Mythologizing Modernity Through Vernacular Discourses

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Political communication is often depicted as an exchange of rational arguments between rational individuals. However, in political communication people not only communicate emotionally but also rely on nonrational understandings drawn from mythical representations of various symbols and images. The problem becomes especially acute in the realm of global communication as nations permanently appropriate the political ideas of modernity. This study investigates how a local newspaper in the USSR during perestroika interpreted the concepts of "democracy" and "market"—two essential components of the discourse of capitalistic modernity. Following Roland Barthes' method of deconstructing mythologies, this study shows how the newspaper's interpretations led to a mythologizing of modernity's basic concepts.

Political communication is often depicted as an exchange of rational arguments between rational individuals. Such an image implies that participants are not only able but also willing to interact in a rational manner (Habermas, 1996). However, quite a different picture confronts observers of the everyday activities undertaken in the name of "politics." People involved in political communication not only communicate emotionally (Mouffe, 1999) but also rely on nonrational understandings drawn from mythical representations of various symbols and images (Barthes, 1972).

The difference between depiction and reality becomes especially acute in the realm of global communication as nations permanently appropriate the political ideas of modernity. As Dipesh Chakrabarty (2008) puts it, "An abstract and universal idea characteristic of political modernity elsewhere—the idea of equality, say, or democracy or even of the dignity of the human being—could look utterly different in different historical contexts" (p. xii). Because no human society is a tabula rasa, local communities adopt ostensibly universal concepts of modernity only after filtering them through a sieve of preexisting beliefs and cultural predispositions. The appropriation of Western modernity by non-Western societies is therefore not just a problem of historical transition—it is a problem of translation or interpretation (Eisenstadt, 2000).

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This study investigates how a local newspaper in the USSR during Gorbachev's reforms interpreted the concepts of *democracy* and *market*—two essential components of capitalistic modernity's discourse. Following Roland Barthes' method of deconstructing mythologies, this study shows how the newspaper's interpretations led to a mythologizing of modernity's basic concepts.

The article begins with a review of the literature on multiple modernities and cultural globalization, followed by an explanation of Barthes' method of deconstructing mythologies. After a brief description of the USSR's numerous historical attempts at modernization, I present the case study of a local Ukrainian newspaper's effort to appropriate the ideas of Western modernity within the context of Gorbachev's modernizing reforms. This study shows that the newspaper's contributors constructed the myths of democracy and market by depriving these concepts of their original meanings and filling their purified conceptual forms with new significations that drew from local sociocultural contexts. The study also shows how these mythological constructions ultimately led to disillusionment among the newspaper's contributors and animosity toward the Western idea of modernity.

Cultural Globalization and the Multiplicity of Modernity Projects

Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt (2000) argues that the best way to understand the contemporary world and explain the history of modernity is to see modernity as a continual constitution and reconstitution of multiple cultural programs. "One of the most important implications of the term 'multiple modernities,'" he claims, "is that modernity and Westernization are not identical. Western patterns of modernity are not the only 'authentic' modernities, though they enjoy historical precedence and continue to be a basic reference point for others" (Eisenstadt, 2000, p. 2). According to Eisenstadt, non-Western societies selectively choose and continuously reformulate the ideas of modernity they try to appropriate from the West. As a result, new cultural and political programs emerge with novel ideologies and institutional patterns.

Other scholars also believe that multiple modernities that are not coextensive with Western political models emerge as a result of interpreting and reformulating Western ideas with local social, economic, political, or cultural nuances. Homi Bhabha (1994) points to the role of local intellectuals in India's appropriations of modernity. He claims that local elites, by representing the local in terms of blood and color and the colonizer in terms of tastes, morals, and opinions, implemented the colonial strategy of mimicry—the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other as a subject of a difference that is "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86). Sudipta Kaviraj (2000) gives another example of India's alternative modernization, stating that because the British idea of sovereignty fundamentally differed from the traditional governing of Indian social life, colonial authorities followed the British example only in some respects, while developing others according to a different logic.

As research on other cultural sites similarly observes, the translations, interpretations, and reformulations that take place within national public spheres are crucial for appropriating and reformulating modernity's propositions. Telling the story of Latin America's modernization, Renato Ortiz (2000) argues that local intellectuals critically evaluated the ideas of European modernity, discussing and reinterpreting them in accordance with local cultural and political realities. As a result, he claims, an authentic version of Latin American modernity took shape. Jiirgen Heideking (2000), presenting a case

study of North America's transition to independence, stresses the importance of "a vigorous public sphere where the clash or 'collusion' of different opinions could strike out 'sparks of truth'" (p. 231). Sean Phelan (2007) shows how the neoliberal version of modernity in Ireland has been constituted through media representations of political leaders' speeches. Shiraev and Zubok (2001) also point to the decisive role of intellectuals' and media's interpretations of liberalism in Russia's transition to a market economy.

