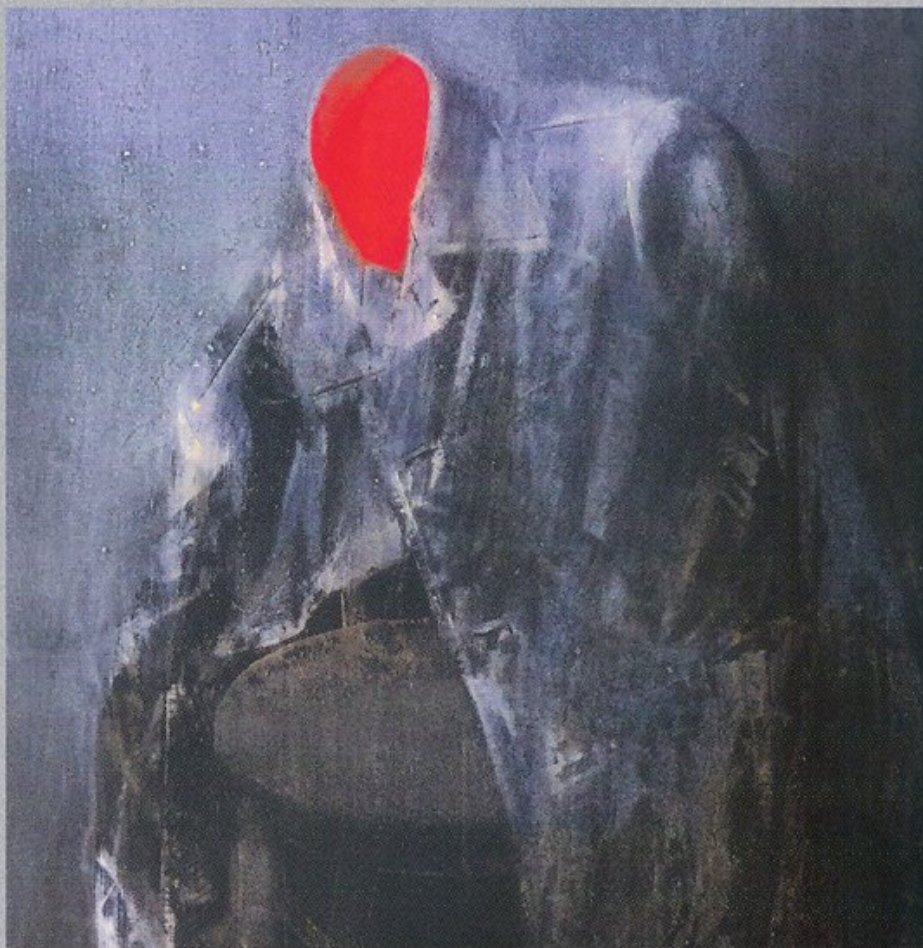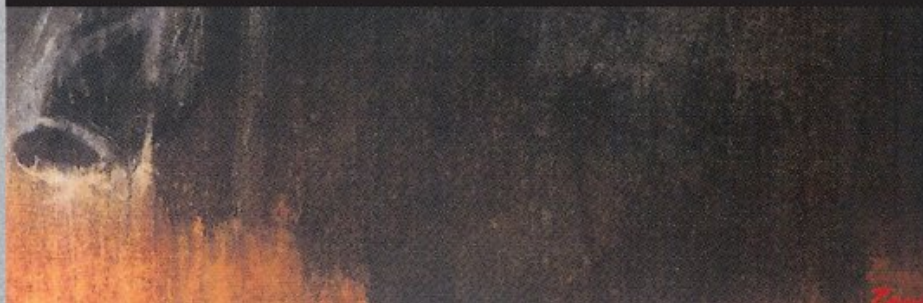# THE PATRIOTISM OF DESPAIR

NATION, WAR, AND LOSS IN RUSSIA

SERGUEI ALEX. OUSHAKINE

THE PATRIOTISM OF DESPAIR

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The Patriotism of Despair

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and Loss in Russia

Serguei Alex. Oushakine

For Kim Lane Scheppele

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Introduction

"We Have No Motherland"

On December 25th 1991, the headline in *Komsomolskaia Pravda,* a major Soviet daily newspaper, reflected the nation's shock at the just-announced dissolution of the USSR: "I woke up, and I am stunned—Soviet power is gone" (*Ia prosnulsia—zdras'te! Net sovetskoi vlasti!*). In a week, the system of state-controlled prices in Russia would be gone too, and very soon inflation would reach 2,000 percent per year. Within next few years, the Communist Party would be banned (but legalized later), and many other traditional institutions associated with state socialism would fade away.

The collapse of state ideology and the attendant dismantling of the elaborate system of state domination were a significant part of the story of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. But they were not the whole story. Amplified by the corrupt privatization of national assets and a massive transformation of existing norms and conventions, this collapse produced a lasting impact on individual and collective identities, modes of social exchange, and forms of symbolization. Usually framed as a "period of transition," the 1990s were quickly dubbed by Russians as the time of *bespredel,* a word that means a lack of any visible obstacles or limits but also an absence of any shared rules or laws.

Apart from this institutional dimension, for many ex-Soviets the collapse of the USSR had a more personal meaning, too. For several generations, the Soviet past and personal biographies had become indistinguishable, and the disappearance of the Soviet country often implied the obliteration of individual and collective achievements, shared norms of interaction, established bonds of belonging, or familiar daily routines. The abandoning of old institutions and the erasing of the most obvious traces of Communist

ideology did not automatically produce an alternative unifying cultural, political, or social framework. As a result, the trope of loss turned out to be the most effective symbolic device, one capable of translating people's Soviet experience into the post-Soviet context. In the summer of 1992, when I visited Barnaul, the administrative center of the Altai region that became the main field site for this book, I encountered a striking example of these attempts to articulate a new life in terms of absence. Along a main road that runs from downtown to a suburb there was a huge link of a metal pipe, left behind by gas workers some years earlier. A dozen meters long, the pipe was also very high, and local kids used to hide inside it. During that summer, someone used the pipe for a graffiti display. Facing the road, large white-washed letters announced simply: "We have no Motherland" (*Nyet u nas Rodiny*). I could not tell whether the statement was an ironic comment, an outcry, or a line from a famous Russian poem. Perhaps the sign, addressed to no one in particular and to anyone who passed, combined all of these.

This book grew out of those pipe graffiti—as an attempt to understand how people in Russia explained their sudden "loss" of motherland, how they reconciled their personal lives with dramatic social and political changes. The project was originally aimed at documenting the local practices through which people tried to restore their feeling of belonging once Soviet power and the Soviet motherland were "gone." The book traces how Russians in a Siberian province filled up the vacant place left behind by the collapsed socialist order and how they reconfigured, reimagined, and objectified their connections with the new nation and the new country.

When I returned to Barnaul in 2001 to do fieldwork, the pipe was gone, and the city had also changed. Yet, in contrast to some of the more prominent Russian cities, there was no radical erasure of the important cultural objects of the past. No revolutionary memorials had been destroyed, no streets renamed. The main city boulevard, fittingly named after the Bolshevik leader, is still punctuated by three old statues of Lenin (one every two miles). The Soviet background persisted, or rather, it silently offset the emerging signs and symbols of new post-Soviet reality.

In 2003, during my fieldwork, another striking juxtaposition of these two culturally distinct periods caught my eye: a clumsy local billboard in a Barnaul neighborhood invited people to celebrate Independence Day on June 12.[1] Its surroundings, however, added an ironic twist. Behind the billboard an old Soviet building bore a reminder of a very different political

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1. The day was introduced in 1994 to mark the Declaration of Sovereignty adopted by the Russian parliament on June 12, 1990. It was the first new official holiday in post-Soviet Russia.

Fig. I.1. "With love to Russia": a poster for Independence Day with nonfunctioning neon signs celebrating the seventy-third anniversary of the October Revolution in the background. Barnaul, 2003. Photo by author.

event. On the roof of the building, nonfunctioning neon combinations of the number 73 and red carnations referred to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 (Figure I.1). Originally erected in 1990 for the last widely celebrated anniversary of the October Revolution, the sign had been neither removed nor replaced, freezing in time and space the power that had been gone for more than a decade.

In his study of liminality, Victor Turner reminded us that a temporary suspension of semiotic and discursive activity of the "liminal personae" is one of the typical features of a liminal stage (Turner 1969, 103). Nonfunctioning revolutionary signs were indeed an example of this temporarily halted semiotics. Ignored yet not removed, they continued their tacit life as a part of the symbolic landscape. Having lost their primary meaning, these "suspended" signs nonetheless retained their ability to demarcate the line between the present and the past, to remind about a past that had become irretrievable yet not erased.

Despite their implicit and even explicitly nostalgic undertones, these remnants of the disappeared Soviet state were far from being just an indicator of a conservative clinging to the totalitarian past or another reflection of "path dependence," blocking the steady movement toward a bright neoliberal future. If the post-Soviet period can teach us anything, it is, perhaps, that during times of comprehensive social and political transformation culture matters more than ever. In this book, I show how such traces of loss, the remains of objects and histories that had disappeared, helped sustain continuity in people's lives during a time of personal or collective transition. By analyzing narratives collected in Barnaul, I identify symbolic anchors—"transitional objects" as Winnicott (1971) called them—that provided the liminal subject with a minimal set of navigation tools in the fragmented and disorienting post-Soviet landscape.

With no predictable beginning and no expected end, Russia's post-Soviet transition came with no clear set of rules or paths to follow. Individual and group liminality of the 1990s coincided with the liminality of the society at large: communities had to be created, new systems of values had to emerge, and traditions of discursive interactions and social exchange had to be invented. Unlike Turner's study of liminality, this book emphasizes not the structurally conditioned "suspension" of the symbolic activities of post-Soviet "liminars," but the new languages and skills through which people–in–passage endowed the period of radical changes with some graspable meaning. In short, the book examines popular forms of symbolization that were used to frame the perceived liminality of the Russian state and the Russian nation in the 1990s and the beginning of the twenty-first century.

As I discovered during my fieldwork, these new languages were often profoundly pessimistic; loss was their beginning, their driving force, and their destination. Veterans of the Chechen wars and mothers whose sons died while performing their mandatory military service were my first informants in Barnaul. While talking to these people, reading the mothers' letters and veterans' memoirs, watching videotapes of their public events, and listening to the soldiers' songs, I became more and more aware of the link that my informants built between their personal exposure to violence and the general condition of the post-Soviet state. As a result, I transformed the project into an attempt to outline the prominence of the traumatic in the process of national reconstruction. In some cases, literal violence caused deaths, suffering, and pain. In others, the sharp disruption of once stable institutions resulted in poverty, a loss of status, or professional disorientation. Extensive depictions of misery coupled with practices of suspicion saturated mundane daily conversation and sophisticated intellectual de-

bate. What remained similar in all these cases was the feeling that state institutions had profoundly altered people's lives. Yet, as my materials demonstrate, while provoking or in some cases even organizing violent experience, these institutions proved to be consistently incapable of dealing with the traumatic consequences of their own actions. In the absence of a developed network of civic institutions, it was the logic of connectedness that was used as a mechanism through which trauma and violence were depoliticized, domesticated, and integrated into one's daily life. Questions of political responsibility were eventually displaced by collective practices of grief and discourses of bereavement, as if no positive content could function as a basis for a sense of belonging, and a community must envision a shared experience of loss in order to establish its own borders.

This post-Soviet tendency to achieve a sense of belonging by framing the nation's history as one of experienced, imagined, or anticipated traumatic events remains at the center of this book. The chapters trace how "the work of the negative" (Green 1999) was used in creating new forms of collectivity and demonstrate that the sharing of actually experienced suffering among soldiers' mothers, the unceasing circulation of traumatic memories of war among veterans, the academic production of intellectualized narratives about the Russian tragedy, and the persistent striving to discover in new economic practices a hidden source of imaginary or real danger all brought a new focus to people's relations with the state and the nation.

Telling personal stories about dramatic changes, losses, or violence in one's own life involved the construction of both a general framework within which these stories could make sense and a potential audience for these narratives. Frequently, the individual and group narration of these trauma stories produced communities of loss, which simultaneously acted as the primary author and as the main target of narratives about suffering.

The patriotism of despair, as I call it, emerged as an emotionally charged set of symbolic practices called upon to mediate relations among individuals, nation, and state and thus to provide communities of loss with socially meaningful subject positions. In 1933, disillusioned with the unfulfilled promises of the Bolshevik Revolution, Nikolai Punin, a scholar and a critic, wrote to Anna Akhmatova, his wife at the time, "do not lose your despair... —there is nothing else to lose." Despair, he explained a decade later, was a way of keeping a distance from the unbearable reality; it was a way of preventing oneself from being totally consumed by things that could not be controlled otherwise (Punin 2000, 323, 375). This book explores the patriotism of despair that is also rooted in disillusionment and aimed at providing distance from painful reality. There is an important difference,

though. What is crucial in the cases described here is that the feeling of loss, the emotional memory of experienced or imagined injury, was not a result of withdrawal into one's private life but was translated into ideas of national belonging. Stories about the nation and the country were used as a major organizing plot for *individual* accounts: these personal feelings acquired a socially recognizable narrative structure. Triggering an immediate emotional response, the ritualized descriptions of the wounded past provided their authors a crucial entry point into the public discourse at the time when other mechanisms of interaction and recognition ceased to function. After all, *otchaianie,* the Russian-language equivalent for "despair," means lost hope and dejection but also decisiveness and courage without any constraints.

This analysis of such narratives and practices does not aim to pursue them through the lens of contemporary studies of melancholia and mourning, which tend to emphasize the "internal" and "projective" aspects of the identity preoccupied with loss. Rather, it seeks to both document and understand the relations, things, and discourses through which people's traumatic experience became materialized. This interest results in a somewhat different framing of trauma as well. Instead of focusing on the limits and constraints that trauma imposes on one's symbolic capacity—instead of exploring the unclaimed, the unsaid, and the unrepresentable—this book examines mechanisms and forms that capture the individual or collective experience of the traumatic.[2] At the collective level it discusses the fragmentation of the social fabric in two forms. The first is the intense search for missing links and hidden connections that many felt would reveal the concealed logic of seemingly random post-Soviet changes associated with the second coming of capitalism to Russia. Equally important are the ways that narratives of "Russian tragedy" and studies of "vital forces" were taken up by Russian scholars in order to decouple the nation from the state and ethnicity from the nation. These were marked by persistent attempts to reformulate the Russian past along lines of ethnic distinction—as a history of hostile nations who were made to live together. Among individuals much can be learned about the role of trauma in creating post-Soviet society by understanding how the veterans of the Chechen and Afghan wars gradually transformed their individual narratives of self-sacrifice and patriotic duty into rituals of public recognition. Each "exchange of sacrifices," in which the premise of mutual loss functioned as a common starting point, helped ex-soldiers evoke the respect of a larger public, leading what had

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2. For a discussion see Caruth (1995); Bar-on (1999); Friedlander (1992).

been considered a questionable military activity to be rewritten as a story of individual perseverance. Likewise, the mothers of the soldiers who died in these wars developed a set of rituals that allowed them to somehow objectify their loss and their own community: these domesticated metonymies of death became a way of preserving a continuing link with the past. Their practices of memorialization not only made clear the mothers' bereavement but also produced a series of material artifacts that transformed grief and loss into a physical as well as an emotionally inseparable part of mothers' everyday order of things.

In Barnaul and throughout much of Russia these stories of the hidden structure of capitalism, ethnic vulnerability, devalued military sacrifices, and unacknowledged deaths merged into an extensive memorial service for relatives who had been lost, for a country that had vanished, and for achievements and expectations that no longer mattered. Different in their scope and scale, each post-Soviet obituary is also a sign of a gradual, postmortem disengagement from the past: an attempt to recognize what has been lost by focusing on the accessible that remains.

This book relies on field materials I collected during extended stays in Barnaul, the administrative center of Altai *krai* (region), located in southwest Siberia on the borders with Mongolia and Kazakhstan. However, for all its specificity, the site of my research was hardly an exception in post-Soviet Russia. In most respect, Altai was a typical province searching for its way in a market economy without the influx of investment that radically changed a small number of mineral-rich Russian regions. The ethnographic materials that I draw upon in this book provide a close-up view of tendencies that could be generalized to many other Russian regions.

In fact, various forms of the patriotism of despair outlined in this book provided a key base of support for the resurgence of Russia's national assertiveness that became so vivid during Vladimir Putin's presidency. While high oil prices in the first decade of the twenty-first century were certainly instrumental in making the new Russian nationalism heard, it was the shared memory of loss, along with the firsthand experience of living through the *bespredel* of the 1990s, that ensured the widespread positive reception of this revitalized patriotism in postmillennial Russia. My book uncovers the local roots of this national pride and presents those still fragmented and isolated voices of patriotic despair that would later merge in a chorus of powerful support for Russia's new identity.

When planning my research, I was deliberately interested in studying how post-Soviet changes were perceived in a remote province. This geographical choice was stimulated by my attempt to break away from a dominant trend

in post-Soviet ethnography to study Russians in a few major cultural and industrial centers. I thought that an in-depth ethnographic study in a region that did not have immediate access to the global flow of ideas, images, and goods so typical of Russia's two capitals could produce a somewhat different picture of changes and people's responses to them. While focusing on the local knowledge of my informants, I also trace the larger historical and geographical links that situate my ethnographic encounters within broader cultural and political contexts.

My choice of location had a more personal reason, too: I grew up in Barnaul during the late Soviet period. During perestroika, I studied history in a local university there. In December 1991, right before the unexpected end of the USSR, I moved to St. Petersburg (then still Leningrad), returning to Barnaul throughout the 1990s, albeit less and less frequently. I watched from a distance how life in this provincial Soviet city was slowly transformed into a post-Soviet experience. Neither from within nor quite from outside, these observations followed the uneven and confusing process of "the unmaking of Soviet life," as the anthropologist Caroline Humphrey (2002a) aptly phrased the period of postsocialist changes in Russia.

Barnaul is a city with an unusually long history for Siberia. It was established in 1730 as an important eastern outpost of the Romanov dynasty. Most of Russia's silver and copper in the eighteenth century came from the Altai region. By the middle of the nineteenth century these sources were depleted, and until the Second World War Barnaul remained in a state of economic hibernation. The war returned the city to its earlier status as a major provincial industrial and cultural center: in the 1940s, several large military plants were moved from the western regions of the USSR to Barnaul and its neighboring towns. Until the very end of the USSR, this heavily militarized industry served as the backbone of the regional economy, sustaining the city with its eight hundred thousand people, multiple universities, museums, theaters, and symphony orchestras.

Throughout the 1990s, many of the large factories and plants were shut down, following the state's radical reduction of military-related spending.[3] The military-industrial complex that dominated the Altai economy for decades was replaced by labor-intensive "merchant capitalism." Heavily influenced by their Turkish, Greek, and Chinese partners, shuttle-traders (*chelnoki*) and small retailers brought to this Siberian city a new commercial culture. They also changed the power balance in the region. Within the centralized

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3. During the privatization campaign in 1992–95, 20 percent of all military plants throughout the country were deemed "bankrupt" and were closed (Analiz 2004), 93.

Soviet economy, the city's industrial plants were traditionally autonomous from the local authorities. CEOs were appointed by the Soviet government. The plants' substantial budget came directly from Moscow, and a large portion of it was used to support the social infrastructure (housing, schools, hospitals) associated with the plants. The economic changes of the early 1990s radically reversed this situation. Plants were privatized, with CEOs elected by their working collectives. In their attempts to survive the quickly changing economic conditions, the new leadership dumped the dilapidated social infrastructure onto borough administrations, which had neither money nor skills to maintain it. Merchant capitalism, still in its infancy, could hardly provide any powerful support in this respect. Financially weak, this form of economic activity tended to be heavily dependent upon privileged relations with local authorities. Moreover, as many post-Soviet ethnographers pointed out, the dominance of small retail business has rather negative social consequences: it usually prevents rather than contributes to the formation of economically and politically independent groups (Burawoy and Krotov 1993).

In addition to these local economic trends, Altai in general and Barnaul in particular had only very limited exposure to many of the favorable economic trends and influences that became associated with post-Soviet reforms throughout the first two decades of changes. The region has no gas or oil; the city is not a major transportation hub. The region's potential economic asset—beautiful mountains, lakes, and rivers—is underdeveloped and requires investment and management that have not been readily available. Along with a majority of Russia's provinces, the region could not sustain itself financially; it was habitually labeled by the local and federal media as "economically depressed."[4] Subsidies from the federal government usually made up more than 50 percent of the region's expenses. For several years in a row, Altai was consistently the second largest recipient of federal funds in the country, following the Caucasus province of Dagestan (*Altai Daily Review* 2003).

Control over state subsidies and an absence of economically independent groups have turned the local government into a major—and often the only—source of financial and political support available for local educational, civic, and political organizations. This confluence of administrative and financial power produced a certain political stability and perhaps stagnation. As in many other regions of the country, sweeping political changes

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4. In 2003, at least seventy-one Russian provinces (out of eighty-nine) relied on financial subsidies from the federal center (Grozovskii 2003.)

at the national level did not significantly influence the local makeup of major regional institutions. Until 2004, the key administrative positions in Altai were all occupied by members of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. The same mayor administered the city from 1986 until his sudden death in a car accident in 2003. In turn, the last Communist governor of the region was in charge of the *krai* from 1991 until 2004, when he was unexpectedly defeated in the local elections by a famous stand-up comedian, labeled "Altai's Schwarzenegger" by the media (Mereu 2004).

The economic and political stagnation in the region had a significant impact on its population. Barnaul's post-Soviet history is the history of the city's steady shrinking. Migration, early deaths, and low birth rate significantly changed the city's population. In ten years, Barnaul lost two hundred thousand people, about a quarter of its Soviet-era peak population of eight hundred thousand. By 2005 the city's population was below six hundred thousand.

Traditionally inhabited mostly by ethnic Russians, Barnaul also interested me as a possible place for studying the formation of Russian (*russkoi*) national identity.[5] Throughout the Soviet period, the meaning of "Russianness" and modern practices of "being Russian" remained largely unclear. In the USSR, the Russian dominance in political, social, and cultural areas was widely practiced but rarely acknowledged in any explicit way. The ethnic makeup of leadership positions, university admissions, and party membership was indeed closely monitored. However, practices of this control were not formally institutionalized. The Soviet Russian Federation, for instance, never had its own republican branch of the Communist Party, Komsomol, or KGB (unlike, say, Estonia or Uzbekistan). Hidden by the homogenizing official notion of the "new collectivity, the Soviet people" (*novaia obshchnost' sovetskii narod*), many Russians found their own ethnicity left unspecified. This imperial model of Soviet nation building allowed Russian ethnicity to persist as a blank spot, as an indeterminate source of power, framed by ethnic differences of other Soviet nationalities, which were constantly reproduced by the official Soviet policy of indigenization (Martin 2001; Hirsch 2005).

After the collapse of the USSR, the situation changed dramatically. As a distinctive nation with specific characteristics, Russians did not follow the

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5. In the early 1990s, in addition to *russkii* (Russian), the country's officials started actively using the words *rossiianin* and *rossiiskii* to refer to the post-Soviet nation. Unlike *russkii*, *rossiianin* has no clear ethnic connotation and implies a supraethnic collectivity identity (see Tishkov 2007 for a recent attempt to defend this approach). In English, both terms tend to be rendered as "Russian." I follow this tradition, indicating in parentheses the original Russian term.

path of other nationalities from the former Soviet republics (and east European countries) that used various versions of presocialist national identity models as their fresh starting point. Attempts to claim the legacy of the Romanov empire were mostly limited to funeral rituals, associated with the exhumation and reburial of the royal remains. The aborted history of Russian democratic development between the two major revolutions in 1905 and 1917 did not attract a lot of attention either. The initial post-Soviet fascination with Russo-Soviet émigrés and exiles quickly faded away. Several highly publicized attempts by the Yeltsin government to invent a new national idea that would rejuvenate and consolidate the Russian nation ended up as spectacular failures: a fragmented Russian society could reach no consensus about its long-term values, perspectives, and expectations. Such a limited cultural repertoire of identifications, I anticipated, would make it difficult for ex-Soviet Russians to frame their new social and cultural location in positive and/or nonimperial terms (Oushakine 2000a, 2000b). Barnaul provided a good ground for studying this tendency. The city had a large group of local intelligentsia and a network of political groups actively involved in the production of nationalistic narratives. The city's relative isolation made these movements and intellectual trends more salient and, at times, more radical.

As many anthropologists have pointed out, the lack of easily available positive models of social and political development often results in attempts to build social, political, and economic activity around notions and practices of individual- and group-relatedness (Weston 2001, 153). The post-Soviet fragmentation of the social fabric has forced people to similarly revisit or rediscover basic premises of long-term interaction (Dinello 2002; Oushakine 2004b). It is indicative, for instance, that in the absence of an easily available sociopolitical vocabulary, my informants—Russian veterans of the Chechen wars, mothers whose sons were lost in the army, national Bolsheviks, regional politicians, local sociologists, and politically active youth—framed new forms of post-Soviet connectedness through the language of family and kinship ties such as "brotherhood," "soldiers' mothers," or "Slavs."

Studies on kinship have demonstrated that a striving to naturalize social bonds is a common characteristic of groups whose narratives of origin are threatened or challenged (Borneman 1992; Carsten 2000). If references to trauma, violence, and disorientation point toward a possible origin of the discourse on post-Soviet relatedness, then the naturalizing terms of kinship used by my informants, I suggest, reveal a "biopolitical" context in which postsocialist transition takes place. These post-Soviet attempts to naturalize

imagined communities reveal the extent to which the emergence and development of new sociopolitical regimes depend on such an intertwining of biological and political categories. Predictably, loyalty to one's familial interests is often counterbalanced by hostility to racial or ethnic outsiders. This book makes clear that the legitimizing of one's individual or collective membership in a marginalized group is not the only function that the naturalizing relations and terminology of social kinship could perform.

In many cases, examples of post-Soviet communities of loss could be read as an attempt to restore—at least to some extent—the sense of collectivity and cohesiveness they felt during the Soviet period. At the same time, communities of loss repeatedly pointed to the untranslatability of the shared substance that bound them together. Thus, in their interviews and writings, veterans of the Chechen war routinely distanced themselves from those who "have not lived through the war." In turn, Russian nationalists persistently highlighted the unique nature of the suffering associated with Russia's recent history, while soldiers' mothers watchfully maintained social distinctions aimed to reflect the types and degrees of their injuries and losses. These examples could be easily multiplied, yet what unites them all is the differential deployment of pain that brings these groups together at the same time as it sets them apart from others.

This tendency to deal with social instability and individual vulnerability through exclusionary, naturalizing bonds was precipitated by Russia's specific external conditions. Unlike that in many eastern European countries, the transition from state socialism to a market economy was not undertaken with clear goals (Burawoy 2002; Lovell 2006). There was no motivating prospect of joining a large multinational alliance with established democratic traditions—for example, the European Union or NATO—which would significantly mediate the shape of the evolving rules and procedures, principles of political activity and civic participation, and patterns of relations between the public and the private (Böröcz 2000; Bruszt and Stark 2003; Kolarska-Bobiriska 2003). Against this background, the rhetoric of exclusion could be seen as a reaction to a perceived geopolitical isolation, often epitomized in Russia by the image of the steady proliferation of NATO's bases along the country's borders.

As my fieldwork shows, the emphasis on group loyalty and closely monitored group boundaries was a direct reaction to the fundamental economic changes that followed the collapse of the USSR. The market economy was accompanied by an immense social polarization of the Russian population, by a quick and unfair transfer of national property to a limited group of appointed oligarchs, and by an increasing role for money in structuring

various aspects of public and private life. This post-Soviet capitalization of the country was often interpreted by my informants as an invasion of foreign values, aimed at undermining Russian traditions and ways of life. In turn, the volatility of new economic practices, the unpredictability of economic exchanges, and the nontransparency of market behavior were all associated with notions of falsity, corruption, and mistrust. As a result, the alien character of differentiating capital and a lack of trust in monetary mediation stimulated a search for "real" values able to withstand what was perceived as the corroding and atomizing effect of money. For many of my informants, an image of a self-enclosed national community with inconvertible values and an untranslatable history, framed in a vision of an exceptional Russian path, was the usual outcome of this search. With their clear delineation of spaces of nonbelonging, these newly created configurations of relatedness shaped and strengthened communities of loss.

The specifics of Russian nationalism and Russian national self-perception have been studied before, of course. Scholars usually focus on the political implications and political meaning of speeches, published materials, and organized events.[6] This book, by contrast, attempts to explain how the rhetoric of trauma influenced producers of these texts and organizers of these events. It examines how this regular symbolic reinscribing of violence and suffering in the fabric of daily life was used as a means of self-organization, a way to produce meaningful forms of connectedness in a situation of radical changes. The chapters trace how this solidarity evolved into a patriotism of despair.

Each of the following chapters deals with a particular aspect of post-Soviet transformation: capitalism, ethnicity, state, and memory. Chapters 1 and 2 look at forms of connectedness that were based on the "activation and reactivation of traumas that have not been personally experienced" (Ewing 2000, 249). Each chapter explores a set of politically and intellectually driven efforts to produce overarching ideological frameworks, in which national cohesiveness was constructed as a reaction to a potential or concealed catastrophe—be it a threat of invading capitalism or a danger of "competing ethnoses." Chapters 3 and 4 analyze interviews with groups that were directly affected by Russia's recent military politics: Russian veterans drafted to participate in the war in Chechnya and soldiers' mothers, whose sons died while performing their army service. The Chechen war in particular (1994–present) and Russia's recent military history in general

6. See Cosgrove (2004); Franklin and Widdis (2004); Hubbs (1988); Kozhinov (2002); Tumarkin (1994).

offered the potential for constructing new state-oriented identities, but the state routinely failed to deliver on its promises.[7] Sharply outlining the relationship between the government and individuals in post-Soviet Russia, these war-related stories highlight the traumatic core around which new communities emerged.

Certainly, it would be wrong to reduce the post-Soviet development in Russia only to stories about trauma, suffering, perceived ethnic extinction, and state-organized violence. Fortunately, communities of loss were not the only form of belonging that emerged in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Yet by discussing these narratives, this book demonstrates how people were capable of sustaining dramatic personal changes while their country collapsed and their state, their economy, and their culture were all radically transformed—all within less than two decades.

In 1923, describing St. Petersburg after the Russian Revolution, the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky compared the city with "a man whose insides have been torn out by an explosion, but he keeps on talking." As the formalist continued, "Imagine a group of such men. They sit and talk. What else are they to do—howl?" (2004, 133–34). This book is an attempt to document similar talks after an explosion, in a situation where cultural and social insides have collapsed or have been torn out. The traumatic symbolic anchors and practices of sharing suffering that I discovered in a Russian province may not be the best solution for dealing with radical dislocations, yet they kept many afloat in the flux of post-Soviet changes.

7. As chapter 3 shows, from the military point of view, the war in Chechnya is divided into two separate campaigns: from 1994 until 1996 and from 1999 to the present. In public discussions and presentations, however, the "Chechen war" tends to be perceived as a continuous process that started with the assault of Grozny, the Chechen capital, in 1994.

1 Repatriating Capitalism

Fragmented Society and Global Connections

It was understood in everyday economic life that many items could not be bought. State trade was institutionally structured in such a way that money was not important.…If you had money but no connections, you would not have access to goods in short supply. You were a nobody. Your money just demonstrated your lack of position in society. This was the economic reality not just for a year or two but for decades.

—Yegor Gaidar, "Russian Reform."

Only recently, we were all together. During the [Second World] war, our grandfathers together fought Germans. In the 1960s–70s, our parents studied in the same universities. But in the middle of the 1980s, our paths were split apart. Today there are *Them* and *Us. They* are the masters of this life; *We* are this life's orphans. One thing is still encouraging, though. *They* make up only 5 percent of the Russian population; *We* are the remaining 95 percent. Those among *Us* who are smart, bright, and active are still dreaming of becoming deputies and businessmen under the current political regime. This is why this regime is being treated with some respect. Soon, *We* all realize that these dreams are utopian. In the world of capital, only *They* could become deputies and businessmen. Then *We* will decide to build a new world for us. And *They* won't stop *Us.*

—Viktor, a student at Altai State Agricultural University, Barnaul, 2004.

Conspiracy theory is not an open-ended set of "reading practices" but a particular structure of feeling. It is a nervous system, a split sensitivity, an internally divided cultural space that has force, that generates as well as registers the contradictions of contemporary social transformations.

—Susan Harding and Kathleen Stewart, "Anxieties of Influence"

Paths and Patches of Postsocialist Capitalism

For anyone coming to Barnaul, the city's new commercial landscape presents a startling postsocialist palimpsest. Fading signs of the Soviet past are merged in an unlikely combination with new symbols of post-Soviet capitalism (figure 1.1). This palimpsest has a certain consistency: local shops, entertainment centers, and casinos that have been built in the city's downtown are usually marked as destinations with an ostensibly foreign flavor.

Fig. 1.1. Square in front of the Central Universal Store (TsUM). The apartment building to the left of the store carries a symbol of the Order of October Revolution that the city was awarded in 1980; the sign reads "Order-Bearing Barnaul." The striped emblem below is an ad for a mobile phone company. June 2006. Photo by author.

Over several years, a series of upscale establishments with exotic names have appeared on Lenin Prospect, the main city street. The "trading house" Kaligula, built near the dilapidated cinema-theater Rodina (Motherland), was joined by a "trading center," Tsezar' (Caesar). The fur store Ellada (from Hellas) now sits next to El'dorado, a branch of the electronics chain store. Less than half a mile away another shopping mall presents a different but no less foreign-inspired outlook. In this case, the mall's name, Ultra, has not even been transliterated (figure 1.2). The symbolic reshaping of the local landscape is most visible on Red Army Prospect, the city's second major avenue. In this case, the symbolism of ancient decadence was combined with references to less distant examples of Hollywood glamour and bandit chic. Tsentr Vavilon (Babylon Center), the city's main and the most expensive shopping mall, symbolically echoes Kolizei (Coliseum), the most prestigious club and entertainment venue. Next to Vavilon and Kolizei, the casino Oskar mirrors Las Vegas, a gambling machine pavilion across the street (figure 1.3).

Fig. 1.2. Trading House Ultra on Lenin Prospect. Barnaul, 2004. Photo by author.

The tendency to give exotic names to new economic practices and institutions was not limited to this particular city. Throughout the country, this early post-Soviet capitalism was marked by similar corporate and private attempts to reconfigure public space by establishing new historical and geographic connections. To understand the full significance of this process, one needs to remember that for more than seven decades Soviet public space was largely devoid of individualizing features. Generic names were used to indicate the establishments' function, while numbers pointed to their place within the larger system of Soviet institutions. For example, my apartment building in Barnaul was located next to Secondary School Number 22 and Secondary School Number 76. Close to the schools, in a striking contrast between the two traditions of naming, the generic Public Library Number 10 faced Maria-Ra, a new grocery store named after the owner's wife.[1]

1. Dubin (1994, 223–30), Krongauz (2008), and Yurchak (2000) provide useful details of a similar process in other regions.

Fig. 1.3. Barnaul's own Las Vegas: a "gambling club" on Red Army Prospect. June 2006. Photo by author.

