

Enduring Socialism

Explorations of Revolution and Transformation,
Restoration and Continuation

Edited by

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CHAPTER 10

Historical Analogies and the Commune: The Case of Putin/Stolypin

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The theme of 'enduring socialism' asks us to consider the equivocal relation of socialist thought to the past. This chapter will address the representational practices through which continuities and transformations of rural Russia are being conceived. I suggest that there are strains of socialist thought abroad in Russia that take their inspiration from pre revolutionary Russian social forms. And I shall argue that an important rhetorical nexus in which we can discover this undertow of inveterate socialism is historical analogy. In fact, as a popular way of thinking about history, analogy has swamped and taken over from conventional Marxism – to the extent that the main political leaders often use it as a form of legitimisation of their policies. Historical analogies are used by people across the political spectrum, on both the 'right' and the 'left', and this means that representations of the past have become arenas of fierce debate. To put this another way, people are now seeking to comprehend their present circumstances by looking for precedents in another, seemingly understandable, time – a displacement in which the present is taken to be somehow 'the same as' some feature in history.

These arguments about history are taking place in a situation of extraordinary uncertainty, for the transformation of agriculture that was expected with the end of the Soviet Union has not taken place. Despite the efforts of the Yeltsin and Putin governments, collective forms of farming have not been replaced to any significant degree by capitalist-type small farms. In 2003 individual farms had declined in number from the mid-1990s, holding only around 5 per cent of the land and producing 2.5 per

cent of agricultural output (Lindner 2004: 18 quoting state statistics). Rural life is dominated by large collective enterprises. Many of them even retain the old status of collective farm (*kolkhoz*) or state farm (*sovkhoz*), while around 47 per cent have become closed shareholding firms owned by the members of the former collective.¹ In practice, these collective enterprises are enormously varied, ranging from large market-oriented firms dominated by one or a few powerful shareholders to more egalitarian farms with collective decision making. In all of them a number of the villagers are somehow left out of the membership, and in vast swathes of depressed regions the collectives have become little more than carapaces to support the mostly elderly villagers left eking a living from the tiny 'subsidiary plots' they had held from Soviet times (Fadeeva 2002: 165; Humphrey 2002: 160). What had been expected – that reformed collectives would be productive, would pay workers regularly for their labour or that they would continue to support the community by providing kindergartens, culture clubs, and so forth – often does not happen. In fact, almost everywhere the familiar rural community has become unfamiliar, even to its own members, as its inner workings and character changed. Yet for people working in agriculture the private individual farm is too risky, isolated and underfinanced to provide a solution – and while in the 1990s it was seen a 'threat' (Van Atta 1993) to communal resources, now it is more like an irrelevance. For the reformist policy makers the widespread resistance to private farming was a surprise and disappointment. Yet they have not given up the attempt to find new, more productive and market-oriented forms. Thus at many different sites in society it has been a puzzle how to conceptualize (or what even to call) the emergent hybrid types of farm. In these circumstances there is a general casting around for models to make sense of the unfamiliar, and from a variety of different stances people have recourse to the repertoire of what they 'know' – stereotypes and images from the past.

Within the torrent of opinions there are strains that we might call socialist. Rather strangely perhaps, given the modernizing, statist and industrial emphasis of Soviet socialism, the new forms of socialism often harken back insistently to the pre revolutionary village commune. They do not, however, make up an ideology in the sense of a structured intellectual system. Rather, the 'conservative' Marxist class-struggle theoreticians are in combat not only with one another (Macey 1993) but also with the interactive and ongoing activity of probing, wondering and trying out ideas for their fit with actual circumstances. So I am not arguing that that Russian socialists today are 'transmitters' of a system that has coherence separate from political contingencies or their own idiosyncratic interpretations, still less that there is some path-dependent scheme of 'socialism' that has survived through history from the

commune to the present day (for discussion see Lindner and Nikulin 2004: 32–33). The present collectives are not necessarily the locus of socialism. Rather, in various sites throughout society we find people who for one reason or another are attached to the values of social equality, 'honest labour' and corporate mutual support. These values may, or may not, be linked with admiration for a strong state or nationalism. Russian socialists therefore do not form a coherent social movement and are not confined to a political party. As this chapter will suggest, they can be seen as forming two types, however: those publicists, journalists, academics, etc. who advocate socialism (for society as a whole) and those ordinary people who simply think they are themselves living socialism. I attempt here to sketch a broad sweep, providing examples of how people are imagining socialism, from politicians to the farmers themselves. What exists across the board is a repertoire of images of the past imbibed through the universal education system, as well as films, novels, the media, and so forth, and this provides 'counters' to think with and argue about. Mostly such images enable people to come up with what we might call an interpretative framework, but sometimes, as this chapter will attempt to show, they have the force of reality-shaping discourse-as-action. I shall suggest later that in the former case we have to do with analogy, while sometimes in the latter a more 'substantive' identity with the past is imagined, one that we could call homology.

