

THE BIRCH

Journal of Eastern European, Slavic, and Eurasian Studies

2024 - 2025

Politics | Cuture & History | Arts & Creative Writing | Photography

About *The Birch*

Founded in 2004, *The Birch Journal* is the first national undergraduate publication devoted exclusively to Slavic, East European, and Eurasian studies. Any undergraduate student at any college or university is welcome to submit work to be published in our issues, featured both online and in print. We accept essays on the culture, history, and politics of the greater region, literary criticism, photography, translations, and creative writing.

The Birch editorial board is composed entirely of current undergraduate students at Columbia University. More information about *The Birch Journal* is available online, our Instagram account (@thebirchjournal), our website (thebirchjournal.com), and by emailing us at thebirchjournal@gmail.com. *Photos courtesy of Alaina Parent and Karel Ruiz.*



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Letter From The Editors

It is with great pleasure that we present to you the 2025 edition of The Birch Journal.

This edition of The Birch is published amid a wave of demoralizing and distressing developments in the United States' relationships with its European allies and in Ukraine's existential resistance against Russian aggression. While Russian disinformation is being actively appropriated and echoed by the US government, ensuring the preservation and accessibility of serious academic inquiry into Eastern European politics, culture, history and society has taken on a renewed urgency. We undoubtedly stand at a crossroads in both national and global history; one can not help but anxiously feel the intensifying relevance of studying the autocratic and fascist regimes of Eastern Europe. We hope that our journal, in a small way, has contributed to the development of the next generation of thinkers who will dedicate their expertise towards the defense of truth, the promotion of international cooperation, and the proliferation of cultural exchange.

The Birch Journal is the oldest undergraduate Slavic journal in the nation. Our editors and authors have proudly participated in a long tradition of platforming student voices and encouraging undergraduate inquiry in the field of Eastern European and Eurasian Studies. The mission of our journal is not only to spotlight emerging scholars working in a variety of disciplines, but also to challenge the predominant Russo-centric perspective of Eastern Europe through a multiplicity of regional foci. We believe that this edition, which explores 13 different nations through the lenses of political science, history, poetry, photography, and art, accurately represents our mission.

This year has also marked a period of unprecedented growth for our journal. In the past year alone we have received nearly seven times more submissions than during the 2023-2024 academic year, and we have accordingly increased our volume of publications. The launch of our online journal Slova has also allowed us to spotlight more remarkable undergraduate work and increase the accessibility of our publications. We are greatly indebted to all those who submitted to our journal and encouraged by the expanding interest in our project. Our editors fielded work from students representing almost 40 different universities from four continents and demonstrating a wide diversity in thought, discipline, and regional interest. War, democratic backsliding, political turmoil, disinformation, and other crises which have plagued Eastern Europe over the past years have no doubt prompted this widespread interest in our project.
The Birch has become an increasingly critical platform for inquiry and debate as scholars search for ways to respond to ongoing instability and turmoil.

Our staff, who have worked tirelessly to produce this journal, deserve endless thanks. Their expertise, initiative, and dedication continue to define the success of The Birch's mission. We are additionally grateful for the extensive work of our writers and the continuous support of our readers. We hope you enjoy this 2025 edition of The Birch!

Karel Ruiz and Shiori Horton
Editors-in-Chief of The Birch Journal

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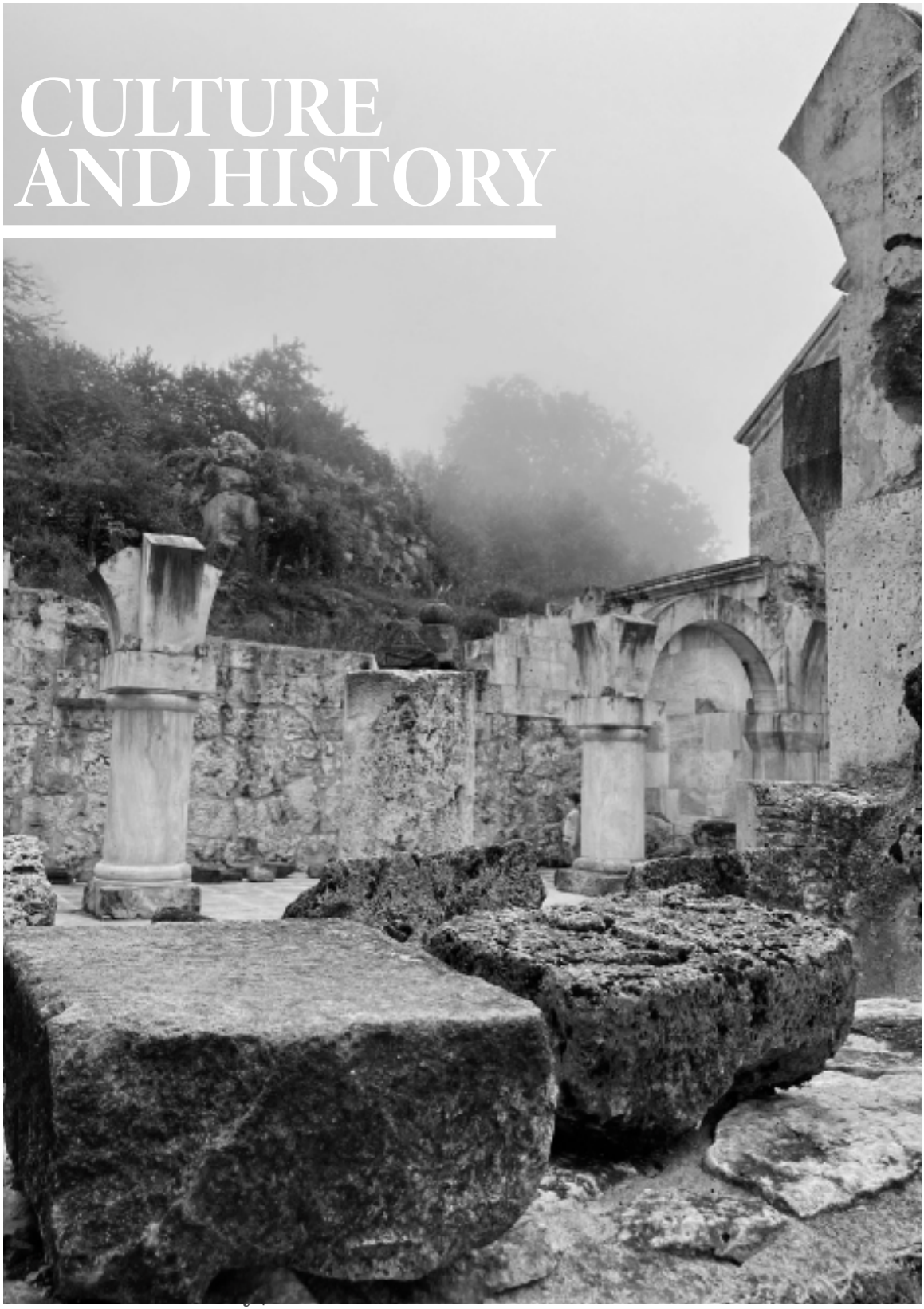
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CULTURE AND HISTORY



Revolution from the Bandstand

Thomas Lyons, Wesleyan University

"Even good jazz is hard to take in quantity, but this kind of jazz bombardment was beyond endurance."
– Nikita Khrushchev (1963)

In 1921, the Russian poet Valentin Parnakh wandered into a Paris jazz bar (Lücke). Mesmerized by the syncopated rhythms coming from the saxophones of Louis Mitchel's Jazz Kings band, Parnakh returned to Moscow with trumpets, sheet music, and a new sound that would expose the divide between popular culture and Soviet ideology for the next seventy years. As the Socialist project attempted to create the new Soviet human from above, their efforts to manage popular culture, such as jazz, faltered between bans, restrictions, and ultimately attempted co-option. Using the examples of jazz and rock music as a symbol of public disenchantment, subversive music increasingly represented the widening chasm between popular spirit and official doctrine during the 20th century. Ultimately, this chasm eroded public faith in the Soviet project's single-truth ideal. In the face of public contestation, what the Party considered permissibly Soviet shifted. Therefore, to understand what it meant to be Soviet, one must engage in cultural history. A cultural history forged from public imagination, not official doctrine — one from the bandstand, in defiance of the Soviet man above.

The Soviet State's initial attempt to reject jazz revealed the slowly widening chasm between Socialist Realism and Socialist reality. When Parnakh's band first performed in the Union at the State Institute for Theatrical Art in Moscow on October 1, 1922, the instrumentation included a piano, drums, xylophone, two violins, and, quizzically, a banjo (Starr 14). The performance was "better read about than heard," Frederick Starr, founder of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, wryly remarked in his compendium on Soviet Jazz Red & Hot (14), and yet, writing and reading about the advent of jazz music put its subversive sound at the forefront of intelligentsia discussions during the 20s and 30s. "Nervous, convulsive, spasmodic," a Pravda editorial wrote in 1936, "the music quacks, grunts, and growls" (*Pravda*). These critiques, ostensibly about jazz's musical merit, revealed a far deeper wound to the Party's organs. Jazz music — founded not on the conductor's vision from above, but on improvisation and individual freedom from below — "carried a message of individual and physical liberation that was incompatible with the puritanic morality of communism," Starr

wrote (Starr 90). Or, as F. Scott Fitzgerald put it, "jazz…has meant first sex, then dancing, then music" (10). To the Soviet State, jazz culture awoke the fear that popular culture might blossom organically against Socialist ideals. While Bolshevism attempted to harness collective strength through labor, jazz argued workers could expend energy on their own time. Yet, despite State concerns, jazz became wildly popular in Moscow, and public support mixed with the economic leniency of the NEP years allowed for its continued presence and even aroused State curiosity: in 1924, Parnakh's band (the formidably titled "First Eccentric Orchestra of the Russian Federated Socialist Republic") performed at the Fifth Congress of the Communist International (51).

As Fitzgerald's quote alludes, the Soviet debate around jazz mirrored the time's discussion around sexual activity, further revealing Soviet fears that culture might overtake doctrine. "Soviet sexual enlightenment had no room for pleasure and sexual fulfillment," Frances Bernstein wrote in *Dictatorship of Sex*. "Sexual normalcy…was defined negatively as the absence of…deviant behaviors" (Bernstein 7). Jazz, the Party feared, was as full of sexual deviancy as it was sharps and flats. "The insulting chaos of insanity pulses to a throbbing rhythm," Maxim Gorky wrote of the genre in 1928. "An orchestra of lunatics, driven mad by sex, and conducted by a human stallion wielding an enormous phallus" (Gorky). How could the five-year plan be fulfilled in four if workers were always running around playing jazz and making love? Gorky wrote at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, when the Soviet platform had admittedly enjoyed success in creating the myth of the new Soviet human. That period, before the Terror and the reign of the McCarthyistic "professional public denouncers," proved a time of youthful optimism distinctly connected to Socialist ideals. "We shall build our world, a new world," *The International* declared (Fitzpatrick 109). This was the time of Stakhanovites, of the "reforged man," of "speaking Bolshevik," and of young communists "itching to be unleashed" in the fight against religion (81).

Despite that fight, jazz experienced a state reinterpretation during the Cultural Revolution because of its origin as the music of oppressed Black Americans. In 1928, Soviet leaders declared the need for a Black Republic of the South in the US (Starr 120). To support the hypothetical movement, Soviet leaders attempted to manufacture a fictional film about Black steelworkers' efforts to unionize in Birmingham, Alabama (103). The film ultimately fell apart, but the Soviets discovered it far harder to create culture than it had to simply ban one form. As Matthew Arnold wrote in *Culture and Anarchy* in 1869, leaders cannot simply feed the masses "an intellectual food prepared and adapted in the way they think proper for the actual conditions of the masses" (157). Culture, in other word, lost its flavor when bred from the top down. Thus, unable to carve out the new culture for the Soviet Human, leaders instead attempted to co-opt what already existed, further revealing their inability to drive the urban spirit.

"Culture, in other word, lost its flavor when bred from the top down."

Yet, popular culture, not Lenin's writing, inspired the dictatorship of the proletariat during Soviet Jazz's Red Age from 1932 and 1936 (the Roaring Twenties were delayed in their trans-Pacific journey). During these years, the Soviet critic Alexei Batashev declared "jazz" a "signally successful advertising gimmick" (109). There was theatrical-jazz, cinema-jazz, extra-jazz, jazz operettas, and even circus-jazz (109). In reference to the preceding years, one critic remarked, "The jazz epidemic

is to some degree the natural reaction to the excessively austere puritanism that reigned among us until so recently" (111). While the booming popularity of jazz marked a significant cultural turning point, it would be a mistake to consider the music itself intentionally political. Rather, the spontaneity of the music itself represented an apolitical demonstration of youth and energy at the expense of the Socialist idea. Therefore, through its apolitical nature, jazz music represented a deviance from the Socialist form, all the more significant for its organic social awakening.

While the revolution from below fueled jazz's Red Age, the official meaning of jazz continued to evolve according to the ever-changing Socialist doctrine. During Stalin's Terror, for example, jazz suffered under suspicion of treason against the Socialist cause. Anyone caught with American jazz records could face a 100 ruble fine and six months of jail time (94). However, after confronting the difficulty of creating culture, the State began a surprisingly earnest project to co-opt the Soviet jazz culture. Here, the Party began an intentional distinction (perhaps a hypocritical excuse) to differentiate foreign, bourgeois jazz, from the proletarian anthems of Soviet jazz. Ironically, only a decade earlier in 1928 when Gorky had declared jazz "the music of the gross," he wrote that capitalist traitors and proponents of jazz supported the "worldwide herd of fat men…trampling upon culture" (Gorky). Only the proletariat, he concluded, could save culture. And yet, by the mid-30s, Soviet leaders, not the Soviet people, were most prominently involved in "manufacturing musical ecstasy," as Starr wrote (Starr 127). For example, First Secretary of the Moscow Party Committee Lazar Kaganovich published a 1939 brochure titled "How to Organize Railway Ensembles of Song and Dance and Jazz Orchestras," explicitly linking labor and jazz for the first time, a surprising turnaround from the Party's earlier fears that jazz would distract from collective labor (173). Throughout the 20th century, the State played this game of catchup, like a forgetful musician rehearsing in the green room. In 1938, at the height of the Terror, Stalin's own State Jazz Orchestra debuted at the Bolshoi Theater.[1] And with the advent of the Second World War, requests for jazz entertainment at the front revealed its persistent popularity (184). The Soviet people, it appeared, had been able to foster a revolution from below.

In the postwar period, the state's strict jazz censorship resulted in cultural vacuums. After World War Two, the State waged war against anything smelling of Western suspicion. "Today he plays jazz, tomorrow he'll betray his country," a post-war propaganda poster read (Hasse). Such a great irony (as discussed above, the State-sponsored jazz bands during the War) further reveals the Party's ineffectual attempts to guide culture. Still, the State "banned" jazz: in 1949, new laws forced every saxophonist in Moscow to bring their instrument for confiscation to the State Variety Music Agency (Starr 216). Soon Soviet leaders were attempting to switch Baltic States from shortwave to cable radio, which could more easily block out jazz from international stations such as Radio Iran or Radio Luxembourg (228). Music, Khrushchev argued, should inspire collective labor, only possible if composers "remain close to everyday life and the problems of national struggle, those [composers] who are supported by the people" (Khrushchev). And yet, in the absence of other cultural output, all this repression succeeded only in creating a cultural vacuum, invariably filled from below. Fundamentally, the State continued to misunderstand the role

1. Though, through an unfortunate combination of the day's prominent jazz musicians exiled to Gulags, a lack of improvisation, and a dreadfully orchestral ensemble, "the results were disastrous," Starr wryly observed (p.176).

and process of popular culture. Ultimately, the top-down cultural approach — that effort to create the Soviet human from above — could not exist in conjunction with social movements. "The job of organizing youth is Komsomol's task," Moscow's Komsomol told members of the jazz collective "The Eight," "not [artists]" (Starr 268).

Despite the Komsomol's best intentions, the youth stood steadfastly unorganized, and though the State grew closer to Communism's material and technical base during the economic growth of the Khrushchev years, they had yet to succeed in forming the new Soviet human. Indeed, the late 50s and 60s spawned a different sort of adolescence: disenchanted youth, Stilyagi, turned to jazz as a form of self-expression. In psychological textbooks, researchers wrote about jazz as if it were a teenage disease (Idashkin). In a satire article, an aimless, jazz-listening youth loses such will to be human he becomes an actual cockroach (Vikhrey). "If we lag behind in the education and character training of the Soviet people," the psychological institute Iu. V. Idashkin published in 1961, "then the entire matter of building communism is inevitably retarded" (Idashkin). The Party had realized Communism could not stand on factories alone. Yet, even while leaders attempted to wage "a decisive and merciless war on every idler, parasite and other morally depraved person who is… avoid[ing] socially useful labor," Khrushchev's thaw continued to allow for a jazz resurgence (Idashkin). Moscow and Leningrad celebrated jazz festivals in 1962, and the Tallinn International Jazz Festival premiered in May 1967, where both State-run Melodiia and American Atlantic Records distributed recordings (Starr 285). During the 60s, the Party played a dangerous game, cautiously opening Soviet borders to foreign artists while trying to retain cultural control of the Socialist form. However, a new sound was on the horizon, one that would shock and electrify and lead to calls for freedom from below.

The process through which rock music entered the Soviet mainstream mirrored the process jazz had experienced earlier that century. By the late 70s, half of Moscow workers listened to Western radio stations, and both American and Soviet leaders recognized that cultural diplomacy could further erode faith in Soviet ideology (Fitzpatrick 174). Going back to the early 50s, Vasilii Aksynov wrote about the cultural influence of the two-hour Voice of America jazz program, broadcast from Tangiers into the USSR. "Jazz was America's secret weapon number one," he wrote (Aksenov). (Years later, Billy Joel would call rock and roll America's newest "greatest export") (Brown). "I was on the verge of becoming a Soviet person," Boris Grebenshikav, founder of Russian rock band Akvarium, said. "The Beatles came to save me. It was the start of a new religion" (Brown). While this subversive cultural influence certainly played a role in the popularity of jazz and rock music inside the Union, American "soft diplomacy" simply expanded the possibilities for subversive activity — it did not create the desire itself. That desire was sometimes literally organic, as when citizens would illicitly burn songs onto old medical x-ray discs, called "Bone Records" (Brown). Change was in the air(waves), and so were the power chords, snare drums, and long hairs of the coming rock revolution. While Soviet leaders first banned electric instruments,[2] continued

2. In the wonderful documentary "Free to Rock", Soviet guitar maker Valery Saifudinov describes how guitarists would steal magnets from public telephone booths to construct the electric pickups on homemade guitars. This method was so popular it disabled the majority of public telephones in Moscow.

popular support behind rock music eventually forced the State to attempt to co-opt the movement.

Therefore, we should understand the glasnost and perestroika movements not as the causes of change, but as the response to it. Even as leaders attempted to mold the new Soviet human, their sculpture now seemed little more than a low-budget knock-off of the people's creation. Under growing cultural pressure, in 1981, the KGB (covertly) opened the Leningrad Rock Club, a 600-seat theater for Soviet bands (Maynes). Agents would monitor lyrics and live performances and sometimes suspend bands for playing unsanctioned songs. In an even more brazen attempt to co-opt the rock movement, the Communist Party would hire legitimate rock musicians to form pro-Soviet, state-sponsored bands. These Vocal Instrumental Ensembles (or VIAs) could sing about two things, Time Machine frontman Andrey Makarevich said, "love and love for the Communist Party" (Brown). "Guitars marching forth to build railways and dams," one of their songs proclaims. "We warmed the world with our hearts, now join us in the fire" (Brown). Many of these VIAs were quite popular, but the state's bureaucratic management of popular culture was always just keeping up with its unsanctioned producers and consumers. Indeed, rock musicians continued to push the boundaries, and groups such as the Plastic People of the Universe received jail time for controversial performances (Brown). By the time Gorbachev opened up the Union's borders to international musicians, the candle, to quote Time Machine, was already burning.

"Everything was forever until it was no more," wrote the Russian anthropologist Alexi Yurchak. Even the Berlin Wall, that powerful symbol of Communism's might and fear, fell to host a Pink Floyd concert in 1990. While the many causes behind the collapse of the Wall and the USSR deserve their own research papers, this essay has argued that popular culture resulted in the erosion of ideology, both from below and above — what Alexander Dallin called the "quiet revolution" (Dallin). Yet, the revolution was quite loud. The cultural-revolutionary influence of jazz and rock music bloomed from an organic social awakening among the Soviet citizens during the 20th century. While the State initially attempted to quell both genres, continued public spirit rallied against official doctrine, forcing the State to keep remolding and shifting what was considered permissible to be Soviet. Yet, in their attempts to co-opt these subversive youth movements, the State revealed their shaky foundations, an exposition that helped foster a lack of faith in the Socialist project. "In the end," Alexander Zinoviev once wrote, "the narrow trousers, like cybernetics, were purged of all ideological deviations and recognized officially as corresponding with the ideas of the 'ISM.' By which time, they had already passed out of fashion" (Starr 289). Constantly shifting, but never keeping up, the State failed to manufacture popular culture from above — instead, they resignedly legitimized culture from below. The new Soviet human did develop, but it was one born in the music of Stas Namin and The Beatles, not the words of Lenin. What it meant to be Soviet was to create a revolution from below, one forged joyfully from guitars and in singing crowds, one molded from the public's imagination, not official doctrine — one from the bandstand, in defiance of the Soviet man.

"What it meant to be Soviet was to create a revolution from below, one forged joyfully from guitars and in singing crowds, one molded from the public's imagination, not official doctrine. — one from the bandstand"

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Area of Effect: Memory & Myth of Chernobyl in Video Games

Sharon Sun, Cornell University

Disaster struck in 1986 when a nuclear reactor in Soviet Ukraine's Chernobyl Power Plant exploded and released massive volumes of radioactive material and energy into the atmosphere and surrounding landscape. The mysterious allure of the region is owed to its prolonged radioactive nature, modern seclusion, and eerie memory of its Soviet past through a decaying urban landscape frozen in time. Numerous hit media projects, ranging from television shows to books to films, have emerged inspired by a return to the disaster site, but video games have managed to reconsider the disaster from a new perspective. The memory of Chernobyl in video games reinterprets historical trauma into intimate and interactive narratives, commodifies historical tragedy by appealing to conventional video game genres, and mythologizes the historical site through exaggerated elements of otherworldly horror and desolation. This paper conveys its claim through the analysis of six of the most prominent video game productions that heavily feature Chernobyl in their premises: *Chernobyl Again* (2024); *Chernobyl VR Project* (2016); the *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* franchise; *Chernobylite* (2021); *Liquidators* (2020); and *S.W.A.N.: Chernobyl Unexplored* (2021).

Unlike other popular works (such as the hit HBO series Chernobyl and the widely-acclaimed *Voices from Chernobyl* by Svetlana Alexievich), video games occupy a unique space in the re-imagination of Chernobyl as interactive media that prioritizes the player's agency, active participation, and control in a critical historical event. Some games go further to market themselves on role-playing elements that create uniquely personal stories enmeshed in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone. The trailer to the popular survival game *Chernobylite* stresses the core interactive nature of its gameplay; emphatically, it declares to its audience: "it is your story, waiting for you to be written" (IGN). It advertises the highly choice-dependent nature of the game and invites players to personally make decisions that impact the progression of the main story and the future of other characters. Moreover, through the inclusion of various plot points that include investigations of the site of the meltdown and overarching schemes to prevent the entire tragedy, these games offer players narratives of heroism. The official description of the virtual reality puzzle game, *Chernobyl Again*, calls upon

players to "visit the most well-known places … and find a way to rescue [Chernobyl]" (Vimagineo). Hinting at a wider conspiracy revealed through puzzle-solving gameplay, the game recruits the player to serve as an agent of truth and justice tasked to avert the historical catastrophe in the first place. In another game, *Liquidators*, players actively adopt the role of one of the three historical nuclear plant workers tasked with venturing deep into the reactor to drain the reservoirs directly underground (1986 CL3, "Liquidators"). The game directly places agency, leadership and the stakes of the historic, critical mission in the player's hands. Subject to the player's intuition, judgment, and decision-making are the lives of other liquidators, the success of the mission, and the future of Europe. Distinct from other popular representations of the setting in visual media and literature, video games grounded in Chernobyl offer a deeply personal and uniquely participative engagement with a historical tragedy seemingly far removed – both in terms of time and place.

Furthermore, reimagining Chernobyl through video games builds a platform for immersive and interactive historical education. Developed as a virtual tour around the Chernobyl and Pripyat area, the developers of the *Chernobyl VR Project* meticulously collected images from the original Exclusion Zone and reconstructed them into virtual reality; moreover, they complemented the virtual environment by incorporating narrators and tour guides, developing the project for the purposes of education and awareness (BBC Click). Noting the potential of virtual reality for the advancement of social impact, they donate the proceeds from sales to Ukrainian foundations supporting victims of the Chernobyl disaster (The Farm 51, "Chernobyl VR Project"). The *Chernobyl VR Project* highlights the innovative potential of virtual reality for historical education, using digital technologies and interactive features to create engaging and accessible learning experiences for otherwise inaccessible sites. Likewise, the creation of *Liquidators* shares a similar premise founded upon education. Created by a group of students to "raise awareness for the people that contained the fallout," the game is offered free of charge and promotes donations for various relief organizations supporting Ukrainian children affected by both the nuclear disaster and the ongoing war (1986 CL3, "Press Release"). Reviews praised the game's accessibility, its engaging exercise grounded in reality, its educational value, and its social impact for Ukrainians (Iesyu). As a widely accessible game combining immersion, entertainment, education, and social impact, *Liquidators* contributes to the historical education surrounding the Chernobyl disaster and the celebration of the unsung liquidators of the meltdown, spreading its message to diverse audiences across the globe.

Next, Chernobyl as a principal setting within video games commodifies the historical tragedy through appeals to Western exoticism, portrayals of Soviet decay, and adherence to conventional gaming tropes. Many of these games appeal to the audience's curiosity over the tragedy and their desire to explore more through the convenient mediums of digital gaming. One player expressed his excitement to explore a digital recreation of Pripyat in the *Chernobyl VR Project* virtual reality experience, stating that he had grown up with "an intense curiosity about Chernobyl" and viewed the game as "the perfect chance to explore this dark corner of recent history" (Without Parole). Highlighting his prior interest in the disaster that pushed him to explore this experience further, he enjoyed the project's focus on a seemingly under-reported footnote in history through the popular and engaging digital medium of virtual reality. In addition, he praised the potential of virtual reality expe-

riences as a "way to visit places in the real world that are impossible to go to" (Without Parole). Indeed, the game trailer itself invites its audience to come "explore a hidden city" and to "find out what happened" on the night of Chernobyl's nuclear disaster (PlayStation). These responses reflect a broader tendency in many Chernobyl-based games to capitalize upon their Western audience's curiosity of such a distant event, promoting their gameplay through promises of hands-on player participation and immersion into dangerous, faraway places from the comfort of one's own home.

