

## Forum 8: Nationalism and Xenophobia as Research Topics

Research in the humanities and social sciences has certain ‘frontline zones’, and nationalism, xenophobia, and religious fundamentalism are obvious cases in point. When working on topics like this one is very much in the public eye (and working under scrutiny from different sections of the public), and one often has to engage in tense dialogue not just with other members of the academic community, but with the subjects of one’s research. The material itself can shunt anthropologists (sociologists, psychologists, specialists in cultural studies, etc.) out of their comfortable academic niche into the social space inhabited by the problems under scrutiny. This raises certain issues which we invited participants to address:

- 1 *Can nationalism and xenophobia be addressed from a position of neutrality (and should they be so addressed)? Is it desirable to adopt a public position (for example, to express and defend one’s views to the media)?*
- 2 *There are cases where academic values (e.g. considerations of fieldwork ethics, the traditional academic ethos of objectivity/non-involvement) come into direct conflict with researchers’ own ideas about their civic roles (put more simply, where a person finds the views held by a group that he or she is working on offensive). How, in your experience, is it best to resolve problems of this kind?*

- 3 What strategies are best adopted when one is dealing directly with people or groups who are involved in promoting violence, ethnic conflict, and religious fanaticism?
- 4 Have you yourself ever been the target of accusations of political bias, and if so, how did you deal with them? What position would you adopt towards other academics whose work you consider xenophobic, or who (as much more commonly happens) simply ignore the very existence of xenophobia as a problem?

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1 I don't think I am being particularly provocative by saying that researchers are fairly frequently confronted with examples of intolerance; indeed, this is not just the case for those working with skinheads and religious radicals, but also applies to those doing field work with the ordinary inhabitants of villages and towns. In general the notion of tolerance as we understand it is not a feature of (but neither is it entirely absent from) traditional and particularly faith-based cultures. Ultimately, the *svoi* — *chuzhoi* [us and them]<sup>1</sup> dichotomy constitutes one of the basic cultural oppositions for these communities. At the same time, however, cultures are able to develop the mechanisms that allow them to coexist peacefully and interact with members of neighbouring ethnic groups and religions. Nevertheless, at times of crisis, these mechanisms can malfunction, leading to tensions and in the worst case pogroms.

Today you don't have to study any particular society to end up on the receiving end of 'propaganda' about national or religious difference. You need only venture into the street (drop in for a chat with family or neighbours), or scan some blogs on the internet to realise that Russia is full of *chinks* who behave like they own the place and that it is high time they were driven back to their *kishlaks*.<sup>2</sup> You need only flick

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<sup>1</sup> Literally, 'one's own' and 'someone else's', but the aggressive-defensive flavour is probably better captured in a less literal translation. [Editor].

<sup>2</sup> A generic term for a tribal mountain village [Editor].

though any book (especially thrillers ‘for real men’) to discover a whole hoard of detestable Chechens or Arabs — a real pick-and-mix of terrorists, Islamic fundamentalists, drug-dealers, rapists of Russian girls, and cold-blooded murderers.<sup>1</sup> Fully-fledged xenophobia is part of everyday culture; it is the diseased reaction of Russian society to the military activities in the Caucasus, the arrival of migrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia in other regions, including predominantly Russian ones, and the activities of ethnic criminal gangs (not to mention the anti-Russian sentiment in some of the regions, which is a separate theme entirely).

Drawing on my own field work with communities whose ideologies are permeated by xenophobia, I would suggest that the behavioural strategies of any researcher are defined firstly by his ultimate goal (to collect information) and secondly by the role he/she assumes in the company of a given group. Exchanges ‘as equals’, in which the researcher deliberately positions himself as a scholar (theologian, sociologist, etc.) do admittedly take place; such a standpoint, however, takes for granted the fact that the researcher’s perceptions are different from those which are shared by the community he studies (the community generally recognises this fact too). The researcher need not go to great lengths to explain his own beliefs, so long as no-one asks him about them; indeed, everyone is entitled to their own opinions. Alternatively, the researcher plays the role of ‘an interested party’ (especially in the case of ‘participant observation’). The researcher’s behavioural strategy in this case is determined by the character of the informant he is talking with. In some instances, he might need to provoke a quarrel with the hope of exposing the opinions of the interviewed party more fully. At other times, asking questions and observing how the informant turns on the researcher himself as he attempts to express his opinions would be the right way to go about things, because saying what you thought would immediately provoke opposition: ‘Those Yids have filled your head with rubbish, there’s no talking to you!’ — and a refusal to discuss the matter any further. The latter is particularly pertinent to cases of ‘participant observation’ in which the researcher plays the role of the ‘newcomer’ whose task it is to assimilate the values of the local community. Any researcher who is unable to behave impartially (and that is not the same actually *being* impartial, which is almost impossible) when studying certain controversial problems (unless of course, he is confronted with real violence) ought to think about choosing a more harmonious community and less damaging problems to study.

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<sup>1</sup> It is only fair to note that in recent years several prominent publishers involved in the publication of mass-market fiction have made efforts not to allow texts containing this sort of material to be published (I know this to be the case from some temporary work I did several years ago for the publishing house ‘AST’).

All in all then, it seems to me that by getting into arguments with members of the communities he is studying in the vain hope of changing their minds, the researcher not only harms himself, but helps no-one else either. From this point of view, how does the belief in the racial inferiority of Africans or in the existence of a Jewish-Masonic conspiracy differ from any other belief that is fundamental to a certain ideology? Would the researcher also try to convince the informant that God doesn't exist (or on the contrary that God does exist), or try to refute his political points of view?

The societies that we study can nevertheless provoke a different sort of intolerance, as well as becoming the victims of this. I would like to dwell in more detail on this last case, and in particular on the problem of new religious movements (which I'll abbreviate NRM). The demonisation of 'non-traditional' religious movements in Russia is obvious to everyone. The word *sect* itself has in the last 15 years lost almost any neutrality it might have had, though it has yet to become a wholly derogatory term.<sup>1</sup> It has even been bandied about by members of NRM themselves, who silence the accusations of their opponents — members of the Russian Orthodox Church — by labelling them a 'totalitarian sect' and identifying 'sectarian' features in the behaviour of Orthodox believers. This demonisation is as much a result of the scandals linked to NRM in our country and abroad as it is the work of journalists; perhaps most importantly, it comes from the energetic efforts of anti-cult organisations. It is precisely as a result of this anti-religious discourse that terms such as 'totalitarian sect', 'destructive cult' and others have come into being, terms which have an explicitly emotional hue and, as a rule, are frequently employed by journalists as a particular kind of 'labels'.

Many of the stereotypes associated with NRM have now made their way firmly into the mass consciousness: they purposefully manipulate the way their disciples think often with the help of special technology ('zombification', 'brainwashing', hypnosis) or with drugs; they extort money and property from them; they drive them to suicide. These stereotypes also exist in anti-religious literature. In this case, the term 'sect' applies to a criminal group looking to get rich by deceiving its followers. In general the *religion* — *sect* dichotomy which is characteristic of anti-religious discourses not only comes down to a *traditional* — *non-traditional* opposition (the historical dimension), and *sincere* — *deceitful* opposition (the evaluative dimension), but also entails a *religious* — *non-religious* opposition. Consequently, the NRM are often not officially recognised as reli-

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<sup>1</sup> For this reason, the use of this term by theologians, sociologists, and anthropologists who did not take an anti-religious stance with regard to NRM was, by the turn of the twenty-first century, regarded as inappropriate.

gions (cf. their characterisation in anti-religious literature as *pseudo-religious movements* or the term *pseudo-religious gibberish* introduced by workers at the Institute of Forensic Psychology named after V.P. Serbsky [Polishchuk 1995] and used to designate an illness apparently peculiar to members of NRM and consequently distinguishable from *religious ravings*).<sup>1</sup>

Of course, that is not to say that the leaders and members of NRM are incapable of committing crimes or suffering from mental illnesses. However, the propagation of these sorts of stereotypes as representative of the fundamental principles of any NRM underpins a negative understanding of the very words 'sect' and 'sectarian', inevitably resulting in intolerance of these groups (for a more detailed account of religious xenophobia see for example [Verkhovsky and others 1998: 168-189]).

What might we, as researchers, do to help in this situation? Well, get involved in public discussions and elaborate our points of view for a start. We should realise, of course, that for reasons beyond our control we are unable to contend with the popularity of members of anti-cult movements, who benefit from the support of both the state and the church authorities (it is worth comparing the circulation of the average publication on humanities or social sciences with that of the pseudo-academic 'Sect Studies', by A.L. Dvorkin [Dvorkin 2000] sold both in book shops and over the counter in churches).<sup>2</sup> We can however ensure the information circulated about NRM in reference books and in encyclopaedic editions, which have a broader readership than academic literature in the humanities, is both coherent and unprejudiced.

This is clearly a real and urgent problem. Many reference materials are prejudiced against NRM. These are published as part of the Russian Orthodox Church's missionary work to demonstrate the heretical nature of such teachings from an Orthodox point of view, and emphasise the threat they pose to individuals and to society [New Religious Organisations 1997 — 1998; New Religious Organisations 2002 — 2002; Religion and Sects 2006]. The denunciatory way in which NRM are described in these publications is partly comparable to the manner in which Soviet atheist literature described 'religious fanatics' and 'obscurantist bible-bashers'. But the same strategies can be found in secular literature too, which itself promotes hostile

<sup>1</sup> Incidentally, such an approach has been legitimated in recent lexicography. For instance, N.Y. Shvedova interprets the idiom *totalising sect* in the following way: 'In the C20, organisations of a *religious nature* [italics added – M.A.] founded on a leadership cult and the unconditional subordination to its head.' [Shvedova 2007: 870].

<sup>2</sup> The circulation of the first edition of the book was 12,000. The third edition came out in 2002, 2003, 2005, and 2006 with circulations of between 5,000 and 15,000.

relations with national NRM. In this regard, the most revealing articles are those concerning the White Brotherhood,<sup>1</sup> the Mother of God Centre (now known as the Orthodox Church of the Mother of God), and the Community of One Faith, Vissarionites, currently known as the Church of the Last Testament, in the Encyclopaedia *Narody i religii mira* [Peoples and Religions of the World], which was released by 'The Great Russian Encyclopaedia' publishers with the stamp of the N.N. Miklukho-Maklai Institute of Anthropology and Ethnography, Russian Academy of Sciences [Narody 1998 — 2000: 692–693, 782–783].

The author's (R.A. Silantyev's) antipathy to NRM is so strong that he even employs the term 'totalitarian sects' and feels it necessary to explain that 'criminal cases have been incited against them more than once' (without feeling it necessary to add that, in the cases relating to the Mother of God Centre and Vissarionites, these charges were dropped). He is concerned enough to repeat disparaging assumptions about NRM (saying, for example, that the activities of the White Brotherhood and Mother of God Centre have been made illegal in some towns, when in fact these latter have been prohibited from registering in these places, which is not the same as outlawing them completely). Silantyev's work is full of factual and methodological errors, some extremely crude. The Vissarionites, for example are labelled a 'neo-flagellant sect' in which the followers believe they 'communicate with God' by means of working themselves up into a frenzy, in the Mother of God Centre, marriage 'is not recognised as a sacrament and is rejected outright', and the 'schism' between the leaders of the White Brotherhood allegedly took place before they predicted the world would end on November 24, 1993.

The author's emphasis on the differences between the dogma and practice of NRM and that of the Russian Orthodox Church is also notable: the public worship of the Mother of God Centre 'differs in essence from that of the Orthodox Church', prayers are used in the former which 'are not recited in Orthodox churches'; of all the Orthodox rituals, the only one that Vissarionites observe (albeit with serious distortions) is baptism. One wonders how the public worship of these NRM can resemble that of the Orthodox when, for example, the Mother of God sect do all they can to distance themselves from the 'patriarchal' church and when the teachings of Vissarion share

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<sup>1</sup> The White Brotherhood is perhaps the most demonised in society; it is widely believed (and this belief is supported by anti-religious publications and journalistic articles) that, when the leaders of the White Brotherhood predicted the end of the world on the 24 November 1993, its disciples – the Yusmaliane – had to commit mass suicide (despite the fact that literature published by the Yusmaliane at that time suggests that nothing of the sort was planned)

little if any commonalities with those of the Orthodox church. This is evidently an example of the logic of anti-cult discourse (undoubtedly shared by R.A. Silant'ev — the future secretary of the Inter-Religious Council of Russia): NRM are bad because they are non-traditional, which to all extents and purposes means that they are not Orthodox. But what might go unchallenged in dogmatic polemics is far from acceptable in an article in an academic reference book.

The problem here, however, is not as much the competence of the author (who at the moment of writing the article was a final-year student), as the permissiveness of the editors of what is essentially the most authoritative Russian encyclopedia publisher. These latter appear either to have cast a cursory glance over this illiterate text, which clearly falls wide of the limit of 'provocative and debatable comments' (something they warn the reader about in the foreword [Narody 1998–2000: 3]), or otherwise to have been unwilling to delve further into the question, given the clearly 'unsavoury' nature of NRMs.

The articles on the White Brotherhood and the Community of One Faith in 'Peoples and Religions of the World' (mistakes and all) were drawn on in the text book compiled by D.A. Taevsky [Taevsky 2001: 26–27, 51–53] — a very dubious publication from the point of view of the definitions offered. In it, NRM are described in firstly as a 'totalitarian syncretic sect of a neo-Khlystic sort', and secondly as a 'syncretic sect related to the *khristovery*' (obviously, a reference to the *khristovery*, Believers in Christ, the self-proclaimed title of the Russian mystical sect better known as the Khlysts [Flagellants]). This was seemingly Taevsky's attempt to rework the definition of 'Khlystic sects' conferred on the Vissarionites by Silant'ev).

The abovementioned NRM are more intelligently defined in the dictionary of religions published by the Russian Independent Institute of Social and National Questions and the research centre 'Religion in Contemporary Society' [Religii 1999], although here too they are not completely free of evaluative characteristics. In the article, 'Non-Traditional Religions and Cults in Russia', these movements are thus identified as 'artificial formations with far from religious goals'. These movements (indeed all of them, according to the text) are characterised by a 'fixation with changing or transforming the consciousness of their members by 'programming', 'codifying', 'zombifying' and so on, with the help of certain mechanisms ranging from the repeated reading of mantras (sacred formulas), religious texts, and meditations to purposeful hypnosis, the use of narcotics and even concentration-weakening nerve-paralyzing gases and narcotics which strengthen the state of meditation; [...] with the intention of maximising commercial profit' [Ibid: 300–301; see also the article 'Destructive Cults in Russia': 87].

Obviously, this type of publication does not help to reduce religious intolerance. With this in mind, I want to reiterate that the publication of coherently written reference works,<sup>1</sup> which are as unprejudiced as possible in their descriptions of NRM (and whose points of view could be borrowed by those compiling academic textbooks about the history of religion) is not only important for academia but could also help to lessen the degree of xenophobia in society.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It would nevertheless be wrong to say that no text books of this sort have been released. During the past ten years, perhaps the only accurate reference work to be published was produced by the Russian Academy of State Service [Novye religioznye kulty 1997-1998]. It is also important to note the publication of an authoritative reference-analytical series dedicated to both new and traditional Russian religions (I am referring here to the results of the joint Russo-British project the 'Encyclopedia of Contemporary Religious Life in Russia' [Contemporary Religious Life 2003-2006: Atlas 2005-2006]). Unfortunately, as far as circulation is concerned, these publications are much less widely distributed than the 'anti-sect' materials.

<sup>2</sup> It is, however, important here not to swing to the other extreme, as often happens with human rights discourses. The defence of NRM becomes an attack on the groups who view themselves as their victims. See for example 'Someone "commissioned" the "White Brotherhood". Logically thinking, it might be suggested that the 'customers' in question could be: 1) the parents of members of the 'White Brotherhood' who are unhappy that - now they have grown up - they have lost control over their children' [Murashov n.d.]; 'There is clearly sexual sublimation involved in the mystical experience of the 'Kingdom of immaculate conception [...] which for Ioann Bereslavsky, the chairman of the Bogorodichi centre [...] involves the negation of natural sexual life - that 'sinful Eros' which Christians must reject along with the 'defeat in blood'... which is particularly irritating to worn out parents of the sort that staff PTAs' [Levinson 1999] and others.

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## ELENA BEREZOVICH

1

Before separating the purely scientific view of xenophobia from the civic-minded view of this, it is necessary to formulate the first of these (I am not so concerned about the second; it derives from notions of civility and decency which are still relevant today). In my opinion, the importance of impartiality is indisputable: academia and ethics must deal with events in their own separate ways. At the same time, it is still too early for us to talk about any sort of objective and complete study of xenophobia (and more generally relations to outsiders, ethnic stereotypes and so on). Take, for example, the discipline with which I am personally associated — linguistics.

This theme rarely comes up in Russian linguistic literature and even when it does, in those few

works that we do have available, it is far from always discussed with the necessary measure of ‘scientificity’. I was confronted with this problem ten years ago when I began consulting the literature on linguistic stereotypes of various peoples (both foreign and Russian) (at the time this was a very topical subject). It was not a very pleasant experience given that, at that time, I still believed in the relative objectivity of linguistics, and thought that, as a discipline, it might be able to influence the nature of research by providing valuable information on naïve xeno-psychology. After all, data on vocabulary and phraseology (unlike literary texts, narratives, interviews etc., in which, at one level or another, one individual’s subjective opinion is manifest) record the objective ‘knowledge’ of native speakers, who have passed through a process of linguistic natural selection. Nevertheless, the researchers who I am talking about here (see for example the works on linguistic culture by V.V. Vorobyeva) did not take up these opportunities. Instead they preferred to select their sources in a tendentious manner (for example, using texts by the ‘Pochvenniki’<sup>1</sup> and propagators of the ‘Russian idea’ when studying the usage of the adjective *Russian*), as well as their own analytic data (as such, the author ‘notes’ *Russian generosity*, but ‘fails to note’ *Russian laziness* or *drunkenness*). The intrusion of unverifiable stereotypes into the linguistic system (for example, French egocentricism, American stupidity, German impersonality, Spanish superficiality — but *Russian sobornost* [religious communitarianism]) is also a notable phenomenon. The arbitrariness of these interpretations is obvious: on the basis of such randomly generated characteristics of *Russian* such as laziness, boldness, generosity of spirit, daredevilry, irresponsibility, simplicity, the impression is created that Russians ‘believe’ — in God and in good. Reading texts of this kind, one might be excused for thinking that Mikhail Zadornov’s satirical sketches about ‘our’ national character and those of other nations have been transposed into the language of linguistics (‘oh those Americans are silly-ly-ly-ly-ly-ly’). Not for nothing does this author actively include ‘linguistic’ exercises in his recent talks in which xenophobic tendencies are increasingly evident.

Of course there do exist studies of another sort — see, for example the methodologically important article by E.V. Rakhilina and V. A. Plungyan [1999] which suggests we should impose strict limits on access to linguistic and non-linguistic information about other peoples, and proposes a method for imposing limitations. Some authors have reached objective and meaningful conclusions on this subject, but such a small number of articles does not allow for an in-depth examination of the subject.

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<sup>1</sup> From *pochvennichestvo*, a nationalist ideology that literally translates as ‘closeness to the soil’. [Editor].

Any valuable analysis is hindered by the fact that linguistic data of the sort that focuses on the reciprocal characteristics and evaluations of ethnic neighbours is rarely collected or put to any academic use, not to mention the fact that during the re-publication of dictionaries and other sources from the nineteenth century in the Soviet period, ‘national’ materials were simply left out. Many derivatives of the ethnonym *zhid*, for example, which featured in the pre-revolutionary dictionaries compiled by V.N. Dobrovolsky, G.I. Kulikovskiy, and in the third edition of V.I. Dahl’s dictionary, did not make it into the compendious *Slovar russkikh narodnykh govorov* [Dictionary of Dialects of the People of Russia], the corresponding volume of which (the ninth) was published in 1972. This is the characteristic condition of source bases in almost all the Slavic scientific traditions, apart from maybe that of Poland.

It thus appears clear that researchers must firstly study the problem from the context of their own discipline and from the position of an impartial observer. This in no way negates the researcher’s civic position; on the contrary it enriches it. His or her work can help the thinking part of society to understand the mechanisms that engender and ‘unleash’ xenophobia, and can help, in effect, to translate these ideas into some other ‘language’ — juridical, literary, artistic etc. And if there is real occasion for statements in public tribunals, if researchers have something to say to the media and know how to go about this, if they believe their opinion can be authoritative and meaningful for anybody, then, of course, it is worth defending this opinion publicly.

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Something similar is taking place at the moment. I am in the process of studying patterns in the semantic development of ethnonyms (names of nations and peoples) in various Slavic and European languages. This linguistic data clearly shows the universality of xenopsychology: not only are the evaluations (for the most part negative ones) of those phenomena signified by ethnonyms similar (in their derived meanings), but also the phenomena themselves are similar (mythical essences, poisonous plants, insect-parasites, primitive technical arrangements, illnesses etc.). Material of this sort interests me not so much from a ‘thematic’ point of view, as from the perspective of theoretical semantics and motivology. After producing a series of articles and a section of a monograph about this very subject, I received an offer from a Moscow-based publisher to compile a dictionary of derivatives of ethnonyms in the Russian language tradition. The task was an interesting and, from an academic point of view, important one; as I remarked above, lexical ‘xeno-material’ is poorly represented in academic publications, and this dictionary provided a possibility to fill this gap. Not to mention the fact that the offer was, so to speak, a ‘profitable’ one; the publishers were respectable, the circulation was large (ten times larger than the circulation of a mono-

graph or our collections of articles), there were reasonable royalties, and no need to worry about finding grants and so on. But at this point, my 'civic (or more accurately 'human') position' caught up with me. I was proposing to provide the mass (of course, the mass character of anything is relative, but even so!) reading public with a book whose pages would be filled with dangerously high concentrations of 'Tatar mugs', 'Jewish fevers', 'German cockroaches' and other vermin. This troubled me. I remembered the reaction of several of my friends after reading a well-known and valuable collection of Little Russian sayings by M. Nomis (this collection, which was first published in 1864, was republished in Ukraine in 1993): they said that being confronted with a whole series of formulas in the vein of 'one Jew killed — forty sins redeemed' had seriously depressed them. Of course, reading this sort of thing does not depress everyone; some people react to these texts with exasperation, others with sympathy etc. It is clear that when publishing 'xenophobic' materials, one needs to think about the preparedness of one's audience. A monograph intended for a specialist audience is one thing. A dictionary intended for 'general use' is quite another, especially one in which the material is not diluted by other words, but rather collected together on a 'thematic' basis. There is no doubt that readers exist who would read this book from an ideological perspective, taking the folk wisdom as justification for their xenophobic aggression I am still to make a decision about the publication of the dictionary, but an evaluation of the reading audience has become the basis for any decision I might make.

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I personally have not come up against accusations of *prejudice*, but colleagues from Slavic countries have told me about such situations. Demonstrations of xenophobia in an academic context can provoke only one reaction — physical disgust.

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## JOVAN BYFORD

**Nationalism and Xenophobia  
as Research Topics****1**

I have recently completed a research project looking at the rehabilitation, over the past two decades, of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirovic (1881–1956) — the controversial Serbian Orthodox Christian philosopher who, having been vilified by the former Yugoslav Communist authorities as a traitor, anti-Semite and a fascist, has come to be regarded in Serbian society as the most important religious persona since medieval times. In charting Velimirovic’s posthumous passage from ‘traitor’ to ‘saint’ I explored the rhetorical strategies that have been used by his admirers to divert public attention from the controversies surrounding the bishop’s life (the most important of which is his antisemitism) and which have enabled favourable representations to penetrate the public sphere and come to dominate memorial discourse. In doing so, I also wanted to shed light on the ways in which an Eastern Orthodox Church manages controversy surrounding the presence of antisemitism within its ranks. Finally, I considered the implications of the continuing reverence of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirovic for the persistence of antisemitism in Serbian Orthodox culture and Serbian society as a whole. The outcome of this research was published as a book in Serbian in 2005, with the English version published by Central European University Press in 2008.

**2**

As well as looking at representations of Nikolaj Velimirovic in the media, in religious art and at commemorative ceremonies, I analysed interviews which I had conducted with thirteen public figures (clerics, leaders of Christian right-wing groups, authors and politicians), all of whom have been actively involved in Velimirovic’s rehabilitation over the past two decades. In most instances, this involved talking to people who belonged to the mainstream of Serbian Orthodox Christian culture, although I also talked to the leader of *Obraz*, an extremist right-wing group with a history of violence.

The fact that my collocutors agreed to be interviewed *as public figures* made things easier for me with regard to the potential conflict between the consideration for fieldwork ethics and the freedom to express my opinion. When dealing with public figures (especially those who regularly participate in public debates or deal with the media), power relations within the interview setting are different to what they are when an academic talks to ordinary members of the public. At the same time, while I was less concerned that potential clashes of opinion might cause psychological or emotional harm to my interviewees, I was aware that confrontation might bring the interview to a close, leaving me without any material to work with. For this reason, I adopted what seemed like a pragmatic strategy. While being completely open about who I was and (broadly speaking) what I was working on, I kept silent about where I stood on Nikolaj Velimirovic' and his legacy until I was *explicitly invited to give my opinion*. Thus, I neither approved nor disapproved of the controversial claims made by the interviewees and I did not confront them when they said things that I found abhorrent (except by posing the occasional hypothetical question, using appropriate 'footing' techniques). Also, I never encouraged them to express extreme views by asking them leading questions or pretending to be in agreement with them when I was not. To my surprise, in over 20 hours of interview material, I was asked about my own views only once, and this not only did not bring the interview to an end, but generated a (for the most part constructive) two-hour polemic!

3

Since the publication of my work in Serbia, I have been called a 'communist poltroon', a 'scoundrel', a 'mercenary of George Soros', an 'enemy of Serbia', an 'agent of the New World Order', even a 'totalitarian nihilist'. Significantly, the use of these and similar epithets, otherwise commonly found in the vocabulary of the Eastern European far-right, was not restricted to reactions to my work from marginal extremist organisations (of the kind that propagate their views only on the internet or in fringe publications of little public consequence). All of these disparaging references about my character or my political and financial motives have appeared in a book which received formal 'blessing' from the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and was endorsed by it as a 'response to the most recent wave of attacks on Bishop Nikolaj Velimirovic'.

The fact that a book which criticises my work (and me personally) was formally sanctioned by the highest authority within the Church would perhaps not in itself be noteworthy were it not for the fact that the book's preface — authored by the influential Serbian theologian and retired Bishop Atanasije Jevtic' — alludes to me not just as a 'communist' and a 'Euro-slobberer' (*evroslinavac*), but also as 'the Jew John Byford'. The label 'Jew' was, of course, not presented by

Bishop Atanasije as an (in this case inaccurate) biographical ‘fact’, a description of my cultural, ethnic or religious heritage. Rather, it was intended as an *explanation*, a way of accounting for what was presented by the bishop as my treacherous, alien, pro-Western, anti-Orthodox agenda. Paradoxically, this classic antisemitic rhetorical trope appeared in a book whose principal message was to deny that there is or ever could be any antisemitism within the Serbian Orthodox Church!

These and similar criticisms do not trouble me personally, although I find them worrying as expressions of anti-Semitism in mainstream Serbian culture. I generally do not respond to this kind of ‘critique’ both as a matter of principle and because I would not know where to start. I find it much more rewarding (and easier) to study, analyse, and expose the exponents of anti-Semitic ideology than to engage them in conversation or a public debate.

4

When dealing with politically controversial topics, which are likely to attract interest and be discussed outside the academic community, the issue of ‘researcher impartiality’ is always problematic. The frequency with which accusations of ‘partiality’, ‘bias’, etc. are wielded at ideological opponents in the context of non-academic arguments has deprived these and similar terms of any substance or real meaning. Most academic disciplines have at least some, no matter how fluid or vaguely defined, criteria for evaluating evidence and truth claims, but in the context of heated political debates (often among individuals who occupy radically different moral and epistemological universes), the notion of ‘objectivity’ is of little consequence. That is why scholars of nationalism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism, should bear in mind that once the work becomes a matter of wider controversy and public interest, they will be judged by different criteria to those that they may be used to. This was certainly my experience with regard to the Serbian Orthodox Church. It took me, as a social scientist, some time to get used to the fact that I suddenly found myself having to debate Velimirovic’s credibility with those who believe that there really are such things as saints and intercessors before God, who claim to have experienced genuine miracles on Velimirovic’s grave and who believe that the New Testament contains absolute truth. No wonder that to them I seem biased.

## ALBINA GARIFZYANOVA

2

The sociological-ethnographical research that I'd like to discuss here has evolved through several stages. It was my first experience of participant observation, and I ended up being sent to one of Russia's northern towns. I had to try and become part of a community which was not only completely foreign to me but which was also unfamiliar in terms of its mindset, lifestyle, and its outlook on the world. I had to somehow find a 'happy medium' to guide my behaviour, which was somewhere between performance and sincerity, between faking it and being natural. At the first stage, I had the following tasks to fulfill: to get in with a group of young people who clearly exhibited xenophobic tendencies, to establish my position within the group, to earn their trust as a researcher, to carry out a series of interviews with the key people in the group, to uncover the group's hierarchy, to prepare them for potential video sessions, and to establish friendly relations in case we wished to return to the field at some later date. I managed to make contact with one of the main actors in the group while I was still working on an earlier project in the same town.

Participant observation begins when one arrives in the field of research and here much depends on one's guides and on the authority of previous researchers. As a rule, the success of the research depends on the behavioural strategy the sociologist adopts; depending on how close his real-life situation is to his research situation, his behavioural strategy in the field will change accordingly. I had to become an insider with people who were not only completely unknown to me, but whose way of thinking and everyday lives were totally unacceptable to my mind. As a researcher who was trying to understand a foreign way of life with the help of participant observation, I came up against a great many difficulties, and not only from a professional point of view. The sociologist is 'an alien in relation to his object of study', as a person he cannot escape the fact that he is 'a product of a separate cul-

ture, whose influence he can escape as much as one can escape from one's own skin'. Ethnography on the other hand is more like self-examination, it is the understanding of others through the understanding of oneself.

It was hard for me to hold on to my independence: as much when I was presenting the materials that I had collected in the field as when I was carrying out the participant observation. 'Nonalignment', 'outside observation', 'the maintenance of informant-researcher relations', 'control over one's own emotions' — all of these good intentions seemed to have fallen by the wayside. There were many things that I had not been prepared for. First of all, I had not been ready to deal impartially with the things going on in the field, to be personally turned into an object of xenophobic sentiment. Secondly, I had not understood the influence that I would have on my informants and that they would have on me, nor was I prepared for the new, emotionally exhausting interrogation by those who had already become more than just informants for me. I had not been prepared for many of my own actions/ emotions either. It's not only the field which is unpredictable, once in it, it is impossible to predict the actions of informants, the course of events; and it was impossible to control my own emotional transformation.

I would like to describe/ analyse/ reflect upon one feature of the research position: the emotional experience of the researcher. My discussion will be based exclusively on my personal experience, and in it I will emphasise two important points. The first of these is the emotional experience of studying manifestations of xenophobia from the position of one who finds themselves the actual object of that xenophobia, and the second is the relationship between the sociologist and the informants not only from the perspective of mutual trust/distrust, but also when the power of emotions is at stake [cf. Blackman 2007]. As difficult as it is to put into words everything to do with our feelings, sympathies/antipathies, attraction, and romances in our everyday lives, it is even harder to talk about this from the point of view of a researcher, particularly as far as our inner feelings are concerned.

At some point or another I began to feel that I had really become an insider in the skinhead group: they trusted me, phoned me up, invited me round and so on. But, as experience has shown, the field is an unpredictable place. Whatever you were certain of yesterday can seem like an illusion today. As with everything in life, trust borders on distrust, deception on truth, and hypocrisy on sincerity. For the first time in my life, my ethnicity seemed to be a drawback. I had come to study the xenophobic feelings of young people towards some imaginary person, and not towards myself; I had never thought that I would become someone who would count as 'kind of black'. In

sum, I was the subject of their hostility: something that was as unexpected as it was instructive.

I'll quote from my research diary:

*There are two people battling it out inside of me — me the researcher, because A. started talking about something related for first time in front of those two guys and I realised that I would have to keep on talking about it, and me the person Garifzyanova Albina Raisovna — born a Tatar, who always knew and felt Tatar, but who never knew how unpleasant that could be for somebody else!!! Unpleasant to be with and talk to a Tatar that is, which means with Albina. I never thought that someone could talk, laugh, and play jokes, tell me stories and listen to me just because I sort of look like a Russian, but the fact that I'm actually from Tatarstan suddenly changes everything. What's wrong with me is that I'm from Tatarstan, but then if I said I was from the Moscow area with this same 'face' then I wouldn't shatter all their illusions. Is that it?! That's more or less what I told him and everyone else, and bit by bit I realised I could already cross a boundary in the field that it's better not to cross. It's not a question of personal security. I could even tell him that I'm an Azeri and still feel totally safe. It's just about the feeling of humiliation that I had. It's incredible, but I can't compare that feeling with anything! I remember when I was a kid at school, the Russian girls would say that sometimes I spoke with an accent in September because I'd spent all summer at my grandmother's place in a village speaking Tatar...Sometimes they laughed at me and said 'Tatars can't read'. I remember like it was yesterday my dad talking when the national uprising was beginning in the republic, when being a Tatar was becoming 'cool', prestigious, well it wasn't shameful at least, and my dad said that 'All the Russians can learn Tatar now', he said, he remembered well the time when some older girls had laughed at him in the town where he sold potatoes, or how when he started his national service the only Russian word he knew was 'mama'. All these memories washed over me. Even so, someone saying to my face, in public, that I'm a 'black by default', which makes me worse than them, inferior, stupid, a freak of nature — that hadn't ever happened before. And even what A. said after that, that 'I'm not listening to him at all', that 'he said that there are good and bad people in every nation' — it didn't help to calm me down at all. The only way out that I could see was to get up and leave myself. My heart was beating so hard it seemed like it was going to jump out of my chest! I realised that I could only react with anger, fury, because that's how I always react when people are being humiliated I think, I lash out with words. I didn't want to ruin the field so I decided to leave, but at the same time I showed how I was feeling by keeping silent, by not expressing my anger in words. That was enough for everyone to realise that I was really offended. I went out into the*

*road and felt so bad that I just hid behind the brick wall of some house and started to cry. I'll never forget that wall, that place. And then I went off in the direction of the bus stop. Then A. came up behind me. He asked me to wait for him a few times and asked me a few times if I was always that emotional. I couldn't control myself, even though I realise now that it would have been better if I hadn't have said it, so I said 'It's hard to keep cool when someone tells you to your face that you're a freak, and when before that they've acted perfectly normally towards you'. He apologised for ages, in his own special way of course, saying 'so what, do I have to get down on my knees?!' And then he said 'I could do something now that I might regret later'. It was these words that brought home the fact that above everything else I'm a researcher. If I had been in my 'real life', I probably wouldn't have even allowed myself to talk to him, to come into contact with him, I called him a nasty name and left. The rational element in me had won out.*

This event divided my participant observation into two parts — before and after. At some point after this, A. said that he would never have started talking to me if he had known that I was a Tatar, and 'really, far as he could see, it would have been better if I had lied and said that I was from the outskirts of Kaluga'. I now began to realise that you yourself become part of the field, that you have an influence on others in the field and vice versa.

I remember a seminar that took place during a trip to this town in 2006 when we said that the sociologist has to stay somewhat detached, remain subordinate, but I didn't manage to do that either last time or this. As Shane Blackman pointed out, it's rare for fiction between the subject under observation and the researcher to be made public in sociology, and more often that not this is because in the world of sociology it is normally considered important that the sociologist is able to control their emotions, otherwise the results of the research are deprived of their objectivity [Blackman 2007: 699]. As far as I am concerned, however, it is this very emotionality of the researcher, his or her efforts not only to study and describe, but to understand and become emotionally involved in the lives of his informants which allow him achieve accurate and realistic results. This is because, most of the time, the sociologist ceases to abide by the 'artificial rules of life' and becomes part of the research field himself. My own research experience and that of my colleagues on the project appears to indicate the importance of the researcher's emotionality and the human factor in general in any case.

The field was full of incidents that were sent to try me not only as a sociologist and a person, but also as a woman. It was a test of my emotionality. On the whole, a lot of what happened in the second field concerned me personally: I was asked many questions about

myself and about my private life. It sometimes seemed like I had switched places with the informant: who was studying whom?

The long periods of time spent in the same environment as one's informants, the absence of the sociologist's normal social sphere, and his transformation into an organic part of what is essentially an unfamiliar routine all deprive him of the distance necessary not only to understand the things happening around him, but to keep hold of his own identity. I had assumed that being immersed in a foreign environment would certainly have an influence on me. Only now do I understand however that the moral and emotional trials of the researcher in the field are the real challenges. Just like in normal life where we are unable to separate ourselves from our own emotions, our individual resources, sometimes in the field you lose the sense boundary between the real 'I' and the person who you are here and now during this period away from your socio-cultural sphere. In the first stage of my research, the real test of me as a person came in the form of a the situation related to my Tatar identity in which, as a result of being described as a 'kind of black', I was transformed from an observer of the manifestations of xenophobic sentiment directed at Others into a person who was the object of ethnic hostility. In the second stage, the real challenge was my own, internal, emotional experience which was linked with the dilemma of negotiating between my personal feelings/ sympathies, trust/ distrust, and my professional identity. A new dimension of participant observation, of which I was not aware, is when, on the one hand, the boundary between the field and real life become blurred and you start asking yourself more questions than you are asking the respondent, and, on the other hand, when, in accordance with the notion that the sociologist herself 'is the most accessible and open informant, through whom one can access the darkest recesses of the soul', you turn your own intimate inner feelings into an object of research and analysis. My emotionality became something that both hindered and helped me in the field.

Who was studying whom more: I them, or they me? This question remains to be definitively answered. My own influence as a person was obvious in several cases, although the role of the sociologist should not be exaggerated. It is more likely that I managed to glean a general impression of what was going on there, and was just grateful that I had the occasion to spend time with them, that I had been allowed to see something that might otherwise have been concealed from me. This very feeling of gratefulness was at the root of my efforts to befriend my informants, and after that to be, at some level at least, close to them.

If they let me into their lives, then I also let them into mine. At first, my position in the group was built on the authority of the previous

researcher ('If it hadn't been for Olga, we wouldn't be talking to you, but she asked so nicely') and a certain curiosity about what I was really up to and why I needed all this information. The second step was to get back to people that I already knew and whom I trusted, and who to some extent trusted me. I was already more than a guest passing through, I had no need to make a big show to get on the inside. During my participant observation as a researcher I ran the gamut from 'dumb sociologist to close friend' for a few informants, while for others I remained part of the communicative environment. This situation, which might at first glance seem to have turned out auspiciously, did not however protect me against misunderstandings, mistaken interpretations, and errors. Perhaps because 'complete immersion involves not only the present of the people studied, but also their pasts', one month of last year was not sufficient. What's more, in the words of one informant, 'we are too different, we're people with different points of view'.