The tendency to personalize the public space started in Barnaul in the early 1990s, when a small group of businessmen opened one of the very first private stores in the city. Located on Lenin Prospect, the store was called the Butik Renome (from the French *renommé,* "renowned"). The shortage of available real estate in the city and the high costs of new construction significantly influenced the architectural outline of early postsocialist capitalism. In the beginning, it was newly privatized apartments in buildings located on main city streets that entrepreneurs converted into market space.[2] (The free-standing Kaligula, Vavilon, and Kolizei became a part of Barnaul's landscape several years later, when new construction started.) Epitomizing the trend of the decade, Renome was created in a two-room corner apartment on the ground floor of a residential building: internal walls were demolished, the floor was sunk into the basement (to increase the height of the space), a window was transformed

2. For more discussion of this tendency in Russia's provinces see Ruble (1995).

Fig. 1.4. Carving out an entry to the market: new commercial sites in Barnaul often begin as converted residential space. In this emerging commercial row in an apartment building the store Avtozapchasti (Autoparts) is joined by a yet unnamed establishment. Barnaul, 2004. Photo by author.

into a door, and a separately built staircase provided an autonomous entry (*figure 1.4*). With its foreign-inspired *renomme,* initial commercialization was materialized as a literal intrusion into private living spaces, which had formerly been excluded from the circulation of money.

Carving out their separate domains from what had been domestic territory, new commercial establishments extended their presence into available public space as well. Turning a residential property into a commercial site was normally accompanied by a typical stipulation: the new owners had to maintain the sidewalk in front of their premises. Given the uneven pace of privatization, this often produced a peculiar spatial experience in practice. Each owner of the apartment-turned-into-a-store would pave and decorate the corresponding part of the sidewalk in a particular way. As a result, many sidewalks could tell vivid stories about buildings' gradual commercialization. What had formerly been a sixty-foot-long stretch of ordinary pavement now could be made up of a series of unmatched and uneven patches: several squares of white cinder blocks would be interspersed with pieces of old asphalt, which in turn would be continued by areas of red brick.

Diverse in its shape, depth, texture, and color, this hazardous landscape mapped in stone the uneven path of Russia's post-Soviet development. In an idiosyncratic form, it represented a primary sociosymbolic problem of postsocialist capitalism: no economic, legal, or aesthetic framework was able to homogenize fragmented pieces of semiprivatized public space into a seamless surface. No basic "social contract" or at least no social consensus among newly appearing owners could yet be used for redefining their common ground. The previous pavement might have been drab, but it was coherent. The new sidewalk was established as a chain of adjacent but aesthetically and physically disconnected patches. It is perhaps only fitting that in daily conversations, people often referred to new shops and kiosks as "lumps" (*komok,* from *kommercheskii kiosk*) and "commercial dots" (*kommercheskaia tochka*). New economic formations were perceived as something that broke out of the existing environment (lumps) or as something that only punctuated it (dots).

During my fieldwork, I witnessed how this trope of the fragmentation of social fabric was discussed in different settings and environments. Images that emerged in these conversations were not always commerce-related, nor were they always exotic. Sometimes metaphors of disjuncture were translated into a very literal feeling of personal disconnectedness. In the fall of 2001, soon after my arrival in the city, thieves cut off all the wires that supplied electricity to street lamps in an urban district where I lived during the fieldwork. The wires had copper and aluminum, which could be sold to scrap metal collectors.[3] Local authorities had no money to rewire the lamps, and for more than two years this part of the city—with dozens of apartment buildings, twenty thousand inhabitants, several large schools, kindergartens, stores, and a big hospital—remained totally dark during long Siberian nights. Few people drove cars, especially in winter; the majority just walked around the district or relied on public transportation. Every morning and evening, one could see an improvised light show around neighborhoods: to illuminate the road to stores or nearby schools, neighbors used flashlights. During this time, the bankrupt city government drastically reduced the number of municipal buses and promised to completely replace them

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3. The so-called aluminum rash started in the 1990s and has not stopped since, despite the authorities' efforts to outlaw the scrap metal business. Probably the most publicized case took place in 2003, right before the highly advertised three hundred-year anniversary of St. Petersburg, when malefactors cut out 1.5 km of electric wires along the railroad from Moscow to St. Petersburg, effectively blocking the traffic of electric trains between the two cities (Popov 2007, 4).

with more expensive *kommercheskii* (privately owned) transportation.[4] The lack of illumination was aggravated by the enforced immobility. Small talk with neighbors and friends was frequently peppered with ritual complaints about being left in the darkness (*ostavili v temnote*) and being cut off from the rest of the world (*otrezali ot mira*). My informants were eager to take the theme of disintegration beyond their daily problems, too, and easily extended their grievances about the failing infrastructure to complaints about the wrecked country (*razvalili stranu*) or to debates about disintegrating minds (*razrukha v golovahk*).[5]

This does not mean that people gave up their attempts to connect the isolated dots and cut-off parts. In fact, if the perceived feeling of disconnectedness resulted in anything, it was the incredible production of popular and theoretical discourses that exposed missing links and discovered hidden structures. The "zero years" (*nulevye gody*), as the first decade of the new century was often called in Russia, were marked by an intense striving to imagine a new environment that could symbolically unite the diverse pieces that had been isolated by quick commercialization. Surprisingly enough, the articulation of loss and dislocation did not result in practices of disengagement. Instead, the mutual recollection of negative experience was often used to shape new forms of solidarity and belonging.

This chapter explores the post-Soviet obsession with missing links exposed by the rapid fragmentation of public and private space. It attempts to reconstruct the dazzling picture of the post-Soviet provincial landscape, with its confusing, contradictory, and often barely compatible patches, pieces, and shards. It also documents how emerging market relations both polarized people and simultaneously activated what Jean and John Comaroff have fittingly called the "will to connect" (2003b, 297). The disintegration of the previously coherent public space and the domestication of foreign-looking enclaves (in the shape of Kaligulas and Vavilons) resulted in increasing attempts to envision and objectify "'traditional' ways of life as cultural wholes" (Harrison 2000, 662). The experience of global circulation of capital was counterbalanced with ideas of an enclosed national community and unmediated values. Increasingly, Russo-Soviet culture was construed as "inalienable wealth," as a particular form of socially meaningful

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4. In addition, to save money, the city authority wanted to stop removing snow from streets and to cancel buying chalk for public schools (Negreev 2000).

5. For more discussion of the trope of *polnaia razrukha* (complete disintegration) see Ries (1997, 44–49).

property that could be shared among people but that could not enter commercial circulation or exchange (Weiner 1985).

I refer to this sociosymbolic dynamic as the "repatriation of capitalism" in order to highlight both the return of the economic regime that was abolished after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and widespread attempts to filter new market-driven practices through the lens of myths and histories that were perceived by my informants as distinctively Russian. The narratives analyzed here show how people redesigned and regrouped history and geography in order to respond to new politico-economic realities and social identities. In many of these stories, the "invisible hand" that was supposed to guide the free market was made dramatically real in various scenarios of manipulation.[6] The post-Soviet uneasiness about the increasing social role of capital was translated into stories about universal lies and deceptions. After all, despite all its obvious pretense, Butik Renome was selling nothing but imitations and counterfeit versions of expensive French perfume.[7]

In order to understand how the atomizing and deceptive logic of capital was routinely contrasted with an abstracted Truth and an idealized wholeness of the Soviet collective, I examine a set of interviews and materials that I collected in Barnaul. During my fieldwork in 2001–3 and shorter visits in 2004–5, I attended meetings and interviewed individual members of local political and religious groups. Originally, my informants ranged across a wide spectrum, from Western-oriented liberals to hard-core Communists, from neo-hippies to neo-pagans. This chapter, however, focuses only on Communist, National-Bolshevik, antiglobalist, and religious groups that were most active in the city during my fieldwork. In my analysis, I actively supplement transcripts of these conversations with texts written by my informants or widely read by them. Such a combination allows me to trace a wider range of emerging rationalities that were shaped by experienced or imagined threats of Russia's exposure to the global circulation of capital.

Money, Cycles, and Moral Dilemmas

Scholars studying transitions from noncapitalist economic orders to capitalist ones have already pointed out that these moves inevitably involve a comprehensive reorganization of the moral presumptions necessary for

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6. See also Verdery (1996, 180–84) and Ries (2002) for different examples of a similar tendency.

7. The store's business did not last long: in 1998, in the aftermath of the major collapse of the country's financial system, the store went bankrupt.

justifying new choices and alternatives. For instance, Michael Taussig observes, "There is a moral holocaust at work in the soul of a society undergoing the transition from a precapitalist to a capitalist order. And in this transition both the moral code and the ways of seeing the world have to be recast" (1980, 101). Readjusting their moral and social optics, Taussig suggests, groups and individuals tend to resort to preexisting cosmogonies, using them either as sites of resistance to the emerging order or as a means of mediation. Rites and myths are the most visible forms of such socio-symbolic reconfiguration (101). Katherine Verdery, in a similar vein, argues that the radical change of the property regime that followed the collapse of socialism "alters the very foundations of what 'persons' are and how they are made" (2000, 176).

Jonathan Parry and Maurice Bloch (1989) in their seminal collection on money and morality suggested a useful model for understanding the relationship between pecuniary exchanges and ethical assumptions. They maintained that it is impossible to grasp the meanings of money if we limit our analysis to the immediate context of short-term transactions. To realize the full social importance of exchanges mediated by money, these transactions must be approached within a larger set of practices through which groups maintain their social and symbolic continuity. Relying on diverse ethnographic material, Parry and Bloch pointed to the fact that individual monetary transactions were indeed prominent in precapitalist societies, but they were usually limited to a separate domain that was "ideologically articulated with, and subordinated to, a sphere of activity concerned with the cycle of long-term reproduction" (26). To put it differently, money and monetary exchanges were viewed as part of a larger, nonmonetized, symbolic system rather than as a form of activity opposed to this system. The balance between the individual and the collective was achieved through maintaining a particular form of relationship between the short-term sphere of politico-economic exchanges and the long-term sphere of morality. Within this framework, then, the "moral holocaust" described by Taussig is not so much a reflection of the detrimental impact of money itself as a product of a situation in which the values and logic of the short-term cycle encompass values of the long-term transactions (Parry and Bloch 1989, 29; see also Maurer 2006).

Russia's socialist legacy adds an interesting theoretical and practical twist to understanding the restructuring of the relationship between existing assumptions and an emerging economic order. The starting point here is both anticapitalist and—at least theoretically—postcapitalist. As early as 1938 the exiled Trotsky pointed out that Soviet money had "ceased to be

money." It no longer served as a measure of value, working mostly as a "universal distribution card" in the USSR's planned economy (2004, 54). Reduced to its "accounting role" (Clarke 2000, 178), Soviet money nonetheless performed a significant role in everyday life. As Alaina Lemon rightly points out, the lack of a developed system of individual credits and checking accounts made the daily presence of cash quite salient under state socialism (1998, 24).[8] However, there were several important factors that modified the role of monetized exchanges among institutions and individuals in the Soviet period. The heavily controlled distribution of physical goods and strictly regimented system of salaries and prices created a situation in which one's individual prosperity no longer depended on the amount of accumulated money one had. Moreover, severely policed channels of currency exchange made it almost impossible to use foreign money for saving. By and large, "making money" as an autonomous form of social activity made little sense (Gladarev 2000; Yurchak 2006, 138). What was important within this system of constrained financial circulation was access to actual flows of goods and services, secured through a ramified network of informal social relations usually known as *blat*. Money did change hands in these transactions, acting mostly as "adjustments" to the established process of distribution of goods and services (Verdery 1996, 181). But as Gaidar (1995) indicates, it was neither money itself nor its amount that was socially meaningful. Calculations were structured around potential strategies of nonmonetary exchange, "a kind of barter based on personal relationship," as Alena Ledeneva puts it (1998, 34). The moral assumptions and economic practices—as deformed and informal as they were—complemented each other, providing a relatively stable sociosymbolic framework for late Soviet society.[9]

This particular cultural matrix of the previous period heavily determined the new meanings that became associated with money after the dissolution of state socialism. Perceived through a particular interpretive lens, the traditional economic functions of money (exchange, accounting, accumulation) were incorporated into daily life and discourse. However, the speed and intensity of post-Soviet "shock therapy" left no chance for a gradual integration. When on January 2, 1992, after decades of stable prices, Yegor Gaidar led the Russian government to abandon state control over prices altogether, money suddenly emerged as an independent social institution, almost totally disconnected from previous habitual practices and

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8. See also Pine (2002) for a similar argument regarding Polish households during the socialist period.

9. I discuss this at length in Oushakine (2003).

assumptions. With some exceptions (bread, milk, alcohol, public services, transportation, electricity, and gas), all prices were "liberalized." Anticipating high inflation, the government even ordered the issuance of ruble notes of higher denomination.[10] The subsequent rapid inflation, financial pyramids, repeated rounds of ruble denomination, increasing monetization of welfare services, widespread salary arrears, privatization of industry and housing, as well as new practices of consumption pushed monetary exchanges to the forefront of social practices and the social imagination.[11] In the early 1990s, trying to deal with the collapse of the national financial system, some provincial governments even issued temporary "surrogate currencies" and "regional money" (Anderson 2000). This fragmentation of the country's financial circulation had its own hierarchy. Along with the ruble economy, a new commercial world emerged around the circulation of the U.S. dollar in Russia. In daily conversations, the inconvertible Russian ruble was routinely labeled "wooden" (*dereviannyi*), in contrast to the "green" (*zelen', zelenye*) U.S. money. Endless jokes referred to U.S. dollars as "Russian bucks" (*russkie baksy*), and many stores began listing their prices in dollars.[12] The Moscow Pizza Hut added to this "currency apartheid" a spatial dimension by creating two separate dining enclaves for its dollar and ruble customers respectively (Lemon 1998, 41).

The situation was all the more striking because only a few years earlier, the circulation of foreign currency in the USSR was extremely limited and the undocumented possession of foreign money was a series criminal offense.[13] The Yeltsin government tried to stop the proliferation of the dual currency regime and in 1993 banned the open use of the dollar sign in advertising and price labels. In response, stores and service providers switched to listing prices in u.e., an abbreviation that stood for a "conditional unit" (*uslovnaia edinitsa*) of measurement, equal to the market value of the dollar.[14]

This reemergence of monetary exchanges as a distinctive yet highly volatile sphere of postsocialist life often met strong resistance. Of course, it was

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10. For more details see Gaidar (1999, 130, 95).

11. See Woodruff (1999) for a detailed analysis of monetary changes in the 1990s.

12. Evgenii Popov (1998) in his novel provides many relevant examples from this period.

13. In 1961, Khrushchev succeeded in including capital punishment for violating "the rules of currency transactions" (*valiutnye operatsii*) in the existing Criminal Code (Fedoseev 2005, 154).

14. In 2006, the Russian parliament made yet another attempt to reestablish the ruble as the only currency in the country. Deputies seriously discussed possible measures to punish those state bureaucrats who would attempt to use the u.e., euro, or dollar for measuring values in Russia (*Nevskoe vremia* 2006).

not money or its amount that produced such a negative response. Rather, it was the fragmentation of transactional systems that caused persistent anxiety. The hierarchical relationship between the long-term and short-term spheres of exchange vanished. At best, the profit-driven politico-economic domain and the sphere of moral exchanges emerged as competing areas of social activity and symbolic production in post-Soviet Russia. At worst, the values of the long-term cycle became radically marginalized by new market relations.

The recognized arbitrariness of the conditional units tended to provoke angry responses to the new system of valuation. In January 2005, the Russian government decided to implement its program of *monetizatsiia* and replaced remaining individual welfare benefits such as free (or heavily discounted) medicine and transportation for pensioners, war and labor veterans, decorated citizens, and others with fixed financial allowances. In response to this decision, for several weeks (in spite of frost and snow), angry people marched around the country, blocking roads and administrative buildings and demanding the restoration of social privileges and material benefits. Using the metaphor of the time, some journalists described these protests as waves of a "political tsunami," referring to the earthquakes and tsunamis that killed more than two hundred thousand people in Indonesia in December 2004 (Arkhangelskaia, Rubchenko, and Shokhina 2005).

That the amount of calculated financial compensation for the loss of previous benefits was both insufficient and arbitrary was only part of the problem. Predominantly, protesters reacted against a new form of equivalence that directly linked the amount of money offered with the social recognition of individual achievements, which the previous nonmonetary benefits used to signify. Again, it was not money itself that caused the trouble. Rather—to use Parry and Bloch's terminology—the public discontent was caused by a broken link between a short-term sphere of monetized exchanges (compensation) and the long-term order of social and moral values (social achievements).

In a very different form, a similar tendency of avoiding the monetary equivalent was also demonstrated in Russia's industry. In 1992, barter accounted for only 5 percent of enterprise transactions. By 1998, at least 60 percent of enterprise transactions were done in kind (Marin, Kaufmann, and Gorochowskij 2000, 207). Barter was also used by plants and factories for paying local and federal taxes (Guriev and Ickes 2000, 147). People's salaries were often paid in kind as well, providing a constant supply of goods for local bazaars. While a general lack of liquidity was the primary reason for this mass demonetization, it is important to keep in mind that

this postsocialist "economy of debt" emphasized first of all networks of exchange rather than the substance of exchange (Commander and Seabright 2000, 363; Anderson 2000, 343). At least in Russia's case, the conditions of these transactions, as scholars of barter have stressed, were determined more by personal connections between the parties than by the nature of the exchanged objects (Guriev and Ickes 2000, 173). Speaking about the average Buryat household in 1996, Caroline Humphrey summarizes the prevalent attitude toward money that could be largely applicable to Russia's early capitalism in general: "Money is greatly desired for its instant convertibility into many different things, but no one saves money....Money as a substance is regarded with suspicion (there are special machines to check the validity of dollar notes at most banks and stores). The rationale now is more or less immediate transactability" (1998, 459; also Rogers 2005).

Different as they are, all these cases seem to point in a similar direction: people had difficulty accepting monetized social exchanges when those exchanges were not accompanied by the expected symbolic context. The core of this difficulty had to do with a lack of trust, a lack of shared understanding of norms, values, and evaluation. The attractiveness of barter in this respect is telling. Unlike monetary exchanges, barter exchanges and informal personalized networking are built on trust that "has no external moral referent outside the deal itself and the belief generated by partners in the truth of one another's statements" (Humphrey 2000, 83; also Hedlund 2005, 326–31).

There was another important echo of Soviet economic practices in post-Soviet life. Soviet individual and group cosmogonies were closely associated with or even created by the political regime itself. Explicit identifications with Soviet life, the dissident negations of it, and the late-Soviet distancing from anything ostensibly Soviet were all significantly shaped by Soviet practices and institutions.[15] Given this preexisting context, how did people in Barnaul link the parts of their biographies and experience that had been disconnected by radical economic changes?

"Everyone Lies, Everyone Steals"

In post-Soviet studies of Russia, it has become a commonplace to view the existing Communist movement as a hangover of the previous period, a political phantom that persisted rather than developed. This perception

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15. For more discussion see Kharkhordin (1999); Oushakine (2001b); Yurchak (2006).

has some validity. A majority of supporters of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (the KPRF, as it is usually called) belong to the generations that developed their political views in the Soviet period. Communist-oriented groups and organizations are most active in areas outside major industrial and cultural centers, usually in rural and newly demilitarized provinces. Given these two factors, scholars of Russia routinely frame Communist-inspired actions as "protest-like" behavior, as a backlash *against* liberalization and reforms, not as an intrinsic and inseparable part of these processes (Shestopal 2004; Sedov 2003; Kiewiet and Myagkov 2002; Wegren 2004).

The situation is not that simple. From 1991 on, the Altai regional parliament was continuously controlled by a pro-Communist coalition. However, the typical "Communist prototype"—"a retired *babushka* with a hearing aid who tries to relive her Communist youth," as a young Barnaul Communist described it to me—had very little in common with people who were actually associated with Communist institutions in the region. In fact, many Communist deputies elected to the Altai parliament in 2004 were thirty or forty years old. People who worked for local leftist organizations were relatively young, too: most of them were born in the 1970s and 1980s. Many studied at local universities, majoring in social sciences; there were quite a few among them who became full-time politicians. To avoid historical and terminological confusion, I refer to this new generation of Communists as "neocommunists," or "neocoms." Increasingly, this group describes itself as the "children of reforms" (*deti reform*), resolutely distancing itself from the generation of "pro-Western and liberally-minded 'children of perestroika'" who came of age in the 1980s and early 1990s (Ekart n.d.) (figure 1.5).

Providing numerous and extensive descriptions of the "detrimental impact of capitalism," my neocommunist informants often started by identifying an unexplainable gap between new economic relations and practices of daily life produced by this economic order. It was precisely this disjuncture of the economic and the quotidian that I was interested in exploring. How did young people in Altai react to the limited applicability of their social knowledge and interpretive skills? What symbolic resources did they draw upon in order to produce meaningful structures in the context of uncertainty?

On December 16, 2002, Aleksei Z., an eighteen-year-old member of the radical National-Bolshevik group (*natz-boly*) and I agreed to meet in front of an old shopping center, the Central Universal Store (*Tsentral'nyi Universal'nyi Magazin, TsUm*), in downtown Barnaul. It was snowy and windy outside; the temperature had dropped to −10°F. In this weather, the *natz-boly's*

Fig. 1.5. Children of reform: a Barnaul neo-communist during a political rally. Barnaul, 2002. Photo by author.

usual place of socializing, the Eternal Flame Square near a local monument to the martyrs of Socialism, did not look very attractive. The TsUM was crowded, and there was nowhere to sit. Finding a place to have a talk with Aleksei was a problem. Actually, it had been a problem throughout my entire fieldwork in Barnaul whenever offices or private apartments were not available for meetings. Apart from flashy, loud restaurants and fast-food stands—the two extremes that defined the public space in the city—there were very few affordable cafés. Nor was there any developed pub culture. Shopping malls, one possible indoor hangout, tended to be cluttered with stalls and kiosks to maximize the real estate's revenues. Public libraries required special passes (or a passport). In a warmer season, things might look different in Barnaul, but from October until early May the shape of public space remained narrow.

I asked Aleksei if we could go to any café nearby. The only plausible choices were a Baskin-Robbins around the corner or a newly opened cafeteria-style Food-line (transliterated in Russian), located half a mile away. Aleksei's reaction to Baskin-Robbins was negative. He explained that as an antiglobalist he found it objectionable. There was a more personal story to tell, too. Earlier in the fall, Aleksei, together with several other National-Bolsheviks, had smashed several big windows of the Baskin-Robbins to protest the invasion of global capital into the region. Police never discovered them, yet revisiting the crime scene did not sound like a very good idea. I respected his choice, but the cold weather was also persuasive. Vacillating, Aleksei picked the Baskin-Robbins in the end because it was closer.

Labeled an "ice-cream store," the Baskin-Robbins franchise (the only one in the city) had, nonetheless, several tables and chairs. Being faithful to its strategically chosen name ("store"), it had no public bathroom, an old and proven Soviet trick to discourage customers from staying inside for too long. As became clear, Aleksei's knowledge of this particular form of global capitalism was rather distant: he had never been inside the Baskin-Robbins. Apparently he had also grossly overestimated its impact on the local economy. During the entire two hours of our conversation, we remained the only customers in the café, a fact that deeply surprised him.

Our interaction with the salesperson, a young girl behind the bar, provided some interesting local information about adopting global trends to "native" tastes. The place was plastered with posters advertising its seasonal special: "genuine hot chocolate for 69 rubles!" (about $2.20). I asked if the chocolate was indeed real. A bit hesitant in the beginning, the girl explained that it was not. The *real* "real hot chocolate" would be "way too expensive," and it would be "too bitter" anyway. Hence, the drink was "diluted by half" with water. Having settled on tea (7 rubles), we started a conversation for which the image of partially "genuine chocolate" seemed to be a perfect metaphor.

From the very beginning Aleksei told me that he had joined the National-Bolshevik Party because his views were "exactly anti-Semitic" and because he saw "nothing good in our state order [*stroi*]." Despite my inquiries, he did not explain what "exact anti-Semitism" was supposed to mean; instead our discussion was mostly focused on his views of the state and the fate of Russians. The party's active (and at times violent) defense of the Russian nation had led the mass media to associate it strongly with fascism (Likhachev 2002, chap. 2; Job 2001; Mathyl 2002). But Aleksei rejected that view, maintaining that it was completely wrong: the party was not fascist—it was "patriotic." Being "half-German," as Aleksei put it, he did not welcome fascism at all: "Patriotism is good, but fascism is too much." Yes, he agreed, the

party's main slogan, "Russia—for the Russians!" was interpreted sometimes as nationalistic; but the party had already modified its ideological policy. Now the slogan was supposed to be inclusive: anyone who "lives in Russia and likes it can claim to be a Russian (*russkii*)." As he summed it up, the party's ideology was nothing but "naked patriotism" (*golyi patriotizm*).

In 2003, Eduard Limonov, the ideological leader of the party and a famous writer-provocateur, defined further the gist of this naked patriotism in his book *The Other Russia: An Outline for the Future:*

> We have to revolt. For ourselves, for our group, for those people whom we consider to be a part of us. We have to think. We have to figure out a different model of life, and we have to impose it. But first of all, we have to create a new nation. Everywhere one can hear today: "Russians," "We—are Russians," "I am a Russian," "For the Russians" (*russkii*) But this label hides all kinds of people. This label applies to Yeltsin, and to an alcoholic, bluish from drinking, and to a dirty bum, and to the active spermatozoon [ex-prime minister] Kirienko. If all of them are Russian, then I am not a Russian. What should we do? We should select people for the new nation. We could call it differently; say, "Eurasians" or "Scythians." Names don't matter; the new nation should be based on different principles. The color of one's hair or eyes isn't important. What counts is the courage and faithfulness to our commune." (2003, 8)[16]

Scythians or not, the communal emphasis of Limonov's National-Bolshevism certainly appealed to the younger generation. Perhaps even more important was the fact that the party was the only organization that remained "honest," as Alexei Z. emphasized during our conversation. It "says what it thinks," and the party's members "don't lie, they tell nothing but the truth." This description sharply contrasted with Aleksei's account of the situation in Russia: "Today everyone lies; everyone steals. The whole country steals because of our [leadership's] politics.…In short, some people are good at stealing, while others work for those who steal." Then followed his brief summary of the period of changes:

> People were used to building socialism, and they had this goal [*stimul*] to build communism. Gorbachev destroyed all that overnight. People rushed

16. In 2006, the title of Limonov's book was appropriated by a group of politicians who formed a loose opposition to Putin's government. Together with the name, this political movement, The Other Russia, also eagerly embraced Limonov himself (as well as his National Bolshevik Party), the former prime minister Mikhail Kasianov, and representatives of the neoliberal Union of Rightist Forces. Led by the former world chess champion Garry Kasparov, this political motley crew presented itself as a new democratic force.

about, fussed about, and ended up with nothing. Those who managed to steal a lot, they rose above others [*podnialis'*]; they opened their firms; they became oligarchs. The majority initially hoped that all these changes were for the better, but they missed the turn. Now some of these people drink themselves to death; some toil for their masters.

With some adjustments, it is possible to read this narrative, in which the universal deceit and corruption among strangers are opposed by truth shared only among close friends, as yet another edition of the theme of cynicism, imposture, or dissimulation that has been firmly linked with the Soviet period.[17] One can also read this story of lying and stealing as an inverted trope of dispossession, as an attempt to explain and justify the process through which people "missed the turn" and "ended up with nothing." Firmly linking immorality ("stealing skills") and property, the story shaped the perception of the new capitalist order and its moral economy as a system of lies and thefts. In turn, a connection between the truth and naked patriotism was used to overcome morally the state of post-Soviet material dispossession.

The interplay of these two lines of narration—lying/stealing vs. truth/patriotism—significantly determined the development of Altai leftists' discourse in general. Not only did it emphasize the structural intertwining of the economic and the symbolic, but it also drew attention to distinct logics that each narrative suggested. The interrupted circulation that stealing introduced and the flawed communication exchange that lying indicated were counterbalanced by uncoined values of truth/patriotism that resisted any exchange or circulation.

"It Just Can't Be This Way"

A self-described Trotskyite and "*alter*-globalist," Nikolai T. was a full-time leader of a Barnaul political organization that defended "alternative ways" of political and economic development. In our conversation in September 2002, Nikolai explained his political evolution. Born in 1973, he grew up during perestroika. But the extreme politicization of the time barely influenced him. He paid no attention to the changes, nor was he a political activist during the first years of his student life. As Nikolai put it, "In [October] 1993, when there was a live TV broadcast of tanks shelling the White

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17. For different versions of this approach see Kharkhordin (1999, 270–71), and Fitzpatrick (2005).

House in the very center of Moscow, I watched all that without the slightest understanding as to who was right and who was not. It was just so shockingly interesting that in the middle of the country's capital there were tanks shelling the parliament. It was an aesthetic experience of sorts."

The White House that Nikolai described was a big administrative complex in downtown Moscow, where the Russian parliament resided in the early 1990s. In September 1993, after a series of disputes with deputies, President Yeltsin issued a decree that disbanded the parliament and called for new elections and a new constitution. The Constitutional Court found the decree unconstitutional, and the parliament began appointing new ministers. Negotiations between Yeltsin's team and the leadership of the parliament were unsuccessful. On October 3, armed supporters of the parliament tried to storm the headquarters of the Russian TV center in Moscow. In response, on October 4, the army troops began shooting at the White House, following Yeltsin's decree. Deputies refused to leave the building, and the troops started bombarding the White House from tanks. By the late afternoon on October 4, the deputies surrendered and the White House was in flames. The shooting continued in Moscow for several more days and, according to the state prosecutor's Office, 148 people were killed. The parliament's supporters cited 1,500 casualties as a more realistic number. Yegor Gaidar (1999) in his memoirs calls these events "a brief civil war," while the post-Soviet media routinely perceive Yeltsin's decision to shell the parliament in October 1993 as the origin of his later decree to use heavy weaponry to storm Grozny in December 1994.[18]

Nikolai's ambivalent reaction to this event was not entirely unusual for the first post-Soviet generation. The changes of the early 1990s did not immediately produce a political framing that could present the transitional period in a graspable manner (Rimskii 2003; Solov'ev 2004; Ryklin 2003). For many, the aesthetic gloss over political reality remained the dominant mode of symbolization, with its strong (and carefully sanitized) nostalgic appeal for all things Soviet.[19] In Nikolai's case, however, the "aesthetic experience" ended in 1995. Graduating with a master's degree in history from a local university, he started a teaching career in Barnaul's semiurban suburb. "It was exactly the time when salaries were not paid at all. And in general, the school was a distressing sight [*udruchaiushchee zrelishche*].... When

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18. For a discussion see Gaidar (1999) and Pikhoia (2002). For the constitutionality of the October crises see Scheppele (2006).

19. On post-Soviet nostalgia in Russia see Boym (2001); Ivanova (2002a); Oushakine (2007). For a similar tendency in other postsocialist countries see Nadkarni and Shevchenko (2004).

I saw all that, somehow I got a clear idea that it just can't be this way [*tak byt' ne mozhet*]: a teacher who is hungry, barefoot and so on."

In the first half of the 1990s, the miserable material conditions noted by Nikolai were not a small factor. With galloping inflation and salaries unpaid for months, teachers—along with doctors and other professionals who were employed by the state and paid from the drastically shrinking state budget—perhaps suffered the most from economic reforms. The following statistics give a rough picture of the level of inflation. According to the official data, within a year, from 1991 to 1992, the consumer price index in the country increased 26.1 times (Analiz 2004, 79).[20] In 1992–94, wholesale prices for commodities produced in Russian industry went up 1,115 percent. In Altai, between 1994 and 1998, prices for products of daily consumption increased by 7,530.1 percent. The subsistence wage in the region in 1998 was 378 rubles; the average income was 439 rubles. For comparison, in Moscow the same correlation between the subsistence wage and average income was 552 rubles vs. 3,164 rubles; in the neighboring Novosibirsk province—478 rubles vs. 735.[21]

Important as these miserable conditions were, they rarely acted as a politicizing factor in my informants' explanations. As in the previous example, it was the theme of deception that channeled the motivation for political engagement. In Nikolai's case, the trope of universal falsehood was framed as a felt nonpresence in the flow of publicly available images, as a form of discursive disfranchisement that marginalized politically those who were unwilling or incapable to join in symbolically. As he put it, apart from his personal experience, there was "another important thing" that influenced the formation of his political view during the Yeltsin era: "It was the impression that 'They' constantly lie on TV. That is to say, there was a huge discrepancy between official propaganda and the reality that surrounded us."

The lack of correspondence between personal experience and public representation was often generalized further. *Their* lie on TV would mutate into an overwhelming general distrust of "liberal values" promoted by Yeltsin's reformers in the 1990s. In daily usage, liberal values would become associated not so much with individual liberties as with a total absence of any constraints. It is somewhat not surprising, that in the 1990s among

20. For an extensive collection of data related to economic changes caused by the liberalization of prices and privatization in the 1990s see the report of the Russian Audit Chamber (Analiz 2004).

21. Before the financial collapse in August 1998, $1 was about 6 rubles; after August 17, one U.S. dollar cost between 18 and 20 rubles. For details see Raiskaia, Sergienko, and Frenkel (2001, 111, 97–99).

younger generations the abbreviated form of "liberal values" (*La-Ve* in Russian) became a slang word for "cash."[22]

The distrust produced a double effect. The dismissal of liberal values, democracy, and private property was accompanied by a parallel move in regard to dominant post-Soviet interpretations of Russian and Soviet history. Irina L., an eighteen-year-old student at the local university and a very active member of the KPRF, said: "If I know that I am being lied to right now, right here, I start asking myself, 'What else did they lie to me about? Maybe socialism was not that bad?'" Perestroika-driven attempts to open up suppressed or censored moments in the past in order to disclose the true history of socialism in Soviet Russia seemed to have come full circle. The Soviet past and socialist legacy had become once again a major source of inspiration for political activism. The trope of the Soviet tragedy was supplemented by the trope of Soviet grandeur. It was, however, the presumed falseness of the present that made the post-Soviet reappropriation of Soviet cosmogonies possible.

"History Already Loves You!"

In 2001, a group of young Altai neocommunists and the antiglobalist organization Alternativa started publishing their own newspaper, *Pokolenie* (Generation), using their age as their main organizing category. In the first issue, the newspaper's authors presented themselves as a "young opposition to the [ruling] regime," and compared *Pokolenie* to "a breath of fresh air in the smoky Motherland, which has been burned down by reformers" (*Pokolenie* 2002). The slogan of the newspaper, "History already loves you!" (*Istoriia uzhe liubit vas!*), emphasized *Pokolenie*'s clear attempt to suggest a positive alternative to the dominant tendency of turning Soviet history into a grim list of political crimes and persecutions, into a "black book of Communism," as one publication had it (Courtois et al. 1999).

