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60 pages: Special section.  
Dietary reforms 1850-1950

# BALTIC WORLDS

Special theme.  
Post-USSR  
1991-2021

balticworlds.com

## This is war

### Voices from scholars in Ukraine:

Evacuation  
from Mariupol

Staying  
in Kyiv

Kharkiv, a city  
under attack

Lviv, a city  
for displaced

### also in this issue

SOVIET DESIGN 1975 / GRASSROOTS FEMINISM / SPACE NOSTALGIA / MEMORY LAWS / ÅLAND AUTONOMY



## editorial

## Losing our grounds. What's next?

This is a double issue of *Baltic Worlds* 2022. A thick issue mirroring the situation in the region and the status of area studies: There are texts that are the result of work and plans since at least a year back when we were living in post-communist times; and there are texts produced during the period post-February 24, 2022, and the ongoing war.

We begin in Mariupol, Ukraine. Viacheslav Kudlai, Professor at Mariupol State University, shares his diary on his escape to Lviv, beginning in mid-March. The image of the burning sky over the Square of Freedom is taken by his brother.

We have invited several researchers in Ukraine to write and share what is happening to them, as people and researchers, and in their country. It felt like the right thing to do, to firstly give the pages to Ukrainian researchers. Their letters and essays are testimonies from direct victims of the war. *Baltic Worlds* will continue to show solidarity.


We also have voices from researchers in neighboring countries to Ukraine. They write essays on the background and consequences of the war. For instance, Dmitry Dubrovsky, Russian researcher in exile today (marked as a foreign agent February 25, 2022), writes about the pressing situation today for Russian scholars and universities, in Russia and abroad.

**EVERYTHING CHANGED** on February 24, 2022. For the people in Ukraine, for the people in the surrounding countries, for Russians, for us all. My first instinct was speechlessness. There were no words to grasp the tragedy. Then came the meaninglessness of all suffering; how can we describe, understand, yes indeed, how can we go on studying this region on fire? We have lost our grounds as area studies researchers.

It might therefore be interesting to look more

closely at the time right *before* the war happened, at the 2021s 30-year anniversary of the dissolution of USSR and the long period of afterness – that we now understand as a period “in between”: Or as Irina Sandomirskaja puts it in her introduction to the theme, Post-USSR 1991–2021, an *interbellum*. In this theme we present several texts written by PhD-candidates at CBEES' graduate school BEEGS, exploring the nostalgia that marks this period, but also the use and abuse of history. Today everything reads with another taste, in view of the ongoing war and violence.

**IN A LONG-PLANNED** special section on dietary reform in the Baltic Sea region and Eastern Europe from the 1850s to the 1950s we can read about the food development from different perspectives in imperial Russia, Bulgaria, Estonia, Sweden and Germany. The idea of a more natural and healthier diet and nutrition spread during the period; ideas often came from the US and grass-roots movements picked them up and adapted them, explains the guest editor Julia Malitska in her introduction. In many countries the state gradually began to take an interest in the nutrition of its citizens as part of overall modernization, promoting hygiene reforms, for instance.

In sum, this thick double issue tries to navigate the conducting of area studies of a region in total collapse and crisis, with an indisputably entangled past and an unforeseeable future. What's next? 

Ninna Mörner

## colophon

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Evacuation from Mariupol  
during the Russian invasion.

# A BRIEF DIARY OF A WITNESS

by **Viacheslav Kudlai**

**S**ince the previous cycle of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014, Mariupol was one of the most important places which hosted refugees from the occupied territories of the Donetsk region and Crimea. Mariupol warmly welcomed residents of Donetsk, Makiivka, Yenaikieve, Horlivka, Novoazovsk, and other cities. The atmosphere of fear spread after the shelling of residential areas in Mariupol on January 24, 2015 – this tragedy marked the start of displacement from our city to central and western regions of Ukraine. During the last eight years we have become used to living near the line of fire and the feeling of danger has been lowered: but everything changed the early morning on February 24, 2022. That day the first Russian rockets destroyed Mariupol's anti-aircraft weapons and next day we observed civilian casualties in the eastern part of the city.

Electricity and water disappeared in all the houses in our city on February 28. The electricity supply was restored on March 1 for several hours, but after that it was cut off again and it has not been possible to fix it since. In the evening of March 6, the gas in Mariupol was cut off as well, so after that day it was only possible to cook in the yard, where fragments of shells regularly flew so everybody was in danger, not only because of hunger. It was unsafe to stay at home and it was even more dangerous to go outside to boil water or cook something: Every moment could be the last moment of life. Since that day, the feeling of despair hasn't left me. It was clear that every person in Mariupol will be unsafe for a long time but nevertheless sparks of hope tried to

welcome my mind, so I prayed like never before for me, my family, and my friends to survive that hell.

**F**rom the first days of March, fighting was going on in the western area of Mariupol near my house. In particular, a rocket-propelled grenade fired at school #67 blew up windows in neighboring houses, as well as damaging the second floor of our building. More and more fragments of ammunition appeared lying around our yard. On March 9, at about 10:00 pm, a piece of shrapnel flew into our apartment through the balcony window and our living room was damaged. After that accident, my body started to tremble uncontrollably each time I heard the sound of weapon strikes near me. On March 10, we were cleaning the apartment after the damage and around 11:00 we heard the sound of an airplane; then the bomb hit the neighboring house corner (Hrushevskoho Street, 14). The air strike knocked out all the windows and frames in our building, as well as the front doors of many apartments, including ours. The entire apartment was littered with pieces of concrete, glass, wood, and dust. All this destruction, cold weather, the lack of water, and the absence of gas and electricity in the apartment meant that it became impossible to live. My parents and I started to pick warm clothes, packing our bags with the most important things and while we did that the second air wave struck us and we were thrown to the ground again. Momently we checked each other and moved through broken doors, the glass that lay all around, to the first floor of our building. For three hours



Square of Freedom – Center of Mariupol, March 13, 2022.

PHOTO: OLEH KUDLAI

from 11:00 till 14:00 we could not leave the house due to heavy shelling. At about 14:00 on March 10, we couldn't wait any longer and moved to a private house of my mother's friend in the seventeenth district of Mariupol (Dokuchaeva Lane). The whole way to the new place was horrifying. Everything around was broken and on fire, there were bomb craters all around and while we walked new craters appeared pretty near us. But we couldn't go back or stop; we moved forward because we naively believed that it would be safer in a new place.

**E**arly in the morning on March 12, a powerful bomb blasted and erupted near the house where we were staying. As a result of this explosion, the ceiling in the house fell on the floor and only the rafters and the roof covering remained. Everything in the house was covered with plaster and fragments of brick blocks. My first thought after I got out of the stones and dust was about others; I was afraid that someone was hurt or killed, and it was a real miracle to me that everyone was still alive, including the housewife's 90-year-old mother. We cleaned the house as much as possible, tried to fix the windows with boards and spent the night on the floor. The night was restless; active shelling was constantly heard. That night we couldn't sleep: We heard the strikes and we shivered. On March 13, around 10:00 am, an air bomb was dropped on a nearby house, which damaged several houses. Pieces of earth and fragments flew into the house from

***“That night we couldn't sleep: We heard the strikes and we shivered.”***

this blow and the blast wave. On the same day, we again tried to fix the windows and covered them with carpets, but the next air strike tore them apart. It was a shock for me to see a dead neighbor and to realize that I had been talking to him just a few hours before. Going outside at about 17:00 on March 13, we saw terrifying damage to the surrounding houses and saw dead bodies of three victims on the road. Our family walked along roads covered with dead bodies, earth, stones, glass, wires but nothing could stop us; we still wanted to survive so we came to the center of the city where it seemed calmer.

From March 13, we went to live in the shelter called Cube near the volunteer center Khalabuda, where Mariupol residents were fed from prepared warehouses. Electric generators and the satellite Ukrainian TV channel *Dom* worked here. We joined with other families like ours; we worked together, so it was a kind of relief to be there – but not for long. On March 19, a bomb fell on the warehouse of the volunteer center; the entrance and the warehouse were damaged. The next day Russian soldiers were based in our location, and for the first time I was checked by the occupiers for tattoos on my body, photos on my mobile phone, and entries in my military ID. It was very humiliating and frightening to communicate with occupiers; they acted unpredictably and one of the guys from the shelter got a bullet in his hand because he couldn't carry out one of the soldiers' orders. We lived here until March



Map of March 8, 2022.

23, when we realized that it was too dangerous to stay there.

On the morning of March 23, our family gathered and walked together with other families towards Zaporizhzhya Highway. As this part of the city was occupied at that time, there were many representatives of the so-called "Donetsk people's republic" (dpr) troops who stopped us, examined our bodies for tattoos and checked documents. It was especially painful to walk through the shattered buildings of the Department of Psychology and Pedagogy and the Department of Philology and Mass Communications of Mariupol State University, where I worked. Arriving at the ANP gas station (Zaporizhzhya Highway 53), we boarded a bus that took Mariupol residents to the village of Nikol'ske, which was controlled by Russians and representatives of the so-called dpr. In the village of Nikol'ske, residents from Mariupol gathered in the school building No 2, where we spent the night sitting on chairs. For three days we were looking for transport to reach Berdyansk and then, along a humanitarian "green corridor", to Zaporizhzhya. On March 24, representatives of the so-called Donetsk people's republic, including Denis Pushylin, visited this school. They lied to the displaced people from Mariupol and said that going towards Berdyansk was dangerous; we needed to go eastwards to Novoazovsk, and then to Donetsk or Russian cities. Those who registered for the evacuation buses in the direction of Novoazovsk were put through the procedure of filtering men with the verification of documents and fingerprinting by representatives of the so-called dpr. On

March 25, 2022, dpr Rih representatives began to detain volunteers who organized the departure of people to Berdyansk. People began to protest and defend the detainees, but the occupiers began threatening to detain everyone who spoke out. I started to think that we were caught in a trap and doomed to be taken to Russia.

**T**hat Friday we managed to find a driver who helped us to leave from Nikol'ske to Berdyansk. So again, I felt some hope of getting out of the war zone. We drove on detour roads and in front of Berdyansk we were stopped at a checkpoint near the village Azovs'ke. There were several representatives of the so-called dpr armed with the guns at the checkpoint. They did not check on elderly men and women. I and another young man were taken out of the van, forced to expose body parts to check for tattoos, as well as for bruises on shoulders from machine guns. These people also checked all the things in our bags and examined everything carefully. At this checkpoint, my phone was checked for photos of destroyed homes or checkpoints. After that we were stopped again at the next checkpoint at the gas station Caravan before the village Azovs'ke. A car marked Z appeared, from which so-called Cossacks in caps got out with machine guns pointing at us. All the bus passengers had their documents checked. We were stopped by the Russian military once again on the bridge over the Kutsa Berdyanka River on P37 highway. Documents, bags, and mobile phones were checked again. One of occupiers wanted to take away my mobile phone

after checking it but returned it on my request. Russian soldiers also had some kind of propaganda conversation based on theses that we should go to Russia, where life seems to be better so we would definitely get rich there. We arrived in Berdyansk on March 25, at 16:00, where we felt safer. There was no shelling, mobile communication was working, there was electricity and a water supply. On March 26, we registered in a free dormitory (Berdyansk, 80 Kirova Street). On this day we went to the sports complex in Berdyansk, where we registered on buses to Zaporizhzhya. We were lost and confused and didn't know what to do next to get safer place.

**W**e decided to move closer to the village Azovs'ke and spent the night in the Fakel camp. On this day, March 26, the mobile connection disappeared so now we could not clarify details about where the evacuation buses would arrive. On March 27, we returned to the sports complex, but could not get information about the evacuation. On the morning of March 28, we went to the checkpoint in the village of Azovs'ke to find evacuation buses, but we did not see them, so we returned to the camp.

There was no point in staying in the camp without communication, and on March 28, we moved to Berdyansk sports complex. On March 29, we found a man who took us to the P37 highway in the village of Azov, where we joined other people who were waiting for evacuation buses to Zaporizhzhya. We waited there all day, but the buses didn't arrive. A feeling of frustration did not leave me.

At about 18:00 we tried to spend the night at the nearest gas station and one Russian military man let us stay in the Prime Group gas station motel (Azovs'ke, 78 Kosmichna Street). The motel was crushed, windows were partly without glass, walls were marked with symbols of the occupiers (Z, dpr, Donetsk etc.). The night was restless, and we felt frozen in the morning. On March 30 at 6 am, we went on the road again, but that day there were no vehicles for evacuation, and we spent the night at the same gas station. On March 31, we waited all day again and returned to the gas station in the evening, but by chance saw the evacuation buses arriving. We lined up and waited to board the buses. We were so happy to get on the bus and it was not so important to know what the next moment would bring; at that point it seemed like a dream coming true. That evening the buses went to the village Dmytrivka, where we spent the night. In the morning of April 1, we returned to Azovs'ke village to pick up all the people who were waiting for evacuation and at about 12:00 we left for the city of Zaporizhzhya.

All the way we were checked at checkpoints – phones, body for tattoos etc. At the penultimate checkpoint, many people's mobile phones were confiscated (four people from our bus alone were robbed by occupiers). It was a long road of humiliation and mockery; many people shouted, made crazy demands to our drivers (to go ahead and not stop at checkpoints), children vomited, old people lost consciousness. In the village of Vasylivka, we saw that the Russian military did not allow private vehicles

to drive to Zaporizhzhya. In fact, after Vasylivka, we could drive much faster. In the city of Zaporizhzhya we were dropped off near the Epicenter shopping center, where we were checked by the police and then we were housed in a kindergarten No 135 (Korishchenko Street, 11) where we spent the night. On April 2, we boarded the Zaporizhzhya – L'viv bus and arrived in L'viv on April 3. Here we started to get used to a life like that we had in Mariupol before the declaration of this unprovoked war.

The inhuman attitude of the occupiers towards Ukrainians and, in particular, Mariupol residents which we experienced, as well as the rhetoric of the Russian media that civilians and civilian objects are not attacked, very loudly demonstrates that the aggressor does not consider us as people; our life has no value for them, we are just enemies, we need to be removed from the territory. It is tragic that the events of the 1930s are repeated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Just as the Nazis exterminated Jewish people during World War II, Russians are exterminating people in Ukraine today. As President Volodymyr Zelensky said, Ukraine is: “defending the ability of a person to live in the modern world” by fighting off Russian invaders. We can see that this is true,

that Russia made this tragic step back in time to bloody wars like in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This “traveling in time” possibly brought to Mariupol much greater losses than the events of the World War II. The chronology of events described in this text is nothing unusual for each and every resident of Mariupol. Each person from Mariupol has a personal dramatic story, and, unfortunately, many of them did not have such a positive finale with evacuation to a safer place. Many families lost loved ones – sometimes forever. If the world lets the aggressor continue this war, we will witness more and more dramatic stories from different parts of Ukraine, and I am not sure that Russia will stop in Ukraine.

**I**n conclusion, I would like to thank my colleagues, president and members of the Ukrainian Educational Research Association (UERA), who offered me and my family shelter in L'viv after the evacuation from Mariupol and provided substantial psychological and moral support. This is an excellent example of the solidarity of Ukrainian people. I got great support and inspiration from the UERA team to continue to work for Ukrainian university education at Mariupol State University and to reunite with my colleagues and students. As a citizen of Ukraine I also feel strong support from all over the world. Such synergy, in particular, of educators and scientists, gives hope that even in these hard times for our country this light of human unity will stop this cruel war and prove that human life is the highest democratic value, and it is impossible to forget this fact in contemporary world! ✕

Viacheslav Kudlai, PhD in Social Communications,  
Associate Professor, Information Activity Department,  
Mariupol State University.

**“There was no point in staying in the camp without communication.”**



The first flowers in Kyiv, March, 2022.



Textbooks in school library after bombing, April, 2022.



Destroyed secondary school in Makariv region, April, 2022.

text & photos **Sergiy Kurbatov**

# *My soul was somewhere*

**U**sually you observe such dramatic changes to everyday life when you read a book or watch a movie, but here we are faced with a cruel reality ... When my sister Halyna left Ukraine for Argentina on February 9, 2022, after her first visit to our parents since the COVID-19 pandemic situation started, she told me: “Can you imagine: When I decided to visit Ukraine, my colleagues thought that I was recruited as a reporter for the future war between Russia and Ukraine! Will everything be ok?” “Everything will be ok!” – I responded and this was a false prognosis ...

I recalled this dialogue on February 24, 2022, after being woken by the sound of explosions at approximately 5 am. My first impulse was to turn off this “bloody movie”, but it was reality. Currently millions of Ukrainians continue to live and to struggle with Russian aggression in this new reality. Psychologically it was difficult to accept the idea that our

traditional peaceful life has ended – probably for a long period. That is why the first day of war was a chaotic one for me. While withdrawing some cash from an ATM machine, I observed numerous people with children and pets – they were heading for the railway station, which is not far from my apartment. It was 6 am, when public transport just started running. I understood that I needed to make a decision about where I should stay during the first period of the war: in Kyiv, where I have lived for about the last twenty years, or in my native city, Sumy, with my parents, Volodymyr, 84 and Olha, 81 and their cat Martyshka. I decided to go to Sumy to support my parents and bought a train ticket. But the train was cancelled due to a Russian attack. So this was my destiny – to stay in Kyiv!

Since the beginning of the war both academic institutions where I work – Kyiv National Economic University named after

**“So this was my destiny – to stay in Kyiv!”**

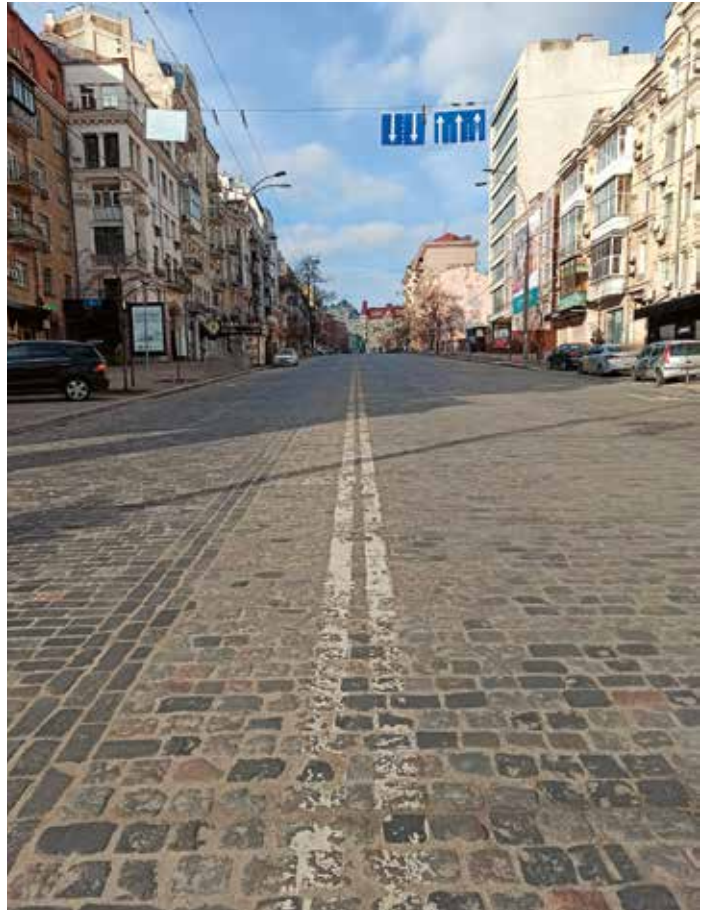




Meeting of the Presidium of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv, March, 2022.



Together with representatives of the Council of Young Scientists at the MES of Ukraine during volunteer work, April, 2022.



Empty central street in Kyiv, February, 25, 2022.

## *between Kyiv and Sumy...*

Vadym Hetman and National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine – provided clear instructions regarding the peculiarities of our work in the war situation. Paradoxically, it was a positive result of COVID-19 pandemic situation, which prepared us for distance teaching, communication, and cooperation. I could recall here the regular monthly meeting of the Presidium of National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine in March 2022. Usually numerous people join this event, but this time the large hall was almost empty – only our president, Vasyl Kremen, and two vice-presidents were sitting at their places, but many colleagues joined this meeting online.

A few days after the war started, Kyiv also became almost empty, with a very limited number of people and cars. All public transport was stopped. Only in some working pharmacies you could see long queues for medicines. Curfews sometimes lasted for 36 hours and, again

***“But the initial horror became routine very soon.”***

paradoxically, the sound of the alarms provided the rare opportunity to go outside and take some exercise while walking to and from the shelter. Can you imagine – I was waiting for the alarm to sound during these long curfews! My impressions from this period were described in an interview to Diane Taylor from the *Guardian*<sup>1</sup>, which was published on March 15, 2022. Although I gave permission to mention my surname, Diane wrote to me that the editor decided not to mention it – for safety reasons. The situation around Kyiv was still unpredictable this time.

During the whole of March 2022 we heard bombing – the most stressful of these sounds were in the night, usually between 1 and 2 am. But the initial horror became routine very soon. I was much more worried listening to news about bombing of Sumy, where my parents were still living. I became almost crazy when there was no mobile connection with them for a few



Inside destroyed secondary school in Makariv region, April, 2022.

hours. My soul was somewhere between Kyiv and Sumy during this time. It was difficult to understand that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is totally impossible to cross these approximately 330 km between the two cities and to help your old parents to survive in situation of bloody war.

Really helpful during this time was the support of my foreign colleagues. Every day I received numerous messages from them with different proposals and kind words. A substantial number of these messages were from Sweden where I had previously held a research position. Li Bennich-Björkman and Ann-Cathrine Jungar recorded a video with words of support of Ukraine and the necessity to stop Russian aggression for our project “Western Academia Support Ukraine”, which we conducted on volunteer basis together with Ukrainian journalist Anton Podlutsky. I received numerous messages of solidarity and support from Matthew Kott, Ausra Pads kocimaite, Pär Gustafsson, Michal Smrek and other Swedish colleagues. As a Ukrainian proverb says: “You need to be in trouble in order to understand who your real friends are”. I am really happy to have numerous real friends in Sweden!

When I saw the first flowers in Kyiv botanical garden, I understood – everything would be ok and we would be winners in this



Red tulips near the Red building of Kyiv National Taras Schevchenko University, May, 2022.



Chestnut trees – the symbol of Kyiv – are flourishing, May, 2022.

battle. And, paradoxically for the third time, this revelation coincided with the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Kyiv and Sumy regions. I was able to observe the results of this Russian “visit to Ukraine” in April 2022, when together with representatives of the Council of Young Scientists at the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine I visited Makariv with a humanitarian mission. This town suffered dramatically from the Russian invasion and we could see destroyed houses, schools, churches. This is unforgettable!

On Orthodox Easter I visited my parents in Sumy for the first time since the beginning of this war. During our meeting I recall the main message of the Easter – life is more powerful than the death. The culture of war is connected with death, the culture of peace – with life. I am sure we can overcome death! ✕

Sergiy Kurbatov is a PhD at Kyiv National Economic University & National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine.

## reference

- 1 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/15/resident-describes-life-in-kyiv-ukraine-russia>



# LIFE IN KHARKIV

text & photos  
Vladyslav Yatsenko

## A researcher's diary during full-scale war

**FEBRUARY 24, 2022.** I have learned about the open invasion of Ukraine by the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation at 8.45 a.m. from the news release on 1+1 TV channel. On February 24, I woke up very late. When I heard and saw footage of the shelling of the cities, for the first 5 minutes I was silently watching the news. Explosions were heard on the street, at first I thought that these were idle schoolchildren, who had got somewhere extremely powerful firecrackers. Five minutes later, I woke up my mother, she was napping near a working TV. My mother, Liudmyla Yehorivna Yatsenko, celebrated her 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary on February 8. I told her that the Muscovites attacked us, that they were approaching Kyiv, Kharkiv and had crossed Chonhar. My mother stood up, sat for a few seconds, then said that yes, it was the war, but there was nothing one could do.

For the first hour, I listened to the news and then began to collect the backpack. I was collecting the most important documents, finding cash, remembering where was my envelope with the foreign currency, mainly Polish zlotys, which I brought from a scientific internship, as a winner of the Ivan Vyhovsky Award in 2016. [...]

**ON FEBRUARY 25,** I woke up from hearing explosions. [...] All day long I listened to the news and after the Internet was connected. I read what the Ukrainian media wrote and listened to the Polish Radio. I went to the website of Rossiyskaya Gazeta in the evening. The first material that fell in my eye contained a slogan and an annotation to the article, announcing that the slogan “no war” is equal to “no Russia”. I did not read it further.

Before the war, I created a historical channel “Historical Webinar” on YouTube, abbreviated “HW”. For a month and a half ahead, I had agreements planning to record the speeches of historians from different cities of Ukraine, Poland, Belarus, and Russia who investigated various aspects concerning Ukrainian-Russian relations. On this day, I began to receive messages from

colleagues from Poland and Belarus, they expressed condolences, noted that the recordings should obviously be canceled, because it was a bad time for it. Condolences and support were expressed to me also by my Russian colleagues Professor Tatjana Tairova-Yakovleva and Aleksandr Almazov. [...]

**ON FEBRUARY 26,** I woke up because of the explosions. I brewed tea, condemned Putin and wished all Muscovites to become impotent. I was agitated. My mother was still asleep. At 6.55-7.05 a.m. I clearly heard the shooting: it were AKM submachine guns and probably machine carbines, fast and long strings of bursts. From the news and text messages in the phone I learned that mechanized brigades of Muscovites broke through in Kharkov. In the reports, they were called sabotage and reconnaissance groups: SRGs. A curfew was imposed in the city for 24 hours. During the day, I went out to the stairs several times and looked out the window. The street was empty.

At 4.00 pm I recorded a webinar with Mrs Dr. Agata Kvitkovska. That evening, I posted it on YouTube and distributed it online. After the speech of the historian and in comments to the video I called for support of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Strong explosions were heard at night. My mother was scared. [...]

**FEBRUARY 27,** I woke up because of the explosions. After a short and emotional conversation with my mother, I went shopping. My mother did not want me to go out to the street. There was not much food at home. Because of the explosions, my mother did not want to let me go, and then agreed and asked, among other things, to buy some cooked sausage.

The first thing I saw going to the arch that overlooked the avenue was the military. Some had chevrons of the national guard, armed with AKMs, fully equipped, in camouflage fatigues. The emergence of the military inspired me at once. I noticed that the army men were not young, all of them in their 30s, some in their 40s. [...]



End of February, after the shelling.

**FEBRUARY 28.** At home I said I was going to looking for something edible. I actually went on foot from 23 Serpnia subway station to the University. The buildings along the avenue were whole. Then I got to the University. I saw a trolleybus at the bus stop. I took a place in it. The driver said I could pay if I wished. I paid 10 hryvnias, got 4 hryvnias of change and went home. It was the last day when public transport was moving in Kharkiv. The subway went into bomb shelter mode, urban transport was removed from the routes. In the news, I saw the shelling of my neighborhood with the Russian MRLS called Grad.

**I WAS HOME ON MARCH 1.** I looked out the window and listened to the news. They have stopped removing garbage since the beginning of the war. The garbage bins were full and the garbage quantity was growing. My mother called the city's hot line and filed a request to remove the garbage, emphasizing that in the Cooperative where she was the Chairman the garbage was removed. I went out to bring some water. I called a colleague, asked him if he thought about going to sign up with the Territorial Defense. On the same day, there was a report of a missile strike on Svobody Square in Kharkiv.

**MARCH 2, 2022.** I went to the water source in Sarzhyn Yar to bring some water. I took with me a backpack with a camera in it. At the water source I saw a small snowman with which I made a picture of myself. When I walked with water in canisters, I returned through the cable way. On a running path I saw the first trace of Grad and took a photo of it. Next, I made photos of the buildings on 79 and 81 Otakara Yaprosha Street, then went further and took photos of battered and burned cars, traces of Grad on the ground, burned cars near XADO, broken window fragments, traces of shrapnel on the walls of houses, broken windows and the curtains of school No. 135 waving in the breeze, the traces of damage on Sumhayitska Street.

I met a friend from the Historian Faculty, she showed me the place where the bomb was dropped, but I could not make a picture of it because the battery was empty. The bomb fell near the hatch. The hatch was reinforced and it was above concrete slabs



End of February, explosions continue.

and the masonry. The bomb seemed to have ripped off parts of masonry and concrete.

I returned at home in agitated state. I posted the photos online.

After posting the photos, I wrote to my friends. My Polish colleague Krzysztof Ratai who was living in Poznan and working at the Dzialinsky Palace, after seeing the pictures of burned cars and broken windows, asked if he could share them. I agreed. At the same time, we agreed that he could give my contacts to Polish journalists.

**ON MARCH 3, 2022,** I was contacted by Polish journalists from Poznan and by phone, because I did not have the Internet, and I told about the situation in Kharkiv as far as I knew. On the same day, with the assistance of Krzysztof, Christian Kalischak contacted me on the FB. He was from TV Poznan. We agreed that on March 4 at 3.00 p.m. Warsaw time, via Skype, I would tell about the situation in Kharkiv. On the same day, there were reports of a missile strike aimed at the building opposite the City Administration.

***“The subway went into bomb shelter mode, urban transport was removed from the routes.”***

**MARCH 4.** I woke up early. I said to my mother that I was going in search of food, and went to the Center. For the conversation with the Polish journalists, I wanted to have photos of Russian shelling of the city. At that time, the negotiations began on supply to Ukraine, from Poland, Bulgaria, and Slovakia of MIG 29 and SU 25.

So I wanted to have photos that will cause resonance and contribute to the formation of the Polish point of view in support of Ukraine, to provide it with heavy offensive weapons.

I moved quickly. I took the first photos of a crushed tree and the broken glass of the Saltivsky store near the Sport Master shop, at the Druzhba trolleybus stop.

In front of the building of the former Govorov Academy, I took a photo of a poster addressed to Russian soldiers to surrender in order to save their lives. After that I photographed the main building of Karazin University. The university was whole, but with broken window panes on many floors. Then I took a photo of the Svobody square and the building of the Regional Administration (KhODA), then I moved down Sumska Street, photographing the damaged buildings and the consequences



March 1, on the way to fetch water.



March 1, on the way to fetch water.

of the explosive wave. When I went to the monument to Taras Shevchenko, sirens howled and it was unpleasant, because it would be impossible to hide if anything happened. I photographed Shevchenko from several angles, and then went to the Opera House (KhATOB). I photographed the building of Economy Faculty of Karazin University, where the firefighters were still extinguishing the fire. I photoed the damage to the Temple of Myrrh-Bearing Women, then made some photos on Skrypnyka and Pushkinska Streets. I was glad that the Historical Museum on the Constitution Square was not damaged. I photographed the broken windows at the University of Culture and the Vedmedyk Shop, owned by Kharkiv Biscuit Factory. Then I moved in the direction of Korolenko library making photos on the way. In the center there were passers-by who also took pictures but with their smartphones. I took pictures with my Sony camera.

Suddenly, two policemen appeared near the new Shopping Mall. They had me in the crosshairs of their AKSU and AKM, and demanded that I go to them with my hands up.

I followed their order. They shouted that in case of sudden movements they would shoot to kill. They shouted in Russian. I headed for them. I was saying aloud my name, date of birth and place of residence. Then I came to them. I began to explain to their questions that I was photographing the destruction caused by the Russian shelling in order to send these pictures to the Polish media, which I had to give an interview to. I said that I was a historian and a winner of the Ivan Vyhovsky award. I was kept in sight.

They searched me and eventually took me to a shopping mall. Of course, I did not resist. At the entrance, there were several more police officers who repeated the questioning. One remarked that I was not violent, others confirmed that I caused no difficulties.

I was taken away for a check. They took off my glasses and put them in the inner pocket of the jacket. They put on shackles on me. The hat was pulled over my face. They brought me into the premises of the shopping mall and by the stairs of the escalator, which was stopped, I was taken to a basement.

On the way, I could see where to go and asked the policemen, because they were very fast, not to bump my head at the door. To

a sarcastic request, why not, I replied that my head was a tool, high-precision and expensive. To which I was advised to spare my breath, because it could be knocked out of me. I did not like this comment at all.

While we were going down, I repeated twice more who I was and why I was photographing. When we were downstairs, I repeated again, noting that the number of questions would not change answers. The superior officer approached me and asked who I was, declaring that he would take the phone and documents for verification, to which I agreed. At the time of the inspection, those who guarded me first wanted to take the shackles off me and wrap my hands with the tape. There was no tape. Therefore I was standing with shackles on.

I once again repeated who I was and why I was photographing. Someone new who came up said that I was lying too much and I needed to get the wind knocked out of me so that I would tell the truth and noted that they already had one of them lying

a little aside. I was angry that they threatened me and used the informal form of address. So I immediately replied that I have not bred the pigs with the policeman and that I should be addressed formally. The police laughed and at the same time made a remark that I should not be haughty and should remember the limitations of wartime. I replied that wartime did not imply ignoring my rights, and I expect a lawful behavior from the Ukrainian police. To an unpleasant question why I was not in the Armed Forces of Ukraine I answered that I had a

military service exemption certificate, a history of oncology and problems with endurance and liver. When asked who authorized to take photos, I replied that it was my conscience and the desire to help the Motherland.

The police asked me if the bank cards belonged to me. I confirmed and noted in letters how my name was written in Latin. When asked why I had a Kyiv urban transport pass, I said that I went to conferences there from time to time.

One asked if I wished to be spoken to in Ukrainian and replied that I did not use Russian.

The superior officer returned. My papers and camera were

***“They shouted that in case of sudden movements they would shoot to kill. They shouted in Russian.”***

returned to me. He said they would return me to where I was taken from. I could go to photograph the Center, but not to take pictures of their location (the last I did not see). I was taken out as I was brought in with a hat on my face and with shackles on. I asked if the building of Korolenko Library was intact. I got an affirmative answer.

After that, I took a photo of the City Administration. And of the building opposite, which was hit by a missile. I took pictures. In the center I saw anti-tank hedgehogs, barricades, armed members of the Territorial Defense holding the perimeter, saw cars pierced through with shrapnel, as well as trucks with paired anti-aircraft machine guns mounted on them. On Sumska Street, near the central park, through which I planned to return home, I saw closed gates unexpectedly. While looking for a way to get around I met a military patrol, it consisted of cadets of the University of the Air Force named after Ivan Kozhedub. Once again I passed a short verification procedure without excesses. Cadets from the patrol said that I had to walk along the park, and then down parallel to the highway to Novgorodska Street. So I did it. [...]

That day I gave an interview in which the photos I took were presented. I was pleased with myself.

My friend Krzysztof Ratai the day before created a new profile for me on the FB, in the Polish sphere, because in the old one, which was in the Russian sphere, I could not post some photos of burned cars and they began to block my posts when I wrote about the consequences of the shelling by the Russian MLRS.

Thanks to Krzysztof, a number of Poznan journalists contacted me in March. And thanks to Vladislav Gribovsky, I met a Kazakh journalist, for whom I wrote a text about the situation in Kharkiv as of the beginning of March.

**ON MARCH 5,** I decided to go to the point of handing out the humanitarian aid. My mother was not happy that I planned to go to get the humanitarian help, she did not like at all when I went out. We agreed that I would only take the food at the point. I knew the fact that in Kharkiv there were points of distribution of humanitarian aid from the website of the city council. The nearest point to me was in the House of Projects, which is located three trolleybus stops from my house. The distribution point was in Branch of Nova Poshta No. 135.

In the morning, I was still hoping to record a webinar with Dr. Barbara Jundo-Kaliszewska of the University of Łódź. The recording was scheduled for 9.00 am, but technically we were not able to record it. Therefore, we agreed that Ms. Barbara herself would record a digest of news from Lithuania regarding Vilno's position towards Russian aggression against Ukraine. The recording would be sent to me, and I would post it on my channel.

At around 11.00 a.m., as I reached on foot the 135<sup>th</sup> Branch of Nova Poshta, there was already a queue. It was frosty and the snow was falling, it was cloudy. I was staying for 20 minutes in line. I noticed that a lot of people were talking about different things in the queue. People were not familiar with each other, but ready to talk, which was caused by nervousness due to the

war. Twenty minutes later, the woman behind me announced that the 135<sup>th</sup> branch where we were standing was not open on March 4. The woman said that her children in return received humanitarian aid in the 138<sup>th</sup> branch located on Oleksiivka, 18 Askharova Street, in the building of the Topolok market. They got a chicken and 10 chicken eggs per person. [...]

On the way I met a couple of retirement age carrying packages, they said that they were shopping in Vostorg supermarket. Vostorg was on Klochkivska Street and much closer than the Rost.

I reserved a place in a queue, called my mother, said where I was, and asked whether to buy flour, to which I got an affirmative answer. I saw the volunteers buying a large batch of flour, 4 large carts, which were placed in the car. I stood in the queue for 30 minutes. Already after 10 minutes, I heard the plane's engines working in the sky, it was cloudy, but the sun was shining behind the clouds. The plane was not visible, but the sound of the engines annoyed me. Near the Vostorg there were two gas stations. There were cars standing nearby. On the other side of the road there was a beautiful tall and long house of 22–24 floors.

I stood and assessed all the dangers that would happen if a

house or a supermarket and gas stations were attacked by a plane. The sound of the plane's engine intensified, then went away. When I came close to the door of the supermarket, the manager came out accompanied by police armed with AKSU and AKM and said that the store is closing, tomorrow it will be open from 9.00 am to 12.00 pm. I exhaled and went quickly straight in the

direction of the Rost. At this point, the piercing growing sound of the plane's engines was heard, then there was a whistle. At that point, I started running, and then I heard the explosion. While running, I turned around and saw a cloud of smoke and debris coming out on the horizon from the unfinished building, I was running quicker. On the run, I shouted to the guy running close to the glass windows of the supermarket to turn off the phone and move away from the glass. I was running so fast that I could win Olympic gold, stopping only when I passed the second gas station and moved to the other side of the road. After that I walked coughing, because I was nervous and overstretched during the run. The engines of the plane were no longer heard. In 20 minutes I reached the Rost. There was no queue, the entrance was free, but a lot of people came in and out.

When I was in the supermarket, I felt that fortune smiled upon me. I stocked up for more than 1,200 hryvnias. I bought two chickens, 100 hryvnias per kg, frozen chicken legs, 114 hryvnias, canned mackerel, apples, however, they were expensive, 20 hryvnias, and bananas for 37 hryvnias. I bought a full bag of food and went home. It took me about 3 hours to return home. [...]

**ON MARCH 6, 2022** I was at home. In the evening, I began to upload a digest with the participation of Barbara Jundo-Kaliszewska on YouTube, on my channel. In early March, the organization of webinars, where the historians from the European countries could present how the media of various states were covering the invasion of the Muscovites in Ukraine, seemed to me an extremely

***“I started running, and then I heard the explosion.”***

important matter. At the same time, it allowed me to be considered involved in the information resistance. However, I failed to complete this task.

At about 6.00 p.m., when I had already uploaded and distributed in the FB a link to the video, there was an extremely strong explosion. I turned off the laptop at once, and then went to turn off the Wi-Fi repeater, and at the moment it was turned there was a strong explosion. I went to the window and looked out from behind the curtains. There was a new explosion and I saw a flash. I thought something had hit one of the 14-story buildings. After that, the image disappeared on the TV and no channels were working anymore. Soon the heating radiators cooled off and it became clear that we were left without heating.

**MARCH 7, 2022.** In the morning, after having a breakfast I went to the central regional hospital on 6 Trinklera Street. Earlier, my mother called and found out that there she could get Farmasulin there. I took my mother's pension ID and left. [...] Explosions were constantly heard. I walked along the central park to school No. 116. [...] I went to the military hospital, where at the entrance there were heavily armed and fully equipped national guardsmen. [...] In the room, the doctor quickly gave me two vials of Formasulin H and H NP. I was surprised that it was so few, my mother was usually given three boxes. I signed in the log to acknowledge receipt, refusing from disposable syringes. I went home. I returned through another place that passed near the Slovo building. There was a burned car and a fence was broken from the explosion of the Uragan rocket shell. I photographed the destruction and the damage caused to the entrance of the house. Next to the house I made the photo of the destruction on the Kosmonavtiv Street. [...]

**MARCH 8, 2022.** The morning began traditionally around the sixth when I was awakened by the sounds of gunfire. [...] I went out again to the Mak supermarket which is located in the cooperative part of my big house. There I bought eggs for 32 hryvnias for a dozen and a loaf. When I returned, Krzysztof Ratai from Poznan called me. I told him that I was fine but had no Internet because my provider had been bombed and that it was uncomfortable for me to talk. We agreed to talk in the afternoon.

At 4.30 p.m. I helped my mother to go down to the basement. I talked to friends on the phone, including Krzysztof. The latter asked whether I needed medicines and food. Then I talked to Mykola Mykhailichenko and Maria Senych and went to bed.

**MARCH 9, 2022.** I woke up because of the explosions. I wished the Russians that they would be impotent and that they would have perished by the evening. I had some tea. Around 7 a.m., I helped my mother to come up to the apartment. [...] I went to the Rost supermarket, on the way I looked out for the places where they might be selling something. There was no trade. But I saw a frantic queue at the tobacco kiosk. Near Vostorg I saw two BTR-80 armored vehicles, they were driving with machine guns lifted

up, holding the air perimeter. The armored vehicles stunned me at first. There were no flags on them, but there were also no Russian markings. I calmed down and moved on. At that moment, I received a call from IdeaBank bank where I had a deposit account. I was informed that the deposit was expiring, the money would be transferred to my card. I did not listen attentively to what the operator was saying because the quality was bad, and I wanted to go shopping. [...] I went home. At the House of Projects, I made a number of photos with dislodged window panes. Unexpectedly I witnessed a jeep with fully equipped Ukrainian troops overtook and blocked the path of the car on the street. The soldiers jumped out of the jeep, searched the car and questioned its owner, at the same time they began to stop the cars of a certain model, which were checked quite carefully.

I watched it for five minutes and then left. While walking I neared a guy of a hooligan type, he was watching me looking at the work of the military, and cheerfully asked me in Russian: "What's going on, are they bullying someone?" I sharply replied that hooligans were bullied, and the military were working. Near Otakara Yarosha Street I met a guy carrying a heavy bag and three bottles of bottled water. I had one hand free so I offered to help the guy. I actually helped them to carry the burden for two trolleybus stops, the guy was bringing water and food to his mother. His parents were living in the 2nd entrance of my house. Along the way, the guy said that he was from Zhukovsky District and that it was bad there, the Russians were constantly shelling civilian houses and the Aviation University. I brought two bottles of water for the guy to the entrance and went home.

I was tired. At half past five, I helped my mother to get down. In the night I talked with Mykola Mykhailichenko. Starting from 6:15 p.m., I was watching out of the window a certain constant glow, like dawn. It lasted till 11:30 p.m., then I went to sleep. On the afternoon of March 9, the heating was restored and the internet started to function. In the evening I uploaded all the photos that I had taken by that time. At the same time, I photographed the glow from a fire that was one moment decreasing, the next moment increasing. From the first day I photographed the smoke and the places that were bombarded, if I saw them out of the window, and uploaded the photos online with a delay of a day or two. A TV was working. It upset me. I realized that despite the huge losses, the war continued, the Muscovites were coming, Putin was alive and no one obviously planned to kill him. It became clear to me that the war would not end quickly and now everything depended on the victory of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. [...] ✕

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Note: The diary continues and can be read in its full-length online, from day 1 (February 24) until end of April.

***“There was a burned car and a fence was broken from the explosion of the Uragan rocket shell.”***

# MANY UKRAINIAN CHILDREN HAVE LEFT HOME. SOME DISPLACED CHILDREN END UP IN LVIV

Insights into the state of a society, as well as that of the historical mini-epoch, are to be gained by listening to children's conversations and observing what games they play. I remember fifteen years ago noticing that children played at being bank employees near our house. In 2014, however, when the war broke out in eastern Ukraine, local young boys organized big battles in this same place. I once heard the roles being assigned – who would be “zombies” and who would be “humans.” There were no kids willing to be zombies at first, but in the end someone agreed – because the game was about to begin. Now, as the cities of Ukraine are under constant fire, it is no wonder that a colleague's four-year-old daughter Daryna informs her doll: “We are having a war and you probably have a war too.” Little Danylo, of the same age, was recently absorbed in a car race. When asked what he was doing, he replied that he was very busy because he was saving his friend. The next day, it turned out that it was at this very time that his father was driving a pregnant woman, his colleague's wife, out of a place being shelled by missiles. Sophia, age 5, knows for sure that the war has adjusted her plans for the future: “Mom, I don't want to be a paleontologist anymore. Those bones have lain in the soil for a million years, they will remain there for another million and will wait for someone else. I want to build. Do you see how well I build the toy walls? We will rebuild all the destroyed schools, hospitals, supermarkets, every little shop.” She speaks from the heart of Ukrainian hope, which these days looks exactly like this – we are going to rebuild our country, to be reborn from the ashes, and heal the wounds.

**DURING THE FIRST** month of the war, more than half of the children in Ukraine left

their homes. Many of those who came out of hell arrived in the relatively calmer west of Ukraine as well as to neighboring European countries. Some were displaced after weeks of hiding in basements, dilapidated houses, in cars or even lines of vehicles under the enemy fire. When a crying child quickly runs to the bomb shelter in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv, reacting to the blaring sirens, a local mother, who also heads to the shelter, sighs: “This is one of the migrants, a kid from a displaced family; our local children do not react like that.” Some families have moved out of the danger zone, mourning the deaths of relatives

**“We will rebuild all the destroyed schools, hospitals, supermarkets, every little shop.”**

and friends. The statistics of losses with each week of the war become more and more shocking. More than two hundred children have been killed and 360 wounded over fifty days of war. In the early days of Russian attacks and war crimes, we sought comparisons based on familiar cross-cultural realities and symbols. But we soon moved on to superlatives. “As in Syria” seemed to be an image of absolute destruction and crimes against civilians because it was hard to imagine that anything could be worse. My colleague, journalism professor Borys Potyatynyk, questioned this comparison, referring to a Syrian who works in Lviv: “My neighbor, a dentist from Syria, says the destruction of Mariupol is incomparably worse than what happened in Aleppo.” This city was targeted from all the sides – bombs from

sky, artillery from the ground, and missiles from the sea. A total of 1200 missiles were fired on the territory of Ukraine during the first month of the war. Over the first three weeks, more than 1,400 bombs fell on Ukrainian soil, and about half of them targeted Mariupol. Cluster, phosphorus, thermobaric, vacuum bombs – we used to know about these means of destruction from someone else's bitter experience, but now we have to learn the alphabet of forbidden weapons in connection with the names of our own Ukrainian settlements.

**IN MARCH, THERE WERE** days when Russian aircraft dropped bombs on Mariupol every twenty minutes. Some Ukrainian media outlets report a death toll in the city of over 20,000, while locals say it is twice as many – 40,000. Of course, the statistics will be updated later, but, as the authors of publications in the media and social networks observe, regardless of exactly how many, the fact is that more people died in Mariupol during the current Russia – Ukraine war than in any other European or former Soviet city that suffered from the Nazis in the period prior to and during World War II (such as Guernica, Lidice, Warsaw, or Brest in Belarus). A maternity hospital, a swimming pool where mothers with children and pregnant women were hiding, and hospitals have all been destroyed in Mariupol, and then it was the turn of the local drama theater. Satellite images documented the fact that the inscriptions “Children” in Russian were clearly visible near the drama theater building. Undoubtedly, the signs were perfectly noticeable also for Russian pilots who dropped bombs, yet they still targeted this site.

“My theater does not exist anymore,” said the artistic director Lyudmyla Kolosovych over the phone. She had moved





Burned residential apartment building in Luhansk, July 28, 2014.

PHOTO: PRYSHUTOVA VIKTORIA

to Lviv after the occupation of Luhansk in 2014, then later relocated to Dnipro, and had recently been working in Mariupol. Another of her workplaces, the College of Culture and Arts, which was next to the theater, was also burnt down. She tells us that the most devastating blow fell on that wing of the theater where the dressing rooms were located and where many women who were preparing to give birth

were hiding. “They were all killed, they died,” says Lyudmyla Kolosovych. Her friend Vira Lebedynska, an actress and sound director, miraculously got out of the ruined film studio, climbing out from under the rubble of the building over dead bodies. Now she considers March 16 her second birthday. According to preliminary data, three hundred people died, out of more than a thousand who were in

the theater. “The city with a population of half a million is gone, 90% of the buildings are destroyed”: Those who escaped the horror share their pain. “It was beautiful, modern, European, green, and it seemed that it should develop in the direction of life,” remarks Lyudmyla. The enemy in Ukraine resorted to total genocide and ethnocide, combining the practices of extermination with methods of intimidation

and moral humiliation of people. In the town of Bucha in the Kyiv region, Russian soldiers, after asking local inhabitants about their professions, shot local teachers and educators – simply because they worked in schools and kindergartens, the institutions of the Ukrainian state. The director of the kindergarten in neighboring Irpin was also killed, together with her husband. A friend from the southern city of Kherson writes that the occupiers kidnapped Oleksandr Knyga, the general director of the Kherson Regional Music and Drama Theater, the president of the Melpomene Tavria International Theater Festival, and the head of the Eurasian Theater Association.

**AT A TIME WHEN** children and their mothers are trapped under the rubble in Ukrainian cities and villages, people are dying of dehydration, starvation and depletion, and artists, journalists, and mayors are being held hostage by Russian terrorists, thousands of theaters continue to operate in Russia. There are more than five hundred of them in Moscow alone. During such a war, every word on the stages of these theaters seems to be false and self-deceptive. Millions of people watching the plays do not want to know how painful their neighbors' reality is. Within the context of Kremlin policy, modern Russian culture is nothing more than business as usual, or even worse, it is a means of legitimizing Putin's regime. Most representatives of the cultural and educational sphere in RF have failed to explain to society their position on the essence of the system created by Putin. The worst episodes of the symbiosis of the cultural elite with the authorities were when artists and intellectuals consciously and voluntarily joined the propaganda campaigns and approved of the Kremlin's aggression. In March 2014, the Writers' Union of Russia published an open letter on its website, in which this organization personally supported Putin and the decision of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation to start the war in Ukraine. In 2022, 305 rectors of Russian universities officially approved the actions of the Russian president, who believes that "demilitarization and denazifi-

cation of Ukraine" is a way to protect their country from "growing military threats."

**AS VARIOUS SURVEYS** conducted in RF showed, between 50 and 70% of Russians shared and supported this far-fetched motivation for war and the very idea of a "special operation," the official Kremlin name for this invasion and military action. According to the most recent Levada center poll, conducted in the end of March, support for Putin rose by about 10% to more than 80% over the period of war (since the attack on Ukraine). The bloodier the regime, the more support it receives? Not only the elites, but also a large part of Russian society, the so-called "ordinary people", have chosen unconditional trust in propaganda in matters of war. While some children refuse to be zombies during games, elsewhere some adults readily agree to be zombies in real life. Time will tell whether the war will free the Russians from the illusions of their "great mission." At present, it seems that only a few individuals in Russia are able to speak out publicly against the war. Some do this for pragmatic reasons – hoping for future lifting of the sanctions, they signal that not all in the country are ideologically preoccupied morons. Some express just ordinary human compassion – and it is good not only for Ukraine, but for the world and their own souls. My Ukrainian friends, as well as some foreign colleagues who came to Lviv in 2014, well remember the first wave of immigrants from Donbass, in particular communication with an upright Donetsk resident named Oleg, for whom the key word for understanding the prospects of Ukraine and, by the way, Russia too, was the notion of "de-zombification." He was shocked by the susceptibility of so many people from his region to the propaganda of their neighboring country and believed that the future expected (and demanded) de-occupation, that the return of the occupied Ukrainian lands should come together with a change of consciousness, its liberation from the influence of Kremlin ideologemes and narratives.

Ukraine is the Russia's neighbor which has historically, for centuries, been enslaved in Russia's "prison of the nations."

Having escaped from captivity upon the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine has gone through a not ideally successful, but a truly free path of development during its thirty years of independence. Now our country is once again threatened with undisguised genocide and the erasure of its culture. In a political sense, it is jeopardized by the regime that promises total slavery to those who are silenced and jail for activists – like in Russia. The stakes in the current military conflict are therefore very high – it is about where the line of demarcation of the Iron Curtain will be drawn. The task for Ukraine is to leave behind the borders of this Curtain and to separate itself once again from the laws (lawlessness) of the Evil Empire. This is not only a battle for the future of Ukraine, but also a global battle, because nuclear weapons, chemical agents, as well as huge amounts of conventional weapons could leave the world with countless environmental problems. While adults in Ukraine are fighting for freedom and safety, Ukrainian children are well aware of the alternative to negative scenarios of destruction, and this alternative is simple – to save lives, rebuild cities, and revive the Earth. As for paleontology, it will have to wait for a while. ✕

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# STAYING IN KYIV. “A COUNTRY THAT HAS SUCH HEROIC YOUNG MEN IS A POWERFUL COUNTRY”

Ukraine is a part of me; maybe this is the most expected answer.

Nevertheless, in fact, speaking frankly, I cannot imagine my life without my country. It is a world of my friends and colleagues, of different social and academic bonds, responsibilities, goals, and expectations. My parents are living in the US; they have been there for a long time, and they got the news about the possible war just a few weeks before the catastrophe hit us. They begged me to come to their home, but I refused. It was not possible for me even to think that I could stay in some other place when my country is in danger because of the actions of a foreign dictator. When the war began, my European friends from Poland and the UK (you know this for sure) offered me sanctuary, but this is not for me. I must stay here to do all I can to help my friends who are now struggling for Ukraine (and I work every day as a member of the Information Defence of Ukraine). We will not have a Victory Day if we all leave the country, though it's a natural instinct (mothers do need to save the lives of their children); we need to unite our efforts here in defence of Ukraine. The dictator understands this, which is why it was so important to unite militarily with our world partners.

I do not believe in the nuclear winter, but I still consider that only with the world army can we stop this monster.

**I REMEMBER** the sentence that I heard for the first time during the Orange Revolution, when I was a student at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. The concept of that sentence was that the heart of Europe is being beaten out in Kyiv.

In 2022, the heart of the world is in Ukraine. Ukraine is a country that may change ideas regarding the concept of



Dmytro Drozdovskiy in the streets of Kyiv region.

new politics. Now the courageous armed forces of Ukraine have changed the world's opinion of our people. Putin, I am sure, did not expect to get such powerful counterattacks and maybe the tyrant and his administration – the creators of the war – wanted to inflict a blitzkrieg.

But it is not possible to invade and conquer Ukraine in 2-3 days. It is not possible to conquer Ukraine in a month. Ukraine will continue to fight until the last Ukrainian. Moreover, this is a new concept for the world that lives in the post-capitalist, post-information, trans-cultural paradigm.

Ukraine has now become a world symbol – a country of heroism, brave hearts that of course want to live in the new comfortable reality; they have wives and children. However, each day our men now are standing at their posts, and they are ready to give their lives to save Ukraine from the enemy. This is a new representation of the human being where they are represented by something more than “the pursuit of

happiness”, the comforts of everyday life. Only in this paradigm, when we are ready to give our lives for our country – and we have no alternative – can we win. Those who are ready to meet the requirements of the war will forge the peace.

This is, in fact, an old idea represented in many Eastern cultural systems (the samurai for example). Our people represent this message to the world. In addition, I think the Ukrainian people are worthy of the Nobel Prize for Peace because they know how to fight to defend freedom. Only the strong armed forces of Ukraine can stop the dictator. His only power is a small nuclear button, with the help of which he blackmails the world.

**SO FOR ME**, Ukraine is a country of the future that is a symbol of “true” human identity. This is a country that represents the idea of the real “return to the human”. However, it resembles the idea that the humanity can only be in a safe

place if it is strong and if it is not afraid to devote itself to defence of its freedom and democracy. We need a new policy for the new world – what we have already had is not enough if we have such monsters on the planet. We are no longer in the polarised world of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but we see that again in the multifaceted world of the 21st century we have Ukraine (and all our partners in the world) defending itself from invasion from the Russian federation and a dictator who ruthlessly pursues his place in the history books. This was started as the result of propaganda about Nazis in Ukraine. This is absurd and does not have any foundation in fact. The second point of absurdity is the idea of nuclear power in Ukraine that can be used against Russia. The third point of absurdity is the inflated rumors about biological weapons that can be used against Russia. In fact, Russian soldiers behave like Nazis, killing women and children in Ukraine. Mariupol will be a tragic symbol of the terrorism Russia is inflicting in Ukraine during this war.

I think the new motto for the world will be found in Ukraine: New concepts of peace and war, new concepts of human values and human essence. What is more important for me is the idea of deep transformation that we now have in our society that has been united to defend the country.

**WE UNDERSTAND** that Ukrainian independence is one important point, but the second important point is being with Europe politically, I mean being a member of the European Union. I am shocked, speaking frankly, by the position of some political leaders in Germany and the Netherlands. I understand that the process of becoming an EU member isn't quick. But war is an extraordinary situation, and we wait for extraordinary decisions of the EU despite what North Macedonia or Albania may say if Ukraine becomes a member of the EU, which is now ethical, logical and natural. Ukrainian people are dying for European values every day now. Putin does not want to appreciate the European future of Ukraine.

If we are politically in one system, then it will be much easier to stop the world aggression from Russia – people are be-



The National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine where the author works.

ing killed in Ukraine every day. What is more important: Saving lives or following detailed procedures according to bureaucratic mechanisms? Laws can be changed but humans only have one life. Now the EU must do all it can immediately to save the lives of Ukrainians. Money is nothing compared to human lives. European procedures are nothing compared to the essence of human lives. Or else we risk the holistic vicissitudes David Mitchell

### **“For Putin the concept of the Russian language in Ukraine is very important.”**

predicts in his *Cloud Atlas*. Mitchell's biorobots live in Neo Seoul reality, thinking that they are in a happy world “producing” pleasant and comfortable things. But they are all in a new empire. Putin demonstrated that in fact he has followed the strategy of Hitler and his vision of how to “make Russia great again” (sorry for this slogan) is based on Nazi principles.

**WE NEED TO STOP** the aggression, we need to work as a unit, we need to rethink our life and find a new path.

I was in Suzirja theatre in Kyiv with my colleagues from that magnificent theatre. We had the feeling that February 23 could be a special day for the dictator who still intends to renew the Soviet Empire. This is the day of the new Soviet army.

Speaking frankly, my friends from the government sent me the news that the war would start the next day. I did not want to share this information, but sent a message to my friend Taras Kremin, who is the State Language Protection Commissioner, from the theatre in the evening, just so he could take all possible actions to support the institutions that might be attacked first as they are a part of the Ukrainian linguistic identity, and for Putin the concept of the Russian language in Ukraine is very important.

Moreover, one of my old friends who left the country on February 23, after which the sky “was closed” for civilian flights from Boryspil airport, also informed me about the imminent invasion. However, it was my conscious decision to stay with my country, supporting my compatriots in any way I can.

On March 24, I visited the military hospital in Kyiv together with my colleagues from one Kyiv publishing house. That was very important for me as I saw the “inner” world of the war of young soldiers injured. Many of them suffer in terrible pain after surgery as there is a shortage of painkiller medication.

Nevertheless, I saw people – quite young people, 18–28 years old – and they were so positive despite the pain and the injuries. They love Ukraine, they love this life, and they are ready to do everything possible to defend the country again and again despite all the physical inconvenience and pain. I am sure that a country that has such heroic young men is a powerful country. One colonel who was following me in the military hospital is an example of a very sincere and wise person. Every day he observes very difficult scenes of real life, but he exudes positive energies; he is a very intelligent and kind person. People who, after the attacks, after physical pain, can generate this energy of light and positive thinking are, figuratively speaking, immortal. For me, these people are heroes. ✕

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*Our Army, Our Protectors* (1978)  
by Maria Prymachenko.

# Manuscripts do not burn. What about unwritten manuscripts?

by **Alla Marchenko**

**D**estruction of cultural heritage during war is a form of symbolic violence – especially when it comes to deliberate destruction. UNESCO defines cultural heritage as “artefacts, monuments, a group of buildings and sites, museums that have a diversity of values including symbolic, historic, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific and social significance”.<sup>1</sup> As cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker emphasized, acts of creativity deny death; in this regard, heritage is a tribute to creativity.

According to the databases of Ukrainian Cultural Foundation<sup>2</sup> and of Ministry of Culture and Information Politics in Ukraine,<sup>3</sup> there were 389 crimes against cultural heritage on June 10, 2022. In the conditions of an ongoing war, it is impossible to be certain of any further damage; this general insecurity and vulnerability adds to general losses. In many towns in Ukraine people made efforts to secure their monuments, covering them physically and digitalizing them in databases.<sup>4</sup>

Among the first examples of the destruction of tangible heritage was the Museum of Mariia Prymachenko located in Ivankiv,

Kyiv region, although it is rumored that some her artworks from that museum were saved by some locals. Her works, in the Naive art style, have become a symbol of peace across the world since the tragedy.<sup>5</sup> This illustrates the transformation of physical pieces of art into a message about the tragedy in Ukraine.

Thus, along with physical dimension of cultural heritage, I find its two other dimensions no less important (although underrepresented both in the UNESCO definition and many public discussions): symbolic and human. This underrepresentation is quite understandable – what is called tangible heritage is easier to measure, and this also refers to the calculation of losses, in contrast to intangible heritage.

**HUMAN LOSSES**, in this regard, are connected to losses of people as creators and keepers of cultural heritage. While common sense dictates that every human life is of the highest value, losses of well-known people are remembered in the first place. For example, the deaths of Artiom Datsyshyn, a top ballet dancer from Kyiv or Oxana Shvets, a famous actor, also have overall



These images were widely circulated in social media showing what was not destroyed in the Russian attacks. To the left: a ceramic rooster in a demolished kitchen cabinet in Borodianka. To the right: a sculpture of Hryhorii Skovoroda, by Ihor Iastrebov, in the Skovoroda museum.

symbolic meaning – killing some part of Ukrainian culture. Indirect human losses are connected with displacement and leaving Ukraine. On June 10, there were 4.8 million refugees that had fled from Ukraine to Europe, since February 24.<sup>6</sup> This impressive number also holds a symbolic meaning – the biggest still-growing refugee influx in Europe since World War II. According to Liudmyla Denisova, the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, 1.4 million people, including over 240,000 children, were forcibly moved, ie deported, from Ukraine to Russia. Those figures were reported May 23, 2022.<sup>7</sup>

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) by June 10 recorded 9,585 civilian casualties in Ukraine since February 20: 4,339 killed and 5,246 injured.<sup>8</sup>

The human losses among Ukrainian soldiers are said to be 200 soldiers a day.<sup>9</sup>

**SYMBOLIC LOSSES** refer both to the present and the future and cannot always be measured during war. The most striking cases discussed in social media and mass media were those of bullets in the head of the monument to Taras Shevchenko in Borodianka (Kyiv region) and destruction of the museum of Hryhorii Skovoroda in Skovorodynivka (Kharkiv region) by a Russian missile. Several photos of some preservations among mass destructions became viral exactly as symbols of resilience and hope for restorations. A good example here belongs to the photo with a ceramic rooster and a surviving kitchen cabinet, also in Borodianka - it brought many memes, such as "being as strong as the kitchen cabinet", and discussions about ethical boundaries of making a personal tragedy public without permission of the owners. In the case of Borodianka kitchen, however, the owner was found and interviewed by several mass media.

**“Symbolic losses refer both to the present and the future and cannot always be measured during war.”**

Physical damage to many objects that are not classified as cultural heritage may also be connected to symbolic losses, such as the destruction of the biggest aircraft in the world, Mriia (“Dream” in English). As Volodymyr Zelensky, President of Ukraine, mentioned in his speech to Australia:

**Can we say that Russia has destroyed our dream? No. It burned the plane, it burned the iron. It destroyed matter, not soul. The shell, not the essence. Not freedom. Not dignity. Not independence.<sup>10</sup>**

I would like to discuss two core themes directly connected to the loss of cultural heritage in Ukraine in its physical, human and symbolic aspects: Russia’s denial of Ukrainian identity and the devaluation of important concepts, caused by Russian propaganda and the ongoing war.

## Denying Ukrainian identity

On February 21, 2022, a few days before the full-scale war started in Ukraine, Vladimir Putin, President of Russian Federation, mentioned that he aims “to correct a historical mistake” of letting Ukraine become an independent state. He also denied Ukraine’s

agency: “Ukraine never had a tradition of genuine statehood”, or “As a result of Bolshevik policy, Soviet Ukraine arose, which even today can with good reason be called ‘Vladimir Ilyich Lenin’s Ukraine’. He is its author and architect”.<sup>11</sup> Such theses paved the road to Russian war crimes, while the road of Russian imperialism and supremacy over Ukrainians was constructed for years in many fields in society. With the war developments, this denial was even sharpened: For instance, Dmitri Medvedev, ex-President of the

Russian Federation and Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of Russia, claimed in early April that “Ukrainianness, fed with anti-Russian poison and overall lies about its identity, is one big fake”.<sup>12</sup>

An illustrative example of this denial refers to books connected to Ukrainian identity and history. As reported by the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine on March 24, 2022, such books are being confiscated from the libraries in the occupied towns of Donetsk, Luhansk, Chernihiv and Kharkiv oblasts (regions).<sup>13</sup> On the list of forbidden names one could find complex historical figures as Ivan Mazepa, Symon Petliura, Stepan Bandera, and Roman Shukhevych, as well as more recent names – for instance, Vasyl Stus, a poet, and Viacheslav Chornovil, a politician and former prisoner of the Soviet regime, both with articulated pro-Ukrainian positions. A marker of importance of erasing the Ukrainian identity for the invaders is seen in the immediate renaming of the occupied villages in towns in the Russian manner. An example with Mariupol, where one could observe a difference in just one letter - a Ukrainian “i” or Russian “ы”, shows the value of each and every detail in the war, and symbols belong to its weapon no less than tangible missiles.

**THUS, IT IS NOT** surprising that some Ukrainian artists and intellectuals decided to join the Armed Forces of Ukraine (for instance, Andrii Khlyvniuk, front man of Bumbox, a Ukrainian music band, Oleg Sentsov, a film director and former prisoner of Moscow regime, and Vakhtang Kipiani, a historian and journalist) or to resist in territorial defense units in their towns. Others chose to use their artistic methods to react to extreme symbolic violence imposed on Ukrainian symbols. An example of the united cultural response is the creation of a new version of a Ukrainian traditional song, “Oi u luzi chervona kalyna” [Oh, the Red Viburnum in the Meadow], written by the composer Stepan Charnetskii in 1914,<sup>14</sup> which could be interpreted as a revival of Ukrainian patriotic march. It became a basis for a new Pink Floyd song: “Hey Hey Rise Up!” in support of Ukraine, made in cooperation with the above-mentioned Andrii Khlyvniuk.<sup>15</sup> At a Grammy Awards ceremony, John Legend presented his new song, “Free”, as a tribute to Ukraine’s fight.<sup>16</sup> Ukrainian artists spread information about the war with their pictures – for instance, Olga Wilson became known for her pictures of human souls wandering in devastated towns of Ukraine,<sup>17</sup> and Oleksandr Grekhov for his sharp illustrations of daily news in time of war.<sup>18</sup>

In this regard, it is worth mentioning the extreme importance of Ukrainian state symbols – flag, anthem and emblem, in counteracting the denial Ukrainian identity. For instance, a new mural of a Ukrainian flag being sewn together after being torn apart appeared in Kyiv in early April.<sup>19</sup> A Ukrainian flag has not only become an important symbol of authorities in each unoccupied city, town and village of Ukraine, it has spread internationally as a symbol of Ukraine’s independence.

At the same time, one could find reactions of activists and local authorities to the denial of Ukrainian identity in the form of removing Russia-related associations in public spaces – objects or names. In Uzhhorod, local activists unofficially renamed a monument to the Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin as a monu-



Change of the sign with name of "Mariupol" after the Russian occupation, May 2022.

ment to singer Joe Dassin,<sup>20</sup> while in Mukachevo and Ternopil similar monuments were removed from streets. Many unofficial debates were launched on the imperialistic nature of Russian culture and the necessity to at least make a pause to a dominant Russian voice of the region in order to reflect and analyze the deeply rooted sources of the current war. A Telegram channel “And what did Pushkin to you?” is a chatbot initiative to unveil the stance of historical personalities connected to Russia towards Ukraine – in their creative works or in articulated worldviews.<sup>21</sup>

The head of Kyiv underground stations suggested renaming several stations, such as the station “Druzhby Narodiv” (“Friendship of People”, implying friendship between Russia and Ukraine) and asked people about their opinion and ideas for new names. A public opinion poll conducted in April-May 2022, defined the variety of proposals for the new names (e.g., renaming “Minska” (Minsk) station into “Varshavska” (Warsaw) station), but the process was put on hold until consultations with experts. Oleksandr Tkachenko, Minister of Culture and Information Politics in Ukraine, confirmed the right of responsible local communities to do so; however he asked them to behave and not permit any acts of vandalism towards physical objects.<sup>22</sup>

## General devaluation of important concepts

The second theme refers to the devaluation of words and well-known concepts of the contemporary world. These are the concepts mostly connected to World War II: Fascism, Nazism, genocide, etc. Russia attacked Ukraine under the pretext of neo-Nazis there, using years of deliberate propaganda and staged performances of “violence on the Ukrainian side” connected to the Russian-occupied territories in Donbas since 2014. Its appeals to military rhetoric and the importance of “the great victory over fascism” (assigned by Russia exclusively to Russians) was used to justify contemporary war crimes against civilians in Ukraine. According to propaganda by Medvedev, “active Ukrainians prayed to the Third Reich during last 30 years”.<sup>23</sup> Various sociological polls confirm that the majority of inhabitants of Russia support

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



Ukrainian rescuers check the remains of a street in Chernigiv.

PHOTO: ALLA MARCHENKO, APRIL 6 2022



An exhibition dedicated to Mariia Prymachenko in Warsaw.

PHOTO: ALLA MARCHENKO, APRIL 6 2022



A mural of a Ukrainian flag with an international symbol of peace, Roundabout of United Nations, Warsaw.

Putin and the invasion in Ukraine; although declarations of certain numbers may be a point of methodological discussion, it is clear that propaganda has worked well.<sup>24</sup> The case of Russia must be an object of thorough research and developments of new terms connected to its aggression – possibly, Rashism is a better term than Putinism, because it emphasizes the overall nature of an existing phenomenon. The American historian Timothy Snyder defined the regime of Russia as the fascist one, insisting that the cult of Putin has played a fundamental role in the regime development. Lithuanian Parliament became the first parliament to condemn the military aggression of Russia as the act of genocide towards Ukrainian nation.<sup>25</sup>


It deserves attention that the objects of cultural heritage damaged by the war represent various religious denominations and ethnic groups in Ukraine, including objects of Jewish cultural heritage. At least six objects had received direct hits by April 1: Babyn Yar in Kyiv, a place of mass murder and a Holocaust memorial; Drobytsky Yar in Kharkiv, a Holocaust memorial; a Jewish cemetery in Bila Tserkva; two synagogues in Kharkiv; and the territory of Anatevka, a special Jewish settlement created for people fleeing from Russia-fueled terror in Donbas since 2014.<sup>26</sup> Jewish cultural heritage is an immanent part of Ukraine's rich cultural heritage and, as one can see, it has also become a target of Russian military attacks.

**ON MARCH 30, 2022**, the Russian Ministry of Defense made a statement about one of Uman's synagogues: "an object of the Jewish cult in Uman is deliberately used by the Kyiv nationalist regime for military purposes. This is in order to provoke conflict and political pressure of Jewish religious organizations upon Russia in case of an attack".<sup>27</sup> In this regard, such an official statement has several functions: to link the Hasidim in Uman to Ukrainian nationalists, to justify possible attacks in Uman, and to condemn the Jews for hypothetical interference into Russia's affairs. Replies of several Jewish authorities in Ukraine (including the Moshe Reuven Azman, Chief Rabbi of Ukraine representing Chabad Hasidism<sup>28</sup>) and their denial of alleged military support in a synagogue followed; however, in a war fueled by Russian propaganda one may state that the symbolic damage is already done.

The end of March unveiled the scale of Russian military violence and humiliation of Ukrainian civilians in various towns, either occupied (for instance, Bucha, Borodianska, Melitopol) or blocked from outside (for instance, Mariupol). The above-mentioned town names quickly became international symbols of atrocities. Such findings led to the search for parallels, most of which once again came from World War II. Comparisons to the tragedy of the Holocaust and the "final solution of the Jewish question" were made. For instance, Volodymyr Zelensky addressed the Knesset, Parliament of Israel, taking such parallels to a higher political level.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, the word "Holocaust" is also used by official Russia to describe the outcome of economic sanctions imposed, exaggerating Russian suffering.<sup>30</sup> Naming this war "a special operation" illustrates the will of official Russia to neglect Ukrainian suffering. Thus, the ongoing Russian war in Ukraine demands a rethinking of the conceptual framework and



existing ideas about military aggression and the decisive role of cultural dominance and symbolic appropriation in Russia's growing totalitarianism. In this regard, a trend of what is called "canceling Russian culture" (or rather, pausing its dominant voice in cultural sphere until the end of the war in Ukraine) is a radical reply to radical violence, understandable in a situation where Ukrainian cultural heritage is in deadly danger.<sup>31</sup>

Final word. We need to remember who uttered the phrase about manuscripts that do not burn – it was Voland, an embodiment of devil in the novel *The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov. Unfortunately, war atrocities demonstrate that everything can be burned down and devalued, once the silent majority permits. Unwritten manuscripts, as well as unspoken conversations, can never be digitalized. 

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# Mariupol.

## A city that is no more

A military endgame is taking place in Mariupol that could be an omen for Europe's future to come

by **Karl Schlögel**

I visited Mariupol for the first time in the spring of 2014, on my way from Donetsk to Odessa. Russia had just occupied Crimea, and the administrative buildings in Donetsk had been stormed by Moscow's special forces. Travelers were not allowed to leave the bus stations in Mariupol and Berdiansk. It would be too unsafe and dangerous. The following months saw unrest and a temporary seizure of power by pro-Russian insurgents. Since then, shelling of the city has continued from separatist-held areas, from beyond the border line, just a few kilometers outside the city. With the construction of a bridge across the Kerch Strait and Ukrainian ships subject to attacks, the pressure was mounting on Ukraine's second largest port.