Even now, it is extremely difficult and painful to remember the life experience I gained in that remote northern town. My emotional attachment to everything that was going on in the field is yet another indication of the need to study not only the field, but also the world of the sociologist in that field. According to Blackman, researchers such as Denzin and Lincoln also believe that, when doing high quality sociology, the work also has an emotional impact on the sociologist (the reflexive turn) [Blackman 2007: 699]. In order to understand reality when carrying out ethnographic research, it is important for the sociologist himself or herself to become part of the world s/he is studying, which in effect means that the reactions and the inner feelings of the sociologist in the field are no less important than the points of view and opinions of his informants. For Bourdieu, this reflexive turn is at the same time an advantage and a risk since the sociologist lays his biography, locus, and personal convictions bare for all to see. [Blackman: 41, 699]. Nevertheless, the 'discoveries made in the field' should not be exaggerated [Omelchenko 2004: 173], and it is worth remembering that there are no rules in the field: you never know what is going to happen to you at some later date and how this will occur. It is hard to decide immediately who you really are: Are you playing the hypocrite to get to your research goals, or are you sincerely attempting to understand human beings?

How does the researcher's presence change the field? And last but not least, how, without violating any ethnics or breaking any promises, are you supposed to present the material you have collected and all that which has been confided in you 'as a friend' by someone who trusts you? These ethical questions started to nag at me as soon as I returned home. It is at this moment that you really realise the real meaning of the words 'do no harm'. The same dilemma, for example, between wanting to present the results of one's work in various for-

mats (scripts of interviews, photographs, videos) and the promises made to informants ‘not to expose them’ suddenly arises when the time comes to make a decision about visual materials: ‘should the informants face be obscured or not?’ Both in the field and now it seems like I violated ethical rules, deceived, broke my word, exploited friends as sources of information alone, and to use an expression of one respondent, ‘discarded them like a used condom’. And everything I said about them being ‘more than just informants’, and the feelings of friendship I started to experience all seem to be thrown into doubt, by me personally for the most part. This contradiction is, in my opinion, the most important element for the sociologist as an individual in ethnographical research. It’s a test. Sooner or later, in the field, or following his return home, the sociologist has to provide answers to a number of questions. What’s more important: one’s personal relations with the informant or one’s professional achievements? To realise the extent to which the informant has allowed the researcher to penetrate his life, or, to use the words of one respondent when describing the relationship with the sociologist ‘how far you can wriggle in’? And to what extent did the informants simply use you as a ‘sociologist in the field’?

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### ROGER GRIFFIN

1

The relationship between academic knowledge in the human and social sciences and the sphere of political engagement/ personal moral values plagued Max Weber a hundred years ago and continues to raise methodological and ethical issues of considerable complexity (especially since the ‘cultural turn’ has finally laid the ghost of objectivity as a property of human knowledge, if not as a methodology for achieving it). Obviously absolute neutrality/ objectivity on fundamental issues raised by nationalism are impossible academically (and actually undesirable

since they imply a de-humanised, God-like, definitive position), and even within the more ‘ordinary’ sphere of civil society they are deeply problematic. (E.g. whereas some humanists see their position, in the spirit of the American Declaration of Independence, as ‘self-evident’, I for one see liberal humanism as an irrational value system to be fought for non-violently à la Voltaire with passion and ingenuity). My need to achieve personal clarity on these issues was highlighted in 1992, shortly after the birth of a new ‘democratic’ eastern Europe, when I attended an international conference where the chair of the panel on nationalism I was in turned out to be a vehemently fundamentalist believer in the absolute innocence of his own ethnic side in the Balkan conflict of the early 1990s and in the unmitigated genocidal evil of the ‘enemy’ ethnic group (many members of whom he had previously lived alongside as a Yugoslav citizen for over thirty years without hostility).

I think it is possible to evolve a coherent approach to xenophobia in its many permutations on the basis of Enlightenment (secular) humanism and rigorous science which allows it to be condemned in terms which are consistent with both value positions/ethical identities (since they are not coterminous). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the scientific understanding of race, genetics, and heredity was such that genuine uncertainties and ambiguities existed about the ‘essential’ nature of ethnic characteristics and the role of race in determining history/civilisation at a time when imperialistic, nationalist, ethnocentric, male chauvinist, Eurocentric and Christianity-centred, militaristic, social Darwinian, and scientific assumptions about endogenous cultural or genetically determined racial supremacy and inferiority were the norm. This is no longer the case. The scientific (‘physical anthropological’ bases) for all xenophobic, racial, and biopolitical permutations of nationalism have long since been utterly discredited *scientifically* with the rise of genetics and the walls of the imperialist/male chauvinist etc Jericho have been largely demolished (though not as totally as the Berlin Wall, since large sections of unreconstructed 19<sup>th</sup> century prejudice still remain, and no amount of true genetic science will deter racists and ultranationalists from peddling such scientific — utterly mythical — notions as ‘seedlines’, ‘racial purity’, race- or gender-determined IQ, or ‘gene pools’). As a result, outside the bastions of politically motivated perversions of the human and natural sciences, there is a strong *convergence* between the secular assumptions of all the human sciences and the commitment to secular humanist values which axiomatically reject ethnocentric and xenophobic forms of nationalism. No mental juggling act of controlled schizophrenia is now needed to reconcile anthropology and anti-racism, or at least not on the scale of mental gymnastics of the sort now required by ardent Christians who teach Darwinism or committed racists who teach genetics. The only major

pockets of rear-guard action where scientific defences of ultranationalist and racist positions can be found are in the sphere of religious fundamentalism (Christian Identity, Islamism, Hindutva, Creationism) and the European New Right which has attempted with some success to create an 'alternative' anti-Enlightenment culture to pursue its tactic of 'right-wing Gramscism'.

I thus propose that an appropriate strategy for true human and natural scientists when then find themselves being interviewed on matters relating to the far right assumptions about race or nationhood is to use their knowledge (e.g. of anthropology or genetics) *informed by the pluralistic, anti-xenophobic passion of a secular humanist* to discredit and expose as utterly fantastic the premises of xenophobia and white (black, brown, yellow, olive, Christian, Muslim, Hindu etc) supremacy. This is not neutrality, but joined up thinking and feeling. In fact human scientists have arguably a professional DUTY to use their painstakingly acquired expertise to reveal the fallacies and mythic premises of racial thinking (just as they have a duty to be involved in the campaign to stop global warming that is destroying the very habitat they are studying.)

2

As implied above, the premises of the human sciences are profoundly compatible with a civic humanism that sees all human beings as equal in rights, with no innate supremacy or superiority as far as 'rights' are concerned (since all rights are conferred by human society. If there is a conflict of the sort alluded to in the question, then the researcher needs to undergo (submit her/himself to or be submitted to) an extended 'prise de conscience' (or what Communists used to call 'self-criticism') to ferret out residues of mythic thinking (prejudice) on religion, humanism, race, imperialism, gender etc that may have resisted the corrosive impact of exposure to science and the secular humanism that it underpins as a methodology, epistemology, and fund of knowledge. A thorough reading of a book such as Salman Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands*, Richard Dawkin's *The God Delusion* or Ed Husain's *The Islamist* for those could act as a useful form of colonic irrigation for strains of unexamined/ unconfrosted religious/nationalist prejudices about racial identity and supremacy which have proved resistant to a university education.

3

If 'directly' means in their professional role then if they are called to account by the media to 'take on' xenophobes, they should find out about the precise arguments being marshalled by the racists/fanatics in question (which can be of surprising sophistication) and seek to refute them *scientifically* and expose their mythic substratum and devastating consequences if turned into state policies. (For example, many journalists assume that the British National Party is still a neo-Nazi movement and base their confrontational questions

on this assumption, ignoring the fact that under Nick Griffin, party members have officially, albeit largely on paper, adopted the European New Right discourse of *differentialist* racism which artfully rejects the language of nationalism and white supremacy to defend the principle of maintaining cultural difference, and hence (rhetorically) rejects multi-culturalism allegedly *for the sake of all the ethnic parties involved*. For an idea of the new euphemistic (or ‘modernist’ as Nick Griffin has misleadingly called it) racist discourse propagated by the once overtly neo-Nazi British National Party, see the article on its website ‘Is the BNP Racist?’ at <http://www.bnp.org.uk/2007/12/23/is-the-bnp-racist/>, where one can read:

*The enemies of British Nationalism continue to parrot the claim that the BNP is a ‘racist party.’ This claim is most often repeated because the BNP unashamedly addresses itself to the issues and concerns of the indigenous British population, and because it seeks to ensure that British people remain the majority population in this country. Opponents point to the fact that the BNP has an all-white membership, and that we address issues concerning white people.*

*If the BNP is racist for holding this position, then, we would suggest, all of the following organisations — some of them state funded — are also ‘racist’ because they too address themselves exclusively to the issues and concerns of their respective communities:*

*1. Watford Asian Community care [...there follows a list of 31 other Asian, black, Chinese, Irish, Jewish, and African organisations]*

*Have you noticed how the media NEVER calls any of these organisations ‘racist’ even though they are openly organised along ethnic lines and stand for the rights of their respective communities?*

*It seems as if every group has the right to have an organisation speaking up for its rights — EXCEPT the indigenous British people.*

*In reality, none of these organisations are ‘racist’ — each and every community has the inalienable right to look after its own interests.*

*This includes the indigenous British folk, and the BNP is proud to be the party which stands up for the rights [of] our folk and country, in exactly the same way that all of the above organisations stand up for their folk.*

In other words, the BNP articulates a ‘victim complex’ (cf. another item on the site about how Muslims should be prohibited from overflying Britain because of the ‘terrorist threat’), which resonates strongly with those who post on the site — e.g.:

*The BNP is not racist, but for some reason the media portray them as racist.*

*We identify ourselves with our Anglo-Saxon group and want to keep it; just like other ethnic groups want theirs keeping. But this obsession by the press to call us racists is bewildering.*

*I would never even consider joining or giving support to such groups who are racists. The idea one group is superior to another is simply not true. All we want is to keep our identity.*

Were the adaptation of interwar fascism to postwar historical realities recognised more widely, then it would be possible for anthropologically trained anti-fascists to deploy their expertise more effectively in engaging with fascists who assume a neo-populist guise such as the BNP (or some factions within Zhirinovskiy's Russian Liberal Democratic movement), or a 'metapolitical' New Right one, such as Aleksandr Dugin's Eurasianist Arktogaia. For example they could offer effective *scientific* refutations of the thinly disguised xenophobia of such formations (e.g. by stressing that anthropology refutes the idea of pure cultures, whether British/English/Russian or Eurasian) and adduce evidence that mass immigrations/emigrations (and hence racial and cultural miscegenation and the 'bastardisation' of cultures has always occurred and always will).

4

I have been accused of political bias by some Marxists (one academic in particular) who see me as giving credence (and even respectability) to fascism and neo-fascism by taking their ideas, and even their revolutionary aspirations, seriously as the basis for understanding and defining fascism. I have been occasionally maligned by the 'odd' racist (e.g. one who emailed me to tell me I was betraying my own race by promoting an internationalist brand of humanism), and accused of calumny by the British Holocaust denier and pseudo-historian David Irving and the founder of the 'metapolitical' New Right Alain de Benoist for suggesting they are fascists — an accusation which I wear as a badge of honour. But in the main I have been well received by right-wing intellectuals since I at least take the trouble to try to understand their world-view.

I have a colleague in the US who constantly attacks me in articles and books and whose work betrays residues of a phase of his career when he was a racist and contributed biologically racist articles to the extreme right-wing press (a fact attested by a highly detailed website about him). Whenever I have alluded to this in my own reviews of his books the editors have told me to cut out the reference. When taken to task by racists or by Marxists who see ME as racist in print or debate I attempt to stand my ground by sticking to the facts and refuting their argument (e.g. I can document that have not sought to mitigate the crimes of Nazism by seeking to explain them as ideologically motivated, and my attacks on the European New Right are based on a historical knowledge of their ideological origins and the subtext of their pronouncements about defending 'cultural difference').

It is possible, of course, for academics to join social or political movements fighting racism/fascism, but at that point they operate not as academics but as members of civic society, and have to do what they can to retain clarity about the relationship between academic knowledge and value judgements (e.g. about issues raised by immigration, assimilation, and the tolerance within a pluralistic society of ‘alien’ customs which offend against secular liberal humanist principles or notions of gender equality for which there are no ‘scientific’ answers).<sup>1</sup>

## DOUGLAS R. HOLMES

### *Overview*

My answers to the questions emphasise, I think, the distinctive aspects of my thinking on these matters, as first laid out in my text, *Integral Europe* [Holmes 2000]. Here I examined the emergence of political movements in the early 1990s with agendas rooted in radical discriminations of identity, specifically, enduring affinities and irreconcilable differences.

I analysed groups and movements committed to an illiberal modernism within an ‘integralist’ framework. The activism of Jean-Marie Le Pen was, for paradigmatic reasons, my focus. Key to my analysis was my sense of how integralist movements such as his were adjusted to the imperatives of advanced European integration. I cast Le Pen as a ‘European integralist’ — rather than merely a French nationalist — to empha-

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<sup>1</sup> It might be a matter of some interest (or some concern) for professional anthropologists to know that in my latest book, *Modernism and Fascism. The Sense of a New Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* that I trespass some distance into the terrain of cultural anthropology in my creation (through what I call a ‘reflexive metanarrative’) of a theory of the human need for an *essentially* mythic nomos/cosmology/culture/sense of transcendence (‘a sacred canopy’, a ‘sheltering sky’). The book offers a theory of how this primordial and thus continuing need for a ‘sacred canopy’ which (re-)embeds, (re-)roots, (re-)centres, (re-)enchants human life and provides a suprapersonal meaning and identity expresses itself in conditions of *modernity* which disenchant (disembed etc.) human existence, and explains how this phenomenon helps account for the existence both of modern forms of ultranationalism, racism, and xenophobia *and* of totalitarian states attempting to ‘garden’ a new type of modernity. I have asked the editorial board of *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* to place the two relevant chapters on the journal website so that the journal’s readers can have the dubious pleasure of subjecting my excursus into anthropological speculation to the rigour of their professional expertise. The chapters in question are three and four where I elaborate my theory of modernity, the primordial human need for a fictional transcendence, and modernism. I am also posting the book’s postscript where I make my own plea as a civic planetary citizen for a ‘different beginning’ from that envisaged by fascists and xenophobes in a register whose anti-xenophobic credential are explicit.

sise his remarkable political innovativeness. He is the most conspicuous, if by no means the only, agent to actively recast identity as a subject of political practice. At the same time he stands out as the individual who first diagnosed how fundamental aspects of political integration were inseparable from questions of identity.

My responses here are in the first instance drawn from my long-term ethnographic experiences operating within these dissonant political milieus. Thus what follows is my side of a conversation representing what are important aspects of my thinking. However, I by no means feel entirely certain of or dogmatic about my positions, nor do I imagine they should serve as ideals to be emulated. On the contrary, I invite alternative formulations; I fully expect there are better ways to negotiate these remarkable phenomena ethically and analytically. I also draw here on those particular aspects of my research in Europe that I imagine to be most relevant to circumstances unfolding in Russia. In that regard particularly, my analysis should be understood as impressionistic and speculative.

I have always tried to resist addressing nationalism, xenophobia, and various forms of fundamentalism from a position of neutrality. From my earliest engagement with these configurations of ideas and sensibilities, I have assumed that I am fully implicated in them and with the intellectual traditions and histories that inform them. I have always assumed that what makes these sensibilities so perilous and so tenacious is not their alien character, but rather their proximity to a liberal humanistic tradition, particularly my own intellectual lineage as an anthropologist. I have thus been inclined to view the kind of research predicaments we are discussing here as reflections of deeper analytical questions. What masquerade as idiosyncratic ethical and methodological quandaries are, in fact, fundamental theoretical difficulties that deserve to be treated as such. The discomforts of this kind of inquiry often arise because our values and our intellectual conceits are directly challenged by these discordant politics, which at some level seem to parody them.

More generally, I think that any effort to treat racism, anti-Semitism, or ultra-nationalism as matters of mere ideological hygiene that can be sanitised with ideological vigilance is in error. However repugnant the ideas and how contemptible the violent enthusiasms such phenomena might spawn, I don't think I can claim some form of scholarly objectivity that entitles me to adjudicate the acceptability or unacceptability of these political and ideological phenomena. I can of course make such discriminations as an individual, but I think my status as an academic demands a more robust engagement with these questions.

I understand my role to be to demonstrate as systematically as I can why these cultural phenomena are plausible intellectually, why they

are enthralling emotionally, and, perhaps, why they are decisive politically at the opening of the twenty-first century. My work as an ethnographer thus requires that I talk with political activists who articulate what are, at times, distasteful ideas and investigate how these ideas are mobilised to impel what are often deeply vexatious political movements.

Pursuing ethnography based on these assumptions has its own distinctive challenges. The obvious one has to do with appearing to normalise or to valorise the sentiments that enliven these political movements. By examining political figures and their movements on their 'own terms', I am obliged to take them seriously, to recognise the range and the diversity of their ideas, the sophisticated ways they analysed contemporary circumstances, and the innovative nature of their political programmes. I was not only compelled to recognise the acuity of their social and political insights, but also to draw them into my analysis.

Most troubling for my colleagues was my argument that however distasteful and intransigent such political movements might be, they posed real challenges to mainstream politics — to our politics. I further argued that despite the fact that these political movements invoke incessantly convention, tradition, and the past, they, in fact, espouse radically future-oriented agendas. It is fair to say the way I framed these issues was not well received when I first articulated them in the mid-1990s.

I responded to this at best ambivalent reception to my work by formalising my ideas and insights under the rubric of integralism, which drew together theoretical, methodological, and ethical imperatives for research. I developed a conceptual model to guide how my colleagues and I engage these activists and their ideas, a model that I used to reshape various registers of identity as moral framework, analytical construct, and empirical fact.

For the compressed discussion here, I draw on my recent participation in an interdisciplinary project on European identities [Holmes 2009], my contribution to which deals with the experiments with liberal and illiberal configurations of identity that developed in Europe in the period after the drafting of the Maastricht Treaty (the constitutional instrument that marks the onset of the current era of European integration).<sup>1</sup> What I have sketched out is a very brief schematic framing for the questions posed in this roundtable. Or, to put it

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<sup>1</sup> The Treaty of Maastricht (1992) covers areas such as economic integration, nationality and the status of national parliaments, as well as subsidiary areas such as general policy on human rights, animal welfare, practical matters such as police co-operation, etc. See [http://europa.eu/eur-lex/en/treaties/dat/EU\\_treaty.html](http://europa.eu/eur-lex/en/treaties/dat/EU_treaty.html). It is seen as an instrument for the erosion of national sovereignty Europe-wide by conservatives. [Editor].

in more reflexive terms, I have developed this schema to help explain why we pose these kinds of questions about our ethical relationship to these phenomena at this particular time, and perhaps why these phenomena appear to be so fraught?

### *Experimental ethos & opportunistic practice*

One of my students told me about how Jean-Marie Le Pen had appeared at a public rally in Budapest earlier in this decade, where he was enthusiastically greeted and where the form and content of his message found deep echoes. This posed for me a key question: Why would Le Pen's message, formulated to appeal to an ardently French audience, have appeal in Central Europe, to a Hungarian audience?

Earlier I had observed that Le Pen had created a discourse on Europe ardently opposed to the basic assumption of integration, yet had, significantly, formulated this agenda while serving as an elected member of the European Parliament. From his vantage point within a major European institution, he discovered that his message, designed to address a tiny conservative, if not reactionary, French public, could be re-crafted, giving it wide currency that could inspire activism beyond the borders of France. Le Pen created a conceptual architecture to address (as he sees it) the essence of human nature and the character of cultural affinity and difference, and to give an analytical grip on the shifting nature of collective life, transformations of the public sphere, and realignments of human intimacy.

I increasingly use the phrase 'Le Pen' *figuratively* to stand for a series of innovations that Le Pen, the person, initially worked out, but which now operate beyond his control in all twenty-seven member states of the EU in the hands of other agile and typically younger political actors. The key point here is that 'identity' emerges in the twenty-first century not as an idiosyncratic psychological reflex or residual collective sensibility, but as a phenomenon that must be framed in reference to the supranational realities unleashed in the wake of Maastricht.

After the completion of the great identity project of the second half of the twentieth century — the integration of Germany within Europe — and under the sway of a comprehensive and far-reaching liberalism, a new and very different project of identity has emerged in this time of experimentation. To sum up:

1. The imperatives of European integration are inciting identity experiments, often involving dissonant and unstable forms of consciousness, that defy or exceed familiar categories of analysis.
2. Rather than a mere shift in identity from, say, being German, Irish or Latvian to being European, a fundamental change in the underly-

ing dynamics of identity formation is underway. Identities are coalescing on the level of intimate encounters, expressed in obscure and arcane cultural vernaculars, by which experience gains highly pluralist articulations. In turn, these pose unusual analytical challenges.

3. The people of Europe are at the outset of the twenty-first century negotiating among liberal and illiberal registers of identity. These shifting configurations typically do not succumb to a single, stable, and unambiguous expression.

4. What we awkwardly and imprecisely term ‘identity’ has acquired a twofold nature. First, it is not merely or solely contingent on convention, tradition, and the past, but has assumed a future-oriented purview and experimental dynamic. Second, the other hand, citizens of the EU, as they pursue these experiments, are continually parsing the nature of cultural affinity and difference.

5. The EU imparts to its citizens a distinctive challenge and an ambiguous burden: to negotiate continually the cognitive meanings and political exigencies of a pluralist Europe.

This experimental ethos underwrites specific kinds of communicative relationships and the mediation of particular forms of knowledge and belief. New political practices emerge that embrace far more than fidelity to the idea of ‘nation’, and that draw authority from a wide range of collective sensibilities that can inform new forms of association and activism. These are the conditions that framed my encounters with neo-Nazi street fighters in the East End of London, anti-immigrant Flemish activists, and ultra-nationalist German politicians. Within this kind of *mise-en-scène*, however, the spirit of experimentation mutates to opportunism, at times radical opportunism, creating distinctive intellectual challenges and ethical discomforts. In particular, one is faced with the increasing irrelevance of the terms ‘right and left’, as a dynamic pluralism emerges, and with an increasing emphasis on the redundancy of ‘politics’ overall, in favour of categories such as ‘lived experience’. All this, combined with the contempt among activists for normative definitions of politics, and for normative social sciences, makes neutrality among academic observers hard to sustain.

Since I began this research I have become increasingly convinced that we are now all fated to inhabit this still rather occult political landscape. Now, sensibilities that were in the early 1990s assumed to be ‘extremist’ are becoming commonplace. The predicaments for my research and projects like it have become pervasive.

I am going to conclude by returning to my initial point about having sought resist addressing nationalism, xenophobia, and various forms of fundamentalism from a position of neutrality. I would like to em-

phasise that the nature of my complicity is in some fundamental sense ‘methodological’. This is because the subjects of our discussion — the political activists themselves — are engaged in intellectual labours that approximate, or indeed are entirely indistinguishable from, the analytical practices of an ethnographer. As I have argued elsewhere:

*To pursue their insurgency, these figures employ intellectual modalities to inform their politics that continually draw on what are essentially ethnographic insights. To align their message with the at times strident experience of their audience, they must craft ethnographically informed discourses. These activists are acutely sensitive to cultural idioms, dialects, and patois in defining the messages by which they seek to mobilise the sensibilities and the aspirations of an inchoate European public [Holmes 2009].*

The forces generating these insurgent sensibilities and mediating volatile configurations knowledge and belief are built into the structure of the contemporary—call it culture—and this is and will create vexing empirical and ethical challenges for academics and for intellectuals, more generally ([Holmes & Marcus 2006]; [Holmes, Marcus & Westbrook 2006]).

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### SEBASTIAN JOB

#### **Ethnographic Schizophrenia and the Truth of Racist Nationalism**

For some people an ideological perspective like racist nationalism feels obvious, natural, a matter of patriotic duty. Why? What are the conscious and unconscious motivations which anchor ideological commitment in such cases?

These were the questions I pursued during my original research with Russian racist nationalists in Moscow in 1998 and 1999 [Job 2007]. To help me answer them I adopted what I came to think of as a ‘low-immersion non-participant observation’ approach. This meant that I was forthright about being a social scientist and did not try to pass as any kind of right-winger; yet at the same time I cultivated friendly relations with those I was studying. In the following I want first to take up one sort of dilemma encountered in that fieldwork experience. I will then make some linked observations about ‘truth’, ‘neutrality’, ‘objectivity’, ‘subjectivity’ and ‘ethics’ in social science.

‘Puzzles about native thought’, wrote Mary Douglas, ‘are puzzles about thought in general and so puzzles about our own thought’ [Douglas 1975: 277]. Bearing in mind that we can all be ‘natives’ for some other observer, one way to break into what Douglas is getting at is to observe that in the normal course of things the task of intercultural understanding makes two demands. First, you have to forge theoretical and empathetic means of ingress capable of elucidating the inner experience of another cultural lifeworld. What are the conscious and unconscious categories, desires and strivings by which the various members of this world understand who they are? How do they actualise this understanding in the ongoing project of being who they are? Answering these questions involves what, following the linguist Kenneth Pike, some anthropologists have taken to calling the task of generating an ‘emic’ interpretation; that is, an elucidation of what it is like to be and think as this other people [Pike 1967].

However, to count as an *explanation* this elucidation has to make sense *in itself*. This is the second task. The job of the social or cultural anthropologist is not simply to produce a pocket version of the self-understandings of another people, but to make a case for *what is really going on in their world given how the world is*. Mark here the way anthropological methodology refers us now to two distinct conceptions of the ‘world’: their culturally and ideologically specific ‘emic’ world, and, secondly, a different, would-be universal, would-be transcultural conception of *the* world. If we have to refer the first world to the second (i.e., to ‘how the world is’), this is because any explanation of how these people think, experience and behave has to be placed within a wider context, has to be related to the ‘knowledge’ we are prepared to answer for. What is needed then is a standpoint capable both of comprehending the specificity of another cultural mode of being, *and* of justifying the empirical claims it makes and the concepts it deploys in the task of comprehending that otherness. In Pike’s terms this second imperative can be glossed as the need to provide ‘etic’ explanations; that is, propositions about why, in the terms currently most comprehensive to the external observer, they do, think and feel as they do.

Despite fire across the trenches, all investigation of the lifeways of cultural others effectively relies on both emic (interpretative and ideally culturally internal) and etic (explanatory and culturally external or transcultural) moments. Let us then consider where these moments take us when investigating racists and xenophobic nationalists. Do they not invite us down two divergent paths? Do they not place absolutely incompatible demands on the anthropologist's psyche?

Maybe the best thing about going into 'the field' and actually associating with those you want to write about is that the experience prods you to take them as *real*. Exactly because it raises more puzzles than it can answer, it discourages you the researcher from cramming other people into the kind of reductive formulas you would scoff at if turned back on yourself. 'The whole truth is only revealed to the whole man', as Nicholai Lossky wrote, paraphrasing the philosophers Kireyevsky and Khomyakov [Lossky 1952: 404]. By this he meant that full understanding cannot rely on sense perception and rationality alone. It must also engage aesthetic sensibility, moral experience and religious contemplation. To Lossky's incomplete list we ought to add the psychoanalytic dimensions of 'transference' and 'counter-transference', both positive and negative — i.e., in the anthropological case, the emotionally charged projections which emerge between the field-worker and some of the people they study [Devereux 1978].

However, it is exactly at this level of negative or ambivalent counter-transference that the study of 'unsympathetic' people usually comes unstuck. One man, a skinhead leader I got to know fairly well, told me with a grin about his greatest triumph thus far: helping to set alight a foreign workers' hostel in Moscow in 1997. On his account, confirmed by others in his group, around fifty people, mainly Vietnamese, were burned to death. How to share laughs with the person who has done this? How, even if he only *says* he has done it?<sup>1</sup> Others I knew in these circles went on 'street patrol', searching for, and sometimes kicking to death, vulnerable 'enemies'... If our knowledge of what drives racist nationalism has not got further than it has, a key problem no doubt lies in the *Verstehen* or 'hermeneutic', or 'emic' moment: the requirement to empathetically identify with ideologically driven racist nationalists so as to try to see and feel the world as they do. This is something most researchers find literally repulsive.

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<sup>1</sup> Although he promised to show me the newspaper clipping he had reporting the fire, I never saw it and have been unable to confirm the story. But I detected no insincerity in his claim. Later I asked him why he wasn't doing the same today. 'Because we could get away with it then', he said. 'Today they'd put us in jail'. 'Who would?' I asked. 'Luzhkov', he replied, naming the Mayor of Moscow. For details of another possible case of racially motivated mass murder by arson, this time in November 2003 and killing forty-two students, mostly from China, Bangladesh, Vietnam and Africa, see the report by Sophie Lambroschini [Lambroschini 2004: 1-2].

There is no shame in being repulsed, of course, but the repulsion needs foregrounding. As to its origins, the least we can say is that for any more or less ‘civilised’ person today the racist/anti-racist opposition prestructures every encounter they have with such people. This is the etic horizon which tacitly controls what they allow themselves to see and understand about this ‘other world’, and it takes both emotional and intellectual effort to get that horizon into view.

On the face of it, psychoanalytically informed scholars ought to be well placed to reflect on these dynamics. But in practice the option is seldom taken up. Many psychoanalysts of racism and nationalism simply fail to control for their negative relationship to their object, using their putative access to the unconscious as a way of bypassing contact with the subjectivity of those they pronounce upon.<sup>1</sup> Evidently this kind of contact is avoided because it is psychically taxing. It involves punctually suspending your conscience and stretching your attachment to the good. It entails risking ‘guilt by association’, and necessitates imaginatively and perhaps socially inhabiting what, at its extreme, fully deserves to be called evil.

In my own case, to say I felt ‘ambivalent’ about those I hoped to understand would be to understate the case. Even my ‘low immersion’ approach among ‘friendly enemies’ generated plenty of psychic gristle to chew through. It meant, for instance, a change in how I saw ethnic minorities in Moscow. I would find myself on the metro looking at some slightly darkish-skinned person from the Caucasus and involuntarily pitying them and wondering if they had any idea how much they were hated. In short, I was beginning to look at non-Russians with a gaze mediated by those who wanted to get rid of them. Perhaps such phenomena should have given me a sense of satisfaction, since they meant I was succeeding in an emic sense! But of course this was hardly a conscious process. After a few months, like some kind of demonic possession, tape-loops of racist insults would come unbidden into my head — in English. Meanwhile, relentless exposure to racist nationalists telling me how they were going to hang the Yid-Masons from the lamp-posts down in Manezh square; or how blacks, due to the sulphur content of their skin, were toxic for whites; or how Jews had no souls and were really biorobots controlled by even shadier forces, had a cumulatively depressing effect. Time spent wandering around the city with groups of skinheads taking every opportunity to stare down, provoke and insult ‘foreigners’, left me with the unconquerable desire to somehow communicate to outsiders that, despite appearances, I was not the ‘race warrior’ I appeared to be. One day, after standing around with half a dozen skin-

<sup>1</sup> For an example of this approach dealing with Russian material see Daniel Rancour-Laferriere’s psychoanalytically informed study of Russian nationalists [Rancour-Laferriere 2000].

heads as they refused to take another drink until I raised my glass and said 'Heil Hitler!', I came home literally needing a shower to cleanse my soul and wondering if these feelings of pollution and demonic possession were any clue to the 'pollution' and 'possession' racists themselves talk of. At night extravagant nightmares involving neo-Nazis would sometimes visit me; and when the phone rang inviting me to this or that private event I would wonder whether this was it, whether finally they had decided I too was an 'enemy' and that a bashing or worse was in the offing.

From these items, the reader may gain the impression that I am an 'unstable' personality. In fact the opposite is the case. But it is important to give some indication of the internal 'Hell's Kitchen' in which ideas about political opponents as fieldwork subjects are cooked up. Much the same is entailed in any imaginative effort to see things from 'the other side'. The leftwing author Christos Tsiolkas, for instance, describes writing his novel *Dead Europe*: 'When you deal with something like racism you know it can invade your psyche, you start creating a character that is racist or thinking about racism all the time and suddenly you find yourself thinking as a racist, and you need to step back...' [Tsiolkas and Cornelius 2005: 20]. A strong political conscience, or a strong superego, is in this respect an unsuspected liability. Political commitment constantly urges you to 'step back', which is to say, it commands you to 'save yourself' at the expense of your commitment to understanding.

We can summarise by observing that this kind of ambivalence is, so to say, reflected within the anthropological method itself. Etic and emic moments do indeed make contrary claims on the soul of the anthropologist. As to the etic moment, let me reaffirm that it is not simply your 'particular perspective'. Were it no more than an undigested and culturally received emic opinion about other emic opinions it would be a fraud. The etic moment is, or should be, the outcome of considerable conceptual labour, and therefore rests on what approximates most closely to your understanding of *the truth*. However, this also means that the etic is inherently ambiguous as to its status. When Douglas says: 'Puzzles about native thought are puzzles about thought in general and so puzzles about our own thought', we should observe that the etic ultimately names that place where we can no longer tell the difference between 'our own thought' and 'thought in general'. The etic is both one pole in the intercultural encounter, and the ground of the encounter itself as we understand it. It is, if you like, the axis where truth appears not only as something we are *searching for*, but as something we can *never get away from*. It is the affirmation about 'what is' presumed in even our most self-effacing admissions of epistemological incompetence [compare Bhaskar 1989: 13; Bhaskar 1993: 205; Pivcevic 1997: 187].

The upshot is that the etic also plays a *psychological* role. It cannot be something psychically indifferent for the truth-oriented social scientist. Rather, it is the place where you ‘commit’ yourself. It is where, attempting to express truthful judgement, you tacitly see yourself from the perspective of the ideal. And by the same token it is where you *stop* questioning, where you fall, at this limit, into your *own unexamined emics*. Here your explanatory judgements have the egoic security of the ‘obvious’. Here they disappear into an interpretative mesh you no longer know how to question. Here they appear grounded in what it makes no sense to question and, let us admit it, in what you would be *ashamed* to question.

The emic moment proper, meanwhile, is a different kettle of fish. It requires you to ‘suspend judgement’, to let go of your etic commitments. At a moral level this quite literally means, with Nietzsche, an attempt to see from ‘beyond good and evil’. Likewise, at epistemic and ontological levels it means to ‘bracket’, as Husserl would say, your own understanding of reality. Psychologically, it means a kind of floating non-judgementalism maximally receptive to the emotional concerns of the people in question. These ‘self-castrating’ operations are performed not simply so as to ‘enter into’ another world (your airtight ideological space suit around you), *but to let it enter into you* — so you can, as far as possible, learn what it is to think and feel as they do. But there is the rub! For when it comes to feeling and thinking as merciless political opponents do, there is a powerful urge to never really allow it to happen. You feel the anxiety of losing yourself; you feel evil is making a nest inside you, that you are getting taken over; and then in the next minute you wonder at your own weakness, for how could you lose yourself?! The mere thought is an embarrassment! But then maybe you only continue to feel psychologically secure because all along you really stayed outside, holding on to your external etic gaze like a crucifix against the devil.

Unhappily, it took me a long time to become fully conscious of these competing intellectual and psychological processes. Had I known beforehand the necessity of fully embracing all the contradictions signalled by those little words ‘emic’ and ‘etic’, I would have saved myself a lot of effort. But then, is it really necessary to succumb to this kind of ‘fieldwork schizophrenia’? The best way to come at this question is to take up the general problematic signalled by words like ‘truth’, ‘neutrality’, ‘objectivity’, ‘subjectivity’ and ‘ethics’ in social science, particularly in the context of the study of racist nationalism.

Firstly, I take it that the primary duty of the social scientist is not to strengthen one or other existing political standpoint, but to elucidate the truth. As social scientists we make ourselves redundant if we do no more than blend our voices into the existing civilised chorus con-

demning racism, chauvinistic nationalism and xenophobia. For the same reason, it is vital to sustain intellectual spaces where immediate political passions are suspended, at least to the extent necessary to give dissident and unorthodox perspectives a hearing.

However, and secondly, to express as best you can the truth about a systematically self-deluded ideology can never be an ethically or politically neutral act. The reasons for this, in fact, go deep. The most immediate dimension of the problem is that racist nationalists and other xenophobes will probably recognise you as an intellectual enemy, and so rob you of any socially effective 'neutrality' you might aspire to. Undoubtedly this also sets up obstacles to further fieldwork. Yet in the end this is not a conflict which either can or should be avoided. For the real obstacle for would-be ethically or politically 'neutral' truth claims is that, as some of the Greeks already knew, the true and the good are kindred spirits.

What I mean by this is that the sober attempt to elucidate the factual truth of racist nationalism automatically points us in the direction of a higher anti-racist ethics. But this assertion raises immense problems for modern social science, since its own foundation presupposes the eclipse of the classical metaphysics which vouchsafed the kinship of the true and the good. In most cases social science is still at home with truth understood as *adequation* (i.e., as the correctness of representations to the external things or states of affairs they represent). But for the most part it has lost sight of an earlier *ontological conception* (truth as adequation of a thing to its own proper being). In this older conception, the truth of something is inherently also a *moral-ethical* conception (for a case in point, consider the meaning of the phrase 'a true friend').

Thirdly, it will be apparent that an ontological conception of truth has implications for the ideal of social scientific 'objectivity'. Here, to be sure, we face a lot of confusion. As I see it, 'objectivity' is a necessary goal of social scientific practice, but only in the specific sense that each investigator must strive to remove subjective distortions from their thinking so as to arrive at results which competent others can assess (for their factual correctness, intellectual fruitfulness, theoretical coherence, parsimony and plausibility). In such usages we legitimately treat the 'subjective' as equivalent to idiosyncratic distortion and error.

However, in accordance with standard assumptions about truth as adequation, the temptation is to slip into philosophical *objectivism*; that is, to proceed on the assumption that we have arrived at a maximally correct account of human affairs when we have satisfactorily established the 'objective' cause-and-effect nexus operating at the time. This is the operative assumption, for instance, when Issac Deutscher declares that the historian can only claim to have suc-

ceeded when they have shown why what happened *had to happen* [Deutscher 1961: xv-xvi]. In that event, something partial (social objectivity without subjectivity; historical necessity without freedom), is taken for the truth of social processes. Certainly this is neither ‘the whole truth’ nor ‘the whole man’.