Pokolenie became a major outlet for organizing political events and campaigns. For instance, in December 2002 Altai leftists conducted an essay competition among the region's schools in order to stimulate students' interest in the eightieth anniversary of the Soviet Union's creation (December 31, 1922). The theme of the competition, "The Soviet Union Is My Address," was borrowed from a Soviet-era hit song written in the mid-1970s. The song's chorus line is often quoted in mass media or used as the headline for multiple

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22. For an extensive exploration of this transformation see Pelevin (1999); for an etymological review see Erkhov (2007). On liberalism and distrust in Russia see Veselov (2004, 135–85); Eremicheva and Simpura (1999); Guzeva and Rona-Tas (2001).

nostalgia shows on TV.[23] This choice brought with it a historical reference that perhaps was not entirely intended. Back in the 1970s, the song was originally meant to weaken one's attachment to one's place of birth ("a small mother-land") and to provide some romantic flavor to the organized migration of workers to construction sites in the Far East. Regardless of its initial context, however, it is striking that just as in the past, a search for a sociopolitical "address" was preceded by a sense of dislocation, whether this dislocation was caused by a move to a remote construction site or by a vanished country.[24]

Among seventy entries in the competition, a majority were about the Great Patriotic War, "the only remaining sacrality," as Aleksei Ekart (2003), the leader of *Pokolenie,* called it.[25] Many participants also tried to draw comparisons between Soviet and post-Soviet periods. One student, for instance, wrote:

> I realized that the Soviet people were several steps higher in their moral attitudes than myself or my generation....I think individualism is not typical for the Russian national consciousness, even though a lot of people in my generation welcome it. They will be disappointed later, for individualism leads to alienation, loneliness, and self-isolation; it destroys links between generations. We should be developing according to our traditions; that is to say, we should follow the Russian path. (Quoted in Ekart 2003)

Together with the trope of universal falsehood, the anxiety about individualism that opposes the traditional "Russian path" was a major theme in my discussions with Altai neocoms. Emerging in different contexts and articulated in different metaphors, this threat of "alienating individualism" (and the private property that reifies it) contrasted with the idealized collectivity that was allegedly so typical for the Soviet people.

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23. "I am with smart guys / I am next to the sign "Forward!" / I am among working people / I sing working songs with everyone in the country! / My heart is concerned / My heart is anxious / My cargo is ready to go / My mailing address is not a building / Nor is it a street / The Soviet Union is my address!" (Lyrics by V. Kharitonov, music by D. Tukhmanov.)

24. In 2005, a somewhat similar attempt was undertaken by pop singer Oleg Gazmanov. One of the most popular songs of the year was his clumsy ballad "Made in the U.S.S.R." Known for his patriotic bent, in his new song Gazmanov strung together a long list of Russo-Soviet names and objects (the Riuriks, the Romanovs, Lenin and Stalin / This is my country) interrupted by a chorus line: "I was born in the Soviet Union. / Made in the U.S.S.R."). As the singer explained it: "[In the song] I decided not to debate what is good and what is bad; these are our symbols....We grew up with them. Why should we erase them from our memory?" (Chernykh 2005, 8; see also Arvedlund 2005).

25. The Great Patriotic War refers to the Soviet participation in the Second World War—from June 22, 1941, when Germany entered Ukraine, to May 9, 1945, when Germany capitulated.

This romanticizing view of the generalized "people" (*narod*) is important. Like many other key cultural concepts, narod provides a stable conceptual container, a familiar symbolic form for new experiences and meanings. Usually understood as inclusive and all-embracing, the term often refers to "populace," "folk," or "nation."[26] Frequently, it references something traditional, earthy, and provincial: a fundamental social layer that can withstand the extravagancies of fickle urbanites. Russian populists (*narodniki*) of the 1870s famously turned narod into a cultural and moral icon, into a repository of knowledge and skills that were to epitomize the Russian way of life. Of course, bonds of solidarity that my informants retrospectively associated with the "Soviet people" were no more real than the "innate communism" that the populist movement of the 1870s discovered in the Russian peasantry. For my discussion here it is crucial that in both cases appeals to narod were used primarily to frame a reaction against capitalism in Russia. In both cases, appeals to popular knowledge and the narod's daily experience were supposed to undermine the "abstract intellectualism" of yet another generation of bookish Westernizers. In his analysis of populist ideology, Andrzej Walicki reveals the core of this attitude: "[T]he Russian democrats [of the 1860–70s] were so much impressed by [Marx's] *Capital,* especially by the description of the atrocities of primitive accumulation, that they decided to do everything to avoid capitalist development in Russia, thus becoming full-fledged, "classical" Populists" (1979, 225).

More than a century later, Altai neocoms were inspired by a similar process. Evgenii M., a twenty-year-old antiglobalist and a big fan of William Burroughs and Gabriel García Márquez, framed his reaction to the second coming of capitalism in Russia in the following way:

> In the Soviet period, there was this communion [*prichastnost'*] with something big. People felt that they were part of a certain whole, a part of a certain totality. And now everything is completely atomized. Maybe this is the way Americans want to think about themselves. But if we recall Aristotle's idea that man is a social animal, we would see that his idea was realized pretty well in the Soviet period. Today, in the post-Soviet person the level of this sociality [*sotsialnost'*] is next to zero. Everyone is as isolated as a grain of sand.

It is precisely this experience of being socially marginalized and pushed beyond meaningful networks and relations in the present that brought back the desire for the connectedness of the past. The historical component of

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26. See Ries (1997, 27–30) for a detailed discussion.

this "meaningful totality" often remained unarticulated. It was not the actual Soviet experience that my informants were trying to rediscover. Rather, it was the "sociality" missing in the present that the reclaimed Soviet backdrop helped to reveal.[27]

In some cases, the juxtaposition of capitalist individuality and the empowering encasement of Soviet belonging led to unusual metaphors. In my discussions with Margarita Nurmatova, an active member of the KPRF (and a student of political science at a local university), she compared the Soviet people with "a person who lives in a golden cage with a blister on his toe." In her view, predominantly positive features of the Soviet period—stability and social cohesiveness (*splochennost'*)—were somewhat offset ("blistered") by economic shortages and a constrained freedom of movement and speech. Unlike the contained-yet-content life in the Soviet Union, the post-Soviet situation produced very different associations. As Nurmatova said, people now are "scared, intimidated, and worn out" (*zapugannoe, zatiukannoe, zadergannoe*). Projecting the dichotomy onto herself, she brought up the issue of belonging: "Soviet people did realize that they were elements of a whole; the whole that was cohesive and very strong.... Today I do not feel that I am an element of something big at all. I have a feeling that I am totally on my own in Russia today, and Russia hardly needs me."

It is easy to dismiss these desires for a meaningful wholeness as a posttotalitarian throwback, caused by the inability to properly work through the nation's traumatic history. Yet, as Étienne Balibar reminds us, the individual emerges as "a *responsible,* or an *accountable,* subject" only through subjecting himself or herself to a higher moral authority, a superior power, or a lofty ideal (Balibar 1994, 9; emphasis in the original). Regardless of its actual content, the process of subjectivation highlights the "transindividual" character of norms to which the individual submits himself or herself (Foucault 1997, 264).[28] Or, to use a slightly different framework, the formation of the subject can be understood as a process of recognition of values of the long-term cycle of exchange, discussed earlier. It is by realizing his or her own location within a larger symbolic order that the subject could address and be addressed by others.

27. In her study of postsocialist Poland, Elizabeth Dunn traces a similar reluctance of people to easily see themselves as "anonymous providers of abstract labor." In their symbolic struggle, employees often appeal to "alternate interpretations of socialism," evoking such forms of organic collectivity as kin and family as their main organizing metaphors (2004, 82, 158).

28. For a detailed discussion see also Foucault (2005, 365–66).

Such longing for an address, for a subject position within a field of long-term values, was clearly reflected by my informants. Again and again, in their interpretations, sociality and social relations were seen metonymically: the individual was perceived first of all as an element of the whole, as a part of the totality. My informants, however, tended to reject the other side of the equation: the status of the *part* of the totality was rarely specified. The content of the part's own distinctive quality often remained unspecified. As a result, the idealized totality of the past not only provided an important feeling of belonging to something big but also helped one to deny (or ignore) the individuating principles that underlay the present. Within this frame of reference, the collectivity was perceived not as a group of distinctive individuals but as a ramified yet integral national body.

Several weeks after my conversation with Nurmatova, I observed how the elemental desire for the whole was realized in practice. On November 1, 2002, I attended a meeting organized by local Communists and labor unions. The event took place in front of the building of the regional administration in downtown Barnaul. Throughout the rally city workers, pensioners, and peasants from the region criticized the federal government's agricultural policy and welfare cuts (figure 1.6).

The demonstration did not last long. After half an hour, the electric power that the regional administration provided for microphones and loudspeakers was mysteriously turned off, effectively forcing the group to leave. Nurmatova, with another young woman, participated in the meeting in an unusual form: with two big banners, they posed in front of the big sculpture of Lenin throughout the whole event. As she described the scene to me, "People tend to think that Communists are nothing but senile elders. So, imagine what happened to all these passersby when they saw us….I paid attention to their reactions on purpose. Nobody who saw us turned their eyes away. People would stop and look at us. For a long, long time. Their entire mocking attitude disappeared when they saw us, our armbands, and our banners. It was really powerful" (figure 1.7).

Expressionist motivations aside, the quotation shows how subjection to the gaze of others is realized through constructing a meeting point: armbands and banners act as "the locus of mediation" between the gazers and the gazed upon (Lacan 1978, 107; 1997, 267–69). The symbolic details (armbands and banners) differentiated Nurmatova and her colleague and simultaneously channeled the outsider's gaze toward the source of the detail's origin (the whole).[29]

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29. See Barthes (1981, 55) on the role of metonymic *punctum* in structuring the gaze.

Fig. 1.6. An antigovernment meeting in Barnaul. The banner reads: "Patriots, Unite in the Name of the Motherland and the People!" November 2002. Photo by author.

In his work on language, Valentin Voloshinov, a Russian linguist, emphasized a similar dialectics of belonging (element/part, detail/picture, metonymy/whole) and dialogical exchange. As Voloshinov put it, if experience "is susceptible of being understood and interpreted, then it must have its existence in the material of actual, real signs" ([1929] 1998, 28). This material sedimentation of experience has its own spatial dimension. The "medium of signs," as Voloshinov insisted, "can arise only on *interindividual territory,*" between socially organized individuals (12; emphasis in the original). Nurmatova's case demonstrates a somewhat reverse tendency, where the interindividual territory was claimed as dialogical through the will to connect, through constructing a material meeting point. A metonymic sign (an armband) not only created a bundle of social relations among responsible subjects ("people would stop and look") but also reconfigured the character of these social exchanges (the "mocking attitude disappeared").

The importance of such exchanges and meeting points—as imaginary as this importance might be—was widely shared by Altai neocommunists. But successful performance of subjection or deliberate self-inscribing in already existing settings occurred infrequently. More often, neocoms failed to establish an effective locus of mediation for expressing their position, as the following quotation indicates. In January 2003, summarizing the results of the

Fig. 1.7. Connecting with "something big." The Square of Soviets with a sculpture of Lenin (and a Baskin-Robbins ice-cream store behind it). Barnaul, November 2002. Photo by author.

essay competition mentioned earlier, twenty-nine-year-old Aleksei Ekart, a former teacher of history, the main leader of Altai's neocoms, and a recently elected member of the regional legislative assembly, wrote in *Pokolenie:*

> Only ten years ago, from each and every corner one could hear a lot of scorn and contempt addressed to the totalitarian Soviet Union, to the cursed CPSU, and to the bloodthirsty tyrannical Soviet leadership. You can still hear all that even now, especially if you spend a lot of time in front of the TV. But if you take a break and look back, if you think just for a moment, then in your con-sciousness…there would emerge the Great Country; the country where life was a thousand times better and more honest than the loathsome reality of today….There is a new generation that is seeking the truth, even though this generation's thoughts are still shaped by stereotypes imposed by the regime. With time, these stereotypes will peel off, although the regime's ideologues and owners of the television-screen would try to impose new clichés again. But one cannot hide the Truth….Looking back at the Soviet Union from a destroyed and poverty-stricken Russia, contemporary school students see the

> Mighty Giant whose birthday is a true holiday.…These students are young communists; they just don't know it. They speak the same language as the KPRF's members do! And one day they will realize that things should be named accordingly.…very soon, like a thunder [they'd say to current politicians]: 'Pygmies, get off the stage of History; a new red generation is here!'" (Ekart 2003)

Ekart's statement touches upon major issues raised earlier. Today's "loathsome reality" is counterbalanced by the honest past and a search for the truth. In turn, the (Soviet) Mighty Giant reappears in the foreseeable future as a powerful (and consolidated) "new red generation" that displaces (atomized) pygmies of the present. The present is negatively charged and then rhetorically bypassed altogether by affirming the past and by projecting it into the future. The here and the now are constructed as a virtual territory of stereotypes, as a faceless and timeless space (*bezvremen'e*) colonized by the industry of ideological clichés. Characteristically, various leaflets frequently pasted by neocoms and *Pokolenie* around the city demonstrated the same tendency. The slogan "History already loves you!" was usually accompanied there by "The future belongs to us!"

The language of imposed stereotypes highlighted an important development of the trope of universal falsehood so typical of Altai leftists. Soviet-style deception as a tactic, as a flawed form of social exchange and distancing ("They pretend to pay us, and we pretend to work"), became devoid of its implied malfunctioning reciprocity. Instead, it was elevated to the status of strategy for the manipulation of consciousness. By describing hidden or violent technologies through which stereotypes were imposed, my informants explained away the collapse of the Soviet Union and the current state of affairs in Russia.

These politically charged attempts to unmask the lies and falsities of capitalism have developed historical roots. After all, for more than seventy years the newspaper titled *Pravda* (Truth) was the official outlet of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Today, the Soviet *Pravda* is close to nonexistent, and a "new red" *Pokolenie* replaced the old Marxist idea of alienation with the notion of an illusionary subjectivity produced by the media.

Uncoined Values versus Conditional Units

Pravda-seeking neocoms in Altai often started their intellectual search with a basic historical question: "How did the collapse of the Soviet Union become possible?" The neocoms' answer was straightforward. Andrei And-

reev, a frequent writer for *Pokolenie,* observed, "There must have been a radical change in the minds of the Soviet citizens, and it was undertaken very cunningly. Forces interested in destroying Soviet civilization carried out a brilliant operation. Yet people neither stopped it, nor did they even notice it. Some of them even thought that this was the only possible course of development during the last fifteen years of our history" (2002, 5).

The brilliant operation in question is what neocoms termed a "technology of domination," realized through the "manipulation of social consciousness." The purpose of this manipulation, *Pokolenie*'s authors insisted, was to "preprogram" the masses' opinions, desires, and even psychological conditions in order to ensure a type of behavior suitable to the interests of those who owned the means of manipulation. Unlike Soviet propaganda, manipulation is a hidden process. As Andreev explained, "Manipulators work tacitly (like thieves) on the subconscious level," convincing people to act in a way they never would act otherwise (2002, 5).

Igor K., a twenty-six-year-old member of the Altai Slavonic Society and an active member of the Communist Party, explained in an interview how this manipulation works. Drawing my attention to the (seemingly) widespread "American films about psychos [*man'iaki*]," he contrasted them with the Russian detective genre. The difference, as Igor's argument went, was crucial. Detective plots require a "work of mind." To be able to narrow a circle of potential suspects down, one has to think and to analyze. By contrast, in American films about maniacs, everything is irrational and meaningless. Anyone can do anything to you at any time. One has to be on a constant alert, expecting to discover a maniac in every social encounter. As a result, Igor concluded, this culture of suspicion encouraged "hatred of others" and promoted "individualism and mutual distrust."

Using very different material, Andreev reached a similar conclusion in his article on manipulation. Combining old schemes of Soviet Marxism, conspiracy theory metaphors, and the post-Soviet fascination with "neuro-linguistic programming," a special set of linguistic techniques that allegedly could influence one's behavior and attitudes,[30] he wrote: "Programming works successfully when people are transformed into an 'atomized crowd.' One way to achieve such an atomized state is by promulgating the 'myth'

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30. Almost any big bookstore in Russia now has a special section on "neuro-linguistic programming" (NLP), a special set of linguistic techniques that allegedly can influence one's behavior and attitudes. Sometimes this section is a subdivision of a larger section of books on PR; in other cases books on NLP are categorized as a subfield of psychology. Supporters of this approach like to refer to the "effect of the twenty-fifth frame" as the most typical example of the programming on the subconscious level. See Kovalev (2004).

of civil society, which makes everyone believe that civil society is an ab-solute good, and that it is impossible to achieve without private property, competition, individual freedom (egotistic individualism), the law-based-state, etc.…. This is exactly how the 'atomized' crowd is created" (Andreev 2002, 5).

We have already seen how property and immorality became intrinsically linked in the Altai neocoms' imagination. Andreev's writing logically com-pleted the narrative of dispossession by adding to it the theme of victim-hood. As a result, for the Altai neocoms, the post-Soviet redistribution of property—with oligarchs on the one pole and those who "ended up with nothing" on the other—appeared to have two sources of origin. Not only were people deprived of "stealing skills" necessary for participating in the redistribution of property, but they were effectively blocked from taking any significant part in this process by being subjected to heavy psychologi-cal manipulations and programming.

One of the neocoms' favorite examples of this manipulative and atom-izing programming was the privatization campaign in Russia. In 1992–94, the Yeltsin government conducted large-scale privatization by quickly transferring most national assets into private hands. Within a decade, a state-dominated economy became an economy with mixed forms of prop-erty ownership: by 2002 the number of state-owned enterprises was only 3.78 percent of all officially registered companies (Analiz 2004, 87). The campaign is usually associated with Anatolii Chubais, the head of the State Committee on Management of State Property at the time.[31] Under Chu-bais's leadership, in the fall of 1992, about 150 million privatization checks were distributed in Russia. Each citizen got one check, regardless of his or her age. Usually known as *vautchery* (vouchers), these conditional units could be sold for cash or invested in a piece of public property.

By the end of the campaign on July 1, 1994, more than 240,000 enter-prises became private; over 40 million citizens—30 percent of those who received privatization checks—chose to own shares of privatized enter-prises (Kokh 1998, 31, 39). The majority sold their checks for money. Dur-ing the twenty-month campaign, market value fluctuated between four and twenty dollars (Boycko, Shleifer, and Vishny 1996, 101). Meanwhile, by late 1996 seven prominent bankers controlled over 50 percent of the nation's assets and 80 percent of national TV outlets (Goldman 2003, 2). Popularly considered the largest scam in Russian history, this privatization is often

31. On Chubais's career see Goldman (2003, 141–43).

labeled "grabitization" (*prikhvatizatsiia*), and many hold it responsible for the immense economic polarization of contemporary Russian society. Stories about insider deals and fake auctions are numerous. Their plots, though, usually unfold within the same basic matrix. For instance, when VAZ, Russia's major carmaker and the country's largest enterprise with five hundred thousand workers and a 7 percent share of the GDP, was singled out for privatization, the plant's managers designed an elaborate mechanism for restricting any unwelcome bidding. As a result, the market value of the plant established during the action was around $45 million. In 1991, Fiat, interested in buying the company, apparently offered the Russian government $2 billion (Boycko, Shleifer, and Vishny 1996, 108).[32]

When questioning privatization, Altai neocoms did not focus on its actual economic results. They were more concerned with trying to understand how it was possible to convince a huge number of people to give up their property. Describing their views on privatization in interviews and publications, my informants often referred to the work of the prolific Russian essayist Sergei Kara-Murza (n.d.), a Moscow-based historian of science. Beginning in the 1960s, Kara-Murza (born in 1939) worked within the system of the Academy of Sciences, the highest research institution in the Soviet Union. Throughout the 1990s, he published a series of books that discussed the role of ideology in social life. Kara-Murza's magnum opus, the almost seven hundred-page *Manipulation of Consciousness,* came out in 2000, and it was especially popular among *Pokolenie*'s authors. In the book, citing major Western philosophers—from Antonio Gramsci to Michel Foucault, Guy Debord, and Jurgen Habermas—Kara-Murza depicted how in "so-called democratic society" manipulation alters people's desires and behavior by implanting "idea viruses…that give birth to monsters that disable one's own mental capacities" (2000, 92).[33] The book is heavy on anecdote and theoretical conclusion and contains very little evidence about people's actual responses to the technologies of manipulation. One of his ideas, actively publicized by the Altai neocoms, is summarized below.

In an extended excerpt from *Manipulation of Consciousness* published in *Pokolenie,* Kara-Murza explained the reasons behind the success of privatization. He particularly singled out one symbolic strategy of the substituting

32. For brief reviews of the privatization campaign in English see Kotkin (2001, 129–34) and Goldman (2003). For an extensive analysis see the report of the Russian Audit Chamber (Analiz 2004); for a theoretical discussion of privatization see Verdery (1996, 204–28).

33. Elsewhere, Kara-Murza outlines the logic of manipulation this way: "We won't force you [to do anything] but we'll get into your soul and subconsciousness and turn everything in such a way that you'd want to do it yourself" (2000, 26).

mediation that "reformers" relied upon: "Cunning 'architects' [of privatization] launched [*zapustili*] a false metaphor in [people's] consciousness." This "false metaphor" equated "public [*obshchestvennaia*] property" with "nobody's property." In turn, public access to property was restricted by vouchers. Given the state of hyperinflation in the country at that time, vouchers were quickly accumulated by would-be oligarchs (Kara-Murza 2002b, 8).

Kara-Murza's focus on metaphorical substitutions in the process of privatization was not as paranoid as it might sound. In the collection of reviews *Who Owns Russia,* published in 2003 by *Kommersant-Vlast',* Russia's major and most informative weekly, there is a section with the heading "A Short Course on Capitalism in Russia."[34] In an ironic twist, each year of the decade is associated in this section with a particular economic trend typical for that time. For example, to indicate the boom of the chaotic retail trade that started in 1993, the year is named as the "year of the commercial kiosk." Nineteen ninety-six is "the year of seven bankers," a description that referred to the period when Russia's seven major commercial banks allegedly managed to establish full control over the Russian president and the government (*seminbankirshchina*). The description of 1992 is illustrative: "1992—The Year of the Voucher. It was exactly in 1992 when every citizen was granted a right to a part of the people's economy [*narodnoe khoziaistvo*] in the shape of the voucher. Even though this right was symbolic, it was precisely the voucher that started privatization and ruined the thesis that everything around belongs to the people, that is to say—to nobody" (*Komu prinadlezhit Rossiia* 2003, 11).

The quick evolution from the people's economy to nobody's belongings is essential here, as is the recognition of the merely *symbolic* importance of the right to property in the shape of the voucher. It is even more striking that both supporters and opponents of privatization recognized the symbolic significance of the voucher. Interpretations of this significance, of course, differed drastically.

When I interviewed Maria K., a local bureaucrat working for the office of cultural affairs, our discussion of the Chechen war took an unexpected turn. Complaining about the grim state of the nation's culture and language, Maria singled out the lack of popular understanding of current changes, aggravated by what she labeled "the expansion of imported words." Not

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34. The title is a thinly disguised ironic reference to *A Short Course on the History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik).* Allegedly edited by Stalin, this famous hagiographic volume outlined the canonical version of the party's history in 1938, in the middle of purges.

knowing the actual meaning of imported words, she adamantly insisted, people become hostages to the hidden content that these words bring with them. "Look, we were told about *elektorat* and *vautcher*. But *vautcher* actually means "fake money" [*fal'shivye den'gi*]. See how we were duped from the very beginning?"[35] I protested, trying to explain that "voucher" usually means something else in English. My explanations were firmly rejected: "In America it is a slang word; precisely, in America. And where did Chubais study? At Harvard, that is to say, in America. They brought it over here and implemented it. And today we have this dominant attitude that anything could be done in a false kind of manner because it *might* work this way!"

Chubais did not study in America (let alone at Harvard), but neither this fact nor the actual meaning of "voucher" really mattered in this context.[36] What was important instead was the displacing move through which repatriation of capitalism was imagined. Social injustice was linguistically (and geographically) linked with the West; it was preprogrammed by the West, as the Altai neocoms would have said.

Of course, regarding vouchers as fake money was only a reflection of the anxiety about the lost certainty of social exchanges. Aleksei P., an active member of the Altai Slavonic Society, pointed to the root of this symbolic destabilization in his interview, drastically opposing the short-term monetary exchanges to the long-term moral perspective. As the twenty-four-year-old man put it, Soviet ideology provided meaning for people's lives: "People lived not with a single idea of how to stuff their stomachs, but with an idea of creating something new. Even if it was a utopia, it does not matter now; there *was* a supreme goal. The best accomplishment of the Soviet period was the fact that there was created a society that was *not* based on money."

In this quotation (as well as in many others) money was rarely seen as a vehicle of exchange or as a store of value. Rather, it was conceived as a condensed metaphor of change itself, as a "false value" that replaced previous utopian projects and informal relations. Associated with falsehood and substitution, money was frequently juxtaposed to real values. What appeared to be problematic was the conversion scale that could bring these

35. Yegor Gaidar, the head of the Russian government that started privatization, recalls in his memoirs that Boris Yeltsin supported the privatization plan but was resolutely against the term "voucher," which he considered "almost an indecent word." Yeltsin effectively banned the word, and governmental officials used the expression "privatization check" instead (1999, 169).

36. While Chubais did not study at Harvard, some Harvard scholars did influence the privatization process in Russia in a serious way (Wedel, 1998a, 1998b; McClintick 2006; Yale Connection 2002).

two spheres together. What caused uneasiness was the absence of a mediator able to transform a nonmonetized collectivity into a collectivity created by the circulation of the generally accepted equivalent. What was at stake, in other words, was a question of the price that one was willing to pay for such a transformation. Vasilii Filippov, a vocal professor of philosophy in Barnaul, whose work is discussed in the next chapter, expressed this position in the most succinct way: "Money, as the equivalent of value of things (commodities), in fact substitutes things, lumps them together, and then exchanges everything for anything: faith for disbelief, loyalty for betrayal. Money could turn an honest person into a scoundrel; a brave individual into a coward; one's duty to the Fatherland into a treachery against the Fatherland; worship of the ancestors' graves into desecration of the memory of the elders" (Goncharov and Filippov 1996, 351).[37] To put it simply, within this order of things, money becomes a source and a mechanism of "money-pulation."

Hand in hand with the "oligarchic dictatorship of the wild market" (Buldakov 2002, 14), the all-permeating manipulation of capital finally finds its fullest representation in another crucial substitution, pointed to by Altai neocoms. As Vitalii Buldakov, a leader of the newly organized Altai Communist Union of Youth (Komsomol), put it, the simplest way to manipulate people's consciousness consists in "substituting artificial and virtual-cultural needs of the consumer society for one's real needs." Performed mostly by the mass media, such a substitution produces the "illusion of one's own subjecthood" (*illiuziia sobstvennoi sub"ektnosti*) (2002, 14). How does that happen? Buldakov's main arguments were drawn from his experience in a summer seminar on psychological methods, organized in 2002 by professors of sociology from Altai State University. In his article "A 'Harmless' Psychology," the leader of the Altai Komsomol group explained: "An object is invested with a symbol of a certain need, and it becomes valuable not by itself but as a carrier of a certain culture—and history-specific need." Once invested, such needs are universalized. As a result, "freedom is illusory, since all the alternatives are predetermined. Priorities have been selected; the choice has been made. Society is under total control" (2002, 14).

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37. There is at least one more substitution taking place here. Filippov's description is basically an unreferenced paraphrase of Marx's lines from *The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society of 1844:* "[M]oney is thus the general overturning of *individualities* which turns them into their contrary.…It transforms fidelity into infidelity, love into hate, hate into love, virtue into vice, vice into virtue, servant into master, master into servant, idiocy into intelligence, and intelligence into idiocy" (1972, 82; emphasis in the original).

There is a certain irony in the neocoms' oscillation between nostalgia for the meaningful totality of the Soviet past and the fear of a new totality of illusory freedom, between the lost utopia and the horror of predetermined needs. Buldakov's conclusion indicates a possible way out of this deadlock: the critique seems to be aesthetically driven. What is important is not the need associated with a particular object but rather one's ability to value the object by itself. Exchange value and use value, which normally determine the social life of things, are both completely discarded here. Instead, a new value class is constructed (Parry and Bloch 1989, 15). Aggravated by false and illusory connections among atomized individuals, the lost sense of authenticity is restored through appealing to absolute standards of measurement. The following citation from *Pokolenie* is a good example of this anxious search for a reliable touchstone. Explaining why liberalism cannot be "our own value," eighteen-year-old Margarita Nurmatova wrote in 2002:

> By now we've been trained to get accustomed to the West for quite some time. Turn on any TV channel, and you'd watch an American speech or Americanized ads, Americanized serials or Americanized shows.…It is hard to withstand this pressure. Russian reformers have everything they need: mass media, administrative power, money. Today the most important thing is to hold out against all the temptations, to resist various attempts of turning us into "free individuals" of the Western mold, that is to say, into "human material" that could be used for destroying Russia. We should remain the way we are—just as nature and history have created us. Not everything shiny is gold. Gold is us. And the best gold is Russia itself" (2002).

Naïve as it might be, this description nonetheless reflects a strong yearning for standards destabilized by the quick advance of postsocialist capitalism in Russia. It reveals an attempt to secure some meaningful control over the flow of ideas and commodities. Its strong anti-Western language should not hide the underlying concern with the perceived debasement of local cultural values.

It is useful to approach this constellation of false money, manipulated consciousness, and illusory subjectivity on the one hand, and references to truth and the gold standard of Russia on the other through a theoretical framework suggested by Jean-Joseph Goux. In his study, Goux traces a structural homology between money and language, pointing to the "increasing disembodiment of value," which is understood both financially and discursively (1994, 17). For instance, money backed by gold corresponds to the expressive realism of descriptions. In turn, paper currency

goes hand in hand with representational capacities of language, able to portray reality with only some degree of precision. Finally, and more relevantly, a "forced currency"—that is to say, conventional or fictive money (conditional units)—manifests "a true crisis of confidence in the value of language" (18). The disembodiment of value, in other words, demonstrates how the amalgam of measurement, exchange, and deposit falls apart: "What used to be a complete general equivalent…now explodes in a generalized counterfeiting effect" (80).

The examples discussed earlier reveal a similar tendency. Persistent portrayals of post-Soviet falsehood, taken together with obsessive fixations on manipulative mediation, indicate a perceived symbolic or material imbalance that has been produced by existing strategies of symbolization (a right to property in the shape of the voucher). In the texts of Altai neocoms, words, objects, and values have lost their authenticity; they are not what they purport to be. Just as in the eighteenth-century political economy and courtship novels studied by James Thompson, Altai neocoms are working through the semiological crisis of the concept of value by trying to restore its proper location either in the signifier, in the referent, or in the process of exchange itself (1996, 17).

To put it differently, the gradual uncoupling of different functions of money (equivalent, token, treasure) resulted in the "regime of noncoverage," a mode of symbolizing and exchange based on inconvertibility (Goux 1994, 121). For Goux, the inconvertibility of values under the regime of noncoverage—and the admission of loss and the unpredictability of gaining that are associated with it—is a starting premise of any contemporary exchange. Value is a product of dialogical interaction rather than a reflection of the inherent quality of objects.

The polemical efforts of Altai leftists were aimed at locating principles of inconvertibility and noncoverage in a very different context. It was not a search for an effective form of mediation in a given circumstance that was at stake here. Instead, the Altai neocoms were mostly concerned with the rhetorical substantiation of the regime of noncoverage. It was an attempt to determine the size and scope of the inalienable wealth that animated their symbolic activity. The context-bound perception of values and meanings of the sign was overshadowed here by a striving to resurrect the ultimate referent, to go back to uncoined values (Goux 1999). As a result, a particular set of symbolic practices and symbolic objects was construed as exclusive cultural possessions that had to be protected from duplication, corruption, or piracy by others, precisely because these possessions were perceived as representing important aspects of collective identity (Harrison 1999, 239, 241).

Significantly, the neocoms' attempt to solve the crises of confidence by evoking abstract categories (truth, the Mighty Giant, or gold) has some structural resemblance to the strategy outlined by Goux. As he pointed out, to be effective, the regime of noncoverage must compensate for the decreasing confidence in value with the increasing faith in the abstract aspects of exchange and representation (1994, 45). But here the resemblance ends. For Goux, "the collapse of referents, the dissolution of exchange standards, and the disassociation of the sign from what it signifies" require the "dictatorship" of law to rationalize and regulate the predictability of forms, stages, and outcomes of social exchange (1999, 115). For neocoms, universality of formal law was hardly a choice. The Russian capitalism of the 1990s was remarkably divorced from legality, with law being "up for definition and appropriation" (Humphrey 2002b, 125). What could function as a new source of legitimacy in this case? In what form were social relations abstracted by neocommunists?

There are two main approaches through which Altai neocoms tried to maintain their confidence in the social order. Both reflect the tendencies explored throughout this book. The first approach produced strong bonds of social attachment by repeatedly articulating a culturally shared traumatic experience. The second approach highlighted the commonality of the place of origin as a crucial component of the sociocultural and political solidarity of Russians.[38] These appeals to the nation's trauma and place of origin could be seen as examples of inalienable cultural symbols.[39] As with many other symbols discussed here, the importance of these two forms is determined negatively: claims to particular cultural forms and practices are rooted in the recognition that loss of these cultural possessions would radically affect both the group's self-perception and its ability to relate to others (Welsh 1997, 17; Rowlands 2004). As a part of what Richard Rorty called the "final vocabulary," these symbolic practices reveal that "beyond them there is only hopeless passivity or a resort to force" (1989, 73). Unlike manipulative rhetoric, these final cultural tools aim at creating a community of speakers and listeners by "stating fully and sincerely" the foundations that should be used as a starting point for a common action (White 1985, 6, 17). The next section demonstrates how such statements and foundations were laid out.

38. More on the place of origin (mesto rozhdenia) and the place of development (mesto razvitia) as key elements of Russian nationalist writing see chapter 2.

39. See Michael Brown (2004); Harrison (1999); Weiner (1985) for more details on inalienable cultural possessions.

"Victory Is Not about Gaining"

In February 2002, the Altai Regional Committee on Public Education organized in Barnaul a "scientific-methodological" conference, "Contemporary Problems of Patriotic Education and Some Ways to Solve Them." The conference brought together a diverse group of people. Among the 150 participants were local politicians, educators, heads of regional museums, and military-patriotic clubs (Pol'shchikova 2002). In his long presentation, the head of the committee listed numerous patriotic song festivals, boot camps, and exhibits that were intended to instill the right patriotic attitude in the new generation. The next plenary speaker, Major-General Vladimir Val'kov, the head of the regional division of the Ministry of Interior, which cosponsored the conference, framed the issue quite differently. Quickly dismissing the existing practices of patriotic education as "good and diverse but lacking the most important things," the general appealed to the experience of the Great Patriotic War. The war, the general insisted, was both a source of patriotic values and a source of veterans who had been able to transmit these values to other generations. Bemoaning the drastic depletion of this source, the general asked:

> Who can implement patriotic education today? And, generally speaking, what does "patriotism" mean in today's Russia? It has not yet found its decoding [*rasshifrovka*], if you will. There is no decoding whatsoever! We don't respect our anthem. We don't want to see our state flag. We call the state emblem of Russia...—how do we call [this double-headed eagle]? That's right! We call it a "chicken" [*kuritsa*]! It all starts with educating people, with making them love their native Russia. But how could you possibly love it when the child does not absorb this pure [feeling]? Instead of absorbing it as the infantile sponge [*gubka detskaia*] and carrying [this feeling] with him throughout his life, the child absorbs something else. He absorbs drugs. Very quickly, he absorbs the idea that one can have a lot of money without working. He absorbs the fact that studying isn't important because one can be the happiest and most important person in the world if one has lots of money. And the main symbol of patriotic education today is precisely this: the close-shaven, pumped up physiognomy [of a mobster]."[40]

This basic binary of "patriotism vs. money" articulated by Val'kov is familiar by now. The increasing autonomy of money, as well as the logic of universal exchangeability that associated with it, constantly raises unsettling

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40. I quote from the tape recording made during the conference.

questions about the limits of monetization. Moreover, the drastic polarization of post-Soviet society in the process of privatization has painfully revealed the arbitrary character of exchange-value. No longer associated with the labor invested in the object of exchange, exchange-value became solely dependent on the interplay between supply and demand. In this respect, Val'kov's appeal to the symbolically grounding experience of the Great Patriotic War as a contrast to the empty symbolic artifacts of the present (anthem, flag, the state emblem) was essential. Acting as the nation's ultimate cultural property in the post-Soviet era ("the only sacrality left"), the activated memory of the war provided an emotional anchoring point necessary for producing a feeling of solidarity. Exchange was equated with empathy.

