

THE HARRIMAN INSTITUTE AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

# HARRIMAN

FALL 2017



VICTORIA  
LOMASKO'S  
OTHER  
RUSSIAS

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Cover photo: The grassroots White Circle flash mob resembled an unwitting reprise of the 2007 performance "White Line," when artists from the Trade Union of Street Art drew a white chalk line around Moscow's inner Garden Ring. . . . White ribbons waved from passing cars, the snow was falling, and the mood was upbeat (February 26, 2012).

Image on this page: "We beat Hitler, we'll beat Putin" (in script above flag) and on large banner: DOWN WITH PRESIDENTIAL AUTOCRACY (February 4, 2012). All images from *Other Russias* (Brooklyn: n+1 Foundation, 2017) courtesy of the publisher. © Victoria Lomasko.

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*Opposite page:*  
Alexander Cooley  
(Photo by Jeffrey Schifman)





The year 2017 marks the centenary of the Russian Revolution, and it is certainly proving to be an unsettling year when it comes to geopolitical developments. In these turbulent and unpredictable times, it is important to maintain an open and constructive academic space for debate and to revisit the past. On that note, I am delighted to announce that the Harriman Institute has come into the possession of an invaluable resource. Journalist and Carnegie Europe senior fellow Thomas de Waal has donated a collection of audio files containing all the unique interviews he conducted for his first two acclaimed books—*Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus* and *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War*. These books detail the history and evolution of two conflicts often overlooked by the international community, but whose details and dynamics we know about largely because of Tom's brave reporting.

In this issue of *Harriman Magazine*, we travel back to the 1990s, to Russia's first conflict with Chechnya, in an in-depth interview with de Waal about his first book. De Waal covered the conflict from its inception, and he takes us into the minds of the Kremlin policymakers and Chechen resistance fighters of that time, reminding us just how easily the conflict could have been avoided. He also recounts the history of the relationship between Russia and Chechnya—the resistance against the Russian Empire, Stalin's deportations—highlighting the importance of historical context when it comes to policymaking. Stay tuned for the spring issue for an interview with de Waal about his second book on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Also in this issue, we have a piece from our postdoctoral research fellow Yana Gorokhovskaia, about the upcoming presidential elections in Russia; profiles of political scientist Kimberly Marten, our alum Matthew Schaaf—who currently directs Freedom House's first office in Ukraine, and the Russian graphic journalist Victoria Lomasko; and an essay about my latest book, *Dictators without Borders: Power and Money in Central Asia*.

We hope you enjoy this issue and look forward to hearing your feedback and ideas for future stories.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Alex Cooley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Alexander Cooley  
Director, Harriman Institute





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## COVER STORY

[Victoria Lomasko: Drawing in the Dark](#)

By Bela Shayevich

*Other Russias* collects the graphic reportage of Victoria Lomasko, a fixture at Moscow's protests and political trials. The fragment above depicts the protest of December 24, 2011, which was memorable for the presence of the "common people"—people who were "poorly dressed, didn't have iPhones, and didn't have any party allegiances." Man talking on phone: "All of Moscow is here"; sign at left: UNITED RUSSIA SHOULD BE ASHAMED; sign on balloons: RETIRE PUTIN.

As Shayevich writes, Lomasko's "other Russias" developed along two tracks: documenting protests and working with marginalized groups, for example, children in a juvenile detention center or the sex workers in the series *The Girls of Nizhny Novgorod*.



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[Electing Putin: Looking Forward to the 2018 Presidential Race](#)

By Yana Gorokhovskaia

Presidential elections are coming up in Russia, but the incumbent, Vladimir Putin, has not yet declared his candidacy. In spite of this, there is little doubt that he will be Russia's next president. Gorokhovskaia discusses the Kremlin's electoral strategy.

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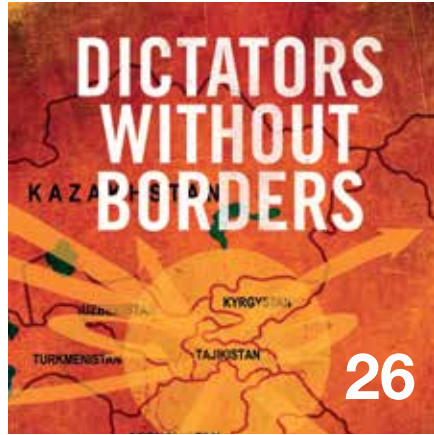
[Kimberly Marten in Profile](#)

By Ronald Meyer

With recent appearances on *CBS This Morning*, *Charlie Rose*, and *All Things Considered*, Marten has become the media's go-to person for comment on U.S.-Russia relations. Building on her expertise in foreign policy that dates back to high school, Marten views her on-air time as an extension of the classroom.



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The journalist and Carnegie Europe senior fellow Thomas de Waal has donated a collection of audio files to Columbia Libraries and the Harriman Institute, containing all the interviews for his first two books, *Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus* and *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War*. In this interview about his Chechnya book de Waal discusses the policy decisions that led to the first Chechen war, the characters involved, the historical context, and his hope for the tapes.

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# ELECTING PUTIN

BY YANA  
GOROKHOVSKAIA

*LOOKING FORWARD TO THE  
2018 PRESIDENTIAL RACE*



**G**iven Russia's current political landscape, where elections have become pro forma contests meant to convey the appearance of competition, there is almost no doubt that Vladimir Putin will win the presidential election on March 18, 2018. Despite his assured victory, Putin has repeatedly demurred from saying whether or not he will run, suggesting that election campaigns are detrimental to the normal functioning of the government. According to reports in the Russian media, the Kremlin is formulating a platform focused on Putin's personal accomplishments and his foreign policy. The media also reports that Putin is likely to return to his pre-2012 pattern and run as an independent candidate. This would distance him further from United Russia, a political party that has lost significant ground with voters in recent years due to allegations of corruption. Meanwhile, the field of potential competitors is being cleared. In late June 2017, Russia's Central Election Commission announced that Alexei Navalny, an oppositionist and anticorruption campaigner with a considerable political following, will not be able to run for president. Navalny's ineligibility for political office stems from an embezzlement conviction in a politically motivated case that the European Court of Human Rights has ruled to be an arbitrary application of the law. The prohibition against his candidacy is unlikely to stop Navalny's anticorruption campaign, which has brought tens of thousands of people onto the streets in the spring and summer, yet it effectively prevents the presidential election from becoming a focal point for public dissent.

Minimizing interest in the election and demobilizing opposition voters is the Kremlin's overarching electoral strategy. The approach carries risks but is likely to be successful.

### How to Win an Election You Can't Lose

Putin is undeniably popular with Russians. Polling agencies regularly report his approval rating to be around 80 percent and survey research has shown that the numbers are a genuine reflection of people's attitudes.<sup>1</sup> To some extent, Putin's popularity stems from the stability and security that many Russians associate with his leadership. His first two terms in office coincided with an economic recovery and rapid improvement in living standards powered by oil and natural gas exports. His third term as president advanced an aggressive foreign policy targeting countries on Russia's periphery, which resonated with Russians concerned about the country's diminished international standing since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Putin's time in power also corresponds with a transition of the political regime from unconsolidated democracy to stable authoritarianism. The above-mentioned lack of electoral uncertainty is characteristic of an electoral authoritarian regime where elections are regular and relatively free but highly unfair contests. In these regimes, preferred candidates have access to the resources of the state, while their opponents—who are either loyalists without independent political agendas or outsiders—have to contend with administrative hurdles, harassment, and a biased media. Though

Russian president Vladimir Putin, accompanied by Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov, second from right, speaks during a meeting focused on Syria and Ukraine with U.S. secretary of state John Kerry at the Kremlin in Moscow, Russia, on March 24, 2016 [State Department photo/ Public Domain].

Putin's time in power also corresponds with a transition of the political regime from unconsolidated democracy to stable authoritarianism.



Riot police during protest on June 12, 2017.

their democratic substance has been significantly diminished, elections still remain the only legitimate route to political power. Moreover, in Russia, as in other authoritarian regimes, winning elections convincingly is an important tool for signaling to supporters and opponents alike that the leader is secure in his or her position. Using fraud to achieve this effect, however, can backfire. This was the case in December 2011, when United Russia won a majority in the parliamentary elections thanks to large-scale electoral malpractice. Evidence of ballot box stuffing and carousel voting circulated online and sparked massive protests across the country that lasted for months. At the time, many observers hailed these antielectoral fraud protests, the

biggest since the collapse of the Soviet Union, as the beginning of the end for Putin. However, by summer 2012, a combination of repression and disorganization within the opposition had stalled the movement. Since then, elections have only grown more fraudulent—using forensic techniques, the University of Michigan's Kirill Kalinin and Walter R. Mebane, Jr., have recently shown that as many as two million extra votes were manufactured for United Russia in the 2016 parliamentary election.

The Kremlin's strategies for manipulating elections are multifaceted and extend well beyond fraud. The overall purpose is to discourage opposition-minded segments of the population from participating while ensuring that loyal voters cast a ballot.





Photo courtesy of premier.gov.ru.

To this end, election day for parliamentary and presidential elections has been moved around on the calendar to maximize both inconvenience to certain voters and symbolic value. As of 2013, parliamentary, regional, and local elections have been moved to a single day of voting in September. This means that campaigning now takes place in August, when most Russians, particularly those living in urban areas where support for the Kremlin is typically lower, are on vacation. Election day itself coincides with the start of the academic year, making it difficult for teenagers and university students—a steadily growing contingent of antiregime protesters—to show their dissent.

The upcoming 2018 presidential election is no different. Earlier this

year, the Kremlin rescheduled election day to fall on the fourth anniversary of the official incorporation of Crimea into the Russian Federation. This will attract voters who were in favor of Crimea's annexation and also highlight Putin's foreign policy, an aspect of his administration that is very popular.

Voter turnout in Russian elections, at all levels, has been decreasing. In the 2012 presidential election, it was 4 percent lower than in 2008. Turnout for the 2016 parliamentary election was at an all-time low, at just 48 percent. In major urban centers, such as Moscow, turnout was below 30 percent. Russians may decide not to vote against Putin, but they may also choose not to vote at all. And this poses a serious problem for the Kremlin. In the absence of real polit-

ical competition, electoral legitimacy must be derived from voter turnout. By ridding himself of affiliation with United Russia and disallowing opposition candidates like Navalny to appear on the ballot, Putin could potentially depress interest among average voters—a strategy that is not without risk. However, the regime has ways to ensure that the voters who matter—loyal voters—cast a ballot.

### Reversing Accountability

Russia's political regime is permeated by clientelism—the unequal and targeted distribution of material benefits in return for political support—with Putin as the ultimate patron. Instead of voters holding politicians accountable for their promises, the reverse



*Top to bottom:* Balloons flying into the sky on Russia Day protests, June 2017; 2007 Duma elections campaign billboard, “Moscow Votes for Putin. Vote No. 10,” in Manezhnaya Square, Moscow, Russia (photo by Leonid Dzhepko); yellow rubber duck as an anticorruption protest symbol in Russia, photographed (by Daggetts) during the protest on March 26, 2017, in Chelyabinsk.

is true, with politicians using state resources to reward or punish voters in a relationship that Susan Stokes of Yale University has dubbed “perverse accountability.” Scholars researching Russia have found that politicians and agents of the state are able to target socioeconomically vulnerable voters. For example, Inga A.-L. Saikkonen of Åbo Akademi University argues that rural voters living in geographically concentrated communities, such as former collective farms, are deeply dependent on the state for subsidies and can be easily monitored to ensure voting for regime-backed candidates. Similarly, survey research carried out by Timothy Frye, Ora John Reuter, and David Szakonyi has shown that state-owned firms or firms doing business with the state were more likely to hold political events in the workplace and ask their employees to vote for regime-backed candidates. Most worryingly, the authors found that 15 percent of employees surveyed believed that their employer was able to monitor if and how they voted.

In regions where voters are less susceptible to economic mobilization, the regime has to be careful to avoid heavy-handed malpractice that can trigger protest. My own research on the connection between civil society mobilization and elections in Russia has shown that “noisier” protest regions tend to have more competitive elections. Here too, however, the regime has taken steps to limit the ability of civil society to aid electoral competition. Since 2012, many well-established civil society groups, including Memorial and Golos, have been labeled foreign agents, a designation that limits funding and their ability to operate. And, according to a new law passed

In regions where voters are less susceptible to economic mobilization, the regime has to be careful to avoid heavy-handed malpractice that can trigger protest.

in 2016, election observers must register three days before the vote, ensuring that the regime has ample warning about which areas will be monitored for malpractice.

### An Autocrat's Exit

Next year, Vladimir Putin will begin his last constitutionally permitted six-year term as president. Affairs in Russia, while stable, are not rosy. Oil prices are down, and ordinary Russians are feeling the economic brunt of countersanctions imposed by the Kremlin. Anticorruption protests, along with other socioeconomic protests, are attracting many thousands of participants across Russian cities. Emigration—even by official, heavily manipulated statistics—is back up to mid-1990s levels, with many educated young Russians leaving the country as the government continues to cut funding for universities and scientific research.

The biggest challenge facing Putin in his last term, however, is his eventual exit from politics. In personalistic regimes, leaders are likely to be punished after losing power. Abel Escribà-Folch of Universitat Pompeu Fabra notes that almost half of all autocrats who lost power between 1946 and 2004 were exiled, killed, or imprisoned. Ironically, it is the structure of the political system these autocrats have created—centered on the decision-making of a single leader and his or her close circle of allies—that leads to this type of “irregular exit.” Personalistic regimes have weak institutions and are therefore unable to channel political demands from the public or opposition parties. Over time, the leader in power also tends to eliminate allies that cultivate independent support, leaving few viable candidates for a successor. And yet, for those who would be happy to see Putin go, it is important to remember that since 1945 only about one-quarter of leadership changes in autocracies have resulted in democratization.<sup>2</sup> With or without Putin, Russia's democratic future is uncertain. ■

*Yana Gorokhouskaia is a postdoctoral research scholar in Russian politics at the Harriman Institute. She completed her Ph.D. in political science at the University of British Columbia in August 2016.*

<sup>1</sup> See Timothy Frye, Scott Gehlbach, Kyle L. Marquardt, and Ora John Reuter, “Is Putin's Popularity Real?” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 33, no. 1 (2017): 1–15.

<sup>2</sup> See Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz, “Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set,” *Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 2 (2014): 313–331.





Photo © Dorothy Hong

*BY RONALD MEYER*

# DECIPHERING RUSSIA AND THE WEST

## KIMBERLY MARTEN IN PROFILE

Russia is in the headlines now more than ever, thanks to Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller's investigation of President Trump, allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections, and issues of cybersecurity more generally. Kimberly Marten, Ann Whitney Olin Professor of Political Science at Barnard College, is now one of the go-to Russia experts for radio and television. Marten's big break came on the *Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (March 6, 2014), where she explored the reasons for Vladimir Putin deciding to risk so much on Crimea. More recent media appearances are clustered around Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's visit to Moscow: NPR's *All Things Considered* (April 11, 2017) and *Charlie Rose* (April 14). It's easy to see why Marten keeps getting invited back. She's good at taking large, complex issues, and breaking them down into bullet points. For example, from the *Charlie Rose* appearance on April 14, 2017: What does Putin want? Answer: (1) to remain in power; (2) to go down in history as the man who made Russia great again; (3) to be treated as an equal. Or: Putin is a tactician; someone who's reactive and opportunistic. As she put it in her article, "Putin's Choices: Explaining Russian Foreign Policy and Intervention in Ukraine" (*Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2015), Putin is a judo master, not a chess master. "Judo is about immediate tactics, not long-term strategy. A judoka walks into a room, sizes up the opponent, probes for their weaknesses, and tips the other off-balance in a flash—causing the opponent to fall from their own weight." Breaking down the narrative into manageable and memorable bytes, and having recourse to thumbnail psychological sketches, allows Marten to get her point across in the tight time frames of the fast-paced media.

