

## 19. Extinção / Extinction (2018)

### **Technical details**

HD video, 2:39, black and white, Dolby 5.1 sound, 80 min., Germany – Portugal

### **Synopsis**

The question concerning the borders of the territories of what the USSR was once has proved to be a potential time bomb. *Extinction* is an eclectic patchwork of materials (fiction and nonfiction) led by Kolya, who is of Moldovan nationality, but declares himself a national of Transnistria. Fragments draw the viewer to the collective imaginary of the Soviet Union. The film aims to make an abstract comment on Vladimir Putin's latest political stands of "war without war, occupation without occupation."

### **Director's intentions note**

I don't have an easy relationship with borders. They frighten and unnerve me. I have been searched, prodded, delayed, again and again, for having the temerity to cross a few meters of land. Borders are bureaucratic fault lines, imperious and unfriendly. Their existence is routinely critiqued by academic geographers, who cast them as hostile acts of exclusion. And yet, where in a borderless world, could we escape to? Where would it be worth going?

The end of the Cold War did not produce a thaw throughout the continent. A peculiarity of today's Europe is the variety of "frozen conflicts" it contains. Shot in Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, and Transnistria, with additional scenes in Portugal and Germany, the film departs from Transnistria, where it appears that several eras coexist simultaneously, but time doesn't stand still, which might be a case study in a much wider portrait. Dystopia, utopia's doppelgänger, is not a way to enunciate what will come, but more of a logical and hidden revelation of the present.

Now, it seems Moscow is moving from sticks to carrots in its attempt to persuade Moldova to rethink an upcoming EU Association Agreement. If on one hand, the memory of the Holocaust was influenced by the evolution of the Cold War in the Western part of Europe, and if years after the fall of the Berlin Wall Europe was leaving the Cold War or a long-war period, then any consideration related to memory must answer this simple question: What is the best enemy to remembering? Why are the East and the West today bursting with spectral figures?

### **Credits**

Written, directed: Salomé Lamas

Assistant director: Stanislav Danylyshyn

Cinematography: Jorge Piquer Rodriguez

Sound: Salomé Lamas, Stanislav Danylyshyn

Production director: Stanislav Danylyshyn, Iulia Puica

Production manager, driver: Alexandru Cuciuc

Additional camera, focus puller: Salomé Lamas

Additional scenes: Mónica Lima, Pedro Maia, Jorge Quintela

Music: Andreia Pinto Correia

Performance: Christoph Both–Asmus

Editing: Telmo Churro, Francisco Moreira

Assistant editor: Rita Quelhas

Interns: Maria Inês Gonçalves, João Martinho

Studio recording: Roman Bordei

Sound design, mix: Miguel Martins

Foley: António Porém Pires

Color correction: Paulo Américo

Digital compositing, visual effects: Rodolfo Pereira

With: Kolja Kravchenko, Stanislav Danylyshyn, Vivlaedsimir Emelianov, John Donica – OSTK – Obiedinennyi Komitet Trudovykh Kollektivov, KGB – Officers Tiraspol, Sergiu Finite, Valentin Chenkov, Victor Drumi, Galina Lazarenco Popescu, Ninela Caranfil, Andrei Jaloba, Natasha Veleanik, Alexandr Veleanik, Ivan Shvet, Paraskovia Shvet, Anatolii Shvet, Anna Chesnok, Danila Babenko, Viktor Shvet, Oksana, Alina, Professor Nikolay Babilunga, Alexandru Cuciuc, Isabel Pettermann

#### O SOM E FURIA

Production: Cristina Almeida, Fabienne Martinot, Sofia Bénard

Accountant: Aline Alves, Amadeu Dores

#### LAMALAND

Production: Salomé Lamas

#### MENGAMUK FILMS

Production: Michel Balagué

Production assistants: Julliette Rigaleau, Unai Rosende

#### BIKINI

Production: Eugénio Marques

#### SCREEN MIGUEL NABINHO

Production: Ariana Couvinha, Vera Amaro

#### WALLA COLLECTIVE

Production: Tiago Matos

Producers: Luís Urbano, Sandro Aguilar, Salomé Lamas

Coproducers: Michel Balagué, Marcin Malaszczyk

Associate producers: Eugénio Marques, Paulo Américo, Miguel Nabinho, Tiago Matos, Miguel Martins

Translation: Alina Lunina, Salomé Lamas

Additional translation: Anna Avramenko, Stanislav Danylyshyn

Translation revision: Salomé Lamas, Maria Inês Gonçalves, Gloria Dominguez

Graphics: Sara Bozzini

Sound, image equipment: Screen Miguel Nabinho,  
Jorge Piquer Rodriguez  
Editing studio: O Som e a Fúria, Lamaland  
Sound studio, mix: Walla Colective, Yuki  
Digital laboratory: Bikini  
Insurance: Gras Savoye, Riskmedia

#### Music

SOBRE UM QUADRO (2013)  
Andreia Pinto Correia, Aljezur Music, ASCAP  
Interpreted: OrquestrUtópica, Katharine Rawdon – flutes, Catherine Strynckx  
– violoncello  
Commission: Culturgest – Fundação Caixa Geral de Depósitos  
Additional sound design: Miguel Martins

#### ALFAMA (2012)

Andreia Pinto Correia, Aljezur Music, ASCAP  
Interpreted: Orquestra Sinfónica da Fundação Calouste  
Gulbenkian, Ana Maria Pinto - soprano, Joana Carneiro - conductor  
Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian  
Commission: Fromm Foundation, Harvard University, for the Berkeley  
Symphony Orchestra  
Additional sound design: Miguel Martins

#### ELEGIA A AL-MU'TAMID (2010)

Andreia Pinto Correia, Aljezur Music, ASCAP  
Interpreted: Orquestra Sinfónica da Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Joana  
Carneiro - conductor Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian  
Commission: American Composers Orchestra, with the support of Patricia  
Wylde Plum  
Additional sound design: Miguel Martins

#### Performance

THE TREE WALKER (2011)  
Christoph Both–Asmus  
Performer: Christoph Both–Asmus  
Art direction: Chika Takabayashi

Text – excerpts adapted from Imperium (1993), Ryszard Kapuściński

#### Locations 2014–2016

Bulgaria: Shumen, Varna, Buzludzha  
Portugal: Lisboa, Porto  
Moldova: Chişinău  
P.M.R.: Rîbniţa, Tiraspol, Lenin, Bendery, Dubăsari  
Germany: Berlin  
Romania: Constanţa

#### Checkpoints

Chişinău, Moldova – Dubăsari, P.M.R.  
Cahul, Moldova – Oancea, Romania  
Călăraşi, Romania – Silistra, Bulgaria  
Kuchugan, P.M.R. – Pervomarisk, Ukraine  
Rezina, Moldova – Rîbniţa, P.M.R

With the financial support: ICA – Instituto do Cinema e Audiovisual

With the participation: DAAD – Berliner Künstlerprogramm des DAAD

Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian

Selected: Agora Works in Progress 2016 – Thessaloniki International Film Festival

Additional support: Rockefeller Foundation – Bellagio Center, Yadoo, Bogliasco Foundation, Yuki, Screen Miguel Nabinho, Walla Collective, Bikini

Distribution: O Som e a Furia

### **Seeing in the dark (excerpts)**

by Eric Hynes

In black, white, and smoky gray, a young man stares back at us in slow motion. That same man sits in the back of a car as it hurtles down wet streets, then wanders around desolate landscapes, conversing with various strangers about the collapse of the Soviet Union and the splintering that followed. Yet no matter how arresting these images are, the most important activities in *Extinction* aren't visually depicted.

In fact, for many minutes at a time, there's nothing to see at all, save for a dark-blue depthless expanse disrupted only by subtitles. There's still a picture—note the blueness, not blackness—but it's one you have to populate for yourself. It's like looking at a fully fogged window: something's supposed to be there, something should come *through* there. You're drawn to the frame and also past it, replacing a lack of projected imagery with your own private projections of what's missing. Private in that they're invisible to others and subjective in detail, prompted and motivated by what's objectively present and richly suggestive: the soundtrack.

There's much—far too much for a single column—to be said about the qualities of cinematic sound. But what's particularly evocative about its role in *Extinction*, as well as in some other recent works of nonfiction, is its interplay with thwarted expectations for visuals. These aren't radio pieces or podcasts, in which an element of cinematic theatricality might be situational (such as when radio pieces are attended by a live audience, or when foreign-language podcasts are presented with subtitles, à la Eleanor McDowall's Radio Atlas series). These are films in which an empty screen isn't solely a formal condition, but rather something active, unstable, provocative, meaningful. Here sound doesn't merely fill in what's absent, it challenges and converses with a screen that answers back with pointed opacity. Meanwhile

the viewer, while ideally always engaged, has no choice but to actively process and synthesize, to get to work.

Consider Derek Jarman's *Blue* (1993), a masterpiece in this vein, which sonically constructs room after room of memories, emotions, aphorisms, characters, stray thoughts, and impassioned declarations—all somehow related to, emitted from, and poured into a vibrating horizontal canvas of cobalt blue. Faced with Jarman's visionary deathbed opus, your eyes aren't closed, you're not getting lost in the infinite space of your own darkness—you're open and awake to his blues. As with up-close viewings of monochromatic minimalist paintings (Yves Klein was an inspiration for Jarman), your eyes aren't even primarily visual tools anymore, they're quivering, overactive muscles. You stop looking for shapes in the color; instead, the color starts shaping you.

In *Extinction*, the visuals are arrested whenever our young protagonist, along with the film's crew, attempts to cross a series of borders in eastern Europe. These checkpoints of Ukraine, Romania, Moldova, Transnistria, and Russia, are netherlands where cameras are seemingly unwelcome but also perhaps irrelevant. There's a shifty indeterminacy to these crossings that merits witness, but it's also possible that visual witness won't make anything more legible. Hear the posturing, hear the dissembling, hear the grift come through loud and clear. That feeling of being nowhere and somewhere at the same time—one moment in an inter-nationally recognized nation, the next in disputed, supposedly illegitimate territory; one moment having physical autonomy, the next being denied free movement—is profoundly expressed by Lamas's formal gambit. (Whether or not the gambit is motivated by necessity or theory, it plays persuasively as the former, legitimizing the latter.)

Based on the audio, you might picture what's happening, perhaps even vividly. Thwarting one sense often heightens the capacities of another. But the point isn't merely to play with our senses. Our subjective understanding of these events parallels those of travelers who never know what new reality they're walking into—"the situation has changed a bit," a border guard says to justify detention—never know what improvised law will be used against them, never know which crossing will turn out to be a barrier. Creativity along the margins can be liberating; it can also be corrupting and subjugating.

Her experiment called to mind *I Had Nowhere to Go*, Douglas Gordon's collaboration with and tribute to nonagenarian experimental filmmaker Jonas Mekas, which made the festival rounds in 2016. Nearly everything goes unseen in the film, yet Gordon's empty screen serves less as a dark canvas on which to project Mekas's spoken remembrances than as a neutralizing monolith. No doubt there's much to picture in Mekas's often harrowing stories of flight from Lithuania during the Second World War, which involved living in a Nazi prison camp and escaping to the U.S. But Gordon's sporadic insertions of imagery function as near non sequiturs—here, briefly, is a gorilla, several minutes after Mekas mentioned one, and not even *this* one, in passing—

...serving to effectively rebut our impulses to fill in the gaps. What it does is train our ears, instead of satisfying our eyes, so that Mekas's voice, with all of its accented character, poetic cadences, and refined melancholy, absorbs our attention.

If Gordon had withheld visuals entirely, we'd settle into the experience as we might a radio broadcast, free to concentrate our eyes wherever we might, and bring Mekas's voice into our own individual space. Whereas these rare, unevenly spaced glimpses of things that are never *the thing* situate us in the cinema, if unfamiliarly. It's another move that disciplines our eyes so that we'll really listen.

Published in Film Comment in the May/June 2018 Issue. Eric Hynes is a journalist and critic, and curator of film at Museum of the Moving Image in New York.

## **Who's afraid of the Russian Soul?1**

By Emília Tavares

The militant cynicism of the writer Thomas Bernhard hangs over Salomé Lamas' most recent film, *Extinction*, in a very significant way. A fierce critic of the idea of nationalism and the heavy historical legacies of Nazism in post-war Austria and Germany, his thinking radically introduces a critical conception of the idea of border to which *Extinction* leads us.

*Extinction* is a documentary and fictional plot about the social and political reorganisation of Russia, and the tragic consequences of the institution of a new empire. Filmed at border checkpoints, in a problematic enclave between Moldova, Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria, the film unfolds under the gloomy cloak of historical heritage and new forms of despotic control over territories.

At the heart of the action is Transnistria, a small country with a complex political and social history which clearly shows the power play in the region between Russia and bordering countries, all formerly part of the USSR. Although it belongs to Moldova, Transnistria claims its independence together with integration into the Russian Federation, an aspiration which is recognised neither by the Kremlin nor internationally. This does not prevent the existence of a clear occupation of social, political and economic influence in this small country by Russia, creating yet another constant source of tension in the region. Russia remains dominant, through border controls, an active spy network and strategic financial aid, establishing its political and economic dominance, but without any recognition of Transnistria's independence.

*Extinction* also reflects on the recent history of Eastern Europe, with clear references to the work of the Polish historian and journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski (1932-2007), author of *Imperium* (1993), one of the most distinctive works on the political history of Russia and bordering countries. Furthermore, it confronts us with Russian mentality, through the thoughts of two survivors of the Siberian

Gulag, Varlam Shalamov (1907-1982) and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008), whose view of their personal experience in the prison camps under the Stalin regime represents the paradox of Russian culture itself with respect to its totalitarian history.

The project was filmed in 2015, at a time when the conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation was at its peak, due to the annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea by the latter, which would give rise to an atmosphere of constant tension and fear, evident at each border crossing. This state of conflict persists in the region of the Donbass. With an illusory script and an identity as journalists, the film's crew experience the reality of this web of control of identities and nationalities to which the whole region is subjected on a daily basis.

The material filmed for *Extinction* was also used to make a short-film *Self-Portrait* (2018) and a diptych of photogravures (2017) that allude to the only border incident, between Moldova and Ukraine, with KGB agents, and to a series of 3 photographs from a sequence of 148 shots of the film with the title *Dream World* (2018), about the colossal *Memorial House of the Bulgarian Communist Party*, built on Mount Buzludzha between 1974 and 1981.

*Extinction* travels through four Eastern European countries with the historical burden of a Bolshevik Russia, in a dramatic duality of past and present, memory and future resolution, dominated by the decadence of the ideology and its most atrocious ghosts. By engineering the whole film around border regions, the director emphasises the despotic nature of these controlled areas, to which the witnesses confer vehement documentation.

The film clearly expresses the confrontation of memory with the decadence of a future, through the character Kolja, who has Moldovan nationality but claims his Transnistrian identity. Symbolically, Kolja was born at the time of the fall of the communist regime and is conflicted by a drifting identity and a feeling of unconditional love for his homeland. Kolja's life is also the reflection of a historical confrontation between East and West, exposing the weaknesses of the project of the European Community in the face of the imposition of a new wave of nationalisms and autocratic regimes.

Conscious of the symbolic importance of architecture and its legacy of a complex view of history, Salomé carefully films some of the emblematic monuments of the communist regime, which create a second filmic structure that guides us through the horrors of the end of the ideology, and which endure, in the landscape and in memory, as uncomfortable reminders of a recent past. In doing so she reveals their material and allegorical magnificence and the flagrant contrast with the eminent degradation and abandon of some of them at the present time. It is important that we reflect on these monuments, which Kolja visits as if on a tour of the past, as patrimonial and symbolic markers with which the new regimes produce their history.

Two important monuments in Bulgaria set the stage for *Extinction*. The first is the monument that commemorates 1300 years of the Bulgarian nation, erected in 1981, also known as the *Founders of the Bulgarian State Monument*, erected on a high plateau near the city of Shumen. The scene of colossal mythical figures which constitute the monument evoke some of the most violent stories of the despotism of the Stalin regime.