When I returned to Mariupol in the summer of 2018, you still felt the tense atmosphere. The international airport was shut down and it was a long-drawn and cumbersome journey by night train from Kyiv, along the so-called line of contact. And yet: In hindsight, in a city that is today practically a pile of rubble, there

was an incredible sense of normalcy. "A Bridge of Paper" was the title of the conference for German and Ukrainian writers who had not given up hope that there must be a language that could escape the pull of hostility. We were not allowed near the border, but Serhij Zhadan read from his texts to the volunteers manning advance deployments.

### Anticipation of change

For most of the participants, not only the German ones, the name Mariupol did not evoke any associations. We heard about the environmental issues with pollution and saw the plumes of smoke and exhaust gases emanating from the blast furnaces and chimneys in dull colors of toxicity. At the time, the environmental problems caused by enterprises, acquired during privatization by the richest man in Ukraine, Rinat Akhmetov, seemed to overshadow the war and the never-ending minor and major skirmishes.



Collapsed building in Mariupol, March 26, 2022.

PHOTO: ANADOLU AGENCY VIA GETTY IMAGES.

But even at the far southeastern corner of Ukraine – usually an hour’s drive away from the border with Russia – there was an anticipation of change, as everywhere else in the country. From the bus station, you could travel anywhere in Europe anytime you wanted. You could hear from the English spoken by the youth that many had spent time abroad. The cityscape had changed, hotels and guesthouses had been brought up to modern standards. There was a “creative scene” that used the massive docks in the harbor for staging performances after sundown.

**NOW THAT THE CITY** has caught our attention through the horrifying images of all the buildings shelled to pieces and the mass graves in the lawns between prefabricated blocks of flats, it is abundantly clear what Mariupol was before

the Russian attack: the embodiment of a large city with half a million inhabitants with the whole kit and caboodle: congestion in the city center, efficient public transport, modern supermarkets and shopping centers, commercial buildings, public parks, multiplexes, bars, and clubs. In short: Mariupol was a city with everything that constitutes a European metropolis, one that left its past of Soviet provinciality behind – a communist past on display in the cult film *Little Vera* shot in the city in the late 1980s.

### Reinventing oneself

The new Mariupol was a reinvention of itself holding true to its historical heritage. A street, once again, called Greek Street, commemorated the fact that Mariupol was an old Cossack fortress and a city chiefly settled by Black Sea Greeks from Anatolia and the Crimean Peninsula at the

**“Mariupol was a city with everything that constitutes a European metropolis.”**

end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with elegant villas of Greek merchants and entrepreneurs.

The industrial and cultural boom at the onset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is demonstrated by buildings in the historicist style, such as the former Continental Hotel, The bank and publishing building, the neo-Gothic water tower, which amazingly had survived all the turmoil of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The house of the merchant Nathan Ryabinkin and the ruins of the synagogue on Georgiewska Street bear witness to the existence of an influential Jewish population, which was wiped out in front of the city gates after the German invasion in October 1941.

**CONSTRUCTIVIST ARCHITECTURE** of the 1920s also left its mark on the “prospekt Myru”: the street named Peace avenue. The old city center is dominated by the buildings of the Stalinist Empire, erected after WWII – countless of them bear witness to the disruptions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The house of the lawyer Yuriev was once home to the local newspaper, then to the Soviet secret service NKVD and, in the period of German occupation, to the Gestapo. Numerous churches were demolished in the 1930s,

Mariupol was the full embodiment of a large city – with congestion, public transport, supermarkets, shopping centers, commercial buildings, public parks, multiplexes, bars, and clubs.

One of those on the site, where a theater was erected after WWII. The very theater, where hundreds of civilians sought refuge recently and met their end to a targeted Russian missile strike.

## Only state-of-the-art is good enough

All avenues and roads of Mariupol seem to lead to the big metallurgical conglomerates – to the Illich Iron & Steel Works and to Azovstal on the other side of the Kalmius River, which divides the city into two halves. Their blast furnaces, rolling mills, machine shops and smokestacks form the towering skyline of Mariupol. The shift changes of the workers – there were once 40,000 of them – defined the rhythm of life for the city as a whole, and the history of these factories constitute much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century history of the city. They epitomize the rise of Mariupol to become the center of the Ukrainian steel industry and one of the largest metallurgical complexes in the world.

The Illich Works, which emerged from the Providence Russe Co. in 1896, was established by American engineers and Belgian capital. The other plant, Azovstal, was a product of the first five-year plan and was part of the lineup with similar “large-scale undertakings of Communism”, such as Magnitogorsk and Kuzbass. Mariupol, with its railroad and seaport, was the center of gravity for coal and ore trade and drew on the endless reservoir of peasant laborers who, forced by collectivization and famine, migrated from the rural areas to the cities.

Only state-of-the-art was good enough. Equipment was

sourced from Siemens-Schuckert, Demag, Metro Vickers, and Schloemann. The metallurgical enterprises in Mariupol supplied everything necessary for the modernization of the agriculture: cast iron, steel, pipes, bridge girders, railroad tracks, armored trains. What could not be dismantled in time before the German occupation was handed over to Friedrich Krupp AG on behalf of the trust activity of Bergbau- und Metallgesellschaft Ost m.b.H.

Although the plant was severely damaged, production was resumed shortly after the recapture – and, as if already anticipating the next war, it was equipped with those underground complexes, the “city under the city”, which have served as the stronghold of Mariupol’s defenders against the Russian aggressors. Azovstal, the symbol of development and industrialization, has yet again become a symbol, one of destruction, of a city bombed back to the Stone Age.

The ground zero of the final, decisive battle, the area of the conglomerate,

this city within the city, is clearly visible on satellite and drone images. Modern technology makes us eyewitnesses to a horrific struggle. The rust-brown colored surface, which can be zoomed in on, is clearly recognizable.

## Europe’s fortress

A bird’s-eye view of the man-made industrial landscape of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, now subjected to Russian bombing and missile attacks. In 2016, Czech photographer Viktor Macha documented the monumental factories, not knowing that these works would one day become the place of retreat for the last defenders of Mariupol against Putin’s troops and the last refuge for those residents who had not managed to leave the besieged city. What was built with the blood and sweat of generations has become the target of systematic and unprecedented destructiveness.

What goes on there in the tunnel system below the city is ineffable, not even with the most graphic descriptions by the commander, Serhi Wolina. Lack of water, lack of food, hundreds of wounded soldiers and civilians who cannot be cared for – and all this under non-stop bombardment.

**WE HAVE READ** Lidiya Ginzburg’s diaries of the siege of Leningrad, the testimonies of the survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the records of Hans Graf von Lehndorff from the enclosed Königsberg or Vasily Grossman’s Stalingrad epic. These days, Azovstal is the fortress where not only Mariupol and Ukraine is being defended, but also Europe, which cannot muster the strength to rush to the city’s rescue. ✕

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**“Modern technology makes us eyewitnesses to a horrific struggle. The rust-brown colored surface, which can be zoomed in on, is clearly recognizable.”**



Olesko castle, Ukraine, 2003.

PHOTO: EGLĖ RINDZEVIČIŪTĖ

# With Ukraine

by **Eglė Rindzevičiūtė**

**T**he 21<sup>st</sup> century started for me with a move from Moscow, where I had completed an MA in cultural management at Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences (MSSES), to Budapest, in order to study on the nationalism MA course at the Central European University. Almost immediately, in October 2000, I flew to Kyiv. This mobility in the region felt exciting, as if a new world was opening up before me; but now, at the time of writing, mobility has morphed into instability. Sergei Zuev, the rector of the MSSES, who was head of my department, is very ill today in a prison hospital, where he is awaiting trial, charged with corruption by Putin's regime a few months ago. The CEU has been forced out of Nador Street in Budapest to Vienna. Kyiv itself is under siege.

But back then, 22 years ago, I was at Kyiv Contemporary Art Centre to install a work by Artūras Raila and Gintaras Šeputis entitled 'Nostalgia/Everything Beautiful Is the Past Recycled into Drum'n'bass for Daddy' as part of Kyiv's International Multimedia Art Festival (KIMAF). It did not take long to install Raila's and Šeputis's work in Kyiv: we found a television monitor (not a flat screen), and decided to place it at the end of a long corridor, in a

corner by a glass door (into which the festival's director crashed, in a rush just before the opening). I spent the next few days with curators: Katya Stukalova of KIMAF, and Mirko Schaeffer and Richard Pyrker of [d]vision Festival of Digital Culture in Vienna. Katya would later fight at Kyiv's maidan. Mirko would move to Utrecht University, where he established the Utrecht Data School. I remember Kyiv as an open, very bright and expensive city. Although it was already chilly, we sat shivering in a large tent at an outdoor cafe; this cafe must have been cheaper than the pricey restaurants. The other shards of memory are of touristy sites: the ancient Lavra monastery and its great bell tower, designed by Johann Gottfried Schädel, which we were allowed to climb as the sun was setting over the city; the mind-bogglingly huge complex of the Ministry of Defence; and a massive open-air market, offering an endless choice of objects, gadgets and memorabilia from the Soviet period.

**THE SECOND TIME** I found myself in Ukraine was a couple of years later, in 2003, no longer as a curator but as a researcher, as part of a study trip organized by the Baltic and East European Gradu-

ate School of Södertörn University in Sweden. We flew from Stockholm to Warsaw, and then took a bus to L'viv, stopping in Przemyśl and Lublin (as well as Treblinka), visiting institutes of history and social sciences. It was history fieldwork: all the scholars we met, the texts we read and presentations we listened to merged into a landscape of extravagant Baroque architecture and inconspicuous nature. Whereas in Kyiv I could communicate in Russian, in L'viv I had to resort to my very imperfect Polish. Our group was accommodated in the old town in L'viv, in the Hotel George, built in 1899 and 1900, with an impressive lobby and very high ceilings. The hotel bar had the atmosphere of John le Carré's novels: in its gloomy light, we drank warm sparkling wine, corks escaping violently from the waiters' hands. We visited Olesko Castle, whose compact Renaissance architecture grew organically out of the hill. The hillsides themselves were covered with subtle gardens landscaped in the English style, with the scent of blossoming lilac trees and lush grass. It was amazingly quiet. I could not help lying down on the grass, just listening to the wind rustling through it, with the sun beaming down warmth. In one of the castle's halls, I found a marble bust of Barbora Radvilaitė, the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Grand Duchess of Lithuania.

LIKE STEFAN ZWEIG writing about the sophisticated idyll of Central Europe in the 1930s, I clutch at these memories like straws, at the same time that the Russian army is continuing to attack Ukraine, pulverizing its cities and killing its people. Although I have spent very little time in Ukraine, I have spent a lot of



***“I clutch at these memories like straws, at the same time that the Russian army is continuing to attack Ukraine, pulverizing its cities and killing its people.”***

soaked in cultural fundamentalism. As a member of the young generation of scholars, I should have understood the limitations of this view back then. However, the ‘veil’ described by W.E.B. Du Bois was also covering my eyes, and my own consciousness was ‘double’, where the history of parts of Eastern Europe was written and evaluated on the basis of Western stereotypes.

Perhaps that is why, yearning to escape this hierarchical, one-sided narrative of colonial modernity, I turned to science and technology studies (STS), seeking to discern the key features of modern epistemology: the emergence of notions of complex order. I moved away from art and culture to the genealogical investigation of cybernetics and systems theory. But culture did

Hotel George, L'viv, 2003.

PHOTO: EGGLE RINDZEVICIUTE

time *with* Ukraine. During my research and doctoral studies in the area studies center in Stockholm (2001 to 2008), Ukraine was at the center of academic discussion. Historians, political scientists and sociologists debated endlessly whether the eastern and western parts of Ukraine would part ways, whether the language-based identity of Ukraine's residents would determine their political identity. However, since Maidan and the occupation of Crimea in 2014, theories based on linguistic determinism do not appear convincing. Looking back, when after four days of hard fighting, Russian-speaking Kharkiv has withstood the Russian army's attack, those years of debate about east and west Ukraine strike me as time wasted over a non-essential question. To put it more harshly, the discussions themselves could be interpreted as a form of Orientalizing, a colonial approach that casts East European societies as being blinded by ethnic nationalism and

not go away, it kept surfacing, breaking through schematic historiographic narratives in forms that were most fascinating and unexpected. Moreover, when I was exploring the Cold War period, a time when the institutional and epistemological foundations of contemporary governance were being laid, I began, most surprisingly, to uncover forms of classic liberalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Browsing through Soviet documents in the archives, interviewing Cold War veterans, I could detect these forms of liberalism in ephemeral practices, where the creators of Soviet culture and science chipped away at the frames of ideological politicization, seeking to open up contact with liberal democracies. For most of them, the late state socialist system was both evil and a vestige of the past. Philosophers, artists, mathematicians, biologists, neuroscientists, engineers and pedagogues, many of them were creating new paths in their own disciplines, moving towards a global, anthropocenic way of seeing, where the principles of dialectical materialism, capitalism and communism, or the nation and the individual, were no longer conceptually expedient. And yet, as three decades have passed since the collapse of the Soviet Union, these principles continue to be invoked by those seeking to concentrate political power. I remain intrigued, however, by those outbreaks of freedom from unfreedom, freedom manifesting in irregularities that are quiet and not declarative, just like the sensorial blast of meaning described by Algirdas Julius Greimas.

**I AM GRASPING** at my own autobiographical experience because I am not certain what kind of academic writing is ethical in the con-



***“I am grasping at my own autobiographical experience because I am not certain what kind of academic writing is ethical in the context of death.”***

on Donskis’ words gives me hope that nobody will exhaust our lives and choices with their political strategies, neither from the outside nor from the inside, that some space will be left for the good, generous human spirit, allowing for something unexpected, something else. That the war will not destroy our own humanness. But first, it is necessary to secure peace in Ukraine. [x](#)

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Hotel George, room, L'viv, 2003.  
PHOTO: EGLE RINDZEVICIUTE

text of death. I do not want to be trapped in the universalizing discourse of ethics. Thinking about what kinds of words I can find in my own subject position, here and now, at a time when in Ukraine houses are being destroyed and lives are being lost, I remembered a talk by the late Leonidas Donskis, delivered at a seminar that I organized at the Paris Institute of Political Studies on 10 June 2015. In this seminar, the title of which was ‘The Ambiguous Role of Culture in the New Cold War’, a panel discussed the tense relations with Russia following Russia’s occupation of Crimea. We also spoke about the possibility of ethical cultural diplomacy. Donskis argued that in principle it is not possible to sort culture into the categories of ‘own’ and ‘alien’, collaborators and opposition, because the very semiotic architecture of culture is characterized by pluralism and heterogeneity, where resistance to a regime can sprout in the most surprising places, and at the most surprising times. Reflecting

# Belarus' relations with Ukraine and the 2022 Russian invasion

Historical ties, society, and realpolitik  
by **Andrej Kotljarchuk & Nikolay Zakharov**

Since the beginning of its history Belarus was closely connected to Ukraine. The name of the country, Belarus (Беларусь) is related historically to Kyivan Rus – an early medieval state with its center in Kyiv and its principalities on the territory of modern Belarus. The oldest cities in Belarus, Polatsk (mentioned in 862), Turau (980), and Minsk (1067), were founded by the princes of Rus (i.e. Tor in Turau and Ragnvald in Polatsk). Sviatopolk, Prince of Turau, became the first Grand Prince of Kyiv from the Rurik dynasty in 1015.

Since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, most Belarusian and Ukrainian lands were part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Ruthenia and Samogitia – a medieval multiethnic state. After the 1569 Union of Lublin, both Belarus and Ukraine became a part of Poland-Lithuania. Until the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century, the East Slavic population of Poland-Lithuania had the same literary language, called Ruthenian (руська мова). This language, which was different from Muscovite Russian, was the official language in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and one of the official languages in Poland-Lithuania. Therefore, many medieval and early modern writers from Belarus and Ukraine (e.g. Lawrentij Zyzanij and Meletius Smotrytsky) are considered today as writers of both Belarusian and Ukrainian literatures. Modern Belarusian and Ukrainian literary languages are very close to each other (like Czech and Slovak).

The medieval Grand Duchy of Lithuania, then a principal

military rival of the Duchy of Muscovy, is considered to have played a crucial role in the formation of the Belarusian and Ukrainian peoples. After 1569, the Grand Duchy's southern border with Poland almost perfectly coincided with contemporary state border between Belarus and Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> The early political and cultural differences between the Belarusian and Ukrainian parts of the Ruthenian nation relate to the emergence of the Ukrainian Cossack state led by hetmans Bohdan Khmelnytsky, Petro Doroshenko and Ivan Mazepa. Belarus became part of the Russian Empire at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a result of the partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Unlike Ukraine, the entire territory of Belarus was within the Russian empire, a fact that contributed to the underdevelopment of a Belarusian national movement. At the same time, a significant part of western Ukraine (*Galizien*) became part of the Habsburg Empire and achieved a certain degree of political and cultural autonomy from the 1870s on. The town of Lemberg (Lviv) in Austria became a key center for Belarusian cultural activity. Francišak Bahuševič, considered to be a “father” of modern Belarusian literature, published his books in this city; they were then smuggled into the Russian empire.

**NATIONALIST POLITICAL MOBILIZATION** emerged in Belarus in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, about fifty years after this development in Ukraine. The First All-Belarusian Congress, held in Minsk in





Rahvalod (Ragnvald), Duke of Polatsk. Painting by the Belarusian artist Pavel Tatarnikov.

December 1917 with 1872 delegates, proclaimed Belarusian autonomy. The Congress was violently dispersed by Bolshevik military forces. In February 1918, the members of the Executive Committee of the Congress returned to Minsk and proclaimed the independence of Belarus on March 25, 1918. Until the end of 1919, the government of the Belarusian Democratic Republic (BDR) co-existed with an alternative Communist project, the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR). The young democratic Belarusian republic gained significant economic and political help from the Ukrainian Democratic Republic and the BDR opened a diplomatic mission in Kyiv, led by Professor Mitrafan Dounar-Zapolski. Both Belarusian and Ukrainian democratic republics of 1918-1920 ceased to exist in the course of the Bolshevik and Polish aggression.<sup>2</sup> In 1921 the territory of Belarus and Ukraine was divided between Soviet Russia and Poland by the Treaty of Riga. Soon, the Belarusian Soviet Socialist republic with its capital in Minsk and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist republic with its capital in Kharkiv became autonomies within the Soviet Union. At the same time Western Belarus and Western Ukraine became part of Poland. The Belarusians and Ukrainians established a close cooperation in Poland, together participated in election campaigns to Polish parliament and formed in the end of the 1920s a joint fraction in the parliament.<sup>3</sup> Many Ukrainian cultural and political organizations acted on the territory of Polesie, a region which is today divided between Belarus and Ukraine. During the Nazi occupation the Belarusian part of Polesie was under the administration of the Reichskommissariat Ukraine. After World War II, Belarus and Ukraine were the main republics in the Soviet Union (after the Russian Socialist Federative Republic) by population and economic capital. As founders and members of the United Nations, Belarus and Ukraine was de-jure independent and had their own Foreign Offices and diplomatic staff since 1945.

**ON DECEMBER 8, 1991**, the leaders of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine signed the Belovezh Accords as the representatives of three of the four republics which had signed the 1922 Treaty on the Creation of the Soviet Union. The leaders of three states declared that the Soviet Union had effectively ceased to exist and established the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). After the conflict in Donbas in 2014 the Foreign Office and the Security Council of Ukraine announced the decision to start the procedure of leaving the CIS. In 2018–2021 Ukraine declared the final termination of the country's participation in the statutory bodies of the CIS. At the same time, Belarus played a leading role in the development of the CIS and has been building the Union State since 1996 – the political, military and trade union with Russia. In spite of numerous accusations of “denationalization” of Belarus, this policy represents a specific version of nation-building. Indeed, unlike other newly formed East European states, the Belarusian leadership marginalizes such ethnic referents as national language, while bringing to the fore the collectivist repertoire, borrowed from the Soviet era. The Belarusian authorities promoted the image of homogeneity, social cohesion, and total unity of the nation, implying the absence of disagreements,



PHOTO: BIBLIOTEKA NARODOWA/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The First All-Belarusian Congress was held in Minsk in December 1917. Minsk City Theatre, the venue of the congress.

disputes, and different opinions within the population.<sup>3</sup> This is a kind of auto-training in national unity, when the need for unity is inculcated primarily via creating an unfavorable image of what would happen if the people of Belarus followed the example of the Ukrainian revolution and resistance.

## The Borderland

Belarus' state border with Ukraine is 1,084 km long. The border starts from the triple junction with Poland (in the Brest region) to the west and stretches to the triple junction with the Russian Federation (in the Homel region) to the east. This is an old historical border established in 1569 as a border between the Crown of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Since then, the border shared a geographic and cultural region of Polesia in two parts. The division has also a natural dimension. The Polesian marshes separate the population in the Belarusian countryside from their Ukrainian neighbors. In interwar Poland, the western portion of the border roughly coincided with the administrative border of Polesian and Volhynian voivodships. The eastern portion coincided with the administrative border between the Soviet republics of Belarus and Ukraine. After 1945 and until 1992 it was an administrative border between the Belarusian and Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republics. Following the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, a large part of the eastern borderland was depopulated and the people were resettled to the other regions of the countries. Today, the *Zone*, as people called this territory, is governed by special state agencies of Belarus and Ukraine.

The strategic Polesian railway, built during the tsarist era, runs from the city of Bryansk in Russia to the city of Brest along the border on the Belarusian side. The Chernihiv-Ovruch railway runs along the border on the Ukrainian side, connecting the Chernobyl nuclear power plant with the city of Slavutych. The tracks cross the border twice. The Prypiat River is used for the transportation of goods from Belarus to Ukraine by the water. The state border has 26 checkpoints, as well as good road and rail links. The citizens of Belarus do not need a visa for Ukraine and the citizens of Ukraine could stay 90 days without a visa in Belarus. In February 2022, during the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Russian troops began moving across the border from Belarus into Ukraine as a part of the Kyiv and Chernihiv offensive operations. In April 2022, Ukrainian troops retook control of their side of the border to Belarus.

## The religious issue

Christianity came to Belarus in the 10<sup>th</sup> century from Kyiv. Until the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, all Belarusian and Ukrainian lands were under the jurisdiction of Kyiv Orthodox Metropolis. During the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the residence of Kyiv Metropolitans was on the territory of Belarus in the city of Navahrudak. From the Brest Union of 1596 until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century most Belarusians and western Ukrainians were Greek Catholics (known also as Uniates); the minority belonged to Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations. In 1839 the tsarist government abolished the Greek Catholic church, then the largest church

in Belarus; since then, most Belarusian believers belong to the Russian Orthodox Church. However, the Greek Catholic Church survived in Austrian Western Ukraine and was abolished by Stalin only in 1946. After the fall of the Soviet Union the Ukrainian Catholic Church (official name for the former Greek Catholic Church) recovered its structure in Ukraine. In Belarus, the Greek Catholic church is marginal. Today, most Belarusian believers belong to the Russian Orthodox Church, and this is still the largest in the eastern and southern provinces of Ukraine. Church life in Belarus contrasts with the situation in Ukraine where churches actively engage in politics.<sup>5</sup>

## Lukashenka and the war in Ukraine

Independent Ukraine and Belarus did not have any inter-state conflicts. Lukashenka had good working relations with all five presidents of Ukraine with whom he collaborated for 28 years in the Minsk office. Economic ties between the two countries have grown steadily since 1992. The war has changed this situation and the recent economic crisis in Belarus also plays a role. Before the war, Ukraine was the main trade partner of Belarus, after Russia. Imports of Belarusian goods to Ukraine in 2021 are estimated at 5.4 billion US dollars.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, Belarus has a great economic interest in stopping the war. Some influential businessmen already publicly expressed their negative attitude towards the Russian invasion. For example, Arkady Izrailevich, a well-known entrepreneur in Belarus, called on “those who started the war to stop it immediately” and noted that “as a Jew, I can’t understand how a Jew was elected president in a country filled with “Nazis” in completely transparent and democratic elections.”<sup>7</sup>

By providing territory and military airfields, Lukashenka violated not only international law, but also treaties signed by him personally: For example, the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborhood and Cooperation between Ukraine and the Republic of Belarus from July 17, 1995, which was ratified in 1997. The first and second articles of the Treaty state that the parties base their relations on mutual respect, trust and consent, guided by the principles of respect for state sovereignty, equality and non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, non-use of force or threat of force.<sup>8</sup>

Since 2020, main task for Lukashenka is the maintenance of his regime.<sup>9</sup> Confrontation with the West and sanctions have led to a much stronger rapprochement between Alexander Lukashenka and Vladimir Putin. Having supported Russia’s actions at the very beginning of the war, a week later, seeing the failures of the blitzkrieg, Lukashenka began to distance himself from the Russian invasion. The hottest issue is the participation of the Belarusian army in aggression. Since March, almost every day, Lukashenka or some of his ministers has stated that Belarusian troops will not participate in the war. This fact could be explained by the enormous pressure on Lukashenka from Moscow on the issue of sending the Belarusian troops. Despite the state-



PHOTO: LI WANOV/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

1991, and the signing of the Agreement to Eliminate the USSR and Establish the Commonwealth of Independent States. Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk (second from left seated), Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus Stanislaw Shushkevich (third from left seated) and Russian President Boris Yeltsin (second from right seated) during the signing ceremony in Viskuly Government House in Belarus.

ments of many Western and Ukrainian experts about the puppet nature of Lukashenka’s governance everyone in Belarus knows that he completely controls the army and police. Refusal to send the army to the war in Ukraine gave Lukashenka new opportunities for political maneuvering. As known, Belarus has become a negotiating platform for Ukrainian and Russian diplomats and Belarus is seeking further participation in the negotiations. The withdrawal of the Russian army from the Kyiv and Chernihiv regions means, among other things, that the issue of the participation of Belarusian troops in the war has lost its relevance.

**“Refusal to send the army to the war in Ukraine gave Lukashenka new opportunities for political maneuvering.”**

**LUKASHENKA** is an excellent orator and populist who often used contradictory statements in his rhetoric. Putin, on the contrary, previously played the role of the rational politician. The war in Ukraine has changed this situation, and Putin’s speeches contain some propagandist clichés,

which were always common for Lukashenka. Lukashenka skillfully used a new tendency in Putin’s rhetoric. Now he says that Belarusian troops are guarding the western borders, preventing NATO attack in the rear of the Union State. The dubious statement has a practical meaning. Speaking the language of propaganda, Lukashenka found the most important argument for refusing to send his troops to Ukraine. The anti-NATO and especially anti-Polish rhetoric of the Belarusian leader became stronger and affected even the narratives of early modern history. At a meeting with academic historians devoted to historical politics Lukashenka suggested calling the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth “a period of brutal occupation and ethnocide of the Belarusian people by Poland”.<sup>10</sup> He ordered schoolbooks

and museum expositions to be revised in order to propagate this new vision on Belarusian history, which is in fact, rooted in the stereotypes of tsarist times. At the same time, through diplomatic channels, Lukashenka is looking for ways to normalize relations with Poland and other EU countries. In a letter from April 6, 2022 to some counterparts in the EU, Uladzimir Makei, the foreign minister of Belarus, complained about “a new witch hunt” against his country. Speaking on behalf of Lukashenka he states that “we categorically reject any insinuations about Belarus somehow being involved in the hostilities in Ukraine. Belarus is not going to be dragged into a war. We have had our fill of wars in the course of our long and complicated history.”<sup>11</sup> In conversation with the Associated Press on May 5 Alexander Lukashenka claims he is doing everything he can to help stop Russia’s war against Ukraine, which has “dragged on longer than he thought it would”.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, Lukashenka has indicated that the seemingly more independent political course of Belarus will serve common aims of Russia-Belarus cooperation.<sup>13</sup>

## 2022 Russia’s invasion and Belarusian society

Since the 2020 protests, most major independent media in Belarus have been declared “extremist” and outlawed. Access to them via the internet is blocked. State-run media follow the Russian agenda on the war in Ukraine. However, the regime did not consider people’s diplomacy: many families in Ukraine and Belarus are separated by the border but connected by mobile phones. According to the 2019 census, 237,004 Ukrainians were living in Belarus, 1.7 percent of the total population. For last ten years, the number of Ukrainians has grown by 80,000. Ukrainians are the third largest ethnic minority (after Russians and Poles) in Belarus.<sup>14</sup> According to the results of the last Ukrainian census there are 275,800 Belarusians in Ukraine, 0.6 percent of the total population.<sup>15</sup> Relatives in Belarus and in Ukraine constantly communicate, monitoring the ongoing situation. This factor is of great importance. For example, on the YouTube platform, which is still available for viewers in Belarus, an emotional video was posted on February 27, 2002. Gleb Voinov from the city of Dnipro in Ukraine asked his brother Oleg Voinov from Minsk to do everything in order to prevent sending of Belarusian troops to Ukraine. General Oleg Voinov is Assistant Minister of the Belarus Ministry of Defense and responsible for international military cooperation. His mother is a citizen of Ukraine.<sup>16</sup> In May 2022, General Voinov was dismissed from the military service and appointed by Lukashenka as director of the National Historical Archive of Belarus.

**THE LEVEL OF SUPPORT** for the war in Ukraine in Belarusian society is relatively low. In March 2022, Chatham House published the results of a survey in Belarus. Only 3 percent of Belarusians want to fight with Ukraine; the majority were for the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops and against the shelling of Ukraine from Belarusian territory. Due to the political situation the poll was conducted online and included 896 people, urban dwellers who use the internet.<sup>17</sup> The lack of support for the war within Be-



PHOTO: PAULIUK-SAPIECKA/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Belarusian volunteers in Ukrainian Armed Forces on March 8, 2022 (later, a separate Belarusian batallion was created).

larusian society is the factor that Lukashenka has to reckon with. Of course, he is more concerned about the attitude towards the war in the Belarusian military. According to some anonymous surveys, attitudes within the military towards the entry of Belarusian troops into Ukraine are also ambivalent. In an open appeal on YouTube from February 27, 2022, to the officer corps of Belarus, Brigadier General Valery Sakhshik condemned the Russian invasion. General Sakhshik is a founder of the Special Operations Forces of Belarus, a legend of Belarusian Spetznaz and former commander of the 38<sup>th</sup> Brest Airborne Brigade. He urged Belarusian soldiers “not to carry out a criminal order to attack Ukraine” and concluded with words: “This is not our war”. The video has been viewed on YouTube alone by over 4 million persons.<sup>18</sup>

**UNLIKE THE RUSSIA** army, the absolute majority of the Belarusian army consists of conscripts, who as non-professionals are not required to participate in operations abroad. In today’s Belarus all male citizens aged 18 to 27 who are in good health are called up for military service. Military service is 18 months (12 months for those with a university degree). The possible reaction of Belarusian parents to the deaths of their young sons in an incomprehensible war might be much stronger than the reaction of the wives and parents of professional soldiers.

At the same time, hundreds of volunteers from Belarus have joined the Ukrainian Armed Forces as the soldiers of Kastus Kalinouski Battalion.<sup>19</sup> The old guard of the battalion belongs to soldiers of Belarusian descent from the Azov Battalion, many with far-right connections.<sup>20</sup> However, this is a new formation that unites volunteers of different political opinions. The visual representation of the battalion is based on national symbols, not attributes of the far-right movement. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine began, dozens of Belarusians have been detained because of a “rail war” – damage of the railroad infrastructure in the southern part of the country. For example, on March 30, several “repentant” videos of detained people appeared in one of the pro-government telegram channels. In addition, four more railway workers were detained in Homel; at least one of them was placed in the KGB prison. There have been some 80 acts of sabotage on Belarusian railways as of April 12. Four persons were wounded by the police.<sup>21</sup> Nowadays both the Belarusian state and Belarusian civil society are involved in one of the most serious international crises in post-war Europe. Drastically changing circumstances open up different scenarios in Belarusian-Ukrainian relations. ✕

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# War and the academic community in Russia

by **Dmitry Dubrovsky**

## Academic freedoms in Russia before the war

**H**igher education has traditionally been considered in Russia as an important factor of international prestige.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the development of international projects within the framework of the modern neoliberal approach has always been seen by Russia as a serious financial component related to international student exchanges, as well as the opportunity to use higher education as a “soft power”.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, Russia traditionally continues to maintain a serious position in the field of higher education, mainly in the natural sciences.<sup>3</sup> President Putin himself sees this work as very important, regularly convening meetings of the Presidential Council for Science and Education and takes an active part in it. In particular, the participants of the meetings actively discuss the internationalization of science and higher education in Russia; at one of the last major meetings, information was disseminated that in recent years, Russia has invested more than 2 billion Euros in joint international scientific projects.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, real investments in education and science, according to OECD, are such that real investments in research and development in Russia are three times less than such leaders as the United States, Japan and Israel and less than half average of the OECD.<sup>5</sup>

**IN THE FIELD** of the higher education, joining the Bologna process, the rapid development of many new human studies (human rights, gender studies), active cooperation in the traditional Russian fields, as well as the emergence of new educational institutions or innovative projects in the traditional universities as a result of international support and cooperation – all this taken together promised a serious breakthrough for Russian science and education.

Nevertheless, the position of Russian universities in the international ranking, which was actually the main goal of the 5-100-2020 program, continues to be modest. By 2022, only Moscow State University reached the top 100 (78<sup>th</sup> place) in the QS ranking, and the Higher School of Economics entered the top 50 industry universities together with the Moscow State University; at the same time, the position of the rest of the program participants is in the middle of the third hundred.<sup>6</sup> However, some uni-

versities were also included in the subject ranking, and Russia was among the 10 countries in terms of the number of universities included in different QS rankings.

Those relative achievements of the Russian science and higher education were reached in “the time of prosperity”, the era of high oil prices, and were accompanied by serious restrictions of academic rights and freedoms. First of all, the autonomy of universities has sharply decreased, many democratic procedures in the field of university self-government have disappeared, and the level of authoritarian managerialism has increased – all these factors were combined with rather serious financing of higher education compared to previous periods.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, especially after 2011–2012, the situation in the sphere of academic rights and freedoms in Russia has deteriorated. This was primarily due to increased pressure on students and teachers who took part in the civil protests against the falsification of the elections of 2011–2012, and then against the annexation of Crimea. In general, this time can be described as a time of conservative turn, which dramatically increased authoritarian trends in Russian society and worsened the situation with academic rights and freedoms in the country.<sup>8</sup>

*“The situation in the sphere of academic rights and freedoms in Russia has deteriorated.”*

First of all, there were serious restrictions on academic freedom of speech<sup>9</sup>, serious problems in a number of studies, including history<sup>10</sup> and gender studies, growing fear for espionage<sup>11</sup> and securitization of the higher education and the science<sup>12</sup>.

The active search and identification of “foreign agents” and “undesirable organizations” had a special effect on Russian science<sup>13</sup> and education; among the latter, even before the war, Bard College (USA) was recognized undesirable.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the state began to prosecute not only “pro-American influence groups in universities”,<sup>15</sup> but also criminally prosecute teachers and activists; now the trial of the *Doxa* student magazine editors accused of “calling on minors to go to unauthorized rallies” is nearing its end.<sup>16</sup>

**THEREFORE, THE SITUATION** with academic rights and freedoms has seriously deteriorated. This also affects the international assessments of the situation: for example, the V-DEM project shows a serious drop in indices related to academic rights and freedoms, especially after 2014.

The outbreak of the war on February 24, 2022, was a real



Rectors signing the letter in support of the Russian invasion in Ukraine. From left: V. A. Sadovnichiy, Moscow State University; N. M. Kropachev, St. Petersburg State University, and M. A. Eskindarov, Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation.

shock for the Russian science and higher education, and completely turned the situation upside down, even in comparison with the negative trends of the previous years.

## The Russian academic community and their attitude to the war

It is worth mentioning that the Russian academic community has never been politically monolithic. This is especially true for humanitarian and social studies. Russian sociologists M. Sokolov and K. Titayev believe that the Russian science is divided into “provincial” science, that is, the science, which is mainly engaged in the adaptation and rephrasing of the world science, without creating new theories and concepts, but included in international exchange and context, and the “native” one, which for various reasons is isolated from external sources of information and focuses on the development of some autochthonous, often quite exotic and archaic topics for an outside observer.<sup>17</sup> In Russia, these groups roughly coincide with the political division between the broadly understood democratic and conservative camps of Russian scientists. According to M. Sokolov and K. Titayev, there is a division “[...] between those who believe that reading Western books is more important than the Russian ones, and those who are sure of the opposite, more or less along the line separating Bolotnaya Square from Poklonnaya Gora”.<sup>18</sup>

This division was vividly reflected in the reaction to the Russian aggression against Ukraine. When the conservative camp,

which generally agrees with the logic proposed by the Russian authorities, welcomes and supports the “special military operation”, as the official Russian authorities shamefully call the war, the democratic academic community reacted with protests, dismissals and fleeing from the country. At the same time, those few “systemic liberals” in the scientific community who were forced to sign pro-war statements, apparently tried in every possible way to soften the official aggressive rhetoric, describing situation as a “conflict”, with “equal responsibility of both sides”.

**AN EXAMPLE OF AN** obviously pro-state position is a letter from teachers of the St. Petersburg University, which expressed support for “the difficult decision of President Putin”, and also stated that “it is unacceptable to take actions leading to division”.<sup>19</sup> It is significant that there are representatives of “native science”, in particular, working as experts in cases against representatives of the political opposition, among those who signed a letter in support of the war.<sup>20</sup> The Academic Council of the Ural Federal University acted in a similar way.<sup>21</sup> It states, inter alia, that:

**The university community cannot remain indifferent to the process of displacement of the Russian language and Russian culture from the territory associated with Russia by inseparable kinship, and the destruction of people, respecting their traditions, history, and time-honored values.**



DOXA editors Armen Aramyan, Natasha Tyshkevich, Alla Gutnikova and Volodya Metelkin.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

On February 25, immediately after the invasion began, the representatives of the pro-state Russian Military Historical Society spoke most vividly, having expressed to the President Putin support and confidence that “[...] very soon a special operation to expel from Ukraine the armed bases created by NATO and American advisers and the ideological heirs of Bandera and Shukhevich, finally, will be completed”.<sup>22</sup>

However, the most significant as far as the content and the consequences are concerned was the letter of the Russian Union of Rectors. In it, more than three hundred rectors of Russian universities expressed their unconditional support for the war, which was called the actions to “denazify” and “demilitarize” Ukraine. The key point of this appeal seems to be the statement that “the universities have always been the support of the state”<sup>23</sup>; the complete rejection of autonomy and the affirmation of the state nature of the Russian higher education. It should be noted that this letter made the greatest contribution to the European position regarding the need to fully boycott the Russian higher education and science. No less active were the members

of the Russian academic community who actively supported the hostilities on their social pages, not only approving them, but also calling for expansion of “denazification” in Russia itself. Thus, Andrey Mamonov, deputy editor-in-chief of the magazine *Rossiyskaya Istoriya* and an employee of the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, wrote on his Facebook page, decorated with the Z symbol of the Russian invasion<sup>24</sup>: “in addition to the external Ukraine, there is also the internal Ukraine, which must be identified and cleaned up with no less rigidity than the external Ukraine”.

It should also be noted that not all representatives of the Russian science and education supported the war so straightforwardly. Some texts give the impression that the letters of formal support were written under external pressure and contain much less harsh wording than those quoted above.

**INDICATIVE IN THIS SENSE** is the statement of the “members of the Presidium” of the Russian Academy of Sciences in which academicians diligently avoid definitions of Russian propaganda, and the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine is described as “the escalation of many years of confrontation into an acute military conflict”. The academicians appeal to the international community to “[...] continue and develop cooperation, strengthen international scientific and educational ties, prevent any attempts to restrict access to international scientific infrastructure, publishing opportunities, as well as open databases.”<sup>25</sup> Hope for maintaining international contacts and, in general, continuing research and education is also voiced in the statement of the Higher School of Economy, once the most liberal



Russian university. The university's statement, titled "The main capital of the university is people", instead of "special military operation" ambiguous words like "unprecedented threats", "political turbulence" are used. In this text, former rector J. Kuzminov, current rector N. Anisimov and the Chairman of the Board of Trustees A. Shokhin, in particular, point out that "We will not stop international cooperation on our own initiative, and we thank those foreign partners who remain committed to academic values accepted all over the world."<sup>26</sup> It is obvious, however, that the number of such partners is constantly diminishing (see the reaction of foreign scientists below).

**NOTEWORTHY IS THAT** some pro-war statements appeared as a result of anti-war statements, and vice versa. Thus, one of the first anti-war petitions was a petition of the Russian anthropologists and ethnologists, who, protesting against the war, pointed out, in particular, that this "[...] is a path leading Russia to international isolation, the destruction of its economy, culture and science and condemns it to hopeless lagging behind."<sup>27</sup> Immediately after that, there was a kind of refutation of this statement on behalf of the official Association of Ethnographers and Anthropologists of Russia, in which the leadership of the Association stated that "In the current situation of tough geopolitical confrontation and Russia's armed actions to protect the population of Donbas, our association is ready to make every possible effort for the sake of peace and mutual understanding between the peoples of Russia and Ukraine, for the sake of saving the lives and well-being of our compatriots" and resolutely, in a completely Soviet spirit, disowned the authors of the anti-war petitions, pointing out that "[...] there are many signatories who do not represent our profession and are not members of the association, are not citizens of the Russian Federation or are working abroad". It is interesting to note that it was signed, among others, by Valery Tishkov, Director of the Institute of Anthropology and Ethnology of the Russian Academy of Sciences Dmitry Funk, Director of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of RAS Andrey Golovnev.<sup>28</sup> The latter, as the chairman of the organizing committee of the International Association of Anthropologists and Ethnologists IUAES, explaining the reasons for the cancellation of the international congress of this organization in St. Petersburg at the end of May 2022, pointed to "current geopolitical tensions" and was afraid of "[...] losing collaboration with our international colleges".<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, the general message of such cautious statements is the belief that science and education should not be "politicized", but, on the contrary, should serve the "cause of peace". These formulas clearly echoed the Cold War narrative, when scientific and educational exchanges between the antagonistic parties were understood as a way to reduce military tension.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, it seems that these hopes are completely unrealistic: we are not talking about a new Cold War, where Russia takes the role of the USSR, but the idea of the aggressor as Nazi Germany,

and the cooperation with the aggressor country condemned by most UN countries, of course, has nothing to do with the cooperation between the antagonistic countries in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Anti-war statements are silenced and punished in Russia

A part of the academic community, which has always been focused on the international cooperation, and is more democratically oriented, has spoken most sharply and radically. A number of anti-war petitions and letters from Russian students, teachers, representatives of various scientific studies expressed their disagreement with the war. One of the most striking letters of protest was a publication in the *Troitsky Variant* newspaper,<sup>31</sup> which is currently supported by more than 8,000 Russian scientists, scientific journalists, students, and teachers. This text states that the war unleashed by Russia is a gross violation of the international law, and the war itself was unleashed "for the geopolitical ambitions of the leadership of the Russian Federation, driven by dubious historiosophical fantasies". Under these conditions, one of the obvious consequences of the war is "further cultural and technological degradation of the country".

The newspaper itself was immediately recognized as a "foreign agent", the page with the letter disappeared from the newspaper's website and even from the cache of Yandex, the Russian search engine.

The reason for this is the hastily adopted amendments to a number of laws. In particular, a new article 20.3.3 of the Administrative Code has been introduced, "Public actions aimed at discrediting the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in order to protect the interests of the Russian Federation and its citizens, maintain international peace and security".

**IN THE REAL** practice of modern Russia, in fact, any anti-war statement is qualified as "discrediting the actions of the armed forces of the Russian Federation", and a public call for peace can cost

a fine of 50,000 rubles (approximately 600 euros). A much more serious sanction is contained in another law, a criminal one, envisaging prosecution for "fakes", 207.3: "Public dissemination of knowingly false information about the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation".<sup>32</sup> This law envisages the punishment for "spreading knowingly false allegations" about the actions of the Russian army in form of a fine of 5 million Russian rubles (60 thousand

euros) or up to 15 years of imprisonment.

This threat has led to the fact that public protests and anti-war protests of students and teachers begin to be punished by the dismissal of teachers who signed anti-war letters and the expulsion of or threats of expulsion of students.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, the university administration is monitoring the content of social pages of students and teachers, apparently the most politically active ones. Thus, the author of this text, until March 31, a

**"The university administration is monitoring the content of social pages of students and teachers."**

teacher at the Higher School of Economics, after publishing an anti-war post on Facebook in the evening of the same day, received a warning from the management of the Higher School of Economics about "the inadmissibility of violating the principle of political neutrality" prescribed by the Code of Ethics for the employees of the Higher School of Economics.

Nevertheless, the protest activity of students is growing. The students of Moscow State University and St. Petersburg State University filed petitions demanding their rectors to withdraw their signatures under the letter of the Union of Rectors. Separate petitions were drawn up and signed by students of St. Petersburg State University, M. Bauman Moscow State Technical University, Russian State University of the Human Studies, Kazan Federal University, Petrozavodsk State University and others.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, students and teachers defend the rights of expelled students, conduct flash mobs against the war, participate in anti-war demonstrations and pickets. They are doing all this at the risk of detentions and fines, as well as expulsions and dismissals, and even the initiation of criminal cases.

**FACULTY MEMBERS AND SCHOLARS** are less active in this regard: for example, according to Konstantin Morozov, Professor at the Free University, out of 150 employees of the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, only 5 people signed a letter protesting against the war. Obviously, teachers are more affected by the pressure of the university management, and in general, there is a greater dependence of university teachers and employees.

Still, some teachers in this situation either leave the country or publicly resign from institutions that supported the war. Thus, Andrei Lavrukhin, a teacher at the Higher School of Economics, a citizen of Belarus, resigned and wrote in a statement "in connection with the war in Ukraine" and they did not want to sign his resignation due to his use of the word "war".<sup>35</sup> Such examples of voluntary resignation, however, are rare: exit power remains very expensive, given not only the political, but also the economic consequences of such a step.

Already at the beginning of the war, the tendency to put pressure on social scientists increased. The previously used mechanism for recognizing journalists and direct political opponents as "foreign agents" began to be actively used against scientists and researchers. It should be noted that earlier a number of research and scientific organizations have already become "foreign agents"<sup>36</sup> and even, like Bard College, were declared "undesirable organizations".<sup>37</sup> However, before the war, there were only three people on the list of "foreign agents" being



Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Moscow, Leninsky Prospekt, 32a.

PHOTO: MIKHAIL IVANOVICH LUKIN / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

private individuals who were somehow connected with science and higher education, and, apparently, their inclusion in this discriminatory list was due to their active position towards both observers and independent analysts present during elections. With the outbreak of the war, both the author of this text and such well-known Russian scientists and teachers as Ekaterina Shulman and Viktor Vakhshstein were included in the list of "foreign agents". Moreover, despite repeated allegations that the very status of a "foreign agent" is allegedly non-discriminatory and does not entail a loss of rights, the Russian authorities, according to recent information, plan to prohibit the "foreign agents" who are private individuals from teaching and educational activities (this measure is already being used against organizations recognized as "foreign agents").

In addition, a simple and effective step to "cleanse" the universities from critics and opponents is simply not to renew the contract, explaining it by some administrative, not political reasons.<sup>38</sup>

In sum, teachers and students are persecuted for anti-war posts, both by university authorities and by law enforcement agencies.

Thus, in Blagoveshchensk, historian and local history expert Vladimir Pushkarev was fined under a new article on "discrediting the armed forces".<sup>39</sup> It is to be expected that the list of teachers and students punished for "discrediting" (i. e., their anti-war position) will grow with time.

Of course, the outbreak of the war was actually the beginning of an academic boycott of the Russian higher education and science. All European countries have terminated their cooperation with Russian universities and research organizations.<sup>40</sup>

Many foreign scientists who have worked at Russian universities are also quitting and leaving the country, although not all are equally radical. For example, some foreign teachers left

***"In a number of European countries, scientists and students, being in fact in exile, face a total academic boycott."***

Skolkovo, which broke off relations with MIT in connection with the war, but some remained.

Nevertheless, many teachers, scientists and students are leaving Russia, mainly to Armenia, Georgia, Turkey (visa-free countries for Russian citizens), but also to Europe. In a number of European countries, scientists and students, being in fact in exile, face a total academic boycott of Russian scientists and students, a refusal to cooperate even at a personal level and to accept Russian students was declared by many countries.

**ALL ACADEMIC EXCHANGES** were canceled, and many of the students and postgraduates from Russia and Belarus who applied for various internships and projects were rejected. At the same time, many scientific associations have decided that an official affiliation with the Russian institutions is no longer possible, in particular, at the conferences or other scientific events.

In general, this position was expressed in the direct demand of a number of Ukrainian scientists for a complete academic boycott of the Russian science and education.<sup>41</sup> The initial position of the Ukrainian scientists is the statement that “the Russian universities are an instrument of war”, in particular, because they spread toxic propaganda. Taking into account the official letters of support quoted above, it is hard to disagree with this. It is more difficult to agree with the demand of the Ukrainian scientists in order to protect from the Russian aggression, to lock all scientometric databases for the scientists from Russia and Belarus, to make it impossible to cooperate with scientists affiliated with the state educational and scientific institutions of Russia and Belarus, to prohibit Russian and Belarusian citizens from participating in any way in international publications and scientific projects. According to the authors of the appeal, this academic boycott should not apply to those who can document their participation in anti-war protests. The authors believe that this will push the scientific community to more active anti-war actions. This meaning that for a representative of the scientific and educational community in Russia, in order to be excluded from the academic boycott, they should publicly declare their anti-war position, with the prospect of a dismissal or the prosecution by the Russian state.

A similar position on the issue of publications by Russian authors was taken by some publishing companies, in particular, Clarivate closed their office in Russia. However, another major publishing campaign, Elsevier, said that it would not allow a boycott of Russian researchers.<sup>42</sup> The position of the journal *Nature* regarding this boycott is the condemnation of the war and the continuation of personal contacts with Russian scientists. It is significant that *Nature*, among other things, draws attention to the serious support of the anti-war movement in Russia, including that among scientists and teachers.<sup>43</sup>

It seems that various statements by scientific associations from different countries show that there is a desire to separate official Russian institutions, which are mostly represented by directors or rectors who have supported the war, and individual scientists, researchers, and students. Thus, the President of Harvard said that maintaining scientific contacts is becoming an even more

important task during global crises. At the same time, it is obvious that different countries and institutions clearly have different understanding of the decisions of their governments regarding the cessation of cooperation, and prohibiting either institutional cooperation or any cooperation with Russian researchers, teachers or students. For example, Finland has effectively banned cooperation not only at the institutional but also at the personal level. The University of Tartu in Estonia has announced that it will not accept students from Russia and Belarus in 2022.

However, at the moment, it is not clear what will be the general policy towards Russian and Belarusian researchers who work abroad, as well as towards students from these countries.

It is obvious, however, that the pro-war statements make the situation worse.

The appeal of the Russian Union of Rectors, quoted above, provoked an immediate reaction: for instance, ASEES noted in the special statement<sup>44</sup> that “these representatives of Russian higher education have betrayed their responsibility to their educational purpose and to ethnic leadership and brought shame upon their institutions”.

Meanwhile, it is obvious that the Russian scientific community has yet to face large-scale isolation, and its principles and duration depend not only on the development of the military and political situation, but also generally on the position of the international academic community.

International conferences that were planned in Russia are canceled or relocated to other countries. Thus, the above-mentioned International Congress of Anthropologists and Ethnologists in St. Petersburg was canceled. At the same time, due to the difficulty of obtaining visas and paying for participation in conferences, Russian scientists are unable to get to venues which they could attend in their personal capacity.

Therefore, we are facing a strong and increasing unprecedented isolation of Russian science and higher education, perhaps exceeding the scale of the Cold War and more comparable to the USSR of the late Stalin’s time. Repressions against students, teachers, and researchers who protest against the war expanding in Russia only reinforce this analogy. ✘

Dmitry Dubrovsky was an Associated Professor in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Higher School of Economics (HSE) in Moscow since 2008, but was declined to renew the contract February 25, 2022, apparently on political grounds, as he is seen as a “foreign agent”.

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# BALTIC WORLDS

Post-USSR. 1991–2021

Guest editors:  
PhD-candidates  
at BEEGS

special theme

Introduction.

## 30 years of forgetting and unforgetting

In 2021 it was 30 years since the dissolution of the USSR. In December 1991, the Soviet Union ceased to exist, and new circumstances became relevant, the post-Soviet, post-socialist, and post-communist ones. The year of 2021 marked the end of the region's third decade under the sign of "afterness". What came after seemed, at least during 2021, to have almost entirely coincided with what was left after: the USSR's legacy and heritage; its accursed or blessed memories; the private nostalgic longing for it and the retrotopian public policies; political restoration and the remnants of the past in the present-day historical revisionisms. From 1991 the word, post, came to dominate the social realities in our region for 30 years, as well as scholarship about it.

During 2021 CBEES arranged a series of roundtables for a critical reflection on this thirty-year long *durée*. (That we did not know then that it would more or less end abrupt February 24, 2022).

THOSE ROUNDTABLES were covered by PhD-students from the Baltic and East European Graduate School (BEEGS) at CBEES in reports published at *Baltic Worlds* website. Online one can read their

full-length reports of all roundtables and events, here in the following pages we present just a selection of excerpts.

Professor Irina Sandomirskaja, who took the initiative to the series of roundtables at CBEES, in her introduction reflects on it, also in light of the abrupt end of this 30 years' period with the war.

IT WAS AN ENGAGED group of PhD-candidates that formed an editorial board to report on USSR 30 years series 2021. Monthly meetings on zoom were hold around the covering and wider discussions and reflections emerged: on why nostalgia is such a characteristic feature for the region, and on the images of the communist period and the use of the past in contemporary politics. Here in this special theme, we therefore publish a couple of new texts that evolve around the forgetting and unforgetting of the USSR. ✖

**Florence Fröhlig & Ninna Mörner**

Florence Fröhlig is Director of Studies for BEEGS, Ninna Mörner is editor of *Baltic Worlds*.

### roundtables- series 2021

**46 Losing one's way and looking for a future 30 years after.** *Irina Sandomirskaja*

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# Losing one's way and looking for a future 30 years after

**T**he series of roundtable discussions dedicated to the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the USSR was organized during 2021 by CBEES as a palliative measure. The idea was to counteract those destructive effects of the covid-19 pandemic that threatened to disrupt all scholarly activities and dissolved all networks. As it turned out, this would not be necessarily the case. Thanks to the efforts by CBEES scholars, online exchanges were organized that felt weird at first but eventually gave even broader and more variegated perspectives, with relevant topics and an impressively high level of expertise and debate. The role of BEEGS doctoral students in this must be specially stressed.

At their time, Södertörn university and then CBEES and BEEGS appeared as a result of, and in response to, the fall of the USSR. It was the dissolution of the Second World that motivated the Swedish government in the late 1990s to set up a special institution for higher education, to deal with changes and exchanges in cultures and societies around the Baltic Rim including Sweden herself. Yet recently, the need for a special Baltic and East European research agenda started to be questioned, its strategic purpose in the post-Soviet Europeanization appearing already fulfilled. The series of roundtables *Thirty Years After* had an additional objective of checking if the East - West divisions from the Cold War time still applied, and if they did, then, in what way, with what kind of new manifestations and effects, and with which unanticipated outcomes.

These problems were not only taken up in discussions with invited experts but also reviewed in a series of articles published

**“THOSE THIRTY YEARS WERE NOW OVER, IRREVOCABLY LOST TO WAR, TERROR, THE RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA'S OBSCENE LYING AND THE RUSSIAN ARMY USING CRUDE BESTIALITY IN WARFARE.”**

online by *Baltic Worlds*. It was BEEGS' PhD candidates who thought up the plan and thus provided a record of this complex event and commented on it in a series of reviews and essays. I guess CBEES could not do better providing a unique learning opportunity for the younger colleagues – the unexpected beneficence of the quarantine regime. They also took the initiative of organizing roundtable sessions, one that I thought was the most successful in the series, dealing with environmental impacts of Soviet industrial legacy.

**AS I EXPERIENCED** those conversations throughout the spring and autumn terms, they developed into a truly and essentially multidisciplinary dialogue: one is almost embarrassed to use these two words nowadays – *dialogue* and *multidisciplinary* – but they quite aptly described both CBEES and BEEGS at their inception until bureaucratic misuse deprived them of all meaning. To participate in such con-

versations, one needs to be able to step beyond the immediate needs of making a career in a certain discipline at a certain institution but learn to understand many different professional languages and to share the general understanding of problems encoded in other people's terms. Matters of transitional justice and memory laws; economic problems in state capitalism; documentary film and its strategy relating to a difficult historical past; the far right and the leftist art activists; urban spaces in transition and Russian post-Soviet literature – this is just to give an idea of the scope. A kaleidoscope of topics not claiming to exhaust the problems but suggesting a possibility of a future knowledge more adequate to the complex realities of the region, both in concepts and in content.

And better competence is indeed going to be required.

**AFTER FEBRUARY 24<sup>TH</sup>**, the day the post-Soviet Russian Federation brutally attacked post-Soviet Ukraine, we realized that the thirty years before – that very *long durée* after the USSR that we were trying to define in those ten scholarly events throughout the pandemic year 2021 – those thirty years were now over, irrevocably lost to war, terror, the Russian propaganda's obscene lying and the Russian army using crude bestiality in warfare. The three decades after the USSR, as full of uncertainty and contradiction as they had been, now turned openly and unambiguously murderous, a colossal displacement of history that washed off like a tsunami everything that was, is, and was to come. In our discussions of the thirty years long post-Soviet period, we failed to anticipate its violent



ILLUSTRATION: KARIN Z. SUNVISSON

finale just a couple of months later. What was wrong with our expertise, then?

The *long durée* of post-Soviet, post-socialist post-Cold War ambiguity now acquired *post factum* a much sharper image; an *interbellum*. Now, looking back at what we did or failed to do in the 2021 series, the legitimate question would be: Has the post-Soviet period, so irrevocably gone nowadays, been the cause of the disaster, or has it served throughout the time as the disaster's braking mechanism and then finally gave way? And can we, indeed,

think it as an interbellum while in actual reality it was not any period of peace but all transfused with "local" wars including those far away from our borders that were either ignored or trivialized by both the international and domestic public opinion? How did the ambiguities of "post" ("both gone and still present") affected the ignorance and trivialization? These are by far least important questions now that Ukraine is bleeding but winning, and the frightened world is slowly recovering its senses vis-à-vis Putin's nuclear black-

mail. Still, this will be one of many questions to reflect on in a very near future. CBEES researchers are already planning this year's annual conference with the title, "Where Are We Now?" This is a good strategy, starting with a question, and an honest one, acknowledging that we have lost the way, but are in search of a future. ❌

**Irina Sandomirskaja**

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# Post-USSR 1991–2021.

Excerpts of the online publishing on the USSR 30 years. Full length: [balticworlds.com/tags/ussr-30-years/](https://balticworlds.com/tags/ussr-30-years/)

In December 1991, the Soviet Union ceased to exist, but its material and symbolic legacies still appear powerful enough to obliterate perspectives on the present and the future that has lost its utopian force.

Throughout the year 2021, CBEES arranged a series of roundtable discussions to make sense of this *longue durée* of “afterness”. The coming war and the end of the post-Soviet era we didn’t see coming, but a second reading may recognize signs of a turn to come. The roundtable organizers created international panels for discussion on questions ranging from economics and law to environment and urban space; from the European right to

global art, political and gender activism; the role of contemporary literature and documentary film; theoretical issues of than present-day regionalism and critical methodologies after the end of the post-Soviet. On *Baltic Worlds’* website all roundtables were covered by PhD-candidates at the Baltic and East European Graduate School at CBEES; Alexandra Allard, Sofia Beskow, Wouter Blankestijn, Cagla Demirel, Martin Englund, Vasileios Kitsos, Maria Mårsell, Cecilia Sà Cavalcante Schuback, Tatiana Sokolova, Ksenia Zakharova.

On the following pages we present extracts, edited by PhD-candidate Jane Ruffino. [x](#)

## POST-SOVIET ECONOMIES. FROM THE MYTH OF TRANSITION TO STATE CAPITALISM AND BEYOND

Roundtable  
March 22, 2021

THE POST-SOVIET COUNTRIES’ economic performances have been diverse since the 1990s.

Comparing four countries – Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan – Belarus have had the most impressive development, in terms of annual change in GDP per capita, with an explosive growth in the 90s and 00s. This was concluded by Ilja Viktorov, Research Fellow at Stockholm University, in his introduction to the Roundtable “Three Decades of Post-Soviet Economies: From the Myth of Transition to State Capitalism and Beyond”.

The Roundtable was arranged by Ilja Viktorov, Researcher, Stockholm University. Speakers at the event were: Yuko Adachi, Professor at the Sophia University in Tokyo; Viachaslau Yarashevich, Humboldt visiting Researcher at Ludwig-Maximilians Universität in München; Yuliya Yurchenko, Senior Lecturer in Political Economy, University of Greenwich, London; and Yelena N. Zabortseva Associate Professor at University of Sydney.

**Viktorov** described the transition in the 1990s as ‘a destruction of a developed industrial society and a quick transformation of former post-Soviet republics into a number of developing countries.’

**Adachi** expressed that informal governance based on Putin’s network has become an operational principle in Russia, both in politics and the economy, with many of these state-owned companies being controlled by people considered to be part of Putin’s inner circle as well as the business elite.

**Yarashevich:** Belarus is reported to spend a higher share of its GDP on public education, health care, and pensions. Further, since 1990, Belarus have had the lowest infant mortality rate and the highest life expectancy, among these countries.

**Yurchenko** commented that in terms of welfare provision there is a sort of envy in Ukraine of what is going on in Belarus, as Ukrainian



Former USSR GDP (PPP) in 2019. Source: reddit.com.

state and policy makers have been neglecting its population. But how did Ukraine go from being highly industrialized and educated at the time of transition to being one of the poorest countries in Europe?

**Yurchenko** explained that there of course are regional differences, as in many countries, but for these differences to lead to armed conflict something more must happened or be added. Yurchenko argued that this something else in this case was the oligarchs going into power pitching different parts of electorates against each other as part of their electoral strategy.

**Zabortseva** emphasized that although overall ranking is meaningful it is also important to also look at sub indicators. For example, when looking at subcategories of the global competitiveness index Kazakhstan are ranked at the 25th position concerning the labor market.

ALEXANDRA ALLARD



# 30 years of “afterness”

## LEGISLATING MEMORY. FROM MEMORY LAWS TO TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

Roundtable  
March 22, 2021

**TWO PANELS** on memory laws were held on the same day. The panel “Dealing with the totalitarian past: Laws on memory and legislation” addressed the ways different countries have approached the Soviet past in legislation and through “memory laws.” It was arranged by Yuliya Yurchuk and Florence Fröhlig. Speakers at the event included Maria Mälksoo from University of Kent; Andrii Nekoliak from Tartu University; Nataliya Sekretareva from the Human Rights Memorial; and Felix Krawatzek from the Centre for East Europe and International Studies (ZOIS).

This was followed by panel “Memory laws: an interregional perspective on commemoration and legislation.” One aspect that was carried throughout the whole event was a discussion of Western vs. Eastern models of memory laws. It was arranged by Cagla Demirel and Martin Englund. The speakers on this panel were: Jelena Subotic from Georgia State University; Joanna Michlic from the UCL Centre for Collective Violence, Holocaust and Genocide Studies; Johanna Mannergren Selimovic from Södertörn University; and David Gaunt from Södertörn University.

Providing examples from Russia, Ukraine

and Poland, **Mälksoo** emphasized the production of memory laws as a punitive mechanism that serves to protect the image of the state according to security theory.

**Nekoliak** described how different mnemonic actors in the Ukraine parliament advocated two competing memory models, also referred to as grand narratives: The Soviet-era memory model versus the National-Ukrainian memory model.

**Sekretareva** argued that Russia will not fully deal with the crimes in the past without distancing itself completely from the communist past. This notion of Russian national identity seems to impact on both mainstream national memory narratives and transitional justice mechanisms adopted for victims.

**Krawatzek** returned to the aspect of demand, concluding that memory laws are not solely a tool to control the cultural memory from above, but that there is an observable demand for memory laws in the populations.

**Subotic** highlighted that memory laws emerged in the context of considerations in relation to criminalizing Holocaust and genocide denial; however, they have been increasingly utilized and instrumentalized for nation-building purposes.

**Michlic** stressed that the memory laws have been stimulated within a framework that promotes ethno-national unity. Therefore, they tend to marginalize minorities and polarize the citizens within these contexts.

One of the first trials related to rape as a war crime was based on the findings of rape as a modus operandi in a camp located in central Foča. However, **Mannergren Selimovic** observed that over time people’s willingness to talk about these verdicts changed.

The concept of memory laws makes scholars focus on high politics, which is a dead end, in **Gaunt’s** opinion, as long as they do not look at how these memory laws are being implemented, how they affect people’s lives.

Per-Anders **Rudling** gave a talk on memory laws in Ukraine which is also connected to Poland. He described Poland and Ukraine as an old dysfunctional couple that can neither get along nor manage to divorce. Ukrainian memory laws are being mirrored in Poland and vice versa.

**CAGLA DEMIREL  
& MARTIN ENGLUND**



ILLUSTRATION:  
MOA THELANDER

## THE RUSSIAN INDUSTRIAL LEGACY. BLIND FAITH IN BIG SCIENCE AND TECHNOCRATIC SOLUTIONS

Roundtable  
May 26, 2021

“**INHERITING THE Pandora Box:** Environmental Impacts of the Soviet Industrial Legacy” explored the relevance of the Soviet environmental legacy and its impact on how we as a society understand our relationship to the environment today.

On the website there are two texts from the roundtable. One is a longer report from the environmental studies’ perspectives, written by the organizers of the roundtable: PhD-candidates Tatiana Sokolova, Wouter

Blankestijn and Ksenia Zakharova. The other is a brief summary of the event from a social studies perspectives, written by PhD-candidate Vasileios Kitsos. The panel featured four speakers: Paul Josephson, Professor in History, Colby College, Waterville, Main; Anna Barcz, Assistant Professor, Institute of Literary Research, Polish Academy of Science, Warsaw; Dimitri Litvinov, Campaigner, Greenpeace Sweden; and Arran Gare, Associate Professor in Philosophy and

Cultural Inquiry, Faculty of Life and Social Sciences, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne.

The speakers were united in their search for a hopeful message. They each expressed the need for a continuous cultural and political struggle, for the democratization of science and technology, and for a dialectical, synthetic process philosophy, including the revival of some of the progressive environmental ideas of the pre-Soviet and early Soviet era.

## RUSSIA FROM THE OUTSIDE. THE EUROPEAN FAR-RIGHT LOOKS EAST

**Roundtable**  
June 10, 2021

**WHAT ROLE DOES** Russia play for the contemporary far-right movement? How is Russia perceived “from the outside” (in the viewpoint from Eastern Europe)? These questions were discussed among the four speakers who shared views of Russia from their own national contexts: Ukraine, Slovakia and Poland. The speakers were Jose Pedro Zuquetem Social Sciences Institute, University of Lisbon, Portugal; Andreas Umland, Department of Political Science, Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Kiev, Ukraine; Tomasz Kamusella, University of St Andrews, St Andrews, UK; and Nina Paulovicova, Centre for the Humanities,

Athabasca University, Canada. The event was organized by Mark Bassin, CBEEES, Södertörn University and Per Anders Rudling, Lund University.

“Playing on the growing nationalist spirit, Russia have tried to regain the former connection by campaigning against this turn to the west. This campaigning has been somewhat influential, as it seemed to have played a part in the electoral success of the Ukrainian far right in 2012.[...] Although nationalist attitudes were largely evoked by the Russian attack, they were later used by Russia to re-establish the former connection.

**SOFIA BESKOW**

## ART, GENDER & PROTEST

**Roundtable**  
August 26, 2021

### THE PARTICIPANTS

in the roundtable were invited to reflect in advance on several questions on art and activism to provide inspiration for the discussion. The four participants were: Victoria Lomasko, artist and author, Dr. Diana T. Kudaibergenova, researcher at the University of Cambridge, Antonina Stebur, curator and researcher, and Dr. Nadezda Petrusenko, researcher at Södertörn University.

**YULIA GRADSKOVA  
& MARTIN ENGLUND**



Victoria Lomasko  
and her art in 2017.

## URBAN SPACE IN TRANSITION. AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF THE USSR

**Roundtable**  
September 21, 2021

**THIS ROUNDTABLE** offered perspectives on approaches to architectural heritage, and the ways memory has been made and remade in urban spaces since the dissolution of the USSR. It investigated four examples from both Moscow and St. Petersburg. The panel was arranged by Irina Seits, who also joined as a speaker, along with Jan Levchenko, Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Olga Kazakova and Vadim Bass, the European University, St. Petersburg.

**Bass** addressed the recent competition for the new Museum of the Siege of Leningrad. Introducing his case, Bass made a reference to early attempts to commemorate the Siege, already short after WWII: These



**Cinema Rossyia, transformed into a playful pop object. Moscow, 2016.**

included triumphal arches, cemeteries and an exhibition which failed to gain a permanent character.

**Seits** presented the history of industrial

PHOTO: V.KITSOS

plants St. Petersburg through their names and addressed the practice of renaming as a means to appropriate the heritage in this city.

**Kazakova** drew attention to an additional aspect of the cinemas, which was their sociopolitical and spatial function. Under Soviet censorship, whenever program directors managed to screen a rare or censored films, they played them in such peripheral cinemas.

**Levchenko** gave a presentation of characteristics cinematic visions of Moscow in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As he first argued, the views to a capital city, especially of a totalitarian state, demonstrate the dominant conception of lifestyle.

**VASILEIOS KITSOS**

## FORGETTING AND UN-FORGETTING. 30 YEARS OF THE USSR'S FALL AND SERGEI LOZNITSA

**Roundtable**  
December 1-3, 2021

### THE MONTH OF DECEMBER

began with three days of a much-awaited Symposium on the 30th Anniversary of the USSR's fall, with the presence of film director Sergei Loznitsa in Stockholm. The Symposium, organized and presented by Professor Irina Sandormirskaja, took place at Södertörn University

and at the Swedish Film Institute between December 1–3, 2021.

**Sandormirskaja** managed to bring diverse disciplines together for vivid reflections and rich exchange on issues such as the event, image, history, archive, memory, and oblivion, as well as the world of Loznitsa. Invited speakers were the poet Lev Ru-

binstein, the author and Professor Mikhail lampolski, and Professor Andrea Petö. Along with screenings of Loznitsa's films *The Event* (2015), *The State Funeral* (2019), and *Austerlitz* (2016), there were lively discussions with several invited speakers and the audience.

**CECILIA SÁ CAVALCANTE  
SCHUBACK**

## WHAT IS POST-SOVIET LITERATURE TODAY?

Side-event  
December 4, 2021

**FOR LARGE GROUPS** in the East, the fall of the

Soviet Union was like a floodgate opening through which history flowed in. The period following 1991 has been described as transitional, and the literature as post-Soviet. In the panel discussion “Fast forward – Rewind” at the Stockholm Literature Fair at Kulturhuset on December 4, 2021, questions such as how this transition can be understood in retrospect, and how we are to talk about Russian literature of today, were addressed.

According to sociologist Ruth Levitas the Cold war, the spread of capitalism and the fall of the Soviet Union closely interlinked utopia with dystopia. Still, human beings inevitably relate to utopias and establish a relationship with them. Philosopher Ernst Bloch even claims it to be a part of human ontology and emphasises art’s potential to visualise and evoke the not-yet-here. After the fall of the Soviet Union expectations on radical social transformation, which lies close to the notion

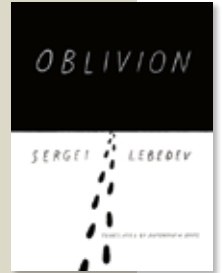
of utopia, was high. The panel discussion – a co-arrangement by the Swedish cultural magazine *Aiolos* and the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES) at Södertörn University – revolved around the outcome of these expectations.

The panel consisted of experts in Russian literature and Cultural Studies: Professor Emeritus Lars Kleberg, Professor Irina Sandomirskaja and Lecturer Mattias Ågren. In her introduction moderator Tora Lane, Associate Professor and research leader at CBEES, framed post-Soviet literature as characterised by the relationship with the Soviet Union or Soviet culture and the change this relationship has undergone during the thirty years that have passed since the fall of the Soviet Union. After the fall there was an urge to move fast forward in time. This, said Lane, just like a need to deal with the past – its myths and lies – characterised the literature during the 90s and beyond.

MARIA MÅRSELL

### THE PANEL RECOMMENDS THE FOLLOWING POST-SOVIET LITERATURE AND FILM:

- *Aiolos* 72–73 (2021) on post-Soviet literature
- Sergei Lebedev *Oblivion* (Предел забвения, 2010)
- Vladimir Sorokin *Telluria* (Теллурия, 2013)
- Alexander Etkind *Warped Mourning. Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied* (2013)
- Lev Rubinstein *Complete Catalogue of Comedic Novelties* (2014)
- Sergey Loznitsa *The Event* (Событие, 2015)



## FARTHER AND FARTHER ON By Lev Rubinstein, translated by Philip Metres and Tatiana Tulchinsky

[...]

28 *Let's go farther.*

29 *Here it's said: "All those craving and lusting, those fighting in vain and those scrambling out of the filth, those half-deaf and those forever hoarse—well, what are we to do with them?"*

30 *Here it's said: "All those striving higher, those sliding into the abyss, those climbing on and out, those hurting and those living through uncontrollable passions, those accustomed to everything, those interesting in their own way—what do they want here? Why should they be here?"*

31 *Here it's said: "All those guilty without sin, those bitten and shy, those intently pondering and those attracted by a barely-audible voice of eternity, those stooped from the backbreaking puzzles of existence, those in undue agitation from God knows what news, those anxiously listening to what is said—where do they find themselves heading?"*

32 *Here it's said: "All those not guilty but confessing, those seemingly cheered up but every other minute falling into depression, those striving to beat their neighbor in grasping what's going on, but not understanding a thing, those dragging the baggage of their own hopes and those affirming that everything is lost, all those now too late, and now too early, those swaying in the weak breeze and those stubborn in their own delusions, those thinking that everything is passed, and those shifting from leg to leg waiting for changes—that's enough already—it's time to stop."*

[...]