In my interviews with Altai neocoms, the theme of war very rarely developed into a special conversation. My questions about the Chechen wars were usually shrugged off, too. Aleksei Z., sitting in Baskin-Robbins, seemed to have a point when explaining to me the cultural distinctiveness of the Russians. "If there is a fight, we won't lend a hand, but if there is a war, we'll win it with God's help," Aleksei said, quoting a line from a song. He elaborated: "We can get all together only when there is a war; then we all act as one person, as a single whole."

This mechanical solidarity provoked by threat adds an important correction to the picture of something big that ensured the cohesiveness of the Soviet people and was so often idealized by my informants. Kara-Murza, in his *Manipulation of Consciousness,* follows a similar logic when drawing a sharp line between the "two types of life-arrangement" (*zhizneustroistvo*). As Kara-Murza insists, the main goal of the Russian civilization has been a "decrease of *suffering,*" not the "increase of *pleasure*" that has become so typical in the West (2000, 177; emphasis in the original). Yet attempts to alleviate the traumatic memory are bound to reproduce representations of misery as their ultimate point of departure. Firmly anchored in the negative ("if there is a war…"), the zero point of this decrease of suffering is often way below zero, so to speak.

It is not the war memory as such that is problematic here. Rather, it is the persistence with which images of overwhelming social trauma are used as the universal equivalent that could symbolically bring people together. In this context, it is indicative that despite their very different social and educational backgrounds, Altai neocoms ended up using the same strategy of consolidation that would be deployed by Chechen war veterans (see chapter 3). Both neocoms and ex-soldiers approached social difficulties and a state of moral uncertainty through the lens of the militarist discourse of besiegement. In turn, the symbolic legacy of the Great Patriotic War was

reappropriated and reconfigured for an imaginary overcoming of current crises. It is important that Altai neocoms tried to establish links with a broader community by emphasizing first of all popular memories of war losses rather than war victories. An article published in the October 2002 issue of *Pokolenie* illustrates this tendency.

Designed to celebrate the eighty-fifth anniversary of the October Revolution of 1917, the headline of the issue announced: "Our red October is yet to come!" The issue came out in the midst of the national crisis provoked by a traumatic event in Moscow, when a group of Chechen terrorists took hostage a full Moscow theater during a performance. Instead of the usual editorial, this issue of *Pokolenie* had a short essay called "What Victory Means":

> Some time ago Shakespeare wrote: "Tired with all these, for restful death I cry." We have leaders who don't even bother to hide their treason, their incompetence, and their helplessness. We have a sodomite [*sodomitskaia*] "elite" that has occupied all the TV channels and newspapers, despising the "cattle" [*bydlo,* people] and "that country" [*etu stranu,* Russia]. We have a political opposition that is even incapable of picking a leader who could bring its members together.
>
> And then, there are the people….There are the people who are glued to TV commercials for tampons and condoms. There are the people who are dying out and drinking themselves to death; there are the people who go through two million abortions annually, accompanied by the squealing of [the lesbian duo] Ta-Tu. The only reasonable conclusion for all that is: we are doomed.…
>
> Perhaps, a similar feeling of despair dominated the mood in 1941, in Moscow's suburbs [occupied by the enemy]. It was the time when the multilingual army crashed through our land and burned down our villages and cities; when untrained cadets attacked tanks only with rifles in their hands; when the Government conducted its meetings in [the security of] underground galleries of Moscow's subway system; when the sarcophagus with the body of the Leader was being hidden in Siberia. And nonetheless, we won then [*i vse-taki my pobedili togda*].…
>
> To keep one's feeling of Victory alive is already a feat. A feat that is achieved in one's soul, where the devil fights with God, as Dostoevsky put it. The whole world—enemies, friends, relatives, and even your own mind—keeps telling you: "Back off." And they give you thousands of reasons and arguments for this. And then, knowing damn well that you will lose it, you make yourself believe. And you become invincible.
>
> The meaning of Victory cannot be expressed in numbers of conquered cities or killed enemies. The Soviet warriors who raised the banner above

Berlin were invincible. But so was the Sixth Paratrooper Company that did not surrender but faced death from a group of Chechen fighters [*boeviks*], which was ten times bigger.

Victory is not about gaining [*vyigrysh*]. One can gain by cheating, or by chance, or by building a quantitative superiority. Victory is the Truth [*Pravda*]. Victory is Providence. This might be a really tough lot for us; yet the enemy cannot have victory. The victorious are the ones on the side of the Truth. As we are. (Borovikov 2002)[41] (Figure 1.8)

Written by a graduate student at a local university, the text repeats motifs traced throughout this book—namely, post-Soviet practices of solidarity that emerge through the articulation of negation and the recollection of loss. What is quite distinctive about these forms of connectedness is a particular type of fixation on the things being rejected. The compulsion to repair the social fabric, torn in moments of crisis, by appealing to the power of the collective seems to be very limited here (if it is present at all). This solidarity of grief is not about restorative mending, nor is it usually aimed at retribution. It appears that the primary meaning of this type of connectedness is to bring back multiple recollections of the traumatic experience, to reveal the semblance of the current situation with grave historical events that similarly consolidated the nation in the past. Continuity of national history is constructed by tracing the unceasing circulation of pain. "Victory is not about gaining" in this cultural matrix; hence successes are rarely associated with the effective use of force or a productive deployment of cunning. Seemingly accidental, achieved in spite of everything, these victories of despair highlight obstacles and recall ordeals (rifles against tanks). Rather than celebrating achievements, they constantly recall their impossibility: "You know you will lose it."

The trope of truth adds an important dimension to this general cultural narrative about the subjectifying role of the traumatic. Introducing an effective rhetorical opposition, statements of truth remain performative ("We are on the side of the Truth"), not descriptive.[42] Undertaking their negative

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41. The pop-duo t.A.T.u. mentioned in the essay is a Russian teen group that became extremely popular in 2001–3. It was the first Russian group that was marketed as lesbian (Heller 2007). The Sixth Paratrooper Company mentioned later refers to an event on February 29, 2000, when ninety combatants from the Sixth Company were blocked by a large group of Chechen troops (about two thousand people) near the village of Ulus-Kert, Chechnya. Eighty-three Russian soldiers were killed; all of them were awarded highest military distinctions posthumously (Khairulin 2006, 6).

42. For more on truth as a binding value in provincial Russia see Solovei (2003, 98–101).

Леонид КОРНИЛОВ

НОРД-ОСТ

И горы встали в полный рост.
И все ветра упали разом.
И только мстительный норд-ост
Гудит над Северным Кавказом.
Берет ущелья за груди.
Гремит лавинами беспределом.
Но погодите, мужики,
Да не в Кавказе вовсе дело.
А мир трещит напополам
По тайной прихоти Сиона.
С чадрою носится ислам
А Голливуд раздел Мадонну.
И содомиты у руля.
И ЦРУ живет с «Моссадом».
И на земной оси Земля,
Как стриптизерша, крутит задом.
И сводит нравственность на нет
Все то, что пишется с натуры.
Подогревая кровью нефть,
Схлестнулись насмерть две культуры.
А Русь глядит по сторонам,
Хрипя в предательской трясине.
С одной – разврат, с другой – ислам.
А православие – в средине.
Олег, сбирайся-ка давай
Отмстить хазарам за обиды.
Но знай, американский рай
Не легче пояса шахида.
И преклонив свою главу,
Ты уясни себе в печали,
Что овстры зла не на Москву,
А на Бродвей в Москве напали.
И горы встали в полный рост.
И все ветра упали разом.
И только засранный норд-ост
Нас косит вперемешку с газом.
Венец природы, как конец,
Предстал под знаком Атлантиды.
И подписана АЭС
Тяжелым поясом шахида.

ПОЛИТИНФОРМАЦИЯ

Как мы понимаем происходящие события

Принятие Госдумой РФ поправок в Закон «О референдуме»

Они долго орали, что являются демократами. Расстреляли Верховный Совет, состряпали и протащили в 93-м году «демократическую» Конституцию. Тогда же захапали предприятия. И сегодня добрались до нашей земли. У народно-патриотической оппозиции ничего не оставалось, как обратиться к мнению народа... У нас ведь вроде демократия!?

Оказалось, что демосу не мешало бы заткнуться годика на полтора. Решили, четыре раза «тупо проголосовали», как выразился Митрофанушка Элдэлэзеровский, жидко поаплодировали. Возможно, вечером выпили – шутка ли, закон-то конституцию, нужно 300 голосов, а набрали 304.

Спасибо, Родина вас наверняка не забудет. А мы-то уж точно, поверьте на слово. Не верите? Клянемся! ГОТОВЬТЕ СПИСКИ.

ЧТО ТАКОЕ ПОБЕДА

Как писал Шекспир, «все мерзостно, что вижу я вокруг». Правители, даже не скрывающие своего предательства, своей некомпетентности и беспомощности. Содомитская «элита», оккупировавшая все телеканалы и газеты, презирающая «быдло» и «эту страну». Оппозиция, не способная выдвинуть такого лидера, чтобы хотя бы просто объединиться. И народ... Народ, не отрывающий глаз от рекламы прокладок и презервативов. Народ, вымирающий и спивающийся, народ, делающий по два миллиона абортов в год под визги «Та-ту». Единственный разумный вывод из всего этого – мы обречены.

Может быть, такое же чувство обреченности было в 41-м под Москвой. Когда армия «двунадесяти языков» топтала русскую землю, сжигая деревни и города, когда необученные курсанты шли с винтовками на танки, когда Правительство заседало в подземных галереях метро, когда саркофаг с телом Вождя прятали в Сибири. И все-таки мы тогда победили.

Победа приходит не в борьбе, не в бою, и уж тем более – смешно сказать – не на выборах. Вожди, партии, страны побеждают благодаря тому чувству Победы, той веры в Победу, которые вспыхивают в сердцах искренних и честных людей. Главное, не дать погаснуть этому огню.

В Великой войне мы победили не тогда, когда последний солдат вермахта поднял руки вверх, а уже тогда, когда Матросов бросался на дот и Гастелло совершал воздушный таран. Когда Сталин отказывался эвакуироваться из прифронтовой Москвы или обменять захваченного в фашистский плен сына Якова на фельдмаршала Паулюса. Когда академики и артисты отказывались от «брони» и шли в ополчение рыть окопы. Когда безногий Мересьев начал учиться танцевать. И все бессмертные и безвестные Герои, оставшиеся на полях сражений, вовсе не были безрассудными смельчаками. Наоборот, они с первых дней войны твердо знали, что победят и совершенно осознанно выбирали смерть. Остальное было лишь делом времени.

Победа не сваливается с неба, не даруется просто так. Надо заслужить право быть победителями. Надо быть достойными стяжать Победу.

Сохранить в себе чувство Победы – это уже подвиг. Подвиг, совершаемый в душе, где, как говорил Достоевский, дьявол борется с Богом. Ведь весь мир – враги, друзья, родные, да и твой собственный разум говорят тебе: отступи. Приводят тысячи очевидных и неоспоримых доводов. И когда ты, поводив умом, что проиграешь, заставляешь себя вновь поверить – ты становишься непобедимым.

Смысл Победы нельзя выразить только во взятых городах и убитых врагах. Непобедимыми были советские воины, поднявшие знамя над Берлином. Но непобедимой осталась и Шестая десантная рота, уничтоженная в Чечне десятикратно превосходящими ее боевиками, но не отступившая ни на шаг.

Победа – это не выигрыш. Выиграть можно благодаря обману, случаю, количественному перевесу. А Победа – это Правда. Победа – это Промысел.

Поэтому, как бы тяжело нам не приходилось, враг никогда не сможет победить. Победить могут только те, за кем Правда. А она за нами. И мы, оппозиция, победим не потому, что выиграем выборы. Логика здесь другая – мы выиграем выборы, потому что мы должны победить.

Дмитрий БОРОВИКОВ.

Fig. 1.8. *Pokolenie* (Generation): "Our Red October is yet to come!" October 2002. Photo by author.

selection, determining sites of negative dependency, these statements mostly reject ("incompetent leaders," "a sodomite elite," or "an incapable opposition") without pointing to plausible alternatives. Stringing together a chain of negations, these sentences nonetheless produce an affirmative effect. You know you will lose. You know that victory is not about gaining. But more importantly, you know that the enemy cannot have victory. By framing social relations within the logic of martyrdom, recourses to past suffering (in the name of truth) delimit the nation's borders. The nation's history is presented as a teleological process: a community of people that was brought together by a shared experience of pain in order to memorialize their losses for future generations (see Ries 1997, 126–60; Pesmen 2000, 54–59).

Viktor Shklovsky in his *Sentimental Journey* had a striking observation that sums up this foundational role of loss in Russians' self-perception. Writing after the Bolshevik Revolution and World War I, he observed, "It is impossible to lead the dead into battle, but you can line them up, cover them with a little sand and use them for a roadbed" (2004, 188). As the metaphor of the roadbed paved by the dead suggests, this "cultural transmission of loss" unfolds in a particular interindividual territory (Rowlands 2004, 219). The mother-land (*rodnaia zemlia*) acts as a perfect totality that simultaneously provides an ultimate moral ground, a dominant national symbol, and a literal physical container for the martyrs of the past and the future.[43] Artem Manakov, a Barnaul student, wrote to the editor of *Pokolenie* in his letter titled "On Russia: With Love and Pain. Fighting for Russia":

> In the world's history, there is no other land, except for Russia, that three times shed the blood of its own people in order to rescue the West, as well as the whole world from enslavement....But every nation has a breed of people who associate their mother-land [*rodnaia zemlia*] only with gas, oil, or metals. This is the only value that it has for them. [Russia's] reformers are trying to assess [the land] through auction, and then to sell it exactly to this breed.
>
> For me, Motherland [*Rodina*] means the graves of my ancestors. It means sweat, blood and the tears of our people. For what cause have millions of people died? Did Russian peasants, merchants, tsars, and secretaries-general carefully pull together my Fatherland so that a peddler could sell it piecemeal? He could spit on my Motherland....The Soviet soldier saw burning

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43. The English word "motherland" is usually translated as *rodina* in Russian, although the Russian original has no direct correlation with "mother." *Rodnoi* has the same root as *rod,* which means *kin* but also *gender.* The word can be used to describe relatives (*rodnye*) or, for instance, one's mother tongue (*rodnoi iazyk*). I will use "mother-land" to render *rodnaia zemlia,* "the land of the kin," intimate land," and will render Rodina as Motherland.

huts and birch trees, he saw the grief of mothers, children, and elders; he saw motherland [*rodnaia zemlia*] burning down. He also saw the enemy, and he crushed this enemy without pity. Today our land is not on fire, nor is there an enemy at the borders. But one invisible force has already passed our borders; this force destroys everyone and everything. This force imposes norms alien to our peoples: the cult of Golden Calf. Tomorrow, having conquered our land, the enemy won't spare our churches, our culture, or our history. (Manakov 2001, 1)

Used as a screen for projecting traumatic histories of the past and economic anxieties of the present, the mother-land (*rodnaia zemlia*) constantly fluctuates here between the symbolic and the material, between the sign and the referent, resisting any stable localization. The quote also suggests an interesting semantic triangulation within which the meaning of the motherland emerges. It is a combination of land-death-enemy that brings together the sociotemporal (dead ancestors) and the sociospatial ("enemy at the borders") dimensions and activates the traumatic again and again ("For what have millions of people died?"). I follow this unstable symbolism of the land by looking at an attempt to prove a physical incompatibility of neoliberal capitalism with Russia's terrain.

Why Russia Is Not America

Vladimir O. (born in 1962), a high-profile official in the regional Orthodox diocese in Barnaul, was a secular bureaucrat working for a religious institution. Not constrained by church doctrine, he was quite outspoken and opinionated in conversations with me. Comparing "liberal ideas of unlimited permissiveness and freedom" to a "black veil that descended on Russia at the West's request," Vladimir explained why freedom is detrimental in the Russian climate:

People don't know how to use freedom. In the same way our people don't know how to treat alcohol.…You cannot grant freedom to them! Especially in our miserable economic conditions. Our economy is forever geographically determined by the negative [i.e., below freezing] temperatures. These conditions demand that Russia have strong state leadership, an authoritarian one. Otherwise, all these democratic values would result in a simple fact: as soon as Russia opens itself to the world market, all our capital flees.…The new Russians [capitalists] have saved lots of money, but where would they invest this money? Here? They would have to build a plant and then to heat it all the time, because it is −20°C outside. Plus they'd have to pay their employees enough money so that they could buy a lot of fatty food and warm

clothes to protect themselves from the cold. Of course, they'd rather invest their money somewhere in Malaysia.

During my fieldwork I gradually got used to this geographical determinism. In different cultural and social settings I repeatedly observed the same intellectual attempt to reconnect the national history with the soil in order to restore the original configuration of nature and history and return to the geohistorical context that had shaped up the Russian people in the past. These discussions were usually structured around the argument developed by Andrei Parshev, a Moscow-based economist, who in 1999 published the first edition of his book *Why Russia Is Not America*. Written in a highly accessible manner, the book seemed to provide a final, objective, and ideologically neutral argument against the current course of liberal reforms.

Between 2001 and 2004, the book was reviewed in major academic journals. Its main arguments have been examined by a wide range of experts, from local economists, historians, and literary nationalists to senior fellows from the Brookings Institution (Laktionova 2002; Burganov 2002; Kudrov 2002; Rusakova 2002; Hill and Gaddy 2003). Parshev's suggestion to locate the main cause of Russia's consistent economic failures in its own climate and terrain quickly became "an integral part of the economic and geographic knowledge of any educated Russian [*rossiianin*], a truism that does not have to be verified anymore," as one reviewer of the book put it (Tsirel' 2003, 182). Within a very short time, a previously unknown lecturer from a Moscow military college became a highly sought-after pundit. The Russian Academy of Sciences invited him to present his views to economists, and Russia's major TV programs and radio talk shows asked him to participate in their programs (Parshev 2001a, 102–4; 2001b; 2003). For a while, discussions about the climatic predestination of Russia's political and economic development saturated every conceivable venue. Altai also followed this intellectual fad. In August 2002, Aleksei Ekart, the leader of Altai neocoms, published a long review of the book in *Pokolenie* (2002, 15). As if sharing the same script, in interviews and conversations my informants also repeated the meteorological view of the economy already articulated for me by Vladimir O.

When the second edition of the book came out in 2001, it had a political framing that could not be called subtle. Published in the series *The Grand Confrontation* (*Velikoe protivostoianie*), the book bore the subtitle *For Those Who Stay in Russia*. Parodying a familiar cliché, a blurb recommended the book as "an introductory economics course for ministers of finance, ministers of economics, and directors of institutes for the economy

in transition."[44] The book's title is somewhat misleading. *Why Russia Is Not America* has almost nothing to say about America, and given the main message of the book, Russia could be easily compared with any other place.

The starting point of the book was a set of seemingly economic questions. Why, despite all these years of liberal reforms, did foreign companies not invest in Russia? What happened to foreign capital in Russia? Moreover, why was there a persistently unequal economic exchange between Russia and the rest of the world? For years Russian merchants brought commodities into the country and took dollars out of the country, even though Russia does not "produce dollars," as Parshev put it (2001c, 36). Instead of looking at political aspects of Russia's investment climate, Parshev concentrated on the potential competitiveness of commodities produced in the country. The end result was discouraging. According to Parshev, only one-third of Russia's territory could be economically "effective," given the temperature regime, fecundity of soil, and so on. Yet even this third is located in the coldest part of the world: Russia's average annual temperature is −5.5°C; Finland, by comparison, has +1.5°C (2001c, 42, 39). Low temperatures would constantly demand high energy consumption not only for industrial production and agriculture but also for the organization of one's private life. The extremely energy-intensive life in Russia would be forever aggravated by yet another geographic factor: the country's expanse. Given the low density of Russia's population, long distances would always increase transportation costs and make Russia's economy even less competitive. Hence, Parshev's general conclusion: given Russia's geography, industrial production in this country is destined to have minimal surplus value (2001c, 103).

Taken at face value, such geographic observations could hardly provoke any substantial interest. But it was a link between Russia's geography and globalization that turned Parshev's book into a subject of hot debate. Parshev repeatedly stressed that the inefficiency and lack of competitiveness of Russia's economy were not a secret. What had been hidden until then was the very fact that factors determining Russia's economic inefficiency were "inalienable" (*neustranimy*) (2001c, 106). As a result, Russia's entry into the world market had to be detrimental, since the country's economy was "fundamentally incompatible" with the world's economy (2001, 125).

Parshev articulated the incompatibility of two different geo-economies through a particular metaphor of Russia's violated integrity: "a capital

44. There is only one Institute for the Economy in Transition in Russia; it is organized and chaired by Yegor Gaidar, the leader and the main intellectual force behind the reforms in the early 1990s (Institute for the Economy in Transition, n.d.).

drain" was the major way through which Russia's "openness" to the world was envisioned. As the main argument went, by creating for itself an entry into the free market, Russia simultaneously provided an exit for the capital that had been accumulated at home. As soon as legal and physical obstacles were lifted, money fled for a location with a more efficient (and warmer) climate. In Parshev's view, this "economic law" alone could explain why "knowledgeable American consultants" stayed away from Russia's affairs in the 1990s and did not help Yeltsin's team of reformers. "Americans knew from the very beginning that Russia's economy would be inoperative after its integration into the world' market....Sad as it might be, the reformers were to be sacrificed for the just cause of the global economy. Instead of a partner state, Americans found the total disappearance of the Russian state" (2001c, 199).

What kind of economic strategy could work in this situation? What could help to avoid Russia's economic suicide? What were the mechanisms that could ensure a "fair exchange" between Russia and the rest of the world (2001c, 316)? In Parshev's view the most effective way to guarantee a fair exchange would be to significantly limit the scope of this repatriated capitalism. The country should buy only those objects that it could not produce in exchange for objects it did not need. In other words, to stop capital drain, the country must introduce a set of barriers. "Anything and everybody could leave the country, except for Russian capital" (2001c, 161). In political and economic terms, three main measures aimed at institutionalizing a controllable form of the regime of noncoverage: (1) a state monopoly on foreign trade, (2) a state monopoly over the circulation of foreign currency, and (3) the declared inconvertibility of the Russian ruble (2001, 260). Put differently, the solution was a mild form of autarchy, "a reasonable distancing from the world economic system" (2001, 389, 311–15).[45] This geopolitical program had its moral underpinning too. Repeating a similar argument, Margarita Nurmatova told me: "Collectivity is typical for the Russian mentality....It is all determined by our natural conditions. In America, they

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45. Apparently inspired by Parshev's book, several American scholars have examined the role of climate in Russia's history and economy. While their arguments strikingly resemble Parshev's, their proposed solutions are quite different. Hill and Gaddy, for instance, suggests that Russia's climate problem could be solved by turning "Russians into Canadians," that is to say, by radically shrinking Russia's involvement beyond the Urals and by moving Russia's population to warmer areas (2003, 205–6). Needless to say, such grandiose plans tend to be totally divorced from any substantial ethnographic or cultural research and, as these authors admit, usually require changing Russia's psychology and mind as the starting point (Hill and Gaddy, 2003, 199; see also Lynch 2005, 195–238).

can get by individually, but to survive in this damn climate we have to do everything together.…Historically, this communality is in our blood. We cannot let a neighbor down; otherwise we'll all freeze to death."

As Parshev's critics pointed out, many crucial premises of his book were not exactly correct. Critics disagreed about Russia's average annual temperature (Tsirel' 2003, 183). Some of them drew attention to the fact that Russia's energy consumption per person was much lower than that of the United States, Canada, Singapore, Sweden, Germany, or France (Shishkov 2001, 117). Others questioned Parshev's simplistic understanding of free-floating commodities and totally unconstrained competition. Yet others found his rather physiocratic understanding of capital, still unfamiliar with financial derivatives, somewhat outdated.

These factual errors and (perhaps somewhat deliberate) miscalculations were important, but they did not undermine the book's popularity, which was rooted in its opposition to global practices of circulation that the arrival of capital manifested so vividly in Russia. Not unlike the traumatic trope of the Great Patriotic War, the idea of Russia's doomed geo-economic destiny provided a grounded teleology of the inconvertibility of national values. It emphasized a permanent lack of equivalence and at the same time a permanent state of exception. Notions of historical loss and the vital environment anchored people in time and space and suggested useful "constitutive metaphors" for nationally shared substance.[46] They also helped to render current changes meaningful. Economic failures became located within their "proper category" of the natural, with the corresponding "assignment of blame and guilt" to the cursed Russian climate (Mirowski 1994, 469). The next section shows how people in Altai translated this vision of the enclosed community and inalienable wealth into local politics. The region itself was framed as a part of cultural property that could not enter commercial circulation.

The Region in Danger

In the spring of 2004, the usually quiet Altai region was turned into a political hot spot, attracting much attention from the national and even international media. Aleksandr Surikov, the incumbent governor, decided to run for a third term. In 1996 and 2000 he had already won two gubernatorial elections, actively supported by the local Communists. Strictly speaking, Surikov's third campaign should not have happened. Federal law precludes

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46. On the role of metaphor in economic analysis see Klamer and Leonard (1994).

anyone from being elected for the same state office more than twice in a row. But the law came into effect only in 1999 and did not specify how to count already served terms. Controlled by Surikov, the regional legislative assembly in 2001 removed the two-term limit from the region's statute and made it clear that nothing in the local regulations or in federal laws could prevent Surikov from running for his *second* second term. Altai legislators were not alone in their preoccupation with figuring out how many terms "two terms" actually were. After the federal law was adopted, the interpretive calculation of terms became a favorite pastime for many regional assemblies.[47]

Surikov's third campaign was important not because it provided one more example of the political longevity of old Soviet cadres nor because it demonstrated once again the lack of new politicians able to effectively challenge the old guard. It was the immense symbolic orchestration of the campaign that attracted so much attention. Heavily relying on the popular anxiety associated with the arrival of capital, the election highlighted tendencies described earlier in this chapter.

Originally planned as a routine confirmation of Surikov's third "mandate," the election was supposed to go smoothly and quickly. Surikov was confident that his victory in the first round was inescapable, and his team ran a low-key campaign under the slogan "Happiness to you, my compatriots!" (*Schast'ia vam, zemliaki*!). The slogan stressed the very local nature of the campaign. In the Russian original, *zemliaki* (compatriots) has the same root as "land" (*zemlia*) and usually emphasizes the commonality determined by the same place of birth.[48]

On March 14, 2004, the results were sobering. The incumbent was 3 percent short of the 50 percent plus one vote required for an outright victory.[49] Surprisingly, the election revealed strong opposition. With 39.3 percent of votes, Mikhail Evdokimov, a nationally famous stand-up comedian and film actor, was elected to run against Surikov in the second round.

Within a week, the general tone of the election campaign drastically changed. Dissatisfied with his team, Surikov hired a leading Moscow PR company to manage the second round. On March 22, 2004, Barnaul was

47. These inventive exercises in political chronology abruptly stopped in the fall of 2004, when President Putin decided to get rid of the direct election of governors altogether.

48. Unlike *sootechestvenniki* (people who have the same fatherland), *zemliaki* (literally soil mates) tend to be more geographically specific.

49. To win in the first round of a local election, a candidate had to collect 50 percent plus one vote of those who registered for the voting; the second round required only a simple majority of votes of those who actually participated in the voting.

plastered with huge billboards. Their white lettering read against red and black backgrounds: "Stop the Invasion" and "Come, Vote, and Defend Altai!" A popular FM station, Russian Radio in Barnaul, came up with a political commercial that epitomized the essence of the election in three slogans: "Hands off Altai! Say no to Moscow oligarchs! Vote and defend Altai!" In addition, people's mailboxes were stuffed with copies of a leaflet published by the "Social Union of Patriots of Altai." The title of the letter conveyed the message bluntly: "The Region is in Danger!" Surikov's own interviews followed the same line, promising to "be on guard for the interests of the native region [*rodnoi krai*]" (Salanin 2004).

Suddenly, Altai emerged as a territory on the verge of being looted and occupied by greedy and cunning Moscow capitalists.[50] The political rhetoric became more and more intense. Three days before the second round, local newspapers, generally favorable to Surikov, published a letter from the governor addressed to staff members of polling stations. Adding more fuel to the already overheated campaign, Surikov expressed his confidence in "people's ability to tell the truth from a lie" and called upon every citizen to be suspicious of any effort that "black [negative PR] technologists" (*chernye tekhnologi*) could undertake in order to rig the election and to violate the law (*Vtorzhenie v Rossiiu* 2004).[51]

The election drama reached its peak less than twenty-four hours before the votes were cast. On April 3, the regional administration announced through the mass media that the regional security service had detained three charter planes from Moscow that had landed in Barnaul's airport early in the morning. As the media reported, the charters were "paid for by commercial institutions," and they brought 463 men and a woman ready to discredit or disrupt the election (*Svobodnyi kurs* 2004a). The next day the planes (and people) were apparently sent back to Moscow, but nobody ever came forward with an explanation. Nobody took responsibility for a failed invasion, and the incident remains one of the murkiest moments of the campaign (*Altai Daily Review* 2004; Chernyshev 2004, 34–36).

Evdokimov, with his cultivated image of a simple countryman," including stories about a country cabin that he built in his native Altai village, with his strong passion for saunas and homemade Siberian dumplings, could not have been further from the picture of a "greedy Moscow oligarch" that Surikov's PR team (from Moscow) tried to paint. Nor was Evdokimov actually foreign

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50. For a detailed discussion see Chernyshev (2004).

51. On black PR and other dubious post-Soviet political technologies see Ledeneva (2006, 28–57).

to the region. He had been born in Altai, and despite his eventual move to Moscow, he frequently visited the area, bringing his fellow actors to the region to film one of the most popular comedy shows on national TV. Having no political experience whatsoever and constrained by a lack of money, specialists, and (seemingly) ideas, Evdokimov responded to his opponent with a different version of the same region-is-in-danger theme. Denied any visible access to local TV and radio channels, the comedian repeated his party line in his meetings with people: the incumbent administration had already looted the region, and it was time to take it back. Surikov's massive billboards and multiple posters were challenged by small yet omnipresent (and hard to remove) stickers, on which a gloomy globe with a blood-red silhouette of the Altai region bore a stamped sign, "I am selling it. Surikov."

On April 4, 2004, Surikov lost the election by more than 3 percent.[52] Tired by a situation of "stable stagnation," many people voted for change. After all, in different capacities, Surikov had been in charge of the region since 1991, when he was initially elected to preside over the regional assembly.[53] However, popular hopes for radical change, associated with the new administration of "Altai's Schwarzenegger," as Evdokimov was quickly dubbed, proved to be in vain. Attempts to see in Evdokimov yet another American actor-turned-politician failed too. Hopes for a regional version of Reaganomics—"Evdokimonomics," as a local journalist called it—turned out to be groundless (Nikulkov 2004). No invasion of Moscow oligarchs, allegedly hiding behind the governor, was in sight, nor was there any corrupting influx of capital.

The biggest and most bitter surprise was the discovery that the election was just a vanity campaign of a popular star with no political program to realize or any strong ambitions to carry out. Originally considered by many as the "governor of hope," Evdokimov could achieve nothing throughout his first year, apart from appointing a handful of his friends (Goncharenko 2004, 41–48). The governor's frequent and extended trips to Europe only aggravated the situation. At the end of March 2005, less than a year after the election, the local legislative assembly passed a vote of no confidence in the governor. In his comments on the impeachment, the chairman of the Federal Election Committee summed up the general disappointment: "Evdokimov was not Schwarzenegger!" (*RIA Novosti,* 2005). Both sides appealed

52. In the second round, M. Evdokimov had 49.53 percent, A. Surikov, 46.29 percent (Oleg Mikurov and Vladimir Tokmakov, "Vybor sdelan," *Altaiskaia pravda,* April 6, 2004).

53. Almost two years later, Surikov was appointed ambassador to Belarus (*Altaiskaia pravda,* September 2, 2006).

to President Putin, with no visible result. The deadlock lasted through the summer, and was resolved unexpectedly: on August 7, 2005, Mikhail Evdokimov died in a car accident, when his Mercedes, exceeding 180 kilometers per hour crashed into an unsuspecting Toyota coming from the opposite direction. Following the new procedure, President Putin nominated a new candidate for governor who was quickly approved by the local assembly. On the day when the new governor was sworn in, a leading national polling company published results of a recent survey, in which 52 percent of respondents viewed Evdokimov's death as an assassination masked as a car crash (Sevriukov 2005, 2).[54]

Two moments in this campaign are worth emphasizing. One is the use of danger and threat as a way to mobilize the audience. It is significant that the danger was persistently construed in economic terms—either as an invasion of capital from the outside or as local, homegrown, corruption. The second moment deals with the way that the mass media and my informants chose to characterize the election. Regardless of their actual political preference, a majority of voters and the media perceived the campaign as an operation that was masterminded behind the scenes, as an event whose true meaning *must* be guessed and deduced from various hints and signs. Half a year after the election, I interviewed a wide range of people in Barnaul, from local political scientists, philosophers, and journalists to young radicals and members of the conservative business community. Most of them still expressed a deep conviction that the mysterious politico-economic force that had brought Evdokimov to power would soon come out of hiding. There was no particular agreement about the geographic origin of these interest groups. Guesses ranged from the neighboring Novosibirsk to Vladivostok in Russia's far east to Krasnodar in Russia's south. This desire to locate the agency of economic and political changes elsewhere is quite important. Ironically, the will to connect with a higher power in another place radically preempted the existing environment. Imagining alternative—or at least nontransparent—webs of meaningful relations, these emerging cosmogonies indicated a certain shift in the mode of questioning political figures, too. The metaphoric inquiry "Who is Mr. Putin?" that was so common during the late 1990s, was replaced in the first decade of the 2000s by the metonymic "Who is behind Mr. Evdokimov?"[55] In other words, a search for

54. The Levada Center, a major independent survey company, polled sixteen hundred respondents throughout Russia; 34 percent of them thought it was an accident, and 14 percent did not have any opinion (Sevriukov 2005, 2).

55. For local discussions and examples see Chernyshev (2004, 34–35).

unfamiliar comparison and unknown codes was marginalized by a search for plausible links and connections.

