

# European and Eurasian Undergraduate Research Symposium 2023



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# SECTION 1

## Hard Power | Soft Power



## **“Russia-Syria ‘Special’ Relations: Modern-day Realpolitik”**

*Chirag Bansal, Science Po (France) George Washington University*

### **Introduction**

As a year of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, security analysts and international relations scholars across the world are relying on their knowledge of Russia’s experience in Syria. From warfare tactics to weapons technology, the Russian intervention in Syria is of relevance to get a true picture of Russian strategy on the battlefield. Since the beginning of Putin’s leaderships of Russia — the ties between Moscow and Damascus have been concerning for the West. These concerns were materialized when Russia intervened to support Assad in the civil war in 2015. Has a relationship stemmed from geo-political necessity become a strategic alliance? Or is it just two megalomaniac leaders engaging in 21st century Realpolitik?

### **Historical Context**

Russian relations with Syria can be traced back to the times of the Soviet Union. From recognizing Syria as a country in 1944 before its effective independence from the French rule in 1946 to fostering a partnership with Hafiz Al-Assad in 1970s, the Soviet Union had a historically shaky yet consistent relation with Syria. Russian-Syrian relations can be seen as a legacy of the Cold War, as Moscow first supported Syria after the 1956 Suez Crisis. As Syria signed a major economic agreement with Moscow in September 1957, the UK Foreign office responded, “Syria can now be regarded as a Soviet satellite”. Turkey, as a NATO member, sent troops to the Syrian border, which prompted a warning from the Kremlin that it would take “all necessary measures” if Syria came under attack. Consequently, leading the United States to briefly put its nuclear forces on alert.<sup>1</sup> In the following years, Syria briefly got into a union with Nasser’s Egypt, a major Russian ally in the Middle East, forming the United Arab Republic. At the end of this union in 1963, Syria came under the rule of a Baathist-Nasserite junta. Thereafter, the Ba’ath party firstly disposed its Nasserite allies, and later its founding leadership, creating a leftist party dominated by the Alawite sect a small Shia-linked minority from western Syria.<sup>2</sup> From then on, Russia-Syria cooperation expanded very quickly— more military support arrived, accompanied by economists for national planning, and engineers for infrastructural development. This “romanticized” Soviet view of the new Syrian regime relied on the hope that its strong but disorganized anti-colonial leftism would evolve into proper Marxism-Leninism.<sup>3</sup>

As Aaron Lund explains, the 1967 Six Day war with Israel was an important event in the history of USSR-Syria relations. After having triggered the war, the Syrian regime failed to match its fiery rhetoric on the battlefield. Resultantly, the Soviet Union had to step in to shield its Arab allies — it drew the “red line”, warning Israel against continuing towards Damascus and Cairo, but strategic territory such as Golan Heights, the Sinai Peninsula, and Gaza were already lost. For damage control, the Soviet Union reacted by cutting ties with Israel and delivering

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<sup>1</sup> Alexey Vasiliev, *Russia’s Middle East Policy: From Lenin to Putin*, Routledge, 2018, pp. 46–47; Rathmell 2013, pp. 141–142.

<sup>2</sup> Lund, Aaron, ‘From Cold War to Civil War: 75 Years of Russian-Syrian Relations’, *The Swedish Institute of International Affairs*, 2019, Pg 5-6

<sup>3</sup> Alexey Vasiliev, *Russia’s Middle East Policy: From Lenin to Putin*, Routledge, 2018, pp. 46–47; Rathmell 2013, pg 62

greater amounts of arms to its Arab allies. Reciprocally, Syria cut its ties with the United States.<sup>4</sup> However, Syria did not become a true client state of the Soviet Union until 1971. Nuritdin Mukhitdinov, the Soviet ambassador to Damascus from 1968 to 1977 said, “It’s true that Syria accepts from the Soviet Union aid, loans, student exchange, military programs— when you think of it, it accepts everything from us”, and paused before adding, “except advice.”<sup>5</sup> Although communists were allowed a seat in the cabinet as independent candidates, the Syrian Communist Party remained illegal. In 1970, Syria’s then defense minister Hafez Al-Assad took over the Ba’ath party and the country, eliminating the leftist elements of the Ba’ath regime. Presenting himself as a realist (in international relations), he advocated for the need of stronger Syrian ties with the West. On the other hand, he fostered a close relationship with USSR – one of cooperation, and not of interference – strictly based on national interest and stripped of all ideological content.<sup>6</sup> This narrative of a relationship of ‘only cooperation’ can be understood as a precursor for the present-day Russia-Syria relations. One of the most controversial events with respect to the USSR-Syria relations was the Syrian occupation of Lebanon. In 1976, Syria launched an offensive in Lebanon against the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which was backed by the USSR. A few years later, the two countries hit a rough patch as the Kremlin froze Syria’s supply of weapons and Assad suspended Soviet access to Syrian ports.<sup>7</sup> However as the interests of the two roughly realigned in 1980s, Assad made Syria’s pro-soviet orientation official by signing a ‘Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation’ in October 1980.<sup>8</sup> The ever-changing balance of power in the Middle East made regional players align with major powers of the Cold War. Unfortunately, the collapse of the Soviet Union brought dire consequences for Syria.

The loss of Soviet economic aid prompted Assad to set Syria on its neoliberal trajectory. But Assad’s envisioned future of the country did not translate into reality. At the same time, eager to secure a spot for itself in the post-Cold War world order, it became essential for Russia to seek regional allies. This importance to have strategic and economic partners like Syria has been further amplified due to the various conflict such as the present one between Russia and Ukraine. This paper will discuss the Syria-Russia relations, with an aim to understand the motivation behind the same. It will also be discussed how the same has evolved in the present times, in comparison to the Cold-war era, further trying to understand if the ties between the two countries can be attributed to the status of special relations. For this purpose, the dimension of strategic cooperation between the two will be shed light upon, first. Afterwards, the economic and trade partnership between the two countries will be analyzed as one of the fundamental aspects of their alliance.

## **A ‘Transactional’ Strategic Alliance**

In the post-Soviet times, it has been imperative for Russia to maintain the old and foster new strategic alliances. In the case of the Middle East, Syria is the only major ally that Russia has been able to retain. Similarly, the strategic partnership between the two has always been advantageous for Syria. Increasingly so with the unfolding of the Syrian Civil war since 2011.

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<sup>4</sup> Lund, Aaron, ‘From Cold War to Civil War: 75 Years of Russian-Syrian Relations’ , The Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2019, Pg 6-7

<sup>5</sup> As related by former US Ambassador to Syria Richard Murphy, speaking at “The New Narrative: Who Authors the Future?”, Beirut Institute Summit 2018, [youtu.be/zixOd\\_J1QmY](https://youtu.be/zixOd_J1QmY), at 15.00.

<sup>6</sup> Seale, Patrick, *The Struggle for Syria*, Oxford University Press, 1965, pp. 147–148.

<sup>7</sup> Seale, Patrick, *Asad of Syria : The struggle for the Middle East*, pp. 287, 311

<sup>8</sup> Lund, Aaron, ‘From Cold War to Civil War: 75 Years of Russian-Syrian Relations’ , The Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2019, Pg 9-10



Not only has Russia shielded the Assad regime from international action, but since 2015 has also directly intervened in the conflict.

Syria has been a subject to US sanction since 1979, when the United States designated Syria a “state sponsor of terrorism.” Unsurprisingly, it was only a year later that Syria and Russia signed the ‘Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.’ American sanctions on Syria, although limited in the beginning, only increased as years passed. Prior to 2004, these sanctions largely restricted assistance from the United States to Syria or were targeted to Syrian officials and government entities involved in specific activities. With the passing of the 2003 Syria Accountability Act, George W. Bush issued the Executive Order (E.O.) 13338, which restricted the export of American goods to Syria (except food and medicine), banned Syrian air carriers from United States airspace, and broadened the pre-existing targeted sanctions against Syrian officials and government entities.<sup>9</sup> Resultantly, Assad regime found itself quite isolated from the West. To sustain itself in a region stained by cold-war era rivalries and power blocs, Syria had continued to seek support from Russia. As Syria slid into a civil war in 2011, the sanctions increased, further isolating the Assad regime. The European Union also introduced sanctions on the Syrian government— banning imports and exports from/to Syria, putting an arms embargo, and also putting financial and investment restrictions in place.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the United States expanded its earlier sanctions— leading to a reduction in bilateral U.S.-Syria trade, which exceeded \$900 million in 2010, to under \$60 million per year from 2012.<sup>11</sup> Finally, in 2019 the Caesar Act was passed in the US, which authorized the executive branch to impose sanctions on third-parties (individuals, companies, and entities) that engage in specific types of business with Syria, the Syrian government, and individually sanctioned persons and companies in Syria.<sup>12</sup> Russia has always stepped up to help its middle eastern ally. With 10,000 Syrian officers already having received training at both Soviet and Russian military academies. Western experts also estimate that up to 2,000 Russian military advisors, under the command of Lieutenant General Vassily Jakushev, are currently serving in the Syrian military. Russian officers also hold teaching positions at Syria's military officer training academy.<sup>13</sup> Adding on, Syria heavily relies on Russian weapons technology for strategic purposes. In 2006, it received the vehicle mount variant of Russian Kolomna KBM Strelets multiple launch units which can be used GM 39 Igla surface-to-air missile (SAM) system.<sup>14</sup> Within two years, Syria upgraded its air defense capabilities with the new BUK-2M Ural medium-range missiles. Other air-defense capabilities were also ameliorated, procured in entirety from Russia.<sup>15</sup> As Andrej Kreutz argues, even though Russia has provided sophisticated weapons, it has also been careful to not upset the balance of power in the regions<sup>16</sup> — denying sale of advanced aircrafts like MiG-29 Fulcrum and MiG-31s,

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.state.gov/syria-sanctions/>

<sup>10</sup> ‘U.S. and European Sanctions on Syria’, Carter Centre (2020, September), Pg 12, Retrieved May 14, 2022, from [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict\\_resolution/syria-conflict/us-and-european-sanctions-on-syria-091620.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict/us-and-european-sanctions-on-syria-091620.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, Pg 7-8

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, Pg 10

<sup>13</sup> Klusmann U, ‘An old base (friendship), gets a facelift’, Der Spiegel, June 2006, Retrieved from: <https://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/russia-and-syria-an-old-base-friendship-gets-a-facelift-a-422911.html>

<sup>14</sup> ‘Syria receives first Strelets SAM’, Jane’s Defence Weekly, August 2006

<sup>15</sup> ‘Annual Defense Report: The Middle East and Africa’, Jane’s Defence Weekly, December 2009

<sup>16</sup> Kreutz, Andrej, ‘Syria: Russia's Best Asset in the Middle East’, Russie.Nei.Visions, no. 55, Institut français des relations internationales (IFRI), November 2010, [ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/kreutzengrussiasyria\\_nov2010.pdf](http://ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/kreutzengrussiasyria_nov2010.pdf), Pg. 19-20

citing “political sensitivities.”<sup>17</sup> The relationship between the two countries is no more an unconditional one, with Russia accounting for international and Israeli pressures when dealing with Syria. Moreover, unlike the Soviet Union, this time Russia has no freebies for Syria and all weapons must be paid for.

On the other hand, Russia has also gained major strategic assets out of this partnership. This transactional nature of the relationship was also visible during the Soviet period when USSR was granted access to Tartous Port in 1971, as it received weapons. Contrary to the past, the present Russia-Syria relations are transactional to the last cent. As Russia undertook a project for the modernization and expansion of its blue water navy, the Tartous port became a focus point. By 2010, engineers were already rebuilding the depot to cope with more traffic and larger ships. Russia’s then Navy chief, Admiral Vladimir Vysotsky, told the media, “Russia’s presence in Tartous would be developed into a naval base capable of handling aircraft carriers.”<sup>18</sup> Moscow’s weapons delivery to Syria were also carried out by the Tartous Port, making it a convenient avenue for trade to-and-from Syria and the Middle East. But more importantly, the port offers Russia a strategic base for its navy, which can now effectively “create a military threat from the Tartus facility to NATO’s southern flank in the Mediterranean,” as explained by Anton Mardasov in Al-Monitor.<sup>19</sup> This has become of even greater importance with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. When Russia intervened in the civil war in 2015, it also established a presence on the Khmeimim Air Base. Over the course of the war, the base has served as the center of all Russian operation. In 2017, in exchange of its support for the Assad regime in the Syrian Civil war, Russia has sealed the deal for 49 years of sovereign jurisdiction of the Tartus naval facility and the Khmeimim Air Base.<sup>20</sup> It has also extracted a variety of other benefits, in exchange of its support for the Assad regime. The war has been a testing ground for the Russian weapons technology and war tactics. Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu said in an interview in 2021, “All of the Russian latest weapon systems have been tested in the counter-terror operation in Syria.” He further claimed that around 320 types of weapons were tested in the country during the Russian intervention.<sup>21</sup> Sadly, these testing often costed many innocent civilian lives, for understanding the real time damage caused by the weapons— only the Syrian war zone could have been used as such an environment for testing.<sup>22</sup> The conflict in Ukraine shows striking similarities in war tactics employed by the Russian forces in Syria. Indiscriminate aerial bombings targeting civilian facilities and more specifically ‘besiegement’ tactics in Ukraine, are similar to the besiegement of Aleppo and the Damascus suburbs in Syria.<sup>23</sup> In addition, Syria could take the role of supplying soldiers for the Russian war in Ukraine. Kremlin officials have claimed to receive more than 16,000 applications from the Middle East. This includes hundreds of Russian-trained Syrian fighters who have reportedly signed up to fight

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUKLK17338220090520>

<sup>18</sup> ‘Russian Navy to base warships at Syrian port after 2012’, RIA Novosty, 2010, [sputniknews.com/russia/20100802160041427](https://sputniknews.com/russia/20100802160041427)

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/12/kremlin-hopes-syria-can-be-future-thorn-natos-southern-flank>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-bases/russia-establishing-permanent-presence-at-its-syria-bases-ria-cites-minister-idUSKBN1EK0HD>

<sup>21</sup> Russian News Agency, 2021, <https://tass.com/defense/1331715>

<sup>22</sup> Al-Mashareq, 2022, [https://almashareq.com/en\\_GB/articles/cnmi\\_am/features/2022/02/28/feature-01](https://almashareq.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_am/features/2022/02/28/feature-01)

<sup>23</sup> NPRs Interview with Mona Yacoubian, Can be accessed at: <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/20/1087783750/lessons-from-russias-role-in-syria-war>



alongside Russian troops in Ukraine, including Syrian soldiers, former rebels and experienced fighters who fought for years in Syria's desert.<sup>24</sup>

The strategic cooperation between Russia and Syria is indeed a mutually beneficial one. The very transactional nature of their alliance can be characterized as the biggest evolution in terms of the relationship between the two in the post-Soviet times. Weapons delivery is neither free, nor inconsiderate of the regional balance of power. However, within these broad constraints, the level of cooperation is probably at its highest. The abandonment of Syria by the West, and the lack of allies in the region—prompted the two to foster a partnership. In this post-Soviet phase, it has been a relationship stemming from needs and strong Realpolitik considerations. Every gesture of cooperation is compensated with similar gestures ranging from strategic deals assuring access to naval and air bases to lucrative economic opportunities.

### **A 'Lucrative' Economic Opportunity**

The discussed strategic cooperation between Russia and Syria, mostly manifests itself in economic terms. The economic ties between Russia and Syria, if not the most, are an important aspect of the relationship between the two. Syria's international isolation coupled with Russia's proactive foreign policy, as a defensive response to the United States' 2003 Iraq war and the enlargement of NATO, was conducive for a new Moscow-Damascus relationship.<sup>25</sup> The same was reflected by Russia writing off 73% of Syrian debt, during Assad's 2005 visit to the country.<sup>26</sup> This opened the way for Syrian leadership to purchase defense systems worth billion in an effort to increase their deterrence capabilities against Israel. For Russia, this was a lucrative trade opportunity. On one hand, Syria found a strategic partner in its period of isolation, on the other, Russia found a commercial partner in the region. Russian firms played a central role in stimulating the Syrian economy, with Moscow Times estimating Russian investments in the country to be around \$19.4 billion in 2009, covering infrastructure, energy and tourism.<sup>27</sup>

These economic relations have been quite diverse, but the most significant sectors of trade and cooperation have been weapons and energy. Russia's major oil and construction firm Stroytransgaz began operations in Syria in 2009, as it commissioned its first gas processing plant in Homs.<sup>28</sup> Over the years it has been engaged in various projects. Most recently, it has been awarded a 50-year concession to extract phosphate in the central region of Palmyr.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Russian energy company SoyuzNefteGaz signed a 25-year deal for joint offshore exploration in Syrian territorial waters in 2013. Syrian Oil Minister Suleiman Abbas had hailed this agreement as "a continuation of the fruitful cooperation" between the two countries.<sup>30</sup> However, the same

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<sup>24</sup> Mroue, Bassem, Associated Press, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-islamic-state-group-syria-europe-4ede428219450a58b0439912bc43cc15>

<sup>25</sup> Kreutz, Andrej, "Syria: Russia's Best Asset in the Middle East", *Russie.Nei.Visions*, no. 55, Institut français des relations internationales (IFRI), November 2010, [ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/kreutzengrussiasyria\\_nov2010.pdf](http://ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/kreutzengrussiasyria_nov2010.pdf), pg. 14-16

<sup>26</sup> Review, G. T. (2005, February 7). *Syrian debt write-off by Russia*. Global Trade Review (GTR). Retrieved May 11, 2022, from <https://www.gtreview.com/news/europe/syrian-debt-write-off-by-russia/>

<sup>27</sup> Amos, Howard. "Billions of Dollars of Russian Business Suffers along with Syria." *The Moscow Times*, 2011. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/09/01/billions-of-dollars-of-russian-business-suffers-along-with-syria-a9298>

<sup>28</sup> Energy Intelligence, 2012, <https://www.energyintel.com/0000017b-a7c1-de4c-a17b-e7c340a60000>

<sup>29</sup> 'Russia's growing ties to Syria amid military backing', *France24*, 2022, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220228-russia-s-growing-ties-to-syria-amid-military-backing>

<sup>30</sup> 'Russian Firm Signs 25-Year Energy Deal with Syria.' *Los Angeles Times*, December 26, 2013. <https://www.latimes.com/world/la-xpm-2013-dec-26-la-fg-wn-russia-energy-oil-gas-syria-20131226-story.html>

and the two onshore projects in block 12 and block 26, near Syria's borders with Turkey and Iraq were put to an end in 2015 due to security concerns caused by the civil war.<sup>31</sup> As the civil war has progressed, leading to a loss in infrastructure and need for more resources, Syria has increasingly relied on Russian support. In 2019, the Syrian parliament approved contracts for oil exploration with two other Russian companies — identified as Mercury LLC and Velada LLC.<sup>32</sup> According to state news agency SANA, “the deals cover exploration and production in three blocs, including an oilfield in northeast Syria and a gas field north of the capital Damascus.” In the same year various other projects were also undertaken. Russia restored the only chemical fertilizers plant in Syria, in order to restart industry and create employment in the war-torn country. According to Russian Prime Minister Borisov, “Under a 40-year investment contract around \$200 million will be invested to restore and modernize the chemical plant in Homs.”<sup>33</sup> Moreover, in a meeting with Assad it was discussed that Russia will spend \$500 million to upgrade Syria's commercial port of Tartus — the four-year modernization program aimed to construct a brand-new port. Borisov also mentioned the plans to build railways across Syria and Iraq connecting the Mediterranean coast with the Persian Gulf.<sup>34</sup> It should be noted that three years have passed since, and any real progress is yet to be seen, although factors such as the COVID pandemic and now the Russia-Ukraine war can also be held accountable for this reality.

As for weapons, Russia accounted for 78 percent of Syria's total weapons purchases between 2007 and 2012. And from 2007 to 2010, Russian arms sales to Syria reached \$4.7 billion, more than twice the figure for the previous four years, according to the Congressional Research Service.<sup>35</sup> These imports are of much significance to the Russian weapons industry. Moreover, as Russia competes with other established weapons exporters such as France and the United States of America — MENA region has been an important market. Russian weapons exports to the MENA region increased by 125% between 1999-2008 and 2009-2018. In the past 10 years (2009-2018) Russia exported arms to 14 countries in the region, accounting for 26% of the total volume of its arms exports, while in 1999-2008 it was 14%. Russia's involvement in the Syrian Civil war has also helped reaffirm itself as an important player in the region. Foremost, it has provided Russia with an opportunity to test its weapon systems in real time conflict scenarios— these real time demonstrations might have helped Russia attract new customers for its weapons systems and technology. Overall, arms trade to Syria and the region are of great economic interest to Russia. Therefore, it has actively tried to promote its weapons and cater to the specific needs of its clientele. It can be understood that a big motivating factor for Russia's role in safeguarding the Assad regime stems from the same. When the Libyan regime fell, Kremlin lost about \$4 billion worth of weapons contracts, in fact Mikhail Dmitriyev, the head of Russia's Federal Service on Military and Technical Cooperation had stated, “The figure of \$4 billion is only nominal, the real lost revenue could top tens of billions of dollars.”<sup>36</sup> Russia did

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<sup>31</sup> Butter, David. “Russia's Syria Intervention Is Not All about Gas.” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Accessed May 15, 2022. <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/62036>

<sup>32</sup> ‘Syria Hands Oil Exploration Contracts to Two Russian Firms’, Reuters, December 17, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/syria-oil-russia-idINL8N28R1O0>

<sup>33</sup> Russian News Agency, 2019, <https://tass.com/economy/1100101>

<sup>34</sup> Associated Press, 2019, <https://apnews.com/article/d7fe2c22bfd57007261aff8ad4f08889>

<sup>35</sup> ‘Russia's Many Interests in Syria.’ The Washington Institute. Accessed May 15, 2022. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/russias-many-interests-syria>

<sup>36</sup> Anishchuk, Alexei. “Gaddafi Fall Cost Russia Tens of BLNS in Arms Deals.” Reuters. Thomson Reuters, November 2, 2011. <https://www.reuters.com/article/russia-libya-arms-idUSL5E7M221H20111102>

not and does not want the same in Syria, and therefore is motivated to not only foster ties with the country, but also protect the regime.

On a different note, earlier, Russia had also shown intentions to provide humanitarian assistance to Syria, assuring a delivery of 100,000 metric tons of grain as part of humanitarian assistance to Syria. According to Associated Press, a 2019 Russian Cabinet document also stated that the Russian government had earmarked nearly \$17 million in assistance to Syria.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, Russia only views humanitarian aid as a tool for soft power and is more likely to invest in areas which either add to the country's global image or brings long term economic gains from those investments. Even the current aid provided is both insufficient and irregular — declining each year, in 2020, Russia just provided \$23.3 million into UN-coordinated aid compared to the \$3 billion by western allies.<sup>38</sup> Even during the pandemic, Russia could not step up to fill the gap in healthcare services and humanitarian aid in Syria. The sent aid included 250,000 doses of Sputnik Lite and medical supplies regarding COVID-19 detection kits - enough for only a million people, out of a total population of around 17 million.<sup>39</sup>

It is worth noting that the war has changed the realities of Russia-Syria economic cooperation. Syria was extremely dependent on economic and humanitarian support from Russia. Since the start of the conflict in Ukraine, Syria has been particularly exposed to the war's fallout, both because of its ongoing humanitarian crisis and because of Russia's pivotal role in Syria. Syrians are likely to suffer even worse privation, as rising food prices further outstrip impoverished Syrians' limited means. The international diplomatic focus on a zero-sum war in Ukraine threatens the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Syria—compromises that have depended on a U.S.-Russian dialogue that now seems impossible as the Ukraine conflict rages.

Looking at the overall economic cooperation between the two countries, it can be argued that Syrian partnership with Russia is only limited to sectors where it has vested interests, such as energy, arms trade, and the modernization of strategic infrastructure. Russian contributions in other sectors, such as that of humanitarian aid or construction of civilian infrastructure has been very little. This is telling of Russia's ties with Syria can be reduced to merely a lucrative economic opportunity.

## Conclusion

Kremlin today benefits from its significant role in the Syrian economy due to its political and military ties with the Assad regime. Although, the alliance between the two countries can be seen as a legacy of the Cold War period, the increasingly transactional nature of their relations is the most striking discontinuity from the Syrian relations with the Soviet Union. The relations with USSR, comprised reasonable unconditional aid and support, which is both missing in the present-day Syria-Russia relations. Although cooperation between the two is at an all-time high, each state only prioritizes its immediate and long-term strategic interests. A true Realpolitik based relationship; it does not necessarily have any aspects of a special one. Most commonly, these strategic interests are manifested in the economic cooperation between the two countries. Partnership is limited to sectors of mutual economic gains like oil and gas exploration and arms trade. These deep but limited economic ties, and the transactional strategic cooperation—work

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<sup>37</sup> Associated Press, 2019, <https://apnews.com/article/d7fe2c22bfd57007261aff8ad4f08889>

<sup>38</sup> Robinson, Jonathan, 'Five years of Russian aid in Syria proves Moscow is an unreliable partner', Atlantic Council, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/five-years-of-russian-aid-in-syria-proves-moscow-is-an-unreliable-partner/>

<sup>39</sup> 'Russia Sends 160 Tonnes of Humanitarian Aid to Syria', Al Mayadeen, 2021, <https://english.almayadeen.net/news/miscellaneous/1496438/russia-sends-tonnes-of-humanitarian-aid-to-syria>

together in a reinforcing cycle. This cycle can be concluded to have significantly strengthened Russia-Syria ties but does not translate to an equal alliance of respect. At present, Syria works around Russian interest, more than Russia around Syrian ones, due to the precarious situation brought upon the country by the Assad regime. In a true sense, it can be minimized to a relationship between Assad and Russia, instead of one between Syria and Russia. In the long run, this also makes it a fundamentally weak alliance— for instance, Russian setbacks in Ukraine can result in reduced Russian ability to support the Assad regime, in an extreme scenario this can lead Syria to fall back into the hands of the rebel which will further fracture the country. All in all, Russia-Syria relationship, although strong, is limited and lacks unconditional support in essential spheres.

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# **“Thieves and Law: How Russian Organized Criminal Networks Took Over the International Underground”**

*Jack Gallick, University of Pittsburgh*

## **Introduction**

Russian organized crime has captured the imagination of many, particularly in the entertainment industry. From *The Sopranos* to *The Dark Knight* to *GoldenEye*, the likeness of the “Russian Mafia” is everywhere. Occasionally, high-profile criminal busts bring Russian organized crime into the news, particularly in areas with high concentrations of Russian immigrants such as Brighton Beach, New York (U.S. Department of Justice). However, Russian organized crime is not just a Russo-American phenomenon. It is a global phenomenon with global geopolitical consequences.

Russian organized crime itself remains an abstract object of analysis in literature. Russian organized crime acts as a type of secret society, so researchers struggle to obtain information to fully understand its structure. Therefore, it is useful to identify the operations of Russian organized criminal networks (ROCns) to gain insight into their structure. Scholars identify drug trafficking, human trafficking, illegal arms trafficking, contraband, illegal duplication, and financial fraud as the primary “industries” for Russian organized crime (Levitsky). Attempts to track the flow of these resources indicate that industries like drug trafficking and human trafficking flow from poorer to richer countries (Levitsky 233). This international operation links states in all continents, with the most references pointing to Latin America and the Caribbean, the countries of the former Soviet Union, the United States, and Western Europe. This paper explores the question: What drove Russian organized crime to globalize beyond the state borders of the Russian Federation, while other networks remain national or regional?

I begin this study with a discussion of the literature on Russian organized crime and how this paper fits into various debates and discussions in organized crime and international relations research. Then, I explain my methodological approach to the study of Russian organized crime networks. I choose to use a critical realist methodology, as outlined in Patrick Jackson’s *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations*.

The main portion of the study will look at the deep historical processes that shaped the evolution of Russian organized crime. First, I discuss the development of organized crime in the Soviet Union by unpacking the phrase “Russian organized criminal networks.” After this, I discuss the role of globalization as a historical phenomenon that established connections to potential international criminal markets. After examining globalization and its transformative powers, I turn to neoliberalism, an ideological movement with strong consequences on the global environment in which Russian organized crime operates. Within both discussions, I examine the role of national discourses in shaping organized criminal growth. I close my study with a discussion of the stakes of this subject, as well as a discussion of generalizability and its relationship to my research methodology.

## **Literature Review**

The literature on Russian organized crime exemplifies the issues of handling secret societies as subjects in international relations research. Traditionally, local and federal law enforcement dominated research on the topic because of their deeper stake in the issue. Their so-called “orthodox” interpretations of organized crime tend to portray Russian organized crime as a “mafia” (Rawlinson 347), which presumes that Russian organized crime follows a centralized,



hierarchical structure. Other scholars have challenged this interpretation. Peter Vassalo's work on the Russian transnational sex trade features a revision of the orthodox mafia reading. Vassalo argues that the "Russian mafia" is not a single group, but instead describes 6,000 individual groups, centered around ethnicity, region, and trade (173). Although critical of the orthodox approach, this work retains its assumption that Russian organized crime is organized vertically.

Other scholars have also challenged the mafia model further. Martin Bouchard advances the idea that a network approach better explains the complexity and fluidity of organized criminal interactions. Bouchard also rejects Vassalo's claim that organized crime is organized around ethnicity, deeming ethnic classifications as "counterproductive" because they distract from other, more important, organizing factors (448). This is crucial given the international and multiethnic nature of contemporary organized crime.

In each of these cases, scholars attempt to construct a broad concept of "organized criminal structure," which fails to account for the diversity of contexts in which organized crime develops. Filippo De Danieli rejects this search for universal models while using the decentralized network approach to evaluate drug trafficking in Central Asia. When studying ROCNs specifically, some scholars make use of the network structure (Lonsky; Varese, Lonsky, and Podvysotskiy). However, these studies tend to avoid a deeper analysis of how these networks were shaped by interacting social structures.

This leads to the challenge in international relations research of how to conceptualize transnational actors in the modern interstate system. After the end of the Cold War, scholars began discussing the changing "character" (Falk 312) of the world order in the context of integration between Soviet and U.S.-aligned states. More classical assessments, like that proposed by Richard Falk, describe such a world order as "Neo-Westphalian," arguing that the current system constitutes a return to the anarchic and realist order established by the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Alternatively, scholars like Jan Zielonka have revised this concept with a medievalist assessment. This model emphasizes the "polycentric system of authority and multiple loyalties" (Zielonka 5) in contemporary Europe, creating a compelling case against the dominance of neo-Westphalian approaches. While Zielonka's revision of the neo-Westphalian model features plenty of examples of state actions in the international system, the role of organized crime has yet to be explored in this context.

Another challenge within the literature on organized crime is the reliability of knowledge production. Some scholars argue that law enforcement consciously safeguards information from becoming public to prevent organized crime from exploiting it (Naim 109), which inherently distorts information traditionally held as "empirical." Other research emphasizes the issue of assuming phone conversations serve as reliable proxies for criminal behavior (Campana and Varese), or that research itself can be neutral when dealing with a subject like organized crime (Edwards and Gill). In the discipline, scholars have yet to explore how the debate over reliability itself contributes to the growth of organized crime. At the same time, rejecting the production of knowledge based on strict empirical criteria is not only intellectually limited but comes with real-world costs.

## **Methodology**

Like most topics in international relations in general, the methodology of neopositivism continues to dominate research on organized crime (Jackson 58). Neopositivism combines the assumption that the object of research exists in a world separate from the researcher with the

notion that the production of knowledge must be limited to observable phenomena. This presents specific challenges to studying organized crime, because observable information can be varied, contested, missing, or distorted by organized crime and law enforcement. This situation, in turn, complicates the ability to construct law-like statements about organized crime behavior.

For this reason, I draw upon the alternative methodological approach of critical realism as the basis of this study. Like neopositivism, critical realism retains the assumption of a mind-independent world in which the researcher operates separately from the object of research. Unlike neopositivism, this framework includes the analysis of “causal complexes,” drawn from unobservable phenomena. Critical realists do this by employing the methods of abductive and transcendental reasoning (Jackson 94). The main tradeoff of this methodology is its lack of generalizability (Jackson 115). This means that this research will not put forth a hypothesis about how *all* organized crime globalizes. Rather, the conclusions drawn from this research speak to the Russian case alone. This means that researchers must grant the same level of attention to other cases arising from other political and social contexts. In the final section of this paper, I explain the stakes of trying to generate generalizable knowledge on organized crime using a neopositivist framework for its effect on policy and law enforcement capabilities.

### **Why “Russian Organized Criminal Networks?”**

Before Russian organized crime started expanding in the 1990s, it had to develop internally. This leads to a few questions: Why did it begin in Russia? What makes it “organized?” What makes it “criminal?” Why are these entities organized as networks? By unpacking each of these questions, we can gain some insight into what Russian organized crime is, and what conditions fostered its growth within Russia and beyond.

#### *Russian*

The first of these terms, *Russian*, does not serve as an ethnic qualifier for membership in these entities. Instead, this describes the lineage of these global networks to the more locally organized criminal operations in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). Scholars like Jakub Lonsky have taken to the task of tracing modern Russian organized criminal networks to these historic criminal syndicates<sup>40</sup> that formed primarily during the expansion of the gulag system during the rule of Joseph Stalin. Although gulags, or forced labor camps, existed throughout the Soviet Union, the RSFSR contained the highest concentration (Lonsky 11). Data suggests that formal Russian organized crime originated in Moscow around the 1910s with a group that served as the foundation for the *vory-v-zakone*, or “thieves-in-law” (Varese, Lonsky, and Podvysotskiy 150).

#### *Organized*

This prison setting played a role in cultivating an environment of collaboration between perpetrators of petty and professional crimes, who then conspired, created common monetary funds, and established a criminal code of conduct (Lonsky 4). This process allowed these individuals to establish a system that was, indeed, “organized,” as opposed to more spontaneous criminal associations like riots. Russian criminal syndicates of the Soviet era certainly did not develop or act spontaneously. Rather, these early criminal syndicates managed to draw from the pre-existing social networks provided by the gulag system and local networks outside them. With

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<sup>40</sup> Here, I use the term “syndicate” as a concept to distinguish it from the transnational networks that developed later in the Soviet period. In this understanding, a syndicate is more local and hierarchical.

the threat of repression from prison officials, these entities developed a common sense of attachment and loyalty in order to protect their operations from encroachment by the state. In this arrangement, the criminal syndicate became a sovereign competitor to the state with far less institutional or informal power (Rossi 313). This notion of sovereign competition became clearer once organized crime gained power vis-à-vis the state during the 1990s.

After the death of Joseph Stalin, his successor Nikita Khrushchev took steps to undo the work of his predecessor during the period of de-Stalinization. Khrushchev closed many of the gulags in the Soviet Union, allowing some criminals to re-enter civilian life (Lonsky 10). Records of home addresses and death records from this period reveal that many of these former prisoners remained close to the area of their imprisonment (Lonsky 13). As such, these individuals retained access to pre-existing local networks initially developed in the gulag system, but now without the strict supervision of a prison camp setting.

By the late 1950s, internal Soviet law enforcement agencies reported that the *vory-v-zakone* had disappeared, despite evidence obtained from the Prime Crime News Agency that suggests that initiations within the organization persisted (Lonsky 13). To explain the disconnect between official state reports and evidence from retrospective data, we must consider the role of official discourses surrounding crime in the Soviet Union. Organized crime was a strong social taboo in the Soviet Union. The ruling regime portrayed organized crime as a product of Western decadence and moral corruption (Rawlinson 349). To admit that organized crime was operating within the Soviet Union meant to admit an internal failure of the Soviets' claim to have eliminated the "social grounds for crime" (Orlova 24). For the regime, the solution to this problem was to censor the discussion of internal organized crime in Soviet mass media. Without the opportunity to draw on critical discussions of organized crime or participation from average citizens in reporting such activities, the Soviet regime was left to rely on its own intelligence apparatuses. This provided some space for the *vory* to evade persecution and increase their small-scale operations.

### *Criminal*

These entities conducted operations deemed illegal by the state, making them "criminal." In this framework, the organization and activities are criminal, not their participants.<sup>41</sup> Thinking of these entities as a "network of criminals" is unproductive because it necessitates a conversation about what it means to be a "member" of a criminal network or syndicate. Such an exercise reveals a gray area between criminal associations and regular social associations (Bouchard 436). For example, a model using social ties might consider the wife of a hitman to be a member of a criminal network simply because of her relationship to her husband. It is more productive to conceptualize a criminal network (or syndicate) as an apparatus whose operations are criminal because it removes the need to identify membership, which itself is analytically unnecessary to this research question.

### *Networks*

As Russian organized crime grew beyond the local and hierarchical *vory-v-zakone* of the gulag system, internal pressures caused criminal syndicates to alter their structures. The internal growth of criminal operations forced syndicates to evolve into more informal, horizontally

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<sup>41</sup> As Morselli (2010) explains, describing an individual as a "criminal" tends to conjure pathological assumptions about behavior, which distract from the institutional and political conditions that shape the growth of organized crime.

structured associations. Rather than a centralized hierarchy, organized crime at this level develops around “nodes” in a flexible network (Morselli 4). This network structure allows criminal operations to persist without the threat of retaliation within a hierarchy or from outside. The transition to a network structure is suggested by the increased resilience of *vory* operations in the 1980s, despite their consistent growth (Lonsky 2020, 13). As I explain in the next section, this evolution in the restructure of organized crime allowed it to permeate other pre-existing networks more effectively.

### **Globalization and Transnational Network Creation**

Before Russian organized crime became a global phenomenon, globalization provided the networks necessary for transnational expansion. Globalization is not necessarily an official policy of states, but rather a descriptor for a general trend in the global system. It is one in which actors have the ability to participate, or “take advantage of” (Levitsky 234). Globalization is thus an evolving, though directly unobservable, process.

The economic effects of World War II introduced new ideas regarding transnational economic integration in Europe. It is important to note that globalization was not limited to the U.S.-aligned world during the Cold War. For both national security and ideological reasons, the Soviet Union participated in globalization alongside the United States. Particularly after the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the Soviet Union increased trade with Latin America through its economic organization, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA). By 1985, the CMEA maintained trade relations with 13 Latin American states, with the highest share of imports and exports shared with Cuba (Evanson 76). Excluding military trade, the CMEA primarily exported oil to Latin American countries in exchange for foodstuffs, minerals, and materials for oil refineries (Evanson 76). Oil and precious minerals would later prove to be significant industries for Russian organized crime to exploit as they permeated Russian state apparatuses.

Though more limited in scope, arms manufacturing became one of the most consequential industries for Soviet globalization, both for its content and its lasting network connections. The Soviet Union contributed most weapon imports to the Global South in the 1980s (Menon 91). This made the Soviet arms industry one of its most profitable enterprises (Anthony 92). In Latin America, the Soviet Union engaged in significant military trade with Cuba, Nicaragua, Peru, Grenada, and Guyana in particular (Edwards and Gill 78). This form of transnational integration established trade networks and allowed the arms industry to mature internally. Since many of these arms transfers were used in proxy conflicts between the Soviet Union and the United States, the future of transnational cooperation played a key role in the decision to export weapons.

Global socialist integration thus set the stage for Russian organized crime to expand beyond the RSFSR. Globalization established lasting networks between Soviet officials and “clients” in the Global South, as well as networks among European states and the world at large. At the same time, it led to the growth of the Soviet arms industry, which organized crime heavily infiltrated after the fall of the Soviet Union.

### **Neoliberalism and Post-Soviet Global Integration**

Neoliberalism reshaped the political landscape of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, providing the impetus for Russian criminal expansion beyond its new national borders. Neoliberalism is an ideology that emphasizes economic liberalization and the reduction of the state’s role in the economy by means including privatization, austerity, and free trade. In the West, neoliberalism

began to permeate discourse on the role of the state in the midst of economic crises in the United Kingdom and the United States in the 1970s, leading to the rise of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and President Ronald Reagan in the United States (Gamble 984). As global hegemony, the U.K. and U.S. managed to integrate the new neoliberal policy template into agencies with international order-shaping potential, including the IMF and World Bank. These mechanisms established the global neoliberal order that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, just in time for the crises that led to the reshaping of multiple Soviet-aligned regimes and the Soviet Union itself.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 offered the perfect opportunity for Russian-based organized criminal networks to capitalize on the transition to a free market. Particularly in 1993, turf wars broke out between criminal groups in the Russian Federation (Lonsky 4). Under the influence of Western-prescribed austerity measures, the Russian judicial system faced the issue of backlogged courts and law enforcement agencies with insufficient funding, as well as inadequate institutions to match the distribution of new property rights (Lonsky 14). This allowed organized criminal networks to provide private protection to businesses in place of those traditionally filled by public institutions, as well as licit business operations. Between 1992 and 1998, some reports estimate that individuals with strong ties to organized criminal groups infiltrated 40% of private businesses, 60% of state-owned businesses, and 85% of Russian banks (Lonsky 3). This suggests that Russian organized criminal networks first rooted themselves in the Russian financial sector before expanding into criminal operations abroad. This makes sense since the opportunities to take advantage of the weak transition to capitalism proved less risky than the option to first emigrate and establish criminal operations abroad.

Along with exploiting key industries, Russian organized criminal networks managed to develop relationships with state actors within the Russian Federation and other republics of the former Soviet Union. Contrary to popular narratives, the Russian state did not completely assimilate organized crime into its ranks, nor did organized crime necessarily “capture” the Russian state (Stephenson 412). The period of capitalist transition saw the state and organized crime undergo a process of “reciprocal assimilation,” in which individuals that worked within crime networks received opportunities to assimilate into legitimate, licit positions of power (Stephenson 413). In return, the state received access to private violence and illegal expertise obtained from organized crime, which they could employ without bureaucratic oversight. With this new power vis-à-vis licit sovereigns, organized criminal networks gained access to new avenues outside the borders of the Russian Federation.

With these connections in place, ROCNs exploited pre-existing trade links established during the period of Soviet globalization. This was aided by the growth of indigenous organized crime in other states during the neoliberal turn in the 1990s. For example, the former Soviet republics in Central Asia became a particularly important source for Russian drug trafficking. For example, Central Asia served as an ideal trade route for Afghan heroin. The low population density and diverse terrain of the region allowed organized crime to utilize a number of routes for the shipment of Afghan drugs without the suspicion of central authorities (De Danieli 1237). Also, authority over border protection shifted from the central authority of the Soviet Union to the national governments of each Central Asian republic. Since some of these states engaged in civil wars during their transition to capitalism, the new state authorities could not prioritize securing the integrity of a border with Russia that did not reflect natural geographic boundaries (De Danieli 1237). Then, as these states consolidated power after the period of civil conflict in the 1990s, they granted Central Asian organized criminal networks some level of immunity in

the emerging liberalized economy (De Danieli 1239). With common economic goals, ROCNs naturally created alliances with these indigenous networks and expanded their operations.

ROCNs also benefitted from the neoliberal turn in Latin America. Economic crises brought IMF-sponsored austerity policies to Latin American countries in exchange for foreign loans (Bagley 34). This allowed indigenous organized crime to develop highly lucrative drug trafficking networks without the threat of state retaliation. ROCNs, in turn, managed to enter these weakened Latin American states and gain access to illicit indigenous networks using historical links created during the Soviet era. For example, U.S. intelligence agencies tracked several “arms-for-cocaine” deals in Colombia between 1999-2000, reporting that Russian military equipment and former Soviet operatives directly participated in these operations (Bagley 40). While the scale of these operations is up for debate, as well as the level of involvement by either the Russian or Colombian governments, it is clear that ROCNs exploited contacts in Latin America using pre-existing trade networks from the period of Soviet globalization. The dominance of the Russian arms trade in this region speaks to the role of historical Soviet trade relationships and criminal network infiltration.

Discourses concerning law enforcement in Russia have also evolved in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, bringing a new dynamic to the organized crime phenomenon. Since 2000, President Vladimir Putin has increasingly rejected the neoliberal consensus by centralizing Russian state apparatuses and expanding the police state (Varese, Lonsky, and Podvysotskiy 154). Putin has used this position to essentially declare war on organized crime, passing laws targeting “top positions in criminal hierarchies” and approving the 2015 Russian National Security Strategy, which specifically targeted criminal organizations (Varese, Lonsky, and Podvysotskiy 154). The continued characterization of Russian organized crime as a “criminal hierarchy” distorts the actual capabilities of criminal networks.

Russian state officials also reported a five-fold decrease in the number of reported organized crimes between 2008-2015. As some scholars have pointed out, this could be a trick by the Russian state to distort the presence of organized criminal activity, since *reported* crime is much different than *actual* crime (Varese, Lonsky, and Podvysotskiy 155). Like the Khrushchev era, discourse on organized crime in Russia tends to serve the political interests of the state, providing ROCNs to continue to integrate into the global economy and exploit state apparatuses.

## Discussion

It is clear that the globalization of Russian organized crime resulted from the interaction of complex historical forces, from its growth in the Soviet system to the period of globalization and neoliberalism in the 1990s. These processes, as well as the discourses that shaped them, turned Russian organized crime into a global phenomenon with the capacity to integrate itself at a truly global scale, unlike any other criminal association. With this in mind, the stakes of this research become clearer.

