

3/23

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Decolonization



A SPECTRE  
NO LONGER  
HAUNTING  
~~POST-SOVIET SPACE~~  
NON-SOVIET STATES

**Gazeta Sasha 3 / 2023**  
**Decolonization**

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**Ainejärjestö Sasha ry**

This issue is dedicated to Dragana Cvetanović  
who passed away recently.

Dragana was always inspiring and supportive with students.

We want to commemorate the scholar who shared her knowledge and  
enthusiasm with us for four decades.



E

# aditonia

Text — Anna Kananen and Juho Pitkänen

There are many praise words one hears about Finland. It is, supposedly, the happiest country in the world and “aces” in education and health care.

But over the past summer, Finland has faced less positive international attention. Former minister of economy **Vilhelm Junnila**, who ended up holding the position for only 11 days, had to resign from his position in July due to his previous racist and neo-Nazi comments. Minister of finance **Riikka Purra** still holds her position, although her previous violence-filled and racist writings were uncovered by the media during the summer.

On September 19, a group of students occupied the main building of University of Helsinki. The occupants

protested the planned cuts to student’s living. Basically, the government is aiming to cut from the poor while lowering taxation on the rich.

The demands included improvements on students’ mental health services as well as abolishing tuition fees for all students. Currently, students from outside the EU and ETA are required to pay a tuition fee. The occupation provoked further occupations in other universities, universities of applied sciences and high schools around Finland, some of which are still on-going.

The second largest party in the government, *Perussuomalaiset*, which Junnila and Purra belong to, has also repeatedly undermined the value of social sciences and humanities. There is no guarantee that the

Aleksanteri Institute will avoid having its funds cut in the coming years.

As academics from around the world gather in Helsinki for the Aleksanteri Conference, we want to remind you that freedom of academia, students’ rights and their wellbeing are under attack even in the “happiest country in the world”.

The theme of this issue, following the Aleksanteri Conference, is *decolonization*. We wanted to give the voice to the students to talk about issues from their personal points of view. We believe that only a vocal, inclusive and critical academia is able to defend itself from those who seek to weaken it – our responsibility is to take a stance.

# Chair's Greetings: For Sasha, Embracing Decolonization Also Means Building an Inclusive Language Community



Text — Jalmari Sarla

The journey of decolonization begins with introspection, particularly within organizations. At Sasha, this process is fundamental to our ongoing commitment to fostering inclusivity and approachability among all kinds of students.

Recently, our dedication extends to our cherished international student community, who find themselves disenfranchised by the hateful and racist policies of our current government. Over the past year, we've taken significant strides toward

creating a more inclusive environment for non-Finnish speakers. I'm delighted to witness the fruits of our efforts, with an increasing number of foreign students participating in our organization's activities.

However, our transition to using English, while promoting inclusivity, has inadvertently reduced our focus on advancing the use of Finnish, a valuable cause in itself. Recognizing that our university community is inherently international, we acknowledge the challenges faced by international students in

Finland. Embracing a diverse range of voices and perspectives necessitates adjustments to our language policies.

I am profoundly enthused about the growing international community within Sasha and the broader Eastern European and Russian studies academic sphere. The journey of decolonization is one that begins from within, and it is heartening to see us taking these essential steps toward a more inclusive and welcoming environment.

# index

<b>Hidden Legacy of the Non-Aligned Movement in Zagreb</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>“В чём главное? В том, что мы не были никогда колонизаторами нигде” (V.V.Putin, 2023)</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>How to Approach Kosovo: 18 Essential Things to Know</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Column: Decolonizing Identity – A Path to Finding My Ingrian Roots</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Study Trip to Qazaqstan – Thoughts on (Linguistic) Decolonization</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Lost in Colonization: The Invisible Influence of Turkic Languages on Russian</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Զայմանդում</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Dear AI, How Should We Decolonize Eastern Europe?</b>	<b>44</b>

# Hidden Legacy of the Non-Aligned Movement in Zagreb

## Interview with Petra Matic

During the Cold War, a third block emerged to balance the bipolar rivalry between the United States of America and the Soviet Union. Yugoslavian leader Josip Broz Tito was one of the founding members of the Non-Aligned Movement, and there are many stories about opulent gifts and Tito sailing with Gamal Abdel Nasser on the Adriatic Sea. However, there is also a more ordinary side to the story. Between the 1960s and 1990s, thousands of students from the Global South were educated in Yugoslavia. In this article, museologist and artist Petra Matic tells how this legacy appears to people of the 2020s.



The story with foreign students in Yugoslavia already began in 1955, when the country granted five scholarships to Burmese students. In 1967, there were over 4 000 foreign students in Yugoslavia, and in 1984, there were over 1 200 students just in Croatia, with half of them coming from African countries. Students were mainly males, but there were also women, especially later in the 1980s.

The International Student Friendship Club (MSKP) was founded in Zagreb in 1962 as one of the four Yugoslav friendship clubs, along with those in Sarajevo, Ljubljana, and Belgrade. The club aimed to provide extracurricular activities for foreign students and to organise activities for all the young people of Zagreb.

The MSKP was an umbrella for many other organisations, such as the Arab Student Union, the African Students Union, the Latin American Student Union, and clubs for students from different countries. In 1966, there were students from 54 different countries.

## Hidden Legacy

Petra Matić (b. 1988) is a Zagreb-based museologist, artist, and activist who works with the histories of the Non-Aligned Movement in Zagreb. Four years ago, she started a research project called Non-Aligned Zagreb (*Nesvrstani*

*Zagreb*). The project deals with the histories of foreign students who relocated to Zagreb between the 1960s and 1980s as part of Yugoslavia's involvement in the Non-Aligned Movement solidarity.