Marten published an essay about Tillerson's visit to Moscow on *ForeignAffairs.com* on the same day as her *Charlie Rose* appearance, in which she concludes: "no one with any real knowledge of the situation had expected a major breakthrough in U.S.-Russian relations. The interests of the two countries simply fail to intersect on too many issues around the world." In July Marten published a piece in the Monkey Cage blog of the *Washington Post*, in which she gives Trump some pointers on Russia's very different style of negotiating ("President Trump, Keep in Mind That Russia and the West Think about Negotiations Very, Very Differently," July 25, 2017). Her five points, which might seem breezy on first reading, are grounded in decades of studying Soviet and Russian policy vis-à-vis the United States and personal

observations and interviews. I'll cite just two of the five: Moscow sees negotiation as a tool to serve its interests—and is happy to junk that tool if something else would work better; and Russians value *khitrost* (cunning or wiliness).

I do not wish, however, to give the mistaken impression that Marten has forsaken rigorous research. A partial list of Kimberly Marten's academic activities for 2017 would include articles in the *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, *Asia Policy*, and the *H-Diplo International Security Studies Forum Policy Roundtable*, and the publication of her special report, *Reducing Tensions between Russian and NATO*, for the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) Center for Preventive Action; invited talks related to the publication of her CFR report—in Washington, D.C. (with Alexander Vershbow, Harriman alumnus and former U.S. Ambassador to Russia); in Talloires, France, for a Center for Preventive Action workshop, *Managing Global Disorder*; and once again in D.C. for a group of Congressional staffers.

Marten is clearly at the top of her game and indulging the passions that got her into political science in the first place—namely, international security and foreign policy—and she enjoys it. Her interest in policy dates back to her high-school days, when she was on the debate team and won a speech event that gave her a berth at the national tournament. "I knew from a very young age that I was interested in policy. My dad traveled all over the world when I was growing up, so I knew that I was interested in international affairs and international relations. I give him a lot of credit for instilling in me the desire to see the world." Not only did her father, a research scientist for the U.S. Department of Agriculture and adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota, travel extensively, but he would also deliver a paper every four years at the International Grasslands Congress, which in 1974 happened to take place in Moscow, by chance concurrently with President Richard Nixon's historic visit. Following the conference, Marten's father traveled by bus to agricultural research stations throughout the Caucasus and came back with slides, which he shared with neighbors and family, as well as the observation that the further away people were from Moscow, the happier they seemed to be. Her father's trip to the USSR cemented her ambition to study foreign policy and international affairs with a USSR focus, which was natural given her desire to focus on military policy. Moreover, when this "Cold War baby," as she described herself for the Harriman Institute Oral History Project, was in college and graduate school, the Soviet threat was not only real but seemed intractable.





Camp Julien, NATO ISAF Peace Operation, Kabul, Afghanistan, 2004.

As a government major at Harvard University in the early 1980s, she was selected for a research affiliation with the Center for International Affairs, now the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs. She was also associate editor for military affairs for the *Harvard International Review*, an undergraduate journal, an early manifestation of her professional specialization. And it was at Harvard that she began her study of the Russian language, even though at the time she could not imagine that she would ever have the opportunity to conduct research in the USSR and interview people for her work. As a result, she studied Russian for two and a half years, with a focus on reading for social scientists, and admits that her speaking ability is not as good as her reading comprehension (which she continues to use in her research).

When we turned the conversation to her graduate years at Stanford she remembers being surprised that policy issues did not play a more pivotal role in graduate studies in political science, but went on to say, “I loved graduate school, and the reason I loved it, I think, was because I had very good mentors.” She also credits her good fortune in receiving predoctoral and postdoctoral fellowships at Stanford’s CISAC (Center for International Security and Arms Control). The weekly CISAC seminars that all fellows were expected to attend, on both policy/political science/history issues and technology issues, helped build a sense

of cross-disciplinary camaraderie. Marten also remembers with fondness the speaker series and graduate student conferences sponsored by the Berkeley-Stanford Program in Soviet International Studies, and the sense of lasting community that program built across the two political science Ph.D. programs.

Her Stanford adviser (and one of her chief mentors) David Holloway opened up what she calls “fantastic opportunities” to her and the other graduate students. One such opportunity was an invitation to be the graduate student rapporteur for a conference that led to the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities Agreement of 1989, an agreement brokered and signed by U.S. and Soviet military officers. William J. Perry, codirector of CISAC at that time and a defense industrial mathematician, engineer, and entrepreneur, had long been instrumental in bringing together the academic community and Silicon Valley. His connections with the defense establishment from his time serving as undersecretary of defense for research and engineering (he would later serve as secretary of defense under President Bill Clinton) were an engine for the meeting on the U.S. side, while Andrei Kokoshin, deputy director of the Institute for the USA and Canadian Studies in Moscow (and later first deputy defense minister under President Boris Yeltsin), helped bring together the Soviet delegation. The Soviet Air Force officer’s hat that is proudly on display



among other mementos in Marten's office is a souvenir from the dinner celebrating the conclusion of the conference, where all the Soviet military officers took their hats out of their bags and gave them to the Americans sitting next to them.

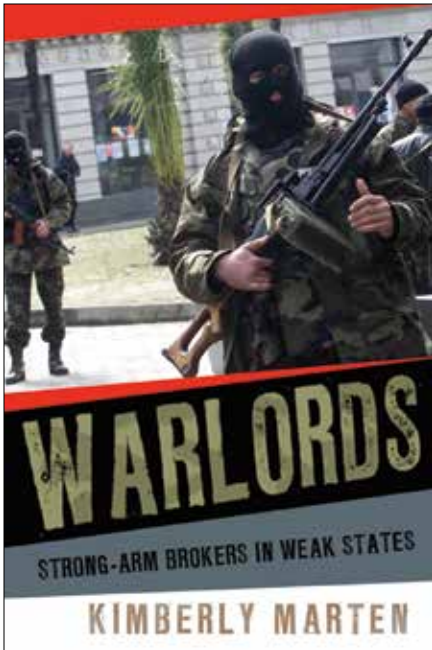
Surely this is one reason that Marten rues the breakdown of military to military talks now between the U.S. and Russia—particularly since there was a history of such negotiations even during the coldest days of the Cold War (for example, the Agreement on the Prevention of Incidents at Sea in 1972, reached on the sidelines of the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks). While conceding that it is unlikely that conversations today could have much immediate effect, she believes that the absence of military to military programs cuts out yet another source of information that could prevent inadvertent military escalation during a crisis with Russia, and that the incalculable value of getting to know your counterpart is lost.

Her adviser David Holloway and Andrei Kokoshin also set up an informal exchange program between Stanford and the USA and Canada Institute, which allowed Marten to spend time in Moscow to collect materials for her Ph.D. thesis, “Soviet Reactions to Shifts in U.S. and NATO Military Doctrine in Europe: The Defense Policy Community and Innovation.” Kokoshin even helped her to set up interviews with retired Soviet general staff officers for her dissertation, which became her first book, *Engaging the Enemy: Organization Theory and Soviet Military Innovation, 1955–1991* (Princeton University Press, 1993), an examination of three historical cases of how the Soviet military reacted to changes in NATO doctrine. Marten's use of interviews is one of her signatures. As she remarks for the Harriman Oral History Project: “I've always interviewed policy people. And it's been a real benefit. I've gone all over the world and interviewed people in defense ministries and foreign ministries and policy advisers. I added it up once, and I think I've conducted interviews in twenty-eight countries.” The book went on to win the Marshall Shulman Book Prize of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (1994)—and Holloway would win the prize the following year for his historical masterpiece, *Stalin and the Bomb*.

For her second book, *Weapons, Culture, and Self-Interest: Soviet Defense Managers in the New Russia* (Columbia University Press, 1997), Marten went to Moscow for three months to research how Russian defense industrial managers were



Top to bottom: Central Armed Forces Museum, Moscow (1992?); Soviet Navy Museum, Leningrad (1989); VDNKh, Moscow (1989).



Left to right: Cover of *Warlords: Strong-Arm Brokers in Weak States* (2012); Tsar Cannon, Moscow (1989); taking part in a conference at the Harriman Institute (2000?).

adapting to the new market economy. Her trip included, of all unbelievable things, a visit to the arms fair in Nizhny Novgorod. Through CISAC she had also been given the opportunity to visit several Russian defense enterprises. At the time, everyone was talking about defense industry conversion, and trying to ply Russian defense technology in the civilian marketplace. Bill Perry was spearheading an effort to get Silicon Valley to talk to Russian defense industrialists and figure out ways to make conversion feasible. Marten learned from David Holloway about the opportunity to gain access to newspapers put out by defense industrial enterprises and the surrounding towns, including those like Arzamas-16 that were “closed” because of their nuclear materials production. She spent many days at Khimki (the Lenin Library’s newspaper library in the town of that name near Moscow), copying out extracts from the newspapers by hand, since this was before smartphones, and working photocopier machines were not to be found. Through a funny quirk of fate, she ended up renting an apartment from the son of a high-ranking engineer at a defense industrial plant, who also brought her internal newspapers from his own enterprise. And then, suddenly, without explanation, two months into her trip, she was

told that the newspapers at Khimki were “not available” any longer. As she flew home in November 1994, the state newspaper *Rossiiskaia Gazeta* published a story claiming that foreign scholars were collecting intelligence for the U.S. government about the Russian defense industry, under the guise of academic research. That put a quick end to Marten’s research trips to Russia for a while.

Consequently, her third book, *Enforcing the Peace: Learning from the Imperial Past* (Columbia University Press, 2004), investigates a topic unrelated to Russia. Instead, it focuses entirely on the policies of Western liberal democracies and their leadership of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations in Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and East Timor in the mid- to late 1990s. The book touches on both postwar Afghanistan and the occupation of Iraq, with comparisons to the colonial activities of Great Britain, France, and the United States. Again, interviews with military officers and peacekeeping officials at the UN, NATO, and elsewhere provide examples for the various cases. For a project related to the book, she was able to be embedded briefly with the Canadian Armed Forces who were leading the NATO peace operation in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 2004, and to go out on several patrols with them.

For her fourth book, *Warlords: Strong-Arm Brokers in Weak States* (Cornell University Press, 2012), Marten returns to Eurasia for some of her case studies. Four case studies (Chechnya, Georgia, Pakistan, and Iraq) follow two explicitly theoretical chapters. One of its themes is that both the U.S. and Russia have chosen to work with warlords at various times and places. She was especially delighted to be able to spend time in Tbilisi and Batumi, Georgia, for her research on the book. Like most visitors to the country, she was wowed by Georgian wine, food, and hospitality.

The book was selected to be the subject of a roundtable in *H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable Reviews* (2013). Henry Hale (at George Washington University) had this to say: “How can we understand the important phenomenon of modern-day warlords, often associated with state failure and transborder criminality, even as state leaders frequently rely upon them as a source of order or peace in the most difficult of conditions? Kimberly Marten’s *Warlords* blazes a new trail in answering this question. . . . This engagingly written book makes a number of major arguments . . . [that are] pioneering in the study of warlordism, likely framing a debate for years to come on a subject about which there is as yet relatively little theory.” Matthew Evangelista (at Cornell University), in the same roundtable, writes that Marten was drawn to the topic of warlords “by a concern for public policy, namely, observation that the United States and other countries were becoming increasingly dependent on ‘individuals who control small pieces of territory using a combination of force and patronage.’” In a profile published in *Barnard Magazine* (Fall 2015), she said that her findings and work on the book reignited her interest in Russia, and Putin in particular, whom she described as a “KGB operative who loves surprises.” She recognized that Putin’s system of corrupt patronage and control by informal networks dating from his KGB days bore a striking resemblance to the warlord politics she had studied elsewhere. The immediate payoff for the students was Marten’s retooled course “Russia and the West.”

Marten is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. She is also a member of PONARS Eurasia (the Program on New Approaches to Research and Security in Eurasia), designed to bring academic research on Russia and Eurasia into the policy mainstream, while creating new linkages between scholars from North America, Russia, and Eurasia. (The program was founded by Celeste Wallander, now president and CEO of the U.S.-Russia Foundation, whom Marten first met when they were both

*She recognized that Putin’s system of corrupt patronage and control by informal networks dating from his KGB days bore a striking resemblance to the warlord politics she had studied elsewhere.*

in graduate school. It has been funded for many years by the Carnegie Corporation, which has also generously funded Harriman’s Program on Russian Studies and Policy.) In an interview published in the September 2012 issue of the *Harriman News*, Marten states: “I’ve been a member of PONARS Eurasia since it was founded in the mid-1990s, and I [have served] on its Executive Committee. PONARS is a terrific organization that allows North American and Eurasian scholars to interact and connect. I’ve participated in PONARS conferences in Nizhny Novgorod, Odessa, and Moscow, in addition to ones held in the U.S.” Her most recent memo published by PONARS Eurasia is “The Security Costs and Benefits of Non-State Militias: The Example of Eastern Ukraine” (PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo 391, September 2015), and she will soon present a new draft memo on “Russia’s Schizophrenic Policy toward the United States” at an upcoming PONARS conference at New York University.

As far as the Council on Foreign Relations is concerned, Marten has been a member since her second year at Barnard, first as a term member and then as a permanent member. She held a Hitachi International Affairs Fellowship from the Council in 2000, during which she spent three months in Japan researching Japanese peacekeeping policy and the Japanese government’s ideas about the proper role of national defense in the country’s future. She has been an active member of the Council. She just completed a five-year term on the International Affairs Fellowship Committee and has appeared on several Council panels in both New York and Washington in recent years that have focused on Russia. As noted above, earlier this year she wrote *Reducing Tensions between Russia and NATO* for the Council’s Center for Preventive Action (Council Special Report, no. 79, March 2017), returning full circle to her dissertation topic of NATO/Russia relations, but this time attempting to give advice to the Trump administration on how to interact with Russia in the European theater. In one



section she presents four scenarios on “how a crisis might erupt.” I asked her if she particularly feared the possibility of one of them, and she answered almost without thinking that she worries most about what she calls “dangerous military activities,” which might be occasioned by the breaching of sovereign borders or airspace.

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In 1997, after a stint at Ohio State University’s Department of Political Science and Mershon Center, during which time she was also a visiting scholar at Harvard’s Olin Institute for Strategic Studies for a year, Marten came to Barnard College. She had contemplated (for the second time) trading in the academic profession for a career in law and had actually been accepted that year as a student at both Columbia and NYU law schools. Her visit to Barnard, however, and her interaction with the highly engaged Barnard women who asked great questions, changed her mind—and law school dropped out as an option. When asked about her teaching, she enthusiastically responds: “I love teaching. It’s the most valuable thing we do. I think of my media appearances as an extension of my teaching, to help a wider audience understand what’s really going on. The biggest joy I get is when I see the light come on in somebody’s eyes; when a student makes a comment in class discussion that you weren’t expecting and you know it’s brilliant. I think in some ways it’s more important than research in terms of its lasting value.” The queue for Marten’s office hours (for the past few years her office has been next to mine) more than adequately demonstrates that students remain her highest priority and how seriously she takes the role of teacher and mentor, surely to some extent as a way of acknowledging the support of her own mentors at Stanford.

Marten served as associate director of the Harriman Institute under Cathy Nepomnyashchy (2002–04), and as acting director in 2012–13, using her tenure in both positions to advocate for funding new initiatives for both undergraduate and graduate students. As associate director, she instituted the Harriman Institute Undergraduate Fellowship, of which she is particularly proud. She credits former Harriman director Bob Legvold for the idea. The fellowship is designed to provide research support to juniors and seniors who have a serious interest in the post-Soviet states and East Central Europe, to assist them in researching and writing their senior theses or to

complete an equivalent major research project. At the time, undergraduate students were not a visible contingent at the Institute. The fellowship has been an enormous success—and the undergraduate presence at Harriman has grown.

As acting director, Marten conceived and began to raise funds for the Civil Society Graduate Fellowship. This program is designed to support travel and living expenses for Columbia master’s degree students, allowing them to take unpaid summer internships at an international or nongovernmental organization that benefits civil society in any of the countries of the Russian, Eurasian, or East Central European region. Characteristically generous, Marten credits former Harriman program manager Lydia Hamilton for the concept.

