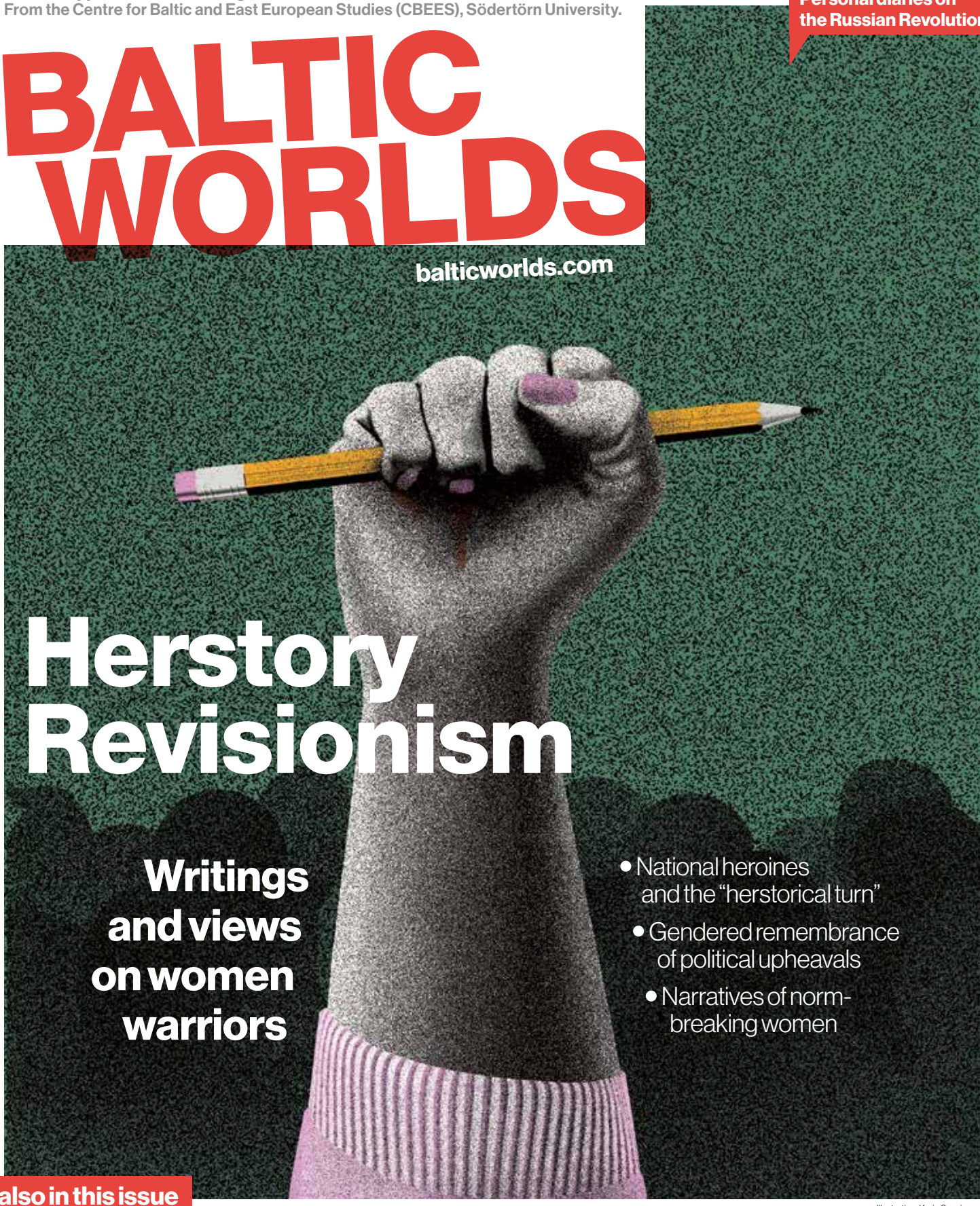

# Herstory Revisionism

## Writings and views on women warriors

- National heroines and the "herstorical turn"
- Gendered remembrance of political upheavals
- Narratives of norm-breaking women

Illustration: Karin Sunvisson

also in this issue

UKRAINIAN WORRIES / AVANT-GARDE ART / ORIENTAL "OTHER" / NEGOTIATING NORD STREAM / NUCLEAR LEGACY

BALTIC WORLDS
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editorial

# History, herstory and other stories ...

In this issue of *Baltic Worlds*, we present a selection of diary entries from 1917 in Russia, the year of the Revolution. It is a fascinating read, with depictions of a tumultuous, epochal event, recorded by men and women known and unknown, revolutionaries and their detractors; with everything from observations of growing bread lines to realizations that life had changed forever. Valentina Chebotareva, senior nurse at Empress Alexandra Feodorovna Palace Hospital, on the news of the Tsar's abdication:

> **One signature and the way of life we had for centuries has been destroyed. Everybody is silent. People are seized with horror. Russia ... without the tsar. There is total silence in the hospital. Everybody is shocked and depressed.**

**A VARIETY OF** voices thus provides a rich image of one, of many, overwhelming historical events. Historical descriptions normally tend to emphasize one perspective at a time, and highlight the importance of single individuals, most often male individuals, in creating legends to build upon. Frequently we hear the criticism that there are so few women in history books, and that their absence is palpable in school books, for example.

Here in this issue of *Baltic Worlds* we present a section on Herstory which goes one step further seeing how the absence of depictions of women in history is exploited, and filled with the ideas of right-wing movements in order to promote their goals and their myths. Women, associated with the image of the mother, are presented as custodians of the nation, or – in the opposite image – as enlightened, independent women who leave family, country, and ideology in order to shatter the existing order, associating danger with emancipation.

**WE HAVE** collected articles that address upheavals in Eastern Europe and the roles women had before and have been assigned subsequently. When women are deprived of the right to write their own history, the field is left wide open for others to attribute to politically active women whatever role they wish.

*Baltic Worlds* is the first to present an interview with Agniezska Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk, describing a community development in which anti-gender forces are increasing. There is a polarization between advocates of neo-conservativism and the women's movement in Poland. They refer to the statement of the Polish bishop Tadeusz Pieronek: "Gender ideology is worse than communism and Nazism put together."

Gender studies has become a highly politicized research area, and as a result, a target of repression.

**Ninna Mörner**

in this issue

## Early photography and the railroad

"The idea of luxury travel seems to erase the mythological contrast between 'civilized Europe' and 'wild Asia'. .

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## War worries of the people

"A clear majority in all Ukrainian regions has supported the unity of the country throughout the conflict.

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## colophon

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by **Eva Karlberg**

# ”Is it the swan song of patriarchy, or the beginning of a new ice age?”

## Interview with Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk

I met Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk in Stockholm to talk about the phenomenon of anti-genderism, as they have recently written together on this puzzling yet so urgent topic.[1] At CBEES Annual conference “Competing Futures: From Rupture to Re-articulation” 2017, Agnieszka Graff gave a thought-provoking keynote lecture on anti-genderism as a mobilizing force which incorporates such diverse ideas as anti-colonialism, anti-feminism, homophobia, Catholic conservatism, EU-skepticism, general populism, islamophobia and an aversion to refugees. In this amalgam, “gender” is used to connect the cultural with the economic, or as a “symbolic glue”[2] which does not just attack women or feminism but functions as a tool to challenge liberal democracy.[3] In her speech, Agnieszka Graff also highlighted the need to combine redistribution and recognition politics with gender (especially the inclusion of politics of care), in order to counter illiberal and conservative movements. Elżbieta Korolczuk examined the topic from the other side in her presentation of her recent research on parental movements, in which she sees anti-genderism from the point of view of the grassroots – showing the very attractiveness and political efficacy of the anti-gender discourse. Elżbieta Korolczuk also directed an appeal to us: we, as academics, researchers and feminists, need to show a genuine interest in people’s life-worlds and their concerns, and to start looking for what we have in common with those who are attracted to conservative and anti-feminist ideas. Thus, both Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk strive to understand the phenomenon which is spreading in Poland – and also elsewhere, in Hungary, Russia, France, Germany, Sweden, and the US.

In the last few years, something has happened to the notion of gender in the Polish public debate. In 2013, for instance, the Polish bishop Tadeusz Pieronek stated, “Gender ideology is worse than communism and Nazism put together.”[4] In 2013 “gender” also became the word of the year in Poland. In 2014, conservative politicians formed a parliamentary group called “Stop Gender Ideology”. Around the same time, a parental group called “Save the Little Children” (*Ratujmy Maluchy!*) argued against the Istanbul Convention, claiming that it imposes gender equality



**Elżbieta Korolczuk** is a sociologist, commentator, women's and human rights activist. She works at Södertörn University in Stockholm and teaches Gender Studies at Warsaw University. Her research interests involve social movements, civil society, and gender, and her most recent publications include two edited volumes, *Civil Society Revisited: Lessons from Poland,* co-edited with Kerstin Jacobsson (Berghahn, 2017) and *Rebellious Parents: Parental Movements in Central-Eastern Europe and Russia,* co-edited with Katalin Fábián (Indiana University Press, 2017). For over a decade she was a member of the informal feminist group Women’s 8th of March Alliance, and currently she is engaged in the association “For Our Children,” fighting for changes in the Polish child support system, and serves as a board member of the “Akcja Demokracja” Foundation.

Writer, translator, literary critic, commentator, publicist, lecturer in gender studies at Warsaw University, feminist, women’s activist, and co-founder of PK8M (Women’s 8th of March Alliance) – **Agnieszka Graff**’s career and importance can be described in numerous ways. However, as introduced by Jenny Gunnarsson Payne at the 2017 CBEES Annual conference, Södertörn University, Agnieszka Graff is above all a public intellectual who has contributed greatly to the debate on gender equality in Poland by revealing the absence of women in Polish public life, especially with her book “Świat bez kobiet” (*A World without Women*) in 2001. She has since published several other books: Rykoszetem [Stray bullets: gender, sexuality and nation] (2008); Magma [The quagmire effect] (2010); Matka Feministka [Mother and feminist] (2014). She is also the author of numerous articles on gender in Polish and American culture published in anthologies and academic journals, including *Public Culture* and *Feminist Studies*.





policies which are seen as a danger to children, and outside Poland, Pope Francis referred to gender identity as an "ideological colonization". Suddenly, gender is at the center of public debate as politicians, clergymen, and other public figures refer to "genderism", the "gender lobby" and "gender ideology". Along with gender equality policies, feminism, the LGBTQ movement, sexual education and reproductive rights, 'gender' has been transformed into a great danger to Polish society. How did this happen?

"Initially we thought it was a misunderstanding. We thought the Right didn't understand the word gender and that we as gender study scholars needed to explain it", Agnieszka Graff tells. However, after a rather violent encounter with anti-genderism in the fall of 2013, when a group of men in the audience of a panel at the Dominican Church in Warsaw threw a smoke bomb and held up a banner with the words "Gender = 666", Agnieszka Graff understood that "they're not looking to be educated. This was a dividing line in the cultural wars that were happening in Poland." After initially assuming that the war on gender was a local Polish, or at most a regional East European, phenomenon, Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk soon realized that it is instead transnational and well-organized, and that the producers of the discourse of anti-genderism are based in Western Europe – such as the German writer Gabriele Kuby, the Belgian theologian Marguerite Peeters and the French priest Tony Anatrella. This view, that anti-genderism is not something uniquely Polish, but a novel transnational phenomenon with local outcomes, brought Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk together and they have since published several texts on the topic, including their article "Towards an Illiberal Future: Anti-genderism and Anti-globalization" (published 2017 in *Global Dialogue*). However, they also share an interest in the politics of care, which they both connect to the Polish development of anti-genderism. At the center here is motherhood, or rather "motherhood as an institution, social practice, and experience, and the fact that the state in Poland has been ignoring the needs of mothers for decades", according to Agnieszka Graff. Given that the Polish state for a long time has failed to make sure fathers actually pay child support, many single mothers struggle economically. A group of women from all over Poland thus initiated a grassroots movement fighting for their right to child support. Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk both took part in this movement as supporting activists and have also followed a series of debates which took place in the presidential place in 2012 concerning mothers' social and economic demands. From these experiences Agnieszka Graff, remembers, "to these women it really didn't matter whether the people trying to help them were right wing or left wing. All that mattered was that somebody would care for their issues. It is to some extent a historical coincidence that parental groups became ultra-conservative. If the left had been seriously interested in these issues, if liberalism had been attuned to these issues, they wouldn't necessarily have gone in that direction. But the right had a feel for family oriented issues. During debates on specific issues, such as institutional child care or the child-support crisis, I found myself, to my own surprise, closer in my thinking to conservative women than women who claimed to be feminists but who were actually business-oriented. The neoliberal agenda was, basically, 'parenting is your own private enterprise'. And from the other side, there were women claiming that millions of people in Poland felt abandoned by the state. So, two years later, these very same women were demonizing gender. It was an evolution, but before the war on gender started, we found ourselves in dialogue with some of the people who would later demonize gender. Elżbieta Korolczuk today showed this genuine interest in their world view. It's not like they demonize us and we want to demonize them – no, we really want to hear what they are saying."

"We thought the Right didn't understand the word gender and that we as gender study scholars needed to explain it."
Agnieszka Graff

**Is it possible, then, that the liberal left, and feminism itself, have contributed to this situation?**

"I wouldn't say contributed," Elżbieta Korolczuk explains. "I think more in terms of leaving an empty space, which has been filled with right-wing discourse, so it is a case of negligence or marginalizing specific issues, such as motherhood and care. I mean, of course this configuration would play out differently in different contexts. In the Polish context, unfortunately, the left party and the post-communist social democratic party have been leaning towards a very neoliberal agenda, so when they were in power they liquidated the Alimony Fund, for example. It was due to the social mobilization of single mothers and the decision of the Law and Justice [PiS] government that the Alimony Fund was reestablished in 2007. These are the conditions in which we are working. Agnieszka and I and some other feminists, including Iza Desperak, Sylwia Chutnik, and Julia Kubisa, have been working within the feminist movement to re-orient the discourse, because although there is a lot of discussion of reproductive rights, but for a long time there hasn't been a discussion on motherhood, on how this care regime functions when someone really wants to have children, and what it means to be an impoverished parent. These questions have been marginalized. For feminist discourse, the question of family has always been problematic, but if we abandon the discussion about family, as a movement, then we miss out on a large portion of social policy which we should have on our agenda. And this is something we try to address within the feminist movement today." Agnieszka Graff argues that they have been successful in this endeavor: "Initially, when we were introducing this topic into the feminist discussion, we were accused of conservatism. My book *Mother and Feminist* was attacked as a betrayal of feminism. The moment you start using the word family or motherhood, a lot of feminists say, you are selling out. So, it was a question of reframing that set of issues. What should feminists do? I would say, feminists should read Nancy Fraser – and Elżbieta Korolczuk! We should understand how issues of motherhood, how issues of care are central, and not just issues of freedom."



Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk say they are not only trying to reach out to the feminist movement by making it aware of the complexity and the pragmatics of care issues, but that it is equally essential to address the left and the so-called liberal establishment in order to point out the ultimate importance of gender – liberal politics needs to take gender seriously and include it systematically. "We wrote this article for the largest Polish daily, *Gazeta Wyborcza,*" Agnieszka Graff says. "We were explaining why gender matters, trying to alert the people who are now in the position of trying to defend democracy from the Kaczyński regime that they cannot ignore gender, and that it is not just about paying lip service to how wonderful and brave women are. But, of course, this is a very difficult task because, at least in Poland, there is this sense that there are the real political issues of democracy, freedom, transition – the big history that has been written by men – and then because we are civilized, we are pro-European, we also include women, but it is a kind of afterthought. I think it is symptomatic that our article for *Gazeta Wyborcza* got retitled by the editors as 'The Polish Macron must be a woman'. The Left has a problem with thinking of gender systematically, as a set of social, cultural, and economic issues. Instead we have a discussion on who is going to win the next elections: will it be a male or female leader? Again and again, we who fight against anti-genderism find ourselves relegated by the liberal press into this tiny little corner called 'women, children and sex-related topics'. I think that until the Left takes gender seriously, the Right will turn this topic to their advantage. Because gender is a hugely important topic which concerns the distribution of resources and dignity. Sweden is at least considered to have understood this long ago – or maybe that is a myth?"

"In Poland I would say, the right wing is fighting against a straw-man because feminism and the feminist movement never has been as influential as it is claimed to be."
Elżbieta Korolczuk

**As you have said, this is not only happening in Poland but also elsewhere including the US, and I can see it in Sweden – maybe not as much, but it is similar – that there is a feeling that the establishment has forgotten about me, and the feeling that "I am being accused of not being modern".**



"You put that beautifully, except I would replace the word 'accused' with 'shamed': I am constantly shamed for not being modern and I've had enough; I intend to be proud of the way I live my life," Agnieszka Graff replies. Elżbieta Korolczuk, who lives in both Poland and Sweden, compares the two countries' experiences of anti-genderism: "the main difference is that in a Swedish context the question of gender equality has been integrated into the national identity of being a modern nation among those who are not yet developed, which makes it problematic. The claim that those who oppose gender and queer studies have been marginalized is at least partly grounded here and I think this means something – you have that anti-systemic air around such claims, which is visible especially online in anti-feminist groups. In Poland, I would say, the right wing is fighting against a straw man because feminism and the feminist movement never have been as influential as they are claimed to be. Of course, we had successes and the Black Protest was important but, in terms of political influence we are still the pretenders to the political elite." Here, Elżbieta Korolczuk again emphasizes the importance of and need for a feminism which aims at restructuring the very basis of society and which takes people's life-worlds and concerns into serious consideration, rather than a feminism which only cares about quantitative equality.

Agnieszka Graff agrees: "Our feminism is community-based, left-wing in its attitude towards capitalism and not just left-wing in, let's say, its attitude towards the Church. Poland has a Left party which, paradoxically, completely ignores economic issues. This is one of the reasons why I think the public's opinion of feminism is that it is a form of individualism; that it is about getting those seats on boards of directors. Elżbieta in her presentation today used the word 'alienation', and it struck me how this is a double-edged word. On the one hand, it has a long tradition in Marxist theory as alienation in labour. On the other hand, it is a state of emotional abandonment – a feeling that you are unloved, that you are misunderstood and left out – and I think that anti-genderism became a magnet for feelings of alienation and nostalgia. People want the family and gender roles to be a space of predictability, of naturalness and community, and there is a strong demand for any talk about gender in the public sphere to confirm their preconceptions. For a long time, I have studied popular cultural discourses about gender in Poland and the US, and it is astonishing how pop sociobiology is filled with endlessly repeated stereotypes. No matter how many times these

ideas are debunked, the books that promote them are best sellers. Women are monogamous, men are polygamous. Women are caring, men are competitive. It's all in your brain. All your preconceptions are true. Gender studies is a field of critical thinking which is, by definition, suspicious of such discourses, and so it arouses people's anger. People want the study of gender to be a confirmation of what they thought gender difference was all about, and so I don't think it is a coincidence that Judith Butler, for instance, arouses such fury. She is hard to understand and what she says is counter intuitive. So alienation and nostalgia, these are the public feelings that needed a language and anti-genderism became a language for expressing these feelings."

**Would you say that feminism and the discussion on gender equality have been an enclosed academic debate not disseminated, or made relevant to people?**

Elżbieta Korolczuk does not completely agree "If we think about leftist feminist activism, which I was involved in for a long time, I would say that we used the language of class struggle and social justice, which at that time seemed fresh, or even revolutionary, because the main stream was so neoliberal. The problem is that when I look at what I wrote five or ten years ago in the pamphlets which were distributed during demonstrations, and compare it with those which are distributed now, I see they basically use the same language. It is a language which appears transplanted from debates on the left which reflect the Marxist language of class struggle. And the only alternative became the language of identity politics, which refers to the uniqueness of individual experiences. So the problem is not so much that we are using the academic jargon, but that we don't develop new ways of communicating with the people. And it is interesting to see how popular feminist ideas can become when they are translated into a more accessible language – for example, through popular culture – and I think that actions such as #metoo show a great potential and a great need for retelling our feminist stories in more personal, emotionally compelling ways, which is something we never really had in Poland – compared to Germany, for example, where consciousness-raising groups have been very popular." Agnieszka Graff remembers how readers flooded her with emails once, after she had written an article on the topic of being a mother with a small child in a Polish hospital, and about being humiliated by doctors and nurses: "This was to some extent an essay about the horrors of the Polish health care system, but also about the invisibility of a woman once that woman is in the position of a mother. I received so many stories from women. There is clearly a desire to share these stories."

"The Polish mother is idealized because she makes no demands. Once she starts making demands, as a citizen, she is actually demonized."
Agnieszka Graff

**This makes me think of the Polish symbol "Matka Polka". How is it possible that, in a country where motherhood is almost worshipped, so many women report such treatment at hospitals and, as we said earlier, single mothers need to fight for their right to alimony?**

"For that I actually have an answer!", Elżbieta Korolczuk exclaims. "Because – together with Renata Hryciuk – we have written about this in a book called 'Farewell to the Polish mother?'[5] in which we argue that the Polish mother is venerated only when she is self-sacrificing. That is, sacrificing her own well-being, her happiness, her basic needs. The moment she starts making demands, the situation changes." Agnieszka Graff interposes that "the Polish mother is idealized because she makes no demands. Once she starts making demands, as a citizen, she is actually demonized as selfish, grabby, as making ungrounded demands – this is exactly what happened to the single mothers who were asking the state for help with alimony." Elżbieta Korolczuk adds: "There is a class aspect here: what kind of mother do we really respect? We have seen a lot of hatred and disrespect for poorer mothers, and for less educated mothers, a Polish version of the 'welfare queen, discourse in the US'. There is a strong discourse of class division which is dressed up as a division between those who are truly respectable and those who are ungrateful and demanding, and of course those who are ungrateful and demanding always happen to be poor and are attacked for having made bad choices."

**But given the recent mass protests such as the Black Protest, isn't there hope for change regarding women's needs and the position of feminism in Poland?**

"For someone who has been doing feminism for years," Agnieszka Graff says, "what is happening is quite heartening. Yes, there is this huge anti-gender movement. But on the liberal and leftist side, everybody seems to identify with feminism today, and a lot of male pundits and politicians on the opposition side attach enormous importance to feminism as the possible savior of Polish democracy. On the other hand, this mobilization comes too late; the right wing has already consummated political effectiveness. I think there is a cause and effect relation between the war on gender in 2012–2014 and the electoral victory of PiS in 2015. In other words, I think that anti-genderism paved the way for the acceptance of this authoritarian regime. Anti-genderism mainstreamed populism in Poland:



'the elite has shamed us and we need to regain our dignity'. A lot of this populist rhetoric in Poland was articulated in a language of gender, or rather anti-genderism, responding to Western protests against Polish homophobia, and it was considered a disrespect of the Polish national identity. I think that on the wave of that, plus of course the fear of refugees, Kaczyński took over. The Black Protests were of course wonderful – we both wept seeing the crowds and I was deeply moved by seeing tens of thousands in the streets saying what I have been saying mostly alone for a long time – but I think these protests came too late."

Elżbieta Korolczuk agrees, but wants to place Poland in a larger, global, context: "You mentioned the refugee crisis, and I think this shows how much now depends on what is happening globally. In that sense, predicting the future becomes incredibly difficult. If not for the refugee crisis, anti-genderism and other trends would not be enough. But then the question is: is the way of re-traditionalization or right-wing populism the swan song of patriarchy, or is it the beginning of a new ice age? I think that we should look at the Black Protest and other mobilizations not so much in terms of the immediate effects they have but in terms of long-term changes in the ways people think. The Right have absolute power today but their anti-gender discourse is based on the idea that they are the victims – this notion becomes more and more empty and ridiculous. So the question is how this reconfiguration can play out in the long term. If there truly will be a strengthening, and self-identification of many women with feminism, then it can have consequences in the long run – given that there will be openings in the political opportunity structures in terms of parties which can win in the next elections. The next question then is: What will happen with the liberal elites? The reason why the Black Protest was so big was because the struggle of women has become reconstructed as a struggle against the regime, and that's why they decided to support us. So the question is: What, in the long term, will be the consequences of seeing the feminist struggle at the forefront of progressive thought?"

And as a reply, Agnieszka Graff ends with a powerful remark: "We're right back where we started. Our agenda – and we have made a vow to repeat it endlessly in various forms – is to convince the well-meaning, liberal left and defenders of democracy that gender is absolutely central to the current political debate. Not just because women deserve equality, and certainly not because women are morally superior to men, but because this is where the struggle is happening – gender is where recognition meets redistribution in the most politically explosive way." ×

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PHOTO: PRYSHLTOVA VIKTORIA

# WAR AND OTHER WORRIES OF THE PEOPLE

## VIEWS ON UKRAINE FROM UKRAINE

by **Simo Mannila** & **Natalia Kharchenko**




## abstract

The article describes Ukrainian views on the war in the eastern region of the country and other worries of the people as well as Ukrainian-Russian relations and the views on the EU. The empirical material is from opinion polls carried out by the Kyiv International Institute for Sociology in 2014–2017. The conflict in the east is the main concern of the population. Two thirds of Ukrainians rely today on international negotiations as a means for resolving the conflict. Since 2014 the majority of Ukrainians have turned politically towards the EU, while the support to the Russian-led customs union has diminished. The esteem of the Russian government is down, which is not reflected in the ethnic relations in Ukraine. There are major regional differences in Ukraine, and Donbas stands out. Distrust in government and policy-makers is typical of the whole Ukraine.


**KEY WORDS:** Ukraine, Ukraine-Russia relations, Ukraine-EU relations, opinion polls, governance.

There are different views on the conflict in Ukraine. Russia defines the conflict as a civil war, claiming to deliver only humanitarian support to the eastern separatist parts of the country. For Ukraine and most of the world, Russia is an active participant of the conflict and often its main inflictor, and there is a wealth of evidence to support this view.[1] This article describes the development of popular beliefs and attitudes in the Ukraine of today on what should be done in the country, while also taking into account that the war is not the only problem in Ukraine. This article also reviews the Ukrainian-Russian attitudes and changes in the geopolitical orientation of the Ukrainian people since 2014, both of which seem to be considerably influenced by the war. The data are based on opinion polls in Ukraine, focusing on what is happening in the Donbas region, how the conflict should be resolved, what is the preferred political orientation of the country, how ethnic relations look today, and other worries of the people. The key findings of this article are based on the data of the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) along with some other poll data that are used for supplementary and comparative purposes. The KIIS data were collected by surveys carried out in compliance with international standards of public opinion surveys. The findings are discussed in relation to regionalization and the development of a modern civil society.[2] The occupation of Crimea is not addressed.

Since 2014, the social and economic situation of Ukraine has worsened. The present war, which started in full-fledged form in 2014, has had a major negative impact on these developments. Even without the war the economy of the country would be in a rather poor state and in need of urgent reforms. For 2015, the IMF reported a GDP reduction of 9.9% in Ukraine, which was the second massive drop since 2014, but for 2016 there was 2.3% growth, which seems to have continued at the pace of 2% in 2017, and the IMF and the World Bank forecasts for 2018 are growth between 3.2% and 3.5%. Thus, Ukraine is recovering to the modest, European level of economic development; nevertheless, the losses of 2014 and 2015 have not been compensated for. The economic recovery is uncertain, with international experts having given rather reserved comments on its sustainability and emphasizing the need for long-term external support and funding.[3]

However, a way out of the war in the eastern territories of Ukraine is not at hand; there are continuous casualties, and the interpretations concerning the Minsk 2015 agreement and its implementation are heavily contested. With the separatist territories, Ukraine is estimated to have lost approximately 20% of its economic potential – either in separatists' hands or destroyed by the war[4] – and there is a considerable internal refugee problem bearing a potential impact also beyond the Ukrainian borders both in the Russian Federation and Western Europe. According to the UNHCR[5], the conflict has affected 4.4 million people in Ukraine, of whom 3.8 million need humanitarian assistance. The population has also diminished, some moving to the west and others to Russia. For instance, it is estimated that there are up to 800,000 Ukrainian citizens in Poland, many of them working informally, although this is not only due to the war, and it also reflects the link between Ukraine and the EU.[6] Serious problems of governance remain in Ukraine, and the popularity of the present political establishment as well as trust in many key institutions is down.[7]

**ACCORDING TO HABERMAS**,[8] public opinion is constituted in the public sphere, which is accessible to all, by means of rational discourse, where anybody independent of their social status can contribute. Rationality is a heuristic idea, however, and in practice it is not the case that all citizens have equal access to the public sphere or an equal capacity for discourse. Public opinion is strongly influenced by elites and interest groups, and the public sphere is today international. In Ukraine, public opinion is of key importance: the concept of "cyber war" was first coined for international usage during the first year of the war in Ukraine, and it has been estimated that Internet information concerning what is happening in Ukraine is often manipulated. It is advantageous for the people if there are various groups or elite blocs in a country, because in that case the groups or blocs need to compete for the support of the people by utilizing various media, and this is an argument for democracy.[9] However, the competition also takes place by means of distorted information, and there can be external stakeholders manipulating information, which seems to be the case in Ukraine. In the case of a massive and successful distortion, people might end up living in a "hyper-reality" or "hyper-realities", whose links with factual reality are few even though factual reality still exists.[10]

In today's society, mass media, including social media, plays a key role in the constitution of public opinion, and television is of key importance, because Ukrainians watch television more than most European nations.[11] There are major regional differences in television watching in Ukraine; for example, in 2015 32% of all Ukrainians watched, among other channels, Russian channels, while the corresponding share in

the Donbas region, i.e., Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, was 82%. Approximately one third of the people in Donbas did not have any confidence in the information from Ukrainian television, while the corresponding share of distrust in Russian television information was only 7%. In contrast, in the whole country 15% did not trust the information from Ukrainian television, while the share of those who distrusted Russian television information was around 50%.[12] These figures indicate the influence of Ukrainian versus Russian mass media, although the differences in regional mass media practices have deep historical, cultural, and linguistic roots.[13] These differences are in compliance with what we find in the people's opinions of the war, the possible ways out of it, and their confidence in social institutions, and they might at least partly explain the differences.

In this article, we want to give a rare insight into Ukrainian views on the war in the eastern region of the country, Ukrainian-Russian relations as they are experienced at the grassroots level, and other worries of the population during the ongoing conflict. This insight is rare not due to a lack of adequate and reliable data, instead, to a lack of interest in Ukraine, which is internationally often considered to be a mere passive reflection of Russian or NATO/European interests. For a constructive debate, it is of paramount importance that methodologically correct opinion polls are carried out and the results widely disseminated. These polls and the dissemination of their results are important both in Ukraine and internationally, if we want to avoid strategic deception or self-deception.[14]

## Research materials

During 2014–2017 KIIS conducted several targeted opinion polls with samples covering (a) the whole country, (b) the whole country excluding the territory under separatist rule, or (c) selected oblasts. The interviews are carried out as telephone interviews in urban settlements and major regional centers and as face-to-face interviews in smaller sampling units. Crimea and the separatist territories were mainly excluded from the polls as of July 2014 due to the safety risks for interviewers and interviewees. The sample sizes usually vary between 2,000 and 3,000 respondents, and the results are representative at the level of oblasts and the whole country. Below we refer to KIIS survey results by the authors of articles or press releases if they are mentioned on the KIIS website; otherwise, we refer to the results anonymously as KIIS publications. Additional methodological information (e.g. data collection dates, sample sizes, and sampling errors) for the surveys utilized here is available from the KIIS website (http://www.kiis.com.ua).

In this article, we focus mainly on poll types "b", and when focusing on selected oblasts (poll type "c"), we address the eastern and southern oblasts of Ukraine, i.e. Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzha, Kharkiv, Kherson, Mykolayiv, and Odesa oblasts plus the government-controlled parts of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts.

## The conflict – war or something else?

According to KIIS,[15] Ukrainians from the very onset of the war most often (40%) supported the view that the Donbas conflict was a war between Ukraine and Russia. Moreover, approximately one fifth of the respondents in 2014 said that that they believed that the conflict is a civil war provoked and supported by the Russian Federation. Thus, the majority of Ukrainians put the blame for the conflict on Russia. There was, a minority of 12% who considered that there was a geopolitical conflict between Russia and the US taking place in the territory of Ukraine. This is in stark contrast to international debates often circling solely around US-Russian relations. In the southern and eastern regions of the country in 2014 there was also a minority of 14–21% who regarded the conflict as a civil war provoked and supported by the Kyiv Government. Thus, in these territories the blame for the war was originally put on the Kyiv Government as often as it was on the Russian Federation. Regional differences were considerable, and the response pattern remained very much the same in 2016; while in all Ukraine 65% of the respondents considered the conflict to be a war between Russia and Ukraine, in Donbas only 8% saw the conflict in this way.[16]

**"THE INVOLVEMENT OF RUSSIA IS TODAY AN INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED FACT, BUT THERE ARE STILL MAJOR REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THIS REGARD IN UKRAINE."**

**IN APRIL 2014**, when it was less obvious what was happening and what would happen, the possibility of civil war was brought up in a KIIS survey. Almost 50% of the respondents in the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine considered that there was a risk of civil war. Global Attitudes Surveys[17] show that there have been some fears of an ethnic conflict for quite a long time in Ukraine, practically throughout the whole period of independence since 1991. In 2014, the share of those considering that there was a risk of a serious ethnic conflict was as high as 73% in all Ukraine. This finding most certainly also reflects what was happening in Donbas, but there was also fear of an escalating conflict, which happily enough did not occur. [18]

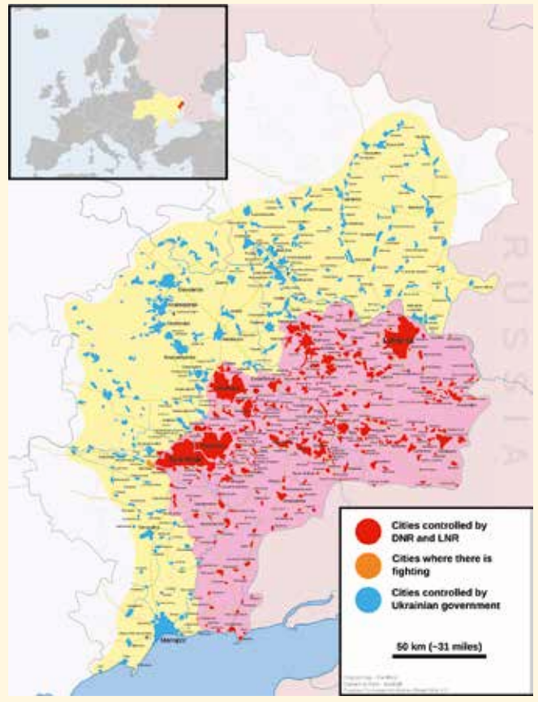
During the initial stage of the armed conflict in the eastern part of Ukraine, KIIS[19] asked about the potential solutions to the conflict and received a wide variety of responses. The most popular alternative chosen was liberation of the regions by the Ukrainian army, but this was supported by only about a third of the respondents. In Donbas, this alternative was preferred by only 8% of the respondents, while one third of the respondents supported autonomy for Donbas as the way out of the conflict. However, the interview scheme did not go further here by asking how the borders of the autonomic region/s or how the autonomy itself should be defined. Autonomy for Donbas was also often supported in other eastern and southern regions of Ukraine. In 2014, one fifth of the respondents in the western parts of Ukraine supported an economic blockade of the separatist territories in order to make them understand that they would not be able to survive independently. Today, we see these territories drifting away from Ukraine and that some form of blockade has been set up, although it is commonly assessed that the economic feasibility of the separatist territories depends more on Russian support than on the performance of the territories themselves.[20]

Throughout the war, Russia has remained an important trading partner for Ukraine, although the trade between the two countries as a share of both country's total trade has declined since the beginning of the war. Today, the EU is the leading trading partner of Ukraine with a share of over 40% of all trade.[21] The change is largely due to the EU accession treaty signed by Ukraine 21 March and 27 June 2014, which led to a Russian boycott of Ukrainian imports. Russia has, however, been a more important trade partner for Ukraine than Ukraine is for Russia, whose economic interests in Ukraine have mainly been indirect and related to energy policies or transfers.[22] European markets must still be conquered by Ukraine. There is, however, a promising perspective due to the visa-free regime established between Ukraine and the EU in 2017.

In 2014, approximately half of the Ukrainian population was unwilling to join the war because the leadership of the army was considered incompetent. This attitude was more typical (79%) in the eastern parts of the country, but in non-separatist parts of the Donbas region with a direct risk of war, the share was 57%. Other government institutions criticized due to the unsuccessful war effort included the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense and the Administration of the President. Approximately half of the respondents saw, however, that the war was necessary in order to defend the regional unity of the country. In the Donbas region, a more typical response (38%) supported resolving the conflict through negotiations.[23]

In the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine, people were also asked in 2014 what they would do if the Russian army were to occupy their territory. The most popular alternative chosen was to stay home and not to be involved (36%), although armed resistance was supported almost as much (33%). In Donbas, 60% of the respondents supported the former alternative, which might be explained by the cultural proximity of Donbas to Russia. Giving a warm welcome to the Russian forces or expressing a willingness to join them were alternatives given in the KIIS survey, but they were favored by only a few percent of the respondents.[24] The responses show indifference to the Kyiv government in the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine, but they do not show any preference for Russian power.

**IN FEBRUARY 2016**, there were simultaneous polls conducted in Ukraine by KIIS and in Russia by the Levada Center on the relations between the two countries. As we might expect, the interpretations of the conflict were different. In Ukraine, 63% of the respondents considered that there was a war between Ukraine and Russia, while 18% did not agree with this. In Russia,



Euromaidan pro-EU protesters in Kiev, December 2013.

People queueing for water in Donetsk, August 22, 2014.

A funeral service for a Ukrainian soldier, September 11, 2014.

Donetsk civilians living in bomb shelter, January 2015.

the corresponding shares were 25% and 65%. In Ukraine, 65% of the respondents said that there were Russian troops in Ukraine, while in Russia this statement was reported as true by 27% of the respondents and false by 52%.[25] What is interesting here is not the Ukrainian views per se, but the difference between Ukrainian and Russian views and their relation to facts. In 2016, KIIS surveyed the sociopolitical situation in Ukraine by also asking how the military conflict in Donbas should be resolved. Now, two thirds of Ukrainians supported the continuation of international negotiations until a complete resolution, and 21% supported military actions until full liberation of Donbas, while for 13% it was difficult to say how the conflict should be resolved.[26] The responses show a sense of reality among the population in Ukraine in a situation where the war had lasted over two years – and now three and half years have gone by with no prospective end to the conflict.

## European Union or Russia – views on Russia and Russians

Ukrainian views on the political and economic future of the country have fluctuated somewhat, but we can discern a clear tendency as of 2014. Support for the EU has in the western parts of the country been two- or three-fold higher compared to that in the southern and eastern parts of the country, especially in Donbas, where only 25% supported the EU in 2014 and the majority was against joining the EU. In Ukraine as a whole in December 2014, altogether 60% of the population supported joining the EU.[27] In March 2017, if there had been a referendum, 77% would have voted for joining the EU and 23% would have voted against it. The support for NATO membership has been somewhat lower in the surveys, but lately it has risen to 60% and more. Earlier regional differences, however, remain.[28]

Before 2014, the support for the EU and support for the Russian-led customs union were usually at an equal level of approximately 40%, but things changed due to the war, probably partly also due to the Russian boycott of Ukrainian goods. As the ex-Finnish Ambassador to Russia René Nyberg[29] stated, "Russia has won Crimea and lost the Ukrainians." According to the Global Attitudes Survey, the influence of the Russian policy on Ukraine was in 2014 considered negative by two thirds of the respondents, while the corresponding negative view on EU influence was held by one third of the respondents.[30] The support for EU membership and European political orientation, however, fluctuates, while the support for membership in the Russian-led customs union remains stable and low.[31]

For comparison, we might bear in mind, for instance, the Nordic referendums on EU membership in the 1990s, where the support for joining the EU was in all countries at the same level or less than it is today in Ukraine. The difficulty in taking a stand, however, is reflected throughout the surveys carried out by KIIS. The share of those giving no response to key questions or explicitly saying that they do not want to take a stand has often been up to 20%. These results show insecurity towards the future, but we see also a rise in the responses emphasizing the self-sufficiency of Ukraine; people feel more often that instead of relying on external aid the country must be able to stand on its own. Since 2016, the share of those supporting neither EU membership nor joining the customs union has been 28%, and this is the most popular alternative in Donbas.[32]



**THE KIIS ALL-UKRAINIAN** survey in 2014[33] contained a question concerning double citizenship, which today is not available in Ukraine. Almost half of the population took a critical stand against double citizenship, while around 30% supported it. The responses were, again, very much linked with the region – the western and the central parts of the country were against it, while the southern and the eastern parts were for it. The reasons for the double citizenship were, however, very practical; the respondents who supported it did so because they felt it would allow them to have formal employment abroad and would make travel easier. This is most relevant for those Ukrainians who traditionally have worked in the Russian Federation, which in today's situation might be more complicated if they want to maintain their Ukrainian citizenship, and it is also relevant for the Ukrainians working in the EU and might gain in relevance due to the visa-free EU regime for Ukrainians. However, dual citizenship is not favored by the decision-makers in Ukraine.

Besides citizenship, the views on the political and economic orientation of Ukraine are linked with ethnicity and language, but the relationship is far from simple. Ukrainians have a very positive view on Russians, which is productive for the social climate of the country, because Russians are a very important minority in Ukraine and made up 17% of the Ukrainian population in 2001.[34] The polls indicate that discrimination and ethnic intolerance are higher in the separatist territories than in the remaining Ukraine, and the attitudes in separatist territories are hardening, while there seems to somewhat increasing tolerance in the remaining Ukraine.[35] Polese[36] found that the development of the Ukrainian nation has been a tolerant process, due less to official political declarations and policy-making than to the everyday practices of the population – Ukraine is an officially monolingual country but in practice the country is bilingual. Utilizing Richard Sakwa's[37] terminology, we might state that officially monistic policies have not been supported by monistic practices in Ukraine, and there is an interesting parallel in Russian developments, where the officially pluralistic policies have not been supported by pluralistic practices.[38] Taras Kuzio[39] discussed the concept of "the other" in Ukraine and stated that Russia does not have the status of the "other" in Ukraine in contrast to what is often presumed. The relationship with Russia and Russians is very important in general for Ukraine and Ukrainians, and Russia is regarded as "the other" only by a small percentage of Ukrainians. Sakwa's and Kuzio's arguments focus on different things; Sakwa looks at legislation, while Kuzio emphasizes policy-making and everyday practice.

**"BESIDES CITIZENSHIP, THE VIEWS ON THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ORIENTATION OF UKRAINE ARE LINKED WITH ETHNICITY AND LANGUAGE, BUT THE RELATIONSHIP IS FAR FROM SIMPLE."**

Ethnicity in Ukraine is separated from the mother tongue, and a very large segment of the country speaks Russian but defines itself as Ukrainian. In 2011, altogether 47% of Ukrainians spoke only Ukrainian at home, 37% spoke only Russian, and 16% spoke both. In practice, bilingualism is the standard, with only approximately one fifth of the population stating that they only know Ukrainian or Russian well.[40] In 2017, only 1% were concerned about the status of the Russian language and 2% about the relations between different nationalities in Ukraine.[41] Nevertheless, the views on the Russian Federation and its policies have become much more negative, which might in the longer run also have a social and cultural impact, especially when taking into account that a similarly increasing distance to Ukraine has been found in the Russian Federation. The loss of almost monolingual Russian Crimea has considerably weakened the status of the Russian language in Ukraine.[42]

In general, the Russian views on Ukraine and Ukrainians have always been less positive than the Ukrainian views on Russia and Russians. Volodymyr Paniotto[43] compared the development of Ukrainian attitudes to Russia with the corresponding Russian attitudes towards Ukraine, the latter data being based on parallel research by the Levada Center in Moscow. The earlier positive attitudes seem to become rarer in both countries. While in 2006 up to 88% of Ukrainians had a positive view on Russia, the share in 2014 was down to 48%. In Russia the corresponding share in 2008 was 55%, but in 2014 it had been reduced to 32%. The change took place in 2013–2014 in both countries, and the most obvious reason for this is the war and war-related media. Paniotto[44] finds several reasons for the popularity of Russia in Ukraine, including the differential policies and the impact of mass media in Russia and Ukraine, the influence of pro-Russian lobbies in Ukraine, the increasing routinization of war, and distrust among the population of Ukraine of policy-makers in their own country.

**HOWEVER, WHEN WE** discuss the attitudes towards "Ukraine" or "Russia", we might refer to the country or to the nation. Both in Ukraine and Russia, the respondents make a clear difference between these two concepts. In 2014, altogether 74% of Ukrainians had a positive attitude towards Russians, and the corresponding share among Russians towards Ukrainians was 60%. In 2016, the positive and negative attitudes towards Russia were even in Ukraine – the share of those with a positive view was 42%, and the share of those with a negative view was 43%. This trend has continued during 2017 with the latest share of positive views at 37%.[45] Still, 67% of Ukrainians have a positive attitude towards

Russians, while the corresponding attitude towards Russian political leaders was only at 8% in 2016.[46] The populations both in Ukraine and Russia make a clear distinction between politics and people.

## Instead of a conclusion: stability or change?

The KIIS survey in the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine in 2014 pointed out key issues to be addressed by the central government of Ukraine. These were disarmament and the dispersion of extremist groups (39%), dialogue with Russia (23%), and support for regional development by means of supporting regional business (22%). The first issue might have been raised because of the separatist groups, but also because of the right-wing organizations that are active and demonized in the Russian media. There was rather modest support (23%) for the armed occupation of government buildings in Donetsk and Luhansk, which was how the separatist movement originally manifested itself.[47]

A clear majority in all Ukrainian regions has supported the unity of the country throughout the conflict. In Donbas in 2014, 14% supported a merger with the Russian Federation, and 9% supported independence. Those were the highest figures by oblasts – in other eastern and southern regions of Ukraine, the share of those supporting the merger with the Russian Federation was only 3%. Also, the Global Attitudes Survey[48] has shown a high level of support (77%) for the unity of the country, and only in Crimea did the separatist feelings have a small majority when the conflict started (54%).

Ukrainian findings show, despite the clear regional differences, that there has been no strong support for separatism in Ukraine. It is unclear how the opinions have developed lately, however, because reliable data from the separatist territories are not available. Interestingly, in corresponding surveys carried out in Russia in 2014, 61% of the respondents felt that some (unnamed) parts of the neighboring countries belong to Russia[49], and the legitimacy of Ukraine as a state was seen as questionable.[50]

**THE WAR IN** the eastern part of Ukraine is the most important concern for an overwhelming majority. In the spring of 2017, it was a concern for 72% of respondents, followed by standard of living (60%), economic situation (47%), and the security of Ukraine (27%).[51] This also shows that for 28% of the Ukrainians the war is rather a distant problem, and everyday life related to income and subsistence are also major worries of the population. The response pattern has remained rather similar in the course of the past few years. KIIS has assessed social and individual well-being in Ukraine since 2012, and we can see that social well-being has declined considerably since 2014, while individual well-being remains more or less stable. The former trend is largely related to the worries of Ukraine's economy, and regionally the worst expectations are in the southern oblasts.[52]

These findings show an interesting discrepancy; while at the individual (and family) level there has been no major downturn, the perspectives of the society as a whole are considered to be increasingly negative. The popularity of the president and government that existed – at least for the president – in 2014 is gone, and the majority of the population feels that the government is leading the country in the wrong direction.[53] The response alternatives of the question were definitively right/ rather right/ rather wrong/ definitively wrong/ difficult to say. In light of other findings reviewed in this article, the responses show general criticism and disappointment in politics, but do not directly tell which direction would be desirable. It remains to be seen whether this will be reflected in the elections of 2019.

One key reason for criticism and disappointment is corruption, whose core element is misuse of public office for private gain. Ukraine was ranked 131st out of 176 countries according to the 2016 corruption index by Transparency International, and this was only a modest improvement from 2012. A KIIS report[54] with comparative data from 2007–2015 had similar results. In 2015, 66% of the respondents had encountered corruption during the past 12 months, and 21% encountered it monthly, which was a slight reduction since 2011. The reduction was largely due to decreased offers of bribes to public service providers, which might be explained by impoverishment of the population. Voluntary bribes are, however, not the most typical form of corruption, extortion by the civil service seems to be more than twice as common.

**"UKRAINE WAS RANKED 131st OUT OF 176 COUNTRIES ACCORDING O THE 2016 CORRUPTION INDEX BY TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL."**

Interestingly, the KIIS results point out that there is a difference between the experience of corruption and the perception of corruption. The figures show that since 2011 the actual experience of corruption has decreased, while the perception of corruption has increased, indicating a higher sensitivity towards corruption. Even if only one in three Ukrainians would refuse to pay bribes,[55] the share of those who, when facing corruption, would not defend their rights, is reduced from approximately one third of the population to less than 20%. Although it is still largely a very negative picture, we see some indications that a civil society willing to defend its rights is developing.[56]

KIIS's[57] interpretation of corruption links corruption with general impoverishment of public services and lack of good governance. Over half of the hospital patients provide their own medicine and instruments as needed, and 22% consider this to be their obligation without being forced to do it – thus it is clearly obvious that the citizens' right to health care is not fully observed, and people have adapted themselves to the situation. The most typical form of corruption in education is collecting money for class or school funds and paying, for example, for classroom repairs. This might happen voluntarily or by extortion. This means, too, that the public sector – the government – is neglecting its obligations and that civil society is making this up out of its own pockets. We do not know whether there was funding that was misused or if there was no adequate funding, but it is clear that those patients, parents, and relatives who can pay keep the system going.



**THE KIIS RESULTS** show that there are systematic differences between the eastern and southern versus western and central parts of Ukraine concerning the conflict, and also concerning language and culture. The findings indicate that some form of regionalization of the country would be needed, but the key issue is what is politically feasible. Various solutions are on the table, but each of them seems to be unacceptable for different reasons. Bartlett and Popovski[58] stated that the powers of the central government increased during the Yanukovych regime largely due to a concentration of corruption on the central level.

We might define the pre-Maidan Ukraine as "a captured state",[59] which is not a rare case in post-Soviet countries. In a captured state, the benefits of transition are usurped by a monolithic joint business and state elite, while the costs of the transition (e.g. poverty and degeneration of public services) are shouldered by the whole population. In a captured state, the voters are "clients" of power structures or groupings and are rewarded mercifully for their support; they do not act as decision-makers concerning who is in power and how this power is used.[60] This is shown in politics as strong links between political representation and private interests that are maintained by the vicious circle of corruption and weak civil society.[61]

The discourse on the captured state is in many ways analogous to Alena Ledeneva's[62] critical analysis on today's Russia and its "sistema", with the key difference being that the Russian government presently enjoys high popularity, while in Ukraine the corrupt Yanukovych rule has been replaced by a new regime that, again, lacks popular trust. This shows that we must, besides the war, also focus on other key issues of Ukrainian society and how the population feels about these issues. Salnykova[63] and Shapovalova[64] find that the discourse on regionalization has in the course of Ukrainian history largely been led by regional elites who have utilized it for power negotiations with the central government, without a focus on regionalization as a means of democracy.

There is both stability and change in the views of the Ukrainian people. The regional differences found in 2014 remain similar to those in 2017, and the Ukrainian views about Russians have not changed much. A significant change has taken place since 2014 concerning the Russian government and the geopolitical orientation of the country, with the rating of the Russian government decreasing and that of the EU rising – however, we might consider the latter trend uncertain and very much dependent on EU policies in general and towards Ukraine in particular.