Numerous sociological observations on the emergence of different modernity projects are in line with global communication studies that find local cultures capable of critically evaluating hegemonic programs of modernity. For example, Arjun Appadurai (1996) suggests that globalization expands possibilities for not only the adoption of global capitalism, as David Harvey (1990) claims, but also resistance against it. "Images of the media are quickly moved into local repertoires of irony, anger, humor, and resistance," Appadurai (1996, p. 17) writes. Situating the possibility of local resistance within the sphere of the social imaginary, Appadurai conceptualizes it as "neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined" (p. 4). Rather, it is a "space of contestation," (Appadurai, 1996, p. 4) where the global is appropriated to become the local through translation, interpretation, and adaptation.

John Tomlinson (1999) also stresses the importance of the "hermeneutic appropriation" of global symbolic forms within local cultural contexts, viewing globalization as a complex network of interdependencies that characterize modern social life. Together with the interpretive potential of local cultures, this interconnectivity allows communication researchers to speak of the possibility of *hybridization*, indigenization, and creolization of cultural patterns and modernity projects (Cohen, 2007; Kwok-Bun & Peverelli, 2010; Pieterse, 2001). According to the hybridization outlook of global communication studies, which is coextensive with the multiple-modernity sociological perspective, non-Western countries do not passively consume cultural and ideological products of the West delivered to them through media: they always "bring their own cultural resources and 'horizons of expectations' to bear in a fully dialectical and often unexpected way upon the imported goods and images of cultural capitalism" (Archer, Bosman, Amen, & Schmidt , 2007, pp. 5–6).

Modernities in the contemporary world are disseminated and interpreted through global communication networks, which incorporate both global and local media resources (Couldry, Hepp, & Krotz, 2010). The border between the global and the local thus constitutes a potential site of translation, interpretation, resistance, and intervention. Here, there emerges the possibility of "vernacular modernities," which are typically conceptualized as a "critical appropriation of Western modernity reproduced in indigenous forms" (Neyazi, 2010, p. 908).

This hybridization outlook often fails to acknowledge that the mixture of local and foreign cultural elements can be socially explosive: where Western scholars or local westernized intellectuals see the triumph of "alternative modernities," local populations may discern only the failure of their hopes for the improvement of living conditions (Ferguson, 1999). This indicates a need for a more nuanced analysis of "where and under what conditions cultural hybridity, translation, inflection, deflection, and so on, is inherently destabilizing and disruptive of the cultural powers of the nation state and neo-liberal capitalism" (Archer et al., 2007, p. 8). In other words, it is not enough to simply map different combinations of modernity elements within various cultural, social, and political environments. To grasp the social meaning

of those configurations, one has to situate cultural analysis within the web of power relations and answer some crucial questions: Who are the winners and the losers of the emergent reality of hybrid, vernacular, or alternative modernities? Whose interests do new modernity projects represent? Who sets the rules of the new power games and who is excluded? The answers to these questions need to account for elite or intellectual discourses, as many scholars on multiple modernities seem to do (Wittrock, 2000), but also for lay discourses of nonelite and nonintellectual publics who are often excluded from both their domestic public spheres and scholarly research on those spheres.

The lack of attention to nonelite and nonintellectual vernacular discourses within national public spheres can be explained by the fact that social scientists often define the vernacular along national lines, seeing the nation as a coherent whole. This perspective often obscures the different social groups' unequal access to media resources, the different class interests of national "interpreters" and their mass audiences, and other important factors in the power dynamics inside national borders (Fraser, 1990; Krishnaswamy, 2002; Toor, 2000; Winant, 2005). Hauser and McClellan (2009) see a similar trend in rhetorical studies of social movements. "In the communication tradition of rhetoric," they claim, "studies of social movements mostly have focused on the discourse of leaders, on single events, or on movement strategies" (p. 25). Such exclusive attention to leaders or intellectuals is problematic, they maintain, as it leads to a "skewed picture of the public sphere by defining it in terms of privileged voices" (p. 25) and also fails to illuminate the formation of genuinely *vernacular* meanings and their dialectical interaction with meanings presented through official or elite discourses.

This study attempts to break with the traditional equation of the vernacular with the national by focusing on how the readers of *Vecherniy Kharkov*—a city newspaper of Soviet Ukraine—tried to make sense of what was going on in their country, the USSR, during its last years of existence. In other words, it investigates how the common citizens of the declining Soviet Union at a local, nonmetropolitan level understood ideas of modernity—democracy and market—that were actively discussed first by dissident intellectuals and later by broader circles of society during perestroika.

From Soviet Modernity to Liberalism

Many currently believe that the Soviet project was not the countermodernity enterprise it was held to be during the Cold War, but one of multiple modernities—one version of the Western modernity project. From this perspective, the Bolshevik revolution appears not as a unique and radical rupture in the historical current, but as merely another link in a long chain of attempts to modernize Russia, originating with Peter the Great's reforms in the second part of the 17th century (Ivakhnenko, 2006). Following this line, Johann Arnason (2000) sees the Bolshevik project as a mixture of Marxist ideas and borrowings from Russian traditions that combined a critique of the established patterns of Western modernity with "an imaginary projection of their potential beyond present limits" (p. 70). Jennifer Turpin (1995) also addresses the fact that Bolsheviks rejected a capitalist economy but supported the idea of technological and scientific progress, reformulating other concepts associated with Western modernity—freedom of human agency, democracy, political participation—in terms of traditional Russian values and norms.