The remains of the past also include the *Memorial House of the Bulgarian Communist Party*, built on Mount Buzludzha between 1974 and 1981. An empire of symbolism, it narrates the great achievements of the Bolshevik Revolution in Bulgaria and of its main protagonists. The monument's first phase of construction involved some 6000 workers. It was operational for a decade, but after 1989 it was abandoned as a result of the fall of the communist regime in the country, succumbing to the same fate as many other similar monuments that were either ransacked or destroyed. Currently, the Bulgarian government is planning a mammoth recuperation project with the aim to 'preserve the monument for future generations, while incorporating new museum elements in order to present a full and comprehensive account of Bulgarian history', according to the project's website.<sup>2</sup>

As one of the poorest countries in Europe, with an oligarchic tradition of political and economic power and a worrying swing to the far-right in the recent elections, the past and future symbolism of the monument seems to compromise any critical exercise in history. *Extinction* shows us the immense frieze of the intellectual mentors of socialism covered in anti-communist slogans and graffiti, signs of the political failure of a regime, but not necessarily of its cultural and social ghosts.

In Moldova, the film features the 'Romanita' Tower, situated in Chisinau, built between 1978 and 1986, intended to be a model for collective housing. The building was quickly privatised after the end of the regime and is now abandoned due to its unsuitability for modern public requirements.

These are spaces of disintegration, whose memory remains active, representing the decadent ruins of an ideology, and which continue to affect the life and future of the population. Uprooting, lost utopias and frustrated hopes contaminate the formerly noble 'Russian soul'.

Surprisingly, the recuperation of the mythology of this 'Russian soul' seems to be a new source of inspiration for European politicians. A concept invented by philosophers and writers in the 19th century, the 'Russian soul' was rooted in the defence of an intellectuality closer to spiritual values and the people, in a return to the cultural and historical origins of Russia. It strove for an ideal of a universal congregation of humanity, based on Christian values and led by the superior messianic capacity of the Russian people.

The literary and intellectual movement *Pochvennichestvo* responded to the historical duality of Slavophiles and Westernists, constituting a third path for the



fate of Russia on the map of nations. Defending Christian ethics, spirituality, suffering and resignation as values of purification, the constitution of this 'Russian soul' was also an indictment in favour of a return 'to Russian soil', to '*pochva*', a way of bringing intellectuals closer to the people and thus allowing them to affirm, above all other nations, their singular capacity for putting fraternal universalism into practice.

As noted by various historians, the concept of 'Russian soul' came about at a time in history of intense struggle and uncertainty between the East and the West, but was nevertheless a concept produced in the romantic context of nationalisms, which would be reused throughout history to justify an identity gap between a unitarian political force and the people.

Another more critical perspective was that of the philosopher Pyotr Chaadayev, who considered that the memory of the birth of the Russian nation was intimately connected to "first wild barbarism, then rude superstition, then cruel and humiliating foreign domination, whose essence our rulers subsequently inherited, that is the sorrowful story of our youth (...) we live only in the present in the narrowest of its confines, with neither a past nor a future – in dead stagnation."<sup>3</sup>

Nowadays, the allegory of this historical concept is being recuperated by some of the political elite, for example, the French president, Emmanuel Macron, who on his last visit to the Kremlin invoked Dostoevsky's messianic vision of the 'Russian soul' to move Putin and Europeans towards a fraternal universality. Other Eastern European leaders have invoked a foundational spirituality as the programmatic axis of an extremist nationalist ideology.

### **Borders and Peripheries**

In a Europe of free movement of people and goods, Extinction reminds us that the symbolism of borders and their territory are linked to the political constitution of Europe itself, and that they have been crucial in the development of both democracy and despotism. The first great historical border was the separation of East and West, which was amplified by the developments of the dissolution of the USSR and which, according to some historians and political analysts, turned Eastern Europe into the object of social and cultural phenomena of a 'peripheral' nature.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, Eastern Europe was positioned on the political map and in public imagination as a territory that was 'foreign, 'external and exterior' to Western Europe, which recent phenomena of xenophobia and exclusion, such as the attacks on Polish communities in the wake of Brexit, in Great Britain, seem to confirm.<sup>5</sup>

By shifting the reflection from the purely political and geostrategic sphere to aspects of culture and mentalities, the debate and understanding of the constitution of the borders of Eastern Europe take on new shapes.

A fundamental aspect which the countries and societies rebuilt after the fall of the Berlin Wall seem to have in common is the failure of political, democratic and participative devices, since regime change was not accompanied by a change of mentalities or culture. The cyclical failure of an institution of democracy lies, therefore, in a historical context too rooted in despotism and violence, without time for regeneration, reformulated in terms of experiences.

Salomé Lamas' film clearly shows us this mental failure in the face of change, through Kolja and his resignation to a historical legacy, to a dark and difficult present, an 'I'm nobody' which finds its loudest expression in the divorce of politics from life.

As Pamela Ballinger asserts (2018), "for those individuals suffering the effects of life in a European superperiphery or for mi-grants trapped in the no-man's land of the "Balkan corridor," the language of Eastern peripheries continues to resonate as a way to denote deep asymmetries. Similarly, such a conceptual vocabulary provides those in the Balkan countries remaining outside of the European Union (...) a means to articulate their sense of being the periphery of the periphery."<sup>6</sup>

Through Kolja and the testimonies of inhabitants of these border regions we can better understand this notion of multiplied periphery, not only in its political sense but, above all, in its human dimension. When Kolja affirms that "Europe doesn't interest me, and I don't interest Europe", we are faced with an immense historical echo of a division between East and West that was never purely ideological, but also with a legacy of paternalism and political ignorance, which feeds all extremisms.

The opening of the European Union to the Balkans did not signify, therefore, a universalisation of some of their better principles. Rather, according to some analysts, in the Baltic region, EU accession "has not helped the parties to put the past behind them, as optimistic end-of-history scenarios foresaw. Instead, some of the most dramatic clashes over history and memory have taken place after the historic enlargement of Western institutions."<sup>7</sup>

The violence of which *Extinction* constantly reminds us continues to rise up like a perennial monument, in a region that is both disputed and abandoned, in a cyclic errancy between utopia and its failure.

The response to the question posed by Salomé Lamas, 'Why is it that the East and the West are now about to explode with spectral figures?' has a complex and ambiguous history of understanding.

On the one hand, the Balkans are, in certain circles, under-stood as a transitional border zone, populated by a masculine and paternalist discourse, embodied by the political figure of Putin. On the other, some historians emphasise the psychological factor of the impossibility of forgetting as crucial in the analysis of the history of Eastern Europe, given that many unresolved problems seem to emerge with new dynamics. Here, the role of historical and ideological

manipulation was and continues to be fundamental in a context in which, according to Vaclav Havel, collective hatred has a terrible “power to draw other people into its vortex”.<sup>8</sup>

The pair of historians Bidelieux and Jeffries summarise the region’s historical and political crossroads: “The Revolutions of 1989 and their aftermath have not only presented old questions in a new light. They have also raised questions about the past of the new present.”<sup>9</sup> Such questions still overshadow the democratic projects of Eastern Europe, but alarmingly they also threaten the consolidated democracy of Western Europe.

*Extinction* is a film which takes a stand, and in this sense allows us to overcome many of the preconceived ideas about East-ern Europe and its recent history, which we see as entrenched between communism and post-communism, but which is much more complex than that. It also demonstrates to us that Putin and Russia are only the most visible face of a wider Europe, which feeds on the paradox of a new autocratic messianism and a savage globalising capitalism.

*Extinction* affirms that ‘The soul is not a border’, putting the worn out ‘Russian soul’ of the past on a new level of human rights and respect for diversity and identity, which political history cyclically resists. In 2016, on a visit to the Russian Geographical Society, Putin put the geographical knowledge of new generations of Russians to the test<sup>10</sup>, talking ironically about a Russia without the limits of borders, whose past is still active and legitimises its modern political attacks of territorial expansion.

(1) Title of an article by Hannah Gais “Who’s Afraid of Russian Soul?”, published in *The American Baffler*, 31 August 2017.

2<http://www.buzludzha-monument.com/project/>

(3) Cited in Ostapenko, Raisa (2018) – “The significance of the Russian Soul in understanding contemporary geopolitics” in *Cambridge Globalist*, 7 August 2018, consulted online.

(4) See for example the article by Ballinger, Pamela (2017) – “Whatever Happened to Eastern Europe?- Revisiting Europe’s Eastern Peripheries” in *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, volume 31, number 1, February 2017, pp. 44-67.

(5) *Ibidem*, p. 46.

(6) *Ibidem*, p. 61

(7) E. Berg, P. Ehin (1999) – “Incompatible Identities? Baltic-Russian Relations and the EU as an Arena for Identity Conflict” in “Identity and Foreign Policy: Baltic Russian Relations and European Integration, Franham, Aghgate, cited in Bellinger, Pamela, *op. cit.* p. 52.

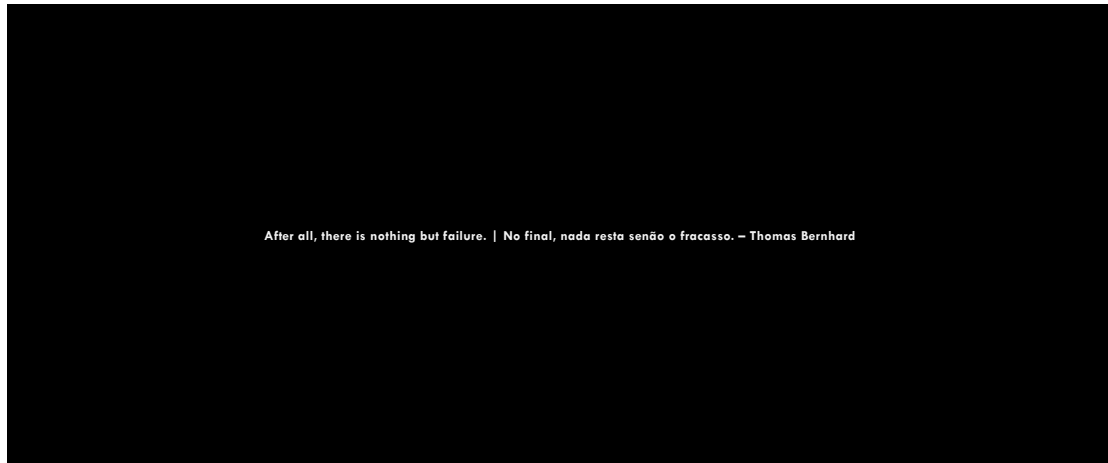
(8) Havel, Vaclav (1994) *Towards a Civil Society: Selective Speeches and Writings, 1990-1994*, Prague: Lidove Noviny Publishing House, cited in Bidelieux, Robert and Jeffries, Ian (1998) – *A history of Eastern Europe - crisis and change*, London and New York: Routledge, p. 32.

(9) Bidelieux and Jeffries (1998) *op. cit.* p. 33.

(10) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=btLHVYoYnXI>

*Who's afraid of the Russian Soul?* by the curator Emilia Tavares published in the Artist Booklet produced for the solo show *Extinction/çãõ* at MNAC – Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea, Museu do Chiado, Portugal in 2018, containing the text *Who's afraid of the Russian Soul?* by the curator Emilia Tavares.

## Diary notes on *Extinction* / Film and politics



*Extinction* (2018) opening quote by Thomas Bernhard, “After all, there is nothing but failure.”

**From:** Michael Bobick <bobick@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, November 21, 2014 5:08 PM  
**To:** Salomé Lamas  
**Subject:** Transnistria

That said, when you return to Tiraspol you could go to meet with OSTK directly. They have an office in the “Dom Sovieto” - the city council building. I believe they have meetings on Tuesday, but if you ask at the front office they will tell you if anyone is in. I know a few of the people I spoke to passed away, but someone in there could help you. If you are interested in talking to someone about the events of 1992 and Transnistrian historiography, I know of some professors at the university who would probably be willing to talk with you.

Let me know if you want me to put you in touch with the professors.

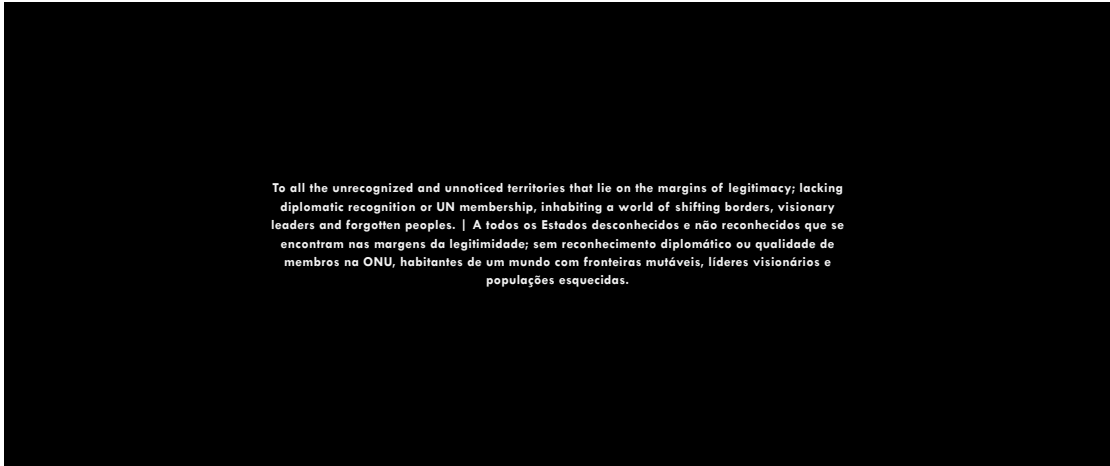
As for the best way to get into Transnistria with equipment, I would suggest you use your friends/contacts to cross from Rezina to Rybnitsa. The border crossing between Chisinau/Tiraspol is both busy and you have more of a chance of being harassed with equipment. Rezina/Rybnitsa is much easier... If you are not a journalist, you need to establish some sort of identity. I would bring proof that you are an artist - this helps a lot if you have something tangible to show, and maybe get a letter from a sponsor/museum and get it certified/translated into Russian. I did this when I started doing research (a letter from my dissertation chair), and it helped me seem more official.

As for finding OSTK people, see if your Rybnitsa contacts know of any veterans, they all will lead you to people with firsthand knowledge.

Another thing you might want to do is try to get some state official who could vouch for you. All you would need is someone from any KGB office to give you their business card/contact, and if you have any trouble call them and they can sort it out. A bottle of good Port might put you in their good graces.

Best,  
Michael

Postdoctoral Fellow  
Center for Russian and East European Studies  
University of Pittsburgh



To all the unrecognized and unnoticed territories that lie on the margins of legitimacy; lacking diplomatic recognition or UN membership, inhabiting a world of shifting borders, visionary leaders and forgotten peoples. | A todos os Estados desconhecidos e não reconhecidos que se encontram nas margens da legitimidade; sem reconhecimento diplomático ou qualidade de membros na ONU, habitantes de um mundo com fronteiras mutáveis, líderes visionários e populações esquecidas.

Extinction (2018) final text note, "To all the unrecognized and unnoticed territories that lie on the margins of legitimacy; lacking diplomatic recognition or UN membership, inhabiting a world of shifting borders, visionary leaders and forgotten peoples."

One can ask if there is a need to make films politically as opposed to making political films. What is the difference between the two? Is it possible to make a film without political ramifications?

The answer has to do with how one sees the political. Jean-Luc Godard made a distinction between making films politically and making films that focus on a political subject or that have a political content. Films classified as "political" usually center on authority figures. On institutions or on personalities from the body politic; or else, they focus, for example, on a strike of the workers, or a crisis that happened between suppliers and consumers or between the boss and the workers.

Many contemporary theorists, such as Michel Foucault, have focused their studies on power relationships in the intimate realms of our lives. Power relationships are, therefore, not just to be located in these evident sources that I have mentioned. Even if you criticize these sources, even if you eradicate them, the question remains how is it that we continue in our daily life to be violent, to be racist, to be sexist, to be homophobic, xenophobic and so on? How is it that we continue to oppress while being oppressed? So, it must

be in something that is much more than these locatable evident sources of power.



