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Cover image: Ann Cooper in Vilnius conducting interviews at the first public demonstration of Baltic independence on the anniversary of the Molotov Ribbentrop Pact; August 23, 1987. Photo by Povilas Obuchovicius.

Image on this page: A doctor at a Soviet women's clinic being interviewed by Ann Cooper (not pictured).

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Opposite page: Alexander Cooley.
Photo by Jeffrey Schifman.



his academic year marks a major milestone: the 75th anniversary of the Harriman Institute. Founded in 1946 as the Russian Institute within Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs, it quickly became a national hub of interdisciplinary research, outreach, and debate about the region. The Institute was the first of its kind in North America—a foundational den of what was known as Sovietology. Much has happened since, including the renaming of the Institute in 1982 in honor of a major gift made by Averell Harriman, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the plunge into the unprecedented post-Communist transitions in Russia and the Soviet successor states.

Rather than mark our 75th anniversary with a celebratory institutional history, we wanted to reflect on how the mission of the Institute—to promote world-class research, understanding, and debate about the region—has evolved throughout these different eras. Indeed, as the world has changed, so too has regional studies as an academic field and professional practice. I want to briefly highlight three trends:

First, the space of the region can no longer be bound by the political geography or administrative boundaries of the post-Soviet or post-Communist countries. During the Cold War, our research networks and communities, located "over here," were conditioned to ascertain what was happening in the political and social life of a far-flung region that remained fixed "over there." In this global era, however, we see more transnational actors and processes that actively shape our understanding. Multiple generations of the Eurasian diaspora, such as Ukrainians and Uzbeks right here in New York City, selectively engage with the political and social life back home; we celebrate artists and writers moving between countries, interfacing with cultural communities across Eurasia, Europe, and North America; and governments and exiled political opposition leaders play cat-and-mouse games overseas, battling in media and litigating their disputes in foreign courts, such as in the UK. What constitutes the "region" and its spaces is so much more fluid and globalized than it once was.

Second, far from what we once viewed as the Soviet monolith, this evolving "region" involves increasingly complex dynamics, encompassing a mix of local, national, and transnational actors and processes that align and associate themselves with a variety of cultural influences and historical backgrounds. The governments and, by extension, national academies of the individual post-Communist countries are forging their own histories, cultural guidelines, and research agendas, while these same flourishing scholarly communities now interface with their counterparts in North America and Europe. Moreover, the major regional conflicts we have witnessed in Georgia, Ukraine, and Nagorno-Karabakh have forged new national identities as political leaders and publics redefine their identities and political orientation. The influence of the European Union and the West is welcomed in some countries and openly rejected in others, while other external players like China and Turkey are also rapidly reshaping the region.

Finally, we see area studies engaging with exciting new fields and academic partners. The classic tension between interdisciplinary "area studies" and the disciplines that privilege comparative theory and methods itself seems increasingly anachronistic. One such area is the exploding new field of social media analysis and communications scholarship, where researchers now

use the big data found in the mass use of Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to study matters such as cultural trends and the dynamics of social protest movements, while the digitization of humanities is changing our perceptions of contemporary cultural associations. Moreover, beyond the traditional academic "disciplines" of the arts and sciences, area studies centers like the Harriman are increasingly engaging with professional schools and researchers from fields like journalism, law, social work, and higher education. Many of these researchers and professionals are eager to learn from the contextual and interdisciplinary approach of regional studies as they engage in their own discussions about global best practices and standards. In turn, there are now new fields and professional careers for our graduates. Though many continue to pursue traditional careers in government and academia, new private and not-for-profit actors that interface with the region, such as in the blossoming political risk analysis sector, greatly appreciate the interdisciplinary skill sets of our contemporary regional studies graduates.

In recognition of some of these trends, for our two 75th anniversary issues of the magazine we have reached out to our multigenerational community of alumni, faculty, and practitioners and asked them to give us a unique insight into how some of the professional fields and activities associated with studying the Soviet and post-Soviet region have evolved over the decades, as well as into the challenges that they face today. This is the first of our two anniversary issues, and we take up the important, but underappreciated, role of academic and expert community exchanges as important forms of intercultural transmission and understanding. We include a piece by Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier on her experience with the U.S.-Soviet exchanges of the Cold War era, including her stint as tour guide in 1959 at the National American Exhibition in Moscow, where participants were given glimpses into the daily life and conditions of the other sphere. Later she made frequent research trips to the USSR, where the name of her mentor Philip Mosely opened many doors. We are very fortunate to have a contribution from Mark Pomar, former president and CEO of IREX (as well as a Harriman alumnus and member of our National Advisory Council [NAC]), who was based in Leningrad as an IREX senior scholar in 1981. For the better part of his career Mark has energetically designed and overseen ambitious programs in areas including media, policy, law, and education that strove to export best practices and civil society engagement to assist in the project of post-Soviet political and economic transition. And, Julie Newton (also a distinguished alumna and NAC member), the principal investigator of the University Consortium—an academic exchange network founded in 2015 to encourage mutual understanding among students in the U.S., EU, and Russia—reflects on the challenges of fostering empathy and understanding of each side's contending narratives in the wake of the Ukraine conflict in 2014.

The other topic we are spotlighting is journalism and what it means in practice to cover developments in the Soviet Union, Russia, Eurasia, and Eastern Europe. The section opens with Colette Shulman's recollections on the challenges she faced as a United Press reporter in Moscow and Warsaw in the 1950s, whether interviewing Pasternak after he won the Nobel Prize or reporting on everyday life in Moscow. Colette continued her reporting career in the 1960s in Cambridge,

Massachusetts, with her public television program, Soviet Press This Week. We also include a piece by Ann Cooper, who was NPR's Moscow correspondent in the final years of the Soviet Union and later executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists and a faculty member at Columbia Journalism School. She recalls the perceived freedoms journalists felt at the end of the USSR and contrasts that optimistic period with the challenges facing journalists in Putin's Russia. Justin Burke-publisher, executive director, and founder of Eurasianet (hosted in the Harriman Institute's office space since 2016)—writes about the ups and downs of running a website devoted to covering Central Asia and the Caucasus, which launched out of the Open Society Institute (now the Open Society Foundations) during the early years of internet publishing in 1999 and became an independent nonprofit during the rise of the misinformation age in 2016. Finally, we have a piece by our alumnus Joshua Yaffa ('08), who has been covering Russia since the Bolotnaya protests and is currently a Moscow correspondent at the New Yorker. Josh writes about the evolution of his experience covering Putin's Russia and reflects on the challenges faced by journalists there today.

We also have two stories in addition to our anniversary themes—an interview with alumnus and former Harriman director Timothy Frye ('92) about his new book, *Weak Strongman: The Limits of Power in Putin's Russia*, and an excerpt from Volodymyr Rafeyenko's novel, *Mondegreen: Songs about Death and Love*, translated from the Ukrainian by Mark Andryczyk.

This particular issue of Harriman Magazine is bittersweet for me as it is the final one where I have the privilege of penning the director's letter. Though the pandemic has brought great personal and professional challenges for all of us, it has also affirmed to me the extraordinary nature of the Harriman's supportive and dynamic global community. More than ever, our remarkable students, alumni, and faculty continue to actively shape our understanding of the region, whether as members of academia, government, the private sector, or influential civil society organizations. It has been a privilege to learn from them and their groundbreaking achievements. I am also grateful that the future of the Institute is brighter than ever, with a dedicated and talented staff and the incoming leadership of Valentina Izmirlieva, a distinguished intellectual historian and member of the Department of Slavic Languages who specializes in both studying and promoting intraregional connections and understanding. These last six years have been among the most rewarding of my professional life, but I am now excited to return to conducting more intensive research and teaching and mentoring students under the auspices of the Institute. As always, I look forward to seeing you all on the 12th floor.

All the best.

Alexander Cooley
Director, Harriman Institute







### The Harriman Institute's 75th Anniversary (1946–2021)

The Harriman Institute first opened its doors on September 25, 1946. This academic year we commemorate its 75th anniversary. We invite you to join us in celebrating the richness of our past and the promise of our future. Our many anniversary events will include conferences, lectures, concerts, and two Columbia Libraries exhibitions. And keep an eye out for the second anniversary issue of Harriman Magazine in 2022, which will feature reflections by Institute faculty and alumni. We look forward to celebrating this year with you!

harriman.columbia.edu/75th



Challenging the Misconceptions about Russia: Timothy Frye on His New Book, *Weak Strongman:* The Limits of Power in Putin's Russia By Masha Udensiva-Brenner

On the trade-offs of authoritarian rule in Russia and on examining the country from a comparative perspective.

### **CULTURAL EXCHANGES**

14

Cultural Exchanges: A Personal Reflection By Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier

Valkenier recalls her early visits to the USSR.

20

The Success of U.S.-Russia Academic Exchanges during the Cold War By Mark G. Pomar

Experiencing Leningrad as an IREX Fellow.

26

The University Consortium and the Harriman Institute: Promoting Engagement with Russia By Julie Newton

How a student exchange program helps facilitate interregional understanding during a time of extreme polarization.







### **JOURNALISM**

30

Getting the Finger-Tip Feel: Reporting on the Soviet Union in the Late Fifties and Sixties By Colette Shulman

Covering the USSR in Moscow for the United Press and from Cambridge, Massachusetts, for television.

36

Let Them Listen: Covering the Soviet Collapse By Ann Cooper

NPR's Moscow correspondent during the final years of the Soviet Union discusses her experiences reporting on the region over time. 42

Ebbing & Flowing: A Brief History of Eurasianet
By Justin Burke

Publisher and founder of the firstever online publication devoted to Central Asia and the Caucasus on the evolution of his field.

46

A Slow-Motion Crackdown: A Decade as a Foreign Correspondent in Putin's Russia By Joshua Yaffa

The *New Yorker*'s Moscow correspondent reflects on his career in Russia.

52

Mondegreen: Songs about Death and Love (An Excerpt) By Volodymyr Rafeyenko Translated by Mark Andryczyk

The fictional story of Haba Habinsky, a refugee from Ukraine's Donbas region, who escaped to Kyiv at the onset of the Ukrainian-Russian war.

62

Alumni Notes

Students, Postdocs, and Visiting Scholars

The Peter Jacyk Centennial



Giving to Harriman

CHALLENGING THE MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT RUSSIA: TIMOTHY FRYE ON HIS NEW BOOK

WEAK

STRONGMAN

THELIMITS

OFPOWER

IN PUTIN'S

RUSSIA

## BY MASHA UDENSIVA-BRENNER

ast spring Timothy
Frye, a political
scientist who directed
the Harriman
Institute from 2009
to 2015, published
a new book, Weak
Strongman: The Limits
of Power in Putin's
Russia (Princeton
University Press,
April 2021). Aimed at

general audiences and buttressed by Frye's extensive personal experiences in Russia, the book challenges popular misconceptions about Russia with interdisciplinary academic research and argues that Russia is more like other autocracies than conventional wisdom suggests.

I spoke with Frye in June 2021. Our conversation has been edited and condensed for clarity.

Masha Udensiva-Brenner: This book is different from your other books—it has a lot of personal anecdotes, and it's aimed at a more general audience. I'm curious; why did you decide to write it in this way?

Timothy Frye: I've been thinking about this book for a long time. I started the project in 2015. I was reading all this really interesting research on public opinion, on polling and election fraud, and on repression, and it just was not jiving with the way many people in popular outlets were writing about Russia. I found it really frustrating that scholars had put in years of research on topics that were of general interest to policy makers,



Russia watchers, and to academics, and it was just really not getting the attention that I thought it deserved.

So, the book was originally designed as an explainer book. The goal was to translate the research my colleagues and I were doing for a general audience. And I think for the most part it's remained true to that vision. And it required a very different writing style, which was both a lot of fun and very challenging.

Udensiva-Brenner: You mentioned during your book talk at the Harriman Institute that you also wanted to turn the heat down a little bit on the debate about Russia. Can you talk about what you meant?

Frye: The debate about Russia seems inevitably to be very high pitched and very heated. We don't have the same kind of debates about Brazil or Turkey. Or even Iran, which is a hot-button issue. We're starting to have similar levels of enmity and debates about China, but even there, I don't think the rift between different schools of thought about how to approach China is as great as it is on Russia. And I don't think that's particularly helpful.

The book tries to use the best academic evidence we have—and, of course, academics have their own biases, but the general review process irons out a lot of the worst biases that come through in academic research, because reviewers will not allow you to get away with making claims that are not credible and backed up with evidence. So, by relying more on the academic research, I hope the book forces us to think harder about the kinds of evidence often used in debates about Russia. I also wanted to put my own stories in the book to

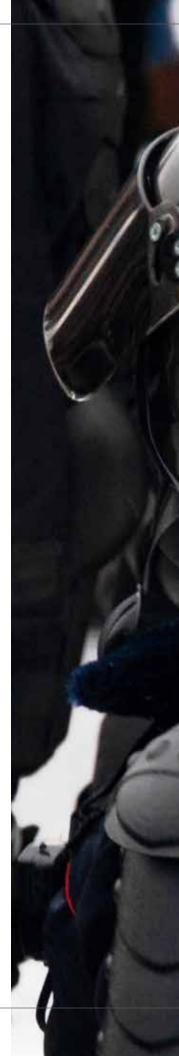
try to personalize the book and also reduce the heat.

Udensiva-Brenner: There are a lot of myths and misconceptions about Russia. What are some of the biggest misconceptions that frustrated you while you were writing the book?

Frye: There is a point of view that Putin is this all-powerful master who's able to turn elections abroad with a wave of his hand—that he's able to hoodwink the Russian people just by making a few statements or by cranking up the propaganda machine.

But what I try to show is that when we look closely across a whole range of issues, we see that Putin faces many difficult trade-offs and is often much more constrained than we realize. People often conflate the notion that he has no open political competitors, particularly now that Navalny has been sidelined, with the idea that he can do whatever he wants. But Putin has to manage this large, corrupt, self-interested bureaucracy—to govern a territory of more than 140 million people across 11 time zones. And they often resist a lot of what he's trying to do. He also faces the difficult trade-off of trying to keep his inner circle happy so they do not stage a coup, and also to keep the mass public happy so they do not protest. And often those two goals are at odds with each other.

So, I write in the book about the problem of corruption, which enables Putin's elite cronies to enrich themselves—and then they continue to support Putin. But at the same time, Putin can't allow them to distort the economy so much that the economy really tanks and people's living standards fall. Then the public will be much more likely to protest, which is



Pictured: Protest against the arrest of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, January 2021. Photo by Kirill Zharkoy via Unsplash.

also bad for the Kremlin. So, as we look issue by issue, Putin faces a host of these trade-offs.

Udensiva-Brenner: Another tradeoff you mention in the book is foreign policy. The more assertive Putin is abroad, the worse the Russian economy ends up doing, and the economy is what kept him popular in the first place. Can you talk about that?

Frye: People often look at Putin's assertive foreign policy as if he doesn't pay any price for it. But, in the long run, I think this is one of the most difficult trade-offs that Putin faces. because his more assertive foreign policy in Ukraine and in Syria has not only invited sanctions, which have hurt the Russian economy, but also it empowers those groups in Russia who are least interested in economic reform and economic growth. It's the status quo political constituency that benefits from this more assertive policy rather than the firms that would like to do business with the West-the firms that don't have privileged access to the state and that don't have good connections.

These groups are all a possible base for a reorientation of Russian foreign policy. But Putin has chosen to pay the costs of slow economic growth and the continued distortions in the economy generated by his more assertive foreign policy.

Udensiva-Brenner: And because of all this, and the economic stagnation and dissatisfaction among society, Putin then has to ramp up repression, which you also say comes at a great cost. Can you talk about the costs of political repression?



Frye: Sure. One point of view is that Putin's increased use of repression is really a sign of his strength—he's so powerful that he can use repression in order to sideline his political opponents. And that's one argument, but I don't think that's really the correct one.

I think Putin resorts to increased repression not as a first choice, but because other less costly ways of governing Russia have become much less effective. Putin's popularity is not what it was, and public trust in Putin has fallen too. The economy, which was a great source of popular support for Putin, has been stagnant for a decade.

There's no second Crimea on the horizon that would boost his popularity again. And even propaganda has become less effective. More Russians are getting their news from social media now—the number of people getting news from state sources has declined. So, all these other tools, which are less costly, are failing; and Putin has turned to repression.

Repression doesn't solve the economic problem. If anything, it makes it worse. It doesn't help resolve the problem of low trust in government. It also doesn't help solve the corruption problem. It might even make the corruption problem worse, because those groups that are benefiting from corruption are also the ones that are benefiting from repression.

The real danger is that autocrats like Putin come to rely more and more on repression because the underlying problems that generate opposition in the first place become much more difficult to solve.

Autocrats tend to use repression when other tools don't work. I think we see that in the Russian case.

INTERVIEW

Udensiva-Brenner: I want to talk a little bit about Russian society and the misconceptions there. One prevailing narrative that you challenge in your book is this idea of Homo Sovieticus. Can you talk about what that is and what the flaws in that narrative are?

Frye: There is a long-standing idea that the Soviet system created a sense of values and attitudes among citizens of the Soviet Union that made them more passive toward authority, more willing to cut corners and engage in unethical practices, uninterested in politics, and with values that would make it difficult to adapt to a market society based on free exchange. Given the system that they were raised in, they can rationalize these kinds of behavior. But there is not a lot of evidence for this view.

When we look at things like voting participation rates in the 1990s in Russia, which were higher in the presidential elections in 1996 and then in 2000 than they were in the United States, we see that given the chance to take part in competitive elections, Russians were no less likely to vote than were citizens in many other countries.

There was a great study where researchers literally dropped tens of thousands of wallets in 40 different countries. In some wallets researchers placed small amounts of money, and in some there was no money, but in all cases there were instructions about who the owner was and how they could be returned. And what the researchers found was that Russians were just as likely to return the wallets as were American, British, and Canadian citizens. So, it doesn't seem that there's underlying support for high levels of unethical behavior among Russians.

And then finally, there's the notion that Russians like a strong hand. If we

look at the evidence, there's not a lot of support for that view either. Even in the United States, about 20 percent of Americans think that the country would be better off if it was governed by an unelected leader, which is not that different from what we see in Russia.

Now, there are a couple of areas where Russian attitudes differ from citizens of other countries at their level of economic development. Support for the welfare state is greater, in part because of the Soviet legacy and the extensive benefits that Soviet citizens received—that still remains today.

Also, if you use the word democracy in a survey question, support for democracy is often lower in Russia than in comparable countries. But that has less to do with the Soviet legacy than with the legacy of the 1990s, which was so difficult for so many.

If you ask Russians about the individual components of democracy, then they're very supportive. About free speech, about having multiparty elections. Yes. Eighty percent of Russians support that. About the right to protest. Yes. We should have the right to protest. Should there be turnover in government at high levels? Yes. But when you use the term democracy, they often associate that with the 1990s and respond negatively. And, of course, President Putin has done a lot to reinforce that idea.

So, history matters. But we need to be careful about making broad claims about how values get passed down from generation to generation.

Udensiva-Brenner: One study you cite looked at the lasting effects of Stalinist repression on voter turnout. Can you talk about that?