We can say that where the search for social scientific ‘objectivity’ finds itself treating ‘subjectivity’ as nothing more than a source of ‘distortion’, it becomes itself a source of distortion. By contrast, a conception able to accommodate the inherent subjectivity of social and psychological phenomena better approximates to their truth. And such a conception, I would argue, is not one that is misled by conceiving of the truth solely as ‘something objective’, but rather is one oriented to truth understood normatively and ontologically, that is, as the proper or ideal or good destination of things.<sup>1</sup>

All the same, why exactly should the study of racist nationalism and xenophobia go wading in these rather murky philosophical waters? Because to think about conflicts over social scientific neutrality, objectivity and ethics primarily in terms of pragmatic ‘strategies’ is to risk missing what is at stake. The ethics and politics of truth — or if you like, a maximally truthful ethical and political practice in social science — will not be advanced much by restricting ourselves to rules of thumb for tricky situations, indispensable as this kind of craft wisdom undoubtedly is.

Here then the first reason for emphasising the need to fully experience the contradiction between the emic and etic wings of ethnographic methodology. If the researcher is willing to let their psyche become the common space in which each wing stretches out almost to breaking point, then empathetic engagement with the alien and sometimes repulsive emic universe becomes a priceless challenge to their own etic framework. Expressed programmatically, intercultural encounter not only *ought* to, but *must* be used by the social scientist as an opportunity for scrutinising the tacit categories in which they

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<sup>1</sup> Paradigmatically, normativity and subjectivity meet in the idea of freedom. The classic modern rendition of this idea of truth as ontological and thus also moral-ethical is Hegel’s [Hegel 1991 [1830]: 287]. It should also be noted that Russian ‘truth’ remains closer to the classical Platonic, Aristotelian and Christian Neoplatonic sources in this respect than does the English ‘truth’. This is famously so in the case of *pravda*, which historically has also meant ‘everything the community regarded as “right”’: justice, morality, God’s law, behaving according to conscience’ [Hosking 2001: 17]. Arguably something similar also applies to the other word for truth, *istina*. Pavel Florensky, whose polylingual erudition was second to none, put the case forcefully: ‘Our Russian word for truth, “*istina*”, is linguistically close to the verb “*est*” [to be]. Hence, “*istina*”, according to the Russian understanding of it, embodies the concept of absolute reality: *istina* is “what is”, the genuinely existent, *to ont s on* or *ho ont s on*, in contradistinction to what is imaginary, unreal, unactual. In the word “*istina*”, the Russian language marks the ontological aspect of this idea. Therefore, “*istina*” signifies absolute self-identity and, hence, self-equality, exactness, genuineness’ [Florensky 1997 [1914]: 14]. We can note in passing that a difficulty in all ontological conceptions of the truth is their availability for deployment as apologies for authoritarian ‘tradition’.

themselves experience the human world, and thus as a stimulus for deeper comprehension of reality at both culturally constituted and transcultural levels. On the basis of this broadened etic comprehension increasingly insightful emic formulations now become possible: the methodological and psychological contradiction becomes a virtuous dialectic.

The other option, however, is to flee from a genuinely empathetic encounter with what feels morally compromising. Psychologically untouched by the subjective strivings of the bad racist other, we remain secure in our position of superior understanding and are content to describe and analyse their pathology as if they were 'objects' whose inner workings were already apparent to us. How curious that they too conceive their enemies as mere 'things' and 'objects'! But uncomfortable symmetries like this are to be expected when to the hardened narcissism of their group-belonging we unconsciously pit our own collective narcissism, our own thoughtless subordination to shame, our own collectively sustained self-idealizations (as dispassionate scholars, civilised people, anti-racists...). In such cases the dialectic of emic and etic freezes into debilitating form.

Finally, at a more substantive level, my interest in the subjectivity of racist nationalists in Russia has left me with the conviction that racist nationalism is centrally a matter of *moral or ethical judgement* [compare Garcia 2004: 41]. That is to say, to be a racist nationalist it is not enough that semi-automatic racist insults get triggered in your head. Nor should we append this label to someone *simply* because they don't like aspects of most members of another ethnic (or racial, or religious etc.) group; or that they consider there are serious social problems arising from ethnic conflicts (perhaps derivative of different cultural traditions, different gender expectations, different places in the social division of labour); or that they consider that some other ethnic groups don't generally feel the same kind of loyalty to the nation as do some others, and so forth. The decisive point, as I see it, is what kind of *moral conclusions* people draw from these reactions and observations. Do they fortify a determination to also find the admirable in others in their individuality, their ethnic particularity and their humanity? Or do they serve as occasions for consolidating a hateful image of the ethnic other against which there can be no appeal?

If it is accurate to say that the *being* of racist nationalism (i.e., what it *is*), is centrally characterised by a mistaken form of *moral* reasoning, then coming to grips with it must entail entertaining questions about the ontological foundations of moral reasoning in social science. The latter is the indispensable etic lens through which we will view the former. This area, however, is where social science, heir to Hume's fact/value opposition, fashionable nominalism and other thin con-

ceptions of truth, is notoriously unsure of itself. How can social scientists contribute to a wiser anti-racist politics, one confident of its moral-ontological ground precisely *because* it does not fail to be as sceptical, self-critical and objective (in the sense of undistorted by subjective limitations) as it knows how to be? Conceivably a virtuous dialectic of emic and etic moments can open us to a standpoint in which their racism and our own anti-racism appear as separate possibilities of an ultimately common human psycho-spiritual condition. From within this broader moral and ontological horizon, we might re-enter the political fray on condition that we keep rising above it. And we might be less susceptible to the intellectual phobia which haunts and limits the study, and the combat, of racist nationalists and other xenophobes.

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PAUL MANNING

**From Clashes of Personalities to Clashes of Civilisations**

I'd like to preface my comments with a more general rant about the term 'ethics'. While ethics arise in a philosophical context of personal moral deliberation over 'the good life', currently practicing anthropologists confront a code of ethics as an alien entity embodied in the activities of institutional review boards, none of which are 'professional'. That is, those who deliberate over the 'ethical' status of proposals are usually not members of one's own profession. So the 'ethics' that matter are neither 'personal ethics' nor 'professional ethics', but part of a broader institutional context which, in Canada for example, is a centralised government body. One consequence of this is that the conditions that grants must submit to for ethics clearance are formulated generically, often on the model of some sort of laboratory oriented science treatment of human subjects. A different epistemic model, a different methodological model, is presumed, one which is entirely at odds with the sort of open-ended informality of the work of participant observation. In practice, anthropologists are virtually required to lie to these boards to do their work. My suspicion is that people who engage in pious homilies about 'ethics' are either lying or simply have stopped doing anthropological fieldwork altogether. Perhaps they have begun that charming mature phase of their careers where they stop doing their own work and start trying to micromanage the work of others. These are the sort of people who are also pious about 'university service' being just as important as scholarship or teaching — department chairs and future deans, in short. In the pursuit of ethics, we find that we are professionally required to lie. I note that the requirements of ethics boards are almost always entirely founded in paradoxical injunctions that would cause a robotic brain to explode because of their logi-

cal contradictions.<sup>1</sup> Because signature has been consecrated in our culture as being a performative act par excellence, we are asked to provide consent forms to our informants that they authenticate with signature. (And, for amusement, I invite readers to idly entertain the fantasy of actually *doing* this, giving a consent form to literally everyone you meet during your fieldwork, which is logically entailed.) We are already in Lalaland, then, when we are further asked to protect the anonymity of our informants. Logical contradiction ensures, robot head explodes. Two institutional discourses confront each other like matter and anti-matter, a legal discourse of the performative act of giving consent (the signature) and an ethical discourse of guaranteeing anonymity. But signature (writing down one's *name*) is the *opposite* of anonymity.<sup>2</sup> This is not merely hard to do, it is logically impossible. To my mind, to claim that you can somehow do this is *extremely* unethical (you cannot protect the right to consent and the anonymity of your consultant simultaneously, and if you *ever* tell them you can, this is simply reckless endangerment), yet, again, we are asked to be unethical in the service of ethics.

So, presumably, when we talk about ethical engagement, we must be talking about something which is not moored in any institutional or even professional discourse. At first glance, then, we are not separated from our subjects by an epistemic or moral white lab coat, and we interact with them in fairly intimate ways that cannot help but affect their lives, and, as we often forget until too late, vice versa. In addition, even if in general we prefer to let our informants do most of the talking, we sometimes lose our tempers, and sometimes, since our informants are largely people like us, they want us to be honest, and they will know if we are lying. Saying what we think, sometimes, is an obligation, after all, why should they tell us all this stuff if we won't respond in turn? There is a give and take, and we should also remember, that we lie, but they lie too. Obviously, we should obey the cardinal rule obeyed by doctors, 'first, do no harm', and it seems to me that that pretty much takes care of the various spies, spooks and 'embedded anthropologists' who use our methods for frankly nefarious ends. It's all very messy, and one must weigh the consequences not only for them, but for oneself, depending on what one reveals.

<sup>1</sup> The science fiction geek in me requires that I note that this trope, found in no less than 5 separate Star Trek Episodes, is a combination of the so-called 'logic bomb' trope (that logical paradoxes can kill artificial intelligences) with the equally popular 'explosive circuitry' trope (the visual motif that circuits, when overloaded, don't shut off, rather, they explode).

<sup>2</sup> For an excellent volume on auto-ethnographies of the academic see [Meneley, Young 2005], which contains many savvy and engaging discussions along the lines of those we are engaging in here, where they also attribute this observation on the logical antithesis of signature and anonymity to me ([Meneley, Young 2005: 24, note 1]).

The topic at hand is nationalism and xenophobia, but, where I work, the more pressing topic is a constellation of features having to do with a broader recently fashionable, Orientalist imaginary of a ‘clash of civilisations’, which frames discussions of nationalism, xenophobia, religion, what have you. First, religion. Let’s face it, if you are an atheist, much of the time you had better just lie about what you do or don’t believe. The safe bet there, if there is one, is to simply assent amiably to whatever religious belief they choose to impute to you. It’s a safe bet, but it is still a *bet*. For example, in contemporary Georgia, talking for example to Muslims in Pankisi, I will allow that I am some kind of Christian and in general that seems to satisfy all curiosity. For Orthodox Christians, however, there really is no good answer. Most of the time, all anyone really wants to hear is that you are a Christian, full stop, which is just the same as announcing a public claim to being a good or normal person. (This, I note, is as true of North America as it is of Georgia, particularly since much of the contemporary ‘Clash of Civilisations’ discourse at both vulgar and elite levels engages in a kind of specious genetic fallacy form of discourse that locates desirable properties of secular Western modernity in Christian antecedents, including the specious non-argument that ‘Judeo-Christian’ religion [a chimerical non-entity if there ever was one] is the basis for secular morality, but I digress.) It’s a bit like in American culture, when you are a stranger in town, announcing that you have a spouse and children, and therefore have a place to go at Thanksgiving and Christmas amounts to identifying yourself as being a ‘normal human being’, as being a part of a moral community of belonging, somewhere.<sup>1</sup> If they are part of the Philetist (religious nationalist) persuasion, then there really is only one kind of Christian that is adequate, Georgian Orthodox, and there is no way I am that. If I identify as a Protestant, then it is assumed I am a Jehovah’s Witness (who represent the most populous, or at least, best known form of Protestant in Georgia), if I identify as a Catholic, well, that’s just as bad. It’s just one of those things, once the question is raised (for example, during a toast at a *supra*), you have a series of bad choices. I admit that, out of boredom and irritation, I have fashioned a rather esoteric apophatic Christian sect that I am the sole member of, some version of Unitarian Universalism (which I was in fact raised as) that apparently regards all outward pronouncements of religious belief as idolatry and enjoins each believer to ‘keep it to himself’. This has never really

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<sup>1</sup> In the context of noting the medico-scientific or bureaucratic rationalist origins of the emergence of the notion of a ‘normal human being’, Goffman notes that this notion has become part of the normative order, such that ‘Whatever its origins, it seems to provide the basic imagery through which laymen currently conceive of themselves. Interestingly, a convention seems to have emerged in popular life-story writing where a questionable person proves his claim to normalcy by citing his acquisition of a spouse and children, and, oddly, by attesting to his spending Christmas and Thanksgiving with them.’ [Goffman 1963: 8 footnote].

satisfied anyone, but it has forestalled lengthy rants occasioned when I have claimed membership in some more numerous sect. But, if you are going to be forced to lie, in a manner that probably isn't going to materially hurt anyone, why not lie artfully? One of the people you are responsible to in fieldwork is yourself, and if you have reason to believe that one of your perduring status attributes (religion, sexual preference, etc.) is likely to get you beaten silly, you should lie about that. After all, it's not like 'they' don't do it. And, moreover, most of the time in the field you don't have a good option, just a series of bad ones. With respect to some status attributes that are not visually perceptible, lying is an option. We should count ourselves lucky we have that option sometimes.

Sometimes you just lose your temper. For example, last year, according to the average Georgian, exactly 40,000 Chinese traders descended on Tbilisi (the number can only be explained by a mystical Georgian nationalist numerology, King David the Rebuilder settled 40,000 Kipchaks in central Georgia in the 11<sup>th</sup> century). Apparently this was a token of the end of the world. Let us remember that Georgians do not experience 'the city' as a space whose primary characteristic is its heterogeneity. Indeed, under socialism Tbilisi became ever more monolithically Georgian than it ever had been under Tsarism. Furthermore, Georgians have a slippery grasp on the predicate 'European' (a category which includes America), which they generally associate with modernity, progress, and basically everything good in the universe (and in this one respect, if no other, Georgians really are Europeans). The Chinese are Asians. Not good, especially since Georgians are somewhat obsessive about their precarious status as Europeans. Plus, as the rant continues, they breed like rabbits and pretty soon Tbilisi will be a Chinese city. Having heard this rant a good number of times, I began to be irritable, pointing out, for example, that many of my best students were of Chinese descent, or idly wondering why, if the Europeans were so great, why were the Chinese, and not the Europeans, investing in Georgia, and so on. In a moment of sheer contrariness, I even reprogrammed my mobile phone to have a pleasing Oriental-sounding ring tone. My main point was this: you Georgian have so many real problems to complain about, why make up fake ones? I admit, my Bad Anthropologist was coming out, but then, if I hadn't engaged in debate, I wouldn't have found the people who actually agreed with me. Plus, I had heard more than enough. I wasn't ever going to learn anything new by hearing the same tirade again, except about my capacity for self-control, which is minimal. Whatever choice you make, you'll still learn something, it seems. Plus, it seems to me, that in order to be taken seriously as a potential friend, a relevant social other, it's not sufficient to bend pliantly like a reed to any and all social pressures, you have to provide *resistance* to be experienced as a real social being. Some-

times, of course, it is a real obligation too. Friends of mine emigrating to the United States (and planning, of course, to remain illegally) would frequently ask me about the country. Knowing that they had a largely fantastic view of the country in which all positive aspects of value resided *there*, just as all negative ones were *here*, they would become ever more irritated when I warned them, for example, that cops in the US were not Care Bears but very much to be feared. Often we fought because my empirical description of the place where I grew up did not correspond to their fantasy of a place they'd never been, and this angered them. They never took my warnings seriously, of course, before they left. However, after spending some nights in a US jail, they later thanked me for honesty.

I've never been one for excessive hand-wringing about these things. Like most anthropologists, I suspect, I make one idiotic error of judgment after another and then conceal my errors by not writing them up for publication (unless you are one of those anthropologists who revels in performing a transgressive persona.) As near as I can tell, the primary victim of these errors of judgment has usually been me (anthropologists seriously kid themselves about the power asymmetries in fieldwork, I think, which don't always, or even mostly, favour the anthropologist) (again, see some of the papers in [Meneley and Young 2005]). But what I'd like to talk about is an uncomfortable moment in my fieldwork, a set of relationships involving two of my informants whose personal relationship soured around the same time as the relationship between the ideologies they were representative of became truly a 'clash of civilisations', the story of why my fieldwork in Pankisi Gorge, with a Georgian folklorist and our Georgian-Chechen host, was a dismal failure.

I met the Folklorist, whom we will call 'Nugzar', at a rather dismal conference in Kutaisi in 2003. He was a likeable fellow, my age, who liked me because I was an Georgian-speaking American who smoked. Also, we had a similarly alienated relationship to the emergent theme of the conference, many of whose older attendees were ex-members of Parliament under the Gamsakhurdia regime, and therefore mystical nationalist crackpots of the first order. I attended his paper on language contact in Pankisi Gorge, where his characterisation of the language of the Gorge as 'variegated' was lambasted. How could there be 'language contact', let alone a 'variegated' result of contact, when what was in contact was, after all, different kinds of Georgian dialects? The emergent theme of the conference, in which the Patriarchy of Georgia also participated, was that Georgian was the mother tongue of all Georgians, even those who did not speak Georgian, because Georgian was the language of confession of the Church. Thus, what western linguists would characterise as different 'languages' (like Georgian, Svan and Mingrelian) were really different 'dialects'

(albeit mutually unintelligible ones), thus preserving the unity of the Georgians as united by sharing this single ‘mother tongue’. We skipped most of the conference, drank and smoked to excess, and complained about ‘the crazy people’.

Beginning in Kutaisi and later in Tbilisi, Nugzar convinced me that I really should accompany him to do fieldwork in Pankisi Gorge. Since Pankisi had been identified as a ‘hotspot’ in the War on Terror, with (completely unfounded) rumors of Al Qaeda bases and biological weapons labs, I agreed. Also, I wanted to go to a place that the U.S. Government forbade me to go to. Plus, it was understudied, the ethnic mixture of Pankisi having no fascination for Georgian nationalist ethnographers, other than Nugzar. The next year we went off to Pankisi, a grueling folkloric tour largely determined by Nugzar’s scientific plan. We would march from village to village, some days covering 20 kilometres in the hot sun, seeking out old people, collecting genealogies, staving off offers of hospitality, and returning each night to the house of our host, a local Kist eminence whom we will call ‘Soso’.

Soso is a bit of a local character, a local representative of the intelligentsia, fluent in various languages including Chechen, Kist, Georgian, Russian, a writer of poetry, and a weaver of fantastic cross-linguistic etymologies in which all words of every language could be reduced to inherited Vai-Nakh language roots. The esoteric meaning hidden in all these etymologies, when decoded, pointed to a period of history in which the Vai-Nakh people ruled the earth and the Jews were their slaves. (Yes, anti-semitism, and no, I never bothered to say anything about it: literally everyone in the village considered the man’s theories to be a silly but harmless eccentricity, not just me or Nugzar.) You never really could tell if he was joking or not, and if so, at whose expense. Then he would declaim ponderous poetry in a thunderous voice, and we would get drunk, too, on indifferent home-brewed vodka which, often as not, had flies floating in it. Soso struck me as being a fairly harmless local eccentric. Though he had known Nugzar for ten years, I could sense that Nugzar was finding Soso less funny than before. You might guess that the anti-semitism was what it was about, but I doubt it. The fact is, Nugzar was a Georgian, Soso a Kist. Moreover, Nugzar was an ardent supporter of the Rose Revolution, ‘pro-western’, and deeply afraid of ‘Muslim Extremism’, specifically Wahhabism, which had taken root in the Gorge. Nugzar’s argument was that not only was Wahhabism bad because it was tantamount to terrorism, but also because it represented a falling away from the traditional forms of Islam in the valley which represented a kind of folklore. Soso, therefore, was the kind of Muslim that Nugzar could sort of get along with, after all, he was a traditional adherent of local forms of Islam and he drank enough to

prove it, plus, they were both members of the intelligentsia: if Soso was Nugzar's patron in the valley of Pankisi, the Nugzar was Soso's patron in the intellectual and academic world outside it.

But what can one do when one's two colleagues and hosts enter a state of enmity? Part of the reason may have been an ugly intrusion of the increasingly authoritarian Saakashvili regime (whose authoritarian tendencies, by now, are common knowledge), who, in 2005, responded to a relatively minor felony by a Kist man by bringing in heavily armed Special Ops troops into the village of Duisi and attacking the house where the man was holed up with at least one other Kist with automatic weapons and rockets, in an obviously pedagogical display of the state's capacity for violence. The house exploded right before our eyes, while we were trying to do fieldwork a few blocks away, and, as it happens, it was my last day of fieldwork in Pankisi with Nugzar. That same day, we visited Soso, and suffice to say, Soso, whose close relative had been killed in the violence, was not a little discomfited. We drank heavily that night at Soso's, and various things were said, but it was clear that this moment had produced an ideological rift between Nugzar, an ardent and uncritical supporter of the government, and Soso, an erstwhile one. Interestingly, this came to a head, as it always did, in the toast to the Homeland, and, specifically, since as a foreign guest this toast had to register my homeland, the question of what my homeland was to be. As a avowedly Pro-Western Pro-Bush Islamophobe, Nugzar would often wax quite embarrassingly and frankly irritatingly on this toast toasting my erstwhile country of residence, the United States. On this occasion, he did so, only less loquaciously. For the Kists, however, I was always considered to be a Canadian, though I am not a citizen of this country, and on this occasion too, the toast was to Canada. My own identity was subdivided rhetorically to reposition me on different sides of the 'War on Terror', of the 'Clash of Civilisations', with Canada (as a non-participant in the Iraq war) preferred by the Kisti, and the US preferred by the Georgians. (This is perhaps more insidious than our complicity with nationalism and xenophobia in our fieldwork: when we allow ourselves to become emissaries of 'the West', we are often forced to align ourselves with local political projects and programmes that local elites or our own governments are engaged in, presumably in imitation of 'the West'.)

The following year, I visited Soso alone in Pankisi. He expressed regrets that, after a period of 10 years, that Nugzar no longer would come to visit them, and work with them. Nugzar had told me this when I arrived in 2006, and we made plans to visit regions of Georgia that are more classical topics of Georgian ethnography. Nugzar had not only abandoned Pankisi, on the grounds that his work there was finished, but had abandoned Soso as well. The university reforms ini-

tiated by the Saakashvili regime in 2006 led to the liquidation of the academic intelligentsia as a class, particularly the rural exponents of the intelligentsia, people like Soso. Soso's wife claimed (Soso was relatively silent on the point) that Soso's pet theories that were the cause of his expulsion from the university, that he had been warned to be silent about his Vai-Nakh etymologies. This may have been part of it (but frankly, had his theories had a pro-Georgian bent they would not have been considered 'crazy'), but part of it was simply a disenfranchisement of the bulk of the academic intelligentsia. Nugzar, of course, as one of those who stood to gain from this change, became ever more loyal to the government position. At the same time, his attitude towards Soso was ever more patronising. Ultimately, of course, he stopped 'patronising' Soso, that is, he withheld his patronage from Soso, perhaps because he could do nothing to help him, perhaps because he did not wish to help a 'crazy' man work in the new academic world.

But Nugzar, predictably, hid all this somewhat shabby academic politics behind a sublime window-dressing of the War on Terror and Clashes of Civilisations. The fact that he had, in effect, abandoned a friend and colleague in a fairly self-serving and instrumental fashion could instead be recast in the rather more noble light of the moral certainties and teleologies of the War on Terror. Now Soso, a secular socialist intellectual with a couple of somewhat wacky ethno-linguistic theories typical of this genus, was rebranded as an Islamic or Chechen terrorist, if not personally, by association (and a series of entirely typical, and entirely absurd, elisions such that 'Chechen' or 'Wahhabi' are synonymous with 'Terrorist'): He had had Chechen guests had he not? His eldest son was a Wahhabi, was he not? One night in 2007 while doing fieldwork in Khevsureti, Nugzar kept us up all night long worrying aloud in a pitiable whine that Soso threatened to have him killed by Chechen terrorists. Impatient with this new line of nonsense and desirous of sleep, I tried to calm him by emphasising that Chechens had better things to do than kill someone like him, a relatively insignificant academic. To no avail, the whining continued until dawn.

I last saw Soso on the streets of Tbilisi, drunk, in the company of a group of Svans who were representatives of a publishing house which Soso hoped would publish his book on the glorious prehistory of the Vai-Nakh (specifically Kist) people revealed through etymology. I was shanghai-ed to get drunk with them in a socialist style eatery, on some of the worst vodka I've ever had. It looked like Soso had fallen into the hands of wolves: I wondered if he was picking up the bill for their drinking, giving them a feast (called a *magarichi*) in anticipation of some reciprocal favour (consideration of his manuscript?). I will never know. The moment I entered the room I was

already engineering my escape, but I was sad indeed to leave Soso there, dead drunk, at the mercy of some fairly dubious people, telling me over and over again outside as I was leaving: 'Paul, I'm in a bad way.' There was nothing I could do for him, then or now.

This is the sort of tragedy that happens all the time. It's worth thinking about it because it is tragedy in the usual sense: a train of events that unwinds inexorably, crushing all in its path. Agency is irrelevant, that's why it is tragic. Could I have changed the outcome? The last thing on my mind, from the moment the house exploded under rocket fire, to the last time I saw Soso, was the fate of my fieldwork in Pankisi. Is there anything to be learned from it? Perhaps the same thing that I learned in general in Pankisi gorge, a microcosm of the larger macrocosm. It was this. Pankisi had never really been anything like the global terror centre that it was alleged to have been by various 'intelligence' sources in the West. The discourse of the War on Terror and the Clash of Civilisations, however, applied to an extremely dull little backwater like Pankisi, made Pankisi newsworthy and research there even became fundable for 'policy relevant' grants. The same thing happens all over the world, fantastic paradigms of macrocosmic opposition are useful to make relatively tawdry and banal local conflicts seem interesting and fundable. That was why I went to Pankisi, after all. But Nugzar's representation of his conflict with Soso was of a piece, too, turning a personal estrangement between colleagues into something grander, more 'political' and less 'personal'. On a small level, of course, this is what we are forced to do all the time to gain the ear of foundations or publishers, turn our sleepy or not so sleepy little ethnographic backwaters into exponents of broader political, economic, or social thematics, writing them into grand narratives of one kind or another.

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### JELENA OBRADOVIC

#### Researching Nationalism in Post-Conflict Societies

Nationalism has always been an elusive topic of research. Not only are there difficulties in defining and 'recognising' nationalist practices and discourses, but there are also the issues of cop-

ing with unpleasant, discriminatory or xenophobic behaviour during the time of the research. Regardless of competing definitions, nationalism is by its virtue an exclusive discourse, and as such creates potential for exclusion rather than inclusion, leading to the possibility of incidents which may become unpleasant for the researcher. These issues become all the more difficult to negotiate if the research concerns societies which are not the researcher's own culture, and especially if those cultures are in the process of emerging or recovering from periods of conflict, violence or disturbing social upheaval. Nationalist practices may be their only way of coping and making sense of what has happened. In addition, actors and groups whom we often label nationalists hardly ever see themselves as such. To them, their nationalist reaction to events, appears rational and 'common sense' ([Forgacs 1999], [Bourdieu 1977]).

This is very much the case of present-day Serbia, a country affected by four conflicts during the 1990s, out of which the society emerged defeated both on a physical and on a moral level — especially so since it has been represented as the primary culprit of the wars of the 1990s. However, representations of Serbs as the main aggressors, which have persisted since the 1990s, are countered by Serbia's own insistence on its innocence and exclusive victim status. Academics and journalists have long recognised this dichotomy, with frequent claims that this is precisely why Serbia cannot 'come to terms with the past', labelling the issue as a Serbian nationalist response. This includes both the responses of the government, which has repeatedly failed to fulfil its obligations to the ICTY<sup>1</sup> by extraditing indicted war criminals, as well as having failed to instigate debate about the issues of war crimes and Serbia's participation (indirect or otherwise) in ethnic conflicts of the 1990s. In addition, the failure to confront these issues is said to be augmented by the 'psychological resistance' of the politicians and the Serbian public [Batt 2005: 60].

Failing to confront the past and address issues of war crimes and paramilitary participation has often been labelled as nationalist by external observers. The labels are not surprising. The funeral of the former (some would say nationalist) leader Slobodan Milosevic, drew thousands of supporters in 2006. Indicted war criminals Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic are still fugitive; there is a cultural reluctance to agree their extradition [Obradovic 2007b], and they remain symbols of Serbian national pride and resistance to external pressures. Their images appear on T-shirts, calendars, posters and books have been written about them. Whilst they are icons of active nationalist factions such as the '1389 Movement' or the Serbian Radical Party, they are also treated as heroes by those sectors of the

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<sup>1</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

population who refuse to associate themselves with actively nationalist organisations [Obradovic 2007b].

In short, in the recent and present-day Serbian context, a democratic government has replaced Milošević but ideologies about war crimes remain almost unchanged. The attitudes, perceptions, constructs as well as the limits of the acceptable with regards to war crimes, are re-fashioned from direct Milošević repression and denial, to more subtle indirect forms which use the same motifs. Persistent also is the use of national mythology as a basis and legitimation of denial strategies. Most public denials are premised on the idea of Serb victimhood as a basis for the ‘impossibility’ (or relativisation) of Serbs having committed war crimes, and in such cases ‘nation’ overrides evidence. Events themselves are not disputed; what is disputed is the idea of the Serb perpetrator, which is then counter-attacked through various strategies. Importantly, extremist and non-extremist discourses of denial use the same motifs, if not precisely the same language and actions. These motifs are also evident in private narratives of ordinary, non-nationally active individuals.

It is often the case that both factions of the society — the extreme, active groups — and the private spheres, individuals who claim not to subscribe to nationalist ideologies, perpetuate the same motifs and similar discursive strategies when invoking the nation. Thus the classic images of Serb nationalists as drunken paramilitary units from the war in Bosnia, football hooligans prior to war, or Milosevic and his nationalist rally in Kosovo in 1989, need to be revised, are somewhat ethnographically false. Nationalism, as Billig [1995] pointed out, does not only belong to the sphere of the visible, or the ‘flag waving’ nationalisms, such as those so often associated with Serbia, but with the quieter, more banal examples.

Whilst it is fair to point out that all of the instances given above are of a nationalist nature insofar as they invoke ‘the nation’ in order to negotiate difficult situations (e.g. deny war crimes, claim territory, dispute legal facts...), analysis does not often go beyond this labelling. Suggesting that a society is reacting to culturally traumatic post-conflict events, in which its identity narratives are continually challenged [Eyerman 2002], with nation-orientated discourses is a fairly basic observation to make. But to consider the processes which lead up to and contextualise such reactions is an altogether different analytical category, and one which would provide vast and rich data. Nationalist-orientated reactions of Serb individuals, media and politicians to war crimes are not free-standing narratives, nor are they de-contextualised from their cultural system; likewise, the three different spheres have long been acknowledged as interactive, and therefore we should treat them as such.

A quick survey of academic literature would suggest that research and analysis of nationalism are more often than not confined to the levels of the theoretical, and when empirical conclusions *are* made, they are often based on the discourses of the elites: intellectuals, writers, politicians. In short, the specific problems of researching nationalism are rooted in the problem of definition and approach to nationalism in Western academia, which has often seen nationalism confined to the margins and non-Western countries [Billig 1995]. In this paper, it will be argued that such approaches and analytical attitudes are at the root of the difficulties of researching nationalism. Nationalist behaviour is not a finished product, nor a neatly packaged text to be analysed, but rather, as critics such as Brubaker have long been noting, a set of processes. As such, nationalism is perhaps best understood as ‘the political *utilisation* of the symbol nation through discourse and political activity’ [Verdery 1996: 227, added emphasis]. Even so, we should attempt to understand nationalism as *banal*, i.e. as the ‘routine’ and daily ‘reproduction of the nation’ [Billig 1995: 6, 16], rather than as an ideology, a movement a mobilising force, something worthy of sensationalisation and far removed from everyday life (c.f. [Billig 1995: 6]); or the ‘return of the repressed’ [Ignatieff 1994]. As Brubaker suggests

*Nationalism is not a ‘force’ to be measured as resurgent or receding. It is a heterogeneous set of ‘nation’-oriented idioms, practices, and possibilities that are continuously available or ‘endemic’ in modern cultural and political life* [Brubaker et al 1996: 10].

Nationalism should not be considered as an ideology which has the potential to mobilise populations or sentiment. Rather, it shapes perception patterns, and the political usage of national discourse changes contexts and social frameworks to make making certain beliefs acceptable in certain times and not others. To suggest that nationalism itself has power to mobilise sentiment is misleading, because it allows individuals no personal agency to make choices and respond to discourses.

Nationalism, therefore, is also a construct, produced in discourse. It differs from the nation as a construct insofar as the nation is a self-identifying *group*, and nationalism can be conceptualised as the utilisation of common-sense beliefs about that group to achieve strategic aims. These aims are better described as strategic than political because ‘political’ can imply ‘grand’ ideologies, elite discourses and movements, whereas the reproduction of the nation can have rather banal aims. For instance, in narratives of the nation after conflict, the nation can be invoked according to its common-sense beliefs, so that an individual can evade introspection or critical engagement with their own actions. Likewise, if political parties utilise the same ideas about the nation for a ‘bigger’ purpose, such as justifying war,

this too constitutes nationalism. The disparity between the two actions bears out Billig's problem — that nationalism is often only seen in terms of 'flag waving', whilst other more banal forms are ignored, yet how on this dichotomous basis do we delineate where an extreme form of nationalism starts or a more 'benign' form stops? Rather, nationalism is a broad spectrum of discursive practices [Jansen 2005: 47] which encompasses a vast range of social usages for the nation.

Following Billig, nationalism can also be seen as the continual flagging and reminding of nationhood; moreover, this reproduction of the nation occurs on such a routine, familiar and continued level that 'it is not consciously registered as reminding' [Billig 1995: 8]. Although this approach is perhaps the most appropriate way to understand the broad nature of nationalist practices, Billig confines 'flagging' to objects and symbols of the nation, rather than, for instance, discursive acts, events (not commemorations), incidents, media representations, cultural output etc. Continual flagging of the nation is carried out in all spheres — political, public, private — in present-day, post-conflict Serbia, with the aim of constructing not only specific narratives of the nation, which are often utilised to justify political aims, but also contexts in which those images seem acceptable and appropriate.

Whilst such a broad definition of nationalism allow us to avoid essentialising groups or behaviours, it poses another problem — if nationalist discourses and behaviour can be located anywhere, in all spheres and on part of all actors, how do we research nationalism if everyone is a potential nationalist? Ideas offered by Brubaker [2006] and Eriksen [1993], offer some insight. In line with Billig's notion that nationalism is not confined only to the 'visible' and the 'flag waving' (over support for nationalist politicians, for instance), Eriksen [1993: 1] suggests that anthropological research methods afford us the opportunity to uncover sites of nationalism through the participation in everyday culture whilst Brubaker highlights that in such settings, we should attempt to uncover the instances where ethnicity in everyday life really matters [Brubaker et al 2006: 15]. This is a departure from analysis often used for Eastern Europe, where nationalism is treated as a state of being and a characteristic of the people; often, it is simply a given that countries of East Europe are nationalist.

Employing the methods of Brubaker and Eriksen in the post-conflict research field gives rich results and allows an insight into sites of nationalism and ethnicity which would not normally be available, if we approached nationalism from above, or as a 'return of the repressed.' In Serbia, with whom nationalism has been synonymous in analytical circles since the 1980s, has seen its politicians, literature, media, and other fields of cultural production labelled as not only nationalist

but as militantly and vehemently so. After the conflicts of the 1990s, this did not abate, and hence Serbia's reaction to war crimes, Kosovo and NATO air strikes had always been 'nationalist', according to non-Serb sources and media. The labelling is not misleading. Milošević, despite his personal convictions [Ramet 2004], created such policies that they could only be deemed nationally orientated, isolationist and therefore nationalist; the wars of the 1990s were exclusively concerned with the nation; as is the Kosovo issue; and Serb war crimes of the 1990s are almost exclusively denied on the basis of national self-perceptions [Obradović 2007a]. What becomes fascinating about Serbian nationalism is that once it is approached anthropologically and ethnographically, as per Brubaker and Eriksen (and it must be pointed out that this is hardly ever the case), it becomes evident that instances of nationalist discourses are to be found not only more or less where we expect them, such as in openly nationalist political statements, but also in the private discourses of individuals who make every effort to disassociate themselves from the same. In other words, it emerges that in Serbia, nationalist discourses are replicated across all spheres, or using similar nation-orientated motifs: in the explicitly nationalist policies of the Serbian Radical Party and Milošević, as well as the individuals who claim not to support them. Further, it transpires that the site where ethnicity and nation 'matter' [Brubaker et al 2006: 15] across most spheres is specifically related to the conflicts and to the accusations of Serbs of war crimes [Obradović 2007a]. Such observations give weight to Billig's argument that nationalism is not located solely on the periphery of society, but all across it; as long as there are strategic aims in invoking the nation. In this context, deciding which views are 'extreme' is highly problematic.

This issue becomes all the more salient when we consider the efforts being made by the international community and various bodies (EU, ICTY<sup>1</sup>, ICJ<sup>2</sup>, NGOs) attempting to bring Serbia to 'come to terms with its past', a process many believe to be impeded by resurgent nationalism [Ramet 2004]. This happens most often with Serb reactions to war crimes and Serbia's failure to comply with the ICTY. In such a context, is mere 'nationalist labelling' productive and what does it actually achieve, other than the imposition of our own cultural values onto another group? (We must bear in mind that those groups we label as nationalist hardly ever see themselves as such).

Whereas researching nationalism is difficult enough in itself, researching it in a post-conflict context is even more so. Post-conflict contexts always involve varying degrees of what can broadly be re-

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<sup>1</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

<sup>2</sup> International Court of Justice.

ferred to as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and a period of individuals and societies attempting to come to terms with and understand the violent events in their society. In such situations not only will there be sensitive or taboo topics, but also may contain extremely polarised discourses, or ones which may be incongruent with the researchers' own values and beliefs.

In Serbia, this was most often the case with the denial of war crimes, which took place across all sphere of the society (politics, media, culture, individuals), and in various forms — from categorical denials to justifications and explanations [Cohen 2001]. The denials were almost always based on the idea of the nation which was invoked as a way of justifying atrocities for which Serb army and paramilitary personnel have been indicted or sentenced [Obradovic 2007a]. Thus, certain facts were disputed because 'Serbs are not like that' or because 'Serbs can't have done it, we were only the victims' — narratives which, by invoking the nation to clear individual and human responsibility, can be labelled as nationalist.

Encountering denials of war crimes (which are nation orientated and thus broadly, nationalist), during research periods can be as difficult for the researcher as encountering openly intolerant or xenophobic behaviour, especially if the research is of an ethnographic nature and thus requires extensive and intensive periods of time to be spent with one's respondents. The close proximity of such discourses repeated on a daily basis can be destabilising — my own experience is that most often, the comments and discourses perpetuated by my respondents vis-a-vis Serb war crimes, were not only offensive but sometimes deeply violent, disturbing and difficult to negotiate. My own Serb background led many respondents to believe that I shared their values and opinions with regards to the war when this was not the case.