Game developers capitalize upon Western fascinations with post-Soviet decay, adding elements of post-Soviet urban desolation within game environments and scattered inclusions of Soviet imagery and paraphernalia. The six games analyzed in this paper feature developers of predominantly Ukrainian and Polish origin: *Chernobyl VR Project* and *Chernobylite* were developed by Polish studio The Farm 51; *S.W.A.N.: Chernobyl Unexplored* by Polish studio Volframe; *Chernobyl Again* by Polish studio Vimagineo; the *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* franchise by Ukrainian studio GSC Game World; and *Liquidators* by anonymous creators originally based in the University of Southern California. A perspective of the national origins of these video game productions contextualizes their individual recreations of Chernobyl within a shared historical trauma; it further reveals Polish and Ukrainian interpretations of the event and its aftermath within post-Soviet viewpoints rooted in local remembrance and cultural media. In Polish-produced *S.W.A.N.: Chernobyl Unexplored*, the overarching storyline explores the horrific creations of a hypothetical institute of human experimentation run by the Soviets settled deep beneath the nuclear plant (Volframe). Reimagining the Chernobyl disaster as a cover-up for cruel and unethical Soviet experiments situated far on the periphery, the game draws upon suspicions of Soviet secrecy; further, it conveys a sense of violation and injury rooted in the relentless real-life exploitation by Moscow of peripheral Soviet states for resources and experimentation.

The nightmarish world of *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.,* crafted by Ukrainian developers, is no different. A hellish urban landscape – abandoned buildings, rotting flora, radioactive anomalies, aberrant wildlife, and grotesque mutants – embodies the wasteland setting of *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*'s unique reconstruction of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone (GSC Game World). The existence of such deviations is a commentary by the creators on the impact of human hubris attempting to manipulate nature itself and leaving abhorrent creatures in its wake. Such commentary recalls the disastrous campaign of Soviet pseudo-science by Ukrainian scientist Trofim Lysenko; convicted in his own unique doctrine of Lysenkoism, the agronomist's efforts to genetically manipulate plants through physical means ended in failure, famine, and disgrace. The grotesque nature of the virtual world of *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* communicates a digitally-rendered criticism about the folly of scientific overambition and conveys the trauma of a disastrous era of Soviet pseudoscience on the game developers' home soil. Although *S.W.A.N.: Chernobyl Unexplored* and the *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* franchise portray a fictional, gamified Chernobyl that is popularly received by Western players for its settings of exotic post-Soviet decay, a closer contextualization of these uniquely Polish and Ukrainian reimaginations finds subtle elements of a shared historical trauma from their Soviet past.

Moreover, popular Chernobyl-based games exploit the uniquely desolate and radioactive nature of its settings to cater towards conventional gaming genres of horror, sci-fi, and post-apocalyptic survival. Embodying an

omnipresent and invisible danger, the lingering presence of radiation is an element that players find particularly unique and compelling about the setting of Chernobyl in games. One fan of the *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* franchise lauds the authentically bleak atmosphere built by its radioactive setting as "practically unparalleled in gaming" (Rossignol). He notes that "no other game broods and rumbles like Stalker [*sic*]." *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*'s special appeal to this player lies in the game's effective immersion into Chernobyl's notorious radioactive environment to amplify its elements of survival horror. As a lingering, invisible threat, the radioactive atmosphere transforms the Zone into a unique space of eerie hostility and psychological dread; as a perpetual danger, it stacks the odds against the players' survival in an already unforgiving landscape. Complementing *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*'s survival horror and first-person shooter genre, the setting of Chernobyl has contributed to the series' immense fame and popularity; widely regarded as the most famous and influential of all Chernobyl-based games, the franchise's long-awaited sequel, *Heart of Chornobyl*, sold over one million copies within the first two days of release and continues to delight millions of players worldwide (Walker).

Moreover, other successful games grounded in the setting of Chernobyl also aim to follow the examples set by *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* by manipulating elements of the desolate, radioactive setting into game mechanics that contribute to the player's survival horror experience. In *Chernobylite*, certain areas of the game map are heavily irradiated and cause acute damage to player health, creating challenges for the player to overcome; in other areas of the game, the decaying environment of abandoned Soviet ruins create a fertile setting ripe for jumpscares, monsters, and hallucinations (The Farm 51, "Chernobylite"). Indeed, these characteristics make Chernobyl the perfect environment for a typical survival horror game with post-apocalyptic notes. It is also precisely this apparent compatibility that raises players' expectations for the quality of the game with regards to the popular survival horror genre – it is what makes a game about Chernobyl so marketable. In fact, a player review of *Chernobylite* complained that the game's setting of Chernobyl was not hostile enough, criticizing the game's "forgiving landscape [compared to] its historical setting" (GmanLives). The reputation of Chernobyl, which continues to carry an air of mystery and danger, is made directly the standard for interactive video games set in that environment – and, no matter how fictional, that environment must conform to those expectations. Thus, a cycle is perpetuated where a game must conform to genres of horror and sci-fi typical of Chernobyl-based games to be considered "viable" in that setting – leaving little room for flexibility. Another review of *Chernobylite* also criticized the lackluster execution of horror elements despite the game's promotion under the survival horror genre; furthermore, the author characterizes those "throwaway" horror elements as poorly implemented and ill-fitting, but "apparently mandatory in any Chernobyl-based media" (Zak). Though sarcastic remarks, they reflect an understanding that there exists an unspoken norm in the development of games based in the setting of Chernobyl contributing to its marketability and perception by players. This relationship creates a self-reinforcing phenomenon: game developers repeatedly opt for familiar video game genres of horror, survival, and sci-fi because these categories resonate more closely with audience expectations of Chernobyl-based media. Doing so maintains the game's commercial viability in the face of numerous other Chernobyl-based games on the market that echo the same conventional genres.

Like most other popular media, video games set in Chernobyl are subject to exaggeration and historical dramatization for the purposes of marketing and entertainment above historical accuracy. A number of gameplay mechanics reflect the conversion of Eastern European stereotypes into full-fledged gameplay mechanics, setting a dangerous precedent for the commodification and exoticization of the region and its peoples. In *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*, perpetual faction warfare and prospects of treachery and deception by various non-playable characters characterize the gameplay in the wasteland; indeed, appealing to the unforgiving environment of a particularly violent survival horror game and referencing in-game moments of jarring betrayal, the developers advise the player to "trust no one but yourself" (GSC Game World). While attractive to the genre of solitary post-apocalyptic survival, depictions of these local non-playable characters perpetuate durable stereotypes portraying Eastern Europeans as treacherous, violent, and morally ambiguous. These game mechanisms contribute significantly to the uniquely hostile atmosphere of the Exclusion Zone created in *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* and praised by its fanbase; yet, they reduce the image of the people and the region to lawlessness and moral decay and reinforce the misconception that Eastern Europe is inherently a place of chaos and treachery.

Furthermore, in the role-playing gameplay of *Chernobylite*, players mitigate the psychological damage – represented as a player health statistic called sanity – of killing other non-playable characters through repeatedly consuming alcohol (The Farm 51, "Chernobylite"). In fact, answering a player's question about the effects of sanity on the game's story, a *Chernobylite* developer encourages the player to "soothe [the player's] mental wounds with vodka" when pursuing a particularly murderous game campaign (Twisted Shape). Although such a mechanism intends to allow a realistic quality to the gameplay, it reduces Eastern Europeans to stereotypes of alcohol dependence: they are perceived as drunkards and quick to engage in vice as a mental coping mechanism. While the inclusion of this feature was clearly intended as a source of dark humor relevant to the Eastern European cultural settings of the game, it runs the risk of exoticizing Eastern Europe and commodifying its stereotypes for entertainment value.

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Finally, games based in Chernobyl mythologize the historical site through exaggerated elements of otherworldly horror and desolation, blurring the lines between historical memory and dramatized fiction. It provides fruitful grounds for the insertion of supernatural sci-fi plots and unearthly mutant creatures, raising important questions about the ethical remembrance of the catastrophe: do video games reimagine the Chernobyl disaster in a way that keeps its history alive, or do they trivialize the tragedy into a popular commodity for entertainment? In the extraordinarily popular S.T.A.L.K.E.R. series, the presence of violent, otherworldly mutant creatures and crackling, mysterious physical anomalies constitute its trademark horror survival elements that have thrived through over seventeen years of game development and over four critically-acclaimed game productions (GSC Game World). The lore of the game builds

upon the fictional story of a second, anomalous physical disaster that occurred on the same site of the nuclear reactor in 2006. The *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* series' appeal to horror game fans is rooted in the game's reimagination of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone as an entrance to the otherworld, in which players delight in experiencing an alternative timeline of a Chernobyl rife with zombies, aliens, and portals. Video games like *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* serve this medium of visualizing that hypothetical world, offering interactive elements to get your hands dirty and – with more freedom than, say, a documentary series – often taking creative liberties to a questionable extreme.

Chernobylite also pounces on this imaginative freedom to carve a name for its plotline within the field of Chernobyl-based games. The titular chemical resource in the game, Chernobylite, is an otherworldly mineral created from the explosion in 1986 that is unique to Chernobyl's surroundings. Bending time and space, it is a highly coveted in-game resource that permits its user to travel through different worlds and memories (The Farm 51, "Chernobylite"). *Chernobylite*'s creative reinterpretation of the highly scientific and complex chemical nature of the nuclear reactor's meltdown makes Chernobyl a perfect setting in which to create an otherworldly chemical substance, born from the violent mix of real, alien-like chemicals in actual history. The zone's current association with elements of lingering radioactivity and chemical contamination further supports *Chernobylite*'s ambitious reinvention of the nuclear disaster along the lines of sci-fi tropes, demonstrating the appeal of sci-fi elements associated with the Chernobyl nuclear reactor to gamers' fantasies of otherworldly mutations and alien chemical compounds. The game's rapid success reflects its audience's morbid fascination with the turmoil of the nuclear meltdown; however, the extraterraneous, otherworldly, and fantastical nature of the Chernobylite mineral runs the risk of reducing the severity of the actual chemical disaster, a dangerous trend reflected in popular game portrayals of the Chernobyl incident.

Similar supernatural elements take center stage in *S.W.A.N.: Chernobyl Unexplored*, where monsters, ghosts, and apparitions emerge from the bowels of the reactor as a result of years of unethical human experimentation (Volframe). Once again, the Chernobyl power plant is a superb setting for both the game's story and atmosphere. The secrecy of the Chernobyl power plant during its Soviet era and the exclusivity of its modern zone lend to an aura of mystery that feeds into the fictional horror stories of *S.W.A.N.*'s walking horror game. Furthermore, the chemical nature of the plant sparks endless observer curiosity and speculation, permitting the game's developers to seamlessly reimagine Chernobyl's radioactive essence into a source for the supernatural. This paper's analyzed collection of video games boasts a wide variety of genres, plot points, and themes, but the infamous image of Chernobyl is more than eager to lend credence and immersion into whatever new absurd, supernatural, or unearthly fictional elements game developers contrive of next.

Reinterpreting a uniquely freakish incident in the pages of history, video games set in Chernobyl carve out a unique space for themselves in the realm of Chernobyl-oriented media. Through promises of an interactive experience, they offer players an opportunity to forge a uniquely personal narrative engaging directly with the Exclusion Zone and a chance to engage with the nuclear meltdown through digital reality. A marketable product, the setting of Chernobyl is incredibly popular in games and blends seamlessly with curated game mechanics to enhance players' experiences of survival horror and post-apocalyptic genres. Finally, the mysterious and daunting environment of Chernobyl provides a sandbox unparalleled in game development through which creative imaginations of horror, supernatural, and pseudoscience take root and thrive. As the Chernobyl of today remains frozen in time, its digital reimagination through the medium of gaming continues to develop and prosper.

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Remembering Babyn Yar: Collective Memory in the Face of Repression and Denial

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The phrase "Holocaust by bullets," attributed to French priest Patrick Desbois, captures the incomprehensible swiftness, efficiency, and brutality of the fascist invasion of the Soviet Union. Unlike the atrocities perpetrated by Nazi Germany against Central European Jewry that often took the form of confinement to ghettos and concentration camps, the eastern Holocaust was characterized by firing squads and mass graves. Between 1941 and 1943, during which Nazi forces occupied Soviet lands, 1.5 million Soviet Jews were exterminated. Jews across Poland and Ukraine were annihilated; entire communities were murdered in the span of a single day. The sheer scope of the atrocities still borders on the edge of indescribable. In his essay "Ukraine without Jews", Jewish Red Army Soldier Vasily Grossman poignantly emphasizes the collective Jewish identity of the victims and that identity's destruction: "This is the murder of a people. the murder of homes. entire families. books. faith. the murder of the tree of life; this is the death of roots. and not branches or leaves; it is the murder of a people's body and soul," (Zavadivker, 13).

Out of the many Nazi-led genocidal mass killings on the Eastern Front, the Babyn Yar massacre stands out due to its location and scale. It took place in present-day Kyiv, which was home to one of the region's largest and most vibrant Jewish communities prior to World War II. Despite being the site of one of largest mass-murders in human history, with around half of the Jewish population that remained in Kyiv upon the Nazi conquest of the city murdered, Babyn Yar is surprisingly absent from Soviet and Ukrainian collective memory (Yad Vashem). In this paper, I argue that the trauma Ukranians suffered during the Nazi invasion, Ukrainian complicity in Jewish extermination, and the state-sanctioned physical and narrative erasure of the massacre have all contributed to the repression of memory and the present-day inability to adequately memorialize Babyn Yar.

Before turning to questions of collective memory, an overview of the Babyn Yar massacre is warranted. The genocide of eastern Europe's Jewish population was characterized by the use of firing squads to murder them en masse and the burial of bodies in mass graves at favorable natural sites such as ditches, depressions, and ravines. The largest of these graves is at Babyn Yar, a ravine where 33,771 of Kyiv's Jews were killed on September 29-30,

1941, located in what was then the outskirts of the city. It was the largest massacre of the Holocaust up to that date, soon accompanied by another instance of mass-murder on a similarly vast scale in Odessa the next month. Over the course of the Nazi occupation, the bodies of more of the region's Jews, as well as Roma people and non-Jewish prisoners of war, were continually brought to Babyn Yar. The number of corpses dumped into the ravine is estimated to be 100,000 (Berkhoff, *Babi Yar*, 8).

The memory of Babyn Yar is undoubtedly sacred. With nearly the entirety of Ukraine's Jewish population perishing in the "Holocaust by bullets", the site exemplifies the horrors of Nazism and the complicity of civilian populations in genocide. This memory, however, has consistently been manipulated and undermined in the years since the end of World War II, with Soviet and subsequent Ukrainian governments eager to wash their hands clean of this painful history and move forward in their ideological and national pursuits. The conscious repression of the truth inherent to the events at Babyn Yar has led to an abundance of misinformation and antisemitism, exemplified most clearly by the denial of the Jewish identity of the people buried in the ravine. In an even more extreme manner, some even deny that the events occurred at all. Alongside the sinister attempts to disregard the historical reality of the massacre, deep confusion and disagreement over how the site should be memorialized has become the subject of renewed interest by people and governments around the world. Understanding what actually occurred at Babyn Yar and the many ways in which the nature of the massacre was systematically forgotten is crucial to the task of correcting the inaccurate and incomplete historical narratives that permeate Ukrainian society today. Only then can we move towards creating methods and structures for its proper commemoration.

Very few individuals remember Babyn Yar. Not only has official memory of the event been repressed for decades, but very few people who experienced the events at the ravine survived. Prior to September 29, it was clear that the fate of Kyiv's Jews was grim, but few could fathom what would soon occur. In his essay "Babi Yar: Site of Mass Murder, Ravine of Oblivion," researcher Karel C. Berkhoff describes the many attitudes among the region's Jewish population as the Nazi invasion advanced further into Soviet territory, writing "...many of the Jews moved east, but others deliberately stayed behind. Some likely did not want to abandon elderly or frail relatives; others may have had an attachment to belongings. But perhaps the most important reason some would have stayed was the hope for a better life under the Germans—a hope shared with many non-Jews," (Berkhoff, *Babi Yar*, 3). This attitude, which was in retrospect extremely dangerous and entirely incorrect, was largely the result of Soviet propaganda that ignored Nazi Germany's espoused antisemitism and portrayed "Nazism as an extreme form of capitalism" (Berkhoff, *Babi Yar*, 3). This misrepresentation appealed to many Jews who were dissatisfied with the Soviet Union's socialist economic model (Berkhoff, *Harvest*, 61-62).

Rumors of the violence Nazi troops committed against Jewish communities west of Kyiv were circulating when the city was captured in late September. However, they were drowned out by two competing developments: the celebrations of those who saw the Nazis as liberators and the destruction that accompanied the Nazi invasion before Babyn Yar (Berkhoff, *Babi Yar*, 3). In Sergei Loznitsa's documentary film *Babi Yar. Context*, Nazi footage shows large crowds gathering to receive newspapers and miniature flags with the swastika emblem on them, showing how many excitedly welcomed the invaders into the city (Loznitsa 50:00). Additionally, the chaos that ensued with the detonation of bombs planted by the retreating Soviet mil-

itary gripped Kyiv with fear and uncertainty. At this moment, the fear that many Jewish civilians likely experienced upon hearing news of antisemitic violence may have been superseded by their fear as Kyivians whose city was soon engulfed by a "sea of fire…about one square kilometer" in size (Berkhoff, *Babi Yar*, 4). Distracted by the present threat of a violent transfer of power and the onset of Nazi occupation, non-Jewish Ukrainians struggled to contend with their own fears and anxieties about what the future would hold. This concern for their own well-being obscured their ability to see what would become of the Other–the Jews of Kyiv.

Before the true implications of the Nazi occupation for Ukrainian Jews and gentiles could be fully understood, plans for the destruction of Kyiv's Jewish population were already underway. Flyers were soon posted in Russian, Ukrainian, and German instructing Jews to gather at an intersection near the Babyn Yar ravine at eight in the morning on September 29 (Berkhoff, *Babi Yar,* 5). Many could not comprehend that anything more than an evacuation of the city's Jewish population was taking place. Almost all of the people who came to Babyn Yar that day did not survive. There are testimonies of onlookers as the procession of Kyivian Jews approached the Nazi encampment near the ravine's edge, but few lived to recount the horror that occurred on the precipice of Babyn Yar. One of these few survivors was Dina Pronicheva, a Jewish actress in the Kyiv puppet theater. The harrowing story of her escape from death is captured in Anatoly Kuznetsov's documentary novel *Babi Yar* and in Loznitsa's *Babi Yar. Context*, which includes video recording of her witness statement from the trial "on the atrocities committed by the fascist invaders on the territory of the Ukrainian SSR" in 1946 (Loznitsa 1:41:50). Pronicheva was able to survive the massacre by jumping into the ravine before she could be shot, pretending to be dead for hours, and eluding Nazi soldiers by climbing out of Babyn Yar under the darkness of night. Her testimony is essential in corroborating or refuting the testimonies of Nazi soldiers, Ukrainian accomplices, and the material remains that have been recovered from the ravine, even after Nazi attempts to destroy the evidence of their crimes.

How is it that the atrocities at Babyn Yar left such a limited collective scar on the people of Ukraine given their magnitude and scale?

How is it that the atrocities at Babyn Yar left such a limited collective scar on the people of Ukraine given their magnitude and scale? In what follows, I will explain the paradox between, on the one hand, Babyn Yar's exceptional brutality and scale and, on the other, its historical manipulation and repression.

First, the memory of Babyn Yar has been profoundly shaped by the suffering of the Soviet Union's non-Jewish population that came with the Nazi invasion. Loznitsa's inclusion of Nazi and Soviet footage depicting the aftermath of battle, the destruction of homes, and the release of Soviet prisoners of war provides the viewer with a glimpse at what non-Jews were experiencing around the same time of the Babyn Yar massacre. Clips of wives with their children arriving at prisoner of war camps to collect their husbands stand out as an example of the added complexity that war can bring to historical analysis, with its indiscriminate upheaval of life for all people, not just those who are the victims of genocidal violence, in this case Jews. The Ukrainian women's faces appear relieved and show reserved signs of joy as they watch their partners accept the Nazi officer's command: "You may now return to your civilian life and get back to work for the benefit of the German army and the German nation" (Loznitsa

47:00). The immense trauma associated with a loved one going to war and subsequently being captured in battle was common among Soviet families throughout the Second World War and should not be discounted. Their vulnerability during the war cemented a remembrance of the Nazi invasion of Ukraine in which they were the primary victims, overshadowing the victimhood of Jews who could no longer advocate for their own memory. For many Soviet citizens of Ukraine, the Nazi occupation was one of the darkest moments of their lives, crowding out much of the space in their collective psyche for empathy and compassion for a people that were never fully assimilated or accepted as Ukrainian.

A second factor influencing Babyn Yar's memory is the reality that Ukrainians, armed militias and civilians alike, aided in the Nazi campaign to annihilate their Jewish neighbors. Auxiliary policemen and paramilitary forces formed by Ukrainian nationalists, namely the Bukovinian Battalion, assisted their Nazi counterparts in the mass-murder of Jews at Babyn Yar and in many other instances throughout the "Holocaust by bullets" (Berkhoff, *Babi Yar*, 7-8). Some engaged actively in the logistical activities associated with the extermination, such as serving as interpreters and translators as Jews were led to their deaths at the edge of the ravine (Berkhoff, *Babi Yar*, 7-8). Many civilian witnesses simply stood in silence or "jeered and shouted insults" as whole Jewish communities were removed from their neighborhoods, markets, and cities (Berkhoff, *Babi Yar*, 6). Berkhoff writes that of the Ukrainians he spoke to who remember the early days of the Nazi invasion, "few expressed regrets…but many seemed to have petitioned the authorities to exempt particular Jews" (Berkhoff, *Babi Yar*, 6). Their care for individuals they knew to be endangered and not the collective body betrays their efforts to claim their own innocence and lack of knowledge about the enormity of the massacre. Ukrainian complicity in the events of Babyn Yar plays a crucial role in the way the truth of the massacre has been concealed and dismissed. This complicity includes active measures of repression, such as the desecration of the site and state censorship, as well as passive responses such as a lack of narrative contestation against Soviet propaganda and widespread deference of guilt on the part of Ukrainian civilians. Remembrance is inextricably linked to culpability; as such, memory must be repressed or altered in order to avoid the painful process of contending with the guilt of aiding and abetting genocide. Rooted collective memory cannot take hold when there is a refusal to acknowledge complicity.

Complicity alone, however, does not necessitate collective denial and erasure from memory. In myriad contexts, societies can own up to past mistakes. From Germany to South Africa, nationally led processes of healing and reconciliation have created foundations upon which to resurrect painful and difficult memories (Wiseman, 479; Bindenagel). What is lacking in the Soviet and Ukrainian case is a deliberate and explicit effort by governments to engage in reflective and restorative projects that facilitate a collective reckoning with the past. In the wake of World War II and the total reconfiguration of the Soviet experience that was accompanied by a societal retreat inwards, there was little call for memorializing anything but the "Soviet" sacrifice associated with their great victory over the fascists. In the absence of an effort to reconnect with the Western world that would have forced the Soviet Union to reflect upon its culpability in the events of WWII, there was no need to atone. The complexity of the victim-perpetrator paradigm was simplified to be a Soviet victim and a fascist perpetrator.

Third, in the period after Babyn Yar, the Jewish identity of the majority of the massacre's victims was intentionally excluded from memorial efforts. In an interview, a Soviet

prisoner of war who was forced to dig up and burn the bodies of people buried at Babyn Yar before the Soviet recapture of Kyiv recalls "In total, during the time we worked here, we were forced to burn approximately one hundred thousand Soviet citizens," (Loznitsa 1:15:00). The victims of the Babyn Yar massacre are homogenized to be "Soviet citizens" and there is little mention that these victims were by and large Jewish. Additionally, in his essay on Babyn Yar, Berkhoff points out the erasure of Jewish identity from official materials and documentation related to the massacre. He writes: "According to an officially published report, the occupiers killed more than 100,000 'men, women, children, and old people' at Babi Yar. Jews were not mentioned," (Berkhoff, *Babi Yar*, 9). The restructuring of the historical narrative of Babyn Yar was primarily spurred on by the Soviet Union's collectivist ideology, in which ethnic and national differences were repressed and negated in the service of a common Soviet identity. Remembering particular atrocities committed against Jews was antithetical to the Soviet project of creating a society devoid of internal divisions and differences. As an example, on the 25th anniversary of the Babyn Yar massacre, around 600 people, mostly Jews, gathered in an attempt to mourn and memorialize the victims. Berkhoff writes that after a few speeches, "policemen and KGB officers began dispersing the crowd. The city party chief thought that 'Jewish and Ukrainian nationalists' had organized the event in order to 'inflame nationalist tendencies' among the Jews of Kiev," (Berkhoff, *Babi Yar*, 12). Speakers and attendees were targeted by the state as dissidents and some were even forced to emigrate. The positioning of citizens attempting to protest and correct the state's narrative of the Babyn Yar massacre as threats to national security underscores the Soviet Union's underlying interest in preserving an historically inaccurate memory that supports the Soviet agenda.

Remembering particular atrocities committed against Jews was antithetical to the Soviet project of creating a society devoid of internal divisions and differences.

Fourth, in addition to the erasure of Jewish identity and sectorial victimhood, the Soviet government, both locally and nationally, went to great lengths to destroy the physical landscape of Babyn Yar in the years after the massacre in 1941. Loznitsa's documentary concludes with the 1952 decision made by Kyiv's city council to flood the Babyn Yar ravine with industrial waste from a nearby factory. What could not be erased from history books was drowned under layers of toxic runoff and garbage. In the following years, concerns over the safety of this topographical reconfiguration culminated in a mudslide on March 13, 1961 that killed more than 145 people, flooded the city, and buried Babyn Yar (Berkhoff, *Babi Yar*, 11). This, however, did not end the physical desecration of a site that could have served as the foundation for renewed interest in the massacre and, therefore, a source of remembrance. In 1969, a new road was completed over the submerged ravine and "By the late 1970s, the rest of the terrain was designated a "Park of Culture and Recreation," (Berkhoff, Babi Yar, 11). With this, the project of forgetting Babyn Yar was virtually complete. Physically and psychologically, there was no place to situate the memory of the massacre or to mourn, an activity that itself is essential to processing and properly remembering. Today, Babyn Yar is the site of the Dorohozhychy metro station.

