



EX

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ON

A FILM BY
SALOMÉ LAMAS

EXTINCTION

A FILM BY SALOMÉ LAMAS

OUR SOUL ISN'T A BORDER

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.

SYNOPSIS

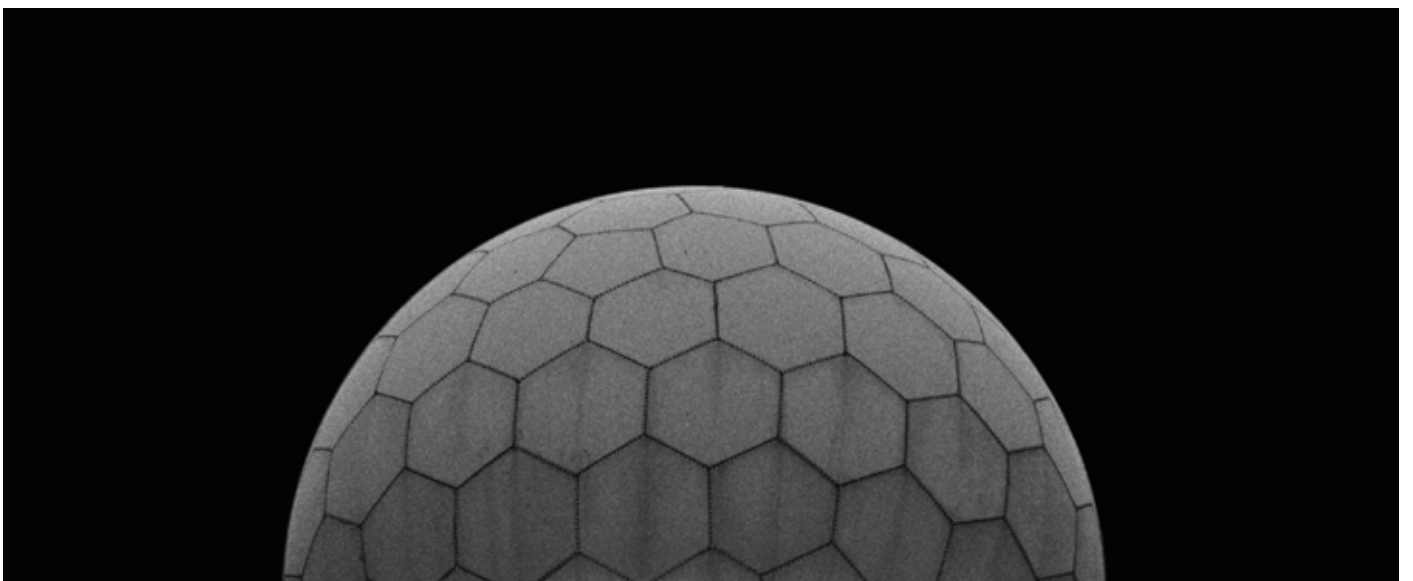
The question concerning the borders of the territories of what was once the USSR has proved to be a potential time bomb. *Extinction* is an eclectic patchwork of materials (fiction and nonfiction) led by Kolya, who is of Moldovan nationality, but declares himself a national of Transnistria. Fragments 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 European Union 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?



BIOGRAPHY

Salomé Lamas (Lisbon) studied cinema in Lisbon and Prague, visual arts in Amsterdam and is a Ph.D candidate in contemporary art studies in Coimbra. Her work has been screened both in art venues and film festivals such as Berlinale, BAFICI, Museu Arte Reina Sofia, FIAC, MNAC – Museu do Chiado, DocLisboa, Cinema du Réel, Visions du Réel, MoMA – Museum of Modern Art, Museo Guggenheim Bilbao, Harvard Film Archive, Museum of Moving Images NY, Jewish Museum NY, Fid Marseille, Arsenal Institut fur film und videokunst, Viennale, Culturgest, CCB - Centro Cultural de Belém, Hong Kong FF, Museu Serralves, Tate Modern, CPH: DOX, Centre d'Art Contemporain de Genève, Bozar, Tabakalera, ICA London, TBA 21 Foundation, Mostra de São Paulo, CAC Vilnius, MALBA, FAEMA, SESC São Paulo, MAAT, La Biennale di Venezia Architettura, among others.

Lamas was granted several fellowships such as the Gardner Film Study Center Fellowship – Harvard University, the Rockefeller Foundation – Bellagio Center, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Sundance, Bogliasco Foundation, the MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, Berliner Künstlerprogramm des DAAD.