Marten currently directs Harriman’s Program on U.S.-Russia Relations (PURR), now in its third year. PURR’s mission, in a nutshell, is to get as many people with expertise in Russia together, from the widest possible variety of life experiences and perspectives, to talk about what is and is not possible in U.S.-Russia relations. The program has hosted a variety of scholarly and policy conferences. Marten is particularly proud of two pieces of the program. First is the student forum, modeled to a certain extent on the Berkeley-Stanford Program, where students come together on a regular basis and choose their own visiting speakers from academia, journalism, business, and the policy world. The talks are attended by a core group of students, and there’s food, so the general atmosphere is more informal than the usual invited lecture. The student population is drawn from both undergraduate and graduate students at Barnard and Columbia, as well as New York metropolitan area graduate programs. The second piece is the relationship that Harriman has established with IMEMO (Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences), organizing conferences both large and formal and smaller and informal, held in Moscow and New York (and now funded by the Carnegie Corporation). The latest conference series is an attempt, as Marten put it, “to get younger scholars on both sides to know each other and share ideas.” Marten continues, “my hope is that when these people get to be at the peak of their careers, when they remember those connections, they can promote U.S.-Russia relations,” a sentiment that reflects her experience as a graduate student at Stanford and the desire for dialogue with Soviet counterparts. The Harriman-IMEMO joint conference, “Russia, the U.S. and the World: A Next Generation Policy Conference,” held

*“My hope is that when these people get to be at the peak of their careers, when they remember those connections, they can promote U.S.-Russia relations.”*


at the Harriman Institute on March 31, 2017, is a good example of this spirit of cooperation (you will find the policy memos presented at the conference posted on the Harriman website).

Right now Marten finds herself between book projects. She thinks that Russia may be at an inflection point and is waiting to see what happens next before committing to the years it will take her to write a new book. For now she enjoys the freedom of working on smaller pieces; for example, an essay on the dangers posed by the Ukrainian volunteer militias, coauthored with Olga Oliker (published in the War on the Rocks policy blog, September 14, 2017). She also has a piece forthcoming in the *European Journal of International Security*, in 2018, that takes a new look at the NATO enlargement decision of the early 1990s and the Russian reaction to it (using, as always, her interviews with key members of the policy community on both sides), and asks at a counterfactual level whether a different outcome in the bilateral relationship was possible. Marten is working on two more articles—one on Putin’s policy decisions toward the United States, and another on the impact of Russia’s intelligence agencies on security policy. Even though she is currently on sabbatical, and finds herself speaking at conferences and other events around the country and abroad, she is a regular presence at the Institute, getting ready for the spring semester’s events for the Program on U.S.-Russia Relations and meeting with students. It will be interesting to see what comes next. ■



*Top to bottom: Lydia Hamilton, Masha Udensiva-Brenner, Eugene Sokoloff, and Acting Director Kimberly Marten at alumni reception in honor of Catharine Nepomnyashchy (2012); with Director Alexander Cooley and IMEMO participants of the Next Generation Conference of the Program on U.S.-Russia Relations (March 31, 2017).*





Protesters clashing with police on Maidan. Photo by Mstyslav Chernov.

# REFORMING UKRAINE

CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

*MATTHEW SCHAAF  
IN PROFILE*

BY MASHA UDENSIVA-BRENNER



When Matthew Schaaf ('11), a project director at Freedom House, the Washington, D.C.-based freedom- and democracy-promoting NGO, moved to Kyiv to establish the organization's first Ukrainian office in August 2016, there was reason to lament the state of the country—the prominent journalist Pavel Sheremet had recently been assassinated by a car bomb in central Kyiv; oligarchs continued to have disproportionate power within the Ukrainian government; and the war in the east of the country showed no signs of abating. But there was a lot worth celebrating, too. Civic engagement was at an all-time high, and, despite initial skepticism about its staying power, the partnership between political leaders and civic actors—human rights activists, anticorruption organizations, independent advocacy groups—that had been established during the Euromaidan revolution nearly three years prior was still in effect. “It has been the deciding factor in terms of implementing reforms in Ukraine,” Schaaf told me over Skype from Kyiv.

The reforms included an overhaul of the *militsiya*—the national police force inherited from Soviet times—replaced by a more modern organization, with new officers trained in tolerance and nondiscrimination by human rights activists; a new constitutional amendment granting more independence to the judiciary; the creation of a national anticorruption bureau (a precondition for visa-free travel to the European Union); and a public, electronic income and asset declaration requirement for government employees that went into effect in October 2016. These important measures would never have been adopted without civic pressure and facilitation by Ukraine's civic organizations and activists. In Freedom House's 2016 *Nations in Transit* report, civil society was named “the strongest element in Ukraine's democratic transition.”

In March 2017, however, the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian parliament) passed an amendment to the Law of Ukraine on Prevention of Corruption that would seriously curtail civil society's role in Ukraine's transition process. In response to the income and asset declarations imposed on civil servants, which exposed and embarrassed public officials, the parliament retaliated with a similar requirement for anyone involved in anticorruption work. “There's a quote from the deputy head of the presidential administration of Ukraine, summarizing the parliament's position: ‘You want to check us, we'll check you,’” explained Schaaf.

In accordance with the new legislation, organizations and individuals connected with anticorruption work will be required to submit lengthy financial reports. Failure to submit them by the established deadline will result in large fines and the loss of nonprofit status. The amendment is vaguely phrased and thus obligates *anyone* connected with anticorruption to make public their income and assets. This includes not only activists but also journalists, any organizations that have publicly voiced support for anticorruption work, and anyone employed by what the government deems to be anticorruption organizations—janitors, graphic designers, caterers. Schaaf sees the measure as a Russian-style attempt to crack down on public engagement in civic life. “Of course, this law is going to affect people's ability to work,” he told me. “If I were a trash collector, I could quite easily say, ‘You know what, I'm not going to work there anymore; I'm not going to provide services to this organization, because it requires that I publicly announce to the whole world what my income is and what my assets are and violates my own privacy.’”

In response, Freedom House has continued working with civil society organizations to try to inoculate them against new challenges with grants and other support. Schaaf regularly publishes an op-ed column for *Ukrinform*, a Ukrainian government newswire, which he uses to garner public attention and put pressure on public officials. “There are lots of opportunities for us to engage and to be supportive,” he told me. “And that's the reason we're here.”

Though his interest in the post-Soviet region dates back to his time at the University of Rochester, where he majored in political science and Russian studies, Schaaf did not foresee his career leading him to Ukraine. Back in college, he barely spoke Russian and had only superficial knowledge of regional politics. After graduating in 2004, he wanted to do something “interesting” and found a job as an English teacher in Vladimir, a small Golden Ring city about three and a half hours to the east of Moscow. When he wasn't teaching, Schaaf explored Russia—Ufa, Nizhny Novgorod, the Golden Ring cities around Vladimir. For winter break, he went to Kaliningrad, a Russian exclave sandwiched between Poland and Lithuania, and traveled over to Vilnius to bring in the New Year. It was December 31, 2004, the tail end of the pro-Western Orange Revolution in Ukraine that overturned the fraudulent election



Collective portrait of activists as the clashes stop; Euromaidan, Kyiv, Ukraine (February 22, 2014).

runoff victory of the pro-Russian presidential candidate Viktor Yanukovich. Just three days prior, the pro-Western candidate Viktor Yushchenko had been declared the new president-elect of Ukraine. Schaaf, who was in Vilnius alone, ended up celebrating New Year's Eve with a group of elated Ukrainian activists who had just come from Kyiv. But, at the time, the developments in Ukraine did not concern him. "The Orange Revolution felt very far away," he told me. "It wasn't something I was paying close attention to."

To Russia's political leaders, however, the Orange Revolution could not have felt closer. President Vladimir Putin saw it as a Western attempt to diminish Russian influence in the region and was growing increasingly paranoid about the possibility of a similar event occurring in Russia. It was not unusual for the FSB (Russia's Federal Security Service) to keep tabs on foreign visitors, but in this context, Schaaf—a U.S. citizen traveling to various corners of the country and associating with Ukrainian activists—must have appeared particularly suspicious. That spring, FSB





Schaaf poses before an old brick building, one of his favorite architectural features of Ukraine and Russia (2008).

officers showed up at the school where Schaaf taught English and questioned his colleagues. “They wanted to know who I was, what I was doing there, and whether or not I was an agent,” he recalled. Schaaf was surprised. “I figured what I was doing was pretty harmless—just a young American guy exploring Russia.” His brief confrontation with the Russian government ignited his interest in the post-Soviet region from a human rights perspective.

In 2008, three years after his return from Vladimir, Schaaf moved to Moscow for a position with Human

Rights Watch (HRW), where he researched civil society issues and developed and maintained relationships with other NGOs in the region. It was during this period that he traveled to Ukraine for the first time, on vacation, to the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv. “It was quite a change from Russia,” recalled Schaaf. “I was surprised to see that people actually smiled on the streets.”

After a year and a half at HRW, Schaaf knew he wanted to make human rights in the post-Soviet region the focus of his career. In 2009, while vacationing in Morocco to escape the harsh Moscow winter, he submitted his application for admission to Columbia’s School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA).

Schaaf enrolled in SIPA in the fall of 2009. While at Columbia, he spent the majority of his time at the Harriman Institute. He worked on book projects with Harriman professors (including Alexander Cooley, whom he helped research and edit his 2012 book, *Great Games, Local Rules*) and took advantage of funding opportunities that enabled him to spend a summer in Kyrgyzstan interning at the Eurasia Foundation, among other things. “Harriman shaped my SIPA experience,” he said, listing a number of memorable endeavors—a Human Rights discussion circle with the late Catherine Nepomnyashchy; a Russian blogosphere conference where he presented a paper on the use of antiextremism legislation to censor online content in Russia; and memorable events, such as a discussion with the renowned Russian human rights activist Ludmila Alekseeva, which he reported on for the Harriman Institute’s website.





Taking a break from his work in Moscow, Schaaf visits Kharkiv and sees the world's largest samovar at the train station (2008).

His studies paid off. After his graduation in May 2011, Freedom House hired Schaaf as a program officer in Washington, D.C.

The new position required frequent travel to the post-Soviet region, taking Schaaf out of the country several times per year, often for weeks at a time. While abroad, he attended civil society conferences, met with activists and leaders of nongovernmental organizations, and gathered research on post-Soviet countries for Freedom House's annual *Freedom in the World* reports. Passionate about LGBTI issues since college, he also became a key figure at Freedom House in promoting the rights of sexual minorities in the former Soviet space, advising LGBTI rights organizations across the region (he would eventually become director of the Eurasia and Ukraine LGBTI program).

Then, in early April 2012, Schaaf was sent to Ukraine as part of an independent international Freedom House delegation that would meet with political leaders, key opposition figures, and civil society activists all over the country. By this point, Schaaf had already familiarized

himself with Ukraine's political landscape, having helped prepare a series of reports on the democratization crisis there. The trip, however, would be his first true immersion into the complex world he had researched.

The delegation's visit took place more than eight years after the leaders of the Orange Revolution had promised to democratize Ukraine and eradicate corruption. The promises had not been kept, and, if anything, the country was slipping backward, with Viktor Yanukovich—the pro-Russian presidential candidate whose election in 2004 the revolutionaries had declared fraudulent—legitimately voted into power in 2010, and corruption running rampant as ever. The group, led by Freedom House president David Kramer and comprised of eight prominent Americans and Ukrainians, was in Ukraine to assess the state of democracy and human rights and to compile information for a report and policy recommendations to be published that summer. It received much press attention as it made its way around the country.

Perhaps the most memorable part of the trip was a visit to Kachanivska Female Penal Colony No. 54, where former prime minister and opposition politician Yulia

Tymoshenko had recently started serving a seven-year prison sentence on charges widely believed to be politically motivated. The Freedom House group was the first independent international delegation allowed to visit Tymoshenko since she had been transferred to the prison the previous December, and the government's willingness to facilitate the meeting was a victory of sorts. But, of course, there were strings attached—the meeting with Tymoshenko was scheduled for the same date and time as the group's visit to President Yanukovich. "They clearly wanted us to choose between the two," Schaaf told me. "But we decided to split up instead." Schaaf was part of the group that went to the prison.

Tymoshenko, a natural-gas magnate turned politician turned opposition leader, had once been the face of the Orange Revolution. Always appearing in designer suits with the traditional Ukrainian peasant braid crowning her head, she had managed to turn herself into an international symbol, even making it to number 3 on *Forbes Magazine's* 2005 list of the world's most powerful women. But the 2008 global financial crisis dealt a devastating blow to Ukraine, and Tymoshenko—who ruled as part of a fragmented and paralyzed coalition of contradicting, and often corrupt, political forces—proved unable to deliver on the promises of the revolution. She began to lose popularity, and many came to per-

ceive her as the face of the revolution's failures. In 2010, Tymoshenko lost the presidential race to Yanukovich. Not long thereafter, she was thrust into the international spotlight once again, this time as a political prisoner of the new regime.

Schaaf, along with three colleagues and an interpreter, made his way past a crowd of journalists and demonstrators waving "Free Tymoshenko" signs, and into the former prime minister's living quarters. Schaaf was surprised by the amenities—the room was more like a dormitory than a prison cell. Tymoshenko, who had been complaining of chronic back pain since her imprisonment, greeted them from a cot in another room. She was lying down, hair unkempt, and spoke in a barely audible voice. It made for a striking picture. "It was strange to see someone normally so accustomed to presenting this image of power, in a situation when she appeared so vulnerable," Schaaf told me. "Of course," he added, "I think this was the image she wanted to project."

The group spent ninety minutes next to Tymoshenko's cot, discussing her medical issues, Ukraine's upcoming parliamentary elections, the government's efforts to eliminate the opposition, and her role in trying to unite opposition forces. "Up to that point, I didn't have much experience with political and human rights issues in Ukraine," Schaaf told me. "This was my entrance into the project."

Protesters throwing trees into the fire they set to prevent internal forces from crossing the barricade line; Kyiv, Ukraine (January 22, 2014).







Demonstrator wearing Ukraine state flag colors facing the massive fire set by protesters to prevent internal forces from crossing the barricade line; Kyiv, Ukraine (January 22, 2014).

In December 2013, Schaaf went to Kyiv for the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) Parallel Civil Society Conference, an annual gathering of civil society leaders from all fifty-seven OSCE states that would precede the twentieth OSCE Ministerial Conference ending Ukraine's yearlong chairmanship of the organization. The Parallel Conference takes place alongside the Ministerial Conference every year, but that year was different. Protests had erupted on Maidan Nezalezhnosti, Kyiv's Independence Square.

The demonstrations, which had begun peacefully in opposition to President Yanukovich's decision to suspend preparations to sign the association agreement between Ukraine and the European Union, had turned violent just two days prior, when government forces attacked the demonstrators and demonstrators rioted in response. As peaceful protesters populated the square once again, Schaaf and his colleagues were in a convention center, attending panels on issues such as international freedom of expression, combating xenophobia and discrimination, and democratic development. Some of the participants began to wonder why they were attending panels instead of partaking in the demonstrations. It was not long before the group dispersed, effectively end-

ing the conference. Some participants went to monitor peaceful assembly, and others, Schaaf among them, joined the protesters.

Schaaf became a regular on Maidan over the next several months, observing the events unfold and trying to make sense of the chaos around him. The atmosphere was exhilarating and unpredictable, and Schaaf felt as if he were getting a deeper understanding of the various undercurrents guiding Ukrainian political culture than ever before. Nearly two years had passed since Schaaf's visit to Tymoshenko's prison, and he was now a leading force behind Freedom House's efforts in Ukraine. Meanwhile, Tymoshenko was released from prison in February 2014, appearing on Maidan's stage and addressing the crowd from a wheelchair, her signature braid back in place. She urged the crowds to entrust her with Ukraine's political future once more, but, to no avail. In May, Ukrainians elected the oligarch Petro Poroshenko to lead them.

