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Special section. **St. Petersburg**
in the 1990s. A window in time

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editorial

Fear and loss of freedom

The war continues. In this issue, and the coming ones, we will try to grasp its impact for Ukrainians, their neighbors, and for the future of democracy in the region.

In Belarus, the streets that for two years were filled with peacefully protesting people are empty. Alesia Rudnik gives us an insight into the level of oppression – and the still existing resistance in Belarus. But it is dangerous to protest. Detention, torture, and disappearances happen. The level of violence from the state towards its citizens is escalating in Russia too. Elena Palenova's essay reflects the voices of several students, journalists and activists that describe the fear they live in and the despair they feel, thus questioning the West's expectations of Russians that they change the system from within.

Many Russians who take an anti-war position have already left Russia. *Novaya Gazeta*, the independent journal that was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2021, left Russia for Riga as a consequence of the war and the restrictions on freedom of speech. Kirill Martyniv, editor-in-chief of *Novaya Gazeta Europe*, talks about Russian journalism in exile.

Emma Rönngren writes about the situation for Russian speakers in Latvia. In her view, the younger generation does not associate itself with Russia or what one could call the Russian world, nor the values and aggressions carried out in Ukraine in the name of Russia.

IN THIS ISSUE, our special section is indeed very special: "St. Petersburg in the 1990s. A window in time", guest edited by Anna Kharkina. The first generation to enter university studies during perestroika in St. Petersburg experienced change, loss of grounds, the flow of new ideas,

and an intoxicating feeling of freedom. Everything was possible. In retrospect, comparison with the Weimar republic is unavoidable, writes Konstantin Zarubin in his summary that follows the collection of memoirs and perspectives from several academics that experienced, each in their own way, this particular creative period and place.

This energetic period is now erased and gone, except in the hearts and minds of the people that are nowadays scattered around the world. In her introduction, Anna Kharkina concludes:

"Unfortunately, the window of openness which opened in the 1990s is closed now. Russia has come back to where it started, in fact to an even worse place."

YES, THE WAR has suffocated not only the once budding freedom in Russia, but brutally brought death and sorrow to its neighbors. In Ukraine, the shelling and bombing goes on. Dzmitry Pravatorauis' argument gives reasons why Ukraine may have to seek security agreements outside NATO. Kateryna Mishchenko shares her thoughts on the symbolic role of Ukraine's Snake Island and loneliness. Yuliya Krylova-Grek writes about disinformation and hate speech directed at Ukrainians in the mainstream Russian media.

The war continues. ✖

Ninna Möerner

colophon

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Editor-in-chief

Ninna Möerner

Publisher

Joakim Ekman

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Copyediting/proofreading

Matthew Collins, Semantix, Bridget Schäfer

Layout

Sara Bergfors, Lena Fredriksson, Serpentin Media

Illustration

Karin Z Sunvisson, Moa Thelander

Subscription

bw.editor@sh.se

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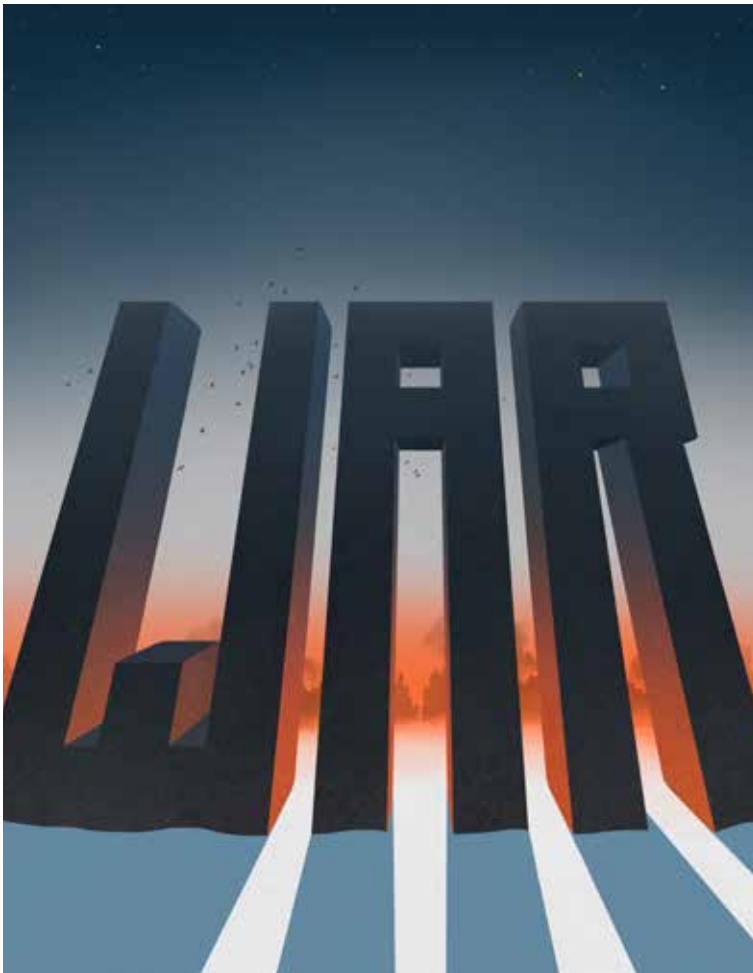
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Contact *Baltic Worlds*

ninna.morner@sh.se



special section

St. Petersburg in the 1990s. A window in time

81 Introduction. St. Petersburg – intangible heritage of the 1990s. Archiving work in progress, *Anna Kharkina*

memoirs

85 The Bohemian life of the St. Petersburg State University dormitory, *Tatiana Samokhova*

91 The *otherness* of the city made it artistic, *Vladimir Rannev*

92 "In the 90s everyone was in a hurry", *Mikhail Borisov*

100 Leap into the void, *Anna Kharkina*

107 Fabulous lost years, *Olga Serebranaja*

112 The Pravednick's band project. My musical experience in the 90s, *Andrei Patkul*

120 The revival of the Orthodox Church, *Julia Kravchenko*

123 Summary. The Weimar Republic analogy seems unavoidable, *Konstantin Zarubin*

Guest editor: **Anna Kharkina**

essays

4 Belarus – where society is deprived of power but not agency, *Alesia Rudnik*

12 The violent state – fear and protest in Russia, *Elena Palenova*

22 Cancelling Russia. The situation for Russian speakers in Latvia following the invasion of Ukraine, *Emma Rönngren*

41 Dehumanization the "enemy". Hate speech to Ukrainian in Russian media, *Yuliya Krylova-Grek*

46 Why neutrality is dangerous for Ukraine's statehood, *Dzmitry Pravatorau*

61 Chernobyl as a post-Soviet memory space, *Achim Klüppelberg*

66 Tsopi, Georgia. Where Azerbaijanis and Armenians are living side-by-side, *Klaudia Koscińska*

127 Challenges and opportunities for island societies in Sweden during the Covid-19 pandemic, *Paulina Rytönen, Marcus Box, Tommy Larsson Segerlind, and Youssouf Merouani*

135 A twin city divided during corona. A story of unintended geopolitics, *Thomas Lundén*

reports

19 Russian journalism in exile. A new chapter in *Novaya Gazeta's* life, *Ninna Mörner*

35 Safeguarding human rights during war, *Ninna Mörner*

feature

28 Hopes and worries at the Finnish-Russian border, *Pähl Ruin*

peer-reviewed article

70 Digital Orthodoxy. A typology of non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs, *Dragoş Şamşudean*

commentaries

38 Sovereignty and loneliness on Snake Island, *Kateryna Mishchenko*

55 Olena Zelenska on the cover of *Vogue*, "Critized and praised", *Karin Winroth*

58 International politics and the fashion scenery: What happened to the Russian Fashion Mafia? *Karin Winroth*

143 Role-play. European integration with a focus on the Baltic Sea region, *Zane Šime*

conference report

148 The politics of environmental knowledge. Shaping environments through research, art, and activism, *Hugo Faber, Florence Fröhlig, Viviane Griesinger, Tatiana Sokolova, and Ksenia Zakharova*

misc.

150 Call for papers. *Baltic Worlds'* Special section: Nationhood, gender, and classical music education, *Ann Werner*

152 A new university of unity, UNE, *Jan Claas Behrends, Alexander Etkind, Dina Gusejnova, Mykola Makhortykh, Andrea Pető, Philipp Christoph Schmädeke, Ellen Rutten and Dorine Schellens*

BELARUS



**– where society
is deprived of power
but not agency**

by **Alesia Rudnik**

Protest rally against Lukashenko
in Minsk, August 30, 2020.

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



I was terrified and scared but more than ever before I felt that I am a Belarusian and I could not stay home. I can't say that I felt exactly like a soldier preparing to die while protecting the Homeland, but a similar feeling overwhelmed me then.

These are the words of one of the female protestors who took part in a street demonstration in Minsk on February 27, 2022. According to different estimates, between 1,000 and several thousand Belarusians came out to protest against the start of the war in Ukraine and against the referendum on constitutional change in Belarus.

The national vote covered amendments to the Constitution that granted immunity for a president that served his term, secured a transfer of power to the Security Council if a president “dies violently” as well as removing the country’s neutral status from the constitution. With the long practice of manipulating elections in Belarus, the stated number of 65,2 percent Belarusians who approved the amendments caused a lot of doubt. Additionally, the constitutional reform was developed without any participation of citizens; no public hearing was held.¹ Many foreign stakeholders criticized the upcoming referendum. For example, the Venice Commission noted that the amendments “fail to correct the strong imbalance of powers which already exists

PHOTO: EPA-EFE/ADAM WARZAWA



People take part in an anti-war manifestation under the slogan "For Your and Our Freedom", on the occasion of the Belarusian Freedom Day, in Gdansk, northern Poland, March 27, 2022.

under the current Constitution and indeed may even aggravate it".² The Belarusian opposition was working on an alternative version of the new constitution,³ open for public discussion online. Just before the referendum, the Belarusian opposition announced its campaign calling people to sabotage the voting ballots and gather at polling stations at 14.00.⁴ However, after February 24, democratic leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya announced⁵ that voting on the referendum was no longer about constitutional change but about protesting the war in Ukraine. The day of the national vote was the last large-scale protest in Belarus up to now. More than 500 people were detained and placed in detention facilities for up to 15 days.⁶ For many, joining this protest was an act of unprecedented bravery, when striving for justice and peace outweighed their fear.

REPRESSIONS AGAINST representatives for civil society and private business, politicians, journalist, activists, and many others who have expressed discontent with the Belarusian regime have shaped Belarusians' lives in the last two years. The costs of any public criticism grew with increasingly restricted freedom of speech. By different estimates, from 100,000 to 500,000 out of 9.5 million Belarusians left the country, tens of thousands were charged and given short-term sentences and at least 1,443 recognized as political prisoners.⁷ Severe human rights violations against Belarusian civil society deprived it of any decision-making opportunities within political life.

Since summer 2020 the international community has stood in solidarity with Belarusians who demanded free and fair elections but ended up oppressed and squeezed out of the country by the regime. However, since February 2022 the image of Belarusians abroad shifted along with Lukashenka's decision to assist Putin in launching the attacks against Ukraine from Belaru-

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PHOTO: T.ME/TSIKHANOUSKAYA

Leader of Democratic Belarus, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya meets Oleksiy Arestovich (Voice of Belarus) in Vilnius on September 8, 2022.

sian territory: A decision that Belarusians did not support but became trapped in.

Challenged by the Belarusian population in summer 2020 following the rigged election and unprecedented violence against the population, Lukashenka lost a part of his supporters. In November 2021, 30 percent of urban population in Belarus mentioned they would vote for Lukashenka as the future president. The same number would vote for an imprisoned presidential candidate, Viktor Babaryka, and around 10 percent for the opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya.

In addition, Belarusian society was polarized in its trust in state institutions. While those supporting protest completely distrusted all state institutions, regime supporters demonstrated high loyalty to the army, courts, and Lukashenka.⁸

With the attitudes of general distrust of the state, lack of security and a high level of repression, Belarusians woke up on February 24 to the news that shook the whole world. Belarusians' position on the war was

different from the support the "special operation" received from the population in Russia. Less than 3 percent of Belarusians wanted to see Belarus as an ally of Russia in the war.⁹ Leader of democratic forces Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya immediately released a statement condemning the actions of Belarusian regime:

One hour ago Russia, with the participation of Lukashenka's regime, launched a groundless and shameless military aggression against Ukraine. The regime turned our country into an aggressor. But Belarusians don't want war. Belarus strongly condemns this move and stands with Ukraine, reads Twitter of Tsikhanouskaya.¹⁰

At the same time, the regime of Lukashenka started a long game

of reconvincing his electorate of the necessity of “helping” Russia, despite his long-term promises that Belarus will always remain a peaceful country. While Tsikhanouskaya’s support to Ukraine was rather an expected political statement, Lukashenka’s electorate had to change their vision. Firstly, for a long time, Lukashenka’s promise of stability was grounded on him serving as a guarantor of peace. For Lukashenka, the famous saying “aby ne bylo wajny” (anything but war) constructed one of his long-lasting promises that he can personally secure country’s independence and peace. Secondly, Lukashenka refused to formally recognize the annexation of Crimea or the self-proclaimed eastern Ukraine republics, DNR and LNR. Thirdly, he suggested Minsk as a negotiation platform for Russia and Ukraine in 2014. Those and many other political moves attracted a section of the Belarusian population. However, after Belarusian territory served as a platform to launch attacks on Kyiv, those principles had to be reconstructed for the electorate loyal to him. Thus, in March 2022 Lukashenka met with Putin where he promised to show “where the attack on Belarus was being prepared” allegedly pointing to Ukraine and Western countries.¹¹ He also tried to serve as a mediator in the conflict, suggesting Belarusian territory for the negotiations that were held on February 28 in Homiel. Before that Lukashenka had a phone call with Volodymyr Zelensky, during which he promised a ceasefire.¹² Unsuccessful negotiation and continued firing of rockets to Ukraine from Belarus made it clear that Lukashenka would not manage to maneuver and maintain neutrality, as he did after the annexation of Crimea and the start of the war in Eastern Ukraine. The new status of Belarus as a co-aggressor pushed Belarusians to launch an underground partisan movement.

Partisan movement

I watched this video and I couldn’t believe it but I also clearly understood that it was him. I went on a couple of dates with him 15 years ago. It was like a hit, a shot, my body was in cramps... I have watched the video again and again to make sure it was him, and to see some goal in his eyes to understand that he was ready to face the consequences for what he has done. I was really afraid that he would end up in a wheelchair, because he is an athlete, and he was shot in the knees. I was afraid he will remain in prison for years or murdered there. When the wave of fear went away, I was overwhelmed with hatred and anger for those who do this to my people, to us, to the best of us.

In this quote an independent Belarusian journalist from Barysau, currently living in exile, describes her reaction to the dramatic and cruel video that appeared on the state-controlled Telegram channels a few weeks after the outbreak of war. On the video she recognized a person she knew. Group of men had been violently detained and shot in the knees by the police. All of

**“GROUP OF
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PHOTO: FLICKR CREATIVE COMMONS

February 2022 Lukashenka’s (right) decided to assist Putin in launching the attacks against Ukraine from Belarusian territory.

them later became suspects in ‘terrorist’ cases for damaging railway infrastructure to prevent transportation of military equipment through Belarus to the Ukrainian border.

RAILWAY PARTISANS became known to the public in the first days of the war. A group of individual railway saboteurs, coordinated through the number of initiatives, targeted the rail network across whole country but mostly near the border with Ukraine where Russia transported its military equipment and manpower.

Rail is the most convenient and cheap means of transportation of food, people and equipment – disruption of it created a serious challenge for Russian troops in the speed of deliveries and probably even deterred a much stronger attack on Kyiv.¹³ The first acts of sabotage happened on February 26 and 27, damaging rail alarm and control functions. These actions of the railway partisans were highly risky and involved preparation, knowledge and

skills. The acts were performed in small groups or pairs to maintain trust and remain unnoticed. Supposedly, Belarusian railway workers with their experience were involved in the most effective signal interlocking sabotages. The head of Ukrainian railway reached out to the Belarusian railway workers and thanked them for assisting Ukraine.¹⁴ Physical attacks on the railway were combined with the active work of Cyberpartisans – the initiative claimed to have hacked the Belarusian railway transportation management point. This led to slower movement of trains as well as a blockage of centralized control over the railway.

The word “partisans” has more than a symbolic meaning here. Though such initiatives as Cyberpartisans, ByPol took responsibility for the railway sabotage – the rest of the people risking their lives remained unknown. Similarly, thousands of reports and visual proofs of transportation of military equipment



Empty streets in Minsk, January 2022. Image from the official site for tourism reading “Minsk is a great place to visit for its many attractions. One of the top attractions to see in Minsk is the National Museum.”

PHOTO: CHASING WHEREABOUTS

through Belarus reached the project Hajun. Belarusians actively engaged in anonymous tips to the initiative in order to help gather information about Russia’s military movements.

If we talk about Belarusian Hajun, a new project, the bot (chat-bot on Telegram) was only launched on February 28. 10,000 people sent more than 33,000 messages, commented the founder of the Hajun initiative for *Ukrainska Pravda*.¹⁵

While according to Chatham House,¹⁶ almost 40 percent urban Belarusians did not consider that Belarus is a participant of the Russian-Ukrainian war, residents of towns and villages close to the border observed the presence of the Russian army and witnessed military equipment being transported in the region. The independent poll of pro-protest Belarusians *Narodny Opros* showed that one fifth of respondents regularly saw movements of manpower and weapons.¹⁷ Not only did ordinary citizens report to initiatives tracking the military activity and preparations in Belarus but doctors who treated wounded Russians opened up about the scale of Russia’s casualties.¹⁸ Leaks from the Belarusian army were another source for the public. Democratic initiatives and politicians reported on reluctance of the Belarusian

military personnel to join the war on Russia’s side if Lukashenka were to order it. Tsikhanouskaya and ByPol appealed to the generals of the Belarusian army, suggesting that they either sabotage entrance to Ukraine or surrender.¹⁹ While the Belarusian army has not yet formally joined the war on the Russian side with its manpower, Lukashenka continued to supply the Russian army with military equipment and to host thousands of Russian soldiers in Belarus. Addressing the threat of disruption of the railway, on May 29 the regime approved an amendment to the Criminal Code that sanctioned the death penalty as a punishment for “terrorist acts”.²⁰ Dozens of suspects who had a significant impact in slowing down and sabotaging the Belarusian railway remain in custody. Most of them are in drastic conditions, like the group of partisans from Barysau, mentioned above, who were shot in the knees.

War resistance took an active turn with hundreds of Belarusians forming the first national division within the international legion of the Ukrainian army. The stories of the Belarusian men who decided to join the defense of Ukraine as a part of the Ukrainian army within the Belarusian Battalion named after Kastus Kalinouski are very varied, ranging from former political prisoners to professional soldiers who served in the French legion. Some of those Belarusians had already participated in defense

of Donbass since 2014 and were living in Ukraine. Others were in exile in countries such as Poland, Lithuania or Georgia. After being verified, they were allowed into the country for preparation. Many joined the defense missions of Bucha, Mykolaiv, and Lysychansk. By summer there were about 1,500 Belarusians formally employed by the Ukrainian army within the regiments and battalions formed by Belarusians.²¹ Hundreds of other men and women joined the territorial defense or the volunteering initiatives. The Belarusian authorities immediately reacted to the formation of the Belarusian battalion in Ukraine and reported on 50 criminal cases against the soldiers.²² Another source at the battalion reported on instances of blackmailing the soldiers while their relatives were held in custody and interrogated. When I reached a soldier who is currently off the front due to wounds and mental trauma, he said:

I had not talked to my mom in months because I did not want to put her in danger as a target for the Belarusian secret services. Recently we have talked. I found out that they have already interrogated her and threatened her with imprisonment if I do not return to Belarus... But she still won't leave home.

Solidarity at all costs

“Koly nastane den, zakinchytsya viyna...” [When the day comes, the war will be over], – young singer Meriem Herasimenka sang the song by the famous Ukrainian band Okean Elzy in the cozy yard of a popular bar in Minsk. Hundreds of people around sang along and lit up their phones. Next day, Herasimenka was detained by the police and has still not been released. Currently she is accused of organizing action that ‘undermines public order’ and donating money to the Ukrainian Army.²³

For those who did not observe the military preparations with their own eyes, the war felt less close but not less terrifying. For reasons of justice, and safety of their relatives, fellow Belarusians chose Ukraine as their second home, fleeing repressions in Belarus. Local protests among Belarusians occurred now and then despite the extreme threat to individual safety. Telegram groups of local communities that were created during the protests in 2020 have transformed from open groups to closed communities of neighbors who trust each other. They coordinate and organize small-scale individual protests with Belarusian historical white-red-white flags and slogans – but in 2022 they have to cover their faces. Reports on such protests regularly appear from districts of Minsk, for example Chyzhovka and Barauliany. Another person from one of the Minsk city centers described to me their house community as a closed and trusted circle of people who gather in different apartments each week, despite their fear, and talk over a cup of tea while they discuss plans for the weekly partisanshchyna (partisanship) or underground activities. Others demonstrate solidarity through graffiti

**“MANY ARE
SCARED OR HAVE
SIMPLY LOST HOPE
FOR THE VICTORY
OF DEMOCRACY.”**



PHOTO: INSTAGRAM.COM/MERIEM_GERA

Belarusian singer Meryem Herasimenka was detained after performed a Ukrainian song in a bar in Minsk. She was arrested due to “active participation in group actions that grossly violate the public order”.

in support of Ukraine. Since 2021, several initiatives of samizdat or self-produced brochures with independent news have been distributed anonymously on paper to mailboxes.

BELARUSIANS HAVE actively donated to Ukrainian army, for which dozens of people have been identified and imprisoned, including Meriem Herasimenka, the singer mentioned above, who donated for Bayraktar and paid with her freedom. In Poland, Belarusians donated \$20,000 for the needs of Ukrainian army within a short time.²⁴ In Sweden, the Belarusian diaspora has donated a car and gathered money for thermal clothes and a thermal imaging camera for the Ukrainian soldiers. Foundations that actively supported former political prisoners, Belarusian refugees, and other suffering from political repression in Belarus, have partly restructured their work to help out Ukrainians in need.

FOR OTHER BELARUSIANS inside the country, risks related to expressing their public opinion resulted in acceptance of the reality. Many are scared or have simply lost hope for the victory of democracy and continued their daily lives “without politics”. Others enjoyed the momentum of free Belarus in 2020 but have given up. Continuing to live in Belarus without risk-

ing detention required Belarusians to depoliticize (at least publicly), avoid any open activism and obey the new rules.

Survival despite oppression

The news on mobilization in Russia came as another blow. Thousands of Russian citizens came to Belarus in an attempt to hide from the potential military draft. This news has triggered worries that mobilization will be announced in Belarus. Some independent media reported on queues to visa centers, lines to prepare

papers for taking pets abroad, and queues to renew passports. At the same time, Minsk has become a new service hub for Russians who came to open a bank account to receive Visa or Mastercard, now banned for Russian citizens, to visit shopping malls with world-famous clothing chains that recently closed in Russia, and most importantly, to hide from the military draft.²⁵ 66 percent of Belarusians surveyed by the above-mentioned Narodny Opros state that they are not ready to assist the Russians arriving in Belarus but will not create any obstacles either.²⁶

Additionally, Belarusian authorities have reported that the KGB will now have the power to forbid people to leave the country for six months to secure national interests. Most likely the measure is targeting Belarusian men eligible for mobilization and representatives of law enforcement services.²⁷ Those who managed to leave the country have been facing obstacles legalizing in other countries. First of all, it targets Belarusians who were living in Ukraine and emigrated to EU countries, as they are not eligible for temporary protection as war refugees.

INSIDE BELARUS, the repression wave is hitting harder and harder. In October, the KGB raided the Academy of Science and detained over 44 employers;²⁸ in Hrodna the history lecturer at the state university was fired after spending three days in prison for distributing “extremist materials”.²⁹ Earlier the authorities detained several owners of food chain stores in a framework of fictional criminal cases.³⁰ Against this background, repressing Belarusian citizens, Lukashenka continues to strengthen Russia’s military might. Recently, reports from monitoring initiatives suggested that Belarus is supplying Russia with its old tanks³¹ and that Belarus and Russia will activate its joint training exercises on the western border of Belarus.³²

Whether or not Lukashenka will send his troops to take part in the war against Ukraine on Russia’s side, the aftermath of the decisions made by the strong man in Minsk have significantly damaged the international image of Belarusians, created the strongest distrust in the political system and undermined guarantees for the country’s independence in future. Unfortunately, this is a challenge for Belarusian society and opposition to be solved in future, as it is unlikely that Ukraine’s victory will lead to automatic democratization of Belarus. Until Lukashenka checks the movements of military equipment and activities potentially resulting in new attacks on Ukraine, and negotiates with Putin, the international community will continue to consider him a main actor. In this picture, the role of the democratic forces embodied by Tsikhanouskaya, her office, cabinet and diaspora, fades away. Supporting the initiatives of democratic politicians and diaspora projects is therefore vital to strengthening and supporting a traumatized civil society in Belarus. ❌

Alesia Rudnik is a PhD-candidate in Political Science at Karlstad University, and a research fellow at the Belarusian think-tank in exile Center for New Ideas.

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THE VIOLENT STATE

Fear and protest in Russia

by **Elena Palenova**

Russian feminist activist Nika Vodwood left the country in 2021. She says that she herself was very scared to even talk about leaving Russia and was terrified when journalists asked her to comment on it. She feared criminal cases against feminists in Russia and wanted to “leave the police state”.

“Someone reported me to the police, and I was taken to the police station for a conversation. Also, a member of the presidential human rights council included me in his presentation as a representative of a so-called ‘special detachment attacking family values,’” she says.

On September 20, 2022, the pro-Russian administrations of the occupied regions of Ukraine initiated referendums on joining the Russian Federation. On September 21, Vladimir Putin announced the start of “partial mobilization.” Putin’s decree did not establish any criteria for mobilization.¹ The number of people who were to be taken into the army is classified. The

mobilization turned out to be impartial; men from 18 to about 65 years old were taken, regardless of their military experience and their relationship to the war.

At the end of September, the main news was the annexation of the occupied Ukrainian territories to Russia and the mass exodus of Russian men abroad. In total, at least 200,000 people left the country during the first week of mobilization.² They left and did not come out to protest. For this, many resented them.³

I WONDER IF the protest situation in Russia today needs to be explained to people that were not born in Russia.

Nika Vodwood emphasizes that it is not important to explain any of this to Ukrainians.⁴

“There is no need for statements like: ‘We are actually doing something, I’m good, don’t hate me’. Ukrainians should not be expected to know the whole context, to sympathize, empathize, understand us,” she says.

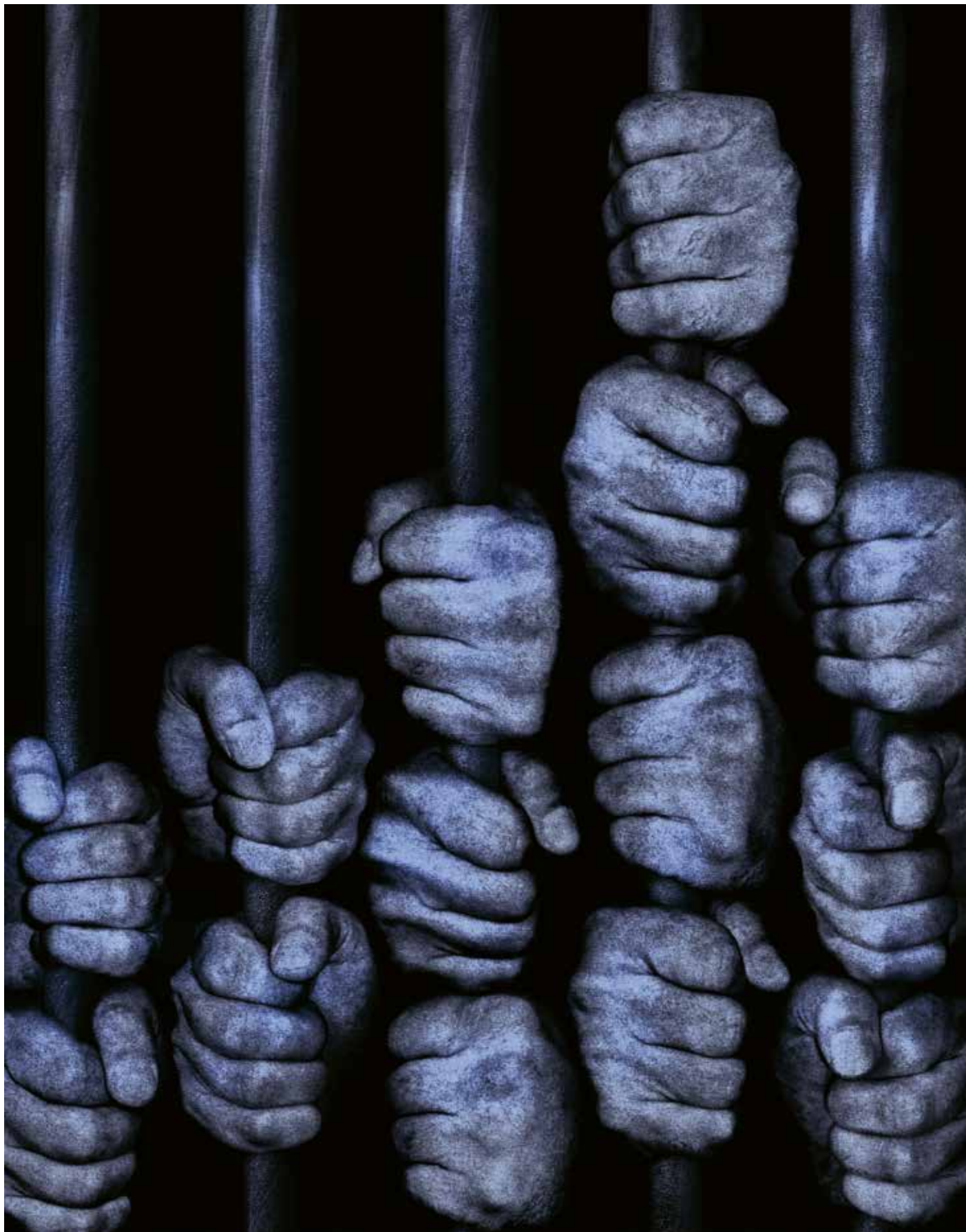


ILLUSTRATION: KARIN Z SUNVIVSON

She claims that people who are subjected to the incredible level of inhuman violence that Ukrainians are experiencing today may begin to empathize and understand their abusers only in the context of Stockholm syndrome, only if for the sake of self-preservation. She compares the situation to patriarchy. Men should not tell women: “We also suffer from patriarchy” since they are an oppressor group, and any suffering of the oppressors is incommensurable with the suffering of the victims.

But is it necessary to explain the protest situation at all, if not to Ukrainians, then to the world? Is it still important to understand what fear of the state is and how the senselessness of protests works?

“It’s weird to talk about ‘fear’ while living under a peaceful sky and falling asleep not to the sound of bombs but to soothing mantras on headphones. However, our fear, the fear of the Russians, should not be underestimated either,” says 20-year-old Evgeny Ruchkin (name changed), who is studying journalism at a Russian university. He was almost expelled from the university for participating in protests. His story is below.

RUSSIA HAS A LONG HISTORY of state-run systematic violence that continues to this day.⁵ For Russians who want to live a normal life in peace, it meant that people have had to stay as far away from the state as possible, for generations, says Olga Andreeva (name changed), a business analyst and writer who left Russia in 2019. “State and people exist independently of each other and try to keep it that way,” she says.

“For example, when some shit happens, no one calls the police, because the situation usually gets worse. Crimes are not reported, because going through hell with the police is more difficult than just recovering from what has happened,” points out Andreeva.

Russian people categorically do not want to be in the state’s field of view. “When you go to a protest, you intentionally attract the attention of a random unpredictable jerk who may not react in any way or may stick a dumbbell up your ass. You don’t know what will happen; you don’t know if something will happen to you or your family and friends,” says Andreeva.

Defenseless before the state

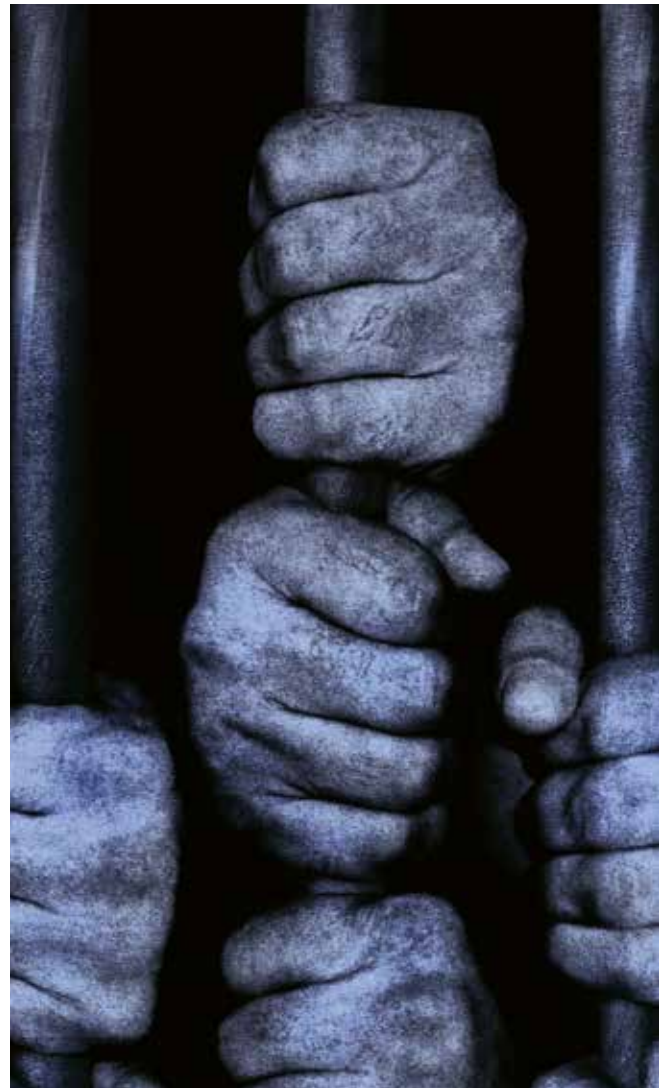
According to the human rights media project “OVD-Info”, in the eight months since the war started there have been only 18 days when no one was detained for their anti-war position.⁶ Detainees are exposed to all sorts of threats and punishments. Women detained at anti-war protests in March were threatened with rape and beaten up.⁷ The poet detained for anti-war poetry was raped by dumbbell.⁸ According to another human rights project, Committee Against Torture, 77% of complainants of torture are denied the request for criminal investigation; the 23% of complaints when cases are initiated are cases that ended in death.⁹

“Russians are absolutely defenseless before the state. Protest-ing is literally putting your life at risk. The police can do whatever they want with you, and you have no one to complain to,” says Anna Titova, a data journalist studying data science at one of Russia’s online universities. “The last real legal way to deal

with it was complaining to the European Court of Human Rights. But after the start of the war, Russia was excluded from the Court so there are no more ways to protect yourself except for silence or emigration”.

THE MODERN RUSSIAN state is built on random and unpredictable institutionalized violence, on fear and pain. Therefore, one of the most common reactions to the power abuse from the Russian government is to ignore the state and try to build your own little life. Those who leave also often talk about personal and professional values.

“If I survive as a journalist, I can tell the truth about what is happening in Russia and in other countries,” says Anton Karliner, photojournalist and former chairman of the journalists’ union which was closed for anti-war statements. He fled to



Kazakhstan with his wife and newborn daughter after the announcement of mobilization.

"I did everything I could; I was an activist, I protested, I suffered for it, and left because I realized that I could not stand it anymore," says Vladimir Katynev (name changed), who left for Serbia in the first week after the start of the war. "We see how people have been imprisoned for decades, and violence has been used against them, including my friends. You live with it in Russia every day. On the one hand, it's scary; on the other, you just want to spit in their faces. My friends are protesting and committing different radical acts; I will not give details in order to ensure their safety."

"I was at the protests, saw that it was useless, and left the country," says Valentina Grigoryeva (name changed), who left Russia in 2017 without finishing her medical studies in Moscow.

"In Europe, you can go on strike and get a pay rise. In Russia, you can go on strike and get beatings, rapes, and arrests," she says.

"It's a very nasty feeling that what you're doing is useless. You rationally understand everything about the delayed effect of protests, but at the protest all your instincts are yelling at you that you urgently need to run and save your little life and not to be beaten," says Kira Kotova (name changed), former university lecturer.

"I am very afraid of any crowd. But I also carry guilt for Putin's continuing rule," adds Kotova. "I guess we all, literally everyone, should go to jail in some 2014 for the sake of a happy future."

Why now, not before?

In the current history of Russia, there were the First and Second Chechen wars, the Russo-Georgian five-day war, wars in Donbas, in Syria, the Moscow theater hostage crisis, and the Beslan school siege, as war journalist Elena Kostyuchenko lists dryly.¹⁰ She notes that thousands of people with disabilities live in places that are basically concentration camps. There is harassment of religious groups and the LGBT community, tortures and killings in police stations and prisons.

"We have an eternal president, a cult of personality, a church that has merged with the state, political terror, state propaganda," she writes. "You did not know that we have fascism? The world says it didn't know. The monster grew up and began to eat so much that the whole world noticed."

WHEN WAR WAS DECLARED, the horror at what was happening was immense, but it was no surprise. However, when the military started knocking on doors to take men to war, it became almost impossible to ignore the reality.

"People did not leave before the war and even before the mobilization, because it was still possible to live in an illusion of normal life," says journalist Viktor Sukristikov (name changed).

"My husband and I did not leave when the war started, although we discussed it a thousand times. Russia is our homeland, our whole life is here, our job, our parents," says Anna Tito-

va. "But when the mobilization was announced, we packed up and left in a couple of days. The idea of dying for the government that you hate and going to war where you destroy other people's lives was just too much."

The war mobilization was the "too much" point for many.

War's womanly face

One of the latest examples of the mass protests in Russia was "women's marches" on September 24. The idea of "Woman in Black" protests was that women dressed in black would "go out for a walk" along the same route in many Russian cities."

"I was on Nevsky Prospect in St. Petersburg on a women's march. Now on protests you need to be ready for anything,

including being beaten by the police and going to jail," says Kira Kotova. "I was walking through Palace Square and my legs were shaking. My husband was with me and I was scared for him, because he could be arrested and mobilized."

I was seven years old when Vladimir Putin came to power. My brother was two years old, and he is now at risk of

being mobilized. Feeling like the government and the country has always been like this is reinforced by the general perception of the age hierarchy in Russia. The hierarchies occur as the patriarchal structure of society plays its role in the protest behavior, creating a state of learned helplessness.

"IN RUSSIA, older means smarter, and this is the only possible state of affairs," says Svetolik Bersenev (name changed), a PhD researcher studying applied physics in St. Petersburg. "The voting population are mostly people over 40 who watch TV every day and receive constant propaganda. I can tell by my own parents, who sincerely support the war. People who refuse to listen to the non-propagandized version of events are the compliant majority that are indifferent or supportive of government action."

Protest behavior is severely influenced by a patriarchal upbringing, believes Russian journalist Olesya Gerasimenko, who left the country with her family after the war started. She explains that in Russia, only 10% of the efforts in a child's development are invested by the father, as in many countries in the world. "The unpleasant consequences of such a system are the depreciation of human life, increased aggression in society, and a positive attitude towards violence at home and at work," she comments.

The most active participants in the anti-war resistance in Russia now are women, Gerasimenko claims, specifically "mothers who know the value of human life and are not afraid of prison, which undoubtedly threatens them under the new Russian military laws, because they have gone through pregnancy, childbirth, the first sleepless years of a baby, the adolescence crisis".

"If the average Russian father knew how much time and effort was invested in raising, feeding and helping a child, he would

"I WAS AT THE PROTESTS, SAW THAT IT WAS USELESS, AND LEFT THE COUNTRY."

resist sending him to the front more than Russian men do now. The price of a human life can only be understood by the involved parent,” she concludes.

Helping men leave the country became a form of protest for many women. “In the first week of mobilization boys were still trying to protest, but the detentions for them were super tough and they started to be taken to the army directly from the streets, so it became clear that it was better to help the boys leave the country,” says Kira Kotova.

Young and not protesting

Students and academic staff are generally considered to be protesters. However, the administrations of Russian universities are threatening expulsion and the sacking of staff who protest or endorse anti-war sentiment.¹²

“It is three times scary for the male students,” explains scientist Svetolik Bersenev. “Students are expelled from universities for participating in protests, and men who are not enrolled in studies are taken into the army, which is now a direct path to the war.”

In October, St Petersburg State University fired Denis Skopin, associate professor at the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences.¹³ The reason was: “Committing an immoral act incompatible with the continuation of teaching work.” The immoral act was participating in a protest against mobilization.

“Some of the students, including mine, were almost expelled for protests during the spring. One of my first-year students protested twice and served ten days in prison,” says Kira Kotova, former university lecturer.

Kotova resigned at the end of the academic year. She made this decision after the publication of the support letter for Putin and military operations signed by St Petersburg University employees. “I did not want to be part of this letter, even indirectly,” she says.¹⁴

According to Kotova, the faculty asked people who openly express their disagreement with the war not to present themselves as university employees. Moreover, the first-year students were banned from publishing a school newspaper because it mentioned Bucha, without any explanation.¹⁵

“This limits the right to freedom of speech and thought, and also directly violates the law on education,” says Kotova. “Everything that is now classified by law as ‘discrediting’ the army automatically begins to be considered illegal and extremist. It turns out that a teacher who takes an article from – let’s say Meduza, the online newspaper writing a lot about the war – to the class automatically becomes a distributor of extremist materials.”

EVGENY RUCHKIN (name changed) is studying journalism at a Russian university. When Russian troops invaded Ukraine, he went to an anti-war protest in the city center, was detained after an hour of protesting and spent the night at the police station, where he and other detainees were threatened by the police. In

the morning, Yevgeny was released, but two weeks later a document was sent to the university about his detention. The university put him on the to-expel list.

“I decided that I had nothing to lose and went to protest again,” Ruchkin says. At the protest, he was arrested and held by the police for seven days. The document about his detention was received by his grandmother.

“It’s hard to ignore the fear of being jailed, getting killed quietly, or your family being hurt,” he says. “I love my grandma and I couldn’t put her in danger. I was scared for her.”

Maria Krylova (name changed), journalist and final-year bachelor student at St. Petersburg State University, protested for the first time in support of Alexei Navalny, Putin’s most vocal political opponent who is now in a Russian prison. She was there taking photos for *Novaya Gazeta*, an opposition newspaper. “Right in front of me my journalist colleague was tasered and dragged into a police car, where he fainted. It made a terrible impression on me. I was 20 years old when I saw how eight men in special

vests and helmets, with batons, shockers and guns, rushed at a journalist who came with journalist ID. This is how I got my fear of police and stopped going to protests.”

Students explain their inability to participate in protests or leave Russia by the need to finish their studies. “Young people are in the most brutal situation now. We are tied to Russia, we have no money, and we cannot go

abroad; we have no opportunity to study somewhere else and feel safe,” says Maria Krylova.

What is protest?

Nevertheless, people are still actively protesting, although the leaders of the protest were imprisoned and there is no one to lead the revolution.¹⁶ “The last time I participated in a protest was in January 2021 when opposition politician Alexei Navalny was sentenced,” says Elizabeth Sinekoneva (name changed), a feminist historian studying woodworking at the St. Petersburg college. “Shortly before this, I had adopted a dog from a shelter, so I left the protest soon because I didn’t want to risk detention. A few hours later, I watched online how people were beaten with batons and electric shockers at this same protest. This made a very strong impression on me, although I have quite extensive experience of going to protests.”

“Surely, there are places in this world where people are not afraid of the police and prison, but I believe that they are in the minority,” says Elizabeth. “The demand for protests that flooded the liberal media at the start of the war may have encouraged some people to protest, but it also created intense tension within formerly liberal communities due to the insensitivity and indifference of Western observers to both Russia’s global dispositions and the local political context.”

Sinekoneva points out that for the last 30–40 years, Russian human rights activists and those from the late Soviet era have

“IT’S HARD TO IGNORE THE FEAR OF BEING JAILED, GETTING KILLED QUIETLY, OR YOUR FAMILY BEING HURT.”



been constantly writing and sending reports on the state of affairs in police stations, prisons, army, and penitentiary institutions to the UN and other international monitoring structures.

“The relevant question is how this information was taken into account at the top international political and economic levels that preceded this phase of this war,” she concludes.

Those who have ceased to actively participate in the protests choose indirect forms of protest.

“My way of protest became to help and coordinate assistance in social media to the boys who want to leave,” says Zoya Podkollina (name changed), a student at one of the Moscow universities.

“I volunteer for those who are in police detention,” says Maria Krylova. “The conditions there are often terrible: no food, water, phone charges, a person simply cannot go to the toilet, there are no hygiene pads for women with their periods. We pass it all on as volunteers.”

“I chose a form of ‘silent’ protest,” says Evgeny Ruchkin. “I place green ribbons around in the city, which symbolize peace and love, and began to write articles for opposition newspapers. I know that while I am free and while I am in Russia, I will be more useful. And I will do much more to stop the war than if I am dead, imprisoned or expelled.”

Privilege of leaving

There are still many men who do not want to fight and cannot leave. Those who are under direct threat of mobilization will not be able to leave.

Journalists of the “Important Stories” online media calculated that in 23 out of 26 regions from which the largest number of people are taken, incomes are even lower than the overall Russian level.¹⁷ In these regions, especially in small and medium-sized settlements, it is almost impossible to resist war and mobilization: people go to war because they have no other way out.

EMIGRATION IS A LUXURY for most Russians, points out journalist Anna Titova. She lists: in the first days of the mobilization, air ticket prices skyrocketed: the flight from Moscow to Yerevan cost €3,760, €2,030 to Tashkent, €1,200 to Baku. The monthly rent for an apartment in Tbilisi started from €800 in September,¹⁸ whereas the median salary in Russia is €630.¹⁹ “Leaving is a privilege now; my husband and I are now spending thousands of euros just to leave the country,” she says.

The situation is made worse because of the closed airspace and semi-closed borders. Many men at risk of mobilization who flee will be without income, and may not even have a passport or visa to successfully leave the country. It is a dangerous task in the time of mobilization to request a passport from the government. Some Baltic countries agreed to bar the entry of Russian citizens, “Travel to EU is a privilege, not a human right,” said the prime ministers of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Poland in a joint statement.²⁰

“I stay in Russia to be a witness to the changes that are happening with my society now,” says Elizabeth Sinekoneva.

“I myself stay because I understand how I will hide here, and I don’t know what to do abroad,” said musician Vadim Hublov (name changed), who has always been against violence and tried to live a peaceful creative life.

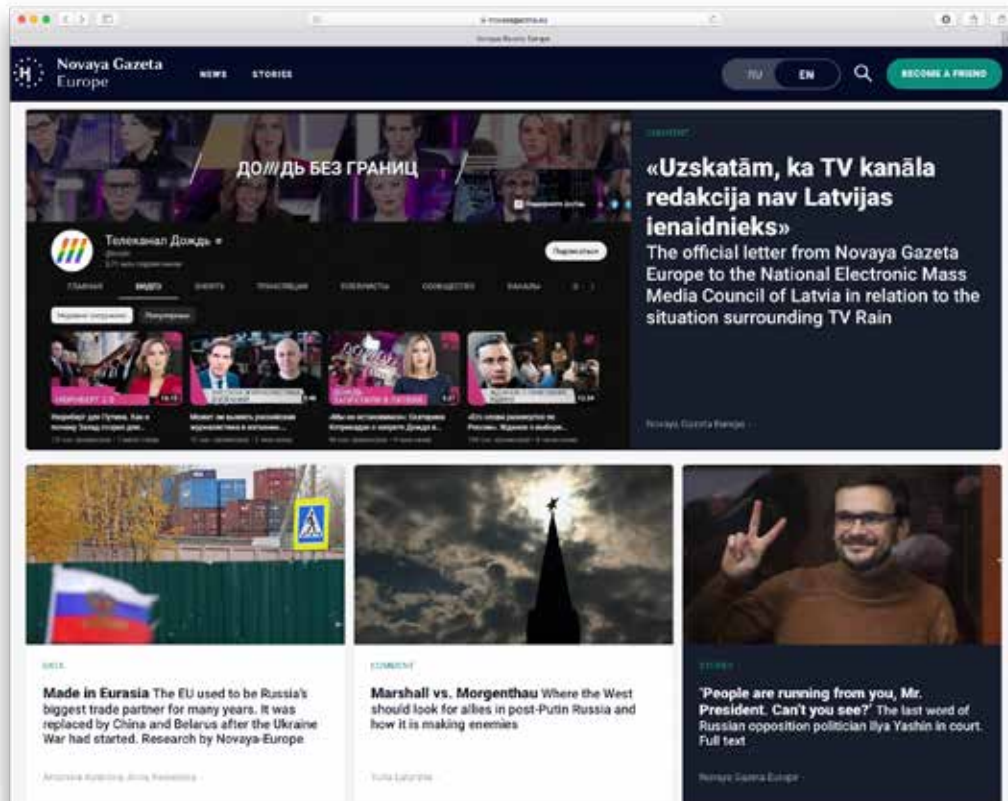
“Now, instead of protesting, it’s easier for me to break my own leg and get away from the meat grinder,” said Viktor Sukristikov.

The other example is 27-year-old Russian rapper Walkie who killed himself because of mobilization.²¹ Self-harm and setting military offices on fire with incendiary bombs look like the latest and ultimate form of protest in Russia in 2022.²² ✕

Elena Palenova is a Russian journalist now living in Sweden.

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Novaya Gazeta Europe is an independent newspaper online.

RUSSIAN JOURNALISM IN EXILE

A new chapter in *Novaya Gazeta*'s life

by **Ninna Möerner**

The independent Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* is known for its critical and investigative coverage of Russian political and social affairs. Their former editor-in-chief, Dmitry Muratov, received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2021. Kirill Martynov is now editor-in-chief for *Novaya Gazeta Europe*, operating from Riga, Latvia. He is the newspaper's former political editor, a political scientist, and a former associate professor at Moscow State University. In an open lecture at Södertörn University

November 22, Kirill Martynov discussed Russian journalism in exile and the new chapter in *Novaya Gazeta*'s life.

MARTYNOV ENJOYED being back at a university and speaking for an academic audience. The last time he held a lecture was at his former workplace, he tells us, on February 26 this year. In that lecture he talked, as scheduled, with his young students about Kant and ethics and Kantian views on moral issues; but all the examples he applied were related to the

ongoing criminal war that Russia had started two days before. The university administration fired him immediately for this.

It is not possible to talk about the war today in Russia, not from any perspective. Martynov gives an example: When the Russian army withdrew from occupied Kherson two weeks ago it was not possible to comment on this in a professional way without contravening regulations. If you stated that you were glad that they left Kherson, it was criticism of the war; if

Left: Kirill Martynov, editor-in-chief for *Novaya Gazeta* Europe.

Right: Dmitry Muratov received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2021 for his efforts to safeguard the freedom of expression.

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



you saw it as negative that they withdrew from Kherson, it was criticism of the Russian army.

“I left Russia eight months ago when journalists were forced to be blind to reality, not able to write and see reality. Coverage of the war was not possible.”

PEOPLE WHO STAY in Russia must find a strategy to cope with life under an authoritarian regime. Social scientists try to conduct research without entangling themselves closely with any issues that might be sensitive, meaning that they focus on history rather than the present reality. Many “normal” citizens do not have any other information than the propaganda from the authorities. They follow state-controlled media and hear that all is good, Putin has a plan for everything, a secret but sure plan and everything is just fine. They can then continue life and feel rather comfortable. So many people do not want to question this version; it is too risky, they rather prefer going on sleepwalking, says Martynov. To do so, to question the official version, and take in the brutal reality, means that you also realize the danger you, your family, your workplace, and the whole country is encountering under this regime and the insane war, continues Martynov. With this follows fear, he emphasizes, making it understandable that many Russians still prefer to be blind to reality. The journalists employed by the state also have the same reasons for reporting in accordance with what the government allows: keeping safe and coping with everyday life.

Post-imperial trauma

Martynov shares a story about how to handle the risk of being drafted to the army. In sum, it is about another Russian journalist in Russia who published a chronicle about what to do if you were drafted: better strive to be placed in an aircraft division so you don’t need to kill anyone directly, he suggests to his readers. This chronicle led to strong reactions from Ukrainians and anti-war activists, and accusations such as, “Even those Ru-

“THERE ARE NO INSTITUTIONS OR NGOS LEFT TO DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS.”

sisans that say they are working for peace are ready to fight anyway”. The text was deleted quite soon (it should never have been published, comments Martynov). But this story shows that the mind-set for most Russians is that if your government calls you, you do your duty. This patriotic response is deeply rooted in the Russian people with its history of wars, he explains.

The next part of the story is that the very same journalist’s family are very upset with him when he comes home, giving him a suitcase and the advice to immediately leave for Kazakhstan. And so he does; he becomes a refugee, he takes the

step to not fight but to flee. This is a very big leap for many Russians, but nevertheless, many are doing that today.

PUTIN HAS BUILT this war on the Russian sense of some sort of injustice at being a small country, or at least not the great one it once was. There is a post-imperial trauma that Putin evokes. Martynov predicts that “when Putin loses this insane war, it will create an even greater trauma”.

However, Putin was well prepared for this war when it comes to the internal control of Russia, Martynov says and adds – but not prepared, however, for the Ukrainian army’s resistance. Gradually, since 2014 and the annexation of Crimea, Putin has erased independent institutions and introduced legislation to limit freedom of speech to make sure he had the power and means to keep control of Russia internally.

“After all, 20 million people voted against giving Putin more power, but they have no representation in parliament and could not influence the decisions around the war. In this way, the dictator has silenced all critical voices and there is no real functional opposition.”

Martynov continues:

“Limiting freedom of speech was the first step towards this dictatorship that prevails today. There are no institutions or NGOs left to defend human rights. The last one, the Civil Rights Defenders Memorial, vanished while everyone was reporting about the shelling of Ukrainian cities.”

This development can be seen as a warning for all countries that experience a regime that gradually introduces regulations for independent institutions and limitations of free media and the freedom of speech.

Killing of journalists

Novaya Gazeta was formed in 1993, when a high level of freedom of speech existed. Back then, the journal was printed and delivered as hard copy. They had advertisements from Apple Mac which was allowed in those days. In 1994, the war in Chechnya started and *Novaya Gazeta* did not support that war – they have not supported any wars or the annexation of Crimea, Martynov emphasized. This



Anna Politkovskaya covered the war in Chechnya for *Novaya Gazeta*. She was killed in 2006.

PHOTO: NOVAYA GAZETA



PHOTO: AMNESTY FINLAND/FLICKR CC

Demonstration in Helsinki, October 7, 2014, eight years after the murder of Anna Politkovskaya.

meant that they were isolated by the state and not able to sell advertising space or gain funding to pay salaries. They were, however, devoted to the idea of free independent media and therefore continued. But it is dangerous work, journalism, in a country like Russia.