Extinction (2018), checkpoints crossed and featured in the film. Chisinău, Moldova – Dubăsari, P.M.R.; Cahul, Moldova – Oancea, Romania; Călărăsi, Romania – Siliistra, Bulgaria; Kuchugan, P.M.R. – Pervomarisk, Ukraine; Rezina, Moldova – Rîbnita, P.M.R.

We come to a situation in which to make a film politically would be to place in question your own position as filmmaker. Power relationships can be looked at from many angles. You can look at how technology and the tools that define your activities are never neutral, and how they are always interpellated by ideology. The film industry, for example, has technologies that serve its own ideology of expansion and consumption.

When you work politically, you have to politicize all aspects of filmmaking. It's not just when you focus on a political subject that your film is political. The film is not yet political enough, because you can focus on a political subject and yet reproduce all the language of the mainstream ideology reproducing thereby its oppressive mechanisms. In other words, to open up the field of your political activities you have to think politically about every aspect, not just the content of the film.

There are no apolitical works, but some works politicize the daily realms of our lives and other works simply look at these daily realms without offering the viewer a critical space in which the tensions between the political and the personal are played out. So sometimes a filmmaker might think that their work does not have anything to do with the political, but, as I said, there are no "apolitical" films. For someone to say "I'm apolitical" simply means "I haven't yet politicized my life or my work."

Interview notes for OSTK – Obiedinennyi Komitet Trudovykh Kollektivov<sup>1</sup> and Professor Nikolay Babilunga of Transnistrian Historiography, University of Tiraspol

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<sup>1</sup> OSTK played a key role in the strike movement in the early 1990s that created a local power base to

1. Can you summarize the events that lead to the creation of Transnistria?
2. Can you outline the history of the territory? (Borders of Transnistria, development, etc)
3. What was the role of the OSTK in the events?
4. That was the role of the Propaganda in Civil War?
5. Do you still believe Moldova is a threat?
6. Can you comment on the Crimea and Ukraine conflict?
7. Putin:
  - a) Putin's occupation without occupation – is a distinctive form of warfare that uses cultural construction of fear and intimidation to beat back the borders of the European Union?
  - b) Justifying “occupation without occupation” on humanitarian grounds as “responsibility to protect”. Putin satirizes the Western European and American ideology that justify invading foreign states.
  - c) Putin uses pervasive fear created by those frozen conflicts to constitute a new form of post-soviet liminality that challenges international law, humanitarian intervention and the rules of international system.
  - d) “Theater States” - Russia – a state that focuses on the production of spectacle rather on an economic development or provisional social wealth. “Spectacle of Dominance”, “Spectacle of Violence”. He is extending this new form of sovereignty into Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova.

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This would never work in the EU and Western Institution. These are new technologies of rule adapted to post-Soviet political circumstances. They have origins in Soviet Era practices and identifications. These practices are being adapted to the 21st century, in which spectacle and image, not the body, became the terms on which power is publicly established.

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Russia is in a role of the aggressor, provocateur and a peacekeeper.

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challenge Moldova. As we discussed the organisation's founding and its earliest actions, Boris began to speak about anti-Russian actions and provocations in Chisinau: Russian-speaking deputies beaten on the streets; women dragged by their hair out of government buildings; and a 16-year-old ethnic Russian killed by a mob of nationalists on the streets. As he spoke about these events that occurred in 1990, his voice trailed off and he mentioned that he possessed photographs of these and other crimes. He opened up a desk drawer and took out a bundle of black and white photographs. The drawer was full, containing hundreds of photographs, including duplicates. One young woman who appeared to be in her early 20s, he calmly explained, had her ears cut off. Pregnant at the time, she was raped and murdered. Her husband, he continued, had his penis cut off. As he handed me a picture, his eyes widened with emotion: 'What could we do?' he repeated, shaking his head while looking at me for acknowledgement. The photographs were a visible reminder of what could potentially occur if one was not vigilant. These photographs offered proof as to why left-bank residents responded the way they did, why they rose up and asserted their rights.<sup>20</sup> Although the photographs ostensibly show the atrocities he described, they primarily served to legitimate this view of events. Given the significant question about the emergence of the PMR as a polity, legitimating itself in the eyes of Transnistrians is more important than any objective understanding of events.

8. "Nostalgia for Soviet Past" Can you comment on it intellectually?
9. Why is the Russian army 22 years later, the Russian-speaking Transnistrians of all nationalities including Moldovans, Russians, Ukrainians have internalized the idea of threat from a common enemy represented by the Moldovan state. (Public memorials in the Tiraspol)

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At the same time declaration of separatisms also create less discussed opportunities to control local politics, oil and gas transit roots, and facilitate "grey market", human traffic and smuggling.

10. With Transnistria under Russian control, Moldova can also be informally controlled – Political blackmail.
11. A form of political synecdoche where a war inside a breakaway province stands for a potential war inside the jure state and where the occupation of the separatist region creates the constant threat that the country as a whole will be occupied.

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War without war (occupation without occupation).

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Russian Federation – the legal successor of the Soviet Union.

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This is why Putin doesn't want closure in Transnistria.

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Are the XXI Century vassal states neither self-governing nor occupied, neither at war nor at peace.

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This is not the old Cold War, there are no Superpowers – A miniaturized Cold War where tinny frozen conflicts mess up the geopolitical standing of the west.

12. Are all countries fictitious? Are all states a fiction? As much as Transnistria is a fiction?
13. When did utopian Transnistria become dystopian Transnistria? (When did the optimism and the spirit of the new born country disappear from its citizens)?
14. Check other notes – Ideas for Extinction.



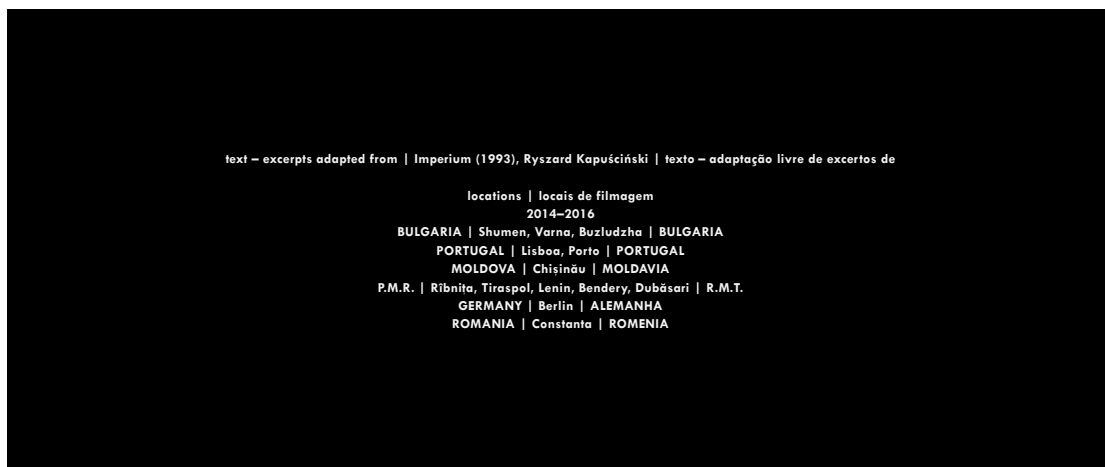




Publication offered by the OSTK – Obiedinennyi Komitet Trudovykh Kollektivov and included in the film Extinction (2018)

### Additional interview notes for Kolja Kravchenko to be conducted outside of Transnistria

1. What is your name, your age, profession, degree, etc.
2. What has changed since our last visit in March 2014?
3. Suddenly the world hears about Transnistria in the media, because of what is happening in Ukraine. How do you relate to the fact that most people don't know you exist?
4. Do you know of other people from Transnistria working under contract for the Russian army, or simply sympathizers that went to Ukraine to fight and show support?
5. What do you think of Bulgaria? It is part of the EU, is it nice here?
6. Have you ever been to the sea?
7. Are you still optimistic about Transnistria?
8. What does your wife think about this film?
9. Why did you accept to work with us?
10. Why do you refuse to talk about your work in the Russian army?



Extinction (2018) shooting locations 2014-2015 featured in the film. Shumen, Varna and Buzludzha in Bulgaria; Lisboa, and Porto in Portugal; Chişinău in Moldova; Rîbnita, Tiraspol, Lenin, Bendery, and Dubăsari in Transnistria; Berlin in Germany; Constanta in Romania.

### Notes for dialogues, monologues to be performed by actors and for voice over adapted from *Imperium* (1993) by Ryszard Kapuściński

#### The border

I don't have an easy relationship with borders. They frighten me and unnerve me, I have been searched, prodded, delayed, again and again, for having the temerity to cross a few meters of land. Borders are bureaucratic fault lines, imperious and unfriendly. Their existence is routinely critiqued by academic geographers who cast them as hostile acts of exclusion; and yet where, in a borderless world, could we escape to? Where would it be worth going?

### Граница

У меня не простые отношения к границам. Они меня пугают и тревожат. Меня обыскивали, в меня тыкали, задерживали, снова и снова, за то что смела перейти несколько метров земли. Границы это бюрократические линии разлома, высокомерные и недружелюбные. Ихнее существование регулярно критикуют научные географы которые определяют их как враждебные действия отчуждения; и все таки, куда-же мы, в безграничном мире, сможем убежать? Куда-бы стоило поехать?

(Russian translation)

### Lenin's statue

Ashkhabad is a young city in two senses. It started to come into being only in 1881, when the Russian army, after breaking the Turkmen's resistance, built a fort here. The fort started to sprout little streets; a small town grew around it. In 1948, during an earthquake, one of the most severe in modern history, in the space of fifteen seconds the town disappeared from the face of the earth. There had been one cemetery in the town, Misha recalls, and after the quake there were sixteen. Of all the city's structures, only the statue of Lenin survived.

The Ashkhabad you see today is the city that came into being after the disaster, essentially new from the foundations up. There is nothing here for the lover of antiquities to visit.

### Статуя Ленина

Ашхабад молодой город в двух смыслах. Он начал развиваться только в 1881 году, когда российская армия, преодолев сопротивление туркменских защитников, построили там укрепление. Форт начал распускать небольшие улицы; маленький городок вырос вокруг них. В 1948, во время землетрясения, одного из самых мощных в современной истории, в течении пятнадцати секунд, город исчез с лица земли. Было одно кладбище в городе, вспоминает Миша, и после землетрясения их стало шестнадцать. Из всех сооружений в городе, осталась стоять только статуя Ленина.

Ашхабад который мы видим сегодня, это город который был создан после бедствия, по существу новый с основ до крыш. Здесь нет ничего что мог бы посетить любитель античности.

(Russian translation)

### Stalin's chessboard

After seventy-three years of Bolshevism, people do not know what freedom of thought is, and so in its place they practice freedom of action. And their freedom of action means freedom to kill. And there's perestroika for you, the new thinking.

How was communism built? Communism was built by Stalin with the help of the bezprizorny, the millions of orphaned, hungry and barefoot children who wandered along Russia's roads. They stole what they could. Stalin locked them up in boarding schools. There they learned hatred, and when they grew up, they were dressed in the uniforms of the NKVD. The NKVD held the nation in the grip of a bestial fear. And there's communism for you.

What is Stalin's chessboard? He so resettled nations, mixed them up, displaced them, so that now one cannot move anyone without moving someone else, without doing him injury.

There are currently thirty-six border conflicts, and perhaps even more. And there's Stalin's chessboard for you, our greatest misfortune.

### Шахматная Доска Сталина

После семьдесят-трёх лет большевизма, люди забыли что такое свобода мысли, и поэтому вместо неё практикуют свободу действия. И там, свобода действия означает свободу убивать. Вот вам и перестройка, новое мышление. Как был построен коммунизм? Коммунизм был построен Сталином с помощью «bezprizorny», миллионными сирот, голодными и босыми детьми, которые бродили по дорогам России. Они крали то что могли. Сталин попрятал их по школам-интернатам. Там они научились ненависти, и когда они выросли, они были одеты в формах НКВД. НКВД держало нацию в захвате ужасного страха. Вот вам и коммунизм.

Что такое шахматная доска Сталина? Он настолько переселил нации, их перемешал, их вытеснил, что теперь нельзя переместить некого без перемещения кого-то иного, без принесения ущерба кому-то ещё.

В настоящее время существуют тридцать-шесть трансграничных конфликтов, и возможно даже больше. Вот вам и шахматная доска Сталина, самая великая наша беда.

(Russian translation)

### Cold War maps

There are two kinds of global maps being printed in the world.

One type is disseminated by the National Geographic Society in America, and on it, in the middle, in the center, lies the American continent, surrounded by two oceans – the Atlantic and the Pacific. The former Soviet Union is cut in half and placed discreetly at both ends of the map so that it won't frighten American children with its immense bulk. The Institute of Geography in Moscow prints an entirely different map. On it, in the middle, in the central spot, lies the former Soviet Union, which is so big that it overwhelms us with its expanse; America on the other hand, is cut in half and placed discreetly at both ends so that Russian child will not think: My God! How large this America is!

These two maps have been shaping two different visions of the world for generations.

This map is a kind of visual recompense, a peculiar emotional sublimation, and also an object of unconcealed pride. It also serves to explain and justify all shortages, mistakes, poverty, and marasmus. A great size, which explains and absolves everything.

### Карты Холодной войны

Печатаются два вида карты мира.

Одна распространяется национальным географическим обществом США, и на ней, по середине, находится американский континент, который окружен двумя океанами — атлантическим и тихим. Бывший советский союз разделён пополам и скромно помещён на обе стороны карты, чтобы он не пугал американских детей его необъятной величиной. Институт географии в Москве печатает совсем другую карту. На ней, по середине, находится бывший советский союз, который настолько большой что он охватывает нас его просторами; Америка, с другой стороны, разделена пополам и скромна помещена на обе стороны карты чтобы русский ребёнок не подумал: Боже мой! Какая большая, эта Америка!

Эти две карты формировали две разные версии мира на протяжении нескольких поколений.

Эта карта, это своего рода визуальное возмещение, своеобразная эмоциональная сублимация, и также предмет неприкрытой гордости. Она служит и ещё как объяснение и оправдание всех дефицитов, ошибок, всей нищеты и всего маразма. Великая величина, которая объясняет и освобождает всё.

(Russian translation)

### Russian mystery play

The world is already accustomed to the fact that the Caucasus is burning, that bloody disorders are erupting continually in the Asiatic Republics, that battles are being waged on both sides of the Dniester. All these collisions and rebellions, and wars are on the distant peripheries of the former USSR; they are taking place, in a sense, outside of Russia, beyond its body.

In short, following the disintegration of the USSR, we are now facing the prospect of the disintegration of the Russian Federation, or, to put it differently; after the first phase of decolonization (that of the former Soviet Union) the second phase begins – the decolonization of the Russian Federation.

### Тайная русская пьеса

Мир уже привык к факту что Кавказ горит, что кровь постоянно проливается на расстройках в азиатских республиках, что битвы проходят на обоих сторонах Днестры. Все эти столкновения и восстания и войны находятся на далёких перифериях бывшего советского союза; они происходят, в каком-то смысле, за границами России, за рамками её тела.

Вкратце, вслед за распадом СССР, мы сейчас сталкиваемся с возможностью распада Российской Федерации. То есть, иначе говоря: после первой стадии деколонизации (той бывшего советского союза) начинается вторая стадия — деколонизация Русской Федерации.  
(Russian translation)

### Mafia

Here where one hundred nations once lived “in harmony and brotherhood”, one hundred mafias have now appeared. The nations have vanished, have ceased to exist. Three large mafias have taken place – the Russian mafia, the Caucasian mafia, and the Asiatic mafia. These large mafias are divided into an infinite number of smaller ones. There are Chechen and Georgian mafias, Tartar and Uzbek, Chelyabinsk and Odessan. The smaller mafias are divided into even smaller ones, and these in turn into utterly small ones. Small, but dangerous, armed with pistols and knives.

All the mafias have two characteristics: (a) their members do not work but live well, and (b) they are continually squaring accounts. Stealing smuggling, or squatting accounts – that is what the everyday life of a mafia member looks like.