Memory is always subject to contestation. In the case of Babyn Yar, however, this contestation is amplified by the absence of

a societally agreed upon and upheld dominant historical narrative. This has resulted in deep divisions among Jewish, Ukrainian, and Russian groups who have taken up the task that was abandoned in the 1940s. Beginning in the late 1990s and early 2000s, after the fall of the Soviet Union, numerous efforts to reclaim and reconsecrate Babyn Yar with a memorial and Jewish community center failed to materialize (Berkhoff, *Babi Yar*, 13). The present day site of Babyn Yar is littered with a number of disconnected and incoherent memorials representing the disparate agendas resting on the faded memory of the massacre. Thus, for example, one can find a cross commemorating the Ukrainian nationalists who died alongside glass cylinders punctured by the same type of bullets that were used to murder Jew in 1941. Linda Kinstler, in her article "The Many Oblivions of Babi Yar," published in the magazine *Jewish Currents*, describes a recently constructed synagogue meant to recognize the destroyed heritage and culture of Ukrainian Jewry. This motivation notwithstanding, the result left Kinstler moved but unfulfilled. She writes, "...it never occurred to me to sit down on its single, curved wooden bench—the diorama seemed too beautiful to disturb," (Kinstler). One of her interviewees in the piece reflected on the synagogue's inability to properly serve as a "place for prayer and mourning," (Kinstler). Proper memorialization requires active engagement from visitors. Memory requires interlocutors of the present to be in dialogue with the events of the past. Memorials that do not facilitate an active dialogue are likely to fail in the core objective of transmitting meaningful memory from one generation to the next. The discordant patchwork of memorial attempts at Babyn Yar demonstrates the inability to coalesce around a collectively acceptable understanding of what form memory of Babyn Yar should take. This environment tolerates eccentric and offensive proposals. Take, for example, artist and filmmaker Ilya Khrzhanovsky's plan to "use facial recognition technology to give visitors an emotional 'score' and conscript them into various roles, including victim, collaborator, Nazi, and prisoner of war" (Kinstler). Khrzhanovsky, supported by the Russian and Ukrainian oligarchs funding the efforts of the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center, was selected to be the initiative's executive director. Reducing experiences of genocide to arbitrarily assigned roleplaying and fetishized depictions of violence constitutes no more than a gimmick and certainly does little to establish a foundation for meaningful historical reconciliation.

The existing memory of Babyn Yar is the product of a confluence of forces that separately and together attempted to repress a coherent historical account of what occurred at the ravine during the Nazi occupation of Ukraine. Ukrainian and Soviet suffering that took precedence over Jewish memory, Ukrainian complicity and guilt, Soviet ideology that attempted to eliminate sectarian identities, and the physical destruction of the site of mass-murder itself all contributed to the obfuscation of a massacre of unimaginable proportions. In some respects, this obfuscation has succeeded. Today, Babyn Yar's many memorials and unrecognizable landscape fail to capture the true nature and enormity of the atrocities committed there. Nevertheless, none of these forces were able to fully eradicate the memory of Babyn Yar. Despite massive efforts to repress and manipulate actual events, and despite decades of Soviet and Ukrainian silence, memory buried as deep as the ravine itself refused to remain concealed and forgotten. Babyn Yar is at once an example of the powerful forces marshaled in order to forget and the remarkable persistence of memory in the face of such forces.

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The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists: Ukraine's Dark Past

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In 2010, Viktor Yushchenko, President of Ukraine at the time, awarded Stepan Bandera the title of Hero of Ukraine (Kremzner). This recognition paved the way for the 2018 announcement that established Bandera's birthday as a national holiday, a commemoration that continues to be celebrated annually in various cities with participation from officials and institutions throughout Ukraine (Starr). Bandera served as a leader of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), a group founded in 1929 aiming to achieve Ukrainian independence. In pursuit of this goal, the OUN collaborated with Nazi Germany during World War II and their military wing, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), was involved in significant acts of violence against minority populations, particularly targeting Poles and Jews. Yet, within the collective memory of the nation, the OUN's struggle for independence often overshadows its dark past.

The Ukrainian government has endeavored to extricate the OUN from the shadows of its more nefarious deeds, casting its members in the light of national heroism. Since the enactment of the "decommunization" laws in 2015, the Ukrainian authorities have prohibited any 'public expressions of disrespect" towards the OUN, instead portraying its members as freedom fighters (Kremzner). Bandera himself is frequently celebrated, ranking among the most revered figures in Ukrainian history, with many citizens viewing him as a champion of liberation while conveniently overlooking the darker chapters of both his and the OUN's past ("People's TOP"). Some scholars of Ukrainian descent, including nationally acclaimed Historian Volodymyr Viatrovych, have also attempted to sanitize the troubled history of the OUN, minimizing or dismissing any links between its ideology and fascism. According to the Ukrainian nationalist narrative, embraced by scholars like Viatrovych, which has been the dominant perspective since the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko (2005-2010), the OUN's temporary alliance with Nazi Germany was not rooted in ideological kinship but was instead a strategic gambit aimed at securing independence. This alliance, Ukrainian scholars who try to protect OUN's image claim, unraveled

swiftly following the Nazi regime's dismissal of OUN leaders' declaration of a Ukrainian state in Lviv on June 30, 1941—a crucial juncture that precipitated the arrest of many OUN members by the Nazi state, including Stepan Bandera himself. (Katchanovski 220).

The objective of this paper is to challenge and refute the existing Ukrainian nationalist narrative that depicts the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists in a favorable light. Instead, I will argue that the OUN was unequivocally a fascist entity. The OUN's ambitions extended beyond the mere liberation of the Ukrainian state; it sought to forge a fascist Ukraine, one that was exclusively for ethnic Ukrainians. During World War II, this perilous quest led the organization to systematically eliminate those they deemed undesirable, including Jews and Poles. Ukraine must confront the OUN's past and firmly distance itself from this fascist organization and its controversial figurehead, Stepan Bandera, especially in the context of today's ongoing conflict. Any lingering sympathies for the OUN could jeopardize Ukraine's war efforts by potentially alienating Western allies who might hesitate to provide the Ukrainian government with much-needed aid.

To demonstrate the extent to which the OUN was a fascist organization, this paper will be divided into three sections. The opening section will examine the OUN's founding ideology and its commonalities with fascist ideology from Italy and Germany, elucidated by analyzing texts produced at three major OUN conferences between 1923 and 1943. The next section will concentrate on the OUN's fascist state-building methods. The final section will examine how the OUN's military wing carried out the ethnic cleansing of Poles and other non-Ukrainian nationalities in order to realize their fascist vision for Ukraine's future. This paper will predominantly draw on the studies of historians Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe and Alexander Statiev concerning the OUN, leveraging their findings and insights to offer a detailed and authentic portrayal of the organization.

THE FASCOST IDEOLOGY OF THE OUN

Founded in 1929 in Galicia, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) emerged as a radical movement of the ethnic Ukrainian majority in the region. Ukrainians encountered discrimination and significant economic and social inequalities in Polish-controlled Galicia; the Polish government viewed Ukrainians as ethnically inferior and sought to assimilate them into Polish culture (Rossolinski 62). In response to repression, the OUN pursued independence to remedy the plight afflicting the Ukrainian populace, and they believed independence could only be realized through violence. In its early years, the OUN engaged in a campaign of terror directed against Polish authorities, hoping to inspire a spirit of rebellion among Ukrainians in the region. After the Soviet regime annexed Eastern Poland in 1939, the campaign of terror was directed instead at the Soviet regime (Statiev 143).

In 1940, the organization divided into two factions: the larger, more radical OUN-B, under the leadership of Stepan Bandera, and the OUN-M, led by Andrii Melnyk (Statiev 143).

The schism within the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, resulting in the emergence of the OUN-B and OUN-M factions, was primarily a manifestation of a generational rift. The elder members, loyal to Melnyk—who ascended to leadership following the death of Yevhen Konovalets—found themselves at odds with a younger, fervent contingent led by Stepan Bandera (Rossolinski 173). This younger generation viewed Melnyk as ineffectual, accusing him of permitting the organization to be infiltrated by what they termed "enemies" and "Bolshevik agents" (Rossolinski 173). In stark contrast, Bandera rallied his

followers with a promise to purge the OUN of "traitors" and "enemies," vowing to restore its integrity. Yet, in spite of the divergence in leadership and vision, both factions remained steadfastly aligned in their fundamental principles, united by an ardent devotion to extreme nationalism, the glorification of violence, fascist ideals, and pervasive antisemitism. Although they professed similar beliefs, the schism between OUN-B and OUN-M led to fierce hostilities and a relentless campaign to undermine one another (Rossolinski 175). OUN-B quickly emerged as the more formidable entity, bolstered by superior underground networks in Galicia and Volhynia, as a wave of enthusiastic young Ukrainians flocked to its cause (Rossolinski 173). When German forces advanced into Ukraine in 1941, both factions allied with Nazi Germany. OUN-M collapsed following the withdrawal of German troops, while OUN-B successfully established the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), which continued to combat the Soviet regime until the early 1950s (Statiev 143).

The OUN was not merely a nationalist faction that allied with Nazi Germany as a means to achieve Ukrainian independence; rather, it was an entity that adopted many tenets of fascist ideology. This theoretical foundation was meticulously articulated during a series of congresses convened between 1929 and 1943.

The First Grand Assembly, which took place in 1929 in Vienna, resulted in the establishment of the OUN. The organization set forth a primary objective focused on "regaining, building, defending, and expanding an independent, united Ukrainian nation-state" (Motyka 10). This vision aimed to encompass all "Ukrainian ethnographic lands," referring to areas that the organization believed were inhabited by Ukrainians during the medieval period, including parts of Poland, Romania, Belarus, and Russia (Motyka 10). The Resolutions of the First Congress provide valuable insight into the foundational ideological tenets of the OUN, with a primary goal of establishing an independent Ukrainian state through a "national revolution" (Gibiec 77). The core of Ukrainian nationalism, along with the extremist and violent tendencies of the OUN, is vividly articulated in the "Decalogue of a Ukrainian Nationalist," authored by Stepan Lenkovsky, a founding member of the OUN, and included in the Resolutions. Lenkovsky's document underscores the OUN's radical and aggressive stance, stating, "You will win the Ukrainian state or die fighting for it" and "You will greet your Nation's enemies with hatred and resolute struggle" (Gibiec 77).

The resolutions articulated at the First Grand Assembly unequivocally declared that the nascent Ukrainian state, under the aegis of the OUN, would be governed by a national dictatorship, with legislative institutions to be established only once stability had been secured (Boshyk 167). Key industries were to be nationalized, religion was to be distinctly separated from the affairs of state, with the state assuming a pivotal role in the orchestration of all societal functions (Boshyk 168-171). The concepts articulated by the OUN at the First Grand Assembly were significantly shaped by the influential Ukrainian nationalist Dmytro Dontsov. Although he was not a member of the OUN, he acted as a mentor, and his ideas served as a source of inspiration for the organization. Drawing heavily from the writings of Adolf Hitler, Joseph Goebbels, Alfred Rosenberg, and Francisco Franco, Dontsov wrote that Ukrainians were a superior race "made of the clay God used to create a chosen people" (Statiev 146). He further contended that "violence, brutal ruthlessness and war were the methods used by the chosen nations on their way to progress" (Statiev 146).

As long as fascism was on the rise in Europe, members of the OUN openly expressed their admiration for this ideology. Evhen Onatskyi, the OUN representative in

Rome, viewed Ukranian nationalism as a form of fascism. In an article he penned in 1929, titled "We and Fascism," Onatskyi articulated that the members of the OUN perceived fascism, "in particular in its first stateless phase-another example to follow-the example of idealism" (Rossolinski 110). For Onatskyi, fascism served as both a means for Ukrainians to achieve statehood and a political framework that the OUN aimed to implement within that state. Others, including Mykola Stsiborskyi, one of the leaders of the OUN, expressed the view that "the fascist system could become a roadmap for the oppressed nations" (Statiev 146). Similarly, Yaroslav Stetsko, one of the ideological architects of the OUN, regarded the fascism of Italy, the National Socialism of Germany, and Ukrainian nationalism as interconnected components of a unified nationalist uprising, ready to create a new global order (Statiev 146). The goal of completely removing all "invaders" from Ukrainian land was to be accomplished through OUN leadership of a national, "permanent revolution" from the outset through means propaganda, sabotage, and acts of terror (Motyka 10).

In April 1941, during the Second Grand Assembly, the OUN solidified its ideological framework. Its principles largely reflected the earlier writings of prominent Ukrainian nationalist figures, such as Dmytro Dontsov, a proponent of integral nationalism, and Mykola Mikhnovskyi, a foundational figure in Ukrainian political ultra-nationalism. (Statiev 147).

Like other fascist organizations in interwar Europe, the OUN expressed its steadfast loyalty to a single leader, Stepan Bandera. Bandera was venerated by his followers not merely as the "Leader of the OUN," but the "Leader of the Ukrainian Nation." Bandera's position within the party hierarchy resembled the "leadership principle" that the OUN had appropriated from the Nazi *Führerprinzip*. This structure was defined by a hierarchy of officials appointed from higher echelons rather than elected through a bottom-up process. These officials held total responsibility within their domains and demanded complete obedience from their subordinates whom they had selected personally (Statiev 147). The Grand Assembly, the highest governing body of the OUN, gathered but once every five years—a rare congregation of members appointed by the organization's leader rather than elected by the populace. In theory, this infrequent assembly meant that the Grand Council was to hold sway in the interim, functioning much like the Italian Grand Council of Fascism and exerting considerable influence over state institutions. Yet, despite the formal authority of the Grand Council, it was the Central Leadership of the OUN, reminiscent of the Italian *gerarchi*, that truly shaped the organization's policies and direction. Consistent with the Italian fascist framework, members of the Central Leadership also served on the Grand Council. Ultimately, it was this small committee, rather than the Grand Assembly or the Grand Council, that shaped the policies of the OUN (Statiev 147).

During the Second Grand Assembly, OUN members also declared that the organization was the sole political entity committed to the Ukrainian nation's continued prosperity. The OUN, resolute in its convictions, exhibited little regard for dissenting opinions or alternative interpretations of nationalism, as articulated in their bold proclamation: "The Ukrainian Nation is the OUN – the OUN is the Ukrainian Nation!" (Rossolinski 187). At the Second Great Assembly, the OUN also introduced the category of race, proclaiming, similar to Nazi ideology, the need to create a strong and healthy "Ukrainian race." The OUN was to protect the Ukrainian race from the "communist worldview, from internationalism and capitalism" (Rossolinski 179).

In addition, at the Assembly, the OUN gave assurances that it would fight and destroy all Ukrainian democratic parties and organizations, which it described as "opportunistic." (Rossolinski 179). These political parties were anticipated to fade away in a manner similar to how non-Ukrainian residents of Ukraine were expected to disappear under the leadership of the OUN.

In the same year that the Second Grand Assembly took place in 1941, the OUN released a 74-page manifesto intended to steer Ukrainian nationalists through the early stages of the war. This document proclaimed that "during [this] time of chaos and confusion, we should take the opportunity to liquidate undesirable Poles, Muscovites, and Jews, especially the supporters of Bolshevik-Muscovite imperialism" (McBride 635). The authors classified national minorities into two groups: members of unspecified, previously oppressed nationalities who supported the OUN cause, and those who were deemed antagonistic, including Russians, Poles, and Jews. Additionally, the OUN document stated that Poles might be "forcibly assimilated" in certain instances, but their leaders ought to be "destroyed" (McBride 635). At the Second Grand Assembly, the OUN implemented a series of fascist principles and rituals that became mandatory for all movement members. They introduced a red-and-black flag, symbolizing blood and soil, which echoed the racist and proto-fascist German ideology of blood and soil, emphasizing the connection between a people (*Volk*) and their "living space" (*Lebensraum*). Additionally, the OUN adopted a fascist salute, accompanied by the chant "Glory to Ukraine," to which the response was "Glory to the Heroes!" (Rossolinski 180). They also established several obligatory holidays, including Unification Day on January 22, the Day of the Revolutionary Heroes on March 23, and the Day of Struggle on August 31 (Rossolinski 180).

Held in August 1943, the OUN's Third Grand Assembly presented the organization's program in its final form. Historians and Ukrainian nationalists who seek to challenge the OUN's connections to fascism view this assembly as a clear shift towards a "democratic course," which was adopted in 1943 and continued until the organization's dissolution in the early 1950s. OUN leaders themselves viewed this Assembly as signifying the beginning of a struggle "for a democratic order in the future Ukrainian Independent United State," along with the adoption of a "nationally inclusive program" (Statiev 156). The OUN's apparent and sudden pivot from fascist aspirations to democratic ideals in 1943 was, in truth, not a profound alteration of the organization's essence but rather a calculated maneuver. Their strategic shift aimed to garner the support of Western powers against the looming threat of the Soviet regime. The leaders of the OUN stressed that their organization was battling against two imperial powers, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, and they condemned all Ukrainians who collaborated with these authorities (Rossolinski 264).

The OUN's apparent and sudden pivot from fascist aspirations to democratic ideals in 1943 was, in truth, not a profound alteration of the organization's essence but rather a calculated maneuver.

In a conscious effort to align with Western democratic ideals, the OUN integrated the principles of freedom of speech, press, and religion, permitted trade unions, and promoted the fair treatment of all Ukrainian citizens into its ideological framework, regardless of their ethnicity (Statiev 157). However, this program retained the OUN's unwavering intolerance for dissent, declaring itself "the

sole... leader of the Ukrainian people's revolutionary liberation struggle" and deriding "the opportunist camp" for misleading its efforts (Statiev 157). Indeed, in September 1943, just a month after the OUN first shifted towards democracy, its armed groups targeted the headquarters of Taras Borovets, a moderate nationalist figure. Several of his commanders and his wife were killed (Statiev 159). The entrenched racism and violence against ethnic minorities thus continued unabated: Jews faced severe persecution despite the declaration of equality for "all citizens of Ukraine regardless of their nationality" (Statiev 160).

Beginning in 1945, the leaders of the OUN fully embraced the rhetoric of pursuing "the democratization of all social, political, and economic life" in order to portray themselves as a democratic organization rather than a fascist one (Statiev 157). In May 1945, the OUN leadership issued an official statement denying any ties to fascist ideology: "The Ukranian liberating-revolutionary movement was not and is not a term equivalent to Italian Fascism and German National-Socialism" (Rossolinski 317). Even then, however, elements of fascism persisted within the OUN. The organization maintained its commitment to the *Führerprinzip*, and repressing any dissenting ideas. In June 1948, the OUN pinpointed its enemies within Ukrainian nationalist circles as "all the émigrés who oppose the UHVR, seek to tarnish the glorious name of the UPA and spread slander against the OUN led by S. Bandera" (Statiev 159). Even by 1950, the OUN was still promoting its racist ideology through leaflets that attributed the troubling history of anti-Semitism in Ukraine to "the loss of a healthy way of thinking on the part of the Jews." One leaflet further claimed that "it was not difficult to provoke the Ukrainians, considering the behaviour of the Jews in the past" (Statiev 160). The actions of the OUN after 1943 and especially after 1945 illustrate that the organization was fundamentally unchanged, and any inklings of democratic inclinations were merely an attempt to alter the OUN's facade in a bid to attract Western favor.

OUN's Vision of a Fascist Ukraine

Having delved into the intricacies of the OUN's assemblies and unearthed the core principles that underpin its ideology, it is now imperative that we direct our attention to the OUN's vision for Ukraine. This vision was significantly influenced by fascism, and included aspirations for violence, authoritarian rule, and the calculated eradication of those labeled as undesirable. As noted at the outset of the paper, the official Ukrainian narrative seeks to downplay the OUN's fascist ambitions for Ukraine by emphasizing the arrests of Bandera and other OUN members by Nazi Germany in 1941. These arrests were not due to the OUN opposing the Nazis or renouncing fascist ideology; rather, they were a response to the OUN's declaration of an independent Ukrainian state, which was at odds with the Nazi plans for the region (Alexiev 11). The Germans dismissed the prospect of Ukrainian autonomy, even under the aegis of the fascist OUN. Instead, Ukraine's destiny was to be orchestrated in accordance with *Generalplan Ost*: German settlers would occupy the Ukrainian lands, a portion of the Ukrainian populace would be subjected to enslavement, while the remainder faced the grim prospect of annihilation (Rossolinski 245).

The OUN leaders intended to forge a collective society. In their vision, individualism was to be replaced by a conception of citizenship that amalgamated each individual into the representation of the state. The state was a singular, undivided entity that demanded absolute unity from its people. The collectivist aspirations of the OUN drew heavily from the

Nazi ideology of *Volksgemeinschaft*: a vision of a racially cohesive and hierarchically structured community where individual desires were relegated to the overarching needs of the nation (Statiev 148). The OUN espoused a vision of profound transformation for Ukrainian society, one that would be marked by a sweeping cultural revolution. This cultural revolution would reforge the Ukrainian people, instilling in them a sense of identity unmarred by foreign influences while championing a "new, heroic essence of Ukrainian culture" (Statiev 149). Drawing upon the methods of fascist human engineering, this plan for a cultural upheaval sought to sculpt individuals who would embody the spirit of an independent Ukraine—individuals so devoted to the cause that they would "not hesitate to kill [their] father, brother or best friend if [they] g[ot] such an order," as outlined in the OUN program of military education (Statiev 149).

The OUN believed that the indoctrination of a person should start from childhood, with indoctrination spearheaded by the OUN itself. As the leaders of the organization explained, "raising youth in general and training its leaders must belong indissolubly to the OUN" (Statiev 149). Ukrainian nationalists advocated for the creation of a unified youth organization under the OUN aimed at advancing the party's agenda, drawing inspiration from other fascist youth groups like the German *Hitlerjugend*, the Italian *Gioventù Italiana del Littorio*, and the Spanish *Flechas* (Statiev 150). The indoctrination aimed to convert individuals from having "souls of slaves" to "souls of masters" and from being "defenders" to "aggressors" (Rossolinski 112). In fact, the most foundational objective of the OUN was to transform Ukrainians into a nation characterized by "fighters and fanatics" (Rossolinski 189). The necessity of indoctrinating Ukrainians from childhood was recognized as a means for the OUN to sustain itself in future generations. This approach was intended to guarantee that the Ukrainian state would remain fascist, even after the OUN's leaders had died.

To promote the shift of Ukrainian society towards fascism, the OUN would leverage propaganda as a key tool. Members of the OUN were compelled to engage in numerous propaganda methods, such as disseminating rumors, singing revolutionary songs, producing and distributing booklets and newspapers, and employing radio as a medium for their propaganda efforts (Rossolinski 185). The central theme of the propaganda was to focus on the rejuvenation of the Ukrainian state and the critical need to wage war against the "Musocivte-Jews" and other enemies of Ukraine, with the popular slogan being: "Kill the enemies among you – Jews and informers" (Rossolinski 185). As part of their propaganda strategy, the OUN intended to display yellow-and-blue and red-and-black flags on every administrative building. They planned to paint tridents, representing Ukrainian national identity, on buildings, create posters for public areas, and encourage community participation in parades and memorials for fallen OUN members (Rossolinski 187).

From the vantage point of the OUN, the successful metamorphosis of Ukrainian society hinged upon the organization's ability to delineate the boundaries of acceptability within the nascent Ukrainian state. The OUN sought to limit personal freedoms within the country, allowing only those expressions and actions that were consistent with its vision of creating a fascist Ukrainian state. For example, the OUN only allowed nationalist media, while "all popular publications in which nationalistic ideas and slogans are not popularized have to be forbidden" (Rossolinski 189). Similarly, public assemblies devoid of a nationalistic emphasis would be prohibited, ensuring that the collective consciousness remained firmly tethered to the OUN's ideological framework (Statiev 151). The OUN

would assume comprehensive dominion over the nation's educational landscape, mandating a curriculum solely devoted to extolling "the true Ukraine, Her Heroes, the dignity of the man, the OUN" (Rossolinski 189). From the OUN's point of view, this approach represented a turn towards freedom, which could only be achieved by controlling the people and dictating what was and was not allowed. Volodymyr Martynets, a member of the OUN leadership, captured the OUN's attitude aptly in stating, "Only a stick can turn a slave into a human being. This unhappy nation must be whipped for its own good, because otherwise it would never wake up and leave its yoke. ... Terror and violence applied to our own nation will bring it freedom" (Statiev 151).

Under the leadership of the OUN, ethnicity would be paramount, since the ideal Ukrainian state would consist solely of ethnic Ukrainians. This ideology was encapsulated in their slogan "Ukraine for Ukrainians!" which closely resembled the Nazi slogan "Deutschland für die Deutschen!," effectively rejecting the concept of multiculturalism (Rossolinski 185). Thus, the OUN sought the eradication of the rich tapestry of diversity that characterized Ukraine—a nation where a notable segment of the populace were non-Ukrainian (Statiev 151). OUN classified the non-Ukrainian population into two categories: friendly and hostile. Ethnic groups such as Russians, Poles, Jews, and Transcarpathian Rusins were labeled as hostile, as the OUN believed these groups harbored animosity towards the OUN and thus represented a significant threat to Ukraine's future. In contrast, other unspecified minority groups were regarded as friendly (Statiev 151). The OUN aimed to repatriate the friendly non-Ukrainian communities residing in Ukraine to their respective homelands, whereas the hostile groups were to be treated similarly to how the Nazis approached the *Untermenschen* or subhumans (Statiev 152).

The OUN's stance towards these so-called hostile minorities is explicitly detailed in the document titled "Guidelines for the First Days of the Organisation of the State:"

> *The destruction in the struggle particularly of those who will defend the [Soviet] regime: resettlement in their lands; the destruction mainly of the intelligentsia, ... and in general we hamper the production of the intelligentsia – that is, access to schools, etc. ... So-called Polish peasants are to be assimilated... Leaders are to be destroyed. Jews are to be isolated, dismissed from positions in order to avoid sabotage; all the more so, Muscovites and Poles. If there would be an unavoidable need to leave a Jew – e.g., in the economic apparatus – place one of our militia men over him and liquidate for the slightest infraction. Only Ukrainians may be heads of individual branches of life, [sic] not foreigners who are enemies... Assimilation of the Jews is excluded... Our government must be fearsome to its opponents (Statiev 152-153).*

This document serves as a chilling blueprint for genocide, one that the OUN based on Nazi protocols, revealing a disturbing alignment in ideology, particularly in their approach to the Jewish population (Statiev 153). The OUN's leadership perceived the Jewish question as one demanding urgent resolution, citing the Nuremberg Laws as a fitting initial measure (Rossolinski 80). OUN member and ideologist Volodymyr Martynets claimed that Ukrainians were victims of Jews and that it was necessary to "cleanse" Ukraine of Jews and thus solve the "vital problem of the Ukrainian nation" (Rossolinski 80). Similarly, Ivan Klymiv, the OUN's regional chief in Volyn, encapsulated the ruthless philosophy of the OUN Central Leadership with a grim proclamation: "Death to the Muscovites, Poles, Jews and other enemies of Ukraine" (McBride 636).

