

The background is a vibrant, abstract composition. It features a white grid of latitude and longitude lines overlaid on a colorful, organic, and somewhat distorted map of the world. The colors are primarily shades of green, blue, pink, and purple, with some areas appearing more saturated than others. The overall effect is one of global connectivity and fluidity.

FEMINIST

TRANSLOCALITIES

Feminist translocalities

Researchers Lesya Pagulich and Tatyana Shchurko (2020) believe that «decolonial theory, critical race theory, Black feminist thought and queer of color critique have powerful tools and theoretical frameworks to address such issues as colonialism, imperialism, and structural inequality in the transnational perspective». Criticizing liberalism as the only scenario proposed to the countries of the former USSR, researchers suggest paying attention to its interpretation by Neda Antanasoski and Kalindi Vora, who view “post-socialist imaginations as “radical and decolonial imaginaries of collectivity and political action” (Antanasoski and Vora 2018), destabilizing and dismantling “Western hegemony, imperialism, colonialism, and racial capitalism».

Interpreting post-socialism as a global state, Feminist Translocalities zine focuses on its imperial and colonial aspects, as well as asserts and emphasizes the diversity and significance of the experience of queer feminist researchers and activists from post-socialist countries. Shchurko and Pagulich (2020) ask what place the studies of post-socialism occupy in the debate about the global coloniality of power, noting that the post-Soviet space is rarely analyzed in the context of colonialism and imperialism and seems to be «raceless». In criticizing racism, one often hears arguments about the impossibility to transfer the American experience to the countries of the former USSR. As researcher Lana Uzarashvili writes, «It is clear that colonial and racist regimes are different, and discrimination against black people in America is different from that directed at them and other non-whites in Russia. However, the way people are categorized in empires shows similarities.» The zine texts place the experience of non-white women at the center of the history of the Russian Empire and the USSR.

Structures of global inequality shape and condition migration paths, creating situations of «homelessness» - not belonging to any of the contexts. *Translocalities* contain decolonial and feminist reflections on the histories of one’s own country, family, personal histories of the search for «home». The authors of the zine question the past and present of the countries of the former USSR, claiming the place of homo- and trans*-sexuality, disability, and the experience of non-white women in it. Talking about the challenges of feminist and LGBTIQ* activism, the work of NGOs and the discipline of gender studies, the texts of Feminist Translocalities show the diversity and complexity of the stories of resistance.

This zine is not an academic initiative. It contains texts by researchers, activists, artists. The texts were collected as part of a call, one of the goals of which was not to reject anyone if the text or work was in line with the theme of the zine. Our selection is not perfect - there are many texts from Russia in the zine. However, Russia is not a homogeneous space for us - our authors come from regions experiencing ongoing colonial violence. This zine is not a complete statement, but a set of impulses for reflection. More lyrics, poems, artwork are available at feminisms.co. You can also suggest your own statement there.



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Rabiga Kushaeva

Mother of the nation

Text: Tansulpan Burakaeva

Illustration: Aynaza Karakay

The text was prepared by Tansulpan Burakaeva based on articles by R. Shakur, I. Saitbattalov, R. Nasirov, M. Burakaeva, S. Khamidullin, R. Suleymanova.

Aynaza Karakay portrayed young Rabiga Kushaeva, dressed in a Bashkir national costume, which she wore to celebrations. The author deliberately portrayed Rabiga in a modern, daring pose, not typical for women of the early twentieth century, in order to emphasize her closeness to today's peers.



It was July 1917. The first All-Bashkir Kurultai in Orenburg was coming to an end. For the first time in the thousand-year history of the Bashkirs, autonomy was created, and much was discussed. But the speech of the only woman delegate excited everyone present at the Kurultai.

It was a sixteen-year-old girl, a teacher from the village of Burzyan, Samara province.

Her name was Rabiga Yumagulova.

Rabiga was born in 1901 in the village of Khasan, Samara province. Her father, the foreman of a territory in the region and a rich man Yangul Yumagulov, was a progressive person for his time and invited the best governesses for Rabiga, who taught her Russian and foreign languages, music and other sciences. From the governesses, Rabiga may have adopted the ideas of suffragism. Or maybe she herself was outraged by inequality since childhood - after all, the rich man Yangul had three wives. Or maybe it's all about Yangul's younger brothers - Gilyazh and Harisa, who were revolutionaries and whose views greatly influenced Rabiga.

It was Uncle Gilyazh who advised fifteen-year-old Rabiga to start a teaching career. The father did not allow that. Then Rabiga ran away from home and began teaching in the village of Burzyan on the banks of the river Irgiz. There she was elected as a delegate to the I All-Bashkir Kurultai. Arriving, she learned that women's issues are not on the agenda and demanded that it should be brought in, expressing her willingness to make a report.

Rabiga begins her speech by asking why there are no other women among the delegates of the kurultai. Because women have no education and live in a difficult situation, - she answers her own question. And makes demands:

- according to Sharia law, men and women have equal rights, therefore they must be equal in political rights and be able to vote and actively participate in public life;
- only under the condition of equality of rights can a nation develop and achieve a high cultural level, therefore, women themselves must vote when laws concerning women are passed;
- you cannot marry girls until they reach seventeen years old; the consent of both the groom and the bride is required to enter into a marriage;
- if a woman wants to get a divorce, then she should have this opportunity;
- polygamy must be banned;
- it is necessary to provide education for girls in Bashkir and Russian languages.

"Long live women who make up half of the nation and take an equal part in the education of future generations! Women are the mothers of the people! « - Rabiga concluded her speech.

The audience was confused. A heated discussion began. Despite the fact that many, especially religious leaders, were against it, the majority supported Rabiga's proposals, and clauses on gender equality were included in the resolution.

Now the girl began to be called «Mother of the Nation» - someone said it mockingly, and someone with respect.

When, inspired by the victory, Rabiga returned home, her father kicked her out of the house. Rabiga left for Orenburg, where she entered a madrasah to study and continued to teach. Soon, at the age of eighteen, she met her chosen one - Vali. The newlyweds moved to Sterlitamak, but lived together only a little more than two years, before Vali died.

In Sterlitamak, Rabiga was actively involved in social activities. She was the head of the women's affairs department. She was responsible for orphans in orphanages and educational institutions. Rabiga participated in the organization of the first congress of workers and peasants' women. In 1921 the newspaper «Azat Katyn» («Free Woman») began to be published, and Rabiga became its editor-in-chief.

In the same year, Rabiga was elected a delegate to the IX All-Russian Congress of Soviets. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin himself received the delegation from Bashkortostan. Rabiga, again the only woman among them, appeared in a national costume. Vladimir Ilyich was impressed and devoted a few minutes to the conversation with the young Bashkir woman.

In 1922, Rabiga went to an amateur concert, where the military commissar Hafiz Kushaev performed a song. Rabiga married him, and in the same year the Kushaevs moved to Ufa, as Hafiz was appointed chairman of the Bashkir Central Executive Committee.

This is how Rabiga became the first lady of the young republic. Their family became the center of attraction for the Bashkir intelligentsia; delegates of the congresses were constantly visiting them. Rabiga continued her active social activities - she participated in the organization of the 1st All-Bashkir Congress of Workers and Peasants' Women, then the All-Bashkir Congress of Women. But she herself still strived to work with children, and soon got appointed a director of the orphanage.

In 1929, Hafiz Kushaev was transferred to Moscow, and Rabiga left with him. There she worked as an inspector of the department for orphanages at the People's Commissariat of the RSFSR under the direction of Nadezhda Krupskaya.

In the summer of 1937, returning from another business trip around the country, Rabiga Kushaeva was shot dead by unknown assailants. In the same year, her husband Hafiz Kushaev and uncle Haris Yumagulov were repressed and shot.

Rabiga had three children. The eldest Minsylu died in infancy, the second daughter Tansylu became a famous ballerina - for twenty years she was prima of the Perm Opera and Ballet Theater. The youngest child - son Irek - was only five years old, when his parents died. He was sent to an orphanage. Later the relatives tried to find Irek, but the search did not give any results.

Bashkortostan keeps the memory of Rabiga. Historians write about her, lectures are given at feminist festivals. In 2017, the Society of Bashkir Women established a medal named after Rabiga Kushaeva: «Woman - Mother of the Nation», which is awarded to active public figures.

All-Russian Congress of Muslim Women

Text: Alexandra Biktimirova
Illustrations: Diana Khalimova
Translation: Irina Sharkadiy

In 1917, on April 24-27, a General Congress of Muslim women from different Muslim regions - Crimea, the Caucasus, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Siberia, and Turkestan, was held in Kazan. It discussed the problems of women's electoral rights, their participation in the public sphere, the legal and marital status of women, the issue of nationality. The Central Bureau of Muslim Women of Russia was elected, which included Gulsum Asfandiyarova, Dilyara Bulgakova, Zakhida Burnasheva, Rauza Chanyshhev-Sultangalieva, Salima Yakubova. They and four other women: Krinitskaya (from the Lithuanian Tatars), Fatima Kulakhmetova, Khadicha Tanacheva, Ilgamiya Tuktarova, were elected representatives of Kazan at the Moscow All-Muslim Congress.

Khadicha Tanacheva, chairwoman of the congress, opened it: "In the preceding time, the previous state did not allow us to discuss our powerless and oppressed situation. Now the former government is gone, the revolution has given us freedom. On behalf of the Central Bureau, I would like to share this joy with you and congratulate the congress from the bottom of my heart... The congress aims to discuss only the most important problems, those that will be presented to the consideration of the General Muslim Congress in Moscow."

One of the most important results of the Kazan congress, the provision "On the equality of men and women in Islam" consisted of three points: "According to the terms of Sharia, a man and a woman are one," "According to Sharia, women have the right to participate in political and social activities. Therefore, women on the basis of Sharia can participate in elections", «In Sharia, there is no requirement for women to wear a hijab and to cover their faces.»

The congress also resolved organizational issues to unite all women's organizations in Russia into one and the establishment of the Central Committee as a temporary institution. It also claimed the equality of men and women's political rights, as well as the participation of women in the elections of deputies to the Constituent Assembly, and formulated civil requirements in the field of family and marriage relations.

One of the main symbols of the congress was the red satin ribbon, which marked a change for Muslims and Muslim women in Russia.

The initiators of the congress were Zeynab Aliyeva, Fatima Alkina, Sara Akhmerova, Mariam Gubaidullina, Khadicha Mustafina, Zukhra Salikhova, Khadicha Tanacheva.



Olga Lebedeva

Text: Alexandra Biktimirova

Illustrations: Diana Khalimova

Translation: Irina Sharkadiy

Olga Lebedeva – Olga Sergeevna Barshcheva – Russian translator, academic Orientalist. She was a student of Kayum Nasyri, knew Turkish, Tatar, Arabic, French. Olga was a member of the Society of Archeology, History and Ethnography of Kazan University, which included the largest scientists and educators of that era.

Since 1881, Lebedeva has worked as a translator in Istanbul. Her works were appreciated by Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II, who awarded her the Order of Mercy of the II Degree (Shevkat Nishany) for her services to oriental studies.

In 1890-1893 she translated into Turkish and published works by Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoy.

In the article «Muslim Feminism» Faizov calls Olga Lebedeva the first Muslim feminist. At the 12th International Congress of Orientalists in 1899, Olga Lebedeva prepared a

report on the culture, history, and position of the Kazan Tatars, and part of the report was called «Freedom of Muslim Women.» In 1900 the book «On Emancipation of Muslim Women» was published, in which Lebedeva raises the problem of the equality of women and men in Islam, and describes the misinterpretation of the Koran by medieval Muslim theologians as the cause of the existing inequality.

Olga Lebedeva also translated the work of Fatma Aliye «Nis-

val-i Islam» into French – in this work, Fatma Aliye examined the position of women in Muslim society.

Our knowledge about Olga Lebedeva ends in 1913; her further fate is unknown.



Natsionalka: USSR and the «ethnic minority women»

Text, illustrations: Yulia Gradskova

Translation: Sofia Smirnova

It's reasonable to look at the Soviet gender history, and particularly, at the early-Soviet campaigns for «emancipation» of «ethnic minority women» or «natsionalki» in terms of multiple power hierarchies and colonial contexts. Which consequences for gender and national hierarchies (and their intersections) did the campaign for «emancipation» of «ethnic minority women» lead to on the regional and country scale in Russia?

On one hand, the Bolshevik center declared the emancipation of women their goal. On the other hand, all local and national activism of women before and during the revolutions of 1917 was ignored.

For example, historically, the «women's issue» in the Volga-Ural region appeared to be linked not just to women's rights in general, but to the process of national self-identification, issues of the development of national languages and culture, and the issue of freedom of religious life. Thanks to the works of the region's historians, first of all of Tatarstan, we know quite a lot about the fight for women's education among Muslims as a part of the project of national renewal (since women were seen as mothers of the nation who influence social progress in general).

We also know about the decisions of the first congress of Muslim women in April 1917. Women who then gathered in the congress in Kazan, mainly graduates and teachers of New Method (following the ideas of Jadidism) schools proclaimed the equality of women in the political and familial area. Also, they stressed that such equality does not contradict the laws of Shariah.



Tamina Biktimirova, Grades of education up to the Sorbonne, Kazan: Alma-Lit, 2003

Alta Makhmutova, It's time for us to light the dawn of freedom, Kazan: Tatar Book Publishing House, 2006

A lecture by Alta Makhmutova:



A commentary by Tamina Biktimirova:



An interview with Tamina Biktimirova:



A magazine for women in the Tatar language has been issued in Kazan since 1913.

The monography of Alta Makhmutova examines the destiny of Mukhlisa Bubi (Bobinskaya) – the first woman chosen for the position of the Muslim judge (Qadi) who, until her death in the period of Stalin's repressions in 1938, worked in the Central spiritual administration of the Muslims in Ufa.

Finally, newly published documents, including the documents of the first congress of Mari in July 1917, indicate that many national leaders of the region considered important and necessary to introduce educational programs for men and women, establish courses for adults, organize cooperatives, kindergartens, summer areas for children and reading-houses.

The recent studies by historians of the region and newly published, especially in translation to Russian, documents of 1900-1910 demonstrate that peoples of the Volga-Ural region in general considered the increase of women's status in the society as a part of the project of national liberation. Tatars especially emphasized that.

Despite the young Soviet republic criticizing the «bourgeoise West», the Bolshevik center represented itself as the center of «culture», i.e. as the «West» for «peoples of the East».

Although the «lack of culture» in one or other traditions and habits was explained by the link to European types and well-argued with the help of scientific data, in some way or another it presumed a cultural superiority of those who by default were excluded from «ethnic minority women»: workers, citizens, conscious women of the «center» who almost always appeared to be Russians/Russified and those who originated from the Christian environment (although atheists in the new life).

The Soviet option of «liberation» inevitably assumed a classification of women and contributed to the formation of a hierarchy between more advanced women of the «center» (Russian and Slavic women) and «national-women» who differed by clothing, language, religion, and organization of life. The orientation towards equality in the future implied inequality in the present, and the new classification, in contrast to the previous confessionally-ethnic ones, was based to a significantly larger extent on differences in appearance and behavior.

How were the women named «natsionalki» presented in Soviet documents? The answer to this question is found in brochures that were issued for those working among «women of the East».

Structures and institutions for the improvement of the situation of «women of the East» and equality suggested by Bolsheviks included the majority of what the educated part of non-Russian peoples and separate women and organizations (in Volga-Ural region too) wrote and talked about long before October 1917. For example, about the literacy of women, about creating educational and social establishments and cooperatives.

But Bolsheviks propagated the measures of organization of kindergartens and areas, creation of reading-houses and fight against the forced marriages of underage girls as a component of the secular ideology, in no way connected with the previous activity of the national and women's organizations of the region.

Moreover, the Soviet type of «liberation» was proclaimed as the only right one. All other projects of the «liberation» of women, when mentioned, were defined as «bourgeois-nationalist» and «counterrevolutionary». For example, in the section devoted to the issues of the emancipation of a Tatar woman one can read that the congress of women-Muslims in April 1917 was convened by «bourgeois-intellectual elements».

The decision of the Soviet government to form a commission for improvement of labor and life of working women by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and in allied and autonomous republics of SSR was adopted on September 20, 1926.

The creation of a central commission for improvement of labor and life of women was chaired by S. Asfendiarov and implied bringing together efforts of various ministries and agencies. It included members of People's Commissariats of Education, Justice, Finances, Health, of the Supreme Economic Council, and People's Commissariats of Health, Social Security, department of workers and peasants by the Communist Party Central Committee (women's department), and also the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions.



Footage from a Soviet film about Mari, RSACFD (Krasngorsk)

The work of the commission was linked to many difficulties even on its most active stage. But its staff gained new skills of leadership, and a part of «national-women» joined the Soviet apparatus of management. Still, even these results should not be overrated, as in the second half of the 1930s the wave of Stalin's repressions began, of which many participants and activists who worked to reform the life of women of «culturally-backward ethnic groups» became victims. For example, the first chairman of the commission, Sanzhar Asfendiyarov became a victim of repressions.

Other projects for modernization of the society together with alternative projects of women's emancipation were driven out and forbidden. The «liberation» itself, despite its obvious achievements described by Soviet historians, turned out to be at the same time a variety of suppression and manipulation on the basis of differences.

The politics of preparation of women and men, independently of their nationality, for the role of a complete and equal subject of Soviet modernity in the situation of the Volga-Ural region of the late 1920s was maintained by identifying differences in civilizations and forming hierarchies of peoples. New differences built around the definitions of «socialism» and «culturalism» not only didn't destroy but even strengthened the hierarchies between «backward women» of the Volga-Ural region and «advanced» women of the «center». The latter then received significant symbolic privileges as the carriers of culture, an embodiment of modernity and rationality. They were supposed to contribute to the evolution of «backward women».



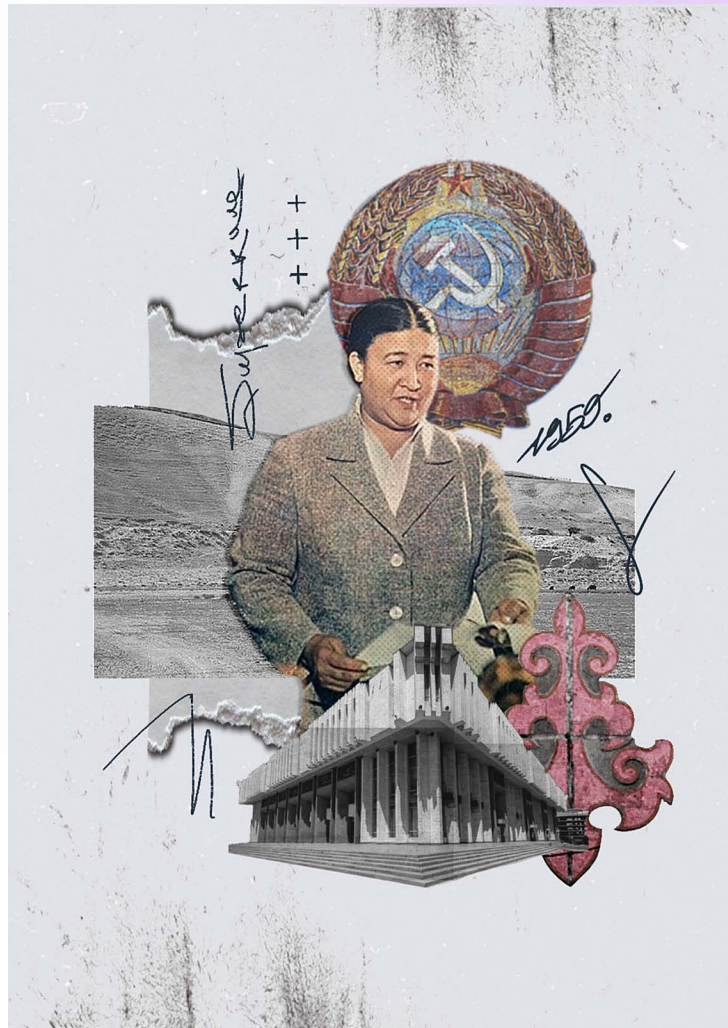
«The worker of the East»: Mari, Otyak, Bashkir woman, 1928

The Absent Portrait

Text: Sasha Talaver

Illustrations: Diana Khalimova

Translation: Anaita Azizi



Historian Christine Varga-Harris suggests looking at the magazine «Soviet Woman» published by the Committee of Soviet Women not only as a propaganda platform (which, of course, it was) but also as an essential source of moral support for women in decolonizing and newly liberated countries. Addressed to women in developing countries, the magazine was about the Soviet East women and their path to liberation. The magazine emphasized the active role of women in the revolution and the ongoing modernization. They preserved their national traditions (often presented in costumes or folk art) since the latter was an important symbol of their national liberation. According to Varga-Harris, the magazine offered women in developing countries a third way — different from Western cultural universalism and a conservative turn toward traditional values. The magazine proposed a complex hybrid of socio-economic modernization. Women play an important role in preserving a traditional culture in which national pride is expressed - and all this is reconciled under the banner of international socialism. USSR's self-presentation in the magazine was such that it did not create a clear line between developed and developing:

«Basically, by publicizing official programs aimed at ongoing progress within the USSR, outreach to the foreign East presented “developed-developing» as a continuum rather than a dichotomy. The divisions that emerged in Soviet Woman between “self” and “other” were also muted by Soviet emphasis on “international integration rather than on territorial imperialism.”»

Christine Varga-Harris, “Between National Tradition and Western Modernization: Soviet Woman and Representations of Socialist Gender Equality as a ‘Third Way’ for Developing Countries, 1956–1964,” Slavic Review 78, no. 3 (ed 2019), 780.

Turns out, as Varga-Harris writes, that the Soviet Woman magazine avoided the typically colonial attitude towards the «women of the East,» eliminating the tension between subject and object.

But such a representation was combined with a repressive policy towards the national republics with mass deportations of peoples, the imposition of the Russian language and cultural norms, economic exploitation, and suppression of local political elites based on their nationalism.

And although the national republics were represented in both the government and the highest party bodies and public organizations, the RSFSR's preponderance was evident. For example, in the Committee of Soviet Women, there were 90 representatives of the RSFSR and three Central Asian republic representatives. Nevertheless, historian Sergei Abashin notes that the woman who reached the highest political post in the USSR was from the Uzbek SSR - Yadgar Sadykovna Nasriddinova.

Article from the Great Soviet Encyclopedia: Nasriddinova Yadgar Sadykovna (born 26.12.1920, Kokand, Fergana region, Uzbek Soviet Republic), Soviet stateswoman and party leader. Member of the CPSU since 1942. Born into a working class family. In 1941 she graduated from the Tashkent Institute of Railway Transport Engineers. In 1941–42 Nasdriddinova was an engineer of the machine-track station of the Tashkent railway. In 1942–46 she was a secretary of the Central Committee of the Young Communist League of Uzbekistan. In 1946–1947, a First secretary of the Tashkent Regional Committee of the Komsomol.

In 1948–50 she was the Second Secretary of the Central Committee of the Young Communist League of Uzbekistan. In 1950–52 Nasdriddinova was at party work. From 1952 to 1955, she was Minister of the Industry of Building Materials of the Uzbek SSR. In 1955–59 - a Deputy Chairwoman of the Council of Ministers of the Uzbek SSR. In 1959–1970 she was the Chairwoman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek SSR, in 1960–70 a Deputy Chairwoman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. In 1970–1974 Nasdriddinova was a Chairwoman of the Council of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. She was a member of the Central Committee of the CPSU since 1956. She was a Deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of the fifth and ninth convocations. She was awarded four Orders of Lenin, Order of the October Revolution, and four other orders and medals.

How did Yadgar Sadykovna understand her political tasks for herself? Did she have exceptional sensitivity arising from her positionality and physicality? Who were the activists in the USSR who had a strong national identity and defended their interests? How did “women of the East» understand the created differences since the “nationality» column always reminded them about it? Was there a room for such a reflection?

In 1975, the Committee planned to hold a seminar for Asian women, “Raising the level of women's self-awareness.» The name astonished me with its consonance with the “self-awareness groups,» which flourished as a form of feminist political work. But we never know what could have happened in the process and as a result of raising the level of self-awareness of Asian women, since during the negotiations the seminar was renamed into “Participation of women in the economic development of their countries and the upbringing of the younger generation.»

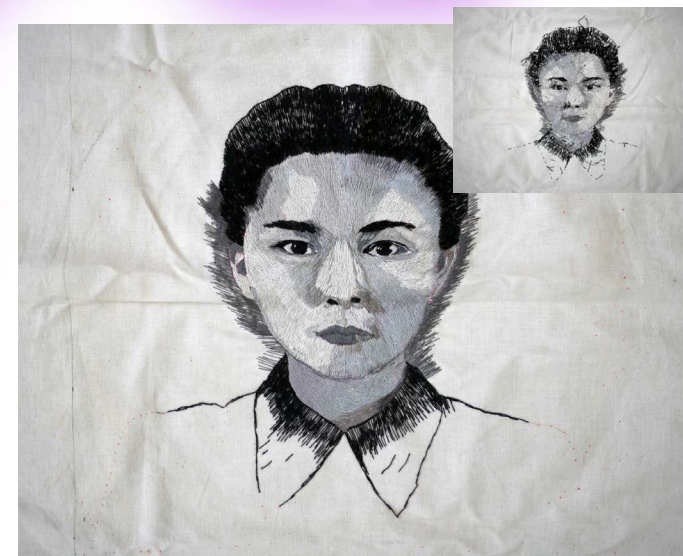


Motherland

Victoria Sarangova



1.



2.



3.

The series consists of four portraits.

1. Portrait of an unknown Kalmyk woman.

2. Maria Adianova, Frunze, 1946 - I saw this photo on Elza Guchinova's website in the "Siberian Album" section. There I also read an article 'Everyone has their own Siberia' with Maria's recollections.

Link to memoirs: <http://www.elzabair.ru/content/memoy/stati/uzkazhdaga.html>

3. Larisa Yudina - chief editor of the newspaper "Soviet Kalmykia". Killed in 1998. I often read this newspaper, as my mother sold it in the Central Market. Larissa's death shocked me.

«Caucasian Knot» wrote that Larisa Yudina, editor of the opposition newspaper Sovetskaya Kalmykia Segodnya, was killed on June 7, 1998. Members of the public and human rights activists believe that this murder had a political connotation, since Yudina published materials of journalistic investigations on the pages of her newspaper, the threads of which reached out to the President of Kalmykia Kirsan Ilyumzhinov and his entourage. Although the killers of the editor of the newspaper were found and convicted, the real beneficiary of this crime, in the opinion of many people, was never named.

Source: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/221420/>

4. My mother Sarangova Nadezhda. She was born in 1949 in the village of Talmenka, Altai Territory, in exile. She died in 2010 in the city of Elista, Kalmykia.

Photos of the series of hand-embroidered portraits "Motherland" (2014)



4.

Problems with translation, or Who is this Other that they are afraid of?

Text: Mariam Agamian

Translated from Russian by Feminist Redakcija

Countries without a history of slavery based not only on class but also on racial inequality do not want to speak about their racism.

After I wrote a blog post "What's new in my backpack?" I learned from the feedback that I should have called the kind of hate I receive xenophobia and not racism.

In my non-expert opinion, xenophobia is a term from human rights vocabulary. There is no group facing systemic violence behind this word; only a group of human rights defenders who wish to study "xenophobia" as a phenomenon.

By all means I identify with the anti-racist movement; it has agency, visibility, and positionality. Perhaps, there is an impressive movement against xenophobia? It mostly mobilizes for the purpose of a seminar for police, with a photoshoot and a story about how a kind word changed a mindset.

It is time to start studying the problems with science and terminology. There are no words to denote "people of color" not because they haven't been yet approved by some chief of the dictionary.

This year it's the 5th anniversary of my "Menya besit" project (<https://www.facebook.com/text.menya.besit/>); I have restored it and am open to new texts. It is a small but important movement resisting binary and racism. Only liberal feminism is at odds with small movements; I am for it. Many small but radical movements are better than a big one but against all the bad. The bad actually have names, and it's time to start saying them.