In terms of ethics, what are the researcher's options? To speak out against offensive comments would lose the trust of the group and potentially access to the field and research data. To comply with the respondents and openly agree would mislead them as to the researcher's agenda, beliefs and values. Remaining quiet and not expressing an opinion either way seems the only option; and often, one finds, that discourses such as those which we label nationalist are difficult to argue against, because their interlocutors often speak from an emotional rather than rational or academic platform. Just as importantly, in terms of analysis, how do we approach such discourses? Denial of war crimes is a serious issue, and accusing a group of this can have grave consequences, not least the dissatisfaction of the group and the alienation of the researcher. But, recognising denial of war crimes as a by-product of post war nationalism gives a broad scope for analysis.

Wars and coping with after effects of wars are culturally constructed processes, and as culturally traumatic events are heavily mediated [Eyerman 2002]. Resorting to nationalist discourses, such as insisting on the innocence of the national group in atrocities (which have been forensically and legally proven to have been perpetrated by the same group), is a way of making sense what happened — but in such a way that it resorts to the use of what the group believes to be true about itself ([Obradovic 2007a]; c.f. [Schöpflin 1997], [Žanic 2007]). Therefore, stories which groups tell about themselves, i.e. cultural myths ([Schöpflin 1997], [Kolstø 2005]), such as stories of innocence and victimhood after war (which analysts so easily dismiss as nationalism and nothing more), tell us more about the group's perceived identities, traditions, values and perceptions of history than just about their intolerance of others etc (as suggested by terms such as 'xenophobia', 'nationalism'). Freeing the discourses of nationalism from their analytically rigid categories, and viewing them as a part of a cultural process, allows us to move away from essentialising a group's behaviour through our own culturally relativist lenses, and allows us to consider a broader context which can in turn tell us much more than just what a group's nationalist opinions are. If we were to take the most often encountered view that nationalism in Eastern Europe is almost always a 'return of the repressed' or the result of an 'ancient hatred'; we would only be able to draw the conclusion that nation-orientated or nationalist discourses such as denials of war crimes (or the Serb failure to come to terms with the same) are the products of an ancient hatred towards others — Muslims, Croats, Albanians...

It is all too easy for the outsider researcher to draw culturally divisive assumptions by labelling certain displays of behaviour and discursive practices as nationalist and offensive. However, such strategies may be the only ways of coping and re-establishing meaning in societies which have emerged from negative social change [Sztompka 2000]. Such practices as the reinforcement of the national status quo, regardless of facts or circumstances, are a way of re-establishing meaning ([Sztompka 2000], [Eyerman 2002]) in societies whose basic premises of culture and foundational identity narratives have not only been threatened but seriously violated and undermined. In this case, one may also question the ethics of judging the coping strategies of the culturally traumatised. One way to get around this dilemma — avoiding being critical of a group's coping mechanism by judging it through one's own cultural and ethical standards, whilst avoiding presenting the groups' nationalist practices and beliefs as unproblematic — is to place a strong emphasis not only on the actual nationalist practices/discourses, but also on the *context* in which they are produced.

In doing so, we do not only learn of the content of nationalist discourses but values which contribute to their construction. For in-

stance, why is denial (through justification, or direct denial) of the 1992 Srebrenica massacre, not criticised in Serbia? In other words, why is this reaction normalised, whilst attempts to bring indicted war criminals to justice in local courts are treated as treason? Through an analysis of nation construction in these instances, we can consider processes rather than ‘characteristics’. Thereby, we go from treating undesirable behaviour such as denial of own group’s atrocities against others as inherent characteristics of the group (the idea that ‘Serbs deny war crimes because they hate the Muslims as this is what has always happened in the Balkans’) and seeing it more as a culturally constructed, historically contingent process. This process is one which is highly dependent on myths of own nation, stories told by a group about itself [Schöpflin 1997], in Serbia’s case especially that of victimhood and own martyrdom; dependent also on political agendas, and what is culturally acceptable to say — or Bourdieu’s limits of the ‘sayable’ and the ‘thinkable’ [Bourdieu 1977: 169]. In this instance, we can see that in what is often analysed as ‘extreme nationalism’ and put down to a deterministic relationship between history, culture and ‘mentality’ of the people; lies another, analytically rich picture. Constructs of the nation after conflict and the nationalist discourses they produce, can help us understand not only how conflicts were understood locally, but also exactly how and on what level they were traumatic. In the case of Serbia, it is the post-war nationalist discourses which suggest that the wars of the 1990s. For this reason, what is often referred to as extreme or intolerant nationalism or one which helps produce such discourses as denial of war crimes, should not be dismissed by researchers as a product of marginal groups nor be analysed as such. Not only are such discourses present in different levels across all spheres, but quite often, they point to a much larger picture — they help to indicate the limits of the culturally acceptable.

Furthermore, if a group’s main coping mechanisms after war are the resorting to nationally orientated narratives, it tells us a lot about the nature of the trauma which they had incurred during the wars. We can tell that with the case of Serbia, who did not experience conflict until 1999 on its own soil, the trauma was largely cultural. Understanding this, and understanding nationalism almost in retrospect (not as a characteristic but as a part of a process) can help us also to understand ethnic conflicts better — the reason that different ethnic groups turn on each other is often not linked to ‘ancient hatreds’, but rather to cultural perceptions and ideology [Kaldor 2001]. Nationalism here plays but one role in a complex interweave of cultural and political processes, and understanding this gives us much wider scope for understanding conflicts and preventing them in the future. The Balkan wars of the 1990s have long suffered from an oversimplification into nationalism and ‘ancient hatreds’ and it is unfortunate that

an analysis of the same region after the conflicts continues to be approached in the same way.

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## ELENA OMELCHENKO

Some preliminary remarks:

1. The following reflections are taken from a project on which I have had the opportunity to participate as researcher.<sup>1</sup>

2. It is unlikely that we will succeed in giving clear-cut answers to the given questions since, in the course of the research project from which much of the material for this article is drawn, many of the problems that arose were part of everyday communication practices with informants. Ethical questions related to the interpersonal contact with young men and women who shared many of the same ideas and identified as members of a skin-society arose on a daily basis; my colleagues and I were obliged to regularly resolve such questions.

3. Special attention will be paid here to the emotional side of research communication, which includes both 'those who study and the studied', as well as other agents directly or indirectly involved in open and clandestine discussion of the growth of xenophobic feeling in Russian society.

The first question appears to be formulated in a purposely provocative manner in as much as it incorporates a contradiction. I have never assumed the 'position of an impartial observer' in any of the research I have conducted, whether this was directly related to the problems of xenophobia, religious intolerance, and other sensitive issues or otherwise. As a matter of fact, the field work that we recently conducted with a group of skinheads in one northern Russian town challenged some of the (more or less wide-

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<sup>1</sup> The project is called 'Society and Lifestyles: Striving for Social Harmonisation through an Understanding of Sub-Cultural Communities' (SAL, supported by the European Community). The research was carried out in several stages: we approached a group who identify as skinheads in one of Russia's northern towns on three separate occasions (2003, 2006, 2007). This was an ethnographical study which used methods of participant observation, in-depth and biographical interview work, and photo and video ethnography. The research was carried out by a mixed group of English and Russian researchers. Participating in the field work from IUTs 'Region' (Ulansky Gosuniversitet) were Albina Garifzyanova, Olga Dobroshtan, Elena Omelchenko and Elvira Sharifullina. Hilary Pilkington (University of Warwick, UK) was our representative from the UK.

ly accepted) postulates concerning the professional ethics of the sociologist.<sup>1</sup>

The long and at times torturous discussions of how our field ‘intervention’ affected the life of the group, who were oblivious to our research interests (at least until we arrived on the scene), as well as discussions about the role and place of the sociologist in sensitive fields provoked such strong emotions and passionate responses that it became appropriate to study ourselves as well as our informants. It sometimes seemed that the field had had such a strong influence on our relationship with each other as sociologists (researchers, ethnographers) that this influence on us could be ranked alongside the other findings in the field as one of the most significant results of our research. What impartiality was there to talk about then? I’m certain that the emotional constituent, which is evident far from just in the rational interaction between researchers and those people who allow themselves to be the object of their study, is becoming one of the most relevant themes to contemporary sociology.

The questions proposed for discussion are in this regard very topical. They demand some professional reflection and turn the researcher’s attention to that very process of interaction between the researcher and his field of research. More concerted reflection in this regard can help researchers to avoid reductive formalistic approaches to their work, and to assume responsibility for public discussions of ‘today’s burning questions’, which touch on the essential aspects of the ways and means of societal harmonisation, the dissemination and acceptance of the value of ‘different forms and ways of human life’ — but on much more than this as well. Such reflection also teaches us to take responsibility for the principles that we ourselves share in regard to the formation of human relations, those, at least, which we adhere to when conducting research. As tolerant as we are, what habitual, evaluative, and idealistic baggage do we bring with us when we enter into a dialogue with someone? Do participating observers bring their own particular xenophobic, homophobic, and other —phobic feelings to the field? Or, do we somehow become infected by others when we involve ourselves in such ‘sensitive’ fields? Do we begin, perhaps without even being aware of it, to share some or all of the values of our infor-

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<sup>1</sup> There exists a limited, but nevertheless broad corpus of academic literature dedicated to sociological ethics. One part of this focuses directly on sociological education, while other writers concentrate their discussions on the dominant ethnical principles and their critics. See e.g. ([Blackman 2007]; [Mauthner, Birch, Jessop et al. 2002]; [Kleinman, Copp 1993]; [Kvale 2007]; [Rose 1990]; [Wolcott 1995]; [Veselkova 2000]; [Dobroshtan 2004]; [Kizhevatova 2005]; [Omelchenko 2004] and others.)

mants, becoming voluntarily or involuntarily converted to their way of thinking? Indeed, is it possible to understand ‘the Other’ at all without accepting it to some extent — a controlled acceptance, admittedly, but nevertheless a non-hypocritical one? Aside from our material discoveries, then, which touched upon the peculiar character of the skinhead’s internal hierarchy, the nature of their relationships with the main ideas of the movement, the character of their activities and other things, our fieldwork also provided us with astounding emotional material, the nature of which we intend to explore in a separate book.

This sort of discussion could, to no lesser degree, help rid us of those short-sighted, scholastic, stuffy ideas which maintain that research should be an organised and formal means of exchanging the information received through everyday attention to those who possess it, with the goal of receiving positivistic and ideally socially meaningful knowledge which can be turned into practical action to overcome social problems. With such an approach, the researcher — that is his/her professional experiences, skills, knowledge, and also body, together with its feelings, emotional, physical, and psychological parameters and abilities — is turned into some sort of INSTRUMENT, which assists in the process of conducting, mediating on, and consolidating research in the form of a sociological result (an article, book, account, report etc.).

It is difficult to answer the questions proposed for discussion directly. They conjure up a whole spectrum of reflections and remarks. This most probably has something to do with the fact that the term ‘impartiality’ has a wider application than the questions suggest.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, we are talking here not only about simple dictionary definitions, but rather about the present-day connotations of these terms in a professional context. Abiding by ‘bookish’, professional etiquette, the sociologist is obliged to take an impartial position with regard to all the techniques (instruments) that he/she employs; s/he should not have any preconceived ideas, biases, or hints. This is one side of the so-called ‘objective disinterested’ position of the researcher, which, and then not even in all cases, can be exclusively applied to quantitative methodology, in which is impor-

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<sup>1</sup> According to V. Dahl’s explanatory dictionary: ‘IMPARTIALITY: Cf. untaintedness, without prejudice, the absence of partiality, adherence to one side or another, fairness, veracity, justice, truth....Impartial, equal in one’s judgment of all things, fair, , untainted, unprejudiced, truthful, upright’ <<http://vidahl.agava.ru/P009.HTM#1635>>. And partiality, according to Efremova’s explanatory dictionary: ‘strong bias, inclination to sth. or sb. Unbalanced, prejudicial attitude to sb. or sth.; prejudice, obs. threat’. Following this, to conduct research with ‘impartiality’ means ‘meticulously, censoriously’. Figuratively (obsolete): causing physical or moral suffering’ <http://www.efremova.info/word/pristrastie.html>. According to these definitions, impartiality is a positive, rather than a negative quality, while partiality is just the opposite.

tant to learn how to formulate questions ‘correctly’. ‘Correct’ is to be understood here as signifying the utmost neutrality in the formation of questions, and, at the same time, the generation of as many alternative renderings as possible of the contemporary use of the concept employed. When talking about participation observation, many of the arguments for ‘disinterestedness’ simply appear naive, in part schematic, and more often than not old-fashioned. All fields, and particularly sensitive ones, refute this model. Firstly (but not exclusively), this concerns the researcher who employs methods of inclusionary or (as my colleagues say) participant observation.

Which fields then, can we refer to as ‘complex’? For the most part, this applies to any process of interaction between the researcher and ‘Others’: different perceptions of the world, routines, skills (the level and quality), different understandings of the meaning of life and destiny. We need ‘unknown others’ (as opposed to the ‘known others’ who we come into contact with on a regular basis), but at the same time they have no need of us. Here is an excerpt from a conversation with one informant:<sup>1</sup>

*Inf: I wanna ask you something — what do we need you for anyway? E: What do we need you for? Inf: Nah, you, like, need us, we’ve got that, we’re where you get your information from. But what do we need you for? We’re just living our lives, and you, what the fuck? — asking questions, following us around, what do I need that crap for? E: What, is that what you really think? Really, you think that the sociologists are having some sort of effect on you? Has something changed, or what? Inf: Come off it, you don’t have any effect on us. We’re just having a laugh. You’re, like, studying us, and we’re doing the same to you. It’s like, we get together, talk about something, have a laugh. It’s just, I dunno, a bit of fun, and that’s it. Nah..., it’s interesting like, new people and all that, but change? Change what? No, you don’t change anything, you couldn’t if you tried...*

As a matter of fact, this informant was not being completely honest. Our project progressed in several stages. By the end of our stay there, a large part of the group had broken away, and the skin-head community as such no longer existed. With a good dose of humour, we can even put that decidedly positive (in civic terms) result down to our research. In all seriousness though, it is hard to tell to what extent the long discussions about nationalistic sentiment had an im-

<sup>1</sup> The interview and talk from which I quote here took place during the last stage of our ‘northern’ project.

pact on our informants.<sup>1</sup> Was it more a matter of the kids simply growing up?<sup>2</sup>

In our NON-research lives, if that life actually exists, it is only with those people closest to us, who are family or practically so, that we associate as closely as we do with our main informants. The level of interest and attention that the researcher displays toward his informant during participant observation does not exist in everyday life. However clandestine and even conspiratorial the group, they are unlikely to remain completely indifferent in the face of constant, and (if the sociologist is acting professionally) engaged, but not curious in the everyday sense of the word, and selfless attention from the researcher. Nevertheless, the effects of research interaction should not be exaggerated. It remains a research situation, as much as we try to smooth out the moments of communicative disequilibrium.

Turning now to the sorts of situation that provoked the greatest degree of passion/emotion in those fields of thematic research in which I and my colleagues have worked. These were the points that manifested themselves most vividly.

***The containment of negative emotions.*** It was really very difficult to keep up a relaxed dialogue when the conversation turned to the reasons for racial/national intolerance, just as it was to sit through the informant's arguments as he/she discussed cases of outright aggression against members of other nationalities. We were not obliged to show full understanding or sympathy for our informants; our

<sup>1</sup> Incidentally, our informants turned out to be much more clear-sighted than we might have expected. Thus, despite our story about 'studying various groups of young people in various parts of Russia', they realised immediately that we were studying them as 'skins' and not as 'normal people'. In our open discussions, this 'clearly selfish-political' and not strictly academic interest was interpreted by the informants in various ways, from being an indication of our unprofessionalism as sociologists (the mildest alternative) to showing that we 'were part of the system', the harshest variant of which was being part of 'the FSB'. From one interview: 'Inf: So, you're only interested in why I'm a skinhead and all that. But you never shown any interest in who I am, what I do - in my life, basically. Why's that not interesting for you? I'm more of a sociologist than you are. I've learned to watch what I say, so I don't go over the top, to control myself, like. And you think you've sussed something out about me...it's not you who's studying us, it's us who's studying you.' Reflections on the theme of mutual influence and mutual research clearly fall outside the bounds of the proposed discussion, and so I do not intend to pursue this line of enquiry. But I am convinced that this side of emotions in the field is of equal importance and significance, as much for the process, as for the results of the research, even though these, like the above, remain outside the boundaries of professional attention and reflection.

<sup>2</sup> By the second stage of the research, almost half of the group had left for other towns, partly for 'personal reasons', i.e. new girlfriends or boyfriends and one couple decided to begin a family during this period. One person decided to 'split with the movement' altogether. According to one of the most charismatic leaders, 'it seemed like lots of ex-friends had got scared by the mass propaganda in the media, and the new law (here the informant was referring to Article 282, Part 1, of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation: 'the incitement to national, racial, and religious hatred' - E.O). They came up with different reasons, but I think they just got scared. None of them were skins of course, they were just hanging out together and that's all'. In general the question of the mutual influence between the researcher and his informants is little studied.

‘research story’ did not require that we dress ourselves up as ‘disciples of national-socialist ideas’. The nature of our interaction with the informants and the level of trust that they felt towards us allowed us, to some extent at least, to maintain our own separate positions. We did not engage in open discussions, nor did we show that we agreed with their arguments — to have done so would have appeared quite unnatural. We did our utmost to convince our interlocutors of our interest in their thoughts and feelings, which was in fact true. In order to delve deeper into their statements and often, as analyses of the interviews showed, to get exclusive demonstrations of their adherence to the ideas of the movement, it was better to talk with these young men and women as people rather than ‘skins’. It was important to understand what the individual cultural choices each had made had been determined by, and which social, societal, biographical, and situational factors had facilitated this particular life strategy as opposed to any other. Our own positions in regard to the questions under discussion, our mutual psychological and intellectual therapy, we left for our own nighttime chats.<sup>1</sup>

***To act dumb, or not?*** This element of communication was no less difficult. And was, for me at least, one of the most critical. The gap between our skills and life experiences was determined not only by our ages (although this factor was also significant) or academic degrees,<sup>2</sup> but more often than not by our life positions. Obviously, the sphere of my knowledge about life (both everyday and professional) is much broader and more harmonious (at least I would hope it is) than that of many of our young interlocutors. We had to overcome a whole range of communicative habits and customs: those of a mother (pity), leader (authoritarianism), teacher (didacticism, edification, formation), and member of the academic community (academic terminology, esoteric humour); to relinquish the cultural or consumerist habits of our non-field lives, to react freely to and use slang and swear words, to drink cheap beer and bad vodka, snack on

<sup>1</sup> During the concluding and most difficult (from an emotional point of view) stage of the research there were five of us in the field. The help and support we gave each other was really vital and helped to re-establish normal ways of seeing ourselves, other people, and the outside world. Here, however, is most probably not the place to set forth in more detail the postulates developed by our research team on this subject.

<sup>2</sup> Hiding the fact that Albina Garifzyanova is a candidate of philosophy, I am a doctor of sociology, and Hilary Pilkington is a professor of sociology was senseless. Our informants were extremely well informed about us and our research centre ‘Region’. As we found out, they regularly visited our site, read the news there, including the things related to our research. It also turned out that they were up to date on our academic biographies and that they had read our academic articles. This last revelation was particularly surprising and earned our respect. By the end of the project, they were openly discussing and arguing with us about the appropriateness, from their point of view, of the research methods we were using and the conclusions that we had drawn.

cheap fast-food, react appropriately to the humour used by the group, and not get riled in extreme situations.<sup>1</sup>

***A female researcher in a male field.*** This question has most probably been best elucidated in the answers given by my colleague, Albina Garifzyanova. I can only add one thing. The group that we were studying was not simply made up of males, but aggressive males at that who acted in accordance with a clearly formulated and well-established patriarchal gender regime, including a clearly articulated normative masculinity, at least when it came to public demonstrations. I cannot help but mention in this regard a series of important contradictions. On the one hand, there were the constant references to the repulsiveness of other ‘non-traditional sexual orientations’, and the homophobic leitmotifs of many jokes and conversations. On the other hand, a ‘pure male brotherhood’ homoeroticism was on constant display. In our ‘hanging-out’ sessions at least, bodily practices, unarticulated but manifest feelings and emotionality, and open bodily proximity between the men in the group were some of the key features of their interaction with each other. This contrasted with their feelings about the participation of women in the group:

*Inf: You, right, Lena, you're not just a researcher, are you, you're not an asexual being, right? You're a woman. E: So what? Is that so important to you? Inf: Course it's important. I mean, why'd only women come here anyway? I mean, if it had been a bloke, a man, right, he could've got loads more out of this. It's like, I'd 've taken 'im round no problems, I'd 've shown 'im all sorts, he'd 've got you loads of good stuff.*

***Conflict of identities — How should one react to emerging ethno-patriotism when it is directed, not against people in general, but against you in particular?***

There was one very tense moment during a general discussion with the group in which one informant began talking about the fundamental ideas of the Christian faith not only with scepticism but with outright cynicism and mockery. At that point, it was the video-camera with which I was filming this fragment of the discussion which saved me. The other difficult moment occurred during a discussion about the idea of a ‘Jewish conspiracy’, which caused me to protest angrily, and provoked a disturbing psychological reaction from me both at a general personal level, and be-

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<sup>1</sup> These situations could be extremely provocative: sexual advances, drug abuse, the drawing of tattoos in the form of Nazi symbols, slam (a fairly aggressive and traumatic dance form), night excursions/ tests of ‘courage’, heartfelt talks on overly personal topics, provocative emotional outbursts, conflicts and fights between leaders etc.

cause I, for a number of reasons, identify myself as having Jewish origins.<sup>1</sup>

The ethical problems of sensitive research become more acute once photos, video recordings and their presentation at a later date are involved. Indeed, this aspect of ethnographical research is perhaps the most disputed. There is wide debate over the ethical boundaries for the use of visual documents. On the one hand, visualisation is one of the characteristics of contemporary life, and not only for young people, albeit for these latter this may be true to a greater degree. At times one has the impression that only that which is printed and shown on the screen of a mobile telephone, or on the monitor of a television or computer has the right to real existence. Chats, blogs, and services such as ‘odnoklassniki’, ‘kontakty’, ‘druzya’ and ‘fani’<sup>2</sup> are bursting with personal and collective representations. Indeed, all the above are characterised by an ostensible tendency to deanimate presence, which is indicative not only of the growth in demand for self-realisation, but also the deficit of sincerity and intimacy in ‘un-monitored’ real life.<sup>3</sup> All of these new phenomena cannot but influence our understanding of the permissible boundaries of visual interference in the lives of our informants. As I already mentioned, during the course of the research, we made active use of photographs, video and audio-recordings. And we were not the only ones to do so. Our informants often filmed each other and us at the same as we filmed them. We had agreed of course that all this material would be used for academic purposes alone and would under no circumstances be broadcast on the television. We nevertheless decided to use one of our research films in one academic seminar. It was at this point that we were accused by one colleague of *political bias* — not with regard to the system (power, the consumer etc.), but with regard to the informants themselves. In other words, we were accused of ‘justifying cruelty and xenophobia’, since, according to our critics, the skins

<sup>1</sup> This subject also had a positive effect on me. Finding myself in an extreme situation, I fully understood that ethnicity is far from always a mere construct, and, furthermore, is not always discursive. For some reason, I was really tempted to say: ‘You’re not referring to me, by any chance, are you? What about me — am I also in on this plot, in your opinion?’ If only for a short time, I assumed a distinct identity whose value and neutrality I was prepared to defend to the last. If nothing else, I had found some sort of completeness.

<sup>2</sup> Social networking sites equivalent to Facebook, Bebo, Friends Reunited, etc. [Editor].

<sup>3</sup> This is helped to no small extent by the excess of reality shows and fame-factories that fill our media space. There are literally thousands of new leaders, ‘high society’ stars/ Paris Hiltons, and ‘have-a-go heroes’. To qualify as such, these shows must expose the intimate details of everyday life, criminal and semi-criminal themes, exclusive sexual practices, and shocking details of ‘top secret’ passions. They sing, dance, ice-skate, box, climb into cages with lions — the whole shebang. Everything is possible for everyone. On the one hand this leads to a devaluation of meaningfulness and value of professional experience and skills. On the other hand, it encourages people, particularly young people, to try to win fame, to become a household name. The development of this theme, however, goes beyond the bounds of the present discussion.

were presented almost like heroes as a result of our not having expressed our own civic position in the film or passed any judgment upon them. I doubt I am able to express myself any more clearly on this issue at this point. There still remains a lot to think about with regard to the future of field video-ethnography. It is interesting that, somewhere along the line, a contradictory, or to put it more accurately, a highly regrettable situation was set up.

Accusations of *political bias*, albeit of the opposite sort, were also launched by informants. It was hard to explain the nature of our task in that faraway northern Russian town, for which, in their opinion at least, we were getting paid big money. Who would have gained if we had mentioned the long journeys, the domestic, cultural, and psychological hardships, the days spent without sleep, the exposure to danger? Discussions about the value of academic study were far from convincing. Unfortunately, we are now getting the same arguments from the people in power themselves, whose understanding of the concept of ‘financial support’ is narrower than it ever was...

Accusations of *political bias*, as we have seen, can come not only from various sides, but also in various forms. If we thus decide to get involved in the research of such ‘sensitive fields’, we should be prepared to answer accusations from different sides in different ways. Perhaps the most offensive accusations, however, are those subtle and crafty allusions (employing numerous authoritative references and quotations) to our ‘Western’ bias, which imply that, lacking any real professional competences of our own, we are merely amassing ‘raw material’ to support academic imperialism. In my personal opinion, this is one of the most obvious manifestations of xenophobia, which often goes hand in hand with the haughty (and not always justifiably so) attitude of the Moscow-based academic circle towards so-called provincial sociology.

Finally, the most complex and subtle question: should we collaborate with the authorities — state, political, or media — in such research? To answer such a question would require an interrogation of the term ‘cooperate’ in a contemporary context, a task that I am not yet ready to take on.

I hope that some of the ideas that I have detailed above prove useful for the continuation of this discussion.

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## ALEXANDER OSIPOV

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By definition, it is almost impossible to approach social phenomena with complete neutrality, objectivity and without prejudice or bias. At a stretch, and even then not in all cases, we might consider the strategy of avoiding discussion of certain sensitive questions as some sort of impartiality. Even then, however, the language one chooses to describe a certain phenomenon reveals a particular perspective and, of course, evaluation of the problem. In my opinion, however, all this is of not real significance as long as three conditions are observed. Firstly, in society in general and in the academic community in particular, freedom of discussion must be preserved, following which any bias in the views of one particular person can be balanced out by the opinions of others, who are, quite likely, biased people themselves. Secondly, developed reflection on the part of the academic community with regard to the language of description is useful in all respects. Thirdly, methodological rigour is required from the academic community in general and individual researchers in particular.

I don't see any reason why academic researchers should not get involved in public discussions. The researcher as a person like any other, and what's more, like any a citizen, is entitled to his or her own opinion on the most diverse of questions. Researchers are fully justified in their desire to present these opinions to others. The danger that Sergei Sokolovsky has pointed out on more than one occasion is, however, that when publicly detailing their opinions on social problems many people for various reasons, sometimes wittingly, but more often than not inadvertently, go beyond the boundaries of their own competencies. They make their judgments from the pedestal of science and scholarship when in fact their level of professional knowledge is really no different from that of the layman and the ignoramus. It is hardly possible, even with the best intentions in the world, to completely avoid this unrestrained or restrained abuse of one's social status; nevertheless, it seems to me essential to bear this perspective in mind.

2 In my own experience, I can't recall anything like this ever happening. This, however, could be due to my limited (in all senses of the word) experience of the field. It could also be partially a result of the fact that I often go into 'the field' in guises other than that of the 'researcher' and make every effort not to disturb the other actors in it. There are most probably other reasons why I have not been confronted with the situations which we are discussing here. As a human rights activist, I always attempt to explain to the informant in as much detail as possible his mandate and the task in hand, while at the same time refraining from making any commitments or promises that fall outside of the bounds of that mandate. I keep my distance and avoid getting mixed up in relationships based on personal trust. I avoid making any promises or commitments apart from those which are advisable for the completion of my work (which goes without saying) and small favours (for example, sending a certain book to an informant).

3 The demonstration of one's efforts to understand and describe the positions and arguments of the community under investigation as accurately as possible. For example, showing that one does not have preconceived ideas or judgments, avoiding promises and commitments, and avoiding the creation of personal and informal ties.

4 This has happened many times. More often than not these accusations are provoked by biases of the opposite kind, which is itself interesting as an ethnographic fact. Much less frequently, however, one is faced with accurate and meaningful criticisms of one's factual or methodological shortcomings.

This raises an interesting question: who can one really consider a colleague in the field when many people are combining various professional and personal roles? Some refuse to consider civil servants,

politologists, or journalists who have publications in academic journals and are outstanding for their expertise, as colleagues. Others are not prepared to recognise co-workers in human-rights organisations or members of ethnic movements as such. In my opinion, there are some possible criteria which one can use to make such a differentiation; the qualifying characteristics should not just be regular participation in academic activities, but also probity of research standards, and the observation of academic ethics.

In Russia, people who are somehow connected to the academic community as a result of their public positions or origins frequently display what can be labelled collectively and very conditionally as xenophobia. Indeed this has been common knowledge for some time. Part of the problem here is down to the fact that this very 'xenophobia' is not a physical object that can be measured with precise instruments, but rather a conventionally defined and redefined area of practices and ideas lacking any clear boundaries. This area has a very clear centre around which, in most modern societies at least, there was (or still is) a wide-reaching negative consensus. I am thinking in particular of various ideals and models of behaviour that are rejected by most of society across a whole range of ideological positions (from radical Marxism to conservative nationalism) (not to mention that the articulation of such ideas and participation in such activities is subject to legal penalties). For instance, the condemnation of the following practices is widespread and does not require any particular substantiation: direct calls for violence and acts of violence themselves, invocations of the principle of collective responsibility, judgments about the inferiority or superiority of one group of people in relation to another, positive or negative evaluations of individuals or groups on the basis of their biological origins and so on.

In Russia, tolerance for all forms of intolerance, even the most extreme, is becoming more and more widespread and obvious. In my opinion, tolerance for extreme forms of xenophobia should be generally considered a negative social phenomenon. But the disinclination to join the mass movement<sup>1</sup> to publicly condemn manifestations of xenophobia and ostracise certain groups by accusing them of intolerance does not always have the same motivation. For instance, some people dislike being associated with the official 'fight against extremism' especially when this involves the pursuit of dissident political goals, and are less than thrilled by accusations that may have a disproportionate and selective character. Some (including the author of this article) dislike the fact that accusations of extreme forms of intolerance are sometimes used as an excuse to gloss over or dismiss

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<sup>1</sup> The word used in the original is *massovka*, which meant a Soviet political meeting, often to the purpose of expressing kneejerk collective indication ('down with Zionist aggression!'). [Ed.]

completely the more widespread, everyday, but less radical forms of xenophobia and discrimination.

A relatively clear case of the latter is the violation of academic ethics for xenophobic (in the most general sense) ends, for example, fiddling or selectively presenting the results of one's own research or that of some other researcher in order to justify some repressive measure or another adopted by the government.

At the heart of this complicated problem, then, are the ideas which fall beyond the boundaries of patent or universally condemned xenophobia, or, to put it another way, which are located outside the 'centre' as it is decided by consensus, and on which there is no broad agreement. For some, chauvinism and xenophobia are just catch-phrases accompanying the creation of a 'national' (in the ethnic sense) state system or territorial integrity, while for some, these terms signify the refusal of others to accept their own (the dominant group's) account of history and their demand for 'historical truth'. In my opinion, many ideas that appear relatively harmless at first glance can have more serious consequences than extreme forms of hostility if they are realised, not to mention the fact that they can end up justifying violence and strengthening radical xenophobia. Discrimination in most of its forms and guises does little to incite hatred or hostility; indeed, it is not driven by misanthropic ideas or passionate emotions. I will, however, detail at this point three phenomena which can, in my opinion, produce alienation and create the conditions for discrimination. These are, firstly, the social engineering of government with regard to ethnicity (whether this goes under the name of migration policy, conflict prevention, or the regulation of 'international relations'); secondly, nationalism in its various forms, and thirdly, the idea of defending and preserving of 'ethnic cultures' and 'identities'. There are various points of view on each of these issues, all of which might have completely acceptable and rational foundations.

I can be critical, for example, of the ideas of collective responsibility, restrictive immigration policy, 'positive discrimination' or the 'defence of ethnic cultures', as things which require some kind of ideological resistance. But whatever the risks associated with these ideas, I don't have the grounds to tar them with the same brush as racism and xenophobia, that is to say, with those extreme forms that are condemned by consensus. I might consider these or other points of view distasteful and their defence in the name of academia unpleasant, but in the absence of a universal or general consensus, it is impossible to propose any universally applicable conditions or prohibitions. In this case then, opposing such ideas is a question of my ideological preferences and choices. It is my personal choice to criticise those who do not agree with my points of view, and not the responsibility of the academic community or any other group.

I would argue then, that one is walking a slippery slope by evaluating the constructions and conclusions proposed by any researcher according to how closely they correspond to certain ideological postulates. Unpleasant as it is to see racist ideas justified by academia itself, I am staunchly opposed to any form of censorship or ‘political correctness’ on the grounds that it creates a culture of academic censorship and presents ideology as a criterion for truth or the acceptability of knowledge. That said, I am not repudiating the social responsibility of the researcher. To find a way of combining conflicting principles, in this case social responsibility and academic conscientiousness, is always a difficult business. It goes without saying that freedom from censorship and the integrity of the researcher should be accompanied by a particular scrupulousness and prudence in the formulation of hypotheses and conclusions, as well as the study of all possible alternatives.

### ALEXANDER PANCHENKO

**1**

The problems related to the ‘impartiality’ of the observer/researcher of certain cultural phenomena are complicated ones to resolve. Everyone has biases, be these moral, aesthetic, political, or ideological in character. At the end of the day, these biases are the consequences of and means for the formation of our identities (personal and collective, positive and negative, stable and diffuse), without which it is difficult to imagine society functioning as it does. When constructing the object of our research, we deliberately rely on our ‘background knowledge’, which is never completely neutral in character. While advancing essentially pluralistic and multicultural approaches to the research problem, we nevertheless refrain from making certain public statements that we think might offend the people we love or respect.

It is another matter that, since they are capable of reflection and rational analysis, researchers must, obviously, try to be impartial and even indifferent with regard to the phenomenon under observation. Academia seems to me to have nothing to do with axiological teleology; we are concerned with things that exist or existed at some point in the past, and not with how things could or should be. The history of mankind

should nevertheless be seen as a history of xenophobia and religious intolerance, and not as a history of open-mindedness. Consequently, I see no reason why the anthropologist should be prevented from studying this and other such 'sensitive issues'. That, however, does not prevent the researcher from having and expressing, in both the public and private domains, his or her own civic and ethical positions. In my opinion, we must strive to prevent our personal views from influencing our rational analysis of certain problems. At the very least, we should be aware of the reasons, form, and consequences of such influence.

2 I don't think that I have ever been confronted with any real problems of this kind. I've had to reconcile drunk villagers and while, from a research point of view, it would have been interesting to see how their argument ended, it was of course of no real importance to my academic career. Hypothetically speaking, I could imagine being in such a conflict, although the means by which it would be resolved would depend very much on the circumstances.

3 Here again, a lot depends on the concrete situation. As far as the most general rules are concerned, the norms of anthropological field work in general apply: explain your intentions and methods to the informant in as clear a way as possible; don't conceal or obscure your position with other questions; don't get caught up in discussions, but at the same time don't avoid them outright; speak less, listen more.

4 Let's consider what is implied by the term *political bias*. I've occasionally been accused of nihilism, cynicism, relativism and the like. But in this case, it is not completely clear who I am siding with, if I am siding with anyone at all. It would of course be true to say, borrowing a phrase from a certain former Chekist,<sup>1</sup> that I 'suck up to foreign embassies', or, more precisely, that in my life I have received a lot of grants from western sponsors (as well as, admittedly, one from the President of the Russian Federation). But, this is more complicated than it seems, particularly since it is not completely clear, for me at least, what exactly these foreign embassies want out of us. If they are looking to destroy Russian spirituality, then one must firstly clarify what this spirituality actually is: which particular ideas, texts, artifacts, and characters from history it ascribes to and so on. It suddenly seems I might just be constructing rather than destroying Russian spirituality, doesn't it? In short, there's food for thought here.

I have a pretty low opinion of academics who are themselves xenophobes or who simply ignore xenophobia. I should specify here,

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<sup>1</sup> Member of the secret police. [Editor].

however, that as far as my relationships with colleagues are concerned, I try not to mix personal attitudes with my scholarly ideas. If an anti-Semite wrote a competent and intelligent book, for example, I would evaluate that study without taking into consideration the particularities of the author's personality. Then again, that situation rarely occurs, more often than not xenophobia and stupidity go hand in hand.

## HILARY PILKINGTON

**1** My understanding of social research is that researchers do not sit outside of the relations, mechanisms, processes or structures of society that they study but, on the contrary, are placed firmly within that world. Researchers bring their own experiences and predispositions that arise from their structural positioning to the research setting and they must account for that positioning not only before and after the research process but throughout it. Thus the notion that a researcher can be 'neutral' or impervious to the subject matter of their research is unrealistic. Moreover, the idea that they might enter and leave a research environment with all pre-existing values unchallenged or unchanged seems not only impossible in practice but also undesirable in theory; it suggests the relationship between research subjects (respondents) and researchers — the living tissue of engaged social research — is little more than a pseudo-social shell encasing a positivistic research practice.

It follows that my response to this question has changed over time and in the context of the particular relationships that have developed with research subjects (respondents). When, in 1993, I first encountered xenophobic cultural practices among the young people I knew in Russia I was wary of any substantive engagement. This was partly because I was poorly — emotionally as well intellectually — prepared for it; I had stumbled across the phenomenon as I followed up respondents from earlier research

some of whom, it transpired, had moved on to become 'skinheads'. My main dilemma at that time was whether or not to write about the phenomenon at all since the ethnographic nature of my research tends towards giving voice to research subjects. The desire not to provide a platform for the political views of these particular individuals led me to avoid further engagement with them. I wrote only one article that drew on my experience with them, which focused on skinhead culture primarily as a gendered subcultural strategy (a route into 'harder' masculinity).

The dilemmas today are very different and I would point to two of the many issues which complicate the question of the decisions we make about taking a 'public position' that challenges xenophobic or nationalist attitudes.

