

COLUMBIA | HARRIMAN INSTITUTE Russian, Eurasian, and East European Studies

Harriman Magazine is published biannually by the Harriman Institute.

Managing Editor: Ronald Meyer Editor: Masha Udensiva-Brenner

Comments, suggestions, or address changes may be e-mailed to Masha Udensiva-Brenner at mu2159@columbia.edu.

Cover photo by Artem Drachev: Demonstration in Moscow on Bolotnaya Square, May 6, 2012.

Design and Production: Columbia Creative

Harriman Institute Kimberly Marten, Acting Director (2012–2013) Timothy Frye, Director Alla Rachkov, Associate Director Lydia C. Hamilton, Program Manager, Alumni and Student Affairs

Harriman Institute Columbia University 420 West 118 Street New York, NY 10027

Tel: 212-854-4623 Fax: 212-666-3481

For the latest news and updates about the Harriman Institute, visit www.harriman.columbia.edu.

Stay connected through Facebook and Twitter!



www.twitter.com/HarrimanInst



www.facebook.com/pages/The-Harriman-Institute/165273220175750



elcome to the inaugural issue of the Harriman Magazine. Our hope is that the magazine will allow us to develop deeper and more sustained ties with the alumni of the Institute—our MARS degree recipients and Harriman Certificate holders—as well as with our visiting scholars and postdoctoral fellows, as they progress in their careers. The Alumni Notes section will be a permanent feature; in the next issue we will begin publishing Postdoc Notes—so please send us your information.

The heart of the magazine will feature in-depth profiles and stories about Institute alumni, visitors, faculty, and students and their projects. Our inaugural issue profiles two alums who have worn many hats at Harriman. Dr. Maria Sonevytsky was our first Ukrainian Studies coordinator. She earned her Ph.D. in ethnomusicology at Columbia as well as a Harriman Certificate, and most recently has been the spring 2013 postdoctoral research fellow and course instructor supported by the Petro Jacyk fund at Harriman. Professor Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy first came to Columbia in the 1970s as a graduate student. Cathy earned her Ph.D. in the Department of Slavic Languages as well as what was then a Russian Institute Certificate and went on to chair the Barnard Slavic Department and direct the Harriman Institute for many years. She was honored as our alumna of the year in 2012.

The issue opens with a piece by journalist Svetlana Reiter, our 2013 Paul Klebnikov Russian Civil Society Fellow. Svetlana is closely following the legal proceedings against those who were arrested at the Bolotnaya Square demonstration in Moscow last spring. Our cover photo, by Artem Drachev, was taken at that May 6, 2012, Bolotnaya event.

The magazine highlights two faculty projects. Professor Timothy Frye of the Columbia Political Science Department (who has been on leave from his role as Harriman director this past year) outlines his joint work with the Higher School of Economics in Moscow. Three current Columbia Ph.D. students who are on his HSE team also provide brief summaries of their experiences on the project. And Professor Alexander Cooley of the Barnard Political Science Department is interviewed about his new book on Russian, Chinese, and U.S. competition in Central Asia, Great Games, Local Rules, which has garnered a lot of buzz among both policymakers and academics.

Last but not least, Bradley Gorski, a Ph.D. student in Columbia's Department of Slavic Languages, interviews the leading Russian writer Mikhail Shishkin. Shishkin's novel Maidenhair has been shortlisted for Best Translated Book of 2013 by the University of Rochester's Three Percent translation resource center. He has been in residence for a month at Harriman this spring, teaching a course on "Classics and Politics in Contemporary

The Harriman Magazine will be published twice a year. We're planning the fall issue now and would love to hear your thoughts about the magazine and your ideas for future stories.

Kimberly Marten Acting Director, Harriman Institute, 2012-2013





4 On the Cover

The Usual Suspects: Protesting in Russia By Svetlana Reiter

Svetlana Reiter, a Moscow-based journalist and 2013 Paul Klebnikov Fellow at the Harriman Institute, deftly charts the rise and fall of the protest movement in Moscow, from the December 2011 demonstration protesting the illegitimate victory of the United Russian Party, when "irate citizens" and the "creative classes" set out for a demonstration on Chistye Prudy "to protest lying," to the May 6, 2012, demonstration on Bolotnaya Square, which ended in arrests and a splintered opposition.

10

<u>Interview with Maria Sonevytsky</u> By Ronald Meyer

Harriman postdoc Maria Sonevytsky finds herself at the intersection of Ukrainian studies, ethnomusicology, and musical performance, all of which feed into her research on "Wild Music: Ideologies of Exoticism in Two Ukrainian Borderlands" and the performance-based "Chornobyl Songs Project."

16

Great Games, Local Rules, and the Shifting Dynamics of a Multipolar World: An Interview with Alexander Cooley
By Masha Udensiva-Brenner

Alexander Cooley discusses the complex dynamics between the Central Asian states and Russia, China, and the United States—the "great powers" vying for influence in the region—and argues that Central Asia is a window on the future of a multipolar world.







Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy in Profile By Masha Udensiva-Brenner

Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy became the Harriman Institute's first female director in 2001 and received the 2012 Harriman Institute Alumna of the Year award. Read about her life, her innovative approach to scholarship, and her contributions to the Harriman Institute.

32

My Two Educations By Timothy Frye

In 2010, Harriman Institute Director Timothy Frye and his colleague Andrei Yakovlev received a \$1.8 million grant from the Russian government to establish the Center for the Study of Institutions and Development (CSID). Not only did they learn a great deal about Russia's regional governments, but they also discovered the challenges of running a transparent research institution in contemporary Russia.

36

Student Perspectives on CSID By Noah Buckley, Israel Marques, and David Szakonyi

An Interview with Mikhail Shihskin By Bradley Gorski

According to prize-winning novelist Mikhail Shishkin, "all my books are about what cannot be conveyed in words ... A writer is someone who must take the language he is given, the most impoverished and dead language, and make it great and powerful ... In one way or another, all my texts are about the power of the word."

Alumni Notes

Erin R. Carll (MARS, 2010) Mark Mozur (Harriman Certificate, 2010) Emily Nelson (MARS, 2010) Lara J. Nettelfield (Ph.D., Political Science, 2001) Nataliya Rovenskaya (MARS, 2011) Peter Zalmayev (MARS, 2008)

Giving to Harriman



On March 8, 2013, International Women's Day, OVDinfo.org reported 24 arrests at the demonstration "Feminism Is Liberation" held on Moscow's Novopushkinskii Square. "The police roughly seized people outside the territory of the demonstration as well as on the agreed-upon territory," and then took them to the station in police vans, the portal records. Moreover, those arrested have stated that they were beaten in transit. The central office for the capital police

responded that on that day in Novopushkinskii Square, a demonstration took place that had been approved by authorities, in which approximately 100 people took part. Interfax carried the following explanation of the events from the press service for the Central Administration of the Moscow Ministry for Internal Affairs: "Toward the end of the demonstration a group of citizens, advancing slogans not agreed upon earlier and which violated the rules pertaining





to conducting the demonstration, was taken into custody." One of those detained informed Gazeta.Ru that the Krasnoselskaya OVD (Department of Internal Affairs) "did not admit them and that they were carted around in the police van for two hours," before finally ending up in the Krasnopresenskaya OVD. She maintained that the arrests at the demonstration for gender equality were carried out roughly: members of law enforcement agencies kicked activists by the police vans, one of the members under arrest lost consciousness, and one of the women suffered an injury to her arm. One of the arrested members informed the press that they all had to wait around in the police station for more than an hour, and that the police refused to inform them of the reason for their arrest or write up the charges. "We were merely sent," an unnamed person related. Later it was reported that they had begun to release those under arrest in the police stations: some were charged with breaking Article

The spontaneous demonstration on Chistye Prudy is rightly considered the starting point of the protests.

20.2 for violating rules pertaining to the conducting of meetings, rallies, etc.; others were released after making a statement. Meanwhile, OVD-Info reports that three young women under arrest face charges of breaking Article 19.3 (disobeying the orders of a police officer). Earlier on the same day, near the Moscow office of the Federal Prison Service, the police arrested

Members of law enforcement agencies kicked activists by the police vans, one of the members under arrest lost consciousness, and one of the women had her arm injured.

10 lonely picketers supporting Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alekhina, members of Pussy Riot, the feminist punk-rock group. These news items represent a fair indication of the present state of Russian protests that began in the winter of 2011.

The spontaneous demonstration on Chistye Prudy is rightly considered the starting point of the protests. On December 5, 2012, after the Duma elections, the citizens of the city, incensed by what they considered to be the illegitimate victory of the United Russia Party, made their way to the Griboyedov monument.

I remember that day very well, as I remember down to the tiniest details what preceded it, namely, Election Day. On that day I got up at 7:00, since like most of my colleagues and friends, I was going to be an observer in a mobile brigade that would visit polling stations at the first sign of election tampering. I'll be cautious and put the number of these signs at around 40. The brigades that had been organized by Citizen Observer were comprised of two people, a journalist and a lawyer. I was one of the journalists, but I would like to look a bit more closely at the lawyer paired with me: Maria V. had earned her legal degree a long time ago, but for all practical purposes had never worked in her specialty.

Her story strikes me as typical for Russia of the late Putin era. A good-looking blonde about 40 who drives a jeep of alarming proportions, Masha married early and, as they say, well. Her husband was a classmate who had had his fill of the law and started working in construction. Five years ago he received a large government order for the construction of the residence of an important bureaucrat. Afterwards his competitors fabricated a criminal case against him, and then against their son. Later, just to make sure, they kidnapped the son's daughter. After the girl, fortunately, was rescued (with the assistance of a public prosecutor and enormous administrative resources), Masha decided to be an observer for the parliamentary elections. "Because I simply hate all this," she explained to me, adding later: "But I might start a fight at the election polls." I think a lot of people felt the same. That day we traveled to five polling places and in each one witnessed infringements of varying degrees of seriousness. The most common: attempts made on various pretexts to send the observer away from the polling place; not allowing the observer to move freely around the polling place; forbidding taking photographs; attempts to beat the observer; forbidding the observer to be present during the vote count; not delivering the count on time.





First observers were not allowed to enter the polling stations, and then the press. Those who managed to make their way inside the polling station were not allowed to see the ballot-box before it was sealed. There were scandals of various sorts: at the polling station near the Preobrazhenskaya metro stop the corpulent chairman of the election committee kicked out the second observer from the Yabloko Party. The remaining observers were corralled into an area enclosed by school desks, and the ballot boxes resourcefully obscured by the corpulent woman could barely be seen. "The fact that ballots were being deposited," one of the observers reported, "could only be determined by a dull thud." In several polling stations the observers were seated so that they couldn't see the ballot boxes, they were shouted at and treated rudely. One of the observers from KPRF (Communist Party of the Russian Federation) was beaten several meters from the polling site. All this notwithstanding, United Russia, according to the testimony of observers, barely garnered 30 percent of the vote, but the results of the election, if you are to believe Russian national television (which nobody has believed for a long time) comprised the impossible number of 144 percent.

On the next day, those who would later be labeled "irate citizens" and the "creative classes" set out for the

At that moment they had a single goal—to stop the lying. Unfortunately, they didn't succeed.

Griboyedov monument on Chistye Prudy. Correspondents for Lenta.Ru and bloggers who went to Chistye Prudy say that it's extremely difficult to estimate the number of people on account of the big crowds, but the majority agree that at least 5,000 people came to Chistoprudnyi Boulevard. At one point officers of the MVD stopped

letting people inside; as a result a large crowd gathered on the boulevard and near the metro station. Traffic on Chistoprudnyi Boulevard ground to a halt, people occupied the tram tracks. A correspondent for Interfax puts the number of people directly in front of the stage at 1,500.

Among them was my close friend, the mathematician Vasily Shabat: 40 years old, good job, three children, a two-car family. He could live and enjoy his prosperity and tranquility, but to his great misfortune he became an election observer. I remember how he called me on December 5, and told me in a trembling voice that at his polling station United Russia received 25 percent of the votes, and Yabloko 64. As he was instructed at the training sessions, Vasya took home a copy of the ballot count, which had been stamped and signed by members of the election commission, and the next morning decided to compare the results with the report on the website of the Central Election Commission. An experienced mathematician, Vasya couldn't believe his eyes when he saw the following totals in the corresponding columns: United Russia 64%, Yabloko 25%.

People went to that first winter demonstration to protest lying, and that bound together these essentially very diverse groups of people, like cement binds bricks.

At that moment they had a single goal to stop the lying.