Russian organized crime poses a significant threat to geopolitical security. Russian organized crime most effectively integrated itself into states that benefitted from Soviet globalization in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly those in Latin America and Eastern Europe. The neoliberal turn in many of these countries in the 1990s diminished the capacity of states to respond to their own growth of indigenous organized crime, let alone Russian networks. Without the same international incentives that limit or “check” certain state behaviors, Russian organized criminal networks are able to collaborate with entities within weak state structures in ways that could threaten regional stability. In an extreme case, in 1994, state law enforcement agencies



caught several Russian individuals smuggling nuclear materials to Germany (Vassalo 179). Russian organized crime is motivated primarily by financial compensation and its own survival, which makes it more difficult to discourage criminal activity with traditional interstate methods like sanctions or treaties. Identifying how Russian criminal networks operate and where they came from is a crucial first step in building more productive law enforcement operations and establishing effective networks with other states to prevent transnational organized crime at its source.

Another risk posed by this phenomenon is the erosion of faith in political institutions. In Latin America, for example, the effect of neoliberalism and globalization has led to growing popular resistance and social unrest (Bagley 34). As a result, organized crime gains legitimacy as a sovereign competitor vis-à-vis the state. With diminished interstate cooperation and the increased integration of economic activities through globalization, more states in the system risk the erosion of faith in law enforcement and interstate cooperation. This could mean an increase in extremist political movements and democratic backsliding, which appears to have already begun in some European and Latin American countries, where political actors have mobilized the populace against perceptions of outside threats produced by globalization and systemic weakness (Cianetti, Dawson, and Hanley 245).

Some researchers might be inclined to seek out generalizable hypotheses about the origins of transnational organized crime. We must reject this inclination, especially due to its implications for foreign policy. States simply cannot combat organized crime with a one-size-fits-all law enforcement policy, because there is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all model for how organized crime forms, develops, or globalizes. Russian organized criminal networks developed in very specific circumstances, influenced by a number of observable and unobservable factors. It is essential to study each case of transnational organized crime in order to produce more effective policies. Otherwise, organized crime is sure to spread, threatening the stability of the entire international system.

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## SECTION 2

# **Democracy's Decline : Rights at Risk**



## **Russian Music in the 2000s: Censorship of Alternative Genres**

*Alisha Mithani, Howard University*

### **Introduction**

Even before the Soviet era music in Russia has been a driving force of culture, unity, and mutual understanding. In today's times, these ideals are no different from our reality as artists continue to create works that defy the scope of their expectations. The artists from the past sported their work in soviet rock clubs with censored lyrics and a calmed audience but were budding for any chance to change the status quo. We see continuing reflections in Russia today as metal, punk, and electronic artists face government shutdowns of concerts and internet censorship as they outwardly express the change, they so desire. Continuing censorship of music in Russia has been a constant struggle in the face of alternative youth culture as society moves forward. In analysis of works by artists such as IC3PEAK, Poshlaya Molly, and others we can truly intersect the targeted issues and lifestyle the government continues to focus on.

### **Trending Changes**

When exploring current trends in relation to music in Russia there are clear winners for the mainstream. Artists like Manizha have taken over the scene of Russian music bringing controversial topics to more mainstream or mass appeal genres. Her blends of pop and folk characterize her identity that is so underrepresented in media in relation to the Russian diaspora. As well as her recent song featured in Eurovision Russian Woman, she has brought to light a view of feminism as well as what a Russian can look like to a broader audience. She faces backlash as she speaks out politically for queer people as well as currently against the war with Ukraine. Through these political statements “Many of her concerts this summer have been scrapped after details of the organizers were posted on social media.”<sup>1</sup> Though immensely popular she still faces increasing difficulties with the Russian government. And she is just one of many artists facing issues as they take political ground in relation to the current war. Manizha is the modern version of the censorship of music that began in the soviet era.

We see reflections of the soviet era music censorship where now classic bands like Kino performed their music in what were known as soviet rock clubs. Though concerts were not being canceled they were heavily regulated whether it was the lyrics or how the audience was supposed to react, the standards persisted throughout time. Popular depictions of this era are included in movies like Leto depicting this journey of success through censorship for these bands and the creation of alternative cultures through history. But music censorship is no longer a hindrance to success but rather a clear depiction of the government's intentions. In looking at artists of alternative genres like metal, punk and more we see an outcry for change that the government wants to muffle.

### **Basis of Censorship**

In exploration of current artists there are clear patterns in the governments targeting of these musicians. Justification in this censorship is through relations to children and creating themes that are unfit for consumption by children. They refer to it as protection of children from information.<sup>2</sup> Artists like IC3PEAK are targeted on their use of suicidal images and drug use as

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<sup>1</sup> Dartford, K. (2023, March 07). Russian pop star Manizha Sangin vows to sing despite tour cancellation.

<sup>2</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2021, September 06). Russia: Censorship of younger generation's music.

this law references “This Federal Law regulates relations related to the protection of children from information harmful to their health and (or) development.”<sup>3</sup> Other laws have aided in the censorship of work related to queer imagery what their government refers to as gay propaganda. Referencing a need to censor “nontraditional sexual relations” or “nontraditional sexual attitudes”<sup>4</sup> they have deemed these topics inappropriate for children or minors. It's more than direct political relations but critiques and fear of an alternative lifestyle that bases the legal implications of censorship.

Though this is the justification for constant shut down of concerts and banning of videos, these artists often clearly show a distaste for government policies. As we further the analysis of the works of IC3PEAK there is clear disinterest and disdain for current political choices of the war deepened in their lyrics. From visuals in the Red Square to defiance of the war through visuals in their concerts, IC3PEAK and artists like them have brought attention to the political impact of alternative genres. Including the artists that inspire them like Poshlaya Molly who reference a lifestyle involving sex and drugs and though heavily popular also face backlash even with less political directness.

### IC3PEAK

IC3PEAK describes themselves to be a sort of audiovisual duo who create forms of Visual Terror. Anastasia Kreslina and Nikolai Kostylev formed this music duo that has created music in genres from electronic, to underground rap, to Nu-metal. They rose to acclaim due to the song Death No More where Kreslina is depicted lighting herself on fire in front of a Russian government building. Since their release their tours within Russia have been canceled and their media presence censored. Their music has continuously been censored by the Putin regime for expressing issues in the country including drugs, domestic violence, terrorism, and much more. In analysis of a few of their works we see a clear pattern of political dissent as they tackle issues such as LGBTQ rights, the status of women, and the war in Ukraine in genres that are pushing further and further away from the mainstream.

#### *Go With the Flow*

я не хочу оглядываться  
я не хочу  
я не хочу оборачиваться  
я не хочу возвращаться  
я не хочу оглядываться  
я не хочу возвращаться  
I know with that glance  
You can take me away  
By a chance  
One more time  
I know with that glance  
You can take me away  
By a chance  
Unless you don't wanna back  
Unless you don't wanna  
Unless you don't wanna back  
Unless you don't wanna

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<sup>3</sup> Федеральный закон о защите детей от информации, причиняющей вред их здоровью и развитию.

<sup>4</sup> Федеральный закон о защите детей от пропаганды гомосексуализма. (n.d.).



I can be anything you want  
 I can be anything you want  
 Go with the flow  
 Go with the flow  
 Pretend that I don't exist at all  
 I know with that glance  
 You can take me away  
 By a chance  
 I know with that glance  
 You can take me away  
 By a chance  
 One more time  
 I can be anything you want  
 I can be anything you want  
 Go with the flow  
 Go with the flow  
 Pretend that I don't exist at all<sup>5</sup>

*Go with the Flow*, originally released in 2016 on the album *Fallal* was considered one of their first instances with these types of controversy in relation to censorship. The song mostly in English repeats the phrases “I can be anything you want” “go with the flow” and “pretend that I don't exist at all”<sup>6</sup>. Though on the surface it simply depicts a carefree existence, the music video for the song provides much more context. The band directly targets the ban on “gay propaganda”<sup>7</sup> within Russia. The video shows people in drag like makeup, expressive dancing and even kisses between two men.<sup>8</sup> Though this video was filmed as they toured Brazil it was still a clear line of support to the LGBTQ community by a Russian group of artists. Though this work was at the very beginning of their career as they still made music in English it has clearly influenced their current work as they tackle issues of war and human rights abuses.

### ***Dead But Pretty***

Dead but pretty  
 Dead but pretty  
 I am dead but pretty  
 Dead but pretty  
 I am dead but pretty  
 Dead but pretty  
 I am dead but pretty  
 Dead  
 Ты напился моей крови аж до тошноты  
 Помню, я была живая, а теперь, как ты  
 Не осталось даже слёз  
 Не осталось даже слёз  
 На моей могиле свежие цветы  
 Мои любимые белые лилии  
 Ставишь на мне крест, но я живей, чем ты

<sup>5</sup> IC3PEAK. (2016, January 01). Go with the flow.

<sup>6</sup> IC3PEAK. (2016, January 01). Go with the flow.

<sup>7</sup> Федеральный закон о защите детей от пропаганды гомосексуализма. (n.d.).

<sup>8</sup> IC3PEAK. (2018, March 11). IC3PEAK go with the flow official video.

На моей руке у судьбы нет линии  
 Dead but pretty  
 Dead but pretty  
 I am dead but pretty  
 Dead but pretty  
 I am dead but pretty  
 Dead but pretty  
 I am dead but pretty  
 Dead but pretty  
 Ты наелся моей плоти аж до тошноты  
 Моё сердце ещё бьётся полное любви  
 Ты напился моей крови аж до тошноты  
 Помню, я была живая, а теперь, как ты  
 Не осталось даже слёз  
 Не осталось даже слёз  
 Раз, два, три, четыре, пять  
 Шесть, шесть, шесть  
 На моей могиле свежие цветы  
 Мои любимые белые лилии  
 Ставишь на мне крест, но я живей, чем ты  
 На моей руке у судьбы нет линии  
 Dead but pretty  
 Dead but pretty  
 I am dead but pretty  
 Dead but pretty  
 I am dead but pretty  
 Dead but pretty  
 I am dead but pretty  
 Dead  
 Ты напился моей крови аж до тошноты  
 Помню, я была живая, а теперь как ты  
 Не осталось даже слёз  
 Не осталось даже слёз  
 Не осталось даже слёз  
 Не осталось даже слёз<sup>9</sup>

In the duo's latest album *Kiss of Death*, they use *Dead but Pretty* at the featured track traversing into the genre of metal shifting from their original electronic roots. Whether it's the heavy guitar mix, the screaming of “Dead but Pretty”<sup>10</sup> or the repeated use of satanic imagery with “Шесть, шесть, шесть”<sup>11</sup> the dark nature depicts the gruesome reality of war. When looking directly at the song we see references to laying flowers on a grave as Kreslina sings “Мои любимые белые лилии”<sup>12</sup> as in the video she comes out of her grave and dances with a soldier. As the song goes on Kreslina sings “Once I was full of life but now, I'm as empty as you”<sup>13</sup> as she is coming back from the dead. The video depicts them being driven to the Red

<sup>9</sup> IC3PEAK. (2022, April 22). Dead but pretty.

<sup>10</sup> IC3PEAK. (2022, April 22). Dead but pretty.

<sup>11</sup> IC3PEAK. (2022, April 22). Dead but pretty.

<sup>12</sup> IC3PEAK. (2022, April 22). Dead but pretty.

<sup>13</sup> IC3PEAK. (2022, April 22). Dead but pretty.

Square after they have risen from their graves as they perform standing on a cop car as soldiers surround and cheer for them<sup>14</sup>. As the video continues Kreslina is depicted kissing a female soldier and Kostylev kissing a male soldier. As Kreslina continues to sing “dead but pretty”<sup>15</sup> they are pushed into a circle as they slowly are pushed closer to each other in a sea of soldiers. Finally, she screams “dead.”<sup>16</sup> The visuals of soldiers are a clear reference to the current state of Russia as people continue to die senseless deaths as the ongoing war with Ukraine continues to escalate. They create a bold statement with their visual of iconic Russian buildings which are often seen as sacred. Their use of the metal genre emphasizes their overall anger and distrust of the current state, and the visuals add to their daring words and enragement. *Dead but Pretty* is a song that is what the government would characterize as antiwar propaganda and incredibly effective in that regard.

### ***Kiss of Death***

You don't want me happy  
 You want me when I'm sad  
 You don't want me healthy  
 You want me when I'm bad  
 So, do you want a kiss? (Kiss-kiss)  
 Последний поцелуй  
 So, do you want a kiss? (Kiss-kiss)  
 Смертельный поцелуй  
 Поцелуй меня  
 Поцелуй меня  
 Поцелуй меня  
 Ха-ха-ха-ха, ха  
 Do you want a kiss? Do you want a kiss?  
 Do you want a kiss? Do you want a kiss?  
 Do you want a kiss? Do you want a kiss?  
 Do you want a kiss? Do you want a kiss?  
 Kiss of death  
 Kiss of death  
 Kiss of death (Ха-ха-ха-ха)  
 Kiss of death  
 Ту-ту-ту-ру-ту-ту, ту-ру-ту  
 Do you want to kiss me, last time?  
 Ту-ту-ту-ру-ту-ту, ту-ру-ту  
 Последний поцелуй, прощай  
 You don't want me happy  
 You want me when I'm sad  
 You don't want me healthy  
 You want me when I'm bad  
 So, do you want a kiss? (Kiss-kiss)  
 Последний поцелуй  
 So, do you want a kiss?  
 Смертельный поцелуй  
 Do you want a kiss? Do you want a kiss?

<sup>14</sup> IC3PEAK - dead but pretty. (2022, March 18).

<sup>15</sup> IC3PEAK. (2022, April 22). Dead but pretty.

<sup>16</sup> IC3PEAK - dead but pretty. (2022, March 18).

Do you want a kiss? Do you want a kiss?  
Do you want a kiss? Do you want a kiss?  
Do you want a kiss? Do you want a kiss?  
Do you want a kiss? Do you want a kiss?  
Do you want a kiss? Do you want a kiss?  
Do you want a kiss? Do you want a kiss?  
Do you want a kiss? Do you want a kiss?  
Kiss of death  
Kiss of death  
Kiss of death (Xa-xa-xa-xa)<sup>17</sup>

The song *Kiss of Death* goes beyond the literal sense of much of their work as they pull references from the Russian folktale including gory imagery. They reflect on past tracks like *Сказка (fairytale)* referencing the monsters from our childhood like Baba Yaga. Within this characterization is a commentary on the role of women in Russian society reflecting on similar themes to the work of Manizha and other female artists of the time. An incredibly graphic and gory video goes alongside the audio for this track.<sup>18</sup> A multitude of elements allow a recreation of a childhood horror in relation to the treatment of women. Specifically looking at the line “you don't want me happy; you want me when I'm sad”<sup>19</sup> this is in relation to women's roles within Russia. As women who pursue their goals and careers are happy yet not wanted by society. The color white is also significant in this work as this is one of their only videos where they are depicted wearing white. Beyond this the chicken legs and fairy circles in tandem with the blood across their faces and the eating of live animals like frogs create a sense of emotion needed in the enagement of their political message. Through these choices they can characterize the status of women as well as tying directly into the roots of Russian culture.

### **Poshlaya Molly**

Though Poshlaya Molly is a Ukrainian band they have become a large influence in the Russian pop-punk scene in recent years even inspiring artists like IC3PEAK in their work. Though incredibly controversial as a group and often criticized for their work, their influence is still prevalent. Rather than directly speaking on political issues they go on to tackle another issue with censorship in the region. Though they have spoken out against pro-war efforts and effectively canceled their own performances in places where these ideals are supported. They recently dropped out of one of Russia's largest music festivals Nashestviye as the festival supported militarization.<sup>20</sup> They depict what are seen as unacceptable lifestyles giving ideals reminiscent of Western sex, drugs, and rock n roll. Looking at a piece from their discography you can see how their pop-punk melodies bring alive this aura. They are incredibly controversial as a group and are again one of many being censored in Russia as their concerts get canceled and their music becomes inaccessible.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> IC3PEAK. (2022, April 22). Kiss of death.

<sup>18</sup> IC3PEAK - Kiss of Death. (2022, July 12).

<sup>19</sup> IC3PEAK. (2022, April 22). Kiss of death.

<sup>20</sup> The Moscow Times. (2023, March 15). Russian rock bands Boycott Music Festival Over Defense Ministry ties.

<sup>21</sup> Raspopina, S. (2018). Stop the music: Young artists' gigs are being cancelled all over Russia. what's going on and why? Retrieved March 15, 2023, from

## *Non-Stop*

Девчата пляшут под спидами  
(Девчата пляшут под спидами),  
А ты стоишь как вкопанный  
(А ты стоишь как вкопанный).  
Кроссовками ломают пол  
(Кроссовками ломают пол).  
А ты стоишь как вкопанный.  
Ну что за мать его дерьмо?  
Я знаю, что ты хочешь,  
Ты хочешь танцевать.  
Ну-ну же, ну давай же,  
Ну-ну же, ну давай же.  
Я знаю, что ты знаешь этот трек,  
Готовься подпевать.  
Раз, два, три, четыре.  
Музыка громче, глаза закрыты  
Это! нон стоп! ночью открытий  
Делай, что хочешь я забываюсь  
Это! нон стоп! Не прекращаясь!  
Музыка громче, глаза закрыты  
Это! нон стоп! ночью открытий  
Буду с тобой самой примерною  
Утро в окне и мы будем первые!  
Этот трек делает тебя сильнее  
Он прикольной, чем колеса  
И роднее, чем портвейн.  
Раза в три круче, чем самый первый секс-партнер.  
И все девчата в таком трипе,  
Что аж мама не горюй.  
Прыгай так, прыгай так  
Будто ты совсем дурак.  
Прыгай так, так и так и так, так  
Ты же воздух как никак.  
Прыгай так, прыгай так  
Будто ты чу покемон.  
Будто бы вся твоя жизнь  
Не такое уж дерьмо.  
Ну что за мать его дерьмо?  
Музыка громче, глаза закрыты  
Это! нон стоп! ночью открытий  
Делай, что хочешь я забываюсь  
Это! нон стоп! Не прекращаясь!  
Музыка громче, глаза закрыты  
Это! нон стоп! ночью открытий  
Буду с тобой самой примерною

Утро в окне и мы будем первые!  
Я забываюсь, помоги мне.  
Я задыхаюсь, помоги мне.  
Делай, что хочешь я задыхааааюсь.<sup>22</sup>

Poshlaya Molly's song *Non Stop* comes from their debut album *8 Sposobov Kak Brosit'*... released in 2017. The cover art depicts a sketched drawing of a woman touching herself, with a bottle of alcohol on her floor and a Poshlaya Molly poster on her wall. The cover art alone sets the scene for the lifestyle depicted in their music. The song *Non Stop* repeats the phrase “Это! нон стоп! ночью открытий”<sup>23</sup> as the artists express the feeling of the song to be like a drug to the body. They form this romanticized ideal around partying and drug use through not just this work but through the other songs in the album. The title *Non Stop* plays into this carefree ideal of existence. This is a continuing theme through the album as they emphasize the feelings associated with these choices in a sense romanticizing sex and drugs. Their work is clearly reflective of the pop punk genre and is a step away from the government expectations within youth culture and music.

## Conclusion

Music censorship has continued to be a problem throughout Russian history and will continue to be. Regardless of popularity or genre concerts will continue to be cancelled and videos will continue to be banned. However, that doesn't diminish the impact of these works through time. As artists on the edge of society continue to spread their message through antiwar visuals or inclusive representations of love which will continue to impact others knowledge on the changes needed in Russian society. Whether its carefree artists like Poshlaya Molly or openly political artists like IC3PEAK alternative genre will share the direction needed for the preservation of human rights in Russian society. The basis of censorship will continue to lack validity as acceptance and anti-violent sentiments continue to become less and less valid to the ideals around children from information. Censorship of alternative genres whether it is metal, punk, electronic or many others will continue to impact the way political messages are sent and spread through Russian society as well as youth culture.

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<sup>22</sup> Poshlaya Molly. (2018, June 06). Нон стоп.

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## **“Independent Romanian Journalism: Negotiating a Post-Communist Identity”**

*Irina Bucur, Chatham University*

### **Abstract**

Independent Romanian journalism is at a crossroads. By promoting transparency within the media and the government, it exists in contradiction to Romania's post-communist identity and media structure, which are characterized by media capture and personalization of the press. Independent journalism is practiced without substantial legislative or financial support, but has caught the attention of EU media watchdog groups, which put pressure on the Romanian government when it threatens the independence of its news agencies through media legislation. This exploratory narrative examines independent Romanian journalism, the challenges that face Romanian media at large, and the role of independent journalism within an external post-communist media structure. It proposes that independent Romanian journalism drives media pluralism, taking a grassroots approach toward European identity formation without sacrificing a Romanian national identity.

### **Introduction**

As Romanian independent journalists have discovered, the line between past and present is fluid. Decades after the 1989 revolution, high-profile cases of corruption and fraud remind us that the past lingers in the present far too long—longer, in any case, than the European Union would like.

At the end of the Second World War, the communist takeover of Romania was followed by a wave of Soviet-style arrests, trials, and heavy prison sentences targeting prominent journalists and other media creators and distributors. The Romanian press became ideologically homogenous, mirroring the monochromatic politics of the totalitarian state. With the Soviet troops leaving the country in 1956, and Romania's refusal to join the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, greater independence from the USSR and a certain distancing from the excesses of the previous two decades brought a period of relative relaxation and hopes of better times. These hopes were brought to a brutal end in the wake of Nicolae Ceaușescu's 1971 visit to North Korea, which contributed to a sharp rise in the “providential leader's” cult of personality and the forging of an increasingly isolationist and nationalist form of Romanian Communism.

With Ceaușescu's “July Theses”—the unofficial term given to his address, in July 1971, on “Proposed measures for the improvement of political-ideological activity, of the Marxist–Leninist education of Party members, of all working people” (Ceaușescu, 1971), the Romanian Communist Party became even stricter in defining what media content was acceptable, how media was censored, and by extension, how intellectuals lived and created within the regime. The July Theses articulated strict ideological control of media and culture, which were officially assigned to the task of propaganda for the advancement of the Party. After this point, Romanian mainstream media became a mechanism for the indoctrination and silencing of the population by means of complete state control of information, and the enforcement of specific modes of communication—all of this in the name of “Marxist-Leninist” education aiming for the optimization of “political-ideological activity” (Ceaușescu, 1971).

Three decades after the fall of communism in Romania, the historical, cultural, and sociopolitical symbolism of the defunct totalitarian regime found ways to continue by other means. The legacy of a broken media structure, upheld by the 1971 law, lingers as media is highly polarized and concentrated with big business exerting influence over airtime and editorial



policies. The fact that the figureheads of today's post-communist media conglomerates—Dan Voiculescu and Sorin Ovidiu Vintu—have worked as collaborators and informants of Romania's former Communist secret police agency, is not only notorious, but even recognized by the National Council for the Study of the Archives of the Securitate (Romanian acronym: CNSAS). Moving forward toward democracy means disentangling these bureaucratic and post-communist tendencies from the contemporary journalistic landscape.

Although Romanian media legislation falls under the purview of the European Union, systemic and bureaucratic challenges related to media pluralism and self-censorship remain. According to the Resource Centre on Media Freedom in Europe, regulatory groups like the National Audiovisual Council operate on political preference, appointing its leaders based on politics rather than by professional experience. This also skews the data aggregated by the watchdog group. Meanwhile, the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom notes that "Multiple confounding structural factors—social, economic and political—including a dysfunctional media market, weak state capacity and a symbolically polarized political competition, contribute to the situation of the media in Romania" (Popescu et al., 2016).

While the Romanian media model is politically influenced and shaped by corporate interests, independent journalistic investigations such as the health and regulation scandal revealed in the 2015 fire at the "Colectiv" nightclub, which led to then-Prime Minister Victor Ponta's resignation, indicate that independent journalism—journalism free from political or business affiliation—is tremendously potent in galvanizing social conscience, with concrete effects on the political scene.

## **Literature Review**

Following the collapse of communism in the former Eastern Bloc countries and the change in the market economy, media and culture developed in post-communist states in three ways: through pluralism of media ownership, market pluralism, and political pluralism (Simeunovic, 2009). These changes were expressed in the media sector through "fundamental changes in production, organization, management, distribution and consumption" (Simeunovic, 2009, p. 506). However, with low newspaper circulation, dwindling profits, and a recession in the 2000s, investigative journalism in the decades after 1989 faced a great deal of instability.

Today, Romanian media outlets, though diverse in number, are vulnerable to economic and political influence. Prior to Romania's accession to the European Union, and in the years that followed, media ownership remained concentrated in the hands of a few players (Lazar & Paun, 2006). It is also true that Romania's membership within the EU has led to a certain increase in media pluralism. Within the current media market, however, Romanian journalism is characterized by disproportionate ownership, lack of funding for independent journalists, and polarization.

Bucharest is not only Romania's geographical capital, but also its media hub, where a large percentage of the country's news is produced and broadcast. This reflects the high concentration of media moguls and oligarchs based in the same city (Holdis & Dragomir, 2019), shaping the information distributed throughout the entire country, and points to possible news deserts in rural areas. Intact Media Group and Central European Media Enterprises are two of the media magnates in Romania. Until his death in March 2021, the latter was run by late Czech billionaire Petr Kellner, an entrepreneur whose investment group, the První Privatizační Fond, bought and sold media distribution groups in Romania (Eckel, 2021). The former is controlled by the family of Dan Voiculescu—a financier and businessman-turned-politician found to be a collaborator and informant of the Securitate, Romania's communist-era secret police.

More than thirty years after the communist government was toppled, Romania is subject to the media laws and recommendations set forth by the European Parliament, reflecting its membership within the EU. Nevertheless, implementation of media regulation is inconsistent. In a Center for Media, Data and Society report, Holdis and Dragomir (2019) found that journalists cannot always rely on standards of practice and policy regulation. The existing legislation in Romania does not address the lack of media pluralism insofar as to prevent media capture (Mungiu-Pippidi & Ghinea, 2012), personalization of the press, or implement shared standards of journalistic professionalism. Additionally, trends in media consumption differ from general trends in Europe, where media usage, distribution, and production are comparatively more balanced (Holdis & Dragomir, 2019). State bodies, including a specialized parliamentary committee and state-appointed regulators help shape legislation as well as regulation (Holdis & Dragomir, 2019), both of which are central to the development of a functioning media structure.

Simeunovic's (2009) work suggests that European media structure is necessary for the emergence of a European identity (p. 501), in which media freedom, pluralism, and transparency take precedence. These tenets of media liberalism are valued by the EU and help shape what we know as a European identity.

The modern concept of national and regional identity has its roots in the 18th and 19th centuries, solidified by the distribution of newspapers and media (Anderson, 1983). Belonging to a certain group means identifying with and subscribing to a set of values of an imagined community (Anderson, 1983). According to Simeunovic (2009, p. 501), "identity is a discursive formation, and the discourse is produced by those who have power." If we define "those who have power" as individuals and groups dominating Romania's media market, we can see that national identity is closely tied to a media structure sustained by the interests of a concentrated few; in the case of Romania, the power players are oligarchs, media proprietors, and conglomerates.

European identity formation begins with media content and a media framework, which play a part in economic and political integration (Simeunovic, 2009). As such, the development of a European identity for Romania became possible by the very structure (or restructuring) of the media. Media logic comes into play here; through its different platforms, the media influences the public's interpretations of social and political reality (Altheide, 2016). It forms expectations as well as social, cultural, and political identities. Press freedom and a commitment to journalistic integrity are fundamental to the kind of journalism that plays a part in a country's thriving media market. In such a market, these features are embedded within a cultural identity. They become expected by legislative powers, and more broadly, by the public.

According to Simeunovic (2009, p. 516), "media are a pivot of democratic multicultural European society that will respect, protect, cherish and improve ethnic, national, cultural, religious and linguistic differences. If one is a German, Italian or Romanian, he is at the same time European." Dodds (2005, p. 100) found that "the media ... can contribute to the projection and reinforcement of particular national ... identities and ideologies, and [can also] help subvert and contest such hegemonic positions."

Both Dodds (2005) and Simeunovic (2009) indicate that media structure and identity formation are shaped by the dominant power players within a country's media sectors. In continuity with the decades following the 1989 Revolution, the two parties holding the most influence over Romanian media, including journalism, are oligarchs and politicians (Zubascu, 2013). The "interdependence between the political and economic power and the media" (Gerli, et al., 2018) is one of the primary challenges facing independent journalists in particular.

Romania's media model might follow some of the features of a liberal model; in particular, political parallelism and a high level of journalistic professionalism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). These features are shared by North and Central Europe's Democratic Corporatist Model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), and are the "two crucial preconditions required so that investigative journalism can perform its social function of controlling democracy" (Gerli et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, expecting Romanian newsrooms and media councils to build on a liberal media model as this new democracy grew in its infancy would have been naive; even today, a liberal media model has not been achieved.

Proximity to politics has transformed investigative journalism into pseudo-journalism with oligarchs at the front, and with blackmail and disinformation campaigns as its main preoccupation (Candea, 2011, p. 7). According to Stefan Candea, co-founder of the Romanian Center for Investigative Journalism, "The reason that they invest in money-losing media corporations is to gain leverage to negotiate with politicians to keep themselves out of jail" (Candea, 2011, p. 10). There is no better example than that of Sorin Ovidiu Vintu, an investor, businessman, and owner of the media trust Realitatea-Catavencu, which counted a number of radio stations, newspapers, magazines, and TV channels in its conglomerate. Vintu also founded the Brussels-based Vintu Foundation for Excellency in Education and Journalism, which partnered with the International Federation of Journalists in 2007 (IFJ, 2007). The manager of Vintu's foundation represented the Romanian Chamber of Deputies at the European Union (Candea, 2011, p. 9).

Between the late 1980s and 2017, Vintu was convicted of blackmail, embezzlement, money laundering, and most recently, found guilty of crimes connected to Romania's largest Ponzi scheme. The fall of the FNI, or Fondul Național de Investiții, left hundreds of thousands of Romanians without the money they had invested (Candea, 2011, p. 9). In 2015, Vintu was sentenced to eight years in prison for his involvement in the FNI scheme (Marica, 2018). With Vintu as the primary example, Candea's (2011) report claims that journalists are embedded in Romania's media structure, at the confluence of concentrated media ownership and corruption.

Pressure to comply with political or business interests, to be silent, or to continue the status quo of low-quality, copycat journalism, is also exerted by the government. Several pieces of legislation were drafted—though not passed—after the news came to the attention of watchdog groups sponsored by or affiliated with the European Union (in particular, with the European Commission). In October 2017, the Romanian government drafted legislation that would allow any political majority to dismiss the director-general of Agerpres, Romania's national news agency (Swaminathan, 2017), a proposal that would effectively politicize service media, the European Centre for Press & Media Freedom brief states.

In 2016, a proposed anti-defamation bill came under scrutiny by groups of journalists and members of the media who claimed it would limit freedom of expression (Chiriac, 2016). The concern was that the law would silence criticism of the ruling party instead of targeting discrimination in the media.

Finally, in March 2020, COVID-19 emergency legislation passed during lockdown limited freedom of speech and journalists' access to records by restricting access to information and removing online content (Holdis, 2020). This attempt to curb misinformation was conducted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs without an explained procedure showing how the information being taken down posed a risk to the public.

## Results

In contrast to the media conglomerates that surround them, independent journalists in Romania encourage media pluralism by working against a media model that does not support investigative journalism outside the framework of political and corporate interests. Through its non-politically aligned work, independent journalism does not fit within the Romanian media structure. The existing media model places Romanian journalism in close proximity to political and business interests. As part of the media, journalists are embedded (Candea, 2011) in the post-communist media model, while independent journalists question the media model itself. Therefore, a distinction between journalism and independent journalism must be made.

With its elite politically oriented press, highly concentrated media ownership, instrumentalization of the press, late democratization, and low newspaper circulation (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), Romania's journalistic practices fall into the Polarized Pluralist Model. Within this model, independent journalism is not supported or regulated without outside influence, which is wielded primarily by oligarchs and politicians (Zubascu, 2013), who often assume both roles at once as media owners.

The media sector shapes the regional or national identity of a country (Simeunovic, 2009). Romania's media sector is largely influenced and controlled by former political and corporate figureheads, many of whom can be traced back to the Romanian Communist Party. Its democratic identity, in terms of shared values and features of its media sector, is still evolving.

## Discussion

Regardless of membership within the European Union, Romania's post-communist features reveal a country that is still in transition. When journalists work around the system to gain audience attention, shed light on governmental issues like corruption, or call for action—as journalists did in 2017 through social media—they are utilizing a grassroots approach to journalism, which directly counters the partisan bias and owner interests of major media conglomerates. This emphasizes the importance of transparency and media pluralism, which independent journalistic groups promote freely. With more adequate financial and legislative support, independent Romanian journalism could make a more sustainable and lasting impact on Romania's path to democratization.

Independent journalism reflects the current state of Romania's practices in media transparency, which is murky at best. However, the investigations of negligence and corruption like the 2015 nightclub fire, and the 2017-2019 pardoning of crimes of state officials, show independent journalists taking matters into their own hands. The mass protest sparked by those investigations also reveal a Romanian audience that is engaged with the media and willing to participate in the political sphere and push for democratic governance.

In order for independent journalism to be effective and proactive in its work, it must follow some of the features of a liberal model. Under the liberal model, independent journalism must maintain low political parallelism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) and avoid attaching itself to political parties or organizations, thus avoiding media capture. Independent journalism must also reflect a high level of journalistic professionalism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). However, Romanian journalism does not need to take a fully Anglo-American approach to move past a post-communist media structure. This would ignore local journalism practices, cultural attitudes, and the “bottom-up” grassroots approach that Romanian independent journalists have started taking to address the systemic issues within the country. Embracing a European identity along with membership into the European Union, or adopting an Anglo-American media model, should complement a cultural identity rather than seek to replace it. The issue here is negotiating a

cultural identity that is disentangled from its communist past, which at present does not exist, while maintaining a national identity that is not at odds with an EU identity. If it is to be successfully implemented, a media model must recognize both identities; otherwise, it risks existing parallel to the reality of how journalism is practiced in the country—similarly to how EU standards exist in Romania, but are not effectively implemented or regulated.

Romanian journalism and media, especially in the context of EU accession and membership, are political issues in which national identity comes into question. By putting pressure on the post-communist media structure, and pushing toward a democratic form of media, independent journalists negotiate post-communist and contemporary Romanian identities alongside Romania's relationship to Europe.

According to Stefan Candea (2011), what has proven of greatest value “has been hands-on training from working with Western colleagues. But no skills or approach could be directly imported to my work in Romania; I had to adjust them to the reality in my region” (p. 9). The reality of Romania's media structure is in the inheritance of its communist past. Ironically, Romania cannot “move on” socially or politically without recognizing the systemic implications of post-communism that still remain, including in the media.

The effectiveness of independent journalism in Romania can be assessed insofar as the socio-cultural conditions shape journalistic practices: when journalism challenges the status quo by investigating cases of corruption against pressure by politicians and businessmen with ties to media outlets, a richer media landscape begins to form. However, this does not completely do away with the media model that Romanian journalism falls into.

The autonomy of the journalist and a varied media market exist in a mutualistic relationship. Therefore, media pluralism supports independent journalism that is free from political influence. Now that we have established the systemic challenges, it is apparent that independent journalists are doing work that is substantial and significant; they navigate a polarized, dominated media landscape and uncover corruption independently from political or corporate interests. Romanian independent journalism reworks the old media logic of communism, as well as the monopolized reality of a post-communist media structure. It engages the audience with transparency, in line with EU media standards, developing the dual Romanian and European identity.

If independent Romanian journalists have the legislative support to report and broadcast at the same level of public engagement as media conglomerates dominating the media market, they can begin to build a sustainable, democratic media model that informs a European identity. Independent journalism subverts the idea that Romania is perpetually post-communist by offering an alternative, politically independent ideology that sustains a media pluralistic framework. However, it does not currently have the means or support to safely and sustainably carry out this politically independent ideology; media conglomerates have more financial and political support. An existing media framework is not the same thing as the implementation of media pluralism and freedom.

### **Limitations, Future Research, and Conclusion**

This paper has not given enough attention to the journalistic strides of award-winning Romanian journalists and active media groups engaged in tracking corruption. It must be noted that by broadly connecting politics and journalism, the bigger picture of Romania's media landscape is somewhat obscured. In short, while both individual and systemic challenges are obstacles to journalists, and to independent journalists in particular, this does not represent the

whole story. There are other factors that influence the state of the media and hinder media pluralism.

Another limitation of this analysis was encountered within the literature review; the vague definitions of watchdog, investigative journalism, and independent journalism, sometimes used interchangeably, required that I expand my own definition of independent journalism. Because of this, I did not focus on a particular group or journalistic organization; rather, the objective became to analyze independent journalism broadly, in the context of European and post-communist identities. Future research on media pluralism and independent Romanian journalism could discuss independent journalism in reference to specific newsrooms and organizations. A quantitative analysis would solidify the evidence within this exploratory narrative and others.

The current strides toward transparency and democracy by independent journalists who investigated the 2015 nightclub fire and the 2017 government scandal, for example, do not contradict the lack of media pluralism in Romania. Rather, they are examples of a revitalized journalistic practice that is actively engaged in sparking collective action. Independent journalists bring national and international attention to both media owners and the government and expose their role in maintaining a corrupt, weakened media. They work despite an unsupportive media model within a corrupt political system.

A dual Romanian and European identity can exist, if the media model is revised, supported, and governed with transparency. Media is at the heart of a European identity, as Simeunovic's (2009) research reminds us. The current work of independent Romanian newsrooms, and the way that independent journalism is regulated and protected, may very well shape more than the media structure of tomorrow's Romania; what is at stake is Romania's leaving behind a dysfunctional post-communist identity by encouraging media pluralism and rejecting the media logic left over from its communist past, of which elitism, media capture, and high political parallelism played part. These must be addressed through law and collective journalistic standards. Independent journalism can integrate a Romanian national identity within a broader European identity if formed by a healthier media model.

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## Don't Display the Gay: Reframing Queerness, Reclaiming Agency, and Resisting the Russian State in *Children-404*

Max Heimowitz, Yale University

The documentary film *Children-404*, directed by Askold Kurov and Pavel Loparev, premiered in Russia and then at the Hot Docs Festival in Canada in April 2014. A project undertaken with the support of Cinema Politica, the film was produced in the aftermath of the 2013 passage of the Russian federal law “for the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating a Denial of Traditional Family Values,” also known as the “gay propaganda law.” The documentary draws its name from the online web forum *Children-404*, hosted on the social network *Vkontakte*,<sup>1</sup> where LGBT youth post stories about themselves anonymously. Kurov and Loparev’s film follows Russian gay teen Pasha and the founder of the site Elena Klimova, interwoven with the audio of 45 interviews with forum participants, overlaid with text and images.

At face value, it would be hard to contend that a documentary film such as *Children-404* accomplishes much in regards to LGBT activism or visibility; both the forum and the film are intended to function as a testament simply to “existence,” that “Мы существуем.”<sup>2</sup> However, I argue that *Children-404* reframes the narrative of the “Iron Closet”<sup>3</sup> and reclaims agency for those located within its confines. The film, beyond its stated claims of simply asserting the existence of LGBT youth, subverts the Russian-state media propagandizing narrative, reframing the closet and reevaluating public discourses surrounding queer identity.

In order to situate *Children-404* in a contemporary discourse of queerness in Russia, I begin with a discussion of Soviet queerness, tracing it to modern-day developments—specifically against the backdrop of the 2013 “gay propaganda law.” I contextualize these historical developments with their relationship to the West. I then propose an agency-based framework to consider the film as a whole, which situates and helps to illustrate my analysis of three key moments from the documentary. I then close-read these selected instances, analyzing them in tandem with theoretical approaches from Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Roman Utkin, to understand representations of subjecthood, closetedness and spectacle, and vulnerability. I conclude by situating *Children-404* in a contemporary context, illustrating how the film functions as a mode of resistance, reframing popular discourse amid new legal developments in the Russian Federation.

### Queerness and Queer Legislation: Soviet and post-Soviet Russia

Legislation surrounding queerness, sodomy, and LGBT issues has been tumultuous throughout Soviet and Russian history. As a means of disciplining the military, Peter the Great passed the first ban on sodomy in the Russian Empire.<sup>4</sup> This 1716 ban only applied to men in the army and the navy—it was not until 1835 that homosexuality was criminalized among civilians.

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<sup>1</sup> ВКонтакте (*Vkontakte*) is a Russia social network, in some respects akin to Facebook. The “404” in “Children-404” draws from the Internet landing page “Error 404 – Page Not Found.”

<sup>2</sup> Translation: *We exist.*

<sup>3</sup> The term “Iron Closet” was first termed by David Tuller in his 1996 book *Cracks in the Iron Closet: Travels in Gay and Lesbian Russia.*

<sup>4</sup> Emil Persson, “Banning ‘Homosexual Propaganda’: Belonging and Visibility in Contemporary Russian Media,” *Sexuality & Culture* 19, no. 2 (June 2015): 257, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-014-9254-1>.

Yet despite the laws being in place, accounts of their application are rare. As a result, LGBT communities formed and thrived in urban centers, including in Moscow and in St. Petersburg.<sup>5</sup>

The laws of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century were abolished in 1917 as the Bolsheviks came to power, in effect legalizing homosexual relations. In 1934, however, Stalin passed a new law banning sex between men that carried a punishment of up to five years in the Gulag.<sup>6</sup> As opposed to its initial application in regards to military discipline, the law's reintroduction was in its Soviet form intended to quash any political upheaval: covert same-sex relations were cast as potential sites of Western espionage. The regime transformed homosexual relations and acts into a form of political criminality, a "bourgeois crime against the workers' paradise."<sup>7</sup> The sodomy law was only repealed in 1993, two years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, to allow Russia to enter into the Council of Europe.<sup>8</sup>

Western comparison often mediates the Russian state's relationship to queerness. That is, Russia has passed both progressive and repressive legislation, which serves to underscore Russia's fraught relationship to the West, whether it be the aforementioned fear of Western espionage, or as a tool for ascension into a European space.<sup>9</sup> Following this pattern, as Russia's often hostile turn to the West coincided with attitudes of a similar variety towards sexual minorities and queerness. David Tuller, in his 1996 book *Cracks in the Iron Closet: Travels in Gay and Lesbian Russia*, encapsulates this hostility, framing it as Russia's "Iron Closet." Tuller reconceives the concept of the Iron Curtain—the figurative term used to delineate Russia's isolation from the West—and applies it to queer closetedness. Laurie Essig borrows the term in *Queer in Russia: A Story of Sex, Self, and the Other* to characterize the sexual climate of the late 80s and 90s, explaining that in 1989, in the midst of *perestroika* and leading up to the fall of the Soviet Union, the "Iron Closet" began to slowly open.<sup>10</sup> With the repeal of the 1993 sodomy law, it appeared that the Iron Closet therefore had finally been struck down.

However, despite the absence of explicit legislation, attitudes towards homosexuality since the sodomy law's repealing have remained fraught. The narrative propagated by the Putin-era Russian state considers homosexuality an existential threat to Russia as both a nation and state, and from the perspective of many Russians, non-heterosexuality is an alien concept introduced by the West to corrupt the country. The proliferation of homosexuality threatens the Russian cultural code, which is used as a means of promoting an identity uniquely distinct from a Western one.<sup>11</sup> Attempts to recriminalize homosexuality began at the local and federal level in the early 2000s; all of this legislation targeted the protection of minors.<sup>12</sup>

The language of an existential threat from the West echoes in the so-called "gay propaganda" bill passed in the Russian Duma in June 2013. The bill targets the promotion of "non-traditional sexual relationships," promoting the protection of children from "harmful

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<sup>5</sup> Sasha Raspopina, "Secret Histories: LGBTQ Life in Pre-Revolutionary Russia," *The Calvert Journal*, June 3, 2019, <https://www.calvertjournal.com/features/show/9567/being-lgbtq-secret-histories-lgbtq-life-in-pre-revolutionary-russia>.

<sup>6</sup> David Tuller, *Cracks in the Iron Closet: Travels in Gay and Lesbian Russia* (The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Tuller, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Persson, "Banning 'Homosexual Propaganda,'" 257.

<sup>9</sup> Persson, 257.

<sup>10</sup> Laurie Essig, "Preface," in *Queer in Russia: A Story of Sex, Self, and the Other* (Duke University Press, 1999), xi.

<sup>11</sup> Elizaveta Gaufman, "Sexuality Must Be Defended," in *Security Threats and Public Perception*, by Elizaveta Gaufman (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 146, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-43201-4\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-43201-4_7).