Why is the peasant commune, the *obshchina* or *mir*, evoked today in capitalist Russia? What the commune stands for has been a matter of dispute ever since the mid-nineteenth century. It was always seen as quintessentially 'Russian', as opposed to 'European', but the issue was whether it was to be understood as a backward brake on progress or a cornerstone of the future society (Kelly 2002: 499). For many early socialists, who turned their eyes firmly away from its reality, the commune represented a glowing utopian vision of egalitarian society. The crucial thing about the commune is that it stood against private property in agricultural land. It allocated strips of land to each household on an egalitarian basis, for example according to the number of male workers in the family, and the land would be returnable when the number changed. Periodically, all the village plots were reallocated, to make equal access to good land fairer. The communal aspect of this way of life was underpinned by the institution of *krugovaya poruka* (literally 'circular helping hand'), whereby the commune as a whole was responsible for the taxes, debts, crimes and misfortunes of each single household. This meant that in principle the dues of weak households were paid for by the wealthier and more efficient. And it was the village as a self-governing whole, not individuals, that confronted the exigencies of heavy state taxation on the one hand, and the ever present spectre of famine on the other. I will discuss later exactly which situations in contemporary life are

held up as 'like' this ideal of grass-roots socialism, but first let me sketch how the contemporary socialist argument goes.

First, 'socialism' has been detached from its earlier prescriptive identity with the Soviet system. Socialist-inclined journalists and publicists, whose interests lie in appealing to supposedly popular values, now propose that the Soviet structure distorted and mangled the ur-socialist wellspring of the commune, partly because of its reliance on the mistaken Marxist theory of class struggle, partly because of its 'foreign' atheism, and further, because it gave way in its later stages to acquisitive, incipiently 'capitalist' urges. The pure and self-denying communal way of life, in this discourse, only just survived the USSR and now is again virtually overwhelmed (but not quite) by the new capitalism. What we should note about these arguments is that 'socialism' ceases to be a theory about humanity in general but is identified with the specifically Russian institution of the peasant commune. Forget the Marxist proposition that peasant agriculture is a universal precapitalist stage found all across Europe and elsewhere and destined to be dissolved away through class war. Instead, reconceptualize the village commune as an original, noncapitalist, morally superior and enduring form of existence, indeed the foundation of a whole distinctive Russian civilization (Kara-Murza 2002: 8).

Now, theoretical definitions of socialism, as a historical stage and a type of political economy, are neither here nor there as far as these journalists are concerned. Rather, what interests them is analogies between historical personalities, who have come to stand for whole political economic processes. This is what gives the edge to the Putin-Stolypin analogy I shall discuss in this chapter.

Petr Stolypin was both the Prime Minister of the last Tsarist government and the head of the secret police. He was renowned as a strong, authoritarian advocate of the modernization of Imperial Russian government and agriculture along Western European lines. What historical analogy does is to draw a parallel between Stolypin's attempt to get more independent-minded peasants to leave their communes and set up as private farmers and Yeltsin's and Putin's policies of disbanding collective farms and promoting '*fermery*' today. Stolypin, in a famous phrase, said that Russia must now 'place a wager on the strong'. In brief, since both Stolypin and Putin attempted to impose private individual ownership of agricultural land, what they both represent is *the destruction of the commune*. And what is at issue is whether this is to be seen as an entirely beneficent and long overdue reform of Russia's 'backward' social organization, or (as the socialists claim) as a malign, deeply mistaken, annihilation of all that is best and most distinctive in Russia's contribution to the world.

Historical analogy has become an extraordinarily popular pastime in Russia and President Putin has been likened by his friends or enemies to

other figures, such as Peter the Great and Stalin. We know that Putin himself cast around for a suitable historical precedent for his presidential role from an anecdote recounted by Simon Sebag Montefiore. In the early 1990s Sebag Montefiore was writing a biography of the great eighteenth-century general Potemkin, the lover of Catherine the Great who conquered and ruled huge tracts of the Empire and attained the title 'Serenissimus'. 'During the first months of Vladimir Putin's presidency,' Sebag Montefiore writes, 'I was secretly approached by a top Kremlin official who met me in a London hotel and told me that a most elevated personage, who could not be named, was casting about for historical models for the Russian state and wondered if I thought Potemkin, with his mixture of humanitarianism and authoritarianism, might be a useful basis for a 21st century Russian president. He asked me to write a memorandum on the subject, which I did. I heard nothing further' (Sebag Montefiore 2005: 33). Presumably the memorandum was unconvincing. In the event it is the analogy with Stolypin that has come to the fore. Numerous books, articles, web pages, as well as conversations among ordinary citizens, have alluded to the theme. Putin himself has frequently referred to Stolypin's ideas in his public speeches.

Historical analogy carries great possibilities for irony, of course. It can be 'taken too far', so the rhetorical effect may bizarrely undercut a literal reading. No more so than in the Stolypin-Putin case, we should note, for Stolypin managed to make an enemy of practically everyone, survived several assassination attempts, and indeed was in the end murdered in 1911.