Unfortunately, they didn't succeed. Exactly a year later, when activism on the part of protesters had for all practical purposes reached the zero mark and you didn't have 50,000 people coming out for a demonstration, but if you're lucky a hundred, I interviewed one of the most remarkable men of our time, the human rights activist Sergey Adamovich Kovalyov. The well-known dissident, who had stoically passed through all the circles of Soviet hell—from underground activity and samizdat to grinding poverty in camp barracks—used the following remarkable formulation to explain the difference

When you see injustice and lying, you simply need to act. You need to get to the truth. The main thing is not to stop.

between the former dissidents and today's "street Fronde." In answer to my question about his thoughts on the street protests, Kovalyov answered:

Despite what I will say in a moment, this phenomenon is both long in coming and unexpected. Its foundation was laid by the indignation at the lying: "Enough lying, no election took place. Nobody chose you, you appointed yourselves, you came to an arrangement back on September 24 about who would be president and who would be premier." And in that sense, and in that sense only, the street protests have something in common with the dissidence movement of the 1960s-'80s. A moral impulse was the main reason then and is now as well. In every other regard, these phenomena are different. On my part, being a representative of the Paleozoic era, I prefer the dissident movement. You see, for example, despite our naiveté we took a deeper look at things. The movement today places the same value on everything, the same two kopecks: housing problems and the separation of powers; the preservation of architectural treasures or afforestation and the administration of justice. But in reality there are only three things outside politics and above politics: honest elections with transparent competition among political opponents, an independent justice system, and independent mass media.

I think that over the course of a year we have forgotten about the most important things, and have frittered away our energies. The "Bolotnaya Square case," which began after the disturbances that took place at the last mass meeting of the opposition on May 6, has done a good job of splitting the "creative class" into two unequal groups: some are of the opinion

that it's not at all necessary to stand up for the 20 people arrested and charged in the disturbances ("They're guilty, they should have minded their own business"). Some are mad at the Coordination Committee of the Opposition ("Why aren't they doing anything?"). Others are looking for betrayers among the opposition's ranks; some are of the opinion that demonstrations are not enough and are demanding stern measures.

I think that engaging in this blame game has caused us to forget the main thing: When you see injustice and lying, you simply need to act. You need to get to the truth.

It's not important how you do thisalone or with somebody else.

The main thing is not to stop.

Translated by Ronald Meyer

Svetlana Reiter is a freelance journalist based in Moscow. She is a special correspondent for Esquire Russia and for the cultural magazine Bolshoi Gorod. Reiter's publications focus on medical, social, and, most recently, political topics. Reiter was in residence at the Harriman Institute in 2013 as the Paul Klebnikov Russian Civil Society Fellow.

INTERVIEW WITH SOLLAR BY RONALD MEYER SOLLAR SOLL

HARRIMAN STAFFER, ALUMNA, POSTDOC, INSTRUCTOR







From left to right: Interview with Odosyia Plytka-Sorokhan, a member of anti-Communist insurgency in 1940s and 50s, and a self-taught musician and songwriter who documented her war experiences in song (Kryvorivinia, Hutsulshchyna, Ukraine, 2009; photo: Oksana Susyak); a nightclub accordion performance; promotional shot for *The Debutante Hour* (2008; photo: Thomas Bayne); background photo of the top of Mount Pip Ivan in Hutsulshchyna (photo: Alison Cartwright).



On launching a career in Ukrainian studies and ethnomusicology.

Ronald Meyer: You've had a pretty amazing year. First, you defended with distinction your dissertation in ethnomusicology at Columbia, then you spent the fall semester as a Mihaychuk Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Ukrainian Studies at Harvard, and you taught a new course this spring for the Harriman Institute as Petro Jacyk Visiting Professor, "Musical Exoticisms of the Former Soviet Union." Could you tell us a little about your dissertation, how you envision making the transition from dissertation to book manuscript, and, finally, how this fed into your new course?

Maria Sonevytsky: Thanks for your kind words. My doctoral dissertation was titled "Wild Music: Ideologies of Exoticism in Two Ukrainian Borderlands" and was a comparative (or contrastive, really) study of competing histories of exoticism as tied into two indigenous groups that are Ukrainian by

citizenship: the Hutsuls of the Carpathian Mountains and the Crimean Tatars of Crimea. Currently, I am revising and expanding my dissertation into a book manuscript with the working title, "'Wild Music' on the Margins of Europe: Ukrainian Indigenes and the New Exoticism." At this stage, the revisions have centered on fleshing out a more complete history of the discourse of "civilization and barbarism" in the Slavic world, on deepening the theorization of Ukrainian "indigeneity," and on revisiting some of my field materials from 2008 to 2009. The class that I taught for the Harriman Institute reflects my interest in how "exoticism" or discourses of "otherness" have operated on the territory of the former Soviet Union, which has its own history of liminality and internal colonization that has been tied into "civilizing" missions at different points in modern history. My primary interest lies in how Soviet ideology shaped and reimagined ideas of "civilization" vis-à-vis music and expressive culture in the twentieth century, but we examined earlier examples stretching back to Catherine the Great's conquests in the south of Ukraine and into Crimea.



Celebrating the anniversary of Sergei Paradjanov's film *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* with a song ("Verkhovyna, Hutsulshchynaverk," Ukraine, 2011; photo: Alison Cartwright). Paradjanov's 1964 work was filmed in and around Verkhovyna, where he lived in a cottage, now preserved as a museum, while making the film. It is a Romeo and Juliet story set in Hutsulshchyna and is an iconic representation of that part of the world.

Ronald Meyer: You've had a very Harriman-intense career, starting out as the first Ukrainian Studies Program coordinator in 2003–2004 under Mark von Hagen, and continuing now as Jacyk Visiting Professor. Along the way you contributed an article to *The Harriman Review* on ethnography in Ukraine and have had funding from the Institute for research travel and support for your studies as a junior scholar. I'd be interested to hear how these separate pieces fit together in your academic career.

Maria Sonevytsky: The Harriman Institute has been a wonderful resource for me on campus since I was an undergraduate at Barnard, double majoring in music and Slavic regional studies. I was lucky to have Professor Catharine Nepomnyashchy as my undergraduate mentor, to take rigorous courses with Professors Frank Sysyn, Vitalty Chernetsky, and Mark von Hagen on the history and literature of the region at that formative stage in my scholarly career, and later to work under Mark as the first administrator of the Ukrainian Studies Program. Harriman has also supported me for some short-term trips to Ukraine, both to pursue fieldwork and to attend and participate in scholarly conferences there. Along my path in the pursuit of the Ph.D. through the

music department, the Harriman Institute functioned as my second intellectual home and a great support of my various endeavors.

Ronald Meyer: How did you come about writing your blog "My Simferopol Home"? Do you currently write a blog? Where did your fieldwork in Ukraine take you and what exactly was it that you were looking for? Did you find it?

Maria Sonevytsky: While I was conducting fieldwork in Crimea and Western Ukraine, I maintained the "My Simferopol Home" blog as a way to process my experiences, to keep in touch with family and friends, and to share some of my insights and questions with a broader public. Now, I maintain a website (www.mariasonevytsky.com) that functions more as a repository for my projects, gigs, lectures, etc., and less as a site to stimulate exchange and conversation. Depending on where I land down the road, I could imagine starting up another blog, but at the moment, I am too focused on writing, revising, and publishing articles.

My fieldwork experiences in 2008–2009 formed the bulk of my ethnographic research for my dissertation, though I had been conducting fieldwork expeditions in the region since 1999, and some earlier data made it into the dissertation as well. I knew upon setting out that my fieldwork would take me to Crimea— I was based in the rather unspectacular capital, Simferopol—and to the mountains of Western Ukraine. Over the course of the 18

Today, my primary musical/performing activities are dedicated to singing traditional village songs from various regions of Ukraine.

months that I spent in the field, I developed and expanded on my network of friends, colleagues, and interview subjects and had a variety of incredibly memorable and significant experiences. These in-the-field experiences—the documentation of musical events, conversations, social occasions—form the backbone of my doctoral work, which theorizes how people today negotiate histories of exoticism that stretch back to previous imperial, social, and political regimes.

Ronald Meyer: In addition to being an academic ethnomusicologist, you're a musician. I know your group Zozulka has played at Barbes in Park Slope and that you're involved in some other music-making ventures. And I would definitely like to hear about the all-woman accordion orchestra, how it came into being, where you played. How did this fit in with your M.A. thesis?

Maria Sonevytsky: My M.A. thesis, "The Accordion Project: Narratives in the Social Life of a Music Object" (2006), was an ethnography of 22 accordion players based in New York City and reflects my interests in the intersections of material culture with music in culture, especially related to the history of immigration in the United States. Much like my doctoral dissertation, the M.A. thesis combined ethnography with historical analysis. In it, I advocated for a model of "critical organology" that considers the social history of the musical instrument alongside its morphological and sonic qualities. I published an article in The World of Music based on this work in 2008.

The project developed organically, in a sense, related to my own emergence as an accordion player. I had been a serious classical pianist (and oboist), and after graduating from college, I decided to pick up an instrument that would allow me to travel more easily and that would challenge me to play music without using notation, which has always been—and still is—a real crutch for me because of my classical training. Picking up the accordion literally changed my musical life—suddenly, I was being asked to play klezmer tunes for beer-launch parties, play German beer-hall polkas, record "French musette-sounding" solos, or play the piano accordion parts from experimental atonal operatic scores. I fell in with The Main

Squeeze Orchestra (led by the legendary Walter Kühr), where I spent a few fun years getting comfortable performing in relaxed nightclub contexts, and had an opportunity to flex my arranging muscles. It also got me back into singing, which has become a huge part of my life in the last few years.

Today, my primary musical/performing activities are dedicated to singing traditional village songs from various regions of Ukraine which I have been doing lately with my new trio Zozulka (with Eva Salina-Primack and Willa Roberts), and also to my cabaret-pop trio The Debutante Hour, which has been described as the "existential Andrews Sisters." Last March, I also sang in Stravinsky's Les Noces with the Brooklyn Philharmonic.

Ronald Meyer: Some of your recent research and publications address musical heritage and activism in Ukraine and Crimean Tatar songs of exile and ideology. How do politics, ideology, and activism inform your work?

Maria Sonevytsky: As the daughter of two post-World War II Ukrainian refugees, I was raised with a real sense of how the political affects our daily lives. My musical interests steered me toward ethnomusicology, a discipline with an illustrious (and sometimes embarrassing) history of activism, where advocacy for underrepresented, discredited, or marginalized musical traditions is given serious, rigorous attention. Since the canonic works of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms are treated with nearly reverential respect in the academy, why shouldn't we take the traditions of indigenes all over the world seriously? Why shouldn't we ask how popular

As the daughter of two post-World War II Ukrainian refugees, I was raised with a real sense of how the political affects our daily lives.

music informs and reflects contemporary society? Why shouldn't we ask how music bears upon the political, the ideological, the social?

These are really some of the guiding questions of my approach to the study of music and have been reflected in most of the scholarly work I have done, especially in the two "public ethnomusicology" projects that I have developed since 2008. The first, "No Other Home: The Crimean Tatar Repatriates," was done in collaboration with photographer Alison Cartwright, who documented the lives of Crimean Tatars in Crimea with me in May of 2008. Together, we compiled a multimedia exhibition that merged visual, sonic, and textual representations of an indigenous community that is largely misunderstood and often discriminated against in Ukraine. That exhibition was shown at the Cocani Palace in Bucharest, Romania, at the Ukrainian Museum in New York

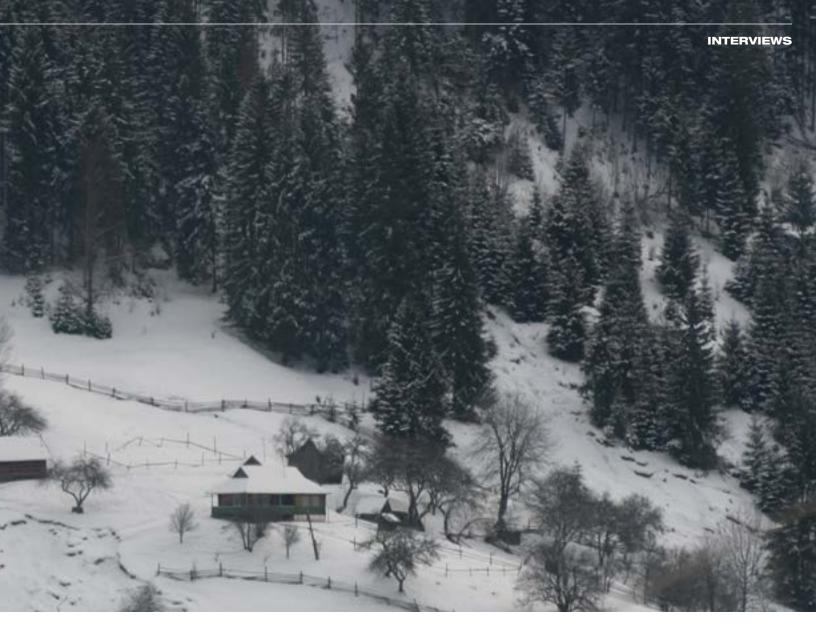


City, and at the Honchar Ethnographic Museum in Kyiv, Ukraine. The second public ethnomusicology project, "Chornobyl Songs: Living Culture from a Lost World," brought Yevhen Yefremov, the leading ethnomusicologist and master singer from the Kyiv Academy of Music, to New York to train a group of 12 singers in the ritual and secular repertoires of Kyivan Polissia (the Chornobyl Zone). I felt compelled to design such a project in 2011 because it was the 25th anniversary of the traumatic nuclear disaster that uprooted more than 160,000 villagers from a remote and fascinating corner of Ukraine. Through a collaboration of the Yara Arts Group and the Center for Traditional Music and Dance, we created a multimedia theatricalized performance that portrayed a year in song. We recorded the project as a document of our work in late 2011, and that record will be released this year through Smithsonian Folkways.