We might interpret the Ukrainian findings as reflecting a transition from an anti-modern society into a modern one. In an anti-modern society, informality, including corruption, is a part of life for everyday coping.[65] It makes up for inadequate public and private services and helps to cope with structural injustice, and this was the case during the Soviet times and has continued to be the case in independent Ukraine. However, particularistic networks, which are needed when formal institutions fail, are inadequate for efficient functioning of a modern society and might become counterproductive[66] because successful functioning of a modern society requires societal-level capital where trust is universalized.[67] In the somewhat rising trust in NGOs, we might see urgently needed modern social capital developing; however, whether this process will be enhanced and a new civil society will emerge as a result of this remains to be seen. The support for the EU reflects, among other things, hopes for a societal order with better governance and decent life for all. But life is slow and time is running out: as J.M. Keynes said, "In the long run, we are all dead."[68]

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## IN THE RUSSIAN IMPERIAL CONSCIOUSNESS:

# EARLY PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE POETICS OF THE CHINESE-EASTERN RAILROAD

by **Viktoriya Sukovata**

The wild and powerful landscapes of the Amur region before the KVGD: the River Shilka in the Trans-Baikal region of Russia, a left tributary of the Amur.


## abstract

This paper is devoted to the semantics of the visual images of the Chinese-Eastern Railroad (KVGD)[1] and the "Oriental Other" in the Russian public consciousness of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A study was carried out on early photographs of the late 19th century that contained images of the eastern borders of the Russian Empire – the Far East, Manchuria, and the KVGD. I argue that the construction of the KVGD was intended to be a symbol of the technological progress and spiritual strength of the Russian Empire in the Russian mass consciousness.


**KEYWORDS:** early Russian photography, empire, "Oriental Other", technical progress, Chinese-Eastern Railroad (KVGD).

The empire was one of the key concepts of the 19th century consciousness and of contemporary cultural studies. Images of the empire were reflected in many of the philosophical and artistic works at that time – including literature,[2] painting,[3] and photography,[4] the latter was a new kind of art in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The leading European empires of the 19th century were France, Russia, and Great Britain; these empires struggled for dominance in politics, economics, and culture, and also worked to widen their borders. The famous theorists of postcolonialism and nationalism (Eduard Said,[5] Homi Bhabha,[6] Benedict Anderson,[7] and others) have insisted that empire, race, and nation are artificial constructions, whose purpose is in part to create a positive image of the "self" (i.e., the nation or empire), and a negative image of the "Other". The "Other" is a central figure in the formation of an empire or nation; this is particularly true of the European image of the Orient, in which "the Orient" does not have a geographical meaning (i.e., the East) but is rather used in a symbolic sense (i.e., as cultural and political opposition toward white, Christian Europe). The concept of the Orient was given important symbolic meaning from the beginning of the formation of the European empires, and from the development of Romanticism and Orientalism in the 19th century. Contemporary Western scholars have analyzed the imperial consciousness in the works of Charles Dickens,[8] Arthur Conan Doyle,[9] and Rudyard Kipling.[10] Orientalist ideology, according to Said, was formed in the 19th century as a romantic image of the mysterious, exotic, and rich lands that were presented as the racial and cultural "Other" to Europe. "Oriental plots" with exotic people and volcanic passions became essential sources in the formation of the self-consciousness of the European empires in the 19th century because they fulfilled the role of the Other to whom the European subject was opposed. Said argued that the creation of the image of the exotic or hostile Orient was an effective tool of the imperial European consciousness to confirm its own positive identification and to mark the symbolic borders of European normative culture. The most powerful instruments in the construction of the imperial consciousness were European Romantic literature and the Oriental paintings of the 19th century: the "Oriental plots" with the depiction of the fatal "Oriental" passions, exotic sexuality, insidious beauties, and wild animals were to emphasize the chaotic, unpredictable and illogical nature of the "Orient" that needed to be disciplined by the logical and rational "West", that is, Europe. Such an approach asserted the inequality of races and cultures at a symbolic level and thus justified the colonial aggression of the European empires.

Many scientists in the 19th century searched for evidence of racial hierarchies in biology, medicine, anthropology, and other natural sciences.[11] I argue that the image of the Orient in the European mass consciousness was founded not on real knowledge about the economic and cultural life of the Eastern peoples, but on the visual metaphors of the Orient that were created in European painting and photography. The Orient was often represented in Western European painting as a selection of exotic boundary effects, such as the *harem* as a metaphor for the sexual subordination of women, the *bazaar* as a metaphor for economic backwardness, and *opium dens* as a metaphor for moral depravity.[12] "Oriental plots" in the works of European artists visualized the phenomena that appeared strangest in comparison with Western Christian culture: images of Oriental masculinity were symbolized in the European visual mentality in images of Turkish *scimitars*, Arabian racing horses, and tiger or lion hunts, while Oriental femininity was imagined as Oriental harems and beautiful *odalisques*; these images played a leading role in the exoticization and eroticization of the East (as presented in Western European painting of the 19th century, in works by Eugène Delacroix, Jean Léon Gérôme, Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, John Frederick Lewis, and others).[13] A similar situation existed in European photography of the Orient of the 19th century: the people in those photos symbolized the exotic to the same extent as Oriental temples and tombs, bright Eastern bazaars, and rare wild animals.[14] Although photography became an independent art form in the 20th century, early photographs followed the artistic canons and ideological traditions of the 19th century and were concentrated on the unconscious wishes and expectations of European viewers.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the symbolism of the Chinese-Eastern Railroad (KVGD) in the Russian imperial consciousness, and to assess how the Russian Empire constructed and visualized its borders within its cultural self-image. I develop these ideas based on early Russian photographs of the Far East and of Manchuria, locations that represented the most distant Eastern borders of the Russian Empire. The first photographs of the Far East and Manchuria were taken during the construction of the KVGD – an event that had significant political and cultural importance in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries as a connection between the European territories of the Russian Empire, and Manchuria and the Amur River. I want to determine what position the KVGD occupied in the Russian imperial consciousness and in the frames of Orientalist ideology, and to identify how the KVGD was reflected in earlier Russian photographs: was there a difference in the perception and visual constructions of the "Oriental Other" in Western Europe and in Russia?

**THE ENTIRE 19TH CENTURY** was a time of active expansion of the Russian Empire to the East – not only to Central Asia, but also to the Far East and the Amur region. Cultural evidence of Russian expansion and of the new Russian imperial borders was reflected in the paintings, diaries, and literature of the time. The Russian Empire began "collecting" Eastern lands in the 15th century: the movement of the Muscovy Kingdom to the Urals, Siberia, Central Asia, and the Far East began in the times of Ivan the Terrible. The combined territories of Central Asia and Siberia were already inhabited by ethnic Russians and other Slavic peoples, and many mixed marriages had occurred between the Slavic peoples and the ethnic Siberian tribes. As a result, the integration of these parts into the Russian Empire was comparatively peaceful.

The peculiarity of the Russian expansion to the Far East in the 19th century lay in the fact that many enthusiasts from different circles of the Russian intelligentsia actively participated in the reclamation of the new lands: mining engineers and geologists, school teachers and university professors, army and navy officers, doctors, and political exiles were among the first explorers.

The natural power and severity of the Russian Far East and the Amur region. The title of the photograph: "Forms and Types of Manchuria".

KVGD: the new technological landscapes of the Far East. The title of photo: "KVGD: South Line; Bridge on the River Lyakin-Ho".

The Chinese Eastern Railroad transformed the space of taiga into an "urban space". A line of the KVGD on the banks of river Mae-ho.

Between mountains. A locomotive leaving the Khingansky tunnel near the station Hinggan, KVGD, 1903.

Many of these had not only military, political, or economic interests, but also research and cultural ambitions. Scientific management missions were carried out by the Russian Geographical Society. Siberian merchants and industrialists were interested in studies of the natural resources of the Far East and the Amur region, and provided logistical and financial support to those expeditions. It is notable that, in the Russian public consciousness of the 19th century, the Russian movement to Siberia and the Far East was considered to be a type of territorial extension of the empire; rather than being seen as a capture or conquest of "others" (i.e., Eastern peoples), it was considered as a kind of joining of stateless lands and ungoverned tribes. The perception of the advancement of Russian researchers and military engineers into Siberia and the Far East in the cultural consciousness of the Russian Empire had much in common with the perception of the movement of America into the West in the American consciousness of the 19th century: both poeticized human will, the technical progress of the motherland, the development of new spaces, and the concept of "wild nature".

Does this similarity mean that the Far East and Manchuria did not play the role of the "Oriental Other" in the Russian cultural consciousness? According to the Canadian scholar Shkandriy,[15] Ukraine and the Caucasus played the role of the metaphorical Orient in the Russian national consciousness for a long time; for example, the Crimea was ethnically and culturally linked with the Turks, the Tatars, and the Greeks, all of whom were perceived as culturally other (i.e., foreign) in the mentality of the Russian Empire. However, the Siberian, Northern, and Far Eastern peoples of Russia (i.e., the Evenks, Chukches, Buryats, Saami, and other populations) were not considered to be totally foreign to the Russian Empire; rather, they were considered to be the inhabitants of the outskirts of the Russian Empire.[16] The well-known Norwegian researcher Iver Neumann pointed out[17] that Russia itself was often depicted as the "Eastern Other" by the European West. Neumann insisted that the discourses of the "Russian Other", "Russian coldness", and "Russian unpredictability" in Western mass culture were a psycho-symbolic defense of the Western consciousness against the phobia of Russia's possible superiority to the West.

**EUROPEAN WRITERS** and painters often imagined southern and eastern lands as places of European dream fulfillment – that is, as a sort of eternal paradise. Paintings of the 19th century, followed by early photography, created a "catalogue" of Oriental motifs in which young, beautiful, and partially clothed women played a significant role. However, Russian Oriental images were largely determined by the paintings of Vasyliy Vereshchagin, one of the most famous Russian Orientalists of the 19th century, and a representative of critical realism in art.[18] Vereshchagin's poetics of the Orient differed from the Western European Orientalism of Delacroix and Jerome: Vereshchagin did not personify humanity as a particular national or cultural group, whether European Westerners or exotic Easterners; rather, he critically depicted both the cruelty of the British Army in India and that of the Russian Army in Central Asia. Unlike Western European Orientalism, which was based on unconscious escapism by Europeans from everyday bourgeois contradictions, Vereshchagin tried to depict the East not as an exotic place in which naked odalisques were held in harems, but as an independent culture with its own spirituality and ethics. Although Vereshchagin never used gender metaphors to represent the opposition of the East and the West, he created many ethnographic sketches of the different Asian ethnic groups and of traditional Asian sacred buildings that evidenced the spiritual life of the Eastern peoples. At the same time, he actively painted not only the locals of the Russian Far East, but also typical Russian settlements and Russian peasants. The same approach – both an ethnographic and a spiritual one – toward the Eastern peoples and their life can be seen in the early photographs of the Russian Far East and the Amur region, which were intended to portray life in those regions in a naturalistic style.[19] On studying these early Russian photos, I believe that one of the semiotic purposes of the early photos of the Russian Far East and the Amur region was to emphasize that Russian life was similar everywhere, for all Russian citizens and in all parts of the Russian Empire: despite their distance from the center of the empire, Russian locals in the Amur region lived in the same manner as Russian peasants in the central provinces. I consider that the Far East and the Amur region were not understood in Russia as the exotic or hostile Orient, or as something alien, unpredictable, and hostile to the traditional culture of the Russian Empire. According to the concept of Benedict Anderson,[20] *maps*, *censuses of populations*, and *museums* played very important roles in the construction of empires: the map of a country is the political symbol of the "body" of a nation or an empire; the census of population asserts the existence of the nation or empire in terms of the physical bodies it contains; and museums represent the history of the nation or empire in the form of visible artifacts in order to establish the ontological right of that nation or empire to exist within generational memory. For this reason, photographs of the distant parts of the Russian Empire performed not only geographical and cognitive functions but also political ones in the imperial struggle for dominance. From this perspective, photography was an important tool that transformed the everyday life of the empire into visible and documented facts. What kind of reality was reflected in the images of the KVGD?

**"PHOTOGRAPHY AS ETHNOGRAPHY WAS USED TO EXAMINE AND POSITION THE DIFFERENT LIFESTYLES IN THE VARIOUS PARTS OF THE EMPIRE."**

The last part of the 19th century was a time of active development of photography. The first Russian photographers, beginning with Maxim Dmitriev and Sergey Prokudin-Gorsky, used photography to display the everyday life of different ethnic groups and professions in the Russian Empire, along with images of nature and the cities of this huge empire. For example, Dmitriev was the creator of the famous "Volga Collection" of photographs, which included unique images of the cities and natural environment of the Volga River, from its sources to its mouth (1894–1903). Prokudin-Gorsky became famous by undertaking the first major photography trip around the Russian Empire (1905); during this trip, he took about 400 color photographs of the Caucasus, the Crimea, and Ukraine. In 1907, he also created color photographs of Samarkand and Bukhara. Prokudin-Gorsky conceived the project of capturing Russia's culture, history, and modernization in photographs of modern Russia. In 1911, he twice performed photography expeditions to Turkestan, and filmed monuments in the Yaroslavl and Vladimir provinces.[21] The goal of early Russian photography was to be scientifically accurate in recording the humanity of the Russian Empire: photography as ethnography was used to examine and position the different lifestyles in the various parts of the empire. In 2001, the Library of Congress in the United States opened an exhibition titled "The Empire which Was Russia", for which 122 color photographs were selected from Prokudin-Gorsky's collection.

Since the development of photography, images of the Far East and the Amur region occupied a significant place among early photographs of the Russian Empire. The first photographic images of the powerful nature of the Amur region and the Far East amazed the inhabitants of Central Russia and acted as visual evidence of the vastness of the Russian Empire. Many of the early photographs of the Far East belong to the landscape genre and depict the forests, rivers, volcanoes, and hills that formed a background to the geographic or military expeditions in those locations. On the one hand, photographs of the natural environment in the Far East were seen as very exotic by Russians in the central parts of the Empire; on the other hand, these same photographs inserted the natural envi-

KVGD as a hymn to technical progress and order. Harbin Railway Station. A new Russian city which was one of the achievements of the KVGD.

The lounge car of an express train, 1909.

Chinese workers on the construction of the KVGD.

Inside the luxury carriage of the KVGD train: advertising a "pleasant journey" for wealthy people.

ronment of the Far East into the concept of Russia's "homeland" in Russian mass culture. Early Russian photos of the Far East and the Amur region created the image of "our great and powerful country" in the Russian public mentality, and similarly created public reasons for national pride. For this reason, I consider the photographs of the KVGD to be a construction of Russian cultural mythology and a project aimed at establishing a new "image of the Empire".

**BEFORE TURNING** to an analysis of the early photographs of the KVGD, I will briefly describe its position as a cultural and historical phenomenon, along with its place in the Russian national mythology of the early 20th century. The KVGD was begun in 1897 and was completed in 1903. The railway seems to have had an extremely romantic image that was in keeping with the optimistic philosophies of the 19th-century: the KVGD was imagined as a part of the Great Trans-Siberian Way that would establish a direct rail link between the Western European countries and the countries of Eastern Asia (between Russia and China). It was built at a record pace for those times, despite problems which included the extremely difficult construction in the mountains, gorges, and canyons; a lack of roads for technical equipment; a severe climate for Russian workers; and an extremely ethnically diverse local population, with whom Russian engineers interacted.

**"THE KVGD WAS IMAGINED AS A PART OF THE GREAT TRANS-SIBERIAN WAY THAT WOULD ESTABLISH A DIRECT RAIL LINK BETWEEN THE WESTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AND THE COUNTRIES OF EASTERN ASIA."**

In its symbolic position within the Russian Empire, and in the way in which the KVGD connected the two continents of Asia and Europe and the nations of Russia and China, the construction of this railway was consistent with the 19th century belief in the possibilities of universal progress, transatlantic traffic, and the universalization of social and human values.

The photographs of the KVGD can be divided into four major groups: the first group is devoted to the wild nature of the Amur River, the KVGD region, and Manchuria; the second group comprises images that are devoted to the railway itself, the new tunnels in the mountains, stations, and other results of hard work; the third group comprises photographs of the trains themselves, and includes internal and external views of carriages, locomotives, passengers, and conductors; and the fourth group is devoted to photographs of ethnic communities that were located within the KVGD region, and of their national and religious lives.

The first group of the photographs contained the images of the Siberian primeval forest, the mountain rivers of the Amur region, the Far Eastern mud volcanoes which were posted in many postcards which were distributed all over Russian Empire. These photos of the Russian Far East played several roles in the imperial consciousness: for one thing, they had an "educational" function and introduced the images of the far boundaries of the Russian Empire to a broad public audience, as it were symbolically "domesticating" the wild and exotic nature of the Far East in the Russian cultural consciousness. That Far Eastern natural landscape was very unusual in comparison with the typical natural landscape of the Central Russia and the knowledge about the extreme variety of Russian landscapes and imperial borders encouraged the national myth about the "illimitable space" of the Russian Empire. For other thing, the photos of the Far Eastern natural landscape were intended to stimulate national pride among the ordinary Russian citizens in their "great and powerful country" whose territory was so diverse and vast. The postcards with the photos of the far-flung corners of the empire served as of visual evidence of the natural wealth of the Russian Empire.

**THE SECOND GROUP** of photographs depict the railway as an embodiment of the romantic spirit of technical achievement in the Russian Empire. It should be noted that very few Russian urban photographs were taken of the Far East and the Amur River in the early part of the 20th century. This situation reflected the reality of that time – that is, the absence of cities or even large settlements in these regions. However, the lack of urban development aligned with the way in which the inhabitants of Central Russia viewed the Far East as a kind of "natural kingdom" – as opposed to the urban environment of the European part of the Russian Empire. The famous scholar Uriy Leving wrote[22] that the emergence of trains, airplanes, and cars had a profound impact on the cultural consciousness of the 19th century, a concept that was reflected in many literary texts of the era. These phenomena, along with the introduction of electricity into the domestic sphere, became cultural sensations. The train became a "hero" in the early cinema of the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a symbol of the industrialized world. Examples include the famous silent French documentary by the Lumière brothers, *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (1896), the American cinema adventure titled *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), and the American documentary *Northwestern Pacific Railroad* (1914). In particular, the *Northwestern Pacific Railroad* spends 18 minutes representing the landscapes of California: images filmed from the moving train encompass the new tunnels in the mountains, wild forests, mountain rivers, and canyons that the train passes on its journey. The railway, which ran along the severe and formidable natural environment of the American Western coast, is the main focus of the visual effects in that film. However, the main idea of the film represents the admiration of the director for the achievements of the American workers and engineers who built tunnels and laid rails in such inaccessible places. The triumph of this achievement is analogous, in my opinion, to the triumph that is present in the first photos of the KVGD, because many of the latter photographs depict the newly discovered and little-known Far Eastern lands, with their grandiose landscapes of taiga and great mountains, along with the rails and trains that were built to pass through all of nature's obstacles.

**THE AESTHETIC PARADIGM** of the time also had a definite impact on the aesthetics of the early KVGD photos, which show the influence of the industrial and urban aesthetics of modernism that were the style of the epoch, and which romanticize the technological achievements and growth of cities (similarly to futurist aesthetics).

Upon analyzing the gender symbolism in the photographs of the technological achievements of the KVGD, it is apparent that nature was not given connotations of femininity or passivity in these photographs, as it was in the traditional European metaphors of the East (the Orient). On the contrary, the nature of the Amur River region could be considered to have a "masculine" character (because of its severe climate), while the Russian workers and engineers of the KVGD achieved their success in laying tunnels and roads using characteristics traditionally associated with femininity: patience and perseverance. Despite the difficult and unusual climate, the summer heat and the severe winter cold, the Russian workers continued to construct the railway and build stations and settlements through the most difficult terrain; the triumph of their labor is shown in the photographs. For this reason, the optimistic triumph of the noble human spirit through the technological achievements of the KVGD was not simply a cultural myth of the Russian Empire, but was also a fact of the construction that was achieved. The construction of the KVGD and its accompanying photographs were expected to stimulate pride among the citizens of the Russian Empire regarding the new opportunities and achievements that had been obtained thanks to the KVGD. Thus, the photographs no doubt increased


Manzhouli Station, China bazaar.


Chinese mortuary buildings in Even-Ho.

national and imperial patriotism, as well as demonstrating the possibility of managing life as a Russian on the eastern borders of the empire.

The construction of the KVGD was an ambitious project that involved connecting the Siberian and Eastern cities of the Russian Empire, from Chita to Vladivostok and Port Arthur, with Khabarovsk. In addition, the construction of the KVGD yielded many positive achievements for the region: in particular, the completely new city of Harbin (now a Chinese city) was founded by the Russians in 1898 as a railway station on the Transmanchurskaya Railway. The old districts of contemporary Harbin are still marked by the typical architecture of 19th century Russian Siberia. Thus, the Russian Empire expanded its cultural, political, and financial influence in China, Manchuria, and Mongolia; this expansion acted as a kind of "soft power" of the Russian Empire in the Far East and the Amur, because hundreds of Chinese and Manchurian workers obtained jobs thanks to the KVGD construction. In fact, the KVGD was the first successful joint Russian-Chinese implementation of a large-scale industrial and financial project, and provided an impetus to the development of the whole region for many decades.

**THE THIRD GROUP** of photographs of the KVGD can be associated with the poetics of trains themselves as the new achievement of European civilization.[23] These photographs show views of luxurious carriage interiors, which were designed for rich passengers who were accustomed to travel with the comfort that had been adopted in Western Europe at that time. These images of traveling on the KVGD acted as a kind of advertising for travel from the center of Russia to the Far Eastern borders of the empire. Other photographs depict dining cars in long-distance trains, in which the table settings and the level and quality of the dishes correspond to the highest European standards of the time. For the culture of the 19th century, the trains symbolized the modern world of speed and industrial progress simplifying connections between rural and urban areas. The train, along with the car and the telegraph, symbolized the changing cultural notions of time and space, and travel itself was considered as a special chronotope: a number of works by the classical authors of the 19th century were devoted to different types of travel by train (for example, the novels of Jules Verne and Charles Dickens). The first public railway opened in 1825 in England, an event that was reflected in paintings. The largest railways in the world – the American Transcontinental and Russian Trans-Siberian Railways – were built in the United States and Russia in the 19th century. I argue that the symbolism of the KVGD in this group of photographs is comparable with the symbolism of a famous European train, the Orient Express, which has connected Asian Istanbul with the capital cities of several European countries (London, Paris, Milan, Belgrade, Sofia, and Bucharest) since 1883. The train was a symbol not only of fast and transcontinental travel, but also of "comfortable travel", the space and time of "luxury".

In this way, the idea of luxury travel seems to erase the mythological contrast between "civilized Europe" and "wild Asia". The dominance of railway stations in the photographs devoted to the KVGD demonstrate human victory over the severe climate and over nature, and gave optimism to the observers of the time regarding the successful labor and conquest. Thus, the aesthetics of the KVGD included the triumph of human transformation of nature, scientific achievements, and technological optimism.

The factual history of the KVGD was more complicated and more tragic than was presented in the historical photographs of the late 19th century. The Russian government decided to build a railroad from Chita to Vladivostok, not along the Amur River, which was a natural border between the Russian Empire and China, but within Chinese territory, in order to consolidate Russian influence in China. As a result, although the KVGD belonged to Russia (according to the contract), it partly ran through Chinese territory, making it defenseless: in the spring of 1900, the Chinese religious revolt started in an area close to the KVGD construction, and Russian workers became involved in Chinese affairs against their will; Chinese rebels killed some Russian engineers and workers as foreigners. The Russian Navy and the Cossacks came to the Far East to help the Russian working groups, and Manchuria was drowned in blood. The revolt was not suppressed until 1901. However, the KVGD began to operate in 1903, and the development of Manchuria progressed so rapidly that within a few years, Harbin, Dalny, and Port Arthur had surpassed the population and progress of the Far Eastern Russian cities of Blagoveshchensk, Khabarovsk, and Vladivostok.

Nevertheless, my aim in this article is not to consider the real history of the KVGD, but rather to examine the image of this railroad that was created in early Russian photography in accordance with the needs of the aging Russian Empire and the traditional understanding of "the East" that existed in Russian culture.

The last significant group of KVGD photographs was devoted to the everyday life of the Eastern workers of the KVGD, and to the Mongolian and Manchurian settlements, religious shrines, and places of prayer. The East that is represented in these photos is a hard-working region, depicted in the aesthetics of naturalism. The photographer drew a symbolic parallel between the work days of the Russian workers in the construction of the KVGD and those of the Chinese workers; both groups appear to have shared similar lifestyles. The Eastern worker was represented not as a stranger, savage, or alien to the Russian spectator, but as a person sharing a common task and a common goal with the Russian worker, thus stimulating unity and solidarity.

In fact, the idea of social justice was implemented in the KVGD in reality. More than 200 000 Chinese workers were employed in the construction of the KVGD, and their income was significantly higher than that of agricultural workers. The board of the KVGD even provided free medical care for workers of all nationalities and citizenship, paid temporary disability benefits, and paid benefits to families in cases of workers' deaths.

Chinese markets ("Oriental bazaars") are also present in the KVGD photographs, but these appear to have more an ethnographic function than a decorative one; that is, these images depict the traditional life of people in the Far East. Some images depict the different physical appearances and traditional clothes of the people living around the KVGD and building it. Some photographs show a very naturalistic style, and demonstrate the poverty of the local Chinese and Manchurian people. In my opinion, the underlying message of such images was that the KVGD was bringing civilization to the most distant regions of both China and Russia, and that the poverty of the local ethnicities was being transformed into progress by the urban and technological achievements of the KVGD. Thus, the KVGD, which connected the center with the outskirts of the empire, was regarded as being of the highest benefit to the far-flung population.

The photographs of Chinese, Mongolian, and Manchurian temples among the KVGD photos depict the traditional way of life of the Far Eastern peoples and were ethnographic in nature, aimed at a wide Russian audience.

**IN SUMMARY,** I can draw several conclusions regarding the photographs of the KVGD. First, the principles of visual representation of the Russian Far East were different from the Oriental paradigms of Western painting and photography: the Russian




The Chinese Eastern Railroad from Chita to Port Arthur and Vladivostok.

Far East, despite its location in the geographical East of the Russian Empire, never played the role of a symbolic "Other", of "the Orient", or of a symbol of the "Eastern colonies" in the Russian imperial consciousness of the 19th and 20th centuries. Second, the early KVGD photographs had several main purposes: their primary was the glorification of the empire and of its technical, technological, and spiritual capabilities, while their secondary was to establish the borders and "body" of the empire, including its multi-religious population, its powerful and diverse natural landscapes, and its multinational cities with ethnographic and political functions. The third purpose was to depict and invoke admiration for the spirit of the people who were involved in the construction of the KVGD – a spirit that was manifested through perseverance, endurance, and triumph over the difficulties of construction. The KVGD photographs also carried an underlying purpose: to support the idea of the multinational Russian Empire, and to promote progress, both technical and social, and the unification of different peoples to achieve great goals.

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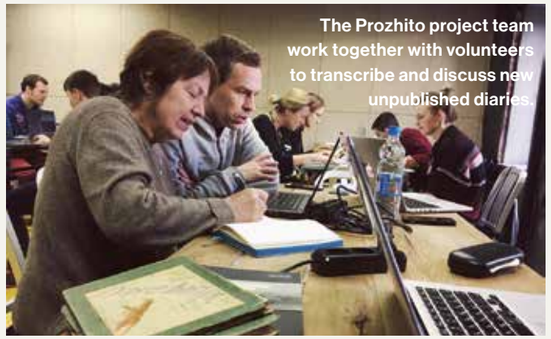
Examples of diaries handed in to Prozhito by the public.



The Prozhito project team work together with volunteers to transcribe and discuss new unpublished diaries.



# RELIVING THE PAST THROUGH EVERYDAY STORIES

## THE PROZHITO PROJECT AIMS TO CREATE AN ARCHIVE OF DIARIES

by **Ilya Venyavkin**

Initially, Prozhito was intended to become a digital library and an archive containing diaries of people who lived through the Soviet period. However, it turned out that creating a digital archive of personal diaries is impossible without real people eager to spend hours transcribing manuscripts, proofreading scanned copies of published diaries or preparing texts for upload. As the project evolved it turned into a social network connecting volunteers from Russia and abroad interested in history of the twentieth century.

The digital project Prozhito was launched by Russian historian and activist Mikhail Melnichenko in Moscow in 2014. I, Ilya Venyavkin, was one of the founders of the project.

The aim of the project is two-fold: on the one hand, to digitalize already published diaries and on the other, to find previously unknown or unpublished manuscripts and to convince their owners, whether public or private, to make them available to broader audiences. The latter involves convincing the owners that the project is reliable and, what is more important, that their diaries really matter.

The idea behind the creation of such an extensive archive of diaries is to provide an alternative to the state-centered and state-controlled version of history promoted during the Soviet period and still dominant today. Given that during Soviet times the social sciences and humanities were under ideological control and independent media were literally non-existent, we chose to look for another perspective on the past by turning to first-person accounts. It was not an easy choice, as we soon realized any selection of diaries would be fragmentary and voluntarist. Hence, we decided to archive all diaries that ended up with us. It is difficult to say how many years it will take to reach such an utopian goal as archiving all existing diaries, but we believe that even in the form of "a work in progress", this project can be of great help to various scholars, journalists, artists and other users.

So far, we have published about 800 diaries, ten percent of which are made public for the first time. This amount constitutes only a tiny part of all diary accounts of the Soviet era, but it may be enough to give some impression of personal experiences of crucial events of Russian history in the 20th century.

## Collecting diaries of people who lived through the Soviet period

**DIARIES ARE** original handwritten personal records consisting of entries arranged by date, reporting on everyday occurrences, reflections, emotional experiences and impressions. Diaries are usually written for the author's own use and not with the intention of being published. However, history knows examples of diaries being intentionally written for profit or self-vindication with a possible reading public in mind. A diary is usually a notebook filled with notes. Its form and material, the ink it is written with, its condition often reveal a lot about its author and the circumstances in which the diary was written.

Prozhito diaries are written by people from various backgrounds, some famous and some absolutely unknown, for different reasons and for different purposes. This makes Prozhito an archive that consists of eyewitness accounts of great events as well as everyday banalities and provides a diverse and nuanced picture of life in the 20th century. What makes Prozhito a unique project is the convergence of digitalization activities with community building, achieved through practices of offline labs where the members of the project team work together with volunteers to transcribe and discuss new unpublished diaries. Volunteers get to work with a few pages of a diary each, which are later jointly discussed with the aim of understanding the life of the author and the events the person had to live through. Usually the lab meetings take place in Moscow, but recently the lab have started to travel to other cities of the Russian Federation.

**EKATERINA KALININA**

# THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION IN PERSONAL DIARIES

**This collection of excerpts from diaries of 1917 and 1918 may give insights into how different people experienced the Russian revolution and found words to give meaning to these events.**

Translation and editing: Ekaterina Kalinina and Alexandra Kochergan

## Tatiana Sukhotina-Tolstaya

**October 4, 1864 – September 21, 1950**

Author of memoirs, elder daughter of Lev Tolstoy, and wife of M.S. Sukhotin, public person, member of the First State Duma.

**January 2 , 1917**

Yasnaya Polyana. Yesterday I read striking news in the newspaper: Rasputin has been shot. I won't tell you the details as I am attaching a press-cutting from *The Russian Word*.

For a long time a lot of people have been talking about the necessity getting rid of this dark force and now we have new Decembrists who have sacrificed themselves for what they consider the good of their Motherland.

I am sad and I think that the crime committed won't bring anything good to our miserable homeland but will weigh on the conscience of those who have done it like a bloody indelible stain.

"The dog has been shot". But will it make our ruler wiser and help him to choose his advisers?

Will hysterical dissolute women become rational and chaste?

Will the bankers and ministers with blotted reputations be more honest and won't they find other people whom will they bribe for their own rehabilitation?

I think that the disappearance of Rasputin won't change anything. And this case may and probably will become the spark which will lead to the explosion of people's seething resentment.

Misha would be concerned about the event. He took a special interest in Rasputin. His notes say a lot about Rasputin– he took the information from people who personally knew him and who learned a great deal about him.

They are starting to talk about peace. I can't believe that all these disasters are coming to an end. The atmosphere in the rear is awful: pillage, thirst for money and irritation.

I am happy that I am in the village. I live in the Yasnopolyanskoye wing together with Tanya, Wells and young high school student O.K. Grigoryeva, who is preparing Tanya for the third grade. I am satisfied with Tanya. She is becoming a good, keen, happy, easy-going, loving girl. She is of moderate abilities, which is very strange, as at the age of two-three years she was an absolutely remarkably smart and precocious child. She amazed not only me, but everyone.

Mama lives in the big house together with Dushan. She is growing weaker, hardly takes any interest in anything (she did not even read the article about Rasputin), is becoming sickly and stingy. But she is less worrying, does not get angry, does not get irritated. Hardly remembers anything, and everything that she tells, she tells with inaccuracy. Aunt Tanya Kuzminskaya read her memoirs last summer and freaked out over their inaccuracy and the wife's attitude to her husband. "As if she is writing about another person!" said Aunt Tanya, "But I was the one who saw their life. I saw his love and goodness towards her. But from her perspective, it looks as though she is an innocent victim of a despotic, cruel and stern tyrant!"

Well, how difficult it will be for the future generations to sort out this family drama and be fair to both of them! It was about her that Lisa Obolenskaya said that she is a phenomenal woman. This is true. Such a combination of opposite qualities in one person is difficult to imagine.

## Moris Paleolog

**January 13, 1859 – November 21, 1944**

French politician, diplomat. French ambassador to Russia from January 1914.

**January 3, 1917**

As soon as the corpse of Rasputin was taken from the Neva River, it was secretly moved to the Shelter of Chesma Veterans located five kilometers further from Petrograd on the way to Tsarskoye Selo.

Having examined the corpse and described the wounds, Professor Kosorotov invited Akulina, a young novice, to the hall where the autopsy had been carried out. She had become acquainted with Rasputin in Oktaiskiy convent where he exorcised demons from her. In accordance with the will of the empress she and an orderly started to dress the corpse for the last time. Akulina was the only one who could approach him: Rasputin's wife, his daughters, his most ardent fans begged to get permission to see the dead man, but in vain.

The formerly obsessed, now pious Akulina spent half of the night washing the corpse, filled his wounds with aromatic herbs, dressed him in new clothes and put him in the coffin. Finally she put a cross on his chest and a letter from the empress in his hands. Here is the text of the letter which I got from Lady T., an acquaintance of Rasputin and Akulina's friend:

"My dear martyr, give me your blessing so that I may have it with me all the time as long as I am alive. And pray for us in heaven in your holy prayers. Alexandra.".

The next morning, i.e. yesterday, the empress and Lady Vyrubova came to Rasputin's body to pray and brought a lot of flowers, icons and lamentations.

A lot of times while going to Tsarskoye Selo I passed by Chesma asylum (the former residence of Catherine II) which I could see through the trees. In this season it is covered with snow, located on an endless foggy and cold plain – an ominous and sad place. It's suitable scenery for yesterday's event. The empress and her ill-omened friend were crying near the swollen corpse of a dissolute man whom they loved so much and whom Russia would curse for all eternity: history, the greatest playwright, created these pathetic episodes.

At about midnight the coffin was taken to Tsarskoye Selo under the supervision of Lady Golovina and Colonel Loman, and then it was brought to the chapel in the imperial park.

## Vladimir Korolenko

**July 15, 1853 – December 25, 1921**

Writer, journalist, public person and civil rights defender.

**January 17, 1917**

**Letters from the front:**

"People are suffering badly. We don't move in spite of December frost, living in barracks, in dirt. Body next to body, no room to turn round. Our company is called a disciplinary squadron. Birching, slapping in the face, kicking, cursing – all these are our everyday life. Something awful is going on. Soldiers are signing up for marching companies, to go anywhere rather than stay here. This is how they are suffering. And we can't stay at home. We must be here."

"In recent days, during the holiday, we (a bunch of intelligent soldiers) got newspapers. We are surrounded by soldiers all the time. The faces, bodies, all the movements symbolize the question: "What? Peace?" Instead of answering the question we tell them about Rasputin, Protopopov, etc. The eyebrows are knitted angrily, the fists clench."

"Grandfather! There are 650 people of different ages from 18 to 42–43 in our company. Nobody understands the goals of the war; they are alien to them. In the Duma they shout that the people don't want peace. What a mess! It's 6 a.m. I must go to training."

**July 17, 1917**

The news about the murder of the tsar has been refuted. The news about Volodarsky turned out to be true. The Bolsheviks think it is a terrorist plot, even (as of old) that the English are responsible for it. Volodarsky is said to be a bad person and demagogue in the worst meaning of the word ... But if it is a true terror, the medicines are not better than the illness ...

There are rumors... . There are punitive expeditions and ordinary talks and suppositions... after all, somebody may appear as in Filonov's case ... As before, it would be bad and silly ... Instead of rational resistance and the fight of real forces we have murders behind one's back and violent repressions ... Nobody is going to be intimidated by them and it is the least suitable role for intelligentsia: subservience to people who don't want to accept the best that intelligentsia can give them – it is subservience to the worst: "murders behind one's back". The people are inclined to do all this without them. Pandering to people doesn't mean serving them with dignity ...

They say that Michael Alexandrovich has escaped. There is almost no information on where the tsar is ...

## Yuriy Lomonosov

**April 24, 1876 – November 19, 1952**

Engineer and railroad-man, revolutionary. Played an important role in the February Revolution.

**February 20, 1917**

The previous days. I came to Tsarskoye Selo from the Romanian front on February 20. On the front line life took its course. We had a good supply of ammunition but very little food. On average in Romania we got 60 percent of what we were supposed to get but in certain units this number fell below 20 percent. We had to eat dead horses. The situation with railroads was awful, mainly because of the trains' miserable condition. I don't know where it was worse: on Romanian railroads or on ours. But the ministers didn't want to hear the truth; in this respect the headquarters were braver.

"The poor condition of railroads at the Romanian front was obvious: the fact that they had to replace hospital trains with freight cars and transport the wounded in the carriages from which the food had just been removed shows what happened with the railways in the Romanian front. The mortality was awful. A lot of soldiers froze to death in unheated carriages. To re-establish hospital trains meant to stop delivering food to healthy soldiers. The question was put point-blank: "Let those die who left the ranks," General Sakharov decided.

These circumstances led to resentment in the army. It's amazing but the resentment was only against the tsar and especially the tsarina. At headquarters she was severely criticized; there was talk not only about her incarceration but about the abdication of Nicholas II. Even the general talked about that. But as usual when these talks took place the most likely outcome was revolution, purely a palace one like the assassination of Paul I.

I didn't talk to soldiers at the front; it can be assumed that, since I was a general they wouldn't be sincere with me. But I remember that on my way to Romania I met a soldier whom I knew. He was from wealthy Poltava grain-growers, an honest monarchist and a wise man. We had a talk. The breaking news then was the murder of Rasputin and we touched upon it in our talk. I remember very clearly his sorrowful and puzzled eyes and his voice full of sadness when he asked me: "You are living in Tsarskoye Selo, tell me how the tsar puts up with such a vulgar character in his house?" I was at a loss. "I am a simple man but I would prevent such a shame. He is a Tsar, you see such a word – Tsar. We spill our blood for him!" – "For him?" – "Yes. For him. For whom else?" He paused for a moment and then added: "Is he even worth it?"

The murder of Rasputin exercised the minds of people. I remember another event at the railway station in Yassakh. The winter day is breaking. The train is slowly arriving. Having put up his food tents, Purishkevich is fussing on the platform (a lot will be forgiven him for them). Soldiers and officers are coming from their carriages. The biggest of them, a Cossack captain, who weighs about 12 pood, sees Purishkevich, stops, stares at him, grunts and heads for him.

"Are you Purishkevich?"

"That's me."

"Let me shake your hand on the behalf of Russian army – you killed Rasputin."

""For goodness' sake ..."

"Don't be modest. The whole of Russia knows it. Hurrah for Purishkevich and those who killed this damned dog!"

So on February 20 at about midday I arrived at Tsarskoye Selo. The day was clear and frosty. My wife met me at the railway station. We hired a cabman and went home. We got home. We were supposed to pay the cabman 35 kopeks but I gave him 50 because of war time. Two months ago he would have been grateful for such a tip but now the cabman flipped a coin and looked at it thoughtfully. Having got what the matter was, my wife told me with irritation: "Are you crazy? Give him a ruble."

"A ruble?"

"Yes, we have been paying that for a long time as the price for oats has gone up four times."

I realized that the ruble had fallen more in the two months of my absence than in all the war time. The lines I saw the next day in Petrograd showed that there is very little food in the capital. We had to stand in a line for 3–4 hours to get some bread, 5–6 hours to get some milk and days to get boots.

I went to a new minister, Kriger-Voinovsky. He was as civil, uncertain and cold as when he held other posts. He said that I wouldn't go to the front any more as they decided to put me in charge of coil manufacturing. He ordered me to give him my plan for it. He was talking about months and years ahead but not very sure. But in the administration of railroad communication and in other administrations – the same old way! They were as cool as cucumbers. After having been at the front their clerical work seemed useless and their complacent archness disgusting. I wanted to come back to real life. In Romania I felt helpful but here it was very doubtful. I didn't believe in the success of my coil dictatorship. I found out the hard way that old authorities would be still in power and it would result in nothing but a diarchy and a mess.




A bread line in Petrograd, early 1917.

A political cartoon depicting Rasputin with tsar Nicholas II and tsarina Alexandra.

**February 26, 1917**

I have been having a rest at home in Tsarskoye Selo. It seems that it is calming down. But it is a sign, of course. Let's play at war. We are expecting not only a revolution but also a knife-fight. They will slaughter those who don't have calluses on their hands. We will win but not without a small revolution. Now we must go to war and not pay attention to any provocations.

**February 27, 1917**

I went to Petrograd in the morning. First I went to the institute and gave an announcement that lectures would start again on Wednesday. Then I worked in the office the whole day. Volkenau who had come from the Vyborg district said that there was shooting and a barricade had been put up in Kirochnaya Street. We could hear the shooting here. It's not clear who is shooting at whom. It's more likely that they started to shoot at the demonstration but a part of the military troops went over to the opposite side. It's awful. But in spite of all this recklessness of the armed conflict, there is a happy feeling in my soul. Nevertheless some soldiers are for their people.

**"WE ARE EXPECTING NOT ONLY A REVOLUTION BUT ALSO A KNIFE-FIGHT. THEY WILL SLAUGHTER THOSE WHO DON'T HAVE CALLUSES ON THEIR HANDS."**

I wanted to go to the dentist' s but he warned me on the phone that it was better not to go to Pushkinskaya Street because of the disturbances. There was no way to get there.

They say that there are machine guns in the attics from which the police shoot at people. In December Misha (my cousin, an officer) told me that gendarmes and the police are taught to shoot machine guns. To sum it up, it is becoming clear that this is a provocation.

I went home with a temporary authority, Menshikov. He told his acquaintances that Protopopov published a decree signed by the tsar a long time ago about the dissolution of the Duma and that all the ministers except Protopopov had resigned. There are no newspapers.

## Lubov Martynova

**1903 – November 18, 1935**

High school student.

**March 5, 1917**

Everybody felt fear for George. 18-year olds were drafted into the army on February 3. George is in the 7th grade and he is 18. Aunt Manya had forgotten to obtain a draft deferment and George could have been taken to the war. But everything turned out all right: Aunt Manya did get a draft deferment and he wasn't drafted.

I am going to play the *Song of Gondolier* at our school concert on March 3. I am terrified of making a mistake.

Yesterday I had such a terrible migraine that I wasn't able to go to the Gantovers for lunch (I don't know why but I am always sick when the Gantovers ask us for lunch. The first time I had a stomach ache, the second – migraine).

I feel very sorry for Kalinovich. My mother and I are going to write him a letter to the Black Sea Fleet.

It's very difficult to get meat and sometimes we don't have it for months. A lot of people didn't have any pancakes for Shrovetide [Maslenitsa] but we have a lot of sources to get food: "Law Academy, Guards' Society ration and Yurinration". Shurka is going to be promoted to midshipman this spring.

Our school term finishes on March 1 and I am afraid of getting a "3" for Russian. We have hot breakfasts at our grammar school and I take them.

I feel very sorry for Kalinovich. He may be suffering much without a leg. What is he going to do?

The war is said to last for another three years. It has been going on for four years already. We have never had such a war before. We can't win because that nasty Alexandra is preventing it (she is really like the Russian tsarina!).


A demonstration of workers from the Putilov plant in Petrograd during the February Revolution.

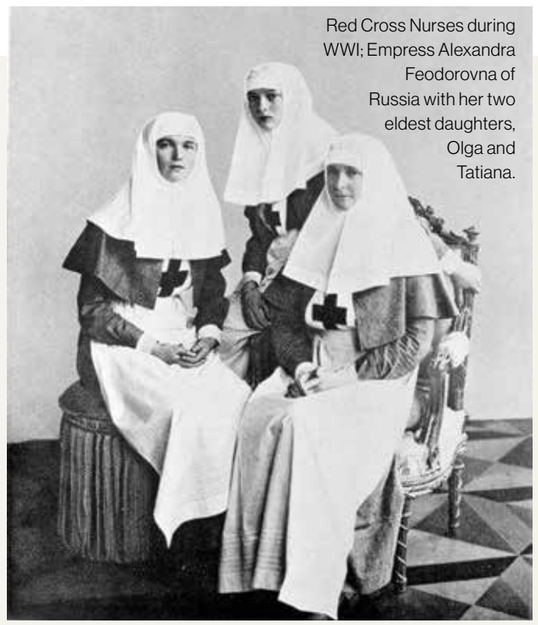
I am sick and tired of Petrograd. I want to go to the Crimea to see Friend and Dashka. I am through with having anemia.

**March 9, 1917**

There was a strike yesterday in the Nevsky Prospect. Phillipov, O'Gurmer and many others were crushed. There are no trams. The first one to go on strike was tram #6. Workers rushed into carriages and were locked in. Today I went to school with curiosity. The mother of one my classmates was nearly killed. None of those who live in Bolshoi Prospect in Petrogradski district came. Only Asya came but when she was going by tram, workers rushed into the tram and everybody who was in it ran away. Few teachers came. At 1 p.m. we were free. Zotov and I wanted to go home but we weren't allowed. Nobody was allowed to leave the school without an escort. There was a crowd of workers and policemen in Sredniy Prospect. Workers burst into George's school and asked the schoolchildren to go with them but they refused. Silly things! Aunt Manay got into the crowd and hardly got out of it. Olga Sergeevna was going to her mother's but there was such a crowd that she was nearly crushed. She was afraid that she wouldn't be able to get back and she went back home but she did see crowds of workers.

Merchants are afraid of going out. They deserve it, idiots!

Now I must go to my music classes along Sredniy Prospect and I am eager to see how they will be destroying something. Lucky those who have seen it! Merchants are hiding poods of bread and the workers are starving. That's why they are destroying buildings. It serves those nasty merchants right. I think now they have their hearts in their mouths. "Au bon goût" might be destroyed. I am leaving now. I want to go alone. It's such an interesting thing!



Red Cross Nurses during WWI; Empress Alexandra Feodorovna of Russia with her two eldest daughters, Olga and Tatiana.

## Valentina Chebotareva

**Circa 1879–1919**

Senior nurse of Empress Alexandra Fedorovna Palace hospital, who stayed in contact with the royal family after their abdication. Daughter of the military doctor I.S. Dubyansky, wife of the general P.G. Chebotarev.

**March 6, 1917**

Yesterday I had so many impressions that I wasn't able to set pen to paper. I learned of the abdication only on March 4, in the morning; the news came to Petrograd on March 3 in the evening. I will never forget the moment when I got the news. It was snowing hard and cold. I saw an artisan with a page of *Izvestiya*. I asked him to read it. I was standing in a crowd and he read the fatal words to all of us: Nicholas abdicated for himself and for his son. Five days and the monarchy has gone. One signature and the way of life we used to have for centuries has been destroyed. Everybody is silent. People are seized with horror. Russia ... without the tsar. There is a total silence in the hospital. Everybody is shocked and depressed.

Vera Ignatievna was crying like a helpless child. We were waiting for a constitutional monarchy but suddenly the throne was given to the people and we are going to have a republic. All the newspapers came out yesterday. I read all of them from cover to cover. The chosen government is perfect but the demoralization of the army as soldiers will chose the authorities, the deputies, among doctors and orderlies – and I start to fear for our future. Slack discipline in the army means the death of the state. Only a few people are ready to die for the idea, but most will sacrifice their lives because of the strict discipline. Will the new government be able to cope with this scourge or will it allow a contagious agitation to spread in the front?

## Rurik Ivnev

**February 11, 1891 – February 19, 1981**

Poet, writer, translator.

**October 1, 1917**

Afternoon. Tram #2. Michailovskaya Square. A general, his stout wife (wearing furs) and a cadet (who may have been their son) were sitting in front of me. A poor boy entered. He was asking for some money. Nobody paid any attention to him. Neither the general's family nor the others. The general's wife gave him an haughty (and even gloating) look (I was sure that this boy symbolized revolution for her). I was paralyzed (like in a dream sometimes). When I put my hand into the pocket to get a wallet, it was too late: the boy had gone. I heard the words of a gentleman (the mocking words addressed to the boy):

"Come to my house to do the washing up."

"Sure! He will come," – his neighbor was laughing angrily.

I felt bad. This tiny episode reflected all of our life.

## Maria Vishnevskaya

**January 31, 1901 – late 1970s**

High school student.

**October 11, 1917**

I thought I would meet Alexander. Why? – I didn't know. In the morning I hoped, no, it was not a hope, I was sure I would meet him. Now it's ridiculous and strange to think of it. We got separated a long time ago and it is done with.

Days are going past, so empty and sad, sometimes awfully dreary.

They say there will be a massacre at night. It is disturbing outside. They are whispering unchecked facts to each other.

And me... I am waiting for a meeting, awfully nice and amazingly tender, mysterious words and charming smiles.

Against the background of horror and outrage I am waiting for a spiritual life. I am waiting and I am sure that a miracle will happen and the mysterious will come revealing its attractive but uneasy horizons.

Dreams, dreams about the beautiful but life is a horror, troubled and sticky.

Everyday life is remote and alien to me. The impossible and those who have become stars on the vanished horizon are close, charming and beautiful.

**"DREAMS, DREAMS ABOUT THE BEAUTIFUL BUT LIFE IS A HORROR, TROUBLED AND STICKY."**

## Michael Menshikov

**September 25, 1859 – September 20, 1918**

Writer, journalist, and public person, one of the ideologists of the Russian nationalist movement. Executed.

### July 7, 1917

Oh, my God! Time flies! Today is July 7 and we are still alive. We have nothing to believe in but a dispensation. The same dispensation killed some people and didn't protect others from the theft of all their property, from poverty, from slavery when you are old, from the bitterness you feel when you see your children barefoot and hungry, going as yesterday to a monastery to get some bread. What a difference compared to the last year! Last year we had plenty of bread, milk and meat were five times cheaper (meat was 7–8 times cheaper), my property was then mine, there were no revolts and threats, and the danger of being occupied was far away. If we survive this year, will milk cost 5 rubles a bottle and meat 30 rubles a pound? And a pound of bread for 100 rubles? It's clear that there are three ways out: to die, to wait for peace or to run away to southern or eastern countries where there is bread. It's easy to say: to run away in the time of siege! Where to live? How to live? In the afternoon. "Nicholas II has been shot." The official news came at once. My heart is heavy. What is this blood for? Who needs it? Why did Portugal allow Alfonse who had abdicated to leave the country? Why did even Persia let the overthrown shah leave but we imprisoned and finally killed the tsar to whom we had sworn fidelity? And so recently! Out of court, out of trial, according to the verdict of an unknown group of people … When Nicolas II was alive, I didn't respect him and often hated him very much for his silly decisions which were caused by his obstinacy and petty tyranny. The feeling I had after the Japanese and the German defeat was nothing but hatred when it turned out that all that shame resulted from our unpreparedness and wrong choice of generals and ministers. I blamed the tsar for it as the leader. As the leader he was worthless. But I feel pity for this miserable, really miserable person: I don't know a more tragic figure than "the person out of place". He was bad but look what human rubbish his own people surrounded him with! From Pobedonostev to Grishka Rasputin – all of them suggested insane and meaningless ideas. Everybody covered the tsar's eyes with their own scarf and it's not surprising that he reached the edge of the abyss and fell into it … ×

## Alexey Budberg

**May 21, 1869 – December 14, 1945**

Lieutenant general. Managed military department in A.V. Kolchak government.