46 *Another voice: "So what now? What can I do? There's no way back—it's clear. Stay where I am? Well, no, that's not for me. Should I go and face my fate? Okay, then, I'm ready. (To the audience). And why are you silent? Why aren't you stopping me? Or consoling me? Surely one human word can sometimes save you from ruin. But what am I talking about? Whom am I speaking to? Farewell..."*

[...]



PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

**LEV RUBINSTEIN** is a Russian poet, essayist, and social activist. He is a founder and member of Moscow Conceptualism. In his “notecard poems”, each stanza is represented on a separate notecard. These notecards highlight the text as both an object and a unit of expression. To read the poem, the reader is supposed to interact with the text on a physical level.



The Soviet Union 1970 stamp, *Conquerors of the Space*.

# Space nostalgia: the future that is only possible in the past

Why has the Day of Cosmonautics, April 12, never become a national holiday in Russia? by **Roman Privalov**

A popular video, *Russian Space train*, made by a comedian group Birchpunk, gathered more than 4 million views on YouTube. In the 8-minute episode, a train conductor working on board a spaceship composed of Russian train carriages and operating on the line to Neptune makes a home assignment for her English class. In a peculiar mix of Russian and English words, she describes the happenings onboard her carriage, taking place against a view of the galaxy opening up through the windows. The episode is thoroughly nostalgic: it offers popular songs with a guitar accompaniment, tea-drinking from Soviet-style glasses, and a train station on another planet that is simply taken from any Russian provincial town. The comments to the video are thoroughly positive: this short piece simultaneously raises feelings of belonging and of wonder at a seemingly impossible assemblage of Rus-

sian realities, Soviet fantasies, and futuristic projections. These are commonly expressed in opposition to the state-sponsored mainstream movies that give their audience a bitter taste of lost future, with comments such as “at least someone can still make a great movie”.

**IS THIS SHORT EPISODE** another case of capitalization on nostalgia? In modern Russia, space culture and space politics are commonly seen through the lens of nostalgia and commodification of memory that allows both economic and political capitalization.<sup>1</sup> The legacies of the Soviet space program, of Sputnik, of Gagarin’s flight and of the first spacewalk are turned into a set of easily recognizable symbols that are put on pullovers for sale as much as they appear on election posters. To a large extent, the appropriation of Soviet space legacies seems to coincide with the



appropriation of the commodified memory of the Great Patriotic War. Through the post-Soviet decades, the latter has become an inexhaustible resource for extracting profit, for legitimation of the Russian political regime, and recently also for the market of political repression, with photos taken in wrong places at wrong times and posted later in social media functioning as motives for criminal prosecution. Sometimes, the War and Space appear together: such was the last parliamentary election booster campaign, conventionally titled “The Land of the Winners”, in which the heroes of the Great Patriotic War were accompanied by cosmonauts and space program engineers such as Gagarin and Korolev. The recently renovated memorial sites of the Soviet space program, such as museums and monuments, also increasingly recall the sites of “patriotic education” erected around the memory of the Great Patriotic War. Finally, the recent set of historical space blockbusters: *Gagarin The First in Space*, *The Spacewalk* and *Salyut-7*, all glorifying the pantheon of Soviet space mythology, conjoins the profusion of historic movies and series resurrecting the heroic settings of the war. In general, the nostalgias of the war and space appear to have similar functions in modern Russian capitalism and the political regime accreted to it.

**YET THE ANNUAL** Victory Day on May 9 brings a climax of mobilization through commodified memory, while April 12 is nearly forgotten. On May 9, there is nowhere to hide for an urban dweller: in all news and all media, in all supermarkets and all parks, “from every smoothing-iron”, as the Russians say, the message of great common victory will reach you. This message is

**“WHAT HAPPENS ON  
APRIL 12 IS RATHER  
AIMED AT THOSE  
DIRECTLY INTERESTED  
IN SPACE.”**

supposed to be readily converted into loyalty and pride, – to be fair, this does not always happen smoothly – and also into some, often erroneously underestimated, money. What happens on April 12 is rather aimed at those directly interested in space. The space museums and planetariums provide some events. There may even be an opening of something extraordinary, such as the giant second exhibition hall of the oldest space history museum in Kaluga in 2021, on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gagarin’s flight, that was under construction for more than a decade. Markedly, President Putin was expected to perform the opening of Kaluga’s new iconic landmark but changed his plans just a couple of days in advance. In many of my conversations with Russian space professionals and space enthusiasts, a bitter memory of the half-century anniversary of Gagarin’s flight in 2011 was disclosed. According to many, the state has almost neglected the occasion. The point of this essay is not to give an explanation of why Russian officials make certain decisions and not others; there might be plenty of mostly profane reasons for this. Rather, the point is to use this ob-

servation of neglect as a point of entry to a view on nostalgia that is different from the mainstream, that would see it as a valuable resource that is potentially dangerous for the established order rather than a melancholy and readily-commodified resentment.

Although the attempts to capitalize on space nostalgia clearly recall how the memory of the war is appropriated in modern Russia, it might be no less fruitful to compare April 12 with November 7 – the day of the Great Socialist Revolution, the uncomfortable memory of which seems both inextricable and dangerous. Its centennial in 2017 closely resembled how plenty



A view of a mural depicting Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space, created by Italian artist Jorit in Odintsovo, near Moscow, August 21, 2019.

of my interlocutors remember the Gagarin celebration in 2011. Some light-hearted TV shows were brought in to close the apparent gap, to create an image of a difficult discussion of a topic that is currently impossible to discuss. However, such a comparison might not be very fair either. In fact, November 7 has been explicitly counteracted: the new Russian holiday of “People’s Union” on November 4 was adopted specifically to replace its Soviet counterpart. The intensity of debates on the revolution is also hardly comparable to the ones on the Soviet space program. I make this comparison rather to elucidate the similarity of official attitudes, which may well be connected to how the official narrative of space exploration was constructed in the Soviet Union. The Soviet master narrative of space exploration, inevitably awakened at least in part through nostalgic capitalization, connected the conquest of outer space with the utopian victory of communism, making an explicit link between the revolution and the space program.<sup>2</sup> Both occasions seemed to offer a certain futuristic vision, even if this was worn out to an extent throughout the 1980s. Then, the ironic counter-narrative of space exploration placed official dreams of a communist future in space on a par with economic stagnation and frequent shortages of basic commodities. I would like to offer this remnant of

for its own mythological unproblematic past, it is obsessed with rebuilding the past – a place of wonders that never existed and the desire for which often provides the most malformed results stretching all the way into the future. It is to restorative nostalgia, says this common view, that we owe nationalistic upheavals and at worst, conspiracy theories. The good, reflective, type of nostalgia functions differently – it is an ethical, private and painful investigation of the lost past, an attempt to temporarily return there in order to distinguish the avoided possibilities but also to retrace the chosen path. Not surprisingly, it was suggested that the attempt to attribute the political dimension – the possibility of making forms of collective belonging – to reflective nostalgia, which functions rather as a personal or group therapy of sorts, is problematic.<sup>4</sup>

**A MORE CRITICAL** view on the restorative-reflective divide suggests that actual practices of nostalgia almost always combine elements of both, taking further Boym’s own observation that restorative and reflective nostalgia can be connected to the very same objects.<sup>5</sup> The Russian Victory Day may offer some examples of how the two branches are intertwined. For example, the “Immortal Regiment”, initially an initiative of local activists

a futuristic halo of the Soviet space program as a possible way to comprehend why April 12 never managed to become a full-fledged fantasy world of what Boym terms “restorative nostalgia” like May 9<sup>th</sup>, and to see which alternative ways to understand nostalgia it may open up. The future-oriented gaze of space nostalgia makes space memory a dangerous commodity for the current Russian elites, one that should be kept at bay and allowed only a certain degree of capitalization, in the same way as fake Lenins can pose as much as they want for tourist photographs on the Red Square, but no occasion should allow any substantial debate on the Revolution.

There is a common perception that nostalgia can be “bad” or “good”, largely coinciding with Svetlana Boym’s division of it into restorative and reflective types.<sup>3</sup> The bad, restorative, variety of nostalgia sees itself not as nostalgia, but as the truth. A world of traumatized fantasy that strives

in the city of Tomsk where the locals marched with photos of their veterans, later taken over by Russian officials and turned into an all-national spectacle with nationalistic sentiments, does not necessarily preclude the possibility of ethical reflection on behalf of its participants. Seen from this angle, the common view of “bad” restorative nostalgia and the “good” reflective type appears rather shortsighted. What matters is rather the political and social context which gives particular nostalgic practices their meaning.

Importantly, in such a critical view even the nostalgic attempts labelled restorative should not confuse their critical readers: nostalgia is not a longing for a lost past, but a longing for longing itself, “a desire for desire”,<sup>6</sup> for “the subject’s memory of their own past investments and fantasies”, for “the imagined futures these fantasies projected”.<sup>7</sup> It is “a structure of fantasy” that is “perceived as lost”,<sup>8</sup> not any particular fantasy as such. In this light, space nostalgia points not so much to the specific achievements of Soviet space exploration, as to the possibility to imagine such achievements in the future more generally. The colloquial saying: “Yuri [Gagarin], we f\*cked up everything” – that became a popular motto in the post-Soviet Russia, points exactly at this difference. What is f\*cked up is not a particular spacewalk or space launch or Soviet Moon program – about which general public tends to know very little, and which function as resources for political and economic capitalization – but rather a possibility of a particular imaginary and feeling of agency associated with it.

**STILL, CRITICAL READERS** of nostalgia struggle to offer an alternative to the political dimension attributed almost exclusively to restorative nostalgia. Arguably, their reluctance to accept such conceptualization is mostly private and existential, and I share it too: I am nostalgic, and I don’t feel agreement with the idea that it is worthless beyond my own self-therapy. In fact, my experience is very different: my nostalgia, not least that connected to the future-oriented Soviet space mythologies, allowed me to make many meaningful connections in different cities and towns, at conferences and during interviews, in railroad carriages and commuter buses. So I would like to try to offer an alternative that seems more plausible to me.

To do this, I would like to look more closely at how desire is understood in nostalgia scholarship and which political possibilities its understanding allows through a “desire for desire”. Despite a turn from

exact objects of desire to structures of fantasy, the critical takes on nostalgia still seem to operate with the conceptualization of desire most common in analyses of political discourse: a Lacanian-inspired idea of desire as a lack that can never be fulfilled. This view of desire is still object-oriented: it looks for an endless repertoire of replacements for an object that can never be replaced, putting emphasis on the hegemonic shifts of meaning in social and political practices.<sup>9</sup> From this point of view, “desire for desire” is marked by a certain “lack of a lack”, and restorative

nostalgia closes the possibility of any contingent arrangement which could function as a basis for political resistance and alternative political formations. Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, aims at overcoming the first of two lacks, thus returning its subjects to normalcy.

This is not the only way to approach desire. In fact, more affirmative views on desire can fit the elusive concept of nostalgia in more satisfactory ways. Through works of Gilles

Deleuze and Felix Guattari, for instance, lack is understood not as a primary basis of desire but as an effect of social production that renders desire a constant phantasmatic compensation for something that is missing.<sup>10</sup> But desire itself is not a desire for a lost object; rather it is a principle of differentiation that manifests itself in “the production of production”, in continuously integrating what appears incompatible.<sup>11</sup> In this view, Lacanian desire appears rather reactive, as it is a desire that is desiring its own repression due to the practices of social production, a desire that is desiring a possibility to be managed and stabilized. Indeed, seen from this angle, the nostalgic “desire for desire” may be assumed to disallow desire’s own arrest/suspension and to allow the continuation of “the production of production”. In

other words, Deleuzian accounts could attribute to nostalgia a possibility of reassembling the seemingly obvious identities into aggregations that can be foreseen only to a limited degree. This is because the apparently stable, although contingent, identities constitute the macropolitical level while nevertheless always possessing a micropolitical dimension, in which the fluidity of their pre-given forms becomes obvious and in which desire seeks what escapes them and from them, striving to make new connections.<sup>12</sup> The ways to such new connections are called, conveniently for the space dreamers, “lines of flight”.<sup>13</sup> Crucially, such a view of nostalgia is also underpinned by Deleuze and Guattari’s rejection of a linear conception of time and the introduction of a temporal logic of immanence, in which the past is never

## “THE FUTURE-ORIENTED GAZE OF SPACE NOSTALGIA MAKES SPACE MEMORY A DANGEROUS COMMODITY FOR THE CURRENT RUSSIAN ELITES.”



Soviet poster commemorating Yuri Gagarin's space flight.

gone, but rather a part of the present, at the same time underlying and challenging the seemingly stable identities of subjects.<sup>14</sup> It is in this light that the futuristic visions of space nostalgia play a crucial role, as longing for a lost future may eventually light up paths to new futures, embedded in the current contexts. The thesis on a future that is only possible in the past, attributed to contemporary Russian space politics and space culture,<sup>15</sup> in this way becomes a revelation of a specific structure of fantasy rather than a statement on particularly sorrowful situation.

**THIS IS NOT** to say that space nostalgia is not used to legitimate current nationalistic upheavals by state-affiliated actors. To make such a statement would amount to extreme ignorance of the current political context. Rather, what I want to say is that such appropriations do not exhaust the political possibilities of space nostalgia, and that its political possibilities should not be seen as limited to what currently makes sense as “political”. The profusion of grassroots connections, “rhizomatic” if one wants to put it in a more Deleuzian way, that space nostalgia opens up, possesses a no less political dimension than the state-sponsored practices of nostalgia. What are these connections and in which context do they unfold? In recent years, a team of Russian anthropologists has been documenting the practices of horizontal and amateur space exploration in Russia.<sup>16</sup> What they found were networks of space amateurs, launching satellites into the stratosphere, organizing space lessons in schools and maintaining hundreds of museums of cosmonautics throughout the country – very different from the shiny buildings of key and famous state museums, and sometimes located in village sheds with models of spacecraft that locals made themselves from the available materials. We might also consider the recent return of space projects to the domain of futuristic dreaming more generally, and the availability of information on them throughout the Internet. The revival of expansionist projections through neo-liberal fantasies, such as Elon Musk’s *SpaceX* and Jeff Bezos’ *Blue Origin* plans for the Moon and Mars colonization plays with the ideas of futures that are green (as Bezos suggested relocating all industries to the Moon and asteroids) and politically alternative (as Musk noted, Earthly laws will not be applied in extraterrestrial settlements). The official Russian discourse on space does not seem to offer any alternative to these,<sup>17</sup> which causes significant dissatisfaction among the Russian publics interested in space exploration, related not least to a memory of the Soviet space program with its utopian visions. Such reactions are observable in the YouTube comments on the recent Russian space blockbusters, many of which draw a comparison between the Soviet, allegedly ideologically based, space program and the Russian one that seems to make no sense in terms of future projections. Even more so, they are observable in many social media groups related to space, whose members put a lot of energy into ironic mockery of Russian space officials. For instance, the infamous quote by the director of Roscosmos, Dmitry Rogozin, who suggested in 2014 that the USA could deliver their astronauts to the International Space Station with the help of a trampoline if they refused Russian services, led to widely-shared mockery of

this key Russian space manager as a trampoline jumper, which continues to this day. In this light, fueling up space nostalgia for the sake of economic and political capitalization may be able to unfold “lines of flight” quite unforeseeable and potentially unmanageable by the current Russian elites.

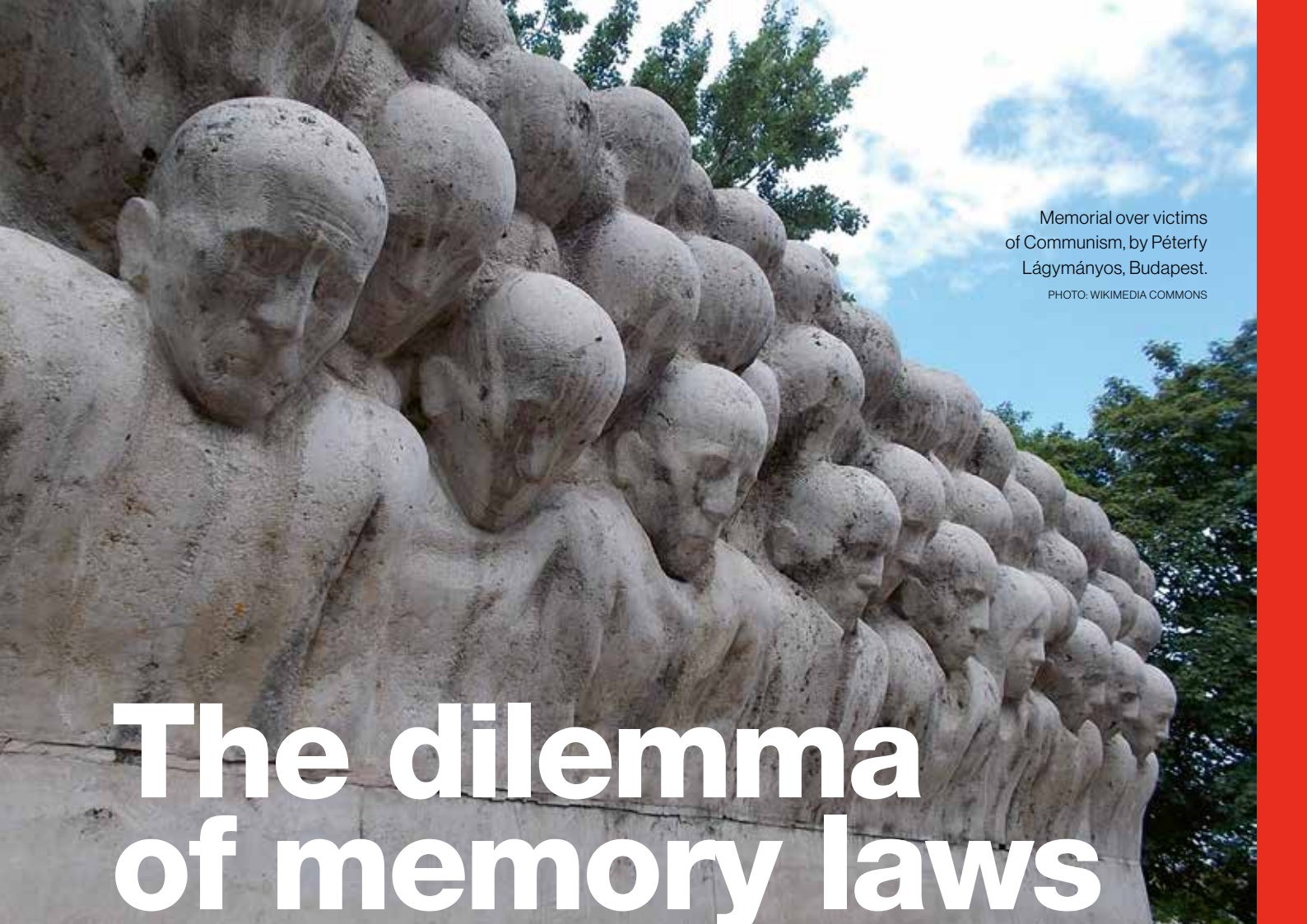
These “lines of flight” might well reflect the very exact line of flight that a Russian spacetrain conductor takes. We leave her on the way to Neptune, seemingly on the outskirts of the Solar system, after an accidental love affair with a paratrooper which bore no fruit. She is moving on to her future, but given the time contraction that happens during space travel, for us the observers she always has one leg stuck in the past. I wonder if in this future, so thoroughly intertwined with the past, April 12 is still ignored – although not because it is dangerous, but because in such a composition of time, specific dates no longer make much sense. ✖

Roman Privalov is a PhD-candidate in History at Baltic and East European Graduate School (BEEGS), Södertörn University.

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Memorial over victims  
of Communism, by Péterfy  
Lágymányos, Budapest.

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

# The dilemma of memory laws

**To restore the dignity of victims  
without feeding into ultra-nationalism** by **Cagla Demirel**

In their simplest form, memory laws are legal rules that govern selective and state-approved narratives regarding historical events. They can articulate descriptive, declaratory, or punitive legislation regarding nations' past. In this sense, legal governance of narratives and memory of past events can consist of punitive measures or other forms of legal acts such as official recognition and commemoration of historical events and figures. Contested narratives about a nation's past among minority and majority groups or injustices inflicted upon specific minority or ideology groups could be banned from the official memory through establishing and solidifying memory laws. In a broader sense, the memory laws could also be embedded in transitional justice processes and take the form of court decisions as components in settling the truth about the past and shaping memory and historical records.<sup>1</sup> Even though memory is cultural and contextual, it still is subject to contested relations between ethno-religious groups, nations, and nation-states and potentially used for political purposes. Legitimizing state-ap-

proved memories and criminalizing others in varying ways bring about "memory wars" over a shared past between governments and regions. Therefore, memory laws and memory politics are inevitably connected to each other, and the legislation of memory can be considered a piece of a greater mnemonic whole.

**ALTHOUGH INITIAL** memory laws were implemented against Holocaust denial by Germany in 1985 and Israel in 1986, governance of memory dates back as early as the French Revolution.<sup>2</sup> More intense discussions about punitive memory laws, as presented by Kaposov, were initiated by the Gayssot Law in France in 1990, banning the questioning and denial of the existence of crimes against humanity and the Holocaust.<sup>3</sup> Initiation of these punitive memory laws can be considered a continuation of the Press Law of 1881 in France, which regulates press freedom and responsibilities by criminalizing offensive and defamatory language against an ethnic group, a nation, a race, or a religion. In the same line, early versions of memory laws aimed at pre-

## **“MANY POST-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES RANGING FROM BULGARIA TO UKRAINE TO MOLDOVA ADOPTED MEMORY LAWS THAT PROHIBIT THE JUSTIFICATION OF THE FORMER TOTALITARIAN COMMUNIST REGIME.”**

venting insults against certain groups and offensive expressions regarding their past. Other countries having followed the trend, there has been a significant increase in regulating the writing of history by introducing memory laws, especially after the dissolution of the USSR. Most post-communist countries increasingly imported the concept of “memory laws” from Western European states that replicated laws on Holocaust memory. Similarly, laws against Holocaust denial subsequently spread into other contexts and led to the adaptation of laws on denial of other genocides, as can be seen in the recognition of Armenian genocide in declarative laws and parliamentary decisions or punitive prohibitions of its denial.<sup>4</sup> Initiation of a criminal code against denial of the Holodomor famine in Ukraine was imitated in the same line.<sup>5</sup> Further, in post-war Bosnia, history has been primarily constructed by the legislative power of the Office of High Representative (an outside intervener) as shown by the latest decision of the former High Representative banning denial of the Srebrenica genocide.<sup>6</sup>

### **Shifting focus: From suffering to nationalism**

In most post-communist countries after the breakdown of the USSR, memory legislation often aimed at constructing an identity of suffering under Nazism and the totalitarian Soviet regime, which relativized itself according to a cosmopolitan understanding of victimhood<sup>7</sup> centered on the Holocaust memory. Regulations of memory, in this sense, were considered an indicator of democratic transition and an entry ticket to the European Union. However, especially since the 2000s, there has been a significant shift in the instrumentalization of memory laws towards nationalism. More and more post-Soviet and post-communist states have utilized memory legislation to enforce certain parts and ways of remembering the past while censoring alternative interpretations. In this respect, current memory laws often stimulate within the context of nation-building projects and state valorization. For example, Maria Mälksoo defined memory as a “referent object of security” and associated the use of memory laws with the pursuit of securitization by nation-states.<sup>8</sup> Thus, fixing memory laws, in general, seeks to secure historical narratives by excluding and even criminalizing alternative views. For example, contemporary Russia illustrates how a memory law (Article 354.1 to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation adopted in 2014)<sup>9</sup> is formulated to protect the state’s image according to security theory. It shows a way of creating a “state autobiography” or a sort of “grand narrative.” The 2020 Constitutional Amendment adopted in the Russian Federation included a clause on protecting a historical truth:<sup>10</sup>

**Article 67.1 of the constitution declares that the Russian Federation honors the memory of the defenders of the fatherland and ensures the defense of historical truth. Diminishing the significance of the heroism of the people in defense of the fatherland will not be permitted.**

It is established by the constitution that Russia is the successor of the USSR. Accordingly, narratives emphasizing the Soviet role in World War II with a negative connotation – such as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact – or rhetoric that compares the Soviet invasion of Poland to the Nazi invasion are deemed offensive to Russia. Under the recent amendments, these are now criminal acts with legal consequences. Correspondingly, Russian laws of 2014 and 2020 criminalize claims about Soviet-Nazi collaboration, and Russia fails to distance the state image from the communist past.<sup>11</sup> The strong identification with the USSR seems to impede the potential for dealing with the past crimes if contemporary Russia does not distance itself from the communist past.

Similar formulations of memory laws that construct and reconstruct nation-state identities and their grand narratives are also evident in post-communist space. However, countries apart from Russia differed in their framing of post-Soviet legacy. Many post-communist countries ranging from Bulgaria to Ukraine to Moldova adopted memory laws that prohibit the justification of the former totalitarian communist regime. The use of communist symbols and narratives associated with past regimes was banned within the same wave. For example, in Estonia, the narrative of Soviet occupation gained prominence to erase a widespread narrative that suggests Estonia’s voluntary integration with the Soviet Union. Similarly, in Ukraine, there has been a tendency to regulate the interpretation of the past from a nation-state perspective to condemn communist crimes. The memory law adopted in 2016 in Poland prohibited communist propaganda and penalized public pro-communist statements. Moreover, memory laws in Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland all criminalize the denial of the totalitarian communist regimes, unlike the Russian criminal code (2014) that aims to protect the USSR’s image in WWII.

**THE STRONG CONTRAST** with Russia on this account has been reflected in a “memory war”, especially between Russia and former republics. For example, when the Soviet statue of Marshal Ivan Konev in Prague (which had been vandalized many times) was removed,<sup>12</sup> adoption of Article 243.4 Russian Criminal Code in the Russian constitution made it a punishable offense to damage war graves, monuments, or memorials dedicated to Russia’s military glory or the defense of the Russian fatherland – regard-



Memorial to the victims of the Holocaust, Dachau concentration camp.

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

less of the location within or outside of the Russian Federation. Accordingly, similar legislative reactions via memory laws have also been ongoing between former Soviet republics. For example, Ukraine and Poland legislated controversial memory laws regarding the same historical events with varying interpretations (e.g., Volhynia “tragedy” for the former and Volhynia “massacre” for the latter). While Ukraine passed legislation to criminalize those who explicitly discredit the OUN and the ABN (so-called national Ukrainian heroes),<sup>13</sup> Poland passed a declarative law to define the events committed by the very same “heroes” a genocide.<sup>14</sup>

Utilizing memory laws to condemn past crimes by the Soviet regime and emphasize how formerly communist countries suffered at the hands of the USSR indicated a clear break away from the Soviet legacy and fed into re-construction of a nation-state identity. However, especially from the early 2000s, the nation-building projects through regulation of historical narratives shifted towards cleaning the dark spots of nation-states’ pasts to solidify the pureness of the nation via memory laws. For example, a memory law was issued in Poland in 2018 that criminalized any public statement claiming that the Polish people and Poland were responsible for or complicit in Nazi crimes.

The developments mentioned above, which increasingly incited the silencing and censoring nature of memory laws, raised the problem of freedom of speech. In countries like Poland and Ukraine, any narrative that touches upon the nation-state’s compliance with the Nazi regime during World War II led to the criminalization of statements about the past. As the grow-

ing scholarly debate about these prohibitions showed, the new trend of memory laws violates freedom of expression. It also challenges the democratic elements within post-communist Eastern European countries instead of what was expected from their initial formulations (e. g. strengthening democracy and protecting victims’ dignity).

**A SIMILAR DISCUSSION** about freedom of speech has been ongoing concerning Holocaust or genocide denial in general. Yet this legislation is often considered a safeguard for protecting victims’ dignity. In contrast, the new trend of memory laws only strives to conceal dark spots in the history of nations that might identify them as perpetrators or complicit actors rather than victims within specific periods of history. These developments have a significant impact on scholars and historians. For example, as shown by reactions against Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe’s research on Stepan Bandera in Ukraine, the controversies around Jan Tomasz Gross and his book *Neighbours*, and legal disputes around Jan Grabowski and Barbara Engelkind in Poland,<sup>15</sup> enforcing memory laws challenges and stigmatizes scholars; and in some cases, they are even framed as traitors or enemies of the nation.<sup>16</sup>

For the time being, the main problem with memory laws derives from the tension between the right of freedom of speech and the prohibition of abuse of the very same right. As many verdicts by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) established, references to Nazism or the use of Nazi symbols are outside the boundaries of freedom of speech because they include notions of incitement to violence, or they pose a threat to public

order or the rights and reputations of others by distorting the established historical facts. However, the same ECtHR issued decisions stating that prohibiting the denial of Armenian genocide<sup>17</sup> or banning the use of communist symbols are a breach of Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR),<sup>18</sup> which promotes the protection of freedom of expression. These decisions arguably implied that historical events and crimes other than Holocaust must be open to debate and criticism. It puts the Holocaust victims at the epicenter of the victimhood debate. And every victim group worldwide inevitably compares their victim status, rightfulness, and innocence with victims of Nazis, and perpetrators are also relativized accordingly. As the above-mentioned verdicts by ECtHR indicate there is an ambivalence when it comes to other genocides and historical crimes against humanity in other places.

**IN CONCLUSION**, the legal aspect of cementing selective memories can act out within a broad range of areas. It can be declarative or punitive, national or transnational. It can feed into nationalism or cosmopolitan humanitarianism. In most post-communist countries, 30 years after the fall of the USSR, the use of memory laws centered around the autobiographic narratives of nation-states. Most of the post-communist countries securitize the nation-state via legislating memory by silencing alternative voices and marginalizing other perspectives and narratives, by purifying their history to repair national self-esteem and their national image in world politics. Memory laws perilously become a foreign policy tool at the hands of authoritarian regimes. This problematic political function of memory laws has been fueling the “memory war” between contemporary Russia and former Soviet and communist republics especially for the last two decades. And current Russian aggression against Ukraine is a breakthrough in the memory laws debate because it would be fair to say we are entering a new era in which adopting memory laws is not only problematic regarding the right to freedom of expression. Instead, at the opposite end of the spectrum, a nation-state’s (Ukraine) right to exist is problematized by an aggressor state (Russia) based on history. Thus, inter-state war is (re)defined as a punitive mechanism against how the past is remembered.

On the one hand, free and open debates about the past are still crucial principles according to ECHR, unless they pose distortions of historical facts or offenses to the victims or incite violence. On the other hand, “the memory war” took an extreme form and transitioned from a rhetorical or legal ground to a physical one as can be seen in Putin’s firm reference to the de-communization of Ukraine as one of the causes in his speech declaring war against Ukraine.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the question still stands: How to produce memory laws to restore the dignity of victims without feeding into ultra-nationalism, while the international community still cannot prevent wars making new victims. ❌

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- 16 Joanna Mihlic, the CBEES Workshop; “Memory laws: an interregional perspective on commemoration and legislation”, April 21, 2021.
- 17 See *Perincek v. Switzerland*, App. no. 27510/08 (ECtHR, October 10, 2015).
- 18 *Vajnai v. Hungary*, App. no. 33629/06 (ECtHR, July 8, 2008).
- 19 “And now grateful descendants have demolished monuments to Lenin in Ukraine. This is what they call decommunisation. Do you want decommunisation? Well, that suits us just fine. But it is unnecessary, as they say, to stop halfway. We are ready to show you what real decommunisation means for Ukraine.” See. “Extracts from Putin’s speech on Ukraine”. *Reuters*. February 22, 2022.

# The post-communist legacy in the shadow of the Empire

by Aleksandra Reczuch

**Professor Andrzej Leder, psychoanalyst and professor of philosophy, in a conversation with Aleksandra Reczuch about the history and social transformations in the region, the threat of Russia, and the historical memory embodied in buildings, symbols, commemorations, and family albums.**



PHOTO: [HTTPS://BIENNALEWARSZAWA.PL/](https://biennalewarszawa.pl/)

**T**he building of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw always makes me think about Foucauldian power/knowledge – a monumental neoclassical palace built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Stanisław Staszic, a leading figure in Polish Enlightenment, and donated to the Society of Friends of Science after 1823. The building's history is a history of the attempts to organize education under Russian partition and the repressions those attempts faced. The Society of Friends of Science was banned after the November uprising in 1830; later in 1857 the palace became a seat of the Academy of Medical Sciences, the first higher education institution re-established in the Russian partition. As the academy was closed soon after another unsuccessful insurrection in January 1863, in 1890 it became an orthodox church and was renovated by the Russian authorities and remodeled in neo-byzantine style. The building was nearly razed during World War II and rebuilt in neoclassical style after the war. Today it is the seat of the Polish Academy of Sciences, where Professor Andrzej Leder works. He is the author of *Prześniona rewolucja. Ćwiczenia z logiki historycznej* [Sleepwalking the revolution. Exercises in historical logic]. His studies focus on the period between 1939–1956 or even 1989 and analyze the consequences of the radical and brutal change in the structure of Polish society – firstly in the Holocaust and then during Stalinist times, when the remaining elites of interwar Poland were annihilated. Those events, despite their formative aspect, never became a part of the common imaginary of the Polish nation, and are not remembered as revolutionary, but rather as a sense of injustice that has not been accommodated by the collective memory.

We meet in the lobby of the building for the interview about the book, the collective memory of the nations in Eastern Europe, the ways in which the politics of memory influence the discourses of the present, and the common experience of Communism and historical differences.

**ALEKSANDRA RECZUCH (AR):** Your book *Prześniona rewolucja*: the title can be translated as *overslept* or *slept through revolution*...

**ANDRZEJ LEDER (AL):** The translation I like is: *Sleepwalking the revolution*.



Tillage, the Polish way. Painting by Józef Chełmoński (*Orka*), 1896.



PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The aftermath of the failure of the January Uprising. The crowd of captives awaits transport to Siberia. Russian officers and soldiers supervise a blacksmith installing fetters on the wrists of a woman representing Poland. The blonde woman behind her, next in line, may represent Lithuania. Painting by Jan Matejko, 1863.

**AR: Oh, that sounds very good! The book presents the thesis that during WWII, and the early years of establishing the communist regime in Poland, the country went through a major social revolution from an agrarian peasant society to a modern industrial one with a visible working class. It was a revolution imposed upon rather than organized by Polish society. Communism and the communist regime played a great role in the modernization processes, yet it seems that the impact that Communism had on creating Polish society in its current form is not remembered; why is this?**

**AL:** As this revolution was performed mainly by two alien and hostile forces – one might even call them empires – Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, there was no feeling of agency in Polish society. For a revolution to become a part of social identity, a common identity, or – to use Charles Taylor’s term – part of the social imaginary, it has to become part of the structure, and structure in this theory is the symbolic field of extraction. A historical event such as the revolution has to have some symbolic signifiers which will become a reference point to forge a new identity and in Poland, the main symbols or the main signifiers for this period are the signifiers of the resistance against it. The signifiers brought by it... I would say that Nazi Germany didn’t even try to bring any new signifiers which would be comprehensive for Polish society and stand in time, while even if the communists tried to force some kind of social imaginary it was too much connected or copied from the Soviet imaginary to be attractive for Polish society. And in this sense, no, not much was left from this system of signifiers to provide a base, and in this sense, after the Stalinist period, Polish society did not have any positive social symbols that could be connected with this enormous and very profound change.

The imaginary, the points of reference that were available, were the ones connected with the tradition of the Polish intelligentsia, the uprisings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and even today, they still remain the main symbols in the Polish imaginary. Even when there are symbols, signifiers that are still present and cherished in popular memory – for example, Edward Gierek,<sup>1</sup> the good first secretary of the party who really modernized Poland, introduced Poland to the mass and consumption culture as it was known in the occidental world – they are too weak to reshape the way society remembers this period.

**AR: And what about social mobility? A large group of people moved from the countryside, from this peasant, feudal environment, to something that you might even call a modern socialist middle class. One might assume it’s like a positive move upwards. Is there maybe something that could reshape the memory of that period as something positive?**

**AL:** I do not think that this moment of the social movement could serve as such a symbol; at least it is not narrated in this way. It is also one of the biggest holes in Polish historiography that the emancipatory history is not narrated. It is changing now, let’s say during the last five to eight years, where we see research on the history of slavery, of serfdom in Poland,<sup>2</sup> it is flourishing, and it is a very positive phenomenon, but I think that what this wave lacks is that it

shows only a snapshot of the poverty and oppressive conditions of this serfdom system. Currently, we do not have a way of narrating history which would show the social movement of emancipation. And that even when serfdom was abolished, again, by the emperors of Russia and Austro-Hungary at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when mass politics and mass parties were organized, there was a huge shift in the consciousness, attitudes, a spring of political agency, yet it is still not a part of Polish imaginary. We are completely focused on the unfortunate uprising in 1863<sup>3</sup> and then on the resurrection of the Polish state in 1918. There is a huge gap in between. Historically, it was one of the most important epochs for modern Polish society, the forging of modern Polish society, so in that sense, we lack this kind of emancipatory history. Having done this, one could then talk about the history of this enormous movement that happened after 1945: from the countryside to the cities, from Eastern Poland to cities and provinces which became Polish after 1945: it is not done. It is to be done.

I think that we are living in very interesting times with the authoritarian or more or less authoritarian regime of Kaczyński because it pushes the citizens, the middle class, to redefine their identity. And I think it will have positive consequences in the end. Well, if we are not pushed out of the European Union. Because if that happens, we will be eaten and digested by the Russian empire. But if we stay in the European Union, I think that this period of the fight for democracy and in some way, the fight against this nationalistic catholic authoritarianism can redefine the Polish social imaginary.

For the generation of people who still remember the penuries of communism, the most important thing was to have basic comfort in life. I am from that generation, but now I see the question of what it means to live in a free society, and how important the questions of human rights are for the generation that does not remember communism.

**AR: And what about the threat of Russian imperialism? It seemed that with the war in Ukraine, the threat became real for many Poles. Won't it push people into the nationalist, conservative vision of Polishness?**

AL: I would say that it was an object of attention in the first days of the war, the first days of the Russian invasion. Now, I think we have the quite opposite. We, I mean people who are analyzing political consciousness in Poland, are aware that wars always strengthen the government in place. Also, the Russian danger is always a good way to mobilize people in Poland around a nationalistic or military agenda. However, I think that it is not going in this direction. For example, polls do not show growing support for the main political force: Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS, Law and Justice). They also show rather stable support for democratic parties. In my opinion, what we face right now is not a direct confrontation with Russia but the social consequences of the war in a neighboring state. It means immigration. And that is a completely different social experience. For the first time in history, Poland is facing such massive immigration of war refugees and I think that ideas which are promoted in such a situation are different than typical militaristic ideas. This is the question of the organization, the efficiency of the state, and people's activity, NGO activity, or as we call it now: the care capacity of society.

Those are typical democratic themes. And in this sense, I think that if the war continues as it is now, it means that the Russian army is not capable of crushing Ukrainians. The fear of war will diminish in Poland; it has diminished already. And the main problem will become providing help to refugees. Therefore, I think that if we now have to face a direct threat, and I don't think we will, if we are going to be bombarded with an atomic bomb, we will not have the time to discuss it. In this sense, I think it shifts the political situation. It pushes society towards more modern questions than the question of how to fight Russian invaders.

**AR: Talking about Russian imperialism and Russian aggression, it is 30 years since the collapse of the USSR, and I was wondering to what extent the Russian invasion of Ukraine can be seen as an attempt to rebuild the empire, to give the people a feeling that Russia is once again a powerful state?**

AL: I have a family history with Russia. My family fought tsarist autocracy, then they were in social democratic and communist movements. My grandfather was killed in 1937, in the purges. My father was imprisoned by the Stalinist rulers in Poland. So I have a long experience of thinking, reading, and discussing the question of Russian imperialism and in this sense, my opinion is that first of all, it is not only about bringing back Soviet imperialism; it is Russian imperialism at its core.

Rus, Muscovite Rus, not Kievan Rus, was always an expansionist state, but what is maybe more important is the legacy of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the failed assassination attempt on Emperor Alexander II, political police became the spinal cord of this state. The tsarist secret police Okhrana and its traditions were copied and continued in Soviet Russia. Cheka, and then NKWD, became organizations that worked in the same manner, then KGB and FSB in the present. As the democratic experiment from the Gorbachov-Yeltsyn times failed, this vertebral column came back to power. The modern Russian state was built on this vertebral column and the *raison d'être*, the core reason

**“After the failed assassination attempt on Emperor Alexander II, political police became the spinal cord of this state.”**



Celebration in 2008 of the former members in the resistance army Armia Krajowa active during WWII.

"We demand bread!", Poznań 1956 protests.

for the existence of this institution is a system of expansion. So, in this sense, Russia cannot accept the failure of the empire. All the symbols Putin uses, all the signifiers of his rule are a strange mixture of Imperial Russia – the two headed Eagle and green uniforms of the soldiers in the Kremlin, which are tsarist uniforms – and Soviet symbols. And I think that until this vertebral column is broken, the Russian state will continue its imperialistic politics, but the problem is that the economic basis of the empire is very weak. It is maybe the last aggressive jump before it becomes vassalized by China.

**AR: I was thinking a lot about how this strange mixture of signifiers is going to work together on the discursive level. And how for example the concept of “brotherly nations” is used to justify aggression against an independent state. Can it be understood as a colonial logic, in which the attempt to liberate a certain country is used to rebuild the empire and enslave that country?**

AL: I think that there are some similarities between, for example, European colonialism and Russian imperialism on a general level. But I think the sources of these ideologies are different. Modern European colonialism, and I am talking about 19<sup>th</sup>-century colonialism, not early Spanish or Portuguese colonialism, was based on the idea of modernization – we are colonizing those savages because we want to see them, we want them to act like civilized people – and in Russia the sources of this colonial logic are different. What is at the core is the concept of the third Rome and the necessity to defend it against the enemy, the teleological enemy. Russia will always find itself an enemy, be it American imperialists or Nazis, as Putin now calls Ukrainians, or modern secularized societies. The main point is the defense of the values connected with Orthodox Christianity against this diabolic civilization, the teleological enemy. And when you look at it this way, the idea of *russskiy mir*, the Russian order,<sup>4</sup> is an emanation of this kind of teleological idea. It is not only the question of political play of power but is the Manichean combat of good and evil. And it has mobilizing power. Even if again, we have the impression that this mobilizing power is not so strong now as it was in the past.

**AR: How is nostalgia for the Soviet Union mixed up with those discourses around the ultimate combat between good and evil, defending the *russskiy mir*? And, given the current circumstances, can anyone outside Russia be nostalgic about it? Are people still nostalgic about that Soviet force that was to bring ‘the good’?**

AL: I think that the nostalgic feelings were at their peak in the late nineties, early 2000, partly for generational reasons. Now we have an adult generation that does not remember the Soviet Union, but I can easily understand that people are nostalgic about the USSR. We know all of this because in Poland, East Germany, in Czechoslovakia, or Czechia and Slovakia, and other countries we have seen nostalgia for the former people’s republics. The transition in those countries was often very positive for just one part of the society, and at the same time deeply catastrophic for another part. In Poland, all the big industrial centers were almost completely destroyed. In Russia and all the former USSR republics, it was even more brutal.

I can imagine a lot of nostalgia for the Soviet Union, which was a stable society in the last decades of its existence, not a free society afterward. I think this is why Putin thought that he would be supported in Ukraine as he was in Lugansk and Donetsk in 2014, or in Crimea where, to some extent, he had real support. What he did not understand



was that there was a real revolution in Ukraine and that they have their own new identity which is connected with Maidan and all those revolts and with democratization, looking toward Europe.

**AR: What happened to the Soviet identity, the feeling of commonness or togetherness, coming from the shared experience as Soviet people?**

AL: I think it is not that strong anymore. Partly, as I said before, for generational reasons. We have already an adult generation which never experienced the Soviet Union. And we can also see it in the Yugoslavian process, where the identity of Yugoslavianness was quite strong, and now does not exist anymore. It is really purely nostalgic and maybe it is questioned by some intellectuals living completely in the past. But then, in ex-Yugoslavia the national identities became nation-states; they are self-ruling crowds now, Serbians in Serbia, Slovenians in Slovenia, etc. And we don't have any kind of popular movement aiming at the restoration of Yugoslavia and I believe this is more or less so also in the former Soviet Union.

**AR: When we talk about identities, what comes to my mind is Belarus. In Ukraine, people now are all very much mobilized to fight for their independence and the nation-state, and all those elements that they understand as Ukrainian, Ukrainian culture, and Ukrainian land, and I am wondering whether you can see similar processes in Belarus. We have seen the waves of democratic protests in 2020, but Lukashenko is still trying to push the Soviet narrative, defining Belarus as a Soviet state.**

AL: In the Graduate School for Social Research, here at the Polish Academy of Science where I teach, we have and have had students from Belarus, and what they say, and what I also see, is an evolution of the way they define themselves. This discourse has changed during the last ten years. Ten years ago, they were saying as a matter of fact that there is no Belarusian nation; there are tiny circles of intellectuals, artists, political activists, and nationalists who cherish this idea but the popular attitude is that we are soviet people; now, those students are speaking in a very different way. That summer, I think, made possible what happened in many other countries with different uprisings, even the crushed ones. It means that people are identifying Lukashenko not only as an autocrat but also as Putin's puppet. And when they want to identify the difference between Putin's puppets and themselves, they will define it in a national way. They will say: we are different from Russians, and I think this is a nation-in-building.

It is a similar process to the one that happened in Czechia, for example, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was a non-existent nation and because of the resistance against Austrian dominance and the activity of a small group of intellectuals, this nation became a nation. And I think this happened in Belarus.

We will probably see again some kind of revolt against Lukashenko's autocratic regime and then Belarus will become a nation-state. Because before it can be a fully democratic state, maybe it must be a nation-state.

The way Lukashenko crushed this wave of protests in the summer is horrible and extremely repressive, but at the same time, at least during the last 30 years, he was trying not to become Russian. So, what he actually was saying was: "Yes, we are like Soviets but also Belarusians and we have our own Belarusian identity". And in this sense, he created a space for Belarusian national sentiment to grow, even if he is now against it.

**AR: The final thing I wanted to discuss is the collapse of the USSR and the transition to a liberal economy. We briefly spoke about that, about how it was beneficial for a certain group of people and how deeply traumatic and hard it was for others, mainly industrial workers and those on state-owned farms. In Poland, the main beneficiary of the transition were the people that now can be called the middle-class, but my guess would be that in other countries that were under influence of state socialism similar processes can be observed?**

AL: Yes, but I would say that there are huge differences! It can be simplified into two models; We have the middle-class model and the oligarchic model. In Poland, in Estonia and Latvia, for example, we have a more or less a middle-class model. And the reasons for it are different in different countries. For example, Estonia, Latvia, and Czechia were already middle-class societies before the Soviet invasion in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Poland was not, but Poland had a very active working class with strong democratic aspirations.

The Solidarity movement can be read as a history of that type, a history of democratic aspirations. I think that in Russia, they do not have this kind of middle class. And that is why the system is so strongly oligarchic, also in the sense that the only way to become economically wealthy is to be in a vertical position, directly facing the power, political power. This is also the program PiS wants to introduce in Poland, but they face the resistance of the democratic middle class. In Russia, there is no alternative, no democratic middle class outside the big cities like Moscow or St. Petersburg. What is very interesting, when talking about

**"I can imagine a lot of nostalgia for the Soviet Union, which was a stable society in the last decades of its existence, not a free society afterward."**

Ukraine, is that it seemed it was a society with exactly the same oligarchic system as Russia and now the society is changing. And I do mean it. If I were to compare it with Polish history, I would risk saying that this is a similar process that happened in the seventies and eighties, when some kind of new democratic consciousness was appearing in the society.

And I think that what has happened during the last ten years in Ukraine is the growth of democratic consciousness, but when we talk about Russia, I think they have a long, long way to go before they will be able to have this widespread social identity, which now is present among some groups in Petersburg or Moscow. Really tiny groups, not a whole class in society.

**AR: When I think about what you just said, and about the beginning of our interview when we talked about the way Polish society was modernized and the way it moved from a peasant society to a modern middle-class one: Well, of course, communism in Poland and communism in Russia had different shades and they looked a bit different. Modernization in the USSR was much more brutal – forced collectivization, deportations, the gulag system, prisoners as a slave workforce, etc.: All those things did not happen in Poland. But I am still wondering if the communist era in Russia created any possibility or space for a conscious middle-class to emerge outside big cities as it did in Poland?**

AL: I think that if Khrushchev had not been swapped for Brezhnev, maybe the evolution of Russian society would have been different. There is one event, a date in Polish history, which is very important and not enough remembered and analyzed: it is the year 1956.<sup>5</sup> It was a true social revolt. First of all, we had the big strikes in Poznań and then many other places. Then we had a complete change of discourse within the communist regime and it never again became truly communist. It was the most socialist revolt in Polish history. Industrial workers were fighting for workers' councils and one could see the strong influences of the Yugoslavian model where workers' councils had something to say and could influence working conditions.

It was the industrial plants with the struggle for better working conditions, and the fact that new communist discourses appeared, brought by young people in the communist party, activists who were very, very socialist, in the positive sense of this word. It opened the communist party to many other streams of thought, not just hardline communism. I would say also that the history of Polish liberalism connected with the period before the war, so more or less connected with Piłsudski in the first period of his political activity, never fully died. And then there was the tradition of *Armia Krajowa*<sup>6</sup> which had also a very strong civic and democratic orientation and has been rehabilitated to some extent after the Stalinist period. So all of this exploded. The end of the Stalinist era was also a time of some degree of cultural liberty; translations, and cultural influences from the West started to appear. The party line never came back to communist orthodoxy, which was the case for example in the German Democratic Republic, the Soviet Union under Brezhnev, or Czechoslovakia after the fall of the Prague spring.

I think that gave Poland this space to form a really different imaginary for the new middle class and democratic identity, which was never the case in Russia. Brezhnev absolutely crushed all those kinds of things. ✖

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- Edward Gierek was the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party between 1970 and 1980 and the main person behind opening the economy of communist Poland more towards the West. He is still remembered today for his modernization processes like the construction of over 1.8 million apartments, building the first modern motorway between Warszawa and Katowice (called colloquially "gierkówka" even today), and the improved living standard of average Poles.
- Serfdom in Poland became the dominant form of relationship between peasants and nobility in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and was a major feature of the economy of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.
- The January Uprising (1863–1864) was an insurrection in the Russian controlled Kingdom of Poland, aimed at restoration of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The uprising, the longest in the post-partition history of Poland, is often described as a partisan war and ended in 1864 when the last insurgents were captured by Russian forces.
- Also sometimes translated as Russian world, is a concept of social totality connected with the Russian language and Russian culture based on essentialized identity of "Russianness"
- The events of autumn 1956 are often described as the Gomułka thaw (Pol. *Odwilż gomulowska*), from the name of the First Secretary, during whose rule some liberalization of the communist system was introduced and to some extent the communist terror was limited. The strikes in June 1956 were also the catalyst of those reforms.
- Armia Krajowa*, [Home Army] was the dominant resistance force during World War II, the armed forces of the Polish Underground State.



# SERGEI LOZNITSA'S "NEARING DISTANCING"

*The Event* (2015) pictures the day of the failed coup d'état in August 1992, which later led to the fall of the USSR.

by **Cecilia Sá Cavalcante Schuback**

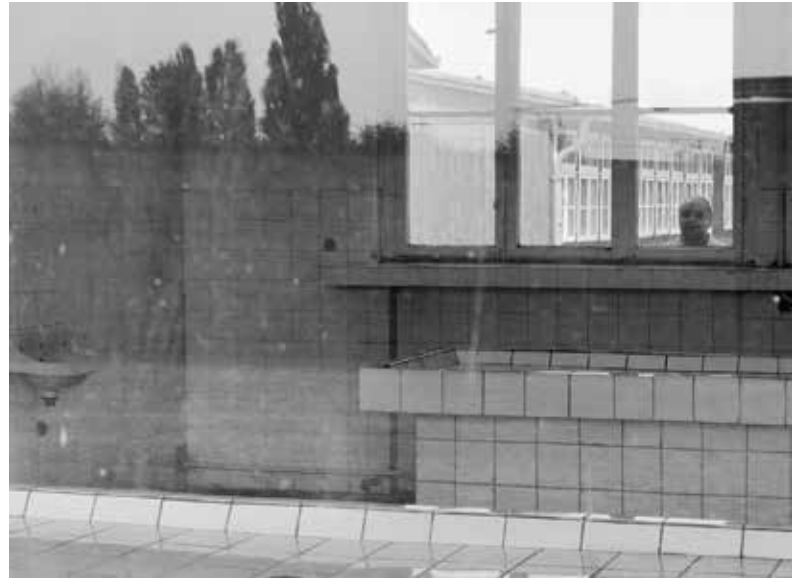
**T**he presence of fluid images is striking in Sergei Loznitsa's films. It seems that no communication of an underlying message is taking place, at least not intentionally. Rather, the image itself is the message. The intense contrast and the sound as something which is constantly lacking is salient due to the use of celluloid film and non-diegetic sound. What calls us to an uncomfortable viewing is a "nearing distancing" that feels quite familiar. The presence of fluid images is a presence of distance, a presence of the image, of a representation, as such. And it is *as such* that the image is the message. Moreover, the work of editing is not only technical, but in fact a political gesture in Loznitsa's films that use archival and documentative footage such in *The Event* (2015), *Austerlitz* (2016), and *State Funeral* (2019). We could recall Brecht for the sake of understanding what is at stake politically in Loznitsa's special cinematographic technique. However, I wish to underline the fact that if Brecht's aim was to force viewers into critical mindsets by making the familiar strange, then perhaps we can find a difference in Loznitsa's films in that he makes the strange familiar. This may sound like a simple wordplay, but there is a fundamental and indispensable political difference here that is

necessary in order to understand our contemporaneity in both its positive and its negative aspects.

Distance is crucial for Loznitsa's work: Not only because of the above-mentioned inverting of Brecht's determination of distance, but also when we see that the film director himself left St. Petersburg, where he lived and worked, for Berlin in 2000, precisely to establish a geographic distance to his subject, that is, Ukraine-Russian relations and the Soviet legacy thereby implied. In this sense, distance is necessary for a certain manipulation: To control one's material so that emotion does not take hold of and thus endanger the creative work and its potentials. It is through distance that an estrangement from passive acceptance, enjoyment and immersion is possible. As Loznitsa once said himself, "one must rather take a step back, presupposing a certain duplicity or fracture of personality".<sup>1</sup> This comparison to quantum physics is not vain rhetoric: the principle of superposition, also called *linear function* (which has a temporal accordance to this name), states that overlapping of waves in space results in a disturbance equal to the algebraic sum of the individual disturbances. We can see a sort of analogy in this principle with what has



Sergei Loznitsa at 2010 Karlovy Vary International Film Festival.



Images from the film *Austerlitz* (2016).

been called negative magnitudes that the philosopher Immanuel Kant attempted to “introduce” into philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Without going into detail, Kant attempts to show that what is at hand is an effort of the mind of which we are conscious through a feeling, a feeling that is numbed-out because of movements that have as an effect the value of coming-out-even.

The double movement of a conscious effort through such a feeling may seem quite contradictory since this feeling would rather be one of indifference or apathy. The point is that the forces, the effort, involved never cease even when in a moment of indifference. Furthermore, this break-even movement achieves more significance when a certain temporality is ascribed to it. Seeing it as a past-future-present will help us understand Loznitsa’s particular technique of rendering the strange familiar, that is, an effect of nearing distancing.

### A superposed history

Loznitsa works with history and time as his material. Time is decisive for any sort of filmmaking, but history is particularly significant to his work. To work with history in film, which is an instantaneous artform, means to work with history not only in terms of that particular historical present given in the film, nor the present when the work is carried out, but also in our own present in which we are watching the film as well as the present time and generation we inhabit. What is decisive to comprehend is, however, that one cannot reach our present only from our past: For the past (which was a present) to reach our present, one must go through a future. I am not speaking of time-traveling here, but rather of a projection of hopes and fears, hope and hopelessness, regarding the future which is transmitted from generation to generation. For instance, in the film *The Event* (2015) we follow the images of what happened on the day of the failed coup d’état in August 1992 instigated by a group of Com-

munist Party hardliners who strongly opposed *perestroika*. This event led to the end of the USSR. In this film, the superposed history is clear. The presence of Soviet history culminates in that very event which leads to the end of the USSR, a future that is already in motion before the event, the present, itself. There are, however, two presents to be kept in mind: the present of the time of the event and our watching present. There is also a relation to the Soviet past in that present of the event and the one of our watching present. Likewise, there is a future involved in the present of the event as well as in our own. Historical superposition works thus doubly, in parallel, in this film.

The question of a stasis, of an inertia, is also a constant in the film. It captures a certain ambiguity regarding what this particular event was, overflowing into the ambiguity of what an event as such is. What is clear is the contradictory stasis involved in an event. An event is something that happens, takes place, which is some kind of importance. But in the happening itself we find its inertia. As that which happens, there is nothing *that* happens since it already *is* what happens: its being-event annuls its own “eventness”. The event is thus numb: eventness is numbness. Furthermore, by using the broadcast of Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake* instead of news of protestors and the people pouring into the streets, the organizers of the coup could conceal the coup as an event at the same time as they emphasize the event as one. The broadcasts of *Swan Lake* are a constant in the film. It not only works with a dialectic of concealment and emphasis in terms of the footage; it also reminds us to the use and conception of soundtracks, the accompanying music in films for a full-on immersion without distance. It is here that we can find one of the most tangible examples of rendering the strange familiar. The entire film is accompanied by this soundtrack that is out of place, but which attests its veracity. The film distances us insofar that we never see the event as an event on screen while it is still



visibly unseen for us to find it. Moreover, we hear and see what the people on screen see and hear (recreated by sound director Vladimir Golovnitsky) as well as seeing people look straight into the camera which seems as if they are looking the spectator straight in the eye. We are therefore immersed in a sensation of being there where the feeling of uncertainty about the outcomes is reproduced. We are in the present of the event, being in our own present, feeling its future which is our present - because of the past. Time could not be more superposed in a representation than this.

The indifference and apathy in the happening of this event also remind us of our own contemporaneity: the more events, the more happenings, especially the shorter and more instantaneous they are, the more is our indifference and apathy. Indeed, this is a coming-out even in its more general sense. But when looking at this indifference and apathy through a temporal or historical lens we find more to this indifference. It is the sensation of future, of a simultaneous hope and hopelessness, that is, the sensation of future possibilities that is opened up and dissected in the film through our watching present. Our present remembers this sensation by being completely *away* from it. Even though we have not taken part in this event or the Soviet past at all, the transmission and projection of this sensation is too heavy and intimate for us to neglect it. Our present sight is the culmination of the past and future, the present being a peak of inertia with all these temporalities' forces involved. In this sense, the distance of history and future is always nearing us. Nevertheless, for this distance to near us, a manipulation is necessary, a manipulation in terms of Loznitsa's editing work.

### Editing and the art of manipulation

Brecht's distancing effect states that it is by making the manipulative contrivance obvious, that is, the "fictitious" qualities of the medium, that one can attempt to estrange the viewer from any passive acceptance and enjoyment of the play as mere "entertainment". The goal is thus to force viewers into a critical, analytical frame of mind, serving to disabuse them of the notion that what they are watching is a sacrosanct, self-contained narrative. This is the distancing effect which makes the familiar strange. That is, by making the manipulative contrivance obvious one makes the familiar strange. Loznitsa, however, works the ma-

nipulative, manipulates what is manipulated. His documentary films are fundamentally artworks of editing.

*State Funeral* (2019) shows us the mass hysteria and grief that followed the death of Stalin in 1953 through hundreds of different lenses. Rearranging archival and propaganda footage, Loznitsa gather "different" perspectives in one big perspective or lens which is Loznitsa's work proper. Thus we see Stalin's death and funeral as a culmination of the dictator's personality cult. Through the gathered footage we can observe every stage

**"FOR THE PAST  
(WHICH WAS  
A PRESENT)  
TO REACH  
OUR PRESENT,  
ONE MUST GO  
THROUGH A  
FUTURE."**

of the spectacle of the official obsequies, which was described by the newspaper Pravda as "the Great Farewell", as well as the dramatic and absurd experience of life and death under Stalin's regime. Stalin's personality cult is shown as a form of terror-induced delusion, giving insight into the nature of the regime and its legacy, which still haunts the contemporary world. This is not to say that Loznitsa is the one who sees Stalin this way. Rather, Loznitsa manipulates the manipulative footage that was meant to promote and further Stalin's personality cult to reveal the



Images from the film *State funeral* (2019).

conditions involved in a personality cult, the religious idolatry at stake in such a cult.

It is clear that the footage used in the film, with scenes of people shuffling along to see the obsequies, reading newspapers, listening to the broadcast about the dictator's death, was meant for a different purpose. Loznitsa shows a solemnity that is zombie-like, where the people are grieving the death of this personality, of this idol, following the obsequies as if it was a sanctified procession. Playing with the religiousness of this event is also a way to play with the hypocrisy involved in this regime. On the other hand, we are intrigued by the filmed faces, where not only a repressed anxiety is clearly visible, but also something hidden is rendered visible. These faces, what they think and feel, are not easily read. Although the many cameras filmed them for a different reason, their faces show that whatever they are thinking and feeling is censored, not only actively by the regime, but also by themselves for their own individual protection. We are constantly in an ambiguity of honesty and suspicion. On the one hand, there are images of real grief. On the other, there are images of suspicious eyes in terms of the camera and the entire spectacle itself. To be in between these two states of emotion, we are also being played in that we feel with them in both senses: grief and suspicion. At the end of the film, seeing the brief note reminding us of Stalin's crimes, we leave uncomfortable, in a completely ambiguous state.

What makes us uncomfortable is not only that we may or may not feel with the USSR, the people and Stalin's legacy, but rather that we are so easily consumed by the product which Loznitsa reveals to us as a product. The consumption of the product which was Stalin and the USSR resulted in an idolatry. What is revealed to us is not only a product, but a consumption of a product in

which we also are involved with as spectators. Editing work, that is, working with manipulation to reveal truths, aims not only to show us a manipulation, but to manipulate us and show us how we also manipulate, depending on the view and narrative that we have. This aspect of product consumption, and its relation to apathy, is further investigated in the film *Austerlitz* (2016).

### A nearing distance

The film *Austerlitz* deals with the Holocaust by observing visitors at the Nazi concentration camps of Sachsenhausen and Dachau. Placing the camera among people, Loznitsa decides to adapt to

the screen the exterior of the camps, making the walls and ramparts the frame of the film's subject. Loznitsa never opts for movement; he only changes the location of the camera. What happens thus happens against this framework and imposes an immersion in the past without showing the past itself, letting the past be a part of the present. He then shows the witnesses of this past in the present as not actually witnessing the past, but rather their present: the visitors to the camp are more preoccupied in taking selfies

than actually visiting the location. The horrors committed here are present, but they are present in that they are being overshadowed by this obnoxious behavior.

By choosing to see the present, the past appears as something that is becoming a product to be consumed. The film first shows the entry to the camp, then the duration of the visit of different sites dividing the camp, and finally we accompany the visitors to the exit. Their unconscious is captured by the camera. Many times, the visitors are surprised to see the camera when they look straight into it: A surprise that also reaffirms their narcissistic obsession. Nevertheless, what is in question is not to see this

**“THE  
CONSUMPTION  
OF THE PRODUCT  
WHICH WAS  
STALIN AND THE  
USSR RESULTED  
IN AN IDOLATRY.”**



Images from the film *The Event* (2015).



behavior and judge it ourselves, but to realize that we, whether we like it or not, as a contemporaneity, behave exactly like this. The apathy that is shown awakens us to see the horrors of the Nazi crimes within this frame, just as we watch this product-consuming behavior in terms of the framework of a Nazi camp. Not only does this event become a spectacle, but our own spectating becomes an event. What is strange in this image becomes familiar. Moreover, the images we watch are fluid, and in their fluidity, they convey their message as images. It is not the content nor the form that is at play, but rather the image as it is being watched as image. Whatever way we receive the image and interpret it is our own way to deal with the message, but the message itself as it is to be received. As has been said, what is strange becomes familiar, and this is fundamentally Loznitsa's way of bringing the distancing near to us.

## A Ukrainian filmmaker

Most films by Loznitsa deals with issues and problems we have inherited from the past. He has been celebrated for his experimental films representing a humanity that is confronted with economic, social, and political upheavals, using the tool of editing to paint his picture. Not only does he approach the Russian moral disintegration, but he also has a strong sense of scenery, of a stable *mise en scène* as daring narratives are shown. However, while writing this reflection on some of his documentary work, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has taken its hold. The dimensions of the war and the effect that it has on artists today are also relevant in the story of Loznitsa's work, at this very moment. Sergei Loznitsa was born 1964 in the USSR, the city of Baranovitchi in Belarus, but later his family moved to Kyiv where he went to school. In 2001 he left St Petersburg, where he had been studying and producing films, and migrated with his family to Germany.

Loznitsa was quick to condemn the war. He also left the European Film Academy, because of their initial statement that

was for him conformist and neutral in regard to Russia. Then the director was expelled from the Ukrainian Film Academy because he critiqued their overall boycott of Russian artists and films. The Ukrainian Film Academy rejected Loznitsa's so-called "cosmopolitanism".<sup>3</sup> The director, in turn, has written an open letter appealing to "keep common sense in this war", stating that:

a 'cosmopolitan' has been called a person who is open to everything new and free from cultural, religious and political prejudices [...] Speaking against 'cosmopolitanism', Ukrainian 'academicians' use the Stalinist discourse, which is based on hatred, the denial of dissent, the assertion of collective guilt, and a ban on any manifestation of free individual choice.

He further stresses that he always only represent himself, he has never been part of any group or "sphere" or community. Still, he stated that "I am and will always be a Ukrainian filmmaker".<sup>4</sup> ✖

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Red Square 1975. Hotel Rossia at the left. Souce: Livejournal.



Close to the hotel Rossia: Lubyanka, the former headquarter of the KGB.



# “BUT WE REFUSED TO BE SCARED INTO SILENCE”

## SWEDISH DESIGNERS’ COLD WAR VISIT TO ICSID ‘75 MOSCOW

by **Margareta Tillberg**

### abstract

This text gives a glimpse of a hitherto unknown design discourse during the Cold War – from both sides of the Iron Curtain – by exploring the 1975 Congress of the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID), held in Moscow. Sweden sent a big delegation to Russia. More than forty of the small country’s top designers and influencers participated, which was more than twice as many as usual to these international design congresses. Thanks to reactions published about the events in journals on design in Sweden and in the Soviet Union, archival material, and the author’s own interviews with the delegates from Sweden who participated in Moscow, as well as one-off exclusive backstage witnesses from the local staff of the host organization during the ongoing congress, Moscow 1975 is experienced through the eyes of contemporary witnesses. The essay gives new insights into the world congress in design and illustrates the international atmosphere during the Cold War.

**KEY WORDS:** ICSID, design, disability, ergonomics, human rights, VNIITE, Gosplan, KGB, Sakharov, Cold War.

**Mister President! Ladies and Gentlemen! Fellow Comrades! On behalf of the Soviet organizing committee, please allow me to welcome the participants and guests of the IX Congress of the International Council of Societies of Artist Construction who have come here from all ends of the planet. It is a great honor for our scientific and technical community that ICSID chose the capital of our Motherland for this congress.!**

It is 10:07 on Monday morning on October 13, 1975. Dzhermen Gvishiani, government representative for international relations of science and technology and the powerful State Planning Committee Gosplan, taps the microphone as he looks at the auditorium from the stage in the Rossiya Main Concert Hall – rumored to be the best concert hall in the country in the newly built luxury Hotel Rossiya next to Red Square and the Kremlin. We are now in Moscow – the capital of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), at the same time the capital of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)

## Дизайн на службе человека и общества

Выступление председателя советского организационного комитета IX конгресса заместителя председателя Государственного комитета Совета Министров СССР члена-корреспондента АН СССР Д. М. Гвишяни

Господин Президент! Дамы и господа! Уважаемые товарищи! Позвольте мне от имени советского оргкомитета приветствовать участников и гостей IX конгресса Международного совета организаций по художественному конструированию, прибывших из самых разных концов земного шара. Для нашей научной и технической общечеловечности весьма приятен тот факт, что ИКСИД избрал местом проведения своего очередного конгресса столицу нашей Родины. Интерес к проблемам технической эстетики в нашей стране закономерно растет и стал особенно активно проявляться в последние годы. По самой своей природе социалистическое государство ориентировано на то, чтобы



Dzhermen Gvishiani on the podium at Hotel Rossiya ICSID '75 Moscow. From the editorial in the November issue of *Tekhnicheskaja estetika* (1975).

– the power hub of the entire socialist bloc during the Cold War.

In the previous days, 700 Soviet specialists, 757 guests from 32 countries and 147 accredited journalists had gathered for the *ICSID '75 Moscow* congress, October 13 – 17, as the Moscow-based journal *Tekhnicheskaja estetika* reported in the editorial of the November 1975 issue.<sup>2</sup>

The audience did not want to miss a word from the elegantly dressed man with a well-modulated voice that pronounced the welcoming address to the design world congress of 1975. The tailors here must be excellent, pondered Arthur Hald (1916–1993), alderman of the Swedish delegation. Hald, art historian, former director of *Svensk Form* [The Swedish Form Association],<sup>3</sup> was also artistic director of plastic and porcelain manufacturer Gustavsberg, manufacturer of the standard bathroom equipment (white porcelain toilet, bathtub, basin) for *Miljonprogrammet* [The Million Program]. With its one million reasonably priced flats and one-family houses fully equipped with bathrooms and kitchens with stove, sink, refrigerator, and freezer, built from 1965–1975, it was the largest and most controversial housing project ever realized in Swedish history. *Miljonprogrammet* was successfully crowned with a Palace of Culture (Kulturhuset) in the very city center of Stockholm where all the subway lines and commuter trains meet. By 1975 the Palace of Culture at Sergels Torg was a living room open for all, with chess boards, newspaper reading room and music listening on headphones in a comfortable setting.

Now Arthur Hald is in Moscow, eager to learn as much as possible. He does not want to miss a single word and adjusts the earphones that he received tickets for in the congress kit (*ICSID '75 Moscow* registration no. 0929) in exchange for his passport.<sup>4</sup> He needs them for the simultaneous English interpretation. The sound could have been better though.

The Swedish delegation departed from Stockholm's Arlanda Airport on Saturday afternoon on October 11. On Sunday afternoon the group left the Finnish capital of Helsinki in a Soviet aircraft bound for Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport. In spite of the geographical proximity – less than an hour by air across the narrow Baltic Sea – this was a rare visit from Sweden to its big neighbor.

Moscow is eager to impress. The place to do it is the new Hotel Rossiya with its 1960s high-end Soviet-style: white marble columns, red carpets and enormous crystal-looking chandeliers in the lounges and vestibules – perfect for the get-together cocktails of the luminaries of the international design world on a brief exotic visit behind the Iron Curtain.

**THE CONTEXT IN WHICH** to understand the *ICSID '75 Moscow* congress is as a part of the cultural communication during the Cold War. The world had been divided into two separated competing blocs since Yalta 1945, manifested 1961 by the erection of the Berlin Wall. Ballet performances and ice hockey championships

turned into Cold War battlefields. Two superpowers' every whim was followed by the rest of the world, including Scandinavia – a few sparsely populated countries in the northern periphery of Europe squeezed in between the two blocs, where the “communists” in the “East” and the “capitalists” in the “West” fought for two contrary worldviews.

In 1975, the oil crisis was a fact, the hippie movement preached peace, love and understanding and the Vietnam war fought by proxy by the US and the USSR had at last come to an end, with the fall of Saigon in April 1975. In July 1975, the whole world followed Apollo 18 and Soyuz 19 on TV, watching a moment of fragile détente when Soviet cosmonauts and US astronauts shook hands – far out in space. But the hi-tech varnish was thin. In reality, Soviet industry was obsolete, and the Soviet leadership was aware of this. Industrial design was thus an important arena in which to become updated with international developments. With a world full of problems, *ICSID* had major plans to solve them and also, at least so it seemed, the right connections to do so. *ICSID* – International Council of Societies of Industrial Design – was founded in 1957 as an independent, non-profit, non-government organization to promote better design.<sup>5</sup> Although initiated by countries in the rich, highly industrialized world, the aim of *ICSID* was to be globally inclusive for design and designers in all countries – rich and poor.

The first *ICSID* World Congress took place in Stockholm in 1959. With industrial designer and member of the Swedish royal family Sigvard Bernadotte (1907–2002)<sup>6</sup> as Chairman, *ICSID Stockholm '59* was a success. Sigvard Bernadotte was elected *ICSID* President for the period 1961–1963. From then on, biennial congresses with interim workshops and seminars were arranged – *ICSID* became the perfect arena for the exchange of knowledge

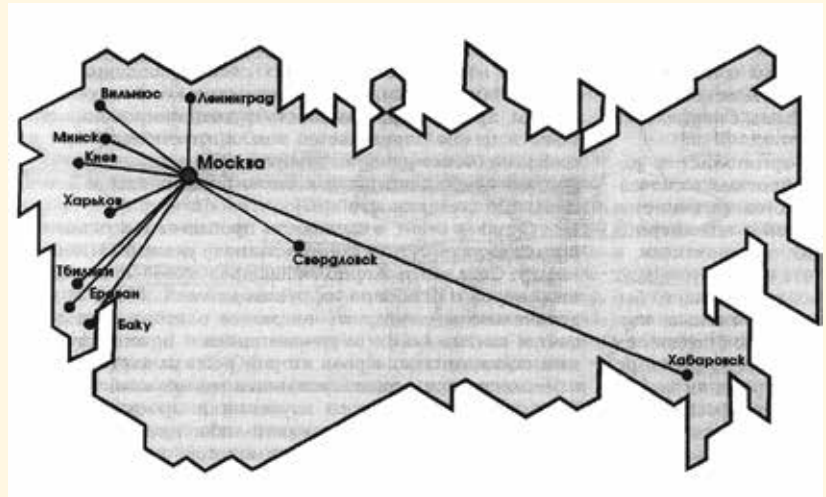
of industrial innovations. The networking by the James Bond-like world-improving designer aristocracy soon turned ICSID into an international platform. Successively, the ICSID congresses developed into something of – at least in the designers’ world – similar dignity to the Olympic Games.