Much like their counterparts in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, the OUN ambitions of territorial expansion also formed part of their vision for a fascist Ukraine. At the First Grand Assembly, held in 1929, the OUN announced its plans to control "all Ukrainian lands and ... foreign territories inhabited by Ukrainians," stretching from "the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea to the Tisza" (Statiev 154). This ambition, echoing the Nazi concept of *Lebensraum*, remained vague regarding the demographic thresholds that would legitimize such expansion into foreign territories. The OUN regarded Ukraine's neighbors—Russia, Hungary, Belarus, Romania, and Poland—as usurpers of lands they believed rightfully belonged to Ukrainians, despite the reality that neither Belarus nor any region of Russia possessed a Ukrainian majority. The OUN's vision of the future Ukrainian state was one steeped in xenophobia and a rigid ideological favoritism, wherein the land would be deemed the exclusive domain of ethnic Ukrainians. In an OUN-ruled Ukraine, ethnic Ukrainians would gain control over all resources: "The Ukranian land is for Ukranian peasants, the factories and plants for Ukranian workers, Ukrainian bread for Ukranian people" (Rossolinski 177). In accordance with the vision of the OUN, unemployment would be eradicated, with every citizen guaranteed a job (Statiev 155). This ambition was rooted in the expulsion of all "foreigners" from Ukrainian soil, signaling a dark agenda of ethnic cleansing if they had come to power.

"The OUN's vision of the future Ukrainian state was one steeped in xenophobia and a rigid ideological favoritism, wherein the land would be deemed the exclusive domain of ethnic Ukrainians."

THE OUN'S ETHNIC CLEANSING OF POLES

The fascist doctrine espoused by the OUN transcended mere words and vision. This organization did not merely theorize about their ambitions; they set their designs into motion with chilling resolve when confronting the national minorities within Ukraine, such as the Jewish population. The OUN articulated a chilling commitment to systematically eradicate Jews from the Ukrainian landscape, advocating for a methodical approach that entailed either their extermination or complete expulsion from all Ukrainian territory (Rossolinski 185). As a harbinger of this grim vision, the OUN unleashed a torrent of brutal pogroms, leading to the savage killings of no fewer than 13,000 Jews, along with hundreds of Poles, often in collusion with the SS as they perpetrated their heinous crimes (Statiev 154). As the historian Alexandre Prusin contends, the "murderous practices of the OUN-UPA were completely in tune with the racial war Nazi Germany waged in the East" (Statiev 161). This dark ambition manifested the OUN's active participation in German genocidal campaigns targeting Jews, Ukrainians, Russians, Belarussians, and Poles.

Members of the Ukrainian police in line with and ordered by the OUN played an important role in genocide alongside their Nazi counterparts. They rounded up Jewish individuals, oversaw their mass executions, apprehended those who sought to escape, and policed the confines of Jewish ghettos (Katchanovski 222). Similarly, local police were complicit in the capture and guarding of Soviet prisoners of war, the majority of whom were ethnic Russians and Ukrainians. The OUN significantly contributed to the planning and execution of anti-Jewish pogroms in a considerable number of Western Ukrainian towns and cities during the summer of 1941. Mass executions often occurred in conjunction with these pogroms as part of Nazi policy (Katchanovski 222).

However, while the OUN was involved in the genocide of Jews, their primary focus was on another ethnic group whom they perceived as the major "hostile ethnic minority:" the

Polish population. A commander of the UPA noted that the primary threat to the OUN's vision of a Ukrainian state was the Polish population, which he intended to deal with in the manner that Hitler addressed the "Jewish question" (Motyka 81). The grim lessons drawn from the OUN-UPA's collaboration with the Nazis led the organization's leaders to a chilling conclusion: the only viable solution to the Polish question was to systematically eliminate the Polish people. Following the pogroms of 1941, tensions between the Ukrainian and Polish communities increased; by 1943, significant violence erupted. This escalation was triggered by the Red Army's victory at Stalingrad, which led OUN-UPA leaders to conclude that it was an opportune moment to address the "Polish question" definitively. They contended that Poles posed a risk as potential fifth columnists (traitors) in light of the impending Soviet occupation (McBride 636).

Consequently, the UPA's leadership embarked on a program of ethnic cleansing modeled after the Nazi Final Solution. Some historians and nationalists attempt to separate the atrocities committed by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) against the Polish population in 1943 from the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), seemingly to safeguard the latter's reputation. For example, in 2022, Ukraine's ambassador to Germany, Andrii Melnyk, denied any involvement of Bandera and the OUN in the mass murder of ethnic Poles and Jews (Tilles). However, the UPA and OUN had undeniably strong ties. The upper echelons of the UPA were OUN members, while their lower-ranking commanders operated under the watchful eye of OUN territorial leaders of corresponding ranks (Statiev 164). The UPA combatants pledged their unwavering loyalty to the OUN-led "Supreme Political Leadership of the Ukrainian People" and executed the directives issued by the OUN (Statiev 164).

Even more explicitly, prominent OUN leader Mykola Lebed issued directives to "cleanse" and the "liquidate" the Polish people (McBride 638). Testimonies from another UPA leader also contain orders to "physically exterminate" the Polish people (McBride 638). This was not merely a struggle between the Ukrainian nationalist group UPA and the Polish partisans, as some Ukrainian Historians would assert, claiming that the UPA's atrocities against Polish civilians were "an inherent part of World War II" (Viatrovych). Instead, the UPA's actions represent a striking instance of ethnic cleansing, resulting in the massacre of thousands of innocent Polish civilians across countless villages—slaughters which UPA members openly took pride in (Statiev 161; McBride 638). In July 1943 alone, the UPA was accountable for the deaths of approximately 10,000 to 11,000 Poles (Statiev 161). Following the so-called democratic transition marked by the Third Grand Assembly in August 1943, the UPA persisted in its assaults on Polish villages. On August 29 and 30 of 1943, they killed between 500 and 600 people in the villages of Ostrivky and Volia Ostrovetska, along with an additional 100 to 200 Poles in other villages (Statiev 161-162). The assaults were executed with chilling precision, orchestrated by the UPA under the directives of the upper echelons of the OUN. By the end of the campaign, the OUN-UPA was estimated to have killed around 50,000 to 60,000 Poles in the Volhynia region alone (McBride 639). The broader scope of the war saw the total number of Polish fatalities in western Ukraine estimated between 70,000 and 100,000 (McBride 639). Furthermore, upwards of 350,000 Poles abandoned their homes in Western Ukraine, driven by the specter of violence and persecution (Statiev 162).

The ethnic cleansing of Poles in Western Ukraine by the OUN-UPA highlights the nature of the actions they might have taken against other non-Ukrainian nationalities had

they come to power. In sum, the OUN's violent actions resulted in the deaths of over 100,000 individuals, including Poles, Russians, Jews, and Ukrainians (Statiev 165). Ultimately, however, they failed to gain a strong presence outside of Western Ukraine. Thus, their violence was limited to this region, and the part ultimately disintegrated by the early 1950s.

CONCLUSION

The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) was unequivocally a fascist entity. The OUN's alliance with Nazi Germany, its extermination of Poles and Jews, and its ambition to establish a Ukrainian state governed by violence, authoritarian rule, and suppression of dissent dispel any doubts regarding its fascist identity. Yet, the official narrative in Ukraine seeks to obscure and repudiate the OUN's fascism, which, under the aegis of Bandera, has intricately interlaced itself into the tapestry of national memory. Instead of being viewed as a group deserving of condemnation, the OUN is honored and respected for its role in the struggle for Ukrainian independence. This is evident in the numerous monuments and streets across Ukraine dedicated to OUN leaders such as Stepan Bandera, Roman Shukhevich, and Evgeny Konovalets ("Monuments"). Beyond their physical memorialization, notable Ukrainian officials, including Mayor of Lviv Andriy Sadovyi and the Ukrainian parliament, have celebrated the birthday anniversary of Stepan Bandera (Tilles). The Ukrainian public as a whole also overwhelmingly shares this admiration for the OUN. According to a 2022 national survey, approximately 81% of Ukrainians view the OUN-UPA as freedom fighters while 74% expressed a positive opinion of Stepan Bandera (Kremzner). However, pro-Bandera and pro-OUN sentiments have not come without complications; they have fueled Russian propaganda and strained relations with Poland, one of Ukraine's steadfast allies.

It is essential for the Ukrainian government and its citizens to thoughtfully address the OUN's complex history. The Ukrainian government should recognize the OUN's associations with fascism and openly take steps towards its condemnation similar to how the German government acknowledges its Nazi past. Fortunately, since taking office in 2019, President Zelensky's administration has taken such steps. In contrast to previous administrations that prioritized national sentiments over the historical suffering of Jews and Poles in Ukraine, Zelensky's government has redirected its focus toward acknowledging historic Ukrainian victimization, with particular emphasis on the Holodomor and the Holocaust. He has consciously refrained from elevating Stepan Bandera to the status of a national hero and instead places greater emphasis on the tragic history of the Jewish Holocaust in Ukraine (Kremzner). Zelensky's participation in a Catholic vigil in 2023, together with the Polish president, to honor the victims of the Volhynia Massacre represents an important act of reconciliation. Furthermore, he has permitted Polish experts to investigate and exhume the remains of ethnic Poles murdered by Ukrainian nationalists in one of the villages during the war, reflecting a commitment to historical truth (Tilles). To ensure that these efforts have a meaningful impact, the Ukrainian government must continue to confront the OUN's troubling legacy through a coordinated initiative that includes formal anti-fascist education and an official condemnation of the OUN. Ukraine finds itself at a crossroads, necessitating a profound reexamination of its national narrative concerning the OUN. In a concerted and transparent collaboration between the government and its citizens, it is imperative to confront the unvarnished truths surrounding the OUN. Only through a collective reckoning can the nation continue to progress.

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POLITICS



Protracted Aggression in Nagorno-Karabakh: From War Crimes in 2020 to Ethnic Cleansing

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In the past five years a considerable body of first-hand documentation of gruesome violence has emerged from the battlefields of Nagorno-Karabakh. In September 2022, Azerbaijani soldiers cut off the legs, gouged out the eyes, and mutilated the body of a female Armenian soldier named Anush Apetyan, then posted it to social media. Three months later, "environmental activists" bearing the Azerbaijani flag, holding signs that read "Stop Ecocide" and "Save Nature!", began a ten-month blockade of the Lachin Corridor, the only road from the small region of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. A year after Azerbaijani troops posted their crimes against Apetyan, Azerbaijan conducted a blitz attack on Nagorno-Karabakh which drove roughly 100,000 ethnically Armenian residents from their homes and made them refugees in Armenia. Following the displacement of more than 95% of Nagorno-Karabakh's population, Azerbaijan announced the dissolution of the region and its "reintegration" into Azerbaijan.

This paper will provide evidence that both Armenian and Azerbaijani troops committed war crimes in 2020 and 2022, but will situate the violence as indicative of a four year Azerbaijani campaign to exert untenable pressure on the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh. Following Armenia's submission of claims of ethnic cleansing and discrimination against Azerbaijan to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in April 2024, there is an urgent need to form a body of scholarship that contextualizes the displacement of Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenians as the final outcome of a calculated, nationalist, irredentist Azerbaijani project. The proposed Zangezur Corridor must be identified as a piece of this Azerbaijani project, for the displacement of Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenians was a necessary step to ensure the project's infrastructure. Entering 2025, the situation in the Southern Armenian provinces is tense, as the memory of Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan's expansive corridor project lurks on the border.

Nagorno-Karabakh is nestled between Armenia and Azerbaijan and has been bitterly fought over between the two countries for a century. The population of Nagorno-Karabakh, known as *Artsakh* to Armenians, has been historically ethnically Armenian, around 95%. Rising tensions between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, the fall of the USSR, and persecution of Armenians led to the First Nagorno-Karabakh War from 1988-

1994 that resulted in Nagorno-Karabakh's de facto independence via a Russian ceasefire and Armenian control of regions surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh. Deadly spurts of fighting took place in the following years and became increasingly violent in September 2020 when the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War began. Russia brokered a ceasefire again, however, this time Armenia ceded much of the territory it previously controlled to Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan continued their assault against Armenia from September 13-14, 2022, and fighting left hundreds of Armenians and Azerbaijanis dead, including civilians.

BREACHES OF INTERNATIONAL LAW IN 2020

During the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020 serious breaches of international humanitarian law came to light through social media, news reports, and field research. Atrocities included the targeting of civilians, indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas, attacks on protected civilian objects, killing of prisoners of war (POWs), and mutilation. Both Armenian and Azerbaijani troops breached the Geneva Conventions and committed war crimes.

In 2021 the International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) and Truth Hounds published a report on the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, *When Embers Burst Into Flames*, in which their team surveyed areas where strikes and fighting occurred, spoke to witnesses, and captured photographic evidence of indiscriminate attacks on civilian populations by Azerbaijani and Armenian forces.

An indiscriminate attack against a civilian population is defined by Additional Protocol 1 to the Geneva Conventions in Article 51(4) (a) as an attack that is "not directed at a specific military objective, [employs] a method or means of combat which cannot be directed at a specific military objective, or a method or means of combat the effect of which cannot be limited as required by this Protocol." The IPHR/Truth Hounds report provides evidence that Azerbaijan launched twenty-three indiscriminate attacks and Armenia launched nine indiscriminate attacks against civilian populations during the 2020 war.

Both Azerbaijani and Armenian/Armenian-backed Nagorno-Karabakh troops committed attacks that can be prosecuted under the International Criminal Court's (ICC) *Elements of Crimes* as a war crime of attacking protected civilian objects. Attacks from both sides that had no veritable military target and thus targeted civilian populations resulted in mass civilian death that can be prosecuted (IPHR/Truth Hounds). For example, Azerbaijan used what appeared to be a guided missile against a protected civilian object, a fire station, which resulted in one civilian death and attacked the main electrical plant in Artsakh which resulted in two civilian deaths (IPHR/Truth Hounds). Though the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War was not a symmetrical war—Azerbaijan was supplied with superior military weaponry, especially drones—Armenian/Armenian-backed Nagorno-Karabakh troops were still able to inflict heavy losses on the Azerbaijanis. Armenian forces used outdated, highly indiscriminate 'SCUD' missiles against Ganja, Azerbaijan, in a series of attacks on illegitimate military targets that killed twenty-three civilians.

AZERBAIJAN ESCALATES VIOLENCE IN 2020 VIA ATTACKS ON PROTECTED MEDICAL WORKERS

Documentation reveals that both combatants engaged in indiscriminate attacks and purposeful targeting of civilian populations, with the above examples representing just a fraction of evidence available in the IPHR/Truth Hounds report. This violence does warrant in-depth analysis and redress,

however the present situation of Azerbaijani control of an Armenian-less Nagorno-Karabakh necessitates highlighting the war crimes committed by Azerbaijan against Armenian medical workers and soldiers. This is to reinforce the idea that the 2020 atrocities occurred in the context of Azerbaijan's calculated, nationalist mission that utilized increasing military pressure, blockades, and irredentist propaganda to make Nagorno-Karabakh unlivable for Armenians and ensure expulsion.

During the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War Azerbaijani troops attacked medical facilities in Nagorno-Karabakh multiple times and killed Armenian medical personnel. There is a possibility that an Armenian attack on Barda, Azerbaijan, on October 28, 2020, targeted a hospital, however IPHR/Truth Hounds were "unable to confirm whether this attack was deliberately aimed at the hospital." However, they were able to easily verify that Azerbaijan targeted a civilian hospital in Stepanakert, the de-facto capital of Nagorno-Karabakh, with guided missiles with extremely small margins of error (IPHR/Truth Hounds).

Azerbaijan attacked the Republican Medical Center in Stepanakert with an Israeli 'LORA' guided missile on October 28, 2020, seriously damaging the maternity ward, though there were no civilian deaths (IPHR/Truth Hounds). Photos and a video posted on Twitter after the attack show four floors of windows blown out and the inside of the maternity ward completely destroyed. Human Rights Watch reported that "dozens of patients and staff were at the hospital during the attack, including pregnant women, women with bleeding and other gynecological issues…". As the 'LORA' missile is guided, this attack specifically targeted the hospital, which is a direct violation of Article 18 of the Geneva Convention of 1949 that stipulates: "Civilian hospitals organized to give care to the wounded and sick, the infirm and maternity cases, may in no circumstances be the object of attack." There were soldiers in the hospital being treated, but per Article 13(2) (d) of Additional Protocol 1 protection of medical facilities cannot be discontinued even if "members of the armed forces or other combatants are in the unit for medical reasons."

On September 28, 2020, five Azerbaijani soldiers attacked a clearly marked Armenian ambulance, killed an Armenian military doctor, Sasha Rustamyan, and injured the driver and accompanying Armenian sergeant (Human Rights Watch). When the three men were driving in the then Armenian/Nagorno-Karabakh-held Kalbajar district, five Azerbaijani servicemen appeared on the road. Rustamyan jumped out of the ambulance and then the Azerbaijani soldiers started firing. The Azerbaijanis shot and killed Rustamyan. The driver suffered a concussion, and the sergeant was shot in the lower arm. There is no doubt that the ambulance, though it was painted camouflage, could be confused for anything other than an ambulance because it bore a red cross above the windshield, and medical service signs on the sides (Human Rights Watch).

Human Rights Watch corroborated that the attack on the ambulance and the murder of Sasha Rustamyan can be prosecuted as a war crime in violation of Article 21 of Additional Protocol 1 which states: "Medical vehicles shall be respected and protected in the same way as mobile medical units" or hospitals. The presence of the two military affiliated individuals, and that there was a rifle on board for defense purposes, did not discontinue the ambulance's status as a protected medical unit, per Article 13(2) of Additional Protocol 1 which allows personnel in the unit to be "equipped with light individual weapons for their own defense…."

VIOLENCE PROGRESSES IN 2022 WITH EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS AND MUTILATION

The November 9, 2020, ceasefire that ended the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War did not create the lasting peace that was hoped for. Though Azerbaijan and Armenia exchanged POWs in December 2020 and "the deployment of peacekeepers [established] a new status quo" in the region, tensions remained high (Ghaplanyan 2021). The ceasefire was breached by both sides multiple times throughout 2021 and major violence erupted on September 13, 2022, when Azerbaijan attacked Armenia proper with artillery, mortars, and drones along a 200-kilometer strip of the border (International Crisis Group). Over two days of fighting, videos and photos of the conflict were posted online that provide evidence Azerbaijani troops committed war crimes against Armenian troops. Two videos that I will be focusing on document Azerbaijani soldiers murdering Armenian POWs and of the murder and mutilation of a female Armenian POW, Anush Apetyan. These two actions constitute war crimes that breach Article 3 of the Third Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, to which Azerbaijan is a signatory. Apetyan's murder is also a war crime of mutilation, and a war crime of outrages upon personal dignity, using the ICC's *Elements of Crimes stipulations*.

On October 1, 2022, a video of Azerbaijani troops executing at least seven Armenian POWs was published on Telegram (an online messaging platform where photos and videos, often graphic, of the September attack were posted directly by troops). Human Rights Watch used the uniforms of the belligerents to confirm that they were Azerbaijani. Though they were possibly wearing Turkish-origin uniforms (which is not unusual considering the close Turkish-Azerbaijani military relationship), the soldiers that killed the Armenian POWs all wore uniforms consistent with Azerbaijani troops. The Azerbaijani soldiers shot at the detained Armenian soldiers for twelve seconds, and seven of them were clearly dead by the end of the video. Human Rights Watch verified that a photo posted on Telegram on September 13 shows the dead bodies of two of the men who were in the video posted on October 1. The photo posted on September 13 shows nine dead Armenian servicemen in total, which means that two more men were killed in addition to the seven that were killed in the video. This video is evidence of a gross violation of international humanitarian law, a breach of Article 3 of the Third Geneva Convention, and can be prosecuted as a war crime.

"What media outlets called "border clashes" or "flare-ups" from 2020 to 2022, must now be situated into the present as indicative of Azerbaijan's protracted aggression against the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh."

On September 15, 2022, a video of the mutilated, dead body of thirty-six-year-old Armenian soldier Anush Apetyan was posted on an Azerbaijani Telegram channel. Apetyan was captured alive in Jermuk according to Edward Asryan, the Armenian Army Chief of Staff, but it is unknown if she was killed on September 13 or 14 (Asbarez). What is known is that she was captured by Azerbaijani forces, possibly raped (this is claimed in multiple articles, but is not confirmed), her legs were cut off, a severed finger was placed in her mouth, and one of her eyes was gouged out and a stone was stuffed into her eye socket. The word "YASHMA" (or "YAŞMA") was cut into Apetyan's stomach, which is the name associated with the Azerbaijani Special Forces (it references their headquarters, which is in the village of Yashma, near Baku, Azerbaijan)

(Asbarez). In the minute-long video an Azerbaijani soldier walks over a pile of dead Armenian soldiers, including Apetyan, and says, "look at the bitch, there are two women. She became a rock." (Azeri War Crimes).

What media outlets called "border clashes" or "flare-ups" from 2020 to 2022, must now be situated into the present as indicative of Azerbaijan's protracted aggression against the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh. The fighting during September 13-14 was marked by the egregious war crimes committed by increasingly brazen Azerbaijani troops. The responsible soldiers published videos of their crimes, flaunting the atrocities they committed with what seems to be an expectation they would receive no punishment for breaching the Geneva Conventions. Azerbaijani troops' willingness to publish their war crimes with impunity has historical precedent in the irredentist, anti-Armenian political ideology Azerbaijani leaders have cultivated for decades. What world media outlets characterized as "border clashes" or "border conflicts" in 2020 and 2022, were not disconnected spurts of violence, they were the logical steps to the final Azerbaijani achievement of a Nagorno-Karabakh cleansed of 95% of its population.

"The scope of Azerbaijan's violence, accompanied by the government's entrenched anti-Armenian racism and irredentist claims, reveal that the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War was a purposeful steppingstone to break the will of the Armenian population."

MOBILIZING IRREDENTIST CLAIMS

There is no denying that both sides breached international law in the 2020 war and in violations of the ceasefire in the following years. However the scope of Azerbaijan's violence, accompanied by the government's entrenched anti-Armenian racism and irredentist claims, reveal that the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War was a purposeful steppingstone to break the will of the Armenian population and achieve decades long Azerbaijani political aims of expanding the Azerbaijani border.

President Ilham Aliyev has established his grasp on power and emboldened his war-waging via years of anti-Armenian, pro-war, expansionist rhetoric and state policy. In 2004, when Ramil Safaraov, an Azerbaijani man, hacked sleeping Gurgen Margaryan to death with an axe in Hungary he was pardoned and promoted after extradition to Azerbaijan. Aliyev defended the decision saying: "But I will repeat with the same determination that Azerbaijan freed its officer, returned him to the homeland and restored justice." Aliyev has continuously erased Armenian history not only in Nagorno-Karabakh, but in the entire Caucasus region: "their [Armenian] history, their past, their statehood and their mythology are nothing but fake. Armenians of the world have simply created the false impression in the countries where they live that the Armenian people have allegedly lived on these lands for centuries." The irredentist claims increased during the 2020-2022 period. In a speech after the violence in 2022 Aliyev promoted a false narrative not just of Nagorno-Karabakh but of Armenia proper, calling it "Western Azerbaijan" which is Azerbaijan's "historical land… Unfortunately, as they did in Karabakh, the Armenians razed all our historical and religious monuments in Western Azerbaijan to the ground." Aliyev confidently asserted that Azerbaijan *started* the Second Nagorno-Karabakh and re-upped claims that erased Armenian historical roots there: "Azerbaijan started the War of Salvation, liberated its historical lands from the occupier…" (CNN Turk TV).

The boldness of violent, anti-Armenian state policy during this period was marked; swiftly after the ceasefire in 2020 the Azerbaijani released a commemorative stamp collection that showed a man clad in a hazmat suit fumigating Nagorno-Karabakh away from Azerbaijan (de la Torre). The intent was clear for this stamp: foment irredentism and war mongering via dehumanization of Armenians in a literal symbol of ethnic cleansing, fumigating Armenians away like insects.

University Network for Human Rights' 2023 report on Nagorno-Karabakh provides interviews from Armenian residents that testified to Azerbaijani use of loudspeakers to intimidate Armenians as early as the Spring of 2022. The loudspeaker message provides direct precedent for the eventual displacement in September 2023. The Nagorno-Karabakh Ombudsman reported the statements:

> *You are in the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Any action carried out here is regulated by the laws of Azerbaijan… Taking into account your safety, we demand to stop the work and leave the area immediately, otherwise FORCE WILL BE APPLIED on you, the responsibility for the losses will fall on you. Do not endanger the lives of your family members. Leave the area, leave the area. (University Network, "We Are No One")*

Aliyev's statements in December 2022 reveal Azerbaijan's aim of a Nagorno-Karabakh without Armenians. His own words positioned the Second Nagorno-Karabakh war as a stepping stone in forcing the Armenian population to flee. After asserting that Armenia is actually "Western Azerbaijan" he said "the liberation of Karabakh and East Zangezur on the battlefield is a historic event…Our military and political successes achieved this year have laid the groundwork for the future…the September clashes insure us against significant problems in the future.

Propaganda that *celebrated* the illegal violence of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, statements that positioned the 2020 and 2022 fighting as necessary steps for an Armenian exodus, and use of intimidation tactics reveal Azerbaijan's ultimate goal: the ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BLOCKADE IN DECEMBER 2022

By December 2022 a new element of escalation created an untenable humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh when Azerbaijani "environmental activists" blocked the Lachin Corridor, the only road that connects Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. A fact-finding report from IPHR/Truth Hounds in 2023, *Why Are There No Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh?*, states that "multiple sources have verified that the activists were directly linked to the Azerbaijani government." TCitizens of Nagorno-Karabakh were deprived of adequate supplies of food, fuel, medicine and medical services for nine months; from June to September 2023, no food passed through the Azerbaijani controlled checkpoint along the corridor into Nagorno-Karabakh (IPHR/Truth Hounds, "No Armenians"). Interviewees from the report attest that "there [had] been no gas in our village since December 2022…I think they were doing everything to disappoint [us] and [make us] leave our houses and Artsakh."

