



# ***CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN REVIEW***

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**BETWEEN THE BALTIC AND THE BLACK SEA.**

**RECENT TITLES REVIEWED.**

**By**

**Martyn Housden**

**University of Bradford, UK**

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Aušra Jurgutienė and Dalia Satkausytė (eds), *The Literary Field under Communist Rule*. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2018.

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# *Central and Eastern European Review*

## **Between the Baltic and the Black Sea. Recent Titles Reviewed.**

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The history of the lands between Berlin and Moscow has always been recognised as particularly rich. It has, indeed, been home to some of the most impressive human achievements (e.g. in philosophy, art, culture, the sciences and practical engineering), as well as some of the most abhorrent (there's no need to recount these). This review considers four recent titles which, from different perspectives, deal with the region's multifaceted past. Since the texts encompass Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine and the Caucasus, in the process they present a wide view of the region as a whole and, in fact, tell us something about the engagement of both Germany (although more so) Russia in the region.

The contribution originating from Lithuania is edited by Aušra Jurgutienė and Dalia Satkausytė. The volume is based on a conference held at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore in Vilnius in 2015. Taking the contributions as a whole, the volume insists that national literatures, as developed within the Soviet Union, must be

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viewed as more than simply followers of trends observable within 'Russian' literature. Equally, and especially after Stalinism, literature did more than simply deliver ideological messages. As Satkausytė puts it in the introduction, after Stalinism, literature could support the system, but also it could either erode or 'exist beyond' the system (ix). Since the collapse of Communism and the re-emergence of independent states in Central and Eastern Europe, there has been a re-discovery of interest in the national cultures which existed within Soviet space. Satkausytė appears to be on strong ground with the following comment:

'...the literary field of the Soviet Union was formed and functioned as a project of multinational literature, thus it was a complex construct composed of varying cultural segments that affected one another. Hence it is impossible to analyze any Soviet national literature without taking into account the very project of a multinational literature, the history of its formation and continued functioning, its national literature, and the interaction and relationships of their traditions; in other words, the complexity and multi-layered nature of the literary field cannot be ignored.' (xi)

During the Soviet period, apparently, a formula appeared, 'national in form and socialist in content' (xii). Whether or not this was realised in actuality is explored in this volume, especially in connection with the generation of Lithuanian writers born in the 1930s, that's to say, during the life of an independent Lithuania. To quote Satkausytė again:

'Under Soviet rule, Lithuanian literature had to either reject the entirety of the literary legacy of the interwar period as bourgeois or Sovietise it...' (xiii)

The author feels that the multiple impacts of Soviet pressure and occupation are still present today across the literary field; and this is what the study wishes to unpack.

All of the contributions to this volume have distinct merit, but several are particularly strong. Certainly this is the case with respect to Dobrenko's discussion of 'Soviet Multinational Literature'. Take the following two quotations:

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'National literatures became the real domain of the Soviet imagination, thus creating a national mythology and an appropriate "historical past" for these nations.' (3)

And:

'One of the most important tasks is to trace and document the way in which Soviet Russian literature, its institutions and ideology (including theoretical and critical polemics) shaped the development of national and ethnic identities in the non-Russian Soviet literature.' (3)

Either comment could be discussed at length, likewise the contention that processes of identity formation which occurred under Soviet authority still help shape today's 'new public sphere' in the 'newly independent states' (4). When it comes to analysing Lithuania's literary heritage, Dobrenko recommends periodising the past as follows: a) the unification of literature in the 1920s and 1930s, b) what happened under Stalin, c) de-Stalinization between the 1960s and 1980s, followed by d) a time during which literature became increasingly 'national' during the 1980s and the 1990s (6). Against this backdrop, the author discusses the interaction of Russian literature with other national literatures, leading to the production of Soviet literature as a 'multinational phenomenon' (9). As if all of this was sufficiently interesting in its own right, discussion also broaches how ideas of 'The Orient' became intertwined in the process and how Socialist Realism interacted with societies in the North Caucasus and Central Asia which didn't have written literary traditions (13). Dobrenko maintains that, all in all, Soviet literature developed as something truly Eurasian, which had consequences for national literatures. The conclusion is:

'Not tempered by cultural tradition, the whole body of national culture got infected easily, so the very existence of a "Socialist Realist canon" could be compared to a scar left on the heart after a heart attack.' (16)

Tensions between Soviet universalism and ethnic particularism in literature are also investigated by Ivcanaukas, who compares Lithuanian and Georgian experiences. More unexpectedly, Satkausytė discusses Aesopian language as a means to understanding the interactions of power and culture. Putinaitė deals with atheist autobiographies as a form of literature subjected to the principles of Socialist Realism.