In late 2014, after Russia invaded Crimea and civil war engulfed the eastern part of the country, Schaaf, along with a few colleagues, started urging Freedom House's leadership to open an office in Ukraine. "It was a good, strategic move," said Schaaf. "Ukraine is a really import-





“Euromaidan” by Christiaan Treibert.

ant project for democracy and human rights in the whole region, and there are many people who think that if Ukraine is not successful, then it doesn’t bode well for the other countries.”

Schaaf’s efforts proved fruitful, and, less than two years after he’d proposed the idea, he moved to Kyiv to open the Freedom House office—an endeavor that involved “a frightening amount of bureaucracy and paperwork.” In addition to running the office, the bulk of his work revolves around supporting civil society organizations in Ukraine, where Freedom House provides financial backing to twelve partner organizations and offers technical assistance and support to journalists and other NGOs. At present, the partners are on unsure footing. President Poroshenko has vowed to rescind the income and asset declaration requirements for NGOs, but his proposal to do so has included other, more problematic anti-NGO rules and requirements. And civil society is being squeezed in other ways, too. Since Schaaf arrived in Ukraine, he’s seen an intensified effort to discredit activists. “There have been very suspicious, very sensationalistic investigative reports that create the impression that anticorruption activists are wealthy, greedy, and living the high life by tak-

**“Ukrainian civil society is amazing, diverse, and very strong. They are making up for the weakness of the government in so many ways.”**

ing all these grants and buying fancy cars and apartments,” he told me. “That they’re in cahoots with the Russians, that they’re stealing money from the U.S. government and the Ukrainian government.”

But, Schaaf feels optimistic nevertheless. “The Ukrainian people want us here, and that is a good sign,” he told me. “And Ukrainian civil society is amazing, diverse, and very strong. They are making up for the weakness of the government in so many ways.” ■



# DICTATORS WITHOUT BORDERS

AZARHISTAN

UZBEKISTAN

KYRGYSTAN

KRKMENISTAN

TAJIKISTAN

AFGHANISTAN

*Dictators without  
Borders: Power and  
Money in Central  
Asia cover.*

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# THE GLOBAL NATURE OF CENTRAL ASIAN POLITICS

DICTATORS WITHOUT BORDERS: POWER AND MONEY IN CENTRAL ASIA *BY ALEXANDER COOLEY AND JOHN HEATHERSHAW*

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BY RONALD MEYER

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Five years after publishing his prize-winning *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia* (Oxford University Press, 2012), Harriman director Alexander Cooley returns to Central Asia with *Dictators without Borders: Power and Money in Central Asia* (Yale University Press), coauthored with British colleague John Heathershaw (University of Exeter). The two became collaborators after Heathershaw reviewed Cooley's *Great Games, Local Rules* in Chatham House's *International Affairs*, focusing on the chapter on corruption in Central Asia. For his part, Heathershaw had spent three years on the ground in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and had done significant work on the Tajik transnational state, which led to two books on the politics of Tajikistan, published by Routledge in 2009 and 2012. As Cooley and Heathershaw shared their findings on transnational corruption, they began to discern patterns in methods and networks that played out time and again across the five Central Asian states. Their shared research interests laid the groundwork for the workshop "Central Asia's Hidden Offshore Ties: The Politics of Money-Laundering and Virtual State-Building" (Harriman Institute, 2013), which they followed up with a panel at the convention of the International Studies Association that same year. The two events formed the basis of

the articles published in *Central Asian Survey* as "Offshore Central Asia" (2015).

The title *Dictators without Borders* alludes both to Keck and Sikkink's *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Cornell University Press, 1998), a study of transnational activism and the impact it has had on human rights, and—perhaps more importantly—to the well-known humanitarian group Doctors Without Borders and a host of other groups "without borders" ranging from architects and reporters to the internet literature site Words without Borders. More than just a catchy riff, however, the title encapsulates one of the book's major premises. Conventional wisdom speaks of Central Asia's lack of connectivity and isolation (political, geographical, cultural). Cooley and Heathershaw, however, take to task the whole notion of Central Asia as a special case. Cooley began his book talk at the Harriman Institute (March 21, 2017) with three myths about Central Asia: (1) myth of globalization and the lack of connectivity; (2) partial liberalization; and (3) local traditions (clans, etc.). While he addressed all three myths, lack of connectivity took center stage. Cooley and Heathershaw show with meticulous deliberation that Central Asian elites are global actors who deftly make use of global relations,



“[Cooley and Heathershaw] are intent on highlighting the extent to which the corruption of authoritarian rulers in these countries relies on the complicity of outside abettors, including Western lawyers, banks, and even courts, and how such collusion erodes the power of international norms and institutions.”  
—*Foreign Affairs*

products, and institutions in pursuit of their own agenda. To take one example: In 2012 capital flight from Tajikistan in the amount of 65 percent of GDP per annum shows just how *connected* Tajik elites are and how adept they are at manipulating international institutions and practices to move money out of the country and into offshore accounts.

Why is the myth of lack of connectivity so potent? “Perhaps because if we focus on connectivity, then we don’t have to talk about other things,” Cooley offered as an explanation. He instead believes that we need to be more analytical: “Is Central Asia underdeveloped because of a lack of connectivity, or is it the wrong kind of connectivity? And if it’s the latter, then it’s a much more difficult problem.” One can make the argument that these are young democracies and it takes time to learn, but, Cooley counters, “they are savvy enough to use shell companies, hire prestigious public relations firms, know all about soft money, and know how to use think tanks.”

In this sense, *Dictators without Borders* continues the story from Cooley’s previous book, which, among other things, was “an attempt to look at how this region all of a sudden had become intensely interactive with the rest of the world and how it provided a window on the dynamics of an emerging multipolar world,” to quote Cooley from our interview in June 2017. As he shows in *Great Games, Local Rules*, by the mid-1990s Central Asian elites were already laying the foundations for stripping state assets, creating monopolies, and consolidating their own power, all the while paying lip service to Western democracy promotion,

universal human rights treaties, and economic transition. *Dictators without Borders* builds on this backstory and puts Central Asia into a global perspective by examining how domestic politics, economics, and security dynamics are being staged beyond the borders of Central Asia. To quote Robert Legvold, former director of the Harriman Institute, in his review published in *Foreign Affairs*: “[Cooley and Heathershaw] are intent on highlighting the extent to which the corruption of authoritarian rulers in these countries relies on the complicity of outside abettors, including Western lawyers, banks, and even courts, and how such collusion erodes the power of international norms and institutions.”

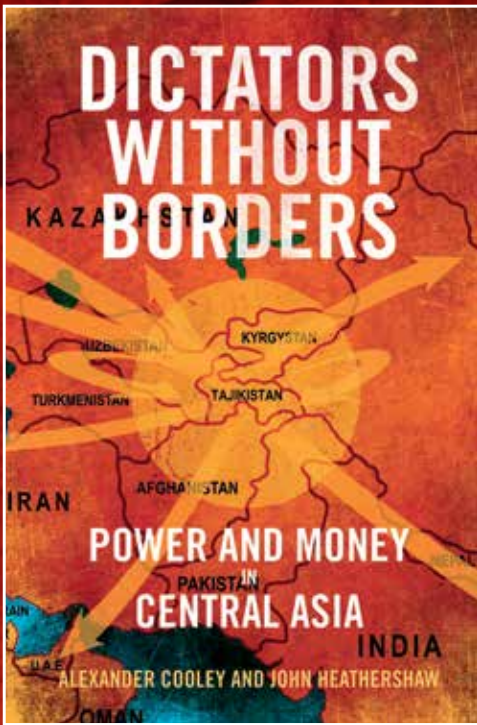
In a series of chapters devoted to four of the five Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan) Cooley and Heathershaw document staggering levels of state-directed corruption facilitated by Western institutions and procedures. The case of Mukhtar Ablyazov, in chapter 2, “Kazakhstan’s Most Wanted,” is a good introduction to the ground Cooley and Heathershaw cover. Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan’s first and only president since independence, oversees what has been characterized as a “patrimonial” style of politics—that is, doling out state assets and positions to loyal supporters through both formal and informal channels. Ablyazov, Nazarbayev’s one-time ally and minister for energy and trade before cofounding an opposition party, was jailed and then pardoned. He went on to become chairman and main shareholder of BTA Bank. But the financial crisis of 2008 hit the bank hard, and it was effectively nationalized in 2009. According to BTA lawyers and Kazakh prosecutors, between \$8 billion and \$12 billion worth of loans were funneled to offshore shell companies that Ablyazov controlled. Ablyazov fled to London following the bank’s nationalization, where he applied for political asylum, which was granted in 2011. BTA’s new management has initiated a vigorous legal campaign to reclaim about \$6 billion of the bank’s assets from Ablyazov. There have been fourteen court battles in the United Kingdom. In 2012 he was found in contempt of court on three counts, including failure to disclose his assets, whereupon he fled to the south of France on a Central African passport, which he had acquired along the way.

On December 16, 2011, Kazakh police opened fire on protesting oil workers in Zhanaozen. At least sixteen workers were killed and sixty-four injured. Forty-five individuals were indicted for a trial, during which



Alexander Cooley in his office at the Harriman Institute.  
(Photo by Jeffrey Schifman)





*Dictators without Borders: Power and Money in Central Asia*  
Alexander Cooley and  
John Heathershaw  
Yale University Press (2017)  
ISBN 978-0-393-24797-8

the Kazakh authorities tried to make the case that the defendants had close ties to Ablyazov, framing him as a threat to the Kazakh state. Two years later the Kazakh authorities, making use of the Interpol Red Notice system, had Ablyazov arrested in France to be extradited to Russia. The extradition order was found to be politically motivated and was subsequently revoked. That same year Ablyazov's wife and daughter were arrested and forcibly transported to Kazakhstan. After international protests of this extraordinary extradition, the two women were allowed to return to Italy.

*Dictators without Borders* provides many more details, financial and otherwise, to flesh out the story of “Kazakhstan’s most wanted,” but the patterns established are repeated in endless variation throughout the region. Massive sums of money are funneled to offshore accounts to minimize tax liability, facilitate capital flight, conceal the national origins of investments, and provide official actors plausible denial about the legality of their transactions. You wonder why the Netherlands is responsible for 42 percent of inward direct investment in Kazakhstan and 58 percent of Kazakh outward investment—what exactly are they trading? Central Asian governments routinely make use of international instruments and courts in pursuit of political exiles (the Interpol Red Notice) and domestic political agendas.

To take one more colorful example, Uzbekistan, the most “closed” of the Central Asian states, is the most involved in international arbitrations. Gulnara Karimova, the former president’s daughter, erstwhile United Nations diplomat, and gatekeeper to the communications industry in Uzbekistan, married while still in her teens an Afghan American businessman, whom she divorced thirteen years later after a bitter custody battle over their two children. The Uzbek government, in retaliation, placed her former husband’s name on an Interpol warrant list for “import-export fraud,” expropriated his Coca-Cola bottling plant in Uzbekistan, and deported a couple dozen of his relatives. She earned a higher degree from Harvard’s Kennedy School, entertained pop star pretensions, and headed a large charitable institution—all the while officially in the service of the Uzbek Ministry of Foreign Affairs as counselor to the U.N. and then Moscow, permanent ambassador to the U.N. and international organizations in Geneva, and ambassador to Spain. But it’s her financial dealings that have garnered the most press attention of late. The repercussions



from the myriad corruption scandals involving her telecommunications enterprises set off reprisals at home, when in 2013 she was removed from the ambassadorial appointment to Spain and forced to return to Uzbekistan having lost her diplomatic immunity.

*Dictators without Borders* adroitly sets out many more pieces of the Central Asian puzzle, particularly as concerns the involvement of the West. For example, the quid pro quo exacted for U.S. military bases in the region, about which Cooley first wrote in his book *Base Politics* (Cornell University Press, 2008); the lack of regulation in the luxury real estate market in London, New York, and other major capitals, for which Central Asian actors gladly pay premium prices in order to safely stash their money overseas; the funding by Central Asian states of centers at major universities in the West; and the use of public relations firms and charitable organizations to further the advancement of Central Asian elites. What becomes clear, to return to Robert Legvold's review quoted earlier, is that the West, whether consciously or not, abets the aspirations of Central Asian actors.

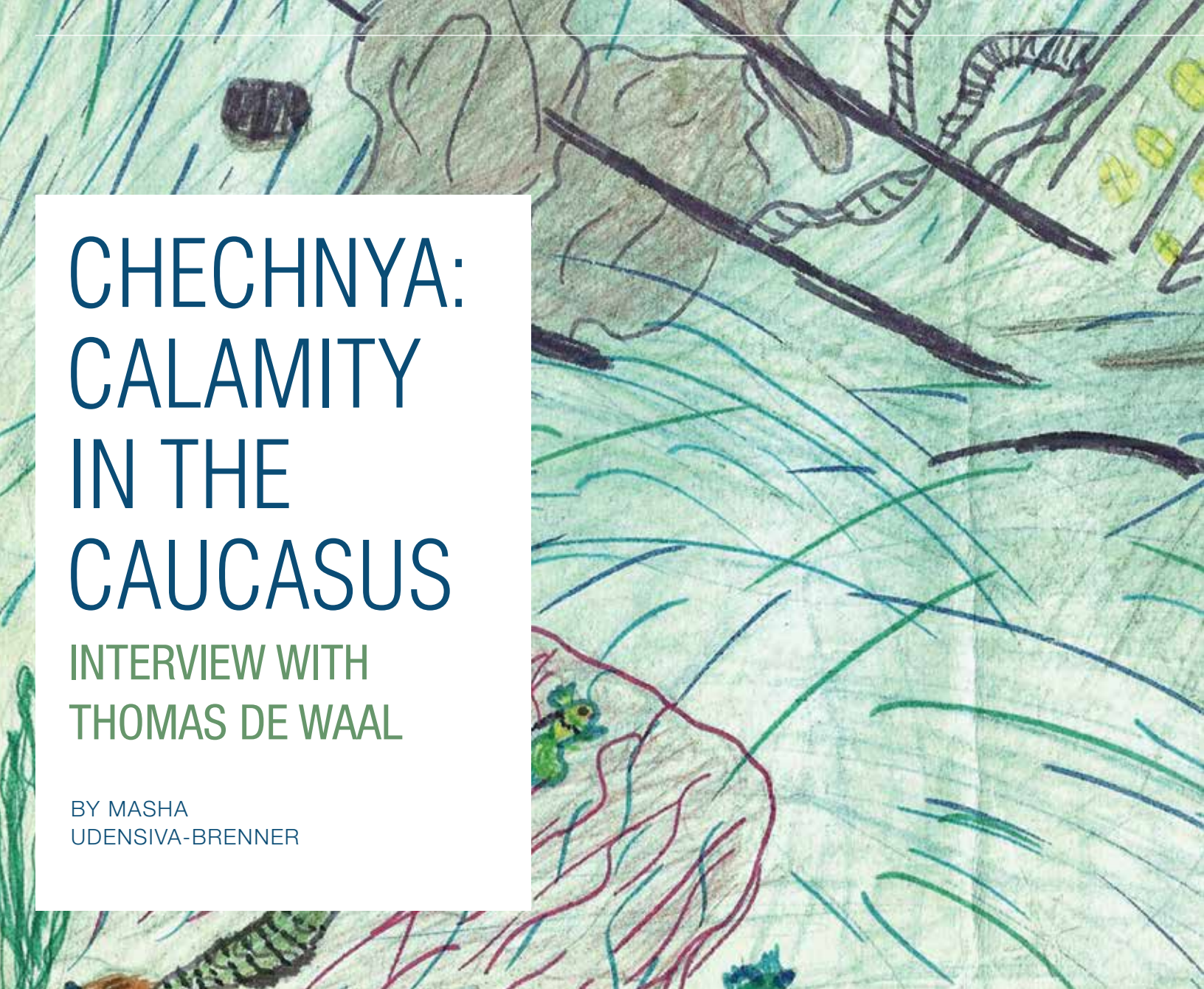
Of course, writing a book about corruption presents its own particular methodological dilemmas. Cooley and Heathershaw viewed their work as a "statement book" as opposed to a comprehensive sweep. The authors made the decision early on in their project to rely wholly on public sources and openly available information, much of which had become accessible as a result of legal proceedings, government investigations or audits requested by international organizations, and documents that were leaked for political purposes; they would not rely on interviews with the subjects, their lawyers, or their family members, nor would they attend court proceedings in progress. The plus side of this decision is that anyone can verify the numbers and transactions, not to mention that given these litigious times the prospect of a libel suit being initiated by one of the book's actors is much diminished. Even so, the authors brought in a lawyer to comb the manuscript for potential legal problems, which on occasion led them to rephrase a passage.