Most of the current debate, however, is devoid of irony. As far as the general public goes, the main grounds for the likeness are that both men were strong proponents of centralized state power, both were in charge of the secret police, and both pushed through, against fierce opposition, a series of reforms introducing private property in agricultural land in Russia. The goal in both cases was to transform Russian agriculture into a modern market-oriented European type made up of enterprising farmers, loyal to the state, and who would supply products to the cities. These parallels are so striking that a number of serious historical studies have attempted to analyze their import (Macey 1993; Pallot 1999; Lohr 2000; Danilov 2002; Skyner 2001, 2003; Klimin 2002). This paper is concerned, however, with a different issue: the way that historical analogies are used in contemporary public debate about essential values. The stakes are high. The 'socialists', the defenders of collective farming and the commune ideal, are pitted against the entire 'reformist' trend of postsocialist policy, against, that is, the admirers of Stolypin/Putin.²

One set of arguments concerns whether Stolypin's reforms in fact worked or not – it being rather difficult to judge, as they were cut short by the First World War and the Revolution. Some present-day polemicists

argue that Stolypin's reforms were successful and constituted the best hope for a modernized and Europeanized Russia (Fedorov 2002). Another popular version sees Stolypin as the proponent of a 'third' Russian way, providing a patriotic and 'Great State' alternative to Western free-market capitalism and Soviet-style communism. Others insist that his reforms were bound to fail because they contradicted the deeply rooted peasant culture of the Russian people – indeed, Stolypin's heavy-handed measures incited peasant anger and were a prime cause of the Bolshevik revolution (Kara-Murza 2002). Another series of passionately held disagreements is over the moral import of the reforms. Stolypin's own concern with increased productivity is not the issue here. What matters is whether private property in land is morally right or not and whether a just society could ever be created on that basis.

Private property in agricultural land has never been 'naturalized' in Russia as the bedrock or default position. Indeed, one could argue that Russia has never really had such private property, since even the nobles' estates could be confiscated by the Tsar. In the Soviet Union land relations were founded on the legal prohibition of private property. The state in the name of the people was the sole formal owner of land until the passage of the RSFSR law of November 1990 'On land reform' (Skyner 2003: 891–92). Even after this law, as in Stolypin's time, private property still has to be explicitly legislated for. And in Russia the existence of legislation does not mean that people on the ground are able to use it. Even today, local political permission has to be given for any particular parcel of land to be extracted from a collective type of ownership. The debate over private land thus engages historians, sociologists and journalists, but the protagonists take part too – the politicians, administrators and famers who have to take decisions one way or another. Not only have Putin's presidential decrees been held back by foot-dragging in the Duma, but regional administrators usually give decisions in favour of public/collective as opposed to individual ownership (Skyner 2001). For the deep assumption lurking in the background is that landed private property is the cornerstone of capitalism, and with this the debate is instantaneously rendered in black and white terms. Capitalism, it is widely assumed, is the deathly enemy of a socialist way of life.

I hope I have said enough in this introductory sketch to indicate something of what is at stake in the Putin–Stolypin parallel. But before moving on to discuss its ethnographic actuality in present-day Russia, let me examine in more detail the kinds of reasoning involved in making such historical analogies. It has to be admitted that no precise terminology exists for defining different kinds of sameness across time. There is a range of possible types of relation, which may be described as follows. Historical analogy proper is perhaps the weakest of these links, for it states only that X today is in some respects like Y in the past. A second

kind of historical relation, proposing not just likeness but a connection of an actively productive kind, is the idea of the historical exemplar (for example, the notion that a current leader like Putin would be inspired to take some decision by the example of Peter the Great). Historical homologies are stronger than either of these, in that they claim X today is structurally the same as, or descends from, Y in the past.³ Thus we frequently find reification in the language of these debates, the notion of continuous ongoing identity. One form of this is when a current social phenomenon is given a 'displaced' backward existence, as though it were actually present in the past. For instance, Petr Stolypin, who died in 1911, is said to have 'fought all his life against the communists' (Fedorov 2002: 1), when 'the communists' as a party and even as a single political category did not exist in his lifetime. Forward displacements are even more commonly used. Contemporary successful farmers may be attacked as 'kulaks', for example, as if they 'are' in some sense the richer peasants of the early twentieth century. Note that in the disunited and verbally promiscuous ambience of post-communist discourse, the word *kulak* could imply either a noxious insult or even be considered a compliment. Finally, in what is probably an incomplete list, writers sometimes refer to fateful historical parallels, the linking of destinies. An example of this is the 'mystical connection' that Fedorov finds between the fates of Stolypin and the Emperor Alexander II. Both were great reformers and both were assassinated; indeed Stolypin was killed on the occasion of a festive commemoration of Alexander's freeing of the peasants from serfdom fifty years before (Fedorov 2002: 7).

Such time-annihilating ways of thinking about history are incompatible with Soviet Marxism. It is not that Soviet historians did not tie together events and processes from disparate times and places. But this was done in order to argue that diverse phenomena were examples of one and the same unrepeatable historical category or evolutionary stage. What could not be argued by Soviet historians was that the present, in the country that was building socialism, was objectively 'the same as', or even simply 'like', a past social formation. The idea of the revolutionary break was essential.