Illustrated with the qr-code with a link to the karaoke song by the "Rozmyta povistka" band.

The text is written in preparation for the Feminist Critique discussion forum dedicated to the Combahee River Collective Black feminist manifest.



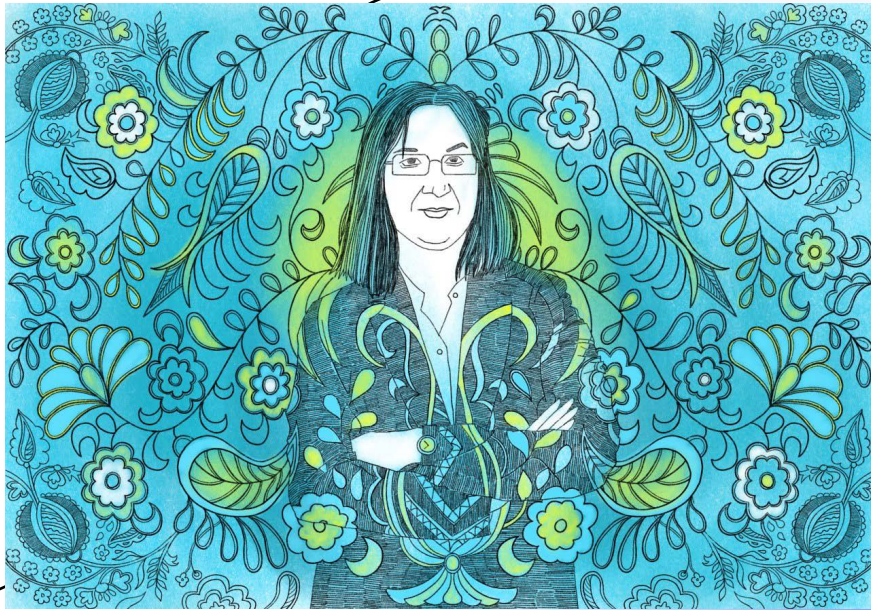
Gulnara Bekirova, Crimean Tatar historian



Text: A. Murtazayev

Illustrations: Simor Nezoriy

Translation: Lisa Guryeva



The history of Crimean Tatars, as of many other nationalities existing in the post-Soviet milieu, is one of unresolved conflict and pain. Only seventy years after the 1944 exile of Crimean Tatars from Crimea did Ukraine recognize the event as genocide. The event split life into a before and after for this ethnic group. The struggle for the right to return to their native soil continued well through the 1990's, with many activists still fighting even today. The deportation and subsequent scattering of families, with communities and even ethnic subdivisions forming over the decades, led to an immense loss of historic material, access to oral tradition and familial history. The Soviet authorities attempted to reshape the historical narrative in a way that favored them. After the annexation of the peninsula by Russia in 2014, the history of Crimean Tatars gained distinct politicization.

Under such circumstances, the study of national history or that of dissidence transcends the framework of academism, transforming into part of a movement which returns to its people the right to grief, a voice, and identity – collectively, the right to national history. Historians who are engaged in this matter often encounter situations which require reevaluation of the standards of research objectivity. Today, as the history of Crimean Tatars and the repression against its people continue to be marginalized and misrepresented, it becomes difficult to distinguish where historiography ends and politics, activism and protection of human rights begin.

Gulnara Bekirova is a historian who has worked on the intersection of these domains for her entire career. It would have taken three such articles to list all her scholarly publications, appearances on radio and television, partnerships with kindred organizations and other achievements. However, it nevertheless would not be enough to convey the immense scope of the researcher's work. The Crimean history expert Bekirova's practices can be divided into two key research paths: the first being the national movement of Crimean Tatars, its origins, development, peculiarities and principles; the second – the deportation of Crimean Tatars, the reasons behind it, its genocidal nature and its destructive consequences. Gulnara's parents, Tasim and Kaside Bekirov, are originally from the Crimean cities Baidar and Kerch'. In 1967 they settled in Melitopol, where a year later Gulnara was born. Neither Tasim nor Kaside could return to their birthplaces after their deportation from Crimea: the territory of Baidar was partially closed off and inaccessible to Crimean Tatars, and their native village Anzhimendi near Kerch' had been destroyed.

Bekirova recalls how in her school days, history didn't interest her. Instead, what drew her in more was painting and fiction literature. Gulnara had even applied to Kharkiv State

School of Art, but changed her mind and withdrew her application. Deciding on a profession did not come easy for Bekirova. After graduating from school, she worked as an operator at the Melitopol Motor Plant, thus giving herself more time to think. Her plans included the faculty of philosophy and the faculty of directing at the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography, continuing with two unsuccessful attempts to join the classics division at University of Leningrad, and an undershot of points for the faculty of history at Moscow State University. Finally, in 1989 Gulnara was accepted to the Moscow State Institute for History and Archives and graduated in 1994 with the specialty of historian-archivist. In 2003, she was accepted as a member of Memorial, part of the National Research Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, with whom she had been in contact with since 1996, if not earlier. This occurred after the publication of her article, "The problem of emigration of Crimean Tatars in Russian historical literature» in the collection Grassroots which had been created with the support of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, together with Memorial. Already in 2008 she had left Memorial, which was quite a significant event for her – that year, she started her professorship at the Crimean Engineering and Pedagogical University in the Department of History and Philology, and started hosting her weekly program Tarikh Sedasy (tat. – Echoes of the Past) on the Crimean Tatar television channel ATR, where she discussed important events and figures in Crimean Tatar history. Bekirova also hosted another program on ATR: Tarikh Levkhalari (tat. – Pages of History).

In 2012 Gulnara became a candidate of political science. She received her qualification at the I.F. Kuras Institute of Political and Ethnic Research of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. In a 2006 interview on the weekly show "Peninsula», she remarked that her dissertation did not serve as an important milestone in the development of her career, and found no interest in it. "I value the essence and substance of a piece of work more than its form. That's where my work lies,» Bekirova stated. It's worth noting that the interviewer was the editor of "Peninsula» Vasvi Abduraimov, who is currently the chairman of the Crimean Tatar organization Milli Firka, the political opponent of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, with whom Bekirova collaborates. It's noticeable: in the significantly long period between Gulnara's graduation from university and earning her PhD, she managed to make a name for herself as a historian, publish numerous articles and monographs, participate in research projects and television programs, and receive the international B. Çoban-Zade Award, which recognizes outstanding humanitarian research on the subject of Crimea and artistic works in the Crimean Tatar language.

Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula affected Bekirova's life, just as it has for many other Crimean Tatars. For some time still after the event, Bekirova continued teaching at the Crimean University, whereas now she no longer lives in Crimea. As of 2014 Gulnara keeps a column by the name of "Pages of Crimean History» on the site Krim.Realii (rus. – Crimea.Realities) of the Ukrainian PEN Center. Since 201 she holds

the position of vice-chairperson of the Kulturai Commission of the Crimean Tatar People in the study of the genocide of the Crimean Tatars, and has been assisting the Prosecutor's Office of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in the investigation of the genocide proceedings, procuring relevant documents and sharing those sources that are already in her arsenal. Investigation is a complex task, since Ukrainian legislation does not coincide with the standards of international law governing war crimes.

Gulnara has travelled extensively throughout Ukraine post-annexation of Crimea, attending conferences and giving open lectures on the history of Crimea and Crimean Tatars. Bekirova explains that it was thanks to the annexation that she discovered the beauty and diversity of Ukraine as a country. In recent years, she has been increasingly involved in the study and popularization of the shared history of Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians and their joint struggle with the Soviet regime.

In one of her interviews, Bekirova noted that the title of 'professional historian' "connotes a certain objectivity and a pursuit of historical truth independent of national identity». She herself admits that she is not only a historian, but also a Crimean Tatar whose family has yet to return home, for whom distancing herself completely from politics or national consciousness is impossible. The way in which research objectivity within the context of dealing with crimes upon one's own people or upon another social group to whom one belongs should work is a separate, painful question, especially within this post-Soviet space, in which reparations, or at least the coverage of historical truth, are still far from being addressed.

The processing of the history of Crimean Tatars done by Crimean Tatars themselves is a dynamic process which is instrumental not only as a contribution to the bank of historical research, but also as a way of preserving vital memories – historical, cultural, and personal ones. Returning to home soil has been the dream of these people for so long, and for some, it is still an ongoing one. Historical research, such as the type that Gulnara Bekirova does, signifies the return of a voice.

Parisian Scarf with «Red Moscow» Scent

Text, illustrations: Nadya Sayapina
Translation: Anaita Azizi

My grandmother Valentina Nikolaevna, whom we sometimes called «the Countess» because of her maiden name Orlova, cherished life, people and memorable and aesthetically beautiful things. That is why, when sorting through her closet after She passed away, I immediately realized that I had found not just an ordinary box among the starched sheets. The old cardboard box was not filled with jewelry (it had been stolen long ago by fraudsters who played on her trust), but the feeling of being in touch with a real treasure filled me along with the overflowing smell of «Red Moscow». Lacy and embroidered, silk and nylon scarfs crunched with innocent intactness and careful storage, silently asking questions about their historical message.

One seemed familiar to me - it was a wedding gray-haired post-war old-timer. Others, more modest, betrayed their later Soviet and perestroika origins. But there was one that I wanted to call queer: it stood out with its variegated and pretentious modernity among this antiquity, it seemed both an «original» and a «fake», «expensive foreign» and «cheap Chinese» souvenir depicting sights around the commemorative seal:

«Mon passage a Paris».

It was this scarf that became the map of my research passage.



The first frontier brought no results: dad’s responses did not bring facts nor hypotheses about the origin of the unusual scarf. There was no one else to ask: the sisters and brothers of my grandmother passed away: some of them lived to an old age in different cities of Russia, where they were from, and some of them passed away in a difficult inter- and war period.

The second stage - google excavations - helped to identify the object: a similar scarf was exhibited as an antique lot on etsy and was called «probably» a Frenchman from the 1940s. This information raised even more questions, because none of my relatives visited Western countries in those years, and Valentina [my grandmother] herself was young and was just about to get married. Commission stores, queues, Czech glass, German porcelain and French perfumes were still far ahead.

The third and culminating stop arose a couple years later, and remains a hypothesis, but very important for my today’s «women’s agenda.»



Shop rating
★★★★★
Total shop reviews
622
Debbie Williams 24 июл 2020 г.
★★★★★

GenevaVintage
1902 sales ★★★★★

Mon Passage à Paris -
1940s Souvenir Nylon
Hankie Hanky
Handkerchief

Local taxes included (where applicable)

Vintage from the 1940s

Material

nylon

Translate to Russian

Description

Mon Passage à Paris - 1940s Souvenir
Nylon Hankie Hanky Handkerchief

This is a souvenir nylon hankie
probalby from the 1940s. It features

Rakov appeared in life a few times: as a study of ceramics history during student years, as a trip to plein air, as an excursion to a private museum, and finally, as a visit to a friend who moved there from the capital. Exactly after this trip the sensational and historically important past of a once border settlement town and a mecca of smuggling began to intrigue me.

«What is Rakov of the 20-30s - it is 134 stores, 96 restaurants, 4 brothels, a casino...» And again I find a «treasure» among the «starched» articles, namely a photograph from V. Likhodeev's collection «Rakov. Students of cooking courses. 1931», and the history of the Parisian scarf with the «Red Moscow» scent begins to unfold in my head.



Раків. Учасники курсів по кулінарії. 1931 г.

Alevtina («reflective», «strong», «wandering», «rubbing with incense») - that was the name of the eldest and, perhaps, the most unfamiliar of all the sisters. Memories were limited to the fact that the grandmother saw her at a conscious age only at her wedding, and soon after that Alya died due to a serious «female» illness. Her first husband, with whom she moved to Belarus, when my grandmother was very little, seemed to have died in prison before the war. No details were mentioned, and they never had children.

I also remember how once, having praised the delicious pancakes, I heard: “Mom always said that Alevtina baked the best. She was a real cook.»

A problem²

Given:

«Rakov. Students of cooking courses. 1931»,
«Real cook» Alevtina and her husband, who ended up in prison before the war,
Grandma's wedding in the late 40s,
A French souvenir scarf “probably from the 1940s”...

Question:

- Dad, don't you remember where Alya, grandmother's older sister lived?

Answer:

- I didn't find her, we moved here only in 1966. But it seems like somewhere near Minsk, or Radoshkovichi, or Rakov, something with an «r» ...

² This is a reference to how math problems were solved in schools (translator's note)

Instead of an epilogue

«- now the carriers will appear now. Levka is there with them. Bombina is preparing food.
- how are you, squeezed her at least?»
(S.Pesetsky «Lover of the Big Dipper»)

«... the 1937 edition was the first popular spy novel written by a professional intelligence officer. And in 1938 Pesetsky was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature»
(newspaper «Komsomolskaya Pravda in Belarus»)

I have no facts and their ends have sunk into oblivion. But I believe that Alevtina could be a disguised smuggler, the right hand of her husband and a henchwoman, who was rewarded for taking the risk of baking bread with jewelry, being afraid of raids and searches, hiding and hiding, ashamed of her life, afraid of the death of her beloved and facing her, - just a Parisian scarf. And to present this scarf at a wedding of a younger sister, whose adult life was just beginning and smelled openly and honestly of «Red Moscow».

And I keep this thin nylon as a prize for an unknown and unwritten autobiography marked «quasi», where a woman smuggler became the protagonist.

THE CUTTER



Text: Adiba

Illustrations: Victoria Sarangova

When I was eighteen, I was forced to roll dough every Saturday. A big circle of dough – thin enough to see the kitchen table’s fine grey cage pattern, or, as they say, “thin enough to be able to read a newspaper through it.» The dough would then be used for beshbarmak (a traditional Kazakh dish), for orama or for manty;— in that case, it should be slightly thicker, so that only the day’s headlines would be recognizable. I was forced into this traditional female labor by my grandmother because my uncle would come over every Saturday for lunch. My grandmother would wake me up around 9 o’clock in the morning and give me chores. I would probably still be drunk from the night before, after four hours of sleep (if I’m lucky!). My strict and reserved grandmother would never address my red eyes and pale hungover face. Only once would she ask me why I behaved like that. I explained to her that nowadays clubs are the places to find someone. In fact, isn’t she the one insisting that I find me a husband?

I started living with her right after my mother’s death. After, my uncle – while sitting at the head of the family dinner table – proclaimed that he was sacrificing his ability to continue living with his mother for me, so that I could now have an actual chance to become the real Shoshanova. He said it as if “the royal» Shoshanov family finally recognized the bastard that I was and decided to take in a stranger who just happened to have the same last name. What would that entail? To become someone real in regards to a random surname assigned to them at birth?

Anyway, here I was; standing in the kitchen and performing as a perfect ‘Kazakh girl’ through a hectic dance with a dough roller, as close as I could ever be to what it means to be the real Shoshanova. But those were Saturday mornings, on Friday nights, however, one would normally find me at the gay club. At that point Almaty, a rather big vibrant city with typical Soviet architecture mixed up with ugly, newly erected skyscrapers made out of glass and metal, had a single gay club. Plus one lesbian party that happened once a month at the ‘Art Club’ with a huge portrait of Leonardo da Vinci on the ceiling. The crowd was full of butches and femmes – the division was present, clear and in a way mandatory. I was hanging somewhere in between, not femme enough in the absence of makeup, long hair and high heels, and not butch enough in the absence of cologne, short hair, and a big wristwatch. The amount of alcohol that was consumed at those parties was dizzying, and there would always be a fistfight by the end of the night.

Two years later my grandmother would give up in her fight with the cancer that she was living with for the last ten years. She planned everything. Together we went to “Kyzyl Tan» — one of the oldest trading houses of Almaty, an astonishingly beautiful 19th-century landmark of Russian wood-architectonics — and bought five meters of white fabric for my grandmother’s burial. She would be wrapped in it, with pieces of cloves between the layers before being put in the traditional Muslim carpet and then sent six feet under. The previous set, prepared a long time ago, was given away to bury her daughter. She planned everything. She called a remote relative to come and be her caregiver. Bakhty: a small, full- bloodied, earthy woman in her fifties with a big, red, weather-beaten face, high cheekbones and thin lips covering uneven teeth – one of them golden. She would curse in Russian like a sailor and laugh loudly. This would be the first and last time in my life that I would hear such cursing from an elderly Kazakh woman. “Where were you last night, nahuy blyat?», she would ask me smiling. Her eyes, two thin lines, sparkling.

I would watch my grandmother’s gradual fading: not being able to walk, not being able to sit, not being able to eat, not being able to talk.

Around that time I would pick up, or rather let myself be picked up, by a butch-y dyke who was 10 years older than I. It was my first time in giving up on feelings and love, and a start in fucking strangers. She was big, strong and full of life. Our sex was the most heteronormative sex one can imagine: she would shortly go down on me and then finger-fuck me for hours, desperately digging for what science used to call “vaginal orgasms». She would be disappointed by my “clitoral orgasms» and would never get fully naked, always remaining in her underwear. For a while that didn’t bother me much; I took whatever salvation life would give me to reclaim my body back from the constant feeling of being drowned in the waters of death.

I remember how we brought my grandmother to the bathtub. Bakhty would take her back, while I would secure the legs and hold back the doors. A big, red, full-blooded body with a pale-white skeleton on top. My grandmother would sit in the water like an overgrown wrinkled child, while I would rub her back with a washcloth. She would always instinctively cover her right side with a palm, almost with a fist, where her breast before her mastectomy had been. My little old Amazonian, who survived her father’s raskulachivanie, his deportation to Siberia and death at the war; who grew up during this war, married a man-child at age 18, gave birth to three children almost in a row, then at age 24 buried her mother who died of cancer, built a family, lost her husband at 59, went through the fall of the Soviet Union, got cancer at 69, and buried her daughter at 77.

I remember us, me five years old and my cousin seven, playing in our grandmother’s room, jumping on her bed, while she was undressing and changing into home clothes. We would jump towards her, kiss her and touch her. I would say that her right breast is mine and my cousin would react very fast to claim the ownership of the other one. Breasts always fascinated me: they gave milk, they served as a perfect pillow and occasionally became a toy. In order to play with a breast, one should push on a nipple, count until five and release... the nipple would harden and the areola would get all wrinkly. Push at it again and it will soften, push once more it will harden. A perfect game to bring oneself to sleep.

One of my friends told me how her mother, while explaining a perfect consistency of a dough, suddenly said: “Just grab your breasts! Do you feel it? That’s how the perfect dough should feel like!» I know how to knead dough. It should be as tight as your grand/mother’s breasts, as your own breasts, as the breasts of your lover. I know how to roll dough. It should be as thin and as white as your grand/mother’s burial cloth.

Throughout her last night, she screamed a lot into a feverish oblivion. I would enter her bedroom and lay down beside her to calm her down. Bakhty told me to use an old Kazakh saying that will ease her departure: “Kyidym seni, kyidym seni, kyidym seni,» which means “I cut you off, I cut you off, I cut you off.»

And I used it.



Text, illustration: Aida Akhmedova

From Asia to Africa to Europe, the largest mass movement in history is under way as millions return home to sit out the pandemic. This includes irregular migrants, even to unstable regions with deficient healthcare: from Iran back to Afghanistan and Pakistan; from eastern Libya back to Chad, Niger, Egypt and Algeria, and so on.

(Brady, 2020)

What is home?

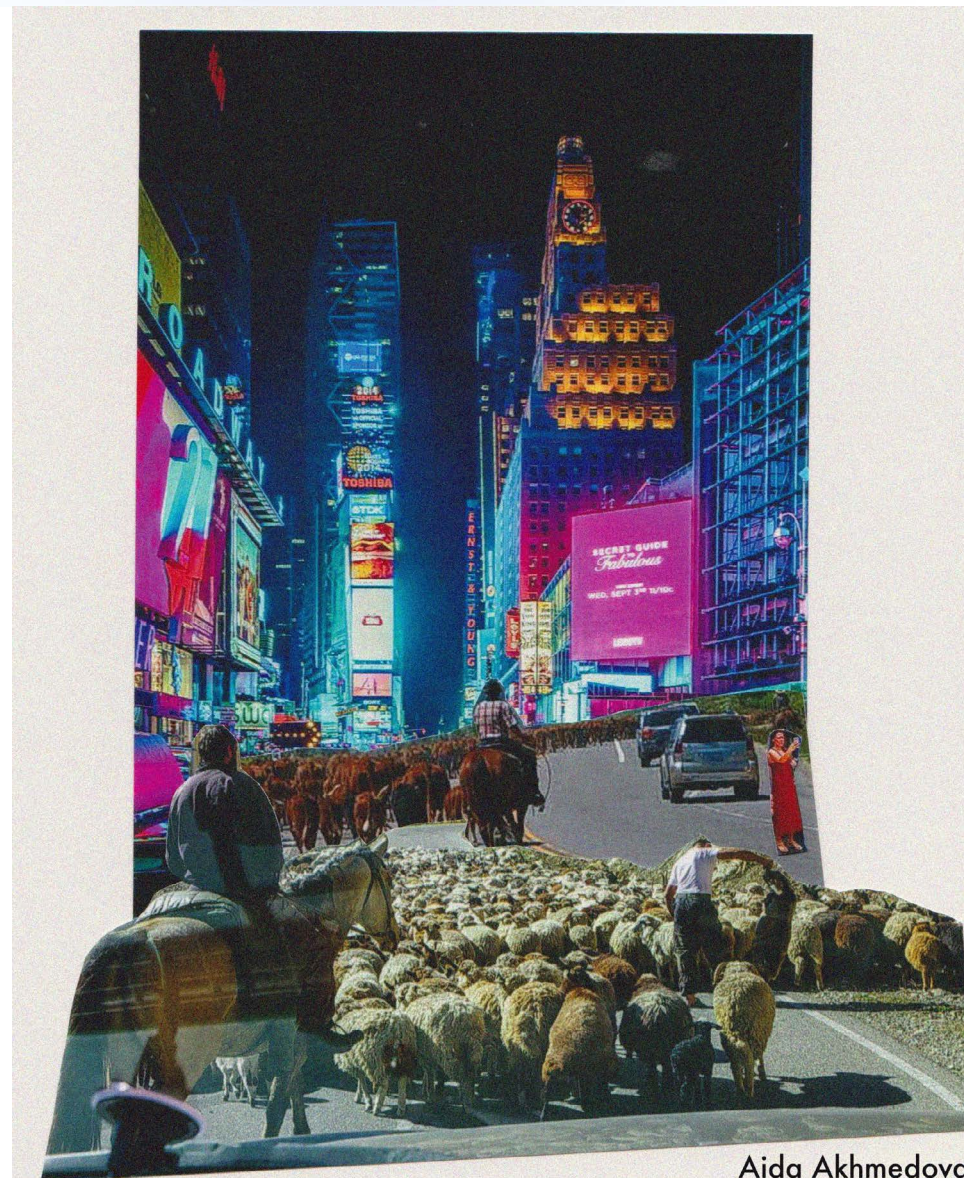
What does it mean to return home after being away in labour migration for years?

Who can afford to return?

How are these processes regulated transnationally?

How are these processes being negotiated and challenged by those who are «on the move»?

These and other questions were posed in my research on the topic of «Women's experiences of Return Migration in the post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan».



Aida Akhmedova

In the following short text, we will share some thoughts with regards to return labour migration from Russia to Kyrgyzstan.

Every time I come back to Osh having lived or travelled elsewhere I would feel like 'stuck in time'. Every time I returned, I looked for ways to move out from Kyrgyzstan, even though I deeply love and care for my country. At times, return was unbearable, leaving me angry and mad at many things, including the current economic situation that Kyrgyzstanis' are left to deal with. As a generation of people who grew up in the independent Kyrgyzstan I never understood this 'longing for the Soviet times' that older generations would express. I think exactly that longing, that nostalgia has created some kind of an imagined immovable time space in my head, where people often look to the **past** to think of the **now**.

In my thesis I attempted to look at return migration through decolonial perspectives in order to have space to think beyond and between borders, be it physical or imagined. Why those borders came to exist in the first place? What are their effects on people's collective consciousness?

I had a colleague; he was similar in appearance to Caucasian. He is Russian, very similar to Caucasian - apparently a mestizo. When we had some food together and he went to the restroom, [Kyrgyz] boys approached me and asked whether he was my boyfriend and whether I was sleeping with him. I am very ashamed sometimes to admit being Kyrgyz. (S)

There is something more to the topic of return I thought, something that bothers me deep inside every time I come back home. While talking to a psychologist that I could afford to pay when I was studying in the Netherlands, I found myself noticing self-censorship of some type. There are stories that I can no longer share upon return. There are behaviors that I can no longer practice upon return. There are patterns of conduct and norms that I have to comply with in order to preserve my 'place' as a woman.

[...]I'd better come now, I'll settle down here, than later I'll come back when I'm already over forty. When I'm not accepted to work anywhere, I'll be at that age and I will not have neither job nor nothing. And I'll return, and what will I do [where will I work]? (G)

Labour migration corridor between Russia and Central Asia is one of the biggest in the world. Oftentimes, people I know in Kyrgyzstan have some sort of relation to migration; their siblings are migrants, their neighbors or they themselves have gone to Russia to work at some point. The reasons

for migration vary, but the economic and financial component of this question stays.

Economic independence is when you can count your money - financially be literate and be able to save up. Accumulate so that you can live half a year without working. This is for me economic independence. And everything else that you earn and send to the penny back home - is not economic independence. (S)

We may take for granted the notion of 'home'.

Seeing the experiences of people in my hometown returning home or talking about the impossibility of return, it is possible to see with a naked eye that it is not a personal issue, but a political one.

Here in Russia, the word migrant is not very pleasant, since here the word migrant is associated with an uneducated person from Central Asia who came to work, who takes away jobs from Russians, one can say. Or who reduces the average salary of a Russian white man (S).

[I am] Just a newcomer who came to a neighboring country to work. There was nothing so terrible to consider myself a migrant. The word itself oppresses me so. It always sounded kind of humiliating to me (G).

It is by listening, suggesting a communication that stems from the place of honest confusion, an imagined room for self-reflexivity; thanks to the stories told by five women, who are my sisters, my girlfriends, my fellow citizens that our voices came to exist. Our voices echo each other, albeit not identically. We are all women who were relocated due to life circumstances and only a tiny little part of our life stories came to be reflected upon together, partly, in these pages.

Thank you.

RE-SEARCHING HOME

Text: Tanja Sokolnykova
Illustrations: Olga Kozmanidze

I.

«We need to learn in our bodies [...] in order to name where we are and are not, in dimensions of mental and physical space we hardly know how to name.»¹

Donna Haraway

I was born in Ukraine in 1989. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Francis Fukuyama proclaimed the End of History. My life path started with the End. History not only came to an End, but the existence of it was also denied. Or rather, the individual and collective memories were obliterated and replaced by the specter of one alleged past. Squeezed into the defined and monumental frame of History, the lived experiences turned into unprocessed trauma that was silently begging to face its own repression. It was the End in which the future also did not exist. Because the future was already corrupted by the present. But what was there in the present? In the present there was a void called the post-Soviet transition. Was it the rise of a new socio-political order or was it an old Ego, disguised in tricolor and the aura of freedom, stability and prosperity? An Ego of universal and ultimate truth that has plagued and devoured spaces of human and non-human life, thus taking cover behind its own homogenized self in order to appear as historically innocent? It was a shift that revealed itself to be the enduring and enclosed limbo of yet another power regime, rather than an open-ended process of emancipation. It was a force that could be put into effect and sustained at the cost of the erasure of the past and future - the End of History celebrated the eternal Ego. A force that manufactured the desire to be subjugated and eradicated, playing into the hands of those who seemingly acted out of “good will» but ultimately only served their own interests. «Good will» was nothing but the will to secure the inheritance of the observer and not of those observed. The observer who glorifies the inheritance of normality. The line that separates sanity from madness has never been clear. In fact, it is not clear that such a line ever existed. This is because what passes for sanity is in fact a kind of madness. Maybe it is a neurosis of normality, or let’s call it the “normotic disease», meaning the insane need to appear normal. What if all normality is really normotic?