Ronald Meyer: A typical interview question for an assistant professor: Please tell us about your second book.

Maria Sonevytsky: The performance-based "Chornobyl Songs Project" that I initiated in 2011 is rapidly developing into a substantial research project that looks at the confluence of late Soviet social movements that hinged on ideas of "nature" and the natural: the nascent environmental movement and "econationalism," the reemergence of Native Faith or neopagan beliefs, and the explosion of interest in "authentic" (meaning precolonial, pre-Soviet) village folklore. All three of these phenomena gain steam and coherence as a result of the nuclear disaster that occurred on the territory of the Ukrainian SSR in 1986, and I am in the process of researching how these three movements overlapped, mutually enforced, and gave credence to a certain kind of Ukrainian identity that was emergent in the last years of the Soviet Union.

Ronald Meyer: What's your family background? Did you speak Ukrainian at home? Was Ukrainian culture a big part of family life?



Maria Sonevytsky: Yes, both of my parents were staunch Ukrainian patriots who had been uprooted, as children, from Western Ukraine during World War II. They had parallel stories: both lived in displaced persons camps after the war in Germany and Austria, both immigrated to Canada (my mother's family) and the U.S. (my father's family) between 1949 and 1952. I spoke Ukrainian exclusively until I started school, so much so that I spent kindergarten in an ESL program along with other immigrant children, though I was actually born and raised in Yonkers. My maternal grandmother, whose English never improved past the level of pleasantries, was one of my primary caregivers in my childhood, which further reinforced the need to speak Ukrainian. I grew up attending weekly "Uki school" and church services in Yonkers, the East Village, and later, Washington, D.C. In "Uki school," we took part in declamation competitions, where we had to memorize and recite the poems of the Romantic poet-hero Taras Shevchenko. Typical Ukrainian diaspora upbringing: folk dancing, folk singing, folk arts, summer PLAST camp. As a child,

I could not make sense of why this Ukrainian stuff was important, but when we first returned to Ukraine in 1991, when I first met my family there, and later, when I really began to make friends in Ukraine, it all fell into place. Now, I am so grateful that my parents were as strict as they were because it has shaped and given meaning to who I am personally and also professionally.

Postscript, May 2013: Maria will be a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Toronto's Centre for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies in 2013-2014. The following year she will assume her duties as assistant professor of music at Bard College.



GREAT GAMES, LOCAL RULES, D THE SHIFTING DYNAI

INTERVIEW WI H ALEXANDER COOL

Why we should pay more attention to Central Asia.

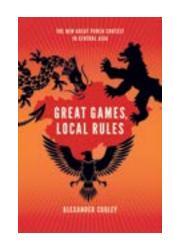
The Harriman Institute's Alexander Cooley, Tow Professor for Distinguished Scholars and Practitioners in Political Science at Barnard College, published his fourth book, Great Games,

Local Rules, in June 2012. The title alludes to the "great game" portrayed by Rudyard Kipling during the nineteenth century, when Russia and Great Britain struggled for control over Central Asia. But the new "great game" described by Cooley is of a different naturethe regional interests of Russia, China, and the United States don't necessarily contradict one another; instead, the countries often cooperate in their dealings with Central Asian states, which, unlike the Central Asia of Kipling's time, are sovereign and have established their own "local rules" that they use to manipulate the "great powers."

The book emerged from Cooley's work as an inaugural Global Fellow at the Open Society Foundations (OSF) from 2009 to 2010, where he studied the impact of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) on regional integration in Central Asia. Since the end of his fellowship at OSF, Cooley has been serving on the Advisory Board for the OSF's Central Eurasia Project (CEP), which examines cross-regional issues such as the inner workings of Western military arrangements

> there and the human rights implications of security assistance (in 2012, he also joined the Advisory Committee of Human Rights Watch, Europe and Central Asia Division). In February, CEP partnered with the Harriman Institute on a half-day conference titled, "Uzbekistan in a Time of Uncertainty: Domestic and Regional Trends." In April, as an offshoot from the chapter of his book that deals with corruption, Cooley organized another conference at the Harriman Institute (this time independently of the CEP) titled, "Central Asia's Hidden Offshore Ties: The Politics of Money-Laundering and Virtual State-Building."

Currently, he is working to turn Great Games, Local Rules into a 4000-level course titled "Politics of a Post-Western World." It will be introduced next spring.



We're so accustomed to looking at Central Asia as this region that harks back to the past; instead we should think about it as a window on the future.

Masha Udensiva-Brenner: After the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a prevailing sentiment that Central Asia would be a blank slate, "a space ripe for new conquering influences and ideas." Can you explain why this didn't turn out to be the case?

Alexander Cooley: In retrospect, the 1990s, certainly the early- to mid-1990s, were notable more for documenting our ignorance of the area than anything else. There really was a scramble to try and influence the identities and orientations of these states. The West saw Central Asia as a region ripe for democracy promotion and transition and lumped the countries together with the East-European countries, assuming that they would gradually become more Western and adopt Western-style institutions. The East also had its interests. Japan was heavily involved as a donor; Turkey was involved, especially culturally, opening schools; even the Saudis were there in various capacities, trying to promote Islam.

What very few people caught at the time was that the Central Asian governments were carefully laying the foundation to consolidate their own power. They were paying lip service to things like democracy and elections, because they wanted international

What very few people caught at the time was that the Central Asian governments were carefully laying the foundation to consolidate their own power.

acceptance, and signed the universal human rights treaties, but in reality they were consolidating, building their security services, creating monopolies over lucrative assets and businesses, and forging states and identities to go with them. This happened almost under the radar, and by the late '90s and early 2000s, when we had renewed external interest in the region, all of these rulers were quite comfortable in their skins and successfully managing their internal politics.

Masha Udensiva-Brenner: This resulted in the "local rules" you refer to in the title of your book. Can you tell me more about these "rules" and how they have shaped Central Asia's relationship with Russia, China, and the United States, the primary players with external interest in the region?

Alexander Cooley: Local elites use the external interest to consolidate their political power, on the one hand, and enrich themselves on the other. They push back on political conditions and human rights demands, while taking advantage of geopolitical interests and opportunities. For example, they are demanding military equipment and increased assistance from the U.S. and NATO as they exit Afghanistan.

I devote a chapter in my book to what I call "Kyrgyzstan's base-bidding war." President Bakiyev orchestrated a bidding war between the U.S. and Russia. The U.S. had been paying \$17 million a year, as well as up to \$150 million in aid and assistance, to use the base. Then, in February 2009, Bakiyev announced that the base was unpopular and that he was going to shut it down. At the same conference, Medvedev announced that Russia was going to provide Kyrgyzstan with \$2 billion economic "anticrisis" assistance. And so, U.S. officials scrambled behind the scenes, sent delegations, and tried to renegotiate a new deal. In essence they did; the base was renamed a transit center, and the rent went up from \$17 million to \$63 million. Now we know that the deal was redone shortly after Kyrgyzstan received the first \$300 million, wired from Moscow, which went to Asia Universal Bank. A year later, after Bakiyev was ousted from power, it turned out that Asia Universal Bank was like an empty cupboard, and that they took the funds that came from the Russian Federation as part of this bidding war, and sent them into a web of offshore bank accounts and networks. So, there was a pretty blatant attempt by Bakiyev to use this external interest to enrich himself and his close family circle. Global Witness documented this in its recent report, "Grave Secrecy." That's one example. [You can find the report on www .globalwitness.org.]

There are others I talk about: the Giffen affair—Jim Giffen was a famed broker who put together a number of Western oil deals with the Kazakh government in the 1990s and was charged by the U.S. Department of Justice for violating the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and for money laundering. I also discuss some Chinese deals, and the structure of the contracts, which helps to ingratiate the Chinese with part of Kazakhstan's ruling circle. The scandals are regular throughout the region, and we see them time and time again with external funds. Whether they are funds from fuel contracts the U.S. is providing to Chinese energy companies, or as in a recent scandal with IMF [International Monetary Fund] loans in Tajikistan, where hundreds of millions have been diverted by the former central bank head to his family's agriculture enterprises, this abuse of external flows comes up all the time.

Masha Udensiva-Brenner: Russia, China, and the United States put up with a lot of these "local rules" in order to realize their own agenda; what is each of them trying to accomplish in the region?

Alexander Cooley: The interesting thing is that for the most part, Russia, China, and the United States all want different things there, so even though the interactions have become more intense over the last ten years, they've mostly coexisted. There's been some competition, a lot of mimicry . . .

Masha Udensiva-Brenner: What do you mean by mimicry?

Alexander Cooley: Certain countries are trying to emulate the form if not the substance of others. For instance, traditionally the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] has monitored elections in the region according to a set of monitoring

Local elites use the external interest to consolidate their political power, on the one hand, and enrich themselves on the other.

procedures, a UN code of guidelines, and so forth. Well, around the early 2000s the Central Asian states became sick of the negative criticism they were receiving from the OSCE, so they decided to support the creation of both CIS- [Commonwealth of Independent States] sponsored and SCO-sponsored election monitors. I call them phony election monitors. They started sending monitors to every Central Asian election since 2005, and their assessments of Central Asian elections are far more positive.

Masha Udensiva-Brenner: So, they coexist with the Western entities?

Alexander Cooley: Right, they coexist with the OSCE, and a lot of people have said that the CSTO [Collective Security Treaty Organization] is building its security organization consciously as a counter to NATO. Or that the Customs Union, now Eurasia Union, proposed by Vladimir Putin, is trying to emulate the EU in the region. There is a lot of emulation. But for the most part, the three countries have had different goals. For the U.S., the primary goal has been Central Asia in service to the military mission in Afghanistan. That's meant setting up military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan—the U.S. was evicted from Uzbekistan in 2005 and since 2008, setting up supply lines, the so-called "Northern option," to avoid the troubled lines in Pakistan and bring in material for troops in Afghanistan [from] all across Eurasia. And now, as they're exiting Afghanistan, the northern route to leave Afghanistan has increasingly become an object of negotiation.

China's concern is less Afghanistan, more its troubled Western Province of Xinjiang. It views Central Asia, and especially the countries that border Central Asia, as vital for Xinjiang's stability, particularly for clamping down on the activities of Uighur separatists, and trying to develop and modernize the whole perimeter surrounding Xinjiang. The assumption here is that if there are economic opportunities in the region, Xinjiang itself will become more stable, more prosperous, more integrated. And of course, China is interested in the raw materials from Central Asia, especially the gas, the pipelines. It's built two pipelines very quickly—one, an oil pipeline that traverses Kazakhstan, and the other, a natural gas pipeline that originates in Turkmenistan and flows eastward.





Russia is a little more complicated. It's a common assumption that Russia wants to reconstitute the Soviet Union. I don't think that's true. The 1990s signified a pause as Russia itself was recovering and transitioning. Then, over time, the interest in Central Asia increased. Russia doesn't want any single material thing; it doesn't have a strategy the way China and the U.S. do. Russia wants to be acknowledged for its status in the region. It wants to be deferred to as the "privileged power," as Medvedev said after the Georgia War. It wants to be deferred to, it wants to be consulted, it wants to speak on behalf of the Central Asians. In part, Russia views Central Asia as a means to justify its own "great power" status, a demonstration of its sphere of influence, a way to justify things like its seat on the Security Council. So that's why we see, what I term in the book, "schizophrenic behavior."