In today’s post-Soviet society not only individual criminals exist, not only elements, but an entire criminal class possessing a genealogy and tradition different from the rest of the society. Each successive crisis - WWII, the postwar purges, the corruption of the Brezhnev era, the disintegration of the USSR – reinforced and augmented the ranks of this class.

The first is the conspiratorial theory of history, for years promulgated by Stalin. The Second is the tradition, practice, and climate of mysteriousness that is characteristic of the political and social life in this state.

### Мафия

Здесь где сто наций однажды жили «в духе братства и согласия», появились теперь сто мафий. Нации исчезли — они перестали существовать. Три большие мафии встали на их место — Русская мафия, Кавказская мафия и Азиатская мафия. Эти крупномасштабные мафии разделены на бесконечное число менее крупных. Есть Чеченские и Грузинские мафии, Татарские и Узбекские, Челябинские и Одесские. Менее крупные мафии сами разделены на ещё более небольших, и те, на ещё меньше. Небольшие, но опасные, вооружённые пистолетами и нажами.

Всё мафии имеют две характерные черты: (а) члены мафии не работают но живут хорошо, (б) они постоянно сводят счёты. Кража, контрабанда и свод счетов — вот так выглядит повседневная жизнь мафиози.

В сегодняшнем постсоветском обществе существуют не только единичные преступники, не только начатки, но целый криминальный общественный класс обладающий генеалогией и традицией которые отличаются от тех у остальной части общества. Каждый последовательный кризис — Вторая мировая война, послевоенные

чистки, коррупция брежневской эпохи, распад советского союза — укрепили и увеличили ряды этого класса.

Первое, это заговорщицкая теория истории, которая много лет была обнародована Сталиным. Второе, это традиция, применение и климат таинственности, что характерно политической и общественной жизни при этом режиме.

(Russian translation)

### Camp

There were 160 arctic camps. Whoever survived Manadan or Kolyma was never again the person he or she once was. “It is a terrible thing to see a camp” wrote Varlam Shalamov of Kolyma “No one on earth should know camps. In the camp experience everything is negative – every single minute of it. A human being can only become the worse for it. And it cannot be any other way. There is a great deal in the camps about which a man should not know. But seeing the very bottom of life is not the most dreadful part of it. What is the most dreadful is when a man appropriates this bottom as his own, when the measure of his morality is borrowed from the camp experience, when the morality of criminals finds application in life. When man’s intellect attempts not only to justify those camp sentiments, but also to serve them.” “Together with the 99% that did not survive the camp, the souls of those who survived died.”

### Лагерь

Было 160 арктических лагерей. Любого кто пережил Магадан или Колыму изменился навсегда. *«Это ужасное дело повидать лагерь»* написал Варлам Шаламов *«Ни кто на свете не должен знать лагерь. Лагерь во всём отрицательная школа - каждая минута его. Человек только может ухудшиться изза него. По другому и быть не может. Есть множество того что человеку в лагере не надо видеть. Но видеть самый нижний предел жизни не самое худшее. Самое худшее, это когда человек присваивает этот предел как свой собственный, когда меры его морали заимствованы из опыта лагеря, когда мораль криминала находит применение в жизни. Когда интеллект человека пытается не только оправдать эти чувства в лагере, но и ещё им и поклонится.»* *«Вместе с теми 99% кто не пережили лагеря, погибли души тех кто их пережил.»*

(Russian translation)

### Lenin’s statue II

There is no shortage of Lenin statues in Ukraine – five thousand, it is said. Where did they get that figure? It’s simple. They just added up all factories, schools, hospitals, kolkhozes, army units, ports, train stations, universities, villages, towns, cities, larger squares, bridges, parks, etc., knowing that there had to be a statue of Lenin at each location, and arrived at the figure of five thousand.

Erecting the statues of Lenin, incidentally, posed no less a problem than that now entailed in their removal. In nearby Moldavia I met a man who spent ten years in a camp as a result of trying to install a heavy bust of Lenin in a second-floor common room. The doors were too narrow, so this unfortunate soul decided to hoist the bust up over the balcony, first coiling a thick rope around the neck of the author of *Marxism and Empirical Criticism*. He didn't even have time to untie the noose before he was arrested.

### Статуя Ленина II

Нет дефицита статуй Ленина на Украине — говорят: их тысяч пять. Откуда у них такое число? Это просто. Они суммировали все заводы, школы, госпитали, колхозы, армейские части, порты, вокзалы, университеты, деревни, города, большие площади, мосты и парки итд., зная что на каждом местонахождении должна стоять статуя Ленина. И так они получили цифру - пять тысяч.

Воздвигать эти статуи Ленина, кстати, было не менее проблематично чем влечёт за собой ихнее удаление. В недалёкой Молдавии я встретил мужчину который провёл десять лет в лагере, изза того, что хотел установить тяжелый бюст Ленина в комнате отдыха на втором этаже. Двери были слишком узкие, так что этот неудачный мужчина решил поднять бюст через балкон, обматывая толстую верёвку вокруг шеи автора «*Материализма и Эмпириокритицизма*». У него даже не хватило времени развязать петлю перед тем как его задержали.

(Russian translation)

### The Great Famine

One can say that there are two Ukraines: the western (the former Galicia, territories that belonged to Poland before the war) and the eastern. In the western its inhabitants speak Ukrainian, feel themselves to be one hundred per cent Ukrainian, and are proud of this. It is here that the nation survived, its personality, its culture.

Things look different in the eastern Ukraine, which covers a territory larger than the western. Thirteen million native Russians live here and at least as many half Russians; here Russification was more intense and brutal; here Stalin murdered almost the entire intelligentsia. In 1032 and 1933, he had several million Ukraine peasants starve to death and ordered tens of thousands of Ukraine intellectuals shot. Only those who fled abroad were saved.

The differences between the western and the eastern Ukraine are still in evidence.

In the fall of 1990, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn published his plan for the kind of state he believed should arise in place of the USSR. In the publication — entitled *How to Build Russia?* He proposes that the future state comprise Russia, Belorussia, Ukraine, and northern Kazakhstan. Let us give back the rest, Solzhenitsyn advises, because “we do not have the strength for the peripheries.

Stalin decided that by the fall of 1930 the entire peasantry of his country must be in kolkhozes. But the peasants do not want to join the kolkhozes. He sends

hundreds of thousands of them to the camps or deports and resettles them in Siberia, and the rest he undertakes to starve into obedience.

The main blow falls on the Ukraine, officially the matter presented itself as follows: Moscow had determined the size of the quota each village was obliged to deliver to the state, but the quotas were significantly greater than the land could realistically be expected to yield. Understandably, the peasants were unable to fulfill the plan imposed upon them. So then, by force – usually by military force – the authorities started confiscating everything edible in the villages. The peasants had nothing to eat and nothing to sow. A massive and deadly famine began in 1930, lasting seven years. The majority of demographers and historians today agree that in those years Stalin starved around ten million people to death.

“The forms of hunger are terrible and varied. Hunger became a norm of life. Only certain individuals had adequate amounts of nourishment. They were the higher officials and the cannibals. Six-year old Tania Pokidko picked a clove of garlic from the garden of a neighbor, Gavril Turko. He beat her so severely that after she dragged herself home, she died. Her father Stiepan, was a Red guerrilla. He took four of his children, already swollen from hunger, and went to the county authorities to ask for help. When he was refused, he said to Polonski, the secretary of the council: “It would be better if you ate them than for me to have to see how they suffer”. And he hanged himself on a tree in front of the council building.” (Sergei Maksudov, Zvenia, Moscow, 1991)

### Великий Голод

Можно сказать что существуют две Украины: западная (бывшая Галичина, территории которые принадлежали Польше до войны) и восточная. На западе его жители говорят по-украински, считают себя стопроцентными украинцами, и гордятся этому. Именно здесь сохранилась нация, её характер, её культура. По другому выглядит ситуация на востоке Украины, которая охватывает территорию больше западной. Тринадцать миллионов коренных русских живут здесь, и по крайней мере такое же количество полу-русских; здесь русификация была более сильной и жестокой; здесь Сталин убил почти всю интеллигенцию. В 1932 и 1933, он уморил голодом несколько миллионов украинских крестьян и приказал пристрелить десятки тысяч украинских интеллектуалов. Только тот кто убежал за границу остался в живых.

Разницы между западом и востоком Украины до сих пор видны. Осенью 1990 года, Александр Солженицын опубликовал своё предложение о государстве которое он полагает должно восстать в место СССР. В публикации — *«Как нам обустроить Россию?»* он предлагает что в будущее государство должны входить: Россия, Белоруссия, Украина и северный Казахстан. *«Давайте отдадим остальное»*, советует Солженицын, потому что *«нет у нас сил на окраины»*.

Сталин решил что к осени 1930 года всё крестьянство его страны должно быть в колхозах. Он посылает их сотнями тысячами в лагеря и



переселяет их в Сибирь, остальных он заставляет голодать до послушания.

Основной удар падает на Украину. Официально дело выглядело так: Москва решила размер квот, которые каждая деревня обязана была доставлять государству. Но квоты были значительно больше чем земля могла реально произвести. Понятно что крестьяне не смогли осуществить план возложенный на них. И так, насильно — обычно военными силами — власть начала конфисковать всё съедобное из деревень. Крестьянам было нечего есть и нечего сеять. Массивный и смертельный голод начался в 1930 году, и продолжался в течении семи лет. Большинство демографов и историков согласны что в эти годы Сталин заставил около десяти тысяч людей умереть от голода.

*«Формы голода ужасные и разнообразные. Голод стал нормом жизни. Только некоторые личности имели адекватное количество питания. Они были высшие чиновники и каннибалы... Девочка шести лет, Таня Покидько, сорвала на грядке у соседа, Турка Гаврилы, головку чеснока. Турка избил ее так, что она, забравшись под свою хату, умерла. Ее отец, Степан, бывший красный партизан, взял четырех уже опухших детей и пошел просить помощи в районном комитете. Получив отказ, он оставил детей в кабинете секретаря райисполкома Полонского, сказав: "Лучше вы их съешьте, чем я буду смотреть, как они мучаются". Детей отдали в интернат, где двое из них вскоре умерли. Степан повесился на березе во дворе райисполкома.»* (Сергей Маскудов, Звения, Москва, 1991)

(Russian translation)

### Glasnost-Perestroika

The writer Yurii Boriev compared the history of the USSR to a train in motion: "The train is speeding into a luminous future. Lenin is at the controls. Suddenly – stop, the tracks come to an end. Lenin calls on the people for additional, Saturday work, tracks are laid down, and the train moves on. Now Stalin is driving it. Again, the tracks end. Stalin orders half the conductors and passengers shot, and the rest he forces to lay down new tracks. The train starts again. Khrushchev replaces Stalin, and when the tracks come to an end, he orders that the ones over which the train has already passed be dismantled and laid down before the locomotive. Brezhnev takes Khrushchev's place. When the tracks end again, Brezhnev decides to pull down the window blinds and rock the cars in such a way that the passengers will think the train is still moving forward" (Yurri Boriev, Staliniad, 1990)

And thus, we come to the Epoch of the Three Funerals (Brezhnev's, Andropov's, Cherenko's), during which the passengers of the train do not have the illusion that they are going anywhere. But then, in April 1985, the train starts to move again. This time Gorbachev is the engineer, and the slogan GLASNOST-PERESTROIKA is painted on the locomotive.

### Глазность-Перестройка

Писатель сравнивает историю СССР с поездом в движении: «Поезд спешит в светлое будущее. Ленин сидит за штурвалом. Внезапно — стоп, железнодорожные пути прекращаются. Ленин призывает народ на дополнительный субботник. Рельсы положены и поезд продолжает свой путь. Теперь Сталин за штурвалом. Опять кончаются рельсы. Сталин приказывает расстрелять половину кондукторов и пассажиров и остальным заставляет положить новые рельсы. Поезд опять начинает двигаться. Хрущёв заменяет Сталина, и когда пути снова приходят к концу, он приказывает разобрать те рельсы по которым поезд уже проехал и положить их перед локомотивом. Брежнев заменяет Хрущёва. Когда рельсы опять заканчиваются, Брежнев решает закрыть жалюзи на окнах и качать поезд так, чтобы пассажиры думали что поезд всё ещё движется вперёд.» (Юрий Бариев, Сталиниад, 1990)  
(Russian translation)

### The Border II

At the end of 1991, the telephones on Gorbachev's desk ring less and less frequently. The center of the power has moved elsewhere: as of June 12, the president of the Russian Federation is Boris Yeltsin, who gradually seizes the reins of government over the greater part of the territories of the Imperium.

It is Yeltsin who in November suspends and illegalizes the ruling Communist Party without Gorbachev's consent.

On December 25 Gorbachev resigns as president of the USSR. The red flag with the hammer and sickle is removed from the Kremlin.

The USSR ceases to exist.

The question concerning the borders of the territories of what was once the USSR is a potential time bomb. Many of these borders, as in Africa, cut across lands inhabited by the same people.

### Граница II

В конце 1991 года, телефоны на письменном столе Горбачёва звонят все менее и менее часто. Центр власти переехало куда-то на другое место: начиная с 12 июня, президент Русской Федерации - Борис Ельцин, и он постепенно захватывает бразды правления над наибольшей частью территорий Империи.

Это Ельцин, кто в ноябре распускает и делает незаконной правящую Коммунистическую партию без согласия Горбачёва.

25 декабря уходит в отставку Горбачёв, президент СССР. Красный флаг с серпом и молотом удаляется из Кремля.

СССР перестаёт существовать.

Вопрос касающийся границах территорий бывших стран СССР потенциальная бомба замедленного действия. Многие границы, как например в Африке, пересекают земли обитаемые одними и теми же людьми.

### Afterword

“Heaven only knows where we are going, and heaven knows what is happening to us” (Leo Tolstoy, War and Peace, 1863–9)

Послесловие

«Мы бог знает где едем, и бог знает, что с нами делается» (Лев Толстой, Война и Мир)



Extinction (2018) Art by Ilhas, 2018



### Who's afraid of the Russian Soul? 1

Emília Tavares

The militant cynicism of the writer Thomas Bernhard hangs over Salomé Lamas' most recent film, *Extinction*, in a very significant way. A fierce critic of the idea of nationalism and the heavy historical legacies of Nazism in post-war Austria and Germany, his thinking radically introduces a critical conception of the idea of border to which *Extinction* leads us.

*Extinction* is a documentary and fictional plot about the social and political reorganisation of Russia, and the tragic consequences of the institution of a new empire. Filmed at border checkpoints, in a problematic enclave between Moldova, Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria, the film unfolds under the gloomy cloak of historical heritage and new forms of despotic control over territories.

At the heart of the action is Transnistria, a small country with a complex political and social history which clearly shows the power play in the region between Russia and bordering countries, all formerly part of the USSR. Although it belongs to Moldova, Transnistria claims its independence together with integration into the Russian Federation, an aspiration which is recognised neither by the Kremlin nor internationally. This does not prevent the existence of a clear occupation of social, political and economic influence in this small country by Russia, creating yet another constant source of tension in the region. Russia remains dominant, through border controls, an active spy network and strategic financial aid, establishing its political and economic dominance, but without any recognition of Transnistria's independence.

*Extinction* also reflects on the recent history of Eastern Europe, with clear references to the work of the Polish historian and journalist Ryszard Kapuściński (1932-2007), author of *Imperium* (1993), one of the most distinctive works on the political history of Russia and bordering countries. Furthermore, it confronts us with Russian mentality, through the thoughts of two survivors of the Siberian Gulag, Varlam Shalamov (1907-1982) and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008), whose view of their personal experience in the prison camps under the Stalin regime represents the paradox of Russian culture itself with respect to its totalitarian history.

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The project was filmed in 2015, at a time when the conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation was at its peak, due to the annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea by the latter, which would give rise to an atmosphere of constant tension and fear, evident at each border crossing. This state of conflict persists in the region of the Donbass. With an illusory script and an identity as journalists, the film crew experience the reality of this web of control of identities and nationalities to which the whole region is subjected on a daily basis.