### October 28, 1917

The situation is still unclear; the fight for power in Petrograd is going on. We only know that Kerensky took Gatchina and the sailors and the Izmailovsky regiment that guarded it surrendered. Some Emergency Committee was created in Luga that announced that it would take state power until the Constituent Assembly was created.

Petrograd has its own government with Lenin at the head and some Bolshevik Ethiopians as ministers. All newspapers except the bourgeois ones came from Petrograd. They write that Petrograd has been seized by the Bolsheviks and the situation is so bad that even the *New Life*, the meanest and most harmful Bolshevik newspaper, suddenly became more right-wing and cries havoc because of the regime that has been established by its friends.

In the afternoon our radio stations caught the radio of the Petrograd garrison revolutionary committee, which asked for help and called for taking Kerensky, who occupied Gatchina, in the rear. The tone was very uncertain but taking Gatchina could lead to very serious consequences; the Bolsheviks reassured themselves and the executive committee of the army took on a decisive tone.

In the evening we got the first telegram from Pskov for the last four days written by Commander-in-Chief Cheremisov, saying that politics and the army are two different things.

A new government headed by Lenin published the decree on immediate peace. In a different situation it could be laughed at but now it is used as a perfect way to win over soldiers to their side. Today I have visited three regiments and have seen that Lenin's telegram about the 3 months armistice and later the peace have caused a great impression and elation. Now we don't have any chances of saving the front. If Kerensky had known the Russians better, he would have been obliged to take the country from the Bolsheviks at any cost. It was a good idea to start dragging out peace proceedings having arranged things with the allies and gain the time to carry out big reforms and rely on the officers.

Now that the Bolsheviks has thrown this welcome sop to the soldiers, we can't fight those who have given it to the people. What can we oppose to this crushing effect caused by the announcement? We can only remind them of their patriotic duties, of the necessity of continuing the war and of fulfilling our duties to the allies … Does our army think about such things? One must be blind and deaf to believe in it. Now these words are not only useless but they will cause more hatred.

The newspapers write that the allied ambassadors have declared that if the Bolshevik government stays in power, they will leave Petrograd. The diplomats realized what was going on in Russia too late and it's they who are responsible for it because of their silly, blind and irresponsible actions. They are responsible for any consequences that will result from the Bolsheviks' reign made in Germany for Russia and the rest of the world. The ambassadors surrounded by hundreds of representatives must know Russia, what is going on in the army and in the country and take measures in advance, not pack their things in a hurry.

Kerensky have been exhausted. We hope that a newly formed central executive committee will manage to take power and will annihilate both the Bolsheviks and Kerensky. This is the only way to prevent a general bloody chaos in which Russian sovereignty will inevitably die.

Patrol of the October Revolution, 1917.

What is the upper stratum of the Bolsheviks is made clear by their German origin. Who the other members are we know well: Sklyansky, Sedyakin, the head of Division 120, Fedotov, the leader of the Belevsky regiment, Pertrov, and others.

In the afternoon we got different telegrams from various organizations, which are against the Bolsheviks. It would have done some good if it had happened earlier and had been confirmed by the actions, not only by words. Railway men and post and telegraph officials declared that if the Bolsheviks didn't stop their revolt, they would block all communication with Petrograd. But the Bolsheviks don't give a damn about it and answer with a peace decree, which has more influence than any other announcements.

The Bolsheviks are taking advantage of Kornilov's escape and Kaledin's armed uprising, describing what terrible dangers they are and saying they want to go back to the old regime and start the bloody war again. According to the officers, all the soldiers are talking about either the peace or Kaledin's and Kornilov's uprisings.

**"THE LAST DAY OF THE FATAL YEAR FOR RUSSIA. THE YEAR IS EQUAL TO MANY HUNDRED YEARS AND ITS RESULTS WILL AFFECT THE LIVES OF MANY DOZENS OF GENERATIONS."**

The executive committee of the army has been having a meeting for the whole day and is trying to fulfill the order of Petrograd to give them reliable (in the Bolshevik's sense) soldiers from the fifth army. The Bolshevik presidium of the army's executive committee deters the unclear situation. They want to send a neutral group of soldiers to Petrograd to stop the fighting going on there.

A lot of soldiers want to go to Petrograd. One of the nastiest and the most cowardly divisions, Division 183, declared its desire to go to Petrograd with its full complement.

In the evening the scouts sent by me to Petrograd came back and said that there were no disturbances there and the fight between the Bolsheviks and Kerensky was taking place only in Gatchina.

### December 30, 1917

I am using different methods to get non-suspicious documents to go to the south if my business trip to Japan fails, but in vain. I am scolding myself for little revolutionary experience. I should have taken some stamped papers when the old corpus committee and the commissar were working. I could have got them from the army committee as well.

### December 31, 1917

The last day of the fatal year for Russia. The year is equal to many hundred years and its results will affect the lives of many dozens of generations. We are in a very dismal mood as all attempts to get the necessary documents have failed.

The Black Sea Fleet is exterminating its officers. The Bolsheviks know well that on their way to taking power and to immersing Russia in the chasm of chaos, horror and shame, Russian society will become their main enemy and they are doing their best to destroy it.

In a quarter of an hour the New Year will come and in spite of everything we want to hope for something but the heart is empty. The abysses of Russian reality and the savage instincts of the Russian people's leaders are too dark and unvarnished. The evil has come out and filled the past with its pus and destroyed any hope for the future. ×

## Alexey Oreshnikov

**September 9, 1855 – April 3, 1933**

Employee of the Historical Museum, specialist in Russian and classical numismatics.

**October 12, 1917**

The anarchy is continuing. In the south (in Bendery, Elisavetgrad and Nikolaev) soldiers are committing outrages. In the Tambov province estates are being destroyed! On the Riga front, near Timerman, the Germans started an offensive and some of our companies retreated. Today F.I. Prove has donated a golden star of Mitrid Bosporsky to the museum, a valuable gift. He told us that in Riga the Germans shot two regiments of the Russian soldiers who surrendered but they did honors to the officers who had been imprisoned by the soldiers. If it is true, it serves them right, our soldiers are rascals.

**December 28, 1917**

In the morning I went to the bank but it was closed. Some private banks are said to be occupied by soldiers. I saw two red guards near the Discount Bank. There are no newspapers.

**July 19, 1918**

I attended Mass in the church where the burial service I.I.B. was read. The Bolshevik newspapers (there are no others) write about the execution of the tsar in Ekaterinburg on July 3/16 caused by the danger of his escape; the former tsarina and the heir have been sent to a safe place. It is interesting that I noticed neither indignation nor sympathy. M.M. Voronets came to me to get books. I had lunch at S.V. Prokhorov's house. Besides Pridirik, there was Laymin, Prokhorov's son-in-law, and professor Malmberg who was quite drunk. It got warm and clear in the evening and stopped raining.

## Nicolay Scshapov

**June 4, 1881 – May 28, 1960**

Doctor of engineering, professor, historian, photographer.

**February 18, 1917**

It's cold in the flats: firewood used to cost 10 rubles, now it costs 50 rubles. There is little food; we heard that there are groats in Sukharev market; we have bought a pood *(Old Russian unit of weight, approx. 16,38 kg)*, but don't have any bread.

**February 19, 1917**

There is no bread, meat or oil in Moscow; cow's milk – 2.5 rubles a pound; there is little grain; milk and vegetables are expensive. There is no supply of flour in Moscow; when they bring it, it is used for baking immediately. Three pounds of sugar is a monthly ration for one person. Today I was lucky: I had a cup of tea with sugar at the college. There is some meat in the buffet, but there is no bread and the buffet is a privileged one. On my way back I had a look at private bakeries – no bread. There is a line of 70–90 people in front of the two state bakeries. I stood in a line for 40 minutes but didn't get anything. The basket of bread which was brought was enough for just 20 people. Soldiers don't stand in a line and people are angry about it.

**February 21, 1917**

It's getting worse and worse with food. Yesterday there were almost revolutionary speeches in the Duma. There are lines of 100–120 people in front of bakeries; I wish bread tickets were introduced. It seems that soldiers and nurses can't skip the line any more to get food.

The state has had to buy food cheap and the food often goes bad. It's unprofitable to produce it and that means we will have less of it next year.


Soldier of the Red Guard next to a propaganda poster that reads "Better death than the life of a slave".

## Vera Sudeikina

**December 25, 1888 – September 17, 1982**

Actress of Kamerny Theatre and silent films artist.

**July 20, 1917**

I promised myself to be healthy from now on. Serezha suggested making a kitchen and did it well. He promised pictures. After lunch he was working on Casa Belle Donna and successfully put a violinist among the girls. I was tired after cleaning the house and tried to read *Lord of the Flies*. Lidia Nikitichna came for a coffee. While Serezha was sleeping, I went to Reinbot to buy some flowers. I bought a big bunch of flowers for 3 rubles. In the evening Lidia Mikhailovna and we were sitting in a newly-made kitchen. I was reading N*ight-Owls* aloud and Serezha started the picture he had promised of him and me in the Dutch 18th-century style."

BALTIC WORLDS
Herstory Revisionism

Guest editor:
**Weronika Grzebalska**

Co-guest editor:
**Andrea Pető**

## Introduction.

# Writing women's history in times of illiberal revisionism

Through the past century, East-Central Europe has been the scene of numerous spectacular political upheavals and often violent political change: from the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Second World War, and the Warsaw Uprising of 1944to the 1956 revolution in Hungary and the Velvet Revolution of 1989, to Maidan protests of 2014 and the subsequent war in Ukraine. All these events have since been transformed into potent political myths, and their leaders serve as national or revolutionary heroes, their interpretations shape future political projects, and their commemorations define the values underlying contemporary collectives. Women played active roles in all of these watershed events, as feminist scholarship on gender and war in the region and beyond has shown.[1]Their participation, however, has often been ignored by mainstream accounts,[2] which largely reproduce the gendered division between the front and the rear or the home front, and symbolically subjugate women's emancipatory goals to revolutionary or national ones.

ILLUSTRATION: KARIN SUNVISSON

Stemming from this perceived absence of women and their political participation in official narratives about the past, the rationale for women's history of wars, revolutions, and political upheavals seems to have been straightforward. First and foremost, it inscribed women back into the "blank spots" of official narratives about the past. In fact, from the 1970s onwards, women's and gender history constituted itself as a vigorous field of study mostly in reaction to the absence of women and gender from written history and collective memory. Hence the systemic omission of women from history, called "the problem of invisibility" by the prominent feminist scholar Joan Wallach Scott,[3] has long remained the foundational issue for women's history. In consequence, the feminist perspective has largely functioned as a critical tool to uncover female figures active in the past, as well as to explore and document women's contribution to society.[4]Against

**"THIS REVISIONIST STRAND OF NATIONALIST HERSTORY HAS CERTAINLY MADE SOME WOMEN VISIBLE IN NARRATIVES ABOUT HISTORICAL EVENTS, BUT IT IS ALSO HIGHLY PROBLEMATIC."**

this background, it is much rarer to find women's history works that have attempted to revise mainstream accounts of the past and reformulate knowledge about politics using these discoveries. It can be argued that this relative underrepresentation of significance-driven revisionism[5] has, in turn, led women's history to function largely as an appendix to political history, a separate field with little bearing on mainstream understandings of political processes.

**HOWEVER, AS THE** papers in this special issue alert us, absence and invisibility are not necessarily the key challenge and point of departure for feminist research on wars and political upheavals in East-Central Europe. In fact, some countries in the region have recently witnessed what can be called the 'herstorical turn' – an outbreak of interest in women as participants in historical events, accompanied by a departure from viewing the past in a 'male stream'[6] framework. Even more telling is the fact that this shift has often been carried out, not by feminists, but by right-wing actors. Among them have been right-wing authors engaged in herstory writing, neoconservative political groups that use women as symbols of the national struggle, and newly founded national memory institutions that research and commemorate women as national heroines and martyrs. In this issue, the articles by Andrea Pető and Weronika Grzebalska reflect on the recent mainstreaming of women into history in a nationalist framework as part of a broader illiberal shift in Hungary and Poland. As they argue, women's history has become one of the spaces where the values and narratives underlying the new anti-modernist project of the New Right are being forged and popularized.

Of course, the phenomenon of nationalist herstory is not a novelty. Across the region, various women 'worthies' and their biographies have often been used as symbols of independence movements or broader political projects. Like feminists who have engaged in the ethical task of righting injustice by recording the stories of individuals and institutions "whose experience [they] share and whose life stories and world views they often find laudable",[7] right-wing circle shave also studied and celebrated their women worthies in frameworks rooted in conservative or nationalist politics. In fact, it can be argued that nationalist herstory has often been an effective avenue for ensuring women's visibility in the political process, recovering female figures from the "epigons' niche" of women's history[8] and mainstreaming them into the very center of national history. This has even led some right-wing historians to claim that the marginalization of women's history research stems from its rejection of the national-militarist tradition and the role it gives to women's emancipation. In line with this narrative, Undersecretary of *State* Magdalena Gawin of the Polish Ministry of Culture under the illiberal party *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS) has recently argued that "research on women does not enter the mainstream because it is often written against the national tradition."[9]

**AS THE ARTICLES** in this issue demonstrate, this revisionist strand of nationalist herstory has certainly made some women visible in narratives about historical events, but it is also highly problematic as it often reproduces traditionalist notions of femininity, masculinity and ideas about women's "proper" place in history and society. In doing so, it has often distorted the political significance of women's participation and downplayed the importance of gender politics as a tool of manpower mobilization. Looking at women soldiers in the WWII Red Army and the Ukrainian Armed Forces fighting in the Donbas region, Olesya Khromeychuk argues that the primacy of the nationalist interpretative framework for making sense of the war effort has resulted in the marginalization of women in historical narratives about the past. Reproducing the gendered imageries of national projects which cast men as the metonym of the nation and women predominantly as its metaphor,[10] mainstream accounts of both these conflicts portrayed women's contributions as exceptional and subsidiary. Similarly, Zuzana Maďarová argues that the dominant narrative of heroism and suffering under Communism has created a paradoxical image of female activists as "strong women who resist the authoritarian regime but are obedient towards their husbands and fathers"[11] through her analysis of the memory of the Velvet Revolution in Slovakia. Agnieszka Mrozik analyzes the portrayals of women communists in the Stalinist period in Poland, produced in the framework of nationalist history during the illiberal turn. She argues that biographies of women dignitaries served the broader political function of delivering a cautionary tale against "excessive" liberation of women, so that female communists were often presented as beasts and demons rather than political agents. Similarly, Nadezda Petrusenko argues how conservative historians from the early 20th century pro-governmental tradition in Russia have presented female terrorists as mad and promiscuous. By showing how conservative historians depoliticized women by explaining their radicalization with reference to emotional and psychological dysfunctions, the latter two articles unveil the broader gendered power relations in history writing. In all three articles, the authors show how the discursive framework of anti-Communism or counterrevolution has often appropriated their political agency and concealed the motivations of their ideological engagement.

Contributions in this issue remind us that right-wing historical revisionism is itself an example of value-driven revisionism, a tool used for the production of the nation here and now, aimed at weaving a certain value system into the very fabric of society's self-knowledge. As such, it has often used women's history instrumentally in the service of these broader political and ideological goals. Yet much of women's history has shared the same predicament. In fact, Andrea Pető makes the important assertion that this high degree of reliance on value-driven revisionism has been the fundamental weakness of women's history in the region and elsewhere. Because it has attempted to write women into history based on "a new system of values becoming hegemonic",[12] it has become increasingly "vulnerable to populist redefinitions".[13] In this hegemonic struggle between value-driven revisionisms, women's history and feminist research have long been fighting a losing battle. In fact, as the ongoing illiberal shift demonstrates, feminists do not have a monopoly on writing women's history, just as they cannot count on their monopoly on representing women politically.

**HOW, THEN,** can women's history escape this vicious circle of value-based revisionisms engaged in a power struggle for cultural hegemony? One way to go about it can be found in canonical feminist scholarship that argued for the need to reach the level of significance-driven revisionism by using gender as a category of analysis: i.e., tracing how the political process has been shaped by the production and mobilization of notions of gender by different actors.[14] By revealing how a specific organization of the private sphere plays a crucial role in the production and legitimization of a particular political order – and many ostensibly private practices are, in fact, activities necessary for upholding the political process – significance-driven gender history of political upheavals becomes an indispensable tool for understanding political processes themselves.

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**Women in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution**

"The women of 1956 were presented in the frame of 'national feminism', in which women's actions were evaluated in terms of how useful they were for the national project. **Page 42**

# Roots of illiberal memory politics

## Remembering women in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution

by **Andrea Pető**

Most studies on memories ignore their own audience, as Wulf Kansteiner warned us some years ago.[1] Because stories matter and because memory can be assigned and attributed to certain social groups, there will necessarily be competing memory cultures. Kansteiner argued that collective memory is a result of complex processes of production and consumption that acknowledge different traditions, values, and interests.[2] This is very true in the case of the memory politics of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, which has recently been transformed and now includes a new focus on women's experiences and memories, perhaps a surprising development at first glance.

In discussing the gender history of 1956, the main question is whose stories are being told.[3] This means that when discussing women's memories of 1956 we need to distinguish the producers and consumers of collective memory from the traditions of gendered memory and the appropriations of memory. Appropriation was used by Michel de Certau in underlining that consumption is not a passive process. The producers of memory are building on their own meanings and values through the consumption of culture, which is at the same time a revisitation of culture.

Never has so much money been involved in commemorating the 1956 Revolution than for the commemorations in 2016. The *Official Gazette* announced the government decision 1728/2015 to commemorate 1956, which was backed by unprecedented – and not very transparent – public funding.[4] There were 2,500 proposals submitted for grants from this fund, of which 1,600 were supported. In 650 villages and cities, a total of 1,430 events were held to commemorate the 1956 Revolution.[5] The history of the 13 days of the 1956 Revolution, which was quickly crushed by the Soviet occupation of the country, was a key foundational narrative of post-1989 Hungarian democracy, and therefore it is no surprise that the Christian-Conservative FIDESZ-KDNP government paid such special attention to this celebration. This article explores the roots of the paradigm change of gender politics of commemorating the 1956 Revolution by the illiberal Hungarian state.[6] It argues that the women's history turn in commemoration practice is a part of this paradigm change in memory politics and that it has its roots in revisionist history writing.


## abstract

In 2016, commemorations of the 60th anniversary of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution brought new conflicts in memory politics. This article analyzes the reasons for women's absence from the historiography of the 1956 Revolution and discusses how the polypore state is using the populist turn to introduce hegemonic narratives and to include women in the narrative of "national feminism".


**KEY WORDS:** 1956 Revolution, revisionist history, memory politics, appropriation, polypore state, illiberal memory politics, familialism, 'new history', women's history.

## The absence of women in the historiography of the 1956 Revolution

The bloody foundation of a collaborationist state was laid after the Soviet occupation of Hungary that crushed the revolution on November 4, 1956, and imprisoned or executed many of its participants. Already from the beginning of the Soviet occupation of Hungary, different interpretations of the events have been written both in conflict and in dialogue with one another, and have constructed a divided collective memory. Before 1989, the history of the failed 1956 Revolution was already a target of meaning-making processes. Collaboration with the Kádár regime was at the center of these debates and became the basis of self-definition for different political actors after 1989. History writing has always been a process in which different groups in communication with each other produce new narratives and create discursive spaces, and this is why it is crucial to trace how women's memories are represented, constructed, and appropriated.

The history of 1956 was taboo before 1989 as the Kádár regime (1956–1989)


Erika Szeles on the billboard.

PHOTO: ANDREA PETŐ

was founded on the crushed revolution in collaboration with the Soviets. The frame of history writing was heavily ideological, and it labeled the 1956 Revolution a "counter revolution", aiming to fill up the rhetorical space about the events while politics enforced historical amnesia of the revolution through effective censorship and imprisonment.[7] Forgetting, omission, and amnesia were successful tools for depoliticizing Hungarian society after 1956. Bloody oppression led to the largest wave of migration as 200,000 men and women fled Hungary over the course of only four months.

After many had emigrated, participants in the 1956 Revolution started to write a different history abroad in order to record their version of events. Outside Hungary, for example, the Imre Nagy Institute in Brussels (1959–1963) was focusing on writing about 1956 as the political history of important men.[8] Hungarian émigrés were writing the history of 1956 without a particular interest in women because their main framework of interpretation was anti-communism and political history. Women were present in the histories as wives and daughters of important male politicians, but they were not seen as worthy of the attention of historians other than as mirrors to the activities of great men.[9]

**"THIS APPROACH OF WRITING THE HISTORY OF 1956 WITHOUT WOMEN IN AND OUTSIDE HUNGARY IS FAR FROM INNOCENT."**

Inside Hungary there have been different layers of silence about the 1956 Revolution. Members of the democratic opposition, including János M. Rainer – the future director of 1956 Research Institute and biographer of the executed prime minister, Imre Nagy – were writing in samizdat publications.[10] The samizdat *Beszélő* featured an article on 1956 in every issue because it worked with the truth paradigm and its aim was to delegitimize the foundational myth of the K ádár regime. The articles were countering the false statements and narratives of the Kadar regime based on testimonies and archival research in order to set up a hegemonic position for the interpretation of the 1956 Revolution through the truth paradigm. This was a very different form of memory politics from that of the Polish opposition where dissidents were promoting the resurgence of romantic nationalism in opposition to the internationalism of communist historiography. After 1989, the official 1956 Research Institute grew out of the risky process of collecting and indexing the oral history testimonies of distinguished members of the democratic opposition. In the oral history collection, women as wives and daughters only remember the deeds and actions of their fathers, partners, and husbands.

**THIS APPROACH OF** writing the history of 1956 without women both in Hungary and internationally is far from innocent. Horowitz warns in analyzing the gendering of the Holocaust that, while the gender-neutral approach produces a unified version of the past "that unintentionally ends up occluding experiences particular to women", the concentration on essentialist differences "inadvertently reproduces the marginalization of women".[11] When women are denied the acknowledgement of their active role, they are also denied future involvement in political processes. Writing a history of their own was a key political demand of emancipatory struggles like the women's movement and worker's movement and meant revising the already existing canon and writing a counter-canon.

After 1989, one might wrongly assume that the collapse of communism brought a major change in the historical narrative about 1956, especially because forced amnesia together with the meta-narrative of "counter-revolution" had produced a variety of conflicting meanings of 1956 that were already visible during the festive reburial of Imre Nagy on June 16, 1989. Stefan Auer warned in 1989 about the real political dilemma regarding the legacy of 1956, namely how a regime that was set up as a result of peaceful roundtable negotiations could relate to the legacy of a violent revolution. Intellectuals, the driving force of the 1989 transition, were advocating the concept of a "self-limiting revolution", the idea of a "return to normality", and the ideals of an ethical civil society and "anti-politics".[12] For Hannah Arendt, 1956 was an example of a "spontaneous revolution", in the term coined by Rosa Luxemburg, and this was diametrically opposed to the ideals and values of the participants in the Hungarian Roundtable Talks.[13] The popular memory of the "boys of Pest" – very young, working-class men who were fighting with weapons against the occupying Red Army – was sidelined in the canonized historiography of 1956 after 1989 as being an example of political radicalism. Workers's councils that played a key role in 1956, praised by Arendt, as alternatives to the party system, were difficult to appropriate in the transition process driven by political parties and not by movements.[14] The post-1989 neoliberalization of Hungary was based on stripping workers of their rights and slicing up the trade union movement and privatizing its property. This transformation was led by political parties attempting to create apolitical neoliberal subjects, and not by a popular movement.[15]

**AFTER 1989 THERE** was a great public need for consumption and appropriation of the past and for access to new information, which led to the opening up of formerly closed archives. Narratives written by professional historians and individual stories about the events remained necessarily separate. As part of this new division of memory, the story that could be told after 1989 in the public sphere was exported by Hungarian dissidents and followed the traditional gender stereotypes. Instead of a meta-narrative of "counter revolution", family stories were told in which women were seen only as wives and victims.

After 1989, the variability and plurality of the interpretation of past events also gave legitimacy to the 1956 Revolution. A remembered past is connected to identity formation, and omitting and ignoring the memory of women in the events of 1956 occurred in parallel with excluding women from political citizenship and the revival of stereotypical male and female images in the collective memory.[16] Women's memory of 1956 was missing from the historiography because it could hardly fit in the framework for constructing gendered political citizenship after 1989, and this for several reasons.

**FIRST, BECAUSE** the image of the armed female fighters was disturbing to the social order, there was also little discussion of women as leaders or as politicians. Women's agency and autonomy were non topics. Second, the 1956 Revolution was also fought against communist emancipatory politics, and it was in several aspects a conservative revolution. It lasted for only 13 days, which was not enough time for the internal political conflicts and contradictions to play out publicy. Demands of the workers' councils, such as overturning the liberal abortion laws in Hungary and installing a nationalist, pro-natalist agenda labeling the right to abortion a communist trick to destroy the nation, were not generally publicized during important debates about redefining reproductive rights after 1989.[17] Third, in their life stories, conservative and far-right female politicians entering political life after 1989 narrated 1956 as a turning point in their lives – as the moment when they became anti-communists. Therefore, the memory of 1956 was necessarily more empowering for conservative and far-right female politicians than for progressive forces.[18] For the few female politicians on the progressive side, relating to these events of 1956 was not an option because they had a strong anti-communist agenda and progressive politics failed to relate critically to the state communist period. Instead, the rhetoric of anti-communism was successfully used to discredit the traditions and values of progressive politics. Fourth, due to the continuity of gender stereotypes in family memory, the history of 1956 has been the story of heroic men and loving female relatives who also suffered but who cared for their beloved sons and partners. Remarkable female politicians were rare during communism, and also rare in the democratic opposition.[19]

## Including women in history: framing matters

This historiography based on the omission of women fundamentally changed when the history of the women's silent demonstration of December 4, 1956 was written by Borbála Juhász as a master's thesis submitted to CEU in Budapest. Juhász analyzed women as political actors and identified the different axes of forgetting in historiography.[20] The history of tens of thousands of women who silently protested against the Soviet occupation in Budapest and in some other cities, the only public protest against the Soviet occupation, has been omitted from the historiography of 1956. Silence about the event is even more disturbing as Hannah Arendt, in her reflection on the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, considered this women's demonstration to be the last revolutionary political action: "The silent procession of black-clad women in the streets of Russian occupied Budapest, mourning their dead in public."[21] Although this demonstration was not broken up by the Soviet Army, as Arendt claimed, it was still the beginning of a new era of women's participation in politics. Mourning and maternal feminism proved to be powerful political strategies during the military occupation.[22]

**WOMEN SLOWLY BECAME** acceptable and worthy topics of historical research, but without the traditional framing being questioned. The first step in the analysis of women's presence in 1956 is to count them in photographs and among the imprisoned and executed. Mária Palasik analyzed the number of women in the photo collection of the 1956 Institute and in the archives of the State Security Services.[23] She pointed out after analyzing photos of iconic events of the revolution that, for example, women were present in the demonstration in front of the Parliament on October 23rd. As night fell, the women left due to possible threats to their safety, so women are missing from the photos taken at the same spot later that day.[24] The proportion of women in the photos was about 10% (depending on the time when the photo was taken), and they made up about 4% of those who were persecuted after the revolution.[25] The distribution of charges and indictments handed down against women has raised methodological questions because women were not only indicted for multiple charges, but also often arrested for political reasons or charged with criminal or economic offenses and not with political offenses, so that they are missing from the statistics. Palasik claims that 14.8% of women who were arrested were charged with participation in armed clashes, 14.8% with making provocative statements, 18.3% with spying and putting up posters, 9.5% with giving medical aid to fighters, 8.3% with editing and distributing flyers, 7.1% with denunciations, 4.1% with participating in women's demonstrations, 3% with hiding weapons, and 0.6% with membership in the revolutionary national guard. Only 8.3% were charged with participating in workers' and revolutionary committees or parties.[26] This distribution, compared with the percentage of women in the post-1945 people's tribunal cases, shows that the gender distribution was very much the same and was reflective of traditional gender stereotypes.[27] These results also show that gender inequality in women's participation in public life had not really changed during the forced emancipation process of communism.

Three other directions have been taken in researching women's participation in the 1956 Revolution. The first was the book by Kőrösi and Molnár, which used the testimonies of children to introduce the concepts of silences and silencing in intergenerational memory. The book features testimonies of children about their mothers and how they coped while their fathers were in prison.[28] The second line of inquiry was pursued by Zsófia Eszter Tóth, who analyzed the absence of references to 1956 in her interviews with female workers in a textile factory in Budapest. 1956 as an event only featured in their stories because they were assigned empty flats by the state due to the massive emigration that took place after the Revolution. Tóth claimed that women workers were rarely in leadership positions and that the workers's councils were only recruiting them as secretaries.[29] The third was a major book by Zsuzsanna Bögre who interviewed women and reconstructed the history of 1956 through the narratives of women.[30] Four topics emerged from her interviews


The play by Andor Szilagyi about Ilona Tóth in the Hungarian National Theater. PHOTO: ANDREA PETŐ

– the first day of the Revolution, the solidarity that was fostered during the Revolution, the moral purity of the people, and the date of the Soviet invasion, November 4. The meaning-making process of using exact dates of canonical events and the pompous style of narration were due to the timing and context of the interviews as these interviews were recorded in 2003. The first Orbán government (1998–2002) had started a re-canonization of the narrative and had opened up space for women's stories in the national feminist framework of victimhood and suffering.[31]

This absence of women as political actors in the history of 1956 was, surprisingly, replaced by their presence in the celebration of 1956 in 2016, which brought a number of events commemorating women in 1956. This increase in the visibility of women also resulted in recycling the article by Borbála Juhász – which is available online without any reference to the original work – in political speeches, articles, blog posts, and exhibitions because there was no other relevant research available on this topic. The most visible change in the politics of memory has been the surprisingly large number of billboards in Budapest advertising the deeds and martyrdom of women in the 1956 Revolution. Twenty-three persons were portrayed on these billboards, and 20 of them were easy to identify, including 5 women. But most notably, university students, workers's councils, military personnel, and prominent members of the revolutionary government were missing from this commemorative line-up. The absence opened up space for presence as they were replaced by street fighters from Budapest who were only representing the social and economic deprivation during communism.[32] Even the commemorative postage stamp issued for this occasion featured women in arms. The radical popular memory of 1956, which had been marginalized in 1989, had returned by 2016. The women on the billboards – Havrilla Béláné Sticker Katalin (1932–1959),[33] Sponga Julianna (1937–1990),[34] Szeles Erika (1941–1956), and Wittner Mária (1937–) – were all from poor and troubled families and worked in precarious jobs when the Revolution opened space for them to believe that they were agents of their own fate.[35] Wittner, who survived a death sentence, became a face of the anti-communist political regime and later a FIDESZ MP.[36] Ilona Tóth (1932–1957), a medical student and also from a poor family, allegedly killed a young soldier whom she believed worked for the Hungarian State Security Agency. The debate over whether it was a show trial or whether she was really a murderer is ongoing among historians.[37]

Manipulation of photos had already started in 1956. Photos about fighting women with weapons in Budapest were mostly staged by the mostly young western freelance photojournalists who were covering the fighting. Some of the fighting and escape scenes that were widely circulated in the press were staged in peaceful Austria for the western media who did not want to venture out for a risky journey to Hungary behind the Iron Curtain. It is no surprise that in 2016 the billboards appropriated these staged photos for their own purposes.[38] The mediatization of the revolutionary events and personalities continued on the billboards as bodies were Photoshopped out and rifles were added to maximize the effect.[39]

**"DIFFERENT STATES ARE SILENCING STORIES ABOUT THEIR OWN TECHNIQUES OF DISCRIMINATION THAT ARE INHERENT PARTS OF THEIR HISTORY IN ORDER TO PROVE TO BE A VICTIM."**

**THE SUDDEN PROMINENCE** of some women whose stories of 1956 had not been featured before (except Ilona Tóth) is due to the "women's history turn" in history writing. This new school of history writing is a way for the illiberal state to appropriate the memory politics of historical events for its own purposes. The major traveling exhibition about women in 1956 was entitled "56 Teardrops – Women's Destinies" and summarized the contents of this shift in memory politics:

> **In memoires and historical publications, very often the only focus on women's activity in 1956 is the silent women's demonstration of December 4th. However, women were caring for the wounded, printing flyers, helping in kitchens, and sometimes even participating in the fighting; therefore, the crushing of the revolution impacted them. As museologist Fanni Lukács, one of the curators of the exhibition, said to the Hungarian News Agency, the exhibition also highlights that women and girls lost their husbands and fathers in the fighting, and this fact influenced their lives greatly. There were instances when one was not allowed to return to the elementary school because her father had participated in the revolution. Others were fired from their jobs or imprisoned.**[40]

Absence was replaced by the presence of women, but within a framework in which the history of women was written in terms of suffering, sacrifice, and victimhood, and not in terms of agency or subjectivity. During the celebrations in 2016, the women of 1956 were presented in the frame of "national feminism", in which women's actions were evaluated in terms of how useful they were for the national project. "National feminism" is emerging from revisiting the history of 1956, and it is reducing stories and testimonies to politically acceptable notions of patriotic femininity and setting them up as an example for present-day Hungarian women. In the case of the 1956 Revolution, female street fighters are only presented as victims of communist repression and not as women who decided to take part in an armed struggle. The sexual harassment and violence committed against street fighters by their fellow heroic fighters have also not been discussed publicly.

## Genesis of the memory politics of the illiberal state

In 2010 and in 2014, FIDESZ – in coalition with the Christian Democratic Party – won the elections in Hungary and set up a new system of governance called: the System of National Cooperation (NER).[41] During the past years, FIDESZ has been under international pressure to comply with written laws and European liberal values. And despite taking over all kinds of policy agencies, state institutions, and funding opportunities – FIDESZ has not encountered nor invited the formation of any effective political opposition. This proves that FIDESZ over the past years has set up a successful form of governance, which is not setting the stage for future electoral victories, but also indicating new paths for obviously successful governance. In recent years, political scientists and political analysts have been forced to reconsider not only their analytical toolkit, but also their concepts in order to try to understand this new phenomenon – calling it "democratic authoritarianism", an "illiberal state", or a "mafia state", just list few of the new terms. Along with the Polish sociologist Weronika Grzebalska, in comparing Hungary and Poland we argued in our previous work about a new form of governance stemming from the failures of globalized (neo)liberal democracy, which created states that are weak for the strong and strong for the weak.[42] Based on its modus operandi, we call such a regime an "illiberal polypore state" because it feeds on the vital resources of the previous political system while contributing to that system's decay. Hungary, indeed, is an example.

**THE POLYPORE STATE** works with what is referred to as "mnemonic security", and with the control of hegemonic forms of remembrance.[43] The translation of history and its application, and thus its identity-shaping effects, have become a geopolitical factor. After 1989, fueled by anti-communist sentiment within the former Eastern Bloc countries and by the memories of retributions that took place during the Soviet occupation, anti-communism became the foundation along with the revision of the progressive political tradition at both the national and international level. Memory politics plays a key role in this process. Different states are silencing stories about their own acts of discrimination that are integral parts of their history in order to show themselves to be a victim. The memory politics of the "polypore state" is to duplicate, depoliticize, and empty the narrative about women's presence and agency during the 1956 Revolution in order to appropriate the Revolution's meanings and to attribute meanings of victimhood and anti-communism.

These developments are not unique to Hungary, as it is demonstrated in this special issue. The recent turn of "herstory" writing in Central European countries has left feminist historians and secular human rights activists puzzled. However, the illiberal memory politics is not coming from nowhere.

Gábor Gyáni, the renowned Hungarian historian, mentioned two reasons for this when analyzing developments in the historiography of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 in 2006. The first is the post-structuralist turn in history writing after 1989 that undermined the professional standing of historians in public life.[44] If everything is a narrative or a discourse, anybody can be a historian. This democratization has opened up spaces and opportunities outside the profession for constructing new narratives. From the 1970s, as a part of this "new history", feminist history aimed to make women visible in order to transform the writing of history. Those who were engaged in what at first glimpse might be considered a hopeless activity believed in the impact of their work – to make the world a better place by writing a different history that would help to "right the injustice". This was particularly evident in the fact that those who were interviewed for the first collections of testimonies on the events of 1956 by members of the democratic opposition were also those were missing from the official history of the events. Collecting women's oral history collects information about the event and the meaning-making process.[45] By telling our own story, we gain power over our lives, and therefore women's testimonies also give importance to women's actions.

Representatives of "new history" argued that writing political history was the center of national history writing,[46] as it was in the case of writing the history of 1956. National history and political thinking are processes of inclusion and exclusion. In the center of this narrative is the male citizen, who is fighting for the nation. Everybody else, including women and ethnic minorities, is on the margins. As Gianna Pomata has argued, gender history is analyzing national and universal history in terms of the roles that gendered characteristics and symbols have played in historical events and processes.[47]

The novelty of "new history" is the inclusion of class, gender, and ethnicity as categories of analysis. But this "new history" is not merely a genre of "writing of history", but rather is constructed as an alternative "culture of history", marking systems and points of connections to the past by constructing pluralities of interpretations instead of a single canonized narrative. This narrative strategy offers a new path for gendering history, but it is still supposed to fit in and refer to the "old canon", and thus be but one of several narratives about nation and democracy. This plurality of discussion also influences the definition of what sources count as legitimate because the question is no longer "what happened", but rather how to redefine the relationship to the past based on visual sources, statues, testimonies, and rituals.

**THE CANON OF** women's history writing its place in the national historiographies of Central Europe after 1989. As Liakos points out, "Writing history means to internalize the canon, and to be ascribed in a mental geography prescribed by the canon."[48] At the same time women's history was necessarily pushed towards a particular history, pointing out a void in prior historiography. This negative approach is aptly characterized by Liakos: "The idea of not belonging to the canon creates a consciousness of absences and failures which could be described as a 'negative consciousness': negative in the sense that the consciousness is not defined by what the subject is, but by what the subject is not, that is, the adoption of a perspective of self-exclusion."[49] Therefore, writing women's history defined itself as separate with the hope of filling in the void.

**"ORAL HISTORY BECAME A POPULAR METHOD OF COLLECTING STORIES OF 'HOW THE 20TH CENTURY HAS REALLY HAPPENED' WITH THE AIM OF CREATING A COUNTER CANON TO COMMUNIST HISTORY WRITING."**

Writing women's history in Central Europe has a specific intellectual history.[50] In this paradigm, women's history found a place for itself, joining the stream demanding the revision of history based on oral history testimonies, while beginning through conferences and conference volumes to build up its own canon, or a canon of their own, to paraphrase Virginia Woolf. During this process in the early 1990s, women's history partly functioned as a revisionist history because it undermined and/or revised the previous canon by bringing in a new group, namely women, as a legitimate focus of historical analysis.

Writing women's history emerged in that region as a part of the European neoliberal modernity in the transition of 1989 from communism to democracy. But the normative power of

Women's demonstration on December 4, 1956, in Budapest. PHOTO : FORTEPAN COLLECTION NO. 85716, DONATED BY GYULA NAGY

Europe (the EU) and the international framework has been weakening in recent years. The triple crises – the financial crisis of 2008 and the refugee crisis together with security problems – contributed to the previously consensual neoliberal concept of Europe becoming multilayered and to the emergence of new actors. Alternative concepts of Europe have gained momentum, and different forms of illiberal governance have influenced, among other important institutions, the infrastructure of writing history.[51] These characteristics of writing women's history as a revisionist history were connected to "negative consciousness", which made it extremely vulnerable to reconceptualization during the second transition of the build-up of the polypore illiberal states and the associated populist turn.

**THE REASON WHY** women suddenly came to the center of the celebration of the 1956 Revolution in 2016 was the revisionist character of women's history. History writing and teaching history still treats women's history as separate, or, as Virginia Woolf wrote nearly a hundred years ago, as an appendix. Paradoxically, the practitioners of women's history mostly consider this separation and particularism as a fruitful and promising path for developing women's history.

According to Tucker's typology, historical revisionism uses three strategies: *significance-driven* revisionism, that is, when there is a change in what historians find significant in history, *evidence-driven* revisions, when new evidence is discovered, and *value-driven* revisionism, when historical events and processes are re-evaluated because a new system of values becomes hegemonic.[52] These three kinds of revisions cannot be divided so strictly, but women's history writing can mostly be considered as belonging to value-driven revisionism, which makes women's history vulnerable to populist redefinitions. Women's history writing has never reached the status of significance-driven revisionism, especially because it is a part of "new history".[53] Demanding that women's stories should be included based on ethics is not enough, because this process of revision is a political power struggle, and the actors should understand how politics works and how people are mobilized for different struggles.

**GÁBOR GYÁNI** also argued that the second cause is the fact that the post-modern turn was combined with the emerging importance of personal recollections about events (ego documents, oral histories, testimonies, diaries, etc.) as sources.[54] Only personal sources about the history of 1956 were considered as authentic and true, in opposition to the history of falsifications during the Kádár regime of 1956–1989. While the "age of witness"[55] in Holocaust historiography addressed experiences of new victim groups and came up with unprecedented and innovative methods of historical research, the case of writing the history of the 1956 Revolution in Hungary has resulted in the opposite – including a marginalization of professional historians and an overwhelming description of personal experiences instead of theorizing, as well as marginalizing the experiences of certain groups while prioritizing those of others, such as women.

The history of 1956 is mostly based on oral tradition. Because the Revolution lasted only 13 days and was followed by bloody repression and heavy censorship, documents were either produced by the repressive state or remained in the oral tradition. As connected to the demand of "recovering the truth", this means that testimonies were labeled as true, not just authentic. The positivistic credo of Langlois and Seignobos, written in 1898 in *Introduction aux études historiques* "L'histoire se fait avec des documents. Pas de documents, pas d'histoire?" still pursues historians today. "New post-stucturalist history" has not stopped following the "source driven" nature of history and rational idealism, saying that all of history can be truthfully understood if there are enough sources available. These sources, however, were mostly oral sources presenting a claim to authenticity and truth in a historical culture in which multiple stories were competing for hegemonic status.

Writing the history of 1956 started off in the positivist and rationalist idealist frame. Several books were published of collec-


The Hungarian National Opera announcing 56 themed performances.

PHOTO: ANDREA PETŐ

tions of interviews that were to be analyzed as written memory documents. The spoken words of testimonies became written documents. Collections of interviews are hosted at the Institute of Political History (the former Institute of Party History and Oral History Collection of the 1956 Institute). The 20th Century Institute and the House of Terror started collecting their own testimonies from survivors whom they had selected to create their own collection. Testimonies serve in this paradigm as authentic and true memories. Families and the private sphere were sites where , it was hoped, the state could not penetrate, and they were the main sites of identity formation defining "us" and "them". Family was also the site that was the most resistant to statist feminist emancipation and where expectations regarding femininity and masculinity had not changed much, thus leading to the emergence of "familialism" after 1989 in gender equality politics.[56]

**THE THIRD FACTOR** contributing to the change of illiberal memory politics is that after 1989 there was a shift in memory studies towards a truth paradigm that sought to counteract the previous manipulative historiography of communism. The category of memory has been placed in the center of scholarly investigations, and in this process a memory boom of alternative personal stories and new methods of oral history has resurfaced. "Truth" has become a personalized matter, making the individual subject the subject of history writing. In this paradigm, women's history writing was introduced seemingly on a winning ticket as life stories became an acknowledged subject after 1989. At the same time, the quickly emerging new historical canon integrated both the previously dominant truth framework and new truths, including women as the subjects of history writing.[57]

The truth paradigm as a framework for history writing was necessarily strengthened in Central Europe after 1989. The idea was that political freedom made it possible to access the veracity of history because political manipulation was no longer imposed on readers. Previously inaccessible archives were opened up for researchers, and this was the period of "archive fever" described by Jacques Derrida.[58] The belief is that the truth and its explanations are there in the archives and you just have to find it because, and here is the chance for conspiracy theories, the archives were closed and hidden from you by unidentified powers, although these powers are mostly understood to be "the communists". Oral history became a popular method of collecting stories of "how the 20th century really happened" with the aim of creating a counter canon to the communist history writing.[59]

## Towards a new paradigm of gendered memory politics

The illiberal memory politics' use of the women's history turn is informed by the populist turn. Duncan Light pointed out, while analyzing the transition of 1989, that the various nations of Central Europe were moved "by the desire to construct new post-communist identities, characterized by a democratic, pluralist, capitalist and largely westward-looking orientation".[60] Now a deepening reversal is present – these identities are not democratic, not pluralist, not capitalist, and certainly not westward looking. Instead, as I pointed out in my article on far right memorialization practices in Hungary, the community of jointly experienced suffering defines national identity. And community itself is seen as anti-pluralist. The newly emerging and victorious anti-modernism, which from a social and spiritual point of view questions neoliberalism, also turned history into an ideological weapon in order to reach its political aims and to offer a livable, real, and acceptable alternative future. This anti-modernism goes hand in hand with revisionist history writing (and "history politics"), which defines the nation as a community of victims (always referring to those who caused the suffering) and offers redemption in the near future. As a result of this revisionist history writing, large meta-narratives are being constructed, new methods are being used, and new sources are being discovered, all of which refer to the position of the narrator of the story. This narrative position, as Eric Hobsbawn wrote in *The Guardian*, comes down to "my truth is as valid as your truth".[61] This stance entails a general opposition to universalism in non-traditional history writing. This anti-universalism and the relative statute of truth connect revisionist history writing to women's history writing. This connection is transformed into a socializational fight, to use the words of Gramsci, and both streams define new historical sources as legitimate historical sources.[62] The revisionist history writing is fighting against communist history writing, while women's history writing opposes the sanctification of social hierarchies.

The revisionism of "new history" together with the truth paradigm informed by anti-communism made the previous narrative about 1956 vulnerable when the populist turn brought in the "my truth is as valid as your truth" framework. As a result of the populist turn, the memory politics of the illiberal state is focusing on people, not on leaders – "the people" have spoken – and it is no longer individuals who are the agents of history. The commemoration of 1956 labeled the events as the revolution of the masses, as was emphasized on the official website:

> **We can say it out loud now, that this revolution did not have leaders, in this revolution and freedom, people raised their arms because their real leaders had been executed, forced to emigrate, or imprisoned, and those who replaced them were servants of foreign, soviet occupying forces who betrayed them.**[63]

The familial turn as a major component of the polypore state emphasizes women's roles as caregivers, wives, and daughters. The roots of familialism go back to the 1956 Revolution and can be found in the historiography written by émigrés and members of the democratic opposition, together with the missing paradigm shift in 1989. The evidence for this is in what has happened with the visual representations of those women who were selected to be on the billboards. The women on the billboards are represented as innocent and caring women with light makeup – while tough street fighters are presented as victims – and heavily Photoshopped. This type of history writing is based on the fetishization of complementary gender differences, just as we saw prior to 1989. And if it is not accompanied by a critical scrutiny of its production, it can be fraught with the same dire consequences as ignoring the very same differences.

The emerging anti-gender discourses have had a major impact as far as the future of writing women's history is concerned. The turn in women's history writing is a hegemonic fight, in the Gramscian sense, for controll of the process of writing history. Revisionist history writing is successfully applying the same methods and theories used in women's history writing, and by doing so it is creating another counter canon. As far as the politics of presence is concerned, there are women in history, but in a fundamentally different frame. The triple crises of 2008 also determined the challenges which women's history writing faces as a form of revisionist history writing, while at the same time anti-gender movements are challenging the definition of gender.[64]

The professional response to the institutionalized memory politics of the illiberal state remained in the frame of "negative consciousness". At the major scientific conference in Eger titled "1956 and Socialism" held on September, 8-10, 2016, only six out of nearly 100 conference papers focused on the history of women in 1956. In all six papers, all published in a women's studies journal, women were discussed as prostitutes, workers, wives, and as symbolic representations.

**THE GOVERNMENT OFFENSIVE** to use public spaces for the memorialization of its version of history also mobilized civil resistance. The group "Living Memorial", which was founded to protest against the Monument of German Occupation on Liberty Square also participated in this resistance with a guerilla exhibition.[65] They set up a series of four panels entitled "Living '56: The Non-amended Memory of the Revolution" in front of the controversial and highly popular House of Terror museum to show what was missing from the remembrance. All of the panels included a small inset with the text: "Did you know that this was also part of the 1956 Revolution? Do you agree that no one should appropriate history? These are a couple of things that are being left out of the official narrative." The signs were then dedicated to the intellectuals and politicians, to the journalists and writers, to the Imre Nagy group, and to students and workers detailing the roles they played in the revolution. Needless to say that all were men. The illusion of 1989 – that un-politicized memory spaces are possible because there is a consensus on what the good fight is – is still present among historians. The illusion that the present backlash will be over at some point is still haunting the profession, which does not seem to recognize that this is not an innocent omission but a socialization fight to hijack the memory of 1956. Unlike the case of Holocaust memorialization, the turn towards witnesses' testimonies was not based on a consensus, but rather on conflicting hegemonic claims. The "new history" writing opened up space for an even "newer history" that is using the same revisionist methods. Only a rethinking of relationships to politics and to the political can change power relations in this hegemonic fight. The belief that the memory of 1956 is a living memory, and that it is possible to reintegrate the previously omitted social groups and personalities into the revised history of 1956, is a fight that was lost from the beginning.

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Images from the popular TV series *Czas honoru* [Time of honor].

# Beasts, demons, and cold bitches

## Memories of communist women in contemporary Poland

by **Agnieszka Mrozik**


## abstract

I am examining recent works published on the Polish market aimed at popularizing historical knowledge, both non-fictional and fictional literature. I show that they devote an inordinate amount of space to communist women. The function of the images of communist women of Stalinist times, as presented in the publications being discussed here, does not merely boil down to providing a historical reckoning with the emancipation policies of the People's Poland project. These women are also – and perhaps primarily – a useful tool in contemporary debates on women's rights. In their role as the anti-model of the emancipation policy, female communist dignitaries serve as a cautionary tale against the excessive liberation of women.


**KEYWORDS:** women's rights, history writing, emancipation.

Polish publications aimed at popularizing historical knowledge devote an inordinate amount of space to communist women – that is, to women who were involved with the communist movement prior to World War II, and who were later members and sympathizers of the Communist Party of Poland (1918–1938), the Polish Workers' Party (1942–1948), and the Polish United Workers' Party (1948–1990). These women self-identified as communists and shared the communist ideals. In examining recent publications, I am mostly referring to works published on the Polish market, which are a combination of non-fictional literature (i.e. biographies, reports, interviews) and fictional literature (i.e. novels, short stories). Their authors (who are usually male) attempt to engage their readers with a non-complicated plot that is filled to the brim with shocking content, scandals, and rumors, and the works are being "sold" using legitimizing subtitles that suggest that they are the result of journalistic investigation or archive research. Such works present the basic historical facts – authenticated with comments by so-called "witnesses of the times" and professional historians – in a thick coating of phantasms, myths and, not infrequently, stereotypes.