This transition occurred inside and around me. A transition towards the game of catching up with imposed standards and developments. A transition towards farce and intoxication. A transition towards the survival of the fittest and self-othering. A transition towards the decline of communal life and intergenerational hatred. A transition towards Homelessness...

While I am typing these words, digesting the remnants of memories, my mind interrupts and asks me: «Where is your home?» My lungs are contracting. I pause and pass the question on to my heart: «Where is my home?» My lungs are expanding, sending a response out into my limbs: «This locality can not be found on official maps. It is the closest geography that can be listened to and experienced through sensations rather than being represented through as seemingly trustworthy symbols and predetermined codes – it is your body and the ties that you weave with other bodies. Home is embodied in the space of in-between relations, in the act of putting oneself into connection with seemingly distant fields in order to recognize their proximity – a geography of our fatigued bodies, communities, places, the environment.”

But, why don’t I remember my home? Isn’t it because my sense of home was biased and misused? Isn’t it because my muscles, my tissue and my breath were shaped in a way as to make me incapable of feeling home? Isn’t it because the flesh of my body was hollowed out by the void of the present? Isn’t it because an external gaze filled that void and pushed my feet towards Homelessness?

The more the image of the fatherland manifested, the less the children of the land had a chance to not become an image of the father. The more cars occupied the streets, the less health care was valued. The more the cities were swallowed up by luxury properties, the less the beggars were dressed right in front of them. The more fashion brands established the objectified self, the lower the wage of the textile workers became. The more «integration” proceeded, the less dis-integration was possible. The more I sank into the void, the less I was resistant to the forgetfulness. My home was amputated.

Re-Searching points to the process of a new search of something that was encountered or experienced once but is already lost or forgotten. Re-Searching is the intention to overcome the condition of alienation and to heal the exhausted fibers of micro-relations. Re-Searching insists on memories and reclaims bodies. To remember is to allow the past to collapse into a multitude. To remember is to make a claim that other futures are possible. To remember is to embrace conflicting feeling on the way towards home.



¹ Donna Haraway (1988): Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective, in: Feminist Studies, Vol. 14, No. 3., pp. 575-599.

II.

«We are humus, not Homo,
not anthropos.»²

Donna Haraway

A land is not only a territorial unity, but rather, like a human body, a knot of intertwined meanings and relations. It is a spatial entity of geo-historical conditions and contexts that we inhabit and perform, individually and collectively. It is a place where we take our first breath and where our breath is taken away. It is the contaminated ground under our feet and the intoxicated air that we inhale. It is the environment that we take for granted in the same way as we take for granted the mechanisms of oppression that are imposed upon the land, shaping it into a site of socio-cultural constructions and projections. Struggles, contests and discourses are played out across the land, treating it as an object whose value depends on the extent to which it can be commodified, extracted and controlled. As a corporeal archive, it comprises a multitude of memories, types of knowledge and histories, imprinted in the texture of places and landscapes. The land bears witness to colonial violence, enacted upon its body – an imagined site of «other» that is so deeply entangled with another constructed «other», deviated from a single norm of humanity – racialized, gendered, ethnicized and economically stratified.

I am willing to approach the definition of land as a body in order to explore other ways of thinking about home and the foundations of belonging, beyond border regimes and rigid identity politics. This allows me to search for a conception of land which might result in a divergent way of thinking, one that incorporates locality, and how this thinking might nurture relations of care and repair in the face of patriarchal violence and environmental extractivism. I propose, dear reader, to direct our attention to the ground and attend to the Soil, the material essence of the land, which holds the potential to become the fulcrum for «thinking from below». Thinking from below constitutes the foundation for Re-Search.

I start this search at the Museum of local history in my hometown Mykolajiw.

Here, I come across the name of Vasilij Dokuchaev, a Russian geologist who established what is referred to as soil science back in the second half of the 19th century. What makes me curious about Dokuchaev is his conception of soil as a «natural and historical body»³, a view which he developed during his years of travelling across the territories of the Russian Empire. While the museum's vitrine only displays very sparse information about Dokuchaev's studies, I decide to delve deeper into his writings⁴. This historiographic journey brings me back to the time of the late Russian Empire, growing capitalism, prospering scientific thought, agricultural expansion and the massive drought across the oppressed lands. Dokuchaev was sent on an expedition as the Empire's attorney to find out about the reasons behind this drought. During his expeditions, Dokuchaev developed his own ideas through encounters and conversations with peasants, learning about their hard work on the land, though he was closely familiar with people's living conditions since he had grown up in a small Russian village in the family of a priest. Dokuchaev made discoveries beyond his role as an attorney, recognizing that the exhaustion of natural resources was directly linked to the violent mechanisms of growing economic control over the land and the exploitation of labor. Although Dokuchaev represented the scientific male elite of that time and the interests of the Empire, he criticized the rules of domination over the land that went hand in hand with the legacy of serfdom and the coercion caused by capitalism.⁵ These realizations accompanied Dokuchaev's scientific investigations of Chernozem soil's properties across Russia, Ukraine and Moldova through which he paved the way for conceiving the soil as a natural and historical body. He stressed the importance of recognizing the soil as a relational and dynamic being that emerges as a result of the interaction of complex activities and living forms such as bedrocks, the climate, organisms, vegetation, water, the topography and human impact.⁶ Hence, Dokuchaev suggested that soil is intrinsically local as the material interactions are closely interlinked with the immediate environment and human activity, though these realities are woven into a wider web of collective becoming. In this way, he challenged the belief that soil is dead matter and a consistent framework on which culture developed. In his lectures,

² Donna Haraway (2016): Staying with the trouble. Making kin in the Chtulucene. Duke University press, p.55.

³ Докучаев В.В., Значение почвенных карт: Избранные сочинения, том III Картография генезис и классификация почв, Москва 1949, с. 18

⁴ Докучаев В.В., Избранные сочинения, том I, II и III, Государственное издательство

⁵ Докучаев В.В., Значение почвенных карт: Избранные сочинения, том III Картография генезис и классификация почв, Москва 1949, с. 335

⁶ Докучаев В.В., Значение почвенных карт: Избранные сочинения, том III Картография генезис и классификация почв, Москва 1949, с. 18

⁷ Докучаев В.В., Лекции о почвоведении: Избранные сочинения, том III Картография генезис и классификация почв, Москва 1949, с. 357

⁸ Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2019): Re-animating soils: Transforming human-soil affections though science, culture and community, in The Sociological Review Monographs 2019, Vol. 67(2), p. 398

⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 391

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 399

¹¹ Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2015): Making time for soil: technoscientific futurity and the pace of care, in: Social Studies of Science 45 (5), September 2015, p. 13

¹² With the relation of «becoming-with» I refer to what Donna Haraway means a multi-species companionship:

«Companion species are relentlessly becoming-with. The category companion species helps me refuse human exceptionalism without invoking posthumanism. Companion species play string figure games where who is/are to be in/ of the world is constituted in intra- and interaction. The partners do not precede the knotting; species of all kinds are consequent upon worldly subject- and object-shaping entanglements. In human-animal worlds, companion species are ordinary beings-in-encounter in the house, lab, field, zoo, park, truck, office, prison, ranch, arena, village, human hospital, forest, slaughterhouse, estuary, vet clinic, lake, stadium, barn, wildlife preserve, farm, ocean canyon, city streets, factory, and more.», in: Donna Haraway (2016): Staying with the trouble. Making kin in the Chtulucene. Duke University press, p.13

Dokuchaev contested Darwin's law of nature, which is based on the principles of competition and the survival of the fittest, with his own understanding of nature and soil in particular, describing it as a relational reality, driven by the force of mutual care, love and cooperation.⁷ He provided a conception of soil that emphasized its intrinsic value – a being that has an agency to experience and respond, thereby affirming the notion of soil's liveliness. Dokuchaev elaborated eco-ethical principles of human activity and a series of practical methods for soil protection that he believed have a role in fostering a life-sustaining environmental approach, preparing in this way the foundations for ecological thought. Dokuchaev's ideas went beyond purist scientific insight, revealing that soil is not only a relational body in itself, but that it exists in relation to human spiritual life, social structures and knowledge systems that determine and shape those relations. Nevertheless, most of Dokuchaev's methods and ideas were ignored in his time and were lost throughout history, echoing the epistemological violence of modernity that has created the categories that force the land into a contract of exploitation and whereby nature is classified as an alterity. This violence also resonates in the way that soil is commonly being used as a weapon in the defense of national identity and colourblind traditionalism, by extension providing the grounds for the construction of «the other», often concealed in expressions such as «this is My land».

I would like to highlight a term from the soil epistemologies of Dokuchaev, namely what he referred to as the historical body with a quality of liveliness, to stress that this way of thinking constitutes a concept of land and particularly of locality as a very material site of belonging which does not exist outside of us and cannot be reduced to an object that can be owned or made use of. It alludes to our experience of being soil, meaning that we too are living and at the same time historical bodies, shaped by objectifications created by capitalism, race and gender hierarchies. Countering this and reshaping our intimate, mindful and affective connection with the corporeal being as a living, historically and culturally specific locality from which one perceives, senses, breathes, pulsates, experiences and structures relations is what holds the potential to move us towards the healing alignment

with the larger dimensions of locality and environments, «claiming back a connection that is not mediated by expertise but by proximity».⁸ The feminist thinker on ecological futures, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, refers to the notion of proximity which is embedded in the «human-soil entanglements»⁹, in the «commonness and connection to the materiality we share with soil and other forms of elemental matter»¹⁰. The awareness of these entanglements emerges and grows in the process of learning from and being in companionship with the soil's body, while inhabiting and performing the relations of care «for which maintaining, continuing and repairing living webs of interdependent relations are fundamental features»¹¹. This brings me back to the soil epistemologies of Dokuchaev which emphasize a holistic model of soil in which the reciprocal care and cooperation of human and non-human agencies are what sustain the relation of collective liveliness. What makes me especially interested in the ideas of Dokuchaev is that his understanding of soil as an interdependent body goes hand in hand with the historical conditionality which allows me to think about the ethics of care and the reparation of «commonness and connection», to say it in the words of Bellacasa, as an archeological practice, an excavation of erased memories, resisting types of knowledge and the silenced history of colonial violence that are inscribed in the corporeal specificities of the land and both the individual and collective bodies. This allows the intertwined histories to reemerge as a living force against forgetfulness. Turning to the matter of the ground means exploring the foundation of belonging in the sense of longing for «becoming-with»¹², shaping our thinking with the semantics of this neglected and devaluated universe right under our feet, a place without center or periphery – a home of diversity, a multispecies community, where transversal relations and the remembrance of that «becoming-with» emerge from below.

Re-Searching is proceeding.

This contribution is a text assemblage that has grown out of the exhibition project that I co-organized in Chisinau (September 2019) and my master thesis of the same titel «Taxonomy Moldova. Re-Searching» at the Zurich University of Arts (ZHdK). The crucial aspect of the project as well as of the master thesis was the critical elaboration of the post-Soviet condition from the perspective of decolonial thinking (Mignolo, Tlostanova, Țichindeleanu) with the aim to complicate the politics of belonging and to disclose the tensions between the categories of space and locality. Moreover, I consider this work a meta-dialog, through which I am dealing with my own sense of belonging.

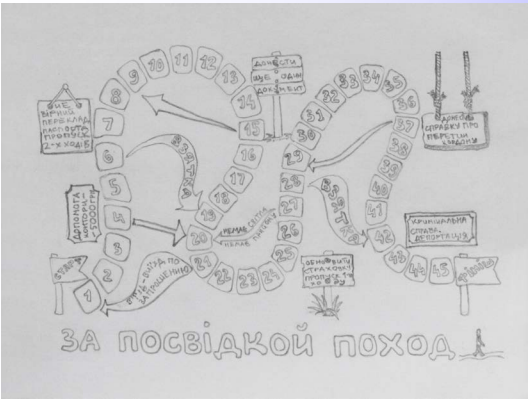


Migrant

Translation, illustrations: Tonya Melnyk

I have dreamed more than once: some time will pass, and in 3-4 years, when I will receive a permanent resident card, I will feel safe, gain strength and do several works about my own or general migrant experience for exhibitions and festivals of contemporary art. for example, the board game «Migrant», where you need to choose a path (different legal grounds for getting a permit), be able to submit all documents on time...or I'll make a visual text object from papers related to the story of a fine of almost 7000 UAH. - Oh yeah! I will do that,

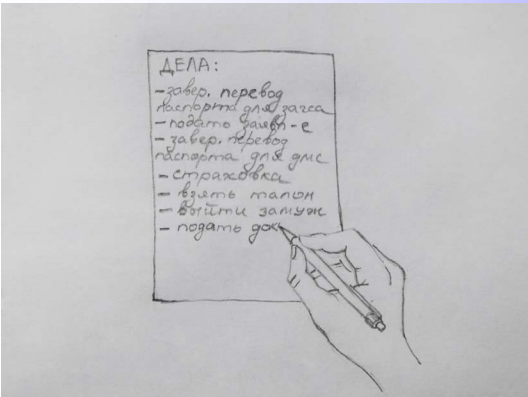
but now I am writing this
write a long time ago,
but postponed until the
awareness of my status as
resident identity already
it seems that it is still far
winter will be poisoned by
days when you will have
read if any updates to the
been introduced, go to get a
you get into a cabinet after
if you have to cancel
or if it can be extended?



text, which I wanted to
which I was going to write,
last days, because the
a person with a temporary
reminds me of the deadline.
away to next spring, but
the approachment of the
to start taking action: re-
current legislation haven't
coupon in advance to ensure
2 weeks, find out in advance
registration before or after?

It's one thing to clarify all the
- to collect the package of documents. from year to year you have to order a translation of a passport certified by notary, to make medical insurance - that's all! well, yes, find time during the working week, go here, go there, pay 300 UAH here, 500 UAH there (prices are growing, of course).

I am childishly postponing these necessary unpleasant things for tomorrow, next week, and for the time it is definitely necessary. And in the ms (migration service) they will say: «you are leaving everything to the last moment again!»



- Yes, we all do, we are not eager to meet with you and experience situations of humiliation, we can't argue with you and resist your demands, but sometimes we have to.

alas, we hear usually: still bring such and such a paper before the end of the day / order a certificate from the administration of the border service about crossing the border.

- you can make a request, they will answer you in three days, and to me they will give a certificate in 3 weeks.
- so order a certificate.
- but I don't have 3 weeks.
- then leave the country.

I knew that I was right, but I needed to call a lawyer, to consult how to act in such a situation: «go and apply, if they don't take - call the police, take written explanations». Can you imagine what powers a migrant must have to call the police in the migrant service? I honestly do not possess them (

I re-read what I had written and realized that it's not obvious why I myself need to figure it out, go deep into the legislation by myself, - public servants must explain everything to us who apply to institutions for obtaining documents for legal residence in the country. This is because on my migrant path I have more than once met incompetent specialists who said wrong things, and I began, myself and together with a partner, to read and to rewrite the necessary points into a notebook, in case I had to quote legislation to civil servants.

Sometimes, in the queues in ms, a visitor can find out more useful information from people like him or her. These are examples of usual mutual aid among migrants: prompt to read the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated April 25, 2018 No. 322, where the list of documents can be found, where to get cheaper insurance, where to order a translation, what new circumstances have arisen in connection with quarantine.

Sometimes my friends and acquaintances ask me, acquaintances of acquaintances write me, sometimes it happens in queues at the migrant service, if a person has a specific question and I know the answer. Often in the ms you meet foreigners who do not speak Ukrainian or Russian, who try to speak English with employees, but get the answer: «I don't understand».

it's good that the translator is usually among those who came to apply. inside myself I am indignant that at least a couple of employees who speak English could be hired (?), but then I think that there is hardly a decent salary, that knowledge of English is a privilege, that English, like Russian, in the context of Ukraine is a language of colonizers... but on the other hand, this is the language a student from Ethiopia will most likely be able to speak with you... Fortunately, one might say, foreign students in Ukraine pay for their studies, so universities are interested in them and help with obtaining residence permit for the period of study.

When I came to pick up a certified translation of my passport from one translation agency, I saw a poster on which help is offered in English to extend one's period of legal stay in Ukraine «all inclusive»: they will help with the paperwork and go to the migrant service with you. it costs more than one thousand hryvnas - oh, I write ridiculously, because, even without resorting to the help of such offices, you can't keep up with 1000 UAH: except expenses described above, 940 UAH is a state fee (for the temporary resident card) - just go and lay it out. and then it's better to forget it, in order not to reproach myself for spending so much money, not to think that i could go to the dentist, and afford a holiday for myself.

probably, in the opinion of state agencies migrants are very rich people, a good find for the state treasury, from them you have to pull funds, more and more. especially if they made a mistake. mistakes are not forgiven to migrants.

If you registered at the address of residence not on time - pay a fine / If you didn't have time to leave the country after expiration of the period of residence - pay a fine / If you had to leave the country, but found yourself in reanimation - pay a fine / If you forget to change your permanent residence card when you are 40 - pay a fine. Pay a fine! Not a clear amount, but what the head of the department of ms will decide to appoint you personally. For example, if there is a certificate from a doctor that you were in reanimation, and for this reason you could not legally extend the period of stay on the basis of illness and treatment, namely, personally appear at the reception of migrant service and write a request for an extension of the period of stay in the country, with an explanation of the reasons and attachment of supporting documents, then this, of course, mitigates your guilt - and the fine is only 1500 UAH. But it can also be 3400 UAH or 5000 UAH. Migrants pay these fines, worse than bribes, only not to complicate their life even further.

I am supported by so many comrades, who help me, helped in these difficult migrant matters: we went to the migrant service together, even to the offices, they fed me and offered tea at the most difficult moments, listened and hugged me, went together to write papers on appeal, borrowed money for a fine and did things that I promised not to disclose.

Without this support from my partner, friends, comrades, «queer fairies», I'm not sure I would have survived. this feeling of insignificance for the system, terrible indifference to my fate, contempt for me, a thirst to poke me, humiliate, frighten, punish. Winter-spring 2019 for me was like a social drama, where I played one of the main roles. I was already beginning to see myself from the outside and wonder if I would do anything with myself or if it would pass. Absurdity after an absurdity gradually played out: I could not find a comrade willing to marry with me for a long time, we delayed filing of an application, at last we filed it, but suddenly it turned out in registry office that on my last exit-entry into the country border guard put me an extra stamp - a carousel started spinning: the border administration services - migrant service - reception of ms - ms - reception of ms - ms... On one of these days, full of migrant affairs, already in despair, I came to my friend's workplace in the bookstore, almost crying, with shaking hands. we smoked a cigarette and she told the story of Walter Benjamin, who wasn't allowed to come to the United States in 1940, and he committed suicide. I can't say that it cheered me up, but my friend pointed out that it was a day that had to be lived through. After that, several times throughout the spring and summer, I told myself: I just lived through this day and would live on.

- congratulations! now you are in the club) - said a friend, also a migrant, after finding out about my marriage.

I didn't want this for a long time and mentally «tried it on»: Rosa Luxemburg also got married for the sake of German citizenship, for the opportunity to study, write a dissertation, work and live as she wanted. This is really the easiest way and not so stretched in time, it is 3-4 years in total, you have to carry less documents, just bring your husband, show him where to sign. but internally this is a clear compromise. i had advice from a comrade from an organization that helped me before: «Get married to someone and it will become easier». other acquaintances talked about it too... it looks like pressure, but not patriarchal, not parents' pressure, but simply one of the migrant circumstances of life (alas, you cannot be an eternal volunteer).

Why, in general, there have to be reasons, weighty in the eyes of officials, to live in a country not of your citizenship? When you read the list of grounds to try them on and choose what you can take, you understand that in the eyes of law a migrant should be useful, so to say, to the economy - a worker, an investment; for culture, social sphere - volunteer, international representation; from the point of view of demography - to become related. I understand that the state also has plans for its own citizens, but it's easier to downshift here. These thoughts lead me to philosophical reflections about the structure of human society, questions: why states were formed, why it is so important to have citizenship and identity documents with a bunch of additional papers, why everything is so complicated, though it pretends to be simple, as if for the good of humans. I am expressing myself badly, because for someone everything is ok. if you are a citizen, white, cisgender, with a sufficient level of income, more privileged - it is easier for you. strangely, it often depends on the chance to be born on some territory, in some family. In life these schemes are more complicated and confusing.

I personally suddenly realized unpleasantly that even after leaving the country where I was born and raised, I am still addicted, as if I continue to belong to that country. as soon as someone asks me to show my passport - I am embarrassed and get scared of this eagle by myself. not only in government agencies, it's awkward at the post office, on trains, in airports. when writing a CV, I don't understand which one it should be, so I indicate 2 countries.

But I started writing about another trauma. I thought about changing my citizenship and became firmly convinced that there is no such country that I sincerely would like to be a citizen of, but it would be even more difficult to live without citizenship, it's as if it was impossible.

a year ago I attended a performance at Tromso Contemporary Art Festival in Norway. the performer did not think about the foreign participants of the festival and spoke Norwegian. I had the title of the performance On the Boundaries, looked at her actions and interpreted her freely. She unwound the hosepipe from the bobbin, expressingly using the body, its different parts, then pulled the hosepipe through the legs along the crotch, as if pulling it out of the vagina, or from behind the back along the buttocks, as if out of the ass, straight and rough.

Before that, a month ago, I listened to a lecture on necropolitics towards migrants in Greece, how different identities of a person can overlap and multiply situations of discrimination. So, I looked at the performance and

thought that some people are born in the country and become citizens, while others come, and the attitude towards them is like they came here through the ass. A metaphor that reflects specific actions. when you are examined at airports with addiction, because you get out of the usual look of a local, when someone looks at you as on exotic sexual object. Of course, the authorities also persecute the citizens, but how do they, so to say, take care of migrants, collecting all the information about us, visiting our homes (did we provide a reliable address of residence)? It hurts to remember how one of my close friends said that it's natural, because they are not local, they are not citizens, the citizens must first get the benefits. Probably, in order to change this attitude, to give migrants an opportunity to influence the policies of the states where they found themselves by the will of fate, it is necessary to arrange another great migration of peoples so that we are not in the minority as we are now.

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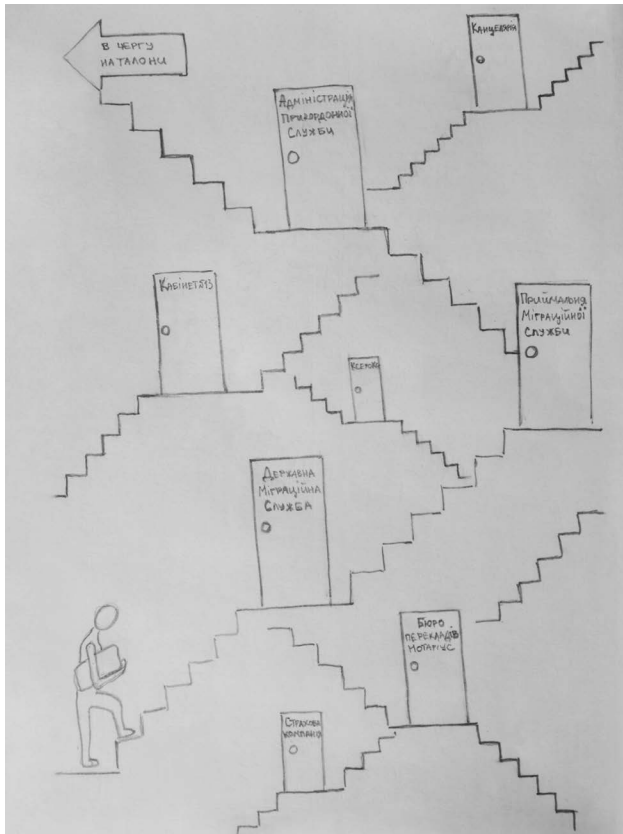
i will not be able to speak about everything that is a migrant experience. a residence card is just the beginning. attached to it are trials and tribulations with registration at the place of living. then you want to claim for medical care. the insurance that was made to apply for the residence card is not enough. you need to draw up an ITN (individual tax number), with it you can already sign a declaration with a family doctor. don't even dream about a bank card with a temporary residence card. any relationship with the bank becomes extremely complicated, requiring a lot of papers, petitions and proof that you earned this money by honest labor. all these important and usually difficult relationships with banks, hospitals, government agencies became more complicated because of the status of non-citizen, a migrant, a creature that seems to require a particularly biased look and attitude, control.

In the end, I got used to it and began to work up myself to a humiliated attitude in advance, an internal migrantphobe began to arise in me. **It's stupid, but I feel guilty that I am a migrant, that it seems additional expenses of the family budget, a waste of time and effort, the worries of a partner, friends and comrades for me.** I am tired, I don't see opportunities to fight for my rights as a human, I feel like a person deprived of the right to have rights. I strive for small things: let everything be in order, on time and without incidents. It's sad, but so it is for now.

afterword: written from the first person about the personal experience and the experience of several more people. for security purposes without names. my migrant experience was formed in Ukraine in 2016-2020, but I suppose that there are many countries where the system also operates in an anti-human way.

not to make you feel pity, but to share

give a reason to think



An aberrant kind of «white»: a story from Australia

Text: Nina Serova

Illustrations: Katya Ptashka

Translation: Polina Nikitina, Victoria Kravtsova

shallow stereotypes

...

When I was a teenager, every weekend during the school holidays I would go to house parties. I lived in a low socio-economic area about an hour and a half from Sydney, Australia in Campbelltown, the last suburb that could still be classified as the city's fringe. My friends and I, hair straightened with household irons and in fur-hooded jackets, Ugg boots and denim miniskirts, would pile into a friend's car on our way to get drunk and smoke cigarettes.

Sleazy older guys would leer at our goosebumped legs and invite us to sit on their laps. Having a generally circumspect disposition and not long ago emigrated from my home in Russia, I swallowed my surroundings with bitter stoicism, determined that as soon as I finished school, I would leave this alien place forever. And unlike most of my female friends, I was more terrified of sex than I was of the social shame of not having it.

Around this time, I had a close Russian friend and the pop music group t.A.T.u. was high in the charts. These two things coalesced into a reputation for us as the 'Russian lesbians', which for some reason made my friend and I off-limits in the minds of the teenage boys. I did nothing to dispel this notoriety and felt gratefully neglected by would-be adolescent predation.

Since then, many encounters with similarly uninspired Russian stereotypes have reminded me of this 'lesbian cloak' (and the humour of this sham image simulating a phony relationship has not escaped me). With the benefit of adult hindsight, it goes without saying that strategic commodification of queerness is not advisable. However, what is interesting, is that this stereotyping of Russians with comical platitudes has repeated itself in various guises, forming a pattern that reveals something about how collective ideas are formed in this country.

Friends have ascribed my mannerisms, tastes or behaviours to my being Russian in a way that would not be permissible with other migrants. I commonly get asked to say something in Russian when I first meet someone. I receive memes about Russia (a memorable example is the Instagram account @lookatthisrussian), which shamelessly ridicule extreme poverty and alcoholism.

To be honest, this is fine. It is not a systematic problem. Unlike other migrants, I am not asked where I am from and do not bear the implications this attitude carries for non-white people. The ridiculous flatness of Russian cultural stereotypes is more indicative of how Australian understandings of race and culture are produced, and which types of identities are valanced and why. In a cultural moment of broadly acceptable feminism, which calls itself intersectional, I think this deserves pause.

In the 1990s, when rapid developments in network technologies precipitated various forms of tech utopianism, cyber feminist collectives sprung up in Australia and Russia simultaneously. Adelaide's VNS Matrix and Saint-Petersburg's Кибер-Фемин-Клуб were separately working on ideas around women, technology and art from different parts of the globe. If at that time, Russia and Australia were tied together by a synchronicity of thinking about among other things, the internet's potential to eradicate embodied inequalities, there has been little transnational interaction since. In the hands of private interests, new technology has not produced the capitalist and patriarchal disruptions envisioned by some early network cultures and it is questionable what kind of a 'global community' has materialised at all.