ANNA POLITKOVSKAYA covered the war in Chechnya for *Novaya Gazeta*. She was a critic of Russian president Vladimir Putin whose reporting exposed high-level corruption in Russia and rights abuses in the North Caucasus republic of Chechnya. She was shot dead in the elevator of her apartment block in central Moscow on October 7, 2006. This killing is infamous, but five other journalists working for the journal have also been killed the last 20 years. Not to mention all threats.

“It is hard to understand how Dmitry Muratov endured all this, but he kept going”, notes Martynov and adds that Dmitry Muratov shared the money he received when he was given the Nobel Peace Prize:

“He gave away 90 percent to charity and the rest he shared with all 103 people that in some way have had something to do with *Novaya Gazeta*. Everyone got exactly the same amount, no matter what their role.”

Journalism in exile

After the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine this year, *Novaya Gazeta* suspend-

ed their online and print activities after several warnings from *Roskomnadzor*. In April the same year, Kirill Martynov launched *Novaya Gazeta Europe*, issuing the following statement:

“Russia has essentially banned professional journalism. The Russian government has ‘cancelled’ us right when Russian citizens and the whole world need us the most. [...] Here, we will tell the whole

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truth about Russia and the war against Ukraine, regardless of what the Kremlin thinks about it.”

Today, *Novaya Gazeta Europe* is blocked in Russia but 3–4 million Russians each month still manage to find it online and read information about the war that is not propaganda.

The journal still has journalists inside Russia that conduct “shadow journalism” and send material; anonymously and without any credit or contract, they provide *Novaya Gazeta* with important in-

formation and stories. They are all around Russia and they risk a lot.

“It is crucial that we receive those reports from the inside. That we still are able to do this.”

MARTYNOV SHARES that he was given a hint of the next, final, step in the dictatorship from an encounter with Belarussian colleagues:

“They said: ‘Beware of the future that we know. Everything here is destroyed; there are no independent voices left. You say you have three shadow reporters there, five there – you sweet summer-child, we too once had that, before, but it is now all gone’ and silenced”.

Martynov stresses that gradually, step by step, freedom of speech has been threatened and silenced in Russia and this is a warning example; the situation in Belarus is another warning example. He is not optimistic about the future but says that *Novaya Gazeta Europe* will keep on reporting about the war, publishing investigating stories, and conducting independent journalism in exile.

“Many people need and seek information about reality and a token of that is that February 25 and 26, the days after the invasion, we had 3–4 million readers each day.” ✕

Ninna Mörnér

Note: This text is based on an open lecture given by Kirill Martynov at Södertörn University, November 22, 2022.



The Russian ambassador
in Riga has a new view
from his office.

PHOTO: EMMA RÖNNGREN

Cancelling Russia

The situation for Russian speakers in Latvia following the invasion of Ukraine

by Emma Rönngren

abstract

Many who grew up speaking Russian in independent Latvia do not associate themselves with Russia or what one could call the Russian world, nor the values and aggressions carried out in Ukraine in the Russian language. A recent survey shows that the Russian speaking residents aged 18 to 34 years were more likely to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Yet, many Russian speakers in Latvia are experiencing an emotional crisis over Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The war has securitized already divisive issues in the country, such as historical memory and access to media in one's preferred language.

KEY WORDS: Latvia, Russian speakers, Russian invasion of Ukraine

On August 25, 2022, the central obelisk of the Soviet Victory monument in Uzvaras Park, Riga, was demolished. Having caused decades of tension in Latvian society, residents could now watch in real time as the 79 meter tall obelisk fell into the pool; the demolition was livestreamed by Latvian Television. The Monument to the Liberators of Soviet Latvia and Riga from the German Fascist Invaders, unofficially known as the Victory Monument, was erected in 1985 to commemorate the Red Army soldiers in the liberation of Riga from Nazi Germany at the end of World War II. It featured statues of soldiers and a woman surrounding a central obelisk and was – up until August 25 – the biggest Soviet-era monument in the Baltic states. It had been the subject of tensions in Latvian society for decades, since ethnic Latvians do not regard it as a symbol of liberation but rather as a symbol of the Soviet occupation which lasted until 1991. Russian speakers usually gather by the monument each year on May 9 to celebrate the victory over Nazi Germany in the Great Patriotic War. Over the years, the event has transformed from a day of commemoration of those who fought in the war into a bombastic celebration with military parades and fireworks, primarily used to boost nationalism and patriotism in Russia.

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Latvian authorities announced that May 9 this year would be a commemorative day for the victims of the Ukraine war. Residents were further discouraged from visiting the monument as it would be seen as an act supporting Russia's war and therefore could be used by Russian propaganda to justify the war in Ukraine. The monument was cordoned off with yellow police fences and the photo exhibition "Glory to Ukraine" was set up, depicting the reality of war on stands of images from Bucha and other Ukrainian cities destroyed in the Russian invasion. Traffic and public transport were restricted and the park full of police officers. Nevertheless people went to lay flowers at the monument throughout the day and did so in a quiet manner. No major incidents were reported. What happened overnight, however, angered a great part of Latvian society as it was found out that the flowers were directly taken away by bulldozer. Footage of the operation spread quickly around social media and caused a wave of negative emotions of disrespect. The following day the situation escalated: people continued bringing new flowers to the monument and celebrated together. The celebration was no longer a memorial, but had turned to a protest event. In the evening hundreds of people gathered, displaying pro-Russian symbols and flags, and Latvian television observed that several people were aggressive and did not hide their support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Several people were arrested and the footage from the square on May 10 caused outrage among those who oppose Russia's actions and feel negatively towards the Soviet Union. The bad handling of the whole situation led to that the resignation of interior minister Marija Golubeva.

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LATER A DECISION was made to remove all Soviet monuments in Latvia, including the Victory Monument in Uzvaras Park. According to the law adopted this year in June 16, by the Saeima,¹ "On the prohibition of exhibiting objects glorifying the Soviet and Nazi regimes and their dismantling in the territory of the Republic of Latvia", all Soviet-glorifying monuments in Latvia must be demolished by November 15 and up to 300 monuments around the country are set for removal. Controversy

about the continued existence of Soviet memorials on Latvian territory has existed for years, but intensified following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Similar removals are also under way in Lithuania and Estonia.² The decision to remove the Victory monument was met with anger in Russia where the Russian Ministry of Foreign affairs demanded compensation for the monument as well as threatening counter measures. Protests were held outside the Latvian Embassy in Moscow and a survey conducted by the research center SKDS in June 2022 showed that 70% of Russian speakers in Latvia were against the demolition.³ The Latvian Russian Union, a controversial political party with close ties to the Kremlin, tried to organize a protest on the streets, but this was not allowed. The Riga City Council and the State Security Service (VDD) regarded the suggested protest march as a possible threat to the democratic state and liable to cause divisions in society. Meanwhile an anti-Soviet monument march on May 20 entitled "Getting Rid of Soviet Heritage" was allowed and attracted around 50 000 people, which led to further frustration among the Russian-speaking minority.

THE ACTUAL TIME for the demolition was not announced officially for security reasons. The fact that Russian speakers did not protest the demolition of the monument has puzzled local experts. There are different possible interpretations according to local experts. Professor Deniss Hanovs says that there is no culture of mass protests and demonstrations in Latvia and that after the 2012 language referendum that rejected making Russian a second official language,⁴ there has been a breakdown of Russian speakers' confidence in democratic structures in Latvia: "They have gradually since lost interest in political participation as many experience that their voices are not heard".

From professor Mārtiņš Kaprāns' perspective, the war has probably also had an effect and the ideological confusion and vacuum created by the war among Russian speakers in Latvia cannot be overlooked.⁵ Many Russian speakers are still experiencing an emotional crisis over Russia's invasion of Ukraine as many Russian speakers in Latvia had seen Russia as a liberator, which has now turned into an aggressor attacking another Slavic nation, he explains. The monument had less significance for the younger generation of Latvian Russian speakers. They are more willing than older generations to admit that there was an occupation and for them the actual monument is therefore not that important. That said, many among the younger generation of Latvian Russian speakers still think that the monument should not have been demolished. For some, May 9 is no different than any other day, for others it is a day to remember the relatives who fought in the war that made it possible to bring peace to the next generation.

A recent survey shows that the Russian speaking residents aged 18 to 34 years were more likely to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Furthermore, the same

survey shows that the number of people in Latvia who view Russia negatively has increased from 37% last year to 66% this year.⁶

The blocking of Russian media in Latvia

The change of public opinion in Latvia is not only connected to the war but also to the ban of Russian media, which has reduced Russia's information influence. Latvia has had a long and complicated relationship with Russian media outlets and its media watchdog, the National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEPLP), has a history of banning Russian state-controlled media, particularly since Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. As of June, all Russia-based television channels are banned in the territory of Latvia according to the law which stipulates that channels registered in a country threatening the territorial integrity and independence of another country should not be operational in Latvia. Hundreds of websites including social networks such as *Vkontakte* and *Odnoklassniki* are also blocked, in accordance with sanctions imposed by the European Union. According to NEPLP these channels will be allowed back in Latvia when Russia withdraws its troops from Ukraine and frees occupied territories, including Crimea. The ban is also connected to Russia's information war throughout Europe, including in Latvia, adding risks to Latvia's national security. The NEPLP said that restrictions are necessary to achieve the legitimate objective of protecting people's rights, the democratic state, public security, welfare, and morality. The NEPLP decided to block these sites due to "a Russian narrative blaming Ukraine for causing the war, justifying terrorism, justifying hostilities, blaming Ukraine for war crimes" and distributing similar content.

While the ban can be seen as a currently justified short-term solution, it also raises critical questions about freedom of speech and equal access to information. Reporters without borders have criticized Latvia for lacking transparency regarding the motives for the measures taken against pro-Kremlin media and NEPLP has previously received criticism for being vulnerable to political influence. Historically, media policy makers in Latvia have been enthusiastic in restricting the presence of Russian television in Latvia. In contrast, efforts to provide alternative content to what has been offered by Russian television have been limited. For a long time there was no pro-active or consistent long-term media policy for the development of Russian-language public

broadcasting. This, however, changed in 2021 when Latvia's political elite granted Latvian public radio and television organizations extra funding to provide Russian-language news and current affairs content. However, they rejected the idea to launch a fully-fledged Russian language public TV channel. This was a decision contrary to Estonia, where, in 2015, the Russian language public service TV channel, ETV+ was launched.

It is important to keep in mind that Latvia inherited a bilingual media landscape which contributed to linguistically divided

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PHOTO: PETER FORSBERG/EUROPE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

The obelisk in Victory park before it was demolished.



PHOTO: ALSTISPOLICIA/ZENGER

The image shows the demolished 80-meter-high obelisk from the Soviet era in Riga in Latvia on Thursday, August 25, 2022

audiences in the country. Regular audience statistics and other survey data show that both the Latvian-speaking majority and the Russian-speaking minority prefer media in their first language: A pattern that has been inherited from the Soviet period when Latvia's Russian speakers had little interest in domestic Latvian-language media. Closing down channels without offering alternatives in Russian risks irritating residents as well as creating a piracy boom, given the information vacuum for the Russian-speaking audience. Professor Anda Rožukalne is critical of the decision and together with media representatives, she raises concerns about whether the decision does not compromise freedom of expression in Latvia as law amendments have been adopted in haste. The decisions were not as transparent as one could expect in a democratic state. Blocking information is associated with authoritarian states, Rožukalne notes, and in any regard, it is misleading to believe that blocking all propaganda sites means that we are no longer reached by propaganda and disinformation.⁷

THE WAR HAS SECURITIZED already divisive issues such as historical memory and access to media in one's preferred language. For years there has been a tendency to view Latvia's Russian-speaking minority as a vulnerable group needing protection from Russia's manipulation. The depiction of Russian speakers as pro-Russia is only partly justified, however, and their media consumption patterns are far from uniform.⁸ One problem with

viewing media and information as weapons is that a heightened fear of propaganda can call for stronger state regulation of information and the internet and drive a propaganda arms race as each side tries to outdo the other. Amplifying the propaganda threat without offering transparency and non-dominative solutions to the problem is also likely to deepen public distrust of media. Even before the war, both audiences in Latvia tended to be suspicious and critical towards media. The current discussion drives policy responses and public reactions that prioritize an empowered state and disempowered citizens as both sides tend to see propaganda simply as an external-only threat and represent it through conflict-related language.⁹ Censorship, it is further argued, can also have a counterproductive effect on audiences who follow the banned media and make them more prone to access such media.

We should also keep in mind that limiting access to content in the internet era is more difficult in practice. Most people know that it is possible to bypass restrictions using VPN. For a younger audience of Russian speakers, circumventing restrictions is no challenge as they get their information online and from social media. Just because television channels are blocked in Latvia does not mean that they do not stumble upon this content online. Clips from Russian state-controlled media oftentimes circulate on *TikTok* and *Telegram* as memes. One Russian speaking 22-year-old woman from Daugavpils for example says that even though she does not watch Russian state-controlled media, she



PHOTO: EMMA RÖNNGREN

There are also newspapers in Russian and from Russia.

sees clips being shared on social media where independent bloggers and journalists highlight the absurdity of Russian state propaganda. She also adds that among her peers the term “foreign agent” has become something good; if one angers the Russian authorities, it usually means that one is doing something right.

Amid discussions about replacing the banned Russian television channels and websites there are now more than 200 Russian journalists and 23 Russian media organizations that have emigrated to Latvia since the war in Ukraine started. Independent Russian media *Meduza* is now joined by *Novaya Gazeta* and *Dozhd*. As such there is a possibility to replace Russian state-controlled media with independent Russian channels, who are now also targeting a Russian-speaking audience in Latvia. The Latvian State Security Service (VDD), however, is not overly optimistic, stating that accepting Russian journalists and media comes with risks considering what is happening in the information space in the context of the current geopolitical situation and Russia’s war in Ukraine.¹⁰ Meanwhile newspapers such as *Argumenty i Fakty Europa* (which is an adapted version of the popular Moscow newspaper) and *MK Latvija* (local version of *Moskovskij Komsomolets*) as well as news portals such as *Baltijas balss* are still operating in Latvia. The latter was previously part of the Russian newspaper *Vesti Segodnya* and is known for republishing content from state-controlled Russian media. So-called informa-

tion laundering, where false or deceitful information is legitimized through a network of intermediaries, is prevalent in the Latvian information sphere. Even though such behavior is being monitored by authorities, media literacy among residents in Latvia becomes crucial. From a media perspective it is troublesome that survey findings show that most Latvian teenagers are not taught media literacy at school. A third of children and young people in Latvia face false information on the internet and nearly half say that they face such information sometimes. 62% said that they sometimes checked the information before sharing it and 10% said that they never did.¹¹ As a result, many initiatives are being made to help boost media literacy among the Latvian audience: among others, the creation of the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence in Riga.

Speaking Russian does not equal Russia

Compared to their parents and Latvian peers, Russian speakers who have grown up in independent Latvia access both Russian and Latvian language versions of news. There is also a gap developing in the Russian-speaking environment in Latvia. Research conducted by *Spektr* and SKDS in July 2020 found that the younger generation had very different ideological values than older generations. The young generation is in general pro liberal freedoms, EU values and NATO membership. They have a better command of the Latvian language than other generations and more than 40% speak English at a good level. This may be one of the reasons why reading books and watching films in Russian is no longer as important for them as for older generations. They are also more on the internet and are therefore perhaps not as influenced by Russian state-controlled media. There are however also indirect influences of both public sentiment and the information flows in which families live. In general, the difference between generations in Latvia is little studied and as for Russian-speaking youth, very little is actually known about them so far.¹²

Many who grew up speaking Russian in independent Latvia do not associate themselves with Russia or what one could call the Russian world nor the values and aggressions carried out in Ukraine in the Russian language. Following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine where Putin’s justification for invading the country was that the Donbass region was home to Russian speakers who needed Russia’s protection, many Russian speakers in Latvia fear that he could use the same logic in the Baltics. This fear is shared by the Latvian authorities and NATO has doubled the size of its force in Latvia since the war started. When walking in Riga it is not uncommon to see military officers on the streets. While some think about what they would do if war came to Latvia, there are also conflicts between different generations and families as views differ in the conflict. Only 40% of Russian speakers condemn Russia’s action in Ukraine and 28% are neutral. Many also have relatives in Ukraine and Russia where opinions differ as to who is to blame for starting the war. Russian speakers often mention that they are experiencing an information war in Latvia and as such they are consuming news from different news outlets and first-hand sources in order to find the truth somewhere

in between, as well as talking to their friends in Russia, Ukraine, and other parts of the world.

Prior to the war, the Covid-19 pandemic has also contributed to changing Russian speakers' media consumption. Following the outbreak, many Russian speakers turned away from Russian state-controlled media in favor of following local media in order to keep updated on new restrictions in society and to access reliable information from local experts. As such, the pandemic served as a unifying force but also as an eye-opener as it became obvious for many how media on both sides reproduce the common myths and stereotypes that exist in their target audience. Young Russian speakers who read the news in Latvian and Russian oftentimes claim that they notice a difference between for examples *Delfi's* Latvian and Russian content. The fact that not just editorials are different but journalists also fail to reflect the views of all sides in an argument, stressing certain information over other information or just disregarding some information, creates suspicion among audiences that media are not telling the whole story. Many Russian speakers I have talked to oppose a total ban of Russian media and emphasize that one should be allowed to choose what media one consumes but they also understand why propagandistic content is prohibited.

TO CONCLUDE, it is clear that Latvia is going through several societal changes which have accelerated following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Following years of tension, Russia's information influence in Latvia is severely restricted and monuments glorifying the Soviet regime will soon be a thing of the past. Important steps have also been taken to strengthen public service media in Russian as well as housing Russian independent media outlets now operating in Latvia. In times of war where everything can be used as propaganda, it is important to continue to promote openness and unity in a world of tension and polarization, however. Many young Russian speakers feel loyal to Latvia but feel excluded by the Latvian authorities. A critical aspect lies in perceptions of belonging to the state. As such the Latvian authorities should more visibly embrace and praise the multiculturalism that already exists within the country and work to include all residents of Latvia in the public sphere. ❌

Emma Rönngren is a PhD-candidate at IRES Institute for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Uppsala University.

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HOPES AND WORRIES AT THE FINNISH-RUSSIAN BORDER

by **Påhl Ruin**

Statistics show that around 40 000 Russians escaped through Finland from the day that President Putin declared the mobilization and during the nine days that followed until the border closed. I am on my way to Karelia, a region along the southern part of the Finnish-Russian border where some of the most intense battles between two countries took place during the Second World War. As I write this October 2022, the atmosphere around the border is tense, the relations between the two countries are colder than in a long time, and people on either side of the border have difficulties even seeing each other.

That, however, has not always been the case – in this article I will describe the thriving contacts across the border before the large-scale invasion of Ukraine (and the pandemic). And I will discuss what happens now that the contacts have come to an almost complete stop.

Lappeenranta is located some 230 kilometers east of Helsinki, and only 20 minutes by car from the Russian border. From the flagpole in front of the City Hall hangs a Ukrainian flag.

“When Russians started to come back in larger crowds last summer, before the entry ban, we also played the Ukrainian national hymn from the loudspeakers”, says Päivi Pietiläinen, Head of International Affairs at the Municipality. “The Russian visitors should all know where we stand on this issue.”

She is a very suitable person to give us an insight into the dramatic developments in the border area from the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 until the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020 when most borders around the world closed due to health reasons.

“The opening of our border to Russia actually started already in the late 1980s during Glasnost”, she tells me as we sit down for

a cup of coffee in a mall opposite the town hall. “We signed a city agreement as early as 1987 with Vyborg, which is located only some 60 kilometers from here. Cultural and sports exchanges between our two cities started before the collapse of the Soviet Union.”

It is with fascination that she describes the quick development that followed during those early years of the 1990s: “In the parking lot here outside the town square eight out of ten cars were Russian some days.” So why did they come in thousands? And what did they do during their visits to Lappeenranta? Pietiläinen describes a change over time:



Päivi Pietiläinen, Head of International Affairs in Lappeenranta.

“At the beginning, they came to buy pretty much anything. At that time our supply of merchandise was so much richer than in their post-Soviet society. Food, clothes, electronics – you name it! After a couple of years, it changed a bit. You had a growing number of Russian customers who had quickly become rich. Suddenly you found stores in this mall which sold luxury clothes that you had not seen before in Lappeenranta.”

She points at the store across from the café where they sell leisure clothes today. Some years ago, those same premises marketed something completely different: glitter and high heels, fancy dresses, and jewelry. “Those kinds of shops are gone today, not only because of the closed border during the pandemic and the tensions with Russia; they also

disappeared because of changing tastes. Middle class Russians today are more like us, they consume the same things; a couple of decades of yearly visits to the west have changed them.”

AFTER 2014, WHEN THE WEST introduced sanctions to punish Russia for the annexation of Crimea, the type of merchandise that Russians were interested in changed somewhat. As a response to



Russian cars queuing at the Nuijamaa border crossing in 2008.

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



Laplandia Market, close to the Russian border, in 2022.

PHOTO: PÄHL RUIN

the sanctions, the Kremlin decided, among other things, to stop the import of Western cheese. It had a direct effect on cross-border trade, says Pietiläinen. “They were allowed to import five kilos of groceries per person. But many bought more and had different imaginative methods to smuggle them into Russia. Some hid them in secret compartments in the doors of their cars, others rented buses and paid old Russian ladies, babushkas, to join the bus so that they could add up more individual rations.”

Even if Russian tourists more or less have stopped coming, the intense contacts over the years have left clear traces: There are 3 300 people in Lappeenranta with Russian as their mother tongue, that is around five percent of the population. Before 1991, there were barely any. Most of the Russian-speakers came in the 1990s. Where do they work today?

“In here, for example”, she says and points down the aisle in the mall, “almost all the shops have Russian-speaking personnel. That’s how it is in Lappeenranta”. Pietiläinen tells me that she has three neighbor families where the husbands are Finnish and the wives Russian. And she lets me know that “it’s public knowledge that the mayor is married to a Russian lady”.

Nostalgia over Karelia

At the peak of cross-border cooperation, in 2012, there were almost 13 million crossings of the 1 340-kilometer-long Finnish-Russian border – the longest of all EU-Russia borders. Most of them took place in Karelia. When it comes to movement in the other direction – Finns crossing the border to Russia – in the early 1990s, these journeys were dominated by a phenomenon called Finnish nostalgia tourism: Finns wanted to visit the places on the other side of the border which were a part of Finland before 1939. After the Winter War (1939–40) and the Continuation

War (1941–44), the border became heavily guarded and closed for private crossings. For Finns, the loss of territory meant not only the loss of economically and symbolically important parts of Karelia, but the relocation of approximately 400 000 inhabitants of the former Finnish territories. The memory of lost Karelia has been vivid since the war – in the early 1990s many still had their own memories and wanted to see what had happened to their homes and their neighborhoods.

An additional group of people crossed the border, especially in the early years, in organized bus trips to hear guides describing battle fields, the fighting units, the number of soldiers killed and other detailed information. Organizations like the Association for Cherishing the Memory of the Dead of the War, whose membership is largely male, have searched for the bodies of Finnish soldiers. During the wars, approximately 13 000 Finnish soldiers were either lost on the battlefield or reported missing, many of them in Karelia. Around 1 200

of them have been found. Remains that have been identified (approximately one third) are laid to rest in their hometowns; the majority of the unidentified are buried here in Lappeenranta.

For residents of Lappeenranta, most trips over the years have gone to Vyborg, easy to reach by car or bus and only half an hour away by train. Or they have taken the ferry along the beautiful Saimaa canal. At the peak of these travels to Vyborg and other parts of Russian Karelia, research has shown that 700 000 Finns crossed the border every year. But because of the lack of some key elements for tourism development, the Finnish tourist flows to the region dropped dramatically to just 150 000 per year in the mid-1990s.

Many of those who went there for nostalgic reasons, felt disappointment with what they saw, says Pietiläinen: “I have

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The Mustola lock in Saimaa canal was inaugurated by president Uhro Kekkonen in 1968.



There is no activity in Saimaa canal in 2022.

several friends who had to witness how their old houses had been abandoned or demolished and how the whole town was worn down. Many didn't want to return again. Some brought back plants and plant shoots from their former gardens. I understood their feelings, I felt a similar sadness visiting Vyborg, even though my family lacks roots there".

Low prices, however, made many Lappeenranta citizens return to Vyborg over and over again. "It was, for example, popular to go to the hairdresser or just to pop over to buy some cheap goods", she says. A study from 2008 showed that about 70 percent of the Finns crossing the border did it "in order to save money". The most popular types of goods were alcohol, cigarettes, and gasoline. But they also bought sweets and handmade local souvenirs, the study concludes.

In 2016 it became evident that cheap liquor and tobacco had indeed been a major reason for Finns to make the journey. When a change in the Finnish tobacco law took effect that year, requiring a stay outside the country more than 24 hours to be able to bring back tax-free cigarettes – the border crossings fell by 25 percent.

A survey from 2021, conducted just before the pandemic broke out, by asking people at the border about their opinion, showed that many did short but frequent visits. Buying cheap goods was the major reason for those answering the questionnaire, but many also stated "visiting relatives and friends" as a reason or that they went to Russian Karelia to enjoy its beauty, the authentic architecture, and the traditions of the region.

PETROZAVODSK, SITUATED ON the shores of Lake Onego, is an attractive green city and the region's capital with several concert halls, 17 museums and art galleries. The city also hosts the Republic of Karelia National Theatre, the only one outside of Finland regularly performing plays in Finnish. At least it used to.

Trips across the border have also included visits outside

of Karelia, especially to the magnet city of St Petersburg. Pi- etiläinen describes how a family chat in Lappeenranta could be played out before everything changed with the pandemic: "Let's go to the ballet in St Petersburg this weekend, and try that nice restaurant close by", we could say. "Or should we rather go to a hockey game?" She points out how easy everything was back then: "You could just jump on the train and be in St Petersburg one and a half hours later".

She has a deep personal affection for St Petersburg, since she lived there with her family for a total of ten years, starting in 2007 when she was appointed to inaugurate the Lappeenranta municipal office in the city. "We were not alone doing that; all big cities in Finland, like Helsinki, Turku and Tampere, opened their own offices in St Petersburg. There was great optimism in the air; we all wanted to support business contacts over the border and develop cross-border tourism".

Everything changed February 24

The optimism was somewhat dashed by the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, but the cooperation still continued.

In March 2020 the office stopped its activities due to the pandemic. On February 24, 2022, everything changed. "It's over, the office is closed for good. I will never visit St Petersburg again", she says in a sad voice. Never? But things can change in the future? "We have a proverb in Finnish that I believe in: 'You can only lose your trust once'. I have lost mine".

She remembers vividly the very moment she got the news of the invasion on the 24th: She knocked at the door of her daughter's apartment in Esbo and her daughter had tears running down her cheeks. Something very dramatic had evidently happened. "St Petersburg had been her home for years, now everything had changed". Today Pietiläinen summarizes her mood in two words: "Sad and mad". She is mad because of all the efforts they

"A STUDY FROM 2008 SHOWED THAT ABOUT 70 PERCENT OF THE FINNS CROSSING THE BORDER DID IT 'IN ORDER TO SAVE MONEY'."

PHOTO: HELSINGIN SANOMAT/PUBLIC DOMAIN

PHOTO: PAHL RUIN



Scandic Imatra State Hotel, in the centre of Imatra, was built 1903.

made to develop the relations between the two countries along the border.

According to Ilkka Liikanen, professor of border and Russian Studies, at the University of Eastern Finland, Lappeenranta's co-operation with Russian partners was part of a broader national Finnish strategy: "to advance EU-Russia relations and actively promote initiatives aimed at overcoming the legacies of the Cold War East-West division".¹

On the relations since the early 1990s, he writes:

The EU had gradually broadened the scope of its programs of territorial cooperation to include cross-border cooperation on its external borders [...]. With Finnish membership the Russian Federation became a target country of regional cooperation programs.

The cooperation however, gradually lost momentum, especially after the Georgian War in 2008. But it didn't come to a stop, even after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. Ilkka Liikanen sends me his chapter in the book by email, adding in a solemn note: "As you can see it's written before the Ukraine war and many of the policy options discussed in the latter part have been closed since then."

One of the latest state-funded projects, now cancelled, was to renovate and rebuild the locks in the Saimaa channel, so that longer boats could pass between the countries, more goods could be transported in both directions. In the last few months hardly any boats have actually made the trip, since the risk is too high that the boats could be confiscated by the Russian state. For that reason, insurances are hard to get or at least extremely expensive. All in all, Finland as a whole and the region have become less dependent on Russia over the years, and especially since 2014. The share of Finnish exports to Russia has declined to 5,4 percent and is only slightly higher in South Karelia (6 percent).

I DECIDE TO DRIVE towards the border to see it with my own eyes. On my way, I stop by the Saimaa canal, inaugurated in 1856, where the bright autumn colors are reflected in the still water

– no boats breaking the surface of the water, no activity whatsoever by the locks. Some ten kilometers from the border is the huge Raja Market department store, the size of a football field. Inside I saw three (3) customers, two of them on the phone, both speaking Russian. The third was a young Finnish man, filling his shopping cart with loads of cheese, butter, cooking oil, coffee, tea and much more. He tells me he will bring it over the border to sell it in Russia. His name? No, he doesn't want to say: "What I do is a bit in the grey area", he tells me.

Further down the road, even closer to the border, is another department store, Lapplandia Market, with a reindeer as its symbol on top of the roof. But underneath that, the store is dark, the huge parking lot is empty. It's over, the whole basis of the business idea is gone. I drive all the way up to the border crossing at Nuijamaa, one of eight international crossings in the country. I wait in the parking lot for half an hour. Two cars leave Finland, no cars enter the country. A week earlier, there were long lines of people who wanted to leave Russia before the border was closed. Well, not totally closed; people with family connections may enter, or if you have property on the Finnish side which has to be looked after.

At the peak of the cross-border traffic, around 5000 Russians travelled into Finland every day through this crossing. "How many have come today?" I asked a border guard who had walked up to me. He makes a nervous impression, asking me about my ID, and walks back into the building. While I wait, I glance at a sign with the EU flag displaying a message dripping of cruel irony these days: "This border crossing point was improved with the support of the South-East Finland-Russia Program".

The border guard never returns. I drive away a couple of hundred meters from the border and stop the car by the roadside to look for an address on my phone. In less than a minute, two other border guards are there, asking me what I am doing. I drive yet another kilometer away from the border, again stopping by the roadside to check my phone. The border guards in their minivan have followed me, and again they knock at my window asking what I am doing. It's evident: the contrast in atmosphere in the border area is like night and day compared to how it was before the invasion.

Life without Russians

I continue driving in the north-eastern direction, towards Imatra 35 kilometers away, a town with world-wide popularity due to the impressive waterfalls in the middle of the town. The Russian border is only ten minutes away, which, of course, has contributed to many thousands of Russians visiting over hundreds of years – it is well documented that in the late 1700s, Catherine the Great came to admire the power of nature where the masses of water came rushing down the cliff.

Trying to check into my three-star-hotel in the outskirts of Imatra, I realize that the dependence on Russian tourists has not disappeared – the hotel is unattended and the person answering the phone only speaks Finnish or Russian. No English. Eventually, he finds an English speaker and I am let in. English speakers are evidently not the main customers.

PHOTO: VARPUIHEISKANEN



Olga Davydova-Minguet, professor of Russian and border studies at the Karelia Institute in Joensuu.

PHOTO: WILLIAM CRAFT BRUMFIELD/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



The central market in Petrozavodsk in 1991, the same year Olga Davydova-Minguet left the city to move to Joensuu in Finland.

PHOTO: PRIVATE



Olga Davydova-Minguet, right, with her mother Emilia Polozova, who was an Ingrian Finn. Emilias maiden name was Hytti and she grew up in the outskirts of St. Petersburg as part of a Finnish-speaking Lutheran minority.

The following day I had my breakfast at the beautiful Scan-
dic Imatra State Hotel in the center of town, close to the falls
and the hydroelectric plant which was built in the 1920s to take
advantage of the power from the falling water. The hotel, in the
European art nouveau style, was inaugurated in 1903 at a time
when Finland was a Grand Duchy and an autonomous part of
the Russian Empire. The targeted guests were almost exclusively
aristocrats from St Petersburg. According to the information
sheet they gave me at the reception desk, “In the beginning the
personnel of the hotel were Russian and the service languages
were Russian and French; only the porter could speak Finnish”.

The hotel was sensitively renovated in the 1980s, but traces
of its Russian heritage can still be found, such as a couple of tea
samovars and a portrait of Tsar Nicholas II’s wife Alexandra
Feodorovna in the dinner hall, a room which originally was the
tsar’s family quarters. But the dependence on Russian guests is
evidently not there anymore; the hotel was fully booked during
my visit, despite the entry ban for Russians. And its international
character becomes evident when considering the languages
used to inform the guests about the breakfast buffet: Apart from
Russian, it is also written in Finnish, English, German, Swedish,
Chinese and Japanese.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE Russian guests these days? The general man-
ager, Joni Erinko, could not take my questions that morning but
responded diplomatically via email the day after: “All guests are
important to us, no matter the nationality”. And then he adds:
“I don’t see a problem with Russians not returning. They haven’t
been able to visit us for the past two years because of Covid-19.
So we are already prepared.”

When I asked Päivi in Lappeenranta to list the companies in
the region that she believes have the biggest challenges after los-
ing their Russian customers, she mentioned some shops and the
whole service sector, for example the Imatra Spa Resort on the
shores of lake Saimaa. “Russians were totally dominating there,
I experienced it myself visiting the spa”. Via email, the Chief Op-
erating Officer of the company, Harri Hirvelä, informs me that
45 percent of the customers were Russian before the pandemic.
How can the company survive losing almost all of them? “We have
adapted, primarily by targeting domestic customers”, he said.

I drive there to see it with my own eyes: in the parking lot
there are approximately 200 cars, all of them with Finnish li-
cense plates – except one which has a Russian one. Inside the
lobby there are Finnish and EU flags, the information brochures
presented are only available in Finnish and English, a billboard
advertises upcoming Finnish hit singers. It is almost as though
the Russians had never been there (apart from a couple of re-
maining smaller signs about rules and regulations in Russian).

Entangled identities and languages

To complicate matters further: Who is actually Russian and who
is Finnish in the Karelia region? Well, the answer is not simple.
My third stop along the border is Joensuu in Northern Karelia,
where I have an appointment with Olga Davydova-Minguet,
professor of Russian and border studies at the Karelia Institute,

which is a part of the University of Eastern Finland. She moved to Joensuu in 1991 from Petrozavodsk in Russian Karelia where she grew up. So, is she yet another Russian moving to Finland after the collapse of the Soviet Union?

“No I don’t call myself a Russian,” she says when we meet on campus. “My mother was an Ingrian Finn; she grew up in the outskirts of St Petersburg as part of this Finnish-speaking Lutheran minority. Over the centuries, they have kept their faith and their language in the Orthodox and Russian surroundings.” So what does she call herself? “I try to escape ethnic terms; I am of mixed ethnic origin. I rather identify myself as a Finnish citizen, dweller of a border region.”

During her childhood, they spoke some Finnish at home, but mostly Russian, since her father was Polish-Russian. While she was studying Finnish at the university in Petrozavodsk, the Soviet Union collapsed, the border opened and eventually she moved to Joensuu – initially working as an interpreter for the growing number of Russian and Finnish companies cooperating. Later, she launched an academic career at the university.

Her research focus has been on the people who have crossed the border – or who have been living by the border over the years. She has interviewed several hundred of them and concludes that they constitute a wide variety of people. The day before we met, for example, she spent a couple of hours interviewing with her colleagues Father Ioannis Lampropoulos, an Orthodox priest in the town of Illomantsi, a few kilometers from the border.

HER MOST RECENT AREA of interest is burial traditions in a border area, to some extent influenced by the death of her mother the previous year. After her father had passed away, she convinced her mother in 1999 to come and live with her on the Finnish side. Being an Ingrian Finn, the mother had no problems getting permanent residence – president Mauno Koivisto had already declared in 1990 that “they are Finns” and could therefore re-immigrate.

“My mother spoke Finnish and Russian as native languages, so for her moving to Finland was easy in a way. She could talk with neighbors, and people were friendly to her, interested in her ‘typically Ingrian’ history.” And this history was indeed a dramatic one: she and her family were among 63 000 Ingrian Finns who were transferred to Finland during the war under the German occupation of Leningrad oblast. But in 1944, after Germany and Finland had lost the war against the Russians, these people were returned to the Soviet Union. Therefore, she ended up in Petrozavodsk where she lived the greater part of her life. “At the end of her life, living here in Joensuu, she suffered from Alzheimer’s, and kept longing for home. I was her only child and I had trouble deciding what she meant by ‘home’. Was it Petrozavodsk or her native home in Strelna near St Petersburg?”

Her mother is now buried in Joensuu, but Olga Davydova-Minguet has already collected soil from her grave which she will bring to her father’s grave in Petrozavodsk – and, hopefully, she will also be able to take some soil to Strelna, where the family had lived since the 1600s.

DAVYDOVA-MINGUET HAS FELT satisfaction over the years, seeing first-hand how people on either side of the border are connecting, how the number of Russian students grows, how intermarriages become more frequent, how mutual prejudices are toned down, how she gets new Russian-speaking acquaintances as the years go by (in the corridor she greets a cleaner in Russian). Against that background, she feels a deep sadness at what is happening right now. “If it wasn’t for the war, all this positive development would continue. What we see

now is not only a loss for the people living on both sides of the border; it is also a loss for North Karelia as well as Russian Karelia. Both regions are among the poorest in their respective countries. With less business cooperation, with fewer Russians coming here to work, with less tourism, both regions will become poorer.”

The weekend before we met, she had planned to visit family and friends in Petrozavodsk – as she had done hundreds of times – but she cancelled the visit. It did not seem safe to go. Today she wears a sweater with the word “Culturas” printed on it, a foundation which pro-

motes dialogue between Russian speakers and other population groups. Among other things, Culturas has done a survey on Russian speakers’ attitudes towards – and experienced consequences of – the war in Ukraine. “I was glad to hear that the survey showed that 80 percent of the Russian speakers in Finland don’t experience discrimination as a consequence of the war; most people here still make a clear distinction between them and the regime in the Kremlin. But I’m afraid that might change,” Davydova-Minguet concludes.

It made me think of my visit to the North Karelian Museum in the centre of Joensuu earlier the same day and the risk of history repeating itself: The museum displays a description of how Karelian Russians in Joensuu experienced growing anti-Russian sentiment in the late 1890s. They were merchants and traders with the names Kononoff, Tichanoff and Moldakoff. Later on, most of them fennicized their names to get accepted.

Davydova-Minguet is critical of the decision to stop the entry of Russians with tourist visas, since it underlines the notion that all Russians are responsible for the war. “It’s a very complicated issue. Yes, it is offensive to witness how Russians can go on vacation while their government conducts a terrible war. And yes, there is a risk that people close to the government could get out and possibly do damage in countries supporting Ukraine. But still: the question of human rights should carry more weight. Individuals criticizing the war should have a chance to get out.”

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Students Veikka Suni och Roope Pakarinen.

Securitization and fences

The young generation of students at the university, what do they think about the sensitive border issues? About living so close to a border that now has become both contested and dangerous? Behind two computers, I found students Veikka Suni and Roope Pakarinen working on a paper about Apple's new marketing strategy.

"It feels a bit scary having the border so near", says Pakarinen. "If I lived further away, I would have more time to escape". Veikka is a bit less concerned: "Finland is a small country, we would have problems wherever we live if Putin decides to attack us." Both are positive about Finland applying for Nato membership. "I think it could be an important deterrent", says Pakarinen. "Finland has been scared of Russia for decades; it is time that we do something about it", says Veikka Suni.

Further down the corridor, I met two first year students studying theology, Sakari Soini and Vesper Hautamäki. Vesper has dyed her hair red and declares that she's an anarchist: "I'm against Nato membership, Nato is too dominated by America. And it's all about Russia being evil. Today's leadership in Russia is evil, but the country is not. I think our membership in the EU is enough to protect us." Sakari Soini did his military service the other year. He sees both pros and cons to a Nato membership. "The war has shown that the Russian military threat is exaggerated, they are not so skilled as we thought. And I trust the Finnish defence forces. On the other hand, we won't get military help from the rest of Europe if we don't join Nato."

Vesper Hautamäki's grandparents got worried when she said she was moving from Tampere to study in Joensuu, coming so close to Russia. "They told me I would be sent to the war to help in some way if the Russians attack." Sakari Soini says that friends more jokingly told him that he "would die first in the case of an attack". Both of them are critical of the decision to stop the entry of Russian tourists, to stop people from leaving who are against the war. Vesper Hautamäki tells me that she has Karelian roots. Her grandparents taught her to speak Karelian, a language which



Sakari Soini och Vesper Hautamäki are first year students in theology.

is fairly close to Finnish. "People speak Karelian on the Russian side too, we belong together. I am very worried about the tendency to de-humanise all Russians."

VESPER HAUTAMÄKI'S thoughts made me think of a person that Olga Davydova-Minguet quotes in her article "Desires for past and future in border crossings on the Finnish-Russian border", written with Pirjo Pöllänen and waiting to be published. The middle-aged Finnish woman that they had interviewed describes her personal development: "When I was a little girl, we used to go to the Värtsilä sports hall hill to see the lights on the other side of the border, Russian Värtsilä's lights. My father is originally from that side of the village. You know, my father yearned for his native place. When I was little, it was almost as if you didn't dare look at the Russian side of the border, but now it's different – you just pop over it to buy cheap petrol."

When people no longer has this chance to "pop over", the risk increases that a new generation sees those on the other side as aliens, and yes, even as threats.

On October 19, the Finnish Broadcast Cooperation YLE informs that the Finnish government has gotten a green light from Parliament to build a fence along parts of the border to Russia, primarily in the Karelia region.

"The fence is being built in a changed security situation that won't return to normal for decades, if even then", comments Interior Minister Krista Mikkonen. ✖

Pähl Ruin is a freelance writer working in the Baltic Sea region

reference

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PHOTO: ZMINA

At the end of June, a ZMINA journalist visited Shestovytsia together with the Educational Human Rights House Chernihiv experts who document the Russian war crimes of the Russians within Ukraine 5 AM Coalition.

SAFEGUARDING HUMAN RIGHTS DURING WAR

by **Ninna Mörner**

Civil society in Ukraine is, although under severe stress, very active and plays an important role in providing people with their basic needs and safeguarding their human rights. Civil society in Ukraine is still functioning even in a situation of full-scale invasion and warfare, with constant shelling and unpredictable attacks on infrastructure and Ukrainian civilians. How is this possible?

I talk with one of many Ukrainian human rights activists, Onysiia Syniuk, an international lawyer working at the

Ukrainian Human Right Center ZMINA (Change).¹ ZMINA is part of a coalition of NGOs, 5 AM Coalition, working together to safeguard human rights during war.² Among other things Onysiia Syniuk analyzes reports, collected by documentators at ZMINA and by volunteers trained by the 5 AM Coalition, on possible war crimes in the occupied regions, where settlements have been liberated. Onysiia Syniuk's explanation of Ukraine society's resilience:

"As NGOs, we need to be very flexible and very creative. Also, many citizens show solidarity and take their own initia-

tives when they see what is needed most. Society is also focused, trained and has routines on how to act to secure a newly liberated area and repair the most urgently needed infrastructure".

When an occupied area is liberated, she explains, the army make sure that the area is safe and that for instance there are no Russians dressed as Ukrainian soldiers hiding anywhere, and soon afterwards, the law enforcement units enter to keep order.

"National shop/supermarket chains are moving in quickly to provide all kinds of products, not only agricultural – this

was the case in Kherson. In a lot of areas infrastructure is heavily damaged or completely destroyed; Russians very often destroy it deliberately when retreating, so there is a lot of work to do to make it function again”.

Testimonies of war crimes

As soon as the areas are safe enough a team of trained people from ZMINA, often journalists, enter the area to collect testimonies and indications of war crimes. The law enforcement authorities have sometimes argued that they should be the first to hear the stories that may become evidence in a possible trial. According to Onysia Syniuk, people prefer to talk with someone who just wants to listen and does not convince anyone to talk and take part in a criminal proceeding.

“A good approach is the ‘no-harm-approach’. We never make anyone talk; if they want to tell us, we are there to listen. If not, that is fine. We ask if we can publish their stories, if they may be made public to tell the world what is happening.”

She continues: “If they do not want us to make their statement public, we ask for permission to file them in our archives, to be able to use them later if the person changes their mind. We also leave information on where and how to contact us if they would like to add anything, or if they later feel like reporting what they have been exposed to.”

If there are reports that indicate violations of the conventions and human rights that are there to protect them, ZMINA can refer them to receive further legal support. War crimes such as rape and sexual violence are occurring as part of the war and the dehumanization process.

Survivors of sexual violence

Onysia Syniuk has an academic background in working with gender-based violence and is aware of the trauma and stigma that surround sexual violence. People hesitate to talk because they can be blamed and shamed if it is known that they are survivors of sexual violence.

“It happens that Ukrainian people say about Ukrainian women that have been

raped or violated by Russians that *she* is to blame, that she ‘let them have her’, ‘went to the Russians’ or similar remarks”.

Therefore, one needs to have the possible consequences in mind when one collects testimonies. Many more stories of violations might come up later during the criminal investigation, if just one or two victims dare to talk. That survivors are met with compassion is crucial, not only for their own healing process, but also for their participation in the legal process if it goes to court.

“Law enforcement units have been trained to interact with people that have severe traumas and to do so in a sensitive way. But there is limited training within their official education; it is all given by civil society and as part of programs. When the project or program has ended the people that they trained might have left their positions, and the new employees have not yet been trained. We still need to integrate the trauma-sensitive approach in the education of all groups in law enforcement”, Onysia Syniuk says.

Secondary traumatization

It is also a problem that people in law enforcement who work with war crimes get secondary traumas themselves, from working with such a challenging and brutal reality.

How do you yourself deal with it when you are analyzing testimonies and reporting on war crimes?

“We recently had resilience training



Onysia Syniuk, ZMINA.

“WE NEVER MAKE ANYONE TALK; IF THEY WANT TO TELL US, WE ARE THERE TO LISTEN. IF NOT, THAT IS FINE.”

with Ukrainian experts, recommending the WHO *Doing What Matters in Times of Stress: An illustrated Guide*, which is a self-help tool. One of the techniques they shared was turning negative thoughts into an “I feel” statement and trying to turn it into action. For example, if you have a circulating thought: “I am useless, I am not doing enough”, try thinking about it as “I feel useless, I feel like I am not doing enough”, and then try thinking what you can do to change that feeling. For me personally, it was a case of reading news of all the violations, and I felt like what I was doing was really insignificant, like I was doing nothing when there is so much suffering. So I sat down and wrote a legal analysis of the case that was the last straw for me – I wrote about the legal instruments and specific rules governing the situation and how they were violated.

In Ukraine today people know that everyone, in one way or another, is suffering in this war. There is like a silent understanding of this, but one does not talk openly about the violence and the sentiments. This is the experience expressed by many, and also Onysia Syniuk. There is solidarity in this situation of constant alertness, and everyone has joined forces against the external enemy: Russia.

“Russia is imperialistic and has been since the dissolution; it is ‘in them’, this self-proclaimed sense of their right to people and land in the former USSR. They never left the Cold War dichotomy”, she says, expressing her sentiments against the Russians as having internalized this Russian viewpoint of their neighbor countries as “their little brothers”.

Forced displacement of children

When she and a colleague were mapping the forced displacement of Ukrainians by Russia, she also took into account Russian information about children taken from Ukraine and re-educated and adopted by Russian families. It is very hard to verify the amount of forced displacement.

There are Russian speakers in the occupied parts of Ukraine that have willingly left for Russia, there are Ukrainians that left these areas believing they would

be transferred to a safer part of Ukraine but instead were locked inside the buses and taken to Russia, and then there are many children that simply have been brought to Russia.

“Children without guardians cannot consent. Many children were taken from institutions, sometimes by the staff, and then there are children that lost their parents, but they might still have relatives in Ukraine!”, she underlines.

The Ukrainian government has created a website, *Children of War*, to gather information and help people find missing children. As I write this, November 30, 2022, there are 12,462 deported children.³

Onysiia Syniuk says that the children taken to Russia immediately came under the influence of Russian propaganda.

“These children are usually brought to summer camps, recreation centers, hotels and shelters. Those children that are of age to go to school are automatically enrolled in Russian schools and learn according to the Russian curriculum, which is heavily influenced by propaganda. And during walks they listen to the Russian anthem and all events held include Russian flags placed all around.”

Some Ukrainian children have also been adopted by Russian families – although she emphasizes that they may have Ukrainian relatives searching for them. ZMINA works intensively together with the 5AM Coalition to try to bring the children back to Ukraine.

“We work to bring the children back immediately. The relatives do not know if the children are still alive; we cannot get information from Russia although we tried to cooperate on this. The Russification campaign of the children is known through open sources, and media investigations.”⁴

If the war goes on several years, it might be a problem to determine the child's best interest if they have settled in Russia?

“We prioritize getting them back as soon as possible. Two years is a long time



Children of War is a government-run website.

**“THE RELATIVES
DO NOT KNOW
IF THE CHILDREN
ARE STILL ALIVE.”**

for a child, they will be easily indoctrinated.”

A future peace

There is planning for a future of Ukraine without occupation, the peace that Onysiia Syniuk hopes to see. Civil society in Ukraine is cooperating with the Ukrainian authorities to develop a strategy for how to deal with liberated Crimea and the areas in the south-east that have been occupied since 2014. Apart from rebuilding destroyed cities, examples of what issues the strategy includes are the need to have a plan to give property back to owners that were forced to flee, to introduce a functional educational system, and to give information and counter the years of propaganda that Russia spread.

If such a peace is achieved there will be a lot of traumatized people and a lot of weapons. We know from the Balkan war that this resulted in an escalation of human trafficking and gender-based

violence. Have you been able to prepare for this as well?

“Yes; we, Ukrainian civil society, did actually visit Bosnia and talked with NGOs there to learn from them and prepare to avoid this development after war. It was very helpful to meet them. Also, our first lady Zelenska makes the issue of gender-based violence a priority and one issue that must not be forgotten in time of war as well.”

Today, however, the focus is on survival for all and the solidarity in Ukrainian society is striking. Many countries are reacting against the Russian aggression and in support for Ukraine and the resilience

shown by Ukrainians, including civil society. ❌

Ninna Möerner is editor-in-chief
for *Baltic Worlds*

references

- 1 ZMINA Human Rights Center works to protect freedom of speech and movement, counter discrimination, prevent torture and cruel treatment, combat impunity, support human rights and civil activists in Ukraine, including in the territory of occupied Crimea, as well as protect the rights of people afflicted by the armed conflict. The organization carries out information campaigns, education programs, monitors and documents violations of human rights, conducts research providing analytical outputs, and seeks changes through national and international advocacy. Read about ZMINA at <https://pen.org.ua/en/centr-prav-lyudini-zmina>
- 2 The coalition is formed by a number of Ukrainian human rights organizations. Read more at <https://www.5am.in.ua/en>
- 3 See the Governmental website, *Children of War*. Available at <https://childrenofwar.gov.ua/en/>
- 4 See for instance: Sarah El Deeb, Anastasiia Shvets and Elizaveta Tilna, “How Moscow grabs Ukrainian children and makes them Russian”, *AP*, October 13, 2022. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/ukrainian-children-russia-7493cb22c9086c6293c1ac7986d85ef6>



PHOTO: HANDOUT PHOTO/UKRAINE DEFENCE MINISTRY

An undated handout picture made available by the Ukrainian Defense Ministry press service shows Ukrainian servicemen raising a Ukrainian flag on Zmiinyi Island, or Snake Island, in the Black Sea, Ukraine, Issued 7 July 2022. Ukrainian forces hoisted the national flag on the Black Sea island, after Russian forces withdrew from the island.

Sovereignty and loneliness on Snake Island

by **Kateryna Mishchenko**

“One of the most dangerous places in the world”: a description of Ukraine in the 1930–1940s by historian Timothy Snyder that I constantly find running through my mind. Snyder’s bestseller *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* has attracted a large readership in Ukraine over the past eight years, presumably not only due to the historical background of the Russian war, which was considered a “hybrid” conflict at that time. The concept presented by *Bloodlands* includes a particular state of being at the mercy of the cultural landscape, which has a complex

imprint – of history, politics, socialization. I saw the task of my generation to be the “liberation” of this landscape, a performative healing of my country, where the process of coming to terms with the bloody past would have coexist with the development of solidary and non-violent cohabitation. Today’s war of annihilation has torn not only my generation, but also the older and younger generations from their previous lives and brought them down to the bloody ground. And life now feels like the stuff of history books.

I experience the war as something spatial, that can transport you to other

places. In May, for example, I received a long-awaited visitor from the war, from the capital city of my perilous homeland. A friend was in Berlin on business; her first time abroad after the large-scale invasion. Although the war is still delimited by the contours of the Ukrainian border, inside the individual, sinister and safe spaces have become mixed. I was homesick and observed and listened to her inward thoughts with empathy.

IN MY FRIEND’S STORIES, there is no before and after. It was as if she were simply throwing light onto different, new scenes. She walked through empty streets in the

lively Kyiv district of Podil, a place of young electronic music and old architecture, and could not imagine that this also being destroyed. In April, she visited a famous ostrich farm outside Kyiv and saw so many burned, dead birds. When a noise came from the street outside the open window here in Berlin, she flinched and continued after a few seconds: The woods where the Russians camped out were littered with huge garbage dumps, demonstrating why the Russian troops are referred to as “hordes.” Her voice, which continued with other examples of ruin, was like an invitation to my new home, and I gladly accepted.

Here, I said later, in peaceful foreign countries, where Covid, inflation, and energy prices are still sources of worry, we could perhaps be seen as ambassadors of a bleak future. Hopefully, however, this will not become a universal future, but rather a dark and intense period that instead leads to “turning points” in other places. In any case, I imagine this existence somewhere between safe places and the war to be a permanent meeting with one’s own *doppelgänger*s and the looks they give, although – in the end – one seems to stand alone anyway.

MY FRIEND BROUGHT ME a small souvenir: the famous collector’s stamp with an illustration by Crimean-born artist Borys Groch showing a Ukrainian soldier giving the middle finger to a Russian cruiser. The position of the soldier, depicted from behind, immediately reminded me of the romantic *Rückenfigur* or “back figure” of Caspar David Friedrich. Here, however, the external landscape – the war machine – is confronted not only by the man’s gaze, but also his gesture: “Russian warship, go f*** yourself!” At the start of the invasion, this was how a Ukrainian border guard on Snake Island replied to a demand to surrender issued by the Russian military under a warship call sign. Born in radio waves, this response became a collectively internalized slogan of the Ukrainian resistance. And, beyond that, a component of the current Ukrainian decolonial myth.



The collector’s stamp with an illustration by Crimean-born artist Borys Groch.

“THE COLORS OF THE STAMP BRING TO MIND THE UKRAINIAN FLAG, BUT WITH THE BLUE OF THE SEA AND THE DESERT-LIKE YELLOW-BROWN OF SNAKE ISLAND ITSELF.”