In publications such as Przemysław Słowiński's *Boginie Zła* [Goddesses of evil] (2010), Tadeusz M. Płużański's *Bestie* [Beasts] (2011), Sławomir Koper's *Kobiety władzy PRL* [Women of the authorities of People's Poland] (2012), and Marek Łuszczyna's *Zimne* [Cold ones] (2014), as well as in the popular TV series *Czas honoru* [Time of honor] (2008–2013), which was aired by Polish public television, and in the Oscar-winning movie *Ida* (2013),[1] female communists fill the role of "evil women". For even stronger effect, this role is often juxtaposed with the "brave and pure girls" of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, the Home Army patriots, Girl Scouts, or nuns. These authors usually present communist women of the Stalinist era as being rare (and frequently use the same few recurring names, such as Wanda Wasilewska, Julia Brystiger, and Helena Wolińska), but as particularly noxious and insidious – as women who abused their power and used it against their male subordinates. In *Czas honoru* and *Ida*, the characters of female communist dignitaries – a minister and a prosecutor – were based on the infamous biographies of Brystiger and Wolińska. At the same time, these authors stress that the power wielded by communist women was specious and non-sovereign, as these women were always anointed by men.

**IT IS DIFFICULT** to shake off the impression that contemporary stories about female communists are driven by male fears and by the obsessions of the authors, and are based on old concepts of women who transgress traditional gender roles and are typically described as "beasts", "goddesses of evil", "cold bitches", or "lovers of the mighty of this world".[2] In Słowiński's book, female communists are portrayed as yet another link in the long chain of "evil women" in the history of humankind; they share the limelight with such infamous heroines as Lucrezia Borgia, Catherine the Great, Magda Goebbels, and Ulrike Meinhof. Łuszczyna, in turn, opens his gallery of "Polish women who were called criminals", "common felons", and "psychopaths" with the story of Julia Brystiger – one of the most demonized of all Polish communist women. Like Wolińska, Brystiger is a particularly useful object of attention among all the aforementioned authors for a number of reasons: first, in her role as director of the 3rd and 5th Departments of the Ministry of Public Security, she allegedly personally surveilled parties, political organizations, and religious groups; second, she was said to be particularly bent on the brutal questioning of suspects; third, she was known for her intriguing beauty, which was purportedly appreciated by Picasso himself;[3] fourth, she rumored to have remarkable sexual appetites; and, fifth, but not least, she was known for her constantly emphasized Jewish origins. The image of a "comrade Minister", as constructed by these authors, encompasses all the possible impressions that are encoded in the stereotypical figures of "a beautiful Jewess" and a "Judeo-communist": a demonic quality, sexual transgressions, and criminality.[4] The accumulation of fears, obsessions, and fantasies that are associated with these figures is clearly visible in one scene from Łuszczyna's book: in this scene, Brystiger is in a conversation with Primate Stefan Wyszyński, and is described as a "snake hissing in a corner of a chapel"[5] – alternating between being seductive and being dangerous. In another scene – one that is frequently cited, although it only addresses the account given by Brystiger's alleged victim, an account that is as yet still unconfirmed by any other sources – Brystiger is depicted as a ferocious sexual deviant who takes great pleasure in torturing young "cursed soldiers".[6] At this point, the authors' uneasy fascination with the purported sexual wantonness and violence of the "comrade Minister" reaches its apogee, and comes close to bursting into perversion.

The sexual life of communist women seems to be of primary interest to the authors of pop-historical publications: it is described as "prolific", "knowing no bounds", or, at other times, as being completely subjugated to the whims of men, whether party comrades or superiors. The authors eagerly quote the derogatory wartime nickname that was applied to communist



### Wanda Wasilewska (1905–1964)

Polish writer, publicist, and politician. Before WWII, Wasilewska was a member of the Polish Socialist Party; during the war, appointed by Stalin, she became the Chairperson of the Union of Polish Patriots and co-organizer of the Polish Army in the USSR. After the war, Wasilewska settled in Kiev as a member of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and as a post-war peace movement activist.

### Julia Brystiger (1902–1975)

Polish-Jewish social and political activist. Before the war, Brystiger was a member of the Communist Party of Western Ukraine; she was imprisoned for communist activity, which was illegal at the time in Poland. Between 1945 and 1956, she was the Director of the 3rd Department (responsible for countering the anti-communist underground) and of the 5th Department (responsible for the infiltration of churches and intelligentsia circles) of the Ministry of Public Security. Although Brystiger was accused of torturing prisoners, she was never formally charged or tried. After she finished her political career, she took up writing.

### Helena Wolińska (1919–2008)

Polish-Jewish political activist, prosecutor, and academic teacher. Before WWII, Wolińska belonged to the Polish Union of Communist Youth. During the war, she served in the People's Guard and the People's Army. Between 1949 and 1954, Wolińska was a military prosecutor in political trials that resulted in death sentences and lifelong imprisonments. After her political retirement, she turned to academic work (she received her PhD in 1962 with a thesis titled *Pregnancy Termination in Light of Penal Law*). In the wake of the anti-semitic purges of March 1968, Wolińska was fired; she then emigrated to Great Britain, where she was naturalized. Toward the end of the 1990s, the Polish authorities applied to the authorities in Great Britain for her extradition, accusing her of having aided in the execution of 24 Home Army soldiers in 1950–1953. In 2006, the British authorities rejected the request.

women: "transient field wives" (shortened to TFW). The authors also provide something that is akin to a psychosexual analysis of these women's personalities, based on rumors – that is, on information that is not confirmed, but that is still suggestive. For example, Łuszczyna conducts an interview with a "renowned Polish sexologist" (unnamed in the book), who authoritatively states that Julia Brystiger (universally referred to as "Bloody Luna"), who purportedly was the owner of an ominous drawer that she allegedly used to slam on the genitals of young Home Army soldiers, was driven by a "desire for vengeance":

> **Imagine a sensitive, educated, intelligent, pathologically ambitious woman, who's climbing up the career ladder at any cost, in awful times, through the beds of hideous schmucks, who most certainly did not smell of the men's equivalent of Fragonard [which was purportedly Brystiger's favorite scent – A.M.]. If you had been a TFW for a number of years, would you have any warm feelings left toward men? [...] She'd clench her teeth and ignore the opinions about her. Yet she was harboring a sensation of harm and disgust toward herself, she was not able to shut down those emotions. [...] She got lost, directing all the hatred she felt toward herself and her career fornicators against young, handsome guys whose love she had never known. – So, tearing off testicles of young WiN soldiers[7] was revenge for Berman and Minc? – And for men generally, because it was them as the species who were guilty of the fact that her career was not as she had wished it to be, and at a price which she never accepted deep in her heart.[8]**

The misogynistic, pathologizing language of this conversation reveals not only the great depths of the male fear of female sexuality – of its imaginary power to castrate men – but also a strong contempt for all expressions of emancipation, the crowning of which is the political power of women. Both fear and contempt find their manifestations in a refusal to acknowledge the political autonomy and agency of communist women and in the determination to push them into the sphere of female biology, instincts, and drives. Thus, Wasilewska (called "Stalin's favorite"),[9] Małgorzata Fornalska (called "Bierut's woman"),[10] and Brystiger and Wolińska (referred to as "transient field wives")[11] are ultimately characterized as being torn by their passions and using their sexuality to secure their positions, while continuously moving within the orbit of male influence. These women are brought down to the role of "private women": rather than being depicted as "women with power", they are shown as "women *of* power" – that is, as the daughters, wives, sisters, and lovers of influential men.

Through these "demonic women", who are after all easily pacified and tamed by being pushed into traditional roles, communism alternatingly reveals its monstrous, criminal face and appears grotesque and exaggerated. In this context, communism's most serious crime is to upend the gender order. At the same time, the caricature-like quality of communism stems from the fact that this is just a specious upending, as the emancipation of women is specious too: in reality, women never ceased to fulfill traditional roles, as proven by the biographies of prominent female politicians of the Stalinist period.

**THE FUNCTION OF** the images of communist women of Stalinist times, as presented in the publications discussed here, does not merely boil down to providing a historical settlement with the emancipation policies of the People's Poland project.[12] These women are also – and perhaps primarily – a useful tool in contemporary debates on the equality of women's rights, transformations of the models of family and parenthood, and the changes that are occurring in the community under the influence of policies that give women greater decision-making power in politics. In their role as the anti-model of the emancipation policy, female communist dignitaries serve as a cautionary tale against the excessive liberation of women, which is manifested in their sexual wantonness and abuse of power. These tales of our heroines, which feed into a moralizing narrative of crime and punishment, sin and redemption, and guilt and atonement, are intended to show just how harmful this liberation is to women themselves, as it brings about life tragedies, unhappiness, and loneliness. This narrative teaches us that "women of power" always meet a sad end: they are lonely and heartbroken (e.g., Wasilewska was married three times and was allegedly cheated on and abused by her last husband, the Ukrainian playwright Oleksandr Korniychuk); they are marginalized or even spied on by their former comrades (e.g. the Security Services conducted a surveillance campaign dubbed "Egoist" against Brystiger from 1962–1974); or they are forced to emigrate (e.g., Wasilewska stayed in Kiev after the war, while Wolińska moved to Britain in the aftermath of March 1968). Their road to redemption and their return to the fold of society can only occur through conversion to Catholicism, which is purportedly desired by them. Thus, despite an absence of proof, the authors of these tales stubbornly repeat the rumors that tell how Wasilewska, Brystiger, and Fornalska became devout Catholics toward the end of their lives, or even how these women financially supported the Catholic Church.[13] By means of a normative gender narrative, the lives and work of female communists are shoved into well-known and recognizable frames, thus making these women more palatable to society and controlling women who elude the now-binding conservative norms of "Polish femininity" – which comprise women who are patriotic, virtuous, and motherly, and who know their place in the world.

**"THIS NARRATIVE TEACHES US THAT 'WOMEN OF POWER' ALWAYS MEET A SAD END."**

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1 P. Słowiński, *Boginie zła, czyli kobiety okrutne, żądne władzy i występne* (Chorzów: Videograf II, 2010); T. M. Płużański, *Bestie: mordercy Polaków* (Warsaw: 3S Media, 2011); S. Koper, *Kobiety władzy PRL* (Warsaw: Czerwone i Czarne, 2012); M. Łuszczyna, *Zimne: Polki, które nazwano zbrodniarkami* (Warsaw: PWN, 2014); *Czas honoru* (TVP, 2008–2013); *Ida*, dir. P. Pawlikowski (2013).

2 See K. Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, vol. 1: Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, transl. C. Turner, S. Conway and E. Carter (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

3 According to one rumour, in the mid-1920s, Brystygier was to pose for Picasso in Paris, where she studied.

4 See B. Umińska, *Postać z cieniem: Portrety Żydówek w polskiej literaturze* (Warsaw: Sic!, 2001).

5 M. Łuszczyna, *Zimne*, 17.

6 Brystiger's "black legend" is actually based on the unverified account of her alleged victim – a man whom she apparently tortured with utmost cruelty (by beating his genitals, among other tortures), and who purportedly died in the aftermath of her questioning. However, the most recent biography of Brystiger indicates that this alleged torture victim not only did not die, but also did not become infertile (he became a father). See P. Bukalska, *Krwawa Luna* (Warsaw: Wielka Litera, 2016).

7 WiN (Wolność i Niezawisłość, Freedom and Independence) was a civil-military anti-communist organization that formed in 1945, and remained active into the early 1950s. Its purpose was to fight against the communist authorities, and it used attacks that also involved civilians. The organization advocated the need to liberate Poland from Soviet dominance, return to pre-war traditions, and "cleanse" the country of Jews. Its members were hunted down by communists, and were arrested, tried, and sentenced to prison or death. The members of this organization are now referred to as "Cursed Soldiers" and are glorified by the Polish right. The National Day of Remembrance of the "Cursed Soldiers" has been celebrated in Poland on March 1, since 2011.

8 M. Łuszczyna, *Zimne*, 33–34.

9 S. Koper, *Kobiety władzy PRL*, 33–85.; S. Słowiński, *Boginie zła*, 131–139.

10 S. Koper, Kobiety władzy PRL, 171–207.

11 T. M. Płużański, *Bestie*; S. Koper, *Kobiety władzy PRL*, 209–226; S. Słowiński, *Boginie zła*, 121–129.

12 Małgorzata Fidelis writes about emancipation policies in the People's Poland in her book *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

13 *Zaćma* [Blindness] (2016) a movie by the Polish director Ryszard Bugajski, materializes the popular phantasm of a female communist as a "sinner-turned-believer" and a "prodigal daughter" who longs to return to the fold of the national (Polish) and religious (Catholic) communities. Bugajski's movie provides a spin on Brystiger's fate after her retirement from the Ministry of Public Security, and is a study of the (self-)humiliation of a communist woman. The "way of the cross" that the movie's heroine goes through in the course of a single night in the twilight zone between dream and reality, including her attempt to "atone" for her sins, strips Brystiger of her special status of politician and as the director of a department; it deprives her of pride and dignity and returns her to her "proper" – that is, "feminine" – role as a weak and indecisive creature. In this movie, we begin to see Brystiger as a woman only when she humbles herself, and even more so when she is humiliated by her real and imagined victims and begs for a forgiveness that we, the viewers, may deny to her with boundless pleasure.



### Stefan Wyszyński (1901–1981)

Polish Roman Catholic priest, and Primate of Poland from 1948–1981. Wyszyński was the initiator of the 1950 agreement with the communist authorities, which made him fall into disfavor with Pope Pius XII. In 1957, he supported Władysław Gomułka, the first secretary of the PUWP's Central Committee (CC). Between 1957 and 1966, Wyszyński organized the millennial celebrations of the Baptism of Poland. Mediator between the Polish People's Republic and the leaders of the Solidaritymovement in 1980–1981.

### Jakub Berman (1901–1984)

Communist activist, and politician. From 1944 to 1956, he was a member of the Political Bureau of the PWP/PUWP, a member of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers (1952–1954), and the deputy prime minister (1954–1956). Berman was responsible for overseeing education and culture, and was also the Minister of Public Security. Called "the grey eminence," during the "thaw" (1954–1957), Berman was accused of orchestrating political repressions and was removed from the party. He was rumored to have been one of Julia Brystiger's numerous lovers.

### Hilary Minc (1905–1974)

Communist activist, economist, and politician. Before the war, Minc was a member of the Polish Young Communist League and of the CPP. After the war, he was the Minister of Industry and Trade (1944–1949) and the deputy prime minister (1949–1957). Minc was a supporter of economic centralism. He was removed from the party in 1959. Minc was also rumored to have been one of Julia Brystiger's lovers.

### Małgorzata Fornalska (1902–1944)

Polish communist activist and politician. Before the war, Fornalska was a member of the Communist Party of Poland. She spent many years in prison for illegal communist activities. In 1942, she was one of the founders of the Polish Workers' Party. In 1943, she was arrested by the Gestapo in Warsaw and jailed in the Pawiak prison. She was shot in July 1944. In her private life, Fornalska was the partner of Bolesław Bierut (1892–1956), who was the first secretary of the CC PUWP (1948–1956), the president of Poland (1944–1952), and the prime minister (1952–1954).

Andriana Susak went straight from Maidan to the warzone. She joined a volunteer battalion and served as a shock trooper under the nom-de guerre “Malysh” (“Kid”).
PHOTO: KLEOPATRA ANFEROVA

# Experiences of women at war

## Servicewomen during WWII and in the Ukrainian armed forces in the conflict in Donbas

by **Olesya Khromeychuk**

Women’s relationship to war is more complex than men’s “because society with its traditional gender divisions of labor has assigned the official task of fighting to men,” argues Nicole Ann Dombrowski.[1] This does not mean, of course, that women do not fight in wars. As Simone de Beauvoir puts it in her now classic text, historically “women were known to take part in bloody wars or vendettas; they showed as much courage and cruelty as males”.[2] The problem of women’s invisibility as actors of political violence, therefore, is not in their supposed inability to fight in wars. The problem is in societies’ ongoing inability to see women in roles that do not fit traditional gender norms. Beauvoir herself and many scholars before and especially after her have tried to make women visible in all spheres of life, including warfare. Nevertheless, the dilemma of how to represent women in the context of war persists. If non-military (although not necessarily unmilitarized) women are usually fitted into categories of civilian victims and mothers-sisters-daughters-lovers-wives of military men, those who become members of the military are usually perceived as exceptional female warriors.[3] Indeed, female members of the military are relatively rare, but, as Barbara Alpern Engel argues, they form “a substantial minority”.[4] Ignoring them because of their numerical inferiority would mean neglecting war stories of thousands of individuals who can offer a narrative of war different to the customary heroic tale of male glory on the battlefield. However, emphasizing their participation in war carries the danger of hailing them precisely as extraordinary, thereby strengthening the assumption that “ordinary” women are inherently peaceful and that the job of fighting wars should be reserved for men whose gender predisposes them to soldiering. The ways in which these dilemmas are dealt with (or ignored) are indicative of the attitude of state and society towards its female citizens.

In this paper, I examine perceptions of servicewomen’s contributions to war by comparing two cases: women in the Red Army during the Second World War and in the Ukrainian Armed Forces in the conflict in the Donbas region. In spite of their distance in time and the difference in scale and type of respective conflicts, the similarities in the two cases are startling. I focus on the discrepancy between the contribution of women to the war effort and the perception of this contribution within their respective societies and demonstrate that in both cases, regardless of their roles in warfare, women were perceived as an auxiliary force, supporting men in fighting wars. Specific individual women who did not fit into the auxiliary category have been presented as exceptional, but rather than challenging gender stereotypes, accentuation of their exceptionality has been more likely to reinforce the general perception of women’s contribution as essentially supportive. I argue that structural gender discrimination was ingrained in the military, which accepted women’s contribution to war in times of need, but treated that contribution as subsidiary. Such auxiliarization of most women’s contributions to war on the one hand, and the turning of others into exceptional heroines, reinforces male participation in war as the norm, distorts the reality of war as experienced by both women and men, and facilitates the instrumentalized militarization of women. There is a significant body of literature analyzing the participation of women in the Red Army. It is rich in detail about the types of roles women performed and the attitude the Soviet state adopted towards their recruitment.[5] The literature on contemporary servicewomen in the Donbas is much scarcer, and I will rely on the few published sources available to date.[6] In both cases, I will refer to interviews with the former servicewomen, which I collected in 2015–2016, and other sources such as published interviews and media material.


## abstract

This paper examines women’s contribution to war and the perceptions of that contribution by comparing experiences of women in the Red Army during the Second World War and in the Ukrainian Armed Forces in the conflict in the Donbas region. Through comparative analysis, the paper argues that in both cases structural gender discrimination was ingrained in the military, which accepted women’s contribution to war in times of need, but treated that contribution as subsidiary, thereby distorting men’s and women’s experiences of warfare and facilitating the instrumentalized militarization of women.


**KEYWORDS:** Gender, war, militarization, Second World War, conflict in Donbas.

Servicewomen's partial visibility in the two cases discussed here means that their exact numbers are not known. The Red Army estimates vary significantly. Oleg Budnitskii relies on an official Soviet state estimate and argues that "according to the Ministry of Defense, 490,235 women were called up by the army and the navy during the war".[7] Anna Krylova states that more than 900,000 women served in the Soviet Armed Forces during the Second World War.[8] Roger D. Markwick and Euridice Charon-Cardona offer an even higher estimate. They write:

> **Between August 1941 and October 1944, the GKO [State Defense Committee] and NKO [People's Commissariat for Defense] decreed the mobilization of an estimated 712,529 women for the Red Army and Navy [...]. 463,503 were still in the Red Army as at 1 January 1945; 318,980 of these women were actually on the fighting front. If we add the 512,161 "civilian volunteers" (*volnonaemny[i] sostav*) in the Red Army, but not in the Red Navy, as at 1 January 1945 (medical, food, supplies, laundry, repair personnel, etc.) [...] the total number of women who served with the Soviet armed forces in the course of the war was just in excess of one million.**[9]

The number that is usually quoted in literature about Red Army women is 800,000.[10]

In the Ukrainian case, there is also no clear figure for the participation of women in what is officially known as the anti-terrorist operation (ATO).[11] According to the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, as of October 9, 2017, 6,282 women had received the "status of participants of military action for their participation in the anti-terrorist operation".[12] This figure, however, did not include a number of categories of servicewomen: those who served in the war zone illegally, volunteers who worked at the front irregularly, around 500 women who were part of the National Guard, and those who were part of the Ukrainian Armed Forces but did not serve in the ATO zone for any lengthy period.[13] Indeed, Maria Berlins'ka, who is one of the authors of the first sociological study of women who are fighting in the Donbas region, says that no one has objective figures on servicewomen engaged in the ATO because of their complex status at the front.[14]

In the cases of both the Red Army in WWII and the conflict in Donbas, most women who joined the conflicts did so voluntarily. Reina Pennington states, "Legal precedents in the Soviet Union made it possible for women to fight. Women's political and legal equality was guaranteed by the constitution of 1918, which also established universal military service for men, and voluntary military service for women."[15] The *Vsevobuch* (*Vseobshchee voennoe obuchenie*, Universal Military Training Administration) aimed to ensure that citizens between eighteen and forty years of age received military training; the *Osoaviakhim* (*Obshchestvo sodeistviia oborone, aviatsyonnomu i khimicheskomu stroitel'stvu*, Union for Assistance with Defense, Aviation, and Chemical Construction) provided paramilitary training for civilians, and the *Komsomol* (*Vsesoiuznyi leninskii kommunisticheskii soiuz molodezhy*, All-Union Leninist Young Communist League) "was charged with instilling political militancy in the young".[16] Women took part in all of these. When the Soviet-German war broke out, many women of the generation who grew up persuaded by the state that the war was imminent and that all citizens had to prepare for it rushed to seek ways to contribute to the war effort. However, as Markwick and Charon-Cardona point out, "To the profound disappointment of most politically active young women, when the hour came to exercise their rights to bear arms alongside their menfolk, they were rebuffed."[17] In the USSR, gender equality was proclaimed in principle, but not implemented in practice. As Pennington states, "women were usually relegated to lower-ranking positions at work and filled many traditional women's roles at work and at home."[18] Anne Eliot Griesse and Richard Stites argue, "Pronatalist, sexist, and suspicious of spontaneity, Stalinism assured that the Soviet high command would have a deeply ambivalent attitude to the participation of women in the next war."[19] This ambivalence led to the chaos in the initial recruitment of women during the Second World War.

Krylova states, "Throughout 1941, rank-and-file male officials in military commissariats were on their own in deciding what to do with young women. There were neither clear orders nor general direction from the centre." She argues that at this stage, the leadership did not encourage women to volunteer, but did not prevent them from entering the armed forces either.[20] Stalin and his leadership were not willing to openly change their conservative position on the role of women, and they did not wish to provide evidence for Nazi propaganda that stated that the Red Army was in such a desperate position that it recruited female battalions.[21] The reality of the huge losses in the initial stages of the war, however, meant that recruitment of female combatants could not be ruled out. The leadership therefore decided to conduct covert recruitment of women into combat roles, and the first secret order that gave permission to form three women's air regiments was issued on October 8, 1941.[22] The losses persisted, rapidly draining male resources, while at the same time there was no shortage of women willing to serve at the front. Necessity proved to be the mother of invention, and in 1942 militarization of women occurred on a mass scale. This stage of women's recruitment, however, as Markwick and Charon-Cardona argue, "was not done with any fanfare,"[23] and "in spring 1942, a second, secret phase of women's mobilization [...] was launched by Soviet authorities, desperate to compensate for nearly 6.5 million, overwhelmingly male, casualties."[24] The drive to militarize

**"THE LOSSES PERSISTED, RAPIDLY DRAINING MALE RESOURCES, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME THERE WAS NO SHORTAGE OF WOMEN WILLING TO SERVE AT THE FRONT."**



Red Army women snipers celebrate victory in 1945.

A Red Army woman sniper on the Baltic Front, ca. 1944.

PHOTO: RIA NOVOSTI

women on the one hand, and the official rhetoric that continued to emphasize that women's primary responsibility was maternal on the other, resulted in the "stubborn official ambivalence towards women soldiers".[25] Women were thus encouraged to join the military, but their involvement in the army was not widely advertised and their position in the armed forces was often unclear. However, this did not prevent thousands of women from volunteering to enter the military and from going to the front.

Many saw their contribution to the war effort in the context of the defense of their motherland. What constituted the motherland, however, differed for many of them. Some understood it in ideological terms as propagated during the pre-war decades by the Komsomol; others were simply keen to defend their towns, villages, and homes from the occupying enemy.[26] As Engel states, "Soviet citizens rallied to the defense of their homeland, some because of their feelings about the government, the Communist party, and the leadership of Joseph Stalin, others despite their feelings."[27] There were also, however, women whose mobilization was not strictly voluntary: some Komsomol members simply received a draft notice to join the army. Feoktista Rabina from Novosibirsk was one of them:

> **I was summoned by the call of the Party. [...] I came to work and they told me that a draft card was waiting for me. I was told: "Here is your referral to the city Party committee." I took it and went there. They met me there and said: "You have to go to the frontline". I thought: "How can I go to the frontline if I am not a nurse, don't have medical education?" [...] But I was a candidate for Party membership. [...] So they sent me to work for the KGB.**[28]

Women went to the front not only out of patriotic duty or the call of the Party, but for a variety of other reasons. Markwick and Charon-Cardona argue that "some young women wanted revenge; some yearned for excitement; others were lonely or simply anxious to escape the appalling deprivation and duress of life on a half-starved home front."[29] Like men, women had no say in where they would be posted, but their gender meant that they were viewed not as soldiers in their own right, but as substitutes for men.

Recruitment of women to fight in the Donbas has also been characterized by chaos and lack of clear information.[30] In the Maidan protests, which preceded the start of the hostilities in eastern Ukraine, women were often marginalized, encouraged to fulfill traditionally feminine roles as cooks and caregivers and presented as helpers of male revolutionaries, despite the fact that they took a very active part in the protests.[31] As soon as the protests in central Kyiv had ended, the conflict in the Donbas began, and some of the most active participants of the protests departed for eastern Ukraine from the still upturned Independence Square, the main site of the protests. They formed the core of the volunteer battalions, and included women. Among them was Iuliia Tolopa, an 18-year-old Russian national and nationalist, who had come to Kyiv to see whether the portrayal of events in Ukraine by the media in her own country corresponded to reality.[32] During the Maidan protests, her Russian nationalism evolved into Ukrainian nationalism, and she decided to fight on the side of the Ukrainian state and joined one of the buses heading to the ATO zone. She said that when she got to Luhans'k, a battalion commander decided who out of those who had arrived on the bus should be accepted to serve in his battalion and who should be sent back. Tolopa passed the "test", and she was given a rifle and started to fulfill combat duties.[33] At first, Tolopa served as a "combat fighter" (*strilets'*) and later became an infantry fighting vehicle commander.[34]

Another woman who went straight to the warzone from the Maidan was Andriana Susak. Like Tolopa, she joined a volunteer battalion. With the *nom-de-guerre* "Malysh" ("Kid"), she served as a shock trooper (*shturmovyk*), but was officially registered as a seamstress.[35] This peculiar situation can be explained by the fact that the recruitment of women into the armed forces in Ukraine is regulated by a restrictive list of occupations that are open to women.[36] This meant that until June 2016, servicewomen were formally accepted into only a limited number of positions in the military, performing traditionally feminine tasks such as that of a

PHOTO: KLEOPATRA ANFEROVA

Iuliia Tolopa was 18 years old, and a Russian nationalist when she changed opinion and decided to join the Ukrainian side of the conflict.


PHOTO: PRIVATE

Maria Berlins'ka, right, is one of the authors of the first sociological study of women who are fighting in the Donbas region.

nurse, musician, librarian, accountant, hairdresser, tailor, baker, chef, etc.[37] The law, however, was observed mostly on paper. The initial high losses of the army, the widespread evasion from conscription, and a steady flow of female volunteers willing to go to the frontline meant that the commanders on the ground accepted women and gave them the tasks they were most suited for, disregarding their gender and the official regulations.[38] Therefore, when it came to recruitment, the commanders in the Donbas, like those in the Red Army, were left to their own devices, improvising according to immediate circumstances. Women therefore ended up serving not only in "permitted" positions, but also as combat fighters, reconnaissance officers, snipers, etc. However, they either had no documentation at all, and thus were at the frontline illegally, or found themselves in a semi-legal position by being registered as office administrators, chefs, accountants, etc., while performing other duties.[39] Two years into the conflict and following much pressure from female veterans, the list regulating women's recruitment was expanded by 63 positions and included jobs such as sniper, driver, gunner, reconnaissance agent, and others, making it possible to legalize some of the women who were already performing these tasks.[40] Nevertheless, as Tamara Martsenyuk, Ganna Grytsenko, and Anna Kvit argue, "Two-thirds of all military positions remain inaccessible for women in Ukraine," and the expansion does not apply to all branches of the armed forces or to positions at officer level.[41]

As in the case of the Red Army, the women who have volunteered to fight in the Donbas have done so for different reasons. Motivations have ranged from feelings of guilt and helplessness as their compatriots were risking their lives on the frontline to following their children or partners who were already in the military, to hoping to build their own military careers.[42] Many also have spoken of the desire to fight for Ukraine, but as in the case of the women in the Red Army, this has not always translated into loyalty to the state or a particular ideology; it refers rather to the idea of the defense of the motherland and its people (*narod*).[43] As in the Red Army, the actual roles women have performed in the Ukrainian army defy traditional gender norms, but women continue to be perceived as an auxiliary force temporarily helping men to fight the war.

The roles women played in both cases are difficult to separate into categories of combatant and non-combatant. Enloe argues that the problem lies in the fact that the term combat is "infused with patriarchal understandings of masculinity (that is, what femininity is not)".[44] She specifically addresses the question of servicewomen who are not registered as combatants, but whose roles require them to be located in the combat zone: "Nurses, in practice, have served in combat regardless of official prohibitions banning their presence there. They have served in combat not because of unusual individual bravery – the stuff of nursing romances – but because they have been part of a military structure that has needed their skills near combat."[45] The Second World War saw not only Soviet female pilots, snipers, and gunners, but also non-combatants deployed at the frontline and in direct danger. According to Pennington, "More than 40 percent of all Red Army doctors, surgeons, paramedics, and medical orderlies, and 100 percent of nurses, were women."[46] Engel argues, "Only the troops themselves had greater casualties than women physicians who served with rifle battalions".[47] In the case of the conflict in the Donbas, the term "woman combatant" is an oxymoron, and in reality "seamstresses, accountants," and "office managers" are used in combat. Andriana Susak explains her situation at the frontline:

> **My commander came and said: "Andriana, we need to make a combat order. Everyone is being registered as part of the fire support company. How on earth can we explain that we have a seamstress [at the frontline]?" And I said: "Tell them that I am sewing socks for the boys. Include me in at least one combat order for all the time I have spent in the warzone."**[48]

The commanders, therefore, were fully aware of the precarious position of their servicewomen who performed combat roles.[49]




PHOTO: OLESYA KHROMEYCHUK

Hanna Kolomiitseva served during the Second World War as a wireless operator and air gunner.

The cases of the Red Army and of the Ukrainian Armed Forces confirm, albeit differently, the reluctance of military officials to reconcile the reality of servicewomen's experiences with their official position in the military hierarchy. Enloe states that "to close the gap between myth and reality would require military officials to resolve their own ideological gender contradictions, something many are loathe to do."[50] Thus, in both cases, although women ended up fulfilling a great variety of roles, those in traditionally feminine jobs were perceived as helping the men to fight the war, while those performing combat duties were seen as male substitutes, engaging in these positions temporarily and only due to the circumstances, and their exceptionality was emphasized. In both cases, there was a degree of secrecy when it came to the recruitment of women; their contribution was accepted, but not widely advertised.

Jean Bethke Elshtain states, "War is a structure of experience."[51] We tell war stories in order to make sense of war experiences. These stories, in turn, perpetuate our understanding of war, including its gender order. Elshtain argues that although the accepted view of women is of "the noncombatant many" – "embodying values and virtues at odds with war's destructiveness, representing home and hearth and the humble verities of everyday life" – there also exist tales of the "ferocious few," that is, "women who reversed cultural expectations by donning warrior's garb and doing battle".[52] However, as Elshtain points out, "their existence as fact and myth seems not to have put much of a dent in the overall edifice of the way war figures in the structure of male and female experience and reactions."[53] As both cases studied here demonstrate, fulfilling "masculine" duties does not guarantee being treated the same as men. In a situation where labor in the military is divided according to traditional perceptions of gender roles, a soldier of even the lowest rank is likely to have a higher standing than a woman, regardless of the nature of her actual involvement in the army. An assumption that participation in the military can grant marginalized groups, including women, a chance to acquire full citizenship, and, subsequently, a greater degree of equality has been criticized by scholars and refuted by numerous examples in history.[54] The two cases discussed here demonstrate not only that "exceptional" women did not necessarily acquire full citizenship, but point to the fact that this very "exceptionality" sometimes prevented them from attaining the respect of a society guided by gender stereotypes. The labels that were applied to them also extended to the "ordinary" servicewomen.

**"AS BOTH CASES STUDIED HERE DEMONSTRATE, FULFILLING 'MASCULINE' DUTIES DOES NOT GUARANTEE BEING TREATED THE SAME AS MEN."**

One of the popular tropes in stories of Red Army servicewomen is their supposed promiscuity. Red Army women have frequently suffered from the label of a "field wife" (*pokhodno-polevaia zhena*, PPZh) and the assumption that they went to the frontline to find themselves a husband.[55] Hanna Kolomiitseva, who served during the Second World War as a wireless operator and air gunner, recounted that her father made her promise not to form any intimate relationships in the military: "When I was joining the army, my father told me, 'You are my pure [*chistaia*] girl; I beg you to come back the same.' I gave him my word. He said, 'Don't let anyone kiss you on the lips, only on your cheek.' And that is what I did."[56] Given the ratio of women to men at the frontline, and that soldiers were granted leave only in the event of serious wounding or "in exceptional cases for special achievements", sexual relations at the front took many forms from consensual to coercive.[57] The practice of securing a "field wife" was widespread – for women, this often meant that one sexual partner, especially of a senior rank, would protect them from the sexual harassment of others; for men, especially in senior positions, it meant a feeling of entitlement to

seek sexual favors from servicewomen under their command. Anna Bebykh, a searchlight operator during the Second World War, had to prematurely leave the hospital where she was being treated for her wounds because she was being sexually harassed by a man in a senior position:

> **When I was in the hospital, I was harassed by a major. Can you imagine? He kept trying to kiss me. For goodness sake! I started to scream. I discharged myself from the hospital. I said to the doctor, "What is this?" And she answered, "Well, they got accustomed to it." I said, "Who made them accustomed to it?" [and she answered]: "Well, there are different people out there."**[58]

It is notable that Bebekh's story includes not only complaints about men's behavior, but that it also hints that women themselves were to blame for such behavior and confirms the widespread disdain for the so-called "field wives". However, Pennington argues, "male veterans seem more likely to categorize military women as 'field wives'. Female veterans often distinguish between a small group of 'field wives' and other women."[59]

Seven decades later, military women still find it difficult to avoid the assumption of promiscuity. Iryna Kosovs'ka, a member of the Ukrainian Volunteer Corps, explicitly compares the way women were perceived in the Second World War and how her contemporaries were viewed. She states that "both during and after World War II many women who had served in the army faced unfounded insults, gossip, and humiliation based on the assumption of their promiscuity." She continues by arguing that such views are still held in Ukraine today: "Many elderly women I encountered claimed that promiscuity was the only reason why a girl would join the army."[60] The perception of women who come to the frontline as potential sexual partners rather than military comrades also persists among military men. This creates the need to secure a "protector" against others' sexual harassment, thereby creating a modern-day equivalent of the so-called "field wife". Although such semi-consensual relationships put women into precarious positions, and make them highly dependent on their male partners, as Marta Havryshko argues, violence in military partnerships in the conflict zone receives little attention because it occurs in the context of mass extreme violence, where individual expressions of violence can seem insignificant.[61] In the case of the conflict in the Donbas, with only a few exceptions, the discussion of gender-based violence perpetrated by "our boys" as opposed to the enemy remains taboo.

One of the reasons for the lack of discussion of the mistreatment of women by their fellow military men is the heroization of military men and the adoption of militarized culture in which heteronormative militarized masculinity is celebrated and unchallenged. While the Red Army men were hailed as heroes, regardless of their actual achievements in the military, decorated women were often reluctant to wear their medals at victory parades in order to avoid the accusation that their awards were not for "combat services" but for "sexual favors" (*"za boevye zaslugi"/"za polovye uslugi"*). Zoia Nyzhnychenko said that when she told people that she had served as a nurse during the war, some replied, "Oh, yes, she served there, we all know *how*".[62] Women therefore preferred to hide their military past. Karen Petrone tells the story of Vera Malakhova, who also served as a nurse and even took part in the Battle of Stalingrad:

> **Her husband encouraged her to wear her medals to a May Day parade a few years after the war, saying "Put them on. You're going with me, you earned them. I know everything there is about you, and you earned them honestly." Nevertheless, when her husband lagged behind, a man accosted her, saying "Here comes a frontline W[hore]."**[63]

As this story demonstrates, a woman needed a man, in this case her husband, to "guarantee" her adequacy as a soldier, though even such guarantees did not fully protect her from the public perception.

While women in contemporary Ukraine can talk about their experiences in the military more openly, their stories still cause a certain degree of discomfort in a society that largely expects women to be at home rather than fighting in a war. Oksana Ivantsiv, one of the makers of a documentary film about women who fight in the Donbas, says that women find it hard to return from the war zone for the fear of being rejected by society:

> **I heard stories about men who are ashamed to go to the train station to meet their wives who are coming back from the war, because they feel uncomfortable and do not know how to react. At the same time, we have completely opposite instances when men [returning from war] are welcomed as heroes.**[64]

The perception that women should not seem braver than men or be seen to take a leading role is internalized by servicewomen. Susak remembers when during one of the attacks she tried to encourage male recruits to come out from their hiding place:

> **During one of the assaults, paratroopers hid under the "Ural" [a large army truck], we were fired at, and I had to motivate these young guys somehow. They were really young, twenty, twenty-two years of age. So, I come under this "Ural" and simply drag them out, saying: "Let's go, there is no fire any more, let's go, don't worry!" And they see that I am a woman. […] I am standing first in line, but the boys say, "Look, at least go to the back, please." And I say, "Fine, you lead the way, it's okay."**[65]

Thus, even in times of danger and when the inadequacy of gender stereotypes is obvious, both men and women are prepared to perform traditional masculinity and femininity in order not to disturb the gender order prevalent in the war and dominant outside of the war zone.

Traditional gender norms are not disturbed with any lasting



results even by the existence of celebrated servicewomen such as the Red Army sniper L'udmyla Pavlichenko or the Ukrainian pilot and veteran of the war in Donbas Nadiia Savchenko. Both women might have made women's presence in the war zone more visible, but this did not translate into significant practical improvements for the majority of women in the military.[66] Individual women who were hailed as heroines were used instrumentally by their respective states. Markwick and Charon-Cardona argue: "Pavlichenko's reputation as a lethal sniper was not just deployed on the battlefield or the home front. Soviet authorities clearly believed the 'heroic' role of women in general and her reputation in particular could sway international public opinion in support of the war against the 'fascist hordes'."[67] She represented the USSR in the USA, Canada, and the UK, urging the Allies to open a second front in western Europe. The Sunday Mirror's impression of Pavlichenko is very telling about the role she was supposed to fulfill as a soldier and as a woman. The 1942 article details the meeting between the "heroine of Russia's [sic] front line" and "just a woman of Britain":

> **"I am Mrs. Collett," she said to this sturdy, upright woman the world respects as a soldier.**
>
> **Then she bent down, placed the flowers in Lieutenant Pavlichenko's hands, and opened her mouth to speak. […] No words came. She wanted to say so much, but instead, she placed her hand on the soldier-woman's shoulder and talked by looking into her eyes.**
>
> **Yes, they both understood – the mother and the soldier. To both of them that look meant that one day their children would be free to walk the streets in peace. The ordinary woman of Britain was saying to her counterpart in Russia: "Thank you for helping that day nearer."**[68]

These two women, despite the fact that one of them had 300 kills as a sniper to her name, are still presented as women, contemplating the peaceful future as women should.

The situation with Savchenko is similar. After she was captured in the Donbas, she was put on trial in Russia for allegedly directing a mortar attack that killed two Russian journalists in eastern Ukraine and was sentenced to twenty-two years in prison. She quickly became "a symbol both of a new chapter in Ukrainian history – and the ensuing stand-off between Russia and Ukraine."[69] The hashtag #freesavchenko was used by politicians, diplomats, and activists in the conflict and became synonymous with a call to support Ukraine.[70] Thus a woman who was once prevented from training to become a pilot because of the gender restrictions in the Ukrainian military suddenly became a heroic figure and an embodiment of Ukraine itself: resilient and defiant, but in need of international support.[71]

The examples of Savchenko and Pavlichenko are indicative of a trend in which the roles women take on in the military have little influence on women's wider emancipation. Both women served as role models for other women, but neither of them set herself the aim of ensuring gender equality in the army, and their experience and fame did not suffice to challenge the wider restrictions servicewomen faced. As Dombrowski argues, it would be naïve "to insist that women can transform military culture without understanding how military culture transforms 'women'".[72] The examples of Savchenko and Pavlichenko, but also those of the less "remarkable" women discussed above, demonstrate that participation alone, even in high numbers and in "masculine" roles, or as outstanding fighters, does not necessarily lead to the reform of the patriarchal culture of the military and beyond. On the contrary, the presence of women in the military as temporary helpers or substitutes for men can in fact serve to reinforce the gender order that is already in place.

An acceptance of gender stereotypes is conducive to the celebration of traditional gender war roles, with the military man at the pinnacle of the hierarchy. Militarization of society, in turn, strengthens traditional gender order outside the war zone. This vicious circle produces a situation in which women's entrance into the military can only be publically visible on a symbolic level. It is difficult to imagine an exhibition telling the story of the USSR's involvement in the Second World War without the famous 1941 poster by Iraklii Toidze "Motherland is calling", depicting a woman wrapped in red garb holding a piece of paper with the military oath on it. The army of loyal children is represented by the rifles behind the woman. While this symbolic image of a woman was omnipresent, the stories of real women were much harder to come by.

**"THE PORTRAYAL OF 'WOMAN' NOT ONLY AS MOTHERLAND BUT AS A MOTHER WAS WIDESPREAD DURING THE WAR."**

The portrayal of "woman" not only as motherland but as a mother was widespread during the war. In the post-war years, when the Soviet population had to come to terms with its colossal losses, the cult of motherhood only grew stronger. Post-war society, which understood heroism as an ultimate value, awarded women who gave birth to five or more children with the title of "Heroine Mother". Engel states that although in the post-war period "the state-controlled media continued to praise women for their accomplishments and sacrifices on the home front, it virtually effaced their military role. And in postwar monuments, fiction, art, and film the warrior is invariably male and only men fight at the front."[73]

The collapse of the USSR renewed an interest in the history of the war and women's participation in it. Svetlana Alexievich's *Unwomanly Face of War* caused a sensation in the post-Soviet countries and beyond, but outside of academic debate, its mark on the way servicewomen were perceived was limited.[74] Even now it is difficult to find examples of popular rhetoric that challenges the previously established stereotypes. Although female veterans are becoming more and more visible as fewer male vet-

erans are around to attend the parades, much of the celebratory or commemorative practices related to the Second World War in the post-Soviet region are focused on the the heroic male narratives of the glorious victory. Women's war stories are not excluded entirely, but as in the actual war, they take a subordinate place to the narratives about male soldiers.[75]

In the context of the hostilities in eastern Ukraine, the representation of Ukraine's military history has become increasingly important for the state. Since the Maidan protests and throughout the conflict in the Donbas, the representation of Ukrainian military men as modern-day Cossacks has increased.[76] The representation of women has continued to emphasize their symbolic and auxiliary place: on the one hand, they have been portrayed as symbols of the motherland, and on the other, their image has been highly sexualized.[77] Servicewomen have not been entirely invisible, but they have also tended to be objectified, as in a series of so-called patriotic pin-ups depicting scantily-clad women in uniforms from various branches of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, widely circulated on the social media.[78]

As the conflict progressed, the militarization of society became ubiquitously visible from the highly gendered army recruitment posters on the streets of Ukraine – for instance, depicting a little girl saying, "Daddy, will you defend me?" – to the fashion style of Ukrainian politicians.[79] From the start of the conflict, President Petro Poroshenko could regularly be seen sporting a full military uniform. Battalion commanders-*cum*-people's deputies preferred camouflage to business suits to attend parliamentary sessions. The former prime minister, Yulia Tymoshenko, while not wearing a real uniform, chose stylized military jackets for public appearances. This made a particularly uncomfortable sight given the dismal state of the Ukrainian army, which lacked basic uniforms, not to mention the total absence of uniform supplies for servicewomen at the front.[80]

The militarization of society did not stop with politicians' wardrobes. Since the start of the conflict in the Donbas, the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (*Ukrains'kyi instytut natsional'noi pam"iati*, UINP), the central executive body operating under the Cabinet of Ministers, has prepared a number of projects and exhibitions celebrating the military.[81] In contrast to the post-war representation of the Red Army, women have not been excluded from the projects. On the contrary, a special exhibition entitled "War Makes No Exceptions: Female History of the Second World War," opened in 2016 and has been touring the country since. Among thirteen stories selected by the UINP to tell about women's experiences are several about servicewomen, including three members of the Red Army.[82] The exhibition recognizes that during the Second World War, "at the frontline, women mastered all military professions: in aviation and the navy, in infantry and cavalry, intelligence, communications and medical care. There even appeared a linguistic problem, as words such as tank operator, infantryman, and machine gunner had no feminine equivalent."[83] The UINP stresses that "the theme of the tragic and heroic women's fates will also help to make connections with the participation of our female compatriots – the military, physicians, and volunteers – in the contemporary confrontation with Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine," thus recognizing the parallels between the participation of women in the Second World War and in the ongoing military conflict.[84] However, the exhibition does not raise the question of the gender inequality within which women functioned in both cases. The parallels highlighted by the UINP emphasize the victimhood and/or heroism of the women, but not the ongoing inadequacy of the legal system, supplies, and even the language used to describe servicewomen's experiences both now and seventy years ago.[85]

The UINP continued to prepare exhibitions on the theme of war and the Ukrainian military tradition, and in 2016 it presented a project called "Warriors: History of the Ukrainian Military".[86] Two women were included among the twenty warriors displayed in the exhibition. One represented the women of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army,[87] and the other depicted an actual ATO veteran, Iryna Tsvila, who was described on the poster as a "warrior of the 'Sich' volunteer battalion".[88] The word "warrior" (*voiak*) was used in its masculine form, thus highlighting the preference of the official institutions to avoid the feminization of military professions even in language.[89] While the poster depicted a female warrior, it did not even mention the participation of women more broadly in the volunteer battalions in the conflict in the Donbas. This partial visibility of women thus strengthens the overall image of them as a symbolic and supportive force and emphasizes the prevalent ideas of gender roles.

**"THE INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF WOMEN'S MILITARIZATION, THE PREJUDICES, AND THE GENDER NORMS PREVALENT SEVENTY YEARS AGO CONTINUE TO PLAY A PART TODAY."**

The conflicts discussed here resulted in the militarization of their respective societies. In the USSR, militarization was total, with the economy and much of the population working exclusively for the needs of the army and the front.[90] In Ukraine, the hostilities in the Donbas region, although of a much smaller scale, also encouraged militarization of many aspects of life.[91] In such contexts, the militarization of women was inevitable, and there were many women who, like men, chose to contribute to the war effort. However, the entrance of women into the military, in both cases, was seen as a contingent measure, and for the duration of the conflict only. Pennington argues that "while women were at the front, the Soviets instituted gender segregation in the educational system and the exclusion of women from the newly created Suvorov cadet schools." She continues by stating, "Performance was irrelevant to Soviet decision making about whether to allow women to remain in military service, and there is strong evidence that during the postwar period, the Soviet government deliberately obscured women's wartime achievements."[92] Traditional gender roles were also reinforced outside of the military with the heroization of motherhood and the strengthening of pronatalist policies.

In the case of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, it is too early to draw firm conclusions. There is evidence of some reforms, especially the expansion of the list of available positions in the army. Martsenyuk and Grytsenko point out that the Ministry of Defense has hired "an external gender expert, who works closely with the ministry representatives in different structures."[93] The reforms, however, have been introduced as a reaction to the situation on the ground and to pressure from veterans and feminist activists, and they continue to be very limited. As in the case of the post-war USSR, much will depend on the general attitude to gender equality in Ukraine both among politicians in power and in society more widely, which at the time of writing leaves much to be desired.[94] The experience of women's active participation in the Second World War, to some extent, shapes the understanding of women's roles in war and provides role models for women who join the contemporary Ukrainian Armed Forces.[95] At the same time, the instrumentalization of women's militarization, the prejudices, and the gender norms prevalent seventy years ago continue to play a part today.

The cases discussed here point to the fact that militarization of women might not only fail in challenging gender stereotypes, but might even result in their consolidation. In both cases, the roles women occupied directly reflected the demands of the army, but their recruitment was chaotic and influenced by gender stereotypes. Women fought in the ranks of a state-sanctioned military and saw their contribution to warfare as part of the defense of the motherland. Their popular image, however, was more linked to the motherland itself than the warriors who defended it. Those women who challenged the stereotype of women as a supporting force did not escape being perceived as women first and foremost. Their exceptionality was instrumentalized by their respective states and simply served to prove the rule. The study of servicewomen's experiences of warfare juxtaposed with popular perceptions of them leaves a pessimistic impression of the potential of militarization for women's emancipation and gender equality. Joshua S. Goldstein argues that "the gender-war connection is very complex" and "none of us knows the correct direction or doctrine that will end war, equalize gender, or unlink war from gender."[96] He nevertheless believes that the "war system is not set in stone, nor driven by any simple formula, but is alive, complex, and changeable."[97] Understanding how gender roles came to be formed within war systems and why they have changed so little over the decades creates possibilities to examine how they can be altered in the future.

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9 Markwick and Charon-Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 150. These figures are only for the regular army and do not include the partisans. Markwick and Charon-Cardona estimate that there were 28,000 women in the Soviet partisan units. See Markwick and Charon-Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 1.

10 See Martin Mccauley, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union* (London: Routledge, 2014); Barbara Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Women* (Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 1997); Amnon Sella, *The Value of Human Life in Soviet Warfare* (London: Routledge, 2005).

11 The military hostilities in the Donbas, which started in April 2014 and are ongoing at the time of writing, are referred to in everyday speech in Ukraine as a war. The official term used by the Ukrainian authorities and much of the media was Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) until October 2017, when it was replaced by "security operations for the reestablishment of sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the country". For further discussion see Nataliya Lebid', "Vzhe ne ATO, ale shche ne viina", [No longer ATO, but not war yet] *Ukraina moloda*, October 6, 2017, http://www.umoloda.kiev.ua/number/3221/180/116472/, accessed October 29, 2017.

12 Official response of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine to author's information request, October 9, 2017, author's private archive.