She collaborates with Universidade Católica Portuguesa and Elias Querejeta Zine Eskola. She collaborates with the production company O Som e a Fúria and is represented by Galeria Miguel Nabinho.

salomelamas.info

ARTIST STATEMENT

In a fertile occupation of 'no man's land', Lamas refers to her work as critical media practice parafictions.

Rather than conventionally dwelling in the periphery between cinema and the visual arts, fiction and documentary, Lamas has been attempting to make these languages her own, treading new paths in form and content, challenging the conventional methods of film production, modes of exhibition and the lines between various filmic and artistic forms of aesthetic expression.

These works of modified ethnography show an interest in the intrinsic relationship between storytelling, memory, and history, while using the moving image to explore the traumatically repressed, seemingly unrepresentable, or historically invisible, from the horrors of colonial violence to the landscapes of global capital.

SELECTED WORK / FILMOGRAPHY

FATAMORGANA [in production], EXTINÇÃO / EXTINCTION [2018], FATAMORGANA [2017] (theatre play), UBI SUNT I [2017], UBI SUNT II [2017] (video installation - in collaboration with Christoph Both-Asmus), UBI SUNT III [2017] (video installation - in collaboration with Christoph Both-Asmus), COUP DE GRÂCE [2017], HORIZON NOZIROH [2017] (video installation - co-directed with Gregorio Graziosi in collaboration with Christoph Both-Asmus), AUTO-RETRATO / SELF-PORTRAIT [2016-17] (video installation) ...RIOTS AND RITUALS [2016] (web installation), THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD [2016] (video installation), ELDORADO XXI [2016], A TORRE / THE TOWER [2015], MOUNT ANANEA (video installation) [2015], NORTE / NORTH: TRIAL BY FIRE (audiovisual performance) [2015], LE BOUDIN [2014], THEATRUM ORBIS TERRARUM [2013], TERRA DE NINGUÉM / NO MAN'S LAND [2012], A COMUNIDADE / THE COMMUNITY [2012], ENCOUNTERS WITH LANDSCAPE3x [2012], VHS - VIDEO HOME SYSTEM [2010-2012], GOLDEN DAWN [2011], IMPERIAL GIRL [2010], JOTTA: A MINHA MALADRESSE É UMA FORMA DE DELICATESSE [2009] (co-directed with Francisco Moreira)

TECHNICAL DETAILS

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

CREDIT

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 Drumii, Galina Lazarencu 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 Soares

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 Domingues

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: Orquestra Utópica, 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

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ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

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 22nd, 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 Bomeshko 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?

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 Fukayama, 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 21st 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 21st 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 subsequent 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