The Bolsheviks' attitude toward the United States clearly illustrates their selectivity regarding different elements of Western modernity's project. Despite their contempt for capitalism, many Soviet leaders admired the United States for its industrial scale and scientific development. In the sense of technological modernization, the United States became a model of modernity for many leading Communists:

> The reference to America in Stalin's 1924 definition of Leninism (a combination of "Russian Revolutionary Sweep" and "American Efficiency") was typical of post-revolutionary Bolshevik culture: the symptoms range from Lenin's enthusiastic acceptance of Taylorism to less significant speculations about the new man as a "Russian American." (Arnason, 1993, p. 118)

As Beilharz (2009) explains, Soviet enthusiasm for America was an example of mass modernism: "All the motifs were there—speed, efficiency, the machine: locomotion, automation and automobile, progress and more progress, giganticism, growth at Americanski tempo. From aesthetics to everyday life, Fordizatsia—Fordization—saturated Soviet social life from the 1920s" (p. xii). Bukharin called for Marxism plus Americanism; Trotsky demanded Bolshevism in the form of Soviet shoes with American nails; Lenin promised Soviet power plus American technology, American-like organization of trusts, American public education, and American tractors. "Vladimir Mayakovsky loved the Brooklyn Bridge, and almost everybody admired Henry Ford . . . Stalin was happy to acknowledge that fully two-thirds of the nation's large industrial establishments had been built with American assistance" (Beilharz, 2009, p. xii). This Bolshevik admiration for the United States—the leader of the Western world—looked only natural against the long history of Russian elites' admiration for the West and vision of their country as "backward" and "lagging" in comparison (Ivakhnenko, 2007, p. 599).

After World War II (termed the Great Patriotic War in Russian historiography), Stalin, realizing that the United States had become the USSR's main competitor, aimed Soviet propaganda at "Uncle Sam" (Shiraev & Zubok, 2001, p. 11). However, because of the ambivalence of Soviet attitudes toward Western modernity—from admiring its technological progress to condemning its exploitative economics—the image Soviet people had of the United States and the West remained inconsistent and conflicting. Nikita Khrushchev, known for his friendship with U.S. millionaire Roswell Garst, his famous denunciations of capitalism, and his public acknowledgment that the USSR was far behind the United States in terms of economic development, aptly personified Soviet society's contradictory attitudes to the Western world.

Khrushchev's Thaw, which released political prisoners and raised the Iron Curtain so that Soviet citizens could travel abroad, allowed many to see the positive sides of Western modernity not only in terms of technological or scientific progress but also as happy consumerism. Starting in the 1960s, Western commodities flooded the Soviet black market:

> The spread of American material and cultural symbols—like blue jeans, cigarettes, and jazz and rock music—was a healthy reaction to the monotony, uniformity, poverty, and duplicity of Soviet life. Music and clothing styles, idolization of cult stars, and beatnik-

like behavior became the core elements of this counter culture. (Shiraev & Zubok, 2001, p. 19)

Khrushchev's slogan "Catch up and overtake America" illustrates the Russian elites' centuries-old striving for westernization. However, the historic peculiarity of this catchphrase lies in its initiation of a tradition of imagining Soviet modernity not in terms of social justice, as Bolsheviks always tried to present it, but in terms of consumer happiness—a frame more pertinent to a Western consumer society than to a Communist ideological state (Ahmad, 1992).

In the late 1980s, when the official Communist ideology was jettisoned at the highest level of *nomenklatura*, mass striving for jeans, cigarettes, and other commodified symbols of Western happy consumerism helped American liberal ideas to captivate popular Soviet imagination. Through media, liberated from censorship by glasnost, pro-liberal Soviet elites were free to present laissez-faire policy as a totally self-regulating force able to fill shop shelves with consumer goods and give people access to the achievements of "real" modernity and civilization (Åslund, 2007; Krausz, 2007; Ryvkina, 2007; Shlapentokh, 1993).

In stressing the efficiency of the free-market economic system, Soviet pro-liberal intellectuals failed to inform their mass audiences that the transition to a market economy would not only end the Soviet welfare system but also bring social stratification—something many Soviet people did not want because of the anti-capitalist mentality that persisted in the declining USSR (Aage, 1991). As Dorn (1991) put it, "After living off the state for their entire lives, most people in the CIS have become conditioned to socialism and fear the risks of capitalism" (p. 188). To push their liberalizing reforms, advocates of market transformations could only extol the advantages of liberalization and obscure its undesired consequences. Framing the situation in terms of cultural hybridization, we may thus state that when introducing Western liberal ideas to the Soviet public sphere, Soviet pro-liberal intellectuals took account of the pro-Socialist sentiments of Soviet people.