13 As of November 2017, 55,629 women were employed by the Ukrainian Armed Forces (around 2,400 of whom joined in 2017). While many of them hold civilian posts, 24,298 (almost 10 per cent of total military personnel) hold military positions. Almost 3,000 women are officers, but there are no female generals. See "U Zbroinykh Sylakh Ukrainy prokhodiat' viis'kovu sluzhbu i pratsiuiut' 55629 zhinok," [55,629 women serve and work in the Armed Forces of Ukraine], Ukrainian Military Pages, November 22, 2017, http://www.ukrmilitary.com/2017/11/female-soldiers.html, accessed January 9, 2017; "Chysel'nist' ukrains'koi armii nablyzhaiet'sia do 'zakonodavchoho limitu'," [The number of Ukrainian army personnel is approaching the "legislative limit"], *Ukrinform*, October 3, 2017, https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/2317217-ciselnist-ukrainskoi-armii-nablizaetsa-do-zakonodavcogo-limitu.html, accessed January 9, 2018; "V armii maie sluzhyty stil'ky zhinok, skil'ky bazhaie, – ministr oborony Ukrainy," [The army should recruit all women who are willing to serve – Minister of Defense of Ukraine], *Povaha. Kampaniia proty seksyzmu*, November 24, 2017, http://povaha.org.ua/v-armiji-maje-sluzhyty-stilky-zhinok-skilky-bazhaje-ministr-oborony-ukrajiny/, accessed January 9, 2018; "V ZSU pochaly rozrobku bilyzny dlia viis'kovykh-zhinok," [Ukrainian Armed Forces start developing underwear for servicewomen], TSN, September 28, 2017, https://tsn.ua/ukrayina/u-zsu-pochali-rozrobku-bilizni-dlya-viyskovih-zhinok-999855.html, accessed January 9, 2018. See also Berlins'ka, Martsenyuk, Kvit, and Grytsenko, "Nevydymyi batal'ion".

14 Maria Berlins'ka in "Viina – tse tezh zhinocha sprava, i nashi zhinky na fronti voiuiut' dobre, – avtorky proektu 'Nevydymyi batal'ion'," [The war is also a woman's business, and our women are fighting well at the frontline – authors of the "Invisible Battalion" project], *Hromads'ke Radio*, June 9, 2017, https://hromadskeradio.org/programs/hromadska-hvylya/viyna-ce-i-zhinocha-sprava-v-nas-na-fronti-ye-zhinky-i-vony-voyuyut-dobre-avtorky-proektu-nevydymyy-batalyon, accessed June 10, 2017. See also Berlins'ka, Martsenyuk, Kvit and Grytsenko, *'Nevydymyi batal'ion': uchast' zhinok u viis'kovykh diiakh v ATO*.

15 Pennington, "Offensive Women," 779.

16 Markwick and Charon-Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 14. See also Pennington, "Offensive Women," 779.

17 Markwick and Charon-Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 32.

18 Pennington, "Offensive Women," 779.

19 Anne Eliot Griesse and Richard Stites, "Russia: Revolution and War" in Nancy Loring Goldman, ed., *Female Soldiers– Combatants or Noncombatants?. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Westport CT.: Greenwood, 1982), 68.

20 Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, 28.

21 For a discussion of the changing gender policy in the USSR, see Wendy Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993). For analysis of the Soviet reaction to German propaganda, see Markwick and Charon-Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 44–46.

22 See "Prikaz NKO SSSR 0099 ot 08.10.41 g. O sformirovanii zhenskikh aviatsionnykh polkov VVS Krasnoi Armii", [Order NKO SSSR 0099, dated October 8, 1941, on the formation of women's air regiments in the air force of the Red Army], in Markwick and Charon-Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 84–116.

23 Markwick and Charon-Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 149.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 151.

26 Interviewee Hanna Kolomiitseva, June 8, 2016, Kyiv; Interviewee Feoktista Rabina, June 8, 2016, Kyiv; Interviewee Anna Bebykh, November 12, 2015, Kyiv; Interviewee Halyna Pavlikova, November 8, 2015, L'viv.

27 Engel, "The Womanly Face of War," 138.

28 Interviewee Rabina.

29 Markwick and Charon-Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 180.

30 For a discussion of the military conflict in eastern Ukraine, see Serhy Yekelchyk, *The Conflict in Ukraine: What Everyone Needs to Know*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West* (London: Yale University Press, 2014).

31 The events that have come to be known as the Maidan were a wave of protests, demonstrations and civil unrest that took place in Kyiv and throughout Ukraine in late 2013 – early 2014. The protests took place on and around Independence Square (*Maidan Nezalezhnosti*, better known simply as *Maidan*). See Olesya Khromeychuk, "Negotiating Protest Spaces on the Maidan: A Gender Perspective," *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 2 no.1, (2016): 9–47; Olesya Khromeychuk, "Gender and Nationalism on the Maidan," in *Ukraine's Euromaidan: Analyses of a Civil Revolution , ed. David R. Marples and Frederick V. Mills* (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2015), 123–145; Sarah D. Phillips, "The Women's Squad in Ukraine's Protests: Feminism, Nationalism and Militarism on the Maidan," *American Ethnologist* 41 no. 3, (2014): 414–426; Olga Onuch and Tamara Martsenyuk, "Mothers and Daughters of the Maidan: Gender, Repertoires of Violence, and the Division of Labour in Ukrainian Protests," *Social, Health, and Communication Studies Journal. Contemporary Ukraine: A case of Euromaidan* 1 no. 1, (2014): 105–26.

32 Interviewee Iuliia Tolopa, June 9, 2016, Kyiv.

33 Iuliia Tolopa in "My znaishly rosiis'ku BMP, i ia stala komandyrom – rosiianka z 'Aidaru'," [We found a Russian infantry fighting vehicle, and I became a commander – Russian woman from "Aidar"], *Hromads'ke Radio*, October 15, 2015, https://hromadskeradio.org/en/programs/hromadska-hvylya/my-znayshly-rosiysku-bmp-i-ya-stala-komandyrom-rosiyanka-z-aydaru, accessed June 14, 2017.

34 Interviewee Tolopa. Tolopa's position at the frontline was illegal, not only because of her gender, but also because of her nationality. In 2015, the number of foreign nationals fighting on the side of the Ukrainian state in the Donbas region was estimated at over a thousand. See Sviatoslav Khomenko, "'Inozemnyi lehion' po-ukrains'ky: khorosha novyna chy zakon bez sensu," ["Foreign Legion" Ukrainian-style: good news or a meaningless law?], *BBC Ukrainian*, October 7, 2015, para. 7, http://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2015/10/151007_ukr_army_foreigners_sx, accessed June 14, 2017.

35 Andriana Susak in "Viina na Donbasi ochyma ukrains'kykh zhinok u dokumental'nomu fil'mi 'Nevydymyi batalion'," [The war in the Donbas as witnessed by Ukrainian women in the documentary film The Invisible Battalion], *Ukraine Crisis Media Center*, June 9, 2017, http://uacrisis.org/ua/57284-nevidimij-bataljon#prettyPhoto/0/, accessed June 11, 2017.

36 See Decree no. 337, "Tymchasovyi perelik viis'kovo-oblikovykh spetsial'nostei riadovoho, serzhants'koho i starshyns'koho skladu z urakhuvanniam tykh, na iaki dozvoliaiet'sia pryznachaty viis'kovosluzhbovtsiv-zhinok, ta vidpovidnykh im viis'kovykh zvan' i taryfnykh rozriadiv posad," [Interim list of staff positions for privates, sergeants, sergeants-major, including those, for which the appointment of female military personnel is permitted, and the corresponding ranks and wage categories], *Ministerstvo Oborony Ukrainy*, May 27, 2014, http://zakon3.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0600-14#n116, accessed June 14, 2017.



37 See Decree No 337.

38 Although conscription was supposed to end in 2013, following the start of the conflict in eastern Ukraine it was resumed. See "Ukrainian Parliament Recommends Resumption of Mandatory Conscription," *Radio Free Europe.:Radio Liberty*, April 17, 2014, http://www.rferl.org/a/ukrainian-parliament-recommends-resumption-of-mandatory-conscription/25352661.html, accessed June 14, 2017. The punishment for evasion of conscription is between two and five years' imprisonment, but throughout the conflict, men all over Ukraine found semi-legal and illegal ways to avoid the draft. See "Ukhylyvsia vid mobilizatsii – vidpovidai po zakonu," [Evaded mobilization – answer before the law], *Ministrerstvo oborony Ukrainy*, http://www.mil.gov.ua/ministry/aktualno/do-uvagi-vijskovosluzhbovcziv/uhilivsya-vid-mobilizaczii-vidpovidaj-po-zakonu.html, accessed June 14, 2017.

39 See Khromeychuk, "From the Maidan to the Donbas".

40 See Decree no. 292, "Zminy do Tymchasovoho pereliku viis'kovo-oblikovykh spetsial'nostei riadovoho, serzhants'koho i starshyns'koho skladu z urakhuvanniam tykh, na iaki dozvoliaiet'sia pryznachaty viis'kovosluzhbovtsiv-zhinok, ta vidpovidnykh im viis'kovykh zvan' i taryfnykh rozriadiv posad," [Amendments to the Interim list of staff positions for privates, sergeants, sergeants-major, including those for which the appointment of female military personnel is allowed, and the corresponding ranks and wage categories], *Ministerstvo Oborony Ukrainy*, June 3, 2016, http://zakon3.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0881-16/paran7#n17, accessed June 14, 2017.

41 Martsenyuk, Grytsenko, Kvit, "The 'Invisible Battalion'," 183. See Decree no. 292.

42 Interviewee Tolopa, Interviewee Maria Berlins'ka, June 9, 2016, Kyiv. See also Berlins'ka, Martsenyuk, Kvit, and Grytsenko, *Nevydymyi Batal'ion*, 25.

43 Interviewee Berlins'ka. See also Olesia Kotliarova in "Odkrovennia divchyny-dobrovol'tsia: zhinky na viini moral'no vytryvalishi," [Revelations of a female volunteer: women in war have higher moral endurance], *Dyvys' Info*, July 25, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YtOYQKmXAKw, access February 6, 2017.

44 Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 223.

45 Ibid.

46 Pennington, "Offensive Women," 788.

47 Engel, "The Womanly Face of War," 141.

48 Andriana Susak in "Viina na Donbasi ochyma ukrains'kykh zhinok".

49 The semi-legal or illegal position of women at the frontline meant that they were ineligible for remuneration and benefits to which male combat fighters were entitled. See Berlins'ka, Martsenyuk, Kvit, and Grytsenko, *Invisible Battalion*, 24–25.

50 Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 223.

51 Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), x.

52 Ibid., xiii, 8.

53 Ibid., 8.

54 See Enloe, *Maneuvers*; Nira Yuval-Davis, *Nation and Gender* (London: Sage, 1997).

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56 Interviewee Kolomiitseva.

57 Budnitskii, "Muzchiny i zhenshchiny," para. 18.

58 Interviewee Bebykh.

59 Pennington, "Offensive Women," 809.

60 Iryna Kosovs'ka, "Eastern Europe's Women in World War II," review of *Zhinky Tsentral'noi ta Skhidnoi Ievropy u Druhii svitovii viini: henderna spetsyfika dosvidu v chasy ekstrymal'noho nasyl'stva*, [Central and East European Women in the Second World War: Gendered Experiences in a Time of Extreme Violence], ed. Gelinada Grinchenko, Kateryna Kobchenko, Oksana Kis', (Kyiv: Art Knyha, 2015), *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 2, no. 1, (2016): 231–236 (234). The Ukrainian Volunteer Corps was formed in the summer of 2014 as a military wing of the "Pravyi Sektor" (Right Sector) nationalist organisation. Unlike the units of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, volunteer battalions such as the Ukrainian Volunteer Corps were more flexible in their recruitment practices and thus more likely to accept women into their ranks. However, the nationalist ideology followed by this group affects their restricted perception of gender roles in the military and in society more widely. See Olena Bilozers'ka, "Zhinky v Dobrovol'chomu ukrains'komu korpusi 'Pravoho sektora'," [Women in the Ukrainian Volunteer Corps of the "Right Sector"], documentary film, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w64ZRrf4NuE, accessed January 16, 2018.

61 Havryshko, "Henderne nasyl'stvo v partnerstvakh viis'kovych," para. 4.

62 Interviewee Zoia Nyzhnychenko, June 8, 2016, Kyiv. Emphasis as in speech.

63 Karen Petrone, "Between Exploitation and Empowerment: Soviet Women Negotiate Stalinism," in *Gender Politics and Mass Dictatorship. Global Perspectives , ed. Jie-Hyun Lim and Karen Petrone* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 125–141, (137).

64 Oksana Ivantsiv in "Viina – tse tezh zhinocha sprava". In 2017, Maria Berlins'ka produced a documentary film, Invisible Battalion, which highlights the reality of women's experiences at the frontline. See the Invisible Battalion Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/InvisibleBattalion/, accessed October 30, 2017.

65 Susak in "Viina na Donbasi ochyma ukrains'kykh zhinok".

66 For Pavlichenko's story see Liubov' Vinogradova, *Angely mshcheniia: Zhenshchiny-snaipery Velikoi otechestvennoi* [Angels of vengeance: Women snipers in the Great Patriotic War], (Moscow: KoLibri, 2016). For a discussion of Savchenko's career, see Maxine Boersma, "How Nadiya Savchenko became Ukraine's Joan of Arc," *New Statesman*, November 21, 2016, http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2016/11/how-nadiya-savchenko-became-ukraines-joan-arc, accessed June 14, 2017.

67 Markwick and Charon-Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 207.

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69 Natalia Antonova, Maxim Edwards, Mikhail Kaluzhsky and Tom Rowley, "#FreeSavchenko," *OpenDemocracy Russia*, February 23, 2016, https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/natalia-antonova-maxim-edwards-mikhail-kaluzhsky-thomas-rowley/nadiya-savchenko, accessed June 13, 2017.

70 See "The Whole World Calls on Russia to #FreeSavchenko," https://storify.com/MFA_Ukraine/the-whole-world-calls-on-russia-to-freesavchenko, accessed June 13, 2017.

71 See Olesya Khromeychuk, "What Place For Women in Ukraine's Memory Politics?," *Open Democracy Russia*, October 10, 2016, https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/olesya-khromeychuk/what-place-for-women-in-ukraine-s-memory-politics, accessed June 13, 2017; Christopher

Miller, "The Many Faces of Nadia Savchenko," *RadioFreeEurope: RadioLiberty*, July 2016, https://www.rferl.org/a/the-many-faces-of-nadia-savchenko/27869488.html, accessed June 13, 2017.

72 Dombrowski, "Soldiers, Saints, or Sacrificial Lambs?," 4.

73 Engel, "The Womanly Face of War," 149.

74 Svetlana Aleksievich, *U voiny ne zhenskoe litso* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1988); Svetlana Alexievich, *The Unwomanly Face of War: An Oral History of Women in World War II* (London: Random House Publishing Group, 2017).

75 See National Museum of the History of Ukraine in World War II, http://www.warmuseum.kiev.ua, accessed June 13, 2017.

76 See Khromeychuk, "Negotiating Protest Spaces,"18–19.

77 See Amandine Regamey, "Falsehood in the War in Ukraine: The Legend of Women Snipers," *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies* 17 (2016), para. 24, https://pipss.revues.org/4222#ftn29, accessed June 19, 2017. See also Khromeychuk "From the Maidan to the Donbas".

78 "Patriotychnyi pin-ap: zvablyvo oholeni divchata i kamufliazh," [A patriotic pin-up: seductively undressed girls and camouflage], *TSN*, October 2, 2014, https://tsn.ua/tsikavinki/patriotichniy-pin-ap-zvablivo-ogoleni-divchata-i-kamuflyazh-371856.html, accessed June 19, 2017.

79 See "Tatu, ty mene zakhystysh? – patriotychni plakaty v Sievierodonets'ku," [Daddy, will you defend me? – Patriotic posters in Sievierodonets'k], *Znaj.ua*, August 27, 2016, https://znaj.ua/news/regions/15440/tatu-ti-mene-zahistish-patriotichni-plakati-v-syevyerodonecku-foto.html, accessed June 14, 2017.

80 Servicewomen in the Donbas struggled to find uniforms and shoes that fit them and had to either buy these items at their own expense or get them through volunteer organizations. In this, their situation was very similar to that of the Red Army women, who at least in the initial stages of the war had to improvise with uniforms and army boots that were made to fit men and were mostly too large. See Berlins'ka, Martsenyuk, Kvit, and Grytsenko, *Nevydymyi Batal'ion*; Markwick and Charon-Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*; Aleksievich, *U voiny ne zhenskoe litso*.

81 The UINP invented an epithet for the Ukrainian people – an army-nation (*narod-viis'ko*) – thereby militarizing not only contemporary Ukrainians, but also their historic ancestors. See "Vitaiemo zakhysnykiv i zakhysnyts' zi sviatom! Ukraintsi – narod-viis'ko," [Congratulations to the male and female defenders on the holiday! Ukrainians are an army-nation], *Ukrains'kyi Instytut Natsional'noi Pam"iati*, 2015, http://www.memory.gov.ua/news/vitaemo-zakhisnikiv-i-zakhisnits-zi-svyatom-ukraintsi-narod-viisko, accessed June 14, 2017.

82 See "Viina ne robyt' vyniatkiv. Zhinochi istorii Druhoi svitovoi," [War makes no exceptions. Female history of the Second World War], *Ukrains'kyi Instytut Natsional'noi Pam"iati*, http://www.memory.gov.ua/news/viina-ne-robit-vinyatkiv-zhinochi-istorii-drugoi-svitovoi-informatsiini-materiali-dlya-zmi-do-v, accessed June 13, 2017.

83 "Viina ne robyt' vyniatkiv".

84 Ibid.

85 See Khromeychuk, "What place for women in Ukraine's memory politics?". Ukraine is not unique in such an approach to women's history by official institutions. For a discussion of the Polish case, see Weronika Grzebalska, *Płeć Powstania Warszawskiego* [The gender of Warsaw uprising], (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2014).

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87 For further information on the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, see Myroslav Shkandrij, *Ukrainian Nationalism: Politics, Ideology and Literature, 1929–1956* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); Oleksandr Zaitsev, *Ukrains'kyi integral'nyi natsionlalizm, (1920–1930 roky): Narysy intelektual'noi istorii* [Ukrainian Integral Nationalism, (1920–1930). Sketches on Intellectual History] (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2013); Grzegorz Motyka, *Ukraińska partyzantka 1942–1960. Działalność Organizacji Ukraińskich Nacjonalistów i Ukraińskiej Powstańczej Armii* [Ukrainian partisan movement 1942–1960: The activity of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army], (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, 2006).

88 "'Voiny: Istoriia ukrains'koho viis'ka'". The "Sich" volunteer battalion was formed in June 2014. In December 2015, it became the 4th Company of the "Kyiv" Regiment of the Special Police Patrol Service.

89 For a discussion of the use of feminine forms in the Ukrainian language, see Liudmyla Smoliar, "Try prychyny, chomu varto vzhyvaty feminityvy," [Three reasons for using feminine forms], *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, October 28, 2017, https://life.pravda.com.ua/columns/2017/10/28/227141/, accessed January 16, 2018.

90 See Mark Harrison, *Accounting for War: Soviet Production, Employment, and the Defence Burden, 1940–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Robert William Davies, Mark Harrison and S. G. Wheatcroft, *The Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union, 1913–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

91 Since the start of the conflict, the defense budget of Ukraine has seen a significant increase. Since 2016, it has been at 5% of the GDP. See "Military Budget," *GlobalSecurity.org*, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/ukraine/budget.htm, accessed June 15, 2017.

92 Pennington, "Offensive Women," 819.

93 Martsenyuk and Grytsenko, "Women and Military in Ukraine," 36.

94 The Ukrainian Parliament refuses to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence because the wording of the document contains terms such as "gender". See Valeriya Shyrokova, "Dev"yat' zapytan' pro domashnye nasyl'stvo i Stambul's'ku konventsiyu v Ukrayini," [Nine questions about domestic violence and the Istanbul Convention in Ukraine], *Povaha*, October 24, 2017, http://povaha.org.ua/dev-yat-zapytan-pro-domashnje-nasylstvo-i-stambulsku-konventsiyu-v-ukrajini/, accessed October 29, 2017; "Ukraine fails to ratify European convention on gender-based violence," *LB.ua*, November 17, 2017, paras. 3, 12, http://en.lb.ua/news/2016/11/17/2351_ukraine_fails_ratify_european.html, accessed June 19, 2017. See aslo "Ukrainian parliament considers bill to ban elective abortions," *Censor.net*, March 31, 2017, https://en.censor.net.ua/news/434136/ukrainian_parliament_considers_bill_to_ban_elective_abortions, accessed June 19, 2017.

95 See "Kazhut', shcho u viiny ne zhinoche oblychchia, ale vono i ne liuds'ke," [They say that war has an unwomanly face, but it is also inhuman], 112 UA, December 25, 2016, https://ua.112.ua/interview/kazhut-shcho-u-viiny-ne-zhinoche-oblychchia-ale-vono-ne-liudske-359659.html, accessed January 17, 2018.

96 Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 413.

97 Ibid., 413–414.

Polish women, soldiers of the Warsaw Uprising, after liberation of POW camp Oberlangen.

# Between gender blindness and nationalist herstory

## The history of Polish women in WWII as the site of an anti-modernist revolution

by **Weronika Grzebalska**


### abstract

This paper discusses the current "herstorical turn" in professional and popular historiography and memory of WWII in Poland: a growing interest in women and the distinctiveness of their wartime experiences. The paper starts by describing the three "ideal types" of professional and popular WWII history writing with regard to the position of women: the false universalism of a large part of professional historiography, the compensatory character of women's history that adds women to the picture without reframing the picture itself, and the recent "herstorical turn". Focusing on one dominant strand of this "herstorical turn" – nationalist herstory – the article reflects on the ways in which women's history has become one of the platforms a broader illiberal political shift that is currently ongoing in Central Europe.


**KEY WORDS**: Poland, Warsaw Uprising.

In the decades following 1945 in Poland, women's history of WWII constituted itself as field of study predominantly in response to the absence of women and gender from the historiography and the collective memory of the period. Both women's historians and female combatants engaging in history writing critically acknowledged the invisibility of women in mainstream narratives about the war, and they sought in their works to make women visible as participants in armed resistance. In contemporary Poland, however, this state of affairs in the field of WWII history and memory, as well as the rationale for feminist historical interventions, have changed significantly. The second decade of the 2000s marks an important turning point for the visibility of women in the popular history and collective memory of WWII, and it is characterized by an outbreak of popular interest in women's participation in the war. In recent

years, numerous books dedicated to women's participation in WWII have been published, along with documentaries, press articles, museum exhibitions, musical projects, social media initiatives, reenactment groups, and even t-shirts. In 2001 the Polish freedom fighter Elżbieta Zawacka observed critically that in the contemporary collective consciousness the Polish WWII soldier of any armed organization is a man,[1] but in 2014 the 70th anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising seemed to be all about women, with several books on the topic published and wide media coverage of the issue of women's participation.

Yet, while these various herstory initiatives certainly made women visible as actors and questioned the false universality of wartime experience, they often also uncritically naturalized femininity and masculinity, reproduced traditionalist ideas about women's place in WWII and its history, and used women's history as a didactic resource to promote a gendered and militarized concept of citizenship and nationhood. In fact, the major challenge that stands before feminist historians and herstory practitioners in today's Poland no longer seems to be the absence of women from historical narratives, but rather the mainstreaming of women into history in an illiberal, anti-modernist framework that fetishizes gender difference and reduces history writing to a tool for producing nationhood. The popularity of this nationalist herstory is of course part of a broader political shift that is currently ongoing in Central Europe. In this shift, a particular construction of WWII memory has become one of the discursive tools for the creation of an alternative illiberal mode of governance and community built on the rejection of liberalism and modernism and centered on the notions of nation, family, and tradition.[2]

My own work[3] on the Warsaw Uprising[4] of 1944 has been entangled in this broader shift. In the years 2009–2013, I was conducting an oral history project devoted to the gender politics of armed resistance in Warsaw. When I began my research, the myth of the Warsaw Uprising had been gaining ground, symbolically elevated and politically instrumentalized[5] by the Right since 2004 as the origin story of the post-1989 national collective. The myth, however, has long been a largely masculine one, as women and gender did not sufficiently figure in this story. Yet, when my book was published in late 2013, it entered a completely different political and public context from the one I had originally intended it for. It was no longer primarily with women's invisibility and the "white spots" of collective memory that the book needed to enter into dialogue. Rather, it was the nationalist herstory "boom" that it had to engage with, along with the instrumentalization of history in the service of right-wing illiberalism and the intensified attacks from conservative historians and far-right groups against "gender" in academia and beyond,[6] which also unfolded around the same time.

Building upon the arguments and analyses presented in my previous work[7] on the visibility and position of women in professional and popular historiography of the Warsaw Uprising, this paper discusses the current "herstorical turn" against the background of the state of mainstream professional and popular historiography, occasionally referring to history teaching and public memory about WWII as well. It describes the three "ideal types" of WWII professional and popular history writing with regard to the position of: the false universalism of a large part of professional historiography, the compensatory character of women's history that aimed to merely add women to the picture without reframing the picture itself, and the recent "herstorical turn" characterized by a growing interest in women and the distinctiveness of their experiences. Focusing on one dominant strand of this "herstorical turn" – nationalist herstory – the article also situates itself in the broader context of the illiberal political transformation that is currently ongoing in Poland. It reflects on the ways in which women's history has become one of the platforms for the production of a new anti-modernist commonsense that rejects liberal democratic values, as well as a tool for the re-militarization and re-gendering of citizenship.

## False universalism of the history of the Warsaw Uprising

To understand the recent "herstorical turn", one must first situate it against the background of professional historiography on the Warsaw Uprising. As I have argued,[8] this has up until very recently been written predominantly in the disciplinary framework of political and in military historiography, which centers its attention on what happened in the offices of politicians and diplomats, military headquarters, and on battlefields, limiting the scope of studied phenomena to the experiences of a narrow and predominantly male group of participants. As the German historians Angelika Epple and Angelika Schaser have observed, the political-military paradigm in historiography leads not only to the writing of the history of a particular male group in society consisting of political and military elites and worthy soldiers, but also to the universalization of their experiences as the history of the whole collective: "Under the guise of studying high politics, international affairs, anonymous structures and social developments, general history is quite often centered on the history of a specific male group in society – certainly without analyzing the masculinity of its members."[9] The invisibility of women can therefore be understood as a side effect of applying a narrow framework of political and military historiography, which focuses its attention on the center of power – high military and political ranks – a sphere where women have usually been underrepresented.

**"OF THE THIRTEEN HISTORY TEXTBOOKS PUBLISHED AFTER 1989 THAT I ANALYZED, NONE CONTAINED A NAME OR IMAGE OF A FEMALE MEMBER OF THE UNDERGROUND."**

The description provided by Epple and Schaser faithfully



Warsaw Uprising: Courier bringing new orders.

renders the character of the most renowned and widely read monographs on the Warsaw Uprising, e.g. those of Jerzy Kirchmayer,[10] Jan Ciechanowski,[11] and Norman Davies.[12] Because their aim was to present the political and military course of the uprising and the decisions that led to it, these authors largely omitted women from the narrative about the past, limiting the story to one "written primarily by men, for men, and about men", in which "women are, by design, supporting actors whose roles reflect masculinist notions of femininity and of women's proper 'place'".[13] If women appear in these works, they usually do so as witnesses accounting for the events, often lacking biographical information, and not as active agents.[14] This political-military paradigm also prevails in school curricula – out of the thirteen history textbooks published after 1989 that I analyzed,[15] none featured a name or image of a female member of the underground, and only one included a simple mention that women also took part in the uprising.

Likewise, the aforementioned paradigm has also shaped the official commemorative politics of the Polish Parliament.[16] Out of the 188 commemorative acts issued between 1989 and 2015 that commemorated people, organizations, and events connected to the war and the military, only one celebrated a woman – Irena Sendlerowa, who rescued Jewish children. An additional five acts mentioned women in passing while commemorating other events or organizations, albeit always as an anonymous collective – as "women" or "daughters of the Fatherland". Non-militaristic acts were not much better in this respect. Out of the rest of the total of 419 commemorative acts we analyzed, two memorialized female figures (the actress Helena Modrzejewska and the scientist Maria Curie-Skłodowska), and two more celebrated occasions associated with women as a collective (International Women's Day and Women's Suffrage).

While a simple lack of female figures in the narrative is an obvious example of women's invisibility in mainstream historical accounts, another instance is the omission of certain aspects of women's collective or individual biography that could challenge stereotypical ideas about women's wartime involvement and complicate the neat national master narrative. For instance, in books and encyclopedias women who participated in direct combat are often described as nurses and couriers. Likewise, in his description of the London mission of the emissary Elżbieta Zawacka, Norman Davies[17] leaves out the fact that one of its goals – which Zawacka personally underscores[18] – was to persuade the president-in-exile Władysław Raczkiewicz to improve the situation of women within the ranks by legally acknowledging their effort as military service equal to men's. In fact, emancipatory aspects of Women's military service[19] are ignored by most historical publications in favor of accentuating the patriotic dimension of women's military participation. The Warsaw Uprising Museum is another good example of this false universalism of national experience and its consequence – the invisibility in the exposition of issues such as women's gendered participation or Women's Military Service as a specific organizational structure and a lack of focus on the gendered experiences of insurgents and civilians. In fact, when I approached the Warsaw Uprising Museum in 2010 to access data about the percentage of women among the insurgents, I was informed that this largest of archival institutions did not possess such data due to the fact that its database simply did not include the variable "gender". This proved no obstacle for the helpful employees, but it revealed a lot about the character of public remembrance and history writing of the event before the "herstorical turn". The primacy of national frames of reference rests on the assumption that men and women shared similar experiences because belonging to the same nation and undergoing the same national oppression was of much greater significance than any gender differences. This underscoring of the unity of national experience, ostensibly undifferentiated by gender or other social parameters, leads to the exclusion of issues that do not fit easily into such a narrative.

## Filling in the blanks: women's history as an appendix

The first group that was very vocal in its criticism of the invisibility of women and their military (and paramilitary) structures in historical works about WWII was female veterans themselves. In 1951, Major Wanda "Lena" Gertz complained in a letter to her subordinates that the Polish Historical Institute in London not only omitted women in its book on the Home Army, but also refused to financially support efforts by the women's editorial committee to publish a supplement dedicated to women's participation.[20] Two decades later, Lieutenant-Colonel Grażyna

Major Wanda "Lena" Gertz served in WW1 masqueraded as a man. During WWII she commanded a women's diversion and sabotage unit.

PHOTO: WWW.ZAWACKA.PL

General Elżbieta Zawacka (in the center) and the commanders of the women's platoons, Garczyn 1939.

Lipińska analyzed three thousand publications on WWII and gave a speech in which she voiced concern that in the historical literature women usually lacked essential biographical information and often even surnames.[21] In 2001, Brigadier General Elżbieta Zawacka summarized women's visibility in historical research on WWII on a similar note: "These issues are not reflected in research plans of academic institutions. It is very hard to find them in the abundant publications about the Polish underground during WWII. The existing literature is very limited in providing systematic knowledge about women's wartime participation, its geographical and quantitative scope, and the types of service women were able to participate in."[22]

This disappointment with the omission of women from historical research pushed female combatants to launch various initiatives aimed at documenting and disseminating knowledge about their participation in WWII, among them publishing joint volumes, organizing conferences, setting up historical archives, and erecting monuments. The official politics of history in a given period has of course shaped the general conditions for research on women in the uprising. For example, while research on the Home Army was impossible under Stalinism,[23] the thaw of October 1956 brought about a new myth of "the unity of resistance" that permitted new research and publications on WWII.[24] After the thaw in the 1960s, Brigadier General Maria Wittek began the archiving of documents connected to women's military service that led in 1970 to the official founding of the Commission for Women's History in the Struggle for Independence in 1970. About the same time, materials about women's wartime participation were also being gathered by Elżbieta Zawacka. The first academic publications dedicated to Polish women's WWII participation started coming out in the 1970s and early 1980s, and although their focus was predominantly on members of the Peasant Battalions and the Polish People's Army,[25] and although they sometimes constructed women's participation in the framework of "the fight for the Poland of the working people",[26] several also concentrated on the wartime participation of women who belonged to the Home Army and Polish Armed Forces in the West.[27] As the Polish sociologist Barbara Szacka has argued, along with the revival of romantic national liberation motifs and the growing significance of samizdat publications, the 1980s saw the popularization of the image of the Warsaw Uprising as a symbol of a heroic fight for freedom.[28] Following that shift, numerous memoirs of female insurgents were published, as well as historical works dedicated to women in the Warsaw Uprising and the Home Army, along with other formations.[29] In turn, Szacka observes, the breakthrough of 1989 initiated the period of "recovered memory"[30] – the opening of the archives in Central Europe was accompanied by efforts to write the "truer" history of WWII, countering the narratives from the communist period.[31] On the wave of this revisionist turn, the Warsaw Uprising has gradually become elevated to the status of the founding myth of the post-1989 national collective. The sources of the symbolic potency and wide relevance of the event for the public cannot be reduced to a single political campaign, no matter how successful such a campaign may have been. However, with the erection of the Warsaw Uprising Museum on the initiative of the leader of the Law and Justice Party, Lech Kaczyński, it also became clear that the Right saw the event as a key building block of its counter-hegemonic narrative.[32]

While broader political shifts have provided an important context for historical research and commemorative initiatives dedicated to the uprising and to WWII in general, I would argue that traditional historical watersheds such as 1989 have not affected history writing as far as the visibility and position of women and gender in these works is concerned. The majority of publications on female insurgents published after 1989 were still personal recollections and joint volumes authored by female veterans, and the historiographical articles and books[33] dedicated to women that came out after 1989 did not introduce new theoretical or methodological frameworks. In fact, women's history works published before and after 1989 have more similarities than differences. What is more, this observation is true of the works written by conventional historians and of the writings of scholars associated with women's history. As the Polish historian Natalia Jarska observes, the tendency in historical publications on women during the occupation in WWII is that they "do not go beyond factographic description and heroic narrative, not asking the question of gender. The narrative on this topic is often essentialist and stereotypical."[34]

One common feature of these works has been their methodological nationalism, [35] which is the tendency to analyze women's wartime participation solely in the national framework and to ignore critical socio-historical categories that could undermine the explicit primacy of the nation such as the concept of "gender" or "militarism". Another common characteristic has been what the Polish historian Dobrochna Kałwa called "methodological orthodoxy" : the concentration on establishing "historical facts" – dates, names, and numbers – rather than understanding the sociopolitical processes that have shaped women's wartime situation, as well as adhesion to methodological rules of classical historiography and hostility to new methodologies and theoretical approaches such as those springing from gender studies.[36] Last but not least, what these works also share is that they treat "women" as a stable and essentialist category instead of reflecting on how such a category was created and mobilized in a given moment by various political actors.[37] All of these characteristics contributed to the ghettoization of women's history in WWII and the fact that their history has not been integrated with the broader history of the war and has resided on its margins, thus holding the status of a "feminine appendix" to the otherwise uncontested history of WWII rather than knowledge that could transform the way the war is conceptualized and narrated. Up until today, the Warsaw Uprising has not been the object of much feminist analysis apart from my own work. While the situation is less bleak in the case of feminist literature dealing with other aspects of WWII in Poland, many of these important works[38] have been written by authors working outside of Polish academia and have not been translated into Polish. As argued by Natalia Jarska, the body of Polish historiographical works that survey the war from a gender perspective is still in the process of being made.[39]

**"THE OMISSION OF WOMEN FROM HISTORICAL RESEARCH PUSHED FEMALE COMBATANTS TO LAUNCH VARIOUS INITIATIVES AIMED AT DOCUMENTING AND DISSEMINATING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THEIR PARTICIPATION IN WWII."**

Feminist activists and popular writers, however, have been an important part of the post-2010 "herstorical turn" that can be defined as a sudden increase in interest in women in the history of WWII, accompanied by the departure from viewing the past in a universalist framework in favor of acknowledging the gendered diversification of historical experiences and their unequal representation in history writing. In 2008, the feminist writer Sylwia Chutnik raised the topic of female civilian experience during the uprising in the book *Kieszonkowy atlas kobiet* [Pocket female atlas], followed by a Warsaw city guide dedicated to women's history that also featured herstories from the Warsaw Uprising. In 2010, numerous screenings across the country of the documentary *Uprising in a Floral Blouse*,[40] produced by the feminist NGO Feminoteka, popularized the topic of women in the Warsaw Uprising. Since its premiere, the 20-minute feature has been shown at almost 30 events, been the topic of various press articles and even university courses, and been watched almost 9,000 times on YouTube and Vimeo. In 2012, the feminist and Vice-Marshal of the Sejm Wanda Nowicka organized a conference in the parliament dedicated to women in the uprising. While it is too early to make an informed judgment about the influence of the feminist strand of the "herstorical turn" on professional historiography, recent publications[41] suggest that it could potentially play a positive role in influencing professional historians to study this topic in novel ways.

## The anti-modernist memory boom and the securitization of memory

The growing emphasis on women as wartime actors that began in popular historiography and public memory in the second decade of the 21st century did not emerge out of the blue; on the contrary, it was preceded by a broader anti-modernist WWII memory boom orchestrated in large part by right-wing political actors, as well as attempts to securite a particular version of collective memory. As James Mark argued, due to the absence of judicial reckoning with communist political elites, and to the brutal social costs of the neoliberal transition, 1989 was not broadly accepted as a heroic political myth; instead, the insecurity produced by the post-1989 era has been narrated by the Right in the region as the "unfinished revolution".[42] Moreover, in the absence of convincing left-wing political alternatives, the insecurities and disenchantment produced by the period have been channeled into identity conflicts,[43] and memory wars have been their key example. Memory scholars agree that in Poland the beginning of the era of what has been dubbed the "new politics of history"[44] – the growing emphasis on the promotion of nationalist and neoconservative narratives about the past by the state and right-wing political actors – was symbolically marked by the erection of the Warsaw Uprising Museum in 2004. Our research on the commemorative politics of the Polish Parliament in the years 1989–2015 confirms this claim.[45] As we observed, while an increase in the number of commemorative acts was visible even before 2005, the "memory boom" – the largest increase both in absolute and relative terms – occurred during the first Law and Justice government of 2005–2007. The subsequent governments led by the conservative liberal Civic Platform continued to pass commemorative acts

at a similar rate. This post-2004 era of the politics of history has witnessed an intensification of revisionist discussions on recent history – especially WWII and state socialism – together with the emergence of two potent military myths, that of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 and that of the Cursed Soldiers,[46] who led the anti-communist resistance in the post-war period. Interestingly enough, while at the turn of the century Law and Justice worked to revive the memory of the Home Army and the Warsaw Uprising, the party later largely abandoned these issues and turned to celebrating the Cursed Soldiers instead. This is arguably because the myth of the Cursed Soldiers worked better with the main principles of the broader illiberal counter-revolution that Law and Justice began orchestrating. This counter-revolution claims that previous historical watersheds such as 1945 and 1989 should not be regarded as such because they brought the continuation of occupation and oppression rather than genuine change.[47] Cursed Soldiers fit better with to this narrative because some of them stayed undercover in the forests after 1945 and did not accept the new post-war order.

An underlying feature of this memory boom has been right-wing anti-modernism. Stories about the glorious past produced by the Right are therefore implicated in broader narratives of cultural and national decline as a result of the communist experiment and subsequent Europeanization. As the religious studies scholar Arthur Versluis argued in defining anti-modernism, "[i]f the essence of 'modernism' is progress, a belief that technological development means socio-economic improvement, the heart of antimodernism is a realization that 'progress' has an underbelly – that technological industrial development has destructive consequences in three primary and intertwined areas: nature, culture, and religion".[48] With the illiberal turn in Central Europe, these anti-modernist narratives have once again resurfaced, providing community and meaning to those faced with the dire consequences of contemporary risk societies. The rewriting of the past thus became the platform for the forging of an alternative to what has been seen as destructive and corrupt modern progress represented by Europeanization and globalized capitalism. Across Central Europe, illiberal right-wing actors emerged who refer to the modern world as the "civilization of death" and who promise an alternative to the modern liberal democratic model. This alternative emphasizes the cultural and socio-economic stability of family and of religious and national communities, and it offers a militarized concept of security. Yet, as the political scientist Timothy W. Luke argues, one should not culturalize politico-economic processes by obscuring the structural regimes that produce modernism with vague terms and binary oppositions such as "progress versus tradition" or "technology versus humanity".[49] Modernity – Luke observes – has a lot to do with the "creative destruction of capitalism", including the commodification of social relations, the hegemony of market rationality, and global capitalism.[50] What follows is that while the opposition to modernity's battleground might predominantly be the culture of modern society represented by liberal and progressive values, it is in fact often fueled by deeper structural issues such as socio-economic insecurity or the political disempowerment of some parts of the population.

As indicated by Polish parliamentary discussions, through increased attempts at passing commemorative acts politicians in Poland have sought to discursively secure historical narratives of heroism and victimhood and a certain vision of present-day nationhood and citizenship. Similarly, the Estonian scholar Maria Mälksoo observed that after EU enlargement, Central and Eastern European actors in general attempted to protect and institutionalize particular narratives about WWII and communism, on both the national and transnational level.[51] This securing of a certain flow of memory, she argued, could be seen as a way to provide ontological security to a state or society undergoing rapid transition or other threats to its unity and identity. At the same time, however, the illusion of ontological security comes at serious costs. One is the securitization of memory, that is, the removal of public remembrance from the realm of normal political debate and the framing of alternative memory cultures as a security threat. Another is the militarization of memory – the use of historical narratives to promote militaristic values, practices, and notions of citizenship. As Mälksoo observes, "The social framing of issues of historical remembrance as ontological security problems and the related lax use of military metaphors [...] condition and legitimate the rhetoric and the means of security for handling them, thereby enhancing the potential of militarizing a state's historical self-understanding and culture as a whole."[52]

**"WHILE AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY LAW AND JUSTICE WORKED TO REVIVE THE MEMORY OF THE HOME ARMY AND THE WARSAW UPRISING, THE PARTY LATER LARGELY ABANDONED THESE ISSUES."**

As our research on commemorative acts of the Polish Parliament revealed,[53] militarism in general and WWII in particular have been an important strand of official remembrance culture in Poland ever since the beginning of the socio-economic transformation. Acts that commemorated people, events, and organizations connected to the war effort constituted over 45% of all acts issued between 1989 and 2015.[54] This tendency to construct collective identity primarily in relation to war by securing a certain type of historical narrative has been further strengthened by the WWII "memory boom" that began in 2004. In the years 2005–2007, the number of acts commemorating military issues grew by 100% compared to those issued under the previous government. Yet political actors did not stop at the discursive securitization of memory, but turned to legal measures as well. In 2016 and 2017, several activists faced charges for using the altered symbol of the WWII Polish underground – Fighting Poland – in the context of women's rights demonstrations.[55] In one instance, the charges were pressed by an NGO dedicated to the Cursed Soldiers, in other cases the notification of a suspicion of criminal offence was filed by right-wing activists. The symbol of Fighting Poland has been legally protected since 2014 when the then-governing Civic Platform passed a bill to that effect, but attempts to legally ban activists from using it to promote struggles for an open society and human rights have begun only under the illiberal right-wing Law and Justice government.

## Nationalist herstory

While the outbreak of women's history projects based predominantly on oral history sources in the context of the Warsaw Uprising is a recent occurrence, nationalist herstory as such is not a new phenomenon in Poland. The Polish historian Alicja Kusiak-Brownstein observed a similar proliferation of fighting women's autobiographies in the years of the formation of an independent Polish state after 1918. While these were written by the women themselves, the schematic character of these writings, including their entanglement with politically endorsed notions of patriotic femininity, and the careful selection of those that got published, led Kusiak-Brownstein to argue that in all these texts women "function as national metaphors of women's loyalty to their fathers, husbands, brothers, as well as the social and political institutions they represented."[56] Given the importance of WWII memory in the broader anti-modernist political project and the fact that women function in nationalist politics as metaphors of the collective and as the bearers of its values,[57] it is not surprising that women's history once again has become the key battleground for the definition of the contemporary collective.

As mentioned above, few feminist activists, writers, and academics have critically engaged in this ongoing discussion about wartime women, and it has been the newly established conservative memory institutions, right-wing authors, and reenactment groups that that have played a leading role in revising history with a focus on women, researching and commemorating women as national heroines and martyrs and promoting wartime women as symbols of national struggle. Unlike feminist interventions that generally sought to open up a space for different experiences and memory cultures and to go beyond the national framework of analysis by introducing categories such as gender or militarism, works from the nationalist herstory strand are mostly written in the neo-traditional and anti-modernist framework. After the topic of women in the uprising first gained wider public relevance, the Museum instantly initiated several undertakings of its own. Patrycja Bukalska captured this new-found interest in women on the part of the Museum in the foreword to her book where she recalled: "In the summer of 2010 I received a call from the Deputy Director of the Warsaw Uprising Museum [...] He asked me if I had thought about a book on women in the Warsaw Uprising. From this conversation my work on *August Girls '44* started."[58] Also in 2010, the Warsaw Rising Museum announced a comic book contest about female participants, followed by a broad commemorative project dedicated to women entitled Morowe Panny [Brave Girls] in 2012. As part of this "herstorical turn", numerous popular history books on female insurgents were published.[59] Several exhibitions[60] and campaigns[61] were launched, along with social media profiles[62] and music projects.[63] The outbreak of interest in the female insurgents of the Warsaw Uprising was swiftly followed by a similar offensive of projects dedicated to the female members of the post-war armed anti-communist resistance dubbed the Cursed Soldiers. In 2017, Polish public TV, which since 2016 has been used as a tool for broadcasting the party agenda, will air the first TV series dedicated to female members of the wartime underground.

Members of Women's Military Training (PWK), 1932.

One common characteristic of these works has been their neo-traditional frame, that is, the focus on the story of women predominantly as brave and patriotic role models. While the authors of these books[64] aim to recover the history of women, they are, in fact, only interested in a particular group of women – those whose lives can be presented in the framework of heroism and martyrdom. This rationale was directly laid out on the Facebook fan page "Poles Serving the Fatherland that commemorates female fighters of WWII: "Polish women are not only wonderful mothers and wives, they are also dedicated patriots, actively serving the Fatherland. Every Polish woman who contributes to national defense [...] deserves respect."[65] Similarly, the author of *Girls from the Uprising,* Anna Herbich, explained in an interview the principles of the selection of female figures for her book: "If women played hardball, they would not be heroes to me. A woman who killed, stole, sold her body, who wanted to survive no matter what, would not be my hero."[66] This focus on the herstory of heroines and martyrs points to the overriding function of this type of historical writing, namely, the production and legitimization of a specific version of nationhood. The goal of these works is not so much to uncover women's experiences for the sake of learning more about the politics of the event in question. Rather, women's stories are carefully selected and used to secure a certain narrative about the past. As another author, Barbara Wachowicz put it: "Memory is important. We cannot forget our history. It's a guarantee of tradition and Polishness."[67] Here women's history becomes just another way of


From the film *Uprising in a Floral Blouse* (2009). The text reads: "Washing yourself wasn't so important, it was more important to not get shot by the Germans", "When they're shooting it's better to be dirty than to be clean and die".

telling the same romantic narrative of what the Polish feminist Sławomira Walczewska has called the story of "knights and ladies"[68] – a narrative about the brave community of men protecting "women and children"[69] and their loyal female companions who sometimes fought by their side.

The nation-building function of this type of herstory writing is of course reliant on the production of a particular gender order because the life stories of women in WWII set a scope of propagated gendered attitudes and values for contemporary women. These propagated models draw on two politicized notions of patriotic femininity established in the Polish national canon over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries – the Matka Polka and the female soldier.[70] In current memory politics, these two patriotic feminine ideals are often discursively juxtaposed with the "Other" of the Polish national consciousness, namely Soviet women whose ostensible lack of femininity personifies the barbarism of the USSR[71] and female communists who are portrayed as demonic and lecherous criminals. [72] Therefore, as Alicja Kusiak-Brownstein noted in regard to women's life stories which served the goal of nation-building should not be read as multidimensional testimonies of women's experiences, but rather as a record of politically accepted notions of patriotic femininity.[73] Of course, such a nation-oriented framing of women's past results in numerous taboos and the erasure of those elements of their life stories that challenge or outright undermine the national narrative. Therefore, in national herstory works one will not read about women who did not want to fight or to sacrifice their children "on the altar of the Fatherland", about acts of oppression or violence performed by Polish soldiers, or about women's fight against the prevailing gender order.

While the neo-traditional narrative remains the dominant way of telling the history of women during the Warsaw Uprising, nationalist herstory sometimes also relies on what can be described as the Alltagsgeschichte frame. Within this frame, women's wartime lives are narrated through the prism of the spheres of life that are marked as "private" and "feminine" – motherhood, fashion, beauty, and relationships – and as such have not been the focus of conventional political-military historiography. A good example is the book *Girls from the Uprising* whose cover blurb reads: "Sławka regrets to this day that she did not kiss a young insurgent who was in love with her. Halina gave birth to a son right before the uprising and saved his life in a miraculous way, and Zosia broke the rules of the conspiracy and revealed her name to her beloved. The author lets us see the uprising from an entirely new perspective: through women's eyes."[74] In some respect, the Alltagsgeschichte frame can be viewed as a promising alternative to both the pompousness of national martyrology and the abstractness of general historiography because it takes everyday experiences of ordinary women as its starting point. This concentration on the microhistory of everyday lives, emotions, and relationships could indeed have the potential to transform the dominant historiography of the uprising that predominantly serves the function of producing a narrowly defined national identity. With this transformative intention in mind, the producers of the feminist film *Uprising in a Floral Blouse* proclaimed on their website: "Monuments are many, and we do not intend to build another one. We want to know how our grandmothers lived when they were our age."[75] Yet, while the move away from the nation-building orientation is promising, equating women's history with the private history of everyday life, and understanding a "women's perspective" as restricted to the experiences of motherhood, romance, and beauty, raises serious doubts. Especially if it is not followed by a similar interest in men's everyday practices. For instance, the all-female group DiSK, named after a WWII women's diversion and sabotage unit, concentrates mostly on reconstructing the customs, clothing, and make-up of female conspirators, and not the primary activities of DiSK such as military training and sabotage operations.[76] The same rationale motivated the contest organized by the fashion blogger portal szafiarenka.pl in cooperation with the author of *Girls from the Uprising,* Anna Herbich, who explained the contest's rationale in the following way: "Thousands of young women took part in this battle, who even in the most dramatic circumstances did their best to look good [...] If [young girls] want to commemorate them this way, I don't see anything wrong with that."[77]

However, while nationalist herstory dedicates a lot of space to women and their experiences, gender differences are unreflexively accentuated, not problematized. No questions are asked about the cultural and political forces that shaped the notion of femininity and masculinity in a given context, and when the invisibility of women in history is acknowledged, no attention is paid to the very processes that have contributed to omitting women. One example of this fetishization of gender difference can be found in the foreword to *August Girls, 44*, where the author writes: "Their stories about the uprising are also different from the ones we are used to. There's little about operations and shooting, numbers, data, location of troops. There are more feelings, smells, colors, recollections of rain and a first cigarette."[78] Yet, while underscoring the specificity of women's stories, nationalist herstory leaves readers with a mere ascertainment that men and women are fundamentally different and thus have different wartime experiences. The gender order is perceived as historical and eternal and, therefore, unworthy of analysis. Yet the fetishization of gender differences can be fraught with the same dire consequences as ignoring such differences altogether. As Sara Horowitz alerts us, the concentration on essentialist difference "inadvertently reproduces the marginalization of women"[79] by depoliticizing them and portraying them as belonging primarily to the private or biological sphere.