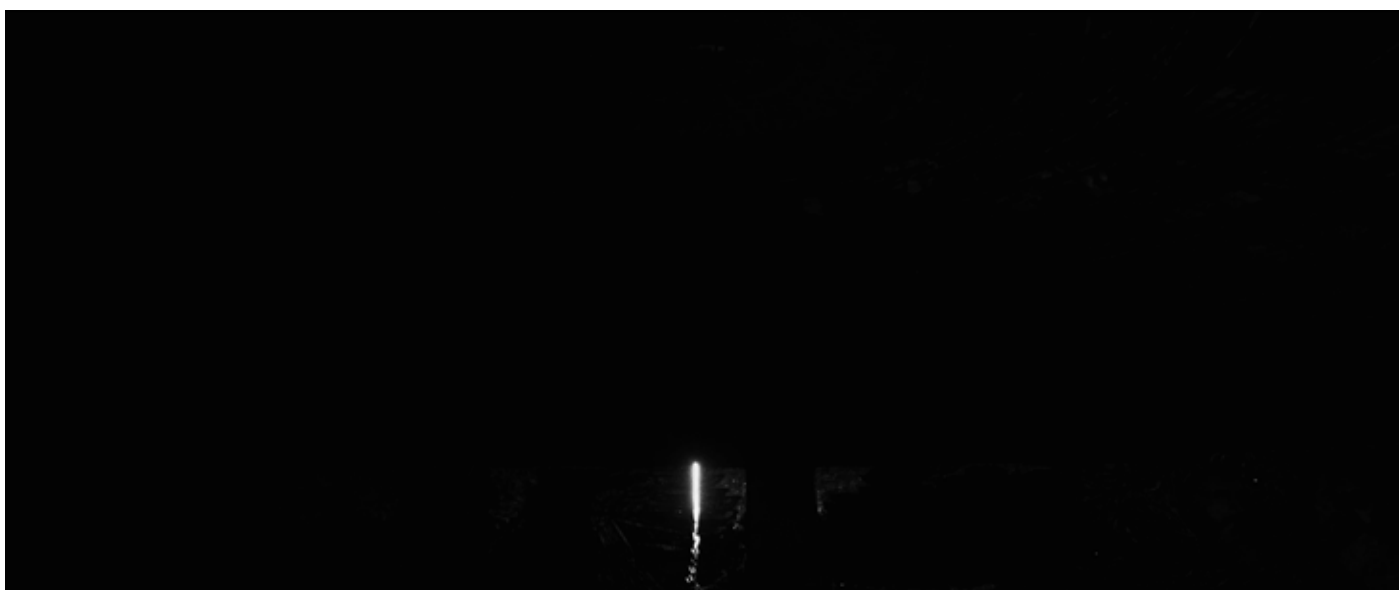
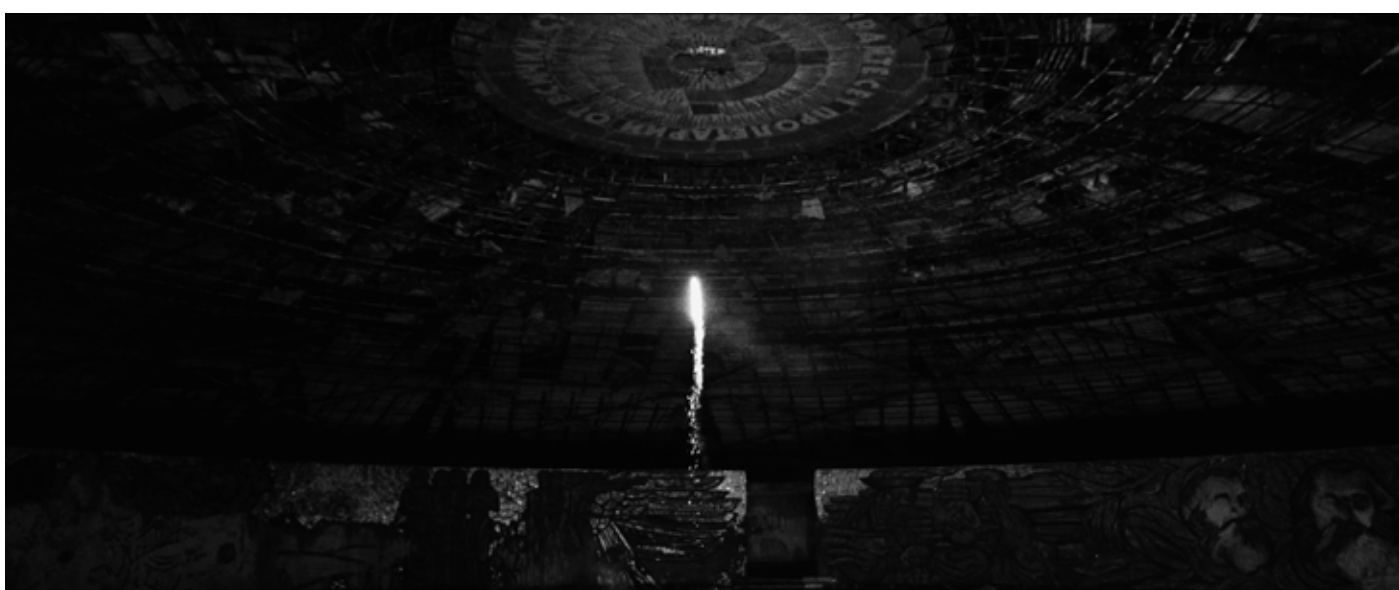
A key element of Russian strategy is to use separatist regions (Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Crimea) as enclaves from which to threaten the states that should legally govern them. Russian actions in these territories offer no single plan or blueprint, but instead a variety of aid and forms 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 “selfdefense” 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 selfdetermination, 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, selfdetermination, 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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O SOM E A FÚRIA
Av. Almirante Reis,
nº113 – 5º, Sala 505
1150-014 Lisboa, Portugal
tel.: +351 213 582 518
geral@osomeafuria.com
www.osomeafuria.com

WORLD SALES

Fabienne Martinot
fm@osomeafuria.com

EXTINCTION