As well as creating new patterns of communication and connection, online technologies have exacerbated exploitation on a global scale. In addition to supporting minor identities and important forms of political action, social media has created cultural and political echo chambers with overdetermined ideological positions. Certain forms of online discourse have made historically contingent relations seem universal.

Take, for example, the importation of the United States' term 'BIPOC' (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) into certain Australian vernacular. This language is absorbed into analytical conversations that take place in the critical and community-oriented contexts such as contemporary art, as well as political social media influencers and activist circles, which are often identified as feminist or intersectional. These online discourses are frequently legitimated by wide-reaching 'traditional' media, so the sphere of influence is not niche.

In the US, the term BIPOC exists to highlight the particular racial oppression experienced by Black, Indigenous and People of Colour. In Australia, however, Indigenous people are Black and the settler colonial violence brought upon them is particular to this context. Employing BIPOC in discussions of race in Australia neglects the term's historical meaning and implies an association with the catch-all of racisms faced by non-white people, including migrants.

More than semantics, such use of language, especially as it sits in bourgeois discussions unmoored from material realities, can result in compressing specific types of structural oppressions that are experienced by particular groups of people, diminishing the role these play in peoples' lives. An Indigenous person who has suffered inter-generational trauma has had a materially different experience to, say, a third generation non-white migrant who has benefitted from colonialism and systemic whiteness. The term blurs the differences in relations to power among people that it was intended to centre.

A similar process has absorbed the use of 'intersectionality'. This concept was developed by Black American feminists, following Kimberlé Crenshaw, as a lens through which to consider how systems of power and oppression reproduce inequalities based on gender, race, class, disability and other hierarchies. In certain types of Australian feminist discourse, the term ends up deployed as a rhetorical tool that denotes any type of individual identity in a neoliberal marketplace. Curiously, class tends to disappear from discussions too.

Against these more geographically untethered processes that shape how and where we think, there's the matter of Australia as a place. The country is pregnant with unresolved issues and its history and geography directs opinion, including thought which is progressive or left-leaning.

Consider the following:

1. Australia has a profound and unresolved colonial problem. This country's First Nations people are the most incarcerated group on earth and face life expectancies which are roughly 10 years lower than the non-indigenous population as a direct result of ongoing colonisation. The colonial frontier of land theft has never stopped – Indigenous land continues to be poisoned and usurped in the interests of resource mining and development, even as acknowledgments of traditional land ownership are performed faithfully in boardrooms. Earlier in 2020, the global mining giant Rio Tinto destroyed Juukan Gorge, a 46,000 year old site of cultural significance for Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura people. People in Laramba, a remote community in Australia's most northern territory, have recently lost a case against the government for supplying uranium-poisoned drinking water. The foundationally racist context in Australia bleeds into every aspect of intellectual life, including academia and research, as Indigenous livelihoods and perspectives that pose to seriously threaten the social and economic order are pushed to the periphery.
2. Australia's political interests are closely linked to those of Britain and the United States. Media barely reports on events in countries outside of the sphere of the US empire, including non-Anglophone Europe. Unless one is an immigrant, or the child of one, Australians tend to speak English only. Knowledge about people and places continues along old colonial and Cold War boundaries. Even critical discussions of oppression are collapsed along the lines of Western European and US domination.
3. Relatedly, like anywhere, the ways in which people are categorised are shaped by in-person social interactions. Australia's migration patterns, as well as border policies, have historically been linked to labour: Chinese migrants first came here during 19th Century gold rushes, while Southern Europeans tended to arrive in visible numbers post World War 2. Despite today developing a more global perspective through media and travel, certain cultures are 'blind spots' simply because most Australians haven't interacted with them in a personal way.
4. There is a concept here called 'tall poppy syndrome'. This means a tendency for Australians to disparage those who achieve success, particularly when it comes to intellectualism. As well as state schooling that tends to exclude histories other than British settlement in Australia, there is a broad ignorance of geopolitical dynamics of the 20th Century that have shaped geopolitics today.
5. Australia is a good example of a place that can be understood as the conceited West, or a place that deems itself ideologically, as well as economically superior. Bourgeois comfort and security are deeply embedded in the national psyche. Along with settler colonial peers US and Canada, Australia has the biggest houses in the world. Understandings of material exploitation do not rate in discussions because most people with a platform are themselves incredibly rich on a world scale – so representational, rather than systemic or economic explanations of gender or race inequalities tend to dominate.

being stuck

Text: Marko Kwirenko

Illustration: Daria Apakhonchich

While adolescent pop star tropes are now behind me, questions of how identities are legitimised by dominant Australian discourses are not. The gaps in understanding, and their subsequent dissemination produced by unresolved histories and unreflexive global positions, are a problem in Australian feminism too. This is not because, in its understandings of hierarchies of global oppression, this type of thinking fails to include the post-Soviet region in particular – especially because there is no relation of exploitation between Russia and Australia, in the way there is say, with the Philippines or Indonesia via resource and labour extraction. It is an issue because feminism has now long been characterised by locatedness as an epistemological foundation and has adapted post-colonial critiques of Western imperialism, at least rhetorically. As such, feminist thinking should honour its commitment to fulfilling positionality in earnest, including more ambiguous contexts, to grapple with nuanced and regionally specific questions: in Australia, does being Russian mean being 'white', or is this reserved for descendants of Anglo-Saxon settlers who form the dominant culture? Whose culture and/or social position is valenced as worthwhile of political attention, and what systems and interests are thus threatened – or upheld?

The near absence of the post-Soviet context, as well as the questions it might engender in the Australian intellectual imagination, is an example of many such places. Despite a seemingly connected online world, this situation shows that a geographic logic still impacts which places and people are worthy of attention. Anthropologist Mary Douglas writes that stickiness is a substance that defies classification: it is at the same time, an aberrant fluid and a melting solid. She says that one of the ways anomalies like this are treated, is that they are avoided and the definitions to which they do not conform, strengthened. Maybe stickiness can explain why I continue to get stuck with two-dimensional stereotypes. Or, perhaps this position of ambiguity is a place from which we can think better about how ideas of difference are shaped in dominant culture.



Revolutionary queers are marrying each other
Utopias are getting institutionalized and become dystopias
And I am dancing on this road, where I have been before
Boris* goes to cemetery in order to quit his attachments,
Yegor* has nothing to lose,
And I am dancing on this road, where I have been before
I am imagining that I find new migrant/queerfeminist language
and do not fear no one,
but I am just dancing on this festive road, where I have been before.

**allusions to some famous Russian male rock singers*
(2014)

After stopping to dance the intercultural can-can
After coloring the split with rainbows
I am pouring the anniversary of migration into a glass
In order to stop vomiting with the reflections of westerners

And during they are destroying their heads
On the intercity patriarchy
I am analyzing the homely garbage
My Berlin turned from a dream into poison

Their fun (quoting) is farce on the bones
What is wrong, normative normal queer
Loaf-community, ghostly fear
From burned bridges and empty flats

We evolutionized to ourselves
And in which direction you not translate
This experience of societal-private sufferings
Does not fit in formulas and middles

Do not torture me with your -isms
Better draw me a fairytale about a cat
How it catches a September beam with its paw.



Witchcraft in modern Armenia

Text: Amalia Prtavyan
Illustrations: Yulia Litvinova
Translation: Irina Sharkadiy

Interview N. 1.

- I had an abortion – my neighbor did it, she is a doctor. I didn't do it in the clinic – the documents had to be drawn up. So, I went next door. When I was walking home, my mother-in-law started doing the laundry. I asked her not to do this – we bought a new washing machine, which she did not know how to use. I came home to lie down, but I looked – and saw a foam from the washing machine coming out into the staircase. Instead of lying down, I continued doing laundry until eleven o'clock in the evening. All my feet were wet, mother-in-law went to bed, and I kept wiping the floor. Finally, I laid down. On the second day, I had severe pain. Usually, the blood is purified, but nothing came out for me. My mom came and went to my room. I lied to her, said I had a kidney attack. In the evening, I felt terrible, my temperature raised to forty degrees, and my husband called a neighbor. She said, «you need to call the doctor.»

The doctor realized that something went wrong because, for her part, she did everything right.

I sat up in my bed. Everything hurt. I roared, I wrinkled the pillow in pain. Suddenly I felt something hard in it. At work, I already heard people saying that some women found it too... I thought it was the same thing... They opened it – there was fluff and folded paper that also contained fluff and hard to read hieroglyphs. They were Turkish or Arabic. My mother-in-law planted it on me! ...

(Was your mother-in-law able to hex?)

- I do not know, but they said that she is fond of it. Everyone in the village does it – they can do everything. My mother-in-law knew how to do it. None of the nieces loved her – everyone called her a witch. I tore it all up and flushed it down the toilet. I haven't found anything since then. And I didn't look. We have moved, and life has changed. In general, they can sew it into clothes. They can tear up the lining, put it in and sew it up. They did it to someone I knew: they did it to a woman from my work to break her up with her husband. She found it by accident.

(Why would your mother-in-law do this to you?)

- She wanted her son to marry a neighbor's girl. She was saying so even years after: «I still have my eye on the village girl.»

Interview N. 2.

- We found tukhtugir a couple of times. One was hidden in a pillow. It looked like strings. It was obvious that it wasn't wrapped up by accident: someone weaved it and put it in on purpose. It was a curse. We threw it into the water – they say it should be burned or drowned. We found threads, I think they were colored. And there was grain. I don't know, some kind of grain – a pea, or a lentil – something like that. They said that it was so that there were squabbles at home so that it was restless so that there were arguments. Also, there were some feathers that seemed to be woven.

My mother gave me a little golden key on my 16th birthday. Then we forgot about it – it was hidden somewhere. One time my mom was sweeping – and the house was old with the floor made of boards – and from somewhere, either from under the plinth or elsewhere – something folded flew out. A piece of paper. Mom opened it, and there was my key, so they thought it was done to me on purpose.

There was my key, there were needles, and it all was wrapped in colored thread. And when they unfolded the paper, and there was a writing in old Russian, it was hard to read, we only understood the «God». In old Russian, incomprehensible. The impression was that they asked God to do something to us. They told my mom that someone did it so that I would never have a wedding. The plot was that I stayed in this house. And so it turns out that I returned to this house, and I, in fact, did not have a wedding. I was married without a wedding. I think my grandmother did it – she was the only one who visited us. Things like that often happened to our house.

(And when you found it, did you have any clues about who might cast a curse?)

- Well, we knew that it was some sibling, but you never know one hundred percent.

Interview N. 3.

- I found it too! When my daughter was little, we had guests over, and there were some photographs on the cupboard. My mother-in-law picked it up to show it to our guests. One photo remained there. It was a photograph of my daughter's baptism. She was one year old. It was a picture of me, my husband, and our daughter. We took this photo to give it to the mother-in-law so she could show it to the guests. And I noticed that the eyes on this picture were scratched out. And for the close-up, it was visible that the picture was burned, as if with a candle. But there were no inscriptions.

Interview N. 4.

- We had one relative, I don't want to take a sin on my soul, but it happened right after her visit. She spent the night in our room. She was a distant relative, father-in-law's niece. After her visit, we found a blue triangle made of fabric in our pillow. We ripped it up, opened a triangle, and saw a piece of corrugation. We unwrapped it – and there was an Arabic script, some symbols that look like Arabic letters. Something written. It also has feathers attached to it, either from a rooster or chicken, some bird feathers. My mother-in-law found the triangle. And I found a small bunch of feathers tied with colored threads. Just like that – there were many, many ties, several colors, I don't remember which colors, but I remember that there were colored threads. And colored feathers.

In general, they do it in many different ways. Inside the clothes, inside the pillows, in the bed. They often put it in bed, why, because people spend a lot of time in sleep: at night, they are relaxed, so this kind of energy works easier on them.

(Why are women, and not men, do witchcraft and cast curses?)

- Women are more suspicious, more emotional. It is so prescribed by nature that women are closer to the spiritual realms.

These four stories you read are excerpts from interviews I conducted in Armenia in the summer of 2019. I must note that this is just a drop in the ocean, and there are a large number of such stories. It would not be an exaggeration to say that each of my informants had a history related to witchcraft. Even if my informant does not believe in magic, there will certainly be some cases that would come to mind, be it the story of friends, relatives, and so on. These short excerpts clearly show that witchcraft is extremely relevant in modern Armenia. Women in cafes are reading each other's tea leaves, women of different professions and educations are exchanging fortune-tellers' and healers' phone numbers with each other. And it is customary to explain the black streak in life by the curse that was hidden somewhere in clothes or inside the bed – tukhtugir («tukht» means «paper « in Armenian,» Gir « means «text»).

Tukhtugir, according to the informants, is done mainly to cause harm, notably, to damage family relationships (usually to break up a couple). Tukhtugir looks like a piece of paper (or cloth) with a «spell» written on it. What usually happens next – the paper is being folded down gets sewn into bed linen – and then it is no longer tukhtugir, but a cap (from «kapel» – to tie something up). Tukhtugir in general is just a text on a piece of paper, not even necessarily a bad one – it can also be made as a talisman. But, in the view of my informants (and perhaps, in general, modern Armenians, since no one makes a difference in an everyday conversation between tukhtugir and kap), under the category of tukhtugir also fall: photographs with scratched out eyes, cut out pieces of clothing, a photograph with fragments of a mirror left on a fresh grave (there was such a story too), i.e. any object that can be regarded as magical and harmful. I would like to note that the use of magic and belief in it does not depend on the level of education and the informant's place of residence (among my informants there were people with and without college education, living both in cities and in villages), but in the vast majority of cases it depends on gender (rather women than men) and marital status (rather married than single). I often heard from my informants that, being unmarried, they brushed off this whole witchcraft topic, but along with them getting married, they began to fear that someone might harm their family. I think this is quite natural – a married woman develops a new level of anxiety associated with the family: she worries about a child; she worries that her husband will be taken away; that someone

will break them apart; that a rival will appear; that relations with her mother-in-law will not work out. Sometimes men also broadcast a narrative about witchcraft, recalling cases from childhood – but mostly they do not believe in witchcraft and do not resort to magic practices. And the stories from childhood that they recall are related to their female relatives. I think that you have noticed how often the mother-in-law and other relatives from the husband's side appear in the interviews given above. It is important to indicate the status of the mother-in-law in the Armenian family. The average Armenian family is far from only a husband, wife, and, subsequently, a child – on the contrary, they are newlyweds who very often (in the vast majority of cases) live with their husband's parents. A young family does not separate, does not live apart from the husband's parents («What will the neighbors think?», «Why rent a place if the husband's family has a house?»). A young wife who enters a new family (does not create a new family with her husband, but enters an already established one) has the obligation not only to be a good wife (i.e., cook well, serve her husband, keep the house clean), but also to take care of the husband's family. She needs to please the toughest censor – her husband's mother. I think that every Armenian girl heard in her childhood this phrase: «You have to sweep the floor better than this, imagine if your mother-in-law was standing next to you!».

How come the mother-in-law has become such a dominant figure in the Armenian patriarchal family? It is important to understand that in a traditional Armenian family, a woman is being suppressed – first by her parents, then by her husband and her husband's relatives, whom she must obey all her life. But, becoming the mother of a son, that is, the father of the future family, a woman gains power due to her 1) age, 2) status: now she is the mother of the head of the family, everyone obeys her son, and she is the only one who can contradict him. She has power concentrated in her hands, and now she can suppress her daughter-in-law the same way she was being suppressed. But it also happens that the son goes against his mothers' will (remember the part about “the eye on the village girl»? The son did not marry the girl his mother wanted him to, but the one he chose himself). In this case, the mother-in-law may feel that she is inferior to a younger woman, and, importantly, a fertile one. The one who will give her son an offspring, therefore, will become more worthy in his eyes and also might compete with the mother-in-law

over the influence on her son. And then different methods of eliminating a rival for male attention are used, but the most common of them is a curse.

In the course of my fieldwork, I sincerely hoped to collect stories of the curses cast to harm business, career, etc. But the vast majority of my interviews broadcast one pain – a curse that can cause family conflict, mostly with the mother-in-law or husband's female relatives as suspects.

Why relatives? My informants answered to this question shortly: «Men don't need this.» To some extent, this is true. The



Armenian man spends little time at home. He leaves for work, returns, and at home, he is welcome by his wife and his mother/sister/other women who are ready to serve him. Women who – since his absence at home – begin to feel the competition on an everyday basis. I think that often a man does not even know what a struggle for his attention is flaring up behind his back.

Why does it happen this way? It is difficult for me to answer this question right away.

Certainly, the popularity of witchcraft practices in Armenia is rooted in the social structure of society and those unequal opportunities that are given to representatives of different genders. However, prematurely summing up the results of my not finished yet research, I can say that I see the roots of this problem in the girls' upbringing. Since their childhood, girls from Armenian families are often being told that they must cook so they can feed their husbands well, and learn Armenian to sing their children lullabies in their native language. For a girl, siche her early childhood trained to be a mother, wife and daughter-in-law, the breakup of marriage equals death. The family is the most important thing in the world, and the threat to the family idyll must be eliminated at any cost. A woman is limited by her family, while a man can get fulfillment from his work, his life purpose, a circle of friends.

A woman cannot influence her future – but at least she can ask her friend to tell her fortunes on tea leaves or tarot cards so that she can be aware of what awaits her in the future. A woman is afraid of witchcraft and curse – so she obsessively searches for a tukhtugir sewn into bed linen or her clothes. Then she will be able to neutralize it in time and save the family from disaster.

I want to emphasize that the current generation of young Armenian women is very different from the one I am referring to. I'm appealing to the late Soviet and early post-Soviet generations. Modern Armenian women are more independent, confident in themselves and their future. Nevertheless, based on the interviews it is obvious to me that witchcraft practices in Armenia have a pronounced family orientation, and the users and «victims» of witchcraft so far are mostly women who ignore the rational causes of the problem (a woman who spent the whole night after her abortion cleaning the flood at home and therefore felt sick) in favor of magic (a woman who thinks she was cursed by her mother-in-law because she wanted a different daughter-in-law). Just like the bad attitude of a husband or his betrayal are explained by the «evil eye» (navs), and not by spoiledness, impunity and male permissiveness in patriarchal Armenian society.

P.S. I would like to express my deep gratitude to the anthropologist Yulia Antonyan, whose dissertation on Armenian witchcraft and healing practices served me as a deep background and gave me courage in my own research.

«Ghilman»*

Text, illustrations: Leyli Gafarova

*In Persian: Paradisiacal, beautiful, young beardless males

A multi-media documentary project, researching historical and present aspects of homo-social culture, which has predominated the Azerbaijani region in the past, and what is left of it in the present. The project documents religious and cultural reflection of homo-social gender norms.

The artist is interested in paradoxes in the Azerbaijani society - phenomena that question the bi-polar understanding of gender. The project «Ghilman» (Farsi: paradisiacal, beautiful, young beardless males) refers to the theory of Dutch philosopher Michiel Leezenberg who talks about the «silent power» of the Islamic world not represented as active, political or revolutionary violent, but on the contrary as defined by its mystery, reservedness, passiveness and tolerance - characteristics rather associated with the feminine. It relates to historical material of pre-modern, classical Islam that proves to have a far going tolerance in terms of love and gender identification.



Five Second Rule

Text, illustrations: Mano Svanidze

«Have you heard of the Five Second Rule? When food falls down, if you pick it up before five seconds have passed, it's safe to eat. This is how we live, not letting ourselves down for too long.»

Georgia remains a conservative country, where hate and aggression towards sexual minorities are common. Hiding would be the instinctive thing to do, but not everyone can afford it.

Having complicated and violent life journeys, many transgender women end up homeless and in order to survive, become sex workers.

Georgia has been at the forefront of the movement towards more inclusiveness in the South Caucasus region. Its government has been striving towards closer ties with Europe, and this determination has led to improvements in the overall human rights situation, and more specifically of the human rights of LGBTI people. This progress in the legal sphere is undeniable.

However, despite the existence of laws and guidelines prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, discrimination and violence against LGBTI people continue and the everyday lives of members of the LGBTI community are a far cry from this paper reality. Among the most vulnerable are those who identify as transgender.

Some of the manifestations of structural and systemic violence that transgender women face on a daily basis are: denial of employment, absence of legal recognition of their gender, inaccessibility of all things related to transition, excommunication by families and communities, unwillingness of house owners to rent out living space to them, verbal and physical violence wherever they go.

This photo story is my attempt to share the stories of these women. They chose not to give up, but to live and somehow survive in an environment where they are most unwelcome.



The Letters

Text, illustrations: Parvana Rahimova

In the Caucasus, especially in Azerbaijan, writing about women, LGBT rights, and gender discrimination in general is not so popular or well accepted. When I searched for lesbian women, especially members of the LGBT community, I found that most of them hide their identities to avoid embarrassment and harassment in the society. Some of them wanted to give an interview while a few wrote down their feelings. So I decided to write their stories in the form of letters.

Aygul's letter:

Dear Mom, I wish you would read this letter.

It took a long time to understand and accept that I was different while living in a remote village. When I was in sixth grade, I started to feel changes in my body that I couldn't understand.

I had a soft spot for my English teacher for the first time. When I didn't see her, I started to miss her. I remember listening to her carefully, waiting to see her and I still remember her in all my experiences. These memories strengthen me and connect me to life.

I had very strange feelings as well as embarrassment. I couldn't understand this strange attraction. Who could I talk to about this feeling?

Mom, for the first time I wanted to share this with you, but I was shy. I was afraid I would lose my relationship with you. I hated my father because he made you cry. My friends, who I had been friends with for years, walked away when they found out that I was "different". Living in fear of losing you was very frustrating for me.

When I was studying in the university, I decided to cut my hair short for the first time and after that you didn't talk to me. You seemed to be beginning to understand that I was different. If you only knew how lonely I felt, I was suffering.

I could not be the child you want to see, mom. Sorry...

You really want me to wear a wedding dress and get married, but I can't explain to you that I'm different. I simply can't... After all, if you love me as I am, you will accept who I am. You complain about the pandemic and can't walk down the street, so you complain about not being able to have a cup of tea and talk to your neighbor. You wish for birthdays and weddings. You complain that you can't fit in the frames when you are alone in the four walls of the house.

You know how I have been afraid of the judgments that have kept me in isolation from you, my father, my relatives, my friends for years. How I was shocked by stereotypes and exclusion.

I am 23 now, who is not afraid to go hungry, to be alone between four walls. Only you can see me. If you can feel the pain that is raging inside me, mother.

Rumors began to circulate among my relatives. They began to realize that I was not wearing women's accessories. They said she dresses like a man and doesn't wear make-up. It's as if she was a man, not a woman. They make fun of me, they make fun of me.

I write my words on white paper. How can I show my family who I am with in the picture frame? For years, I lived with an identity that was hidden from me, from my classmates, from my friends, and even from my mother. I feel the coldness of the iron chain of stereotypes on my arms. There is a woman living inside me. It's like an experimental mouse doomed to live with its mouth closed for years in a box. A dumb, dumb animal. I live in a society laboratory that expects me to do what I expect, not what I want. Who will win, who will be the victim?

Nigar's letter:

I am 32 years old and I am an editor by profession but unfortunately, I am unable to find a job. I love cycling, watching football and animals. I even have two cats at home. My favourite hobby is to buy different flowers and shrubs and take care of them. I live with my mother and I have no idea how she would react if she knew I was a lesbian. But I do not want to lose her. I have a girl-friend for 8 years and I am happy with her.



Michelle's letter:

My name is Michelle, I am 22 years old. I identify myself as a gay (lesbian). I am a free woman. I work and earn my living and I have no financial dependence on my family. I have tried myself on many jobs, and the money I earn is mainly through promotional jobs at supermarkets. I am a social worker and an amateur actress.

I was born and raised in a traditional, heteronormative Azerbaijani family, so I have always tried to overcome certain feelings I have. I had never revealed my identity as a LGBT individual until three years ago. When I was twelve or thirteen, I liked a girl in school but I was very shy because I was told that all such attractions are «sickness, sin, and immorality.» Therefore, I always kept my sexual orientation a secret and pretended to be heterosexual like everyone else. This lasted a few years until I fell in love with another girl. So I started doing a lot of research about this feeling inside of me. I was no longer the previous person, and this time I was very strong and was not afraid to tell everyone about my sexual orientation. Even if I am at risk of being abandoned by my family, I will still not give up on my real identity.

My family is phobic to gay relationships. I know they won't accept me like that, because we have a lot of arguments about it at home. My relationship with my mother is good, but when it comes to LGBTQ, it gets too bad. No matter how homophobic she is, I can't give her up because I love her. I know people won't accept me. My relationship with my father hasn't been great. I cannot discuss such issues as LGBT with him or even gender equality.

Certainly, homosexuals are more discriminated against by men. Another reason why I am less discriminated against is that I am dedicated at my work, in my family relationships and in other environments. However, I have been subjected to sexual and psychological pressure regarding my sexual orientation. You would see a lot of criticism of alternate sexuality on social media by men. Men want to prove that I chose my sexual orientation because of the lack of men in my life. Some even send nude pictures and pictures of their money to me. Since there is no point in talking to such disgusting people, I do not bother about them.

I can see that my psychological problems are getting worse. This mental tension is not only due to my family, but also due to the extension of pandemic quarantine. I also have a gynecological problem. The remedy to this problem is very expensive and requires constant treatment. It's not certain even after surgery whether I will get rid of my daily pain or if I will feel healthy. But as I said, I have been in this situation for the last few months, and although it is critical, I can't seem to find a solution in the near future.

Note: Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there are many LGBT members in Azerbaijan who are unable to find a job at all. This leads to many economic and psychological problems. Most of them are forced to live in rented houses away from their families due to their homophobic behavior. Moreover, due to reduced financial resources, they have difficulty paying rent and surviving during this quarantine period.

How a Mother Saved Her Unborn Daughters

Text, illustrations: Parvana Rahimova

«During my pregnancy they were nice to me. As soon as the sex of my first child was known, my dark days began. My mother-in-law angrily told the doctor, 'Take a good look and check again. Maybe it's a boy ...' So she took me to another gynecologist because she wasn't sure if the first doctor's test was correct. The second doctor also confirmed it was a girl and then my mother-in-law went into a rage.»

It is difficult for Gulnara (not her real name) to describe - her voice trembles as she speaks. She and her two daughters have been living alone in a small dilapidated accommodation for four years.

After her graduation from high school, Gulnara's aunt used to visit her mother frequently. Gulnara says that her mother sacrificed me to her sister (Gulnara's aunt) and their traditional customs. On her mother's compulsion Gulnara married her aunt's son but she did not know what was waiting for her.

According to gynecologist Rashad Sultan, parents usually console each other about having a female child. This makes him very upset. He says: «Sometimes in the first pregnancy couples or their parents ask me what is the gender of the fetus? If it is a boy, they are extremely happy but if it's a girl they just say: 'May she be healthy'». It is very interesting that when it's a boy the reaction is more exciting and this applies to modern educated families as well. The expression «be healthy» is perceived as a consolation for having a daughter instead of a son. If the fetus is still a female in the second pregnancy, they may not even bother to wish her to «be healthy».

«What I swallowed was poison,» - says Gulnara, who did not even hide the fact that her relationship with her husband turned cold when he came to know it was going to be a daughter. She speaks frankly when she talks about her husband with tears in her eyes. She did not forget his resentment. «When he found out he was going to have a daughter, he turned his back on me at night and slept. He did not speak to me for days. I asked him what's her fault and he replied saying he simply does not want a daughter.»

According to Gulnara, although her mother-in-law was well educated, she did not want a girl child in the family. She compared Gulnara with her daughter and asked if she can give birth to three sons, why can't she?

After Gulnara's first daughter was born, she had to put up with verbal abuses and grim behavior for a while. She says she had to put up with the abuses because of her daughter.

«Many times I just wanted to leave my in-laws home but my mother kept saying: 'Have patience. What will the people say if you leave your husband? It will be a matter of shame in the society!'»