The information culled from public documents is rounded out by data from WikiLeaks, which has the advantage of capturing the perspective of the political actors in process, and not after trials, arrests, or convictions. The downside is the politicization of the source and the charges of false documents, which have

"This ambitious and eye-opening book shows what political science at its best—based on real-world knowledge, free of jargon and focused on substantive concerns rather than disciplinary marginalia—can contribute to pressing contemporary debates."  
—*Times Literary Supplement*

led Cooley to conclude that he would hesitate to use WikiLeaks in future work. And last but not least, the Panama Papers were released in 2015—just as Cooley and Heathershaw were finalizing their manuscript for Yale University Press. According to Cooley: "The Panama Papers offered a really interesting additional hook, but there's not a lot of information on Central Asian actors, partly because of their skill at embedding and concealing these transactions. The Papers were useful in corroborating the embedded nature of corruption, but there was no 'aha' moment."

All this barely scratches the surface of Cooley and Heathershaw's engaging, agenda-setting book, which the *Economist* lauds as "insightful and topical, a comprehensive take on a neglected region," and *Publishers Weekly* praises as a "lucid, iconoclastic primer on the region that demolishes the artificial distinction between domestic and international politics in Central Asia once and for all." But I think Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, writing for the *Times Literary Supplement*, got it just right: "This ambitious and eye-opening book shows what political science at its best—based on real-world knowledge, free of jargon and focused on substantive concerns rather than disciplinary marginalia—can contribute to pressing contemporary debates." ■



# CHECHNYA: CALAMITY IN THE CAUCASUS

INTERVIEW WITH  
THOMAS DE WAAL

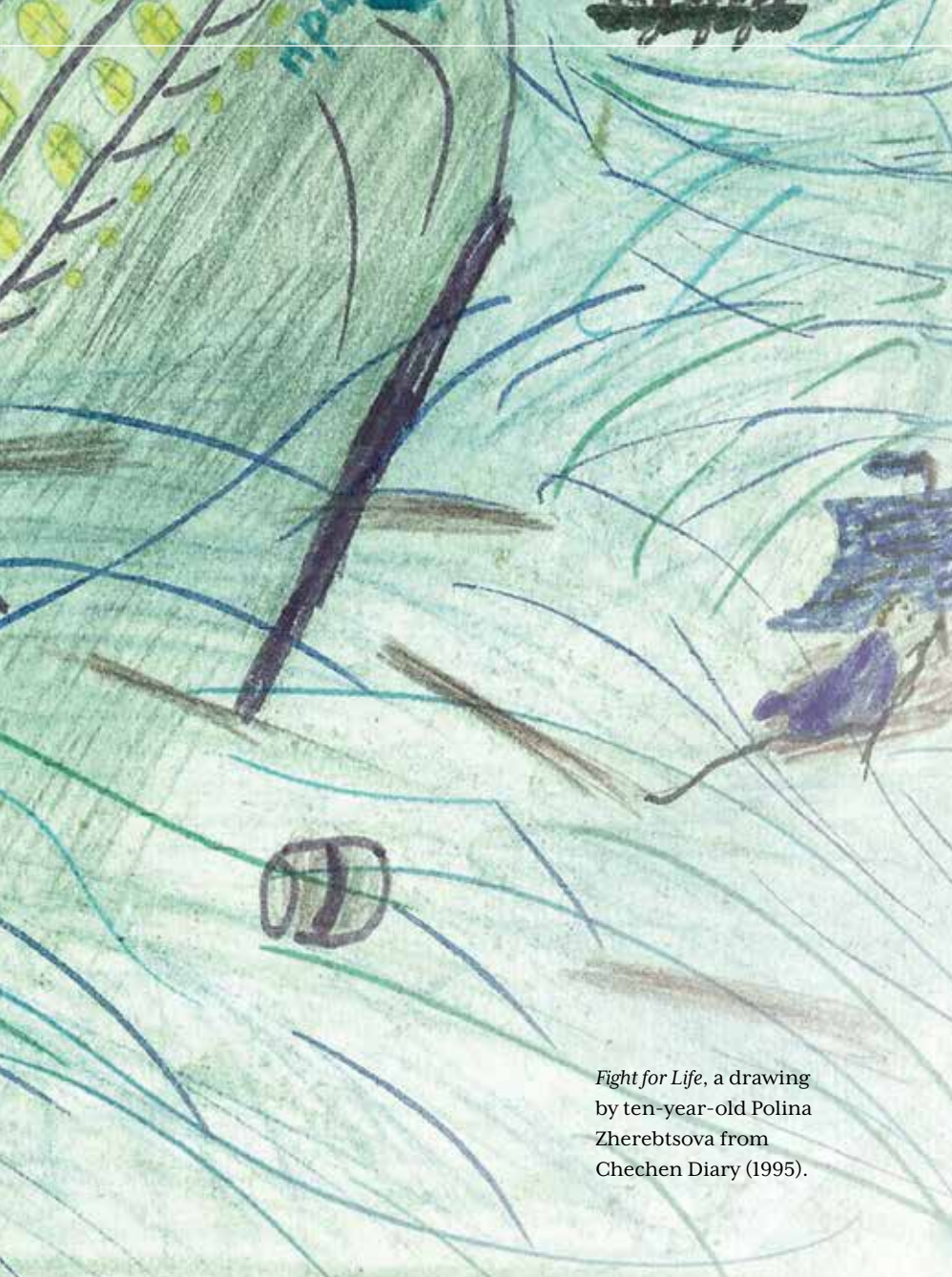
BY MASHA  
UDENSIVA-BRENNER

Several years ago, the journalist and Carnegie Europe senior fellow Thomas de Waal approached the Harriman Institute with a proposal. In between house moves, he had discovered a box of tapes collecting dust in his attic. It contained all the interviews he had conducted for his first two books—*Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus* (New York University Press, 1998) and *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War* (New York University Press, 2003). De Waal had only used a fraction of each interview in the books, and he thought the tapes would be a valuable resource to scholars and journalists. Would the Harriman Institute be interested in housing the collection? Timothy Frye, director of the Institute at the time, eagerly

agreed, and we embarked on the process of bringing the project to fruition—digitizing, transcribing, dealing with legal considerations. This year the Thomas de Waal Interviews Collection became available at Columbia Libraries.

I spoke with de Waal over Skype about both books last spring—an interview that will be published in two parts. What follows is an edited transcript of our conversation on *Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus*. The book, coauthored with de Waal's former *Moscow Times* colleague Carlotta Gall, was the first ever to be published about the 1994–96 conflict in Chechnya. The authors' in-depth investigation of the conflict and its roots is crucial to understanding the Chechnya we see in the news today.





*Fight for Life*, a drawing by ten-year-old Polina Zherebtsova from *Chechen Diary* (1995).

**Masha Udensiva-Brenner:** The late Russian economist and politician Yegor Gaidar, whom you quote in the book, contended that, had the West intervened or put pressure on Russia in some way, the first Chechen war wouldn't have happened. What are your thoughts?

**Thomas de Waal:** I think that's the case. Now we're used to thinking of Chechnya as this frightening zone, a place [Ramzan] Kadyrov

dominates, that could be an incubator of terrorism, has been an incubator of terrorism. And yet the trigger for all that was the military intervention in December 1994. And the West's reaction was pretty limp, considering that this was a massive war crime. The Western narrative at the time was all about supporting Yeltsin, supporting a pro-Western government. And, of course, supporting Russia's territorial integrity. Bill Clinton famously came

to Moscow and strayed off script when asked about Chechnya. He hadn't been prepped on this and said that Abraham Lincoln fought a war to keep this country together, and so he understood Yeltsin's point of view.

But there are many different ways of achieving territorial integrity by peaceful means; you don't have to go to war. And the terrible paradox is—though this was supposedly a war to prove that Chechnya was part of Russia—the way the Russian army behaved was as though it was conquered enemy territory. Everything they did drove Chechnya away from Russia and Chechens away from Russians. If something like this had happened in the Balkans, everyone responsible would have been facing trial in The Hague. But because it was Russia, they got off. So Gaidar's point was that if the West had dealt more clearly, more forcefully, with Yeltsin just before the conflict started, and even at the beginning of the conflict, they could have reined him in, and the worst of this tragedy could have been avoided.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** Because Yeltsin still cared quite a bit about the West's opinion.

**De Waal:** He was still totally dependent on the West, on IMF [International Monetary Fund] credits; there was massive Western leverage with Yeltsin.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** Your book left me with the impression that a realignment in the Kremlin, after the more liberal politicians criticized Yeltsin for his drinking, indirectly led to this conflict.





Jokhar Dudayev mural on the fence of the Raszynska Social Gymnasium in Warsaw.

**De Waal:** That's right, and you could make an argument in that direction; it's slightly exaggerated, but you could make the argument. There was a famous incident where Yeltsin was in Berlin for a ceremony [in August 1994], when he was clearly drunk—a military band was playing, and he picked up the baton and started conducting the band. A group of his liberal advisers wrote to him afterward saying they disapproved of his behavior, a rather courageous thing for them to do. But it had the opposite effect from what they intended. Yeltsin was offended and shifted toward the more hawkish advisers, people like [Alexander] Korzhakov; and that group became dominant, and their views therefore influenced Yeltsin to go to war in Chechnya. So one could draw a kind of direct line between Yeltsin conducting the band drunkenly in Berlin and the decision to go to war in Chechnya.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** What were the machinations inside the Kremlin during the period leading up to the invasion?

**De Waal:** I did a lot of interviews to try to reconstruct a chronology of the decision and what followed. I interviewed Yuri Kalmykov, the one man at the Security Council meeting who spoke out against the conflict. The only person in the room who actually supported him was Yevgeny Primakov, which was interesting. He subsequently became Russian prime minister and is someone who was never really very popular in the West. When I was presenting the book, and said that Primakov opposed the war and the supposedly pro-Western Foreign Minister Kozyrev actively supported it, I confused a few Western audiences. So these categories of hawk and dove in Russia are not so clear cut. There was a lot of maneuvering within the Kremlin—hard-line advisers trying to persuade Yeltsin to go in, liberal advisers being much more cautious. But it wasn't a case of the good czar and the bad advisers; I think Yeltsin himself ultimately made the decision to start the war.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** What did he want to get out of it?

**De Waal:** At the time, Yeltsin was looking for new ways of boosting his own popularity, of legitimizing himself. [Vladimir] Zhirinovskiy, the far-right extremist, had done well in the Duma elections of December '93. So I guess Yeltsin wanted to rebrand himself. Or, to be precise, people in the Kremlin, one group in the Kremlin, wanted to rebrand Yeltsin as the tough guy, the Russian nationalist.

These people were constantly bouncing the idea of a quick solution to the Chechen problem—a quick crushing of the Dudayev regime, which would successfully rebrand Yeltsin. And, hence, the title of our book in the original British version was *A Small Victorious War*. This is a phrase that goes back to the Russian-Japanese war of 1904, but was used by one of Yeltsin's advisers, Oleg Lobov, in a conversation I quote in the book. ["We need a small, victorious war to boost the President's ratings."] And they thought it would be over in a couple of days or a week—that the Dudayev regime would crumble and Yeltsin would score this political victory.

Crazy as it sounds, people at the Kremlin meeting, discussing this issue, brought up the example of Bill Clinton in Haiti: Bill Clinton had gone into Haiti, overthrown a military regime, and it all happened very quickly and had been a political success for him. Where do we begin? Chechnya isn't Haiti; it has all these historical grievances. Also, the one thing that was guaranteed to unite Chechens under [Jokhar] Dudayev was a Russian military invasion. Particularly when you consider the state of the Russian army, which was totally unprepared. It was not going to go into Chechnya in a disciplined way, enforcing law and order. On the contrary, it was a force of disorder and lawlessness.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** Why didn't the Kremlin wait a little while in order to prepare the army for the invasion, to organize their efforts?

**De Waal:** I don't think you could have done anything with the Russian army back in 1994. It was a conscript army. The economy had collapsed; the soldiers were underfed, badly clothed, badly equipped, poorly trained, no morale. One had to feel sorry for them being sent off to this region in the south. There were appalling levels of indiscipline, and let's not even talk about human rights abuses—just the looting. You saw these trucks heading out of Grozny full of furniture and possessions that Russian soldiers had been looting from supposedly Russian homes.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** And although Chechnya was technically Russian territory, no state of emergency was declared.

**De Waal:** It was definitely not thought through. This was a classic issue of the Yeltsin period, when Russia was basically a democracy with this very dysfunctional government. So, on the one hand you had the Russian army going in, supposedly to restore order; on the other hand you had huge unhappiness within the army about what was going on, some generals refusing to fight.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** And Russian troops, desperate for water and provisions, were actually prolonging the conflict by selling arms to the Chechen fighters . . .

**De Waal:** That's right. It was a reporter's dream reporting from Chechnya because pretty much every day—without even trying too hard, just by being around and talking to lots of people—you would come across the most extraordinary stories. One day in a village I met this guy; he said, "Let me show you something," and he took me into his house and showed me some weapons he'd bought off the Russians and a huge stack of dollars that he was going off with to buy some more weapons from the Russians. So one combatant in the conflict was actually selling its weapons to the enemy it was supposed to be fighting against.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** How pervasive was this?

**De Waal:** Very pervasive. Chechens would joke, "If you give me enough vodka, I can buy a tank." The morale was so much higher on the Chechen side; and most of the Russian army just didn't want to be there, didn't want to fight, and were doing things like selling their weapons.



Thomas de Waal



Zherebtsova (Chechen Diary, 1995).





Top to bottom: Chechen man prays during battle for Grozny (January 1995), photo by Mikhail Estafiev; Boris Yeltsin during his inauguration (1991); Zherebtsova (Chechen Diary, 1995).

**Udensiva-Brenner:** And not only was the army selling its weapons, but there were also high-level informers within the Russian government selling top secret information to Jokhar Dudayev, president of Chechnya at the time.

**De Waal:** That's right. Dudayev would enjoy telling Russians all the gossip he'd heard from inside the Kremlin. I never got to the bottom of that, but it was indicative of the state of Russia at the time. Our book is about Chechnya, but on a bigger level it's also about Yeltsin's Russia. You read these stories about it that describe market reforms, and [privatization minister Anatoly] Chubais, and so on, but in fact you had to get out to the edges of Russia to find out how dire the situation was in the '90s. And we don't necessarily blame Yeltsin; we blame the legacy of the Soviet Union, a collapsing state. But the corruption, the collapse of infrastructure, the low morale, the lack of belief in the state—that's basically what happened in Chechnya, too, to the most extreme degree.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** What role did the media play throughout the conflict?

**De Waal:** This was an extraordinary aspect of it. While the Kremlin was saying, "The operation is going smoothly to restore law and order," the new NTV channel was reporting from the ground, from Grozny, and showing these scenes of devastation, and lawlessness, and bombing, and the killing of ethnic Russians, which particularly enraged the Russian viewing public. You see, the Chechens who lived in Grozny could flee to their home villages, but the

Russians had nowhere to go. A lot of them were pensioners, so they were disproportionately victimized by the artillery and the bombing of the Russian air force and died in great numbers. I would say that, when the war finally ended, it was largely because the Kremlin failed to control the narrative and the Russian population as a whole had stopped supporting it.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** Why didn't the Kremlin try to limit the press in some way?