The material filmed for *Extinction* was also used to make a short-film *Self-Portrait* (2018) and a diptych of photogravures (2017) that allude to the only border incident, between Moldova and Ukraine, with KGB agents, and to a series of 3 photographs from a sequence of 148 shots of the film with the title *Dream World* (2018), about the colossal *Memorial House of the Bulgarian Communist Party*, built on Mount Buzludzha between 1974 and 1981.

*Extinction* travels through four Eastern European countries with the historical burden of a Bolshevik Russia, in a dramatic duality of past and present, memory and future resolution, dominated by the decadence of the ideology and its most atrocious ghosts. By engineering the whole film around border regions, the director emphasises the despotic nature of these controlled areas, to which the witnesses confer vehement documentation.

The film clearly expresses the confrontation of memory with the decadence of a future, through the character Kolja, who has Moldovan nationality but claims his Transnistrian identity. Symbolically, Kolja was born at the time of the fall of the communist regime and is conflicted by a drifting identity and a feeling of unconditional love for his homeland. Kolja's life is also the reflection of a historical confrontation between East and West, exposing the weaknesses of the project of the European Community in the face of the imposition of a new wave of nationalisms and autocratic regimes.

Conscious of the symbolic importance of architecture and its legacy of a complex view of history, Salomé carefully films some of the emblematic monuments of the communist regime, which create a second filmic structure that guides us through the horrors of the end of the ideology, and which endure, in the landscape and in memory, as uncomfortable reminders of a recent past. In doing

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so she reveals their material and allegorical magnificence and the flagrant contrast with the eminent degradation and abandon of some of them at the present time. It is important that we reflect on these monuments, which Kolja visits as if on a tour of the past, as patrimonial and symbolic markers with which the new regimes produce their history.

Two important monuments in Bulgaria set the stage for *Extinction*. The first is the monument which commemorates 1300 years of the Bulgarian nation, erected in 1981, also known as the *Founders of the Bulgarian State Monument*, erected on a high plateau near the city of Shumen. The scene of colossal mythical figures which constitute the monument evoke some of the most violent stories of the despotism of the Stalin regime.

The remains of the past also include the *Memorial House of the Bulgarian Communist Party*, built on Mount Buzludzha between 1974 and 1981. An empire of symbolism, it narrates the great achievements of the Bolshevik Revolution in Bulgaria and of its main protagonists. The monument's first phase of construction involved some 6000 workers. It was operational for a decade, but after 1989 it was abandoned as a result of the fall of the communist regime in the country, succumbing to the same fate as many other similar monuments which were either ransacked or destroyed. Currently, the Bulgarian government is planning a mammoth recuperation project with the aim to 'preserve the monument for future generations, while incorporating new museum elements in order to present a full and comprehensive account of Bulgarian history', according to the project's website.<sup>2</sup>

As one of the poorest countries in Europe, with an oligarchic tradition of political and economic power and a worrying swing to the far-right in the recent elections, the past and future symbolism of the monument seems to compromise any critical exercise in history. *Extinction* shows us the immense frieze of the intellectual mentors of socialism covered in anti-communist slogans and graffiti, signs of the political failure of a regime, but not necessarily of its cultural and social ghosts.

In Moldova, the film features the 'Romanita' Tower, situated in Chisinau, built between 1978 and 1986, intended to be a model for collective housing. The building was quickly privatised after the

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end of the regime and is now abandoned due to its unsuitability for modern public requirements.

These are spaces of disintegration, whose memory remains active, representing the decadent ruins of an ideology, and which continue to affect the life and future of the population. Uprooting, lost utopias and frustrated hopes contaminate the formerly noble 'Russian soul'.

Surprisingly, the recuperation of the mythology of this 'Russian soul' seems to be a new source of inspiration for European politicians. A concept invented by philosophers and writers in the 19th century, the 'Russian soul' was rooted in the defence of an intellectuality closer to spiritual values and the people, in a return to the cultural and historical origins of Russia. It strove for an ideal of a universal congregation of humanity, based on Christian values and led by the superior messianic capacity of the Russian people.

The literary and intellectual movement *Pochvennichestvo* responded to the historical duality of Slavophiles and Westernists, constituting a third path for the fate of Russia on the map of nations. Defending Christian ethics, spirituality, suffering and resignation as values of purification, the constitution of this 'Russian soul' was also an indictment in favour of a return 'to Russian soil', to '*pochva*', a way of bringing intellectuals closer to the people and thus allowing them to affirm, above all other nations, their singular capacity for putting fraternal universalism into practice.

As noted by various historians, the concept of 'Russian soul' came about at a time in history of intense struggle and uncertainty between the East and the West, but was nevertheless a concept produced in the romantic context of nationalisms, which would be reused throughout history to justify an identity gap between a unitarian political force and the people.

Another more critical perspective was that of the philosopher Pyotr Chaadaev, who considered that the memory of the birth of the Russian nation was intimately connected to "first wild barbarism, then rude superstition, then cruel and humiliating foreign domination, whose essence our rulers subsequently inherited, that is the sorrowful story of our youth (...) we live only in the present in the narrowest of its confines, with neither a past nor a future – in dead stagnation."<sup>9</sup>

Nowadays, the allegory of this historical concept is being recuperated by some of the political elite, for example, the French president, Emmanuel Macron, who on his last visit to the Kremlin invoked Dostoevsky's messianic vision of the 'Russian soul' to move Putin and Europeans towards a fraternal universality. Other Eastern European leaders have invoked a foundational spirituality as the programmatic axis of an extremist nationalist ideology.

#### Borders and Peripheries

In a Europe of free movement of people and goods, *Extinction* reminds us that the symbolism of borders and their territory are linked to the political constitution of Europe itself, and that they have been crucial in the development of both democracy and despotism. The first great historical border was the separation of East and West, which was amplified by the developments of the dissolution of the USSR and which, according to some historians and political analysts, turned Eastern Europe into the object of social and cultural phenomena of a 'peripheral' nature.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, Eastern Europe was positioned on the political map and in public imagination as a territory that was 'foreign, 'external and exterior' to Western Europe, which recent phenomena of xenophobia and exclusion, such as the attacks on Polish communities in the wake of Brexit, in Great Britain, seem to confirm.<sup>5</sup>

By shifting the reflection from the purely political and geostrategic sphere to aspects of culture and mentalities, the debate and understanding of the constitution of the borders of Eastern Europe take on new shapes.

A fundamental aspect which the countries and societies rebuilt after the fall of the Berlin Wall seem to have in common is the failure of political, democratic and participative devices, since regime change was not accompanied by a change of mentalities or culture. The cyclical failure of an institution of democracy lies, therefore, in a historical context too rooted in despotism and violence, without time for regeneration, reformulated in terms of experiences.

Salomé Lamas' film clearly shows us this mental failure in the face of change, through Kolja and his resignation to a historical

legacy, to a dark and difficult present, an 'I'm nobody' which finds its loudest expression in the divorce of politics from life.

As Pamela Ballinger asserts (2018), "for those individuals suffering the effects of life in a European superperiphery or for migrants trapped in the no-man's land of the "Balkan corridor," the language of Eastern peripheries continues to resonate as a way to denote deep asymmetries. Similarly, such a conceptual vocabulary provides those in the Balkan countries remaining outside of the European Union (...) a means to articulate their sense of being the periphery of the periphery of the periphery."<sup>6</sup>

Through Kolja and the testimonies of inhabitants of these border regions we can better understand this notion of multiplied periphery, not only in its political sense but, above all, in its human dimension. When Kolja affirms that "Europe doesn't interest me, and I don't interest Europe", we are faced with an immense historical echo of a division between East and West which was never purely ideological, but also with a legacy of paternalism and political ignorance, which feeds all extremisms.

The opening of the European Union to the Balkans did not signify, therefore, a universalisation of some of their better principles. Rather, according to some analysts, in the Baltic region, EU accession "has not helped the parties to put the past behind them, as optimistic end-of-history scenarios foresaw. Instead, some of the most dramatic clashes over history and memory have taken place after the historic enlargement of Western institutions."<sup>7</sup>

The violence of which *Extinction* constantly reminds us continues to rise up like a perennial monument, in a region that is both disputed and abandoned, in a cyclic errancy between utopia and its failure.

The response to the question posed by Salomé Lamas, 'Why is it that the East and the West are now about to explode with spectral figures?' has a complex and ambiguous history of understanding.

On the one hand, the Balkans are, in certain circles, understood as a transitional border zone, populated by a masculine and paternalist discourse, embodied by the political figure of Putin. On the other, some historians emphasise the psychological factor of the impossibility of forgetting as crucial in the analysis of the history of Eastern Europe, given that many unresolved problems seem

to emerge with new dynamics. Here, the role of historical and ideological manipulation was and continues to be fundamental in a context in which, according to Vaclav Havel, collective hatred has a terrible "power to draw other people into its vortex".<sup>8</sup>

The pair of historians Bidelleux and Jeffries summarise the region's historical and political crossroads: "The Revolutions of 1989 and their aftermath have not only presented old questions in a new light. They have also raised questions about the past of the new present."<sup>9</sup> Such questions still overshadow the democratic projects of Eastern Europe, but alarmingly they also threaten the consolidated democracy of Western Europe.

*Extinction* is a film which takes a stand, and in this sense allows us to overcome many of the preconceived ideas about Eastern Europe and its recent history, which we see as entrenched between communism and post-communism, but which is much more complex than that. It also demonstrates to us that Putin and Russia are only the most visible face of a wider Europe, which feeds on the paradox of a new autocratic messianism and a savage globalising capitalism.

*Extinction* affirms that "The soul is not a border", putting the worn out 'Russian soul' of the past on a new level of human rights and respect for diversity and identity, which political history cyclically resists. In 2016, on a visit to the Russian Geographical Society, Putin put the geographical knowledge of new generations of Russians to the test<sup>10</sup>, talking ironically about a Russia without the limits of borders, whose past is still active and legitimises its modern political attacks of territorial expansion.

- 1 Title of an article by Hermann Cain, "Who's Afraid of Russian Soul?", published in *The American Review*, 22 August 2017.
- 2 <http://www.budapestmuseum.com/journal/>
- 3 cited in *Outscape*, issue 22 (2018). "The significance of the Russian Soul in understanding contemporary geopolitics" in *Cambridge Slavist*, 7 August 2018, consulted online.
- 4 See for example the article by Kullinger, Pamela (2017). "Whatever Happened to Eastern Europe? Revisiting Europe's Eastern Europeanism" in *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, volume 31, number 1, February 2017, pp. 44-97.
- 5 Ibidem, p. 60.
- 6 Ibidem, p. 61.
- 7 E. Berg, P. Shin (2010). "Incompatible Identities? Baltic-Russian Relations and the EU as an Arena for Identity Conflict" in *Identity and Foreign Policy: Baltic-Russian Relations and European Integration*, Frankfurt, Ashgate, cited in *Bellagio*, Firenze, no. 48, p. 52.
- 8 Havel, Václav (2004). *Towards a Civil Society: Selected Speeches and Writings, 1970-2004*. Prague: Lidové Noviny Publishing House, cited in *Blackwell, Robert and Jeffries, Ian (2000). A history of Eastern Europe: crisis and change, London and New York: Routledge, p. 22.*
- 9 *Ibidem* and *online* (2010) op. cit. p. 21.
- 10 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LH4Y7o7a8I>

Extinction (2018), Excerpt of the Artist Booklet produced for the solo show *Extinction/ção* at MNAC – Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea, Museu do Chiado, Portugal in 2018, containing the text *Who's afraid of the Russian Soul?* by the curator Emilia Tavares.





Extinction (2018), at the solo show *Extinction/ção* at MNAC – Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea, Museu do Chiado in 2018, Portugal



Dream World (2018) and Self-Portrait (2017), at the solo show *Extinction/ção* at MNAC – Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea, Museu do Chiado in 2018, Portugal

## Dialogue list

- *What is your name?*
- *Nikolai (Kolja).*



- How old are you?  
- Twenty-four.

- Are you married?  
- Yes.

- Do you have Russian or  
Moldovan citizenship?

- I have our Transnistrian passport  
and a Russian one.

*We are in Transnistria.*

- What?

- This is not Moldova.  
- You were born in Transnistria, weren't you?

- I was born on the 24th of February, 1990;  
Rîbnița district, Lenin village, Soviet Union.

- But now...what are you?

*If someone said that you were Moldovan,  
then would you contest: "No, I'm Transnistrian."*

- Sure.  
- Aren't they all the same people?

- You could also ask for a Moldovan passport...  
- What for?

- Then you could easily  
travel in Europe.

*I don't need Europe and Europe doesn't need me.*  
- No!

- What's so good about Europe?  
- Is Russia better?

- Why not?  
- What if Transnistria hadn't joined  
Moldova, but Russia?

- I want that.  
- To be annexed to Russia, right?

*Therefore, we will call it Russia?  
Does Transnistria need Russia?*

*- Probably it does.  
- Why?*

*- Their military is implemented here,  
I don't know...*

*Well, we have our own factories, but Russia helps  
with pensions. In fact, it is all owned by us...*

*- Would you like your kids to grow up  
in an unrecognized territory?*

*Where they don't exist, or do they exist?  
It is not important if the country is recognized or not,*

*they will grow up.  
- What is important then?*

*You are totally blocked.  
You are confined.*

*Would you be able to travel without a Russian passport?  
Or without a Ukrainian passport?*

*- No, but it turns out that Ukraine and Russia  
are real countries and this is not.*

*This is the difference.  
- But we keep breathing, right?*

*- Then what? Romania?  
Ukraine? Ukraine...*

*- Cars with Transnistrian license plates  
won't be allowed to enter Ukraine...from today on...*

*- Maybe.  
- Ukraine is upset.*

*- With whom, with Transnistria?  
- With Russia...*

*Because of their attempts to transform  
the Donbass into a new Transnistria.*

- You all have a visa, correct?  
- Only two of us.

- Have the others filled in their immigration forms?  
- No, we're only here for a day.

- Then go through, on the right,  
the customs officer will check you.

Then you'll have to go  
down to the parking lot.

Do you see that office block down there?  
In front on the right side.

- Right there?  
- Yes. Go in there for registration.

- Ok.  
- Yes.

- I should park there, on the right, shouldn't I?  
Down there on the right. Why are you worried?

- Give them your passports and car documents.  
- Alright.

- You can stay in the car for now to stay warm.  
- Alright.

- Don't walk around, sit down please.  
- Ok, approximately for how long will we have to wait?

- For about 15 minutes.

*I believe.*

After all, there is nothing but failure. | No final, nada resta senão o fracasso. – Thomas Bernhard

*- I don't get it. Doesn't Russia have an army in Transnistria?*

*- Yes.*

*- What if they said:*

*"Let's move this army to the Odessa region,"*

*wouldn't the Transnistrian military under contract go too?*

*- No. Why?*

*- Why not? You would be with Russia.*

*- Who granted Transnistria its independence? Russia didn't sign.*

*- Transnistria is an independent republic.*

*- Did Russia recognize this independence?*

*No one recognizes you. Not even Russia, isn't that strange? It is strange.*

*Russia doesn't want Transnistria to break away from Moldova.*

*It would be a disadvantage. Having an army here is solely a strategic interest.*

*- Surely people understand that. They are controlling the territory.*

*It's – history repeating –  
over the same script.*

## EXTINCTION | ÇAO

*- Have you been recording?  
- I'm recording everything.*

*- Why have you been recording?  
- In order to trap me, or what?*

*- Not at all.  
Maybe the Transnistrian government...*

*I was in shock after being called to the  
KGB – Committee for State Security (headquarters).*

*I believed to be in a free country. But it seems that  
the KGB is out in every corner. Watching us.*

### VOICE OVER

*I don't have an easy relationship with borders. They frighten me and unnerve me. I have been searched, prodded, delayed, again and again, for having the temerity to cross a few meters of land.*

*Borders are bureaucratic fault lines, imperious and unfriendly. Their existence is routinely critiqued by academic geographers, who cast them as hostile acts of exclusion; and yet where, in a borderless world, could we escape to? Where would it be worth going?*

*- After...Seventy-three years  
of Bolshevism,*

*people do not know what  
freedom of thought is,*

and so in its place they practice  
freedom of action.

And their freedom of action  
means freedom to kill.

And there's perestroika for you,  
the new thinking.