Just to please her, Gulnara named her daughter after her mother-in-law. Their relationship had improved for a while until she learned that she would be a mother for the second time. «During my second pregnancy, when my mother-in-law found out it was a girl again, she became furious. She said to the doctor, 'Oh no! My daughter in law has a female fetus again! Why do we need a second girl?'». Then she demanded an abortion.

The in-laws also supported the husband's decision to have the baby aborted and said: «If we don't have a boy, then our bloodline will not continue. We have to have a boy!»

Gulnara, who did not agree to an abortion, was faced with the choice of «either to abort the baby or be forced to get a divorce». Gulnara chose to divorce and live alone with her two daughters.

She hugs her daughters and says: «How can anyone discriminate between a boy and a girl? I could never do that».

Since then, no relatives or family members have visited Gulnara because she is divorced. Divorce is a stigma in this conservative society although Azerbaijan is governed by liberal laws.

«When a woman wants to protest and divorce, the families can't accept it. Parents and relatives sometimes force young girls to get married but divorce is a more serious process than marriage. People in Azerbaijani culture take the issue of divorce more seriously than marriage,» - said social worker Sanubar Heydarova.

The father did not call or come to see his daughters even once in the last four years. There is a bitter smile on Gulnara's face. "Why would he come? ... He was the one who filed for divorce because I gave birth to the girls. Either I had to kill my unborn daughter or I had to choose divorce. If I had an abortion, he would not divorce me. It is true that I suffer as a woman and I'm not happy but I am happy as a mother. My conscience is also clear. I have healthy daughters like beautiful flowers.»

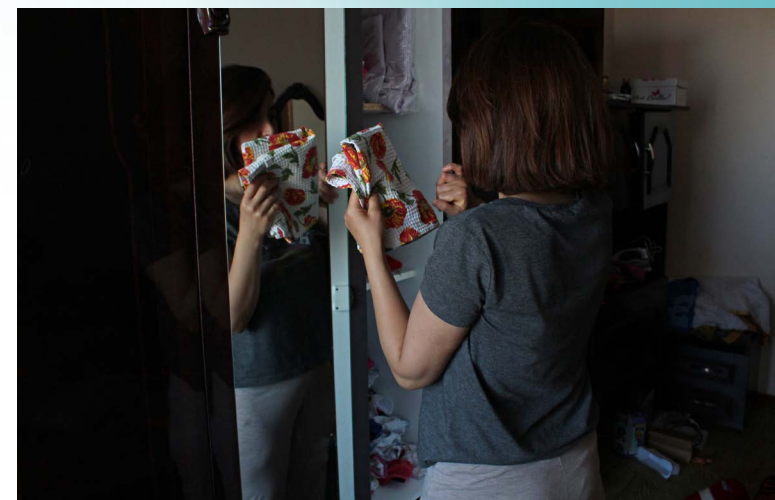
Azerbaijani gender experts note that attitudes towards women have always been different. Having a girl in the family is normally not welcomed. They must have sons first.

Gender activist Nisa Hajiyeve believes that there are certain stereotypes in society and we will continue to see them. She says «Women have always been degraded in Azerbaijani society. According to these stereotypes, women are less capable and less knowledgeable and need constant monitoring. This mentality is very common towards girls in a family.»

According to the UN Population Fund in Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan is in the forefront of gender imbalances after China. Thus Azerbaijan is a «leader» in the Caucasus, leaving behind Armenia and Georgia with high rates of early marriages and selective abortions. As per the State Statistics Committee of Azerbaijan, in 2017 there were 114 males for every 100 females in Azerbaijan. In 2018 there were 118 males for every 100 females. Looking at the gender difference in the population in 2018 there were 46.8% women and 53.2% men in Azerbaijan. Also, the number of abortions in 2017 was 37,618 while in 2018 this figure slightly decreased to 36,141.

2017 was the year with the highest number of abortions among girls aged 15 - 19 (with the total abortion count at 1605). Let me note that the official statistics include abortions that were performed in medical institutions.

Gulnara's biggest dream is to educate her daughters. She plays games with them every day and often takes them for walks in the park so that they do not feel the absence of their father. Gulnara, who is a qualified teacher but is unable to take up a job because of her children. She adds that she sometimes reads psychology books for hours to better understand the psychology of fatherless children, and listens to psychologist's speeches on Youtube.



She says he would be happy to find a good job so she can raise her daughters well.

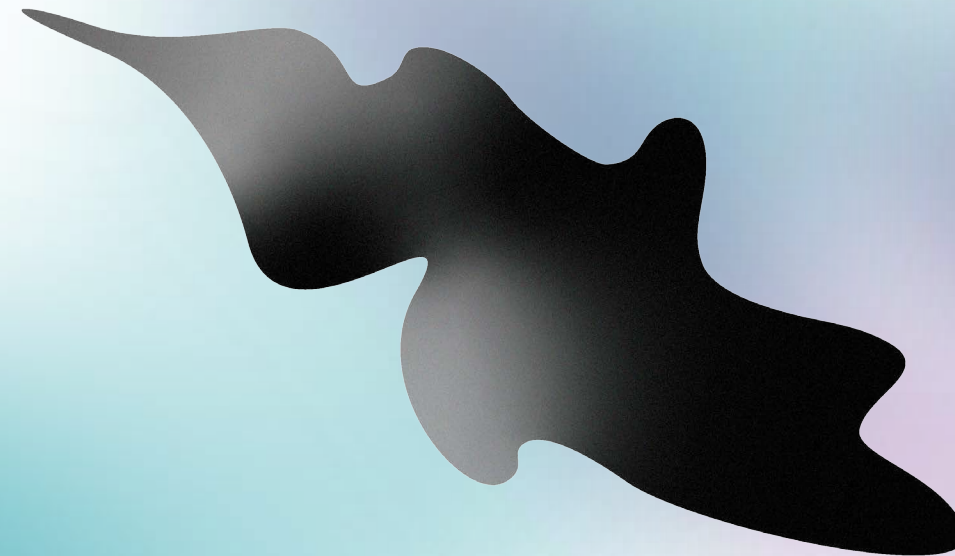


Gulnara, who has been raising her daughters alone for years, has repeatedly appealed to the relevant authorities for social assistance. She says that the representatives, who visited her, set her monthly allowance at only 50 Manats (or 29 US dollars). With the alimony of 300 Manats and social assistance Gulnara only gets a total of about \$ 200 a month.

Caring Theatre

Curator: Kira Shmyreva

with & of: Anna Kilina, Miriam Cochanski, Kerstin Techentin, Kira Shmyreva, Alexandra Dimotroula, Evgenia Damme, David Konkol, Roman Malyavkin



All of us need care and take care of people, animals and objects. Care is a work practice and manifestation of love and responsibility without guilt. We do and need care in different

spheres and contexts of our life. All of us want to live in a society where one can not be afraid to have a child with a disability, atypical partner, close and loved ones with mental illnesses or chronic pains, living with assistive, adaptive, and rehabilitative devices. What can everyone do to create a diverse and atypical society like in a favourite Netflix series to become a safe reality and not survivors spending life energy to survive?

Everyday we experience care. It is important not to exclude it from our everyday life and talk about what it means and involves to be a care giver and care receiver, self-care and who cares about you, who or what you care about, how you care about and how someone/something cares about you.

The project Caring Theatre is intersectional and looks at feminist care practices. In our research and performative process we are thinking theater globally. Theater is not only a performance act or a social role and "masks", but our relations with a wider world, physical presence of objects we truly love and need in our everyday life (like props). We have to try to stop social isolation of medical objects and live with a wheelchair and a ventilator like with a smartphone or a teapot. I mean: to transport it from hospital into living rooms. We have to try to make a break with volunteers' logic and see people with disabilities or chronic diseases, all atypical and marginalized people as our friends, family members, employers, sexual partners who care about us, and not like consumers of services and care assistance, who are born for being creatures with financial problems and are placed forever on a secondary market. We have to stop our inclusion freak show projects and tell only a single story. Maybe we'll be able to observe whether we can stop induce animals with human traits and cease all our internal and external zoos. Inclusion is horizontal and full of care.

Future Manifest of Kerstin Techentin

The world should be such that everyone feels comfortable - people, animals, trees, plants, meadows, so that my ducks feel good.
And then everyone should have an apartment, whether in pairs or in fours, everyone should have an apartment. And not that expensive. Nobody should sleep under the bridge. The homeless should also have accommodation.
And people should be nice to one another.
And the cats shouldn't always be in the house, they should be outside sometimes. And other animals too. And nobody should kick the animals and hit them and so on.
And then people should all get food, whether one is poor or rich. The poorest should also get something to eat and something to drink.
And things should be worn until they break and only then thrown away.
And everyone has the right to live.
And people with disabilities in wheelchairs should be treated well, just like any other person.
And older people who live in nursing homes are also allowed to have sex when they want.
Best of all, people should ride bikes, scooters. Then there are no exhaust gases.
It should also rain a lot so that nature can grow.
If there is no waste bin and you have something to throw away, then you should keep it until the next waste bin comes.
And everyone should get school education so that everyone is clever too.
Everyone should do what they can.
And every person should also be full, not dying of thirst and with clean water to drink, wash and prepare food.
What people still have to learn is that you are who you are. Be yourself.

*Kerstin has a mental disability and wants people with disabilities to live independently and have their rights.



Anna Killina: The Birth of My Queer&Crip Pride

proud to be earthy
because i am fucked in your Space.
my dog is Rikki,
not Strelka.
not Belka.
not guide dog.
not seeing eye dog.
not assistance dog.
Rikki loves go for a walk
now 100 meters from our house block
not for spaceflight.
Rikki is not my light.
Rikki is Rikki.
and i have two hands.
it just depends
what do you think
about you space
i am not your perfect race
i am not a space
for pity and advertisement
i am not a mirror for your face
2for your inclusion
it is illusion
it is not my story
i am not from a Space
i am not ability
for your charity projects
i just want to have my rights



THEAssisTER

Hello! I am Miriam (personal assistance employer), and I am Kira (inclusion assistant). We talk about how life based on the "personal assistance» model is not a luxury, but a necessity and a self-evident form of life. Together we are THEAssisTER.

<...> When people like me talk about self-determination and autonomy, then first of all they mean something that goes without saying for the majority, which is not even worth thinking about, something that does not manifest itself in ordinary care, which is not described in any standard, in any module, or in any document - seeming platitudes: how thick the layer of butter should be on the bread, how cold the beer should be, or how short the nails should be cut. <...>

Matthias Vernaldi (1960-2020), queer-crip activist from Germany



The photo shows two hands from the front. One hand holds a piece of cucumber and the other points to a specific spot on the cucumber. There are pink scales in front of the hands. They are decorated with white flowers. People living according to the model of "personal assistance» can choose for themselves what they want to eat and how much they want to eat, and they can be very detailed in their choice.

IN BOARDING AND ACCOMPANIED RESIDENCE HOUSES AS A MI-GRANT: ZHENYA'S QUIET PICKET ABOUT THE FUTURE OF CARE

RUSSIA. LONELINESS

Every tenth resident of the boarding school is infected with COVID-19. More than 155,000 people in Russia live in boarding schools.

155,000 LONELINESSES

I look at the ceiling. I know that children and adults from psychoneurological boarding schools in Russia are dying due to the virus. The staff work in shifts of two weeks, then another shift comes. The volunteers put the children's beds closer to the windows so that the children could see at least something of the outside world. At least the sun. They are alone.

I am lonely too. I do not consider myself one of the people who love publicity. Rather, I'm hiding. I cannot go to demonstrations with a poster, but I want to support this emancipatory movement. Rather, I am an assistant, but for a limited amount of time. It is possible in intermediate shifts. Then I come specifically to a certain person and do what she or he wants.

I remember myself. I remember how I try to do something together out of clay with people who come to the day center. How there was less and less space. One room was flooded. The state did not want to sanitize it. We were 25 people and had 2 rooms and a kitchen. I remember the camp for «normal» children and children with disabilities, where I was with children from Pavlovsk. We were assigned a room in the state of emergency. There were holes in the floor, mold in the shower. At night, a window with glass and a frame fell on the bed where G. was supposed to sleep. And he could not sleep alone that night and fell asleep with me in my bed.

ZHENYA'S SILENT PICKET

I am standing here now with these posters in my hands.

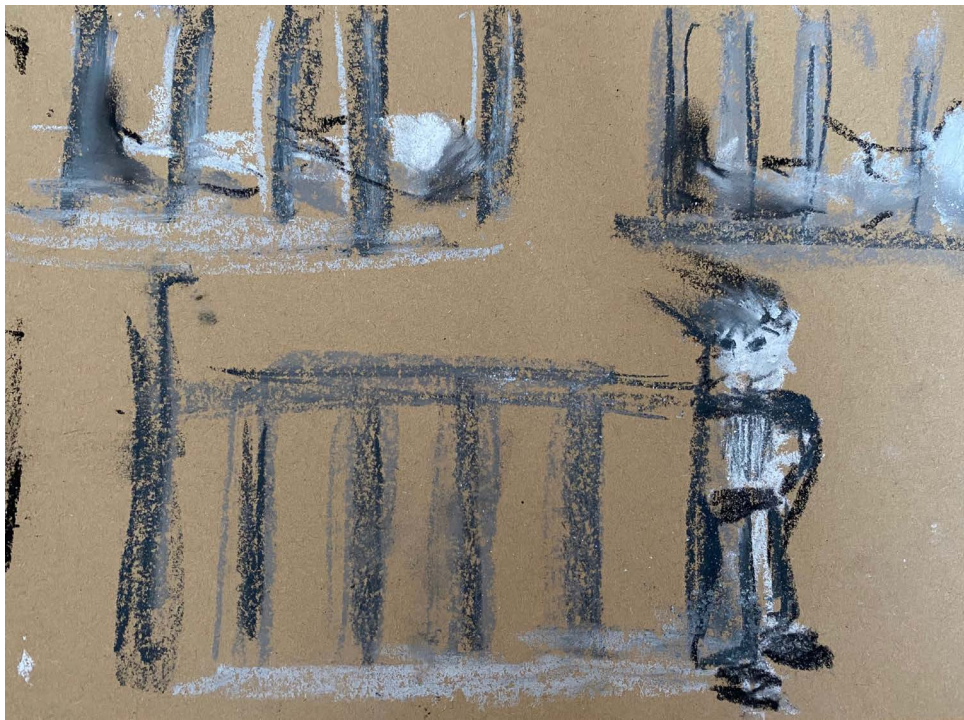
This is unusual for me. I know I know very little. Once I didn't notice that I had been depressed for a year. I realized it only now. It was difficult for me to leave the orphanage and day center despite the smells, terrible conditions, helplessness, overwork. The feeling of guilt never leaves me. It's like standing in the corridor in that very center and constantly colliding with people, because it's narrow. But all the same, I am glad that I work in this area and am ready to accept that my profession will disappear in a couple of years and will no longer be necessary.

But now I want to come to these people. I don't know if they will ever be able to live on their own. Many initially live in the houses of accompanied residence. They don't know there is an option to have an assistant. I know that many people from psycho-neurological boarding schools, when they get the opportunity to live in apartments, after weeks of training, want to go back to the boarding school. It's hard to believe. But they make that decision.

...I find it hard to imagine that the extermination of people with disabilities in Germany was an official operation. But I just know this story. Many of my classmates, for example, do not know that after National Socialism there were also boarding schools in Germany. As in Russia they still exist. And it's strange to me that they don't know that. Maybe because I live in two worlds...



Not children, not clients, just people who give me work.



A child tied to their bed



Installation in memory of the children from the boarding house in Pavlovsk

Fight for life!

Feminist activism in the North Caucasus

Text: Saida Sirazhudinova

Illustration: Diana Mikhailova

Thanks to the possibilities of media and the popularity of social networks and public rallies, in the last years we have come to notice more activity of feminists who stand for their ideas and protect the rights of women claiming gender discrimination to exist.

Feminism didn't bypass the North Caucasus as well. The ideas of feminism penetrated the region showing themselves somewhere vividly and openly. And somewhere, mixing with traditionalism and just from time to time showing their voices.

Its origins are strong and bright historical female images that are inspiring for modern women.

It is strengthened also by the existing problems, the complicated situation of women, endless pressure from society due to which the critical point for women has been reached, leading to the formation of groups of feminist allies.

At the moment, feminism in the region exists in three forms:

- in the form of informational materials (publications, studies, statements, appeals), as well as groups in social networks stating the issues and drawing public attention to the problems of domestic violence and discrimination;
- in the form of predominantly private groups of like-minded women who discuss problems and think about the ways to change the situation of women;
- in works of the practice-oriented activists fighting societal issues and offering help to the people in difficult situations caused by discrimination, threats from society, relatives, need to save lives, etc.

A survey was conveyed among feminists from Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Dagestan to better understand the issue. Names of the feminists won't be indicated (besides the official group names) due to the complicated situation of feminists in the region and the growth of the opposition by the radical patriarchal groups.

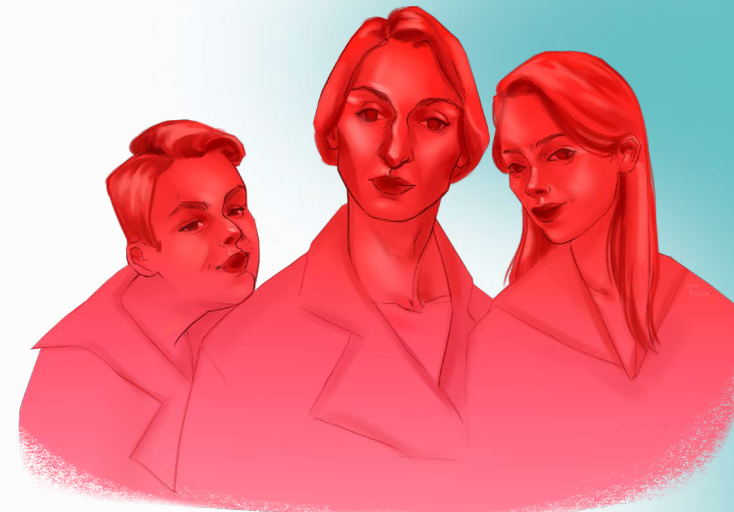
Often, in the region, there are escalations of threats to the activists because they identify as feminists. At the moment, another aggravation has happened. **Many activists who work with domestic violence¹ and are perceived as feminists² receive threats, including the author of the publication³ (and this happens not only in the North Caucasus).** So, a famous journalist from Dagestan and a public figure Svetlana Anokhina recently received death threats⁴: «On 22 July, Anokhina was contacted by a man who presented himself as Dalgat Umakhanov and claimed that he had “an order to deal with all feminists”. Anokhina offered him to meet up, and he replied with a threat to kill her».⁵

In Dagestan, the famous activists are Svetlana Anokhina and the group in social networks “DagFem». In the

Republic of Ingushetia, there are groups of feminist women, a Telegram channel “Mado» (private due to safety concerns). In the Republic of Chechnya, there are single and autonomous activists too who cannot afford unity and public activity because of private safety.

Local feminists draw their power and knowledge from the achievements, experience, and winnings of “Western» feminists.

All feminists pointed at the problems, complications, and limitations of local feminism. The priority questions there remain not the ideological feminist concerns, but personal safety and preservation of women's lives.



Current concerns for the feminists of the region are:

- safety. Work and life in difficult conditions, the sense of danger coming from thinking, being different;
- the absence of ability to express oneself and own position publicly;
- situational hesitation between intersectionality, radical feminism, and other types of feminism;
- absence of favorable prognosis for women and the development of feminism for the nearest future;
- hope that step by step, the situation will change someday.

At the moment, the activity of feminists is concentrated on the confrontation with violence, help, informational statements of the issues, and organization of discussions. Both those who dye their hair and discuss theory and those who take action, stand against the current system and promote changes appear.

Now, we cannot talk about an empowered and consolidated feminist movement in the region, but the sprouts of feminism have already rooted here, and they give their outcomes. Informational community, possibilities of the modern women, and global processes have their influence and push women to accept their issues more and more, and they give the strength to lift their heads up and fight. To fight, first of all, simply for living. For saving lives, health, for feeling like a complete person. Like a human being.

¹ “Dzhigits promise to hunt down and cut out the throat». They fight for women's rights in the North Caucasus. For that, they are being stalked and threatened to kill.

<https://lenta.ru/articles/2019/04/25/kayfem/>

² “Honor killings» in Caucasus. From who and why do the authors of investigations receive threats? 13 December 2018.

<https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-46557892>

³ The author of the report about the “honor killings» in the North Caucasus noticed that she is being stalked. 9 December 2018.

<https://meduza.io/news/2018/12/09/avtor-doklada-ob-ubiystvah-chesti-na-severnom-kavkaze-zametila-za-soboy-slezhku>

⁴ Svetlana Anokhina goes to the police because of a death threat. 25 July 2020.

<https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/352272/>

⁵ Dagestan journalist went to the police due to a death threat. 24 July 2020.

<https://novayagazeta.ru/news/2020/07/24/163264-dagestanskaya-zhurnalistka-obratilas-v-politsiyu-iz-za-ugroz>

Problems of trans* and queer-activism on the post-Soviet space:

grassroots activism and NGOisation, activist practices through the lens of the socialization of men and women, activism as reproductive labor.

Text: Friedrich Chernychev
Illustrations: Alena Levina
Translation: Victoria Kravtsova



you must be kind to everyone
while we who fuck women
beat you in porches
while we who, so be it, have accepted
your transition
use grammatical
masculine gender when bullying
while we deprived you of home
and gave a new place
by stinky lakes

you can't say that you hate
jokes about boobs
pictures about boobs
that you hate straights
this is too heterophobic
you must be tolerant

because we have accepted you

hide your teeth

they whisper from the other front
before they're knocked out
hide and keep quiet
don't provoke

they have almost accepted us
they have almost accepted us
soon there will be gay marriages
lesbians also have children
and when polyamorous women
will grow bellies they finally will
get back to their
main partners

they have almost accepted us
if you know 7 languages and walk
with little dogs
just say it's europe

they have almost accepted us just
grow a beard and don't say
fuck you to everyone
put on an embroidered shirt

they almost accepted us just
don't be so vivid why
provoke them

they have almost accepted us just
don't keep them and us from accepting us further
get the fuck out of here
don't spoil freshly painted
into patriotism and snotty tolerance
conscious nation

get the fuck out of here
that one is not with us

I wrote this text in 2018, worried about what was happening in the community that is still named activist. I am talking about LGBT-activism and precisely about the non-governmental civil LGBT-organizations which are mostly presented by white homosexual cisgender men in Ukraine. And which respond to the needs of exclusively that group (and even then not of all of its representatives). In this text, the author equalizes NGO-«activism» with transphobic and homophobic society. In this case, the attempt to «fit in», to be a «patriot-gay» is nothing different from the patriarchal statements that everything is so tolerant already that the heterosexual majority is being oppressed. In this situation, where can a transgender bisexual feminist-man go? Who appears to be the edge of the pathology himself which intends to define the norm. Who is being displaced by both sides of the front and is on the edge between them.

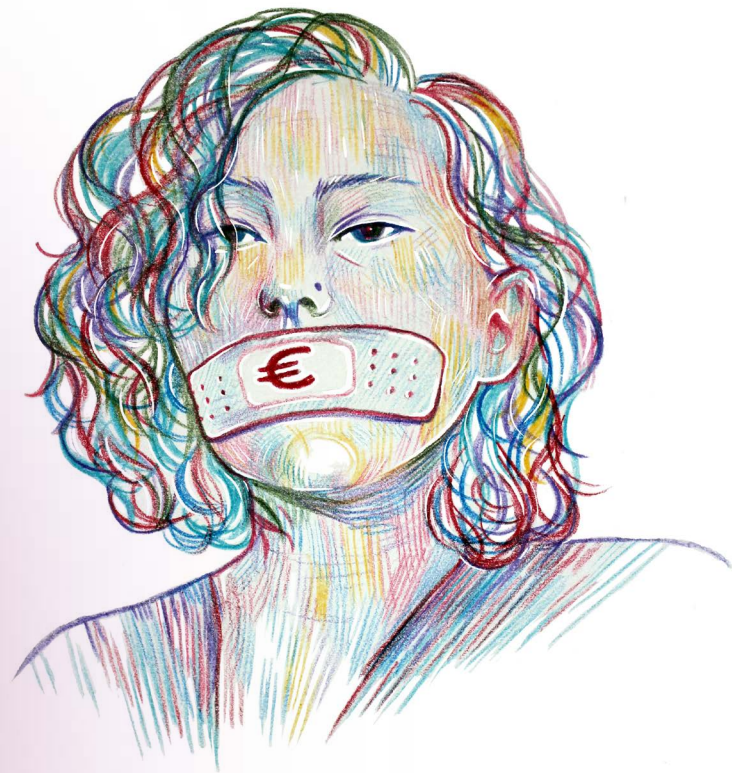
The issue of «fitting in», being «non-provoking» (queer-activism is perceived exactly so: in this sense, I can compare grassroots queer-activism to a wild weed that denigrates a cleaned-to-match-the-majority flower bed of NGO-structures) is the most visible but, unfortunately, not the last one.

a young woman in metro

stands in front of her child
don't look she says don't look
putting her hand as a blinder
don't look at him my little goat
what if you become like him
all people with colored hair are faggots
they tell you that's not true
that masculine gays exist
true protectors of the fucked in the ass fatherland
with steel biceps
who don't smoke marijuana
but listen that's not true
that is a product of the western propaganda
which is to lead you astray
i sincerely tell you
all those with colored hair are faggots
vivid girls love cunt
blue-haired boys fuck each other
we are not marginalized and we watch for our health
says a dressed-as-woman man
from a local trans-community
with a shitty as usual make-up
a blond wig three higher education
degrees
but listen that is not true
i am reading this being high
with a sober head, one would never
think of criticizing your bonds
prying into your traditional families
poking his dick into rot
it's impossible to live here without tripping
every night i come home
exhausted after this war
if lucky – not beaten by conscious fascists
i take off my shoes and let down my hair
hug myself
fall on the sofa sorting before sleep
like photographs in a small album
forms of my beloved ones
of secreted superspies
who didn't make it through the queer-revolution alive

Besides «fitting in», the silencing of the right-radical violence and stigmatization remain an important situation. NGO-«activism» is presented as a highly-noble action (but in no way grassroots!). It forms some kind of class. Not once have I seen NGO-structures to post vacancies for LGBT-people where some of the requirements are... higher education and work experience. At the same time, grassroots activism remains an invisible, reproductive, unpaid labor: «if you need it – you must make changes», «it's impossible to take everyone into account», «again trans people are unhappy with something». You must not be poor, use drugs, make «too radical» statements because this might influence the shaky government position regarding monogamous gay-marriages and the cheerfulness of the pride!

Moreover, grassroots activism on the post-Soviet space is to a greater extent the work of people with female gender socialization, cisgender women, and transgender men, meaning people who have been gender-oppressed from the beginning. Activism that is built on anger and inability to withstand violence. If we look at NGO-structures, they mostly consist of cisgender men. Trans*people also appear to be there now (because donors insist!) and it's indicative what kind of them do. Although most activists in the post-Soviet area are transgender men and non-binary people, LGBT-NGOs most willingly «pick» transgender women and, of course, not trans*lesbian-butches (it seems – there's nothing more queer!) but serious business-ladies who comply to the class norm. In such a situation, the voice of people with masculine gender socialization (i.e. people who were taught to speak and not to listen) becomes even louder, while the protest, anger, incompatibility, inequality, and poorness are being silenced, trampled, washed off: step away, to the border, let the majority become more tolerant, let us become the majority.



Stuck between the past and the present: coloniality of queer activism in Central Asia

Text: Altynay Kambekova
Illustration: Daria Rokossovskaya

In July, 2019, Central Asian queer activist initiatives organized the first regional LGBT platform in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The event was a self-organized forum, where activist groups from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan discussed common issues and challenges they face as a region, as well as individual countries. Apart from the discussion of issues that the queer community faces worldwide, such as hate speech, discrimination, access to healthcare, among myriads of other challenges, the main difference of Central Asian LGBT platform was that it was the first event where the local queer activist community gathered to discuss the issues of Western coloniality when it comes to donor-grantee relationships and to think of the alternative modes of survival without the support of donor organizations. The goal was first of all to finally acknowledge that there is a certain relationship, definitely not equal, between us and our partners from the West that troubles us (although, admittedly not everyone). As it happens with any unhealthy relationship, the most difficult thing is to recognize that you are in one, and to openly say that you have been manipulated and not free all this time. This happened to Central Asian activists as well, it hurt to rip off the band-aid, especially when this band-aid literally comes in the form of aid, financial aid, promising the bright future of equality and justice that the queer community has been longing for all these years.