The search for hidden forces was reflected in yet another way. I was told many times that the election was a product of "dirty technologies," an outcome of "black PR." Or at least it was an expression of "a manipulated quasi-democracy," as a local professor of political history put it (Chernyshev 2005). Again, there seemed to be a general consensus that words and people were not what they purported to be. As this chapter has demonstrated, a similar operation of discursive dissociation of the real object and its visible identity could be discovered in many other settings. Framed through a rhetorical pairing of invasion and manipulation, this patriotism of despair structured various narratives about post-Soviet dislocation, dispossession, and detachment. What the election campaign highlighted very clearly was a strong belief that manipulative invasions (of liberal values or Moscow oligarchs) were not accidental but followed a certain logic, if not a master plan. The general picture would become clear as soon as one found out who was *really* hiding behind Evdokimov.[56]

A Sufficiently General Theory of Governance

Maria K., a woman in her mid-thirties, was one of my main contacts in Barnaul. She spent several years working with local nongovernmental organizations and eventually started working for the regional government. When I interviewed her, she worked for the office of cultural and educational affairs in the Altai region. Actively involved in staging and supervising local public events associated with official holidays (Victory Day, New Year's Eve), Maria was also in charge of programs on patriotic education in the region. One of our meetings happened shortly after she supervised a regional competition among school students for the best performance of patriotic songs. Maria passionately complained about the dazzling political diversity of the performed songs that ranged from military ballads of White Russians who had left the country after the Russian Revolution to late Soviet romantic pop songs about Mother Russia, to post-Soviet patriotic military chansons:

> Imagine a teenager, with no feeling of distinction at all, who sits and listens to all this. He sits there and slowly goes out of his mind. He has no clue what

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56. A set of materials on the results of the 2004 elections, published by Altai scholars in the summer 2004, is a good example of this interpretative strategy (Chernyshev 2004).

> Russia means, where the Motherland is. Some people favor the tsar, some—
> the Russian Patriarch, some—Trotskyites, some—Communists. We do not
> train the feeling of distinction at all.…But information governs the indi-
> vidual; it is like water: your body gets what you drink. People are information
> animals. What could happen, if they cannot make distinctions? Well, this is
> why we get skinheads who grew up in one culture and monarchists who were
> shaped in a different culture. We get all kinds of groups and groupings today.
> These groups are all created by those who have access to the levers of gover-
> nance. In a very accurate fashion, they play these groups against each other,
> and in the right time and in the right place they get the result they need.

As in many other cases in this chapter, depictions of the rapid fragmen-
tation of the environment that had looked so solid and coherent in the
recent past generated here a search for a cultural explanation that could jus-
tify the evident disintegration. Cultural polyphony was construed not as a
representation of autonomous, independent groups and tendencies but as
a deliberate outcome of post-Soviet governmentality. Atomizing diversity
was linked with a particular regime of power that diffused any consolidated
challenge by purposefully differentiating the field of social relations. What
seemed to be unusual here was Maria's emphasis on the feeling of distinc-
tion that could be trained and applied to surrounding informational flows.
It was Maria who introduced me to a group that took such training seri-
ously: the local seminar on the Concept of Social Security, or "a seminar on
the Concept," as she called it.

    I attended several sessions of the seminar that took place in an audito-
rium of the Altai State Pedagogical University, in the wing that hosts the
Department of Philosophy. This geographical proximity appeared to be
quite accidental; the sessions that I visited had no faculty members from
the philosophy department in attendance. The seminar seemed to be open
to anyone who wanted to come, but given the fact that even getting in the
building required a special pass, the seminar could not be convened on the
university premises without an official permit. The sessions that I visited
lasted about two hours and were typically structured as a short lecture fol-
lowed by questions and a group discussion. Judging by their questions and
appearances, people who attended the seminar came from diverse educa-
tional and economic backgrounds. Most participants were men between
twenty and sixty years old; there were also a few women in the audience.
Each session covered a particular aspect of the Concept of Social Security,
also known as the "Sufficiently General Theory of Governance." After each
session, participants could buy books and newsletters on the Concept. As
I discovered later, introductory lectures by the organizer of the seminar

(a graduate student at a local technical university) and his interpretations of current events were heavily based on materials published in the bi-weekly newsletter *Mera za meru* (*Measure for Measure*), easily available from newspaper stands throughout the city. In what follows, I outline the main ideas of this seminar by using its publications as well as the notes I took during the sessions.

The Concept was apparently developed at the end of the 1980s by a group of officers working in military colleges and academies throughout the country. Later the group was joined by technical intelligentsia from provincial universities. In the 1990s, this group tried to institutionalize itself as a political movement; it even managed to present its views to the members of the Russian parliament in 1996 during a session on national security. The movement's activity has been mostly concentrated in St. Petersburg and Novosibirsk, but it has a network of local chapters as well. When in 1997 the movement organized its first congress in Moscow, it managed to attract representatives from fifty-four regions of Russia (Moroz 2005, 68). The party's website claims eleven thousand members in fifty-two regional chapters.[57]

It is hard to estimate the actual political weight of this group. Some Russian newspapers and scholars have traced a close connection between the leadership of the Conceptual movement and high-profile Moscow politicians (Soldatov and Borogan 2004).[58] In 2003, representatives of the movement ran for office in the parliamentary elections; even though their party Edinenie (Unification) failed to cross the 5 percent threshold, it was supported by more than seven hundred thousand people throughout the country (Moroz 2005, 14). In Barnaul, Maria K. was absolutely confident that the leadership of the region was well aware of and quite sympathetic to the ideas of the movement. However, it was impossible to either confirm or deny this assertion. In 2004 the party candidates ran for seats in the regional assembly but managed to get only 1.8 percent of all votes.[59] Apart from its possible political influence, the Concept is an important symbol that connects in a plausible way apparently disjointed facts, processes, and motivations by weaving together issues of new economy, patriotic feelings, and a strong desire for an organizing plot.

Since the middle of the 1990s, the group associated with the Concept has been publishing a string of books and brochures as a part of the series

57. For program documents and statistics see Edinenie (n.d.).
58. See Moroz (2005) for a detailed review of this movement.
59. Communists won, with 26.6 percent of the votes (*Svobodnyi kurs* 2004).

Library of Conceptual Knowledge. Usually the publications are not signed, and the texts are presented as the "common property of Russian culture." There is a certain mystical aura that accompanies these texts, too. The short standard blurb printed in each book of the series warns: "When using these materials for personal purposes either in the form of fragmented citation or as a reference, the reader accepts personal responsibility. If such a usage creates a context that distorts the meaning or the integrity of cited materials, this person might face the chance of being subjected to 'mystical,' extra-juridical retribution" (Dostatochno 2003).

The basic premise of the Conceptual movement is hardly controversial: Russia entered the new millennium while experiencing a condition of "conceptual uncertainty." Administrators and politicians carry out opposing, contradictory, and even mutually incompatible plans (*Rossiia, Rus'!* 2001, 12–13). There is a profound lack of "knowledge and understanding of what kind of state and what kind of society we are building" (*Mera za meru* 2002c, 1). As the movement's publications suggest, this conceptual uncertainty is not a result of an accidental combination of individual ignorance, political factors, and historical circumstances. Rather, it reflects the strong desire of "the world financial mafia of globalists" to get rid of Russia altogether (*Mera za meru* 2002c, 1). However, they suggest, politically driven interpretations of the cold war should not be taken seriously. It was not ideological differences between Russia and the Western world that were important for the mafia of globalists. After all, as the argument goes, the Soviet Union and the United States were not that different in terms of their economic bases. In both countries, it was the "corporate ownership of means of production" that provided the structural backbone for the political system. But the two countries radically differed in the ways their respective corporate ownerships were established. Unlike in the United States, where "corporations of hereditary clans" were created during the last two centuries, in the Soviet Union similar clans were shaped only in the late Soviet period, as a "symbiosis of the Party *nomenklatura* and the directorate of major industrial enterprises" (*Mera za meru* 2003, 3).

It was precisely this ideological-cum-managerial (post-)Soviet elite that became the main target of global influence, the authors of the Concept insisted. The "world masterminds" (*mirovaia zakulisa*) chose the Soviet Union as one of their main objects of influence first of all because they realized that their level of consumption could be sustained only by limiting consumerism throughout the world and by establishing global control over pivotal energy sources (*Mera za meru* 2003, 3). This is why, during the cold war, informational outlets such as Voice of America, Radio Liberty, and the

BBC proclaimed the improvement of living conditions in the Soviet Union as their main concern, while in fact they "tacitly pursued both the seizure of the USSR's natural resources, and the annihilation of the country as such" (*Mera za meru*" 2002b, 3).

This general outline of geopolitical disposition was then followed by another conceptual conclusion. One issue of *Mera za meru* has a diagram that presents the process of governing in general and for Russia in particular. The diagram is simple: the "object of governance" (a car or Russia) is connected with the "subject of governance" (a person or state institutions) in a double way. First, the subject directly influences the object, and then it receives feedback on its own action by analyzing the outcome of its influence (figure 1.9). As the newspaper suggests, given the success of the "informational pressure" that the "globalists" have had on Russia, the same mechanism for "seizing governance" could be used by anyone. Predictably, it was the Conceptual Party Edinenie that was seen as the perfect subject to realize this "remote control over bosses."[60] Just as during the process of destroying the Soviet Union, the subject (elites) and the object (the country) could be subjected to informational pressure, the feedback channel could also be tapped. By exercising informational influence at schools and universities, in companies and enterprises, across cities and the countryside, the successful "correction" of the subject's goals of governance could be ensured on every level. Perhaps even more important, the project of "entering governance" (*vkhozhdenie v upravlenie*) should be realized in regard to members of local and federal parliaments, to the heads of all administrations, and finally to all heads of state (*Mera za meru* 2002b, 3).

These conspiracy narratives and scenarios perfectly fit the type of symbolic production that Frederic Jameson labeled "the poor person's cognitive mapping" (1988, 356). Yet, as recent studies of politics of paranoia in postwar America indicate, such a dismissive attitude usually neglects two important aspects of the conspiratorial mode of "thinking critically" (Dean 2000).[61] One of them is the political gesture that conspiracy narratives produce. As Timothy Melley convincingly suggests, conspiracy theory is closely linked with the profound doubt about the dominant methods of knowledge production and about the claims to authority by those who produce

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60. For an extremely detailed explanation of this scheme in different social and historical settings such as ancient Egypt or contemporary society see the main manual of the movement Dostatochno (2003, 193–99).

61. For studies of the role of paranoia in political life see Marcus (1999); Knight (2002); West and Sanders (2003); Pratt (2003); and Waters (1997).
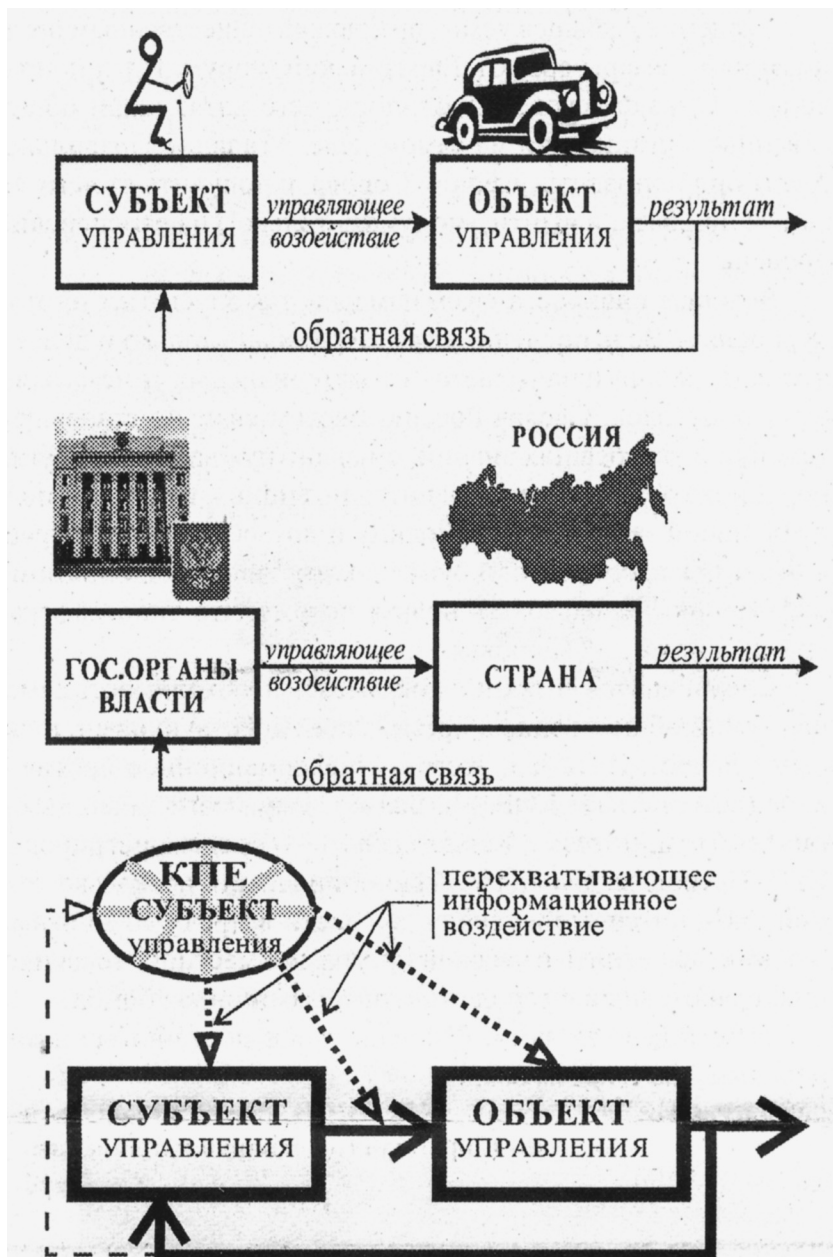
Fig. 1.9. A sufficiently general theory of governance: Subject vs. Object. Each diagram suggests a higher level of generalization of governance: from managing a car (the first diagram) to managing Russia (the second diagram), to managing Russia's managers (the third diagram). Source: *Mera za mery,* September 2002. Courtesy of the newspaper.

this knowledge (2000, 13). The second important feature of conspiracy theory is the particular form in which its will to connect is realized. Providing "an interface between the immediate existential experience…and larger global systems of knowledge," conspiracy theory nonetheless avoids a usual retreat from globalization into marginalized enclaves and fragmented ghettos (Mason 2002, 50).

As has been shown, post-Soviet narratives, brought to life by market irrationality, stemmed from a dual desire to register profound disagreement with the dominant view of Russia's development and, at the same time, to offer a new cosmogony, a new type of connectedness, a new form of totality that could effectively replace fragmented or dysfunctional cultural frameworks of the previous period. Political control of the Soviet regime and consumerist illusions of the market society were replaced by the fantasy of a large-scale presence in convoluted networks of relations. The fear of individual isolation attributed to capital was overcome by a vision of polymorphous embeddedness in the constant flow of information.[62] The main message of this post-Soviet conspiracy, though, was a promise of linking rather than its confirmation. The scenario of seizing governance suggested that everyone and everything *could be* connected, if only through informational pressure.

The publications of the Conceptual movement offer an extensive variety of such potential plots and tacitly realized scenarios. Many treatises in the library are filled with formulas, diagrams, mathematical equations, cybernetic schemes, and extremely close readings of official documents and artistic texts. One example of these exercises in "conceptual power," as it is usually called by its authors, was the interpretation of events that occurred on October 23, 2002, in Moscow when a group of Chechen terrorists and suicide bombers took eight hundred people hostage during the performance of the musical *Nord-Ost.* The October issue of *Mera za meru* published a long letter from the presidium of the Conceptual Party that outlined the hidden logic of the event:

It is obvious that the main GOALS of *the hostage taking are the following:*

1. To remove Putin from his position of the head of the country.
2. To make the Russian people accept the regime of international fascism [established by the "world masterminds"]…and the return of the Yeltsin

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62. For less convoluted versions of political conspiracy in post-Soviet Russia see Norka (2004); Prokhanov (2002); Morozov (1999).

clan ("Family") to power, which would manifest the end of fights among Russia's ruling clans.

3. To start the dismembering of Russia by using the country's regions as the basis for a new confederation "Russ-Union" [*Rossoiuz*] under the leadership of Yeltsin. (*Mera za meru* 2002a, 1; emphasis in the original.)

Bizarre as it is, this excerpt nonetheless highlights the basic anxiety about the actual and imaginary fragmentation of Russian society and points out the main source of this obsession with disintegration: the institutional collapse of the Soviet Union. The dissolution of the USSR was perceived as a paradigmatic model for the possible dismembering of Russia itself.

As with many conspiracy theories, what makes them interesting is not the reasoning behind them but their particular ability to "convert metaphors into metonymies" (Harding and Stewart 2003, 280) and thus to restore the whole picture. The success of conspiracy is rooted in the leaps of imagination that establish similarity between apparently unconnected events, objects, and people. In the quoted paragraph, the hostage taking was viewed as the beginning of a multilevel and multisited operation aimed at weakening Putin's power in order to clear the way for Yeltsin's return. To quote from the same letter:

> There were threats to Putin articulated by [Boris] Berezovskii, an old and loyal friend of the Yeltsin "family." There was an attempt to create the superstate union between Russia and Belarus, so that Yeltsin would become the head of it. There was the Ostankino TV-tower fire.[63] There was an explosion in a Moscow underpass; there was the submarine *Kursk* disaster; there was a terrorist attack in Kaspiisk on May 9, 2002. There were many other events that were designed to provoke people's discontent with Putin, to demonstrate his inability to establish order in the country, and thus to stimulate his removal. (*Mera za meru* 2002a, 1)

In Russia, the newspaper insisted, such a removal would be beneficial for all "clans" interested in preserving the assets accumulated through privatization. Internationally, as the article indicated in October 2002, a politically feeble Putin would have to give in to the U.S. leadership and to put up with the U.S. desire to start a war in Iraq. Since Yeltsin and his clans were so helpful during the time of reforms in "promoting the interests of Europe

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63. The Ostankino TV center is the main communication hub that hosts Russia's major radio and TV stations. On August 27, 2000, a fire destroyed the tower's transmitting equipment; for several days some TV and radio stations could not broadcast in the Moscow region.

and America, not the interests of Russia itself," they could reasonably expect
now that "the U.S. leadership would defend them from Putin" (2002a, 1).

It is the Concept's ability to connect "objective multiple qualitative dis-
tinctions in an unambiguous fashion" that *A Sufficiently General Theory of
Governance,* the manual of the movement, singles out as its main theoreti-
cal advantage (Dostatochno 2003, 188). Within this context, governance is
associated with one's ability to ensure the "stability of the object from the
point of view of the predictability of its behavior" (21). In a situation of
change, ability to predict requires a special kind of interpretive skill. For the
Conceptual movement, only a "mosaic type of consciousness" could trace
the connections among diverse facts and objects, paths and patches. That
is to say, fragmented bits and pieces of information could be seen as parts
of a meaningful (yet disconnected) mosaic panel only by those who pos-
sessed the necessary mental glue.[64] Without such a skill (the will to con-
nect), individuals would be constantly exposed to the manipulative media
that treated them as a mere container for disjointed views and impressions.
Unable to form their own "world picture" or to predict their own behavior,
"object individuals" would be totally dependent on frameworks provided
by others, becoming an easy target for external influences or internal im-
pulses (281–82).

Interestingly, Sergei Kara-Murza, whose *Manipulation of Consciousness*
was discussed earlier, construes the same idea of disjointed consciousness
as the main tool through which a collapse of national statehood can be ac-
complished. As long as the "cultural core of society" is stable, Kara-Murza
maintains, "[t]here is a 'stable collective will' aimed at preserving the exist-
ing order, too. The undermining of this 'cultural core' and destruction of
this collective will lead to the collapse of the state. Such undermining is
carried out through a 'molecular' aggression in the cultural core" (2002a,
168). Unlike the authors of the Conceptual movement, Kara-Murza sees
this aggression against cultural values of the nation not as a product of *ex-
ternal* forces. The virus of molecular aggression was conceived and imple-
mented as a conscious "anti-Soviet project" by the Soviet intelligentsia in
the 1960s. As Kara-Murza insists, Soviet society might have been sick, but it
was alive. It was the bomb of the anti-Soviet project that killed it (10–12).
Moreover, the intelligentsia failed to realize the global condition of its own
activity. As Kara-Murza points out, liberal capitalism in Russia is a utopia,

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64. In a less radical form, the same post-Soviet will to connect bits and pieces of informa-
tion into a coherent plot is reflected in the incredible popularity of the detective novel in Russia
since the early 1990s. For an extensive discussion see Olcott (2001).

since no *local* capitalist order could emerge today without being drastically modified by existing global structures: "The West devours the very sprouts of "other" capitalisms, just like bacteria destroy the mucus (*sliz'*) from which life could have sprouted….Accelerated globalization…will inevitably get rid of the majority of Russians. Those who would survive would be subjected to a profound involution so that they could be easily controlled by a tiny enclave of "modernity" that extracts gas and trains ballerinas" (195).

In his essay on "paranoia within reason," George Marcus rightly suggests that at least two important factors help to keep conspiratorial schemes of understanding afloat. The end of the cold war did not automatically remove its epistemological premises, its ways of questioning the unknown, as well as its constitutive metaphors. The symbolic legacy and structuring residues of the cold war, Marcus suggests, made conspiratorial frameworks "an expectable response to certain *social facts*" (1999, 2; emphasis in original). Second, a broader crisis of representation reveals the inadequacy of existing channels of communication, modes of translation, and genres of interpretation. Hence, paranoia within reason is a result of striving for "knowledge in the absence of [a] compass" (5).

There is another important factor that helps us understand the intellectual and emotional attractions of conspiratorial thinking in contemporary Russia. The end of the cold war (with the demise of the Soviet Union that accompanied it) and the contemporary crisis of representation were intensified in Russia by a rapid transition to the market-driven economy and to the unprecedented monetization of social relations. Produced in the course of privatization, the extreme social differentiation activated a variety of discourses rooted in mistrust. Social dislocation and economic dispossession were accompanied by "moral holocausts" (Taussig 1980, 101) that gave rise to various forms of "naked patriotism." Partly capitalizing on the hermeneutic of suspicion honed during the Soviet period, the post-Soviet narratives about universal falsehood, lies, and corruption presented nontransparency and nonfamiliarity of the newly emerging social order as a set of practices and institutions that lack authenticity. Simultaneously, they situated the true origin and usually negative content of these socio-semantic inadequacies outside or behind. Metaphors of spatial and cultural fragmentation that often framed this search for post-Soviet meaning could be read as a form of symbolic cartography. Initial fragments were turned eventually into meaningful clues, unified by the implicitly present organizing system. Providing a map for navigation, this post-Soviet

cartographic endeavor defined the available space by outlining the borders of unknown terrains.

This chapter began by documenting ways in which Russia's socialist past modified the country's transition to a capital-driven economy. More specifically, it explored local cosmogonies, those emerging hermeneutic practices and forms of rationality that were able to capture the fleeting meaning of post-Soviet changes. As has been shown, the arrival of capital in provincial Russia was often perceived as a culturally alien, geographically and historically distant event. Newly emerging commercial institutions rarely grew out of existing forms of life. More often they appeared as a stylistic invasion, a physical rupture in the established social fabric: Butik Renome in a former apartment on Lenin Prospect. The chapter examined different social and political enclaves and suggested that fragmentations and ruptures precipitated searches for missing links and hidden connections. In turn, the foreign flavor of repatriated capitalism stimulated heated debates about local loyalties, national values, and patriotic feelings. A dizzying array of groups, tendencies, and ideas were eventually brought together by an organizing plot. This organizing plot, no doubt, was far from being a linear and coherent narrative. Like recent sidewalks in front of new commercial establishments in Barnaul, it consisted of disconnected patches of different color, texture, and size. This symbolic dissonance produced by post-Soviet changes revealed a shortage of positive mediating cultural mechanisms in Russian society. This shortage, in turn, has been significantly amplified by a lack of trust in emerging procedures and processes of social exchange. As has been demonstrated, the unpredictability of outcomes that social exchange might produce frequently activated discourses of universal manipulation. These discourses helped to justify failed or unequal exchanges ("We were duped"), but they also usefully located the source of responsibility for these interactions elsewhere. The popularly shared linkage between money and lies or capital and corruption resulted in yet another important strategy: attempts to rediscover real values, uncontaminated by the logic of the market were called upon to overcome the corrupt and false present.

In some cases, this search led to revisiting Russia's recent past in order to recover a lost sense of unifying collectivity ("History already loves you"). In others, a similar striving for an ontological anchor found an outlet in neoromantic interpretations of the economic predestination rooted in the national soil and climate. What was significant about this alternative search

for the true Russian path was its overwhelming pessimism. Even a perfectly organized national economy would be forever doomed by its geography, and even major national victories were not about success. This national poetics of despair was not without its own value, however. Used as a lowest common denominator, this conscious resort to suffering often managed to generate communities of loss bound by the solidarity of grief.

2 The Russian Tragedy

From Ethnic Trauma to Ethnic Vitality

> We were killed as a nation [*narod*], as a country, as a society, as bearers of communism—this is the truth. We weren't just defeated, we weren't just squashed. We were killed. Killing a nation does not mean killing all its representatives.…Some representatives of the nation can exist; they can even flourish. But socially speaking, a large number of individuals have ceased to be a nation. Having lost its ability to resist the powers that try to destroy them, the nation is disintegrated and atomized.…One can witness today how this is happening to the Russian people in Russia.
>
> —Aleksandr Zinoviev, *Russkaia tragediia* (*gibel' utopii*)

> When we are unable to impose our power on another person, we can always elude the other's power by destroying ourselves. In this way, we control the situation. In this case, positive and negative are both positives of opposite value, each striving for eventual pre-eminence.
>
> —André Green, *The Work of the Negative.*

> [T]here's no racism without a language.
>
> —Jacques Derrida, "Racism's Last Word."

"Is This Not a Tragedy?"

On April 25, 2005, in his annual address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, then president Vladimir Putin made an unexpected rhetorical turn. Revisiting Russia's recent history, he offered his own definition for the early 1990s. As Putin framed it,

> We should acknowledge that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century. As for the Russian nation, it became a genuine drama.…Many thought or seemed to think at the time that our young democracy was not a continuation of Russian statehood, but its ultimate collapse, the prolonged agony of the Soviet system. But they were mistaken. That was precisely the period when significant developments took place in

Russia. Our society was generating not only the energy of self-preservation, but also the will for a new and free life.[1]

The passage caused a stir in the foreign press; in Russia the comment did not provoke any particular reaction. As in many other cases before, Putin's address did not offer a distinctively new vision but mostly articulated an opinion that was already widespread in the country. Indeed, for many Russians, the perception of the collapse of the USSR was quite different in scale from the view of Putin's foreign critics. In Russia itself, the disintegration of the USSR was linked much more closely with the painful immediacy of everyday survival than with archived horrors of the Great Terror and the cold war. The need to equate the Soviet Union with the Stalinist regime, which was so crucial for many Western commentators, was less obvious in the midst of post-Soviet changes. Yet two weeks after the original speech, Putin defended his choice of words in extensive interviews with foreign correspondents. "Liberation from dictatorship should not necessarily be accompanied by the collapse of the state," he explained. The collapse of the USSR divided the Russian nation, leaving millions of Russians outside the border of the Russian Federation; it severed family ties, it ruined economic networks, and it obliterated people's life savings. "Is this not a tragedy for these people?" asked Putin. He then drew the final line under the discussion. "People in Russia say that those who do not regret the collapse of the Soviet Union have no heart, and those who want to bring it back have no brain" (ARD 2005; CBS 2005).

The following discussion explores this tendency to perceive and narrate the collapse of the Soviet Union as an emotionally charged discourse on political disintegration and traumatic survival. The genre of the Russian tragedy is the main subject of this chapter. From the early 1990s, the Russian tragedy has been defining major interpretive approaches to Russia's recent history. It is articulated differently by people with different social and educational backgrounds and may be framed as sociological journalism, ethnological analysis, demographic forecast, or political essay. Over the years, the traumatic component of this genre has expanded. The Russian tragedy started as a way to emphasize the essence of Russia's socialist experiment. By the end of the 1990s, the term was further applied to the period of the post-Soviet transition.[2] By analyzing a range of nationalist texts, this chapter

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1. For the Russian original and an authorized English translation see Putin (2005).
2. For different variations on this theme see Govorukhin (1991); Iskhakov (2005); Kara-Murza (2002a); Kozlov (1996); Solzhenitsyn (1998a); Troitskii (1997); Zinoviev (2002).

shows how authors of the Russian tragedy equated the dissolution of the Soviet state with the dissolution of the Russians as a nation. The demographic *decline* and the erosion of national values were to mirror the lost Soviet state. The intense circulation of themes, ideas, and images of the nation's demise reveals the crucial role of traumatic discourse in shaping post-Soviet forms of belonging. The chapter also traces how recognition of the loss eventually resulted in the rediscovery of the Russian nation's new vitality.

Unlike the previous chapter, where the experience of social fragmentation was often linked with intensive searches for unifying narratives, this one emphasizes a different symbolic strategy. It shows that in their obituaries for the vanished country and dying nation, authors of the Russian tragedy exposed the underlying attempt to reshape Russia's recent history in ethnic terms. Ethnic mapping was called upon to reformat a past that had suddenly become incoherent and incomprehensible. Using the notion of *etnos* (defined below) as their main analytic tool, my interlocutors and the authors of the texts discussed here were able to introduce a clear-cut split between the Russian "etnos proper" and institutions of the Soviet and post-Soviet state whose politics was deemed to be non-Russian or even anti-Russian. The ethnic split produced an important effect. It juxtaposed traumatic experience and responsibility for it; rhetorically, narrators and victims of the Russian tragedy were isolated from the real or imagined perpetrators. This chapter explores these post-Soviet strategies of reinscribing ethnic difference into what was previously seen as a homogenous historical space. It relies on two types of sources. Texts written by prominent Moscow scholars are supplemented by interviews and publications of Barnaul informants. This combination demonstrates the symbolic consistency of the post-Soviet discourse on Russian tragedy throughout the country, and at the same time it highlights Altai variations of this genre.

National History as an Ethnic Project

Until perestroika, the term *etnos* was a part of the professional lingo of a small group of Soviet scholars. Originally, the concept of etnos, or ethnical unit (*etnicheskaia edinitsa*), was introduced into Russian ethnography by Sergei Shirokogorov (1887–1939), a Russian ethnographer of the Far East.[3] A scholar from Petrograd, after 1922 Shirokogorov resided in China, where

3. For more details and discussion see Kuznetsov (2006) and V. Filippov (2006). Francine Hirsch traces a different genealogy of the term in her book on early Soviet ethnography (2005, 196–97).

he wrote extensively on the ethnography of aboriginal groups of the Far East (Tungus). In his major theoretical work, *Ethnical Unit and Milieu: A Summary of the Ethnos,* published in 1923–24 in Shanghai, Shirokogorov maintained that the "division of mankind into ethnical units" is simultaneously a "natural function" and "an impulse of development of man[kind] as a whole" (1924, 31).[4] Writing in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution and bloody civil war, Shirokogorov was preoccupied with the issue of ethnic survival, emphasizing in his work that the principal purpose for "all biological species"—etnos included—is maintaining their "right of existence" among other etnoses and animal species (1924, 7). A successful ethnic self-maintenance can be traced through the type of relationship that an etnos establishes with its environment. Shirokogorov even invented the notion of the "ethnical equilibrium" to describe the optimal correspondence between the size of the etnos and available resources. To achieve "ethnical equilibrium" each etnos has to properly position itself within the ethnical milieu, exercising resistance "to the pressure of other etnoses." When necessary, etnos must be able to incorporate adequately "the sum of impulses" for changes that it received from the "interethnic environment." In some cases, the demand for adaptability might force the etnos to "utilize" other etnoses in its own interests (1924, 9).

Shirokogorov's ethnic Darwinism was not widely known or even directly available in Russia until the late 1990s.[5] However, in the 1960s a limited circulation of his writings among the intelligentsia significantly inspired the work of several prominent Soviet ethnographers and resulted in a substantial body of academic publications on the topic. Shirokogorov's attempt to link his theory of ethnic survival with his analysis of natural environment and ethnical milieu was used to create an academic version of the late Soviet doublespeak. The revived binary "etnos versus nation" allowed Shirokogorov's followers to keep intact the dominant homogenizing concept of the "Soviet people," which was supposed to mark the formation of a new, ethnically inclusive type of nation and at the same time to draw attention to autonomous etnoses and ethnic environments.[6]

With perestroika, the academic prominence of the Soviet theory of etnos temporarily faded; yet at the turn of the twenty-first century the etnos theory became, once again, a major analytic device for conceptualizing the

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4. I slightly adapted the translation using the Russian original (Shirokogorov 1923, 127).

5. For a review of Shirokogorov's work and his influence on Russian ethnography see Revunenkova and Reshetov (2003).

6. On the notion of the "Soviet people" see Hirsch (2005, 314–19).

continuity of post-Soviet nations. As before, renewed discussions about etnos were focused on ethnic stability and the role of the ethnic environment in the nation's history (Kozlov 1999; Tishkov 2003). Reflecting the increased importance and autonomy of Russia's ethnic regions and republics, the term began to be widely used in the academic and popular press to mark something local and essential. Russia's Ministry of Education, usually reluctant to deal with anything that might remotely concern national feelings, in 1993–94 actively encouraged regional educational boards to include in their curricula courses that would introduce high school students to "ethnocultural values" and the "ethnonational" history of their particular region (Shnirelman 2006c). Within a decade, etnos became the subject of a major intellectual industry; new disciplines and fields of studies emerged almost daily—from *etno-pedagogika* and *etno-psikhologiia* to *etno-ekonomika* and *etno-ekologiia.*

There are at least two main reasons that made the concept of etnos especially attractive for the post-Soviet intelligentsia. Methodologically, the concept was useful in providing a plausible substitute for class categories of orthodox Marxism, which were so typical in Soviet humanities and social sciences. The theory of etnos stayed away from such ostensibly Marxist notions as means of productions or basis/superstructure. But just like the Soviet class-based approach, etnos offered a comprehensive system of social classification (ethnic groups) and a certain vision of progress (ethnic development). Theoretically, etnos helped to isolate the constructivist view of ethnicity. "Nation" was exclusively linked with the nation-building process, normally initiated by the state. In turn, etnos itself was used to describe "bio-psycho-social" collectivities that transmit their most prominent features from generation to generation. Not unlike the concept of race, etnos provided an elaborate vocabulary of somatic metaphors for mapping out various social organisms and social bodies.

Indeed, restructuring the nation's history along ethnic lines often amounts to a politics of racism. As alarming as it is, however, it is not the racist content itself that is significant in the ethnocentric, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic texts analyzed below. There is an important difference that distinguishes the post-Soviet emergence of racism from the "privileged moments" of the racist outbreaks in modern societies (Foucault 2003, 255, 257). In post-soviet Russia, racist discourses were no longer a privileged instrument of the sovereign or state. Instead, while still acting as a "technology of normalization" (256), the post-Soviet edition of biopolitics was used first of all by various communities of loss as a "maintenance mechanism" with which they could uphold the borders of their public space (Theweleit

1989, 210). The scapegoating aspect of the Russian tragedy should not be underestimated, yet the main appeal of this genre was in its affective production of the suffering subject. What was created in these literary and historical exercises was a list of injuries that could anchor new networks and sustain new collectivities. What seems to occupy a prominent place in this tragic version of national belonging was the ability to claim a particular injury as one's own.

The link between expressions of suffering and the subjectivity that these expressions produce is crucial for understanding the work of the patriotism of despair. As Ludwig Wittgenstein pointedly indicated in his *Philosophical Investigations,* the purpose of pain behavior is to identify the painful place and to draw attention to the "subject of pain," that is to say, to the agent who gives expression to pain (1958, 101). After all, articulations of pain can hardly describe pain. Hence, the trope of the Russian tragedy is predominantly used as a performative rather than a descriptive device, as a tool with which to "stir the memory of our feelings," as one of my Altai informants wrote in his book (Filippov 1999, 87).