How was communism built?  
Communism was built by Stalin

with the help of the bezprizorny,  
millions of orphaned,

hungry and barefoot children,  
who wandered along Russia's roads.

They stole what they could.  
Stalin locked them up in boarding schools.

There they learned hatred,  
and when they grew up,

they were dressed in the uniforms of the NKVD  
– People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (Ministry of the Interior).

The NKVD held the nation in  
the grip of bestial fear. Fear.

And there's communism for you.  
What is Stalin's chessboard?

So, he resettled nations,  
mixed them up, displaced them,

so that now one cannot move anyone  
without moving someone else, without doing him injury.

There are currently thirty-six  
border conflicts, perhaps even more.

And there's Stalin's chessboard for you,  
our greatest misfortune.

- Are we in Romania already?
- No, this is Moldova.

- Shall I show the Russian? Do I need the Russian passport or the Transnistrian passport?

- Russian.

- Right, I didn't know...



- *"Trans-Dniester." What does it mean?  
The territory was inhabited by Russians,*

*Moldovans, Ukrainians, Germans, Poles,  
Gagauzians, Bulgarians and many*

*other ethnicities, as well as Jews.  
Initially we weren't a separatist movement.*

*We were legally inscribed within  
the legislative Moldovan system.*

*It had been created by those who  
refused to witness the neo-Nazi movements,*

*controlling the Moldovan government,  
or something to that extent.*

*They started announcing that Moldova  
was a second Romanian state*

*and that those against it  
should leave.*

*That we would soon return  
to our mater Romania.*

*Simultaneously  
the Soviet Union collapsed.*

*We thought that we would  
have the support of the Western states.*

*But the so-called  
democracy hasn't been confirmed.*

*- What if Russia would say:  
"You must go and fight in Ukraine."*

*Aren't you registered  
in the army reserve now?*

*- Why would we attack Ukraine?  
And why would Ukraine attack Transnistria?*

*- Why would Transnistria  
attack Ukraine?*

*- Wouldn't it be strange for Transnistria  
to attack Ukraine?*

*- The Russians have helped Transnistria.  
Now you can also help.*

*So they will protect the New Russia.  
They will claim that the Ukrainian Nazis*

*are threatening the New Russia.  
Something like that.*

*Just like what happened in Donbass.  
It was all made up, realpolitik.*

*Who are these DPR – Donetsk People's  
Republic? These...*

*All of that is organized by the mafia.  
And Putin also benefits...*

*...by showing that Maidan is worth nothing.  
So that would not happen in Russia.*

*Because he wants to stay in power... he's already.  
It's a political game.*



- *It was because of your Maidan that the war started.*

- *That's correct. People decided to change something.*

- *And what have you changed?*  
- *We forced that government to fall.*

*And the Russians felt threatened...  
Then suddenly they annexed Crimea.*

- *Russia will not send its army into Ukraine.*  
- *What?*

- *Russia will not send its army into Ukraine.*  
- *"God forbid it."*

- *Why would they do such a thing?*  
- *Why are you yawning?*

- *Because I'm sleepy.*  
- *We must drink.*

- *Go on, tell me.*  
- *I'll tell you some fairy tales*

*and you will fall asleep.  
About Transnistria and Donbass.*

#### VOICE OVER

*The world is already accustomed to the fact that the Caucasus is burning, that bloody disorders are erupting continually in the Asiatic Republics, that battles are being waged on both sides of the Dniester.*

*All these collisions, rebellions and wars are in the distant peripheries of the former USSR. They are taking place, in a sense, outside of Russia, beyond its body.*

*In short, following the disintegration of the USSR, we are now facing the prospect of the disintegration of the Russian Federation.*

*Or to put it differently, after the first phase of decolonization (that of the former Soviet Union) the second phase begins – the decolonization of the Russian Federation.*

- *Here, where one hundred nations once lived in harmony and brotherhood...*

One hundred mafias  
have now appeared.

The nations have vanished.  
They have ceased to exist.

Three large mafias have  
taken their place.

The Russian mafia, the Caucasian mafia,  
the Asiatic mafia.

These large mafia groups are divided  
into an infinite number of smaller ones.

There are Chechen and Georgian mafias,  
Tartar and Uzbek, Chelyabinsk and Odessan.

The smaller mafias are divided into even smaller  
ones, and these into utterly smaller ones yet.

Small, few...  
But dangerous...

Armed with pistols and knives.  
Stealing, smuggling or squaring accounts,

that is what the everyday life of  
a mafia member looks like.

Each successive crisis, like WWII, or the  
postwar purges, the corruption of the Brezhnev Era,

the disintegration of the USSR, reinforced  
and augmented the ranks of this class.

The first is the – conspiratorial theory of history –,  
promulgated by Stalin for years.

The second is the – tradition –, the practice and  
climate of mysteriousness that is characteristic

of the political and social  
life in this state.

- There were 160 arctic camps.  
Those who survived Magadan or Kolyma,

were never again the  
person they once were.

"It is a terrible thing to see a camp,"  
wrote Varlam Shalamov of Kolyma.

"No one on earth should know camps.  
In the camp experience

everything is negative,  
...every single minute of it.

But seeing the very bottom of life  
is not the most dreadful part of it.

What is the most dreadful is when a man  
appropriates this bottom as his own.

When the measure of his morality  
is borrowed from the camp experience,

when the morality of criminals,  
finds application in life.

When man's intellect attempts not only  
to justify those camp sentiments, but also to serve them."

#### VOICE OVER

*In the fall of 1990, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn published his plan for the kind of state he believed should arise in place of the USSR.*

*In the publication – entitled "How to build Russia?" he proposed that the future state comprise Russia, Belorussia, Ukraine, and Northern Kazakhstan. "Let us give back the rest," Solzhenitsyn advised, "because we do not have the strength for the peripheries."*

*- There is a strong fundament for  
the existence of the Transnistrian government.*

*The absolute majority of  
the population supports it.*

*We aspire to be reunited with Russia.*

*Yet, that is not Russia's desire.*

*They would get into trouble.  
Nevertheless, the Russian World remains.*

*It is evident in the Donbass, New Russia,  
Odessa as in many other locations.*

*The fact is that Albania is free to express  
its will, not Crimea or Transnistria.*

*Therefore, we ask folks coming  
from Western Europe.*

*“Why is that granted to  
some and not to all?”*

*“Well, the cases are distinct.  
It is not comparable.”*

*Politics are imposed by  
powerful countries.*

*It is impossible to foresee  
their final decision.*

*Nobody can tell.  
That's how it is.*

*Two weights and two measures,  
that we obviously reprove.*

*- It shouldn't make this noise, something is broken.  
- Something is not right.*

*Now they've signed a gas contract.  
Ukraine has always bought that from Russia.*

*Their gas prices are higher than in Europe,  
higher than in Germany, for instance.*

*On the other hand, it appears that  
they have close relations.*

*But when it comes to business  
there is no brotherhood.*

*Yanukovych reported everything...  
Info regarding the army, for example.*

*She had been reporting  
everything to Putin.*

*When they entered in Crimea, the army  
wasn't even there...to protect Crimea.*

*Now that the oil prices are dropping  
they will fall into a crisis.*

*- Who?  
- Russia.*

*- Why will they fall into a crisis?  
- Their internal economy is indexed to oil.*

*Have you seen the inflation rate  
of the Russian ruble?*

*They have a very weak economy,  
which is directly linked to energy contracts.*

*The situation inside the country is degrading.  
Only vodka gets cheaper.*

*He (Putin) needs some sort of victory  
to keep the moral. Putin must keep the ratings.*

*They don't need Crimea for anything.  
They struggle to manage a huge territory already.*

*Their state budget doesn't even reach the provinces.  
And now they are adding Crimea.*

CHECKPOINT | FRONTEIRA  
Kuchurgan, P.M.R. | R.M.T. – Pervomaisk, Ukraine | Ucrânia  
KGB inquiry | interrogatório

- Hello.  
- Damn, what is going on?

- Hello.  
- Hello.

- How are you?  
- Everything is fine.

- What is going on?  
- Hello everybody.

Why are you all gathered here?  
Who speaks Russian?

- Yes, but not all of them.  
Some do, the others don't?

- Where are the documents?  
Do you have them?

Where? Show us.  
- We already showed you.

- Yes, but not to me. Passport.  
- The passport.

- Where do you come from and where are you going to?  
- Lenin.

- What have you been doing there?  
Right, I recognize your faces.

*Where did you register?*

*- They entered and left...*

*- You're out of time? Where were you lodged?*

*- No, no.*

*- Did you enter through Moldova?*

*- Yes*

*- Which Moldovan address are you all registered in?*

*- Well... we rented an apartment.*

*- Still, there must be some kind of registration in the EU?*

*- The EU doesn't require registration.*

*- Today you won't need it, right?*

*- Yes.*

*- You only entered and left?*

*Rented an apartment in Moldova?*

*- Yes*

*- What for? Are you the translator?*

*- Yes, I am.*

*- Are you Moldovan?*

*- No, I'm Ukrainian.*

*- From Ukraine. And you've just arrived with them?*

*- Yes, they don't speak Russian and I do.*

*- Interesting. I want to know what you are shooting.*

*- You should've called before.*

*- Film.*

*- I understand that you're shooting but... Is it over or what?*

*- No, it is still the same film.*

*- Haven't you finished yet?*

*Why Transnistria, what is the reason?*

*Is it Moldova and Transnistria separately?*

*- The main theme is Transnistria.*

*- What is he smoking? Show me.*

- Tobacco.
- *Our cigarettes don't please you?*
  
- *He's used to rollies.*
- *Our cigarettes are expensive outside.*
  
- *Are they expensive where he lives? ... Yes.*
- *Yes.*
  
- *Damn, here you can smoke them.*
- *That's why they smoke tobacco. Half the price.*
  
- *If you have the opportunity,  
you should try smoking our cigarettes.*

*It might be better for him.  
Joking...*

- *They bought some.*
- *Here everyone always smokes cigarettes.*
  
- *I was also surprised.*
- *For them, cigarettes are chic.*
  
- *Yes?*
- *It's expensive, you can buy it for 5€*
  
- *That's too expensive.*
- *Not smoking costs less, here it's the opposite.*
  
- *They tasted and bought the Soyuz  
cigarettes, with no filter.*
  
- *Too strong for them.*
- *Yes.*
  
- *Who is financing this expedition?  
Is she the director?*
  
- *Yes, the director.*
- *Who ordered it to be about Transnistria?*
  
- *She did.*
- *She decided?*
  
- *Is there any particular objective?*



- *Interesting, no?*

- *That's true.*

- *What are you shooting in Transnistria?*

*On television? There's nothing to see.*

*Everything is adulterated. Especially in Western television.*

*Everything's clear with you now.*

*I certainly want to see the film.*

*But isn't there a script explaining what the film is about?*

- *Yes.*

- *Is it about the lives of ordinary people or other things?*

*Is it a worthwhile project about Transnistria?*

*Or are there any other interests?*

*There must be something else.*

- *The history.*

- *The history of Transnistria? Did you go to United Work Collective Council office?*

*OSTK can tell you the origin.*

- *Yes, that's why we did some interviews.*

- *Have you interviewed people?*

- *Yes.*

- *Who owns the car?*

- *We rented it.*

- *In Chişinău? ...Is the driver from Chişinău?*

- *Yes.*

- *Are you from Chişinău?*

- *Yes.*

- *Is it interesting?*

- *Very.*

- *What border have you crossed today?*

- *We came through Dubăsari.*

- Did you jump right in our direction?  
To Lenin?

- Yes, we came to Lenin with Kolja.  
- Who is Kolja? This is Kolja, right?

- Yes.  
- This is Kolja.

*Kolja, what did you want to show them?*

- Me?

- Yes, where have you been?  
- To Lenin, I live here.

- But did you go to your house?  
Or have you been shooting again?

- No, to Oksana's.  
- Who?

- Natasha.  
- Natasha?

- Oksana.  
- Who's she?

- And the grandmother. There's an old woman  
and an old man. We wanted to talk to them.

- Are they Kolja's grandparents?  
- No.

- What did you want to talk about?  
- Nothing special.

- Considering that Moldova has almost  
entered the European Union.

*It is easier to cross the border, no documents  
are needed, nor the registration, as before.*

- No, only the registration.  
- And how many Moldovans do you see out there?

- That I don't know. I just know that  
they have biometric passports.

- *Do you have a biometric passport?*
- *You don't need one.*
  
- *They arrive at any time, they rent an apartment and live there as...*
  
- *I'm not sure, if it's for a long-term stay I guess you must register.*
  
- *Are these people here for a long term?*
- *No, they stay until the 4th of February.*
  
- *Isn't that a long-term stay?*
- *A long-term stay is more than three months.*
  
- Now they're here as tourists.*
- *Have you filmed anything today in Rîbnița?*
  
- *In Rîbnița today... let's see.*
- Yes, near the hotel... We filmed him leaving.*
  
- *Who, Kolja?*
- *Yes, leaving the hotel.*
  
- *Is Kolja the protagonist?*
- *Yes...*
  
- *Kolja, what do you do in Rîbnița?*
- *I work.*
  
- *Where?*
- *In the Russian Regiment.*
  
- *Do you work or serve in the Russian Regiment?*
- *I work as a civilian.*
  
- *As a civilian?*
- *Yes.*
  
- *In the heavy lifting work?*
- *What?*
  
- *In the heavy lifting work?*
- *No, no.*
  
- *Where?*
- *Surveillance.*

- *I can't hear you.*
- *Surveillance.*

- *So you're a guard?*
- *Yes, yes.*

- *Hello?*
- *That cell phone doesn't have signal.*

- *She has brought you presents.*
- *You should've called before.*

*You should've called before.  
Now we'll have to escort you to Tiraspol.*

- *Yes? With whom?*
- *Indeed.*

- *I'm going to be punished.*
- *Seriously?*

- *Why are you going to be punished?*
- *Yes, yes.*

- *The two people with the cameras  
should go by jeep.*

*Me and Vitali Yurievich will go by van,  
to divide ourselves.*

- *You should've called yesterday,  
warning that you would arrive today.*

*Then I would have met you...  
Now it'll be difficult.*

- *Have you planned to return to  
Moldova after this trip?*

- *Yes, because we didn't register for long.*
- *Did you enter for a day?*

- *For about six/eight hours.*
- *Yes...*

- *Is the authorization for less than a day?*
- *Yes, yes.*

- *Did everyone register when you crossed the border?*
- *Yes.*

- *Do you all have the immigration cards?*  
*They must be in your passports.*

- *They didn't give us that.*
- *They didn't?*

- *They only returned us the passports with our visas.*

- *All clear. Do you have a visa for the Transnistrian territory?*

- *Yes.*
- *When does it expire?*

- *Yes, it is valid until February.*
- *Hmm...For a month.*

*Kolja, when should you go back to work?*

- *Tomorrow.*

- *As a guard?*
- *Yes.*

- *You are a Russian citizen, correct?*
- *I have their passport.*

- *If you have the passport, you are a Russian citizen. Why are you so uncertain?*

- *Well... Yes...*
- *You have the passport and you*

*don't know which country you belong to?*  
*Nikolai Nikolaevich, maybe it's better not to waste time?*

- *Should Romanich write it or will it take long?*
- *We don't need to.*

*The situation has changed a bit and now you'll have to be escorted to Tiraspol.*

- *Oh!*
- *It's on your way out.*

*We need to talk to you in more detail.  
There is no need to stay here in the open field.*

*Let's go. In half an hour  
we'll be in Tiraspol.*

- The history of the USSR is  
like a train in motion.

First there was Lenin and the train  
was speeding into a luminous future.

The train was progressing  
and suddenly it stopped.

"What is going on?" asked Lenin.  
"The tracks have come to an end."

"Alright, let's call on people for  
additional subbotnik (unpaid labor)."

New tracks were laid down  
and the train moved on.

Lenin died and then Stalin was driving.  
The train was in motion and again it stopped.

"What is going on?"  
"The tracks have come to an end."

"Right. We'll execute all the conductors  
and force the passengers to lay down new tracks."

The train started again.  
Khrushchev replaced Stalin.