After the demise of the Soviet Union, Central Asian region found itself in a position of a limbo between the Soviet past and the quasi democratic transition with the flow of development projects from the Western world, which deemed these countries to be the «third world», and later added to the category of developing countries in the reverence to political correctness. The problem the queer community in Central Asia faced after the dissolution of the USSR was twofold: on the one hand, the erasure of the voices, and therefore, the mere existence of the entire region, just because it could not be perceived as a separate entity outside of its former colonial center – Russia, and on the other, inevitable subjugation to larger neocolonial forces that came along with neoliberal Western capitalism. As it can be seen especially from the experience that the region had to go through, one of the facets of neoliberalism and neocolonialism is manifested through the prism of human rights and democratization. In this regard, the promotion of women and LGBTQI+ rights has become a prominent part in this agenda of Western aid, which stepped into the region with its «civilizing mission». This is not to say that we did not have any problems with human rights, nor do I claim that it is easy or safe to be queer here. However, what I am trying to say is that since Central Asian countries have witnessed a significant flow of development aid in forms of grants from international organizations and Western countries, this was all done within the neoliberal developmental project, spiced with the colonial approaches, where the newly-formed independent countries were portrayed as lacking civilization, and «human rights» have become the currency of coloniality in the region.

The dichotomy of West vs. East, where under East in academia one more frequently sees only Eastern Europe, has been a problem for a long time, and has been a focus of many discussions. Many theories of radicalization, xenophobia and the lack of respect to human rights in former countries of the Soviet bloc have been vastly developed since late 1990s and early 2000s. We

constantly discuss what it means to lag in time and development behind Western Europe, theorizing about the complexities of the concept of time, yet, almost in none of these discussions the region of Central Asia has been looked at separately. It is always assumed that Central Asia is still part of the larger Eastern European region, and what applies to the latter automatically translates to the former. It seems that the region froze somewhere in a static position in time and space. The problem is that no one cared to really ask and, most importantly, to see.

Behind fancy theories and academic conferences, be it either in gender and sexuality, or regional studies, queer community in Central Asia always found itself an object – on the one hand, an object of study, if they are «lucky» to be studied, and on the other, an object of salvation projects. In fact, these two sides are the ends of the same stick, as they both serve a single purpose – to entrap us in the prison of inferiority, where we are always either studied or helped by our mighty «seniors» from the West. We speak with their voices, we think with their ideas, we want what is right for them, and condemn what is deemed bad by them, as it is always them who are privileged to think and speak. If one still followed Cartesian cogito, ergo sum paradigm, then we are non-human, and within this model of importing «human rights» through the «civilization» mission of Western donors, this is the message that we get, and we should clearly understand this in order to set ourselves free from this dependent relationship.

This brings us to a larger problem, the issue of coloniality – the internalized belief in the superiority of the colonizers, and reproducing this idea through one's actions, texts and general production of knowledge (Mignolo 2013). In Central Asia, the problem of postcolonialism and the process of decolonization has been very dubious, starting from the question of whether we indeed were colonized, and if so, by whom? Do we say we were colonized by Russians or by the Soviet Empire, where either option has its own underpinnings and limitations? As a result, what we see today is constant discussions and debates on how to decolonize from the past, from the haunting ghosts of Russian coloniality that has infiltrated every cell of our lives. Yet, very few people dare to think about the Western coloniality of the present, or perhaps it is better to say that they deliberately choose not to do so, because it would shed a light at a dismal position we find ourselves in.

I was once amused by the concept of «subaltern empire» proposed by Viatcheslav Morozov (2015) in relation to Russia, however, now it seems that even the fact that Russia can participate in the race for modernity, even if it loses time after time to its opponents, automatically means that it is not in a position of a subaltern, and calling it a «subaltern empire» would be an appropriation and eradication of the experience of those who have been subjugated

by colonialism under the Russian Empire and later Soviet Union. When it comes to Central Asia, we unfortunately cannot afford this luxury of acting as independent runners in the competition. The region still serves just as an addition to a bigger actor in geopolitical games. The only difference is that if before we could not choose our colonizers, now we are given an illusion of this «choice», yet still unable to choose the option of «none of the above». We are always doomed to follow a master, unable to break free from the chains.

During the Platform I witnessed a manifestation of this coloniality among the LGBTQI+ activists from Central Asia. Despite the fact that we took time to discuss how to become financially independent from Western donors, and how to claim our positionality as a separate and full-fledged region, which itself was a big step forward, I could not help noticing that some activists mimicked the behavior of the Western donors, from whom we wanted to get free. It was very interesting, and at the same time frustrating to listen to and participate in the discussion of our role as activists in the region in relation to the general queer community in our respective countries. It is not a secret that any form of activities related to LGBTQI+ rights bears a certain amount of risks. The problem is even more exacerbated with the fact that this danger touches not only those who implement them, but the entire group of people, and thus might have a collective negative impact on all of us, including those who did not consent to these actions in the first place.

One of the parallel discussions during the Platform touched whether we, as activists, carry the responsibility for the general queer population in our countries, if by our activities we can incur immediate harm to them, and to my surprise and horror, some of the activists proclaimed that «Activism is always violent», the idea not new, yet appealing by all means. However, this case is very indicative of how the local

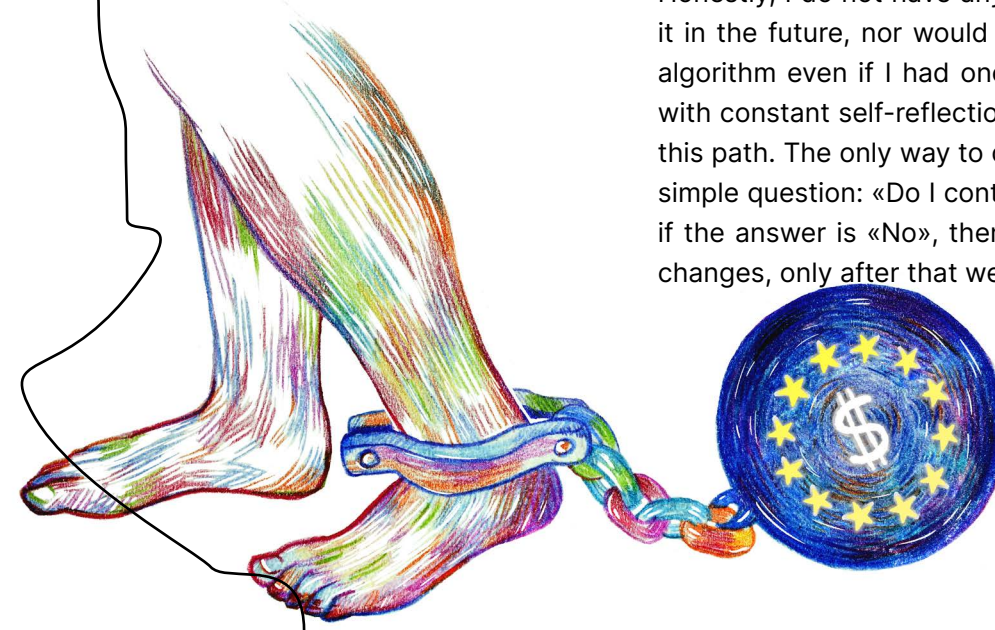
References:

Mignolo, Walter D. 2013. Globalization and the Decolonial Option. 1st ed. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315868448>.

Morozov, Viatcheslav. 2015. Russia's Postcolonial Identity : A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World. Central and Eastern European Perspectives on International Relations. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire : Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

civil society groups themselves fell prey to the colonial behavior, the one, which they were so willing to escape from. The argument behind this motto was that immediate harm of precarity can be a price in the way to long term benefits, such as elevated rights for the LGBTQI+ community in the region, changing the perception of the society towards queer people toward more positive, and elimination of other structural problems. The same idea lies behind the quite alien concept of «coming out», where we learned to celebrate the stories of coming out by convincing ourselves that it was for better, and trying to silence the voice saying that for many of us coming out was never a choice, but rather an act of forceful outing. I do agree that human rights should be respected, as I call myself a human rights activist, and since the first thing we learn about human rights is the concept of their inalienability, I also believe that no one can deprive others of the most basic right – the right to live in security, even if it is done with so-called good intentions. Hence, when I hear from my colleagues, that any form of activism incurs certain costs, I revolt with every cell of my body.

This discussion during the Platform deeply troubled me and made me think for a long time how it was possible that the activist community was eager to put others in danger for the sake of the «greater good», the slogan itself reminding of a dystopian world. I tried to shake it off by justifying it with personal traits of character, but I learned that nothing is ever personal. Now I see how these three days of the Platform were in fact tied together with a thin red thread of good old coloniality, - attestations of some of the activists that they finally want to be seen by the Western European organizations as equal, or discussions on how to provide services if the financial support ends, where the question itself is not about if but rather when, and of course the infamous discussion of the extents of activism. In all these topics we were tied up in a colonial matrix without even realizing it. In our aspiration to be seen equal, we granted the privilege of vision to our colonizers in a truly Lacanian manner, and in trying to bring human rights to the queer community, we fell prey to the same colonizing pattern. Honestly, I do not have any ready-made recipes of how to avoid it in the future, nor would I want to prescribe any step-by-step algorithm even if I had one, as this is the path without an end, with constant self-reflection on one's own stance and position in this path. The only way to do so is by always asking yourself one simple question: «Do I contribute to subjugation of others?», and if the answer is «No», then keep repeating it until the response changes, only after that we can think of next steps.



Bishkek Feminist Initiatives (BFI)

Text: Saadat Salieva

Illustrations: Daria Rokossovskaya

This brief herstory of Bishkek Feminist Initiatives' (BFI) is based on a published zine "Stories of The Women's and Feminist movement in Kyrgyzstan". In this submission, I would like to present some of BFI's her-story aspects during the period of my involvement in the organization from 2012 - 2019.

Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
July 2020

Background

The idea behind Bishkek Feminist Initiatives (BFI) was born in 2009 as a small initiative group of students in Bishkek who began organizing themselves around public actions such as performances of The Vagina Monologues. By 2010, this unofficial group of students had become SQ. In 2011 the group officially registered as "Bishkek Feminist Initiatives SQ" and found its own space in 2013. Over time, the name of the organization was shortened to just "Bishkek Feminist Initiatives" (BFI). Overall, it is important to note that the collective had different members and strategies over the years, and as such BFI as an entity was ever evolving.

From the beginning, the diversity within BFI with politically engaged grassroots feminist activists drawn from communities and backgrounds from throughout Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia as a whole lent a uniqueness to the story and organizing strategies of BFI. In the face of a growing traditionalist and nationalist discourse about gender norms on the part of both the Kyrgyzstani government and hate groups, BFI has led impactful direct actions and activism campaigns to advance gender justice, demonstrating new ways of women-led organizing in the country. Moreover, I would argue that BFI was one of the first openly and unapologetically self-led intersectional feminist organization in Kyrgyzstan.

Feminist activism in practice

Over the past ten years, the diversity of Kyrgyzstani feminist activism has grown, as different generations of activists use different organizing tactics. Currently, feminism is considered more like a dynamic social movement than a narrow sub-category of women's rights organizations. Feminist organizing inevitably involves feminist political analysis that centers experiences of girls, women and non-binary people, which had little presence in mainstream women's rights and wider civil society sector before.

While many kyrgyzstani women's rights organizations examine the role and status of women and girls, they do not necessarily position themselves as feminist for a variety of reasons. Openly promoting feminist principles and self-determination is often met with a very violent and negative reaction. Open misogyny is all too common, and the risk of being attacked for being outspoken feminist activist is quite real.

In order to strengthen locally-led social justice struggles and take grassroots organizing to the next level, BFI has prioritized the girl, women and LGBTIQ rights agenda since 2009. Along with other feminist and LGBTIQ initiatives, BFI brought a fresh perspective on the idea of women-led organizing in Kyrgyzstan by expanding the notion of "womanhood and the women's experience" as well as enhancing women's issues beyond the confines of heteronormativity, early marriage, bride kidnapping, domestic violence and political (party) representation.

Community building as an extension of collective care

From the beginning, the idea of building a community was BFI's raison d'être. Each member of the BFI community came from a different background. In the team, we had different ethnicities, ages, sexual orientations, gender identities, nationalities, economic classes and native languages. We represented the diversity of modern Kyrgyzstan.

People came to BFI for a million different reasons. Some activists joined as part of an ongoing anti-discrimination fight for justice, some joined to turn their trauma into a powerful force for social change, and some were looking for creative ways of resistance to dominant violent structures.

BFI had no "beneficiaries". Instead we had ourselves. We were our own community. We were building activism to not only improve our own lives, rights and freedoms, but also to challenge systemic and structural inequality that persisted in the country despite the 2005 and 2010 revolutions and the endless series of "reforms".

Being a part of this community was also our attempt to build a lived feminist reality - here and now. This was largely made possible by our having a safe and cozy learning space (known simply as The House) that also served as a feminist activist platform with elements of collective care. Various initiatives were started in The House that aimed at meeting our needs. At The House we built ourselves a library, a "do-it-yourself, do-it-together" workshop, a garden and an office. It was a place where we studied, worked, discussed, relaxed and had fun.

While the collective regularly organized public protests, we actually considered the day-to-day processes of building a feminist community and practicing collective care to be the most important thing we did. The House was especially important due to the challenges faced by girls, women and non-binary people in the city and the lack of places to gather freely and safely. Cafes, squares and parks tend to be cis male-dominated spaces and restaurants are not an affordable option for most. The House was an attempt to offer those lacking the privilege of their own space to gather freely and safely in a place all their own.

The House was the heart of BFI. The space facilitated consciousness-raising practices that resulted in increased political formation of sisterhood and collective care. This was a truly transformational process and radical re-imagination of a reality free from oppression. The House was a place where you could just be yourself.

By providing a safe space for the feminist community, The House served as an incubator for a number of initiatives that later became fully autonomous and self sustainable. This includes feminist parents groups, book circles, and art initiatives, as well as independent groups such as Girl Activists of Kyrgyzstan and Teenage & Youth for Justice and Equality.



Participatory processes as a way of taking charge of own destiny

BFI's feminist activism demanded a complete reimagining of our work processes as well. Knowing that control, domination and violence are cyclical in nature, BFI experimented with non-hierarchical structures to avoid reproducing oppressive norms within the team.

BFI's structure was flexible by design and changed and transformed as needed. Our efforts to maintain a horizontal organizational structure was our attempt to foster participatory and self-led organizing processes. This was a principle we took very seriously. If even one member of the Working Group was unable to participate in a given meeting for any reason, a final decision would not be made until we had the necessary quorum.

As girls, women and gender non-binary folks in Kyrgyzstan are often denied the opportunity to make their own choices or be part of any decision making processes, the BFI team felt that everyone should be able to participate in the collective's decision-making process. This allowed everyone to take back the right to be in charge of one's life and actions. The idea of non-hierarchical and participatory decision-making created an alternative to mainstream structures, where the dominance of one over the other is a norm and often presented as the only way to build relationships and interactions in all spheres of life.

BFI's horizontal and non-hierarchical structure was a deliberate response to the dominant model of NGOs with their hierarchy and strict role distribution. Despite the state's legal requirements imposed on BFI as a registered NGO, BFI wanted to try a different model of activity that struck a delicate balance between the collective's values as a horizontal organization with the externally imposed requirements of a legal hierarchy.

The role of coordinating members was important within our horizontal structure. This role was an attempt to reimagine what feminist leadership would look like in our context. One practice that became a foundational norm of BFI over the years was regular transfer of organizational coordination, accompanied with mentorship, which allowed interested BFI activists to try out being in a leadership position. This practice gave the team a more dynamic structure, which also lent more stability to the movement as a whole.

Our non-hierarchical and participatory approach is what actually drew many people to BFI. However, as in any process especially those involving self-organization, one has to be ready for active participation and increased responsibility. Some people simply could not break out of the old habits of hierarchical systems. Sometimes activists would not take personal responsibility, which meant that much of this responsibility fell on the shoulders of the coordinator due to their legal responsibility to sign documents. Decisions were sometimes made by those responsible for reporting, which later led to conflicts within BFI. There was a fear that BFI might become exactly what we all despised - a hierarchical organisation dominated by a single person.

Burnout as a path to renewal?

It is as important to talk about activist burnout as it is about other aspects of feminist organizing.

Often, burnout in activism is characterised by the lack of necessary internal resources for people to stay engaged in mentally and emotionally demanding labour. When burnout set in, some of us were unable to simply check our email, read, keep updated about the events or get involved in organizing with the same enthusiasm and faith we had before.

Burnout is something many grassroots activists have experienced for various reasons, and BFI activists who worked on the zine were not exceptions.

There were both internal and external reasons for our burnout. People moving away made collaboration harder. A lack of communication negatively impacted working relationships and friendships. A lack of attention and care often meant we did not listen to each other, which put some in difficult positions. Sometimes, despite our own principles, there were disagreements and personal hostility among BFI activists. Some of these internal issues underscored the importance of constantly returning to collective agreements and principles as we helped each other go through this stage of growth together.

The BFI collective by no means regarded conflict as something inherently bad. Our collective also believed that anger, disagreement and rage could also be beautiful. This is particularly true for those of us who came to feminism to challenge the oppressive practices.

In some ways, burnout led to necessary changes within BFI. We came to a collective decision to hand over the legacy and herstory of BFI to reinvigorate the collective. So, in the spring of 2019, BFI began a new chapter of its herstory with an all-new generation of BFI activists.

Collective renewal was necessary for BFI's self-organization to remain vibrant and sustainable. It also meant that BFI's methods, tactics and approaches evolved and changed as one generation of activists passed the torch to the next.

BFI is one of the few platforms in Kyrgyzstan that allow for experimental projects, demonstrating the collective's fearless attempts to grow, make mistakes, learn and press forward. This is a "living and breathing" example to continue building feminist community and creating the present and future ourselves - here and now.



Non-heterosexual women in the Soviet Union in the second half of the 20th century

Text, illustrations: Anna Golovina

2020. A group of Federation Council members headed by Senator Elena Mizulina introduced a package of bills that limits LGBT-people rights and discriminates against this social group¹. In accordance with the Bill, the marriages of trans-people become de facto impossible, along with the full change of personal documents. Moreover, LGBT people who married abroad are stripped of the possibility of recognition of their status in the territory of the Russian Federation.

2020. In the Russian Federation, following an all-Russian referendum, that was held with a large number of falsifications², amendments to the Constitution were adopted, defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman and consolidating a conservative path in the policy of the state government.

2013. In the Russian Federation, Article 6.21 of the Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation was adopted, prohibiting “the promotion of non-traditional sexual relationships among minors». Since the introduction of this article, the dissemination of any positive or even neutral information about the LGBT community in the public domain has become a risky business, and some people, such as democratically-minded teachers, have found themselves in a particularly vulnerable position. In 2017, the ECtHR declared this article discriminatory³.

1934. The Presidium of the CEC of the USSR adopted a resolution criminalizing same-sex contacts between men (sodomy) and establishing punishment for the perpetrators for the period from 5 to 8 years (Article 154-a of the CC of RSFSR). In 1960, this article was retained with a change of number and became article 121 of the Criminal Code. Until the article was abolished in 1993, more than 38⁴ thousand people were sentenced under it.

¹ In the Federation Council, it was proposed to ban transgender people from marrying and adopting children// Meduza - Electronic Resource. URL:



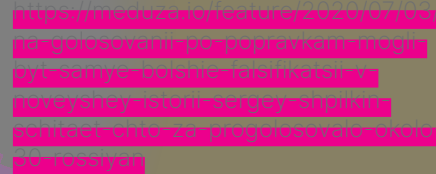
(Date of address: 12.08.2020)

² Expert: almost half of the votes for the constitutional amendments were falsified//Znak. - An electronic resource. URL:



(Date of address: 12.08.2020)

Smith Dmitry. The amendment vote could have been the biggest falsifications in recent history. Sergei Shpilkin thinks that about 30% of Russians voted «for» // Meduza - Electronic Resource. URL:



³ Sergey Vitko, Vladislav Gordeev. The ECtHR found discriminatory the Russian law on gay propaganda// RBC - Electronic Resource. URL:



⁵ A Soviet common man: Experience of social portrait at the turn of the 90's / AA Golov, AI Grazhdankin, LD Gudkov, etc.; under general ed. Yu A. Levada. - Moscow: World, Ocean, 1993.S. 286.

⁶ Kon I. Sexual Culture in Russia. - M.: AST, 2018. page 214.

⁷ Same source. page 249 -254.

⁸ Kozlovsky V. Argo of Russian Homosexual Subculture: Materials to be studied. - Benson, Vermont: Chalidze Publications, 1986. page 13.

⁹ Borisov A. Right ear. Monologues of people born in the USSR. - M.: SAM. PIZ, 2018. page. 19.

¹⁰ Beetle O. Russian Amazons. History of the lesbian subculture in Russia. XX century. - Moscow: A verb, 1998. page.95-97.



История движения
А-90-90
Коллекция
Панк и Треш-культура
Российская
Коллекция



years has almost always left much to be desired. Discriminatory legislation, negative attitude of the government and society, illegal prosecutions. However, even in such a situation the queer people continued to stand up for their freedoms and to pursue the expansion of their rights. The lesbian community was very present in this area. Their activism dates back to Soviet times.

What did it mean to be a lesbian in the Soviet Union? How did homosexual women resist discrimination and find new forms of solidarity?

In the Soviet Union, homosexuality was considered deviant and even criminal, both by the political elite and the majority of the state population. For example, in 1989, the Levada Center conducted a survey among the population that revealed the attitude of Soviet people towards deviant, not normal behavior. 33.7 percent of respondents spoke in favor of the «elimination» of homosexuals and 30.7 percent for their social isolation. Only 10.1% of respondents suggested, «leave [such people] to their own devices⁵». Many people could not even know about the existence of same-sex attraction, because after the 1930s there was complete silence around homosexuality: the existence of same-sex eros was not spoken about in literature, journalism, or the media. This topic became taboo, as did the public and loud discussion of sexuality itself: abnormal behavior in this area was corrected through sexopathology, and normal sexuality was rarely described in adolescent manuals^{6,7}. As a result, many people did not have a complete understanding of homosexuality in general, and could not have formed their own opinions on this issue. However, the lack of large amounts of information in public sources does not mean that the «ordinary» person remained completely ignorant of this issue. Among other things, the public created jokes⁸ that ridiculed homosexuality. Such behavior seemed immoral and unacceptable to a Soviet citizen, was closely connected with the ideas of prison camp culture. In the 1970s and 1980s, another phenomenon appears which clearly illustrates the public attitude towards same-sex contacts - the so-called «repair». The term was used to refer to attacks on homosexuals by young people interested in robbing or beating up a «pederast» or «lesbo»⁹. The state, for its part, continued and supported these negative sentiments. Apart from the discriminatory legislation already described, there was an almost complete lack of information on homosexuality available to the «common man». In addition, homosexuals may have been subjected to forced psychiatric treatment and punitive psychiatry.

Thus, being a lesbian in the Soviet Union meant several things for the most part. First of all, a woman found herself in an almost complete information vacuum. She could not understand whether her thoughts and feelings were normal and possible, which made the girls feel «different». Moreover, in the Soviet Union, it was quite difficult to articulate her own homosexual experience, as the terms and euphemisms that existed at the time were obviously offensive. Lesbians could be nicknamed «kobel» (in a way similar to the American «butch») or «kovvryalka¹⁰) but both of these terms were stigmatized by the prison camp subculture and were not suitable for self-representation. The diverse vocabulary that now exists to describe homosexual experience, coming out, outing, and minority stress did not exist in the Soviet cultural space, which made it impossible for non-heterosexual women to properly understand their own lives. Literally, it felt

like you not only couldn't understand who you were, but you also found yourself unable to describe it in words you were familiar with.

Secondly, homosexual women were at risk of being placed in punitive psychiatric institutions, which could threaten not only loss of social status but also mental and physical health. Young women often had to get fake married just in order to avoid being judged by others. For adolescent girls, the suspicion of «abnormalities» from parents was particularly dangerous, as the family had real power and could get the girl to be placed in «forced treatment».

Thirdly, lesbians were most often forced to hide their experiences and identities in the course of their lives, developing numerous defensive mechanisms and behavior strategies. Lack of self-fulfillment, inability to «live normally» led to minority stress – a chronic high level of stress experienced by members of stigmatized social groups.

However, despite this far from rosy picture, homosexual women found ways and possibilities not only for self-advocacy and identity building but also for building collective solidarity – a community that was willing to help and support.

Researcher Arthur Klesh notes that the lesbian group was included in the community, which received the symbolic name «theme». For the researcher, «theme» becomes a kind of a form of group subjectivity – the ability to act and actively participate in social life. Thus, within the «theme», lesbians could help their gay friends by entering into mutually beneficial fake marriages or providing them with the necessary household support. Moreover, there were often significant horizontal connections within the LGBT community: quirks actively helped « their own « with jobs or housing, could provide protection from physical assault or bullying¹¹.

Also, the lesbian community has been involved in human rights and activism activities since the early 1980s. In 1983, philologist Alexander Zarembo founded the first organization – the «Blue Laboratory», whose goals were the organization of education and the formation of group solidarity among representatives of the community. The «Blue Lab» included such activists as Olga Krause, Raisa Tairova, Olga Zhuk, and others. « Laboratory» was able to join «ILGA». (International Lesbian and Gay Association), but was already closed by 1986. Olga Krause recalls the end of this organization in her autobiographical anthology:

«Shurka [Alexander Zarembo] was locked up quickly. I pity him, he was foolish. But who does set himself up like that? What, the heck, [he thought] that laboratory would do? And there was not even a show trial, not even a sound about that in the newspapers. Maybe there, in the government, was some noise, but there were still four years left before Glasnost, and even four years later their Glasnost wasn't for our kind.»¹²

However, the Blue Laboratory was only the first, but by no means the only, organization that emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In St. Petersburg (Leningrad), such organizations as the «Association of Gays and Lesbians 'Wings'» and the «Association for the Equality of Homosexuals» appear. In 1989, largely due to the activity of activist Yevgenia Debrianskaya, the «Association of Sexual Minorities» was founded, which soon split into several independent cells. In the early 1990s, the organization «Triangle» emerged, which included not only Debrianskaya but also Masha Hessen, who was actively involved in human rights work. On the basis of the «Triangle», the private «Archive of Gays and Lesbians» began to gradually develop. Currently, the «Archive» is located in Moscow. The organizations' activism was manifested not only in disseminating knowledge about homosexuality but also in providing legal support to prisoners. Thus, after the abolition of Article 121 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR in 1993, many former convicts were able to have their case reviewed thanks to the assistance of activists.

Thus, despite the complexity of the situation, the Soviet LGBT community developed different ways to resist and adapt to conflicting contexts. Homosexual women in the second half of the 20th century possessed subjectivity, showed collective solidarity, and participated in activist activities. And this gives us confidence that in modern Russia lesbians, together with other community members, will continue not only to assert their rights but also to support each other regardless of individual differences.

¹¹ Clech A. Between the Labor Camp and the Clinic: Tema or the Shared Forms of Late Soviet Homosexual Subjectivities. – Slavic Review, 77(1), 2018.

¹² Krause O. Behind the facade of that garden. Historical stories. – «Publishing Solutions». C. 87.