The first relates to the fact that the researcher no longer plays the role of mouthpiece for such views. The young skinheads — or at least some of them — with whom we<sup>1</sup> are currently working are themselves media savvy. They post their views and pictures to websites dedicated to the politics and style to which they adhere and they themselves contribute directly to journals and other publications. At the same time, as researchers we are also much more exposed to the media. Even working papers are often made available publicly, making us responsible, at ever earlier stages, for what we write. Moreover we speak through these multiple, rapid and often undesired media channels not only to other academics but to the public at large and, importantly, to our respondents. The dilemma now, therefore, is not whether or not to release information about xenophobic practices and attitudes but how to retain adequate control over what is reported about our research and to present that information adequately, and simultaneously, to very different audiences.

A second, and even more fundamental, difference is that in the current climate it is difficult to define what working with 'xenophobic' youth means. Our recent fieldwork involves ethnographic research with a group of young people who call themselves 'skinheads'. But what does this mean in the context of the growth of chauvinistic and nationalistic attitudes among the population in general, which makes it difficult to determine where 'everyday', routine, or 'banal' nationalism or racism ends and 'extreme' or 'radical' nationalist views begin? Moreover, these views are invariably interlaced with other attitudes that may be offensive such as homophobic or sexist views

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<sup>1</sup> The fieldwork I refer to here is a series of three six-week periods of ethnographic fieldwork (2003, 2006, 2007) conducted with a group of young people self-identifying as 'skinheads'. The research began in 2002 and involved a team of researchers from 'Region', Ulianovsk State University (Elena Omelchenko, Albina Garifzyanova, Olga Dobroshtan and Elvira Sharifullina) and the University of Warwick (Hilary Pilkington).

and practices. In choosing to take a public position against a particular set of views, do we potentially ignore or condone other equally offensive attitudes?

Finally, as a British sociologist whose research is based primarily in Russia, there are additional dilemmas in publicly upholding apparently ‘universal’ values which may be, legitimately, perceived by Russian citizens as, on the contrary, particular to their (foreign) context of origin. The very different historical origins and contemporary experiences of multi-ethnic co-existence in Russia and the UK mean that cultural practices of talking about and engaging with ethnic, racial and cultural difference also differ enormously. I have reflected elsewhere on the significance of this for thinking about the limited usefulness of the notion of ‘multiculturalism’ in the post-socialist environment (see Pilkington and Popov 2008 forthcoming). I would note here therefore only that I have long abandoned any shock at the public reference to ethnic, religious or other cultural difference that I first felt when in Russia. Indeed, I would like to think that now, among friends on equal terms, I can even enjoy the playful banter that can accompany a recognition, acceptance and enjoyment of our differences. It is, of course, not the recognition of, nor reference to, difference that constitutes a xenophobic outlook but the notions of power and hierarchy that may be attached to it. This does not mean I don a cloak of relativism each time I clear passport control but that I am more prone to use my experience in Russia to interrogate rather than propagandise my own particular form of post-Imperial ethnic/racial consciousness.

2

In the particular kind of work in which I and my colleagues are engaged — qualitative sociological research involving observation and participant observation — the issue is not one of involvement versus non-involvement since we have no option but to be involved. We can choose only — as I noted above — to exclude certain kinds of research subjects from our remit. The problem is rather how to manage the counter pressures of ‘acceptance’ by respondents and the maintenance of an identity with which we are comfortable outside of the field. Despite the very helpful recent work on the importance of ‘reflexivity’ and ‘positionality’ in the social sciences that helps us manage some of the intricacies of ethnographic fieldwork ([Willis 1976]; [Clifford and Marcus 1986]; [Okely and Callaway 1992]; [Back 1993]; [Rose 1997]), the ethnographic practice remains premised on gaining ‘acceptance’ by respondents. Herein lies the problem of working with respondents with racist or xenophobic views; how do we manage the desire to be accepted into an unacceptable community?

The honest answer to this question is that these tensions are not resolvable. Personally I remain deeply uncomfortable, at times also

frustrated, with my incapacity to challenge views and practices that I consider to be inhumane. These moments of discomfort are particularly acute when 'in-' and 'out-of-field' worlds clash; the moments when you meet respondents in places where you are known as someone else or when you swap home addresses and extend invitations to visit. Moreover the discomfort cuts two ways. We are concerned that in our out-of-field world we will be seen as having 'changed', having been 'influenced' by the unacceptable views of our respondents. At the same time we feel guilt at being 'ashamed' of being seen with respondents, of being associated with their views. Why guilt? Because in practice, no matter how reflexive we are, or how dialogic our research practice is, and no matter how much our respondents may taunt us that it is they, not we, who are conducting the research, the power dimensions of the research process remain firmly loaded on the side of the researcher.

Resolvable or not, of course, we continue to practice a series of management strategies to negotiate these tensions. The key one, in my opinion, is recognising that although as an ethnographer you need to be 'accepted' by your respondents, that does not mean you need to be accepted as a racist or xenophobe. It means you need to be accepted as a person. Adopting this researcher position is premised on an understanding of respondents as practising a particular politics rather than being consumed by it and thus that they can accept you even though you do not share their political views. Starting with such an understanding of your relationship with respondents helps considerably in feeling able to balance in-field and out-of-field identities. However, it has its own consequences. Such a positioning assumes that you approach your respondents not in a single dimension, not as empty bearers of xenophobic ideology, but as rounded individuals whose participation in xenophobic youth cultural groups plays a particular role in their lives. This approach, in my experience, lays you open to criticism of lending at least tacit support to their xenophobia.

While such accusations remain painful, for me personally, understanding and explaining the experiences and attitudes of young people, in the often complex and contradictory form that they appear, does not challenge but confirms my 'civic position'. My work has been concerned with understanding, and explaining to others, these experiences and, for me, this involves a fundamental principle that no young person should be viewed, literally or metaphorically, as black or white, integrated or marginal, 'socialized' or anti-social. The young people we encounter in our research, I would argue, should always be treated as multi-dimensional human beings and be understood in their full complexity. To do this we have to listen to them in this non-judgemental way and commit to that process of listening over a period of time. I have never felt that this condones or

legitimizes their views. At worst it provides an additional audience for those views. At best it opens both researcher and researched to the important art of listening.

A further consequence of treating your research respondents as full human subjects is that it makes it likely that you will encounter them in situations in which they themselves are vulnerable. This has been a persistent element of our current research with xenophobic young people and it has an enormous impact upon both how you view them and how you understand the role of xenophobic views in their lives. Particularly telling here is a refrain which a number of our respondents developed during the second phase of fieldwork. Aware that after that period of research we had no definite plans to come back to the city to work with them at least over the next year, our respondents began to accuse us of treating them like ‘condoms’ (which are used once and then thrown away). While this was partially a comedic thread to our joint narratives, the sheer brutality of the way in which it visualised the power relations in the research process was painful for us as well as them.

On a more practical level, research of this nature often raises the question of the researcher’s ‘civic duty’ with regard to upholding the law or acting in the best interests of society. For some it is a dereliction of that duty not to make known to the police people who report their own involvement in racist crimes. For others it would be an ethical outrage to betray the trust of respondents in this way. At the ethical level I have already made clear that for me once the decision has been made to engage in such research, it follows that the ethical rule of ‘do no harm’ to your respondents applies and I have never experienced a situation in which I felt that principle to be seriously threatened. At the day to day research level, however, it remains important to minimize the chances of such situations arising by approaching fieldwork not as a fact-gathering exercise but as a means of recording experiences which will help understand broader social questions. There is rarely a need to seek experiences or information of a kind that is of interest to law-enforcement agencies or a threat to respondents and those that are encountered unintentionally should be recorded in a way that recognises their sensitivity. Indeed, awareness (on the part of respondents as well as researchers) of the risk involved in the research process often becomes an important analytic category in and of itself, revealing a range of individual and group attitudes not only to the law but to norms of group solidarity, masculinity, trust, emotionality etc.

3

As I noted above, to resolve the issue of acceptance, the best ethnographic strategy is to take up a position other than one of a participant that is ideologically committed to the group. There is, of

course, an argument that it is precisely in this kind of research that 'covert' research is ethically acceptable; it is the only way in which full acceptance can be achieved and thus 'true knowledge' of the group gained. I remain sceptical about this except in circumstances where the research question relates directly to the organisational structure and working of a political or para-military organisation. In the research we have carried out — which has been concerned at a more general level with how and why racist or xenophobic attitudes and practices are incorporated increasingly into mainstream youth cultural identities — covert research has been unnecessary. We have always declared our position as researchers and, within the group, have taken up positions of 'friend of friend' and naïve observer.

While these identity or access issues might be thought out in advance of research, there are always myriad unimagined situations which require instantaneous responses yet have serious implications for the course of research. Strategies for dealing with these situations are deeply personal — they are rooted not only in the positionality of the researcher but also in the intricacies of the relationship of the researcher with the group at that particular point in time. In my research in the 1990s, I was confronted with a situation in which, after participating in a beer drinking session with a small group of skinheads, the lads began to verbally abuse a racially mixed couple on the street. It is hard to relay the sheer horror, or maybe fear, that the encounter would boil over into a physical attack and that I would have to make a demonstrative choice about whether to try to physically protect those under attack. In such crisis situations we fall back on the strategies we know best and as an academic whose verbal armoury is stronger than their physical one, my reaction was to distract attention away from the potential thrill of the fight with suggestions of things to do that would be even more 'worthwhile' and 'fun'. I have no way of knowing whether my words had any influence at all on the group's decision 'not to bother' and I raise it only to illustrate that knowing your respondents in a rounded way is important to managing the field situation as well as being a principled academic stance. In our current research, the presence of more than one researcher in the field provided the rare opportunity to compare and reflect on how our different positionalities underpinned our available strategies. Being older and directly connected to an outside world to which respondents had very restricted access allowed me to make small scale verbal challenges to their arguments; their desire for alternative sources of information and ways of looking at the world allowed me as a researcher to listen to them but also to question elements of arguments they put forward or suggest alternative interpretations. This strategy was also open to the older of my Russian colleagues and, to a lesser extent, to our younger colleague who was

the primary fieldworker. Her ‘outsider’ position and high level of education afforded similar authority. However, her closer day to day relationship with the respondents, and position as a young Tatar woman, challenged their prejudices in a much more direct and physical way; at one particular moment of tension within the group it seemed to other team members that her refusal to be subordinated by dominant group members was even adopted as a strategy for resistance by other members of the group. But this is a story that she should tell herself.

4

Colleagues with whom I have worked directly in both the UK and Russia have never shown signs of xenophobia; on the contrary they have been themselves often on the front line of challenging stereotypes, not only ethnic (and racial) but gender, sexual, class (capital/provincial) and ‘Westerner’/Russian. They do this not necessarily through overt stances or public positions but in the way they choose to work. Even when working directly with people committed to anti-racism, however, and especially when working cross-sectorally and in international collaborative environments, imperfect modes of communication can develop that force us to consider seriously how, as academics, we can challenge xenophobia.

I became acutely aware of this as part of an NGO-academic collaborative project which brought together organisations and individuals committed to combating xenophobia in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. A dilemma that project participants returned to on a number of occasions was whether research designed to understand how and why people form stereotypical or hostile attitudes towards members of ‘other’ ethnic groups should be avoided because it might be misused by political forces who would choose to represent this as evidence that the presence of ‘other’ ethnic groups causes political tension and thus that ‘immigration’ should be halted or ethnic minorities ‘removed’. Academic participants, on the other hand, felt equally strongly that such research — which often prioritises subaltern voices — is essential to any genuine attempt to understand the origin and escalation of ethnic intolerance, hostility and tension.

Underpinning these debates is a really important discursive gap. Among social scientists, whether or not they label themselves ‘constructivists’ or ‘postmodernists’, it is taken for granted that the narratives or statements of research subjects are socially constructed. This is far from the case outside academic circles. This was made clear by some project participants for whom the reproduction of narratives of young people that expressed negative images or stereotypes of members of other ethnic groups meant there must be ‘some truth’ in these statements. In this way, the project gave

concrete meaning to often quite abstract epistemological and methodological debates about the relationship between research, politics and ethics. These discussions proved extremely productive since they obliged both academic and practitioner participants in the project to interrogate their positions on this question — positions which generally go unchallenged within their own professional communities. However, they left the group divided. On one side were those who felt that it was important to understand society as it is presented to us in the very diverse narratives of individuals (and groups) that we encounter and, only then, as a subsequent but separate process, present that research in a form that makes explicit its political implications. On the other were those who considered the danger of providing ammunition to state actors that might be used in a way that was damaging to the interests of ethnic minority groups outweighed the necessity for fundamental academic research even if such research in the long run, promised a better understanding of ethnic (in)tolerance.

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## DAVID RASKIN

## 1

1.1 The problem here is not whether the impartiality of the observer is compatible with the study of history and anthropology's 'sensitive questions', but rather whether it is worth the researcher's while striving to achieve absolute impartiality at all costs. It appears to me unlikely that we will ever achieve the absolute impartiality Pushkin described, in the words of his character Grishka Otrepyev with reference to Pimen ('with indifference he hears evil and good'). As everybody knows, even the historical Pimen (the generalising name for those who created the chronicles, that is) failed to live up to this ideal. As I see it, the principle of 'fair play' is much more productive than that of impartiality. The 'Fair Play Principle' rather than the 'Pimen Principle' could happily provide a basis for the researcher's behaviour, and this applies to historians, philologists, and anthropologists alike.

I am not required, or, to be more precise, I am not able to, rid myself completely of negative ideas about Slavophiles or members of the Black Hundred.<sup>1</sup> But, while observing the principle of fair play (in other words, playing to the role of objective researcher and on the basis of that keeping clearly within the boundaries of academic research methods), I cannot help but notice both the role, for example, played by Slavophiles in the cultural development of the individual peoples in the Russian Empire (in the introductory teaching of native languages in schools, in particular), and the fact that the character of the Black Hundreds was not so much 'military' as to a large extent spontaneous. There are many examples of this sort.

I would even go so far as to say that any deviation from the principle of fair play has disastrous consequences for the quality of the academic research being conducted and is thus disadvanta-

<sup>1</sup> Originally, the xenophobic, anti-Semitic political groupings of the early twentieth century; more loosely, an extreme xenophobe. [Editor].

geous to the researcher (that is of course if he considers his goal to be the understanding of scientific truth).

1.2. Generally speaking, a public discussion of the most sensitive social problems (including xenophobia and religious intolerance) will only have sense and substance if it is conducted by specialists who have the deciding say in such discussions. There is no reason why any researcher should purposefully avoid such discussions. There are several situations, however, in which it would be advisable not to indulge in public statements, or at least to do so with a certain amount of self-restraint. For me personally, this applies to the regular appearances I make as an expert on article 282 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. For a field worker, the deciding factor in this case might be the need to make contact with members of xenophobic or religious-fundamentalist groups.

2

I have always worked with either documents (archival or contemporary), or printed texts. As such, I have not been faced with the problems generated by field research. Archival research however, can also spark conflicts between one's 'civic' and 'academic' positions. I will give just one example from my own experience. Whilst working with materials related to the history of one of the remote regions of the Russian Empire, I came across a document which helped explain the historical premises for a conflict on territorial grounds between two native peoples of this region. In essence, this document exposed the role played by the Russian administration in transferring the given territory from one people to the other (in exchange for the latter's loyalty to the Empire). According to the ethics of the historian/archivist, a new historical document of this kind should be published or somehow introduced into academic circulation regardless of censure and administrative pressure. As a Russian citizen, however, I was forced to act differently. Under no circumstances will I publish this document, and nor will I facilitate its retrieval, even under the threat of punishment. Maybe I am wrong, but in the present situation it seems that this sort of information would only serve to fan the flames of international conflict. At the same time, as a scholar I have to admit that the revelation of truth is always beneficial to academic ethics, as is its concealment or distortion in contradiction to them.

3

Given that my academic work for the most part involves working with archival documents, my opinion about the best strategy for establishing relations with members of the communities under examination are hardly of vital importance. I think that the guiding principle in all cases must be that of 'fair play' (Cf. 1.1). You should never pretend to be someone you are not, for example by expressing agreement with opinions and actions that are thoroughly foreign to you, although you might admit your interest (albeit of an academic nature) in these latter.

## 4

4.1 I have never come up against accusations of this sort, or, at least, no-one has ever made such accusations to my face, nor have they ever filtered down to me. That said, I must mention (and not without a certain pride) that several articles on the Union of the Russian People<sup>1</sup> that are essentially apologies for this organisation make reference to my work. It appears to me that the real question here is less whether one has ever been confronted with such accusations, and more whether such accusations have any real grounds. Indeed, it is only when we allow our academic objectivity to slip or we forget about the principle of ‘fair play’ in our research, regardless of how familiar we are with our subject or the fullness and well-foundedness of our argument, that there are really grounds for this sort of accusation. As such, the problem is connected more to the quality of one’s academic research than the civic or any other position of the researcher.

4.1. Any expression of xenophobia (outspoken or hidden) from a member of the academic community not only deserves to be categorically condemned but should also be met immediately with opposition from that same community. In this case, all forms of opposition (including the most extreme ‘liberal terror’) are permitted and even justified. After all, we are talking here about preserving the dignity and authority of academia in contemporary society. Academics that turn a blind eye to such manifestations deserve no better treatment than those they shield.

It is another matter however that, in contemporary Russia, limited opportunities exist to express such condemnation, thanks to the far-reaching monopolisation of the media and the low social status of academics. The success of the academic community in its protests against the xenophobia displayed by the history faculty of St Petersburg State University nevertheless provides grounds for optimism.<sup>2</sup> The academic community’s ability to influence what is going on around it depends on its ability to organising itself. A good example of such self-organisation (but, unfortunately, one without a very wide reach) is the St Petersburg Council of Academics, which was founded by Nikolai Girenko<sup>1</sup> and others.

As someone who belongs to the generation of those brought up on existentialist thinking, I cannot help but add that the most important thing in this case is not that our efforts produce the desired effect, as much as we ourselves are capable of making such efforts, whatever the predicted outcome.

<sup>1</sup> The major political grouping in the Black Hundreds. [Ed.].

<sup>2</sup> I. A. Froyanov, former Dean of the Faculty, became notorious for his nationalist views: for example, his *October 1917* presents the Bolshevik coup as a Zionist plot. See the report by the Moscow Helsinki group on nationalism in St Petersburg, <http://www.mhg.ru/publications/1B07179>. (Accessed 6 February 2009). He was removed from his position as Dean in 2001.

## YURY SHABAEV

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No! A short answer to the first question is no, the researcher can never take an impartial position on xenophobia. But here a second question arises: why not? This question, I think, is more important than the first.

By taking an impartial position, the researcher is, in fact, inciting xenophobia and entering into a silent solidarity with xenophobes themselves. Indeed, given that researchers are often understood to represent a certain sort of moral authority, or in any case, to be representatives of a knowledgeable social group, this sort of alliance is all the more valuable to xenophobes and religious radicals.

There seems no point in developing this theme any further. It is nevertheless important to say that in Russia there is a clear need for anthropologists (ethnologists, ethnopolitologists) to mobilise against xenophobia, racism, and ethnic and religious extremism. The need for mobilisation has arisen as a result of the fact that very few people are actually competent to oppose xenophobic ideas. Today, journalists, leaders of ethno-national movements fighting for the rights of minorities, and political leaders whose job it is to maintain stability in society, are all impotent to oppose xenophobia.

Experience has shown that appeals to the journalistic community to work out ethical rules and strictly abide by these, and to show tolerance towards the objects of their reports and articles, are based on little more than wishful thinking. Journalists may agree with such appeals in the abstract, and even strive to observe certain moral norms in their coverage of intercultural interactions, but as soon as professional interest and the thirst for a ground-breaking article come into conflict with their moral principles, the ob-

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<sup>1</sup> Nikolai Girenko (1940-2004), was an ethnologist and specialist in inter-ethnic relations who was murdered by extremists in revenge for his activities as an expert witness in prosecutions against those accused of racist violence. See the obituary in *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*. No. 1 [Editor].

servation of the latter takes a back seat. Apart from *déformation professionnelle*, the desire to ensure their work conforms to the demands of the market (to publish something that makes them a profit) also plays an important role. That means that journalists frequently present readers with material in a way that makes it appear scandalous, sensational, in a way that piques the reader's interest (and at the same time produces a financial profit). More often than not readers' interests are fired by the creation of negative, frightening portrayals of the hero/heroines of journalistic articles and reports (migrants, guest workers, foreigners). The picture painted by journalists is often far from realistic, but the rules of the genre and the conditions of market competition demand its creation.

The market and the particular skills of the reporter (and not the consideration of morals and principles of tolerance) will decide the content of many future publications in the media, which is why journalism cannot be considered a dependable ally in the battle with xenophobia.

And all the while, contemporary Russia is witnessing the emergence of xenophobic sentiment on an unprecedented scale. In all the years that I have been gathering such information, for example, I have never before had to vet such a large number of papers, publications, and declarations in which the Public Prosecutor's Office discerns calls for inter-ethnic and inter-confessional hostility. When browsing through the information provided on the website of the Moscow Bureau for Human Rights, one is reminded of wartime 'reports from the front'. Special studies, including those that have been carried out under my own authority, show the level of xenophobia is palpably increasing, even in those outwardly tranquil regions like the European North of the Russian Federation.

What has happened to our society? Why is this happening? In my opinion, the blowback of xenophobia and intolerance is not unexpected; its grounds were laid by the logic of the preceding stage of the country's development. The 1980s and 1990s produced serious political changes which resulted in the former political and cultural ideals being pulled from under our feet.

Over the last 15-17 years, an active and pointless discussion has taken place concerning the idea of the state and state ideology, while at the same time notions of ethnic, racial, and cultural tolerance (in Soviet terminology — 'internationalism'), civic solidarity and civic unity (in Soviet terminology — 'the unity of the Soviet people') were 'rinsed' from public knowledge thanks to the efforts of politicians at different levels of government. More: ethnicity was actively imposed upon us. Some politicians and entrepreneurs (including entrepreneurs from ethnic minorities) did not see the populations of separate regions or Russian society in general as a united civic society, but as

a collection of ethnic groups with different historical destinies and particular cultural values.

Mobilised ethnicity began to be reflected in the political practices of the regional authorities and strengthened by legislative acts, declarations, and ethno-political organisations that were often characterised by open discrimination. Inevitably, the purposeful or inadvertent efforts to play one ethnic community off against another and to establish the uniqueness and specificity of ethnic communities not only led to an increased emphasis on the cultural independence of these, but also generated cultural racism and accelerated the erosion of the civic solidarity between the inhabitants of the Russian Federation.

All in all, politicised ethnicity and the absence of any purposeful policy for strengthening civic ideals helped to create a 'feeding ground', from which welled up the current outbursts of xenophobia, racism, and outright fascism against which we are now trying to organise resistance through antifascist/ antiracist committees and declarations. The ignorance of political managers, public activists, and society itself concerning the limits and acceptable boundaries for the politicisation of ethnicity is due to a lack of *efficient* ethnographical and particularly ethno-political training and, in its place, the monopolisation of *ethnological indoctrination* by entrepreneurs from ethnic minorities.

The most illustrative example of the 'education' that Russian society receives in the sphere of ethnography is surely the understanding of the notion of *nationalnost* (nationality). This concept is interpreted all over the world as a synonym of citizenship, but in Russia during the Soviet Union it was a synonym of 'ethnic affiliation'. Having rejected the notion of the Soviet people as a civic community at the end of the Gorbachev period, the Russian political elite could suggest nothing to take its place. Or more accurately, the alternative suggested was ethnic nationalism. It is no accident that the civic term, *rossiyanin* [citizen of the Russian Federation] has yet to enter common parlance. People totally fail to understand that they can identify not only with an ethnic community, but also with a civic community (communities), that *they have the right to chose between two types of identity*.

The concept of the nation-ethnos is the basis for the ideological constructs of almost all ethno-political (for some reason, usually referred to as 'national') movements in Russia, and is employed by many politicians. Nevertheless, the obsession with pure ethnic origins on the part of regional communities, and the fixation with the principle of blood ties in political life, serve to blur the boundary between ideas of cultural independence (cultural self-determination) and racism. The so-called 'new racism' does not attach particular importance to

the physical differences between people. It focuses its attention on cultural/national characters and uniqueness of cultural communities, with the result that political projects are created calling for the division of political interests of ethnic and racial communities.

One Finno-Ugric political movement has already embarked upon such a project. In the resolutions of the first congress of the AFUN<sup>1</sup> (Association of the Finno-Ugric Peoples of Russia) established in 1992 in Izhevsk, it was suggested that one of chambers in the regional parliaments of the Finno-Ugric regions be made up exclusively of members of the titular ethnicity, in other words, according to the principle of 'blood ties'. Something similar was attempted in the Republic of South Africa after 1983, at the beginning of the end of the era of apartheid, when, under pressure from the international community to reform parliament a chamber was created for Whites, Coloureds, and Indians. Naturally, this form of representation did little to impress the critics of apartheid. Everyone knew that the division of racial and ethnic groups had simply been dressed in new clothes.

The ideological constructs of the Tatar ethno-national movement showed the exact same tendencies. The ideological platform for a significant part of that movement became the document worked out between May 1994 and the beginning of 1996 which was given the title the 'Tatar Canon' (adopted on the 20<sup>th</sup> January 1996). The authors of this document deemed that among Tatars, a large part of whom are strongly westernised, only those who are guided by the Koran, the Sunna, the Hadith, the Sharia laws, and 'the enduring age-old rites and rituals of the Turkic peoples', should be recognised as 'faithful Tatars'. In the minds of the ideologues of this movement, the positions of authority were to be occupied by this type of faithful Tatar, who would rise from the bottom, from the very depths of the people. As such, the orientation of contemporary Tatarstan and of the Tatars themselves should be in one direction — towards the Tatar-Islamic world.

For the leaders of the Finno-Ugric movement, the most important point of orientation is the 'Finno-Ugric world', the fixation with which was at first conceived as a means of widening the solidarity group (that is, strengthening the political resources of the movement). Nowadays, this imagined world is frequently presented as a new form of existence or a particular societal model. In this way, the Finno-Ugric people have managed to disassociate themselves from Russian society and from the unified cultural space in the country, and position themselves in opposition to it. At the same time, one can remark an active process by which the cultural image of the

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<sup>1</sup> In the original, *Assotsiatsiya finno-ugorskikh narodov Rossii*. [Editor].

Finno-Ugric people is being constructed as the Other of Russian society. In Karelia, for example, not long after the events in Kondopoga,<sup>1</sup> a Finno-Ugric boxing tournament took place, in which only sportsmen with Finno-Ugric ethnic origins were permitted to participate. The closing festival of the beauty contest 'Northern Beauty' was also held in this town, where the girls showing off their physical attributes not only went by the ethnic signifiers of Udmurt, Karelian, Komi, Mari and so on, but were also proclaimed to be capable of speaking one of the Finno-Ugric languages. It was common for ethnic entrepreneurs to point out the essential features separating the canons of Finno-Ugric beauty from the perception of female beauty common to other peoples (though these essentially could not be distinguished from the Finno-Ugric people in cultural terms). In one of the publications distributed at the event, entitled 'You won't find Karelian girls on stage in bikinis', the reader was informed that the standard 90-60-90 measurements were not applicable to Finno-Ugric beauties.

At the same time, it is important to note that along with the image of the 'Other', ethnic entrepreneurs inevitably introduce the idea of the 'Alien' into common knowledge. If for Karelians, Komis, and Mordvins — half of whom end up marrying Russians — the Hungarians and the Finnish are considered to be close 'kinfolk' (the Days of Kindred Peoples is now celebrated in all 'Finno-Ugric regions of the RF'), the cultural proximity between Russian peoples which developed over hundreds of years and which previously seemed much more notable than linguistic kinship, is viewed with significantly more scepticism.

Russian nationalist-radicals and numerous groups of skinheads, who were at first considered to be 'difficult teenagers', have in their turn not only managed to 'train' Russians to calmly accept the slogan 'Russia for the Russians' (according to a survey of students in Syktyvkar in 2007, not only a large part of the Russian, but also one fifth of Komi students considered this demand to be 'reasonable'), but have also made us immune to the constant racial and ethnic murders committed by these 'difficult teenagers'.

The regional authorities are not only *not* attempting to strengthen civic solidarity among Russian citizens, but are also inclined to ethnic favouritism, frequently and in all good faith promoting the idea of an ethnically segmented society and ethnic hierarchies. The clearest example of this is the division of citizens of a republic into 'indigenous people' and the 'non-indigenous population. Regional politicians don't even grasp the fact that separating citizens into qualita-

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<sup>1</sup> The site of serious interethnic violence in September 2006. [Editor].

tive strata along blood lines (even where this is done symbolically) constitutes outright racism. All these 'Finno-Ugric judo tournaments' or 'Finno-Ugric boxing tournaments' are set up by the authorities themselves, and their representatives are totally unable to remember that sport should serve to bring people together and not to separate them.

What can be done? How can we fight against xenophobia under these conditions? *Motivation* is the only effective means to combat xenophobia and create links between cultural and religious groups. It is of the utmost importance to encourage society as a whole, and its separate institutions not to be judgmental of manifestations of otherness, and, at the same time, to stimulate processes of civic integration, which strengthen solidarity among members of society, as it is only those well-integrated societies that are able to respect people's right to be different, and not perceive this as a threat to their own stability.

In our opinion, a corrective federal and regional state ethno-political policy for the RF (something which has already been partly put into practice) is urgently required. First and foremost, we must work out and adopt a **state programme for integration**. Programmes of this sort (and the corresponding administrative structures) exist, for example, in Latvia and Estonia. As long ago as 1973, Clifford Geertz developed the theory of an 'integrative revolution', which promotes successive actions with the goal of subordinating primary ethnic (primordial) sentiments to a universal civic order [Geertz 1973]. The direction of these programmes differs of course from country to country: in some it applies in particular to migrants and is used to deal with the problems of adapting culturally heterogeneous groups to the traditions of the receiving society, while in others it is focused on bridging the gulf that separates ethnic and religious groups. The most important thing, however, is that **civic consolidation is recognised as one of the most pressing political problems** in contemporary states.

Any such programme for integration in Russia should clearly have its own particular content and priorities, but it is essential to realise that the political elite are of vital importance in this case and will be responsible for the effective realisation of any plans. When designing such a programme, the government should consult specialists from different branches of academia: sociologists, political scientists, ethnologists, psychologists and so on. The **guiding principle of the programme should be the creation of conditions for strengthening the Russian nation and for forming civic solidarity and an all-Russian identity** and, on that basis, for limiting manifestations of intolerance.

The programme should include both measures of a socio-economic character and a wide spectrum of humanitarian actions.

2 Situations in which one's research and civic positions are brought into contradiction with each other can occur, but I have never come up against any. When mixing with the people who are the object of your research interests, it is sometimes better not to advertise your own opinions on certain topics. If I were required to express my views on a certain subject, however, I would not think it necessary to conceal them. The researcher should not only possess his/her own position on a subject, but this position should also be a socially responsible and open-minded one; in this regard, I am in agreement with Claude Lévi-Strauss who said that anthropologists should not understand society merely as an object of their studies, and with professor George Marcus, who recently, in *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*, spoke about the need for 'a movement for socially meaningful anthropology', which would use the academic potential of the discipline to resolve the real problems of contemporary society.

3 I consider the best strategy that one can and should adopt in 'clashes' with members of societies advocating intolerance to be active dialogue (even if this is in absentia) with the said members, since this is the only way to resist xenophobia and radicalism and to demonstrate their harmfulness for the development of society.

4 Yes, I have encountered such accusations. But it seems to me that they carry little weight if they are not accompanied by convincing and serious arguments in an academic context. As I have elaborated above, I consider non-interference to be ineffective as a principle, and I not only condemn xenophobes in our academic community, but also make every effort I can to confront them. This is not an easy task given that closet xenophobes can be found not only among ethnic entrepreneurs, but also among politicians and state representatives who are always ready to 'clamp down' on academics who disclose the real substance of the declarations made by politicians of this sort.

**Reference**

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## ELEONORA SHAFRANSKAYA

I am not sure whether I am really the right person to respond to your questionnaire, but, as a teacher, I am regularly confronted with the very essence of the topic under discussion here, particularly in seminars on contemporary literature and folklore — where a ‘gateway’ to polyreligious and ethnocultural domains is created. This aspect is a real ‘turn on’ for students: after elaborating my mental-cultural map of other (non-Russian) peoples and confessions (in particular, Judaism and Islam), the lecture hall (unfailingly) resounds with emotionally loaded outbursts, which just go to prove the widespread nature of stereotypes (more often than not traditional rather than new). I would like to reflect here upon these *stereotyped remarks*.

The lecture hall of the philology faculty is dominated by females, and here the most common response is the following: ‘You’re walking down the street and they (‘blacks’, but Russophone ones — members of Caucasian and Central Asian former Soviet republics) come up and start pestering you, you can’t get away from them’. And in response to the question, ‘What do you mean “pester”’: do they use force, block your way, insult you, or what?’ there follows a negative response, something along the lines of, not force — not directly anyway, not in the physical sense — no, evidently this is a case of everyday ‘chatting up’, but it irritates the informants all the same.

Another response: ‘They take liberties!’ The question: ‘In what concrete sense?’ generates no intelligible explanation, evidently, pheno-/ethnotypes are irritating in themselves (‘I’m hungry, and it’s your fault’). The following argument is often used: ‘Just go to Cherkizovsky market yourself (a warehouse/market in Moscow), you’ll see what I mean!’

It is impossible to discuss the prose of a number of contemporary Russian authors without considering the resonance at the semantic level of Judaic mythology (for example, the myth of the

Messiah). However, this also provokes resistance (among a minority it's true, but it nevertheless shows itself on a regular basis). 'We're Orthodox', they say, 'we don't need this'. In response to the argument that we are familiarising ourselves with a certain culture and its constituent mythology, the 'sacred' and wholly illogical stereotype is trotted out again: we're Orthodox, we don't need this. (This reminds one of a kindred 'logic': 'The teachings of Marx are all-powerful, because they are true'). At the same time, when we start to interrogate what is meant by 'we're Orthodox', it turns simply to equate to the conviction that 'we're Russians', or 'we're Slavs'. (It should be noted that informants rarely say 'I', but always 'we', which suggests that they are broadcasting the opinion of the masses).

One more stereotype, this time from a number of 'departmental' colleagues in connection with the xenophobic intentions of Valentin Rasputin's story 'Daughter of Ivan, Mother of Ivan'. Rasputin was right, they say, the time was right, the poor Russian people were downtrodden, repressed by migrants — this is how on a case-by-case basis the 'argument' is propagated by the media, marching under the banner of 'Russia for the Russians!'

In the summer of 2007 in Moscow and the nearby Moscow region, a number of leaflets were distributed by the 'Movement of Young Political Ecologists: the "Locals"' (I've seen them since with drivers of minibuses and buses), on which a little picture was printed on glossy paper: a car, behind the wheel, a driver of unmistakably Caucasian ethnic origin who has stopped, apparently to offer a lift to a girl whose ethnic origin is also unmistakable, since she is both 'white' and 'blonde'. The caption 'We're not going in the same direction', printed in large letters, appears to be directed by the girl at the Caucasian man. Having taught students a range of courses such as 'National Images of the World' and 'Myth and Literature', and thus having become positively 'hooked' on themes related to multi-cultural contexts (and consequently to the theme of xenophobia), I decided to 'test' my colleagues by showing them the 'We're not going in the same direction' leaflet. The reactions of the 'respondents' can be divided into two unequally sized 'camps'. Most people were horrified, significantly fewer approved. The latter aroused a 'professional' interest in me. I tossed their way harmless bits and pieces that clearly contradicted their convictions: E.E. Shmitt's story 'Noah's Children', 'Monsieur Ibrahim and the Flowers of the Koran' (it's difficult to find a text more supportive of tolerance), the film 'Schindler's List'. The result was lamentable, my efforts had been idealistic, and the conclusions were easy to foresee: none of the literature or the art had an impact, nothing had an effect on people. Xenophobia either exists, or it doesn't. The latter is just as doubtful as the former: xenophobia is more likely to be one of the cosmological

constituents of man, and active and many-times-refined stereotypes dating from time immemorial endow it with conviction and a sort of authority. And in response to the question on the form: ‘Is it worth the researcher engaging in public discussions?’ I would answer, ‘Yes, it’s worth it’. But at the same time this has no effect.

I hope that my position on this question is sufficiently clear. While working it out for myself, it often occurred to me that my views were most probably influenced by the fact that I spent most of my life in the ‘Soviet Babel’, forever under the warm glow of the spotlight of ‘friendship of peoples’- Tashkent. My classmates, course mates, colleagues, neighbours, and friends included Germans, Jews, Armenians, Koreans, Greeks, Tatars, and Uzbeks. Doesn’t my tolerance come from here then, I thought?

It would be nice to answer ‘Yes, it comes from here’, as this would provide a recipe for the friendship of peoples. But the following scene comes to mind: in my school, my class, and my yard there were always a lot of Germans, for the most part children of resettlers from the Urals and Kazakhstan who had worked there in the mines and the pits there (many of them suffered from silicosis), who were from very poor but hardworking families. These children were nevertheless teased constantly for being ‘fascists’; among Russians, Uzbeks were called ‘babai’ or, even more harshly, ‘beasts’, and women — ‘opushki’ (from ‘opa’ meaning sister). During perestroika, when Russians had ceased to be the ‘older brothers’ in Tashkent, a leaflet appeared in all the mailboxes bearing the slogan: ‘Russians to Ryzan, Tatars back to Kazan!’ (the Germans and Jews had almost completely left by this time. Back in the ‘blessed’ Soviet period, one could receive the following insult after being shoved on public transport: ‘Why don’t you get a taxi!’ and later, ‘Get back to Russia!’ (this from members of the ‘titular nationality’). As an adult, I myself ended up the object of anti-Semitic attention as a result of my surname which, like a red rag to a bull, brought xenophobes flocking around me (despite having no Jewish origins, I often ended up in ‘interesting’ situations, which is what actually induced me to ‘study’ this theme in the end). The head of the faculty (Doctor of Philosophical Sciences Prof. I.P. Varfolomeev) banned me from carrying out graduate work on the theme of Abram Terts’s ‘Strolls with Pushkin’. My protest (no less a journal than *Voprosy Literatury* had devoted four issues in a row to the discussion of this work) was countered. It was a Zionist organ, I was a propagandist of Zionism, and I (which is to say, I. P. Varfolomeev) won’t put up with ‘your Sinyavskys, Voinovichs, and Erofeevs! I won’t stand for them in this faculty!’

Unfortunately, even in Babel, xenophobia flourishes: as much among respectable adults as among children.