IN 1963, ICSID was granted special consultative status with UNESCO in order to use “design for the betterment of the human condition”, to quote the protocols of the ICSID Paris Congress, UNESCO headquarters, June 1963’ – a wording which suggests ambitions far beyond the factory workers’ concrete working conditions on the shop floor by the conveyor belt.<sup>8</sup> The expression “human condition” was hardly a coincidence considering the quite impressive reading lists ICSID compiled for the professional designer, that included literature on active life and labor such as that of existentialist philosopher Hannah Arendt. But how was the designer to improve the circumstances for the human condition? ICSID suggests: “The function of an industrial designer is to give such form to objects and services that they render the conduct of human life efficient and satisfying.”<sup>9</sup>

So – what was/is the ICSID, really? Monica Boman (1929–2014) – editor-in-chief of the Swedish language journal *Form*, spokesperson for design in Sweden under the auspices of *Svenska Slöjdföreningen* [Swedish Handicraft Association] – puts it somewhat critically: “ICSID started as an exclusive Anglo-Saxon gentlemen’s club and developed into a kind of international United Nations for questions about design.”<sup>10</sup> As a historian interested in design during the Cold War (with my additional a birds-eye perspective, as it were, thanks to the time passed as well as being informed by decades of research made on this topic by hundreds of scholars) I make the interpretation: With the ICSID, design became a platform for professional designers to participate in peace building and détente after the World War II, by way of creating a relaxed setting where the superpowers could talk and interact together with non-bloc countries such as Sweden.

The USSR very much wanted to be a part of this international designers’ jet set. In 1965, the Soviet Union was granted ICSID membership. In ICSID’s own history writing, however, there are surprisingly few traces of the Soviet Union. No mention of it is to be found for instance at the website of ICSID/WDO. Russian sources that I have consulted on the contrary emphasize their presence – and the participants of the Swedish delegation to *ICSID ‘75 Moscow* confirm that they were there.<sup>11</sup>

Although *ICSID ‘75 Moscow* was the biggest ICSID congress that had hitherto ever taken place (according to my Russian



VNIITE branches in the major places for heavy industry in the Soviet Union, all connected to Moscow (here with the Russian spelling used during the Soviet era): Leningrad (Russia), Vilnius (Latvia), Minsk (Belarus), Kiev (Ukraine), Kharkov (Ukraine), Tbilisi (Georgia), Erevan (Armenia), Baku (Azerbaijan), Sverdlovsk (Russia), Khabarovsk (Russia).

sources, including VNIITE director Yuri Soloviev and articles in *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika* and *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR*), the congress is not mentioned at all in ICSID’s history writing, despite the boast of having “members from all over the world in both capitalist and non-capitalist countries”.<sup>12</sup> I find the absence of the congress in Moscow in the ICSID historiography remarkable. Not only was it important for the communication between the two blocs during the Cold War, it was crucial in the world of design to have an event of this dignity taking place – for the first time behind the Iron Curtain.

## “THE ICSID ‘75 MOSCOW CONGRESS WAS AN EVENT OF IMMENSE PRESTIGE FOR THE SOVIETS.”

The *ICSID ‘75 Moscow* congress was an event of immense prestige for the Soviets. It was the opportunity to remedy the missed opportunity for the Soviet Union to host the World Fair in 1967 – which would have proudly commemorated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution that brought the Bolsheviks’ Party to power. It was Mon-

tréal, Canada, however, that won the competition to host Universal Expo -67. Instead, 1975 was the 30-year anniversary of the victory in WWII, with its grandiose mass celebration in the Red Square, where the German Nazis were severely humiliated by being forced to lower their red, black and white flags with the big black swastikas and put them on the ground in front of the Lenin Mausoleum – with the whole world watching.<sup>13</sup> But the victory was not settled. The US boycotted *ICSID ‘75 Moscow* (which could be the topic of another article.)

The host for the *ICSID ‘75 Moscow* congress was VNIITE, a Moscow-based institute for industrial design, assigned to handle national and international design connections. The Russian acronym VNIITE – *Vsesoiuznyi Nauchno-Issledovatel’skiy Institut Tekhnicheskoi Estetiki* – means, in translation, the All-Union

Research Institute of Technical Aesthetics (the Soviet-Russian term for industrial design is technical aesthetics). An institute for scientific research and innovation, VNIITE was a think tank of sorts founded in the beginning of the 1960s along with many other new institutes, with the task of upgrading Soviet industry to quality standards that were sufficiently high for export. It was to ignite modernization and reconstruction in industrial production after the World War II, and to do so (and this is crucial) – on a more user-friendly basis – be it for the metal miner in the deep shafts, or the worker by the conveyor belt: the quality of the working conditions was in urgent need of improvement.<sup>14</sup>

In 1975 VNIITE had existed for more than a decade. From its foundation in 1962 it had expanded with ten branches in the major industrial centers spread over the entire country: Leningrad, Vilnius, Minsk, Kiev, Kharkov, Tbilisi, Erevan, Baku, Sverdlovsk and Khabarovsk. The ICSID '75 Moscow congress was the very moment for VNIITE to show the great value and necessity of its work.<sup>15</sup> Now was the time to show that the money spent had served a useful purpose. The institute produced the entire concept for the congress with the headline “Design for Man and Mankind”, and also served as the local host.

**THE HARSH WORKING** conditions in the Soviet Union were not unknown in Sweden. The previous year (1974) Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918–2008) had at last been able to receive in person the medal of his 1970 Nobel Prize in Literature for his books on the hard and inhuman labor conditions in the Soviet Union. His books were forbidden in his homeland (although read in samizdat among the cultural élite) but smuggled into the West and published in inexpensive paperbacks. There was a large audience for his serious books. So – was there perhaps another story – not yet told – to be expected in Moscow? A story of respect for the worker? This, combined with a curiosity for what might hide behind the ill-reputed Iron Curtain in the ill-reputed Soviet Union, forty-six of this small country’s top designers and influencers signed up for Moscow. This was the biggest Swedish participation in an ICSID-event – ever.

In 1975, Sweden was at the peak of the *rekordåren* [Years of Records], as the era after the WWII is called in Swedish history writing. Far removed from the poor, miserable country deserted by more than one million emigrants (more than one fourth of Sweden’s entire population between approx. 1850–1920), the Swedish industrial sector was booming. The surplus was redistributed as welfare according to the societal model called *Folkhemmet* [Home of the People] which included free education (with a hot meal for school children in grades 1–9 and high school students for 2–3 years) and free health insurance for all.

But the Swedes were also genuinely interested in the Soviet system, which had proven itself to be able to deliver welfare as well. The enormous size of the Soviet Union (the population of

Moscow alone exceeded the population of the whole of Sweden with its eight million in 1975), reasons for being awed but also curious were obvious. The Soviet Union had produced an enormous amount of housing in the ruins of the war. There were similarities and differences between the two systems. There was a lot to see and to learn.

The friendly human-oriented congress name “Design for Man and Mankind” pointed to a humanitarian approach different from the technocratic machine world of Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern Times*. This sympathetic approach was one of the reasons that the Swedes became curious and wanted to make the effort to go to the Soviet Union (despite the enormous amount of paper work demanded to maneuver through the humiliating and controlling bureaucracy to get a Soviet visa).

It was largely thanks to Lennart Lindkvist (1930–), designer and director of *Svensk Form* (ICSID '75 Moscow congress registration no. 0942), who had managed to enthruse an impressive number from the Swedish designers’ community join an adventure to Moscow. He phoned his designer colleagues and convinced them of the worth and importance of showing an effort – this was a once in a lifetime opportunity to look behind the façade. Who knows what achievements the Russians have made? Let’s go there and see for ourselves!<sup>16</sup> For the first time, an exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences was to take place with colleagues on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

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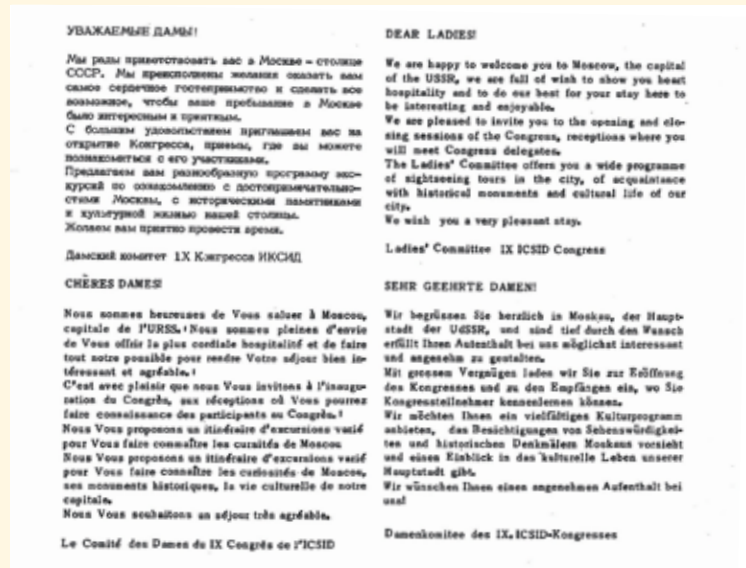
**THE FOUR DAYS** of the Moscow ICSID event, October 13–17, coincided with the October week when, by tradition, the Nobel Prizes are announced. On October 14, international media an-

nounced that the 1975 Nobel Prize in Economics had been awarded to Soviet mathematician Leonid Kantorovich (1912–1986) for his theory on the “optimum allocation of resources”. Since economics and industrial production are two sides of the same coin, Kantorovich’s prize was good news for the design community. The *Transportation Theory* presented real solutions to logistical knots. Transportation could be more efficient and the potential to save both money and resources

was huge. The Soviet Union was the largest country in the world, stretching across eleven time zones from Japan in the east to Norway in the west, from Arctic permafrost in the north to the south with its subtropical climate in the Crimea, and deserts and mountains on the borders to China and Afghanistan.

Kantorovich’s theory indicated that a centralized economic planning system could serve as a convincing alternative to “chaotic capitalism”, the traditional Soviet term for the economic system in the West. In the Soviet Union, the control of all natural resources, metals, oil, water and endless forests, factories and the entire workforce, was in the hands of a few. The decision-

**“THE TIRED SWEDES  
SAW THE FINNISH  
STAR DESIGNER TIMO  
SARPANEVA STEPPING  
OUT FROM A LONG  
BLACK LIMOUSINE  
DRESSED IN LARGE  
WOLFSKIN COAT.”**



For the female participants a little pink folder was found in ICSID' 75 Moscow congress registration kit.

makers in charge of all the resources, the means of all production, and the entire workforce, were so few that they could meet eye to eye around a single table.

If the blocs separated by the Iron Curtain could be unified, this would have a huge impact on the allocation of resources on a global level.

In the tradition of excellent mathematicians, the government representative for opening the ICSID '75 Moscow congress, Dzhermen Gvishiani (1928–2003), for example, was not only a very important bureaucrat for inaugurating a high-profile international event, but was undoubtedly also a very able theorist in economic management in his own right. Such a bright and highly placed person would for sure be able to push decisions in the right direction, and to execute some power.

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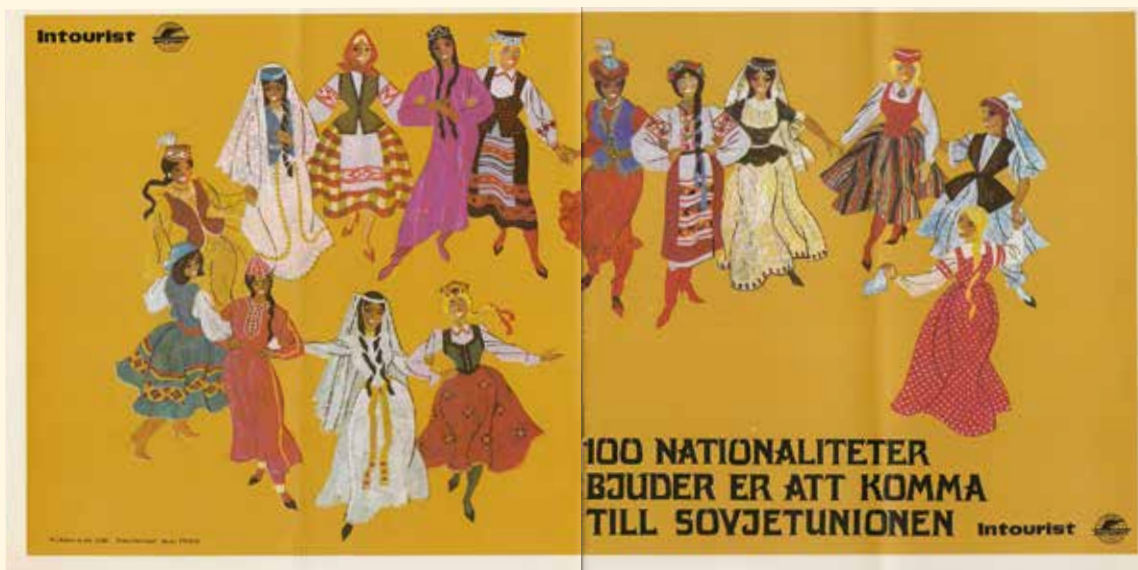
On October 12, the Soviet aircraft finally landed at Moscow Sheremetyevo Airport. Officials in greyish green uniforms had hours at their disposal to conduct controls. By the time the bus with the Swedish contingent that had registered for the ICSID '75 Moscow congress was ready to depart from the airport, it was already dark. The warm Indian summer had turned into frost. The smell of cheap cigarettes and Belomorkanal, mothballs and low octane petrol, was the sign they were now behind the Iron Curtain. The journey from the Swedish capital to the capital of Russia and the Soviet Union had taken more than thirty hours.

Arriving at Hotel Rossiya a few minutes before midnight, the tired Swedes saw the Finnish star designer Timo Sarpaneva stepping out from a long black limousine dressed in large wolfskin coat. Sarpaneva was famous as the first foreign designer from the capitalist West ever to have a separate exhibition in the Soviet Union: “an event of course of exceptional significance”.<sup>17</sup>

The word about Sarpaneva's successful show at the Exposition of the Achievements of the People's Economy (VDNKh), spread like a fire. Many newspapers had written about it long before its opening. Everybody talked about it. The guest book witnesses to visitors from Samarkand to Tula who express their gratitude for the simple and beautiful items. Within two weeks, the exposition had been visited by “tens of thousands Muscovites and visitors to the capital”. Sarpaneva's “Ilya” and “Kalinka” glasses with a frosted and bark-like surface were made for the Russian market and soon became highly sought-after gifts among high-ranking nomenklatura officials.

With its more than three thousand rooms for 5890 guests, Hotel Rossiya was one of the biggest hotels in the world.<sup>18</sup> The best rooms had a view of view of the nearby Red Square and the golden onion cupolas of the cathedrals in the Kremlin.

Entering their rooms, selected members of the Swedish delegation<sup>19</sup> (the women) found an extra treat in the form of a little pink folder in their ICSID' 75 Moscow congress registration kit.<sup>20</sup> Among them were team members of international industrial textile star designer Astrid Sampe (ICSID' 75 Moscow registration no. 0923): Louise Carling-Fougstedt, textile designer of numerous printed kitchen towels shown at the H55 exhibition in Helsingborg in 1955, who worked with Sampe at the NK Textile Chamber (Moscow registration no. 0960) and Anna Maria Hoke, textile and interior designer responsible for the textiles in most of Gotland's churches, who cooperated with Astrid Sampe for the 1939 New York World Fair (registration no. 1253). Also in the group were Eva Ralf, responsible for exhibitions from Sweden at the Council of Industrial Design in London, interior designer for the National Board of Public Building, Silja Line flagships and the Swedish Room in the Royal Family's summer residence, Solliden (no. 0971); Thyra Nordström, scenographer and interior architect, author of many books from 1954 – 1991 for Konsumentverket (the



Cover of Intourist Brochure in Swedish, with smiling women in folk costumes from all the Soviet Socialist Republics. [100 nationalities welcome you to the Soviet Union].

Swedish Consumer Agency) including the book *Bosättningsråd* [Advice for settling in to your first home] reprinted in eleven revised editions (no. 0940); Jane Bark (1931–) fashion illustrator for *Damernas Värld* and *Femina* (no. 0938); and Monica Boman, editor-in-chief of design journal *Form*, author and editor of the standard book *Svenska möbler*, “Swedish Furniture” (no. 0927). These very important designer-influencers sank into the brown synthetic bedspread in their respective rooms, took the bright pink booklet that they had found in their *ICSID’ 75 Moscow* congress kit, and pondered the following words:

‘Уважаемые дамы! Dear Ladies! Chère Dames! Sehr geehrte Damen!

We are happy to welcome you to Moscow, the capital of the USSR. The Ladies’ Committee offers you a wide program of sightseeing tours in the city, of acquaintance with historical monuments and the cultural life of our city. We are pleased to invite you to the opening and closing sessions of the Congress, and to the receptions where you will meet Congress delegates. We wish you a very pleasant stay.

Damskii komitet – Ladies’ Committee  
IX ICSID Congress’

The very important congress delegates (the men), on the other hand, found other additional treats in their congress kits, such as entrance tickets for the plenary sessions in the Rossiya Concert Hall. These delegates included (selection): Rune Zernell, constructor of the first subway car in Stockholm and the Volvo Amazon (*ICSID’ 75 Moscow* registration no. 1252); Rolf Häggbom, head teacher for industrial design at Konstfack University of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm (*Moscow* no. 0932), Mike Stott, professor of interaction design, Umeå Institute of Design (no. 0955); John Grieves, graduate of Central Saint Martins in London,

team leader for the Swedish design department of IBM (no. 0953); Claes Frössén, SID designer at Husqvarna (no. 0963); Per Olof Wikström, professor of design methodology at Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg, and chair of Swedish Industrial Designers (SID) 1975–77 (*ICSID’ 75 Moscow* registration no. 0967).

In everyone’s congress kit: food coupons *Lux* (which included a big bottle of vodka and a bottle of *champanskoe* to be shared by three people), tickets to the Bolshoi Theatre, the State Circus and to all the receptions, including an invitation to the grand finale: “The Organizing Committee has the pleasure of inviting you to the Closing Reception in the ‘Rossiya’ Restaurant (western wing, ground floor) on October 16, at 8 p.m.”

OF COURSE, THE REAL bonus of any international conference is the social interaction. The Soviet Union had a population of 246.3 million people comprising more than 130 larger and smaller nationalities living together like “one big family in 15 Socialist Republics”, stated the colorful brochure distributed by the Soviet State Tourist Bureau Intourist to every foreigner visiting the country. The cover depicted smiling women (no men) in traditional folk costumes in bright happy colors ring dancing and holding hands.

At last they were to see the best Soviet-made products and meet with colleagues across political barriers. In the vein of ‘Workers of the world – unite!’, as Jack Ränge (designer of functional chairs and tables for public interiors, *ICSID’ 75 Moscow* registration no. 0928) wrote in his enthusiastic article ‘Soviet form: We blast into the sky, with ferro-concrete’ in the Swedish journal *Form*.<sup>21</sup> For a few intense days, the Swedes were to join their Soviet comrades.

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While the delegates from the Swedish group tried to orient themselves in the very big hotel, in other parts of the city, staff mem-

bers of the host organization VNIITE made their final preparations for the upcoming event.

## Soviet design and the State Central Planning Committee *Gosplan*

Few countries have such a heroic past as the USSR when it comes to design. But what had become of the noble beginnings of Russian constructivism's self-proclaimed "designers for the everyday" since the heyday of the 1920s? In the vein of Marx, Engels and the Arts & Crafts movement with its socialist roots, the aim was to make work more bearable for the industrial proletariat. But what about the fruits of all the efforts made since the dictatorship of the proletariat and the workers' state was founded as the Soviet Union in 1922? No one knew.

The true situation was an official secret. Many millions of prisoners had been in the camps. Every other family had a family member who had either died or returned home but remained silent about what they had experienced.<sup>22</sup> At least until the story by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn about the long working day of the GULAG prisoner Ivan Denisovich was published in 1962 during the short Thaw, with some moderate relaxation from the authoritarian state control. When Solzhenitsyn's first-hand experience of the forced labor camps were published in Russian, a witness to the cruel conditions at the Gulag Archipelago in the first workers' state, it was a shock.

What did "Made in the USSR" look like in 1975? No one knew, neither in Sweden (nor anywhere else). And vice versa. In the Soviet Union, very little was known about Swedish design. The only article on Swedish design to appear in the Soviet media for a long time was a brief, dry report in *Tekhnicheskaja estetika* on devices for home use, compiled by a translator.<sup>23</sup> Not intentionally, perhaps. After all, we are realistic. Not every small country could expect to be acknowledged. The Soviet Union had a lot on its plate.

**IN THE USSR**, with its centralized system for planning and (re-)construction, the means to shape the world to become accessible for bodies with various functionalities and (dis-)abilities, was in the hands of a few decision-makers. How bodies physically interact and negotiate with structures in society could be easily changed by the State Central Planning Committee – *Gosplan* – the designer, so to speak, of the entire means of production. That was the plan. That was the goal. The focus of the five-year plans for 1946–1950 and 1951–1955 was reconstruction after WWII.

The five-year plan launched in 1975 – also called The Five-Year Plan for Quality – was an enormous leap since it focused not only on *what* should be produced, but also *how* the production was to be carried out. The quality of working conditions was to become better. For the people of the USSR, this was a promise

for a better future – within reach. By 1980, in less than five years, the goals of the Quality Plan were already to be reached.

*Gosplan* representative Dzhermen Gvishiani's close involvement in design issues raised hopes for action. His opening address for the *ICSID '75 Moscow* congress, "Design in the service of the people",<sup>24</sup> paved the way. The whole concept and the international presence raised hopes for increased focus on the humanitarian side of the man-machine constellation.<sup>25</sup>

"We count on your active participation in the congress, and are convinced that the forthcoming exchange of ideas will be fruitful for the further development of design".<sup>26</sup> With these words, Dzhermen Gvishiani officially opened *ICSID '75 Moscow* on Monday morning, October 13, and handed the microphone to

Yuri Soloviev (1920–2013), director of VNIITE. Tall, good-looking and well versed, Soloviev was locally known in Moscow as 'the aristocrat'.

"Strong state control", declared Soloviev in his plenary speech from the podium in the Rossiya main congress hall, "is the prerequisite to execute operative decisions on questions of such importance and complexity as the welfare of human beings and society".<sup>27</sup> So – what could possibly go wrong? All the prerequisites for betterment were there: the power in the hands of a few, the good will for implementation in practice,

the pragmatic Soviet logistic models to make dreams become reality (that had even been awarded the Nobel Prize). What did this reality look like? How was it in real life?

## Organic flaws in the economy

Soviet industry was in a stagnant, constant crisis ever since Stalin had accused consumer and human friendly economists of "sabotaging" the expansion of heavy industry in the 1930s. Thus, there was leeway to make working conditions more friendly. However, a long misanthropic tradition had to be dealt with. In the words of renown Soviet-American sociologist and political scientist Vladimir Shlapentokh (1916–2015): "With their deep contempt for the masses, the Bolsheviks looked upon the people as expendable material and were never seriously concerned about the number of human lives they sacrificed for the achievements of their goals."<sup>28</sup>

**PERESTROIKA LEADER** Mikhail Gorbachev, in a "last attempt to improve economic performance initiated in 1986" is credited by Shlapentokh to be the one "who created the state quality system".<sup>29</sup> But this attempt also failed, as had earlier efforts – to which the *Gosplan-VNIITE*-efforts (albeit not mentioned by Shlapentokh) that we describe here – belong.

One contributing factor to the system's failure was an overload of control, an overload of ineffective bureaucracy, instead of finding the real remedy. Shlapentokh: "The Soviet leaders were aware of the weaknesses in the mechanism of perfor-

**“SOVIET INDUSTRY WAS IN A STAGNANT, CONSTANT CRISIS EVER SINCE STALIN HAD ACCUSED CONSUMER AND HUMAN FRIENDLY ECONOMISTS OF ‘SABOTAGING’ THE EXPANSION OF HEAVY INDUSTRY IN THE 1930s.”**



Novo-  
cherkassk  
Massacre,  
June 2,  
1962.

mance”, and sought to remedy them by way of external mechanisms of control: “By 1985, no less than 10 million people, about 10–15 percent of all employees, were enrolled as social auditors.” And “once again these inspectors went into collusion with managers, which aroused the hostility of the party committees”.<sup>30</sup>

ON JUNE 2, 1962, the workers at the Novocherkassk Electric Locomotive Plant finally dared to go on strike. Their modest pleadings were for salaries high enough to occasionally afford some meat for dinner, and some flexibility from the functionaries in charge of public transportation to adjust the timetables to accommodate the needs of the nightshift workers who did not want to have to walk all the way home anymore. The bus timetables did not fit with the work schedule of the factory with 12 000 workers. But instead of meeting these very reasonable demands that one would have thought would not have been too difficult:<sup>31</sup> “They shot into a completely calm crowd”, stated Anatoly Zhmurin in 2017, fifty-five years later, to *Meduza* correspondent Daniil Turovsky, who documented eye witness accounts of the Novocherkassk massacre, the capital of the Don Cossacks, two hundred kilometers east of Mariupol in the Donbass. Novocherkassk in Russia is near Rostov-on-Don, very close to the Ukrainian border.

Human life counted little, as we saw Shlapentokh noting above. Furthermore, the Don regions were targeted during *Holodomor*, the famine in the 1930s, and the suffering were immense. The famine was orchestrated at the same time as the five-year plans were launched in the 1920s and 1930s, with Moscow’s hungry eyes on the rich natural resources in what is now Ukraine.

These historical facts were silenced, however: Including the fact that the Soviet authorities had an “explicit anti-Cossack agenda” in order to give more *Lebensraum* to the Russian ethnicity. Archival documents were declassified only a few years ago,

and the article referred to here was published as late as in 2020.<sup>32</sup> Information has thus come to light very recently. The extent and consequences of the *Holodomor* was not present in the Socialist Realist paintings and novels – that instead gave an impression of happy collective farmers painted in “happy colors”<sup>33</sup> and workers happily giving their all in the steel factories. The propaganda was focused on those glorified goals, not the costs of life or the suffering to achieve those goals – if they were ever achieved at all.

It is important to note this gap between the realities as they were, and as they were pretended to be. The 1962 strike, the very same year VNIITE was founded, tells the story about the realities behind the façade, whereas the efforts made during the congress in 1975 in Moscow to show no flaws in the success of the communist system of production talks about how the façade was upheld and created. Actually, in the 1930s the five-year plans were already bringing surpluses to the center in Moscow and its manufacturing factories by suppressing ethnic minorities in remote areas, and taking advantage of the natural resources in the periphery (everything emerged from the center in Moscow).

At the very moment that I write this, in April 2022, Azovstal, the Ukrainian steel plant in Mariupol, one of Europe’s biggest metallurgic plants, established 1930 during the first five-year plan, is all over the world news, described as “a fortress in the city”, now defending Mariupol from falling into Russian hands.

## VNIITE’s human-friendly worldview – a challenge to Soviet industry

VNIITE was founded as a part of the post-Stalin reforms initiated in the 1960s to make life more comfortable and to produce higher quality consumer goods in working places of higher quality. VNIITE continually proposed solutions for better working conditions in all spheres of society: For the drivers of combine harvesters on the fields of wheat and corn stretching from horizon to

horizon, and the long-distance pilots and drivers of airplanes, trucks, and trains. And numerous war veterans adding to the need for all kinds of empowering tools, including replacement limbs and better prostheses. However, with its inclusive view of a society designed for everybody, the work by VNIITE was rather the exception than the rule.

Ergonomics, defined as the science of labor, was a task that coincided with the UNESCO-ICSID definition of its mission: “design for the betterment of the human condi-

tion”, mentioned above. At VNIITE, ergonomics was important. Even key. Vladimir Munipov (1931–2012), head of the Department of Ergonomics, was vice-director of the whole institute. As described in one of his many articles in *Tekhnicheskaja estetika*, Munipov equated quality with user-friendliness which equaled the science of labor.<sup>34</sup> Science was the foundation of the Soviet state ideology, and in this way Munipov skillfully presented ergonomics as the firm scientific basis for the changes that were so urgently needed for industrial production.<sup>35</sup> But only with the 11<sup>th</sup> five-year plan from 1975

**“THE PEOPLES  
IN THE VAST  
SOVIET UNION  
HAD PATIENTLY  
WAITED FOR EVEN  
THE MOST MODEST  
IMPROVEMENTS IN  
THEIR LIVES.”**





The cover of Lasse Brunnström's *Swedish Design History* (Stockholm: Raster 2010) shows the ergonomic coffee pot for Scandinavian Airlines.



The pioneering angled kitchen knife for people with weak hands made by Maria Benktzon and Sven-Eric Juhlin, Ergonomic Design Group for Gustavsberg manufacturer, produced from 1973. The knife was presented by Maria Benktzon at the *ICSID '75 Moscow* session "Design for the handicapped and the ageing" on Tuesday 14 October 1975.

to 1980 were these requirements at last made explicit, established by General Secretary of the Communist Party Leonid Brezhnev as 'The Five-year Plan for Quality'.<sup>36</sup> This really seemed to be a promise for a better life. The rulers in Moscow had it all in their hands – and the peoples in the vast Soviet Union had patiently waited for even the most modest improvements in their lives.

The friendly human-oriented congress name "Design for Man and Mankind" was VNIITE's idea. It clearly shows the worldview of the institute: Human well-being in society at large – through design.

The plenary themes to be presented in the Rossiya Concert Hall were: Design and State Policy, Design and Science, Design and Labor, Design and Leisure, and Design for Children. The parallel sessions included topics such as communications, education, developing countries, disaster relief, design promotion and 'design for the handicapped and the ageing'.<sup>37</sup> Design and state policy was the major theme around which everything revolved.

With the extraordinarily important mission to bring creativity to the stagnant industry, to make Soviet products more user-friendly and more appealing, VNIITE director Yuri Soloviev accepted only the very best professionals as members of his staff. Thanks to an excellent library with most recent literature and the latest journals ordered from abroad, Soloviev managed to attract the most innovative designers, architects and artists, the most astute art theorists, historians, and philosophers, the cleverest of engineers, the most skilled film directors, and the deftest prototype constructors. Soon, the institute had become a kind of free zone for an active group of inventive intellectuals, who were ironically enough paid full-time by the state. With free access to information, in a few years VNIITE had turned into a progressive place.

Considering the lack of human-friendliness in practice, VNIITE was an unusual player in Soviet industry, even an anomaly. To formulate suggestions for change in the way in which the industrial production was to be carried out was a great challenge that the large industrial conglomerates did not welcome.<sup>38</sup> The changes interfered too much with the way production was or-

ganized and would cause initial dips in productivity which was deemed unacceptable, since the directors received their bonuses only if the pre-formulated plan was over-fulfilled. A catch-22 situation. Absurdly enough, the state financed institute with the duty to propose changes for the betterment of the working conditions turned into a place for dissidence for simply proposing solutions that were uncomfortable for the people in power to act upon. The demands for change were too challenging for the corrupt leadership who instead drowned any suggestions for innovations in tons of documents in the insurmountable bureaucracy.

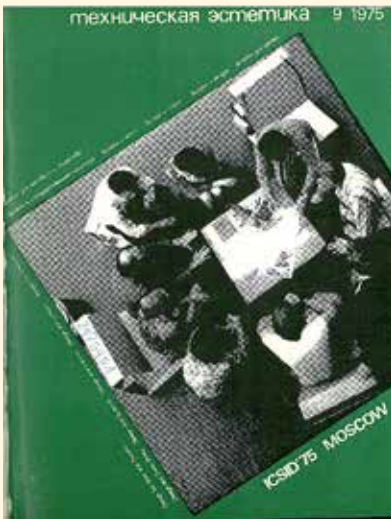
VNIITE had become an institute of resistance – simply by doing its job. And this really needs to be stressed; therefore I repeat it again: paradoxically enough - VNIITE was a scientific research institute financed by the state.

### **Ergonomics — key for the self-image of good Swedish design**

Ergonomics was (and still is) important for the self-image of Swedish design. Under the motto "Design for all", Sweden promoted its trademark as an inclusive society, consciously designed for both rich and poor; catering for not only well-functioning bodies – but for everybody. It is no coincidence that the cover of the first book on *Swedish Design History*<sup>39</sup> shows the hugely successful and best-selling ergonomic coffee pot for Scandinavian Airlines. The "SAS pot" was designed by Maria Benktzon (b. 1946) and Sven-Eric Juhlin (b. 1940).

The *ICSID '75 Moscow* heading "For Man and Mankind" was appealing to the Swedes. The care for the user's well-being was an interest that the designers from the Swedish group shared with the designers at VNIITE. The theme that the Swedish group had chosen for its participation thus fit very well in the overall concept of *ICSID '75 Moscow*.

**THE SWEDISH GROUP** had prepared two presentations for *ICSID '75 Moscow*, both of them on ergonomics. In practice, ergonomics



The cover of the September issue of *Tekhnicheskaja estetika*.

(human factors, industrial psychology or whatever you want to call it) is about designing tools, devices and equipment that have been adapted to fit human bodies with various needs.

In Moscow, in addition to the key lectures in the main concert hall on state policy, science, labor, leisure and design for children, the parallel sessions (four at a time, running concurrently) included the themes education, developing countries, disaster relief and, last but not least, according to the wording of the official congress program: “Design for the handicapped and the ageing”.

One of the Swedish presentations was by Torsten Dahlin (b. 1936) together with Henrik Wahlforss, and the other by Maria Benktzon and Sven-Eric Juhlin, with Maria Benktzon giving actual presentation, elected to do so by the Swedish group, according to Lennart Lindkvist and Maria Benktzon.<sup>40</sup> In the late 1960s Sven-Eric Juhlin and Maria Benktzon were commissioned by the state financed Handikappinstitutet<sup>41</sup> [The Institute for the Disabled] to elaborate tools for home use. The very important Gustavsberg company was one of the manufacturers of the tools. In Moscow, on Tuesday October 14, Maria Benktzon presented gripping tools for people with weak hands. In the presentation, she described the user participation method she and Sven-Eric Juhlin had applied and showed slides of both the process and the end result: a special knife on its cutting board.

Let us halt the presentation of the program here, and go back to the organizers of the congress in Moscow and particularly the staff members of VNIITE.

### **Moscow: Reactions from VNIITE staff backstage at Hotel Rossiya**

One very distinguished VNIITE staff member was trusted with writing the speeches for the Moscow head representatives. His name was not mentioned officially; instead Dzhermen Gvishiani and Yuri Soloviev were the most visible, in charge of controlling the speeches. The obstacles the real author behind the speeches met were many. Too easy to forget for its incomprehensibility, the Soviet Union was a place where self-sufficiency was not allowed.

In the Soviet Union there was no freedom of speech which meant that self-censorship, a kind of self-abuse as I would describe it, had become a disability caused by decades of power abuse. What I find astounding is that the VNIITE staff that I quote below were still healthy enough to react the way they did – in spite of the many years of oppression they had suffered. These very staff members are therefore quite remarkable. Many more examples could be given. (Luckily enough, I was able to use a small window of opportunity that I saw, to organize and carry out interviews with eyewitnesses from the congress who at the very last moment were able to give some glimpses from behind the front stage.)

From those October days in 1975, Alexei Kozlov (b. 1935), PhD in design theory and architect, head of VNIITE’s theory department, author of the important article “The role of scientific knowledge for the development of design”,<sup>42</sup> and of the congress speeches for Gvishiani and Soloviev (“But after all the washing and censoring, not much more than the usual empty phrases remained”) – recalls:<sup>43</sup>

**During the ICSID congress, ordinary staff like myself who were not party members were never allowed to attend the plenary sessions. We sat secluded in the basement, like firemen ready to march out and help the big bosses in case of emergency. This has burnt into my memory, since every time someone needed assistance, we had to run up an escalator that was out of order. It felt awkward, absurd, and humiliating. Try it yourself.**

VNIITE housed somewhat more angry voices.

### **Voices from the VNIITE house journal *Tekhnicheskaja estetika***

The house periodical *Tekhnicheskaja estetika* was important for spreading the word about the activities at VNIITE. *Tekhnicheskaja estetika* had been issued once a month since 1964 with a successively increasing circulation. By 1975, it was almost 30,000.<sup>44</sup> The impression I have from interviews with the editorial staff is that they had relatively big freedom to publish more or less what they wanted there, backed up by VNIITE director Yuri Soloviev himself, who in my interviews with him liked to give the impression that he was quite independent from inference from the authorities. That is, until the *ICSID '75 Moscow*.

The September issue of the VNIITE monthly *Tekhnicheskaja estetika* was made to be distributed to the congress delegates in addition to the usual audience. It expressed how the VNIITE staff wished the congress to be, with an international readership in mind, on a rare visit in the Soviet capital. In addition to the many lectures presenting the latest news in the design field, the congress delegates – foreign and local – were to discuss and socialize for a few days. That is how the editorial board imagined (and wanted) the congress to be, as is clearly shown by the cover of the 1975/9-issue. Travelling abroad was unthinkable for the average Soviet citizen. The congress was therefore a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to meet colleagues and like-minded people from other parts of the world.

The cover for the September issue of *Tekhnicheskaja estetika* shows a photo of a group of people sitting on low chairs around a table, seemingly collaborating to solve a problem. In the green background, the congress topics are printed in Russian and English. With a nod to Frank Gehry's cardboard chairs, VNIITE designers Alexander Ermolaev, Igor Berezovskii and Yevgenii Bogdanov had made cardboard furniture that was placed in the hotel lobby: As conversation pieces shown on the cover – to sit on.

While the members of the Swedish delegation took a peaceful evening stroll (one incident, however, disturbed the perfect façade. Maria Benktzon: "I saw an old woman without legs outside the hotel on a homemade skateboard")<sup>45</sup> in the crisp air on the brilliantly illuminated Red Square with the red silk flags moving beautifully in the floodlights lighting up the Lenin Mausoleum, Svetlana Silvestrova, reporter for *Tekhnicheskaja estetika*, made her final preparations for the interviews she was to conduct with the foreign designers on their brief visit to the capital, in the room she shared with her husband and small daughter in a communal flat (bath, toilet and kitchen co-inhabited with unknown people).

Svetlana Silvestrova (b. 1936) was an adept English-speaking journalist who had recently moved to Moscow with her husband, designer Dmitry Azrikan (b. 1934) who was hired at VNIITE for his innovative ideas on how to effectively re-organize oil and petrol distribution with petrol stations for the private car owner that even look welcoming and pleasant.<sup>46</sup> The couple came from the international petrol and port city of Baku on the Caspian Sea. Recently hired, the erstwhile reporter then became a member of the editorial board of *Tekhnicheskaja estetika*.

Svetlana Silvestrova wanted to animate the occasionally quite rigid and dull layout of the periodical (page after page without illustrations was not unusual in *Tekhnicheskaja estetika*) with more personal portraits, interviews, and photos (she was the author of the pages with Timo Sarpaneva mentioned above). She wanted to make contemporary Western designers more present and less alien to the Soviet readership, many of whom lived in far off industrial cities that were closed to visitors – not only foreigners, but also non-authorized Soviet citizens.

Then, late Sunday on October 12 came the surprising news. The content of the program had to be changed. "The material we had prepared for the congress had to be replaced with other material", according to Svetlana in my interviews with her: "We had not seen it coming. It came as a shock to all of us."<sup>47</sup> No explanation was given. The day before the opening, without prior notice, the congress was suddenly censored. Without warning. "The telephones ran hot all night for we had to cancel the content and presentations we had prepared for many months", Yuri Soloviev confirms.<sup>48</sup>

**MONDAY MORNING** on October 13, VNIITE staff reporter Svetlana Silvestrova gets off at the metro station by the KGB prison Lubyanka and the big statue unofficially called "Iron Felix". From

there, it is a short walk, just down the slope, to the Hotel Rossiya. She heads for the lobby, the area intended for congress socializing, but she had only just started the first interview with Italian star designer Ettore Sottsass, during a break between sessions, when she was interrupted.<sup>49</sup>

**Suddenly, one of those vapid, expressionless people turns up: Who has given you permission to talk to a foreigner?!! This will have consequences for you. I was threatened! While only doing my job!**

In spite of the almost forty years that had passed since the event, Svetlana Silvestrova still vividly remembered the unpleasant encounter when I first met her in her home in Chicago in 2008. She told me about how ashamed she felt for the international celebrity whom she interviewed, that she, an accomplished professional, was treated like a disobedient child caught in the middle of some dirty, shameful action. So, no more interviews for her. Instead, she was ordered to prepare a short questionnaire which was handed to a selection of delegates by a middleman with official clearance to communicate with foreigners. But that was not all. The censorship continued after the congress as well.

**"THE DAY BEFORE THE OPENING, WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE, THE CONGRESS WAS SUDDENLY CENSORED."**

**THE PLAN WAS** to fill the *Tekhnicheskaja estetika* November issue with content from the congress: with the illustrated lectures by the international guests, the interviews with pictures of the designers, and much more. In spite of the obstruction of their work, the VNIITE staff succeeded in collecting an abundance of material from the guests: Photos, typed presentations, and more.

Svetlana Silvestrova:

**We had material for many full issues to come. But nothing came to be. We were not allowed to publish any of the lectures from the congress. Nor the full answers to the questionnaire with the two questions that were posed to the international designers. We were only given permission to publish eight edited answers. That was all. Everything was censored... No real meetings or discussions were allowed to take place, and we had so much looked forward to learning from other places. There was no bustling and lively interaction among like-minded professionals taking place that we had all so much looked forward to.**

### **Post-congress reactions from the editorial board refusing to be silenced**

The *Tekhnicheskaja estetika* editorial board wanted to express their feelings about what had happened. All the preparations they had done – they did not want it all to be in vain: All the hopes for interaction with the colleagues from all over the world, and in the larger perspective – hopes for a motherland

## техническая эстетика 11



*Tekhnicheskaya estetika*,  
November, 1975.

ТОРСТЕН ДАЛИН, дизайнер,  
фирма «Эргономик-дизайн» (Швеция)



The *Tekhnicheskaya estetika* November issue contained a very short interview with Torsten Dahlin.

1. Важным моментом я считаю углубление знаний для расширения диапазона действий в системе человек—машина. Дизайнер-практик, работающий во имя улучшения условий труда, должен быть рядом с рабочими, погружаться в производственную атмосферу, чтобы работать целенаправленнее и с большей пользой.

2. Хочется верить в успех идеи гуманизации мира вещей, перенасыщенного и хаотичного сегодня. Думаю также, что будущие дизайнеры будут вооружены какими-то новыми методами проектирования — в этом, видимо, поможет научно-исследовательская работа.

to become a more decent place to live, with good, empowering design for everyone, even for the weakest. In short: equal rights and a dignified existence for everyone. But how to express this enormous frustration? Their approach was as simple as it was effective: Show but not say was their method. An image telling more than a thousand words:

The message on the cover of *Tekhnicheskaya estetika* for the 1975 November issue is clear. The cover shows a photo of the stage in the Rossiya Main Concert Hall. Void of people. The only thing to be seen are sixteen screens that repeat “ICSID ‘75 Moscow”. Below, three more screens show the walls and the towers of the Kremlin — the absolute center of Soviet superpower. This is a real photo of how the congress began.<sup>50</sup> However, it should have been followed by an experimental grandiose screen show with moving images on the sixteen screens, accompanied by sound. The VNIITE film crew had spent many months producing this. But as chief artist of the ICSID congress Yuri Reshetnikov (1937–2012) told me when I interviewed him in Moscow in October 2008, it was cancelled without explanation at the last minute and replaced by the standard tourist folklore show. The reaction of the editorial staff was this cover. An empty, silenced stage. As a result, a number of *Tekhnicheskaya estetika* editorial board members, including the editor-in-chief, were fired.

The *Tekhnicheskaya estetika* November issue contained a very short interview with Torsten Dahlin (or rather, his shortened answers to a questionnaire).<sup>51</sup> That was the only trace in Soviet media of the Swedish participation in *ICSID ‘75 Moscow*.

**QUESTION 1:** What are the most important problems, as you see it, that the artist-constructor should focus on now?

**DAHLIN:** Of importance, I think, is to deepen the know-how for a wider range of measures in the system “man-machine”. In order to become immersed in the production conditions, the designer who works within the field of betterment of working conditions has to be next to the worker, to gain more benefit from the study.

**QUESTION 2:** What will design in 2000 be like?

**DAHLIN:** I would like to believe that ideas on a more human-oriented world of objects will replace the overabundance and chaos of today. I also think that future designers will be equipped with some new methods for the design process — scientific research could be helpful.

### Sweden: Media reactions — “The Dialogue that Never Came to Be”

Editor-in-chief of bimonthly Swedish design journal *Form*, Monica Boman, commissioned articles from the Swedish delegation. Her own main article from the congress had the headline “Den uteblivna dialogen” [The Dialogue that Never Came to Be]. Here, some quotes from the January issue from *Form* 1976:<sup>52</sup> [Figure 9].

The visionary projects of the 1920s constructivists — to work out practical solutions for ordinary people in their everyday lives — were never realized in the poor, backward and war-torn country. Other areas were prioritized.<sup>53</sup>

Maria Benktzon’s project presentation was one of the most well-received at the congress. In the midst of grandiose declarations and abstract design theories, this was a concrete and down-to-earth presentation on how a designer can make everyday life easier for the physically challenged minority.<sup>54</sup>

Design and politics was the main theme of the congress. What design is, we seem to agree upon, no real difference there between East and West. More so when it came to design and politics. The socialist states see design as an instrument for total societal planning and change for society, while the western view is more pragmatic: design is useful for economic growth and export, it increases quality in the growing public sec-

tor, etc. In his key-note lecture, ICSID President Auböck (Austria) took the responsibility of the public sector as starting point. According to his estimations, 30–40% of GNP in West European countries are used for state purchases. This enormous economic power of the public authorities is rarely combined with a responsibility for the quality of the products they buy. A heightened awareness in state policy of what high quality production entails is therefore needed for design products.<sup>55</sup>

The ninth ICSID congress was maybe nothing more than a big theatrical spectacle staged for internal purposes in order to put the spotlight on design issues... What was the conclusion? That the East has a system but no design, and the West has a design but no system.<sup>56</sup>

The goal was to liberate the masses from heavy, physically and mentally degrading work on dark, smoky and dirty shopfloors. Labor was to be lifted to a higher technical level in light, well-ventilated and beautiful industries and laboratories, for a happier cultured life.<sup>57</sup>

You feel at home here. It's similar to Scandinavian design schools... bustling, full of life... An exchange with our design schools in Scandinavia with students from Stroganoff would be extremely valuable.<sup>58</sup>

Maria Benktzon, who met the audience from the congress stage in Moscow with her presentation “Design for all”, won numerous prestigious red dot design awards and became a professor of ergonomics in Stockholm. In her obituary for Henrik Wahlforss (1949–2016) “who infused ergonomic design in Sweden with energy when he moved to Stockholm from Helsinki”, she recalled his vision for a future “Norden 2030” published in 1982, in which he “hopes for a human, resilient society built around small-scale communities in the United Nordic Countries.”<sup>59</sup>

**FROM THE SWEDISH REPORTING** on the 9<sup>th</sup> ICSID congress in Moscow we move to take a helicopter view of an event of international importance with repercussions for the October days in Moscow 1975: the Nobel Peace Prize announcement October 9, 1975.

Only a few days before the ICSID '75 Moscow congress was to take off, the Nobel Peace Prize for human rights activist Andrei Sakharov was announced. This of course created newspaper headlines worldwide. Sakharov was the nuclear physicist who had developed the most powerful atomic weapon to have ever been detonated, before changing to fight for peace and disarmament. On what levels had this news become known behind the Iron Curtain? In Moscow even? Of course, the top bureaucrats



Design & politik: ICSID-kongressen i Moskva: Den uteblivna dialogen [The dialogue that never came to be] Text and photo by Monica Boman, editor-in-chief, *Form* 1976/1: 9. Notice that Hotel Rossiya can be discerned above the head warmed by an ushanka on the soldier on the far left.

knew. Of course, the Organs of the State Security (KGB) knew. But the rest? Did they know about the goings-on in the world? What sources of information were available to them?

What was known in Moscow about the Peace Prize? Did the man on the street, even in Moscow, the capital, let alone far away in the provinces, know who Andrei Sakharov was? Or was this kept a secret from the citizens who had only access to state-controlled media?

The news had loud international repercussions and the Soviet

leaders changed the premises for the Moscow congress entirely at the very last moment. A shock went through the congress before it had even started. Of course, the foreign guests to Moscow knew.

All the staff of the host organization VNIITE that I have interviewed confirm that the content of their congress contributions were severely censored: That they had to change the entire program at the last minute. Already mentioned above, the exper-

imental slide show on sixteen screens, was cancelled. According to VNIITE director Yuri Soloviev “the telephones ran hot all night”. Dmitry Azrikan, one of the few local staff members from VNIITE allowed to make his own public congress presentation, said: “All the visual material we had prepared was cancelled. We were not allowed to show anything, only to talk.” The impressions this gave the Swedish delegates was that: “It all seemed very improvised.”

Dmitry Azrikan, who has always been very patient answering my never-ending row of questions (we have been in continuous contact since February 2008<sup>60</sup>) last said (when I contacted him

**“ONLY A FEW DAYS BEFORE THE ICSID ‘75 MOSCOW CONGRESS WAS TO TAKE OFF, THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST ANDREI SAKHAROV WAS ANNOUNCED.”**

per e-mail again in April 12, 2022, for some more details about ICSID '75 Moscow<sup>61</sup>): “We are amazed that you still heroically stick to this topic, in spite of the burglary of all your materials.<sup>62</sup> But we do not want to shovel this dirt anymore trying to remember details. Who is interested in this? What happens today is much more scary. We are old now, and we do not want to remember all these Soviet nightmares, from the crushing (*razgrom*) of the 1975 Congress, to the destruction (*razrushenie*) of Kiev in 2022. The first havoc of Kiev I experienced in 1941 when I was six years old.”

Dmitry Azrikan, who do not anymore wish to remember life and oppression in the Soviet Union, was born 1934 in Odessa.

**DID THE VNIITE STAFF** know why the congress suddenly was censored? Could they have accessed that information? All media was state-controlled, and they were busy trying to make the best of the situation – dignitaries from all the world arriving in Moscow and it was their institute that was responsible for the congress. The newspapers named *Truth* (*Pravda* was the official newspaper of the Communist Party) and *News Herald* (*Izvestiya* published by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet) – served words, words, and words. Words with no connection with reality. In short – lies. The paper, however, was valuable in Soviet daily life that was characterized by a lack of every day goods. The newspapers were used for rolling homemade cigarettes – and toilet paper. So, the answer I would give is: No – the local staff in Moscow did not know anything about Sakharov’s Nobel Prize. But was this the reason for the censorship of the congress? Was this the reason that made the Soviet authorities censor and change the program at the last minute, preventing the Soviet designers and journalists meeting, interviewing, and discussing with their foreign delegates and guests, etc.? Or was it just business as usual for the State Security (KGB) to interfere where there were foreigners from the capitalist world that could result in cooperation with the West – which was what many of the Socialist block designers wanted. And vice versa. There were many things the Western designers admired in the Socialist bloc. For one, the state planning system that when used for the betterment of human life could have quite rewarding results. To listen and to learn – that is what *ICSID '75 Moscow* was for.

And last but not least: It was at the same time an excellent opportunity for the KGB to assert their power over the ministries and other state organizations formally in charge, using Sakharov’s Nobel Peace Prize as a pretense conveniently handed to them just at the right time.

Moreover – and now it is getting really cynical: In the words of the Nobel peace prize committee, Sakharov won the prize for being “a spokesman for the conscience of mankind”, a formulation that fits well into how I would describe what good design is all about: Good design is an empowering tool for the inclusion of human beings with every kind of bodily variances. **BETTERMENT.**

And then? What happened in Moscow after the congress?

## Epilogue – Moscow

Yurii Reshetnikov: The cancelled slide show that was to open the congress was shown in a closed session to a small, selected audience in January 1976.

Dmitry Azrikan: And yes, of course we were glad to receive Sakharov’s award! Although at VNIITE did not discuss this topic. Too many informers!<sup>63</sup>

Alexei Kozlov, speechwriter to top bureaucrats (who disliked escalators that were out of order), handed in his resignation from VNIITE right after ICSID Moscow. Choosing the saxophone instead, Kozlov became leader of *Arsenal*, one of the most successful jazz bands in the Soviet era.

For the Soviets, *ICSID '75 Moscow* was greatly rewarding insofar as VNIITE Director Yuri Soloviev was elected ICSID President for 1977–1979 (cooperating with Jan Trädgårdh as Vice President), and the VNIITE institute survived for many years to come.<sup>64</sup>

In September 2013, I called founding director of VNIITE Yuri Soloviev on his Moscow number to ask him about the closing down of VNIITE (that was dissolved at that time along with many other research institutes in Russia, when the premises were to be privatized).

### Yuri Borisovich, what is your comment about the final closing down of VNIITE?

“Unfortunately, our country has no industry to speak of. We have no project orders. Management has no insight into the most fundamental issues. That is all I have to say.”<sup>65</sup>

**“FOR THE SOVIETS,  
NOTHING LESS WAS  
AT STAKE THAN  
TO PRESENT THE  
SOCIALIST LIFE-  
STYLE AS THE MOST  
DESIRABLE.”**

**AS WE SPOKE**, of course I did not know that these would be the last words we would ever exchange. A few weeks later, in October 2013, Yuri Borisovich passed away, 93 years old.

Break with the past: The statue unofficially called “Iron Felix”, (of Felix Dzerzhinsky, founder of the Cheka, precursor to the KGB) that VNIITE reporter Silvestrova passed on her way from the metro to Hotel Rossiya, was the first in a row of

statues to be torn down in August 1991. A few months later, the Soviet Union ceased to exist. Svetlana Silvestrova now lives with her family in the US. She and Dmitry Azrikan emigrated to the US 1992 with their daughter Dasha Azrikan. Exiled Dmitry Azrikan who, almost sixty years old, left his promising design bureau in a prime location in Moscow, to start a new life on a new continent:

**It is not impossible that the dumb-assed ill will (*tupaia zloba*) towards Sakharov did have an influence on the Congress. But hardly. The KGB was just like any other Soviet bureaucratic instance, where the right hand does not know what the left hand does. Main thing was – **THE ATMOSPHERE...** I feel sick recalling this.<sup>66</sup>**

Andrei Sakharov, human rights activist and 1975 Nobel Peace Prize winner, was arrested and deported to the heavy motor

industry city Gorky where foreigners were banned, following his public protests against the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979.

On December 14, 2021, Memorial, the oldest and most prominent civil rights group in Russia, established in the late 1980s with Andrei Sakharov as one of its founders, was put on trial by the Russian Supreme Court. The verdict of December 28 was liquidation due to accusations of being a “foreign agent” for its memory work refusing to forget atrocities committed by the state. As a contrast, Memorial is Russia’s conscience for the younger generation. The year 2021, commemorating 30 years since the dissolution of the Soviet Union when so many hopes rose for what was thought to be a new beginning, instead became a year of sorrow and despair.

## Concluding words

The need to improve living conditions for the majority was urgent in the Soviet Union (1922–1991). The focus of this article is first of all the working conditions in Soviet industry that needed improvement, in the words of ICSID, the international organization that globally strived for design as “the betterment for the human condition”, their definition of design once they became part of UNESCO’s cultural program. Secondly, the article is about human rights and freedom of speech. These two factors coincided in an acute way during the first international congress for design behind the Iron Curtain, and here the author has taken the opportunity to show a few snapshots from that unique event.

This article presents and gives a short analysis of the ICSID ‘75 Moscow design congress, from two perspectives: the Swedish design delegation and VNIITE, State Research Institute for Industrial Design, the local host in Moscow. Primary sources used were interviews with participants and initiators of the event, archival documentation, and articles in journals, in Swedish and in Russian, issued by the participants who were also interviewed by the author as eyewitnesses.

The article tries to show how the “grassroot” delegates and representatives of the local host acted and reacted (the doings of the ICSID representatives higher up in the hierarchy have not been included, which would have been another article).

ICSID ‘75 Moscow was the 30-year anniversary of the victory in WWII. Three decades of reconstruction and rebuilding were to be presented to the world.

For the Soviets, nothing less was at stake than to present the socialist life-style as the most desirable. Under the congress name “Design for Man and Mankind”, designers and influencers came from all over the world to meet and discuss questions of great urgency for the well-being and dignity of people and society.

**OCTOBER 1975:** For a whole working week one and a half thousand specialists, including the VIPs from the design world of the day, were congregating in the heart of the socialist world. The few days were meant to be full of opportunities to meet and to discuss, perhaps even to negotiate future transnational co-operations. An amazing opportunity that would probably never come



Andrei Sakharov studies his Nobel Prize diploma in his Moscow apartment in 1975. Source: Sakharov Archives.

again, at least not for a long time. The congress *ICSID ‘75 Moscow* was thus a very fragile moment in the midst of the Cold War.

Despite the repressive Soviet authorities, the VNIITE staff had hoped to be given some little space at least this one single time. After all, the very topic of the congress was addressing the very basic conditions that their institute had been founded to solve: VNIITE had been founded with the task to modernize industry (and to improve the working conditions therein). Industry was the economic driving force that entailed the foundation for the potential prosperity and future well-being for everyone, including the very important politburo members sitting around their big table in the Kremlin.

“We were all so disappointed”, was the unison voice of the VNIITE staff that I have talked to. “The party at the end of the congress? None of us were invited.”

Perhaps not much of a loss? Claes Frössén, senior design advisor at the Swedish Industrial Design Foundation (SVID) with the VIP treatment (same as for the international hard-currency congress guests) of the Swedish delegation: “What I remember from Moscow 1975? Endless corridors. Cigarette-smoke. Alcohol. It all seemed very improvised. From a designer’s point of view it gave very little. I saw no signs of any advanced design.” Be that as it may, his wife, a primary school teacher who participated in the Ladies’ program, made some remarkable observations. What she saw, is however beyond the scope of this article.<sup>67</sup>

**THIS ARTICLE PRESENTS** and gives a short analysis of the *ICSID ‘75 Moscow* design congress, from two perspectives: the Swedish design delegation and VNIITE, State Research Institute for Industrial Design, the local host in Moscow. Primary sources used were interviews with participants and initiators of the event, archival documentation, and articles in journals, in Swedish and in Russian, issued by the participants who were also interviewed by the author as eyewitnesses.

The article tries to show how the “grassroot” delegates and

representatives of the local host acted and reacted (I have not included the doings of the ICSID representatives higher up in the hierarchy, which would have been another article).<sup>68</sup>

The short conclusion is that the contact and communication that both sides wished for was obstructed by the authorities who controlled all international contacts. This article reveals one misunderstanding (there were many more) caused by the clumsiness of the VNIITE contingent in charge of all foreign contacts (a compulsory department in any institution under the auspices of the Organs for State Security, better known as the KGB) that apparently did not have even a basic knowledge as to women's roles as professionals, and also lacked the *Fingerspitzengefühl* (tact) how to communicate this. Not only was the pink folder with the Ladies' program a real *faux pas*: The women in the Swedish delegation were allowed to enter the main congress hall only if accompanied by a male. The real designers were assumed to be men!

**ICSID '75 MOSCOW** was the 30-year anniversary of the victory in WWII. Three decades of reconstruction and rebuilding were to be presented to the world.

For the Soviets, nothing less was at stake than to present the socialist life-style as the most desirable. Under the congress name "Design for Man and Mankind", designers and influencers came from all over the world to meet and discuss questions of great urgency for the well-being and dignity of people and society.

The participants of course wanted the meeting to be fruitful and constructive, which was made very difficult due to the unnecessary censorship and other obstacles that were clumsily forced upon the event by the Soviet authorities in control: the KGB.

The lack of faith in the visiting delegates in place for this unique event, in fact even in its own highly educated staff of the local host organization, made the Soviet leadership deprive the congress participants of their agency to create a constructive dialogue, and instead obstructed any opportunity of contact, and by humiliating the delegates and the local staff in this way clumsily destroyed the event. The reaction among the congress delegates on both sides of the Iron Curtain was of course that of great disappointment. For the transnational collaborations that took place after 1975, despite all, more research needs to be done.<sup>69</sup>

**THE RECOLLECTIONS** presented here show that not even the VNIITE staff who had authored the speeches for the dignitaries was treated with any dignity, or even in accordance with basic human rights – freedom of speech – the foundation for democracy.

The urgent needs for improvement were at last acknowledged by the Party. The five-year plan for 1975–1980 was loudly proclaimed as The Five-Year Plan for Quality. The goals of the

plans were to be realized by 1980. They were not. The ways to improve working conditions for the industrial worker at the conveyor belt, the women with extraordinary heavy workloads in the communal kitchens, and the drivers sitting on the tractor on the enormous wheat fields in the "breadbasket" – the Ukraine: The suggestions VNIITE made meant empowerment. They were intended for the weak to become stronger. This was dangerous of course.

The suggestions for improvement remained as grandiose promises from glamorous podiums with the world watching. But they were not carried out in real life. Instead, the authorities used a standard mechanism to make people lose focus on what is really important for them by creating a crisis with chaos and confusion, effective in its way. For an aggressor such as the Moscow Empire, an attack on other peoples was the *modus operandi*. In 1979 Afghanistan was invaded.

**HOW COME THE POWER** in the Kremlin got (get) away with this again and again? The hunger for the people to be happy – to live in happiness – is enormous. And after many generations of propaganda showing the enormous power of a state that will solve everything, and that individual agency and self-sufficiency were made criminal during the Soviet dictatorship, the tools for action have become difficult to access: Like a muscle weakened because it has not been used for so long.

Self-censorship – I would call it self-abuse – had become a severely handicapping disability. Living in fear every day for decades produced such post-traumatic stress syndromes that many grew silent. The abuse of power in the Soviet Union was

massive. What I find astonishing is that the VNIITE staff that serve as witnesses in this article had been able to retain even a grain of health, making them able to react the way they did, in spite of the many years of severe abuse they had suffered. The covers for *Tekhnicheskaja estetika* shown here are proof as good as any.

Still, good design means a realistic acceptance of differences. The good

designer would, I would argue, have to stand up for and empower those in need.<sup>70</sup> The bottom line of good design is simply to respect human dignity and to create products that can make a challenging everyday life less difficult even for those who do not fit into the norm. Correspondingly, respect for human dignity no matter what was what Soviet citizen Andrei Sakharov fought for in a system which was infamous for its disrespect and even cruelty with regard to those who behaved and thought a little differently than the mandatory norm. During the days following the Sakharov Nobel Peace Prize announcement, one and a half thousand specialists on design arrived in the Soviet Union in order to discuss how to design for human dignity, for better and more decent human conditions. Good design, I would argue, is something more than simply a well-functioning artifact with good

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looks (important, of course, but not always enough). Good design as an empowering tool for body and mind would have to be – in the bigger perspective – a human right. That was the road Moscow unfortunately decided not to take. Again. Novocherkassk 1962 – and sixty years later – Azovstal in Mariupol only a few hours away – both industries in the Donbass-region built as a result of Soviet super-effective five-year plans, that reduced human needs to nil and nothing – needs such as decent working conditions.

By way of showing a few concrete events, the very weakest mechanisms of Moscow power execution are revealed, mechanisms whose consequences made the subordinated peoples wanting to leave that rule; the Soviet Union dissolved. But the same mechanisms still repercuss as of today, shown by the Russian attack on the Ukraine: the institutionalized state contempt for its citizens, its subjects – the systematic lack of respect for human dignity.

VNIITE's human-friendly worldview was an anomaly and a challenge to Soviet industry. With its inclusive view on a society designed for everybody, the work by VNIITE was rather the exception than the rule. The need for a revision of how humans were treated in Soviet society was enormous, but the distance between visions and reality was very far. Too far? No. The failure was due to the lack of willpower.

The very moment I write this -- Monday April 25 – there seems to be complete darkness at noon. Does that mean we should give up? No. I think not. ❌

Margareta Tillberg, Associate Professor in Art History,  
Uppsala University. Adjunct Professor, Stockholm University

Note: All translations from Russian and Swedish into English are made by the author of this text.

#### Acknowledgement:

I want to dedicate this article to the staff members of VNIITE (as well as the facilitator at GKNT) mentioned here, who struggled for the betterment of the human condition despite severe dictatorship (in alphabetical order): Dmitry Azrikan, Dzhermen Gvishiani, Aleksei Kozlov, Vladimir Munipov, Yuri Reshetnikov, Svetlana Silvestrova, and Yuri Soloviev.

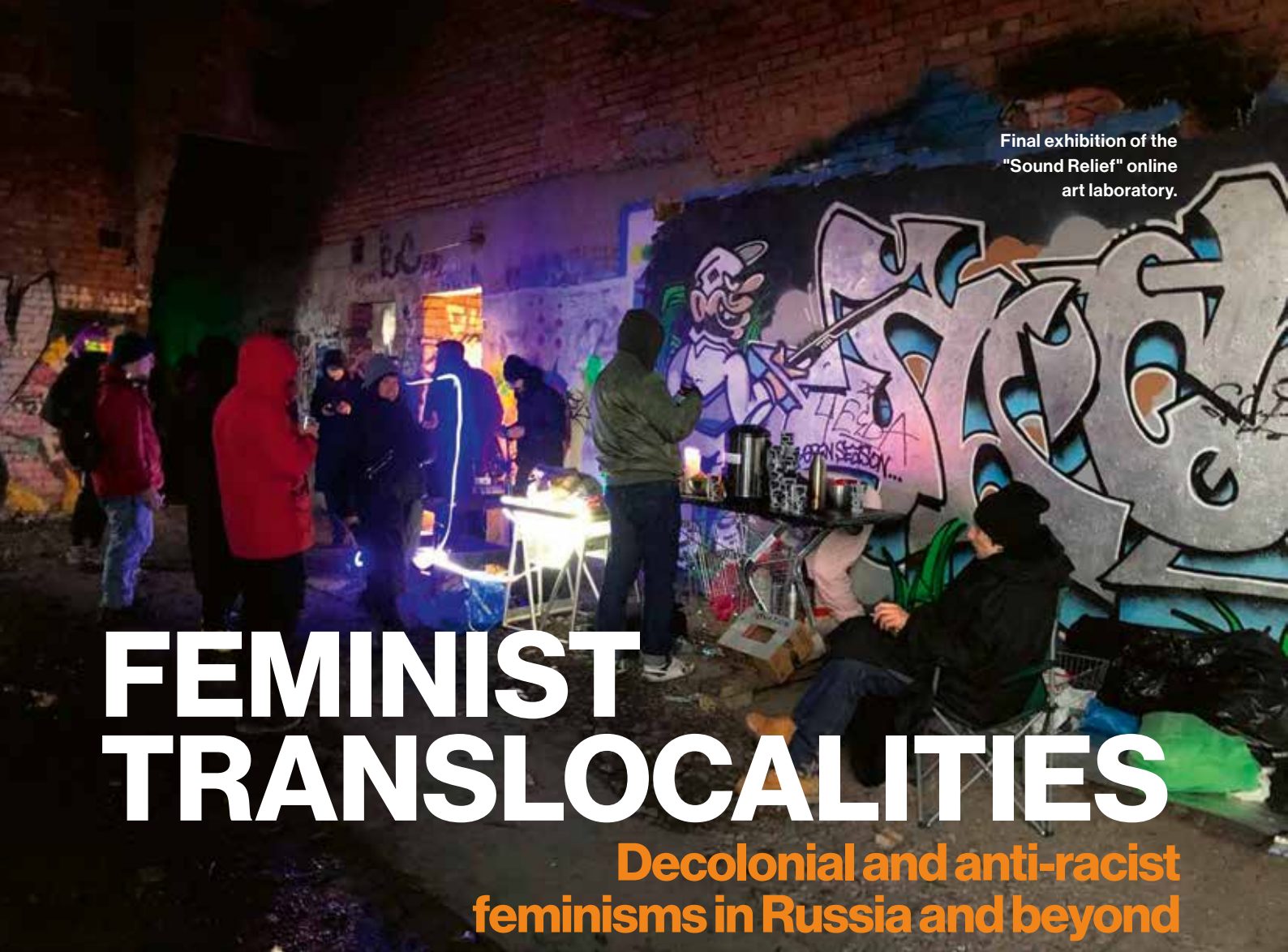
I am indebted to the blind peer reviewers of this article for valuable comments.

## references

- 1 The source for this quote is: D.M. Gvishiani, (1975), "Dizain na sluzhbe cheloveka i obschestva. Vstuplenie D.M. Gvishiani IX kongressa IKSIDA" [Design in the service of the people and society]. Opening address by D.M.Gvishiani for the Ninth ICSID Congress], *Tekhnicheskaja estetika* vol. 11, no.143 (1975): 2. In the Russian language, the terms used for design during the Soviet period was khoduzhestvennoe konstruirovanie (artist construction) and tekhnicheskaja estetika (technical aesthetics).
- 2 "Moskovskii kongress IKSIDA", *Tekhnicheskaja estetika* vol. 11, no.143 (1975): 2.
- 3 Svenska Slöjdföreningen (SSF), the Swedish Slöjd Association, a non-profit organization initiated for the protection and development of craft (in Swedish "slöjd"). Founded in 1845, it was one of the first associations of its kind. On behalf of the Swedish Government, SSF was responsible for all the important art and industrial exhibitions from then on. In 1976, its name was changed to Svensk Form [Swedish Form].
- 4 The part of Arthur Hald's archive which includes his ICSID '75 Moscow congress registration kit with items, booklets, tickets and invitations, was handed to Arkiv Svensk Form by his wife, design historian Hedvig Hedqvist. Arkiv Svensk Form, Centrum för Näringslivshistoria, Stockholm: F9A vol 2: "ICSID Kongress Moskva 1975".
- 5 In 2015, ICSID changed its name to World Design Organization (WDO), see WDO homepage <https://www.idsa.org/news/design-news/icsid-becomes-wdo>, accessed December 14, 2021.
- 6 Count Sigvard Bernadotte (formerly prince but lost his title due to marriage to a commoner) was the second son of the future King Gustav VI Adolf and Princess Margaret, granddaughter of Britain's Queen Victoria. Bernadotte learned silversmithing with George Jensen in Copenhagen. In 1950, with Danish architect Acton Bjørn, he started Bernadotte & Bjørn Industrial Design A/S.
- 7 "ICSID Paris Congress, UNESCO headquarters, June 1963", Arkiv Svensk Form, Centrum för Näringslivshistoria, Stockholm: F 9A vol 1.
- 8 Noteworthy is that the exact same formulation is still used at the website of WDO (the ICSID changed its name to World Design Organization in 2017). See: <https://wdo.org/about/history/> Accessed October 10, 2021, and April 23, 2022.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Monica Boman "Vad är ICSID?" [ What does ICSID stand for?], *Form* no. 1 (1976): 12.
- 11 This text emanates from the project "Observer and Observed in Soviet State Design Institutes, 1960s–90", which I worked on as principal investigator at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (MPIWG) initially founded by them, then by the Swedish Research Council (VR) and then again by MPIWG, 2005–2011. At that stage of my research I focused on the Soviet material, where I found out that the ICSID '75 Moscow congress had at all taken place. In my subsequent project (financed by The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (RJ) 2012–2013), I shifted focus on the Cold War design to the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), Finland, Sweden and East Germany. My research projects on Cold War design in the USSR were initiated by me and conducted by myself as principal investigator.
- 12 There is no mention of the Soviet Union becoming an ICSID member, or of the Moscow congress in 1975, either on the WDO homepage <https://wdo.org/about/history/> retrieved October 10, 2021, and April 23, 2022, or the Wikipedia-page on ICSID [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_Council\\_of\\_Societies\\_of\\_Industrial\\_Design](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Council_of_Societies_of_Industrial_Design). Accessed October 10, 2010, and April 23, 2022. Stockholm, Venice, Paris, Montreal. Slovenia, Scotland, Taiwan, Canada, Australia, Kyoto and London are mentioned as hosts for the event, but not Moscow.