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Daugirdatė addresses the visit of Sartre and de Beauvoir to Vilnius in 1965, an event which seems to have been a missed opportunity to publicise the difficulties which faced Lithuanian authors at the time. Mačianskaitė provides an absolutely fascinating discussion of Nekrošius's play '*Kvadratas*', which was staged in the 1980s and made use symbolically of an X-Ray machine as a means of looking into people's lives. Not only was the play remarkable in that it made it past the censor, but it ran for 16 years and was performed 315 times. Of the play, Mačianskaitė says this:

'As *Kvadratas* ends, the main characters approach the condition of people controlled by fear and constant self-suppression.' (105)

Using Western and Eastern music to help make different kinds of points during the course of the play, this sounds like a drama which really does deserve much greater exposure outside of Lithuania.

Mitaitė presents a splendid analysis of Lithuanian poets born in the 1930s. These include Baltakis, Marcinkevičius and Maldonis. One of the strengths of the article is that it deploys a number of thought-provoking quotations from the poets themselves. In one quotation, for example, Maldonis discusses the moral problems associated with the decision to work and publish as a literary figure in the Soviet Union. To do that, you had to conform. If you didn't want to conform then no one could read your work and probably you would end up working in a 'meagre state job' (121). Maldonis also had interesting things to say about the decision to remain in the Soviet Union or to flee to the West. Some important figures, such as Štromas, maintained more could be achieved from exile than from remaining inside Lithuania. For several reasons, however, Maldonis thought it was more important to remain:

'I was not an advocate for fleeing, I still thought that regardless of what happened, we needed to live here. Maybe this is wrong, I don't know, but my view of emigration was negative. I thought that regardless of what happened to us here, we needed to stay. Of course, perhaps this position has many negative aspects, because a person who has escaped a certain environment examines himself on a totally different plane, with different opportunities, in a different space, in different cross sections and cross-winds, and then this could yield unexpected benefits and a novel quality. The fertilization of literary ideas and literary techniques probably occurs in the face of these challenges, these fortunes, and these paths. Here everything seems unambiguous. But knowing his ability, his potential, his

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intellectual strength, he was very much needed here. Although ... he would have been constantly tormented here and maybe would not have realized some of those opportunities.' (128-9)

Mitaitė's contribution is to be welcomed especially for the outstanding clarity with which it raises such challenging issues.

Jurgutienė addresses 'mimetic resistance', or discourse that neither agreed nor disagreed with the prevailing regime (138). Eglāja-Kristsons examines the Lithuanian journal *Karogs*, which was published between 1940 and 2010. Arsenev investigates Socialist Realism's insistence that language and the senses should be brought into alignment. Kharkhun injects a comparative essay with a discussion of Ukrainian literature under late Communism, while Mihkelev does the same by examining the use of Hamlet and folklore as means for resistance in Soviet Estonia.

As this brief outline of the overall edited collection makes plain, this volume is varied in its subject matter. Nonetheless, it is always worth reading and is to be welcomed as an English-language treatment of themes regarded as important by Lithuanian-language experts of national literature. We must hope that more comparable texts will become available in time.

Sara Bender's monograph deals with lands to the south of Lithuania. *In Enemy Land. The Jews of Kielce and the Region 1939-1946* is a history of the Jewish community (and its relations with the gentile population) in the named area. In the preface, the author explains why such a study is important: it's because of a major pogrom which occurred there in July 1946.