## NONA SHAKHNAZARYAN

1

Can social anthropology be made to work for society? Judging by the experience of several colleagues from Russia and the CIS (Galina Starovoitova, A. Mkrtychyan, Nikolai Girenko), we know the realisation of this idea to be a dangerous business, and the people who propagate it to be incurable romantics. It is much easier to realise the inverse of this project — that is, to collaborate with the authorities to suppress, or else stamp out minority/sub-cultures, as a team of sociologists in one provincial university did (these time-server academics were working with Meskhetian Turks, the fate of whom is anybody's guess). Anthropologists who get mixed up in the work of NGOs and who carry out grant-funded work, get called human rights defenders, jurists, and lawyers, with the negative connotations of these words emphasised as much as possible — and that's best-case scenario. In the worst case, they are given the more emotionally tainted monikers of anti-patriots, agents of western secret services, sell-outs, and traitors. There is a middle road, too, however — keep your distance from the authorities, don't shout about your (seditious) opinions, and don't kick against the pricks (in general wise decisions from a rational-existential point of view).

It is not possible to call any of these positions real impartiality. In my opinion, in the social sciences it is just not possible to adopt an impartial position. If we are judging the end product of the research — the publication, then I think almost everyone would agree that all texts are to some extent ideological. I think it is probably worth getting involved in public discussion, even if my own experiences have been diverse (and at times quite unpleasant) in this regard, for two reasons a) you want to develop/ popularise the ideas of your discipline and research, and to strengthen its (the discipline's) newly-established position (bearing in mind the almost century-long elision of the discipline of anthropology by 'descriptions of the material and spiritual culture of the peoples of the USSR'); b) you

want to improve the community and society in which you live; c) simply for ethnical reasons and a feeling of responsibility to those who are sponsoring your work.

Pierre Bourdieu has expressed his opinion on this subject. If researchers, who so blench at the terms *expert* and *specialist* (in general, any term that sounds authoritative), even where these would actually suit them, consciously avoid getting involved in political discourse, and more broadly in public discourse, then less competent people will just take their place. This is how idiotic and greedy authorities come to power. We discussed these questions in Pushkin (September 2007) in a seminar about the future of Russian-speaking anthropology.<sup>1</sup> As long as researchers feel unsure and uncomfortable about taking the mantle of *the expert* simply because it appears unpalatable to them, less suitable people will take it upon themselves *without giving it a second thought*, and promote themselves the *expert committee of Russia* [Tishkov 2006: 6]. Noam Chomsky's platform takes us one step further. Everyone has the right to participate in the decision of the world's most urgent and worrying problems. There is absolutely no need to be an *expert* or to possess any sacred/ secret knowledge (here we can see the same argument used against power-wielding nominations as above) [Introducing 2004]. This sort of moral universalism is directed at the destruction of hierarchies and against the puffed-up politician-*experts*, and against the establishment's claims to exclusivity.

As far as I am personally concerned, there has not yet been a case when I carried out research or wrote an article in the expectation of being allowed to give a lecture course on the same subject at my university (such is the stagnation of the Russian education system that cross-fertilisation of this sort can simply be ruled out). Even so, I always have a secret, naïve hope that somehow or another, the message will be passed from one social group/ sub-culture to another. This seems particularly important when dialogue between these groups is difficult, if not impossible. But the sticking point is the fact that no-one (apart from a small group of our colleagues) reads these opuses. Bob Marley, Bob Dylan, and System of a Down have been a thousand times more effective in bringing their message to the people with a good song. But perhaps everything isn't as bad as it seems (apart from the results) and the intentions of the authorities do have a certain role to play. The case of the director of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Professor Valery Tyshkov, who, in the difficult 1990s, was invited to hold the position of Minister for National Affairs, is illustrative in this regard. The government's strategy

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<sup>1</sup> Vlada Baranova's report on this meeting is published in the current issue. [Editor].

at this time was influenced to no small degree by the Chechen war, and the dearth of any real political vision, innovative plan for knowledge, or programme of action, that descended on us after democratisation and the violent disintegration of the USSR which followed this. It is another matter that this collaboration turned out to be quite unproductive (a clash of interests?).

We should of course remember that it was not so long ago that anthropology was finally brought into the realm of academia and it became possible to *do anthropology* in the West. The Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA) was founded only in 1941. Since then, several publicly meaningful projects have been carried out in behavioural anthropology (the Fox project in the USA, the Vicos project in Peru), but in general things have moved fairly slowly. In the swinging 60s, academia's involvement in the military campaign in Vietnam through its participation in pro-governmental programmes provoked a storm of criticism from professional associations. Since then, anthropologists have spoken out against war more actively, and have also begun consciously to avoid participating in projects sponsored by the government. The increase in practicing anthropologists has nevertheless altered the very structure of the discipline [Nolan 2003: 2]. In 1978 the first edition of the journal 'Practicing Anthropology' was published, and the following year the American Anthropological Association (AAA) adopted a 'Resolution in Support of Anthropologists Working Outside Academia' and began to include applied-practitioners in its reference books. In 1984 the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology (NAPA) was formed [Ibid.: 4].

But let's return to the unpleasant experiences that can result from including oneself in public discussions that I mentioned above. First and foremost, Krasnodar region is a special case as far as the dissemination of xenophobic ideas is concerned. Historically this territory was dominated by Kuban Cossacks, who adhered to segregationist terms of the *not one of us*<sup>1</sup> sort. Despite the best efforts of the Soviet regime, this tradition essentially survived. In the post-Soviet period right up to recent times, the regional media have made use of exactly the same rhetoric. Along with colleagues, I 'made an appearance' on a programme (talk-show) presented by the Muscovite human rights activist Yury Dzhibladze, 'Is the language of hatred the language of modern politics? How might we avoid the language of hatred in Krasnodar region?' (24 May 2004). Following this, I was invited to engage in a *duel* with my opponent who, as it turned out, was an open supporter of fascist ideas. The whole thing was a disaster of course. A schoolmate of my eleven-year-old daughter told her that

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<sup>1</sup> Literally, 'from other towns'. [Editor].

they had seen on the ‘box’ how that horrible interviewer hadn’t let me get a word in edgeways and had ‘slaughtered’ me in the duel (thankfully for both me and my daughter, this was relayed with sympathy). I must confess, however, that I am not inclined to take up the position of sacrificial lamb again any time soon.

In the last few years, my family’s disgust for the over-the-top discussions on television has reached such a level that the TV in our house has simply become an extra piece of furniture or something used to watch videos of interviews we’ve carried out as part of our projects. As a result, I didn’t realise immediately, or maybe just didn’t know in the first place, that the ‘duel’ was already an established trope of most major television channels. More importantly, I had no idea HOW such ‘duels’ were conducted. The talk-show made it obvious that academics work in an altogether different genre, that they talk a different language, have different manners and a distinct style, and that this results in almost a complete lack of understanding between the opposing groups. The inanity and futility of these *dialogues*, particularly when they are shaped by vendetta terminology (cf. the word *duel* — even if what people have in mind is only a political one), weren’t hard to see. These days, I make no effort to get myself mixed up in this sort of activity, although when journalists and television producers come up with initiatives I do not refuse on principle, i.e. I take a passive-active position.

On the other hand, a nearly hour-long appearance on the television in Stepanakert, Nagorny Karabakh (the birthplace of my ancestors) went smoothly, not least, no doubt, because I was considered *One of Ours, Our Girl* — a loyal and faithful subject a priori. At the very least, that is how my image was constructed. The questions, however, were no less tricky (What is your opinion of women in power? Could there be a woman president in the Republic of Karabakh? A matriarch-patriarch?) and the answers no less open and at times unnecessarily direct (this I discovered in retrospect when watching a recording of the programme given to us as a memento).

2

During the several years that I have been working in the ‘hot spots’ of Russia, Armenia, Georgia, Nagorny Karabakh, and the USA, the most complex task has been the collection of material about military experiences in ethnic conflicts and the formation of consistent conclusions and evaluations. There are many aspects to this question, the most important of which is the following: you are dealing with people who have lived through numerous traumas and are sometimes not even able to ‘stomach’ their own terrifying experiences.

At an individual level, it is a complicated business to write articles about people who have lived through war. Even though I embarked on such an endeavour in Nagorny Karabakh in 2000, the material

was molded into an article as part of a separate study only a few months ago. I decided however to pull myself together and write about them. But the problem was that I didn't know HOW to approach this question. Over several years I had collected a colossal amount of material, conducted a longitudinal study with numerous interviews with the same informants, but they were somehow non-operational, explosive, in shock, numbed. HOW was I supposed to write, what conclusions was I supposed to come up with? Everyone already knows that war is terrible and horrible and that death is deadly; it has provided the subject matter for so many books and films that it seemed pointless to insist masochistically upon this. Something almost intuitive, however, drove me to accumulate, to stock-pile data while I waited for some clarity to come to my thoughts. The time that I was describing would not be representative of the experiences of all veterans of the Karabakh war, but only the very young ones, those who were still young boys at the time of the war. It would be about youth, about a tender age in far from tender circumstances. It would be about adolescence, youth, war, culture (as a way of life), and the state, about the ideas young boys have of what it means to be a REAL man, and about how they relate to the justification for their participation in the war; how they survive acts of violence that are committed face to face, eye to eye.

The material flowed in almost of its own accord, and access to informants was, as it were, of an unconventional character. I think it is probably worth dwelling on this in a little more detail. Access to the field, that is to young veterans as informants and simply interlocutors, was facilitated for me by several factors. I had taught history and organised extra-curricular activities as part of my internship as university graduate for most of these kids. I was twice dispatched on a mission for training purposes: in spring of the uneasy years of 1989 and 1990. Among the students who passed through my hands was my cousin Emil, who had difficulty suppressing his laughter when having to address me officially as Nona Robertovna. As is usual in the socialisation process of young Armenian men, he often brought his friends to our grandmother Zhena's house, where I was given the possibility of talking briefly to each of them, or to all of them together. My cousin now lives in Yerevan (Armenia) and I in Krasnodar (South Russia), but if our trips to Karabakh 'to grandmother's house in the village' coincide, we meet up with the same group again (apart from those who were killed in the war and those serving prison sentences) at this same grandmother's house. I can't say which of these factors — my teaching or my 'correct' kinship — has played the most significant role, but the information just kept flowing in. These meetings somehow took on a ritualised structure because of their repetition and almost ceremonial consistency. A few days before the arrival of my cousin, one of his friends comes to collect his hunting

rifle and polishes it until it shines. Once my cousin arrives from Yerevan, the group of peer-veterans sets of on a hunt, after which they all gather at the house (in the summer, in the yard) and, dividing up the carcass (if there is one at the end of the hunt), feast (arrange *kef*). At the same time, they all talk loudly, recounting the ins and outs of the Karabakh war here with rollicking laughter, here with smarting sadness, and here again with an almost unnatural mixture of both emotions. Together with my grandmother, I have already fallen into the role of the kindly hostess, handing out food and drink. I seem both present and absent as a result of my comings and goings to the room, the little contribution I make to the conversation, and the absence of eye contact with those talking.

This sort of communication was very natural and a whole myriad of extraordinary subjects were raised and discussed in shocking detail, and repeated many times from the perspective of new arrivals to the group. I found myself in the right place at the right time, it was just a matter of recording it all. Only a very lazy anthropologist would be able not to react to such a theme in such circumstances.

There was an altogether different mood during the direct interviews I conducted on the theme of ‘your experience of the last war’. Of course, there could be no ‘gate-keeping’ in this case, no-one was there to cut them off, and here my insider status played no small role, although it is true that the lads gave their interviews without much enthusiasm — it was quite unlike the spontaneous discussions — as if they were doing a favour for either a former teacher-trainer, or for their best-friend’s cousin, or for a sympathetic compatriot (which figured the most in their minds doesn’t much signify).

One of the guys, Samvel Kasian, gave me an interview because we were friends. I got to know him during my most prolonged period of field work in 2000–2001. At that time, he had spoken in detail to me about the war, but in the ‘unnatural’ context of an interview in 2006 he clammed up. ‘You know, Non, I can’t really remember. You’re not offended, are you?’ — ‘Of course I’m not’. I noticed more than once that the interview context itself provokes a micro-transformation in the consciousness of the informant as a result of the artificial situation created by the researcher. Traumatic experiences are relived in their telling. And aside from any field ethics, I had no desire to inflict more suffering upon these people.

My maternal aunt Larisa, Emil’s mother, also used this same strategy of silence. In the summer of 1993, she had relayed to me in heart-wrenching detail her emotional experience after her son was wounded. Many years down the line, in 2007, she categorically refused to speak about this same incident despite her affection towards me and her respect for my work. Did this mean that she had come to terms with the pain and the trauma and no longer wished to rake up painful

memories, or rather the opposite — that these feelings still remained? Back in 1993 in Stepanakert, she had tirelessly searched for the guilty party. At times this latter had been her own husband who had been unwilling to catch up with the bus from Yerevan to Stepanakert, and bring back their 15-year-old son who had run away for the third time to join his friends at their military post; at times it had been herself for not being with him and keeping track of him; at times she had blamed her sister whose house he had run away from in the middle of the night; and then again she blamed him personally who, while being a child and unaware of many things, had nevertheless been a strong enough character to overcome the powerful resistance of most people who were united and immovable in their decision to keep him in this safe place. The thing was that Emil's father held a high-up position in the civil service, and it had only been possible to 'conquer' him on the strength of his argument — *'I want to live the same life as my friends, to feel needed, I don't want to lose their respect, I want to be able to look them in the eye, I was with them when we threw stones [reference to the stone war, waged on the roads by young boys from both sides at the very beginning of the Karabakh conflict- N.S] and I'll be with them again in the war.'* And he prevailed. His father gave him the 'all clear' to do what he wanted, he was already a grown man.

That day Emil arrived in Martuna and went straight to the post, which he guarded with his friends for ten days. Following that, there was a shift change, and he was sent to the headquarters, before going to his grandma's to have some sleep before his new shift. He never got there. At the headquarters, they were discharging ammunition. There turned out to be defective weapons on the ammunition truck, which spontaneously exploded, taking with them the lives of ten people who found themselves in close vicinity. Only two survived with serious injuries that cost them their sight — the classmates Emil and Ovannes.

I first understood the sensitivity of the theme of child-veterans (or boy-majors as they are called in the article) as a 'clueless' second year doctoral student in 2000, when after a long session during one of my cousin's trips I made an informal agreement with one of his friends Armen, who goes by the nickname Lyur, to conduct an recorded interview. We started the interview at ten in the evening and finished it at three in the morning (with breaks). Anyone involved in the anthropology of war knows how this happens, when you already regret starting the interview (it touches too many raw nerves), and would like to bring it to an end (the things you are listening to are too emotionally burdensome), but there is no way out of the situation (at least, I didn't know a way out at that point). But breaking off the interview did not mean an end to this story. The next day my cousin

asked me in front of Armen what we had talked about for such a long time the previous evening. I answered that we had talked about Armen's life and about the war. 'Can I listen to your recording?' he asked me somewhat suspiciously. I told him that the information was too personal and that I couldn't let him listen to it. 'But what if Lyur says yes?' he said. 'Well, OK, you can in that case,' I answered.

I brought him the cassette and, wearing earphones, he scrupulously listened to the interview for hours. After that, he left his room, came back later, and said 'There, the cassettes have gone, I've thrown them away'. I lost my rag completely. He started to explain that I had no right to *provoke someone into pouring their heart out* when they were drunk, and how Lyur regretted the whole conversation and so on. We started to argue bitterly right in front of the informant. I wanted to know firstly why he had thought it necessary to act in such an underhand way, running away with the cassette. I'd have given the cassette back myself if Armen had said that he regretted the previous evening's discussion. My second line of argument was that I had not known that Armen was drunk since he'd spoken in a serious and coherent manner. Emil's argument went like this: 'I am a police investigator, and I know exactly how one shouldn't ask questions. And you asked them wrongly. I know that I've offended you by saying this, but Lyur only agreed to do that interview because he didn't want to refuse something to MY cousin. Both of you are very special to me, but you're my cousin. Any offence that I cause you will disappear quickly, and I've protected my best friend.' I have to admit that, on the one hand, I was relieved to no longer have to wrack my brains about what to do with this material — which was unbelievable to the point of being phantasmagoric, indeed, at times revolting. On the other hand, however, I didn't like the way in which Emil had handled the whole thing, as if I were an agent out to cause harm to others.

Thankfully there is a happy ending to this story. A few years later, on one of my regular trips to Karabakh, Armen decided *voluntarily* to do a recorded interview with me, and we joked about the last time: 'Let me smell your breath, you're not drunk again are you?' The subsequent interview was indeed somewhat more composed, and now I *almost* don't regret the loss of the first.

As a human being, it was difficult to listen to how people kill other people, kill each other. Sometimes feelings like this are just impossible to conceal — I gathered as much from listening to my interviews. Over time, these kids' immersion in violence makes it appear normal to them, at least going by the way that they talk about it. There are nevertheless nuances here too (I think, grasping at straws). In wartime, A. had deliberately killed a person, not because that person was Azeri, but because he'd killed A.'s best friend. As far as it is possible to speak of optimism in studies of war, it is heartening to

hear that the majority of Karabakhian veterans, including A., said the same thing, albeit in different words: 'In battle, we didn't feel one little bit of hatred toward the enemy'. As a result of this study, we established that at the height of ethnic war, veterans who were still very young acted more out of concern for their own images (linked with the ideas of honour and dignity), that is, how they appeared in front of their peers and other referent groups, than out of a fierce hatred for the Azeris as an ethnoform or an ethnic Other — and this despite strong, covert ideological pressure.

Differences in perceptions of Azeris among various groups of Armenians have recently come under examination. Karabakhians and Azerbaijani Armenians, who have an intimate knowledge of Azeris, rarely if at all conflate their participation in military activities and the war with ideological nationalism and ethnic hatred (particularly in recent times), departing instead from certain *objective* requirements such as the need to defend their homes and their families. Volunteers from Armenia, on the other hand, who previously had little if any contact with Azeris, displayed much harsher behaviour and attitudes towards prisoners. There were also nuances of the following sort: Armenians from Azerbaijan who had for whatever reason avoided getting mixed up in military operations that posed a threat to their security, and finding themselves in more or less secure positions at the rear, exhibited manifest cruelty, taking pains to demonstrate their *exclusively* and *authentically* Armenian identities through illustrative acts of violence and their harsh treatment of hostages.<sup>1</sup> There was clearly something of a biased and servile attempt by the neophytes, these nomadic marginals,<sup>2</sup> to ensure their own survival here. These observations deepened my sympathy for the unmediated familiarity of cultures resulting from the processes of globalisation, and for the culturally rich border communities in contrast to the 'pure', isolated communities; at the same time my antipathy deepened toward war as a self-contained system with its own rules, laws, political identities, and *justifications* [Orend 2000].

But what conclusions can be drawn from all this? The criticism that one of the critic/referees made of my text following his examination of it was in fact not wholly unanticipated. He accused the author of

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<sup>1</sup> That said, women and elderly refugees from Azerbaijan behaved in a different way towards refugees: they shared the scarce food available with them, supported them emotionally, putting the cold-hearted to shame. At the risk of demonising the young, I should add at this point that individual factors also played an important role in determining differences in behavior.

<sup>2</sup> 'Nomadic' is a concept that is linked with the description of the dynamics of identity. As far as we adhere to the idea that identity is not something one acquires, but is rather unstable, changeable and dependent on the situation, the word nomadic (in Russian *kochuyushchii* [wandering], nomad being *kochevnik*) as I use it here, is intended to reflect this movement, the absence of fixed boundaries, an indeterminacy, and, conversely, a certain drift.

sympathising with the veterans and of using academic writing as a means to voice political messages, in short, of bias and nationalism (I am in agreement with the first of these evaluations, but not with the second). I was given time to amend the text and present it in a more appropriate form. Unfortunately, however, I still have no idea of how to adapt the conclusions of my research. Judge for yourselves. The concluding passage of the article appears as follows:

*All wars bring with them a multitude of destructive consequences for society, including a whole host of neuroses. For years after, members of this society understand reality in purely military terms. The particularly pronounced militarisation of consciousness in Karabakh is due to the fact that the war is not yet over, and could start up again at any minute. In 1994, an armistice was concluded for ten years, the expiry date of which was 2004. It is for this very reason that all media channels broadcast the idea of militarisation: dance, songs, and poetry are all engaged in apologetics with regard to the war and military exploits. This has an enduring effect of creating a siege mentality. The saddest thing of all is that this includes children as well. In Martuna in 2001, I wrote down the following comical exchange between my daughter and the little girl next door, who were 7 and 10 years old respectively:*

*Manush: Margul', what's your mum doing in the house?*

*Margarita: She's peeling a pomegranate.<sup>1</sup>*

*Manush (eyebrows raised in terror): Woah! Isn't she afraid that she'll be blown up?*

*In the same year, however, I turned my attention to some of the perspectives that accompany the psychological consequences of war. On the one hand, the militarisation of childhood runs the risk of reproducing traumatising, on the other there is deliverance from the victimhood complex. In contemporary Karabakh, old people complain that throughout our history we have been persecuted by Turki (In Armenian, this is the general ethnonym for Turks, which includes Azeris), and children reply with puzzlement — Turki? Us? That's impossible. As paradoxical as it may seem, the Karabakh war has had in this way a cathartic, healing effect for Armenians all over the world. Such a thought however does little to console the wives and mothers of those soldiers who have been killed.*

That's how it happens. Researchers are unable to speak unambiguously, unemotionally, employing the standard rhetorical devices — on the one hand...but on the other...

<sup>1</sup> An untranslatable misunderstanding: *chistit granat* signifies both 'peeling a pomegranate' and 'cleaning a grenade'. [Editor].

The other case in which my academic ethics were brought into conflict with my human position was related to the exchange of gifts with informants. The cultures with which I am personally associated and in which, as it turns out, I work are cultures orientated toward exchange, where presents are used as a means of communication, a way of saying something without words, through an act of giving. In this sense, it is preferable to conceive reality through the *habitus* of the informant [Bourdieu 1969]. Perhaps I would be able to distance myself from these ritualistic actions if I didn't already know how it all worked — which messages are sent out and how important it is to answer them. At any rate, ignoring all ethical rules and instructions, I have participated in these exchanges, and it is something which has served me with many pleasant experiences, scintillating joys, and happy, trusting discussions. At these times, my only regret is that anthropologists aren't rich, any more than the informants themselves are. But it is also true that rich people do not really need this kind of exchanges, and appear emotionally self-sufficient, thus breaking the chain of social mechanisms.

3

In Armenia and in Karabakh I was often confronted with sexist propaganda — though I'm not sure that 'propaganda' is the right word for points of view that are essentially internalised and considered *normal* by almost all members of the male sex, and often those of the female as well. In first place, this applied to the double standards in relation to the observance of physical *purity* before marriage, which dictated the need for women to be chaste, and for men, by direct contrast, to be sexually experienced. I was unable to bear this and had heated arguments about it with informant-friends on a regular basis, even though I realised with some unease that according to the customs in these places I, as a woman, should not put up with, let alone embark on, such conversations. The men in question were sincerely unable to grasp the asymmetry of this situation. *Someone has to be more experienced in the matter*. My colleague from Yerevan, Levon Abrahamian, became concerned for me at that time (2001), and anxiously told me about the American anthropologist Henrietta Shmerler, who was raped and killed in an Indian reservation. She had also been asking questions about gender in the field. His warning had its desired effect and I have become cautious to a fault.

4

In my alma mater, I was sometimes accused of ethnic cliquishness and collusion, despite the fact that there wasn't anyone around to collude with. The only teacher of Armenian descent (in the department) got ordained and held the position of priest in the Armenia apostolic church in the town, as a result of which he was left with only a very limited amount of time to give lectures. Several instances of such accusations touched on my teaching activities, and some students had suspicions as well.

At a workshop dealing with how regional authorities construct conflict situations by referring to them in certain ways — we were discussing the ‘*problem*’ of the Meskhetian Turks — one student asked why we were talking about the Meskhetian Turks and ignoring the discrimination against Russians in Kyrgyzstan or Estonia. There were quite a few comments of this type, and an amusing situation arose in which over the course of a semester I attempted to deconstruct a brain-teasing statistical analysis which used three or four-digits figures to prove how a high birth rate among members of different nationalities or an influx of migrants might be disastrous for the demographic situation. At the same time, students were bringing me essays supported by the authoritative opinions of local researcher-colleagues which made use of these same four-digit figures and statistical data in an attempt of their own to deconstruct my text.

There was also a case of malevolent xenophobia from colleagues that equated to symbolic exclusion from the academic field. During the preliminary defence of my dissertation,<sup>1</sup> which my supervisor arranged (despite the fact that there was no board for ethnology/ anthropology in our town and that the defence itself was to take place in Moscow), one of my opponents, a young sociologist nevertheless remarked: ‘What you have done here is not academic, and if you succeed in defending it, it will only be through your ethnic connections’. In one fell swoop (one sentence), he reduced my six-years of work to nothing, and cast me out of the field of academia, *barred me from the game, refused me legitimate existence* [Bourdieu 1969].

It is of course important to say something here about the treacherous imperfection of language and its traps. Sometimes, your anthropologist colleagues and you yourself, despite having read a lot of clever books about racism, nationalism and the harm it causes (sic!), permit yourselves to say things that themselves contain traces of xenophobia. There is no room here to discuss this in detail. As one colleague from Yerevan put it, researchers are also people and, like all people, they know what it is to be human. This is usually labelled as inadvertent, accidental racism. Since it is precisely inadvertent and well-meaning, attacking it seems out of place, while accepting any apologies offered. That’s really the only appropriate response.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a relatively informal discussion at which the fitness of the dissertation to proceed to the formal defence, a largely ritual occasion, is tested out by the immediate colleagues of the person concerned. [Editor].

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## STEPHEN SHENFIELD

### Nationalism and Xenophobia as Research Topics

1

A neutral stance may not be impossible, but it is certainly extremely difficult. The feelings of the researcher as a human being, citizen, and member of various groups (often groups in whose name xenophobes speak, often groups that are targets of their hatred) are inevitably engaged. I think we should nonetheless strive to be as unbiased as possible, and also cultivate an empathetic (not sympathetic) understanding of xenophobes.

A distinction should be made here between nationalism and xenophobia. Nationalism comes in many varieties and does not necessarily entail hatred of other groups.

It is desirable to disseminate understanding to a broad public, but dealing with the media is always a problem, especially when such emotive issues are involved. I think that to prevent deliberate or unwitting distortion a researcher should set the conditions that the content of any article or interview as published or broadcast must be under his full control; any editing, cuts, or changes to be made only with his or her consent.

2

I think these problems are irresolvable, and all you can do is compromise between them. There is also the consideration of the researcher's own safety.

3

Oh yes, clashes of this kind are inevitable. Some-times I have entered into discussion with the

4

critic, sometimes (when this seems pointless) I have ignored accusations. Sometimes accusations are made in secret, in an effort to get you fired without public controversy. Unless you find out, what can you do? In my case, though, I did find out, thanks to sympathetic individuals who knew what was going on, and the effort failed. (This was in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict.)

I don't understand the second bit of this question, though. If people's area of research has nothing to do with xenophobia, why should they be expected to deal with it? Generally, I try to criticise arguments without naming individuals ('some people claim that...' etc.). *Ad hominem* arguments always detract from the substance of an issue.

There is another problem worth addressing, that is, the misuse of an academic's work for purposes unintended by him or her. For instance, an essay I wrote on the Circassian genocide was used by a website devoted to denial of the Armenian genocide. You can take great care to make your writing difficult to misuse, but you can't make misuse impossible: if someone is determined to misrepresent you they always can. This is one of the situations where it may be necessary to clarify matters publicly.

## VIKTOR SHNIRELMAN

### Academics and Xenophobia

The postmodern era, presenting familiar phenomena from unfamiliar angles and casting doubt upon things which not so long ago went by unquestioned, also presents a challenge to academics, forcing us to re-interrogate those beliefs which not so long ago were considered unshakable. This is particularly relevant for the study of racism and xenophobia, the study of the ideology and activities of far-right movements, and of the spread of xenophobic sentiment in society and its impact on inter-ethnic relations. In this regard, it is bewildering to think that an overwhelming number of Russian ethnologists (or social and cultural anthropologists) distance themselves from this problem, wilfully refusing to address it in either their theoretical argumentation or their hypothetical constructions, more often than not unconsciously, but occasionally deliberately, thereby fanning the flames of xenophobia and giving a *de facto* green light to racism. To understand why this has happened,

we must firstly reconsider several of the fundamental positions of Russian academia, and secondly give some thought to the social role of our discipline, and to the place of the scholar in society.

This 'distanced' position of the academic is far from always linked with the fact that he himself harbours xenophobic feelings, although this does sometimes occur. The motivation and objectives of the specialist are notable by their diversity.

Firstly, from time immemorial the traditional object for our studies has been ethnic minorities whose languages and cultures are in need of protection. As such, the ethics of our discipline always required us to show consideration to the society being studied, or to the group and their individual members, and to protect them if and when the need arose. Clearly, these same conditions do not apply to xenophobes and racists. Here the established ethical norms are not appropriate. This presents a challenge to the basic principles of our discipline, and leaves specialists with a conundrum; they do not know how to conduct themselves in this new situation.

Secondly, far from all specialists realise the extent of the changes that have taken place over the last fifteen to twenty years, fundamentally altering the place of science and the scholar in society. During the Soviet period, the only real channel connecting academia with the outside world was the two-pronged contact with the 'higher organs' of power, that is to say with the authorities who controlled academia and with whom academics were constantly haggling over the boundaries of their research field and the form that academic knowledge should take. At the same time, 'society' was not taken into account: it constituted the 'silent majority' and was required to do all it could to master the 'scientific truth' that resulted from the deal brokered between scientists and government. This society did not possess its own voice.

In the last two decades, this has all changed fundamentally. 'Society' has begun to find its voice, although, as it turned out, one with its own peculiarities, polyphonies, and dissonances. It has become clear that 'society' was very far from indifferent to academic debates; indeed, it was falling over itself to participate in these. The unidirectional current of 'professional knowledge' flowing smoothly from academia to society suddenly came up against a countercurrent of 'popular knowledge', in which traditional ideas, memories from school, surrogate information from the mass media, and politicised, historico-ideologised concepts of the 'national idea' sort were all strangely combined.

In the meantime, it has transpired that academics are not only specialists in their fields of knowledge, but also members of society, and as such are infiltrated with the popular ideas and prejudices that it

propagates. It has turned out that that our science stands a long way away from 'neutral scientific knowledge', and is subject to the influences of public sentiment and interest groups lying beyond the boundaries of science. There are few academics, however, who are prepared to think of themselves in this way, let alone begin to analyse such a complicated phenomenon. On the contrary, many today still try to present their vested interests as 'universal, objective, scientific knowledge'. Occasionally, this scientific knowledge incorporates xenophobic views, but refuses to recognise this as xenophobia. It is always 'Other People' who are accused of practising this. Clearly, under these conditions, there can be no serious study of xenophobia or of inter-ethnic conflict.

Thirdly, our science has until now been characterised by cynicism, that is to say that it has ignored its social role and distanced itself from any moral values or engagements. Even today some specialists consider the whole business as something through which we are able to achieve, as it were, a 'pure knowledge', which is neutral in ethical terms. This fits with the argument that the scholar is not responsible for who and how the 'knowledge' he has acquired is used. Meanwhile, we find here the traditions of infantilism and irresponsibility cultivated by the characteristic isolation of academics from society during the Soviet period. In connection with this, however, the following question arises, should, for example, the researcher indulge in 'Aryan Studies' knowing about the role that the 'Aryan idea' played in the tragic history of the twentieth century and the role it plays today in neo-Nazi propaganda and the ideas of the champions of the 'preservation of the white race'? And how should this scholar react, knowing that skinheads who believe themselves to be 'Aryans' are murdering Tadzhiks in Russian towns, and that they celebrated quite recently the 'Year of Aryan Civilisation'? In this regard, the practice of scientism in Nazi Germany seems to me more than instructive, as a part of which academics were practically forced into against their wills to serve the interests and the policies of the Nazis. We need only think of the notorious Dr Mengele who carried out inhumanly cruel experiments while he was camp physician at Auschwitz, and handed over the data to his supervisor who used them to make theoretical constructs while sitting in his comfortable office and at the same time keeping his hands 'clean'. To get back to our theme, however, one might note that today's racists gratefully draw on the primordialist theories of a number of our academics as examples of declarations of 'scientific truth', while at the same time stigmatising those who cast doubt upon such constructions. And meanwhile, this use of 'scientific knowledge' invites no protests from the authors of these theories themselves. They believe above all else that they are serving 'pure science'.

Fourthly, in cases in which society, as we have seen, breaks its 'vow of silence', academics are faced with an acute conflict of loyalties. In other words, a significant number of specialists find themselves confronted with the following difficult decision: should they remain faithful to scientific methodology, which would require them in some cases to renounce vested interests, or by contrast, should they continue to serve specific interests in defiance of scientific ethics? For some specialists, their first priority is to uphold ethnic (national) ideas. Some of them sincerely believe that this is in fact their duty to their community or society as a whole. Others deliberately draw up 'Grand Ethno-National Narratives' on the promise of material rewards from those who order them.'

Fifthly, the feeling of allegiance to one's group weighs on some members of the dominating majority and has a certain influence on their scientific strategy: the choice of theme, the working out of scientific paradigms, the way in which the theme is illustrated and the interpretation of the data collected. For example, the work produced by one white man's study of racism in the 1940s and 1950s was marked by a notable tendency to emphasise the 'shortcomings' in the culture or behaviour of the blacks, that is to say it blamed the victim for his own misfortunes. And only later, when representatives from Developing Nations or from African American groups themselves began to appear among specialists did a more balanced approach begin to be established which took into consideration the social, economic, and political factors and emphasised the role of discrimination against the 'non-white population'.

Today, 'migrants from other cultures' arouse suspicion and hostility among a number of Russian sociologists. This manifests itself in particularly in erroneous interpretations of collected data: when, for example, sociologists study the attitude of the population to migrants by conducting surveys, and on uncovering negative stereotypes, present these as 'objective reality'. When confronted in particular with the prevalent myth about the allegedly 'high rate of crime' among migrants, this kind of sociologist, rather than referring to the real state of affairs with regard to crime, would occasionally conclude that there really was 'a higher level of crime' among migrants. This kind of sociologist may well harbour xenophobic views and, through their academic authority, legitimate the chauvinistic attitudes in society. As is well known, there have been several cases in which these very 'specialists' have, through their expert opinions, saved racists and neo-Nazis from being tried in court.

Sixthly, some specialists are motivated by a fully understandable feeling of self-preservation and the desire not to be seen as 'traitors to their race'. Indeed, skinheads and neo-Nazis hate such 'traitors' even more than they hate members of 'inferior races'. And it is these

people in particular who are the first to become the focus of their violence.

Seventhly, Russian academia is yet to rid itself of dogmatism and rigidity, the inability and unwillingness of some specialists to think theoretically. This forces them to rely on ‘authority’ in their attempts and to employ without proper interrogation popular, although shakily founded models and hypotheses. Sometimes specialists present ideas that please them as scientific hypotheses. Instead of questioning the grounds for such ideas, they present them in their latest piece of work as established theories, drawing their colleagues’ attention to this material. In order to preserve good relations with them, their respected colleagues agree to participate in this game which they consider to be harmless from an academic point of view. Thus, the ‘theory’ gains the right to exist. Even more striking is the case involving a certain Mr G<sup>1</sup>, whose grandiose theoretical construct, albeit weakly supported by the facts, became the legislator of academic trends in the post-Soviet period, to such an extent that barely a discourse was developed without borrowing certain ideas and terms from his work. The key factor in this case was clearly that, benefiting from the support of influential bureaucrats, this theory was thrust upon society and, most importantly, was assimilated into the educational system. This had a huge impact on scholars, few of whom were able to resist its attractions. This brings us back to the aforementioned second factor, which concerns the absence of impenetrable boundaries between society and academia and the opposite influence of societal ideas on the scholar.

The case of Mr G’s theoretical construct forces us to pose a question about an eighth factor related to the Russian academic community’s lack of interest in the history of ideas, and its at best shaky knowledge of the history of its own science. Indeed, the abovementioned theory did not so much develop new ideas and approaches as regurgitate long rejected and forgotten ones that had fired the imagination of the reading public a hundred or so years earlier. With the development of scientific knowledge in the twentieth century these ideas were subjected to criticism on several occasions and were eventually refuted. Being linked to chauvinist historiography and supported by Nazi scholars, however, both these ideas and their critics were suppressed within Soviet academia, since it was believed that this unpleasant page in the scientific history had long since been tuned over and that such notions should thus be cast from the collective memory. As reality has shown, however, a short memory takes its revenge on the shortsighted.

It is by now clear enough that the problem of academic ethics lies at the base of this article. In his time, Zygmunt Bauman posed the valid question, what does the Holocaust say about sociologists (he was re-

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1 i. e. the controversial Eurasian thinker Lev Gumilev (1912–1992). [Editor].

ferring to their civic position)? This scholar convincingly showed that the Holocaust could be understood as something 'out of the ordinary' only as a whole. If its individual component parts were considered individually however, then they exhibited nothing 'out of the ordinary', indeed they fitted well with contemporary civilisation. A machine for destruction in fact differs little in principle from any other sort of machine. And if we think about the theoretical postulates on which the Nazi ideology of racial purity and genocide was based, then we must admit that they developed as part of European science at the start of the twentieth century. The Nazis did not add anything fundamentally new to these ideas. The Nazi regime in Germany was defeated but many of its theoretical ideas survived it. They were picked up and easily reformulated by neo-fascists in the post-war period; they are at the base of the new 'cultural racism' which in Europe has turned on immigrants. It is not difficult to find them in the work of Mr. G. mentioned earlier. In the meantime, for no small number of our colleagues, his constructs are considered to be beyond reproach; one is expected to make awestruck reference to these ideas, but under no circumstances to criticise them. In this way, some academics are willing to provide xenophobia with a 'scientific base'. And they fail to see anything untoward in this behaviour.

The following question thus arises: is just any sort of 'academia' permissible in society? Are there moral boundaries in academia, or is it rather exclusively instrumental and free from any moral obligations? Is it enough for a scholar to be devoted to science and its methodology, or should he/she be guided by certain ethical norms? And if so, which? Where is the boundary between scientific experiment and civic responsibility? Carlton Coon, for example, was somehow able to correct a reference to the data of a physical anthropologist in a book that was just about to be printed on the request of one of his relatives. At first glance, this does not seem to present anything out of the ordinary. But the book had racist content!