The colors of the stamp bring to mind the Ukrainian flag, but with the blue of the sea and the desert-like yellow-brown of Snake Island itself. In Europe’s largest country, the very ground beneath your feet is uncertain. The alienation, dispossession, and expulsion caused by the war have brought us to a small island that can stand as a metaphor for our present situation. Is it even possible to separate the island from the people?

At the start of August 2021, in the framework of a big celebration of Ukraine’s 30th Independence Day, the Ukrainian president held the first press conference since the annexation of Crimea with Crimean journalists, who had just joined forces in the project “How will we take back Crimea?” They discussed Ukraine’s willingness to protect itself militarily and how to use the Crimea Platform initiative as an attempt to put the occupation of the peninsula back on the international

agenda. Snake Island was seen as a symbolic location that represented every Ukrainian territory that would be fought for in the event of an attack, and serve as a starting point for the liberation of the occupied territories. I interpreted this visit to the small island as Zelensky’s prospective gesture: looking towards Crimea, he spoke about future peace and integration. In that regard, Snake Island could well represent the – rather narrow – scope that existed at that time. It was not clear whether anyone would support us in the event of a major Russian attack. On

the small island, the dominance of the sea can be felt more keenly: since the annexation of Crimea, Ukraine has lost control of three-quarters of its maritime territory. Even then, this figure of solitary self-determination was apparent.

Later, while reading about Snake Island, I learn that its waters are home to sunken ships. Resting in the lower anoxic layer of the Black Sea, they must still be well preserved. This vertical perspective, this immersion in the history of the place, shows how old the traces of war are around here. In times of antiquity it was called White Island and had a temple dedicated to the cult of Achilles, who, by the way, tried to escape “mobilization” by dressing in girls’ clothes and living with the daughters of the king of Skyros. In the end, however, the hero’s fate – the mission to kill and be killed – caught up with him. Can the pilgrimage to his temple in ancient times somehow be connected to the symbolic visit of the current Ukrainian president in 2021? Could it have been an intuitive attempt by the latter to stand up to fate through his own political project for the future?

ON UKRAINE’S Independence Day this year, my country brought to mind the dystopian arena islands constructed for the *Hunger Games*. Both in Ukraine and abroad, there was much discussion about the level of destruction with which Russia would “congratulate” us. These days, the interactive map of Ukraine is often covered in red, either completely or at the regional level, to signify air raid

alarms. The impotent expectation of a bloody spectacle feels as if has been pre-programmed. The recent news that the programmers of the missiles falling on Ukrainian cities include the developers of computer games elevates this feeling into a legitimate description of the situation in my country.

With incredible speed, Ukraine became one of the most mine-infested countries in the world, and in an instant the sea became toxic. The sea coast is constantly rocked by deadly explosions. The damage that the mining of the sea is causing to the underwater environment can only be estimated at present, just as the data on the number of dead Ukrainians, a figure that is increasing by the day, also remains submerged. As the methane cloud over the Baltic Sea shows, the contaminated sea is bound to bring forth further unexpected phenomena and consequences of the war.

Isolation, from the Latin *insulatus* meaning “made into an island,” is also a means of war. It involves cutting off or taking away – referred to as “liberation” in the newspeak of the Russian war – from life, from lovers, from home, from one’s own life story. The island is also well suited for isolated and isolating spaces of violence: torture chambers, occupied regions, filtration camps.

In this situation where the ground beneath your feet is torn away, there is often not much left but to submit to the mercy of the heroic, without knowing whether fate will spare you. The severing is internalized. Two of our neighboring countries have now become toxic zones that provide the violent import of bombs and troops. In this context, the transition from the Russian language to Ukrainian being made by many Russian-speaking Ukrainians today also serves as a demarcation from the world of the lost neighbor. There is a dialectical incantation of this, expressed by Volodymyr Zelensky in one of his speeches:

Without gas or without you?
Without you. Without light or
without you? Without you. With-
out water or without you? With-
out you. Without food or without

you? Without you. Cold, hunger,
darkness, and thirst are not as
scary and deadly for us as your
“friendship and brotherhood.”
But history will put everything
in its place. And we will be with
gas, light, water, and food ... and
WITHOUT you!

The island can be reconquered or assimilated. And that, I think, can describe the strategy of Ukraine’s current collective imagining. If I had devised this strategy, I would start with the quote from *Causes and Reasons of Desert Islands* by Gilles Deleuze:

Dreaming of islands – whether with joy or in fear, it doesn’t matter – is dreaming of pulling away, or being already separate, far from any continent, of being lost and alone – or it is dreaming of starting from scratch, recreating, beginning anew.

If the island serves as a mental space, then for Ukrainian society it is certainly also a place of its own, perhaps permanent redefinition. It could perhaps be described as a self-directed Robinsonade, that not only involves building oneself anew after the catastrophe, but also re-discovering oneself. In this context, the meeting with others is undoubtedly important, although this should be an equal friend, not an “older brother”. Exercising resistance in this war means many things, including upholding the promise of a better democratic future fought for by the Maidan Uprising. And utopian ideals must shimmer on the horizon. After every Russian extermination operation, the Ukrai-

**“WITH INCREDIBLE
SPEED, UKRAINE
BECAME ONE
OF THE MOST
MINE-INFESTED
COUNTRIES IN THE
WORLD.”**

nians routinely say to themselves: We will rebuild everything, it will be better than before; we will get reparations from Russia and all war criminals will be put on trial; we will join the EU and will be a better version of ourselves. The main thing is not to choke on your own tears.

The self-determined lone fighter on the stamp looks out at the sinking Russian ship: the cruiser Moskva, pride of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. The ship was built in Mykolaiv in Soviet Ukraine, one of the cities now under constant shelling, and was one of the vessels involved in the attack on Snake Island. It was fatally damaged by Ukrainian Neptune missiles.

WHAT DOES THE SCENE of the sinking of the Moskva say, except that the slogan “Russian warship, go f*** yourself!” is a self-fulfilling prophesy? Certainly, it is a moment of questioning a colonial relationship. The ship can be seen as a greedy colonizer, ready to steal both works of art and household technology, and a transporter of the oppressed, whose size and billion-dollar price have left no chance for Ukraine. However, the control of the great war machine did not function “in the element of reality,” as formulated by Michel Foucault in his lecture *Security, Territory, Population* ... at the end of the 1970s. Something was not anticipated: especially the voice of the border guards. The political voice of the “little brother.”

In the first days of the attack, all the soldiers on Snake Island were considered to have “fallen heroically.” It was later reported that they were in captivity, and some have since been released. Remarkably, the voice that articulated the famous phrase became part of the resistance narrative as a voice from the realm of the dead. Its haunting and compulsive existence conveyed to me that, despite all my loneliness, I am not alone. And despite all the despair, there is hope that for the instigators on the warship, that voice will break out into a chorus of sirens. ✕

Kateryna Mishchenko is a writer and editor of the Ukrainian publishing house Medusa. Recently fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin.



DEHUMANIZING THE “ENEMY”

Hate speech directed at Ukrainians in Russian media

by **Yuliya Krylova-Grek**

The impact of negative rhetoric towards Ukraine, the United States and European countries are the constant ingredients in the “menu” of Russian state media resources, not to mention blogs and social networks.

Previous examples such as Rwanda and Srebrenica have shown how words of hatred lead to acts of hatred, with yesterday’s civilians being ready to kill their dehumanized neighbors. Unfortunately, one now can add to this list of examples Ukraine. Hate speech towards Ukraine began to gain momentum since 2014, after the “Revolution of Dignity” took place and the country was taking a political course towards European integration. Against the background of horror stories about Europe and the US dictatorship, the main target was Ukraine, and everything related to the Ukrainian language, culture and “Ukrainianness”, a concept used in the Russian media with a negative meaning.² Almost every day, hate rhetoric was spread through the Russia’s

main state channels, reaching the audience in Russia, occupied Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk regions.

Investigating the activities of the Russian media in 2014–2021, I wrote that the systematic character and the scale of the creation and distribution of such materials in the information space have signs of preparation for genocide.³ But no one could have imagined that this crime could happen in the center of Europe in the 21st century.

THE STUDY OF the content of Russian media operating in the occupied territories of Crimea and eastern Ukraine was conducted in the period of December 1, 2020, to May 31, 2021. It is important to note that after gaining control over these regions in 2014, Russia launched active propaganda activities, an integral part of which were the materials aimed at dehumanization, demonization and marginalization of Ukraine and Ukrainians. Publishing houses

remaining in the regions have adapted to the new government (for example, *ForPost*) and new publishing houses (for example, *Politnavigator*, *Novorossiia*, *Russkaya Vesna*, etc.) have been formed.

As a result of the study, it was found that before the military intervention, Russian media had used indirect and manipulative hate speech, avoiding direct calls for destruction, which could have created the illusion of compliance with journalistic standards. At the same time, journalists practiced the active use of negative narration: compilation of negative events, indirect and manipulative hate speech.

Eight years of systematic spread of negative narration have done their job and led to a dehumanized, demonized, and marginalized image of Ukraine and Ukrainians in the minds of Russians. The image of a dangerous and aggressive enemy was created using a range of methods and techniques, the most common of which was the use of archetypes of the Second World War and Soviet stereotypes. Ukrainianness in Russian content was equated with Nazism and fascism, and people were called Nazis, fascists, Banderas, whom Russian journalists described as aggressive creatures with a low level of intelligence. For example, about the people who took part in the march dedicated to the birthday of Stepan Bandera "[...] there are going fools and half-fools, I do not dispute intelligence abilities".⁴

IN THE RUSSIAN mass media, the phenomenon of *banderophobia* plays the role of a "horror story" for an ordinary citizen. In the Russian mentality, "banderophobia" is one of the fundamental, negative ideas about Ukraine, but, at the same time it has little in common with Bandera movement as a real phenomenon of Ukrainian history. Rather, I would argue, it is a mythologized construct on a Ukrainian topic. Bandera, Bandera people and other words derived from the surname of Stepan Bandera turned into a generalized horror symbol, actively used in many publications.⁵

Another generally accepted technique is the creation of new concepts with a negative meaning. Typically, these words are formed by combining two words into one or by changing and adding a new ending to the word. For example, "potheads", "sprechenführer", "languass policy"⁶, "shiroes".⁷ The newly created concepts and their offensive meanings can be understood only in the Russian and Ukrainian language space. Therefore, for foreigners, I have created a special dictionary with the explanation of terms, which is placed in the addendum to the study.⁸ The main topics on which the Russian media built the negative narrative were as follows: 1) in relation to citizens who support "Ukrainianness", participants in the Revolution of Dignity, supporters of European integration, associating them with the Nazis, Banderas and fascists, 2) in relation to the Ukrainian state

as an unsuccessful project, a territory that should not exist,⁹ 3) the Ukrainian language as a dialect of uneducated citizens,¹⁰ 4) the Ukrainian army which in the rhetoric of the Russian media was called punishers, murderers and fascists,¹¹ 5) Ukrainian education as a tool for educating the Nazis,¹² 6) the topic of opposing citizens within the country and their division into "good (pro-Russian) and bad (pro-Ukrainian) ones".¹³ By the way, a few months after the outbreak of military activities, the topic of division almost disappeared from the information space, instead, there appeared in the rhetoric of Russian journalists only a "bad" group to which belonged all Ukrainians.

AGAINST THE BACKGROUND of demonized Ukraine and Ukrainians, the Russian media started to voice calls for specific actions: "Fascist Ukraine does not have the right to exist",¹⁴ and the term "special operation" began to be used as practical advice for "solving the Ukrainian question".¹⁵

So, with the image of an "underdog" (Untermensch) in mind created by the mass media, the majority of Russian citizens support military aggression, as evidenced by the results of a sociological survey: as of March 5, 2022, 71% of the polled residents of Russia supported the "special operation" against Ukraine.¹⁶ The behavior of the Russian military, who carry out massacres and torture of civilians and prisoners of war, can be seen also as evidence that hateful propaganda in the mass media has achieved its goal.

Let us dwell in more detail on the content which was distributed by the Russian media since 2014 to prepare

and justify the planned military aggression. I would like to draw your attention to the methods and techniques used by journalists, as they can be used in any mass media and be a signal of a campaign to spread hate speech.¹⁷

As noted above, as a result of the study, it was found that indirect and manipulative hate speech was actively used in the information space. The study was conducted on the material of journalistic publications issued during the period of December 1, 2020, to May 31, 2021. The material for the study was selected by keywords using a content analysis program. We analyzed online media with an audience of more than 1 million readers per month. The sample set included 10 news websites: *Forpost Sevastopol*, *Novosti Kryma*, *RIA Krym*, *KP Krym*, *Russkaya vesna*, *Politnavigator*, *Novorossinform*, *Krym24*, *Vesti Krym* and the official website of the "government" of Crimea (Pravitel'stvo Kryma) to see the local government rhetoric.

Altogether we obtained 560 publications featuring hate speech elements selected from the entire content. These include 16 texts with Direct Hate Speech, 341 texts with Hidden Hate Speech and 203 texts with Manipulative Hate Speech.

Indirect hate speech is characterized by the following: the use

"EIGHT YEARS OF SYSTEMATIC SPREAD OF NEGATIVE NARRATION HAVE DONE THEIR JOB AND LED TO A DEHUMANIZED, DEMONIZED, AND MARGINALIZED IMAGE OF UKRAINE AND UKRAINIANS IN THE MINDS OF RUSSIANS."

of words that are allowed by literary norms (present in general lexical dictionaries), but in the context carry an offensive meaning (for example, the words “thief” or “looter” when used in criminal proceedings have a direct meaning. At the same time, their use in relation to a group of persons by region of residence or civic affiliation is a sign of marginalization: “Looting Galicians”,¹⁸ “90% of the citizens of Ukraine are thieves”¹⁹; the use of ethnophobisms in relation to the people, nationality, nation (for example, “khokhlys”); the division of society according to the principle of “our own people vs. strangers”; generalization of negative features;¹⁰ transfer of a separate case to a group of persons on a certain basis (nationality, religion, sexual orientation, etc.); masking contempt with sarcasm and irony with a tinge of disdain and negative attitudes (e.g., writing phonetic pronunciation in quotes “svidomye” (“conscious”), Kiev is the capital of “Tseevropa” (“Thisiseurope”)²⁰; creation of new concepts with a negative connotation (for example, “Ukropanonics”, “Ukrolunacy”)²¹; the use of the archetypes of the Second World War and the creation of negative associations on their basis.

Manipulative hate speech involves techniques for substituting meanings of concepts through the use of Euphemisms and Dysphemisms.²²

Euphemism is an inoffensive word or phrase substituted for one considered offensive or hurtful. For example, “a good will gesture” instead of withdrawal of the Russian garrison from the island of Zmiyniy, “clap” instead of an explosion. By the way, the Russian word “clap” (loud sound) has a homograph in Russian translated into Ukrainian as “cotton”. On this semantic game of meanings, the Ukrainian mass media began to use the word “cotton” as a synonym for “explosion”.

Dysphemism is the substitution of a harsh, disparaging, or unpleasant expression for a more neutral one. For example, the training program of the Ukrainian military is a “sophisticated program”, the servicemen of the Ukrainian Armed Forces are “militants”, and their training is “drilling” (like the dog training).²³

MANIPULATIVE TECHNIQUES also include the technique of using fake news as a fact on the basis of which the publication is written; involvement of experts who have a biased opinion or are not specialists in the field they comment on; distortion and subjective interpretation of historical facts;²⁴ justification of aggression, violence against a certain group of persons on the basis of speculative conclusions about their danger and actions to prevent it; strengthening information by non-linguistic means (photos, collages, etc.); manipulative titles of publications (the name is considered manipulative if it does not coincide with the information provided in the text of the article, or distorts it).

Indirect and manipulative hate speech was used mostly before and at the beginning of the military aggression and was served “under the guise of ‘liberation’”. After several months of war, the Russian propaganda changed the narrative from a mission of “liberation” to open calls for the destruction of Ukraine as a state²⁵ and the destruction of everything related to Ukrainianness.²⁶ At the same time, we should investigate the origins of genocide manifestations, which are now documented by lawyers and public activists: they have their roots in 2014, when the Russian media space was actively filled with materials that changed the attitude towards Ukrainians from the “brotherly people” to the inhabitants of the “Nazi state” and the support for the so-called “denazification”.²⁷

The very concept of “denazification” appeared after the Second World War to designate a system of measures aimed at eliminating Nazism (fascism) in the political, economic, and public life of the German people after the defeat of the Hitler’s Germany.²⁸ The concept of “denazification” in relation to Ukraine sounds like a threat, since its meaning in the context of the Russian aggression is the call for the fight against Ukrainianness.

“AFTER SEVERAL MONTHS OF WAR, THE RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA CHANGED THE NARRATIVE FROM A MISSION OF ‘LIBERATION’ TO OPEN CALLS FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF UKRAINE AS A STATE.”

WHAT DOES ACTUALLY the used term denazification of Ukraine mean, to which Russian political forces call and which is supported by Russian propaganda in the media space?

The word contains the prefix “de” (Russian), which in Russian denotes the negation or difference from something. The second part of the word “nazification” is used

as a derivative of the word “Nazis”, to which the Russian media referred Ukrainians as carriers of national identity, especially in relation to the participants of the 2014 Revolution of Dignity and the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Journalists deliberately put a sign of equality between Ukrainians and the negative archetypes of the Second World War, massively using such expressions as “Ukrainian Nazis”,²⁹ ““Glory to Ukraine, glory to heroes” is a Nazi slogan”,³⁰ “Nazi state”³¹ (referring to Ukraine), “Nazis”³¹, “Ukronazism”,³² etc. Among other things, it happens that Russian journalists in media put an equal sign between “Ukrainian Nazism” and fascism, creating an image of a fascist and Nazi country, for example, referring to Zelensky’s trip to Donbas as “[...] a typical Nazi method of activating full-scale combat actions”, referring to the government of Ukraine as “the source of fascism, death and elimination of Ukraine [...]”.³³

The artificially created concept of “Ukrainian Nazism” is aimed to show Ukrainians as carriers of neo-Nazi ideology, which is condemned and considered dangerous in the civilized world.³⁴

The analysis of the Russian media showed that the markers of Nazism were Ukrainian language, the desire for European integration, the Ukrainian culture, service in the Armed Forces of

Ukraine and belonging to the movement of the Ukrainian nationalists. It is important to note that the referring to the Ukrainian nationalists as to Nazis is based on the phonetic similarity of words, although these concepts are different in meaning.

Taking into account the propaganda and the hate speech spread by the Russian journalists before the war, the concept of “denazification” in this analysis implies depriving Ukrainians of national signs of identity, language, culture and turning them into a second-rate part of the Russian world.³⁵

Today, the work is underway to collect materials proving the planned character of “denazification” or acts of genocide on the territory of Ukraine. The author’s work is to conduct a psycholinguistic analysis of the collected materials³⁶ to substantiate the accusations of the Russian journalists in calls and incitement to genocide, which have been taking place in Ukraine since the beginning of the military aggression.

AFTER FEBRUARY 24, 2022, Russian main stream mass media continue to actively spread hatred, dehumanizing, demonizing, and marginalizing Ukraine and Ukrainians: from accusations about the terror of the Russian-speaking population³⁷, to the call for “desatanization of Ukraine” (meaning “destruction of Satan” represented by Ukrainians)³⁸ and “war against absolute evil”, which the Russian journalist V. Solovyov associates with Ukraine and NATO.³⁹ And some Russian journalists allow themselves to talk publicly about the extermination of Ukrainians, for example, journalist Anton Krasovsky, who said that children complaining about the Russian occupation should be destroyed, “drown in the Tysyna (river)” or “burn them up”.⁴⁰

The conducted study showed that since 2014, the Russian mass media have been systematically working to create a dehumanized, marginalized, and demonized image of Ukraine and Ukrainians, which became the basis for war crimes and an approving attitude to the aggression of the majority of Russian citizens. Moreover, Russian journalists who had actively used indirect and manipulative hate speech until February 24, 2022, a few weeks after the start of the war, began to use direct appeals and insults against everything related to Ukraine (state, language, culture) and Ukrainians. ❌

Yuliya Krylova-Grek, PhD and Assistant Professor
at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy

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Why neutrality is dangerous for Ukraine's statehood

And why Ukraine may have to seek security agreements outside NATO

by **Dzmitry Pravatorau**

On September 30, 2022, after hastily organized pseudo “referendums”, Russia formally annexed the territories of four more Ukrainian regions in addition to the territory of the occupied Crimean peninsula. On the same day Ukraine formally applied for NATO membership, announcing its objective of “accelerated accession”.¹ The statement issued by NATO was predictable and did not differ from many similar statements issued in the previous decade. While mentioning that the alliance continued its open door policy, no direct endorsement of Ukraine’s bid for membership was issued by Jens Stoltenberg, the alliance’s Secretary General, who stated that such an endorsement would depend on the support of all 30 member states.

abstract

In this essay it is argued that membership of a military alliance with clear security guarantees is a fundamental factor for safeguarding Ukraine’s statehood. The neutrality solution advocated for Ukraine by the so-called “realists” in both academic and political environments does not apply to the Ukrainian-Russian war. Realist readings, as the author demonstrates in the essay, are problematic and cannot explain the fully complex nature of the conflict. On the other hand, an insight into Russia’s imperial identity provides a more convincing outlook of the situation.

KEY WORDS: NATO, Ukrainian statehood, security agreements.

Even if Ukraine wins the war, it will most likely not be guaranteed peaceful co-existence with Russia if the latter does not “de-imperialize”, that is, reject pseudo-historical myths about Ukraine being part of Russia and an object of Russia’s imperial ambitions. Equally important will be the rejection of Russian-generated political narratives about Ukraine, and of the traditional mode of interaction with Russia by the West, specifically, Western Europe, which has contributed to the full-scale invasion by directly collaborating with Putin’s regime, despite multiple warnings.

Whose delusions?

A popular stance on the origin of Russia’s designs and hostility towards Ukraine portrays the war as a consequence of Ukraine’s Western orientation which, together with potential European Union (EU) and NATO membership, presented an immediate threat to Russia’s legitimate national interests in its “backyard”. The solution, according to supporters of this stance, is to stop “provoking” Russia, and find a “compromise” with Putin’s regime, such as a peace agreement aimed at making Ukraine a neutral state.² This opinion has been shared by many left and right-wing politicians and journalists alike, both in Europe and across the pond, including open pro-Putinists, corrupt elites, the so-called “useful idiots”, *Putinverstehers* politicians advocating for more respect for Russia’s interests, Eurosceptics, as well as all kinds of anti-elitists supporting Putin’s agenda to challenge the Western-dominated order.³ Even the Pope emphasized NATO’s purported role in precipitating Russia’s feeling of insecurity on



ILLUSTRATION: KARIN Z SUNVISSON

its borders. His statement caused controversy in Europe and, understandably, outrage in Ukraine.⁴

IN THE ACADEMIC REALM, the mainstream of such “Putin apologists”, as Horvath⁵ has designated them, are “realists”. They are analysts and academics attempting to pinpoint the origin of the conflict using academic theory rather than speculation, conspiracy theories or Russian propaganda. Unfortunately, this is increasingly not the case, as some realists eagerly participate in Russia’s propaganda shows or events, or publish pseudo-academic research that attempts to whitewash Russia’s aggression.⁶ In international relations, realism together with liberalism have been described as “rationalist” theories which, for realists, present states as the main actors in the international system, acting on the basis of a cost-benefit analysis with survival as the primary goal that cannot be altered in an international system that has no global hegemon policing the world order.⁷ According to one of the most vocal proponents of realism and its influential theorist, John Mearsheimer,⁸ this has not been taken into account by “delusional” liberals, who tried to bring Ukraine closer to Western institutions that were allegedly provoking Moscow to respond violently to Western actions by annexing Crimea and igniting the conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

Nevertheless, as demonstrated by the empirical data that accumulated during eight years of Russian aggression, it is not only “liberals” that might have been “delusional” in their accounts of Russian behavior in the post-Soviet area. As Horvath⁹ noted in 2015, Russia’s actions were far from rational. Instead, they jeopardized the future interests of the state and seriously weakened Russia’s security, instead of boosting it. No prospect of NATO membership ever was or is in sight now for Ukraine, and the EU Association Agreement was never a promise to join the bloc itself. While Ukraine did not present an immediate threat to Moscow, Russia’s aggression, however, generated a response from NATO countries, which increased their military spending, and resulted in the deployment of new battalions in Central and Eastern Europe. China has become more influential in its relationship with Russia the latter gaining the moniker of “China’s vassal”.¹⁰ The recent destruction by bombs of entire cities with a predominantly Russian-speaking Ukrainian population that used to vote for pro-Russian parties, as well as atrocities committed by the Russian army in Ukraine’s Bucha, Izium and Liman regions, have further increased popular antagonism towards Russians, and united the nation. Finally, planning a blitzkrieg in Ukraine, whose population was supposedly ready to greet its “liberators” with flowers, does not seem to have been an action planned on the basis of rational calculation, but rather on the total misinterpretation of reality.¹¹

It is not only empirical data that render realist accounts of Russia’s aggression problematic.

As D’Anieri¹² indicates, the realist theory embraces several traditions, which differ in their prognoses for peace and lead to multiple foreign policy outcomes. The aforementioned Mearsheimer himself is a theorist of offensive realism, an offshoot of the neorealism theory, which posits states as not seeking a “status quo” to achieve sufficient security but being ready to constantly accumulate as much power as possible. In this case, as D’Anieri notes,¹³ even if the West were to tune into Russia’s sensitivities and explicitly refused to expand into the post-Soviet area, this would not mean that Russia would give up its assertiveness and hostility. It is also not clear whether it is Russia as an analytically non-divisible state actor, Putin’s chekist mafia regime, or another sub-state element that perceives an alleged threat from NATO. Moreover, realist analysts are frequently reluctant to engage in their research or opinion pieces with the legitimate security interests of Ukraine and Eastern Europe, focusing exclusively on Russia and its “sphere of influence”. Realists do not take into account the agency of Ukrainian civil society and its pro-Western

orientation either, dismissing the efforts made as Western induced, and frequently retransmitting conspiracy theories disseminated by Russian propaganda. As Kuzio argues,¹⁴ many Western realists and scholars of Russia engage in a discursive Orientalism of Ukraine and the post-Soviet area by adopting an uncritical approach to Russian narratives. They deny the legitimate rights of these states to select

“THE MAP OF PUTIN’S RUSSIA IS LARGELY A RESULT OF INTENTIONAL IMPERIAL TERRITORIAL EXPANSION.”

their own geopolitical orientation and restrict their role to Russia’s “backyard” or “buffer state”.

IN THE NEXT SECTIONS I will demonstrate why realist accounts of Ukrainian-Russian relations are problematic and cannot explain the fully complex nature of these interactions. Yet, envisaging Russia’s hostility and expansion in the context of Russia’s imperial identity and the objectification of the post-Soviet area allows for deeper insights into the origins of Russia’s behavior and potential solutions to alter it in the future. I will also address how different historical experiences of Western Europe with Russia have led to the devastating consequences of today, when a full-scale war has erupted in Europe.

I would also like to clarify that this essay does not aim to discredit the theory of realism in international relations. Instead, the aim is to draw attention to highly problematic realist readings of the specific Ukraine-Russia case, which have been widely used by Russia to disseminate anti-NATO and anti-Ukrainian narratives in the West.

Imperial revanchism

Realists often advocate for the neutral status of Ukraine, which would allegedly alleviate the tensions between Ukraine, the West and Russia, diminishing the latter’s perceived sense of insecurity. The cases of Austria and Finland are routinely cited. For example, according to prominent



Kremlin apologist Anatol Lieven, during the Cold War these states “moved towards the West economically and politically rather than militarily”.¹⁵

However, a problem can be identified in such reasoning. Although Finland was part of Russia’s Tsarist Empire (together with Poland), it had never played such a significant and sacral role in Russia’s identity as Ukraine, Austria having been the core of a rival empire altogether. Russia claims that Kyiv is the origin or “cradle of Russian cities”. However, Putin’s pseudo-historical claims that Ukrainians and Russians were spiritually united, and “were a single country, bound by a shared origin”¹⁶ do not easily align with the realist argument about Ukraine: if it is one country, would it really make sense to offer Ukrainian neutrality to Russia? When Finland recently joined NATO, Putin announced Russia would not object to the former’s bloc membership as Ukraine’s case was different to Finland’s.¹⁷ It is also hard to imagine Russia engaging in the irrational erasure of all things Finnish, Polish or Austrian, as it currently does when it comes to Ukraine: removing references to Ukraine from Russian school textbooks, repainting and changing Ukrainian street signs and stelae, or demanding to “solve the Ukrainian question” using clear Nazi undertones.¹⁸ The Kremlin’s objective is rather the full capitulation of Ukraine, which will have no sovereignty at all and will be entirely controlled by Moscow.¹⁹

An insight into Russia’s state identity, whose significant trait, imperial mentality, was historically cultivated on all levels of the state, including the ordinary population and the government, provides a more convincing outlook on Russia’s behavior in the post-Soviet area. As Laenen²⁰ highlights, the identity of a state and the formation of its national interests is largely a result of

negotiation between societal values and the government, not merely a “top-down” phenomenon. What is now called the Russian Federation was never a nation state but an amalgamation of different ethnic territories, including many non-Slavic ethnicities into whose lands the empire, with its core in Moscow, expanded. Thus, the map of Putin’s Russia is largely a result of intentional imperial territorial expansion, which distinguishes it from former Western European empires. The culturally heterogeneous population was united by a social agreement with the sovereign, who was obliged to protect vast and insecure imperial lands from potential attacks from invaders, and the population agreed to live under internal despotism. Security, however, was understood by Russia’s sovereigns as “control of space”, or expansive and offensive actions against non-Russian lands.²¹

According to Van Herpen,²² internal oppression for many different ethnic groups living in the territories of the modern Russian Federation was balanced by a personal connection to the imperial power and the fear it projected abroad.²³ Nalbandov notes that Putin’s regime has similar expectations of the Russian population. He identifies the social agreement between the state and the population as one “based on reciprocal fears”:²⁴ the fear of the population’s rebellion on behalf of the state, and the fear of losing autocratic control over the country on behalf of a population that is frightened of mutiny, internal disorder, external intervention, or a “color revolution”. Fear of Russia abroad, therefore, serves the purposes of international prestige, highly appreciated by the internal population.

TO BORROW ANN LAURA STOLER’S CONCEPT,²⁵ apart from the Tsarist Russian Empire, Russia’s historical instances of statehood, such as the USSR and the current Russia of Putin, can be designated as imperial formations. An imperial formation utilizes selected imperial practices in a specific historical period. For example, during the period of active decolonization, the USSR contrasted itself with the “imperial” West as a “federation” of Soviet national republics. The Soviet Union was, nevertheless, built on clearly hierarchical political, military, economic and cultural relationships between the metropolitan center in Moscow and the Soviet republics. Motyl calls such imperial interactions the relations of “incomplete wheel”,²⁶ where interactions between the republics had to be mediated by the authorities in Moscow. Contemporary Russia largely follows this model, with the center in Moscow overseeing the regional interactions and appointing regional governors in a nominally “federal state”.

Many scholars have indicated that since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the previous Russia’s imperial formation, the country has suffered from an imperial syndrome, shared widely on all levels of Russian society from the government to ordinary citizens and only briefly masked by Yeltsin’s democratic “facade”. The invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 saw Putin’s support skyrocketing, even among former critics, including the so-called Russian “liberals”.²⁷ A mediated blend of imperial ideas drawn from the Tsarist and Soviet periods, including anti-Westernism, the idea of the “tripartite” Russian nation allegedly comprising Great Russians,

Little Russians (Ukrainians) and White Russians (Belarusians), was met more than favorably by the audience.²⁸ Thus, a myopic tendency on the part of some Western European leaders to designate Russia's invasion of Ukraine as purely "Putin's war" does not match the reality of the Russian population, whose absolute majority might not be in favor of fighting in Ukraine after Putin announced "partial mobilization"; but nevertheless shares Russia's pseudo-historical view of Ukrainians.²⁹

Timothy Snyder argues that Putin's Russia objectifies Ukraine in a vividly imperial fashion: the Kremlin views itself as an actor "with purpose" – reclaiming the lands allegedly belonging to Russia that were "separated" by the Bolsheviks.³⁰ The role of Ukraine is reduced to an instrument "to realize the imperial vision"³¹ – to become a territory controlled by a new Russian imperial formation, which is constructed to attend to the imperial syndrome of the elites and the population. The views and orientations of the Ukrainian population itself, which, unlike Russians, has participated in free elections for the last three decades, are dismissed. This is strikingly similar to how realists analytically reduce the role of Ukraine's civil society to being proxies of some other actors such as the US or "Western Ukrainian nationalists".³² The objectification of Ukraine was also a trait demonstrated by the Russian Empire and the USSR in political, economic and cultural spheres. Great Russia, with its center in Moscow since Tsarist times, is a clear example of a self-constructed *primus inter pares* (first among equals) actor. It developed the implicit and explicit contempt of the government and the population for Belarusian and Ukrainian ethnic cultures and dismissed any possibility for those nations to have any autonomy or independence outside Moscow's political orbit.³³ Economic objectification revealed itself in the Stalinist period, when Ukrainian peasants suffered an artificially induced genocidal famine to facilitate Soviet industrialization.³⁴

THUS, THE CONFLICT has a clear clash between the two identities: Russian imperial identity and Ukrainian independent identity. As Portnykov³⁵ argues, as far as the Kremlin is concerned President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is not the head of an independent state but the mere governor of a "rebel province" (*buntivna provintsii*) of Russia. However, the current identity of Ukraine as an aspiring "European" independent country has not always been mainstream. Ukraine did not have enough time to establish a stable independent state in the interwar period, unlike the Baltic states. Apart from the repression, the Soviet regime in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic left an impact on the identity of a considerable number of Ukrainians who adjusted to the hierarchical imperial relations. Emerging as an independent state in 1991, Ukraine had to traverse different variants of its own understanding of Ukrainianness. The country went in various directions during the three decades of independence with differ-

ent presidents in office, looking either towards the West, Russia, or remaining somewhere in between. Because of this, Portnykov argues,³⁶ Ukraine failed to exploit a "window of opportunity" that opened straight after the breakup of the USSR, when it would have been possible to start bringing the state closer to the West and NATO. The popularity of Ukraine's NATO ambitions was initially quite low and reached roughly one-fifth of the population before 2014, only increasing to two-thirds of the population after Russia annexed Crimea and occupied Eastern Ukraine under the auspices of pseudo-republics.³⁷ Even after 2014 the demand for pro-Russian political parties in Ukraine did not vanish and remained stable, although it was much lower because most

traditional supporters of such parties remained in the Russian-occupied regions of Ukraine. Most Ukrainians, however, excluding admirers of the "Russian world" doctrine, even if they considered Russia a "brotherly" nation or an important political partner, believed that Ukraine was not Russia, which could not be understood in Moscow.³⁸ When the "brotherly" nation started erasing Mariupol, Kharkiv and other Russian-speaking cities

in Ukraine, the population's identification with Ukraine only started to increase.

The following section will focus on how the West, in particular, Western Europe, contributed to the creation of circumstances that facilitated the outbreak of a new full-scale war on the European continent.

The West's collective responsibility

Western European states such as Italy, France, Austria, and, in particular, Germany have received a lot of criticism since the beginning of 2022 for assisting Russia by engaging in trade that led to accumulation of Russia's material power to invade.³⁹ Having not experienced the Soviet Empire's direct control and all its consequences during the Cold War, these states failed to predict and actively prepare for Russia's imperial revanchism in 21st-century Europe, unlike the newer members of the bloc. For Russia, as Sherr argues,⁴⁰ the new "West" of Central and Eastern European members is "unnatural" as it used to be integrated into Russia's sphere of influence and has never played a serious role in Moscow's historical interaction with the great powers of "traditional" (or Western) Europe. It appears that Western Europe has similarly adjusted to interact with Russia directly, as it (specifically Germany) used to during the Cold War, without paying much attention to the weaker and less economically powerful "new" members of the EU.⁴¹ Thus, continued warnings from the new members were simply ignored, as was acknowledged by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in September this year.⁴²

OF ALL THE FORMER parts of the Soviet Empire, the Baltic states were the first to predict Russia's renewed imperial ambitions and

"THE BALTIC STATES WERE THE FIRST TO PREDICT RUSSIA'S RENEWED IMPERIAL AMBITIONS AND PREPARE ACCORDINGLY."

prepare accordingly. Unlike Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania managed to establish their own internationally recognized states, which were orientated towards the West in the interwar period. Soviet occupation and the imposed communist regime were never considered “normal” by the majority of the population, which emphasized its strong “Western” or “European” identity.⁴³ After the breakup of the USSR the newly independent countries ignored Russia’s offers of security guarantees and firmly started their journey towards NATO and the EU.⁴⁴ Thus, unlike Ukraine, the Baltics successfully realized the “window of opportunity”, which was enabled when Russia was still weak and could not yet demonstrate its assertiveness in the former Soviet region. However, Russia’s re-emerging imperial aspirations, such as the “Yeltsin Doctrine” of 1993 and Medvedev’s Law of 2009, which enabled the state to intervene in former Soviet republics to “protect” Russia’s national interests and citizens, were taken by the Baltic leaders as a signal to remain vigilant. These concerns mostly fell on deaf ears in Western Europe and in the US where the Obama administration even engaged in the “resetting” of relations with Putin’s regime only one year after Russia had invaded Georgia.⁴⁵ With the annexation of Crimea, and the invasion of Eastern Ukraine, the Baltic states together with Poland have become the core of the “New Cold Warrior” camp, as Kurecic⁴⁶ has designated them. They have actively supported the strictest sanctions on Russia, which, nonetheless, were not supported by the camp of “pragmatics” in Western Europe (this also applies to the Visegrad Group States, excluding Poland). Instead, those countries continually expressed doubt about the effectiveness of sanctions. With the full-scale invasion on February 24, the two “pragmatics” of the Visegrad Group joined the Baltics and Poland and confirmed their support of Ukraine, while another Visegrad member, Hungary, has instead effectively become Russia’s agent in Europe.

THE “NEW COLD WARRIORS” have traditionally considered the US to be their most reliable and important ally in security matters.⁴⁷ The “pragmatics” of Western Europe, on the other hand, have never played such a role. They have been continuously criticized by the Baltics and Poland for their close economic cooperation with Putin’s regime, making the unity of Europe exceptionally vulnerable. Having never experienced the burden of Russian occupation, the former great powers of Western Europe have formed their own vision of dealing with the Kremlin, which has been radically different from the Baltic and Polish approaches. In fact, Western Europe’s behavior towards Russia has been more in line with rationalist postulates than many realists would acknowledge. While routinely expressing “concerns” about Russia’s behavior in Ukraine since 2014, and evoking European “values”, two of the most influential countries in the bloc, Germany and France, instead pursued their own interests by engaging in arms trade with Russia via a loophole in the sanctions regime. This continued even after the mostly symbolic sanctions had been introduced by the EU in response to the annexation of Crimea.⁴⁸

The actions of German leaders observed during the last de-

cade remain a great puzzle, which might equally be resolved by an investigation of corruption and foreign influence among German elites, in addition to their “political naiveté”.⁴⁹ In 2008, Germany and France vetoed possible NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia, essentially giving Putin a green light to invade. In the strategically important sphere of energy supplies, Germany blindly persisted in making itself and Europe highly dependent on Russia’s gas, despite continued warnings from the “New Cold Warriors”. A clearly geopolitical project of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline was described by Berlin as a “commercial venture”, rather than being seen as a way to facilitate a full-scale war against Ukraine, whose infrastructure would no longer be required.⁵⁰ This was, for example, transmitted by Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the current president of Germany, who reiterated the importance of business partnerships with Russia and blamed NATO’s exercises in Eastern Europe for provoking Russia.⁵¹ Recent years have even seen the US questioning Germany’s credibility as a reliable ally.⁵² However idiosyncratic Trump’s foreign policy may have been, his complaint that Germany had become a “captive” of Russia and its energy resources actually sounded very legitimate.⁵³ The response of German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas to the US sanctions against the Nord Stream 2 pipeline was that energy issues should be resolved by Europe, not the US. The fact that not all EU states supported Germany in its enthusiasm for the pipeline apparently did not prevent Maas from speaking on behalf of “all of Europe.” This behavior on the part of Germany was echoed in August 2022, when Poland’s Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau accused the most powerful EU state of “imperialism within” the bloc. In particular, Rau stated that Germany was attempting to impose new gas reduction policies on all member states, including those that had continuously warned about the geopolitical risk of the dependence on Russian gas.⁵⁴

Nor did Germany demonstrate much credibility in the wake of the full-scale Russian invasion, blocking Estonia’s arms shipment to Ukraine, and refusing to send its own arms. And although the “new” European states welcomed an open acknowledgement of the failure to listen to them, this is unlikely to lead to any visible results in the near future. Russia has already received billions in revenue from selling its gas to the EU, which has been used to kill Ukrainians, and the Western and Eastern flanks of the EU have still not agreed on a common future policy towards the aggressor.⁵⁵

THE “PRAGMATICS” OF EUROPE have participated in the discursive objectification of Ukraine by prioritizing Russia’s narratives over those of its neighbor, there-



by openly preferring the reality constructed by the aggressor. Particularly Germany, with its historical “guilt” for World War II, has tended to highlight Russia as the main victim of the war, although the most significant losses were in the territories and population of Ukraine and Belarus.⁵⁶ Russian propaganda media, which continued operating in Europe even after 2014, has been quite successful in representing Ukraine as a state in which Western Ukrainian “fascists” took control. This was eagerly parroted by many European left-wing political groups and media outlets, as well as local useful idiots and Putinists.⁵⁷ The fact that more Ukrainians fought against the Nazis than all the Western allied forces combined is not widely known in Germany.⁵⁸ Neither has the fact that Ukrainians’ support for nationalist parties has remained negligible compared to Western Europe, where support for radical right-wing nationalist parties has grown steadily.⁵⁹ Openly pro-Russian parties have also been actively participating in elections in Ukraine since 2014 and have enjoyed popularity in Kharkiv, Mariupol and other eastern regions, which are now being destroyed by Russian army shelling.⁶⁰ Vividly fascist tendencies in the Kremlin, including Putin’s admiration of Ivan Ilyin, a Russian fascist philosopher, have been generally highlighted by analysts and specialists, but not by the mainstream media of Western Europe.⁶¹ In this case, as Hill and Stent argue,⁶² the label of “Nazism” that is imposed on Ukrainians does not have anything in common with national socialism, but rather refers to the reluctance of Ukrainians to be controlled by Russia. An eloquent summary of everything mentioned above has been provided by Snyder in one of his tweets: “For thirty years, Germans lectured Ukrainians about fascism. When fascism actually arrived, Germans funded it, and Ukrainians died fighting it”.⁶³

Conclusion

It is impossible to completely predict what direction the situation in the battlefield will take, given how swiftly the events of the Ukrainian-Russian war have been changing recently. However, it is also clear that a neutral Ukraine should not be one of the potential options for resolving the conflict. The Kremlin’s objective is to control all Ukraine, not make it a neutral state, let alone a state that is politically associated with the West. The imperial identity of Russia, shared widely between the population and the elites, will inevitably lead to another conflict, unless Russia rejects imperial myths of the past and internalizes democratic values, which doesn’t seem likely to happen in the near future.

To increase the chances of safeguarding its statehood, Ukraine will therefore need to join a military alliance that offers clear mutual guarantees. Whether it will be NATO depends not only on how effectively the Ukrainian Armed Forces demonstrate their skills and approach to NATO standards, but how Ukraine’s bid is viewed by some of the alliance’s members. As membership issues are reached by consensus, the weakest link in the alliance remains the group of states that have been relying on Russian-generated narratives about Ukraine, specifically Germany, Italy and France; open Putin’s agents in Europe, such as Hungary; countries trying to demonstrate a degree of ‘neutrality’ in relations with Russia and Ukraine such as Turkey; or coun-

tries whose population and governments have traditionally been sympathetic to Russia (e.g. Bulgaria). Unless these obstacles are overcome, Ukraine is unlikely to join NATO in the near future, and will need to search for other alliance options or state-to-state defense agreements. ✖

Dzmitry Pravatorau is an independent researcher based in Brisbane, Australia.



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OLENA ZELENSKA ON THE COVER OF *VOGUE*; "CRITICIZED AND PRAISED"

by Karin Winroth

Fashion has always kept an eye on the army. Few sources of inspiration have been used so regularly and for so long. On the catwalk and on the fashion scene we see uniforms, khaki, army green, cargo pants, camouflage patterns and combat boots. However, when fashionable pop culture refers to war, it has primarily been to economic combat. There may be new markets that lure the vision of the fashion industry. When India emerges as an attractive market, the fashion designers include saris in their collections. When haute couture is in demand in the Middle East, collections are inspired by *The Arabian Nights*. And when the Russian market for luxury fashion opened up in the 2010s, there was a search for the faces who would "open the doors" to this market of extravagance.¹ However, when Olena Zelenska, the first lady of Ukraine, is on the front cover of *Vogue* in the middle of an international crisis due to the Russian war against Ukraine, the fashion magazine comes to relate to war from another perspective.

In July 2022 the digital version of the American and Ukrainian *Vogue* had Olena Zelenska on the cover. The digital version previews the paper issue to be published in October, also including an interview. The photos in the portrait were taken by the celebrity photographer Annie Leibovitz and show a beautiful woman living her present days in a country at war. The photos are beautiful, but also mirror the pressured situation. They illustrate life in the basement, with sandbags round the walls to support the building in case it is bombed. Another photo is taken at Antonov Airport where Zelenska is surrounded by female soldiers. There are no smiles in the photos, rather an air of sorrow.

Even though it is not uncommon for



**"ZELENSKA IS
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first ladies of various countries to be pictured on the cover of *Vogue*, this time it stirred some concern. There have been heated discussions on social media. Why does the most prestigious fashion magazine in the world offer their front cover to a first lady defending her country, a country unknown for its design and fashion? And why does she accept? There were considerable discussions on the matter and Zelenska has been both criticized and praised for taking this opportunity.^{2,3} The critics claim that a fashion magazine is not the appropriate arena for discussing a subject as sensitive as warfare. They consider that the article is only selling through glamorizing

the war. Zelenska is accused of stealing the spotlight from the women actually serving as soldiers. Some also claim she is promoting what they call a cult around Zelenskyy. However, having read the text this kind of criticism is hard to understand. Peter Dickinson, editor of the Atlantic Council's Ukraine Alert service, suggests that most of this criticism is coming from Russia, Russian proxies and people critical of their countries' support for Ukraine.

THE PRAISE comes from those who consider that Zelenska is using every possibility she has to reach out to new audiences to spread understanding of the situation in Ukraine. How they count and keep counting the number of innocent children among the dead. How the younger ones can no longer go to school regularly due to continual attacks. And not least, what it is like for her and her children to be the second prime target for the Russian army (the number one being her husband). How the family is split up for security reasons, regularly changing their positions. How her husband Volodymyr Zelenskyy has not met his children since the war started. And how she struggles to cope with the continuing stress of the situation. Vanessa Friedman, of *The New York Times*, comments on the social media turbulence and the article:

[...]you can't dispute the fact that it once again put the war of Ukraine in the headlines – and in the minds of people who may not have been following it as closely as others. In that context, her interview is not just an interview. It's a battle strategy.⁴

The portrait also sparked a discussion of how you "Sit-Like-A-Girl". Some read-



“INCREASINGLY, THEY ARE POSTING WITH #SITLIKEAGIRL ON SOCIAL MEDIA PHOTOS OF THEMSELVES IN THE SAME POSITION AS ZELENSKA TAKES IN THE VOGUE PHOTO.”

ers were critical of the sitting position of Zelenska on the front cover, thinking it was too masculine. A number of women posted comments of defense in answer to the criticism of the interview and not least on the critique of the posture on the cover. Increasingly, they are posting with #SitLikeAGirl on social media photos of themselves in the same position as Zelenska takes in the *Vogue* photo.⁵

Zelenska was aware that the *Vogue* interview might cause some concern. She was not, however, expecting all the turbulence that was to follow in social media. But the posting of hashtags on #SitLikeAGirl seemed to really touch her heart.

‘I hope our women will never let anyone tell them how to sit, dress, or work’ she continues.⁶

OLENA ZELENSKA was called Olena Kyryshko before her marriage. Like her husband she was raised in a Russian speaking household, her father being a professor at a technical school and her mother an engineer and manager in a construction company. Like her husband, she was 11 when the Berlin Wall fell and in junior high school when Ukraine gained its independence in 1991. The couple met in their hometown Kryvyi Rih, in southeast Ukraine, during high school. At university Zelenska graduated with a degree in architecture, while Zelenskyy graduated in law. Quite soon after their university years, Zelenskyy and some friends founded a group present-

ing satirical comedy. The comedy troupe soon became increasingly popular, so in 2003 they started a production company called Kvartal 95, a company also including Zelenska. The production company became one of the largest in the Russian- and Ukrainian-speaking world. Zelenska preferred to stay out of the limelight, but became an asset for the firm as she was a writer. She wrote scripts for several programs, for example, *Evening Kvartal*, for several years. In 2015 the television series *Servant of the People* was initiated, starring Zelenskyy as a high school teacher who criticizes the ruling class for corruption, and later finds himself elected president of Ukraine. Consequently, Zelenskyy first appeared as the president of Ukraine in this comedy before circumstances changed thoroughly and he took on the role in real life. Sometimes life imitates fiction.

Naturally, Zelenskyy becoming president completely changed the family’s life. Zelenska was upset when Zelenskyy wanted to run for office, but she also wanted to respect his choice. Their life transformed even more on February 24 when the Russia initiated their so-called “special operation”. Zelenska told the *Vogue* reporter:

‘The first weeks after the war broke out, we were just shocked’. And she adds: ‘After Bucha, we understood it was a war intended to exterminate us all. A war of extermination.’⁷

Trying to reach out to audiences through various magazines seems like a strategy grown out of necessity.

Vogue is the world’s oldest fashion magazine, established in the US in 1892 by Arthur Baldwin Turner. He ran the magazine until his death. In 1905 the magazine was bought by Condé Nast, one of the largest publishing houses in the world. The British edition of the magazine was first published in 1916 and the first French *Vogue* in 1920. The magazine is still published in the US but also has a number of local versions. Even though labelled as a fashion magazine, the chief editors have influenced the magazine in various directions over time, also contributing to the trend of fashion publishing. Diana Vreeland, chief editor of American *Vogue* from 1963 to 1971, is presented as a person who shaped the magazine to mirror not only fashion, but also the cultural, social, and political currents of the time, as well as the sexual revolution. So the fashion industry shaped *Vogue*, but *Vogue* also shaped the fashion industry and influenced what readers expect to find inside a fashion magazine. Legendary in our time is the French editor Carine Roitfeld (2001–2011), daughter of the Russian-born film producer Jacques Roitfeld, known for her style as well as for introducing a bolder photographic approach in the French version of the magazine. Even more widely known is Anna Wintour, who was initially editor of the British *Vogue* from 1985 to 1987 but has now been in charge of the American edition since 1988. She

is also portrayed in a book, later a film, called *The Devil wears Prada*.⁸

BOTH RUSSIA and Ukraine have their own version of the magazine, mirrored in the language as well as the photographic and fashion style. However, as of April this year *Vogue* Russia closed due to the “rise in censorship”. Condé Nast has announced the closure of the franchise due to the new censorship laws. The magazine was presented as having more than 800 000 readers at the time, and was the most-read high-end fashion magazine in the country before the closure.

The title of the interview with Zelenska is “A Portrait of Bravery – Ukraine’s First Lady Olena Zelenska”.⁹ It follows the discourse of communication set by the Ukrainian government. Part of the fight against the Russian invasion is the communication strategy using the tagline: “Bravery. To be Ukraine”.¹⁰ As Associate Professor Nadia Kaneva underlines, the strategy is to position Ukraine in the mind of the world as well as relate Ukrainians to a specific character and quality.¹¹

In recent decades, nation branding has become progressively more pervasive. Branding has been introduced widely as a tool for positioning not only products but also political parties and non-commercial organizations as well as nations.¹² In contemporary society, branding aims to influence perception and behavior rather than to focus on a specific exchange. Branding practice has become as much about culture as it is about economics. It is about the stories we tell about ourselves, how we organize ourselves in the world.¹³ The Ukrainian government has most sincerely adopted this, trying to maintain the world’s awareness of the conflict on Ukrainian territory and the qualities of the Ukrainian people.

The portrait of Zelenska in *Vogue* is a strategy to reach new audiences and to illustrate another angle of the situation in Ukraine, according to Zelenska herself. It is in the interest of the country that the world is reminded of the ongoing conflict, as Ukraine depends on support from the outside world. The interview in *Vogue* also presents the conflict through a different voice than those reporting on the



From Olena Zelenska's official Instagram.

news. The news covers battles, numbers of the dead, and weapons. This interview shows a civilian woman's side of the war, under just as much pressure as the soldiers with weapons, but in different ways.

When talking about fashion, the images are very subtle and sophisticated. They are simple, showing the clothes discreetly. They also portray a beautiful woman, with big green-brown eyes, her hair loose, looking natural and serious. She represents a natural beauty not often seen today in fashion magazines, as facial surgery has become a regular habit in the world. If the fashion scene needs a new trend – which it usually does – being natural would offer a possibility. In addition, articles such as this one are usually presented with extravagant fashion photos, clearly informing the reader about the designer brands used. But this time the names of the Ukrainian designers are only mentioned in the small print below the images. In the physical publication this is even more discreet, showing the designer names only in connection with the last photo.

IT SHOULD BE mentioned that Volodymyr Zelenskyy has been on the cover of a number of magazines¹⁴ and Olena Zelenska has been on the cover of *Time*, for example.¹⁵ However, the cover of *Vogue* evoked more intense emotions and reactions in social media. This leads us further to the question of *Vogue*'s interest in this matter. Why is a fashion magazine reaching out to a country in distress? Are they

trying to stay relevant when the world is turning to an even more politically polarized setting? Do they once more wish to have the status of mirroring the cultural, social and political currents of the times?

In any case, social media has become a powerful weapon in our time. When the magazine *Vogue* (US) was published in October 2022, Zelenska was no longer on the cover. The interview “Portrait of Bravery” is still intact and extended. This time the social media storm about the digital article is discussed and commented upon. The cover, though, shows a photo of the American actress Jennifer Lawrence. On the front page there is a text relating to the Zelenska article, titled “Courage under fire – Ukraine’s Olena Zelenska”. For sure, there were debates within the power circle within the publishing house of how to relate to the social media turbulence. And for sure Anna Wintour, nowadays also Global Editorial Director of the *Vogue* Magazine, was involved.

Authenticity is said to be a strong “currency” in communication today.¹⁶ Corporations, nations, and brands search in various ways for the correct strategy to present themselves as authentic. To be authentic is to be trustworthy, original, and true. However, being true in a world of ambiguity is a challenging strategy. The historian Sophia Rosenfeld vividly discusses how the line between fact and fiction is becoming increasingly obscure. In her book *Democracy and Truth – a short history*¹⁷ she analyses the relation between the two concepts from a historical perspective. How the view of the truth can vary over time has been thoroughly illustrated in the European history of the 20th century. Truth as a concept has, however, never been a political virtue, according to the writer. Rather, deception has been an accepted strategy for winning political favor. Discussing authenticity and branding in our times is as important as it is relevant. However, in the situation of the world today, there are many voices stating that Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Olena Zelenska do represent bravery. ✕

Karin Winroth is Associate Professor in Business Studies at the School of Social Studies, Södertörn University.