Pictured: Moscow protest commemorating the fifth anniversary of the murder of opposition leader Boris Nemtsov; February 29, 2020.

**Frye:** There's a fascinating piece by Roya Talibova and Yuri Zhukov, where they scoured the archives for the degree of repression in each different district in Russia during 1936, '37, and '38. They found a correlation between the level of repression and the participation rates in elections in Russia in the 1990s. The higher the level of repression, the lower the level of voting. That doesn't explain all the participation rates-people vote for all kinds of reasons—but they did find that this historical factor had a systematic relationship with participation rates and voting rates in the 1990s.

Why that is, it's hard to say. It needs to be explored further to understand whether this was an effect that was passed down generation to generation. Or, if it is because the more active part of the population was repressed and is no longer present in these districts. That's something that needs further research, but it's the kind of research I like to highlight, because it's not the kind of thing that people would normally seek out to understand the effects of the Great Terror and repression.

Udensiva-Brenner: Another claim that you take issue with in the book is that to understand Russians, you have to read Russian literature. I've actually heard that a lot, including in our oral history project; Ambassador Jack Matlock talks a lot about how his knowledge of Russian literature really helped him to negotiate with Gorbachev to end the Cold War. I am curious to hear your thoughts on that, because obviously it's a complicated thing. It's not black and white.

Frye: I was a Russian language and literature major. I still read Russian literature as much as I can, and it's

invaluable in informing us about the great moral dilemmas that persist over time.

But as a guide to how Russians see the world, it's not great, in part, because you can pick and choose any story from Russian literature to make a point and its opposite. On the one hand, you have stories of Russian peasants who are submissive and just willing to take whatever is given to them. They're being beaten by their masters. And that's why we see Russians liking this strong hand and being willing to suffer through even terrible governance. But we also have stories where the peasants rise up and protest and stories of how the barons live in fear that there's going to be a peasant revolt.

So, depending on what types of stories you want to tell, you can dig in all the richness of Russian literature and support a variety of different kinds of arguments. More fatalistic versus agency-based stories. I just want to say, we need to be careful about overgeneralizing based on something we've read. After all, Russian literature, Soviet literature, is not all of one piece.

Udensiva-Brenner: One thing that really surprised me reading your book was that, when surveyed, Russians don't see being a great power as a very important thing except during the annexation of Crimea period. If you had asked me, based on anecdotal evidence I would have said, absolutely, Russians want to be a great power. But according to the research you discuss in your book, that perception seems to be misguided.

Frye: This is a great point, because if you ask Russians whether Russia is a great power, 80 percent of Russians will say yes. And 80 percent will say

that Russia should be a great power. But asking people a question like that is misleading, because being a great power also has costs.

Levada Center has asked this very nice question: Would you rather be a great power that other countries fear, but not the most economically developed country, or would you rather be an economically developed country, but not one that is greatly feared? And the data shows that, often by a significant margin, Russians would prefer economic development over a more assertive foreign policy that tries to make Russia a great power.

Udensiva-Brenner: You've been running a research center at the Higher School of Economics for the past 10 years or more. Can you talk about how that shaped your view of Russia and what's been happening there?

Frye: It's really been a great opportunity over the last decade to run the International Center for the Study of Institutions and Development at the Higher School of Economics (HSE). It's part of a government program to try to raise the international rating of the HSE. The ratings haven't increased as fast as initially planned, but there has been improvement. The Center has also been a great opportunity for non-Russian graduate students and for younger scholars working in the field to have a base in Moscow where they can go attend seminars and conferences.

An area where we haven't been as successful is in affecting policy. Initially, we had projects on policy making in Russia, where we hoped to provide some policy advice. For example, the Moscow city government has a program giving money to firms to promote exports. And we approached



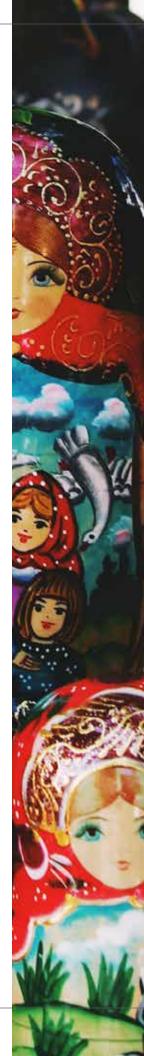
it with the opportunity to evaluate whether this was having the desired effect. But as relations between Russia and the West became more fractious, our opportunities to do anything like that just dried up.

Also, the NGO sector has really shrunk in Russia. That's difficult, because in many countries, NGOs are very good partners for academic research. They often have expertise on particular policy issues that academics lack, and they're good partners to work with on particular projects, but that too has become very difficult. At the same time, we've been able to collect a really impressive database of political and economic indicators across Russia's regions over the last 20 years. We've been able to collect a lot of interesting voting data and public opinion data that our scholars continually mine, and that's been great.

Udensiva-Brenner: When you first started the Center you were working on a project about police corruption in Russia, and you mention in the book that you wouldn't delve into a topic like that now. Can you elaborate?

Frye: When we first opened the Center in 2011, President Medvedev had pushed through a reform of the police that required them to hold public meetings as police forces often do in other countries. We wanted to study whether holding these meetings increased trust in the police. That effort did not come to fruition. But that's the kind of topic that we would not even go near now.

The Higher School of Economics is in a difficult position. It's a pretty international institution. Its students have been active at various times and at various protests, which has caught the





*Pictured*: Russian matryoshka dolls. Photo by Alina Grubnyak via Unsplash.

attention of those who do not want to see protests.

The general atmosphere in Russia has made it harder to recruit scholars who don't already have a deep commitment to studying Russia. In 2013 the Higher School of Economics was able to recruit some very promising recent Ph.D.'s from the University of Illinois and from the University of Pennsylvania by giving them a generous research package.

Those efforts have become much more difficult. Russia itself has become a much less attractive place for scholars. That's been a real loss.

Udensiva-Brenner: One of the personal anecdotes in your book is about your one and only face-to-face meeting with an oligarch. Can you talk about that—how that came about and what happened?

Frye: Yes. A Russian oligarch was interested in building a research institute that would be a joint Russian-American effort to study ways of promoting interethnic tolerance, which is a worthy ideal. Through an intermediary, he contacted me. At the time I was the director of the Harriman Institute, which would have been a good partner for such an endeavor. It's not something we've done before, but it was something that I was interested in at least exploring.

So, I was picked up in a car, and we drove out from the center of Moscow—out to the oligarch's dacha past Rublyovka, past the shops of Dolce & Gabbana and the Mercedes dealerships that are located out in the middle of the forest.

We discussed this project. There were numerous difficulties, and the conversation didn't go very far. But one of the most fascinating things that

happened during the dinner was that he received a call from the incoming minister of industry—the new Russian government had just been sworn in—just to say hello. The minister wanted to tell this oligarch that he was thinking about him, which I thought was a sign of who was really calling the shots in that relationship.

After dinner, we retreated to the yard of this oligarch, and we were drinking tea and having sweets and enjoying the late Moscow summer night. And, as I was leaving, the governor of the district where the oligarch's largest economic asset was held was coming in the door. We kind of bumped into each other, and I thought, wow, this shows that the Russian state really cares about its oligarchy. It would be great if ordinary Russians received the same kind of attention as my acquaintance, the oligarch, received.

Udensiva-Brenner: I really liked this story and the other personal anecdotes in the book. Do you think you would write another nonacademic book in the future?

Frye: Yes, I would like to do that. I've thought about going back and writing about the late 1980s and early 1990s when I was spending a lot of time in the Soviet Union and Russia. It's a remarkable period that we're still learning about, and it's still a topic of contemporary political discussion, because Putin's attempts to shore up his position have often involved invoking the instability of the late 1980s and the 1990s. It might be worthwhile to delve back into that fascinating period.



invited any of the girls from school to what seemed to me to be an impoverished household.

Not surprisingly, I had no friends at the start, which was compounded by the fact of not being fluent in English. (Before World War II, French was the first foreign language I had learned, beginning at the age of six.) Another constraint was the lack of familiarity with American customs-in our case, baseball games to which we were invited soon after our arrival in fall 1941. I was eager to participate, but it turned out that I had cheered for the wrong team. And to top it all, we were very insecure financially. Smith College was very generous in offering my father a teaching position that enabled him to sail from Spain, where he had been stranded at the outbreak of World War II. The salary, however, was minimal. Fortunately, it was supplemented with a small grant

from the London Polish Government in Exile. Eventually, he would make his way to Columbia University, where he held the title of Adam Mickiewicz Professor of Polish Studies and pursued a distinguished career of teaching and publishing.

Looking back, I cannot say that I have any regrets about my displacement, or "deracination" might be a better word, and the various hardships that it involved. While on occasion painful in the beginning, in the long run emigration offered so many advantages. First and foremost, it introduced me to another cultural tradition, making me appreciate and cherish diversity, and instilled in me tolerance or what I would call an "a-systemic" way of looking at what some people would call the "Other" (an attitude that prevailed regarding Russia and the Soviet Union during the height of the Cold War).

My second opportunity to experience the benefits of cultural exchange

came in 1957, when I joined a 14-day group tour of the Soviet Union, during which we visited Leningrad, Moscow, and Kyiv for the astonishingly low price of \$100. Our group consisted of about 15 participants-retired couples for the most part-pleasant and well meaning but pretty colorless. Fortunately, we had an exceptionally intelligent, well-educated, and competent Intourist guide-a young woman university graduate who never subjected us to Pravda-like lectures. Knowing that I had a Baedeker and spoke Russian, she would let me go on my own explorations during the day. In the evenings, she would take me to literary cafes, the theater, or concerts. One performance, in Kyiv, remains memorable. It was a concert. which, in addition to the customary folk songs and dancing, presented a selection of Western popular music.





This upset some stalwart Communist in the audience who objected to the "decadent" music and demanded to know who had given permission for such a disgraceful performance. The ready and unapologetic response from the conductor was to name article suchand-such of the Soviet constitution, granting freedom of expression—an answer that met with thunderous applause from the audience. So much for the seemingly total and effective control by the Party about which we had read and learned so much.

Serving as a guide at the first American National Exhibition in Moscow during the summer of 1959 offered another eye-opening experience. For about a month we guides faced daily, intense questioning from Soviet citizens, on topics ranging from the cost of food or housing to literature. To our surprise, and relief, most questions were friendly. Occasionally a Party agitator would ask us a provocative question regarding the treatment of Black Americans, unemployment, or labor conditions. Invariably, he or she would be silenced by the irate audience-objections that made it obvious that the Soviet visitors did not want to hear more official propaganda.

Knowing that I had a Baedeker and spoke Russian, our Soviet guide would let me go on my own explorations.

# Serving as guide at the American National Exhibition in Moscow during the summer of 1959 offered another eye-opening experience.

Leading cultural exchange groups to the USSR for Citizen Exchange Corps (CEC) was another rewarding and educational experience. The CEC was organized by Dan James, a visionary businessman who believed that a nuclear confrontation between the superpowers could be avoided by the presence and experience of numerous American visitors in the USSR. The best part of the trip was a boat excursion down the Volga, from Kazan to Rostov. In addition to our own speaker (usually, one of my colleagues from Columbia), we had a Soviet lecturer who would give us the official, orthodox version of past and present events. But there were also Soviet tourists on the boat, and they gave us another version of Soviet reality.

The most outspoken lesson took place during an election day (obligatory-Soviet ID papers would be stamped), when many of the Soviet passengers, usually sober, got drunk in the middle of the day in order to go through what one of them called a "farce." In addition, these trips gave the American tourists a chance to observe ordinary, everyday Soviet life-how Soviet citizens relaxed and amused themselves in ways that were not that different from ours. They had a chance to see for themselves that many of the Cold War verities about totalitarian controls seemed hollowthey did not plague Soviet citizens every minute and hour of the day.

My own research in the Soviet Union, first on Soviet relations with the Third World, and later on the history of Russian art, demonstrated graphically that solid, honest research-independent scholarshipcould and did exist. Some scholars toed the Party line, while others tried to pursue a neutral course, and still others put impartial scholarship first. I had the good fortune to meet with all three positions. Even in the politically charged field of foreign policy studies, a number of scholars questioned both in their publications and in personal interviews the wisdom of Soviet economic aid largesse to the developing countriesits enormous cost and few rewards, with the former colonies taking advantage of Soviet-American

competition for their supposed allegiance, while basically advancing their own interests. I was told that I was among the few Western scholars who brought up this fact in my publications. But I should point out here that this judgment was not my original discovery-I heard it first from Soviet academic specialists and later discerned it in their writings. It may sound surprising, but at the risk of repeating myself, it was the Soviet specialists who first drew my attention to this lack of success-the failure of the USSR to gain genuine allegiance from the Third Worldsomething that very few Western scholars had noticed at the time. The Cold War outlook and Soviet-American competition clouded their vision, to put it politely. My own, nonsystemic approach saved me from falling into that trap.

Studying and working for Philip E. Mosely, one of the founders of Columbia's Russian Institute and Soviet studies as a whole, contributed enormously to my appreciation of the role of culture not only in the history of individual countries but in international relations as well. Mosely taught Russian and Soviet foreign policy, but his knowledge and appreciation of the history and literature of Russia and Eastern Europe was profound. I have not met any other Russian foreign policy

Opposite page: Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier (Harriman Photo Archive). When I went to Moscow in 1957 on my first research trip, Mosely's recommendations opened the doors at the Academy of Sciences. specialist who had that broad a background, spoke Russian that well (that is, during the 1950s to '70s), and had such a multifaceted appreciation of that country. To give one example, it was Mosely who introduced me to the writings of Vsevolod Garshin, a writer who was not even mentioned in the course on Russian literature taught by Ernest Simmons at Columbia. Mosely's lectures did not echo the Cold War slogans that prevailed in those days but were a sober assessment of the realpolitik practiced by a great power.

Even more important for my own career, Mosely suggested a culture-related topic for the seminar I was taking with him—Soviet and Communist pressures on Polish scholars to rewrite history to legitimate the post–World War II regime change. Moreover, he urged me to publish the paper and arranged for its appearance in the *Journal of Central European Affairs*.

Mosely's profound and wideranging knowledge of things Russian earned him deep respect in the Soviet Union. So much so that when I went to Moscow in 1957 on my first research trip, his recommendations opened the doors at all the specialized institutes at the Academy of Scienceseven dinner invitations to the homes of some directors. Mosely's firm stance in defense of U.S. interests, combined as it was with his evident knowledge and appreciation of things Russian, earned him a very high regard among Soviet academics. And it might be added that the Soviets



did not have much respect for those American scholars who believed that we could win Soviet cooperation by being accommodating.

What can one say in conclusion that is not obvious or banal? In my own experience, the extreme form of cultural exchange-emigration-was enormously enriching and gratifying. Fortunately, there are ever so many easier, less demanding ways to gain the same insight. One option is to read; another is to entertain foreign guests in your city; still another is to go to foreign movies or art exhibits or even to a different section of town. They all allow one to have a peek at another way of doing things, another reminder that in the final analysis we all live in a single world with ever so much in common.

Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier (Resident Scholar, Harriman Institute) is the author of Valentin Serov: Portraits of Russia's Silver Age (2002); Ilya Repin and the World of Russian Art (1990); Russian Realist Art: The State and Society (1977); and The Soviet Union and the Third World: An Economic Bind (1983)—all published in Studies of the Harriman Institute. She earned her Ph.D. in Columbia's History Department (1973) and holds a certificate from the Russian Institute (1951). For many years she taught courses in political science and art history at Columbia.



Opposite page: The first American National Exhibition in Moscow (1959), via Alamy. Below: Harriman director Philip E. Mosely (left) examines an issue of The Current Digest of the Soviet Press with assistant editor Fred Holling (1953). Above: Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier.





the Inter-University Committee on Travel Grants, initially housed at Columbia University; and the coveted IREX fellowship became, in Robert Belknap's memorable words, the "rite of passage" for scholars in Russian and East European studies.

Getting ready for the IREX fellowship was akin to preparing for a long trek into the wilderness. One had to plan for shortages of everyday goods, sparse living conditions, lack of medications, and a meager diet. Even worse, there was no guarantee that one would get access to the archival

materials noted in the application form or meet the right Russian experts. To help young American scholars, IREX alumni set up an informal network that would provide invaluable advice: whom to call on the first day in the Soviet Union (and only from a public pay phone); what over-the-counter medications to bring for older scholars—as well as an array of lipsticks for the archivists and the required gifts for the directors of the relevant institutions. This preparatory work was exceptionally important and if done right could lead to a fruitful

and enjoyable exchange experience. I spent weeks buying the necessary gifts and arrived in Leningrad with six stuffed suitcases. Naturally, as the only American on the Aeroflot flight from Helsinki, I was pulled aside by the customs officials and told to open my luggage. To my embarrassment out tumbled make-up kits, pantyhose, lipstick, aspirin, and several bottles of whiskey. "Опять американцы со своей аптекой" (again, Americans with their own pharmacy), muttered the Soviet official and with an air of exasperation waved me through.



Since I had defended my doctoral dissertation a few years earlier, the Academy of Sciences considered me a "senior fellow" and that entailed certain privileges. While most IREX Fellows were housed in dilapidated dormitories, the Academy placed me in the new Hotel Leningrad, situated on the Neva with spectacular views of the city. It also provided a handsome stipend of roughly 300 rubles a month, access to the best library reading rooms, and tickets to the Kirov Opera and major concert halls, as well as occasional invitations to formal receptions with high-level Soviet officials. I took advantage of these unexpected luxuries, but my aim was to break free of my "Soviet minders" and to explore unofficial Russian culture and get to know independently minded Russians.

Until Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of glasnost allowed for greater freedom, the IREX exchange program was one of the few ways Americans could live in the Soviet Union for extended periods of time, interact relatively freely with Soviet citizens, and work in Soviet institutions, if only as outside experts. To get the most from my fellowship, I followed the advice of the IREX alumni. After receiving my official Soviet documents, I called the first person on my list of contacts and was immediately invited to dinner. That led quickly to more dinner invitations, and before long I was visiting new friends in their modest apartments and sometimes even in communal apartments. I recall spending an evening in a shabby apartment on the outskirts of Leningrad as my hosts tried to entertain me by tuning in the Russian broadcasts of VOA, BBC, and RL, despite the whirring and crackling coming from the local jamming stations.

While I regularly attended the Kirov Opera and symphony concerts, my most memorable cultural experience was discovering the Molodezhny Theatre. Through the informal IREX alumni network I met the director, Vladimir Malishchitsky, who invited me to come to the rehearsals and performances as his personal guest. In contrast to most Leningrad theaters, the Molodezhny was experimental in design and daring in its productions. Although many plays in 1981 dealt with conventional Soviet themes such as World War II and revolutionary movements, Malishchitsky imbued his productions with a spirit of individual freedom. "Our intention is to resurrect the truth of the past," he would tell me, "and not allow it to be buried." By challenging the red lines of Soviet censorship, the Molodezhny Theatre became a rare "public space" where not only could taboo subjects be voiced on stage but also audience members were invited to provide comments after each



performance and then discuss their views with the director and the actors in an open forum.