For instance, after the attacks of 9/11—people forget this—Vladimir Putin was the first world leader to call President Bush.

I call it "authoritarian log-rolling." There was certainly a sense that the West had not kept its end of the bargain.

He talked about confronting a common civilizational challenge and pledged support. He offered facilities- and intelligence-sharing in support of U.S. efforts in Afghanistan. But he did this assuming that the U.S. would work through him, and Russia would mediate the U.S.'s role as a senior partner. Instead, over the next couple of years, it became clear that the U.S. was dealing with these countries bilaterally without consulting Russia. In fact, it started to provide military assistance to these countries, and Special Forces training, among other things. And as the U.S.-Russian relationship deteriorated anyway, as a result of the Iraq war, and the ABM Treaty [Anti-Ballistic Missile], and so forth, by 2003 Russia began to perceive the U.S. presence in Central Asia as threatening.

Masha Udensiva-Brenner: And Russia was counting on some security assistance in the Caucasus . . .

Alexander Cooley: That's right; Russia figured that everyone's security concerns would be lumped together, and that this would be acknowledged. And in fact, they got this from China. One of the interesting things I show in the book is that as the region became securitized by all three powers; there was this kind of ratcheting up of who was and wasn't considered to be a security threat. We heard Chinese-Russian proclamations that China recognized the problem of terrorism and separatism in Chechnya, and Russia recognized China's territorial integrity. I call it "authoritarian log-rolling." There was certainly a sense that the West had not kept its end of the bargain.

Masha Udensiva-Brenner: Then the Russian-U.S. relationship was further strained by the placement of missiles in Eastern Europe and the Color Revolutions.

Alexander Cooley: Absolutely, yes. So, missile defense was a big one that broke down Russian-U.S. relations. And the Color Revolutions were huge, because they fused Russia's geopolitical fears about Western encroachment and the West's outspoken normative commitments to promoting democracy. The revolutions in

There was the sense that the idea of "democratization" was just a Trojan horse for the U.S.'s toppling of governments and regimes.

Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan happened in the context of the Bush administration's freedom agenda, during the regime change in Iraq. There was the sense that the idea of "democratization" was just a Trojan horse for the U.S.'s toppling of governments and regimes. And at that point, all of these external actors supported by the West came to be coded and viewed as security threats.

Masha Udensiva-Brenner: So this sentiment really solidified the Shanghai Cooperation Organization . . .

Alexander Cooley: Exactly—very much so. The SCO started to become a counter-Western vehicle—even though the Chinese didn't want it perceived as such—Russia viewed it as a way to counter Western influence, and the Central Asian countries started closing down NGOs, enacting new restrictions, at about the same time that Russia did. They broadened their sense of what constitutes a security threat—pretty much anything that's in opposition to a Central Asian regime now gets coded as a security threat. So it's this total push back against the West, and that's one of the things I try and show in the book—that a lot of this wasn't necessarily intentional on the part of Western policymakers, but their various modes of engagement came to be perceived with great suspicion. And also, they were cynical of the U.S. on a lot of these issues, especially democracy and human rights, particularly in light of Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib.

Masha Udensiva-Brenner: You mentioned in the introduction to your book that you initially set out to study the SCO, which was expected to rise and come to rival Western organizations, but then the competition between Russia and China intensified after the financial crisis and the Russia-Georgia war, and this halted the organization's progress. Can you explain what happened?

Alexander Cooley: Originally I was fascinated by the SCO as a vehicle for counternorms, counter-Western organizations, and architectures. For instance, the SCO had plans to create a regional development bank, which was clearly a parallel to the World Bank and the IMF. It also had plans to create youth programs and an educational exchange—a clear counter to Western-sponsored youth programs installed in the region—that would very much build on the Nashi model.

After the financial crisis, the real differential in economic power between Russia and China emerged. Russia was one of the countries hardest hit by the financial crisis; its stock market plunged by more than 70 percent; it retracted a lot of its investments and commitments in the region. At this point China made its move, using the crisis as an opportunity to invest there. It made big loans for energy deals with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan and opened up a gas pipeline, and its official trade with Central Asia crossed Russia. Russia had always been suspicious of economic integration for fear of China, and this is when it really started dragging its feet on the nonsecurity agenda and stalled the momentum for integration. Russia wanted to maintain a security agenda as a forum for eschewing anti-Western proclamations but did not want to enable the Chinese to conduct free trade and move forth with economic integration.

The other factor you pointed out is the Georgia War, which is really interesting. It tells us a lot about who really runs the SCO. Just a few weeks after the Georgia War [August 2008], there was an SCO summit in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. Russia had just recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and Medvedev went to the SCO summit in the hope, according to the Russian journalists I spoke with, of trying to get the Kazakhs and the

After the financial crisis, the real differential in economic power between Russia and China emerged.

Kyrgyz to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia too. Because of Xinjiang, the Chinese are adamantly opposed to any separatist sentiment, especially within Eurasia. So they stiffened their backbone, and it was quite humiliating for Medvedev because he got nothing, even though the purpose of the trip was to solidify recognitions.

A year later, when there were big riots and ethnic violence in Ürümqi, in Xinjiang every single SCO member, including Moscow, signed off on a statement of support for Chinese actions—drafted by the Chinese MFA [Ministry of Foreign Affairs]—within twenty-four hours. This showed that the security agenda is really more the Chinese security agenda than the Russian one. Sometimes they coincide, but in this case, when Russia really needed something, the Chinese said no way. And that tends to be the Russian-Chinese

relationship. There is an outer veil that they have this alliance, but when you dig a little deeper, you find very heavy economic competition, and while Russia is interested in countering the West, China is always more hesitant to do so.

Masha Udensiva-Brenner: In your recent ForeignPolicy.com article, "The League of Authoritarian Gentlemen," you said that the SCO member states have been banding together across borders to fight opposition movements within their own countries. What's been happening?

Alexander Cooley: The SCO has been really effective at the so-called "internal security" agenda. There is an increasing institutionalization of a number of activities that go against international norms and established human rights conventions. One of them is an SCO antiterror treaty signed in 2009, which, by article, gives member states the right to conduct criminal investigations on the territories of other states while bypassing extradition and asylum procedures. A state can request a suspect with no standard of probable cause or proof of misdeed—you could just be handed over. This is increasingly invoked in the region, and there are two main vectors: Central Asians being sent home, sometimes abducted from Russia and returned to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and Uighurs and some Falun Gong being sent from Russia to China. But there have also been some inter-Central Asian cases—accused extremists going from Kazakhstan to Uzbekistan and so forth. For me, this is an example of the innovation of the SCO, perhaps not in the way we want, because it's an attempt to displace established international law in the justification of regional security cooperation.

Masha Udensiva-Brenner: How should the West counter this? Is there a way for the West to counter this?

Alexander Cooley: I think the West has to call them out. A lot of people are saying that this is a self-righteous position, that the West has its problems too, and my response is: I'm an equal opportunity criticizer. My book has a section on comparative renditions that compares what the CIA did in places like Uzbekistan—and there has been more and more news about that lately—with what China and Russia have done there.

When you engage with the SCO, you can't just focus on the common nonvalues stuff, because then you legitimize the other things.

Bracketing the values agenda tends to marginalize its importance. For example, the EU has established something called the "Human Rights Dialogue" with all of the Central Asian countries as part of its strategy in the region. Well, that sounds good. It tells us that the EU is engaged in human rights dialogue. But, the problem is that now, any discussion of human rights or civil society has been relegated to the "dialogue." So, you don't have to bring up these

issues at high-level meetings because there is a separate "dialogue" for them. It's almost a way of sequestering them, as opposed to integrating them into the whole agenda.

We should be asking these countries, who is on your black list of extremists? What are the procedures of listing and delisting? Are they in accordance with UN norms? These are all things that can be brought up. I'm not advising that we shun the SCO, or ignore it, but all of these issues should be on the table when engaging with it. But, there's not a lot of appetite for that.

The other trend I see with both Russia and China is their growing influence in now established UN committees, especially the human rights committee. Russia, for example, introduced this

The West can't assume that because our Helsinki-era institutions and norms are in place that they're going to endure.

horrid bill in September, which passed, on declaration of traditional values—a bill that provides cover for national antigay and lesbian legislation. We now see such legislation making its way through the Duma. There's also another draft bill Moscow is circulating, that's also publicly available, about the need to reform the monitoring treaties in the interest of making them more "effective"—but as worded the bill would actually gut rigorous external monitoring and make it less intrusive.

The West can't assume that because our Helsinki-era institutions and norms are in place that they're going to endure. We have to respond to these challenges, recognizing that perceptions of Western hypocrisy hurt our ability to strengthen human rights law against challenges from the SCO or other bodies that wish to carve out regional exceptions or create more culturally-specific standards of democracy and human rights. But, especially in Central Asia, our preoccupation with Afghanistan has led to a desire to engage these regional forums relatively uncritically.

Masha Udensiva-Brenner: So security is trumping other issues.

Alexander Cooley: Definitely.

Masha Udensiva-Brenner: Has U.S. strategy in the region changed during the Obama administration?

Alexander Cooley: There's been an attempt to try and use the reset to sort of ensure Russian cooperation on Afghanistan routes both in terms of the Northern Distribution Network and Manas. That has been a relative success, but there was a lot of anger in Kyrgyzstan after Bakiyev fell from the interim government because of the perception that the U.S. supported Bakiyev. Because of its

interest in the base, the U.S. toned down its criticisms of many of Bakiyev's excesses. But there is also a growing sense that this isn't the U.S.'s neighborhood; this is China and Russia's neighborhood. Russia is the security player and China is the economic player. As the U.S. exits Afghanistan, I think the tension between Russia and China is going to increase.

Masha Udensiva-Brenner: So, you think the new, new "great game" is going to be between Russia and China?

Alexander Cooley: Yes. The West will continue to have a limited presence in places like Uzbekistan, it will continue to conduct Special Forces operations, and counterterrorism, and so forth, but Russian-Chinese economic competition will magnify, and some other players will enter: India, South Korea, Turkey . . . once again sort of reengaging. Not having the West around should take away some of the bargaining leverage that the Central Asian states have traditionally had.

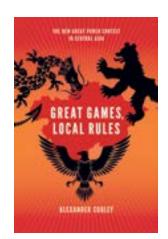
Masha Udensiva-Brenner: Will Central Asian states be more likely to succumb to the demands of Russia and China?

Alexander Cooley: Yes. I think their bargaining leverage is definitely going to be weakened, once the U.S. becomes less dependent on them for security issues, and thus ceases to be present as an obvious regional patron. But, we'll see; we also have to see what the size of the footprint in Afghanistan will be, what logistical arrangements are being made to support them involving the Central Asian states.

Masha Udensiva-Brenner: What are the implications for the rest of the world once the U.S. steps out?

Alexander Cooley: I'm not sure there are implications directly. In the book I emphasize that we're so accustomed to looking at Central Asia as this region that harks back to the past; instead we should think about it as a window on the future. I call it an example of a multipolar region. And the multipolar world is messy. It challenges Western authority, it's got numerous actors, doing lots of things, some effectively, some not . . .





Great Games, Local Rules by Alexander Cooley Oxford University Press, USA (2012)

ISBN: 0199929823

Available from Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble, directly from the publisher (http://global.oup .com), and select bookstores.



BY MASHA UDENSIVA-BRENNER

CATHARINE THEIMER NEPOMNYASHCHY PROFILE

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE HARRIMAN INSTITUTE'S FIRST FEMALE DIRECTOR AND 2012 ALUMNA OF THE YEAR.

Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy, the first woman to become director of the Harriman Institute, is described by friends, students, and colleagues as a "sparkplug," a woman with a sense of adventure, infinite ideas, and the capacity to undertake (and accomplish) even the most outlandish-seeming endeavors. An innovative scholar who wrote the

first comprehensive book on the Abram Tertz works of the Russian dissident writer Andrei Sinyavsky and edited the first-ever English-language volume on the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin's African heritage, she is known for exploring topics—such as Russian chat rooms that focus on the English writer Jane Austen and President Vladimir Putin's fashion



He wanted out of the Soviet Union, and he was considering scuba diving to Turkey under the Black Sea.

choices—that would not occur to many of her contemporaries. Nepomnyashchy's students emphasize the "democratic" approach with which she treats peopleputting undergraduates, graduate students, and clerical workers on equal footing with even the most distinguished scholars in her field—and see her as a mentor who will always "have your back." But, most importantly, Nepomnyashchy is someone who sees connections between seemingly unrelated topics, and the efforts she undertook during her eight-year tenure as director (2001 to 2009) have broadened the Harriman Institute's scope in the areas of culture, literature, and the arts, and deepened its ties to Central Asia and the Caucasus.