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WHAT HAPPENED TO THE RUSSIAN FASHION MAFIA?

by Karin Winroth

During the 2010s a new group entered the stage of fashion celebrities. A handful of young Russian women made their appearance on the international fashion scene and became known for their varied style, their charm, and their constellation.¹ They were seen as both exotic and inspiring, using the latest trends as well as Russian traditions for their looks. Appearing in a tiara and a feminine dress, or thigh high boots with a short skirt, made their looks surprising and cool – everything that the viral fashion industry needed. They were also seen as gate openers to the attractive market of luxury fashion in Russia, and were consequently used as models, guest designer and collaborators. All of a sudden, being Russian was related to being trendy and cool. And Russian designers started to show their collections at international Fashion Weeks. Privately, these women were married to or had close connections to Russia's oligarchs, making the financing of their wardrobes something quite above the ordinary.

Even though there was a larger number of people involved in the cool Russian Fashion Pack, some individuals stood out as being at the heart of the Russian Fashion Mafia. Miroslava Duma (called Mira Duma) was often presented as the leader of the group, being an international digital fashion entrepreneur. Elena Perminova is a model, with a "Cinderella background". Nowadays she has four children together with the former KGB agent Lebedev (also a publishing mogul and a

Representative in the Duma). Ulyana Sergeenko was once a model but developed has her own fashion brand during the last decade. She was appointed "Look of the year" by Style.com in 2012, an appointment that became a sort of game-changer for the Russian fashionistas. Suddenly they were "the IT-girls". Even if a bit more private, the designer Vika Gazinskaya was usually also mentioned as one of the people in the core Russian Mafia.

Though they all came to live in Moscow, most of these women were from

"THESE WOMEN WERE MARRIED TO OR HAD CLOSE CONNECTIONS TO RUSSIA'S OLIGARCHS."

other parts of Russia. Mira Duma and Elena Perminova both grew up in Siberia, and Ulyana Sergeenko originates from Kazakhstan. Vika Gazinskaya is the only one in the constellation who grew up in Moscow. This illustrates how these women became part of

the changing circumstances in Russia and the movement of people after the fall of the Soviet Union.

MIRA DUMA WAS earlier called "the force of the fashion industry" by the *Financial Times*,² and "the most connected digital entrepreneur" by *Vogue*.³ She was also acknowledged in "The World Economic Forum Young Global Leader" (YGL), Class of 2018.⁴ There she was recognized for her professional accomplishments, commitment to society, and potential to contribute to shaping the future of the world through leadership. However, due to a faux pas on social media, after she was accused of being both racist and homophobic, she dropped her public appearance and left the central stage of fashion.



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

At the Paris Fashion Show in 2013. From left, Polina Kitsenko, owner of fashion shop Podium in Moscow, Elena Perminova, model, Natalia Vodionova, model, Ulyana Sergeenko, designer, Vika Gazinskaya, designer, and Mira Duma, digital entrepreneur in fashion.

After the years of Covid closure, when the world was making socializing a possibility once more, Putin attacked Ukraine in February 2022. This meant controversies about how Russians are seen in all industries, including in fashion. So, what has happened to the Russian Fashion Mafia? How did they survive the time of Covid and the internationally so noticed conflict between Russia and Ukraine?

The entrepreneurial star of the group, Mira Duma, had already resigned from the spotlight in 2018 when she was accused of overstepping social norms.⁵ Coming from the East of Europe means that you do not always understand the “rules” of the West until it is too late. In addition, there were rumors of somebody or a group who wanted her away from the central fashion stage. In the early spring of 2018, she withdrew from all her assignments in the corporation she had

contributed to shaping except from the Future Tech Lab, the firm she had created by herself. In late 2019 she appeared again on Instagram, informing followers that she had been cured of a deadly disease. After this, her Instagram account mostly showed photos of her with her children, often going downhill skiing together. Her Instagram also contains images of environmentally friendly clothes from the brand Pangaia.

However, on February 24, photos of a different kind appeared on her Instagram account. As her parents had emigrated from Ukraine to Siberia, the family has close connections to their relatives still in Ukraine. At first Ms. Duma showed some photos of peaceful resistance of the war, including a photo of a man with a sign saying, “I am ashamed of being Russian”. The photos are no longer to be found on the account. The latest post (dated



Mira Duma's Instagram account, March 20, 2022.

March 20, 2022) is a black image with the text, “day 24”, acknowledging that a dear member of the family passed away the previous night.⁶ Not only is the family from Ukraine: In addition, Duma's father Vasily Duma was a senator in the Russian Federation from 2004 to 2011 as well as

head of the Ukrainian diaspora between 2005 and 2012. As for her personal status, official sources claim that Mira Duma is divorced from her husband Alexander Mikheev, as well as stating that she has never been divorced. In addition to Duma's account on Instagram, there is also a Mira Duma fan group on one account, showing her earlier outfits.⁷ She is still remembered and cherished as an outstanding and inspiring fashionista.

THE DESIGNER Ulyana Sergeenko has continued to develop and show her own fashion brand.⁸ You can find shows from her Spring Summer collection 2022 on YouTube. However, these films are from late January 2022, and subsequently there is nothing more recent. The latest post on her Instagram is from January 25, 2022. It has been hard to get in touch with both Mira Duma and Ulyana Sergeenko, according to sources. Rumors says they are worried about how the Kremlin might react if they act in public.⁹ Both of them are still located in Russia.

Vika Gazinskaya was always the low-profile Russian of the group, not exposing very much of her private life. She still keeps her life private, but her design is vivid and visible. Her experience includes launching a guest collection in 2014 for & Other Stories, a brand owned by the Swedish retailer H&M. Gazinskaya is, however, mostly known for her own design branded under her name. Also, her latest collection, Fall Winter 2022–2023, is exposed on various sites on the Internet.¹⁰

THE MOST VISUAL Russian fashionista nowadays is the model, Elena Perminova. Her Instagram is still regularly updated.¹¹ The posts usually show herself in various outfits, or her visits at exotic and beautiful destinations. She does expose brands such as Bulgari and Prada on her account, so there are probably commercial interests involved in some of



Model Elena Perminova and media mogul Alexander Lebedev in 2017.

her posts. She is also the only one of the group who travels in Europe, for instance visiting Milan in September 2022, and in other parts of the world. There is a black image posted on February 24, 2022, but otherwise no references to Russia's war

against Ukraine. Her children are sometimes shown on the views of Instagram, but her partner/husband Alexander Lebedev very seldom appears in the images.

Alexander Lebedev is a former KGB agent, nowadays a media mogul. As of today, he is on Canada's sanction list due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, something that has stirred some attention in Britain. Lebedev's son,

Evgeny Lebedev, has been a member of the House of Lords since 2020, and is also owner of the *Evening Standard*, as well as other papers. Lord Evgeny Lebedev has condemned the invasion of Ukraine, and also encouraged Putin to withdraw his "military operation".¹² However, he also

expresses understanding for the fact that every person with Russian roots is under scrutiny under these circumstances.¹³

Political turbulence in Europe has always stirred economic changes and personal sacrifices. At the present time, however, this poisonous tonic involves nuclear weapons and climate change to a degree that make the consequences more perilous than ever. The flourishing Russian fashion market that seemed so attractive in the 2010s now seems to be dried up and barren. ✕

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Reactor 4 in the Chernobyl
Nuclear Power Plant.

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

CHERNOBYL

AS A POST-SOVIET MEMORY SPACE

How ideas of progress
and fear shaped
a nuclear heritage site

by **Achim Klüppelberg**

abstract

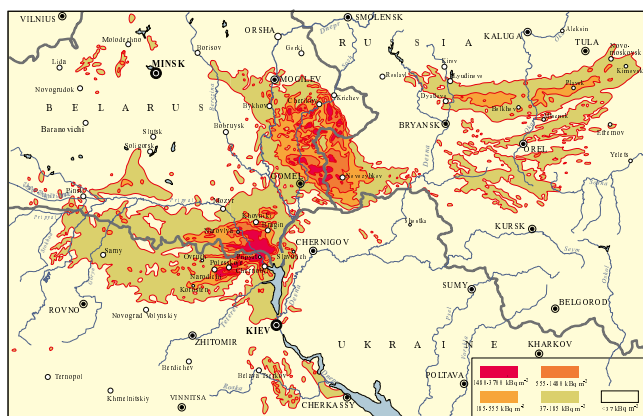
What Chernobyl means to different people has dramatically changed over time. Today, its image mostly invokes fear of radiation, illness, as well as uncertainty. The ruins of the plant are regarded as a somewhat unpredictable source of danger that needs constant attention and monitoring. This is a remarkable historical change from how Chernobyl used to be seen. Before 1986, the construction of Ukraine's first major nuclear power plant symbolized progress and the hope for a better future. In light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and recent media coverage of nuclear energy in this context, Chernobyl has truly become a memory space, serving as a place for projections of a multitude of attitudes regarding nuclear safety, catastrophe, war, maintenance and negligence.

KEY WORDS: Chernobyl, nuclear heritage, legacy, communism.

Chernobyl was in the news in March 2022 because parts of the Russian invasion force captured the plant and caused disruptions which, in turn, fueled fears of the possibility of another disaster.¹ When the Russians retreated from Chernobyl after the failed first attack on Kyiv, it became headline news that Russian soldiers had actually built trenches in the heavily contaminated Red Forest, close to the plant. Media outlets were concerned about cases of radiation sickness in the Russian forces and the renewed spread by wind and contaminated dust of radioisotopes.²

When Zaporizhzhia, Europe's largest nuclear power plant was repeatedly attacked and caught up in warfare, this became the focus of intense media interest, culminating in a visit by the IAEA's General Secretary's commission to assess the damage to the plant and help prevent any spread of radionuclides into the environment and atmosphere.³ The Chernobyl disaster has already demonstrated what could happen in the event of an explosion of a single reactor of that size. Zaporizhzhia has six of them, and if a meltdown were to occur, it would be the first ever major nuclear reactor explosion caused by warfare.

Following the consequences of the Russian invasion in Ukraine, EU countries see themselves being forced to commit to making tough decisions in the energy sector. Russian sources of fossil fuels are no longer feasible from a political perspective



Surface ground deposition of caesium-137 released in the Chernobyl accident. Source: UNSCEAR 2000 report

causing politicians to scramble for alternative sources of electricity and heat. For the German Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, Robert Habeck, despite his policies originating in the so-called “green” party, one of the apparently necessary countermeasures is the extension of the operational life of all three remaining nuclear power plants in the country until mid-April 2023.⁴ Merkel’s government had negotiated a phase out of nuclear energy until the end of 2022, but Habeck is now seeking to change this decision in the face of energy shortages in the coming winter.⁵ This represents a complete U-turn from both Habeck’s pre-election position on nuclear energy and the previously established and codified paths of decision-making. Political ambitions aside, these power plants have reached the end of their operational life and are not that easy to keep online. The companies Preussen Elektra, EnBW and RWE, which operate these plants, even doubt whether it would be technically and economically feasible to keep them running.⁶ While some people still support this decision, the ongoing discussions about the potential risks once again evoke the ghost of Chernobyl.⁷ This is linked to the continuous threat of nuclear warfare from Russian President Putin and inevitably places the Chernobyl disaster in the minds of people trying to come to terms with the potential conflict scenarios and their consequences. Chernobyl has become a term that on the one hand describes a roughly defined scale for nuclear disasters enabling comparisons in other

socio-political contexts. On the other hand, it also has become a term that invokes fear and is being used in debates to influence the discourse against nuclear power.

On another note, unrelated to the war, the wild response to HBO’s miniseries *Chernobyl* and the continuing publication of high-class scientific literature has estab-

lished that both scholarly and public interest in the Chernobyl disaster has not waned.⁸ There are many reasons for this. First, there are remaining questions that demand answers about the disaster and its consequences. Second, these consequences still play a profound role in the present for many people, especially in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. Third, the debate on Chernobyl is still ongoing because it influences the discourse on a potential future for nuclear energy in a plethora of countries. One example is the controversy surrounding Kate Brown’s *Manual for Survival*, which is an historic account of the health crisis in Belarus and Ukraine following the disaster at Chernobyl in 1986.⁹ Pro-nuclear activists strongly criticized Brown’s account and discredited her for being unscientific and biased, which, in turn, provoked a response from her.¹⁰

Chernobyl as a memory space

This supports the interpretation by Kalmbach and Uekötter that Chernobyl has become a memory space; a place which became both a site and a projection space for a catastrophe, for heritage, and for images of the future.¹¹ It became a metaphor for nuclear fallout, technocratic hubris, and the hope of overcoming its consequences, as well as for its vulnerability to war and terrorism, even now after the plant has been shut down for more than 22 years.¹² The collective memory of Ukraine, the region and Europe has linked Chernobyl to these projections, because of the place’s history, ideas of industrial progress, fears of technological failures, as well as imaginations of survival, overcoming and reclamation.

Today, we only remember parts of the massive initial liquidation process. The Soviets struggled to contain the spread of radioisotopes using every tool, material, and personnel they could mobilize in a situation that had never occurred before. Unfortunately, apart from building the first sarcophagus they largely failed, as contamination and redistribution continued to happen over time. Man-made radioisotopes remained in many unintended locations, such as tree stems, lichen, soil, aquifers, animal and human bodies. Gradually it became clear that many attempts at containment were doomed to fail due to the nature of some isotopes, which will remain toxic for hundreds or even thousands of years. The 30-km zone surrounding the devastated power plant acts as a reminder for the attempt to keep potentially dangerous – but mostly invisible to the human senses – radiation inside a designated area. This attempt notwithstanding, toxic radioisotopes are being recirculated through several pathways, unintended from liquidators.

When plants grow, they incorporate radioisotopes into their cells. As soon as they die and rot away, these isotopes are dispersed again into the soil. Trees form leaves built with hot particles and shed them in the fall, causing a redistribution via wind and through the earth. Forest fires during the summer lead to new contaminated clouds that spread radioactive particles as far as the wind can carry them. The vertical migration of radioisotopes through the soil sometimes takes decades and leads to a slow toxic trickle from the surface to the groundwater which, in turn, distributes them across roots, wells, rivulets, streams

**“TOXIC
RADIOISOTOPES
ARE BEING
RECIRCULATED
THROUGH
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PATHWAYS,
UNINTENDED
FROM
LIQUIDATORS.”**



PHOTO: IAN BANCROFT/FLICKR CC



PHOTO: BROOK WARD/FLICKR CC



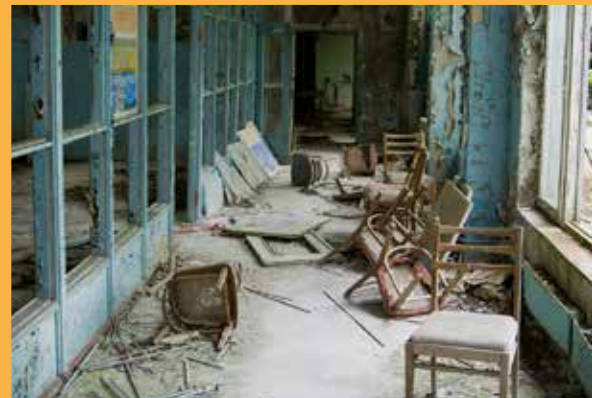
PHOTO: SPOILT EXILE/FLICKR CC



PHOTO: IAN BANCROFT/FLICKR CC

Inside the Chernobyl
exclusion zone.

PHOTO: JORGE FRANGANILLO/FLICKR CC



– and unfortunately also through human pumps into faucets, shower heads and basins.

The Soviets imagined that the struggle against Chernobyl's unleashed radioactivity was a war and used terminology that was reminiscent of that used in WW2. This is understandable, as the fight to limit the damage of the disaster encountered multiple unforeseen obstacles. Even now after all these years, Chernobyl challenges us in new ways. A newly occurring circumstance is making the trickle of radioisotopes into groundwater and waterways more probable for the upcoming decades. One of the toxic particles is plutonium-241, with a half-life of 14 years. Today it decays more and more into americium-241, with a half-life of 433 years. While plutonium does not migrate easily and usually remains fairly stable locked in the soil, americium seems to be more mobile, especially via underground and surface waterways. Americium as an alpha-particle emitter is only dangerous if it enters the body via the digestive system or the lungs but, if it does, it can have devastating consequences. If contaminated water is consumed, americium will lead to long-lasting contamination of the body. Thus, the region potentially faces a new wave of irradiation, 36 years after the burning reactor was smothered and enclosed with concrete and steel.¹³

What Chernobyl meant before 1986

If we go back in time, the Chernobyl nuclear power plant also had a rich history before the catastrophe unveiled and tarnished its reputation for ever. The message portrayed in Soviet documents and media was that of a beacon of achievement and of hope for a better future. What a stark difference! Working at the plant was regarded as prestigious and offered a multitude of benefits, such as better living conditions, a fascinating workplace, and the rewards of belonging to a scientific and therefore also a socialist elite, that is, if you were part of the white-collared personnel inside the plant. For construction workers it was a more down-to-earth experience. Nevertheless, despite the plant's downfall in 1986, the situation was perceived as being generally good for many people involved in the construction, maintenance, and operation of the plant.

Chernobyl was Ukraine's first major nuclear power plant. Even more so, it brought a domestic Soviet reactor design to the Pripyat Marshes, one of the newest high-tech industrial endeavors of the late 1960s. Suddenly a region that had previously been characterized by relatively sparse settlements, agriculture,

fishing, gathering and hunting – after all, the Pripjat Marshes are Europe's largest wetland area and form an invaluable diverse ecosystem – was to become a showpiece of Soviet modernity. A perceived backward region was to be catapulted into the Socialist avantgarde or, in a Marxist-Leninist interpretation, the

people of the Marshes were to be elevated to an advanced stage of Socialism through the implementation of modern technology, built by the hands of ordinary workers.¹⁴

This grand, and in my eyes profoundly ideological, task did not come without its obstacles. The plant's leadership had to tackle a multitude of problems, starting from a lack of sufficient building material, the poor quality of key equipment, to the ever-increasing pressure of Gosplan's demand for the rapid fulfilment of plans.¹⁵ While the progress of construction was remarkable, wrong decisions were made, and accidents happened. Not least, the partial meltdown in reactor one in 1982 marked a significant precursor to what was to come in 1986. Nevertheless, business continued as usual and it was only in 1986, when the scale of the problem got out of hand and the plant's shortcomings became impossible to hide, that the positive connotations towards the power plant became negative.

As the catastrophe of Chernobyl unfolded, the mistakes in this approach of avoiding the signs had also registered in the Soviet government. At a Politburo meeting to discuss the situation at Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Moscow on July 2, 1986, USSR Prime Minister Ryzhkov said: "The accident was inevitable.... If it hadn't happened here and now, it would have happened somewhere else. We have been heading toward this for a long time."¹⁶ Ryzhkov had put his finger on the prevailing wound of the Soviet nuclear industry, which materialized in the destroyed reactor 4 at the power plant. A change in narrative had inevitably occurred.

What Chernobyl represents

The change from a beacon of hope and progress to one that represented what could go wrong with a nuclear reactor is characteristic of Chernobyl as a memory space. Chernobyl might mean different things to different people. Pro-nuclear activists might see it as something detrimental to the industry; anti-nuclear proponents might see it as a prime example of public argument along their lines; former residents might see it as their former home and have different kinds of memories; nuclear engineers might see it as a spectacular workplace; biologists as an extraordinary 30-km² open laboratory; or the Ukrainian state might see it as an area which needs to be reclaimed for agriculture. In any case, all these associations are firmly linked to Chernobyl as a physical place, which I interpret as a monument of Soviet nuclear heritage.

The word *Chernobyl* as a place has become a household name



"Atoms for Peace and Communism", Soviet propaganda poster.

“THE CHERNOBYL NUCLEAR POWER PLANT ALSO HAD A RICH HISTORY BEFORE THE CATASTROPHE UNVEILED AND TARNISHED ITS REPUTATION FOR EVER.”

in everyday discussions. While it represents something slightly different for everyone, its common denominators are sufficient to keep Chernobyl in the discourse and the collective memory. As such, it also means more than the actual power plant, but also the 30-km exclusion zone, contamination, fears of fallout, hopes for overcoming and healing, and a standing critique of the ideas of modernity. The word *Chernobyl* has transcended its original location-bound meaning and has become an interpretative term with many personal meanings and is used in discussions that are not about the original location of the power plant. In this way, the memory space of *Chernobyl* can be placed next to Hiroshima, Fukushima, Bhopal, or the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. What will become of this memory space is uncertain, but it is certain that it has left its mark on our societies and will persist as a projection space of different qualities – both negative and positive – for the foreseeable time to come. ✕

Achim Klüppelberg is a PhD-candidate in History of Science, Technology and Environment at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm.

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TSOPI, GEORGIA

Where Azerbaijanis
and Armenians
are living side-by-side

by **Klaudia Kosicińska**

The Georgian village Tsopi is situated around eight kilometers from the border with Armenia.

The majority of the population are Azerbaijanis, who account for 73% of the village population or 596 persons. It is a small village but Tsopi is well-known for being a place where Armenians and Azerbaijanis live side by side in a relatively peaceful way. Researchers and journalists come here to describe their co-existence as a model of a peaceful neighborhood in the context of two conflicting nations, and some of them make a comprehensive analysis of local relations. One might see difficulties with examining the contradiction between the majority of Azerbaijanis and Armenians living in Armenia and Azerbaijan who rarely communicate with each other owing to nearly thirty years of conflict, and Azerbaijanis and Armenians who interact and live in the same small village in Georgia. One obstacle to understanding the complex situation may be that there is an existing taboo, among both Azerbaijanis and Armenians, of not talking about the conflict with outsiders.

If we scratch the surface of this idyllic image of co-existence in the village of Tsopi, we may better understand what the limits are to the good relations among neighbors. This is especially interesting in light of the second Nagorno-Karabakh war, that broke out in 2020. In January 2022, I stayed in Tsopi with an Armenian family to learn more about their life and the lives of the other villagers. Having four years' experience of research in Shulaveri, another ethnically mixed village in Marneuli district, and staying with an Azerbaijani family all that time, I was wondering what I could learn when sharing everyday life with an Armenian community.

I soon found out that in Tsopi, residents' relations have been constantly negotiated. Armenians claim that the Armenian population is steady diminishing, and that in their place Azerbaijanis arrive and buy houses abandoned by Armenians. Armenians assure me that there are no conflicts in this situation between the two groups. On the other hand, sentiments related to the war in Nagorno-Karabakh are strong. The taboo regarding the war can be broken, but only in a controlled manner. Such conversations are mostly kept between people close to each other, who are not afraid that their counterpart would think that they are crossing a line or saying too much, which could lead to a drastic change in relations and, as a result, an outbreak of conflict in the neighborhood.

Silencing the war

One example of the sensitiveness of the topic is given by my host, Lora (name changed), a 30-year-old Armenian woman. In 2020, when some Azerbaijani residents were celebrating the victory in the Karabakh war, this was upsetting for, and caused resentment among, Armenians. She tells me that her neighbor, a young Azerbaijani girl, wrote on her Facebook page: "Our people won". "Our?" Lora repeats to me with emphasis, evoking the emotions of that moment. Lora went straight to her neighbor's house and complained to the young girl's mother. The mother in turn ranted at her daughter for writing inappropriate statements. Lora told me that the girl's fiancé is from Baku, and she was probably "influenced by him in a bad way". But my host believes that for the sake of maintaining good neighborly relations, such an incident should never happen in their village again. Finally, she added: "Here is Georgian land, so there should not be any talk about the war to make sure that no incidents related to the war will happen."

Obviously, she found the story upsetting and felt uncertain about the whole situation. Later, Lora said that in 2020, when the war was on-going, she went to the hospital in Marneuli to have surgery. However, when she found out that she was to be operated on by an Azerbaijani woman she got frightened and decided to postpone her treatment, and left the hospital. This feeling of insecurity seems to be built on fear of the potential outcomes if the conflict abroad crosses national borders, which could have consequences for daily life in the village and region. In the case of Lora, it is also the result of long-term remembered and transmitted experiences and stories heard about the first Karabakh war, stories that were revived at the time of the 2020 conflict and contrasted with the relatively peaceful everyday life in the village.



Silencing friendship across borders

I spent most of my time in Tsopi in the company of Lora, her family, neighbors, and relatives. I was able to observe how instant messaging through WhatsApp is an important tool of connecting not only with relatives living in another city or country, but also with friends from the same village. One evening, Lora told me about her two friends, both female medical doctors from Marneuli. One is Georgian, another one is in fact – despite

the previous story – Azerbaijani, and a friend whom she likes and appreciates very much. She kept in touch with the latter on WhatsApp. She added however that for a time, she stopped looking at the content she added in her group account since the doctor went to Baku for a while and did not want her clients from Baku to see that one of her contacts was Armenian. Therefore, the Azerbaijani doctor turned off Lora during her stay in Azerbaijan, and Lora waited patiently for her return, sure that she understood the situation. I will call this social phenomena "silencing contact", trying not to provoke in the wake of war. At the same time, Lora keeps lively contact with some of her Azerbaijani friends, at least from what I could observe while conducting research: Women meet and help each other in various circumstances.

Rimma Marangozyan, an Armenian journalist, notes after conducting interviews in Khojorni, another ethnically mixed village near Tsopi, that disagreements between the two ethnicities exist, but during visits by "outsiders", such as foreign journalists or researchers, residents present only a positive picture of relations in the village, hiding any information that could lead to a disturbance of the mutually beneficial image of the village. In the moments of encounter with the "Other", the inhabitants produce for him/her the image that they imagine that she/he wants to see.

Silent agreement of solidarity

Despite the rule of not talking about neighbors with visitors from outside, I noticed that Lora does not always control herself when it comes to this silent agreement. For example, once her husband's phone broke down and they tried to fix it in the nearby larger village of Sadakhlo which is inhabited by Azerbaijanis. After unsuccessful attempts, Lora lamented to me that not only did they have to pay, but the phone was not fixed. She was convinced that her and her husband's ethnicity probably influenced

this, and use the term "scoundrels" ("aferisty", a term taken from Russian), a common term used in Georgia to describe someone who cheats at getting something done or messing around in their own interest.

However, the residents of the village share a common memory of working together in the past. They often recall

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their memories in their accounts. The collapse of the USSR and the closure of factories left the region in an economic slump, which contributed to changing people's relationships. In addition, the political situation made it difficult to maintain contact with neighbors from Armenia and Azerbaijan since the majority of Azerbaijani citizens of Georgia are not allowed to enter Armenia, and Armenians from Georgia cannot visit Azerbaijan. Nagorno-Karabakh is an unhealed wound that reopened after the 2020 conflict. In particular, people who frequently visit their "kin states" are prone to be hostile towards other groups. There is still uncertainty about the role played by public media in influencing local residents. I even heard some criticism of some TV programs and the way the community was presented in them. They are available on YouTube so this could be shown to me, with comments.

Representatives of both ethnicities have limited access to Georgian television due to the language barrier and broadcasting problems. Thus, many of them watch Azerbaijani, Armenian, or Russian programs.

During the war, the situation in the regions inhabited by Armenians and Azerbaijanis was tense, especially where the possibility of dialogue and daily confrontation was virtually impossible due to the absence of one of the nations, but also in places inhabited by both minorities. The villages where inter-ethnic relations were particularly affected were those where the inhabitants were confronted with a choice between two mutually exclusive needs – on the one hand, a sense of obligation to the ethnic homeland, and on the other, to the neighbor and the Georgian state. This led to cognitive conflicts and the breaking of many personal relationships. Now relations between residents are partly frozen, just as they were after the first war in the 1990s, but now the situation is made maybe even more difficult by the fact that access to the media, to information propagated by Azerbaijan and Armenia, and to news hindering dialogue distributed by both nationalities through Internet channels, can make it much more difficult to mentally detach from the war and stabilize relations. Environmental pressure towards both ethnicities is also a cause. For this reason, despite the fact that living on Georgian territory contributed to neutralizing the tensions between Azerbaijanis and Armenians, nowadays more depends on the policies and cooperation of three countries situated in the South Caucasus than ever before. ❌

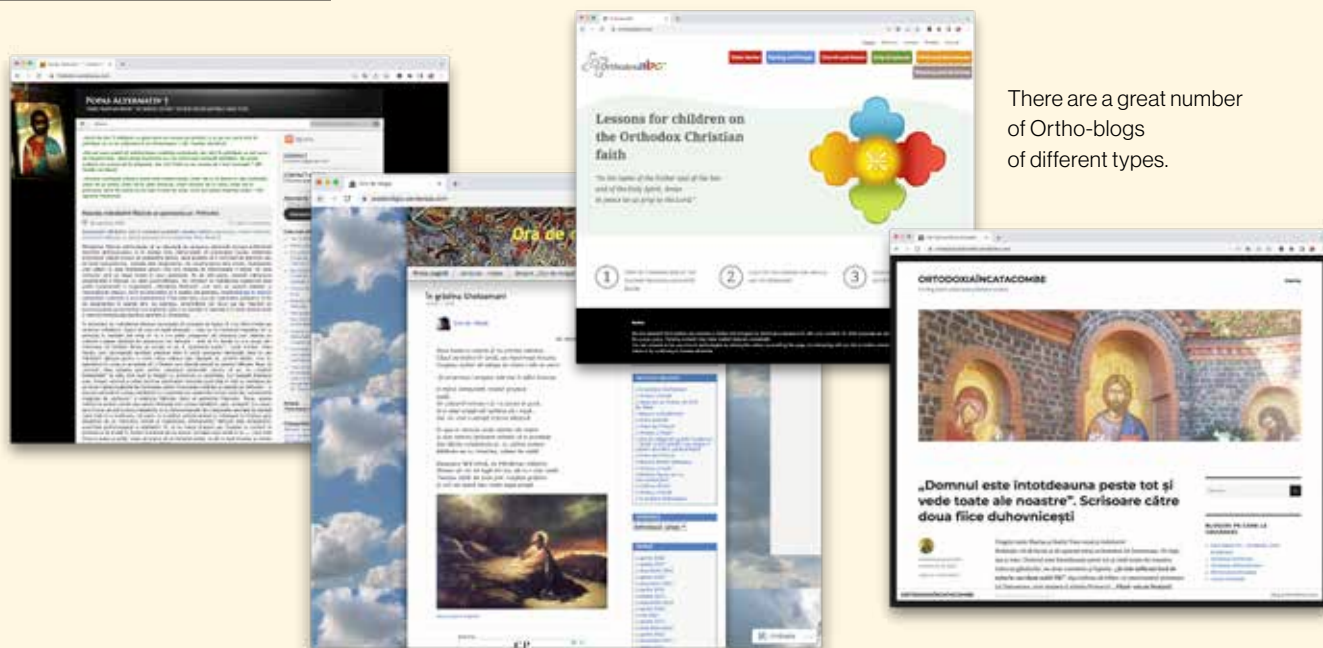
Klaudia Kosicińska is a PhD-candidate in Anthropology at the Polish Academy of Sciences.

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From above: 1. The village seen from the Armenian cemetery. 2. One of the houses in the village. 3. At the local shop and tea house.

PHOTO: KLAUDIA KOSICIŃSKA



There are a great number of Ortho-blogs of different types.

DIGITAL ORTHODOXY

by Dragoș Șamșudean

A typology of non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs

abstract

Social media and the Internet have experienced a rapid development to which the religious factor has not remained indifferent. Religion has found ways to adapt to the online environment. This new online context has been thoroughly analyzed in relation to Christian denominations such as Catholics, Protestants and Neo-Protestant groups, yet we do not know much about how Orthodoxy has adapted online. While a few studies emphasize the presence of Ortho-bloggers in the online environment, we know very little about how they organize their activity in terms of structure, content, and purpose. This study addresses this gap in the literature by proposing a new approach to Ortho-blogging research. It describes the types of Orthodox religious blogs found within the typology of non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs in the context of the Orthodox sphere in Romania. Romania has a large Orthodox population, a very active church at societal and political level and a good Internet infrastructure. In the analysis, several types of the Ortho-blog are highlighted in relation to structure, content, and purpose. This study carries an empirical significance for the study of online religious actors in general and Orthodox Christian actors in particular.

KEY WORDS: Internet, digital religion, orthodoxy, Ortho-blogs, Romania

An introduction to religion and the Internet

In recent decades, religion has shown rapid adaptation to the Internet and the expansion of social media and digital technologies. Hoover and Echchaibi¹ identified three areas of overlap between religion and the online environment: New forms of religious activities and practices emerging within the digital cultures, traditional religions and religious authorities who establish a strong online presences to maintain their traditions and their belief systems, and a “wide range of old traditions, new traditions, non-traditions, hybrid traditions, and aggressively ‘anti’ traditions, [that] are finding a place in digital space”. Several conceptual approaches have been proposed within the field of religious studies to define the relationship between religion and the Internet / the digital environment.

One approach is the concept of “digital religion” that “describes the technological and cultural space that is evoked when we talk about how online and religious spheres have blended”.² Emerging from it within the field of religious studies is the concept of “digital Orthodoxy” which can broadly be defined as the Orthodox religion’s ability to “domesticate” digital technologies

and social media. It frames the attempt of the Orthodox faith to integrate digital technologies in the practice of worship and how the Orthodox Churches responds to a digitalized world.³ Digital Orthodoxy describe a reality in which popular perceptions of Orthodoxy coexist with mediatized forms of religion, particularly in blogs and social media.⁴ The concept “digital Orthodoxy” refers not only to the technological character of Orthodox religion but also acknowledges the specificity of its on-line transmission and representation.⁵ Due to the fact that media have become “the prime arenas where people [. . .] encounter religion in daily life”,⁶ “digital Orthodoxy” can also be seen as an authoritative and authentic form of mediation between secular journalists and the Orthodox churches.⁷ Finally, “digital Orthodoxy” can be seen as a form of “vicarious religion” position in which online Orthodox communities also speak in the name of offline Orthodoxy.⁸ Another approach considers that the relationship between the online environment and religion can be better understood through the concepts of “religion-online” and “online-religion”.⁹ Finally, Hogan and Wellman¹⁰ and Hel-land¹¹ highlight the connection between religion and the online environment as a form of “networked religion”.

While these approaches cover the relationship between Orthodox religion and the online environment, we know very little about the organization of “digital Orthodoxy”. In other words, in order to understand the relationship between religion and the Internet, it is important to first know how the religious factor has adapted to social media in terms of the digital technologies they use, the types of religious actors (institutional, non-institutional) and how they have organized their activity in the online space (the online platforms they use to create their content and structure their web pages and blogs). I proposed the Ortho-sphere in Romania as a case study, considering the fact that Romania has a large Orthodox population, a very active Church at societal and political level and a good Internet infrastructure (for more details see the methodology section). In addition to these, I conducted a systematic review of the Romanian Ortho-sphere. I identified 50 active non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs (with a posting frequency between several posts per day to one or two posts per month) based on dedicated blogging platforms such as WordPress and Web.com, and 80 non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs active on social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram).

THIS ARTICLE ADDRESSES a gap in the literature and aims to identify the types of Orthodox religious blogs found within the typology of non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs. Thus, I propose a new approach in terms of studying the non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs through the lens of a typology. This typology expands the debate on the study of Orthodox blogs and points towards several types of blogs, taking into account their structure,

content, and the objectives pursued. More than that, the article has empirical relevance for the state of research because online Orthodox groups have rarely been covered. Previous research devotes attention to the evolution, organization and activity of online Christian religious actors among Catholics, Protestants and Neo-Protestants groups.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. The next section establishes the theoretical framework, summarizing the main concepts used and debating the literature. The third section is dedicated to the methodology while the fourth section includes the analysis and results. Finally, the last section contains the conclusions.

Ortho-blogs in the literature

Ortho-blogs are one type of religious blog. A religious blog can be viewed as an example of a hypermediated religious space.¹²

“Hypermediated religious spaces” is understood to mean digital venues where private and public, real and virtual, marginalized and mainstream spaces intersect and blur.¹³ On religious blogs, various individuals share religious values, articulate their identity, express their belonging to a community, create common religious meanings, reflect on private religious experiences and practice religious rituals.¹⁴ These types of blogs provide integrative experiences in particular but not necessarily for the faithful, due to the fact that, as a specific feature, religious blogs realize a melding of the personal and the communal, of the sacred and the profane.¹⁵ Finally, a religious

blog can be seen as a tool through which religious communities spiritualize and socially shape the Internet in line with their discourse, worldviews, and practices.¹⁶ Examples of such an approach within the Romanian online environment are, among others, the Ortho-blogs “Serving the Priestess” and “Steps to Resurrection”.

Orthodox blogs are online spaces where the main topics focus on the work of Orthodox clergy and the Orthodox Church. One of the distinctions highlighted by religious studies literature is focused on the entity that manages and finances the religious blog, resulting in a distinction between two types of Ortho-blogs: institutionalized and non-institutionalized. Institutionalized Ortho-blogs are online spaces administered in general by an institutionalized structure within an Orthodox Church, such as patriarchate, archdiocese, episcopate or parish. Institutionalized Ortho-blogs can be managed by other types of religious institutions such as religious NGOs or various types of religious associations.¹⁷ Non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs are online spaces that are administered by ordinary Christians, lay people and members of the clergy, outside the institutional attributions and hierarchy of the Church. This particular type of Orthodox religious blog is characterized by a high degree of interaction with followers in comments and personalized content that is not

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limited to providing religious information to those who access it, but even provides the means to practice religion online.¹⁸

The person who manages an Ortho-blog (institutionalized or non-institutionalized) is called an Ortho-blogger. They are defined as small groups of individuals who share the same orthodox dogmatic norms and values. Their online activity is focused on spiritual life and moral values, as well as the activity of the Orthodox clergy and the Orthodox churches. They provide a new social infrastructure for practicing the Orthodox faith and recruiting followers, in a new 'spiritual market' online.¹⁹ Orthodox bloggers carry out their activity in the Ortho-sphere, the Ortho-dox part of the blogosphere. This segment of the blogosphere has arguably become the main source of informing people about religion, boasting extensive connections with Orthodoxy worldwide, which now numbers some 300 million believers in the Russian Ortho-sphere alone.²⁰ In the literature, the term Ortho-blogger tends to be used to refer only to those persons who have a fundamentalist perspective on Orthodoxy or are members of the Orthodox clergy.²¹ As a type of media actors, Orthodox bloggers may appear as an indication of the pivotal role of the media in the public resurgence of religion.²² For the purpose of this paper a better definition of the Ortho-dox-blogger may be: Someone who posts in an official or semi-official capacity at an Orthodox church, monastery or other Orthodox organization, or an "ordinary" person, follower of the Orthodox faith or a layman, who wants to share stories from different fields with a small group of people using all the digital technologies (e.g. blogging platforms such WordPress or Web.com or social media as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc.).

AS PART OF THE RELIGIOUS communities' online literature, a large number of authors have examined online Christian religious communities, most of the research being focused on Protestant and Neo-Protestant denominations, as well as online Catholic religious communities.²³ However, only a few isolated studies consider the Orthodox communities online, and even fewer their evolution in the context of the new social media technologies. The Russian Federation is among the few areas considered for research on online Orthodox religious communities. One of these studies is focused on the community of Russian Orthodox bloggers on the LiveJournal platform. The results showed that there are both institutionalized Ortho-blogs (administered by churches and monasteries) and non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs (administered by various persons, Orthodox believers or other lay people).²⁴ The study also showed that the Ortho-bloggers do not explicitly discuss issues concerning the mission of Orthodoxy and do not necessarily use this online channel to promote a spiritual mission and the gospel. They often express their own opinion on the faith, or on a range of issues relating to political, economic or even military events.²⁵ Examples from the Roma-

nian online environment are the Ortho-blogs "crestinortodox.ro" discussing war and "cuvantul-ortodox.ro" discussing the European COVID-19 certificate and the QR code in terms of a worldwide conspiracy and the situation of sexual minorities in Romania.

Another important study regarding the online Orthodox communities was conducted by Zasanska,²⁶ from a gender perspective. The study addresses the roles of *matushki*, the wives of Orthodox Christian priests, as (un)aware producers of extra-institutional forms of patriarchal ideology in social media. Matushki, highly respected women within Orthodox communities, increase the patriarchal power of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) through the promotion of Orthodox women's identity as a basis of social and ethnic identities in post-Soviet societies.²⁷ This research also identified that, in the context of blogging in social media, three main groups of bloggers can be recognized: institutionalized blogs, collective blogs open for a wide public (platform vk.com/matyshkaonline) and private religious blogs with restricted possibilities for enrolment. The popular social

platforms for Orthodox bloggers in Russia are *Vkontakte* and *Instagram*. In contrast to the priests' blogs, focusing mainly on religious education and Orthodox practices, *matushki* answer questions about Orthodox life – marriage, love, pregnancy, childbirth, bringing up children, and fashion. This promotion of *matushki* bloggers in social media helps the Church shape positive attitudes in society to the ROC, as well as to impose certain worldviews.²⁸ All these findings from

previous studies may suggest a flat-out rejection of the version of post-Enlightenment secular modernity in which religion is supposed to go private or even die.²⁹

In contrast to studies on the Russian Ortho-sphere, the few studies on the Ortho-sphere in Romania identify two possible features. On the one hand, we are dealing with an Ortho-sphere dominated by institutionalized Ortho-blogs of the parishes and metropolises, which seem to operate on a hierarchical line. However, it seems that often these Ortho-blogs are not properly maintained, showing a low flow of posts, few followers, and outdated data.³⁰ On the other hand, it seems that the Ortho-sphere is becoming a religion in itself, with individuals failing to distinguish faith in real life from that manifested online and within other media spaces.³¹ Moreover, through the diversified content creation options, people assume the role of creator themselves, resembling the Divinity online and offline. Thus, the Romanian Ortho-sphere is also characterized by the appearance of a so-called secular religion which, based on social media technologies, transforms man into God.³²

Methodology

The Romanian Ortho-sphere is an appropriate case for this study for three reasons: Romania is the third largest state in terms of the Orthodox population, has a very active Orthodox Church at

"MATUSHKI ANSWER QUESTIONS ABOUT ORTHODOX LIFE – MARRIAGE, LOVE, PREGNANCY, CHILDBIRTH, BRINGING UP CHILDREN, AND FASHION."



The Russian platform vk.com/matyshkaonline is an example of a collective Ortho-blog open for a wide public.

the societal and political level and a good internet infrastructure (details in the following paragraphs). First, 86 percent of the population in Romania, according to the last census, is of the Orthodox Christian faith. After 1989 and the fall of the communist regime, despite debates in the public space (online, mass media, TV) regarding the collaboration of Church hierarchs with the former communist security apparatus, the Romanian Orthodox Church continued to maintain its majority, with a high level of confidence among the population.³³ In Romania, the public space “is far from being a neutral, apolitical, or irrelevant backdrop to everyday life”. Instead, it is an arena in which every actor, from the individual to the institution (including the Orthodox Church) expresses his/her ideas according to his/her own beliefs, ideologies and practices.³⁴

Second, the Romanian Orthodox Church is a socially and politically active actor in Romania. The institution is distinguished by the constant construction of religious buildings and churches, of which the most important is the National Cathedral currently under construction.³⁵ At the same time, the Romanian Patriarchate stands out due to the social and philanthropic projects it carries out,³⁶ and through the care of Romanian Orthodox Christians in the diaspora.³⁷ Moreover, from a political point of view, the Church has redefined its relations with the secular state by signing a series of protocols that present the relationship between the two actors in a new form of symphony.³⁸ Also, the Orthodox religious institution is very active in debates on human rights, especially regarding the rights of sexual minorities and religious education in schools.³⁹

Finally, according to the Digital Economy and Society Index, the Romanians have fast broadband connections in urban areas, which translates into the second highest share of subscriptions in the European Union. In the same way, mobile broadband is also accelerating, offering Romanians better connectivity. Also, according to the chapter on telecom in Europe’s 2017 Digital Progress Report, the internet market in Romania is characterized by infrastructure-based competition while providing high-speed connections at affordable prices, especially for the benefit of end-users in urban areas. Although Romania’s rural areas still have problems with internet coverage, these are being solved – in October 2017, high speed broadband implementation was completed in 361 localities among the total of 783 marginalized rural localities targeted.⁴⁰

THE DATA COLLECTION for this study includes an examination of documents on Orthodox religious blogs. For this article I considered active Ortho-blogs (at least one post per month) starting in 2007, which marked Romania’s accession to the European Union. This date marks the beginning of Romania’s process of adaptation to a new set of socio-political norms and values. Aiming to identify the nature of the Ortho-blogging phenomenon, I organized the data as follows: from non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs considered as a typology, described from the perspective of several subtypes within it, based on three inclusive criteria: structure, content and purpose of the Orthodox religious blogs. This analytical framework allows a more detailed study of Ortho-blogs, considering the way in which people interact with them,



Figure 1: The central-upper part of an Ortho-blog based on WordPress
Source: The religious web page Jurnal Scoțian [Scottish Diary], (2021).



Figure 2: The right side and the central part of an Ortho-blog based on WordPress. Source: The religious web page Jurnal Scoțian, (2021).

the form and content of the materials posted and the objectives of such religious blogs. This approach also highlights the diversity of Ortho-blogs and emphasize how deeply Orthodoxy merged with new digital technologies in what we might call a process of digitalizing the Orthodox faith. Thus, the next section of the article will focus on a detailed description of the Romanian Orthosphere.

Non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs: a typology

The few studies on the Orthodox religious blogs take a far too general approach to Ortho-blogs, proposing two types: institutionalized and non-institutionalized. However, the practices of Orthodox religious blogging in Romania emphasize a need to further narrow and organize the two existing types. Thus, I consider the non-institutionalized religious blogs rather as a broader typology. Within it there are several types of religious blogs, depending on the platform on which they operate, content and objectives. Next, this section focuses on a detailed description of these types. At the same time, for a comprehensive understanding of the typology discussed, examples based on Romanian Ortho-blogs will be offered.

Types based on structure

From a technological point of view, the structure of blogs is a marker of the digital skills of people who practice such activities in particular and of society in general. The more complex the structure, the more it implies the need for advanced knowledge about how to manage a blog, how to create quality content and how to make connections between different digital technologies. From a cultural-religious point of view, the structure of Ortho-blogs points to the way in which the Orthodox faith has managed to adapt in terms of content and practices to the new digital technologies.

In terms of structure, two main types of Orthodox religious blogs occur. On the one hand there are non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs based on dedicated blogging platforms such as WordPress (e.g. *ortodoxiacatacombe.wordpress.com*, *hristofor.wordpress.com*) and Web.com (e.g. *nistea.com* or *vremuritulburi.com*). WordPress is considered one of the most easily accessible

platforms for someone who wants to practice blogging, in terms of both installing software and using it. Brad Hill, lead blogger for Weblogs Inc., where he covers Google, Yahoo! and digital music, and author of books in the field of digital technologies, describes WordPress as “the first big-name, self-installed blog program to come anywhere near the ease of setting up a blog on a hosted service. [...] I can say for certain that WordPress is the most painless blog installation program I’ve encountered.”⁴¹ In general, Ortho-blogs created on the WordPress platform have a structure similar to a general website. Depending on the type of Orthodox blog, the structure may differ slightly. Ortho-blogs are structured in sections which in turn may contain subsections. The structure of the blog allows real-time communication with the Ortho-blogger through comments and notifications, but also interaction by e-mail or telephone. This information is found in a dedicated and highlighted section of the blog usually called “Contact”. At the same time, as part of the ortho-blog structure, it may have a certain background theme chosen from WordPress options or created / uploaded by the Ortho-blogger.

ALL THESE STRUCTURAL elements can be found in the Ortho-blogs created with this software, in the central-upper part of the blog next to the name of the blog and a short presentation of the author. Also, depending on the typology, on the right side of the Ortho-blogs created on WordPress platforms you can find special sections dedicated to a religious calendar, advertisements, hyper-links to other Ortho-blogs or sites, internal search engines within the Ortho-blog, subscription buttons, and quotes or highlights of the most recent articles posted. Finally, the central part of the Ortho-blog created on this platform is dedicated to displaying materials that may be in text, audio or video format. For a much more comprehensive understanding of the technical aspects set out above, I have attached an example below and discussed the figures.

The Ortho-blog in Figure 1 presents a background theme with a “Celtic cross” specific to the missionary and religious space in which the creator and administrator of the Orthodox blog lives (Scotland), the theme also being in accordance with the name of the blog, *Scottish Journal*. At the same time, on the left next to the title, the name of the Ortho-blogger and his profession can

be seen. The dedicated “contact” section and a section that includes reviews about the blog are placed on the right.

In Figure 2, you can see different internal engines (search, subscription) on the right side of the Ortho-blog as well as the number of followers who already subscribe. In the central part you can see how the articles and materials on the blog are displayed, the option to add comments to the articles and materials posted being highlighted. A particular element within the selected Ortho-blog is represented by the option to disseminate part of each article / material posted on the blog. This is done through connections with other digital technologies and applications such as WhatsApp and Facebook, with the option to share via Facebook also highlighting the number of followers on the blog who have already shared the respective content. At the same time there is the option to send an article by e-mail or to print it. In summary, the structure of an Ortho-blog created using the WordPress platform comprises three main parts: The central-top part where we find the main sections of the Ortho-blog such as the dedicated contact section, the right edge of the Ortho-blog which is a display space for secondary content elements, and the central part reserved for displaying materials and comments or interactions within the Ortho-blog.

In relation to the structure, another type are non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs based on social media platforms such as Myspace, Facebook and Instagram. These platforms are defined as: “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.”⁴² Social media platforms are open to anyone and provide a wide range of general social media features (blogging, profile management, friend management and video, audio and photo sharing) to serve a broad demographic.⁴³ As part of the options and features of social media platforms, blogging on Myspace, Facebook and other such networks has provided a new space for practicing and manifesting religion. Through what the literature calls microblogging, social media have created a new environment for communication and religious rituals, favoring the development of new religious actors such as Ortho-bloggers.⁴⁴

An Ortho-blog created within the Facebook platform presents in the upper central part a series of predefined sections of the system as follows: posts, about, mentions, followers and several sections which in turn include a series of subsections, also predefined (photos, videos, live, groups, events, music, questions, visits, sports, movies, shows, books, appreciations, reviews). Unlike the dedicated blogging platforms where the blogger establishes his sections and subsections of the Ortho-blog, in the case of social networks these are pre-established, the user operating

“SOCIAL MEDIA HAVE CREATED A NEW ENVIRONMENT FOR COMMUNICATION AND RELIGIOUS RITUALS, FAVORING THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW RELIGIOUS ACTORS SUCH AS ORTHO-BLOGGERS.”



Figure 3: Hyperlinked Ortho-blog based on a social media platform
Source: Facebook web page Orthodoxia Tinerilor (2021).

within the limits of this structure. As in the case of blogs on the dedicated platform, Ortho-blogs created on Facebook have the option of a background theme with the option to add a profile photo and a short description. At the same time, for Ortho-blogs created on social networks there is the option of a section dedicated to displaying contact information as well as the location on the left side of the Ortho-blog.

DESPITE THE FACT that the structure is somewhat pre-established and little influenced by the Ortho-blogger, it allows a much more dynamic interaction with followers and connectivity with other communities and much faster information transmission through

the technologies embedded in the structure. The digital technologies used, the connection to other digital platforms and applications, and the options for direct contact with followers (email, comments, messenger) are markers that individuals are interested not only in following such blogs, but in interacting with the content and the Ortho-bloggers. The first of these technologies is represented by the Facebook Messenger system, which allows real-time communication with the Ortho-blogger, in addition to the traditional comment option. Another particular innovation is the interactive

notification system “emoji react”, which allows the Ortho-blogger to receive quick feedback on a post. Last, but not least, the “share” function allows a much faster dissemination of the materials posted on the blog than in the case of Ortho-blogs created on dedicated blogging platforms. In addition to these structural elements of the Ortho-blog, the internal algorithm of social media based on “interests” allows the rapid increase in the number of followers.⁴⁵ The Ortho-blog is automatically recommended to interested persons.

In the Romanian Ortho-sphere, an example of such a blog is depicted in Figure 3.



The Ortho-blog *patriarhia.ro* offers informative content organized in ten main sections.

As shown in the Figure 3, Ortho-blogs created on social media platforms are connected with Ortho-blogs created on a dedicated blogging platform through a direct hyperlink.

When it comes to structure, both Ortho-blogs created on dedicated blogging platforms and those created on social networking platforms have advantages and disadvantages. The structure of the former allows the addition of sections and subsections according to the creator's need and preferences but does not allow a very efficient distribution of content, feedback is limited to comments, and the interaction of the Ortho-blogger with the community takes place only through comments and sources external to the ortho-blog structure. For Ortho-blogs created on dedicated blogging platforms, the focus is on its content and display and less on interaction with followers. Specific themes and background elements are selected to attract followers to read the content and to distribute it, without particularly encouraging an active interaction between Ortho-blogger and followers. This points to the different types of motivations that these Orthodox bloggers may have in their online activity.

The structure of the second category of Ortho-blogs allows a faster distribution of content, an active interaction of the blogger with the community, and real-time communication, all with the help of digital technologies in the structure of social networking platforms. At the same time, the basic structure is predefined with categories and subcategories that cannot be modified.

As can be seen from Figure 4, the option of managing and creating this type of Ortho-blog emphasizes a focus on an active and constant interaction with the followers. The quick sharing options, comments and various reactions (in the order presented in the figure above: emojis representing different human feelings, GIFs that represent short video reactions, animations and more emoji options can be seen) discussed above, along with the possibilities of real-time text messaging and even live video-streaming, highlight the focus of Ortho-blogs created on social networks on interaction with the Ortho-blogger online community. From the followers' point of view, they have a wide variety of options for interacting and communicating with the creators

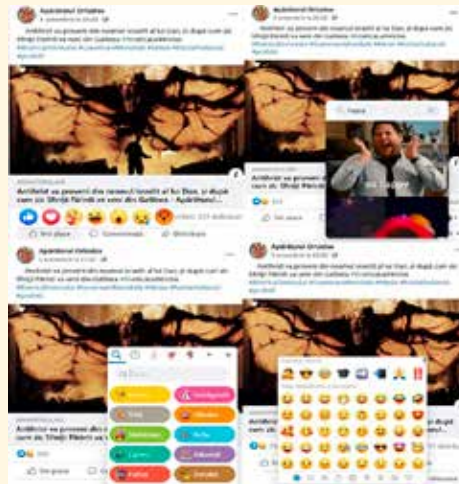


Figure 4: Reaction/interaction on Ortho-blogs based on social media platform. Source: Facebook social media page *Apărătorul Ortodox* (2021).

of religious content, to express their feelings and opinions towards the materials and topics posted on the blog. This points to the complexity of religious blogging activity, with Ortho-blogs aiming to address even the emotional side of their followers.