In the waning years of Leonid Brezhnev's rule, a comparable sense of political frisson extended even to the staid world of Soviet archives and libraries. Although IREX Fellows stayed clear of political activity, our presence in Soviet institutions inevitably caused concern among the staff. Most librarians and archivists treated us with utmost caution and were wary of bringing us materials that could be used to produce "anti-Russian" publications. In sharp contrast, some staff went out of their way to convey a sense of solidarity, communicating to us in subtle ways that they wanted to help us understand the essence of the Soviet system and see an unvarnished picture of Russia. One day, as I was examining letters from the early 19th century, a young archivist asked if I wanted to see the real treasures of the Saltykov-Shchedrin Public Library. He then led me to a large dark

room in the bowels of the building. As he turned on the lights, I was stunned to see hundreds of incunabula-works in Latin illustrated with exquisite miniature drawings. When I asked him why these works were not displayed on the main floor, he told me that they had been stolen from the Warsaw National Library after the third partition of Poland in the late 18th century. Over time, some works were returned to Poland, but the most precious ones remained hidden in the library. The archivist wanted me to see these treasures and draw my own conclusions about the nature of Soviet rule and its impact on Russian-Polish relations.

In all likelihood, some of my informal contacts were reporting on

my activities to the KGB, but that did not affect my easy interaction with Russians. The people I met were eager to engage in serious discussions about the Soviet Union and U.S.-Russian relations. As trust grew, some even shared with me their abhorrence of Soviet ideology and practice, telling me that they simply wanted to live as free people.

As Gorbachev's policy of glasnost gained momentum in the late 1980s. the IREX exchanges began to lose their Cold War aura. American scholars were now welcomed in Soviet institutions, and library resources were readily accessible. The collapse of the Soviet Union further changed the nature of exchanges. Postcommunist Russia could no longer afford to host foreign scholars, and formal governmentto-government agreements seemed unnecessary since the new Russian government allowed Western universities and NGOs to administer language study programs and research

GETTING READY FOR THE IREX FELLOWSHIP WAS AKIN TO PREPARING FOR A LONG TREK IN THE WILLDERNESS. Opposite page: Mark Pomar's Soviet library card from 1981



fellowships by setting up their own offices in Moscow.

In those heady times, the U.S. government passed the Freedom Support Act (FSA) of 1992 that allocated hundreds of millions of dollars to help integrate the former Soviet Union with the West. In the case of exchanges, the U.S. government was now ready to fund the Russian students, researchers, and professionals who would study in the U.S. as well as the Americans heading to Russia. But the allocation of resources turned out to be lopsided. The overwhelming amount of money went to support participants from the former communist countries through many different programs: from short-term business training sessions and study tours for Russian judges and jurists to the establishment of internet centers in rural Russian libraries and American Corners in major cities. Among the more significant achievements of FSA funding was the establishment of large programs for students at the high school, undergraduate, and graduate levels that offered thousands of young

people from across the former Soviet Union the opportunity to study in the U.S. and, in some cases, even earn American degrees. So expansive was U.S. government funding that USAID even set up enterprise funds throughout the former Eastern bloc that invested tens of millions of dollars in smalland medium-sized businesses on a commercial basis. The purpose of the investments was not only to teach Western business practices but also to earn a profit that could then be converted into an endowment that would fund free-standing foundations. Several investment funds were so successful that we now have large foundations in Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, and Russia that continue to fund educational and cultural programs.

As president of IREX, I saw

the merit of many FSA-funded programs but felt that, in the exuberance of the post-Cold War era, the U.S. government was shortchanging Americans preparing for scholarly careers in Russian and postcommunist studies. As vital as it was to help former Soviet citizens understand Western democracy and society, it was no less important for Americans to spend long periods of time conducting research in Russia and the former republics of the Soviet Union. In the 1990s and at the start of the new century, IREX sought funding from private sources to support American scholarship and received grants from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Starr Foundation, and several individual donors. But to operate at scale, IREX needed government funding. Together with my colleagues at American Councils, the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, and the Kennan Institute, I would make our pitch at State Department meetings and in Congress, arguing that support for American scholars



Opposite page: Rooftop view of St. Petersburg, via Alamy. Left: Mark Pomar.

was fundamental if we were to gain a more nuanced understanding of a rapidly changing and potentially dangerous part of the world. Fortunately, our collective lobbying efforts were successful in preserving a modicum of funding for the former Eastern bloc countries, known as the Title VIII account of the Department of State annual budget. This funding provided merit-based grants to American citizens for research in the humanities and social sciences, as well as for advanced language study. It was indispensable for supporting American scholarship and launching many successful careers.

> With a deep "cold peace" settling in, and the shuttering of American educational exchange organizations in Russia, this may be an appropriate moment to look for useful lessons

from an earlier era. Even in the most politically tense periods of the Cold War, including the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the U.S. boycott of the 1980 Olympics in Moscow, educational exchange programs between the U.S. and the Soviet Union continued to function without interruption. Given its distrust of Western NGOs and foundations, today's Russian government may be amenable to reestablishing formal governmentto-government exchange programs that would be apolitical in nature and would operate on a reciprocal basis. Like its Soviet predecessor, the Putin government could see the mutual benefits of student and scholar exchanges and the role they could play in developing a healthier U.S.-Russia relationship. Most important, these programs would give the next generation of American experts on Russia and Eurasia the opportunity to gain greater fluency in Russian, to get to know Russians, and to develop a personal "feel" for the complexities of post-Soviet societies.

Mark G. Pomar is currently at the University of Texas, Austin, as a senior fellow at the Clements Center for National Security and as an adjunct professor at the LBJ School of Public Affairs. From 1975 to 1982, Pomar taught Russian studies at the University of Vermont. He joined Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) as the assistant director of the Russian Service in 1982; in 1983 he became the director of the Russian Service of the Voice of America. From 1987 to 1993, Pomar served as executive director of the Board for International Broadcasting, a federal agency overseeing the operations of RFE/RL. In 1993, Pomar joined IREX, a preeminent U.S. educational organization, as a senior executive; he served as its president from 2000 to 2008. From 2008 to 2017, Pomar was the founding CEO and president of the U.S. Russia Foundation (USRF), a private U.S. foundation based in Moscow that administered educational programs. Pomar received his Ph.D. in Slavic languages and literatures from Columbia University and a certificate from the Russian Institute. He also holds a B.A. from Tufts University. He is the author of the forthcoming book Cold War Radio: The Russian Broadcasts of the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (University of Nebraska Press/Potomac Books).

# The University Consortium and the Harriman Institute: Promoting Engagement with Russia

By Julie Newton

ataliya would not go inside. Her peers-a group of international graduate students from the six elite Russian, European, and American universities that comprise the University Consortium-filed happily into our Harvard host's front door for a welcome dinner and the 2016 Superbowl game. But Nataliya lingered out front. I finally found her there, snowflakes layering her coat and hat. "It will be just like Paris," she said, trying not to look at me. "I just don't want to go in." She then told me about her first trip abroad to France a month after Crimea. The few Russians at the conference faced hostility, she said, and it felt personal. "They told me that 'Russia today is aggressive; that's why we are doing what we are doing in Ukraine," she continued, recovering her composure, "'but that's exactly the way we see you.""

Inherent in Nataliya's story are strands of competing narratives about today's Russia-West confrontation that the University Consortium (UC) sets out to examine. For the past six years, the UC—in which the Harriman Institute and its director Alexander Cooley take a leading role—has brought equal

numbers of Russian, American, and European graduate students together for weeklong intensive training modules (now also online) to unpack their respective narratives in front of one another within a scholarly framework.

The results are impressive: after every module, UC fellows report greater understanding of the other side(s), broadened conceptual lenses for analysis, shifted or expanded perspectives, and stronger belief in the need for cooperation to solve common problems. UC alumni have surpassed expectations by forming the UC's crown jewel, its Alumni Network, comprised of active members from all years, going back to our first module in 2016, which took place at the Harriman.

Such results have branded the University Consortium an unusually

successful multilateral project promoting constructive engagement among Russia, the U.S., and Europe. Funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York and led by six equal partners—the Harriman Institute at Columbia, the Davis Center at Harvard, St Antony's College at Oxford, Sciences Politiques in Paris, the Moscow State Institute for International Relations (MGIMO), and the Higher School of Economics (HSE) in Moscow-the UC generates critical thinking, honest exchange, and greater trust among our network of students, scholars, and former officials across our regions. The University Consortium does this through careful, sustained efforts to build and expand safe spaces for genuine Russia-West dialogue where Nataliya and her Western peers do not feel attacked, dismissed, or disrespected-no matter how deeply they disagree-but instead remain willing to listen to and learn from one another.

Such platforms for productive engagement are not only painstakingly difficult to create; they are also increasingly rare. At both official and unofficial levels since 2014, Russia-West forums for discussion have steadily shut down. Shutting off engagement has encouraged tendencies on all sides to explain the other's behavior as a function of its nature. This leads to what many call "essentialism"—a disproportionate focus on inherent or

Essentialism has encouraged sharp divisions about the causes of the Russia-West confrontation along national, or rather tribal, lines.

systemic factors, without considering the role of contingent or contextual ones. Essentialism has encouraged sharp divisions about the causes of the Russia-West confrontation along national, or rather tribal, lines. Even around the UC's seminar tables, we hear versions of these essentialist narratives, mirroring black-andwhite images of the other, as Nataliya suggested. But "the color of truth is gray," to quote former Harriman director (and UC senior adviser) Robert Legvold, citing the painter Piet Mondrian. And that is the problem. Essentialism rejects gray. It undermines complex understanding, pours fuel on confrontation, and reduces our willingness for cooperation to overcome today's global threats.

It is the mission of the UC to foster constructive engagement in order to gain more accurate understandings of the other's intentions, assumptions, beliefs, interests, and domestic political influences—that is, the multiple sources driving each side's foreign-policy behavior. These sources are not fixed in any country; their content, nature, and relative weights shift over time, depending on internal and external conditions, so understanding them is hard going. And yet, the risks of misunderstanding, mistake, and miscalculation represent the most likely causes for military conflict in Europe, cyber warfare, or even the failure of nuclear deterrence.

Heightened concern for these stakes as well as other costs drives the UC's work and unites its growing community. At all our activities (semiannual training modules, online conversations, member publications, alumni gatherings, and annual conferences), we stress empirical inquiry into the sources of the Russia-



U.S.-EU confrontation and assess the effectiveness of proposed solutions. We seek local and context-specific knowledge through area-studies programs; we apply academic insights from multiple academic disciplines from politics to economics, history, sociology, psychology, and so on; and we incorporate ideas from professional and practical realms. Such a comprehensive approach-for which the Harriman Institute is especially well known-is invaluable. It allows our interregional fellows to explore together not just our countries' profound material and systemic differences but also the more contingent, contextual, and ideational factors dividing us.

Regarding the latter, UC fellows evaluate the impact of perceptions and action-reaction dynamics on Russia-

U.S.-EU relations over the last 30 years. In a popular UC seminar, fellows plumb underlying assumptions and motivated biases on each side-biases that unconsciously inform thinking and hamper positive change. For example, they consider the dangers of "confirmation bias" on Russia-West relations—how preexisting beliefs shape how we react to new information, whatever the reality. Fellows also identify "fundamental attribution errors," where one side tends to offer mitigating, circumstantial explanations for its own behavior, while explaining the other's actions in immutable, essentialist terms. And they discuss the power of emotion, such as resentment, humiliation, respect, fear, hubris, or disillusionment, in shaping change in Russia-West relations over the past

Above: A Harriman-hosted University Consortium training module on Zoom, February 2021. All photos courtesy of Julie Newton.

three decades—all corroborated by recent social science.

Such "mental unpacking" has to happen on all sides to make a difference. As UC senior adviser and emeritus fellow at St Antony's College Dr. Alex Pravda observed, the process of spelling out our mental assumptions and discussing them in front of one another fosters empathy and stimulates introspection on all sides.

To be clear, empathy does not mean sympathy; it simply means seeing the situation from the other side's perspective for the sake of progress in areas of mutual selfinterest, as reported by President Joseph Biden from his recent summit with Vladimir Putin. Empathy is even "indispensable" as a practical policy tool for solving diplomatic problems, as British Ambassador to the USSR Roderick Braithwaite explained to the UC. This means that empathy and introspection are essential for the success of official Track I or unofficial Track II negotiations—something that Legvold says he learned from Marshall Shulman, his own mentor and predecessor at the Harriman and special adviser on Soviet affairs to the Carter administration.

But even inside the safe spaces of the UC, the depths of Russia-West hostility make listening, introspection, and empathy hard. Listening at official levels is even harder under the weight of domestic politics, domestic lobby groups, vested corporate and political interests, biases, misperceptions, historical fears, and emotions.

What helps? First, we take indirect approaches. Rather than debating issues directly—such as Crimea, Donbas, election meddling, or NATO enlargement—we approach them



indirectly through workshops about different national understandings of core concepts, such as sovereignty, interference, security, or national interests. The issues then emerge as examples to illustrate broader concepts, not as subjects for argument. Students may disagree over Ukraine, for example, but they tend to remain constructive as they discuss differences in their respective conceptual understandings, rather than pointing fingers at one another. They learn a lot about each other's thought processand the reasons behind it—and this generates mutual understanding and respect, even in times of disagreement.

Second, we strive to represent as many voices as possible around our tables. Though we were concerned at first that including emotive voices from conflict regions or former Soviet satellites/republics might inject too much intensity or provoke fights, we have found that incorporating those voices is crucial, given that their security concerns and postcolonial complexes shape Russia-U.S.-EU relations in fundamental ways. Indeed, East Central European or East European concerns go to the heart of European security, so we include

constructive voices from those regions at every event. As a result, we have managed to retain a productive and educational atmosphere, while exposing our students to fuller understandings of how *all* sides think through different conceptual lenses, which encourages real learning and cognitive shifts.

What about impact? That UC events lead to more broad-mindedness and solution-oriented thinking is documented in UC surveys and feedback. Moreover, many UC fellows who report new thinking or cognitive shifts have gone into professions in the field. This brings us back to Nataliya, outside in the snow. I finally coaxed her into the Superbowl welcome-dinner and she loved it. She reported that as a result of what she learned during

Above: Participants at a MGIMO (Moscow State Institute of International Relations)-hosted University Consortium module in Moscow, March 2017.

that UC week of training at Harvard (led by an MGIMO professor with a vast array of multinational speakers), she adjusted her master's thesis on NATO enlargement/Russia-NATO relations by adding more insights from the international relations theory of constructivism and greater emphasis on perceptions. She participated enthusiastically in successive UC events, until she left to accept a Russian Foreign Ministry internship with the goal of joining Russia's diplomatic corps.

Similar stories abound among the Western participants. One American student, for example, stressed the value of hearing firsthand (even via Zoom) how differently her Russian peers perceive the same events, and how much they focused on the role of centuries of Russian history in explaining current Russian foreignpolicy behavior. Our inter-regional Zoom module, she added, had deepened her understanding of the sources of Russian foreign policy in ways exceeding American academic curricula. Regarding professional impact, UC alumni (13 of them) were selected by the European Leadership Network as special interns to assist former European officials in policy action-groups, hitching their unique UC training to practical policy goals. Perhaps the greatest demonstration of impact, though, is the UC's growing Alumni Network, which is highly active from the bottom up across all three geographic regions.

Unsurprisingly, we face tough problems. First among those are the Kremlin's political squeezing of Russian universities and America's political polarization over the Russia issue-both of which reduce participants' openness to honest reflection and genuine dialogue. Second, the decrease in job opportunities in professions related to Russia-West relations, especially in Russia, makes it harder for UC alumni to remain in the field. Third, there is the problem of "engagement skepticism." Persuading some UC members, especially from East Central Europe or Eastern Europe who have experienced postcolonial trauma or war, that engagement is required for improving accuracy and enhancing security is especially hard going. Finally, our future growth and financial strategy may require additional funding, but it's a struggle to identify funding sources beyond Carnegie Corporation of New York that are politically acceptable to all sides.

But these struggles are worth the effort. We are relatively small, but I am reminded of Elizabeth Valkenier's interviews with the USSR's 1960s generation. Their unorthodox thinking over two decades helped build the intellectual foundations of Gorbachev's "New Thinking" in foreign policy. I am also reminded of my own IREX exchange back in 1989 when I interviewed Soviet experts on Europe from the early 1960s onward: their engagement with Europeans over decades fostered the kinds of new ideas, greater understanding, and genuine trust on both sides that helped lead the Cold War to its



peaceful end. And I think of Nataliya, who took what she learned from the UC about complexity to Russia's Foreign Ministry. I also think of our American and European fellows, who report similar intellectual and affective benefits from our UC dialogues and who will become the policy-makers and opinionshapers in Western countries for the future. In this way, the UC's growing epistemic community-promoting better mutual understanding through intellectual exchange, more complex ways of thinking, and genuine Russia-West respect—is on the path to affect change.

Julie Newton is the principal investigator of University Consortium; a research fellow at St. Antony's College, University of Oxford; and associate professor at the University of Paris. She is also a member of the Harriman Institute's National Advisory Council and an alumna of the Harriman Institute ('85).

Above, right: Students and faculty at the first-ever University Consortium training module, which took place in New York at the Harriman Institute in November 2015

# GETTENG-THE EEL

# Reporting on the Soviet Union in the Late Fifties and Sixties



## BY COLETTE SHULMAN

he emptying of Stalin's
GULAG began right after his
death in 1953 with the release
of those held on criminal
charges. Soon Khrushchev
included political prisoners and exiles,
and from 1956 onward, hundreds of
thousands came home, a movement
of survivors unseen and unknown by
us Western noncommunist journalists
stationed in Moscow.

Khrushchev's "secret speech" of March 1956, and its repercussions inside the country and beyond, put Moscow on the front pages worldwide for months. Yet we were severely challenged in our reporting. No travel outside Moscow without permission, and then only to major Soviet republic capitals. Few local sources of news-TASS bulletins, official and often useless press conferences, reading between the lines of newspapers, talking with West European ambassadors briefed by their own intelligence sources. Whatever emerged from our searches was subject to Soviet censorship. I remember the frustration of my bureau chief, Henry Shapiro, trying to cover Moscow's reaction to the Hungarian Revolution in November



1956. Not a word from officialdom, and the phone line to Budapest was dead. Of his sometimes revealing Russian contacts he complained, "They get scared and won't tell you anything."

I joined the United Press (UP) Moscow bureau in the middle of this tumult as a wholly inexperienced reporter. What Henry expected of me I knew not, only that we became three to the AP's two. I had spent the year before teaching in and running the small Anglo-American School under the British and American embassies and knew my way around central Moscow. During those first weeks in autumn 1956 of absorbing news agency routine, I had some free time and determined to carve out my own sphere of reporting. The Russian Institute's two-year program of intensive language and area studies gave me the confidence to walk Moscow streets and talk with whomever would respond. I walked into shops and schools and buildings where it looked like something interesting might be going on. I was young, attractive, speaking Russian, saying I was an American journalist bent on informing readers abroad what everyday life was like in Moscow.