"It used to be a given that as an educated person, you would be broadly educated," Nepomnyashchy said over lunch at Columbia University's Faculty House. Sitting next to a window overlooking Manhattan, where she has lived since she started her second year as a graduate student at Columbia in 1974 (her first

was spent commuting from her hometown, Rumson, New Jersey), she voiced her disappointment with the fact that few modern scholars explore beyond their niches: "The kind of time and thought, and intellectual independence that would allow you to follow your instincts and take your attention away from the immediate goal, is getting lost." Nepomnyashchy, who has always followed her instincts, is thankful to be in the type of university setting where students have the resources to develop a wider perspective. She sees the Harriman Institute, in particular, as "an outpost" where heated cross-disciplinary discussion still exists.

Though she has no direct ties—"My childhood had nothing to do with Russia, I have no Russian blood, and in grade school I studied French"—Nepomnyashchy has been drawn to Russia since she was a little girl, finally pursuing her interest at Pembroke College in Brown University, which was known for having one of the best Russian and French departments in the country. She took a Russian language

course her first year (1969–70), but Brown went on strike against the bombings in Cambodia during her second semester, and she says the classes "just stopped," so she "spoke very little Russian." The summer of 1970, she travelled to the Soviet Union for the first time, on the pilot program of the American Institute for Foreign Study.

The group had plans to spend most of its time divided between Moscow and Sochi. While it was in Sochi, a cholera epidemic hit the Soviet Union. In typical Soviet fashion, the authorities left everyone in the dark. Nepomnyashchy and her compatriots stayed put—Sochi was one of the only cities not quarantined—without any knowledge of what was going on and seemingly no way out. (They tried twice to visit Tbilisi and were mysteriously denied entry, one time even making it as far as the Georgian border on a rickety tourist bus.) It was there, on the beach, that Nepomnyashchy met Viacheslav (Slava) Nepomnyashchy, the man who would eventually become her husband. "We were brought together by a cholera epidemic," she reflected (Slava, who had planned to be in Yalta, was only in Sochi because of the quarantine).

That summer, Nepomnyashchy embarked on what she figured was just a fling, but was unknowingly igniting a seven-year uphill battle to get Slava to the United States. "He was a rebel with romantic







From left to right: Catharine Nepomnyashchy and Slava Nepomnyashchy during their first summer together (Sochi, August 1970); Catharine Nepomnyashchy and Slava Nepomnyashchy in their Upper West Side apartment in the late 1970s, within the first years of Slava's arrival to the United States; Olga Nepomnyashchy at the Requiem for Anna Politkovskaya, a puppet performance commemorating the life and death of the Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya (created and directed by Amy Trompetter, October 7, 2007). Watch the performance at http://vimeo.com/793471.

notions," she related. "He wanted out of the Soviet Union, and he was considering scuba diving to Turkey under the Black Sea." He spoke "perfect English," which was a plus, and was arrested for being caught in a "Berezka Bar" (a place designated for foreigners) on the morning Nepomnyashchy left Russia. He was soon let out, and a month after Nepomnyashchy returned to the United States, started sending her letters, initiating a correspondence that would last years. "I was nineteen, I wasn't planning on getting married until well into my thirties, so this was all very abstract," Nepomnyashchy confided. But, the following summer she returned to Russia, spent two months with Slava, and decided to marry him. A wedding, though, was impossible. Slava's father, who was head of the personnel department at Bykovo Airport, "had no desire to see his son emigrate to the United States." When word got out that he wanted to marry an American, Slava was sent to Siberia, "basically into a punishment battalion," explained Nepomnyashchy. He was released two years later and became a refusenik. She waited for him to get out of the Soviet Union, finishing college and launching a career in academia.

Nepomnyashchy was not always on the path to become a Russian literature professor. Her dream was to be a United Nations interpreter. After graduating from Brown, she decided to get a Ph.D. in Russian at Columbia University (thinking she needed it to work at the UN), but her adviser at Brown, a Pushkin specialist named Sam Driver, told her: "If you say on your application that you want to study language, they'll throw it in the waste basket." She was nonetheless accepted to the doctoral program at Columbia and studied under the late Rufus Mathewson, then chair of the Slavic Department. He ultimately convinced her "that it was okay to study literature, and stay in academia."

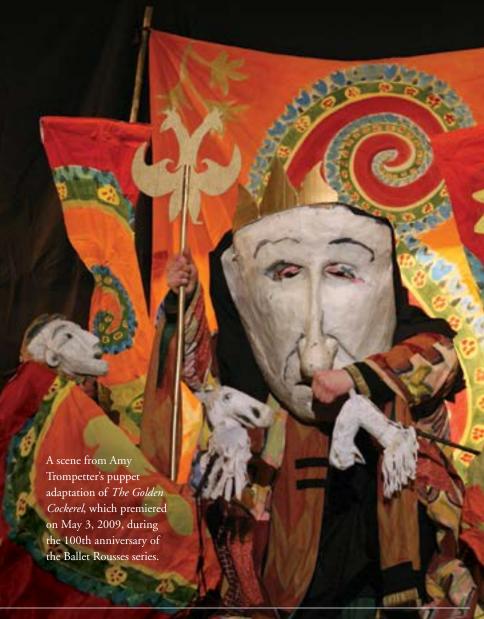
A large part of Nepomnyashchy's graduate career was spent running between the Barnard Slavic Department (where many of the graduate courses were Nepomnyashchy currently serves on the editorial boards of Slavic Review, Novyi zhurnal, and La Revue Russe.

She was president of the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Language (AATSEEL) from 2005 until 2007.

She has chaired the Executive Committee of the Slavic Division of the Modern Language Association and served a number of terms on the MLA Delegate Assembly.

She has been on the Board of Directors of AAASS since 2003.

She is recipient of the 2011 AATSEEL Award for Outstanding Service to the Profession.





Catharine Nepomnyashchy with Mikhail Gorbachev during his visit to the Harriman Institute on March 11, 2007.

held) and the School of International Affairs (SIA). At that time, the Columbia Slavic Department and the Russian Institute (which became the W. Averell Harriman Institute in 1982) were both in SIA and very much involved with one another. The Institute hosted brown bag lectures every Tuesday and Thursday, "which *everyone* came to," and Nepomnyashchy remembers it as a sort of utopia, "a wonderful place for someone who did not want to be stuck in one discipline."

As a graduate student, Nepomnyashchy longed for a greater sense of community between her colleagues, whom she felt were somewhat fragmented and unfocused. Over lunch at a "mediocre" Mexican restaurant, she and Michael Naydan, another student in the Slavic Department, conceived of a community project—an academic journal run by graduate students and focused on Slavic languages and cultures—that eventually became

the Ulbandus Review. Ulbandus, which means "big exotic wandering animal," a term introduced to the Old Slavs by the Old Goths, began as a vague concept and materialized into a difficult undertaking. In addition to rigorous editing, there was manual labor—"typing and retyping, running to the library, and cutting and pasting," as Nepomnyashchy described in a 2002 article for Ulbandus, which is still in existence nearly 40 years later. There were also all sorts of fundraising efforts—bake sales, sales of Soviet posters and knickknacks-to keep the journal afloat ("Sometimes I feel like I spent most of the Ulbandus years mass-producing brownies"). The project became a focal point during Nepomnyashchy's years as a Ph.D. student.

During this time, the struggle to get her fiancé, Slava, out of the Soviet Union—false hopes, failed invitations, pleas to the State Department—persisted. Finally, in

September 11 sparked the realization that the United States suffers from a strategically dangerous shortage of regional specialists. January 1977, while Nepomnyashchy was studying for her comprehensive examinations, she received an unexpected phone call: "It was a journalist announcing that my fiancé was getting out, asking me what I thought about it." Slava had left a personal message for journalist Tom Kent at the Associated Press, who had gotten to know him well while covering the couple's story. Kent, though, was on leave in the United States, and another journalist took the call; without his knowledge, he turned Slava's message into an article. And so, through the media, Nepomnyashchy discovered that her fiancé would be in the United States later that week.

By U.S. law, the couple had to be married within 90 days of Slava's arrival. Meanwhile, Nepomnyashchy was "a nervous wreck"; she joked that letting Slava out during her exams "was the final revenge of the Soviet government." But, she passed the comps, and two weeks later, on the 90th and final day of the allotted period, they were married.

Perhaps the most exciting period in Nepomnyashchy's early career came during the years surrounding the fall of the Iron Curtain. After years of having her visa denied, Nepomnyashchy was finally allowed entry and began taking frequent trips to the Soviet Union. At that time, an intense collaboration developed between American and Russian scholars. In 1989, during a frigid Moscow winter, she became friends with the now prominent Russian journalist Nadezhda Azhgikhina and her husband, the late investigative journalist Yuri Shchekochikhin. Azhgikhina was in the process of finishing her graduate work at Moscow State University and remembers hearing a lot about Nepomnyashchy through mutual acquaintances. The two instantly connected after she spent a week driving Nepomnyashchy around Moscow, taking her to the houses of various Russian writers. "It was an intense and happy time in our lives," said Azhgikhina, recalling the array of projects she started with Nepomnyashchy on topics previously neglected by literary scholars—such as feminism and contemporary Russian culture. The pair were together in August 1991, during the Moscow coup—a transformative moment for both of themand are currently finishing a book about the event, which is dedicated to their youth and their hopes beyond the Cold War.

The summer of 2001, after an ordeal of equal magnitude to getting Slava out of the Soviet Union, Nepomnyashchy and her husband adopted a two-year-old girl, their daughter Olga, from Russia. (Sadly, Slava passed away only a decade later, on August 18, 2011—the 20th anniversary of the

In Harriman style, we were very hands on. We paid for the entire event, there was a dinner, and Gorbachev picked the menu.

Moscow Coup, and the 41st anniversary of his meeting Nepomnyashchy in Sochi.) The same year as the adoption, Nepomnyashchy became director of the Harriman Institute.

Her opening reception never took place. It was scheduled for the evening of September 11, 2001. That morning, she took the elevator to the top floor of the School of International and Public Affairs building for a meeting and watched the first tower of the World Trade Center fall. September 11, she would write in the February 2002 Harriman Institute Newsletter, "sparked the realization that the United States suffers from a strategically dangerous shortage of regional specialists." The event was also an important geopolitical moment for Russia: Vladimir Putin was the first world leader to call George W. Bush after the attacks. Nepomnyashchy emphasized that this call "put Russia back on the world stage." During the initial months of her directorship, responding to 9/11 in the Harriman Institute's programming became her priority. Along with a variety of panels about the regional and transnational implications of the event, she initiated the "Director's Seminars," an ongoing series of roundtables that would focus on questions about the field of area studies.

On the six-month anniversary of the attacks, Nepomnyashchy arranged for Mikhail Gorbachev to speak at the Institute. "I felt that one way to make my mark was to have an unexpected or particularly big Harriman lecture." To the best of her knowledge, Gorbachev had never spoken at a private university before, or to a public audience in New York City. "In Harriman style, we were very hands on. We paid for the entire event, there was a dinner, and Gorbachev picked the menu."

The Gorbachev lecture set the tone for the rest of her directorship—"The ante was up about visibility," she said. Throughout her tenure, Nepomnyashchy brought in various diplomats, luminaries, and politicians, including Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov (who was then the ambassador to the UN), the







From left to right: Catharine Nepomnyashchy with Mikhail Gorbachev during his March 11, 2007, visit to the Harriman Institute. Roman Khidekel, Leonid Lubianitsky, Russian dancer, choreographer, and actor Mikhail Baryshnikov, Regina Khidekel, Olga Nepomnyashchy, and Catharine Nepomnyashchy at the opening reception for "People," an exhibit of photographs by Leonid Lubianitsky, curated by Regina Khidekel. Olga Nepomnyashchy, flanked by her parents, Slava Nepomnyashchy and Catharine Nepomnyashchy, during a faculty trip to Turkmenistan in 2008.

But one of her greatest accomplishments as director was the versatility and creativity she brought to the Institute's programming.

famous Albanian writer and poet Ismail Kadare, and the Nobel Prize-winning Hungarian author Imre Kertesz. She also collaborated with the Columbia University World Leaders Forum to host leaders ranging from Russia's President Vladimir Putin and Turkmenistan's Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov to Georgia's Mikheil Saakashvili and Estonia's Toomas Hendrik Ilves. But one of her greatest accomplishments as director was the versatility and creativity she brought to the Institute's programming. "The thing that was most important to me, and that I'm kind of proud of from being director, was trying to involve as many people as possible from different parts of the University."