Types based on content

Ortho-blogs of this type mainly include materials and information about religion but also information concerning science, politics, economics and security. Examples of such content can be found in the Ortho-blogs *ortodoxinfo.ro*, *cuvantul-ortodox.ro* and *sfaturiortodoxe.ro*. Thus, similar to the previous subsection, here we are also face two types. First, we consider non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs that display and discuss only religious content. The religious content can include simple informative articles about the activity of hierarchs and priests (participation in liturgical services, consecration of liturgical spaces and churches), about decisions of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church or about canonical interreligious visits. Information about the Church's activity in the social and philanthropic field may also be posted (humanitarian aid projects, social canteens, summer schools, building churches, etc.). Advertising materials for various church and liturgical objects, icons and magazines as well as the display of materials with offers of theological educational institutions may be presented for information purposes. The informative material may also address topics from all over the Orthodox world regarding the activity of some regional synaxes and ecumenical synods, and the representation of the Orthodox Church in various global forums (e.g. World Council of Churches).

ORTHO-BLOGS WITH predominantly informative content are mostly institutionalized Ortho-blogs. The *patriarhia.ro* Ortho-blog offers a wide range of informative content organized in ten main sections, ranging from the structure of the Romanian Orthodox Church to the activity of the patriarch and the patriarchal administration and to official documents and publications (synodal statutes, economic reports). Ortho-blogs of metropolises and

Table 1: Types of Non-Institutionalized Ortho-blogs

Criteria	Type	Description	Example
Structure	Non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs based on dedicated blogging platforms	Created on platforms such as WordPress and Web.com with WordPress being the most used platform within this type	hristofor.wordpress.com
	Non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs based on social media platforms	Created on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram	instagram.com/micul.ortodox
Content	Non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs that display and discuss only religious content	Discuss religious content focused only on a certain topic (only dogmatic, only ecclesiological) or religious content with mixed topics of discussion (church history, dogmatics, holy fathers of the church, liturgy).	oradereligie.wordpress.com
	Non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs that display and discuss non-religious content	Display materials with content from outside the religious field that deal with issues and topics of politics, security, economics, conspiracy theories and other.	cuvantul-ortodox.ro
Purpose	Informative	Provide information about the activity of the patriarch, archbishops, bishops and priests, organization of pilgrimages, guides about missionary and social-philanthropic activities and also about the program of church services, main dogmas, prayers and how to pray.	prieteniiismunteathos.wordpress.com
	Didactic / Catechetical	Provide the user with the opportunity to be educated in the Orthodox faith.	ortodoxiatinerilor.ro
	Theological	Dedicated to theological and dogmatic discussions, a space dedicated to debates between theologians, patristic and scriptural analyses and the presentation of scientific and specialized articles in theology.	forum.teologie.net

bishoprics may also display information regarding exams and related bibliographies, in order to fill vacant parishes or the program of the hierarchy's audiences with the faithful.

The religious content category also includes materials related to the practice of ritual and specific worship known as orthopraxy. Thus, the Ortho-blog may contain material on how and how often a Christian should pray, what fasting is and why the Church urges people to fast, as well as various prayer books, Akathist hymns, and prayers for different situations and needs. All these elements of content can be synchronized and displayed along with an Orthodox calendar that displays in real time the date and day with the saints who are celebrated by the church on that day, so that the followers know who to pray to, whether to fast or not or if it is a day on which the Divine Liturgy is celebrated. This type of content is often correlated in Ortho-blogs with materials related to ritual and liturgical elements. In other words, materials and content related to the Divine Liturgy and other religious ceremonies performed by priests are presented. Also, materials related to mysteries such as baptism, confession and marriage can be found, materials that represent a guide to why, when and for what purpose these mysteries are performed.

Another type of religious content that a user may encounter in an Ortho-blog comprises articles on biblical and patristic texts, often accompanied by comments and debates by established theologians. This type of content can also be delivered in the form of video and / or audio recorded sermons, most often presented by a well-known clergyman, hierarchy or monk from the Holy Mount Athos. In addition to the explanations and debates highlighted by members of the clergy based on biblical texts, users can find articles that highlight the life of a certain saint, hermit or monk, texts often taken from works such as *Philocalia* or *Patericon*. This type of material often has an educational character, complemented with a series of teachings that the Orthodox Christian is instructed to take as a model and landmark in everyday life. Related to this type of didactic content is the catechetical content; this is similar, but pursues an Orthodox ecclesiological Christian education, not necessarily dogmatic. As in the previous case, they include video and / or audio material of interfaith and interreligious debates between Orthodox Church members and other Christian denominations (Protestant and Neo-Protestant) or other religions (Muslims, Mosaic). Examples of Romanian Ortho-blogs with catechetical



The blogs *ortodoxinfo.ro*, *cuvantul-ortodox.ro* and *sfaturiortodoxe.ro* are examples of non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs.

and didactic content are *www.oodegr.com*, *orthodoxabc.com*, and *oradereligie.wordpress.com*,

The religious content also includes the posting of materials containing accounts of some of the Ortho-bloggers' personal spiritual experiences and even of their followers. These include accounts of miraculous healings, visions of supernatural entities, extrasensory experiences of heaven and hell, and accounts of people returning from the dead. Also, materials with various holy relics (icons that performed miracles, objects belonging to people considered holy) may be presented as well as content related to certain holy places (e.g. Mount Athos, the Holy Sepulcher, etc.) and the experience of visiting those places. Other types of posts with religious content may be materials with various recipes for fasting food, materials related to the role of Christian women and women's conduct in Orthodoxy, as well as various religious materials for children such as coloring books, bibles for children and prayers addressed to Saint Stelian the protector of children. To all this can be added religious content taken from TV and radio media and the religious press or hyperlinks to various materials posted by religious television channels on social media.

The second type of non-institutionalized Ortho-blog are those that display content not related to the Orthodox faith or the activity of the Orthodox Church and the clergy. Such content may include material on economic issues, various state policies and laws, news from various fields, scientific articles, and press statements about political and military events. Examples of such content can be found in the Ortho-blogs *ortodoxinfo.ro*, *cuvantul-ortodox.ro* and *sfaturiortodoxe.ro*. The first of these presents four sections with content from outside the religious sphere. The first section is called "Anti-system" and includes three other subsections called: 1. "Big Brother" with materials related to social networks and various facial scanning and tracking technologies, 2. "Chips" with content regarding the

various electronic identity documents with chips, 3. "WWIII" in which materials are presented summarizing news and reports with reference to various armed conflicts and security systems, and section 4. "Other news" with varied content, from press statements of political leaders to medical news and scientific articles. The second Ortho-blog mentioned includes content such as analyses by epidemiologists of COVID-19 and against the COVID vaccination, as well as materials on various natural disasters related to religious interpretations. The third contains content on sex education and the introduction of subjects in schools such as abortion, bioenergy and yoga, as well as materials on luck, riddles and witchcraft, the UFO phenomenon and rock music.

Types based on purpose

Finally, within the Romanian Ortho-sphere there are non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs that pursue different goals (examples within Table 1). First, the "Informative" type comprises non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs that often provide information

about faith in general: main dogmas, prayers and how to pray. At the same time, the information can be targeted according to users (for priests, for believers, for lay people, for people of other faiths). The "Didactic/Catechetical" type address (not only) young people, proposing varied topics of discussion from a religious perspective, with a catechetical and didactic-religious purpose, ranging from biblical study and dogmatic discussions up to topics of sex education presented from a religious perspective. The Ortho-blog also provides links to radio

broadcasts and audio and video content from other digital platforms such as YouTube. Finally, it offers a space for more in-depth and professional academic debates in the field of theology, taking into account liturgical, patristic and dogmatic content material as well as scientific articles and links to academic conferences.

“RELIGION HAS ADAPTED OVER TIME TO TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS, WITH RELIGIOUS BLOGGING BECOMING PROMINENT IN THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT IN THE LAST DECADE.”

Table 1 summarize the types of Orthodox religious blogs in the Romanian online space, offering an example for each type.

Considerations on the typology of non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs

Within the literature, non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs have been introduced as a type of religious blog. Considering non-institutionalized Orthodox religious blogs as a typology, rather than a simple type, allows a much more detailed analysis of the religious phenomenon and online religious actors in general and considering the Orthodox faith in particular. Thus, through this typology it is possible to identify more easily the relations between online religious actors, their motivations for carrying out their activity and the way in which the offline-online relationship is influenced in the religious sphere.

At the same time, considering the perspective of the typology of non-institutionalized Orthodox religious blogs can help researchers to gain a more precise understanding and much clearer presentation of a religious digital space. As it appears from those previously presented, the Orthodox sphere in Romania is like a mosaic. First of all, we are dealing with non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs that are created using different platforms specially created for blogging activity or that have the blogging function as a secondary option. Second, non-institutionalized Orthodox religious blogs may display and present only religious content or a mix of religious and non-religious content. Finally, non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs serve different purposes, functioning as online religious spaces for information, education and catechesis or platforms for theological debate. Thus, by appealing to a typology such as the one proposed in this article, aspects from an empirical, theoretical and methodological point of view can be highlighted much more clearly in other analyzes and studies.

THE TYPOLOGY OF non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs is empirically relevant. The typology contributes to the development of knowledge in the field of religious studies and research in the area of religion and the Internet, establishing a basis for future analysis and studies focused on online religious actors in general and the Internet and Orthodox Christianity in particular. The typology allows a much more detailed and clear analysis of the online religious phenomenon from the perspective of the offline-online relationship and the relationship between different actors in the area of digital religion. The highlighted features within the different types discussed in this article may represent another analytical framework towards the further and thorough study of what Mikhail Suslov⁴⁶ calls “Digital Orthodoxy”. The typology and types discussed in this article show how the Orthodox faith is trying to “domesticate” the online environment and digital technologies. Specifically, the types of Ortho-blog point towards the digital technologies that allow a mediation between online and offline Orthodoxy, the religious themes that have adapted to the digital environment and the forms in which both content creators (Ortho-bloggers) and consumers (followers) manifest their religiosity online.

Conclusions

Religion has adapted over time to technological developments, with religious blogging becoming prominent in the online environment in the last decade. The main objective of this research was to map and discuss in detail a part of the World Wide Web network that is focused on a particular religious faith, namely the Ortho-sphere. More precisely, this paper was focused on a certain typology of web pages, the non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs, considering the relative lack of existing research and data on the phenomenon of Ortho-bloggers. Within the Ortho-sphere, I identified several types of Orthodox religious blogs within the typology of non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs, considering as criteria the structure of such blogs, their content and purpose.

THIS ARTICLE CONTRIBUTES empirically to the general study of the relationship between religion, new digital technologies and the Internet, by focusing on religious groups online that have been less studied in the literature: Christian Orthodox online groups. More exactly, this study complements existing research regarding Ortho-blogs, offering a detailed description of types which make up one of the typologies of religious Orthodox blogs: Non-institutionalized Ortho-blogs. In future research, I will consider highlighting the relationship between the motivations of Ortho-bloggers and the types discussed as well as an extensive analysis of Ortho-blogs (for example, blogs from outside Romania with the option of language/translation into Romanian). Also, other articles may consider the situation of institutionalized Ortho-blogs or the way in which the Internet and the constant technological development in the social media field influence Orthodox religious blogs in terms of content, access to people / followers and structure. ✖

Dragoş Şamşudean is a PhD-candidate at the Department of International Relations and Contemporary History, Babeş-Bolyai University in Romania.

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special theme

Introduction.

St. Petersburg – intangible heritage of the 1990s.

Archiving work in progress

I have rewritten this introduction many times and can continue to do so. We have stepped into a river which is moving very fast – all the meanings, symbols, and stereotypes we grew up with have changed rapidly, so there is a need for constant re-thinking, re-turning to the past, re-considering, regretting. Thus, in this version of the introduction, I want to refer to Irina Sandomirskaya's recent book, which also includes "re-" in the title: *Past Discontinuous: Fragmenty restavratsii*. In her introduction, Sandomirskaja refers to Jean-Luc Nancy's epigraph to one of his books: "There is no heritage". From her 30 years of research in Soviet and post-Soviet memory, Sandomirskaya paraphrases Nancy: There is no memory.

I interpret this claim to mean that there is no unquestionable, unchanged heritage nor unquestionable, unchanged memory. There are artefacts from the past, significantly changed by "the present" in our attempt to make them look like old things. Yet they still remain a part of contemporary materiality and the current value system, rather than a time capsule from the past.



On the eve of fireworks
on the Spit of Vasily-
evsky Island. Late 90s.

PHOTO: MIKHAIL BORISOV

Sandomirskaja proposes using another concept to deal with the past, neither *heritage* nor *memory*. According to her, the relation with the past is better described by the concept of *restoration*, which "serves to fulfill the desire for a collective belong-

ing to the past, which is constantly adapting to the present day" (p.13).

It is interesting that the concept of "restoration" has at least two meanings. The first has to do with materiality – the technique to repair a historic object – to clean it from the layers of recent history, fixing what can be fixed, aiming to make the object resist becoming dust, preserving the touch of the past enough to claim the object's authenticity. Another meaning of "restoration" is an attempt to bring back a former condition, a nostalgic move backwards, hunting the disappeared past, pretending that it could have been brought back, if only we had performed the right restoration technique.

IN THIS COLLECTION of memoirs on St. Petersburg during Boris Yeltsin's time, the authors are trying to do both. From the perspective of what is happening now, we suddenly have found that the 1990s, which are usually considered to be not far enough in the past, uninteresting, a desperate time of Russia's first decade as an independent state, are actually a decade in history which is worth contemplation. That time which is considered to be mate-



Picnic on the shore of Vasilyevsky Island Late 90s.

PHOTO: MIKHAIL BORISOV



The festive crowd returns from the fireworks.

rially poor and anxious is demonstrated to possess other qualities, which can be appreciated nowadays – the feeling of freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of hope. Because the culture of the 1990s was primarily intangible, our restoration is the restoration of that cultural heritage in its immateriality as well as an attempt to revive the time when openness was one of the important conditions of existence. It is an attempt to re-vitalize and re-experience that feeling of not being afraid to talk, to hope for a united Europe, which would include even a forever changed, democratized Russia. This romantic side of the 1990s is more vivid in the texts of Tatiana Samokhvalova and Mikhail Borisov. Samokhvalova dives into the Bohemian life of the St. Petersburg State University dormitory, as well as her discovery of the non-touristic part of the cityscape. The touristic infrastructure which made St. Petersburg so pleasant in the 2000s did not yet exist. For example, there were no established coffee chains and we mostly met at our homes, making basic salads, and covering the lack of taste with mayonnaise.

Mikhail Borisov tells about a vivid cultural life in St. Petersburg, which was often spontaneous and almost always lacked financial support from institutions. To be

“THE CITY OF ST. PETERSBURG THEN WAS GLOOMY AND BOHEMIAN AS WELL AS CREATIVE AND INTELLECTUAL – AND VERY, VERY POOR.”

honest the cultural institutions themselves often lacked financial support for projects too. In the 1990s, most of us still did not have the financial possibility to travel outside Russia, so the investigation of the habits of Westerners was left to our imagination, listening to music, watching films, and reading, but by time filled in by our encounters with guest artists, designers, journalists, filmmakers from the West, that started to come more often as it gradually became easier to travel to Russia.

THE CITY OF ST. PETERSBURG then was gloomy and Bohemian as well as creative and intellectual – and very, very poor. There was not big difference if one was born in Leningrad or moved there later. 50 per cent of my classmates came from

other parts of Russia, but it did not play big role for their adaptation of St. Petersburg identity. There was no difference, who was really born here or who came from some other region. You automatically became a real St. Petersburg citizen if you embraced that this cold and rather uncomfortable place on Earth at the same time is the greatest place to be. In his contribution to this collection of memoirs, Vladimir Rannev describes what was characteristic of the city at that time and gives the readership a clue to the meaning of its intangible deviant culture.

So we make an attempt to restore that time and place. However, one can say, paraphrasing Nancy and Sandomirskaja, there is no restoration either. Restoration is an attempt that always fails. The failure is part of the concept of restoration. One cannot go back in time and cannot experience it as it was. Yet this collection of memoirs is an attempt at the restoration of the immaterial culture of the 1990s in St. Petersburg. It was written with the awareness of the integrated failure of the project by all its participants. At the time of the current cruel and absurd war with Ukraine, which broke all previous understanding of where the border of insanity begins, silence took over our work for some months, as a sign of the impossibility



PHOTO: MIKHAIL BORISOV



PHOTO: MIKHAIL BORISOV

Rock festival at the Petrovsky stadium *Let's fill the sky with kindness*, 1996.

for a human brain to digest the reality. We had to postpone digital meetings several times, because participants of this writing project did not have strength for anything more than their most necessary everyday work. We had a sense of the impossibility of managing the project to revive private memories from the 1990s, describing the time when democracy had a chance. All this suddenly became meaningless – our memories, our voices, our stories. When we started to discuss this project in 2021 there was a feeling that we are coming back to the beginning of *perestroika*, that the circle of openness came to its end. This openness of the 1990s felt like a short moment in history which we wanted to record and preserve. Doors opened and have been closed again. We, born in the USSR, becoming adult in the new Russia, did not even manage to reach retirement age before this openness came to its end. February 24, 2022, changed this still romantic metaphor of a circle which we had in mind. It probably has to be exchanged for a metaphor of Moloch, but events are happening so fast that there is no longer any time to search for the right metaphors.

Nevertheless, some texts have emerged during this time, and here they are, connected to the city and for almost all participants of this project to the

St. Petersburg State University. They probably say something to someone as a written attempt of archiving that time. The 1990s were a very immaterial time, and creativity was concentrated on cultural absorption: books and music, reading and listening. This time was an attempt to restore access to European culture, which Soviet citizens were deprived of for many years. In the 1990s we tried to assimilate, get access to, understand, appropriate, and learn Western culture very fast to fill in the gap of discontinuity during the Soviet era. I think that because that time has not been archived systematically and generally did not produce so many material artefacts – for example, one cannot speak of architecture and design of the 1990s – there is a need to archive it in stories, memoirs. Otherwise this intangible very subtle culture gradually vanishes and disappears forever, especially being overwritten by nowadays brutal narrative, which dominates Russian media during last decade.

IT IS GENERALLY unusual to write memoirs about such recent times, but it felt as though something is about to be finished – a balance that began in 1991 when the USSR dissolved, and new countries started to get their shapes has been shaken. No

one I knew in the 1990s was sad or nostalgic about the Soviet Union, even though ordinary life after its collapse was more difficult for many. My mother lost her job, as did the mother of my twin friends. The job market collapsed together with the USSR; many places where one could have been employed were closed. After one year of desperation and constant searching, my mother found a less qualified job than that she had before, more physically challenging, which with the combination of her being stressed led to her serious illness. Still, she did not complain; she was satisfied that she could participate in real elections and listened to TV debates with representatives of different new political parties.

Thanks to our age – I was 16 when the USSR disappeared – we did not immediately need to be breadwinners like our mothers. What we had to do was to apply and be accepted at some university, which I and my friends did. The opening of society had actually already started before 1991 thanks to Mikhail Gorbachev and his idea of *glasnost*. At school, we were already free to discuss new books that were not part of the Soviet curriculum. We read Varlam Shalamov's *Kolymskie rasskazy* [Kolyma Tales], a powerful judgement of the Soviet era. History books were rewritten, trying to give a balanced view of

different history actors – for the first time, they were not the history of one party, but an attempt to tell a story without taking this or that side. When we finished our Soviet school, our minds were already formed by *glasnost* and *perestroika* to take these ideas further at university. With the criticism of the former Soviet grand narrative came our ignorance of everything connected to that, including our university teachers who had previously taught Leninism and Marxism. After 1991 they could retain their teaching positions, but they had to adjust what they were teaching to the significantly changed view on reality. At the same time came the tendency to ignore political ingredients in private life as well as denial of the ideology of collectivism. As Olga Serebranaya mentions in her memoir, we were very apolitical back in the 1990s.

ONE OF THE CULTURAL movements in the 1990s was necrorealism, a macabre art trend founded by St. Petersburg filmmaker Yevgeny Yufit, an absurdist, dark narrative with references to Socialist realism. In the 1990s I actually did not get the point of that artistic expression and thought that it was just trying to be provocative and quirky. However, as history was unveiled, the movement started to reveal its depth and even in some sense the possibility to predict the future. One can say that nowadays, necrorealism has become a part of mass culture, blessed by Russian political and religious leaders, just without that humor and intellectual distance which was essential to the necrorealist artists in the 1990s. One of the memoirs in this collection, written by Andrei Patkul, reveals his own and his friends' take on this matter.

Another special feature of the 1990s was that intellectuals started to be interested in the work of the Russian Orthodox Church, and tried to find the meaning of life there. As with many other institutions of power which survived the historical catastrophe, the church system demonstrated its rigidity, despite the fresh air of the newcomers: educated cultural young people. As we know now, that new generation of believers did not manage to reform and modernize this institution; instead it was appropriated by the official

power and ideology structures, as we can read in Julia Kravchenko's history.

To collect memoirs of the 1990s is a work in progress. I hope that many people who lived in the 1990s will write their own memoirs and reflect on why democracy did not get its roots into society. United by the city of St. Petersburg then and scattered around the world afterwards, we were often driven not by a personal dream or career but by the impossibility to stay or accept the taste of reality in Russia. This exodus continues even now. As Mikhail Borisov said in our private chat – St. Petersburg feels unusually silent now in 2022. This must be because many whom one could have as a conversation partner left, or resists talking, as dialogue with other citizens became meaningless and even impossible.

Unfortunately, the window of openness which opened in the 1990s is closed now. Russia has come back to where it started, in fact to an even worse place. The decade of the studies of nostalgia is coming to an end. *Nostalgia* from Snow White turned out to be a wicked witch, demonstrating the degree of violence it can lead to in the attempt to revive the past: from melancholic visits to nostalgic cafes to the demolishing of societies and lives. We would do better to abandon our feeling of nostalgia, to wake up and come back to our senses and minds. By writing our 1990s stories down, we let them go at the same time. The 1990s were about openness and democracy but that time did not bring any healthy fruit.

MY WISH IS that a new rationality is on its way to overcome nationalistic and imperialistic animosity and lead to modernity and democratic freedoms. There is a third meaning of *restoration* – restoration of a political regime. The post-Soviet time developed a dream of pre-revolutionary Russia, an idealized picture of how it was. This idealization was frequently used to stimulate the nostalgic drive of the Russian population – backwards in history, not forward. The extensive reading of our favorite writer, Vladimir Nabokov, as I see it now, fitted well in the framework of this trend. We lived through his nostalgia. But the reading of good books is not modernizing as such.

The restoration of the Russian connection with the West is failing not only as a project directed to the future. It also fails as a *retrotopia*. We did not manage to restore Nabokov's childhood Russia, which was then a part of Europe, either. As Konstantin Zarubin summarizes in his concluding comments, while we were occupied by renewing our thoughts, "the fragile new institutions created in the 1990s have since been destroyed or rendered utterly decorative". ❌

Anna Kharkina

Holds a PhD in History
and is a project researcher,
archivist, and author.

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special section

81 Introduction. St. Petersburg – intangible heritage of the 1990s. Archiving work in progress. Anna Kharkina

memoirs

85 The Bohemian life of the St. Petersburg State University dormitory.

Tatiana Samokhova

91 The otherness of the city made it artistic. Vladimir

Rannev

92 "In the 90s everyone was in a hurry", Mikhail Borisov

100 Leap into the void.

Anna Kharkina

107 Fabulous lost years.

Olga Serebranaya

112 The Pravednick's band project. Andrei Patkul

120 The revival of the Orthodox Church. Julia Kravchenko

123 Summary. The Weimar Republic analogy seems unavoidable. Konstantin

Zarubin



From left: Anna Mateeva, Olga Chegodaeva, Tatiana Samokhvalova in room 184, on the 5th floor, Shevchenko 25, June 1993.

The Bohemian life of the St. Petersburg State University dormitory

by **Tatiana Samokhvalova**

I have spent my student youth in the scenery of St. Petersburg and Russia of the 1990s. These were the times of tremendous change. Looking back from May 2022, I have to tell you the following.

I have spent the first four years of my life in St. Petersburg in a university dormitory on Vasilyevsky Island, a stone's throw from the Smolensk Cemetery that was ancient by the standards of a 300-year-old city. Built in Stalin's years, the five-story dorm building was filled with freaks and strange characters of all sorts, as well as mosquitoes, mice, cockroaches, and bedbugs. In fact, this place has become the most serious university for me.

Year 1992. I am 17 years old; the Soviet Union has already collapsed, my parents have divorced with a big scandal after 20 years of difficult marriage, my sister and I have graduated from school against this wonderful background.

I clearly remember the doorbell ringing; my kindergarten friend Anya was standing on the doorstep. We went to different schools, albeit located in the neighbourhood, and practically

TATIANA SAMOKHVALOVA entered the newly renamed St. Petersburg State University September 1992. She belonged to the last freshmen that had to spend their first month of study picking potatoes in the fields of the Leningrad Region. Dorm-life during this decade was intense and explorative, many life-lessons were learnt. Since 2014 she has been living in Berlin.

did not communicate with each other through all school years. However, for some reason, she came to me to invite me with her to St. Petersburg, to enter the Faculty of Philosophy at St. Petersburg State University.

"What was that?" I asked. "This is the former Leningrad State University (one of the leading universities in the USSR, which law faculty Vladimir Putin graduated from), it has changed its name after the renaming of Leningrad to St. Petersburg", laughed



Classmate Ilya Kozhurkin and schoolfriend Edward Kuzmin on the roof of the Philosophical Faculty.



Roommates and friends: Olga Chegodaeva and Tatiana Samokhvalova on the roof of the Philosophical Faculty.

Anya. A couple of months later, she and I found ourselves 2,000 km from home. She eventually entered the University of Culture (which is popularly called “Kulyok”, aka plastic bag) and I joined the Faculty of Philosophy!

I have heard from my parents as a child, that “there are only two decent universities in the country: Moscow State University and Leningrad State University”. It is not the most typical opinion for a provincial family, but my parents were higher school-teachers, they met and got married while studying at the post-graduate school (aka Aspirantura) in Leningrad.

I was an excellent student at school, and it was easy for me to learn. I enthusiastically read Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, which were not particularly interesting and understandable for my classmates. I adored Eugene Onegin, identifying myself with Tatyana, and sometimes felt like a 100 per cent Turgenev woman capable of a real heroic act for love.

Therefore, my admission to the Faculty of Philosophy, though unexpected, was quite “in my spirit”.

NOW, TO SHOCK or to entertain my companions, I just have to tell something about my life at that time, without even embellishing anything much. Looking back, I understand that only the recklessness of youth helped to experience things so easily and cheerfully.

What I experienced and lived through then made me resistant, and sometimes insensitive, to things that would cause shock to many. This very, very peculiar experience has made me who I am now, with all the pros and cons that it implies. It was also very important for my family and my school friends, who often visited me in Peter (this is how St. Petersburg is usually called

by its residents’ people on the entire post-Soviet space).

What was so special about St. Petersburg when I first came there in autumn 1992? To be honest, the city was very gloomy and very uncomfortable, in places. And it did not look much like Leningrad that I knew from my childhood, with its clean and neat central streets.

September 1992 was extremely warm, and we were the last freshmen that had to spend their first month of study picking po-

tatoes in the fields of the Leningrad Region. This is a very Soviet tradition, to go picking potatoes with the whole company or the entire university course. It was not only me having great doubts about the economic feasibility and effectiveness of such actions. In fact, it was very similar to the German gymnasium Kennenlernenfahrt, new acquaintances, the first serious, I would even say grave, experiences with alcohol (for the first time I got properly drunk with the di-

luted hard alcohol called Royal, popular at that time in all stores in the country). And this was me, a 17-year-old dreamer from the southern and very much wine-growing region of Russia. I also remember how, being a child of the southern forests, I was amazed with the blueberries near an old Finnish cemetery on the edge of Polyany village, where we spent this month.

IT WAS A FASCINATING START. Almost the entire academic year golden tubers then fed those in the dormitory who were smart enough to take more potatoes with them. My classmates, or almost all of them, were very bright personalities. We ate with those who were living in the dormitory a huge pound of salt (an expression that is used in Russian to refer to those with whom you went through serious difficulties). This salt was greatly

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Tatiana Samokhvalova. April 25 and snowing in St Petersburg.

PHOTO: YURA NOSOV



PHOTO: ARSENIY BORISOV

St. Petersburg State University is situated on Vasilevskiy Island.

sweetened by youth, a healthy hormonal background, and the run-down beauty of St. Petersburg in the 90s.

It was really so! Who else could, in such a rebellious time for the whole country, go, sometimes thousands of kilometres from their hometown, to study philosophy? How could I not fall in love with St. Petersburg completely and irrevocably for many years, growing up hearing the stories about my parents' student youth? Almost every year my mother "took out" my sister and me to Moscow and/or to the city on the Neva River (one of the many poetic names of St. Petersburg).

Vasilevskiy Island, aka "Vas'ka" (the diminutive form of the male name Vasily, a typical nickname for a cat in Russia), a large island in the delta of the Neva River, is connected to the neighbouring large island, Petrograd Side, and the city centre with drawbridges.

Vaska is still my favourite district of St. Petersburg, I feel so comfortable there as in few other places in the whole world. It is almost the city centre but separated by the Neva Delta from the rest of the city, featuring historical buildings and huge quarters of "newly built buildings" of different periods. It features a chequered layout of streets (some of which, in imitation of Peter the Great's beloved Amsterdam, were once channels). They are not just streets, but lines, thanks to the "channel" past, each side of the street has its own number! And the Spit of Vasilevsky Island, on which the university buildings are located, is one of the most beautiful architectural ensembles in the world. I lack the words to describe it, it is better to look at the photos or just to visit it in person.

You can imagine what impression all this made on the girl who grew up, although not in the most typical Soviet provincial city (it was a large port on a warm seacoast), but in the city, almost destroyed by bombs during the Second World War. All this abundance of monument buildings, all these memorial plaques with the names of great writers, poets, and composers, numerous museums, theatres, and clubs made a lasting impression on me.

The reverse, shadow side of my life in St. Petersburg was no

less colourful: the dormitory where I lived had not been renovated since Stalin times when it had been constructed. It featured the romantic view of the giant pipes of TPP-7 (thermal power plant number 7), the infinitely long corridor on each of 5 floors and the abundance of interesting people as well as giant cracks in the old window frames. Mice, mosquitoes, bedbugs, and cockroaches; kitchens and toilets littered with garbage on weekends and holidays; regular heating shutdowns, including at -20 Celsius degrees outside; document checks in the entire building at night done by Special Purpose Unit of the Militia aka OMON; as well as a dark and scary shower in the basement.

But I, a domestic girl who grew up in an almost sterile apartment, thanks to the efforts of my mother, treated all this easily and with the good humour. I was surrounded by friends, I took my favourite bus 47 to one of the most beautiful places in the world to study, my father supported me financially, and I did not have to worry about my daily bread.

NOW, LOOKING BACK, I see how the recklessness of youth painted the gloomy Peter of the 90s for me in the bright colours of friendship, love, joy, and inspiration with its culture and its real-life plots. But in fact, what was happening in my life, in the life of the city and the whole country was sometimes frankly terrible. It was better to go to the basement shower of the dormitory together with my friends, because at some point a girl was raped there. Half of the first three floors of the dorm were inhabited by immigrants from Dagestan and Chechnya, and some of them simply gave no peace to females. Therefore, we sometimes went in pairs even to put the kettle on the fire in the kitchen!

OMON conducted very strenuous checks of documents and seized anyone who did not have registration under this address. In most cases, people paid off, as far as I understood, and continued to live in the dorm. Or they were hiding on other floors or even in toilets, so as not to be caught by policemen with their loud voices, bulletproof vests, and the machine guns.



The Twelve Collegia is the largest edifice from the Petrine era remaining in St. Petersburg.



PHOTO: YURANOSOV

Tatiana Samokhvalova and friend Yulya Starova in the colonnade of Kazan Cathedral in 1993.

Many of those living in the dormitory were drinking regularly and a lot, mostly vodka. I also learned to do it pretty quickly. It was a kind of youthful bravado, as it should be. I started smoking immediately upon arrival in Peter, and by the end of my first year I switched to “Belomorkanal” cigarettes, which were extremely strong and cheap. But the decisive factor was the impression that I made with this cigarette between my teeth on others. Ah, wild-wild youth... We were young and reckless! Later, my older friends taught me how to insert a piece of cotton wool into a cigarette instead of a filter. Afterwards I went back to “normal” cigarettes.

I was surrounded by a strange, difficult, and interesting environment. Some of my classmates at that time were incredibly erudite and clearly thinking. I did not spend much time reading, more talking about everything in the world. Like peripatetic philosophers, we wandered around Saint Petersburg and discoursed. We were sitting in the smokeroom next to the room I lived in (number 184) and looking into the infinity of the corridor. We thought out loud about everything that was worrying us.

Having exhausted our souls and bodies with not the healthiest lifestyle, 2 times a year we went to our hometowns for a long vacation to recover next to our parents’ refrigerators and old schoolmates.

I remember a lot of sun in my St. Petersburg of those years, and many gloomy days without it. It was perishing cold and cosy warmth outside. There were drunk philosophers crawling down the corridor of the second floor of our dorm and quoting Nietzsche in wonderful German. There were senior students who seemed demigods to us, and newly arriving provincial boys and girls with big naive eyes. There were stupid lectures that made it easy to fall asleep and lecturers we listened to with our mouths open and bated breath:

Incredibly charismatic Professor of the Department of Ancient Philosophy Sergeev, brilliant thinkers and speakers Askold Timofeenko and Alexander Sekatsky. Professor Torchinov, a world-renowned expert in Chinese philosophy. Professor Markov, who was affectionately loved by all students. World-famous film director Alexander Sokurov who taught a special course of studies at the faculty.

This list is far from being complete! After all, there were also

Kobzar, Sukhachev, Litvinsky, Perov, Ivanov and others who greatly influenced me, all of us, our worldview. We have learned from these people to think clearly, to see beyond the surface and not to get lost in the bubbling abyss of humanitarian knowledge.

And there was also an ancient, built like an amphitheatre, auditorium No. 24 that amazed me already during the preparatory courses. When I go back to my years at university in my mind, I often remember it in the first instance.

And the building itself, which still houses the faculties of history and philosophy, was magnificent! It is a rebuilt Gostiny Dvor (shopping arcades) with covered outer suites along the entire perimeter, high ceilings and long booming corridors, a courtyard in the centre, which was rarely visited by students.

SPEAKING HONESTLY, I did not really bite into my studies, I grabbed it at the top, as they say. Many things, due to my youth and immaturity, I was simply unable to understand and assimilate then. And the “spirit of change” that reigned throughout the country at that time, actually a spirit of laxness, to be honest, allowed even those who returned to school from vacation a month later to study further.

What was good then is that freedom of thought that was almost absolute. None of us even thought about how his or her opinion corresponded to the “general line of the party”. It simply did not exist then, or it was called “perestroika, democracy, and freedom (of self-expression)”. Now, in mid-May 2022, when I am writing these lines, I cannot even believe that this was once possible in Russia...

Many of those living in the dorm in 25 Shevchenko Str. had serious financial difficulties, ate what they managed to “compose” in the kitchen from products collected from various friendly rooms. Or they just went “out to eat” to those to whom parents regularly sent money or parcels with groceries.

Oh, those parcels from sunny Moldova! There were quite a few guys and girls in the dorm from this former Soviet republic, which is now a separate state. Life in Moldova was definitely not easy, people chronically lacked money, but the fertile sunny land of this country generously gave not only its children, but also their friends, grapes, apples, wine, and much more. Each parcel

from Moldova was an event not only for the one who was waiting for it, but also for all his or her ever-hungry friends. It was a good luck if you were asked to help bringing a heavy box from the Vitebsky railway station (parcels at that time were usually transferred with passenger train conductors). After all, it was always followed by opening it and treating all those involved!

The dorm was living at its own rhythm, weaving us all into it. Sometimes I think that I spent all my years of study, 1992 to 1997, in some very strange greenhouse, having minimal contact with the reality of the 90s in Russia. I spent eight months a year between the building of our faculty and the dorm, also located on Vasilyevsky, in the Harbor, an area of new buildings of Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev times. In the process of developing and rebuilding this area, the city constantly conquered land from the Baltic Sea. The embankment of new lands and the riot of architecture, now in the Putin's period, continue there to this day.

I especially remember the silhouettes of friends sitting in the open windows at the ends of the infinitely long corridors of the dorm; the Dummy album of Portishead, which was sounding from almost every room in the spring of 95; the screams and the tramp of the special force policemen checking documents on all floors in the depth of the night. A large photo portrait of Boris Grebenshchikov (a St. Petersburg rock musician, known since Soviet times, who has left the country after the Russia's attack on Ukraine, despite a rather respectable age of 69 years). Boris's hands were decorated with unusually large rings. I am wearing rings like this ever since.

And suddenly there was a knock, the door opened, and the friendly face of Boris Borisovich was replaced by the stunned faces of the dorm alcoholics, Slava and Oleg: "Girls, we just heard on the radio that Kurt Cobain shot himself!" I also remember these wonderful last days of June before leaving home for the holidays, where the warm Black Sea, my family, and my former school friends were waiting for me, and all this against the background of an endless amount of sun and fresh fruits. The dorm was getting empty, the corridors seemed to lengthen, and they became even more booming. Silence, emptiness, only some post-graduate students (PhDs) and students who did not go anywhere because of work, lack of money or the insane high cost of air and railway tickets to the other side of the infinitely vast Motherland.

A FEW MORE MUSICAL memories: it was there, on 25 Shevchenko Str., where my deepest love for the work of the legendary 4AD label's artists, Cocteau Twins and Dead Can Dance, was born. Sometimes it was easier to get interesting music in the dorm than food.

МreMИ I liked this not-so-easy life very much. I was genuinely surprised by those who wanted to rent a room in the city at any cost. And at the same time, I willingly agreed to live in the "city", in some temporarily empty apartment of the friends of my



PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Among the teachers were sinologist Evgeny Torchinov, film director Alexander Sokurov, and philosopher Alexander Sekatsky..

friends. Of course, "own" bathroom, kitchen and toilet were, of a great value for the people like me.

In my fourth year, I was "awarded" a separate room. To do this, it was necessary to have a "ghost soul" – a student who was only registered in the dormitory but did not live in it. Then you could live alone in a double-bed room. It was some privilege!

In addition to the intensive and familiar alcohol culture, psychedelic culture also flourished in the dorm. Thanks to Castaneda's books and other instructive works (by Terence McKenna, Stanislav Grof, etc.), students were theoretically aware of the use of magical "plants of power" to expand consciousness. Of course, when we had the opportunity to taste mushrooms like

the ones fed to Carlos by Don Juan, how could there were any doubt about it in our young heads?!

Psilocibins grew on collective farm fields fertilized with cow manure and on pastures of the Leningrad Region (the region was never renamed after the city was, and St. Petersburg is still surrounded by the Leningrad Region). According to legend, biology students of Leningrad University discovered this mushrooms there back in the 1970s, and since then every autumn the region was plagued by the expeditions of "psychonauts" (as

people who use psychedelics were called, the term was formed by combining the words "psyche" and "astronaut"). Mushrooms were rarely consumed fresh; they were mostly dried and then taken throughout the year for special occasions. Meanwhile, teenagers from the suburbs and villages did not beat about the bush with magic mushrooms and consumed them mixed with alcohol and other drugs.

The police aka militia, of course, was aware of it, and over time, a game of hide and seek and catch-up began on these collective farm fields every autumn. Therefore, the expeditions were carried out secretly, and the "right" fields and their coordinates were transmitted from mouth to mouth.

In my fifth year, a friend of mine and I decided to rent rooms in communal flats (apartments in which several completely different families were living at once). It was too expensive to rent a separate apartment.

The room I ended up renting was truly beautiful, with a high ceiling and a bunch of paintings on its walls. It was on my

**"SOMETIMES I THINK
THAT I SPENT ALL MY
YEARS OF STUDY, 1992
TO 1997, IN SOME VERY
STRANGE GREENHOUSE,
HAVING MINIMAL
CONTACT WITH THE
REALITY OF THE 90S
IN RUSSIA."**

favourite Vasilyevsky Island, of course. However, quite in the spirit of Saint Petersburg, the author of these paintings recently jumped out of the window, and his beloved, the owner of this room, fenced off a corner in a huge 20-meter kitchen with curtains to rent her room to me and to live on this money with her two sons. The apartment was also inhabited by the charismatic Olympiada Nikolaevna, the elderly mother of the owner of the room, and a neighbour who had nothing in common with this family. The neighbour was extremely rare to see, so all the time I was living on the 14th Line, I spent inside this complex and contradictory family of “landlords”. As a result, my friends and I became friends with my “landlady” Jana and her friends, and for many years afterwards our lives crossed again and again.

THE ERA OF THE DORM on Shevchenko Street ended with the university diploma I got in June 1997. How joyful I was looking in the future then, not knowing a bit how it all would continue!

After all, everything worked out somehow, in the fall of the same year I entered the Faculty of Postgraduate Studies (aka Aspirantura) at the Department of Philosophy of St. Petersburg Electrotechnical University aka “LETI” at the suggestion of the kind-hearted Boris Vasilyevich Markov. He headed the Department of Philosophical Anthropology, where I defended my diploma.

To be honest, I did this to a greater extent to be able to maintain my St. Petersburg residence permit. Its absence severely limited social opportunities, although some of my friends and acquaintances lived without it for years or even decades. The situation at the Department of Philosophy of a technical university was very different from what I was used to at the St. Petersburg University. And since my motivation was clearly insufficient, I did not get to the defence of my thesis there. At some point, I started to look for a job. A career in higher education



Oleg Shmyrin and Lada Ilicheva also lived in Shevchenko 25, and was also photographed by Boroda.

was not appealing to me at all. I wanted to prove to myself and others that I was able to earn money normally and to stop being dependant on the support of my caring father.

However, when the crisis of 1998 broke out (rouble crisis or the Russian flu), I took the opportunity to get a room in the dormitory of “LETI”. It was a completely different building in a residential area of the city, where I was given quite an acceptable room, that had even a balcony! I only lived there for a few months. Work (oddly enough, I was hired in the marketing and PR sphere, having only a philosophical diploma and no experience!) gradually

dragged me headlong, I rented an apartment and dropped out of the post-graduate school.

A separate small apartment with my own bathroom, kitchen, and toilet (!) was located in an area where the metro line was washed away by groundwater, and the residents of the northern districts of St. Petersburg had to overcome the gap between stations using the land transport for almost 9 years.

Living in the proximity of Akademicheskaya subway station, I spent a lot of time in so-called “marshrutkas”, small private buses, which ran much more often and more conveniently than the free ones provided by the city. I clearly remember December 31, 1999, I was going not by the most common minibus, but by a huge old Ikarus (Hungarian-made buses that were actively used throughout the USSR). The radio was turned on and was loudly announcing that Boris Yeltsin is resigning, and Vladimir Putin is being appointed Acting President of the Russian Federation. This was how my 90s ended.

Over the next 3 months of 2000, I got suddenly fired from my job, went headlong into music, singing and making a huge number of new friends; my mother finally made her dream come true to return to the city of her student youth and moved to St. Petersburg; and Putin became the popularly elected president of Russian Federation. ❌

About the photographer

I WOULD LIKE TO SAY a few words about the photographer whose pictures accompany my story.

Yura Nosov aka Boroda (Beard), was not an ordinary person, now they would call him a freak. He wore a funny old flat cap, was bald, wore the beard and smoked Belomor. He worked as a plumber, was much older than all of us and had a lot of friends among the university students, mostly from our dorm.

Boroda took pictures all the time. He was

ready to take you out for a photo shooting in the summer as early as 7 am, “when the light is the best and there are almost no people on the streets”. He made pictures simply because he liked it and because he could not imagine his life without it. He never took money for his photo sessions, sometimes he was requesting small amounts to buy film or paper. Many years later, already in

the 2010s, he began to digitize his giant photo archives and tried to distribute the photos on CDs to his “models” from the 90s. He told me:

“When I die, Samokhvalova, you will remember me with a kind word –

I brought you your whole youth on CD!”. It has happened to the word. Yura died of lung cancer on August 24, 2020, and I still remember him with gratitude. And not just me.



The otherness of the city made it artistic

by **Vladimir Rannev**

“**T**he more deviant you are, the more artistic you are,” remarked Boris Groys. I would like to think that this idea came to his mind in St. Petersburg, where he had spent his student years, usually leading to the freedom of judgment and the distrust of everything normal. St. Petersburg, of course, is an abnormal city, which has succeeded in creating deviant forms of life, where the usual is layered with a unique content. Even in the most conformist Soviet years, when everyone was like everyone else, the city was known as the incubator of nonconformity. People who were reflecting and came here for something “different”, were often disappointed, because the “different” should be carried within, and not demanded from others. Thus, the “otherness” of St. Petersburg/Petrograd/Leningrad/St. Petersburg became a myth. History, climate, architecture, and everyday life – everything here is mythologized, because it is deviant in its own way and therefore, following the logic of Groys, it is artistic. This artistic city is more significant than the amount of all the artists who inhabited it at different times; they were well aware of it and paid tribute to it in their work. This was also realized by those who did not work in the artistic field, but while living in this city, cultivated *Lebens-künstler* at any level possible, from bohemia to urban madmen.

IN THE 90S, when I came here having entered the conservatory, the city was a collage of the front facades of palaces, street buildings of the past centuries, left to themselves since the Siege in the Second World War, and rapidly decaying late Soviet panel architecture. The surrealism of the coexistence of these buildings was picturesque in its own way. This was also observed in the social landscape: splurged life success of a clearly criminal origin coexisted with the blatant poverty, and all the border areas of the social ladder were interlaced with many subcultures. It was uncomfortable, but interesting to live there and then. The density of cultural life went through the roof, and the constant exchange of people and ideas with the outside world (mainly with Finland and Germany) fed the mythology of the “cultural capital of Russia” with new stories.

In the 2000s, the big oil era, the city was touched up with varnish, contrasts were levelled with consumer stereotypes, and cultural diversity began to deplete. Berlin-style cafes, clubs,

The music composer **VLADIMIR RANNEV** describes what he found as a closed “St. Petersburg” community in the 90s, with a mosaic of various subcultures. Vladimir Rannev was born in Moscow in 1970. He graduated in 2003 from the composition department of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, where he studied with Professor Boris Tishchenko.

shops, and squats gave way to more pragmatic commercial formats such as chain coffee shops, brand boutiques, mini-hotels, and shopping malls. Having discovered an art market around them, the artists learned to keep up with it and no longer showed-off their marginality. Glamor spread everywhere, the city culture was the discounted *dolce vita*. In the 90s, this did not happen yet, everything lived in a closed “St. Petersburg” community, which consisted of a mosaic of various subcultures.

“EVEN IN THE MOST CONFORMIST SOVIET YEARS, WHEN EVERYONE WAS LIKE EVERYONE ELSE, THE CITY WAS KNOWN AS THE INCUBATOR OF NONCONFORMITY.”

IN THOSE YEARS, for various reasons, I often travelled to Germany and Finland, and noticed one difference, among others, in the habitat of a resident of St. Petersburg and a resident of Western Europe. The usual dwelling, for example, of a Berliner was well-groomed and had a certain level of habitual comfort, while cafes and clubs cultivated a sloppy, aesthetically ruined style, as if they were freeing the visitor from the *Ordnung* of everyday life. In St. Petersburg, on the

contrary: the life of a citizen remained unsettled (about a third of the population has lived and is still living in the “shared apartments”), the municipal economy was poor (significant funds have been stolen and are being stolen by the corrupt authorities), but the residents of St. Petersburg preferred to spend their leisure time in the oases of well-being – spotless restaurants and clubs designed in the style of “Albanian Baroque” (expression of the St. Petersburg composer, Leonid Desyatnikov). All this defocuses the impression of those years, diverting the attention not to this or that form of life, but to the mutants formed by the chaotic crossing of these forms. It was a wonderful era for the detached reflection taking on the craziest artistic forms, but unhappy for the everyday habitual existence of the inhabitants of this huge and uncomfortable urban agglomeration. ✕



“IN THE 90s EVERYONE WAS IN A HURRY”

The Association of Photographers took form, and young artists, such as Mikhail Borisov himself, began to explore and create together; any non-boring styles were welcome.

text & photo **Mikhail Borisov**



A boy on Nevsky Prospekt
near the oldest bookstore
– House of Military Books.



Boys on the eve of the holiday "Scarlet Sails".

When did the 90s begin in St. Petersburg? During the first rallies against the demolition of the Angletierre Hotel in 1987? In 1989, during the election of Anatoly Sobchak to the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR? Or during the renaming of Leningrad to St. Petersburg on September 6, 1991? Or during the abolition of the compulsory school uniform?

In the 90s, everyone was in a hurry. Some hurried to the TV to watch *600 Seconds* with Alexander Nevzorov and *The Fifth Wheel* with Sergei Sholokhov, others – for money in *Hopper Invest* and *Russian House of Selenga*, the entrepreneurs registered cooperatives and banks. Newspapers were launched for all occasions, publishing houses raced to release books of Dovlatov and Brodsky. Josephus Falvius and Antsiferov's *The Devil* were printed on gray newsprint.

Vanya, a neighbor in a communal apartment, worked as a turner at a factory. One could see the factory entrance from the kitchen windows. In the evenings, Vanya looked out the window and wailed: "All the good things are being taken out of the factory!" Another neighbor, red-haired Eugene, turned on loudly the *Voice of America* at night. One day, a scream was heard from Vanya's room. Everyone entered his room hurriedly. Vanya stood at the open wardrobe and threw up his hands. "Just have a

MIKHAIL BORISOV here shares his memories from a hectic and creative St Petersburg, that he caught with his camera. In this theme section his photos are frequently displayed. Today Borisov is a freelance writer and photographer.

look! That's crazy! How could they do it! It is scandalous! "The wardrobe was filled to the top horizontally with whole bottles of vodka. Vanya, being a law-abiding citizen and non-drinker, bought vodka using coupons, but did not drink it, and the carriage turned into a pumpkin before his eyes. Stacks of vodka, his investment in the future, a commodity that could be sold profitably anywhere and at any time, became once again just a commodity. Coupons were canceled. It was probably in 1992, simultaneously with the decree "On Free Trade", when citizens went out to sell whatever they got on the streets near the metro.

In the Yusupov Palace in those years there was a workshop of Rafael Mangutov, Rafa, the photographer. Rafa was a kind and energetic person, he shot Boris Eifman's ballets for posters and portraits of beautiful girls at the call of the heart and for souvenirs. In Yusupov Palace, where the Teacher's House was located,



Dostoevsky Street 4. The residents of the house N4 had purchased a bust of Lenin at their own expense and installed it in their yard. A teenager at the bust of the leader covered with paint on the eve of the referendum on renaming Leningrad to St. Petersburg. Summer 1991.

there were plenty of girls, so Rafa had no shortage of models. On the antique-sepié prints, barmaids and teachers looked beautifully as actresses of the Silver Age.

Once Rafa started the Association of Photographers and decided to make exhibitions. In Rafa's workshop, young journalists, art photographers, and experimenters gathered, any non-boring styles were welcomed. Lyosha Yakovlev brought absurdist landscapes of the city with garbage cans, Pavel Glebov showed surreal "sandwiches" obtained by combining several slides on an orvo-chrome. Zamir Usmanov, Sasha Belenky and Felix Titov shot social reportages and chronicles of city life. In the first exhibition, which they decided to launch in the open air right on the fence of the Catherine Garden, because no permission was required, Alexander Filippov, Sergey Leontiev, and, probably, even Zhenya Mokhorev took part. Participants gathered on a weekend, quickly hung pictures and enjoyed how the audience reacted vividly to the stories.

Then they decided to make such an exhibition in Moscow on the Arbat, on the fence around some construction site. At that time, artists painted on the pedestrian street Arbat, singers sang, books were sold by booksellers. Guests of the capital were promenading there. At the exhibition, everything repeated itself: there were a lot of spectators.

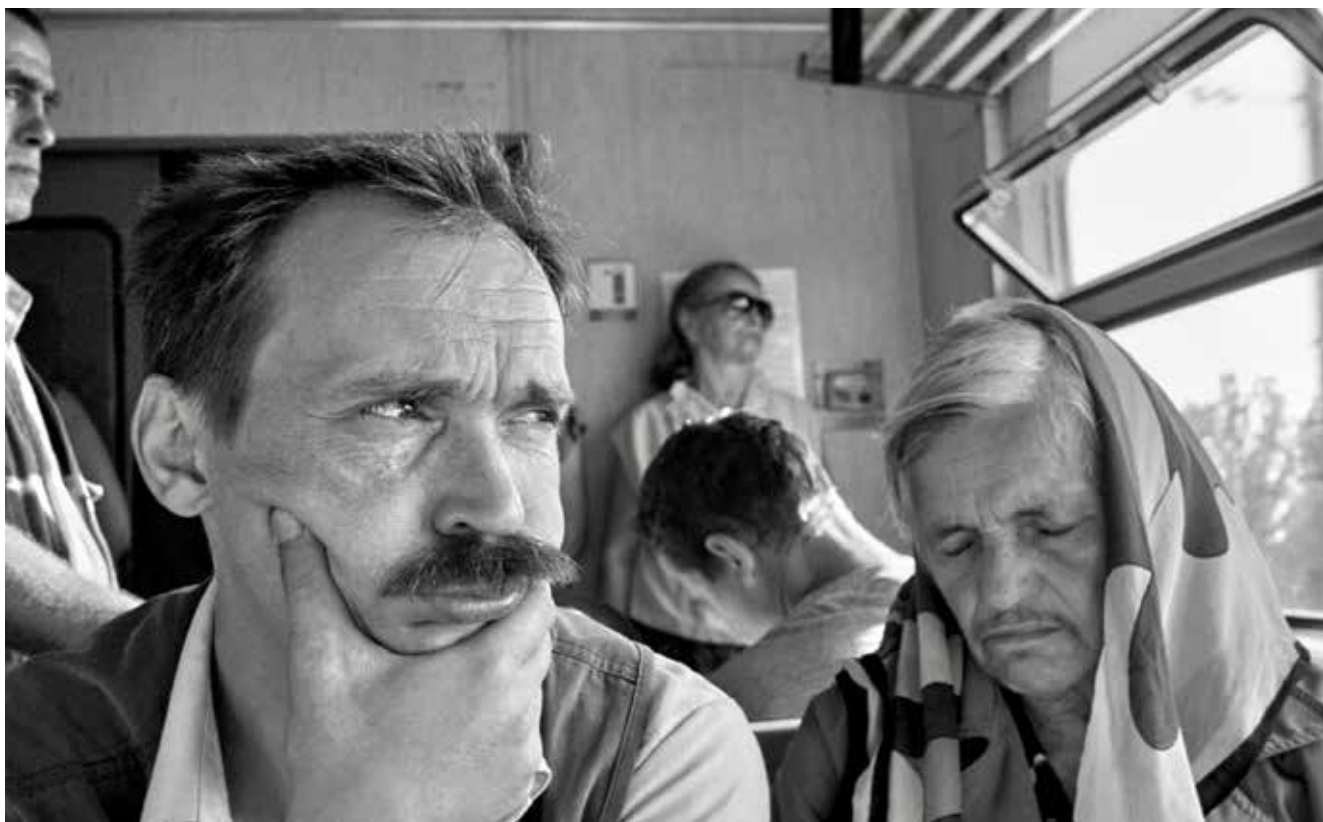
Raphael organized the third exhibition in some kind of a squat or a youth center in the courtyards near the Griboyedov Canal. Photos were hung all over the building on clothespins, like laundry in a yard.