Nationalist herstory has its merits and should not be underestimated. By presenting examples of women from the past as politically engaged actors, and popularizing herstory as a genre, it certainly provides a powerful alternative to male-dominated historical narratives. However, what all these right-wing revisionist herstory projects have in common is their anti-modernist undertone – the fact that stories about wartime women are used as a metaphor for a utopian state of cultural normalcy – a past where women were still "proper" women and men were "real" men, and a projected future society that will be designed according to anti-modernist values. In 21st-century Poland, women's history has thus become one of the key battlegrounds for the (re) definition of the contemporary national collective. A particular construction of the history of wartime women is played against current emancipatory tendencies in Polish society and is used to counter the feminist movement and the changes in gender roles that it advocates. While providing a powerful alternative to the values, gender roles, and modes of citizenship promoted by the liberal democratic project, this nationalist herstory also has the effect of re-militarizing the notion of citizenship through the celebration of martyrs and heroes as role models. The productiveness of securing a certain version of the past for present political goals was further revealed in 2016 by the ruling Law and Justice party's flagship project: the creation of a new branch of the armed forces called the Territorial Defense Forces, formed predominantly from local citizens and not professional soldiers. Not surprisingly, the Forces officially took over the military traditions of the Home Army, and the first three brigades bear the names of three Cursed Soldiers. While the forces are open to women, so far women constitute only 9 percent of the cadres.[80] Thus in the creation of the Territorial Defense Forces, right-wing memory politics, a militarized form of citizenship, and an anti-modernist gender regime have been symbolically woven together.

**"PRESENTING EXAMPLES OF WOMEN FROM THE PAST AS POLITICALLY ENGAGED ACTORS, AND POPULARIZING HERSTORY AS A GENRE, [...] PROVIDES A POWERFUL ALTERNATIVE TO MALE-DOMINATED HISTORICAL NARRATIVES."**

## Conclusions

The sheer number of recently published works dedicated to women who participated in important events of the past, as well as the total sales figures of these books, clearly shows that nationalist herstory has fallen on fertile ground in 21st century Poland.[81] The re-emergence of nationalist herstory as a dominant way of mainstreaming women into history in 21st century Poland challenges both the rationale for, and the ways of doing, feminist history, making it increasingly harder for professional feminist historians and public historians alike to conduct and promote their research the way they used to. As right-wing circles celebrate female fighters and mothers of fighters, it is no longer credible to assert that feminist scholars are the only ones revisiting history for the sake of women and working towards advancing women's position in society and its culture of remembrance. As feminist scholarship in the region is being delegitimized and attacked by anti-modernists, it is increasingly harder to find institutional support and financial resources to conduct and disseminate academic research to counter the anti-modernist narrative. As discussions about women's history are brought by right-wing actors out of academia and into the public sphere in the form of books, exhibitions, reenactments, and TV series, it is no longer enough for feminists to restrict their activity to academia either. Moreover, as women's history is turned by the Right into a platform for the promotion of a nationalist, anti-modernist model of society, some activists argue that the topic of wartime women has been lost to the nationalists and that feminists should abandon it altogether. Yet, as a politically instrumentalized history of WWII once again fires the imagination of the people, and is used by the Right as a building block of a new illiberal and militarized model of citizenship,[82] the danger of having a single story of war and a single story of female empowerment is all the more serious. Therefore, the critical and deconstructive potential of gender as a category of analysis is more important than ever because it can show how things that are considered natural, innate, and infinite are actually carefully constructed and mobilized.[83] However, in the case of WWII the deconstruction of the militarized and nationalist master narrative is not enough. There is a need to complicate this politically-endorsed single narrative with more stories that

show different experiences, values, and goals. Here the role of feminist historians as discoverers and facilitators of alternative narratives is crucial.

Moreover, instead of a simple rejection of nationalist herstory of wartime women, I believe we need to do better at understanding the sources of the popularity of these narratives and the empowering aspects of anti-modernist projects in general. Despite its tendency to depoliticize and fetishize gender difference and subordinate women's life stories to the nation-building goal, it would be a mistake to perceive nationalist herstory as purely regressive and oppressive for women. In fact, there is much to suggest that women can experience these narratives as beneficial and empowering. Back in 2009–2010, when I interviewed female participants of the Warsaw Uprising, a few of them mentioned to me the role that stories of women who had actively engaged in national struggles – like the French Joan of Arc or the Polish Emilia Plater – played in their personal development, their understanding of female citizenship, and their decision to engage in resistance. I have since found similar tropes in several interviews with female members of contemporary Polish paramilitary organizations who pointed out how they had enjoyed nationalist wartime herstory prior to joining the largely masculinized paramilitary movement. Yet the empowering potential of nationalist herstory goes beyond inspiring some to challenge the dominant gender order. In fact, for some women it is not the gender transgression, but rather conforming to politically significant female roles such as that of combative/patriotic motherhood that is considered symbolically elevating. The popularity of nationalist herstory could thus be seen as stemming from its entanglement with what Andrea Pető has described as an alternative, anti-modernist model of emancipation[84] – one standing in opposition to the modernist tradition represented by cosmopolitan feminism and (neo)liberal progress and accentuating the empowering aspects of family, nationalism, and religion. Much like in the Vatican-promoted idea of the complementarity of the sexes, in this anti-modernist vision women are seen as essentially different from men in their ontology and social role, but equal in their dignity. The salience of this anti-modernist vision of emancipation grows out of the failures of the modernist model that entangled feminism with neoliberalism and tied women's value to the labor market.[85] For those who do not find the individualistic, market-oriented model of emancipation appealing, the anti-modernist vision offered by a nationalist herstory accentuating the importance of women's patriotic involvement may be seen as a feasible and dignifying alternative.

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2 For more on the recent illiberal turn in Central Europe and beyond, see e.g. David Ost, "Grappling with the Hungarian and Polish New Right in Power," *News of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies*, 56, no. 4 (August 2016); 1–4; Weronika Grzebalska and Andrea Pető, The Gendered Modus Operandi of the Illiberal Transformation in Hungary and Poland, *Women's Studies International Forum*, forthcoming (2018).

3 Weronika Grzebalska, *Płeć powstania warszawskiego*, (Warszawa: IBL and NCK, 2013); "Od fałszywego uniwersalizmu do fetyszyzacji różnicy (2015); "Militarizing the Nation: Gender Politics of the Warsaw Uprising," in *Gendered Wars Gendered Memories, The Feminist Imagination – Europe and Beyond Series*, ed. Ayse Gül Altinay and Andrea Pető (Routledge 2016).

4 The Warsaw Uprising was a military operation carried out by the underground Home Army to free Warsaw from Nazi occupation. Having lasted 63 days, it resulted in around 150 thousand civilian casualties and 85% of the city destroyed. Women constituted around 22% of active participants of the armed struggle (Grzebalska, *Płeć powstania warszawskiego*, 63) and performed not only the roles of couriers and nurses but also engaged in sabotage, explosives production, and sometimes even direct combat.

5 For more on the political construction of the myth of the Warsaw Uprising and broader memory politics, see note 33.

6 For more on anti-gender mobilizations, see, e.g., Eszter Kováts and Maari Põim, eds., *Gender as Symbolic Glue: The Position and Role of Conservative and Far Right Parties in the Anti-Gender Mobilisation in Europe*, (Brussels: 2015); Roman Kuhar and David Patternotte, eds., *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2017).

7 The analyzed literature consisted of books and articles published in Polish after 1945 and dealing specifically with the Warsaw Uprising and the armed underground preceding it. Due to limited space, the full list of primary sources cannot be included here but can be accessed in Grzebalska, *Od fałszywego uniwersalizmu*. While the analysis focuses on the Warsaw Uprising as one particular case study, I believe the general tendencies discovered there can to a large extent be observed in the popular and professional historiography of WWII as a whole.

8 Grzebalska, *Od fałszywego uniwersalizmu*, 141–144.

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12 Norman Davies, *Powstanie*, 44 (Craców: Znak, 2004).

13 Joane Nagel, "Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2 (1998): 243.

14 One notable exception is the works by Tomasz Strzembosz, *Oddziały szturmowe konspiracyjnej Warszawy 1939–1944*, (Warsaw: PWN 1979); and partially also Adam Borkiewicz, *Powstanie warszawskie. Zarys działań natury wojskowej* (Warsaw: Instytut wydawniczy PAX, 1957), which broadened the scope of analysis to include lower military ranks and rank-and-file participants of the uprising. This widening of the scope of interest had a side effect of making women visible as identified and named participants of the events and not just witnesses. The same applies to many monographs of specific units – because they reconstruct the composition and exploits of a unit, they cannot leave women out. The lack of a gender analysis, however, means that topics and experiences important to women are omitted.

15 Grzebalska, *Płeć powstania warszawskiego*, 11.

16 *Mnemonic Dimension of the Political Transformation in the Light of Polish Parliament's Commemorative Resolutions 1989–2014*, National Science Centre grant supervised by Marcin Napiórkowski.

17 Davies, Powstanie '44.

18 See, e.g., Zawacka's own recollection in her biographical documentary *Miałam szczęśliwe życie* [I had a happy life], dir. Marek Widarski (Poland 2005).

19 Women's Military Service (Wojskowa Służba Kobiet) was an underground organization headed by Brigadier General Maria Wittek and established in 1942 on the basis of the pre-war paramilitary organization Women's Military Training (Przysposobienie Wojskowe Kobiet).

20 Anna Nowakowska, *Wanda Gertz:Opowieść o kobiecie żołnierzu* (Craców: Avalon, 2009).

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22 Zawacka, *Szkice z dziejów*, 8.

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24 Joanna Wawrzyniak, *ZBoWiD i pamięć drugiej wojny światowej 1949–1969* (Warsaw: TRIO, 2009).

25 See e.g. Maria Jędrzejec, ed., *Twierdzą nam będzie każdy próg: kobiety ruchu ludowego w walce z hitlerowskim okupantem: sylwetki, wspomnienia, artykuły* (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1968); Wacław Jurgielewicz, "Kobiety w regularnych jednostkach Wojska Polskiego na frontach drugiej wojny światowej," *Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny* no. 2. (1971); Franciszek Rudomin, Z *„drucikami" od Oki do Warszawy* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo MON, 1977).

26 Andrzej Gierczak, ed., *Kobieta w walce* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo MON 1970), 6.

27 See, e.g., Anna Borkiewicz, "Kobiety w dywersji", Więź, no. 10 (1976), 110–115; Zofia Polubiec, *By nie odeszły w mrok zapomnienia: udział kobiet polskich w II wojnie światowej*, (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1976); Witold Lisowski, "Sanitariuszki walczącej Warszawy," *Pielęgniarka i Położna*, no. 9 (1979), 23–25; Witold Lisowski, "Pielęgniarki i sanitariuszki Armii Krajowej w powstaniu warszawskim w r. 1944," *Lekarz wojskowy*, no. 9/10 (1980), 514–519; Edward M. Car, "Kobiety w szeregach Polskich Sił Zbrojnych na Zachodzie, 1940-1948," in *Kobiety polskie*, ed. E. Konecka (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1986).

28 Szacka, "Powstanie Warszawskie", 177–179.

29 See, e.g., Ewa Bukowska et al., eds., *Łączność, sabotaż, dywersja. Kobiety w Armii Krajowej*, (London: Zarząd Główny Armii Krajowej, 1985); Felicja Bańkowska, "Kobiety-żołnierze AK w powstaniu warszawskim i ich wyjście do niewoli po kapitulacji," in *Łambinowicki Rocznik Muzealny*, vol. 8 (Opole 1985), 5–18; Czesława Bambrowicz, ed., *Udział kobiet polskich w II wojnie światowej* (Olsztyn: ZBOWiD, 1986); Jacek Praga," Kobiety w regularnych jednostkach Wojska Polskiego na frontach II wojny światowej," in *Kobiety polskie*, ed. E. Konecka (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1986), 166–183; Bożena Urbanek, *Pielęgniarki i sanitariuszki w Powstaniu Warszawskim w 1944 r.*, (Warsaw: PWN, 1988).

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53 *Mnemonic Dimension*.

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Natalia Klimova was a member of a terrorist group that took part in preparations for the famous explosion in the dacha of Prime Minister Petr Stolypin in August 1906. She was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1908. She later escaped prison and fled the country.

# Female terrorists: political or just mad?

## Conservative narratives in the historiography of early 20th century female terrorism in Russia

by **Nadezda Petrusenko**


### abstract

Most historians writing about revolutionary terrorism in Russia in the second half of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century have long treated it as the history of a righteous fight against the autocratic regime, which is the way the terrorists themselves represented their activities. However, conservative contemporaries of the terrorists, with a progovernmental perspective on revolutionary terrorism have until recently not been taken into account. This article discusses the main narratives employed by conservatives at the beginning of the 20th century to explain the political violence committed by women, and it shows how these narratives have been employed in the scholarly analysis of the topic. The article provides an answer to the question why progovernmental conservative views on the female terrorists and terrorism in prerevolutionary Russia have never been influential in the historiography.


**KEYWORDS:** terrorism, Russia, women, conservative narratives, historiography, conservative turn.

The revival of conservatism in the political life of contemporary Russia has influenced the work of Russian historians in many ways. Diverse aspects of the conservative past of the country have become popular research topics, and progovernmental conservative interpretations have been applied to different historical issues by researchers inspired by the state ideology.[1] Although political terrorism is one of the most important problems faced by Russia and the whole world nowadays, research on the history of Russian terrorism, and particularly on female participation in such activities, is present only marginally in the conservative turn in historiography. Such a lack of interest in women can be explained by interpretations of the feminine as being second-rate in the context of the current conservative "remasculinization of Russia".[2] In addition, in the patriarchal culture that promotes traditional forms of femininity for women,[3] women who participate in political violence are not seen as an interesting research subject. The

lack of interest in female terrorism in Russia in contemporary conservative historiography, however, cannot be explained by the absence of conservative views on the issue. Before 1917 and even after that conservative contemporaries of terrorist women wrote at length about female participation in political violence.

The purpose of this article is, therefore, to show why the conservative narratives have never become influential in the historiography of female participation in political terrorism. It will focus particularly on the conservative narratives and historiography of female terrorists from the beginning of the 20th century, who were the second generation of Russian terrorists and who received much attention from both scholars and laymen. In order to answer the central question of the article, I will first introduce conservative views on women in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century. Second, I will identify the typical narratives that appeared in prerevolutionary accounts of female terrorists written by conservative authors. Third, I will show what role these narratives have played in the professional historiography of female participation in political terrorism in Russia. In the final section, I will present the way contemporary conservative historians and laymen have approached this question.

## Conservative perspective on women

During the second half of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, the Russian authorities were seriously challenged by systematic political terrorism, which was used as a means of political struggle by many left-wing political groups. Members of these groups saw the tsarist regime as autocratic, and having no legal way to change the situation in the country they considered political terrorism as the only powerful means to resist tyranny.[4] Women had even fewer legal rights than men in Russia at that time, and many of them joined terrorist units where they could enjoy the freedom and equality with men that were otherwise denied to them.

According to their conservative contemporaries with progovernmental views, however, women were not expected to take part in political activism of any kind. The female ideal of that time that was promoted by both the tsarist regime and conservatives was for a woman to be a good wife to her husband and a good mother to her children and to dedicate her life to her family.[5] Female terrorists, the majority of whom chose not to start families in order to be politically active, were in the eyes of their conservative contemporaries individuals who deviated from that female ideal. Their wish to be present in the political arena that was considered to be an exclusively male domain[6] was interpreted as an abnormality by the conservatives, who tried to find explanations for the women's behavior using various narratives.

## Conservative narratives of female political violence

The tsarist regime, whose most hated representatives were the targets of political terrorism, and the conservatives, who supported that regime, saw women who participated in political terrorism first of all as law breakers. As a result, the attitude towards them was more or less similar to the attitude towards criminal women in prerevolutionary Russia. That attitude was based on Cesare Lambroso's criminal anthropology, according to which criminal women were seen as unnatural and unsexed.[7] Women who committed violent crimes were seen as the worst kind of criminals because they contradicted the existing gender expectations about women as "naturally" peaceful. Their participation in violence was often attributed to extreme emotionality, which was considered to be a "typical" feminine feature at that time. As a result, female violence was attributed to emotional motivations like love, jealousy, or revenge.

However, political violence perpetrated by women could not be easily portrayed as stemming from such emotions.[8] As a result, in order to explain female participation in political terrorism, the conservatives suggested particular narratives. In the following paragraphs, I will introduce the conservative narratives that would have particular importance for future historical works, and I will illustrate them with examples of conservative writing on some of the female terrorists in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century.

First of all, female terrorists were seen by conservatives as unnatural women, which was very much in line with the existing criminological perspective.[9] Their participation in political terrorism was, therefore, often attributed to their failure to be "natural" women. Such a narrative was used, for example, by the philosopher Vasily Rozanov, an ardent advocate of patriarchal domesticity,[10] in his article on Fruma Frumkina in *Novoe vremya* [New time], an influential conservative newspaper. Fruma Mordukhovna Frumkina (1873–1907) was a midwife born into a better-off Jewish family and was a member of the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries (PSR), the biggest socialist party in Russia at that time. On May 27, 1903, while in custody, she tried to cut the throat of the head of the Kiev gendarmerie General V.D. Novitsky, who was particularly notorious for his repressions of revolutionaries. On April 30, 1907, while in Moscow's Butyrki prison, Frumkina made an unsuccessful attempt to kill the prison warden Bagretsov. She justified that attempt by Bagretsov's cruel treatment of political prisoners.[11] In his article on Frumkina, Rozanov contrasts her profession of midwife to her participation in political terrorism. He writes that giving life and easing suffering, the "typical" duties of a "natural" woman and the basics of the midwife's profession, were rejected by Frumkina in favor of taking lives and creating suffering.[12] In this way, Rozanov represents Frumkina as a deviant woman who consciously rejected her "natural" female duties in favor of activities considered as "unnatural" for a "good" woman.

**"WOMEN WHO COMMITTED VIOLENT CRIMES WERE SEEN AS THE WORST KIND OF CRIMINALS BECAUSE THEY CONTRADICTED THE EXISTING GENDER EXPECTATIONS ABOUT WOMEN AS 'NATURALLY' PEACEFUL."**



Maria Spiridonova was sentenced to hard labor for the assassination of provincial government cuncilor G.N. Luzhenovsky. In the right photo she is seen in centre of the top row.

Another way of approaching female violence for the conservatives was to see the perpetrator as insane.[13] The narrative of madness was one of the first reactions to the political assassination committed by Maria Spiridonova. On January 16, 1906, Maria Alexandrovna Spiridonova (1884–1941), a member of the PSR, born into the family of a nonhereditary Tambov noble, fatally wounded the provincial government councilor G.N. Luzhenovsky who had ordered the brutal police suppression of a peasant uprising.[14] Two days after the assassination of Luzhenovsky, *Tambovskie gubernskie vedomosti* [Tambov provincial gazette], a local conservative newspaper published in Spiridonova's hometown, contained an editorial in which she was described as "some kind of insane, unscrupulous female revolutionary".[15] The assassination of Luzhenovsky was thus represented by the conservative author not as a political action, but as the result of Spiridonova's madness.

In a different manner, the narrative of madness was used in the case of Natalia Klimova. Natalia Sergeevna Klimova (1885–1918) was born into a noble family in Ryazan and was a member of the Union of Socialists-Revolutionaries Maximalists, a terrorist group that took part in preparations for the famous explosion in the *dacha* of Prime Minister Petr Stolypin in August 1906.[16] Aleksandr Ellis, the commandant of the Trubetskoi bastion, where Klimova was incarcerated after her arrest, wrote in his message to Maximillian Trusevich, the head of the police department "The prisoner Klimova doesn't value her life, and in view of her extremely indomitable temper I request orders from Your Excellency about her temporary transfer to some hospital to prevent harmful consequences of the hunger strike."[17] A hunger strike was considered to be a popular and effective method by Russian revolutionaries to sustain the political fight against the regime even while in prison.[18] However, the prison authorities chose to define Klimova in this case not as a political activist, struggling for her rights in prison, but as a suicidal, unruly, and mentally unstable individual in need of hospitalization.

In addition, the attitude of conservatives towards both revolutionary women in Russia, who openly broke with the gender conventions, and women who committed violent crimes was based on assumptions about their sexual promiscuity.[19] On February 19, 1906, *Tambovskie gubernskie vedomosti* characterized Spiridonova's letter from Tambov prison, where she wrote among other topics about the sexual abuse that she had been subjected to after her arrest,[20] as "a work of pornography". The author of the article wondered how Spiridonova's womanly morals could have sunk so low as to allow her to write a letter of that kind.[21] Spiridonova was constructed in this case as a promiscuous woman solely because she mentioned in her letter the sexual advances of the government agents who interrogated her. Her political engagement was not mentioned.

## Conservative narratives in historical works on terrorism in Russia

The conservative narratives discussed in the previous section did find their way into works on political terrorism in Russia written by professional historians, but they have never been dominant there. In this section, I will explain what place these narratives have had in historical works on the topic.

The first research work on political terrorism in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century was written by a conservative progovernmental author. It was Alexandr Spiridovich, a major general of the Russian gendarmes, who in 1916 wrote a book on the history of the revolutionary movement in Russia, which was meant to be a textbook for the Secret Police. The book is written from the criminological perspective of that time as discussed above, and the revolutionary terrorists are represented there not as political activists, but first of all as people who broke the law. Female terrorists are mentioned in the book sporadically; Spiridovich does not take up the problem of women's participation in political terrorism, and he represents terrorist women similarly to terrorist men. Some of individual terrorist women, including Natalia Klimova and Fruma Frumkina, are mentioned in the book in connection with their participation in political violence, but the author tries to maintain an objective tone in his book by avoiding any judgmental representations.[22] Spiridovich writes about crimes committed by these women without discussing the reasons for their participation in political terrorism. As a result, the conservative narratives of female participation in political terrorism were not employed in the only research work on political terrorism in Russia written by a conservative from the beginning of the 20th century.

When it comes to professional historiography, the perspective that has dominated it from the beginning is not the conservative one. Oliver H. Radkey, the author of the first comprehensive scholarly work about the PSR,[23] used as his main sources interviews with émigré leaders of the party whom he met in the 1930s.[24] Radkey was also influenced by numerous works of Russian radicals who lived abroad and glorified the terrorists. As a result, the perspective of the conservatives is not at all present

Actress Alla Demidova as terrorist Maria Spiridonova in the film version of Mikhail Shatrov's play *The Sixth of July* (Shestoe iulya).

in his book. Besides that, under the influence of his mainly male informants, Radkey does not pay attention to the problem of female participation in political terrorism.

Radkey's work has become the starting point of almost all Western historiography on terrorism in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century, where the terrorists, including the women, were represented with sympathy as fighters against the autocratic regime.[25] Russian historians who started writing in the late 1980s and early 1990s about female terrorists in prerevolutionary Russia followed the majority of their Western colleagues in representing revolutionary terrorists as fighters against the autocracy. The reason for this was partly the influence of the Western historiography that emerged much earlier, and partly Russian scholars' focus on the sources created by the terrorists themselves. Thus, the mainstream historiography of female participation in political terrorism in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century has been dominated both in Russia and in the West by the narratives created by the terrorists and their sympathizers.

The narratives of female participation in political terrorism created by the conservatives before the revolution, however, re-emerged first in the Soviet Union. Soviet historians did not consider the political terrorism of the political parties that operated alongside the Bolsheviks in Russia prior to the revolution as an important research area. As a result, nothing was written about the female terrorists by professional historians. The conservative narratives of female participation in political violence, however, can be found in some works of fiction published in the 1960s, where female terrorists from the beginning of the 20th century were introduced as characters. As it will be shown later, the conservative narratives employed in these works influenced some later works on the topic. Particularly interesting for this article are Nikolay Virta's novel *Evening Bells (Vecherny zvon)* and Mikhail Shatrov's play *The Sixth of July (Shestoe iulya)*. Maria Spiridonova was introduced as a characters in both of these works.

In Virta's novel there is a character named Sashenka Spirova, whose appearance, biography, as well as the surname, resemble Spiridonova. Spirova is a member of a terrorist group of the PSR, but the author does not represent her as a devoted revolutionary. First of all, Spirova is introduced as a young woman of questionable sexual morals and as an "empty minx", who was interested more in opportunities to meet men than in participation in revolutionary struggle.[26] Virta thus represents a terrorist woman first of all as promiscuous, very much in line with the tendency mentioned above of conservative authors from the beginning of the 20th century. One of the characters in the same novel is called Nikolay Gavrilovich Luzhkovsky. Luzhkovsky is introduced as a local attorney and one of Spirova's beaus. The name and occupation of that character recall Spiridonova's victim Luzhenovsky, who was a liberal attorney in Tambov before he started working for the government.[27] Although the assassination of Luzhkovsky does not take place in the book, by making him and Spirova personally involved, Virta undermines any political motivations of the female terrorist, implying that if the assassination was to be committed, it could only be a crime of passion. This, again, is reminiscent of the attitude of the conservatives from the beginning of the 20th century towards women who committed violent crimes. Virta thus interprets Spiridonova's case in his novel very much in line with the conservative criminological perspective from the beginning of the 20th century.

In Shatrov's play, Spiridonova is introduced after the end of her participation in political terrorism as the leader of the Left SR party, the radical wing of the PSR that became a separate political party in 1917. The party was considered as oppositional towards the Bolsheviks after the July uprising of 1918, which was organized by the leadership of the Left SRs against the Bolshevik dictatorship. Although it is not Spiridonova the political terrorist who is the focus of the play, Shatrov employs the conservative narrative of madness when he writes about her. The author often describes Spiridonova's way of talking as hysterical and characterizes her on one occasion as almost insane.[28] Shatrov's representation of Spiridonova was the direct continuation of the characteristics that were attributed to her by the Bolsheviks after the July uprising.[29] As Sally A. Boniece has argued, such attributions were typical of the opponents of politically active women at that time, including the conservatives.[30] Furthermore, the narrative of Spiridonova as mad, as we have seen had been established in the conservative newspapers in the course of reporting on her case.

**"THE NARRATIVE OF SPIRIDONOVA AS MAD WAS ESTABLISHED IN THE CONSERVATIVE NEWSPAPERS IN THE COURSE OF REPORTING ON HER CASE."**

The literary works discussed above were never introduced by their authors as anything other than fiction. These works seem, however, to have become the source of inspiration for the emigrant Russian philologist Ekaterina Breitbart, the first person who tried to question the glorification of the revolutionary terrorists in the mainstream Western historiography. In an article published in the Russian emigrant journal *Kontinent,* Breitbart suggested an alternative version of Spiridonova's attack on Luzhenovsky claiming that it was not a political crime, but a crime of passion. According to her, Luzhenovsky was a former lover who left Spiridonova, which was the reason for her, a hysterical young woman, to shoot him.[31] The narrative about the love affair between Spiridonova and Luzhenovsky, which is not confirmed by any sources available to historians,[32] recalls the narrative about the fictional Spirova and Luzhkovsky from Virta's novel. The introduction of Spiridonova as hysterical by Breitbart, also without any clear references to historical sources, also recalls the characteristics attributed to the former terrorist in Shatrov's play. In this way, Breitbart used in her article both the conservative narrative of promiscuity and the conservative narrative of madness to explain the assassination committed by Spiridonova. In addition, likewise, in line with the conservative authors from the beginning of the 20th century who preferred to see violent crimes committed by women as stemming from their emotions, Breitbart denies Spiridonova's political motivations.

Breitbart's article, however, did not change the mainstream historiography on female participation in political terrorism at the beginning of the 20th century. The main reasons for this were that Breitbart did not use any reliable sources of information to verify her ideas and that she did not go any further in her discussion than simply denying the information from the sources created by Spiridonova's sympathizers. The majority of professional historians have either ignored Breitbart's ideas or expressed a critical attitude towards them.[33] Only emigrant Russian historians Yuri Felshtinsky and Semion Lyandres as well as American historian Anna Geifman mention in their works Breitbart's ideas as a new approach to the question.[34] However, even these historians do not integrate Breitbart's ideas into their own arguments, but mention them only in notes, thus distancing their professional research from her article.

The 1993 book by Anna Geifman was the first scholarly work on political terrorism in Russia that instead of exclusively using sources created by the socialists and liberals, as other historians had before her, employed previously unused materials from the Foreign Agency of the Okhrana [the tsarist secret police]. In this way Geifman has offered an alternative view on terrorism in prerevolutionary Russia. Although her book does not have a gender perspective, the prominent female terrorists and their motivations for participation in political violence are discussed. In the chapter entitled "Psychologically Unbalanced Terrorists", Geifman writes about mental problems as the main reason for participation in political violence by both men and women. As a result, the conservative narrative of madness often appears in the accounts of different terrorist women. For example, according to Geifman, Fruma Frumkina became a terrorist because of feelings of inadequacy and a desire to confirm her own importance as an individual.[35] In addition, Geifman mentions that Spiridonova was accused of hysteria on numerous occasions.[36] Geifman also writes about Zinaida Vasilievna Konoplyannikova (1879–1906), a village teacher who was born into the family of a soldier, and who on behalf of the PSR on August 12, 1906, assassinated General G.A. Min, who had brutally suppressed the Moscow uprising in December 1905.[37] Geifman interprets the famous narrative from the socialist accounts about Konoplyannikova's eagerness to be executed as a sign of suicidal tendencies.[38] As we have seen conservative authors at the beginning of the 20th century wrote about the suicidal tendencies of female terrorists.[39] In addition, Geifman offers an interpretation of Spiridonova's letter from Tambov prison that is quite similar to the interpretations of conservative newspapers from the beginning of the 20th century. The letter is characterized as containing irrational, troubled fantasies.[40]

Geifman's book attracted much attention from scholars working on the history of political terrorism in Russia because, unlike the previously discussed article by Breitbart, it was based on reliable historical sources and contained well-grounded scholarly discussion. Although Geifman's book was recognized as a novel contribution to the research field, it did not start a new historiographical trend. In Russia, although contemporary professional historians actively use the results of Geifman's research, many of them express critical opinions about her main points, including those that stem from the prerevolutionary conservative narratives. For example, Oleg Budnitsky, a recognized authority in historical research on political terrorism in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century, does not share Geifman's opinion about mental problems as the main reason for individuals of both sexes to join terrorist units. According to Budnitsky, the mental illnesses of some individuals were rather the result of a hard life in the revolutionary underground and not the reason that led them towards participation in political violence.[41] Budnitsky's position illustrates the eagerness of the majority of professional historians in Russia who write on prerevolutionary terrorism to continue working with their research questions within the tradition started by their Western colleagues who in turn chose to follow the narratives created by the terrorists and their sympathizers.

## Conservative narratives in contemporary Russian historiography

The conservative turn in contemporary Russian historiography has left the research field of terrorism in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century almost unaffected. Conservative views on women's roles in society are applied to female terrorists from the beginning of the 20th century mostly by laymen who write about them in their Internet blogs or in newspaper articles. Most of the time the authors of such works explain the political activism of terrorist women as an irrational attitude towards political violence.[42] In this way they employ the narrative of madness that was used by conservative authors prior to the revolution.

In historical works, the conservative turn is represented by only one work, the 2005 doctoral dissertation on the historiography of Russian terrorism at the beginning of the 20th century by Anatoly Bakaev, a member of the progovernmental party *United Russia (Edinaya Rossiya)* who had never been a member of the

professional historical community but had worked in different positions in Russia's Home Ministry for many years.[43] Although Bakaev does not touch upon the problem of female participation in political violence specifically, he expresses criticism towards apologetic biographies of Russian terrorists written by Russian historians in the 1990s. Bakaev is particularly critical of Konstantin Gusev's book from 1992 about Maria Spiridonova, entitled *The Holy Mother of the Esers (Eserovskaya Bogoroditsa)*. According to Bakaev, it is wrong to call a woman who committed an assassination and who did not become a mother as a "Holy Mother".[44] His reasoning is obviously inspired by post-Soviet Orthodox conservatism and is reminiscent of the reasoning offered by conservative authors at the beginning of the 20th century who represented female terrorists as unnatural women who failed to fulfill their "natural" womanly duties.

Oleg Budnitsky has written a review of Bakaev's dissertation in which he accuses the author of plagiarism and homophobia.[45] Although Budnitsky's criticism was not directed towards Bakaev's interpretations of the reasons behind female participation in political terrorism, his general evaluation of the dissertation shows that the conservative progovernmental views expressed by Bakaev are not accepted by historians working in the research field. Other Russian conservative historians, as mentioned above, do not find the topic of female participation in political terrorism in Russia as interesting for their research.

## Conclusions

This article has discussed the reasons for why conservative narratives of female participation in political terrorism in Russia have never been dominant in the historiography on the topic. It was shown that conservative contemporaries of the female terrorists discussed the women and their violent political activism at length in their works and offered explanations that could fit with their view on women as "naturally" confined to the domestic sphere and destined to motherhood. To explain women's participation in political terrorism, their conservative contemporaries represented them as unnatural women, as insane, or as promiscuous, implying that this is what led them to be interested in entering the political arena that, according to the conservatives, was reserved for men.

These narratives, although employed by some historians, have never been dominant in the research field mostly because the first influential works on terrorism in prerevolutionary Russia were written by historians influenced by the perspective of terrorists and their sympathizers who saw their activism as a righteous fight against tyranny. As a result, there was no place for conservative interpretations in the narratives constructed in these works.

Conservative interpretations have until recently not been revived by professional historians. In literary works written in the Soviet Union, where female terrorists were seen after 1918 as the opposition of the Bolsheviks, the authors represented their fantasies of these women which were not based on any historical sources. Ekaterina Breitbart, the first person who tried to challenge the dominant historiography with more progovernmental interpretations, could not present any historical evidence that could support her theories. As a result, even historians who found her conclusions interesting did not use these ideas in their own works so as not to undermine their scholarly value.

The first professional work that tried to give more place to the conservative interpretations, Anna Geifman's book, was published after the tradition of writing about female terrorists as heroines fighting for the people's cause had been established by Western and Russian historians. As a result, although the professional historical community recognized the novelty of Geifman's conclusions and the high professionalism of her work, its publication has not yet led to any historiographical turn in research on female terrorism.

As a result, contemporary Russian conservative historians, besides their general lack of interest towards women's roles in history, do not have at hand any historiographical tradition of approaching female participation in terrorism in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century from a progovernmental perspective. The only historical work of that kind, the doctoral dissertation of Anatoly Bakaev, was rejected by the professional community of historians working within the research field and thus could hardly lead to further attempts in that area. The view of female terrorists as "unnatural" women who preferred political activism to their "natural" destiny of motherhood, which corresponds to the prevailing contemporary view on women's roles in Russia, is present only in the works of laymen who do not have to look for the approval of the professional historical community.

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14 N. Erofeev, 'Spiridonova', in *Politicheskie partii Rossii: Konets XIX – pervaya tret XX veka: Entsiklopedia*, (Moscow: Rosspen, 1996), 584; Alexander Rabinowitch, 'Spiridonova', in *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution 1914–1921*, ed. Edward Acton et al. (London; Sydney; Auckland: Arnold, 1997), 182–186; Liudmila Zhukova, 'Spiridonova Mariia Aleksandrovna (1884–1941)', in *Encyclopedia of Russian Women's Movements*, ed. Norma Corigliano Noonan (Westport, CT, 2001), 82–83; Sally A. Boniece, "The Spiridonova Case, 1906: Terror, Myth, and Martyrdom", in *Just Assassins: The Culture of Terrorism in Russia*, ed. Anthony Anemone (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 136.

15 *Tambovskie gubernskie vedomosti*, January 18, 1906.

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25 See Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*; Stites, "Women and the Russian Intelligentsia", 39–62; Knight, "Female Terrorists", 139–159; Margaret Maxwell, *Narodniki Women: Russian Women Who Sacrificed Themselves for the Dream of Freedom* (Pergamon Press, 1990).

26 "пустая вертихвостка"; Nikolay Virta, *Vecherny zvon* (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 1961), 76.

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30 Boniece, "Heroines and Hysterics".

31 Ekaterina Breitbart, "Okrasilsia mesiats bagriantsem…" ili podvig sviatogo terrora?", *Kontinent* 28 (1981), 321–342.

32 In his book on Spiridonova, Yuri Mescheryakov refers to information from old inhabitants of Tambov about a personal acquaintance of Spiridonova and Luzhenovsky, but without making any clear references to the source of his information (Mescheryakov, *Maria Spiridonova*, 98).

33 See, for example,K.V. Gusev, *Eserovskaya bogoroditsa* (Moscow: Luch, 1992), 56; Leonid Praisman, *Terroristy i revolutsionery, okhranniki i provokatory* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2001).

34 Yurii Felshtinskii, *Bolsheviki i levye esery: oktiabr 1917–iul 1918*, (Paris: Russian Social Fund for Persecuted Persons and their Families, 1985); Semion Lyandres, "The 1918 Attempt on the Life of Lenin: A New Look at the Evidence", *Slavic Review* 48 (1989): 433; Anna Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill: Revolutionary Terrorism in Russia, 1894–1917* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 315.

35 Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 156.

36 Ibid, 316.

37 Knight, "Female Terrorists", 145–146; Budnitsky, "Ukazatel terroristicheskih aktov", 624; N. Erofeev, "Konoplyannikova", in *Politicheskie partii Rossii: Konets XIX – pervaya tret XX veka; Entsiklopedia* (Moscow: Rosspen, 1996), 266; Hillyar and McDermid, Revolutionary Women in Russia, 87, 135.

38 Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 169.

39 Konoplyannikova's eagerness to die, however, was not seen as a suicidal tendency by all of her conservative contemporaries. In his memoirs, Alexander Gerasimov (1866–1944), head of the St. Peterburg Okhranka 1905–1909, writes about her: "All the terrorists died with great courage and dignity. Especially the women. The story of Zinaida Konoplyannikova, who was hanged for the murder of the commander of the Semenov Regiment, General Min, who had in December 1905 suppressed the uprising in Moscow, is still clearly preserved in my memory. She approached the scaffold, reciting the lines of Pushkin … The heroism of these youths, it must be admitted, attracted sympathy for them in society." (Alexander Gerasimov (1985), *Na lezvii s terroristami*, (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1985), 123.

40 Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 170.

41 Budnitsky, "Zhenshiny-Terroristki", 16.

42 See, for example, "Terroristski – fanatichki, nesuschie smert", http://repin.info/kriminalnoe-chtivo/terroristki-fanatichki-nesushchie-smert, accessed October 27, 2017.

43 See Bakaev's detailed biography at the United Russia website: http://ulyanovsk.er.ru/persons/7750/, accessed December 31, 2017.

44 Anatoly Bakaev, *Istoriografiya rossiiskogo revolyutsionnogo terrorizma kontsa XIX – nachala XX veka* (doctoral dissertation, Moscow: Rossiisky universitet druzhby narodov, 2006), 302.

45 See Budnitsky's review, http://socialist.memo.ru/recens/y05/budnic.htm, accessed December 31, 2017. See Bakaev's answer to Budnitsky's review http://www.zsuo.ru/deyatelnost/analiticheskie-materialy/6544-analiz-otzyva-retsenzii-dissertatsionnoj-raboty-aabakaeva-istoriografiya-rossijskogo-revolyutsionnogo-terrorizma-kontsa-xix-nachala-xx-veka.html, accessed December 31, 2017.

# The butterfly effect in history-making

## Conservative subjectivities of women in the anti-communist discourse in Slovakia

by **Zuzana Maďarová**

**"My name did not belong to me any more. People pronounced it stammeringly, artificially and heavily. A substantive reason to feel out of place. And my way of speaking in a new language was suspiciously awkward. Every time I made a mistake, a hole opened up. And the locals liked smooth relations and fixed holes. My teacher tried to convince me: 'Adapt. Just imagine that you walk down the street and everybody thinks you're a local.' But I knew that my face, shaped like a full moon, would betray me."**[1]

In the novel *Die undankbare Fremde* ["The ungrateful stranger" or "country"][2], the Swiss author Irena Brežná, who emigrated with her family from Czechoslovakia in 1968, reflects upon the place of a woman immigrant in a new language and a new society. As she suggests, one can try, learn, struggle, challenge, and conform, but the language resists, as does the society that creates it. The main character strikes back and looks for her own ways of speaking and living. The author examines a power game between a newcomer and a new country, as well as the story of their expectations, inclusion, and resistance. Readers may ask along with the protagonist: to what extent does a person need to integrate to become a part of the collective story; how much can one resist; to what extent can one create one's own place in an appropriated language?

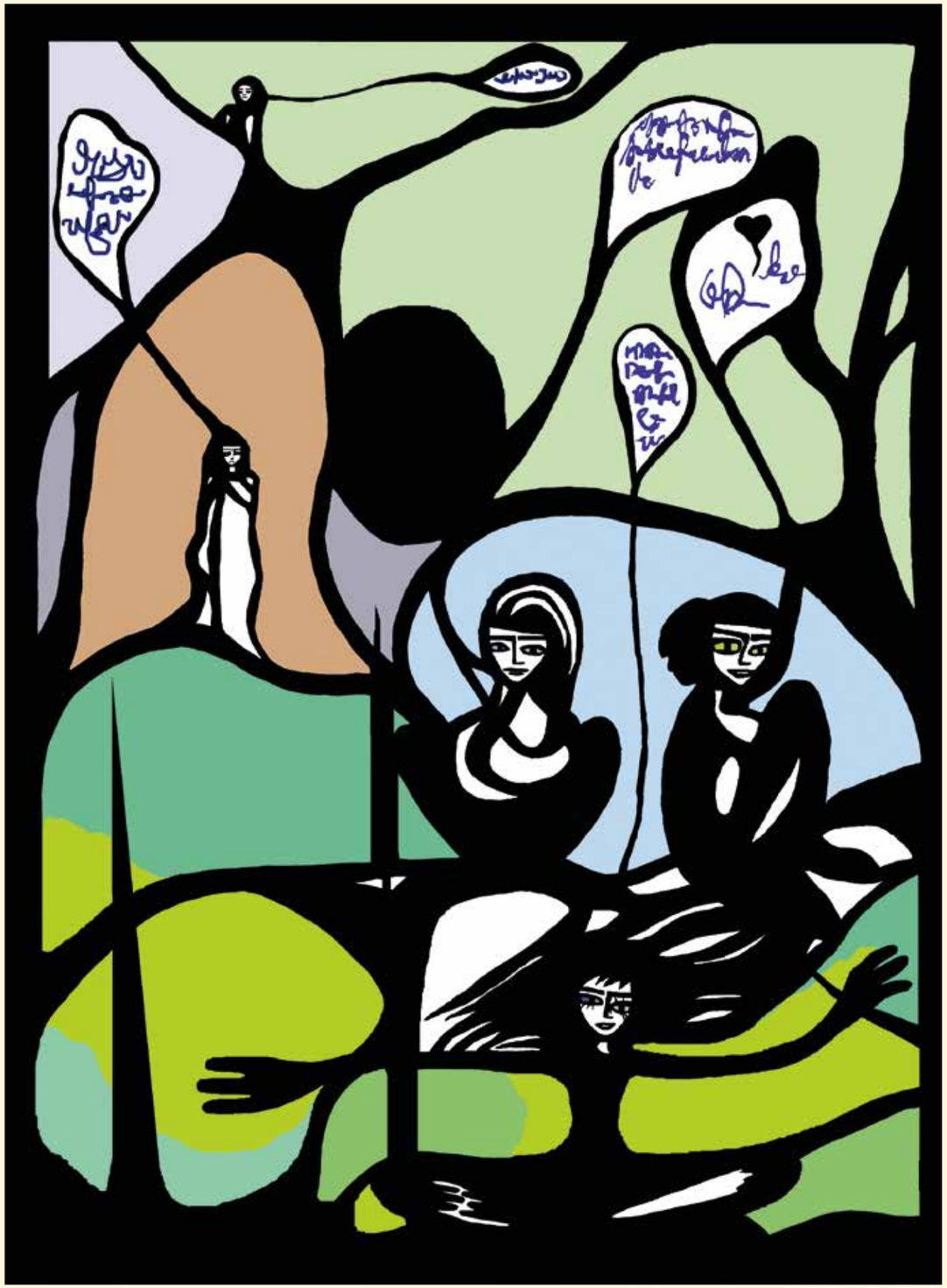
In the collective memory in Slovakia, women are still treated as strangers in the male-dominated mainstream discourse.[3] While a few "women worthies"[4] are publicly commemorated, they are usually not a part of the country's modern history and very rarely challenge dominant historical narratives.[5] Placing women in history, as Gerda Lerner puts it,[6] or placing major historical events in the life stories of female individuals, thus causes tension like that experienced by an immigrant in a new country. It invites women to search for language that would enable them to articulate their life stories while admitting that neither life nor a story can precede its articulation.[7] This tension provides an opportunity to explore the ways women remember, and it also underlines the role of social context in the process of recollection and history production. Edna Lomsky-Feder argues that society frames and channels the way subjects create and represent their memories.[8] She writes that personal memory is "embedded within, designed by, and derives its meaning from a memory field that offers different interpretations" of a given event.[9] The remembering subject cannot freely choose an interpretation of an event (at least, not without consequences) as the memory field is not an open space. Rather, there are distributive criteria that frame and channel a subject's recollection and interpretation. These criteria may be particularly strict in a situation when memory fields are very limited for women.

This article is guided by two major assumptions: every account of experience is an interpretation and needs an interpretation[10] and every historical interpretation is in need of exploration. In the context of women's overall limited participation in the articulation of history in Slovakia, I explore some aspects of life stories of women embedded in the anticommunist discourse. I ask what types of subjectivity and


## abstract

The oral history archive of the non-profit organization Nenápadní hrdinovia (The Inconspicous Heroes) is considered as an example of a wider trend in Slovakia to exploit women's memories for the purposes of conservative or nationalist interpretations of history, placing women in the traditional roles and discourses of victims, auxiliaries, and self-sacrifice. The purpose of this politics of remembering is to emphasize the totalitarian nature of the state-socialist regime by bringing forward the oppression and violence inflicted on women. Using the concrete oral history project as a vehicle and a case study for the argument, the article contributes to the understanding of the current discursive landscape of memory of state socialism and of gender in Slovakia.


**KEYWORDS:** gender discourses, history writing, oral history, populism.



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femininity these stories present and how they are embedded within a broader anticommunist discourse.

The relevance of this research project is twofold: rather than building upon feminist historiography projects developed in academia and civil society in Slovakia in previous years, the oral histories of women analyzed here are embedded in the conservative discourse in Slovakia. Since the oral histories presented gain political and media attention and involve schools from all around the country, the subjectivities they construct and present deserve close attention. At the same time, the conservative framework of the oral history projects discussed gains further significance in the context of a more general conservative turn in the public and political discourse in the country,[11] and in the context of historical revisionism in other postsocialist countries.[12] As Andrea Pető argues, an antimodernist variant of history writing is gaining momentum in post-communist Eastern Europe.[13] Since the post-1989 political culture has been built upon anticommunism, the memory of communism and the leftist tradition are omitted and new memories are constructed, reproducing the same principle by which communist revisionist history production worked. History is constructed to serve its political aim, promoting the identities it envisions for the future.[14] Traditional images of femininity and masculinity are reproduced in these processes. This development, facilitated by various conservative political actors, is embedded in a fundamentalist interpretation of history based on national and individual past suffering, but with the promise of future redemption.[15]

## Emerging oral histories as an opportunity and a limitation

A need for searching and articulating women's voices in postsocialist countries is illustrated by the genesis of the international project "Women's Memory". As the feminist philosopher Zuzana Kiczková describes, in the first half of the 1990s, feminists from the US and Western Europe started visiting the postsocialist countries and researching the experiences and situations of local women. However, their work often resulted in gross generalizations, and women were represented in dichotomies: as either victims of the regime or heroines. Analyses and evaluations of the situation were often made without regard to the social, political, cultural, and historical context.[16] "Many distortions were caused by the fact that the researchers used their own social criteria and experience, often very different from ours, and they used paradigms which could not always be applied to the experiences of women during socialism," Kiczková explains.[17] A search for tools that would enable women to express their experiences in socialism – different from the experiences of men captured by general history and from descriptions made by the "Western" feminist researchers – led to an exploration of biographical narrative and oral history as research methods.

Oral history brings with it the opportunity to put women's voices at the centre of history, highlight gender as a category of analysis, focus on those topics that are important to women themselves, integrate women into historical scholarship, and challenge the mainstream historical narratives and the common definitions that obscure women's lives in the social, economic, and political spheres.[18] While oral history has been considered a tool of empowerment for individual women who recollect and construct their stories, it can also illuminate the collective scripts of a particular social group[19] and allow us to trace the ways in which society frames and channels subjects' stories and memory fields.[20] Feminist oral history often asks how historical memory is shaped by dominant ideologies and the intersection of gender, class, race, and other axes of power.[21]

Despite the opportunities, limitations and risks of oral history must not be overlooked,[22] and the question "Whose voice has been represented?" is of particular relevance for this article. While oral history can be an opportunity for women to talk about their lives and topics that are relevant to them, the outcome of the interview and the narrative analysis are always influenced by the researcher as well as the narrator.[23] The researcher is inherently present in the story and shapes the overall discourse: they decide on questions, reflect answers, influence the course of the interview, and conduct the interpretation and analysis. The fact that the researcher is in a position of power should be reflected in the research process, and the relationship between the researcher and the participant ought to be a part of the interpretation.[24] Transparent research processes which do not further silence women participants and a clearly reflected researcher's position are some of the necessary ethical concerns of oral history.

In recent years, Slovakia has witnessed a burst of oral history projects. Personal stories have been recorded and archived by a number of actors, ranging from the Nation's Memory Institute, which is a public-law institution, to various nongovernmental organisations.[25] Although they have the potential to diversify or challenge the dominant popular memory,[26] most of these oral history projects have been presented in a way that supports the mainstream historical construction of a nation of suffering. For instance, the most extensive project of the Nation's Memory Institute is called *Witnesses of the Oppression Period* and contains more than 550 stories. As presented by the Institute's website, the structure of the database covers three main historical periods: Slovakia in the years 1938–1945; the transitional period (1945–1948); and the communist regime (1948–1989), which is the most extensive part of the collection with a more detailed structure. Regardless of the period, suffering and repression are the key topics. According to the titles of subtopics presented, the stories are framed as testimonies about the end of democracy, repression and Holocaust, concentration camps and gulags, communist totalitarianism, persecution and criminal legal processes, violent collectivization, the persecution of churches, and normalization. The "other side" of history is constructed using stories of remedy and heroism, such as those about anti-Nazi resistance, dissent activities, anticommunist resistance, November 1989, and the fall of communism.[27]

In this frame of national suffering and rare-but-precious heroism, new initiatives emerged aimed at further exploration of the "communist past". In 2010, numerous institutions and more than 3000 citizens supported a public call to establish a Museum of the Crimes of Communism.[28] The Ministry of Culture was commissioned to realize the idea, but later the museum disappeared from the state agenda. At the moment, it is run by the nongovernmental organization *Nenápadní hrdinovia* [The inconspicuous heroes] and is financially and institutionally supported primarily by volunteers.[29] The organization aims to establish the Museum as a public institution because "the totalitarian period significantly influenced the history of our country, and for Slovakia it is very important, if not indeed necessary, to have a decent institution that would point out the crimes of this period and their victims."[30] The dichotomy of victims and perpetrators is further reflected in the name of the institution, which is currently called the Museum of Crimes and Victims of Communism. It is worth mentioning that the institution is called a "museum" even though it has not been registered as such by the Ministry of Culture.[31]

Since the very beginning, the need for a Museum of Communism was legitimized by the existence of similar institutions in other postsocialist countries, the House of Terror in Budapest being one of the better examples. As Andrea Pető notes, the House of Terror, like other similar museums in the Baltic countries, employs the narrative built upon dichotomies of affective politics without significant factual basis. The museum becomes a place where history is supposed to be experienced through the body in search of a promised authenticity, and thus becomes a medium used in the process of redefining heritage.[32] It seems that histories and ideologies of these anticommunist museums share some similarities with the Museum of Crimes and Victims of Communism in Bratislava, such as a dichotomist victims/perpetrators approach to history and the fact that they are embedded in the conservative discourse. Even though the Museum of Crimes and Victims of Communism is currently a minor institution in Slovakia, the experiences of other countries suggest that it may have the potential to shape the public memory more significantly in the future, and therefore it merits deeper inquiry.