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled on February 22, 2023, that Azerbaijan must "take all measures at its disposal to ensure unimpeded movement of persons, vehicles and cargo along the Lachin Corridor in both directions." Food dried up as the blockade continued, people waited in bread lines for hours and often left with nothing, miscarriage rates tripled and cases of anemia in pregnant women rose 90%, the mortality rate from heart failure increased 60%, there were severe shortages on medications needed to manage chronic conditions, schools shut

down due to lack of heating, and severely malnourished children could not walk to school without fainting (IPHR/Truth Hounds, "No Armenians"). Malnourished women found it difficult to breastfeed and baby formula was severely lacking, and kindergartens shut down due to lack of food and fuel needed to travel to them (IPHR/Truth Hounds, "No Armenians").

After four months of no aid, the Russian Red Cross was able to deliver aid on September 17, 2023. However two days later an Azerbaijani offensive led to the forced displacement of over 100,000 Armenians living in the blockaded Nagorno-Karabakh (IPHR/Truth Hounds, "No Armenians").

FINAL AZERBAIJANI OFFENSIVE AND ARMENIAN FLIGHT

Azerbaijan began their final step in expelling Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh in the early afternoon of September 19, 2023, with an announcement that their military was launching "anti-terror" operations and began bombarding smaller communities surrounding Stepanakert (Kirby, "Azerbaijan launches"). Thirty-four civilians, five of those children, were killed by Azerbaijan and thirty-one civilians, ten of those children, were wounded (IPHR/Truth Hounds). After Armenians fled to central Stepanakert to find some refuge, Azerbaijani troops began encroaching on the outer villages; in the following days, as residents determined their next steps, those who tried to return to their villages found their communities encircled by Azerbaijani troops (IPHR/Truth Hounds, "No Armenians"). Armenian testimonies from the report reveal how Azerbaijan made it impossible for Armenians to return to their village communities, and one interviewee stated that her father-in-law "saw that Azerbaijanis had already surrounded the village. Russian peacekeepers…told him not to return to the village, as the Azerbaijanis were already there." With no possibility of returning to the villages of Nagorno-Karabakh and imminent fear that Stepanakert would come under attack, the Armenian population proceeded with a mass exodus from their home. One interviewee stated that "I believe that there was a risk of falling in captivity or being killed had we stayed…" another said that "initially, we thought…they would kill everyone. Then we saw that people were moving to Armenia and there was no choice" (IPHR/Truth Hounds, "No Armenians").

"With no possibility of returning to the villages of Nagorno-Karabakh and imminent fear that Stepanakert would come under attack, the Armenian population proceeded with a mass exodus from their home."

Though no precise definition of the term "ethnic cleansing" has been confirmed by an international legal body, customary international humanitarian law, definitions of forced displacement, and decisions in the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) provide a sufficient framework to label Azerbaijan's conduct as an act of ethnic cleansing. The UN Commision for the ICTY defines ethnic cleansing in its final report as "a purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas." The ICC's *Elements of Crimes* Article 7 (1)(d) defines forcible transfer occurring when "the perpetrator deported or forcibly transferred, without grounds permitted under international law, one or more persons to another State or location, by expulsion or other coercive acts." It is important to note that the ICC stipulates that "forcibly" not only refers to physical force, but may include threat of force or coercion. Following the framework of the

ICTY definition of ethnic cleansing and the ICC's definition of the crime of forcible transfer there is sufficient evidence that Azerbaijan committed an act of ethnic cleansing against the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh.

From the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020 to the violence in September 2022, to the blockade of the Lachin Corridor, to the final offensive in September 2023 a clear scheme of intimidation, a state-policy of irredentism and dehumanization, threats, and manufactured humanitarian catastrophe has emerged. Aliyev's statement on September 20, 2024, confirms this argument of a calculated plan to reach the final step of a cleansed Nagorno-Karabakh: "…all our steps and the work we did from November 2020 to September 2023, we can see that each step was a logical continuation of the previous step, and the ultimate goal of each step was September 20, State Sovereignty Day"(AZERTAC). With 95% of Nagorno-Karabakh's population gone and the region's former Armenian leaders facing trial in Azerbaijan, using Aliyev's own words, "the ultimate goal" must be interpreted as the displacement of 100,000 Armenians.

INTERNATIONAL LEGAL RESPONSE AND THE ZANGEZUR CORRIDOR PROJECT

Nagorno-Karabakh is now dissolved as an independent region and Azerbaijan is in the process of repopulating the area and erasing any memory of an Armenian presence. International legal bodies now face the project of interpreting the events of the past five years and weighing the evidence of prosecutable crimes. However, the possibility that Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenian population will see Azerbaijan or Azerbaijani troops prosecuted is uncertain and continues to be complicated as of February 2025 when Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan suggested recalling legal complaints lodged with the ICJ in 2021 in favor of reaching a peace settlement with Azerbaijan (Asbarez).

Armenia and Azerbaijan each brought cases against each other in 2021 at the ICJ using the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), and the most recent judgement in November 2024 has shown "the narrowing of Azerbaijan's claims, coupled with the dismissal of key allegations unrelated to racial discrimination, has highlighted the robustness of Armenia's legal strategy and its alignment with the Court's interpretative framework" (Petrossian). Despite Pashinyan's recent statements, lead ICC prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo reiterated his commitment to proceeding with Armenia's complaints, a ray of hope for the 100,000 Armenians displaced from their homes: "Yerevan cannot halt the investigation into crimes against Armenians at the ICC, even though it has the right to withdraw its complaints" (Asbarez).

Proceedings in other courts could prove indispensable to Armenian arguments against Azerbaijan. The Administrative Court of Germany's recent decision to grant refugee status to a family from Nagorno-Karabakh is particularly prescient (Petrossian). The court's ruling that "ethnic Armenians in Azerbaijan face systematic discrimination, citing long-standing case law on the persecution of Armenians there, including the denial of citizenship and re-entry" provides a basis to build a legal framework to prosecute Azerbaijan for forced displacement and thus ethnic cleansing (Petrossian).

In September 2024 a communication was filed with the ICC on the behalf of two Armenians that were displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh with a complaint of crimes against humanity, which is prosecutable under Article 7 of the Rome Statute (Ghazanchyan). Armenia is a signatory of the Rome Statute, however Azerbaijan is not—which significantly hampers the efficacy of any ICC ruling against the state itself.

Any redress for the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh is further complicated by the Turkish-Azerbaijani plan for the Zangezur Corridor, a transport route that would link Turkey to the Azerbaijani Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (situated to the southwest of Armenia) to Azerbaijan proper, in effect cutting Iran off from Armenia and thus Europe. The corridor would pass through the southernmost Armenian province, Syunik, which was itself bombarded by Azerbaijani forces in 2021 (Ohanyan). Syunik is internationally recognized as Armenian territory, though Aliyev often reiterates the claim that this territory is actually "Western Azerbaijan"; the possibility of a militarized transport route through sovereign Armenian territory has shaken the Armenian political sphere in the wake of the forced displacement of Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenians.

The opening of Armenia's southernmost region to transport routes was a critical aspect of the 2020 ceasefire agreement brokered by Russia, but Armenian assurances were based on an expectation that Russian peace-keeping forces would ensure free passage between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. The position of many within the Armenian government is that due to Azerbaijan and Russia's failure to follow the 2020 ceasefire any previous Armenian commitments to transport routes is now infeasible. However, Pashinyan's recent comments bring into question the flexibility of the Armenian position regarding Zangezur.

Considering that Turkey and Azerbaijan already have infrastructure set in place for the corridor and that it could be a "complement [to] the newly unveiled India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), Washington's answer to China's Belt and Road Initiative" there are serious questions as to whether the United States would impede any plan put forward by NATO partner Turkey that would result in a disgruntled Iran (Ohanyan). Tensions are rising in regard to Zangezur; Iranian Foreign Policy Advisor Ali Akbar Velayatis voiced his opposition to the project on November 26, 2024, claiming that it would "threaten Iran's borders" (Braverman et al.). Even in the face of possible impingement of Armenian sovereignty via Azerbaijani militarization of the transport route in Syunik, it is unlikely that a repeat of Nagorno-Karabakh, but in Syunik, would result in any different international reaction or legitimate protection for Armenians.

State Sovereignty Day is how President Aliyev refers to the day the Azerbaijani military forcibly displaced 100,000 Armenians from their home and achieved the realization of a cleansed Nagorno-Karabakh his nationalist, irredentist rhetoric has promoted for years. There is no way to extricate the breakout of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, the violence in 2022, and the blockade of the Lachin Corridor from the final outcome in 2023.

Armenian backed forces did breach international law via indiscriminate attacks and targeting of civilians during the war, however, this occurred within what Aliyev admits was a project in which "all our steps and the work we did from November 2020 to September 2023… was a logical continuation of the previous step" (AZERTAC). His statement that "the ultimate goal of each step was September 20" is an unambiguous admission that an ethnically cleansed Nagorno-Karabakh was made possible via four years of prolonged aggression, war crimes, indiscriminate targeting of civilians, blockade, starvation, and ultimately forced displacement. With the possibility of serious prosecution against Aliyev unlikely, and Pashinyan reneging on previous commitments to pursuing prosecution against Azerbaijan, the Zangezur Corridor looms in the background as a significant driving force of impingement on Armenian sovereignty. The opportunity to prevent a new refugee group was ignored in Nagorno-Karabakh for three years, and the question now is if Azerbaijani pressure on Armenia to complete the Zangezur Corridor will limit Armenian support for 100,000 people who endured three years of escalating threats and protracted aggression.

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Fueling Identity: Commodifying Natural Resources in the Russo-Ukrainian Conflict

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"The commodification of oil and gas shifts the way we see the world and our place in it. It creates a relationship of dependence—on the commodity, on the market, and on the systems of power that control them—shaping not just our economy, but our very identity." — David Harvey

What is it about the commodification of natural resources that leads to dependency, and even more alarmingly, the manipulation of our "very identity"? Before the 20th century, the main use of petroleum was to provide artificial light and lubricants for machinery (Mitchell 31).

Harvey suggests that the transformation of natural resources into marketable commodities reshapes not only economic systems, but also personal and collective identities. This suggests that the structures of power that control the extraction, distribution, and consumption of natural resources are not neutral—they shape and enforce systems that benefit some while marginalizing others.

Economic anthropologist Karl Polanyi argued that the drive to create a self-regulating market system, where land, labor, and money are treated as commodities, undermines power and social stability and ultimately leads to devastating outcomes for society (Polanyi 36). These commodities, including natural resources, are "fictitious" because we give them meaning through the market (Polanyi Chapter 6). Sociologist Steven Lukes argues that power comes in three forms: decision-making, agenda-setting, and ideological power (Lukes). These dimensions of power and their applicability to natural resource allocation lead us to question: How does power over natural resources dictate change in national identity? To answer these questions, we will examine Russia's War on Ukraine to understand how natural resources influence identity and dependency. Russia's power over natural resources creates a complex dynamic between the "power-holder" and the "powerless," using ideological interdependence with Ukraine and economic geopolitical control of European energy markets to assert authority over other nations and shift the meaning of national identity; however, this is met with social resistance and competition.

WAR OF IDENTITY

On February 24, 2022, the Russian Federation launched a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine (Michalova et al. 74). What is the reason for Russia's invasion of Ukraine? To understand this question, we must discern Russia's complex nationalist-imperial identity. No matter how many attempts Russia has made to create equality and community, its imperial ambition is constant: "the Kremlin's drive to dominate its neighbors has passed from tsars to Stalin, and from Stalin to Putin" (Rohac). In the late 18th century, the concept of an "All-Russian nation" was made to bolster Russian imperial claims (Rohac). Following the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union transformed the meaning of imperialism into one that emphasized unity.

Michael Gorbachev, Soviet Union leader, believed in creating a "'common European home' that would include all peoples of the USSR in a closer relationship with the West" (Rohac). Russia was not a 'classical' colonial power but a "specific imperial construction" where the "core ethnic group," Russians, sacrificed their well-being to support the development of "backward provinces" (Laruelle 15). However, opposition leader Boris Yeltsin believed that this attempt at preserving the 'union' oppressed the Russian state (Rohac). In the name of Russian preservation, Yeltsin officially dissolved the USSR in 1991. Ironically, Yeltsin expected that Russia would be welcomed into the 'West' with a massive aid package and NATO membership; instead, it was left in the 'East' (Rohac). Yelstin's economic 'shock therapy' brought an atmosphere of "brutal lawlessness that enriched a few and impoverished the many" (Rohac).

Russia became a network of "nationality-based republics…without a unifying concept" (Rohac). Consequently, in the year 2000 came a man named Vladimir Putin who would shake the social and identity dimensions of the Russian republic by reigniting the tsarist imperialist formula of "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality" (Laruelle 8).

NATURAL RESOURCE POWER OVER IDENTITY

Russia did not acknowledge the collapse of the Soviet Union as an end to its "centuries-long imperial project," the legacy of Moscow's cultural and political domination "of ethnic minorities within and beyond Russia's borders continues to haunt the region" (Rohac). Russia's war on Ukraine is a direct consequence of this imperialist Russian cultural identity. For Ukraine, freedom is the key trait in its identity as a political nation. It is not centered exclusively on any single ethnic, linguistic, or religious identity; it is pluralist, showcasing its culture on the global stage through art, language, and heritage. Identity for Putin (be it national, sexual, or gender) is not a mere "social construct that can be changed simply because an individual feels dissatisfied with it" (Laruelle 16). Russia turns to the past to rebuild the "greatness" of Russia by presenting itself as the "last bastion of reason and stability against a descendant and destabilizing West" (Michalova et al. 75). The West, in Putin's view, threatens Russia's identity through its 'westernization' and NATO influences on Ukraine (Laruelle 17).

"For Ukraine, freedom is the key trait in its identity as a political nation."

Although Putin did attempt to use Soviet-unity symbolism through his "one-nation" rhetoric, believing this to influence Russian perspective on the "special military operation" of Ukraine, this proved unpopular with the population (Laruelle 33). He shifted his language to present the war as a conflict with the West, a portrayal which 50-70% of the population agreed with (Laruelle 19). Russians believe that they must put their doubts aside to support the government: "my country, right or wrong" (Laruelle 33, Lukes). Francis Fukuyama has argued that identity is based on "human dignity and the desire for recognition of this dignity by others." He emphasizes that while people are driven by self-interest in

seeking more wealth and resources, economic motives do not capture the full complexity of human behavior (Michalova et al. 77). However, when a nation like Russia turns its back on its cultural history and interconnectedness, it comes to rely on other sources of identity. During the Tsarist era of unapologetic Russian imperialism, national pride was driven by expansion and control of territories rich in natural resources, such as Siberia, Ukraine, and the steppe regions. The conquest and colonization of these areas were often seen as "manifestations of Russia's growing power and influence" (Library of Congress). For Russia, natural resources are not just economic assets, they are intertwined with the country's sense of national pride and global influence.

"Russia's military encroachments in eastern and southern Ukraine since 2014 and most recently in 2022 have taken control of two-thirds of the country's naval zone and an estimated 80% or 2 trillion cubic meters of oil and natural gas deposits."

UKRAINE'S NATURAL RESOURCE POWER

If not for cultural ideology, why does Russia want to take Ukraine? Russia has deep cultural, economic, and political ties with Ukraine and is "central to Russia's identity and vision for itself in the world" (Masters). However, Russia's strength and power is reliant on its ample natural resources. Russia is not running out of oil, but oil must be pumped from places that are "colder, deeper, and more remote" such as the Arctic (Aron 3). Thus, Russia has determined it would be fruitful to focus on extracting minerals from Ukraine.

In 2014, Russia solidified its control of Crimea on the Black Sea, not for ideological unity but to establish a much larger military presence on the Black Sea that would open up access into the Mediterranean, Middle East, and North Africa, areas where Russia traditionally had limited influence (Masters). Ukraine is home to some of the largest energy, mineral, and agricultural assets in the world (SecDev Group). Ukraine has repeatedly attempted to increase its energy security by "diversifying supply sources and routes away from Russia" (SecDev Group). It launched oil and gas privatization efforts in 2013, but these were impeded by Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and military intervention in Donbas (SecDev Group). After launching a new energy strategy in 2017 and hastening mineral extraction licenses in 2021, Ukraine's moves were stopped by Russia's invasion in 2022 (SecDev Group). The Russian-occupied Dnieper-Donetsk region accounts for 80% of oil, gas, and coal production and reserves (SecDev Group). In Europe, Ukraine may have the second largest natural gas deposits with 1.2 - 5.4 trillion cubic meters of proven reserves and up to 37 billion tons of coal reserves, among the largest in the world (SecDev Group).

The chief reason for Russia's backing of the now-terminated Nord Stream 2 was precisely to circumvent oil pipelines running through Ukraine (SecDev Group). Russia's military encroachments in eastern and southern Ukraine since 2014 and most recently in 2022 have taken control of two-thirds of the country's naval zone and an estimated 80% or 2 trillion cubic meters of oil and natural gas deposits (SecDev Group). Thus, control over Ukraine's fossil fuels would not only generate significant revenue for Putin and his oligarchs, wealthy Russian businessmen with great political influence, but also reinforce Putin's vision of Russia as a dominant natural resource powerhouse (SecDev Group).

INTERNAL DEPENDENCY

Now that we understand Russia's fundamental material attachment to Ukraine's natural resources, we can analyze how Russia's own natural resources have led to a dependency on

Ukraine. The Russian oil industry began in the 19th century in Baku, present-day Azerbaijan, which produced more than a fraction of the world's petroleum for a short period at the start of the 20th century (Mitchell 33). Beginning in the 1870s, the Russian government opened Baku to competing private companies, reaching 10.8 million barrels within a decade. (Ermolaev). However, in the first decade of the 20th century, the Baku oil industry started losing momentum due to a lack of industrialization (Ermolaev). World War II reignited oil production and transformed Western Siberia into a major oil-producing region in the USSR (Ermolaev).

Despite the increase in production in Western Siberia, Russia demanded the extraction of even more oil (Ermolaev). The ample reserves of oil in the mid-20th century enabled the creation of "the economy" as an object of political management. During the Cold War, control over oil resources became intertwined with "national security interests, legitimizing interventions and supporting authoritarianism" (Mitchell 122). After the Cold War, Russian politics focused on "restoring the state's power through military and energy status" (Shiraz 38).

Putin furthered this notion by forming his own state doctrine that asserted that the state was to "become the only sovereign political and economic actor in Russia," with the private sector as mere objects (Aron 2). By Putin's second term, the state had heightened interference in the oil and gas industry by taking command of all drilling and production licensing (Shiraz 45).

Gazprom and Rosneft, the state-owned oil giants, emerged as key energy players expected to rival global corporations and safeguard national hydrocarbon resources by enforcing preferred policies (Shiraz 45). In 2013, Rosneft bought Russia's third-largest private company, TNK-BP, for $55 billion and as a result, the state share of Russia's oil production increased from 20% in the early 2000s to 56% in 2024 (Vidal 8). Thus, Oligarchs used natural resource revenue to embed themselves in political apparatuses and maintain control over the population. Putin and Oligarchs exploited the financial windfall of international energy demand. Putin's energy enterprises accumulated a wealth of approximately $41 billion in foreign currency reserves (Brzezinski 99). Russia's wealth is derived from its output of natural resources and from holding large amounts of foreign assets in currencies other than its own, rather than relying solely on its own currency. Before the war, people often questioned why Russia's foreign currency reserves were so disproportionately large, reaching nearly $600 billion (Brzezinski 99). It became evident that once the war began and sanctions were imposed, these reserves had purposefully been stockpiled to prepare for this kind of economic fallout. The aim was to use these reserves to fund the war effort and help keep society quiescent by stabilizing the ruble's value as it inevitably collapsed due to sanction and war-related pressure. Ultimately, the political strength of Putin's authoritarian political system derives from his dependency on and control of the natural resource market (Brzezinski 105).

While Russia's reliance on natural resources consolidates its power in the short term, it exposes vulnerabilities to global market fluctuations and limits economic diversification. "Dutch disease" is when overreliance on commodity exports, depresses other sectors of the economy by starving them of investment and modernization while appreciating national currency, making other exports more expensive and thus less competitive in global markets (Aron 2). This overreliance on natural resources subjects Russia to price volatility, and slow growth, corruption, and inequality (Dodds 77). As long as the government continues to regard natural resources as alleviating economic, social, and political issues, they will hinder or even eliminate the need for modernization, often at the expense of democratic participation (Aron 3). Therefore, Russia must evaluate whether sustaining its influence

in international markets justifies the potential hindrance to domestic economic growth.

EUROPEAN DEPENDENCY

In recent years, Russia's resource wealth has been used as a tool to reassert power in global politics, resulting in Europe's dependency on Russia (Dodds 79). Putin, a year before becoming president, reiterated that Russian mineral resources would be central to the country's economic growth, security, and modernization through "at least the first half" of the 21st century, and he was right (Aron 1). Russia's economy in 2023 outpaced both the United States and Europe in terms of growth, increasing by 3.6% ("Russia GDP 2024"). Its GINI decreased from 47 in 2007 to 36 in 2023 while its GDP increased from 260 billion in 2000 to 2 trillion in 2023 ("Russia GDP 2024"). Before the war in Ukraine, Russia supplied Europe with approximately 40% of its natural gas, 27% of its crude oil, and 46% of its coal imports (Vidal 7). Since 2009, demand for Russian raw materials has grown exponentially as a result of the increase in price of raw materials (Vidal 8). The COVID-19 pandemic caused enduring destabilization of the global economy, escalating extreme volatility for all raw material prices (Vidal 9). Russia's deep integration into the global minerals market makes it challenging to implement sanctions targeting this sector.

"This pivot not only demonstrates Russia's economic adaptability, but also reflects a shift in its geopolitical identity from a European-focused power to a Eurasian energy supplier."

Since the War in Ukraine, Europe decreased Russian natural gas imports to 20% (Kuzmin). As a result, Russia cut off most gas supplies through the Baltic and Belarus-Poland pipelines, resulting in a "European Energy Crisis." Germany, for example, had to "shell out" billions of Euros to set up floating terminals to import LNG by ship, not by pipeline (McHugh). Europe viewed the Russian cutoff as energy blackmail and outlined plans to eliminate Russian gas imports by 2027 (Kuzmin). However, Russian gas was never banned. Austria increased its Russian gas imports from 80% to 98% over the past two years. While Italy has cut direct imports, it receives Russian-origin gas through Austria (McHugh). Romania and Hungary made gas deals with Turkey, which openly imports gas from Russia (McHugh 2024). Russia on several occasions suspended gas to Ukraine (in 2006, 2008, 2009, 2014, 2015) (Vidal 7). Since then, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has confirmed the power of "energy weapons," denoting a lasting testimony to how dependent Europe is on Russian energy (Vidal 7).

DEPENDENCY ON CHINESE AND INDIAN MARKETS

Nevertheless, as a result of the stabilizing market and Europe's adaptation to high prices, Russia has started to look 'East' for economic assistance. China and India brought about 90% of Russia's crude oil exports in 2023, with Russia's oil exports to China increasing by 24% in 2023 and its liquified natural gas (LNG) exports growing by 47% (Kulakhmetov 2). Similarly, by late 2023, almost two-thirds of Russia's former oil exports to Europe were going to India. In 2022, Russian coal exports to India grew to "$4 billion, from $1.1 billion in 2021." (Kulakhmetov 8).

By the end of March 2023, 82% of total "Russian coal exports went to developing countries–China, India, and Turkey" (Kulakhmetov 6). This growth occurred as a result of Russia's Power of Siberia pipeline, and supporting ports and infrastructure along Russia's Northern Sea Route (Kulakhmetov 3). Gazprom hopes to deliver an additional 10 billion cubic meters a year (bcm/year) of gas to China through its Far Eastern Route before 2027, while also having plans for

Power of Siberia 2 with a capacity of 55 bcm/year (Kulakhmetov 5). Meanwhile, the International North-South Transport Corridor would allow Russia to transport an additional 33 million metric tons (Mmt) to India by 2030 (Kulakhmetov 8). This pivot not only demonstrates Russia's economic adaptability, but also reflects a shift in its geopolitical identity from a European-focused power to a Eurasian energy supplier.

IS RUSSIA IN ECONOMIC TROUBLE?

Dimitri Trenin, a Russian foreign policy analyst, argued that being an "energy superpower is a myth, and a dangerous one" (Brzezinski 109). Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Russia became the most sanctioned country in the world, slowing down certain technologies and capital in mining activity (Vidal 22). Nevertheless, Russia has managed to find its way out of economic ruin. To avoid triggering the G7-EU price cap on oil exports to Asia, Russian firms use complex cross-border loans and cryptocurrency trading on oil exports (Kulakhmetov 2). Russian sources are optimistic about completing the Arctic LNG projects to Asia before the U.S. and Qatar (Kulakhmetov 2). According to the Center for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA), nearly two years of Western sanctions appear to be having little impact courtesy of China and India (Sharma). In fact, Russia's macroeconomic position today is fairly solid: "the country's budget is balanced; hard currency reserves are second only to China's; inflation, while rising, is still among the lowest in the country's post-Soviet history; and public debt is only 12.2% of the GDP" (Aron 6). At least in the nearby future, there is enough oil for Russia to feel "comfortable" and maintain its identity as a natural resource behemoth (Aron 6).

UNITED STATES MONOPOLIZATION OF EUROPEAN MARKETS

Economic anthropologist Polanyi argued that commodifying land and natural resources triggers social unrest, prompting political reforms to curb market control and safeguard community well-being, as demonstrated by Europe's and the United States' resistance to Russian natural resource production. (Polanyi 71-80). Since the War in Ukraine, the US and Europe formed the US-EU Task Force on Energy Security to diversify EU gas supplies and transition away from imported fossil fuels in Europe (Irié et. al). The Biden administration promised in March 2022 to ensure "stable demand for additional US LNG until at least 2030 of approximately 50 bc/annum (Irié et. al). Today, about 50% of Europe's LNG imports come from the US (Gavin). However, the Biden Administration paused new LNG projects due to decarbonization efforts under the 28th UN Conference of the Parties (COP 28) (Irié et. al). Meanwhile, President Trump, regardless of his pro-fossil fuel legislature, has imposed 20% tariffs on European goods for not buying enough American exports (Euronews). As a result, Europe will most likely impose retaliatory tariffs on US LNG and source natural resources from other sellers (Maguire). US energy product exports could redirect cargoes to other buyers, but in reality, the loss of European buyers would be a heavy blow to US firms (Maguire).