When the tracks ended again.  
"What's going on?"

"The tracks have come to an end,  
Nikita Sergeyevich."

"Then this is what we'll do.  
We'll dismantle the tracks over

which the train has already passed,  
and lay them down before the locomotive."

So they did. Then Khrushchev died,  
and after that Brezhnev took his place.

The train stopped again.  
"What is going on?"

"The tracks have come  
to an end, Leonid Ilyich".

"Then this is what we'll do. We'll pull down  
the window blinds in such a way that

the passengers don't see anything  
and we'll shake the carriage, so everyone will have

the illusion that the train  
is still moving forward."

And thus we come to the  
epoch of the three funerals.

First Brezhnev died, then Andropov and  
after that Cherenko,

but people still had the  
illusion that the train was moving.

But it had stopped.  
And in 1985, Gorbachev rose to power.

And the train started again. And on the locomotive  
it was written – "Glasnost-Perestroika." Do you get it?

#### VOICE OVER

*Stalin decided that by the fall of 1930 the entire peasantry of his country must be in kolkhozes. He sent hundreds of thousands of them to the camps or deported and resettled them in Siberia and the rest he undertook to starve into obedience. The main blow fell on Ukraine.*

*So then, by force – usually by military force – the authorities started confiscating everything edible in the villages. The peasants had nothing to eat and nothing to sow. A massive and deadly famine (Holodomor) began in 1930, lasting seven years. Stalin starved around ten million people to death.*

*"The forms of hunger are terrible and varied. Hunger became a norm of life. Only certain individuals had adequate amounts of nourishment. They were the higher officials and the cannibals.*

*Six-year-old Tania Pokidko picked a clove of garlic from the garden of a neighbor, Gavril Turko. He beat her so severely, that after she had dragged herself home, she died. Her father Stiepan, was a Red guerrilla. He took four of his children, already swollen from hunger, and went to the county authorities. When he was refused, he said to Polonski, the secretary of the council: 'It would be better if you ate them than for me to have to see how they suffer.'*

*The kids were brought to a care home, where two of them soon died. And he hung himself from a tree in front of the council building."*

- Do you remember the moment of the collapse?

- I don't. How could I?  
Back then I didn't even walk straight.

No.

- Have you ever talked about it?

With your family? Their emotions...  
They never told you about it?

How they felt?

- We don't talk about the Soviet times.

- Then nothing has changed?

- Changed? We don't talk about it.

The collapse, right? Now we need passports and visas, to enter anywhere.

- Was there a subject on Transnistrian history while you were studying?

- No...There wasn't. We were taught USSR, Russian and Ukrainian history.

But I don't remember them teaching anything on Transnistrian history.

- Do you think it's possible that Transnistria will be recognized in your lifetime?

- I don't know. We've been waiting for 20 years.  
And no recognition.



- What about in 50 years?
- I don't know.

- Are you aware that the non-recognition of a territory subserves the trafficking of arms?

You have no idea of what I'm talking about, right?

- If weapons are sold in Transnistria?
- Yes, have you heard...
- Impossible. Where would we keep them?
- In your factories?
- Which factories?
- Those few.

- No. They produce barbed wire, that's all.

- I've read it several times. That weapons trading and...

- Who wrote it?
- Hum?

- But who wrote it?
- The reporters that have been around.

They say that, when a country isn't recognized, it becomes uncontrollable.

And that Russia, for example, can benefit from that.

They produce weapons and earn money. There's no control in these territories.

- That's just wire and fences. They come and take what's there.

- Weapons or equipment?
- It's easy to see them carrying wire.

They fill the trucks and then return. That's all.

- During the day it's wire, during the night it's weapons.
- That can't be. That's a calumny.

What would be the reason for exporting arms?

- Money, business!

- Stop! The factories almost never work.
- One day they work, the next day they stop.

How much money can that give?

That's not true.

And that's enough of questions.

It is stupid to answer this.

- In the past, Transnistria had been forgotten.
- The media put it aside.

But now with the recent events in Ukraine  
it is in the media again.

That the situation is identical to the one in  
Transnistria, that it repeats itself, etc.

What do you think of it?

- What can I think? Who started it?

What are they talking about Transnistria?

Let them talk...

I don't know what's going on there.

I didn't understand your question.

- There are comparisons in what is happening  
in Ukraine and what has occurred in Transnistria.

- In the 90's?

- Yes.

A republic was declared, that's what's  
happening now in Ukraine.

So, as this is occurring in Ukraine, the media  
has started to actively speak about Transnistria.

Have you heard any...

stories of Transnistrians going to Ukraine?  
Do you know anyone who's made that choice?

Do these people exist?  
- From Transnistria?

I don't know anyone.  
I don't know anything about that.

- So, you naively believe that nothing is going on?  
- I don't know.

I haven't heard about anyone  
who's left.

Why the hell is she asking  
these questions?

- She's interested.  
- She should ask the people.

- You're part of the population, aren't you?  
- From Ukraine, dammit! In Donbass...

She should go and ask the militias or  
the Ukrainian army why the war has started.

How shall I know?!  
- Do you believe that Transnistria

became sort of a...Russian puppet?  
- I don't know.

I can't say anything about that.  
- You work for the Russian Army.

Why aren't you in Ukraine?  
- I don't work for them!

I will not answer this  
question, it's enough!

Why do you avoid  
talking about Russia?

Or your work?

- For what?  
I don't want to, that's all.

I didn't come here to  
answer your questions.

I came here to film, dammit! We filmed what  
you've wanted, I won't answer anymore.

Goodbye.

I'm not answering anymore,  
whether you ask it or not.

So, go to hell.  
- Are you distressed?

- I already said that I wouldn't fucking  
answer to that! Goodbye.

*- Let me tell you something.  
He understands everything.*

*Putin understands everything.  
Absolutely everything.*

*Putin is Russia's hope.  
If he isn't, it will not work.*

*You know what?  
I would like to go to Tbilisi.*

*To visit my mother's tomb.  
But I can't go. Do you know why?*

*I'd have to take a plane,  
because there are no trains.*

*So what? They'll say.  
"The Russian spy has arrived."*

*Why the hell would I need that?  
On top of that I'm a soldier.*

*I still have my pride.  
In Moscow...*

*- It is insane.*

*The border is right behind that forest.*

*I don't know, I've heard that there are  
military troops nearby, in Kotovsk.*

*Right behind that mountain.*

*Not far from here.*

*If they start firing we'll be  
the first to be killed.*

*But we were told that they  
won't do anything.*

*Nearby there is also, in  
Kolbasna, the Russian Army.*

*It is their army. There are more than  
500 Russian units.*

*Here the army is completely Russian.*

*- I thought the army was Transnistrian in Kolbasna.*

*No, there's a Transnistrian  
but also a Russian Army.*

*There you can find underground tunnels.*

*Can you imagine the destruction?*

*You enter here in the tunnels.*

*And you get out in Odessa or anywhere else.*

*These underground tunnels. That's how everything  
keeps moving. Underground.*

*- The border was not here and people  
would come to the market in Rîbnița.*

*We had a lot of people here before.*

*And now what? They dug a hole...*

*Vera and I, we planned to go and  
pick some herbs.*

*Because the pigs like  
those herbs.*

*I saw that they were coming.  
And I thought "What can they do?"*

*Take our herbs away?"  
"Freeze old lady or I will shoot!"*

*Vera was scared. I said "Let us go through,  
we'll pass quickly!"*

*We didn't pass. Vera threw the sack,  
I threw the sack with the herbs.*

*That's it. They took us. I was scared and worried.  
They took us as if we were criminals.*

*Is it such a big deal to collect herbs,  
if one lives near the border?*

*- It's all good until now.  
All's OK, nobody bombed us yet...*

*...We are afraid to go.  
The other day we went to Kulna (Ukraine),*

*my brother lives there.  
I'm Ukrainian, my homeland is there.*

*...To Stara Kulna and the bastards  
were at a crossroad.*

*So they stopped us, four  
huge men with guns came out.*

*Shit! "It will be our fucking  
end here Vanja!"*

*They will shoot us. They will take the car  
and what will we do?*

*"What kind of passport do you have?"  
I said "Ukrainian."*

*"And we are going back." We were on our way  
back to Voronkovo (Transnistria).*

*They checked it.  
It was really stressful for me...*

*He said "Don't worry grandmother,  
I can see that you're a native."*

*He asked "Where are you going?  
Through here or across the border?"*

*"Through the border, because we can't cross  
through the forest...there are a lot of trenches."*

*But we have never tried to cross  
the border in any other place.*

*They say that there are a lot  
of trenches and panzers.*

*Where?  
In Ukraine.*

*- Don't think that I'm an idiot.  
- How could I?*

*- Don't think like those people...  
We've seen too much.*

*Hunger, cold, and so on.  
We don't need neither of it.*

*For what?  
These wars, these bloody troubles.*

*Do you remember how we lived?  
After the war?*

*- Who is on what side?  
Ukraine is sided with Moldova,*

*and Transnistria with Russia.  
- It seems so.*

*Fuck, you can be a Russian spy.  
- Seriously?*

*- Yes.  
- KGB? Uh FSB – Federal Security Service?*

*- Putin's FSB.  
- Why did you agree to work with us?*

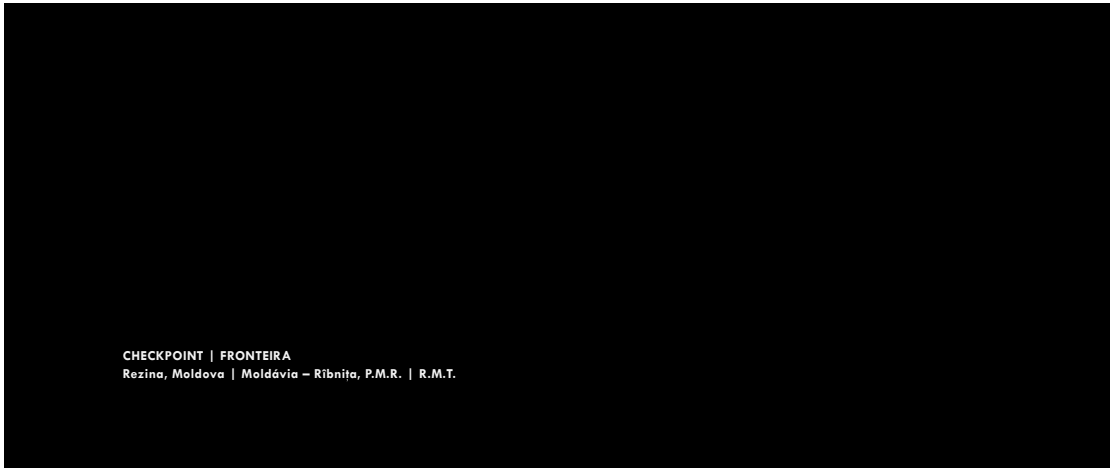
- Well...to wander with you.  
To get to know Europe.

- And what do you think about Europe?  
- I don't know... It's normal.

- Did you see what you were expecting or  
were you hoping it was something else?

- I wasn't expecting anything.  
I liked what I saw, but

what could've I expected?  
If I didn't have any expectations?



CHECKPOINT | FRONTEIRA  
Rezina, Moldova | Moldávia – Ribnița, P.M.R. | R.M.T.

- I must see your permit.  
- Authorization?

What kind of authorization?  
- From Tiraspol, Transnistria...

- Tiraspol, Transnistria?  
- Yes.

- We don't have it...but everything is clear.  
We have been checked by a KGB agent.

- I can't, I just called the city council  
and they ordered me to refuse it unless

you had an official permit.  
- Why?



*- I've just called. She asked me  
"Have you checked the papers*

*for them to remain in our territory?"  
And I replied "No."*

*Then I asked "What kind  
of authorization?"*

*I thought you had an authorization  
from Chişinău.*

*She said that the authorization  
must be issued in Transnistria,*

*issued by Tiraspol or by  
any other official institution.*

*Otherwise we can't do anything.  
Those are the management's orders.*

*Because Moldova and  
Transnistria aren't friends.*

*- If it helps, we have the  
contact of that KGB agent.*

*- He has given you his contact?  
- Yes. Nikolai Nikolaevich...*

*- Galina Nikolaevna, they've just  
told me that the KGB*

*has checked them and  
has vouched for them.*

*- No, they have nothing.  
That's right, thank you.*

*She's going to call somewhere else...  
- Hmm.*

*But she also said that you  
must have the documents.*

*- Do you want your kids to live here in Transnistria,  
in Rîbniţa, or do you have other plans?*

- I want them to leave.  
But in order for them to leave

they need to have  
a destination, a good job.

- Why do you want them to leave?  
- Perspectives are very narrow here.

You can't find a job...  
In fact there are no workstations around.

- Imagine that you could choose any country,  
and have your house there and your car...

- Transnistria.  
- Would you stay here, why?

- I don't wanna go anywhere.  
I don't know. I'm patriotic.

- What does that mean?  
- That's a kind of love for your homeland.

- They wanted him to come today.  
But he's on duty.

Or he had been yesterday.  
- Whom? Kolja?

- Yes, Kolja.  
- If his superiors hear about all this he can be... expelled.

- Did he cross the border with  
his Russian passport?

They wouldn't issue him the documents  
if it were forbidden.

- ...The visa allowed it.  
- That's right they issued him a visa.

- Anyway they asked him:  
"Where do you live, occupation?" And so on...

- Can't he be a tourist,  
what's the deal?

- No, they must check all the information  
in order to grant you a visa. It is not that easy.

#### VOICE OVER

*At the end of 1991, the telephones on Gorbachev's desk rang less and less frequently. The center of power had moved elsewhere.*

*As of June 12, the president of the Russian Federation, was Boris Yeltsin, who gradually seized the reins of government over the greater part of the territories of the Imperium. It was Yeltsin who in November suspended and illegalized the ruling Communist Party, without Gorbachev's consent.*

*On December 25, Gorbachev resigned as president of the USSR. The red flag with the hammer and sickle was removed from the Kremlin. The USSR ceased to exist.*

*The question concerning the borders of the territories of what was once the USSR is a potential time bomb. Many of these borders, as in Africa, cut across lands inhabited by the same people.*

- Borders. What do I care about borders?  
Our soul isn't a border.

*Our soul isn't a border.  
Transnistria is decent and honest.*

*It has emerged by itself.  
I'm nobody.*

*I live in Transnistria.  
I'm Moldovan.*

*Therefore I'm nobody.  
Fuck... There's no other option.*

*"Raise doomed war.  
We all adore you.*

*We and our patriotic brothers.  
God has hung the nations..."*

*But Lenin said that and he didn't pray to God.  
But the song goes like this...*

*And now the Russian...  
"Russia... and our republics.*

*Russia is our large country! Russia!  
Our mater Russia. Your highness, mother and father..."*

*Questions?  
There are no questions.*

To all the unrecognized and unnoticed territories that lie on the margins of legitimacy; lacking diplomatic recognition or UN membership, inhabiting a world of shifting borders, visionary leaders and forgotten peoples. | A todos os Estados desconhecidos e não reconhecidos que se encontram nas margens da legitimidade; sem reconhecimento diplomático ou qualidade de membros na ONU, habitantes de um mundo com fronteiras mutáveis, líderes visionários e populações esquecidas.





Extinction (2018)

## **Text**

### **Sovereignty and the vicissitudes of recognition: peoplehood and performance in a *de facto* state**

*By Michael Bobick*

With its dissolution in 1991, the Soviet Union's fifteen constituent republics became independent states. Overnight, individuals and populations became subjects and citizens of new nation-states, some of which did not exist prior to Soviet rule. The demise of the Soviet Union was far from peaceful, and struggles over the territory and resources of its newly independent states took a violent turn. The April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1993 edition of Pravda states, "Since 1991 we have lost approximately 150,000 in wars on the territory of the former Soviet Union. This is eleven times greater than [were lost] in ten years of war in Afghanistan — such is the scale of the new tragedy" (Babilunga and Bomesko 1993: 29).