By uncritically supporting the agenda of liberalization, new liberal media contributed significantly to the deplorable results of Gorbachev's perestroika. They are well known. Via a privatization of state property conducted with no transparency, little control, and unreliable accounting, "all valuable assets in Russia were sold for ridiculous prices for whoever [sic] had the money and the power to control the transaction" (Castells, 2000, p. 188). The "whoever" were party *nomenklatura*, red directors, and organized crime. Those transformations resulted in Russia's transformation, from an industrial giant that outpaced the West in economic growth and was able to achieve strategic military parity with the United States and launch Sputnik, into a natural resource exporter (Castells, 2000c). In the period from 1990 to 1998, "the loss in GDP was greater than Russia had suffered in World War II" (Stiglitz, 2003, p. 143). In 1989, only 2% of those living in Russia were in poverty. "By late 1998, that number had soared to 23.8 percent" (Stiglitz, 2003, p. 6).

Ukraine and the Late Soviet Transformations

As numerous observers agree, Ukraine's independence was in part a reaction to the economic decline unleashed by Gorbachev's reforms (Dykzok, 2000). Many Ukrainians supported the idea of political divorce from Russia "because of the expectation that Ukraine would be better off economically" (Bukkvol, 1997, p. 26). This economic hope was not realized, however. In many ways, the collapse of the Soviet Union radically changed people's lives for the worse:

> *The Financial Times* commented in 1992 that post-communism is dangerous to your health, citing an increase in mortality rates throughout the region after 1989. Like others, Ukraine has experienced an increase in mortality rates and decrease in life expectancy. Between 1989 and 1994 mortality rates rose by 25% and life expectancy dropped by 3 years. (Dyczok, 2000, p. 90)

Between 1989 and 1996, the population of Ukraine fell from 52.057 million to 50.9 million. The birthrate, which had been declining for years, became negative and was registered at -0.61 for 1996 (Dyczok, 2000, p. 84).

The negative tendencies in the development of human capital were a reaction to the destruction of the welfare system of the Soviet state, which had ensured a basic living standard for most people: "Health care and education were provided free to all citizens, employment was guaranteed, housing, utilities, food and transport were heavily subsidized" (Dyczok, 2000, p. 37). In many ways, the system of these social services was structured around the workplace: industrial enterprises provided their workers with housing, health care, and recreation facilities. With economic liberalization came annihilation of the job security system, which contributed significantly to the steep decline in the quality of people's lives: "Job security has disappeared and many state sector employees do not receive wages for months at a time" (Dyczok, 2000, p. 89). Many Ukrainians found the liberalization of their lives to be psychologically overwhelming: Instead of an improved system of social justice, which Gorbachev had promised at the beginning of his reforms, people received a system of new inequalities created by the market.

This study focuses on one industrial region of Ukraine—Sloboda Ukraine—and its center, Kharkiv , a borderline city where the prevailing identities are not ethnic Ukrainian but "multiple" or "hybrid" (Rodgers, 2006, p. 682). This peculiarity of Kharkiv has its historical explanation: The settlements of Sloboda Ukraine were founded in the mid-17th century by Ukrainian migrants from central Ukraine and Russian settlers. The capital of Soviet Ukraine from 1919 until 1934, Kharkiv was a major cultural, intellectual, and transport center of the USSR. It also became a major center of the military-industrial complex, a model modern city of Soviet Ukraine. When the Soviet Union collapsed, many Kharkiv industrial enterprises came to a standstill, and tens of thousands of people found themselves jobless. In this sense, the case of Kharkiv exemplifies the general situation of economic decline associated with Gorbachev's reforms.

Deconstructing Mythologies

This article analyzes the content of *Vecherniy Kharkov*—a city newspaper of Kharkiv —from the beginning of 1989 to the end of 1991, the most crucial period of perestroika and a time of heated debates on the country's future within the Soviet public sphere. These debates often revolved around vital historical events such as the last elections of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (May 25, 1989) or the first free elections of the Supreme Parliament of Ukraine (March 13, 1990). This process of imagining modernity culminated in the parade of sovereignties of the Soviet republics and the demise of the USSR, which was officially recognized in the Belavezha Accords signed on December 8, 1991.

The study analyzes letters to the editor of *Vecherniy Kharkov* and opinion pieces discussing Glasnost's democratic and market transformations, published within the indicated time period. By selecting commentaries over hard news, this research conceptualizes *Vecherniy Kharkov* not as a "vendor of news" but as a "dealer of public opinion" (Habermas, 1974, p. 53). This conceptualization reflects an important change in the relationship between media and politics. The essence of this change is that "the media have gradually moved from the role of reporting *on and about* politics, 'from the outside' as it were, to that of being an *active participant* in" (Blumer & Gurevich, 1995, p. 3). In other words, this study considers *Vecherniy Kharkov* as a peripheral part of the Soviet public sphere (Dyczok, 2009) in which ideas presented at the national level were discussed and reinterpreted.