Some people put me off with "Come back tomorrow"; others talked, and out of these conversations came dozens of feature articles. About Soviet cars: Who could get hold of one and afford to buy it? What were people watching on Russian TV? How easy was it for a woman to get an abortion, which once again was legal? High school graduates celebrating on Red Square and going down to the river to greet the dawn. Press Departmentarranged interviews with the Bolshoi Ballet School's best pupil who became a prima ballerina; and with the Russian Republic's minister of culture, describing an exciting period in the 1920s, bringing literacy to peasant women in the deep countryside. My editors called for more; our UP clients were curious after years of Iron Curtain separation.

As political repercussions increased, articles reported heated debate at student-faculty meetings, the Moscow young well informed from access to Polish and Yugoslav newspapers and East Europeans studying in Moscow. During the Hungarian Revolution an institute bulletin board asked: WHAT ARE SOVIET TROOPS DOING IN HUNGARY? At an exhibition of

I was an American journalist bent on informing readers abroad what everyday life was like in Moscow.

Opposite page: Colette Shulman.

Above: Shulman interviews Ilya
Ehrenburg for WGBH (1967).

An impressive collection of mostly
French paintings adorn the walls
of his apartment. Ehrenburg died
a few weeks later.



Picasso, young voices advocated complete freedom for Soviet painters, to which the official response was: students have been making too many "demagogic" speeches.

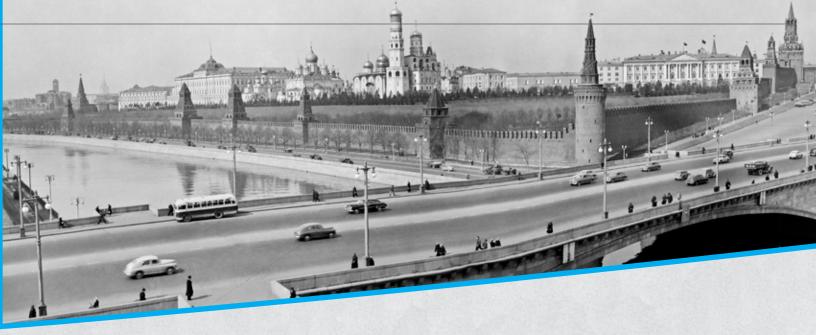
I began writing interpretations of Soviet policy in various areas. One about the Middle East referred to then Foreign Minister Dmitri Shepilov, with whom I had spoken at an embassy reception—a big man with a leonine head of hair, soon to disappear as a member of the "anti-party" group of Malenkov, Molotov, and Kaganovich. What happened to them? I was standing outside the prestigious Botkin Hospital, waiting to interview someone when Shepilov, in pajamas and bathrobe, walked by me with a companion to a secluded bench. I went over, recalled our conversation, and wished him a good recovery; and I got my comeuppance when he looked straight at me and said, "You are mistaken; I am not Shepilov." The censor blacked that out but left the several references to his illness.

From 1956 to 1959 I coincided with almost the last of the old Russian intelligentsia who had survived the purges and the war. I saw them at concerts in the Conservatory, the

Scriabin Museum, Tolstoy's House, and the Tretyakov Gallery. They were still working as writers, scientists, doctors, restorers of museum art, and translators of Western literature, and a few still teaching in secondary schools influencing the young.

An interview with Boris Pasternak in his home in Peredelkino, the writers' colony outside Moscow, on the morning after he won the Nobel Prize remains memorable. He was outwardly pleased to have been so honored. In response to a question, he was off on a 15-minute discourse about the scientific and technical achievements in the world over the past 50 years, how the position of the writer and the artist has changed since his father illustrated the novels of Tolstoy, that he receives many letters from abroad about Doctor Zhivago and tries to answer them all, and how the beautiful French translation of his novel made him weep on reading it. Then he returned to my original question and answered it simply and to the point. There was a childlike quality about him-a vulnerabilitytogether with an enormous power of concentration. His long-boned face was full of expression and warmth-I was altogether captivated.

Above: Shulman (far right) interviewing Moscow University students (Summer 1967).



There was a childlike quality about Pasternak—a vulnerability—together with an enormous power of concentration.

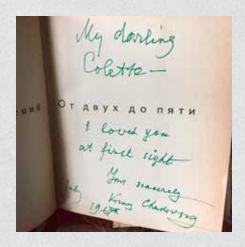
Above: View of the Moscow Kremlin (1956), via ITAR-TASS News Agency/Alamy Stock Photo The censor held up my article for 24 hours awaiting the official response. Although no surprise, it nonetheless shocked me; it was impossible to recognize the Pasternak I had listened to in the vitriolic attacks by *Pravda* and the *Literary Gazette* calling him a traitor, a slanderer, an immoral second-rate writer. A few days later his wife, Zinaida, said he had suffered a mild heart attack—"I am going to cook for him as well as I can; and we will live here quietly, with no interviews, no commotion."

Nine years later, back in Peredelkino to film Korney Chukovsky telling stories to the village children, I arrived with two "minders" instead of the usual one. Chukovsky took a good long look at them and with a subtle gesture whispered in my ear, "If I were you, I would prefer this one to that one." Good as my instincts about people generally were, they got sharpened in being with Russians. In 1967 I also filmed conversations with the writer Ilya Ehrenburg and with Nobel physicist Igor Tamm; by early 1971 all three had died.

Many of the faces I saw on the streets and in the subways suggested a worker-peasant background.

Older babushki, reflecting the Russian village's collective responsibility for looking after one another's children, thought nothing of telling me in winter to put on my hat or, when I was tiptoeing around the back of a large church looking at icons, "Devushka, eto ne muzei" (Young lady, this is not a museum). In remote Russian villages there had existed a communality that enabled them to survive. It was admired, even seen as a model for the future by Slavophiles. In college I thought this might be a distinctive trait of Russian life; as a reporter in Moscow I heard more about the cruelty of collectivization and saw the crush of urban indoor living. People hated communal apartments; they yearned for privacy and room to breathe. It was a clear caution against generalizing about national traits in a country as large and culturally varied as Russia.

I began to reflect on when there is a sharp break between generations as against what gets transmitted from one to another. When talking with bright, educated 20-year-olds in 1956, I knew they must have absorbed something of their parents' deep fear during the late Stalin years. They showed no sign of it. Sometimes



Korney Chukovsky's book From Two to Five, inscribed to Shulman.

Below: Chukovsky (1962), via ITAR-TASS News Agency/ Alamy Stock Photo. Opposite page: Shulman with Jonathan Sanders, assistant director of the Harriman Institute (1986); photo by Wm. W. Irwin. they showed anxiety in conversing with an American, in criticizing their surroundings, in hoping that after Stalin things would be better. How, I wonder, have they negotiated the ups and downs that followed? Now in their eighties, do they fear the severe repression of public protest—if not for themselves, then for their children and grandchildren?

Women's attitudes toward men became for me an example of what gets transmitted. In the early '60s two Russian friends had companions who were heavy drinkers. Not unusual. Unattached men were still scarce from heavy wartime losses, their weaknesses tolerated by women who wanted a child and some companionship. My reflections on the continuity of attitudes passed from mothers to daughters over several generations developed gradually in dialogues with women.

In autumn 1957, when our correspondent in Warsaw was expelled on charges of espionage, I was sent in to replace him for three months. It was a year after the "Polish October" that shook the country, returned Władysław Gomułka to power, and nearly provoked Soviet troops to intervene. Polish Communism struggled with

the deep roots of Polish Catholicism. Religious education reentered the school curriculum. At Christmastime St. Nicholas once again appeared; the Kremlin's Santa Claus Father Frost had gone home, Poles said with a smile. It was good for me to be exposed to a culture different from Russia's, to feel the national cohesion of a people whose land had been overrun and claimed by rulers and their armies over the centuries. Warmly as I felt about Poland, I was glad to get back to Moscow, where the ungainly Polish language could not "mess up" my Russian.

In the 1960s, I continued reporting from Cambridge, Massachusetts, on a 15-minute weekly prime time public television program, Soviet Press This Week, giving me freedom to talk about whatever seemed important. I drew on the daily press and the revelations of Novy mir and other literary-societal magazines-Alexander Solzhenitsyn on the GULAG, Victor Nekrasov's reenvisioning the battle of Stalingrad, the "village writers" on the poverty of the Russian countryside, memoirs, and stories. These probing glimpses as well as travels to Kyiv, the Black Sea, and the grain-growing areas of Kazakhstan broadened my sense of the



Soviet Union's hugeness, its variety of landscapes and peoples.

The program's first year-from the assassination of Kennedy to the overthrow of Khrushchevwas dominated by the Sino-Soviet conflict and particularly by domestic preoccupation with the problems of Soviet agriculture. Politically weakened from withdrawing the missiles from Cuba, Khrushchev was criticized by the Chinese in one attack after another saying he was afraid of war, he was losing his commitment to world revolution, and he was becoming too bourgeois with all his talk of people needing a better life. Khrushchev himself was concerned about the influence of Chinese views in Africa, where Chou En-lai visited 10 countries trying to establish a presence there, with an eye to China's long-term advantage.

Following issues from week to week, I became more adept at reading between the lines. My audiences in Boston, New York, Washington, San Francisco, and in between were on the whole educated and dedicated, commenting appreciatively and often

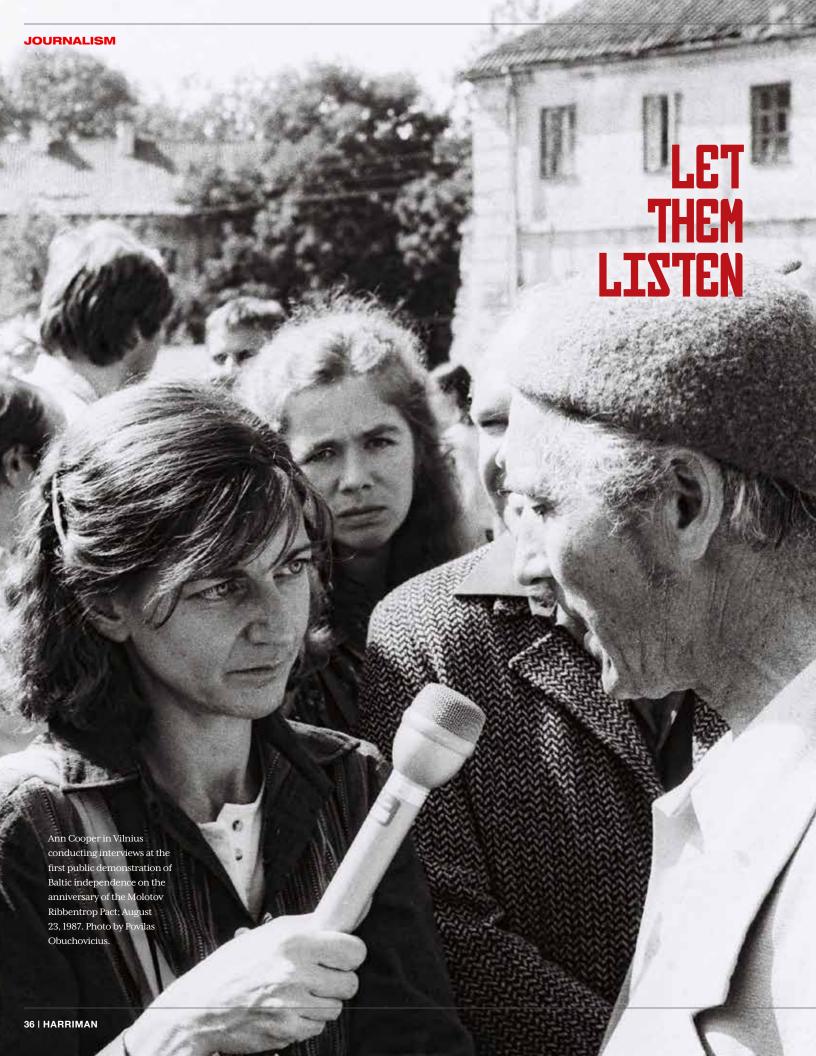
controversially. Coming to know the USSR in some depth, gaining a fingertip feel, also brought me face to face with the ignorance and prejudices inflicting many Americans. At a hearing on the television program in the Massachusetts legislature, it was stated that "Miss" Shulman reported things from the Soviet Union that were really propaganda in the guise of news reporting. I was criticized from both left and right.

A favorite letter from a reader came in response to an article about how carefully and attractively Nina Khrushchev had dressed for the Khrushchevs' White House dinner with the Eisenhowers in 1959. "So many unkind remarks have been made in regard to Mrs. Khrushchev's dress and because she does not wear lipstick or jewelry . . . imply[ing] what a common person she is. . . . Anything wrong with being common?... The effect on the people of Russia of these remarks fills me with some concern. Also, for them to think clothes are so important here.... Thank you, again, for such a kind article."

You've paid tribute to my reporting, Mrs. Stineman from Indiana, and to the importance of kindness in our lives.

Colette Shulman has been a journalist and editor, facilitated and participated in cultural and educational exchanges, and with colleagues shaped a newsletter into a Russian-language magazine for women in Russia creating NGOs in the emerging civil society of the 1990s. She was a student at the Russian Institute from 1953 to 1955.





# COVERIN9 THE ZOVIET COLLAPSE

**B4 ANN COOPER** 



aniel Schorr was the CBS radio correspondent in Moscow in the mid-1950s, a time when broadcast journalists wrote their scripts at the Central Telegraph Office on Gorky Street (now Tverskaya) and handed them to a clerk, who pushed them through a slot in a wall to an unseen censor. Heavy black pencil marks on the returned scripts indicated the words, sentences, and paragraphs that Schorr was not allowed to say when he broadcast to New Yorkthough sometimes, in mid-read, he would slip in some extra information for listeners: "13 words deleted here" or "Two paragraphs deleted here."

Schorr told stories of those heavily censored days over a jovial dinner with several NPR colleagues in my Moscow apartment in 1988. The NPR crew was there to help cover the historic summit meeting of Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev. For two of our team—commentator Schorr and reporter Anne Garrels—it was the first time they'd been allowed in since Soviet authorities had expelled them (Schorr in the 1950s, Garrels in the early 1980s).

Gorbachev's glasnost (usually translated as openness) was the policy that opened a door for Schorr and Garrels to return. But the Soviet glasnost experiment was only beginning, and much of the infrastructure that severely restricted the movements and access of Moscowbased foreign correspondents was still entrenched. Like all foreign journalists and diplomats, I was required to live in a specially guarded housing compound. My car was always easily identified with its bright yellow K004 license plates (denoting "American correspondent"); and all travel outside Moscow by car, plane, or train had to be registered and approved by the Foreign Ministry (a

typical turn-down response: "You want to go to Baku? Sorry, no hotel rooms are available in Baku next week").

Soviet surveillance was also still very much in place. Sinister-looking men occasionally tailed me en route to interviews, and it was assumed that our conversations in the foreigners' compounds were constantly monitored.

As glasnost developed, though, people began to ignore the surveillance—cautiously at first, then much more boldly. By early 1990, when I interviewed former political prisoner Lev Timofeyev in his Moscow apartment about the disappearance of fear, he said he was certain authorities were listening in. But, he added, "Now there is no fear about it. Let them listen."

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As NPR's first Moscow correspondent, I was obliged to cover anything and everything that happened in my five years there. One day I might be scrambling to report on the explosive, behind-closed-doors ejection of Boris Yeltsin from his Communist Party leadership position. Another day I might see the unveiling of yet another Kremlin economic reform plan-each seemingly more complicated than the last. Arms control developments were a staple of our news diet, as were visiting foreign dignitaries and the frequent national Communist Party meetings that had always been heavily choreographed (and were heavy on sycophancy)—but now sometimes erupted in genuine, passionate policy debates.

Just covering events in Moscow was more than a full-time job, but there was also a tsunami of news in Russia's provinces and the l4 other Soviet republics. I made dozens of trips: in Uzbekistan, I watched at the border with Afghanistan as the last Soviet tanks and soldiers came home from a humiliating war; in Siberia, striking coal miners described their abysmal working conditions; in the Baltic republics, which I visited more than a dozen times, I chronicled the growing demands for independence from Soviet power.

Underpinning so much of this news was what Lev Timofeyev had identified with his "Let them listen" comment. As glasnost spread across the country and through its major institutions—politics, arts and culture, the church, journalism, academia—you could literally hear people losing their fear of speaking out and watch them openly embrace ideas that once would have earned them a stint in the Gulag, or even execution.

But you could also see how this exhilarating freedom set off a backlash, eventually joined by glasnost architect Gorbachev. He denounced as "rabble" the many protesters calling for his resignation at the May Day 1990 Red Square parade. For me, the disappearance of fear and its many repercussions was the central story of the final years of the Soviet Union.

Of course, it wasn't a straight path from the Communist Party's ruthless control of everything to a period of remarkably free speech. Reformers and conservatives battled at all levels of power, in all kinds of institutions. A trip I made in 1988 offers a snapshot of how that turbulent push and pull affected foreign correspondents.

I'd met Sasha Mokretsov, a young Russian veteran of the war in Afghanistan, who invited me to his hometown, Perm. For years, the Soviet war in Afghanistan was a highly censored topic, and young men who served there came home with mental and physical injuries that got scant public attention.

Sasha, with help from a sympathetic local Komsomol leader, Andrei Yablokov, had organized an informal group where the city's young veterans could talk and support one another; in a previous era, when it was dangerous to contradict the myth that Communism took care of all problems, it would have been impossible to form such a group.

I was eager to go to Perm to learn more about Sasha and his group and to see how other people in the city regarded the disastrous Soviet military venture. There was a big problem, though. During the Cold War era, Perm was declared a closed city, completely off limits to foreigners. No American had been allowed to visit since.

No worries, said Sasha. He would get his friend Andrei, the Komsomol chief in Perm. to send me a formal invitation.

That invitation, and the new commitment to more openness, somehow convinced the Foreign Ministry to quietly sweep away a Stalinist policy and clear me to become the first American in decades to visit Perm.

Only after I arrived did I learn of my next major obstacle. Andrei and Sasha had acted on their own in inviting me, and when local Perm Communist Party bosses learned what they'd done, they were apoplectic. Andrei received strict orders to keep me so busy I would have no chance to speak with anyone, about Afghanistan or anything else of substance.

He had little choice but to oblige. During the day, he led me on a classic Soviet propaganda tour, from



*Above*: Cooper in Perm interviewing Soviet veterans who had served in Afghanistan, 1989.



# FOR ME, THE DISAPPEARANCE OF FEAR AND ITS MANY REPERCUSSIONS WAS THE CENTRAL STORY OF THE FINAL YEARS OF THE SOVIET UNION.

museum, to factory, to a very slow boat ride on the Kama River that killed an entire afternoon.

But in the evenings and on the weekend, with a wink and a nod, Andrei's agenda disappeared. I had dinner with veterans at Sasha's home. I met more of them on the weekend. when they gathered in a nearby forest for athletic competitions that they dubbed "war games." A journalist, sent to photograph me on that interminable boat trip, later told me how Afghan veterans had once confronted his editor, asking why the newspaper didn't write about the war. "We don't have any war dead in Afghanistan," the editor told them. (In fact, the year I visited Perm-eight years into the conflict-the Soviet government finally revealed how many soldiers had died: over 13,000. At least 28 of them came from Perm.)