Ironically, by merging memory and perception, the Russian tragedy acted as a peculiar defense mechanism that encapsulated the subject of pain in this tragic genre and compelled its authors to keep revisiting their traumatizing plot. Thus the genre inspired Russia's scholars and intellectuals to examine "instincts that control the mechanisms of the [Russian] ethnos' self-preservation" (Filippov 1999, 59). It pushed some authors to investigate the factors of "ethnic viability" (*zhiznesposobnost'*) of Russians (Kozlov 1995, 6). But perhaps even more important, it allowed these people to assume a critical social position in post-Soviet Russia. Having lost much of its influence after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian intelligentsia recovered at least some of its clout by producing multiple accounts of traumas that had taken place in the past or would take place in the future (Panarin 1998; Kniazevskaia 1999; Iskhakov 2005).

It is not easy to dismiss the narratives of the Russian tragedy as the intelligentsia's pragmatic attempt to accumulate certain political or social capital by utilizing available symbolic tools. Nor can these theoretical constructions be understood (or debunked) by demonstrating their logical flaws, historical inaccuracies, or theoretical dead ends. Neither normative or political critiques nor attempts to dismiss ethnoframeworks as more sophisticated examples of the post-Soviet turn to "archaic" or "mythic" thinking (Gudkov 2005)are helpful in explaining the high degree of intellectual and emotional intensity with which ethnoframeworks are often charged by their producers. Such a critique would have missed the point: namely,

the cultural and social effects that these discursive constructions are capable of delivering for their authors and audiences.

Despite their obvious academic vacuity, I want to approach these desperate explanations of Russia's ethnic development as alternative forms of post-Soviet cosmogony that challenge the flattening mechanical functionalism of postcommunist neoliberal ideology. By rationalizing their fears and anxieties, these nationalist texts envision the "organismic ontology" (Cheah 2003, 2) of the Russian nation as a new logic of nation building. These ethnonarratives can be construed as an example of "enactive remembering" (Bass 2000, 118), in which the line between representation of the past and experience in the present is blurred. Put simply, enactive recollections of the Russian tragedy do not just register a lived (or imagined) past; they situate the past content in the present. Hence, the past never loses its emotional grip, repeatedly stirring the feelings of the authors of the Russian tragedy.

Academic approaches examined in this chapter fall into two major categories. Histories of ethnotrauma usually addressed Russia's current problems by rewriting the country's past in order to demonstrate the non-Russian character of its state institutions. Ethnic differentiation was used to restructure national memory and to reshape ways of remembering. The second category, ethnovitalism, while being closely associated with the rhetoric and methods of ethnotraumatic narratives, was less preoccupied with depicting past tragedies. Its main goal was to provide the analytics of ethnic survival, to outline methods that could "compensate for the loss of the cultural genotype" of the Russian nation, as one Altai scholar put it (Maltseva 2004, 240). Ethnovitalists replaced the struggle over constructing and interpreting the nation's memory with a similar struggle over channeling and interpreting perceptions of the nation's current experience.

The construction of these post-Soviet ethnonarratives would have been impossible without a particular ideological groundwork conducted during the last decades of the Soviet Union. The basic split between etnos and nation, on which post-Soviet narratives of the Russian tragedy are based, resulted from the efforts of a group of Soviet ethnographers and historians to carve out their own domain within the ossified and politicized field of nationalities studies. Without an understanding of the logic of the Soviet theory of etnos, current Russian debates over nationalism and ethnicity may appear only as an extravagant mixture of peculiar ideas and strange frameworks. The following discussion outlines the main aspects of the two major Soviet theories of etnos and then explores modifications of this theory in post-Soviet approaches to nationalism.

Etnos as Such

Two of the most prominent contributors to the Soviet theory of etnos were Yulian Bromley (1921–90), a well-established Moscow-based historian of the Balkans, and Lev Gumiliev (1912–92), a nonconformist historian and geographer from Leningrad. Emphasizing different aspects of ethnic development, both scholars demonstrated a desire to break away from the dominant Soviet tradition of perceiving nation formation as a steady linear progression (tribe–nationality–nation) that was to mirror the development of means of production in primitive, feudal, and capitalist/socialist societies. Both scholars significantly influenced the development of Russia's theories of ethnicity. Bromley's framework was the main academic doctrine of national development in the Soviet Union. Gumilev's model was presented as a powerful intellectual alternative to it. Bitter rivals at the time, today these authors appear as a product of the same intellectual endeavor aimed at decoupling the two parts of the nation-state. In both cases, their appeal to the not-quite-social essence of etnos was a key factor in avoiding the stifling schemes of Soviet social sciences.

In 1966 Bromley (a grandson of Konstantin Stanislavskii, a famous Russian theater director, and a son of a university professor) was appointed director of the Institute of Ethnography, the highest disciplinary unit within the Soviet hierarchy of science. The institute was a part of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, a large academic industry that included several regional divisions (for instance, the Siberian division and the Urals division), libraries, a network of laboratories and institutions throughout the country, and a powerful publishing house. In the Soviet period, each disciplinary institute in the academy (for instance, the Institute of the Russian History or the Institute of Laser Physics) heavily defined and policed the standards of its respective discipline in the country. Bromley was in charge of the Institute of Ethnography for almost twenty-five years and became known first of all for his persistent attempts to expand and clarify the analytic vocabulary of Soviet ethnography.[7] In the 1970s–1980s, through his access to administrative resources, publications, and academic appointments, Bromley turned the theory of etnos into a leading research theme of the field (Basilov 1992, 7; Hirsch 2005, 313–15). Despite its certain shortcomings and current critique, this theory remains the most serious and "conceptually grounded" contribution to ethnology in Russia, as some Russian

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7. For a review of Bromley's work see an article of Viktor Kozlov (2001), his frequent coauthor. For a range of views on Bromley's legacy see S. Kozlov (2003).

ethnographers have recently maintained.[8] This section summarizes the key elements of this theory.

Starting at the end of the 1960s, in a series of articles, Bromley theorized a complex web of relations through which an ethnic group transforms itself into a national or political formation. Etnos became the central category and was used to produce a host of connected notions and neologisms. Defining the fundamental feature of ethnic groups, Bromley repeatedly singled out "self-awareness" as the "essential feature" of tribes, nationalities, and nations (1989, 9). Ethnic self-awareness included the individual's general awareness of his or her "actions, feelings, thoughts and motives of behavior" (9, 38). In turn, on the level of the etnos itself, ethnic self-awareness was manifested in "so-called ethnic auto-stereotypes" and collectively shared opinions about the nature of the ethnic community, its specificity, and its achievements (38). To put it simply, within Bromley's framework, ethnicity became a psychosocial pivot that sustained other individual and collective identities.

Somewhat reluctantly and usually without any further elaboration, Bromley often accompanied his discussion of ethnic self-awareness with a standard statement that would deem as mistaken attempts to "reduce the essence of etnoses" to their self-awareness only. As Bromley insisted, ethnic self-awareness was not a "demiurge" that could create etnos out of nothing (1989, 38); if perceived this way, etnos would be merely "a figment of imagination" (1976, 14). However, Bromley never identified in details those "objective factors," from which an ethnic "form of consciousness" derived (1989, 37–53).[9] Questions about the origin of ethnic division were replaced by discussions of etnos's historical past. Evidence of etnos's existence was enough to undermine any doubt about its place of origin. What became crucial instead were issues of survival of the already existing etnos.

Such an approach to ethnicity allowed the official Soviet ethnography to conceive etnos as a unit that was not firmly rooted in *any* specific social arrangement. As Tamara Dragadze (1980), a British anthropologist, saw it, etnos could be compared to a language that changes over time but cannot be fully located within a particular historical period. Etnos's historical autonomy, then, allowed Soviet ethnography to stay away from the more politically charged studies of national pasts. Instead, the theory of etnos

8. For current approaches to the etnos theory see Tishkov (2003); Zarinov (2003, 18); Rybakov (2001); "Discussing Imperial Legacy" (2005).

9. Bromley's critics were quick to point out that his concept of etnos "ignores the significance of socioeconomic factors and the role of socioeconomic formations in the development of ethnic communities" (Ivanov 1976, 237).

was used to trace the vertical continuity of the ethnic unit that unfolds itself diachronically in radically different epochs, stages, or formations (163).

In Bromley's work, the split between the ethnic and the historic emerged in two main forms. The first form was etnos proper, "etnos in the narrow sense," or "etnos as such," defined as "a stable group of people that has taken shape historically, who have common, relatively stable, specific features of culture (including language) and psychology, as well as an awareness of their unity and distinction from all other similar formations" (1989, 20). Was this narrowly conceived etnos, then, any different from a tribe or nation? For Bromley, the distinction was crucial: while etnos always takes the shape of a particular social institution, it is not equivalent to this institution (1976, 14).

If etnos as such was to emphasize the immutable ethnic component, then the category of the "ethnosocial organism," or "etnos broadly conceived," was introduced by Bromley to highlight the social aspect of ethnicity, despite the obvious biological connotation that the term "organism" suggests. Such ethnosocial organisms as nation or nationality, Bromley indicated, are volatile formations that include territorial, political, economic, and social factors, along with the ethnic component. Emerging within very particular social settings, "tribes," "nationalities," and "bourgeois and socialist nations" inevitably change their "principal topological features" during transition from one socioeconomic order to another (1989, 94). Unlike volatile ethnosocial organisms, etnos as such can sustain itself throughout a sequence of different socioeconomic formations because of the "relative conservatism as well as certain independence of ethnic properties" (1976, 15).[10] For instance, as Bromley liked to point out, the Ukrainian etnos retained its "ethnic factors" while taking the shape of different ethnosocial organisms in various periods (feudalism, capitalism, and socialism) and in various countries, such as the USSR or Canada (1976, 15).

The analytic distinction between the self-conscious etnos and ethnosocial organisms made possible a further split in the process of nation building: etnos and nation-state became autonomous entities, as it were. "Ethnogenesis" (ethnic processes) described how core elements of a distinctive etnos were modified or completely changed through "ethnic division" and "ethnic amalgamation" (Bromley 1989, 92). On the other hand, "national

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10. Bromley does offer, however, a taxonomy of etnoses that correlates ethnic origin with a particular stage of social development: "paleogenetic etnoses" ("the peoples of the North") were formed "during the primitive epoch"; "archogenetic" ones arose in "precapitalist class society" (the Russian etnos could be an example); and finally, "neogenetic etnoses" were formed under capitalism (the French) or under socialism (the Altaians) (1989, 29).

development" signified the evolution of the social and political forms of etnoses such as republics, regions, or autonomies.

It is precisely this distinction between the ethnic and the ethnosocial in the nation's history that was reclaimed after the collapse of the Soviet Union by the authors of the Russian tragedy in order to justify splitting off a certain political experience from the natural life of the Russian etnos proper. The framing of the Soviet past as "the seventy years of Holocaust imposed by the Bolsheviks on the Russian nation" (Popov 2000b) became possible first of all as a result of the semantic differentiation between the past of the etnos and the past of the national political institutions. As a result, the nation's history was turned into a history of the Russian etnos's resistance to pseudo-Russian political institutions, eager to impose their anti-Russian agenda. Post-Soviet students of ethnic trauma appropriated yet another important moment from Bromley's construction. In Bromley's own work, the interplay between the continuous ethnic self-awareness and changing ethnosocial organisms was sustained to a large extent by avoiding questions about sources of ethnic self-consciousness: the main apparatus of the basic ethnic distinction (ethnic psychology) was located outside the field of political relations or forces of production. Even though Bromley himself tried to stay away from a direct biological essentializing of ethnic differences, his theory provided enough room for such a move. At the turn of the century his followers logically connected the dots by transforming the extrasocial status of the ethnic, outlined in Bromley's work, into a non-social, substantive, or even primordial quality grounded in the "internal content of the individual" (Rybakov 2001, 19; Zarinov 2000).

The Etnosphere

Bromley's theoretical attempts to fundamentally divorce etnos from the social and political forms that it had assumed throughout history were paralleled in the theoretical project of Lev Gumilev. Bromley's emphasis on the importance of biological and psychological processes in maintaining ethnic self-awareness became the central argument in Gumilev's construction. There was an important twist, though: Gumilev firmly linked elusive manifestations of the nation's psychological qualities with the formative environment. In this version, ethnogenesis emerged as a late Soviet version of romantic psycho-geography.

At the time of his writing, Gumilev's ideas lacked any official institutional or political support. With the changes in the late 1980s, the situation became dramatically reversed. Gumilev's work became a source of major

inspiration for a wide audience—from radical nationalists and more moderate heads of newly independent states to schoolteachers and university professors. Despite their convoluted prose and heavy dose of clumsy neologisms, hundreds of thousands of Gumilev's books were sold. In the early 1990s, his historical exploration *From Rus' to Russia* was adopted as an official history textbook in Russian secondary schools (Gadlo 1995, 3; Lavrov 2000, 360–62; Shnirelman 2006b). Gumilev's writing was widely used as a major theoretical foundation of the emerging political and philosophical movement of neo-Eurasianism.[11] His ideas seemed to be especially popular in Central Asia. In 1996, Nursultan Nazarbayev, president of Kazakhstan, unveiled a newly established Eurasian university in the newly built capital, Astana. The university was named after Gumilev to memorialize his originality in studying ethnic relations in Eurasia.[12] During his time in office, Askar Akaev, the first president of Kyrgyzstan, actively used Gumilev's ideas as a primary source for his historical ruminations on the nature of Kyrgyz statehood (Akaev 2002). Terms like *passionarnost'* and *etnosfera,* introduced by Gumilev, became a part of the popular vocabulary. Implicitly or explicitly, his concepts shaped many post-Soviet debates on nationalism and ethnicity in Russia in particular and in the former Soviet Union in general.[13]

This incredible public recognition (unparalleled by any other late-Soviet scholar), happened, however, mostly after Gumilev's death in 1992. His life was quite tragic. The son of two major Russian poets, Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966) and Nikolai Gumilev (1886–1921), Gumilev was under the constant surveillance of the Stalinist regime. Accused (falsely) of plotting against the Soviet government, he spent several years in prison and gulag camps. In a break between the two camps, he managed to defend his doctoral dissertation in history. In 1956, three years after Stalin's death, Gumilev was vindicated, but his own dramatic life, intensified by the complicated biography of his mother and the tragic death of his father (killed in 1921 by the Soviet regime), made Gumilev's integration into the Soviet academy extremely difficult.[14] Unable to find a job in the highly politicized field of history, he ended up teaching in the less ideologically constrained department of geography at Leningrad State University.

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11. For a discussion see Ram (2001); Paradowski (1999); on Gumilev and neo-Eurasianism see a useful set of a conference proceedings *Lev Nikolaevich Gumilev* (2002).

12. For details see the Eurasian university's website, http://www.emu.kz/obschaya-informaciya/about-university/.

13. For more discussion on Gumilev's legacy in post-Soviet Russia see a special issue of *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie,* 2006 (3).

14. For Gumilev's biography see Golovnikova and Tarkhova (2001); Lavrov (2000).

Gumilev's major and most famous work, *Ethnogenesis and the Biosphere* (1990), was based on his second dissertation, defended in 1973, for a doctorate in geography (Wagner 1991).[15] The monograph examined the influence of the natural environment on ethnic development. Academic authorities proclaimed the book "too specific" and "of little interest" for a general audience and refused to publish it.[16] Following existing rules, Gumilev deposited the manuscript of *Ethnogenesis* in a state library in 1973, and by 1979 the number of requests for photocopies of the whole manuscript exceeded ten thousand (Shevchenko 2002, 29–30). Despite its obvious popularity, the manuscript was published only in 1989, during the time of perestroika, and quickly turned its author into a major post-Soviet academic celebrity.

Gumilev's theory of ethnogenesis (*etnogenez*) was very similar to that of Bromley, his main academic opponent.[17] For both scholars, ethnic self-awareness was the main principle behind etnos. Closely following Shiroko-gorov, Gumilev emphasized that self-awareness resulted from collective self-juxtaposing of a group of individuals (*osobei*) to all the other groups and collectives (1993, 41). Apart from the group's self-recognition, as Gu-milev insisted, there was no single feature that could be consistently used for defining etnos (2002, 93). Not interested in the overt analysis of national political institutions, Gumilev perceived etnos as a "phenomenon of na-ture" that had little to do with socioeconomic formations. He emphasized that similar social conditions do not produce similar etnoses: the unfolding of social processes and that of ethnogenesis happen in different, "parallel," domains (182, 226). By largely ignoring the impact of political structures and processes, Gumilev associated ethnogenesis mainly with geographical and biological conditions. Etnos was construed as an "independent natural phenomenon," as a "corpuscular system" that shaped and channeled the response of humans to their natural environment (105, 177). Specific forms of adaptation were seen as the most important source of ethnic distinction.

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15. Since the English translation of *Ethnogenesis* is available only in an abridged form, I use the Russian edition of the book (Gumilev 2002). All translations are mine.

16. In the Soviet Union, very few universities were allowed to have their own publishing houses; the number of published titles was extremely limited. Even fewer university presses could publish popular literature.

17. Among recently published archival documents of Gumilev, there is a list that he com-piled in 1987 in order to document the suppression of his views and scholarship from 1975 to 1985. One of the entries is a complaint about Bromley's plagiarism of his work. As Gumilev insisted, at least twenty-nine key arguments of his theory of etnos were borrowed by Bromley without any attribution (Gumilev 2003, 244).

Since the etnos's self-adjustment to its natural context was also accompanied by an active modification of concrete locations, space (*mestorazvitie*) was simultaneously construed as a necessary condition of ethnic evolution (place of development) and as materialized evidence of ethos's being ("the developing of the space") (214).[18]

Drawing on diverse ethnographic and historical material, Gumilev insisted that a new etnos can emerge only as the product of a collision between two (or more) different landscapes, etnoses, or social organisms (2002, 322). A "monotonous" landscape, usually populated by an ethnically homogenous group, tended to resist drastic changes, either by expelling rebels or by incorporating changes with a slow and gradual pace. In contrast to this, landscapes divided by various natural barriers made mutual influence among separate groups relatively difficult; such mosaic landscapes increased ethnic specificity and might eventually lead to the outburst of a new etnos. By shifting the emphasis from exploring societal influences on etnos formation to the scrutiny of anthropogenetic potentials of landscapes, in a series of books Gumilev demonstrated how the terrain of Asia remained an area of major "outbursts of ethnogenesis" throughout several centuries (197, 218).

In Gumilev's case, the analytic split between the ethnic and the political, typical of Soviet ethnology in general, resulted in a peculiar displacement. Ethnic differences were to represent an incommensurability of larger proportions: biopolitical taxonomies (ethnic formations) emerged as a by-product of physical distinctiveness of geographic areas. The combination of landscape and people was presented as a new form of human unity and human activity—the etnosphere (*etnosfera*) (Gumilev 2002, 39).

In the previous chapter, I showed how Russia's geography was often used by my informants to justify the uniqueness of the Russian national character and Russian way of life. Gumilev's idea of the all-determining significance of the geopolitical juncture provided them with an additional theoretical argument that grounded the source of Russia's cultural and political uniqueness in its transitory location between West and East.[19] Most extensively, the role of this juncture would be theorized by Russian neo-Eurasianists, who would turn a potentially detrimental clash of Russian and Asian civilizations into a productive collision of ascending and descending

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18. Gumilev borrows the term *mestorazvitie* (from *mesto*—place, *razvitie*—development) from Petr Savitskii, one of the founders of Eurasianism (2002, 189). For the original discussion see Savitskii (1997, 282) and Miliukov (1993, 66–121).

19. For a useful historical review of Russian views on the Europe-Asia juncture see Bassin (1991).

etnoses.[20] "Geography is our destiny," as Aleksandr Dugin (2004), one of the most vocal current proponents of Gumilev's ideas, framed it.[21]

Gumilev's basic perception of etnos as a product of nature was rooted in a theoretical presumption about the biosphere, understood as a totality of living organisms connected with one another through the circulation of elements and the entropy of energy (Gumilev 2002, 325).[22] The outburst of ethnogenesis, through which a new etnos is usually formed, is a result of a mutagenetic (mutation plus genetic) shift, a deviation from the norm, produced by an excess of energy in the biosphere. Most such genetic mutations, as Gumilev insisted, quickly die out, and only micromutations that manage to resist the pressure of the environment can eventually form an etnos. It is precisely the ability of an organism to persist, its "capacity to withstand purposeful hypertensions," that Gumilev defined as "passionarity" (*passionarnost'*), a drive for change, an urge to break out of the already existing mold (328–29). In 1978, at the height of the Brezhnev stagnation, Gumilev wrote: "Normally, mutation never happens within a whole group in a particular habitat at once. Only a few individual organisms mutate, but sometimes this is enough for a new type of people to emerge. In our case, such a consortium of new people could eventually form itself into an etnos, if the conditions permit. Passionarity of the consortium's members is the mandatory condition for the etnos to emerge" (1993, 288). When there is a sudden emergence of "conquistadors and explorers, or poets and heretics, or such enterprising figures like Caesar or Napoleon," Gumilev insisted, we know that passionarity has become a social factor. "These people are small in number, but their energy enables them to develop or to stimulate an immense activity in any place where history is made" (292).

What happens when the drive for change is worn out? That is to say, what happens when the etnos, objectified in the transformed landscape, reproduced through the transmission of its culture, and guarded with a set of political institutions, has already passed its peak of expansion and is more interested in preserving that which has already been accomplished? As Gumilev indicates, in this situation, the most serious danger for the "descending etnos" usually comes from the neighbors or etnoses that still

20. On the notion of "Eurasia" as a post-Soviet intellectual framework see von Hagen (2004) and Kaganskii (2003). For a discussion of the parallel between Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilization" and Gumilev's collisions of etnoses see Goudakov (2006).

21. On Dugin's political and academic views see Ingram (2001); Umland (2003); and Shlapentokh (2007).

22. Gumilev borrowed the notion of "biosphere" from the work of Vladimir Vernadskii (1998).

retain their initial impulse, still try to adapt themselves to new conditions, and therefore are still capable of expanding the borders of their immediate area of existence (Gumilev 2002, 133).

This expansion of neighboring etnoses does not have to be violent. Sometimes it can take the shape of a chimera, a formation that adapts to a new habitat by mimicking dominant features of native species without seriously modifying its own internal qualities. As Gumilev framed it, when an etnos is devoid or deprived of its own environment, it might turn the ethnic space itself into its own living environment. That is to say, it can use another, "receiving" (*vmeshchaiushchii*), etnos as its primary habitat. Along with animals, plants, and valuable minerals, the native peoples become just another "component of the terrain, which is exploited by the etnos-parasite" (2002, 324). Different from mutually profitable symbiosis or traditional neighboring exchanges, chimera is a form of "ethnoparasitism" (*etnoparazitizm*) aimed at the complete hollowing out of the receiving etnos:

> This is not a simple living side by side, nor is it a form of symbiosis, but…
> a combination of two different, incompatible systems in one [ethnic] entity.
> In zoology, an animal's infestation with intestinal worms is called a chimerical construction. The animal can exist without the parasite but the latter
> will perish without the host. Living in the host's body, the parasite, however, takes an active part in the body's life cycle, increasing the demand for
> food and altering with its own hormones the organism's biochemistry.…
> [S]trong, passionary etnoses do not tolerate alien elements in their environment. (2002, 323)

In post-Soviet Russia, Bromley's emphasis on etnos as such, taken together with Gumilev's ideas of passionate ethnic solidarity bound to a particular place of development, suggested a vision of relatedness that exhibited no visible affinity with the discredited framework of Soviet Marxism or the socialist past. Emphasis on the natural, environmental, or extrasocial—a mix of biological concepts, geographical descriptions, and psychological terms—seemed to be the most effective tool to explain ideological flux.

In post-Soviet theories of Russian ethnicity, ideas about ethnic pressure and ethnic passionarity were reactivated by discourses on the Russian tragedy. The nation's recent history was turned into the genocide of the Russian people, and already existing social institutions were alienated further by being invested with threatening chimerical qualities. At the same time, the lack of established or universally shared national traditions was compensated for through the symbolic primacy of individual or collective attachment to space. The Russian terrain, once again, was transformed into

a primary site of struggle for the nation's survival. It was Alexander Solzhenitsyn who forcefully (though not single-handedly) drew public attention to these themes.

The Russian Tragedy as the Russian Cross

On May 27, 1994, the Vladivostok airport was besieged by an immense number of journalists, politicians, and gawkers eager to see the landing of an Alaska Airlines plane. The plane carried Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the writer and dissident who had decided to return to Russia after twenty years of exile. The act of return had its own convoluted drama: on the way from Anchorage, Alaska, the plane made an unannounced stop in Magadan, the unofficial capital of the Soviet gulag. It was there that the writer first embraced and kissed Russian soil, inciting rage among the accompanying media crews whom vigilant Russian border control officers trapped on the plane, preventing them from filming the historic event (Ostrovskii 2004).

Back in 1974, following the publication of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* in the West, the Soviet government had stripped the writer of his Soviet citizenship and deported him. In 1994, taking a special train (paid for by the BBC), Solzhenitsyn spent fifty-six days on a triumphal pilgrimage from Vladivostok to Moscow, familiarizing himself again with the landscape that he had not seen for years (Medvedev 2000, 16). Solzhenitsyn's return to Moscow was televised live for the whole country, and headlines of all the major newspapers announced the long-awaited arrival. The ecstatic reception of the legendary dissident, however, quickly faded away. The highly anticipated speech that Solzhenitsyn delivered in December 1994 to the Russian parliament was met with palpable boredom by the deputies. Solzhenitsyn's weekly TV show on a major Russian network did not succeed in attracting much of an audience either, and it was promptly canceled (Zubtsov 1994, 3). Various attempts to nominate Solzhenitsyn for president of the Russian Federation were preempted by the writer himself, who preferred to concentrate on what seemed to be the more important issues of the day. Neither of his two major books in the 1990s, *The Russian Question at the End of the Twentieth Century* (1995) and *Russia in Collapse* (1998b), managed to provoke substantial public discussion.[23]

Busy with his own historical projects, Solzhenitsyn also preferred to stay away from public discussion of the humanitarian and military disaster

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23. For a review of the Russian Question, see Tolstaya (2003, 155–67).

in the North Caucasus. Famous for vivid depictions of the horrors of the Stalinist period, in his infrequent comments Solzhenitsyn approached the issue of the Chechen war through the lens of geopolitical interests, mainly pointing to Russia's territorial losses and the "genocide of the Russian people" in Chechnya (Solzhenitsyn 1998a, 17; 2001b).[24]

Increasingly, the mass media presented Solzhenitsyn's return as "grossly belated" or even "mistaken." The writer's decision to reside in a secluded area near Moscow, alongside the traditional homes of the Soviet *nomenklatura,* did not make things easier.[25] For many observers, his dacha, with a tall fence and security cameras, became an apt metaphor for the dissident's aloofness and social awkwardness, for the political irrelevance of the "messiah whom we lost" (Milshtein 2003). The final blow came when the man associated with the "national conscience" for so long and for so many became a persistent target of mocking satire (Voinovich 2002).[26] What had seemed so sacred now became profane.

The situation began to change quickly in the spring of 2001, when Solzhenitsyn published the first volume of *Two Hundred Years Together.* In his new work, the writer promised to "illuminate" years of "the joint life of the Russians and the Jews in the same state" (2001a, 8). The book became a bestseller, and the second volume only increased the temperature of the already heated polemics (Sherbak-Zhukov 2003, 21). Konstantin Borovoi, a flashy entrepreneur and the editor in chief of the glossy magazine *Amerika,* called Solzhenitsyn "an adept of Soviet racism" (2001, 8). Vladmir Bondarenko, a literary critic of Russophile orientation, announced that *Two Hundred Years Together* was just as important for understanding the national tragedy of the Russian people as *Gulag Archipelago* was for understanding the social

24. In 1997, for instance, Solzhenitsyn insisted during one of his rare meetings with people (in a provincial library in Tver') that not granting independence to Chechnya was detrimental to Russia's own interest. For one thing, this political decision made it impossible to insist on resuming Russia's jurisdiction over the Crimean peninsula in the Black Sea, a territory that was conquered by the Russian Empire in the eighteenth century (Solzhenitsyn 1998b, 17). The Crimean region remained a part of the Russian Federation until January 1954, when Nikita Khrushchev decided to change administrative borders and transferred the Crimean region to the administrative jurisdiction of Ukraine. This decision did not change much until the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the Crimea, traditionally populated by Russians and Tatars, became part of a new, independent Ukrainian state. For a discussion see the collection of documents in *Istoricheskii arkhiv* (1992, vol. 1).

25. The dacha in Troitse-Lykovo, which Solzhenitsyn's newly built house replaced, was once the home of the famous Soviet general Mikhail Tukhachevskii, killed by the Stalin regime shortly before the war. The dacha was occupied later by a deputy prime minister of the Soviet government (Dyshev 1993).

26. For reviews of Voinovich's satire see Krasukhin (2003) and Ivanova (2002).

tragedy of ethnic Russians (2001, 7). In various media, letters of support from prisoners of the gulag were balanced by petitions pointing out that Solzhenitsyn's book marked the beginning of yet another round of the anti-Semitic campaign in an increasingly undemocratic Russia.[27]

The book got mixed reviews from historians of Russian Jews. Many of them drew attention to the fact that Solzhenitsyn's study presented neither new documents nor new interpretations (Hosking 2002; Klier 2002). Indeed, it was not the historical dimension of the project that made the book a hot topic. Solzhenitsyn's exploration of the two centuries spent by the Russians and Jews together was an attempt to answer his basic question: "Is such togetherness possible at all?" The former dissident offered his answer at the end of the second volume, anticipating emotional rebukes for the very attempt to draw a line between the two groups.[28] As the writer maintained, the division was already there; the striving of Russian Jews for a complete assimilation—however natural this striving might be—was not really achievable. The reason for this failed "self-dissolution," as the eighty-four-year-old writer put it, had to do "neither with the destiny of one's origin, nor with one's blood, nor with one's genes." For what was crucial in defining one's national belonging in this case was one's ability to decide: "*Whose* pain is leaning closer to your heart: that of the Jewish people or that of the nation in the midst of which you grew up?" (2002, 519; emphasis in the original)[29]

Solzhenitsyn was not the first to appeal to the nation's traumatic experience. As the anthropologist Nancy Ries documented, it was perestroika that brought to life traditional Russian genres of litanies and laments in the late 1980s (Ries 1997). In chapter 1, I showed how similar recollections of past injuries were used by my informants to reactivate or reimagine their bonds with other people and the country. Centered on issues of loss, these communities reintegrated the personal and the collective, providing their members with a feeling of historical continuity that was disrupted by post-Soviet changes. These newly established social bonds were often negatively charged, and their power of emotional attachment was sustained first of all through incessant documenting and reframing of the suffering experienced in the past.

27. See, for instance, *Literaturnaia Gazeta,* November 26, 2003, 2; Kadzhaia (2003).

28. Some readers asked in their letters: "What goal, in essence, did Solzhenitsyn have in mind, when he undertook this division?" (Kholmianskaia 2003, 175).

29. See also Solzhenitsyn's response to his critics after the publication of the *Two Hundred Years* (2003, 3). For a general discussion on Solzhenitsyn and the "Jewish question" see Larson (2005).

Solzhenitsyn's vision of national belonging as structured predominantly through the individual and collective recognition of the nation's pain has a lot in common with this everyday patriotism of despair. There is at least one important difference, however. Unlike litanies of perestroika documented by Ries or the cases discussed in chapter 1, in Solzhenitsyn's approach pain does not just produce new forms of emotive connectedness. It also introduces a clear-cut ethnic division. Togetherness and national solidarity, as Solzhenitsyn's book clearly indicates, emerge as two distinctive, if not opposite, categories and practices of national being. Litanies, in other words, acquire specific *ethnic* tonalities.

This ethnic framing, as Solzhenitsyn's example shows, had a particular focus. The discussion of the ethnic differences did not center on the usual figure of a racially or religiously different other—be it the Muslim Chechen in Russia's south or the Chinese migrant in the east. Rather, public debates were animated by the constant quest for the hidden source of heterogeneity within a society that had seemed until recently to be so homogenous. It was an incessant search for signs of the hidden but present difference, a search for manifestations of masked togetherness that permitted the incorporation of tradition and change within the cultural landscape and cultural narrative of the nation.

Solzhenitsyn's history of togetherness did not exhaust the genre of the Russian tragedy, but it did illuminate several crucial aspects of this genre. Its preoccupation with pain pointed to the inescapable failures of attempts to describe once and for all the individual or collective experience of injury. The effort to extricate the nation's history from the history of nations lumped together revealed the retrospective orientation of the overall project. Finally, the fascination with the figure of the Russian Jew highlighted a persistent anxiety about the misleading nature of representation that replaces (Russian) essence with ("chimerical" Russian) appearance.[30] As is shown below, different authors of the Russian tragedy chose to emphasize different themes; yet all of them kept intact the basic desire to read Russia's traumatic past in ethnic terms.

During my fieldwork in Barnaul, my initial introduction to the genre of the Russian tragedy was less academic than I expected. In fall 2002 in Barnaul, I interviewed Konstantin P., an active member of the Altai Slavonic Society (Slavianskoe obshchestvo Altaia). Born in 1978, Konstantin graduated

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30. Arguably, it was Igor Shafarevich, a Moscow mathematician, whose *Russophobiia,* written in 1978–82 and published originally in *samizdat,* started a recent wave of the tradition to explore the "Russian question" vis-à-vis the backdrop of Jewish history (Shafarevich 2003).

from the most prestigious school in Barnaul (with several subjects taught in English). In 1995, he entered a university, in which both of his parents were teaching social sciences. In 2000, he started in a graduate program in social sciences, working on a dissertation that explored issues of Russian "national self-awareness," as he put it in the conversation.

My interview with Konstantin happened in a local school in downtown Barnaul, in a precinct office that accumulated information about the progress of the 2002 federal census campaign. Along with many other students, Konstantin had been mobilized for conducting actual interviews with people. I asked him about his role in the Slavonic Society, where he had supervised administrative issues since 2000. In Konstantin's words, the society had united the region's intelligentsia since 1994, trying to defend Russian culture and the Russian people in contemporary Russia, as well as "to stimulate the development of our national awareness and national culture." Maybe because of the census activity going on in the background, Konstantin started his explanations with statistical data:

> There are 83 percent of us, Russians, in the country. Actually, I think that Ukrainians and Belorussians who live in Russia are no different from the Russians at all. So if we add them, it would be more than that, 85 percent, if not more! But despite all that, our own situation is very far from being ideal, from the way it should be in principle. Especially, when it comes to culture. Real national culture is emasculated [*vykholashchivaetsia*]. And this is true not just about the Russian people, but about all the native [*korennye*] peoples of Russia. Real national culture is practically absent on TV and radio, and it is not represented in the necessary fashion in literature and newspapers.…How often can you hear a Russian song on the radio (never mind the TV)? I mean a *genuinely* Russian one. Not one that is just written in Russian language, but one that is a source of pride of our people.…All this is not limited to cultural infringement only; we should say it directly—[ethnic] Russians are inadequately represented in the power structures, too. Be it the state parliament or something else.…This can be explained by the fact that, instead of expressing the interests of the majority of the population, the authorities in our country express the interests of transnational capital, of those oligarchs who predominantly have dual citizenship or at least are oriented toward foreign countries.