**De Waal:** This was a Russia of lawlessness and freedom in which they didn't really have the tools, and, to be fair, even the will, to censor and suppress the press. Maybe they tried, but as I said, Russian NTV in particular, and some other TV and radio as well, were broadcasting pretty frequently. And as foreign press you could go down there and do whatever the hell you wanted. There wasn't really a front line, so you could pretty easily go back and forth between the Russian-controlled side and the Chechen rebel-controlled side on the same day. Chechnya's pretty small. You could go into the mountains and meet the Chechen rebels and the same evening be back on the Russian side. We roamed around pretty freely. It was a bit scary; sometimes you didn't know where you were. But it was amazing access. And the Chechen rebel side was incredibly good at PR. They wanted to use us, the foreign press, to get across their side of the story, and they were much more open than the Russian military were about talking to us—which of course meant that the reporting reflected their side of the story pretty well.



**Udensiva-Brenner:** And what was that story? What was happening in Grozny during the war?

**De Waal:** All I can say is that when I finally saw the city in 1995 it looked like pictures of Stalingrad. Just appalling levels of destruction. Whole streets and neighborhoods had been leveled. High-rise blocks in the center of the city, which had been full of ethnic Russians, completely destroyed.

Sometimes one got the impression that the Russians were trying to refight the Second World War, trying to take Berlin in 1945. The stain of this must lie on the conscience of Pavel Grachev, Yeltsin's defense minister, who, first of all, tried to storm the city with tanks, which was a crazy thing to do. The tanks got trapped in the streets and burned, and there was a horrific massacre by the Chechen fighters of these Russian soldiers. This story is told in the first chapter of the book by Carlotta [Gall], who went and interviewed the survivors from the Maikop tank regiment. Having suffered this defeat, Grachev basically turned to the air force and ordered them to bomb the city with planes and heavy artillery—which should be a war crime under any definition.

And, of course, this was the great turning point. The point at which a Chechnya that had been part of Russia—part of the Soviet Union—was basically destroyed, including its professional class, and forced back into the more archaic, antimodern, anti-Russian Chechnya that we see today. The city of Grozny may have been rebuilt, but the Chechnya we have today is the result of the bombings of 1994, 1995.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** You write in the beginning of your book that the conflict

cannot be fully understood without understanding the background. What's the historical context?

**De Waal:** The history of Russia and Chechnya is mainly one of conflict, starting at the end of the eighteenth century. While the South Caucasus were basically incorporated into the Russian Empire by the beginning of the nineteenth century—there was fighting, there was violence, but by the 1820s they were basically part of the Russian Empire—the North Caucasus, even though they were closer on the Russian side of the mountains, had this very, very bloody conflict with Russia, which some people have called the longest war of the nineteenth century. It continued right up until the 1860s, and some of the fiercest resistance came from the Chechens. They were very well organized, they fought very hard, and they had a kind of collective leadership, which meant it was harder to buy them off or co-opt them. In the end, they were conquered and they did accommodate; they did start to speak Russian; they did become part of the Russian nation state. But they were always pretty much on the lowest rung of the ladder, as a Muslim people, as a militant people.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** And then when the Communists came into the picture, the Chechens thought they would improve their lot and fought on their side against the Imperial army.

**De Waal:** The Bolsheviks were very good at speaking the language of national liberation. People like the Chechens definitely fought more with the Reds against the Whites in

## *The history of Russia and Chechnya is mainly one of conflict, starting at the end of the eighteenth century.*

the Civil War, but of course once the Bolsheviks established the state, Chechens became problematic again. In 1944, they were deported en masse by Stalin, one of the so-called punished peoples.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** Tell me about the deportations.

**De Waal:** This is a very, very important story. And it applies to many Soviet peoples—Germans, Crimean Tatars, Koreans, and, various nationalities in the Caucasus, all of whom were deemed to be liable to treachery in the paranoid world of Stalin's Soviet Union. This was either because they were directly affiliated with foreign powers, like the Germans, or because they were Turkic, or, in the case of the Chechens, because they had a history of resistance. During the Second World War, when Russia was fighting the Germans, the NKVD—the secret police led by [secret police chief Lavrenty] Beria—also devoted huge amounts of resources to deporting these people, every last babe in arms. So you could just imagine the logistics. Thousands and thousands of railcars being deployed for deportations to Kazakhstan, all done by surprise overnight, in order to minimize resistance. Everyone was crowded into these railcars and sent to Kazakhstan. The death rates were

***This is a classic case of Russian leadership, where the left hand didn't know what the right hand was doing.***

absolutely appalling, from typhus, from hunger; and then when the Chechens arrived in Kazakhstan, there were very few facilities to deal with them.

The deported became second-class citizens who couldn't travel; they were incredibly restricted in their rights and were really the bottom of the pile. This incidentally explains why during the Soviet period the Chechens had a reputation as black marketeers. One of the reasons that a large number of them joined the criminal underworld is because they were an underclass for whom career advancement and the normal ways of getting jobs were blocked.

There was a lot of trauma. I met a man, a Chechen commissar, who was witness to a massacre in Khaibakh, a village high in the mountains where the roads were so bad that, when the NKVD came up there to deport the residents, they decided to just massacre the old people, the sick people, because they couldn't get them down to the valley in time. They rounded up several hundred of the weakest people in a barn and set it on fire. And this man, Dziayudin Malsagov, a young Communist, witnessed this massacre and was absolutely horrified. He very doggedly tried to report on it, until he was himself deported. He thought it was all a mistake; he wrote letters, until

he was given to understand that he should shut up or he would risk being arrested. Then Stalin fell and Khrushchev went to return everyone from deportation. Suddenly this story became rather useful to Khrushchev, and Khrushchev received Malsagov in the opera house in Almaty. As far as Khrushchev was concerned, this was a denunciation of several of the Stalinist figures who had been responsible for the deportations—who were still in office—and it was an additional reason to get them fired. Malsagov carried on protesting and he was arrested, spending time in a Soviet prison. When I met him in '94, he was old and frail, and he couldn't really talk. In 1996, Carlotta and I actually went up into the mountains to see the village, which was completely ruined and deserted and hadn't been lived in since the 1940s. And there's a brief coda to the story: A film was made about this massacre and met with a denial campaign saying that this was all made up, that this never happened.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** When?

**De Waal:** In the past few years, in Putin's Russia. The horrors of the deportations are still something that isn't really acknowledged in Russia as a whole. In fact, there's incredible insensitivity about it, including, amazingly, that the Putin administration and the Russian Olympic Committee decided to have the closing ceremony of the Sochi Olympics on the 70th anniversary of the Chechen deportations. An event in the North Caucasus, usually a tragic day for Chechens, and yet they couldn't even have that closing ceremony one day before or one day after; they chose to have it on that very

anniversary, which shows the incredible kind of amnesia and indifference to this in Russia as a whole.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** And what effect did the deportations have on Chechen identity?

**De Waal:** A huge effect. For one thing, Chechnya before the deportations was quite dispersed, quite regional, with low rates of Russian usage. And, in a funny way, the deportations made it more Soviet, because the people were taken away from their homeland and forced into another part of the Soviet Union. But they also made it more Chechen; they made the people into a collective—it suddenly didn't matter which village you were from; you were branded a Chechen by the mere fact of the deportation. And the fact that they were allowed home was miraculous, but the subject was never talked about in public, in schools; it was a kind of family secret that you were supposed to bottle up. And that all burst to the surface during the Gorbachev period when the Chechens wanted justice, recognition for what had happened. So this was definitely a driving force for the independence movement in the Soviet period.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** And then the movement really took off with Jokhar Dudayev, who was a somewhat unlikely figure to lead Chechen independence. Tell me about him.

**De Waal:** Dudayev was a man of many amazing contradictions. A man who was born in a Chechen mountain village, but was deported to Kazakhstan in 1944, basically as a baby. He grew up completely outside of Chechnya, first in exile in



Kazakhstan, and then in Estonia, after he joined the Soviet air force. He had to lie on his application form and pretend to be an Ossetian, because Chechnya was very much considered a subgrade nation at that point. He rose to become the Chechens' first air force general in Estonia. He married a Russian poet, the daughter of a Soviet officer. So he was a Soviet patriot, a Chechen romantic, a slightly crazy guy who spoke incredibly passionately about everything and would make these wild threats.

An extraordinary personality whom I met during my second visit to Chechnya. That said, he was someone who bears great responsibility for the start of that conflict because of his military, romantic demeanor. He was someone who was not good at making deals and compromises.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** What did Dudayev's Chechnya look like?

**De Waal:** The republic was a kind of a black hole within the Russian state—it was criminalized; there was a lot of black marketeering. But I would argue it was only in the most extreme example of the whole of Russia during that time. If you went to Vladivostok, if you went to a lot of places in Russia, they were also criminalized. There was also a huge black market; Chechnya was just the most extreme example. But, of course, because of the self-declared independence, because of the ethnic nature of the Chechens, and because they had constituted a strong mafia in Soviet times, they were identified as the “other,” and so Chechnya became a problem Yeltsin wanted to resolve.

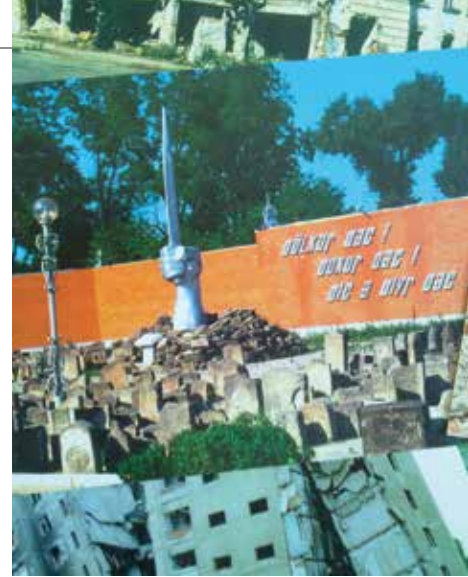
**Udensiva-Brenner:** Did Yeltsin take any steps to resolve it before deciding to invade?

**De Waal:** There were some negotiations. But, in my view, they weren't serious. I think Dudayev was always craving a one-on-one meeting with Yeltsin, and some people thought he should have it—but Yeltsin denied him that meeting, even though, by the end of '94, Chechen independence was more of a symbolic project. They were still using the ruble, there were flights to and from Moscow, the borders were open. Had Yeltsin shown Dudayev a little bit of respect and used a bit of political capital to have a meeting with him, I think Dudayev would have been more inclined to compromise, as strange and ridiculous as that sounds.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** There was a point in '96 when Yeltsin had finally agreed to meet with Dudayev, but Dudayev was assassinated before the meeting could take place. What happened?

**De Waal:** This is a classic case of Russian leadership, where the left hand didn't know what the right hand was doing. They were simultaneously planning a meeting between Dudayev and Yeltsin, and they were also planning to kill him, and I don't believe one effort was more sincere than the other. I think they were doing both tracks at the same time, and the meeting never happened because Dudayev was on his satellite phone and a guided missile tracked the signal and killed him. It was, in a way, an obvious blow to the Chechen cause; but in another way, it basically gave the leadership to [Aslan] Maskhadov, who was a much more moderate leader and with whom it was easier for the Russians to make peace.

I should tell you a good personal story, that makes it into the book,



Top to bottom: Postcard depicting the Memorial of the Martyrs of the Deportation of 1944, in Grozny, and the ruins of Grozny after the war of 1994–1996; Zherebtsova (Chechen Diary, 1995).



about that agreement. This, I think, was the most extraordinary story I did during my reporting in Chechnya. It was spring, probably May of 1996, and I went down to Chechnya with two French reporter friends and a Norwegian, Åsne Seierstad, who's now quite a famous author. The four of us drove into eastern Chechnya looking for Maskhadov. Dudayev had been killed about a month before, and Maskhadov was someone we respected. He was the rebel commander but a very thoughtful, quiet person—not a radical. He was someone you could talk to and the Russians could potentially talk to.

We went to his home village and spoke to some people we knew, and they took us outside the village in a jeep and walked us into the middle of this ancient beech forest. They told us to wait and left us there. A little while later they came back with Maskhadov, who was in his camouflage fatigues. He just sat down on a tree stump and gave us the interview right there in the forest. In fact, on the tape, which you have now at the Harriman, there should be some birdsong in the background.

Maskhadov was in a very good mood because basically he'd just gotten word that the negotiations with the OSCE had borne fruit and he was going to go to Moscow to meet Yeltsin and hopefully sign a peace deal in the Kremlin. This was incredible news, and we were the first people to hear of it. We had a massive exclusive. The trouble was, journalistically speaking, that we were in the middle of eastern Chechnya in the days before mobile phones, and by the time we got back to Grozny and filed our story, word had already gotten out. If we'd been

able to file a couple of hours before, we would have gotten our exclusive. We still had the story pretty much better than anyone else, but we didn't quite have the scoop. Anyway, it was still an amazing story, and we got Maskhadov's version of it and this extraordinary interview with him.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** That's incredible. In the end, Maskhadov worked out a peace deal with Yeltsin's national security adviser, Alexander Lebed, in August '96. What happened there?

**De Waal:** Speaking of left hand and right hand, there was an attempt by Russia to militarily win the conflict [in August 1996]. And this went disastrously wrong, and the Chechen rebels recaptured Grozny basically as Yeltsin was being inaugurated. A huge humiliation for the Kremlin. Shamil Basayev led the operation into Grozny, took the Russians by surprise, and reclaimed the center of the city. At which point the option was either to have another battle to retake the city or to sign a peace agreement. And Lebed, the tough-talking general who ended the Transnistria conflict in 1992, flew down to the region and met with the Chechens and signed a peace deal stipulating that there would be elections in Chechnya, the issue of status was going to be postponed for five years, and the Russians would withdraw. Some of these things happened, but other things didn't. The Russians did withdraw their troops from Chechnya; there were indeed elections, which the OSCE monitored; and Maskhadov was recognized as the elected president of Chechnya. But the status was not defined—as far as the Chechens were concerned, he was the president of

independent Chechnya, and as far as the Russians were concerned, he was the president of a Chechnya that was part of Russia. Lebed did the deal, but unfortunately Chechnya was so devastated that the whole place had collapsed into lawlessness and the Russians did absolutely nothing to financially support it. In this vacuum, Chechnya became the most frightening and horrible place to be, and Maskhadov basically didn't have the authority to run the place.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** And that's what eventually led to the second war.

**De Waal:** Yes, with many, many twists and turns. Chechnya during Independence Part Two was really a frightening place, a black hole. And who bears responsibility there? Well, the Chechens, for sure, because maybe they should have tried to get a better deal with Moscow. But, certainly, Moscow because they basically watched as the whole place collapsed and did nothing to support the reconstruction of Grozny. They created the conditions for the second military intervention under Putin in 1999.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** While writing the book, did you ever imagine that, after the temporary peace agreement that Russia and Chechnya had signed, Russia would invade again, knowing how misguided the war had been and how difficult it had been to achieve some sort of peace?

**De Waal:** I must admit I didn't anticipate it back in '96 and '97 when we were finishing the book. This was a hugely traumatic conflict, and I figured it would take Russia, as a whole, and Chechnya, in particular,





War, a drawing by ten-year-old Polina Zherebtsova from Chechen Diary (1995).

a long time to get over it. I guess I didn't anticipate how bad things would get in Chechnya. The complete internal collapse. In particular, the kidnappings that happened there. And, during the Yeltsin era, I had not anticipated the rise of Putin, who came to power using that conflict.

**Udensiva-Brenner:** Your book, and now these tapes, is an incredible resource. What is your hope for the tapes?

**De Waal:** I've passed from being the guy who was out there on the front lines seeing the bombs fall and getting my boots muddy—although I do still sometimes get my boots muddy—to being the guy who sits at the computer in my comfortable Western capsule and analyzes. But somewhere in me is that person who got out there and got all that empirical experience and believes that you can't really understand places as complex as the Caucasus unless you've been out there and talked to people on the ground and heard what they have to say.

