ABSTRACTS

Apricot Socialism: The National Past, the Soviet Project, and the Meaning of Solidarity in Late Soviet Armenia

MAIKE LEHMANN

In April 1965, an illegal demonstration brought an estimated twenty thousand people to the streets of Yerevan to call for the official recognition of the Armenian genocide of 1915 and the return of "Armenian lands." While this event is traditionally seen as "dissident" and "anti-Soviet," in this article I draw attention to the demonstration's particularly Soviet character, as it followed rules and practices central to Soviet rituals and the official revolutionary narrative. Party officials and petitioners expressed similar views on past national suffering and its implications for the Soviet community and the communist future, all of which were in turn to be affirmed by the construction of the first genocide memorial ever built on Soviet soil. These local reinterpretations of the Soviet project do not just point to developments that help explain the Soviet system's longevity. They are also a reminder that the constant reimagining of communities not only pertains to the "nation" but also concerns and often intermingles with the reimagination of other communities, such as the Soviet one.

The Fire Burns On? The "Fiery Revolutionaries" Biographical Series and the Rethinking of Propaganda in the Brezhnev Era

POLLY JONES

In this article, I analyze the production of late Soviet propaganda, highlighting the shifts toward greater literary sophistication and the reinvention of revolutionary biography, instituted in order to re-enthuse the population about revolutionary ideals. In the Khrushchev and early Brezhnev eras, the State Political Publishing House (Politizdat) grappled with a profound crisis of political persuasion and came to realize that collaboration and compromise with literary writers constituted the only solution. The key outcome of this debate over mass political literature was the innovative and unpredictable "Fiery Revolutionaries" series of biographies, published from 1968 to the end of the Soviet Union. Arguing against the view of the Brezhnev era as a time of political language's standardization, and complicating the binary opposition between Soviet and dissident writers, I argue that it was the sophisticated and nuanced debates and editorial practices within this "niche" in the post-Stalinist propaganda state that ultimately enabled many of the period's most talented (and sometimes notorious) writers to contribute sophisticated biographies to the series later in its history.

"We Have No Need to Lock Ourselves Away": Space, Marginality, and the Negotiation of Deaf Identity in Late Soviet Moscow

CLAIRE SHAW

In the late 1950s, the Moscow branch of the All-Russian Society of the Deaf embarked on an ambitious program to build a network of social and residen-

tial buildings for deaf people in the city. In this article, I examine the resulting emergence of a defined "deaf space" within the Moscow cityscape, exploring the ways in which this space shaped, and was shaped by, the Soviet deaf community. While such institutional buildings were intended as the ultimate expression of deaf agency, drawing on revolutionary understandings of disability to define the deaf as active Soviet citizens, they also served to frame the deaf as visibly "other," inviting contradictory and often problematic readings of the deaf community's place within the Soviet body politic. By examining deaf people's engagement with the developing politics of Soviet urban space, I thus explore issues of disability, Sovietness, and the complex intersection of marginality and emancipation in the late Soviet era.

The Social Scientist Meets the "Believer": Discussions of God, the Afterlife, and Communism in the Mid-1960s

MIRIAM DOBSON

In this article, I use the transcripts of interviews carried out under the auspices of the Institute of Scientific Atheism in the mid-sixties. Informants were asked about diverse aspects of their religious practice and belief, allowing scholars—both then and now—to consider the nature of Soviet "secularization." Following Charles Taylor, I suggest that this was not simply "a story of loss, of subtraction"; instead, informants' rather heterodox conceptions of the afterlife indicate moments of individual creativity. In particular, I find that among the poor and marginalized, visions of the afterlife sometimes articulated a desire for social equality considered missing from Soviet society. I also probe the Soviet state's problematic dependency on atheism. The regime's legitimacy rested on its claim to ensure progress and modernity, and religion—the epitome of backwardness—was a useful antithesis. The interview was a ritual that enacted the superiority of Soviet values (reason, rationality, and enlightenment). And yet the encounter between atheist-interviewer and "believer" could often prove unpredictable, suggesting that the religion-atheism binary was in practice rather more brittle than the authorities might have hoped.

Political Fallout: The Failure of Emergency Management at Chernobyl′

EDWARD GEIST

Ever since the accident that destroyed unit 4 of the Chernobyl′ Nuclear Power Plant on April 26, 1986, became public knowledge, the Soviet government's response to this catastrophe has been the subject of bewilderment and withering criticism. The exact sequence of events that unfolded in the days following the disaster and the forces that shaped it have, however, remained obscure. While the USSR's civil defense organization urged prompt and decisive measures to inform the population of the accident and move people out of harm's way, other Soviet institutions, such as the Communist Party and the KGB, feared the accident's threat to their legitimacy more than its implications for public health. Drawing on declassified archival documents from Ukrainian

archives and memoir literature, I explore the political and institutional logic that prevented the USSR from acting appropriately to protect citizens from the consequences of the nuclear accident.

The Local History of an Imperial Category: Language and Religion in Russia's Eastern Borderlands, 1860s–1930s

KATHRYN E. GRABER and JESSE D. MURRAY

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed the construction and naturalization of many unitary ethnolinguistic categories that would serve diverse ends within the Russian and Soviet states. This article combines disciplinary perspectives from linguistic anthropology and history to excavate the local history of one such category—the Buriat language. We trace the category's origin in the grammars, translations, and correspondence of its first Russian proponents, Russian Orthodox missionary linguists working in the area around Lake Baikal, and its subsequent uptake by Buriat nationalists and Soviet linguists. We show that the missionaries and their religious motivations played a significant role in the construction of ethnolinguistic categories and that these ethnolinguistic categories were not, as is often thought, predominantly imposed by the center onto distant peripheries. Attending to Orthodox missionaries' linguistic work in the Baikal region reveals the more complex local workings of colonial power.