Konstantin's point had several parallels with the theories of etnos discussed earlier. In the cited passage, the theme of Russian ethnicity emerged vis-à-vis other, unnamed but clearly nonnative, ethnic units. The existing cultural institutions (ethnosocial organisms) were seen as socially and ethnically different from the Russian etnos itself. Konstantin's explanations seemed

to be motivated by an understanding that his own Russian experience, be it imaginary or practical, was not a part of the public domain; it was not a part of the commonly shared picture. However, the (inadequate) mechanism of representation was not questioned here. Instead, the feeling of cultural and political nonpresence was used as a starting point for examining how "the Russian culture proper" was replaced by someone else's culture. The social environment was framed as a location of increasingly alienated and alienating cultural coexistence, as a place of forced disengagement from the institutions of power. Subsequently, the very metaphor of common space was undermined by references to transnationality or the dual citizenship of those who were supposed to represent the interests of Russians. Togetherness was turned into duality and duplicity.

There is another important theme articulated by Konstantin—namely, the misleading nature of the easy equation of Russian culture ("genuine Russian songs") with Russian language ("songs in Russian"). In Konstantin's interpretation, the Russian language acquired the hollowed-out quality of the receiving etnos described by Gumilev: without a proper grounding in "the traditions of the Russian people," as Konstantin put it, the Russian language has no particular national value. Struck by this unusual split between the deceptive Russophonic and the genuine Russian, I asked him about these grounding traditions. In response, Konstantin listed three main qualities of the Russian people: universal communion (*sobornost'*), collectivism, and the love for one's neighbor.[31] It is precisely these qualities that are currently being threatened, if not already replaced, by a troika of individualism, cosmopolitanism, and the cult of money, my informant concluded.

This juxtaposition of Soviet spiritual collectivity and post-Soviet money-driven individualism is familiar from the previous chapter. Konstantin's story adds a crucial component that links the collapse of the country with the collapse of the nation. Fully agreeing with the general perception of post-Soviet changes as detrimental to Russian culture, Konstantin told me about the concept of the "Russian cross." Apparently, the concept had been around for quite some time, but it became especially popular in the local media during the discussion of the first results of the 2002 census.[32] As the general story goes, since 1992, Russia's population has been steadily decreasing every year. There are two major demographic reasons for this.

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31. There is no exact English equivalent for *sobornost',* which literally means *collectivity* (from *sobrat'sia*—literally—to get assembled). The word also has a strong religious connotation: *sobor* in Russian means "cathedral." Julia Kristeva translates *sobornost'* as "universal communion" (2000, 134), and I follow her approach here.

32. For details see *Altaiskaia pravda* (2003); Popova (2003a).

Fig. 2.1. The Russian Cross: babies vs. coffins. Artist: Andrey Dorofeev (www.bestcollage.ru). Source: *Argumenty i Fakty,* no. 22, 2006. Courtesy of the artist.

One is the general increase in the number of deaths in Russia; since 1999 seven hundred to nine hundred thousand people have died annually. The other major factor that contributes to Russia's depopulation is a declining birth rate. The diagram illustrating these two processes has been labeled the "Russian cross" (Popova 2003a; Bateneva 2003) (figure 2.1).

Since 2002, the topic has become standard in Russia's mass media. Regardless of political leaning or professional orientation of the specific outlet, most treatments of the Russian cross have been framed by the rhetoric of mourning over actual and hypothetical losses.[33] For instance, the liberal

33. See different interpretations of the theme in Anisimov (2004); Bakhmetov (2004); Bateneva (2003); *Na strazhe Rodiny* (2002); *Morskaia gazeta* (2002).

daily *Nezavisimaia gazeta,* quoting a deputy minister of health, provided the following grim statistics:

> Every year, the population of Russia is shrinking more and more. Every day we lose almost two villages. Every year a small province is gone. During last thirteen years, 11,000 villages and 290 towns have disappeared from Russia's map; 13,000 more villages that are still on the map in fact have no actual villagers anymore. Taking a pessimistic stance, one can predict that in 50–60 years the number of Russians will reach 70 million.…This phenomenon has already received a grave label: "the Russian cross." (Pokrovskii 2004)[34]

Sovetskaia Rossiia, an oppositional Communist newspaper, used the same trope for its own rhetorical purpose. In the editorial published before June 1, the Day of Children's Protection, the newspaper bemoaned, "June 1 is the only day in our country when the state authorities think about children. But even then never would you hear that the number of kids in our country has dropped from 40 million boys and girls in 1991 to 30 million in 2004. Conducted ceaselessly by the ruling regime and the government, the war against its own people has taken its toll: the lives of 10 million children will never be recovered" (*Sovetskaia Rossiia* 2005).

The provinces that are gone annually and the millions of lost lives of children (who were never born in the first place) are, of course, statistical tricks, aggregate numbers used to visualize general demographic trends and to evoke a necessary emotional reaction from the reader. Taken by itself, this preoccupation with the biological reproduction of the nation is not unique.[35] The Russian cross, not without a certain twist, illustrates a typical tendency of modern political regimes to legitimize themselves through a discourse, in which "every people is doubled by a population," as Giorgio Agamben put it (1999, 84). The conflation of demographic and religious meanings in the concept of the Russian cross adds an important dimension to this traumatic narration. The conflation is instrumental in moving a discussion of technical issues of social policies, health and child care, or the epidemic of alcoholism toward the predictable fascination with the nation's suffering.[36] In the process of this conflation, the fact of Russia's depopulation is often transformed into stories of deliberately conceived and purposefully implemented ethnic extermination (Elizar'eva 2002). For

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34. By the end of 2005 Russia's population was 142.8 million (*Kommersant,* January 24, 2006).

35. For a similar post-Soviet tendency in Ukraine see Petryna's discussion of the concept of "demographic scissors" (2002, 146).

36. For a useful exception see Khalturina and Korotaev (2006).

example, Gavriil Popov, a former mayor of Moscow and one of the most active prodemocratic politicians of the perestroika period wrote:

> I think there was a Russian Holocaust. It was organized by the Soviet state and the Communist Party, which was in charge of it. Burning humans alive is not the only way to constantly reduce their number. The people could be burned at the construction sites of Communism. Or—in fights with imperialist aggressors. Or—in a process of collectivization.…Overburdened with inhumane tasks by the leader, the people could be killed in a doomed experiment of building Communism in an isolated country. The people could be destroyed by the Soviet ideology that mercilessly deadens their minds and dries out their spiritual energy, persistently extirpating the century-old foundations of the people's life. The demographic data and predictions regarding the future of ethnic Russians are nothing but evidence of a holocaust. (Popov 2000b)

In this version of the Russian tragedy the story about the dying nation is predominantly a retrospective project. The primary function of the tragedy is to delineate the path that has brought the nation to its current (miserable) condition. A Barnaul journalist suggests exactly the inverse correlation between the Soviet state and resistance of the Russian etnos, framing it as a question: "Is it a mere coincidence that [the Russian cross emerged] exactly in the period when the previous [Soviet] state order was broken down, and new reforms started?" (Popova 2003b; also Glaz'ev 1998) In turn, Aleksandr Prokhozhev, a philosophy professor from the Altai State Pedagogical University, bluntly identifies the "perpetrators of the genocide" in his book *The Shadow People: On the History of the Jews in Russia* (2002): "The decade of complete Jewish dominance in Russia has resulted in the surplus of deaths over births. Every year the population of Russia shrinks by one million. Two million homeless children wander around the country. There was nothing similar to that even after the Great Patriotic War [in 1941–45]. Now, Russia is in a debtor's prison, totally subordinated to Jewish bankers from the International Monetary Fund" (255).

   Regardless of their particular political preferences, each of these versions of the Russian tragedy is rooted in the same rhetorical attempt to juxtapose the natural life of the Russian etnos and the development of its national institutions. Each of them is motivated by the same question: Who is responsible for the Russians' diminishing ability to resist the pressure of alien etnoses and institutions?[37]

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37. In the spring of 2006, the Russian government, apparently alarmed by the level of nationalist rhetoric associated with the demographic data and by the grave demographic

The Bomb That Killed Russia

Aleksandr Zinoviev, a logician from Moscow State University, instantly became a dissident when in 1978 he published abroad his sociological novel *The Yawning Heights* (1979). The Brezhnev regime (rightly) perceived the book as a form of open criticism of the Soviet state, quickly classified Zinoviev as anti-Communist, fired the fifty-six-year-old professor from his university position, and stripped him of his academic degrees, military awards, and finally citizenship. Cornered, Zinoviev left the USSR and spent more than twenty years in exile in western Europe, teaching and writing about the Soviet Union.[38] In 1990, his citizenship was reestablished, and the philosopher continued to live in Moscow from 1999 until his death in 2006. During that period Zinoviev published a steady stream of texts that were extremely critical of post-Soviet changes. In *A Russian Tragedy* (*The Death of Utopia*), a "sociological novel" that came out in 2002, he wrote, for instance:

> When the "bomb of Westernism" exploded in Russia, it hollowed out not only the governmental, economic, ideological and cultural spheres, but also the very human material of the society.…Designed as a weapon against Communism, the "bomb of Westernism" turned out to be much more effective. Only recently, this powerful community of [Soviet] people…was the second superpower on the planet, trying to perform a hegemonic role in world history. Now it is destroyed down to its very human foundations. But these human foundations had nothing to do with Communism whatsoever. The bomb was aimed at Communism but it killed Russia. (234)

How did this tragedy become possible? Given the power of the Soviet community, why did it collapse so quickly? What was it in the very national foundation that precipitated its quick dissolution? Why were the evil plans of the outsiders so successful? For Zinoviev the main reason had to do with the "moral, psychological and ideological disintegration" of the population (2002, 213). Inspired by Western ideas and disgusted with the state of the Soviet economy, the Russian people embraced the changes, and by doing so, they in fact were pushed by "irresponsible leaders" to "commit suicide" (30).

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tendency itself, decided to take control of the situation. A new federal council on demographic policies was instituted, and a large-scale system of pronatalist measures was implemented. The intensity of the nationalist rhetoric was significantly toned down—the "Russian cross" was quickly replaced by the "demographic cross" (Ivanov 2006, 6).

  38. For an overall review of Zinoviev's earlier work see Kirkwood (1993).

Zinoviev's description interweaves several of the strategies I have outlined earlier. The "human material" (etnos) and communist history became symbolically independent of each other. The disintegration of the Soviet state, encouraged by the West and from above, was turned rhetorically into the Russian people's suicide. The conflation of two symbolic frames—the suicide of the people and the genocide of the people—resulted in yet another version of the Russian cross. Issues of political accountability were transformed into depictions of the people's martyrdom, while post-Soviet institutions were perceived as being appropriated by someone else. To quote Zinoviev again,

> What we have is a state of criminals and Mafiosi, incapable of any productive work. This state is defenseless before its external enemies. It can't consolidate the popular masses around itself. State leaders can't grasp the notion of Motherland. They have corrupted the people, especially children and youth. There is no trace of legality in the country; criminality of all kinds is flourishing. And people, devoid of any protection from the state, are at the mercy of the gangsters;…the previous system of spiritual and moral values has totally collapsed.…All that was done consciously; it was even justified "theoretically" as a necessary step in the process of "the initial accumulation of capital." (2002, 226–27)

It is important to see how alienation emerges here as a major way of engaging with perceived reality. No area or activity has been spared, and nothing remains safe: the external world, the internal government, both the individual and collectives selves are either corrupted or collapsed. It appears that the work of negation itself is the only maintenance mechanism that can anchor the individual after the collapse. Following familiar lines of conspiratorial thinking discussed in the previous chapter, the quotation endows post-Soviet changes with a deliberate (although hidden) logic and simultaneously marks the source of individual or collective agency as unreachable.

The bomb of Westernism was not the only type of anti-Russian weapon identified by the authors of the Russian tragedy. The Moscow ethnographer Viktor Kozlov offered an emblematic attempt to frame the tragedy within the context of demographic discourse in his book *The Russian Question: The History of a Great People's Tragedy* (1995). A colleague and frequent coauthor of Bromley, Kozlov has had a successful academic career at the research Institute of Ethnography of the Russian Academy of Science. He is widely published in Russian and in English on the theory of etnos and on demographic processes among various ethnic communities in Russia and

beyond. For his academic work Kozlov twice received the State Prize, the highest annual award of the Soviet government.

Kozlov's post-Soviet publications were focused mainly on "ethnic sustainability" and "ethnic ecology" (1991; 1994). Some of them had a very pointed political message. When in 1996 Kozlov revised *The Russian Question,* the new edition of the book was dedicated "to all the anti-Russophobes" (1996). The book and Kozlov's own controversial public activity caused several waves of heated, if localized, debates among anthropologists and ethnographers of Russia. Many participants in the "Kozlov affair" drew attention to the undisguised racism and anti-Semitism in his work. Some raised questions about the limits of academic freedom of expression and the proper academic response to it. While agreeing with his critics, I believe that Kozlov's writing—like many other texts discussed in this chapter—should also be approached as an example of a particular genre of academic nationalism that emerged within a broader social context in post-Soviet Russia.[39] The importance of these narratives is not in their (predictable) search for the subject of blame. To recall Wittgenstein, it is not the expression of pain that matters here but the painful place that generates these expressions (1958, 101). In other words, these narratives allow us to localize the injury and to trace the experiences that have been manifested through cries of pain.

Kozlov's analysis of the Russian question was determined to a large extent by his basic understanding of etnos as a relatively closed biological group that reproduces itself through transmitting language, culture, and "ethnic orientations" to the new generations, conceived "predominantly within ethnically homogenous marriages" (1995, 15). In Kozlov's interpretation, the Russian question is a combination of two main problems. The first one points to the decreasing vital abilities of the Russian etnos. The other problem stems from aggravating relations among different etnoses in Russia. Despite identifying his own writing as a form of "ethno-demography," Kozlov's analysis is deeply steeped in historical reconstructions. Hence, the Russian question is a consequence of anti-Russian politics that started with the October Revolution of 1917. According to Kozlov, the absence of the proper Russian "national statehood" was the major reason for the ethnic degradation of the Russians in the Soviet Union. As Kozlov maintains, revolutionary changes in the first two decades of the twentieth century managed to successfully consolidate etnoses that previously had not had their own

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39. For the history and discussion of the Kozlov affair see Tishkov (1998). See also comments and responses published in the same issue of *Current Anthropology,* 40(4) (1999): 525–28. For a general survey of post-Soviet historiography and anti-Semitism see Rock (2001).

"fully developed" state. As a result, the majority of other etnoses in Russia (as well as in the USSR) were protected by their own forms of statehood: the Tatars in the Tatar republic, the Bashkirs in the Bashkir republic, the Kalmyks in the Kalmyk republic.[40] However, these changes failed to produce the Russian nation-state. Therefore, within the limits of the USSR, ethnic Russians never enjoyed the status of subjects but were used as objects by other nationalities in order to fulfill their own interests (1995, 119). Moreover, ethnic statehoods were often used by particular etnoses as a political ground for demonstrating increasing hostility toward ethnic Russians who could not defend themselves by relying on similar ethnically based political institutions (1995, 5; 1999, 339–40).

It is important to see how Kozlov reproduces in his narrative the logic outlined by Shirokogorov and popularized by Gumilev. The distinction introduced by Kozlov—Russians vs. other etnoses—generates a usual double split. First, it creates an environment of separate ethnic units within one nation, and second, it places the Russian etnos outside available forms of national statehood. Devoid of its own political institutions, the Russian etnos, then, is nothing but a part of the ethnic milieu, to be utilized by other etnoses. In Kozlov's narrative, Shirokogorov's ethnic "self-maintenance" is negatively translated into decreased "vital abilities" of the Russians. Correspondingly, etnos's ability to withstand the pressure of neighboring etnoses within the ethnic milieu is recast as "the worsening of intraethnic relations." This theoretical continuity (albeit not acknowledged directly in Kozlov's work) illuminates how a generic situation was rhetorically appropriated and subsequently turned into a personalized traumatic story.

Apart from lacking an ethnic Russian state, another important factor that contributed to the ethnic degradation of the Russians in the USSR was a long-standing, centralized campaign against Russian culture (Kozlov 1995, 120). As Kozlov maintains, "the ethnic being of a people [*etnicheskoe bytie*] is mainly determined by their language and their unique culture" (120). Consequently, as the argument goes, any harm to these fundamental elements would have inevitable consequences for the etnos's self-awareness. The rest of his argument is based on the structural split between the misleading Russophone speech (*parole*) and the tradition-bound Russian language

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40. Following the Soviet legacy, the administrative structure of the Russian Federation combines two major principles: there are so-called national administrative formations (republics and provinces with a significant number of non-Russian ethnic groups) and administrative territories that tend to be populated by Russians, where political institutions are usually perceived as ethnically nonspecific or at least ethnically inclusive.

proper (*langue*). As Kozlov maintained, active attempts by the early Soviet government to turn the Russian language into the dominant tool of linguistic communication produced mostly negative results. Appropriated by ethnic minorities, the language was cut off from its vital (Russian) cultural content. The "weakening of the internal unity and lingual-cultural being" of the Russian etnos was aggravated by wide dissemination of the Russophone culture (123). Kozlov defines the predictable subject of this "chimerical" ethno-ventriloquism:

> It should be recognized that most of the Jews, who knew the Russian language pretty well (according to the 1926 census half of the Russian Jews named the Russian language as their "mother tongue"), experienced a certain hostility toward traditional Russian culture and its historical monuments. Hence they played a prominent role in the uprooting of Russian culture, and in substituting for it a "proletarian" ("Soviet") Russophone culture. Mostly, this activity was conducted through the national Committee of Education, and through the press, where the majority of the journalists were Jewish. (143)

As a result, Kozlov insists, by 1991, the Russian Federation was the only republic in the USSR where the struggle for independence and sovereignty of the late 1980s and the early 1990s was motivated by universal democratic liberties and political ambitions of the leadership, rather than by the ethnonationalism of the dominant nation so typical of other republics (228). The Russian etnos could not transform itself into a "collective form of the survival of the fittest" (284). Nor was it able to resist the "toxic influence" and "infiltration of the so-called mass culture of the West" (1996, 209). The "insufficient ethnicity" of the Russian intelligentsia only aggravated the grim conditions of the ethnic Russians (275).

Kozlov's argument suggests that this obsession with the incessant production of obituaries for the nation can be seen as an important cultural device, as an effective apparatus through which people in post-Soviet Russia conceptualized a sudden and unexpected collapse of the order of things, of forms of communication, and of types of collectivity that had been developed and refined for decades.[41] These exercises in writing ethnohistories of the Russian tragedy evidence a slow and painful disinvestment from previously important connections and attachments. The actual location of the object of blame, as I demonstrated, can be radically different—be

41. On the link between funeral rituals and the end of political regimes see Borneman (2004a) and Verdery (1999).

it the bomb of Westernism in the writing of the former dissident or the detrimental influence of other etnoses described in the work of the Soviet ethnologist. Yet the result produced by this alienation is the same: a grim picture of a hollowed-out culture and devastated country.

Stirring the Memory of Feelings

How has this history of ethnotrauma relate to other types of symbolic production? How is it integrated with other forms of knowledge and genres of narration? To answer these questions, I rely on published materials and my own conversations with Vasilii Filippov, an active member of the Altai Slavonic Society, and chair of the Philosophy Department at Barnaul State Pedagogical University. A graduate of the Department of Philosophy at Moscow State University, Filippov was assigned to teach in Barnaul during the Khrushchev Thaw and has remained there ever since. From the middle of the 1990s, in cooperation with Vasilii Goncharov, rector of the university from 1973 to 1997, Filippov authored a series of books that examined various aspects of Russian "national self-awareness."[42] Most of these texts were published by the university's press. Except for the most recent book, all of them were peer-reviewed and recommended for publication by professional scholars.[43] Some of the publications were designed as textbooks for university courses in philosophy, history of education, and anthropology; many are used by Filippov in his own courses. The print runs for these publications are between five hundred and fifteen hundred copies, but given the lack of a distribution network, they have not traveled far. I bought two of the most recent publications in local university stores; most of the previously published books have never been reprinted and are available now only in libraries.

During a conversation, I asked Filippov about his intellectual and public activity. He summarized it as an attempt to "open up for [the Russian] people a path to their self-awareness," a path that was "close to nonexistent." As in many other cases described here, this path to self-awareness started with introducing an internal split into the temporal and spatial continuum: the task

42. As Filippov explained in an interview, the cooperation is merely technical—he writes the texts, while the coauthor helps with publication.

43. The usual formula that accompanies most academic books in Russia states that "the book was recommended for publication by such and so." The book that came out in the fall of 2004 states something very different: "This is the authors' edition [*sobstvennaia redaktsiia*] of a book that is based on an independent research of the most brutal and vicious aspects of the expansion of Zionism in Russia in the shape of Trotskyism and Yel'-cynicism" (Filippov and Goncharov 2004, 2).

of defining one's own past was frequently associated with describing someone else's presence. This shift produced an interesting consequence. As Filippov put it in one of his books, "'We' now know much better who 'They' are. Whether 'They' want it or not, 'They' will have failed to extract from us, dominated by 'Their' leadership, more than 'They' have already extracted from us and our Fatherland" (1999, 79). Predictably, "They" in Filippov's version of forced togetherness are predominantly Jewish. To be precise, they are Zionists. Even more often, Filippov uses the hyphenated label "Zion-Fascists" (*siono-fashisty*). His texts, though, always have a paragraph that defines the line between the "Jewish people" and the "Zion-Fascists" (Goncharov and Filippov 1996, 422; Filippov and Goncharov 2004, 31). Yet Filippov's references to the "faces of Zion" make the distinction misleading (Filippov 2000).

Political alienation was not the only result produced by this rhetorical juxtaposition of the "ruling Them" and the "dominated Us." In a similar fashion, Filippov distanced himself from other social institutions. What was distinctive about his approach, though, was his attempt to link the cultural erosion not so much with the demographic decline of the nation but rather with the activity that aimed at altering the very consciousness of Russians. The political alienation is supplemented by linguistic, cultural, and psychological ones. In fact, for Filippov, this "altered state" is precisely the reason that there was no significant reaction on the part of the Russians to the radical worsening of their living conditions. For instance, in his *Russia and the Russian Nation: A Hard Path to Self-Awareness* (1999), descriptions of grim living conditions of the Russian people in the post-Soviet era were followed by the following explanation:

> Ruling today in our Motherland, politicians of foreign descent have subjected Russia and the Russian nation to global looting. But to be able to realize the scope of this act of looting one has to be able to construe the type of relation that looting and violence imply. In order to relate, to suffer, to strive for changes for the best, the individual has to possess the object of this experience in his memory of feelings. If this memory is empty, or if it is stuffed with other motives and strivings, then this individual is incapable of thinking about socially meaningful factors. (63)

Why is one's own "memory of feeling" not reliable anymore? Why does it not retain anymore the object of the traumatic experience? What made this "incapacity of thinking" possible? Filippov explains:

> There are very, very few people thinking seriously about the causes of the current sufferings, which are taking place in a time of peace.…Why don't

many people want to look beyond their own nose? They don't look be-
cause they don't know. They don't think because their memory of feeling
is stuffed with emotions of a different kind. The Yeltsinoids' regime [*rezhim
yel'tsinoidov*] turned us into zombielike TV viewers. Month after month, year
after year the social values of the *Santa Barbara* "heroes" are more impor-
tant for us than our own national values and passions. By substituting our
values and passions with totally foreign desires, the regime—just like a circus
magician—manipulates the individual and collective consciousness of Rus-
sia's peoples. It is the *method of hermeneutics* that serves as the main tool of
this manipulation (1999, 64; emphasis in the original).

The lack of reaction on the part of the nation, in other words, is construed
as a result of emotional amnesia and rhetorical brainwashing: anesthetized
memory of feelings is reinforced by a manipulated consciousness. The pro-
cess of self-alienation does not stop here; the destabilization of interpretive
ability is extended further onto the physical qualities of the Russian etnos
itself. Alienation becomes total.

In his *Contemporary Scientific Conceptions of Man,* published in 1997 by
Barnaul State Pedagogical University as a textbook in anthropology, Filip-
pov follows closely Gumilev's work in order to document how the Zionists
exterminate Russians by forcing them to exhaust their passionarity (Filip-
pov and Goncharov 2004, 237). As Filippov suggests, during this pressure,
the genotype of the nation—its "internal code"—remains intact. The de-
struction is realized through encouraging the formation of a new ethnic
phenotype, a new set of individual features and qualities of the organism.
By turning "mutagenetic" (mutational plus genetic, *mutagennyi*) vices such
as "homosexuality, lesbianism, alcoholism, drugs, prostitution, laziness"
into its way of life, the Russian etnos undergoes an enforced transformation
and completely loses its human face (Filippov 1997, 195–98).

The physical disappearance of the Russian etnos is accelerated by active
interventions of alien forces in two major spheres—work and education.
Referring to Marx, Filippov describes how the work of an average Russian
was transformed into "penal servitude [*katorga*] and plague" from "the pro-
cess of creative, active, initiative labor." A flight from servitude—a reason-
able reaction on the part of average people—could hardly lead to liberation,
though. As Filippov puts it, fleeing from the formative effect of labor brings
the Russian people even "closer to their animal ancestors that evolve into
humans precisely because of labor" (Filippov 1997, 196–97; Goncharov and
Filippov 1996, 309–13).

Correspondingly, education, having been split from labor, became a target
of a global "psychological war" (Filippov 1997, 207). Foreign "foundations

and committees," either through active participation in the post-Soviet revision of textbooks and educational programs or through support for the desired activity of local educators with grants and stipends, managed to "completely twist and deform the history of Russia" by neglecting centuries of the struggle for Russia's independence and unification (203).[44]

Given such an entrenched worldview and a traumatic perception of the nation's history, is there any hope or a solution? In an interview, Filippov insisted that current deformations of the Russian language and culture, the state of "Yel'-cynicism," as he calls it (Filippov and Goncharov 2004), could mean only one thing: Russians are "doomed." Without their own—ethnic Russian—government, state, culture, and education, the Russians have no future and can only temporarily sustain themselves as a "dead-end nation."

In this state of intellectual deadlock and patriotic despair, it is the basic links of relatedness that manage to deliver a positive symbolic effect.[45] In 2000, at the conference on Effective Education at Universities and Schools, Filippov maintained that "not only logic educates. Blood educates too. What the logic of education might be able to solve only in several years, blood can deliver instantaneously" (2000). In the philosopher's view, it is the method of "ethnopedagogy" that can bring together the logic of education and the educational effect of blood relations: "Every student was born as a grandson and will die as a grandparent. School must see and take into account the fact that every student carries with him the spiritual and moral link with three or four generations, at least.…no revolutions, no reforms, no constructions or reconstructions can break up this ethno-genetic chain" (2000). Kinship, family, and generational ties not only connect the individual to his or her habitat. In Filippov's view, they also "determine the basic biosocial and ethnological vectors of being and behavior." Hence, the purpose of ethnopedagogy is not dissimilar from the goals of the authors and practitioners of the *Sufficiently General Theory of Governance,* discussed in

44. In January 2000, at a roundtable discussion of patriotic education that was organized at Barnaul State Pedagogical University by the International Academy of Pedagogical Education, Filippov maintained that "our textbooks have been reflecting the matrix of the market-driven approach to education, as well as to the principles of postmodernism that are established throughout the postsocialist terrain.…Such an antistate and antinational expansion of a huge army of sold-out educators amounts to nothing else but a loss of the national security of Russia and the Russian people.…It is time to get out of our trenches, it is time to start an open fight for the honor and dignity of our Motherland and our education.…We have been retreating in silence for way too long. There is no place for retreat anymore. Beyond us is only nonexistence" (2000).

45. For a similar tendency in other parts of Russia see Rudakov, Kornfel'd, and Baranov (2000, 9).

Fig. 2.2. The cover of Vasilii Filippov's book *Russia and the Russian Nation: A Hard Path to Self-Awareness* (Barnaul: GIPP Altai, 1999).

chapter 1: both want to ensure a stable reproduction of vectors of being and behavior—either in the process of education or through informational pressure. Used as an instrument of internal homogenization, ethnopedagogy is meant to foster the intraethnic cooperation of collectivities "with the same ethno-genetic value orientation," and to ensure a stable reproduction of behavioral patterns, as well as "psycho-physiological reactions" that are common for the members of the given etnos (2000). One of Filippov's books provides a striking image of what the actual content of this "ethno-genetic value orientation" could consist of. The cover of his *Russia and the Russian Nation: A Hard Path to Self-Awareness* presents the Russian nation as an intergenerational collective of warriors: dressed as medieval knights, this militarized community is protecting, and is perhaps inspired by, the Russian Orthodox church behind them (figure 2.2).

Against this intellectual background, it is easier to understand the value of historical ethnotraumas. The Russian tragedy shapes post-Soviet experience in the familiar language of the negative and the traumatic. The

unintelligibility of profound changes, aggravated by a lack of familiarity with new conceptual tools and mechanisms that these changes have brought about, has resulted in multiple narratives of loss and a rejection of the recent past. References to the alienating and alienated mass media, repeated in many interviews during my fieldwork, similarly suggest the lack of a positive symbolic vocabulary that could make the changes of the last two decades understandable. Reproducing—albeit in a reverse way—the logic of Soviet solidarity projected in a utopian future, authors of the Russian tragedy again and again create pictures of "the Russia that we've lost," to use the title of a famous perestroika documentary (Govorukhin 1991). In these ethnotraumas, the commonality of loss in the past ("*we've* lost") suggests the commonality of victims in the present. Locating post-Soviet changes within the context of negative experience and traumatic emotions, the trope of the Russian tragedy cements yet another community of loss.

These stories about lost national culture, degrading language, stolen national wealth, or statehood colonized by the culturally different others cannot be reduced solely to a search for a scapegoat, a search called upon to mobilize the nation through the activation of "archaic" representations and everyday stereotypes.[46] Instead, these traumatic narratives should be construed as a painful practice of "unmaking" the Soviet way of life (Humphrey 2002b), as a sociosymbolic operation of disinvestment from previously important contexts and practices that vanished within a very short period.

The main problem with this form of dealing with the past and present is its dependency on the negative. Despite all the biopolitical divisions and gaps introduced by histories of ethnotrauma they fail to produce a desired reference point. Ethnic divides that are imagined in the process of rewriting the recent and remote past are hardly used as a new beginning, as the constitutive "cut" that could finally outline the range of the subject's symbolic and identificatory possibilities (Lacan 1978, 206). Rather, the discourse of the Russian tragedy, structured by repetitious operations of division and separation, recalls the figure of a stray *deject* described by Julia Kristeva, "A deviser of territories, languages, works, [he] never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines…constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh" (Kristeva 1982, 8).

For authors of the Russian tragedy, a similar questioning of their borders and location was often inspired by the attempt to produce a comprehensive cartography of their alienation—from language, consciousness, culture,

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46. For an example of such archaic interpretation see Gudkov (2005, 7–80).

power, economy. Devoid of a previously stable social position, these de-jecting subjects, paradoxically, conducted the unceasing (and unsuccess-ful) search for the ultimate "anchoring point" that could stop the "endless movement of signification," and render the nation's experience meaningful (Lacan 1977, 303). Filippov's writings vividly demonstrate this tendency. On the one hand, the inability to explain or accept fundamental transfor-mations in the country outside the frame of ethnotrauma leads to the end-less production of fragmented portraits of the abject other, who is held responsible for changes and for their incomprehensibility. On the other hand, the same situation pushes his writing toward a post-Soviet herme-neutics of suspicion, to a profound mistrust of the emerging social order and failure to recognize its representations. The discursive flow is sustained through an incessant compulsion to keep describing the feeling of a gap, the feeling of noncorrespondence between accessible (Russophone or Western-ized) frameworks for desires and one's own values and passions (which re-main unrepresented). In turn, the shrinking interpretive space is perceived as a product of "an expansion of the ideology of cynicism and hypocrisy" (Filippov and Goncharov 2004), as a "large-scale aggression against the human mind and feelings" created by "the social lie" (Filippov 1997, 207).

Despite their differences, histories of ethnotrauma discussed here dem-onstrate a persistent return of the same narrative device. Stories about Russian tragedy are a result of the operation of traumatic split, of painful differen-tiation. Historical or ethnic experience dissected by this split is often dif-ferent, varying from the presocialist past to postsocialist changes, from one ethnicity to another. What seems to be constant, though, is the significance of trauma—imagined or experienced—in forming post-Soviet narratives about the nation. Historical ethnotraumas focused on the injuries of the remote or recent past. The next section explores how a group of Altai eth-novitalists managed to convert recollections of the trauma into a basis for a new will to live. The concepts of "vital forces" and "vital environment" allowed them to weave together subjectivity, space, and organic teleology of the national development.

Forces of Vitalism

With their persistent attempts to introduce a foundational divide in the historical continuum of the nation, these narratives of the Russian tragedy polarize audiences. Barnaul was no different in this respect, but the heated national polemics that accompanied the publication of Solzhenitsyn's *Two Hundred Years Together* had a more localized tone. In Altai, debates about

national traumas and ethnic differentiation were initiated by a local pub-
lication that merged Solzhenitsyn's affective study of togetherness with
Kozlov's thinly disguised anti-Semitism. In 2002, shortly before the first
volume of *Two Hundred Years Together* became available, Aleksandr Pro-
khozhev, a philosophy professor at the Altai State Pedagogical University, the
oldest educational institution in the region, published *The Shadow People:
On The History of Jews in Russia* (2002).[47]

In the 1980s, Prokhozhev was the secretary of the Altai Regional Com-
mittee of the Communist Party, responsible for "ideological issues." After
the collapse of the party-state system, he started his academic career, ac-
tively defending patriotic values in his multiple publications and speeches.
Pointing to a perceived lack of historical studies of Russian Jewry (in Rus-
sian), the former Communist Party functionary presented his book as an
attempt to get rid of a "taboo of sorts" and directly address an overlooked
problem—namely, why it is that "among more than 120 nations and eth-
nicities in the Russian Federation only Jews have no written history of their
own; only Jews do not use their own language, and constantly try instead to
present their own national Russophonic culture as the culture of the Rus-
sians, or as a national culture of [the Russian Federation]?" (2002, 3). The
answer to this riddle followed pretty quickly. Listing already familiar argu-
ments, on page 4 of the book Prokhozhev puts it bluntly:

> In our opinion, the most important reason for such a silencing of the his-
> tory of the Russian Jews is the detrimental role that a part of the Jewry has
> played and continues to play in Russia. One could always find Jews impli-
> cated to some extent in every turmoil, revolution or counterrevolution, or
> in any other cataclysm that happened to our state. The main executioners of
> Russia almost always are non-Russian; most of them are Jews. Against this
> horrifying backdrop of Russia's grief and misery, any productive input of the
> majority of the Russian Jews, who built and defended our country together
> with many other nations, looks pale. (4)

The rest of the 278-page text is devoted to the portrayal of this grim
backdrop. Prokhozhev's recitation of a detailed list of Russian sufferings
concludes with an appeal that these "unprecedented crimes of the Zionist-
Jewish fascists against the Russian people and other peoples of Russia

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47. Typically for publications of this kind, the publisher is not specified here. The number
of printed copies indicated in the book is nine hundred. The book was reviewed for publication
by a professor of economy and a professor of philosophy. It is not available in regular book-
stores but can easily be bought in the local university bookshops and kiosks.

should be condemned by the International Court [of Justice?] in the Hague" (2002, 258).