When you interview someone and use it for a book, you're probably using at best 5 percent or just choosing some nice quotations. Probably a good half of the people interviewed are now dead. A lot of the Chechens died in the conflict, and some of the Russians have died of old age. I interviewed many Chechens, obviously—people like Aslan Maskhadov, the military leader who became the Chechen president; there was a chief negotiator called Usman Imaev who worked in the first Dudayev government who gave me an incredible interview both about the preindependence period and the negotiations. On the Russian side, people like Yegor Gaidar, Galina Starovoitova, Sergei Yushenkov, Arkady Volsky—all of those people have died; some of them were assassinated, unfortunately. They all had important stories to tell. So I think it's an important resource.

Some people are a bit sniffy about the technique of writing a book relying on oral testimony, and they would say that the only record is the

written record, but I don't believe that is the case. Archival record is also based on the subjective view of the person writing whatever document it is at the time. And the oral testimony of someone who is telling you what they saw—they're obviously putting a personal spin on it, and in a lot of cases, trying to put themselves in a good light. But I think a sensitive reader/listener can form his or her own judgment about the authenticity of what people are saying, and I think most of it has to be taken very seriously. The stories that people tell, particularly if they are corroborated by a few sources, are very valuable firsthand testimony of what happened. And, of course, in a war, a lot of it is never written down; a lot of it is who is in the room, who is out there, what was happening.

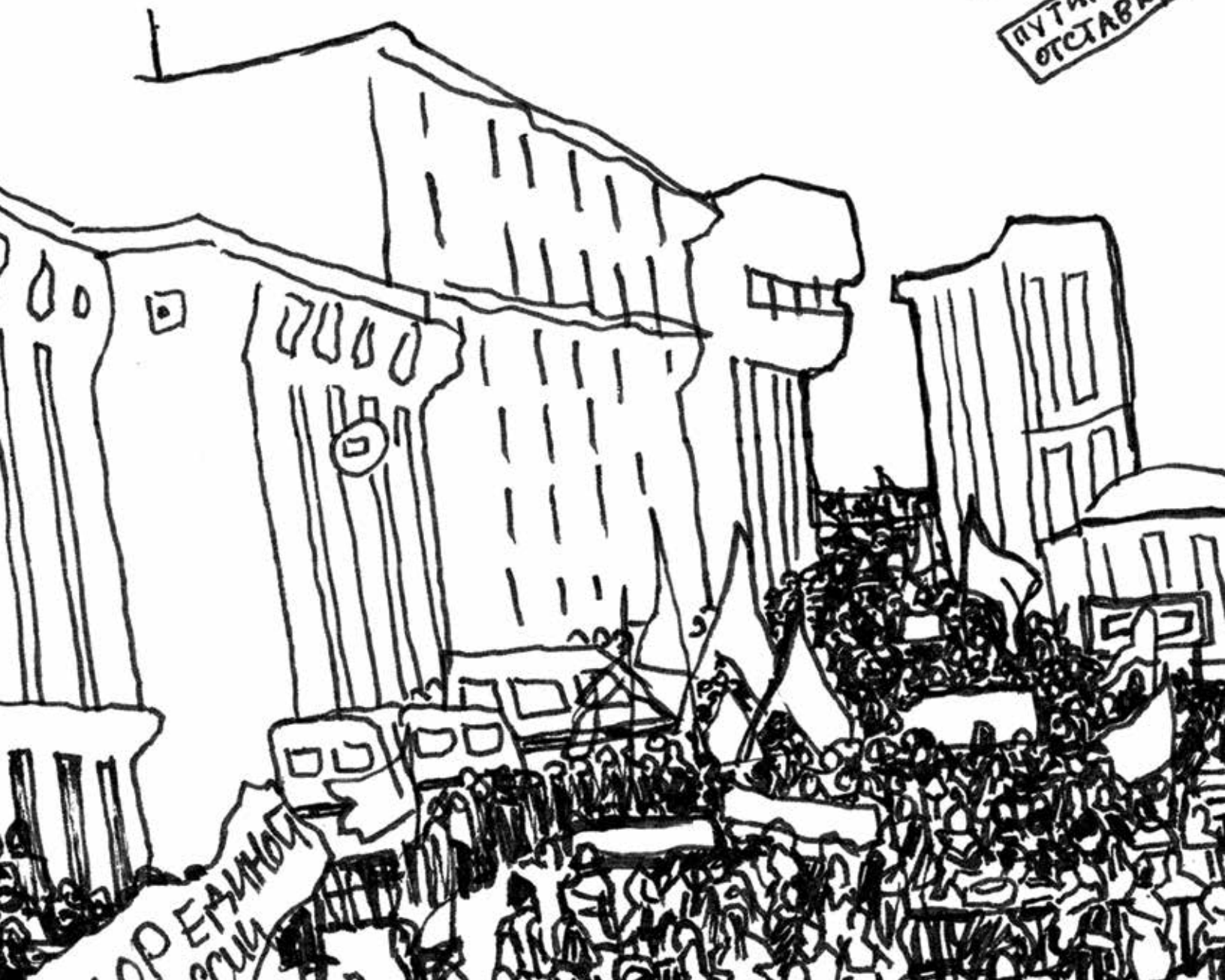
I want to say how grateful I am that these interviews are being preserved. I think they not only convey information but they also convey a kind of mood and aura from that era, which was very turbulent. I hope they are used wisely. ■

BY BELA SHAYEVICH

# VICTORIA LOMASKO

## DRAWING IN THE DARK

*Sakharov Avenue, December 24, 2011; sign on balloons:*  
RETIRE PUTIN. All images in this essay, with the exception  
of photo on page 44, © Victoria Lomasko.





**A**mid the swirling masses of the 2012 opposition protests in Moscow, a young woman stood still with her sketchbook, capturing their essence. Her tools were simple: pen and paper, and yet, they were sufficient for artist Victoria Lomasko to make drawings

deeper than photos, more evocative than words. “I approached each protest as a unique individual, trying to pin down its particular mood.” She always draws on location, with the energy of what’s happening pulsing through her. According to Lomasko, one of the most important advantages

that drawing during protests has over photography is the way it allows the artist to soak everything in, then unify it into the final product. While drawing huge crowds, Lomasko carefully selected the most expressive banners and individuals, forming an image of the demonstration in time—not







Above: Lomasko on the background of her series *The Girls of Nizhny Novgorod*; photo by Sergey Chernov. Opposite page: “I’ve been feeling slutty since December.” From the series *The Girls of Nizhny Novgorod*.

**Lomasko is concerned with being a witness to historical events, such as protests and political trials, or having close interactions with people, and drawing them as she experiences them.**

simply at the moment of having its snapshot taken. Another advantage: “Unlike a photographer, I can work in the dark.”

Victoria Lomasko was born in Serpukhov, a small town outside of Moscow, in 1978. The daughter of, in her words, “a failed artist,” she was pressed to follow in her father’s footsteps, despite her desire to become a writer instead. She received her bachelor’s in

book design, and enrolled in a master’s program at the Institute of Contemporary Art, only to find that her lack of interest in conceptualism made her an outsider. Lomasko had become interested in figurative drawing, which was nearly taboo in the Moscow art world of the early twenty-first century. But the criticisms of her instructors and peers didn’t stop her. Seeking a way out of the tyranny of conceptualism, she returned to her adolescent practice of going out in public and sketching strangers. “Soon, I began writing down what the people I drew were saying,” she says. “And that’s when something clicked.”

In the West, the union of text and image is associated with comics; the combination of text, image, and current events is known as “comics journalism.” While Lomasko is most often compared with Joe Sacco

and Marjane Satrapi, she actually takes her inspiration from Russian graphic traditions, calling herself a graphic reporter, producing graphic reportage. These traditions have nothing to do with laying out a narrative into panels. Instead, Lomasko is concerned with being a witness to historical events, such as protests and political trials, or having close interactions with people, and drawing them as she experiences them. She names her influences as the nineteenth-century graphic reporters who made drawings for newspapers before photography became the common practice; artists who captured the events of the Russian Revolution; then, those who were imprisoned in the gulag and trapped in Leningrad during the siege. Their purpose was not to stylize current events or translate them into narratives, but simply to illustrate them as they happened. For Lomasko, the text within the frame is always a direct, unedited quotation from whomever she is drawing—the complement to a subject’s image, their voice. The texts that surround Lomasko’s drawings describe her experiences with her subjects, their conversations, and the conditions in which she finds them. In her nuanced personal essays, she often reflects on her own involvement with these subjects, and the political situations they’re forced to encounter together.

Like many young journalists and documentarians, Lomasko started out too shy to directly approach strangers, preferring instead to eavesdrop on them. But she knew that she needed to learn how to interview people. So for her first independent foray into reportage, she chose as her protagonist her aunt, a middle-

aged, divorced woman living in a typical Russian provincial town. She traveled there to speak to her and her friends, and the result was “Feminine,” a visual essay on Russian women of a certain age confronting loneliness and economic hardship. The essay’s sensitive portraits are paired with quotations from the women, whose acrid humor would become a trademark of Lomasko’s work. But the accompanying text is the key counterbalance: while Lomasko depicts her subjects with empathy, they ultimately embody the traditional Russian values according to which she, as a single woman and artist, is a failure because she’s not

married and has no kids. The way Lomasko contends with this is one of the deepest insights of the piece.

“Feminine” is a remarkable introduction not only to Lomasko’s striking, iconographic visual style but also to her special brand of Russian feminism. Though she is pitied and looked down upon by her subjects, she ultimately identifies with them, embodying a commitment to depicting women’s struggles and triumphs from the perspective of the working class, where she comes from, and not an academic elite, dealing in theory and ideas. This approach—showcasing the friction between Lomasko’s roots and her status as a

cosmopolitan artist—creates a unique bridge between oppositional spheres of Russian culture, illuminating deep connections between seemingly contradictory worlds.

Before 2012, Lomasko’s work developed along two tracks: she documented trials and worked with marginalized groups. She began volunteering with an organization that assisted children in juvenile detention centers and would travel to them to give drawing lessons. What began as a way to gain access to the institutions in aims of drawing them turned into a long-term volunteer project. In addition to teaching the children to draw, listening to them,





Barclays Center, Brooklyn,  
New York (2017). Image from  
the series *U.S. Tour* (2017),  
courtesy of Victoria Lomasko.





and telling their stories, Lomasko collected their work and showed it in art galleries. She also compiled her lessons into a program for teaching drawing in prison.

As her reputation grew, humanitarian nonprofits began reaching out to her. She worked with organizations like the St. Petersburg LGBT film festival Side by Side and Oxfam's HIV/AIDS initiative to create materials on critically marginalized groups. Part of the reason these groups wanted drawings, Lomasko says, is that they preserve the anonymity of the vulnerable while still telling their stories. The intimacy she cultivates with many of her subjects, combined with the safety of drawing, leads to texts and images whose effect is both stirring and gradual, something to sit with and take in.

Perhaps Lomasko's most powerful series is *The Girls of Nizhny Novgorod*, about sex workers in the small industrial city. Lomasko was able to meet these women through an activist who brought them hygienic supplies and tested them for HIV. She would not have otherwise had the opportunity to speak to so many of these women. Working with the activist, she only had five to fifteen minutes to talk to and draw each woman, often while her subject was being tested for HIV. The drawings reflect this urgency: they were completed in thick black marker, which allowed Lomasko to work as quickly as possible. As a result, they are rough and bold, like woodcuts, and the women's compressed anger flares through in their cutting and concise comments on men and money. "I have a degree; I'm not about to sweep stairwells," says one.

"A lot of them show up just to chat," says another. "We ought to raise the prices for talking—our brains are worth more."

In September 2011, Vladimir Putin announced that in the upcoming election he would run for president, brandishing the final nail for the coffin of Russian democracy. In Moscow and other cities, this announcement set off a wave of protests the likes of which had not been seen since the fall of the Soviet Union. "In the early '90s, I was a teenager living in Serpukhov, and, although it is only 200 kilometers from Moscow, no one there would have dreamed of taking the train and attending the protests. We just watched them on TV. So when Moscow was once again swept by demonstrations, I resolved not to miss a single one," says Lomasko. Over the course of 2011 and 2012, Lomasko drew *A Chronicle of Resistance*, documenting demonstrations, rallies, and political trials, including the trial of Pussy Riot. The rousing drawings from this series were published in oppositionist

Russian publications and abroad as documentation and agitprop.

Lomasko did not shy away from the contradictions of the movement, which galvanized many kinds of different groups, bringing them together. She was more interested in showing them all side by side, in dialogue, and many of her strongest pieces are diptychs of people expressing opposing viewpoints. She was not trying to produce propaganda, but using the opportunity of everyone being out in the street to show how the many marginalized voices she had been drawing for years come together to shout in discordant unison.

"The verdict is overturned, and the case will be sent back to the district court for retrial. Osipova will remain in police custody until March 15."

Приговор  
отменён,  
Дело возвращается  
в районный суд  
на новое  
рассмотрение.  
Осипова  
остаётся  
под арестом  
до  
15  
марта.





Lomasko began finding it increasingly difficult to publish and show her work in Russia. What was worse, many of the nonprofit organizations she had worked for were also feeling the squeeze, both politically and financially.

She grew in renown, and her drawings began to be shown in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and throughout Europe. Alongside gallery exhibitions, Lomasko participated in DIY shows. For instance, at Occupy Abai, Moscow's 2012 version of Occupy Wall Street, Lomasko's drawings from the protest camp were displayed in the camp, to the delight of the protesters. Her drawings for *Volya* (Will), a samizdat anarchist

newspaper, were wheeled through the city on a cart.

At the same time, Lomasko joined forces with artist and critic Nadia Plungian to curate "The Feminist Pencil," a show of women's socially engaged graphic art, mostly from Russia. The work in the show had notably low commercial viability for its political content and media and was created by mostly unknown women artists. It was radical and

Woman holding flowers: "Are the police with the people?"

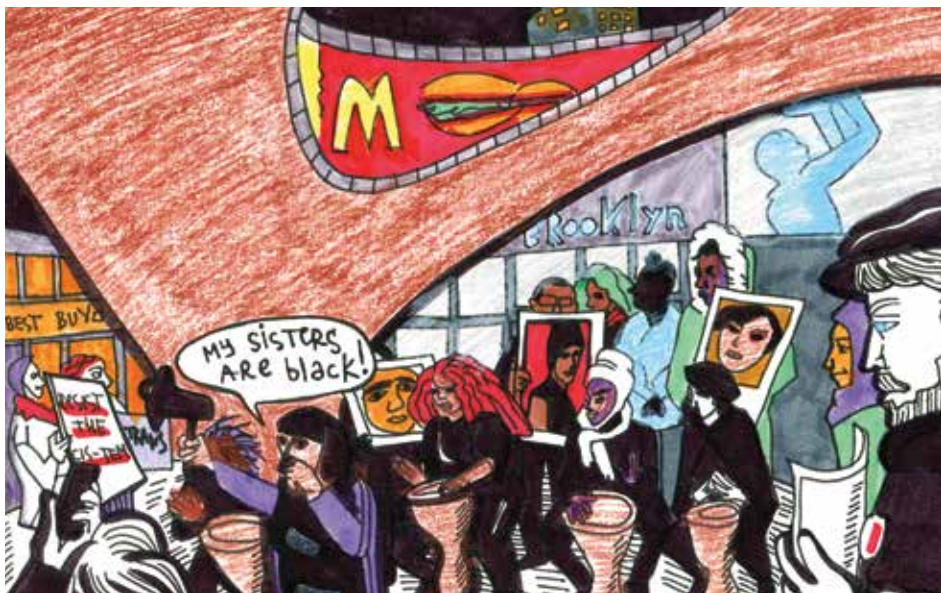




inspired radical opposition: there were cases of visitors to the gallery defacing it. Nonetheless, Lomasko and Plungian cocurated a second iteration, "Feminist Pencil 2," and it traveled to St. Petersburg, Oslo, and Berlin, where they held workshops and lectures open to the public.