My most moving encounter was a late-night visit to Perm State University. Volodya, a blind veteran introduced to me by Sasha, was studying there, with help from fellow veterans who read his textbooks to him. Volodya took me to a dorm room where a dozen students had gathered to share thoughts about Afghanistan.

Some of the students were veterans, and nearly all called the Soviet invasion illegal. "In democratic countries, things like that don't happen," one said.

Another said of the secret invasion: "If people had known the facts then, I'm sure the answer would have been no."

Not so, said a third student. If the public had been consulted, "we would have agreed," he said. Because in 1979, when the Soviet military entered Afghanistan, "We thought in a completely different way. Perhaps we didn't think at all."

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The greatest joy for foreign correspondents in the late Soviet era was the ability to have such conversations, with people from all walks of life who were bursting to share their thoughts and opinions for the first time.

Perhaps the second greatest joy for foreign reporters was the Congress of People's Deputies, the legislative body created by Gorbachev and elected in 1989. We called the elections "quasidemocratic" because, although there was freewheeling political competition for some seats, Gorbachev's plan kept twothirds of the deputy slots safely in the hand of reliable Communists—including Gorbachev and the other Politburo members, who appointed themselves so they didn't have to face voters.

A few years ago, I wrote a nostalgic essay for *Columbia Journalism Review* about spring 1989. Back then, the new legislature had first convened, and Soviet journalists and foreign correspondents had unprecedented access to its sessions in the Kremlin Palace of Congresses.

"During breaks journalists could roam the palace's vast lobbies, where it was possible to corner Andrei Sakharov, listen to the pontifications of Boris Yeltsin, and even, on occasion, probe the thoughts of Mikhail Gorbachev or his fellow Politburo members Yegor Ligachev and Alexander Yakovlev, the political yin and yang of the Communist leadership," I wrote. "What a feast for access-starved journalists, who, in the pre-Gorbachev era, could waste weeks or months seeking meetings with even the most low-level officials."

Inside the chamber, the Congress of People's Deputies gave a national platform to once-banished hard-core dissidents, pro-independence Baltic politicians, and workers from many fields—all of whom had managed to win one of the competitive seats. For two weeks, when Congress met for the first time, the country virtually stopped working, as people tuned in to jaw-dropping debates carried live, gavel-to-gavel, on state TV. Speech had surely never been freer in Soviet history.

But like so many new ideas in those years, this freedom of political speech ran into a massive roadblock. Deputies could denounce policies or call for radical changes like a multiparty system, but they had no actual power to change anything. Power remained firmly in the grip of the Communist Party, where many members now also felt free—to denounce Gorbachev and his reforms, and demand a return to the authoritarianism of the past.

That was the intent of the State Committee for the State of Emergency, a.k.a. the *putschisty*, who put Gorbachev under house arrest in August 1991 and announced they would roll back many of his reforms in order to "save the Motherland."

Rumors of coups had circulated periodically for years, sometimes so intensely that foreign editors ordered their Moscow correspondents to cancel vacations or reporting trips outside of Moscow. When it finally came, the actual coup attempt caught many of us out of the country, or out of town. I was reporting in Vilnius, capital of the Soviet republic of Lithuania, but managed to get back to Moscow in time for the coup leaders' surreal press conference the first evening.

On the coup's 20th anniversary, I wrote for *Columbia Journalism Review* about that evening: "Some of the most brazen and important acts of modern-day journalism played out on TV screens across the Soviet Union." One of those brazen acts was a cheeky

question thrown to the putschisty, during their live press conference, by a young Russian journalist: "Could you please say whether or not you understand that last night you carried out a coup d'état?" Another was a video story, snuck onto the evening news, that showed a defiant Boris Yeltsin, surrounded by hundreds of supporters, denouncing the coup and calling on people to resist. Until then, the airwaves had been full of docile anchors, reading over and over the propagandistic decrees of the coup leaders; now, journalists had managed to signal that there was resistance and a strong voice -Yeltsin's-at its head.

Other Soviet journalists also defied the coup, broadcasting truth on radio, distributing it via fax, and circulating it in primitive underground newspapers. Clearly the hardliners had badly underestimated what it would take to control media that had grown accustomed to the freedoms of glasnost. I have never been prouder of my profession.

Nor have I ever been as sleep-deprived as I was when I raced around Moscow speaking with Yeltsin's defenders, calling friends in other cities to learn what was happening there, and monitoring independent radio station Ekho Moskvy (Moscow Echo), which kept up its broadcasts from clandestine locations. When the coup attempt collapsed on the third day, more nonstop reporting followed as Moscow exploded in joy. People danced on Red Square. They toppled Felix Dzerzhinsky's statue from his pedestal at KGB headquarters. They gathered to cheer Yeltsin, calling his name along with a chant I had not heard before: "Ros-si-ya, Ros-si-ya." The new chant sent a signal; Soviet collapse now felt inevitable.





*Above*: Cooper in St. Petersburg while working on a story about Pushkin, 1987.

A number of foreign correspondents were scheduled to move on from Moscow to other assignments in 1991. What month they left had a distinct impact on how they saw its future. A leading British journalist who departed a few months before the coup wrote a valedictory piece full of the pessimism that was widespread at the time, particularly following the Soviet Army's attack on the pro-independence movement in Lithuania that January.

I left about a month after the collapse of the August coup, when euphoria was still high and the future seemed to hold democratic promise for what would soon be 15 separate countries. As a result, I had trouble understanding what was going on in the 1990s—particularly in Russia, where, in 1993, Boris Yeltsin sent tanks to fire on the same White House where he had led opposition to the 1991 coup attempt. Some of the people he was attacking had been by his side in those scary August days of 1991.

A year later I was puzzled by the amnesty granted to those who had been charged with treason for arresting Gorbachev. And in 1996, my NPR colleague Anne Garrels had to tutor me extensively in current Russian politics, when I returned to help her cover Boris Yeltsin's reelection campaign. His main opponent was a Communist. But didn't Communism collapse, along with the Soviet Union? And if Yeltsin had been the savior hero five years earlier, wouldn't his reelection be a slam dunk?

Well, hardly, and that's why I was there, getting a crash course in the chaos of the Yeltsin presidency and the new public yearning to return to some of the stability of the Soviet era. Yeltsin won the 1996 election, but he was helped along by some of the journalists I had once so admired, who had abandoned their ethical principles to keep their man in office.

By the time Vladimir Putin replaced Yeltsin, I had moved from journalism to press freedom advocacy, as executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). I brought to that job "knowledge of the former Soviet Union and rosy, outdated memories of glasnost. None of that prepared me for being a press freedom

advocate in the challenging new world of post-Soviet journalism," as I wrote in a lengthy 2020 report for Harvard University's Shorenstein Center, which surveys the history of Russian media from glasnost to today.

As CPJ director, I made several trips to Russia, most of them prompted by the murders of talented journalists who dared investigate the country's new powers: Putin, his political cronies, and the rich oligarchs who swore allegiance to him. Violence was the most severe tool, but under Putin press freedom was curbed in so many other ways, from oligarch takeovers of independent papers to administrative fines against critical news outlets (for alleged tax violations or failure to meet a fire code).

Putin's first decade in power was a dismal time for Russian media. Yet press freedom seemed to have hit a new low when—as a journalism professor—I visited Russia in October 2014. It was several months after Russia's annexation of Crimea, and I'd been invited by the U.S. Embassy in Moscow to come as an expert speaker. The list of suggested topics included radio journalism, using social media for reporting, and several other subjects—but *not* the sensitive issue of press freedom.

The Russia I visited on that trip was far less friendly to an American than the one I'd left in 1991. I did several press events, some of which were dominated by hostile questions from one or two journalists, whose vehemence seemed to cow others into silence.

At Voronezh State University one afternoon, the journalism rector introduced me in an auditorium that was filled to its 300-seat capacity. I was pleasantly surprised to see the turnout. But as soon as I finished my talk (I no longer remember what I said, and it

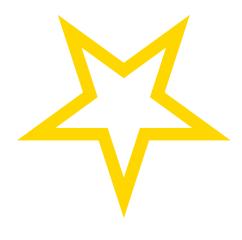
was surely eclipsed by what was about to happen), several young people stood up holding signs, in English, demanding a stop to Nazism in Ukraine. (Whatever I did speak about, it had nothing to do with Ukraine.)

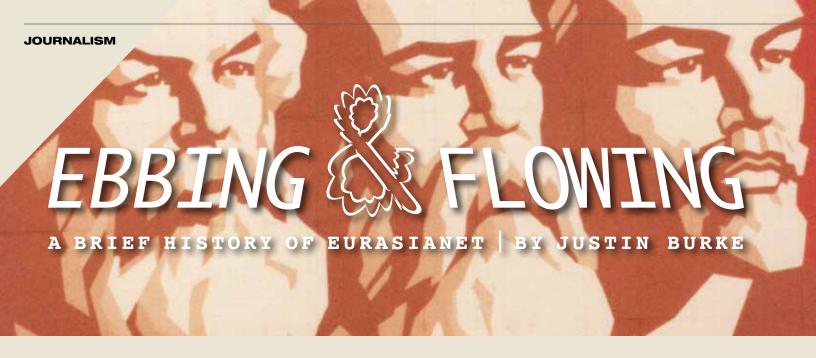
Two other flamboyant provocateurs monopolized the question time. One was a muscle-builder from Luhansk who said he'd worked as a fixer for American journalists covering the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Every one of the Americans, he insisted, lamented that they "can't report the truth of what's going on here" because their bosses in the U.S. ordered them to write only anti-Russia stories. So he claimed, offering not a shred of evidence.

A local website covered the session, and I emailed the article to my husband back in New York. "You look quite stressed," he wrote, referring to the photos accompanying the text.

The visit indeed had its stressful moments. But the strongest feeling I had was sadness, never more so than at the end of that session in Voronezh. Once the provocateurs had their say, and after the rector dismissed the audience, a dozen or so journalism students came up to take selfies with me. I was glad to see them, but sad that they had remained silent through the event. I understood why: unlike those students in Perm, finding their eloquent voices in 1988, these students were living in a new reality. It's one likely to survive throughout Putin's tenure, when criticism is once again stifled, and those who express it can face serious consequences.

Ann Cooper is CBS Professor Emerita of Professional Practice in International Journalism at Columbia Journalism School and a faculty member emerita at the Harriman Institute.





hen Eurasianet publications about refugees and started up migration at the Open Society in mid-1999, Institute, now the Open Society Foundations. But suddenly my Vladimir Putin was a nobody, and democratization was ascendent in Eurasia. These days, I sometimes catch myself shaking my head in disbelief over how much has changed since-no one back then could have imagined that spacetime could bend in such ways as to make facts relative. Eurasianet, and watchdog journalism in general, has

experienced plenty of convulsions over the past two-plus decades. Coming to terms with all the uncertainty hasn't been easy. When we launched, we sailed with the weather gauge. But now it often feels like we're rowing upstream against the flow, expending lots of energy to make moderate progress.

Like so many things, Eurasianet's founding was the by-product of circumstances, not design. In early 1999, I believed my journalism career was over: I had left my job as a foreign correspondent for the Christian Science Monitor four years earlier and had been overseeing

department was shut down, and a colleague asked me to develop a web-based news platform covering Eurasia, mainly the Caucasus and

> Central Asia's 'stans. This was still the pre-Google age, so the internet was generally looked down upon by journalists as a poor cousin of print mass media. But I embraced the task of building what became Eurasianet. It kept me closely involved in covering Eurasia, a region I had spent most of my college years and professional career trying to understand.

I remember talking to some old journalist friends in those early days; they'd ask what I was doing, and I would tell them I ran a news website. They would invariably look at me benignly and try to say something kind, when it was clear they thought I'd been relegated from the Premier League directly to the fourth division. (A few years later, when the digital revolution started pushing print to the brink, some of those same friends would be inquiring

whether there were any job openings at Eurasianet.)

Eurasianet is built on the journalistic principles that I practiced as a young reporter for the Associated Press and with the Monitor: you only report verifiable information; and you ground analysis in available evidence, not conjecture.

> As a Moscow correspondent for the Monitor in the early 1990s, I had the chance to visit all 15 formerly Soviet republics. I was able to explore many of the Soviet

42 | HARRIMA

Opposite page: Justin Burke in St. Petersburg during a study abroad program, 1985. Right: Burke in front of a train car on the Trans-Siberian Railroad, 1996.

> Union's nooks and crannies, experiencing everything from a blizzard in late May during the midnight sun in Murmansk to watching on a frigid February afternoon a shaman's healing ceremony, performed in his izba reachable only by driving 20 kilometers from Yakutsk on the frozen Lena River. Such experiences reinforced in me a conviction that to capture a genuine sense of what it is going on in a country or region,

you've got to travel. That's why Eurasianet has always relied on writers who live in the region. Our breakthrough moment is connected to an indelible tragedy-9/11. In the wake of the attacks, lots of people knew nothing about the region that Osama bin Laden and other radical Islamic movements had used as their base of operations. Eurasianet was one of the few outlets back then capable of providing readers with a solid

understanding of Central Asia,

including Afghanistan. We couldn't know it at the time, but 9/11 was also the high-water mark for the democratization process in Eurasia. The so-called war on terror prompted the United States and European Union to alter their policy priorities: national security considerations overrode everything else. Regional leaders were quick to pick up on this and began to methodically throttle all forms of opposition. It was an open door for kleptocratic behavior.

The start of this century also saw the dawn of social media-at first a boon, but now more of a bane. As readership across the internet grew, Eurasianet experienced rapid growth, and we basked in the glow

of rising respectability. That was the good part. But we also discovered a downside to unfiltered discussion: around this time, we decided to disable comments on stories and

to shut down our message boards entirely. Why? Because we found that followers of Hizb ut-Tahrir, and other radicals in Central

Asia, kept hijacking discussions to spread controversial views, and we

lacked the resources to moderate

the comments.

It's an old adage that it's much easier to tear down than to build. This saying is relevant for social media. It has given everyone a voice, which is great in principle. But in practice, at least in Eurasia, it has enabled a new form of authoritarianism. Illiberal actors have proven all too savvy in weaponizing social media, using it to trump advocates of openness and opportunity.

Social media's effect on factbased journalism has also been devastating. The impact on advertising revenue has been well documented. But more importantly, its rise unleashed a race to the bottom in the search for "eyeballs." Misinformation, disinformation, and trivial information gained more

> Eurasianet resisted the temptation to follow the trend, and our editorial approach has remained consistent. But we were fortunate. At this time of wrenching change,

value than watchdog journalism.

we were an operating program of a major foundation. Thus, unlike for-profit media outlets, we had an operating budget that was never subject to market pressures. We were somewhat shielded from the worst effects of the great digital disruption.

#### **JOURNALISM**

From a coverage standpoint,
Eurasianet experienced some
big moments in the early aughts.
The color revolutions in Georgia
in 2003 and Kyrgyzstan in 2005
raised hopes for the rule of law. (C
But the optimism proved fleeting, in Ru
dulled by the Uzbek crackdown in associati
Andijan in 2005 and Russia's knee- with suspic
capping of Georgia in 2008. government in

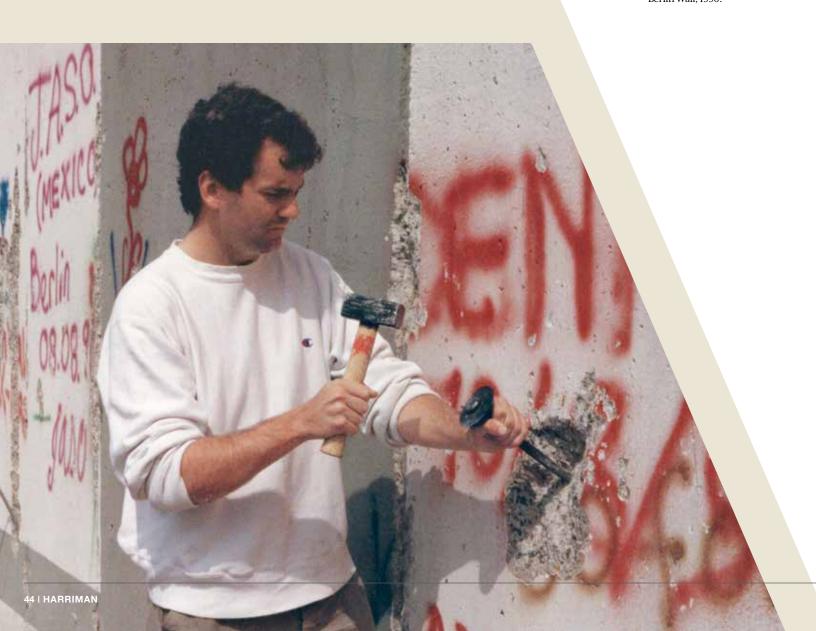
was a tough time for Eurasianet. General reader interest in Eurasia waned a bit as the U.S. war on terror lost its way. More

This century's second decade

a coverage standpoint, importantly, authoritarian leaders experienced some across the region developed new in the early aughts. methods for turning the screws on actions in Georgia independent media and NGOs. By stan in 2005 2015, Open Society Foundations alle of law. (OSF) was declared "undesirable" affecting, in Russia; and Eurasianet, due to its lawn in association with OSF, was viewed linee with suspicion by virtually every government in the region.

The only solution was independence. Eurasianet "spun off" from OSF and became a stand-

Left: Burke at the Berlin Wall, 1990.



alone, nonprofit news organization

in 2016. Shortly thereafter, we

### EURASIANET PUBLISHED SOME OF THE FIRST REPORTING ON CHINA'S BURGEONING CRACKDOWN ON MUSLIM MINORITIES IN XINJIANG, BASED ON RESEARCH AND INFORMATION FROM HARRIMAN SCHOLARS.

entered into a hosting agreement with the Harriman Institute. The relationship provided needed ballast for our transition. It also provided Harriman with a means to accelerate the spread of academic expertise to the general reading public. Eurasianet, for example, published some of the first reporting in early 2018 on China's burgeoning crackdown on Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, based on research and information from Harriman scholars. Spinning off was not difficult editorially speaking. The business side was another matter. Eurasianet had a great team of editors and writers, but no one had much experience with fundraising or managing cash flows. It was a steep learning curve.

The last few years have been challenging to say the least.

Grappling with the spamming of the public discourse by alternative facts often seems like a Sisyphean task.

And let's not get into the nightmare of COVID-19.

While stock in fact-based reporting may now be approaching an all-time low, I remain hopeful, even confident, of a rebound. I

often remind myself of the time
back in August 1991, when I was on
Lubyanka Square and witnessed the
dismantling of Felix Dzerzhinsky's
massive statue amid the failed coup
against Mikhail Gorbachev. I admit
when the statue was ripped from its
plinth and started swaying from the
rting crane's steel cable, I cheered as if my
oning team had just won the World Series
ities with a home run in the bottom of
the ninth. I completely bought into
an scholars. the end-of-history myth: Cold War
over; democracy wins!