This is quite a traditional history book and, as such, follows a chronological, narrative line. By 1819, Bender tells us, Jews had already settled in Kielce and in 1841 a Jewish Council was established there. Signs are that, from an early point, relations between Jews and Gentiles could be strained such that, for example, in 1835 Jews were banned from living within three kilometres of the town centre, a measure designed to reduce competition for Polish merchants. Nonetheless, Jewish settlement in the area grew steadily. In 1841, 12 Jews lived in Kielce and by 1852 there were 101 out of 3,639 total inhabitants. In 1862 the Tsar emancipated the Jews of Congress Poland and thereafter the Jewish population 'ballooned' to 11,000 by 1910. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Jews became engaged in most areas of local business. In 1903 they had opened a 400 seat Great Synagogue, in 1906 they opened a scientific library and by

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1907 were publishing a Jewish magazine. All of this was achieved against a background of nagging anti-Semitic agitations which occurred in 1904 and 1912, for instance. The formation of an independent Polish state in 1918 was also accompanied by anti-Semitic outrages in Kielce.

The chapter which deals with the years 1918-39 is arguable the one most worth reading. It provides a framework view of a Jewish community deeply engaged in seeking success, in organising itself and in pursuing goals which it deemed worthy. In fact, this chapter highlights so much activity on the part of Kielce's Jewish community that you suspect a whole book could be written about autonomous Jewish activity during the period. In 1919, over 45% over commercial establishments in Kielce were Jewish-owned (9). The Jewish community was led by a 20 member council and a 12 member administration, with funding coming from community taxes. During the 1920s, there were numerous Jewish schools, including between 13 and 15 'chadarim' schools (religious schools for younger boys). There were Jewish libraries, sports clubs, Zionist organisations and Jewish political engagement too. This was a vital community indeed, so it comes as a shock to read that in October 1937 Kielce witnessed a pogrom in which 5 Jews were killed (49).

Of course, the bulk of this text concerns the Second World War and the Holocaust. Here, discussion of the individuals who served as *Judenrat* is particularly interesting. The first *Judenrat*, Dr. Mosze Pelc, was appointed in November 1949. He had studied medicine at both Graz and Vienna before serving as a doctor for the Central Powers during the First World War and subsequently joining the Polish army to participate in the fight against Bolshevism on the Eastern Front. In 1933 he became a member of Kielce town council and ran the community's old age home and orphanage without pay. While *Judenrat*, Pelc established a soup kitchen which distributed between 600 and 1,200 meals each day, a strategy which was hoped to build bridges with Polish community. By Summer 1940, however, Pelc was standing down and Bender is completely damning about what he had achieved for his community:

'He failed to comprehend that without permanent sources of funding the *Judenrat* could not surmount the problems created by the occupation regime, and he did not have the fortitude to seek advice and enlist the help of the town's prosperous members. Too proud to bargain with the Germans, he refused to debase himself even for the sake of the Jewish

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public. He had nothing to offer the Jews over whom he presided, let alone those who sought his assistance.’ (89)

In time, Mosze Pelc was sent to Auschwitz where he was killed arbitrarily by a guard. The role of *Judenrat* was taken over by Hermann Lewi, a wealthy entrepreneur, director of the Great Synagogue and city councillor. Later in the text, Bender characterises Lewi as follows:

‘Lewi was not blessed with long-range leadership vision, and just as he was unable to set up a police force that would follow his orders, so did it not occur to him to attempt to persuade the Germans to exploit the Jews as a labour force within the ghetto as a way to appease them and keep the Jews regularly fed. Lewi did not fight. He succumbed to conditions too quickly and plainly did whatever he could to keep the authorities satisfied.’ (129)

His work was curtailed as a result of ghettoisation, nonetheless, Bender finds that Lewi’s leadership led to ‘no discernable improvements’ to the conditions facing Kielce’s Jews (93). Compared to other *Judenräte*, Bender concludes that Kielce’s leadership was ‘rudderless and lethargic’ (93).