«Tema» magazine and the first LGBT organizations of the late Soviet period

Text, illustrations: Khudaiberdieva Elizaveta

Translation: Irina Sharkadiy



Since the beginning of perestroika in the 1980s, the gay and lesbian movement has gained strenght, feeling more freedom. The issue of homosexuality went more and more public, and it became possible to publicly discuss the legalization of personal homosexual

relationships by mutual consent. In 1983 the organization «Gay Laboratory» («Blue Laboratory») was founded, which consisted of about 30 people. The leader was the philologist Alexander Zarembo. Activists Olga Zhuk and Sergei Shcherbakov (then still

students), the poet Olga Krause and others were part of the «Laboratory»¹. At that time, Article 121.1 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR still existed, according to which voluntary homosexual relations were punishable by a term of three to five years in prison². The organization's

illegal meetings were like kitchen meetings of dissidents. In her semi-autobiographical book «Kat'kin Sad» O. Krause conveys the fear of real criminal punishment when creating the organization³.

The organization wrote an open letter to the international

community, and the Laboratory got in touch with Finnish gay and lesbian organizations, through which it became a member of the International Gay Association. The organization was engaged in informing about the history of homosexuality, the AIDS epidemic, and

seeking contacts with foreign organizations. It was mainly a project of Alexander Zaremba, who was a professional linguist. He moved to Kyiv, but the other members of the group, Shcherbakov and Olga Zhuk, played a big part in the subsequent creation of «thematic» associations in Leningrad. Under pressure from the KGB, the group first «quieted down» and then, in 1986, broke up. The organization left little behind, but the main thing was that the organizations for the protection of gays and lesbians' rights began to spread, and many of them adopted the tactics of Western LGBT organizations.

Potential community leaders took advantage of new opportunities opened up by social transformation. At the end of 1989, the human rights organization «Association of Sexual Minorities» («ASM») appeared in Moscow, which aimed at overcoming homophobia and criminal prosecution, fighting for equality, and abolishment of Article 121.1. It was founded by

Vladislav Ortanov, Konstantin Evgeniev, Alexey Zubov, Roman Kalinin, Evgenia Debryanskaya. V. Ortanov, K. Evgeniev, and A. Zubov, on behalf of the entire organization, wrote an appeal to the President of the USSR as well as the Supreme Soviets of the USSR and the Union Republics with a request to abolish Article 121.1 and to declare amnesty for the convicted. In their appeal, they sought to distinguish between homosexuality and pedophilia, condemning the latter. Moreover, they identified themselves as «gay» in the text, which showed their orientation towards the Western LGBT movement, the formation of a common identity⁴.

The event that initiated the self-organization and collective action of minorities was the international scientific conference «Changing attitudes towards homosexuality in 20th century Europe» in Tallinn, Estonia on May 28th-30th, 1990. It was the first public discussion of homosexuality on the territory of the USSR. Many future leaders of the movement

were invited to the conference on the personal recommendation of Igor Kon, the most famous Russian specialist in sexology and the sociology of sexuality.

In addition, in November 1989, ASM published the first issue of the Tema magazine. The word «Tema» meant non-heterosexuals, regardless of their gender, it meant a community that transcends gender, nationality, and social status. Being in «tema» (= in the «theme») did not mean being part of a community, but meant reading the same cultural codes. The magazine was published mostly by V. Ortanov and R. Kalinin, who used the changed social situation to test it for tolerance. V. Ortanov was a key figure in the early gay movement of that time, and Roman Kalinin had experience in print. The newspaper was published in Riga by R. Kalinin in virtue of his connections with the printing house.

The creation of the LGBT press was a big step in building a community. The very first issue of «Tema»

proclaimed that the beginning of the «organized movement of sexual minorities in Russia»⁵ was laid and announced the organisation's congress, like a party. «Tema» was notable for its shocking and frankness, not trying to please an unprepared heterosexual audience. In the very first article of the third issue (No. 0, 1990), R. Kalinin stipulates that it is necessary to compile lists of prisoners under Article 121 and help specific people, as well as collect information to draw the attention of the international community to the problem. Additionally, the editor asked readers for help in the selection of material and publication. Thus, despite its small readership, the magazine initially positioned itself as a tool for building a community.

On its pages, the magazine also raised issues of various forms of oppression and informed about the creation of organizations of gays and lesbians, including deaf-mute persons and the ones with hearing loss. It talked about the dangers of «repairs»

¹ Голубая лаборатория: Сергей Щербаков (Sergei Shcherbakov). Как это начиналось при тоталитаризме // Риск: Журнал. М., 1991. № 1. С. 3.

² Министерство Юстиции РСФСР. Уголовный кодекс РСФСР. М.: Государственное издательство юридической литературы, 1950. С. 102.

³ Краузе О (Krauze O.). Катькин сад. СПб и Харьков: 2006. С. 47-59.

⁴ Ортанов В. Евгеньев К. Зубов А. (V. Ortanov, K. Evgeniev, and A. Zubov) Обращение «АСМ» к Президенту СССР и Верховным Советам СССР и союзных республик // СПИД-инфо. 1990. №5.

⁵ Калинин Р. (Kalinin R.) Tema. 1991. №1. С. 1-2.

⁶ Гарик Сукачев (Garik Sukachev): «Мне нравится, что под нашу музыку парни целовались друг с другом» // Квир URL: http://www.gaytravestia.ru/news/2004/01-january/00_02.htm



(дата обращения: 25.05.2020).

⁷ Воспоминания о первом дне поцелуев // ЛГБТ Музей Истории в России URL: <http://lgbtmuseum.ru/movement/mov-events/2256/>



(дата обращения: 30.05.2020).



– specially engineered attacks on gays. Also at the end of the magazine, there were letters from readers, lyrics. Queer culture was reflected in detail on the pages of the magazine. A large place was given to homosexuality in Russian culture, as well as to famous homosexual persons – both historical (P. Tchaikovsky) and contemporary (Evgeny Kharitonov, David Bowie, Yuri Burov), interviews and biographies were published. By the fifth issue, the «Dating Club» column with letters from readers was getting bigger, and letters from different countries – Canada, USA,

Australia, India, Poland, and, of course, from various cities of Russia, were coming. In some issues were printed articles on sex education, aimed to prevent the HIV epidemic. Thus, in addition to informational function, the magazine contributed to communication and strengthening of ties in the community. In April 1991, a concert «Rock Against Terror» was held, where the band «Auktyon» came out with the support of sexual minorities and supported the abolition of Article 121 of the RSFSR Criminal Code. Garik Sukachev recalled: «A lot of gay guys came. I've seen a lot of

couples kissing. Then some of them came up to us and thanked us for our support for their freedom. I was very pleased. Freedom is exactly what I am striving for»⁶.

After the first issue of Tema, the ASM organization split into moderate and radical representatives. The latter, represented by Evgenia Debryanskaya and Roman Kalinin, created the Moscow Union of Lesbians and Gays (MULG). The moderates started publishing the «RISK» magazine. MULG held provocative rallies and statements, which attracted the attention of American LGBT organizations and alienated the organization from compatriots. In July 1991, in virtue of Tema (organized by the Tchaikovsky Foundation and MULG), an international conference on the rights of homosexuals and lesbians fighting against AIDS, as well as gay-lesbian festival, were held. Gays and lesbians came out with manifestos against criminal prosecution. Discussions were also related to the HIV epidemic – it was a factor that discredited

homosexuals.

At the same time, the HIV threat has probably become a catalyst for the unification of non-heterosexuals in the community. While the Soviet government denied the existence of HIV in the country, they independently spread the information about the disease and helped those affected by the epidemic. Many organizations of that time had similarities on the agendas: political unification of the community in the struggle for decriminalization, informational support of community life, combined with the public implementation of new norms of lesbian and gay culture. In 1993, the first goal was achieved – Article 121 was eliminated from the Criminal Code of the RSFSR. Even if this was not officially the merit of the LGBT community, it became easier to breathe. Maria Gessen, one of the organizers of the gay/lesbian (the term LGBT did not exist back then) film festival in Moscow and Leningrad, recalls that all the events described above provided a real opportunity to fight homophobia – by giving up the silence, by being

open⁷. For her, and for many activists of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the legislative consolidation of homophobia in the period from 2013 to the present time means a devaluation of all the achievements of the young Soviet LGBT movement.

Gender Studies in Ukraine

Text: Tamara Martsenyuk, Anastasia Pastushok

Illustration: Tetiana Kornieva

Gender Studies in Ukraine: long way from 90s to today

The fall of the Soviet Union marked the beginning of a new period in the history of all the countries of the former Communist bloc, including Ukraine, characterized by the ideological, political and economic turn towards the liberalization and the democratization of the society. This transition and redefinition of social and political norms also meant the emergence of new causes in public debate, as well as the emergence of new academic fields. Gender studies became one of the new fields that appeared in scientific circles in the beginning of the 90s, quickly gained recognition in the academic world throughout the 90s and developed into a fairly institutionalized field that it is today. **In Ukraine, as elsewhere in the countries of the former socialist bloc, during the decade 1990-2000, gender went «from the status of absolute theoretical novelty to that of a field of expertise established institutionally and recognized as much in academic circles as in those of political decision making»** (Cîrstocea, 2019, p. 12).

How everything started: «lone warriors» from literature to sociology

Feminist topics came in post-Soviet Ukrainian Academia from the field of literary studies marking the beginning of what Lyudmyla Smolyar, historian and Director of the Odessa Scientific Center for Women's Studies, identified as the first out of two stages of development of women and gender studies in Ukraine. This stage (early 1990s - 1995) is characterized by the transformation of women's studies into independent research programs (Martsenyuk, 2018, p. 284). Solomiya Pavlychko (1958-1999), Doctor of Philology and Professor at Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, was the pioneer of gender studies in Ukraine and an inspiration to a lot of the academic feminists of the first generation. In her article entitled «Is a feminist school necessary for Ukrainian literary studies?» (1991) she raised the question of the need to involve feminist methodology in social and humanitarian research in Ukraine. She was the first «to talk about feminism as a direction, as an ideology, as a methodology» (Gender in details, 2018c).

Tamara Hundorova, a fellow feminist and

a literary critic, remembered in her recent interview: «In the early 1990s, as a researcher, I felt at a dead end, in a vacuum, because I really lacked any new approaches and methodologies. What had been achieved by that time did not suit me. I wanted to understand what the situation is like in the West: what is developing there, which directions, methodologies. [...] I worked in the same department as Solomiya Pavlychko, and she became the person who brought a new direction of gender criticism to Ukraine» (Gender in details, 2018c).

Solomiya Pavlychko together with Tamara Hundorova, Vira Ageyeva and Natalka Shumylo initiated the creation of the «Feminist seminar» - a group that was established in the Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in September, 1990 to develop a view of Ukrainian culture from the position of feminist analysis (Feminist seminar, 1991, p. 10). The aforementioned researchers then also created a special rubric «Feminist seminar» in the «Word and time» magazine

(1991).

Throughout the 90s these few devoted scholars were working on establishing a new direction of literary studies and although their colleagues often treated them with scepticism, close-mindedness and even suspicion, the results of their intellectual development turned out to be quite fruitful. Among the examples of the authors' works are: the monograph «Women's Space: Feminist Discourse of Ukrainian Modernism» (2003) by Vira Ageyeva; «Femina Melancholica: Sex and Culture in Olga Kobylanska's Gender Utopia» (2002) by Tamara Hundorova and many others.

on system and represented by Iryna and Sergiy Zharebkin; Odessa Scientific Center for Women's Studies created in 1994 by Lyudmyla Smolyar; All-Ukrainian Women's Center for Information and Socio-Economic Adaptation (1995); Kyiv Research and Gender Advisory Center (1996); Kyiv Center for Gender Studies at the Institute of Literature was formed in 1998 headed by Nila Zborovska; NGO Research Center «Woman and Society» (1999) in Lviv headed by the historian Oksana Kis. The latter also developed courses on gender studies and taught them in National University of Lviv for a short period of time.



Around the second half of 90s (1995 - 2002) women's studies began to be integrated into the higher education system. That signified the second stage of development of women and gender studies in Ukraine according to Lyudmyla Smolyar (Martsenyuk, 2018, p. 284-285). Several gender research centers were established and many university courses created. Among the most influential gender research centers were: Kharkiv Center of Gender Studies - created in 1994 to popularize and introduce gender and women's studies in the post-Soviet higher education

By the end of 90s, the first study course on gender was also established at National University «Kyiv-Mohyla Academy». A course «Introduction to Gender Studies», first conducted in 1997-1998 by Svitlana Oksamytna at the Department of Sociology is still taught at the university every academic year (among many others).

Despite the fact that gender studies in Ukraine has begun to be rapidly institutionalized through academic courses and research centers, researchers themselves often still lacked knowledge on gender

issues. As there were very few possibilities for them to acquire any knowledge through formal education in Ukraine, more informal learning opportunities were introduced. **One of the most prominent places to get an up to date knowledge in the gender studies field and communicate and exchange with your peers were summer schools on gender studies in Foros, Crimea organized by the Kharkiv Center of Gender Studies from 1997 up to 2009** (Kharkiv Center of Gender Studies, 2020). Historian Oksana Kis, one of the participants of the first summer schools, remembered: «At these schools we were also equipped with a kind of “re-

aders” - photocopies of the basic works of Western feminist thought, which were otherwise simply inaccessible. And in the case of Foros, we also received a package of books on gender issues, including several issues of the journal “Gender Studies”. It was a huge treasure at the time. [...] It was very significant at the time. Researchers from post-Soviet countries came together, and it was very important for all of us to feel that our common environment existed, because in fact, each and every one of us who was developing feminist or gender studies were lone warriors in our institutions» (Gender in details, 2019c).

Role of foreign education & scholarship, Ukrainian diaspora and international donors

When talking about gender studies in Ukraine, one has to keep in mind the three factors that played and are still playing a significant role in it: Western education of the researchers that developed women's studies, the influence of the diaspora and the support of international donors. The opportunity to study abroad gave Ukrainian researchers a chance for academic growth in the gender studies field and an access to a lot of books that have not yet been translated into Ukrainian. For example, Tamara Hundorova remembers (Gender in details, 2018c) that Solomiya Pavlychko was doing an internship in Canada around 1990 where she got to know academic feminism and from where she brought a lot of books. Tamara Hundorova was doing a lot of internships abroad herself and had a Fulbright scholarship in 1997 (and then in 2009). The sociologist Svitlana Oksamytna did an internship in the US while finishing her PhD in 1991 and, as she put it, gained access to a lot of «foreign sociological literature, including on gender topics» (Gender in details, 2018b).

A lot of the researchers from the 90s and until now converted to academic feminism through their «international socialization». Studying abroad has given them the chance to get acquainted with current literature on gender issues in their respective fields, and then try to adapt these novelties to Ukrainian context, creating something truly modern and revolutionary for Ukrainian academic field. The lack of formal specialization in gender studies in Ukrainian universities makes this algorithm as relevant today as it was in the 90s, even after almost 30 years of hard work by dedicated scholars.

In the 90s, the influence of researchers from Ukrainian diaspora in the US or Canada was also very significant. Such researchers as Marta Bohachevska-Homiak and Mariana Rubchak published books that were widely read by women in Academia. For many of them those books were not only the first feminist books available in Ukrainian, but also the first books that focused on Ukrainian context: studying women in Ukrainian history, examining and explaining female activism of the 90s, analyzing feminism and matriarchal traditions in Ukrainian culture. Besides bringing the knowledge on Ukrainian women's history and activism to their Western universities, the researchers from Ukrainian diaspora also invested their efforts into strengthening gender studies in Ukraine. Both Mariana Rubchak and Marta Bohachevska-Homiak were lecturers at Summer schools in Foros. They were close friends with the first generation of feminists and showed their support not only in the academic field, but also in the political field (Gender in details, 2018a).

Due to the weak research and publishing capacities of Ukrainian universities and low public interest in gender studies, it is often researchers from diaspora that are the editors of the anthologies (Gender in details, 2019a) that cover various gender issues in Ukraine and give a possibility to Ukrainian contributors representing modern gender studies in Ukraine a chance to present their work to the international community. Among them, we can cite the first Western publication on gender and politics in Ukraine published in 2012 in Canada entitled «Gender, politics and society in Ukraine» (edited by Olena Hankivsky and Anastasiya Salnykova) and the most recent, published in 2015 in the United States, «New imaginary: juvenile reinvention of the cultural paradigm of Ukraine» (edited by Marian J. Rubchak).

The other important factor to keep in mind while analyzing gender studies in Ukraine is the donors' support. The dissemination of gender studies was and still is largely funded by international donors. To give a couple of examples: summer schools in Foros were funded by MacArthur Foundation; NGO Research Center «Woman

and Society» in Lviv was supported by the small grant from Renaissance Foundation; interdisciplinary master's program in culturology and sociology of Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (2003-2007) - by Open Society Foundation. Recent examples include the creation of a so-called Lecture school on Women's Studies at the Ukrainian Catholic University in 2012, funded by the Ukrainian National Women's League of America (UNWLA). In 2018, the Lecture school was transformed into the UNWLA Center for Women's Studies (UNWLA Center for Women's Studies, 2020).

Changes in gender studies of the 21st century in Ukraine

Comparing gender studies in the 90s and today, the most prominent difference is a certain level of maturity that characterizes the field nowadays. If in the 90s, as Oksana Kis put it, «the researchers mastered the achievements of Western feminist studies in express mode» (Gender in details, 2019c), now the gender study research is already up to date with the Western feminist thought and can afford to not only catch up, but develop in parallel with the international ideas and concepts. Tamara Hundorova also has noticed the diversity of the issues on which gender research focuses compared to the 90s. She notes that the attention is being paid to queer research, to the study of masculinity etc. (Gender in details, 2018c). One of the most prominent examples is the East European Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies «Feminist critique» (Feminist Critique, 2020), published since 2018 and curated by its editors-in-chief and Ukrainian researchers Maria Mayerchyk and Olga Plakhotnik. This journal discusses the issues related to the East European region, taking into consideration its common history and often similar trends due to the Soviet past.

Gender studies is an interdisciplinary academic field that integrates such disciplines as literary studies, sociology, history, anthropology and many others. In the 90s, researchers were often working on gender issues within their disciplines without having a clear profile and boundaries of the said discipline in mind. For example, Oksana Kis remembers that «the 1990s and 2000s were a period when everyone was involved in everything. There was a universal encyclopedic version of researchers from gender studies, when in fact those who studied women's history simultaneously dealt with some sociological issues, and political science, and activism, and everything imaginable» (Gender in details, 2019c). Today there is a clear distinction between the fields and the way gender research is conducted within each of them.

The progress is evident also when analyzing the institutionalization process of genders studies in universities. Since 2010 the departments of Gender Studies have been established in five universities: the National University of Ostroh Academy, National Pedagogical Dragomanov University, Ternopil National Pedagogical University, Sumy State Pedagogical University and the University of Educational Management. Donor support has played a major role in this great endeavor, as the departments have been funded by the European Union. In addition, three educational centers have been established: at the Mariupol State University of Humanities, the Kyiv National Economic University, and the Precarpathian National University (Gender in details, 2019b). We have already mentioned the Center of Women's Studies in the Ukrainian Catholic University established in 2012 and renamed in 2018. In 2012 the representative of the Kharkiv Regional Gender Resource Center in partnership with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Ukraine initiated the creation of the All-Ukrainian Network of Gender Education Centers. Its main focus is the modernization of higher education system and the fight against the discrimination in higher education practices (Gender in details, 2017).

In 2017 the first master's «Gender studies» program (MA program «Gender Studies», 2020) was opened at the Faculty of Sociology of the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. The program is established in cooperation with the University of Lund (Sweden) providing the possibility for a double diploma from Sweden and Ukraine. Meanwhile, only Swedish diploma offers a degree in social studies of gender. The Ukrainian diploma is actually in sociology.

Because of the lack of state's support for science and research in general, and the gender studies field in particular, many abovementioned achievements actually became possible thanks to the individual initiative of the resolute scholars. Although it may seem that gender studies are widely recognized as an academic field, in reality they still struggle to

be institutionalized at all levels. Despite the fact that the number of researchers working in the gender studies field is constantly growing, there is currently no department related to gender sociology at the Institute of sociology and only one professional association of women researchers - the Ukrainian Association for Research in Women's History, a non-governmental organization of professional historians, conceived in 2010 and headed by Oksana Kis (UARWH, 2020). This association includes both younger and older generations of researchers of women's history. Several gender research centers that were established in the end of the 90s still exist but are less influential and more locally oriented.

Conclusions and further issues to develop

Overall, gender studies in Ukraine have evolved from a complete academic novelty that was of interest to only a few researchers, into a partially institutionalized academic field that became an integral part of such disciplines as sociology, history, literary studies etc. and many universities' curricula. Much effort has already been made by the academic community to establish gender studies as a separate field.

In the meantime, there is still a long way to go to gain full institutionalisation and recognition. Gender studies are not very visible for the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. Students can't get Bachelor's, Master's or PhD degrees in gender studies. Moreover, in some Universities there is scholarship on antigender topics and promotion of sex-role theory. In general, the status of gender studies in Academia is supported mainly by devoted scholars like mentioned above who propose courses, conduct research and write books on gender topics.

For bibliography go to website:



Welcome to the DollHouse!

Text, illustrations: Ulyana Bychenkova, Zhanna Dolgova.

Translation: Angela Sileva.



"Found duet". Diptych, floristry. 28x28 cm each piece, creation date unknown, approx. 1990s-2000s. The objects were found on the Sirius second-hand market, Kyiv, 2020.

Exercise 'Girlfriend'

Female Genealogy

The Female Duet responsibly and pompously participates in the creation of female genealogy, studying it in their practices so desperately, replicating a highly fragile unstable sketch of inheritance that tends to vanish.

Genealogy is very important for the Female Duets that is absorbing not only names and theories that articulate and proclaim the knowledge so passionately, encourage us to new life, fighting for the knowledge due to epistemological reasons or a broader group of activists and researchers, but rather genealogy of differing woman practices (possibly even separated from their actors, these practices that have autonomous physical meaning). The genealogy allows us to know and capture frustrating, embarrassing, blending, expanding, tempting, and vague views aspiring to impress as nonsense and at the same time, it is a very

pragmatic plexus.

In this genealogy we excitedly add women artists, heroines of the film club "Girlfriend" and certain songs, household chores, sports fails and achievements, churning of soft peaks, pearls of ancient Greek drama, great practitioners of elegant and ingenious conversations in messengers, creators of theories, researchers of cups, a weed from a greenhouse to eroticize the language, mouths, and their damnations from under the table, the Great Elegant Governess, the Queen of Girlfriends and "also plus the whole" (Virginia Plath) other that allows us to act and think non-dogmatically.

Non-dogmatically unusual: to create itself through a strange line of kinship between women and (theirs) practices for various visible and invisible reasons. All women in this genealogy are dangerous: "housewife with child identity" is not less dangerous than researchers or activists. The Duet is akin to another Duet as intensively as ephemerally.

Including and Disclosure

We found actings, moderations, and manners of the Female Duets focusing on changes of outlines of knowledge and meanings at the macro level, to be included sensually in it with affective and tactile knowledge, with a very practical, tiny, insignificant knowledge. This is the knowledge that struggles with universal inflexibility of traditional truth which is forced to become processual, open, to become a question of a contract between active sides of distinction; that struggles with the passion of individual affect.

This new objectivity, new ways of truth's existence are possible due to disclosure that is collectively produced of affectively and emotionally fluffed femininity. Firstly, they smartly refer to her situationist and embodiment, to the libidinal position of this "Infant among other infants» (Jean-François Lyotard), to her nonneutral epistemic desire of catching and colonizing those who are smaller, more vague and cloven.

Secondly, they refer to the materialistic significance of affect itself as a result of the practical and theoretical work of many women so affect isn't an insignificant individual expression that isn't related to abstract Truth but rather is a linking agency. Moreover, linking at the pre-individual level, it is rather a particular power of matter's gravity, collectively shared, perceived, very materialistic process, something that connects us, a power of matter that can influence the force of mind — to interrupt thinking and to help it. To change an understanding of perception from humanistic ideas as about thinking to ideas as about sensitivity for what is significant (Karen Barad). Something that launches, discloses difficult, nonneutral, and delicate fields of differences.

Isn't it because the Female Duets are very sensible of the differences between themselves and resource-rich masculine individuations, certain Père, that they mostly don't hear the same things being said in their "Cave where it says the same thing» (Luce Irigaray)? Père that "licks lollipops in the shape of Fathers» (Unfriend) and can't stop. This is how they write their history and resist its softening, feminization, as well as the feminization of political decisions and incarnations.

Pleasure Princest

"The more I give, the more is left», says Juliet. The Female Duet is given to us in our own practice as a form of contented exchange between us, flooded with a flood of affects and intensities.

The acceptance of another pleasure without any reason (for example, the pleasure of speaking a lofty language or a language that is not affected), the great ephemeral tensions, "How do we create our own beauty?» (Luce Irigaray). Mutually transforming becoming or recuperating: Exercise Girlfriend.

Outrageous pleasures, outrageous doll values: the shining «girlish» that often women dare to practice together or practice as "life» rather than "art», drawing a dichotomous line that is not friendly to them. The Female Duets also claim: «Without a girlfriend, neither in life nor in art!». As well as multiple paired heroines of our Games: Stella Darwin and Gingema Habermas, Marry and Malvvina, Scylla Whirlpool and Charybdis Hershey, Sylvia Woolf and Virginia Plath, Elektra and Antigone, Prosserpina and Persephone, the Cheeky Girl and the Little Thief.

The heroines of "Welcome to the Dollhouse!», as well as members of other Female Duets, meet each other in an exchange via Princest (a term of Virginia Plath). Princest is both mutual seduction, and thinking of female connections in the space of corporeal materiality and the ban on existence, Freud's Fleur and discursive rejection of it, as well as the ironic practical form of mastering the concept of "New kin» by Donna Haraway — girlfriend as a new specific causeless form of intimacy, attraction not by blood, but by choice.

"I was moved in college by Shakespeare's punning between kin and kind—the kindest were not necessarily kin as family; making kin and making kind (as category, care, relatives without ties by birth, lateral relatives, lots of other echoes) stretch the imagination and can change the story.» (Donna Haraway)

Efficiency Of The Pleasure Configuration

As Donna Haraway writes, "women's culture,» like women of color, is consciously created by mechanisms inducing affinity.»

The Girlfriend exercise is an exercise in nuanced communication, training special forms of attention to each other, sensitivity, and an exercise in dexterity and subtlety of affective attunement.

An exercise that teaches how the "flood of individual affect» can help create political weaves and connections through conscious and complex work with feeling, through the development of sensitivity to layers, intersections, problematic dimensions — everything that forms positions from which individuations and assemblies act, think, speak, mean, through the development of sensitivity to what is missing, to what is suppressed, invisible, repressed, sensitivity to strange "spaces of emancipation where no one has ever been» (Anna Rodionova). This sensitivity to the complexity of the matter of action and meaning has always been familiar to the "women's people» (Hélène Cixous), but for a very long time it was not considered a political force.

We also notice another effective phenomenon in the Female Duet: an increase in pomp with simultaneous mutual reinforcement of the participants or self-strengthening of the Duet. What does the morphological development of the surface of the matter of frills, folds, layers, "Scallops! Scallops all around!» (Tatiana Efrussi), but it is also the configuration that makes us bolder and more maneuverable. "Pompous and mannered» (Mark Fisher), we feel and know that our laces are not neutral for both dramatic and epistemological reasons. We can shout this out in the form of a puppet critical curse of the layered structure, not a joke at all.

The Female Duets also reinforce each other through other joint practices: games, mutual learning, consolation, joint mixing and design, mutual formation, joint research, and joint achievements, dreams, and tears.

An important register of these practices we find Paired Insight — simultaneous sensuously affective "insight»-promotion-together between girlfriends — something that may be found only in women's experience of togetherness, beyond the limits of possible sexual relations between women, something that encourages us to imagine: "perhaps in the future women will fight for mutual love» (Elena Revunova).

"Agency from the label» (Madina Tlostanova)

The Female Duet "Welcome To the Dollhouse!» is localized in two cities: Kyiv, and St. Petersburg. The genealogy of our Duet includes other pairs of cities: Kharkiv and Voronezh, Kerch and Rossosh, Moscow, and Kronstadt.