<sup>12</sup> Gaufman, 158.

material,”<sup>13</sup> concretizing the aims of previous attempts at criminalizing legislation. With the law came the reignition of Soviet “Iron Closet” terminology. The banning of gay “propaganda,” a term which intentionally leaves the latter’s definition vague, has shoved many Russian LGBT individuals back into an already bleak, dark closet.<sup>14</sup> The emphasis on the danger of and protection from “propaganda” indicates efforts to prevent a specific type of harmful information—Western—from reaching Russian popular discourse.<sup>15</sup> The 2013 law has resultingly created an intensely stigmatizing environment, wherein LGBT rights are understood to threaten the future of Russian youth and thus the Russian state, to impose minority norms on the majority,<sup>16</sup> and to conceive queerness as “Trojan horses” sent out by the West.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Framing Agency in *Children-404***

Before analyzing three scenes key to understanding the ways in which *Children-404* negotiates contemporary Russian politics, legislation, and queerness, it is necessary to contextualize the film’s development in conversation with a politics of queer vulnerability. *Children-404* follows three narrative threads: Pasha, a participant in the Children-404 *Vkontakte* forum; Elena Klimova, the founder of Children-404; and a series of audio interviews with anonymous participants of the forum. The film alternates between these threads, centering the narratives of Pasha and Klimova, filmed by the directors. The directors throughout the documentary interweave their audio interviews of forum participants with visual material filmed and provided by the interviewees themselves, often shot in their bedrooms.

Kurov and Loparev contend that having their subjects interview and film in their bedrooms functions as a form of “confession” for their subjects: this is the only private space (aside from the eponymous, anonymized online forum) where they can speak freely about their lives, needs, hopes, desires, and aspirations.<sup>18</sup> This puts the directors’ subjects in a vulnerable, precarious positionality. However, in Roman Utkin’s conception, queer vulnerability can “constitute a mode of resistance.”<sup>19</sup> Borrowing Judith Butler’s terming of vulnerability as a means of being “exposed and agentic at the same time,” Utkin argues that queer identity in Russia—a marker of difference—is also a site of agency.<sup>20</sup> In this framework, I contend that *Children-404* navigates between discourses of difference and agency, which will serve as a useful lens for understanding the following three scenes.

### **Asserting Subjecthood**

A primary narrative component of *Children-404* is the use of interview recordings overlaid with images and footage of computer screens, bedrooms, windows, or daily life. The

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<sup>13</sup> Clinton Glenn, “Мы Не Ошибка (We Are Not an Error): Documentary Film and LGBT Activism Against the Russian Anti-‘Gay Propaganda’ Campaign,” in *LGBTQ+ Activism in Central and Eastern Europe: Resistance, Representation and Identity*, ed. Radzhana Buyantueva and Maryna Shevtsova (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 80, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20401-3\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20401-3_4).

<sup>14</sup> Jeff Sharlet, “Inside the Iron Closet: What It’s Like to Be Gay in Putin’s Russia,” *GQ*, February 4, 2014, <https://www.gq.com/story/being-gay-in-russia>.

<sup>15</sup> Gaufman, “Sexuality Must Be Defended,” 160.

<sup>16</sup> Persson, “Banning ‘Homosexual Propaganda,’” 270.

<sup>17</sup> Persson, 271.

<sup>18</sup> *Q&A With Directors and Film Protagonist - CHILDREN 404*, 2015, <https://vimeo.com/131239963>.

<sup>19</sup> Roman Utkin, “Queer Vulnerability and Russian Poetry after the ‘Gay Propaganda’ Law,” *The Russian Review* 80, no. 1 (2021): 81, <https://doi.org/10.1111/russ.12299>.

<sup>20</sup> Utkin, 82.

directors conducted 45 interviews over the internet and had initially planned to then interview their subjects in-person, but instead decided to use the recordings from their electronic interviews. Other footage is from the interviewees themselves: Kurov and Loparev asked them to film space, their surroundings, school, their bedrooms, or even a window on their phones.<sup>21</sup> One scene early in the documentary is situated inside a makeup store; the shaky, unfocused footage appears as though it were shot at eye-level. A detached, faceless female voice details her process of coming to terms with her sexuality: “Мне с детства мальчики никогда не нравились. [Since childhood I have never liked boys].”<sup>22</sup> While it is unclear in this particular moment whether the voice speaking is the same as the person filming this footage, this scene allows the un-visualized voice to take up space. Despite our lack of visual information for the speaker, we gain access to this female voice, positioning it in a physical space. The narration is normalized through a scene of banality, of everyday life activities: perusing a makeup store, discussing personal woes and experiences.

In the context of the gay propaganda law, Judith Butler’s concept of “hegemonic grammars” becomes a useful tool for understanding the make-up store scene. Butler argues that organs of power control appearance, regulating what and how something is seen and heard in public space, allowing “dominant actors [to orchestrate] what is counted as reality and who are counted as subjects.”<sup>23</sup> In the Russian-state context, the Duma, through its passage of the gay propaganda law, has attempted to exercise a hegemonic grammar of legitimacy: the government sets the bar for legitimate subjecthood and reality.<sup>24</sup> In other words, restricting the proliferation of so-called “gay propaganda” delegitimizes gay subjecthood, infringing on visibility. However, my reading of this scene in *Children-404* rejects this hegemonic narrative. Pairing a personal interview recording—which discusses overtly homosexual feelings deemed harmful by the Russian state—with something as banal as shopping in a store seeks to re-legitimize and make visible that which has been made invisible. In such a way, despite the fact that the speakers’ voices are detached and faceless, their voices gain agency: the pairing of what we see on screen and what we hear reconfigures the hegemonic grammar of the state, allowing the interviewee in this scene (and the other interviewees’ voices throughout the film) to assert subjecthood.

### Conceptualizing and Rejecting the Iron Closet

For the majority of *Children-404*, the directors of the film are not visible—we are aware of their presence, as both Pasha and Klimova engage with them and walk alongside them, although they remain behind the camera. However, in one scene, one of the directors is visible, albeit briefly, cast against a reflective surface on a hallway wall. Immediately preceding this moment, Pasha is in the kitchen at his friend’s apartment, discussing plans for his future outside of Russia.<sup>25</sup> Although a seemingly fleeting moment, I read this scene as a means of complicating narratives of the closet in a Russian context. To do so, I borrow two concepts from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s seminal work *Epistemology of the Closet*: “closetedness” and “spectacle.” Sedgwick theorizes “closetedness” as a “performance” in relation to “the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it.”<sup>26</sup> The “spectacle” of the closet is understood as a “a presiding

<sup>21</sup> *Q&A With Directors and Film Protagonist - CHILDREN 404*.

<sup>22</sup> *Children-404* (Cinema Politica, 2014).

<sup>23</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London; New York: Verso, 2004), xviii-xx.

<sup>24</sup> Butler, 13.

<sup>25</sup> *Children-404*.

<sup>26</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 3.

guarantor of rhetorical community, of authority—someone else’s authority—over world-making discursive terrain.”<sup>27</sup>

In this sense, the concept of the “closet” is relevant to the extent that it relates to that which is outside of it. The “spectacle” is conceived thus as the dynamic between director and subject, put on visual display in this scene. As previously described, the dominant discourse following the passage of the 2013 gay propaganda law was that of the return of the Iron Closet; this particular moment subverts that notion. The “spectacle” of the closet is established through the director’s visible presence in this scene—we are reminded that Pasha’s ability to communicate with us, the viewer, is mediated through the director’s control, the “guarantor” of authority. However, what is vital is the fact that Pasha himself is uncloseted—his sexuality is not covert, nor does he seek to hide it. Sedgwick’s notion hinges on the idea that the surrounding (dominating) discourse dictates and “constitutes” ostensibly queer identity—but Pasha is himself constituting his identity. The Iron Closet argument is logical insofar as it depends on the surrounding discourse functioning as a defining force for queer identity in Russia. Pasha’s presence in this scene, visually alongside the director, makes the “spectacle” of an open-closet, allowing for this discourse to overtake the dominating, Russian-state discourse.

### Subverting Public Discourses

As we follow Pasha’s journey throughout the film, in addition to the faceless interviewees’ voices, Elena Klimova’s narrative runs parallel. At the time of the film’s production, Klimova, who founded the Children-404 online forum to support queer youth, was facing charges brought against her by the state under the 2013 propaganda law. In a scene midway through the documentary, Klimova walks along a sidewalk: the camera focuses on a rainbow pride ribbon tied to her backpack. She stumbles across a rainbow painted across the storefront of a children’s toy store, jokingly commenting on the irony of its inclusion with its gay connotations, especially in the midst of the passage of the 2013 law. The scene then cuts quickly, returning to the storefront sans Klimova. The presumed owner of the toy store stands beside the rainbow painting, shooing away pigeons who have gathered at its doors, saying “My sweeties! Love you but fly away!”<sup>28</sup> Putting these two moments in dialogue with the history of queer legislation in Russia provides for fruitful discussion over the ways in which *Children-404* seeks to subvert the propagandizing and state narrative regarding queer identity.

A queer semiotics comes into play in these instances: the rainbow as a symbol of queerness becomes a public site of queer identity. Laurie Essig explains that Russian legislation prohibiting queer desires functioned for a large part of history as “the *only site* of public queerness.”<sup>29</sup> The gay propaganda law seeks to erase public displays of queer identity, removing it from public discourse—thus positing itself again as the singular site of public queerness. However, Klimova’s rainbow ribbon and the juxtaposition of Klimova and the shop owner and the painted rainbow refute this notion, perhaps even subverting it.

Building on Utkin’s concept of queer vulnerability, the symbol of the rainbow is injected into public discourse—an unmistakable representation of queer identity. Klimova makes herself vulnerable, bearing a clearly queer-associated ribbon on her backpack—but the juxtaposition of her rainbow symbol and the rainbow’s symbology in the context of a children’s toy store conflates the dominating discourse’s promoted narrative. Utkin’s analysis of vulnerability

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<sup>27</sup> Sedgwick, 230.

<sup>28</sup> *Children-404*.

<sup>29</sup> Essig, “Preface,” xviii.

primarily centers the Russian queer poet, rendering them a merging of the lyrical and the political, a combination of the public/state and oppression/erasure.<sup>30</sup> Applying Utkin's framework here, Klimova in this scene functions as a stand-in for Utkin's queer poet. She, much like that of a poet, becomes a figure that "searches for a way to rethink what has come to be considered normal in Russia by means of subverting the very norms of representation."<sup>31</sup>

A radical symbol of the propagandizing, threatening queer community is reproduced on a wall in the very locale of a community from which it is meant to be protected: a space for children. The framing of these scenes in juxtaposition with one another also allows for Klimova—and more broadly, the queer subject—to become a participant in the dominant discourse, rather than being resigned to confined observer.<sup>32</sup> To the viewer, the rainbow on the toy shop's exterior wall is mediated through the previous scene's connotations of queer identity; the quick cut to the shop-owner standing alongside the rainbow injects queerness into the everyday, gaining access to and participating in public discourse.

## Conclusion

*Children-404* as a film serves as a visual reframing method, a subversive strategy that takes queer vulnerability and transforms it into a site of agency and resistance. Presenting narratives of queer subjecthood and identity subverts the propagandizing, threatening notion promoted by the Russian state—and pairing them with the everyday and banal serves to normalize the queer identity in a quotidian, Russian context. Despite the prevalence of the concept of the Iron Closet's return, Kurov and Loparev's film rejects this classification. They posit an alternative view of Russian closetedness, working against state efforts to reduce the visibility of queer individuals. *Children-404* permits the queer subject to participate in a minimizing, dominating discourse, both asserting and making visible existence.

In discussing the relevance of *Children-404*'s premiere both in and outside of Russia, deputy chief editor Mikhail Ratgauz of Colta.ru, the website that hosted the online screening of *Children-404*, explained how many of his colleagues, when asked to attend the film's premiere, replied that it was outside of the scope of their interests—it was "not [their] theme." He elucidates:

Все были не против, но несколько раз звучала реплика: «Это не наша тема». То есть мы всей душой «за», но тема не наша. Но речь ведь в этом фильме идет о сопротивлении. И областей для этого сопротивления у нас сейчас много. Опять-таки в фильме мы видим два выхода, которые сейчас активно обсуждаются. Один — это бегство, эмиграция. Второй — это сопротивление здесь, внутри страны.

[They were all not against, but many times they replied: "It is not our topic." That is, we are wholeheartedly "for," but the issue is not ours. But this movie is all about resistance. And we now have many realms for this resistance. Again, in this film we see two exits which are now actively being discussed. One is flight, emigration. The second is resistance here, within the country.]<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Utkin, "Queer Vulnerability and Russian Poetry after the 'Gay Propaganda' Law," 90.

<sup>31</sup> Utkin, 90.

<sup>32</sup> Utkin, 89.

<sup>33</sup> "«Дети 404». Фильм Аскольда Курова и Павла Лопарева," Colta.ru, April 29, 2014, <https://www.colta.ru/articles/society/3055-deti-404-film-askolda-kurova-i-pavla-lopareva..>

The second “exit,” that of “resistance here, within the country,” is key in relation to the film. The film not only presents modes of resistance, but is in itself a means of resistance, through the ways it depicts and claims agency for its subjects. This is especially vital in the context of recent events: in late November 2022, the Russian Duma unanimously supported new legislation that expands upon the 2013 gay propaganda bill. The proposed legislation prohibits the dissemination of positive and neutral information about LGBT people and the display of non-heterosexual orientations. Moving beyond the scope of purporting to protect children from harmful information, the new ban is a blanket one, covering all public discourse.<sup>34</sup> *Children-404* in this context becomes an even more powerful means to act as a tool of resistance: continuing to subvert and reframe dominant narratives; proclaiming visibility and agency; and injecting LGBT voices into the everyday, public sphere—a space that was already hostile to LGBT individuals, and as a result of recent events, has only become more so.

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<sup>34</sup> “Russia: Expanded ‘Gay Propaganda’ Ban Progresses Toward Law,” *Human Rights Watch* (blog), November 25, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/25/russia-expanded-gay-propaganda-ban-progresses-toward-law>.

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## SECTION 3

# **Socialist Utopias , Dystopias, and Realities**



## Discovering Socialist Realism Along the Volga

Zain Adamo, University of Pittsburgh

The output of a culture is directly and distinctly related to the policies of the society it inhabits, a phenomenon exhibited time and time again but readily apparent in 1930's Soviet society. This era was a global period of intense cultural restructuring as people adapted to a definitively new and changing world. Cinema, ever popular and never stagnant, would be forced to evolve in response. The latest disruptions came from the advent of sound, demanding the creation of new formulas and new films to feed audiences no longer satisfied by silence and intertitles. These developments within the world of Soviet cinema were heavily tied to the Stalinist policies that had recently had pulled the industry through its own evolution. The "formalist" filmmakers of old whose experimentation had brought a unique flavor to early Soviet cinema had been rejected, their visions condemned. The centralization of cinema under Soyuzkino in 1930 headed by Boris Shumyatsky had created a new and singular goal- "cinema for the millions" (Kenez, 95).

Shumyatsky's "cinema for the millions" was the outgrowth of a greater trend gripping Soviet art at the time, referred to as "socialist realism". When married with social turmoil and the invention of sound, it birthed a new genre of Soviet film- the musical comedy. Soviet musical comedies were American-inspired, riotous, grandly choreographed tales with simple delights and catchy tunes. Grigori Aleksandrov was arguably the greatest, if not most prolific, filmmaker within this genre, and his film *Volga-Volga* (1938) represents the technical and ideological pinnacle of his work. Immortalized as Joseph Stalin's favorite film, it clearly and effectively telegraphs the tenets of Socialist Realism (Turovskaya, 75). As a result, *Volga-Volga* is dismissed as fluff- a joke-riddled propaganda piece meant to check off its ideological boxes. This narrow view ignores the fundamental question contained within about the tumultuous state of Soviet art at the time. The film's journey is analogous to the exploration of what art would define Soviet society, a search that sought to blend the reputable and populist. Despite its straightforward utopian facade, *Volga-Volga* reveals deeper cultural concerns about the search for a national art form during the era of socialist realism.

The introduction of socialist realism into film severely disrupted the budding status quo and elevated a new kind of film and filmmaker. Socialist realism was formally established at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, a mere four years prior to the release of *Volga-Volga* (Kenez, 143). It was to become the official blueprint of Soviet art for the foreseeable future, being loosely defined as popular art that depicts the Soviet Union in an idealized, but theoretically realistic, light. Socialist realism in film was spearheaded by Boris Shumyatsky whose single-minded pursuit of the genre spawned a serious shift within film as the experimental, psychological cinema of the "formalist" bloc became branded as elitist and politically irrelevant creations (Shumyatsky, 360, 365). Even montage, which had become the defining feature of Soviet cinema, began its slow decline. These early days of socialist realism were a treacherous time as writers and directors sought to discover what *exactly* a socialist realist film would look like. An early success was the Vasilyev Brothers's *Chapaev* (1934), a massively popular and ideologically successful film that neatly adhered to the "socialist master plot"- a term coined by historian Katerina Clark (Kenez, 144). A film that struggled to fit the mold, however, was Sergei Eisenstein's *Bezhin Meadow*- now infamous for constant production interference and condemnation from Shumyatsky and Stalin themselves (Kenez, 136). Yet Eisenstein's frequent collaborator, Grigori Aleksandrov, found himself successfully navigating

this artistic minefield to emerge with his wildly popular musical comedies. They were an ideal fit for the time- easily comprehensible, incredibly entertaining, and ideologically profitable. The basic storylines could be imbued with any sort of propaganda then made digestible with comedic song and dance. Aleksandrov's fascination with musical comedies came from an earlier trip to America, in which the films of Busby Berkely made a particularly significant impression (Iordanova, "Lyubov Orlova: Stalinism's Shining Star"). At home, Shumyatsky's call for cinema entertaining to the masses would further encourage the development of this genre. Aleksandrov's greatest achievement came from his partnership with his wife Lyubov Orlova, the star of many of his films. Their collaborations became favorites of Stalin, who said of Aleksandrov's *Jolly Fellows* (1934), "This picture offers an opportunity for interesting, entertaining relaxation. We felt a feeling – exactly like after a day off" (Kupfer, "Our Soviet Americanism" 219). In these early days of socialist realism when much of the old artistic world had been overturned, those like Aleksandrov who quickly managed to find "socialist realism" in their art achieved success and popularity. Aleksandrov's sense of what exactly constituted socialist realist art grew more and more acute until culminating with what would even be declared Stalin's favorite film: *Volga-Volga*. *Volga-Volga* is an allegory for Aleksandrov's effort, this search for what "socialist realism" was, and a living product of its beginnings as Soviet filmmakers sought to fulfill the form.

The story of *Volga-Volga* is simple, a tale of feuding performers from the rural village of Melkovodsk who are invited to the Moscow Olympiad under the jurisdiction of the boorish bureaucrat Byvalov. It follows the letter carrier "Strelka", leader of the peasant troupe and secret composer of the film's central song about the Volga River. Being told early on by her "formalist" composer boyfriend Alexei Trubyshkin that "you're a letter carrier, not a composer", Strelka is ashamed to admit the song is hers. The truth emerges during the film's climax, and only then is she able to successfully unite both performing factions- Trubyshkin's classically trained musicians and her peasant ensemble- who put aside their differences to provide a beautiful serenade of the mighty Volga.

The "Mother Volga" has long been a symbol of deep Russian pride, nurturing its earliest civilizations and dependably providing for agriculture and industry. It has been the subject of art of every flavor, a permanent stamp on the national consciousness and a source of pride for those inhabiting the region. Strelka herself acknowledges the river's history of immortalization through art in the opening lines of her song ("many a song has been sung 'bout the Volga/but the best one is yet to be sung"). This setting was then a deliberate choice by Aleksandrov, a location whose living history is essential to a deeper exploration of the film. The Volga is a microcosm of Russia, a physical manifestation of Soviet national pride, and thus something that unites people across cultural lines. It is the benevolence and beauty of the Soviet Union, an unstoppable, eternal force that is dependable as it is grand. In setting the film on the Volga, and centering Strelka's song around the same, Aleksandrov makes nationalism tangible. Strelka's song revolving around such a symbol shows that art under socialist realism could be used to exalt the state, and the film itself being set on the Volga shows that cinema could achieve the same effect. The result of linking art to a distinct, national symbol is a firm resolution that that is where true art resides- in examining a state's greatest assets and greatest prides. Socialist realist art could find truth in portraying Soviet society in all its glory the same way that Strelka and Aleksandrov's arts find truth in exalting the Volga.

The central conflict of the film is that of Strelka's peasant ensemble and Trubyshkin's classically trained orchestra. Both sides believe their art is the purest representation of

Melkovodsk's talent, and both sides fail to create great art until they unite their talents. This message is Aleksandrov's most simple one, the concept of merging formalism and populism to strike a successful balance, and the key to an ideologically satisfying plot. We are afforded a happy ending as all the performers of Melkovodsk get to play at the Olympiad to great success, and Strelka and Trubyshkin mend their artistic and personal differences. Aleksandrov plainly demonstrates that the only way Soviet society can move forward is by promoting innovation and collectivization and sweeping away the remnants of the old world- in the film's case, the impertinent bureaucrat Byvalov. Aleksandrov answers the question about *what* socialist realism was meant to be by declaring that it can only be built off collaboration, by blending the old and the new. Perhaps the formalist school of old was not meant to be entirely forgotten, but simply diluted through Shumyatsky's call for mass appeal. This is demonstrated through the film's story and structure, an answer that echoes on two levels. Within the film, the musician's exaltation of the Volga is made possible through collaboration alone. Through the film, Aleksandrov takes a form of simple, popular entertainment (musical-style ensemble performances as opposed to classical orchestral pieces) and blends it with a more formalist art (film) to create a balance that is undeniably socialist realist in hue.

The force that drives Aleksandrov and all other artists to undergo this process can be seen in the film steaming swiftly down the Volga- a grand ship with the name "Joseph Stalin" inscribed on its side. (Fig. 1) It is not until both groups of characters are rescued by this steamer that their reluctant collaboration begins. So Aleksandrov shows that a unifying leader like Stalin provides the impetus for the successful creation of this new art. The "Joseph Stalin" being seen along the Volga River additionally humbles and humanizes the leader, creating a perception that he is not only a pioneer of art but a servant of Russia as a whole. The ship's existence is given purpose by the Volga as Stalin's existence is given purpose by Russia. And that purpose, as Aleksandrov clearly demonstrates, is to unite feuding factions into a national, grand culture. A final note on the representation of old vs. new/past vs. present is the character of the young boy aboard the ship who eventually provides the orchestral composition for Strelka's song. He is the antithesis to Byvalov- young, innovative and a true "team player". His success over Byvalov's demonstrates that hope lies within the future generations's ability to advance socialist realism. This is directly related to another point Aleksandrov repeatedly makes on the nature and future of bureaucracy.

The self-important, shortsighted, hapless bureaucrat Byvalov is a central character to the film and the subject of much slapstick humor- directed at him rather than with him. He is not a villain per se, but nonetheless a foil to the determined musicians of Melkovodsk. His only goal is to gain a position in Moscow, but he exhibits no great talent and is rather a scheming opportunist instead. Even in the finale (which Byvalov is ominously absent from) do the characters directly address his faults, warning the audience that "opportunists" like him seek to stifle creation at every turn. (Fig. 2) This obvious condemnation that Aleksandrov presents can be interpreted in two ways at the level of socialist realism. First, he is affirming the actions of the state in declaring "cinema for the millions", showing that national sentiments must be placed above individualistic goals. Selfish schemers like Byvalov offer nothing in the way of advancing culture, while true leaders like Stalin are great innovators who push art forwards. A second interpretation, however, reveals a subtle attack on Shumyatsky. Shumyatsky, the head of cinema who knew nothing of film and Byvalov, the head of balalaika productions who knows nothing of music are the figures responsible for the suppression of innovation and true art. Aleksandrov's contemporaries like Eisenstein who suffered under Shumyatsky's heel are those artists held back

by Byvalov's opportunism. Only by sweeping away such bureaucrats could art return to true innovation, experimentation like Eisenstein's and Dziga Vertov's that made Soviet film unique. However, an examination of Aleksandrov's good standing with the Party reveals that this interpretation is very likely not his intent. It remains a relevant parallel that can and should be drawn nonetheless.

Through Byvalov, Aleksandrov again provides an answer to socialist realism and the battle for art. Byvalov's villainy comes not from outright opposition nor violent confrontation but through apathetic indifference and single-minded opportunism. Aleksandrov argues that art's greatest opponents are politicians and bureaucrats, not armies and warlords. A condemnation of Byvalov- the bureaucrat- shows that to Aleksandrov, the struggle for socialist realist art is a quiet struggle. Establishing new art is not like establishing a new government- there is no splendid revolution or heroic October 25th to mark the date- but rather a constant, incremental push involving deference and experimentation. His musical comedies were in fact an experiment, not in the sense of montage and the *Kino-Eyes*, but an adaptation of a foreign genre that had to be applicable to a new art form. The gamble ultimately paid off and, once vetted by the censors, Aleksandrov was able to craft a film like *Volga-Volga* that was ideologically successful in the wake of the establishment of Socialist Realism. A final note on the personification of Byvalov is that his existence in the film may be a significantly more sinister interpretation of this new age of Soviet art. The clear condemnation of bureaucracy and the glorification of national unity (but more specifically, Russia itself- the Volga) is a reminder of the direction in which the state was headed. The perception under Stalin's dictatorship and growing national chauvinism was that pencil-pushing bureaucrats would only complicate the intent of a ruler who allegedly had the nation's best interest at heart. Byvalov's condemnation is an attack on the bourgeoisie systems implemented by the old Bolsheviks and a promotion of a strong, single party leadership like Stalin's (Fitzpatrick, 142). Socialist realism could be seen as taking this path as well- art no longer being the product of debate and collaboration among creative bodies but now the product of a sole individual whose word was law.

A contradiction to the analysis offered in this paper is that *Volga-Volga* is too simple to offer interpretation beyond what is presented. Such a "safe" film in the wake of the establishment of socialist realism may come across as harmless. But its inherent form creates a film with multiple layers that can and must be analyzed. The Soviet musical comedy is an adaptation of a Western genre, not a discovery unique to Soviet history like Soviet montage, but rather a direct transference of a style that had become popular abroad. This style could not remain appropriate as a foreign product and thus had to warp the inherent cultural context to fit socialist ideology. A failed adaptation of this kind would leave the final product as a flimsy facade, neither American nor Soviet, just a genre stuck in limbo. But Aleksandrov succeeds in creating a successfully Soviet genre by providing this relevant context, a cultural backdrop for the facade to rest upon that in *Volga-Volga* is primarily the culturally rich Volga river. Additional plot details of bureaucracy, rural life, and collectivization shore up the gaps. Thus, Soviet musical comedy becomes a genre all its own, a successful adaptation of the musical comedies of the West. American ideology is successfully eschewed through its replacement with Soviet culture, and this swap ensures an interpretable layer of context beneath the song and dance (Kupfer, *Volga-Volga*: "The Story of a Song" 537).

*Volga-Volga* is the pinnacle of Grigori Aleksandrov's work, and a quintessential Soviet socialist realist masterpiece. Entertaining, witty, and simply fun to look at, it's no wonder the film has enjoyed such long-standing popularity- and endured criticism regarding its intellectual

merit. *Volga-Volga* was born in a time of artistic crisis. The search for what defined socialist realism is explored through the film, through metaphorical representation of the Soviet state and the theorized effects of blending old art with new. Aleksandrov successfully adapts a popular Western genre and envelops it in a Soviet context that provides a significant base for analysis. His ability to discover “socialist realism” within his work led to great success in comparison with his contemporaries and allowed him to continue crafting films with depth and nuance under a veneer of propaganda. As a result, *Volga-Volga* retains its well-deserved spot in Soviet film history long after its release.

## Illustrations



Figure 1. The ship “Joseph Stalin”



Figure 2. The cast (minus Igor Ilyinsky as comrade Byvalov) warns us of the dangers of bureaucracy

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## **Soviet Bloc Dystopia: Cross-cultural Comparative Analysis**

*Karim Abouelenein, University of Pittsburgh*

A world with no poverty, no war, and no famine is something human beings often aspire to create — a utopia in which everyone is fulfilled and at peace. This dream has long been just that: a dream. Even the word itself, utopia, reflects this, deriving its meaning from the Greek words *ou* and *topos*, which directly translate to “no-place”. Though it has been known that utopias can never truly exist, modern advancements in technology and political structures have led to increased hope for this perfect world. That being said, humanity has consistently proven that such advancements may also result in misery, whether as a consequence of exploitative governments or corrupt political leaders. This duality of hope and fear is what gave rise to a new term, one coined by English philosopher John Stuart Mill in 1868: dystopia. This sort of “utopia-gone-wrong” structure can be found at the core of some of the most widely consumed novels and films since the dawn of the 20th century, whether that be George Orwell’s popular novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or the recent film series *The Hunger Games*, which has made collectively over three billion dollars at the box office. Since its conception, dystopian media has undoubtedly taken the world by storm, becoming consumable in nearly all languages, leading many to assume that the dystopian genre is a universal one, despite how Eastern and Western societies’ depictions of dystopias have notable variations in theme due to the social norms and pressures of each respective region.

As previously mentioned, the term “dystopia” came about as a result of the duality between hope and fear. However, it is important to mention that fear and hope are interconnected, dystopia and utopia cannot exist without a mix of emotions. The dream of a utopia is a direct result of societal hopes of a land without fear, while the nightmare of a dystopia is a direct result of societal fears of a land without hope. As a result, the histories of both Eastern and Western societies must be briefly touched on, as this allows for a greater understanding of each respective culture and their social pressures, as well as general dystopian themes.

The duality of the themes between Eastern and Western societies is best demonstrated in the Soviet bloc of Europe in the 1980s and the United States in the early 2000s. Starting in the East, early 20th-century Russia was plagued with internal conflict as the result of decades worth of political and cultural unrest. At the time, and for the majority of its history, Russia relied on an autocratic system in which the Tsar, the Russian monarch, had total authority over the state and its people, which many individuals, primarily educated radicals, saw as exploitative. Incredibly simplified, the working class believed there was not enough social reform being done. In 1917, the Tsar was ousted, ending the centuries-long reign of the autocratic system. The next few years in Eastern Europe would see a civil war in former Russia, the reclaiming of former Russian territories that were primarily non-Russian inhabited, and the formation of the USSR. During this period in the USSR, all publications were subject to “preventative censorship” and schools were instructed to participate in atheist propaganda, as the state had not only formally separated itself from the church, but also begun a campaign to discredit it and nationalized all church property. Mock trials were held in which some priests were sentenced to terms in prison, or even outright killed. Generally, the communist regime had managed near-total suppression of noncommunist political organizations and publications. The next few decades can only be characterized by almost complete totalitarian rule. Political enemies were assassinated, the number of prisoners in concentration camps skyrocketed, and the local parties of Eastern bloc satellites and cultural leadership were eradicated. In addition, show trials named the Moscow Trials were held, in

which individuals ranging from political figures to writers were forced to confess to crimes they had never committed. Then came the Second World War. This period, though short-lived, saw a slight relaxation in political matters. A few years after the end of the war, the USSR converted to a collective leadership system after the death of Stalin. Throughout the postwar era, up until the 1980s, a crackdown on culture and media took place. Media that did not explicitly praise the Soviet system was considered unnecessary. In addition, the forced melding of Eastern bloc nations occurred to achieve a unification of the “Soviet people.” It is clear to see that throughout the 20th century, the Eastern bloc was rife with social fears of censorship, propaganda, and authoritarian rule, all of which were reflected in Eastern media.

Examples of societal fears in Eastern bloc media appear in many films and novels, but it is important to remember that media that did not explicitly praise the Soviet system was done away with. Those who opposed the Soviet regime needed to be creative in how they criticized the state, or else suffer the consequences. This sort of rebellious artistry can be seen in Juliusz Machulski’s 1984 film *Sexmission* [Seksmisja] and Piotr Szulkin’s 1979 film *Golem*. *Sexmission* is a science fiction comedy that centers around two men, Max and Albert. The men volunteer for the first-ever human hibernation experiment, in which the two would be hibernated for three years and then reawoken. When Max and Albert awake, however, they find that the world is not as they had left it. The food they are given to eat is synthetic and the facility they are in seems to only be run by women. Confused, the pair demand answers and Lamia, the woman appointed to oversee the men, tells them a horrifying reality. The men had not woken up three years in the future, but over fifty! While they were asleep, war broke out across the world. In an attempt to end the conflict, an “M-Bomb” was created, a biological weapon meant to paralyze male genes. Due to an oversight, however, it actually destroyed all male genes, eradicating men as a whole, and left the entire surface of the Earth coated in radiation. In addition, it appears to the men that the compound of women has discovered the ability to reproduce on their own. Furthermore, the community had completely rewritten history to erase the existence of men as anything more than devils. Throughout *Sexmission*, the viewer watches as the two male protagonists attempt to escape the totalitarian compound they find themselves placed into, while one of the women toils to understand life with men and what it was like less than a century ago. In a very different realm, *Golem* is a post-apocalyptic drama depicting life after a nuclear war. The title itself, *Golem*, reflects the Jewish folktale of *The Golem*, a creature created out of clay whose sole purpose is to defend the Jewish people from their enemies, coming to life when a magical piece of paper is inserted into its mouth. In *Golem*, the viewer discovers a society secretly run by scientists conducting medical experiments on the populace in an attempt to artificially further humanity, attempting to create new artificial humans they coin the “New Adam.” The story centers around Pernat, an escaped artificial lifeform created from a possible convict. Pernat, with no memories of his previous life, returns to his old apartment and strives to live a normal human life. Throughout *Golem*, Pernat is constantly controlled and tested by the secret totalitarian government of scientists until he eventually attempts to rebel.

Again, it is important to consider the context and period in which both of these films were created. Many individuals at first glance may assume that the film is a critique of feminism, as it depicts a gruesome world run in totalitarian fashion solely by women. While this may be what the film appears to be on the surface, it is imperative to ask “What do the women represent?” Looking a layer deeper, *Sexmission* is a political critique of an authoritarian government and how that same government mistreats its people. The women themselves

represent a government system that is foreign to the understanding of the men. Szulkin employs this sort of subversive blame game to critique the Soviet system while bypassing media



*Figure 1: Screenshot from Sexmission [Seksmisja] (Dir: Juliusz Machulski, 1983)*

screening. This authoritarian critique is reflective of the fears and societal pressures that existed during its time. A similar example of authoritarian rule being painted in a negative light can be seen in *Golem*'s scientists and Pernat's birth as the "New Adam." Poland during the postwar era was engulfed into the Eastern bloc and the Communist Party was superimposed and forcefully integrated into the political system of the new satellite nation. Poland already had its own unique, individual culture, but was required to relinquish it so the Soviet Union could unify the "Soviet people." Pernat slowly devolving, breaking under the pressures the scientists expose him to, is analogous to Poland and the Polish becoming unable to cope with the weight of the graphed Soviet system. This is almost literally said by the scientists when they describe how a society of Pernat's would "be endangered due to excessive individualism" and "would crumble." The scientists even go as far as to say that if they continue their experiment, "awareness will rise and he'll rebel." *Golem* is not solely a film that tells the disturbing creation of a new life, but also a film that expresses the emotions of a culture suppressed under authoritarian rule. Akin to this, censorship is another prominent feature of Eastern bloc dystopia, though often more noticeable. Criticism of censorship is liberally littered throughout both *Sexmission* and *Golem*, though many of the more blatant examples can be seen in the analogies of the concealment of an ordinary potato and the forced resignation and signing of man's crimes in *Sexmission*. Beginning with the potato, there is a full-length scene in which Lamia visits "the oldest of the old" within the underground compound in an attempt to discover the true purpose of men in pre-M-Bomb society. Lamia is taken to a housing complex of what visually resemble prison cells and

discovers an old woman secretly growing a potato, which was considered a contraband good within the compound. This concealment mirrors that of *samizdat*, or self-published literature. As mentioned before, media within the Soviet Union was meant to serve a purpose: to push the Soviet system. This meant that all media had to be reviewed and approved before being published. Those who did not get their works approved and secretly wrote or circulated their writings, if discovered, were often sent to labor camps as their works could have possibly critiqued the Soviet government. The allusion to samizdat with the old woman's potato is clear to see. In a second scene, the two men are confined to a small room after they attempt to escape. A group of armed women arrive and give the men an ultimatum: read a prepared apology letter to a judiciary counsel or suffer the consequences. This pre-prepared letter details the crimes man has done to humanity while also denouncing their birth as men. A parallel of this can be seen in the Moscow Trials held by Joseph Stalin in which members of opposing political parties were tried and found guilty of crimes they had not committed. The Moscow Trials were entirely for show and meant to publicly humiliate enemies of the state. The men in *Sexmission* were essentially subjected to the same treatment as that of the Moscow Trials, demonstrated through the pre-written apology they were instructed to give to the council. In addition to censorship, however, this is also clearly propaganda. While there is much propaganda in both films, like how children in schools are taught to hate men as "the enemy" in *Sexmission* or how citizens are told that artificial life in society is "pure superstition" at the beginning of *Golem*, the correlation between propaganda and the social climate under the Soviet Union is rather straightforward.



Figure 2: Screenshot from *Golem* (Dir: Piotr Szulkin, 1979)

Propaganda existed in mass within the Soviet bloc as a means to forcibly push the Soviet agenda, regardless of how the Soviet people felt about the policies being enacted. Ultimately, due to the political and social climate within the Eastern bloc, Eastern dystopian films center themselves around themes of authoritarian rule, censorship, and propaganda. Western society, however, established significantly different themes in their versions of dystopia.

Moving from the mid-20th century into the 21st century, the West is shown to have a very different past compared to its Eastern counterpart. Consumerism can trace its roots back to the United States in the 1920s, though it largely erupted in the 1950s, a few years following the Second World War. This sudden eruption is attributed to many factors, but most importantly, the demand for goods post-Great Depression in the United States and postwar industrial enterprise.

The 1950s and '60s were distinguished by tensions between the United States and the USSR in both the Korean War and Cold War. Throughout this period, the U.S. also experienced a large increase in population growth, and as the population of the United States increased, so did its consumerist culture. Between the 1950s and the 1990s, consumption per capita doubled. At the same time, technology was advancing at an unprecedented rate. In 1969, the United States successfully landed a man on the moon, and by the 1980s, computers had become common in many households. While these technologies were life-changing, societal perception, notably about nuclear technologies, consistently contained criticism. It can be understood that the uncertainties about technology, increased consumerism, and fears of corporatocracy occupied the West as the 21st century was ushered in. These features can be fully visualized within America's Hollywood dystopian films *Idiocracy* by Mike Judge and *Equilibrium* by Kurt Wimmer.

*Idiocracy* is a satirical science fiction comedy that follows the journey of an extraordinarily average military man, Joe, and a prostitute, Rita. They had been selected to participate in a military hibernation experiment where they will be awoken after a full year. After the project overseer is arrested on charges of operating a prostitution ring, the project is long forgotten. Five hundred years later, Joe awakens to find himself stranded in a trash-ridden corporatocracy surrounded by complete idiots. *Equilibrium*, in contrast to the comedic nature of *Idiocracy*, is a science fiction action drama where the world suffers a Third World War. Society then decides that the world could not survive a Fourth World War and attempts to stamp out the source of war as a whole: human emotion. In a totalitarian society run by a mysterious man known as "Father," military men called "Clerks" find and burn objects from the old world in an attempt to destroy anything that makes humans feel. John Preston, a high-ranking Clerk who is tasked with the takedown of an underground society of "Sense-Offenders," or individuals that resist Father, begins to feel emotions after the death of his wife.

As mentioned earlier, the West has shown a consistent amount of criticism towards technology, especially that of nuclear technology. This is demonstrated within the opening few minutes of *Equilibrium*, in which the viewer discovers that a third World War has erupted, killing major populations throughout the world. This, in the most literal sense, shows the Western fear of technology's ability to kill. Similarly, it can be seen that fears of technology do not end with the ability to directly incite violence, but also in the ability to enable it. Looking again at *Equilibrium*, one can see that technology is used to aid in the authoritarian rule of the "Father." This can be seen in the use of monitors and holograms as a means to spread propaganda and surveil the public, but also through the use of emotion suppression medication. The autocratic totalitarian government led by Father uses daily serum injections in order to suppress the negative emotions felt by the populace, but also as a means to suppress disobedience. By directly monitoring the emotions of the whole nation, Father is able to obtain



Figure 3: Screenshot from *Equilibrium* (Dir: Kurt Wimmer, 2002)

near-absolute control of his subjects, essentially turning them into robots – a technological nightmare. Similarly, a related technological dystopia can be seen in *Idiocracy*. Throughout the film, one can see how even though society in the year 2505 is incredibly unintelligent, they are very technologically advanced. This advancement is a direct result of corporatocratic desires. In the vast majority of the cases seen throughout *Idiocracy*, the sole use of technology is to market goods and services easier, faster, and more frequently to individuals. Even everyday appliances, such as a water fountain, have advanced to where they dispense only branded sports drinks. This use of technology to enslave consumers leads directly to corporatocracy and consumerism: two social fears that go hand in hand. In the year 2505, corporations run society. Individuals cannot so much as breathe without a company attempting to sell them something. This can be seen as a direct reflection of Western societal fears of increased marketing ability in the wake of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In a similar vein, the inhabitants of *Idiocracy*'s society have a constant need to buy, which alludes to the Western fear of consumerism as consumption per capita had consistently been on the rise throughout the mid to late 20th century. Once more, it is important to note how technological advancement and the fears of both consumerism and corporatocracy are all interconnected. Consumerism, in extremes, is a direct cause of corporatocracy as corporations prey on people to purchase. The rise of technology, however, only further accelerates these two processes by giving consumers easier access to goods and allowing corporations to market and target their audiences more efficiently. In essence, due to the political and social climate within the West, Western dystopian films center themselves around themes of technological innovation, consumerism, and corporatocracy.

While Eastern bloc and Western societal dystopian depictions are thematically different, as previously discussed, it can be noticed that after a certain time period, Western dystopian films tend to adopt similar conceptual elements to that of the Eastern bloc. This period, of course, is the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the decade following. Stylistically, many aspects of



American dystopian films, even films in general, after the fall of the Soviet Union were directly influenced by the major films in the East. Major directors such as Terrence Malick have publicly admitted to getting much of their inspiration from Soviet dystopian films such as Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. Occasionally, Josh Nadeau, a prominent writer for *The Calvert Journal*, details numerous examples of ways that various newer American films were heavily influenced by older Soviet ones, whether by plot, visualization, or storytelling. More specific examples of this are presented in *Hello I'm Your Aunt!* [Zdravstvuyte, ya vasha tyotya!] directed by Viktor Titov, a 1974 Soviet film, and *Mrs. Doubtfire*, a 1993 American film, both describe very similar plots: a man who resolves a conflict by disguising himself as an older woman. Looking into the subject further, it can be found that Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life* contains many similar elements to Andrei Tarkovski's *The Mirror* [Zerkalo]. Some of these elements are illustrated in the nonlinear structure of both films, as well as the role that trauma plays in progressing this nonlinear storytelling. Lastly, *White Sun of the Desert* [Beloye solntse pustyni] directed by Vladimir Moty is a 1970 Soviet film in which wives find themselves in a desert fleeing from abusive husbands who use them as mere objects. If this sounds somewhat familiar, that is because it is also a quintessential plot point of the American film *Mad Max: Fury Road* directed by George Miller. Fundamentally speaking, the West's utilization and adaptation of the Eastern bloc film concepts after the fall of the Soviet Union is crucial to understanding the progression of the dystopian genre; despite their regional differences, the definition of a modern-day dystopia in the Eastern and Western worlds is far more similar in the 21st century.

In closing, it has been previously proven that due to the cultural context of the rise of the Soviet Union and formation of the Eastern bloc, societal fears of authoritarian rule, propaganda, and censorship had become the main focus of Eastern dystopian media around the 1980s. In contrast to this, the rise of technology and outburst of consumerist culture in the United States directly lead to fears of technological advancement, corporatocracy, and the rise of consumerism. These points have become the keystones of thematic elements within Western society's dystopian media. Western film studios' adaptations of Soviet-era media after the fall of the USSR emphasize that the regional differences between Eastern and Western dystopian themes in media have become more homogenized as a result of modern globalization.

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## **The Establishment, Expansion, and Undermining of the Proletariat and Communism in Czechoslovakia**

*Griffin Mekler-Culbertson, University of Pittsburgh*

Throughout nineteenth and twentieth century Europe, the Czech and Slovak lands formed the region with perhaps the greatest support for communism among its citizenry. This support was primarily the result of the advanced state of industrialization that was established in Czech and Slovak regions of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and then expounded upon in the newly formed First Czechoslovak Republic during the interwar period. Support for the Social Democratic Party gave way to the Communist Party during these years as workers interests began to align with the latter party, with increased industrialization being positively correlated with support for the Communist Party. Overwhelming support for the party after World War II came as a result of the unique role that the Communist Party played in the war and changing attitudes toward European powers that was the final factor to push the electorate toward the Communist Party. Alignment with the Soviet Union proved disastrous as Soviet intervention in the 1948 coup led to a mismanagement of the Czechoslovakian economy and destroyed the Czechoslovak ideal of a parliamentary shift toward a Communist state.

### **Economic Development and its Political Impact**

*Under the Austro-Hungarian Empire*

The Czech people lived mainly in the Bohemian Lands in the Austrian part of the Habsburg Monarchy, whereas most Slovaks lived in regions that belonged to the Hungarian part of the monarchy. Czech Progressives and Social Democrats gained prominence in the Austro-Hungarian empire after liberal revolutions swept Europe in 1848. These political parties advocated for further civil liberties, including universal male suffrage. Perhaps most notably, given the religious context of the region, these parties advocated for the separation of church and state and for anticlericalism (Garver 6). In contrast, Czech Catholic parties were much more powerful in Moravia than Bohemia, due to the more religious and rural population in Moravia (Garver 16). Regardless, anticlericalism rose in both regions with the rise of Social Democratic and middle-class parties, reflecting a stronger Czech national conscious and weaker influence of religion as the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed (Garver 17).