The U.S.'s dominance in the European energy market reflects how natural resources dictate not just economic policy, but also geopolitical alignments and reshaping national motives and identity. Since the War in Ukraine, the revenue of the US's largest oil-producing firms jumped from 100 billion in 2021 to 330 billion in 2022, a direct consequence of U.S. entrance into European energy markets (Statista Research Service). This sharp increase in revenue resulted in declining debt levels for U.S. oil companies, from nearly 300 thousand dollars in 2020 to 100 thousand in 2022 (Bousso). This raises a criti-

cal question: were these actions driven by genuine concern for countering Russian energy dominance, or were they motivated by corporate profit and economic opportunism? In the 1970s, US officials and oil executives could not explain why American oil companies needed to control production in the Middle East "without mentioning corporate profits" (Mitchell 122). Nevertheless, during the Cold War, American companies used rhetoric of countering threats to democracy as a justification for oil extraction in the Middle East (Mitchell 122). Is Europe trading one Goliath for another?

DOMESTIC SOCIAL RESISTANCE

Over 21,000 Russians have faced fines or arrests for criticizing authorities and participating in protests against Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Terekhov 1). Members of the urban middle and upper classes have "emigrated or self-silenced" themselves (Laruelle 34). Meanwhile, polls show that younger generations are the least supportive of the war: 36% of 18-24, and 25% from 25-39, compared to 13% of those above 55 years old (Laruelle 34).

The Russian anti-war movement has formed both within and outside Russia, through nonviolent and violent movements. Russian anti-war groups within Russia are linked to actions such as arson attacks on military recruitment centers, frequent sabotage of railway lines, disruptions at storage facilities, and possibly even drone strikes (Terekhov 4). Non-violent anti-war groups focus on supplying aid to Ukraine, and independent media to Russia, such as NITKA, the largest Russian anti-regime channel (Terekhov 4). Campaigns like Stand with Ukraine urged policymakers to accelerate the transition to renewable energy as a strategy to weaken the Kremlin's ability to fund its war efforts and geopolitical influence (Terekhov 3).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Was Polanyi right in his assessment that "...to allow the market mechanism to be the sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment, even of the amount and use of purchasing power, would result in the demolition of society" (Polanyi 76)? Does the continuous commodification of goods and services make society an 'annex' to economic and market forces?

We have seen this development occur in Russia's commodification of natural resources, which extends beyond economic dependency—it reshapes national identities, geopolitical power dynamics, and societal structures. Russia's invasion of Ukraine exemplifies how natural resource wealth can intertwine with national pride and imperial ambitions. By leveraging energy exports, Russia maintained its influence on a global scale, yet this dependency exposed vulnerabilities within its economy and political system. This reliance has also fueled internal dissent and shifting energy markets, as Europe seeks diversification and the U.S. expands its influence.

Polanyi's concept of the "double movement" emphasizes the need to re-embed market forces into social relations through institutional and governance innovations. Diversifying energy sources away from centralized oil-producing states, such as Russia, to more participatory systems can reduce power concentration and promote equitable energy governance in regions like Europe and Ukraine (Mitchell 237). However, this requires robust political institutions—independent courts, secure property rights, and sound financial systems—which Russia currently lacks (Aron 6). A carbon-free future offers an opportunity to break free from natural resource dependency and imagine new forms of energy governance that are compatible with democratic principles (Mitchell 237). We see this shift in COP29—held in Baku, Azerbaijan, a historical hub of oil production during the Russian Empire, highlighting the region's shift in energy.

As the global energy market moves toward decarbonization, what will become of resource-dependent nations like Russia? Will they adopt, or cling to identities rooted in dwindling commodities, risking long-term instability? The answer to these questions will shape not only the future of global geopolitics, but also the very structure of our international economy.

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Women in Government in Central Asia: Successes and Limitation of Gender Quotas

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Gender quotas have emerged as a key tool in advancing the representation of women in government across the world, with over half of all countries having implemented electoral gender quotas in their legislatures (Gender Quotas Database). Promoting women's engagement in politics is desirable as it can change legislative and policy agendas, promoting discussion of gender issues (Ismailova 661). In Central Asia, gender quotas were first employed when the region was under Moscow's rule as part of the Soviet Union, working towards the professed goals of Soviet leaders to emancipate women in all realms of life (Şentürk 73). Since the fall of the Soviet Union, several post-Soviet Central Asian states have again implemented gender quotas to advance the inclusion of women in public office. While the countries of Central Asia exhibit varying degrees of state repression and hold unique national identities, the region is home to coinciding present and historical influences including Islam, Soviet secularism, and traditional pastoralist culture, all of which impact the role of women in government. This paper will explore the effectiveness and response to the implementation of gender quotas to increase the participation of women in government and politics in Central Asia. This paper will begin by providing an overview of the history and current status of gender quotas, before discussing procedural and societal barriers to their efficacy.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF QUOTAS

During the Soviet period, a quota system was used to affirmatively discriminate in favor of women, advancing their status in government and the Communist Party (Ibrahim 50). In fact, despite the rigid traditional gender roles of pre-Soviet Central Asia that confined women to the domestic sphere, their inclusion in government in Soviet Central Asia was high when compared globally (Falkingham; Şentürk 74). During the Soviet period in Uzbekistan, for example, women were allocated a third of the seats in both government and party administration organs (Ibrahim 50).

The quota system was eliminated during the period of *glasnost*. This had real adverse effects in decreasing the number of women afforded seats in government; the percentage of women elected to the Supreme Council of the USSR was expediently cut in half, to 15.7 percent (Mironov 151). The 1989-90 election in Tajikistan resulted in only nine of 200 women, or 3.9 percent, being elected as deputies of the Supreme Soviet Republic

(Khushkadamova 66). Opportunities for women in the governments of other post-Soviet republics slipped away after they received independence (Najibullah). Only 26 out of 360 seats in the Supreme Council of the Republic of Kazakhstan, or 7.2 percent, were won by women after the 1991 election (Khassanova 3).

This low level of women's representation in decision-making positions in Kazakhstan's government was a contributing factor to the marginalization of women's issues, gender discrimination in social welfare programs, and increasing levels of gender-based violence (Khassanova 3). In Uzbekistan, while the professional advancement of women had been supported during the Soviet period, after independence, men were often automatically prioritized over women for employment due to the widely accepted logic that men would be their families' primary breadwinners by default (Ibrahim 51). Women composed 35 percent of the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, but held only 6.8 percent of seats in the *Oily Majilis* (parliament) of independent Uzbekistan in 2000 (Ibrahim 53). A similar decline was observed in government at the local level in Uzbekistan (Ibrahim 53). Kyrgyzstan to some extent maintained a level of opportunity for women in government immediately after independence throughout the 1990s, having female members in every parliament until 2005, when elections failed to place any female candidate in the *Jogorku Kenesh* (Zakharchenko 2). The absence of women in this parliament led to lobbying efforts aimed at increasing the engagement of women in government (Ibraeva 40).

CURRENT STATUS OF QUOTAS

Quotas were reinstituted in several post-independence Central Asian republics in an attempt to increase the involvement of women in government (Najibullah). Uzbekistan reintroduced a quota in 2004 requiring that 30 percent of parliamentary candidates put forward by political parties be women (Ibrahim). This quota applied to both elections for the *Oliy Majlis*, Uzbekistan's bicameral legislature, and local elections (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance). In October 2023, Uzbekistan passed a law increasing this quota to 40% for women ("Uzbekistan Increases Women's Representation"). In 2020, Kazakhstan also instituted a 30 percent quota for women and people under the age of 29 in its *Majilis* assembly (Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan). In 2007, Kyrgyzstan also introduced a quota for its national legislature, the *Jogorku Kenesh*. Written in a gender-blind manner, it mandates that no more than 70 percent of candidates put forward on party lists are the same sex (Constitutional Law of the Kyrgyz Republic). As candidates more highly ranked on party lists typically receive more favorable positions in the legislature, it provides an additional measure attempting to equalize the order of women and men by mandating that the gap between women and men cannot be more than three places (Constitutional Law of the Kyrgyz Republic). However, this quota had an ulterior motive. In instituting it, then-President Kurmanbek Bakiyev aimed to appear more democratic and gain some support from civil society while simultaneously consolidating power (Turdalieva 9).

While attaining 30 percent representation for women on candidate lists in a region that is around 50 percent female may still underrepresent women, the quotas align with the 30 percent critical mass of women's representation in government as set by the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action in 1995 (United Nations). Tajikistan took a different, non-legislative approach to gender quotas, instead mandating that every government agency appoint at least one woman to a high-ranking position; however, this usually takes the form of a deputy head with a man in a higher position (Najibullah). Turkmenistan has no official quota system to promote gender equality in government, but the country professes "to take gender balance into consideration" (Najibullah). Before Kazakhstan

adopted formal gender quotas in 2020, it likewise had a tradition of unofficial measures to promote a gender balance: in November 2005, Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbaev signed a decree accepting the Gender Equality Strategy in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2006-2016, which declared the objective of achieving a 30 percent threshold for female representation among the heads of government organizations (Bekebayeva 140). In 2009, Alina Hamatdinova, the executive director of the Civic Alliance of Kazakhstan, an NGO promoting the development of civil society, stated that there was an "unofficial agreement" in Kazakhstan that women should be included in all realms of government (Najibullah). These different approaches to gender inclusion policies across the region have had varying effects.

EFFECTS OF QUOTAS

Legislative quotas in post-independence Central Asian republics have proved effective in increasing women's participation in government. In Uzbekistan, the percentage of women in the *Oily Majlis* doubled from 9 to 18 percent with the first election following the quota's adoption (Ibrahim, 53). In Kyrgyzstan, their numbers in the national parliament increased by over 27 percent following the 2007 elections, reflecting a record proportion of women in parliament in the country (Ibraeva 40; Turdalieva 10). Further, some female representatives explicitly cite gender quotas as allowing them to enter politics, saying that without them they would have never been elected (Najibullah). In 2019, the quotas in Kyrgyzstan were expanded to apply to the selection of candidates for local municipal council elections to address a decrease in the number of women included in local councils since 2005 (Freedom House; United Nations). Inadequate inclusion of women in lower levels of government prevents women from being able to gain political experience before rising to positions in the national government (Turdalieva 6). The Women's Caucus of the *Jogorku Kenesh* was instrumental in pushing for this quota at the local level, showing how women included in government can achieve success in advocating for legislation that furthers women's issues (United Nations Development Program). This measure, to establish quotas in local levels of government, was exceedingly effective, as 39 percent of those elected to local office in April 2021 were women whereas the previous elections yielded only 10 percent of local seats to women (Kuhns). However, the gender quota in Kazakhstan has not been as effective, with the proportion of women in parliament actually decreasing following its adoption. One explanation for this is that the quota is not specific to women, instead affording women, young people, and people with disabilities a total of 30 percent of places on candidate lists (Akayeva).

The efficacy of legislative quota systems in increasing the involvement of women has in some cases met obstacles. Legislative quotas are limited in what they can control, and female candidates in Central Asia face barriers even after gaining a place on a candidate list. While experts consider the legal frameworks in Kyrgyzstan to have the potential to provide the fulfillment of international obligations regarding gender equality, women still remain largely disadvantaged in comparison to men, suggesting a gap between policy and reality (Bekebayeva 142). For example, women who do make it onto a party's candidate list may encounter difficulties in gaining media attention. The Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) observed a generally low visibility of female candidates during the campaigns for the 2021 Kyrgyz parliamentary elections (ODIHR). The difficulty female politicians face in attracting press attention remains after election; public criticism has noted that, while women gained seats in the 2007 Kyrgyz Parliament, they were nearly invisible in news coverage, with journalists seemingly choosing to only interview and provide close-ups of male parliamentarians (GenderStan).

GAPS AND BARRIERS

Unforeseen gaps in the gender quota policies also led to discrepancies between quota goals and reality (Turdalieva 13). After the 2010 parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan, 23 percent of incumbents were women (Zakharchenko 3). However, several of the future female parliamentarians withdrew shortly after the elections and were replaced by men, leading the share of women in the parliament to drop to 21 percent (Zakharchenko 3). In addition, political parties were able to deliberately subvert the gender quota by removing women candidates from candidate lists after registration with the Central Election Commission or after the elections took place (United Nations). To address this problem, in 2019 the *Jogorku Kenesh* amended the election laws to require that the place of a retired candidate be filled by a candidate of the same gender (United Nations). However, this still remains a problem in other Central Asian republics.

While simply being elected to a legislative body allows women to be included in the decision-making process, it may not be enough to ensure their ability to contribute meaningfully to policy debates. In Kyrgyzstan, most important work done to create legislative initiatives is completed within parliamentary committees; therefore, being elected to the *Jogorku Kenesh* does not necessarily enable a female politician to forward policy concerns without also receiving committee membership. Additionally, the low positional power of female parliamentarians can be an obstacle to enacting policy goals (Zakharchenko 8). Female candidates and members of parliament may not feel accepted enough by the populace to initiate discussion around women's issues (ODIHR).

Seemingly innocuous procedures such as electoral systems may impact the gender balance of legislative assemblies. Women have been found to be disadvantaged in majoritarian elections in Kyrgyzstan, leading the ODIHR to declare in its report on the 2021 parliamentary elections that the existing gender quotas are insufficient in the face of the reintroduction of single-member districts. Earlier, shortly after then-President Kurmanbek Bakiyev signed the new constitutional amendments in 2006 stipulating a proportional representation system in the *Jogorku Kenesh*, Roza Aknazarova, a female political leader and then-head of the *El Yntymagy*, or "People's Accord" party, stated that she believed the proportional representation system would make it easier for women to get elected to parliament and had the potential to lead to adequate female representation in parliament (News Briefing Central Asia). Research suggests that Aknazarova's prediction came to pass, as the inclusion of women in the *Jogorku Kenesh* increased to a greater level after the change in the electoral system (Turdalieva 19). In 2012, when proportional representation was introduced in city councils in Kyrgyzstan, the election of women likewise increased, suggesting the effects of election methods on gender balance to be consistent across different levels of government in Kyrgyzstan (Turdalieva 13). During the 2021 Kyrgyz election cycle, after the reintroduction of single-member districts, only 6.5 percent of candidates in single-member districts were women, compared to 36 percent in elections based on proportional representation; only one woman was elected in a single-member district (ODIHR).

Changes to the structure as well as the election procedure of government bodies can also alter the gender composition. In 2021, Turkmenistan reported to the 143rd Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) that more women were elected to its legislature when its National Council became bi-cameral in 2020 (Governing Council IPU 29). In the newly-created *Halk Maslahaty*, or "People's Council," women composed 30 percent of parliamentarians, compared to only 25 percent in the pre-existing *Mejlis* assembly (Governing Council IPU 29). However, in early 2023, Turkmenistan reverted to a unicameral legislature (Nelson). In Uzbekistan, although women serve in the parliament, because the legislature

possesses largely nominal power in government, female representatives may not be able to meaningfully affect change (Saidazimova). Women in both Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, states considered to be somewhat more repressive than their other Central Asian neighbors, likewise face an obstacle in attempting to further women's issues through non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as these regimes seek to hinder the development of civil society within their borders (Bekebayeva 144).

SOCIETAL PERCEPTION OF GENDER QUOTAS

The quota system also encounters societal pushback. Some experts argue that the introduction of gender quota systems in Central Asia has built additional barriers in the struggle for female empowerment and increased the "marginalization and stigmatization" of women (Zakharchenko 2). Zurafo Rahmoni, a Tajikistan's Islamic Renaissance Party member, characterizes quotas as artificially promoting women, igniting contempt instead of respect for women who reach positions of power (Najibullah). She advocates for equal treatment of women and men so women can "emerge as leaders on their own merits" (Najibullah). A report on women in Tajikistan lamented the "disappearance" of women from political bodies in Tajikistan, but at the same time argued that the few women "who are elected have now been elected in their own right and may therefore be more effective than the cosmetically high 'quota' in the past" (xiii). After Kazakhstan's first election following its institution of gender quotas, some suggested the female politicians who were elected were chosen simply to fill the quota rather than for their political efficacy, and were therefore unlikely to be able to advance women's issues (Akayeva). Some argue that gender quota systems have actually limited opportunities available to women; Tajikistan-based women's rights activist Marhabo Davlatova notes that, in some cases, Tajik government organizations which are subject to a 30 percent quota of women in leadership positions will bar women from a vacant leadership position if they have already fulfilled the gender quota with a female deputy (Najibullah). Others go even further in their opposition to gender quotas: Toktogul Kakchekeev, then-spokesperson for the Prosecutor General's Office of the Kyrgyz Republic, asserted in 2007, before Kyrgyzstan's adoption of legislative gender quotas, that "allocating quotas to women will violate their constitutional rights" because men and women are considered equal under the Kyrgyz constitution (News Briefing Central Asia). Of course, such arguments commonly oppose measures of affirmative action across the globe.

GENDER QUOTAS AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Gender quotas in Central Asia do not do enough to include minoritized women. While quotas successfully increased the number of women in the Kyrgyz legislature, women who faced other disadvantages in addition to gender were less likely to be elected to office than men facing those same disadvantages (Zakharchenko 5). This can be observed in terms of both age and ethnicity. Young people across Central Asia feel largely excluded from politics (Zakharchenko 5). However, young women face particular pushback; in Kyrgyzstan, older generations and particularly those in rural areas view the participation of young women in politics as "culturally unacceptable" (Zakharchenko 5). To promote the further inclusion of young people in politics, the government passed a 2007 law establishing a 15 percent quota for legislative candidates under the age of 36 (Ibraeva 40). However, "the cultural barrier proved too high for many potential young female parliamentarians," who experienced a coinciding disadvantage due to both their age and gender (Zakharchenko 5). Further, women of marginalized ethnicities in Kyrgyzstan remain largely excluded from the political sphere. For example, Uzbek women, sometimes referred to as a "minority within a minority" because

of their dual oppression due to their gender and ethnicity, face even higher obstacles than Uzbek men (Frank). Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan have been reported to feel like foreigners in their own country rather than true citizens (Frank). This has led to a resurgence of strict, patriarchal adherence to traditional culture and religion among Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan, curbing the amount of career and educational opportunities afforded to women in these communities (Frank). While Uzbeks compose 14 percent of the population of Kyrgyzstan and achieved 11 percent representation in the 2005 Kyrgyz parliament, there has never been a female Uzbek member of the *Jogorku Kenesh* as of 2018 (Zakharchenko 5; Turdalieva 11). In fact, the only ethnicities represented by women in the 2007 and 2005 parliaments were Kyrgyz and Russian, and these two ethnicities have composed the majority of female members of parliament since independence (Zakharchenko 6; Turdalieva 11). In 2015, an Uzbek woman, Khulkarposho Sabirova, came close to being elected for the first time. However, she was removed from the candidate list because of suspicion that she held Russian citizenship (Turdalieva 11). As the wife of a well-established member of parliament Alisher Sabirov, her near success suggests that marginalized women may have to rely on male politicians' existing connections to achieve political pursuits (Turdalieva 11).

Along with age and ethnicity, the rural-urban divide can serve as another factor that limits certain groups of women in forwarding women's issues. In Kazakhstan, obstacles such as poor internet access and communities that are more strictly patriarchal in rural areas have created an environment where NGOs addressing women's issues are increasingly dominated by urban interests (Bekebayeva 146). In Kyrgyzstan, urban women are more likely to participate in political processes (Momaya). Rural women are more likely to fall victim to strict gender roles and patriarchal attitudes, as a lack of economic opportunities in rural Kyrgyzstan leads many women to get married early and live as housewives (Momaya). Some argue that the gap between rural and urban women has widened since Soviet times, as under Soviet rule there were more job opportunities in rural areas, and some rural women were provided with free board to pursue education in women's institutes (Momaya).

DISCRIMINATION AND BIAS

Even after securing positions in office, female government officials in Central Asia continue to face challenges due to societal discrimination on the basis of their gender. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Central Asian countries' efforts to develop national identity have negatively impacted the push for women's rights, as these movements have led to redefined cultural norms that are increasingly patriarchal, confining women to specific gender roles (Kocher). In regard to the involvement of women in politics, a 2008 experiment testing public perceptions of female politicians in Kazakhstan demonstrated that people tended to view them more negatively than men, seeing women as less competent in every policy arena (Herrick). More recently, Lyazzat Nurkatova, the Head of the Division of Socioeconomic Research at the Kazakh Institute of Social Development, cites a survey in which 38.2 percent of respondents said they believe men are more effective politicians than women, and only 3.4 percent believe "that women can succeed in political activity" (Satubaldina). In Kyrgyzstan, a United Nations Population Fund survey found that while a majority of both males and females acknowledged women's contributions to the country's politics, 64 percent saw gender differences in politicians' qualities (Turdalieva 11). Another survey in Kyrgyzstan found that 15 percent of respondents viewed women's participation in local government negatively (Turdalieva 11). In a 2016 report on gender equality in Tajikistan, the Asian Development Bank acknowledged that the stereotype of women as inferior lead-

ers persists and keeps women out of positions of power. For example, participants of a focus group in Kurgan-Tyube, Tajikistan, stated that while women could be included in decision-making on a deputy level, they should not do so in a leadership capacity (Duban). Likewise, former *Jogorku Kenesh* candidate Masuda Mambetova voiced the opinion that "Kyrgyz aren't ready to see women as political leaders" (Kuhns). Other women in politics echo this sentiment: the Democratic Party of Kyrgyz Women has a main goal of promoting the right of women to be elected, along with more general stances regarding the overall promotion of gender equality and women's issues (Bekebayeva 147).

However, in limited cases, gender stereotypes may actually benefit women in government. Alina Hamatdinova, the executive director of the Civic Alliance of Kazakhstan, stated that "there is a tendency to promote women" in state agencies because of a cultural conception that they are less corrupt than men (Najibullah). This has created a double standard, as women who do engage in corrupt behavior are likely to be shunned for illegal acts that a male political figure could likely get away with (Najibullah). This is relevant as corruption is pervasive in Central Asia, with all five republics scoring in the bottom half of 180 countries ranked for corruption in the 2022 Corruption Perception Index from Transparency International. Indeed, some cite women's unwillingness to participate in corruption as a reason why women are not elected in higher numbers. Klara Aijbekova, leader of the Party of Communists of Kyrgyzstan, when discussing the upcoming elections in 2007, stated that "the electorate will vote not for policies, but for money" and that she therefore expected the election of businessmen (News Briefing Central Asia). Indeed, aspiring female politicians in Kyrgyzstan face difficulties stemming from insufficient campaign funds at rates disproportionate to men (Momaya). Some evidence suggests that women are thought to be more effective leaders on a local level: participants of a focus group regarding women in government in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, stated that they perceived women as considering community issues more holistically than their male counterparts (Duban). Research indicates that societal obstacles to women's participation in government may be lessening. For example, a 2020 study on youth perception of women in politics indicated that the perception of female politicians had greatly improved in the preceding two decades, while some gender stereotypes are still perpetuated (Utrobina).

CONCLUSION

Overall, gender quotas in Central Asia are an effective means to promote the involvement of women in politics. While societal stigmas still surround the inclusion of women in government and politics in the region, the top-down approach of mandating gender quotas provides the opportunity for women to gain positions of power that they may not have had otherwise. Observing women succeed when wielding governmental power has the potential to increase the populace's acceptance of wider female involvement in politics in addition to fostering an atmosphere more inclusive to women interested in becoming involved in the political sphere. As *Jogorku Kenesh* member Jyrgalbubu Jusupbekova explained, a "lack of women in positions of power limits the chances of women engaging in politics" (Kuhns). Kyrgyzstan stands out from the region, having promoted diversity and equality to a greater extent than other Republics, achieving better outcomes for women in politics (Simpson). However, there is still a gap across the region between the official narratives of gender equality and the reality of still staunchly male-dominated government bodies and society. Therefore, additional means are necessary to directly address the prevailing sexism in the region and thus combat the forces that prevent women from breaking into the political sphere at the source.

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Language as Power: Hungarian Language Policy and Education in Romania

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Ever since its unification in 1918, Romania has been a multilingual and multiethnic nation. The formerly separate territories that make up the nation today were once part of different empires and home to people of a variety of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. The largest of these minority groups is the Hungarian population, mostly present in the Transylvania region (Kiss 224). The Hungarian population has engaged in a movement for national recognition of their language, but this fight especially gained traction after the fall of Nicolae Ceausescu's communist dictatorship in 1989. The Constitution of Romania, first drafted in 1991, recognizes Romanian as the sole official language of the nation (Rácz 34), inciting challenges for the Hungarian speakers of the nation in various sectors of Romanian society, namely education. This ongoing dispute highlights the role of power in language policy and politics, as Hungarian speakers must tackle substantial barriers to access the same opportunities that Romanian speakers access with ease. This article will discuss the progress of and influences behind Hungarian minority language and education rights in Romania and illustrate how power dynamics both propagate this conflict and are further implicated by it.

BACKGROUND

Under the nationalist communist dictatorship of Ceausescu between 1965 and 1989, there was almost no recognition of minority ethnicities or languages. This was an effect of the extreme Romanian nationalism promoted by the Ceausescu regime in order to build a base of mass support and strongly pushed the singular dominance of the Romanian ethnicity and language. According to scholar Tibor Toró, this period "brought the repression of minorities on [an] educational, cultural, and linguistic level" (10). In the years after the fall of Communism, Romania drafted a constitution and underwent a significant democratization process. The 1991 Constitution expressly guaranteed minority rights in "the field of education, culture and religion" (Dragoman 130). Yet, Romanian was still the only officially recognized national language, hindering the Hungarian population from accessing the equal rights they sought.

INEQUALITIES IN IMPLEMENTATION AND EDUCATION

The first change to education rights for national minorities came in 1995 with the Act of Education that "acknowledged the use of Hungarian and other minority languages in

primary, secondary and university education" but also "stated the obligation for disciplines [such] as history or geography to be taught only in Romanian" (Dragoman 130). This provision was a simple acknowledgement that failed to address the actual inequalities faced by Hungarian students such as a lack of adequate learning materials, while also continuing to enforce the dominance of the Romanian language. In 1999, the Parliament revised the 1995 Act of Education and made more specific stipulations about teaching in minority languages. One of these revisions allowed minority groups to request, based on local need, the establishment of classes in the minority language instead of in Romanian and without favor given to the teaching of Romanian (Constantin 6). Despite how this revision represented some level of official inclusion of Hungarian on Romania's part, local authorities' lack of compliance and the overall inertia of politicians and enforcement authorities rendered this change ineffective.