The Museum is closely related to the other activities organized by "The Inconspicuous Heroes", whose mission is that of "processing and spreading information about the period of oppression in Slovakia and in the world".[33] One of the organization's main activities is the oral history project "The Inconspicuous Heroes in the Fight against Communism," a contest for primary and secondary school students who are asked to record personal stories of people persecuted during communism.

**"IN RECENT YEARS, SLOVAKIA HAS WITNESSED A BURST OF ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS."**

Every year, the project is chronologically framed by two anniversaries: the Candle Demonstration, which was the biggest mass demonstration against state socialism in Slovakia before 1989 and which was organized by Catholic dissent; and the Velvet Revolution which led to a democratic change after 1989. Thus the topic of the project is announced in March and the best stories are publicly presented in November.

In 2016, the topic of the project was 'Girls and Women against Totalitarianism', calling on students "to pay attention to women, girls, daughters, and their role in the fight against the communist regime and totalitarianism."[34] While oral history projects in general – and this one in particular – have led to increased numbers of women who recollect the past publicly, the subjectivity they present is quite limited and very specific. This contributes to the construction of a narrow memory field for women who recall their pasts and narrow discursive spaces within which girls and women can create their own subjectivities. These initiatives do not build on previous activities which examined history from a feminist and gender perspective,[35] but rather present a conservative image of faithful women, nuns, mothers, and daughters who were willing to sacrifice themselves for the nation and their faith. This symbolic representation is not that surprising considering that the Museum of Communism was originally initiated by the Forum of Christian Organizations, an umbrella for around 50 Christian organizations, and that this is also the home organization of the current head of the NGO Inconspicuous Heroes, who also works for the Nation's Memory Institute. This limited representation of women's subjectivity has not been publicly challenged by the political and cultural elites, who often present themselves as liberal, and the project "The Inconspicuous Heroes in the Fight against Communism" has received substantial political and cultural support. For instance, the annual conference at which the chosen students' stories are presented has been held twice under the patronage of the president,[36] and the mainstream media, including the newspaper which presents itself as center-left, revised stories of some personalities presented by "The Inconspicuous Heroes".[37]

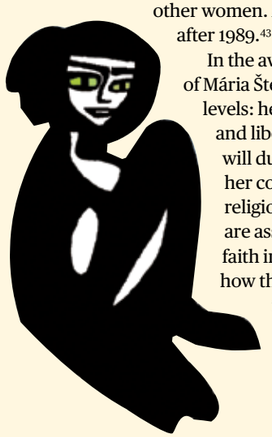
To a certain extent, the oral history projects do help to diversify public discussion about different historical events and to shed more light on "the small histories". It is also necessary to say that education on the modern history of Slovakia is usually limited to a couple of hours in the last years of high school, and that the Secret Church and the Catholic dissent played a key role in activities challenging state socialism before 1989.[38] These contextual factors have contributed to a wide and almost unreserved acceptance of the conservative oral history activities. Moreover, the obstructed conservative representations of femininity are also allowed to remain unchallenged because they are embedded in a broader picture

of women's anticommunist subjectivity as constructed by the canonical dissenting authors.[39]

## The stories of resistance and suffering

"The totalitarian period significantly influenced the history of our country, and for Slovakia, it is very important to have a decent institution that will point out the crimes of the era and its victims," the Museum of Crimes and Victims of Communism states, adding that in the first phase it will focus on recording the stories of people who were unfairly condemned.[40] The oral history activities of The Inconspicuous Heroes, the organisation that runs the Museum, can thus be understood as part of this first phase. Stories collected and retold (these are not transcriptions of the interviews, but rather processed, edited stories with a common structure) as part of the students' project described above are of particular interest for this article. In the social context in which the historical agency of women is at best limited in public discourse and school curricula,[41] these stories, widely represented in the media and accompanied by various events throughout the year, may have a significant impact on the social distribution of memory of women.[42] Analysing two examples of women's life stories that received distinction in the project "The Inconspicuous Heroes in the Fight against Communism", I will illustrate how women's subjectivity is constructed through resistance and suffering. The object of the analysis is the story as retold and presented in the project, since the original narrative is not publicly available.

The story of Mária Štefunková appears to be a narrative of active resistance and mobilization followed by prosecution. In the early 1950s, a group of 300 women from different towns organized and marched to the office of the local authorities to get information about a new chaplain who had been arrested before arriving in the town of Zborov. As no one had any information on his whereabouts or the reason for his arrest, these women mobilized and organized two "visits" to the authorities to find out more and to get the chaplain released. During the second visit, they caused some material damage, breaking the door that the authorities had locked to prevent them from entering. The situation resulted in the prosecution of Mária Štefunková and four other women. All of them were rehabilitated after 1989.[43]



In the award-winning story, the heroism of Mária Štefunková is constructed at three levels: her courage to fight for the chaplain and liberate him from prison; her strong will during her own incarceration; and her contribution to the nation and the religious community. All three levels are assumed to be driven by her deep faith in God. The story first describes how the women marched 10 kilometres to get to the local authorities, noting that they "did not stop praying" on their way. On their second visit, "they entered with courage while singing Christian songs". In this spiritual narrative, their courage is followed by punishment, and the main character's resistance, which was at first expressed publicly (against the authorities), turns into an inner one, lived through the forbidden faith in prison. Despite its intense and active beginning, the main focus of the story is on suffering, with detailed descriptions of living conditions in the prison.

The second part, describing punishment, is also accompanied by more quotations from Ms. Štefunková. The detailed account of struggle and hardship carries implications of remedy and salvation. While there is a vision of returning to the family, the promise of spiritual salvation through suffering is even more significant. "When they took us for a walk, they bound our eyes. I spent Christmas there. I decided not to shed a tear, because these are joyful holidays and I was to be with my kids again in a year. Indeed, that's how it went. When I came to Košice, I found a cross engraved on the wall and the graffito 'God is love, God is strength, God is our sanctuary.' [...] This is what gave me strength, because every time I knelt down to pray, they shouted at me, 'Get up! Hands up!'"[44]

The mythical aspect of the narrative is further reinforced by the idealized notion of motherhood. As the story goes, the communist regime punished not only the individual woman but her whole family, as her small children were deprived of their mother for a year. The tragedy of a damaged family is presented throughout the story and the reader is reminded several times that the main character is a mother of three. Through motherhood, the main character is constructed as a good woman and a Christian who did not give up her faith, who endured injustice and resisted. It is also through motherhood that she makes her contribution to the community: "as she suffered for a priest, a great desire to have a son become a priest was born in her". She therefore "sacrificed" her two sons to God and they became priests. The closing of the story reinforces the dichotomy of good and bad, as the main character forgives the perpetrators and prays for their salvation.

Like other fundamentalist narratives, the story presented draws on religious legends and myths and builds on antagonisms by proclaiming members of the religious community (and potential members) to be guardians of truth and fidelity. The individual story thus becomes a collective story, "a socially and historically grounded story of the faithful remnant standing for righteousness in a society gone astray".[45] Fundamentalist narratives are evocative and compelling because they embrace religious myths and scriptural idealism in such a way that they place the readers in a story which must be either endorsed or rejected.[46] Nevertheless, to reject narratives presented by The Inconspicuous Heroes is not an easy task, as the reader would not only have to reject religious salvation but also the anticommunist struggle it represents. To challenge these narratives means to risk being called a communist.

The second story analyzed also describes suffering in prison preceded by engagement in a religious group, but offers more nuanced characters and motivations. The life story of Františka Muziková is framed by family relations and begins with an introduction of her siblings and parents and the role that family plays in her life. Despite some difficulties, the relations are described as very good and empowering, which is documented by some happy memories from her childhood. Her later heroism is thus constructed as a heritage of her upbringing.[47]

In the story presented, Ms. Muziková experienced the first difficulties in high school, where she was almost prevented from taking the state exams. She received a negative assessment from the representatives of the Communist Party with an explanation that her family owned land which was supposed to be collectivized. Only after the intervention of the school director, who cared about good results of the institution, was she allowed to finish her studies. After Muziková started working as a nurse at a hospital, she joined her colleagues in a religious group. She describes the group as a place for young people to meet, share their experience and spend their free time together. However, as a result of these meetings, she and her friends, her colleagues, and her younger sister were arrested. She was sentenced to two years of detention.

In this story, work is the main topic through which the main character's subjectivity is constructed, as well as her suffering and remedy. Work provides a symbolic site on which the distinction between good and bad is inscribed. For instance, the arrest takes place in the operating room where she was working and nobody was allowed to enter. This invasion of the protected, almost holy place where the staff was saving people's lives may symbolize the invasion of people's private lives by the political regime. At the same time, a dichotomous perspective is constructed between work for others and work against people.

**"THE FUNDAMENTALIST PRESENTATION OF TRUTH, HEROES, AND DEVILS IS NOT ONLY THE RESOURCE ON WHICH THE STORY DRAWS, BUT IT IS ITS MESSAGE."**

Muziková's stay in various prisons and the difficulties she experienced there are also presented through work. According to the account, in Prague she was able to continue her work as a nurse, and after coming back to Slovakia she had to work manually very hard, sometimes even outdoors in cold weather. Her work is represented here not only as a punishment, but also a sacrifice she offered to protect older prisoners.

Later, it seems her release from prison did not bring the main character an immediate remedy, as it was very difficult for her to find a job: "Even though I was free, I could not get adequate employment, and the door kept closing in front of me as if I were unwanted." Through work the story constructs the main character as a good, exceptional person. Her hard work, which was always directed towards other people and was always supposed to help somebody else, represents the main distinction between the heroine and the others. Moreover, her work as a nurse seems to imply a "clean" personality in terms of physical and moral characteristics. This is illustrated by the episode in which a doctor in prison finds out that she has lice, which is described as one of the most embarrassing moments of her life. "For her as a nurse, it was very embarrassing and it proved very bad hygienic conditions in prison," the story recounts. However, the parasites are presented not only as a matter of physical condition, but also as a consequence of the presence of "gypsies and prostitutes" who were also imprisoned. This distinction between different women is further reinforced by including political prisoners in the story and describing them as "the elite" of the nation. Although such a victimizing categorization of people and the implications of physically and morally "unclean" women challenge the pure image of altruistic work, this is not reflected upon in the story.

The story ends with Muziková establishing new family. Here, she is constructed as a threat and her husband as a very brave man for marrying her. As described, the husband "became more vulnerable" after their marriage and he was fired from his job because of her past. The quotation of the main character reaffirms this unequal relation: "They did not care that he had a three-year-old at home. [...] But I must say that he has never blamed me for my criminal past." In the narrative, the main character is constructed as accepting guilt for her "criminal" past, even though she was not a criminal at all. The story presents a humble woman who did what was necessary and tried to help where possible. She is also presented as an introverted person who did not speak much or miss people intensely and therefore coped with prison better than others.

The structure of the story of Františka Muziková reveals some inner tensions. While the participation in the religious group is a reason for her arrest, faith in God is not mentioned later. It is rather work that provides the fulfilment of life. Nonetheless, the story is given a religious framing by the title, "Always Faithful to God". Like the first story, the life of Františka Muziková is presented as suffering as a means to a better life, represented by her new family. The picture of two sides in a struggle – one which destroys people's lives and one which suffers – is the background against which the life story takes place. The fundamentalist presentation of truth, heroes, and devils is not only the resource on which the story draws, but it is its message. The story thus does not challenge or examine the moral values it is embedded in, but rather confirms them.

## Women's life stories in a broader discursive field of anticommunism

The stories of The Inconspicuous Heroes are constructed in a frame of national suffering which allows them to create the special forms of resistance and heroism. Anticommunist, dissident identities constitute a part of this frame, and an examination of their gender dynamics permits a better understanding of the broad social acceptance of the conservative women's identities.

The Czech literary scientist Jan Matonoha argues in his

analysis of the canonical dissent literature (1948–1989)[48] that the discursive practice of these texts significantly contributes to the gendered disciplining of individual subjects and internalization of the patriarchal order.[49] The anti-regime literary texts from the period between 1948 and 1989 present a women's subjectivity which appears progressive at a first glance but in fact reaffirms patriarchal values that reproduce traditional gender roles. Matonoha claims that this paradox is a risky part of the texts that have high social capital and therefore a strong interpellative potential. In other words, readers of these texts "are being interpellated to constitute their solidarity with resistant discourses of [...] dissent on the grounds of identification with its symbolic capital and set of values and, concurrently, on the grounds of [a] volitional, marginalizing and unreflected patriarchal notion of gender roles."[50] As Matonoha argues, the ethos of dissent and counteraction against the oppressive regime intensified the interpellative potential of these injuring identities. His analysis illustrates that, although they appear nonconformist, heroic, and almost martyr-like, they employ traditional gender stereotypes. As a result of this paradox, the interpellative images, such as motherhood, partnership, and resistance to the political regime, and the discursive places where they occur may have a stronger effect on readers than the usual value attributes (physical beauty or social status, personal and social success, or personal prestige) presented by the mainstream culture.[51]

The subjectivities of women in the stories analyzed share some aspects of these characteristics. They present women with a strong positive image: they are brave and resistant towards the oppressive regime; they fight against injustice or sacrifice themselves for others. By appealing to the asymmetry of physical power and the power of faith in God, women's lives are constructed as David's fight against Goliath. They seem to be mythical warriors and role models for young girls. However, as in Matonoha's analysis of dissident literary texts, ambivalence can be found under the strong positive image.[52]

The paradox of strong women who resist the authoritarian regime but are obedient towards their husbands and fathers extends to the dissident literary texts and can also be seen in the narratives of women's anticommunist subjectivities. These two sets of texts, the literary texts and the life stories, are different in style, purpose, quality of writing, and complexity of inner structures, but they share the ideals of women and reinforce patriarchal values. The life stories present women as silent sufferers and companions of men (priests, family members, or God) and offer women very clear remedies through or after their suffering – mainly a material family and spiritual salvation. In order to achieve these treasures, pain is necessary or inevitable, and needs to be borne bravely and faithfully. The clear distinction between male oppressors and female victims is further reinforced through women's forgiveness and generosity: suffering women are not angry; they understand, forgive, forget, and wish the perpetrators only good.

If traditional gender roles are an intrinsic part of anticommunist identities, as suggested by the well-known dissident literary texts, it is less surprising that there is almost no resistance against the monopolization of anticommunist female subjectivities by the conservative discourse. As Matonoha concludes, the discursive practice of dissident texts and their paradoxical injuring identities have contributed to resistance against feminism and to the silence about gender after 1989.[53] Furthermore, their heritage can also be traced in the conformity with which the current anticommunist identities are placed within the conservative gender order.

## Tracing the butterfly effect in history-making

The history presented in the oral history project "The Inconspicuous Heroes in the Fight against Communism" is a fundamentalist one,[54] based on the suffering of the past and promising future redemption. Recent increased interest in women's life experiences in Slovakia has not led to the differentiation of women's subjectivities, but rather to limited, reductionist memory fields.[55] Oral histories currently present in the public discourse in Slovakia paradoxically go against some of the principles articulated by the feminists who started oral history projects in 1990s.[56] While the initial oral history projects valued women's voices and struggled with methodologies to distinguish them from researchers' and narrators' voices, the current projects publish only the reproduced, retold stories without providing clear methodologies, researchers' reflections or narrators' initial stories. This raises questions about whose voice is really heard and what the purpose of the story is. At the same time, the stories of women fighting against communism reproduce the same dichotomy the feminist oral histories had tried to avoid and overcome: the simplified dichotomous identities of women as heroines and/or victims.

**"THOSE REPRESENTED ARE MOSTLY RELIGIOUS WOMEN, GOOD MOTHERS, MEN'S COMPANIONS, DECENT, HUMBLE, AND HARD-WORKING WOMEN WHO FORGIVE AND FORGET EVERYTHING BAD THAT HAPPENS TO THEM."**

In the projects analyzed, only a very specific type of women is allowed to publicly share their traumatic memories of state socialism, and only the traumatic memories can be publicly shared. Those represented are mostly religious women, good mothers, men's companions, decent, humble, and hard-working women who forgive and forget everything bad that happens to them. They can resist the oppressive political regime but are obedient towards and reinforce the conservative gender regime. The subjectivities they represent are embedded within the patriarchal order with obvious or hidden but indisputable, unchallenged hierarchies between the masculine and the feminine.

However, these limited and limiting constructions of female identities seem familiar in the anticommunist discourse that accepts, welcomes, and reinforce them. This phenomenon can be partially explained by the relation with the canonical literary texts written by dissidents, exiled authors, and alternative-scene authors from the 1948–1989 period, which reproduce and reaffirm the patriarchal order and injure the identities of women. While operating with extensive social capital, these texts have contributed to the silence on the issue of gender after 1989, and to a broader deficiency in understanding a democracy that overlooks inequalities related to gender and other dimensions.[57]

The conservative anticommunist subjectivities of women are embedded in the dichotomous discursive field of heroism and suffering that does not allow a proper reflection of the stories presented. The readers have entered the field of absolute values where challenging a narrative seems like a subversion of the woman, heroine or victim; where a feminist reflection of the dominant frames of women's subjectivity may be interpreted as an attack on the narrator. Moreover, it is this monopolized connection between the conservative representation of femininity and resistance against oppression that makes "the other" vulnerable because, in this discursive field, to challenge the traditional gender roles or to embody another femininity is to risk accusations of being a communist (i.e., an oppressor). Although the reproduction of the patriarchal order in the current oral history projects in Slovakia has gone almost unnoticed so far, looking at the political context and seeing neighboring Eastern European countries where the conservative representation of women's identities is part of the ongoing historical revisionism raises some concerns and a number of questions. Coming back to the butterfly effect, one can at least ask what societal repercussions these seemingly small-scale conservative activities in history-making will have in future.

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BALTIC WORLDS
Special section 4/2017



Rivne nuclear power plant in Ukraine.

PHOTO: DYAKOV VLADIMIR LEONIDOVICH/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

# NUCLEAR LEGACIES: A SAGA OF MODERNITY

The conference *Nuclear Legacies: Community, Memory, Waste, and Nature* took place from September 14 to 16, 2017, at Södertörn University. It gathered about forty scholars engaged in nuclear issues, coming from twelve different countries and representing many different disciplines. The conference was one of the concluding events of the research project titled "Nuclear Legacies: Negotiation radioactivity in France, Russia, and Sweden" (funded by the Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies); a basic rationale for both the project and the conference was the expanding landscape of closed-down nuclear reactors confronting us today.

Out of the more than 500 commercial nuclear reactors in existence around the world, 100 have already been taken out of use. In the near future, many more will be closed down, as the first generation of reactors is becoming obsolete. Regardless of shifting political views on nuclear power and ongoing new construction in several countries, humanity has entered an era in which post-nuclear sites exist in large numbers. Furthermore, the current methods of control of radioactive material and sites, and the current experiences of those possessing the privileged high status that comes with the vulnerable "nuclear way of living" and of those who don't, are marked by a striking asymmetry of power between different groups of actors and between different hierarchies of value.[1] This expanding landscape, with its inherent tensions, calls for a similarly expanding scholarly attention.

Public interest in nuclear legacies has often centered on nuclear weapons in a Cold War context. In this conference, however, the focus shifted to less spectacular commercial nuclear power production and its legacy. This is a legacy that knits together regions, nations, and continents; professionals and laymen; center and periphery; nature and culture; and past, present, and future.

**A GLIMPSE AT THE CONFERENCE** paper presentations reveals subjects such as radioactive gardening, nuclear professional improvisation, and desires to show and to hide. The specific character of this nuclear legacy and the particularities of dwelling and working on a nuclearized site were common topics in the presentations. Bengt G. Karlsson, whose works deal with intimacy and estrangement at three nuclear sites in Sweden, notably approached the topic of the nuclear way of living in a nuclearized town. The scientific communities working with nuclear issues also drew much scholarly attention: Anna Veronika Wendland engaged with the development of the social and professional identities of the nuclear workers at Rivne in Ukraine in order to challenge current writing on nuclear history by offering a bottom-up perspective; Susan Molyneux-Hodgson addressed the creation of radiological knowledge by exploring the practices of scientific communities in nuclear-waste contexts; Sonja Schmid reported on her work with engineers at nuclear power plants as she trains them to improvise in order to prepare them for the unexpected – that is, accidents "exceeding the design basis"; and Ekaterina Tarasova approached the topic of antinuclear activist communities by reflecting on the invisibility of antinuclear movements and the professionalization of environmental NGOs in our time of "nuclear renaissance."

The decommissioning processes of different nuclear power plants were examined from different angles: from the debates that take place before a decision to close (e.g., discursive argumentation for or against the closure of the Fessenheim nuclear

The participants visited the underground site of Sweden's first nuclear reactor (R1).


"Nuclear Heritage – What to Do with It?" Public panel discussion.


Atomic gardening was a thing of the 1960s, but is now more or less forgotten.

power plant in France by Florence Fröhlig) to how communities in nuclear towns are affected by such a decommissioning (e.g., Leila Dawney and Kristina Šliavaitė examined how the community in the vicinity of the Ignalina nuclear power plant in Lithuania was adjusting to decommissioning and to the accompanying long periods of uncertainty). Several scholars were studying the decommissioning processes and future of the Sellafield nuclear power plant in the UK. For example, Sarah May (who is part of the research network Heritage Futures) engaged with the issue of waste at Sellafield and opened a discussion on transgenerational equity and heritage future-making. Penelope Harvey, Petra Tjitske, and Damian O'Doherty drew attention to the fact that it is not only nuclear buildings that represent a legacy; safety itself is part of the legacy of Sellafield.

The fates of nuclear sites and their *heritagization* processes were notably addressed by Trinidad Rico, who is currently engaged in writing the history of the Huemel atomic site in Patagonia, Argentina. The writing of this site's story is however challenging due to the scarcity and dispersal of its sources of material, such that information had to be obtained by collecting alternative sources, especially rumors attached to the island. In contrast to Trinidad Rico, who addressed a perceived "heritage of failure," Jaume Valentines-Álvarez reported on the prevention of heritage preservation through the 2005 removal of a 2 300 $m^3$ nuclear block in Barcelona, Spain, as way of transforming a fascist legacy into a "non-legacy."

**WHILE RICO AND VALENTINES-ÁLVAREZ** presented unclaimed sites, Kasia Keeley examined how the nuclear heritage of the Hanford site in the United States was integrated into the Manhattan Project National Historical Parkand, and what role landscape plays in moving beyond an authorized heritage. Fredrik Krohn Andersson problematized the issue of heritagization further in a discussion on the purpose of preservation. Should a nuclear power plant be preserved as an architectural heritage site, or as a site for dark tourism? Should it be preserved as an "object of architecture merit" that should be remembered, or as a way of "adjusting new technology to the environment", of blending it in with the landscape? In this way, nuclear heritage seems to possess both a desire to show and a desire to hide.

**"SHOULD A NUCLEAR POWER PLANT BE PRESERVED AS AN ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE SITE, OR AS A SITE FOR DARK TOURISM?"**

The preservation of a nuclear site opens discussions about a difficult heritage—one that challenges the "identity-affirmative nature of heritage-making," which is normally based on triumphs and achievements.[2] Several scholars in different contexts addressed the concepts of authorized heritage and the memorialization of nuclear projects. Eglė Rindzevičiūtė analyzed the creation of nuclear cultural heritage in Russia over time, and showed that, although the military use of the atom was downplayed during the Soviet period, the atom bomb is now at the center of current exhibitions.

Roman Khandozhko addressed the *sacralization* of the communist past in current discourses related to the organization of a world museum of nuclear energy in Obninsk, Russia. The sacralization of the atom, however, is not a new phenomenon, as illustrated by Ilia Kalinin, who presented the utopia of nuclear energy in Soviet discourses of the 1920s. Like Sellafield in the UK, the nuclear site of Obninsk drew much scholarly attention: Galina Orlova engaged with the nuclear topology of the site – that is, the spatial concentration of nuclear-related research institutes at Obninsk; Aleksandra Kasatkina addressed the nuclear legacies found in the home archives and personal memories of veterans of the nuclear industry; and Zinaida Vasilyeva analyzed how risk, health, and memory were dealt with in radiation narratives collected at Obninsk.

Alison Boyle addressed the official nuclear discourse in British museums by examining object biographies: she explored the public culture of atomic physics by studying the history of the artefacts displayed in British museums. Vanessa Cirkel-Bartelt reflected further on the British atomic legacy by addressing the issue of atomic gardening and radioactive breeding, and their disappearance from public and historiographical concerns after the 1960s. A physicist and radiation protection officer, Alan Flowers, drew attention to the curation of radiation hazards in contemporary museum exhibitions; such hazards range from radium emanators to the uranium compounds in vintage green-colored glass items or timepieces (i.e., radium dials and numerals). Flowers addressed the need to reflect on the holding and displaying of radioactive materials in museums, and urged everyone to identify all radioactive materials in their collections and to undertake contamination checks of all radioactive objects, in order to determine whether the exhibit poses significant risk, or is too hazardous to be shown. The curator Ele Carpenter also engaged with the issue of radiation, but did so from an artistic perspective by presenting the exhibition "Perpetual Uncertainty," in which artists concerned with temporality, materiality, and aesthetics materialized their radiological desires and fears, covering topics from naturally occurring uranium to radioactive waste. The appropriation of the nuclear legacy by popular literature was examined by Karena Kalmbach, who used two fictional books[3] to show how politics has influenced different representations of the Chernobyl catastrophe, and how the disaster has been constructed into different truths in France and Germany.

Nuclear legacies very tangibly impact nature in various ways. Anna Storm drew attention to the monitoring of fish upstream and downstream of nuclear energy production, and suggested how different imaginaries are attached to the monitoring of nuclear fish. Tatiana Kasperski and Andrei Stsiapanau addressed another very visible legacy of nuclear production: radioactive waste. Kasperski examined the politics of nuclear waste in contemporary Russia and addressed the controversy that is embedded in definitions of wastefulness and *nuclearity*, while Andrei Stsiapanau more specifically explored how the issues of nuclearity and nuclear waste are negotiated and re-negotiated at the Sosnovy Bor nuclear power plant located near St. Petersburg.

Cornelius Holtorf engaged with the issue of nuclear waste in a more holistic way by drawing attention to the temporality of the current solution of geological nuclear-waste repositories; he emphasized that it is impossible to predict how coming generations will view nuclear waste. Thus, cultural heritage is conceptualized differently through time: "To each future, its own future!"

Other scholars discussed the role of nature as a protector and radical conservation. Rodney Harrison reflected on landscape's salutary and sacrificial role in nuclear power conservation, and Kate Brown demonstrated the continuing impact of the Chernobyl catastrophe on the surrounding landscape 30 years later, from the deformity of pines' thorns to radioactive berries. Given the significance of nature in the production of nuclear energy, Per Högselius proposed a revision of nuclear energy history that would put water at the center of the narratives, since water is crucial to the production of nuclear energy; this proposal thus challenges existing national narratives on nuclear energy production.

**IN ADDITION TO RESEARCH** presentations and discussion, the conference participants acquainted themselves with some parts of the Swedish nuclear legacy. After Professor Arne Kaijser provided a historical background, participants visited the underground site of Sweden's first nuclear reactor (R1), located at the campus of the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) in Stockholm, which was in operation from 1954 to 1970. They also visited Sweden's first commercial nuclear power plant at Ågesta (R3), located in the Stockholm suburb of Farsta, which was in operation from 1964 to 1974. These occasions included various happenings and art events: the artist Jenny Wiklund presented her radioactive reflection at R1, and the artists Carl Johan Erikson and Karin Willén presented their work titled *10°C – Recipes from the Archipelago of Forsmark*, in which they offered savory crispbread with fish caught in the warm waters near the Forsmark nuclear power plant.

At the National Museum of Science and Technology, the conference participants took part in the opening of a photographic exhibition on the Ågesta nuclear power plant, curated by Magdalena Tafvelin-Heldner. The event was followed by a public panel discussion entitled "Nuclear Heritage – What to Do with It?" that brought together a panel consisting of Kate Brown, professor of history at the University of Maryland, USA; Malin Brikell and Magnus Oskarsson from Vattenfall; and Fredrik Linder from the Ministry of Culture in the government offices of Sweden. The public panel discussion offered the opportunity to discuss with a broader audience the issues and problems that had emerged during the scholarly discussions.

**THE CONFERENCE ATTESTED** to the tremendous impact nuclear energy has had on human society in the past century. However, even if scholars were to agree that "legacy" is something that is passed on, whether we like it or not, whereas "heritage" is something we choose to pass on, there is no consensus about which story should be passed on. Whose version of the story is to be heard? Who is legitimated to narrate the story? The different papers that were presented during the conference clearly demonstrated that the various countries under scrutiny had very different cultural approaches to nuclear legacies. While some countries are tempted to erase all related memories when decommissioning a nuclear site, others struggle to preserve either the nuclear legacy or the chosen nuclear heritage. However, one striking aspect of the nuclear legacy that transcends nation-states' memorialization of this saga of modernity is the range of non-human agents involved in the nuclear legacy. As presented at this conference, these agents included water, rocks, berries, mushrooms, trees, fish, and layers of clay. It is clear that the challenges connected to the nuclear legacies of the world cannot be solved only as a technical issue; they are – perhaps primarily – an issue of biological, social, and cultural concern.

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ILLUSTRATION: RAGNI SVENSSON




## abstract

The Russian–German gas pipeline project Nord Stream is still high on the agenda of regional politics in the Baltic Sea Region. Recent discussions on expanding Nord Stream highlight the fact that this unilateral effort by Russia and Germany has stirred further unrest among the other littoral states. Furthermore, an expansion of Nord Stream seems off limits due to EU regulations. Nevertheless, it is continuously pursued by Russia and Germany out of national interests. We argue that the EU, which has been repeatedly proposed as a mediator of the conflict, is unsuitable because its claim of direct legislative competence strongly affects the conflict. Based on existing mediation research, we suggest that regional political organizations, such as the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), are more likely to be accepted as mediators, and more likely to be successful in that role. Their perceived weakness is a strategic advantage because the parties involved in the conflict do not have to fear being overruled by the CBSS. Furthermore, the CBSS can remain engaged for an extended time.


**KEYWORDS:** Nord Stream, mediation, CBSS, credibility leverage, regional mediator.

# NORD STREAM, MEDIATION, AND THE COUNCIL OF BALTIC SEA STATES

by **Levke Aduda** & **Stefan Ewert**

Around 10 years ago, the Russian-German gas pipeline project Nord Stream triggered a public and academic debate in the Baltic Sea Region.[1] The discussion had at least four dimensions. In addition to political and security concerns, economic, legal, and ecological aspects were referred to. The public debate reopened in 2015, when the Russian company Gazprom, together with several West European partners, decided to found the consortium Nord Stream 2. Under the framework of Nord Stream 2, two more gas pipelines are supposed to be built across the bottom of the Baltic Sea. Controversial discussions on the project have split the region. The governments of Germany and Russia are in favor of Nord Stream 2. The German government supports the project, in spite of some critical arguments in particular by the Green Party. It is mainly the Social Democrats who advocate Nord Stream 2 and have pushed the German government to build an alliance with Gazprom and Russia.[2] The remaining Baltic Sea littorals oppose the project.

To date, the question how to govern the conflict over Nord Stream 2 remains unresolved even though construction is supposed to start in February 2018.[3] Meanwhile, the importance of regional cooperation is even more pronounced in light of recent events such as the Ukraine crisis and Russia's involvement in Syria, which indicate tensions in the international system that are likely to have an influence on the Baltic Sea Region. Particularly in times like these, regional cooperation is crucial because it contributes to regional stability. To encourage flawless cooperation, conflict management on Nord Stream 2 is necessary. This paper examines the question how the conflict on Nord Stream 2 can be successfully addressed.

**TO ANSWER THE** question, we first summarize the debate on Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2. Second, we introduce different conflict management tools with a focus on mediation. Drawing on the literature on international mediation, we seek to highlight the benefits of comparably weak mediators who can credibly promise to act as mediators without using sticks and carrots to pressure the conflict parties towards an agreement. Hence, the conflict parties remain in control of both the mediation outcome

and the mediation process. Moreover, we discuss the benefits of regional mediators who hold crucial insider information on the conflict parties. Third, we propose the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) as a mediator. We argue that it can make use of its relative weakness, and thus act as the type of third party that can bring the conflict parties to the mediation table. As a regional actor, it is likely to stay engaged for an extended period and thus not rush towards an agreement, but, through persistence and endurance, broker a lasting agreement.

## The public and scientific discourse on Nord Stream

In 2005, the Russian energy company Gazprom and the German energy companies E.On Ruhrgas and BASF/Wintershall founded the consortium *North European Gas Pipeline Company*, renamed *Nord Stream AG* in 2006. The purpose of this consortium was the creation of an offshore natural gas pipeline from Russia to Germany. Unlike other offshore gas pipeline projects, such as the *Langeled* pipeline from Norway to the UK, Nord Stream was the subject of controversy and debate from the very beginning.[4] The project was promoted by Russia's president Vladimir Putin and Germany's former chancellor Gerhard Schröder, while several Baltic Sea littorals objected to it for different reasons. The arguments of the proponents and opponents are outlined below. Despite the voices against Nord Stream, the pipeline from Vyborg, Northwestern Russia, to Lubmin, Northeastern Germany, was inaugurated in 2011. From an economics point of view, proponents of the project in Western Europe, and especially in Germany, argued that the pipeline ensures the gas supply from Russia to Europe. They referred to the crucial role of natural gas in the Western European energy mix and its status as a bridging technology for a climate-friendly energy supply in the future. Ecologically, the construction and operation of the pipeline will influence the marine environment only marginally,[5] and it will substantially contribute to reductions in $CO_2$ emissions. Moreover, by enhancing the dependency between Russia and Europe, the pipeline project would guarantee peace in the region.[6] However, opponents of the pipeline have argued that the consortium never took an onshore alternative into consideration, although such a solution might be less costly than an offshore pipeline.[7] In fact, opponents argued that the project is motivated by political reasons[8] and that it enables Russia to use the pipeline as political leverage on neighboring countries including the Baltic States, Poland, and Ukraine.[9] The offshore project allows Russia to sell and deliver its natural gas to its most important customer, Germany, while retaining the power to stop gas deliveries to neighboring countries if it so chooses.[10]

The discussion of the political dimension and the fear of Russian's regional empowerment has strongly shaped the public discourse among the other Baltic Sea littoral states.[11] For example, one concern, expressed mainly by Swedish politicians, refers to Sweden's national security: by crossing the Swedish exclusive economic zone, the pipeline might lead to a Russian naval presence along the Swedish coast, which could lead to political frictions. Moreover, the pipeline and possible related platforms might provide infrastructure for Russian spy attacks.[12] Additionally, to some political scientists, the pipeline project is part of the explanation of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość's (PiS) 2015 election victory in Poland. The national conservatives in Poland gained popularity, while the pro-Europeans parties, arguing for EU solidarity, lost their persuasive power due to the German-Russian bilateral effort.[13]

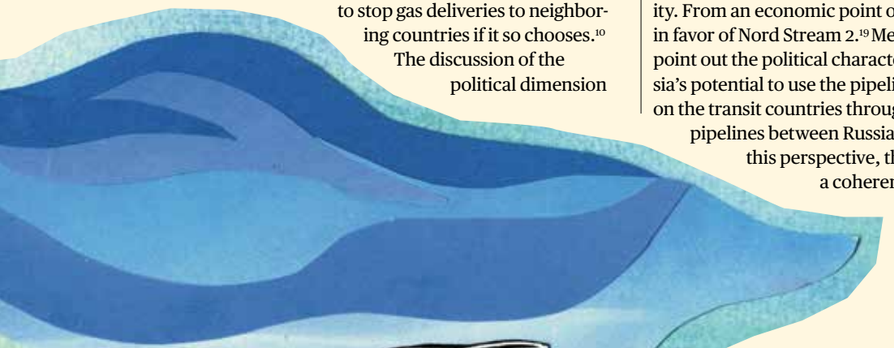
**A LAST GROUP OF** counterarguments is related to environmental concerns. These concerns have mostly referred to the setup process of the pipeline. Opponents have expressed fear that toxic bottom sediments will be released by laying the pipeline and that dumped ammunition and weapons from the Second World War will be exposed and disturbed in the process – with unpredictable consequences for the ecosystem of the Baltic Sea.[14] After the pipeline is laid, accidents in operation and gas leaks would probably have a negative impact on fish stocks.[15] The pipeline has been argued to be "prolonging European use of and dependence on fossil fuels".[16]

Finally, critics have complained of a lack of transparency in the project and the personal connections behind it. Analysts have viewed the friendship between Putin and Schröder as a "key explanation behind the Nord Stream project".[17] The lack of transparency raised suspicions with regard to the underlying aims and dangers behind the given economic rationales, and the registration of the Nord Stream Corporation in Switzerland heightened these suspicions.

## Nord Stream 2: Highly controversial again

After the inauguration of Nord Stream in 2011, the debate calmed down. Yet in September 2015, Gazprom and several European energy companies founded the consortium *Nord Stream 2* to lay two more pipelines, running parallel to the two existing ones, doubling the capacity from 55 to 110 billion cubic meters of gas per year. The two streams are supposed to be built in 2018 and 2019.[18]

This new project has reignited the debate in the EU. Germany, as the strongest proponent of the project, emphasizes the commercial character of the pipeline and regards it as a market activity. From an economic point of view, there are several rationales in favor of Nord Stream 2.[19] Meanwhile, opponents in the EU point out the political character of the project and highlight Russia's potential to use the pipeline as an instrument for pressure on the transit countries through which the existing overland pipelines between Russia and Western Europe run.[20] From this perspective, the pipeline undermines the aims of a coherent European energy policy, energy diversification[21] and security of energy supply.[22] Furthermore, the high cost can only be amortized by long-term use of the pipeline, and hence long-term use of fossil fuels, which will undermine the expansion of renewable energies.[23]





**ON THE LEGAL LEVEL**, the Nord Stream 2 consortium and the German *Bundesnetzagentur* (Federal Network Agency for Electricity, Gas, Telecommunications, Post, and Railways) on the one hand and the EU Commission on the other have debated the question of the pipeline project's legal basis. This dispute marks a crucial stumbling block for the project's execution due to the strong requirements, outlined in EU regulations on transparency, for other firms' access to the project and for the separation of gas production and supply. While the EU Commission insists on the implementation of EU law as the regulatory framework, the Nord Stream 2 coalition and the *Bundesnetzagentur* argue that the offshore project between an EU member state and a non member is not governed by the European Single Energy Market Package.[24] In order to ensure a coherent European energy policy, the European Commissioner for the Energy Union, Maroš Šefčovič, called for a leading role of the Commission in the pipeline negotiations with Russia.[25] However, the Legal Service of the European Council published an opinion in September 2017 and rejected the Commission's intention to engage in negotiations with Russia because the pipeline comes from a third country and thus does not fall within EU jurisdiction.[26] Hence, this expert opinion denied a direct role of the EU Commission as a negotiating partner in the dispute.

**"IN AUGUST 2017, THE US ISSUED SANCTIONS RELATED DIRECTLY TO THE NORD STREAM 2 PROJECT AND THEREBY TOOK AN ACTIVE PART IN THE CONFLICT."**

As a first conclusion, the pro and contra arguments brought forward on Nord Stream 2 are similar to the arguments on Nord Stream. In balancing the pros and cons, there is no "objective" way of understanding all of the underlying reasons for or against the project.[27] Because regional stability is of major importance in a time of increasing instability in the international system, and because the scheduled starting date of the construction of Nord Stream 2 is approaching very quickly, timely management of the dispute is crucial. In the following, we briefly introduce a range of conflict management tools before proposing mediation as the most suitable tool for managing the conflict over Nord Stream 2.

## Which conflict management tool to choose?

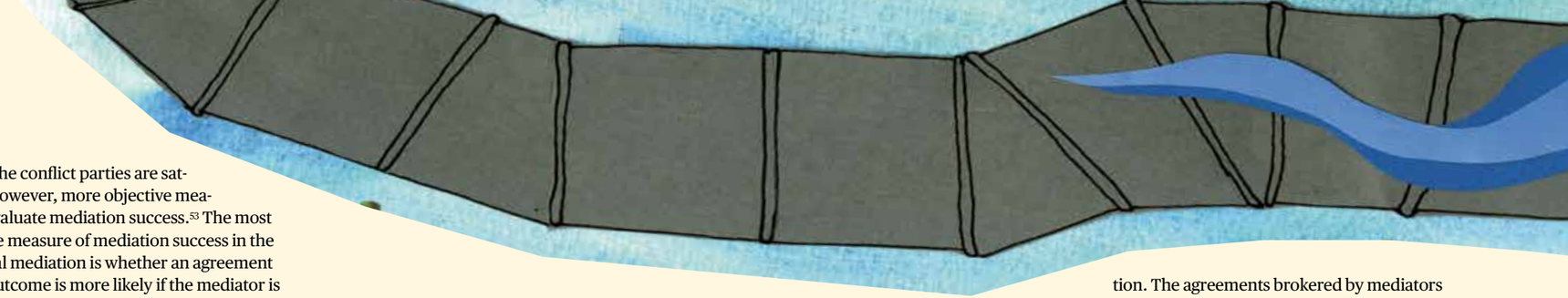
There are a range of peaceful conflict management tools available. Listed in Article 33 of the UN Charter are tools such as "negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their [the conflict parties'] own choice". In the conflict on Nord Stream 2, different tools can be considered as viable options. Sanctions have already been issued,[28] while demands have been made to have the European Court of Justice settle the dispute.[29] Both negotiations and mediation have been suggested as tools by different actors.

In August 2017, the US issued sanctions related directly to the Nord Stream 2 project and thereby took an active part in the conflict. The US Congress has authorized the president to impose sanctions on persons and firms involved in Russian energy export pipeline projects.[30] In fact, the "Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act" allows the US president to restrict the access of individuals or companies involved in the Nord Stream 2 project to US financial institutions and to prohibit procurement contracts between the sanctioned parties and the US government.[31] Germany's foreign minister Sigmar Gabriel accused the US of using sanction policy to promote its own gas export interests to Europe.[32] So far, these sanctions have not had a notable impact. Research has shown that a mix of conflict management strategies is often very effective, though,[33] and the question is what other tools might be used to address the conflict.

Legal measures, such as arbitration and adjudication, would provide binding solutions to the conflict. They are often considered to be the "most effective means of producing long-lasting settlements on contentious issues".[34] However, states often refrain from engaging in legal forms of dispute resolution, particularly when their national security is at stake, because they lose control over the outcome.[35] Especially because the disputants in the conflict on Nord Stream 2 do not agree on which legal measures apply, the hurdle before legal proceedings seems relatively high. In keeping with the EU Commission's position, most Baltic littoral states claim the project falls under EU jurisdiction, while Germany and Russia claim it falls under national jurisdiction.[36] Nevertheless, the European Court of Justice has been suggested as an institution that should address the conflict.[37]

**THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION** has shown a strong interest in bilateral negotiations with Russia. However, not only did the Legal Service of the European Council reject the European Commission's decision to engage in negotiations with Russia,[38] but Russia also stated that it does not want to negotiate Nord Stream 2 with the EU because it does not fall within EU jurisdiction.[39] Hence, bilateral talks between the EU and Russia do not seem to be an option. However, if the conflict parties do start to consider it as an option, it would be sensible to include all key disputants in talks.

Another option for conflict management is mediation, which is "a process of conflict management where disputants seek the assistance of, or accept an offer of help from, an individual, group, state, or organization to settle their conflict or resolve their differences without resorting to physical force or invoking the authority of the law."[40] It is a process throughout which the conflict parties remain in control of the outcome.[41] While this



can jeopardize talks, and can allow conflict parties to pursue "devious objectives",[2] it offers security to the conflict parties. Because there is no clarity on whether EU or national jurisdiction is applicable in the case at hand, mediation might be the key to addressing the conflict. Some political analysts have suggested EU mediation,[43] and Šefčovič himself declared the Commission's willingness to act as a mediator in the conflict.[44] In the following, we argue that mediation is a viable conflict management tool for addressing the conflict on Nord Stream 2. However, due to the EU Commission's strong position in the conflict, and its claim to juridical authority, we propose that another third party – the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) – mediate the conflict instead of the EU. Before we outline our proposal on CBSS mediation, we introduce some key notions on mediation in the following section.

## On mediation

Mediation is a voluntary process. Thus, the conflict parties have to agree to mediation for it to take place.[45] This is particularly true when the conflict parties are unable to solve a conflict unilaterally, i.e. by one side forcing the other to concede, and a continuation of the conflict becomes too costly but no way out seems apparent.[46] In the conflict at hand, the costs are increasing as the conflict continues. With the scheduled starting date of the construction of Nord Stream 2 fast approaching, the pressure on Germany and Russia to have certainty that the project can be implemented is increasing. Meanwhile, the other Baltic Sea littorals and the EU would prefer the project to be stopped, mainly due to the concerns outlined above. Nevertheless, not only Germany and Russia, but also the other Baltic Sea littorals and the EU are likely to be interested in a solution to the problem because this would reduce political tensions in the area.

**"IN THEIR STRIVING FOR MEDIATION SUCCESS, THIRD PARTIES EMPLOY DIFFERENT MEDIATION STRATEGIES. THESE ARE DEPENDENT ON THE MEDIATOR'S LEVERAGE."**

**MEDIATION IS A RELATIVELY** cost-effective conflict management tool that can be employed ad hoc.[47] This is crucial to note, especially assuming not only the conflict parties but also third parties are rational actors. Still, some third parties are more apt to mediate conflicts than others. While the UN often mediates protracted, high-intensity conflicts, and the US intervenes in numerous conflicts as well,[48] third parties with less leverage tend to intervene in conflicts of lower intensity.[49] In addition, in some conflicts several third parties mediate at the same time. These efforts are most likely to be successful if mediators of different types (or "tracks") intervene in a coordinated fashion.[50] If this is the case, they can combine their strengths and carry the costs of mediation together.[51] Which third party is chosen to mediate a conflict ultimately depends on many factors. Among others, the conflict parties' relations with the third party can be decisive.[52]

Subjective or objective criteria can be drawn on to define the success of mediation. On the one hand, mediation might be considered successful if the conflict parties are satisfied with the process. However, more objective measures are often used to evaluate mediation success.[53] The most commonly used objective measure of mediation success in the literature on international mediation is whether an agreement was reached.[54] Such an outcome is more likely if the mediator is able share private information passed to it by the parties in the conflict.[55] Because some third parties are more likely to encourage private information sharing than others, it is not only vitally important to account for mediator identity when analyzing mediation onset, but also when seeking to analyze the likelihood of mediation success.

Inherently linked with a mediator's identity is the mediator's leverage. Depending on how the conflict parties perceive a mediator's capabilities, and to what extent they are interested in these capabilities, a third party holds more or less leverage.[56] In their pursuit of mediation success, third parties employ different mediation strategies, which are dependent on the mediator's leverage. These strategies range from communication facilitation and procedural strategies to taking on a more influential role through directive mediation. Thus, stronger third parties are able to use directive measures, such as sticks and carrots, while weaker third parties are for the most part unable to pressure the conflict parties in a preferred direction. Instead, they seek to clarify the situation and share private information through communication facilitation or to establish a protocol and outline an agenda through procedural strategies.[57] The success rate of these mediation strategies varies. In the short term, mediators using directive strategies are more likely to produce agreements.[58] However, in the long run, time-inconsistency problems arise. As the presence of the third party wanes over time after the agreement is reached, the deal that was struck can seem less beneficial and the conflict parties may deviate from the agreement.[59] Although time-inconsistency problems can arise regardless of the strategy the mediator uses, less directive mediation is more likely to produce more lasting agreements due to increased ownership by the conflict parties.[60]

**MOREOVER, A DEBATE** in the literature on mediator bias highlights the benefits of mediators who take sides.[61] Not only may third parties biased to the stronger conflict party be able to convince them to engage in mediation in the first place,[62] but these mediators are also expected to share information more reliably.[63] They are also more likely to refrain from rushing towards an agreement, instead seeking to ensure that the interests of the conflict actor they are biased towards are met.[64] Thus, while the initial expectation is often that mediators are impartial, this is not always the case.

Due to the voluntary nature of mediation, we argue that it is a suitable conflict management tool to address the dispute over Nord Stream 2. If the conflict parties are allowed to remain in control of the outcome, we are convinced that mediation is a viable conflict management tool for the conflict at hand. If the conflict parties remain in control of the mediation outcome, they may engage in talks, and eventually the conflict around Nord Stream 2 may be solved. Moreover, mediation can be employed ad hoc. Considering that the expected starting date of the construction of Nord Stream 2 is fast approaching, the timely manner in which mediation can get started could be an important benefit of mediation in comparison to legal procedures that often demand more time than mediation. Although the lasting success rate of arbitration and adjudication is high, mediation has the capacity not only to address the position of the conflict parties, but also to account for the actors' interests and needs, especially when strategies of communication facilitation and procedural mediation are employed. Considering the different fronts (Russia and Germany vs. the Baltic Sea littorals), it is crucial to opt for a conflict management tool that permits a positive-sum solution. Because mediation provides for solutions that are more than a compromise, and because it allows the conflict parties to own the process and to remain in control of the outcome, we argue that the conflict parties are likely to accept a mediation offer and that a well conceived mediation process is also likely to be lastingly successful.

## The strength of weak, insider mediators

As has become apparent, the third party's identity is crucial for mediation onset and mediation success. While strong third parties are often more successful in the short term, weak third parties are more likely to broker lasting agreements.[65] Moreover, they are able to credibly promise "pure" mediation, that is, communication facilitation, or, at a maximum, procedural mediation.[66] Hence, weak mediators can credibly promise not to push the conflict parties in a direction they do not want to go. Through the numerous tactics available to them, weak third parties are able to guide the mediation process. By contributing to a clarification of the situation by identifying the interests behind the positions,[67] and thereby providing the grounds for reaching an agreement, weak mediators are likely to be stronger than they may seem to be at first glance.

Furthermore, mediators with cultural or historical ties often have a crucial impact on the conflict parties. In fact, although regional mediators often do not hold as much "capability leverage" as, for example, the US or the UN, they hold "credibility leverage" in the form of crucial context knowledge. They often have cultural or historical ties to at least one of the conflict parties, and therefore they are able to credibly share information. Besides, they usually have a genuine interest in conflict resolution. The agreements brokered by mediators with credibility leverage are likely to last because these mediators draft settlements that usually lie within the natural bargaining range of the conflict parties. Thus, the mediator does not extend the bargaining range through sticks and carrots, and even in the absence of the mediator, the agreements reached often endure.[68] Moreover, because insider mediators come from within a community, they cannot easily withdraw from the process. Therefore, they have strong incentives to be honest and are unlikely to push for agreements that do not match the capability distribution between the conflict parties.[69]

**IN SUM, ALTHOUGH** weak third parties may be perceived to be inefficient mediators at first glance, they often hold crucial credibility leverage, particularly when they come from within the conflict community. Especially in conflicts in which the stronger party does not want to come to the mediation table, weak third parties may be able to convince them to engage in talks because they do not have anything to fear from the mediator.[70] By being able to promise "pure mediation", they increase the likelihood of mediation onset. Because they are often a part of the community the conflict takes place in, they are likely to stay engaged for a longer time and thereby allow the conflict parties room to identify a deal that they can wholeheartedly agree to and are likely to implement. Thus, weak mediators with credibility leverage hold crucial advantages over strong mediators – especially in low-intensity conflicts.