The transition to broader based democracy thus began faster in Bohemia than in Moravia, as by 1864, Bohemia had governing bodies at the district level overseeing local representative bodies, unlike Moravia. The boards were largely elected by upper middle-class Czechs, in line with early liberal democracies throughout Europe (Garver 16).

In terms of relative political power, Bohemia dominated the Czech landscape with 68% of Czechs living in Bohemia and 29.5% living in Moravia (Garver 11). The Bohemian population was also markedly more developed in terms of industry and capital, compared to the largely rural Moravia at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Garver 12). In 1914, there were five banks headquartered in Bohemia that were larger than the largest bank headquartered in Moravia, the Moravian Agrarian and Industrial Bank, itself having only 12.3% of the capital stock of the largest bank in Bohemia, the Zivnostenska banka. The concentration of industry and banking in Bohemia drew the upper managerial classes towards Bohemia, leading to a lack of a strong Czech upper middle class in Moravia. As a result, liberal and progressive Czech political parties were much stronger in Bohemia than Moravia. In fact, most industry in Moravia was German owned, as opposed to the Czech managerial domination in Bohemia (Garver 13).

In terms of crowns per capita, crowns being the Austro-Hungarian currency later adopted by Czechoslovakia, the annual income in Bohemia reached 761 in 1913, higher than Upper Austria at 626, and was exceeded in Austro-Hungary only by Lower Austria, which contained the city of Vienna, at 850. In contrast, Moravia was at 648 crowns per capita in 1913, significantly lower than Bohemia, but above the Austrian Empire's average of 569, indicative of significant development in the region even if it lagged behind Bohemia (Teichova 150). Despite its smaller population, the region that eventually became Czechoslovakia had steel production that was on par with Hungary's and Poland's in 1913, as overall the Czech and Slovak workers were more productive (Kaser 47).

It naturally follows that towards the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Czech and German workers had a tradition of social democratic participation, as in 1907 the Sozialdemokraten Party won the second most votes in the empire's German region and the most in its Czech region (Nohlen 209); however, the Slovak peasants in Hungary had little interaction with socialism. During this time the growth of nationalism and gradualist sentiment stymied the growth of communism, and socialist movements were largely of the evolutionary branch of thought (Skilling "The Formation" 346).

During WWI the Czech Social Democratic Party advocated for a liberated nation but after witnessing the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917, did not desire a similar revolution; rather, a parliamentary democracy with a coalition government incorporating the various ethnicities was favored over a dictatorship of the proletariat. Revolutionaries from this party were invited to the First Congress of the Communist International, but there was little representation, with Czechs and Slovaks having their main presence being formed by a proto-Czechoslovak Communist Party formed in Moscow, by Czechs living in Moscow, many of whom were prisoners of war (Skilling "The Formation" 347).

### *Political Foundations of the First Czechoslovak Republic*

The birth of the First Czechoslovak Republic on October 28, 1918 (Teichova xxi) from the ruins of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, lie in the political tradition of an historic Czech statehood, as well as political maneuvering by statesmen Tomas Masaryk and Edvard Benes. They were able to convince the Allies to include Slovakia in their new Slavic nation, and thus took territory that was historically Hungarian. This new state, led by Masaryk and Benes until 1938, was the benefactor of historical economic advancement, and principled leadership, leading to greater democratic and economic progress in the interwar years than in any of its neighbors (Berger 384-385). This stability was crucial to furthering the development of a politically powerful working class and liberal democracy in the nation.

In 1920, the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party was the strongest party, winning 25.7% of votes, more than the next two parties combined (Nohlen 478), and led the coalition government under Social Democrat Vlastimil Tusar (Skilling "The Formation" 348). Later that year, right wing elements in the party rejected left wing bids to join the Communist International, and even advocated for police seizure of left-wing property and the suppression of their voice within the party. This repression led to a general strike, motivated by a protesting left wing. Clearly, left wing politics became popular among an increasingly active working class. The strike was put down and with the threat of the left wing now seen as more prominent. The government treated the strike as a coup and suppressed this faction of the party. However, the development of a more motivated working class now was visible within the nation, and a need for an organized communist party was clear (Skilling "The Formation" 352).

### *Interwar Years: Comparative Economic Prosperity and Industrialization*

Monetary policy insulated the Czechoslovak crown from the hyperinflation seen elsewhere in Europe during the 1920s, allowing for economic and political crisis to be largely averted, allowing industrial expansion to continue throughout the 1920s (Berger 387). Thusly, prosperity in the interwar years strongly favored Czechoslovakia over its neighbors. While its economy may have grown faster due to the relative lack of development in Slovakia and Ruthenia, Austria also saw an economic slowdown in 1927, likely due to political inefficiency, leading to Austria's being outpaced by its neighbor. Austria's economy was 25% bigger than Czechoslovakia's in 1920, but the latter's 5.7% per annum GDP growth rate made up for much of this difference. Hungary however suffered a different fate. One would suspect it would incur faster growth than Czechoslovakia given that in 1920 the per capita GDP in Hungary was 88% of that in Czechoslovakia, a less industrially productive nation, but only grew 4.5% per annum, ultimately being 82% of Czechoslovakia's GDP per capita in 1929. This lesser growth can largely be attributed to political instability and a repressive continuance of the old aristocracy after the fall of communist Hungary (Berger 395). Only Poland rivaled Czechoslovakia's growth, despite its semi-authoritarian government. This growth may be explained by Poland's initial economic immaturity. Regardless, the economic expansion on a per capita basis indicates further expansion and productivity of the Czechoslovakian working class and its influence on politics.

However, Czechoslovakians still overall had far greater level of industrialization. While 52.2% of citizens lived in rural areas, only 34.6% percent of occupations were related to agriculture, forestry, and fishing, whereas 34.9% were related to industry, 7.4% to banking, 5.5% to transportation and communications, and 6.2% to the service industry (Kaser 91). The latter four occupational areas are related to expanded industrial development. Overall, only 33% of the population was dependent on agriculture. In contrast, Hungary and Poland had far less developed industry-employing 23% and 19.3% respectively-and banking-employing 5.4% and 6.1% respectively. Romania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia were all far less developed, each only employing about 10% of its citizens in industry (Kaser 91). Czechoslovakian agriculture was also more productive, with a 1938 per annum net output of \$200 versus \$150 in Hungary and \$130 in Poland, reflecting greater mechanization and efficiencies in production related to the expansion of industry. The net output of a Czechoslovakian industrial worker was \$450 in 1938 versus \$340 and \$400 in Hungary and Poland respectively. It should be noted that this output is markedly lower than Germany at \$790 per worker and France at \$580 (Kaser 31), but still a leader in Eastern Europe.

Regardless, overall development in the rest of Eastern Europe was still lagging heavily in comparison as Poland had 23.1% illiteracy, compared to 8.8% in Hungary and 4.1% in Czechoslovakia (Kaser 93). Illiteracy numbers were far worse in other Eastern European countries. This can be interpreted as a reflection of the lesser extant of industry in rural areas. Schooling was simply not developed in the countryside in these countries to the same extent. Establishment of universal education is key to relative advancement in the course of European politics, making it eligible for greater worker participation in the democracy and government. Thus, one can see the clear correlation between the continuation of an aristocratic tradition in Hungary, which persisted during the interwar years, as opposed to the appeal of social democracy and later communism in the more industrial Czechoslovakia (Jaszi 714).

### *The Interwar Years: Origins and Rise of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party (KSC)*

Czechoslovakian workers and farmers were not satisfied with the progressive and social democratic parties as the 1920s progressed, and the party was superseded by the Agricultural party in terms of total votes every year after 1920 ((Nohlen 478-479). During this time the beginnings of a communist political party were sparked by Slovak Marxists. Having to adhere to the Communist International's rules, a national party was formed in 1921, relatively void of ethnic distinction. The party then became dominated by Czechs and later that year was admitted into the Communist International under the leadership of Bohumir Smeral (Skilling "The Formation" 353). The party quickly grew to 300,000 members by the end of 1921, the largest party relative to population at the Third International and the third largest party in absolute terms, with the Russian and German parties occupying the first and second spots respectively (Skilling "The Formation" 354). Smeral recognized that revolution was now a possibility, given Czechoslovakia's unique historical position as being the only country with a large Communist Party and a powerful urban bourgeoisie, neither of which existed at the time of Russian Revolution (Skilling "The Formation" 354). The party, abbreviated the KSC, quickly rose to political prominence, receiving 13.1% of parliamentary votes in the Czechoslovak House of Deputies, in 1925 when it was first organized to be eligible for election (Nohlen 479). This is more than the 8.9% of votes received by the Czechoslovakian Social Democratic Party (CSDSD) (Nohlen 478). However, it must be noted that the CSDSD still had more political sway given the coalition governments it helped to form. In 1929 and 1935 the KSC received 10.2% and 10.3% of votes respectively, behind only the Agricultural party and CSDSD and in 1935, the German Social Democratic Party as well, which gained popularity in German regions (Nohlen 479). The popularity of the latter two parties could in part be explained by land reform policy favoring Czechs over Germans and prioritizing the Czech farmer in national policy (Cornwall 263).

### *The Appeal of the Communist Party*

Ultimately, the increasing support for communism reflects the state of the working class, which the party argued was a growing proletariat, during this time. In 1930, 52.2% of the 14.73 million Czechoslovakian citizens still lived in rural areas and 47.8% lived in urban areas (Kaser 83). This distribution is significantly more urban than most other Eastern European nations, and even on par with France, but not on the same level of development as Germany and the UK with 30.1% and 24.5% of their populations, respectively living in rural areas in 1930 (Kaser 83). For comparison, at this time 57.5% of Hungarians, 72.8% of Poles, and 79.8% of Romanians lived in rural areas (Kaser 83). Most significantly, in 1938 over two million Czechoslovakians were members of trade unions, a key indicator of a politically conscious working class. However, less than 200,000 people in Hungary and about one million people in Poland were members of trade unions (Kaser 99). It should be noted that Poland had a far greater population than Czechoslovakia during this period, thus with union membership as an indicator, class consciousness on a per capita basis was relatively high in Czechoslovakia. From the Communist Party's perspective, Czechoslovakia had the most developed "proletariat" of any nation in Eastern Europe apart from the Soviet Union.

As the working class expanded and became more politically active, the Czechoslovak Communist Party sought to take advantage of these evolving conditions and try to implant the idea of class struggle into what they considered the proletariat. Particularly, the party sought to paint the Social Democratic Party members as representing bourgeois interests primarily, and thus the Communist Party wanted to be the true representative of the working class (Skilling "Gottwald" 647). Taking advantage of warm relations with the Soviet Union (discussed later),

Gottwald's campaign against Masaryk for president in the 1935 election utilized the slogan "Not Masaryk but Lenin," and painted Masaryk as a bourgeoisie figurehead using his authority to establish a fascist dictatorship, thus also exploiting fears regarding neighboring Nazi Germany. This attack led to a warrant being issued for Gottwald's arrest for treason and thus his exile to the Soviet Union (Skilling "Gottwald" 650). This action by the Masaryk government perhaps gave credence to Gottwald's accusation.

In terms of actual policy, the Communist Party took a populist stance in their Sixth Congress in 1931. With the goal of appealing to Czechoslovakian workers, the party outlined a program to expropriate large capitalist enterprise, and large land holdings, giving them to workers and farmer respectively. They advocated nationalizing media and giving control over media to workers, as well as a six-hour workday and equality for women. The party also sought to eliminate the influence of the church and bourgeoisie and to arm the proletariat. The appeal to workers was obvious and given the largely non-religious population, ridding of church influence would have been particularly appealing. Schools would also be opened to all members of the working class (Skilling "Gottwald" 647-648). The populist appeal was towards workers and agrarians, thus trying to take votes away from both the Social Democratic and Agrarian party, the latter of which was the most popular party in the 1929 elections (Nohlen 479). In fact, throughout the 1920s, land reform was extensive, shifting land away from large estates towards agrarians in a more progressive nature than its neighbors, but reform was not completed before 1938 and many were left with very small land holdings (Berger 388). Thus, the Communist Party had plenty of room to appeal to both urban and rural populations; hence, receiving the fourth most votes in the 1935 elections (Nohlen 47).

### **Foreign Influence as a Catalyst for the Communist Party**

#### *Prior to World War II*

In 1923, the hopes of communist revolution in the West faltered greatly, as a German communist uprising was soundly defeated, capitalism was stabilized, and fascist elements soon came to dominate the political landscape that were harshly opposed to communist politicians (Luza 561). Moscow now decidedly asserted itself as the voice for communist revolution, believing there must be a violent overthrow of bourgeois democracies and denouncing social democratic parties and "imperialist countries" at the Fifth Congress of the Communist International. However, in Czechoslovakia, the communist party largely accepted democratic principles as the means to exact change.

In 1935 the Soviet Czechoslovakia Mutual Assistance Treaty was created, in which the Soviet Union pledge military aid to Czechoslovakia if the country were attacked (Roberts 49), thus the Communist Party gained a new sense of national protection and preservation. In fact, Czech Communists began claiming that the only way to preserve the nation was via the protection of the international proletariat and the Soviet Union. In conjunction with this messaging came an increase of over 100,000 votes in the 1935 parliamentary elections, signaling their effectiveness (Skilling "Gottwald" 650).

Czechoslovakia further pivoted away from the West after the Munich Agreement, as without Czechoslovakian input, Germany, Great Britain, France, and Italy, agreed to allow Germany to annex Czechoslovakian Sudetenland in 1938. On the other hand, Czechs and Slovaks harbored less animus towards Russia, as a "Slavic brother" with seemingly similar goals and thus also further embraced socialism (Wheeler 8-9).

However, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, a treaty of non-aggression between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, shattered this brotherhood, and communist connections went by the wayside, as Czechoslovakia now felt it was betrayed by both the West and the East (Luza 566).

### *During World War II*

At the start of the war, the communist party still inside of Czechoslovakia split with the exiled leaders such as Gottwald in Moscow, who argued that the real enemy was the West and that the liberation of the German working class in conjunction with those in occupied territories should be the main goal of resistance efforts (Luza 567). The party thus had little hand in the beginning of citizen resistance to Nazi occupiers. However, the German invasion of the USSR quickly changed this tune, as now Czech communities in Russia had support from the Soviets in their resistance, and those on the home front started leading resistance, despite being cut off from communication networks with the Soviets following Nazi purges of communists in occupied territories (Luza 570). Throughout the war, communists were repressed but were able to reorganize and eventually resumed contact with the Communist International who helped organize guerrilla resistance (Luza 573). Towards the ends of the war Benes and Gottwald agreed to a communist dominated coalition government following the war. At home, communists gained massive favor from the people as they were the only organized party in the territory to form an organized network for resistance (Luza 574).

### **Communist Party Popularity Following the War**

Marx concretely established that a proletarian uprising would follow from industrialization and the commoditization of labor and thus stratification of wealth that would occur during the transition to a liberal democracy. Czechoslovakia was perhaps the first to uphold this vision, with 70 percent of its residents receiving income from industry, putting it on par with western peers (Mares 348). Consequently, in the 1946 parliamentary elections, the KSC won 40.17% of the votes, twice as much as the next most popular party (*Rudé právo*). As Marx would have predicted, these results followed lines of industrial development. In the most industrial developed Bohemia, the KSC won 43.25% of the vote, in less developed Moravia the party won 34.36% of the vote, and finally in least developed Slovakia the KSC won only 30.48% of the vote (*Rudé právo*).

After WWII, the new Czechoslovakian government instituted a two-year plan to bring agriculture to prewar levels and bring industrial production to ten percent above the 1937 level. The country fell short of these goals, but the economic order was renewed (Mares 348). Still, by 1948, industrial production per capita returned to 1938 levels (Berend 195).

While the Czechoslovakians had sought a parliamentary path towards socialism (Luza 575), the 1948 communist takeover organized and aided by the Soviet Union made Czechoslovakia subject to the will of the Soviet government, and its distortion of Marxist principles.

### **Consequences of Soviet Influence**

The Moscow-centered Five-Year Plan instituted in 1948 disregarded the unique economic state of Czechoslovakia, which itself reflected Marxist theory as outlined above, rather than the Bolshevik revisionism of communism that revolved around a more primitive economy that had yet to undergo the capitalist revolution (Mares 349). In 1949, Czechoslovakian planners essentially acknowledged that the Soviet model was the only acceptable path (Stevens 19). The new Five-

Year Plan destroyed the existing pooling labor system and financial assets that had been key to the economy. The plan shifted production away from the creation of consumer goods, which are more prominent in wealthier societies, towards heavy industry, requiring an increase in mining. Consumer good production as a share of total production fell 9.9% from 1949 to 1958, with an equal increase in producer goods occurring (Stevens 22). This forced economic transition led to an economic conundrum as mining for coal could not keep up with fuel needs in the early 1950s, leading to a failure in reaching production targets. The aggressive production targets even led to strikes, reflecting the continuing proletarian will under the new regime. This in turn led to a purge of communist advocates, a Stalinist move, and a distinctly non-Marxist aligned philosophy (Mares 349).

The relative advancement of the Czech economy over even that of the reformed Soviet economy, in terms of purchasing power, led to currency manipulation that lowered real wages in Czechoslovakia to reconcile discrepancies in pricing in the Soviet bloc. Again, this led to less production of consumer goods, and more industrial goods, aligned with Soviet needs, hurting workers in favor of the regime (Mares 351). In fact, Czechoslovakia exported over three times more to the USSR than it imported (Stevens, 233), suggesting Soviet policy was not intended to help the Czechoslovakian proletariat, but rather the Soviet economic machine.

In conjunction with the transition from production of consumer goods to capital good production, the new communist regime distributed more staples to manual laborers in general, but due to scarce amounts of said goods, consumers ultimately ended up paying for these goods in a market like structure leading to rapidly inflating costs (compared to the ration price). As a result, one estimate suggests real income of the Czechoslovak worker declined 27.3% from 1948 to 1952 (Evanson 249). Workers started to resent the so-called “dictatorship of the proletariat” and higher wage demands and strikes began in 1948. Worker morale was so low that absenteeism rose 37% from 1947 to 1949, ultimately reaching 15% of the workforce (Evanson 250). Wage increases ultimately were distributed unevenly, favoring heavier industry, with ore mining wages increasing 79%, versus 59% in industrial wages, and most markedly an absolute decline in wages of white-collar workers such as teachers (Evanson 251). In fairness, leveling did lead to managers having less of an advantage over laborers in terms of wage, and benefits such as healthcare were specifically given to proletarians and denied to capitalists throughout the 1950s (Evanson 251).

While this mismanagement may be glaring, overall trends must not be ignored. From 1948 the share in contribution to national income of agriculture decreased from 22% to 16% as early as 1955, corresponding with an increase from a 59% to a 64% share of industry (Stevens 20), indicating overall development, while ignoring specific costs. Perhaps the most glaring indicator of the decline in Marxist values in the new communist government, was the party domination of trade unions, developing in the 1950s, leading to unions no longer advocating for worker interests, but rather taking a more administrative role for the party (Stevens 31).

## **Conclusions**

A combination of geopolitical and internal elements can be attributed to the dominance of the KSC in the 1946 parliamentary elections.

Prior to WWII, Czechoslovakia was a highly industrialized and liberal society with a bustling and active working class on par with Austria and vastly outpacing its neighbors in Eastern Europe. This development allowed the Czechoslovakian Communist Party to appeal to the issues facing the industrial worker, more effectively than elsewhere in Eastern Europe. The government of Czechoslovakia was definitively characteristic of that expected from a nation



transitioning through what Marx described as a bourgeoisie dominated liberal democracy. Social democratic, progressive, and communist elements dominated the political sphere prior to WWII, whereas its neighbors had far less developed democracies and had larger political influence from nationalist and aristocratic elements, thus stymying the growth of communist parties in comparison with Czechoslovakia.

Animus towards the West after the Munich Agreement and towards Moscow following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact led to the development of a more isolated Communist Party at the beginning of WWII that then reestablished affiliation with the Soviet Union during the war. This affiliation then allowed the Communist Party to be one of the most visible elements of resistance to the Nazi occupation in Czechoslovakia. As a result, the KSC emerged from WWII with significant political clout in a nation with an already active proletariat, that had harbored feelings of resentment towards the West and was now under the new sphere of influence of the Soviet Union. Thus, Czechoslovakia was fully primed for the Communist Party to dominate the political landscape.

The KSC was enormously successful in the 1946 elections and a specific Czechoslovakian parliamentary road to socialism seemed possible. However, the Soviet-backed coup in 1948, installing Gottwald as dictator, led to a mismanagement of the Czechoslovakian economy that favored the Soviet economic machine over advancement of the purported “proletariat”, undermining supposed Marxist values and derailing what could have been the most natural and Marxist ordained route to socialism in European history.

The Prague Spring in 1968 is perhaps most indicative in this difference between Soviet and Czechoslovakian proletarian values and priorities in the country and indicates that a dictatorship of the proletariat was never truly established in the country. Rather, the proletariat simply became subjugated to a Soviet dictatorship.

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# SECTION 4

## Gender in Focus



## **The Gendering of Harmful Magic: The Process of Gendered Differences in Witchcraft Through Europe's Middle Ages**

*Kirsten Bell, University of Rochester*

When one thinks about witches, the first thing that probably comes to mind is a woman practicing demonic spells or riding a broomstick across a full moon. Perhaps images of Halloween costumes or witchcraft in popular culture also appear. Regardless of the specifics surrounding modern depictions of witches, the connecting thread between all these portrayals is that the “witch” is most often a woman. But according to scholars like Michael D. Bailey, this gendered association only emerged in the fifteenth century. In his article “The Feminization of Magic and the Emerging Idea of the Female Witch in the Late Middle Ages,” he states that starting in the fifteenth century “an aspect of witchcraft emerged that...is perhaps the most striking and compelling element of the stereotype—the pronounced association of witchcraft with women rather than with men” through the influences of misogynistic works such as the *Formicarius* (1437) by Johannes Nider and the *Malleus maleficarum* (1486) by Heinrich Kramer (Bailey 120). However, could this phenomenon have started earlier than the fifteenth century? Surprisingly, there is evidence that it actually could have developed over a much longer period of time. Sources containing iterations dating back to as early as the ninth century already demonstrate an association of women with certain types of magic and their supposed increased susceptibility to the Devil’s influence (“Have You Believed?”).

Additionally, is there more to Bailey’s argument that involves men in a greater capacity? Could this process actually demonstrate gendering and not just feminization? I believe that magic as a whole was not just feminized but gendered from the very start. Some forms of magic became affiliated with femininity, such as village-level magic (“Have You Believed?”) and eventually witchcraft, but more “complicated” magic was actually gendered masculine, like necromancy. The process that Bailey illustrates was happening much earlier than the fifteenth century, because in the early Middle Ages magic was already gendered, but women who were using magic were just not seen as harmful. Eventually, by the end of the medieval period, magic was still gendered but came to be seen as harmful due to increased fear of the Devil, as I demonstrate later in this paper.

To illustrate this claim of earlier gendering the first primary source that I will examine is an excerpt from Burchard of Worms’ *Corrector* titled, “Have You Believed?” Written in the tenth century but containing iterations originating possibly as early as the ninth century, this work demonstrates how in the Early Middle Ages certain forms of magic were already associated with women. However, clerics saw these women as harmless and were primarily concerned with the false belief in magic. After that I will explore components from Bernard Gui’s 1323 *Manual for Inquisitors* called “How to Investigate Workers of Magic,” to demonstrate the gendering of magic already present at this time and the next step on the timeline of harmful magic. Then I will examine an excerpt written by Enguerrand de Monstrelet called “Politically Inspired Necromancy” from 1407 to display the forms of magic gendered masculine. Finally, I will end with inspecting sections from the *Arras Witch Treatises* written anonymously in 1460 to show the types of magic gendered feminine and masculine in the fifteenth century. Additionally, I will also demonstrate how, by this point, magic was finally seen as harmful compared to the early Middle Ages.

The current scholarly discussion surrounding this topic mainly includes generalizations about the religious and socioeconomic circumstances of the witch hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, there are definitely some scholars who have focused on the Middle Ages, and this paper will engage in that specific conversation. One prominent scholar on this topic is Michael D. Bailey, who has written about the feminization of witchcraft. One of his main arguments is that witchcraft came to be associated with women due to the stereotypes surrounding different forms of magic. Necromancy is masculine because of its complicated rituals, while witchcraft is feminine because its followers have to submit to demonic influence (Bailey 120). Additionally, scholars like Richard Kieckhefer and Frank Klaassen have studied the development of necromancy in the clerical setting. In Klaassen's article "Learning and Masculinity in Manuscripts of Ritual Magic of the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance," he discusses potential desires for clerical men to participate in the masculine form of magic, necromancy, such as gaining wealth, effortless learning, and control over male superiors and women (Klaassen 61). Kieckhefer's chapter on clerical necromancy in his book *Magic in the Middle Ages* suggests that one of the possible effects of necromancy in the clerical underworld was that it contributed to the rise in suspicion of other types of magic within the general public (Kieckhefer 175). This essay will fit into this conversation by building on Bailey's argument of feminization through demonstrating that magic was gendered, not just feminized. I will examine masculine forms of magic as well, supplementing Kieckhefer and Klaassen arguments to provide additional evidence for the gendering of harmful magic. Furthermore, I will be illustrating a longer timeline than Bailey for that process.

### **Early Gendering and "Harmless Witches"**

One very early example of the gendering of magic can be found in the source titled "Have You Believed?" written by the Bishop Burchard of Worms. This work directs priests on how to interrogate and assist penitents. It contains a series of inquiries about whether or not they believe in certain aspects of "local" or "village-level" magic, as in pre-Christian practices and thoughts. One section discusses how one must repent if they believe in the notion that certain women are able to "use certain sorceries and spells to change people's feelings—namely, from hate to love or from love to hate—or can damage or steal people's property with her bewitchments" ("Have You Believed" 273). This quote focuses on the belief that women could practice this magic, and not on their actual ability to do so. Women who believe they can do this are "deceived by the Devil" because clerics did not believe that magic could actually be practiced ("Have You Believed" 273). It demonstrates how clerics were primarily concerned with the belief in magic rather than the practice of it. Women were mainly associated with this village-level magic such as love magic, as specifically mentioned in this quote.

Additionally, the following paragraph in the source also exhibits this notion, stating that those who believe that women have the ability to "on certain nights, along with a mob of demons transformed to look like women...ride on various animals and be counted in their assembly" also need to repent. This idea of women riding at night with demons is dated to as early as the ninth century, which demonstrates how early on certain forms of magic were already gendered. Nevertheless, the focal point of this quote is again that the belief in the ability of women to practice magic is ridiculous, because it is impossible for them to do so. The connecting thread between these two quotes is that they discuss the belief in specifically women practicing magic. Therefore, at this point, the idea that women practice certain types of magic rather than men can definitely be seen.

However, perhaps the most demonstrative component on gendering in this source is when Burchard directly separates questions for men and women. It states that the previous sections could be asked of both women and men, but the following questions apply only to women. One of these questions includes inquiries about the belief in and rituals aimed at the “three Sisters...the ones named Parcae by ancient tradition and ancient foolishness.” The next inquiry discusses whether or not women believe they are able to “go out while the doors are closed and you are still in your body, able to cross great stretches of land along with other women taken in by the same illusion of killing people who have been baptized...and then eating their cooked flesh...and after eating you bring them back to life again.” The last questions are focused on whether or not women have ever been influenced by the Devil after a newborn has died to “remove the little one’s corpse, put it in some secret place and drive a stake through the tiny body, claiming, had they not done this, that the baby would rise and could injure many people” (“Have You Believed” 274). Once more, these quotes focus on the belief of practicing magic and not the reality of it, highlighted in the fact that the belief in the ancient traditions is directly called “foolish.” They also show a direct separation between men and women, and how Burchard of Worms believed that only women would believe or commit the acts in this last section.

Additionally, in this source, the insistence that those who believe these magical practices to be real simply need to repent shows that magic was not seen as particularly harmful. Believers have the excuse of being under the influence of the Devil, and through penance they are able to be forgiven. Compared to much later ideas about witchcraft, as in the violent witch trials of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is fairly easy to repent for the sin of belief in magic. One simply has to fast for an extended amount of time, sometimes as long as seven years, but this is still a less hostile punishment than being burned at the stake which occurs during the later witch trials.

At this point it is clear that as early as the tenth century magic was already gendered, which points to a longer process than what Bailey describes. Women were already associated with certain forms of magic, such as those involving submission to the Devil, some forms of village-level magic involving children or infants, the “three Sisters,” or love magic. There is a clear distinction of what “feminine” magic is composed of, but the women supposedly practicing this magic were not seen as too harmful because the source focuses on the belief in women practicing magic instead of the dangerous reality of it. This section of the paper focuses on the Early Middle Ages, but the next section will discuss the next step in the timeline of the gendering of harmful magic and additional gendering present in the fourteenth century.

### **Fourteenth Century Conceptions of Magic**

Almost three hundred years after the Burchard of Worms source, an example of gendered differences involving magical practices can be found in Bernard Gui’s Manual for Inquisitors. Gui was a Dominican friar and Bishop, and this manual was written in 1324. In the section on sorcerers, diviners, and demon invokers, he says that “You should not interrogate everyone without discrimination or after a single fashion. Men and women are questioned differently” (“How to Investigate” 88). This is an extremely important detail because similar to the previous source, it distinctly separates magic users who are women and those who are men. After this quote, Gui lists certain types of questions to be asked, but does not specify which questions are for men and which are for women. Therefore, I have speculated as to which gender certain questions are aimed at. Additionally, Gui still seems to hold the notion that magic users are simply influenced by the illusions of demons and the real problem is the belief in magic. But,

due to the thoroughness of his proposed investigations, he demonstrates that there is a new seriousness to magic at this time which was not seen in the early Middle Ages.

Of the questions that Gui offers, those that are most likely directed towards women involve children, interactions between husbands and wives, and pregnancy. Some of these questions include what they know about “children or infants who had been ill-wished or were to have the ill-wishing lifted...agreement or disagreement between married couples...[and] the impregnation of those who are barren” (“How to Investigate” 88). It is hard to believe that any of these questions concerning family matters or children would be directed towards a man, especially because at this point in time masculine clerical necromancy was already occurring (Deane 191). Certain forms of magic were already aligned with masculine ideals, such as necromancy, and these types of questions demonstrate clear reliance on feminine stereotypes. For example, women being concerned with children and family matters. This exhibits that gendering of certain types of magic was already present.

Magic users who are men would most likely be questioned about the more technical forms of magic, as in specific magical processes and who they learned these processes from. Gui says that a sorcerer should be asked “what kind of divinatory/magical techniques (sortilegia) or methods of prognostication (divinationes) or invocations he knows, how many he knows, and from whom he learned them” (“How to Investigate” 88). These types of questions are more precise than the ones concerning children or family matters. They probe about what exact types of magical techniques or spells a sorcerer knows and who exactly the sorcerer learned these from. As Bailey mentions in his article, the idea of necromancy is masculine because it requires training, education, and intelligence (Bailey 126). Therefore, questions concerning the more technical side of magic as opposed to those concerning children or family magic would most likely have been directed towards men. At this point in time it can be seen that magic was not just feminized, but gendered, in that some forms were seen as feminine but others were seen as masculine.

Furthermore, another important aspect of this source is how it fits into the timeline of the development of harmful magic. At one point, Gui says that “the diverse plague of casting lots/sorcery, making divinations, and invoking evil spirits...is found in various lands and regions in keeping with the various inventions and false notions belonging to...superstitious people who pay attention to the spirits of error and the teachings of evil spirits” (“How to Investigate” 88). He also later asks the question of whether or not those being interrogated actually believe in what they told others, as in whether or not they actually believe that magic was real (“How to Investigate” 89). Gui still seems to believe that the belief in magic is caused by delusional people under the influence of “evil spirits,” however, there is definitely an increased concern with magic because of the seriousness it is given. If Gui thought that magic was harmless, he would not have gone into such depths asking about specific types of magic and who individuals learned this magic from. This fits into the timeline of the gendering of harmful magic because it is a definite shift from early medieval perceptions of magic. But, the notion of magic being harmful has not yet been completely developed. Separate men and women who use magic are still seen as superstitious people fooled by evil spirits, however there is definitely a new weight given to it. This section discussed evidence of additional gendering in the fourteenth century, and the next section will explore the final development of this process by looking into how magic was not just feminized, but gendered, in the fifteenth century.



## Harmful Magic in the Fifteenth Century

To make a transition into the forms of magic deemed masculine, specifically during the fifteenth century, I will turn to the excerpt “Politically Inspired Necromancy” by Enguerrand de Monstrelet, a French chronicler, written in 1407. Monstrelet describes a speech where a professor of theology at the University of Paris, Jean Petit, accuses the late Duc d’Orléans of hiring a monk to use necromancy in an attempt to murder the King. It states that the Duc was “so inflamed and smitten by greed to obtain empty honours and worldly riches for himself and for his children, and so steal from our lord King...most noble lordship and crown of France, that he plotted and studied through...acts of witchcraft...to destroy the person of our lord King...” (“Politically Inspired Necromancy” 110). The specific acts of magic he supposedly employed are detailed later in the source as acts of necromancy because they involve summoning demons. The use of this specific form of magic, necromancy, in a very masculine way demonstrates gendering in the fifteenth century. Women were not included in the political sphere during this time, so the fact that a man is accusing another man of using magic for political gain directly genders necromancy masculine rather than feminine. Additionally, this type of magic is taken extremely seriously by this point, because even the accusation of the use of it was enough to cause conflict.

Another example of the pattern of gendering certain types of magic during the fifteenth century is present in the anonymously written Arras Witch Treatises, written in 1460. At one point in the text, the differences in incentives for demonic submission between men and women are detailed:

In addition, he [the Devil] bestows the power and the strange and extraordinary abilities to attain offices of secular power and lordship, or dignities and benefices in the church, by fawning and simony, so as to amass riches, or to achieve other damnable ends. Or he promises the power of remaining in the good graces of magnates and princes, or of great men, by means of love powders or potions, which he gives to his people so that they can obtain from those princes whatever is asked, and can control them, or can achieve other goals, on which more below...Moreover, beyond the various powers listed above, the presiding demon then gives to such women received into the congregation some tangible token—such as a ring of gold, of copper, or of silver, or a thread, or a roll of paper showing unknown letters, or some such thing—by the touch or use of which some effect that provides the special power that has been granted [to her] is caused. (The Arras Witch Treatises 41)

In this quotation there is a clear distinction between what the Devil supposedly offers the men of the congregation as opposed to the women. Men are able to gain political benefits, an increase in wealth, and even achieve other goals, while women are simply given a token such as a ring or a roll of paper. Interestingly enough, the incentives for men are very similar to what Klaassen describes as incentives to practice necromancy. He says that some of these desires included gaining wealth, effortless learning, and influence over male superiors and women (Klaassen 61). This source also acknowledges that there are more women present at these demonic congregations than men. The author’s inclusion of more satisfactory incentives for men shows a clear gendering of this form of magic. Men were not particularly suited to witchcraft, they were more suited to necromancy, so they needed to have more worthwhile reasons for joining these congregations. These included incentives similar to those of necromancy, while women would be satisfied with a small token because they are more prone to the Devil’s influence. Therefore, women were affiliated with this form of magic, so there is distinctive gendering occurring here.

Additionally, other sections of this work illustrate a definite shift in thinking in terms of the harmfulness of magic in the fifteenth century as opposed to in the early Middle Ages. The violent depiction of witches at this time demonstrates the increased fear of magic and the Devil. In the Arras Witch Treatises, the witches are portrayed as exceedingly evil, directly renouncing Christianity, and even doing terrible things like desecrating the cross, throwing holy water behind themselves and trampling it with their feet, and even creating a parody of the sign of the cross by “knocking herself under the chin” (The Arras Witch Treatises 38). This portrayal of witches as acting extremely wicked and conspiring with the Devil to renounce Christianity reflects changed beliefs about magic by the fifteenth century. No longer is it something that misguided people believe in, but has now become a very real threat because of magic users' conspiracy with, as opposed to them being influenced by, demonic forces.

Both of these fifteenth century sources illustrate that even at this time, magic was not just feminized but gendered. In general, certain forms of magic such as witchcraft were seen as feminine because of the necessity of its followers to submit to the Devil, which is demonstrated in the Arras Witch Treatises. However, some forms of magic were gendered masculine, as portrayed in both of these sources. Necromancy and complicated ritual magic fit into the masculine sphere because of its association with politics, wealth, and control. Additionally, it is clear that by this time, magic was seen as harmful, as opposed to earlier sources.

## **Conclusion**

According to scholars like Michael D. Bailey, the feminization of magic primarily appeared in the fifteenth century. However, I believe that this process actually started much earlier. The source titled “Have You Believed?” by Burchard of Worms was written during the tenth century, but contains notions originating in the ninth century. This work demonstrates that women were already associated with certain forms of magic during this time. Specifically, some forms of village-level magic regarding children or infants, forms following ancient traditions involving the “three Sisters,” and love magic. There is a clear distinction of what “feminine” magic is composed of, but the women who supposedly practiced this magic were not seen as too harmful. Clerical authorities were more focused on the false belief in magic instead of the practice of it.

Additionally, sources from the fourteenth century show a gendering of magic, not just feminization. Bernard Gui's *Inquisitors' Manual* explicitly states that one should interrogate women and men differently. This clearly distinguishes magic users on the basis of their gender, and the questions Gui proposes demonstrate gendering based on differing types of magic deemed feminine and masculine. Furthermore, this source illustrates the timeline of harmful magic. Gui is still concerned with belief in the reality of magic, but unlike his predecessors, he also shows some concern about the practice of it due to the specificity of his questions.

Finally, the last two sources, “Politically Inspired Necromancy” and the Arras Witch Treatises, illustrate that even by the fifteenth century, magic was not just feminized but gendered. There is a continuation of certain forms of magic being deemed feminine, more specifically witchcraft because of its submission to the Devil. Other forms of magic were gendered masculine like necromancy, as discussed in both of these sources. Additionally, the timeline for magic being seen as harmful is completed because both of the sources place an emphasis on the seriousness of it.

Magic as a whole was not just feminized, but gendered. Gendering can be seen from sources as early as the ninth or tenth centuries, with some forms of magic becoming affiliated with femininity and others with masculinity. The process that Bailey illustrates in his article on

the feminization of witchcraft actually started much earlier than the fifteenth century, and resulted in clerical authorities regarding magic as harmful by the end of the medieval period.

Despite this process dating back to the Early Middle Ages, it continues to have a resounding effect today. In present-day Western society, witchcraft has been transformed into a form of entertainment. With widely successful cinematic and literary adaptations, Halloween costumes, and even the commodification of these practices once deemed heretical through popular culture, witchcraft and magic can be seen across society in many regards. Nevertheless, the most important aspect of these representations is that women are chosen as the main reflections of them. In popular culture, the witch is often portrayed as the villain who uses her demonic magic to harm others. But, if we take a step back and think about what this portrayal represents, there is a much deeper implication. This notion affects modern women today because it reinforces the gendered stereotype of women being weaker or more easily manipulated than men, or on the opposite side of the spectrum, being more willing to do evil than men. It inherently places in our minds the negative and wicked association we have of witchcraft with women as a whole, which contributes to the sexism and discrimination modern women continue to face today. Thus, understanding the evolution of this phenomenon that is taken for granted today may help remove societal biases surrounding women and witchcraft, empower artists to make more conscious decisions, and can perhaps help propel us toward a more equal and unbiased society.

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## The experiences of women living in the Soviet Union and in a Post-Soviet country

Anipa Almazbek kyzy, American University of Central Asia

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) existed from 1922-1991. 15 republics were part of the USSR one of which was Kirgizia which is now Kyrgyzstan. The economy of the USSR had a great impact on its citizens. Although there are many details in the economic conditions of the USSR, Robert C. Allen summarized that the Soviet Union had economic growth until the 1930s and then it had a recession and later collapsed.<sup>1</sup> According to David R. Marples, there were a number of causes that happened at the same time to cause the collapse of the USSR: economic crisis, a costly but unsuccessful war in Afghanistan, an anti-alcohol campaign, the long Cold War, a decline in the number of CPSU (Bolsheviks), the rise of the national republics, the failed putsch, and the struggle between two protagonists: Gorbachev and Yeltsin.<sup>2</sup> Such economic conditions of the USSR influenced the lives of thousands of citizens in the Soviet Union, including the respondents selected for this oral history paper — three women.

The interviewees are a generation of women: Jumabubu Mambetkalieva — respondent #1, her daughter — respondent #2 and her granddaughter — Aidina Nurlanova, respondent #3. Jumabubu's daughter was the only one who decided to stay anonymous; therefore, throughout this paper she will be mainly referred to as respondent #2. These three ladies create a generation of women consequently as they have lived in different periods of the Soviet Union. Jumabubu was born almost 30 years after the formation of the USSR as she was born in 1951, and now is 71 years old. Her daughter was born closer to the collapse of the Soviet Union as she was born in 1974 and now is 49 years old. Finally, her daughter Aidina was born in the post-Soviet era as she was born in 1998 and is now 25 years old.

At the time of the Soviet Union, Jumabubu and her daughter lived in the city of Naryn, Kyrgyziya. They grew up in a Muslim family and still practice this religion. The language of the interviews was Russian. The interview with Jumabubu went for 42 minutes, while with her daughter it was one hour and 8 minutes. With Aidina, the interview was one hour and 18 minutes. Interviewees were quite open; however, it can be implied that they were cautious while speaking because of the fear of telling something untrue and being published. Svetlana Alixievich's book *Unwomanly face of war*, which is an oral history, is used as a guiding example in writing this paper as the themes of this paper and book are similar, and quotes from interviews are used to strengthen the arguments. Secondary sources, which are two articles and three books, are used to provide background information on the USSR. Interviews themselves are used as a primary source to answer the following research question: How did the Soviet Union's regulations impact the lives of women? Since the USSR's regulations helped these women overcome their hardships and become financially independent, they had to meet Soviet societal expectations by supporting the government.

Thanks to the Soviet government's regulations, women persevered through various hardships. Jumabubu as well as her daughter faced many trials on their path. The tribulations of this family started in Jumabubu's childhood when she, as a school child in 10th grade, lost her

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<sup>1</sup> Allen, Robert C. "The Rise and Decline of the Soviet Economy." *The Canadian Journal of Economics / Revue Canadienne d'Economie* 34, no. 4 (2001): 859–81. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3131928>.

<sup>2</sup> Marples, David R. "Revisiting the Collapse of the USSR." *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne Des Slavistes* 53, no. 2/4 (2011): 461–73. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41708351>.

mother. Although the respondent did not want to talk about her mother much, she enthusiastically shared how the Soviet government helped her family financially. To be more specific, the government had supportive regulations, one of which was providing clothes and food to families with many children. During the interview, she mentioned that all of her six brothers always received seasonal clothes, specifically shoes, uniforms for school at autumn and warm clothes for winter.<sup>3</sup> If Jumabubu's father had bought clothes every season for her young six brothers, who were constantly growing and thus changing their clothing sizes, they would have probably devastated the family's income.

It became clear why Jumabubu seemed thankful while talking about this experience. The government helped her family with one of their needs so they could save money and spend it on other necessities like required education, for example.<sup>4</sup> Jumabubu even seemed to be bragging that she happened to live under the rule of a supportive Soviet government: "These kinds of good sides were present...but now these things ... well there are some charity organizations, but they cannot be compared to all of that!". This process was implemented by teachers who would find out students in need as the city was very small.<sup>5</sup> At this point, one can question her first statement about the Soviet Union as a supportive government. Therefore, was it the government or teachers who provided them with clothes? Melanie Ilic in her book *Soviet Women — Everyday Lives* stated that teachers themselves provided for struggling students.: "On the other hand, teachers also celebrated their pupils' successes or assisted in securing social and welfare support for those families most in need".<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it was not exactly the government's regulations as Jumabubu believed but schoolteachers who wanted to support children with difficulties. However, perhaps it was the government after all as it strongly promoted communism, which was the idea of working and giving for the sake of society. Teachers would not have done it if the Soviet government had not instilled communism. Therefore, the fact that teachers were helping students in need still falls under the umbrella of the Soviet government's help.

The next trial of Jumabubu was losing her father — the provider of their family; however, thanks to the Soviet system Jumabubu earned money and provided for her family by receiving an education and getting a job. When the father of this large family died, her role as the oldest sister was to replace her parents for her siblings. Her daughter mentions that Jumabubu's siblings were about to be taken away somewhere, probably to the orphanage since she was thought to be not eligible to take care of them. Therefore, Jumabubu could not possibly bear this burden all alone if there were not for the regulations of the Soviet Union thanks to which she became financially independent and supported her family. It became possible because education was free, under the USSR especially in its early stages and Ilic confirms that too.<sup>7</sup> After graduation, students receive a specialization and were employed right away: "We did not just study and then unemployed with the diploma went search for a job. No, in the Soviet Union, there was no such thing. If we received diplomas, then please with specialization in our hands we would go and work"<sup>8</sup>. In this system, Jumabubu became a schoolteacher immediately after

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with respondent #1, 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2022, 7:13 – 7:26, 7:59 – 8:20.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 8:55 – 9:08.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 7:34 – 7:50.