After 1995, the Hungarian community became much more politically active, with the ethnic Hungarian party in Romania, Uniunea Democrată a Maghiarilor din România (UDMR), joining a political coalition against the dominant Social Democratic Party, giving UDMR significantly more political influence than before, and allowing the party to be a voice for the Hungarian minority as Romania was continuing along a path of democratization in the wake of the collapse of communism (Dragoman 133). Due to the UDMR's favorable place in the parliaments of the early 2000s, the party was able to successfully advocate for the expansion of minority rights. Author Dragoș Dragoman states that during this time, "Not only were the very restrictive legal provisions in teaching history and geography lifted, but the use of minority languages was accepted at all educational levels, from primary school to the university level…" (Dragoman 133-134). The political advantage of UDMR allowed the party to put pressure on the Romanian government to expand Hungarian language rights and remove restrictions still in place from the previously implemented 1995 Act of Education. These developments were a step towards better representation in education for the Hungarian minority as their right to learn in their mother tongue was extended to all levels of education, thus removing the stipulation requiring certain classes to be taught exclusively in Romanian. Each of these steps points to an overall, seemingly positive trend for the progress of Hungarian language rights; however, deep, structural inequalities remain in the actual implementation of these policies.

When taken at face value, these policies seem to indicate a positive trend in the expansion of Hungarian language rights in Romania; but analyzing the actuality of their implementation and enforcement more accurately indicates the true extent of resultant progress. A lack of guidelines and accountability mechanisms for the enforcing authorities weakened many of these policies (Toró 6). For example, in education, the 1999 revision of the 1995 Act of Education that aimed to improve conditions for education in Hungarian schools placed the burden of request on those within the communities and relied on only the local resources available. So, when officials did not comply with the law, they blame a lack of resources and do not attempt implementation (Csata and Marácz 542). Lack of bureaucratic pressure and little weight behind the basic words of the law fostered an environment where symbolic statements and empty promises were all that were offered. Today, these issues still remain as progress for Hungarian language rights has slowed, and the procedural ineffectiveness has yet to be solved.

Further exemplifying the chasm between these policies and their realities are the promises to provide access to Hungarian educational items such as textbooks. Indeed, it is hard to deliver on this guarantee. The Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities noted in a 2002 Romanian State Report that despite the stipulations of the law, there is a lack of Hungarian textbooks and teachers who can teach students in Hungarian-majority schools, often referred to as "Hungarian schools" (Constantin 8). Further, the resources provided to Hungarian classrooms tend to be of far lesser quality than those given to Romanian classrooms. The vast

difference in quality is in part a result of the fact that Romanian remains the default language of education. Hungarian speakers who did their training only in Romanian are the ones translating Romanian language textbooks for use by Hungarian students and are unaware of the specific terms of their profession in Hungarian. For vocational studies in Hungarian areas, "textbooks with very poor translations and inconsistent terminology in all specialties" are the only ones available, a problem that still persists today (Kiss 243-244). As a result of the lack of quality Hungarian resources, Hungarian parents may send their children to Romanian schools so that they have a better chance of quality education (Kuiken and van der Linden 10). The inadequate implementation of these supposed guarantees of access to Hungarian language education contributes to continuing proliferation of the systemic inequality between the two languages, even if the laws seem to indicate otherwise. In 2019 scholar Toró noted that "dominant Romanian language practices are protected through procedural shortcomings, while voluntary minority language use is not forbidden" (23). Toró's distinction is a crucial consideration underlying each policy relating to Hungarian language rights and the distinction between Romanian and Hungarian education within Romania. Even with a supposed promise of equality of education for both languages, there are systemic failures that are still present that are maintaining the dominance and power of the Romanian language.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF BROADER POWER DYNAMICS

The element of power in this conflict is an extremely important consideration yet is often underlooked because of its covert role. In the realm of the education system itself, power has significant implications, since schools are the primary space in which young people are socialized. Additionally, Laihonen and Tódor describe in their 2012-2013 ethnographic study of elementary school students in a Hungarian village in the Szeklerland region of Romania, "...the schoolscape was clearly shaping children's conceptions of what it means to be… a Hungarian speaker and, at the same time, a citizen of Romania" (20). Not only do schools teach students important life skills, they also actively shape their conception of their national identity. These underfunded Hungarian schools shape the way Hungarian students view their role in Romania and how their nation views them. To graduate, all students in Romania must pass exams that test various aspects of their educational skills. These exams test not only their Romanian language skills, but their knowledge of aspects of the dominant Romanian culture. An education in Romanian culture will come much more naturally to the students learning in the Romanian language who are naturally exposed to the culture surrounding the language. Students in Hungarian schools may currently have the opportunity to learn in their first language, but still must focus on developing a strong understanding of the majority culture to complete their schooling, a much more daunting task considering the insular nature of the Hungarian schooling system. The dominance of the Romanian language and culture is continually reinforced by allowing Hungarian students to learn in Hungarian without consideration given for the knowledge of Romanian language and culture they are required to demonstrate. For the exam on literature and language, "test takers need to be able to conduct literary criticism and have detailed knowledge of the periods, genres, canonical authors of Romanian literature and their works" (Rácz 37). Thus, the access to Hungarian-language education does not eliminate the need for comprehensive Romanian knowledge upon graduation.

Even once their secondary-level schooling is over, Hungarian students must also possess advanced knowledge of the Romanian language to take their next steps in life. Hungarian communities in Romania do not regularly speak Romanian in daily conversation, much preferring to use Hungarian for everyday communication (Kiss 250). Despite living within Romania, Romanian is effectively a foreign language for those living within Hungarian communities, and thus should be taught as such in order to ensure proficiency. However, the methodology for

Romanian language education for Hungarian-speaking students focuses on literature and prose, despite these students having extremely limited experience with the Romanian language in general. (Kiss 253).This approach does not teach them the practical, everyday language skills they need to communicate effectively, thus greatly limiting their ability to move into higher education and succeed in the labor market, as well-paying jobs almost always require a strong proficiency in Romanian. Because Romanian is the official state language, provisions to teach it as a second language to students within the nation do not exist (Kiss 253). To combat the inequality in educational and job prospects, Hungarian students should be educated in the Romanian language with respect to their lack of familiarity.

Overarchingly, improving these major disparities in the Romanian education system necessitates the allocation of more resources to ensure that Hungarian-schools can more effectively teach the Hungarian students the Romanian language in a manner that fits their specific language needs. Their needs for proper Romanian-language education must be acknowledged and upheld to aid Hungarian-speakers in their steps towards a career. Romanian students exit their schooling ready to pursue an advanced degree or enter the workforce without needing to take any additional steps while Hungarian students must ensure their Romanian language skills are adequate enough to find entry and success in these areas. All of these factors lead to what scholars Csata and Marácz in their 2016 article call "asymmetric bilingualism" where native Hungarian speakers must also know how to speak Romanian but native Romanian speakers have no reason to speak Hungarian (540). Native Hungarian speakers find it absolutely necessary to learn Romanian but native Romanian speakers do not need to learn Hungarian. Hungarian speakers need Romanian to survive as every single system in Romania is set up with Romanian as the dominant and official language. Once again, Romanian and Hungarian education and access are not equal, and Hungarian students face a significant disadvantage from the moment they enter the school system, and must continue to face the power of the Romanian language as they reach for any success in broader society.

CONCLUSION

Minority language rights in Romania have been and will continue to be an issue with a profound impact on the quality of life of Hungarians in Romania. Hungarian students in Romania will continue to face systemic inequalities in the education system that is meant to prepare them for success in their post-graduate lives. As evidenced here, language policy is nothing without robust implementation measures and decisive enforcement by bureaucratic and political officials. Without these measures in place, language hierarchies will prevail, and minority-language speakers will be left behind, in spite of laws that proclaim contrary realities. The domination of the Romanian language is an unavoidable reality for Hungarian speakers in Romania. Its status as the official language makes it the institutional language as well. This means that not only do Hungarian speakers need to have proficiency in the language to progress in their education and career goals, but also to simply access public institutions and services. A lack of knowledge in Romanian makes it much more difficult to access any public services offered, as all documentation and proceedings at all levels are conducted in Romanian (Toró 11). Without sufficient Romanian knowledge, Hungarian speakers are subject to significant inequality in seeking resources from local services, and are often hindered in their quest for any sort of assistance. Hungarian speakers face both a lack of quality education in their native language and ineffective Romanian language education due to the neglect of their minority language as a result of the dominant status of the Romanian language and the power that it holds within broader Romanian society. At all levels, Hungarian speakers face disadvantages, and will continue to unless the language policy environment of Romania is improved to better educate, support, and accommodate the Hungarian speaking population.

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Strategic Power-Sharing and Compromises: Political Lessons from Poland's 1989 Transition

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The Polish Round Table Talks represent one of the first peaceful transitions from a communist regime to democracy in the Eastern Bloc. The talks were significant as a breakthrough political event resulting in the collapse of communism. Understanding the strategic choices and compromises made during this event provides a model for peaceful regime change and highlights the dynamics of political negotiations between authoritarian regimes and opposition forces. Using a qualitative case study approach, we addressed the question: *How did the Polish Communist Party's strategies and compromises during the Round Table Talks of 1989 facilitate a peaceful transition to democracy?*

By 1989, Poland's Communist Party, or the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), was facing a debilitating combination of economic crises, declining living standards, and dwindling legitimacy among the people of Poland. Public dissatisfaction and a loss in confidence with the regime was dramatic at this time (Figure 1) (Hayden 409). The Solidarity movement, a labor union led by Lech Wałęsa established in 1981, quickly became a powerful symbol of opposition to the Communist status quo and gained widespread support among Polish citizens. Additionally, Soviet Union leader Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) signaled a shift away from the hardline suppression of dissent in Eastern Europe, provided Polish opposition possibilities for dialogue and more room to maneuver while placing pressure on the Polish Communist party (Matynia 457).

Between February 6th and April 5th, 1989, round-table discussions took place in Warsaw between the ruling communists and the Solidarity opposition movement to bridge their differences and find a path out of the ongoing economic decline and social instability. The discussions involved 452 participants and focused on the political system, economic reform, and societal transformation of cultural norms and media freedom. The largest delegations represented the government and Solidarity (Bozoki 242).

The mounting pressures on the Communist Party made it increasingly clear that it could not maintain control through its previous tactics of repression. The Party's decision to participate in the Round Table was a seemingly calculated strategy of co-optation (giving power to opposition groups in order to maintain stability within elite circles). "The round table talks would allow the PZPR to shape the tran-

sition process and hopefully avoid the potential violence that would most likely accompany a revolutionary overthrow" while maintaining a power hold (Kozlowski).

CASE SELECTION

This case was selected due to its unique historical context and its academic relevance to the broader study of democratization and regime transitions (Codogni and Wo Galij-Skarbińska). Many authoritarian regimes in the Eastern Bloc, including neighboring Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and Romania, collapsed through violent revolutions, protests, or military coups. Yet Poland's transition showed that compromise could enable a peaceful shift to democracy. Furthermore, Poland's transition is a strong example of how a negotiated or "pacted" transition, along with dialogue and negotiation, can prevent bloodshed or immediate overthrow (Kauffman 2010).

As an academic case study, Solidarity was unique in its size, organization, and public support. This allows political scientists to study the dynamics between a powerful opposition and an entrenched authoritarian regime. Unique to this case was that the opposition was not a fragmented group, but a well-organized movement with mass appeal. It also highlights strategic risks and concessions the authoritarian regime made in the face of strong opposition, and how opposition movements can influence the regime to bring them to the negotiating table

(O'Donnell and Schmitter 40). The case also illustrates how the ruling Communist party miscalculated and misjudged the level of support before the 1989 election. In short, analyzing the Round Table Talks helps us understand why some regimes choose to negotiate their decline rather than resist it, which has implications for predicting behavior in other authoritarian settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW: MODES OF DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

The rapid transitions from authoritarian regimes to democracies in Eastern Europe in 1989 demonstrate several modes of democratization. Political scientists offer a range of frameworks for understanding these transitions, with varying emphases on the roles of elites, society, and how external factors shape these transitions. The purpose of this limited review is to understand how the Round Table Talks fit within the range of transition frameworks in Europe in the late 1980s.

Stradiotto and Guo *et al.* classify the transitions in Eastern Europe into three categories: revolution, regime-initiated transitions, and society-initiated transitions (7). Revolutionary transitions or "collapse" involve an overthrow of an authoritarian regime. The Romanian Revolution in December of 1989 is one of the clearest examples. Huntington defines revolutionary transitions as rare, often marked by the decisive removal of an old order (114). He notes that the abrupt nature of the transition can complicate the establishment of future stable democratic institutions, as seen in Romania's initial struggles with political corruption and weak governance.

Regime-initiated transitions (conversion), occur when the reformist elites in power take the lead in democratization and the government is stronger than the opposition (Stradiotto and Guo 14). It is the old regime elites who determine the establishment of electoral rules to favor their party which will influence the founding elections. As a result, ancient regime elites successfully retained their monopoly of resources in the transition phase, in hope of maintaining power and stability (Sutter 69). Hungary's transition in 1989 serves as a clear example, where communist leaders initiated reforms, culminating in peaceful, multi-party elections.

Society-initiated (cooperative) transitions are the result of joint action by the regime and the opposition groups using "negotiated transition" or "compromise" (Stradiotto and Guo 8).

Przeworski's work on democratization also emphasizes the role of strategic compromises in achieving peaceful transitions, noting that successful cases often involve mutual concessions that address the interests of both ruling elites and the opposition (87). In Poland, the Communist Party's willingness to allow partially free elections and to legalize Solidarity was critical in setting the stage for a peaceful transition. These compromises reassured the opposition

that genuine democratic reforms were possible while allowing the regime to avoid a complete collapse.

Another important framework is the concept of "pacted transitions," developed by O'Donnell and Schmitter. This approach focuses on elite negotiations and agreements that the opposition comes into power in exchange for guarantees that protect the political and economic interests of the outgoing leaders and elites (O'Donnell and Schmitter 43). O'Donnell and Schmitter argue that negotiated transitions are more likely to be peaceful because they provide a structured mechanism for elites and opposition groups to negotiate terms, reducing the risk of violent outcomes or instability (44). The Polish Round Table Talks represent a classic case of pacted transition. Both the Communist Party and the opposition (Solidarity) had vested interests in avoiding conflict and maintaining some degree of order during the transition. Additionally, it is noted that the talks allowed the ruling party to retain some influence in the short term, which reduced fears of reprisals and made them more willing to concede to democratic reforms (Przeworski 59).

Eastern Europe's 1989 transitions were also the result of external forces. The Soviet Union's declining influence under Mikhail Gorbachev created an environment open to democratization in the Eastern Bloc (Matynia 457). Gorbacehv's policies signaled a shift away from the Brezhnev Doctrine, which had previously justified Soviet intervention in socialist states. Gorbachev made it clear that Moscow would not use force to maintain communist rule, emboldening opposition movements and demands for reform across the region (Paluski 102).

Understanding Poland's transition within the above frameworks and transitions reveals how historical conditions and elite negotiations shaped its path to democracy. While opposition groups frequently push for inclusive democratic institutions, incumbents with power advantages often shape electoral rules to preserve influence. These dynamics underscore the importance of examining both structural conditions and the strategic choices of political actors in the democratization transition process.

STRATEGIES, POWER-SHARING AND COMPROMISES

When looking at the Eastern Bloc countries and their transitions to democracy, Poland has the distinction of being one of the most peaceful. The Polish Communist Party employed several strategies during the Round Table Talks to manage the transition. Some of the most important strategies and compromises included: power sharing, co-optation and compromise, elite bargaining, and authoritarian elections.

The Polish People's Republic was established in 1952 with the dominant party being the Polish United Workers Party (PZPR), lacking elements of personalism or a cult of personality. This was extremely important as the Polish people did not have a central figure to rally behind. Like many other Communist dominant party dictatorships at this time, elections were held in the Polish People's Republic every five years. Unfortunately, these elections lacked legitimacy as the PZPR received an overwhelming majority every election, yet the people were largely unenthusiastic about the party near the end. The other major parties at the time included the Democratic Party and the United People's Party. As a form of co-optation, these three parties formed a coalition called the National Unity Front in 1956, later replaced in 1983 under the new name of Patriotic Movement for National Rebirth. Only parties under this umbrella were allowed on the ballot (Staar pg 379). (Figure 2)

In 1988, the first wave of worker strikes erupted. The Communist Party soon realized that they had to acknowledge and speak to the trade union (which subsequently became the Solidarity Party), resulting in the idea for the Round Table Talks (Codogni 104). As part of the Round Table negotiations, the Communist Party agreed to legalize Solidarity, which had been banned after the acceptance of martial law in 1981. These early events enabled the Solidarity party to gain mainstream and legal support, making them a legitimate political opposition. The PZPR also agreed to permit small-scale press freedom, facilitating an inde-

pendent media which promoted the ideas of Solidarity. These expanded political freedoms were significant in a society tightly controlled by the State, demonstrating the critical importance of compromise and even co-optation.

Yet it is also important to note that to jumpstart the process of the talks, the government attempted to co-opt the opposition to maintain stability within the country. Once granted room to maneuver, however, it was evident there were issues with the opposition movement. The solidarity movement was said to be for the people, or lower-class workers, yet "the most important decisions were not made during the plenary negotiations or discussions at so-called sub-tables, but during secret talks between selected people" during the Round Tables (Polak and Galij-Skarbińska 6). Polak and Galij-Skarbińska even go so far as to say that "the agreement itself was a form of 'a covenant between elites' (as described by Jacek Kuroń) to obtain financial and political benefits" (6). Although the Communist government agreed to negotiate with the opposition movement, they were strategic about who could be included in the Round Table Talks. A prime example of power sharing between elites, although it was between parties.

At the end of the first round of negotiations, the PZPR "agreed to hold free elections in the Polish Senate and partially free elections in the parliament's lower house – the Sejm" (Codogni 126). Solidarity was allowed to contest a significant number of seats in the Sejm, totaling 35%, while the Communist Party and its allies reserved the other 65% of the overall seats. This compromise aimed at maintaining a degree of control while making room for democratic participation. The upper house (Senate), however, was fully open to free elections, giving Solidarity a chance to gain significant influence if they could win the popular vote (Codogni 126). These are examples of the theoretical components of compromise while still upholding an authoritarian election (an election that is neither fully free nor fair). Clearly, as in prior Polish elections, Jaruzelski, the head of the Polish Communist Party, believed that they would win (Pakulski 105).

When the elections took place two months later, they went through two rounds. In the first round a candidate needed to get 50% of the votes to be in office, and if the 50% was not obtained, the most popular candidates would have a second round of voting (Codogni 127). Although these authoritarian elections were supposed to ensure a win for the Communists, they led to a surprise for both parties: an overwhelming majority for the Solidarity movement and a transition to democracy (Figure 3) (Pakulski 107).

The big question for Poland in 1989 in the aftermath of the election was, "will the Communists respect these results?" and miraculously, they did (Pakulski 107). Pakulski proposes that the main reasons for the smooth transition was the Catholic Church's backing of Solidarity, an undeniable and overwhelming Solidarity victory, a need for stability in the country, and their

closest ally Hungary quickly following the Polish model of transition (108). The most likely case for this similarity in transition is the snowballing or domino effect, which is "strongest among countries that are geographically close and culturally similar" (Erdogan 119). Moreover, looking at historical trends of autocratization and democratization, we can speculate as to different outcomes, emphasizing the significance of when and how Poland transitioned to a democracy. The need for a peaceful turnover of power seemed inevitable.

Yet, why did the Communists give up their power so easily? Many regimes that were less stable than Poland refused to transition power smoothly or even at all. If Poland had not transitioned peacefully, would the rest of the Eastern Bloc have followed suit?

The consequences of a prolonged Communist rule in Poland would have been significant for the rest of Eastern Europe. Without Poland's peaceful transition setting an example, the domino effect of 1989 might have been disrupted. Other communist regimes, particularly in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, could have hesitated to negotiate with opposition forces, fearing the risks of reform. The fall of the Berlin Wall, which was heavily influenced by the

Polish and Hungarian transitions, might have been delayed or even prevented if Poland had remained under authoritarian control.

It is unlikely that Poland's Communist regime could have held on indefinitely. The economic crisis, public discontent, and changing global dynamics would have continued to weaken the regime. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 would have removed external support, making the eventual transition to democracy almost unavoidable. However, a delayed transition could have been far more turbulent or even violent, as opposition movements might have resorted to more radical methods to force change.

Ultimately, while Poland's transition in 1989 was not inevitable, its eventual shift away from Communism seemed likely. The key question is not whether change would have occurred, but rather how—and at what cost to Poland. If Poland had remained under Communist rule into the 1990s, it could have significantly altered the timeline of democratization across Eastern Europe, reshaping the trajectory of post-Cold War Europe in ways that are difficult to predict.

CONCLUSION

An examination of the Polish 1989 Round Table Talks provides insight into the broader forces driving post-Cold War democratization. However, one could argue that placing too much emphasis on the Talks as the defining transitional moment risks overlooking deeper structural factors. As Hayden and Kaminski have noted, the 1989 Talks were not meticulously planned. Both authors emphasize the unpredictable and provisional nature of the Round Table Talks, which were shaped by elite miscalculations, economic pressures, and shifting geopolitical realities. While the outcomes of the Talks did not emerge as the ruling party PZPR had intended, much of Communist rule had already eroded prior to negotiations. The PZPR did not enter the Round Table Talks as a ruling party firmly in control of events but rather as a regime already at the end of its reign–in ideological, political, and economic retreat. Although the negotiations may have accelerated the process, I argue that they were not the primary cause of the transition.

If we look beyond just the Round Table Talks themselves, we see a long journey of Polish resistance that suggests that Communist rule was unsustainable. Historian Garton Ash emphasizes that years of worker strikes, underground activism, and a growing political consciousness had eroded state authority before negotiations even began (Garton Ash 360). Even within the PZPR, figures like Jaruzelski and Kiszczak were seeking to negotiate a controlled exit from the system rather than hoping to preserve Communism indefinitely; they recognized the end was near (Hayden 408). Furthermore, by the late 1980s many within PZRP had already lost faith in their ideology and believed that the old system was no longer viable (Curry 204). An often-overlooked detail is the low voter turnout in the June elections, where only 62% of eligible Poles cast ballots. The Polish people by that point were so disillusioned with politics that they viewed voting as pointless. As Porter notes, "apathy and disillusionment may have been more widespread than support for either Wałęsa or Jaruzelski" (467). Thus the Round Table Talks were not merely a negotiation between two rival political parties, but rather a moment when one side had already lost faith in itself, while the opposition pushed for changes which made Communist rule unsustainable. The Talks determined the speed and mechanics of the transition, but the fate of Communist rule had been sealed long before.

While Hayden and Paluski emphasize the PZPR's miscalculation at the Round Table Talks as an underestimation of the results of the 1989 election, the fall of Polish Communism in 1989 wasn't simply the result of an unexpected electoral outcome or a strategic miscalculation. Even if the PZRP had a better strategy for the elections or had delayed the negotiations, the larger societal forces could not be reversed. By the late 1980s, an economy in freefall, the rise of an organized resistance, and declining faith in the Communist ideology had already sealed the regime's fate. The Round Table Talks were not the cause of Poland's transition; rather a final act in a long decline in the Polish ruling establishment.

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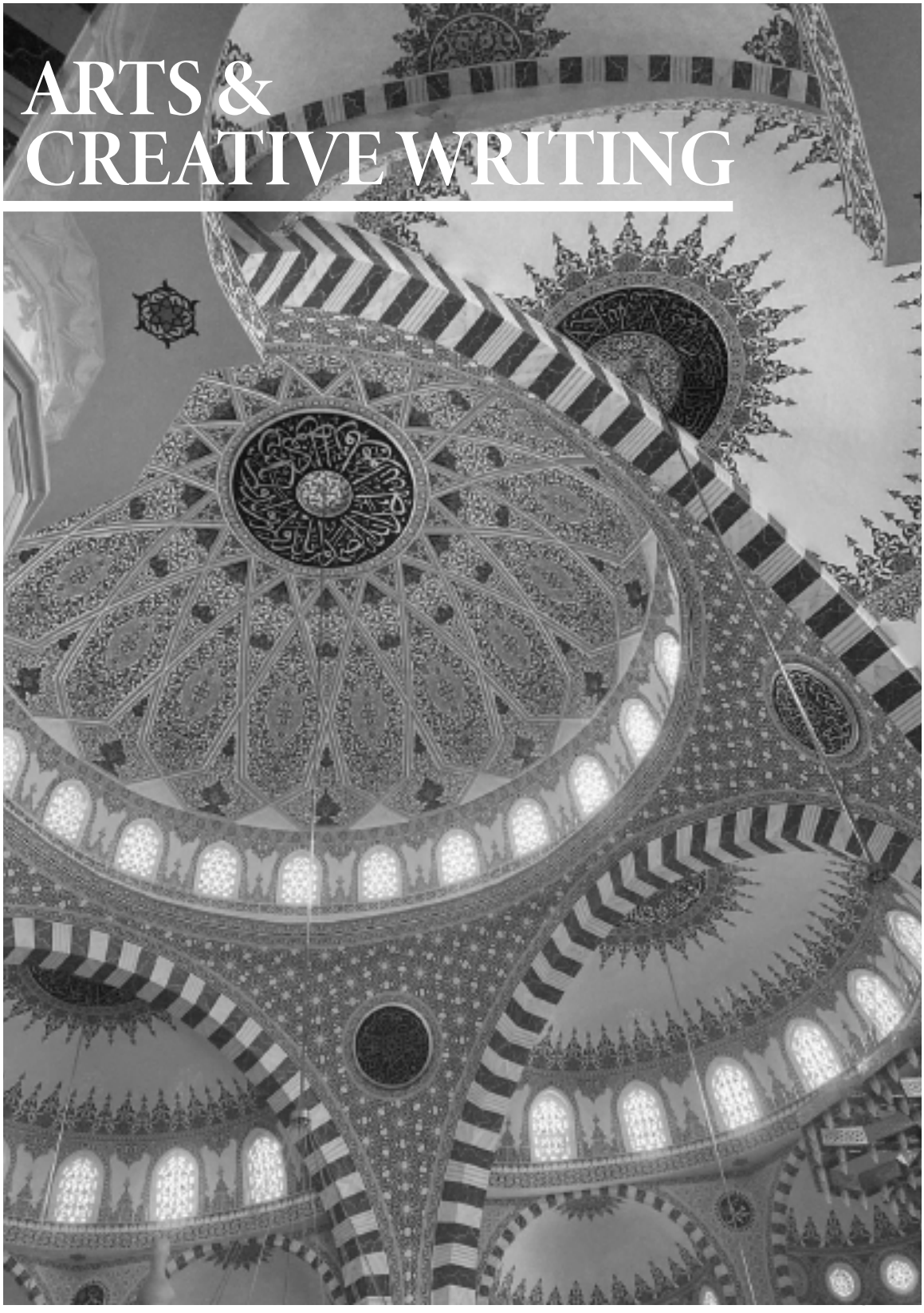
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ARTS & CREATIVE WRITING



Reading Bygone Time in Lermontov's "Нет, не тебя так пылко я люблю"

Ava Young-Stoner, Columbia University

Нет, не тебя так пылко я люблю,
Не для меня красы твоей блистанье:
Люблю в тебе я прошлое страданье
И молодость погибшую мою.