## Mediating the conflict on Nord Stream 2: Calling upon the CBSS

Because the conflict between Russia and Germany on the one hand and the Baltic Sea littorals on the other is ongoing, we seek to underline the benefits of mediation for the case at hand. The literature review on the different positions towards Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2 has shown the diversity of arguments, which at first seem to be incompatible. To resolve the conflict, disentangling the positions of the conflict parties from their needs and interests is crucial.[71] With the assistance of a third party, the conflict parties might share yet unrevealed information, for example, on their security concerns or on their intentions with Nord Stream 2. Once these concerns are identified, a settlement that accounts for the concerns, interests, and needs of the conflict parties might be drafted, thus allowing a resolution of the conflict.[72]

One third party that has been repeatedly suggested as a mediator is the EU, which has increased its engagement in conflict management as a mediator since the early 2000s. For example, it brokered settlements between Serbia and Kosovo during the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue with the help of its leverage and a mix of mediation strategies.[73] However, as outlined above, the EU

Commission is an opponent of the Nord Stream 2 project in the ongoing dispute and it holds a strong position in the question of the project's jurisdiction. While the EU argues that the project falls under EU regulations, Germany claims that it falls under national jurisdictions – just as Nord Stream did.[74] Moreover, EU Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič has stated repeatedly that, according to the Commission, "Nord Stream 2 does not contribute to the Energy Union's objectives".[75]

**WHILE SOME MIGHT** argue that the EU would be a suitable mediator because it is a strong organization in the region and because it is an established and internationally renowned and recognized organization that has gathered experience in mediating conflicts – including conflicts of higher intensity – we argue that the EU is not the most suitable third party to mediate the conflict on Nord Stream 2: it plays an active role in the conflict by claiming authority over the legal status of Nord Stream 2 and explicitly argues against the pipeline. It is unlikely that all conflict parties, especially Russia and Germany, would agree to EU mediation because they will expect the EU to try to pressure them towards an outcome the EU prefers. Although there is a debate in the literature on whether mediators need to be impartial, it is certainly difficult for a third party to engage as a credible mediator if it makes a contested claim to legal authority over the dispute.

Instead of EU mediation, we suggest mediation by the CBSS, which has so far refrained from publicly positioning itself in relation to the conflict on Nord Stream 2. The CBSS is an intergovernmental organization founded in 1992 that seeks to encourage economic, political, and cultural cooperation among the Baltic littoral states as well as Norway and Iceland.[76] It is commonly regarded as a rather weak institution because it is not based on an international treaty, but on a declaration by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs.[77] According to the declaration, the decisions of the Council are not legally binding. The CBSS claims to act as an overall institution of regional cooperation between the northeastern part of the EU and Russia, providing an intergovernmental umbrella for regional activities.[78] For some analysts, the CBSS's main task was the region's preparation for the EU's eastern enlargement in 2004. Hence, when Poland and the Baltic States joined the EU, the continued existence of the CBSS was questioned.[79] Nevertheless, after some structural reforms and institutional changes, it still exists today.

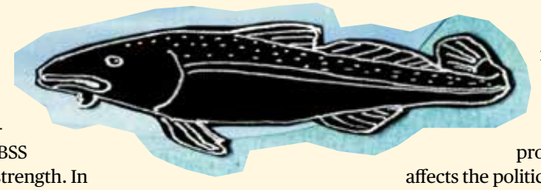
Because it was set up in the aftermath of the Cold War to encourage, enable, and improve political cooperation, among other goals, the CBSS suggests itself as a mediator in the region. Particularly because the continued conflict over Nord Stream 2 has a negative impact on the member states' relations and on regional stability and security, the CBSS should have a genuine interest in engaging with the conflict. The interpretation of PiS's electoral victory in Poland in light of the debate may serve, as outlined above, as one example of how the conflict influences regional politics and member state relations.[80] In fact, as early as 1997, the general idea of an offshore gas pipeline from Russia to Western Europe was on the agenda of the CBSS.[81] After Nord Stream became operational, Angela Merkel, as head of a CBSS summit in Stralsund, Germany, successfully reduced the differences between the disputants at the CBSS meeting in May 2012.[82] With regard to Nord Stream 2, no CBSS activities can be noted, though, and no official document or statement of the CBSS on the second Nord Stream project exists to our knowledge. Thus, the CBSS can claim neutrality in the dispute.

**"RUSSIA AND GERMANY MIGHT ALSO BE MORE LIKELY TO ENGAGE IN MEDIATION IF A COMPARABLY WEAK THIRD PARTY, SUCH AS THE CBSS, OFFERS ITS HELP."**

**NEVERTHELESS, THE CBSS** has several interests in the conflict. Since one of the main areas of regional cooperation is the protection of the Baltic Sea ecosystem, the pipeline's influence on the marine environment can be assumed to be one of the CBSS's priorities. Furthermore because all conflict parties are members of the CBSS, the CBSS would be an insider mediator whose genuine interest should be the resolution of the conflict. Additionally, the CBSS is under pressure to prove its relevance to the region, which it would be able to do by mediating the conflict on Nord Stream 2. To underline its diplomatic importance, it would have a strong incentive to be successful in this endeavor. Thus, it can be assumed that the CBSS would try to broker an agreement at all costs. However, it does not have the ability to use directive mediation. In addition, the CBSS would probably remain engaged for an extended period because it is an insider to the conflict. Therefore, it would be likely to continuously work towards mediation success, and, if need be, agree to multiparty mediation rather than risk failure.[83]

Russia and Germany may also be more likely to engage in mediation if a comparably weak third party, such as the CBSS, offers its help. Neither Russia nor Germany have to fear being pushed in directions they do not want to go during CBSS mediation. Instead, the CBSS would be able to credibly promise to refrain from directive mediation. Due to its relative weakness, it could use only facilitative mediation and, at most, procedural mediation. While this might result in mediation that takes longer, it guarantees the conflict parties' ownership of the mediation process. By focusing on clarifying the situation and sharing private information, mediation may eventually reach a settlement the conflict parties can agree to.





As outlined in the previous section, the perceived weakness of the CBSS can be interpreted as its strength. In fact, due to its insider position, the CBSS is likely to hold more knowledge on the different conflict parties' interests than other mediators. Because of its direct contact with its members, it can hold informal face-to-face talks without the other side feeling neglected. Moreover, due to its insider position, it is likely to have gathered private information on the conflict parties' stances in the course of the conflict. It is likely to have picked up on security concerns voiced by its member states, political and environmental issues, and economic interests that it can make use of once mediation gets underway. Bringing this information to the table provides the CBSS with leverage that stronger third parties who are not insiders to the conflict are unlikely to hold. Because the CBSS is reliable and able to share private information, the conflict parties can be expected to trust its ability to mediate. Hence, eventually, they are likely to share the information necessary for reaching agreements that both sides can commit to. Thus, the CBSS is not only likely to be accepted as a mediator, but also to broker a lasting agreement.

**THE QUESTION REMAINS, THOUGH,** which organ of the CBSS should take on the role of mediator. While the permanent secretary of the CBSS would be one option, we propose that the Committee of Senior Officials, which is appointed by the Council of Foreign Ministers, should appoint a Special Ambassador of the CBSS to mediate the conflict. Although political considerations are highly likely to influence the appointment, we strongly support the appointment of a mediator who is experienced because this will not only benefit the mediation process, but also increase the CBSS's likelihood of succeeding. One option would be to appoint a Norwegian diplomat – if Norway is willing to send one. Norway is experienced in conflict management, particularly in mediation,[84] and also has experience in pipeline construction.[85] Besides, it is not directly affected by Nord Stream 2. While one might ask why Norway should not simply mediate directly instead of being appointed through the CBSS, we argue that the engagement of the CBSS would increase the conflict parties' ownership, since they are all members of the CBSS. This would be crucial for embracing mediation wholeheartedly, and would encourage the mediator and especially the conflict parties to stay engaged for an extended time.

## Conclusion

Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2 have caused conflict in the Baltic Sea Region between Russia, Germany, and the other Baltic Sea littorals. While EU mediation and legal proceedings conducted by the European Court of Justice have been suggested, and sanctions have been issued by the US, the conflict remains unresolved, and to date no third-party diplomatic effort has got underway. However, particularly because "many governments in the region have only limited control over energy decisions in their countries", there is a need for cross-border governance with regard to the pipeline project.[86] Moreover, the conflict adversely affects the political and economic situation in the region. Thus, to enable cross-border governance and to improve relations between the states in the region, we argue that peaceful conflict management tools need to be employed to address the conflict. We strongly advocate using mediation as a conflict management tool.

However, instead of agreeing with recent propositions of EU mediation, we suggest the CBSS as mediator. Due to the central role the EU has taken on in the conflict, and in particular the different standpoints the conflict parties have on whether EU or national jurisdiction applies, we argue that EU mediation is unlikely to work. Being perceived as a rather weak institution, the CBSS can make use of its insider knowledge and turn its weakness into a strength. Because it can credibly offer pure mediation, Russia and Germany in particular would have incentives to engage in talks without fear of being pushed towards an agreement they cannot commit to. Meanwhile, to prove its relevance to the region, and due to the fact that the CBSS is an insider, the CBSS is likely to stay engaged for an extended time, thus allowing the conflict parties to own the process and brokering a lasting agreement.

In a next step, the CBSS should discuss the option of whether to engage as a mediator. We propose that the Committee of Senior Officials appoint a Special Ambassador, who ideally would have prior mediation experience. Because mediation can be employed ad hoc, it could get started soon, which is crucial considering that the conflict has been smoldering for several years now, the starting date for construction is fast approaching, and recent instabilities in the international system have led to a demand for greater regional stability.

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# Call for multi-ethnic citizenship in Poland

In communist Poland, everyday life could require searching and waiting for basic necessities. It seems fair to say that Poland was a relatively bearable society at that time, with less unemployment and a rich cultural and religious life. This is no longer the case in some parts of the country, which has long since ceased to be the communist country it once was. To some people, these changes are a cause of disillusionment,[1] and are often associated with the growing presence of non-Polish people. As Focus Migration data suggests, in the first year following the introduction of the EU mandatory visas, over a million visas were issued at Polish embassies – 600,000 in Ukraine, 300,000 in Belarus, and 200,000 in Kaliningrad.[2] In the same way, many Polish people have benefitted from the freedom of movement, employment, and residency in other EU countries such as France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Importantly, the underlying dictum of the EU is to ensure that all its member states benefit from mutual developments and positive ideologies. These shared developments and ideologies are particularly evident between Poland and the United Kingdom, as many Poles now consider the United Kingdom as an adoptive country; one study suggests that Polish is now one of the languages most spoken in the United Kingdom.[3] Although some Poles perceive the United Kingdom as an adoptive country, many have returned to their country of birth to practice some forms of acculturation, such as integration and multiculturalism.[4] The purpose of the EU's freedom of movement is not just to visit and trade freely within the EU countries; it is aimed at promoting an awareness of multiple cultures within the EU.

However, in Poland, migrants from the Middle East and Africa often experience restrictive immigration policies,[5] widespread resistance from the public due to fears of globalization and terrorism,[6] and an increasing visibility of chauvinistic right-wing organizations[7]. As a result, "the commitment to values that many believed to be widely shared – a sense of common humanity, a minimum of tolerance and respect for constitutional rights – turned out to be rather thin."[8] On the one hand, this seems to be an inescapable sign of modernity; on the other hand, it is an indication of ethnic diversity, due to waves of migration and especially of asylum seekers from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. Today, many Polish people share their public services, public spaces, and welfare with citizens of other countries, who may have similar or dissimilar cultures, traditions, and religions.[9] This situation seems to be a concern that results in continuous disagreement.[10]

In what follows, I draw on key concerns that usually generate controversy in many European societies: immigration and asylum, the welfare state, and culture and religion. I argue that in many progressive societies, most people belong to different exclusive and typically small groups of people with a shared interest – whether a family, profession, class, locality, or nation – and that it is their ability to move between these groups that determines their survival. The idea of "Polish-ness" should go a long way to ameliorate the tension between solidarity and diversity. At the same time, I recognize that diversity is not without conflict, and may lead to ill-founded fears of an out-group. I conclude that neither ethnic homogeneity nor religious attachment can take away fear of the Other; however, good relations with people from different backgrounds and good education about those backgrounds would go a long way towards improving relations between Polish and non-Polish peoples in Poland.

**"THE IDEA OF 'POLISH-NESS' SHOULD GO A LONG WAY TO AMELIORATE THE TENSION BETWEEN SOLIDARITY AND DIVERSITY."**

**THE RISE IN ASYLUM** applications, which has been exacerbated by Polish journalistic accounts and by the public, puts immigration at the top of the list for many Polish voters who are concerned about the presence of Muslims in their country. This concern is escalated by the recent March of Independence (*Marsz Niepodległości*), where there was encouragement for the expression of conservative views, strong anti-Muslim sentiment, and calls for "white Europe" and "pure blood".[11]

The history of immigration elsewhere has proved that xenophobic fears are ill-founded and are not based on reliable evidence. The post-war United Kingdom is a good example of a liberal society coming to terms with issues of immigration, integration, and diversity, and a relatively positive one, as the United Kingdom and France pioneered the European approach to immigration. Both countries had huge immigration during the post-war period, which included the end of the colonies. Post-colonial relationships led to the migration of people from the West Indies, South Asia, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh to the United Kingdom in the 1950s and 1960s. It was immigration on this scale that preceded the 1958 Notting Hill race riots and to Enoch Powell's 1958 "Rivers of Blood" speech in Birmingham. However, the UK government managed this fear fairly well with the enactment of the Race Relations Act of 1965, which was quickly followed by the Race Relations Act 1968, and then repealed by the Race Relations Act of 1976. These laws were mainly created to address racial discrimination in the United Kingdom, and were similar to the civil rights laws in the United States.

With globalization in the 1980s, migration from Africa, Asia, and China accounted for a new pattern of British migration which the anthropologist Steven Vertovec described as "super-diversity" – "multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade".[12] Suzanne Hall talked about an intensely multi-ethnic street in Peckham, South London, which was occupied by independent proprietors coming from over twenty countries of origin: Afghanistan, England, Eritrea, Ghana, India, Ireland, Iran, Iraq, Jamaica, Pakistan, Kashmir, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda, Vietnam, and Yemen.[13] Similarly, the Greater London Authority used the description of a "world in one city" when examining the presence of people from 179 nations within the capital. The only other city with a similarly diverse population is New York.[14]

ILLUSTRATION: RAGNI SVENSSON

**LET US FAST-FORWARD** to 1992, and to the enactment of the Maastricht Treaty. The completion of the idea of European citizenship and the Treaty of Accession in 2003 created a new wave of European migrants from the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, and Slovakia. This shift allowed citizens of these former communist countries to benefit from freedom of movement, employment, and residency in other EU countries such as France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Despite strong opposition from far-right political organizations in the West, the EU insisted on its Lisbon Treaty, which guarantees freedom of movement for citizens of its member states. This treaty enshrines the principles of human rights, and emphasizes that everybody, irrespective of color, gender, ethnicity, and nationality, has the right to a better life. As a result, many Polish people have established a good family life in Germany, France, or the United Kingdom. These migrants have contributed greatly to the economies of their adopted countries, and now consider German, French, or English to be their second language.

The purpose of this demographic history is to demonstrate that since the 1950s and 1960s in the United Kingdom, immigrants are seen as desirable but in many cases also as undesirable. Regardless of national identities, people who are given opportunities may in the long run become contributing citizens.

The point I wish to emphasize here is that population, if used cleverly, could be turned into wealth, as the people seen as "Others" today could become tomorrow's doctors, lawyers, chefs, and teachers, thereby creating opportunities and working toward the betterment of their adopted country.

Imad Alarnab was once seen as an undesirable Syrian migrant fleeing war in the Middle East. He walked, ran, cycled, and toiled through Lebanon, Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Hungary, Austria, and Germany, and finally found himself camping in Calais before being granted asylum by the government of the United Kingdom in 2015. Today, Imad is a chef launching a restaurant in East London.[15] Imad's story is not significantly different from that of a Polish builder seeking greener pastures in London and eventually owning properties in that country. Similarly, many left-wing Polish politicians are no doubt proud of their association with Poland's election of its first black MP,[16] and see it as a step toward diversity in Poland. These achievements would have been impossible without positive immigration and a trust that many immigrants would go on to become, not just citizens, but highly successful citizens.

Society would be better served if we trust that among today's asylum seekers, there are many potential citizens who will contribute immensely to the development of a future Poland.

The German open-border policy that allowed millions of war-fleeing and economic migrants from outside Europe to travel to Germany was seen as a crisis of mobility. The reaction to this policy has fuelled the rise of nationalism:

> **"Indeed, from west to east, north to south, nationalist movements seeking to exclude migrants or trigger the break-up of the European Union are growing in popularity. Nationalism's exclusionary, xenophobic, often racist articulation was a key feature of the UK's Brexit campaign and the subsequent reaction to the referendum result. In France, Marine Le Pen is on the rise, articulating her party's project in terms of securing France against Muslims, and holding their own referendum on EU membership."**[17]

Although Poland may not be a favorable destination for many people seeking asylum, Arab, Ukrainian, and African asylum seekers who are prepared to stay in Poland should be encouraged to become Polish and to hold on to the core aspects of their own culture as well as aligning with Polish social institutions. In return for embracing Polish culture, securing a job, and paying taxes, asylum seekers-turned-migrants must be given an opportunity to become virtuous citizens. It is mainly through this process that Poland can genuinely compete on an economic level with ranking nations such as the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. In encouraging this process, the Polish government needs to reassure its citizens of a robust immigration and asylum system that will not eventually disadvantage the "in-group", as doing so could result in further division, poor political participation, and consequently a poor welfare state.

The welfare state is a powerful rhetorical tool of racialization. If Poland's economy remains as stagnant and its politics as accusatorial as they are at present, conflicts over the allocation of public and other resources could be inflamed by the presence of migrants in the country.[18] However, once Poland has managed to achieve at least a sustainable welfare state, it is understandable that such a state may be unpopular in combination with an open immigration policy, as many in the United Kingdom would argue that "Eastern Europeans" are mainly attracted to the British benefit system.[19] In fact, the vast majority of so-called economic migrants work harder than native citizens, pay taxes, and take less from the state's wallet.[20] This process of sharing has allowed many Polish workers to earn good wages, while the state benefits from the taxes contributed by these immigrants. A similar system is easily applicable in many countries, including Poland. The essence of this argument is that if we are serious about reducing the global North-South divide and the gap between the rich and the poor, we must be prepared to share our resources. This means that the rich cannot continue to ignore the poor, the in-group cannot ignore the out-group, Poles cannot ignore Syrian asylum seekers, and, importantly, the Polish public needs constant reassurance from the government that their money is being spent thoughtfully and wisely. The Polish welfare rules must be transparent and blind to *ethnicity*, *religion*, and *race*.[21]

**"POLAND WAS ONCE A VIBRANT CULTURAL CENTER OF EUROPE, AND WAS COMPOSED OF A COLORFUL COMBINATION OF DIFFERENT CULTURES AND FAITHS."**

In order to make the system more robust, citizens need to hold their politicians accountable. In many countries, people view power as a concrete mechanism that is always situated in the hands of religious leaders, politicians, and academics. Indeed, people are correct in viewing power from this perspective, as this was the way the mechanism of power was originally sold to common people. However, Michel Foucault has shown that "power is everywhere" and "comes from everywhere".[22] This implies that power is not a one-way mechanism; it is not static, and it is not situated at any particular point. Reconstructing power as a two-way mechanism implies that people should have the ability to tell the state what it can and cannot do. A very successful way of doing so is the recent Black Protest in Poland against the planned abortion law, which forced the PiS government to make a complete U-turn from its plan to erroneously criminalize women involved in abortion.[23] This indicates that power is not only situated in the hands of Catholic, far-right and conservative politicians. In essence, the power to make essential decision about life is ultimately situated in the hands of Polish women and girls who correctly stood up to the state over the control of their bodies.

**IT IS ALMOST** impossible to imagine Polish life without the Catholic faith. The Catholic faith influences the life and morality of the Polish people and affects the state's governance. Many politicians have built their authority on the tenets of Catholicism, causing common people to perceive politicians and religious leaders as the main authorities in decision-making. By this position statement, I do not advocate a non-religious state or non-belief in God; rather, I suggest that people should exercise their ability to think for themselves by rethinking the position occupied by politics and religion in their lives. Politicians are only state administrators, and have made huge mistakes on many occasions. Similarly, although Catholicism may have provided many Polish people with a sense of identity and solidarity, this is an insufficient reason to tie all aspects of Polish life to the Catholic faith. It is reasonable to avoid anything that may separate national and ethnic minorities from native Poles; however, doing so could easily lead to an assumption that the society is homogeneous and that everybody must live by an imposed Polish religious and cultural order.

Polish people need to remember that Poland was once a vibrant cultural center of Europe, and was composed of a colorful combination of different cultures and faiths—including Calvinism, Lutheranism, Arianism, Unitarianism, Orthodoxy, Uniat, Judaism, Monophysitism, and Islam—while also retaining the core features of Polish life.[24] This rich aspect of the *Serenissima Res Publica Poloniae* should never be forgotten. Teaching multi-ethnic citizenship in Polish schools will be a welcome step, as too many children have no sense of this broad aspect of Polish national history. It is my view that a multi-ethnic citizenship would give any out-groups who wish to settle in Poland a sense of direction and inclusion. Importantly, people tend to favor their own families, communities, and sometimes bloodlines; it is the task of the Polish state to come up with a society that is liberal enough to accommodate people from different backgrounds, without losing the core aspects of the *Serenissima Res Publica Poloniae*.

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# “They need external enemies and quick victorious wars. And they need internal enemies”

If Mikhail Kasyanov had simply been the former Russian Prime Minister from the beginning of Vladimir Putin’s era, his personality would hardly have attracted much attention from those who are passionate about Russian politics. However, since the end of his four-year term as Russian Prime Minister in 2004, Kasyanov has become a dogged critic of President Putin, first regarding the economic policies of the Russian government and later in relation to other issues like the loss of democratic freedoms, authoritarian state-building, and the fierce anti-Western rhetoric that has led to the current confrontation that more and more resembles the Cold War. Mikhail Kasyanov is now the head of the oppositional, liberal People’s Freedom Party (“PARNAS”). He does not hesitate to publicly call the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014 an “annexation”.

In November 16, 2017, he shared his views about the political situation in Russia and its evolution since Putin took power at a presentation hosted by the Stockholm Institute of Transition Economics (SITE). Comparing the current economic situation with his time working in the government, Kasyanov concluded that there is a vast difference: “Compared with the period, referring to fifteen years ago, when, as a result of reforms pursued by my government, Russia set up and was tuned into the trends of sustainable economic growth with a GDP growth of 6-7% per year and the real income of people grew by 10-15% per year, what do we have now? In the last three years, the economy has been shrinking – we have lost 15% of the GDP, and in fact right now Russia’s GDP is comparable with the GDP of Russia ten years ago.”

The reason for this deterioration, according to Kasyanov, is the “reversed direction” the country has taken under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, including resistance to the West and an aggressive foreign policy, the inability to pursue important reforms due to the risks of losing power, and the drop in global oil prices in recent years. The lack of resources is

The first meeting of PARNAS in Moscow, October 9, 2010. From left: Boris Nemtsov, Vladimir Milov, Vladimir Ryzhkov, and Mikhail Kasyanov.

the reason why budgetary allocations for healthcare and education are shrinking. In contrast, military expenses are mounting, which seems to be an unhealthy symptom of a war-oriented mobilization economic policy: “Reducing expenditures for the most important areas, the most important responsibility of the government, like expenditures for education, which were reduced over a three-year period by 25%! Or expenditures for health, which were reduced over the same three-year period by 22%, while military expenditures have grown to be 5% of the GDP.”

**KASYANOV ALSO** recognized that the sanctions imposed on Russia by Western countries in response to aggression against Ukraine indeed have contributed to the country’s economic depression, but at the same time he noted that these sanctions have never been targeted against private companies or the Russian people as a whole: “There are no sanctions on private business. Sanctions were imposed on state corporations, the personalities who were involved in ‘wrong-doing’ for lack of a better word.” The problem, however, is that Putin’s economic policy has led to the dominance of state or state-tied corporations: “Today we have up to 75% under the state-controlled corporations, and those corporations are in the hands of Putin’s friends.”

Consequently, it should come as no surprise that the incomes of the population have been affected along with those of the companies that the well-being of ordinary Russian citizens strongly depends on.

The internal political climate, according to Kasyanov, determines the external policy. In his opinion, Vladimir Putin and his government have been using methods that are typical for dictators: “They need external enemies and quick victorious wars, and they need internal enemies”. This “gradation” of foes is not hard to illustrate with respect to Russia – the internal enemies are opposition movements, independent NGOs, and human rights activists, while the external enemies are the United States, NATO, and the European Union. Kasyanov cites the example of the imprisonment of some activists from his party after their participation in opposition demonstrations and the hard pressure that is being put on some other activists and their families by the Federal Security Service (“FSB”).[1] The justifiability of this worldview and the entire popularity of Vladimir Putin are maintained through intensive television propaganda that seems to be effective due to the fact that the central television stations are still the main source of information for 50% of Russians, while Internet is such for only 10% of its 60 million Russian users. Many Russians, laments Kasyanov, “are just too lazy to compare the different views that they hear from the government with what is posted on the Internet and with what is available from other sources”. The real electoral support for Putin is estimated by Kasyanov to be between 45% and 52%. The polls reporting 85% support do not seem very objective to him: “It’s another question, not a question of trust, it’s a question of loyalty such as ‘Do you like Putin’s policy?’ – especially when it was asked after the annexation of Crimea, and 85% actually said ‘Yes’.”[2]

As to the nearest evolution of relationship with the Western countries, Kasyanov even expects some kind of relaxation under the conditions of upcoming presidential campaign with subsequent Putin’s predictable re-inauguration for the fourth term. There might be some attempts to draw up an image of Putin as a “mediator” without any back-tracking on major positions in order to reinforce his reputation not only for “internal consumption”, but also worldwide. According to Kasyanov, the main topics here would be the North Korean crisis, where Putin “has nothing to lose” but might show up as a conciliator, and the idea of deploying UN peacekeepers in East Ukraine. However, Kasyanov is skeptical about that: “By just mentioning the word ‘peacekeepers’, I think, Mr. Putin would invite the West into negotiations so as to silence the issue during preparation for the presidential elections and thus avoid any harsh statements on Putin and his activities. I think that this is just a smokescreen and is not intended to truly resolve these problems”.

**WHAT DOES KASYANOV** think about future Western policies towards Russia? At the very least, he suggests considering Putin and the Russian people as two different entities. This would be a ground for dividing the policy into two parts. The first part is the interaction with the Russian government that should be focused on finding solutions regarding North Korea and Ukraine. For that, the West must continue sticking “to our principles, to re-confirm that Crimea is an illegal annexation and to confirm the territorial integrity” of Ukraine with the purpose of showing that “there are no weak links that can be used to divide Europeans and to try to destroy trans-Atlantic unity”. The second part should comprise interactions with civil society in Russia and promote its development. Much has to be invested in the enlightenment of the new generation of Russians and in the guidance and construction of a strong civil society, specifically “to invite more young people to universities here in Europe, to give them an education and to show them what a civil culture is, to show them a different system of interactions between citizens and their governments”. To Kasyanov, this will also help improve the opportunities for business development in the country because people might learn to protect their interests before the government, including those in the business area. Despite the rather somber present, he looks optimistically into the future and hopes that it will be feasible to regenerate the dreams of a pro-Western democratic Russia and a common economic and political space from Lisbon to Vladivostok, as he himself had hoped to bring to life during his time as prime minister.

In my opinion, the most important aspect of Kasyanov’s argument is that the Russian people and the Russian government should in no way be considered as one. Russia still has politicians and opinion leaders who advocate a policy that is free from the artificial invention of enemies and free from modern analogues of medieval doctrines like “Gathering of the Lands”[3] and the “Third Rome”[4] and who work against the fortress mentality and archaic nationalistic militarism. Such politicians and opinion leaders do not hesitate to highlight the most sensible issues of national politics despite the danger this might bring, as has been visualized many times throughout modern Russian history in the tragic fates of such politicians like Boris Nemtsov,[5] Sergey Yushenkov, and Galina Starovoytova; journalists and human rights activists like Yuri Shchekochikhin, Anna Politkovskaya, and Natalya Estimirova; and many others who offered their lives for the sake of the truth in which they so strongly believed.

Supporting the initiatives of those who would promote democratic modernization in the world’s largest country is as crucial for the global future as it is for the destiny of Russia itself. This is especially important in the face of scaremongering and the rise of right-wing populism in some Western and East-European countries, with a huge number of similarities to Vladimir Putin’s governance style.

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3 The “Gathering of the Lands” was the idea to reunify the Russian principalities with the center in Moscow in order to overcome the Mongol invasion and the feudal disunity of the 14th–15th centuries. It has been widely used since then to describe a foreign policy in which Russian governments in different periods have tried to regain control of the lost “ever Russian” territories or more rarely to describe an internal policy of centralization with the purpose to prevent threats of separatism.

4 The concept of Moscow as a “Third Rome” was a political and religious idea popular among the Muscovite tsars during the Middle Ages. According to this, Muscovite Russia has a global mission to rescue the world from the coming Antichrist as the sole civilization inherited from orthodox Christianity from the fallen Byzantium that in turn was a successor of the fallen Roman Empire. After the two previous “Romes” – Rome and Constantinople – Moscow would be the third one until the Apocalypse, and the fourth Rome therefore would never come to be. This concept has served as a point of departure for other theories of Russian exceptionality in later periods.

5 Beside his the other known accomplishments and background, Boris Nemtsov was Kasyanov’s colleague in co-leadership of PARNAS party in the last years before his assassination in the center of Moscow in February 2015.

# The avant-gardist Ivan Aksionov.
## A life marked by ruptures and paradoxes

**Vid avantgardets korsvägar: Om Ivan Aksionov och den ryska modernismen [At the cross roads of the avant-garde: On Ivan Aksionov and Russian modernism**

Lars Kleberg, Stockholm Natur & Kultur, 2015, 248 pages.

This book by Lars Kleberg, professor emeritus of Russian at Södertörn University, is a well-written, pioneering, biography of the – until recently – little-known avant-gardist Ivan Aksionov (1884–1935). Through Aksionov, Kleberg explores the ups and downs of the Russian avant-garde in the 1910s and '20s. Even if Aksionov was not a leading cultural figure, Kleberg shows him to be a fascinating and versatile person; a poet, critic of art and literature, theater expert, and translator, acquainted with many cultural celebrities of his time. Kleberg's background also has some similarities with Aksionov's.

In Kleberg's words, the study of Aksionov unveils new aspects and unrealized potentials of the avant-garde. He sees the avant-garde – cubism, futurism, and non-figurative art – as a reaction to symbolism, which in turn was a reaction to 19th century realism, and both as subcategories of modernism. The Russian avant-garde aimed to undermine all hierarchies, to transgress genres and national boundaries.

The book also gives a picture of the political upheavals in Russia at the time as seen from inside and below, a useful complement to all top-down analyses of the Russian revolution and its aftermath that have appeared in recent years. The book has good illustrations, chronologies, and references.

Kleberg first became interested in Aksionov through conversations, in the 1970s and later, with the famous art collector Nikolai Khardzhiev, who had known Aksionov and to whom the book is dedicated. The book builds on notes from these conversations and material collected for many years: Aksionov's published and unpublished works, letters, scattered information in newspapers, memoirs, and research. Kleberg also builds on papers from the first international symposium on Aksionov, which he organized near Uppsala in 2008, and an edition of Aksionov's collected works that came out in Russia in the same year. Kleberg focuses on ruptures and paradoxes in Aksionov's life, stressing that Aksionov was secretive and that much remains to be found out.

**AS A SON OF** a Russian nobleman and officer, Aksionov grew up on an estate in eastern Ukraine, but Kleberg apparently found little information on relations with his family. Aksionov was trained as an officer in the engineering troops. When the Tsar dissolved the Duma in 1907, he participated in an army revolt in Kiev, was arrested, and was sent to a post in Siberia for two years. Aksionov spent his time there studying languages and literature, and on his return to Kiev started to mingle in its prominent cultural circles. He was noted for his immaculate dress, always in white shirt and a monocle, and for his arrogant and aggressive behavior. In 1911, Aksionov made his début as a translator with French poetry, and the year after as an art critic with an insightful analysis of the symbolist artist Mikhail Vrubel. He became a name in Moscow in 1913 where, speaking after Vladimir Mayakovsky at a spectacular debate, he provided a provocative assessment of contemporary Russian art and its future. Kleberg here surmises inspiration from philosopher Lev Shestov, also from Kiev, who – inspired by Nietzsche – allegedly wanted to undermine strong faith in all its forms. Most of all, however, Shestov rejected the belief in reason.[1]

In 1914 Aksionov, like many others, went to Paris, the world's cultural capital at the time, and became acquainted with cubism and Pablo Picasso, about whom he started to write a book in polemics with the Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyayev. He admired the Eiffel Tower and discovered the French 19th century poet Comte de Lautréamont, whose *Les chants de Maldoror* are well used by Kleberg as openings to each chapter.

When the war broke out, Aksionov – unlike most cultural figures – was called up as an officer to serve behind the Western front, but he spent much time writing and corresponding with the poet Sergei Bobrov, who had a futurist publishing house called Tsentrifuga. He supported its activities with money from his estate and in 1916–1917 published *The Elizabethans*, an anthology of English 17th century poetry in his own close "rhythmic" translation, a collection of poems called *Invalid Foundations*, in a "cubistic" style, including the Eiffeleid suite, the Picasso book, and other things, mostly without getting reviews.

After the February 1917 revolution, Aksionov engaged in politics by organizing a Bolshevik party cell in the army and editing a soldiers' council paper. In October he criticized Prime Minister Kerensky and hailed the Bolshevik takeover. In December he was captured by the Romanian troops for four months, but was then exchanged and joined the civil war. He became deputy head of the Cheka commission for combating desertion and partly responsible for signing death sentences against fleeing peasants, amounting to tens or hundreds of thousands. However, in captivity Aksionov wrote a picaresque novel (only published in 2008) called *The Pillars of Hercules* about a Russian student fleeing to Paraguay, which in style reminds Kleberg of Andrei Belyi and Boris Pasternak.

In 1920, and during the NEP period after the civil war, Aksionov was deeply involved in cultural events as a speaker and critic. In the state journal *The Press and the Revolution*, initiated by Commissar of Culture Lunacharsky, Aksionov wrote sharp reviews and in an essay,

*Still Life with Compote and Glass*, 1914, by Pablo Picasso.

"On the Liquidation of Futurism", argued that its victory in 1917 with poets like Velimir Khlebnikov and Vladimir Mayakovsky also presaged its decline. However, Kleberg shows that Aksionov was not really a Marxist. In another essay, "On the Disorder of the Day", Aksionov attacked Osip Brik, spokesman for an alliance between the avant-garde and socialist society, by dismissing utilitarian art and its union with industrial production. He emphasized that the mission of art is to satisfy aesthetic needs, and that aesthetics is a science.

As a former playwright, Kleberg then devotes a chapter to Aksionov's association with Vsevolod Meyerhold's famous theater, especially the production of Fernand Crommelynck's tragic farce *The Magnificent Cuckold* in 1922, which, according to Kleberg, became a milestone in theater history with its biomechanical acting and constructivist scenography by Liubov Popova. Aksionov provided the translation and engaged Popova; he became the director of Meyerhold's theater school, dramaturg and translator of plays such as Alfred Jarry's *King Ubu*. He was also chairman of the Union of Poets and headed its popular café Domino. Instead of joining the Moscow center for avant-garde art (LEF) led by Mayakovsky and Brik, in 1924 he joined a group of constructivist young poets, publishing a long treatise on the frequency of consonants in Russian poetry in its first anthology.

**IN THE MID-1920S**, when the avant-garde lost its cultural influence to proletarian authors who wanted to use 19th-century art forms to spread Communist ideology to the masses, Aksionov stood without friends, positions, or money from his estate. He earned his living as a lecturer and wrote a history of Meyerhold's theater, which was not published. He criticized the new photo-realist art and in a rightist journal attacked Mayakovsky for adopting the style of capitalist advertisement, an act which his avant-garde colleagues viewed as treachery. In 1930 he suddenly left Moscow to teach physics to engineers at a hydropower station in Ukraine. On his return he was invited by the philosopher Gustav Shpet, deputy head of the Arts Sciences Academy, to publish a book on Hamlet and Shakespeare, notable for its non-ideological analysis. Apparently in need of money, he also translated Anatole France and wrote about the future of Soviet bakeries.

In 1932, when the five-year-plans had started and Stalinist repression was intensifying, the separate arts unions were dissolved and socialist realism became the order of the day, combining realism with utopian visions. Aksionov was affiliated with the Academia publishing house, which specialized in translations of Western classics, and edited a collection of plays by Ben Jonson with a long historical introduction, still the most comprehensive in any language according to Kleberg. During the Shakespeare boom from 1933 on, he wrote several essays on the playwright, but a translation for a big collection of Shakespeare's works was not included, apparently because Shpet was arrested and then killed. In his last years Aksionov authored a book on three prominent contemporaries whom he knew well, namely the artist Petr Konchalovskiy, the Meyerhold actress Maria Babanova, and the film director Sergei Eisenstein, a book which mirrors the history of the avant-garde. After Aksionov's natural death in 1936, his former wife, the poet Susanna Marr, in her turn had some of Aksionov' works published.

Kleberg has now also done a great deal to increase our knowledge of Aksionov and his time. Deservedly, an English translation of this book is planned.

**Ingmar Oldberg**

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## reference

1 Shestov and his view of Nietzsche and Shakespeare are also analysed in a 2017 dissertation by Lars Douglas Eriksson at Stockholm University, "Crisis, Alienation and Authenticity in Lev Shestov's Philosophy".

# Uprootedness in the Polish-German Borderlands.
## The meaning of the transformation revised

**Dystopia's Provocateurs: Peasants, State and Informality in the Polish-German Borderlands**

Edyta Materka, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2017, 234 pages.

**"Toward the end of WorldWar II, the Soviet Union's annexation of eastern Poland and Poland's annexation of eastern Germany precipitated one of the largest demographic upheavals in European history. The Soviet-backed Polish government expelled millions of Germans west of the new Polish–German border and replaced them with millions of ethnic Poles from south and central Poland, along with 'repatriated Poles', a group comprising Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Belarusians, Kashubians, Jewish Holocaust survivors, and other ethnic minorities from Poland's lost east and newly acquired German lands. The Polish government called this new western frontier the 'Recovered Territories' (Ziemie Odzyskane) – a Polish homeland that had been lost to German colonialism for a millennium. What these Slavic settlers would 'recover', however, was unclear."**

The beginning of Edyta Materka's book on the narratives of settlers and "remainers" in the territories annexed by Poland in the preliminary Potsdam Treaty already hints at a critical attitude to official historiography. She is searching for the memories of the daily chores, restrictions and possibilities in a situation of uprootedness and societal muddiness. She is a daughter of the area, now returning with the gaze of a trained ethnologist after a lucky draw that brought the family to "Ameryka". Her maternal village, called Bursztyn, is situated some 100 kilometers west of Gdańsk. Upon returning after many years she finds that the village street is paved with German gravestones, soon covered with concrete in order to conceal history.

Her principal interest is the local people's use of *kombinacja*, defined as the improvising process of reworking economic, political, or cultural norms for personal gain. Materka asks: How is kombinacja socially reproduced, and how does it migrate to new sites? What does it mean to transform into a *kombinator*, and how does this transformation occur?

The concept has a strange history of semantic and spatial transmission from British late 18th-century legislation against combination, the forming of workers' unions for better wages and working conditions. The resistance against oppression was adopted by the intelligentsia of Congress Poland through the writings of John Stuart Mill, Adam Smith, and Karl Marx, as a grassroots nation-building against Russification, an "underground republic of the imagination". In resurrected interwar Poland, kombinacja changed character, developing into the "beginning of an internal revolution within the Polish republic of the imagination. Women's and gay rights activists were beginning to publicly question the organization of Polish society around Catholic-defined, heterosexual, and masculinized spaces."

Materka's book is primarily about the Polish version of kombinacja, but because the time of what she calls Slavic settlement is a period of strong if often counter productive Soviet influence, she devotes some coverage to the use of *kombinatsiya* in the great eastern neighbor. During the more permissive slots in Soviet history, heroes of kombinacja appeared in literature. "Stalin's trickster tactics to eradicate the Nepmen capitalists inspired a new antihero … in interwar Soviet literature." Materka sees the kombinator or *blat* tactics depicted in this literature as symptomatic of Soviet society, from Lenin's NEP and Stalin's different hard and softer regimes to Gorbachev's perestroika.

The Potsdam Agreement endorsed the westward movement of Polish territory, at least as a preliminary solution. The German population of the areas would be expelled. In order to explain the flight of people of diverse ethnic origins from the eastern *kresy*, of Germans from East Prussia and Pomerania, and the necessary repopulation of the newly acquired lands, the Warsaw government adopted a strategy borrowed from interwar nationalist propaganda: The idea of "recovered territories" was a myth based on partly true, partly exaggerated histories of the Piast dynasty ruling a territory resembling the new spatial configuration of Socialist Poland around the turn of the first millennium, before the Germanization of much of the area in the Middle Ages. "Scholars became puppets of the state, manipulating science to validate the Piast myth." The myth served both as a justification of the land grab and for the reestablishment of a new era, perhaps with the intention of putting the nationalizing aspect before the reality of Sovietization.

**THE RESETTLEMENT** of the "recovered territories" met with enormous difficulties well exemplified by Materka under the heading "The Second Serfdom". Land was distributed by faulty or misguided principles to people unprepared for agriculture, villagers were forced to do corvée (szarwark, from German Scharwerk, group work) against all principles of socialism, and remaining Germans were exploited if needed for specialized work, otherwise harassed or expelled. This was a time for kombinacja, especially by the administrators. "The survival of the early Polish elites relied not on following the myth of the Recovered Territories but on navigating official and unofficial identities and discourses to secure


The Polish government called the western frontier the "Recovered Territories" (Ziemie Odzyskane). A million Germans were expelled and replaced by ethnic Poles.

a bricolage of German and Russian resources to keep them fed and in power."

While many settlers in formerly German-occupied areas carefully destroyed all remnants of German heritage in the houses taken over, people from the east, especially those expelled after the Vistula campaign, kept inventories from the former German inhabitants. In cases where Germans stayed in their former houses as "lodgers" with the new owners, they gave some of their remaining belongings to the settlers before leaving westwards. These objects, called "gotyk", were sometimes kept as a link to history and to the future, in case the Germans came back on nostalgia tours, called *Heimat* by the settlers and their descendants.

This time of proto-socialism was one of chaos, but in the villagers' memories the word kombinacja is rarely mentioned. "Socialism in the Recovered Territories was built on the foundations of feudalism that mixed Polish, German and Soviet variants at different points in time. Villages were ruled by father-son teams, commune officials granted themselves landed estates and secured cheap German labor for them; forestry division directors treated workers as their own domestic laborers. The state was defined not by the rule of law from Warsaw but by familial networks."

Around 1948 the attempts to create Polish socialism were crushed by Moscow. In the Recovered Territories, however, chaos lingered on, but the collectivization measures were easier to impose on the rootless than on the autochthonous peasants from the old Polish areas, and creating *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes* partially recreated the old Junker estates. The hard measures did not reach the area until the time of Stalin's death. There is almost no mention of kombinacja in the public archives, only one local report condemning kulaks and kombinators and introducing mandatory quotas of agricultural products to stop speculation. These mandatory quotas marked the Polish peasants' first encounter with Stalinism, bringing back memories of the Nazi occupation. To the remaining farmers in the area, the quota system introduced a repression similar to the Stalinist purge of kulaks. Desperation led to the rebirth of the kombinator, as described in Materka's chapter titled "Magical Stalinism". Peasants learned to "perform magic tricks to meet the state's irrational regime of domination and spaces of mobility within the rigid structures of the command economy". All sorts of trickster behavior are exemplified, all with the aim of deceiving the state while surviving as individuals. But Materka's somewhat surprising conclusion is: "To make ends meet, officials and collective farm workers both used different kombinacja tactics to leverage control over the flow (and pace) of labor and resources between the household and the state supply chain. Thus, the strategy served to stabilize the command economy, preserve the political power of the elites, and lift collective farm workers out of poverty. Kombinacja emerged as the will of the collective." The change in governance from nationalism to Stalinism brought about a change in the practices of informality.

**THE MAJOR PROTESTS** in June 1956 for better wages and bread led, after strong repercussions, to a certain liberalization, de-collectivization, and an attempt by the new government to induce peasants to form cooperatives. The first enthusiasm soon waned, but the local population found that the new system allowed new forms of kombinacja. In the following years a generational shift took place, but many of the children of the settlers opted for other jobs, preferably in the nearby towns. A new type of kombinacja worker-farmer extended family emerged, involving the formal ownership or right to land between parents and children, depending on the possibility of utilizing different grants and avoiding quotas.

The 1980 riots in Gdańsk and Szczecin against food scarcity and corruption marked the beginning of a peak in kombinacja, remaining until the final breakdown of Socialist Poland. In Pomerania, Materka's home region, the first generation of peasant settlers were being replaced by a proletarianized generation, resulting in the abandonment of agricultural land, a re-nationalization of agriculture, and further drops in production. With a new generation, kombinacja tactics were modernized, now taking place at state factories and farms,

## Continued.
# Uprootedness in the Polish-German Borderlands

offices and schools and not in the forests at night as in the old narratives. At the state farms, "workers, bound by the collective experience of poverty, adapted kombinacja to negotiate wages, hours and entitlements, like a loosely formed shadow labor union, without overtly rising up against the state farm administration". In this way "the state's dystopia had become their utopia". In a way, the villagers had taken control of local resources, practicing "socialism" in defiance of the formally socialist central party administration.

Pomerania and its extension into Gdańsk was one of the most nationalized and proletarian of zed areas of Poland, but right from the beginning it suffered from failed policies and implementations at the local level. The two major conurbations in the area, Gdańsk and Szczecin, became the cradle of the Solidarity movement. But while Materka sees the beginning of *Solidarność* in a woman worker's protest against the supervisor's stealing from the shipyard, the fate of Solidarity is another story, a drift towards foreign influence and capitalism, far from the peasant-worker kombinacja socialism waged against the state up to 1983. Around 1987, Poland is no longer socialist; Lech Wałęsa is described as a leader of a pro-capitalist movement. Materka's parents try to open a restaurant, but clients use bad kombinacja, and the project fails. When the Berlin Wall falls the whole area is in disarray. "Communist ghosts and their conjurers continued to torment those villagers through the transformation." Villagers' memories of kombinacja are stories of loss: loss of labor power, loss of property, loss of capital, loss of family and solidarity. In Bursztyn's streets jobless male drunks are seen, using *kombinatory* manipulation. Former *nomenklatura* now control access to EU funds. A small candy factory uses part-time non-unionized women's labor. People glean potatoes on privatized lands after machine harvests. Materka summarizes the Balcerowicz-Sachs shock therapy: the recovered territories, the Sovietized region of Poland, emerged with the highest percentage of privatized state and collective farms and ended up with the highest concentration of poverty in Poland.

**IN THE LAST CHAPTER,** *Border Memories*, Materka accompanies an old German-American woman across the border into Polish Silesia to trace her roots in the former German territory. The old woman is unappealing in her disdain for the "uncultivated Poles". But Silesia is described as a more successful mixture of German and Polish influences than Materka's Pomeranian *Heimat*. The establishment of the state border between Poland and its western "Socialist brother" became a definite hindrance to local contacts. The socially more important boundary was the one between the areas occupied by Nazi Germany in 1939 and areas of ethnic cleansing and settlement.

By concentrating on the local strategies of combination in the areas of uprootedness, Materka has made an interesting and valuable contribution to our knowledge of human behavior. References and the use of Polish words for important concepts are exemplary. From a social science point of view I would have welcomed a more theoretical discussion of kombinacja. Materka mentions Bourdieu's *habitus* concept, the tendency to follow a traditional pattern of action, but kombinacja also borders on *path dependency*, Lindgren's muddling through, Hägerstrand's and Gidden's *time-space niches* and Ostrom's *tragedy of the commons*. But her collection of narratives provides food for thought on the relation between formal regulation and human ingenuity.

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BALTIC WORLDS

conference report

# ROUNDTABLE.
## THREATS TO ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Academic freedom is under attack. One example of mobilizing in order to protect academic freedom is the roundtable that was organized in connection with 2017 CBEES Annual conference Competing Futures: From Rupture to Re-articulation, at Södertörn University November 30 to December 1.

Teresa Kulawik of Södertörn University moderated the session, and began by stressing that, although academic freedom is threatened in the Baltic Sea area, Eastern Europe, and the post-socialist countries, this is not peculiar to the region, but rather a general trend that happens to find expression in the region. Attending the panel were Alexander Kondakov, European University, St. Petersburg; Balazs Trencsenyi, Central European University Budapest; and Elzbieta Korolczuk, Södertörn University and the University of Warsaw.

Alexander Kondakov, European University, St. Petersburg.

**THE CONTRIBUTIONS** of the panelists made it clear that the methods of controlling, limiting, and influencing research and education can change. An indirect and thus perhaps less noticed approach is to use bureaucratic rules to indirectly close university programs and make activity more difficult when it does not square with what particular decision-makers or regimes want. For example, requirements about how the premises are maintained can, if repeated and insisted upon regularly, diminish or destroy an entire sphere of university work. It is precisely this which Alexander Kondakov depicted in his talk, explaining how authorities repeatedly came up with new involving bureaucratic rules – cases where a swimming pool was obligatory in a house designated for cultural activities, yet the house could not be rebuilt; where a door was one centimeter too narrow; where there was no room for evacuation in the event of fire.

Kondakov expressed his resignation: "Due to such constant complaints, European University has not been able to obtain its certification for several semesters now and, if nothing happens, will be forced to close." He added that, in 2008, universities were subjected to restrictions when it was decided they would be classified as foreign agents if they continued to receive EU support for the organization of courses on subjects such as queer theory. The law on foreign agency had profound effects, and was similar to what CEU now faces, Kondakov said.

Balazs Trencsenyi of Central European University, Budapest, sees the efforts of the Hungarian leadership to control CEU and restrict academic activities as a warning to the whole region. Introducing new legislation is an obvious, aggressive attack, even if it is done under the pretext of protecting national interests, taking security concerns into account, and so on. In practice, such amended legislation means that funds are restricted to designated universities and colleges.

He pointed out that the radical right-wing forces headed by Orbán saw themselves as trendsetters and exemplars rather than as marginalized by the European community, which of course is founded on the ideals of freedom and rights: "Before, populism was antisystematic, but now what we see is a systematic populism that works within the system. I would call it neoconservative rather than neoliberal. It is for this reason that what is happening in Hungary concerns not just Hungary, but the whole region", Trencsensi stressed.

Restrictions on academic freedom make it difficult for individual academics, as well as certain disciplines, and even the entire university to conduct their activities. Elzbieta Korolczuk described the situation in Poland, where gender studies in particular are under attack and the entire discipline, as well as individual academics in the field, are now being watched. (See the interview with Korolczuk and Agnieszka Graff, page 4.)

**DURING THE PANEL** discussion, other types of threats to academic freedom were also cited: neoliberal values permit monitoring and control, the flipside of which is that the researcher not only has to spend a disproportionate amount of time making reports but also is directed to spend more time on activities that generate prestige and funds for the university. The effect is once again a violation of academic freedom. A discussion was also conducted about the financial incentives to take over knowledge production, much like a totalitarian regime's attacks on research and education, for precisely the reason that it contributes to critical thinking.

Teresa Kulawik emphasized that, however varied the methods used to limit academic freedom might be, and however unclear the ultimate goal is, one obvious result of the restrictions is that fear is spreading: a fear that can give rise to self-imposed restrictions among academics and universities, as well as to actual alterations and "corrections" in the work produced. Yet, there is, as the panel debate proved, a powerful resistance to all forms of attempts to limit academic freedom.

**Ninna Mörner**