<sup>6</sup> Ilic, Melanie. *Soviet Women – Everyday Lives: Routledge Studies in the History of Russia and Eastern Europe*. London and New York: Routledge, 2020: 39.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid 6.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with respondent #1, 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2022, 10:06 – 10:25.

receiving her degree.<sup>9</sup> Not only did she succeed in providing for her family, but she also moved up in her career ladder as later she became a school principal and kept this leading position for 15 years.<sup>10</sup> That promotion probably increased her salary and made it easier for her to cover the expenses. She managed not only to take care of basic needs like feeding and clothing but also to provide an education to all of her brothers and sister. Although it might seem not very surprising as education was free, students did require extra money for snacks, bus fare, etc, which Jumabubu managed.

Jumabubu had to pay for her younger siblings' education who studied closer to the collapse of the Soviet Union when free slots became limited. Her siblings could not help the family financially by leaving school and doing physical labor, for example. According to Jumabubu, in the Soviet system, one needed an education to get a job not dependent on the type of employment: "Without education, there was no job even as a mason, carpenter".<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the only way to help her siblings become independent was to help them receive an education and provide for their needs as students, and Jumabubu successfully completed this mission thanks to the Soviet system. Her father's death could have led to another pathway of events: the separation of family members, brothers and her only sister would struggle to receive an education while being in an orphanage and ultimately could not become financially independent, not to mention starting their own family and providing for them. However, Jumabubu handled the responsibility of feeding, clothing, and educating her family thanks to the Soviet government's system of free education and guaranteed employment. All of her siblings received a higher education, became employed, and established their families<sup>12</sup>.

The last trial of Jumabubu was the loss of her husband, after already having three sons and two daughters, one of which is respondent #2. Again, thanks to the Soviet Union's system, she could provide for her children who all received a higher education and became financially independent as well.<sup>13</sup> Respondent #2 remembers the struggles of her mother: "My father died in 1995 and my mom had to raise all the five children alone. Beyond that, she had relatives from the maternal side of whom she took care. It was a bit hard. However, regardless of that my mom tried to give us all an education".<sup>14</sup> Losing a male provider certainly lowered the family's income and could have destroyed the chances of providing an education for her children. His death in 1995 after the the collapse of the Soviet Union meant spots for higher education with free enrollment was limited.

Jumabubu shared that she had to pay for her daughter's, respondent #2's, tuition.<sup>15</sup> Illic mentions that in the later stages of the Soviet Union, university entrance requirements became stricter.<sup>16</sup> Along with that inflation came and made things more difficult. In such an environment, Jumabubu could have struggled in handling the basic needs of her children like eating and clothing. However, the government allowed Jumabubu to receive both a pension and her wage, and that helped her substantially. She shared that the government allowed such cases only if one was eligible: "I retired when I was 45 years old. There was this law that in the highland areas,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid 1.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 4:31– 4:42.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 12:32 – 12:37.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 9:02 – 9:20.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 1:19 – 1:30.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with respondent #2, 8th of January 2023, 2:30 – 2:48.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid 8, min 9.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid 6.

women who had 3 children with 20 years of work experience should retire at the age of 45...at that time we received both pension and wage”.<sup>17</sup> Although it was in 1996, and the collapse of the USSR had happened, it seems like the regulations and laws of the Soviet government were still practiced. Jumabubu looked very thankful while sharing this experience. She probably felt so because nowadays such regulations are simply not practiced. The current law of Kyrgyzstan states that women are allowed to receive pensions at the age of 55. Thus, if Jumabubu received only her pension or wage at that time, she would struggle to cover all of her expenses, especially those her husband had been covering earlier. However, thanks to this regulation, they persevered.

Women living in the USSR, especially Jumabubu, certainly had advantages like free seasonal clothes, free education, guaranteed employment, and the ability to receive both pensions and wages. Respondent #2 extended the list of privileges by saying that during the USSR and after its collapse, they did not face hunger or other shortages of necessities. That is surprisingly good because during the “perestroika” many people, even well-off families lost their jobs and faced hunger<sup>18</sup>. Respondent #2 shares that unfortunately even some well-off families could not provide education for their children or help them continue to pursue degrees. It now seems that some people’s professions and backgrounds were very influential and helpful even in times of uncertainty. These women never felt hunger because they were never fired.<sup>19</sup> They were never fired because they pursued career fields that were supported by the Soviet government like teaching and nursing. What are the things that these women sacrificed in order to have these privileges or how did these women support the government back?

When women got all the support from the Soviet government, in return they had to be supportive citizens. Being a supportive citizen meant many things: supporting the educational system of the Soviet Union by studying well and following the strict rules, being part of state-sponsored organizations like “Oktyabryata” and “Komsomols” where patriotism and community work were instilled in them, helping the state by working in the agricultural fields almost for free, and finally it meant pursuing careers that the government wanted them to pursue.

Women had to support the educational system of the Soviet Union by receiving an education and following all the school rules no matter how strict they were. If they were not obedient and supportive in that, they would get punished as well as lower their chances of getting support from the government like free trips or earlier discussed privileges. Ilic wrote that students who arrived late to school or did not do the homework, or refused to wear the uniform were either punished or threatened to be excluded.<sup>20</sup> Historically, anyone who did not follow the Soviet educational regulations got punished. Igmen wrote that when the educational system was just starting to be implemented, the Soviet government would punish disobedient citizens. For example, husbands that would not let women receive an education would be beaten.<sup>21</sup> Igmen also wrote that attending schools was mandatory whether students wanted to or not: “In July 1930, the Central Committee in Moscow made school enrollment and attendance mandatory for all Soviet children, regardless of their gender, between the ages eight and eleven... In the 1930s, resistance to schooling all but disappeared”.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Jumabubu Mambetkalieva, 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2022, 3:40 – 4:21.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with respondent #2, 8<sup>th</sup> of January 2023, 5:56 – 56:23.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Jumabubu Mambetkalieva, 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2022, 4:20-4:27.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid 6.

<sup>21</sup> Igmen, Ali. “Self-Fashioning Kyrgyzzness among Women.” In *Speaking Soviet with an Accent: Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan*, 120–39. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012, 131. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt5vkh78.12>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 128-129.



All three interviewees confirmed they excelled at studying in school; it can be implied that they did not resist the educational regulations but followed the rules and supported the system<sup>23</sup>. These rules were a bit challenging to follow as Ilic wrote that they were so strict that some other witnesses thought they were in prison rather than school.<sup>24</sup> If they had not followed the rules and had not supported the system, they would not receive good grades. For doing good at school, women were supported by the Soviet government as they had a chance to take a free trip to Pioneer camps like Artek. Jumabubu stated that children who were “otlichniki”, which meant students who received the highest grade — 5 for all the subjects — could go on such trips.<sup>25</sup> Routledge confirms that by saying that Artek was founded in 1926 in Crimea and was sometimes “offered as a reward to high achieving students”.<sup>26</sup> Routledge also states that it was an opportunity for children to rest from watchful, controlling parents and perhaps from strict schools as well.

Starting at a young age, women may have concluded that supporting the Soviet government meant receiving support back. Women’s support was followed up with participation in state-funded organizations like Oktobrists that selected children from the age of seven to ten. These children were referred to as Oktyabrya. Young Pioneers were chosen at the age of ten or eleven. Finally, Komsomol from the age of 14 and members could stay until they were 30 years old.<sup>27</sup> Although these organizations were considered fun for children with playing, singing, and dancing, Ilic wrote the students were also learning to become patriots: “At the young age of enrollment into the Oktobrists and Pioneers, many children had already been raised to have an unquestionable faith in the Soviet leadership and a patriotic approach to the country’s revolutionary ideals”.<sup>28</sup> She then mentions that they were taught to become communists: “They encouraged young people to engage in voluntary work and to develop a sense of social and collective responsibility, and were supposed to serve as a training ground for later life”.<sup>29</sup> Thus, their journey of becoming patriots and obedient citizens was continued by participating in such state-sponsored organizations.

Interviewees shared that they were proud to be part of such activities. Perhaps it was because the enrollment requirements were initially very strict; thus, they were happy they passed them. Ilic wrote that admissions were checking whether their parents were “active in the Communist Party or who were themselves more politically engaged”.<sup>30</sup> Even when the admission rules became less strict, children still had to prepare a lot; for example, they had to learn both the personal and political biographies of major leaders of the Soviet Union.<sup>31</sup> Those who were not selected were thought to not be successful in their future careers.<sup>32</sup> Thus, interviewees recalled these years with a smile on their faces because maybe they were promised to have bright and stable future careers. Not only did they participate but they were sometimes

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with respondent #2, 8<sup>th</sup> of January 2023, 1:53 – 2:04.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid 6.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Jumabubu Mambetkalieva, 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2022, 23:08 – 23:11.

<sup>26</sup> Igmen, 42.

<sup>27</sup> Ilic, Melanie. *Soviet Women – Everyday Lives: Routledge Studies in the History of Russia and Eastern Europe*. London and New York: Routledge, 2020, 39.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Jumabubu Mambetkalieva, 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2022, 41 minutes.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid 27.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid 27, 39.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 39.

leaders of such activities. Respondent #2 shared that she held leading positions while she was in Oktobrists and Pioneers. Then, at university, while being a Komsomol, she became a “starosta” which meant a president.<sup>33</sup> While participating in such organizations, women learned that being politically supportive, specifically obedient and patriotic, was good as it promised a stable and bright future. It’s no wonder they pursued professions that the government supported as they simply expected the government’s support for a stable life.

They practiced their devotion and support to the Soviet state by attending field trips. Such trips were kind of a practice of the idea of communism. Students had to attend field trips to help with the harvest, particularly cotton, apples, grapes, etc.<sup>34</sup> For this part, Jumabubu’s sister Erkingul was also interviewed and expressed her feelings towards such trips even better. According to both sisters, they did it gladly and saw nothing wrong in helping their government. As Jumabubu stated, they were just contributing to their own country: “We helped our country. We wanted our country to be rich, we wanted our country to be powerful.”<sup>35</sup> It was especially fun for Erkingul as she enjoyed playing with her friends<sup>36</sup>. She shared that often teachers came up with interesting games and they would even prepare some prizes.<sup>37</sup> For one month of working students received 78 rubles, which was a significant amount of money for students. Although such trips would probably have been considered work exploitation, respondents had fun, demonstrated their support to the state, and even had the ability to earn money.

Lastly, women showed their support by entering career fields that the government wanted them to pursue such as health and education. Historically, there was a shortage of teachers in the USSR when the educational system was beginning to be implemented. In the 1930s, women were forced to study to become teachers for future generations and thus implement the educational system faster. Igmen mentions that one of the initial goals of educating women was that they would become great teachers.<sup>38</sup>

Jumabubu adds that both teachers and doctors were seen as respectful in Soviet society.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps that is the reason why the Soviet government still encourages women to become teachers. Igmen wrote that teachers did not earn much but were the first adults who helped students or future citizens socialize, build self-confidence, and share the ideals of the Soviet government. They were well-respected by their graduates and received presents or were visited as teachers were memorable and valuable in students’ lives.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, teachers were very influential as Jumabubu’s daughter noticed. She shared that it was her mother’s position as a teacher that her connections allowed her into university on her first attempt.<sup>41</sup> She shares that students who did not have connections had to take entrance exams for five and sometimes eight years in order to get in.<sup>42</sup> Thus, being raised in a privileged and stable life, even in times of

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with respondent #2, 8<sup>th</sup> of January, 2023, 59:53 – 1:03:15.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Jumabubu Mambetkalieva, 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2022, 18: 15 — 15:28.

<sup>35</sup> Igmen, 18:58 – 19:08.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Erkingul Shakieva, 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2022, 4:38 – 4:55.

<sup>37</sup> Igmen, 4:58 – 5:30.

<sup>38</sup> Igmen, Ali. “Self-Fashioning Kyrgyzness among Women.” In *Speaking Soviet with an Accent: Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan*, 120–39. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012, 128. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt5vkh78.12>.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Jumabubu Mambetkalieva, 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2022, 16:40.

<sup>40</sup> Ilic, Melanie. *Soviet Women – Everyday Lives: Routledge Studies in the History of Russia and Eastern Europe*. London and New York: Routledge, 2020, 39.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with respondent #2, 8<sup>th</sup> of January 2023, 22.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with respondent #2, 8<sup>th</sup> of January 2023, 18:08 – 18:25.

uncertainty like an economic crisis, shows why Jumabubu's daughter pursued a career that was supported by the government by becoming a doctor.

For these reasons and in hope of having connections and a stable life, Jumabubu chose to become a teacher and did not even try to explore her dreams. When the question about her dreams was asked, she seemed to have a thought blocking as she paused for several seconds. It seemed like she did not even think about the possibility back then and tries not to think about that right now.<sup>43</sup> She was happier to have endured all the trials in her path and that she never faced hunger in times of recession and economic crush. She seemed as if not following her unexplored passion was not a large sacrifice for all the advantages that she received.

Almost the same goes for her daughter who went to medical school because her mother already applied for her and was ready to pay her tuition.<sup>44</sup> Respondent #2 also did not know exactly what her dreams were back then as if she tried to block such thoughts. Although her mother did everything for her, she believed she still had a choice back then and she chose to attend medical school to become a doctor. The government supported doctors because historically their worth had been proven. Ilic wrote during the wars, doctors were in short supply and that showed how significant was the role of women in medicine. The shortage was so high that women were attending short courses on giving first aid.<sup>45</sup> Ilic also wrote that in some parts of the USSR, even after the wars, there was still a shortage of doctors. This profession was also seen as noble because women were helping so many people, but their wages were lower. In other words, women were helping the state a lot and therefore, the Soviet government supported women in medicine as well.

Thanks to that support, respondent #2 grew in this field where she started out as a nurse and currently, has the leading position she created and heads an association of specialists in laboratory diagnostics, where specialists with higher education flock throughout the republic.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, she could move from her hometown of Naryn to the capital of Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek. Currently, she is living in the mountainous areas, the most expensive in Bishkek, with her family, which consists of her husband, her daughter Aidina and her son. Therefore, it can be concluded that Jumabubu's daughter also aspired to have a stable and privileged life, which she received but in return, she gave away her dreams and followed a career that supported the Soviet state.

Respondent #2 also expressed her thankfulness to the Soviet regulations that protected her from hunger and ultimately gave her the stable, calm life she wanted. She liked these privileges so much that she influenced her daughter Aidina. Nowadays, there are many other professions that promise a more or less stable life with privileges. For example, the IT sphere allows workers to work from home but receive a great amount of money. The reason why Jumabubu's daughter did not allow Aidina to follow this, or another path was probably that she already instilled in herself the idea of communism. Thus, in her understanding, a profession should benefit the state despite a person's dreams or passion.

Aidina, on the other hand, shared that she wanted to become a musician, and even now she practices her musical instrument. Neither her mother nor her grandmother supports this profession as they see no clear help to the community. It is interesting that nowadays Aidina does

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with Jumabubu Mambetkalieva, 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2022, 19:40 – 20: 25.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with respondent #2, 8<sup>th</sup> of January 2023, 39:51 – 40:05.

<sup>45</sup> Ilic, Melanie. *The Palgrave Handbook of Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century Russia and the Soviet Union*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 251.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with respondent #2, 8<sup>th</sup> of January 2023, 48.

not really have to worry about uncertainties because nowadays nothing is certain and stable. She may even find that the privileges of being a doctor are not very alluring because there are many other easier and more interesting job options. Since Aidina is more of a creative person, she could become and still can become a singer, dancer, artist, content creator, etc. Therefore, Aidina probably should not feel the necessity of chasing a stable career field as everything changes and most professions are being replaced by robots.

However, just like during the war periods, the COVID-19 pandemic showed the necessity of doctors. Doctors were highly needed as the number of sick people grew during Coronavirus. Perhaps that was the reason why Aidina stayed in her field as she saw that doctors were still needed. Moreover, being surrounded by people who value stability, she probably started valuing it and the idea of chasing a career as a singer could not assure her nor her parents of stable work and a salary. Thus, she herself now is afraid of following something that is not very stable. Aidina tries to combine current trends like content creation with medicine. Although a stable future is not provided for her as there is no more Soviet Union, doctors remain a necessity as people continue to become sick.

Since Aidina is very young, it is hard to monitor her life experience as she has simply not lived long enough. Making assumptions about her future career path cannot be fully true; however, one thing is known for sure. Aidina, a girl that was born in a post-Soviet country, was and still is influenced by her mother and grandmother who experienced life during the Soviet Union and who witnessed its collapse. This influence can be proven at least by the fact that she studied in medical school for eight years despite her interest in music. The lives of the first two women Jumabubu and her daughter were shaped and directed according to their own difficulties and the economic and ideological conditions of the state they were living in. The ideologies that these women grew up in still have an impact on their lives as they continue working in these fields, always praising the USSR's time and influencing the lives of the current generation like Aidina.

Since the Soviet government helped women persevere through their tribulations and become financially independent, in return women had to become supportive citizens. Women faced many hardships like losing family members, facing recessions, and the collapse of the USSR. If these women tried to make ends meet on their own, they could have another, worse chain of events. Thanks to Soviet regulations and support, women pulled it off. In return, women were ready to sacrifice their dreams and support the Soviet government in many ways, from supporting the educational system to chasing career paths that the Soviet government encouraged them to.

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# SECTION 5

## **International Law Perspectives on the War Against Ukraine**



## **The limits of international law in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and their impact on future conflict resolution**

*Tudor Boanda, CUNY – Hunter College*

The global spread of democracy, the increased legitimacy of international law, and the enlargement of organizations such as the United Nations, the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) were supposed to mark the dawn of a new era of peace and stability, especially on the European continent. Looking back, the optimism that emerged in the post-Cold War European foreign policy establishment seems naive, perhaps even foolish. While the increasing threat of violence and the rise to power of nationalists and populists all across the continent already disproved that consensus, it wasn't until early 2022 that most Europeans realized there is still a long way to go until peace will finally be embraced by all countries. When thousands of Russian troops were amassed on Ukraine's border, essentially threatening to roll back every progress the country made since its Euromaidan revolution, it became clear that treaties and powerful institutions are not enough to protect democracies from external threats.

On February 24, President Vladimir Putin of Russia officially launched a military invasion of Ukraine, shortly after recognizing the independence of two breakaway regions in the Donbas: Donetsk and Luhansk. The moment marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Europe, as the relatively peaceful environment of the post-Soviet world ended. It was hard for many to imagine that such a brutal world can still happen in the era of globalism and international law, especially between two countries that were bonded by many cultural, linguistic, and historical ties. Yet, the war in Ukraine has become a reality and its crucial to analyze why the international system, using all available laws and mechanisms, failed to prevent this tragedy.

It was already clear that Putin and most of the Russian establishment disapproved of the enlargement of NATO and might have even felt personally threatened by the increasing popularity of liberal, pro-European politics in eastern European countries, particularly in former member states of the Soviet Union such as Ukraine, Georgia or Moldova. Nevertheless, few expected that he will launch a bloody and merciless war on Ukrainians, especially in cities and areas where most residents are ethnic Russians.

By looking at previous agreements between Ukraine, Russia, and Western powers, as well as at the historical and political background of the region, I will draw a conclusion on the motivations for Putin's invasion. The second part of the paper will take a more theoretical approach by analyzing instances where peace can be accomplished between two states. Finally, using international law theory, the conclusion will sum up whether conditions for a peaceful settlement are met in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict and whether international law provides a viable mechanism for its accomplishment.

### **The Budapest Memorandum**

The Budapest Memorandum was born out of a concern regarding the inheritance of nuclear weapons and was signed by three major nuclear powers at the end of the Cold War: Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Newly independent Ukraine, as well as Belarus and Kazakhstan, gave up their nuclear warheads in exchange for security guarantees from these powers, including to "Respect Belarusian, Kazakh and Ukrainian independence and sovereignty in the existing borders" and to "Refrain from the threat or the use of force against

Belarus, Kazakhstan or Ukraine”<sup>1</sup>. Russia violated both of these clauses when it recognized the independence of the breakaway regions in eastern Ukraine, as well as when it launched the invasion of the rest of the country. Such a serious violation of international law can attract unintended consequences not only for the legitimacy of the law but also for the future of nuclear proliferation.

Russia’s invasion may signal to other states currently debating nuclearization that warheads still serve as the best deterrence mechanism and that denuclearization will ultimately expose them to foreign threats.

Nevertheless, the fight for nuclear containment is not necessarily over and a single, albeit severe, violation of international law does not mean that it cannot solve future conflicts. John Haines of the Foreign Policy Research Institute analyzes the effects of the Russian invasion on the future of security agreements and challenges the claim that Ukraine’s relinquishment of its nuclear weapons and Russia’s subsequent invasion will hinder the prospects of halting nuclear proliferation<sup>2</sup>. He claims that the security guarantees were rendered useless by the qualifying clause in the Budapest Memorandum, which states that they apply only in the event that nuclear weapons are used by a guarantor<sup>3</sup>. A key aspect of the nuclear deterrence argument is to inspect whether Ukraine’s possession of such weapons would have made it less likely to be invaded by Russia. Given the high cost of maintaining a stockpile of nuclear weapons and the size of the defense budget, Ukraine would likely have had to give up some of the warheads voluntarily. Furthermore, deterrence only works if a state is willing to use them against the aggressor. If that were the case, then Ukraine would have actually made itself more susceptible to a nuclear attack from Russia and would have faced a much tougher challenge in rallying international support for its cause, as Haines argues<sup>4</sup>.

Nuclear Proliferation researcher Mariana Budjeryn considers that the Memorandum’s failure to prevent Russian aggression will negatively impact future disarmament efforts and will provide an opportunity for proliferators to advance their pro-nuclear agenda<sup>5</sup>. Budjeryn further argues that the Memorandum’s failure lies in its inability to impose severe costs on the violators, instead resting on “goodwill and self-restraint”<sup>6</sup>. Indeed, the Budapest Memorandum did not legally bind the signatory powers to defend Ukraine using military force, despite the preference of Ukrainian politicians for such a clause<sup>7</sup>. The final document only mentioned the need for consultations between the three powers, which at that time, along with American economic and defense support, satisfied the Ukrainians as they felt their bargaining options had been maximized<sup>8</sup>.

Despite the ambitious nature of the document and its significance for international affairs and denuclearization efforts, its substance of it falls short of the necessary language needed to enforce its deterrent mechanism. Most of the commitments were already legal obligations due to previous treaties<sup>9</sup>. It lists several specific commitments, including some new procedural commitments, such as seeking action at the UN Security Council and activating a consultation

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<sup>1</sup> Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances

<sup>2</sup> Haines, 3

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>5</sup> Budjeryn, 4

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>7</sup> Yost, 509

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 510

<sup>9</sup> Grant, 102



mechanism, and assistance to Ukraine. Grant argues that these provisions might have been satisfactory had they been explicitly legally binding<sup>10</sup>.

Arguing that is not the case, he points out the circumstance of the adoption of the Memorandum. Its relatively short text and quick adoption signaled the fact that the US and UK did not intend on creating a new security pact and that they do not consider it a legally binding document<sup>11</sup>.

Furthermore, the own clarification of the US that the Memorandum is a “politically”, not a legally binding agreement, along with the lack of a binding dispute settlement clause, further highlights the failure of the document to establish a more secure deterrent mechanism.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Minsk Agreements**

While the Budapest Memorandum served as the principal deterrent mechanism and key document that outlined Ukraine’s security policy, it was not the only international attempt at mediating the conflict in the Donbas. The Minsk Protocol called for a bilateral ceasefire in the region and although they were signed by both parties, as well as separatist leaders, and mediated by France and Germany, their efficacy has been intensely disputed. Unlike the Budapest Memorandum, ambiguity was no longer to blame, since the agreements were highly legalized and included clearly defined goals<sup>13</sup>.

The first protocol aimed to stop the fighting and reach an immediate ceasefire but it failed to accomplish its goal. Less than six months after the introduction of the first agreement, the four countries reached a new compromise, called Minsk II. Despite early signs of partial compliance, Minsk II did not accomplish its goal either and the agreement was abruptly terminated by Putin, who cast the blame for the agreement’s failure on Ukraine, shortly after ordering its invasion<sup>14</sup>.

According to Golanski, engaging in a “blame game” is an intentional Russian strategy meant to create confusion that will increase the challenge of monitoring and enforcing the resolutions of the Minsk Protocol. The motivations for shifting the blame could not be clearer for the Russian side: it is against the political calculations of the Russian side to implement Minsk II. Not only was there no opportunity for political gain but rather, Russia benefited from the “status quo of a gray zone”<sup>15</sup>.

Furthermore, he believes that Western countries lack the “necessary leverage to force Russia to fulfill its commitments”<sup>16</sup>. They rightfully decry the acts of Russian aggression but the opportunities for concrete actions beyond some economic sanctions are very limited.

Professor Kristian Åtland largely agrees with Golanski’s conclusion that Russia may find it has more to gain by using force to overwhelm Ukraine and force it into submission than by reaching a peaceful resolution. In a conflict, involved parties may prefer a so-called “no-deal alternative” if military victory is within reach or if they believe they can gain more concessions from the weaker state<sup>17</sup>. Russia may also be inclined to continue a war in order to weaken the “no-deal” option for Ukraine<sup>18</sup>. It is challenging to imagine than scenario under which Russia

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 103

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Embassy in Minsk

<sup>13</sup> Wittke, 278

<sup>14</sup> Golanski, 71

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 72

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 69

<sup>17</sup> Åtland, 124

<sup>18</sup> Odell, 383

will willingly retreat from Ukraine without obtaining at least some territorial or diplomatic concessions, which Ukraine may find unacceptable. Putin may find not only Russia's reputation to be in play but also its security policy.

On the other hand, the possibility of a peaceful resolution may not be entirely out of reach. The invasion has proven to be incredibly costly for Russia, not only in economic but also in political and military terms. Putin may feel that Russia's perceived overwhelming military advantage is no longer strong enough to win the war outright and may be more inclined to accept less drastic concessions. Similarly, in the wake of the full-scale invasion of their country, Ukrainians may likely reject any agreement that doesn't provide legally binding security assurances and strong deterrence mechanisms. Åtland considers the dilemma of the language of the Minsk Protocols, which may be useful for the short-term goal of reaching a ceasefire agreement, but may, at the same time, turn out to be detrimental to a long-term diplomatic settlement<sup>19</sup>. By trying to walk the fine line between Russian and Ukrainian interests, a future security agreement may focus on stopping the violence while stopping short of addressing the more serious political background that led to the conflict initially.

### **Accountability and legitimacy**

Åtland's most convincing and perhaps most consequential argument is the connection between Minsk II's failure and Russia's refusal to acknowledge its role in the conflict<sup>20</sup>. While Russian diplomats were present at the negotiations in Minsk, it is entirely possible that Russia never intended to abide by the resolutions of the agreement because it has consistently denied its involvement in the conflict. How can a peaceful resolution be reached with an actor that doesn't admit the most basic fact about the conflict in the first place, especially if that is one of the requirements for conflict resolution<sup>21</sup>?

Officially, Russia claimed that the Donbas conflict is a Ukrainian internal matter and even described it as a civil war between the government in Kyiv and the separatist leaders. Putin's consistent denial of military involvement in Russia even led then President Petro Poroshenko to claim at the 2016 Munich Security Conference that "Mr. Putin, [...] there is no civil war in Ukraine – that's your aggression"<sup>22</sup>.

The illegal invasion of the Donbas is not the only development denied by Russia. Putin has consistently denied the legitimacy of the government in Kyiv, claiming the Euromaidan and the immediately succeeding political events in Ukraine were the results of a coup<sup>23</sup>. Putin has also claimed that Ukraine is not a separate country from Russia, but rather a region that belongs to the Russian world,<sup>24</sup> and made bizarre and ambiguous claims about acts of Russophobia committed by ultra-nationalists, nazis, and anti-Semites in Ukraine<sup>25</sup>. Whether those are sincerely held beliefs or propaganda meant to rally Russians around his foreign policy aims is irrelevant; the only certitude is that such claims are a major impediment to a peaceful resolution.

Even after the full invasion of the country, Putin still denied Russia's involvement in the war, instead calling it a "special military operation" meant to liberate ethnic Russians in Ukraine. However, the idea that Russian-speaking Ukrainians have any desire to join Russia may be

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<sup>19</sup> Åtland, 137

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 122

<sup>21</sup> Wittke, 278

<sup>22</sup> Åtland, 127

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Kuzio, 465

<sup>25</sup> Yost, 534

unsubstantiated. As Kuzio argues, in reality, the opposite is actually true: “half or more of the Ukrainian military and security forces fighting in the Donbas are Russian speakers, in a development that undermines the description of the conflict as a civil war”<sup>26</sup>. Putin’s wrong assumption about the desire of Russian-speaking Ukrainians to separate from the country and the complete detachment of Moscow’s claims from reality may further fuel the violence in the name of an unattainable goal.

### **International Law in the Russia-Ukraine conflict**

Nevertheless, the war will end at some point and international law can serve as an important tool in the peace process. Huth, Croco, and Appel argue that conflict resolution is possible under certain conditions. International law works best when the two parties of a conflict have asymmetrical legal claims. One party needs to have a superior legal argument for their preferred solution<sup>27</sup>.

It is quite undeniable that Ukraine has a stronger legal case. Not only has Russia blatantly violated its territorial integrity and sovereignty, but as of the beginning of the invasion, it has also engaged in brutal, clear-cut cases of war crimes, with some actions that might even be deemed crimes against humanity. Furthermore, Putin does not have any legal basis to claim that Crimea belongs to Russia<sup>28</sup>. As evidenced by Düben, most of Russia’s claims on sovereignty over the Peninsula are based on an irredentist ideology and on historic arguments turned into nationalist propaganda. While it is true that Crimea has been a part of the Russian SFSR and its predecessors for two centuries, it was legally transferred to Ukraine in 1954, in accordance with the Soviet Constitution at that time<sup>29</sup>. Furthermore, in a free and fair referendum, a majority of Crimean voters declared their preference for Ukrainian independence, and by extension, Ukrainian governance<sup>30</sup>.

On the other hand, Russia may invoke the fighting that has been taking place in the Donbas since 2014. Using vague claims of “Nazism” and “genocide”, it may try to shift the blame on Ukraine and accuse the country of human rights violations, and given the conflict’s duration and intensity, it is likely that the Ukrainian army may not have been in full compliance with international law in the Donbas either.

The lack of legal basis for Russia’s actions is also supported by Huth, Croco, and Appel’s conclusion that “leaders with strong legal claims are more likely to push for negotiations and less likely to resort to force when they are dissatisfied with the status quo”<sup>31</sup>. It can be inferred that Putin launched the invasion, not because of a preference for the use of force, or because of a thorough cost-benefit analysis, but simply because there were no legal or diplomatic options available to accomplish his goal.

Further, the issue of reputation and its importance might have been underrated in the debate about Ukraine. Putin and the Russian foreign policy establishment have a reputation for breaking previous security agreements and for ignoring international law. Ukrainian diplomats are unlikely to trust Russian promises again, especially in the wake of the deadly invasion. The theory argues that countries will seek to establish a reputation that will deter other countries from

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<sup>26</sup> Kuzio, 468

<sup>27</sup> Huth et al., 421

<sup>28</sup> Marxsen, 379

<sup>29</sup> Düben

<sup>30</sup> Nohlen and Stöver, 1976

<sup>31</sup> Huth et al., 433

challenging it: “future players and future stakes[...] strongly influence government decisions”<sup>32</sup>. Therefore, if Ukraine surrenders and accepts concessions that are too generous to Russia, it can expect to face future hostility from Russia. It is, thus, improbable that Ukraine will accept to be the first to implement a ceasefire or accept any settlement with Russia without a strong security agreement from Western military powers. Whether mediators can find a mechanism that guarantees Ukraine’s security and forces Russia to be more transparent has yet to be seen.

Morrow claims that states fighting each other will judge their opponents' preferences based on their intention to honor treaty obligations<sup>33</sup>. Similarly, von Stein finds that a reputation for unreliability and a history of false promises may prevent states from cooperating<sup>34</sup>. If that theory holds true, then it can be inferred that Ukraine may be unwilling to negotiate with Russia because of a nearly complete lack of trust. In two previous treaties, the Budapest Memorandum and the Minsk Agreements, Russia was supposed to protect Ukraine’s integrity and agree to a ceasefire. Yet, neither of those two requests was honored by Russia.

Another small, but significant caveat is the lack of potential negotiators that could monitor or mediate the conflict. The ability to monitor another actor’s actions and respond to possible violations of an agreement are key features of cooperation<sup>35</sup>. Almost all Western democracies, including those renowned for their neutrality, have imposed sanctions on Russia and have been labeled ‘unfriendly’ in return, while most other major powers chose to not get involved in the conflict. Establishing mechanisms for monitoring is an obstacle that may prevent or weaken future agreements between the two parties, especially in the absence of third-parties that would be willing to enforce the agreement<sup>36</sup>.

If negotiation does take place, the feasibility of international law as a peace-making mechanism will be intensely debated. Many on the Ukrainian side could rightfully argue that further agreements with Russia are destined to fail given the history of Minsk II and the Budapest Memorandum. Yet, Wittke argues that “partial or absent implementation is normal in complex conflict and transition settings”<sup>37</sup>. A peaceful settlement may not resolve all underlying issues that caused the conflict in the first place, but it can facilitate a mechanism for some agreements and future dialogue between parties<sup>38</sup>. This view is supported by Lutmar et al., who argue that compliance is a continuous variable, displaying various forms and levels of compliance, rather than a binary one<sup>39</sup>.

### **Prospects for a peaceful settlement**

In order to try to establish a path toward a peaceful settlement, it is useful to assume that Putin continues to be a rational actor and that his claims about Ukrainian identity, sovereignty, and strength of the Russian forces are not actually sincerely held beliefs, but mere talking points used for domestic propaganda. In this theoretical scenario, Russia’s goals are not to control the entirety of the Ukrainian territory and can be limited to Donbas and the Crimean Peninsula, as well as a new security agreement with NATO.

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<sup>32</sup> Walter, 324

<sup>33</sup> Morrow, 975

<sup>34</sup> Von Stein, 5

<sup>35</sup> Morrow, 974

<sup>36</sup> Prorok and Appel, 730

<sup>37</sup> Wittke, 284

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Lutmar et al., 560

Accepting Russia's demands for the independence of Luhansk and Donetsk raises the issue of the feasibility of appeasement. Before the invasion, separatist groups held control over less than half of the territory of the two oblasts, although they controlled the two capitals. Territories may be further divided until a compromise is reached<sup>40</sup> but it is improbable that Russia will settle for anything less than the entirety of the Donbas. Furthermore, while some may find it a small price to pay for relative peace, Donetsk and Luhansk are the first, respectively, seventh most populous oblasts in Ukraine, containing about 15% percent of its population. Crimea is a similar, or perhaps even more important territory, serving as a tourism hub and gateway to the Black Sea.

It can be rightfully argued that the aim of Russia's support for the separatist leaders was not to establish control over them but to create a domestic conflict within the Ukrainian territory that would prevent its accession to NATO or the European Union. This argument is in line with the findings of Golanski<sup>41</sup>, Kuzio<sup>42</sup>, and Marxsen<sup>43</sup> Western assurances that Ukraine will not join NATO or an agreement that guarantees Ukraine's neutrality, akin to a "Finlandization" might also be proposed as starting points for negotiations. However, all these proposals have a common flaw: the issue of cooperation.

The conflict fits the pattern described by Oye's Chicken Game<sup>44</sup>. Cooperation is possible even under anarchy, but there are several issues that should be addressed. Neither Ukraine nor Russia may want to make concessions because they do not want to project weakness. Not only can that be dangerous for future conflicts, as predicted by the reputation theory<sup>45</sup>, but the leaders of the two countries may also fear the domestic reaction to a concession. It is thus implied that Putin will try to score at least a small victory, even if he fails to gain control over the entire territory of Ukraine. Which concession Ukraine should make, if it should make one at all, is likely one of the most pressing questions.

Ukraine does not have a lot of leverage against Russia, so negotiating is difficult. Not only is its military power inferior to that of Russia, but it also has less economic and diplomatic influence, and Western support for Ukraine only partly helps even the power imbalance between the two countries. Still, overwhelming Russian military superiority, whether real or just perceived by Russian leaders, and the power imbalance between the two states contributed to the start of the conflict<sup>46</sup>.

In "War as a Commitment Problem", Powell details the issues arising from the distribution of power. The weaker state must promise the adversary at least as much as it can get in a war in order to prevent violence from breaking out. However, as the weaker actor gains strength, whether absolute or relative, it will decrease the initial offer. This distribution limits the legitimacy of the weaker states' promises and makes bargaining more difficult<sup>47</sup>. As the Ukrainians take back territory and manage to prolong the war, they will be more inclined to refuse a settlement and believe they can end the fight with an absolute victory. This view seems

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<sup>40</sup> Huth et al., 419

<sup>41</sup> Golanski, 72

<sup>42</sup> Kuzio, 468

<sup>43</sup> Marxsen, 379

<sup>44</sup> Oye, 8

<sup>45</sup> Walter, 314

<sup>46</sup> Davis, 191

<sup>47</sup> Powell, 195

to be held by the Russian side as well: according to Western intelligence sources<sup>48</sup>, Putin is prepared for a prolonged conflict aimed at maximizing his country's gains. According to the same source, both countries currently believe they can make concrete gains on the battlefield, thus diminishing the prospects for a peaceful resolution.

## **Conclusion**

Unfortunately, any prospects for a peaceful resolution between Ukraine and Russia are no longer feasible. Power imbalance, issues of legitimacy, and the lack of democracy and regime accountability inside Russia are all factors that contributed to this outcome. Furthermore, even though the international community has tried to settle the post-Soviet disputes between the two states through mechanisms such as the Budapest Memorandum and the Minsk Agreements, both had a major flaw: they relied too heavily on Russian compliance. Ukraine signed the Memorandum despite being aware of the prospects of Russian revisionism and tensions over the sovereignty of the Crimean Peninsula. The agreement nevertheless failed to protect Ukraine's territorial integrity and raised doubts about the effectiveness of security agreements, especially when a great power is a party to such a treaty.

Many realists might claim that such an outcome should ultimately be expected in an anarchic system. While NATO members and their allies have taken economic and diplomatic measures to deter Putin from escalating the conflict even further, there is only so much they can do to coerce the world's largest nuclear power and the third most powerful military. It also raises the question of whether Putin will be open to negotiations and a peaceful settlement or will try to maximize Russia's territorial claims. That decision is ultimately his since it is unlikely that Western powers will find an effective way to force Russia to comply with international norms or that Putin will face credible opposition from within his government.

The horrendous acts of violence and war crimes committed by the Russian army inside Ukraine's territory have likely convinced Ukrainians not to accept a settlement with Russia. Even if a peace agreement will ultimately be reached, it will most likely be the result of the outright military defeat of one of the two countries, and not due to the mechanisms of international law.

Nevertheless, international law should not be dismissed as a solution to military conflicts. Under certain circumstances, such as when parties have asymmetrical legal claims, when there is no overwhelming power imbalance between states, or when mechanisms for compliance and monitoring can be successfully established, international law can provide an effective path to peaceful conflict resolution.

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<sup>48</sup> Haines, 2022

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# Russia-Ukraine War as a commitment problem: How it starts and what is the prospect to its end.

Yijin Qu, University of Rochester

## Introduction

The ongoing Russia-Ukraine war is one of the most shocking wars in recent decades by its scale and its violence. In nature, it is a war with a great power directly involved and with an initial plan to destroy a sovereign state, deviating from the agent war paradigm after the Second World War. In its scale of violence, the war has resulted in over 200,000 military casualties until Nov 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022, according to US General Milley.<sup>1</sup> It is also worth noting that this war drove the international community to the edge of a nuclear war for the first time after the Cuban Missile crisis in 1962. Considering all these aspects, the Russia-Ukraine war has great impact in international politics. Thus, how such a war starts and what is the prospect to its end became a core problem that we should ask.

The origin and the termination of war is one of the central topics of international relations. While different scholars of international politics attributed the cause of the war to different reasons, most scholars agreed that the termination of war is an asymmetrical issue to the cause of war, making the war termination a totally different issue. In this paper, I interpret the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war as a classical commitment problem, which generally overlooked by scholars, and aspires to provide a coherent view in the origin of the specific Russia-Ukraine war and its prospect for termination.

My paper will proceed as follows: first, I will generally examine the past literature on the cause of war and focus on how the classical commitment problem can cause wars. Then, I will argue that the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war can be explained as a classical commitment problem. After that, I will argue that the prospect of war termination actually faces the same commitment problem which promotes a significant barrier for proposing acceptable terms for both sides in the bargaining table for post-war settlements. Both sides have no reason to accept a settlement that is highly possible to be breached. Thus, I conclude that the war is very unlikely to end in a short period of time as long as the war does not lead to “absolute war”.<sup>2</sup> In the final part of my paper, I will discuss the possible situations in which one side may seek peace solutions rather than fighting until the very end with the presence of commitment problem.

## Literature review

As the war broke out, scholars of international politics provided several different views on the cause of the war. Represented by Mearsheimer, the offensive realism offers an explanation that the Ukraine crisis was “the West’s fault” because NATO enlargement and EU expansion “moving into Russia’s backyard and threatening its core strategic interests”.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, constructivists seemed to attribute the war to the de-evolution of anarchic culture in recent years. However, rationalists would oppose those explanations because they “dismiss the view that all

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<sup>1</sup> Cooper, Helena. “Russia and Ukraine each have suffered over 100,000 casualties, the top US general says.” *The New York Times*, 10 November 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Reiter, Dan. *How Wars End* (2009):25

<sup>3</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. “Why the Ukraine crisis is the West’s fault: the liberal delusions that provoked Putin.” *Foreign Affairs*. vol.93 ,2014, pp.1-2.

wars entail destruction and suffering”.<sup>4</sup> According to Fearon, it is the failure of leaders to reach a bargaining settlement that led to a “costly and risky” war.<sup>5</sup> In Fearon and Powell’s rationalist explanation, the “private information” and “commitment problem” are two important mechanisms that lead to the outbreak of war. While the “private information” problem is generally emphasized in current discussion of Russia-Ukraine war, the “commitment problem” seems to generally lack a deliberate discussion. In my paper, I will apply commitment problem into the ongoing war and examine what commitment cause the escalation. I will argue that treating the Russia-Ukraine war as commitment problem can illuminate the prospect of war termination, which is extremely difficult to be predicted precisely.

### **Russia-Ukraine war as commitment problem**

In this section, I will examine what were the possible commitments proposed during the pre-war bargaining and argue that the core commitments in the deal for both sides were not credible for each other. First, the key demand that constantly being made by Russia is that NATO should retreat from east Europe and especially stay out of Ukraine. According to Shyrokykh, Russia sees “former Soviet Union as legitimate sphere of interests” and thus tied the NATO enlargement as a threat to national security.<sup>6</sup> This is exemplified as early as in 2008 by warning that “Ukrainian Membership in west alliance would entail a deep crisis in Russia-Ukrainian relations”.<sup>7</sup> Just before the Russian troops cross the border, as reported by Reuters, Putin again “demand NATO to roll back from east Europe and stay out of Ukraine”.<sup>8</sup> However, even Ukraine accepted the term and postponed its demand to join NATO to avoid a war, Ukraine has a great incentive in joining NATO and the EU to reduce its cost of national defense and promote its economy in the future. By joining the NATO, Ukraine could significantly reduce the risk in national security through deterrence and sharing cost with NATO according to the famous “Article 5”. Though Ukraine may prefer to postpone the process in exchange for temporary peace, their commitment can never be seen as credible for Russians because Russians also know that Ukraine has a strong incentive to breach the current settlements.

As for the Ukrainian side, the biggest concern is the threat of Russia to its independence and sovereignty. After Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the Russian-led independence, the threat of its sovereignty and territorial security mainly came from the neighboring great power: Russia. In this case, Ukraine continued to express its willingness to join NATO to deter the possible total invasion of Russia. Just before the war broke out, in order to appease Russia, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz reportedly made efforts to persuade Zelensky to “renounce its NATO aspirations and declare neutrality”.<sup>9</sup> However, Zelensky replied that Putin “couldn’t be trusted to uphold such an agreement”.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, from the perspective of the Ukrainian leaders, considering the relative power of Russia and the recent historical Russia-Ukraine interactions, it

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<sup>4</sup> Fearon, James D. "Rationalist explanations for war." *International organization*, vol.49, no.3, 1995, pp.383.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*,380.

<sup>6</sup> Shyrokykh, Karina. "The evolution of the foreign policy of Ukraine: External actors and domestic factors." *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol.70, no.5, 2018, pp.842.

<sup>7</sup> “Bush backs Ukraine on NATO bid.” *BBC News*, 1 April.2008, Accessed 5 January2023.

<sup>8</sup> Balmforth, Tom. Tétrault-Farber, Gabrielle. “Russia demands NATO roll back from East Europe and stay out of Ukraine.” *Reuters*, 17 December.2021, Accessed 5 January 2023.