Evidently Coon did not personally support the racist claims contained in the book. But working on the book, he could not have been ignorant of them. And so, as a member of society, the scholar in one way or another occupies a specific civic position, and this inevitably influences his academic approaches and theories. Evidently, he is unable to ignore and even to deny this. Here we are talking first and foremost about scholars in the humanities who study topical issues which touch upon the burning questions of modernity. In this case, whether he likes it or not, the scholar participates in a tense public discourse through his very academic studies (whether we are talking here about contemporary ethno-national symbolic attributes or a version of ethnic history that leads us to the source of the emergence of the 'people'). He inevitably risks being accused of prejudice.

But this is nothing to worry about for those who are not involved in manipulating the facts and ignoring the ethnics of humanism.

Nevertheless, science still evokes respect in our society and a scholar enjoys authority. For this reason, scholars themselves should work on popularising academic knowledge and not leave this to dilettantes who more often than not oversimplify scientific achievements and distort the essence of scientific discoveries. Scholars are not at all obliged to enter into polemics with dilettantes, but it should be from those who are competent in their fields and not from ignorant middlemen that society should receive trustworthy information about the state of affairs in academia and about academic appraisals of the processes taking place in society. Even today it is easy to find sensationalist journalistic material in the media that is either based on unreliable sources or which otherwise distorts scientific reality. In amongst this can be found material which is clearly racist. And what is more disturbing is that this is sometimes provided by scholars themselves, albeit ones who specialise in different fields, be they historians who have taken it upon themselves to solve problems of genetics or physical anthropology, or philosophers who trespass into the unknown domain of ethnography.

In the established conditions, two fundamentally important tasks thus face the scholar: firstly, to make the study of xenophobia and racism an important field of research, and secondly, to exert a stronger influence on society, to halt and reverse its slide towards outright racism. Evidently and for various reasons, very few researchers actually manage to conduct surveys among staunch advocates of xenophobia and racism (although there are well-known examples of such cases in international practice), let alone participate in first-hand observation of the behaviour of skinheads (although interesting surveys have been conducted among skinheads after they have been arrested). There does, however, exist a huge number of websites on the internet and a massive amount of printed sources which demonstrate a racist or chauvinist tendency (including both the limited-circulation 'national patriots' publications, and the more widely distributed chauvinistic pamphlets, novels and pseudo-academic publications of a number of journalists, writers, and even well-know politicians), which deserve serious consideration. Many authors of this sort would not object to being interviewed. The authors of a certain type of academic publication, who are themselves implicated in a highly dubious sort of reasoning, would also fall into this bracket.

The researcher is at liberty to conduct surveys of society as a whole or among particular segments of it (schoolchildren, religious figures, members of this or that political party or movement and so on) with the intention of discovering the actual scale of xenophobia, its motivations, the content of xenophobic ideas and so on. This is no way

requires the researcher to sympathise with the xenophobic or racist attitudes of his interlocutors, but rather allows him to fathom the logic of their argumentation and question its foundations. At times, this sort of research leads to the most unexpected revelations. For example, people sometimes vote for political parties who are well-known for their xenophobic platforms not because they sympathise with xenophobia, but because the programmes of such parties include positions that are meaningful to people but which don't necessarily have any direct connection with xenophobia. Or people who are not engaged by politics usually may simply like the extravagant behaviour of the party's leader, who appears a colourful figure against a backdrop of other, thoroughly drab, politicians.

Lastly, what position should the scholar take when confronted with xenophobia? It is impossible to provide a one-fits-all answer to this question. But it seems relevant here to call to mind some examples of how well-known scholars have addressed this problem in reality. It is widely known that in the 1920s, the famous English archeologist V. Gordon Childe was enticed by Indo-Europeanism and even published a book about the origins of 'Aryans'. Seeing, how the racial 'Aryan idea', which had been advanced by the Nazis, was developing, however, he abruptly abandoned the theme and never again wrote about 'Aryans'. On the contrary, in 1933 he introduced a separate lecture into his teaching programme on racism and the dangers of racial theory [Childe 1933].

In the 1980s, when various leftist statesmen began to upbraid George Dumézil for the fact that the neo-Nazi leaning French new right and activists in J-M. Le Pen's National Front had begun enthusiastically appropriating his ideas, he was quick to publicly disassociate himself from such things, by making statements in the national media [Dumézil 1985]. Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose 'cultural relativism' also touched a chord with the radical right, followed a similar course. In a similar way, Russian physical anthropologists responded rapidly to the use of their data by latter-day racists, attempting to contaminate contemporary Russian society with racist views [Alekseeva 2003]. One can also cite Feodosy Dobzhansky's analogous views on the actions of Carlton Coon, whose scientific data served as the basis for Carlton Putnam's racist books. The acclaimed geneticist remarked that 'it is the duty of the scientist to prohibit the abuse or prostitution of his discoveries' [Shipman 1994: 208]. In other words, any academic with a sense of social responsibility is obliged somehow to prevent his data being used by racists and to prevent them perverting the essence of scientific knowledge with their fantastic interpretations. In particular, he or she must bring to society's notice the real position of academia on certain questions of burning contemporary importance. If racists make use of academic data (with their own

particular interpretations, of course), and gratefully reference academics, while enjoying the indulgent silence of these latter, such behaviour not only permits racists to freely distort the essence of scientific knowledge and successfully promote their xenophobic ideas in society, but also leads to the discrediting of academia. In other words, silence in this case undermines their authority and annuls all their academic achievements. On the contrary, by defending the honour of academia and protecting society from unscrupulous dilettantes, the scholar is not only elevated above accusations of prejudice, but can also take pride in this prejudice with a clear conscience.

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## SERGEI SOKOLOVSKY

### In Search of Truth. Whose? And For Whom?

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Impartiality, and objectivity for that matter, if not always, then for quite some time now, have seemed to me to be privileges that are more appropriated than deserved. If not quite the 'God's eye view', this is definitely the perspective of someone who lives in more comfortable and protected conditions than the person whose feelings and behaviour he or she is entitled to examine precisely because of this vaunted 'impartiality'. As we know, comfortable conditions are achieved through the construction of a meticulously established and preserved distance between the researcher and his 'object' of study. By referring in this case to people as 'objects', I do not wish to break with today's established norms of political correctness, which also function in the Russian social sciences, concerning the obligatory naming of those studied as 'subjects', no matter how small the likelihood that

these 'subjects' will have an influence on the intentions, plans, and results of the research. However, in my opinion, the use of such terms, for the time being at least, distorts the reality of Russian research practice.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, I am even more loath to offend the people that I wittingly or unwittingly transform into the 'studied'. I am simply trying here to describe honestly (and in this particular context — 'objectively') the composite distribution of roles in the concrete situations of field work.

Judging by the canonised genres of Russian ethnography (or more accurately Soviet ethnography since we are talking here about a direct and barely ruptured continuity), objective statements continue to be made with the help of a series of simple methods which create this sense of distance; indeed these methods have many immediate dimensions, the most important of which are probably the political, ethnic, and aesthetic (in a narrower sense — stylistic). This distance permits the creation of 'impartiality' and 'objectivity', which supersede the real emotions experienced by the 'researcher'<sup>2</sup> so effectively that his awareness of these emotions at times ceases completely and they dissolve almost without a trace in the far reaches of the short-term memory. Full-blown dialogues between individuals are inserted into the canonical genres, academic articles or monographs,<sup>3</sup> only with difficulty. There are of course examples of such 'insertions', but these are so rare that it would be no exaggeration at all to call them exceptional.<sup>4</sup> But if the characters in our descriptions do not enter into full-blown discussion with us in our texts, sometimes for the simple reason that characters such as 'I' are completely absent from these texts (the pronoun's presence is dangerous, since it is then necessary also to describe one's own feelings and deeds, and not just the behaviour of the faceless Other), and consequently they have no-one

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<sup>1</sup> One should not forget here about the semantics of the word 'subjects', those withstanding not only the objective world, but also power — as 'political subjects'. To avoid confusion, I also want to make clear that I am not 'fundamentally' against subjectivity, but rather doubt that the subjectivity of those studied manifests itself materially as a result of our research, although, of course, if one so wishes, one can discover its traces everywhere. To rid oneself of this illusion, it is worth posing the question of *in what sense* those whom we study are 'subjects'. Folklorists are in a slightly more fortunate position here, since they come up against the creators of folklore, but here too the latter do not usually consider themselves to be the authors of what is said.

<sup>2</sup> I am putting the word 'researcher' in inverted commas here to demonstrate the very act of creating distance that I am describing. In this case, however, the desired effect is not to create distance from the 'studied', but rather from that objectivising position which gives this word its full impact (irony could be even more effective here, and if I were to employ it now, for example, I would write the 'studier' in place of the 'researcher').

<sup>3</sup> I would like to remind the reader at this point that my discussion thus far has applied exclusively to contemporary Russian ethnography, that is, to the specifics of the 'here' genres, as opposed to 'there' (though this latter type of genre is often called experimental, and remains to some extent new as well).

<sup>4</sup> For an example of this one might refer to the work of Y.B. Simchenko, whose delectable letter written in the first person exhibiting traits of post-modern experimental ethnography was a decade ahead of its time.

to communicate with, then what option is left for our ‘writer’, how can he not but study them from the carefully self-devised, protected, and thoroughly comfortable position of the ‘objective observer’?

The elision of the traces of the observer’s presence is achieved with the help of a particular all-seeing and all-knowing optic, the construction of a universal truth from situations which are entirely personal and often totally dependent on their contexts (or, as philosophers would more accurately put it, contingently conditioned), from impersonal suggestions, and so on. These purely stylistic devices nevertheless have their correlates in the ethics of research and the behavioural strategies that depend on this (and consequently, its politics). I have already alluded above to the particularities of the ethics and psychology of the ‘studier’, recalling his obliviousness with regard to his own feelings and actions in the field at the same time as he records, analyses, and publicises the deeds of others.<sup>1</sup> The ideological and political dimensions of such a strategy can vary greatly, encompassing a whole spectrum of positions from irresponsibly deflected ‘modesty’,<sup>2</sup> to the fully narcissistic passion for ‘objective truth’, which moves its practitioners into the higher domains of fully academic, and as a result, ultimately rigorous and impartial science.

In the context of strictly textual strategies for the creation of distance, ethnographers make enthusiastic use of both those pre-existing and newly established boundaries and gulfs between ‘the field’ and ‘home’, and ‘the field’ and ‘academia’. I don’t know about other academic institutions, but mine is located on the top floor of the presidium RAN building, commonly referred to as ‘the golden brains’,<sup>3</sup> where mere mortals are not permitted without a pass, and which is widely recognised by our ‘good natives’ as a vector of power. The celestial beings who reside here regularly receive petitions from ethnic groups beseeching them to officially recognise them as ‘peoples’ and consecrate this recognition with the authority of academic science. Academicians consent or do not consent — the latter in cases where the ‘objects’ violate the distance and become indistinguishable from ‘us’.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I consider the word ‘deed’ to be too strong and emotionally loaded for this context. For the impersonal landscape of Russian ethnographic, sociological, and even psychological studies, it is more characteristic for researchers to ‘soften’ and dilute the concrete acts and deeds of their ‘wards’, presenting them in significantly more abstract terms such as ‘customs’, ‘practices’, ‘actions’, ‘behaviour’, and ‘culture’.

<sup>2</sup> ‘We are insignificant in this world, it is not in our nature to over-emphasise our “I”, especially in the context of complex academic discussions!’ Let’s infuse this position with a certain degree of asceticism and moral purity.

<sup>3</sup> The Institute of Anthropology and Ethnography in Moscow is in a Brezhnev-era skyscraper topped by an extraordinary gilded bronze decoration of a vaguely acanthoid kind. The presence of numerous high-powered Academy of Sciences institutes, as well as the visuals, make the pun appropriate. [Editor].

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps this is why the Tatar Cossacks (Nagaibaks) were awarded the status of a separate, albeit ‘small-population’, people while the Russian Cossacks were not.

It is also worth noting<sup>1</sup> that the degree of love towards the ‘good natives’ (if I permit myself a certain irony here, it is not at the expense of those to whom this moniker of mine applies, but rather of the romantic and Rousseauian views which dominate Russian ethnography) and the intensity of political activism among scholars who speak out in their defence, is directly proportional to the distance between the researcher’s house and the field. We fervently worry about the ecology of Siberia (or even better, Sakhalin), while at the same time pumping cheap petrol into our old cars in suffocatingly smog-filled Moscow. We also like to stick up for the rights of the native populations of Chukotka or, perhaps, Taimyr, but we are somehow unconcerned about the rights of those ‘foreigners’ driven from the marketplaces of the capital (at least, our concern isn’t evident in our anthropological publications). Ethnographers/sociologists feel love for the ‘foreigners’, but with a certain reservation, a certain constraint, and without the slightest hint of Rousseauianism (OK, they’re savages too, but as for ‘nobility’ — you’d have to take at least three skins off the chemically fertilised watermelon to get down to that). In general, long-distance love affairs are more convenient, safer, they somehow turn out to be more impartial and objective, more justified, so to speak. What’s more, feelings of love, or any strong emotions that may boil up in the realm of the so-called civic spirit (especially where their public demonstration is concerned) are better directed at far-away objects. This permits the preservation of ‘objectivity’, if not ‘impartiality’. And with regard to those most remote objects, even the most politically incorrect jokes are permitted.<sup>2</sup>

From this perspective of distancing (movement towards/away from), it would be interesting to consider, not so much our study of xenophobia and religious intolerance as the results of the judicial opinions in which anthropologists are called upon to participate as experts. I have no statistics at my disposal in this regard, but I make no effort to conceal the fact that thoughts about the dangerous nature of this task, particularly after the death of Nikolai Girenko, have crossed my mind. It is true that thus far I have comforted myself with the fact that (as far as I am concerned) this danger did not influence the final outcome, even though, I am sure, the publication of the names of expert witnesses (as well as the lack of any legal guarantee of their safety) does present a real danger. The practice of calling upon anthropologists to review proceedings under article 282 of the Criminal

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<sup>1</sup> I direct the reader’s attention to this impersonal construction, a most characteristic technique in the Russian style of academic writing.

<sup>2</sup> Judging from the jokes on television, gags about naive natives are being replaced by jokes about just as naive foreigners, for the most part Americans; the Chinese have also become the butt of racist jokes.

Code of the Russian Federation (the incitement to hatred or hostility, the derogation of an individual or group on the grounds of race, nationality, religious affiliation), is these days, I think, confronted less with the problem of bias/ impartiality than with the problems of the level of linguistic and legal expertise of the experts themselves. On more than one occasion, I have found myself on the side of the ‘offenders’ (at the same time as my colleagues delivered a bill of indictment for the same case), even though deep down I felt, along with the hero of a certain well-known film, that ‘the crook’s gotta go to jail’. The legal competency of those accused of racial hatred has increased dramatically of late, and this prevents me from joining in my colleagues’ easy condemnation.

The brochures put out by those on trial, for example, might still contain a standard repertoire of invective, but this was now aimed at some obscure enemy or else contained only indirect references to those whom they had in mind (the court, of course, takes into consideration only direct and purposeful insults). On the one hand, the reader of such leaflets immediately understands who is the target of all these insults (and it is precisely the abusive language they encountered that has prompted some of my colleagues to their bills of indictment); on the other, any literate lawyer could with relative ease demonstrate the ambiguity of the perception and the problems underlying the interpretation of their content and meaning.<sup>1</sup>

I will risk not answering the second part of the question (participation in public discussions in the media), remarking only that the concepts of ‘the public’ and ‘the media’ are inadmissibly conflated, in my opinion, by the authors of this part of the question, underlining to the distance between the academic world and all other sectors of society (here, the ‘public’) that I mentioned earlier. One has to construe either that *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* rejects the concept of ‘media’ altogether (though I am still hoping that my questions will actually be *published* in it), or that, for some reason, the discussion taking place on its pages is considered private. Very well, real ‘tribunes of the people’ may need to have their words heard by the entire population, but still, all of us here are hardly bellowing from a desert island, our mouths stuffed with stones...

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Conflicts have occurred, and very traumatic ones at that, especially during my first trips into the field. As one character that a colleague of mine remembers from his university days used to say: ‘Life’s tough, people are everywhere...’ Given my inability to resolve these conflicts, which I used to explain back then by my lack of life experience,

<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, jurists have already had to write about the ambiguity of the terminology employed in legislation, and the absence of clear definitions of the concepts ‘hostility’, ‘propaganda’, ‘exceptionality’, ‘superiority’, and ‘inferiority’ (Cf., for example, [Makeeva 2001]).

but nowadays (more soberly) see as stemming from a shortage of emotional intelligence and also from cowardice (qualities, or the lack of which, I attribute, however, not to myself alone, but to the mainstream generally — to the average city-dweller, the person who falls into the much talked-about ‘majority’),<sup>1</sup> I resorted to different strategies of digression and avoidance, suddenly falling ill (which removed the necessity of immediately continuing field work) or running off to local archives (and this despite my allergy to dusty old papers!). All my books, stuffed as they are with statistical calculations, historical reviews, and theoretical passages, are nothing but textual analogues of avoidance. The ultimate outcome was methodological solipsism — I began to consider autoethnography<sup>2</sup> the best genre of anthropological writing; you can’t cause any harm to anyone apart from yourself, except for wasting paper, but in this era of paperless technology even that problem has been eliminated.

Then I began to consider the ethnography of one’s own community the second most wonderful genre, although not at all an innocuous one. For the time being, though, I am only courageous enough to make fairly tame and neutral generalisations, once more avoiding, or putting off until a more auspicious moment, the resolution of the ‘conflicts’ mentioned above... In general and on the whole, ‘ethnography of one’s Own’ appears to me preferable to ‘ethnography of the Other’, since it leaves less room for projections and illusions, although, of course, it too has its ‘blind spots’.

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I would not attempt to recommend certain ‘optimal behavioural strategies’ to anyone here (the reader has already guessed that I have no grounds to do so). I can, however, share my experience, though this is of a fairly dubious quality. I unexpectedly discovered that I have a gradually acquired a tendency not to condemn ‘propagandists of conflict and hatred’ automatically, but to try to discern the conditions permitting them to act in such an ugly way, perhaps even to ‘understand’ these ‘scumbags’ (is this typical intellectual cowardice, or the early, but menacing, signs of oncoming incapacity and impotence?). What if old and new left-wingers, having spotted in contemporary urban violence a ‘lingering hot-bed of working class resistance to the hegemony of gangster-comprador capitalism and the values of a society of demand’, are right?<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the labelling of violence is ‘garbled’, in as much as the scapegoats become the vic-

<sup>1</sup> From what I have seen, people from the ‘minority’, who start to attract prods and scratches much earlier than their peers from the ‘majority’, develop social intelligence more quickly, and at twenty-something, or even earlier appear to possess Einsteinesque wisdom or Morzartean sensitivity in comparison to the moronic, urban louts, egoists, and know-it-alls who surround them.

<sup>2</sup> Cf.: [Sokolovsky n. d.].

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, [Clarke et al. 1976]; [Bennett, Kahn-Harris 2004].

tims, rather than the authors of the structural violence and the high-ranking swindlers; this is how hegemony works, — it masters not only the bodies, but also the minds of its victims.

As far as potential strategies are concerned, there is nothing new I can add, in as much as all the strategies have already been articulated, and all that is left to do is to either realise them, or, so to speak, to ‘remain in the snare of hegemonic ideology’, believing that the West is responsible for the contamination of our young people, or that part of this youth is innately degenerate, and there is nothing we can do with them apart from lock them up in jails and psychiatric units...In the context of the said ideology, equal access to proper education, the fair distribution of profit, an improvement in the quality of life at the margins of Russian society, and the broadening of minds (God forbid!) are all regarded as intellectual utopias, of little relevance to the matter in hand, while the best weapon with which to combat youth violence is still considered to be the policeman’s truncheon (at one time fittingly nicknamed the ‘democratiser’) and enforced isolation from the society which itself bred this youth...

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I have a reputation for being an agent of pernicious western influences, who litters his texts with English<sup>1</sup> and steers clear of everything kvas-soaked,<sup>2</sup> homespun, and indigenous. I will not attempt to defend myself. Actually, I do not share some of the general enchantment with we Russians’ theoretical achievements, especially with regard to so-called *ethnology*. At the same time I recognise that there is always a possible catch: being preoccupied with foreign language texts can cause one to miss something important right under one’s nose at home.

As far as xenophobia among humanities scholars and social sciences is concerned, in my opinion, a certain move towards an improvement in moral standards can be detected (that is, they are getting more flexible), and here I am talking specifically about academics, that is people who work in universities or research institutes of a humanities profile, and exclusively about so-called ‘race (or ethnic) hatred’. Getting the reputation of an anti-Semite or a racist has become unfashionable and even dangerous. People like that are not being forced out of their jobs, but the management is beginning to

<sup>2</sup> I did a rough count a while back, and indeed there are too many words with non-Slavonic roots in my writings. but it is not true that Anglicisms are specially dominant. Latinisms and Hellenisms are actually more numerous. I put all this down to the limitations of my education, insofar as I studied at an Institute of Foreign Languages at a time when the Russian language was not taught there at all, thus leaving me with just the Russian I had learned at school. I am aware of this, I beat my breast, and I am trying to reform myself.

<sup>2</sup> *Kvas* is not just a type of small beer brewed from rye crusts traditionally drunk in Russia, but a metaphor for unreflective, naive patriotism of the ‘roast beef of Olde England’ or ‘biscuit-box Scottish’ kind. [Editor].

look at them sideways; nobody likes a fuss. But in the place of these old hatreds, other, ideologically permissible and media supported phobias have emerged, for example, homophobia. Everything that was previously attributed to 'Yids' and 'blacks' (on the quiet and semi-privately) is now directed at 'queers' and 'dykes'. There is nothing to defend these categories of people, neither anti-discriminatory legislation nor sympathy for the oppressed, and, as a result, it is held possible, even necessary, to project all of our resentment and regret for what might have been on to them. It's those queers' fault that there's no water in the taps. And the nation's moral standards are suffering because of those dykes! The goal has been identified, the enemies uncovered. To work, comrades!

I would not like to conclude my answer on such a note, and so let me return to the question of objectivity as a value of academic research in general and the humanities in particular. It appears to me, at least with regard to the social sciences, that the construction of 'objectivity' and its product remain so specific that it is high time we began referring to our efforts to obtain impartiality by another term. The point is not even that the positivist ideal of achieving consistency in evidence while referring to different sources turns out to be inadequate for the goal of historical reconstruction, insofar as we are now searching not for the truth, but rather for the necessary. The problems, in my opinion, are rooted in a domain that we appropriate half-consciously and without much reflection: that is in the same social and political deontology with whose contradictions each of us is obliged to make our own compromises. I am not trying here to depreciate the significance of free will or to excuse anybody (even myself) from the responsibility for their concrete choices and actions, but I question the wisdom of the basis on which, as if on a firm foundation, we erect our liberty, freedom, and accountability. In other words, I would like to point out that the entire domain of the *necessary*, which has never constituted a coherent entity, is today ridden with ruptures and cracks which even a religious knowledge moving towards wholeness would be hard put to fill. Indeed, it is from here that both our tolerance and our intolerance grow, it is from this very source that we draw the motivation for our actions, which are then judged rational or senseless from 'the God's eye view'.

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## DETELINA TOCHEVA

Xenophobia and aggressive nationalism are two out of many similar cases where the issue of ethics arises in the social sciences. I will first address this general topic and then I will turn to the specific issue of xenophobia as far as I have been concerned with it.

### *There is no essential neutrality*

Discussing how social scientists deal with xenophobia leads to the fundamental problem of how research ethics are constructed and performed. My conviction is that the researcher's civic position cannot, and should not, be totally dissociated from the researcher's quest for an objective scientific position. The question of how anthropologists' moral views are intertwined with his/her research has already been the subject of lively debates in fields such as colonial and post-colonial studies, studies on extreme poverty, violence and suffering<sup>1</sup>, disease<sup>2</sup>. At least since Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* [2001], anthropologists' experience of doing fieldwork and writing on sensitive and emotive topics has shown that one can hardly become or remain a totally impartial observer. Anthropologists' introspective insights have in turn provided a basis for both criticising and elaborating on notions of objectivity. They allowed the insight that academic impartiality can hardly be con-

<sup>1</sup> One prominent scholar, among others, who brilliantly discusses relations between objectivity and subjectivity in anthropology, is Nancy Scheper-Hughes. In an earlier issue of this journal [2005:76-86] she summarises her positions on scientific objectivity and civic engagement. Although I do not share her ideas totally, I consider her reflections on the subject to be among the most elaborated and insightful ones.

<sup>2</sup> Works on AIDS offer one of the most striking examples of the last decade.

ceived of as an essentially neutral position of the researcher. For me, academic impartiality is not, and cannot be, a position of neutrality. This does not mean that someone doing academic research is necessarily politically engaged or a militant, and it is an essential skill of social scientists to distance themselves from their data up to a certain degree after having been involved in the production and collection of these. Following these debates, I am bringing here my personal experience and thoughts on the topic of xenophobia.

First, as human beings, anthropologists and social scientists in general see, feel, judge, evaluate, and love and hate. And without a doubt all this also happens in the place where they conduct empirical research, called 'the field', which is, or at least becomes for a given period, a part of their life. In most of the cases this is the place where the hypothetical boundaries of private and professional life are definitely blurred because of the constant interaction of fieldworkers with the people they study. More precisely, categories like 'private' and 'professional' become, most of the time, no more than terms that researchers need to use in their reports to their home institutions, or the institutions providing them with support.

Second, when one arrives at the stage of analysis, it often happens that, in the writing up process, the texts produced are 'polished', 'purged' of aspects considered too emotional, or involving too subjective judgments. Usually in the final contribution, passions, judgments and complaints, products of the lived experience of researching on empirical realities, come to disappear. This is in many cases justified and necessary. Anthropological writing is not the most appropriate genre in which to engage in soul-searching. The problem is that, for reasons connected with perceptions of ethical practices, empirical data constitutive to the social and ideological realities of the field often also disappear, because they are associated with emotive and/or moral views, as well as with normative concepts, and thus conceived of as unsuitable for serious anthropology, or simply embarrassing. For example, expressions of xenophobia that fieldworkers noticed and/or experienced in the field often vanish from the final texts, because describing such unpleasant realities usually makes the researcher feel unease. Therefore, being the victim of timorous treatments in the social sciences in general, 'as a concept it has only a weak theoretical foundation' [Wicker 2001: 16649].<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth mentioning that there are remarkable exceptions. For instance, two French scholars – Michel Wieviorka, a sociologist, and Gérard Noiriel, a historian – have been conducting for about two decades now excellent studies on xenophobia, racism, discrimination, nationalism and immigration in their own country. Also in France, a group of scholars has recently created (January 2008) an Observatory of the Institutionalisation of xenophobia, promoting the study of xenophobia through the scope of the social sciences (Observatoire de l'Institutionnalisation de la x nophobie, <http://observivx.lautre.net>).

In my remarks, xenophobia is referred to as the ‘fear of strangers’ (latent form) and ‘hatred of the other’ (virulent form). It is based on a founding discrimination between insiders and outsiders (strangers). As ideology and behaviour, xenophobia is characterised by its relatedness to nationalism, ethnocentrism, possibly anti-Semitism, racism, religious and cultural prejudice [Wicker 2001: 16649–52]. All these aspects have been present to some extent in the forms of xenophobia which I have been facing and observing during my fieldwork. Although these aspects can be isolated and individually given a specific definition, they are intimately connected in practice [Banton, 1996: 8] and this is why I will treat them as connected here.

*On xenophobia and other rejections among the Russian Orthodox*

I became involved in the anthropological study of contemporary Russian Orthodoxy about two years ago, and I have since conducted fieldwork in Russia where I had to face xenophobia combined with religious fundamentalism. My main topic is materiality and socialisation in local religious life. The topics I discuss here are far from being the most central in my research. But I claim that it would be scientifically unjustified to ignore them.

Outside Orthodoxy, in everyday life, one can easily witness discrimination between ‘Russians’ and ‘foreigners’, for example in newspapers’ announcements for flats to rent (flats are offered to Russians by preference); one can hear about murders inspired by racism and xenophobia in big cities (the victims of such murders are almost always non-Russians, particularly non-whites, but also foreign whites); anti-Semitism seeps into many everyday discourses. One of the reasons for the diffusion of popular forms of xenophobia can be found in the striking social stratification that occurred after the collapse of the Soviet Union and produced vast masses of ‘losers’. Indeed, this process in Russian society fits well with one of the traditional explanations of rejections and aggressive ideologies in the social sciences; the emergence of profound social uncertainty in a given group or class leads to the diffusion of feelings of fear directed against those considered as a potential source of more social uncertainty — immigrants (mostly Central-Asian workers in the Russian case) and external ‘others’ suspected to damage the inner group’s interests. Another, more long-term, reason can be sought in the way in which the Soviet state, while initially aiming to promote diversity of peoples and languages, structurally maintained discriminations based on national and ethnic belonging, associated with policies stigmatising non-Russians [Martin 2001].

In the Orthodox circles with which I am concerned in particular, these two causes appear as fully relevant. Moreover, the imperialist policies of Russification are seen as a way to achieve a kind of civilising mission, which is, in the eyes of the Orthodox, associated with

the expansion of Orthodoxy. The political consolidation of the dominant position of the Russians in the Soviet Union is also positively valued by the Orthodox, though simultaneously the Soviet repressions on religion and the atheistic teachings are overtly blamed. Last but not least, anti-Semitism as ideology inside the 'inchurched' groups<sup>1</sup> and outside them is of enduring character. Anti-Semitism has deep roots in the pre-Revolutionary Russia and the Soviet practices of discrimination continued the imperial tradition.

My contribution here is not a fundamental attempt to explain the presence of xenophobia, and other ideologies connected to it, in Russian society, and in particular among Orthodox believers. Here I do not aim in conceptualising their popular forms. I claim there is an urgent need for such research. Its objective should be to investigate how xenophobia has been historically constructed and reproduced, and what current transformations explain its popularity. Those are issues which anthropologists should critically engage with.

Before I left for my Russian field, some friends and acquaintances told me that I would probably face difficulties when working on ordinary Orthodox believers. In their opinion I would however not be harassed in a serious sense because my Slavic origin would certainly work in my favour. A colleague who had already done fieldwork on Russian Orthodoxy added that I was lucky not to be an American (in the sense of a US citizen). Indeed, all this turned out to be correct. I should emphasise that I was not working with extremist groups as such, but in three small urban parishes and in a couple of neighbouring village parishes. Different believers accepted me or rejected me in different manners and to different degrees. In this respect, my informants, participants in the Orthodox religious life of a single locality in European Russia, reflected the high degree of complexity of Russian society in terms of ideological orientations. Some of the latter might look philosophically incompatible with each other, but are rather successfully combined in individual and collective thoughts. Among these people, one can notice reminiscences of Soviet teachings on friendship and brotherhood between all the peoples of the world, as well as diffused or elaborated anti-Semitism based on more or less structured conspiracy theories, loaded or not with political eschatological meanings. These ideological trends are very often combined with deep-rooted fear of the powerful West. It is worth emphasising that the relation to the West is a very complex one: fear goes almost always with its opposite — attraction to and curiosity about the West.

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<sup>1</sup> i.e. believers who regularly attend church and take an interest in ecclesiastical affairs. [Editor].

I experienced almost no anti-Semitism as directed against me personally,<sup>1</sup> but I did on numerous occasions have to deal with xenophobia, acute suspicion, and discrimination based on religious prejudice. Some of my acquaintances openly produced xenophobic discourses (against immigrant workers from the former Soviet republics in Central Asia, gypsies, Americans, Muslims, Western Catholics they considered rich, powerful and enemies of Russian Orthodoxy) and at the same time accepted me individually in an open and friendly way. But many people, also more or less committed Orthodox, did not articulate or defend any xenophobic, anti-Semite or anti-Western ideas, and did not reject me as a non-believer. I have to confess that these were my closest friends, or it may have been simply that we felt and showed sympathy for each other to begin with.

It would be totally wrong to say that all of my informants and people I met defended xenophobic positions. I experienced xenophobia less often personally than I observed it when directed against other more or less locally 'undesirable' strangers. In some cases xenophobic opinions were totally absent. In some other cases it was diffused and on the whole not aggressive. I was able to maintain a long-term relationship (around a year and more) with people expressing such positions. In other cases, xenophobia was virulently expressed and anti-Semitism took an extremely aggressive form. Then I simply tried to avoid contacts with defenders of such positions. In general, the pervasive and ubiquitous nature of xenophobic trends and anti-Semitism in popular religious thinking was striking to me.

#### *Solving the anthropologist's problem*

Animosity toward foreigners and Jews was one of the themes I heard about, and one of the attitudes I faced most often during my fieldwork. But there was not a single line in the recent anthropological literature on contemporary Russian Orthodoxy about that. On the contrary, there is a salient bias toward treating less emotionally, morally, and normatively loaded topics than xenophobia. Why? A significant part of the answer lies in the fact that interest in this topic is so recent. Anthropological research on mainstream Russian Orthodoxy is still to a very large extent a work in progress. Another part of the explanation is that topics like xenophobia are considered more

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<sup>1</sup> I am in fact not Jewish, but one man, an Orthodox fundamentalist and anti-Semite, suspected me to be a Jew, though he very quickly rejected this possibility of his own accord. Once he had ruled out that I might be Jewish, I became a foreigner of Slavic Orthodox origin, which was in itself a positive fact in his opinion. But he considered me to be corrupted by the West and subsequently definitely not trustworthy. Other people related to this man accepted me individually, but after some months preferred to avoid talking to me, because they started suspecting me of 'transmitting information to the West'. The fact that I am not an Orthodox believer (early in our relationship I personally informed them of this and they could tell from my behaviour anyway) was for them at odds with my interest in their religion, and therefore they decided that I most probably had bad intentions.

suitable for political scientists, journalists, or other public commentators, and less appropriate to anthropologists. My impression is that as an ethically sensitive issue, xenophobia is for the moment almost ignored by anthropologists. However, such an enactment of academic neutrality may be to the disadvantage of the topic itself, and eventually of the discipline.

Is it possible to maintain scientific neutrality when researching on xenophobia in present-day Russian Orthodoxy? My answer is yes. Two recent studies written by non-anthropologists provide good examples. The Russian authors Verkhovsky [2003] and Mitrofanova [2005] offer an overview of 'political Orthodoxy' and Russian Orthodox fundamentalists. They analyse the structures of several organisations, movements, or trends, their ideology and discourses, without blaming or congratulating them. Nonetheless, it becomes understandable to the reader that xenophobia, nationalism and religious fundamentalism are not these authors' 'cup of tea'; these are not their civic ideology. This is what academic impartiality is: not a radical, essentialised neutrality, but a stance of scientific objectivity that does not elide one's civic and human position. Here supporters of the contrary case might argue that it is always possible for any civic position to become overwhelming and thus to undermine scientific objectivity. I would reply that the main means researchers have in their hands is the will to understand empirical realities, the will to know, which is what leads them and forms the basis of their civic position.

After going back from Russia to Germany, I tried to sort out my data and to formulate some general outcomes. Speaking in Germany about the 'fundamentalism' and 'xenophobia' I noticed among mainstream Orthodox believers and low level clergy made me face colleagues' hesitation about the use of the term 'fundamentalism', which I found quite appropriate to describe the case of some radical movements in Russian Orthodoxy.<sup>1</sup> However, some colleagues expressed criticism, or disapproval, regarding the use of the term 'xenophobia'.

When facing such hesitations, some questions appeared to me: Should I look for a 'better' term? Should I keep 'xenophobia', trying to explain that I wasn't intending to accuse my Russian informants of being 'bad guys'? My solution here is to look at the attitudes of those opposing the term rather than to avoid it immediately. First, these attitudes need to be placed in their local context. Twentieth-century German history provides an obvious explanation for the careful use in social sciences of terms that be seen as stigmatising those under

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<sup>1</sup> The issue of religious fundamentalism goes, of course, well beyond the scope of the topic discussed here.

study for their ‘incorrect’ views. Today self-critical discourses are seen as much more legitimate, especially among intellectuals.

But there are more general reasons behind such attitudes. Can ‘xenophobia’ (the same applies, for instance, to ‘racism’) be totally disconnected from the moral convictions the term refers to, from the emotions to which it appeals? Indeed it is difficult to separate two of the aspects of ‘xenophobia’ — the descriptive one: ‘fear of strangers’; and the value-laden, judgmental one: ‘it is bad to hate strangers’. When using the term one should be aware of its intrinsically ambiguous meaning. But should we be afraid of the normative aspect, and longing to be impartial, skip the term from our vocabulary? Should we stick to a particular definition of scientific objectivity as one being necessarily under threat every time when a morally partial term is used? In fact, an intellectual caution or ‘political correctness’ that excludes using terms without discussing the problems they pose, because they refer to emotions, norms and morality, threatens scientific objectivity as well. This sort of ‘political correctness’ might sometimes work against intellectual honesty, and thus against the social scientists’ task of describing, analysing and conceptualising material.

Concretely, contemporary Russian Orthodoxy could be only partly understood and, thus, imperfectly analysed, if the anthropologists interested in it decided to push totally out of the scope of their agenda such widespread trends as anti-Semitism and xenophobia, fear of the West, political eschatology and aggressive nationalism. Such positions are highly elaborated and strongly promoted by some extremist groups. Verkhovsky and Mitrofanova have already presented good accounts of those groups. But what these authors fail to do is to explain popular, or democratic, Orthodox versions of anti-Semitism, xenophobia, fears, political eschatology.<sup>1</sup> Anthropologists must address the topic in order to explore the social anchoring of such ideologies in their non-intellectualised versions, because these versions precisely prove highly effective ways of consolidating Orthodox religion. Among the masses of believers, such versions often do not get understood as appeals to political action. Among the usual non-politically engaged believers, non-members of extremist groups, they function as an element, among other elements, that helps to make Russian Orthodoxy as solid and viable as it is nowadays.

Contemporary Russian Orthodoxy is almost an unploughed field in anthropology. Ignoring xenophobia and its pertaining ideologies

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<sup>1</sup> On these points, my colleagues and friends Zhanna Kormina and Sergey Shtyrkov made insightful remarks and encouraged me to engage with this topic. I am particularly grateful to them. But I alone am responsible for the opinions expressed here.

when doing research on this enormous and important topic, avoiding treating them as relevant field data, is detrimental to the understanding of the whole topic of popular religion. Scholarly impartiality cannot mean ignoring social phenomena of such great importance as xenophobia, nationalism, anti-Semitism. More generally, ignoring a major social phenomenon because a name often given to it makes scholars feel uncomfortable is a rather dubious way of practising academic objectivity and neutrality.

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### ANDREAS UMLAND

**1** Whether nationalism and xenophobia can be addressed from a position of neutrality, I do not know. I suspect — not. But I think we should try to be neutral, and, as far as that is possible, even empathetic. Clearly, for most of us, nationalist and xenophobic ideas are problematic, to say the least. However, there are periods in history when whole societies come under the spell of ideologies as radical as fascism and fundamentalism. To explain how this happens, we have to try to understand why these people believe in these ideas. This does not necessarily imply becoming an apologist of Hitler.