Stalin, in his conversation with H.G. Wells, put the official position bluntly. Wells had been trying to persuade Stalin that Roosevelt's New Deal amounted to adopting the principle of planned economy. State control of banks and regulation of industry and so forth would bring about a better, more equal and more scientific, organization of society. 'In my opinion,' said Wells, 'they are socialist ideas.' He even boldly hinted at a likeness between Stalin and Roosevelt. 'You and Roosevelt begin from two different starting points. But is there not a relation in ideas, a kinship of ideas and needs, between Washington and Moscow?' But this was completely impossible for Stalin to stomach. He responded heavily that

American capitalism might not have quite disappeared, but it belonged to a different historical category from socialism. 'Subjectively perhaps, these Americans think they are reorganizing society; objectively, however, they are preserving the present basis of [capitalist] society.' It was not possible, he said, to realize the principles of planned economy while preserving the economic basis of capitalism – an economic system that must inevitably lead to anarchy in production and eventually collapse (*A Conversation*, 1934: 601).

Now this conversation was held in 1934 and it is well known that later, after the 1937–38 purges and during the Second World War, an analogy was drawn between Stalin and Ivan the Terrible – an analogy whose force Stalin himself realized. I would argue, however, that his tacit acknowledgement of such an analogy was a reaction to popular ways of thinking about history, and that it was always at odds with orthodox Marxism. What is significant is that analogies between personalities concede to the fascination with individual motivation in a way that the class struggle or stages of development cannot. So Stalin intervened in the editing of Eisenstein's film about Ivan the Terrible, for example, in order to portray the monarch not as a crazed tyrant but as a determined victor, in order to demonstrate that Ivan's defeat of foreign foes justified his ruthless treatment of his 'internal enemies'. Scenes depicting Ivan's agonized repenting for his cruelty were cut on Stalin's orders, as he thought they indicated the Tsar's weakness (Perrie 2001: 87). Clearly, Stalin recognized the force of the popular tendency to see history in terms of personalities and allegories. But the Marxist type of explanation of Ivan of the professional historians, in terms of abstract class struggle, was never entirely abandoned during the war. It is documented that Stalin himself never inclined to the personalized kind of history (Van Ree 1997: 23; Perrie 2001: 196). What he was doing was manipulating the swirling forces of a kind of popular history that he himself never espoused. It was as a political leader in need of broad support that Stalin – like Putin after him – stepped into the analogy game.

In seeing that the analogy between Ivan and Stalin essentially came from below – if only from certain historians who were anxious to curry favour and from the Soviet propaganda institutions casting about for means to enthuse the public for war – we can understand that historical analogies have an existence in society broadly considered. My second point, therefore, is to reiterate that historical analogy is rarely a tidy matter, a simple legitimation of a leader's current position by reference to a positive image from the past. As Kevin Platt has argued (2004: 134–35), all such analogies have to deal with what he calls 'historical inertia', the process of re-interpreting heroes that accumulates layer on layer of meanings. In the case of Ivan the Terrible the Soviet public had long been accustomed to the crazed mediaeval despot interpretation. So strong was

this image that when making cuts to Eisenstein's film was being debated in Stalin's presence, no one dared say the film was a direct reference to Great Leader. 'What's the problem?' Eisenstein impudently asked. And a memoir of the occasion recalls, 'But in Eisenstein's boldness, in the gleam in his eyes, in his defiant sceptical smile, we felt that he was acting consciously, that he had decided to go for broke. This was awful' (quoted in Perrie 2001: 177). The dangers of the presence of a many-layered popular consciousness – which the film could quite possibly evoke – were ever present. Platt has rightly pointed out that for historical analogies to work as intended, previously popular histories have to be 'forgotten' or eliminated (2004: 142).

So, to return to the case of Putin and Stolypin, the present positive view of Stolypin as an enlightened reformer, the one that is taught in post-Soviet schools, has to be understood in the light of the previous Soviet image, which was highly negative. For decades Stolypin was interpreted as the pitiless agent of late Tsarist repression, who put down justified peasant revolts with force and shipped recalcitrant offenders off to Siberia in the famous railway trucks that are still today known as 'Stolypin's cars'. Such images have not in fact been 'forgotten', so among the general public, as distinct from the battling ideologues, irony in the analogy with Putin cannot at all be ruled out. And the circumstances of Stolypin's assassination offer yet further ironic possibilities. The murder has long had an existence in historical popularizations as a 'mystery' (Fedorov 2002, vol. 2: 7–41). For Stolypin was shot by a member of his own security guard, a man called Bogrov, who furthermore was a double agent. Bogrov was Jewish and was a member of a revolutionary group, which he apparently betrayed to the secret police. At the same time, as an agent of the security force he could have been induced to kill Stolypin, according to rumours, by the Tsar himself, who is known to have resented his Prime Minister's power. This tangle provoked endless speculation about the 'mystery' of what Bogrov's motivation really was. The explanation in fact seems relatively straightforward, as can be seen from Zenkovsky's positive biography of Stolypin (which could not be published in Russia during Soviet times). During his interrogation before his execution, Bogrov was asked whether he had not planned to kill the Tsar. He denied this, saying that he had been afraid, being a Jew, that assassinating the holy sovereign would give rise to a pogrom. His motive for killing Stolypin was to vindicate himself before the revolutionary comrades he had betrayed. Bogrov explained his reasoning: Stolypin was the state leader whose reforms, by improving conditions for the peasants and workers, would alienate their sympathies from the revolutionaries and thus prevent them from seizing power (Zenkovsky 1986: 97–98). Now my reason for mentioning all this is that the whole personalized tangle (the rigid Stolypin, the jealous Tsar, the corrupt secret police, the double-