<sup>9</sup> Bisscherbe, Noemie. Gordon, Michael. R et.al. “Vladimir Putin’s 20-Year March to War in Ukraine-and How the West Mishandled It.” *Wall Street Journal*. 1 April.2022, Accessed 6 January 2023.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*,

is not reasonable to treat any promise made by Russia credible unless the Ukraine is under the protection of NATO.

Therefore, even until the very last minute, there is a deal on the bargaining table for peace with Ukraine renouncing its NATO aspirations and Russia demobilizing its troops. However, it is the commitment problem that prevents both sides from accepting the mutually beneficial deal.

### **How the war influences the commitment problem**

In this section, I will argue that the current situation of the war exacerbates the distrust between the two sides and the “new information” revealed by the war possibly makes the initial commitment problem to extend to the peace bargaining, creating even more barriers for reaching a mutually acceptable post-war settlement.

First, I will discuss when the commitment problem that caused the war can extend to peace bargaining after the war breaks out. If the war eliminates any side’s concern and made any side’s commitment credible, then the commitment problem would no longer create barriers for war termination. In this case, I will argue in the following that the war even exacerbates the incredibility of commitments of both sides.

For Russia, it has been proved in the ongoing war that even without joining the NATO, the so-called western alliance can have many informal forms presence in Ukraine to provide security and enhance the Ukrainian troops. This is exemplified by the continuous military aid and a great number of informal mercenaries and volunteer soldiers from the western countries fighting on the Ukrainian side, which create great difficulties for the implementation of Russia’s war plan. Though it is very difficult to gauge the number of volunteer soldiers fighting for Ukraine, they do present on the battlefield and participate in the battle rather than only served on logistics. It is estimated that “1000 to 3000 foreign fighters are active in three battalions of the International Legion”.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, the western presence is also exemplified by the massive aid including arms and other resources provided by the western countries. According to Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, until the Jan 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the US congress have approved more than \$113 billion of aid and military assistance to support Ukraine.<sup>12</sup> Not only providing aid, the Western alliance including NATO and EU is also providing training which is invaluable for newly enlisted Ukrainian soldiers and enhanced the Ukrainian troops. According to the European Union Military Assistance Mission Ukraine (EUMAM) launched on February 2022, there will be 15,000 Ukrainian soldiers to be trained by EU in the following two years.<sup>13</sup> In the first stage of the war, the Russian troops gained competitive edge on the battlefield as Ukrainian troops fought without western aids. However, as more and more “informal” western aids were transported to Ukraine, the Ukrainian troops are able to effectively organize defense and execute counterattack against Russian troops even with those “informal” western presence. At the same time, the western presence in the war also showed the resolve of the western alliance to contain Russia along its national borders by bearing great costs in providing aids and the willingness to even increase the aid in following years. For example, during Biden’s visit to Kyiv on February 2023, he announced to give more “critical equipment” to support Ukraine and “more sanctions” to

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<sup>11</sup> Stein, Jeff. “Democracy Defenders and Rambo wannabes: Ukraine’s Volunteer Foreign Fighters”. *The Washington Post*, 18 January 2023, Accessed 11 March 2023.

<sup>12</sup> “Congress Approved \$113 billion of Aid to Ukraine in 2022.” *Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget*, 5 January 2023, Accessed 8<sup>th</sup> Mar 2023.

<sup>13</sup> “European Union Military Assistance Mission Ukraine (EUMAM).” *European Union External Action*, 12 February 2022, Accessed 13 March 2023.

Russian elites as well.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Russia may begin to adjust its national security strategies that prevent NATO enlargement to Ukraine. In this case, Putin may have to consider seeking regime change or annexing the territory of Ukraine to achieve his goal of at least creating a buffer zone between the Western alliance and Russia, as long as the cost of fighting the war does not skyrocket. This is because the strong western presence in Ukraine caused by the war can only increase the tension along Russian border. The acceptable commitment of not joining NATO by Ukraine becomes meaningless to Russia as it is highly possible that the commitment will be breached in the future.

For Ukraine, the current war itself serves as a vivid example for the inability of the Russians to keep its commitment of not invading. The very fact that Russian troops invaded Ukraine while Ukraine has not officially or formally joined NATO itself is the clearest evidence for Ukrainians leaders not to trust Putin's previous commitment. In this case, Zelensky could have been informed that in Putin's mind Ukraine is the tool to respond and threaten NATO enlargement. If he acquires this observation, then he has no incentive to believe in Putin because in Putin's mind Russian-Ukraine relation is dependent on the Russia-NATO bargaining. Meanwhile, considering Putin's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the following independence movements in east Ukraine sponsored by Russia, and the current invasion, Ukrainian leaders have enough reasons to believe that Russia may use coercion again in the foreseeable future to achieve its goal in the confrontation against NATO. It is also worth noticing that the way Putin legitimizes the war may also weaken the credibility of his possible commitment not to invade. In his speech on Feb 21<sup>st</sup>, he referred to Ukraine as an "inalienable part of their own history, culture, and spiritual space" and "modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russians".<sup>15</sup> This narrative, in war situations, can easily be interpreted as demanding for territorial annexation. In this case, the possible Russian commitment for not to invade in the future bargaining table is very likely to be treated as incredible.

### **Prospect for war termination**

Based on the analysis above, it is not easy for both sides to locate the mutually acceptable terms because the commitment of both sides are perceived incredible. In this case, the commitment problem that caused the war may also create a great barrier for the war termination.

It is generally argued by rationalists that wars caused by commitment problems are more prone to fight until the very end, or the absolute results. This is because the commitment problem that initiated the war can be very difficult to eliminate. In Fearon's framework, for example, the exogenous shifts of military power can cause the commitment problem following the logic of preventive war.<sup>16</sup> In our discussion on the Ukraine-Russia war, the logic of preventive war is the strategy followed by Russia concerning the enhanced military power of Ukraine by joining the NATO in the future. It can be very difficult to find solutions can make Ukraine's current commitment credible because given the shifts in power, there will always be the incentive for the Ukraine to join the NATO. However, as argued by Dan Reiter, when the "cost of continued fighting promise to escalate significantly," both sides may not pursue absolute result.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, I argue that each state is facing multiple issues concurrently when dealing with

<sup>14</sup> Biden, Joseph. "Statement from President Joe Biden on Travel to Kyiv, Ukraine" *The White House*. 20 February 2023, Accessed 12 March 2023.

<sup>15</sup> Putin, Vladimir. "Address by the President of the Russia Federation." 21 February, 2022, Accessed 6 January 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Fearon, James D. "Rationalist explanations for war." *International organization*, vol.49, no.3, 1995, pp.405.

<sup>17</sup> Reiter, Dan. *How Wars End* (2009):39.

international politics. Then, the general national interest is extremely complicated with the multiple dimensions of international politics because, as argued by Robert Jervis, treating the international politics as system means the “the chains of consequences extend over time and many areas and the effects of action are always multiple”.<sup>18</sup> The Russia-Ukraine bargaining or more broadly speaking, the Russia-NATO bargaining is one of the dimensions of international politics that both side is dealing with. However, any bargaining results in one dimension can affect the bargaining in other dimensions.

Thus, in the case of Russia-Ukraine war, when continued fighting influence some crucial and urgent interests from other aspects for one side or both, it maybe rational for them to locate a peaceful settlement, despite that their commitment may still be perceived incredible in the long run. One of the cases may be that the enormous destruction caused by the war imperils the regime’s security by destabilizing the domestic politics. Responding to the massive cost imposed by the war, the Anti-war movement may sharpen the existing tension in domestic politics and create instability that skyrockets the cost of war. Therefore, states may find themselves rational to temporarily trust their enemy with a peace settlement to appease the domestic discontent. Another scenario may be that the war destabilizes the alliance system of NATO or pro-Russian alliance. In this case, the cost to continue the war may skyrocket and become even larger than losing the war. Without this scenario, based on my analysis, both sides maybe very difficult to locate a peaceful settlement that can overcome the commitment problem.

## Conclusion

While there is different literature on the current Russia-Ukraine war, I argue that the ongoing war is at least partially caused by the classical commitment problem. Even though both sides fulfill each other’s demand by a commitment, both cannot make their commitment credible. It is reasonable for Russia to distrust Ukraine on not joining NATO because the shift of power balance may occur in the future. It is also reasonable for Ukraine to distrust Russia on not to invade because of the current imbalance of power.

Then, I argue that the current war worsens the commitment problem because for Russia, the effect of “informal” western presence makes its demand meaningless and destined to be breached if Ukraine currently makes a commitment and for Ukraine, the current invasion itself serves as a vivid example that Russia cannot make credible commitment. The recent history since 2014 and Putin’s legitimization of the war deteriorate the distrust. Thus, I argue that it may have a very bleak prospect for the war termination considering the commitment problem.

Meanwhile, I also try to propose a several situations related to possible war termination in the future. When the cost of continued fighting skyrockets as the war imperils other crucial and urgent interests like domestic politics or destabilization of crucial alliance, Russian and Ukraine may be able to locate a mutually acceptable peaceful settlement to end fighting, despite their commitment may still be seen as incredible.

By paying special attention to the commitment problem in the current war, I am not arguing that commitment problem was the only or the most important problem that caused the war and created a barrier for the prospect of war termination. For example, it is also clear that private information also served as a cause for the war. By initiating attacks, Putin clearly overestimate the capability of Russian troops and underestimate the capability of Ukrainian troops and the resolve of western alliance to support Ukraine. Meanwhile, the NATO enlargement and the revival of Realpolitik seem to create a tension between Russia and Western

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<sup>18</sup> Jervis, Robert. *System Effect: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (1997):10.

alliance that paved the ground for Putin's strategic choice. International Politics is an extremely complex system in which different mechanisms can intervene or work together. However, unlike the private information problem, the commitment problem is difficult to solve by the war and will significantly affect the peace bargaining and war termination.

From a more theoretical perspective, if the war itself can deteriorate the commitment problem, then if it's possible that the war can also solve the commitment problem? If so, in what conditions does the war itself eliminate the commitment problem? For example, if the great cost of the war interrupt or even reverse the long-term trend of power shift, the incredible commitment can be credible at a certain point of the war. In these cases, the influence of commitment problems on war termination requires further examination and may contribute to our understanding of the war.

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# War-Inflicted Damages to Transport Infrastructure in Ukraine: Damage Analysis and Roadmap to Reconstruction

*Victoria Piontkivska, University of Pittsburgh*

## Abstract

The Russian war against Ukraine has been detrimental to many civilians and Ukrainian defenders and extremely destructive towards capital assets, in particular transport infrastructure. Assessment of damages caused by the war is an important initial step in the post-war rebuilding process to determine post-disaster needs, including economic recovery planning and reconstruction program design. In this paper, I analyze information on the damages, losses, and potential recovery needs for the post-war reconstruction of Ukrainian transport infrastructure. It is important to prioritize reconstruction works and secure concessional financing and grants from external sources. Ukrainian authorities should prioritize rebuilding of transportation infrastructure necessary to restore supply chains and facilitate a transition to EU standards.

## 1. Introduction

This paper analyzes interim damage, losses, and needs estimation of the Ukrainian transport sector following the Russian invasion and suggests a roadmap to reconstruction after the Ukrainian victory. The Russian Federation invaded Ukraine on February 24th, 2022, with missile attacks and air strikes all over the country destroying cities and homes, separating families, and killing civilians. As a result of targeted attacks as well as collateral damage, an extensive network of transport infrastructure suffered serious damage and losses. Transport infrastructure is crucial for numerous aspects of the economy, so it is important to understand what sectors of transport sustained the most damage to efficiently prioritize recovery needs and allocate funds appropriately. Among transport infrastructure, Ukraine's roads and bridges have seen the most damage and destruction in physical terms and therefore will require the most reconstruction needs.

The roadmap to rebuilding transportation infrastructure should be designed to maximize economic and social impact. It should take into account Ukraine's EU membership aspirations and the security risks that Russia will continue to present. The ultimate amount of war damages is likely to outweigh the preliminary assessments discussed in this paper<sup>1211</sup>. To avoid excessive debt accumulation, Ukraine should advocate for concessional financing instruments and grants rather than loans, and the anchor financing and guarantees should come from multilateral financial organizations with a clear set of procedures and implementation monitoring.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 offers relevant historical background to the war as well as an overview of the pre-war transport infrastructure sector. Section 3 reviews studies concerning the link between investment in transport infrastructure and economic development and post-war reconstruction cases. Section 4 provides an analysis of damages, losses, and needs based on data collected by the World Bank and the Ministry of Infrastructure of Ukraine. Section 5 offers a roadmap to reconstruction and conclusions.

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1 Overall damages and needs were estimated at \$29.9 billion and \$73.8 billion respectively as of June 1st, 2022 by the World Bank. Total recovery needs at the time of writing is likely significantly bigger - between \$264.8 – 351.1 billion (estimate assumes same level of destruction as in the previous war period and includes the investment of changing railroads to align with EU standards).

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Political situation background

The history of Russian oppression of Ukraine goes far beyond the full-scale invasion in February 2022. Ever since Ukraine claimed independence in 1991 following a referendum that was supported by 92 percent of voters, Russia has been constantly attempting to interfere with the political life of Ukraine (Mankoff, 2022). It is crucial to discuss events that motivate the Russian invasion, as well as the potential for future interventions. Following the collapse of the USSR, some politicians and some parts of the population were hoping to restore the idea of the Soviet Union and shift back under Russian influence. Meanwhile, opinion polls showed the majority of Ukrainians supported the country's future as part of the European Union - with similar values and democracy for all (група РЕЙТИНГ, 2022). These aspirations prompted a series of bilateral political and economic agreements with the EU, but the pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych refused to sign a milestone EU-Ukraine Association Agreement in 2013. This triggered public protest and public advocacy for EU accession. The series of protests and eventual fleeing of President Yanukovych was later called the Revolution of Dignity, which took place in Kyiv in late 2013. Following the political disruption from the revolution, Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula and started military intervention in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in the east of Ukraine. For people in Eastern Ukraine, the war with Russia started in 2014 and has been ongoing. On February 24th, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, destroying cities, separating families, and killing Ukrainians en masse across the country.

Missiles and artillery have targeted civilian and state-owned infrastructure, including transportation networks, thus inhibiting necessary transportation routes for both people and cargo.

### 2.2 Overview of the Transportation Sector of Ukraine

The transportation sector<sup>2 212</sup> plays an important role in the economy as it facilitates the efficiency of trade and the mobility of people (United Nations, 2008). Efficient provision of transport services requires extensive investment in infrastructure, including road networks (national and local), bridges, pipelines, railway network, sea and river ports (including water transport and facilities), urban public transport, airports, and postal network.

Ukraine has a well-developed transportation sector and it is a significant contributor to Ukraine's economic output (see Annex 1). Its share in the gross value added was hovering around 6.6% in 2015-19 as shown in Figure 1 before falling to 5.9% of GDP due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

Transportation infrastructure in Ukraine included a vast network of roads and motorways (with 162.2 thousand km of national roads and 200 thousand local roads) and waterways (1.9 thousand km) (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2022). Ukraine has one of the largest railway networks in Europe with a combined length of 19.8 thousand km, of which 47.4% are electrified (Prytula et al., 2019). There were 32 civil airports for international and domestic flights, 13 seaports at the coasts of the Black and Azov seas, and 11 riverports on the Dnieper river and Danube delta (Atlassian, n.d.). Sea ports were used for exporting grain and metal products, two industries where Ukraine engages in extensive trade.

A significant portion of Ukraine's transport infrastructure is outdated and needed modernization in pre-war times (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, n.d.). In view of the EU

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<sup>2</sup> According to ISIC (The International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities), the transportation sector belongs to Section H Transportation and Storage and includes all types of transportation services, warehousing and transportation support, postal and courier services.

integration aspirations, the Ukrainian government had a strategic plan to modernize transportation infrastructure until 2030 to adhere to EU standards (Кабінет Міністрів України, 2018). With its geographical location, Ukraine has huge potential to become a major transportation hub and integrate into strategic European transportation corridors.

### **3. Literature review**

Transport infrastructure is crucial for many aspects of the economy. Well-functioning transportation and logistics systems improve economic prospects via efficiency and productivity gains; these can eventually translate to higher GDP and improved well-being. Numerous studies show positive linkages between the quality and quantity of transport infrastructure and different aspects of economic development (Gaus & Link, 2020; Lenz et al., 2018). Investment in transportation infrastructure significantly improves the prospects of economic development, especially in low-income countries, where even small improvements in connectivity substantially reduce economic costs and boost productivity (Njoh, 2000; Pradhan & Bagchi, 2013).

Thus, efforts to improve transportation functioning in any given country (e.g., through investments in transportation infrastructure) are tantamount to improving the country's economic performance as a whole. Conversely, failure to invest in transportation infrastructure results in the inefficient use of available resources in the crucial areas of the country's economy. Transportation is vital in response to emergency and disaster situations. In times of catastrophic events, the existence of efficient transport infrastructure helps to save lives as it enables efficient evacuations of people, as well as an efficient supply of humanitarian aid to and from disaster and conflict zones. In the case of Ukraine, after the full-scale war began and despite the damages inflicted on transport infrastructure, operational railways, and extensive road networks helped many people to evacuate from the war zones (Martinez et al., 2022). Likewise, they enabled the supply of humanitarian aid and military goods to the frontlines.

Thus, rebuilding transportation infrastructure is a priority for Ukrainian authorities in post-war reconstruction. The study of post-war restoration efforts in Kosovo based on stakeholders' survey results concludes that the post-conflict infrastructure reconstruction process requires thorough planning and needs assessment to yield positive outcomes for society (Earnest & Dickie, 2012). As the rebuilding of infrastructure incurs high costs, it is important to prioritize the key areas and assess the financial needs upfront. Otherwise, inefficient planning may result in large public debt, as has occurred in other reconstruction efforts, such as those in Lebanon (Harvie & Saleh, 2008). Ukraine's aspirations towards EU accession call for infrastructure rebuilding to be in line with the EU standards. Prytula et al. (2019) argue that modernization of the cross-border and domestic transport infrastructure to comply with EU standards will encourage closer and more efficient economic cooperation and call for bringing government regulations concerning the national transport network and border infrastructure in line with the EU regulations.

### **4. Data Analysis**

Russian war against Ukraine has been detrimental to many lives of civilians and Ukrainian defenders and extremely destructive towards capital assets. The World Bank, jointly with the Government of Ukraine and the European Commission, made a joint effort to assess damages and needs resulting from those damages in the first three months of the Russian war against Ukraine (February 24th, 2022 - June 1st, 2022), publishing the Damages and Needs report. The damages reported by the Kyiv School of Economics cover the first six months

(February 24th, 2022 - September 1st, 2022) of the war (Kyiv School of Economics, 2022).

#### 4.1 Definitions

The World Bank guidance notes on damages, losses, and needs assessment to provide a comprehensive methodology framework that is used to assess damages and losses as well as preliminary recovery needs for Ukraine by the multilateral institutional team. In this section following definitions will be used as outlined in the Guidance Notes by the World Bank:

- **Damages:** total or partial destruction of physical assets existing in the affected area. Damage is assessed in physical units, and costs in monetary values are calculated with replacement prices before the war (The World Bank, 2010a).
- **Losses:** temporary changes in economic flows arising from the war, expressed in monetary terms. Losses are estimated based on the volume of traffic flows, higher operating costs due to the war, and the time needed for the reconstruction (The World Bank, 2010a).
- **Needs:** value expressed in monetary terms that are associated with the restoration and rebuilding of prewar infrastructure levels; the costs of needs do not equal the sum of damages and losses because they also include costs associated with a building back better framework which includes, but is not limited to, modernization, sustainability efforts, and EU standards (The World Bank, 2010b). Below is the general formula used by the World Bank assessment team when calculating estimated needs in a given war/disaster.

$$\text{Reconstruction needs} = \text{Value of Damage} + \text{Cost of (Quality improvement + Technological modernization + Relocation, when needed + Disaster risk reduction features + Multi-annual inflation)}$$

It is important to note certain limitations faced by entities collecting and analyzing data on damages and losses. Due to active fighting in certain regions of Ukraine, proper assessment of damages was not possible. Damages in those regions were estimated using satellite images and comparing those to images of the same region prior to the war. Definitions of transportation sectors vary across sources and government entities were not always able to record all damages accurately. All of the aforementioned reasons inevitably lead to some deviation between data sources and under- or over-estimation of costs. Data used in this paper is primarily excerpted from the most recent World Bank Rapid Damage and Need Assessment (RDNA) and the most recent Damages Report by the Kyiv School of Economics (KSE). The RDNA data used by the assessment team was primarily provided by the Ministry of Infrastructure of Ukraine for the calculations. The KSE calculations are based on data from local authorities and information about damages submitted by civilians through the digital app “Diia” under the “Russia will pay” (damaged.in.ua) initiative (Kulish, 2022). The latter initiative records damages throughout the country to help with reconstruction needs assessment. In the future, this will be used as evidence of war crimes Russia committed in Ukraine to enable the payment of reparations from Russia.

#### 4.2 Damages Assessment

Among transport infrastructure, Ukraine’s roads and bridges had seen the most damage and destruction in physical terms. As of August 2022, 18.7% of total national highways and

motorways and 3.8% of all local roads had been damaged or destroyed (World Bank et al., 2022). Bridges have been targeted by Russia because of the critical role they play logistically and because it takes more time to repair a bridge, causing more extensive slowdowns. As of August 2022, Russia has destroyed 3.03 million square meters of bridges (17% of total bridges on national roads). The second largest damage in terms of share of total stock has been inflicted on the aerospace industry, with dozens of operational civil airports being damaged (almost half of the total airports count prior to the war) as Russia wanted to cut Ukraine off military supplies by air. Ukraine lost access to its seaport infrastructure with 83.3% of the seaports being blocked or occupied, making it impossible to use those ports for cargo shipments.

Railways and road networks incurred the largest amount of damage accounting for 17.0% and 54.8% of total damage, respectively (Figure 2). Road and railway networks play a crucial role for Ukraine and its economy since those are the main networks for the movement of goods and services and exports from Ukraine, as well as the evacuation of people from hostile regions and shipments of military and humanitarian aid from the EU and other Western allies.

Throughout 2021, Ukraine's road network has been undergoing significant reconstruction under president Zelensky's campaign "Great Construction" (Кабінет Міністрів України, n.d.). The Russian war not only set those reconstruction efforts back but also destroyed the substantial progress that had been made prior to the invasion. Roads take the highest toll during military aggression since all extremely heavy military equipment is transported along roadways, which while not showing immediate damage, have a cumulative effect over time given their substantial weight. As such, these roads require future restoration. . Air missile strikes also inevitably lead to road damage. For instance, in cases when a Ukrainian anti-air defense system shoots down an enemy's rocket and prevents it from hitting civilian infrastructure, there's a possibility it will hit a less populated road. Total damage to the road network in physical units is estimated at 16,300 kilometers and the monetary cost for that is \$16.4 billion, so essentially every kilometer of the road network is predicted to cost approximately \$1 million to replace (Kyiv School of Economics, 2022). Notably, these numbers are just estimates from 6 months ago and actual damages and costs are significantly larger, especially due to more escalated and extensive attacks in the past few months.

The railway network is the second largest sector for damages. Despite numerous deliberate attacks by Russia, the Ukrainian railway system (Ukrzaliznytsya) has been the backbone of evacuation for millions of civilians all over Ukraine and is crucial for the economic and military supply chains. Free evacuation train rides were provided to anyone trying to flee ever since the invasion in February. Ukrzaliznytsya is also one of the ways aid shipments from the EU are getting into the country - ranging from various military equipment to humanitarian packages (food, clothing, hygiene products) for those in need. A recent nudging study conducted in Ukraine suggests that people are more willing/likely to evacuate if they are offered a clear evacuation plan along with means of transportation to flee a certain region, which is essentially what Ukrzaliznytsya has been providing (Martinez et al., 2022). At times of constant shelling of cities (e.g. Kharkiv), it was impossible to evacuate via private vehicles so the majority of people relied on the Ukrainian railways to provide safe evacuation.

Damages to the aviation sector are relatively small, representing only 1.67% of total damages as the biggest airports have not been physically damaged, rather only have been temporarily closed for flights. Most of the damages are due to direct attacks on regional airport facilities and airfields. The aviation industry sustained a considerable amount of losses due to closed airspace; those are discussed later in this section.

According to KSE, water transport damages (including seaport infrastructure and water transportation facilities) are estimated at \$496 million as of September 1, 2022 (Kyiv School of Economics, 2022). As mentioned previously, the majority of seaports have been blocked or occupied either since the annexation of Crimea or since the full-scale invasion in February. The inland water transportation network exists; however, it is not developed to its full potential. The majority of the water transport infrastructure needs restoration and improvements in order to function more efficiently. Investments in inland water infrastructure could be beneficial and necessary in the current situation while access to most seaports remains restricted. Dnipro, the largest river in Ukraine, currently cannot be used for transportation needs because of the partial blockade (where it runs through temporarily occupied cities). Other damages include damage to the postal services network, which amounted to \$11 million based on data provided by the two biggest postal service providers in Ukraine - Nova Poshta and Ukrposhta (Kyiv School of Economics, 2022). Digital infrastructure damages amount to at least \$566 million (there is not enough comprehensive data to compute further calculations) and include different means of electronic communication such as internet networks of fixed-line operators, radio, and telecom networks.

The total damages to transport infrastructure estimated by the World Bank were at \$29.9 billion as of June 1st, 2022. A report on damages by KSE three months later (as of September 1st, 2022) estimates total damages at \$35.3 billion. Even though both numbers are likely underestimated, there is an increase in total damages by \$5.4 billion in just three months. Assuming that on average the same level of destruction happened in the last three months (September 1st - December 1st) - it is safe to assume that the total damage to the infrastructure is at least \$40.7 billion at the time of writing.

#### *4.3 Losses Assessment*

According to the World Bank estimates, total losses to the transportation sector are estimated at \$26.1 billion as of August 2022. Losses were calculated for the first 3 months of the war and for additional 18 months after that (a total of 21 months). The biggest economic loss comes from losing Black Sea ports access at \$17.6 billion, representing 67.4% of total losses (Figure 3). The ports in the Black Sea handled approximately 70 percent of all exports and almost 95% of grain exports from Ukraine (World Bank et al., 2022). In July 2022, the Black Sea Grain Initiative (United Nations, 2022) was formed as an agreement between Ukraine and Russia with the help of the UN and Turkey to unblock Black Sea ports to allow exports of Ukrainian grain.

The second biggest loss was due to closed airspace and the complete shutdown of the aviation industry. Since February 24th, Russia has been launching missiles throughout Ukraine and therefore the aviation industry couldn't operate safely and provide air transportation services to civilians. Airlines worldwide canceled their scheduled flights to Ukraine and had to alter their routes to avoid Ukrainian airspace (and in some cases Russian airspace since major airlines stopped their air connection to Russia amid the invasion).

As mentioned before, Ukrzaliznitsya has provided free transportation to civilians trying to evacuate since the beginning of the war. Thousands of train rides were completed free of charge evacuating millions of people and resulting in a \$2 billion loss (train ticket prices). Damaged road and rail connectivity accounts for \$2.3 billion in losses. The fastest routes to certain destinations are not available due to damages and one has to travel additional distances to get to the destination, spending more money on gas and more time on the road, primarily for those exporting and importing goods in and out of Ukraine.

#### *4.4 Recovery and Reconstruction Needs Analysis*

The total needs for transportation infrastructure were estimated at \$73.7 billion as of June 1st, 2022 (World Bank et al., 2022). The total number of recovery needs at the time of writing is most likely significantly bigger, at least triple the estimate (\$221.1 billion), assuming the same level of destruction for each 3-month period since June 2022. However, in the next 6 months, Russian attacks became progressively more targeted towards crucial civilian infrastructure including residential buildings and energy facilities, and Russia continued its heavy destruction of transport infrastructure.

With land transportation (road and rail networks) suffering the most in this war, it consequently represents 78% of the total needs for reconstruction and recovery. As discussed in the previous subsection - the road network has been damaged the most throughout the entire territory of the country due to missile attack damages and the movement of heavy military equipment along the roads. In Figure 4, the total number of needs for the railway sector is estimated at \$20.2 billion. This number is likely underestimated and only includes the cost of rebuilding the damaged railway tracks and facilities without taking into consideration the cost of replacing and changing the railway track gauge to adhere to EU standards. Other sources estimate the cost of changing railway track gauge (from 1520 mm to 1435 mm) to align with the EU standards as ranging from \$43.7 billion to as high as \$130 billion. However, this high cost is viewed as a necessary investment due to its dual goal of Ukraine's integration with the EU and disabling Russia from using Ukrainian railways for military purposes (as they do this nowadays) in future attacks (Bilotkach & Ivaldi, 2022). Since the damages to the aviation industry are relatively small (mostly just the airport facilities and airfields), reconstruction needs in this sector are estimated at \$1.7 billion.

The needs are the highest in regions that have been the most affected by active shooting and missile strikes. Some of those regions have been recaptured by the Ukrainian armed forces, and some are still temporarily occupied. The following regions with active fighting and hostilities account for exactly 50% (\$36.9 billion) of the total reconstruction needs: Donetsk, Luhanska, Zaporiz'ka, and Mykolaivska. Liberated regions such as Kyivska (including the city of Kyiv), Sumska, Chernihivs'ka, Khersons'ka, and Kharkivska account for almost 46% (\$33.9 billion) of total needs. This trend will likely hold, with eastern regions of Ukraine and regions after a prolonged occupation in need of more reconstruction efforts. For instance, the city of Mariupol has been almost completely destroyed and it is unknown how many cities have seen the same level of destruction in the Donbas region.

### **5. Roadmap to Reconstruction and Conclusions**

This section of the paper is written under the assumption of Ukraine's victory in this war and consequent reclamation of occupied territories (including the Crimean peninsula), as well as a certain level of security guarantees in place that would minimize the risk of another invasion. However, security precautions and the ceasing of economic cooperation with Ukraine's eastern neighbor will be necessary to minimize the risks of aggressive behavior.

The roadmap to the recovery of the transportation infrastructure should be well thought out and well-designed to maximize economic and social impact. It also should take into account the security risks that Russia will keep presenting. Emergency reconstruction of vital infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and railways has been assisting the Ukrainian Armed Forces as well as civilians during the war.

The extent of damage is overwhelming so it is important to prioritize reconstruction

needs. In order to be able to support more extensive reconstruction efforts as well as facilitate aid flows, the restoration of basic road and rail network functionality should be a top priority. The EU granted candidate status to Ukraine in June 2022 (Polityuk & Hnidy, 2022). This implies Ukraine has to follow certain requirements in order to become a member, including in the transport infrastructure sector. Therefore, another priority in the recovery programs should be centered around transforming and updating the outdated networks toward EU standards along with improvement of westward road and rail connections to the EU to strengthen economic integration with Europe's single market (World Bank et al., 2022).

Reconstruction is also an opportunity for Ukraine to build back better - a framework that implies the construction of more efficient infrastructure. That is, utilizing more modern technologies and prioritizing more environmentally friendly means of transportation infrastructure (e.g. railways, sea and river ports). With the ongoing war, the amount of damages is likely to outweigh the preliminary assessments discussed in this paper, but even now the external financing needs for post-war reconstruction are sizable and hardly affordable for the country at war alone. To avoid excessive debt accumulation, Ukraine should advocate for concessional financing since economic recovery will take many years. It seems obvious that the anchor financing and/or guarantees should come from multilateral financial organizations through various reconstruction programs and projects. As a long-term financing prospect, the UN adopted a resolution on making Russia responsible for damages and paying reparations to Ukraine (United Nations, 2022). The previously mentioned initiative "Russia will pay" can be very useful while assessing the amount to be paid. The goal of this initiative is to use this evidence to back up war crime and human rights violations claims against Russia in international courts and eventually be able to receive war reparations and compensations from the invader to finance the recovery of Ukraine (Kulish, 2022). Another potential pool of financing might come from seized Russian assets that foreign governments have frozen since the invasion. Those assets are worth hundreds of billions of US dollars and could be eventually reallocated towards the reconstruction of Ukraine (Becker et al., 2022), albeit it might happen after Russia is found guilty of all the war crimes and human rights violations it committed in Ukraine.

The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) suggests that G7 countries should lead the initiative about creating an international transparent and monitored platform "Recover Ukraine" to allow international donors to contribute funds to Ukraine's reconstruction (Ganster et al., 2022). To ensure that funds are allocated accordingly based on reconstruction needs, an oversight committee (multilateral oversight committee) should be set up to overlook and coordinate the funds and projects they are allocated to (see Annex 2). Furthermore, Ukraine should be the one in charge of these projects prioritizing its needs and be the ultimate owner of reconstruction, while donors should be allowed to set conditions upon which they are granting the funds (Becker et al., 2022; Bilotkach & Ivaldi, 2022). War risk insurance should be considered in order to attract financing from the private sector.



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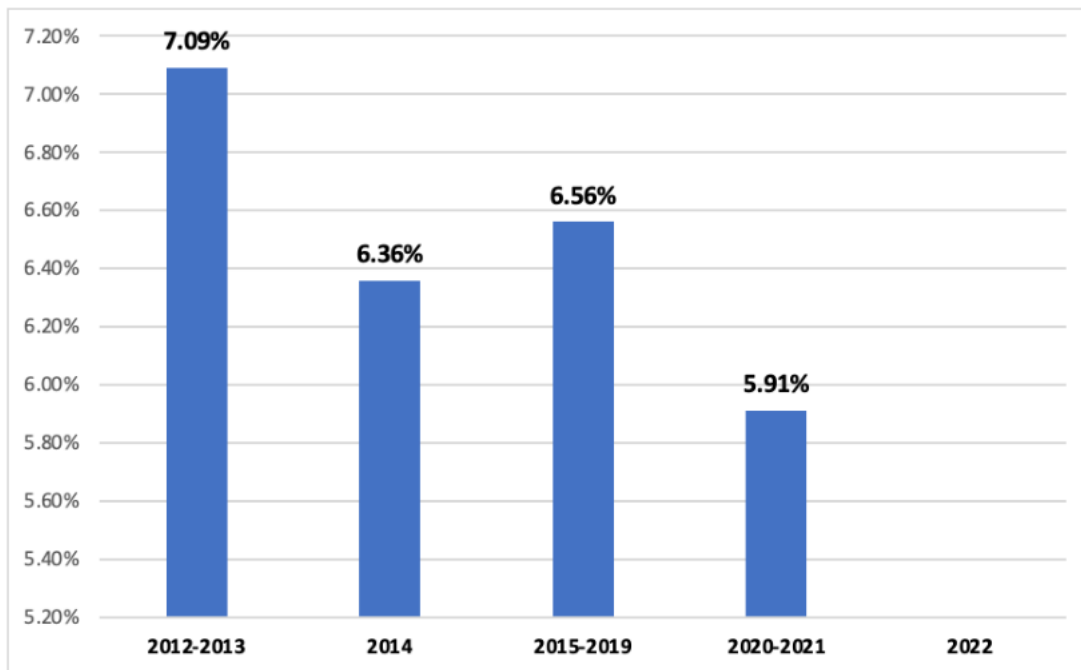
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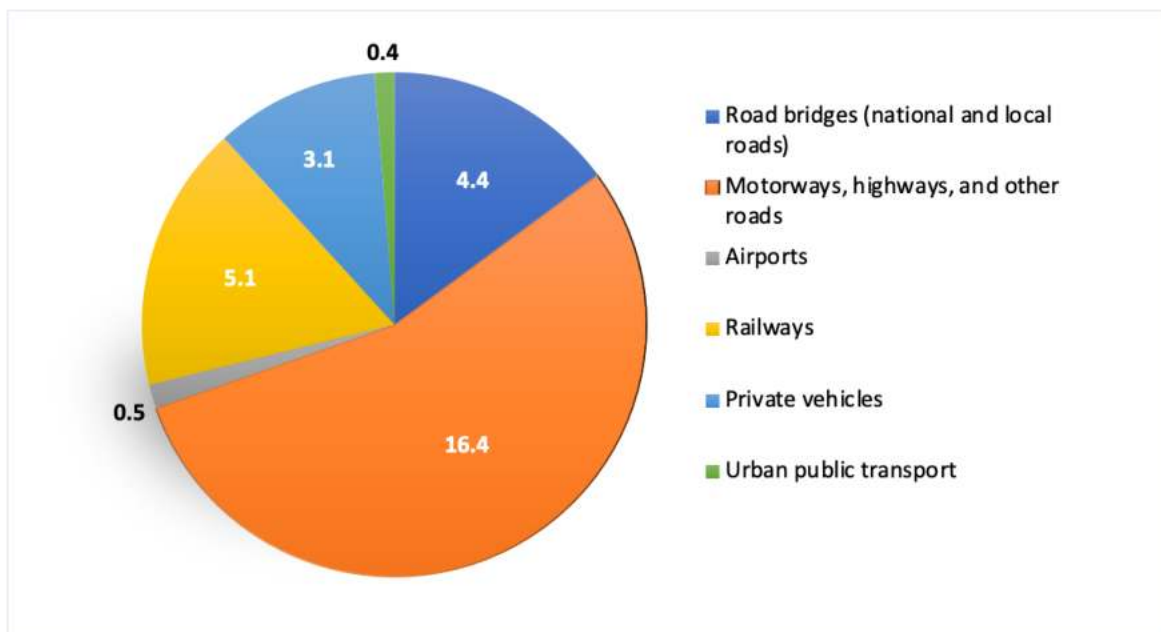
## Figures

Figure 1. Transport sector as a percentage share of GDP (2012-2022)



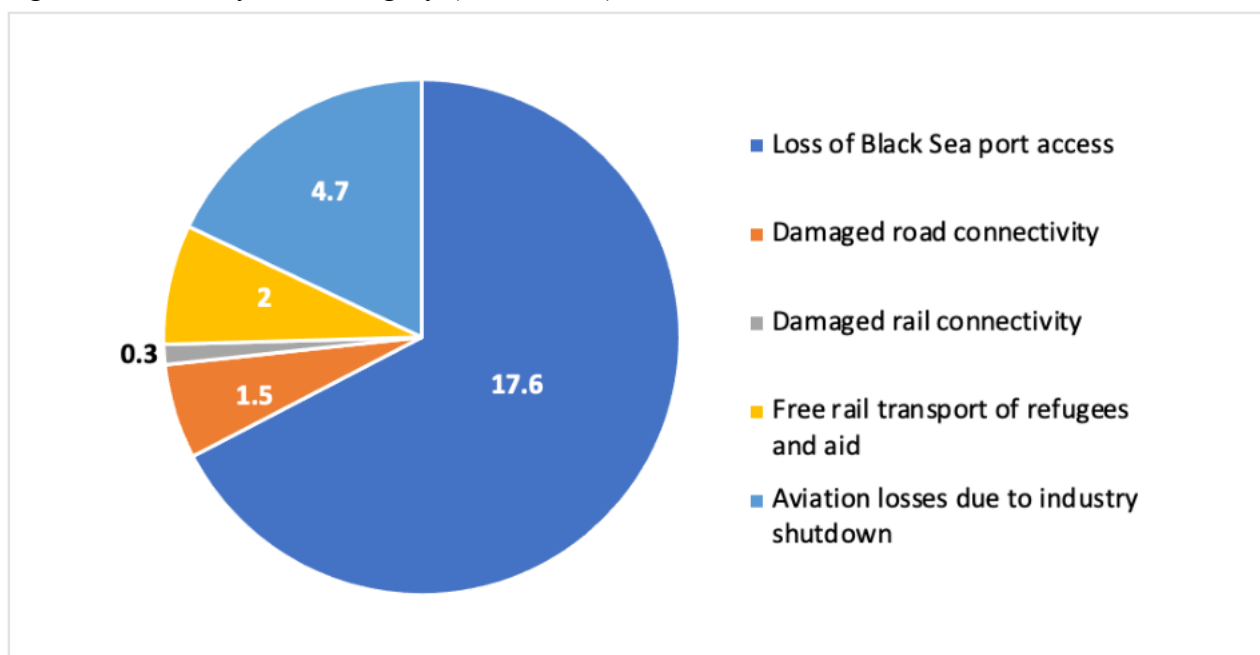
Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2021

Figure 2. Damages by asset category (US\$ billion)



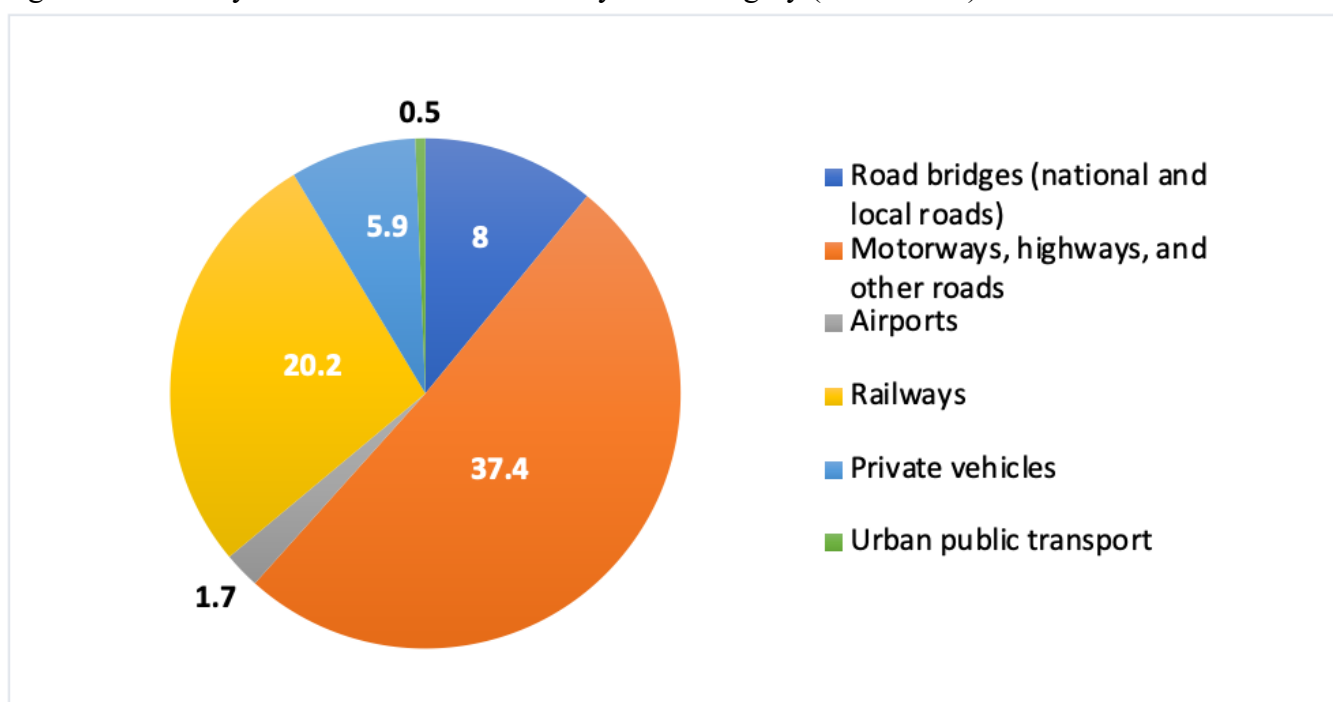
Source: aggregated from the World Bank RDNA based on Ministry of Infrastructure of Ukraine data (2022)

Figure 3. Losses by asset category (US\$ billion)



Source: aggregated from the World Bank RDNA based on Ministry of Infrastructure of Ukraine data (2022)

Figure 4. Recovery and reconstruction needs by asset category (US\$ billion)



Source: aggregated from the World Bank RDNA based on Ministry of Infrastructure of Ukraine data (2022)

## Annexes

## Annex 1. Ukraine's Transport Infrastructure

## 1. Railway network

Ukraine has a well-developed railway network that connects the majority of its big cities. The combined length of railway tracks in Ukraine is about 23,000 km. Ukrainian railways are owned and operated by the state-owned company Ukrzaliznytsia. The gauge width is wider than in the EU thus making Ukraine's connection to the EU less effective (it takes a while for the trains to change wheels on the border with the EU).