This text is admirably and thoroughly footnoted. As the examples of Pelc and Lewi show, there is a lot here that calls for detailed consideration. In the case of the *Judenräte*, we might well wonder what on earth these people could have done to constitute ‘success’. Bender examines the nature of the ghetto police, denunciations that were sent to the police regarding Poles who were hiding Jews, the deportation process, the people who ran it (and their fates)—everything is here. And so, eventually, the text comes to the pogrom of 4 July 1946, which followed allegations that a Polish child had been kidnapped by Jews. The ensuing disorders led to the murder of 47 Jews (284). It took until 1996 for the town of Kielce to ask for forgiveness for what had happened (293).

Make no mistake, this is a scholarly study, but it is a ‘tough read’. Simply to engage with literature such as this really does underline the strangeness of the possibility that anti-Semitism can still (in different ways) invade European politics in the twenty first century.

The third study, Karl Schlögel’s book *Ukraine. A Nation on the Borderland* is not new. It is a translation of a German language version which appeared in 2015. It takes

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the form of a number of essays written by the author over a number of decades. This leads to a bit of an unevenness in the book with, for example, essays about Lviv and Chernivtsi dating to the 1980s, while the pieces about Odessa and Yalta were produced in 2000 and the one about Donetsk in 2014. Still, the translation reads well and the text remains well worth reading. Consistently it raises questions. In response to the title alone you have to think: which nation? Which borderland? Who says it is a borderland? And who identifies the characteristics of a borderland? As the text progresses, perhaps it also raises the possibility that one person's 'borderland' is in fact part of someone else's 'heartland'. Nonetheless, Schlögel sees Ukraine as a place criss-crossed by borders, 'a laboratory of boundary landscapes', which identifies it as 'a Europe in miniature' (61).

The book's particular current attractiveness is that it takes every opportunity to discuss, or perhaps better denounce, the on-going Russia-backed breakup of the post-Soviet Ukrainian state's territory. In this connection, the study is rich in ironies. The current division has occurred against a backdrop of closeness between Ukraine and Russia, but not just geographical proximity, personal-familial closeness too, since many families span both the ethnic and political divide (62). Citing Sociologist Tatiana Zhurzhenko, the book also hypothesises that Putin's recent actions have in fact catalysed the emergence of a Ukrainian nation to a degree never previously experienced (66). In other words, one act of attempted destruction only generated another type of creation.

This text is not, however, a traditionally disinterested academic text, rather it is both personal and impressionistic. At times this quality is reflected in a way that tells us something of the privileges of academic life. As the author recounts being taken around local historical sites by some of his contacts, non-academic readers might well wonder at the style of existence of someone who regards as 'work' the kind of regular trips which for many might only represent occasional holidays. It is clear that for Schlögel, his 'work' is also his 'hobby'. It is therefore quite appropriate that at an early point he admits (as if to a bad habit) that for scholars of Russia, that country '... is more than a subject of research, it is deeply woven into our personal lives' (24). The whole study certainly makes this plain. Under the circumstances, it is inevitable that the author feels deeply about the recent fragmentation of Ukraine and goes out of his way to encourage the reader to feel outrage about this too. Certainly he will never be offered a post as one

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of Putin's advisers since time and again Schlögel denounces Russian strategies of destabilisation and aggression towards its neighbouring state. This is clearly apparent from 'get go', for instance in the first chapter, 'Information War'.

Perhaps it's predictable that a book about Ukraine, written by a western European academic, would be hostile to Putin; less predictable, however, is the way the author tackles his topic. Rather than produce a 'standard' political history with a united text following a broadly chronological structure, the author has produced an 'urban history'. The majority of the text is, indeed, a history of Ukraine's cities. True, there is a cost. Since all of the cities were affected by the narrative of the twentieth century, the chapters have to become a bit familiar. Nevertheless, the approach does provide freshness and enables Schlögel to deploy information and ideas that might engage academics and the Easyjet / Ryanair audience alike.