The *qualitative discourse analysis* of the newspaper's content follows Barthes' method of deconstructing mythologies. Barthes argued that a myth is a peculiar, second-order semiological system constructed from a preexisting semiological chain. He claims that in myth, a signifier can be analyzed from two points of view—as the final term of the linguistic system (which he calls *meaning*), or as the first term of the mythical system (which he calls *form*). The correlation of concept and meaning in myth is what Barthes (1972) calls *signification* (p. 117).

According to Barthes, the meaning of the myth as a sum of linguistic signs has its own value as a part of history: It bears former knowledge, memory of a particular order of things. This history evaporates, however, as soon as meaning becomes form. The form impoverishes meaning, putting its history at a distance but not totally destroying it: "The meaning is always there to present the form; the form is always there to outdistance the meaning. And there never is any contradiction, conflict, or split between the meaning and the form: they are never at the same place" (Barthes, 1972, p. 123).

Because myth is a historical formation, Barthes also allows for diachronic study of myths, "whether one submits them to a retrospection (which means founding an historical mythology) or whether one follows some of yesterday's myths down to their present forms" (1972, p. 137). He argues as well that myth possesses its own geography, which allows drawing "what linguists would call the isoglosses of a myth, the lines which limit the social region where it is spoken. If this region is shifting, it would be better to speak of the waves of implantation of the myth" (p. 150).

Since the concepts of market and democracy—two important components of Western modernity—were foreign to the culture of the former USSR, following Barthes' logic they should have

inevitably acquired mythological features when implanted in the USSR. What kind of features? What were the mythical meanings that the readers of *Vecherniy Kharkov* attached to the concepts of market and democracy? How did these new mythical meanings match or mismatch the reality of late Soviet transformations? Finally, how did discrepancies between the imagined significations of democracy and market and the reality of post-Soviet transformations influence people's attitudes toward reform? These are the research questions this article tries to investigate.

As I mentioned above, this study is qualitative and interpretive in nature. It does not analyze a representative sample or statistical generalization, so its results cannot represent an aggregated public opinion of the USSR, or Ukraine, or even Kharkiv . Instead of random sampling, I used a *cyclical process* (Mautner, 2008), in which the analyst starts by selecting a small corpus of articles, analyzes them, and further selects articles. This method allowed my analysis to include more and more articles until the point of "saturation" was reached—that is, when it became evident that new data no longer brought new visions. In terms of statistical generalization, this method looks limited. However, in terms of cultural analysis, which deals with cultural systems that cannot be experimentally closed (Bhaskar, 1998), this method is very rewarding. It allows us to trace the formation of meanings that cannot be measured but only understood (Geertz, 2000).

Democracy and Market in *Vecherniy Kharkov*

Speeches by candidates for the Supreme Soviet published in *Vecherniy Kharkov* before the elections of 1989 demonstrate the extent to which the meaning of democratic elections was unclear to many people of the late USSR. "I haven't developed an agenda yet because I did not expect people would show such high level of trust," one of the Parliamentary candidates confessed (Kuranova, 1989, p. 1). "If I am trusted to be a deputy, I will work out my program with you," promised another (Khripacheva, 1989, p. 1). "Dmitro Henrihovich does not offer any program yet—he is just not ready for it," an in-house observer commented on the preelection "program" of a deputy candidate (Editorial: "Whom to Choose?", 1989, p. 1). These statements reveal that parliamentary candidates to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR shared a very vague understanding that a democratic electoral process should be about the clash of different positions; however, they had difficulty making sense of what exactly those positions should look like. At that point, to put it in Barthes' terms, the concept of democracy seemed to them to be a pure form—a form that had already lost its historical meanings and needed to be filled with new significations.

Because of their vague understanding of the meaning of democracy, the candidates filled their speeches with mundane promises that they and their electorate understood clearly. "I want at the state level to solve the problem of sending scientific workers to agricultural fields," promised one of the candidates (Logvinenko, 1989, p. 1). Another echoed the intention "to liquidate the practice of sending students, schoolchildren, and workers in agricultural works" (Zvyagin, 1989, p. 1). The famous poet Yevgeniy Yevtushenko promised potential voters he would build them an apartment building with a swimming pool—an inconceivable luxury for Soviet people (Yevtushenko, 1990, p. 1). Yevtushenko also informed them about an agreement he had struck with Nikolai Ryzhkov head of the USSR's Council of Ministers, to provide the city of Kharkiv with more laundry detergents (Yevtushenko, 1990). Here we see how the form of *deputy* acquired a new, mythical signification: Rather than bearing any political or

ideological connotations, deputies were imagined as "the managers of the regions they represent," as one of the candidates put it (Sukhov, 1989b, p. 1).