One such person is Lynn Garafola, Professor of Dance at Barnard College, who first worked with Nepomnyashchy in 2003, during a series of lectures and performances in celebration of the tercen-

tennial of the founding of St. Petersburg. The series contained a segment devoted to ballet, and Garafola partnered with the Institute to stage a performance, a lecture, and demonstration on the choreographer George Balanchine by the ballet dancer Suki Schorer, among other things. "Cathy is someone who makes you feel that you can just run with something, and that generosity of spirit allows people to flourish," said Garafola. She continued her involvement with the Harriman Institute throughout Nepomnyashchy's tenure, coorganizing events such as a series devoted to the 100th anniversary of the Ballets Russes. She stressed how the collaboration provided opportunity for "ballet people who don't necessarily self-identify as Russianists to be in touch with a broader field."

Nepomnyashchy strove to represent the versatility of every issue in her programming. One way she did this was by mounting art exhibits that complemented the Institute's lectures and conferences. At the beginning of her second term, she oversaw the redesign of the Institute's interior, bringing in architects to open up the once cluttered, dusty office (as a former student described it) and create a space where the Institute mounts art exhibits three to four times a year. The first Harriman exhibit was in March 2005—a collection of Horst Tappe photographs titled, "Nabokov in Montreux" that went up in conjunction with other events celebrating the 50th anniversary of Nabokov's most famous novel, Lolita (Nepomnyashchy, a Nabokov enthusiast, is currently working on a book titled Nabokov and His Enemies: Terms of Engagement). During the 2009 Ballets Russes series, the Institute displayed reproductions from Diaghilev's stage designs, titled "Homage to Diaghilev: Enduring Legacy."

In 2006, when Columbia's President Lee C. Bollinger invited Czech playwright and former president Vaclav Havel for a seven-week residency of lectures, interviews, conversations, and other events organized by the Columbia Arts Initiative, Nepomnyashchy involved the Harriman Institute in the heart of the



planning, famously collaborating with Columbia's Miller Theatre and Barnard theater professor Amy Trompetter to stage a puppet production of Havel's play The Beggar's Opera, and bringing in speakers to complement the event. "The programming Harriman did around Havel's visit completely transformed it, and this was largely a product of Cathy's vision," remarked Christopher W. Harwood, a Czech specialist and former graduate student of Nepomnyashchy's, who is currently a lecturer in Czech at Columbia and a teacher of hers (Nepomnyashchy has a fascination with languages and over the course of her career has taken Czech, Georgian, and Serbo-Croatian, among others—"when I die I will probably be studying some bizarre language," she said, "maybe Papiamento"). Harwood admires the vastness of Nepomnyashchy's imagination and her ability to "see potentialities." He was particularly struck by her idea to invite the historically significant dissident Czech rock band The Plastic People of the Universe during Havel's visit. The event was unique in the academic world: "It's one thing having academics in a room talking to one another about The Plastic People of the Universe; it's another thing to have them all at a rock

concert," said Harwood. He can still picture Nepomnyashchy dancing in the front row: "I imagined her channeling Stevie Nicks; she was so into it."

Nepomnyashchy, though, extended the Institute's focus in more ways than expanding activities in the cultural sphere. "Cathy made a real attempt to open up the Institute to the Eurasian region," said Alexander Cooley, Tow Professor of Political Science at Barnard College who recently published a book on Central Asia, "to take it seriously, to understand the dynamics." Cooley was part of a delegation of Columbia faculty, initiated and organized by Nepomnyashchy, which travelled to Turkmenistan in both 2008 and 2009, in an effort to establish cooperation on education reform between Columbia and Turkmenistan and to bring over Turkmen students to study at Columbia. He and Nepomnyashchy also took a faculty trip to Georgia, visiting the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia a few months before the Russia-Georgia War. "These trips emphasized Harriman's strong sense of being an important institutional actor in post-Soviet states, and they probably wouldn't have happened without Cathy as director,"

noted Cooley, adding that "faculty trips are a logistical undertaking and very challenging to put together." Kimberly Marten, acting director of the Harriman Institute (2012–2013) was also a part of the 2008 delegation to Turkmenistan. She sees Nepomnyashchy's ability to connect with people, and her limitless reserve of ideas as "an inspiration," and marvels that while traveling to Georgia or Central Asia for research, everyone she met "seemed to know and ask about Cathy."

Likely, this is because of Nepomnyashchy's ability to draw people in. "One of the best things about knowing Cathy is that there is always something going on with her that's generally more interesting than whatever is going on with you," said her former advisee Karin Isaacson, for whom Nepomnyashchy became a mentor and close friend. "You walk into a room with her and you can't help getting pulled into whatever is already in progress."





On the creation of the Center for the Study of Institutions and Development.

I never thought that the largest grant I would ever receive would come from the Russian government. But in April 2010, my old colleague and friend Andrei Yakovlev and I received a three-year grant of roughly \$1.8 million to establish the Center for the Study of Institutions and Development (CSID) at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow. This grant is part of a larger program to bring foreign scholars to create research centers within universities in Russia, with the larger goal of building human capital and raising the academic profile of universities and research institutes in Russia. What made this project most attractive was the final product. In return for its considerable largesse, the Russian government wanted scholars from our Center to have at least six articles accepted for publication in international peer-reviewed journals by the end of the grant.

Andrei and I quickly gathered a team of Russian- and U.S.-based scholars. In line with the terms of the grant, we focused on younger researchers and invited three superb graduate students, Noah Buckley, Israel Marques, and David Szakonyi, from the Columbia Ph.D. program in political science; a recent Harriman postdoctoral student; and two professors from other

universities in the U.S. We added an equal number of Russian graduate students and academics and set to work on two broad topics: regional politics and police reform.

We have just begun the third and final year of the grant, and I've learned a lot about these topics as a researcher. But I have learned even more by working with the large bureaucracies of the Russian state from the vantage point of the director of the Center.

The Higher School of Economics (HSE) has proven to be a wonderful host. The school offered modest rooms in a guesthouse on Leninskii Prospekt just off Gagarin Square—a prime location and easy commute to work. In addition, HSE provided two large offices on Staraya Ploschad, right at the bottom of the hill at the Kitai-Gorod metro stop in central Moscow. (Upon entering the building, I sometimes laugh because the first interviews that I conducted as a graduate student in December 1992 took place in the same building on the same floor.)

Another gratifying aspect of the program has been the relative academic freedom. We haven't experienced pressure







Andrey Yakovlev and Timothy Frye. Photo by Masha Udensiva-Brenner.

to avoid sensitive topics, although we didn't go searching for topics that would raise hackles either. Our research projects have been designed with an academic audience in mind, rather than with the intent to change policy, which helps keep us out of the headlines unnecessarily.

One primary research project takes advantage of the great diversity of Russia's more than 80 regional governments. At the broadest level, we wanted to understand why some regional governments in Russia worked better than others. Other scholars have pursued this topic, and individual researchers have gathered data about regional governments, but the field lacked a comprehensive and exhaustive database of regional political elites in Russia. Using a small army of research assistants from the HSE, we created a database of the personal characteristics and career trajectories of all governors from 1991 to 2012 and of all vice governors from 2000 to 2012. In addition, we collected similar data on all mayors of cities of more than 75,000 residents. On condition of the grant, we will make all these data available to researchers at the end of 2013.

This source of data has been a gold mine. One paper examines whether appointed and elected governors have different personal characteristics and career paths. Others explore why transfer payments and foreign investment differed so dramatically across regions in Russia over the last twenty years. Still another examines

the impact of the introduction of drunk-driving laws across regions in Russia, and there are more papers on the way.

Our efforts to study police reform have been more frustrating in part because of bureaucratic resistance and red tape. From the start of the project, we viewed our research on policing in Moscow as a "high risk, high reward." One of our CSID experts who

In contemporary Russia, the rules put in place to catch cheaters can make life miserable for everyone else.

had studied the police in Russia for many years reminded us continually that while there were individuals within the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) who shared our goals, on the whole the organization was highly "militarized, commercialized, and corrupt."

To begin, we aimed high. As part of the "Law on Police" passed in February 2010, police precincts are required to report on their activities to the public every six months. Moreover, public opinion is supposed to account for some portion of the salary of police officers in Russia. To take advantage of this opportunity,

we designed a study that would monitor these public meetings in randomly selected police precincts and then measure whether perceptions of the police improved in precincts that held these meetings relative to those that did not. We signed an agreement

Whatever CSID's fate in the coming years, the relations between scholars at CSID and Harriman's ties with HSE will survive...

with the Research Academy of the MVD to share data and work together on this project. We even hired a former MVD colonel to help us navigate the bureaucracy.

For more than a year CSID and HSE representatives met with officials from the MVD and Moscow city government, and while in fact some individuals within the latter organizations supported our idea in principle, the slow grind of bureaucratic resistance wore us down. Our task was also complicated by the simple fact that, with few exceptions, police precincts were ignoring the law and not holding meetings with the public. Studying nonevents is rarely productive. The mass protests of December 2011 killed off any enthusiasm in the MVD for the project, and we changed course.

Yet not all was lost. In preparation for our grand experiment, we conducted a survey of 1,600 Muscovites in December 2011 that examined cooperation with the police and the frequency of bribery. Using a very sneaky survey technique, we estimated that each fifth encounter with a local beat cop in Russia resulted in a bribe. Moreover, thanks to our ties with the Research Academy of the MVD, we received data on crimes against entrepreneurs in all of Russia's regions from 2000 to 2010, a unique source of information that we are currently mining.

Working with other bureaucracies in Russia has been easier, although not always by a great degree. As a state organization, CSID must run all purchases above \$3,000 through the muchdreaded State Procurement System, also known as Goszakaz. Originally designed to increase transparency and reduce corruption in state purchasing, Goszakaz has become famous in Russia thanks to the work of Alexei Navalny and his team of researchers who scour the Internet for suspect state purchases and bring them to the public's attention.

For those of us on the other end of the process, Goszakaz is tremendously complicated, time consuming, and unpredictable. It took three months for the bid to conduct our largest survey to work its way through the Goszakaz process. Combined with a requirement from the government that all budget funds allocated in a given calendar year be spent in the same calendar year, the time pressures to complete the survey in a single year were intense. Apparently, good ideas must come in the first six months of the year or wait until the calendar turns over. In the end, three firms bid to conduct our survey. Our two preferred firms were disqualified for technical reasons, and we were left to work with our least preferred polling firm. Predictably, it botched part of the survey but was paid handsomely nonetheless.

In a word, I now have a much better appreciation of the difficulties of running a transparent and honest research institution in contemporary Russia. The rules put in place to catch cheaters can make life miserable for everyone else. With just under a year remaining on the grant, we are busily writing up our research results, but I've already received an education in Russian-style bureaucratic politics.

The future of CSID is uncertain. Our grant will end formally in April 2014, and there is no possibility of renewing it at its current level of funding, but if oil prices remain high, and our work is well received, there may be a way to keep the Center going in some form. Whatever CSID's fate in the coming years, the relations between scholars at CSID and Harriman's ties with HSE will survive, even without the help of the Russian bureaucracy. At least I hope so.

HARRIMAN AND CSID

Although no formal relationship exists, the Harriman Institute has been a very useful partner for the Center for the Study of Institutions and Development. In May 2010, the Harriman Institute hosted a workshop that brought together Russian and American researchers from CSID and outside experts to learn new research techniques. In September 2011, more than a dozen scholars from Russia and the United States held a workshop for CSID scholars to present work in progress.

Harriman has also been instrumental in the teaching component of CSID. Each year, the U.S. scholars teach one course on comparative political economy to HSE graduate students. About half the lectures are given in person in Moscow, but the rest take place via videoconference equipment recently purchased by the Harriman Institute to grace the new Marshall Shulman Seminar Room. Teaching courses via videoconferencing would have been impossible without this new equipment. Finally, Harriman has also hosted four CSID researchers in the last two years as visiting scholars, and more are on the way.

Student Perspectives on CSID



s a beginning scholar, working with the Center for the Study of Institutions and Development (CSID) has been a rare and highly valuable academic opportunity. I've built phenomenal connections with colleagues at HSE and worked with a talented and dynamic team at CSID. Whether it be theorybuilding, data analysis, data collection and management, or management of a large and, at times, unwieldy group of headstrong academics, each contribution has been critical to our success.