dealing revolutionary) is reminiscent of the environment of secret police 'provocations' that also surround Putin (Kara-Murza 2002: 202–7). It is another layer of meaning hovering around the historical analogy – one, like the assassination itself, of course, that the present Russian executive would have to eliminate from public consciousness if the analogy is to work in a positive way for the leader. And perhaps it is because this has not happened that the Stolypin–Putin analogy has died away in the last few years.

For anthropologists, it is the unruly presence of popular fascinations with 'mysteries', and the whole heterogeneous variety of layered assumptions about the values that political leaders stand for, that is interesting. Historians ignore the social life of such phenomena when they write about analogies in terms of a linear history of thought. And attempts seriously to compare situations that are structurally similar but separated in time likewise have a different goal from mine, for in that case the analogy is drawn by the historian not the living subjects. From an anthropological point of view what is interesting are the questions of from whom these analogies and homologies emerge and why, and to find out what purchase they have among the people who are supposedly their subject, in this case, the farming people of Russia.

So let me return now to the subject of socialism and the commune. Whether we see Stolypin's reforms as successful or not, they did not last very long and were overtaken by the Revolution. After 1917, peasants went back into communes, which came to completely dominate the rural scene, holding around 90 per cent of agricultural land by 1930, after which they were replaced by collective and state farms. I am not now going to analyze the communes themselves, but want to draw out the aspects that are extolled by the socialists who try to influence opinion today. The commune, they say, is something that arose from the nature of Russian agriculture itself, its habits of work, and above all its fragility. Russian peasants were desperately poor – hunger was a reality. In the face of poverty and heavy taxation, the peasants' mutual support for one another, along with levelling institutions, were not just cultural traditions, they were objectively necessary. Polemicists writing about this today leave it to be understood by readers that poverty is again a reality in Russia (see Visser 2003). And furthermore, village institutions arose from a particular sensibility, it is pointed out, a cosmological closeness between the peasant and the land, a sacral attitude to working the soil enshrined in the phrase 'to plough is to pray' (Kara-Murza 2002: 219). Finally, the commune is the source of social solidarity, rooted in joint activity. People outside Russia sometimes think that collective production was imposed from on top by the Soviet system but in fact Russian peasants always had performed certain crucial farming tasks together as a body.

As for the politics of the commune, an early English observer described peasants as speaking their minds openly, with only women relegated to the sidelines, and he called this 'thoroughly democratic' (Wallace 1877: 193). But for present-day Russian socialists the word 'democracy' has only the negative connotations of the capitalist West, and they choose to emphasize something rather different – the 'freedom' (*svoboda*) of the peasant to say what he thinks openly, secure in his little world, in fear of no-one (Kara-Murza 2002: 102). The jewel of Russian civilization has two forms: firstly, the long-suffering patience of the peasant, who sees the landlord as a spoilt child, and secondly, his pride and decisiveness at the moment when it becomes clear that something must be done. This responsibility for everyone, including even the sinful landlord, is the peasant's virtue (ibid. 2002: 244). What all this leads up to is a moral for today. Kara-Murza is trying to persuade people to see the world differently, and he provides a little parable of 'peasant freedom' when he describes its present incarnation in the raggle-taggle of hired workers on his own dacha, their natural gestures, their laughter, their way of bearing themselves as though restraint was an unknown concept (Kara-Murza 2001: 249).

Those who are trying to persuade the public of the benefits of agrarian reform paint a completely different picture. These people, again a mixture of journalists and polemicists, follow all those commentators from Chekhov, Bunin and Gorky onwards (Figs 1996: 88) who portrayed the commune as a sink of apathy, drunkenness and hard brutality. It was not a haven of harmony, but a place of quarrels and manipulation by the richer patriarchs. It turned people into spongers, sentimentalists and sadists (Globachev 2005). Carried forward to today the same features are seen in the doddering and corrupt collective farms. In the reformists' view, there can be no freedom here. In the old peasant commune it was impossible to leave and set up a private farm, even under Stolypin's reform, without the agreement of a majority of the assembly,⁴ just as today one cannot leave the collective farm without unanimous agreement of all the members.⁵ Such permission is only given to a tiny number of people, those with external political clout. Meanwhile, the little personal allotments of remaining members depend crucially on inputs from the collective. As a result, the remaining peasants cling to the collectives and now only 6 per cent of them even want to leave. Their enslavement (*zakabalen'ye*) is complete (Manzanova 2004: 9).