The analysis reveals that this mythical signification of a democratically elected parliament's managerial functions was quite widespread among contributors to *Vecherniy Kharkov*. One reason for its popularity was that most people in industrial Kharkiv could hardly imagine a deputy's duties as anything but representing the interests of working people. Preelection promises published in the newspaper illustrate this:

> To use the profits of industrial enterprises to build more hospitals for children and their mothers. (Mironenko, 1989, p. 1)

> To use the income of industrial enterprises to build more housing for people. (Slyusarenko, 1989, p. 1)

> To increase pensions, ensure better medical services for pensioners, and allow pensioners to obtain medications for free. (Matviets, 1989, p. 1)

> To increase paid leave for workers up to 24 days. (Sukhov, 1989a, p. 2)

As these excerpts show, candidates' agendas did not differ much. All of them aimed to solve the housing, food, medical, and other social problems that tended to determine the quality of life in Soviet society's last years. Importantly, the candidates promised to solve those problems by increasing, not reducing, the welfare function of the state. Especially interesting in this respect were projections related to "maternity defense," where state obligations were imagined to be even bigger than in other aspects of social life:

> Women with children should be paid salaries until their kids are 10 years old. (Batyushko, 1989a, p. 1)

> Mothers should be supported financially until their children are 7 years old. (Bronitsky, 1989, p. 2)

> Maternity should be acknowledged as socially useful work. Women with children should be guaranteed financial support, and a law should be adopted that would defend women's right to get such state assistance. (Batyushko, 1989b, p. 1)

At a minimum, these statements reveal local parliamentary candidates' inability to imagine ways to solve fundamental social problems other than through state interventions—if not their conscious desire to preserve a Socialist state. Sometimes, this was acknowledged openly: Candidates called for the eradication of the "lawlessness of deformed Socialism" (Voskresensky, 1989, p. 1) and the implementation of "human, democratic Socialism" (Editorial: "Human Democratic Socialism," 1990, p. 1). Candidates' potential voters apparently also believed that perestroika was nothing but an attempt to improve the Socialist way of life. In January 1990, only 5.8% of respondents to a *Vecherniy Kharkov* survey believed

that perestroika concerned a "return to capitalism." More than 50% believed it was about a social discussion of how to "revive" Socialism (Editorial: "Youth and the Reforms," 1990, p. 4).

Thus, as the analysis of *Vecherniy Kharkov* content shows, popular imagination—or in Barthes' language, second-level signification of democracy through vernacular discourse—was focused on meeting working people's material needs (housing, food, salaries, pensions, subsidies, etc.), delegating deputies to the Supreme Soviet to represent people's problems, and solving these problems via state welfare interventions. The needs and desires of working people were at the core of that imaginary process, as reflected in the belief that "deputies should have social and political experience and know the moods and needs of people" (Editorial: "Real True Democracy," 1989, p. 2) and that the directors of industrial enterprises should not possess deputy's mandates because their life experience did not allow them to understand workers' wants (Logvinenko, 1989, p. 1).

People's inability to imagine democracy as anything but a direct representation of their needs in supreme state institutions and the state's responsibility to solve these needs resulted in a failure to imagine market reforms outside of this dominant Socialist paradigm. In the popular interpretation, denationalization of state enterprises was nothing more than an attempt to improve workers' conditions of life and solve workers' problems. This was how the newspapers' contributors imagined the meaning of *privatization*:

> It will allow an increase in the role of working collectives in the distribution of enterprises' profits. (Polonsky, 1989, p. 2)

> It will make workers real owners of their enterprises. (Nalivaiko & Sirenko, 1990, p. 3)

> It will allow workers to get income from what they produce. (Dolukhanov, 1991, p. 1)

Many of the newspaper's contributors imagined that privatization of industrial enterprises would make them owners of their factories and plants. By means of privatization, they would regain their property that had been commandeered by the state, and social justice would ultimately triumph:

> The workers in plants, factories, firms, and other enterprises have a right . . . to become shareholders of their enterprises, to get an income out of what they produce. (Berdnik, 1991, p. 1)

> We are not against privatization. We even want to take our enterprise as a collective property. If we don't we won't be owners but hired workers again. Again, we will be working for somebody else. (Logvinenko, 1991, p. 1)

> We demand to solve all privatization problems in a just way, with respect to the desires of working collectives, not behind workers' backs. (Dolukhanov, 1991, p. 1)

> Today, our institute is a state enterprise. But we are preparing for privatization, and we are not going to sell ourselves. No matter whether we're speaking about a joint-stock

enterprise or any other form, we are going to work for our collective, not for somebody
else. (Goryanov, 1991, p. 1)

It is clear from these passages that the specific understanding of social justice that resulted from
the cultural and historical development of Soviet society did not allow many contributors to *Vecherniy
Kharkov* to imagine how *their* enterprises could be given away to those who had not built them, who had
not worked at them, whose lives had not become a part of the enterprises' lives. By imagining
privatization in collectivist terms, people created a mythical signification that filled the form of
privatization with new meaning—as a transition from state to collective ownership of the means of
production.