- 13 *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika* made a special issue celebrating the WWII 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a tank, a “fighting machine” (*boevaia mashina*), on the cover: “A symbol of the victory over the fascists 30 years ago”, see *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika* 05/137 (1975): cover and page 1. The KV-85 heavy tank, named after Kliment Voroshilov, was made in Chelyabinsk Tractor Plant founded in 1933, during the second five-year plan.
- 14 For more on VNIITE, see for example following articles by Margareta Tillberg: “Collaborative Design: The Electric Industry in Soviet Russia 1973–79”, in *Focused. Swiss Design Network (SDN)*, ed. Bern: SDN. (2008): 233–253; “Made in the USSR. Design of electronic/electrical systems in the Soviet Union from Khrushchev’s thaw to Gorbachev’s perestroika”, *Baltic Worlds*, vol 3, no. 2, June (2010): 34–40; “Design institute VNIITE closes its doors”, *Baltic Worlds* vol. 6, no. 2 (2013): 56; “Die technische Ästhetik und die unerschöpfliche Mensch-Maschine als sowjetisches Designprodukt der 1960er bis 1970er Jahre”, in *Helden am Ende. Erschöpfungszustände in der Kunst des Sozialismus*. eds. Monica Rütters and Alexandra Köhring. Campus-Verlag: Frankfurt/M, New York. (2014): 157–181.
- 15 In the author’s interviews with VNIITE director Yuri Soloviev (2007–2013), he repeatedly talked about the disagreements he experienced with the powerful representatives from the heavy industry; how he had to “sell” the ideas of a more “modern way” to see the factory laborer. VNIITE vice director Vladimir Munipov confirmed (we met in Moscow for interviews on a regular basis 2007–2012) that to the administrators whose task it was to implement ideas in real life, the “human factor” was nothing but a nuisance, i.e., the workers were simply “moaning” about better conditions, to put it bluntly, when the forced labour of GULAG prisoners had proven that there was a chance to survive even quite harsh conditions. For more details on the gap between VNIITE’s wishful ideas and the quite brutal reality; the ineffective methods and inability for defining the core of the problem thus not being able to find a solution, I show by closely observing and analysing a few images from *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika*, see Margareta Tillberg, “Die technische Ästhetik und die unerschöpfliche Mensch-Maschine als sowjetisches Designprodukt der 1960er bis 1970er Jahre”, in *Helden am Ende. Erschöpfungszustände in der Kunst des Sozialismus*. eds. Monica Rütters and Alexandra Köhring. Campus-Verlag: Frankfurt/M, New York. (2014): 157–181.
- 16 Thanks to Lennart Lindkvist, for sharing this information (e-mail contact with author April-June 2014).
- 17 S.A. Silvestrova, “Personalnaia vystavka Timo Sarpanevy” [Personal exhibition of Timo Sarpaneva], *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika* vol 12, no. 132 (1974): 6–7, and S.A. Silvestrova VNIITE, “Timo Sarpaneva: Tvorcheskii portret” [Timo Sarpaneva: Portrait of the artist] 11/131 (1974): 15–18.
- 18 *Arkhitektura SSSR 1917–1987. Posviaschaetsia 70-letiiu Velikogo Oktiabria*. Eds. V.I. Baldin, V.N. Belousov, Yu. P. Bocharov, et. al. Moskva: Stroyizdat 1987: 270.
- 19 Reso travel agency participation list for *ICSID ’75 Moscow*. Arkiv Svensk Form, Centrum för Näringslivshistoria, Stockholm: F9A vol 2. “ICSID Kongress Moskva 1975”.
- 20 For the information of the Swedish delegation to *ICSID ’75 Moscow* given here (only a few of all the forty-six who went are mentioned here) numerous internet sources were used, personal interviews as well as telephone interviews made; books and articles on Swedish design consulted; as well as items, booklets, tickets and invitations from *ICSID ’75 Moscow* congress registration kit from Arkiv Svensk Form, Centrum för Näringslivshistoria, Stockholm: F9A Vol 2: “ICSID Kongress Moskva 1975”.
- 21 Jack Ränge, “Vi spränger mot himlen, med järmbetong” [We blow against the sky, with reinforced concrete], *Form* no. 1 (1976): 8
- 22 Recommended further reading: Anne Applebaum, *GULAG: A History of the Soviet Camps*, (Doubleday, 2003).
- 23 “Referativnaia informatsiia. Bytovye izdeliia dlia invalidov (Shvetsiia)”, *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika* 10/130 (1974): 30.
- 24 D.M. Gvishiani, “Dizain na sluzhbe cheloveka i obschestva. Vstuplenie D.M. Gvishiani IX kongressa IKSIDA” [Design in the service of the people and society. Opening Address by D.M.Gvishiani for the Ninth ICSID Congress], *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika* 11/143 (1975): 2–4.
- 25 For the man-machine constellation in Soviet industry from a design history perspective, see Margareta Tillberg, „Die technische Ästhetik und die unerschöpfliche Mensch-Maschine als sowjetisches Designprodukt der 1960er bis 1970er Jahre“, in *Helden am Ende. Erschöpfungszustände in der Kunst des Sozialismus*. eds. Monica Rütters and Alexandra Köhring. (Campus-Verlag: Frankfurt/M, New York 2014): 157–181.
- 26 D.M. Gvishiani, “Dizain na sluzhbe cheloveka i obschestva.” [Design in the service of the people and society], *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika* 11/143 (1975): 4.
- 27 Yu. B. Soloviev, “Dizain na sluzhbe obschestva” [Design in the service of society], *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika* vol. 12 no. 144 (1975): 11.
- 28 Vladimir Shlapentokh, *A Normal Totalitarian Society: How the Soviet Union Functioned and How It Collapsed*. (New York, 2001): 34.
- 29 Shlapentokh, *A Normal Totalitarian*: 106.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 The Novocherkassk massacre was kept secret until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, see historian Tatyana P. Bocharova, *Novocherkassk: krovavyi polden’* [the Bloody Noon]. (Rostov: Izd. Rostovskii universitet: 2002).
- 32 Evgenii Krinko et. al: “The Don and Kuban Regions During Famine: The Authorities, the Cossacks, and the Church in 1921–1922 and 1932–1933”, *Nationality Papers* vol. 48 no. 3 (2020): 569–584, quote from page 573.
- 33 For the ideology of color in USSR painting, see for example Margareta Tillberg *Coloured Universe and the Russian-Avantgarde*, chapter “Contemporary Voices in the USSR” where the analysis from the *Bol’shaia Sovetskaiia Entsiklopedia* [The Large Soviet Encyclopaedia], and marxist literature critic Vladimir Friche’s *Sotsiologiia iskusstva* [Sociology of art] in three editions (1926, 1929, 1930) boils down to “happy ‘collective’ reds and yellows” as expressions of “praise for the communist masses”, quote from page 251.
- 34 See for example V.M. Munipov, “Dizain i nauka” [Design and science], *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika* vol. 10, no.142 (1975): 1–4.
- 35 The topic of ergonomics and disability design is one of the major underlying issues for my entire research. The history of disability design is a growing field of interest internationally.
- 36 Yu. B. Soloviev *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika* vol. 12 no. 144 (1975): 11; and D. M. Gvishiani *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika* 11/143 (1975): 2–3.
- 37 These are the headings as given in the official program. Today, the term “handicapped” is obsolete, the preferred term is “disabled”.
- 38 Everyone I interviewed in connection with my VNIITE project, confirm this.
- 39 Lasse Brunnström, *Svensk designhistoria* (Stockholm: Raster, 2010) in English as Lasse Brunnström, *Swedish Design History* (London: Bloomsbury 2018).
- 40 According to author interviews with Maria Benktzon (in person) and Lennart Lindkvist (telephone and e-mail) April to June 2014. In the official, printed programme, however, neither the names of Maria Benktzon, Sven-Eric Juhlin nor Henrik Wahlforss can be found, only that of Torsten Dahlin, as “F. Dalin”.
- 41 Handikappinstitutet [the Institute for the Disabled], then changed names to Hjälpmedelsinstitutet [The Institute for Tools and Aid] a state financed institute that was phased out in 2013 and privatised as Hjälpmedelcentrum Sverige (HMC Sweden).
- 42 A. S. Kozlov, architect, VNIITE: “Rol’ nauchnogo znaniia v razvitiu dizajna”, [The role of scientific knowledge in the development of design] *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika* vol 7, no.139 (1975): 1–3.

- 43 Author interview with Alexei Kozlov, Moscow, April-June 2014 (e-mail).
- 44 The September issue of *Tekhnicheskaja estetika* was printed in 29 570 copies, and for October, November and December it was issued in 29 000 copies, according to the journal's own colophon
- 45 Author's interviews with Maria Benktzon, Stockholm, April-June 2014.
- 46 V. I. Puzanov: "Tvorcheskii portret: Dmitrii Azrikan [Portrait of the Artist: Dmitry Azrikan]", *Tekhnicheskaja estetika* vol. 9 no. 141 (1975): 10–13. Thanks to his abilities and skills, Azrikan was eventually given the opportunity to make suggestions as to how to rationalize the whole Soviet electricity/electronics industry, see Margareta Tillberg: "Collaborative Design: The Electric Industry in Soviet Russia 1973-79", in *Focused. Swiss Design Network (SDN)*, ed. Bern: SDN. (2008): 233–253; and Margareta Tillberg "Made in the USSR. Design of electronic/electrical systems in the Soviet Union from Khrushchev's thaw to Gorbachev's perestroika", *Baltic Worlds*, vol 3, no. 2, June (2010): 34–40.
- 47 Author's interviews with Svetlana Silvestrova, Chicago, Ill. US, 24–28 November 2008. That the programme was censored and changed in the very last moment, has been confirmed by all VNIITE staff members I have interviewed (all in person), amongst those included in this article: Dmitry Azrikan, Yuri Soloviev, Yuri Reshetnikov.
- 48 Author's interviews with Yuri Soloviev were conducted between 2007–2013. With the exception of the last phone-call in September 2013, the interviews were carried out in person, in Moscow.
- 49 Author interview with Svetlana Silvestrova.
- 50 Editorial, "IKSID-75. Moskovskii kongress IKSIDA", *Tekhnicheskaja estetika* 11/143 (1975): 2.
- 51 Editorial, "Na voprosy 'Tekhnicheskoi estetiki' otvetchaiut: Torsten Dalin" [Torsten Dahlin answers questions from Technical Aesthetics], *Tekhnicheskaja estetika* 11/143 (1975): 8.
- 52 "Design & politik: ICSID-kongressen i Moskva: Den uteblivna dialogen. [The dialogue that never came to be] Text and photo by Monica Boman, editor-in-chief, *Form* no. 1 (1976): 9.
- 53 Monica Boman, "Design & politik: Rapport om formgivning i Sovjet" [Design & Politics: Report on formgiving in the Soviet Union], *Form* 1 (1976): 3–5, quote from page 4.
- 54 Monica Boman, "Design & politik: ICSID-kongressen i Moskva: Handikapp och u-landsproblem" [Design & Politics: The ICSID-Congress in Moscow: Disability and poor countries' problems], *Form* no. 1 (1976): 11.
- 55 Monica Boman, *Form* nr 1/1976:10.
- 56 Monica Boman, 'Design & politik: ICSID-kongressen i Moskva: Den uteblivna dialogen' [Design & Politics: The ICSID-Congress in Moscow: The dialogue that never came to be], *Form* no. 1 (1976): 9–11.
- 57 Jack Ränge, "Vi spränger mot himlen, med järnbetong", [We blow against the sky, with reinforced concrete], *Form* no. 1 (1976): 8.
- 58 Fredrik Wildhagen and Jan Trädgårdh, "Design à la Stroganoff", *Form* no. 1 (1976): 6–7.
- 59 Maria Benktzon: "Henrik Wahlforss 1949–2016", *Dagens Nyheter* 2016-01-26.
- 60 My first contact with Dmitry Azrikan was in February 2008, when I was invited for a keynote lecture with the topic "collaboration design", and thought that Azrikan's projects might be interesting for a wider audience to learn more about. I had already read about some of his projects in *Tekhnicheskaja estetika*, and my investigations on design in the Soviet Union had shown that Azrikan was labelled "Designer No 1" in the Soviet Union. (Nevertheless, he emigrated to the US, when the big design center to be built very centrally in Moscow to stimulate industrial production, signed by the mayor of Moscow, and president of Russia Boris Yeltsin, came to nothing.) I took my courage and contacted Dmitry Azrikan, and we have been in contact ever since: Keynote Margareta Tillberg for Swiss Design Network 4th International Symposium. Bern, May 2008, resulting in the publication "Collaborative Design: The Electric Industry in Soviet Russia 1973-79", in *Focused. Swiss Design Network (SDN)*, ed. Bern: SDN. (2008): 233–253.
- 61 E-mail correspondence between author (in Stockholm) and Dmitry Azrikan and Svetlana Silvestrova (in Chicago Ill. US), concretely on the topic ICSID '75 Moscow, April 12–24, 2022.
- 62 The author of this article had a break-in to her home a few years ago, where very important research material was stolen, that I collected and preliminary analyzed 2005–2015. Of course, I have realized the importance of seizing the moment and to maintaining momentum for a project like this, in order to be ahead of the Russian authorities. However, since I started to publish on this topic the difficulties that I met have successively increased, with the result that I have gone silent. Until now.
- 63 Original message sent via e-mail April 24, 2022, to the author: И да, конечно мы были рады награждению Сахарова! Хотя во ВНИИТЭ эта тема не обсуждалась. Слишком много стучащей.
- 64 At least until 2013 when it was dissolved along with numerous other research institutes and cultural institutions that lost their premises due to their attractive locations and high market value, see Margareta Tillberg, "Design Institute VNIITE closes its doors", *Baltic Worlds* vol. 6, no. 2 (2013): 56.
- 65 Author's telephone interview with Yuri B. Soloviev, September 2013. See further Margareta Tillberg, "Design institute VNIITE closes its doors", *Baltic Worlds* vol. 6, no. 2 (2013): 56.
- 66 Author's e-mail correspondence with Dmitry Azrikan, April 24, 2022.
- 67 "This is a dream come true for a researcher", was my feeling as I started research project at CBEES in 2012, see Stina Loman "Högt tryck på forskarskolan", [High Pressure on the Graduate School] in *MoA: en verksamhetsberättelse för Södertörns Högskola*, [An Annual Report from Södertörn University] May 2012: 18–19. For English, see additionally *CBEES Newsletter* Issue 1–2012, for a short presentation of my externally financed project.
- 68 A lot of probably even general interest could be said for example about Great Britain, the US, Japan, Mexico and Spain, etc. in relation to the Soviet relations with ICSID, a topic that needs more research, however. I did manage to publish a book chapter on state design and the relations between East Berlin and Moscow, including interviews with the design people as close to the very political top as you can possibly get; Martin Kelm was accountable directly to Erich Honecker, communist leader in East Germany 1971–1989, and Yuri Borisovich Soloviev to the powerful Gosplan and GKNT, see Margareta Tillberg, "Martin Kelm: DDR, Moskau und die Designszene innerhalb des Ostblocks", in *Gutes Design – Martin Kelm und die Designförderung der DDR*, eds. Christian Wölfel, Sylvia Wölfel & Jens Krzywinski. Dresden: Verlag Thelem (2014): 218–233. In a coming version, I include the story of how the editors and participants of the publication, tried to change my text to fit their version of past events. My reaction? "With due respect, but my responsibility as a historian is to render the facts and the course of history as truthfully as possible. My absolute priority and responsibility is to the future reader, not to you." This was one of many peculiar 'details' I faced working with interviewees who were used to be obeyed, no matter what.
- 69 The international workshops that were planned for Södertörn University within the above-mentioned project never took place since the project was prematurely aborted by Södertörn University.
- 70 For example, well-designed land-mines disguised with soft cheerfully colored materials lure little children to pick them up in the belief they are toys or candy. This, and many more different perspectives as to what is "good design", were discussed at the conference *Design for War and Peace*, organized by the Design History Society in Oxford 2014. In this case, the opposite of "good" is not "bad" – but evil.



Final exhibition of the  
"Sound Relief" online  
art laboratory.

# FEMINIST TRANSLOCALITIES

Decolonial and anti-racist  
feminisms in Russia and beyond

by **Alexandra Biktimirova**  
& **Victoria Kravtsova**

## abstract

This article describes the current developments of feminist discourses and activism in Russia, as well as in the former USSR in general, towards inclusion of more intersectional perspectives: antiracist, disabled and trans\*/non-binary. It reviews the contemporary feminist movement in Russia, provides some examples of intersectional projects and focuses on *Feminist Translocalities* – a project based jointly in the former USSR and Germany, as part of which an exhibition about intersectionality in the histories of these countries travelled across Russia. Describing this and other activities within the *Feminist Translocalities* project and focusing on anti-racism as a vector of the development of the feminist movement in Russia, the article shows that it is shifting towards more attention to other discriminations, thus also encouraging a similar trend in the broader society.

**KEY WORDS:** Feminism, gender, decolonization, racism, post-Soviet.

Translocalities are dots flickering on the map, the opposition of the hierarchy of the center and the periphery, the formation of a working network connected by a common context, the past and, possibly, the future. Fluid, rigid, unstable, in the process/processes, in transition and becoming, spreading forces, searching for new and old meanings. Borders become bridges between worlds, points of connection by coincidence, not obstacles. This is where the possibility of (re)existence arises. A change of place or location is an opportunity to coexist in two spaces at the same time. So cultural processes move, change, give a new ground for thinking and a field for joint work.

*(curator of the "Feminist Translocalities" exhibition in Kazan)*

In his dissertation about grassroots feminism<sup>1</sup> in Russia, Vanya Solovei points out that the country is "better known for conservative and neopatriarchal policies; feminism, according to a widely held notion, hardly has a place there".<sup>2</sup> The same can be said about the former USSR in general. Scholars either assume that there is no feminism in the region or address

only “specific feminist mobilizations”,<sup>3</sup> focusing on such visible cases as *Femen* or *Pussy Riot*. This article aims to counter these misconceptions and show that there are strong grassroots feminist movements in Russia, as well as in other parts of the former USSR, and all of them are becoming more aware of the need to look at other logics of discrimination. In all countries of the former USSR, individuals and activist groups are increasing the visibility of debates on intersectionality,<sup>4</sup> decolonization<sup>5</sup> and antiracism. Even in Russia, despite the general hostility towards discussions about racism and coloniality in a society filled by neo-imperialist ambitions that have revealed themselves to the fullest in the current attack on Ukraine, feminist activists are raising voices to make society more sensitive towards intersecting discriminations. In this article we look at the developments in the contemporary feminist movement which have not yet acquired their place in the academic literature, using the example of *Feminist Translocalities* – a project network we are ourselves part of. This article is a self-reflection.

We refer to the contexts of different post-Soviet states, as feminist debates are not limited to a single country of the former USSR but are happening across the region – this is connected to the presence of a common Russian-language space and similar challenges. However, it would also be wrong to homogenize the former USSR – states have different trajectories in the development of their feminist communities, which depend on their economic and political conditions. For instance, the feminist community in Ukraine and the ways it builds connections has been greatly affected by the annexation of Crimea and the start of the war in Donbass in 2014 and has transformed even more with the full-scale intervention of Russia in 2022. Though we mention research done in the other countries, the main focus of this article is Russia, home to both its authors – a country that is trying to become “as ‘white’ as possible”,<sup>6</sup> thus marking even its own citizens as external to the nation and “always migrants”.<sup>7</sup> This “not-quite-Western, not-quite-capitalist”<sup>8</sup> racialized empire experiences the desire “to get revenge for the lost battle with the Western modernity”<sup>9</sup> and tries to gather back together the now independent territories by economic coercion and war. The policies of Moscow affect relations within feminist networks, leading to polarization of activists from Russia and the countries that suffer from the actions of its government. Russian activists are also prone to reproduction of the colonial and imperialist logics of their state. We as authors socialized in this country are aware of our positionality and try to be as reflexive as possible. By referring to our colleagues from other countries from the former USSR we want to give due respect to their contributions to the development of feminist activism and research. We want the reader to decenter feminism in Russia and look at it as shaped by the knowledge produced on formerly colonized or still colonized land. However, we also believe that there might be points where we have not been reflex-

ive enough of our positionalities and the context we write about. We ask the readers to excuse us for that.

**THIS ARTICLE MENTIONS** other intersectional perspectives, like that of persons with disabilities, but focuses on the emerging field of antiracism in Russia. Describing the latest developments in the local feminist movements, it contributes to the literature on feminist discourses in Russia, as well as in Eastern European and Central Asian regions. We first review the existing literature on feminism in Russia, also making reference to writings from the other parts of the former USSR. After that, we deal with the feminist movement in Russia, which Solovei defines as “a grassroots network of loosely connected individuals and groups identifying as feminist and maintaining contact with each other”.<sup>10</sup>

This movement “consists of informal, unstable collectives that easily dissolve and reemerge in new constellations”.<sup>11</sup> Next, we focus on how racism is discussed in Russia. Then we describe *Feminist Translocalities* – a project, as well as the exhibition of that name that travelled through Russia in 2021–2022. We write about the topics and authors represented within the project and thus demarcate the field of the contemporary grassroots feminist movement in Russia. Lastly, we discuss the most recent activities and plans of the

project relating to articulating ways to speak about race and racism in the former USSR.

This article is based on participant observation of both authors as active participants of the Russian feminist movement. The authors are themselves participants in the project described in the article, so their analysis and interpretation of it comes from the inside and inevitably contains bias.

## Literature review

In this part of the article we briefly review the literature on feminism in the former USSR and mark the gaps we see in it. Right now, we are witnessing “an increasing scholarly interest”<sup>12</sup> for feminism in the former USSR – also from decolonial and queer perspectives.<sup>13</sup> However, as Vanya Solovei believes, “it may be premature to think of these studies as forming a common field of academic inquiry”.<sup>14</sup> The existing scholarship<sup>15</sup> reflects the general lack of awareness of the specificities of the situation in the region, focusing more on Russia than on other countries and putting an emphasis on the state and its policies as the main frame of reference.<sup>16</sup> The second category is works that focus on specific feminist mobilizations and “make little to no reference to the existence of a more encompassing feminist movement”.<sup>17</sup> The cases analyzed in them are also the most visible, like *Pussy Riot* in Russia or *Femen* in Ukraine.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, separate feminist campaigns are always described as “new kind of activism”, erasing the histories before them.<sup>19</sup> A reader unfamiliar with the local context, only having access to these studies, would see feminist movements in the former USSR as weak, recent

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*Feminist Translocalities* in Novosibirsk.



*Feminist Translocalities* in Kazan.

and fragmented. We agree with Katharina Wiedlack that such a depiction “links feminism to Western modernity and progress, reviving a cold-war East/West dichotomy”<sup>20</sup> and supports the global structures of inequality by fueling the so-called “lag discourse”,<sup>21</sup> where non-Western feminists perceive themselves and their homeland as unable to ever “catch up” with the “West” in terms of equality.

**THE LAST IMPRESSION** one can get from existing studies is one of feminism as a movement of the privileged few.<sup>22</sup> More recent research by Olga Sasunkevich demonstrates that it might have been true for the 1990s, but not now, when the movement has grown and broadened its agenda, becoming more sensitive to the interests of marginalized groups.<sup>23</sup> Solovei agrees with her: the feminist movement is “neither elite nor homogeneous”.<sup>24</sup> Another aspect that is observed in some publications is conflicts between feminists – for instance, between activists who identify as either radical or intersectional. Solovei believes that this “major ideological division” in the feminist scene has been present since around 2013, when a trans\* feminist perspective was articulated by Yana Kirey-Sitnikova.<sup>25</sup> While in the “West” this debate is associated with waves of feminism, in the former USSR these strands of feminism appeared simultaneously.<sup>26</sup> Like the inclusion of trans\* persons, other logics of discrimination that intersectional feminism is concerned with have not yet received much attention from the scholarly community. However, the field is growing – especially in recent years. This article is another contribution.

The need to look beyond just gender, whiteness and ability in feminist scholarship and activism has been articulated at least since the early 2000s, when Madina Tlostanova<sup>27</sup> and Svetlana Gorshenina<sup>28</sup> raised debates about decolonization of feminism(s) in the former USSR. Yulia Gradska<sup>29</sup> revealed the colonial character of the Soviet policies towards non-white women of the Empire, *natsionalki*.

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Svetlana Peshkova<sup>30</sup> described the situation of women in Uzbekistan, who deny the colonial gaze of Western feminism, showing the complexity of their subjectivities. Olya Reznikova<sup>31</sup> published her research with feminists in the North Caucasus, highlighting their sensitivity to the different privileges they and Russian activists have. Debates about racism are mentioned by Perheentupa,<sup>32</sup> who argued that intersectionality was reserved for privileged feminists who had time to educate themselves. Vanya Solovei demonstrated how Kazakhstani feminists problematize the lack of solidarity from Russian activists.<sup>33</sup> He also criticized the arrogant attitude of the feminists from Moscow and St. Petersburg towards activists from “the regions” and their “saverist” approach to Muslim women.<sup>34</sup> Victoria Kravtsova and Anna Engelhardt wrote about the contemporary definitions of “decolonization” in relation to feminism.<sup>35</sup> Lana Uzarashvili<sup>36</sup> and Aleksandra Biktimirova<sup>37</sup> published articles about non-white feminisms in Russian media, emphasizing the fact that talking about race and colonialism is indeed possible in the context of the former USSR.

Research on decolonization of feminism in Russia is influenced and informed by the work done outside of Russia. For instance, in Ukraine, postcolonial research has been present since the late 1990s. In recent years *The Combahee River Collective Manifesto*<sup>38</sup> was translated into Russian and Ukrainian by Tatsiana Schurko and Lesia Pagulich and Mariam Agamyan<sup>39</sup> published statements on racism in the former USSR. Maria Mayerchuk and Olga Plakhotnik<sup>40</sup> created the concept of “uneventful” feminism, which combines “anti-nationalist and anti-colonial agendas, including feminist critique of racism, homophobia, transphobia, and cisheterosexism”.<sup>41</sup> A collective of scholars from Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have criticized the way they are positioned against “Western” and “Russian” feminists.<sup>42</sup> These activists-researchers inspired the authors of this article to do the *Feminist Translocalities* project and are just few examples from the big list of authors who discuss feminism in relation to



*Feminist Translocalities* in Kaliningrad.

decolonization and antiracism in the former USSR. The field is constantly growing and this article is a contribution to it. In the next part of the article we focus on one of the vectors of the development of the feminist movement in Russia – criticism and analysis of the racism and xenophobia in society.

### Talking about racism in Russia

In order to describe the context in which *Feminist Translocalities* was created, we need to focus on the (ir)reflexivity of the questions of racism in the Russian society. The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, has again revealed the post-Soviet (post)colonial structures still influencing the lives of people in all states of the former USSR. In the field of international relations, we have witnessed such countries as Kazakhstan, Georgia or Kyrgyzstan staying neutral or even supporting Russia's actions due to the lingering dependency they have on its resources. Inside of Russia, an unexpected surge of national movements has happened – activists from different regions have condemned war from a decolonial perspective and articulated the need to differentiate between them and ethnic Russians. Large-scale immigration of Russians to the countries of South Caucasus and Central Asia has also served as trigger for a new wave of Russian chauvinism and racism, with Russians wondering why local people do not speak Russian and completely ignoring the independent histories of the places that welcome them.

The war thus again confirmed the need to talk more about the fact that Russian Empire and USSR have a long history of colonization of neighboring land and racialization of non-Russian populations. By now, “a strong body of research accumulates rich historical evidence and compelling analyses of Russian coloniality”.<sup>43</sup> However, as Shchurko and Pagulich<sup>44</sup> note, the post-Soviet space is rarely analyzed in the context of colonialism and imperialism and seems to be “raceless”. Even “the word race is rarely pronounced, even though the practices of racism are instrumental in nation construction”.<sup>45</sup> Sociological research on Russia also does not use race as a category.<sup>46</sup> Researchers from Eastern Europe, such as Miglena Todorova (2006) or Catherine Baker (2018), have demonstrated that the same is present



Round table devoted to the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First Independent Women's forum in Dubna.

in the discussions about the Balkans – while Eurocentrism is problematized, race remains invisible.<sup>47</sup> As Baker puts it, there is a “largely unexamined assumption that race is something that happens in the postcolonial West and ethnicity is something that happens in the Balkans.”<sup>48</sup>

AS THE EXAMPLES of the authors above prove, those who write about race in the post-socialist context are researchers who share a feminist perspective. Thus, discussions about racism in the region are closely interlinked with feminist research and activism, which has inspired *Feminist Translocalities* – a project that, among other things, tries to understand the mechanisms of racialization and develop categories necessary to discuss race in the region. Criticizing racism and xenophobia in the countries of the former USSR, one often hears arguments about the impossibility of transferring the US-American experience to the local ground. Opponents of antiracist activists criticize them for merely “importing” ideas from the West. This is similar to what is being said about feminists, as mentioned in the introduction to the article. So for us, both feminist and anti-racist work discussing local terminology. For instance, defining whiteness and indigeneity is relevant for this article. Whiteness we perceive as a spectrum, in which white people of Russian origin, with Russian citizenship and from big cities of the country are the most privileged in the region. Those of them who support the Russian ethno-national project presents themselves as “true Europeans” and claim whiteness, for instance, through articulating political homophobia.<sup>49</sup> They are well-networked with the right in Europe and receive support from them.<sup>50</sup> Indigeneity is, at the same time, defined through the suppression of language and culture, be described as indigenous if we use these instruments of colonization. Thus, all peoples of the former USSR other than ethnic Russians can be described as indigenous if we use the definition above.

Grassroots initiatives and activists who represent regional groups and have a non-Russian/indigenous background lack visibility both within the country and internationally. As a series of interviews recently conducted by the author of this article has

proven, there is still no unified opinion on what definitions and categories to use to discuss the topic – at least, in Russian.<sup>51</sup> For instance, while Russia is characterized by imperialism and the advancement of the Russian population, other Slavic peoples of the former USSR, such as Belarusians or Ukrainians, also have more privileges than those who are not “Russian-passing” – a term offered by our interlocutors to describe a person who looks similar to Russians and will not be recognized as the “Other” until their accent, religion, city of origin etc. is revealed (this applies to, for instance, some Mari, Udmurt or Komi people). Representatives of non-Slavic peoples, such as Tatars or many of the groups inhabiting the North Caucasus, can also sometimes have a “Russian” pass and not face discrimination until their actual identity is disclosed by their name or other markers. Thus, it becomes hard to apply the category “people of color” in the same way it is done in the West.

As Salem and Thompson<sup>52</sup> argue, the US-centered approach to racism is unproductive in Europe, as some forms of it will remain uncovered. For instance, in Germany attention must be paid to the role of faith and religion<sup>53</sup> and the local history of concepts of *Klasse* and *Rasse*.<sup>54</sup> Outside of the “West” US-American categories also do not work – like in India, where the caste system must be taken into account.<sup>55</sup> As Lana Uzarashvili writes, “It is clear that colonial and racist regimes are different, and discrimination against Black people in America is different from that directed at them and other non-whites in Russia. However, the way people are categorized in empires shows similarities”.<sup>56</sup> Even though Eastern Europeans are denied “whiteness” in Northern and Western Europe,<sup>57</sup> locally they are still white. The discrimination against them is different from racism and sometimes, like in the case of Russians, even makes their claims to “whiteness” stronger.

**THE GROUPS THAT** face racism everywhere in the world – “indigenous people, Roma people, migrants and ethnic and religious minorities caught in inter-imperial conflicts”<sup>58</sup> – are also racialized in the former USSR. Also, Black people, regardless of their background, are discriminated against in all post-Soviet countries. There are also specific forms of racism connected to the Russian and Soviet history. Racialization has different degrees, depending on each individual’s country of origin, appearance, name, and knowledge of Russian. In Russia, a significant part of its local population – namely, indigenous peoples of the Volga-Ural region and North Caucasus, Siberia, the Far East and the North – also face discrimination, especially when they come to Central Russia from their regions. For instance, people from North and South Caucasus, described as “white” in the US, are called “Black” by local Slavic populations. North Caucasians, as well as people from Central Asia, face the most hostility in such cities as Moscow or Saint-Petersburg.

The complex ways of racialization in the former USSR require more attention from the scholarly community. Activists of the *Feminist Translocalities* project try to understand how racism works locally and create categories to describe it. This is the first and the most crucial focus of the project right now, as the war in Ukraine has once again demonstrated the urgency of the

need to debunk Russian racism and reveal it to supporters of Russia for instance, among the left in Europe and the US. The project, which consists of activists and researchers, mobilizes its resources to conduct an intersectional analysis of the Russian society. In the next chapter we describe the context of the feminist movement in the country and then link it to the decolonial and antiracist critique brought about by the *Feminist Translocalities* Project.

## Feminism in contemporary Russia

The history of the contemporary feminist movement, according to Vanya Solovei, begins in early 2000s. In the 1970s and 1980s, “an independent feminist movement emerged among dissidents opposing the Soviet regime”.<sup>59</sup> This is also when Western feminist texts first began to be “read, translated, and disseminated”<sup>60</sup> in Russia. In the 1990s, a number of women’s rights and LGB-TIQ\* NGOs emerged in the country with financial support from US-American, European and international organizations and foundations, and the first scholars began to get acquainted with the field of gender studies at conferences and through personal contacts.<sup>61</sup> Solovei demonstrates “Russian and Eastern European feminists’ agency in interacting with Western theories” and “how Western feminists have, in turn, benefited from Russian and Eastern European thought and critique”.<sup>62</sup> However, the opponents of feminists continue to use the rhetoric of them “betraying Russia for Western money” to discredit activists. This is a part of the general trend to label everything which questions gender binary and heterosexuality as “Western influence”. Jennifer Suchland calls this trend “sexual ‘Cold War’”.<sup>63</sup>

From the 2000s on, it is possible to speak about a feminist movement – “a grassroots network of loosely connected individuals and groups identifying as feminist and maintaining contact with each other”.<sup>64</sup> This movement does not have support either from the state, or from the mainstream opposition (for instance, Alexey Navalny is known for making jokes about feminists).<sup>65</sup> The position of men has strengthened in the political and economic spheres and a new ideal of masculinity is formed that supports existing power structures.<sup>66</sup> Women are encouraged to reproduce by the financial incentive of the so-called “maternity capital”.<sup>67</sup> Heterosexuality is promoted by the state, which has close ties with the Orthodox church – since 2013 there is a law that prohibits the “propaganda of non-traditional values among minors” that allows the police to arrest individual activists and groups. Not all feminists are directly affected by the law, but it also serves as an instrument against them. For example, the definition of a play about gender stereotypes as “propaganda” was one of the reasons behind the case of Yulia Tsvetkova, who has been on trial for several years for posting body positive content on social media. The heterosexual nuclear family model is promoted as a basis for the Russian nation<sup>68</sup> and those who do not comply are at risk of being arrested, fined or even jailed. In 2021, many media activists and feminists faced stalking, threats and intimidation. Some people receive insults; addresses and personal data are being disseminated by the ultra-right activists through their channels.<sup>69</sup> The repressions are getting more intense: while



only two years ago it was possible to organize pickets and demonstrations without having issues with the police, in 2020–2021 activists were detained for any kind of peaceful protest, including single-person pickets.

**NEVERTHELESS, THE FEMINIST** movement in Russia is growing and developing. The main activities of feminist activists and groups are (self-)education, assistance to victims of violence, individual blogs and websites, feminist festivals, free psychological assistance to women and LGBTIQ\*, lectures and seminars, excursions to cities and street interventions to criticize sexism and make women's history visible. In a lot of cities feminist initiatives have formed their own communities – for instance, in Kaliningrad there is *Feminitiv*,<sup>70</sup> in Kazan, *FemKyzlar*,<sup>71</sup> in Ulan-Ude, *YaSvoboda*.<sup>72</sup> In Ufa, Syktyvkar and Moscow feminist festivals are held every year. The main activities of the feminist movement, however, happen online. Nika Vodwood makes a YouTube blog, Mira Tai and Lolja Nordic are active on Instagram, Anna Engelhardt, Sasha Shestakova and a number of other activists are on Telegram. There are feminist podcasts like *Propaganda Feminisma*<sup>73</sup> and *FemTalks*.<sup>74</sup> Right now, the Tiktok community is also growing. Above we have provided examples of intersectional feminists – however, TERFs and right-wing feminists are also active online.

In recent years, feminists have also gained a significant presence in art. There are a lot of individual artists working with feminist topics, as well as collectives, such as *Naden'ka* from Omsk or ШШШШШ (ShShSh) from Moscow. There are online platforms for publishing feminist theory and literature, the biggest of which is *F-pis'mo*<sup>75</sup> on Sygma. There are several creative writing courses led by feminists, two self-published feminist literary magazines, as well as a feminist publishing house, *No Kidding Press*. Feminist literature, like the poetry of Oksana Vasyakina, Daria Serenko or Galina Rymbu, is recognized internationally and translated into different languages. There are several feminist bands: *Lono*, *Punchy Peach*, *Pozory*. Many journalists have feminist views and try to push this agenda into media – thus, in some media outlets it is possible to use gender-inclusive language. Feminist researchers create blogs like *Feminist Chizh*<sup>76</sup> or *Philosophy of New York*<sup>77</sup> to communicate their research via social media. There is also a growing number of educational activities – since the start of the pandemic, three courses on feminist theory were launched: by Daria Serenko and Sofia Sno,<sup>78</sup> by *FemTalks*<sup>79</sup> and by Anna Engelhardt and Sasha Shestakova.<sup>80</sup> Also crucial for the development of local knowledge is the reading group and translation seminar *Levochki*<sup>81</sup> created by Hanna Otchik, an activist from Belarus based in Russia.

Some of the initiatives described above deal with inequalities within the feminist movement. The most visible of these is inequality between “center” and “periphery” of Russia. Center is represented by Moscow and Saint Petersburg. Like activists from Central Asia, activists from other cities feel that they lack

resources and visibility in comparison to the former “center” of the empire;<sup>82</sup> activists from smaller cities and non-central regions of Russia have less visibility than those from Moscow and Saint-Petersburg, the centers of activist life, who often represent the entire feminist movement of the country. Activists fight these inequalities and defend their self-sufficiency and independence from the center. The number of translocal collaborations that do not involve the “center” is growing, as feminist collectives from different parts of the former USSR create networks and collaborations that do not reproduce the hierarchy of the former empire. Kazakhstani feminists deliberately make events only for people from Central Asia, like the feminist festival *FemAgora*.<sup>83</sup> There are also collaborations that include persons from all parts of the former USSR apart from Moscow and St. Petersburg, like the *V Teme*<sup>84</sup> symposium organized by *Shtab* and *Labrys* in Bishkek. Within Russia, an example of a decolonial regional initiative is *Feminism in the Regions*,<sup>85</sup> a podcast by activists from Ufa and Tomsk. During the pandemic, activists Sonya Sno and Dasha Serenko created *FemDacha* – a retreat for feminists that mostly hosted activists from the regions.

Intersectional activism is also getting more and more powerful in Russia. As interviews<sup>86</sup> with activists from Russian regions have demonstrated, many of them believe that more discussions about racism within the feminist movement are needed. Such activists as Lana Uzarashvili, Anna Engelhardt, Vanya Solovei, Sasha Shestakova, Maria Tunkara and Medina Bazargali are doing decolonial and antiracist online activism. In 2020, a project called *Agasshin*<sup>87</sup> was launched that spread the voices of non-

white persons in Russia. In 2021, an online campaign, “How to speak about racism in Russian?”, was organized by Agasshin together with *Feminist Translocalities* to raise awareness about the complexities of race and racialization in the former USSR to demonstrate that the region was never “outside of race” and local activists are not “importing” ideas from the “West” but creating localized understandings of the way intersecting discriminations are

constructed in different ex-Soviet states, thus also contributing to global debates about race and racism. Thus, *Feminist Translocalities*, together with other projects, highlights and encourages the interconnectedness of feminist and antiracist discourses. The next section describes the activities of the project in more detail.

## Feminist Translocalities

*Feminist Translocalities* is a project that aims to bring more intersectional perspectives into Russian-language feminist discourses. *Feminist Translocalities* operates through different media. It includes a multimedia portal, two printed magazines and a traveling exhibition. It is also a project network that supports other feminist initiatives with small grants. *Translocalities* has a broad geography, but mostly focuses on the former USSR. It was started in 2020 by Victoria Kravtsova, a feminist activist and researcher from Russia. The project started by assembling

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*Feminist Translocalities* in St. Petersburg.

a translocal network of feminist activists from all former Soviet countries, with a specific focus on those who pursue decolonial activism or represent marginal groups in societies, such as activists from smaller cities, representatives of ethnic minorities or people with disabilities. The group gathered to discuss common challenges and relevant issues in a zine and on the website, as well as to organize public events that transmit feminist knowledge, such as online workshops on decolonizing feminism or a series of discussions on the methods of feminist research with participants from Central Asia, Ukraine, Belarus and Russia.

*Feminist Translocalities* aims to connect (queer) feminist initiatives from different places and maps their activities to represent the diversity of the contemporary feminist movements in the former USSR, making an accent on art and activism by BIPOC and persons with disabilities. The project aims to contribute to the formulation of a radically inclusive anti-racist feminism aligned with local circumstances of the former USSR. The initiatives within the project encourage collaboration between researchers, artists and activists. For instance, a recent initiative was an artist residency in Ufa for non-Russian artists and researchers based in Russia. Translocal projects support local artists and researchers in broadening their perspectives, understanding the systematic character of the problems they struggle with and searching for common ground to cooperate. In these collaborations, tools to fight coloniality and racism are developed and possibilities to build new alliances arise. The participants of the project are leftist feminists who critically reflect the past of the USSR as colonial. It thus becomes possible to build coalitions of a new character and not reproduce the colonial and imperialist bias often present in the relationships between people from Russia and other parts of the former USSR. This way, the projects lives on and develops even after the Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022.

*Feminist Translocalities'* biggest project in Russia is the traveling exhibition with the same name, created in the context of the year of Germany in Russia. The exhibition is devoted to the



*Feminist Translocalities* in Kaliningrad.

role of BIPOC women, trans\* and non-binary persons, as well as women, trans\* and non-binary persons with disabilities in the history of the former USSR and Germany. The works collected and produced for the exhibitions are mostly easily reproducible and also available on the project website. Apart from photo, video and graphic works, the exhibition includes posters that one can also find on the website in the form of a newspaper. The exhibition took place in Saint Petersburg, Omsk, Togliatti, Perm, Chelyabinsk, Krasnodar, Novosibirsk, Kazan, Ufa, Irkutsk, Kaliningrad and Ekaterinburg. Its format is DIY and differed from a classical traveling art project. In each city a local team of curators choose how what the exhibition would look like, depending on their ideas about the goals of the project and the available location. Some made an open call for local artists; others organized a residency beforehand. One team spent most of the money on renovating the local community center which also served as the exhibition space.

**EVEN THOUGH THE LOCAL** activists responsible for the exhibition were called “curators”, the project dismissed the classic concept of curatorship. This term described an organizing function that a person performed locally but required neither specific education nor previous experience in the field. In the selection of artists, the project was also anti-hierarchical, not rejecting any proposals if they were in line with the main focus of the project: sensitivity to intersecting discriminations. The composition of the *Feminist Translocalities* zine is based on the same principle. It contains texts by researchers, activists, and artists collected by an open call, one of the goals of which was not to reject anyone if the text or work matched the theme of the zine. The zine was also available at the exhibition in an “all languages” version, which was chosen to show the Russian public that the Russian language is not always the local “lingua franca”.

The exhibition questions our understanding of history and tells us about experiences that have been consistently excluded from it. It centers the role of BIPOC, LBQ-women, and

trans\*persons with and without disabilities in the stories of resistance. Going beyond the academic perception of history, one could recognize and imagine what was forgotten or even never known. The exhibition and the zine are about polyphony of experiences. Moving from referencing the past to constructing alternative futures, the exhibition contains a second part called “feminist utopias” that includes statements by activists about what a feminist future could be. Statements by various activists informed the visitors about the queer feminist futures they would like to see. This speculative modeling helped to understand what problems exist today, what worries different activists. This is another opportunity to observe the general vector of development of the feminist movement today. Utopia becomes a tool for dealing with the present and moving into the future, taking into account the often-traumatic experiences of the imperialist and colonial past. The audience of the exhibition were mostly people who already had an interest in feminist topics and wanted to deepen their knowledge.

The *Feminist Translocalities* exhibition places the experience of BIPOC women at the center of the history of the Russian Empire and the USSR by presenting historical portraits of non-White activists from Germany and Russia. Aleksandra Biktimirova, as well as Tansulpan Burakaeva, Ainaza Karakay and Diana Khali-mova, for instance, created portraits of Islamic<sup>88</sup> feminists who were active in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in contemporary Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. Their main goals combined protecting the local language and culture, and demonstrating the possibility to combine the two identities – of a Muslim and of a feminist. Islamic feminists are also present in the former USSR today, especially in the parts of Russia, Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan with large Muslim populations. Intersectionality implies that religion and feminism can coexist. Islamic feminists are an example of a global movement that shows that it is possible. They look for exceptions and alternative readings of the stories and narratives within religious texts and traditions to prove that Islam was not created as hostile to women. They disagree with white, secular feminists, who mostly believed that Muslim women need to be freed from patriarchal oppression by getting rid of Islam. However, researchers often come to wrong conclusions, classifying as Islamic feminists all Muslim women who live an urban life, have their own businesses or stable jobs and do not differ much from other urban women who do not practice Islam. It is an instance of colonial thinking to believe that this already means being a feminist, as it implies that without contesting Islam, women have no opportunity to make a career and participate fully in social life. *Feminist Translocalities* is attentive to this, as well as other marginal perspectives in the feminist mainstream.

Apart from racism, another topic central to the exhibition was disability. At several exhibitions the key role was played

by the *Caring Theater* project. This transdisciplinary initiative curated by Kira Shmyreva investigates issues of access and care. The project is a collaboration with various people with disabilities, all of whom tell their stories through video works, texts and installations. It calls for an end to their social isolation. In *Caring Theater*, neurodiverse persons, persons with disabilities or chronic illnesses are not just receivers of care from volunteers. They are friends, family members, employers, sexual partners who both give and receive care. Criticizing ableism, the project rethinks the interaction between people with different physical abilities. *Caring Theater* raises the question of different ways of living offered to disabled people today, of which only personal assistance can guarantee an appropriate quality of life. It calls on the world to stop the “freak show” of inclusive projects and tell just one story – horizontal and full of care.

**EVEN THOUGH SOME PARTS** were similar, each exhibition was different, depending on the context of each city. It was supplemented with new voices, local stories, often unfamiliar and forgotten. The exhibition in Kazan, for instance, included several zones: an interactive corner of the *Caring Theater* project, historical posters, tables with poetry and essays about migration, queerness and search for identity. Also, posters about the first Soviet feminists from Olessya Bessmeltseva’s *Leningradski feminism* project were presented, coming into dialogue with the inter-

views connected in the framework of *Feminist Translocalities*. Maria Dmitrieva, who curated the first exhibition in St. Petersburg, said that for her, the concept of the exhibition had as its goal the creation of a collective affect, through which polyphonic discussion about feminist utopias was made possible. Maria Dmitrieva used additional audiovisual and sculptural elements that changed the neutral space of the exposition, which was divided into the main exhibition hall, a safe space to

rest and read and projections in different places. The exhibition was made more accessible through the organization of space: It was possible to get acquainted with the works while sitting or lying down.

Masha Alexandrova, a member of the *Naden’ka* art group that curated the exhibition in Omsk, says that for her, the most important aspect of the exhibition was the fact that it revealed and highlighted the multiplicity of feminisms. This exhibition included a presentation of *Barzzine*, a zine about feminist punk bands from the countries of the former USSR. The zine was made in cooperation with *Feminist Translocalities*. According to Masha Alexandrova, this and the adaptation to the space of *Levaya Noga* gallery gave the exhibition the vibe of a punk concert or disco. Daria Abdulina, who curated the project in Kaliningrad together with Alice Che from the local feminist group *Feminitive*, liked the simple and mobile character of the exhibition, as well as the horizontality of the concept, in which there was no pressure on

**“THE PROJECT AIMS TO  
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local organizers. The specificity of the project in Kaliningrad was an artist residency that lasted for a week before the exhibition. During the residency sculptures and installations had been created, which then constituted a significant part of the exhibition. Tansulpan Burakaeva, curator in Ufa, liked the mobility of the project and the possibility to easily reproduce it. The exhibition in Ufa was organized in the context of *FemBayram*, an annual feminist festival. A participatory installation, *Korama*, was added to the exhibition. It was a patchwork blanket sewed during the exhibition that included the stories of mothers and grandmothers of local women. In Krasnodar, the exhibition also took place in the context of a bigger event, *Trening Fantaziya*. Here Daria Kucher invited five artists from the region to participate in the exhibition and a feminist experimental musician, Anna Garcia, to play at the opening. She integrated the exhibition into the library of the local contemporary arts center. Lira Ryazanova, the curator in Ekaterinburg, highlighted the intersection of feminism and disability, as well as gender studies and decoloniality as crucial topics that motivated them to work on the exhibition. In Ekaterinburg, the exhibition included works by feminist artists from the Ural region, as well as a series of lectures.

Most of the exhibitions passed without conflicts. According to Aleksandra Biktimirova, who curated the exhibition in Kazan, it was supported by the local feminist network, as well as other activist circles and local media and no conflict situations arose. The exhibition in St. Petersburg coincided with an outbreak of a conflict about transphobia within the local feminist community, due to which part of the exhibition had to change location. The reception from outside, however, was unproblematic. The exhibition in Chelyabinsk was one of the most stressful for its curator, Vlad Michel. Due to the pandemic situation, the local team decided to organize the exhibition outside. They integrated posters and installations into the context of several streets in the city and gave guided tours through the exposition. After three days, a local right-wing group came and destroyed the exhibition. Lira Ryazanova, the curator in Irkutsk, also reported attacks by right-wing activists – in this case they happened online before the opening, which the right activists were trying to ban by coming there, as they said, “with weapons”. Conflict of a different nature happened in Novosibirsk – there the curators chose to cooperate with a municipal gallery, which decided to censor part of the works during the preparation of the exposition.

**THE EXHIBITION**, as well as the zine that one could read when visiting it, interpreted post-socialism as a global condition, focusing on its imperial and colonial aspects. It asserted and emphasized the diversity and significance of the experience of queer feminist researchers and activists from post-socialist states. The project shares a decolonial perspective in that it focuses on knowledge from the peripheries, supports unknown or less known activists

and does not set any formal academic, artistic or journalistic requirements for its content. *Translocalities* contain decolonial and feminist reflections on the histories of one’s own country, family, and personal histories of the search for “home”. The authors of the exhibition and the zine question the past and present of the countries of the former USSR, claiming the place of homo- and trans\*sexuality, disability, and the experience of non-white women in it. Talking about the challenges of feminist and LGBTIQ\* activism, the work of NGOs and the discipline of gender

studies, *Feminist Translocalities* shows the diversity and complexity of the stories of resistance. All texts can be read on the project website. Out of the variety of topics and authors, we would like to highlight the contributions by Sasha Talaver<sup>89</sup> and Yulia Gradszkova<sup>90</sup> about representation of non-white women in the Soviet leadership on different levels, as well as international organizations led by the

USSR, a zine interpreting the research about the contemporary position of women in Kyrgyzstan by Diana U,<sup>91</sup> as well as a text about the double coloniality of gender activism and research in Central Asia by Altynay Kambekova.<sup>92</sup>

*Feminist Translocalities* is, first of all, a network and an open process. As it maintains feminist ethics of work, it aims to never become fixed, institutionalized or frozen into a hierarchy. The plans of the project include increasing the visibility of the project network to articulate new ways of developing regional politics contrary to those again revealed by the current war in Ukraine – a regional unity based not on the sole fact of having a common past, but on the wish to critically engage with this past and seek new foundation(s) working together in decolonial alliances.

## Conclusion

In this article, we articulated the growing presence of intersectional voices within the feminist communities in the former USSR, particularly focusing on Russia. Our main argument is that attention towards the intersectional character of discrimination is growing both in the activist and scholarly communities, which means that new language and ethics are being developed. The core of the anti-racist movements is constituted by feminist activists. The same can be said about the activism of persons with disabilities – feminists with disabilities such as members of the *Zhenschiny. Invalidnost’*. *Feminism* group, are one of the most active.<sup>93</sup> Like Solovei, we argue that “debates over difference and inclusion are a crucial area in which the feminist movement produces emancipatory knowledge and innovative practices that can be carried over beyond the feminist communities to larger society”.<sup>94</sup>

Researchers Lesya Pagulich and Tatyana Shchurko believe that “decolonial theory, critical race theory, Black feminist thought and queer of-color critique have powerful tools and theoretical frameworks to address such issues as colonialism, imperialism, and structural inequality in the transnational

## “AFTER THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE, THE FEMINIST TRANSLOCALITIES NETWORK FOCUSED ON ANTI-WAR ACTIVISM.”

perspective”.<sup>95</sup> Criticizing liberalism as the only scenario proposed to the countries of the former USSR, researchers suggest paying attention to its interpretation by Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora, who view “post-socialist imaginations” as “radical and decolonial imaginaries of collectivity and political action”,<sup>96</sup> destabilizing and dismantling “Western hegemony, imperialism, colonialism, and racial capitalism”.<sup>97</sup> Fighting coloniality means being attentive to the hierarchies within the global and local feminist communities, criticizing racism, and supporting non-white and non-central grassroots initiatives and voices. The more translocal collaborations happen in the “periphery”, the more internal and external criticism gets vocalized. This increases the visibility of groups with fewer resources and more “marginal” agendas. This offers us a different perspective on feminism in Russia – not as a weak and unorganized community that has to face the mighty state apparatus, but as a powerful movement embedded into a global network of feminist activists who stand on the principles of intersectional justice.

Aleksandra Biktimirova says: “I hope that in the future such projects will expand and turn from a single solo statement into collective ones”.<sup>98</sup> According to Solovei, “through continuous discursive action, [activists] have established a feminist perspective as an integral and legitimate element of the public sphere in Russia”.<sup>99</sup> Right now, we believe, the feminist movement is increasingly dealing with difference – it questions “its own practices and enters into debates over inclusion. It becomes an experimental platform where new ways of being, working, and thinking together are produced and tested, potentially to be offered to the larger society”.<sup>100</sup> Feminist communities in the former USSR are building more horizontal ties. More solidarity and cooperation result in the polyphony of voices and the presence of more anti-colonial, disabled, queer and non-white perspectives in feminist activism. The activists from the “center” begin to take steps to check their privilege and share resources. Conversations about forgotten histories, national and ethnic identity and its absence happen online and offline. Anti-colonial rhetoric enters the fields of art, journalism and academia. Activists from the so-called “national minorities” of Russia, as well as representatives of indigenous nations of the other post-Soviet countries are deconstructing the perception of Russia, as well as of the former USSR as “Russian”.

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the *Feminist Translocalities* network focused on anti-war activism. The same was done by all other feminist and decolonial activists. Some, for instance, have created a horizontal *Feminist Anti-War Resistance*<sup>201</sup> project – an online community mobilizing to protest against war online and offline. Feminists also organized such actions as *Women in Black*, *Anti-War Sick-List*<sup>202</sup> and *Zolotoy Kluchik*<sup>203</sup> and are, for instance, assisting forcibly displaced persons from Ukraine in escaping from Russia into Europe. The nature of the current anti-war resistance again shows that the most active participants of mobilization and assistance initiatives are representatives of marginalized groups – women, LGBTIQ\* persons, BIPOC, and disabled activists. They are the ones most sensitive to the patriarchal and militaristic nature of the Russian regime and see how

Russian imperialism is reproduced even in the anti-war and anti-Putin activism of such liberals as the team of Alexey Navalny.

In the current turmoil of Russian (neo)imperialist war, uplifting non-Russian voices from the former USSR and debunking the colonial and racist nature of Russia becomes even more important – also in Germany, current base of the project, where many people, including leftist activists, are not aware of the colonial and imperialist nature of Russian politics and thus do not do enough to support Ukraine. Right now, the voices of BIPOC, disabled, queer activists, who consciously stay grassroots and “uneventful”,<sup>104</sup> become louder and harder to ignore; they form new collaborations and alliances. *Feminist Translocalities* supports this process by offering opportunities for collaboration and resources. The white or white-passing persons from Russia from the project network seek ways to step back and let activists from Ukraine decide where to invest the available resources. For instance, a member of the project group from Ukraine has inspired us to create an appeal to decolonize Russia.<sup>105</sup> The project, based on the concept of *translocality*, erases the familiar hierarchy of periphery and center, so that marginalized experiences and knowledges come to the fore of feminist debates. Feminist and decolonial thought become the main instruments of resistance and a basis for uniting different groups on the basis of mutual assistance and care – for each other, as well as for the Earth and the (future) peace. ✕

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Note: This article is based on findings presented on the online Roundtable, “New feminist activism in Central Asia and Russia: intersectional and decolonial perspective”, organized by Yulia Gradskova, CBEES, in May 27, 2021.

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special section

Introduction.

## Dietary reforms, ca 1850–1950. People, ideas, and institutions

**F**ood has always occupied a prominent role in public and political discourse, which in its turn has historically been shaped by concerns about hunger, food security and safety. During the last two centuries or so, attempts to change the way people eat have consistently involved invoking different kinds of scientific arguments, co-opting authoritative experts, generating new knowledge and spreading it to the public.

In the period from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until World War I, nutrition research evolved and spread through North America and Western Europe to Scandinavia and the Russian empire. The period witnessed the institutionalization of nutrition science. The field began to acquire some of the common attributes of a scientific discipline, such as the establishment of specialized research institutes, professional societies and dedicated journals. Germany, Great Britain and the United States were central countries for nutrition research.<sup>1</sup> Not by coincidence, these countries hosted organized and vibrant vegetarian movements and experienced far-reaching dietary reform efforts. Similar developments followed in other countries beyond the European continent.

19<sup>th</sup> century vegetarians and life reformers in Western Europe increasingly linked the consumption of meat to a



Workerwoman, strive for a clean canteen.  
For a healthy food (1931).

range of ills, characteristic of modernity and often associated with urbanization, industrialization and societal change in general. By the end of the century, such thinking was joined by the latest scientific knowledge that stressed the role of proteins and calories in human nutrition. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, knowledge about the value of vitamins in maintaining healthy bodies and preventing illness entered the scene. The emergence of modern nutri-

tion science coincided with the development of the modern meat industry in its various national forms.<sup>2</sup> Malnutrition in the lower classes became a special concern of governments. The political and scientific elite tried to reduce the level of protein deficiency in the population. Nutritional aspects of the “social reform question” and “class question” forced scientists to engage in debates and public education. Nutrition had eventually transformed into a field of both social and scientific action, as Corinna Treitel puts it.<sup>3</sup>

**VEGETARIANS WERE** motivated by different imperatives, employed different forms of science, and used different strategies of enforcement and forms of persuasion. Those vegetarians who, for example, were opposed to eating animals for ethical or religious reasons, sometimes sought scientific support for their dietary choices, and the studies they initiated led to the production of new knowledge. Scientific evidence from the fields of anthropology, physiology, chemistry and statistics were used to support vegetarian arguments. Public debaters and critics also turned to science and medicine to demonstrate that an alternative diet could be healthful and nutritious, and that meat could be harmful. But health concerns were only part of the picture. In the wide-ranging account of vegetarianism, environmental

reasoning was also part of the discussion. Vegetarians were also motivated by moral imperative. In all these approaches to diet, scientific rationales for vegetarianism were mixed with philosophical, ascetic and religious arguments, debates about the relationship between human and animals, between body and spirit.

An increasing number of scientific experts, health reformers and home economists went beyond their interest-based communities and were keen to bring the new knowledge of nutrition into the home, to inform women about the best way to feed their families and at the lowest cost. A woman's contribution to society was to be measured by professional work and household management, but also by her adoption of modern nutritional knowledge and keeping her family healthy. Women's magazines, newspapers and popular science journals of the period eagerly published the latest scientific discoveries and discussions on a cheap, healthy and nutritious diet for the benefit of their readers. Dietary experts, health reformers and vegetarian activists travelled around offering lectures to interested audiences and wrote textbooks for home economics classes and culinary courses.

**THE SCIENTIFIC** literature on contemporary dietary reforms and vegetarian movements, their philosophical and sociological aspects, is rapidly expanding, while historical studies on the topic that focus on the Baltic Sea region and Eastern Europe, post-Soviet and post-communist parts of Europe are scarce. A historical assessment of this topic is particularly relevant nowadays given the widespread anxieties about the health and environmental footprint of the current patterns of consumption and production, the rise of food activism and the limits of the planet's natural resources. Contemporary veg(etari)ans and food activists propagate new ways of eating and living, as they had been doing more than one hundred years ago.

Zooming in on the entangled histories of dietary reform in the Baltic and Eastern Europe, a topic which thus far has only been fleetingly assessed in previous research, the contributions in this Baltic Worlds special section seek to initiate a

## “DIETARY EXPERTS, HEALTH REFORMERS AND VEGETARIAN ACTIVISTS TRAVELLED AROUND OFFERING LECTURES TO INTERESTED AUDIENCES.”

scholarly discussion on the historical perspectives on a topic that has become of great interest and public relevance.

The special section is a result of an online workshop on May 7, 2021. The workshop brought together scholars from the disciplines of history, cultural studies and ethnology to examine novel avenues for interdisciplinary and transnational research on the histories of dietary reform in the Baltic and Eastern Europe, through the lens of dissemination, circulation, fusion and motion. In scholarly literature, the period from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until World War I has been called “the first era of globalization”,<sup>4</sup> when border crossings became a mass-scale phenomenon and the flow of commodities, foodstuffs, knowledge and information across borders became commonplace. Dietary reform ideas and efforts were one of many transcultural and transnational phenomena embedded in the reformist cosmopolitan movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century East Central Europe. These efforts, with their focus on scientific rationalism, health, physical strength and hygiene, or moral and ethical imperatives, and whether embraced by a wider public or not, reflected the spirit of “multiple modernities”<sup>5</sup> in Europe.

In this special section, the histories of dietary reform have been approached and explored from different perspectives. The essays weave together threads of the history of dietary advice and nutritional standards with social history, women's history and food history, covering the elements of life reform and women's movements, the establishment of communist food ideology, etc. Three peer-reviewed articles focusing on the case studies of

Estonia, Bulgaria and the Russian empire are built on previously untapped sources and offer original perspectives on the topic. As the contributions suggest, the entangled histories of dietary reform efforts proved to be a valuable and novel prism through which to study the region and the history of Europe in general.

**EMPLOYING SOCIOLOGICAL** framework, **Julia Malitska** analyses the All-Russian Vegetarian Congress, which took place in Moscow in 1913, uncovering the forces and rationales behind its organization and convocation. The study unfolds the ideological underpinnings that were prioritized at the congress and suggests why this was the case, as well as discusses the possible effects of the results of the congress on vegetarian activism in the empire. The congress resolutions failed to represent the whole spectrum of vegetarian thought, including aspects of hygiene and health, environmental and economic deliberations, which were publicly discussed and academically developed at the time. Instead, it favored the ethical strand of vegetarianism and aimed at life reform in a broader sense. An ethical vegetarianism with some Christian religious undertones was decreed to be a priority for vegetarian activism in the Russian empire. This was largely due to the activity and dominance of certain resourceful activists, who seemed to monopolize the symbolic space of the event to promote their agenda and views on vegetarianism.

**Anu Kannike and Ester Bardone** explore the evolvment and spread of the idea of vegetarianism, as well as the variety of educational initiatives, practices and agents related to it in Estonia. The attempts to reform Estonian food culture aimed at modernizing the Estonian nation. The study uncovers the changing trajectories of cultural influences and cultural transfer in the attempts to modernize Estonian food culture, discovering a shift from Baltic German cultural influences towards the Nordic countries, and specifically Finland. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Finland had become an important destination for Estonian women seeking inspiration about the promotion of vegetarian food and acquiring a professional

home economics education. Since the 1910s, Estonian female home economics teachers who trained in Finland started to play a crucial role in modernizing the food culture in Estonia and educating the nation about a healthy and nutritious diet. A network of home economics schools and cooking courses established by female pioneers praised local products, a seasonal diet and promoted lacto-vegetarianism. By the end of the 1930s, as the study suggests, educational efforts through the media, printing matter, educational activities, as well as the general economic growth of the country, resulted in a more varied and balanced diet for population, yet the vegetable consumption was still relatively low.

**ALBENA SHKODROVA** examines the continuities and ruptures between the ideas of “rational nutrition” and science-based diet in early communist Bulgaria with pre-communist food ideologies and the ideas about a healthy diet that were promoted by the vegetarian movement that flourished in the country in the 1920s and 1930s. The study reveals that communist dietary advice built on the legacy of the period prior to World War II in Bulgaria to a greater extent than the communists acknowledged themselves, and more than was acknowledged by previous research. It would appear, Bulgarian nutrition experts - Ivan Naydenov, Tasho Tashev and Nikolay Dzhelpev - were torn between - and thus negotiated - the pre-communist nutrition advice promoting a meatless diet and a high consumption of vegetables on the one hand, and meat-centered protein-rich diet promoted by Soviet nutrition teachings on the other. The article challenges earlier assumptions that communist nutrition advice consistently disregarded vegetarianism. Nevertheless, what the communist regime brought to Bulgarian nutrition science and the notion of healthy nutrition was the centrality of meat in the human diet.

Those articles are followed by an interview with **Corinna Treitel**, whose work on the history of German efforts to invent more “natural” ways to eat and farm at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries had a profound impact on the field of study

represented by the essays in the section. The developments in Germany regarding both the development of scientific knowledge about diet, nutrition, as well as environmental thinking and life reform movements, had centripetal effects on the neighboring countries and communities.

Taking a slightly different approach, **Paulina Rytönen's** essay addresses the foundation of a modern food system in Sweden from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century against the backdrop of modernization and societal change, as well as the industrialization of the agro-food sector, technological development in the country, the consequences of the two world wars and the rise of the welfare state.

It is my hope that this special section will generate a further discussion on the intertwined histories of science, politics, food and the environment in the Baltic Sea region and Eastern Europe. ✕

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## special section

**105 Introduction**, *Julia Malitska*

### peer-reviewed articles

**108 “There is no salvation outside our church”.**

The All-Russian Vegetarian Congress and the making of the vegetarian movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Russian empire, *Julia Malitska*

**125 Vegetarian food as modern food.** Attempts to educate the nation in Estonia in the 1900s–1930s, *Anu Kannike and Ester Bardone*

**138 Radical reformers or not quite?** From vegetarianism to communist nutrition in Bulgaria: contrasts and continuities (1925–1960), *Albena Shkodrova*

### interview

**150 Corinna Treitel.**

“Vegetarianism was part of social reformism”, *Julia Malitska*

### essay

**156 The rise of the Swedish welfare state.** Introducing modern food practices into the modern food system, *Paulina Rytönen*



## The spread of vegetarian ideas in Estonia

“Typical of the period, the students’ weight and strength were measured to demonstrate the beneficial effects of gardening activities and vegetarian food.”

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**Группа участников I Всероссийского Вегетарианского Съезда.**

1. М. Е. Васильевъ, 16. А. Осостновъ, 1а. И. Мельниковъ, 2. И. М. Трегубовъ, 3. Н. А. Машнеръ, 4. С. Маркуевъ, 4а. С. Г. Маркуевъ, 5а. Стрехова, 5. Л. Г. Плаховъ, 4б. Г. А. Недельский, 32. Н. К. Лебедевъ, 6. М. С. Дудченко, 7. А. С. Зоновъ, председатель Съезда, 8. И. И. Горбуновъ-Песадовъ, почетный предсѣд., 9. Е. Н. Поповъ, 10. Г. П. Космида, 11. М. Ф. Германъ, 11а. В. Н. Горбунова, 12. Г. О. Пернеръ, 13. Р. Г. Вессе, тов. предсѣд., 14. М. М. Пудановъ, тов. секретари, 15. Г. К. Морачевскій, 16. Э. Г. Фишборнъ, 17. Братцы Юанитъ Колосковъ, 18. В. Девятковъ, 18а. Д-ръ А. А. Хохряковъ, Х.А. Ф. Коранко, 19. А. П. Алексеевъ, 33. Г-жа Лебедева, 20. В. И. Алексеевна-Лукинская, 21а. К. И. Горбунова, 21. Э. И. Капланъ, 22. З. К. Вессе, 23. Н. П. Бюсти-фьевъ, 23а. Н. М. Полянский, 23б. Ф. А. Витовъ, 24а. И. Шмишко, 24б. Е. И. Петроская, 25а. Д-ръ Докучаевъ, 26а. П. И. Гуровъ, 24. М. Н. Шмишко, 35. И. Шмишко, 36. Ж. А. Зюнова, 37. Г. Ф. Германъ, 25. А. Н. Шаранова, 26. Ж. И. Шухидъ, 38. М. И. Горбунова, 34. Т. Ф. Крауунъ, 39. М. Е. Палеонитъ, 41. Г-жа Зюнова, 42. В. Т. Ванносская, 27. Ф. Х. Граубергъ, 43а и 43б. Братцы Васильевы, 28. А. Л. Гуровъ, 29. В. Ф. Вудановъ, 45. Пряткинъ, 30. А. П. Ковалевъ, 31. В. М. Солиная, 43а, 43б.

The group of participants of the First All-Russian Vegetarian Congress. Note: According to Old Vegetarian, this picture was taken on the last day of the congress when not all participants were present. Source: Vegetariankoe obozrenie, no. 3 (1913).

# “There is no salvation outside our church”

by **Julia Malitska**

**THE ALL-RUSSIAN VEGETARIAN CONGRESS  
AND THE MAKING OF THE VEGETARIAN MOVEMENT  
IN THE EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY RUSSIAN EMPIRE**

## abstract

In this article, I tackle and reflect on the vegetarian *movement* of the Russian empire in its making, branding, and imagining by examining the All-Russian Vegetarian Congress in Moscow in 1913. By scrutinizing its organization, agenda and resolutions, the study brings to the surface and explores the ideological imaginaries and the dynamics of vegetarian collective action. I discuss the organization and convening of the congress, analyze the discursive activity around it, as well as hint at its implications for the fledgling vegetarian activism. I also contextualize the event within a broad reform-oriented social movement space, as well as spotlight the diversity of understandings of vegetarianism. The case study hints at the manifestations of movement making and branding, as well as unfolds the ideological foundations that were given preferences and why this was so. The congress apparently favored the ethical strand of vegetarianism and aimed at life reform in a broader sense. However, it did not really succeed in bringing about the long-awaited consolidation and unification of the vegetarians in the country.

**KEY WORDS:** Life reform, vegetarianism, Russian empire, collective identity, All-Russian Vegetarian Congress, social movement, modernity, counterculture.

**Among us, as it seems to me, there is no one with a narrow conviction: “There is no salvation outside our church,” and therefore, no matter how great the ideological divergence, our “unity in love” will not become either lesser or paler because of it.**<sup>1</sup>

## Aims, scope and sources

The epigraph belongs to Semen Poltavskii,<sup>2</sup> a vegetarian activist and member of the Saratov Vegetarian Society, who positively evaluated the ideological differences expressed at the All-Russian Vegetarian Congress. The aim of this study is to tackle and reflect on the vegetarian *movement* in its making, branding and imagining by scrutinizing the All-Russian Congress that took place in Moscow in April 1913. With the available sources at hand and a sociological analytical framework in mind, I discuss the organization and convening of the congress, analyze the discursive activity around it, as well as hint at its implications for the fledgling vegetarian activism. I am specifically guided by the following questions: What was the idea behind and the purpose of convening the congress? How was convening the congress legitimized, discussed and evaluated? What were the outcomes and possible implications of the congress for the *movement*? How did (if at all) the congress reflect the diversity of vegetarian ideas in the Russian empire and the forces that drove its convocation? What meanings were generated around the congress and as a result of it? By analyzing its organization, agenda and resolutions, and placing the event in a broader context regarding the progress of vegetarian thought and vegetarian movement activity, the study brings to the surface and explores the ideological imaginaries and dynamics within the social movement space.

To contextualize the event within a broad reform-oriented social movement space, as well as spotlight the diversity of understandings of vegetarianism, I analyze the texts and treatises of the activism’s intellectuals and the materials of the vegetarian societies. The All-Russian Vegetarian Congress is studied through its coverage and representation on the pages of *The Vegetarian Review* (The VR), a Kiev-based pressure group periodical.<sup>3</sup> The VR staged and documented the preparations for the congress and its convocation, published its resolutions and participants’ talks, thereby disseminating information about the event. I scrutinize reviews of and press notes on the congress, the memoirs of its participants, lectures and talks, greetings and congress resolutions – all of which were published in The VR. The role of print media as meaning-makers and opinion builders has been acknowledged in previous research, as did its consolidating role in the collective identity building of the reformist environments in Europe.<sup>4</sup> Similar to Ron Eyerman’s observations of the *new* social movements,<sup>5</sup> the reform-oriented movements of the Russian empire were shaped by the print media. Periodicals helped to “create” reform-oriented social movements in the empire. Reformists were conscious of media attention; they were also aware of their own importance in making and shaping events and in catching the public eye.

Vegetarians, dispersed across the Russian empire, committed to and enthusiastic about the fledgling activism, would learn about the congress from *The VR*. Moreover, they would make sense of the event and relate to it based on the information from the daily press and *The VR*. Thus, *The VR* is a valuable resource not only for its basic reporting of events and activities, but for its recordings of the ideas, dreams, debates and disappointments communicated at the congress. It is the perfect resource for tracing the process of the formation and consolidation of the collective action, mobilization strategies and movement imagining and making. It is a rich terrain for studying the construction of a collective identity, as previous research has proved.<sup>6</sup> Finally, it is a promising arena for exploring the formation and manifestations of vegetarian ideologies, as well as the rifts and tensions that emerged as a result of the formative processes, and the role of the different actors in all this. The periodical gave room for debate, negotiation and fashioning of the *movement*, for voicing ideological disputes, for constructing collective identities, a vegetarian self, and much more. Regarding source-critical pitfalls, the factual coverage of the congress, its organization, convocation and results in *The VR* are reliable, whereas the discursive and intellectual activity around the event pursued on its pages will be critically considered in this study.

Finally, this study has no ambition to be exhaustive. Although beyond the scope of this study, an additional analysis of materials from the Tolstoy Museum and possibly the archives of Moscow might be insightful.

## Tolstoy’s vegetarianism and its contested legacy

In the last decade, researchers have begun conducting empirical investigations into the practices and ideas associated with



The cover page of The *Vegetarian Review* with handwritten lines and signed by Lev Tolstoy, dated November 7, 1908. Source: *Vegetarianское обозрение* no 9-10 (1910): 1. Lev Tolstoy enjoying a vegetarian meal in his garden, right.

contemporary vegetarianism.<sup>7</sup> However, socio-historical studies of the vibrant vegetarian activism of the *ancien régime* in Eastern Europe have not hitherto attracted the attention of researchers. Although the All-Russian Vegetarian Congress has been mentioned in previous research,<sup>8</sup> thus far, no one has attempted to unpack and conceptualize the event by placing it within the context of movement-making activity.