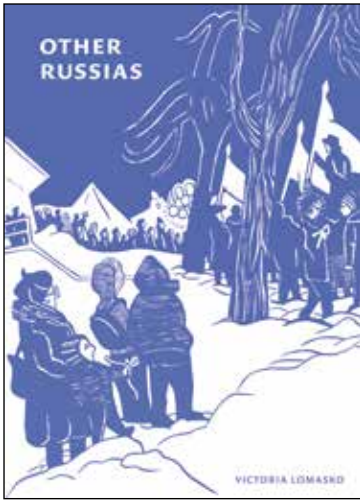
With Putin's reelection, the budding opposition movement found itself squashed. Harsh prison sentences were doled out to activists, such as Pussy Riot and Taisiya Osipova, as well as everyday people who'd come to the protests, such as the defendants in the 2012 Bolotnoe Delo trials. Lomasko began finding it increasingly difficult to publish and show her work in Russia. What was worse, many of the nonprofit organizations she had worked for were also feeling the squeeze, both politically and financially. Everywhere she looked, there was less and less opportunity and a growing sense of doom.

However, new opportunities had meanwhile blossomed outside of Russia. A grassroots feminist group in Kyrgyzstan invited her to Bishkek to teach a workshop. With this trip, Lomasko began her exploration of the post-Soviet landscape, focusing on gender and the vestiges of Russian and Soviet imperialism. In subsequent years, she traveled to Dagestan, Georgia, and Armenia, producing colorful series that explore these territories with fresh eyes. She recounts how the head of St. Petersburg's Center for Independent Sociological Research was shocked by her report on Tbilisi. "That's not the Georgia I visited," he told her. And how *could* it be? While people rolled out the red carpet for the high-ranking sociologist, Lomasko embedded herself in grassroots



Top to bottom: Pittsburgh; Brooklyn Subway; Trans Black Women. All from Lomasko's series *U.S. Tour* (2017).





*Other Russias*  
Victoria Lomasko  
Translated from the Russian  
by Thomas Campbell  
n+1 Foundation (2017)  
ISBN 978-0-997-03184-3  
[www.nplusonemag.com](http://www.nplusonemag.com)

activist groups that she worked with, learning about the activists and their battles organically, alongside the work she did with them. Plus, as a woman and artist in a society that takes neither identity very seriously, she was able to have the kind of interactions that gave her a ground-level perspective—something an official researcher would have to struggle to find. Eventually, Lomasko hopes to travel to all the former Soviet republics and create a compendium of her essays. “In the post-Soviet landscape,” she says, “one sees many of the same issues that affect people in the middle of Russia, but through a new lens.”

In March 2017, a collection of Lomasko’s reportage was published by the Brooklyn publishing house

n+1 as *Other Russias*. It is not only Lomasko’s first book in English but also the first time her work has been collected. It was republished by Penguin UK in June and is to be translated into a number of languages. The book is divided into two sections: “Invisible” and “Angry.” The first includes many of her stories about marginalized groups from before the 2012 protests, and the latter focuses on opposition in Russia from 2012 to 2016, ending with the grassroots social movements led by Moscow park defenders and long-haul truckers. To support the release of her book, Lomasko embarked on a U.S. book tour, including a stop at the Harriman Institute. After her talk, Lomasko was confronted by a group



НАБЛЮДАТЕЛИ  
НАБЛЮДАЮТ  
ЗА ПОДСЧЁТОМ  
ГОЛОСОВ





of individuals from the audience seemingly there to express the views of the Russian government, barraging her with questions about why she supported Pussy Riot. The tension in the otherwise supportive room was an important reminder that the warm reception she meets from Western audiences is but a reprieve from Russia's wintry political climate. "I just want the Russian government to follow its own laws," she told one of the men confronting her. "Since when are you a lawyer?" he retorted. "I'm not," she calmly replied, and moved on to the next question. ■

*Bela Shayevich is an artist and translator living in Brooklyn. She received her M.A. in Russian translation from Columbia in 2007.*

*Right: Cathedral of Learning, University of Pittsburgh. From the series U.S. Tour (2017).  
Left: Election observers observing the vote count (March 4, 2012).*





# Alumni & Postdoc Notes



Sergei Antonov

I joined the Department of History at Yale University as a tenure-track assistant professor. I specialize in modern Russia after 1800, with particular interest in politics, culture, and society in the late imperial period (ca. 1850–1917). My research focuses on the history of Russian law, conceived broadly to include not only legislation and legal doctrines, but also ways in which legal norms and institutions impacted the daily practices of ordinary people.

My first book, *Bankrupts and Usurers of Imperial Russia: Debt, Property, and the Law in the Age of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy*, was released by Harvard University Press in 2016. Based on close readings of previously unexamined court cases, it is the first full-length history of the culture of personal debt in Russia. My current research projects focus on the culture of crime and criminal justice in late imperial Russia as well as on Russian serfdom as a legal regime.

A native of Moscow, I came to the U.S. with my family in 1992 and received my undergraduate education at Washington and Lee University and at University College, Oxford. I also hold a J.D. from NYU Law and practiced law in New York City prior to becoming a historian. At Columbia, I studied under Professor Richard Wortman and happily participated in numerous Harriman Institute and Columbia workshops and seminars. Beginning in 2013, I also developed and taught a number of advanced seminars on Russian history at Columbia as adjunct assistant professor. I am extremely grateful to the Harriman Institute for its generous support over the years.

—[Sergei Antonov](#) (Ph.D., History, 2011; Harriman Postdoctoral Fellow, 2012–2013)

I got my M.A. from Columbia in 1963, the Certificate of the Harriman Institute in 1964, and my Ph.D. from Columbia in 1966. I had taken intensive Russian at Cambridge University when I was an officer-cadet in the British Army and had been seconded to British Intelligence after service in Special Forces in Omagh, Northern Ireland. The program was called the “Joint Services School for Linguists.” I mustered out with the rating of “interpreter,” Brit-speak for “analyst.” I then did a degree at Oxford University’s Merton College in Persian-Turkish-Arabic, and instead of taking up a posting to Iran to guard British Petroleum’s pipeline, I left the army and emigrated to Canada, where I set up the Russian program at Carleton University in Ottawa. After four years, I emigrated to the United States; through the good offices of Robert Maguire I got my first American job at Dartmouth, while I was completing the dissertation. I also taught at the University of Virginia and the University of Arizona. I retired from the University of Arizona as Professor Emeritus in 2010. Since then, while I have continued to publish articles, my main focus has been organizing my research archives, which are housed at Harvard University.

One archive is the basis for a book, coauthored with my wife, Carol Garrard, *The Bones of Berdichev: The Life and Fate of Vasily Grossman*, originally published in 1996

by The Free Press; second edition published by Pen & Sword Military Ltd. Barnsley (U.K., 2012). This book won the Giovanni Comisso Premio, the Italian national prize for history/biography, and has been translated into Spanish and Italian. It is composed of documents related to Grossman's life, the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Union, and the repression of Soviet writers, and includes material from the secret police's own archive, "The Archive of the October Revolution."

The Houghton Library at Harvard has also accepted the research archive for our book *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent: Faith and Power in the New Russia* (Princeton University Press, 2008; Oxford, 2009). However, it has not been catalogued and made available on the internet yet. This book was the result of my year as a Wilson Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C., 2004–5. The following year I served as a senior associate member for Trinity term at St. Antony's College, Oxford University.

—**John Garrard** (M.A., 1963; Russian Institute Certificate, 1964; Ph.D., History, 1966)

I received my B.A. from Dartmouth (2005) and Ph.D. from Columbia University (2011), where I was fortunate to hold a Harriman Junior Fellowship (2010–2011). I am currently assistant professor and director of graduate studies in the Slavic Department at the University of Kansas. Beginning in 2018, I will also be editor of the *Tolstoy Studies Journal*. My training and core specialization are in nineteenth-century Russian literature, from the age of the novel through the fin de siècle. I have published an edited volume, *Russian Writers and the Fin de Siècle—The Twilight of Realism* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), as well as a special issue of the *Tolstoy Studies Journal: Anna Karenina in the 21st Century*. I have a monograph forthcoming in 2018, *Russian Grotesque Realism: The Great Reforms and Gentry Decline* (Ohio State University Press), for which I was awarded a Harriman First-Book Subvention grant, as well as another edited volume, *Beyond Moscow: Reading Russia's Regional Identities and Initiatives* (Routledge). I have written over twenty academic articles, and my writing for the public has appeared in Salon.com, the *New Republic*, Business Insider, and *Los Angeles Review of Books*.

—**Ani Kokobobo** (Ph.D., Slavic Languages, 2011)

After graduating from Williams College in 1961, I entered the Russian Institute and received an M.A. and Russian Institute Certificate in 1965. My M.A. Certificate essay on post-World War II Soviet historical writing on aspects of German history was directed by Professor Alexander Dallin. Although when I came to Columbia I expected to specialize in the history of the Soviet period, I soon shifted to the study of the institutions and officials of late imperial Russia, inspired by Professor Marc Raeff, who ended up directing my Ph.D. work. During the academic year 1967–68,

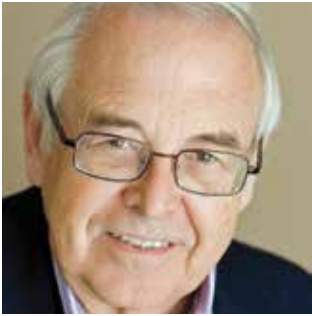


John Garrard



Ani Kokobobo





Richard G. Robbins, Jr.



Lucia Savchik

I spent ten months in the Soviet Union doing research for my dissertation, guided by Professor P. A. Zaionchkovsky. I defended in 1970.

I began teaching Russian history at the University of New Mexico (UNM) in 1969 and in the fall of 1975 had the good fortune to spend a semester at Columbia as senior research fellow at the Russian Institute. I returned to the USSR/Russia for extended periods of research in 1976, 1981, 1990, and 2003, supported by IREX and/or Fulbright-Hays grants. While at UNM I published two books: *Famine in Russia, 1891–1892: The Imperial Government Responds to a Crisis* (Columbia U.P., 1975) and *The Tsar's Viceroy: Russian Provincial Governors in the Last Years of the Empire* (Cornell U.P., 1987). From 1995 to 2001, I served as chairman of the History Department.

I retired in 2007 and now live with my wife, Catherine, in San Francisco, not far from our daughter and three grandchildren. When I moved to the Bay Area, I joined the local Institute for Historical Study, a lively group of independent scholars, and for three years served as its president. I also continue to do some teaching under the auspices of the SF State University's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. My latest book, *Overtaken by the Night: One Russian's Journey through Peace, War, Revolution, and Terror*, a biography of Vladimir Dzhunkovsky, was published this fall, in November 2017, by the University of Pittsburgh Press.

—**Richard G. Robbins, Jr.** (M.A. and Russian Institute Certificate, 1965; Ph.D., History, 1970)

In my apartment overlooking the tracks of Bishkek's main train station, I often peered down to watch passengers queue for the Bishkek-Moscow line. I had graduated with a B.A. in political science and Russian studies from Dalhousie University and was working as a consultant in postconflict stabilization at Search for Common Ground and as a freelance writer on Russian politics for Mic. I intended to complete a master's degree at some point but hadn't yet been hit over the head with a real focus apart from post-Soviet studies. It was in that old apartment complex, studying the rail tracks, that I fully realized the interconnectedness of migration and development and began to examine the effects of Soviet legacies on the region. I never took that train, but the following spring, I began my degree in international affairs, with a focus on political and economic development in former Soviet states at SIPA, and joined the Harriman Institute as a research assistant. At the Institute I found endless resources, knowledge, and camaraderie, without which my research and growth would not have been possible.

I currently work as an international consultant for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Vienna, where I focus on policy and liaison with the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia. In this capacity I have the opportunity to remain connected to the region on a political and academic level and to interact with both local and international players armed with the knowledge and sensitivities the region demands. I am also a contributor and the managing editor for the *Forced Migration Forum*, a scholarly policy-platform borne out of a course at Columbia, and have contributed to *EurasiaNet* and the *Truman National Security Project*. I am a coauthor of the report "A Crowdfunding Platform for the Moldovan Diaspora" (Columbia and IOM) and of "Spheres of Influence in the Eurasian Theater" (St. Antony's College, Oxford).

—**Lucia Savchik** (M.A., SIPA, 2017)

I received my Ph.D. from Columbia in 1999 and was a Harriman Institute Postdoctoral Fellow in 1999–2000. After teaching for a year at the University of Iowa, I took a tenure-track position at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago, where I have taught ever since. I received an SSRC Postdoctoral Fellowship in 2004. My book, *Threads of Empire: Loyalty and Tsarist Authority in Bashkiria, 1555–1917* (Studies of the Harriman Institute), was awarded a First Book Subvention Prize by the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies. In fall 2016, I was a Short-Term Fellow at New York University’s Jordan Center for the Advanced Study of Russia, where I began a new project on the history of sugar as a commodity in late imperial Russia. I am currently professor of history at Northeastern Illinois University and chair of the History Department.

—**Charles Steinwedel** (Ph.D., History, 1999; Harriman Postdoctoral Fellow, 1999–2000)

I am an associate professor of history at Yale University. My research focuses on European intellectual history, particularly twentieth- and twenty-first century Central and Eastern Europe. I am the translator of Michał Głowiński’s *The Black Seasons* and the author of *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation’s Life and Death in Marxism, 1918–1968* and *The Taste of Ashes: The Afterlife of Totalitarianism in Eastern Europe*. My book about the 2013–2014 revolution in Ukraine, *The Ukrainian Night: An Intimate History of Revolution*, is forthcoming with Yale University Press in January 2018; presently I am at work on a longer book project titled “Phenomenological Encounters: Scenes from Central Europe.” My recent essays include “Surreal Love in Prague” (*TLS*); “Out of the Desert: A Heidegger for Poland” (*TLS*); “Rescuing the Yiddish Ukraine” (*New York Review of Books*); “Rachelka’s Tablecloth: Poles and Jews, Intimacy and Fragility ‘on the Periphery of the Holocaust,’” (*Tr@nsit Online*); “Can We See Ideas? On Evocation, Experience, and Empathy” (*Modern European Intellectual History*); “Entscheidung am Majdan: Eine Phänomenologie der Ukrainischen Revolution” (*Lettre International*); “Reading Tony Judt in Wartime Ukraine” (*New Yorker*); and “The Bard of Eastern Ukraine, Where Things Are Falling Apart.” (*New Yorker*).

—**Marci Shore** (Harriman Postdoctoral Fellow, 2001–2002)



Charles Steinwedel



Marci Shore



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# A Note to Our Alumni

We're excited to continue revitalizing the Harriman community with alumni engagement, networking opportunities, career resources, and social events for everyone with a connection to the institute. Please see a list of upcoming events below, and stay tuned for announcements of alumni-specific events already in the works for 2018. Find our alumni groups on Facebook and LinkedIn to connect with other alumni, and stay up to date about our happenings throughout the year.

For any alumni event suggestions or questions, please reach out to alumni chair Stephen Szypulski at [sws2133@columbia.edu](mailto:sws2133@columbia.edu).

## Upcoming Events

Tuesday, December 12, 2017: Book Talk—*Gorbachev: His Life and Times* by William Taubman. The Penn Club of New York, 6:30 p.m. To attend, RSVP to [rld2130@columbia.edu](mailto:rld2130@columbia.edu).

Wednesday, January 24, 2018: Selected Shorts: Love, Laughter, and Vodka with Anton Chekhov; Symphony Space, 7:30 p.m. To reserve tickets, RSVP to [rld2130@columbia.edu](mailto:rld2130@columbia.edu).

# Giving to Harriman

The Harriman Institute relies on the generosity of individuals like you who share a belief in our core mission to promote the study of Russia, Eurasia, and Eastern Europe in this ever more globalized era, and to train specialists who bring in-depth regional knowledge and understanding to a wide variety of career and life paths.

Please join with us in giving back to the Harriman Institute. Visit [www.giving.columbia.edu](http://www.giving.columbia.edu), call 212-854-6239, or mail your gift to:

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