Because of this specific understanding of social justice cultivated within a socialist state, in the
popular imagination of Kharkivites privatization was occurring without the participation of "nonlabor
elements" of society such as profiteers, cooperators, or black market dealers. The newspaper's stories
usually depicted representatives of these social groups as immoral creatures making a killing off honest
people's misfortunes:

It is important not to admit to privatization the moneymakers of shadow economy,
mafia, and the corrupted part of the party apparatus, who possess, according to
different estimations, from 150 to 300 billion rubles. (Mogilevkin, 1990, p. 2)

I am against cooperators. . . . Why do they have such huge incomes? I agree, the
quality of their work is high, but it is aimed at just personal enrichment. They do not
stimulate the development of the social sphere. Their policy is just to snatch quickly.
Often, anti-social elements are grouping around cooperatives. (Patoka, 1990, p. 5)

Again, what these statements reveal is a specific cultural interpretation of collective social justice,
acquired over the years of Soviet power: Not everything should be for sale and for profit. In their creative
signification of the *market*, a concept unfamiliar to them, Kharkivites filled its form with new meaning—
market should exist in some perfect form, where social justice reigns, where profit is achieved only by
ethical means, and where morality matters.

As positive role models, the newspaper presented individuals who managed to preserve kindness,
compassion, unselfishness, and disinterestedness even under the market pressures. A director of a
research institute took care of employees:

We have raised salaries for our employees. The construction of a new apartment
building is almost over. Now, we are preparing vegetables and fruit for winter. The
institute's trade union committee is providing people with flour, textiles and knitted
wear. (Goraaynov, 1991, p. 1)

A farmer provided the workers of "Stoma" medical enterprise with food: "I have three
sons. . . . Here is a lake—we'll raise fish in it. Then, we will supply 'Stoma' with honey,
buckwheat, and vegetables." (Zamyatin, 1991, p. 5)

> A profiteer did not make money on her friends and neighbors: "Yolka never takes anything extra from friends and neighbors. She sells them goods for the original price. She has her own moral standards." (Zolotikh, 1991, p. 4)

Because expectations had been so high and the mythology of market and democracy, as created by popular imagination, so unrealistic, the first results of democratic and market transformations produced painful disillusionment. Soon it became clear that democratic procedures had not given political and economic power to role models of high morality and moving altruism, but to irresponsible windbags and avid grabbers. Working people's interests had been forced off the agendas of governmental bodies:

> We observe now how the underground economy functions, how moneymakers concentrate in their hands more and more material resources, more and more power. (Gavrilenko, 1990, p. 2)

> Privatization, denationalization, corporation, self-sufficiency, bankruptcy, indexation, unemployment. All of this is in the air. Everything is messed up, and everybody says something unexpected will happen. What is waiting for us tomorrow? Are we the owners of the enterprises, plants, and organizations where we have worked for decades, or just hired workers and servants? What do people possess in the collective house to which all their conscious lives have been devoted? Deputies argue about percentages, certificates, and bonuses, while people wait anxiously what will happen to their enterprises? (Goryanov, 1991, p. 1)

> For two years, the debates on the color of the flag go on. The house is collapsing, the roof is burning, but deputies are thinking of the name for a building which is going to be built in the future. (Medvedev, 1991, p. 5)

> We need to stop puttering about with the renaming of cities, streets, and squares, the ruining of monuments. History cannot be changed: we had not only bad things but good as well. If we have some extra money, let's spend it on the needs of old and incapable people and orphans. (Rudnitskaya & Markovich, 1991, p. 1)

Thus dawned the realization that democracy was not necessarily about the representation and defense of people's needs, and that market transformation could lead to impoverishment as well as prosperity.

As the letters to *Vecherniy Kharkov* show, people were concerned with the impoverishment of not only the material conditions of life, but also its human condition, the impoverishment of mind, spirit, morality, ethical norms, and collective bonds—everything that had been part of people's lives for decades:

> We've lost the ability to look each other in the eye We judge people by their clothes or their posts. (Sisoev, 1990, p. 4)

Look around at what is going on: children try to get rid of their incapable parents, mothers leave their kids. . . .We are losing kindness and non-indifference. (Malaya, 1990, p. 3)

Everything started with calls for renewal, but what we see now is kindling of base passions, extremism, disorder, and lies. (Editorial: "On the Contemporary Situation," 1990, p. 2)

What is going on with us? Lines, anger, hatred, frustration. . . .We hate people who surround us and we hate ourselves. . . . In maternity houses, women disown their children before even seeing them. (Nikityuk, 1991, p. 2)

The myths of democracy and market as vehicles of achieving social justice, happiness, prosperity, human dignity, and freedom were crushed under the weight of frustrating reality. As one of *Vecherniy Kharkov*'s observers put it,

About four years ago, I, like probably the majority of my compatriots, thought like this: we will ruin the bureaucratic system, establish glasnost, give self-determination to enterprises, and that's it—the socialist heaven is guaranteed. How naïve were these images! Our life has not become sweeter. (Patoka, 1990, p. 5)

Having lost all their social privileges, workers found no social security or protection in the new reality of a savage market. Instead of a socialist heaven, people got the hell of an unregulated market with soaring inflation, skyrocketing prices, massive unemployment, rampant delinquency, chaos, lies, and despair—everything that pro-liberal Soviet intellectuals forgot to warn about when they presented laissez-faire policy as a self-regulating modernizing force.