**THIS ESSAY IS** a continuation of a breakthrough discussion initiated by Ronald LeBlanc and Darra Goldstein on the ideological fashioning of vegetarianism in Russia and the mythologizations of Lev Tolstoy. Ronald LeBlanc conducted a revisionist account of Lev Tolstoy's conversion to a meatless diet in order to demythologize an established view of his vegetarianism as being essentially "ethical". By thoroughly reading "The First Step" essay, which was canonized as a "bible of vegetarianism",<sup>9</sup> and contextualizing it with other literary works by Tolstoy, he argues that Tolstoy's conversion to vegetarianism was part of his quest for ascetic discipline and moral self-perfection, rather than non-violence and animal rights.<sup>10</sup> He argues for a distinction to be made between Tolstoy's own vegetarian beliefs and those advocated by Tolstoyans. In their efforts to convince people to adopt a meatless diet, Tolstoyan activists chose to highlight the moral and humanitarian aspects of Tolstoy's "The First Step", rather than the ascetic and religious aspects.<sup>11</sup> According to LeBlanc, Tolstoy's colleagues at the Intermediary Publishing House (*Posrednik*) were animal rights activists who contributed to the creation and dissemination of what Darra Goldstein calls the "disingenuous myth of Tolstoy as a compassionate vegetarian"<sup>12</sup>

in order to promote their own cause. Vladimir Chertkov and Ivan Gorbunov-Posadov, public promoters of the Tolstoyan movement, sought to fashion a more appealing image of their leader by toning down some of his old-fashioned views with respect to food abstinence and carnal pleasures. One way this was achieved, as LeBlanc's study implies, was by reprinting only the final section of "The First Step", in which Tolstoy describes his visit to the Tula slaughterhouse, thereby excluding the part devoted to the reflections on gluttony, fasting, abstinence and self-abnegation.<sup>13</sup> The practice of reprinting only the final section of Tolstoy's essay, as LeBlanc implies, seems to have originated with Chertkov, whose Intermediary Publishing House published Tolstoy's depiction of the Tula slaughterhouse in "The First Step" as a separate article entitled "At the Slaughterhouse" (*"Na boine"*) (1911).<sup>14</sup>

The ascetic and religious motivations that led Tolstoy to adopt a slaughter-free diet did not escape the attention of competing groups within vegetarian activism.<sup>15</sup> The literary works, writings and personality of Tolstoy came under scrutiny and close reading of fellow vegetarians, who urged for a holistic approach to Tolstoy's legacy.<sup>16</sup>

The dispute over competing vegetarian ideologies intensified right before and during the First World War. In his article "On Vegetarianism and Vegetarians," published in the 1915 spring issue of *The Vegetarian Herald* (*The VH*), Ivan Nazhivin criticized moralists for their moral hypocrisy, doctrinaire attitude and sect-like spirit. The article prompted criticisms and responses, published in subsequent issues of *The VH*. In his article, Georgii Bosse disentangled Tolstoy's motivation for vegetarianism from

the one that was promoted by some of his disciples, reminding readers that Tolstoy's teaching about vegetarianism in "The First Step" was religious and ascetic. Bosse insisted that the dogmatism of Chertkov and "his like-minded associates" was antithetical to vegetarianism and had no place in "the movement".<sup>17</sup>

The capitalization on Tolstoy's name and philosophy by his disciples in order to promote their reform agenda is not something unusual. As sociologist Donna Maurer reminds us, cultural movements use cultural products such as values, beliefs, stories, art and literature to spur collective change.<sup>18</sup>

## Theoretical framework

My perception of movement-making activity and collective action is inspired by sociological scholarship on cultural social movements, specifically Alberto Melucci's *collective identity* and Ron Eyerman's and Andrew Jamison's *cognitive praxis*.<sup>19</sup> A cognitive praxis, the core of collective action and the cornerstone of the identity of a vegetarian movement, includes: a new "cosmology"/"utopian mission" (worldview assumptions), the practical or technological dimension (media, means of transportation and communication, instruments of production), the mode of organization for the production and dissemination of knowledge (science, education, interpersonal contacts, cooperation), and the proliferation of the roles of intellectuals necessary to implementing ideas in a given context.<sup>20</sup> I view the fledgling vegetarian activism as constituting knowledge producers, new venue creators, propagators of alternative values, reformers, meaning-makers, "new" producers of consumer culture and information managers. Popular movements aimed at change and innovation, pushed for reform, provided new elites, created new patterns of behavior and new models of organization.

Vegetarianism, as the movement's ideology, comprises a set of ideas, practices and values that people and organizations can draw from and combine in different ways; it is a symbolic system that people construct and manipulate, that makes sense to a specific group of people. An ideology provides both meaning and direction to social movement participants, giving them a sense of purpose and the momentum to act. Expressions of ideology, Donna Maurer reminds us, can both increase commitment within a movement and attract new members. Vegetarianism was and is a multifaceted set of ideas. Advocates and movement leaders sometimes debate the finer points of vegetarianism, but they rarely, as Maurer suggests, contest its basic tenets. Instead, vegetarian leaders are more likely to debate *how* these tenets of the ideology should be presented to potential adherents.<sup>21</sup>

I adhere to the process-oriented concept of collective identity, which is concerned about shared meanings, experiences, and reciprocal emotional ties as experienced by movement ac-

tors through their interaction.<sup>22</sup> Collective identity as a process involves cognitive definitions about ends, means, the field of action and the activation of relationships among actors. This process is voiced out through a common language and enacted through a set of rituals, practices and cultural artefacts. Actors do not necessarily have to be in complete agreement on ideologies, interests or goals in order to come together and generate collective action. For Melucci, collective identity refers to a network of active relationships and he stresses the importance of the emotional involvement of activists.<sup>23</sup>

Movements are *action systems* and their structures are based on aims, beliefs, decisions and exchanges operating in a systematic field. Melucci speaks of *movement networks* or *movement areas* as a network of groups and individuals sharing a conflictual culture and a collective identity. The function of movement actors is to reveal the stakes, to publicly announce that a fundamental problem exists in a given area. They have a growing symbolic function, a *prophetic* function, in Melucci's opinion. They fight for symbolic and cultural stakes, for a different meaning and orientation of social action, trying to change people's lives, and society at large. Since their action is focused on cultural codes, the *form* of the movement is a message, a symbolic challenge to the dominant patterns.<sup>24</sup>

**COLLECTIVE IDENTITY** is the result of an interaction between more latent day-to-day activities and visible mobilizations. Both types of activities provide crucial arenas in which activists can foster reciprocal ties of solidarity and commitment, and clarify their

understandings of who they are, what they stand for and who the opposition is. Collective identity is usually perceived as a requirement to strengthen and sustain movements – but is this really so? Boundary work can lead to divisive opinions because strong group collective identities or different understandings of collective identity can make it difficult for movement sub-groups to form alliances.<sup>25</sup> Strong collective identities at the group level can work against movement cohesion because of strong differences between movement sub-groups. At the same time, movement building and move-

ment collective identity can exist despite a strong collective identity at the group level.<sup>26</sup>

Social networks and personal interactions appeared to be particularly critical in maintaining a vegetarian diet, as well as sustaining the *movement*. Vegetarians gathered for congresses across Europe, as well as in their own countries. The International Vegetarian Union, established in Leipzig in 1908 by British, Dutch and German activists, evolved into a quasi-European organization whose congresses took place exclusively in Europe until 1957.<sup>27</sup> Both nationwide and international congresses had a powerful symbolic and mobilizing role for building networks of

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Doctor of Medicine Aleksandr Zelenkov (left). Source: *The Vegetarianskoe obozrenie*, no. 4 (1914): 139.

Cover page of the cookbook *I Don't Eat Anyone: 365 Vegetarian Menus and a Guide for Preparing Vegetarian Meals. 1600 Vegetarian Recipes by Seasons for Six Persons*, written by Olga Zelenkova and under the editorship of Aleksandr Zelenkov. Due to its popularity, the book was republished on several occasions.

active relationships, for formulating and effectuating common purposes, for activating and consolidating resources. There is one more dimension to mention. As Julia Hauser argues, the 15<sup>th</sup> World Vegetarian Congress of the International Vegetarian Union, the first event to take place outside Europe, was seized and instrumentalized by its Indian hosts in order to promote their global political aims and impact on domestic politics.<sup>28</sup>

### A worldview or a diet? Vegetarian thought(s) and the fledgling movement

In this section I briefly illustrate the diversity of intellectual trends of vegetarian thought. Vegetarianism was one of many transcultural and trans-imperial phenomena of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, commonly regarded as a corollary of modernization and as a protest against it. As in many European countries and the USA, vegetarian activism in the Russian empire, stimulated by societal change and urbanization, was also an aspect of broader reformist environments. In the decade following the Revolution from 1905–1907, a network of vegetarian circles appeared in the cities in the European parts of the Russian empire. By the 1910s, vegetarian enthusiasts of different ethnicities and from different backgrounds had mobilized themselves into vegetarian societies, re-launched an advocacy journal and developed an infrastructure to propagate the *movement* in many of the empire's cities.<sup>29</sup> The management and dissemination of information on the cause, as well as public outreach via the press, became one of the key activities of vegetarian activism. Vegetarians were aware of the power of the printed word in promoting their cause and made good use of it.

Though there is an established historiographic tradition of reducing vegetarianism in the Russian empire to Tolstoyism, or to fasting and religious calendars, the sources are outspoken about the heterogeneity of ideas and views on vegetarianism. Depending on their ideological orientation, whether enthused by the *lebensreform* movement or Lev Tolstoy's radical philosophy, re-

form-oriented environments, or *radical habitus*, to quote Pierre Bourdieu, addressed a wide range of issues concerning hygiene and consumption habits, compassion for animals, temperance and anti-vivisection, and called for a return to “natural ways of living,” as well as endorsing abstinence and moral self-perfection. Concerns about social reform and questions about raising children became part of the reform-oriented social movement space. Similar to Western and Central Europe, vegetarianism in the Russian empire was an embodiment of a broad reformist agenda and also had its supporters in the scientific world.

In 1878, Professor Andrei Beketov (1825–1902), botanist and rector of St. Petersburg University, published the essay “Human Nutrition in its Present and Future”, where he argued for the benefits of a plant-based dietary regimen and promoted the need to scientifically identify a “new formula” for a nutritionally rich plant-based diet. The author employed a set of arguments from different spheres: physiology and comparative anatomy (the structure of the human digestive system is adapted to a soft and semi-soft plant-based diet), economy and ecology (the production of plant-based food requires less resources and soil; the earth's capacity would not suffice to produce meat for the ever-growing mankind) and ethics (a plant-based diet promotes the optimal development of the human intellect; love for all living things is the main attribute of a “morally-developed person”).<sup>30</sup> In his article “Future Human Nutrition”, Professor of St. Petersburg University Aleksandr Voeikov (1842–1916), climatologist and geographer, chairman of the St. Petersburg Vegetarian Society, discussed the nutritional value of nuts, vegetable oils and plant-based alternatives to milk, and argued for the replacement of dairy products with nut-based products.<sup>31</sup> It was Aleksandr Voeikov who represented the St. Petersburg and the Kiev vegetarian societies and The VR at the Third World Vegetarian Congress in Brussels from June 10–12, 1910.<sup>32</sup>

The rationale of so-called medical vegetarianism, which asserted the physiological, biological, health and hygiene ben-



efits of a meat-free diet and frequently referred to evolutionary theory, anatomy and physiology, was represented by the couple Aleksandr (1850–1914) and Olga Zelenkov (1845–1921). Aleksandr Zelenkov, who obtained a title of a Doctor of Medicine at Derpt (Tartu) University, came to vegetarianism and temperance largely due to his own health condition. While staying in Germany, he learned about and became interested in naturopathic medicine and homeopathy. He was a founder and the first chairman of the St. Petersburg Vegetarian Society, and a founder of a sanatorium near Riga. Zelenkov authored works on meat-free diets as a means of treating and preventing diseases, an approach which he promoted and practiced as a physician.<sup>33</sup> Olga Zelenkova wrote a culinary book entitled “I Don’t Eat Anyone,” (*Ia nikogo ne em!*), which became very popular, and also wrote about vegetarianism.<sup>34</sup>

**ANOTHER PROMINENT** figure representing this trend of vegetarian thought and practice was Aleksandr Iasinovskii (1864–1913), a graduate of the University of Vienna, a renowned surgeon and Doctor of Medicine, as well as an ideological guru of Odessa’s vegetarian circle.<sup>35</sup> In his book about a slaughter-free diet, Iasinovskii, like Beketov, put forward various arguments in favor of a meat-free regimen and dietary reform, yet, as a man of medicine, he still leaned towards hygiene and health reasons. An overabundance of animal proteins caused constipation, putrefaction and diseases, Iasinovskii argued. Animal proteins produced toxins – purines – which cause uric acid diathesis, gout and arthritis, Iasinovskii stated. Plant foods, he argued, contained a sufficient amount of digestible proteins, and a meat-free diet had a therapeutic effect in cases of diseases. Iasinovskii was in favor of dairy products.<sup>36</sup>

The question of *why* a person should abstain from eating meat divided vegetarian activists and reformist groups. Some advocated a meat-free diet on scientific grounds while others avoided meat out of moral and humanitarian convictions. This latter group was divided between ethical but secular vegetarians and those who abstained from meat consumption for religious and ascetic reasons. Also, discussions regarding not only *what* brand of vegetarianism to propagate, but *how* to do so, were pursued with increased intensity. Moralists wanted dietary issues to stop being the focus of vegetarians’ attention and instead prioritize morals in discussions about vegetarian doctrines. They viewed vegetarianism as an aspect of a humanitarian doctrine, an ethical philosophy, a *new* worldview, a life reform and a counterculture. There were those who supported a slaughter-free diet based on the principle of “no kill”. Critical voices attacked gluttony, since eating was not supposed to be seen as an act of pleasure, but as a satisfaction of basic needs.<sup>37</sup>

Philosophizing on slaughter-free diet at times intersected

with advancing social justice, free pedagogy and moral education (*nравstvennoe vospitanie*), general attitudes to the non-human world, equality in family and society, and the critique of hired labor. Vegetarianism was presented as the panacea for many physical ills and social troubles. If urban dwellers could be persuaded to abstain from meat (and alcohol), as advocates of vegetarianism argued, then the “social question” could be solved. “Scientific” or “medical” vegetarians advocated a dietary reform based on the (then) scientific evidence from the fields of medicine, anatomy, physiology and pathology. Some medical professionals viewed meat eating, along with tobacco and alcohol consumption, as harmful. A general dietary reform was a way of improving people’s health. A dispute between professors and students at the meeting of N. I. Pirogov’s Scientific Circle in Saratov in February 1913 is a telling illustration of the clash between and diversity of perspectives on vegetarianism, as a teaching and a practice.<sup>38</sup> Reconciliation between the different approaches to and views on vegetarianism was hardly possible and a middle ground between the paradigms was never found.

### **The congress: Preparation, organization, proceedings and aftermath** **From a word to an action**

At different times, various strategies regarding the promotion of vegetarian ideas and forms of consolidation of vegetarians across the Russian empire had been articulated. In 1909, Mikhail Pudavov, the then chairman of the Kiev Vegetarian Society and member of the Moscow Vegetarian Society, suggested founding an All-Russian Vegetarian Society.<sup>39</sup> This society with its board in St. Petersburg, would extend its activity throughout Russia,

enjoying the right to open its branches in various parts of the country, and promote vegetarianism locally.<sup>40</sup> This idea was, however, not realized. Iosif Perper, a co-founder and editor of *The Vegetarian Review*, persistently promoted the idea of organizing a vegetarian union inspired by the example of German-speaking vegetarians, united under the banner of the German Vegetarian Federation (*Deutscher Vegetarierbund*).

Print media, postal service and railroads, which represented a powerful way of consolidating vegetarians across the Russian empire, could not,

however, replace the vitality of personal interaction, which was crucial for building ties and networks of active relationships, formulating and enabling the realization of common goals. The very idea of an All-Russian Vegetarian Congress stemmed from the Saratov Vegetarian Society. Its chairman, L. Chernyshev, asked *The VR*’s editor to publish the society’s appeal to the readership of the journal and vegetarians in the country. Finding the idea of convening of the First All-Russian Vegetarian Congress as something that was both timely and urgent, the Saratov Vegetarian

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Society called for all Russian organizations and individuals interested in the idea of a congress to send their proposals regarding the time and place for such an event, approximate number of participants, and general considerations regarding the practical realization of a congress. Most of the responses received were enthusiastic about the event.<sup>41</sup>

The Saratov Vegetarian Society's initiative was taken over by the "Spiritual Awakening" Society (*Dukhovnoe probuzhdenie*), another vegetarian society, founded in Moscow in 1912, which aimed to develop and promote ethical vegetarianism as part of a humanitarian doctrine.<sup>42</sup> The preparatory work for the organization of the congress and exhibition started. At the end of September 1912, the Board of the "Spiritual Awakening" Society petitioned the Minister of the Interior to authorize the convocation of the congress and exhibition scheduled to be held from December 28, 1912 to January 6, 1913. The event was to take place on the premises of the Maria Briukhonenko's Women's Gymnasium. Perceiving the upcoming congress as an event of major importance for the "vegetarian movement in Russia", whose members were described as being of different confessions and nationalities, the society's board asked the Minister of the Interior to temporarily lift restrictions on entering Moscow for the participants of the congress for its duration. The society planned to appeal to the country's vegetarian societies for financial support.<sup>43</sup> However, the convocation of the congress was not destined to take place in December 1912. The society's board had to postpone the congress and exhibition until Easter 1913 for several reasons, primarily because of a lack of official permission.

ON MARCH 10, 1913, the "Spiritual Awakening" Society received official permission from the Minister of the Interior for convening of the congress in Moscow from April 16–20, 1913, although under certain conditions. Firstly, Jewish people without a residence permit for Moscow were not allowed to attend the congress. Secondly, a list of congress participants was to be presented to the city mayor beforehand and approved. Thirdly, the participants were required to be issued with membership cards, as a condition for participating in congress meetings. A separate authorization was required for organizing the congress exhibition. The "Spiritual Awakening" Society took care of accommodation for non-Muscovites.<sup>44</sup>

The congress welcomed talks on the following topics: What is vegetarianism? Vegetarianism and ethics (*nравственность*); vegetarianism and beauty; vegetarianism from a religious perspective; vegetarianism and upbringing; vegetarianism and health; vegetarianism from an economic perspective; vegetarianism and labor (*труд*); vegetarianism in connection with mankind's general worldview; outstanding vegetarian figures; human diets compatible with vegetarianism; the current state of the vegetarian movement both in Russia and abroad; discussion about the

ways of disseminating vegetarianism: about organizing a Central All-Russian Vegetarian Bureau, and the perspectives of organizing an All-Russian Vegetarian Union, publication of a consolidating vegetarian media outlet, vegetarian literature; ways of implementing ideas about vegetarianism: food, footwear and other everyday items.<sup>45</sup> The organizer's inclination towards the *ideal* vegetarianism becomes noticeable when comparing the order of the topics of the All-Russian Vegetarian Congress with the order of the topics of the Third World Vegetarian Congress in Brussels in June 1910.<sup>46</sup>

The draft of the Vegetarian Exhibition comprised eight sections. The first section would be about the "scientific grounds of vegetarianism" (comprising books, tables, diagrams) and would focus on foodstuffs, their composition and digestibility. The second section would be about the "social significance of vegetarianism", covering hygiene, economic, moral, aesthetic and educational aspects. The third section would illustrate the dissemination of vegetarianism, and focus on vegetarian societies in different countries, vegetarian trends in Russia, and other trends related to vegetarianism. The fourth section would showcase "vegetarians' cultural products" such as writings, fine arts, handicrafts. The fifth section would include the portraits of "prominent figures in vegetarianism", while the six section would include vegetarian literature. The seventh section would present household items made from animal-free products. Finally, the eighth section – culinary – would cover the theoretical and practical aspects of food preparation, and comprised cookery books, samples of vegetarian food, and kitchen utensils.<sup>47</sup>

The congress was scheduled to start on April 16 with a meeting of delegates from the various vegetarian societies. The entire organizational part of the congress, such as admission to the congress, participants, contacts with authorities, delivering drafts of talks, etc. was to be taken over by the meeting of the delegates. The meeting of the delegates would also suggest candidates for the Presidium of the Congress. The evening of April 16, the opening of the congress, was scheduled for electing the Presidium and announcing the congress program.<sup>48</sup> The congress comprised full and competitive participants. Full participants could be: delegates from vegetarian

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societies, appointed by their general assemblies or boards; full participants of vegetarian societies who had certificates from the boards of these societies confirming their useful activities in promoting vegetarianism; authors of literature on vegetarianism; finally, individual vegetarians, who were neither authors of literature on vegetarianism nor were members of vegetarian societies, but were recognized by a majority vote at the meeting of delegates as being valuable when it came to promoting vegetarianism. People who did not meet the above-mentioned criteria but who wanted to be given full participation at the congress had to submit an application. Competitive participants might be veg-

etarians or people interested in vegetarianism. Full participants had the right to make a decisive vote at the congress meetings. A president/chairman of the congress had the exclusive right to vote more than once. Competitive participants only had the right to make a deliberative vote at the congress meetings. When attending congress meetings and sessions, all participants were supposed to have an entrance ticket to the congress.

The organization of the congress was mainly funded by the “Spiritual Awakening” Society, the Moscow, Kiev and Saratov vegetarian societies. Eventually, more funds than required were raised for the organization and convening of the congress. After the event, the remaining funds were proportionally returned to the four societies.<sup>49</sup>

### “Man does not live by bread alone”: Event branding

In this section, I focus on three texts in *The VR* written by Iosif Perper, someone whose input in promoting vegetarian activism is hard to overestimate.<sup>50</sup> These texts, which were put before the information about preparations for the congress, presented the event in a certain way.

In the first text entitled “Our fragmentation”, which was a sort of preamble to the Saratov Society’s letter, Perper called on readers to respond to the Saratov Society’s request and send proposals regarding the organization of the congress. He believed the time had come to consolidate the efforts for the cause of vegetarianism. In his opinion, little had been achieved in recent years regarding the promotion of vegetarianism. Even though there had been an increase in the amount of literature on vegetarianism, no fundamental works, either original, or translations, had been produced. At this point he mentioned Lev Tolstoy, asserting “[...] when you remember that Lev Nikolaevich lived in our country and worked so much for the benefit of our movement, you become ashamed of the present state of vegetarianism in Russia, of our indifference, disregard [...]”. Perper poses a rhetorical question about the point in time when fragmentation would end and vegetarians across the empire would meet for a discussion. He optimistically presented the congress as a solution to all the challenges of the fledgling vegetarian activism. Eventually, Perper turned to the Saratov Society’s letter itself, which followed his text, and encouraged readers to react and respond to it. “It is enough to fight individually, without any system. We need to unite”, Iosif Perper insisted claiming that at the upcoming congress, it would be possible to organize a vegetarian exhibition and discuss the founding of an All-Russian Vegetarian Union, which would unite like-minded people from all over the country, and greatly advance the idea of vegetarianism and other related humanitarian movements.<sup>51</sup> Before even taking any tangible form, the upcoming congress was perceived and discursively branded as a joint enterprise, a shared collective action project, and a joint effort of all vegetarians in the country.

In his commentary in the July 1912 issue of *The VR*, Iosif Perper gave his parting words and his assessment of the planned congress and exhibition, inviting readers to study the draft program of the event. According to Perper, the fact that the first

congress and exhibition were organized by the young “Spiritual Awakening” Society was a symbolic act. He continued:

**We vegetarians should have spiritually awakened long ago and not limited our activity and aspirations to the mere organization of beautiful dining rooms with various rich menus, expensive dishes, waitresses in strange-looking dresses. We should be ashamed of this superficiality and unnecessary tinsel ...<sup>52</sup>**

Then he turned to a critique of the vegetarian societies, which, in his opinion, were mostly preoccupied with increasing the number of vegetarian canteens, forgetting that “man does not live by bread alone”. Perper was confident that the upcoming congress would propose a new way of promoting the idea of vegetarianism. He presented the organization of the congress as a joint venture, when “each of us now has the opportunity to do something for our movement”. At the end of this text, Perper mentioned Tolstoy and also referred to the “First Step”.<sup>53</sup> He continued:

**The upcoming congress and exhibition should serve the widespread propaganda of vegetarianism. Our movement should flow throughout Russia as a wide river, so that it will be as Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy envisioned it. [...] This movement should be particularly attractive to people who want to realize a kingdom of God on earth, not because vegetarianism itself is an important step towards this kingdom [...], but because it serves as a sign that a man’s effort to achieve moral self-perfection is serious and sincere, [...] and starts with the first step.<sup>54</sup>**

Interestingly, Perper connected vegetarianism with man’s moral self-perfection, consonant with Tolstoy’s very idea expressed in “The First Step”. The convening of the congress is presented as an embodiment of collective action. Perper’s text is a sort of ideological marker. By invoking Tolstoy and including a reference to his “First Step”, Perper brands the alleged congress in a certain way.

**IN THE MARCH 1913** issue of *The VR*, on the eve of the congress, Iosif Perper wrote another text on the upcoming event. According to Perper, the aim of the congress was to unite all vegetarians living in Russia and systematically promote the idea of vegetarianism. For the first time, like-minded people from different parts of Russia would come together and discuss the issues that interested them. Perper spoke about the lack of a “unifying center”. Thus, the main task of the First Congress, in Perper’s words, should be the founding of an All-Russian Vegetarian Union, which it was believed would bring a sense of belonging and commonality to the country’s vegetarians and reduce the apparent inconsistency in the activities of vegetarian societies and individual vegetarians. Perper praised the First All-Russian Vegetarian Congress for being a historic and important step in “our movement”, since its convening was perceived as a sign of

a firmly strengthened movement that was looking for new forms of growth. Tensions were seen as unavoidable as witnessed by international vegetarian movements and which Perper also highlighted. On the other hand, Perper hoped that participants at the upcoming congress would still avoid unnecessary friction. “Our great idea teaches us love and respect for all living things...”, Perper stated.<sup>55</sup> He also commented on the Minister of the Interior’s decision regarding Jews’ participation at the congress:

**In spreading the vegetarian movement in Russia and in preparing the congress, we Jews had taken an active role, but we are not allowed to “enter it”. Let us hope this will not happen again. Upcoming congresses must be arranged in cities of the “Pale of Settlement”, so that like-minded Jews can freely partake in them. And in the future, this “pale” will disappear, and heavy yokes will fall off the necks of millions of people, their only fault being that they are people of the “Jewish faith”.**<sup>56</sup>

Iosif Perper had discursively placed great faith in the congress as an event that could potentially bring vegetarians of the empire closer, find new ways of promoting vegetarianism, as well as consolidate activists. At the same time, as a member of the German Vegetarian Federation, Iosif Perper was aware of the challenges of movement consolidating activity, fragmentation and alienation. It is also worth noting how, by invoking Tolstoy and speaking of self-perfection, Perper colored the event.

### The finest hour

Thanks to the attention given to the congress by the Moscow press, readers had the opportunity to learn about the event, which, however, could not be easily attended by the public. An informative report on the congress was provided by the newspaper *The Russian Sheet* (*Russkie vedomosti*).<sup>57</sup> Other dailies of the empire also reported on the congress, among them, the Khar’kov’s *Morning* (*Utro*).<sup>58</sup> The congress participant with the pseudonym *Old Vegetarian* provided a detailed description of the event.<sup>59</sup> This section seeks to reconstruct the event.

The congress comprised around 200 participants and representatives of different vegetarian societies, as well as individual vegetarians. It was open from 10.00 to 23.00. A vegetarian buffet with appetizers was organized by Jenny Schulz<sup>60</sup> and other female colleagues at the congress. The Vegetarian Exhibition presented information on the current state of vegetarianism, Russian and foreign vegetarian literature, the documentation of vegetarian societies, household items and kitchen appliances, photos and portraits of well-known vegetarians, vegetarian soap, foodstuffs and samples of dried vegetables, non-animal footwear, briefcases, belts and suitcases, Natal’ia Nordman-Severova’s exhibits and much more. The Jewish section com-

prised brochures and books on vegetarianism in Yiddish.<sup>61</sup> *The Russian Sheet’s* journalist paid attention to a map showcasing the geographical dissemination of vegetarianism in the country, highlighting canteens, sanatoriums that offered vegetarian meals, agricultural colonies, lectures, etc. The vegetarian movement had apparently spread mainly in the northwest and southwest of the empire, from Petersburg to Moscow, Kharkov, Poltava, all the way to Odessa.<sup>62</sup>

THE FIRST DAY of the congress started with a meeting of the delegates of vegetarian societies at which the candidates for the Presidium of the congress were proposed and a number of technical and organizational questions were resolved. The congress was opened during the evening of the same day by Georgii Bosse,<sup>63</sup> chairman of the “Spiritual Awakening” Society. The Presidium was elected unanimously: Ivan Gorbunov-Posadov – honorary chairman of the congress, Aleksei Zonov – chairman, Georgii Bosse – deputy chairman, Semen Poltavskii – secretary, Mikhail Pudavov – deputy secretary. The congress participants listened to a funeral march, dedicated to the memory of Tolstoy, whose portraits decorated the premises.

Greetings to the congress, received from different vegetarian groups and individuals,<sup>64</sup> voiced the expectations and hopes for the congress, sometimes revealing their ideological orientation. The first four greetings, which were very detailed and loaded

with meaning, were likely a form of a discursive activity of ideological branding of the event.

On behalf of the editorial board of the periodical “Calendar for Everyone” (*Kalendar’ dlia kazhdogo*, published from 1907–1918 in Moscow), Ivan Gorbunov-Posadov and Aleksei Zonov greeted the congress participants, wishing them success in strengthening and spreading the idea of “compassion for all living things”. On behalf of the Inter-

mediary Publishing House, an extended greeting was delivered, indicating the self-perceived role of the publishing house in vegetarian activism. The Intermediary Publishing House, which had apparently been working on spreading the ideas of humanity and vegetarianism in Russia for 20 years, greeted its “brothers in spirit and cause”, who attended the congress. When the publishing house started publishing books on vegetarianism, the few vegetarians in Russia were regarded as mere curiosities, according to Ivan Gorbunov-Posadov and Aleksei Zonov. The Intermediary acknowledged the great importance of the issue of nutrition and the replacement of slaughter food, yet hoped that the congress would:

**ensure that its main focus was on mankind’s spiritual rebirth through an increase in the spirit of love, the spirit of active brotherhood of all living things, the spirit of eternal peace, the spirit of universal justice, remem-**

## “THE CONGRESS COMPRISED AROUND 200 PARTICIPANTS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF DIFFERENT VEGETARIAN SOCIETIES, AS WELL AS INDIVIDUAL VEGETARIANS.”

bering that vegetarianism is a great development, but only the first step in the spiritual rebirth of a person.<sup>65</sup>

The Intermediary Publishing House expressed its deep regret that the congress had not been held during the lifetime of Lev Tolstoy, “our greatest apostle of love for all living things”, who, together with Vladimir Chertkov, another “fighter for vegetarianism”, founded the Intermediary Publishing House.<sup>66</sup> This greeting allowed a self-image of the publishing house as an important agent in the *movement*, its founder, to emerge.

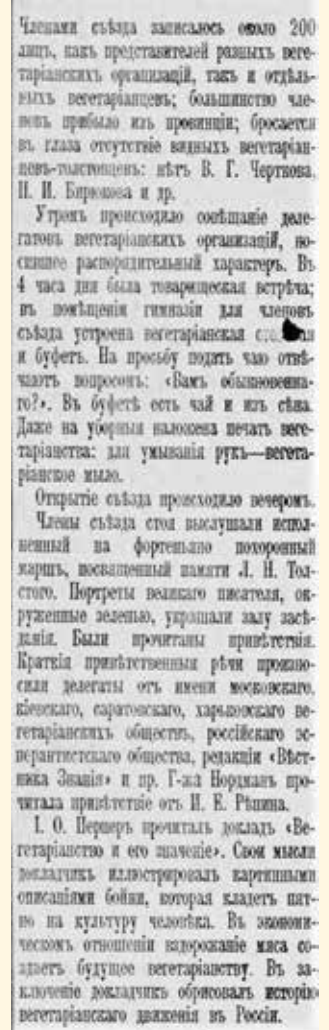
E. Gorbunova, E. Korotkova and I. Gorbunov-Posadov, editors of the children’s journal “Lighthouse” (*Mayak*), also greeted the congress on behalf of its vegetarian children readers, “future participants of the vegetarian movement in Russia”. This greeting also permeated by the idea that compassion for all animals was paramount to the congress. Another extended greeting delivered by Gorbunov-Posadov was from the editors of the journal “Free Education” (*Svobodnoe vospitanie*). Its editorial board expressed the hope that the congress would work on the issue of raising children in the spirit of humanity, sympathy and respect for all living things, as well as the active protection of all life. Also, the vegetarian movement, perceived as a movement that was striving for a natural, truly healthy and joyful life close to nature, should specifically work on the issue of raising children in such settings, and the editors of “Free Education” expressed the hope that the congress would specifically address this issue. The editors wanted the congress to particularly focus on the development of standards for slaughter-free food which, it was believed, would enable the proper physical and spiritual development of children. The greeting ended with the glorification of life, love for all living things, and “natural education” (*estestvennoe obrazovanie*).

**AS WE CAN SEE**, the four greetings had the same ideological content, projecting the idea of compassion for animals and an ethical vegetarianism on the congress.

Regular citizens across the country also greeted the congress. Seven peasants from the Saratov province sent their greetings to the congress. Three vegetarian esperantists sent their greetings in Esperanto. Having acquainted himself with the All-Russian Vegetarian Congress in *The VR*, a “lonely vegetarian”, F. Frey and his wife wished good luck to the initiators and participants in the founding of the All-Russian Vegetarian Union. According to the couple, no one needed it as much as provincial vegetarians and rural inhabitants. Short greetings were sent from chairman Vasilii Zuev on behalf of the Board of the Odessa Vegetarian Society, as well as from vegetarian gardeners from Ekaterinoslav, a vegetarian group from Kishinev, Tobol’sk vegetarians, as well as the first vegetarian canteen in Ekaterinoslav. Personal greetings were also received from people from Samarkand and Tashkent. A group of Vitebsk Jewish vegetarians, as they called themselves, sent their greetings to the congress. Anna Kamenskaia, chairwoman of the Russian Theosophical Society, sent greetings on its behalf. Samuil Perper, a doctor, columnist at *The VR* and Iosif Perper’s brother, together with his wife, sent their greetings to the congress from Rome.



A report on the opening of the congress in Moscow in the Khar'kov newspaper *Morning*. Source: “Poslednie novosti. Vegetarianskii s'ezd v Moskve,” *Utro*, April 20, 1913, 3.



Greetings and brief welcoming speeches were delivered by delegates of vegetarian societies, and other individuals and organizations. Natal'ia Nordman-Severova, a suffragette and a champion of vegetarianism, read greetings on behalf of her partner, Ilja Repin. In his talk entitled “Vegetarianism and Its Significance”, Iosif Perper spoke about vegetarianism from ethical, educational and economic perspectives. The second talk was given by Dr. Dokuchaev on “Vegetarianism as the First Step to a Healthy Life”.

On April 17, during the morning session, the reports of I. Tregubov on teetotalers and their vegetarianism, and Iosif Perper on the “Contemporary State of Vegetarianism in Russia” were delivered. Perper promoted the founding of the All-Russian Vegetarian Union, which, in his opinion, would propel the success of the *movement* even more. The questions about a unified center, consolidation and organization of vegetarians were heatedly debated resulting in a resolution on the establishment of a Vegetarian Enquiry Office (*vegetariankoe spravocnoe biuro*). In the evening, Semen Poltavskii discussed whether “a vegetarian worldview” was possible and criticized the reduction of vegetari-

anism to “a kitchen doctrine” in which morals presumably became less significant.<sup>67</sup> The second evening speech, delivered by V. Totomianets, was about the history of the “Eden” life reform colony, located nearby Berlin suburb.

On April 18, the administration of the congress banned journalists from attending the sessions and there were only closed meetings.<sup>68</sup> On this day, talks were delivered on “The Influence of Vegetarianism on Human Spiritual Life” by P. Skorogliadov, “Where Vegetarianism Takes Us” by I. Prikashchikov, “The Main Questions of Vegetarianism” by M. S. Anderson and “Vegetarianism in Krinita” by B. Iakovlev-Orlov. The issue of the promotion of vegetarianism through the organization of consumer vegetarian societies and shops, and an increase in the number of vegetarian canteens was raised. The canteen issue caused a particularly long and heated debate. In the evening, Poltavskii’s report had been debated for many hours, as well as the question of the enquiry office.

ON APRIL 19, during the morning session, chairman Zonov read out the resolution on the Vegetarian Enquiry Office accepted by all participants. Viktor Lebren’s report proposed to initiate an international encyclopedic periodical, preferably in Esperanto which, for example, would disseminate *progressive* ideas about free upbringing, combating alcoholism and prostitution, promoting women’s emancipation and the true and holistic enlightenment of people and children.<sup>69</sup> Vladimir Kimental lectured on “Vegetarianism and Upbringing”, pointing out that vegetarianism can go hand in hand with an ideal (*ideal vospitaniia*) and rational upbringing (*ratsional’noe vospitanie*), since, in his view, both preached love, willpower, the value of life, respect for individual rights, emancipation of an individual from *zhivotnoe* “*ia*”, i.e. from “the animal within”.<sup>70</sup> The lecture resulted in the congress passing a resolution on education. During the evening session, K. Iunakov talked about “Vegetarianism in Connection with a Human Being’s General Outlook”

and an exchange of opinions followed. Three more lectures were delivered that evening. Based on B. Ioffe’s report “On the Propaganda of Vegetarianism”, a resolution was adopted. After extended discussions, the congress voted to condemn vivisection. The evening session ended with a reading of the resolutions passed after the lectures of Lebren, Poltavskii and Kimental.

The morning session on April 20 started with a report on “the life ideal” (*ideal zhizni*). Later, decisions about publishing a vegetarian handbook and creating a mobile vegetarian exhibition were made. The congress greeted the Esperanto Union and thanked its representative Anna Sharapova for two reports and overall fruitful cooperation.<sup>71</sup> After a few more congress greetings to individual vegetarians, as well as speeches, Zonov read the resolutions, summarized the work of the congress and

thanked all the participants and organizer. Farewell speeches were delivered by Gorbunov-Posadov, Zonov, Bosse, as well as delegates of vegetarian societies. The congress participants then attended a banquet organized by the Moscow Vegetarian Society. On April 21, the remaining congress participants visited the Tolstoy Museum, the Tretyakov Gallery and the Kremlin. Afterwards, a small group of participants visited Iasnaia Poliana (literally “Bright Glade”), Tolstoy’s residence 200 kilometers from Moscow.

The delegates from the vegetarian societies of Moscow (I. N. Morachevskii), Kiev (M. Pudavov and E. Sklovskii), St. Petersburg (N. Evstifeev), Saratov (K. Iunakov), Poltava (M. Dudchenko), Khar’kov (A. Gurov) and Rostov-on-Don (A. Kovalev) attended the congress. It seems that no delegates from the Odessa, Warsaw and Minsk vegetarian societies attended the congress. Vegetarian groups and reformist circles operated in many more cities of the empire than those mentioned above. Speakers who did not attend the congress in person sent their talks and reports via the postal service. They were then read out at the congress.<sup>72</sup>

### The manifesto: Congress resolutions

The Presidium was permitted to propose a resolution based on a speech, which, for instance, provoked a lively discussion, as in the case of Lebren’s talk. Congress participants could also propose ideas for resolutions. A majority vote was needed in order for a proposal to be adopted. The issue regarding potential

manipulations and mechanisms of influence on the resolution adopting process requires further research. Through a majority vote, the congress adopted seven resolutions.<sup>73</sup> Let us have a closer look at them.

According to the first resolution, based on Poltavskii’s talk, the All-Russian Vegetarian Congress, recognizing the need for new and broader ways of developing the idea of vegetarianism, stated that it wanted dietary issues to stop being the focus of vegetarianism. When addressing the theoretical issues of vegetarianism, the primary

focus would be on the spiritual aspects (*dukhovnaia storona*). Vegetarianism would only achieve the highest value when it was sanctified by moral ideas, which was the realization of the kingdom of harmony and justice on earth. Through this resolution, the congress was clearly distancing itself from the hygiene and health tenets of vegetarianism.

The second resolution was inspired by Kimental’s report.<sup>74</sup> Acknowledging the great importance of vegetarianism in child-rearing, the congress considered it necessary to promote the idea of vegetarianism in both family and at school. Recognizing the importance of parents and caregivers as living examples, the congress expressed a strong desire for parents, educators and vegetarians to fully invest in building their lives on the foundations of humanity, in the constant work of creating an atmo-

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sphere for the natural, harmonious and holistic development of children's bodies and souls. The congress identified a number of most urgent tasks of cooperation for all vegetarians. Among them were the establishment of agricultural settlements, urban gardens, gardens for workers, school gardens, etc., and in general all the ways of unity with nature and life of the family and society, particularly for children's lives and the lives of working urban people. In this regard, the task was also about organizing children and youth clubs at schools for the "protection of all living things".

**THE NEXT RESOLUTION** was based on B. Ioffe's report. The resolution claimed that one of the main tasks of social and educational work was addressing the active struggle of the family, school and society against everything that contributes to the "development of cruelty, sexual promiscuity, relaxation of will, and confusion in the souls of children and young men".<sup>75</sup> The congress drew the attention of parents and educators, school and society to the importance of the struggle against alcoholism, to organizing children's clubs of sobriety, and combating depictions of all kinds of atrocities and sexual promiscuity in the content of movie theatres. The congress unconditionally condemned experiments on live animals known as vivisection.

The congress initiated the founding of the Vegetarian Enquiry Office aimed at establishing contacts between and consolidating the activities of vegetarian societies and individual vegetarians by responding to queries, sending vegetarian literature, etc. The office, according to the congress, should consist of delegates from Moscow and other vegetarian societies, as well as all those willing to contribute to its work, to include three appointees from the congress (Zonov, Gorbunov-Posadov, Bosse). The latter were to take on the responsibility of organizing the office.

According to the sixth resolution, based on Lebrén's report, the congress considered it necessary to establish a media outlet that would bring together individuals and organizations seeking spiritual rebirth based on vegetarianism. Thus, the congress expressed the desire that not only vegetarian but also other Russian (*russkie*) *ideinye*, socially oriented organizations such as religious, ethical, peace, cooperative, educational and temperance organizations would engage with the Vegetarian Enquiry Office in order to establish such an outlet. Until this had been achieved, the congress considered it necessary for all vegetarian societies to support *The VR* by sending donations so that it could expand its program, thereby bringing it closer to the type of periodical in question. In addition, the congress considered it necessary to actively promote and support Zonov's periodical "Calendar for Everyone". As previously stated, Zonov had been compiling articles and information on all aspects of "spiritual revival".

Believing that one of the reasons for the spread of alcoholism among the urban working population was a meat-based diet, the congress took it upon itself to appeal to the boards of trustees and temperance societies to introduce an optional plant-based diet in their public canteens. Sympathizing with the development of vegetarian consumer and productive cooperatives, the congress expressed the desire that the vegetarian societies

would contribute to their organization. The congress instructed the upcoming Vegetarian Enquiry Office to publish a handbook of vegetarianism, as well as arrange a mobile vegetarian exhibition. The congress wanted the Second All-Russian Vegetarian Congress to be convened in Kiev in 1914 during Easter week.

The resolutions of the congress aimed to forge and cement the ideological orientation of a fledgling vegetarian activism, thus endorsing life reform and cultural critique. The resolutions also concerned consolidation and the organizational elements of social movement activity, and included aspects of information management, communication and coordination. The resolutions passed at the congress reaffirmed the confidence in the idealistic ambitions of vegetarianism. Overlooking the time-honored scientific debate on dietary reform, one of the resolutions nevertheless inscribed itself into a global debate on vivisection. As sociologist Julia Twigg states:

**Nature is a framework of meaning, not just an alien object for our regard and exploitation. This is the significance of the deep hostility of the counterculture to science.**<sup>76</sup>

The counter-cultural imaginary emanating from the congress resolutions resonates well with Mary Douglas's ideas and Twigg's reflections on purity and vegetarianism.<sup>77</sup> The resolutions evoke dichotomies of purity/impurity, body (stomach)/spirit, meat/vegetables, structure/antistructure and so forth. Vegetarianism was imagined to be concerned with the control of "passions" and the improvement of "will". Passions represent man's carnal instinct, the "animal" instinct of humans, antithetical to rational, spiritual and moral persons. The underlying idea was the subduing of the flesh, the holistic development (read *subjection*) of the body and (*to*) the spirit. Consuming meat was linked with the rise of instincts beyond control and an appetite for food, alcohol and sexual congress. The ethics of wholeness and the ethics of naturalness were undeniable. Vegetarianism was quintessentially about renewal, New Life, New Man, new relations based on the egalitarianism of all forms of life, the unity of all living things. Having all these in mind, it is no wonder that the two resolutions heavily focused on educational aspects and the imagined role of children in the movement.

### **Aftermath: Make no one happy?**

The congress was followed by assessments, exchange of opinions and even critiques of the congress' work and outcomes. The assessments varied and revealed conflicting views on the congress' work, as well as deeper frictions on doctrinal issues.

On May 5, 1913, K. Iunakov, a delegate from the Saratov Vegetarian Society, shared his impressions of the congress with the society's members. Iunakov spoke of the technical shortcomings in the development of the congress program which, however, in his opinion, did not diminish the fruitfulness and value of its work. He expressed overall satisfaction with the results of the congress and gratitude to its organizer. The speaker mentioned the ideological differences that regrettably appeared during the

congress. In his opinion, three “conflicting currents”, – “religious,” “scientific-positivistic” and “hygiene”, – perceived vegetarianism from different angles. In Poltavskii’s opinion, the goal outlined by the congress was realized beyond what the organizer had hoped for. Poltavskii considered the ideological dissent (*ideinoe raznomyslie*) spelled out by Lunakov not to be regret, but rather deepest and sincerest joy. In Poltavskii’s opinion, the diverse assessments of vegetarianism indicated that it concerned different aspects of life. In his words, from the “conflicting currents of vegetarian thought”, from a very “clash of opinions”, a new and a broad vegetarianism, “closely connected with life”, must be born.<sup>78</sup> Poltavskii continued:

**This struggle of thoughts, which – let us hope – will flare up with even greater force and passion at our Second Congress in Kiev, will only strengthen the unity of spirit firmly established by the First All-Russian Congress in Moscow. Among us, as it seems to me, there is no one with a narrow conviction: “There is no salvation outside our church,” and therefore, no matter how great the ideological divergence [*ideinoe raskhozhdenie*], our “unity in love” will not become either lesser or paler because of it.<sup>79</sup>**

In the fall of 1913, the “Spiritual Awakening” Society launched a series of internal discussions on theoretical foundations and the consolidation of vegetarians. The assessment of the congress became one of the subjects of these discussions. In September 1913, L. Plakhov, chairman of the society’s board, opened a meeting by presenting the society’s aims and the direction of its activity, as well as its ideological foundations. He stated that the society had pioneered the convocation of the vegetarian congress in Russia, laying the foundation for a new way of promoting a high moral (*npravstvennaia*) doctrine and the humanitarian trends connected with it, as well as the “brotherly unity of Russian [*russkikh*] vegetarians”.<sup>80</sup> At the meeting in October 1913, P. Gurov started his speech on the aims, forms of propagation and mobilization activity of the “Spiritual Awakening” Society, with a critique of the congress, judging its results as insignificant and its scale as limited.<sup>81</sup> According to Gurov, it was not worth gathering the congress to pass resolutions on movie theatres, Mr. Zonov’s and Mr. Perper’s periodicals, and the “dogmatic resolution” on vivisection. He added that it was pointless to spend time on needless conversations about the benefits and hazards of medicine, when questions of paramount importance were not raised, such as: what was vegetarianism? Or, propaganda about what type of vegetarianism the congress considered to be the most rational; how to make the idea and practice of veg-

etarianism available to the masses, the working class, and other important questions. According to Gurov, the failure of the congress stemmed from the vagueness of the organizer’s perception of the task they faced, and from the vagueness of their practical program. Had the “Spiritual Awakening” Society presented clear views about the idea of vegetarianism, about the obligations to be imposed on its members, the members of the society would have likely voted unanimously at the congress, and the society would have been able to develop a program for the congress and draft resolutions that would meet its objectives. In his subsequent speech, he reflected on how to understand vegetarianism, with whom to unite and on which grounds. Humanistic socio-ethical worldview based on justice and “active love” was a nodal point of the ethical vegetarianism about which Gurov spoke. Interestingly, he did not mention Tolstoy, but cited Jean-Marie Guyau and Nikolai Nekrasov.<sup>82</sup>

AS THE ABOVE examples show, there was no consensus in either the assessment of the work of the congress or the doctrinal foundations of vegetarianism. Poltavskii was enthusiastic about the ideological differences articulated at the congress and believed that ideological diversity did not harm the collective cause. Plakhov and Gurov evaluated the work of the congress from the point of view of promoting ethical vegetarianism. Gurov criticized the “Spiritual Awakening” Society for not being proactive in preparing drafts of the congress resolutions and working ideologically with its members.

**“SOME ACTIVISTS WELCOMED THE DIVERSE ASSESSMENTS OF VEGETARIANISM ARTICULATED DURING THE DISCUSSIONS, WHILE OTHER ACTIVISTS WANTED TO FIX ITS PERCEIVED DOCTRINAL SHORTCOMINGS.”**

The VR provided an opportunity to share impressions of the congress. As Old Vegetarian wrote, 1913 would remain memorable for the “vegetarian movement in Russia” due to the convocation of the congress and exhibition, which demonstrated the vitality of the idea of vegetarianism, its growth and flourishing in recent years. For the first time, the author continued, an attempt had been made at the congress to unite like-minded people living in Russia, and it was hoped that this would be achieved in the future.<sup>83</sup> Being a

Tolstoy devotee, Esfir Kaplan highly praised the congress for the opportunity it gave to personally interact with like-minded people. In her opinion, the question of vivisection raised the most heated debates, and a few of the talks on the religious aspects particularly resonated with her. Hinting at the official antisemitic decision, she regretted that many vegetarians were not permitted to attend the congress.<sup>84</sup> In Iosif Perper’s opinion, the congress was like a large family, in which the participants showed love to each other. Yet, he acknowledged that there had been friction in some of the debates and that the issue of vegetarian canteens created tensions when “passions ran too high” and too much was said. According to Perper, the most important aspect of the congress was the unity of like-minded people, “a feeling



of unlimited love for all living things”, as well as the resolution that “vegetarianism only then acquires the highest value when it is sanctified by moral ideals...”<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, the congress did not manage to launch the All-Russian Vegetarian Union, as Perper had hoped.<sup>86</sup>

Some activists welcomed the diverse assessments of vegetarianism articulated during the discussions, while other activists wanted to fix its perceived doctrinal shortcomings. Although heated debates may have preceded the adoption of the congress resolutions, the resolutions that were adopted did not reflect the diversity of the ideological tenets of vegetarianism – rather the opposite. It seems that Tolstoy was not a unifying symbol, as some activists had wanted him to be. Old Vegetarian spoke of at least two portraits of Tolstoy and a picture of “Jesus with his followers in the corn field” which decorated the walls of the main hall of the congress building.<sup>87</sup> Remarkably, the “Spiritual Awakening” Society published a postcard in memory of the congress with a portrait of Élisée Reclus and his views on vegetarianism.<sup>88</sup> Ivan Gorbunov-Posadov’s verse “Happy is the one who loves all living things”, preaching compassion for animals and all living creatures, voiced out at the congress, became a vegetarian hymn.<sup>89</sup>

## Concluding remarks

As Donna Maurer reminds us, to succeed, vegetarian advocates and activists must balance practicality with moral consistency. Although activist groups want to promote an inclusive vegetarian message, the development of a vegetarian collective identity requires the ability to identify with the various motivations for vegetarianism. A vegetarian collective identity can create a sense of commonality and shared interests among vegetarians, encourage current vegetarians to become more involved in movement activities, yet if it becomes too strong, vegetarian advocates risk alienating some of their potential members.<sup>90</sup>

The congress resolutions appear to be exclusive, endorsing one strand of the vegetarian argument. The moral-ethical vegetarianism with some Christian religious undertones (the third resolution with references to God) was decreed a priority for imperial Russian vegetarian activism. Beside resolution on vivisection, there was no resolution that addressed vegetarianism from a scientific, economic, human health or environmental perspective, even though these perspectives were included in the congress program draft, as well as publicly discussed and academically developed. The so-called “medical” or “scientific” vegetarians were steadily increasing in number and influence, particularly during the 1910s. On the eve of convening the congress some of the leading Tolstoyans themselves were aware that the “moralistic vegetarians” of the Tolstoyan camp had been losing their influence within the *movement*, as Ronald LeBlanc has noted. Those who advocated vegetarianism on the basis of rational or modern scientific considerations showed growing displeasure with the doctrinaire views of “moralistic vegetarians”.<sup>91</sup> The second part of the resolutions focused on efforts to consolidate and mobilize, as well as information management. The congress resolutions made clear which ideological foundations

were given priority and which standpoints were favored by the congress. Enforcement of a certain brand of vegetarianism, and absolutization of its ethical-humanitarian aspects could have disenfranchised all those who sympathized with vegetarianism for health reasons, for example. This could have deepened the existing frictions between movement groups, causing further disintegration and alienation, a tendency which was common in many reformist environments of Europe. The flash of ideological polemics occurred on the eve of the First World War and the congress results might have fueled it.

According to LeBlanc, a rift that developed in the 1910s between “moralistic vegetarians” and “hygiene vegetarians” clearly had a profound impact on the direction that the movement took. By refusing to tolerate any departure from the ethical vegetarianism, Vladimir Chertkov, Ivan Gorbunov-Posadov and other influential Tolstoyan activists alienated and disenfranchised many of those who were attracted to vegetarianism for reasons other than the principle of not killing other living creatures. They were also solely responsible for identifying vegetarianism with Tolstoyism. According to this outlook, not only were all Tolstoyans expected to practice vegetarianism, but all vegetarians were also expected to abide by Tolstoy’s teachings.<sup>92</sup> At the same time, it seems that so-called “moralistic vegetarians” were not united either.

It also appears that the congress participants had different expectations about the congress, which were evident in its diverse assessments. Some participants criticized the congress for its ideological vagueness, weakness and indecisiveness, other participants praised it for providing a forum for communication and interaction between vegetarians from across the empire, while other participants mentioned the significance of the ideological rifts and debates during the sessions. These diverse assessments echoed well with the discussions on the ideological tenets of vegetarianism, which appeared in The VR’s column “The conversations on vegetarianism” and were pursued long before convening the congress. According to Perper, it was not the task of vegetarianism to make a “careful distinction” between “ethical” and “hygiene” vegetarians. The history of the international vegetarian movement, as Perper maintained, included examples of people who adhered to vegetarianism for hygiene reasons, grew subsequently concerned about its ethical side, and became adherents of “our idea”. Thus, in Perper’s view, it was not “we”, who had been striving for unity, who should be obliged to make any distinctions.<sup>93</sup>

THE PRESENT INQUIRY has barely scratched the surface of vegetarian movement activity, its branding and ideological anxieties. In order to further our understanding of these processes, it is crucial that more research is conducted. However, let us speculate on the factors that might have contributed to the dominance of a certain orientation of vegetarianism as manifested in the congress resolutions. First, in The VR, the congress was discursively (and beforehand) branded as the event that placed an ethical vegetarianism at its center. This is the impression that is gained when reading Perper’s texts, which served as a preamble to

information about the congress. This might have discouraged activists who did not associate their vegetarian regime with ethics, or their ethics with Tolstoy, in order for them to participate in the congress. Administrative barriers and official antisemitic decision could also have diminished the ideological diversity of the congress participants. The “Spiritual Awakening” Society, the organizer and the host of the event aimed to promote an ethical vegetarianism, as part of a humanitarian doctrine.<sup>94</sup> The triumvirate of Ivan Gorbunov-Posadov, Georgii Bosse and Aleksei Zonov gained a disproportionate influence.<sup>95</sup> Overall, these could have contributed to the prevalence of people among the delegates and participants at the congress with voting rights that favored moral-ethical/humanitarian vegetarianism. Yet, this point requires additional verification, since the present sources do not hint at the voting process. Due to the outbreak of the First World War, the second congress in Kiev did not take place. The outbreak of war corresponded with the flash of ideological polemics, forcing vegetarian activists to reexamine and more explicitly defend their motivation for abstaining from eating meat.<sup>96</sup>

The congress resolutions witnessed the absolutization of one line of argument in favor of vegetarianism, promoted by certain activist groups with resources. Out of seven congress resolutions, four were about doctrinal aspects and three were about the promotion and realization of these. The educational agenda, which preoccupied two out of seven resolutions, seemed to be one of the milestones of the vegetarian imaginary, promoted by the congress resolutions. The resolutions deliberately overlooked the hygiene and health considerations of vegetarianism. Was the congress and its resolutions representative of the vegetarian activism of the Russian empire? Due to the partiality of the resolutions, it is unlikely that the congress became a consolidating event, as it was hoped. On the contrary, it could have deepened the fragmentation and rifts between the different reformist groups. Micro-historical studies of local vegetarian and reformist environments across the former Russian empire are crucial not only for the nuancing of the historiographic image of vegetarianism in Eastern Europe, but also for comprehending a variety of grassroots initiatives and philosophies from these milieus. The mere fact that journalists were ousted from the congress is intriguing. Did the congress administration want to hide something from the public? Was it a way of influencing, if not controlling, the media image of the event? ❌

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- 2 Semen Poltavskii (1887–ca 1960) was a Soviet journalist, critic, author of prose, translator. He graduated from Saratov University as a physician. In the 1930s, he was subjected to repressions.
- 3 The name of the cities in Ukrainian and Moldavian provinces of the Russian empire (such as Odessa, Kiev, Khar’kov, Ekaterinoslav, and Kishinev), journals or newspapers are translated from Russian as they appear in the source material. Russian was the language of communication within and between the vegetarian societies in the empire. The source material that was produced and left by the respective societies is also in Russian. The activists’ names are translated from Russian as they appear in the source material, with the exception of Jenny Schulz. However, important to bear in mind that vegetarian circles were multilingual and multiethnic in their nature.
- 4 Julia Malitska, “Mediated Vegetarianism: The Periodical Press and New Associations in the Late Russian Empire,” *Media History* (2021): 1–22; Liam Young, *Eating Serials: Pastoral Power, Print Media, and the Vegetarian Society in England, 1847–1897* (A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English) (University of Alberta, 2017).
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- 6 Malitska, “Mediated Vegetarianism.”
- 7 Matthew B. Ruby, “Vegetarianism. A Blossoming Field of Study,” *Appetite* 58 (2012): 141–150.
- 8 In his pioneering book, Peter Brang narrated about the event, see Peter Brang, *Rossiiia neizvestnaia: Istoriia kul’tury vegetarianskikh obrazov zhiznis nachala do nashikh dnei* (Moskva: Iazyki slavianskoi kul’tury, 2006), 301–308.
- 9 Iosif Perper, “Dobavlenie k stat’e, ‘Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoi kak vegetariants,’” VO, no. 2 (1909): 24. An essay, “The First Step” (*Pervaia stupen’*), originally appeared in the journal “Questions of Philosophy and Psychology” in 1892.
- 10 Ronald D. LeBlanc, “Tolstoy’s Way of No Flesh: Abstinence, Vegetarianism, and Christian Physiology,” in *Food in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Musya Glants and Joyce Toomre (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 85, 87.
- 11 Ronald D. LeBlanc, “Vegetarianism in Russia: The Tolstoy(an) Legacy,” *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, no. 1507 (2001): 7
- 12 Darra Goldstein, “Is Hay Only for Horses: Highlights of Russian Vegetarianism at the Turn of the Century,” in *Food in Russian History and Culture*, 104. In 1885, Chertkov organized and financed a publishing house called “Intermediary” which specialized in art and edifying literature. The new publishing house was supported by many outstanding writers of the country.
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- 14 L.N. Tolstoy, “Na boine (Iz ”Pervoi stupeni”)” (Moscow: Posrednik, 1911). LeBlanc, “Tolstoy’s Way of No Flesh,” 102.
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- 17 The *Vegetarian Herald* (*Vegetarianskii vestnik*, further on – VV) subtitled “the organ of the Kiev Vegetarian Society”, had been intermittently published in Kiev from May 1914–December 1917. Ivan Nazhivin, “O vegetarianstve i vegetarianskakh,” VV, no. 4–5 (1915): 6–7; G. G. Bosse, “Vozmozhno li vegetarianskoe mirosozertsanie?” VV, no. 11–12 (1915): 9, 14.
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- 19 Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1991).

- 20 Eyerman and Jamison, 68–70.
- 21 Maurer, 70–71.
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- 28 Hauser, “Internationalism and Nationalism,” 152–166.
- 29 On the evolution of vegetarian activism, see: Malitska, “Mediated Vegetarianism”; Julia Malitska, “The Peripheries of Omnivorousness: Vegetarian Canteens and Social Activism in the Early Twentieth-Century Russian Empire,” *Global Food History*, 7:2 (2021): 140–175; Julia Malitska, “Meat and the City in the Late Russian Empire: Dietary Reform and Vegetarian Activism in Odessa, 1890s–1910s,” *Baltic Worlds*, 2–3 (2020): 4–24.
- 30 A. N. Beketov, *Pitanie cheloveka v ego nastoiashchem i budushchem* (Moskva: Tipografiia I. D. Sytina i Ko, 1893).
- 31 A. Voeikov, “Budushchee pitanie cheloveka,” *VO*, no. 5 (1909): 9–14; no. 6 (1909): 20–21. In his other contribution Voeikov discussed the latest scientific evidence in favor of a plant-based diet, see A. Voeikov, “Voprosy pitaniia po noveishim nauchnym dannym,” *VO*, no. 6–7–8 (1910): 59–71.
- 32 A. Voeikov, “Mezhdunarodnyi vegetarianskii kongress v Briussele,” *VO*, no. 6–7–8 (1910): 19–22; no. 9–10 (1910): 20–23.
- 33 A. Voeikov, “A. P. Zelenkov,” *VO*, no. 4 (1914): 125–126; Iosif Perper, “Pamiati d-ra A. P. Zelenkova,” *VO*, no. 4 (1914): 139–141. A. P. Zelenkov, *Vegetarianstvo kak sredstvo dlia lecheniia i preduprezhdeniia boleznei (Chitano na zasiedanii St. Peterburgskogo vegetarianskogo obshchestva 25 ianvaria 1903 g.)* (Spb: Tipografiia V. A. Tsoborbir, 1903). Zelenkov was well versed in German language literature on the topic of dietary reform. He was specifically fond of Dr. Heinrich Lahmann’s naturopathic medicine and visited Lahmann’s Physiatric Sanatorium at Weißer Hirsch, outside of Dresden.
- 34 Olga Zelenkova, *‘Ja nikogo ne em!’: 365 vegetarianskikh menu i rukovodstvo dlia prigotovleniia vegetarianskikh kushanii: 1600 vegetarianskikh retseptov po vremenam goda, s raschetom na 6 person*. Pod red. A. P. Zelenkova. 4-e izdanie (Petrograd: Tipografiia t-va A. S. Suvorina “Novoe vremia,” 1917); Olga Zelenkova, *Nechto o vegetarianstve: vyp. 1–4* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Doma prizreniia maloletnikh bednykh, 1902–1904).
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- 40 “Proekt ustava Vserossiiskogo Vegetarianskogo Obshchestva,” *V*, no. 1 (1909): 29; no. 2 (1909): 35–36; no. 5 (1909): 39; no. 6 (1909): 35–36.
- 41 For more about the start-up see the columns: “Pis’mo v redaktsiiu,” *VO*, no. 5 (1912). Accessed June 14, 2021. <http://www.vita.org.ru/veg/veg-literature/veg-viewing1912/31.htm>; “Pis’mo v redaktsiiu,” *VO*, no. 6 (1912). Accessed June 14, 2021. <http://www.vita.org.ru/veg/veg-literature/veg-viewing1912/32.htm>; Sovet Vegetarianskogo Obshchestva “Dukhovnoe Probuzhdenie,” Vegetarianskii s’ezd i vegetarianskaia vystavka, *VO*, no. 10 (1912). Accessed June 14, 2021. <http://www.vita.org.ru/veg/veg-literature/veg-viewing1912/71.htm>.
- 42 The Moscow Vegetarian Society founded in 1909 on similar grounds and with the same aims as other vegetarian societies in the empire. In his speech at the first General Meeting of the Moscow Vegetarian Society on March 16, 1909, Ivan Gorbunov-Posadov, chairman of the meeting, asserted that vegetarianism was part of the humanitarian movement, aiming at life reform on the grounds of humanity and that all vegetarian societies must serve a great idea – “establishing love between all living things”. Interestingly, at the second General Meeting of the society on April 29, 1909, a member Sergei Bykov spoke of the scientific promotion of vegetarianism among the population and suggested seeking doctors’ opinions on vegetarianism. V. Molochnikov proposed that they should conceal the hygiene side of vegetarianism and mainly focus on its ethical side. This was supported by Aleksei Zonov, whereas Fedor German considered hygiene to be the basis of the ethics of vegetarianism. For further information, see the Moscow Vegetarian Society’s report from 1909 and the minutes of its meetings: *Moskovskoe Vegetarianskoe Obshchestvo. Obzor sostoiianiia i deiatel’nosti Obshchestva za 1909 g. (Pervyi god sushchestvovaniia obshchestva)* (Moskva, 1910). Accessed June 14, 2021. <http://www.vita.org.ru/veg/history/mosveg1909.htm>. Moscow had become the center of the Tolstoyan movement to an even greater extent after the “Spiritual Awakening” Society was founded there in 1912. The society declared its abstention from the dietary aspects of vegetarianism, see Obshchestvo “Dukhovnoe probuzhdenie,” *VO*, no. 8 (1913): 321–322.
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- 44 Saryi Vegetarianets, “Po miru,” *VO*, no. 3 (1913): 125–126.
- 45 “Proekt programmy Pervogo Vserossiiskogo Vegetarianskogo S’ezda v Moskve,” *VO*, no. 7 (1912): 272–273.
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- 47 “Proekt vystavki pri Pervom Vserossiiskom Vegetarianskom S’ezde,” *VO*, no. 7 (1912): 273.
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- 51 Iosif Perper, “Nasha razroznennost’” (Po povodu predpolagaemogo sozyva Pervogo Vserossiiskogo Vegetarianskogo S’ezda), *VO*, no. 5 (1912). Accessed June 14, 2021. <http://www.vita.org.ru/veg/veg-literature/veg-viewing1912/30.htm>
- 52 Iosif Perper, “Vegetarianskaia vystavka i s’ezd vegetariantsev,” *VO*, no. 7 (1912): 272.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 271–272.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 272.
- 55 Iosif Perper, “K otkrytiiu Pervogo Vserossiiskogo Vegetarianskogo S’ezda,” *VO*, no. 3 (1913): 89–90.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 90.
- 57 “V mire pechati,” *VO*, no. 4–5 (1913): 198–200.
- 58 “Poslednie novosti. Vegetarianskii s’ezd v Moskve,” *Utro*, April 20, 1913, 3.
- 59 “Old Vegetarian” was a pseudonym that most probably belonged to Aleksandr Zankovskii. Saryi Vegetarianets, “Pervyi Vserossiiskii Vegetarianskii S’ezd (Moskva, 16–21 aprelia 1913),” *VO*, no. 4–5 (1913): 136–140.
- 60 Jenny Schulz, a renowned vegetarian chef and activist from West Prussia, contributed to both the opening and the work of vegetarian canteens in Budapest, Zurich, Berlin, Locarno, as well as in a number of cities in the Russian empire. In 1909, she became a member of the Moscow Vegetarian Society. For more information, see Malitska, “Meat and the City,” 14–16.
- 61 Natal’ia Nordman-Severova (1863–1914), a friend of the Perper family, suffragette and promoter of vegetarianism, and much more. She was also the partner of painter Ilja Repin. Saryi Vegetarianets, “Vegetarianskaia Vystavka (16–21 aprelia 1913),” *VO*, no. 6 (1913): 241–243.
- 62 “V mire pechati,” *VO*, no. 4–5 (1913): 199.
- 63 Georgii Bosse (1887–1964) was a Soviet botanist, professor, doctor of biological sciences and member of the Board of the Moscow Esperanto Society.
- 64 “Privetstviia Pervomu Vserossiiskomu Vegetariankomu S’ezdu,” *VO*, no. 4–5 (1913): 141–144.
- 65 *Ibid.*, 141.
- 66 *Ibid.*, 141.
- 67 Semen Poltavskii, “Sushchestvuet li vegetarianskoe mirosozertsanie? (Doklad, chitannyi na I Vegetarianskom S’ezde),” *VO*, no. 4–5 (1913): 157–170.
- 68 “V mire pechati,” *VO*, no. 4–5 (1913): 199.
- 69 Viktor Lebrén, “O neobkhodimosti osnovaniia novago entsiklopedicheskago progressivnago organa pechati,” *VO*, no. 6 (1913): 207–213.
- 70 Vladimir Kimental’, “Vegetarianstvo i vospitanie (Doklad, chitannyi na I Vegetarianskom S’ezde),” *VO*, no. 4–5 (1913): 144–155.
- 71 Anna Sharapova (1863–1923), a Russian translator and activist in the international Esperanto movement and vegetarianism. She was also sister-in-law of Pavel Biriukov, Lev Tolstoy’s secretary. She corresponded with Tolstoy and translated a number of his works and the works of other writers into Esperanto. She translated materials from Esperanto for The VR. Sharapova, who was from Kostroma and Roman Dobrzhanskii, who was from Kiev, were national secretaries for imperial Russia in the International Union of Esperantist Vegetarians founded in 1908. Tolstoy was elected as honorary president of the union. See, inter alia: A. Sharapova, “O Mezhdunarodnom Soiuzze Esperantistov-Vegetariantsev (Internacia Unuigo de Esperantistaj Vegetaranoj),” *VO*, no. 2 (1910): 28–29; “Mezhdunarodnyi Soiuz Esperantistov-Vegetariantsev,” *VO*, no. 2 (1910): 29–30.
- 72 *Ibid.*, 136–140.
- 73 “Rezoliutsii Pervogo Vserossiiskogo Vegetarianskogo S’ezda (Moskva, 16–21 aprelia 1913),” *VO*, no. 4–5, (1913): 131–133. I have tried to summarize and convey the content and rhetoric of the resolutions as close to the original as possible.
- 74 Kimental’, “Vegetarianstvo i vospitanie.”
- 75 Rezoliutsii, 132.
- 76 Julia Twigg, “Food for Thought: Purity and Vegetarianism,” *Religion*, vol. 9 (1979): 22.
- 77 Twigg, “Food for Thought,” 13–35. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002).
- 78 Old Vegetarian reproduced the discussions (with citations) conducted at the Saratov Society, see Saryi Vegetarianets, “Po miru,” *VO*, no. 6 (1913): 243–244.
- 79 Saryi Vegetarianets, “Po miru,” *VO*, no. 6 (1913): 244.
- 80 Obshchestvo “Dukhovnoe probuzhdenie,” *VO*, no. 8 (1913): 321–323; Obshchestvo “Dukhovnoe probuzhdenie”: Svedeniia o namechennoi rabote i planakh Vegetarianskogo Obshchestva “Dukhovnoe Probuzhdenie” v 1913 godu”, *VO*, no. 7 (1913): 277–278.
- 81 It is worth mentioning that The VR’s editorial board disagreed with Gurov’s statement, as revealed by the reference attached to it, yet published his critique in the journal.
- 82 P. Gurov, “Nashi tseli i nashi zadachi,” *VO*, no. 10 (1913): 390–393. Jean-Marie Guyau (1854–1888) was a French philosopher and poet. Nikolai Nekrasov (1821–1878) was a Russian poet, writer, critic and publisher.
- 83 Saryi Vegetarianets, “Po miru,” *VO*, no. 1 (1914): 34.
- 84 Mira K, “Dni Radosti (Vospominaniia o I Vserossiiskom Vegetarianskom S’ezde),” *VO*, no. 4–5 (1913): 133–136. Esfir Kaplan had a pseudonym *Mira K*. Born in Volhynian province, she was secretary of The VR from 1909–1911, led a culinary section in the journal, and was one of the initiators of the vegetarian canteen in Poltava. Esfir was married to Iosif Perper in 1917.
- 85 Iosif Perper, “Nash pervyi S’ezd,” *VO*, no. 4–5 (1913): 130.
- 86 *Ibid.*, 129–131.
- 87 Saryi Vegetarianets, “Pervyi Vserossiiskii Vegetarianskii S’ezd (Moskva, 16–21 aprelia 1913),” *VO*, no. 4–5 (1913): 136.
- 88 Saryi Vegetarianets, “Po miru,” *VO*, no. 7 (1913): 283. Élisée Reclus (1830–1905) was a renowned French geographer, writer and anarchist.
- 89 Saryi Vegetarianets, “Pervyi Vserossiiskii Vegetarianskii S’ezd (Moskva, 16–21 aprelia 1913),” *VO*, no. 4–5 (1913): 140.
- 90 Maurer, 121, 124, 128–129.
- 91 LeBlanc, “Vegetarianism in Russia,” 12.
- 92 *Ibid.*, 25.
- 93 Iosif Perper, “Besedy o vegetarianstve (Otvety Evgeniiu Lozinskomu),” *VO*, no. 9–10 (1910): 51–54. Evgenii Lozinskii’s text “Vegetarianism and Anthropophagy,” published in The VR, triggered a debate on the ideological foundations of vegetarianism, see Evgenii Lozinskii, “Vegetarianstvo i antropofagiia,” *VO*, no. 6–7–8 (1910): 93–95.
- 94 Obshchestvo “Dukhovnoe probuzhdenie,” *VO*, no. 8 (1913): 321–323; Obshchestvo “Dukhovnoe probuzhdenie”: Svedeniia o namechennoi rabote i planakh Vegetarianskogo Obshchestva “Dukhovnoe Probuzhdenie” v 1913 godu,” *VO*, no. 7 (1913): 277–278.
- 95 Saryi Vegetarianets, “Pervyi Vserossiiskii Vegetarianskii S’ezd (Moskva, 16–21 aprelia 1913),” *VO*, no. 4–5, (1913): 137. From 1909–1912, all three were influential members of the Moscow Vegetarian Society and directly involved in its activity. Zonov was the first chairman of the society.
- 96 For more about this, see LeBlanc, “Vegetarianism in Russia,” 12.



Illustration 4. Students of gardening and housekeeping courses at Liplapi Farm in the 1920s. Source: EPM FP 330:30.