Our intense imagination of Prosperity, as our sensitivity to the absences, particularly our development as an activist art related to the peculiarities of the locations, practices of inclusion and exclusion, the work of community organizations and institutions, present and past with two daughters of the collapse of the great universalist of the project and the political and human collapse (connected, certainly not with resentment, but with practical reproduction). We approach the context that connects us, called "post-Soviet», not thematically, but situationally, taking into account opportunities and restrictions, rights and access rules, communication interfaces, and their absence through the need to be connected by the materiality of metaphor and the features of space.

From the particularity in space, the general particularity is intertwined in feminine twos: through the story of the initial accumulation of symbolic and other capital by masculinities and their subsequent material unfolding of the caring management of the common future, response strategies are made: an attempt on the strength with useless means, re-stealing, seduction, biting off, appropriation, which is to face doubling. For example, our absurd motto: «Re-Assimilate everything!», where counter-theft is a local opportunity for global revenge.

Or the specific material-discursive poverty, the abundance of voids in the post-Soviet context, encourages the twos to want to penetrate the existence of discourses, practices, and institutions, and aggressively, and carefully, seeping, filling, subtly or actively increasing the weave, feeling its political necessity and value.

The desire to establish the new here lies not through the new that breaks through, but through the creative, lubricating, connecting practices, localities, matters, strange forms of knowledge, situationality, which can connect and desire it, not because they feel, show, comprehend their particularity, mediateness, material embodiment, and the responsibility and voluminous pleasure of visibility that arise from these limitations.

Cast:
Queen of Girlfriends, Stella Darwin, Scylla Whirlpool, Sylvia Woolf, Malvvina, Persephone, Little Thief, Antigone — Zhanna Dolgova.
Unfriend, Gingema Habermas, Charybdis Hershey, Virginia Plath, Marry, Prosserpina, Cheeky Girl, Elektra — Ulyana Bychenkova.

The publication materials were prepared by participants of the feminist art duet "Welcome To the Dollhouse!».The text "Exercise Girlfriend» was written by Zhanna Dolgova based on joint everyday pleasures, political dreams, research games and theoretical research. Ulyana Bychenkova proposed a research topic, as well as found and conceptualized objects.

"Let the girls do something»: reflections on post-Soviet gender studies

Text: Nastya Krasilnikova

Illustrations: Daria Gornovich

Translation: Angela Sileva

I would like to say at once that restoring the chronology of the formation of gender studies is a difficult task, if at all achievable. I must admit that I do not have such a task, I would first of all like to share my thoughts and impressions. The main source that I relied on when writing — online conversations with the researchers in the framework of the joint project bridging feminisms, syg.ma, and FEM TALKS «Genealogies of feminism». We wanted to track the heroines' motivations, common points and differences, their retrospects, and hopes for the future. We talked to the creators of the Center for Gender Studies in EHU Elena Gapova and Almira Usmanova, to a professor of the Department of Sociology and Philosophy University Elena Zdravomyslova, to a director of the Ivanovo Center for Gender Studies Olga Shnyrova, to the founder of the St. Petersburg Center for Gender Issues Olga Lipovskaya, to the founder of the Center for Gender Culture in Kharkiv Tatyana Isayeva, to the leading researcher at the RAS Institute of Philosophy Olga Voronina, to the creator of the magazine «The Island» Olgerta Kharitonova, to a specialist in gender history Valentina Uspenskaya, to a senior researcher in Russian Academy of Sciences Irina Tartakovsky, to a co-founder of the Cyberfeminclub Alla Mitrofanova.

I will only talk about some of the topics raised during a series of online meetings, my main focus will be on Russia, since most of our guests have developed their activities here, and I am from Russia, so I know the context of this country better than of Belarus or Ukraine.

There is a feeling that generational ties are weak in Russian feminism. What happened in the 1990s and 2000s was one of the most important milestones in the history of the movement. But it's hidden, not very accessible, and not very media-friendly. Olga Lipovskaya noted with an unbiased eye that "Russian feminism, like an old circus horse, is running in a circle"¹ and it sounds hopeless. Turning to history will help you avoid running in circles in the future. Even now, there is a growing interest in the history of the movement. The problem is that to find some information about the activities of that time, about how feminism and gender studies (GS) developed, you need to dig very deep on the Internet. As Nastya Dmitrievskaya put it, in search of information about gender studies of the 90s, you constantly come across "ghost sites"². Turning to history, to the roots is very important for further development because it will allow you to act more effectively.

One of the first Russian-speaking gender researcher and a worker of Moscow Center for Gender Studies (MCGS) Zoya Khotkina in her article dedicated to the decade of gender studies in Russia distinguishes four stages³:

The Late '80s – 1992 This period can be regarded as preparatory. Elena Zdravomyslova notes⁴ that feminist consciousness was forming during

perestroika.

1993 – 1995 Growth in the number of centers for gender studies. Khotkina notes that during this period, researchers acted in isolation, mainly publishing in foreign journals. A burning problem was the isolation of research from the post-Soviet context.

1996 – 1998 These years have seen a period of consolidation, with the first conferences (MSGS, 1996) and summer schools (Valdai, 1996) taking place.

1998 – 2000 Periodization ends at perhaps the busiest time for GS in the post-Soviet space. There is an activation of work, the links between researchers' units are growing stronger.

But by the mid-noughties, the colors began to thicken. In 2004, the Center for Gender Studies at EHU was forced to move from Minsk to Vilnius, and foreign funding for the centers was decreased by 10 times. The political course is also changing, for example, in Russia in 2007 there is a «maternity capital», and this is not only a concern for mothers, but also a signal from the state: «Give birth, but more.» Moreover, the position of pro-lifers is being strengthened, and the law on gender equality is not being passed. The topic of gender is being politicized, and the authorities are concerned about the decline in the birth rate.

Among the stories of the heroines of the meetings was the idea of «new knowledge», which flooded the post-Soviet space after the collapse of the USSR. **Gender studies were then considered part of this new paradigm, so they did not meet strong resistance from the «old Academy», we can say that at first the new direction was perceived with friendly curiosity.** Now feminism is so actively being pushed out of the Academy, but it came not separately, but as an organic part of the «new knowledge».

According to the stories of the heroines, then it was much easier to organize the center for GS — openness to the new was in the air, the fundamentally different situation of «new knowledge» was an epistemological challenge. In the current circumstances, it would require a 5-year plan, approval at all levels of the administration, and a lot of other paperwork. At the same time, new universities and new people appeared. All the guests spoke about their enthusiastic attitude to the new project. At first, the study of Western concepts was devoid of significant critical reflection, this appeared in Zoya Khotkina's periodization. The destruction of the old foundations led to the building of new ones – the use of Western concepts on foreign soil. The word «gender» itself was foreign, and for a long time, there were discussions about its full meaning. **For the first time, this word was used by Olga Voronina at the beginning of the '90s; this fact was founded by Tatiana Barchukova⁵. Afterward, this term was transferred from Moscow Center for Gender Studies into general gender discourse as the generic word.** To understand the context within the new term, it was necessary to translate key texts, so a big trend of the «gender 90's» is translations that feminists still use. For example, «Anthology of Gender Theory» (2000), «Anthologies of Feminist Texts» (2000), «Introduction to Gender Studies. Part II of Anthology» (2001). But we see that the corpus of fundamental texts was finally translated in the 2000s, so in the 1990s the problem of survival of «non-native» concepts on post-Soviet soil was acute.

I was also interested in tracing CGS's relationship with traditional academies. As mentioned above, GS as part of the new knowledge was not rejected, but what gave stability to certain structures? Because some centers were closed, for example, in Belarus in Minsk or MSGS in 2012, and some continue to work until now. What was the guarantee of sustainability? Strong University ties, as in the case of Tver, or vice versa isolation and autonomy from the University, as in the case of Ivanovo? Valentina Uspenskaya, head of the Tver Central State University, noted that the existence within



engaged not only in their scientific interests but also in some state orders. In the case of the post-Soviet context, there was practically no state support, except for «helping indifference». All the resources used by the gender centers at that time were obtained from abroad: with the help of funds, foreign grant programs – the Soros Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, the Ford Foundation, etc. Grants were not the dominant and only incentive, but they gave a sense of security and, of course, the opportunity to carry out their plans. There is an opinion that grants are the way of control while activism gives free hand on an issue. But still, in 2020, with the law on Foreign Agents, it is difficult to imagine the amount of support in the 1990s and 2000s. At the same time, it is necessary to pay attention to the colonizing subtext of these practices. Nastya Dmitrievskaya notes: "The spread of a familiar organizational form in a region with an unfamiliar institutional system has become, on the one hand, a way to explore this unfamiliar space and develop a new sphere of influence, and, on the other, an opportunity to channel resources into this space»⁷.

Studies. It was then held for another 2 years, until 1998. Since 1997, the Kharkiv Center for Gender Studies, with the support of the MacArthur Foundation, has held summer schools in Foros. They functioned longer, until 2009, and were aimed at the post-Soviet space as a whole. Elena Gapova notes that since Belarus is a small country, inter-country interaction was important for them as researchers, while Russia is large, «it has enough», which partly explains why the first summer school was held in Russia.

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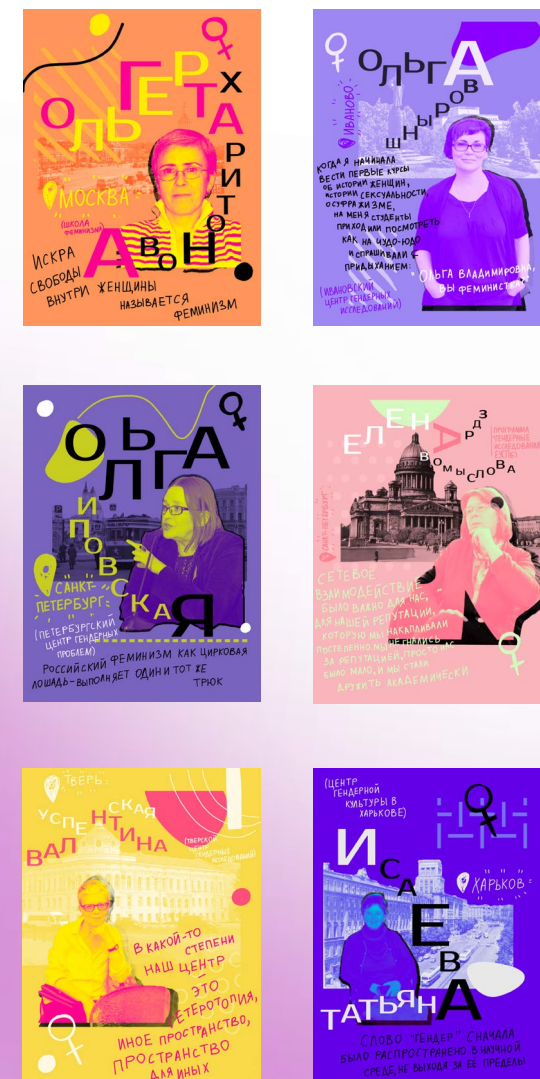
⁴ Zdravomyslova E. Perestroika and Feminism. https://lehtidelet.ee/arv_4/per_9_2/

⁵ Gapova E. (2017). Look back at the crossroads: gender studies between “class» and “discourse” / / Intersections. No 1–2.

⁶ Woolf V. A Room of One's Own. 1928

⁷ Dmitrievskaya N. (2019). Gender studies in Russia: mapping force fields. <https://intermedialterminal.info/feminist.org>

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Transdisciplinarity of the feminist method

Text, illustration: Lika Kareva

Translation: Anzhela Sileva

On the conference “Cabinet of Feminist Research» I made a report on the example of such research — the book Zeroes+Ones by Sadie Plant published in 1997. This book is an example of a hardly classified feminist research and tells about the status of women in Western culture after the First Industrial Revolution, and then the appearance and dissemination of computing. It includes short pieces, joined together by the inconceivable principle, which titles are not always adequate to their content. Moreover, the book is based on different methodologies for interlacing its story that it is hard to highlight the one which can be a key of the whole book: common cultural critique is enriched by analytical elements from Art History, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and mixed with a comprehensive explanation of computing's devices.

This example is not the only case of a multitude of feminist researches. As I see it, feminist researches are the unique example of modern knowledge particularly influenced by post-structuralism. And in this note, I will give an initial description of what is doing feminist knowledge feminist and feminist method — fascinating and nontrivial. **I will divide it into paras for short.**

1. The feminist method has a huge potential that doesn't fit into a special type of academic knowledge, rather flows through its grid.

This is a valuable quality — **transdisciplinarity**;

2. Lucca Fraser notes that the feminist theory is not universal but **transversal**: it doesn't perform the procedure of standardization turning many languages into the one but finds the way of connection **between** languages while keeping its differences.

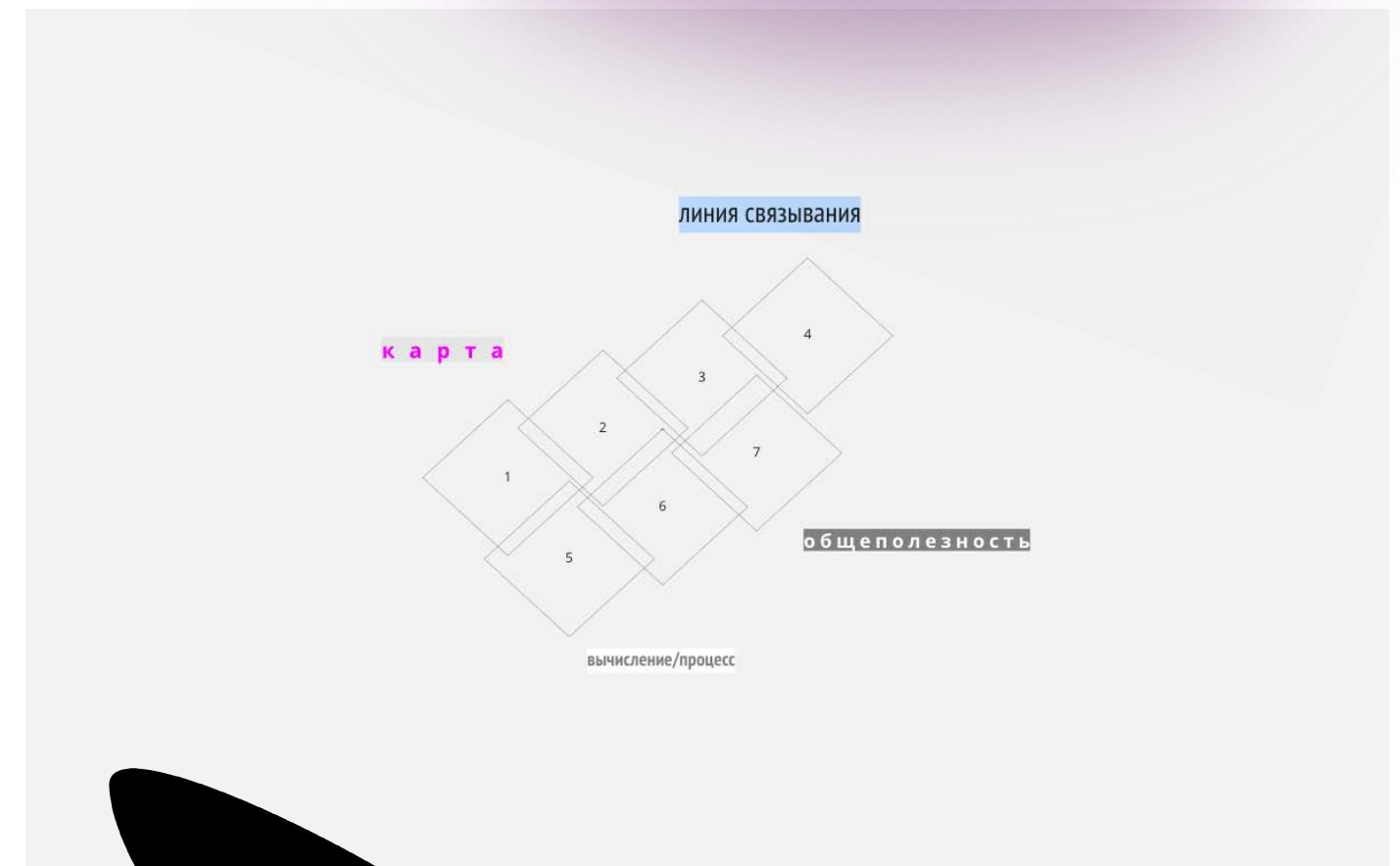
3. Feminist art can work as feminist research: **method** is more important than affiliation;

4. There is no 'feminist philosophy' — so much better: possibly, **non-philosophy** is closer to feminist ideas as Katerina Kolozova's analysis prompts. François Laruelle believes that non-philosophy is not limited by structures which is the inherent quality of any philosophy (making fictitious languages over the world, or cloning the reality), in this sense feminist philosophy is closer to the current political agenda;

5. Saying rather feminisms than feminism we are not focusing on disconnection but on the ability to work with a multitude. This is the point about feminist polyphony;

6. Indetermination of feminism under the one direction can be understood as a positive aspect: not to find a property of finished, circulated within itself knowledge or ground for something, but to perceive it as a process that allows it to connect unmatched things and to support them. Alla Mitrofanova talks about the importance of working on binding practices in philosophy in the lecture how to exist in non-existence

7. You can't fool us: we know that feminism and individualism are ultimately very far apart. Feminist action is always a collective action or one that is aimed at a universally beneficial result.



Concepts-images to theses: Lines of connection, Map, General utility, Calculation / Process.

«Method cabinet» as alchemical

Text: Marina Israilova

Illustrations: Photos by Anastasia Makarenko and drawings by Anna Tereshkina are fragments of the process of their mutual observation.

Translation: Irina Sharkadiy

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During the “bridging feminisms» project, I came up with the idea of open conferences on feminist research methodologies – «Methodology Cabinet» (or method cabinet), and with the prompt response from the project participants and with the organizational assistance of Vica Kravtsova and Kirill Rozhentsov from Syg.ma, we held two conferences, in May and June. In this text, I would like to share my obsessive interest in the problem of the method.

In childhood, or more precisely in school years, the “method cabinet» seemed an alchemical one: no one understood what was happening there, but everyone knew that it was important (as in any other hierarchical institution where the importance of this or that step is understood intuitively). Therefore, for me, the use of this word – «method cabinet» – in the title of conferences was something like a session of exposing magic, or, more precisely, inserting magic into everyday life, making it accessible.

The artistic or research method itself indeed has some magical features. It is a hidden, inner force that determines the work, both the process and the result, and, more importantly, it is capable of changing the obtained results, conclusions, and, most importantly, – the researcher. So, in a sense, it really is alchemy. In the reports presented at the meetings of the method cabinet, and in the very idea of holding them, there is a desire to externalize, show, and share these internal springs, forces, expectations, intuitions, and work algorithms to make our knowledge accessible and familiar to everyone.

This idea in general, the idea of sharing discussions, collectivity, everyday magic of joint actions, is probably one of the most important for me in feminism. In fact, I learned what is feminism and what it is to be a feminist this way exactly – through practice, teamwork, and method. It all started with a series of interviews with artists Anastasia Makarenko and Anna Tereshkina, who are curating the Egorka communal gallery in St. Petersburg. Together with the anthropologist Vita Zelenskaya, we then came up with a study of St. Petersburg apartment galleries – which was the beginning of a long journey through various landscapes. These interviews, taken in my case “without a method,» without a clear understanding of my own position and many concerns about this, taught me the main thing – to listen. To build relationships, to be frank, to share not only insights, but also doubts, to react, and to create a joint conversation. But the main thing is to listen. I witnessed how attentively Nastya and Anya listen to each other, how they build the rhythm of replicas and pauses – and how important pauses are, how the right word is sought in this silence, how important it is to notice what is not spoken in words, but what shifts between them, how it overtakes, comes back, circles, how the thought chases itself. I think this fascination with the way the «Egorka» curators communicate with each other, as well as the value of such communication and that way of listening, I then perceived as a feminist ethic. Without familiarity with theory, intuitively. I wanted to learn this gentle yet stubborn attention, this fragile strength.

Another important point on this route was an interview with Polina Zaslavskaya, Masha Godovannaya, and Daria Voruyubivaeva – members of the queer-feminist affinity art-group “Unwanted Organization». For me, it all was about a completely different stubbornness, even rage and excitement, but also about fun, about closeness as simple as a touch, about the freedom to be whatever you want to be and not to apologize for it. When Dasha

described their joint project with «Silver Rose», the May Day procession of artists, activists, and sex workers who have recently been denied the union registration (i.e. denied labor law), it was the most important lesson in terms of method. To understand and recognize all the differences in placements and positions, to look for ways to do something together. To be together while being different, and to respect this difference.

The interview method is similar to designing a laboratory: you need to prepare everything so that change/transformation became possible, the boundaries of your own plasticity were determined, «new organs were grown» – using the terminology of Alexandra Abakshina, one of my favorite interviewers, who, together with Alina Shklyarskaya, is engaged in scientific/project theater Maailmanloppu in St. Petersburg. One of their recent works was the play «Tidbit» based on Irina Aristarkhova’s book «Hospitality of the Matrix» where, among other things, it offered to grow new organs, to try new ways to be hospitable and to practice kinship.

Having mastered this laboratory, I began to ask questions about the connections and intersections of the mental, epistemological, ethical, and political dimensions of the methods of my work. By now, the concept of subjectivity has become the place where all the key moments that haunted me have connected. Subjectivity, as a way of organizing, a way of practicing oneself, an internal-external structure, a structure, and its variability, an image of what it means to be someone and the embodiment of this image.

I am interested in the question of how one can think of oneself, how the feeling that I am who I am I arises, strengthens, and weakens, what are the boundaries of this I and how these boundaries of subjectivity are permeable. Over the past year, I have written a lot, probably never as much as during this period, and writing – one of the most powerful ways of subjectivation – gave me an important experience of perceiving myself as a space in which others live. These other, perceived as guests in different places of my body, are activated when I write: it’s not that I hear voices (although this is a good metaphor), I rather feel how tentacles or new shoots are growing in the body of my thought, and in this already inhuman state – or unlimited, un-individualistic subjectivity – I merge with the technical device of the laptop and produce my speech. Annmarie Mol, following Marilyn Strathern and Donna Haraway, describes this state with the formula «more than one, but less than many.» How I would like all my others to see this creature emerging – or perhaps waking up, or even responding to the call of the writing to say more precisely, – and also to see others and fragments of themselves in its strange body pieces.

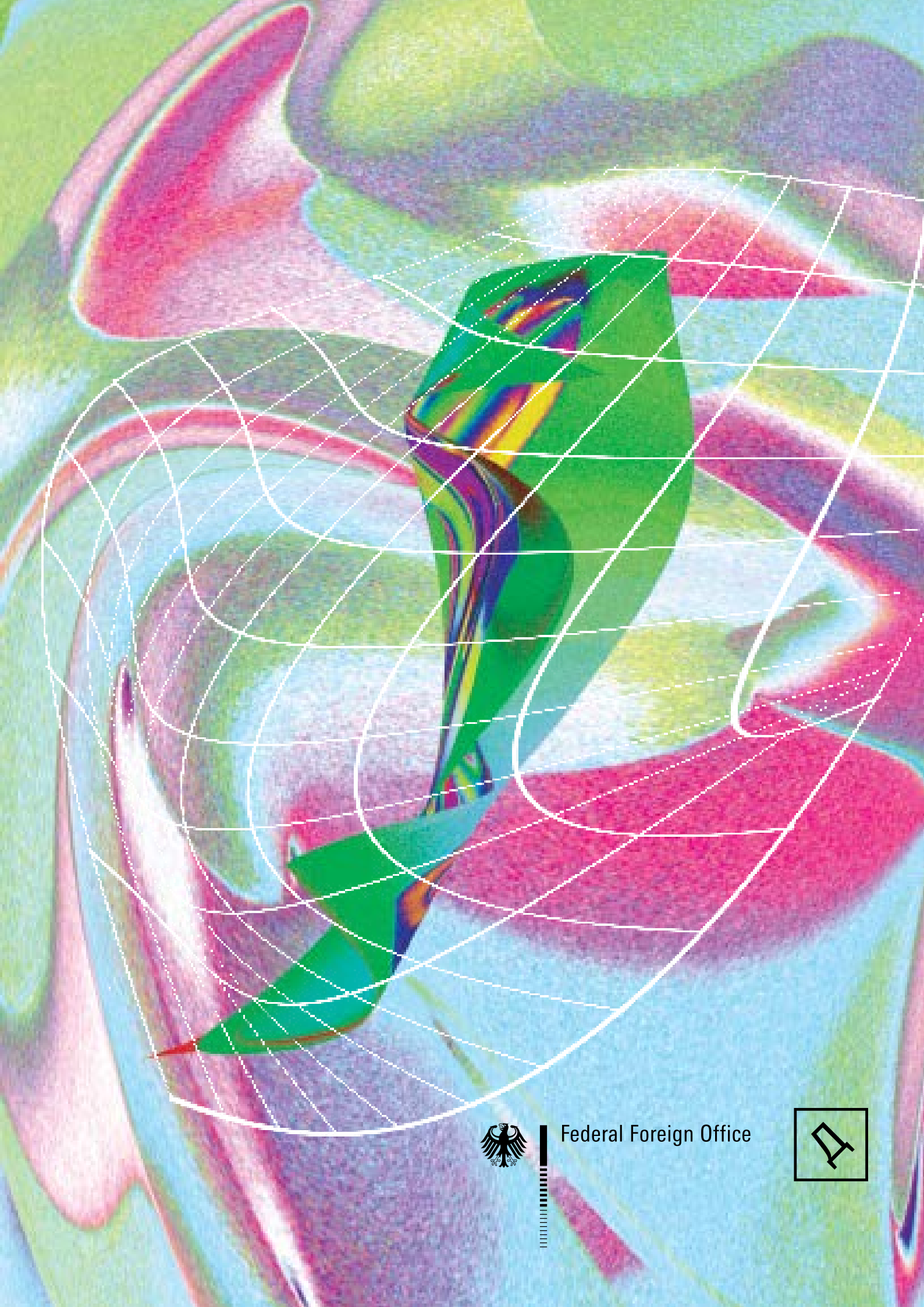
And how does all this relate to politics, ethics, epistemology, and research methodology? Well, I’m sure that it is connected directly. **There is no question more intimate than «how are you thinking?». You can never get an answer to it, and even asking it seems blasphemy.** How then can the interaction be arranged of the individuals who still – before the meeting – do not know how they are structured relative to each other? How do we get access to each other’s reality, rather than to the confirmation/refutation of one’s



ideas about the other? In short, how is any research possible? This question is at the same time a political one (it clarifies the ways of interaction/holding in one field of sets/translation), but also directly relates to epistemology (it converts thought to its reasons, and, of course, to the sphere of ethics: how is it possible to delicately, without violating yet unknown boundaries, remain in the practice of the good as it is understood by the other). **In this regard, any feminism is xenofeminism, it’s just the meaning «Xeno» which is understood on different scales. That is probably my utopia about feminism – expanding the xeno-scale to the maximum.**

The «Method cabinets» task was to ask the questions mentioned above to all the responding creatures, or, more precisely, to wander around them, to spend time in new laboratory conditions, to grow some new organs for oneself, to think differently. To incarnate in a previously unknown way

In these processes participated: Alla Mitrofanova, Anna Temkina, Vanya Solovay, Anastasia Dmitrievskaya, Alexander Kondakov, Irina Shirobokova, “Cooperative of Distributed Consciousness» (Anna Engelhardt and Sasha Shestakova), Sasha Talaver, Marina Israilova, Zhanar Sekerbaeva, Mohira Suyarkulova, Altynai Kambekova, Zoya Falkova, Vita Zelenskaya, Lena Ogorelysheva, Lika Kareva, “Welcome to the Doll House!» (Ulyana Bychenkova and Zhanna Dolgova). The project is open to new proposals and distribution, both outside and within the “bridging feminisms».



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