Of course, it was naive to believe that. Subsequent events have shown there is no final tide—that history constantly ebbs and flows. But this realization is now buoying for those like us who are waiting for a fresh wind to fill the sails of watchdog journalism.

Justin Burke is publisher and executive director of Eurasianet, which is hosted at the Harriman Institute. n February 2012, I landed in Moscow in the middle of what, at the time, looked like Russia's biggest journalistic story in years. Crowds reaching a hundred thousand people were coming into the streets, braving that winter's numbing frost, to protest the results of a fraudulent parliamentary election—and, more generally, to voice their rising displeasure with the corruption, cynicism, and authoritarian overreach that had come to personify the Putin system.

After more than a decade of studying Russia's history, politics, and language—including a formative spell as a graduate student at the Harriman Institute—I had decided to leave my job as a junior editor at a magazine in New York and buy a oneway ticket to Moscow. That winter's protests felt like a unique moment, one that I would be remiss to let pass me by as a young, aspiring foreign correspondent. Would the Russia story ever be as urgent or in demand again? In time, of course, that would come to sound naive.

My first days in Moscow were exhilarating and hectic in equal

measure. I had been to the city many times and was familiar with its madcap energy and imposing form. Moscow always struck me as colossal and majestic-as if thefeeling of tragedy, even menace, lurked never too far offstage, but that's what made the place so invigorating, and certainly fascinating. I had little experience covering protests, even if those in the winter of 2012 were approved by the authorities, giving them the odd veneer of official sanction. Riot police in body armor were everywhere—their imposing yet awkward getup gave them the nickname "cosmonauts"but they let crowds of demonstrators walk past and listen to impassioned speeches from a varied cast of opposition figures.

One of the first stories I wrote from Moscow was on the prominence of humor and satire at the protests, a jocular irreverence aimed at making Vladimir Putin and his allies in the Kremlin "appear out of touch, uncool, and, in a way, not especially dangerous." The country's middle class, I argued, were "forging a new political language: light, very much alive, and thickly coated with irony." But that sense of lightness and promise didn't last long. Nor did the era of the Kremlin tolerating large-scale demonstrations in the streets.

That May, on the day of Putin's inauguration to a third term, I made my way to Moscow's Garden Ring, where a crowd of tens of thousands had gathered. They began to march, signs in hand, the mood rawer and more uneasy than it had been earlier that winter: the protestors frustrated by how little the country's political system cared about their demands; the state ever less tolerant of people still being out on the streets at all.



# A DECADE AS A FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT IN PUTIN'S RUSSIA

BY JOSHUA YAFFA



# THINGS TURNED CHAOTIC, AND SOON, VIOLENT.

Video operator on a fire truck boom at a rally on Bolotnaya Square, December 10, 2011. Photo by Sergey Norin via Wikimedia Commons.

A cordon of riot police blocked the flow of marchers as they moved toward the stage set up on Bolotnaya Square. Things turned chaotic, and soon, violent. I watched as riot police grabbed people from the crowd and brought their batons down on their heads, dragging them away for arrest. Some protestors lobbed bits of asphalt back at the police. I couldn't make sense of much, other than that I wanted to get off the square, which was impossible given the immovable phalanx of police.

In the days and weeks to come, police rounded up dozens of protestors and charged them with participating in a "mass riot," a claim that seemed clearly inflated and politically motivated. The show trial that followed marked the end of one phase and the start of another. "Before that day, it was relatively safe to be a regular, anonymous supporter of the opposition; afterwards, that was no longer the case," I wrote in a magazine feature on the Bolotnaya case, as it came to be called. "Putin and those around him had managed to secure their rule with clever games of cooptation and manipulation. Now they would rely on blunter tools."

I had come to Russia to cover a protest and found myself tracking a slow-motion crackdown, with all manner of independent media outlets and civil-society groups targeted. In

Moscow's liberal quarters—which, to be honest, were home to most of my friends and colleagues in the city—a feeling of buoyant optimism, however naive in hindsight, began to sour.

A year later, the mood shifted even further, with the Maidan protests in Ukraine and, most decisively, what followed: Russia's annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas region of Ukraine. Suddenly I and my fellow journalists in Moscow, both Russian and Western, were thrust into the world of conflict reporting. We had come of age in the postmodern fantasy world of Russian politics, where events often felt not quite real, and now found ourselves donning flak jackets and ducking firefights. That was very real. Making the job even harder was the degree of murkiness, obfuscation, and outright misdirection that defined the war.

I spent a number of months following the story of one Russian conscript soldier named Petr Khoklov who went missing in Donbas, briefly turning up as a prisoner held by Ukrainian forces, then disappearing again just as quickly. How exactly he ended up in Ukraine was a mystery—



Russia was sending its forces over the border even as it denied any such thing—as was the question of how he might ever return home. The Russian military had written him off, and the only person interested in his fate was his older brother back in Russia. I got a series of contradictory stories

from official sources, or just as often, no information at all. "It had become obvious that a Russian soldier in Ukraine was a deeply inconvenient person to bring home," I wrote in an article on my search for Khoklov. On one level, that piece was about Russia's shadow war in Ukraine; but on another, it was about the cost inflicted by those larger forces on one lost and powerless individual.

As Russia's role in stoking the conflict became clearer, and especially after the downing of Flight MH17, the war took on the feel of a proxy geopolitical struggle; at least that was how the Kremlin saw it. Russia was upending the international order and pushing back against Western power—

and however strange or unwelcome it felt, it was hard as a journalist not to get sucked into this new dichotomy.

In many ways the Donbas war was a fight over the presentation of information and narratives, making the very act of gathering facts and reporting them seem a provocative intrusion into the conflict. I rejected this paradigm and insisted on a kind of dispassionate professional competence, but that was hard to explain on the war's front lines. The questions were predictable and relentless: Who sent you, whose story are you here to tell, whose cause are you here to advance? Despite my insistence to the contrary, both internal and verbalized, it could feel as if I was participating in a struggle I had merely intended to observe.

That dynamic reemerged in new ways in the wake of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, when suddenly Russia became a central political story for American readers. Had the Kremlin interfered in that election? Was Donald Trump a compromised agent of Putin? Was Russia making the American electorate paranoid and unstable—or were we doing that to ourselves? As these storylines came to dominate headlines back home, they grew increasingly frustrating to cover from inside Russia.

For starters, much of the reporting grew out of leaks and sources in Washington, not Moscow, which meant I often had very little knowledge or ability to confirm (or refute) the allegations that interested readers back home. Officials in the Kremlin and the FSB do not pass information to journalists as do their counterparts in the White House and the FBI. Who knows, I thought, maybe some of the more alarming tales of

Russian interference were true. Yet, rather paradoxically, Russia was not always the best or most productive place to report on them. I felt at once at the center of a big and important story and yet strangely unable to penetrate its inner sanctum.

Beyond that frustration, I felt another: the Russia I had come to know as a student and then even more intimately as someone who lives and works here was not always reflected in the coverage I was reading in the U.S. press. Instead, it felt as if Russia served as a kind of psychological foil for our own fear and disorientation. It is now clear that the Kremlin did seek to interfere in the 2016 election, but that it did so the same way it usually acts: chaotically, messily, inefficiently. For one article, I spoke with a number of leading independent journalists in Moscow, who, as I wrote, were "bemused, frustrated, or disappointed in the way that the U.S. press has covered Putin and Russia." One of them, Mikhail Zygar, said that coverage has made "Putin seem to look much smarter than he is, as if he operates from some master plan." The truth is, he told me, "there is no plan-it's chaos."

Eventually, the fever of the
Trump-Russia story broke, freeing
up space to return to writing about
Russia itself, in all its wonder and
beauty and tragedy. I wrote cultural
pieces, like one on Maxim Osipov,
a doctor-turned-author in Tarusa,
a provincial town I have grown to
love. Meanwhile, Moscow became
an ever more pleasant place to live:
fun, exciting, alive, with an exploding

number of fantastic and affordable restaurants. This is the aspect of life here I suspect least comes across in my coverage: the surface experience of life in Moscow has become smoother, easier, more enjoyable—European, you could say—but at the same time, the country's politics have tacked in the exact opposite direction.

In recent months, that repressive drift has picked up fearful momentum. The catalyst was the poisoning and subsequent arrest of Alexei Navalny, the country's

# EVENTUALLY, THE FEVER OF THE TRUMP-RUSSIA STORY BROKE.



leading opposition politician. I reported on protests in the winter of 2021 that were broken up with an uncompromising violence that would have shocked me 10 years earlier.

Now I thought it routine. Journalists were told to wear yellow vests if they planned to cover demonstrations, but even that measure didn't protect several from ending up on the receiving end of a police baton. I darted among side streets and courtyards to avoid columns of police on the march.

Across the country, the number of people detained climbed into the thousands. Parliament passed one restrictive law after another; every week it felt as if a media outlet or even individual journalists were being labeled "foreign agents." The onetime small niches for freedom, however self-contained and ineffectual, were disappearing. These days, the

domestic political story has become unambiguously dark.

It has also become personal, so far as the latest wave of repressions has targeted the media. Over the years, I have become close with many Russian journalists, a number of whom work at outlets targeted by the state or have been personally stamped with the "foreign agent" designation, complicating if not ending their careers. Several have left the profession; some, the country. I can't help but feel dispirited as I see those whom I admire face increasingly maddening and absurd barriers to simply doing their job.

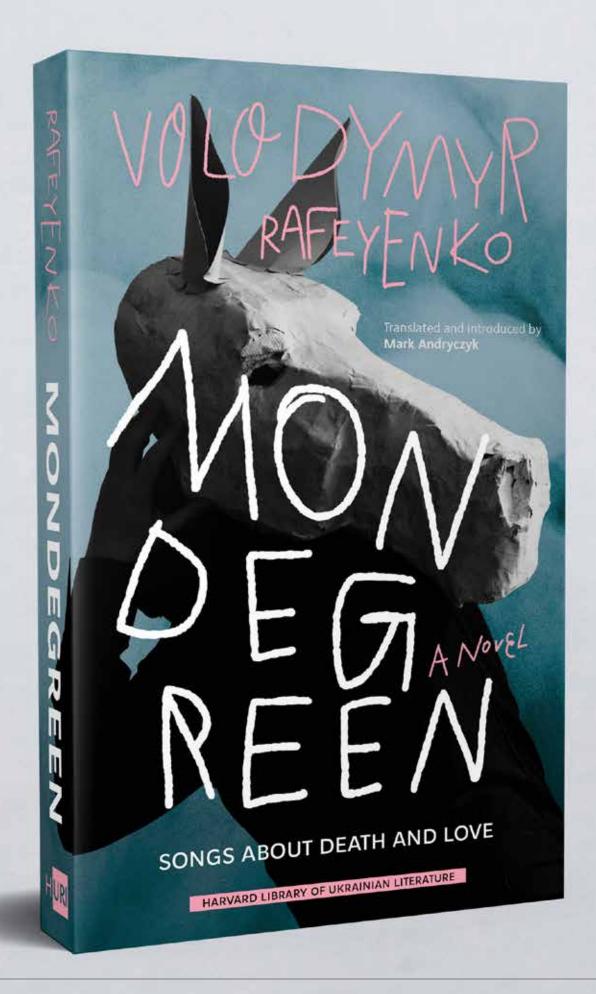
So far, foreign correspondents in Moscow, including me, do not face any of the pressures—legal, economic, personal—that are regularly endured by our Russian counterparts. That dynamic has left me with a heightened respect for those who do work under such constraints. The stakes of journalism in Russia feel much higher; here it's not so much a profession as a calling. Would I have the same level of bravery and fortitude? I'm not sure.

After a decade in Russia, both my affection and fascination remain. I can be delighted or horrified by the stories I'm reporting—but never indifferent. I owe my career to this country, not to mention some of my

most intense, strongly felt memories, both happy and not. I have long found great comfort, and no small amount of utility, in the insider-outsider status of the foreign correspondent: I know the place, its history and language, but I can also see it with the eyes of a stranger, which, after all, is how the reader will see it. The job is one of translation, not so much of language but of experience. Of course, that's the only option available to me when reporting in Russia-I have no familial or personal ties to the land—so perhaps I have a self-interest in the value of such an approach, but I do hope I'm able to bring empathy to my reporting: for those people whose stories I'm telling, and for those who are reading them.

Joshua Yaffa is a Moscow correspondent at the New Yorker. He is an alumnus of SIPA ('08) and Columbia Journalism School ('07).







**SONGS ABOUT DEATH AND LOVE** 

(AN EXCERPT)

VOLODYMYR BY RAFEYENKO

TRANSLATED BY MARK ANDRYCZYK

Mondegreen: Songs about Death and Love, by Volodymyr Rafeyenko, translated with an introduction and notes by Mark Andryczyk, is forthcoming from the Harvard Library of Ukrainian Literature. Printed by permission of the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute.



abinsky finally climbed to the top of Golden Gates. The twenty-ninth station of the Kyiv metro. Although it's raining, there are many people by the metro. It's always like that here. The Syretsko-Pecherska Line. Dark-blue clumps crawl in the sky. They formed over the Baltics and swam over here to this station, which has existed since December 31st of the eightyninth year of the previous century in order to ruin people's moods. This sense of

dampness kills one's self-confidence. And it is only the round columns, the Byzantine chapiters, and the mosaic panels, only the eternal darkgrey granite, that somehow support the will to movement, if not to work. According to *The Daily Telegraph*, it is one of the twenty-two most beautiful stations in Europe. Kyi, Shchek, Khoryv, Lybid, Dyr, Askold, Ihor Son of Riurik, the esteemed Princess Olha, and so on, all the way up to Danylo Romanovych. In other words, all of our guys and gals are here, everyone is where they are supposed to be, there is no need for any concern. Your insanity will find you, nonetheless. And there's the St. Sophia Cathedral, and there's the Church of the Tithes; oh and there we have the Irynine Church, and, hey, look—it's St. Michael's Church. St. Cyril's Church, The Mother of God Church at Pyrohoshcha, The Church of the Saviour at Berestovo. Some say that Orthodoxy brought nothing but grief to the people of Kyiv. It doesn't look that way. The griffins, at least, came out really good. They are so frickin' awesome.

Just look at them. One is Halibey, the other Babliuk. Some people believe that they are named Begma and Bedzyk, but that's crazy. They respond only to Halibey and Babliuk. Although it is true that Babliuk sometimes thinks he's Halibey and that Halibey stubbornly associates himself with Babliuk. You say—Halibey, sweetheart, come to me. But nope, he doesn't. He squirms. Overindulged medieval bastard.

Haba loved those beasts because griffins, obviously, are completely mythical creatures: each of them is both an eagle and a lion. Like all the world's refugees, these beasts are completely irresponsible and, in evenings such as this one, helpless too. And what's the deal with a griffin? What's he all about? A tail that is long and fabulous. In this case, for some reason, triangular. A character that is playful, quirky. And there you have it—a griffin. Babliuk is convinced that his being personifies the Sun, strength, and the astuteness of wisdom. Halibey is responsible for the swiftness of punishment and retribution. In Haba's first months in Kyiv he would play with them for long periods of time, feed those poor dudes

WHAT ABOUT THE DESPAIR THAT SMOLDERS IN ONE'S HEART AND DOES NOT DISAPPEAR, EVEN IN DREAMS?

poppy-seed buns, which he would buy at Yaroslavna and, eventually, they began recognizing him.

The meeting was set up on Yaroslaviv Val, in that very same Yaroslavna café, where they sell poppy-seed buns and coffee, wine, cognac, and compote. The lampposts flickered. People hurried. Smiling faces swam about. The Baltic clouds created a peacefulness and a slow and dull light rain. The young, the old, the Ukrainian-speaking and the English-speaking; everyone was happy for some reason. There is no doubt that among them were readers of James Augustine Aloysius Joyce. And this was a bit strange. How are they able to read such wise books when, in the world-that is, in the Ukrainian worldthere's a war going on or, as they say, an ATO1 endures?

Haba never really understood what this ATO means. Perhaps it stands for "authentic types of observation." But what does that have to do with the war in the East? What about that merciless death that reaps its harvest in these lands? What about the despair that smolders in one's heart and does not disappear, even in dreams? In conscious dreams Habinsky would ever more frequently end up in a strange place—the one with which he became familiar during his final months in Donetsk.

There, people and dolls had equal rights. It was a complete horror, but in no ways was it an ATO. And if it is about observation, then why is there this constant pain that eats at your insides and squeezes out not only dish and fish or hook and rook but also reality itself from your brain.

But really, it's all quite clear. The Ukrainian government is developing skills in the selection and schematization of observations of characteristics. Any Leonardo da Vinci worth his salt must master the skill of simplifying a characteristic in order to later squeeze it into his own talented individuality. These methods have existed for ages. Almost since prehistoric times. It was Schiller who noticed that aesthetic and creative aspirations would constitute a joyous kingdom of play and safety amidst a grave world. It's as if it frees people from everything that hounds them in both the physical and psychological sense. And that is where ATO comes from. Generalization and schematizationthose are the two poles upon which we have been hung, my brother. And we dangle, tangle, and sway from there, kinda like two happy scarecrows among the corn. Painted faces, rags blackened by the rains and winds, and, instead of hearts, which were eaten out by the occupiers-there is a poplar stick. The birds jeer at the scarecrow, the roads beckon and lure, but where can he really go now, one-legged, damaged, and poor? And a frickin' Russianspeaking one at that. Sorry, gentlemen, if that last bit doesn't rhyme.

Looking around the room, Haba didn't see the person he was supposed to meet. On the one hand, the verbal portrait painted by Petro Petrenko may not really reflect reality. But that's not a problem. In real life, Haba

looked just like he did on his Facebook page—gloomy and lackluster.

"If she wants to find me, she'll find me," he said to himself and got some compote, cognac, and a poppy-seed bun; hung up his leather jacket on the back of a chair; and once again looked around. The Yaroslavna quietly rocked on the waves of time. People swam past it. Flowing past the large windows were the street, the buildings across it, stars, cars, female smiles, and past life—and circling around all of this was the ATO zone, like Jupiter around the sun.

"Let our doll not forsake us,"<sup>2</sup>
Haba said, lifted the cognac, smelled it, felt the sweet aroma of genuine Transcarpathia, and took a gulp. The liquid turned out to be so pleasant that he couldn't resist and drank up everything that he had purchased. He thought about it and got another glass of that thick, fragrant amber.

"I believe you're the one that I am looking for," a joyful, young bell rang just above his right ear.

Haba breathed in the air, which still had the aroma of cognac, and carefully turned his head. A smallish young woman in light-grev overalls and a green coat. He wrapped his chosen one in the coat of his love,3 thought Haba, got up and bowed.



#### **FICTION**

a delicate and shy, yet very serious, eighteen-year-old girl. And here, my friends, we have a twenty-year-old, or even, gasp, a twenty-three- or a twenty-four-year-old! (*Twenty-five*?) And she is by no means shy. A young, attractive woman. Fairly happy eyes, a trim figure, cool overalls, a somewhat juvenile little coat, a pink umbrella. And on top of all that—she drinks cognac. "Well, for God's sake, what is left for me to teach her?" Haba pondered.