A LITTLE LATER, with Alex Yakovlev, we came up with an idea of making an exhibition at the Sennoy Market, where there was a flea market. The idea was to shoot a reportage and show it in the same place and to the same characters as in the pictures. We went there several times, noticed good points, looked at the characters. Finally, we decided to do it and on the appointed day Alex arrived at the flea market with a huge camera, hoisted it on a tripod. As soon as he had everything settled, he was "swept away" and dragged to the police station. The action exhibition did not take place.

A partnership of photographers on the initiative of Raphael joined and participated in the movement called Next Stop. A group of Danish young photographers came to St. Petersburg and stayed in our apartments. I got a curly black Sik, I took him around the outskirts of Vasilevsky Island, he photographed old women at the Smolensk Church and got acquainted with scrap metal collectors on the street. There was also a joint exhibition with the Danes in the Palace of Youth. On my photo, someone glued a sticker, saying



Kazansky Bridge during a street demonstration.



In the train to Luga 1999.



Vasilevsky Island, winter 1992, on the eve of the introduction of free prices.



Artist Natasha Kraevskaya in the Akhmatova garden. Late 90s.



Galina Starovoitova, adviser to the President of the RSFSR on inter-ethnic issues, with her voters on Palace Square, 1992.

they wanted to buy it. I was happy to get some money. But then the buyer offered to exchange works, because he spent all money in St. Petersburg. He has brought a graphic abstraction in return, which is still hanging in my mother's apartment.

The next year, Rafael and company went to Aarhus, and I was not able to join them. As a result, Raphael did not register the association of photographers, wealthy collectors were found for his work, and he lost interest in team projects.

Already when the Partnership disintegrated, *Ogonyok magazine* made a large publication with photos on a spread. Many years later, a funny letter was found on the magazine's website. A lady wrote to the magazine that she was walking past the Kazan Cathedral and got into a frame in which protesters were grabbed. She said that she had nothing to do with the event, but in the picture she looked well, with the hair fluttering beautifully in the wind, so she had no complaints.

Photojournalists slowly scattered among the editorial offices, fortunately there was a demand for energetic and young, eager for business trips and for shooting sensational photos from hot spots.

We went to Vilnius and Tallinn, flew to Tbilisi, Baku, and Karabakh. In the early 90s, there was no censorship in St. Petersburg publications, it was possible to get a permit even to make shooting in Kresty prison. Most newspapers adhered to a liberal line, and reality was more incredible than fantasy.

Photographers from the company of Rafael Mangutov had different lives. Felix Titov became a war correspondent and disappeared in 1995 in Chechnya, Pavel Glebov went to England and stayed there for many years, Zhenya Mokhorev became a famous art photographer. Alexander Belenky today teaches photojournalism at the university.

In the mid-90s, in 1996, Sobchak lost the election to a man in a construction helmet and with the slogan "There is a lot of work to do ahead", to Vladimir Yakovlev.

In 1998, Galina Starovoitova was murdered in the entrance hall of her house. That night, I got a call from the newsroom and had to go to the scene. The day was dawning. Policemen, reporters, and onlookers gathered on Griboyedov's channel.

Soon I left the newspaper. There began the time for maga-

zines, glossy, and entertainment. Magazines generously advertised cars, fitness, doors, and jewelry. These businesses were run by those who changed their specialty, philologists and historians who became entrepreneurs. The texts in the magazines tried to direct to the sphere of their former interests: French philosophy, new cinema, and heroes of the underground. Foucault and Derrida co-existed with texts in praise of Gucci and Versace. There was even a special person in the editorial office, who was in charge of the correct spelling of brands. Once a man came to the editorial office with a draft print of the magazine for edits with a finger pointing at one of the lines of advertising text. The man was asked to wait a bit and they forgot about him. So he sat for an hour with a finger resting on the line where something had to be fixed. When he left, they decided that he just did not like to read.

IN THE LATE 90S, with the approach of the Millennium, the idea of a magazine independent of advertisers and devoted to new manifestations of urban life and culture became increasingly relevant, and after several attempts, by 2003 the publishers were found for the *Krasny magazine*. Krasny meant beautiful and revolutionary, not like all others.

In 2013, the last volume of the five-volume series of photo-books about St. Petersburg and Leningrad, collected by University Professor Vladimir Nikitin, called *The End of a Century: Metamorphosis of Being. Leningrad – Saint Petersburg*, was published. The end of the century featured metamorphoses of being – demonstrations, elections, ice swimmers, newlyweds, bankers, crime scenes, and beauty contests.

The end of the century spoke in the language of irony, strange convergences, contrasts, the social seemed to be more important than the figurative.

Today, black and white photographs from the early '90s, made on film, seem older than they really were. As if they were made in a completely different time.

In the late 90s, photography became digital, there appeared Photoshop and color. The dispassionate deadpan, noir, and teenage snapshots trend reached Russia. Between the beginning of the 90s and their end, a chasm was revealed.

Sometime in 2000, in the bookstore Anglia on the Fontanka I saw for the first time the luxury publication of Boris Mikhailov's album *Case History*. 1998–1999, the descent into human hell on snow-white paper caused a physiological bout of nausea and pain. It was impossible to view this story, for which homeless and sick residents of Kharkov posed for a dollar. Just a week later, a review of this album appeared in a St. Petersburg newspaper, the author of which criticized Mikhailov for venality and betrayal. After reading it, I wanted to defend Mikhailov by answering the article, but I never wrote to the newspaper. x

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Late 1990s. Demonstration on Nevsky Prospect, the column of the communist party.



Philosophy students' party at a private one room apartment, Energetikov prospect.

PHOTO: PRIVATE

Leap into the void

by **Anna Kharkina**

I do not know how to best make those times an entertaining story to tell. Was it even a little bit entertaining? It was and we got out of it. By hook or by crook, we managed it. Some people found themselves not in the country where it all had begun, not in the profession they had studied for. These people were lacking a humane state that would support its citizens, they were standing practically on their own free will and curiosity. We were these people, we were the generation of the 90s. The decade began for me in Leningrad and the USSR, and ended with the beginning of the new millennium in the Russian St. Petersburg.

Only those who left the Soviet school in the early 1990s and found themselves in the vastness of a free every-man-for-himself market – an emerging market for goods at market prices and a collapsed labour market – could really understand that time, without explaining the context, interpretations, and references to films (specifically Alexei Balabanov's *Brother*, 1997). On the other hand, every city has its own history. We tell you about St. Petersburg, the place that gathered us under one sky dome. It is the westernmost city in Russia, and not only geographically.

WHAT HAVE THE 1990S taught us? The ability not to make long-reaching plans. We have learned to see the future no further than a couple of years ahead. A two-year contract or stipend seemed to be a miracle of stability. It would mean that for 24 months you were sure that money for food and rent would come

ANNA KHARKINA shares her experiences of a decade that began in Leningrad and the USSR and ended with the beginning of the new millennium in the Russian's St. Petersburg. The students were all badly dressed but genuinely interested to discuss the bigger questions in life.

regularly! And what was beyond this horizon, we would wait and see. Maybe the country would no longer be the same and there would be different employers. In a couple of years, everything, absolutely everything could change. Only the Hermitage was an eternal employer, and its employees went to work there to the last breath, crawling to sit on a working chair, to take a place and not to give it to the younger – having entered this river once, they would never go out of it again.

What time point should we select to start counting down? Not a calendar timer, but a countdown of the era? Viktor Tsoy (rock musician), rock music, *Assa* movie, the romance of the revolution that should have been experienced, but should not have to be fought for, because it was given as a gift by the fate itself, were left behind in the 1980s. We should begin the countdown of 1990s with the attempted coup of 1991. The alternative to inaction was even more dreary than the necessity to act. The majority did not want the continued Soviet boredom, except for those who were

fed by it and authorized it. People went away from the TVs broadcasting classical ballet and went to the square, to the Mariinsky Palace. A few days of the attempted coup did not shake the world but became an important milestone in the choice of future. This choice the citizens of Russia will later betray and forget.

AUGUST, 1991. The calamity did not break out in Leningrad. We got its echoes with the news from Moscow. The tanks did not reach St. Petersburg. I was 16 and had to go to the school soon, to the graduation class. We were living in an outlying residential district of Leningrad. It is called Krasnoselsky, although it is far from Krasnoe Selo. The district consisted of nine-story buildings, built in the late 1970s on a swamp littered with construction debris. It is also a former district of aristocratic palaces and park ensembles built along the line where the seacoast ran thousands of years ago. During the time of USSR, the palaces of aristocrats were turned into art and police schools.

We were living on the border of this cascade of old unkempt palaces on the former bottom of the Gulf of Finland. I remember when I was a child, the ground on the playground was swaying slightly under my feet. It was an old swamp littered with garbage.

Friends who had wealthier parents went to summer cottages, on summer holidays, and had not yet returned. The start of the school year was only on September 1. I was alone – all my peers were in the countryside – I was spinning on a merry-go-round in the kindergarten. For some reason, when I remember my childhood, this picture of a spinning carousel often pops up in my memory. I used it in winter and in summer. In summer, raising dust with my feet, pushing off the ground. In winter, spinning it and falling into the snow. These merry-go-rounds were our Disney Land during the school years. Kindergarten children were taken away by their parents in the evening, and the space around the kindergarten guarded by a lattice fence was allocated to us, schoolchildren.

MY FAMILY DID NOT HAVE a summer house. Before school and in the early school years, my grandmother and I went to visit her relatives in the village, first travelling to Sharya by train, then to Pavino by bus and further to Dobroumovo in a logging machine. This is a separate story and a part of my self-identification – fields, ponds, horseflies, goats, and cows, unpainted wooden huts. Aunt Nyura, grandmother's sister, a pensioner who survived the siege of Leningrad as a child and lost all her teeth because of this, climbed onto the roof herself to repair it. All these summer impressions led to the understanding that our ancestors lived somewhere in a place that was not so easy to reach even in 1980s. Once I asked Facebook friends what was there, at this region where my grandmother grew up? Someone answered – “nothing, just prison camps of GULAG”. The nearby town of Kotlas, which grandmother mentioned several times, for exam-

ple, was a place to which *kulaks* were deported and made to work in the forestry industry. My grandmother was also forced to work in forest industry as a young woman and had a clear memory of sleeping with other workers on the floor of a barrack. She was not a prisoner, and could after a while return to her family, which almost been accused to be *kulaks* but managed to escape this definition somehow, that means that they managed to stay alive.

My summer vacation in the village, of course, included compulsory labour: almost daily picking blueberries and wild strawberries, moulding potatoes, turning over and collecting dry hay with a rake in the field. It was actually fun and now a part of my precious memories about my grandmother. A child was very able to do these duties.

Afterwards my grandmother grew old and had no strength

to go to her peasant homeland, instead my mother in the summer took me to a recreation centre in Kirillovskoe in Karelia. After that, there were dachas of my mother's friends, where we were invited to live in the summer. They were located in Tikhvin, Luga, and Taytsy. Then there was more and more lonely walking around the houses in the city, or sitting on the balcony, with overgrown petunia seedlings and a shabby concrete floor covered with old paint. From the

sixth floor, I looked over at the kindergarten, the one where the merry-go-round stood, I looked at the pigeons on the roof of the kindergarten spinning in one place and wrote poems about involuntary loneliness in summer:

*The pigeons whirling around their axis,
The wires swinging and the leaves swaying,
The kindergarten is built as the letter H,
And somewhere there is me standing alone,
making X-sign with hands.
I am the inevitability of drama,
I am the one who wants to be found
So that there were no gaps in the answer of life.
But people standing in pairs
Are wandering symmetrically –
They are sweeping through me
Two hands clutched together.*

Then my friends returned to the beginning of school. August 1991 ended. The attempted coup ended in failure, and we were happy about it.

AS FAR AS I REMEMBER, we did not have any revolutionary or protest feelings in my family. There was only a reluctance to go back to the boredom and to the impossibility to speak the truth openly. We were quite tired of lies and ideology. We wanted to speak freely, or at least have it as an open opportunity. The Gorbachev era did not give anything in terms of material well-being – on the contrary – it became even more difficult to get food on the table,

**“THE MAJORITY
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PHOTO: MIKHAIL BORISOV

Spontaneous trade at Sennaya Square in 1991.



PHOTO: MIKHAIL BORISOV

there were even fewer things in stores, trips abroad remained, as before, impossible reality. They were not visualized by us even in dreams. For a long time, I imagined Paris as it was depicted in the television series *The Three Musketeers* and was very surprised when I visited Paris much later that it had nothing to do with everyone's favourite Soviet film. But the possibility of telling the truth, of discussing the history not written in Soviet textbooks, was quite an important intangible value that mattered in our adolescence. To tell the truth, one's own truth, suddenly became not scary, and was even inspired by the society. For example, TV crew installed Glasnost (Public Speaking) Booths on the streets, and everyone could come in and speak out about anything. It was filmed and then shown on an official TV channel.

By 1991, the freedom of speech had taken root and we did not want to abandon it. Gorbachev was mostly respected, and it was clear that he was trying to do his best. He was looking and speaking very pleasantly. Those who attempted the coup, on the other hand, looked completely mossy and archaic. Fortunately, it quickly became clear that one could breathe out and the attempted coup failed. The new school year started as usual. The democracy won that time.

During the last year at school, most of us were busy choosing a university which they were going to enter and preparing for admission examinations. At the age of 16, I had no clear idea of various professions. It seemed that by choosing an economic higher education, I could somehow ensure that there would

be money enough to support myself in the future. Therefore, together with my friend, I entered a preparatory course of the Financial Economic Institute near the Kazan Cathedral. For a year, we honestly went to the city centre after school to improve our knowledge of the subjects on which there were entrance exams – mathematics and Russian. At the same time, we were not told anything about the work of an economist, and what we would be studying for five years later if we entered the Financial Economic Institute. Either because I never got a clear idea of the profession of an economist (for some reason, for me, an economist

**“IT WAS GREAT TO STUDY
IN THE DECADE OF
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was equal to an accountant then, I did not realise, for example, the fact that the Financial Economic Institute taught also how to analyse financial markets, the subject which I would be interested much more than accounting), or I was tired of solving equations with three unknown elements, but having studied for the entire academic year at the preparatory school at the Financial Economic Institute, I applied for the Philosophical Faculty at the St. Petersburg State University instead. My

reason was something like this – the future was uncertain, and it was not clear what professions will be needed – at the same time the philosophy answered the question about the meaning of life, at least there would be some certainty in existence.

THAT WAS HOW I ENTERED the Philosophical Faculty in 1992. We had four entrance exams: Russian, English, history and philosophy. For Russian I wrote an essay on Varlam Shalamov, I missed



Counters near Primorskaya, late 90s.



Boys display a banner on the Alexandria Column during a rally to call for the renaming of Leningrad to St. Petersburg, June 1991.

all the meetings arranged by the faculty before the exams, where the teachers at the St. Petersburg State University told what to prepare for. It was not on purpose, it just happened every time that before I found the right room, the meeting was coming to an end. Most challenging was to prepare for the exam in philosophy, of which I has not known anything, since I has not studied it at school, I prepared using I. T. Frolov's *Philosophical dictionary*, which I still deem suitable for a beginner in philosophy.

In the university I was directly disappointed that the search for the meaning of life was not conducted at the Philosophical Faculty. In the first year, Professor Sergeev, who taught Ancient Greek philosophy, as it later turned-out retelling Martin Heidegger's lectures, explained that philosophy was not interested in the meaning of life, for this other organizations, such as church, should be contacted. Philosophy, he explained, deals with the question of thinking, how was this thinking possible and why we could talk about this possibility with at least some certainty. Philosophy also deals with the questions of being – why there was something and not just nothing. And that we might know something about it. At that time, we enjoyed reading Merab Mamardashvili and his beautiful lectures that philosophizing itself is a subject matter of philosophy.

In my first year, the meaning of life for me was not the question of finding the meaning of life, but the practice of overcoming the difficulty of reading philosophical books and transforming them into understandable texts in my head. I can say that I started to read philosophical texts freely only by the third study year. Then, finally, studying began to be fun. I finally started enjoying philosophizing itself, like it was described in Mamardashvili's lectures. Professor Sergeev again made fun of students who thought that they had come to the Faculty of Philosophy to learn something that would be useful in life. He proudly and cunningly winked and told us happily that philosophy was useless in ev-

eryday life, and it should be said that more practical classmates slowly started to do something else over time. For example, one girl from Krasnodar, having suffered in the cold and damp St. Petersburg for a year, went back to the fruitful southern gardens and became a fitness instructor.

IT WAS GREAT TO STUDY in the decade of freedom, at the faculty that did not oblige you to anything and was even proud to graduate free thinkers with vague prospects for future work. As my supervisor and our common informal leader Askold Vladimirovich Timofeenko said, “when you receive your master's degree from the faculty, it will say a “philosopher”, with which you will be very happy, followed by a “philosophy teacher”, with which you will be much less happy.”

When we started our studies there, the building of the Faculty of Philosophy itself, next to the library of the Russian Academy of Sciences and one of the first buildings in St. Petersburg – the building of the Twelve Colleges, which housed the Faculty of Philology – was in the state of the cave, presenting a living illustration to the Plato's work *Republic*. Outside this example of Northern classicism, looked not so bad, but inside paint fell off the walls, water leaked along the walls, and you could almost see stalactites hanging from the ceiling.

At some point during our studies, the Queen of Great Britain visited this building. Not the Faculty of Philosophy itself, but the laboratory located behind closed doors in the same building. On the occasion of her arrival, the staircase she was supposed to walk along was put in order – the falling off paint was cleaned, the walls were painted, albeit in a rather unpleasant colour. So, half of the flight leading to our floor looked decent. The funds for the big repairs came when I finished my studies – in 2000s. The walls were painted everywhere in a color acceptable for official buildings, new good parquet was laid, and a chandelier



Celebrating together with lecturers Askold Vladimirovich Timofeenko (upper row, second from the left) and Professor Konstantin Sergeev (upper row on the right) at the Faculty of Philosophy, 1997.



Philosophical discussion in the corridors of the Faculty of Philosophy with lecturers Askold Vladimirovich Timofeenko (left) and Vitaly Genadievich Karavaev (right)

PHOTO: PRIVATE

was hung. Everything became decent-looking, but the spirit of freedom immediately began to vanish. Even then, it was felt that floors like that were not laid for free for no reason and those who distributed money would soon begin to demand something in return.

The Soviet Union ended to exist in 1991, a year before I entered St. Petersburg State University. This meant that the old Marxist and Leninists teachers, mostly mediocre careerists, had to find some new niche for themselves, they were not lustrated. But they lost their power and were not as terrible as they used to be. Rather, they became ridiculous, but nevertheless inevitable. For everyone else, the disappearance of the oppression of the Soviet ideology meant that it finally became possible to freely do their job without cunning, censorship no longer needed to be cunningly bypassed. It was great!

IN SOVIET TIMES, the classical philosophy and the history of philosophy were not banned, although they were often viewed through the prism of Hegel and dialectical materialism. And through Hegel and dialectical materialism you can see anything, even the ancient philosophy. Hegel had created such a powerful explanatory apparatus, which, once accepted, was difficult to get rid of, especially if it was polished by Marx and Engels. In the late USSR, mainly modern Western philosophers were banned at the Philosophy Faculty, as well as contemporary Western culture in general. Therefore, in addition to the Hegel's prism, there was a survival strategy during Soviet time – to write a book about a modern philosopher, to talk about his or her thoughts as they were, and in the introduction to criticize them from a permitted ideological point of view. Everyone, of course, understood that one did not have to read the introduction, that it was written so that the authorities simply get from the author's back.

There was no need to write in Aesopian language in 1992. The state, on the contrary, supported freedom of thought, although

not financially, but at the level of the state discourse and the permission to speak what you think. There were constant debates on television, where representatives of different parties held interesting discussions on all sorts of topics of the hour. This had a positive impact on the atmosphere in academia as well.

We in our group at the Philosophy Faculty deep within were dandies, although we were terribly dressed, if you look at the photos of that time now. All I had was a large jacket from the Chinese market and trousers, which I had to sew myself using a pattern from *Burda* magazine and the Soviet wool fabric stored by my thrifty grandmother. *Burda* and an old sewing machine were my saviour at this time, because there was nothing else to wear. But it did not prevent us students from displaying self-confidence. Absolutely everyone was badly dressed then, if they did not sew clothes themselves, they bought clothes at Aprashka or similar markets, where shuttle traders sold clothes brought from cheap Chinese markets. People who lost their jobs at the collapsed Soviet enterprises used to take a train to Moscow, where they bought Chinese clothes in small batches at Cherkizon (Cherkizovsky market) and then resold them in Petersburg. It may sound sad, but at that time I never thought about what I was wearing, clothes did not matter much at all.

The student aplomb was not about knowing how to dress, but about honing the argument in conversation. My classmates staged real intellectual duels, they challenged both their classmates and teachers. The Socratic method proved to be quite effective in winning this sort of duel every time. It forced the interlocutor to explain all the concepts he or she used, and this was quite difficult, one might say hopeless. We quickly understood which teachers we had a lot to learn from and which ones it was pointless to waste our time with. We were faithful to the first ones, followed them on their heels, stayed after mandatory lessons in our free time to discuss the philosophical texts that fascinated us at that time. It was mainly



Assistant professor Nikolay Borisovich Ivanov.

PHOTO: PRIVATE

Heidegger, Foucault, and Kant. It was even Hegel, whom we tried to read in a different way, outside the framework of classical Soviet dialectics. The classmates were also fond of antiquity and Aristotle.

All free time was devoted either to the preparation for compulsory classes or to non-obligatory discussions of philosophy. It often occurred in an informal setting, just staying at the faculty, together with our favourite teacher. We have read together with Askold Timofeenko, for example, Hegel and Heidegger in the evenings. He did not receive any money or other academic credits for this, these classes were not listed anywhere. It was pure enthusiasm on our part and on his. At that time, classrooms were not locked and there was no watch at the entrance to the faculty, so we could stay as long as we wanted, even until late. Then we continued our discussions in the trolleybus from Vasilievsky island to Nevsky prospect on our way home. Now there is no more freedom to enter and leave the university as one wishes. Five years ago, I tried to enter our faculty, but at the entrance I ran into a watchman checking everyone for a student card, which I did not have.

ANOTHER IMPORTANT institution in our spare time was gatherings at the Borey Club, which was a café, meeting place and a gallery at the same time. I went there to listen to Nikolay Borisovich Ivanov, Associate Professor of the Department of Social Philosophy, an amazingly intelligent, beautiful, and brilliant oral thinker. His beauty and charisma were almost out of this world, that was, not from the Soviet world. I do not even know if Ivanov has written something worthwhile, I have just listened to him. He invented and practiced an interdisciplinary method of analysing fairy

tales and school textbooks, mixing Vladimir Propp and Juri Lotman with his own way of thinking.

On the ground floor of the building where the Faculty of Philosophy was located, there was also a legendary bookstore, where you could buy everything you needed for the philosophical education. First of all, one could buy there the books newly translated into Russian. It was a Klondike both for students and lecturers alike. There I bought Heidegger's *Being and Time* translated by Vladimir Bibikhin. It was probably the main book for our group, which we never tired of reading, re-reading and discussing, comparing it with the German original.

At that time, publishing houses were constantly translating something, often it was previously banned books. In general, the studies were only in Russian and the literature for compulsory reading was only in Russian translation. Nevertheless, we voluntarily studied Ancient Greek, Latin, and German. It was not difficult to sign up for the additional free classes in these languages. I did not learn Greek, but a group of my classmates, together with Askold Vladimirovich Timofeenko, having quickly learned the basics of Greek, sat down to translate one short work by Aristotle, just to see, what Aristotle actually wrote. Aristotle's Soviet translations were strongly formed by the terminology of dialectical materialism, so we wanted to learn and feel Aristotle's language and perceive his conceptual apparatus without this filter. The result was a completely unreadable text for most, but nevertheless the text was quite logical and understandable for the group of philosophers who had translated it. In my first year, I struggled with the Aristotle's texts failing to understand them. But in this

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strange translation, Aristotle suddenly became much more approachable and clearer. However, it was not possible to publish this translation, because it was not Russian proper, but a new language which had been invented in the spirit of the languages of the Slavic group.

At that time, there was no money for cafes and restaurants, so we often gathered at someone's home. Most often, it was the home of my most ambitious classmate Vitaly Ivanov. His father, unlike other parents

who lost their jobs in the early 1990s and saved the family budget as best they could, sometimes in quite radical ways, such as raising rabbits to feed their family in a two-room apartment, discovered his real talent in the new Russia. He became a businessman, opened a gas station, and made good earnings on it at that time. His business went so well that he had bought his son a one-room apartment in St. Petersburg, where we often spent time discussing philosophical questions or preparing for exams. We drank not much, cheap vodka Royal was unpopular in our philosophical circle. We bought Georgian red wines in a cellar store on the Kadetskaya Line of Vasilyevsky Island, conveniently located just on the way from the university to the metro station. For the holidays, we made a classic Olivier salad and a radish salad, prepared according to a recipe brought by the classmates from Siberia from two main ingredients – radish and mayonnaise.

WE WERE NOT INTERESTED in politics at all, we simply voted for the democratic party of Yabloko, which was in opposition, we voted for the freedom of speech, and for the capitalism with a human face. It seemed that the country was on the right course and that we should not fear for democracy.

At the university there were a lot of old-school intriguers. We fought against them by ignoring them. The intriguers intrigued, pushing themselves up the career ladder at the Faculty of Philosophy, and we kind of did our own business, which was love for Sofia, philosophy, and were not very interested in getting promoted on the career ladder in a complex academic hierarchy. I guess we should not have been so careless and selfless. We should have been smarter to cement democracy at least at the faculty. This would have been difficult, but not impossible, because the resistance of the conservative power was weaker at that time. In principle, we simply did not understand much about the matters of power. And looking at where my classmates are now, we still have not comprehended this matter. Our student group was not about securing a good academic position. It was about how to lead a meaningful life in the situation of significant financial uncertainty. How to reconcile poverty with dignity and meaning.

AT THAT TIME, despite the great interest in the West, we stewed mainly in our own juice. We did not have any projects initiated with the European colleagues almost throughout our studies. There simply was no funding for any form of academic exchange from our university; there was no funding for academic research either, just for teaching. It was only at the end of my time in St. Petersburg State University that I was able to participate in the Nietzsche summer school in Finland in Jyväskylä. We travelled to Finland on our own money, in a private taxi, which was certainly not an official business and rather cheap. The difference in food prices between Russia and Finland was significant, so I took a package of oatmeal with me, and I planned to eat it for a week I was spending at the summer school in Finland. The dormitory where we were accommodated was a 40-minute walk from the university, and I had no money for the bus either. I walked from the university to the dormitory under lunch time to cook my porridge and then back to the university. As it took more than an hour, I inevitably missed some lectures. A couple of days later, Finnish colleagues from the University of Jyväskylä, the organizers of the summer school, realized that some of the participants were disappearing during the lunch to make their own meal in the dormitory, and reduced the price of lunch in the student



On the Razezshaia Street, late 1990s.

PHOTO: MIKHAIL BORISOV

canteen for us. It was a student buffet, and it was some kind of feast with a few salads! This Nietzsche summer school was attended by students from the universities of Jyväskylä and Greifswald, and I think there were also the Poles there, but I do not remember which university. German professors were impressive in size of their well-fed bodies, with fingers as thick as sausages, and that they ignored the fact that most students did not understand German well enough to follow their lectures. They read out their pre-written texts in German ex cathedra and were very pleased with themselves. In their free time, they did not try to communicate with the students on friendly footing. Although we managed to make friends with the teachers from Finland. In general, it was the Finns who understood our problems best of all. They also knew a bunch of Soviet songs translated into Finnish and we were singing them at the end of the summer school together to the guitar after the evening sauna.

GEORGE SOROS, in one of his speeches recorded and preserved in the Open Society Archives in Budapest, said that he was almost the only one who came to Eastern Europe to support the emerging democracy with substantial funding. He really helped many humanitarian scholars in Russia and other countries in Eastern Europe to survive in the 1990s, supporting scientific projects and publications and allowing young people to receive a European-level education at the European University in Budapest. But he was right, he was almost the only one who had tried to give young Russian democracy and open society a chance. One can say by now, that the rest of the West have missed this opportunity. Ten years of the 1990s passed for many in the struggle for existence, and then the completely different 2000s began, oil prices rose, and thanks to this, the Russian political elite was able to start compensating for the gaping hole in budget funding of the society needs, in their own manner and according to their own taste and aims. ❌

Fabulous lost years

by **Olga Serebryanaya**

In 1997, I found myself in Budapest as a political science MA student at the Central European University and was surprised to see the crowds of my fellow students frantically arguing about something. They would sit at a long table, puff clouds of tobacco smoke and leave batteries of empty bottles, yelling at each other in their language. We didn't understand them – we only knew that they all came from the former Yugoslavia and were having a never-ending argument about the war. As students from Russia and former Soviet republics, we didn't want to know anything about it, although Russia had quite recently finished its own war in Chechnya.

As my country that I left long ago is waging a war against a neighboring country I've never been to, I'm starting to understand my former Yugoslav student friends. Yes, now we *are* those Yugoslavs, almost 30 years later, claiming we're not responsible for the killings and shelling and marauding our soldiers have done. Now I, too, would like to sit at a long table anywhere on Earth where I can find a group of compatriots and, being unable to produce clouds of tobacco smoke, to present even longer batteries of empty bottles. Not that I actually do this. But now I can easily imagine what my fellow former Yugoslav CEU students were arguing about. I apologize for not understanding them then. I do understand them now.

THEN, IN RUSSIA, trees were greener. We had survived. And not only that – we had won. In September 1992, I became a philosophy student at the St. Petersburg State University. That wasn't guaranteed. I was born and finished school in Siberia, in a place I used to call “the center of Eurasia”: the Altay region, close to the border with Mongolia, the so-called “16th Soviet republic”. If you are born in a place like this, you are short of the means to escape: it takes four days of a

For **OLGA SEREBRYANAYA** growing up close to the border with Mongolia Perestroika meant a lot. In the former Soviet reality, she could not enter a major university, not without special quotas, Komsomol membership, protection, or family ties etc. Then things changed. Today she is a journalist and news editor living in Prague.

train journey to reach either the Western sea (the Baltics) or the Eastern one (the Pacific) – perhaps, it could be a shorter trip to the shores of the Arctic Ocean but nobody tried because it was hardly an escape. And the escape *was* a topic of my childhood because the late Soviet life in general felt suffocating.

I remember the day Perestroika started: my out-of-school activities were, due to my mother's dictatorial nature, restricted to a music school, and in January 1987, when the Communist party plenary session declared that we should rebuild ourselves, we

were performing for some audience. My female choir fellows came to the music school in white aprons with huge white ribbon knots in their hair (because of the Communist party plenary session) and for the performance we changed into something equally festive. Radio, I remember, was vividly talking about Perestroika – without yet realizing what it was. Next several years proved extremely interesting: I was reading the émigré and dissident literature Perestroika allowed to be published and was frantically following the reassuring

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political developments. They were in my favor: in the former Soviet reality, I could hardly hope to get a place in a major university without special quotas, Komsomol membership, protection, or family ties whereas in the new reality I was free to try. I tried and I won: I got my place at the second-best higher school in the



Queen Elizabeth II visits the Peter and Paul Fortress in St Petersburg in 1994.

PHOTO: MIKHAIL BORISOV

country without anyone's help and despite my mother's opinion that it was impossible.

I won over my dictatorial mother, over my country's totalitarian past, over grey remembrances of my childhood and, finally, over the need to escape. I didn't want to escape anymore, St. Petersburg felt like my true home. A place where I could explore the vastness and depths of European philosophical thought against the backdrop of architectural splendor.

I chose philosophy because I felt underinformed about what was happening in the history of human thought outside of the Marxist tradition that was only allowed in the Soviet Union. I felt that even the most famous Russian classical writers and, it goes without saying, Soviet scribes looked somehow stupid against that tradition. I wanted to be a writer, but I thought that – to become a good writer – I should first study European philosophy in detail in order not to get trapped into that stupidity again. And I did plunge into it.

My five years at the university were the years of total freedom: one could read, watch, and listen to anything one wished. Libraries were available, the nascent publishing houses financially supported by the Soros Foundation were mass-publishing translations of the classics of European thought, and we were mass-buying (and reading) the books. Cinema houses organized retrospectives of the greatest western and eastern European film

directors and one could meet Peter Greenaway's cinematographer Sasha Vierny not only in a movie house but also on the street. He came to take part in a film screening but also to have a look at the city that used to be the capital of the country his Jewish parents emigrated from before his birth. He even spoke some Russian.

You never knew whom you could meet on the streets of

St. Petersburg in those years. I personally saw the Queen of England crossing the Palace bridge, Prince Philip at the wheel, Her Majesty waving at me. But I also met Brian Eno at a private party. Everything was possible – apart from (sometimes) a proper dinner: we were as poor as a church mouse but didn't care much. We thought that money would come one day. While we had none, we plunged into the history of human knowledge. But what is impor-

tant here is that we plunged into that history at the expense of ignoring what was going on in our country.

"I'm a child of Perestroika", I often proudly repeat to my foreign friends. Yes, that's true – but I always forget to mention that I'm also a betrayer of Perestroika. When Yeltsin became the president of my country, I wasn't 18 yet, I couldn't vote, but I was happy that people elected him. He was my president. When he – whose political trajectory I'd been closely following ever since he emerged as a possible leader – became a legally elected head of state, I thought my political mission was accomplished. Now

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President Boris Yeltsin at the entrance to the Mariinsky Palace, 1996.

PHOTO: MIKHAIL BORISOV

that he was the president, the future of my country was safe and I should mind my own business, *i.e.* do my reading.

That was my true belief. I didn't vote in the parliamentary elections of January 1993 (though I had the right to) when the hateful Liberal Democrats of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy became the biggest party in the Russian parliament and one of Russia's famous intellectuals, Yuri Karyakin, declared publicly: "Russia, you have gone crazy". At that moment, I didn't know and didn't want to know anything about that. My mantra was that "we won" and that I had to do what my profession required me to do. I became completely indifferent to anything political. And the whole country did.

When Yeltsin shelved the Russian parliament in October 1993, I lived in a student dormitory not only without TV but also without radio: it was somehow fashionable then to despise any kind of straightforward journalism and, above all, I was catching up with a group of historians who'd started learning ancient Greek half a year earlier than me: Greek irregular verbs were my true agenda. I learned about those events at a lecture on Philosophy of Religion because the lector happened to be in Moscow at the time of shooting. She told us what she'd seen; her lectures weren't interesting; six years later she, famously unstable, was hit by a

car and died. After her death, we learnt that she had been caring for her crazy husband, a philosopher, too. Their generation was prone to craziness because of the doublethink, we thought. Ours was to become the first sane one.

Another moment that flashes in my memory: I'm a third-year student, I'm at home alone, and I wash my then-husband's white shirt while listening to the radio. And the radio says with the voice

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of my president Yeltsin's that "we are sending troops to Chechnya". God remembers, I was against it at the moment — I even stopped washing the shirt and spent some minutes sitting silently on the side of a bath-tube. I thought it was a wrong decision (Chechnya, in my view, should have gone its own way) but I repeated to myself that we won and because of that I should work on the revival of national philosophical thought while Yeltsin minds the war.

We thought Yeltsin was a political actor and we, his supporters, somehow lost that ability by having elected him. The notion of civil responsibility was as far from us at that moment as my birthplace was from St. Petersburg. Politics was someone else's area — everyone thought so in the 1990s.

The philosophical tradition we tried to revive was based on Heidegger. No, that's not true, it was going as deep down as 5th

century BC, and every respectful student of philosophy was studying ancient Greek and Latin. But all that was because of Heidegger. In 1992, we were not aware of any political implications that Heidegger's name would raise later. Even in 2000, when I was participating in a great summer school on Heidegger and Nietzsche in Tuebingen, it was OK for Porsche to finance us – the lady from the company who greeted us as a sponsor was referred to by the participants as 'Frau Ueberporsche' and there was nothing criminal in that. (One of the organizers of that conference, Professor Guenter Figal, resigned from the presidency of the Heidegger Society after the publication of *The Black Notebooks*).

Heidegger was introduced to us by Konstantin Sergeev – an extremely charismatic professor who taught any period of Western philosophy on the basis of Heidegger's lectures about it. That wasn't exactly cheating (though textually it was) – it was the reflection of Sergeev's own discovery of how to construe Western philosophy outside the Marxist tradition. His authority was based on the fact that he read Heidegger's lectures a few years earlier than we did, though, unlike us, he read them in English translation. We took it as our principle to read everything we could in the original.

But Heidegger was fashionable anyway: everyone lectured about him, and one of our less able teachers even demanded from students during her aesthetics exam to discuss *Sein und Zeit* (it hadn't been yet translated into Russian) because she genuinely believed that the *Origin of the Artwork* was the same text as *Being and Time*: some excerpts from the latter were published in a collection devoted to philosophy of art.

That is to say, some of our teachers didn't really know what they were teaching, curriculum was a mess, and we truly believed we would clear it up. In a sense, we did. Quite a few of my peers became sound specialists in various fields although they either left the country or functioned outside the university. Anyway, the philosophical literacy we acquired was perceived as a kind of obligation and when anyone of us hears philosophical terms used incorrectly, one always stands up to correct.

HOWEVER, WE CLEARED UP the mess in our own heads only. Western philosophy appeared to be rich, demanding, prohibiting, changing and generally unstable: the more you studied it, the less you were sure that you understood anything. We were submerging into the depths to get the grip of the tradition and to renew the Russian thinking while in reality it was the institutional structure that primarily required renewal. We didn't think about that – we only thought about the "flesh" of thinking, i.e. details, the slightest turns of thought, underestimated books and authors, the need for new translations and other material (in a different sense from materialism) things.

What we definitely should have thought then was our own reality – the university. In 1992, when I entered St Petersburg State University, the faculty of philosophy seemed to be in ruins: the pillars of Marxism-Leninism had been sent into retirement and new people invited from the army of rebels. The problem was that most of the rebels didn't know how to teach while the curriculum stayed unchanged in its essence: they only renamed "dialectics" as "ontology and theory of knowledge".

Since that time, I have a prejudice about political science: I think of this branch of social theory as non-existent simply because I saw with my own eyes a man in robes replacing the plate "Department of Scientific Communism" with the plate "Department of Political Science". Our new teachers from the rebels were very inspiring but they, too, somehow didn't rebel against the academic system they were supposed to renew. We kept thinking that the Soviet system of 40 hours of lectures per week was a sane one, we thought it was better to listen to forty general courses on various philosophical schools than to study just some of them closely. We never questioned the oral exam format, and, above all, we never thought of reforming the "dissertation defense" procedure. "Dissertation" is roughly a PhD thesis. And here I can tell an illuminating story.

AMONG THE YOUNG rebel teachers, there was a very bright married couple. St. Petersburg wasn't a native city for both of them though they came from the different ends of the formerly huge

USSR: he was from the West and she was from the East. The huge country ceased to exist as they were starting their postgraduate studies but before they could get to writing their theses they were gripped by prosaic poverty: he was working as an assistant professor but the salary the University paid was hardly enough for the monthly supply of cigarettes, and they have had a child already. Because of that (and many other factors such as an irregular supply of

hot water and failing heating in St. Petersburg), she left for her hometown to raise the child under her mother's care while she was writing a doctoral thesis about Kant. She wrote it in three years. During those years, he was lecturing almost daily, generously spending his time with his students and doing menial side-jobs to get the money to pay for his food, cigarettes being paid for by his university salary. However, he, too, was supposed to write his dissertation in those three years. But he didn't – he had no time to.

When those years passed, they both faced the necessity of "defense". Defense is a procedure of presenting one's dissertation to the learned public. This sounds good enough but "public" here means the "academic council" appointed by nobody knows who and – at the time of my studentship – consisting of people who knew nothing. To make things worse, the dissertation itself isn't published but presented in the form of a "self-

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retelling” booklet (autoreferat). The academic procedure didn’t require for the thesis itself to be read by anyone, and since it didn’t require that, one could infer that it also didn’t require for it to be written.

What I saw at the day of “defense” was hilarious: while he successfully defended the thesis that wasn’t even written but consisted of random sheets of paper put together, she was almost stopped in her “defense” because one member of the council whose native language wasn’t Russian couldn’t believe that “transcendental” spells as “transcendental” and not as “transdental” as he insisted. The philosophical dictionary was presented to the audience to persuade the professor that Kant’s “transcendental” had nothing to do with teeth, regardless of teeth’s failing state in most of the members of the council. That’s the epitome of the 1990s Russian academic practices: the key to his easy success was his constant presence at the university. The grid of science was so non-existent that one had to be physically there to persuade everyone one was doing some studies. If one took the liberty to vanish from the sight of one’s colleagues, one became suspicious to such an extent that the dictionary had to be brought to remind the academic council of the meaning of basic terminology.

That “defense” was a defining event. It sent him into madness (because, as a final step, he had to present the text for the approval of a committee in Moscow and he didn’t dare to send random sheets), it showed her that it was hopeless to seek any recognition based on one’s merits (and she retreated to her native city where she had the protection of her mother) and it put me into a pensive state. I saw it all, I promised myself to never behave like him. However, neither I nor anyone else thought of reforming the “defense” procedure itself. It has not been reformed to this day.

I personally had one more encounter with that system. Several years after my graduation from the St Petersburg state university and the CEU and having given birth to a baby, I came to the department of philosophy to find out how I could get to the point of “defending” my own dissertation. I was told that there were a few academic magazines that would gladly publish my articles (according to the rules, one had to have some publications to acquire the right to ‘defend’ one’s thesis) for as small amount of money as five thousand rubles. Since I was earning my living as a journalist at the time, I asked to confirm that five thousand rubles were to be paid to me for presenting an article to these magazines. “No”, I was answered, “you pay five thousand rubles to have your article published”. That was my last conversation with the department of philosophy, and I don’t regret.

WHAT I REGRET is the many things my generation failed to do. We didn’t reform the academic system, and as early as in 2010 it was appropriated by “patriots” for whatever goals Putin’s state might

set for them. Having gone very diverging ways in the search for the means of survival (for the common ways didn’t simply exist), we didn’t create a unity that could stand against the re-sovietisation of our sphere. Being discouraged by our “rebel” teachers from moral assessment of one’s actions, we failed to say that their and other people’s doings were unacceptable. ‘Western’ education didn’t help – it only put one in a conflict between the right principles and Russian reality.

In the end it turned out that the only pillar our generation can cling to now, in 2022, is neither some kind of common experi-

ence, be it success or failure, nor moral principles, nor professional reputation. The only pillar is the truth in the simplest sense of “white is white”, “black is black” and “5+7=12”. And as we are witnessing the disastrous toll of the war in Ukraine, we must recognize that in the previous decades we were passively looking at what happens to the idea of freedom when no one is ready to actively attend to it.

First, it dies under one’s private engagements with European philosophical tradition (or whatever it was on one’s mind then), then it is buried against the

background of general indifference partly caused by financial difficulties, and finally it becomes forgotten: it was easier to forget it than to face daily the popular question “tebe bol’she vsechnado?” roughly translated as “were you appointed by God to improve things on earth?”

This devil-may-care attitude was helpful in the 1990s to legitimize the practices that were prohibited by the Soviets – from free love to liberal attitude towards alcohol and recreational drugs. But the same attitude sends us to the pit now when we’re discussing who’s responsible for Russia’s invasion into Ukraine. None of us. But still every one of us. For the invasion (and Putin’s reign in general) became possible because we took freedom for granted and chose not to apply what we read in our philosophical books to the current reality.

THE 90S WERE FABULOUS – the longer I live, the happier they seem. But what we face now is also the consequence of those happy years. Remember the Yugoslav friends sitting at a long table? Sit down now and discuss. But it seems there is no one willing. Is this, too, the result of the 90s? Yes. But at the same time, it is tempting to believe it’s not. It’s so much nicer to think about those lost years as if they happened on a different planet, with different Russia, under a different, brighter sun. ✕

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PHOTO: SERGEI SHAMAKHOV

Left to right: Evgeniy Timchenko, Sergei Sirotkin, Vladislav Sapov. September 13, 1992. The Rooftop Concert in Sosnovy Bor.

The Pravednick's band project

My musical experience in the 90s

by **Andrei Patkul**

The 90s of the last century in Russia were an amazing, unusually intense time. Remembering it, it seems that each year of this now distant decade was unique, had its own unique aura. The 90s, by some magical power, managed to split and separate themselves into different parts, thereby exposing them, those opposites hiding in the fate of each person: the enthusiastic discovery of the new, the entire semantic continents, the delightful trust in hopes and the fascinating construction of plans for the future, and at the same time, disappointment and hopelessness up to the ruthless obviousness of *no future*.

However, it was precisely these extremes that showed the pricelessness of private human communication, the main language of which for me and my immediate environment, at least until a certain time, was music, more precisely, rock music. Now it seems to me sometimes that it has been a universal horizon from which people close to me and I have realised the world as a

ANDREI PATKUL reveals his own and his friends' take on the music development in St. Petersburg at this particular time. He and the band introduced necrorealism, and they were there when the genre of Zagrob-rock (Afterlife-rock) was born. Today he holds a PhD in philosophy and still plays in Pravednick's band.

whole and everything belonging to it. Friendship, love, reading books, communicating with nature, hours and days of loneliness, discovering piercing truths about the randomness of our existence and the inevitability of death – all this has happened in its single universe. And its heroes were for us not just unattainable idols and role models, but also the teachers of life.

IT IS NOT SURPRISING, therefore, that the attempts to pick up the initiatives of our masters and to produce, albeit at the level of

amateur activity, something in this field has not seemed to my friends and me something unnatural. It all started as if by itself.

Actually, my first experiments in the music occurred already in the mid-80s. At first, they were attempts to perform songs by foreign bands, first of all, The Beatles, the first acquaintance with whose music had been for me a real metanoia, an event after which I could no longer be the same as I was before. Since I had no musical education, and I did not show any special musical abilities at all, initially I was assigned the responsibility for percussion instruments and there was some logic in it. I played on a relatively small concrete ring covered with roofing material, one of my comrades played on a homemade electric guitar, the body of which was sawn out of the countertop, with homemade acoustic pick-ups, and another friend played on a maracas. This was our simple band, which did not even assume a full rhythm section.

The birth of Zagrob-rock

By 1988, the situation had changed. First, I was assigned with a bass guitar, also homemade, where bass strings were installed, designed for a conventional electric guitar. The reasons for which I got this instrument were about the same as the concrete ring with the roofing material that had previously fallen into my area of responsibility. It was believed that since the bass guitar (as far as we knew at the time) had the least strings, it would be easier learning to play. Secondly, and more importantly, by this time we felt in ourselves not only a craving, but also the ability to compose songs. The first topic of our opuses was somewhat unexpected, it was the life in the afterlife. (However, for someone who in the secondary school had to undergo a socially useful practice at Smolensky Orthodox Cemetery among dilapidated crypts and muddy tombstones, while visiting at rare moments of rest the Lutheran part of it, this topic would not seem too exotic). The afterlife, on the one hand, seemed to us to have the flair of mystery, just as any absolute Other should be mysterious. On the other hand, it was not at all gloomy and sinister: in the afterlife with prowess and fun, it was not boring, usually without any conflicts, except for one epic war between Hell and Heaven, devils of different ranks, angels and archangels, revived skeletons, spirits of famous people who had already left this world. It was not hard to guess that their favourite pastime was playing music together. So, first in theory and then in practice, the genre of Zagrob-rock (Afterlife-rock) was born; and so the Zagrob universe came into being.

As for the topology of the Zagrob universe, it was two-part and quite predictably consisted of Heaven and Hell (there was no Purgatory, according to the Russian tradition), between which there was a border – at times impenetrable, and at other times almost non-existent, everything depended, so to speak, on the

current political situation in the afterlife. Much of the toponymy of mythologies of various times and peoples could have been found also on the map of this world: Lethe, Styx, Champs-Élysées etc. Rather, the revolutionary fact was that in this case both Heaven and Hell had their own capitals, each of which contained diplomatic missions of the other side. In general, the development of civilization in the Zagrob universe was so great that on both sides of the border there was its own currency that could be freely converted: in Heaven it was heavenly hells, in Hell – hellish paradises. It is noteworthy that in comparison with the classical toponymy of the afterlife, many new names of otherworldly cities and other settlements have appeared in our Zagrob universe, for example, Helldamsk, Coffinford, Coffin City, Cemetery City, Columbariumburg, etc.

THE INHABITANTS of all these areas had an irresistible inclination to communicate and to form musical groups, which together constituted the phenomenon of Zagrob-rock. The tradition emerged that in playing guitars and percussion instruments, the devils (Devil of Helldamsk, Devil of the Underworld) achieved outstanding success. In keyboard playing, there were skeletons that nominally differed from each other in patronymics – depending on whose skeletons they were (so in Zagrob-rock Skeleton Ivanovich, Skeleton Petrovich and Skeleton Nikolaevich became especially famous, a special case was the Skeleton Ramone). On bass

guitars played the spirits of deceased musicians (so, according to legend, the spirit of Stuart Sutcliffe, the bass guitarist of The Beatles in the early stages of their career, who during his lifetime abandoned musical activity in favour of painting, after death nevertheless – already as a spirit – became one of the central characters of the afterlife music). It was also believed that some examples of the most complex afterlife genres were performed and recorded with the participation of a choir of spirits and a symphony orchestra of the All-Afterlife Television and Other-

worldly Radio. The themes and the content of the works of the afterlife music were grotesque. Instead of such frequent words in the names and the texts of classic rock hits as love, peace, and sex, words were used that were in one way or another associated with death, funeral rites, and transition to another world. (For example, *Cemetery on the Left Bank* (1990) instead of *Cafe on the Left Bank* (1978) by Wings).

Initially, this whole cheerful company found its embodiment in a kind of bandes dessinées, accompanied by more or less detailed “analytical” articles that parodied articles about rock music and rock musicians, which in the second half of the 80s and early 90s were increasingly published in the editions designed for teenagers and youth, primarily in *Rovesnik* and *Studencheskiy Meridian* magazines. At first, the names of the afterlife bands were not particularly original: they were all called Zagrob, only the

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sequential numbers of the groups varied. For example, Zagrob 109 and Zagrob 205 bands remained in memory. But after the exploitation of such a name as Zagrob N, it became clear that this practice had exhausted itself. At first, it was replaced by the technique of transforming the names of real bands in the spirit of the afterlife genre, for example, Deep Purple – in Deep Zagrob, but this was quickly found to be trivial. In this situation, quite by chance, the name was born that our – quite real – team took for itself: *The Pravednicks' Band*.

And it began by trying to transfer some of the achievements of Zagrob-rock from paper to the sphere of sound. In this regard, by the end of August 1988, the songs were recorded and processed in the format of a magnetic album, which original version was subsequently destroyed. It contained songs like *Coffinus*, *Being for the Funeral of Mr. Kite!*, *A Murder in the Merry Coffin Bar*, *What Scientists in Hell Will not Come up with*, *She Came in through the Coffin Window*, *Shady Cemetery Alleys*, etc. In 1990, the already mentioned song about the cemetery on the left bank was added to this group of songs, and in 1991 – an early version of the song *Rock-and-Coffin* (*Rock Around the Coffins*). Genre-wise, the songs in the album were mostly rock and roll and rhythm and blues, and most of the tunes had well-recognizable Western originals. However, in this cycle, it is worth mentioning the lyrical ballad called *The Dead Man's Love* based on the poignant lyrics (somewhat reduced) of Mikhail Lermontov.

At the same time, by 1990, the repertoire of the group, which had already discovered new, more complex, forms of rock music (psychedelic, art rock, hard rock) was changing. A special influence on the formation of the topics and the genre affiliation of the band's work in the 90s was caused by Pink Floyd, first of all, their first leader – Syd Barrett, both as part of the group and solo, The Doors, King Crimson, Yes, Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple etc., in a word, by the classic Western rock of the 60–70s.

The formation of The Pravednicks' Band

As a result, at this time the work of the group divided into three different directions.

First, it was a direction represented by short dynamic songs or lyrical ballads. Basically, they were devoted not to fictional events from the afterlife, but to the real acquaintances. These songs were lyrical, often ironic, sometimes there were cases of rather harsh social satire. Their recordings were planned to be collected in an album called *Cast off the lines!*, the full recording of which the band never started, in part because the material planned for it was not completed. Nevertheless, songs of this direction, such as *Tsushima Blues* (1990), *Oh, Zoya!* (around 1991), *Little Lida* (around 1997) were repeatedly performed by The Pravednicks' Band at its concerts.

The second direction – chronologically, perhaps the latest –

was dedicated to Lisiy Nos. Lisiy Nos was a village in the suburbs of St. Petersburg, nominally a part of it, a place where I was lucky enough to have grown up, and where The Pravednicks' Band had done its first musical experiments. In fact, this direction is a thematic cycle that reflects nostalgia for childhood and fascinating impressions from the nature of the northern coast of the Gulf of Finland, at different times of the year and at different times of the day. Individual songs of the cycle also reflected the unhurried life of the village inhabitants. I think the connection between the title of the series (and its title song) and the Beatles' *Strawberry Fields Forever* is striking. The Beatles in this case, indeed, served as a source of inspiration in many respects. This was shown by the presence in the cycle of a song dedicated to Mirnaya Street (*Everything Is Fine On Mirnaya*, 2000), where the country houses of the band members have been located, as an addition to the title song, just as The Beatles have paired *Strawberry Fields Forever* with *Penny Lane*.

But the key source of inspiration and even the prototype of the cycle was the album of The Moody Blues – another decisive influences on The Pravednicks' Band – *On the Threshold of a Dream* (1969). The cycle opens with the song *Jiakhon Fiona* (1995), which has been inspired by the eponymous children's book by the Soviet writer Elena Vereyskaya with the story of an evil wizard living in a castle, from which in the day-

time only an old gate is visible – without an adjacent fence – on the road between two houses, and which becomes visible with the onset of nine o'clock in the evening. The song *For the First Time* (1997–2000) is dedicated to the childhood friendship of two boys. The core song of the entire cycle, *At twilight* (1999–2000), talks about the semi-mystical experience of the transition from day to night. The whole cycle is permeated by a sub-cycle associated with the seasons, these are four songs *Days to the sunset of January* (1997), ... *And Spring Whirls* (1997), *Seeing Off Summer* (completed around 2013), *September* (around 1995), resulting in the last song in the sequence, *Lisiy Nos Forever* (1996), in the first part of which summer, and in the second – winter pictures of the nature of the village are described.

Thirdly, according to its plan, the most ambitious and epic direction was represented by *Voices of the Universe* project. The first step towards its implementation was taken in the summer of 1990 in Lisiy Nos thanks to the recording of the magnetic album called *Lapse of Cosmic Reason*. Later, the idea grew to a plan to record a double album. The general genre voiced in the *Voices of the Universe* could be described as a new cosmic epic with small lyrical inclusions, playing the role of *itinerarium animae* in Deum.

The implementation of these three multi-scale ideas was the goal of the creative search of *The Pravednicks' Band* in the 90s. At that time the band already had at its disposal Orpheus, a guitar produced in Bulgaria, Ural, a Soviet bass guitar, a twelve-string acoustic guitar, and a minimalist drum set, assembled from sepa-

“A SPECIAL INFLUENCE ON THE FORMATION OF THE TOPICS AND THE GENRE AFFILIATION OF THE BAND'S WORK IN THE 90S WAS CAUSED BY PINK FLOYD.”