To express a public position on the issues we study is not only desirable, but essential for researchers. An implicit or, better, explicit state-

ment of our own beliefs concerning the social issues we write on should, ideally, be a preamble to all our research.

2

I do not see this problem as crucial. Studying right-wing extremism in Eastern Europe, I have been in direct contact with neo-Nazi skin-heads, ideologues of fascism, ultra-nationalist politicians and theorists of racism in Russia and Ukraine. I never thought of an ethical problem there. I was communicating with them to get an idea of how they think. If they ask me where I stand myself, I admit to being, by their standards, a liberal. Although that is one of the worst possible attributes among ultra-nationalists, they usually accept that. Some seem to be pleasantly surprised that I was prepared to take such a keen interest in them all the same.

3

I have been trying to challenge my antagonists by, for instance, explaining that what they are talking about is roughly the same stuff that the Nazis were debating in Germany's beer-halls in the 1920s. Mentioning to Slavic neo-Nazis that Slavs are, within German racist ideology, sub-humans is also a good way of flooring them. In as far as we cannot change these people and, as researchers, are not activists directly engaged in improving society, I believe we have to try to be humorous in dealing with our objects. Otherwise, the situation becomes too frustrating.

4

I have been accused of Russophobia, getting money from the CIA (wish I did), or being 'Orange; — not something I would say of myself, but a badge I shall proudly wear. I have been also labelled much worse with Russian swearwords (*mat*). I find most of that funny.

More serious are accusations by academic colleagues often, moreover, combined with subtle misrepresentations of one's views. At one conference, it was suggested that, being German, I should worry about German nationalism, not Russian nationalism, and leave my field of research to Russians. A relatively enlightened young Russian researcher on the editorial board of one of Moscow's most prestigious scholarly journals suggested that, as a German, I should refrain from applying the word 'fascism' to certain Russian groups. The Soviet tradition of transforming scholarly debates into dubious discussions of an idiosyncratically defined morality seems to be going to have a long life in the post-Soviet sphere, and is something we have to get used to.

Obviously we can approach xenophobic academics as objects of study and not as colleagues. As indicated above, I would take a psychoanalytical position and try to understand why a person has become the way he or she is. Trying to discuss social academic issues seriously with these colleagues is, obviously, useless.

So far as academics who ignore xenophobia go, I try to ignore them. Sometimes that is not possible, which can lead to embarrassing

situations. Concerning Russia, one can now always mention that, on average, there is one murder with a racist motivation per week. If that does not impress the interlocutor there is little else to say.

#### VALENTIN VYDRIN

1

In my opinion, it is absolutely indispensable for the researcher of these problems to take an impartial position. If he loses his most important advantage — the ability to scientifically analyse and interpret the results of his analysis not in emotional terms, but in logical, properly argued terms — he stops being an academic and becomes a politician.

That the theory on which xenophobic ideology is based is scientifically unfounded — as is easy to prove — is a different issue. But here too, I do not think that the requirement to be impartial poses an obstacle to discussion that remains within the confines of scholarly paradigms. Unfortunately, among xenophobes, there are people with scholarly degrees and titles who not only congregate in self-styled institutions like the RAEN (the ‘Russian Academy of Natural Sciences’, better known in scholarly circles as the ‘Regional Academy’), but also hold posts in very respectable academic institutions. In general, these people are not ashamed of their opinions; indeed they make use of their status to lend an air of respectability to their xenophobic ideas.

It is of the utmost importance to engage these colleagues in ‘discussion’. Not to convince them of their own wrong-headedness, of course — as a rule their ‘scientific’ constructions rest on misrepresentations and fuzzy logic and as such these people should not be expected to engage in proper scholarly dialogue. The main beneficiary of such a discussion, then, would be the public at large who, lacking the necessary professional grounding, are far from always able to grasp the scientific unfoundedness of xenophobic theorisation.

My answer to the second part of the question is thus a positive one: yes, researchers must get in-

volved in public discussions. Otherwise trained professionals leave it up to journalists and politicians to take an intelligent stand on questions of inter-ethnic and inter-confessional relations, and these latter — when locking horns with the respectable xenophobes from the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences<sup>1</sup> — will give viewers the impression that the xenophobes are the only serious academics and that the people challenging them are mere dilettantes. If one to any degree buys into the notion that academia has a responsibility toward society (because, for example, our salaries are paid and grants distributed from taxpayers' money) — and if in this particular case we could talk about the responsibility of scholars in the humanities for the social well-being of society — then to avoid such a discussion is simply dishonest.

It should be noted that there are at least two stages to such a discussion. During the 'external' stage, which is directed at the general public, the discussion should be aimed first and foremost at popularising insights that for any qualified (and conscientious) specialist are obvious. Then there is the 'internal' stage of collegial debate which focuses on the question of academic responsibility. We have learned from experience that discussion of xenophobia is absolutely necessary at both levels; indeed discussion will continue to be necessary up until the point when the Russian academic community comes to a firm agreement on their collective attitude toward this problem.

At this point in time, unfortunately, it is impossible to speak of such a consensus in Russia (unlike the academic communities in most western countries). Indeed, public statements by academics affiliated with the Russian Academy of Sciences or some other respectable university in defence of xenophobic ideas are unfortunately far from exceptional. Which just goes to show that it is too early to 'close the door' on this question.

2

My main research area is western Africa. There too, unfortunately, xenophobia and xenophobes abound. One might think of the civil war in the Côte d'Ivoire (which now seems to be coming to an end), which brought with it waves of hatred for members of different ethnic groups, religions and races, pogroms, the expulsion of millions of non-citizens from the country, a 'slow-burning genocide'... But even in the face of these events, I can't say that I was confronted with the sort of highly sensitive, conflict-ridden situation that caused my academic and civic positions to collide. In my opinion, the most impor-

<sup>1</sup> The Russian Academy of Natural Sciences, founded in 1990, is one of many self-named 'academies' set up in the post-Soviet era. The 'academicians' belonging to such organisations lay claim to the authority of the Russian Academy of Sciences, though the organisations to which they belong have no formal affiliation with the RAN and include individuals whose academic credentials are dubious. [Editor].

tant task of the field worker is to describe what is taking place. By reacting emotionally to what one's informant is saying, the researcher simply displays a weakness in his professional training (I do not refer here to those situations in which the 'emotional reaction' of the researcher, in inverted commas, is used as a means to guide the conversation in the necessary direction). I thus always advise students who carry out work in areas of 'conflict' not to get involved in discussing political problems and not to try and convince anyone of anything, even when their informants express opinions that seem completely unacceptable.

In reality of course things aren't always so simple. In the course of a relatively protracted discussion between the researcher and his informant, the roles will inevitably be switched at some point and the informant will be asking the researcher questions in turn, including those which concern inter-ethnic relations. That's happened to me too, of course, and in such a situation it is not always possible to avoid answering such questions. But in my opinion, the researcher can always find a way of expressing his opinion — even when this opinion clashes with that of his informant — in a way that does not put their relationship in jeopardy.

Thankfully, I've never been in the situation when an informant has grabbed the nearest rifle and headed off to exterminate the population of a neighbouring village. I really don't know what I would do in that situation. I would probably try to talk him round — although it's highly unlikely that an outsider would have any influence in such a situation...

**3**

I have never been confronted with this sort of situation in the course of my research, so I will answer this question speculatively, and draw on the experience of others. Clearly, there are various strategies one could use here. If we are talking about field work, then the sociologist or ethnographer ends up playing the role of the secret agent (that is of course if he himself does not share the xenophobic and other extremist views of his informant — but we are not discussing cases when he does here), and as such this branch of the discipline clearly deserves the title of 'extreme ethnology' or 'extreme sociology'. He might give the impression that he agrees with the views of that society he is studying, but in this case he will inevitably get himself into some very tricky situations and if he is exposed might even pay for his 'treachery' with his life.

A less extreme option would be to play the role of the 'independent apolitical sociologist/anthropologist'. That may not be a sure-fire way to avoid risky confrontations altogether, but those confrontations which do take place may end up being less intense as a result. Problems will nevertheless arise when the researcher comes to publish the

results of his research; if, after seeing the publication, the community under observation feels that it has been deceived, then the result might end up being the same as in the case stated above.

Finally, it is possible to study these communities without even entering into direct contact with them (or at least keeping this contact to an absolute minimum): by making use of their publications, internet sites, audio/video-recorded meetings, and other such sources. In this case, the researcher will inevitably be obliged to reveal his civic position (and I simply don't buy the argument that these sorts of problems can be studied from a 'neutral' point of view) and should be ready for those he is researching to proclaim him an 'enemy of the people/faith/race' (once again I am not referring here to those situations in which the researcher himself is a xenophobe or a racist, which in the given context is clearly not the focus of the discussion).

And then there are many positions in between. Take Nikolai Girenko for example, who could talk to extremists without needing to conceal his own convictions, his academic role, and his feelings towards their ideology. Despite this, in my opinion anyway, many of his nationalist opponents only had the greatest respect for him. This could however have had to do with the fact that they considered him a particularly dangerous interlocutor...

It is probably worth mentioning one more aspect of the question under discussion. While unconditionally supporting the argument that academia is both non-ethnic and non-national, it is necessary to recognise that when researching xenophobia and xenophobic communities, the ethnic affiliation of the scholar inevitably plays an important role. I completely understand the choice of one of my colleagues who refused to testify in court as an expert witness for a case involving publications by Russian Nazis — not because he was afraid that the extremists would seek revenge, or because he considered it impossible to pass judgment on their propaganda, but rather because he had a Jewish surname. He didn't want people to explain away his opinions by means of his ethnic origins: as everyone knows, extremists resort to this sort of 'argument' at every turn, and unfortunately a good portion of Russian society echoes this opinion. In my opinion, this means that Russian scholars (and in this context, flying in the face of political correctness, I am referring to ethnic Russians in particular) are confronted with an even greater responsibility. Xenophobes are the disgrace and misfortune of our country, and it is our duty to speak out against them.

I can't really recall any direct accusations of *prejudice* from colleagues (at least not as far as xenophobia and racial or religious intolerance go). As far as academic xenophobes are concerned, it's difficult to give a simple answer. How, for example, are you supposed to

treat an old colleague, outstanding scholar, indisputably upright and honourable person, who in the twilight of perestroika all of a sudden ‘flips’ and becomes a raging anti-Semite? When it is clear that he has never personally caused any harm to a Jew (and has even helped quite a few), but simply believes in a ‘world conspiracy’ and that’s that! I don’t have a simple answer to that. Of course one could act on principle, delete him from one’s list of contacts, and not even tip one’s hat to him in the street. But for some reason I internally forgive him, put this repulsive outspoken anti-Semitism down to ‘senile eccentricity’ for which one can excuse him given the remarkable service he has rendered to academia — in any case you can’t teach an old dog new tricks...

But what I have just described is a special case of course. In general my position remains as stated in the answer I gave to the first question.

This reminds me of a story that an African man who had been to Paris once told me. I should mention however that he himself was from Côte d’Ivoire where, in the last decade, xenophobia has emerged on an unprecedented level and where people are fairly unsympathetic toward the French. This friend of mine happened to witness an incident on a bus in Paris that to some extent altered his impression of the world.

An African woman sitting on two seats of the bus with her young child was accosted by a French woman who started to demand rudely that she vacate one of the seats. It was perfectly clear that the particular source of her irritation was the colour of the young mother’s skin. The other passengers on the bus — who were almost exclusively white — were so revolted by all this that they kicked the racist off the bus at the very next stop.

I apologise for my pessimism but, in my opinion, at present, that bus in Paris is out of reach as an ideal not only for Russia generally, but for our entire academic community as well.

**SERGEI SHTYRKOV**

**On The Problem of Professional Schizophrenia, or ‘This is No Bus in Paris’**

**Response**

When I was offered the opportunity to respond on behalf of the editorial board to the questions set by this forum, I was not sure I would be able to add anything of interest since I have almost

never been faced with a situation in which academic practice and direct xenophobia have overlapped. On reading the responses of those who participated in the discussion, however, I changed my mind: a number of the responses jogged my memory and convinced me that the problems which this forum touches upon apply to most, if not all anthropologists and members of other disciplines and neighbouring disciplinary fields.<sup>1</sup>

Recollection No. 1: I'm participating as an expert in a seminar entitled, say, 'No to Xenophobia, Yes to Tolerance'. Most of the participants are involved in fighting or establishing preventative measures against xenophobia and radical nationalism. At some point, I am asked which methods I consider most effective in the battle against and prevention of xenophobia. I try to explain (or rather, that was what I thought I was doing back then) that the first priority is to unpack the reasons for the emergence of xenophobic sentiment. This was a mistake — I was reproached at for attempting to relativise absolute evil. A little later, I was rash enough to remark that xenophobic views could be identified among some members of the minority with regard to the 'majority'. The public reaction was quick and unambiguous: 'Blaming the victim!' In other words, professionals had no trouble finding evidence of the very thing we were all trying to fight against in my apparently 'objective' opinions.

Another example: On more than one occasion, I have ended up reading or listening to scholars who, studying the history or culture of some people or another (more often than not their own), remained convinced that this history and culture were so splendid that they could not be compared with any others. I clearly remember how some of the opinions expressed by these colleagues made me feel awkward and annoyed. A fascination with one's subject, which strengthens one's feeling of attachment to it, can easily turn into nationalistic narcissism, the natural and logical consequence of which is the search for the enemies of people X (and their mighty culture) and for 'national traitors' in the past and the present. The allusion to 'great people descended from great ancestors', which one encounters fairly frequently in the Russian academic sphere, involuntarily brings to my mind the words of Marx: 'The traditions of all dead generations hang, like a nightmare, over the minds of the living'. And this is for all my conservative attachment to these traditions and my 'natural', professional interest in them. In this regard, it is useful to bear in mind that in Russian academic space (and not only there), scholars do exist who are informed by ideologies such as ethnocentric folklore

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<sup>1</sup> I will refer for the most part to anthropologists, arbitrarily and provisionally including others – philologists, historians and sociologists -- in this bracket. I hope they will excuse me for this.

studies and positivist ‘colonialist’ anthropology. Presented in this way, folklore approaches the ideas of the German Romantics with their perpetual *Geist eines Volkes*, while anthropology approaches the analytic practices of the Enlightenment. Both traditions have passed through a long process of criticism and reflection (this was more pronounced for anthropology), but, in my opinion, they have preserved some of their original presuppositions. This is explained to a great extent by the fact that ‘anthropologists’, for whom antiracism is an integral part and attribute of their professional identity, are keenly aware of the nationalist potential of opinions which appear innocent and natural to folklorists. Such sensitivity appears well-founded. It is sufficient to say that the attention to cultural differences, or, to use an almost obsolete term, *samobytnost* [national specificity]<sup>1</sup> which characterises anthropological activity as such, can play into the hands of those actors who support far from tolerant ideals — compare Roger Griffin’s remarks here about the ‘discourse of differentiated racism’. This discourse is skilfully built around the rejection of the language of nationalism and white superiority, and defends the principle of preserving cultural differences, thus rejecting (on a rhetorical level) multiculturalism, as if defending the interests of all cultural groups implicated in this process. The thoughts expressed by Douglas Holmes bring home the danger of the proximity of the boundaries of anthropology and xenophobic political ideology: ‘What makes these sensibilities [nationalism, xenophobia, and different forms of fundamentalism] so perilous and so tenacious is not their alien character, but rather their proximity to a liberal humanistic tradition, particularly my own intellectual lineage as an anthropologist’.

Finally, on field work: I’ve never had the occasion to make a specialist study of xenophobia, religious fundamentalism, etc. in the field, and accordingly I’ve had little systematic contact with those members of segments of the society who base their social behaviour on such ideologies. Rather, the opposite situation has applied: my experience has been limited to working with groups who constituted the potential or real targets of xenophobic sentiment and behaviour. Occasionally, however, I would hear members of these groups make unkind remarks in the direction of ‘social outsiders’, including their own. In the latter case, these opinions were accompanied by accusations of narrow-mindedness, prejudice and so on. The irony of it all was that I considered myself the (would-be) defender of these groups.

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<sup>1</sup> *Samobytnost* is a term widely used by Slavophile thinkers such as Ivan Kireevsky in order to refer to the special features of the ‘Russian people’, held to be threatened by Westernisation. [Editor].

In summarising the course and outcomes of the preceding discussion, I would like to emphasise the fundamental heterogeneity of the answers we received. This was determined not only by the different ways in which the questions proposed for discussion were approached, but also by the research ‘background’ of the authors. Among our authors there were naturally some who approached the problem from the ‘I’ve personally never been faced with this, but if I were...’ perspective. There are those who study xenophobia from inside a library, while others plunge into dangerous and psychologically trying field work with radical racists. There are also those who have not studied this particular problem, but who, in the course of other research, have been obliged to formulate their views as a researcher and a human being on the question of how to react to and study forms of ethnic and religious hostility. This variation in approaches made the forum lively and interesting.

I would like to remind everyone that the problem at the centre of our discussion was that of the interrelationship between academic practice (whether analytical, fieldwork related, or representational) and xenophobia. As such, answers in which, for example, the nature of xenophobia, and not the problem of academics who are confronted with this in their professional activities, was discussed strike a somewhat disharmonious chord in the general tone of the discussion. This of course does not reduce the value of these reflections in themselves. The only disappointment was perhaps that very few of the contributors paid any attention to the content of the concepts of ‘xenophobia’, ‘radical’ nationalism, and so on.

In this regard, Alexander Osipov’s remarks are doubly valuable: ‘Xenophobia’ is not a physical object that can be measured with precise instruments, but rather a conventionally defined and redefined area of practices and ideas lacking any clear boundaries’... For some, chauvinism and xenophobia are just catch-phrases accompanying the creation of a ‘national’ (in the ethnic sense) state system or territorial integrity, while for others these terms signify the refusal of others to accept their own (the dominant group’s) account of history and their demand for ‘historical truth’. It appears to me that this evaluation not only highlights the various forms of xenophobia and nationalism with which we are confronted in our academic and everyday activities, but also focuses our attention on locating these phenomena in the social space.

When speaking about xenophobia and aggressive nationalism, we usually have in mind groups of skinheads assaulting migrants, or marching under the hypothetical banner of ‘this country belongs to us, members of the titular nation’. In other words, xenophobia is usually associated with views and the actions of the ‘minority in the majority’, or those who represent the numerically dominant social

(ethnic) group. But should we really only look for radical nationalism here? In her answers, Jelena Obradovic, 'on the heels of Michael Billig and Stef Jansen, logically disentangles active nationalism of the 'flag flying' sort from its banal quotidian manifestations, to then combine these things and draw the conclusion: 'nationalism is a broad spectrum of discursive practices [...] which encompasses a vast range of social usages for the nation.'

The moral for researchers is even more clearly defined here: we should look for nationalism in everyday life, and among those who do not refer to themselves as nationalists. The opinions expressed by Detelina Tosheva also chime to a large extent with those just quoted above. She distinguishes two types of xenophobia ('the fear of outsiders', the latent form, and 'the hatred of others', the dangerous, active form) and is inclined to argue that the most interesting of these two for anthropologists is the hidden form of this fear, which is determined to a large extent by how reality is understood socially by different people (in this case by ordinary Orthodox believers).

In his responses, Viktor Shnirelman identified yet another locus of xenophobia and nationalism — the academic's study (or more broadly, following the title of Shnirelman's recently published book, the *intellectual's* study).<sup>1</sup> 'For some specialists, their first priority is to uphold ethnic (national) ideas. Some of them sincerely believe that this is in fact their duty to their community or society as a whole. Others deliberately draw up 'Grand Ethno-National Narratives' on the promise of material rewards from those who order them.'

I would suggest that this far from exhausts the possible types and locations of xenophobia. As has been shown, hostility to 'others' can be discerned among the 'majority' (or some members of the majority). But is this never the case for the minority? One might hazard a guess that it can be. But the anthropologist's perception of how legitimate research into (and condemnation of?) this phenomenon may be is fundamentally different, and, I would say, less elevated. Let me quote Shnirelman once more. 'From time immemorial the traditional object for our studies has been ethnic minorities the languages and cultures of whom are in need of protection. As such, the ethics of our science always required us to show consideration to the society being studied or the group and their individual members, and to protect them if and when the need arose. Clearly, these same conditions do not apply to xenophobes and racists. Here the established ethical norms are not appropriate. This presents a challenge to the basic principles of our science and leaves special-

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<sup>1</sup> *Byt alanami: intellektualy i politika na Severnom Kavkaze XX veka* [To Be Alans: Intellectuals and Politics in the Northern Caucasus in the Twentieth Century]. Moscow, 2007. [Editor].

ists with a conundrum; they do not know how to conduct themselves in this new situation.’

The challenge is clearly a serious one. After all, for many anthropologists the need to resist the aggressive majority and preserve one’s own language, culture and so on appears to be the ‘natural’ explanation for the existence of racist ideas and sentiment among minorities. But is that really the only explanation? Should we be looking for other explanations, or in general considering the problem in the knowledge that our actions strengthen the arguments of xenophobes from the ‘majority’ and in some sense shift the responsibility away from them? After all, the ‘new-right xenophobes’ are guilty not only of practising hatred toward others; in spite of this they sneakily present aggressive members of the majority group as the innocent victims of violence on the part of ‘foreigners’.

This last point leads us to the question of the scholar’s moral responsibility in the face of the social problem of xenophobia and the academic problem of its research. Many of the authors who contributed to this forum gave affirmative answers to the question of whether it was worth the academic involving himself in public discussions of this problem.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, some were of the opinion that publicity and an ethical duty to society and science were intimately connected with each other. As Valentin Vydrin writes: ‘Researchers must get involved in public discussions. Otherwise trained professionals leave it up to journalists and politicians to take an intelligent stand on questions of inter-ethnic and inter-confessional relations, and these latter — when locking horns with the respectable xenophobes from the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences — will give viewers the impression that the xenophobes are the only serious academics and that the people challenging them are mere dilettantes. If one to any degree buys into the notion that academia has a responsibility toward society (because, for example, our salaries are paid and grants distributed from taxpayers’ money) — and if in this particular case we could talk about the responsibility of scholars in the humanities for the social well-being of society — then to avoid such a discussion is simply dishonest.’

Viktor Shnirelman takes a similar position on this issue: ‘Scholars themselves should work on popularising academic knowledge and not leave this to dilettantes who more often than not oversimplify scientific achievements and distort the essence of scientific discoveries. Scholars are not at all obliged to enter into polemics with dilet-

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to note in this regard that several of the authors have had negative experiences with the media and consequently are very cautious about such measures. See for example Nona Shahnazarian’s story about the televised duel with an ‘open supporter of fascist ideas’.

tantes, but it should be from those who are competent in their fields and not from ignorant middlemen that society should receive trustworthy information about the state of affairs in academia and about academic appraisals of the processes taking place in society.'

In her response, Hilary Pilkington points out that the anthropologist can no longer escape the public space and consequently should be prepared for their work to be widely known: 'The young skinheads — or at least some of them — with whom we<sup>1</sup> are currently working are themselves media savvy. They post their views and pictures to websites dedicated to the politics and style to which they adhere and they themselves contribute directly to journals and other publications. At the same time, as researchers we are also much more exposed to the media. Even working papers are often made available publicly, making us responsible, at ever earlier stages, for what we write. Moreover we speak through these multiple, rapid and often undesired media channels not only to other academics but to the public at large and, importantly, to our respondents. The dilemma now, therefore, is not whether or not to release information about xenophobic practices and attitudes but how to retain adequate control over what is reported about our research and to present that information adequately, and simultaneously, to very different audiences.'

Stephen Shenfield points out the importance of the question of the researcher's duty to control the way in which research may be employed by others: no matter how hard we try to insure ourselves against misinterpretation, such misinterpretations are always possible: 'You can take great care to make your writing difficult to misuse, but you can't make misuse impossible: if someone is determined to misrepresent you they always can.'

I will permit myself the following commentary on these statements, which all have something in common. Indeed, the anthropologist should not bow out of public discussions or shrink away from expressing his/her opinions in the media. But one still has to bear in mind that courageous statements may 'close off' the field for good and all. However cautiously and deliberately expressed, an opinion on an inter-ethnic conflict is almost certain to offend one or both parties in that conflict. The use of information collected in the field concerning the problems of xenophobia, nationalism, etc. could be understood as a misuse of the trust and hospitality of those who provided that information. Imagine the following situation: you receive

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<sup>1</sup> The fieldwork I refer to here is a series of three six-week periods of ethnographic fieldwork (2003, 2006, 2007) conducted with a group of young people self-identifying as 'skinheads'. The research began in 2002 and involved a team of researchers from 'Region', Ulyanovsk State University (Elena Omelchenko, Albina Garifzyanova, Olga Dobroshtan and Elvira Sharifullina) and the University of Warwick (Hilary Pilkington).

first-hand information from people who themselves entertain intolerant ideas, or, perhaps, ideas of a nationalist persuasion. In this case, conflict cannot be avoided: your interlocutors might discover from your work for the first time that their opinions and actions are being labeled as nationalist and, consequently, demand recompense as soon as the your research is published.<sup>1</sup> After all, the academic bears a moral responsibility not only toward society and academia, but also toward his or her informants.

The sensitive nature of the question of how to combine responsibility towards informants with one's own ethical convictions is clear from those studies which include direct field work with aggressive racists, such as skinheads. The responses of three people who participated in a collective project dealing with informants of this kind appear here: Albina Garifzyanova, Elena Omelchenko, and Hilary Pilkington. Their answers, embellished with descriptions of their feelings and situations, helped the reader understand all the complexities of the struggle between the various moral impulses that exist in the researcher's consciousness. Pilkington expressed the problem with the utmost clarity: 'For some it is a dereliction of that duty not to make known to the police people who report their own involvement in racist crimes. For others it would be an ethical outrage to betray the trust of respondents in this way.' The complexities of the choice involved are intensified by the delicate intellectual and emotional work that has to be done by researchers in order to evolve an effective strategy for dealing with informants whose views they find antipathetic, but with whom they still have to build a constructive relationship. To quote Pilkington again: 'Adopting this researcher position is premised on an understanding of respondents as practising a particular politics rather than being consumed by it and thus that they can accept you even though you do not share their political views. [...] Such a positioning assumes that you approach your respondents not in a single dimension, not as empty bearers of xenophobic ideology, but as rounded individuals whose participation in xenophobic youth cultural groups plays a particular role in their lives.'

Generally speaking, the answers to the question about the difficulties involved in the study of xenophobia, and the preferred strategies that scholars fall back on once on this rocky road are of particular interest. For some, the fact that they belonged to a particular ethnic group helped them to complete their task. This applies in particular, although not exclusively, to those cases in which the researcher belonged to the ethnic group under examination, for example the case of Jelena Obradovic.' For others, however, ethnicity, or more cor-

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<sup>1</sup> Jelena Obradović's response describes this situation in detail.

rectly its markers, became an insurmountable obstacle. Valentin Vydrin underlined this problem with the example of one scholar who decided not to provide an expert opinion assuming that his 'ethnic affiliation' would shape the interpretative vector of the reader and raise doubts about his own objectivity.<sup>1</sup>

These are the fundamental conditions, so to speak, which the anthropologist can not always, or otherwise is not willing to change (it is nevertheless worth bearing in mind here Paul Manning's story of how he invented a religious identity for himself). The answers given by our authors contain several recommendations concerning the right way to behave when working on 'sensitive themes', particularly in the field. Jelena Obradovic, returning to the discussion of the difficulties of ethical order, describes her choice in the following way: 'In terms of ethics, what are the researcher's options? To speak out against offensive comments would lose the trust of the group and potentially access to the field and research data. To comply with the respondents and openly agree would mislead them as to the researcher's agenda, beliefs and values. Remaining quiet and not expressing an opinion either way seems the only option.'

Jovan Byford took a similar stance when conducting his research: 'While being completely open about who I was and (broadly speaking) what I was working on, I kept silent about where I stood on Nikolaj Velimirovic and his legacy until I was *explicitly invited to give my opinion*. Thus, I neither approved nor disapproved of the controversial claims made by the interviewees and I did not confront them when they said things that I found abhorrent [...] Also, I never encouraged them to express extreme views by asking them leading questions or pretending to be in agreement with them when I was not. To my surprise, in over 20 hours of interview material, I was asked about my own views only once, and this not only did not bring the interview to an end, but generated a (for the most part constructive) two-hour polemic.'

This last example seems to me both illustrative and instructive. It is true that we evade discussions with our informants even when the themes of our research are more innocuous than xenophobia, racism, and radical nationalism. This attitude, it seems, is rooted in the very genre of anthropological research. We listen to others in an attempt to understand their world and their 'socially constructed reality'.

At the same time such (admittedly relative) passivity is not always, in my opinion, the best and only strategy. When we talk about radical nationalists and fundamentalists, it is important to remember that

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<sup>1</sup> Jovan Byford came up against an inverted version of this situation when critics deemed his 'ethnicity' to be defined by his 'ideological bias' as a researcher, that is his 'treacherous, foreign, pro-western, anti-orthodox opinions'.

their entire existence is permeated by controversiality and the desire to convince more moderate members of their ethnic or religious group (more often than not fictitious in nature) that ‘the nation is under threat’, ‘the enemy is at the gates’, ‘soon we will disappear altogether’. At the same time, nationalist alarmism has to be reinforced by certain arguments. The inertia of such rhetoric strategies might also, I daresay, infiltrate communication with the researcher who should occasionally play the part of the skeptic or even the opponent of those who preach such extreme ideas. This obviously needs to be done with caution and only in those cases when the informant does not consider you as an enemy with whom it is impossible to communicate.<sup>1</sup>

Paul Manning has a different opinion on the question of ‘resistance’ (and also, it should be noted, other, less sensitive research aims): ‘It seems to me, that in order to be taken seriously as a potential friend, a relevant social other, it’s not sufficient to bend pliantly like a reed to any and all social pressures, you have to provide *resistance* to be experienced as a real social being.’ And further, ‘If I hadn’t engaged in debate, I wouldn’t have found the people who actually agreed with me.’ This last comment seems to me important given that, when conducting field work in the research area of interest to us, it is important for the anthropologist, from a psychological point of view, to have the opportunity to speak with people who share his/her convictions, if only occasionally.

In his response, Sebastian Job connects the theme of psychological well-being with anthropological theory: ‘The upshot is that the etic also plays a *psychological* role. It cannot be something psychically indifferent for the truth-oriented social scientist. Rather, it is the place where you ‘commit’ yourself. It is where, attempting to express truthful judgement, you tacitly see yourself from the perspective of the ideal. And by the same token it is where you *stop* questioning, where you fall, at this limit, into your *own unexamined emics*.’ In other words, at this stage, we should no longer try to understand the thinking our informants who say things that we are unable to accept. But we hold our tongues for the sake of continuing our research. Here we find ourselves in the company of interpreters, external observers, colleagues, and friends, indeed, all those people who make

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<sup>1</sup> See for example the opinion of Mariya Akhmetova: ‘The researcher’s behavioural strategy in this case is determined by the character of the informant he is talking with. In some instances, he might need to provoke a quarrel with the hope of exposing the opinions of the interviewed party more fully. At other times, asking questions and observing how the informant turns on the researcher himself as he attempts to express his opinions would be the right way to go about things, because saying what you thought would immediately provoke opposition: ‘Those Yids have filled your head with rubbish, there’s no talking to you!’ – and a refusal to discuss the matter any further.’ It is not surprising that such extreme fields have been described as ‘battlefields’ in which it is possible to suffer real casualties.

up the academic community and whose invisible presence helps us in difficult situations.

And here is some more good advice for those who intend to embark on difficult fields or who are already working there (here I can only endorse the words of others). As Andreas Umland tells himself and the rest of us: 'In as far as we cannot change these people and, as researchers, are not activists directly engaged in improving society, I believe we have to try to be humorous in dealing with our objects. Otherwise, the situation becomes too frustrating.'

A sense of humour and the capacity for irony and self-irony are not just means of avoiding the psychological problems that frequently arise when working in 'hot spots'. As strange as it may seem, these qualities happen to be a peculiar means of guaranteeing academic objectivity or, more precisely, that efforts are made to achieve this. At first glance, the question of whether the impartiality of the researcher and the study of such sensitive problems as xenophobia and religious intolerance are compatible with each other appears a 'deadly serious' one and seems to require responses demonstrating an appropriate level of gravity. Our authors approached this question from different angles. Many, like Roger Griffin, for example, believe that 'Obviously absolute neutrality/ objectivity on fundamental issues raised by nationalism are impossible academically (and actually undesirable since they imply a de-humanised, God-like, definitive position).'<sup>1</sup> Others claim to aspire to impartiality, albeit as an ideal. As Alexander Panchenko put it, the researcher 'must obviously try to be impartial and even indifferent with regard to the phenomenon under observation'. The epistemological paradox of the discussion is in the fact those very doubts about one's own objectivity and even about the fundamental attainability of this latter actually serve as a sort of guarantee for objectivity (as with Christians who, by recognising their own sins, increase their chances of repentance and salvation). The anthropologist does not just state his or her impartiality, but attempts to dissect it in order to understand how it functions. And here (self-) irony can be of some assistance as one of the most subtle instruments at the researcher's disposal. In actual fact, anthropologists in general, and anthropologists studying xenophobia in particular, consciously embark on a search for the delicate balance between the demand for moral scrupulousness and aspirations of a professional nature, between the choice of one's subject, in which normative discourses have priority, and the reflexes of the expert attempting to rid himself of normative approaches to the reality he is studying. How can we forget in this context Sebastian Job's wonderful

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<sup>1</sup> Yury Shabaev expressed his opinion on this subject even more pithily: 'By taking an impartial position the researcher is, in fact, inciting xenophobia and entering into a silent solidarity with the xenophobes themselves.'

argument about ‘ethnographic schizophrenia’ and not apply this diagnosis to all the activities of anthropologists working on the problem of xenophobia! A staunch defender of political correctness, he is acutely aware of the possibility of turning this latter into an instrument of social stigmatisation and marginalisation. Likewise, with a sorrowful and apologetic smile, the lyrical hero of Sergei Sokolovsky’s text confesses from the very start to doubts and even fear, and then takes a step which demonstrates great intellectual courage. Leaving the discussion of xenophobia in the field, he writes: ‘I unexpectedly discovered that I have a tendency gradually and automatically to condemn ‘propagandists of conflict and hatred’, and to try to discern the conditions permitting them to act in such an ugly way, perhaps to ‘understand’ these ‘scumbags’ (typical intellectual cowardice, or, perhaps, the early, but menacing signs of oncoming incapacity and impotence?).’ The irony here is completely understandable and appropriate. It highlights that aspect of anthropological reflection, which not only encourages the researcher to try to understand something which deserves nothing more than condemnation (ah, that irresistible id e r e ue: ‘to understand is to forgive’), but also forces us to understand and explain the mechanisms of our own understanding and explanations.

As a conclusion to these remarks, I would like to underline that all the authors who contributed to this forum agreed upon the need for participation in public discussions (even if, as Eleonora Shafranskaya sadly noted ‘this changes nothing’), and also on the responsibility scholars must bear for their actions, whether or not these directly or indirectly touch upon the problem of xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. We must try to calculate the impact of our work in advance, and here the position taken by David Raskin in a ‘conflict of interests’ situation can serve as an example. I cite here at length from this author’s article, and hope that the reader finds it apposite.

*Whilst working with materials related to the history of one of the remote regions of the Russian Empire, I came across a document which helped explain the historical premises for a conflict between two native peoples of this region because of the defined territory. In essence, this document exposed the role played by the Russian administration in transferring the given territory from one people to the other (in exchange for the latter’s loyalty to the Empire). According to the ethics of the historian/archivist, a new historical document of this kind should be published or somehow introduced into academic circulation regardless of censure and administrative pressure. As a Russian citizen, however, I was forced to act differently. Under no circumstances will I publish this document, and nor will I facilitate its retrieval, even under the threat of punishment. Maybe I am wrong, but in the present situation it seems that this sort of information would only serve to fan the flames of international conflict. At the same*

*time, as a scholar I have to admit that the revelation of truth is always beneficial to academic ethics, as is its concealment or distortion in contradiction to them.*<sup>1</sup>

I am left only to hope that we all be confronted as infrequently as possible with the need to decide between the fulfillment of professional and civic duties, but, if this does occur, that we react calmly and decisively to it.

As a sort of epilogue, I would like to come back to the scene on a bus in Paris, described by Valentin Vydrin.

*An African woman sitting on two seats of the bus with her young child was accosted by some French woman who started to demand rudely that she vacate one of the seats. It was clear that her irritation was caused in particular by the colour of the young mother's skin. The other passengers on the bus — who were almost exclusively white — were so revolted by all this that they kicked the racist off the bus at the very next stop. I apologise for my pessimism but, in my opinion, at the present moment in time, that bus in Paris is not only out of reach as an ideal for Russia as a whole, but for our entire academic community.*

*For my part, I worry that I may seem a hopeless optimist, but it appears to me that in Russian academia, although perhaps not everywhere in this, the situation is changing for the better. And this Forum provides excellent evidence of the process.*

*We offer our warm thanks to everyone who took part in this discussion.*

*Sergei Shtyrkov*

*Translated by Victoria Donovan*

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<sup>1</sup> Elena Berezovich writes about a similar situation. She was approached by a well-known Moscow publishing house with a proposal to compile a dictionary of ethnonyms in the Russian linguistic tradition. This proposal, which was tempting in more ways than one, caused Berezovich to do some careful thinking. 'I was proposing to provide the mass (of course, the mass character of anything is relative, but even so!) reading public with a book, whose pages were filled with dangerously high concentrations of 'Tatar mugs', 'Jewish fevers', 'German cockroaches' and other vermin. This troubled me. I remembered the reaction of several of my friends after reading a well-known and valuable collection of Little Russian sayings by M. Nomis (this collection, which was first published in 1864, was republished in Ukraine in 1993); they said that being confronted with a whole series of formulas in the vein of 'one Jew killed – forty sins redeemed' had seriously depressed them. Of course, reading this sort of thing does not depress everyone; some people react to these texts with exasperation, others with sympathy etc. It is clear that when publishing 'xenophobic' materials, one needs to think about the preparedness of one's audience. A monograph intended for a specialist audience is one thing. A dictionary intended for 'general use' is quite another, especially one in which the material is not diluted by other words, but rather collected together on a 'thematic' basis. There is no doubt that readers exist who would read this book from an ideological perspective, taking the folk wisdom as justification for their xenophobic aggression. I am still to make a decision about the publication of the dictionary, but an evaluation of the reading audience has become the basis for any decision I might make.'