Discussion

This article urges reexamination of the implicit assumption, widespread in sociological and communication research, that discursive appropriations of Western modernity via the channels of global networks will result in the unproblematic hybridization of cultural patterns and the emergence of multiple modernities that are inherently stable and socially just. As this research shows, this is not always the case: Pro-liberal Soviet intellectuals' attempts to implant liberal values in the cultural soil of Soviet collectivism resulted in frustration, disorientation, anger, and finally, nostalgia for "the good old days " This finding is in line with other studies showing that just three years after the USSR's disintegration, only 24% of respondents from southeastern Ukraine considered the outcome good (Bukkvol, 1997, p. 26). Today, 20 years after the USSR's demise, nostalgia for the lost way of life is noticeable throughout all Ukraine, not only in its southeastern industrial regions. In August 2011, 47.4% of respondents to an all-Ukrainian opinion poll answered "Yes" to the question "Do you regret the disintegration of the Soviet Union?" Another 12.5% had difficulty answering this question, while 29.7% answered "No" and 10.4% said they were indifferent (Demokatichni Initsiativi, 2011).

By empirically supporting the claim of Archer et al. (2007) that "translations" of Western modernity into cultural hybrids may be inherently destabilizing, this article urges the rethinking of several widespread scholarly assumptions. First, as has already been noted, many communication scholars imagine the vernacular in national terms, failing to acknowledge that national public spheres often present only the hegemonic discourses of privileged national voices. Not all social groups have national media outlets, from which the voices of socially disadvantaged publics may be marginalized and excluded. To grasp the dynamics of power struggles within national public spheres and the competing meanings that different social groups may attach to the same concepts of modernity, one needs to take into account alternative or peripheral public spheres represented by local or specialized media.

Another common assumption in studies on global cross-cultural historical interactions is that the discussions and reformulations of modernity's ideas within non-Western societies is a rational process whose participants critically evaluate arguments and make reasonable judgments on which of modernity's propositions to accept or reject (Heideking, 2000; Kaviraj, 2000; Ortiz, 2000). Perfectly corresponding to the normative models of Western democracy (Habermas, 1996), such an image of modernity's appropriation has little to do with the real world, where people often communicate emotionally and with prejudice (Mouffe, 1999). This article suggests going further, to consider not only the emotional side of communication but also the fact that people can also rely on mythical understandings of concepts and symbols that are culturally foreign to them. As this research shows, people's unfamiliarity with democracy and market led to the creation of mythological, imaginary constructions. By signifying the conceptual forms of market and democracy with the meanings derived from their socialist culture, contributors to *Vecherniy Kharkov* created mythological hybrids that had nothing to do with the realities of the transformations brought by perestroika. Inherently contradictory and unstable, the mythical projections crumbled into the dust of popular frustration and disillusionment with modernity's experiments.

This finding supports the argument of Hauser and McClellan (2009), who warn that lack of attention to people's popular discourses skews the idea of the public sphere and prevents a view of the whole picture of public opinion formation. This study shows that attention to nonelite and nonintellectual vernacular discourses can reveal not only how popular opinion is formed but also how it can draw on people's mythical interpretations. By pointing to the importance of mythical constructions at the level of vernacular discourses, this study urges expanding the frame of reference to global communication research and accounting not only for the rational deliberations of elite national-level discourse (although the extent to which "elite" deliberation is "rational" remains an open question) but also for the mythically informed communication of vernacular local interpretations of modernity.

Barthes' (1972) mythological method is very helpful in this kind of research. The focus on how purified conceptual forms are filled with new mythical significations reveals both people's lofty joy in the creative stage of mythologizing and their despair at the loss of illusions, which sparks frantic searching for new significations when mythical constructions crash. Unlike innocent pictures of the emergence of multiple modernities and cultural hybrids, this method indicates the far more painful process of society's adaptation to modern ideas: Fantasizing leads to disillusionment, the crash of hopes, and then, probably, to new myths.

This line of research holds special promise in the age of globalized media networks, when the pace of transplantation of meanings to foreign territories is enormously accelerated and the significance of mythical communication is growing as well. In this sense, this research is not only of historical interest; it also has a contemporary value.

Failure to address the mythological aspects of global communication results in an imagined world where people do not suffer, lose hope, or want to crawl back into the comforts of a familiar way of life. Lack of attention to the mythology of Western-like modernity as a road to happiness leaves in doubt the possibility of fully grasping the meaning of the Rose Revolution of 2003 in Georgia, the Orange Revolution of 2004 in Ukraine, the Tulip Revolution of 2005 in Kyrgyzstan, or the Arab Spring of 2011. But even more importantly, no one can predict the outcomes of similar situations in the future. Perhaps there are alternatives to Ukraine's story of disillusionment and despair.

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