PHOTO: IRINA SHEPOVALNIKOVA

Left to right: Vladislav Sapov, Sergei Sirotkin, Andrei Patkul. Ca. 1997. Rehearsal. 24 B, Maly Prospekt, Saint Petersburg, Vasilievsky Island.

rate percussion instruments. In addition to the aforementioned *Lapse of Cosmic Reason*, in early September 1990, another three songs were recorded, one of which was *Tsushima Blues*. This marked the beginning of the first direction of the band's work. The recordings were made in a private home in Lisiy Nos, in relative isolation from the public.

A MUCH MORE significant event in the history of the band this summer was a three-hour concert, which we organized on the walking side of Mirnaya Street on August 4, 1991. We built a wooden stage with our own hands, and the power supply was provided by connecting an extension cord to an outlet in one of the houses. All the original members of the group and two new members who joined us participated in the performance. Also, the friendly group *R*ozhestvo* played its set. As for *The Praved-nicks' Band*, the band dared to present a retrospective of their work, starting with a cover of *A Hard Day's Night* of The Beatles and ending with the material already written at that time for *The Voices of the Universe*. Also one of the early versions of *Rock-and-Coffin* was played, for which at that time only two verses were written (out of the final five + sixth, repeating the first one), and the back vocal of "dal-duba, dal-duba" was performed not in each verse, but once separately during the instrumental break. It is worth noting that the atmosphere at the concert was very warm, there were quite a lot (by local standards) of neighbourhood residents of all ages present who gathered to watch and listen to us. Some of them settled on the chairs and sun loungers that they had brought with, and others listened, standing, and sometimes even dancing. Elderly people watched what was happening from the windows of their homes. The relationship between the performers and the audience was so close that both of them shouted at each other in the pauses between the compositions. The listeners were especially impressed by the percussion solos performed by the new drummer.

Encouraged by the success, we decided to intensify our musical activity in the very near future and to transfer it from the suburbs to the city. However, this intensification was rather conditional, since regular rehearsals in the cold season were not held, primarily due to the fact that different members of the



PHOTO: IRINA SHEPOVALNIKOVA

Left to right: Sergei Sirotkin, Vladislav Sapov, Andrei Patkul, Roman Orlov. The Festival of Street Musicians, September 21, 1997.

group lived in the remote places in the city. We rarely met, and if we played music at that time, we immediately tried to record it with the help of household appliances.

Another notable event of this time was the performance of the group, although represented only by a couple of members, as part of an amateur concert party of the students of the First Pavlov State Medical University of St. Petersburg in early May 1992. We had been preparing for this event for a long time, which eventually took place on the stage of the Nevsky Palace of Culture, an iconic place where many recognized Russian rock musicians performed. However, for various reasons, two of the four members of the band could not come to the concert – a drummer and a keyboardist, therefore we had to change the composition of the instruments on the go, reducing it to a guitar and a percussion, or a guitar and a bass guitar, which made the performance, to put it mildly, blurred. The general impression was acknowledged by the reaction of the jury, which, quite reasonably, gave extremely low marks for the performance. Nevertheless, it was a unique experience of performing on a big stage and communicating with the sophisticated audience.

The Office: A creative community

In the summer of the same year, the central event of the entire history of the group took place. By June-July 1992, a common creative space had somehow developed by itself, both in the physical and ideological sense, called the Office by its participants. In a physical sense, the Office was a two-room apartment on the ground floor in Number 34 Chernyakhovsky Street (an apartment building built in 1910) in the immediate vicinity of the Ligovsky Prospekt metro station (therefore, the alternative name of this space was also Ligovka). This apartment was called the Office because it was rented by acquaintances of our drummer for business purposes. He also managed to get from them a temporary permit to stay in this apartment, so as not to travel every day from Sosnovy Bor in the Leningrad Region, where he was from. On his side, he had to repair it.

The Office, however, quickly turned into a kind of community, representing rudimentary forms of what today is usually called co-living and co-working. Only the drummer lived in the



PHOTO: SERGEI SHAMAKHOV

Dmitriy Polguev. September 13, 1992.
The Rooftop Concert in Sosnovy Bor.

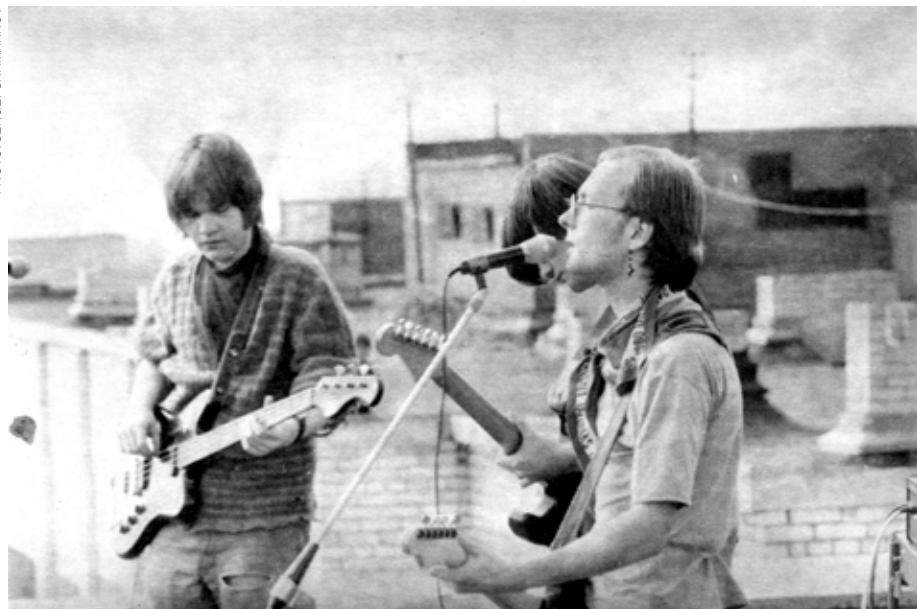


PHOTO: SERGEI SHAMAKHOV

Left to right: Andrei Patkul, Evgeniy Timchenko, Sergei Sirotkin. September 13, 1992. The Rooftop Concert in Sosnovy Bor.

apartment permanently, who occasionally held meetings with the clients of his comrades there. But the doors of the Office were constantly open to visitors, and it quickly began to be a platform for the communication, often heated by alcohol, of like-minded people, united, among other things, by the love of classical rock music. The time of stay in the Office was not regulated in any way, and if you wanted – and the free beds were available – you could have stayed there overnight. I should say that music was not an exclusive topic of conversation: literature was no less animatedly discussed, that at that time was becoming available to the Russian-speaking readers, from fiction to mysticism. Particular attention was paid to poetry, which was easily explained by the role it played for the rock music.

Time has erased many details of the premises, but in general it could be described as follows. Through the front door, the visitor got into a rectangular shape of a fairly spacious hallway, in the right wall of which there was the entrance to the kitchen, directly, opposite the front door, – the door to the living room, and on the left hand – the entrance to the bathroom. The small room, the bedroom, could have been accessed both from the kitchen and from the living room. The companies gathered mainly in the kitchen, behind a table attached to the wall opposite the door, quite quickly overgrown with chairs and armchairs. Instead of the planned repairs, we only slightly stripped off the wallpaper in this part of the Office, and the rest painted – from the walls mountain peaks and dragons soaring above them were looking at us. The profile of the heroine of one of the band's songs – a girl named Zoya – was also depicted, and a quote from the lyrics of another of our songs was written: *Love is a Feast*. At that time, we had a strong feeling that we were at the very beginning of some great achievements that would forever change the national musical culture, at the very least. The sense of com-

munity was unprecedented. The summer of 1992 we called, not originally, “the summer of love of The Pravednicks’ Band.”

IT IS NOT DIFFICULT to guess that pretty soon our musical instruments moved to the Office, including the drum set, the already mentioned synthesizers, the Musima bass guitar and the Fender Telecaster electric guitar, which according to the legend belonged for some time to the guitarist of the band accompanying Anzhelika Varum, a famous Russian pop star. All this equipment was placed in the living room, which we equipped to record our compositions. It was decided to focus on recording the *Voices of the Universe* aiming to finish the album by the end of summer – beginning of autumn. On July 16, rehearsals began and before the end of the month several test recordings were made by the full band: I remember that we recorded and then listened to *Sun-Bellatrix Space Flight*, *Drunken Blues*, *Tell me, Max*, *Max's Space Radio*. During the recording of the last of these compositions, the neighbours came in, who surprisingly very politely said that although our music was beautiful, the room where we were performing was not intended for this, and we should stop playing music. That did not stop us, though. In the last days of July, everything was ready for a full-fledged recording of the *Voices*, but it turned out that our keyboardist unexpectedly moved to Bulgaria, where he was engaged in the field of grape harvesting. This did not fit into the plans of the team, but there was nothing to do: we had to try to record the compositions without him, using a lot of overlaps. However, the atmosphere was no longer the same: the resulting recordings did not bear the trace of the inspiration that accompanied the songs recorded by the full band. To save the situation somehow, we undertook a creative experiment, known in the history of the band as the recording of the *Drunken Album*. When recording the

Drunken Album, the tape ruthlessly documented the process of our ever-increasing intoxication and ever-diminishing ability to sing, play, and speak. After the last more or less related words "Take a music stand!", said by one of the participants in the experiment to another, there were no articulate sounds on the record, either musical or linguistic.

THE PRAVEDNICKS' BAND switched to the street concerts, which they arranged in the underground passage on Nevsky Prospekt (the so-called Warm Pipe) with a full set of musical instruments. At that time, St. Petersburg lived in a smash, the future was completely uncertain, and this created the illusion of some unprecedented opportunities, the opportunities for both success and failure. Freedom was intoxicating. In the underground passage, it was enough to put a drum kit on the floor. Another one immediately appeared next to it and a friendly duel began between the musicians who did not know each other only a minute ago. At that time, we often had the opportunity to share the underground passage with such groups as, for example, *Ad Libitum* which was famous in St. Petersburg and performed the music close to folk, actively using violins and flutes. Once someone sprayed tear gas in the underground passage, and it was very difficult to restrain ourselves and not leave our musical post. Another time, someone spilled some combustible material on the asphalt and set it on fire. However, it looked not like a provocation, but as an element of a continuous carnival. On the street, we played mostly other people's music, which could be immediately recognized by the passers-by. The standard compositions that we had played then were *Whiter Shade of Pale* of Procul Harum, *Light My Fire* of The Doors, *Stairway to Heaven* of Led Zeppelin, *I Saw Her Standing There* of The Beatles, etc. The public was always recognizing and enjoying *Dazed and Confused* of Led Zeppelin, as well as *Anarchy in UK* of Sex Pistols performed by our keyboardist, who by that time had managed to return safely from Bulgaria. However, sometimes we played our own compositions, and for the performance of one of them, someone even threw us a large dollar bill once. The culmination of the concert activity of The Pravednicks' Band was not the performances on Nevsky Prospekt, but an epic concert organized on the roof of one of the houses in Sosnovy Bor. It took place on September 13, 1992 and was timed to coincide with the twenty-first birthday of one of the band's friends living in this city. It's hard to believe now, but then on the morning of the same day, with the help of our fans, we transported from the Office by public transport in one go all the musical instruments, including the drum kit, and the equipment – amplifiers and speakers. To bring all this back to St. Petersburg took much longer time.

While the band was tuning in before the performance, our keyboardist began to play the fragments of the compositions of J. S. Bach, and it created an amazing feeling that this day already

belonged to eternity. The concert itself lasted four hours and consisted of four parts, in the intervals between which some participants even managed to slightly modify their stage image.

NOTHING SIGNIFICANT happened in the remaining months of 1992. In October, we had to vacate the Office – its lease ended, and the apartment seemed to be bought by someone. With the onset of cold weather, our performances on the street also became less and less frequent. In mid-December, however, a joint celebration of the birthdays of the keyboardist and the guitarist was organized at the latter's dacha (summer house) in Lisiy Nos. Many guests were invited, including those from among the members of the group R*ozhdestvo, and an electronic concert was arranged right in the living room, at which the performance of our author's songs was quickly replaced by improvisations on the themes of classical rock, primarily Pink Floyd. While the concert showed that the capabilities of The Pravednicks' Band in its current composition were close to exhaustion, the party had its own charm. The communication itself remained as relaxed as it had been earlier. I also remember the performance at the invitation of the musicians of the same R*ozhdestvo on December 25, 1992, in the Ely-Paly Club, located somewhere on the Petrograd side, in the area of the embankment of the Karpovka River. At that time, too, the keyboardist and drummer could not take part in this even, but an unfamiliar drummer helped me and the guitarist to perform, which, in general, did not give coherence to the performance. We played mostly short catchy songs at that time,

and I liked the club itself for its spicy, smoky atmosphere and reckless behaviour of the spectators, who were pedalling to the music, sitting on a bicycle screwed to the floor, or were actively swinging on a rope tied to the ceiling.

1993 began with disappointments, there were no rehearsals and the scheduled concerts were disrupted. The members of the group began to move away from each other, each hav-

ing their own interests and hobbies, including participation in parallel musical projects. By February, it was clear that the group would no longer be able to function in the way it did before. Our guitarist even announced its dissolution. However, by May we began to appear on stage again in the compositions close to the composition of 1991–1992. By this time I had become a member of a very interesting art-rock band called *Friday the 13th*, which played long and complex compositions. Since this band lacked keyboard and drum players, I invited teammates from The Pravednicks' Band to their performances, and everyone from The Pravednicks' Band of the previous two years had managed to play with Friday the 13th. This cooperation was most clearly manifested at the concerts in a club called Shtig, which at that time operated at the Leningrad Steel Rolling Plant, located on the Kosaya Line, near its intersection with Bolshoy Prospekt of Vasilyevsky Island. The politics of the club was run at that time by a certain People's Deputy Vyacheslav Marychev, who

“THE SUMMER OF 1992 WE CALLED, NOT ORIGINALLY, THE SUMMER OF LOVE OF THE PRAVEDNICKS’ BAND.”

rumoured to be No. 2 in the LDPR after Zhirinovsky and focused the club's activities mainly on the performance of the imitators of Viktor Tsoy and the Kino band (the permanent groups in the club were the Shtat and Igla, who performed covers of the songs of Kino and even copied their manner of performance and behaviour on the stage).

In my case, it was the concerts in ShtIg that were the most intense experience of the stage life in my entire biography. Most of all, I remember the concert in which my former classmate – a professional musician – who played the viola took part: during her solo, which we accompanied, the motley audience of a small house of culture, which included both drunken fans of Tsoy and aggressive punks with shanks hidden in shoes, became a single whole, including the musicians on the stage. It seemed that everyone who was present in the club at that time was pierced through with some kind of electrical discharge. The audience was rocking.

Another agenda in the mid-90s

The concert organized in the summer of 1994 on the pattern of the street concert of 1991 on Mirnaya Street in Lisiy Nos did not save the band. It was clear that there was no trace of the former fellowship, and group, invited to share the scene with The Pravednicks' Band, was much more successful. At that time, our former drummer played there: the level of performance of this group was much higher, and the repertoire was more recognizable.

Only in 1995 there were some serious attempts made to revive The Pravednicks' Band. The situation, however, was complicated because our keyboardist at that time joined the military service in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, and the performance of the band in its full composition was out of the question. He was enlisted for one year, but already during the service it was extended by another six months, so that the reunion was constantly postponed. In addition, by that time I had already studied at the Faculty of Philosophy for almost a year and felt more and more that it was actually high metaphysics, and not music, that was my vocation.

It was not so easy to combine these passions, since both of them required painstaking preparation and consumed a lot of time. It so happened that I preferred reading Aristotle and Hegel to the detriment of playing music. There were also purely pragmatic reasons for this: if you severely limit yourself, you could save money to buy a book, but you obviously could not buy a normal instrument that could at least be configured. At the faculty, where at first, as it seemed to me, some distance was maintained in communication with fellow students, of course, not without happy exceptions, few people knew about my musical hobbies, and those who knew about them were condescending. The people who studied there were often musically educated

people or, at least, had a developed artistic taste. My hobby was perceived by them, rather, as an entertainment permissible for a serious person, obviously devoid of any prospects, which therefore should not be particularly promoted. However, some of my friends at the time even came to The Pravednicks' Band concerts or the parties where the band performed. I can't say that these were two different lives, but, in the language of phenomenology, it took some effort to switch from one attitude to another. Yet, so far I associated my private life with the community of musicians, not future philosophers.

The team also had difficulties finding a permanent drummer. Nevertheless, on December 22, 1995, our concert took place at the Petersburgskaya Moda Lyceum, where the guitarist led a guitar hobby class. His students (vocals, percussion) and one of my friends at St. Petersburg State University (bass guitar) helped us to perform. I myself played an acoustic twelve-string guitar at that concert. Also in 1995, we managed once, quite unexpectedly for ourselves, to perform in the legendary club called Pereval, which was located on the corner of Bolshaya Monetnaya and Kotovsky Streets.

By the middle of 1996, when the song *Lisiy Nos Forever* was written, the contours of the cycle of the same name began to be outlined: we realized that some of our other compositions could be included in it. The keyboardist returned from the army, and we managed to find a drummer who had a very interesting, slightly jazzed, playing technique. We also found a fairly spacious and equipped with high-quality instruments "point" for rehearsals in the courtyards at the corner of Maly Prospekt of Vasilyevsky Island and the 10th Line. This room has also become a place of our creative communication and constant feasts – unfortunately, often to the detriment of the creative process. However, the intensity of this communication could hardly be compared with that which we had in the Office: at the "point" the paid time of presence was extremely limited, and there was no common table at which it would be possible to gather. Nevertheless, this period can also be recognized as one of the most productive in the history of The Pravednicks'

Band. The album *Lisiy Nos Forever*, however, was never recorded then, but at that time several songs were recorded, which received the status of a mini-album called *Probe No. 97*.

ODDLY ENOUGH, we did not play regularly in clubs, where rock music moved in the 90s. Often it was the club scene that opened for the artists the way to the public fame at that time. However, for some reason, we relied on recordings that did not rise much interest among listeners unfamiliar with the group. The Pravednicks' Band somehow isolated themselves from the musical process going on in St. Petersburg at that time. It could be, however, that this process itself did not include The Pravednicks' Band.

"THE PRAVEDNICKS' BAND, WITH ITS FICTIONAL WORLDS, UTOPIAN DREAMS AND FOCUS ON THE MUSIC OF THE 60S AND 70S, WAS HOPELESSLY LEFT IN THE PAST DURING THE CYNICAL AND MERCILESS 90S."

Perhaps the only bands with whom we maintained – and then infrequently – creative contacts were R*ozhdestvo and Bird C who achieved success in the mid-90s and were gathering full clubs. One pleasant exception was our joint concert, which is now difficult to date, but I think it was somewhere in 1996 in the White Rabbit club, which was located in the House of Culture of Communication Workers. The audience at the concert was motley dressed and very enthusiastic, they were mainly fans of the aesthetics of the late 60s and Tolkienists, among whom the song about Jiakhon Fionaf caused a special delight. The Pravednicks' Band, with its fictional worlds, utopian dreams and focus on the music of the 60s and 70s, was hopelessly left in the past during the cynical and merciless 90s.

Such isolation can be explained not only with the insufficient performance level of the group, but also with its general concept, which by the mid-90s turned out to be archaic. By the beginning of this decade, Russian rock music began to lose the scale and the influence that it had gained by the end of the 80s, its golden age, when many bands of the recent underground effortlessly assembled stadiums, and Russian rock itself became the musical mainstream of the whole country. However, already in the late 80s it began to be replaced from the leading positions by more popular music, and in the first years of the 90s – by rave. Rock concerts in stadiums, of course, were also arranged, but they became like a routine. The general commercialization of life almost immediately turned rock music into a market segment, which was insignificant compared to various forms of pop music. Rock musicians ceased to be masters of minds, and either improved the technique of performance to play covers of famous songs in clubs (in St. Petersburg there was and still is a club very popular in the mid-90s called Money Honey, where bands brilliantly copied the style of rockabilly), or played commercially unpromising alternative music. Punk, grunge, hardcore have become favourite genres of Russian amateur musicians, fully corresponding to the era. They bloomed with wide colours in small clubs. In both cases, however, the space for one's own creative search narrowed: even in cases where the composition and performance could not be monetized, the musical repertoire was determined by the demand.

ONE OF THE RARE ATTEMPTS to make a name for itself in public was participation in the Festival of Street Musicians-97. On September 21, 1997, we performed on the stage located at the intersection of Nevsky Prospekt and Sadovaya Street, with a full electric composition, playing only two songs – *Little Lida* and *Tsushima Blues*. The jury was manned by such stars of St. Petersburg rock music as Andrey Burlaka and Oleg Garkusha. The group managed to go to the second round, but after the performance in it, which took place on June 27, 1998 in the Alexander Garden near the Gorkovskaya metro station, the band dropped out of the competition program. The new drummer could not take part in this performance, and it was decided to perform without a rhythm section, which greatly weakened the position of the band.

In April 1999, The Pravednicks' Band was joined by a new

drummer, a classmate of the guitarist, and the band began regular rehearsals. In general, this year was quite fun and promising for the band. We spent a lot of time together at the apartment of our mutual friend, located near Staraya Derevnaya metro station, listening to other people's music and composing our own music, discussing creative plans. It was another reincarnation of our Office. On June 26, we took part in the Tsarskoye Selo Carnival in Pushkin, where we sang songs and staged a show that lasted until the morning. The reception of the audience was very warm, and we even managed to earn some money, to drink free beer and to eat dumplings. On July 24, The Pravednicks' Band performed in a full composition a short electric program at the Sunstroke Festival, which was held at Kirov Central Park. We even got the audience's sympathy award, several bottles of Baltika dark beer. Much more impressive was the performance of The Pravednicks' Band on December 16, 1999, at the festival at the Baltic State Technical University "Voenmeh" D.F. Ustinov. It was very well coordinated, it felt that the musicians had already achieved a good interplay. The concert hall was crowded, the audience eagerly responded to all initiatives from the stage, so that with its dynamics the concert reminded me of the most successful performances in the Shtlg. After the concert, we parted at the Technological Institute metro station very encouraged by our success and joint music-making, we were eagerly discussing our prospects. It seemed that a wide horizon of possibilities was opening up to us again. In any case, this was the first and the last time after 1991–1992 when I sincerely believed that something serious could come out of our project. However, the fate ruled otherwise. A few days before the New Year 2000, the drummer announced his departure from the band, motivating it with his family circumstances. And on New Year's Eve itself, apparently, influenced by the resignation of the President of the Russian Federation B. N. Yeltsin, the keyboardist also announced his departure from the band. He, however, still took part in several events held by the group, but only as a session musician. The band still functioned somehow until 2004, performing at the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Lisiy Nos (2000), as well as in the Polygon club after the Beatles music festival (2002). In the period from 2006 to 2014 it was actively performing in various St. Petersburg clubs, especially often in the White Rhinoceros club, with rare reunions in 2018 and 2019. However, its performances were fuelled by the energy, which developed in the 90s, especially in the period from 1990 to 1992. ✖



Holy Trinity
Alexander Nevsky
Lavra, mid 90s.

PHOTO: MIKHAIL BORISOV

The revival of the Orthodox Church

by **Julia Kravchenko**

In 1991, while walking around Moscow, my friend and I came into one of the Moscow churches. It was crowded there, full with candles and the smell of incense, there was singing. I asked timidly: “Could I be baptized?” I was told the price quite business-like and told to wait a bit. After a while, me and ten other people were placed in a semicircle in front of the font, the priest mumbled something, tilted us in turns over the font, poured water on our heads and smeared with odorous oil (myrrh, as it turned out later). The baptism process took fifteen minutes, then everyone went about their own business.

Later there was an admission to St. Petersburg University, a stormy youth, parties, and friends. We, the students of the Faculty of Philosophy, did not notice our poverty, did not pay attention to politics and economics, bandits fighting on the streets, shootings, explosions – it was some kind of parallel universe that could have been bypassed and simply ignored. We were flooded with books, music, movies, that were banned until recently, and freedom. All this had to be read, heard, watched, and discussed. We did not think about the future in practical terms, we just reveled in freedom. It was as if we did not notice our poverty, the TV promised that the market economy was about to start booming, and we would all live well and happily. It seemed to us that it was enough just to absorb this freedom and to wait for the European cozy prosperous world to grow around us itself.

In my third year of philosophy, I began to study ancient Greek and soon became absorbed in Byzantine theology. Such a depth and freedom of human thought, such an abyss of meanings opened before me, which, it seemed, one could perceive endlessly, constantly finding more and more new facets. I spent all day in the library, studying all the literature about Byzantium accumulated in the Public Library of St. Petersburg over the past two centuries. I read Orthodox canonical texts and studied the structure of worship, the texts of Byzantine theologians and their interpretations by theologians and philosophers of the 19th and 20th centuries. I experienced a similar delight again many years later, immersed in quantum electrodynamics and the string theory. The two fields of science that turned my life upside down were Byzantine theology and quantum electrodynamics. One made a revolu-

JULIA KRAVCHENKO, as a young student, approached the church looking for the parish life as described in the library. Instead she met a demanding obedience to a multitude of rules and prohibitions. Today she has a diploma in Byzantine theology and performs as a vocalist and pianist.

tion in the existential sphere, the other blew up my everyday life, making me wonder daily about everything I saw around me.

FINISHING THE FOURTH YEAR of the Faculty of Philosophy, I once came to a small church on the outskirts of St. Petersburg, which was destroyed in Soviet times, and now was being restored, and started to sing in the church choir. On the wave of the public enthusiasm and general interest in Orthodoxy, it seemed to me very logical. However, the real parish life was nothing like the Orthodoxy I got acquainted with in the library. At the beginning I was shocked by the incredible number of superstitions and immediately afterwards I had to acknowledge numerous prohibitions. No sooner had I been frightened by the monstrous illiteracy of the parishioners in matters of their own faith than I was struck by an understanding of almost the same illiteracy on the part of the priesthood. Ignorance generated fear in people and fear gave rise to prohibitions. The God of the Russian man turned out to be a capricious tyrant, demanding unquestioning slavish obedience to a multitude of rules, for which he generously distributed all sorts of earthly goods, while for disobedience he severely punished by deprivation of money and health. It was like a market bargaining, a game of Monopoly, or a party meeting in a changed scenery. In the midst of the 90s, with complete reckless intoxicating freedom in the country, the people of this country slowly started to search for self-restrictions and prohibitions. And also enemies. Even the demand for material well-being was carried out not in the sphere of a market economy, not by creative activity, but by passive expectation of encouragement and handouts from God, the president or the higher authority. The timid ecclesiastical ecumenical movement

“IN THE MIDST OF THE 90S, WITH COMPLETE RECKLESS INTOXICATING FREEDOM IN THE COUNTRY, THE PEOPLE OF THIS COUNTRY SLOWLY STARTED TO SEARCH FOR SELF-RESTRICTIONS AND PROHIBITIONS.”



PHOTO: MIKHAIL BORISOV

Holy Trinity
Alexander Nevsky
Lavra. Mid 90s.

“THE RUSSIAN VERSION OF ORTHODOXY IS REPLETE WITH THE PATTERNS OF ‘HUMILITY AND OBEDIENCE,’ ‘SLAVISH SERVICE,’ ‘DIVINE MANDATE,’ AND GLORIFICATION OF STATEHOOD.”

was not accepted by the public at all. Catholics, Lutherans, and other Christians were secretly deemed almost worse than the Communists who, until recently being in power, were blowing up churches and eliminating people. New technologies were alarming and frightening. Any new technology was immediately overgrown with horror stories, transmitted from mouth to mouth as sacred knowledge: the microwave oven destroys the human body with emitted waves, brain cancer occurs from the use of mobile phones, and the chips in passports contain the number of the devil. The logical chain of folklore conclusions was built ornately: all technologies are evil, evil comes from the devil, technologies came from the “West”, which means that the devil is also in the “West”. The older generation suddenly began to talk about the great Russian spirituality and contrast it with a soulless “beautiful” Western life. Yesterday’s Komsomol members warned against communicating with Catholics and Lutherans and against jointly celebrating church holidays. It seemed that the whole country had a quick change of scenery in their heads while the actors remained the same. Now pre-revolutionary Russia was considered great, beautiful, and spiritual, and the Soviet Union was an unfortunate misunderstanding. As for the West, it has quickly gone from being an enemy of workers and peasants to the threat to our time-honored spirituality.

EVERY YEAR, the TV more and more propagandized the “return to the roots”, more and more people came to churches, more and more Orthodox literature was printed, resembling fairy tales of the poor quality. There appeared many experts, keepers of the great knowledge of how to properly dye eggs for Easter, where

to take the shell from these eggs, in what clothes you can come to the temple, how to set a candle correctly, where and what relics help and for what purpose, from which saint what and how to ask, in order to get what you want. This “tawdry” Orthodoxy, which came out of all the cracks, was as strange and ridiculous as the magicians and psychics who flourished everywhere at that time. It was a mystery where at one point “scientific Marxism” and the much praised Soviet natural science education have gone. On the one hand, we had unlimited freedom of information at that time, on the other hand, there was impassable incompetence and paralysis of the mind. Fear of responsibility for one’s life, learned helplessness, and even Stockholm syndrome toward the authority characterized our society then and still characterize it now. The Russian version of Orthodoxy is replete with the patterns of “humility and obedience,” “slavish service,” “divine mandate,” and glorification of statehood. The total lack of critical thinking skills is also associated with fear, the fear of thinking, as such. Byzantine Orthodoxy, which has grown out of late Antiquity and Neoplatonism on the scientific and philosophical background of the Greeks and has been forcibly planted by Prince Vladimir in Kievan Rus, that has not had such a background, coincides with the Greek original only in appearance, but not in essence. All this, from the time of Vladimir the First to the present time of Vladimir the Second, turns Orthodoxy in Russia into an instrument of control and suppression rather than a way of spiritual perfection and a path to God. The events that now seem terrible and unexpected to us, the submissive behavior of Russian citizens, which now looks completely irresponsible, is in fact understandable, predictable and, alas, inevitable. ❌



Festival on
Pushkinskaya 10,
1990.

PHOTO: MIKHAIL BORISOV

Summary.

The Weimar Republic analogy seems unavoidable

by **Konstantin Zarubin**

I went to university in 1996–2001, a few years later than the contributors to this issue. My alma mater, if one can call it that, was a lowly teacher-training college on the outskirts of St Petersburg. Temporally, spatially, and socially, my university experience was a kind of missing link between today's Russia and the lost paradise described in this collection of memoirs.

On the one hand, I do remember a grim crumbling city where I felt like nothing could ever again be forbidden. Freedom, it seemed, had somehow triumphed once and for all. I also remember not caring much whether our student dorm had a functioning shower (it didn't) or reliable heating (the temperature in our room could get as low as 8°). What mattered was that I got to read all those books you could never find in my hometown. I got to learn English and German and feel like I was reclaiming my place in a world where I was always meant to live.

At the same time, I was keenly aware that living in that world required a decent salary. Like some of the contributors, I had a vague interest in philosophy when I left school, but majoring in it never occurred to me back then.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, my university was Putin's Russia in a nutshell well before Putin.

**"I FELT LIKE NOTHING
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In these concluding reflections on the lost paradise described in the collection of memoirs, the author dwells on the analogy with the Weimar Republic. He finds that the overlap is too striking to ignore.

The university management was ignorant and authoritarian in equal measure; students were already being forced to collect signatures for a pro-Kremlin party; a special department was already in place for studies of the "Russian soul" and other pseudo-scholarship with an imperialist slant. Four years into my degree, my roommates and I were personally grilled for an hour by the university president because I had drawn a picture showing Lenin as a bird in a cap and put it up on the wall next to our dorm room. We were told that we were unpatriotic scum; that

any "strong" Russian leader had to be respected. I was told to take the picture down and stuff it up my ass.

In other words, as I read the memoirs collected here I found myself occupying the awkward vantage point of someone who is certainly not an outsider but isn't quite an insider.



“THERE IS THE SAME EXHILARATING, SHORT-LIVED FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND LIFESTYLE. THERE ARE THE DRUGS AND THE NEW MUSIC. THERE IS THE CHEERFUL BOHEMIAN POVERTY.”

With that established, let me say a few words about one aspect of this fascinating collection that I keep thinking about, namely the philosophy.

We often use analogy to make sense of the world. Some analogies turn out to be more useful than others. Some turn out to be more useful than we ever wanted them to be.

One such analogy is that between post-Soviet Russia and the Weimar Republic. Once upon a time, I used to feel that comparing Russia after 1991 to Germany after 1918 was lazy thinking. Sure (I would say), both places were defeated empires. Both had crippling economic crises, widespread poverty, gaping inequal-

ity, and fragile democratic institutions. However (I would say), those similarities were superficial. Russia’s “defeat” in the Cold War was very different from Germany’s defeat in World War I. Russia’s “glorious past” was different. Its elite and its people were different. The world around it was nothing like it was in the 1920s or 1930s.

AS I WRITE THESE WORDS in the ninth year of Russia’s war against Ukraine and the seventh month of the full-scale invasion, I must admit I was wrong. It is the differences that were superficial, not the similarities.

The memoirs collected here are a case in point. Try as I might to read them without thinking of Germany between the wars, the Weimar Republic analogy keeps popping up in my mind.

To be sure, St Petersburg in the 1990s was not quite *Babylon Berlin*. The philosophy department of St Petersburg State University (freshly renamed back from Leningrad State University, along with the city itself) was no Freiburg. And yet, the overlap is too striking to ignore. There is the same exhilarating, short-lived freedom of thought and lifestyle. There are the drugs and the new music. There is the cheerful bohemian poverty. In philosophy, there is the same desire to go “back to the roots”: to an imaginary time when pure spontaneous thought had not yet been corrupted by ideology.

When seen through the Weimar Republic analogy, the prominence of Heidegger in these memoirs seems almost spooky. We learn that in the early 1990s, in the shabby philosophy classrooms on St Petersburg’s Vasilyevsky Island, young post-Soviet men and women dressed in heaven knows what spent a lot of their time reading *Sein und Zeit*, first published in German in 1927. Their introduction to Western philosophy was a rehash of Heidegger’s lectures, taught by an enthusiastic professor who had first read Heidegger just a couple of years earlier than his students.

WITH MY SWEDEN-ISSUED philosopher hat on, I want to be careful here. The reasons why, of all the non-Marxist thinkers of the 20th century, the first post-Soviet philosophy students ended up overdosing on Heidegger are surely complex. At least one of those reasons has little to do with post-Soviet Russia and everything to do with Heidegger’s fame as a particularly forbidden fruit in Soviet academia. Perhaps because of his Nazi connections, Soviet censors saw Heidegger as a “decadent bourgeois philosopher” par excellence. Vladimir Bibikhin¹ recalls in his essay *For internal use* (*Dlya sluzhebnoy pol’zovaniya*) how happy and proud he was in 1974 to have a hand in a 250-copy print of “the first Russian Heidegger”. The copies were meticulously numbered and distributed among a select few.

With my writer hat on, however, I feel like throwing caution to the wind. So let me suggest that the Heidegger-heavy curriculum of the early 1990s and the whole going-back-to-the-roots project are telling. They say something about Russia’s Weimar Republic experience.

To begin with, they are indicative of what one American observer of Russian intellectual life in the 1990s called “a sort of

“RUSSIA’S WEIMAR REPUBLIC HAS GRADUALLY MUTATED INTO A REICH THAT IS LIKELY TO BE AROUND MUCH LONGER THAN HITLER’S FOR THE SIMPLE REASON THAT IT HAS THE LARGEST NUCLEAR ARSENAL ON THE PLANET.”

supersaturated space” “crammed” with Western ideas and texts from the previous 70 years. In that space, intellectual imports from the West appeared “stripped of their original contexts and genesis”.² Equally importantly, they came stripped of years, often decades, of copious interpretation, ruthless critique, and further refinement.

This often meant that the illusion of rejoining the West, whether philosophically or politically, was just that – an illusion. Modern Western thought, just like modern Western politics, was not a set of authoritative texts or unassailable ideas that you could simply copy or memorize. Instead, it was and is a messy, never-ending argument, carried out by communities and institutions. Even if we take at face value Whitehead’s quip that all of Western philosophy is a bunch of footnotes to Plato, the fact stands that there is no Western philosophy without those footnotes or the debates raging therein.

THE SOVIET UNION has been described as “the most astounding ... case of a philosophy-centric society”, “an amazing sanctuary where philosophy’s nominal public role was greater than anywhere else at any other time”.³ It is no secret, however, that Soviet philosophy, just like Soviet “democracy”, did not allow for any genuine critique or disagreement. Rather than being an argument, it was a never-ending ritual of invoking the true prophets and doing word magic. In the last decades of Soviet history, it seemed largely accidental that the prophets were Marxist or that the verbiage revolved around dialectical materialism. To paraphrase McLuhan, the ritual was the message; Marxist debates were just as suspect as anything non-Marxist.

Heidegger fit this framework perfectly. In life, he was never one for messiness or pluralism, and he resisted both across the board: from academia to art to politics. In philosophy, he wanted to wipe the slate clean by going back not just to Plato but beyond Plato: all the way to the pre-Socratics, whose thought helpfully survives only in tiny fragments open to creative incantation. Heidegger was a fan of going back to the roots in his conceptual analysis, too: time and again he strives to elucidate a term by trotting out its old use or the literal sense of the morphemes that make it up. In fact, Heidegger’s fondness for word magic famously goes much further than that. While back at the roots, he felt that he needed a pristine new vocabulary to talk about things. Finally, he had a habit of using his trademark vocabulary in sentences so convoluted that one cannot but suspect deliberate obfuscation.

None of that is a fatal flaw for Heidegger as a philosopher. Like so many other important thinkers, he was saved from himself by the messy, never-ending argument – in other words, by

the international philosophical community he was part of. A fundamental feature of this community is that it can be inspired and fruitfully provoked by whatever you say without ever fully subscribing to your assumptions or methods – or indeed while outright dismissing them.

Another community that saved Heidegger from himself were the Allied forces that defeated the Nazis. While cooped up in the Third Reich, Heidegger used his word magic to praise the Führer, expound German exceptionalism and openly rail against “the Anglo-Saxon world of Americanism” [*die angelsächsische Welt des Amerikanismus*], hell-bent on destroying Europe and the cradle of Western civilization.⁴ With the Nazis gone, such rhetoric came to an end. For the 30 remaining years of his life, Heidegger would be spared the temptation to voice his chauvinistic and authoritarian tendencies.

Lone geniuses do not make philosophy. Good leaders do not keep democracy alive. Communities matter. Institutions matter. As Olga Serebryanaya, one of the contributors, puts it, while we were trying to “renew” our thinking, “it was the institutional structure that primarily required renewal” (see page 107 in this issue).

THE STRUCTURE was never renewed. The fragile new institutions created in the 1990s have since been destroyed or rendered utterly decorative. Russia’s Weimar Republic has gradually mutated into a Reich that is likely to be around much longer than Hitler’s for the simple reason that it has the largest nuclear arsenal on the planet. No Allied forces will be coming to save Russia from itself.

Our memories are all that’s left. That’s not much, but it is more than nothing. The lost paradise described in this issue did exist, however brief or however confined to the philosophy classrooms of Vasilyevsky Island and the cold dorm rooms where we read our precious books and drank our cheap booze. ✖

Konstantin Zarubin is an author living in Sweden and writing in Russian.

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Late 90s rave
on Vasilyevsky.

PHOTO: MIKHAIL BORISOV

Note: The contributors to this theme have been writing their memoirs as private persons, and not as representatives for their present working places or positions.

BALTIC WORLDS

Special section 3–4/2022



essay

PHOTO: HAKAN TUNON

“There are more lights in the windows”

Challenges and opportunities for island societies in Sweden during the Covid-19 pandemic

by **Paulina Rytönen, Marcus Box, Tommy Larsson Segerlind and Youssouf Merouani**

abstract

With more than 260 000 islands, Sweden is one of the countries with most islands in the world. Its islands are located along the coasts and in the larger lakes. For the municipalities and regions where they are located, the islands are places for recreation and symbols in tourism marketing. A rough overview over the impact of the pandemic on rural and remote areas indicates that Swedish tourism in 2020 and 2021 mainly consisted of “staycations” and that Swedish countryside attracted many people. However, our knowledge about the impact of Covid-19 on everyday life on islands, and on livelihoods and the tourism industry on islands, is still scarce. This article therefore answers the following questions: How has the pandemic influenced island communities, local livelihoods, and the tourism industry on islands?

KEY WORDS: Archipelago, Covid-19, tourism, islands.

This article summarizes the main results of the project “Island and Archipelago Tourism during the pandemic”.¹ The project’s primary goal was to find out how the pandemic affected companies in the hospitality industry on islands and in archipelagos, which challenges they faced, and to learn from those findings about possible future opportunities.

The project was conducted in 2021. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and focus groups with island communities on islands without permanent land connections, analysis of relevant written sources such as public reports, and content analysis of tourists’ and visitors’ reviews of their visits to islands were included in the sample. In total, consumer reviews include 9 208 reviews on Google, and 569 hotel reviews and 544 restaurant reviews on TripAdvisor. To understand the real impact of the pandemic on the tourist experience, we included reviews from 2014 to 2021. In addition, we conducted a national survey that targeted island businesses.

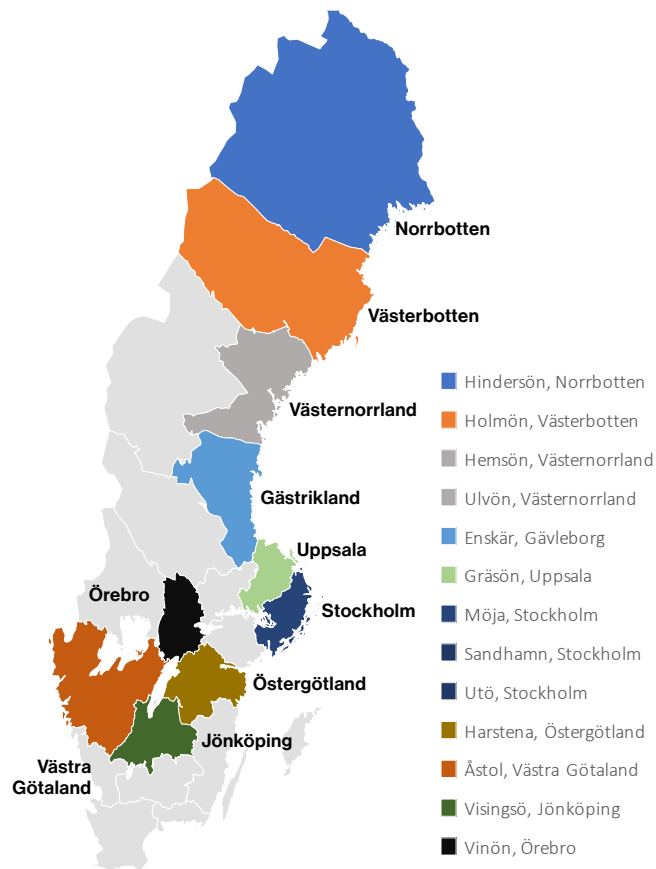


Figure 1. Geographical distribution of the sample (provinces where islands are located)

A national focus was implemented, with a sample population composed of island societies from eight coastal islands and two inland lake islands from all over Sweden. We also interviewed representatives of the following organizations: Archipelago Business Association in the Stockholm archipelago (ABAS); the Archipelago Interest Associations Contact Organization (SIKO), The National Archipelago Association (NAA) and Bohuslän Archipelago Council (BAC).

Studying the hospitality industry on islands and in archipelagos is different from studying the hospitality industry on the mainland, because the industry is well integrated with all other economic activities on the respective island. Thus, it is difficult to distinguish the effects of the pandemic on the hospitality industry from the effects on island communities and other economic activities. Our results, therefore, reflect the effects of the pandemic on entire island communities.

Islands – a specific type of remote context

Conducting any study about island communities and island businesses requires reflection about the type of context that islands constitute. In island communities, inhabitants and business owners often meet larger challenges than those met by people

and businesses in core regions.² Carrying out simple errands and transactions that require going to the mainland often requires extensive planning and logistics. Transport is slow and time consuming and the ferry timetables seldom match connecting land-based transport. Consequently, previous studies have often emphasized infrastructural obstacles for island communities.³ Two concepts that are central to understanding the challenges are *peripherality* and *remoteness*. On many islands, the tourism industry generates the largest contribution to local income. However, tourism is often influenced by seasonal changes.⁴ Some scholars explain and denominate the geo-spatial, institutional, and economic conditions that risk influencing the development of island communities negatively as *islandness*.⁵

However, island communities are not powerless. There are examples that show that it is possible to turn challenges into opportunities by taking advantage of the island's resources.⁶ The possibility of creating positive development trends is dependent on the quality and characteristics of social relations at the local level, by the existence of social capital, but also by cultural values and the type of local formal and informal norms and rules that influence the decisions of island communities in either a positive or negative direction.⁷

The context and quality of social capital differs between island communities; thus the economic and social opportunities and development patterns are quite different. Each island has internal relations that generate a certain type of decisions under the influence of the type of inhabitants, their goals and their common dynamics. Each island community has a relation to other island communities, to authorities on the mainland, and to key businesses and public services that influence the accessibility of the island and either decreases or increases the peripherality of each island community. Decisions made by others that affect everyday life on islands might be influenced by island communities if the ties, collaboration and type of relations enable a favorable outcome for local communities. However, islands have quite different conditions, therefore island communities are affected differently by decisions made about them.⁸ Swedish islands are heterogeneous. Some are located in economically dynamic regions, while others are located in lagging regions. Moreover, the physical, cultural and economic distance of island communities to the centers of power in which decisions about the reality of island societies are made varies substantially. All the issues mentioned above were taken into consideration in this study.

Islands as safe havens

Anxiety about becoming infected with Covid-19 already influenced the behavior of islanders at the start of the pandemic. One of the most immediate effects of the pandemic was that islanders limited their traveling to the mainland. This self-imposed isolation was not unique to Swedish islanders but was an international trend. Island geography made it possible to limit the spread of the virus to islands worldwide.⁹

For people on the mainland and especially city dwellers, the fear of getting sick, combined with the fear that Sweden would introduce a lock-down, became an incentive for many holiday

home owners to move out to their holiday homes on the islands in the spring of 2020. Informants argued that:

suddenly there were more lights in the windows and instead of empty paths, one met many people who we normally only see in the summer.

Those who primarily moved to their holiday homes on islands and other rural locations on a permanent or at least part-time basis were elderly people and white-collar workers who had the possibility of teleworking using internet-based platforms. An additional category of people that moved out to the islands were boatowners who docked at jetties that offered free internet access out on the islands and that granted them the possibility of enjoying the safety of the islands while at the same time living and working there during the pandemic. A key realization for many was that a recent expansion of high-speed internet infrastructure has enabled people to work from remote locations. Many of those who moved to their respective island during the pandemic have therefore decided to make the move permanent and some have moved on a part-time basis.

New opportunities, but also some challenges

The increased population gave rise to both positive and negative effects. First and foremost, the increase in population led to increased sales for grocery stores, and as many of those who moved out have stayed on their islands on a more permanent basis, the larger customer base has enabled local food shop owners to invest in a larger assortment, which is seen as a benefit by island communities. In addition, the newcomers have invested in their holiday homes, which has created an upward economic trend for the construction industry. One informant described the construction boom in the following words:

It will take us a couple of years to clear the backlog of jobs ordered from the waiting list. We have orders for renovations, new roofs, new decks, new builds and everything in between.

Despite the new opportunities, islanders felt safe only if those who moved to the island stayed there. In the spring of 2020, there were serious concerns on some islands about second home owners that “moved out to the island but still commuted to the mainland on a daily or a weekly basis”. In a few places, this created conflicts. Some informants argue that the potential hazard created by commuters was “outrageous”. Certain islanders advised second-home owners through Facebook that people should refrain from commuting back and forth.

“THE CONTEXT AND QUALITY OF SOCIAL CAPITAL DIFFERS BETWEEN ISLAND COMMUNITIES; THUS THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES AND DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS ARE QUITE DIFFERENT.”

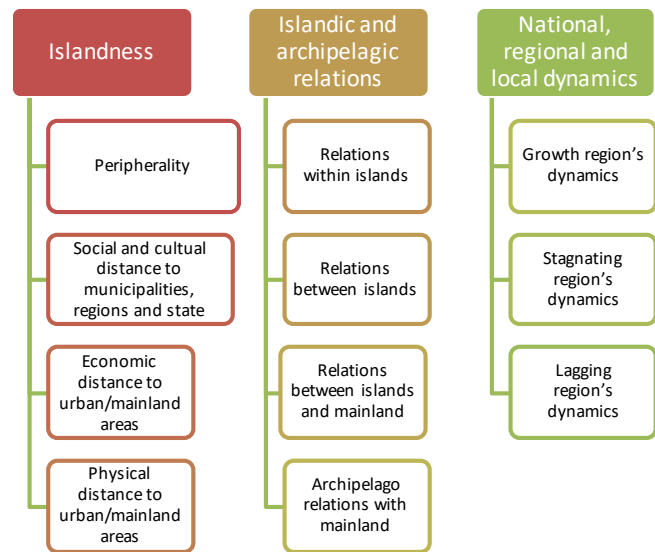


Figure 2. Concepts used in the design of the study.

“Stay away from the islands”

The general uncertainty and the potential consequences that the diffusion the new virus could lead to motivated several municipalities, regional authorities, and also ferry lines to ask people to refrain from going to the islands. Through advertisements in major newspapers, radio, press releases and social media, holiday

home owners were asked to refrain from going to their holiday homes. For ferry lines, pandemic restrictions meant that they had to limit the number of seats on the ferries. In addition, there was a higher risk of infection for the ferry line staff and for permanent island residents if a too large number of people used the ferries.¹⁰

The feared chaos became a reality, especially in the summer of 2020. A few ferries from the Northern Baltic Sea were sent to Stockholm where more traffic was expected, therefore the traffic frequency de-

creased in the North. In the Stockholm archipelago traffic was unevenly distributed; the queues for the ferry to some islands were quite long. Transport to all other coastal islands was restricted due to decreased passenger capacity on the ferries. As a contrast, the ferries to the two inland lake islands are car ferries. These island communities experienced a higher influx of tourists and it got crowded on the ferries when visitors brought along their mobile homes. Luckily, the spread of Covid-19 decreased during the summer, both in 2020 and 2021. However, in the Gothenburg archipelago three cluster outbreaks of Covid-19 took place. The first was in June 2020, when several people in Vrångö



Åstol island, view when entering from the archipelago of Bohuslän.

PHOTO: HÅKAN TUNÖN



Firestation and emergency room at Åstol island.

PHOTO: HÅKAN TUNÖN

island tested positive for Covid-19,¹¹ the second took place at Don-
sö and Styrösö, affecting a large number of families with children,
all of which attended the same school in Styrösö, and the third
took place in October 2021, when 20 people became infected at
a choir rehearsal on Brännö island. Informants argued that out-
breaks mentioned were especially problematic since the islands
are served by liner traffic, thereby giving a high risk of infection
on the ferries.

In addition, with the challenges faced by ferry line restric-

Table 1. Business owners' own estimated percentage changes in revenue for the tourism industry and other industries on islands in 2020.

	Tourism industry	Other industries
Decreased by over 75%	3	7
Decreased by over 50%	7	7
Decreased between 30–49%	9	10
Decreased between 10–29%	22	10
Decreased between 5–9%	3	3
Unchanged	18	31
Increased between 5–9%	7	10
Increased between 10–29%	10	8
Increased between 30–49%	6	7
Increased by over 50%	4	2
Increased by over 75%	4	5
Operations paused during 2020	4	2
Don't know	2	

n = 68 n = 61

Source: Survey of business owners on islands, conducted in 2020.

tions, municipalities were concerned with ending up in an untenable situation if they were forced to offer health care and home care for temporary visitors. Local health care and home care “was already on its knees due to the increased workload caused by the pandemic”. Archipelago municipalities are obliged by law to offer home care to people staying in the municipality, even if the stay is temporary and if those who are offered temporary care do not live in the municipality.¹² For island and archipelago municipalities, this means that many of those who receive temporary help do not contribute to the municipality’s revenue because they pay municipal tax to the municipality in which they have their permanent residence. Affected municipalities asked the government for a temporary change of legislation to avoid what they feared could become an exceptional cost burden, which was denied. However, the feared worst-case scenario did not materialize. Although there are no statistics about the number of cases of Covid-19 on islands, all informants highlight that the island context helped decrease the risk of infection. Except for the cluster outbursts in the Gothenburg archipelago, island communities seem to have been less affected by Covid-19. In addition, on one of the islands, Visingsö, informants reported that no residents in the local nursing home were seriously sick due to Covid-19. In a national perspective, where the hardest affected demographic group were older residents in nursing homes, this case stands out as well worth learning from for the future.

The tourism industry

The general tourism trend during the pandemic was that city tourism decreased in 2020 and partly in 2021, while rural tourism was boosted.¹³ The concept of “staycation” has been promoted in recent years, but during the pandemic it became well-established amongst Swedes.¹⁴ Rural tourism, and especially the demand for experiences of nature and visiting iconic natural parks and landmarks boosted numbers to such a degree that the most popular places became overcrowded. The demand for visiting islands varied substantially.



View of the archipelago standing on Nämndö island.

PHOTO: HÅKAN TUNON

As can be seen in the table above, a substantial number of informants experienced decreased revenues in 2020, but there were also a number that experienced unchanged or increased revenues. A relevant factor is that most businesses on islands are small and diversified. Moreover, all businesses depend on each other, so that a negative trend in one business, regardless of the industry in which it operates, affects all other businesses.

In the summer of 2020, certain segments that are quite important for tourism businesses on islands disappeared completely. The tourist groups that disappeared were foreign boat tourists from Finland and Germany (Baltic Sea islands) and Norwegian boat tourists (West Coast islands). Another important customer segment that disappeared were group events, such as conferences and weddings. This affected large hotels and conference centers in particular. The latter had to develop a new strategy to attract new types of visitors; however, these larger facilities were more affected than small businesses because they were locked in with contracts for events that were cancelled. Large island firms lacked the adaptability that small-scale firms on Swedish islands seem to have. Small tourism businesses often have a combination of different economic activities and their strategy was to focus on the parts of their businesses that were profitable.

In addition, bus groups disappeared. According to informants, the latter are an important category for many island businesses because bus tourists eat lunch at local restaurants and they often spend money in local stores. The big decline in visitors was partly compensated by domestic tourists, many of whom visited islands for the first time in their lives. Despite the new tourist segments, the summer of 2020 was partly lost for

island businesses. However, in 2021, international restrictions were lifted and the level of economic activity was restored.¹⁵ The experience of the tourism industry on Swedish islands does not differ from that of islands elsewhere. The global decline of island tourism is a sign of economic vulnerability, because the pandemic threatened the livelihoods of island communities.¹⁶

One important conclusion is that while existing business models and business solutions did not generate the desired income for

business owners during the pandemic, the increased level of economic risk fueled several small and large investments. Many business owners concretized plans they had for the future to cope with the effects of the pandemic, or to prepare for the time after. Some examples are development of self-service through digitalization and the development of new outdoor nature tours.