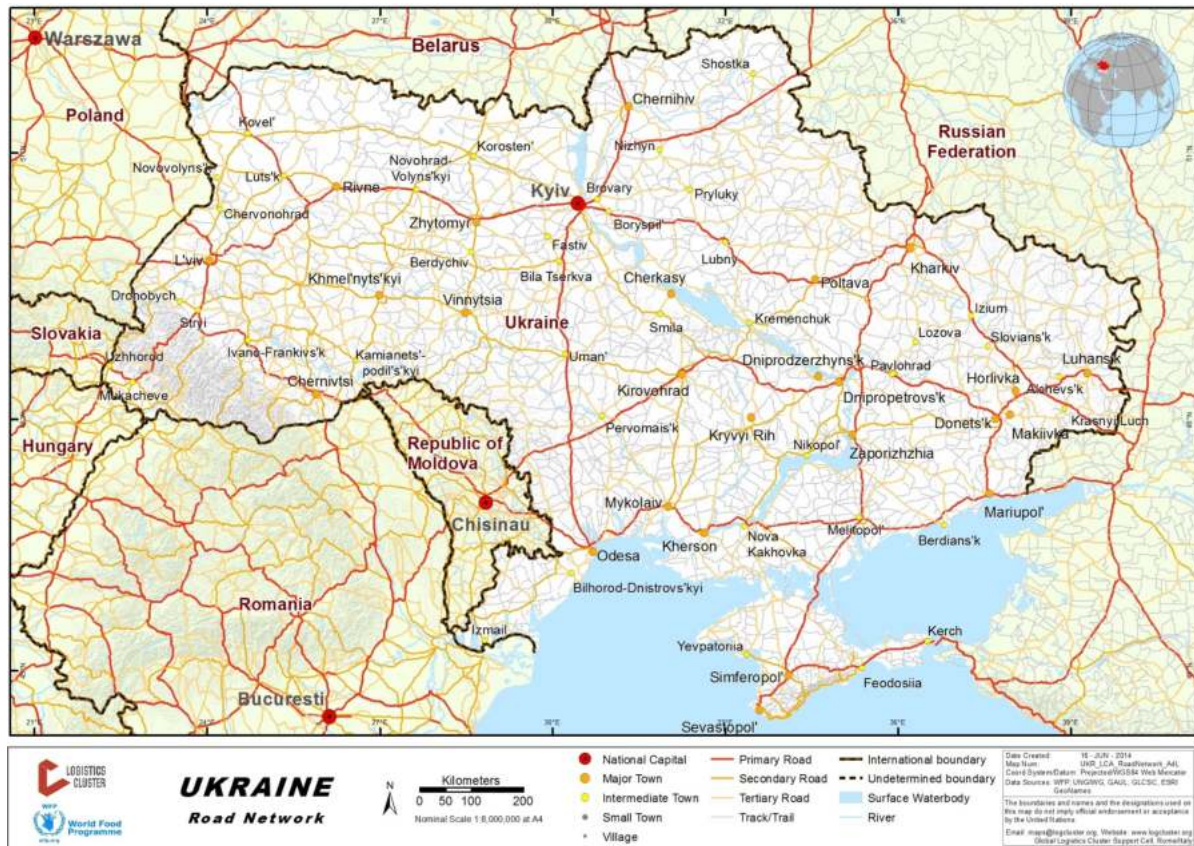


Source: Digital Logistics Capacity Assessments (2017)



## 2. Road network

Thanks to its geographical position, Ukraine is a part of the east-west transport corridors. The Ukrainian road network consists of 161,800 km of highways and motorways as of 2021 (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2021). There are also about 200,000 km of local roads in the cities and villages.



Source: Source: Digital Logistics Capacity Assessments (2017)

### 3. Seaports

According to Ukraine's Administration of Sea Ports, Ukraine has 18 seaports on the coasts of the Black and Azov seas. After the annexation of Crimea, Ukraine lost access to five seaports. With the start of the full-scale invasion, virtually all sea ports (except for Reni) were blocked by Russian warships until the grain deal was struck in July 2022 allowing for limited use of Odessa region ports.



Source: Digital Logistics Capacity Assessments (2017)



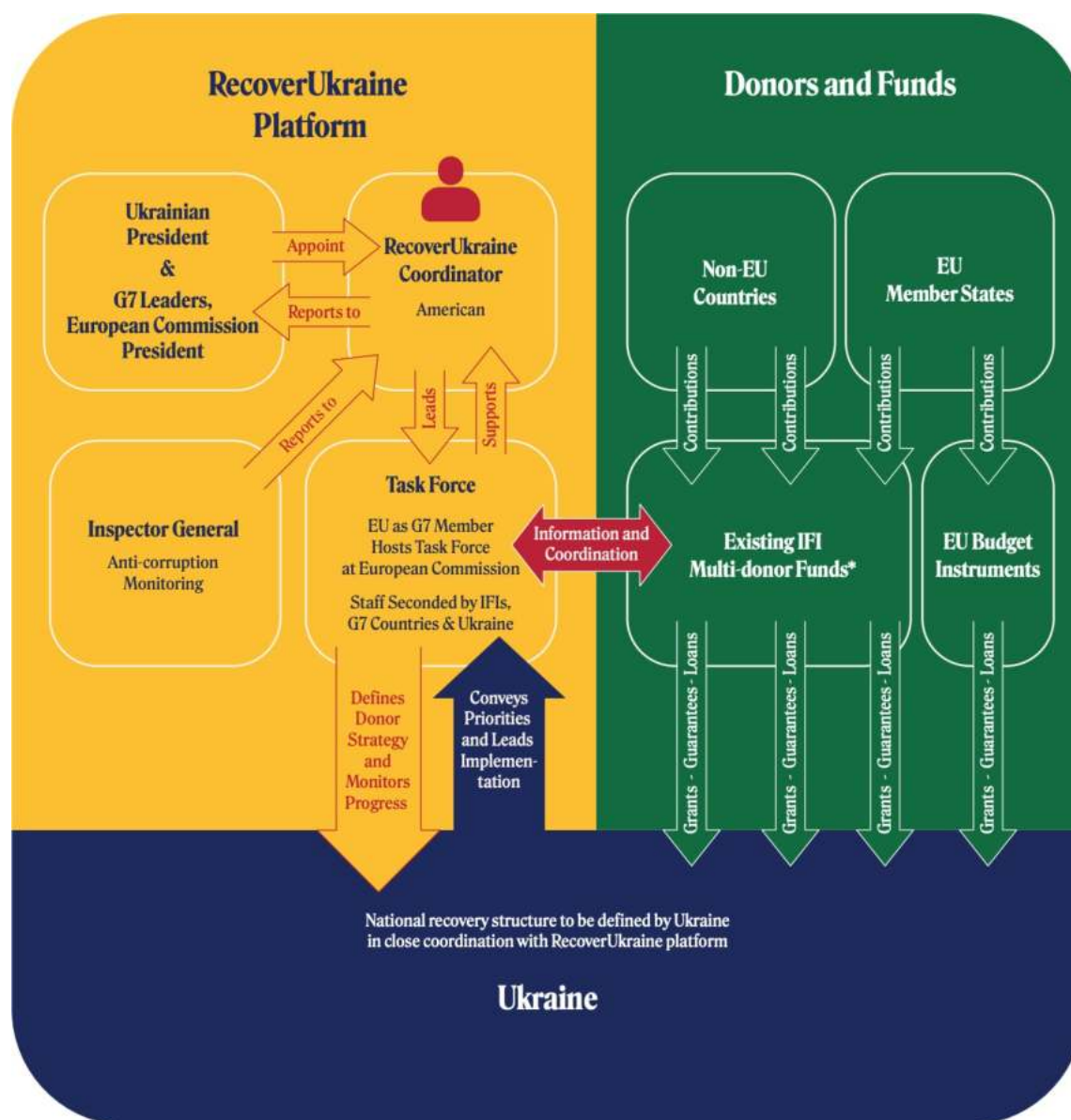
#### 4. Airports

Prior to the Russian invasion and Crimea annexation, Ukraine had 45 civil airports (together with heliports), of which 18 airports had international status and 14 were used for domestic flights.



Source: Digital Logistics Capacity Assessments (2017)

## Annex 2: Recover Ukraine Architecture



Source: The German Marshall Fund of the United States (2022)

## SECTION 6

### **Liminality, Borderland, and the Other**



## The Misrepresentation of Makar (and Other Game fowl and Aliens)

Isabella Mason, Howard University

For this paper, I want to present a brief literary and linguistic analysis of the representation and characterization of indigenous Siberians in literature written by ethnic Russian authors. My main subjects for this paper are *Makar's Dream* by Vladimir Korolenko, and *Explosion* by Alexander Kazantsev, both important pieces in the canon of indigenous Siberian literature. This paper asks two questions. One, given how long indigenous voices have been suppressed and thus unable to represent their own history and culture, how did the nonindigenous people who did have influence over their narrative perceive and thus represent the indigenous people to the dominant Russian class? And two, what do game fowl and aliens have in common, and how is it that these opposing representations of indigenous characters ultimately accomplish the same thing?

### *Makar's Dream*

Published in 1885 after the author, Korolenko was released from his exile in Yakutsk (Fell, ix), *Makar's Dream* tells the story of Makar, a peasant woodcutter from a small village in Yakut who dies and is taken to have his sins judged in front of the Great Toyon. The story very prominently features the Sakha people, an indigenous Siberian tribe from the republic of Sakha, or Yakutia, and their culture. And, while Korolenko often championed himself as an advocate for the peasants and indigenous people living in Siberia, the language he uses to describe them in *Makar's Dream* paints a different, unfavorable picture of the Yakuts. Here are two sentences from the story that show this:

“But while Makar’s forebears had been striving with the forest, burning it with fire and hewing it with steel, they themselves had slowly become savage in their turn. They married Yakut women, spoke the language of the Yakuts, adopted their customs, and gradually in them the characteristics of the Great Russian race had been obliterated and lost,” (Korolenko, 4).

First, I want to focus on the word savage, and the accompanying phrase. In English, the word savage is a loaded term, but my focus is going to be on the Russian word Korolenko used. Because truthfully, what Korolenko says is, “сами они незаметно дичали” or more faithfully translated “they themselves imperceptibly went wild,” (Korolenko, 1987).

Let us begin with дичать. The English translation of the definition is to run wild, become or grow wild, or to grow unsociable/shun society (Smirnitsky, 1948). It comes from the root word DICH: which refers to “game” or wild animals you would hunt, but colloquially it can mean wilderness or even nonsense (Ozhegov, 1949). The word dichat is often associated with phrases like обрастать мохом (A-BRA-STAT' MOH-JHOM), to grow moss, and, I think most interestingly, терять человеческий образ (TERYAT' CHE-LOVE-CHE-SKIY OBRAZ) to lose the image of a human or humanity (Abramova, 1999).

So not only is Korolenko saying that these men became wild, that they lost the familiar face of humanity, even implicitly comparing them to game animals like birds through the root DICH, he adds a modifier to this variable. NIZA-METNO, invisibly, imperceptibly (Seledtsov, 1999). In an invisible almost insidious way, like the wilderness itself was a virus infecting them, these great Russian men became wild.

And it isn't just that they “went imperceptibly wild”, because in the next sentence, Korolenko tells us that they married Yakut women, adopted their culture for themselves, as if because they became wild, it was acceptable or a natural progression that they joined the Yakut culture, or even that the traditions and blood of the Yakut is its own corrupting power that turned

these men wild. Korolenko pathologizes the Yakuts, they are or are part of the virus that, as he says at the end of the sentence, has erased the traits of the Russian race.

Except Korolenko doesn't stop there, he adds a modifier, again: The Great Russian race. As someone of mixed heritage and identity, part Russian and part Ukrainian, Korolenko most likely understood the complexity of questions of racial equality and hierarchy, and perhaps he is being ironic when he says, "Great Russian Race." However, I think the nuance of this is lost upon a wider audience. If one race is said to be great and one is not, then one must be valued more than the other, then to be Russian is preferable, is correct in the context of this story and the speaker, rather than to be Yakut.

So what is happening here? Korolenko has created two opposing sides. On one side is the wild, the shunning of society, an image that is not human. That's the side he places the Yakuts on. And on the other side is society, civility, the Great Russian Race. Not just the Russian race, but the Great Russian race, whose lost traits ought to be mourned. What does it say then, about the Yakuts, what is the solution to our equation when we add together all the variables Korolenko has presented us? If the Yakuts are not only posed against society and humanity, but also as inferior to the Russians then they are dehumanized, they have become a-human, all in just two sentences.

There are our game fowl, our creatures of the wild. Now I want to talk about our aliens, the indigenous Evenki in Kazantsev's *Explosion*.

### ***Explosion***

Published in 1946, *Explosion* centers on the tale of an anthropologist and a physicist, who after going to Tunguska, come back with a fantastical tale about a black woman living amongst an indigenous Siberian tribe and the exploding spaceship that caused the Tunguska Event. For context, the Tunguska Event was a 12-megaton explosion in the Tunguska region of Siberia on June 30th, 1908 (Jenniken 5). Despite scientific research into this event, no concrete explanation has ever been given for the massive explosion and the resulting damage and atmospheric effects.

In the story, the anthropologist is originally going to Tunguska to search for who he believes is a descendant of a long-lost tribe of "Africans" that he believes will prove that pre-glacial Siberia was an arid Savannah inhabited by tribes of Africans (Howell 383). This is where we meet an indigenous Siberian tribe that is said to be housing this long lost African. The indigenous Siberians referenced are from an ethnic group known as the Evenki, from North Asia, who's population stretches from Russia to China. They first made contact with the Russian Empire in the 17th century and were recognized as an indigenous tribe. The Evenki primarily live a nomadic lifestyle in Siberia where they are either hunter-gathers or raise livestock (Katser, 70). This is where my analysis begins.

For the rest of my analysis to make sense, however, it's important for me to spoil the end of the story and the final theory for the Tunguska explosion. The physicist, who is on this expedition to research the Tunguska event, returns believing that the African woman is actually an alien from another planet and it was her spaceship that crash landed on earth, causing the explosion (but burning up in the atmosphere, as to leave no trace) (Howell, 420).

Where the problems arise is that, despite being human, and the alien women representing the Other in this story, the Evenki are not portrayed as human, and Kazantsev instead chooses to portray them as part of the alien Other. When first introduced to them, the author is quick to establish that they are of the yellow race, juxtaposing them to the white Russian main characters, whose own race isn't even mentioned, because it's the default (Howell, 380). Not only that, but while the term "yellow race" may be time appropriate, it is also dehumanizing, manifesting in

the implication that there is a basal genetic difference tied to that the author thinks is important for you to understand. In fact, there is a sensation of defamiliarization. When their appearance is described, they're said to have no eyebrows and no eyelashes (Howell 412), with "such narrow eyes that they almost always seemed to be closed," (Howell 408). The imagery presented to the reader is immediately foreign and lacking humanizing qualities.

Additionally, there is a scene where they are performing a ritual in a swamp with the alien, and as they sing, it is described as a strange, indistinct melody, an "unintelligible but entrancing harmony," (Howell, 412). The language indicates that something extraterrestrial is happening, but when removed from the biases of the text, they become, simply, indigenous people performing a song.

Not only that, but Kazantsev's work removes their legitimacy as an indigenous tribe. The anthropologist at the beginning says they're not from Tunguska, that they were "warlike invaders" who took refuge in Siberia (Howell, 380). And that they were not the first people there, while not making the note that they had been there for a significant period of time. It makes them out to be like strangers on foreign land, aliens, and it builds and builds until they seem as alien as the alien herself and then you have to stop and wonder, why would Kazantsev bother including the Evenki if he could've just had a whole group of aliens land in their place. Kazantsev has alienated human features and practices only because they are foreign to Russian culture and race, but he's gone further than just alienating them from Russian culture - he has alienated them from the concept of humanity.

Despite both stories and representations appearing entirely different in language and imagery, nature vs. aliens, the same goal has been accomplished. The existence of indigenous tribes and culture has been pathologized in a manner that rejects not just their behavior as abnormal, but their existence as non-human.

## **Orientalism**

However, there remains one extra question. How is it that Korolenko advocated for the rights of indigenous Siberian people in his day-to-day life, but in his writing, managed to dehumanize them so thoroughly and efficiently? I think the answer to that lies in the concept of orientalism.

Orientalism was first coined by Edward Said in his 1978 book "Orientalism." His book describes the West's discourse surrounding Middle Eastern and Asian countries, i.e., the "Orient," and how the discourse and knowledge produced by the West gave it power over and otherized the Orient (Howell). Orientalism is thus a style of thought that proposes that there is an essential difference between the East and the West, the Orient and the Occident. While orientalism is not necessarily precluded by racism or ill intent, it, by its nature of otherization, may produce or influence racist/dehumanizing actions (Howell). The East is positioned as the Other, but an Other that is simultaneously mysterious and wise, deeply rooted in a spiritualism inaccessible or foreign to the West, but also dangerous, and unknown, something that is fundamentally not human, because human at least socially, not scientifically, has been defined as being the West.

In 19th century Orientalist art, a main staple was the juxtaposition of Muslim men vs. women. Muslim women were often painted in an erotic light, looking both sexually promiscuous and intriguing, but demure, spiritual, and submissive, and most importantly, white. Painters would frequently paint specifically Circassian women, an ethnic group that was very fair, both in skin color and hair color (Ali, 40). Muslim men, by contrast to the white-washed women, were often portrayed as dark-skinned, associated with violence and greed, obstacles to

the wealth that subjugating the Middle East would give to the Europeans. Not only that, if Muslim women were nothing but an object of desire to European men, to Muslim men, they were even less, frequently depicted in paintings being sold for goods, or being the victims of violent Muslim men (Ali, 41).

Here we not only see the paradox at play within orientalism, where to be Muslim was simultaneously to be exotic, intriguing, and violent, primal, but how the discourse shaped the way we treated the Orient. This juxtaposition existed in most of the discourse surrounding the Orient and to this day, presents as a justification for the invasion of Muslim countries. Frequently women's rights are used as excuse by Western countries for invading Muslim countries, like in Afghanistan, where the fight to provide education to women was co-opted by the American government as a reason to stay in the country (among other reasons). The mistreatment of women by terrorist groups and dictators is shown as proof that Islam is an inherently violent and oppressive religion (despite many of those terrorist groups being initially funded by the US during the Cold War) (Ali, 34). Orientalism is inherently paradoxical but also paternalistic, it breaks people down into the us vs them, and "they" can always be saved, (almost always from themselves), taken care of, etc. but "they" can never be "us." Europe vs. the Middle East, but the Middle East must be saved from itself.

This framework of Orientalism answers my question about Korolenko. I believe that Korolenko, and wider ethnically Russian society, including Kazantsev, subscribe to a modified form of Orientalism, where the Other is indigenous Siberians and a similar paradox exists. While the dynamic of "East" vs. "West" is not present; I believe it can be argued that the distinction created in both stories, Russian vs. Indigenous Siberian, in the authors' language mimics and replicates the same system of dehumanization at the center of Orientalism.

In both stories, there is an underlying conflicting narrative. In *Makar's Dream*, there is a dehumanization that occurs, but Korolenko also spends a lot of time exploring their religion, walking the reader through a profoundly spiritual event where Makar pleads for his soul in front of the Great Toyon, his god. In *Explosion*, the Evenki instinctively pick up on the alien's uniqueness and power, they ascribed to an ancient religion, even in the face of the tsar's punishments (the implication being very pro-Evenki, given this was written by a member of the Communist bureaucracy), and the ritual that the narrator witnesses is described as alien, but also as astonishingly powerful and moving.

That's the dichotomy that's created, not human but also ancient and spiritual. They are not Russian, and so by extension not human, and they are uncivilized and savage, but still valuable and that's why Korolenko is able to champion for their rights but also degrade them in his writing.

Using the framework of modified orientalism functions better than conventional means of looking at marginalization, particularly in Russia because of its complex race relations and is important to taking further steps to improve the conditions of indigenous Siberians and understanding their characterization in Russian discourse. Furthermore, I believe that this concept of modified orientalism doesn't just function to analyze indigenous Siberians, but any race that is non-Russian. To explain this, I want to go back to *Explosion*, and look at the alien character.

The alien is the centerpiece of Kazantsev's fantastical theory on the Tunguska event, and she is primarily identified as alien through her blackness. When described by the anthropologist at the beginning of the story, the woman is identified first by her "black skin" and loincloth, an item of clothing commonly associated with undeveloped or "uncivilized" people (Howell, 384).

In fact, she is believed to be the descendant of a prehistoric tribe of Africans that lived in Russia. Already the image conjured is not of an alien, but of a savage African woman. But more importantly, despite not being identified as an alien yet, with the manner in which she's being discussed as an object of fascination, a streak of black paint on a canvas that has already been painted tones of ivory and beige by the white Russian protagonists, the alien is a foreigner because of her blackness first. I also want to highlight that her skin color is later described as being "tar-black" and her body is referred to as a "black statue... carved in iron," (Howell 412-413). Both descriptions are not only dehumanizing to the alien, but to the concept of blackness.

Obviously, the writer is attempting to peak the reader's interest, make them wonder about the true nature of the Black woman, but it's interesting, isn't it, that the author chose this route? The entire setup to the story, the theory of paleolithic Africans, is unnecessary to the plot of the story, and any number of theories could have been given to justify the expedition to Tunguska, but the writer chose blackness as the backbone to his story of alien encounters. What's even more notable is that in attempting to make her seem more alien or foreign, the writer gives her red hair.

The implication here is multilayered. Kazantsev keeps his representation of "alien" to the realm of human phenotypes exclusively; instead of giving the black woman antennae, or glowing pigmentation spots, he gives her red hair. Again, he is tying a phenotypic feature, red hair, to the concept of alienation. Alternatively, it could also be thought that it is the nature of a black woman having a phenotypically white feature, red hair, and later in the story she is described as having blue eyes is what is meant to be alien to the reader (Howell, 413).

While this doesn't contribute specifically to the racial theory being proposed, it is also important to note the other key moment in the story that is meant to identify the woman as being an alien. When the two scientists finally find the Evenki, they are led to the alien's tent, and as one scientist speaks to her of spaceships and taking her "back home" the alien has a meltdown, slumping "slowly down" in her seat and writhing along the floor, biting at a hide and rolling around with "gurgling sounds" coming from her (Howell, 413). Perhaps this is just the perspective of someone familiar with emotional outbreaks, such as those that are a result of sensory overload in an autistic person, but there is nothing truly alien about this. Her actions could potentially be interpreted as the alien behaving like a toddler, or being mentally unstable, but that isn't inherently alien. It would be alien if her eyes began to glow, or if she spoke in another language, but none of these things occur.

The only truly fantastical things about her, i.e., her ship and healing powers, take place exclusively offstage, thus making these characterizations, the meltdown, the hair, the skin color, and the aforementioned swamp scene the only things the reader has to grasp onto as signs of the inherent Otherness that the story imbues her with. What makes this matter more complex is that he does not attempt to justify this alienation in the text. There is no supplementary language explicitly stating these features and behaviors as alien, there is no imagery to warp her features, her black skin, red hair, and explosive behavior is already supposed to be enough to convince the reader that there is something strange about her.

This is why, despite this being a discussion of race, the inclusion of her meltdown was important because it substantiates the argument that Kazantsev has consciously or subconsciously defined human identity as excluding certain human traits. And while it might be much easier to explain away the alien nature of her meltdown as simply violating social norms and therefore truly being foreign (despite the implications of ableism), the argument for her blackness is much more difficult.



What Kazantsev has done is firstly, tie her blackness to alienhood, and then tie that to a perception of a mentally unstable, incoherent abomination. It should be noted that the author emphasizes that despite being intelligent enough to pilot a spacecraft, in the 40 years she had spent with the Evenki tribe, she only barely knew how to speak, and was described by the Evenki as “ruined” which to them either meant that she had a concussion, or that she was insane (Howell, 408-409).

Blackness being tied to the Other but also to insanity, yet that’s not where her characterization ends. We also learn, a couple lines down from when we were told that the Evenki called her ruined, that she had healing powers, she could heal someone just by looking at them (Howell, 409). The initial description of her appearance invokes an implication of beauty, and later in the story she’s referred to as a “black goddess” and that her beauty was like the “beauty of a cliff of wild,” (Howell, 417-418). Even more important, according to the physicist's final theory, he believes her to be from a race advanced enough to have invented not only nuclear energy, but to also invent long-distance space travel, and she was important enough, or smart enough, to be on one of these nuclear-powered ships (Howell, 420). Two opposing pictures have been painted of the alien, and more importantly, her blackness (because it’s so intricately tied to her entire identity). Her blackness has been fetishized and dehumanized, and the best framework that explains that is modified orientalism. And what’s really important to understand with modified orientalism is that idea of fetishization.

In my original example when I first explained orientalism, the “good” side of the paradox was the Muslim women, except it wasn’t good, they were being objectified by the painters and by the West in general. What I’ve failed to really explain so far is that all of the “good” characterizations I’ve talked about, are really a form of fetishization, where the characters and their identities have been reduced to a few defining traits that misrepresent and simplify their lived experiences. Here, while there may be sexual components to it, such as with the Muslim women and the alien, my use of fetishization is not necessarily tied with sexual desire, and functions perhaps more similar to the concept of “essentialism.”

Either way, this fetishization serves to create an image of these identities that is exploitable and aligns with social concepts. The Yakuts and Evenki, because of their association with spiritualism, can also be written off as quacks, and less civilized, even if their spiritualism is admired by the authors. That’s the essence of modified orientalism, a paradox of traits, where both ends serve to ultimately dehumanize the Other and justify violence, culturally, linguistically, physically, etc., against them.

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## **The Cosmopolitan “Land of Fire”: Symbolic Space, Soviet Legacy, and Post-Socialist Futurity in the Urban Architecture of Baku**

*Sam Heimowitz, Yale University*

The contemporary landscape of Baku, the capital of the Caucasian nation of Azerbaijan, showcases a remarkable exhibition of different architectural styles. The older part of the city is host to a more traditional array of stone buildings, serving as a reminder of the city’s Silk Road past. Communist housing blocks and other brutalist buildings conjure images of Soviet-era removal of excess and monumental power and strength. And the latest architectural development projects, which are grandiose, sleek, and futuristic in design, signal a desire to shift towards a post-Socialist future—a distinctly Azerbaijani cultural cosmopolitanism, bereft of its Soviet past.

However, I argue that in this attempt to fundamentally revolutionize the built urban environment and strip the city of its Soviet past and reclaim its identity as distinctly Azerbaijani, the urban landscape of Baku highlights the competing dynamics of a socialist<sup>1</sup> architectural legacy and a post-Socialist cosmopolitan desire. This contrasting logic of an anti-Soviet future intermixes with a still-socialist legacy to construct the Baku coastline we see today. Thus, this paper will begin with a discussion of post-Socialist (re)construction of space by turning to a similar—but not wholly identical—example in one of Warsaw’s most prominent architectural symbols, the Palace of Culture and Science. I will draw on Michał Murawski’s theories of “still-socialist” urban success and socialist aesthetics to highlight this competing logic in a comparative landscape. I will then discuss Baku’s contemporary nation branding strategy to seek a message of cosmopolitan desire, encompassing historical symbology, Soviet-era internationalism and multiculturalism, as well as the carving out of a new identity by a unilateral, top-down power. Lastly, through examining the Flame Towers and Heydar Aliyev Center, two products of Azerbaijan’s nation branding process, I will show how the Soviet architectural legacy is still enmeshed within the seemingly novel cultural repertoire of the post-Socialist Bakuvian urban space, despite all efforts to depart from it.

### **Still-Socialist Success and the Reformulation of the Symbolic Space: Warsaw’s Palace of Culture and Science**

In post-Socialist nations, the manipulation of public space, reframing of history through architectural development, and the formulation of new symbols through massive construction projects have been central to asserting a regime’s power.<sup>2</sup> In other words, through the alteration, creation, removal, and even co-optation of particular buildings and spaces, political actors in these nations strive for prestige, legitimacy, and influence as they attempt to carve out their respective nation’s new identity.<sup>3</sup> This can clearly be seen in post-Socialist Baku, the capital city of Azerbaijan. The local elite and urban administration of Baku have led the way in shaping growth and development,<sup>4</sup> seeking to shape an identity that is distinctly Azerbaijani. Most capital

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this paper, when I refer to the era of “Socialism,” “post-Socialism,” or “post-Socialist” as a noun representing a very specific period, I demarcate the proper noun with a capital “S.” In other instances, as in its adjectival form or as a general ideology not definitively tied to a nation, region, or era, this is marked with a lowercase “s.”

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson, “Monumental Politics: Regime Type and Public Memory in Post-Communist States,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 27, no. 3 (July 1, 2011): 270, <https://doi.org/10.2747/1060-586X.27.3.269>.

<sup>3</sup> Forest and Johnson, 273.

<sup>4</sup> Anar Valiyev, “The Post-Communist Growth Machine: The Case of Baku, Azerbaijan,” *Cities, Current Research on Cities*, 41 (July 1, 2014): 47, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2014.06.008>.

investment in the city has gone towards the tourism and construction industries, in an effort to market the city as multicultural and cosmopolitan. Most prominently, the Baku skyline has seen an unprecedented increase in taller high-rise buildings, fundamentally transforming its former amphitheatrical layout, which was based on the naturally hilly geographical terrain.<sup>5</sup> But what does it really mean to transform space in such a way? Is this type of transformation not merely a reproduction of a Socialist-era construction aesthetics, in which Soviet political actors sought to dominate the built urban environment to legitimate the regime?

A look at Warsaw's post-Socialist terrain provides a useful comparative frame with which to view Baku's contemporary landscape. In the summer of 2022, I spent a week in Warsaw, frequenting the space around the Palace of Culture and Science, which serves as one of the most prominent symbols of the city as well as a stark reminder of the Soviet era.<sup>6</sup> I asked some Polish peers where to visit, and resoundingly, the answer was the Palace. My informants all jokingly bemoaned that it was a "gift" from the Soviet Union to Poland, but simultaneously noted that one could not visit Warsaw without seeing one of its most recognizable emblems. From any angle, the building is enormous and towering. But what was most interesting was its multifaceted use. The Palace performs a variety of functions: it is host to libraries, a cinema, concert venues, research institutes, municipal institutions, museums and exhibits, a swimming pool, a gym, and a viewing deck.<sup>7</sup> Covered in graffiti and etchings, the building contains multiple entrances and university students loiter and hang out in its surrounding green spaces.

From this point of view, it seems that the building, while emblematic of Soviet domination, has taken on an identity of its own—it may *look* like a brutalist Soviet skyscraper, but that is all it is. It does not retain any of its socialist underpinnings. Yet, Michał Murawski argues that the Palace is actually an example of a "still-socialist" success. He pushes against the argumentative trend that all socialist architectural development projects fundamentally failed. Some socialist spaces do endure today, in spite of the seeming overemphasis on aesthetics and economics, and the "collapse of the political economic system that made them possible in the first place."<sup>8</sup> In fact, the Palace remains a bastion of socialist economic aesthetics: gigantism, bombastic style, symmetry, and the "nodal positioning at the heart of the city's transport network."<sup>9</sup> Moreover, as the city's property increasingly privatizes, the Palace represents an "island of publicness" that resists segmentation and stratification and continues to function as "the sort of radically collective, multi-use building its designers intended it to be."<sup>10</sup> More so than ever before, the Palace "exerts a prominent impact on Warsaw's popular and high culture, on its symbolic sphere and on various other facets of the city's everyday life,"<sup>11</sup> in that it still performs a central role in the Varsovian cultural milieu, as its territorial center of gravity, which inspires "affection, fascination, and even obsession among Warsaw inhabitants."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Valiyev, 48–51.

<sup>6</sup> Michał Murawski, "Marxist Morphologies: A Materialist Critique of Brute Materialities, Flat Infrastructures, Fuzzy Property and Complexified Cities," *Focaal*, no. 82 (December 22, 2018): 18, <https://doi.org/10.3167/fcl.2018.820102>. The Palace was "gifted" to the Polish people by the Soviet Union.

<sup>7</sup> Michał Murawski, "Actually-Existing Success: Economics, Aesthetics, and the Specificity of (Still-)Socialist Urbanism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 60, no. 4 (October 2018): 920–21, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000336>.

<sup>8</sup> Murawski, 909–11.

<sup>9</sup> Murawski, 920.

<sup>10</sup> Murawski, 920.

<sup>11</sup> Murawski, "Marxist Morphologies," 25.

<sup>12</sup> Murawski, "Actually-Existing Success," 920; Murawski, "Marxist Morphologies," 25.

I depart with Murawksi in one fundamental direction. For all of its symbolic power and Soviet aesthetic reminiscence, it is being co-opted for a distinctly non-Soviet-style use in the contemporary era, working against unilateral domination. For example, as I wandered around the entrance to the Kinoteka, I was surprised to see rainbow flags strewn across the wall and an advertisement for an LGBTQ gathering on the doors, with a few individuals already milling about. More strikingly, a large mass of Warsaw inhabitants had gathered outside the theater entrance, gazing at speakers shouting on stage—in what was perhaps some sort of organized protest, given the plethora of signs held by audience members and the repetitive phrases echoing throughout the square (Fig. 3) And most interestingly, graffiti on its walls have left clues to which social groups have symbolically sought to take ownership of the Palace: in two instances, I passed by etchings of swastikas, and in a much more public space, I took note of an anarchist symbol and a tag that read “PUNKS NOT DEAD” (Fig. 1-2, 4).

I must recognize my own limitations in this analysis: I only spent a few hours specifically at the Palace on one afternoon, and do not seek to argue that these four examples are emblematic of a much larger process of the reclamation of space by those who wish to push against Soviet domination. Rather, I use these examples to explore how space can be reformulated in ways that blur the line between Soviet domination, Murawski’s still-socialism and socialist architectural success, and the competing legacies of post-Socialist and contemporary aesthetics throughout post-Soviet space. However, as Soviet construction projects sought to revolutionarily transform the city, we can see a new form of revolutionary transformation at play in Warsaw with the co-optation of publicly owned and formerly Soviet space for its inhabitants own variegated uses.

Baku has not undergone a similar reconfiguration of a Soviet-era skyscraper, though much of its contemporary development focuses on new construction and rebranding spaces to shape a distinctly Azerbaijani identity for Bakuivians. I bring this distant example of Warsaw to the fore precisely for this point. The Palace of Culture and Science raises questions of who owns, who can be represented by, and who is reflected in the urban landscape in post-Socialist Warsaw. How, then, is urban space in Baku transformed through massive architectural development projects, who does it represent, and what does it reflect?

### **The “Land of Fire:” Nation Branding, Cosmopolitanism Desire, and Unilateral Control**

Two concepts characterize Baku’s architectural development plans: nation branding and cosmopolitanism. Through nation branding, Azerbaijan is attempting to brand itself as a well-off, modern, and multicultural nation, while bolstering its own ideas of strength and identity.<sup>13</sup> If a nation does not have an already established image, it must create its own stereotype. In the case of Azerbaijan, the government has selected the “Land of Fire” with the familiar imagery of flames to encapsulate its national identity.<sup>14</sup> For centuries, fire has been a significant symbol along the Baku coast—natural fires marked landmarks; fires lit oil and gas fields; the coat of arms created in 1878 contains three flames; and an eternal flame<sup>15</sup> burning in the Ateshgah of Baku, the “Fire Temple of Baku,” are just a few examples of the significance of fire within the city—and it was only natural that such a symbol would be selected as the national brand.

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<sup>13</sup> Melanie Krebs, “From Cosmopolitan Baku to Tolerant Azerbaijan – Branding ‘The Land of Fire,’” *Identity Studies* 6 (2015): 110–12.

<sup>14</sup> Krebs, 112.

<sup>15</sup> The “eternal” flame is not actually that eternal after all, as it went out in 1969, and is now lit by a continuous gas pipeline.

Baku has historically been a diverse commercial center, having thrived at the crossroads of many different empires.<sup>16</sup> Prevailing discourse about the city has been that it has always been diverse and multicultural, a steadfast symbol of pluralism for over 100 years in the Caucasus.<sup>17</sup> In the Soviet era, internationalism emerged as something to be celebrated: the blending of Azeri and Russian culture, marriages across nationality, and even the infiltration of jazz music into everyday life. In the decades after Stalin, however, a new line of discourse has emerged, as Baku tries to distance itself from its Soviet past: cosmopolitanism.<sup>18</sup> But what does cosmopolitan development mean? Cosmopolitanism in this context can be imagined as a modernity that is high-class, chic, and pristine, showcasing Azeri cultural pride and the tolerant cohabitation of different peoples and cultures. However, Melanie Krebs argues that Bakuvian cosmopolitanism is historically linked to the city's Soviet agenda of internationalization and multiculturalism,<sup>19</sup> and rests on this dialectic between a post-Socialist futurity through the (re)construction of urban terrain and an echo of Soviet-style radical transformation of space. And this is precisely what is at play: in the name of cosmopolitan development, urban space in Baku has undergone a massive transformation. This was particularly foregrounded by the city's hosting of the Eurovision Song Contest in 2012, which radically increased the rapidity and scale of its growth project—ostensibly to market its burgeoning modernity and newly-constructed, distinctly Azerbaijani identity in the international arena.<sup>20</sup>

Baku's post-Socialist development plan of the past 30 years rests on attempting to “erase every trace of the Soviet era” from the center of the city.<sup>21</sup> Skyscrapers have gone up, performing the role of office building, luxury hotels, and apartment blocks. Roadways were rebuilt, a seaside park was extended, a concert hall was created, new towers were erected, and even at one point the tallest freestanding flagpole was hoisted at the center of the city.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Soviet symbols have been removed and replaced, as in the case of a Soviet memorial being replaced with a Sunni mosque,<sup>23</sup> and in some cases, the public space is also accentuated by buildings seeking to promote Azerbaijani national traditions and culture, which can be seen in the construction of a music center dedicated to preserving the mugham genre of Azerbaijani music.<sup>24</sup> Yet, it is precisely in this remaking and reconstruction of the Bakuvian city center that these dynamics of a socialist architectural legacy and a post-Socialist cosmopolitan desire interact with each other in oftentimes competing and contradictory modalities. For example, the new and futuristic landscape of the city embodies a type of Soviet-style hyperbuilding and architectural

<sup>16</sup> Bruce Grant, “Cosmopolitan Baku,” *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 75, no. 2 (June 2010): 124, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141841003753222>.

<sup>17</sup> Grant, 125. Baku of the 60s and 70s was an apex in which people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds lived together in the city. See Melanie Krebs, “The Right to Live in the City,” *The International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 35, no. 7/8 (2015): 553.

<sup>18</sup> Grant, “Cosmopolitan Baku,” 133.

<sup>19</sup> Helen F. Wilson, “Post-Socialist Cities and Urban Studies: Transformation and Continuity in Eurasia,” *Urban Studies* 50, no. 16 (December 1, 2013): 3468, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098013505884>. Baku touted a population of multiple ethnicities and religions especially in the 60s and 70s, and local Bakuvians were proud of and still reminisce about this past today.

<sup>20</sup> Bruce Grant, “The Edifice Complex: Architecture and the Political Life of Surplus in the New Baku,” *Public Culture* 26, no. 3 (74) (September 1, 2014): 502, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2683648>.

<sup>21</sup> Krebs, “The Right to Live in the City,” 555.

<sup>22</sup> Grant, “The Edifice Complex,” 502. The flagpole is still there, but it is no longer the tallest in the world.

<sup>23</sup> Tsypylma Darieva, “Sterilizing the Public Space?,” *Russian Studies in History* 55, no. 2 (April 2016): 171, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10611983.2016.1200356>.

<sup>24</sup> Darieva, 173.

domination.<sup>25</sup> Post-Soviet eclectic architectural styles, shrouded in a distorted sense of scale and experimentalism, sometimes echo the spectacular building projects of the era from which it tries so earnestly to depart.<sup>26</sup> The architectural transformations are described as unparalleled and unmatched, dramatic and radical—akin to Soviet-era transformations of urban space.

What makes Baku's development project an especially noteworthy case is that it is being fueled from the top down. The projects are led by local elites and the government who unilaterally attempt to rebrand the city for everyone, harking back to Soviet-era top-down construction policies.<sup>27</sup> There is a single actor and stakeholder in all of the discourse on the destruction and reconstruction of the Baku city center: the national government.<sup>28</sup> Bruce Grant explains that while many Azerbaijanis are pleased with the construction, a large swath of others view it as the "remaking of authoritarian rule through these elaborate and almost exclusively state-sponsored projects."<sup>29</sup> At the same, the "towering verticality" of Baku is also a departure from Soviet-era rigid construction codes, which "strictly regulated building heights."<sup>30</sup> Baku's nation branding strategy, cosmopolitan aims, historical multiculturalism, and quasi-reproduction of Soviet-era authoritarian domination of urban space constitute a Baku at once looking towards the future and somewhat stuck in the past. In other words, despite Azerbaijan's desire to dissociate and remove itself from its Soviet past, its state-sponsored domination through architecture actually works antithetical to this goal. The ideological foundations of "state-sponsored utopia" are carried through from the Socialist era.<sup>31</sup>

### **Flame Towers and Heydar Aliyev Center: A Post-Socialist Futurity or a Continuation of Soviet Urbanism?**

These competing dynamics can be seen no better than through the Flame Towers and the Heydar Aliyev Center. The construction of both building complexes began in 2007 and concluded in 2012, the former of which was completed just in time for the Eurovision Song Contest held in Baku,<sup>32</sup> and the latter of which was featured on a special postage stamp issued during the contest.<sup>33</sup> In the international arena, these two buildings were meant to highlight the thriving Azerbaijani urban cosmopolitanism and post-Socialist futurity—yet the messages they represent and the symbols they reflect also depict a competing logic of a Soviet past.

#### *Flame Towers*

As part of Azerbaijan's nation branding scheme, the government capitalized on the imagery of the "flame" in touting the nation as the "Land of Fire." Towers have also played a prominent role in the Absheron Peninsula where Baku is located—the Bakuvian coastline

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<sup>25</sup> Grant, "The Edifice Complex," 504.

<sup>26</sup> Wilson, "Post-Socialist Cities and Urban Studies," 3466.

<sup>27</sup> Natalie Koch and Anar Valiyev, "Urban Boosterism in Closed Contexts: Spectacular Urbanization and Second-Tier Mega-Events in Three Caspian Capitals," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 56, no. 5 (September 3, 2015): 575–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2016.1146621>. Valiyev, "The Post-Communist Growth Machine," 45.

<sup>28</sup> Krebs, "The Right to Live in the City," 551.

<sup>29</sup> Grant, "The Edifice Complex," 505.

<sup>30</sup> Grant, 519.

<sup>31</sup> Suzanne Harris-Brandts and David Gogishvili, "Architectural Rumors: Unrealized Megaprojects in Baku, Azerbaijan and Their Politico-Economic Uses," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 59, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2018.1462725>.

<sup>32</sup> "Azerbaijan: From Baku, With Love (And Intolerance)," Pulitzer Center, May 29, 2012, <https://legacy.pulitzercenter.org/reporting/azerbaijan-baku-love-and-intolerance>.

<sup>33</sup> "Azerbaijan Issues Stamps on Eurovision 2012 (PHOTO)," Trend.Az, May 29, 2012, <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/eurovision/2031496.html>.

“became dotted with drilling towers and pumpjacks,” constructed for oil and natural gas mining at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup> In the modern era, new construction projects have been signaled by the arrival of tower-like cranes along the coast, and the subsequent massive buildings that follow. This history of tower erection and fire’s long association with the region inspired the construction of the three Flame Towers.<sup>35</sup> The towers themselves are of three varying heights and are “monumental, vertical giants, visible from every part of the city.”<sup>36</sup> Each tower functions differently, from residences in one, to business and commerce in the others.<sup>37</sup>

The Flame Towers immediately conjure images of futurity and high-tech modernism through their shiny glass windows, their curves meant to mimic flames, and their height, meant to be seen from anywhere in Baku. They stand out from the Old City, the historical center of Baku, almost as protrusions disrupting the less-grandiose skyline. In images taken from the Old City, one can see the distinction in the cityscape: Islamic architectural curves and ancient stone structures stand in tandem with concrete-paneled, strait-laced communist housing blocks, as the three curvaceous flames complete this multilayered panorama (Fig. 5).

In the evening, a light show dazzles residents’ and tourists’ eyes alike. The towers erupt into a series of LED projections powered by 10,000 individual lights, symbolically becoming ablaze (Fig. 6). The images cycle through animated flames and the colors of the Azerbaijani flag—bright blue, red, and green—as well as people carrying the flag.<sup>38</sup> The projections are not only limited to Azerbaijani cultural symbols; during some international events, they reflect an internationalism and tolerant atmosphere. For example, during the Eurovision Song Contest of 2012, all the flags of the participating countries were reflected on the towers.<sup>39</sup> The façade is huge; for some, the towers appear to literally “burst into flame against the night sky.”<sup>40</sup> What is important is that the three “flames” of Baku highlight a duality of representational meanings. On one hand, they are rooted in nation branding of the “Land of Fire,” Azerbaijani nationalistic aims, and ties to wealth, oil, and the reverence of fire. On the other hand, however, they underscore Azerbaijani governmental aspirations to disconnect from the past in a distinctly non-Soviet space—the towers showcase “the luxury consumerism”<sup>41</sup> in the new urban environment of the city, looking to the future, as well as cosmopolitan desires of internationalism and highbrow futurity.

This is to say that, as a newly constructed national symbol of Baku, and thereby for Azerbaijan, the Flame Towers represent a confluence of Soviet and post-Socialist architectural politics. Two phenomena coexist. We see a Soviet-era domination of public space, an architectural spectacle demonstrating the strength, prowess, and cultural unity of the nation, alongside an old symbolic repertoire with ties to oil, wealth, and fire. At the same time, we see

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<sup>34</sup> Elżbieta Kaczmarek, “Contemporary Symbols in the Space of Baku,” *Budownictwo i Architektura* 19, no. 2 (August 28, 2020): 129–30, <https://doi.org/10.35784/bud-arch.2166>.

<sup>35</sup> Federico De Boni, “Baku and Architecture: From Soviet Building to Archistars,” *Geopolitical, Social Security and Freedom Journal* 1, no. 2 (November 30, 2018): 80, <https://doi.org/10.2478/gssfj-2018-0015>.

<sup>36</sup> Kaczmarek, “Contemporary Symbols in the Space of Baku,” 132.

<sup>37</sup> Krebs, “From Cosmopolitan Baku to Tolerant Azerbaijan – Branding ‘The Land of Fire,’” 118; De Boni, “Baku and Architecture,” 80.