# VEGETARIAN FOOD AS MODERN FOOD

by **Anu Kannike  
& Ester Bardone**

**ATTEMPTS TO EDUCATE  
THE NATION OF ESTONIA  
FROM THE 1900s TO THE 1930s**

## **abstract**

This article considers the spread of ideas on vegetarianism in Estonia from the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until 1940. The study builds on analyzing archival sources, media texts and educational work conducted by nutrition experts, schools and organizations. Propaganda about the consumption of vegetarian food was associated with the general moderniza-

tion of domestic culture and the discourse on healthy food as the basis for the nation's vitality. The article highlights the leading role of women's movement in home economics, including attempts to implement food culture informed by nutritional science, especially teaching the people to eat more fruits and vegetables. The spread of vegetarian ideas

in Estonia also illustrates how the previously dominating German cultural influences were gradually replaced by an orientation towards the Nordic countries, and demonstrates how these ideas were adapted to an Estonian context.

**KEY WORDS:** Vegetarianism, modernization, home economics, nutritional science.

In this article we analyze the arrival and spread of ideas and practices of vegetarianism and the attempts to modernize the diet of Estonians from the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to 1940. The period of Estonia's transition from a province of the Russian empire (1710–1918) to independent statehood (1918–1940) was especially significant when considering the changes in food culture that took place in the context of rapid modernization and the emergence of a modern nation state.<sup>1</sup> Estonia represents an interesting case for examining the intertwining of different ideologies and cultural influences because of the country's geographical location at the crossroads between Germany, Russia and the Nordic countries.

Starting from the 1870s, Estonian intellectuals who led the national movement increasingly began to look towards the rest of Europe, especially the Nordic countries, for examples of progressive culture and civilizing everyday life – the ideals that vegetarian visionaries also expressed in their writings and public speeches.<sup>2</sup> Novel nutritional ideas were adapted to the local climate, economy and food habits. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the importance of vegetarian food – not just vegetarianism – was emphasized in the public discourse on food and the nation's diet, based on nutritional science and scientific household management. The consumption of vegetarian food was associated with the general modernization of domestic culture and a healthy diet as the basis for the nation's vitality. The focus on health, physical fitness, natural lifestyle, scientific rationalism, but also ethical consumer awareness, reflected the values of modernity.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, vegetables were envisioned as the food of the future for both health and economic reasons. Plant-based nutrients were less expensive and more accessible to all strata of society. Thus, the ultimate goal of advocates of a plant-based diet was not to convert people to vegetarianism but rather to convince them to change their everyday eating habits by consuming more vegetables and fruits.

**WE EXPLORE** the development of ideologies and initiatives related to educating the nation about healthy eating, the benefits of vegetarian food and how advocating for vegetarian food became a project about modernizing the nation of Estonia. Our main sources are articles published in newspapers and magazines, advice literature and cookbooks, but we have also relied on archival documents (files of home economics schools, the Chamber of Home Economics and the Tartu Association for Vegetarians), as well as published surveys about health conditions. In order to understand the context of our study, it

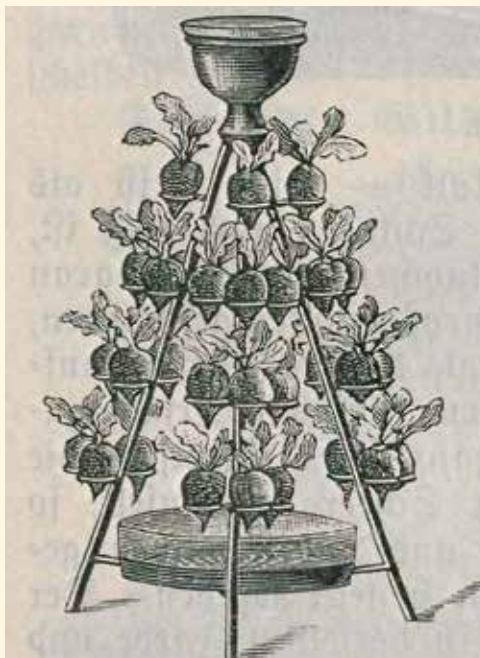


Illustration 1. A frame for serving radishes. Source: Marra Korth *Praktisches Kochbuch* (Riga, 1911).

must be stressed that the promotion of plant-based food until the late 1930s was aimed at a mainly agrarian society in which the emerging rural or urban middle class still retained peasant foodways.<sup>4</sup> How did the educated elite perceive the food habits of the masses and what were the arguments used to convince people to eat more vegetarian food? Unlike the Russian empire until 1917 – and in Western Europe – in which male nutritional scientists and physicists played a prominent role in leading the people towards a modern diet, after World War I in Estonia, female home economics teachers took the leading role in both the nutritional and the culinary education of the nation.<sup>5</sup> Women home economics teachers who instructed other Estonian women to become reformers of the nation's diet by changing their own eating habits are the main focus of this study. Who were these women? Where did they receive their educa-

tion and how did it shape their values and understanding of vegetarian food? Estonian women who established home economics education and led the diet reform can be regarded as “culture builders”<sup>6</sup> who were not only addressing workers and peasants, but also the middle class who, like themselves aimed to change their everyday food habits and values. Their goal was similar to what was envisioned in other European countries in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries – housewives were regarded as being responsible for the physiological and economic prosperity of the nation and a vegetarian diet was seen as a tool for achieving this goal.<sup>7</sup>

### Early introduction of vegetarianism: male experts as educators

Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Estonian (food) culture had developed under the influence of two major cultural spheres. Although Estonia was part of the Russian empire, the cultural influence of the Baltic German elite prevailed until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, due to socio-historical circumstances, like much of the working classes<sup>8</sup> in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Estonians were “vegetarians by necessity, not by choice” – they appreciated meat but could eat it only on festive occasions.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, famines (the most recent from 1867 to 1869) were still relatively fresh in people's minds at the end of the century.<sup>10</sup> However, Estonian simple folk traditionally regarded meat, particularly fat, as a desirable and nutritious food. During holidays, at weddings, and particularly at Christmas, there had to be plenty of meat, and they wanted to eat as much meat as possible.<sup>11</sup> At the everyday table, grain-based dishes dominated, and fruits and vegetables had a poor reputation (with the exception of



Illustration 2. Edible wild stinging nettle (*Urtica* L.).  
Source: Wikipedia.

**“STINGING NETTLES (*URTICA DIOICA* L.) AND GROUND ELDER (*AEGOPODIUM PODAGRARIA* L.) COULD BE CHOPPED AND BRAISED WITH SOME MILK OR DRIED ICELANDIC MOSS (*AEGOPODIUM PODAGRARIA* L.) POWDER COULD BE ADDED TO BREAD DOUGH.”**

potatoes since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century which, in turn, reduced the consumption of other vegetables). Similar to neighboring countries, vegetables were often perceived as animal fodder or a fad of gentlefolk.<sup>12</sup> The attitude of Estonians towards vegetables also reflected the distinction between the social classes. In contrast to modest allotments at farmsteads, horticulture was well developed in upper-class households by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In manor houses in particular, a great variety of vegetables were cultivated, using heated beds and greenhouses for more cold-sensitive plants (e.g., asparagus and artichokes).<sup>13</sup> Like the gentry elsewhere in Europe, the Baltic Germans used to serve vegetables in elaborate ways (see Illustration 1) although vegetarian dishes did not feature much in the cookbooks aimed at Baltic German households before the 1910s as the authors of cookbooks tended to praise the abundance of meat dishes on bourgeois and upper-class tables.<sup>14</sup>

**SEVERAL BALTIC GERMAN** intellectuals, pastors and doctors wrote advice literature in Estonian aimed at country folk. These authors criticized the peasants' poor eating habits and suggested the inclusion of more wild plants in their diet, especially during food shortages and times of famine. For instance, in 1818, pastor and writer Johann Wilhelm Ludwig von Luce (1756–1842) published a booklet *Suggestions and Advice When You are Struggling with Poverty and Famine* (Est. *Nou ja abbi, kui waesus ja nälg käe on*), which was aimed at enriching Estonians' eating habits. He described the culinary use of several common plants in Estonia. For instance, stinging nettles (*Urtica dioica* L.) (Illustration 2) and ground elder (*Aegopodium podagraria* L.) could be chopped and braised with some milk or dried Icelandic moss (*Aegopodium podagraria* L.) powder could be added to bread dough. Luce also preached at local peasants for not consuming enough legumes or vegetables (cabbage, turnip) like Germans, Russians and Latvians did and relying too much on grain-based foods, the quantity of which was often insufficient.<sup>15</sup> Similar concerns about Estonians' limited eating habits were also expressed by some of the leading figures of the Estonian national movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (e.g., doctor and literate Friedrich Reinhold Kreutz-



Illustration 3. Peasants at Saaremaa island at the breakfast table (1913). Photo: Johannes Pääsuke. Source: ERM Fk 1:2/78

**“HELLAT WAS VERY CRITICAL OF ESTONIANS’ NUTRITIONAL HABITS AND BELIEFS. HE CLAIMED THAT THE DIET OF THE PEOPLE WAS UNVARIED, THE CHOICE OF FOOD POOR AND COOKING SKILLS LACKING.”**

reached the countryside. The first Estonian intellectuals felt that their mission was to be educators of the common people, and questions about vitality, morality and the need for personal development became prominent. The advice was often moralizing in nature, underscoring the shortcomings of their lifestyle, hygiene and nutrition caused by their lack of knowledge. Among the health advancement ideas that were based on the natural sciences, the temperance movement had the broadest support. Similar arguments were also used by new teachings about diet – vegetarianism.

Jaan Spuhl-Rotalia (1859–1916), a self-educated schoolteacher, journalist, horticulturalist and the author of several handbooks was probably the first Estonian to discuss the principles of vegetarianism in greater depth. (There had been some introductory articles in Estonian dailies in the 1890s.) His arguments primarily reflected the ideas of *Lebensreform*, a reform movement in German-speaking Europe that praised the natural lifestyle, of which nutrition (especially vegetarian food) formed a significant part.<sup>17</sup> Spuhl-Rotalia was particularly inspired by German natural lifestyle pioneer Eduard Baltzer (1814–1887), whose vegetarian recipes he published in a number of issues of the magazine *The Housekeeper* (Est. *Majapidaja*) in 1905. Among the recipes, root vegetable and grain soups were predominant, and cooking various “grass soups” from naturally growing edible plants was also

wald; folklorist Mattias Johann Eisen). They offered general advice on nutrition to Estonian country folk and criticized their eating habits, which were primarily based on bread and cereals. Since the 1860s, the advice of intellectuals reached more Estonians due to the spread of newspapers and educational literature. Unlike other provinces of the Russian empire, the peasantry in Estonia (and other Baltic provinces) was very literate (by the 1890s, around 96% of them could read and write).<sup>16</sup>

**BY THE BEGINNING** of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, all main ideas of Western social thought had reached Estonians, and by the 1910s, scholarly literature was already being published in Estonian, although most of the publications were popular general knowledge books. Via magazines and popular education, more urban attitudes and a greater awareness of the body, health and food



recommended. Although the magazine's main emphasis was on farming and gardening issues, it also included advice on food. The tone of the advice was moralizing – eating had to be governed by strict rules: you could only drink half an hour after a meal; there should be three hours between supper and bedtime. Vegetables, fruits and dairy products were preferable, while meat was to be consumed in moderate amounts. He repeatedly explained the harmfulness of coffee, even calling it a poison that caused nervousness and thin blood and recommended “coffee drinks” made from malt or peas instead.<sup>18</sup> In 1905 British vegetarian and women's rights campaigner Anna Kingsford's (1846–1888) *The Perfect Way in Diet* (originally published in 1881) was published in a translation by Jaan Spuhl-Rotalia. The book actively promoted vegetarianism, stressing both health and economic arguments. However, in his postscript, Spuhl-Rotalia himself expressed only moderate support of vegetarianism: “As vehement enthusiasts and excessive practitioners can be found in any society, they are not lacking among vegetarians, but a golden mean and sensible moderation are best even in this.”<sup>19</sup> He concedes that eating only raw vegetables is not conceivable in the Nordic countries. He mentioned bread and fruit as the most valuable foods, emphasized a balanced diet and the correct combination of vegetarian and dairy foods. Spuhl-Rotalia concluded that cooking vegetarian dishes was simpler and less costly; in addition, vegetarian eating was clean and humane.

**SEVERAL ADVOCATES** of vegetarianism in Western Europe and America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were male doctors, who combined health and ethical arguments and focused on “the purifying effect, both spiritual and physical, of a vegetarian diet.”<sup>20</sup> During the Interbellum era, Danish physician Mikkel Hindhede (1862–1945), one of the best-known advocates of vegetarianism in Europe at the time, was also the greatest authority for Estonian vegetarians, and his ideas were often reflected in newspapers. In 1911 his *The Exemplary Cookery Book* (Est. Eeskujuline kokaraamat)<sup>21</sup> was published in Estonian. In Hindhede's opinion, the global population would be threatened by hunger due to a looming food crisis, which is why he recommended voluntarily choosing the vegetarian path. His program of a meatless diet was based on both physiological and economical arguments that questioned the earlier nutritionists' dogma of meat being the ultimate source of protein.<sup>22</sup> He promoted simple and moderate nutrition and stressed that in making food choices, the most important factor was its wholesomeness, its inexpensiveness and its taste. Hindhede's approach with its scientific systematicity was novel in Estonia: he proposed complete menus for different meals in each season, as well as tables on the protein, fat and mineral content of foodstuffs. He formulated instructions that he suggested each housewife copy in capital letters and hang on the wall above the dining table. The diversity of food served in the boarding houses he had founded was highlighted and the dishes' “nutritious value” was said to “compete with refined tastes”.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, in Estonia, the doctor and prominent public figure Peeter Hellat (1857–1912) raised the topic of healthy eating for a broad audience in a professional manner. He was a supporter

of temperance and vegetarianism who studied and worked at St. Petersburg before World War I. In the guidebook *A Study of Health* (Est. Tervise õpetus) (1913), Hellat was very critical of Estonians' nutritional habits and beliefs. He claimed that the diet of the people was unvaried, the choice of food poor and cooking skills lacking (see Illustration 3). Hellat suggested that different kinds of dishes should be eaten throughout the year, particularly emphasizing the rich nutrient content of vegetables. He believed that people should be educated that both meat dishes and vegetables – which improve the taste of a meal and its digestibility – were nutritious. Although he was a vegetarian himself, he did not emphasize it, like other European doctors who were practicing vegetarians – medical experts of the age often criticized vegetarians for being unscientific and sectarian.<sup>24</sup> His book took a moderate stance: “What can be called *approximately reasonable* is a position that ascribes equal status to both vegetarian and meat dishes. Among our people it is still impossible to talk about the excessive consumption of meat.”<sup>25</sup> Hellat's views also reflected a broader understanding of vegetarianism elsewhere – being vegetarian did not always mean total abstinence from meat or animal products, and dairy products in particular were considered part of a healthy vegetarian diet.<sup>26</sup>

**IN THE LATE 19<sup>th</sup>** and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian empire, a variety of vegetarian movements emerged based on diverse ideologies, some of which were inspired by vegetarian ideas in European countries, some evolving a uniquely Russian character. Although vegetarianism developed later in Imperial Russia compared to Western Europe, a considerable number of vegetarian societies, canteens, cafes and journals existed before the 1917 revolution.<sup>27</sup> St. Petersburg as an intellectual center of the Empire was also a probable source of influence from where ideas of Russian and Western European vegetarianism might have spread to Estonia.<sup>28</sup> In Russia, the spread of vegetarianism based on spiritual ideas was also facilitated by religion – the Orthodox church had long fasting periods. However, the vast majority of Estonians were protestants and did not fast; only a few vegetarians in Estonia were inspired by sectarian religious ideas that were rather similar to the German natural living movement.<sup>29</sup> The ideas of the influential figure in the Russian spiritual vegetarian movement, Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), were known to Estonian intellectuals (1908 Tolstoy's *The First Step: On Vegetarianism* (the Russian original from 1892) was translated into Estonian) but did not give rise to a similar movement. Although vegetarianism based on medical science arguments was another prominent movement in the major cities of the Russian empire, it had no impact in Estonia. Unlike in the major cities of the Russian empire in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century vegetarian societies, periodicals or canteens were not established in Estonia.<sup>30</sup> Organized vegetarianism did not develop in Estonia despite a strong temperance movement and an awareness of modern medical science and nutrition. The development of vegetarian ideas in Estonia rather reflects the nationalization of modernism very similar to that in Scandinavia.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was mainly men – Baltic German or Estonian intellectuals and foreign or local medical ex-

perts – who were leading the way towards a healthier and more diverse diet for Estonian country folk. Estonian authors translated articles and books by foreign vegetarians and physicians but in their own writing they advocated for a more balanced diet, emphasizing the nutritional value of vegetables but not excluding animal products.

## The rise of local female experts in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Estonia

In Western modernizing societies since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, attitudes towards home economics changed, and it was no longer regarded as an art of service but as a science that required professional training.<sup>32</sup> This new field was based on the latest scientific and technological achievements. The idea of housekeeping as a full-time profession was promoted by a new set of experts who, unlike the doctors and gardeners of the previous generation, were predominantly women. The new home economics culture was introduced by middle-class women and became a means of spreading the values of this social group into the lower strata. The modern educated, rational and efficient housewife who contributed to the nation's welfare became an ideal at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>33</sup> The aim of home economics was not just a private concern of the family because women were supposed to change the way of life and the mindset of the entire nation.<sup>34</sup> Reforming the people's traditional attitudes towards food and their nutritional habits was a critical aspect of the modern housewife's battle. Laura Shapiro described the belief in the transformative power of science in cooking as "culinary idealism." Domestic scientists were inspired by the nutritional properties of food, by its ability to promote physical, social and moral growth.<sup>35</sup> The promotion of vegetarian food became part of a modern home economics education and also part of the modern nutritional and culinary discourse.

**IN THE YEARS** preceding World War I, vegetarianism had already become significantly more visible in Estonia. Similar to the Nordic countries, women played a leading role in promoting vegetarian ideas.<sup>36</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Finland (at that time the Grand Duchy of Finland as an autonomous part of the Russian empire) became the closest sphere of influence for Estonian women. The role of women in society at the time was more progressive in Finland<sup>37</sup> and in the other Nordic countries compared to Western Europe. Women's education in home economics and horticulture was seen as an opportunity to modernize home culture and food culture and thereby society at large, but also a chance for female emancipation. Progressive Estonian women regarded Finland as a good place to acquire a professional home economics education and, after returning home, they became pioneering instructors for their fellow countrywomen.

Like the Nordic countries, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Estonia was mainly an agrarian society, unlike the leading industrialized

countries (Germany, Great Britain, USA) in which mass-produced food started creating health issues in the population and vegetarianism was used to combat these issues.<sup>38</sup> In the 1910s the first vegetarian handbooks and cookbooks were published in Estonian, aimed at a wider audience, not just the elite. Favorable grounds for adopting the new knowledge on healthy eating was undoubtedly laid by the active participation of Estonian women in temperance societies in which they represented one third of the total membership at the turn of the century.<sup>39</sup> Also, the peculiarity of the modernization of Estonian home culture should be understood in light of the fact that women's reading skills and practice were more advanced than those of men at the time.<sup>40</sup>

The rapid pace of the modernization of everyday life at the turn of the century is vividly illustrated by the change of opinions about the importance of education on food and home economics in just a couple of decades. At first, it was advocated by a few intellectuals. In Natalie Johanson-Pärna's girls' handicraft

school (1880–1885) whose curriculum was based on her studies in Denmark in 1878 and Finland in 1879, cooking was included alongside other manual activities.<sup>41</sup> Some newspaper articles of the decade described Finnish housekeeping schools as good examples.<sup>42</sup>

Gardening, nutrition and food education went hand in hand as the people had to be taught to grow fruit and vegetables as well as be introduced to new recipes to make their diet more varied. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the wisdom of the era of national awaken-

**“AS FOOD WAS SCARCE DURING WORLD WAR I, THE NEED FOR AND INTEREST IN VEGETARIAN DISHES GREW.”**

ing had developed into a widespread demand for gardening and cooking courses in both rural and urban areas. In Tallinn, the first cooking courses to last three months were organized in 1906.<sup>43</sup> The advertisement for the course emphasized that the ways of cooking taught by manor cooks were insufficient for real life and the Finnish art of creating better and less expensive dishes should be considered as an example. The course manager was invited over from Finland. In the 1910s, educated Estonians started expressing their opinions in local newspapers about the urgent need to teach the population about nutrition. They argued that the food consumption of ordinary people was incredibly poor. "There is no emphasis on vegetarian dishes; they cannot even cook such dishes."<sup>44</sup> The media was also critical of the food offered at eateries in cities and compared them with Helsinki, where the menu in eateries was much more diverse, and vegetarian dishes were always available, including dishes containing various kinds of fruits and berries. The Scandinavian countries were used as an example as these countries consumed plenty of food based on oats, while in Estonia "the prevailing idea was that oats were only suitable for horses."<sup>45</sup>

**AT THE BEGINNING** of the 20<sup>th</sup> century quite a few young women studied at Finnish schools of home economics. Upon completing their education, some of them found employment as hired housekeeping instructors and started organizing cooking courses for country folk. Marie Sapas (1875–1950), who had been

**FAKE MEAT****Ingredients:\***

approx. 0.7 l water  
 approx. 230 g buckwheat groats  
 3 beets  
 2 onions  
 2 tablespoons of butter or fat  
 2 eggs  
 1 tablespoon of sour cream  
 salt, pepper

Cook the beets until they are soft. Cook the buckwheat porridge. Allow the beets and porridge to cool and then pass them through the mincer. Sauté the onions in butter or fat and add to the buckwheat and beet mix. Add lightly whipped eggs and salt and pepper to taste. Pour the mix into a buttered oblong oven dish and bake in the oven. Serve with boiled potatoes, brown sauce and cucumber salad.

*\*Contemporary measurements have been used.*

Illustration 5. A recipe of "Fake meat" from Marta Põld's *A Course on Vegetarian Food* (1916).

studying at the Järvenlinna gardening and home economics school in Antrea, Finland<sup>46</sup> from 1908–1910, launched six-month gardening and housekeeping courses at Liplapi Farm right after she had finished her training, developing these courses into the first gardening and housekeeping school in Estonia (1920–1927). A total of around 210 women graduated from the school.<sup>47</sup> Several teachers at the school also came from or were trained in Finland. In spring and summer, the students engaged in gardening and in autumn they prepared preserves (Illustration 4). Special emphasis was placed on using local produce "to eliminate expensive and unhealthy foreign products". Also, when feeding the students, vegetarian food played a primary role – meat was only used as an addition, and journalists wrote that the students no longer missed meat dishes.<sup>48</sup> In her report to the Ministry of Agriculture, Sapas wrote that the school mainly taught students how to prepare vegetarian dishes while also emphasizing the contents of foodstuffs and their nutritional value.<sup>49</sup> The training had an element of solid practical leaning but was also based on contemporary science. The school had a sample garden, chemical experiments were conducted, foodstuffs studied under the microscope in housekeeping classes, and tables on the contents and price of food were used. Typical of the period, the students' weight and strength were measured to demonstrate the beneficial effects of gardening activities and vegetarian food.

**BASED ON THE** knowledge acquired in Finland, Sapas published the first original Estonian language book on vegetarian food *Vegetarian Dishes and How to Prepare Them* (Est. Taimetoidud ja nende valmistamine) (1911). The book was dedicated to Jenny Elfving (1871–1950), director of the Järvenlinna school, under whose influence the author had become familiar with vegetarianism and learned about its economic and health-related effects.<sup>50</sup> In her book, Sapas presents vegetarianism as a food choice that is naturally suited to humans and will give more strength and stamina compared to meat. Also, fruit should not only be used as a dessert but should make up a part of the daily fare. She describes how vegetarian food represents better value for money as vegetable protein is less expensive than meat

protein. However, Sapas does not consider it either necessary or feasible to give up meat entirely: "Strict vegetarians who abstain from any form of meat are likely to remain isolated instances in our conditions."<sup>51</sup>

As food was scarce during World War I, the need for and interest in vegetarian dishes grew. They were introduced at exhibitions and offered at canteens and restaurants. In June 1916, a law was introduced that prohibited the sale of meat products and the serving of meat dishes from Tuesdays to Fridays.<sup>52</sup> In September, the Estonian Exhibition in Tartu had a separate buffet offering vegetarian dishes. The daily *Postimees* wrote that it would give tips "to the numerous vegetarians who had previously followed its principles and were adapting to the circumstances. In this current period of vegetarian food, these are especially useful."<sup>53</sup> Housekeeping instructor Marta Põld (1882–1963), who also graduated from the Järvenlinna school in 1912, conducted courses in vegetarian food at the Central Society for Farm Work for domestic employees, as well as the wives of military personnel (without charging a fee). At the course she demonstrated how to cook dishes made from legumes and grain, as well as various soups. The course participants agreed that by using the Finnish examples, Marta Põld could "even make nettle infusion taste delicious, not to mention more delicate garden plants."<sup>54</sup> However, some journalists also published ironic comments about an exclusively vegetarian menu, describing it as an oddity, even during wartime. Her cookbook *A Course on Vegetarian Food* (Est. Taimetoidu kursus) (1916)<sup>55</sup> mainly contains recipes using cabbages, potatoes, carrots, spinach, pea, and beans in combination with rice, macaroni and mushrooms. She suggested meat substitutes such as "fake meat" made from buckwheat porridge and beetroot (Illustration 5) or "fake liver casserole" made from pearl barley, rice and raisins, etc. Such imitation meat dishes were supposed to make vegetable dishes more attractive and acceptable for consumers. Also, mock meat products (e.g. such as Protose) that were available in the USA or Britain and that tasted, felt and smelled like meat were not available for Estonian consumers at the time.<sup>56</sup> Remarkably, the recipes in Marta Põld's handbook

**EVERYDAY  
VEGETARIAN MENU***(summer and autumn season)*BREAKFAST: white radish snack,  
cheese sandwich, grain coffee or milkDINNER: tomato soup, boiled as-  
paragus or common beans with melted  
butter and fresh saladSUPPER: fresh cucumbers with cream,  
sandwich, berries with milk**FESTIVE VEGETARIAN  
DINNER MENU FOR GUESTS***(winter and spring season)*

Apple juice with honey

Beetroot dish

Carrot bouillon with onion pie

Rolled pate made of peas with white  
radish salad

Berry cream

Illustration 6. Sample veg-  
etarian menus suggested  
by Elisabet Sild in *A Book  
on Vegetarian Dishes and  
Housekeeping* (*Taimtoidu-  
ja majapidamisraamat*),  
1938, 253—254.

were almost identical to those published in Finnish cookery books compiled by the teachers at the Helsinki home economics school, which had been published some years previously.<sup>57</sup> Finally, it should be mentioned that neither Marta Põld's nor Marie Sapas' vegetarian cookbooks were strictly vegetarian but rather lacto-ovo vegetarian in the contemporary sense.

Thus, in the years preceding and during World War I, a significant change took place in the educational activities related to Estonian food culture: a leading role was adopted by women and women's organizations, and the teaching of gardening and nutrition was also directed at homemakers. Consequently, we can see a powerful Finnish influence on the modernization of food culture and gardening in Estonia. The Estonian alumni of Finnish housekeeping schools proved to be capable initiators and leaders of the diet reform. Close contact between Finnish teachers and teacher educators of home economics, as well as several Estonian home economics experts and schools, continued until 1940.

### The modernization of food culture from the 1920s to the 1930s

In the 1920s, a network of home economics schools developed in Estonia that started to prepare both educated housewives and professional teachers, cooks, nurses, etc. By the late 1930s, 44 educational institutions specialized in home economics and approximately 6,000 women had been trained in home economics.<sup>58</sup> During the second half of the decade, specialist advice on food topics started to appear in the media, which specifically emphasized the wholesomeness of vegetarian dishes and suggested particular guidelines and recipes. The most influential journals were *Estonian Woman* (Est. Eesti Naine), which appeared in 1924, published by the Estonian Women's Temperance Union, and *Farm Mistress* (Est. Taluperenaine) launched in 1927 by the Academic Farmers' Society. Starting from 1927, rural women began to join societies of farm mistresses and participate in numerous home economics courses.

Despite the extensive explanatory work, it took some time for modern food habits to spread. The predominantly conservative attitude of Estonians was reflected in the criticism launched by educated specialists. For instance, in 1929, a teacher at the Saku Household Management School, wrote that the situation in the field of nutrition was embarrassing: "Although in some

places communal bowls and wooden spoons have been discarded, the manner of serving is still incredibly tasteless and primitive. The worst sin, however, is the unvaried nature of the food." People eat too much meat and too little garden produce, for "the general opinion is that if meat – the expensive food – is missing from the dinner table, it feels as if there

had been nothing to eat at all." Raw vegetables are not eaten. It is the custom to boil them for too long "so that nearly all the nutrients are removed".<sup>59</sup> Fresh salads and green soups created the most ardent resistance due to the common view that these were types of animal food. Furthermore, homemakers regarded the preparation of vegetable dishes as too time-consuming.<sup>60</sup>

The nutritional discourse of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was dominated by a moralizing rhetoric, primarily directed at the eating habits of the poor. The "uncivilized" eating habits of the workers were associated with their lack of knowledge. Yet, unlike in industrialized and urbanized societies in Western Europe and the USA, where advocates of vegetarianism opposed the increasing consumption of processed food, in largely agrarian Estonia, the proponents of vegetarian food mainly criticized people's limited diet based on peasant ideas of what constituted a "proper meal."<sup>61</sup>

From the 1920s to the 1930s, home economics teachers and experts published several innovative cookery books and handbooks on nutrition. Excessively salty, fat-rich and limited diets were criticized, and vegetarian dishes were praised. The authors<sup>62</sup> were unanimous in claiming that the diet up to then had been insufficient, and more vegetables needed to be grown and preserved effectively, primarily in a raw state. There was much talk of making healthy preserves as many of the valuable proper-

**"GROWING,  
PRESERVING  
AND USING GARDEN  
PRODUCE WAS  
PROMOTED."**

ties of berries and vegetables were lost due to. As a good alternative, airtight preserves were introduced, while salting and pickling in vinegar were no longer recommended. General advice on food was complemented by generous collections of recipes, tables of nutrient contents, as well as sample menus. Almost all the authors recommended reducing the amount of meat on the menu, eating more vegetable dishes, and eating fresh salads as appetizers or main courses. It was also believed that vegetables should be used as much as possible as seasonings as they made dishes less expensive, and easier to digest. As a manifestation of such a rational approach, menus containing a complete range of food for the family, covering a week, a month, or a whole season, were published in cookbooks, as well as in the above-mentioned women's journals (see Illustration 6). It is also remarkable that these exemplary menus always recommended seasonal food of local origin.

**THE DEVELOPMENT** of nutritional science in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was related to the rise of modern nation states – it was the period when the state started intervening in people's eating habits, seeing a strong link between physical health and diet.<sup>63</sup> Healthy citizens who could work efficiently and contribute to the nation's prosperity were regarded as a valuable resource. In the 1920s, knowledge of the beneficial qualities of vitamins was spreading, and the vitamin content of vegetarian dishes became the main argument for promoting them. In the 1930s, calorie counting also started in Estonia. Several authors pointed out that the number of calories obtained from eating meat could successfully be replaced by an equal amount obtained from vegetarian food. *The Housewife's Handbook* (Est. Perenaise käsiraamat) (1934) recommended adding at least one boiled vegetable to the daily menu in addition to potatoes, eating uncooked fruit or vegetables once a day, and freely consuming vegetables and bread during each meal.<sup>64</sup> Although graphs and charts about the nutritional content of food never made their way into daily use in ordinary kitchens, the mindset they projected became increasingly attractive to modern housekeepers.<sup>65</sup>

The explanatory work by the home economics teachers emphasized that food should guarantee the physical and mental development of both the individual and the nation. In the second half of the 1930s, educational activities concerning healthy food became particularly extensive and systematic, and the Chamber of Home Economics (Kodumajanduskoda), founded in 1936, became the leading force in the field. The Chamber's Food Committee was tasked with studying, improving and managing the dietary conditions in homes and in public, including offering various consultation services. In the series of publications by the Chamber, the booklet *Inexpensive and Healthy Food* (Est. Odav ja tervislik toit)<sup>66</sup> was published. It underscored the importance of eating local foods from the perspective of both health and value for money and emphasized the need to carefully consider vitamins and calories when making food choices. First and foremost, growing, preserving and using garden produce was promoted (see Illustration 7). By the end of the 1930s, some



Illustration 7. Seasonal autumn foods at the exhibition of the Chamber of Home Economics (1937). On the right the Secretary in Chief Hilda Ottenson. Source: AM F 23319: 10.

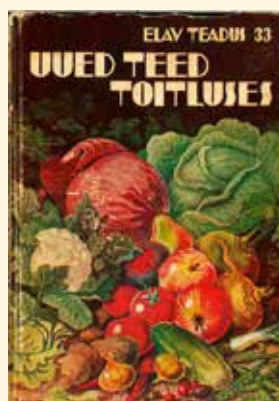


Illustration 8. The handbook *New Ways in Nutrition* (Est. Uued teed toitluses) by home economics instructor Olga Keskk (1934).



Illustration 9. The Association for Vegetarians in Tartu celebrating its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1939. Source: Internet.

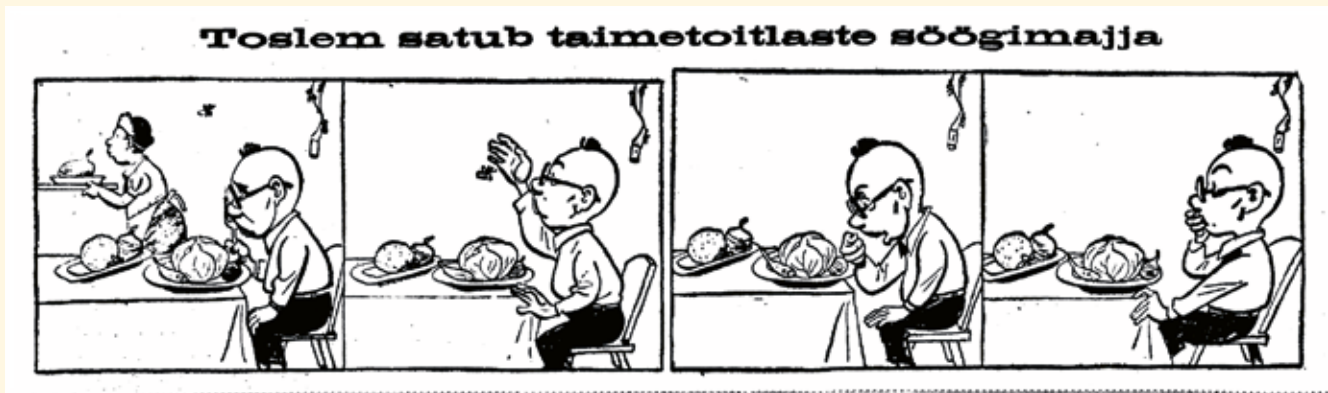


Illustration 10. A comical character Toslem in a vegetarian canteen. Author: Gori. Sädemed, August 1, 1937.

advances in vegetable consumption had been made, mainly due to the awareness-raising activities regarding suitable kinds of food for babies and infants. Numerous lectures and sample cooking classes were organized. For instance, weekly demonstrations of the preparation of inexpensive and healthy dishes were given at schools. Home economics experts underscored that the outlandish and complicated recipes based on bourgeois Russian and French cooking should be abandoned and replaced by a healthier diet. The experts even stated that public eateries should be supervised by home economics teachers, like in the Nordic countries.<sup>67</sup>

Some home economics and nutrition experts such as Elisabeth Sild (1888–1980) and Olga Keskk (1898–?) also collaborated with groups of devoted vegetarians. The only officially registered organization was the Association for Vegetarians [Est. Taimetoitlaste Ühing] founded in Tartu in 1924 under the aegis of the Temperance Union<sup>68</sup> (see Illustration 9). It aimed to combat meat consumption and promote a healthy lifestyle and an understanding of a meat-free lifestyle. However, like moderate vegetarians in Europe, they considered it acceptable to consume butter, eggs, milk and cheese.<sup>69</sup> Educational activities were the priority of the association. Based on the nutritional science of the age, the association provided recommendations about the most beneficial foods to eat, especially recommending raw food dishes and berry and fruit juices. In order to make imported fruit more available to consumers, the association submitted a request to the government to free these products from customs duty.<sup>70</sup> The association arranged regular lectures and cooking demonstrations from both foreign and domestic experts. For instance, Elisabeth Sild demonstrated how to cook raw food dishes and published the handbook *A Book on Vegetarian Dishes and House-keeping* (Est. Taimtoidu- ja majapidamisraamat)<sup>71</sup> at the association's request. She also compiled menus for everyday and festive usage (see Illustration 5). Sild criticized processed and manufactured food, snobbish cooking and the excessive use of meat and spices. According to her, the so-called “food of Sun force”<sup>72</sup>, or raw leaves and the fruits of plants, were most valuable, and she recommended starting each meal with raw food. Olga Keskk also wrote that “nutritional competence today is by far not limited to

the skill of “making soup” but represents a whole new branch of science, full of innovations and novel discoveries.”<sup>73</sup> (see Illustration 8).

**IN THE 1930S**, appeals were also made for the transition to full veganism or even a raw food diet. Along with health professionals, Estonian clergyman Alfred Lepp (1900–1984)<sup>74</sup> aimed to reform people's diet, emphasizing the religious aspects of a vegetarian diet in combination with medical arguments (especially those of Maximilian Bircher-Benner (1867–1939)) and temperance.

By the end of the 1930s, educational efforts through the media, schools and courses, as well as general economic growth, resulted in the people having a more varied and balanced diet. However, progress in the consumption of vegetarian food was relatively slow. Regional descriptions of health conditions from the 1930s conducted by medical scientists<sup>75</sup> give a brief idea of people's actual diet: bread and potatoes were staple foods, as were grain porridges and soups. The persistence of such food habits also reflected generational attitudes towards proper food. With the exception of the poor, most of the middle class remained conservative. The menu was seasonal and vegetables (except sauerkraut) were mainly eaten in the autumn. In 1939 the Secretary-in-Chief of the Chamber of Home Economics Hilda Ottenson (1896–1990) (Illustration 7) had to acknowledge that there were regions in which mostly bread and salted pork were still eaten for breakfast, lunch and supper throughout the year, without even potatoes as a side dish. The consumption of fruit and vegetables was low and was almost non-existent in the winter.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, there is no reason to believe that Estonia's food culture was lagging behind in global terms. For instance, in the USA, a breakthrough in what constituted healthy eating was only made during the Great Depression of the 1930s.<sup>77</sup> In Finland, the change from simple eating to an awareness of the proper menu also occurred in the second half of the 1930s.

Moreover, the media also sometimes published critical or humorous pieces about vegetarians, who would go to extremes in vitamin hunting, depriving themselves of the necessary ani-

mal nutrients (see Illustration 10). Several dailies wrote that in Estonian conditions, imported fruit was an excessive luxury and also warned their readers that raw food could become a health hazard if the rules of hygiene were ignored (which was often the case in rural areas).<sup>78</sup>

## Concluding thoughts

The introduction of vegetarian ideas in Estonia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the systematic spreading of science-based knowledge about the benefits of eating and the skills of cooking vegetarian food in the decades between the two world wars reveal some unique patterns to the modernization of everyday life. At that time, Estonia transformed itself from a province of the Tsarist empire, in which Baltic German culture dominated, into an independent nation state. Western ideas and practices was considered part of new, modern Estonians, who were supposed to rid themselves of both old “unhealthy” peasant food habits as well as admiration for the Baltic German food culture which, in turn, had taken on several French and Russian influences, with its elaborate bourgeois recipes, preference for imported products and excessive eating. In the period studied, the influences of both spiritual and medical branches of Russian vegetarianism in Estonia remained marginal.

**MALE INTELLECTUALS** – doctors, horticulturalists and journalists – were important figures in the early promotion of vegetarian ideas in Estonia. Since the 1910s, female home economics teachers trained in Finnish schools played a particularly significant role in the modernization of food culture. They established similar educational institutions in Estonia and followed similar ideas about healthy nutrition: praising local products, seasonal diet and preferring moderate vegetarianism that did not exclude products of animal origin. Despite the dietary reform efforts of nutrition experts and home economics teachers, the eating habits of the broader population were slow to change and conservative attitudes rooted in peasant culture persisted until the 1930s. Yet, a broad network of home economics schools and cooking courses, numerous manuals, cookbooks and articles in the media, as well as state-supported institutions like the Chamber of Home Economics, contributed to the spread of modern ideas and practices, especially among the younger generation. Furthermore, home economics experts were realistic about the people’s living standards in what was still largely an agrarian society and therefore mainly promoted vegetables and fruits, while emphasizing that consuming more healthy plant-based food might also help them to be thrifty. ✕

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Original vintage sport propaganda poster promoting good physical health and well-being at work: "Industrial gymnastics invigorates, restores and strengthens!" Bulgaria, 1958. One of the goals of Bulgarian communist nutrition ideology was to feed a nation of healthy, efficient workers for the state-run industry, which was forcefully developed under Soviet pressure.

# RADICAL REFORMERS OR NOT QUITE?

## FROM VEGETARIANISM TO COMMUNIST NUTRITION IN BULGARIA: CONTRASTS AND CONTINUITIES (1925–1960)

by **Albena Shkodrova**

## abstract

This article investigates the ideas of correct and modern nutrition during the early communist period in Bulgaria and outlines their relationship to previously existing ideas and practices. The research reveals the multiple influences of pre-communist food ideologies, particularly those of the vegetarian movement that flourished in the country in the 1920s and 1930s. It questions the propaganda claim that the communist regime introduced a radically new understanding of and approach to nutrition. It also suggests that there were significant differences between the attitudes towards meatless diets in Eastern European communist countries. The hostility towards vegetarianism was not equally strong and consistent across the bloc, and despite the evident influence of Soviet teachings focused on meat-based, protein-rich diets, nutritionists introduced meatless diet “through the back door”.

**KEY WORDS:** History of food, Bulgarian food, communist nutrition.

Communist regimes in 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe widely built their legitimacy on claims of radical reforms that stretched from state management to the everyday lives of their citizens. Communist officials regularly evoked contrasts with the pre-communist past or the Western world to emphasize the contribution of the new states to the modernization of societies and their social innovations. However, few studies have explored the limits of these claims: how radical the revolution actually was or how its various elements related to processes which had been evident in the respective societies prior to communism. The question is particularly applicable to Central and South-Eastern Europe, where the modernization that took place<sup>1</sup> towards the end of the Second World War was more advanced than in Russia prior to the October Revolution (1917). This article examines one aspect of the attempted lifestyle revolution in communist Bulgaria – the ideas behind modernizing public nutrition – and shows their relationship to previous understandings and practices in the country. It explores how the pre-war legacy of nutritional ideologies and discourses was approached by leading nutritionists in the new communist state and how various elements were rejected or appropriated.

Early communist ideology paid significant attention to issues of nutrition. Historically, this interest was rooted in the malnutrition and hunger among Europe’s poorer classes, whose circumstances Communism had vowed to improve. The communist regime was established in Bulgaria amidst the pan-European economic crisis and the rationing of food in the aftermath of the Second World War, which exacerbated the problem.

Thus, Bulgarian communist nutrition ideology<sup>2</sup> was promptly formed around several intertwined goals. One of them was to eliminate hunger and social injustice in access to food. Another was to feed a nation of healthy, efficient workers for the state-run industry, which was forcefully developed under Soviet pressure. Finally, scientifically-based nutrition became a matter of credibil-

ity: it was integrated into the ideal of an advanced communist lifestyle, informed by science and dominated by industrial production, which the communist world was striving to prove capable of achieving.<sup>3</sup>

These ideological goals defined the main policies of communist nutrition, such as removing the production and provision of food from the hands of profit-oriented capitalist businesses<sup>4</sup> and entrusting them to the state, developing an extensive network of state-subsidized canteens, providing industrial foods as a substitute for home cooking<sup>5</sup> and so on.

**WHILE THESE POLICIES** were applied with varying degrees of success, the official discourses often presented them as a specifically communist achievement and as a clear illustration of the supremacy of Communism over Capitalism.<sup>6</sup> Hence, they present a good opportunity to investigate how communist nutritional ideology related to or stemmed from earlier ideas or practices. Yet, these ideas and practices have hardly been explored in this sense. Historical research on nutrition in Eastern European communist countries in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is generally scarce. As studies have lately multiplied, they increasingly suggest that – important similarities notwithstanding – national cases significantly vary.

Much of the existing research on communist nutrition is about how the application of ideas was constrained by economic limitations<sup>7</sup> or complex political and professional struggles in communist administrative hierarchies.<sup>8</sup> Studies on how ideologies changed upon confronting reality comprise the main bulk of works on the topic, including research on the concept and failure of the communist canteen networks<sup>9</sup> in Bulgaria or, to some extent, the study of coastal restaurants as revealing a communist culinary utopia.<sup>10</sup>

Nutrition in the pre-communist era has been even less studied, making it difficult to identify any potential legacy. Notable exceptions are the works of Ronald LeBlanc<sup>11</sup> on the vegetarian movement in pre-Soviet and early Soviet Russia and Julia Malitska’s investigation of the vegetarian movement in Ukraine and the European parts of the former Soviet Empire.<sup>12</sup> Both authors noted the hostile attitude among Soviet nutritionist-ideologists, who rejected meatless diets as foolish and outdated and attempted to obliterate the vegetarian movement.

**IN BULGARIA, WHERE THE** communist regime only took power after the end of the Second World War, a vegetarian movement had flourished in the 1920s as part of a pan-European trend, incorporating the teachings of Western European vegetarian activists such as Marcel Labbé, L. Pascault, Evgeniy Lozinskii, Mikkel Hindhede, Aleksandr Iasinovskii, and the popular by then moralistic-religious school of thought of Lev Tolstoy and Tolstoizmut. After a period of significant success, the Bulgarian vegetarian movement took heavy blows from the pre-communist political elites in the late 1920s and never fully recovered.<sup>13</sup> Yet, vegetarianism remained popular in medical circles until at least the late 1940s.

When the communist regime came to power, the nutritional



Left: The cover of *The problem of nutrition* by Michail Stoitsev (Sevlievo, 1938). The extended title reads “Accessible lecture for those who wish to lead a more rational, healthy and long life in spiritual sophistication”. On the right: a portrait of dentist Michail Stoitsev.

The earliest cookery book for vegetarian cuisine, published during the communist period, when the state held a monopoly over the publishing of cookery advice in Bulgaria since 1948. The title reads *Meatless dishes*, avoiding to use the term “vegetarian” (Sofia, 1958).

science strongly emphasized the consumption of animal proteins. It seems that meat was held in high esteem in the countries of the former communist bloc – this was certainly the case in Czechoslovakia.<sup>14</sup> Yet recent research on the GDR shows that early 20<sup>th</sup> century teachings that promoted meatless diets lasted longer in some countries than others. Unlike the Soviet Union or Ukraine, in the GDR the idea of a diet that was predominantly based on raw vegetables proliferated throughout the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>15</sup> Bulgaria was certainly under the heavy influence of Soviet nutritional science. So, did the communist cult of animal proteins ruled out vegetarianism or vegetable-based diets? How radical were the reforms promoted by communist nutritionists?

The present study examines the similarities between Bulgarian communist nutrition – the dominant principles and ideas popularized by the most influential voices in the early communist period, and the dominant beliefs and practices of nutritionists in the pre-communist period. In particular it explores the potential legacy of the most influential nutrition movement from the preceding period – vegetarianism.

The study focuses on the level of discourses: the core ideas of communist nutritionists on rational and modern nutrition and the strategies that were used to promote them. The article does not discuss their actual application, as do some of the above-mentioned works. Instead, it looks at the less considered aspects of potential legacies and adds depth to the understanding of the nature of communist reforms and the extent of their radicalism, which in popular discourses are all too often taken for granted and remain understudied.

Theoretically, the article is embedded in the historiography

on Eastern Europe, which views the communist regimes as non-monolithic systems, influenced and influencing multiple players. This literature treats the ideologies as important but inconsistent and inconsistently applied frameworks and has focused on leading individual voices, players or power groups and their impact on the modifications of the nutritional discourses.<sup>16</sup>

**THE MAIN FOCUS** of the study are the writings of the authorities on nutrition published in the early communist period – between 1944 and 1960.<sup>17</sup> The most prominent and abundant work in this period is that of Ivan Naydenov, Professor of Hygiene, who between 1940 and 1970 authored dozens of leaflets, short monographs and chapters on nutrition in cookbooks, targeted at professional and domestic cooking. Naydenov was born in 1900 in Sofia and in 1947 became one of the founders and the first permanent director of the Institute for Hygiene at the Medical University of Plovdiv. In subsequent years he published a significant body of research and advice on the hygiene of nutrition, which was to become the foundation of the communist nutritional science. In 1957 he moved to Sofia, where he established the Faculty for Hygiene at the Institute for Specialization and Development of Physicians.

Until the late 1950s, Naydenov was the single voice of nutritional advice. Then, two more scientists joined forces: Tasho Tashev and Nikolay Dzhelepov. Tashev, who was born in 1909 and graduated from a French college in Plovdiv and the Medical Faculty in Sofia before the Second World War, became a leading specialist in gastroenterology. He is credited as being the founder of the Bulgarian Scientific Society for Gastroenterology in 1954 and the

Institute for Nutrition at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in 1959. He began publishing nutritional advice in 1957 and was very active throughout the 1960s and the 1970s. His early works, which must have sought to strike balance between science and the politics of the communist state, have also been taken into account in this research. Finally, Nikolay Dzhelepov was also a doctor of nutritional science. He offered advice to the general public, mainly from the late 1960s onwards. Little is known about his career, which was not mentioned in his numerous published works, but he was presented as a “prominent, experienced specialist in the field of nutrition”.<sup>18</sup> In 1956 he wrote an introduction on nutrition in one of the most popular cookbooks of the following decades, *The Housewife’s Book (Kniga za domakinyata)*<sup>19</sup> which was also included in this research.

Due to the lack of previous studies, pre-communist advice on nutrition has also been researched here in order to provide a basis for comparison. Most of the source material from this period comprises booklets published by the vegetarian movement. Important information was found in the prefaces to pre-war cookbooks, both vegetarian and mainstream.<sup>20</sup>

Cookbooks are a powerful historical source and conceal a wealth of information on everything from politics and economy to everyday life. Food historians have frequently emphasized the tendency of cookbooks to represent food ideologies rather than actual food practices.<sup>21</sup> This could be seen as an advantage, considering the purposes of this research. The main limitation of the literature on nutrition in the 1950s as a source is, that it gave expression to very few individual voices.

This article is divided into four parts: The first part examines the ambitions of the communist regime to introduce public nutrition on scientific basis and looks at the background of these ambitions and the context in which they were promoted. The second one discusses the consumption of raw vegetables in Bulgaria and how they were incorporated in communist dietary advice. The third section focuses on the idea of changing the nation’s food habits through a network of canteens. Finally, a more extensive part is dedicated to the importance attributed to animal proteins by communist nutritionists and their attitudes towards vegetarianism.

### A focus on correct, scientifically-based nutrition

A leading theme of early communist doctrine was to portray communist nutrition as being based on scientific grounds and that it was therefore more advanced than that of the capitalist world. Such dichotomous views were regularly expressed by nutritionists and authors of the state-published cookbooks in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>22</sup> Only socialist societies, because of their revolutionary planning system, could achieve proper nutrition among the population, asserted leading Professor of Food Sciences Ivan Naydenov.<sup>23</sup> He wrote that capitalist systems, in contrast, create conditions for poor nutrition and that rational

nutrition is “out of the question” under capitalism.<sup>24</sup> As Franc concludes from his study on Czechoslovakia, many nutritionists across the Eastern bloc saw the vision of a society managed by scientists as quintessentially socialist.<sup>25</sup>

**THE IDEA TO DEVELOP** public nutrition on scientific and medical basis had deep roots in Bulgaria, where nutritional advice had predated the very dawn of written cookery advice (recipes) by one generation: *Igionomia, i.e. rules to preserve our health (Igionomia sirech pravila za da si vardim zdraveto)*, by Greek author Arhigenis Sarantis<sup>26</sup> was translated and published in 1846 and recommended modesty and diversity in nutrition some quarter of a century prior to the publication of the first printed Bulgarian cookbook by Slaveykov in 1870.<sup>27</sup>

The chemical definition of the first vitamin marked the start of modern nutritional science in the Western World in 1926. With the Great Depression causing famine across the globe, there was a rush to find applications for scientific nutritional advice.<sup>28</sup> Bulgaria did not miss a beat in joining the trend. The connection between medical and cookery advice was strengthened in the 1920s when

cookbooks introduced elaborate explanations about the preservation of nutrients during cooking and conservation and published tables with nutritional values and information on vitamins.

One of the earlier examples, *A Handbook on Domestic Food Preservation (Rukovodstvo za domashno konservirane na ovoshtia i zelenchutsi)* by Assen Ivanov (1925) described the differences between the nutritional value of meat, fruit and vegetables by introducing the reader to a range of terms such as albumins, glycologens, minerals, glucose, sucrose, cellulose, organic acids and so on. After the discovery of vitamins in 1926, Kasurova and Dimchevska’s exquisite *Cookbook (Gotvarska kniga)* from 1933,<sup>29</sup> which targeted upper-middle class housewives, opened with a six-page introduction on the basics of nutritional science. “Medical science measures the nutritional value of ingredients with calories,” stated the cookbook. The authors discussed nutritional elements, the importance of vitamins (A, B, C, D, E) to the human body and offered diagrams of calorie usage depending on the reader’s lifestyle and occupation.

By the mid-1930s, medical advice was prominent in the mainstream cookery literature. With no centralized health care or state-organized social care available, women were expected to treat more basic health issues in the family on their own and were regularly advised about healthy and preventive diets. For example, the influential women’s newspaper *Vestnik za zhenata* published more than a dozen books in the 1930s by Dr Nikolay Neykov, offering guidance on a wide range of issues: from rheumatism and hemorrhoids to sexual health. In his *Dietary Cuisine (Dietichna kuhnya)*, physician Neykov dedicated ten pages to introducing housewives to nutrition and the necessity of counting calories and observing the intake of vitamins, fats and proteins. In his foreword to the 1937 *Handbook on Domestic Food Preservation (Rukovod-*

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The covers of *Manual for conservation of fruits and vegetables*, authored by specialist in conservation of food K. Balabanov (Sofia, 1932).

*stvo za domashno konservirane na ovoshtia i zelenchutsi*) by Vlado Ivanov, university professor Assen Zlatarov recommended that a table showing the nutritional values of the most widely used ingredients should be found on the wall of every kitchen.<sup>30</sup>

The level of involvement of the medical community in formulating nutritional advice in Bulgaria becomes particularly clear from the history of the vegetarian movement in the country. As mentioned above, it developed as part of a pan-European trend of basing nutrition and lifestyle advice on the moralist philosophy of Tolstoyism and Western European vegetarian advice at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Bulgarian Vegetarian Union, which aimed to create broader social support for Tolstoyism,<sup>31</sup> was established in 1914. The union opened numerous branches across the country and became very active in organizing talks and publishing health, nutritional and culinary advice.

**THE BULGARIAN VEGETARIAN** teaching was holistic and partially drew on religion: some of its ideologists saw themselves as “direct spiritual descendants” of the Bulgarian non-orthodox Christian denomination of Bogomils, whose worldview was “represented in its purest form” by Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy.<sup>32</sup> But despite this connection to religion and radical ethical philosophy, vegetarianism in Bulgaria – just like the Tolstoyan activist vegetarians in 20<sup>th</sup> century Russia<sup>33</sup> – focused on the moral and humanitarian, rather than the religious aspects of vegetarianism. Most of all it sought legitimacy in modern medical science. At its peak between the 1920s and the 1940s, the Bulgarian Vegetarian Union published dozens of foreign and Bulgarian articles and pamphlets on vegetarianism. The book series *Vegetarian Library* featured works by Eastern and Western authors. Among them were key philosophers like Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but most of all physicians, includ-

ing prominent Ukrainian physician of Jewish origin Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Iasinovskii, French Professor of Physiology Dr Marcel Labbé of Paris, his colleagues Dr L. Pascault from Cannes and Dr P. Carton from Brévannes, as well as the Danish Minister of Health and nutritionist Dr Mikkel Hindhede. People educated in the medical sciences were also prominent among the Bulgarian writers (for example, dentist Michail Stoitsev<sup>34</sup>) and members of the movement.<sup>35</sup>

The impetus of the vegetarian movement on the involvement of medical doctors in nutrition was part of a global trend to utilize medicine for public nutrition on a national, or even supranational, level. Some European countries considered devising national nutrition strategies in the 1930s,<sup>36</sup> and the pressure grew to seek supranational control over global nutrition problems.<sup>37</sup> The League of Nations Health Organization (LNHO), which Bulgarian nutritionists attentively followed,<sup>38</sup> supported the rapid development of new research and internationally promoted the notion of minimum and optimum diets.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, when the communist regime arrived in Bulgaria in 1944, promoting its ideas for a state-organized system of public nutrition – i.e. state-run production, trade, canteens and restaurants, at least some medical doctors thought that it opened new avenues for ideas that had been brewing for a long time. In 1947, while the communist regime was tightening its grip, a medical congress was held in Plovdiv under the title *The Nutrition of our People*. After the congress, two doctors summarized the discussions, along with their previous work, in a book of nutritional advice. The volume, authored by Ivan Maleev and N. Stanchev, addressed “mothers, housewives and managers of public canteens”, advising them to base their work on scientific grounds and help the new government to correctly feed the new generation of the working nation.<sup>40</sup> Their ideas drew on the advice of medical nutritionists from previous years. This

was certainly the case in a number of specific areas: increasing the consumption of raw and fresh vegetables; incorporating more dairy products into the Bulgarian diet; reducing the amount of salt in cooking; using as little meat as possible; using more honey; increasing rice consumption; replacing white bread with whole grain bread; completely avoiding the consumption of alcohol; and using public canteens to promote healthy nutrition. These were the quintessential scientific grounds for proper nutrition at the time, and were based on many of the tenets of vegetarianism.

**THE TWO AUTHORS** never became renowned authorities on nutrition. They vanished from the world of food advice, which in 1948 became a state monopoly and for more than a decade was occupied by one person: Ivan Naydenov. The ways in which Naydenov navigated around the ideas expressed by Maleev and Stanchev defined the nature of Bulgarian communist nutritional science for years to come.

An explanation of what would appear to be two interrupted careers in public nutrition can be found in the observations of Ronald LeBlanc on the Soviet Union, where throughout the Stalinist years and beyond, vegetarian ideas were regarded with suspicion “as utopian fantasies and later with increasing scorn and censure as threats to the hegemony of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine”.<sup>41</sup> As LeBlanc noted, vegetarianism was associated not with advanced ethical standards, but with class oppression and backwardness. However, as the following paragraphs show, the relationship between communist nutrition and vegetarianism was more ambiguous and complex than communist ideologists might have been willing to admit.

Many of the suggestions in Maleev and Stanchev’s book were deemed non-controversial and were adopted by Naydenov. The increased consumption of rice, milk, yogurt and honey became the goals of the dominant nutritionist doctrine in the 1950s. The observed continuity of views on the consumption of fresh and raw vegetables and in the idea of employing canteens in the effort to change the people’s diet is of particular interest for this research, since before being introduced as part of the Marxist-Leninist ideology, they had both been incorporated into the Bulgarian foodways by the vegetarian movement.

### **Eat your (raw) vegetables!**

A survey of early Bulgarian cooking advice shows that raw vegetables were not part of the Bulgarian dietary recommendations before the 1920s.<sup>42</sup> Authors of cookbooks and textbooks for housekeeping schools described fresh vegetables as being difficult to digest, unfriendly to the stomach and lacking in nutrients. Even cucumbers, tomatoes or lettuce were supposed to be boiled or pickled.<sup>43</sup> There was one reference to a fresh vegetable salad in *Domestic Cookbook (Domashna gotvarska kniga)* (1905) and one in *1200 Recipes (1200 Retsepti)* (1901), which was

a translation from French, although this category of food was not included in all the other many cookbooks published before 1917.<sup>44</sup> In that year, the first cookbook to feature salads – an entire section on them – was published: Bulgarian vegetarian cuisine.<sup>45</sup> From that point on, more and more recipes for fresh vegetable preparations were included, first in vegetarian literature and then for general cooking. The discovery of vitamins in 1926 clearly also gave a boost to the attention given to healthy diets. “More fruits, more vegetables – let this become the aim of every mother who cares for the health of her family”, wrote Arthur Gerlach in the foreword of Hristova’s 1926 book *Vegetables. 90 Recipes (Zelenchutsi. 90 retsepti)*, part of the mainstream culinary advice of the Economy School in Sofia.<sup>46</sup>

Communist nutrition appropriated this legacy seamlessly and – needless to say – without making any references to the innovations introduced by vegetarianism and pre-war non-communist nutritional science in Bulgaria. The relationship between vegetarianism and bourgeois society prior to the war, as well as certain religious links that formed part of Tolstoy’s and the Bogomils’ teaching were among the taboos that descended on society with the establishment of the communist regime. Arguments for the inclusion of fresh raw vegetables in the diet

## **“THE INCREASED CONSUMPTION OF RICE, MILK, YOGURT AND HONEY BECAME THE GOALS OF THE DOMINANT NUTRITIONIST DOCTRINE IN THE 1950S.”**

were evident in the developing understanding of the importance of such food to digestion and vitamin intake. Serving raw vegetables with each meal, and preferring them over cooked vegetables, was one of the ten basic principles of a proper diet stipulated by Naydenov in his nutritional advice.<sup>47</sup> Later, Naydenov’s advice was closely replicated by his colleague Tasho Tashev.<sup>48</sup>

Naydenov and Tashev invariably described vegetables as a second-rate source of beneficial proteins, but insisted that their consumption – fresh, preferably raw – was one of the pillars of proper nutrition. Bulgarian vegetable-based cuisine and production during Communism spread its influence across the borders and, according to the research by Martin Franc, it influenced the nutritionist and culinary advice being offered in Czechoslovakia, where it was regarded as a model of healthy foodways.<sup>49</sup>

### **Canteens**

Developing a vast network of canteens across the country was one of the major tenets of post-revolutionary Soviets and was copied by the Bulgarian government which, in the first months after it came to power in September 1944, made it a statutory requirement for all employers in the country to open canteens for their employees.<sup>50</sup> Naydenov became an outspoken proponent of the development of a network of public canteens and regularly endorsed canteen food as being more cost-effective and having better preserved nutrients.<sup>51</sup> He constantly wrote about the canteens being a revolutionary innovation of the communist government,<sup>52</sup> never acknowledging that the concept had been previously introduced in Bulgaria. Vegetarians were not pio-

neers in conceptualizing the canteen formula, but they were the first to popularize it in the country. In other parts of the world, canteens were first introduced as part of industrial models to improve workers' welfare. However, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Bulgaria was still in the early stages of industrialization and only a few canteens existed (for example, in the state-run mining company in Pernik). In such an environment, vegetarian canteens were an innovation for the country's urban population.

In this endeavor, the vegetarians were following the model of similar vegetarian movements in other countries. In the context of the European parts of the Russian empire, Malitska observed that vegetarian canteens came into being largely as a result of the collective desire of vegetarian activists to "promote a vegetarian dietary regimen and worldview."<sup>53</sup> Their strategy was to allow their customers to try a variety of flavors and combinations of ingredients, originating in both local and European cuisine. A very similar pattern can be identified in Bulgaria, where the canteens were a key part of the visibility of vegetarian movement. According to historian Margarita Terzieva, several canteens operated in Sofia in the 1920s and more were subsequently opened in many of the larger towns: Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, Yambol, Burgas, Varna, Ruse, Pleven and Vratsa, for example.<sup>54</sup> These restaurants served as cultural centers for the movement, as they distributed literature, provided venues for public discussions and offered practical demonstrations of the vegetarian lifestyle: their plant-based food was offered in an environment free of tobacco smoke and alcohol consumption<sup>55</sup> – both exceptional for a Balkan restaurant in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**IN ORDER TO DISSEMINATE** the nutritional advice that was used in the canteens, members of the vegetarian movement published cookbooks. In his 1937 *The Newest People's Vegetarian Cookbook* (*Nay-nova narodna vegetarianska gotvarska kniga*), Krasimir Kadunkov, who described himself as a "vegetarian master chef", wrote that popular dishes from the vegetarian canteens had not reached household kitchens. "Many of our supporters and customers have asked for the recipes we use in our vegetarian canteens to be published. But for various reasons, everyone is keeping their art a secret", asserted Kadunkov. He stated that with his book he wanted to spread "his tasty dishes" across all households, thereby allowing a "bloodless diet to rule."<sup>56</sup>

Numerous other leaders of the movement published cookbooks for home cooking. They did not possess Kadunkov's professional credentials but stated their ambition of offering scientifically-based advice. The earliest such cookbook, authored by chairman of the Bulgarian vegetarian movement Ilia Stefanov and his wife Rayna Manushova Stefanova, includes references to a

significant (and, exceptional for a cookbook) medical bibliography of some 14 publications, nine of which were authored by people with medical titles.<sup>57</sup>

All these strategies to popularize nutrition ideology were reproduced by the Bulgarian communist regime, which quickly developed ambitious plans to feed the nation in a vast network of canteens and monopolized the publishing of nutritional and cooking advice. The food in the communist canteens was anything but vegetarian, but their concept echoed the ambition of vegetarian canteens to push through dietary reforms. The introduction of

"dietary, prophylactic and rational nutrition" was one of the official goals of the canteen system.<sup>58</sup>

**“BROAD AND UNRECOGNIZED LEGACY OF IDEAS AND PRACTICES THAT WERE INTRODUCED IN BULGARIA BY THE VEGETARIAN MOVEMENT CAN BE FOUND IN THE COMMUNIST NUTRITIONAL GUIDELINES.”**

**BOOSTED BY REGULATIONS** and continuous efforts, the canteens in the country rapidly increased in number from 2 340 in 1947 to 6 500 by 1986.<sup>59</sup> From kindergartens and schools to factories and institutes, the nation was supposed to be fed healthily and with food prepared on scientific grounds in professional kitchens. The government increased its subsidies in the mid-1950s to make the food affordable. The canteens were also subjected to regular

inspections to guarantee the diversity, quality and adequacy of the food on offer.<sup>60</sup> All these intentions and efforts echoed the practices of the vegetarian movement. The rationale behind their public nutrition system in the 1930s was to serve "a rational and nutritionally rich diet in line with the latest science".<sup>61</sup> Yet, all the references that the communist strategists made cited the Soviet post-revolutionary experience (see, for example, all the works of Hadzhinikolov, one of the main authors on the subject).<sup>62</sup> The extent to which this was due to Soviet-style censorship and self-censorship in the country – or the controversial reputation of the vegetarian movement<sup>63</sup> – remains unclear.

In any case, a broad and unrecognized legacy of ideas and practices that were introduced in Bulgaria by the vegetarian movement can be found in the communist nutritional guidelines. Beyond that, it was also a legacy of the industrial-era household utopia that had been developing across the old continent, Great Britain and the United States, since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, creating a long intellectual history of ideas about communal living. The history of the modern canteen began with the industrial settlements devised by paternalistic entrepreneurs for their workers. It was an element found in many forms of utopian urban projects in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: from the United States to Brazil<sup>64</sup> and from Australia<sup>65</sup> to the Israeli kibbutz.<sup>66</sup>

The Bulgarian communist nutritional science made multiple appropriations from the legacy of the vegetarian movement, but its approach to the consumption of meat, alcohol and white bread made prominent exception in this regard.<sup>67</sup> The most striking among them is certainly the key role, which was given to meat.



## Giving meat a central place in the people's diet

As Franc has previously argued about Czechoslovakia, communist nutritional science regarded meat as a highly valued source of protein and, hence, a central agent of human development.<sup>68</sup> The protein-centric teaching popularized in the Soviet Union largely dismissed vegetarianism as utopian lunacy on precisely these grounds. According to the recollections of prominent Soviet nutritionist Mikhail Gurvich, universities taught that vegetarianism had nothing to do with medicine and was foolish.<sup>69</sup>

On the surface, Bulgarian communist nutrition ideology also expressed anti-vegetarian views. Nutritionists who developed careers during the communist era claimed to share this antagonism. In his 1950 booklet *Food and Nutrition (Hrana i hranene)*, Naydenov quoted Engels' criticism of the movement: "With all due respect to vegetarians, a human would not be a human without consuming meat".<sup>70</sup> These views persisted until at least the end of the 1970s, when Naydenov's successor Tashev was still dismissing the idea that an exclusively vegetarian diet could satisfy the human body's need for nutrients.<sup>71</sup>

But most of all, meat made an extraordinary important part of the ideal communist menu. The concern of Naydenov and other food experts about providing a healthy and balanced diet for the population was invariably and explicitly linked to the individual's ability to perform their work duties for the communist state. "Only a well fed nation is healthy, endures misfortune and can hope for great work achievements".<sup>72</sup> The attitude towards healthy food as being a high-quality gasoline for the engine of the communist people was echoed in all the cookbooks from the period.<sup>73</sup> "A correct diet allows the full development of the body's abilities, ensures good workability, increases work efficiency and extends the lifespan", taught Tashev.<sup>74</sup>

**IN THE COSMOGONY** of communist nutrition, created to feed the bodily machine of the worker in communist industries, meat was seen as the purest, most efficient kind of fuel. Despite the potentially eclectic personal views of people like Naydenov, communist cookbooks in Bulgaria routinely defined meat-based dishes as "fundamental", "central" to the menu.<sup>75</sup> They insisted that both meat and animal fats were crucial to health.<sup>76</sup> Other assertions repeated in cookbooks and culinary literature from the early 1950s until the 1980s were that meat is a "powerful food" <sup>77</sup> that provides the body with essential amino acids, as well as easily absorbed proteins and vitamins.<sup>78</sup>

The importance attributed by communist nutritionists to meat consumption was not solely based on an appreciation of food diversity. According to them, health depended on and was demonstrated by a good appetite, and an appetite was seen as the best stimulator of the salivary glands.<sup>79</sup> Meat, then, was seen as stimulating the appetite.<sup>80</sup> It was like Mark Twain's Painkiller – a cure for any disease. "Meat, this central foodstuff, is widely used in dietary cuisine", declared the *Book for Everyday and Every Home (Kniga za vseki den i vseki dom)* (1967).<sup>81</sup>

It could be argued that the important role of meat in communist nutrition was facilitated by the very logic of the social revolu-

tion. The communist regime sought legitimacy in improving the lifestyle of previously disadvantaged social classes, which greatly appreciated meat.<sup>82</sup> The Soviet influence might have planted the seeds of the communist meat cult in Bulgaria, but here it fell on the fertile ground of an agrarian and not particularly wealthy society, a great part of whose rural population had little access to meat.

**ANOTHER ASPECT** related to the social revolution was that the new state allowed for unprecedented social advancement among previously disadvantaged groups.<sup>83</sup> The new leadership largely originated from such groups; and so their own preferences, which by means of the centrally run economy had a significant influence on public food culture,<sup>84</sup> also remained within the traditional food hierarchy, in which meat was seen as something festive and a privilege. Naydenov's writings certainly suggest that, to him, meat was at least initially a symbol of wealth.<sup>85</sup> It could also be the case that in Bulgaria, as Darra Goldstein<sup>86</sup> observes about the Soviet Union, regular food shortages contributed to preserving the perception of meat as a status symbol throughout the communist period.

In this context, vegetarianism remained an enduring taboo. Even the terms "vegetarian" or "vegetarianism" were not used in the titles of cookbooks until 1980. Yet a closer look at Naydenov's writing reveals that he was strongly influenced by the vegetarian movement and had appropriated at least some of their understandings of how meat affects the human body. He repeatedly stated that meat makes people wild, self-assured, stern, cruel, proud, arrogant and greedy for power, while plant-based foods pacify, calm people's passions, soften their behavior and make them more noble; moreover, they make workers obedient and quiet, but offer them longevity and lean bodies.<sup>87</sup> This understanding repeated earlier writings by vegetarian activists almost word-for-word.<sup>88</sup>

Also, Naydenov never completely rejected the vegetarian diet. His work prior to the imposition of the communist regime seemed to be a fusion of eclectic ideas. On the one hand, acknowledging the omnivorous nature of humans, he was a proponent of the old belief in balanced, all-inclusive diets in which meat and plant-based foods represented the yin and yang of healthy food. On the other hand, he thought that vegetarianism reduced the risk of rheumatism, high blood pressure, arteriosclerosis and many other diseases. He even stated that it made the mind clearer and the intelligence livelier.<sup>89</sup> In his view, the problem with a vegetarian diet was its inefficiency: burdening the digestive system but providing little energy.<sup>90</sup>

Importantly, Naydenov was generally concerned about the poorer classes of the country. He opened his 1940 work by stating that, according to a recent survey, the average Bulgarian consumed 920 grams of bread daily. Commenting on the Orthodox practice of fasting, he stated that it may be only beneficial to those who were tired of overindulgence and wild partying, while it would be no good for Bulgarian peasants, who were "vegetarian by default and anyway only occasionally eat meat".<sup>91</sup> This understanding came close to the already mentioned Soviet idea of the vegetarian move-

ment as being oppressive and tailor-made for the wealthier classes.

Thus, if Naydenov evolved to expressly oppose vegetarianism as director of the Institute for Hygiene in the Medical Faculty in Plovdiv in the 1950s, he had at least two reasons for doing so. The ideological expectations at the time clearly played a role and he found himself quoting Engels and Russian nutritionists such as Ivan Petrovich Pavlov or Boris Ivanovich Slovtsov, alongside Gustav von Bunge and Carl von Voit. But the importance which he ascribed to the abundant consumption of meat and animal proteins should also be viewed in light of his concern about the diet of disadvantaged groups. “Bringing the cauldron to the field – with food cooked by a skillful cook, will rationalize the diet of our peasant population”, who had previously survived mainly on bread and onions, wrote Naydenov.<sup>92</sup> Of course, these beliefs, possibly humanitarian by origin, subsequently happened to serve well the less-than-humanitarian communist understanding of people primarily as a workforce.