We learn, for example, that Kiev is the 'mother of all Russian cities' and exercised a formative influence on Bulgakov when he wrote *The Master and Margarita* and *The White Guard*. (So maybe these books would make for good reading during a city-break.) The chapter on Odessa includes obligatory discussion of the Richelieu Steps, but also highlights the city's rich history of ethnic mixing. Discussion of Yalta and its region highlights its status as home to the first sanatoria for peasants and workers, as created by the Bolsheviks in 1923. Kharkhov emerges as a fascinating home to Europe's *avant garde* between 1919 and 1934. More generally, we discover there are said to have been five Kharkhofs: a Cossack settlement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a nineteenth century regional capital of the Russian Empire, a centre for modernism in the 1920s, a city reborn following German occupation during the Second World War, and today a possible European city (168). This is a thought-provoking discussion. Dnepropetrovsk, Czernowitz (with a particularly strong German heritage), Lviv (with a centre for urban history)—they are all included. Particularly interesting given the current situation in Ukraine is the chapter on Donetsk. Schlögel gives up a firsthand account of the coup which happened there in early 2014. After the city was taken over by 'nutcases' (his word, p. 189) he feels it has become a 'dying city' (186). The text proposes the city has become victim to 'urbicide'. Less depressing is the earlier history of Donetsk and the Donbass area, where a Welsh industrialist called John Hughes turns out to have been highly influential in building up industrial capacity in the late nineteenth century. Historically, the area's economy turns out to have been distinctly

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international, with (in the late nineteenth century) 26 out of 36 joint stock companies operating there being foreign-owned (mostly French and Belgian) (205). There is irony again: a region currently very much 'cut off' from the wider world was built up thanks to international engagement.

This, therefore, is a book well-worth reading. True, perhaps we could have heard a bit more still about arts and culture in Ukraine—a bit more about the heritages of the different peoples living there. Nonetheless, the book is full of interest and insight. It makes the case successfully that too many studies of Ukraine have focused on the empires which controlled them and too little on the place itself, with the result that histories of Ukraine can become histories of other places (54-7). It also does manage to provide a corrective to this. In this respect, Schlögel has made a fine contribution to area studies history.

Schlögel attempts to engage our interest in one area that too seldom is understood adequately in its own right; in fact Jeronim Perovic attempts something similar with respect to somewhere different, namely the North Caucasus. This means Chechnia, Ossetia, Dagestan, Abkhazia and Ingushetia, so once again we're dealing with a territory in which Russia has had a long-standing interest which continues today.

The book's foreword sets the scene appropriately:

'The North Caucasus is one of the world's most turbulent and less understood regions. Nowhere Russia's imperial advance met fiercer resistance than in the mountainous parts of this predominantly Muslim-populated borderland.'

Centrally, therefore, Perovic tells a tale of Russian imperial conquest and its encounter with various kinds of resistance and uprising. More than this, however, he also seeks to examine the way local cultures, circumstances, transformations and motivations coloured the interactions between empire and local populations, a characteristic which does make the book distinctive. Possibly the 'headline fact' of Perovic's study (the feature which casts a shadow over all else) is the mass deportation of Chechen and Ingush peoples, from the North Caucasus to Central Asia. About 600,000 people were moved in early 1944 and were only allowed to return 'home' after Stalin's death. This text does not view the project as attempted genocide, but as a major symptom

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highlighting the failure of modernisation and Sovietisation policies as implemented in the North Caucasus (3).

Despite Perovic's stated aim of trying to do something a bit unconventional, the study's basic structure is a traditional one of following chronology. We read briefly about Ivan the Terrible and the North Caucasus, Catherine II as well. True to the author's promise, we don't just hear about imperial policies, but local populations too. Certainly at least some of this information appears to lie at the extremities of our historical knowledge, for example when the author explains Chechnia's clan-based social system. Apparently there were 135 such clans at the start of the nineteenth century. One consequence of such a diffuse means of social organisation was that if one clan offered submission to empire, others did not necessarily do so, with the result that centre-periphery relationships could be particularly unpredictable. As the example suggests, at times the book feels more like anthropology than history, and it appears likely that there is much more work to do if we are to understand the past of these societies properly. This anthropological tendency also extends to the Cossacks. Apparently at least some of the Cossack communities were descended from people who had fled to the periphery of empire in order to elude its authority. Nonetheless, the Terek Cossacks were accepted into Russian service in 1721