"Let's drink to our acquaintance," the girl suggested. "Uncle has told me so much about you. He said that you're a serious, honest, highly educated, Ukrainian-language-speaking person. You can tell the difference between banosh and zupa and, in general, you have some kind of degree."

"Really?" Haba made himself smaller, "To be honest, your uncle is exaggerating. Ok, I got banosh down, but I'm not all that well-versed in zupa as I would like to be. It's difficult without practice."

"But aren't you a scholar?"

"The scholarliest scholar," Haba smiled. "To be honest, I agreed to meet you only because in those couple of months (days? years?) that we've worked together, Petro Petrovych has become almost like family for me. At the same time, I really have no idea in what context our future relationship could develop, if it is to develop at all."

"Understood," Ole smiled. "How about a brief course in literary aesthetics? You specialize in that, don't you?"

"And what use does a woman your age have for that?" Haba honestly inquired.

Ole once again laughed.

"Forgive me," he became
concerned. "I didn't mean to say that



Yaroslaviv Val during the evening rush hour (2020); via Shutterstock.

young women have no need for this; what I  $\ldots$ 

"Don't fret," Luk-Oie suggested, lifting the glass of cognac. "Shall we drink to our acquaintance?

"Yes indeed," Habinsky agreed. He drank up and inhaled the air that was filled with the din, and the smells, of the buffet, and looked through the windows of Yaroslavna. On the opposite side, above the chaotic and multicolored crowd, emerged the silhouette of the MR.<sup>7</sup> Its eyes were sad and distressed. It smoked, as always, a slim cigarette, and one could see in its eyes that

it was not feeling very well. It's not

used to having people around, Haba

thought with pity. It's always alone,

doesn't know anyone in the city

besides me, and, on top of all that,

there's the traumatic experience of

authentic observation. Something

needs to finally be done with this.
"What are you looking at?" Ole
became interested and began eating

the poppy-seed bun.

"It's nothing," Haba lowered his shoulders and turned his eyes away from the window. "A familiar figure flashed by. So, you say you want to become a student? What subject are you interested in? I assume that technical studies are not really your thing, right? And that's a good thing because technical studies and I are not a good match..."

"The things is," Ole placed her unfinished bun on the plate, "that I'm already in my second year as a PhD student at Chernivtsi University. I'm hoping to defend my dissertation next year."

Haba paused for a minute. He once again looked through the window. The Mare's Head had disappeared. The wind was picking up but the Baltic clumps hadn't gone anywhere. They blackened, blued, and circled above the city, and it became clear that the rain wouldn't stop until morning.

"Honestly, at this point I don't understand anything. Then why am I here? What's the point?"

# VOLO DYMYP RAFEYENKO

ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE, ABOVE THE CHAOTIC AND MULTICOLORED CROWD, EMERGED THE SILHOUETTE OF THE MR.

"The point is," Luk-Oie cheerfully explained, "that Uncle Petro believes that his niece is now brainy enough and that the time has come for her to be happy."

"In the matrimonial sense of the word?"

"Of course," she nodded her head and laughed jovially. "But don't worry. That's what my uncle thinks, not me."

"You don't want to be happy?" Haba inquired seriously.

"I am happy and everything is fine."

"So, what are we to do then?"
Haba extended his arms. "Why did
we meet, why are we drinking this
wine? In times of war, humanities
scholars need to have a clear
understanding of their own motives,
their consequences, and the reasons
for them."

"You know," Ole giggled, "my uncle always tries to introduce me to people, but I don't want to meet with most of them. And when he told me about you christening the dried fruit,

I truly became interested. Besides, I was free for the evening, and so I decided that that it was no big deal."

Luk-Oie became quiet, checked out the elderly couple by the neighboring table for a few seconds, took a sip of tea and a bite of the *pliatsok*.

"What do you say?"
At first, Haba said nothing, just ate a small piece of the bun and later noticed:

"The way I see it, he asked me to 'instruct' you, but you don't need any instruction,

and he told you that I'm insane and that I need to talk to someone. Correct? That's what bugs me about Petro, his constant tending to me. One cannot deprive a Kyivite of his absolute disrespect for the internal brittle world of a displaced person."

"You misunderstood . . . "

"I already told him," Habinsky could feel how in the depths of his multi-eyed "I" the Bee of Great Anger was lifting its head, "that I am not crazy; moreover, I regularly visit my psychiatrist, so everything is fine. Except that my head hurts sometimes. But that should be of no concern to anyone . . ."

Haba had become sweaty (a worm is the larva of an insect); the smile and silvery eyeglasses of Laurentius shone before him. Grabbing his head (that lives in the ground), he exerted great efforts in holding himself back.

Accursed war. (St. Nicholas has turned to dust because of the worms. And even the savior himself, the one on the gates, has split in half.)8

"But I thought it was so funny!" Luk-Oie added, glancing straight into Habinsky's eyes and touching his damp palm, and, in doing so, instantly chasing away the intruding unpleasant reality. "It's so great that you and Uncle Petro are friends.

Oh my God, Mr. Habinsky, blessed onions and dill, that's awesome!"

"Really?" Haba smiled at his cognac, took a big gulp (no one will end up falling on the floor and yelling) and, attempting to act as quietly as possible, took his hands off the table and began secretly rubbing his palms on his pant legs.

"This is so hilarious, oh my God," Ole jovially laughed. "Molière and Beaumarchais have got nothing on you. Three grown men in a drunken state christening a store. That is just precious."

"Yep," Haba nodded, "The Eleusinian Mysteries."

\*\*\*

The Beautiful and the Beneficial is part of the KarmaTown shoppingentertainment center. That huge, silent, and lively space greeted Petro Petrakis and Haba with the smells of a mopped-up floor, of air still filled with the perfume that is sold in the daytime by its entrance, of tasty hot corn on the cob that was cooked right here by the cash registers of The Beautiful and the Beneficial an hour or two ago, and of the light and romantic, like one's first love-smells of onion, cabbage, potatoes, bananas, kiwis, and fresh, but not quite ripe, mandarins. A realm of soft, subdued light.

During the day—it is true—in this giant space, which is as big as St.

Peter's Church in Rome, there are two hundred forty or, more likely, three thousand three hundred thirty-two, different enterprises.

Thirty-four of them or, probably, fifty-eight, are restaurants, bars, cafés,



or small, simple, fast-food stands. Five hundred forty are clothing and jewelry shops. Seventy-three are stores with souvenirs or household goods. Eighteen—bank offices. Ten—toy stores, adult ones too. Five are shops with European cheeses and wines. The second and third floors are set aside for leisure.

"This is your first time here, right, Vasyl? Just wait till you see it," Petro smiled with glee. "Altogether, the center takes up X amount of thousands of square meters or, one hundred and five square kilometers. Which, by the way, is equal to the size of a city, such as Paris."

"In other words, it's big enough," Vasyl respectfully nodded.

"Plenty. Besides The Beautiful and the Beneficial we've got bowling-shmowling, a pool with dolphins, tennis with rackets—Petro poured silent Haba and good Vasyl some vodka—an ice-skating ring to sense the coldness of existence, a small private zoo, three movie theaters with movies, a theater floating on water, a cabaret, fourteen slick business centers and beautifully-equipped halls for assemblies. In other words, assembly halls."

"Truly convenient." Vasyl drank a shot of vodka and ate a pickle.

"Yep," Petro agreed. "In one try you can get a vacuum-cleaner, take a selfie with a monkey, drink some whiskey, go for a swim in a pool, drink some whiskey, insure your life, play a few rounds of tennis, drink some whiskey, and then after all that, like a true man, get on the skating rink and fucking kill yourself."

"It's really, really convenient," Haba nodded. "All this place needs is a funeral parlor."

"In general, I think," Petro continued, "what we really need here is an open natal pavilion."



"A 'Quasimodo' natal pavilion, a '*Nie ma sprawy*' funeral parlor, a Prometheus crematorium, and a Nestor Makhno tele-radio station," Haba amended.<sup>9</sup>

"Yes," Petrunio agreed, "and we're unswervingly moving in that direction."

The posse quieted down and, without agreeing to do so, all started going in the direction of huge glass doors almost five meters tall through which one could see cars racing along an avenue, stopping at red lights; they looked at the large buildings of new residential complexes, which had just lit up with the happy hearths of family joy and comfort, and they observed the endless life of a big strange city, the capital of a country at war.

The Beautiful and The Beneficial takes up less than twenty percent of the first floor. At night, you can just sit on the floor, like now, and listen to how all those things that fill up the Obolonian Paris live. You can hear how Turkish gold converses with Chinese jumble; how an indiscernible individual knocks a ping-pong ball on bare, tennis tables, whose green backs extend to the horizon where, exhausted by the monotony of life, the sad killer whale Femida, who has for two years already been presented by this attraction's owners as the dolphin Tolia, swims in a large dark pool lit up by the fires of Obolon. And this Femida is in no way a Tolia and, moreover, not a dolphin. It is a killer whale, Orcinus orca, hailing from a population of the Norwegian Sea that specializes in herring and follows the migration of the latter to the shores of Norway every autumn. And it is because of its love for herring-and not for those loud, stupid creatures that come to KarmaTown every daythat it has not eaten any of them. It

swims and senses the whole city living and dancing, and dying, and crying, and laughing around it. And it doesn't like it because it does not understand how one can live like that. How one can eat herring that was frozen a hundred years ago and is sold at The Beautiful and The Beneficial and, on top of that, is chased with shot of cheap Polish vodka.

And beneath this random junk, beneath Femida, beneath The Beautiful and The Beneficial, beneath these dudes, who are sitting on the floor by the stands and discussing life, the subway pulses along toward nighttime. This pulse is constantly felt. But soon the hour will come when the underground world will shut its doors. The metro-beast needs time to digest today's impressions and the living shadows of slapdash people—their smiles and memory, and their pictures and movements, that will remain in distant and endless undergrounds for eternity.

Haba thought about all of this while Vasyl talked about how he once studied in a monastery; how he met his first wife, then left the priesthood, and then went to work at a factory. He became the talented head of a division, a great plumber, a big-time dreamer with a capital "D"; and then he completed an institute, became the constructor of constructors, a businessman, even had a few patents, whatever that means. But he stayed true to the hobbies of his youth. He loved to read the Bible

and ponder his future meeting with Christ. He traveled to Jerusalem several times, to the Garden Tomb, to see what is there and what had happened there with his own eyes. He cried like a child when he saw the Garden of Gethsemane (And then Jesus came with them to the place known as Gethsemane and said to His disciples). And in everyday life he always found time to instruct, and heal with enlightening lessons, the toiling hearts of the proletariat and managers of this world.

"Shall we begin, boys?" he finally said, and Peter, with Haba in tow, seemed to have awoken from a long sleep.

"You sure are a good storyteller, my dear Vasyl," Petrunio rocked his head and glanced at the clock above the entrance, "maybe you should have indeed become a priest. Maybe we would have already had Heaven on earth for some time now."

"Would have gotten God's blessing for Ukraine," Haba added, "and would've moved it a bit to the left."

"Where to the left?" Vasyl couldn't understand.

"Past Poland, at least. Let the Poles deal with the Russians on their own. And then we'd see who Lviv belongs to and what authentic national memory looks like. Or, even better—past Germany. Let us have a border with the Benelux countries. With all of them at once, at that."

They became quiet.
"Now then," Vasyl said at last.
All three of them got up. They

66 LET THE POLES DEAL WITH THE RUSSIANS ON THEIR OWN. AND THEN WE'D SEE WHO LVIV BELONGS TO AND WHAT AUTHENTIC NATIONAL MEMORY LOOKS LIKE." mused for a bit. Petro rubbed his beard and motioned to Vasyl.

"Begin!"

That one pulled out of his bag that which he brought with him, laid out everything on the stools, and made the sign of the cross.

"In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit!" he said with a regular voice and coughed. He then read a few Psalms, prayers to God the Father, to the Holy Spirit, and to the Mother of God. "We are blessing the dried fruits of The Beautiful and the Beneficial," he proclaimed at last, sternly looking somewhere into the otherworld space, "and through it—the whole plant world of Ukraine, consumer goods for the soul and body, white sugar and strong onions, buckwheat, Thai rice, the citizen's spirit, all of our salt and soda and oil. And together with them, chocolate, cocoa beans, nuts, various seeds, salted pork, and vodka. Let coffee be not bitter, but let tea, pepper, and all types of ginger (medicinal, Zingiber officinale) be so. Amen."

"Why all that?" Habinsky commented unsatisfyingly. "We have no desire to bless vodka and meat. We desire only that dried fruits be blessed."

"Drop it," Piotrek grabbed Haba by the sleeve of his sweater, "he knows what he should and shouldn't say. Let him say it. It's working out alright, isn't it? Keep in mind, Hitler was an abstinent and vegetarian specter."

"Let these holy goods not be touched by the gluttonous hand

GRANT US VICTORY,
O LORD! LET IT BE
A SMALL ONE, BUT
ONE THAT IS OURS.
AND GRANT US
PEACE IN OUR LAND."

of an evil beast," Vasyl continued, "that is—by its nails, claws, talons, or hooks. Let neither alien overseas wisdom nor our local metaphysical evil ruin the holy and beneficial God's plan to make everything around us magnificent and wonderful. Let these dry and beneficial raisins, cherries, prunes, dates, pears, apples, ginger and pitted apricots . . ."

"Raisins and dried apricots with pits," Haba suggested.

"Raisins and dried apricots with pits," Vasyl picked up and ran with it, "dried mushrooms and condensed milk, preserves, jams, jellies, and powdered eggs all be blessed, grow, and multiply."

Haba approached the stand where an unopened bottle of vodka stood, grabbed it, carefully looked around, sat on the floor, and took a few sips.

"And let this this war finally come to an end," he said quietly.

"Vasyl, let this war come to an end!" Petro asked.

"Merciful God!" Vasyl yelled as tears involuntarily began to fill his eyes. "Let this war, which denies us peace and rest, end. Forgive us, God, have mercy on us!"

Having said that, he pulled out candles, which he had brought with him from the Holy Land, from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, lit them, and stuck one or two of them into a potato, a few into oranges and kiwis; seven were used for dried fruits, onions, grains, and bread. He poured holy water, which he had gotten this morning at St. Nicholas Church, into a glass; a despondent Haba handed him large, hairy paintbrushes, which Haba Habinsky and Piotrek Petravskyi had picked up at the Heroiv Dnipra metro station, dipped them in the holy water and sprinkled it around.

The droplets flew far, all the way to the distant stands, passed them, and partially landed on the cookery display cases, lay there for a few seconds, and then got up and moved along. They circled near the transparent doors and went through them. Having flown outside, they paused for a moment, as if they were checking out Kyiv and thinking what should be done next, and then shot upward. Then, momentarily, in the glow of the lampposts, cars, and advertisement lights, a heavy, clear rain fell in a solid green wave over Kyiv.

"And, Vasyl. Let our enemies fade," 10 Peter said, sat next to Haba, accepted the bottle from him, glanced at the rain beyond the grey walls of the building, and also took a sip.

"Grant us victory, O Lord!" the plumber implored quietly, almost pathetically. "Let it be a small one, but one that is ours. And grant us peace in our land, light, harmony, and hope."

"And let my mother think of me, at least from time to time," Haba whispered and lowered his head, "because not one of us knows where it is that he or she shall perish."

"And Habinsky's mom, Holy Lord," Vasyl voiced sternly, "let her know that this dude loves her and thinks about here every day."

"And father," Habinsky quietly uttered and began to cry.

"And let Habinsky's father have good health, bread on the table, and, at least occasionally, tranquility."

"He has issues with his memory, with his stomach, and with his heart. They are cold and frightened in city Z, but they, holy father, will never leave it."

"Grant our families a guardian angel, O Lord," ardently pleaded Vasyl, quieted for a moment and then with prayer and holy water walked along the stands.

<sup>1</sup>The Ukrainian-Russian war in the Donbas region, which began in 2014, was officially referred to as an Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) by the Ukrainian government until 2018.

<sup>2</sup> A pun on a popular Ukrainian drinking song, "*Hey, nalyvaite povnii chary*" (Hey, Fill the Glasses), which has the line "let our fate not forsake us."

<sup>3</sup> This phrase is a quote from part VI of Ivan Franko's 1905 poem *Moisei* (Moses). The translation of the complete poem by Vera Rich can be found here: http://sites.utoronto.ca/elul/English/Franko/Franko-Moses.pdf.

<sup>4</sup> Among Haba's offerings are *pliatsok*—the name of a pastry-pie/cake that is baked in Western Ukraine and is rather exotic in most other regions in Ukraine—and *chokoliad*—a Western Ukrainian term for the literary-Ukrainian *shokolad*, both meaning "chocolate."

<sup>5</sup> As part of the novel's continual exploration of names and naming, the author plays with several of the characters' names throughout. For example, in this excerpt Petro Petrenko is also referred to as Uncle Petrusio, Petsia Petrovych, Uncle Petro, Petro Petrakis, Petrunio, and Piotrek Petravskyi.

<sup>6</sup> Banosh is a cornmeal dish popular in the Carpathian region of Western Ukraine. Zupa is the Western-Ukrainian word for "soup" (other regions of Ukraine use the term sup).

<sup>7</sup>MR refers to the Mare's Head—a character from Ukrainian folklore whom Haba continually sees, and occasionally converses with, on the pages of the novel.

<sup>8</sup> This is a quote from the 1859 Stepan Rudansky (1834–73) poem-anecdote *Pros'ba* (A Request).

<sup>9</sup> "Nie ma sprawy" means "no problem" in Polish. Nestor Makhno (1888-1934) was an infamous Ukrainian anarchist revolutionary, who was commander of an anarchist army in Ukraine from 1917 until 1921.

<sup>10</sup> This phrase is from the Ukrainian national anthem.

#### Translator's Note

Hailing from Donetsk, Ukraine-the largest city in Ukraine's easternmost Donbas region-Volodymyr Rafeyenko is a writer, poet, translator, literary critic, editor, and film critic. Moreover, he is also a scholar, who completed postgraduate studies in literary theory at Donetsk University. In July 2014, Rafeyenko fled Donetsk for Kyiv when Russia-backed rebels took control of his hometown. Having for years enjoyed great success as a Russophone writer living in Ukraine, the writer was appalled by Russia's false claim that Russophone Ukrainians were in peril as a result of Ukraine's recent Revolution of Dignity. He felt he was both a victim of the war and, in some ways, responsible for it. This roused him not only to flee Donetsk but also to make a concerted effort to learn the Ukrainian language. Mondegreen: Songs about Death and Love, his seventh novel, is the first he has written in the Ukrainian language.

Rafeyenko's Mondegreen explores the ways that memory and language are engaged in the construction of one's self. It tells the story of Haba Habinsky, a refugee from Ukraine's Donbas region, who has escaped to Kyiv at the onset of the Ukrainian-Russian war. His physical dislocation, and his gradual learning of the Ukrainian language, throw the protagonist in a state of disorientation in which he revisits his past and reassesses his country's identity, as well as his own. The novel treads a hazy path between illusion and reality that is full of allusions to world cultural figures and features extensive quotations from Ukrainian and Russian literary texts and pop culture.