In these diametrically opposed epithets – the socialist vision of 'freedom' and the reformist one of 'enslavement' – we have to do, it seems to me, not with analogies but with homologies. The noble bodily stance of the hired man is the freedom of the timeless Russian peasant; the depressed inertia of today's collective farmer descends from, somehow is 'the same thing as', the enslaved condition that Stolypin tried to change.⁶

Something similar has happened with the idea of *krugovaya poruka*, the system of collective responsibility that Geoffrey Hosking sees as 'the basic concept' underlying the village commune (2004: 51). In 1903 *krugovaya poruka* was legally abolished, as it was no longer effective in gathering taxes – peasants were using it as a shield, whereby they all allowed one another to fall into tax debt to the extent that the total could never be recovered. Although legally ended, the practice did not disappear, however. During Soviet times, *krugovaya poruka* morphed into a negative concept, denoting the cosy and corrupt circles of self-protection that were established to manipulate and bypass official rules (Ledenova 2004: 97–104). Thus in the present day, citizens usually locate *krugovaya poruka* in the Mafia world.

However, *krugovaya poruka* is not just an image borrowed from peasant history, it can also be a consciously applied model for current practice. An example is the organization of a large urban working-class family, the Semenovs, described in a newspaper article. The mother had won a 'Mother Heroine' medal and the purpose of the article was to hold her up as an exemplar to other struggling women with the maxim 'the disintegration of the family – is the disintegration of the state'. The mother, Aleksandra Dmitrievna, was asked how she had managed to bring up ten children while both she and her husband were working. 'I taught the children to survive,' she replied. 'I gave them rules like don't go to school before the floors have been cleaned and the beds made. They had *krugovaya poruka*. Serezha answered for Natasha, Natasha for Alyosha, Alyosha for Kolya, Kolya for Larisa, Larisa for Shurik, Shurik for Tanya, Tanya for Slava, and Slava for Katya. Lena was the youngest, and I answered for her myself.' 'What did that mean, the children "answered for one another"?' asked the journalist. Aleksandra Dmitrievna replied, 'Well, if Natasha got a bad mark at school I punished Serezha ... and so on. After that Serezha wouldn't allow her to go out playing instead of doing her homework. This *krugovaya poruka* was good for them, it was their shield!' (Gorokhova 2005).

If these cases can be seen as historical homologies, the use of analogies is far more widespread. One has to ask – why are people likening what is happening today with *the past*? An answer could be that the past furnishes a series of models that have implications in time. Since they belong to the past something is known of their tendency – in brief, of what happened next. This may provide a tool for the imagination of those people today who are bewildered about what kind of social institution they are experiencing and where it is going. There are many examples from contemporary rural life, but let me cite just one.

In 1999–2000, the sociologist Aleksandr Nikulin carried out some fieldwork in the Kuban, one of the richest regions of Russia. Here, though many collectives were in debt, some of them had evolved into what Nikulin

calls by the English word 'holdings'. The former chairman of a collective farm had managed to acquire the majority of the members' shares and now ran the place like his personal fiefdom. Most of the members were now effectively his hired workers. Nevertheless, the chairman, Kravchenko, held back from taking all of the shares, as he knew what resentment this would cause. Kravchenko, as one of the rare success stories in Russian agriculture, had gone abroad on delegations and tried to introduce Western technologies into his farm. One day he asked Nikulin, 'Well, it's true isn't it, here in my place, it's like in the West?' Nikulin replied that, well, the Kuban wasn't quite like the West and that Kravchenko's rule reminded him more of the Tsarist enterprising landowner (*pomeshchik-samorodka*), who was introducing original technologies. The one thing that is valued in the West, the freedom of the independent producer, was absent on his farm. And Nikulin then told the chairman about Lenin's book depicting two types of development of capitalism in agriculture – the Prussian and the American. If the American type was based on independent farmers in a democratic society, the Prussian involved large landowners maintaining top-down control over rural communities in a conservative society. 'You,' Nikulin said, 'seem to be taking the Prussian path.' At this, the chairman was silent, thought for a bit, and changed the subject. Soon it was the month of July, the month of the traditional harvest festival. The members of the farm, which was called 'Rule' (*'Upravleniye'*), by the way, gathered in a remote gully and, headed by Kravchenko, drank to their harvest of 50 tsentners per hectare. The feast was in full swing, when the chairman suddenly turned to his workers and made a speech. 'O! Have you all heard about the latest discoveries in agrarian sociology? Do you know that there are two paths of development in agriculture? Well the American one goes with democracy, freedom, and independent farmers. But what's the good of that for you? You don't need freedom! Yeltsyn gave you freedom, I gave you freedom, but you don't take it! So you won't have the American way, it'll be the Prussian way here. And do you know what the Prussian way is? Ha! Again, you have no idea. Well, it is very simple. I will be your *pomeshchik* [Tsarist landowner] and you will be my *khlopy* [working lads].' Apparently, this tirade was received with polite, understanding smiles, without comment (Nikulin 2002: 366).

