

INTRODUCTION

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The preparation of this issue coincided with the winter school for writers-researchers “School π,” co-organized by *Laboratorium* and the Centre for Independent Social Research. The School was designed to train young authors in good practices of academic writing. As a result, the questions of what exactly academic writing is today, how it is developing, and what it is supposed to aspire to, arose. Are there still classical, canonical formats for academic texts? How can social science texts be made more attractive not only to academic specialists but also to a broader audience, without compromising their academic merit?

Articles featured in this issue (both individually and as a group) present excellent examples for a discussion of these questions. All five texts (four research articles and one essay) go beyond the “canonical” academic article model in one way or another: through their use of theory, through their use of empirical material, through their interdisciplinary approaches, or through their reconsideration of the mission of an academic text in the social sciences.

The first article in this issue, by Olga Echevskaya and Alla Anisimova, is based on a research project focused on the processes of local identity formation of “Sibiriak” (Siberians). The transformation of the concept of social identity is considered in this article in the context of the postmodern transformations of globalization and global migration. The article draws on empirical data that include interviews with experts as well as residents of three Siberian cities (Novosibirsk, Omsk, and Irkutsk). The authors consider the Siberian identity in three dimensions: geographical, ethnic, and political. Unconventional approaches to the concept of ethnic identity allow the authors to locate the central features of the phenomenon they study. The article shows that Siberian identity is not only a type of individual personhood but also a new type of social solidarity and an articulation of certain political demands.

Amandine Regamey's article focuses on the important and understudied subject of the construction and circulation of rumors during wartime, when dispersion of official information is compromised and establishing veracity is a challenge. The article engages deeply with one particular case from the Chechen war: namely, the circulation of rumors about organ theft from bodies of dead Chechens found in the Argun Valley in March 2001. The article draws on a large body of secondary sources and expert interviews conducted

by the author. Regamey pays particular attention to the context of wartime and offers a comparison with analogous instances of rumor circulation in Latin America and Kosovo. The article presents three frameworks for interpreting rumors about organ theft: the communication of traumatic experiences, collective expressions of fear, and the understanding and processing of the consequences of war for Chechen society. Analysis of a specific case and a comparative perspective allow Regamey to formulate conclusions about the function of rumors and—in a broader sense—about the nature of information in contemporary war contexts, as well as the mechanisms that allow for discussion of such cases in international arenas.

Hugo Reinert's article is an in-depth ethnographic study of the transformation of slaughter, as traditional reindeer herding transitions into industrial forms of venison production. The central question Reinert pursues is an issue which may seem marginal at first: engagements with the remains of the slaughtered reindeer under both traditional and industrial regimes of slaughter. But in fact it is this very aspect that allows Reinert to unpack the ontological question of "remains," as well as to address issues of national biopolitics vis-à-vis animals and relational dynamics between humans and other species. Problematizing the concepts of life and power, the author both engages in dialogue with and elaborates upon the works of Giorgio Agamben and Ranjana Khanna.

In his article, young researcher Alexander Kondakov faces a unique challenge. At this moment in time, any researcher attempting to study the issue of human rights in Russia is, in a sense, an innovator. The usual challenges that any researcher faces are augmented by the problem of identifying a theoretical framework applicable to the Russian context, as well as difficulties stemming from the necessity of creating a new vocabulary for phenomena that are absent in the Russian language and of ensuring proper translations of applicable terms into Russian. The author asks: What do human rights mean for gays and lesbians in Russia? The question is complicated, as the author engages with forms of knowledge that are clandestine, oppressed, and banned by law. Theoretically Kondakov draws on the works of Judith Butler and Wendy Brown and uses data from collective discussions and individual interviews with gays and lesbians.

Francisco Martínez's essay nicely complements Kondakov's article. Where Kondakov's piece is empirically grounded, Martínez's essay is more of an abstract meditation on the suppression of queer sexualities. Through the lens of body politics, sexuality, normativity, and biopolitics, the author interrogates the contemporary political regime in Russia. Martínez traces certain trajectories of transformation in Russian politics and locates phenomena such as glamour and pornography on the same continuum, using perspectives from Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben to articulate his insights. In an interesting way, Martínez's essay also resonates with Reinert's article. Both authors use the concept of biopolitics—Reinert in the context of human-animal relations, and Martínez in the context of human politics. That both of these pieces are featured in the same issue offers an additional opportunity for comparative engagement with these works.

As always, the issue features a number of book reviews. Worthy of particular attention is the review by Leonid Tereshenkov of the famous work of Vladimir Lenin, *What Is to Be Done?*, marking the 110th anniversary of the book's original publication. As contemporary social mobilizations gain force, a reminder of this work seems timely.

The section also features two reviews of books devoted to the issues of garbage (thus also resonating with Reinert's article). The first, by Alexandrina Vanke, looks at the most recent reissue of a famous book by the German sociologist Reiner Keller analyzing public discussions of waste in France and Germany. The other is a review by Laurent Coumel of sociologist Zsuzsa Gille's monograph on industrial waste in socialist and postsocialist Hungary.

Two other book reviews cover modern French studies of Russia. The collection *La Russie contemporaine*, reviewed by Larisa Shpakovskaya, presents a broad, nearly complete spectrum of recent research in this area by French scholars. The book by Gilles Favarel-Garrigues about policing of economic crimes in the Soviet Union and Russia (examined by Ella Paneyakh) is an interesting example of the constructivist approach to the study of law enforcement.

In recent years, several books dedicated to reconceptualization of imperial studies came out; two are reviewed here. *Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Empire and Nationalism* (review by Victor Shnirelman), a collection of articles previously printed in the journal *Ab Imperio*, showcases new approaches to the study of nationalism and empire, which fell earlier notions about the boundaries between the "empire" and the "nation-state." Alexander Etkind's *Internal Colonization*, originally published in English and soon to be translated into Russian, examines Russian imperial experience through the prism of the production of imperial consciousness, based on biographies of Russian pre-revolutionary philosophers, historians, and statesmen.

The book *Russian Professors: University Corporatism or Professional Solidarity*, reviewed by Dmitrii Kalugin, investigates the problems of universities in the era of Nicholas I. It will be of interest both to historians and sociologists as it raises many issues that are relevant today—including the rights and responsibilities of universities and the relationship between professorial corps and state bureaucracy. Oksana Zaporozhets's review of Anna Wacławek's book on graffiti and street art continues the inquiry into the relationship between art and the city, the area of interest frequently covered in the journal. Finally, the review by Ararat Osipian of Thomas Remington's *Politics of Inequality in Russia* once again raises the always important question of how to study social disparity and poverty.

In conclusion, to briefly return to the problem identified at the beginning of this introduction: the articles in this issue are all alike in the sense that they locate the "added value" of a text in the social sciences—a text's function that goes beyond analysis and interpretation and into the realm of social action in one way or another. This is true of the actionist approach to identity studies in Echevskaya and Anisimova's piece, distinctly activist backdrop of Kondakov's contribution, or the more nuanced, philosophical activism of Reinert and Martínez. These texts weren't assembled together intentionally, and the editors did not set out to create an issue with the theme of "engaged scholarship," but the final result suggests that discussion of the functions and forms of contemporary academic writing in the social sciences is a welcome and timely one.

Authorized translation from Russian by Veronica Davidov