<sup>38</sup> Krebs, “From Cosmopolitan Baku to Tolerant Azerbaijan – Branding ‘The Land of Fire,’” 118; Gideon Lewis-Kraus, “Boomtown on the Caspian: New Nativism and International Glitz in Baku,” *Virginia Quarterly Review* 92, no. 4 (2016): 196.

<sup>39</sup> “Eurovision 2012 Participating Countries’ Flags Reflected on Flame Towers (PHOTO),” *Trend.Az*, May 22, 2012, <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/eurovision/2029016.html>.

<sup>40</sup> Grant, “The Edifice Complex,” 512.

<sup>41</sup> Koch and Valiyev, “Urban Boosterism in Closed Contexts,” 591.



the building as a newly constructed symbol of the city in a post-Socialist space. The flames can be seen from anywhere in the city, as a new Azerbaijani national icon, representing the cosmopolitan and rebuilt Baku—they attempt to rebrand Baku as a city of internationalism, reshaping the skyline in tandem with the other architectural development projects along the coastline.

### *Heydar Aliyev Center*

Arguably, the most iconic and recognizable product of Baku's architectural development projects is the Heydar Aliyev Center. Designed by Iraqi-British and world-famous architect Zaha Hadid, it houses a museum, an auditorium of 1000 seats, a café, an underground car park, and a large green space, rife with massive snail-shaped sculptures that link the free-flowing structure with the natural environment.<sup>42</sup> Some have described the building as a “futuristic, blob-like cultural center” that fits in as an extension of the renovation and reconstruction of the Baku coast, adding to the atmosphere of new hotels, museums, and entertainment complexes.<sup>43</sup> The Center is clean and innovative, reflecting the government's national branding strategy. Saffet Kaya Bekiroglu, the project designer and an architect of the Zaha Hadid Architects, has stated that “we intended to relate to the historical understanding of architecture, not through mimicry or accession to the iconography of the past, but by developing a firmly contemporary interpretation.”<sup>44</sup> What exactly is this “contemporary interpretation,” what does it represent, and who does it reflect? Does it fully depart from Soviet architectural style, pushing towards a cosmopolitan future?

At first glance, the Center certainly does seem to break almost entirely with the city's Soviet past. If Soviet monumental architecture was rigid, strict, and menacing, the Center is white, silky, and sinuous. Its “undulating curves” and “large glass windows”<sup>45</sup> break away from the nearby monotony of the uniform communist housing blocks. The structure “express[es] the sensibilities of Azeri culture and the optimism of a nation that looks to the future.”<sup>46</sup> It is an aesthetic feat, curvaceous and winding, sleek and cosmopolitan, like the Flame Towers. Moreover, the auditorium in its interior is massive and imposing, incorporating cascading curves that meet at a center point.

The Center purportedly signals a paradigm shift towards a distinctly Azerbaijani identity, calling upon historical symbology to make its claim. The fluidity of its roof mimics the coastal environment of Baku, of both stormy waves and gushing oil. If one follows the edges and lack of any singular straight lines, it might even look like a “poorly curled up carpet.”<sup>47</sup> Calligraphic and ornamental patterns trace the carpets, walls, ceilings, and domes. The space it inhabits is egalitarian, public, and free, a hybrid between architectural design elements and the urban space upon which it stands. The exterior cladding may even suggest “a tent and reference to the nomadic traditions”<sup>48</sup> of historical Azerbaijan, and its sequences of patterns, each following one

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas Winterstetter et al., “Engineering complex geometries – the Heydar Aliyev Centre in Baku,” *Steel Construction* 8, no. 1 (2015): 65, <https://doi.org/10.1002/stco.201520005>.

<sup>43</sup> Grant, “The Edifice Complex,” 512.

<sup>44</sup> Saffet Bekiroglu, “Continuous Plasticity: Heydar Aliyev Centre, Baku, Azerbaijan,” *Architecture + Design* 32, no. 1 (2015): 39.

<sup>45</sup> Koch and Valiyev, “Urban Boosterism in Closed Contexts,” 589.

<sup>46</sup> Bekiroglu, “Continuous Plasticity: Heydar Aliyev Centre, Baku, Azerbaijan,” 37.

<sup>47</sup> Kaczmarska, “Contemporary Symbols in the Space of Baku,” 124.

<sup>48</sup> Kaczmarska, 126.

after the other, evoke familiar images found in Islamic geometric architecture<sup>49</sup>—many of which can be seen in the Old City (Fig. 7-8).

However, like the Flame Towers, the building represents a dialectic of competing logics, one post-Socialist, and the other still Soviet.<sup>50</sup> In writing about post-Soviet architectural transition and transformation in Moscow, Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson assert that the physical transformation and reconstruction of urban space oftentimes engages only political elites. The symbolic dialogue and formulation of a post-Socialist, post-Soviet identity is constructed by a select few, who “impose their visions” of “national identity on the symbolic landscape of the capital.”<sup>51</sup> We see this most clearly in the construction plan of the Heydar Aliyev Cultural Center. In 2007, Azerbaijan’s government organized a competition to select an architect for a cultural center in honor of Heydar Aliyev, who, while supposedly beloved, is frequently touted as an authoritarian leader.<sup>52</sup> Aliyev’s legacy consists of attempting to maintain control through autocracy, veering into totalitarianism, relying on Soviet-style rule, and having established a cult of personality.<sup>53</sup> It is not just that the construction of the Center was spearheaded by a government-led competition and that the government unilaterally adopted a futuristic and modern design, deciding for everyone what could and could not be part of Azerbaijan’s post-Socialist identity. Rather, it is the extension of a Socialist-era architectural dominance in the urban space and blending of new forms with a Soviet-style that troubles a logic of complete Soviet departure—from an aerial view, the building even resembles Heydar Aliyev’s signature,<sup>54</sup> imbuing his Soviet-style autocratic legacy physically into the public space.

On a smaller scale, the interior of the building also complicates the Center’s post-Socialist cosmopolitanism. The massive auditorium draws the eye through a tunnel-vision-style series of wavy lines, eventually meeting at the center: the stage (Fig. 9). Its purpose is ostensibly to be used for showcasing the nation’s cultural programs, asserting the strength of Azerbaijani national identity. The free-flowing interior space evokes a feeling of a holistic, non-hierarchical space, with which to admire cultural prowess. But it also suggests the presence of a myopic and grandiose strength and power reminiscent of using Soviet architectural forms to showcase authority and vitality. Patrons first are enamored with the grandiose and chic exterior design of the building as they enter the cultural marker of governmental authority and architectural dominance; then, entering the auditorium, the waveform ceiling underscores an interface of still-Socialist power, prestige, and legitimacy. Here, too, we see the competing dynamics of Soviet and post-Soviet cosmopolitan construction at play.

## Conclusion: Navigating Post-Socialist Terrain in Baku

Azerbaijan’s government has embarked on a process of rebranding the nation as departing from Soviet legacies and embracing distinctly Azerbaijani cultural futurity notably through architecture. This process fits into a discourse of post-Socialist architecture and the

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<sup>49</sup> De Boni, “Baku and Architecture,” 79.

<sup>50</sup> Or rather, in the words of Murawski, “still-socialist.”

<sup>51</sup> Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson, “Unraveling the Threads of History: Soviet-Era Monuments and Post-Soviet National Identity in Moscow,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 92, no. 3 (September 1, 2002): 525, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8306.00303>.

<sup>52</sup> The Editorial Board, “The Two Faces of Azerbaijan’s Mr. Aliyev,” *The New York Times*, January 12, 2015, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/12/opinion/the-two-faces-of-azerbaijans-mr-aliyev.html>. Heydar Aliyev was the former leader of Soviet Azerbaijan and also served as the president of Azerbaijan from 1993-2003.

<sup>53</sup> Lutz Kleveman, “Pipeline Poker: Baku’s Oil Boom,” in *The New Great Game: Blood and Oil in Central Asia* (Grove Press, 2003), 22.

<sup>54</sup> Lewis-Kraus, “Boomtown on the Caspian,” 195.

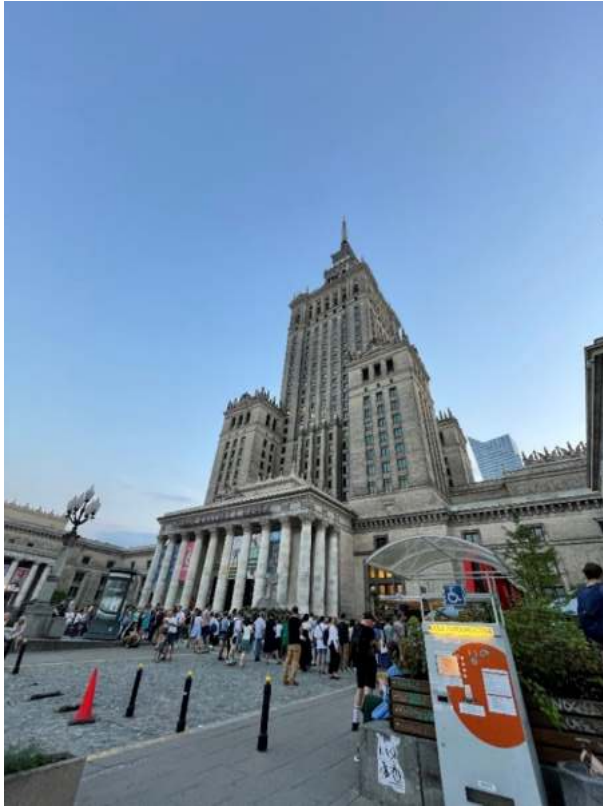
symbolic reclamation and reformulation of public urban space. The Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw arguably depicts a similar process in a much clearer light. A logic of a still-socialist built edifice contrasts with its modern-day multimodal functionality and its co-optation by different actors for novel and non-authoritarian uses. It remains a symbol of Warsaw's past, standing as a reminder of the socialist built environment, while actors carve out a non-Soviet space. Baku's nation branding strategy has led to a similar phenomenon. The anti-Soviet Bakuvian landscape must encompass a cosmopolitan desire, hinging on the international and multicultural history of the city and its pre-established cultural symbology, while simultaneously directing our gaze toward the future.

The Flame Towers and Heydar Aliyev Center serve as remarkable symbols of this competing dynamic. Both structures stand out against the background of historical stone architecture and communist housing blocks as spectacles of futurity and cosmopolitanism. They seek to reject Baku's Soviet past, but I argue that they are doing so through a quasi-Soviet means of domination of the urban environment. The Flame Towers certainly symbolize Azerbaijan's national identity and ties to fire, but the structures themselves dominate the built environment, showcasing strength and power in a Soviet style. And Zaha Hadid's cultural center may not wholly be a "contemporary interpretation" of the past at all. While it departs from Soviet-style in terms of its fluidity, it also represents the imposition of a dominating force, who decides what post-Soviet Azerbaijani culture is, and echoes an authoritarian culture in its exterior and interior design. Baku's coastline thus symbolizes the difficulties of navigating a perseverant socialist legacy in a post-Soviet space. Therein lies the crux: how can a post-Soviet nation, let alone a city, formulate a distinct set of cultural symbols, while wholeheartedly departing from its Soviet past? Despite efforts to leave it in the past, Baku still must grapple with its socialist history in creating its post-Socialist architectural and symbolic future.

## Appendix



**Fig. 1-2.** Exterior walls of the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw. Fig. 1 depicts an anarchist symbol painted in red, accompanied by a tag in all caps reading “PUNKS NOT DEAD,” as well as myriad other miscellaneous drawings. Fig. 2 showcases a swastika etched into the wall, surrounded by a heart, which sat adjacent to another swastika of similar style. Photos by author, 2022.



**Fig. 3-4.** Fig. 3 showcases a protest gathering outside the main entrance to the Palace, while Fig. 4 depicts yet another anarchist symbol, but this time hanging from gallows. Photos by author, 2022.





**Fig. 5.** Three different eras of Bakuvian architecture in one image: the 15th-century Shirvanshah's Palace, adjacent to communist housing blocks, and finally Flame Towers. Photo by Jamie Hawkesworth for WSJ Magazine, 2014.



**Fig. 6.** The nightly light show showcases the Flame Towers ablaze. Photo by Elżbieta Kaczmarska, 2020.



**Fig. 7.** The Heydar Aliyev Center as seen from afar, depicts the confluence of old and new architectural styles. Photo by Iwan Baan, 2013.



**Fig. 8.** A front view of the Heydar Aliyev Center, highlighting the curvaceous geometric design of the exterior. Photo by Helen Binet, 2013.





**Fig. 9.** The interior of the auditorium in the Heydar Aliyev Center, a sweeping waveform structure leading the eye to the stage. Photo by Helen Binet, 2013.



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## SECTION 7

# Trauma in Central European History and Storytelling



## Famous Fairytales and Their Slovak Counterparts

Alexis Waksmunski, University of Pittsburgh

Fairytales are well known and similar stories that cross many cultures because they impart societally moral lessons about conduct, values, and aspirations in ways that children and adults can absorb. Fairytales are also unique in variation based on population and geography. For example, a landlocked region will not have fairytales about mermaids, but rather water spirits that inhabit lakes or rivers.<sup>1</sup> The Walt Disney Corporation and its animated and live action recreations of some fairytales have made certain ones modernly famous. Some of these modernly famous fairytales include Cinderella, Snow White, and Sleeping Beauty and will serve as case studies illustrating feminist theories on strength, goodness, survival, power, control, and perseverance. These three specific fairytales are often criticized as being some of the least feminist princesses. However, fairytales are not insignificant stories, they have unconscious impacts felt by a collective that continues to pass them down from generation to generation. The deeper meanings behind the Slovak and modern versions of Cinderella, Snow White, and Sleeping Beauty illustrate these impacts on society and why we must use them to reflect on ourselves.

### Cinderella / Popoluška

Popoluška, the Slovak Cinderella fairytale shares main similarities with its modern counterpart in key ways: both women are plagued with tragedy when their father dies and step-family make them servants.<sup>2,3</sup> Both Popoluška and Cinderella are good people and hard workers.<sup>4,5</sup> Both women escape to a ball serving as the catalyst for change in Popoluška and Cinderella's lives.<sup>6,7</sup> In both stories help comes to the person who deserves it during this important moment.<sup>8,9</sup> By the end of the fairytale, they marry their prince because the moral of the story is that when you are a good person and a hard worker, people will help you because you deserve it, and your love will find you because they will see you for who you are and not judge you for your circumstances.<sup>10,11</sup> Losing one's shoe merely serves as a means for the prince to find her.<sup>12,13</sup>

Where the Slovak and modern fairytale differ appears mostly in the details. Popoluška does not ride to the ball in a magic pumpkin like in Cinderella's fairytale, nor does she have

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<sup>1</sup> Stehlíková, Aneta. *Character Prototypes in Traditional English and Slovak Fairy Tales*. Univerzita Palackého Filozofická Fakulta Katedra Anglistiky a Amerikanistiky, 2012, <https://theses.cz/id/h9520m/00177823-347786841.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Duričková, Mária. "Popoluška, The Slovak Cinderella." Translated by Helen Savinski, *Folktales, Legends, and Stories*, n.d., <http://www.shsnepa.org/Folktales%20and%20Legends/Folktales/Cinderella%20-%20Popoluska.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> *Cinderella*. 1950. [DVD] Walt Disney Productions: by Clyde Geronimi, Hamilton Luske and Wilfred Jackson.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid 2

<sup>5</sup> Ibid 3

<sup>6</sup> Ibid 2

<sup>7</sup> Ibid 3

<sup>8</sup> Ibid 2

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 3

<sup>10</sup> Ibid 2

<sup>11</sup> Ibid 3

<sup>12</sup> Ibid 2

<sup>13</sup> Ibid 3

talking mice friends or a fairy-godmother.<sup>14</sup> Popoluška rides on her late father's horse to three balls and each evening her step-family gives her menial tasks to keep her from going.<sup>15</sup> One such task is to separate ashes from a bag of flour.<sup>16</sup> Rather than mice, Popoluška receives help from birds who agree to complete her tasks and bring her three hazelnuts which when opened produce three beautiful ball gowns and matching slippers.<sup>17</sup> Popoluška also appears to have a more cunning personality than the modern Cinderella. She has long conversations with the prince at the three balls and during their time together provide him with riddles as to who she is, testing his intelligence in being able to find her.<sup>18</sup>

Popoluška and Cinderella are meant to be empowering stories demonstrating feminine power of perseverance and strength during difficult times. It is significant that the story of Cinderella is often criticized as being the story of a "weak" princess regardless of its popularity by modern audiences. This story is judged and dismissed based on masculine perspectives on strength. Feminist theorists, Rackow and Wackwitz, explain that types of communication that do not obviously reflect certain western male values and behaviors such as assertiveness are considered less than or even wrong.<sup>19</sup> They go on to say that feminist communication theory includes the ability to speak, be heard, and taken seriously in the social and political lives of everyone regardless of differences.<sup>20</sup> What this tells us is that even though the story of Cinderella is not often spoken of in contexts of feminist ideals of female empowerment, it remains popular because of audience's unconscious appreciation for its story of strength and perseverance of a good person. Popoluška and Cinderella include several admirable character traits that women can and continue to identify with, due in part because neither woman actually wants to seduce the prince as their motivation for wanting to attend the ball.<sup>21</sup> Both women aspire for a positive change in their lives and that is what the ball represents in both fairytales. They are stories about the unappreciated hero, who is more beautiful and more valuable than anyone recognizes.<sup>22</sup> The prince chooses to look for Popoluška and Cinderella and ultimately finds her because a well-known narrative found in many fairytales and in modern life discussions is that finding a "good" spouse represents financial stability, personal safety, and happiness for both men and women.

There are many variations of the Cinderella fairytale around the world and even variations exist within Slovak and Slavic folklore.<sup>23</sup> What remains significant are the main themes around personal virtue and overcoming adversity.<sup>24</sup> One of the earliest known variations of Cinderella originated in Egypt around the first century about a girl who is kidnapped and

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid 2

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Ibid 3

<sup>19</sup> Rakow, Lana F., and Laura A. Wackwitz. "Feminist Communication Theory: Selections in Context." *Women in Management Review*, vol. 20, no. 5, 2005, pp. 376–379., <https://doi.org/10.1108/09649420510609203>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Gidwitz, Adam. "The Twisted History of Snow White." *International Literacy Association*, International Literacy Association, 2013, <https://www.literacyworldwide.org/blog/literacy-now/2013/10/24/the-twisted-history-of-snow-white>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Ficová, Adéla. *To Whom the Shoe Fits: Cinderella as a Cultural Phenomenon in the Czech and Norwegian Context*. Masaryk University Faculty of Arts Department of Germanic, Nordic and Dutch Studies, Jan. 2020, [https://is.muni.cz/th/pp7yk/Ficova\\_popelka\\_final.pdf](https://is.muni.cz/th/pp7yk/Ficova_popelka_final.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

forced into slavery.<sup>25</sup> A falcon takes one of her red dancing slippers and drops it into the pharaoh's lap and the pharaoh vows to make the owner of the slipper his queen.<sup>26</sup>

### **Snow White / Snehulienka**

Snehulienka, the Slovak Snow White fairytale shares main similarities with its modern counterpart in key ways. Both women run away from home to escape the jealousy and betrayal of her mother figure and become housewives to be amicable refugees in the woods.<sup>27</sup> The symbolism for both fairytales represent the survival tactic of protective marriages to escape difficult circumstances. However, like with Snow White, the evil mother figure finds Snehulienka, attempts to kill her, nearly succeeds, falls into a deep death like sleep, and placed in glass coffins to be mourned.<sup>28,29</sup> Both women are mourned by admirers like a deity which ultimately saves them because the prince of their dreams finds them and helps to resuscitate them back to life, allowing them to live happily ever after.<sup>30,31</sup> The moral of both fairytales emphasizes how being a good housewife can earn you the love and admiration of those around you, and beauty is the greatest magic of all because it can create enemies but ultimately lead you to your true love.

Where the Slovak and modern fairytale differ appear mostly in their details, which makes the Slovak version more similar with the deeper meanings of the more traditionally recognized Snow White. Snehulienka does not go to live with seven dwarves, but twelve dwarves, miners, or bandits to represent the twelve months of the year and a symbol or foreshadowing rooted in Snehulienka's months long sleep.<sup>32</sup> This fairytale is rooted in Slovak folklore as a kind of female seasonal deity who is resurrected in a sense with the change of the seasons.<sup>33</sup> She marries one of the dwarves, miners, or bandits for her own protection and this coming of age or loss of innocence story is also reflected in the fairytale's color pallet.<sup>34</sup> Red represents menstruation and highlights how Snehulienka is a young woman, and when one is no longer a child there can be new dangers introduced to them, even by other women.<sup>35</sup> The color white represents birth and innocence, and the color black represents death (both fairytales include the detail of black hair).<sup>36,37</sup> This tri-color combination is among the oldest and universally used color combinations especially in Eurasian cultures dating as far back as prehistoric times to describe the ideal female goddess.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Mascarenhas, Hyacinth. "What the Story of Cinderella Looks Like in 9 Countries Around the World." *Mic*, Mic, 2020, <https://www.mic.com/articles/90385/what-the-story-of-cinderella-looks-like-in-9-countries-around-the-world>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Kropěj, Monika. "Snow White in West and South Slavic Tradition", vol. 49, no. 3-4, 2008, pp. 218-243. <https://doi-org.pitt.idm.oclc.org/10.1515/FABL.2008.018>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> *Snow White*. 1937. [DVD] Walt Disney Productions: by David Hand, William Cottrell, Wilfred Jackson, Larry Morey, Perce Pearce, and Ben Sharpsteen.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid 27

<sup>31</sup> Ibid 29

<sup>32</sup> Ibid 27

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> Girardot, N. J. "Initiation and Meaning in the Tale of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs." *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 90, no. 357, 1977, pp. 274–300. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/539520>.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Ibid 29

<sup>38</sup> Hemming, Jessica. "Red, White, and Black in Symbolic Thought: The Tricolour Folk Motif, Colour Naming, and Trichromatic Vision." *Folklore*, vol. 123, no. 3, 2012, pp. 310–29. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41721562>. Accessed 20 Mar. 2023.

Snehulienka's evil mother figure attempts to murder her on three occasions using a magical corset, hair comb, and apple (both fairytales include a dangerous apple).<sup>39</sup> The apple is not poisoned but lodged in Snehulienka's throat and therefore does not require a kiss to reverse its effects.<sup>40</sup> Her prince is so mesmerized by Snehulienka's beauty even in "death" that he tries to transport her glass coffin back to his castle, but there is an accident, and the coffin is dropped which dislodges the apple piece.<sup>41</sup> Her unintentional resurrection from asphyxiation emphasizes the mystical aspects of life and transformation.<sup>42</sup>

Snehulienka and Snow White introduce audiences to the concept of women competing against one another. These fairy tales are not as superficial as they may appear on the surface, rather, both are based on gender politics and understanding power dynamics. The evil mother figure in both fairytales is concerned about potentially losing power to a younger more beautiful woman.<sup>43,44</sup> These traits can be better viewed as types of currency among women. One example of youth and beauty found in both Snehulienka and Snow White's stories is their dark black hair. Women's hair throughout history has been tied to women's sexual maturity and different stages of life.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, Snehulienka and Snow White both travel through the three main stages of life and are ultimately resurrected to live happily ever after. Snow White and Snehulienka are coming of age stories about maturing from childhood into young adulthood.<sup>46</sup> Both traditional versions illustrate this point in their shared symbolism around the colors red, white, and black.<sup>47</sup> Both fairytales also illustrate an idealized feudal society in which a young woman moves into a patrilocal marriage which is expected of them to maintain stability in society.<sup>48</sup> Historically, menstruation would sometimes involve separation from society into nature and becoming ready for marriage could be symbolized with a difficult rite of passage from childhood to psycho-sexual maturity and full membership into society.<sup>49</sup> Snehulienka and Snow White are stories less about the women they portray and more about gender politics and women's roles in society. Neither woman has much character development and is always acted upon rather than making rational decisions in an almost uninspiring passivity in their own fairytale.<sup>50</sup> One key catalyst to both fairytales is the betrayal of the mother figure and the reason she is evil is because she attempts to remain eternally young and beautiful which breaks the natural cycle of new life replacing old life and daughters replacing mothers in their roles.<sup>51</sup> Snehulienka and Snow White illustrate how unnatural the mother figure is in attempting to sacrifice her daughter and essentially absorb her power or status.<sup>52</sup> Women in many ways possess sacred magical powers to create new life. This sacred cycle of life and death is represented with the apple that nearly kills

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid 35

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Ibid 29

<sup>45</sup> Winstead, Karen. *Studies in Iconography*, vol. 35, 2014, pp. 234–36. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23924794>.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid 35

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Ibid 35

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

Snehulienka and Snow White.<sup>53</sup> In the Christian Bible, it is speculated that the fruit of the tree that Adam and Eve were not permitted to eat from that gave them the knowledge of sexuality and how to create life was an apple.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, both fairytales at their core impart important survival lessons to their audiences and illustrate what they perceive to be the natural order of women's upbringing.

There are many variations of the Snow White fairytale around the world and even variations exist within Slovak and Slavic folklore.<sup>55</sup> What remains significant are the main themes around becoming a young woman or complicated marriages.<sup>56</sup> In some Slavic variations there are different numbers of dwarfs or other figures represented such as seven, nine, twelve, fourteen, and forty-eight which all have symbolic meaning for women and women's reproductive functions as mothers.<sup>57</sup> There are also instances of werewolves and some cross-over plot with Little Red Riding Hood.<sup>58</sup>

### **Sleeping Beauty / Šípková Ruženka**

Šípková Ruženka, the Slovak Sleeping Beauty fairytale shares main similarities with its modern counterpart in key ways. Both women are cursed as infants to someday prick their fingers on a spinning wheel and fall into a death like sleep.<sup>59,60,61</sup> Ultimately, both women fall victim to their curses but are found by princes who are with them when they wake.<sup>62,63,64</sup> The main symbolism for both fairytales emphasize how fate can be chosen for us and then ultimately out of anyone's control. The lesson being taught is how little control we may have over our lives and that there can be a timing to when things happen, but living happily ever after is still possible. Faith is required to endure throughout these fairytales.

Where the Slovak and modern fairytales differ appear mostly in their details. Šípková Ruženka's fairytale does not include a recognized villain of any kind.<sup>65,66</sup> As a result there is no battle between good and evil as portrayed in the modern Sleeping Beauty. Instead of fairies, Šípková Ruženka is visited by fates, spirits, or demons who determined the infant's fate but then do not participate in the remainder of the fairytale.<sup>67,68</sup> The Disney Corporation attempted to make the more traditional versions of this fairytale more palatable by changing several details. The prince and princess meet each other before she falls into her deep sleep, there are cute,

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

<sup>55</sup> Ibid 27

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

<sup>58</sup> Ibid

<sup>59</sup> Oliver Tearle, Oliver. "A Summary and Analysis of the Sleeping Beauty Fairy Tale." *Interesting Literature*, Interesting Literature, 2017, <https://interestingliterature.com/2017/09/a-summary-and-analysis-of-the-sleeping-beauty-fairy-tale/>.

<sup>60</sup> "Šípková Ruženka." *YouTube*, The Orchard Enterprises, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u41kKIjuAWk>.

<sup>61</sup> *Sleeping Beauty*. 1959. [DVD] Walt Disney Productions: by Clyde Geronimi, Wolfgang Reitherman, Eric Larson, and Les Clark

<sup>62</sup> Ibid 59

<sup>63</sup> Ibid 60

<sup>64</sup> Ibid 61

<sup>65</sup> Ibid 59

<sup>66</sup> Ibid 60

<sup>67</sup> Ibid 59

<sup>68</sup> Ibid 60



spitely fairy godmothers who help raise the princess until she is sixteen, and the death like sleep only lasts one night.<sup>69</sup> It is not a coincidence that when Šípková Ruženka reaches a marriagable age, she pricks her finger on a spinning wheel, and she, along with her kingdom, sleeps for one hundred years.<sup>70,71</sup> Over a century of sleep causes thorn bushes to encapsulate the palace and men die attempting to cross the grounds.<sup>72,73</sup> The sole survivor, a prince reaches the sleeping Šípková Ruženka and awakes her with a kiss or simply because the one hundred years have lapsed.<sup>74,75</sup> In Slavic traditions, fates or spirits spin the thread of mortals' lives and this magic is always done by women, to which there are usually three and are present soon after a child's birth.<sup>76</sup> These fates or spirits are sometimes known as the sudice which in Slovak mean judges.<sup>77</sup> They represent misfortune, happiness, and death and whichever fate or spirit arrives first, second, or third determines the order for the child's life.<sup>78</sup> This is very similar to the Sleeping Beauty story about christening gifts and how the final one cannot be undone. As a result, there is a superstition that if a family leaves food or gifts out for the fates or spirits when a child is born then the fates will grant the child a good fate.<sup>79</sup> There are also correlations between the concept of the "sleeping kingdom" and Russian and Slavic identity and geopolitics at different points in history.<sup>80</sup>

Šípková Ruženka resembles the traditional Grimm Brothers' version in some of its darker elements and although Disney attempted to make their version of the fairytale more palatable, the central points remain the same. It also draws similarities with the Norse tale of Brynhild who is doomed to eternal sleep until a man rescues her.<sup>81</sup> This fairytale, like Cinderella and Snow White, have many variations around the world and even variations exist within Slovak and Slavic folklore. What remains significant are the main themes around fate and lack of control. One of the oldest known variations of Sleeping Beauty originated in ancient Egypt about an infant prince whose life is threatened by the fates.<sup>82</sup> Interestingly, this version of the fairytale called the Doomed Prince is replaced in modern popularity by the more recognizable variation with a female princess. This likely represents an example of society's overall lack of understanding and respect for female biological autonomy. As a result of this long held unethical

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid 61

<sup>70</sup> Ibid 59

<sup>71</sup> Ibid 60

<sup>72</sup> Ibid 59

<sup>73</sup> Ibid 60

<sup>74</sup> Ibid 59

<sup>75</sup> Ibid 60

<sup>76</sup> Starling, Amelia. "Sleeping Beauty and the Fates of Mythology." *University of Essex Centre for Myth Studies*, University of Essex Centre for Myth Studies, 2017, <https://essexmyth.wordpress.com/2017/05/29/sleeping-beauty-and-the-fates-of-mythology/>.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid

<sup>78</sup> Ibid 76

<sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> Krysteva, Denka. "Спящее Царство и Константы Культуры (Тематизация Концепта в Русских Идеологических Контекстах) [The Sleeping Kingdom and the Constants of Culture (Topicalisation of the Concept in Russian Ideological Contexts)]." *Шуменски Университет Епископ Константин Преславски*, no. 3, 2018, pp. 136–153., <https://www-ccc-ol-com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/search/article-detail?id=720377>.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid 59

<sup>82</sup> "Sleeping Beauty: A History of the Tale." *Pook Press*, Pook Press, 2018, <https://www.pookpress.co.uk/project/sleeping-beauty-history/>.

societal norm, some Sleeping Beauty variations include rape and non-consensual sexual contact as if they can be excused as a normal part of a fairytale.<sup>83</sup>

## Conclusion

Fairytales remain relevant today because they tell us about our culture by imparting lessons about our values, how to behave, and what we aspire to be. It is therefore no surprise that some fairytales like Cinderella, Snow White, and Sleeping Beauty have been recreated in popular western culture to better fit modern values and behavior. This fact tells us that society and culture is fluid and dynamic. The Slovak counterparts of these well-known fairytales also represented certain values and lessons for their audiences. Some of these values remain relevant because we choose to remember these fairytales. We believe that if you are a good person, help will come when you need it most like with Cinderella or Popoluška. We understand that becoming an adult female can be treacherous and sometimes one must learn to survive as best they can and hope for the best like Snow White or Snehulienka. We fear that our fate is outside of our control and is not necessarily dictated by our choices. Therefore, we must accept a certain amount of mystery in why things happen like Sleeping Beauty or Šípková Ruženka.

Each of these famous fairytales and the Slovak counterpart end with the prince finding the princess and living happily ever after. No matter what our story is, we hope that things will get better and aspiring for happiness is universal and timeless. Therefore, the modern Disney versions of these fairytales have not made substantive changes any more than the Slovak versions have. The archetypal teachings and values remain basically the same because decision-makers felt that they reflected their audience.<sup>84</sup> Ultimately, if they did not reflect modernity and appeal to nostalgia both legitimizing their production and transmission, they would not matter by not being shared or remembered.<sup>85</sup> It is more than wish fulfillment literature.<sup>86</sup> There is unconscious initiation similar to early human experiences with initiatory patterns.<sup>87</sup> Fairytales have an inherently religious or spiritual component to them similar to scriptures on how to adapt to adult reality, and there is goodness who triumphs over evils.<sup>88</sup> What Walt Disney did in creating his versions of the Cinderella, Snow White, and Sleeping Beauty fairytales was write himself into each story and emphasized values he considered important, including his privileges in the patriarchy.<sup>89</sup> The process of active editing of fairytales is what the oral fairytales enabled and encouraged because stories were not concrete until written down.<sup>90</sup> Fairytales can be dynamic and personally spiritual stories that touch the lives of the people who choose to value them. We are each a princess in our own stories.

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<sup>83</sup> "Sleeping Beauty." *The Slavic Polytheist*, Word Press, n.d., <https://slavicpolytheist.wordpress.com/2017/03/13/sleeping-beauty/>.

<sup>84</sup> O'Brien, Pamela C. *The Happiest Films on Earth: A Textual and Contextual Analysis of how and Why Walt Disney Altered the Fairy Tales and Legends of "Snow White", "Cinderella", "The Little Mermaid", and "Pocahontas"*, Indiana University, United States -- Indiana, 2002. *ProQuest*, <http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/happiest-films-on-earth-textual-contextual/docview/305513029/se-2>.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid

<sup>86</sup> Ibid 35

<sup>87</sup> Ibid

<sup>88</sup> Ibid

<sup>89</sup> Zipes, Jack and Tatar, Maria. "Breaking the Disney Spell." *The Classic Fairy Tales*, Second Norton Critical Edition, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, NY, 2017, pp. 414-435.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid

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## **“Analyzing *Obchod na korze* (1965) and *Všichni moji blízcí* (1999) in Understanding Nazi Aryanization and the Relationship between Nazi Germany and the First Slovak Republic”**

*Benjamin Sommer, University of Pittsburgh*

The time of the late 1930s proved to be a trying time for European countries. As Nazi ideology and Nazi Germany itself grew in power and influence, no nation was safe from political turmoil and territorial invasion. Apart from annexing entire countries and taking over their governments, Adolf Hitler employed the strategy of creating puppet states. Though technically controlled by Nazi Germany, these countries had their own governments with leaders loyal to Hitler and the Nazi cause. Examples include France, Hungary, Norway, and many others. In many cases these countries helped carry out the Holocaust. Included in this group is the First Slovak Republic. Through a comparative analysis of two films *The Shop on Main Street* [*Obchod na korze*] (1965) and *All My Loved Ones* [*Všichni moji blízcí*] (1999), which both center around the Holocaust and the takeover of Jewish property, the topics of the Sudetenland, the relationship between Nazi Germany and the First Slovak Republic, and Aryanization will be explored in detail.

### **Annexation and Crisis**

Throughout World War II, Nazi Germany took over many European nations. One of them, Czechoslovakia, was a rather special case. This nation, having only existed since 1918, was divided into two different countries. This all started during the Sudetenland Crisis of 1938, just one implementation of Hitler's *Lebensraum* policies which were eventually carried out in Poland, the Baltics, and Ukraine: *Lebensraum* meaning more living space for ethnic Germans in the Third Reich. The execution of this policy meant the invasion of other sovereign, European nations. The Sudetenland was a large border region in Czechoslovakia along much of the German, Austrian, and Polish borders. Living in this region were many ethnic and native-speaking Germans. Some of these Germans who were nationalistic wanted to be part of Nazi Germany, and these sentiments were only strengthened by the Sudeten German Party (SdP) led by Konrad Henlein (Ryback 168). In an act of appeasement and in hopes to avoid another war in Europe, the Munich Agreement, known as the Munich Betrayal to many Czechs and Slovaks, was signed in September of 1938 by Adolf Hitler of Germany, Benito Mussolini of Italy, Neville Chamberlain of the United Kingdom, and Édouard Daladier of France. This agreement ceded the Sudetenland to Hitler and the Third Reich, as the Sudetenland was promised to be Hitler's last claim to territory outside of Germany (Kirschbaum 181). This was, however, far from the truth.

### **The Creation of the First Slovak Republic**

A professor at the Bergische Universität Wuppertal, Dr. Tatjana Tönsmeier, a historian and expert on German-Slovak relations, writes on Hitler and *Lebensraum*, “Zentrale Bedeutung besaßen für ihn die Chiffren ‘Lebensraumgewinnung im Osten’, ‘Schaffung einer Herrenmenschenrasse’, und ‘Wirtschaftsautarkie’” (Tönsmeier 40). Later in her work she writes:

Die Slowakei war für Hitler vor allem der Sprengsatz, mit dem er die Tschechoslowakei auseinanderzusprengen gedachte – in diesem Zusammenhang nahm er die sie überhaupt erstmals wahr. Außerdem hatte das Land für ihn eine Bedeutung als “Tauschobjekt“, vielleicht sollte man eher sagen als “Köder“, den man deutscherseits für die Ungarn auslegte. (Tönsmeier 42)

Tönsmeier clarifies how Czechoslovakia played a role in fulfilling Hitler's wishes to provide more living space for ethnic Germans and further his idea and implementation of the master Aryan race, but also how the country could be used to his economic benefit. Tönsmeier

also explains how Hitler specifically used Slovakia to destroy the combined Czechoslovakia. He saw Slovakia and its people as a bargaining chip to use with Hungary, another country which became shrouded under Hitler's influence. This is due to the fact that Hungary had some land and border disputes with the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia. Offering more insight on the topic of Nazi expansion, a scholar who personally lived this history in the First Slovak Republic, Joseph A. Mikus describes, "According to the Nuremberg documents, Germany at that time had already decided to break up Czecho-Slovakia. But she had not yet made up her mind about what to do with Slovakia. Should Germany take her in direct occupation, or should she get Hungary to take her?" (Mikus 37).

On the formal creation of this new Slovak state, it was the Czechoslovak government in Prague under President Emil Hácha who declared martial law in Slovakia which was then controlled by the Rev. Dr. Jozef Tiso, a Roman Catholic priest, and the Prime Minister of Slovakia. Tiso was invited to Berlin to meet with Hitler, as he had been told about Hungary possibly wanting to invade his country. Hitler urged Tiso to proclaim independence which he did on March 14, 1939 (Mikus 38). To the point of the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, Mikus writes, "Czecho-Slovakia was not destroyed by Germany; she disintegrated. Certainly Germany helped her die, but German propaganda would have been in vain had it not been able to make use of the resentment between Czechs and Slovaks" (Mikus 39). It becomes evident how Nazi Germany used Slovakia for their own benefit, how Germany worked behind the scenes to ensure the nation's downfall and turn to the Nazi cause. The declaration of Slovakia's independence thus destroyed Czechoslovakia, and the creation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia took place only two days later, thus violating the Munich Agreement of only a few months prior. Hitler now had full control in what was Czechoslovakia.

### **Aryanization in Film**

Following World War II, many Czechoslovak films explored the topics of living in the Nazi-occupied country, with films being set in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the Nazi-annexed Czech portion of Czechoslovakia, as well as the First Slovak Republic, the aforementioned Nazi puppet state. A very popular Czechoslovak movie, *The Shop on Main Street* [Obchod na korze] was released in 1965 and centers directly on the Aryanization policies of the First Slovak Republic during World War II. It was the first central European film to win an Academy Award and was also the first film about the Holocaust to win such an award and set the stage for many later Holocaust-centered films to come. *The Shop on Main Street* tells the story of the carpenter Tóno Brtko who is tasked to take over the shop of the elderly Rozália Lautmannová, a Jewish widow. Tóno's true position is to oversee her business and control it, but Rozália is deaf and does not understand Tóno's real role, as she only believes that he is there to help her run things in the shop. The two form an amicable relationship and Tóno does help her manage her business. The film ends in tragedy during a roundup of the Jewish community in the village. Tóno desperately tries to hide Rozália but in his nervousness and fear begins to drink heavily. He then accidentally kills the woman and upon realizing what he has done, hangs himself over his own guilt and anguish.

For a film of its era, *The Shop on Main Street* was quite groundbreaking. During the beginning of the communist era in Czechoslovakia, it was difficult to make films on such a subject, particularly because the subject matter was thought to be the nemesis, in other words, Nazi Germany and Nazi political ideology. Despite films of this nature often criticizing Nazis and the Nazi party for the atrocious acts committed during the war, the communist government would not allow it, as they did not want to give light and attention to something they did not see

as beneficial to their cause. It was only during the de-Stalinization period in the Soviet Union and across the Iron Curtain under Nikita Khrushchev where films exploring these themes then started to be produced. On the production of the film, Slovak scholar Dr. Martin Votruba writes, “It brought the first filmic representation of the broad societal context of the Holocaust in Slovak and Czech filmmaking. All of its characters are Slovak citizens, whether they are identified as Jewish or by default, presumably Christian or non-religious, and range from those who oppress the Jews, to those who work against the oppression, to the eventual victims of the Holocaust” (Votruba 4). This further emphasizes the film’s importance to its nation and people, as it was the first of its kind.

Despite his actions, Tóno is still Rozália’s appointed Aryanizer. With about 2,000 of them in the First Slovak Republic, Aryanizers took over Jewish-owned businesses and often made great profits. It was nothing exclusive to Slovakia, but rather occurred throughout much of occupied Europe. Aryanization or *Arisierung* financially crippled Jews by stripping them of their property and it led to large profits for their overseers. German scholar and professor Dr. Frank Bajohr writes, “The ‘Aryanization’ of Jewish property developed into the single greatest exchange of property in modern German history. Lawyers, realtors, trust companies, and banks were active as middlemen in arranging ‘Aryanization’ contracts. They all pocketed commissions” (Bohar 525). This statement shows the massive scale of profits from Aryanization policies with not only the Aryanizers making a profit, but how many of the people in between these property transactions greatly benefited as well.

Another film which explores the topic of Aryanization in a much different light is *All My Loved Ones* which was released in 1999. The film tells the story of a prominent Jewish-Czech violinist named Samuel Silberstein, and his extended family’s decisions for survival leading up to World War II. In the Nazi-occupied and annexed Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the Silberstein family is quite literally fighting for their survival. Samuel’s brother Jakub is a doctor and can no longer see his patients. Samuel, a concert violinist, can no longer play in concerts throughout Europe. With the situation worsening, Jakub asks the family gardener, Helmut Spitzer, to teach his son David and David’s friend Soša the German language, as he believes it will help them in this new world of Nazi-occupation. Helmut teaches the children a Nazi march song and they perform it to the family during a dinner party. For Helmut, a German living in Czechoslovakia, this was normal and happened to be the music he listened to on his record player; he is almost subconsciously espousing these Nazi views. This enrages Jakub and causes an argument between the two men. Helmut was not a Nazi before, but this would soon change. Near the end of the film, the family’s estate is being taken from them and we see Helmut now working as a middleman with the Nazi officials, conspiring against the Silberstein family. While not a direct Aryanizer, Helmut plays into this narrative of Aryanization as he benefits at the family’s expense and misfortune. However, it is his total shift in belief which is most striking. It is only after he is reprimanded by his employer that he begins to embrace Nazi ideology and becomes a cog in the machine.

As in *The Shop on Main Street*, *All My Loved Ones* ends in sadness with the entire Silberstein family being killed in the Holocaust. The only survivor is the young David Silberstein who escaped with the help of Sir Nicholas Winton, a real-life figure who helped rescue Jewish children in Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia through the *Kindertransport*, an initiative which gave these young refugees new homes, families, and futures in the United Kingdom.

Often a telling and complex medium, film and cinematography show the reality of the world in various ways. *The Shop on Main Street* and *All My Loved Ones* share similar Holocaust

and World War II narratives but in different lights. While *All My Loved Ones* exhibits much surrounding the leadup to the war, there are many details about anti-Jewish sentiment and the beginning of Aryanization at this time. In contrast to this, *The Shop on Main Street* skips almost all of the required background information, assuming that the viewer understands the context of the time and the setting, but it tackles the relationship of Jewish business owner and Aryanizer in a way that is beautiful, complex, and tragic all at the same time. This film portrays somewhat of an illusion by showing a rare and unrealistic form of Aryanization between Tóno and Rozália, with what happened in *All My Loved Ones* being much closer to the truth. It was these Aryanization policies which furthered Hitler's agenda and helped to bring about the mass extermination of six million Jews alone.

While both films do center around a great tragedy, they end positively, with David in *All My Loved Ones* having survived the Holocaust, and Tóno and Rozália in *The Shop on Main Street* spending an afternoon walking together in what is an imagined fantasy, showing how life could have been. This scene exhibits Tóno's reconciliation and consciousness over what he has done. David's journey continues, but for Tóno and Rozália, the journey is over yet leaves us to ponder. Despite the death and despair, these films move past such darkness by showing the hope for the future and life to come, showing hope for a better world that triumphs over fascism.



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