

is only one example of how the book puts Lithuanian Soviet history in a transnational perspective, comparing Lithuanian developments to those of other Soviet republics and states of the Communist bloc. At this point, however, the author fails to acknowledge some important literature such as, for instance, Alexei Yurchak's famous book *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*. It seems to this reviewer that by employing Yurchak's perspective in the introductory part of the book, Davoliūtė's study could have gained from the more sophisticated discussion about agency/structure as the modes of approaching the Soviet history. This omission, however, does not undermine the high quality of Davoliūtė's book and its significant importance for the understanding of the history of Lithuania (and that of other Soviet republics) during the Soviet period.

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Olga Malinova, *Aktual'noe proshloe: Simvolicheskaiia politika vlastvuiushchei elity i dilemmy rossiiskoi identichnosti*. Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2015. 207 pp.

Our lives are largely dependent upon what we tend to forget and what we still remember. Images and symbols alluding to different events in the present and past also play significant roles in the social construction of people's identities. This new book by the prominent Russian scholar Olga Malinova deals with how Russia's ruling elites used its national past in the changing ideological contexts from the rule of Boris Yeltsin up to the second presidency of Vladimir Putin (1991–2014). Olga Malinova is currently a chief research fellow of the Institute of Scientific Information for Social Sciences (Russian Academy of Sciences), professor at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, and professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics. She is also a former (2008–2010) president of the Russian Political Science Association and a re-

nowned Russian expert in the field of identities, the politics of representation, and political discourse analysis, as well as the editor-in-chief of the journal *Symbolic Politics*. Her previous books include *Russia and “the West” in the Twentieth Century: Transformation of Discourse about Collective Identity* (Moscow: 2009); *Ideas and Symbolic Space of Post-Soviet Russia: Dynamics, Institutional Environment, Actors* (ed. by Olga Malinova, Moscow: 2011); and *The Construction of Meanings: the Study of Symbolic Politics in Modern Russia* (Moscow: 2013).

The title of her new book, *The Actual Past: Symbolic Politics of the Ruling Elite and Dilemmas of Russian Identity*, speaks for itself. The word “actual” (*aktual’noe*, which can mean both “actual” and “current” or “topical”) stands here for the highly topical historical narratives currently in use by Russian ruling elites to legitimize their political power. The issues of the past discussed here include the post-Soviet revisions of the historical symbols of “the Great October Revolution” and “the Great Patriotic War” (World War II). Using narrative analysis Olga Malinova deconstructs successive presidents’ annual speeches to the Russian parliament from 1994 until 2012 as well as the repertoire of commemorative speeches by presidents Vladimir Putin and Dmitrii Medvedev from 2000 until 2014. Based on the results of her research Olga Malinova divides the post-Soviet symbolic politics of the Russian state into four periods. The first period lasts from the early to mid-1990s (approximately until Yeltsin’s re-election as president in 1996). This period largely continued the critical stand on the USSR and its totalitarian regimes that had started during perestroika. In a situation of sharp opposition between Boris Yeltsin and Russian parliament (1993) the Russian president refused to undertake any systematic attempts to create a new “infrastructure of memory”. The latter was required to successfully inscribe a new narrative of the post-Soviet transition from communism towards Western ideals of liberal democracy into the collective memory of the Russian nation.

The second period marked by Olga Malinova lasted approximately from 1996 until Putin’s rise to power. Instead of a total rejection of the Soviet past Boris Yeltsin turned towards seeking “recon-

ciliation and national accord". This was when the November 7th holiday of the Great Russian Revolution was replaced with the Day of Reconciliation and Accord. In 1998 the remains of the Russian tsarist family (assassinated in 1918) were reburied in St. Petersburg with Yeltsin inviting the descendants of the Romanov family to come and witness Russia's attempted reconciliation with its own past. Soon annual Moscow military parades dedicated to the anniversaries of the "Great Patriotic War" returned to Red Square. However that did not help Yeltsin to resolve the conflict between the present and past inside the country as he struggle to push through "democratic reforms" that were often unpopular with the Russian people (and in particular among nationalistic circles).

Olga Malinova assigns the beginning of the third period of Russian symbolic politics to Vladimir Putin's rise to power in 2000. The emphasis on continuity between the heritage and achievements of the Russian Empire and the USSR enabled the new Russian president to incorporate into the construction of Russian identity new symbols and episodes of collective memory coinciding with the promotion of the idea of Russian identity as based on belonging to a "derzhava" (or "great power"). The Russian word "derzhava" can be interpreted either as a state, an empire, or even a mighty and advanced civilization. In taking this course, the Putin government announced the state as the key institution binding together the Russian macropolitical community. The notion of belonging to a mighty "derzhava" also sought a significant level of civilizational sovereignty which resulted in the concept of Russian "sovereign democracy", particularly popular in 2006-2007. However during Putin's first term and later Medvedev's presidency concepts like sovereign democracy proved too eclectic and therefore had little potential to solidify a Russian sense of national belonging.

According to Malinova the fourth and final period of symbolic politics started around 2011-2012. The December 2011 street protests pushed Russian political elites (particularly in the lead-up to the spring 2012 presidential elections) to construct more consistent narratives on Russian identity. An example is Vladimir Putin's article "Russia: The National Question" published on 23 January 2012 and subtitled "Self-Determination of the Russian People: A Multi-ethnic

Civilization Sealed with a Russian Core”. At the same time the promotion of a more uniform version of identity politics coincided with attempts by ruling elites to control public debates over the past through quasi-think tanks and by means of memorial acts like the 2014 law on criminal responsibility for public dissemination of false information on the activities of the Soviet Union in World War II.

Taken as a whole, Olga Malinova’s book contains pretty much everything an inquisitive reader or researcher in Russian area studies would want to know on this subject. The book features a thorough review of literature in the chosen field, an accurate and mindful use of a scientific method, sharp analysis of the practices of political power in contemporary Russia, and elaborate research on the discursive construction of national identity in Russia’s public sphere. Perhaps one thing is missing—there is no analysis of the most recent events of 2014 like the Olympic Winter Games in Sochi and the crisis in Ukraine. Feasibly these are topics for Olga Malinova to address in her next book.

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