Когда порой я на тебя смотрю,
В твои глаза вникая долгим взором,
Таинственным я занят разговором,
Но не с тобой я сердцем говорю.

Я говорю с подругой юных дней,
В твоих чертах ищу черты другие,
В устах живых — уста давно немые,
В глазах — огонь угаснувших очей.

No, it's not you I love so fervently,
The glow of your beauty is not for me:
I love in you the bygone suffering
And my stolen youth.

At times when I look at you,
Delving into your eyes with a long gaze,
I'm taken with a mysterious conversation,
But I am not speaking to you with my heart.

I'm speaking with a friend from younger days,
In your features I search for other features,
In the lips of the living – lips long silent,
In eyes – the fire of extinguished sight.

Lermontov, 1841

On Animals On Men

Nini Sikharulidze, Harvard University

SANATORIA[1]

for Malcolm Lintons[2]

There is a "Georgian dog sold on a coupon,"[3]
White-pached Sanatoria,
for Shartava, with right knee-cadaveric-spasming,
perked up for death, cold is the pavement of Abkhazia,

Separatists
[Russians]

gnashing, sharp-washing,
carnivorizing, their clinical schizophrenia
for pregnant women's gouging bellies, their feminized
scent accentuate, alive fire,
Gluttonizing
ethnic-bending,

my futile dystocia, this skin-phagia, I am the
inscribe: self-desecrate,
for skinned minors' gourmandized
meating, them salivating,

Primal-grotesquing for
unpeeled mandarins[4]

1. Reference to a Georgian poem written by Galaktioni, where a white sanatorium is depicted as an identifier of Abkhazia.
2. Malcolm Linton is a British-American photographer known for his images of conflict and humanitarian crises. In Tbilisi, there is a Malcolm Linton's gallery where Shartava's body was identified among the piles of corpses on the photograph.
3. In one of his letters, the Russian journalist Mikhail Aidionov, an eyewitness of the tragedy in Abkhazia, remembers horrific violations against Georgian children: "In Akhaldaba, they skinned a child and wrote on the flesh: "Georgian dog is sold on a coupon" (currency unit of Georgia at that time). Supreme Council of Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia. 4 Zhiuli Shartava (1944 – 1993) was a Georgian politician and who served as the Head of the Government of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and was killed by Abkhaz militants during the ethnic cleansing of Georgians in Abkhazia in 1993. 5 Occupiers and separatists treated women with special cruelty, including pregnant women. Rape (including collective), cutting off the breasts and other parts of the body, gouging out the eyes, ripping open the belly of pregnant women, and finally being burned alive or shot was the fate of the majority of women who fell into the hands of the perpetrators. Supreme Council of Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia.
4. A reference to Tangerines (2013), a Georgian-Estonian movie dedicated to the 1992 conflict in Abkhazia.7In September 1992, the villager, Giorgi Abramishvili, was killed in Bzif, where he was cut into pieces that were marinated and packed in his shoes and sent to his wife. Supreme Council of Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia.

grave-waxing, genocidal tickling,
electric-pole-head-hanging,
for Abramishvili, marinate-cannibalized
electric-current-jolting corpse-mania,

my body
into jaundice

I, this skin on itching, on bleaching,
on peeling, I am bought with
this – galvanist, craven of teething
the barbed wire,

And decades later, as a dog,
Georgian, on sale,
I wake the border for a skin itched –
my knee cap front plate,

alive corpsing
blistering, blistering,
blistering for Abkhazia

And my hearty,
lengthy, frothy
cannibalized licking-wire,
my tongue, my bad, bad tongue in
jargon.

WHEN ASKED IF I WILL VISIT ABKHAZIA WITH MY AMERICAN PASSPORT

The dead can best answer
define, what it means to
allow oneself
freedom for

forthcoming
succumbing, becoming
last sonic breath of

soon
to
be
pronounced
no-body,

for a piece of land,
or a severed father's grave

Pray one day, for

no buried body left on enemy's side

But a rising up,
aerodynamic soar

an elbow-up, mandible-perked
dance towards, forwards, homewards
to black, Black Sea
Mraval-zhamier[1]
they:

Zauri Todua
Nugzar Gvritishvili
Teimuraz Tchitadze
Zviad Datuashvili
Giorgi Ghvindjilia
Zviad Barbaqadze
Albert Balkhamishvili
Nodar Devnozashvili
Giorgi Nanuashvili
Badri Basiladze
Samson
Gurchiani Shalva
Trapaidze Temur
Fichkhia
Vitali Takaidze
Mamuka Berukashvili
Shota Khurtsidze
Aslan Shainadze
Tamaz Nikitini
Mamia Fantsulaia

1. Georgian folk song, with dozens of different versions around the country. The Mravalzhamieri's Kakhetian adaptation is inscribed in the Intangible Heritage of Georgia since 2013. The title translates to "[may you live] a long life".

Levan Tefania
Ednar Diasamidze
Dimitri Djailova
Temur Bokuchava
Mamuka Samakashvili
Amiran Shainidze
Malkhaz Abashidze
Zurab Balashvili
Mikheil Dvalishvili
Teimuraz Beridze
Ilia Sheklashvili
Fridon Turmanidze V
azha Shainidze
Anzor Geldiashvili
Levan Kokhreidze
Aleksandre Oniani
Ruslan Tsuladze
Nikoloz Forchkhidze
Shmagi Kupatadze
Zviad Katsadze
Ilia Gabunia
Irakli Djanelidze
Marlen Baramia
Levan Melqadze
Leri Lagurashvili
Levan Mandzulashvili
Emzar Tsilosani
Feliqs Kakauridze
Romani Zoidze
Kakha Koshadze
Valeri Gognadze
Zurab Efadze
Giorgi Tatuashvili
Malkhaz Giguashvili
Avtandil Qamashidze
Koba Kharchilava
Artem
Balakhashvili
Merab Tutisani
Valeri T
sitsiqishvili Giga
Gogorishvili Vasili
Smirnovi
Paata Kopaliani
Fridon Bregadze
Merab Akhobadze
Koba Sergia
Giorgi Kirakozashvili
Shalva Dolidze
Filipe Mgaloblishvili
Ilya Babutsidze
Giorgi Nadareishvili
Alia Bardavelidze
Levan Devdariani
Irakli Bazadze
Zaur Tenieshvili
Avedik Lomidze
Nika Kalabegishvili
Davit Dvalishvili
Saba Dadvani
Murtaz Iremadze
Vakhtang
Gzirishvili
David Dvalishvili
Onise Doijashvili
Raul Khavanadze
Devi Chaduneli
Gogita Karchava
Zaur Makharashvili
Koba Tsurtsumia
Giorgi Javakhishvili
Soso Ghviniashvili
Giorgi Berikashvili
Vladimir Davitashvili
Levan Iosebidze
Rezo Akhalkatsi
Zurab Abramishvili
Zaza Feradze
Ushangi Sofromadze
Gela Tchedia
Merab Tchelidze
Giorgi Ghviniashvili
Amiran Mamaladze
Jimsher Toroshelidze
Giorgi Muradashvili
Zaza Akhalkatsi
Davit Elizbarashvili
Archil Berianidze
Giorgi Badriashvili
Tamaz Meliqidze
Ivane Kvaliashvili
Vasil Gandjelashvili
Giorgi Romelashvili
Zaza Dotiashvili
Djimsher Kurdrelashvili
Giorgi Mamukashvili
Zaqaria Kvirikasvhili
Elgudja Inauri
Zurab Urigashvili
Ioseb Mekhaturishvili
Mzetchabuk Mitchitashvili
Ramaz Erashvili
Gizo Tsulaia
Ivane Elikashvili
Gogita Makrakhidze
Otar Qareli
Mikheil Tsertsvadze
Giorgi Shanaidze
Omar Aslanidze
Kakhaber Tavgorashvili
Amiran Razmadze
Data Khurtsilava
Goga Tchitanava
Otar Kokaleishvili
Shalva Gabunia
Goga Beraia
Mikheil Iosava
Levani Tchotchua
Irakli Morbedadze
Zaza Botchoidze
Davit Bliadze
Tariel Qamashidze
Rezo Mamisashvili
Giorgi Tsiqarishvili
Tengiz Tchaghalidze
Zaza Glunchadze
Erekle Kuloshvili
Aleksandre Tandashvili
Sergei Gorozia
Levani Midelashvili
Zurab Begiashvili
Giorgi Antsukhelidze
Giorgi Qatamadze
Sergo Melia
Gela Mebaghishvili
Ioseb Bejuasjvili
Zurab Natchyebia
Kakhaber Khubuluri
Roman Ugrekhelidze
Oleg Tchonishvili
Gela Romelashvili
Badri Berandze
Giorgi Djodjua
Gocha Danelia
Aleqsi Natroshvili
Shmagi
Khaikashvili Gela
Tigishvili
Vefkhvia Djishkariani
Giorgi Romelashvili
Zaza Birtvelishvili
Rezo Alaverdashvili
Zurab Turashvili
Shmagi Nozadze Otar
Sukhitashvili Paata
Kardava
…[2]

2. The following lists the names of 170 Georgian soldiers who fought and passed during the 2008 Russia's war in Georgia. According to IDFI, this is only a fraction of 1045 military personnel who sacrificed their lives. IDFI

HYSTERIA

I should sell it door by door my
mind – an occupied country

Watch how it grits its teeth
against warm homes, with
warm carpets made by warm
pairs of hands, bleakening

piloerecting, threat-posturing,
territorizing, terrorizing.

its gaze nibbling on home
cooked meals, growling at each
spoon-full in someone else's mouth

subduing, regurgitating the killed,
meat-tearing, canines gripping,
incapacitating

of bone calcium rotting
against slurping lips
with dust icing overdue.

smell-shearing,
instinctualizing, feralizing,
fetishizing, fantasizing,
of meat string stuck
between incisors

My mind –
how it falls to its knees
in ravaging famish, how
it tears up warm carpets
with its own warm
pair of bicuspids

the textiles quenching
in its nippy gauging throat.

Why I Don't Know the Word for Uncle: The Life and Death of the Croatian Diaspora in Western Montana

Will Carraway, Emory University

Death does strange things. I met my grandfather multiple times, yet I can't picture his face in person. His passing weeks before my second birthday reduced every memory I have of him to a story or photograph of me sitting on his lap. My mother tells me from time to time that he and I weren't so different: soft-spoken, well-mannered, ever appreciative of a nice scarf. I can often sense her sadness when she sees him in me.

The majority of my family's Croatian cultural traditions were rooted in the memories of the elder members, and thus, my grandfather's death marked a transition. The family lost a significant connection to the "old country" and it was suddenly the responsibility of the younger members to uphold our bonds to a culture from which we were now separated by both space and time. Thus, any connections to my ethnically and culturally Croatian past are directly a result of what my family has chosen to keep, and what has been left or unintentionally forgotten. So, upon recently encountering and exploring in depth the idea of Heimat—a complex concept not sufficiently translated from German as one's home, homeland, roots, or sense of belonging—I began to see ways in which this frame may be used to expand my own understanding of myself, of my family, and of my identity. While my family's story begins generations ago in Croatia, my own search led me on a photographic journey to Butte, Montana, the birthplace of my late grandfather.

But a true search for Heimat demands we look even further back, and thus our true origin story begins two generations prior with my great-great-grandparents. Born in the late 19th century not far from each other in the Austro-Hungarian town of Lukovdol, it is possible that Danica Krizmanić and Niko Muretić met in Croatia during their youths. It is unclear if they remembered each other when they crossed paths again in Michigan; when they married; when they relocated to the mineral-rich Mountain West in search of stable work. By way of a mining community in Colorado, they ultimately found themselves in what was, in the early 1900s, the most important American city between Chicago and San Francisco: Butte, Montana (Pictured pg. 2 bottom right). Thus began the original separation of my family from its geographical roots.

What remained were ties forged by community, by generational tradition, and by a collective commitment to the maintenance of a cultural identity. Over time, however, even these began to falter as younger generations seemed less and less willing to assume the responsibilities to a culture from which they were even further isolated. Yet, even as morsels of our past are left to be forgotten, we seem to carry along with us what little else we have room for; and despite my broken ties to any geographical sense of Heimat, the word's contested, yet

extremely open definition(s) allow for an interpretation of cultural identity that far exceed this restriction.

The most recent, and most obvious casualty of time's progression has been my very name. The surnames present in my family have changed many times, but, until recently, they bore one striking commonality: the Serbo-Croatian patronymic suffix, "ić." Although it remains elsewhere in the far stretches of my extended family, this marker reached its effective end with my mother's generation: A patronym, ironically overshadowed by another nation's patriarchy. I possess not my Croatian maternal surname, but instead that of my father.


NADBISKUPIJA FLUMINENSIS (RIJEČKA)

ŽUPA UZNESENJE BDM., LUKOVDOL 31, 51328 LUKOVDOL

SM 35/2022

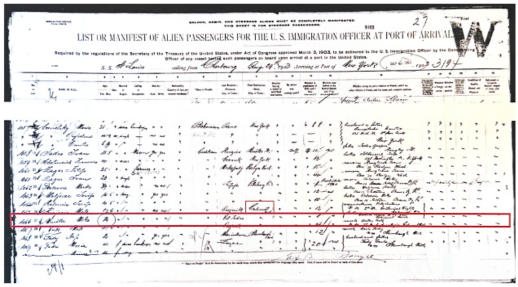
KRSNI LIST
TESTIMONIUM BAPTISMI

U Matici krštenih rimokatoličke župe LUKOVDOL

svezak VIII za godinu 1890. stranica 3 br. 31 upisano je

Datum krštenja (dan, mjesec, godina)	25.3.1890.
Ime	DANICA
Prezime	KRIZMANIĆ
Datum rođenja (dan, mjesec, godina)	18.3.1890.
Mjesto rođenja	Lukovdol
Jedinstveni matični broj građana	/////
Otac (ime, prezime, vjera)	JOSIP KRZMANIĆ
Majka (ime, djev. prezime, vjera)	MARA r. GRGURIĆ
Roditelji kanonski vjenčani	DA
Prebivalište (adresa)	LUKOVDOL 49.
Kum-a (ime, prezime)	JOSIP i BARA VLAŠIĆ
Krstitelj (ime, prezime, služba)	FRANJO K., ŽUPNIK

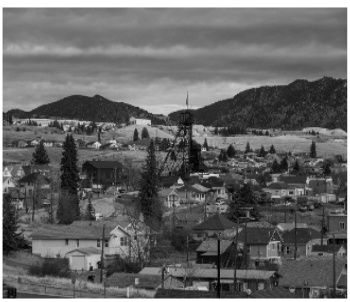
Naknadni upisi i bilješke


LIST OR MANIFEST OF ALIEN PASSENGERS FOR THE U. S. IMMIGRATION OFFICER AT PORT OF ARRIVAL



The passenger manifest of the S.S. St. Louis, the ship on which Niko Muretić arrived in New York (right); and the modern Croatian birth record of Danica Krizmanić (top left). Together, they mark the first generation of Croatians in my family to leave Europe behind. They were born in the same village: Lukovdol. They met by a stroke of luck in the United States.

Butte has been given a host of nicknames over the years, and many are still present in the town; on the facades of buildings; on the billboards lining the interstates. Despite her heritage as "The Richest Hill on Earth," due to a booming mining industry, the vast majority of mines are now closed, and the once bustling metropolis with a population of around 100,000 is now home to just 35,000, but reminders of the town's heyday still remain.





Steel headframes dot the landscape, standing guard over the entrances to the vast network of tunnels that exist beneath the town. A massive open-pit mine scars the otherwise intact street grid to the east between Uptown and the Boulder Mountains.

As it grew, Butte became rich not only in materials but also in culture. Butte's richness, however, arose also from a different aspect of the mines. The town required immense amounts of labor. Attracted by the promise of stable and well-paying (albeit frequently dangerous) work, people–the vast majority, young men and their families–flocked to the young city from around the globe. It is estimated that, at its peak, the city was home to roughly 30 distinct ethnic groups, among which the largest groups came from China, Ireland, and Eastern Europe. Signs hung in the mines displaying "no smoking" in 16 different languages. A variety of international symbols, architecture, and businesses took root above ground.

As Butte's ethnic diversity increased, cultural customs, languages, and traditions combined such that the region now possesses a variety of cultural and linguistic differences as com-



The Pekin Noodle Parlor: The second oldest continually operating Chinese restaurant in the United States. Its sign stands in contrast to an otherwise strikingly typical placeless "American" landscape.





There are a number of Irish pubs located in Butte's Uptown neighborhood. The Irish population made up around 50 percent of the 1940s level of ethnic diversity and remains highly influential in Buttian culture to this day.

pared to other relatively homogeneous regions of Montana. Eastern European dance culture blended with traditional customs from other regions, resulting in a rich syncretic culture of food and dance still present. I immediately imagine the pink bowl of Jell-O salad reliably present at every celebration on a table beside a dance floor on which generations danced the Polka to American and Croatian folk music.

From the day my grandfather was born, his fate was essentially sealed. A young boy in Butte was all but guaranteed to work (and often die) as a miner. Labor, as in many migrant communities, was highly valued, and this dedication to perseverance and "finishing the job" has been an integral part of my family's culture. The catch with this intense perseverance through extremely difficult work: Laborers tended–and were often encouraged–to work until they either died or became so fatigued that they could no longer stand. Many in my family lived and died in the tunnels beneath Butte's surface. Fortunately, however, my grandfather only worked the mines for two summers until, after experiencing too much death and toil, he decided to uproot his life and leave, settling ninety miles east in the university town of Bozeman, my childhood hometown. He did not leave his undying appreciation for hard work behind, opening a small business that he would operate for over forty years. As a legacy of my family's migrant labor heritage, many close to me still reckon with the more destructive aspects of blanket perseverance. There is a sense that one owes it to themselves or to their parents or to their community, to work and to work and to work, even to the point of death or injury.



Among the many ethnicities that enriched the cultural landscape of 20th-century Butte existed a diverse group of migrants from Eastern Europe. The impact is present most notably in various buildings that remain part of the town's oddly urban skyline.



A lone home stands with its characteristic wrought-iron fence and overhanging balcony. This was the house of my great-grandmother. My grandfather grew up here, and my mother frequently stayed here when visiting her grandparents by train. In this house, Croatian was spoken freely and frequently.



A headframe marks the entrance to one of the many below-ground mines, two blocks from my grandfather's childhood home in a typically Buttian working-class neighborhood. An American flag stands watch over the valley where slivers of so many c ountries resided.

I speak very little Croatian and the few words I can accurately recall relate exclusively to my family. Teta is the word for aunt. It's what I learned to call them from the very beginning, and I distinctly recall wondering why others didn't use the same word in elementary school. By blood, I have only teta(s). Teta Katy, Teta Coco, the all-powerful great-aunt who needs no first name: she is simply Teta. This word is so ingrained in my family lineage that when talking about any of these people, Teta almost becomes their first name. Thus, I don't know the word for uncle. Using the Croatian word for the American men the family accumulated by marriage always seemed awkward and out of place, so we stuck with the English word for them. the family accumulated by marriage always seemed awkward and out of place, so we stuck with the English word for them.

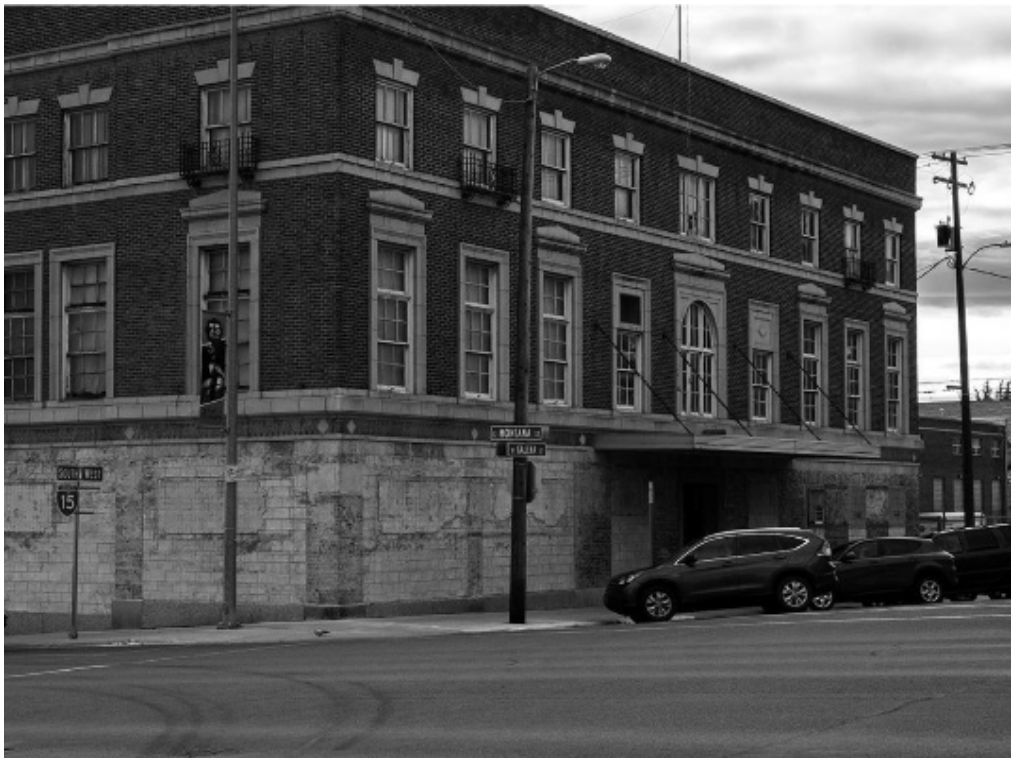
Linguistically and geographically, my family has relatively little: nothing but three words and the fading fifth-hand memory of a faraway landscape. Yet, what does get passed down has been, for me, a result of one's individual experience, and it thus varies widely from family to family. It is for this reason that Heimat cannot be taken to simply mean a physical, geographical homeland. Insofar as our sense of Heimat is in part determined by our connections to our familial culture, as generations progress, it becomes highly individualized, separating from the whole as diversity in experience interacts with unique cultural identity. It is for this reason that I feel little connection to Croatia itself. I do not speak the language, and while others in my family have, I have never once visited the country. This, at times, manifests a degree of guilt that perhaps I am not worthy of claiming the heritage of my grandparents and of those who came before them; that perhaps my isolation from a geographical or linguistic Heimat is evidence enough that I ought to cast off aspects of my quilted identity.

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I know exactly two other words: guzica and povitica. The former has stuck with me since I was a child, likely due to its meaning holding a degree of humor to any eight-year-old: ass. The latter, however, has much more significance. Povitica is a Central/Eastern European pastry named for its many layers that resemble tightly wrapped sheets. For years I swore that this is all Croatians eat: if there was an occasion, you could count somebody whose last name ended with "ić" making povitica.

I do not believe I truly understood the importance a single recipe can have until one such occasion. Three generations stood around a dining table in a room held uncomfortably hot. I, the youngest, at times, questioned the importance of such a gathering. It seemed, for the impatient and restless child I was, that in this case, the journey was significantly worse than the destination. I have thankfully since grown out of that sentiment.

Povitica is a word I can never seem to spell right on the first try; and yet it is the one thing that unites essentially every single one of my familial memories. Regardless of the occasion, it usually ends up something like this: Eight pairs of hands, all stretching dough thin enough to let through the light reflecting off the snow outside some family member's window–hence the 85 degree room, less the dough rip. I was, at eight years old, notably terrible at this, and not even the thermostat–working overtime and probably on its very last legs–could have saved the fragile dough from my untrained hand. It seemed, however, that I was the only one focusing on the recipe. The action came naturally to the others, who were preoccupied in a heated, swear-word-ridden (as usual) conversation. Perhaps this was a turning point for me. For so long I had seen the making of this pastry as a means to an end. After all, you can't eat it if you don't make it. However, in this moment, I, young and impatient, realized (excuse the cliché) that this was our connection. This memory serves as a



On the corner of Montana and Galena Streets sits an unassuming, rather derelict building, which often looks as if it hasn't seen life in many decades. However, twice a year, once in the Spring and once in the Fall, the ground floor sprang to life, hosting Butte's traditional Polkafest, operated partially by my grandfather's siblings. Since their passing, the tradition has faded, and the building serves as a symbol of tradition lost to time.

touchstone, even after the deaths of many in my family with direct connections to "the old country."

If I could have told myself one thing in that moment, it would have been to listen more to the stories told above the dough. They held the keys to a mysterious place which I now simply cannot fully know. The people who told those stories are now gone, but I believe that, as long as we still have this one annual semblance of connection to a past which I will never remember, our stories will continue to be told until they, themselves become our memories. I have watched, in my eighteen years of life, as the anchors that bridged the gap between my family and its past became dislodged from their seabed, leaving us not entirely unlike an unmoored ship, drifting away from a harbor. However, I have also seen my family drop new anchors in place of the old in an effort to reclaim what has been lost: new efforts to document our history, to maintain the old traditions, to keep telling stories because, in the end, we are outlived by that which is told about us. My mother tells me from time to time that my grandfather and I weren't so different. Perhaps I know him better than I thought.



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PHOTOGRAPHY















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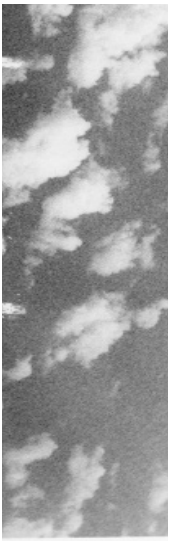
Rita, Vadik and Ozzie and I

Maya Schkolnik
Columbia University



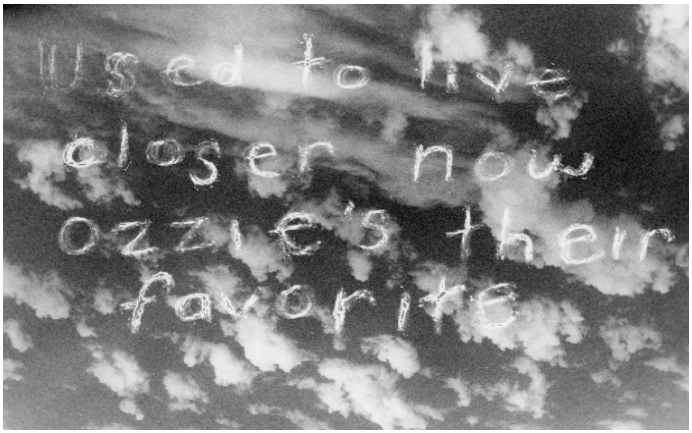











used to live
closer now
ozzie's their
favorite