In any case, as mentioned above, meatless diets were never completely ruled out. Naydenov, Tashev and Dzhelepov all described situations in which such diets are beneficial: during old age or in a warmer climate and for lifestyles involving less physical effort, in which case Dzhelepov advised a meatless diet twice a week (but only in the 1962 edition of the *Housewife’s Book (Kniga za domakinyata)*).<sup>93</sup>

**TOWARDS THE END** of the 1950s, the understanding of a healthy diet as a combination of necessary quantities of amino acids, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, minerals and water rapidly developed into a complex process involving tables and calculations. The process rendered irrelevant the pro vs. anti-vegetarianism discussion: any ways to provide the body with the necessary combination of nutritional elements were acceptable. This was already evident in the later works of Naydenov,<sup>94</sup> in which neither plant nor meat-based diets were discussed in normative terms, although the requirements for various nutritional elements were stated. The trend became even more prominent in the works authored by Tashev and Dzhelepov in the 1960s and 1970s. Meat remained central to the suggested best diets, but the key was balance.

In this context, it is interesting to consider the findings of Treitel on the GDR, where vegetarian advice openly proliferated in the 1950s and 1960s. She associates the success of such advice with the regular shortages of butter, milk and meat. However, such shortages also existed in Bulgaria, where the idea of an entirely meatless diet was firmly rejected in the 1950s. The already quoted suggestion by Goldstein that communist food shortages strengthened the meaning of meat as a power symbol seems to be a counter argument. One possible explanation for the differences

observed between national cases could be the role of the personal factor. The degree of conforming to what were perceived as the ideological tenets of communist nutrition must have remained, at least to some extent, an individual choice, just like the ability to promote alternative views within the dominant discourses. Considering the small number of professionals, who published advice on nutrition, particularly in the 1950s, it seems inevitable that the dominant discourses were defined by the personal qualities and understandings of (only a few) individuals, along the tenets of abstract ideological requirements.

**TO CONCLUDE, THIS RESEARCH** suggests that communist nutritional advice embraced a much broader legacy from the pre-war period in Bulgaria than its authors cared to admit. Its ambition to improve the diet of the nation, which was promoted as radically reformist, echoed – and scaled up – ideas and practices that were not only already in place but had been introduced by movements, whom the communist ideology rejected.

Neither the idea to reform the national diet according to the latest scientific understandings of it, nor the methods to implement this plan via a system of canteens and cookbooks, were new. A significant group of medical experts and authors of cookery advice were promoting the latest advances in nutritional science in the period between the two world wars using accessible and diverse channels. They continuously updated the wide range of educational information and instructions, which aimed at housewives and professional cooks. They were promoting innovative practices, such as eating raw vegetables, following a diverse diet and

understanding food intake in terms of nutrients and calories. Particularly active in the process was the Bulgarian Vegetarian Union, who used a network of canteens and cookbooks and other printed material to promote a diverse, healthy and ethical meatless diet. This research argues that the vegetarian movement was an important agent behind the introduction of raw vegetables/salads in the cooking advice in Bulgaria, which happened in the late 1910s and in the 1920s.

Thus, the legacy of vegetarianism and the pre-war healthy diet project and ideas were widely present in the

official nutritionist advice of communist Bulgaria in the 1950s and 1960s, even though it was never acknowledged.

Moreover, and contrary to what transpires from previous research on the Soviet Union<sup>95</sup> and the assertions that communist nutritional science denounced vegetarianism, various sources in Bulgaria suggest that vegetarianism was allowed back in “through the back door”: as a healing diet, and many leading authorities did not fully reject it. Influential experts were strongly influenced by pre-communist nutritional advice and always remained torn between these earlier teachings and meat-centered Soviet teachings.

This research has found some evidence of direct influence and

## **“THE LEGACY OF VEGETARIANISM AND THE PRE-WAR HEALTHY DIET PROJECT AND IDEAS WERE WIDELY PRESENT IN THE OFFICIAL NUTRITIONIST ADVICE OF COMMUNIST BULGARIA IN THE 1950S AND 1960S.”**

borrowings, such as almost literate repetition of the wording of older texts on vegetarianism in the advice of leading communist nutritionist Ivan Naydenov. But even in cases where such direct borrowings are less evident, and ideas or practices might have arrived through different paths into the early communist nutrition ideology, they were generally already in place in the society. Moreover, they were introduced and practiced by movements like the vegetarian one, towards which the new system chose to be nominally hostile.

**WHAT THE COMMUNIST** regime introduced was an attempt to scale up the reforms and the ability to invest much greater resources in them. Perhaps its most prominent input in the idea of healthy nutrition was to attribute a central role to meat. Meat, as argued by Franc, was and remained central to the communist nutritional cosmogony. It delivered essential proteins, which were easily appropriated by the body, and presented the best-quality source of energy for the body of the worker in the state economy. Due to the specific combination of relative poverty across the nation in the past and chronic shortages of meat during the communist period, meat also retained its character as a “status” food. Food consumption was often used in the official discourses as evidence of the nation’s economic progress.

However, the ideal diet was increasingly conceptualized as a combination of certain quantities of nutrients. How were they delivered to the body – weather through meat or other foodstuffs – became less important. This rendered the debate for and against vegetarianism irrelevant.

Thus, on the one hand, this article disputes previous assertions that communist regimes radically and consistently ruled out vegetarianism. On the other hand, it shows that at least some of the communist “innovations” were not that innovative, but were rather portrayed as such by the persistent propaganda. It challenges the claims of radical reforms through which early communist nutrition sought legitimacy.

This research contributes to the growing body of studies on the technocratic and scientocratic aspects of communist Europe, showing that there were significant variations across Eastern Europe in the extent to which local scientific discourses appropriated the dominant Soviet discourses. It also suggests that the individual characters and qualities of the leading scientists might have played just as important a role as the ideological framework in shaping these discourses. ❌

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- 2 Here the term “ideology” is used as defined by Van Dijk – as systems of ideas, which form the “axiomatic principles” in representations of a given social group. As Van Dijk wrote: “ideologies are expressed and generally reproduced in the social practices of their members, and more particularly acquired, confirmed, changed and perpetuated through discourse.” (Teun A. Van Dijk, “Ideology and Discourse Analysis”, *Journal of Political Ideologies* vol. 11, no. 2 (June 2006): 115–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310600687908>.)
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- 5 Albena Shkodrova, *Communist Gourmet. The Curious Story of Food in the People’s Republic of Bulgaria* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2021), 2–3.
- 6 Ivan Naydenov and Sonya Chortanova, *Nasha kuhnya [Our Cuisine]* (Sofia: Meditsina i fizkultura, 1955), 10; Lyubomir Petrov et al., *Bulgarska natsionalna kuhnya [Bulgarian National Cuisine]* (Sofia: Zemizdat, 1978), 6 as just some examples.
- 7 Martin Franc, *Řasy, nebo knedlyky? Postoje Odborníků Na Výživu k Inovacím a Tradicím v České Stravě v 50. a 60. Letech 20. Století* (Prague: Scriptorium, 2003); Martin Franc, “Physicians, Technologists, Economists and Politicians. Nutritional Policy and Conflicts in Czech Lands from 1948–1970”, *Food and Drink in Communist Europe. Food and History*, 2020: 27–48; Stoličná, “Practices and Changes,” 143–158; Albena Shkodrova, *Soc Gourmet. Kurioznota istoria na kuhnyata v NRB [Communist Gourmet. The curious story of food in the People’s Republic of Bulgaria]*, (Sofia: Zhanet 45, 2014); Stefan Detchev, “Public Catering in Communist Bulgaria: 1950s–1980s”, *Food and History*, no. 18 (2020): 49–74.
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  - 14 Franc, “Physicians”.
  - 15 Corinna Treitel, *Eating Nature in Modern Germany: Food, Agriculture, and Environment, c.1870 to 2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316946312>.
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  - 32 Ilia Enchev, “Petiat mezhdunaroden kongres v Stokholm” [The Fifth International Congress in Stockholm], in *Mezhdunarodnoto vegetariansko dvizhenie [The International Vegetarian Movement]* (Sofia: Bulgarian Vegetarian Union, 1923), 8.
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- 59 Hadzhinikolov, *Rabotnicheskoto*, 15; Shkodrova, *Communist gourmet*, 24.
- 60 The reality never came close to the intentions.
- 61 Malitska, “Meat”, 22.
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# “Vegetarianism was part of social reformism”

by **Julia Malitska**

**Corinna Treitel, Department Chair and Professor of History at Washington University in St. Louis, in conversation with Julia Malitska on dreams about and attempts at dietary reform in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and on German life reformers and their long lasting, but forgotten, impacts on the ways we think today about eating naturally and environmentally consciously.**

**S**pecializing in the interplay of modern science, medicine, culture, and politics in German history, Professor Treitel is one of the most influential scholars of modern European history. She helped introduce Medical Humanities as a field of study to Washington University in St. Louis in 2015. Her first book, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern*,<sup>1</sup> asked why Germany, a scientific powerhouse in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, also hosted one of the Western world’s most vibrant and influential occult movements. Her second book, *Eating Nature in Modern Germany: Food, Agriculture, and Environment, c. 1870 to 2000*,<sup>2</sup> investigated German efforts to invent more “natural” ways to eat and farm. Vegetarianism, organic farming, and other such practices have enticed a wide variety of Germans, from socialists, liberals, and radical anti-Semites in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to Nazis, communists, and Greens in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The book brings together histories of science, medicine, agriculture, the environment, and popular culture to offer the most thorough treatment yet of this remarkable story. Professor Treitel is now working on a third book called *Gesundheit! Seeking German Health, 1750–2000*. It explores changing ideas and practices of health in German lands from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century to the present and tracks their global history. Professor Treitel teaches courses in European history, the history of science and medicine, and medical humanities.

**JULIA MALITSKA: What were the connections and lines of division between occultists, life reformers, and vegetarians in Germany in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries?**

**CORINNA TREITEL:** I think of them all as being part of the life reform movement. Many occultists were vegetarians, but there were also many vegetarians who were not occultists and many occultists who were not vegetarians. For instance, in the first book I noted that almost all the German theosophists were vegetarians and I think that has to do with the connections to South Asia and Hinduism. All these reform movements are kind of cross fertilizing each other, and they often share personnel.

**JM: Why is it important to study the interplay of science, medicine, politics, and culture in German history? Why did you choose and continue with this field? What sparked your long-term interest in it?**

**CT:** It is a rather odd story. I never intended to be a historian. When I went to college, I studied chemistry and planned to do a PhD in biochemistry after I graduated. I was working in a lab. And instead, I started to get interested in the history of science. It was a field I knew almost nothing about. And I do not know if I could have put the feeling



Corinna Treitel, Professor of History, studies the interplay of modern science, medicine, culture, and politics.

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into words at that time, but I think what I was most interested in was the forms that modern belief takes in a scientific culture. The whole secularization thesis is that as religion recedes into the private sphere, rational forms of intellectual life take over. I was interested in what kind of opportunities a scientific age and robust scientific culture creates for belief and imagination. I was attracted to Germany as a kind of test case because Germany had such a robust scientific culture and also such a robust popular culture related to science. A lot of historians, at least in the United States, come to German history because they are interested in the Nazi past, which is a perfectly legitimate way to enter the field. But I actually came into it because of the rich 19<sup>th</sup> century German culture of high science and popular belief. It really fascinated me.

About why I think it's so important: I think of the German past as a kind of "laboratory of modernity", to use a metaphor introduced by other researchers. I think of it as a place to study the intermingling of scientific ideas and popular beliefs, and the mutual influence of popular beliefs and scientific ideas on each other. That is something that you can see in many other places – probably in your own studies of the Russian empire. And there is a tendency, I think, among historians to assume that the history of science and the history of popular culture are two different things. I think that we miss something important about the modern condition if we do not study them together. Germany is a great place to do it, but I don't claim anything exclusive there. The metaphor I use is that Germany is a *Petri dish*.<sup>3</sup> That is my philosophy about this particular topic.



Evoking Giuseppe Arcimboldo's 16<sup>th</sup>-century portraits made of fruits, vegetables, and flowers, the cover of this weekly magazine implies that organic plant foods build firm and healthy flesh. "Bio-Foods: Pleasure without Poison. The Green Bluff?" *Der Spiegel* (July 26, 1982), front cover. DER SPIEGEL 30/ 1982. Published in Corinna Treitel's book *Eating Nature in Modern Germany*, 279.



The image showing Hitler as a butcher is by John Heartfield: "Don't Be Afraid – He's a Vegetarian!" (1936). Heartfield was a visual artist very critical of Nazism. Here he was playing on the idea that all vegetarians are peace loving. In the image, Hitler the vegetarian is about to butcher the chicken, who is wearing the French cockade. Don't be fooled by Hitler's words, Heartfield is saying: he talks about peace, but he is violating the Versailles Peace Treaty. He may be a vegetarian, in other words, but he is also bent on violence and aggression towards France. The reference in 1936 would have been to the remilitarization of the Rhineland, a direct violation of the Versailles Treaty yet one which few contemporaries at the time saw as part of a large spiral of German aggression against her neighbors.

**JM: What is the most fascinating case study and/or personality you have studied, or source that you have analyzed? What is your most unexpected discovery?**

**CT:** I have had so many! I will just give you one example from each one of my projects. Working on the first book on occultism. I think the person who surprised me the most was actually a guy by the name of Carl du Prel,<sup>4</sup> who was extremely well known, a kind of a popular philosopher, and interested in dreams. He tried to think about dreams from a robust philosophical and scientific standing. He actually shows up in the footnotes of Freud's "The Interpretation of Dreams."<sup>5</sup> Freud always gets all the credit for bringing dreams into the scope of scientific research, but Carl du Prel was already doing this in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and he was also a spiritualist. But no one had ever written about him. So, I wrote a bit about him in my first book, and I have always thought he deserves a full intellectual biography. You have probably found people like this in your own work who are just as interesting. You can only do a little bit with them and then you must leave room for someone else to do more. And then, when it comes to the second book, I am still fascinated by Eduard Baltzer.<sup>6</sup> He is the theorist of life reform at its very beginning in the 1870s. I find his origins in this kind of dissenting Protestant sectarianism so interesting, and he was involved in things way beyond vegetarianism. For example, he was involved in the kindergarten movement and women's rights, and in the anti-smoking campaign. I am sure that there is a much bigger story there.



**JM: Were there any established historiographical or popular myths that you faced, challenged, and/or debunked in your research?**

CT: Oh yes. You know, the black hole in German history is always the Nazis. When it comes to my first book, there was a historiographic consensus about the occult movement as a sign of German irrationalism and proto fascism. That was the historiographic consensus that I was arguing against. In the second book on natural eating, the challenge was that most German historians consider life reform movements as kind of strange and fringe. For these historians, life reform is interesting, weird and surprising, but not an incubator of innovation whose impact went beyond the kooky and fringe to the very center of German culture. That is why I came around to this idea of biopolitics. Biopolitics has been a huge thing for German historians talking about the Nazis: the racial hygiene programs, the Nazi anti-smoking campaigns, and so on. For German historians, biopolitics has always been very closely associated with fascist and top-down projects. I wanted to use this story of natural eating as a way of pushing back against that dominant narrative about biopolitics, that these biopolitical ideas about natural eating came from outside the scientific establishment, that they had big influence and multiple political aftereffects from the fascists to social democrats. I was trying to shake up the way how historians, German historians, think about biopolitics.

**JM: In my own research I was struck by a strong, almost exclusive, historiographic tradition of the association of vegetarianism in the Russian empire with Tolstoyism. So there was nothing other than Tolstoyan vegetarianism. When I told people around me that I was researching on vegetarianism in the Russian empire, the immediate comment was: “So you are studying Tolstoyans.” What were transnational and global influences on German vegetarians and life reformers? Where did they get their inspiration from?**

CT: That is a question you can think about on at least two levels. There were international vegetarian congresses where people met. Personal connections certainly occurred. Even early on, one of the first modern German vegetarians, Wilhelm Zimmermann,<sup>7</sup> lived for a while in a vegetarian commune in England, so he knew a lot of British counterparts, and he helped get some of their material translated into German. So, there were those kinds of personal connections and international circulation of 19<sup>th</sup>-century reformers.

The other international factor in this story has to do with the globalization of the food system in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I forget the exact numbers right now, but I think German meat consumption tripled between the early 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and a lot of that was driven by importing of cheap meat from places like Argentina, the United States or Canada. That kind of globalization of the food system was distressing for many vegetarians, though not for all, because they saw Germans as losing control of their own food economy. I always say Germany was not such a great place to be self-sufficient in food. It was not like Ukraine, a breadbasket, or the United States or Canada that had the capacity to be very self-sufficient in foodstuffs. Germany was not that kind of place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so that fears about the globalization of the food supply were also a sort of stimulus, I think, for many vegetarians and early organic farmers, to develop more natural ways to eat and farm.

**JM: The history of vegetarian association activity dates back to 1867, when Eduard Baltzer founded the first German Association for the Natural Way of Life. Several other vegetarian associations developed after 1867. 1892 became a symbolic year in the history of vegetarianism in German-speaking Europe, marked by the establishment of the Leipzig-based German Vegetarian Federation. In the Weimar Republic, however, we can speak, as far as I know, of at least three parallel centers of vegetarianism – Berlin, Leipzig, and Dresden. I believe there also were vegetarians in Switzerland, Poland, and Austria, which might have been part of these developments and organizations. How did these centers (co)operate and relate to each other? How fragmented and/or consolidated were German vegetarians?**

CT: I cannot give you a good answer to that question because I did not really write a history of the vegetarian movement. There is another book that someone should write. And I would love to read it. I was more interested in the dream of eating naturally. But from what I did see, I would say that there was a fair amount of traffic. For instance, some people, such as Eduard Baltzer, were part of a national lecture circuit. They would travel around Germany giving lectures on why everyone should embrace the natural lifestyle and become a vegetarian. There would be someone who heard them speak in Leipzig and wrote to a friend to say that they should invite Baltzer. And Baltzer would come to speak in that other place. So, I think that there was a kind of informal network of people who knew each other, and they collaborated with each other and shared knowledge. And of course, they all published in the same journals, and were part of these international congresses. The other thing that I noticed is that vegetarianism seems to be a very urban phenomenon. Even in the kind of rural colonies where you see vegetarianism

**“I was trying to shake up the way how historians, German historians, think about biopolitics.”**



A well-fed man happily carves up a potato as if it is a ham. This was typical of the visual propaganda produced by the Nazi regime to convince Germans that plant foods were a healthful and rational substitute for meat. *Vom ausgelassenen Apfelschmalz, vom großen Hans, dem blauen Heinrich und anderen guten Sachen zu Frühstück, Brotaufstrich und Abendessen* (Berlin: Rezeptdienst, Reichsausschuss für volkswirtschaftliche Aufklärung, 1940), front cover. Foto (c) Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum Europäischer Kulturen/Ute Franz-Scarciglia. Published in Corinna Treitel's book *Eating Nature in Modern Germany*, 192.

pop up, it is almost always city people playing farmers. There is a definitely an urban dimension, at least in the German context.

**JM: Vegetarians in Germany, I guess, were anything but homogeneous. Were there any tensions or power struggles between different ideological currents; were there any attempts to take over, to dominate? Did you find any traces of ideological conflicts?**

**CT:** I think the answer is yes. I mean of course there were different kinds of vegetarians. It is probably similar to what you have seen in the Russian empire. Some came to vegetarianism through animal rights and antivivisection. Others, like Baltzer, I think, were more concerned with social justice and poverty, ensuring that all types of people had enough to eat in Germany, so their concern was more with hunger. Pacifism was sometimes part of it, but not always. And then there were physicians who came to the whole topic of eating naturally because they were concerned about hunger and hygiene. By the time the eugenicists and the racial hygienists came online in the 1910s and 1920s, they were interested in what vegetarianism could offer in maintaining a pure Germanic people. But I did not see these guys all fighting with each other for dominance of the movement. As I said, I did not write a movement history, so it might be there and I just I did not see it.

**JM: Let me again start with insights from my own research and the context of the Russian empire. Vegetarianism as social activism started to a great extent, I would say, in the multi-ethnic provinces of the Russian empire, and particularly in the cities with a direct cultural and educational link to Central European metropolises. Kyiv, Odesa or St. Petersburg are excellent examples of that. Did ethnic/confessional/religious or gender aspects play a decisive role in the processes you study in the German context?**

**CT:** Vegetarianism was part of social reformism. Reformism came in many different political varieties. There was the anti-Semitic variety, the pacifist variety, the communist variety, the women's rights variety, and so it got mixed in with all of those. I did not notice a lot of Catholic vegetarians. But then, on the other hand, it is always difficult to know the confessional background of particular people. I wondered if this mostly was a Protestant phenomenon. Did it maybe have to do with the secularization of Protestant beliefs about the body? That is just speculation.

The other thing I noticed, and maybe someone will develop this later on, is that there seem to be a lot of German Jewish physicians active in coopting the vegetarianism of the life reformers into academic medicine. Germany is a pork-based culture: meat eating for some Jews can be very problematic and this was a moment of assimilation for many Jewish Germans. I always wondered if some of these physicians had found their way into vegetarian circles or maybe even just vegetarian restaurants because it was a way to fit in, a way of being able to sit down for a meal with other people and not have to confront the issue of kosher meat. Again, that is just speculation. But I always thought that it might be an interesting thing for someone to investigate.

**JM: I also found a sizeable proportion of Jews engaged in vegetarian activism in the context of the Russian empire, but since I do not have sources of personal origin, I cannot really make any speculations about their motives for joining the movement. Some of the main activists were educated in Austria and Switzerland, and they probably got interested in the ideas of life reform there. Can you think of any lasting results of the activities of German reformers and vegetarians on our post-modern societies, maybe on the ways we think, eat or simply are? In other words, what are the tangible historical legacies of German reformers of the 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?**

**CT:** German life-reformers elaborated a lot of the arguments that I hear today about why people should eat less meat and buy more organic food. In the United States, a woman by the name of Frances Moore Lappé wrote a very famous book in the 1970s called *Diet for a Small Planet*<sup>8</sup> and she started her own food activist organization. The book is both a cookbook and a political document, and her basic argument is that meat eating is an inefficient way to use the caloric resources of the world, that it breeds injustice and causes environmental problems.

Both German and imperial Russian vegetarians were already saying that in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. I think we have forgotten that a lot of these arguments were already elaborated in much the same way by these people. I think that may be the hidden but lasting outcome. Again, for organic farming, I do not know what the case is in Sweden, but in the United States, a lot of people in academia are almost messianic about organic farming as the thing that is going to save the planet. And I am agnostic. People in academia also often think that organics is something that was invented in the 1970s by the hippies, and they are shocked when I say that the Nazis were very interested in organics. And there were people before the Nazis who were doing organic forms of farming as well. There is this forgotten past of people who created the techniques and the justifications and the whole philosophy around natural eating that I think are still with us today.

**JM: Yes, in my source material starting from 1870s, I came across ideas of scientists, climatologists, and geographers about soya and other plants that should supposedly be introduced into people's diet for a number of reasons, including environmental concerns and food economy justifications, I would say, to use the modern language. Are there any blank spots in the field of your research? What do we know less about? What would you like to know more about?**

CT: I think it would be cool if a consortium of historians could work with each other to flesh out the international dimensions of this topic, because all of us are limited by our language skills, the peculiarities of the way our mind works and our training. This is actually a global story, and it is probably not just a Western story. I am sure that there are South Asian and East Asian dimensions. Going back to the earlier question about transnational connections, one of the big surprises for me was about the Japanese physicians who came to study in Germany. They got interested in the studies of vegetarian eaters as a way to try to justify their own East Asian diet as being a robust way to eat in the modern world. That was interesting. I did not expect to see Japanese people cropping up in German journals talking about vegetarianism. I think that kind of international story is still hidden. I do not know anyone who is working on it. In my fantasy world it would be so cool if we could maybe create a consortium of people trying to flesh out what that bigger story is. We have zoom now, so maybe it is even possible.

**This is a great conclusion to our interview. Thank you, Corinna.**

CT: Yes, now you can think about it. Maybe you will be the organizer. ✖

Julia Malitska is PhD in History and Project Researcher at CBEES, Södertörn University.

Note: This text is based on an interview conducted on February 16, 2022.

## references

- 1 Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).
- 2 Corinna Treitel, *Eating Nature in Modern Germany: Food, Agriculture, and Environment, c. 1870 to 2000* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).
- 3 The Petri dish is a laboratory equipment item, and the name entered popular culture. It is often used metaphorically for a contained community that is being studied as if they were microorganisms in a biology experiment, or an environment where original ideas and enterprises may flourish.
- 4 Karl Ludwig August Friedrich Maximilian Alfred, Freiherr von Prel, or, in French, Carl Ludwig August Friedrich Maximilian Alfred, Baron du Prel (1839–1899), was a German philosopher and writer on mysticism and the occult.
- 5 *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) is a book by Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, in which the author introduces his theory of the unconscious with respect to dream interpretation and discusses what would later become the theory of the Oedipus complex.
- 6 Wilhelm Eduard Baltzer (1814–1887) was the founder of the first German vegetarian society, the *German Natural Living Society*, an early popularizer of science and much more. Coming from a family of Evangelical clergymen, he was educated at the universities of Leipzig and Halle where he chiefly studied theology. At Nordhausen, Thuringia, he founded a free religious community. Self-described religious humanists regard the humanist life stance as their religion and organize themselves using a congregational model.
- 7 Balthasar Friedrich Wilhelm Zimmermann (1807–1878) was a German poet, historian, literary critic and politician.
- 8 *Diet for a Small Planet* is a 1971 bestselling book by Frances Moore Lappé.

“German life-reformers elaborated a lot of the arguments that I hear today about why people should eat less meat and buy more organic food.”



Slaughterhouse  
in Stockholm 1928–1932  
Source: Axel Malmström,  
1928–1932. Stockholms-  
källan. Object no.  
SSME014382.

# THE RISE OF THE SWEDISH WELFARE STATE

## Abstract

This article highlights the development of modern food practices and food regulations in Sweden with special emphasis on food safety and food security from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to 1950s. The results are linked to the wider discussion about modernization and societal change in Sweden and includes industrial organization in the agro-food sector, technological development, and the reality experienced by the population during decades that were heavily influenced by the consequences of two world wars and the rise of the welfare state.

## KEYWORDS

Food safety, food security, food regulations, Sweden.

**INTRODUCING MODERN  
FOOD PRACTICES  
INTO THE MODERN  
FOOD SYSTEM**

by **Paulina Rytkönen**

## “HUSMANSKOST CONSISTED OF SIMPLE DISHES BASED ON INEXPENSIVE INGREDIENTS THAT WERE AVAILABLE LOCALLY, FOR EXAMPLE, POTATOES, PEAS, CABBAGES, HERRING, BREAD AND CHEAP MEAT CUTS.”

Historically, cereals and fatty fish like herring were key components in Swedish diets. Sweden was one of the poorest countries in Europe. Thus, meat and other expensive foodstuffs were not available to large parts of the population. As Sweden became industrialized, a new dietary norm became established, which was heavily influenced by state actions. Developments in nutritional physiology deeply impacted food practices and national policies. Early findings in nutritional physiology indicated that a rich and balanced diet, in which animal-based fat played a key role, was advantageous for human health.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, Swedish *husmanskost* [traditional home cooking], was adopted. *Husmanskost* consisted of simple dishes based on inexpensive ingredients that were available locally, for example, potatoes, peas, cabbages, herring, bread and cheap meat cuts. It was used as a social marker to differentiate ordinary people from the upper classes. Some examples of old *husmanskost* dishes are lye fish, cabbage pudding and pea soup. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, *husmanskost* was adopted as the official dietary norm by public institutions such as hospitals, workhouses, prisons and after 1937 it was also used in public schools. The concept of *husmanskost* eventually spilled over to private households. Meat, milk and other animal-based products were important ingredients in *husmanskost* and became a pillar of the Swedish diet.<sup>2</sup>

**STATE INVOLVEMENT** regarding how food should be produced and consumed is an important element in Sweden’s modern food history. Food policies included a range of regulations that targeted all aspects of food. State involvement also reached deeply into private kitchens and influenced what and how much households should consume.<sup>3</sup> Historically, food production and food consumption have developed under the influence of formal food regulations and production and consumption practices that often emerge through the interaction of various stakeholders in society.<sup>4</sup> Many studies have shown that it is particularly important to focus on the articulation of the institutional infrastructure, comprising food legislation and modern practices, supported by public food agencies, as well as by informal institutions when the industrialization of agriculture, food production and modern consumption are in focus.<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of this essay is in line with previous research and highlights some of the processes leading to how food sovereignty was achieved in Sweden. Special emphasis has been placed on the development of food safety and food security regulations. In addition, some insights are included into how the two world wars and technical development influenced Swedish diets.

The main sources of this essay are public documents, regulatory and legislative documents, data gathered from the *Stockhol-*

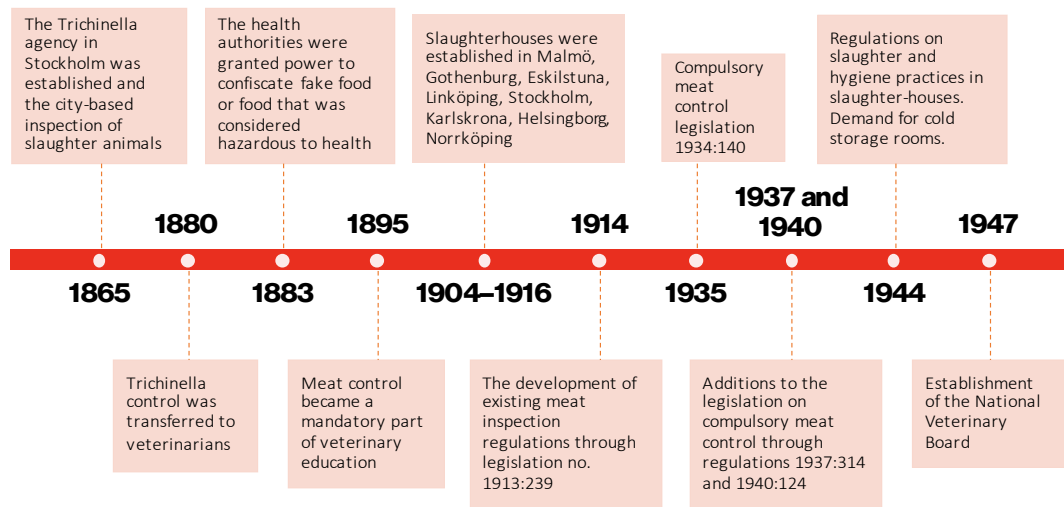
*mskällan* digital archive, as well as previous studies. The essay is organized chronologically with a main emphasis on the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Agriculture, crisis and restructuring 1890–1950 – a background

You cannot discuss the modern history of food in Sweden without mentioning agricultural regulations. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, British demand for food staples such as butter, pork and oats stimulated Swedish exports. To a large extent, Swedish agriculture and food exports became dependent on the British market. But when other countries could offer less costly options, Sweden lost its market. This fueled an economic crisis as the domestic market did not have the purchasing power to replace exports.<sup>6</sup> Oat exports had completely ceased by 1880 and butter exports, which had accounted for 10% of Sweden’s total exports in 1890, had fallen to 5% by 1913.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, during the First World War, food imports decreased due to a trade blockade, inflation rose and between 1914 and 1919 food prices more than doubled, causing domestic demand to fall.<sup>8</sup> This exposed farmers and the emerging food industry to dramatic price fluctuations.<sup>9</sup>

The crisis highlighted above was one of the reasons behind the establishment of agricultural regulations in Sweden.<sup>10</sup> Another reason was the recession following the stock market collapse in 1929. Unemployment rose, prices fell, and the Social Democratic Party searched for ways to support the unemployed. This resulted in an agreement between the Agrarian Party and the Social Democratic Party that secured financial support to agriculture and food producers in exchange for support for legislation that enabled the establishment of unemployment benefits for workers. The agreement led to the regulation of agriculture, which included subsidies, price regulations, export equalization and import restrictions. In addition, farmer’s organizations committed to help reduce the number of food processing companies.<sup>11</sup>

**AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR**, farm structure became incorporated into agro-food regulations when the 1947 Agricultural Bill was passed. The bill targeted three main areas: 1) Farmers’ income level should be equal to that of an industry worker. The government committed to achieve this goal by maintaining agricultural prices at a high (if necessarily artificial) level; 2) agriculture was rationalized and productivity targets set. The ideal farm was defined as a family farm of 10–20 hectares (called “basic farms”). Productivity gains were supported through state loans, subsidies and counselling; 3) increased productivity in “basic farms” was expected to solve food security deficiencies.<sup>12</sup>



**Figure 1.** Milestones in the development of meat regulations and control authorities. Source: Paulina Rytönen, 2022.

Following the 1947 bill, total agricultural production increased to levels that were far above self-sufficiency, while the number of agricultural holdings decreased dramatically.<sup>13</sup> Thus, agricultural regulations helped shape the structure of the food industry. This facilitated the implementation of food hygiene and food security measures and regulations.

## Food safety – examples from meat and dairy products

One of the first modern food policies was the establishment of food hygiene legislation. Historically, it was relatively easy to avoid food that could make people sick. The variation of food was relatively limited and most food was produced and consumed in the same household. When industrialization and urbanization gained momentum (in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century), food production and elaboration moved out of households and into emerging food enterprises. The previously inherited and experience-based know-how, and the personal control over food quality, shifted from a personal to a societal, institutional, and business level. Food quality and particularly food hygiene gained a wider and more intricate meaning as the food chain became more complex. Food hygiene control was established through the establishment of a legislative framework and new public authorities tasked with verifying that food enterprises followed the law. Two such authorities that played a key role in the development and articulation of food safety regulations were the National Medical Board (*Medicinalstyrelsen*), established in 1878 and the Public Health Institute (*Folkhälsoinstitutet*), established in 1938.

### Meat regulations

The control of meat products and milk and dairy products in particular were essential to monitor. Some diseases that were transferred to humans via contaminated animal foodstuffs caused serious illness. This endangered exports and domestic consumption. Thus, already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, measures were taken to avoid trichinella, TBC, typhus and other bacteria.<sup>14</sup>

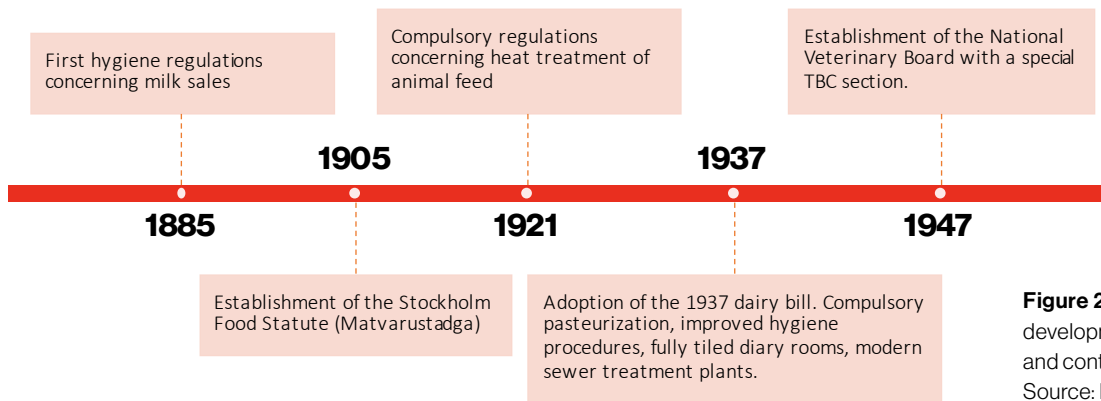
It was difficult to implement safety regulations, particularly when health controls were being developed. Many slaughterhouses had sub-standard premises and practices. The health authorities raided slaughterhouses and when one facility was closed, it was replaced by another one.

Police reports in the City Archive of Stockholm (*Stockholms Stads Digitala arkiv, Stockholmskällan*) bear witness to the discovery of rats and rat droppings, spider's webs, dust, rotten food, blackening dough, sub-standard and dirty facilities and utensils, and much more.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, food control also included aspects of animal welfare. A summary of work by the health authorities from 1878–1928 states that animals were sometimes slaughtered in cruel conditions, causing them great suffering<sup>16</sup>.

**FOOD CONTROL BECAME** increasingly important for the meat industry. In 1931 there were 586 slaughterhouses in Sweden. Some of them were municipally owned, some were privately owned and some were cooperatives. In 1950 the number of slaughterhouses had been reduced and cooperatives dominated the market.<sup>17</sup> Hygiene regulations helped to rationalize the market because many enterprises, particularly private enterprises, could not comply with the health legislation. This also indirectly influenced the rise of the cooperative movement, as cooperative owners could share the economic burden imposed by the hygiene regulations. During the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most slaughterhouses were small and privately owned enterprises. However, as legislative requirements increased, it became necessary to strive for economies of scale, resulting in larger slaughterhouses. Cooperatives as an organizational form helped reduce the business risk for each individual member and helped decrease the information gap that individual enterprises faced when the market became more organized.<sup>18</sup>

### Dairy regulations

Food safety regulations for milk and dairy products also developed rapidly between the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup>



**Figure 2.** Milestones in the development of dairy regulations and control authorities. Source: Paulina Rytkönen, 2022.

century. Dairy products are perishable and sensitive to bacterial growth. Consumption of infected milk spread a number of serious diseases, for example, TBC, listeria, brucellosis. These diseases needed to be eradicated in order to protect the population, especially children.<sup>19</sup> Improving milk quality was also important from a food security perspective. This is how the authorities defined the role of milk:

With consideration to the versatility of milk and in some cases its irreplaceability as eatable, a prominent desire from a nutritional perspective is that milk consumption in our country should not only be maintained at its current level but, rather increased. Milk is relatively inexpensive in relation to its nutritional value and from a dietary point of view, the importance of which, not least in the often-one-sided diet of the wider layers of the population, should not be overlooked. Through extensive propaganda and information activities that have been conducted in our country, especially in the last decade [1930s], the great value of milk as a food and the importance of including it as an ingredient in the daily diet should increasingly become part of our general consciousness.<sup>20</sup>

Legislation, and the 1937 dairy bill in particular, played a key role in eliminating health risks related to milk consumption. The dairy bill included compulsory pasteurization, modern sewage treatment plants, fully tiled dairy rooms and improved hygiene practices in dairies. To comply with the dairy bill, most dairies had to make substantial investments, but since the industry was

still recovering from the export crises, the adoption of the 1937 dairy bill helped rationalize the industry and reduce the number of dairies. In most cases, the Swedish Dairy Association (*Svenska Mejeriernas Riksförening*) merged with hundreds of cooperatives after 1937, while many other dairies shut down.<sup>21</sup> Over a five-year period (1935–1940) the number of dairies decreased from 1,576 to 984. And while the number of cooperatives dropped from 723 to 719, the number of private dairies decreased from 853 to 265.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, hygiene and safety regulations played a significant role in the development of the dairy industry.

**ANOTHER MILESTONE WAS** the professionalization of the veterinary profession. Through the establishment of the National Veterinary Board (NVB, *Statens Veterinärmedicinska Anstalt*), it was possible to achieve better resource allocation. The NVB developed the expertise to address problems that were specifically related to animal production. Another key authority was the National Institute for Public Health (*Folkhälsoinstitutet*). This agency played a key role in supporting the development of what eventually became the first National Food Bill in 1951 (*Matvarustadga, Proposition 1951:63*).<sup>23</sup>

### Food security

Public views about nutrition were cemented already in the 1930s when nutrition became part of general Swedish welfare policies. This was in line with the active state involvement in the welfare of the population. The general formula for achieving food sovereignty and enhancing the nutritional value of food was to improve the living standards of the working class and secure real wage increases through general national wage bargaining.

**“THE VITAMIN DOCTRINE, DEVELOPED IN THE 1910S, LED TO AN INCREASED AWARENESS OF THE BENEFITS OF VITAMINS, AMINO ACIDS AND MINERALS.”**



Rationing cards during the First World War.  
Source: Stockholmskällan, Object no. F85090.



Growing cabbages in Karlaplan, 1917. Source: Axel Malmström 1917, Stockholmskällan. Object no. SSME014287

The vitamin doctrine, developed in the 1910s, led to an increased awareness of the benefits of vitamins, amino acids and minerals. This influenced the outline of nutrition policies, guidelines and recommendations. A key concern of the state was that a poor diet could affect the working ability of the population. Thus, the state actively attempted to increase its knowledge about the consumption habits of the population. Several studies were conducted in order to understand the correlation between income level and diet. A general conclusion was that poverty in combination with family size were the underlying causes behind who consumed what and how much was consumed by each family member. Food consumption, particularly in rural areas and in Northern Sweden, was based on cereals and dairy products.<sup>24</sup> The diet was basic and one-sided, lacking in mineral salts and vitamins and contributed to tooth decay, rickets and anemia.<sup>25</sup> In urban environments, working class people lived in crowded environments in which tuberculosis, measles and rickets thrived. Children were the most vulnerable. A simple case of measles often led to other more serious diseases because the immune system was weakened by a poor diet.<sup>26</sup>

BY THE END OF the 1930s the State Institute for Public Health and the Swedish Co-operative Union (*Kooperativa Förbundet*) conducted the study *27 000 Meals (27 000 måltider)*. This was a milestone as it generated new knowledge about consumption habits and differences in food consumption in families. Women in working class families had “a substantially worse diet than others”. Adult (working) males ate cooked meals, small children ate porridge and gruel and older children ate sandwiches, while women often settled for coffee and sandwiches.

One of the strengths of the study is that it was able to establish what people actually meant when they referred to lunch, breakfast, dinner or coffee. This allowed the nutritional value of food to be clarified. Eggs, fruit and vegetables were virtually absent from children’s and women’s diets.<sup>27</sup>

Historically, butter was an important source of fat, although working class people could rarely afford it. The lack of fat led

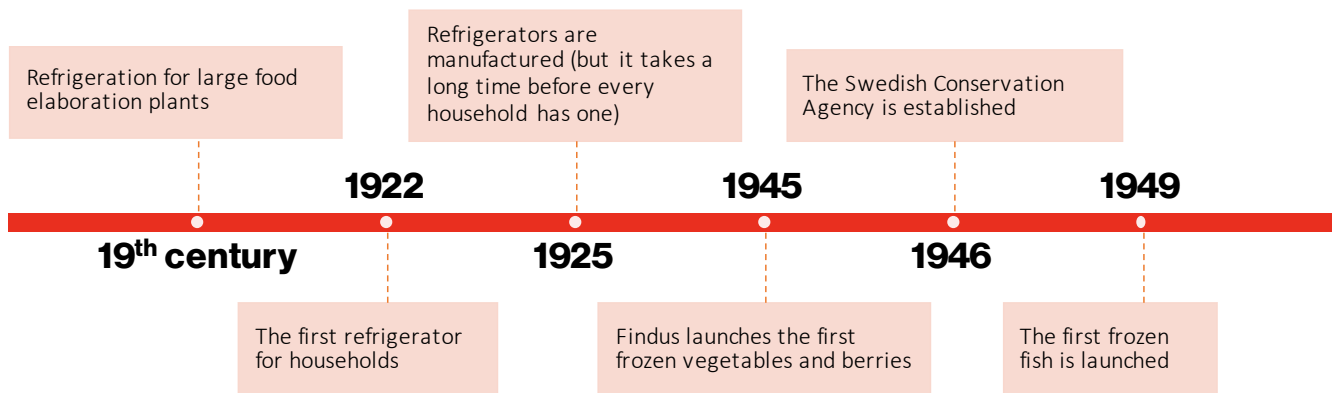
to the promotion of margarine. However, it was not easy to introduce margarine into the Swedish diet. One of the arguments against margarine was that it could lead to food adulteration. Early methods of producing margarine were based on mixing slaughter residuals (lard) with skimmed milk. After the First World War, vegetable oils became more available, leading to an improvement in the quality of margarine. With vegetable oils, the sensory quality of margarine became more stable, it was easier to spread and less expensive than butter.<sup>28</sup> Some arguments in the public debate raised concerns about the nutritional value of margarine. The lack of sunlight in Sweden during the winter, together with malnourished mothers, caused rickets in children. Although no statistics are available on the occurrence of rickets, the problem was substantial enough to raise concerns among decision makers. In the public inquiry 1937:51, which proposed to legislate in favor of vitaminized foods, an important argument was that adding vitamins to margarine would increase its nutritional value, thereby helping to eradicate rickets.<sup>29</sup>

The concern about children’s health also included school meals for working class children. In 1912, only 2 300 of the 26 000 children enrolled in schools in Stockholm benefitted from free school meals. Due to the food situation in poor families, Fredrik Ström, a prominent Social Democrat, submitted a proposal to increase the city’s budget for school meals from 70 000 Swedish crowns in 1912 (equivalent to 3 563 249 Swedish crowns in 2021) to 105 000 in 1913 (equivalent to 5 329 644 Swedish crowns in 2021). He argued that:

**Even during normal times, in a city of Stockholm’s size, there are many families in which the children are never properly fed; in working-class families with high numbers of children in particular, starvation is ever present.<sup>30</sup>**

The number of school meals gradually increased and in 1947 all children in Sweden were granted free school meals. This was expected to alleviate the economic burden for families comprising





**Figure 3.** The development of refrigeration technologies – timeline. Source: Paulina Rytönen, 2022.

many children; facilitate the workload of housewives; improve the nutritional status of all children. School meals were also necessary because the state considered that working-class households lacked knowledge about the importance of consuming versatile and nutritious food.<sup>31</sup>

Another significant measure to improve people's diets was to inform and educate them about how to create a diet following the vitamin doctrine. Milk was identified as crucial because it was inexpensive and contained several nutrients that were difficult and costly to obtain through other foods. Encouraged by the state, in 1923 the dairy industry established the "Milk propaganda" association (*Mjölpropagandan*). The association lobbied the state to introduce milk in schools, as well as inform the public about its benefits. Influenced by this milk propaganda, milk became woven into the national identity and was one of the most emblematic symbols of the modern Swedish food system.<sup>32</sup> Milk consumption helped to improving food security, particularly after pasteurization was made compulsory in 1937. Diseases such as tuberculosis and rickets virtually disappeared.

The process behind how Sweden achieved food safety and food security are closely connected to what we now describe as social engineering.<sup>33</sup> However, this topic has not been fully explored.

### **Food rationing – with Stockholm as an example**

Even though Sweden was not actively involved in the First and Second World Wars, it was indirectly affected by disruptions to trade flows of foodstuffs and inputs that were essential to food production. Sweden was ill-equipped to meet trade challenges, particularly during the First World War. In fact, the two wars considerably delayed the fulfillment of Sweden's national food

security goal. However, there is a considerable difference in the situations that prevailed in the respective world wars.

**DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR**, most Swedes were poor and poor people would occasionally starve. In 1917, a trade blockade affected the import of staple foods, resulting in the state rationing food. In 1917, the lack of food led to many famine revolts across the country. The discontent of the poor shook society to its core.<sup>34</sup> In Stockholm, the 1917 mass protests came to be known as the "potato rattles", as poor housewives, after a very cold winter and almost three years of food rationing, rallied thousands of people in protest against rising food prices and the insufficient food supply.<sup>35</sup>

The hardships experienced by people did not go unnoticed. One of the main headlines of *Dagens Nyheter* (an important Swedish newspaper) on April 26, 1917 read: "Bread to people in need. An appeal for solidarity". The appeal for solidarity was signed by many well-known experts from the National Food Commission (*Statens Livsmedelskommission*) and the main message asked households to be frugal in the use of rationing coupons. As highlighted in the previous section, a key issue behind the far-reaching consequences of food rationing was poverty.

The authorities acted to counter food shortages through initiatives at both a regional and a local level.<sup>36</sup> One strategy was to promote rabbit breeding. The first protocol of the Rabbit Breeding Committee (*Livsmedelskommissionens Kaninuppfödningsskommitté*) in Stockholm on April 3, 1917 includes information about the establishment of rabbit farms and the decision to purchase breeding animals.<sup>37</sup> Rabbits became an important source of animal proteins at a time when other food was being rationed. In only two years,

**“IN 1917, THE LACK OF FOOD LED TO MANY FAMINE REVOLTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY. THE DISCONTENT OF THE POOR SHOOK SOCIETY TO ITS CORE.”**



Coffee surrogate in 1940.  
Source: Rich's 1940–1950, Stockholmsskällan, SSM 48083



Extracting ice on Lake Uttran 1939.  
Source: Herbert Lindgren, 1939, Stockholmsskällan, Object no. SSMFg011650



The iceman places the ice block into an ice cabinet 1960–1967. Source: Lennart af Petersens, Stockholmsskällan, Object no. SSMFa026546

166 rabbit farms were established in Stockholm. Most important, rabbits could be bred in urban environments and were a perfect food during times of rationing. Moreover, the consumption of rabbit meat met with no resistance because other forms of animal protein were scarce, and also because plenty of sources indicate that small game such as hare was part of the diet in rural areas.<sup>38</sup>

Additional measures to improve food security was to grow food in parks in Stockholm. Cabbages, potatoes and carrots were some of the main staples to be grown in the city. People helped each other by posting notices in local newspapers and writing cookbooks on the art of “crisis food preparation”. The most important recommendation was to replace flour with potatoes.<sup>39</sup>

**DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR**, Sweden had emergency food stocks. Nevertheless, food consumption was negatively impacted by a combination of a trade blockade and poor harvests.<sup>40</sup> The Government Food Commission was responsible for the implementation of food rationing.<sup>41</sup> In its analysis about production from 1939–1944 it concluded that harvests were around 80% compared to a regular year. Unusually cold winters between 1939 and 1942 negatively affected output. Moreover, there was a reduction in the import of grain seeds. The production and consumption of beef and pork were reduced due to a shortage of fodder. Some desperate measures were adopted, for example, the authorities organized the collection of household food waste to provide pig breeders with fodder. Technologies that helped to preserve food, for example, powdered milk, made a break-

through when a study of the nutritional content and value of powdered milk using conscripts stationed in the northern parts of the country showed positive results.<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, in 1943, the state adopted regulation 1943:774 concerning a system for income-based food discounts that enabled the poorest segments of the population to utilize their food rations. Most food products were subject to rationing during the war. During the war the state promoted the home cultivation of food and the population was informed about how to preserve and make use of the available resources. Information disseminators were employed and brochures such as “Harvest and winter preservation of garden products” (*Skörda och bevara trädgårdsprodukter*) and “Wise preservation” (*Förståndig förvaring*) were distributed to all households.<sup>43</sup> The combination of all these measures helped the state take control of the food system, although the population’s food intake was still insufficient. On average, calory intake had reduced by 7% during the war years compared to the 1930s.<sup>44</sup>

## Technologies and knowledge

An additional key element of food safety and food security is food preservation. The Swedish state played a key role in promoting technological development at an industrial level and informing households. This is a vast area of research and will only be touched upon briefly here.

The state had already developed industrial policies for multiple industries before the 1930s. In the area of food, the involvement of the state went hand in hand with the adoption of the vitamin

**“ADDITIONAL MEASURES TO IMPROVE FOOD SECURITY WAS TO GROW FOOD IN PARKS IN STOCKHOLM. CABBAGES, POTATOES AND CARROTS WERE SOME OF THE MAIN STAPLES TO BE GROWN IN THE CITY.”**

doctrine and state-led efforts to diversify the working-class diet. Before the 1950s, state policies also focused on modernizing food preservation in households. Such efforts also coincided with a period in which there were increasingly more housewives (1920s to 1960s). An important ingredient of food preservation was sugar. When sugar production was industrialized through the establishment of refineries and the large-scale production of sugar beets, the price of sugar dropped, making sugar available to working-class households.<sup>45</sup>

The state helped to educate housewives on how to use sugar for preservation, which also positively influenced the number of calories that were consumed.<sup>46</sup> The state supported information campaigns, research and the establishment of household schools. The latter were an important means of modernizing food preservation, food elaboration and food consumption at a household level.<sup>47</sup> The recipes included cooked fruit and berry juice *saft* [squash], marmalade and compotes. Through this strategy, households were invited to take advantage of the berries, fruits and other resources that were available for free.<sup>48</sup>

At an industrial level a key event was the foundation of the SIK [Swedish Institute for Food Preservation Research (*Svenska Institutet för Konserveringsforskning*)] in 1946. The SIK existed as an independent state agency and could therefore closely collaborate with the industry to develop industrial food preservation technologies and modern food products.<sup>49</sup>

### Refrigeration as an example

Refrigeration and freezing technologies were developed for both industrial use and for households. After the introduction of freon in 1920, it became possible to produce modern refrigerators. It took a long time before all households could afford a refrigerator. However, many households had ice cabinets that were cooled down with large ice blocks that were extracted from frozen lakes and rivers.

### Final remarks

Over a period of less than 100 years, Sweden embarked on a journey in which the production, elaboration and consumption of food moved from the sphere of rural and agricultural households to industries located in urban areas. In 1950, the dietary norm, comprising “Swedish home cooking” had become the dominant force. The 1950s are often described as the golden years of Swedish industry. After the war, Sweden was able to benefit from increased production, as well as increased exports and industrial productivity. The latter led to higher wages in real terms for workers and a general improvement in the standard of living of the population. An animal-based diet, which the state had so eagerly pursued, became a reality for most people. Sunday roast, pork leg with root mash, pickled herring or Falu sausage and fried potatoes were part of the diet of most Swedes. Milk became the dominant milk-time drink. The national diet had changed, largely influenced by active measures adopted by the state. ✕

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## Targeting Ukrainians that praise the armed resistance to USSR. Putin's authoritarian turn justified by the past

**The Future  
of the Soviet  
Past:  
The Politics  
of History  
in Putin's  
Russia**

Anton Weiss-  
Wendt & Nanci  
Adler, eds.,  
Bloomington,  
Indiana Univer-  
sity Press 2021.  
258 pages.

**H**ardly anyone could have predicted that thirty years after the fall of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin, the disgraced dictator with so many and varied crimes on his record, would be back as a praiseworthy historical figure in Russia. At first, there was an optimistic belief that Stalin's terror would be more fully researched, publicized, commemorated, and redressed. After some initial efforts in that direction, the tables were turned after Vladimir Putin took the helm in 1999. A cult of Stalin slowly emerged as part and parcel of making the Soviet victory over Nazism in World War II into what historian Nikita Petrov, board member of Memorial, in an important article terms a mandatory civic religion (pages 71-88) and marginalizing, even normalizing, Stalin's repression and terror. As this important volume shows, this rehabilitation of Stalin and the Soviet Union is part of a systematic misuse of history for propagandistic purposes. From a Bulgarian background, Tzvetan Todorov pointed out that totalitarian regimes such as the Soviet Union "revealed the existence of a danger never before imagined, the blotting out of memory. History is rewritten with every change of those in power." One could add that the rewriting of history can change even as those in power change their style of rule.

Unexpected as it may seem, a light version of Stalin's repressive system fits well into and normalizes Putin's authoritarian turn. As editors Anton Weiss-Wendt and Nanci Adler reveal in this new anthology, public opinion polls have shown ever growing popularity for Stalin, particularly after Russia's takeover of Crimea in 2014. In 2017 nearly half of Russians viewed him with respect and enthusiasm. The eleven chapters plus the editors' introduction give a fascinating survey of the many ways that the Putin regime and its agents participate in revising, rewriting, and erasing historical facts to legitimize Russian forms of repression and aggression. Based in part on contributions to a conference held at the Norwegian Holocaust Center in 2016, the book covers a wide territory including TV programs pretending to be documentaries glorifying the Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia, censoring films on Chechnya and Crimea, describing the failed Russian-Polish historical commissions, as well as the punitive memory laws, the repression of Gulag museums, the freakish antics of the Night Wolf bikers, and the harassment of grass-roots efforts to identify victims of terror. Above all the figure of Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinskii is implicated for his anti-historical influence in politicizing and dismissing the importance of professional historians. He has said, "You are naïve to think that facts are the main thing in history. Open your eyes: nobody pays attention to them! What matters is its interpretation, point of view, and mass propaganda." Interpretation should, according to him, be nationalistic and patriotic: "If you love your Motherland, your people, you will only write positive history. Always." As Weiss-Wendt comments, Medinskii repeatedly lets heroic myths, politically useful "sacred legends", triumph over facts (page 37).

Purportedly there is a Russian saying that in the Soviet Union the idea of the future remained unchanged; only the memory of the past changed. Although Stalin was denounced in a secret speech for his "cult of personality" and extreme terror by Nikita Khrushchev in 1956, which was later detailed through Mikhail Gorbachev's revelations about his mass crimes, many present-day Russian revisionists cultivate the myth that Stalin was simply a normal "strict but just" Russian ruler. As a new ruler Putin spoke vaguely about the "dark events" of the past that should never be forgotten or justified. But criticism of Stalinist terror has since been abandoned. According to Putin's new position, Stalin was a product of his time and should not be demonized. We should rather "talk about his merits in achieving victory over fascism", he said a 2017 interview. As the editors point out, this gives Putin the opportunity to place himself in a continuity of "ruthless czars, victorious military commanders, and assertive Communist Party first secretaries" for their ability to hold on to power through the exercise of repression (page 8). The rehabilitation of Stalin ultimately serves to vindicate Putin's hard-handed manner of governing which can be seen as putting matters back on to the traditional Russian political track. At the same time the equation of Putin with Stalin makes it necessary, Nanci Adler argues, to "marginalize" the impact of state terror in the official version of Russia's history. The propagandistic use of rehabilitating Stalin gives popularity to the image of neighboring Ukraine as a home of "fascists" who should be punished.

**ONE OF THE MOST** insightful articles is that by Nikolay Kuposov who compares the Russian memory law passed in 2014 with other European memory laws. These are laws that criminalize certain statements about the past. In the West European context this commonly means forbidding statements denying atrocities and denigrating the victims of the Holocaust, above all, but also other genocides and extreme violations of human rights. They serve to preserve the dignity of the victims as an ethical imperative. However, the Russian law of 2014, usually termed the Yarovaya Act, approved against the background of the seizure of Crimea, criminalizes two very different issues: first, it forbids

Continued.

## Targeting Ukrainians that praise the armed resistance to USSR

the justification of crimes committed by the Nazis, and second any “dissemination of knowingly false information on the activities of the USSR during the Second World War.” Thus, this law focuses on preserving the primacy of the victorious state as well as the holy sacrifice of the heroic soldiers. The main “criminals”, according to this law, are those Ukrainians who praise and commemorate the armed resistance to USSR.

**IN CONTRAST**, the memory culture that developed in Western Europe is basically humanitarian and aspires to acknowledge and give recompense for past crimes committed by governments or their associated institutions, and even educational, religious and charitable organizations. This can encompass recognition of genocide, admission of unjust treatment of minorities, or in a few cases criminalizing denial of certain genocides. However, Russia’s memory culture has nothing to do with human rights; it defends actions taken by government and its institutions. This is done for the sake of maintaining a “clean” national narrative. “It openly endorses the memory of an oppressive regime against that of its victims”, writes Kopusov (page 205); there is no room for admission of Russian guilt and blame as a rule is placed on external enemies, often branded as “fascists”. The fascist label is used to great extent in the Russo-Ukrainian memory war with Ukrainian politicians accused of being Banderovists, that is followers of Stepan Bandera who led a vigorous anti-Soviet guerrilla movement linked with the Nazi occupation during World War II. A different Russian memory war concerns the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia and is described by Štěpán Černoušek. A TV documentary broadcast by Rossiia One channel in 2015, *The Warsaw Pact: Declassified Pages*, postulates that Alexander Dubček and other leaders of the Czech “socialism with a human face” reform movement plotted a coup that would “bring about a situation of unrestrained terror”. The major Western European states were portrayed as “arming fascists again”, only to be halted at the last moment by the joint intervention of the Warsaw pact states.

**AS I WRITE**, news comes that a higher court in Moscow has forbidden Russia’s foremost and oldest human rights organization, Memorial Society, dating back to the 1980s. Memorial is famous for collecting thousands of dossiers on the victims and the NKVD agents of Stalin’s repression. This has made it easier for individuals to research what had happened to their family members during the terror. It has also worked to exhume and identify victims in mass graves. Recently Memorial has been harassed by the government under the catch-all accusation of being a “foreign agent”. There are some grassroots voluntary associations that complement Memorial. A similar organization, named “Last Address”, places plaques on buildings from where victims of state terror were taken to their death. The “Immortal Regiment, Immortal Barrack” holds annual marches to commemorate the nameless prisoners of the Gulag. Social anthropologist Johanna Dahlin describes the work of volunteers to unearth and identify

Soviet soldiers fallen in battle, who had been buried in haste.

Such grassroots efforts to deal with the past meet with ambiguous on-and-off sympathy from authorities. About a hundred kilometers from Perm, one of the last existing Gulag hard-labor camps, officially known as Perm 36 and located in a remote village, was turned by former prisoners and employees into a museum complex, starting in 1994. It had held some of the Soviet Union’s best-known political dissidents and human rights activists. The Perm 36 site had great value as the “sole preserved zone out of the tens of thousands of camp zones” that had been created in the Stalin era. With a small amount of financial support from the regional government and larger funding from domestic and foreign donations, local historians saw to it that the camp was gradually repaired and preserved as a museum that opened in 1996. The museum expanded with archival research and expeditions to other former camp sites to gather artifacts, and began to document Gulag history and the daily life of the prisoners. It organized travelling exhibitions, screenings of documentary films, lectures and on-site courses for teachers. An annual civic forum that encouraged artistic performances became a Mecca for Russian liberals. The site itself was the most important aspect since the visitors could “feel the terrifying atmosphere of isolation which surrounded prisoners for years.” As historian Steven Barnes relates, up to 2012 the story of Gulag 36 museum was an outstanding success and had become a national and international knowledge resource considered for inclusion on the UNESCO world heritage list. However, a newly appointed regional governor proved hostile and immediately cut public funding. The self-styled “left-patriotic” association “Essence of Time” began a smear campaign against the museum. A series of TV programs on the NTV channel attacked Perm 36 as a fifth column and for allegedly “teaching children that Ukrainian fascists are not as bad as history textbooks portray them, whilst their grandchildren caused genocide in eastern Ukraine”. The museum’s founding directors were fired and replaced and then put on trial and convicted for refusal to register as a foreign agent. This caused considerable international protests. At the time of writing, the museum



PHOTO: GERALD PRASCHL/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The fence and guard tower at the Soviet forced labor camp Perm-36 100 km northeast of the city of Perm in Russia, part of the prison camp system operated by the Soviet Union in the Stalin era known as the GULag. The last remaining example of a GULag labor camp, the site has been preserved as a museum and is open to the public as "The Museum of the History of Political Repression Perm-36"

had not closed but real damage has been done through government takeover; it has become dysfunctional and has abandoned many of its most successful outreach activities. The exhibits no longer mention the role of Stalin or that the inmates were political prisoners.

**THE POLITICAL ABUSE** of the past leads to many conclusions if one considers the Putin regime's general hostility to independent civil society organizations, particularly those dealing with the state crimes committed in the relatively recent past. One can observe the same regime's willingness to create a "useful" history resulting in international memory quarrels with neighboring countries both near and far, not just with Ukraine, but also Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The same regime's inability to admit any fault, even the most egregious, gives

a few ominous signs. One can only draw the conclusion that this is a regime acting on the basis of a self-inflicted feeling of insecurity and believing that offense is the best defense. Little thought given to the future consequences. Through its manipulation of memory for the sake of its present-day hold on power, is the Putin regime placing itself into a position of having no alternatives other than increasing repression, actually sleep-walking into the future? ✘

**David Gaunt**

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## The Åland autonomy. A success story and a particular case



PHOTO: HELGI PORSTEINSSON/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The Åland archipelago.

### The Future Conditions for the Åland Autonomy

Bjarne Lindström and Göran Lindholm (Olof M. Jansson's Foundation for the promotion of historical research on Åland, 2021), 95 pages

Contemporary political and economic trends are heavily influenced by a powerful centralization tendency. However, in some places the strong centralization reflex is challenged by regionalization efforts.

In Europe, the prime current centralization example in both politics and economics is the emergence and expansion of the European Union. Yet, in spite of its enormous resources, the European Union is forced to co-exist with regionalization forces within its realm.

Several regions in Europe are not at ease with the universal centralization imperative, but seek political and institutional arrangements tailor-made to regional social and cultural preferences. A prominent case in point in the Baltic region is the century-old Åland autonomy: the entirely Swedish-speaking Åland archipelago being politically fully a part of Finland, but culturally always leaning towards Sweden.

IT WAS TOWARDS the end of the First World War that the Ålanders began working for reunification with Sweden. Like the rest of Finland, Åland had been an integral part of Sweden for several centuries, then part of tsarist Russia for over one century.

The Åland slogan was "Finland free – Åland Swedish". The issue was referred to the League of Nations, which was set up after World War I. The League of Nations decided in 1921 that Finland would acquire sovereignty over Åland and that the Ålanders would be granted new guarantees to preserve their ethnic identity, including the Swedish language.

The ambitious recent report *The Future Conditions for the Åland Autonomy* by Bjarne Lindström and Göran Lindholm thoroughly examines the historical intricacies and institutional subtleties of the Åland autonomy and compares it to six other European autonomies. The report is published by the Olof M. Jansson foundation, established for the promotion of historical research on Åland by the farmer and parliamentarian Olof M. Jansson from the community of Strömme in Hammarland on the main island of Åland.

THE SIX EUROPEAN reference autonomies that the report highlights are the Faroe Islands, South Tyrol, the Basque Country, the Isle of Man, Gibraltar and, lastly, Flanders in Belgium (that is found to be less comparable with Åland than the other five). Each autonomy is a case of its own with lots of unique specificities, making comparisons very elusive. To mention but one example, Catalonia is an autonomous region in north-eastern Spain with some 7.5 million inhabitants – 250 times more than Åland. It stands to reason that the autonomy of Åland faces completely different issues than the much bigger Catalonia.

Strategically situated in the middle of the Baltic Sea, between Sweden and Finland, the Åland archipelago comprises 6,757 islands (and, in addition, a total of some 20,000 smaller islets and skerries) but with a population of only 30,000 people, Åland displays a politically very ambitious autonomous entity. Still, the





report makes the case that the Åland autonomy is in great need of renewal; "that the time is ripe for a comprehensive reform of the Autonomy Act".

The report underlines that "the main purpose of the Åland autonomy, and the original ambition behind it, was to guarantee the population's Swedish language and cultural identity" and argues that the protection of the Swedish language remains the core of the autonomy's legal and political competence. The authors point to a need to shift from reactive monitoring of the status quo to a more proactive expansion of Åland's legal and political scope of action, as seen in several of the European reference autonomies.

IT SHOULD BE REMEMBERED, however, that Åland is a dynamic and thriving welfare society, one of the wealthiest in the world. The Åland autonomy has also scored a number of institutional successes in the international arena. Often mentioned among successes for the Åland autonomy is the striking and beautiful blue-yellow-red Åland flag approved in 1954 (in my opinion, arguably one of the most beautiful flags of Scandinavia, second only to the even more colorful and artistic Sami flag), the Åland stamps first issued in 1984 and the latest high-tech breakthrough in securing the domain .ax, approved in 2006 by the international body in charge of registering internet domains. This goes to show that even a very small regional autonomy is fully capable of achieving objectives that improve and streamline everyday life for both its citizens and its occasional guests.



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The shortcomings and challenges that the report describes must not overshadow the impressive achievements and success stories of the Åland autonomy. ❌

**Manne Wängborg**

Former Consul General of Sweden in Kaliningrad, Russia.

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Contact the *Baltic Worlds* editor at [ninna.morner@sh.se](mailto:ninna.morner@sh.se). If you would like to be part of the *Baltic Worlds'* review-pool, please attach a short bio including your research interest and qualifications.

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PhD and an Academic fellow of the Department of Foreign and Slavic Literatures at Shevchenko Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. Scientist, literary critic, writer, editor, and translator. Since 2012, he has been working as managing editor-in-chief of the Ukrainian magazine of translations *Vsesvit*. Drozdovskiy is a member of the Supreme Council of the Writer's Union of Ukraine.

## Dmitry Dubrovsky



Associated Professor in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Higher School of Economics (HSE) in Moscow since 2008, but was declined to renew the contract February 25, 2022, apparently on political grounds, as he is seen as a "foreign agent". An expert on human rights in Russia, he has focused on issues relating to xenophobia, ultra-right nationalism, hate crimes, and hate speech as they relate to freedom of conscience and freedom of speech.

## David Gaunt



Professor Emeritus of History at CBEES, Södertörn University and the first Director of the Baltic and East European Graduate School, BEEGS. Research focus includes what actually happened to the Christian population from 1915 to 1916 in southeastern Turkey, during what is called the Armenian, Assyrian/Syrian, and Pontic-Greek genocides. Inducted in 2011 into the Assembly Academia Europaea, Section of History and Archaeology.

## Anu Kannike



Ethnologist and Senior researcher at the Estonian National Museum. She has worked at the University of Tartu, the University of London, Tallinn University before the Estonian National Museum. Anu Kannike is the co-author of the books *101 Estonian Foods* (2016) and *100 Years of Estonian Life* (2018). Has published on the history and modernity of Estonian everyday culture, especially on home culture and food culture, and museology.

## Andrej Kotljarchuk



Senior researcher, Associate Professor, and Director of operations at the Institute of Contemporary History, Södertörn University. He is a leader of the research project "Memory Politics in Far-Right Europe: Celebrating Nazi Collaborationists in Post-1989 Belarus, Romania, Flanders and Denmark", supported by The Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies.

## Victoria Kravtsova



Feminist researcher, NGO-worker and activist. Born in Smolensk, Russia. Initiated *Feminist Translocalities* – a queer feminist network between the former USSR, Germany, and sometimes other locales, as well as a platform for supporting projects - publications, exhibitions, seminars, podcasts etc. Research interests include the intersections of feminist, antiracist and decolonial struggles in the countries of the former USSR.

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PhD in Sociology, affiliated to the Graduate School for Social Research, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences (Warsaw). At the Center for Urban History, Lviv she works in a project on the multicultural heritage of the two Ukrainian cities of Uman and Lviv. She is in charge of the project's sociological component, such as the research of awareness and request of the cities' population on local history, on current intercultural stereotypes, and opportunities for improving interaction of residents with problematic monuments. Interests: comparative research, Jewish studies, memory studies, multicultural urban heritage.

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## Karl Schlögel



Professor emeritus, historian and writer, lives in Berlin. Among his books: *Moscow 1937* (Polity Press 2012), *The Scent of Empires. Chanel No 5 and Red Moscow* (Polity Press 2021), *Ukraine. A Nation on the Borderland* (Reaktion Books 2022).

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## Margareta Tillberg



Associate Professor in Art History, Uppsala University. Adjunct Professor, Stockholm University. She defended in 2003 her doctorate on Russian art and artists, *Coloured Universe and the Russian-Avantgarde. M.V. Matiushin on Colour Vision in Stalin's Russia 1932*. Main research interests concern art in the widest sense possible (including theory and practice of visual culture, design, architecture, media) in Russia, the former Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe, applying interdisciplinary perspectives.

## Manne Wängborg



A Swedish diplomat and writer, former Consul General of Sweden in Kaliningrad, Russia, and Deputy Secretary-General of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission.

## Nikolay Zakharov



PhD in Sociology, Senior lecturer at Södertörn University. Main focus of research and teaching is sociological theory, global racisms and antiracism, religion and nationalism in Eastern Europe.

# BALTIC WORLDS

Call for papers

## THE BALTIC SEA REGION. WHERE ARE WE NOW?

**T**he ongoing war in Ukraine has far-reaching consequences for the entire region. Whether and how the cooperation in the Baltic Sea region can respond to those challenges is still to be investigated. Therefore, *Baltic Worlds* is encouraging submissions on the topic of Baltic Sea regionalism.

The geopolitical shift implied by the end of the Soviet Union in 1991 presented a window of opportunity for cooperation across the Baltic Sea Rim. In 1991 the Council of Baltic Sea States, CBSS, was established as an organization promoting bilateral and multilateral contacts and collaborations between countries around the Baltic Sea. Its focus has gradually become related to regional identity, sustainability, and security. In the 1990s a range of organizations with all kinds of abbreviations emerged at the same time. Initiatives on gender equality, environmental issues and democratization flourished. The Baltic University Programme, also established in 1991, has focused on promoting sustainable development and democracy through



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activities involving the exchange of people and knowledge. Indeed, several universities and research agendas took shape as the result of the new geopolitical situation after the end of the Cold War (including this

journal). Later, in 2009, the EU launched the strategy for the Baltic Sea region (EU-SBSR), aiming to save the sea, connect the region, and increase prosperity.

Over time, CBSS has grown in significance for the Baltic Sea region, with its 10 member states (besides the EU): Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, and Sweden (Russia was banned March 2022, and left CBSS). Tensions were already present from the start, often with Russia as the *enfant terrible*. There were geopolitical tensions, diverging social values, and a certain distrust that needed to be dealt with. The challenges are no less today: on the contrary.

*Baltic Worlds* invites scholars to send in proposals related to cooperation in the Baltic Sea region: its emergence, role and characteristics, today's challenges, and their possible solutions. Contributions can be papers for peer-review, essays, interviews, or another suggested format.

Please submit your abstract or proposal before September 1, 2022, to: [ninna.morner@sh.se](mailto:ninna.morner@sh.se). ✕

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two independent specialists. *Baltic Worlds* is listed in Scopus, and in the Norwegian bibliometric register (DHB), included in EBSCO databases, DOAJ, and Sherpa/RoMEO.

*Baltic Worlds* is distributed to readers in 50 countries, and reaches readers from various disciplines, as well as outside academia. In order to present multi- and interdisciplinary ongoing research to a wider audience, *Baltic Worlds* also publishes es-

says, commentaries, interviews, features and conference reports. All content relates to the Baltic Sea Region and the wider Central and Eastern European area, including the Caucasus and the Balkans.

*Baltic Worlds* regularly publishes thematic sections with guest editors, enabling deeper explorations into specific fields and research questions. International scholarly collaborations are encouraged. *Baltic*

*Worlds* wishes to advance critical engagement in area studies and to apply novel theoretical and methodological approaches to this multifaceted field.

The journal's Scholarly Advisory Council consists of international scholars, representing different disciplines and with specific knowledge on the area.

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