In this excerpt, taken from the novel's second chapter, Haba explores

his new home- Kyiv-and is often bewildered by the architectural wonders and everyday idiosyncrasies of the capital city. A recent refugee, Haba has few friends in the city beyond Petro, his boss at the wellstocked supermarket The Beautiful and the Beneficial, which is part of the massive, kitsch-laden KarmaTown shopping and entertainment complex. Haba agrees to meet with Petro's niece Ole-Luk-Oie in Yaroslavna Café to help her with her studies. The rendezvous offers lonely Haba the opportunity to test out his growing knowledge of the Ukrainian language. The scene also features a visit by the Mare's Head, a creature from Ukrainian folklore that occasionally appears to Haba throughout the novel as he navigates his new life in his country during a time of war.

- Mark Andryczyk

Mark Andryczyk is associate research scholar, Ukrainian Studies Program, Harriman Institute. He is the editor of The White Chalk of Days: The Contemporary Ukrainian Literature Series Anthology (2017) and is the author of the monograph The Intellectual as Hero in 1990s Ukrainian Fiction (2012).

### Alumni Notes

Students, Postdocs, and Visiting Scholars



Stephen Crowley



Wesley A. Fisher

Though it was many years ago now, I remember my time at the Harriman fondly, and a number of the connections I made during that time remain. Currently I am professor of politics at Oberlin College. My latest book, *Putin's Labor Dilemma: Russian Politics between Stability and Stagnation*, was recently published by Cornell University Press. I am now turning to a research project examining the link between right-wing populism and rust-belt communities in postcommunist and advanced capitalist societies.

Stephen Crowley (Postdoctoral Fellow, 1993–94)

A recipient of the Ph.D. and the Certificate of the Harriman Institute, I began in 1972 to teach courses on Soviet society in Columbia's Sociology Department and the Institute. The first American graduate student in sociology to be accepted on the IREX exchanges, I represented the University to IREX during the 1970s. In 1980 IREX asked me to join its staff as secretary to the American Council of Learned Societies-USSR Academy of Sciences Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences, and eventually I became deputy director and director of Soviet Programs at IREX. I continued to teach in the Harriman Institute until 1987. by which time changes in the Soviet Union and resulting exponential increases in my workload at IREX made it impossible for me to continue teaching. In 1993 I joined the senior founding staff of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and a decade later I became director of research at the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany

(Claims Conference) and the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO), where I continue to work to this day. Although my work now encompasses most of the world, my experience with Russia has remained relevant, most recently in regard to negotiating for the archival documentation of those who were in the Soviet Evacuation in the East and in Central Asia during World War II, to establish eligibility for German reparations.

My favorite memory of the Harriman Institute is the moment in the 1970s when the graduate students and staff gathered around a television to watch the first time a signal was received from a Soviet television satellite in Siberia. That afternoon in New York, all of us started doing *utrennaia zariadka* (morning exercises) with the physical exercise instructors on the screen. In that moment the wall between East and West that had made people lose the visual image of what life was like on the other side disappeared. Happy Diamond Anniversary!

- Wesley A. Fisher (Ph.D., Sociology, 1976; RI Certificate, 1977)

I received my Russian Institute Certificate in 1965 and my Ph.D. in "Public Law and Government" in 1968. After two years of teaching at Columbia College while at Zbigniew Brzezinski's Research Institute on Communist Affairs, I began teaching at the University of Michigan's wonderful Department of Political Science, from which I retired after nearly fifty years. While there, I taught or researched at the Russian State University for the

Humanities, Central European University, Hebrew and Tel Aviv Universities, the Budapest Collegium, the Davis Center at Harvard, and the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. I've written or edited 19 books and many articles, mostly on East European and Soviet politics, Jews in those areas, and Israeli politics. I'm fortunate to be still working on a few research and writing projects and occasionally teaching.

At Columbia, I was initially inspired as an undergraduate by the legendary Joseph Rothschild, Robert Belknap, Seweryn Bialer, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Alexander Dallin, and Henry Roberts. Among my cohort were Steven F. Cohen, Steve Goldstein (China), John Long, Bill Odom, Dick Robbins, Peter and Susan (Gross) Solomon, and Bill Taubman. Those were great times and great people.

- **Zvi Gitleman** (RI Certificate, 1965; Ph.D., Political Science, 1968)

I started graduate work in the History Department and in the Russian Institute in 1963. I was in Turkey, at the Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi, from January 1967 to January 1968 and then went to visit relatives in Russia. Upon my return to Columbia in spring 1968, I submitted my master's essay to the History Department and my certificate essay to the Russian Institute.

I taught at Rutgers University (Newark and New Brunswick campuses) from 1969 to 2012, attaining the rank of Professor II (Distinguished Professor in 1988), offering courses on the history of Central Asia, the Islamic Civilization, the Ottoman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, the medieval Slavic

world, and related subjects. I chaired the History Department (Newark) for eight years and was director of the Middle Eastern Studies Program (New Brunswick) during my later years. In 2019, I was elected as an honorary member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in the field of Oriental Studies. I am the author, editor, or co-editor of numerous books as well as articles in English, Russian, and Turkish.

Peter B. Golden (RI Certificate, 1968;Ph.D., History, 1970)

I was at the Harriman Institute as a graduate student in Russian history from 1983 to 1990, when I received my Ph.D. I am now Distinguished Professor of History at Ohio State University. I have published seven books, including Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism, 1914-1939 (Cornell University Press, 2011) and The Stalinist Era (Cambridge University Press, 2018). My most vivid memory of the Harriman Institute is from a windy day in 1985, when the satellite dish for Soviet television blew off the roof of the International Affairs Building and shattered on the street below. Assistant Director Jonathan Saunders was irate until Kenny Schaffer, the installer of the television system, showed up claiming that all along he had planned to replace the old satellite dish with a larger one. According to him, the wind had done the Institute a favor, clearing the way for the new dish to be installed. Soon we were once again able to watch Soviet television in a small room at the Harriman Institute.

- David L. Hoffman (Ph.D., History, 1987; HI Certificate, 1988)



Zvi Gitleman



Peter B. Golden



David L. Hoffman



Pamela Houghtaling



**Edward Lemon** 



Alexis Lerner

Your email regarding the Harriman Institute's 75th anniversary led me to an enjoyable trip down memory lane. I received a certificate from the Russian Institute back in 1976. It was an exciting time to be at Columbia! I studied with Marshall Shulman and John Hazard, among other legendary scholars.

Prior to Columbia, I graduated from Princeton in 1971 with an undergraduate degree in Russian and a certificate from its Russian Studies Program. I had also attended the Russian Summer School at Middlebury College in 1969.

In 1974, with a master's degree from Columbia's School of International Affairs in hand, I moved to Washington, DC. While most of my career has been in the field of science and technology communications with private industry and the federal government, I cherish the rich and rewarding intellectual and cultural experience I had in Russian studies at Columbia.

Pamela Houghtaling (M.I.A., SIPA, 1974;RI Certificate, 1976)

In 2018, after spending two years as a postdoctoral fellow at the Harriman Institute, I moved to Washington, DC. For the first two years I was a fellow at the Wilson Center, and in September 2020 I joined the Bush School of Government and Public Service's new Washington teaching site as a research assistant professor. That same year I founded a new research-focused nonprofit organization called the Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs, which focuses on building knowledge and understanding of that region. I was delighted to form a partnership with the Harriman, which has so far sent us two wonderful research assistants to work on our projects. I continue to conduct research on security in Central Asia and

have a number of projects in various stages of completion.

Edward Lemon (Postdoctoral Fellow, 2016–18)

I was a visiting scholar at the Harriman Institute from 2017 to 2019, while I was finishing my Ph.D. at the University of Toronto. My time at Columbia was indispensable: I shared my research in Tim Frye and Josh Tucker's Carnegie Postcommunist Politics Workshop, I took in all there was to offer at the annual Association for the Study of Nationalities meetings, and I benefited from the endless writing and research support resources that the University had to offer. The mentorship and scholarly community available to me at Columbia undeniably helped shape my research into what it is today.

I am currently finishing my first book, titled "Post-Soviet Graffiti: Free Speech in the Streets." It's a 10-year ethnography of how graffiti is used in the region to express political discontent and circumvent censorship (I workshopped it at the Harriman in 2018). I'm also working on an article with Andrew Gelman, whom I met during my time at the Harriman, on how to teach data science and statistics to students in non-STEM disciplines. Later this year, I'll start my position as assistant professor of political science at the United States Naval Academy, where I'll teach courses on Russian and postcommunist politics. My time at the Harriman was instrumental in preparing me both academically and professionally to take on this role.

- Alexis Lerner (Visiting Scholar, 2017–19)

I am a professor of communications at Tirana University, and I saw the opportunity to spend a year at the Harriman Institute as a Fulbright scholar as a way to expand the interdisciplinary approach in my field. I was very excited when I received Professor Timothy Frye's approval, as I knew it would be an unparalleled experience. During the months at the Institute, I found a welcoming environment and helpful colleagues willing to discuss and share ideas and suggestions. My experience there led me to rethink my research proposal. With the information and insights that I gathered at the Harriman not only did I complete my research, but I also put together and published a book titled Get the Media—Conspiratorial Approaches for International Media Consumption: Crimea and Kosovo. In academic terms, my experience at the Harriman Institute was exceptional and exemplary. As a lecturer of the course Media and Diplomacy, I follow the example that I witnessed at the Institute, where my students produce a newspaper on international affairs every semester. I also encourage my students to dive into interdisciplinary approaches and attend classes in international relations and history, a practice that I believe will help them gain as journalists a deeper understanding of international issues. My experience at the Harriman Institute influences my research and academic endeavors in general.

Eva Londo (Fulbright Visiting Scholar, 2014–15)

I earned my master of arts in regional studies from the Harriman Institute in May 2018. From the interesting conferences, film screenings, and lectures to the encouragement and financial support to pursue internship opportunities at Human Rights Watch and UNICEF and conduct research with Russian Orthodox Church educators and priests in Moscow and St. Petersburg, I greatly cherish the time I spent at the Harriman Institute. Among my most favorite memories is the time our small, close-knit group of

students presented our thesis research at Harvard University. It was so exciting and rewarding to present to colleagues, professors, and students the research and topics that had captured our attention and further spurred our interest in the region.

After graduation, I worked for two years as a corporate legal assistant at Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP. I now am a J.D. candidate at Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law. I know that the communication, research, and writing skills I gained at the Harriman Institute significantly contributed to the opportunities I have received thus far in law school, including an internship with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission and a spot on volume 43 of the *Cardozo Law Review*.

### -Kerri Matulis (MARS-REERS, 2018)

Long ago, between 1985 and 1988, I roamed the halls of the Harriman Institute and seemed to live in the library. During those years, I often had the feeling I was at the center of the universe for people interested in studying the Soviet Union.

Here's the brief version of what happened afterward: pre-and postdocs that took me to Cornell, Stanford, and Princeton, followed by a year working for the National Democratic Institute in Moscow. I taught briefly at SUNY Albany; ran a Carnegie Corporation-funded project for Jack Snyder with a lot of Harriman folks, assessing democracy assistance in Eastern Europe (Power and Limits of NGOs, Columbia University Press, 2002); taught at the Fletcher School; left that tenure-track job early (husband in DC); and then settled for a decade at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, where I was a senior fellow in the Russia and Eurasia Program. Then, in 2007, I launched and ran its Human Rights Initiative.

I served in the Obama administration at USAID as deputy assistant administrator



Eva Londo



Kerri Matulis



Sarah Mendelson



Kate Schecter



Michael R. Simone (right) Correction: We mistakenly stated Michael Simone's degree as Ph.D. when it is M.Phil.

in the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance, from 2010 to 2014, and then back to New York as the U.S. representative to the UN's ECOSOC, from 2015 to 2017. Since 2018, I have been Distinguished Service Professor of Public Policy at Carnegie Mellon and head of CMU's Heinz College in DC. My current work centers on the Sustainable Development Goals.

Happy Anniversary!

 Sarah Mendelson (M.A., Political Science, 1988; HI Certificate and M.Phil., Political Science, 1990; Ph.D., Political Science, 1993)

I have been the president and CEO of an international development organization called World Neighbors for the past seven years. We work in rural communities in 13 countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Haiti. I haven't been able to travel to Eastern Europe or the former Soviet countries for the past seven years, but I've had amazing experiences traveling to the far reaches of the globe. I worked on health care development in the FSU and Eastern Europe from 1997 to 2014. Despite venturing into new parts of the world, my experience at the Harriman Institute and Columbia has stayed with me, and I still have several close friends from those years.

 Kate Schecter (M.A., Political Science, 1988; HI Certificate and M.Phil., Political Science, 1991; Ph.D., Political Science, 1992)

Columbia served my family and me well over my long career. After graduating West Point in 1975, followed by eight years in artillery units, I started at SIPA and the Harriman in 1983 for two years and then continued on in the Harriman and GSAS while teaching Soviet politics and government at West Point. I spent

two tours in the Moscow embassy in the 1990s during the early Yeltsin and early Putin eras; worked Russian issues at the OSCE in Vienna; commanded DTRA arms control inspections in Europe throughout the former Warsaw Pact countries; and finished my Army career as commandant of the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California, in 2005. Since then, I've worked continuously in support of the DoD and State Department on Russia and other foreign policy/security-related issues, including spending two years in Iraq and Afghanistan. My experience at Columbia and the Harriman was put to good use throughout my career, thanks in particular to the breadth and rigor of courses with Professors Robert Jervis, Jack Snyder, and Warner Schilling (RIP). One of my daughters graduated from Columbia College in 2002.

– Michael R. Simone (M.I.A., SIPA, 1985;M.Phil., GSAS, 1989; HI Certificate, 1989)

I attended the Harriman from 1985 to 1987, having spent an undergraduate year at the Pushkin Institute. It was a heady time. Ken Schaffer had just put his satellite on the roof of the SIPA building, and we spent days watching Soviet TV. I went to Moscow twice during those two years; once as an interpreter with Colette Shulman for a conference with the Soviet Women's Committee. The highlight was meeting Valentina Tereshkova, who asked me why I wasn't married and branded me "razborchivaia" (picky).

After graduation I worked as a reporter-researcher for *Time* magazine in NYC and Vienna; then in 1989, I landed an NYU fellowship to write for pro-glasnost *Moscow News*. I became the first American member of the Union of Soviet Journalists and helped found *Moscow Magazine*, the USSR's first Western-style glossy. I stayed in Moscow until 1995, covering the coup, the

war in Chechnya, and civil strife in Georgia and writing about general post-Soviet upheaval for the Associated Press, *Daily Telegraph*, and *Christian Science Monitor*.

In 1995 I moved to London to work on the foreign desk of the *Telegraph*, eventually freelancing for magazines and newspapers for more than a decade. In 2010 I joined London Metropolitan University, the UK's most diverse university, where I now head up the Journalism Department as an associate professor. Two years ago, I spent a month in Moscow on assignment for the *British Journalism Review*, and had the pandemic not happened, I'd be traveling to the motherland again.

#### -Wendy Sloane (M.I.A., SIPA, 1987)

Between time spent on my Fulbright scholarship in Poland and before joining the Harriman, I took the opportunity to work in public service in my home state of New Jersey. I quickly missed engaging with the region, and continuing my studies at Columbia University provided me the intellectual immersion in all things Eastern Europe I desired. Although my year at the Harriman flew by quickly, my peers, the Institute staff, and the Butler stacks were integral to the time I spent there.

As the Ukrainian Revolution unfolded in 2014, my research brought me back to Ukraine, this time to interview officials and witness the ongoing regime changes. It was (and still is) a fascinating time to explore the region, and I always knew that I wanted to connect my professional career in some way.

After Columbia, I joined Goldman
Sachs in New York, without any previous
inclination of starting a career in financial
services, and spent five years in Financial
Crime Compliance investigating and
solving complex global financial crime,
reputational and conduct matters.
Like many others, I used the extra time
during the pandemic to reflect on my

life and career and decided to start a new opportunity in our firm's Consumer and Wealth Management division this year, a division focused on helping our clients achieve their investment goals and financial well-being.

Now, as chair of the Harriman Alumni Network, and together with our National Advisory Council, I continue to focus on identifying ways that Harriman can remain a resource and hub for students and professionals long after their graduation and on how best to evolve our Institute and mission to meet our changing and globalized world.

May Harriman continue to lead the study and discussion on the region for years to come!

### - Stephen Szypulski (MARS-REERS, 2015)

After brief stints in government and consulting, I returned to my earlier interest in the arts; now I publish as both a poet and translator of Russophone literature. My prose translations of Akram Aylisli's Farewell, Aylis—which to this day is banned in Azerbaijan (Aylisli himself lives under de facto house arrest in Baku)and Anna Starobinets's Look at Him (2018 NatsBest finalist) join award-winning translations of poetry by Inna Kabysh, Xenia Emelyanova, and many others. My first collection of poetry, Day of the Border Guards (2014 Miller Williams Arkansas Poetry Prize Finalist), is set entirely in Russia and the former Soviet Union, while my second collection, Woman Drinking Absinthe, draws on two years' study of Russian poetry that I undertook in Moscow in the 1990s. In 2017, I was named an NEA translation fellow, and I served from 2016 to 2018 as the inaugural poet laureate for Arlington, VA.

katherine-young-poet.com

-Katherine E. Young (M.I.A., SIPA, 1985)



Wendy Sloane



Stephen Szypulski



Katherine E. Young

## The Peter Jacyk Centennial



From left: George Rupp, president of Columbia University; President Leonid Kuchma of Ukraine; and Peter Jacyk (1995).

its independence in 1991, Peter (Petro) Jacyk and his foundation recognized the importance of institutionalizing Ukrainian studies in the academy. As the foundation's mission statement reads, in part: "The primary objective is to develop a network of educational programs and academic centers in world-renowned universities devoted to the scholarly interpretation and dissemination of information about Ukraine and Ukrainians." It is no understatement to say that the Petro Jacyk Foundation's pioneering support in 1995 made possible the establishment of the Harriman Institute's Ukrainian Studies Program.

hen Ukraine regained

Over the years, many visiting faculty and postdoctoral fellows from a wide range of fields—including art history, history, political science, literature, and music—have come to the Harriman Institute as Petro Jacyk Fellows. Olena Martynuk, an art historian, is the current Petro Jacyk Postdoctoral Research Fellow, which is now a two-year appointment.

On September 30, 2021, the Petro Jacyk Foundation celebrated the centennial of the birth of its founder, which featured remarks from Harriman director Alexander Cooley.

We are honored to join the Petro Jacyk Foundation in this celebration. Jacyk's achievements as a philanthropist and community activist gave new life to scholarly institutions through his educational foundation, helping new generations of scholars do remarkable things. We are grateful for the Petro Jacyk Foundation's support, which reestablished and grew the Ukrainian Studies Program at Columbia at a critical juncture. This funding helped create a lively center of discussion of Ukraine's past, present, and future and a welcome place where scholars and political figures from Ukraine interact and collaborate with their North American counterparts.

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