Despite the challenges, tourists appreciated whatever services they encountered when they visited islands. Analysis of tourists' reviews of island restaurants, hotels, B&Bs and other

tourism businesses showed that customers appreciated their experience. A representative comment is that:

I wish that there were more options, but it is a luxury that this business exists and is open!

One of the realizations of the tourist experience during the pandemic was that tourist segments that were new to islands had different expectations from those of the regular island tourists. By analyzing the experienced value, several key categories could be identified. New, contemporary consumers expect more of their island visit than just a place to stay and a restaurant to eat

“ALTHOUGH THERE ARE NO STATISTICS ABOUT THE NUMBER OF CASES OF COVID-19 ON ISLANDS, ALL INFORMANTS HIGHLIGHT THAT THE ISLAND CONTEXT HELPED DECREASE THE RISK OF INFECTION.”



Many different businesses and activities on the same spot.

PHOTO: HÅKAN TUNÖN

in. Some important lessons for tourism businesses are that the new segments expected closer cooperation between local stakeholders on an island. They also expect to get recommendations of what to do when they are vacationing on an island.

Local strategies and authorities

Challenges posed by the pandemic contributed to the mobilization of island communities. Local associations and local businesses helped each other when solving problems related to maintaining and applying pandemic regulations and avoiding the spread of disease. One of many examples concerns the distribution of vaccines to islanders. Regional authorities that oversaw vaccinations lacked solutions for islanders. They requested that people who were prioritized to get the vaccine in 2020 (people over 65 or with multiple diseases), should take the ferry to a clinic on the mainland to get the vaccine. Island communities mobilized forces to open a temporary vaccination center on one island and boat owners from the entire archipelago helped by transporting people to the vaccination center. This was possible due to local mobilization and a conscious effort to convince regional authorities.¹⁷ This example is one of many in our data that reveals that there was a substantial gap between authorities' decisions and what was a safe and acceptable solution. Other examples include lack of solutions for testing islanders with Covid symptoms, or unacceptable solutions for transporting sick people to the mainland. Some additional factors that affected the ability to provide acceptable solutions by regional health care authorities are related to the economic dynamic of each region. For example, in Västernorrland there is only one ambulance he-

Issues that tourists highlight as important for the value of their experience

THE TOURISM FACILITY AND STAFF: Welcoming staff; service oriented staff; knowledgeable staff.

PLACE: Island factor; views; functioning, clean, and well-kept places for staying, eating, recreation and activities.

PRODUCT/SERVICE: Good food and nice hotel/B&B; possibility of experiencing historical places and historical knowledge; activities for different age groups; possibility of experiencing nature; seeing and experiencing animals at close range; value for money.

ATMOSPHERE: A space to breathe and have peace and quiet; a place that wakens interest and emotional engagement; festive atmosphere (evening activities).

MANAGEMENT: Functioning facilities, for example air conditioning that works, lighting and other basic infrastructure. Opening hours that suit the visitor; easily accessible information about alterations to activities and opening hours; understanding for customer demands; clean spaces that are regularly maintained; good logistics (for example concerning check-in, food service and check out).*

*Rytkönen, et al, *Ö- och skärgårdsturism*, 54–67.

licopter for the entire region and therefore it is quite difficult to get help. In other regions, ferries are outdated and cannot carry a modern ambulance.

Local communities responded to the challenges of Covid-19 by collaborating. Local business owners collaborated with the staff on the ferries to get information in advance about the number of passengers per departure and their specific destination. This helped mobilize help from local volunteers to maintain pandemic regulations and restrictions. In addition, local businesses started to collaborate to help each other protect their livelihoods. On some islands, businesses offered discounts if tourists paid a visit to a partner's business. Some offered combined offers. The adaptation strategies also include several initiatives from business owners that were planned or at least discussed before the pandemic, but whose implementation was realized ahead of plan. These strategies include the establishment of new ventures that can benefit from changes in demand patterns that increased during the pandemic, especially the increasing demand for local foods.

People joined forces to solve problems and take advantage of opportunities. On most islands, people helped as volunteers to support local businesses and help solve problems. Local communities organized to ensure that pandemic regulations were maintained: For example, to help avoid congestion and meeting authorities' requirement for limited opening hours. Many informants, but also previous research, highlight the "island spirit". In this case, informants argue that "we have always had to solve everything ourselves". Informants argued that local and regional authorities were not able to help solve problems that arose on

islands; they felt forgotten. Some municipalities “forgot to send the information material that was an essential guide to setting up public operations”. Other examples include lack of understanding about the consequences of regulations on ferries, and the negative impact of public campaigns in which municipalities and regional authorities asked the public to avoid visiting islands. For island communities it is “impossible to generate an income when you expect people not to come to the island”.

Flexibility is a word that appears in almost all interviews. Flexibility and adaptation were a key response to the challenges imposed by the pandemic. Some informants argue that challenges spurred them into finding new solutions. Cooperation was a key word for island communities. It is recognized that well-developed and strong networks provide benefits for local communities that make it possible to identify and implement adaptive solutions and decrease risk.¹⁸

Final remarks

Perhaps the most important result of this study is that the effects of the pandemic enabled us to envision the contextual heterogeneity of islands and island communities, and island communities were influenced quite differently. On islands with a large, dominant economic agent, such as a large hotel or conference facility, the negative impact of the pandemic was substantial at the beginning, because large agents generate economic trickle-down effects as they normally provide local employment and benefit small-scale firms directly and indirectly. Small firms, on the other hand, are often diversified; thus, they could scale down and focus on the economic activities that could generate an income.

The tourism industry was affected in a negative way, especially in 2020 when the total number of tourists decreased. On the other hand, new tourist categories found their way to islands, which opens an opportunity for the future. Pandemic restrictions, such as limited numbers of seats on the ferries, contributed to increasing the economic distance to the mainland, while the physical distance was negatively affected by the shipping companies’ decisions on relocating ferries (from Norrland to Stockholm). Moreover, regional and municipal dynamics can also affect everyday life on islands. Health care infrastructure is less developed, especially in economically lagging regions.

A positive development that offers opportunities for the future is that new target groups of city dwellers and others who do not normally vacation on islands have experienced a Swedish island vacation for the first time. It is possible that the visitors whose experience corresponded to expectations may be interested in returning. An additional circumstance that has contributed to reducing all types of distance is digitalization. Holiday home owners could move out and become part-time residents; boat owners could dock at an island and use the boat as their “corona home”; summer cottages were widely used to

escape the congestion on the mainland. The islands have thus functioned as safe harbors. The pandemic has therefore contributed in different ways to reduce the cultural and social distance between island communities and mainland society. A further positive circumstance is that many island communities have been strengthened during the pandemic. They were forced to solve many problems themselves, without support from mainland society. Local mobilization has also generated new collaborations within the hospitality industry and between the hospitality industry and local communities.

Finally, the economic, social, and cultural gap between island communities and mainland society increased as a result of the pandemic. This in turn led to a strengthened peripherality. Facing a challenge of the caliber posed by the pandemic, mainland society has clearly failed in its mission regarding community service and an equal level of welfare for island communities. On the other hand, the cultural and social distance to mainland society decreased as a result of

the increased number of holiday homeowners who now spend much more time on their respective island. Digitalization enabled people to re-think how they want to live and made it possible for many to enjoy the higher quality of life that residing on an island can offer. Therefore there is an incentive to continue expanding the digital infrastructure. In addition, while relations between island communities and key decisionmakers in mainland society are varied and, in many cases, unsatisfactory, local relations within and between islands were strengthened. ✕

Paulina Rytönen is Senior Lecturer in Business Studies and Associate Professor in Economic History at Södertörn University.

Marcus Box is Senior Lecturer in Business Studies and Associate Professor in Economic History at Södertörn University.

Tommy Larsson Segerlind is Senior Lecturer in Business Administration and Director of the bachelor program Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Market EnterForum, at School of Social Sciences, Södertörn University.

Youssef Merouani is a PhD-candidate in Economic History at Lund University.

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“THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL GAP BETWEEN ISLAND COMMUNITIES AND MAINLAND SOCIETY INCREASED AS A RESULT OF THE PANDEMIC.”

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A TWIN CITY DIVIDED DURING CORONA

A story of unintended geopolitics

by Thomas Lundén

Geopolitics is the discipline about the state as a geographical organism or entity in space: that is the state as land, territory, domain (gebit), or most explicitly, realm.

Rudolf Kjellén,
Staten som livsform, 1916, 39

The civilized states of Europe recognize each other definitely as members of a region, in which exchange is necessary, and where adjacent states have to deal with each other even if they are enemies, that they only close their borders against dangerous plagues.

Friedrich Ratzel, *Politische Geographie*, Introduction, 1897

abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the impact of state territorial regulations and restrictions against the spread of Covid-19 on the life of the population of the twin cities of Tornio and Haparanda, on the border between Finland and Sweden. To the inhabitants, the pandemic restrictions meant an oscillating "life world" of opportunities and containments, affecting them differently, often depending on decisions taken by distant authorities and for reasons irrelevant to the local borderland.

KEY WORDS: Border twin, pandemic, geopolitics, restrictions, Finland, Sweden.

In what ways are people in a borderland affected by a pandemic? The aim of this paper is to analyze how the incidence of Covid-19 in two adjacent states led to different territorial regulations and restrictions on the life of a borderland population. The twin cities of Haparanda (Sweden) and Tornio (Finland) have long been in close cooperation, aiming at a total physical merger, and only divided by the state border and its legal implications. The linguistic, ethnic and citizenship compositions of the two inhabitant groups are strikingly different, making the impact of border crossing restrictions vary considerably.

With the outbreak of Covid-19 in (other) parts of each country, both states enacted decrees or legislation in order to stop the spread of the pandemic. During a two-year period, particularly Finland changed the actual openness several times and also altered the definition of areas affected and of people allowed to cross over, marked by a riot fence separating the two sides of the twin city.

An analysis of the effects of a pandemic in a borderland has to grapple with a number of phenomena:

1. Land
2. Border
3. Time space
4. Diffusion
5. Regulation
6. People in border pandemics

The land — two independent states

Finland and Sweden have a common history but also very different experiences of the last two centuries. While co-operating in many fields, they are only bound by international agreements in the European Union, the United Nations and by the Nordic states. A protocol on freedom from passport control for four of the Nordic states came into force on July 14, 1952, and an agreement on a common labor market from May 22, 1954. There are also state-to-state agreements covering the whole of each country. Domestic regulations typically occur in the pricing and allowance of liquor, tobacco, and fuel, making certain goods and services cheaper, or even only available, on one side of the border, allowing for a specialization typical of borderlands. Differences in legislation, especially affecting health care and physical planning, are aggravated by *hierarchical asymmetry* in the borderland, incongruencies between the political levels of decision making and authority on each side.¹ Local agreements have to be agreed upon individually and have no formal status unless ratified by each state.

The setting – a borderland twin city aiming at amalgamation

The area chosen for analysis is the twin city area of Tornio and Haparanda, divided by the state border between Finland and Sweden and situated near the mouth of the Torne River. The Torne river valley of Sweden, once inhabited by Finnish speakers and Sámi, was divided in 1809 when the river, with some of its tributaries, was made the border with the Grand Duchy of Finland, ruled by Imperial Russia. Tornio, founded in 1621 in Sweden and located on a peninsula on the western bank of the Torne river, was included in Finland, an exception from the river border definition. Haparanda, intended as a Swedish compensation for the loss of Tornio, eventually grew up close to the border of Finland, separated from the mother town only by a marshy area. Unlike the rural parts of the river valley with its Finnish-speaking population, Haparanda got an influx of Swedish speakers, while Tornio eventually lost its Swedish-speaking burghers and administrators. After the two World Wars that affected the two sides very differently, freedom from passport requirements was introduced in 1952, and eventually the two towns started a cooperation aiming at making the twin towns grow into one, only separated by the state dividing line. Now several functions are used in common, and the image of the twins has been an example of a well-functioning bi-ethnic and bi-lingual community. Haparanda has the bus terminal common to the two towns, and a train station with facilities for the two different gauges. An IKEA department store is located on the Swedish side, serving both sides.²

WHILE THE POPULATION of Tornio is almost 100% Finnish-speaking, Haparanda has received an influx of Finnish speakers in the last 50 years, often Finns with a history of migration to Sweden as laborers, now returning to their home area while settling on the Swedish side, but with relatives on both sides of the border. Many of them have kept their Finnish citizenship, as Nordic

integration has made residents eligible for social services and entitled to vote in municipal elections. Another group of settlers in Haparanda come from the Swedish side of the valley, often with a limited and unschooled grasp of Finnish.³ Haparanda is thus a bilingual town in a unilingual country, while Tornio is unilingual town in an officially bi-lingual country. Haparanda and the other municipalities in the Torne Valley in Sweden are part of the area under special minority protection covering standard Finnish, the local dialect now classified as a language, Meänkieli, and Sámi. As indicated above, the population of the twin city is ethnically and linguistically homogeneous on the Finland side, while Haparanda in Sweden has a mixture of 'ethnic' Swedes and Finns and a large group of people with full or partial knowledge of both languages. There is usually a great amount of cross-border movement: work commuting, school attendance, visiting relatives, all involving human interaction. Much of commercial Haparanda is bilingual. Cross-border shopping is intense, mainly (but not only) into Sweden (IKEA products, tobacco; snuff is prohibited in Finland) but does not require much human interaction.

Cross-border behavior in a time-space framework

While usually defined for specific territories (whole states or administrative areas), the effects of administrative regulation on peoples' daily behavior are particularly strong in borderlands. Since the borders of the Nordic states have been open, the hindrances against border trespassing have been minimal. Differences in legislation, especially concerning taxation of goods and services, have in many cases even been causes for boundary interaction, both legal and illegal. Borderland behavior is a matter involving both space and time.

Time geography was developed by Torsten Hägerstrand in the early 1970s and builds on a concept of individuals, units, and indivisibilities of all kinds having locations in time and space, forming paths in time-space under conditions of restrictions.⁴ Hägerstrand defined three types of constraints that limit individuals' choices in time-space: *capability constraints* (related to needs such as sleeping/resting, eating, etc.), *authority constraints* ("rules, laws and recommendations set up by authorities that people involved in the constraints domain of the authority in question are expected to follow"), and *coupling constraints* (relations to others, like face-to-face meetings, courtship, team sports and fighting). Particularly important for the spread of diseases is work that must be carried out in specific places at specific time, and in close proximity with others. Public transportation is another example.⁵

An individual's spatial behavior is of course primarily dependent on preferences, possibilities, and opportunities, often linked to already existing relations and communications, most of which belong in Hägerstrand's categories of capability and coupling constraints. The authority constraints involve legislation, regulation, and ownership rights but in a borderland they are related to coupling, as well as family authority and cultural norms. With a few exceptions of superior legislation, e.g. by international bodies, the principal definer of authority constraints is the territorial state.

A territorial state is, in Hägerstrand's vocabulary, a "domain",



Entrance to IKEA store, Haparanda, Sweden (with bilingual Swedish/Finnish signage). The flags are those of Norway, Russia, Finland, and Sweden. On the far left is the Sami flag.



Haparanda–Tornio double gauge rail across the Torne River, looking towards Sweden from Finland.

a defined unit performing a path through time, undergoing geopolitical changes both in terms of extent and in internal cohesion and strength in relation to competing forces.⁶ Even if Hägerstrand never developed a geopolitical interpretation, mostly concentrating on the human individual, when interpreted for the state his concept seems to be a more stringent development of Kjellén's view on the state as a form of life.⁷ Like the human individual, the state is a unit capable of making decisions pertaining to its territory, restricted by the state borders.

We can discern different actions by the state in the way they influence people's lives:

- Benefits, subventions, and civil rights offered to citizens and to a certain extent, other inhabitants, and visitors to the state territory.
- Restrictions on the supply of certain goods and services deemed illegal or detrimental.
- Restrictions on behavior imposed on inhabitants and/or visitors of the territorial state in question (e.g. on keeping distance, visiting shops during epidemics, see below), driving licenses, and incarceration of criminals.
- Restrictions on leaving and/or entering the territorial state in question.

BENEFITS AND RESTRICTIONS in a unitary state are usually domain homogeneous, i.e. they apply to the whole territory irrespective of the location of the reason for the restriction or benefit. In the Finland – Sweden relations, only the autonomy of the Åland Islands under Finland make a clear exception, while both states give certain exclusive rights to autochthonous national and /or linguistic minorities, defined either individually or to defined municipalities.⁸

“THERE IS USUALLY A GREAT AMOUNT OF CROSS-BORDER MOVEMENT: WORK COMMUTING, SCHOOL ATTENDANCE, VISITING RELATIVES, ALL INVOLVING HUMAN INTERACTION.”

All legislation and regulation by the territorial state results in a difference at the border of a neighboring state, which in turn impacts the movements and contacts across the border. This impact may be hampering or inducive to border crossing. Border controls usually aim at restricting movements and transport to legal behavior, but great differences in domestic legislation between neighboring states may lead to illegal movement and smuggling.

Ellegård presents different examples of peoples' time-space behavior, based on diaries.⁹ To this one might add cultural and linguistic differences, making relations biased, e.g. between ethnic groups and speakers of different languages, all influenced

by peoples' experiences. While often based on situations of restraint, none of these studies focusses on border-crossing with its different aspects of control and time-consumption.

People living in a borderland are of course affected by the restrictions and attractions imposed by each of the neighboring states. From daily chores to life-long movements, these factors influence to different degrees. A sketch of this was made by Lundén showing the importance of e.g. the educational system, military service, demographic differences, e.g. in local gender pro-

portions, inter-state differences in prices and supplies etc.¹⁰

One factor influencing the time budget of border crossers is the often unpredictable delay in border crossing. During a field study, Swedish students interviewed Belarusian hawkers in Białystok, Poland in 2004, when the border was relatively open, and no visas required. The hawkers started in Hrodna some twenty kilometers from the Kuźnica border early in the morning, had to queue, often for hours, at the border, and continued 61 kilometers to Białystok market, trying to sell lower-priced products, and returning in the evening. Depending on the time

spent at the border, the time available for selling their products varied considerably.¹¹ In the case of Finland and Sweden, border crossing before Covid-19 was just passing a line, usually without inspection or other delay.

A pandemic as a diffusion process

A pandemic is a contagious disease, an epidemic, spread through human interaction across continents. The diffusion of the disease is dependent on its medical character, e.g. whether the spread is transmitted through physical contact, by aerosol or by other means.¹²

The diffusion process is in essence a spatial phenomenon.¹³ The spatial structure of society (in a wide sense) with nodes, links, routes and barriers are carriers of and hindrances to change. In Hägerstrand's early study of diffusion (1953), only social indicators were used, but one of them, the use of vaccination against cow (cattle) tuberculosis (thus an infectious disease), was transmitted through information spread by active members of the county's agricultural organizations (*Hushållningssällskap*), a semi-official organization. The disease had spread in Sweden from the mid 1800's without any conscious actions, but after Robert Koch's discovery of tuberculin, measures were taken leading to the eventual eradication of the disease.¹⁴ The spread of the Covid-19 can be compared to that of cow tuberculosis while the countermeasures of the new pandemic has several aspects: individual spatial behavior, political restrictions, and vaccination, all with a strong spatial dimension. Taken together, the physical and social locus of outbreaks, the presence of super spreaders and highly receptive individuals and these persons' spatial behavior (housing, transport, and neighborhood conditions) are all conducive to diffusion of the disease. Restrictions, at different levels of authority, are some of the explanatory factors in Hägerstrand's time geography and are important in the analysis of borderland behavior, as will be developed below.

Pandemics and medical geopolitics

The outbreak of the Corona virus pandemic has led to a number of legal measures, varying in time and space. But the actual distribution of the pandemic does not necessarily follow the administrative territories that form the statistical basis for decisions, an example of the modifiable areal unit problem (MAUP).¹⁵ Statistics must also be related to other measures, e.g. population density, i.e. the proximity of other people to each individual.¹⁶

Shortly after the European outbreak of the pandemic, the states of north-western Europe took different measures to hamper its effects.¹⁷ The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020 first and most seriously affected Sweden, while Finland was affected much later and much less. The Swedish outbreak was, however, concentrated in a limited number of locations, mainly in the great urban conurbations, particularly to clients and personnel who served and serve old people. While Sweden followed the advice of its Public Health Agency, based on general advice to the public and no formal lockdowns or border closures, the neighboring countries took to more drastic measures including

the closure of state boundaries, especially towards Sweden.¹⁸ While Sweden's border relations with Norway and Denmark had strong economic and psychological consequences, the most emotional effects can be seen in Sweden's relations to Finland. In two areas, Åland Islands and the Torne Valley, cross border relations are based on linguistic and ethnic affinities and overlapping, in the first case an autonomous area of Finland, Swedish speaking and with strong contacts with the Swedish mainland; in the second an area of Sweden that is traditionally Finnish speaking and has strong migratory and family connections with its eastern neighbor.

Covid-19 and the movement of people

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic led to a marked change in people's behavior, partly because of binding decisions by the authorities, partly though recommendations by experts and the media. Tøger et al. reports that

...a clear heterogeneity in spatial behavior can already be detected. COVID-19 hotspots have clearly distinguishable geographical features related among others to urban density patterns (often in older urban districts), spatial proximity factors (with a low degree of social distancing), socio-economic segmentation (white collar home office employees vs. blue collar workers at work or commuting), health risks of collective forms of transport (e.g., mass transit) and new space-time patterns of work and leisure.

The corona times have in most countries shown new patterns of people's mobility, in particular disappearance of (or drastic reduction in) typical morning and evening peak traffic, rising popularity of slow-motion forms of traffic (in particular, walking and (e-) biking...and an overall shift in route and mode choice (e.g., a dramatic fall in the use of public transport). It is noteworthy that spatial proximity among individuals is increasingly seen as a potential health threat, with far reaching consequences for spatial mobility and spatial interaction choices. This perceived health threat manifests itself in two ways: (i) a relative shift to individualized modes of transport, in particular, cars, and bicycles; (ii) an absolute decline in general mobility (e.g., staying at home for online work, decline in shopping, entertainment and social life, as a result of "soft", "intelligent" or "hard" lockdown measures.¹⁹

In a study of the geographical factors associated with the spread of Covid-19 during the first wave in Sweden, Florida and Mellander suggest that diffusion factors are significantly more important than place-based factors in the spread of Covid-19 across places. The most significant factor of all is proximity to places with higher levels of infections. Covid-19 case numbers are also higher in places that were earliest hit in the outbreak. Of place-based factors, the geographic variation in Covid-19 is most significantly related to the presence of high-risk nursing homes.²⁰

The pandemic and its effects on borderland interaction

The most visible impacts on people's behavior were in Sweden's borderlands, particularly in the twin cities of Haparanda-Tornio. There are three border crossings between the twin cities, with most passengers using the E4 crossing.²¹ In March 2020, a sharp line was suddenly created with a riot fence along the hitherto almost invisible border. Finnish police and border guards checked the line, and only a few people were permitted to cross, based on strict definition of purpose. The reason for the closure was a high incidence of illness and deaths in Sweden, almost exclusively in the greater Stockholm area one thousand kilometers away. The decisions by Finland were formally criticized by a Finnish professor of law, leading to a very careful analysis by the Attorney General in the Government, including recommendations for more legally founded decisions.²² The life of the local population underwent several turns. On May 14, Finland eased restrictions on work-related crossings of the border, but controls were maintained, affecting e.g. Swedish citizens in Haparanda. Citizens of Finland were free to enter and leave the country, but a voluntary quarantine was recommended. On August 20, Finland eased cross-border traffic towards Sweden and Norway in "the local border communities" where there is daily or weekly traffic across the state border. For ordinary shopping or the use of other services quarantine was not needed. However, the area of the "border community" beyond the urban parts of Tornio and Haparanda was defined by two state roads parallel to the Torne River, leaving some villages divided by the road outside of the community, causing uncertainty and irritation. On September 19 Finland opened its border with Sweden, but it was already closed again a week later, due to higher outbreaks in Sweden (but not in the local area). But the exception for border communities was kept, widened on September 24 to inhabitants of the border municipalities of Finland, Sweden, and Norway, to cross freely under the general regulations of each country.²³

ON JANUARY 27, 2021, Finland introduced a new regulation making border crossing from Sweden by non-Finnish citizens more restrictive. The right to enter Finland on the basis of residence in a border community was stopped. However, Finnish citizens would continue to have the right to enter and leave the country. From that day on, only job commuters in occupations of civil importance (care, energy etc.) were allowed to pass with a certificate from their employer, but they had to take a test at the border. The exception, allowing inhabitants of the border municipalities free access across the border, was abolished.²⁴

The restrictions were renewed in a decree at the end of May 2021 in relation to Sweden and most other Schengen countries and further renewed from July 12, 2021.²⁵ The border to Sweden

was still under restrictions. In the Constitution of Finland § 9 no citizen of Finland can be hindered from entering or leaving the country (except for cases of enforcement of penalties or escape from conscription). Pleasure boats are exempted from border controls, but other traffic must pass the border control station. Border crossing with Sweden is allowed for reasons of civil necessities, e.g. emergencies, and personnel in health and care, logistics etc. when on duty, based on written confirmation by the employer. Swedish (and some other) citizens were further allowed into Finland for continuing studies, for certain family reasons and if they owned a flat or house in the country. From July 27, 2021, the Finnish Border Guard service left their Corona surveillance to the local authorities and Swedish (and other) citizens were welcome into Finland if properly vaccinated or showing a certificate of recovery from Covid within the past 6 months.²⁶ The Government of Finland adopted a new decree valid from September 1st, 2021, obliging people arriving in Finland to present a Covid-19 certificate of vaccination or recovery or to undergo a test.

"THE OUTBREAK OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN EARLY 2020 FIRST AND MOST SERIOUSLY AFFECTED SWEDEN, WHILE FINLAND WAS AFFECTED MUCH LATER AND MUCH LESS."

Exempted from these obligations were arrivals from certain (distant) countries and the Norwegian and Swedish border municipalities to Finland, thus including Haparanda.²⁷ With the new Omicron variant, Sweden required a valid Covid-19 vaccination certificate to enter from December 21,²⁸ while the Government of Finland decided to re-instate domestic border controls at Finland's borders from December 28, 2021, valid until January 16, 2022. Inhabitants of "the border communities with Sweden and Norway" (and some other

areas) only had to show a certificate of recognized vaccination, of a recovery from Covid.-19, or of a negative test taken less than 7 days before arrival in Finland.²⁹ Valid from December 28, 2021, Folkhälsomyndigheten (The Swedish Public Health Agency) stated that foreign citizens above 11 years old not residing in Sweden upon entrance must present a certificate proving a negative Covid-19 test. The certificate was to be written in Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, English or French. Commuters and students only needed weekly tests.³⁰

Public response to the restrictions

Usually, around 115,000 crossing take place every week. During the first weeks of restrictions the number of border crossings sank from 40,000 to 1,200 per day. When the border restrictions were relaxed for a period in the autumn the number increased to half of the normal amount.³¹ According to the Finnish Border Guard, a total of 113,000 border crossings were recorded nationwide between 18-24 May 2020, which represented a 91% drop compared to the 2019 average.³² Compared to the year before, commerce on the Swedish side in 2020 decreased by 12%, while Haparanda municipality recorded a loss of 16%. Comparing the third quarter of 2020 with 2021, the border municipalities to



Finnish border control in Tornio, at the border with Haparanda and Sweden in September 2021.

PHOTO: NEWS ORESUND/FLICKR

Finland had an increase of 13,1 while Haparanda alone recorded 16,4% increase from the year before.³³ Finland's national public broadcasting company, YLE, reveals that by June 2020 grocery trade had decreased by around 25–30%, and in specialty goods by about half, in Finnish border municipalities. As one company owner puts it: "My Swedish customers could not visit my company in Tornio, which significantly reduced the business."³⁴ In this case, the shop owner adds, "this group makes up 30–40% of the customer base, so the impact on sales was very large." One interesting observation from this company is that "most of these customers are Finns, but live in Haparanda".³⁵

In a study published June 28, 2020 by the Nordic Council of Ministers and the *Nordkalottens Gränstjänst* (The Border Service of the Northern Calotte) and finalized in February 2021, the inhabitants of the Torne Valley are, not surprisingly, worried by the restrictions and uncertainties and by negative attitudes towards border crossers and towards the authorities.³⁶ According to Hanna-Leena Ainonen, TornioHaparanda, Nov. 6, 2020, the local authorities, on their part, are troubled by problems of planning and co-operation, but they see the problems as an indication of the necessity keeping the twin towns together. The Border Service further reported that they received a total of 303 inquiries about border crossing-problems in the first half of 2019, 1,380 in the first half of 2020, and 1,101 in the first half of 2021. Internet visits reached 11,666, 22,938 and 22,070 in the same time periods. Having in mind that the restrictions were set in in the middle of March 2020, the increase in the second period is remarkable.³⁷

THE SECRETARIAT OF THE NORDIC GRÄNSHINDERRÅDET [approx. Council on border hindrances] has identified four general challenges to be elucidated:³⁸

1. Employer – employee relations in times of cross-border restrictions

2. The need for clear information and uniform interpretation of the different state regulations
3. The problem of different state regulations concerning the pandemic
4. The lack of regional statistics for the Nordic borderlands.

The challenges reported refer to all Nordic borders, and compared to Sweden's Norwegian and Danish border relations, the Finland relation is more local, and is in fact the only example of an urban twin city truncation. Here, daily relations are at stake.

In an annex to the report on corona-related disturbances on free movement, the council mentions problems related to border relations, two of which relate to Finland-Sweden:³⁹

13. Finland's ban on entrance negatively affects trans-border commuters economically concerning labor legislation. During the ban, only jobs that are of necessary importance are exempted from the closure. The rules for determining and controlling this are complicated, and people may end up being "locked-out" without compensation.

14. Border commuters from Sweden to Finland are recommended a Covid-19 test or a 14 day quarantine. Even if commuters are deemed necessary for resource preparedness, they will need to take these precautions.

The council further reports that an opticians service in Tornio refused to receive customers from Sweden, irrespective of citizenship, referring to Finnish regulations, but changed its rules after information.⁴⁰

While these problems mainly affect border commuters from Sweden into Finland, other problems affect students and pupils from Finland to Sweden:

As an example, the two municipalities of Tornio and

Haparanda started a joint school in 1989, Språkskolan/ Kielikoulu in Haparanda, open to pupils from both sides and operating in two languages. Seija Fjellvind, principal of the school informed me on July 26, 2021, that during certain stages in the regulation of border crossing during the pandemic, entering Sweden was made difficult, but the school authorities issued documents enabling the pupils from Finland to enter.

On July 14, 2020, Swedish television reports that a Swedish citizen, who had lived in Finland for 20 years, was stopped by Finnish Border Guards upon returning into Finland north of Haparanda around midsummer 2020, handcuffed, and fined for “obstruction of an official”.⁴¹ In October 2020, the Swedish language section of YLE, Finland’s state radio & television, reported the case and highlighted a number of other incidents where people of either Swedish or Finnish or dual citizenship were stopped when crossing the border and harshly treated by Finnish border guards, many of whom had been transferred from the border to Russia, with little knowledge of local circumstances. Some recommendations had been interpreted as mandatory obligations, and the constitutional right of citizens of Finland to enter or leave the country seems at times to have been forgotten. But in general, cross-border relations have been positive, albeit under pressure by restrictions often seen incomprehensible by local residents.⁴²

In a comment to the local paper *Haparandabladet*’s editorial of December 8th, 2021, commemorating Finland’s Independence Day, a signature Keke writes on December 28 at 13:17 after the introduction of new restrictions that the border street “Kranigatan is open, no police in place. Send some police there too, much traffic to here from there”.⁴³

In January 2022, the chairs of the municipal governments [kommunstyrelsens ordförande] of three municipalities affected by the border restrictions, Lund, Strömstad, and Haparanda, published an article in Sweden’s largest morning daily, *Dagens Nyheter*, under the heading ‘70 år av fri rörlighet inom Norden är hotad’ [70 years of free movement in the Nordic countries is threatened], with an emphasized citation ‘Many people in the border regions have families on both sides of the border and their possibilities to meet have been forcefully reduced’. The Haparanda – Tornio cooperation is depicted as a model for Europe, in reality one town in two states, divided only in the documents of central authorities. Government decisions in the capitals of both countries have torn apart one community and the prospects for cooperation and development are at risk of being shattered for decades ahead. During the first restrictions during the pandemic the number of daily border crossings in Haparanda-Tornio sank from around 40,000 to 1,200.⁴⁴

Spatial behavior in a borderland under pandemic restrictions

There is no information on aggregate levels of behavior in the Hapatornio borderland. But certain conclusions may be drawn:

During much of the pandemic, a physical barrier (like a riot fence) was placed by Finland on the urban border between Haparanda and Tornio, and Finnish border guards controlled the border, demanding identification and permits. Even if

controls were usually carried out in a respectful way, the fence created a symbolic difference between the countries and images were spread in the media.

Citizens of Finland (including many ethnic Finns in Haparanda) could cross the border most of the time, except for a short period when Sweden closed, but unlike the earlier situation, they had to line up and show identification and prove a negative test or vaccination.

FOR SWEDISH CITIZENS, including many of Finnish origin, crossing into Finland was made very difficult and dependent on certificates of the urgency of passing, and of negative tests or eventually certificates of vaccination.

The situation can be compared to the osmosis situation in chemistry, where two liquids are divided by a semi-permeable membrane, allowing certain molecules to enter in one direction. In the human case, restrictions apply differently depending on the direction of the intended movement, the citizenship of the crosser, and the purpose of the crossing. In most movements, the crossing involved a time-consuming scrutiny at the border.

To the inhabitants of the twin cities, the pandemics restrictions meant an oscillating ‘life world’ of opportunities and containments, affecting them differently, often depending on decisions taken by distant authorities and for reasons irrelevant to the local borderland. Certain restrictions are not spatially relevant, as they emanate from incidences from the whole territory of a country while the real cases are concentrated in certain ‘hot spots’. A story of unintended geopolitics. ✖

Thomas Lundén is Professor Emeritus in Human Geography at the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies at Södertörn University.

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CBSS Ministerial Session, Kristiansand, May 25, 2022.

PHOTO: THOMAS TRUTSCHEL/PHOTOTHEK

ROLE-PLAY. EUROPEAN INTEGRATION WITH A FOCUS ON THE BALTIC SEA REGION

The 30th anniversary celebration of the Council of the Baltic Sea States is an opportunity to strengthen the long-term priority topic Regional Identity. The Model Council of the Baltic Sea States (Model CBSS) can, as is here argued, offer graduate and post-graduate learning, upskilling, and networking opportunities.

On May 24–25, 2022, the 30th anniversary of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) was celebrated during the meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and other high-level representatives from the Baltic

Sea region (BSR) hosted by the Norwegian Presidency in Kristiansand, Norway.

CBSS is a forum for cooperation in the BSR formed after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Council assembles Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden, and the European Union (EU). In March 2022, Russia was suspended from the CBSS in response to its attack on Ukraine.¹ The Kristiansand meeting was the first CBSS meeting without Russian participation. The 19th Ministerial Session of the CBSS is its first ministerial

session in nine years. It occurred amidst an acknowledgement of unprecedented and multifaceted security pressures faced in Northern Europe and mitigatory measures taken by countries unilaterally or jointly within the existing multilateral and regional formats.

This commentary builds on the acknowledgement indicated in the Kristiansand Declaration and the prioritization of youth during the German CBSS Presidency 2022–2023.² The Model CBSS role-play is proposed as an additional learning event for graduate and post-

“THE BSR IS A PROMISING SPRINGBOARD FOR EXPLORING HOW INTERTWINED EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION IS WITH THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS AND OUTREACH OF VARIOUS DOMAIN-SPECIFIC EU POLICIES.”

graduate students interested in BSR affairs.

The recommendation to convene Model CBSS sessions is inspired by the achievements and learning outcomes identified after multiple simulations, games and role-plays construed following several international organizations, regional forums and other entities. The learning exercises focusing on the European Union (EU) decision-making modalities offer manifold insights into the specifics of the most advanced regional integration model. However, they may not always provide a clear picture of how closely the EU collaborates with other like-minded European countries on various issues of common interest. The CBSS format offers an excellent example for a hands-on exploration of these nuances. The BSR is a promising springboard for exploring how intertwined European external action is with the international dimensions and outreach of various domain-specific EU policies.

EU at the CBSS

The EU has a unique role in this constellation of Northern Europe. CBSS convenes so-called “old” and “new” EU member states, and non-EU states that share a considerable degree of like-mindedness with the EU on many portfolios of European external action. At high-level events and the Committee of Senior Officials, the EU is represented by the European External Action Service. The expert-level formats of the CBSS benefit from the engagement of the Directorates-General of the European Commission.

BSR developments have a notable role in grasping the potential, prospects, and niches for advancing an “ever closer [European] union”.³ Likewise, the BSR represents a noteworthy space for a better understanding of positive external differentiation. Differentiation studies explore how non-EU states, such as Nor-

way, are engaged in various formats and constellations in the overarching project of European integration. Differentiation is praised as a potentially promising tool for facilitating closer cooperation in foreign, security and defense policy matters among willing and able EU member countries and like-minded and highly integrated third countries.⁴

The Council’s work revolves around three long-term priorities – Regional Identity, Sustainable & Prosperous Region, and Safe & Secure Region.⁵ Regional Identity focuses on culture, higher education, and youth. It facilitates lasting region-building through continued exploration of the history, heritage, culture, and identity of the BSR. This joint exercise relies on the intellectual input and guidance issued by the expert circles convened in the form of working groups, (EU and otherwise funded) project consortiums, ad hoc conference panels, summer or winter schools for students, and summer camps for youth. Some specific collaborative examples aligned with the intergovernmental cultural ties are between the CBSS and *Ars Baltica*, the Baltic Region Heritage Committee, Policy Area Culture of the EU Strategy for the BSR, and the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture.⁶

As Stefan Gänzle points out in his blog: “Since February 1992, the CBSS has regularly brought together the nine countries bordering the Baltic Sea as well as countries – such as Norway and Iceland (the latter since 1996) – that are part of the wider region.”⁷ I will here argue that the 30th anniversary of the Council is a perfect moment to think about new ways to promote diverse learning opportunities for young generations about the potential and value of the BSR governance constellation. The recent suspension of Russian participation attests that the BSR multi-lateral architecture is not static. It evolves and its shifting contours invite constant

reflection on how to foster peaceful co-existence.

The envisaged target group is young people who are either already contributing to BSR cooperation or are seeking avenues for finding a place that would resonate most with their values, academic profile, skill set and career aspirations. The recommendations articulated in this brief encourage tailoring future opportunities with a strong EU component to keep the CBSS apace with the evolving character of this post-Westphalian entity. The graduate and post-graduate training should provide future professionals with an interactive platform for an in-depth intellectual exercise that would prepare them for their work with the BSR as a distinct and promising area of European affairs with a global scope, resonance, and outreach.

Existing Baltic Sea learning opportunities

The BSR has no shortage of learning and interaction opportunities offered to graduate and post-graduate students, and young professionals. The CBSS is only one among several facilitators of such activities. The Nordic Council of Ministers deserves to be mentioned as one of the most important players in this domain. Among the most recent and ongoing initiatives supported by the CBSS are the CBSS Summer Universities, which take place annually. These events, hosted by universities across the Baltic Sea area, offer graduate and post-graduate students an opportunity to discuss the state of the region with prominent thought leaders. The CBSS Summer Universities are a historical and enduring component of the overall grouping of initiatives organized to implement the Regional Identity long-term priority.

The Baltic Science Network Mobility Program for Research Internships (BARI) is part of the BSN Powerhouse project



PHOTO: CBSS ANNUAL REPORT 2021–22

Youth representatives attending the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference 2022 at the Riksdag (Swedish parliament).

that builds on the CBSS-endorsed Baltic Science Network. The Baltic Science Educational Academy (B-SEA) is a learning and networking event organized for young researchers and PhD students. B-SEA thematically tailored schools is a recent initiative. It was launched in 2021 in alignment with the CBSS Action Plan 2021–2025 *From Policy to Action!*. This Action Plan carves out a more detailed list of steps for implementing the Vilnius II Declaration. One of the planned actions of the Sustainable & Prosperous Region long-term priority within the framework of the CBSS Action Plan 2021–2025 is to promote cooperation in science, innovation, and academic mobility, especially among young researchers.

Among other more ad hoc initiatives is the Winter School on Balticness convened in 2022 and hosted by the University of Gdańsk in Poland. It addressed various transnational identities, such as “Balticness”, “Nordicness”, “Scandinavism”,

“Pan-Slavism” and “Hanseatic”. These and other terms developed, shape and are expected to continue forming the multi-faceted contours of region-building across the Baltic Sea area throughout decades and centuries.

The programs briefly described here lack a component of more applied learning about the routines of policymaking offered elsewhere through simulations, games, and role-plays. Model CBSS would help to bridge this gap. It would bring BSR-specific modalities into the existing provision of hands-on learning exercises convened in the CBSS member states.⁸ However, drawing from previous role-playing experience elsewhere, it should not be forgotten that neither Model CBSS nor the other learning examples outlined in the earlier paragraphs are replacements for routine academic reading, lectures, and seminars. These extra-curricular activities cannot replace the core elements of graduate and post-graduate

higher education programs.⁹ The CBSS-supported learning events are complementary enablers tailored to broaden the analytical process undergone by students. Additionally, Model CBSS would expand the learning opportunities for students and professionals of European Studies because the CBSS format helps (students) to look beyond the internal dynamics of the EU.

Model CBSS

The existing rich literature on simulation exercises¹⁰ of various forums proves the valuable learning curve that these events offer to students and young professionals who wish to get a more hands-on insight into how their acquired knowledge and skills can serve their career aspirations directed toward diplomacy and international affairs.

The dense layer of steering, consultative and collaborative frameworks developed across the Baltic Sea area



PHOTO: CBSS ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Youth Forum in Stockholm June 11–12, 2022, gathered youth representatives from all 10 CBSS member states.

requires not only mastery of numerous textbooks and academic analyses of the distinct traits and history of each of these formats. It should benefit from a preparatory phase offered to highly motivated graduates, post-graduate students, and young professionals to try out their capacity to master BSR affairs with a specific focus on one of the most enduring, most established, and advanced forums – the Committee of Senior Officials. This is the key format of the CBSS that convenes representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and the European External Action Service to solve decisive matters and craft future pathways for the Council.

Offering young generations a simulation exercise that would tackle some of the most important topics addressed by the contemporary routines of the CBSS would help them better grasp the complementarities between various instruments, initiatives and formats implemented throughout the Baltic Sea area. It would project through other methodological means the much-debated potential for more synergies, coordination and mutual learning across various expert circles and instruments.¹¹ Participants could identify where they see promising prospects to expand regional cooperation to better address some of the jointly faced challenges. It is one of the best ways to let young generations apprehend

how resource-intensive, intellectually demanding and professionally rewarding a well-concerted effort to jointly craft the future for this part of the world can be.

A simulation exercise would fill the gap in the existing panoply of learning opportunities facilitated by the CBSS. The main outcomes of the above-mentioned initiatives are made known to the public and conveyed to the Committee of Senior Officials by the CBSS staff members working for Regional Identity. Nevertheless, this is a consultative action. A simulation game offers a much more interactive format for learners who wish to get a more nuanced insight into the daily routines of policy-making and regional cooperation. Model CBSS would be an opportunity to try out responsibilities they might wish to fulfil during their career progression.

CBSS represents a region that seeks close interaction with other parts of the world and fosters fruitful ties with its Observer States, either through annual consultations or ad hoc engagements during projects or other initiatives. The CBSS Observer States are France, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. The engagement of an Observer State official during the debriefing session of the CBSS simulation game with a concise presentation on the country's ties to the CBSS and the Baltic Sea area would be a means to con-

textualize the decisions made by students during the simulation game.

A similar guest presentation made by an EU official responsible for a portfolio that matches the topic of the Model CBSS event but with a focus on a neighboring area of the BSR would be equally valuable. It would help Model CBSS participants draw parallels on how the EU helps to address some of the pressing issues in various parts of the world and what EU instruments are implemented to tailor efficient and context-sensitive support measures. These two guest contributions would help examine how the role-play's achievements are positioned in a broader picture stretching towards Central Europe, the Arctic or any other adjacent geographical area. The choice of the Observer State and EU official should be made depending on the specific topic chosen for each Model CBSS.

Analysis of the Model CBSS

The simulation game dedicated to the CBSS is an opportunity to expand the scholarly analysis of the CBSS and contribute to evidence-informed transnational policymaking for youth and capacity-building actions. The evaluation group would use various research designs and methods to explore the implemented simulation game and participants' experiences, either together or in several subgroups of researchers. This would help to gain a more thorough look at the role of Model CBSS in advancing region-building, tailored upskilling, and networking. Such an evaluation group should be formed by several universities or research institutes to foster collaborative research ties across the Baltic Sea area. This study group constellation would follow the tradition of CBSS-supported research-intensive projects, commissioned research, and assessments, to produce analyses based on pooling a unique mix of expertise and skills from two or more parts of the region.

Additionally, this recommendation to promote research output is inspired by the success of another sister format of the Four Councils of the North – the Arctic Council – to present thought-provoking

learning experiences to students.¹² The Four Councils of the North refers to an annual consultative meeting of the Arctic Council, Barents Euro-Arctic Council, Nordic Council of Ministers and the CBSS. All four regional forums play a crucial role in shaping the future of Northern Europe.¹³ Exploring these formats as notable sites of contemporary multi-track diplomacy practices should foster awareness-building among young generations about the importance of their work and routine errands. Furthermore, mutual learning across regional formats should not be restricted solely to the northern setting. It could be extended to various parts of Europe and beyond.

Conclusion

The Regional Identity long-term priority offers fascinating opportunities to equip the next generation of region-builders and future diplomats with expertise and skills. Model CBSS would help them bring the Baltic Sea cooperation to an even more advanced stage and develop the integrationist dynamics to be ever more responsive to the needs of the contemporary global context, and its specific reverberations across the Baltic Sea area. This simulation game would be a good complementary building block that would fill the present blank space in the CBSS provision crafted for graduate and post-graduate students keen on exploring BSR affairs. Model CBSS would help young people try out the working routines of a senior national policy maker and EU official. Following the Arctic example, such an interactive role-play would help students understand the decision-making episodes they encounter during their studies, from academic literature on the EU's external action and reflections shared by diplomats on various educational or networking occasions. It would help them to see in more specific terms how their talents and abilities could contribute to the aspirations of the CBSS in the future. ✕

Zane Šime

Zane Šime is an Academic Assistant at the EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies Department on the Bruges campus of the College of Europe.

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The politics of environmental knowledge.

Shaping environments through research, art, and activism



The CBEES Environmental Conference, “The politics of environmental knowledge: Shaping environments through research, art, and activism in the Baltic Sea Region – and beyond” took place May 23–24, 2022 and was arranged in collaboration between CBEES and the Färgfabriken art gallery. Day 1: “Challenging borders between knowledge, imagination and action” at Södertörn University. Day 2: “Revealing radical realities: Art as knowledge for transformation” at the Färgfabriken art gallery.

The Baltic Sea region, like many other natural and cultural ecosystems, faces multiple socio-environmental challenges which require substantial societal transformations and adaptations. Such transformations are activated and negotiated in formal politics as well as in everyday lives and call upon different ways of knowing our natural and social environments. How do the politics of environmental knowledge shape the ways in which environments are created and governed? And how can critical research, art, and activism reimagine the interfaces of power and knowledge(s) to highlight marginalized perspectives and environmental problems?

Around thirty researchers, artists, and activists attended CBEES Environmental Conference, “The politics of environmental knowledge: Shaping environments through research, art, and activism in the Baltic Sea Region – and beyond”, in order to reflect on these questions, present their work, and think together about how our theoretical, methodological, creative, and political struggles can be understood and overcome.

The conference took place May 23–24, 2022, in south Stockholm. On the first day, artists and activists were invited to present their projects at Södertörn University, and discuss with an interdisciplinary panel “Challenging borders between knowledge, imagination and action”, featuring filmmaker Clara Bodén, visual artist Pavel Otdelnov,

researcher and activist Leif Dahlberg, and researcher Johan Gärdebo, and moderated by Tatiana Sokolova and Viviane Griesinger. On the second day, the researchers had to venture out of their comfort zone to come to discuss their work at the Färgfabriken art gallery on Liljeholmen in the public event “Revealing radical realities: Art as knowledge for transformation”. The conference was followed by a public event in which the artists Vegan Flava, Pavel Otdelnov, Elise Alloin, and Sidonie Hadoux presented their art and discussed it with each other and with moderators Irina Seits (Södertörn University) and Daniel Urey (Färgfabriken).

WHILE ORGANIZING this event, we learnt that the borders between art, research, and activism are as powerful as they are

arbitrary. As organizers, we found ourselves reinforcing them by grouping and regrouping presentations and themes into the categories of “art”, “science” and “activism” – even though the conference aimed at challenging the borders between the different domains.

But more importantly, the conference made us realize the asymmetry that exists between the “scientific”

and “non-scientific” worlds. Artists and activists told us on several occasions that they felt intimidated when presenting their work to academics. We found it surprising: Do they not “know” the topics of the discussions just as well or much better than the researchers? Moreover, there was a perception shared by people

**“HOW DO THE
POLITICS OF
ENVIRONMENTAL
KNOWLEDGE
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ARE CREATED
AND
GOVERNED?”**




The conference took place in Färgfabriken, an art gallery in the south of Stockholm.

in all three groups that by inviting artists and activists to the university we were “upgrading” their contributions – by providing the possibility to present in an academic setting. This in itself describes the imbalance that is maintained between scientific and “non-scientific” knowledge, such as artistic, activist, experiential, tacit, and practical. However, the conference participants contested the separation between these spheres through their work: by an artist (Vegan Flava) inviting everyone to contemplate the graffiti of a dying bee whose species was unsuccessfully transferred by scientists across the Baltic Sea; by a feminist researcher and curator of contemporary art (Caroline Elgh) singing her presentation to an amazed audience; by another artist (Pavel Otdelnov) presenting a film based on comprehensive research into the “adventures” of garbage using tracking devices and geographic information systems with elements of investigative journalism and political activism. These intersections show that the different approaches do not exclude but rather complement each other: participatory action research is inspired by activism, artistic expression by ethnography and activism by artistic performance. Scholarly, artistic, and activist approaches are all needed to enrich our environmental knowledge.

The conference experience allowed us to identify two leverage points which might potentially allow for a meaningful engagement between academia, art, and activism. First, a sensitivity needs to be fostered for the power hierarchies between the fields, including the structure of funding which promotes the “invited spaces” where better positioned actors (usually academia) pull in “the rest of society” (such as artists) to collaborate on “academic” terms. Although it is very hard to work against such structures, there needs to be a commitment for that on behalf of the academic actors, such as seeking funding which promotes deep collaborative work. Second, it is about finding a mutually inclusive way of communicating to various publics. Again, from the academic perspective, it is all too easy to “hijack” the artists’ contributions into academic texts written in a language which might be alienating for the artists themselves. Here academia can learn from artists who very effectively carry out their own research or include scientific perspectives into their work in ways which deeply engage diverse audiences. Collaborations between artists and activists, or the combination of art and activism in one’s work, can also be a source of learning for researchers.

The conference’s center of attraction was the desire to share the multiple ways in

which we work with and against the different forms of power, both enabling and constricting, which shape our environments. The participants employ different kinds of knowing: seeing, monitoring, calculating, listening, painting, filming from above, feeling their way through to the experiences of what it is to exist and act in constantly changing environments, constantly defying our attempts to know them.

THERE WAS A UNITED sense of urgency resulting from the realization that as we are trying to get to know our environments, so we are changing and shaping them as much as they are shaping us. To see the diversity of the presented work and to try and find ways to work together and to make a collective sense of it all was both deeply challenging and satisfying. As organizers, we hope it was as rich in learning for the participants as it was for us. 

Hugo Faber

PhD-candidate in Political Science,
The Baltic and East European Graduate
School (BEEGS), Södertörn University

Florence Fröhlig

PhD and Director of Studies, The Baltic
and East European Graduate School
(BEEGS), Södertörn University

Viviane Griesinger

PhD-candidate
in Environmental Studies, The Baltic
and East European Graduate School
(BEEGS), Södertörn University

Tatiana Sokolova

PhD-candidate
in Environmental Studies, The Baltic
and East European Graduate School
(BEEGS), Södertörn University

Ksenia Zakharova

PhD-candidate in Environmental Studies,
The Baltic and East European Graduate
School (BEEGS), Södertörn University

Baltic Worlds' Special Section: Nationhood, gender, and classical music education

THE MEANINGS OF CLASSICAL MUSIC AND MUSIC EDUCATION IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION AND CENTRAL EUROPE

Baltic Worlds will publish a special section on classical music and music education in the Baltic Sea region and Central Europe in 2023/2024, guest edited by Associate Professor Ann Werner (Södertörn University and Uppsala University).

In the Baltic Sea region and central part of Europe classical music, and classical music education has been strongly connected to nationhood, and to (masculinized) genius cultures. Even today classical music students learn to uphold and subvert these traditions as part of their education. Classical music is an artform highly valued and historically associated with nation and empire. Still, the specific meanings of classical music and music education in the region are rarely studied. In this section we invite researchers not only from Central Europe and Baltic Sea Region but also from wider region, to publish research focusing on classical music and music education, culture's role in post-empire Europe, nation and/or gender.

Within this framework we suggest some themes (and authors are welcome to address additional themes):

- Values distributed and negotiated through higher music education in classical music.
- Equality and equity in (post-empire) European higher music education.
- Gender and nation in selecting classical music repertoire for higher music education.
- The histories and traditions of classical music education in the region.
- The cultural importance of different classical music education traditions.

TIMETABLE:

- Submit your 200 words abstract to ann.werner@sh.se by February 28, 2023.
- Acceptance letters will be sent before the end of March.
- Full article is due on June 1, 2023.
- Reviews expected in October.
- Issue is planned to be published in December 2023/January 2024.



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Baltic Worlds' statement of purpose

BALTIC WORLDS is a scholarly journal published by the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies at Södertörn University, since 2008. It publishes articles in social sciences and humanities as well as environmental studies, practicing a double-blind peer-review process, by at least

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.

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Zane Šime



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Tatiana Sokolova



PhD-candidate in Environmental Studies, The Baltic and East European Graduate School (BEEGS), Södertörn University.

Karin Winroth



Associate Professor in Business Studies at the School of Social Studies, Södertörn University.

Ksenia Zakharova



PhD-candidate in Environmental Studies, The Baltic and East European Graduate School (BEEGS), Södertörn University.

Konstantin Zarubin



An author living in Sweden and writing in Russian.



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In response to Russia's war in Ukraine, its initiators, a collective of academics and activists from leading European institutions, are also engaged in supporting scholars, students, and cultural workers at risk with a mentoring network. The goal of the UNE Association is to unite and empower students and staff from across Europe, with special attention to those parts of the continent affected by Russia's war in Ukraine and areas where intellectual freedom is at risk.

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The UNE team:

**Jan Claas Behrends, Alexander Etkind,
Dina Gusejnova, Mykola Makhortykh,
Andrea Pető, Philipp Christoph Schmädeke,
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reference

- 1 See UNE's website <https://neweurope.university>



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