Our first concrete output—a set of interrelated databases containing detailed information on Russian elite political actors—was the most fundamental. We began by sketching out plans for analysis and data collection. Then we found, trained, coordinated, and managed the HSE research assistants, who did most of the coding and data collection. Finally, we began cleaning up and working with these datasets, exploring the resulting insights. Even if the work at the time seemed a bit sprawling, each stage was instructive and valuable in its own right. As we continue to analyze data, present our works-in-progress at forums at HSE, Columbia, and around the world, I continue to realize the great deal I've learned from this project about the nuts and bolts of data collection and analysis-skills that are not taught or emphasized enough in graduate school.

—Noah Buckley, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Political Science

efore I joined the Center for the Study of Institutions and Development (CSID) in 2011, my only experience living in Russia was a two-month summer research trip to Moscow at the peak of the 2010 wildfire season—not exactly representative of regular Russian life. The CSID position was a great chance to spend time in the country, and I welcomed the opportunity to see Russia beyond gauze masks and tropical heat. Since I had just begun to write my dissertation full time, I was invited to stay at the Higher School of Economics (HSE) in Moscow for the entire period of our three-year grant. At first, I was unsure what to expect from our Russian colleagues, aside from a mutual interest in the study of institutions, political appointments, and the outcomes they shape. To my delight, I discovered a group of economists working on issues closely related to my dissertation research—how businesses and workers support and shape welfare states. This discovery led to several collaborations on the nature of business lobbying, and I found myself quickly immersed in the academic life of HSE beyond the walls of CSID. It was this camaraderie that led me to one of the most striking experiences of my two years in Russia thus far.

Stories about the horrors of Russian bureaucracy are terribly clichéd, but what we oftentimes forget is the extent to which mutual experiences with it can build strong common bonds. To give a single example, part of my dissertation fieldwork involved collecting annual reports and policy documents—ostensibly publicly accessible documents—from a large number of Russian business associations. After a few months of phone calls and letters, however, I was having no luck. Messages were lost,

phones went unanswered, and key members of some associations seemed to be on perpetual vacation. Discussions with some of my Russian colleagues suggested these were relatively normal tactics, and one colleague of mine even won a free dinner from me by predicting perfectly which associations would give which excuses!

What surprised me, however, was the extent to which this battle with Russian bureaucracy served to galvanize people to aid one another. One of my colleagues, seeing my frustration, volunteered to help me by acquiring an official letter from the Higher School of Economics that asked the associations to assist me. While not guaranteed, such official correspondence minimally requires official rejection. About 400 letters and two weeks through HSE's own apparatus later, we mailed everything and, once again, called the associations. My colleagues schooled me in the art of repeated phone calls, shameless and insistent resends, and constant reminders to officials that official letters required official responses. Our daily calling sessions became a rather light-hearted affair, as we tried to predict which groups would stonewall us and brainstormed novel techniques for extracting information. Surprisingly, we even developed relationships with several of the secretaries in charge of correspondence and public relations, who commiserated with us about their bosses' recalcitrance and the need for constant calling. After three months, we finally did hear from most of the associations. Few of the managers were willing to release their records, but we did get good tips on interview opportunities and public archives.

—Israel Marques, Ph.D. Candidate,Department of Political Science



hen I was first invited to participate in the Center more than two years ago, the idea of bringing together eminent senior Russian and American scholars to engage in joint research made perfect sense. The Center's directors, Timothy Frye and Andrei Yakovley, had established a strong rapport over years of collaboration and coauthoring; the project was a natural extension of their past successes and compatibility. What intrigued me more was how the rest of the team would replicate that same level of cooperation.

After all, the ten or so younger scholars (half Russian and half American, mainly grad students) would be primarily responsible for managing an army of research assistants and helping turn that data into polished pieces. Initially, the two sides had never worked together, much less even met in person. I still remember vividly the first few weeks of the project—the timid introductions, clumsy dinner gatherings, and rambling e-mail chains. Our approaches to academic (and work) life reflected, more generally, many of the same cultural divides

at work in Russian-American relations. I think our Russian colleagues were as initially shocked by our constant levels of sarcasm, as we Americans were by the fact that they, without hesitation or exception, answered their cell phones in the middle of public presentations.

Another early, if not trivial, obstacle to overcome was our markedly different approaches to lunch! For Russians (and much of the world outside the U.S.), lunch is a slow, multicourse meal to be enjoyed in the company of the work collective. For an American crop of grad students, constantly overwhelmed by work and short on time, lunch is just a small daily task, best completed behind a desk, perhaps over some light reading material or e-mail. It took a bit for the two sides to find the proper compromise: three days a week for three-course "biznes laynches" and community building, two days for U.S.style efficient office eating.

The results of meeting each other half way have been clear. The team has been both especially collaborative and jovial. Together we designed an open office set-up (complete with proverbial water cooler and couch) that encourages productivity and socializing. We also make a point of celebrating every American and Russian holiday (from carving pumpkins on Halloween to bountiful bouquets and cakes on International Women's Day) and arrange regular staff outings like ice-skating or watching terrible American movies dubbed into Russian. When the working hours extend into the late evenings or weekends, it's been a relief to spend them in this environment.

In all, I can safely speak for the entire American cohort in expressing our sincere gratitude to our Russian colleagues for their wonderful assistance and hospitality over the past three years. They have truly helped us build a home away from home. Someday I hope we can return the favor properly on the other side of the Atlantic.

—David Szakonyi, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Political Science





From left to right: Participants of a three-day workshop organized by the Columbia Center for the Study of Development Strategies and the Harriman Institute at Columbia University. The workshop was part of the joint project of the Higher School of Economics and the Harriman Institute for the establishment of the International Centre for the Study of Institutions and Development at the HSE, New York, May 18-20, 2011. The Higher School of Economics building in Moscow.



AN INTERVIEW WITH BY BRADLEY GORSKI SHIPS KIND

The prize-winning Russian novelist on reading, writing, and suicide "by lying on the couch."

Mikhail Shishkin has won all three of Russia's major literary awards: the Russian Booker, the National Bestseller, and the Bolshaia Kniga Prize. The translation of his novel *Maidenhair* (Open Letter Books, 2012) has already shown up on short lists of the best translations of 2012. The translation of his novel *The Light and the Dark* was published in the UK in early 2013. The Harriman Institute sponsored his residency at Columbia in April 2013, during which he taught a seminar on "Classics and Politics in Contemporary Russian Literature."

Bradley Gorski: For years you've been living in Europe. The Russian literary world sees you as an émigré writer. How does life abroad affect your relationship to the Russian language and Russian literature?

Mikhail Shishkin: The word emigration isn't completely accurate. We live in the twenty-first century, in a world without borders. My move to Switzerland in 1995 was not at all political—at the time I was married to a Swiss woman, my translator. But I am a citizen of Russia and still travel there often and spend significant time in the country. In recent years I have divided my time between Moscow, Switzerland, and Berlin.

There's a prevailing opinion that a Russian writer cannot live without his language—in foreign lands he must be tormented by nostalgia. I think that this notion was spread by rulers and tyrants reluctant to let go of their writers because it would be harder to control them. If we remember *Dead Souls* (and what could be more Russian?), it was written in Rome and in Switzerland and in Paris. I don't think it is at all important where a writer lives. And furthermore, it seems to me that a writer should leave his home country, his native language for some time. Because then he begins to see himself and his country as if in a mirror. You live in Switzerland, you see yourself in Switzerland—and you see your own reflection. How could you live your whole life without ever looking in a mirror? A different perspective always helps in understanding your own country and yourself.

Leaving Russia, where the language lives and changes constantly, was very important for me. What today seems fresh and new will have already gone bad by tomorrow. Leaving Russia helped me understand that I should create my own language, which will be fresh and vital forever, even after I'm gone.

Any experience of another life is enriching, especially for a writer, and especially for a Russian one. We lived for too long in a walled-off prison space. We retreated too far into our own exotic Russian problems. It's very important to live in various countries in order to understand a simple thing, something Russians often do not understand: Russia is not the whole blessed world. It's only a small part of it.



All true texts, films, plays, have the same plot: the transformation of reality, which is made up of cruelty and death, into warmth and light.

Bradley Gorski: Literature for you is not primarily a game (as it can be for other contemporary writers), but rather a serious engagement, especially with language. How do you see the relationship—or even the responsibility—of literature to language?

Mikhail Shishkin: Literature is to language as Christ is to Lazarus. Language died long ago, and the writer makes it live again. From the outside looking in, being a writer means making words even though they all already exist, and always have. In reality, though, a writer is someone who understands that words cannot say anything. Words that can actually express something do not exist. All words were used up long ago.

I'll never forget the first time I wanted to profess my love to a certain girl, I opened my mouth, and I understood that the world did not have words that could express what I felt. Everything real, everything important that happens with us is beyond words. Words are traitors. Not a single one is to be trusted. The writer starts with an understanding of the futility of words, with a recognition of the impossibility of conveying in words that which exists outside of words. For everything that is real, words are not needed.

Even in school, I was already bored to tears by the poster above the blackboard with Turgenev's famous words about the "great and powerful Russian language." Then I started to write, and all the words were dead, decaying flesh. This is where the writer starts—from understanding that language is finished, like toothpaste in a tube. All my books are about that which cannot be conveyed in words. And this point, it seems, is not limited to Russian, but applies to language in general.

A writer is someone who must take the language he is given, the most impoverished and dead language, and make it great and powerful. Here you're on your own. Your whole life you fight with language in solitude.

Bradley Gorski: Several of your characters actively read in the pages of your novels. Often they write as well. How do they see their own reading process? What do they try to get out of reading?

Mikhail Shishkin: For me and for my characters, reading and writing are ways to cope with reality.

In one way or another, all my texts are about the power of the word. My characters are metaphors for the writer. In "Calligraphy Lesson," it's a court secretary who has to write down everything that happens in that monstrous world. His method of protest is calligraphy. This is exactly what art does when it transforms Christ's sufferings on the cross into an aesthetic experience. The horror of reality is transformed into the beauty of art. The protagonist in

The Taking of Izmail is a lawyer. With his words, he recreates reality, and that changes people's fates. The protagonist of *Maidenhair* is a translator in a Swiss refugee center. He translates fate into words and words into fate. In *The Light and the Dark*, my protagonist becomes an army staff scribe—he writes to parents with notices of their sons' deaths. "Your son is dead, but he is alive and well."

Bradley Gorski: And when you read, what do you want to get out of it? I understand that literary critics and writers read very differently. Do you find that to be the case?

Mikhail Shishkin: It seems to me that I lost the unmediated pleasure of reading long ago. The reader, after all, reads because it's interesting to know how everything ends: Will the two characters get married or not? For me the characters' wedding is completely uninteresting. What is interesting is how the book is constructed. If I understand its construction, then why read it? If I don't understand, then it's interesting. But that rarely happens anymore. I do read quite a bit, but specifically those books that I need for my work, mostly memoirs.

But in general, I should say that in Russia, reading has always played a quite special role. Reading saved me when I realized that I was born in a country of slaves. Reading in Russia was always the way for the reader to reclaim human dignity. True literature circulated through the country like blood through a body. Russian reading is like a blood transfusion. The author shares with the reader that which is most important, that which sustains life. But most importantly, the reader and the writer must have the same blood type. If they don't, reading will be poisonous—you'll be taking foreign words into your bloodstream. My writers back in Soviet times saved me, in the literal meaning of that word. And those whom I do not count as my own, the official Soviet writers, whom they made us read in school and in college, poisoned me.

And that's how it's always been in Russia, because under any regime the first thing to go is human dignity. It's the same today. And I'm afraid it'll be that way forever. It's bad for people, good for literature. If normal life comes to Russia, reading will stop playing that role—it will become entertainment. But "normal" life probably won't make it there for a long time. Alas.

Bradley Gorski: Your fourth novel, *Pismovnik* (literally, Letterbook) has been translated into more than 25 languages (including English, as *The Light and the Dark*). It has won awards in Russia and Germany. It's your most successful book yet, both critically and commercially. In your view, what sets it apart from the others?

Mikhail Shishkin: Why is The Light and the Dark successful in so many countries? Probably because everything that divides us: language, skin color, body shape, customs, history—all of that is external. Inside, we're all similar: we fear death and want love. All true texts, films, plays, have the same plot: the transformation of reality, which is made up of cruelty and death, into warmth and light. My greatest teacher has been and remains [Soviet director Andrei] Tarkovsky, even though he made films and I write books. That's not important—creativity is of a single nature. When I was still in school, Tarkovsky's Andrei Rublev stunned me—you are shown horrors, and you leave the theater feeling illuminated. That's why the artist is needed. He takes on that nightmare that people have made the world into and restores dignity to a person, filling him with human warmth and otherworldly light.