Here we can perhaps see the chairman genuinely struggling to understand the nature of the enterprise he himself is creating. The analogy with Lenin's historical types and the archaic language is not so much a self-justification as a means of conceptual clarification for 'agrarian capitalists' in a genuinely new economic-political situation. This can be compared with people who see themselves as living socialism, where we find the stronger form of the manifested homology, along the lines of the Semenov family's *krugovaya poruka*. There are people who say they are 'creating communism' in Russia today. What can they

possibly mean by this? One such example is a private farmer who separated from his state farm in 1991 and now runs a successful business with thirty-five cows, thirty or so pigs and 35 hectares of arable land. He has eight full-time workers on the farm, all of them relatives. This is what the farmer said:

The people round here have no work, and so there's terrible thieving. They sell the wood from the forest and take any light metal they can find. But that will be used up soon. And they also thief from the fields. It's not too bad for me because I have a lot of land, but it's a real blow to people with only a small plot. There is only one road to my farm. We don't keep any security except the dogs. We don't have guns. Here we have communism. Yes, we are building communism. We six-seven men, we are not afraid of anything. The main thing is, we don't depend on the government nor on the surrounding people (Klyamkin and Timofeev 2000: 337–38).

Another example is provided by the director of a state-owned chicken farm in Novgorod Oblast. His farm is much reduced in size and now has only 160 workers. This is what he said:

I sacked practically no-one. Just a few left quietly by themselves. I gave jobs to all my chicken workers, you see we worked together for many years, some of them had only a couple of years to go before their pensions, so how could I sack them? [...] Among us in the *kollektiv* relations are fine. It's an old *kollektiv*, there are not many changes among the people. They work here permanently, right up to their pension and even beyond. All the specialists prepare successors for when they leave. The people have not changed in our enterprise. We work in a communist regime. (Klyamkin and Timofeev 2000: 350–51)

What 'communism' seems to mean in these examples is certainly not a matter of the whole political-economy, nor even does it depend on a particular legal form of ownership (since the first example is a 'private' farmer and the second the inheritor of a state collective). Rather, 'communism' is a way of being – enclosed, self-reliant, independent of the state, and mutually supporting. Not so different from the ideal peasant commune, in fact.

Conclusion

Western writers on a Putin/Stolypin theme often adopt a monitory tone. Putin should 'learn the lessons' of Stolypin in order to adapt his policies to Russian realities (Lohr 2000). Such an omniscient attitude to historical analogies is only rarely taken in Russia. There, rather, one seems to find a

widespread noncognizance of our own time, a difficulty in giving it its own contemporary name. The historical analogy in such circumstances is more like an act of recognition, of an institution of personality in the past. It is the pursuit – through such recognition – of identity and it thus becomes an imaginative trying-out of models – possibly to be rapidly discarded when the ironic or parodic layers of meaning implied by the analogy come to the surface.

This is perhaps the point where I should differentiate what I am arguing from Nietzsche and Foucault's strictures about historical analogy. In discussing how genealogy (history) should be done, Foucault wrote that the historian offers the confused and anonymous European, who no longer knows himself or what name he should adopt, the possibility of alternative identities, more individualized and real than his own. 'But the man with historical sense,' he continues, 'will see that this substitution is simply a disguise.' Such identities are 'ephemeral props, whose unreality points to our own. The good historian will know what to make of this masquerade. He will not be too serious to enjoy it; on the contrary he will push the masquerade to its limit and prepare the great carnival of time where masks are constantly re-appearing. No longer the identification of our faint individuality with the solid realities of the past, but our 'unrealization' through the excessive choice of identities.' But making up these masks, creating a kind of history 'totally devoted to veneration', bars access, Foucault writes following Nietzsche, to the actual intensities and creations of life (Foucault 1998: 385–86). This tirade has some validity if we see historical analogy as a practice of historians. But I have tried to show in this paper that creating and performing analogies has a life in society and in particular historical situations. In this case, the historical analogy has to be rethought, not as a 'masquerade', but as a situated practice of recognition, bearing with it the undertow of previous meanings, and thus containing within itself its own possibilities of irony and parody.

In present-day Russia there are two kinds of actors who use analogies most actively: the polemicists, who are trying to push a particular policy or set of values (analogy suggested for others), and the ordinary people trying to conceptualize their worlds (analogy created for oneself). Both have to eliminate irony for their images to 'work'. But it is another matter with the general public observing the heated debates through the media. Here there is nothing to prevent detached amusement and the resurrection of incongruities.

In this regard, it is relevant that censorship (or self-censorship) is increasingly present in Russia. Since his advent to power in 2000 Putin has progressively blotted out dissenting voices in the media, and one effect of this – my Russian friends tell me – is that there is now a general silence about Putin himself. Thus books and articles about Stolyпин may

or may not contain a section called something like 'contemporary agriculture in the light of Stolypin's reforms', but they increasingly decline to mention Putin by name. Whatever metaphors and analogies remain in the public arena tend to be safe ones, such as playful fantasies where 'our President' is likened to the hero of a folk story set in 'traditional' times. In one such picture book, *Skazki pro Nashogo Prezidenta* (Fairy Stories about Our President),⁷ an ordinary lad, who is a great athlete, likes skiing and loves nature, and who looks just like Putin, comes to be president through the advice given to him by a magical bird whom he had befriended. Politics and current issues are studiously avoided. The president pays a visit to the English Queen in Buckingham Palace, and the story revolves around whether he can prove himself a 'real gentleman' by arriving on time despite being set upon by London bandits and criminals. Needless to say, he magically defeats the bandits and arrives to the second, and the Queen has to admit that he is a gentleman.