While the "Prokhozhev affair" did not produce any new arguments, it helpfully demarcated positions of local intellectuals in regard to ethnic difference. More important, these debates drew attention to local academic projects in which relations between the etnos and the state were envisioned quite differently from narratives of the Russian tragedy. The debates illustrate one of the most advanced local attempts to theorize the role of current changes in the history of the Russian nation.

In the summer of 2002, the Altai Slavonic Society awarded one of its annual prizes to *The Shadow People* in the category "science and education." Staged in the regional public library, the award ceremony was the culminating point in celebrating the Days of Slavic Script and Culture[48] and was meant to acknowledge people and institutions that had demonstrated "faithfulness [*vernost'*] to national traditions" in their recent work (Tokmakov 2002). In a conversation with Filippov, a member of the society's board and a colleague of Prokhozhev, I asked him about the academic value of *The Shadow People.* My question had a very practical underpinning—in Prokhozhev's book Filippov is listed as "the academic editor." Deflecting responsibility, Filippov described the publication as a product of conspiracy. "This is not [Prokhozhev's own work]. He was just framed. Everything came from Moscow.…He was just given money" to publish it. Filippov also criticized the use of the word "shadow" in the title, pointing out that Prokhozhev "should not have used it. We, the Russians, have even more shadows." The philosopher, however, never articulated this opinion in his own writing. Instead, in his latest book Filippov strongly defended Prokhozhev against criticism in the local media, referring to it as yet another "clear example of the inflaming of anti-Semitism among the Altai people by some local intellectuals of Jewish descent" (Filippov and Goncharov 2004, 216–17).

Members of the Slavonic Society's award committee were not the only ones who found the publication of Prokhozhev's book important. In the

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48. Since 1986, Russia has annually celebrated the Day of Slavic Script and Culture (*Den' slavianskoi pis'mennosti i kul'tury*) on May 24. Originally the Day of the Russian Saints Cyril and Methodius, the founders of the Slavonic (Cyrillic) alphabet, the celebration was officially recognized in 1991 by the state and now enjoys unique status as a religious and civic holiday (*tserkovno-gosudarstvennyi prazdnik*), so far the only holiday of its kind in Russia's calendar. Usually the celebration consists of book exhibits, performances of choir music, and conferences on various aspects of Slavic culture. Highly infused with patriotism and the self-congratulatory rhetoric of national exceptionality, the Day of Slavic Script and Culture is often used as an opportunity to revisit the brightest pages of national history.

fall of 2002, Sergei Danilov, a Barnaul lawyer, requested from the regional prosecutor's office a judicial opinion about the book, citing as his legal ground Article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code, which criminalizes attempts to provoke national and religious hatred. The regional prosecutor asked several professors from the School of Sociology at Altai State University to provide their scientific opinion of the book, including a linguistic, psychological, and historical analysis of the text. Partly on the basis of these reports, the prosecutor deemed Danilov's request to be groundless. One of these experts, a department chair, told me that the case was a "politically motivated event" since the book was an academic project and had nothing in common with hate speech or inflammatory accusations. In the official letter from the prosecutor's office publicized in the fall of 2002, the book was cited as an example of "freedom of thought and speech" granted by the Constitution, and was qualified as neither insulting anyone in particular nor threatening to violently undermine the state order (the two types of hate speech with clearly defined legal consequences) (*Svobodnyi kurs* 2002).

The story did not end there. On the basis of Danilov's appeal, the general prosecutor of the Russian Federation initiated a lawsuit against Prokhozhev, citing the same article of the Criminal Code (Negreev 2004).[49] Reacting to this news, several Altai organizations, the Slavonic Society among them, created the Committee for Defense of A. Prokhozhev. The newspaper *Vitiaz'* (The Knight), published by the Slavonic Society, supported Prokhozhev's publication and labeled the criticism a witch hunt organized by "illegal or semi-illegal Zionist organizations" in the region against those writers, academics, and journalists "who describe the objective and honest history of the Jewish etnos in Russia" (Belozertsev 2004).

More significantly, the book was also supported by Sviatoslav Grigor'ev, dean of the Faculty of Sociology at Altai State University at the time, and the main leader of the Slavonic Society. His defense was not a small matter given the faculty's prominent position in the region. In an interview with the university newspaper *Za nauku*! (For Science!) Grigor'ev said:

> It is true that I spoke in favor of this book and, in favor of literature of this sort in general. That is to say, in favor of the literature that does not call people to pick up an axe [*ne prizyvaet k toporu*] but educates them. This real education is not about things that have happened and are happening with the Jewish people; I would not even frame it this way. It is all about the Zionist expansion in the world in general and in our country in particular.

49. The case has been pending for years, and no official decision has been made.

> The Zionist danger is no less fearsome than the Communist danger, which created the situation of castration of the Russian national self-awareness and of the Russian culture in our country, which created a situation of the global crises of Russian national statehood, Russian culture. As a sociologist, a citizen, and a Russian person, I am concerned, and this concern is justified historically as well as practically, because the takeover of property and power in the 1990s by the Jewish ethnic minority has resulted today in a very conflictual situation. (2004)

As in many cases discussed earlier, the exercise of biopolitical division in this quote produced a double effect: the ethnic split also introduced a political one. The traumatic Russian experience was extricated from the Communist past first and then was juxtaposed with it. Difference was turned into dichotomy.

For the Altai ethnovitalists—by contrast with many authors of the Russian tragedy—the documenting of the nation's trauma was not an end in itself. Grigor'ev's appeal to the educational merits of "literature of this sort" in the interview was symptomatic. Throughout the 1990s, the Faculty of Sociology at Altai State University was actively developing a comprehensive, albeit often confusing, sociological theory in which issues of ethnic difference became a prominent tool for explaining Russia's current condition. The "situation of castration," as Grigor'ev called it, the recognition of irreversible loss, seemed to mark a starting point for narrating not just the past but also the future of the Russian etnos. The genre of historical and/or political blame was transformed into educational readings, social policies, and methodological ruminations.

How were these stories about horrifying grief and misery translated into an analysis of the etnos's vitality? How did this particular "system of marks"—to use Derrida's definition of racism—outline "space in order to assign forced residence or to close off borders" (1985, 292)? In other words, how did the situation of castration help to organize a community? The rest of this chapter discusses the "sociological theory of vital forces" (*zhiznennye sily*) that was developed under Grigor'ev's leadership at Altai State University.[50] It explains how this version of ethnovitalism manages to render

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50. In many cases no exact English translation of the categories created by these sociologists is possible. "Vital forces" is one of them. The Russian word *zhiznennye* (from *zhizn'*, life) could be rendered as "life-giving." The Altai sociologists also use "vitalism" and "vitalist sociology" (*vitalistskaia*) to describe their approach. Following their practice, I will use "vital forces," even though the term implies a connection with the European ideas of vitalism that the Altai sociologists do not have.

dramatic changes meaningful and to articulate a posttraumatic vision of the Russian national identity by using a biopolitical divide as the foundation for a bigger picture of the nation, the country, and the world.

The "sociological school of vital forces," as this intellectual movement is often known, emerged in the 1990s as a network of educational institutions and publications at Altai State University. Despite its provincial location, this is not a marginalized movement on the periphery of the discipline. Rather, it represents a mainstream tendency in official Russian sociology. The influence of ethnovitalists is not limited to the Altai region. The school (both the movement and the faculty) is recognized nationally, and is increasingly cited in national academic journals as an example of a growing field of the "sociology of life."[51] In 2007, Russia's major publisher of college textbooks printed a book by Grigor'ev in the series *National Social Education of Russia in the XXI Century: The Basics of Quality,* presenting the "famous Russian sociologist" as the author of a new "sociological paradigm" (Grigor'ev 2007). Liudmila Gusliakova, chair of the Department of Social Work at the time and a driving force of the faculty, told me that the school's national standing could be easily described by the formula "You may not like us, but you cannot not take us into account."

The intellectual and organizational shaping of the faculty was possible to a large extent because of perestroika. At the end of the 1980s, sociology was a very limited academic field in the Soviet Union. Only three universities (in Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev) had master's programs in this discipline. There were no doctoral degrees in sociology, and dissertations with sociological topics or methods would usually be written and defended only as a part of the training in scientific Communism or philosophy. The first major breakthrough happened in 1990 when nineteen universities in the former Soviet Union accepted nine hundred students in sociology. Altai State University was among them. A small laboratory of applied sociological studies of youth, started by Grigor'ev in 1989, was officially reformed as the Department of Sociology with an MA track.

The novelty of sociology at the time, combined with the political savvy and good administrative skills of several young professors, quickly turned the department into a large educational industry. The faculty was instituted as the "Educational, Academic, and Practical Complex of Sociology, Psychology, and Social Work" (*uchebno-nauchno-proizvodstevnnyi kompleks*). Along with its seven departments, the complex includes a College of Social

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51. For some examples see Bolgov (2003); Dalnov and Klimov (2003); Guzalenko (2003); Nemirovskii and Nevirko (2002); Reznik (2000).

Sciences, a Crisis Center for Men, and several smaller centers of psychological counseling for children and families (Rastov et al. 2000, 118–24).[52] The faculty also has a permanent Dissertation Council that is certified to grant the highest academic degrees of candidate of science and doctor of science necessary for an academic career (Grigor'ev was the council's chair and had to sign off on each dissertation.)[53] With all its divisions, more than a thousand students, and dozens of scholars pursuing advanced degrees, the faculty is the largest institution of sociology in Siberia and claims to be the third largest sociological institution in the country (109). The faculty is also the major local educational institution that supplies cadres for regional administrations, institutions of social work, and educational organizations in Altai. It significantly influences the makeup of the regional intellectual elite and the nature of the intellectual climate in the region. In spring 2004, Grigor'ev even had a chance to give his sociological theory a political test, when Mikhail Evdokimov, the governor, appointed him a vice governor of the regional administration in charge of social issues.[54]

This extensive institutional growth of Russian sociology, however, happened while the discipline was repeatedly questioning its academic legacy and standards. Scholars of different generations and theoretical orientations were increasingly suggesting that Russian sociology as a professional and academic field still lacked an intellectual identity.[55] In that respect, the sociology of vital forces, often branded as a "regional scientific school of thought" usefully outlined the scope of tools and approaches that were perceived instrumental for creating a new intellectual community in a post-Soviet province. It is symptomatic that issues of national identity became a major motivating factor in this seemingly academic project.

52. The school includes seven departments: General Sociology; Empirical Sociology and Conflict Studies; Social Work; Social Technologies, Innovations, and Management; Psychology; Psychology of Communications and Psychotechnologies; and Mathematical Methods in Social Sciences.

53. To illustrate the scope of the Altai Dissertation Council's intellectual influence: in July 2004, during its summer session the council held several public meetings in which one doctoral and seven candidate dissertations were publicly defended by three scholars from the Altai region, one from Vladivostok; two from eastern Siberia; and three from different regions of western Siberia (Degtiarev 2004).

54. Ultimately it did not quite work. After less than a year Grigor'ev resigned, following the unexpected death of the governor who appointed him. In March 2006, he moved to Moscow, accepting a double offer from a Moscow university and department of social development and environmental protection of the Russian government (*Altai Daily Review* 2006). This assignment did not last long either, and in a few months Grigor'ev returned to Barnaul.

55. For different interpretations of the disciplinary crisis see Toshenko (2002); Bikbov and Gavrilenko (2002, 2003); Shpakova (2003); Malinkin (2006); Filippov (2006).

In spite of dozens of monographs, collected volumes, textbooks, curriculum standards, and conference proceedings published by the faculty, it is not that easy to grasp the concepts behind them. Published texts often contain little factual material. Most of them are written in a genre of academic reflection upon a theoretical or methodological issue. Articles tend to be structured self-referentially, with a few often recurring foundational passages and definitions used to justify rather than explain the key terms and ideas of vitalist sociology. Academic recycling seems to be the major strategy that ensures the high volume of the faculty's publications; with minor or no changes at all, the same texts are reproduced under different titles.[56]

In 1999, in a text that Grigor'ev coauthored with Iurii Rastov, a senior sociologist of the faculty, the scholars traced their epistemological evolution. Citing their own studies of migration and employment patterns conducted in the 1970s as a source for their later generalizations, the sociologists claimed that "each subject of social life has in his or her possession a different set of potentialities of subjecthood [*nabory potentsii sub"ektnosti*]." As the sociologists observed, the practical realization of these potentialities depends on three major elements: particular "features of the social space," the subject's "ability to comprehend" these features adequately, and a "system of factors called vital forces" (Grigor'ev and Rastov 1999, 8). The individual or group's ability to purposefully utilize their vital forces indicates their level of "subjecthood" (Grigor'ev and Matveeva 2002, 58–81).

In the absence of a Russian equivalent for the English "agency," the subjecthood of ethnovitalism was understood first of all as an essentialist entity, "the self-ness" (*samost'*) that gradually unfolds itself in time and space, as I was reminded in conversations with Altai scholars. Regardless of its exact content, the ethnovitalist subjecthood did help to move sociological studies from lifeless Marxist analyses of relations of production to the "human-centeredness" and "culture-centeredness" (*chelovekotsentrichnost', kulturostentrichnost'*) of individual and group interactions. In other words, the notion of subjecthood was instrumental in overcoming the limits of the traditional "dialectical relations" between base and superstructure, firmly established in Soviet-style social analysis (Grigor'ev 2003a, 79; 2003c, 20). Later, the primary analytic focus of the school was shifted from subjecthood to vital forces that actually help to make the subjecthood real (Grigor'ev and Subetto 2000, 91).

56. The faculty has a small publishing division; it also edits and publishes *Sibirskii Sotsiologicheskii Vestnik* (Siberian Sociological Courier). The number of articles published by the faculty's sociologists in the nationally recognized academic journals is extremely low, however.

As Altai vitalists often stress, the analytical task of the category of vital forces is far from discovering or even describing some hidden essence of the human being. Vital forces is a sociological rather than a philosophical category; hence, its main purpose is to help explain how the "individual or collective subject of life-implementation" exists in actual space and time (Grigor'ev and Subetto 2000, 103; Grigor'ev 1999a, 26).

The major impetus for developing the concept of human vital forces came from yet another sociological study done by a group of Altai sociologists in the early 1990s. The study traced the regional consequences of the nuclear test explosions conducted in the neighboring Semipalatinsk region (Kazakhstan) from 1949 to 1962.[57] The detrimental impact of the tests was certainly known to the Soviet officials and the local population, yet until perestroika there was neither discussion of this case nor social services for the people who suffered from these explosions. The sociological project was a part of the general policy of openness started by Gorbachev in the mid-1980s, and it was meant to provide the government with practical recommendations that would enable it to minimize negative social consequences of the Semipalatinsk tragedy (Grigor'ev and Rastov 1999, 11). In a 1994 report titled *The Sociologist in the Region of Ecological Insecurity,* two prominent members of the faculty concluded that along with "obvious manifestations of genetic instability among the offspring" of those who had experienced the influence of the explosions in 1949–62, there also was a "multiple and diverse decrease of the vitality (*zhiznestoikost'*)" of the cohorts in question. The population at large was "negatively affected" (Grigor'ev and Demina 1994, 15).

This traumatic origin of Altai vitalism is important, as is the original combination of issues of environmental disaster, health, and political responsibility, on which the initial project was based. By the end of the 1990s, the traumatic foundation of the concept was generalized; references to a specific politico-environmental disaster were replaced by a version of the Russian tragedy. Traumatic experience acquired the force of an intellectual matrix and became an effective interpretive and narrative device. To quote Grigor'ev:

> The transformation of the general order of social life, mass alcoholism, criminalization of both daily life and the governmental sphere, living standards

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57. During these years, Semipalatinsk was used as the main site for testing nuclear bombs above and under ground. For more than a decade, the population in Altai was exposed to the flow of radiation from the testing ground.

below the sustenance level—all that provoked illnesses, increased mortality, and decreased life expectancy among all native people of Russia.... This situation not only brings up questions of national and state security in Russia, but also [it points toward] the numerical decrease in the national-cultural community [of the country] of the state-forming etnos [*gosudarstvoobrazuiushchii*]—that is to say, Russians and other native peoples. (Grigor'ev 1999b, 36)

Significantly, in the process of this generalizing shift, the split between the etnos and ethno-social organisms—that is to say, the split between the nation and the state so typical of late Soviet theories of ethnicity—was somewhat overcome. The state emerged as a direct continuation of the etnos, or, perhaps even more important, the state was now construed as a primary condition for the etnos's survival. True, there were plenty of appeals to Russian ethnic statehood in the work of Kozlov or Filippov discussed earlier. Ethnovitalist constructions radically changed the context of these appeals. The state was no longer construed as a contested apparatus of classes or etnoses. Instead, as Tamara Semilet, another prolific scholar of the vital forces school puts it, the state reflected "the ethnopolitical status of the people," being "a form of vital activity of the 'social body' of culture" (Semilet 2003a, 71). To use Shirokogorov's language, the state was turned into part and parcel of the ethnic milieu, into a biopolitical institution that helped to maintain "the vital forces of national communities" (Grigor'ev 1999b, 42).

Within the framework of ethnovitalism, survival of the Russian etnos was no longer constructed only as an issue of significant cultural and historical proportions. It also became a matter of the socioecological security of the state and the nation (Grigor'ev 2003a, 182–83), as well as a burning question of "ecology of individuals and etnoses" (Grigor'ev and Subetto 2003a, 101–7). Correspondingly, the main task of the nonclassical sociology of vital forces, then, was no less than "the creation of theory and practice of the civilization of the managed socionatural [*sotsio-prirodnaia*] evolution" (Grigor'ev 2000b, 131).

Such intertwining of biological metaphors and sociological analysis, as the anthropology of science has demonstrated, often reflects the emerging character of a new discipline. For instance, in her study of American immunology, Emily Martin showed how the vocabulary of the new field of research was created largely through borrowing images and metaphors of the nation-state: "As immunology describes it, bodies are imperiled nations

continuously at war to quell alien invaders. These nations have sharply defined borders in space, which are constantly besieged and threatened" (Martin 1990, 421). For Martin, the popularity of this somatic nationalism reveals two major dynamics. A lack of a developed analytic language in the new discipline forced scholars to look for ready-made tropes and interpretive tools elsewhere. At the same time, the familiarity and metaphorical transparency of traditional images of the nation-state turned the language of the "state war" into a terminological prosthesis ready to fill the symbolic vacuum.

What is crucial in such borrowings, as Martin suggests, is the ideological work that this imagery does: violence is inscribed in the very core of daily life and is envisioned as a part of the body's function (Martin 1990, 417). The attractiveness of somatic nationalism is not determined only by the all-permeating nation-state discourse, however. By naturalizing the nonorganic or the social, bodily tropes also turn the organismic logic into a self-sustaining and perpetually unfolding narrative: the organic organization of the etnos is construed as the primary mode of ethnic being and as the primary purpose of its existence.

In their attempts to strengthen the language of sociology with the terminology of the nation-state, Altai ethnovitalists seemed to follow the model described by Martin. Images of health and illness were dominant, yet the application of these images was reversed. It was society and sociology that were expressed now in naturalized terms. As a result, the academic project was increasingly construed as a corrective discipline. Grigor'ev even published a text that outlined the necessity of instituting "social therapy" as a new branch of contemporary sociology (2000, 134). The new field of academic social therapy is still in its infancy; a therapeutic function, however, clearly underlies vitalist sociology as a whole.

The generalization of traumatic experience also modified the construction of the agent of this experience. Original demographic groups ("victims of radioactive exposure") evolved into "national groups" and "national-ethnic communities" (Grigor'ev 1999b, 42). Statistical populations were turned back into ethnic peoples, to reverse and rephrase Agamben (1999, 84). Implicitly following Gumilev, Altai vitalists reproduced and theorized further the link between ethnic passionarity and ethnic place of development: the basic category of vital forces was supplemented by its spatial counterpart—the category of the "vital environment" (*zhiznennoe prostranstvo*). The categorical production eventually resulted in "culturevitalism," a peculiar amalgam of organic metaphors and cultural categories that brought together the biological, the ethnic, and the territorial.

Society-Organism and Its Enemies

Within the nonclassical vitalism of Altai sociologists, the specific origin of vital forces is not exactly clear, as was also the case with the more classical European vitalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Wheeler 1939; Cimino and Duchesneau 1997). Gumilev's theory of passionary etnoses is often acknowledged as extremely significant (Grigor'ev 2003b, 29), and many ethnovitalists do explore various aspects of energy exchange between nature and human beings. Different types of energy, it is said, are absorbed from nature through the senses, then transformed and accumulated as psycho-energetic systems in the nervous system and brains (Bobrov 2000, 56; see also Soboleva 2000). Others talk about *Homo vivens,* "a bio-psycho-social being with inherent physical, psychic, and social forces as a source of this being's life" (Rastov 2003, 99). As a particular example, Iurii Rastov, a sociologist of conflict, cites his study of "poor categories" of people who are rarely inclined to protest, despite their objectively bad living conditions. As he concludes, this incoherence reflects the "predominance of physically and psychically defective people" among these categories: "It is impossible to multiply forces when one has none" (100).

In Grigor'ev's own work, the social racism that equates possession with access and, conversely, associates dispossession with degeneration acquired a somewhat different form.[58] It was not the inherent life sources that become problematic for the scholar. Referring to the history of the Slavic etnos as his evidence, he insisted that traditionally the key organizing principle in Slavic history was not blood or kinship but the territorial community (*obshchina*) that sustained the viability of the etnos (Grigor'ev 2001, 121). Following closely Gumilev's argument about the crucial importance of the place of ethnic development, Grigor'ev insisted on securing the unique configuration of vital forces that were shaped by each national-ethnic community in the process of a very particular "interaction with the vital environment, habitat, and the means of livelihood" (2000b, 47).

It is precisely this ability of ethnovitalists to translate the narrative of the Russian tragedy into a narrative about inalienable cultural property, cultural protection, and defense that moved them beyond the preoccupation with past injuries and suffering. The familiar trope of the region in danger acquired pragmatic tones. Histories of ethnotrauma were finally relocated within the context of national security. In her study of *Culture-*

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58. For more on latent and overt racism in post-Soviet social sciences see Voronkov et al. (2002).

Vitalism, published in 2004 by Altai State University and used as a course book for philosophy students, Tamara Semilet, a philosophy professor, outlined the problem of "national cultural security" and provided a list of "threats to the vital forces." The list, in fact, succinctly summarizes grievances about the current state of Russian culture frequently voiced in the mass media. External dangers to national culture, for instance, include the domination of foreign languages, alien religions, foreign-born ideals and standards, external attempts to dominate the internal political life of the country, radical modifications of patterns of social ties and interactions, imposition of a "cultural inferiority complex," and the "apathy of despair" (2004, 63–64). The mutual pressure of etnoses reappeared here as cultural intrusion, and ethnosphere became a stage for the global competition of etnoses (Koltakov and Moskvichev 2001).

Geopolitical scenarios of Altai ethnovitalists did not escape a touch of historicizing called upon to visualize the steady diminishing of the vital space of Russian culture. For instance, during the conference "Vital Forces of the Slavic People at the Turn of Centuries and Worldviews: The Multi-facetedness of the Problem," organized in December 2000 by the faculty of Altai State University, presenters listed multiple facts that could easily be summed up in the following quotation: "On average, from the times of Ivan the Terrible until the middle of the nineteenth century, our country's territory was increasing daily by one square kilometer. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Russia entered a process of slow shrinking. Back then it occupied one-fifth of the world's land surface; now it can barely claim one-seventh of it" (Rastov N. D. 2001, 38).

In more up-to-date versions of a similar narrative, "etnoses of the G-7 [countries]"—often referred to as the "gold billion" (*zolotoi milliard*)—are portrayed as being deeply invested in reducing "the Russian, and predominantly Slavic, population to 40–50 million" (Koltakov and Moskvichev 2001, 136) to be used as a cheap labor force in order to "serve the interests of the world capital-elite," with Russia itself becoming a deindustrialized country with no control over its natural resources (Subetto 2001, 63).[59]

This combination of issues of security, ethnicity, and territory brought back Gumilev's ideas about the importance of the specifically Eurasian place of development. Space and power were firmly linked. As some ethnovitalists like to claim, historically Russia-Eurasia was located *between* the East and the West, occupying simultaneously "the middle and 'the heart.'" The vital

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59. For a detailed discussion, see the previous chapter.

position determined Russia's role as a "cultural mediator" between different cultural poles, and a "synthesizer" of different cultural logics (Ivanov 2001, 281; Grigor'ev 2000b, 99–100). Such a location means that the collapse of Russia would not be a problem of the Russian or even Slavic etnoses only:

> As the Eurasian civilization, Russia is the center of world stability and insta-bility. If the strategic plan [of the world's master minders, *mondialisty*] to confederate Russia were to succeed…instability would settle here. The West and the East would clash; China would make a geopolitical shift toward Si-beria. Germany would "shift" towards the East; the Islamist fundamentalism would also "shift" along the axis of the Volga–River-the North Caucasus-Kazakhstan. A geopolitical disturbance [*smuta*] of grand proportions would then happen. And humankind would hardly succeed in getting out of it, be-cause "portable nuclear bombs," not to mention other weapons of mass de-struction, have become a reality these days. (Subetto 1999, 12)

To stop a potential worldwide catastrophe, as Grigor'ev and Subetto have suggested, one needs to understand that the model of personality devel-oped throughout the course of the Russian history is opposite the liberal model (2003a, 105). Within the framework of ethnovitalists, the primacy of collectivity (*sobornost'*), the unity of the individual, society, and the state that was claimed to be typical of the Russians, emerged as a product of a particular Eurasian location, with its specific climate and extensive land-scape. Survival and preservation of the Russian "society-organism," they claimed, should begin with introducing an "ecology of the Russian people" and with developing a study of "social virology" as a "special scientific field" that could explore and prevent a "special type of 'sociopsychological war' aimed at destroying the backbone of the ethnos's social memory, its basic value system, and its worldview paradigm" (101–2).

With its bio-psycho-social ethnic body, its organic culture, and its rhe-torical "violence in the name of the vital," as the anthropologist James Fau-bion calls it (2003, 78), the administrative and academic success of vitalist sociology is symptomatic of a process through which communities were imagined and institutionalized in post-Soviet Russia. To some degree, this example revealed an experimental situation: a group of scholars with a background in social sciences and humanities, with extensive experience of international academic travel, and with access (however limited) to world academic literature set about to create a new framework for their sociologi-cal data. Starting from scratch, without institutional support or intellectual constraints of the discipline, the school of vital forces in a short time man-aged to consolidate people and financial resources around the persistent

production of quasi-academic narratives, which were structured around the idea of ethnic division.

The traumatic origin of vital forces, the therapeutic goal of ethnovitalist narratives, and the underlying striving to create a protective discursive shield of ethnic cohesion cannot, however, hide the main logical flaw in this theory. The social therapy of this vitalism could sustain itself only through securing a constant production of objects-symptoms for its own application: from the situation of castration of Russian culture to the viral infection of the etnos's backbone, from the global competition of etnoses to the broken genetic code of the national culture.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the ethnovitalist approach is far from being a marginal one in Russia. This analysis of Soviet theories of ethnicity has showed how the analytic separation of the etnos from the state both prefigured current ideas of ethnic solidarity rooted in a particular terrain and helped to frame post–cold war relations as a geopolitics of etnoses. In turn, a discussion of different versions of the Russian tragedy made obvious how metaphors of national pain often led directly to searching for the subject of blame, to defining an institutional, ideological, or ethnic entity that could be held responsible for the trauma of the nation. Yet this delegation of responsibility for the nation's history, this alienation of the past, which only recently was a part of everyone's biography, could also be interpreted as a historically specific affective mapping, as a symbolic tactic used by communities of loss that found themselves in a radically changing environment without any accommodating tools or navigating charts. Blame acts here as an operation of registering the ungraspable without understanding it, as a gesture of recognition of one's own inability to interpret emerging differences and shifting boundaries. By breaking a population into distinctive groups, by separating out some groups, these xenophobic discourses of ethnic difference created the desired effect of intelligibility when dealing with the nation's unpredictable past and rapidly changing present.

Conclusion

"People Cut in Half"

"We ended up in between. Not old, not young.…We did not become patriotic. We did not become cosmopolitan, either. We were filled with hatred for *Sovok*. But for some reason, every New Year's Eve we still sing *Unbreakable Union*" (Minaev 2007, 7; emphasis in the original). *Sovok* is a pejorative term for the Soviet Union; the song about the "Unbreakable Union of Freeborn Republics"—is the old Soviet anthem. The quotation is from the introductory essay that Sergei Minaev, a successful writer and businessman from Moscow, wrote for an edited collection of texts by his peers—Russian authors born between 1970 and 1976. Presented as a countercultural phenomenon, the anthology is devoted mainly to the remembrance of the USSR (Litprom.ru 2007)

There is a paradox connected with the Soviet legacy in contemporary Russia. Attempts to revisit, retain, and reconstruct traces of this vanishing period are increasing as the USSR is becoming more and more the property of professional historians. Multiple polls have traced a steady tendency: more than half of Russians (*rossiiane*) regret the disappearance of the Soviet Union. A third believe that the collapse was inevitable. But there is still no general agreement about the causes of this collapse, almost two decades after the event. About a quarter of those who were polled in 2007 pointed to "the irresponsible behavior" of Boris Yeltsin (Russia), Leonid Kravchuk (Ukraine), and Stanislav Shushkevich (Belarus), who on December 8, 1991, agreed to end the USSR. About 20 percent cited "the people's disappointment" with the Soviet government led by Mikhail Gorbachev. Yet others referred to the "hostile conspiracy of foreign forces" (16 percent) or to the

"total exhaustion" of the Communist ideology (15 percent). Strikingly, despite the strong attachment to the Soviet past, only 16 percent said they would welcome the resurrection of the USSR in its previous form.[1]

Nostalgic feelings, predictably, are decreasing among younger generations, yet they are still very prominent among those who have been shaped in the 1990s, both during and by the collapse of the USSR.[2] The generations that ended up in between are already determining the country's cultural development and will increasingly influence its political agenda as well. Their investment in the past should not be misread, though. Most of these children of reform have no illusions about state socialism, and they have learned their lessons about purges, repressions, and the gulag. But they have also experienced their own share of the Soviet experiment, associated mostly with the Politburo's elderly members rather than with Stalin's iron fist. Their socialism was more domestic than political, and their Soviet legacy is one of the very few sources through which they can explain, if not understand, the historical forces that so dramatically split their lives into Soviet and post-Soviet segments.

Given Russia's current development, this basic cultural inclination to come to terms with the recent past (or even to find appropriate terms for it) will perhaps only become stronger. The "rowdy 1990s" (*likhie devianostye*), as this period is labeled retrospectively in Russia now, passed too quickly to have established a stable ground or produced a cultural demand for any serious self-reflection.[3] The relative "stability" of the first decade of the new century provided both a time-out and a historical distance, necessary for taking a probing retrospective look at the recent past.

It is remarkable that in these increasingly frequent attempts to capture the meaning of the post-Soviet liminality, the children of reform appealed to the primacy of traumatic experience. In the late 1980s, the magazine *Ogonek* made glasnost real by opening important debates about Stalinism. In 2007, the magazine reexamined the changes started by perestroika by publishing

1. For details see the report "What Do Russians Regret about the Collapse of the USSR?" based on a sociological poll conducted in December 2007 by the Levada Center, a major Russian polling firm, http://www.polit.ru/research/2007/12/24/ussr.html.

2. Among Russians between twenty-five and thirty-nine years old, 40 percent regretted the collapse of the USSR. The proportion is higher among older people ("What Do Russians Regret?").

3. *Likhoi* has a double meaning in Russian—the root, *likho,* means "evil," but it can also be used to describe something unrestrained, bold, and dashing.

a review of Minaev's edited collection. Epitomizing a larger trend, the essay was titled "I Have a Trauma." Andrei Arkhangelskii, a literary critic, wrote,

> We are used to talking through our problems one on one, but never—as a country.… Therefore, every generation carries its own trauma with it, unspoken. When compared with the war or repressions, the wrecking [*razval*] of the USSR is nothing special, of course. Just do not try to tell this to my generation.… Yes, we managed to catch the late Brezhnev; and possibly, we were the most loyal Soviet kids ever. The childhood we had was not very affluent but it was peaceful; and we loved that country for it—in our own way, no doubt, but sincerely, nonetheless. In 1991 those who taught us to cherish the motherland as the apple of one's eye informed us that the country had ended—for objective reasons. "Objective" is a good word, but can anyone be objective during the funeral of one's own mother? (2007)

In his interview with the *New York Times,* Minaev himself appealed to similar metaphors in his description of the generation of those who were destined forever to remain ex-Soviet: "We are people cut in half. We were born "v Sovke" [in the Soviet Union]. Then in the 1990s they drastically changed everything. They said, 'OK, now we're watching another channel. We're not watching this one anymore." They said forget about all the heroes, forget about the entire cultural heritage, forget about everything. We've changed the picture. Now survive.' It's like throwing house pets into the forest" (as quoted in Kishkovsky 2007).

This book has attempted to show how this language of trauma articulated by "people cut in half" gradually emerged in Russia as the main symbolic framework for describing radical changes of the 1990s and their consequences in the following decade. The end of the country provoked multiple discourses and rituals, in which personally felt dramatic events wove identity, loss, and the nation into a plausible narrative—with a collapsed state, radical economic reforms, dramatic transformations of social values, and changing cultural patterns in the background. For many of my informants "trauma" was more than a striking image for sudden and inexplicable ruptures in their lives. In many cases there was nothing metaphoric about violence, deaths, or suffering. Yet what unites experience-based trauma and imaginary trauma is a profound desire to get beyond objective reasoning in order to transform the transitional experience into something very tangible: headstones, leaflets, theoretical frameworks, or war songs.

In some cases, elaborate rituals of mourning and memorialization created a lasting link with the past. In others, the recognition of loss led to the

incessant production of obituaries able to retain in words (or to provide an account of) what had been lost. In yet other cases, the search for a meaningful connection resulted in establishing emotional attachments with dramatic events that had not been witnessed and emotional memories that had never been shared. The production and circulation of such narratives and rituals frequently led to a particular form of collectivity—communities of loss. There is, of course, not that much new about this type of belonging in Russia. Consider again Viktor Shklovsky, a Russian formalist, who compared St. Petersburg after the Bolshevik Revolution to a group of men after an explosion: their insides have been torn out, but they sit and keep on talking (2004, 133–34). Separated from Shklovsky by several wars, seventy years of state socialism, and almost two decades of market reforms, during my fieldwork in Barnaul I had a chance to witness people talking after yet another "explosion." These retrospective conversations provided a historical bookend, a culturally specific narrative of closure—for the regime and the country but also for the experiment that gave birth to the Soviet way of life.

Structured by the recollection of personal or historical traumas, the communities of loss discussed in this book habitually framed their relations in naturalizing terms, be it soldiers' brotherhood, mothers' committees, ethnic milieus, or various organic metaphors for the Russian national body. New forms of social kinship emerged through a vocabulary of shared pain: the memory of blood and the memory of suffering seemed to merge in these forms of connectedness. It was this patriotism of despair" that brought the country, the nation, and the traumatic experience together. A wounded attachment, the patriotism of despair deflected rather than healed pain. It was a promise of a community bound by the solidarity of grief. A community of loss, no doubt, but a community, nonetheless.

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