It seems that the secret of The Light and the Dark might actually be my grey hairs. I don't think I could have written this book when I was younger.

Tradition is important for me, and the letter is at the very heart of literature. The Russian word for letter [piśmo] is yet another synonym for prose, the art of writing. The correspondence of lovers is one of literature's major genres, going back to the letters of Eloise and Abelard or Rousseau's La Nouvelle Héloïse. The Russian

Everything real, everything important that happens with us is beyond words. Words are traitors. Not a single one is to be trusted.

eighteenth century saw the popularity of Kurganov's "Letter-book," a collection of exemplary correspondences, a sort of guide for how to write business and love letters. My most recent novel is also a correspondence. He and she are separated. The impossibility of touching one's beloved creates the need for words. If Adam and Eve had got separated in paradise, they would have had to invent writing.

In order to move forward, to do something new, you need to understand where you're from, what came before you. And what could be more traditional than a correspondence? The letter stands at the beginning of literature, of writing in general. The letter does not simply convey information; it is a confession, a message about yourself, not only for a concrete reader, but also to posterity and to God. The writers of letters, after all, have a habit of disappearing while their letters remain. In the twenty-first century, alas, the world of actual letters has receded into the past, yielding its territory to e-mails and texts. My novel in letters is an homage, a memorial to all the letters ever written.

The Light and the Dark is a novel about closeness, about understanding. People can be physically close, live in one

In February 2013, in an open letter published widely online, Mikhail Shishkin refused to participate in the official Russian delegation to this year's BookExpo America. His letter provoked several strong reactions—both supportive and antagonistic—throughout the Russian press. Below is a translation of those paragraphs from Shishkin's letter that explain his abstention:

The political course of Russia, and especially the events of the last year, have created a situation in the country that is absolutely unacceptable and degrading for its people and for its great culture. What is happening in my country makes me, as a Russian and citizen of Russia, ashamed. Taking part in this book fair as part of the official delegation and taking advantage of the opportunities it would provide me as a writer would mean taking on the responsibility to represent that very government, whose policies I consider poisonous for the country, and that official system, which I reject.

A country where a corrupt criminal regime seized power, where the government is a pyramid scheme, where elections have turned into a farce, where the courts serve the authorities and not the law, where there are political prisoners, where state television has been turned to prostitution, where imposters adopt senseless laws in droves, returning everyone to the middle ages—that country cannot be my Russia. I cannot and will not take part in the official delegation representing that Russia.

I should and will represent a different Russia, my Russia, a country free of imposters, a country with government structures that defend not the right to corruption but the right to personhood, a country with a free press, free elections, and free people.

Shishkin tells us his next novel hasn't come to him yet. In the mean time, he has translated Robert Walser's *Der Spaziergang* (The Walk, 1917) into Russian and written an extended essay to accompany it. He says that in Russia, as in America, Walser is underappreciated, despite his work being available in translation for several years. He hopes that his essay, which will be published along with his translation as a single volume, will explain Walser's importance and appeal to a Russian audience.



apartment, share a spousal bed, but still completely fail to understand one another. My characters live in intimacy and understanding, even though everything separates them, everything that can separate people: thousands of kilometers, time, death.

The novel begins with "time out of joint." This sort of thing happens to each of us at least once in our lives. You don't need to be Hamlet for this to happen, just yourself. The usual connections between things fall apart and nothing holds firm, the world falls apart, disappears. And there's nothing to grab hold of—everything has lost its solidity, its reality. And only then does a person begin. He needs to find himself in this emptiness and grab hold of himself, of something real inside. Only then does real time begin, time that does not depend on the calendar. These letters are their only chance of finding themselves in another, in each other. And the reader reconnects disjointed time within himself.

Bradley Gorski: In April you taught a course at Columbia University on "Classics and Politics in Contemporary Russian Literature." Obviously, it was impossible to include all the Russian classics, so you've chosen just two: Gogol and Goncharov. Why did you choose these two?

Mikhail Shishkin: This question seems to want a confession of my love for these two specific writers, but I love all of classic Russian literature as a whole. Gogol lives in my texts both indirectly and directly: in *Maidenhair*, I visit him in Rome. He walks through the pages of my books. I have an indescribable feeling of personal closeness to him. Goncharov, in his *Oblomov*, exposed the mechanism of the Russian soul. That mechanism is the true perpetual motion machine. It will forever torture Russian souls as long as there are Russia and Russians.

Bradley Gorski: Is there something in Goncharov (or maybe in *Oblomov*) that is still relevant in the twenty-first century?

Mikhail Shishkin: Oblomov will be relevant in any century. His problem is every normal and decent person's problem in any society: How can one live with dignity? Russia's own peculiarity makes honest business—without self-debasement, without bribes, without becoming a part of a corrupt system—impossible. Oblomov's solution is escapism on his couch. Some retreat to a monastery, some resort to alcohol, others to revolution. Suicide by lying on the couch—that is Goncharov's brilliant metaphor.



Bradley Gorski: And what about Russian politics? How do you feel about the recent developments in Russia—from the protests of 2012 to the present day?

Mikhail Shishkin: The twentieth century locked Russian history into a Mobius strip. The country turns out to be an empire every time it tries to build a democratic society, introduce elections, parliament, a republic.

The events of the last year polarized Russia. The country is in the midst of a civil war, for now a "cold" one, between the criminal empire and "educated" society. And every arrest of a member of the opposition, every adoption of the latest draconian law by an

The biggest paradox in new Russian literature is the reader: thinking, profound, educated. He has not disappeared.

illegitimate duma, only radicalizes the two sides. The "crackdowns" have brought the country further under the control of the criminal organizations of oligarchs and bureaucrats, and the "protest" movement has been forced into an Internet ghetto.

The hopes for "Europeanization" that we saw during the perestroika period have crumbled. Again, for the umpteenth time, it has been confirmed that Russia is the perfect country for scoundrels and those who would fight them. This empire is not meant for a decent, "normal" life. If you are, by nature, neither a fighter nor a scoundrel, and you just want to live with dignity, making an honest living for your family, all the same, you have no choice: every day you're shoved toward one or the other. You don't want to be a scoundrel with the rest? You'll become a tragic fighter, ready to sacrifice everything, including your family, for the fight. You don't want to be a hero and rot in jail or get beaten to death in front of your home? Get comfortable with the scoundrels. And what are decent people to do these days if, on the one hand, they don't want to become part of the criminal structure—and the whole government has become one enormous criminal structure—and on the other hand, they don't want to foment revolution? There are few ways out-either the couch, like Oblomov, internal emigration, or emigration abroad.

Bradley Gorski: Is there any connection between your novels and the political situation in Russia today?

Mikhail Shishkin: Absolutely, they are intimately connected! My first novel, Notes of Larionov, comes from my experience of life in a totalitarian country. When I was writing it, the Soviet system collapsed and democracy came to Russia. Within an hour, it seemed, the novel was obsolete. But after a short time it became relevant once again. This question will forever be relevant in Russia: How to live in Russia while maintaining a sense of human dignity.

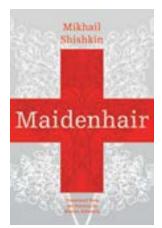
Or in *The Taking of Izmail*. There is a huge monologue in which the heroine says that Russia does not allow one to live a normal life, that she has to leave the country, that if we don't flee, our children will, and if not our children, then our grandchildren. After the peaceful protest movement was quashed by Putin's regime, all that once again sounds even more than relevant.

Bradley Gorski: How do you see the potential future of Russian literature both in Russia and abroad?

Mikhail Shishkin: The biggest paradox in new Russian literature is the reader: thinking, profound, educated. He has not disappeared. He is not looking for entertainment, but for a book that will not insult his intelligence, one that will make him feel his readerly and personal dignity.

As for the future, it has always seemed that everything was already written. Even before Tolstoy it seemed that way. I don't doubt that Russian literature has its best days ahead of it.

Bradley Gorski is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Slavic Languages, Columbia University. He conducted and translated the interview.



Maidenhair

Translated from the Russian by Marian Schwartz, Open Letter Books ISBN 978-1934824368

Available from Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble, directly from the publisher (openletterbooks.org), and better bookstores everywhere.



Erin R. Carll



Mark Mozur



Emily Nelson



Lara J. Nettelfield



Nataliya Rovenskaya



Peter Zalmayev

Alumni Notes

Erin R. Carll (MARS, 2010) is program coordinator at PILnet: The Global Network for Public Interest Law, where she manages a professional development fellowship for leading activist lawyers from abroad. She plans to leave in July to pursue a Ph.D. in sociology at the University of Washington, Seattle. Carll wants to study the inequality in the U.S. criminal justice system, the impacts this system has on those who come into contact with it, public perceptions of crime, "criminals," and the poor.

Since graduation, Mark Mozur (Harriman Certificate, 2010) has been working in Moscow, Russia, and Kabul, Afghanistan, for various oil and gas companies, specializing in natural gas pricing and trade. Mozur has published in the Washington Review of Eurasian Affairs on energy issues (http://www.thewashingtonreview.org/), and in the International Journal of Russian Studies on post-Soviet institution building with fellow Harriman alum Nate Schenkkan (http://www.ijors.net/issue5_1_2012/issue5_1.php).

Mozur is the founder of REDLines, an analytical service specializing in Eurasian energy markets, and maintains an acclaimed blog at oniondome .wordpress.com.

Emily Nelson (MARS, 2010) worked as a senior consultant at Booz Allen Hamilton in Washington, D.C., supporting the communications team in the international development market. She recently passed the Foreign Service exam and will begin working in the Foreign Service this summer.

Lara J. Nettelfield (Ph.D., Political Science, 2001) is a lecturer in international relations at Royal Holloway, University of London. Her second book (with Sarah E.

Wagner, George Washington University), Srebrenica in the Aftermath of Genocide, will be published by Cambridge University Press in 2014. She was a visiting associate research fellow at the Harriman Institute in the 2010-2011 academic year under the auspices of its Human Rights in Post-Communist Eurasia: Strategies and Outcomes project. Her first book, Courting Democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Hague Tribunal's Impact in Postwar State (Cambridge University Press, 2010), won the Marshall Shulman book prize of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) in 2011. This year she will be a juror for the narrative category of New York City's BE Film Festival. You can find her on Twitter @LINettelfield.

Nataliya Rovenskaya (MARS, 2011) reports on Europe and Central Asia for the Committee to Protect Journalists. CPJ's Eurasia team defends press freedom from Russia's far eastern regions to western Iceland, from southern Turkey to northern Norway. Rovenskaya blogs for CPJ. You can read a recent entry, "Turkemenistan Opens Up Media—In Name Only," at http://cpj.org/blog/2013/02/turkmenistan-opensup-media---in-name-only.php.

Peter Zalmayev (MARS, 2008) is director of the Eurasia Democracy Initiative, a New York–based NGO that seeks to promote democracy and rule of law in post-Soviet countries. The organization's website is www.eurasiademocracy.org.

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. Call 212-854-6239, visit giving.columbia.edu/giveonline/?schoolstyle=44500, scan the QR code, or use the enclosed envelope.

DONORS

We thank our generous contributors for their continued support of the Harriman Institute's mission. Donors contributed significantly to the John N. Hazard Endowment for the study of the rule of law in Russia, the Ukrainian Studies Endowment, and our student fellowship fund.

Leaders: Mary W. Harriman Foundation Ukrainian Studies Fund, Inc.

Volodymyr and Lydia Bazarko Irene and Richard Coffman Stephen F. Cohen and Katrina vanden Heuvel

George Bayliss Michael C. Brainerd Gail Buyske Robert Davis and Alice Yurke Bruce Drossman Thomas M. Hoya Daniel Jacobs Madeleine Kalb Michael M. Luther

Leon C. Martel Kimberly Marten Emily Nelson and Jessica Teicher Peter I. Pettibone Mark Pomar and Susanne Sternthal William Root George W. Simmonds William Taubman

DID YOU KNOW?

Since July 1, 2009, the Harriman Institute, though still physically housed in the same building as the School of International Affairs, is no longer part of SIPA. We are now governed by the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS), located across Amsterdam Avenue. Of course, many of our faculty and students are affiliated with SIPA, but our MARS (Master of Arts in Regional Studies) program is administered through GSAS. We encourage and applaud donations to all divisions of Columbia, but if you wish to contribute directly to Harriman programs and fellowships, please follow the guidelines for giving outlined above.



420 West 118th Street, 12th Floor, MC 3345 New York, NY 10027

NON-PROFIT ORG. U.S. POSTAGE PAID NEW YORK NY PERMIT NO. 3593