The nineteenth century saw major initiatives to impose Russian authority in the North Caucasus, including Ermolov's campaign. Local resistance during the 1930s was particularly fascinating. It was led by Imam Shamil who went a long way towards building the clans (or *teips*) into a united political structure. It also saw Islam, in the form of sharia, becoming an organisational principle binding a regional alliance of groups together. The text goes into painstaking detail about the colonisation efforts the Empire undertook during a time that appears to have been strange and experimental (81-2). There were efforts by colonial authorities to co-opt sharia courts in the hope that they would produce 'a form of Islam that was suitable for the projection of imperial rule' (84). It was a remarkably unstable period, during which (for instance) Dagestan saw 18 revolts against Russian rule (1859-77). In 1877 there was, perhaps, the major uprising of the century, involving hundreds of settlements in Chechnia, Dagestan and elsewhere (86). That year also saw a Russo-Turkish war, which led to Turkish-backed activists agitating against Russian authority. As a result, there was an attempt led by Alibek-Khadzhi to set up an independent imamate (88). There followed policies of

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repression and population repression against local populations and the use of Cossack communities as a tool for shoring up imperial authority.

Perovic writes with authority and, with a dense text, provides a 'blow by blow' narrative of the region's experiences of build up to revolution and civil war. Again, there is a lot to capture a non-specialist's attention. We hear, for example, that 1917 saw a conflict between Cossacks and Chechens in which the former killed Sheikh Ali Mitaev (120). The killing of a sheikh: the detail suggests the 'otherness' of the world at issue here. As it progresses, the book does provide a sense of a modernising state colliding with traditional societies. It creates the impression that modern statehood was 'grafted on' to what pre-existed in the region, but that even with this said, in the wake of the Russian Revolution attempts to create state structures in the North Caucasus were rather half-hearted. It hints at how external stressors (such as confrontation with the Ottoman Empire) could promote inter-ethnic violence in a complex society and makes us want to know more about the place of Islam in the Transcaucasus. There's no question that a great many intriguing stories stand behind this impressively knowledgeable text. With a real eye for detail the author takes us through the terrifically difficult circumstances that affected the area at the end of the First World War, during which Denikin's 'White' troops became active in the area. It was a particularly chaotic time during which fighting bands sprang up to wrangle over power and independence in a way reminiscent of UK politicians fighting over Brexit. At times, the fight itself seemed at least as important as the final outcome.

Nonetheless, during the 1920s and thereafter the Bolsheviks tried to consolidate their power in the North Caucasus, in the process establishing a number of different territorial structures, such as the Mountain Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and the Dagestan SSR. The 1920s in particular appears to have been (again) an experimental time during which, for instance, there was a sharia department in Dagestan's Justice Commissariat and when several Muslim clerics were drawn into governmental roles (148). More radically, in Spring 1920, the Bolshevik government deported 25,000 Terek Cossacks (10% of their number) and, in an attempt to curry favour with local populations, distributed their lands to local Ingush and Chechen populations.

Of course Bolshevik authorities soon were attempting to tighten their grip on historically independence-minded territories. Here, Perovic takes time to explain the case of Ali Mitaev, a local community leader who eventually was tricked into attending a

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police station where, in April 1924, he was arrested (175). But it wasn't easy to tighten a grip on a place like this. There were few Bolsheviks beyond the cities and local Muslim societies appear to have insulated themselves from penetration by Bolshevism. To quote the author:

'The Muslim clergy maintained a social system that was largely independent of official state structures. It supported the socially disadvantaged and funded Muslim schools.' (186)

Penetration of Bolshevik ideas into traditional societies was hindered further by low literacy rates and economic challenges to traditional social forms were restricted by low levels of industrialisation. Hence Perovic comments:

'For many people in the North Caucasus, "the Bolsheviks" were no more than an abstract notion.' (188)

And when people did think about Bolshevism, often they misconstrued it, for example by seeing themselves as somehow becoming partners with the state. Symptomatically, in 1927 apparently 60 to 70% of party members worshipped in mosques even though that should have led to them losing their party membership (192).