In Eurasia, the demise of Soviet power resulted in a number of "frozen" conflicts that birthed polities with varying degrees of international recognition: Transnistria in Moldova, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, and, more recently, the Donetsk and the Luhansk People's Republics in Ukraine. These *de facto* states, some of which have

existed for more than two decades, raise a host of questions related to sovereignty and political authority in the 21st century. De facto states bring up not only the issue of de jure versus de facto sovereignty, but of recognition more broadly.

What forms of recognition are required for statehood, both internally and externally? In what ways do processes of recognition operate vis-à-vis constituents, state institutions, and other sovereign states?

## **Text**

### **Substitution, Satire, and Performance: Eurasia's de facto States**

*By Michael Bobick*

Winston Churchill once remarked, "history is written by the victors." After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the West collectively basked in the victory of Western liberal democracy. In a stunning reversal of Karl Marx, who imagined that the antagonistic contradictions of history would end with communism firmly displacing capitalism, it was capitalism and its political armature, liberal democracy, that had proven to be the enduring feature of humanity, the point at which the Hegelian dialectic had reached its ultimate goal. One prominent American scholar, Francis Fukuyama, boastfully remarked in 1992 that

"What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of government."

Viewed more than two decades later, this astounding statement offers a prescient vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Given the absence of any competing alternatives, even those who oppose liberal democracy have embraced it. Russia is but one example of what Dmitri Furman terms "imitation democracies." Given the absence of any competing alternatives, imitation democracies combine democratic constitutional norms with a reality of authoritarian rule. The form is democratic, the content – autocratic. It is through this uneasy embrace of democracy that one must view Russia: as a country that purports to be a liberal democracy in order to subvert and undermine its principled underpinnings.

Since the demise of the Soviet Union, we have assumed that Russia has been transitioning to a liberal democracy, albeit with its norms, standards, and practices. The West has its own liberal democracy, while Russia has its own sovereign democracy. This fusion of two contradictory concepts – sovereignty as the basis for government and states, and democracy as the system in which citizens participate equally in government – is Russia's unique contribution to an already contradictory era of late-liberalism.

This is not to say that Russian democracy is or is not abnormal, but rather that it is an exercise in substitution: Russia substitutes the principles of democracy with strategy. This strategy trumps all – it was not a single threat that forced Russia to

intervene, but rather the example Ukrainian protesters offered to Russians. The Euromaidan movement's overthrow of a corrupt regime offered a blueprint for deposing Putin. This revolutionary fear echoes the thought of Vyacheslav von Plehve, Nicholas II's Interior Minister, who in 1904 remarked "We need a little victorious war to stem the tide of revolution." This led to defeat in the Russo-Japanese war and revolution in 1905. Unable or unwilling to wage a formal war with Ukraine, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Russia must use the tenets of democracy and human rights (intervention, self-determination, human rights protection) to wage war by other means. This hollowing out of terms – a democracy carefully stage-managed, a people cultivated to further Russian goals, an occupation without formally occupying, a referendum without choice – is the most important takeaway from Putin's Crimean adventure.

### **Victors and History**

Mere days after the close of a successful Winter Olympics in which the host nation won the most overall medals, Russia invaded and subsequently annexed the Crimea peninsula, a *de jure* Ukrainian territory. Though this Olympic victory is perhaps of a different scale than what Churchill imagined, this victory has proven to be much more symbolic than even Russia's two Chechen campaigns. Russia's reemergence on the geopolitical stage is both surprising and expected, given Russia's desire to overcome the perceived harm and humiliation it felt at the hands of the West during the 1990s. NATO's 2004 expansion in Eastern Europe was perhaps the most recent slight, though one must not underestimate the humiliation and privation felt by millions under Yeltsin.

Russia's resurgence as a geopolitical superpower is embodied in the figure of Vladimir Putin, occasional Prime Minister and, it would appear, President for the foreseeable future. Putin is the first leader in generations that Russians can be proud of. Not since Lenin has Russia had a leader capable of embodying the collective voice of a people wronged and misunderstood by outsiders. Precise, charismatic rhetoric (and, it must be said, grammatically correct Russian) is a hallmark of Putin's tenure. This ability to articulate a national vision should not be underestimated. Putin's accuracy, fluency, and clarity are part of his appeal, as is well-documented use of criminal slang. As Prime Minister, Putin famously declared in a press conference, "We will pursue terrorists everywhere ... we will kill [moisten] them in the outhouse."

Putin's celebrity is not only political, but cultural. He has become larger than life, an emblematic figure who exudes the confidence of a resurgent nation. In 2002, a hitherto unknown Russian pop duo "Singing Together" —had a surprise hit that shot to the top of the Russian charts. "My boyfriend is in trouble again, got in a fight got drunk on something nasty," the duo sings. Fed up with their drunk, deadbeat men (a stereotype with a particular salience in post-Soviet Russia), they collectively declare that want someone ... like Putin.

"One like Putin, full of strength,  
One like Putin, who won't be a drunk,  
One like Putin, who wouldn't hurt me,

One like Putin, who won't run away!"

The music video shows Putin at his most confident: meeting with world leaders, fielding questions at a press conference, and, of course, taking down an opponent with his judo skills. In 2002, this video existed at the representative level as an intentionally ironic song. Over time, the core message of this song has increasingly taken on a literal meaning as Putin's adept, quick annexation of Crimea reinforces his image as one who "won't run away" from Russia's enemies or forsake their own compatriots.

During Putin's Address to the Federal Assembly in 2005, he called upon Russians to recall 'Russia's most recent history.'

'Above all, 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. Tens of millions of our co-citizens and compatriots found themselves outside Russian territory.' (Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation 25 April 2005, The Kremlin, Moscow)

Though much discussion focuses on first part of this quote, Putin's comments on Russian compatriots in the 'near abroad' are perhaps more relevant. Russians living outside of Russia constitute a category of people that are specifically protected under Russian law. The specific law, "On State Policy of the Russian Federation with respect to Compatriots Abroad," defines compatriots as "people living in other states deriving from some ethnicity that has historically resided in Russia," along with people who have "made a free choice to be spiritually, culturally and legally linked to the Russian Federation." This choice can include "an act of self-identification, reinforced by social or professional activity for the preservation of Russian language, the native languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation, the development of Russian culture abroad ..." The fundamental indeterminacy within this concept is not unlike the "people" who are the constituent holders of sovereignty in the West.

## **Geopolitical Leverage**

A key element of Russian strategy is to use separatist regions (Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Crimea) as enclaves from which to threaten the states that should legally govern them. Russian actions in these territories offer no single plan or blueprint, but instead a variety of aid and forms of intervention. Some territories are recognized as independent states (South Ossetia or Abkhazia), some are merely supported (as in the case of Transnistria, in Moldova), while others are annexed directly (Crimea). In all of these contested territories, the Russian military directly or indirectly guarantees their security. By creating conflicts and subsequently keeping the peace, Russia occupies the roles of aggressor, provocateur, and peacekeeper yet does not formally occupy any territory. Through these separatist entities Russia indirectly controls the internationally recognized sovereign states in which they reside. This re-establishment of control and influence in Russia's "near abroad" constitutes a new form of warfare. Russia, observing the experiences of US intervention in the post 9/11 era, have learned that wars may be short and cheap,



but occupations are exponentially more costly. By threatening occupation, Russia creates a climate of mistrust and fear that controls the actions of the sovereign states and their polities. The Russian-born anthropologist Alexei Yurchak has referred to this as new post-Soviet, post-imperial political technology of “non-occupation.”

By creating territorial conflicts and supporting claims, Russia guarantees that these states will never be admitted to NATO or any other military alliance, given that no organization would accept a member with an ongoing territorial dispute with Russia, a nuclear power and Security Council member.

With these conflict zones, Russia cultivates (in the agricultural sense of the term) peoples for harvesting once they are ripe and needed to further their strategy. First, Russia gives individuals residing in these territories Russian citizenship. Yet these citizens, permanently residing outside their purported homeland, are objects of affection kept at a distance (think of that awkward relative you are forced to see once a year). Though these citizens are supported materially through aid, subsidies, and cheap natural gas, as they are in Transnistria, their most important benefit is their role in the Russian geopolitical imagination. As such, intervention can occur on their behalf in accordance with Russian and international law (more on this below).

These citizens of convenience speak Russian and readily consume Russian media. They have become acclimated with the “Russian” outlook on the world in which the principled, cherished concepts of the West – democracy, freedom, the rule of law – threaten their uniquely “Russian” way of life. To Russian compatriots as well as to the Russian state, these “foreign” ideas are implanted by covert Western agents through NGOs seeking to destabilize Russia. As the Russian media ceaselessly reiterates, once these ideas are put into practice, their true origins are unmasked -- their practitioners become fascists, and these supposedly democratic protesters topple legally elected governments. As was the case in Georgia (the Rose Revolution), Ukraine (2008’s Orange Revolution and Maidan), and, to a lesser extent, Moldova (the 2009 Twitter revolution), the violence and disorder inherent in every revolution becomes a pretext for humanitarian by the perpetual, paternal bearer of peace and stability: Russia.

### **Satire, Liberalism and Humanitarian Intervention**

Recent events in Crimea have illustrated the degree to which the Russian state has created a new form of extraterritorial governance in its “near abroad.” This political technology of non-occupation allows for its military forces to be both anonymous yet recognized, to be polite (witness the selfies with soldiers posted on Instagram and other social networking websites) yet threatening (in particular, to Ukrainians and Ukrainian military forces). Until the Crimean referendum of 16 March 2014 and its almost immediate annexation by the Russian Federation, these well-equipped “self-defense” forces operated without any official, recognized existence, i.e., without insignia. They were any army without the formal backing of a state, without an individual or collective identity (the vast majority of these forces wore masks), and, at least initially, without an explicit goal (save for keeping the “peace). They were not fighting terrorism, bringing sovereign democracy to Crimea, or formally invading a

sovereign Ukrainian territory. They occupied without occupying. Through simply through their presence they projected enough force to keep lawful Ukrainian forces at bay and allow a hastily-organized referendum to occur under the careful tutelage of this armed, organized, and disciplined army that is in fact not, legally, an army.

Putin's repeated disavowal of these soldiers as self-defense forces is a cynical joke, a satirization of international law, human rights, and humanitarian intervention. This comedic drama has real consequences, as the Russian populace has increasingly embraced Putin's narrative script and potential Crimean scenarios proliferate across the former Soviet space (in Moldova, eastern Ukraine, the Baltic states, and in northern Kazakhstan). Through his defense of Russian compatriots, Putin both utilizes and satirizes humanitarian intervention and the "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) political doctrine. The Responsibility to Protect authorizes intervention in the domestic affairs of another sovereign nation if the sovereign state cannot protect its own population from gross human rights violations such as ethnic cleansing and genocide. It was originally intended to authorize foreign intervention in situations like the Rwandan genocide, and to authorize international interventions to protect separatist minority populations seeking ethnic self-determination. But like all cherished political doctrines, its meaning has shifted in practice. The United States, in particular, uses humanitarian intervention to further its own immediate geopolitical interests. By masking attempts to re-establish the Soviet empire in a humanitarian cloak, Putin performs the same script as Western governments but with a noted cynicism, overtly claiming to use the same principled intervention while transparently revealing a previously unarticulated equivalence between American and Russian imperial ambitions. America does this, so why can't Russia?

These "double-standards" are a staple of political rhetoric within these separatist states, given that they see the West as collectively denying their claims to self-determination. By distancing the effects of war from the term itself (similarly to its non-occupation as occupation), Russia has redefined peace as a continuation of war by other means. Humanitarian intervention becomes an instrument to intimidate and control neighboring states. Putin's distortion of the rhetoric of international humanitarian action reveals the *realpolitik* at its core. When Russia occupies another country's sovereign territory, organizes self-determination (i.e., a referendum) under an implicit military threat, annexes those seeking self-determination, and uses humanitarian intervention and international law to justify its actions, satire has come full circle. Unable to offer any countermeasures to Russian aggression, the West is left to make its case against Russia using these same terms from an obvious position of sincerity, even though these terms have been obviously morally evacuated.

## **Conclusion**

What is important to remember about Crimea is the performative nature of the Russian incursion. At first, soldiers operated without insignia and, ipso facto, unofficially. Yet after they have been unsurprisingly unmasked as Russian forces, their presence enables the new Crimean authorities to perform the constituent actions of any sovereign. This performativity illustrates an increasingly large gap

between legal (de jure) and actual (de facto) sovereignty, though international law holds that recognition by other sovereigns is purely declaratory. These separatist entities exist, they fight wars, and their constituents believe in them despite their many visible failings. Most discussions about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of Russia's intervention in Crimea obscure a particularly salient point that must be addressed: these de facto polities are artifacts of war. Their residents and citizens are inadvertent combatants who have been conditioned to see the stakes of acceding to the de jure sovereign as capitulation to enemies at best, and to fascists at worst. Renouncing their tentative independence is equated with a liquidation of the region's distinguishing features and peoples.

More broadly, Crimea and Eurasia's other de facto states illustrate how a critical mass of dedicated individuals, with the implicit backing from another state, can come to embody a phenomenon long the purview of political science: geopolitics. During trips to Transnistria, Crimea, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan, people would stress the geopolitical importance of their place in the world. During field research on statehood and sovereignty in Transnistria from 2008-2009, residents remained certain that Russia would rescue them from Europe and help them keep NATO and Euro-Atlantic values at bay. This would also, ipso facto, stop the extinction of their Russian (Soviet) culture. Events in Crimea have only heightened expectations. While on a November 2008 trip to the Crimea, I toured the dachas of Chekhov, Stalin, and the Russian painter Aivozovsky (born Hovhannes Aivazian), it was clear these Russian cultural icons remained safe under the tutelage of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. In Yalta, at the summer retreat of Nicholas II, the conference rooms remain as they were when Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin presided over the geopolitical division of post-war Europe. In March 2013, this curated cultural narrative took on a life of its own. At a 2008 NGO conference in Georgia (oddly enough, on the topic of interpersonal conflict resolution), my Georgian hosts lamented the lack of NATO intervention as a geopolitical oversight caused by other, more distant wars; the West would come, they said, though it was obvious that Russia would remain. While a visiting scholar at the American University of Central Asia, similar concerns emerged. Kyrgyzstan, the most democratic country in an otherwise autocratic region, could astutely extort the US for financial gain, as its location as a vital logistical terminal overstated its otherwise peripheral location. One taxi driver, happy for US military contractors who paid him generously, wondered how long this geopolitical game would go on. In the absence of a real economy, the rents generated by geopolitics and remittances would have to suffice. In the absence of any other compelling reason, geopolitics became the primary reason for their country's importance. These claims are not simply the ideological remnants of the Cold War, but must instead be seen as attempts to (re)inscribe themselves in a new world's order. As Russian actions in Crimea have shown, this new geopolitical order offers no firm conceptual designations; paradox, contradiction, and double-standards are its means of creating coherence for those living amidst the liminality-at-large. In this sense one must look at these polities not as outliers, but rather as entities in which problematize a worldview in which reality can be described with an accepted-upon conceptual

vocabulary.

The leaders and elites of Eurasia's unrecognized states champion national self-determination, while the states in which they reside stress the need for stability. In the face of these incompatible principles, these entities illustrate the double standards that allow for recognition of some states (Kosovo) yet deny it to others (the PMR, Abkhazia, South Ossetia). Attempts to delegitimize these entities or to discern their artificiality obscures their communality with our own existence as political subjects.

Crimea, along with Eurasia's other separatist states (Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh) illustrate the very real conceptual slippage of the foundational terms of contemporary politics. Freedom, equality, democracy, self-determination, and intervention are fundamental political concepts of the 19th and 20th centuries, yet in the 21st century we can witness their ongoing (re)definition in old, new, and emerging democracies. Far from being concepts with an agreed-upon basis in reality, their flexible reimagining in Eurasia's de facto states illustrates their inherent indeterminacy. The West intervenes on behalf of principles, while Russia intervenes to further their strategic goals. Given the absence of the Cold War as a stabilizing reference point, we are left to comprehend our own uncertain moment with political concepts that have long since lost their referent. In this sense Russia's humanitarian intervention and support for self-determination should not be seen as perversions of long-sacred principles, but as a reflection of uncertain times.

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Extinction (2018), Excerpts from press kit, Art by Ilhas, 2018