This kind of analogy with the folk hero is interesting in itself, nevertheless. What the book does, even if it is 'not meant to be taken seriously', is to resurrect the whole patriarchal Tsarist idiom of government. Thus the president is called '*prezident-batyushka*' (president patriarch), he succeeds in outwitting 'cunning' bureaucrats and, above all, he rules by edict (*Ukaz*). For example, part of the delay in getting to his appointment with the Queen of England is caused by him issuing edicts that polar bears must not be hunted and boggy areas with frogs must be preserved for cranes to live on (2004: 47). The good president, with his beneficent edicts, has the whole cosmos of his realm in his thoughts, is the message. Why do I mention this? The adult reader is inevitably reminded that Putin does in fact rule by edict. In fact, the very laws that have legislated for private ownership of land are presidential edicts. What has been happening is that presidential decrees have been faced with consistent opposition from the parliament to attempts to introduce land reform (Skyner 2001: 984). There is a contradiction at the heart of Russian politics that is not resolved: thus in 2001 it was still possible for regional parliamentary delegates to argue that presidential decrees about land ownership should be suspended until a federal code is accepted (Skyner 2001: 989) and, as I have mentioned, even after the passing of a Federal Land Code, local practices still make it impossible for individuals to acquire absolute private land rights.

The spectre whose threat causes such widespread opposition derives from a lingering socialism – the 'enshrined historical fear', as Skyner puts it, that if the free sale of land is allowed, it will be bought up by wealthy urban and foreign interests, leaving the majority of the population landless and impoverished (2001: 994). The evidence suggests that despite the confusion in the law the situation on the ground does seem to be moving in this direction. There are a few successful large commercial

farms, there are ramshackle collectives, and there are regions where dire subsistence poverty on tiny plots is all that remains. I have pointed to some features of how this situation is being conceptualized. Firstly, by the widespread popular use of historical analogies, that is, a backward focus rather than an attempt to coin a new vocabulary. And second, in contrast to Soviet argument in terms of 'classes' and reified categories like 'the state', here we observe a fascination with personalities. In the new Russia, it is the political personality that is subject to a process of objectivization and reification, such that it comes to stand for wider policies, economic processes and technologies of government. In turn, this reification sets in train habits of caution and self-censorship. Analogical thinking is patchy, temporary, taken up and cast aside, and it does not reach the status of a meta-narrative (see Lindner and Nikulin 2004: 32). But it is a currency of popular historical thinking that deserves attention (Platt 2004). Socialism appears somehow in the interstices of all this, not embodied in a particular representative personality, but manifest in stubborn practices. These could be described from the outside as referring to 'the past' and employing historical vocabularies, but from inside they seem to have another nature. I have called these practices homologies rather than analogies. One way to put this would be to say that Putin/Stolypin, or Stalin/Ivan the Terrible, constitute relations of metaphor or analogy, while the relation between the peasant commune and contemporary self-declared living communism is metonymical (that is, the two parts are attached and somehow part of one another). But actually I think that literary tropes give out here. With contemporary socialism in Russia we find a perspective that is not concerned with implementing progress towards an ideal in the future but rather with manifesting what is *felt* to be a timeless ever-presence. From the actor's point of view there is a socialism that is not in the future, nor in the past – it is here.

Notes

1. Only small numbers of other kinds of farm exist: open shareholding firms (1%), cooperatives (8%) and associations of private farmers (4%) (Lindner 2004: 19).
2. This is a generalization; for a more nuanced view of the various assessments of Stolypin among Russian historians, see Macey (1993).
3. Butler and Saidel (2000: 846–53) discuss the problems with the term 'homology' as used in psychology and biology and suggest that a new vocabulary is necessary. To distinguish similar structures that result from the same generative pathways from those that result from different origins, they suggest the terms 'syngeny' and 'allogeny' respectively.
4. The Stolypin Agrarian Reform, Ukaz of 9 November 1906. <http://www.dur.uk/-dml0www/stolypin.html>

5. This is in the statutes (*ustav*) of Buryat collective farms, 2002, a document which has a local rather than federal legal standing.
6. 'From the time of Stolypin's reforms, as the experience of agricultural reform in Russia has shown, after each breakthrough forwards to economic independence of the peasant and his liberation from the kolkhoz or commune, there necessarily follows a recoil backwards, as a result of which even greater administrative and economic dependency of the peasants always follow' (Manzanova 2004: 9). See also Globachev (2005).
7. Subtitled 'Stories written from the words of the people in various towns, villages, trains and airplanes being within Russian state boundaries', the book is, as it were, a collection of tales written down by various people and illustrated by a number of named children. However, the illustrations are all evidently by the same hand, and perhaps authorship of the book should be credited to the person mentioned as having come up with the idea, Yevgenii Myachin (*Skazki* 2004).

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