It was, however, just about inevitable that sooner or later there would be a major confrontation between the new political system and traditional society. When it happened, the cause was collectivisation and Perovic maintains that this caused a 'conflagration' in Chechnia and across the North Caucasus (225). The signs are that the Bolshevik authorities prepared the way in part at least for the introduction of their policies in the region since, by early November 1929 they had confiscated 12,475 weapons from the local population. Thereafter, Bolshevik policy in the countryside led to food shortages, food confiscations, uprisings and repression (chapter 7). As well as offering a poignant narrative about the forcible implementation of and resistance to collectivisation, the author also offers general interpretative comments. He makes the case that resistance to collectivisation was different to fighting against traditional Russian imperialism; equally, the effort to implement collectivisation was not an attempted genocide, but something else. The whole proceedings were more indicative of a society at odds with Soviet ideas of modernisation and resulted in, for example, the Chechens playing little role in the Central government's political-economic project.

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If the North Caucasus was home to communities at odds with Stalin's aims, how would the confrontation end? Apparently the purges of the late 1930s only had a limited impact, especially in the rural areas of Chechnia and Ingushetia (260). Perovic appears to make this judgement notwithstanding the fact that 5,610 people were arrested in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR during the purges, with 2,408 being shot (258-9). As war approached, so the independent-minded nature of the area became more and more important. It was a region where Grozny was processing about 30% of all Soviet oil, but 60 to 70% of military draftees didn't turn up when required (266 and 269). The picture must have looked even less promising to Moscow after Berlin launched Operation Barbarossa. Some 100,000 people originating in the Caucasus aided the German war effort (272). The book, in fact, makes space to discuss the case of a Chechen soldier who surrendered to the *Wehrmacht* and subsequently served in counter-intelligence (272-3). Soon enough, the Northern Caucasus was home to thousands, if not tens of thousands of deserters and, between 1941 and 1943, Soviet security forces had to conduct numerous security operations against 'bandit' groups, one of which was led by Khasan Ismailov, who wrote extensive diaries (chapter 9). No surprise, therefore, that in April 1942 Soviet authorities consigned all Chechen and Ingush soldiers to the reserve (274).

Indisputably, therefore, the North Caucasus was a thorn in Moscow's flesh and the need to impose order on an unruly area led to the brutal deportations of 1944, during which roughly 20% of the victims died ((284). Perovic is clear that the project was more a kind of 'community-management strategy' rather than a legitimate project to provide security during war time or an attempt at genocide (by which he means the attempted killing of whole population groups) (284). Preparations appear to have been made in November and December 1943 and the operation actually began in late February 1944. By 29 February, Beria was reporting to Stalin that 478,479 Chechen and Ingush people had been resettled to Central Asia (286). In the end, over half a million people were moved to the Kazahn ASSR and by 1 July 1946, 73,681 had died (316). The unfortunates were only given permission to return 'home' after Stalin's death, that's to say in 1956. What exactly 'home' meant by this time has to be a moot point since (notwithstanding his views on genocide) Perovic recognises that whilst in Central Asia steps were made to foster assimilation on the part of the deportees and to destroy their traditions and customs (315).

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So here is Perovic's book. At times, the text is dizzying in detail and narrative complexity. To make matters worse, you suspect that the reality behind the words probably was even more convoluted still. If the book could be improved, perhaps it could do a bit more to explain more fully the differences in language and culture of the peoples discussed here. What were the main features of the Chechen, Ossetian, Ingush and Cossack peoples, for example? What bound them together; what marked them out as separate? Nonetheless, the author is to be congratulated on what he has achieved. The study deals with an area that is too little discussed in a way that is rich and engaging. In the process the study proves a nice balance between general political history and more specific chapters dealing with the lives of noteworthy individuals (such as Ali Mitaev). It is highly recommended.

Here, then, we have four strong texts all of which deserve to be read. It is to the credit of each that, in their different ways, they highlight not only the fascinating character of the lands between Berlin and Moscow, but also that there is still much more historical work to do on them—especially once you turn your gaze away from the multinational empires that competed over their occupation and towards their indigenous inhabitants. These people still need more space to speak for themselves.

### **About the author.**

Martyn Housden is Reader in Modern History at the University of Bradford. His email address is **v.m.housden@bradford.ac.uk**.