Her research efforts have yielded published texts, one short film, and an exhibition at Galerija VN in Zagreb. Matić ended up researching the stories of foreign students after a long journey.

– After finishing my bachelor's degree in phonetics and Swedish language, I worked in Ireland. Later in 2016, I went to help the nearest refugee camp on the border of France and the United Kingdom, i.e. Calais and Dunkirk.

Her plan to stay for two weeks was prolonged to six months, and she recognizes that the experience had a great impact on her. The people of the camp were mainly Kurds, and during her voluntary work, she got acquainted with Kurdish culture.

– After this, I returned home and began to study museology. During my studies, I worked as an archivist for the Večernji list, where I actually encountered the Union of African students for the first time. It was a great shock to read about the African Union in Zagreb, which organised exhibitions or conversations about African art with African

students in the 1980s, because it felt very different from the reality that existed in 2018, when Croatia was extremely hostile towards people who originate from the Middle East or Africa.

– This theme fascinated me a lot, and it has not ceased to fascinate. So, what surprised me? Everything surprised me during the research. Our generation did not think about these things, nor we did not learn about them in school.

Matić admits that the theme of the Non-Aligned Movement and people of the Global South is very distant and extraordinary for people of her age. One could only imagine how the art and culture scene of Zagreb was very different 50 years ago. Someone even commented at her exhibition that the cultural offerings of the MSKP seemed more interesting than the programme at the Student Centre today.

– The programme of the MSKP was very rich and diverse. For example, the first tribune in Zagreb was organised by the MSKP. People were free to discuss and debate, and it is a pity that we did not maintain this culture. Members of the club also celebrated a lot, everything from Nowruz to African Week.

The MSKP was definitely not a clandestine group of foreign



students. It played a great role in Croatian society, and Matic sheds light on the importance of the club for local people as well.

– It was interesting how many Croatian politicians were engaged with the club. However, I find it logical because that was one place of international political power. So, people who lived here and

wanted to enter politics went there, for certain.

## Living in the City of Peace

In the short film "The City of Peace" (*Grad koji ima mir*), two former Zagrebian students, Sam Abdalla Bushara from Sudan and Muhamed Al Younis from Jordan, recall the

history of the International Student Friendship Club (MSKP) and their lives in Zagreb.

The documentary begins with the statue of Franjo Tuđman. The voice-over of Bushara narrates the first impressions upon his arrival, and he praises that the city was and still remains the most secure place in Europe.



Throughout the documentary, the contradiction between sound and image can be observed. The memories lead a spectator to think about the stark contrast between yesterday and today, and the difference is not just in looks or demography. Bushara concludes his reminiscence by saying that people are less friendly today. Unity and solidarity have vanished since their youth – not only in Croatia but in the whole world.

**T**he demise of Yugoslavia and what happened to the foreign students

during the war years is an interesting topic. Some of them stayed and fought in the war, like Libyan-born Ibrahim “Gaddafi” Abushaala. The events of the 1990s are very traumatic and repulsive in many senses, and people might not want to talk about sensitive things. Nevertheless, Sam Bushara’s statement in the documentary that there were some Palestinians who joined the paramilitary group *HOS* in the Croatian war surprised Matić first.

– On the other hand, it was not surprising. In the magazine *Solidarnost*, Palestinian

students always claimed that they were ready to go back home, and ready to help in all possible ways. They raised funds and donated blood. So, their solidarity and readiness to help our people did not surprise me, if you can say so.

Croatia’s declaration of independence denoted the end of the MSKP as well. In 1975, the club moved from Tvrtkova ulica to the N pavilion of the Student Center, where it met its end in the early 1990s.

– The club was burned. In 1992, the locks of the club were changed, electricity and water

were cut off. They were banished, and the police confiscated video cassettes, documents, works of fine arts, and all equipment. Everything disappeared and has not been seen since that. After dubious twists, the building burned down, and it was the only building that burned in the area.

## Non-Aligned Nostalgia?

There are few people interested in this period and theme. Mila Turajlić, a renowned documentarist from Serbia, has directed a documentary diptych, *Scenes from the Labudovic Reels*. Turajlić, who directed *Cinema Communisto* and *The Other Side of Everything*, continues to portray the Yugoslavian legacy with her newest work. The documentary is partly composed of unpublished material by Tito's favourite cameraman, Stevan Labudović (1926–2017), who followed the state visits in places such as Algeria, Mozambique and Tanzania.

Labudović Reels are described as an untold chapter in the history of anti-colonial cinema. Turajlić has given many interviews where she claims that the idea of Yugoslavia is still cherished outside of the Balkans. According to her, there are some links in the Middle East that even today

open doors when you say you are from Yugoslavia.

Matić has interviewed Mila Turajlić and moderated two panel discussions around her film in Zagreb. How does she find the idea of nostalgia and longing for those days?

– I do not know about nostalgia. In fact, the situation in Zagreb and Belgrade differs a lot when it comes to the Non-Aligned Movement. Here, the memory is erased, and people might feel ashamed of it. As a person who led a panel related to the film, I can say only this: The auditorium was packed, but after the screening, the audience was hesitant to ask questions or comment on what they had seen. In spite of that, people found the film interesting. Possibly, we are still processing this and need some time to pose questions.

**T**he Non-Aligned Movement still exists, and Croatia has observer status in it, despite the fact that the Cold War ended three decades ago. When the 60th anniversary of the first conference of Non-Aligned countries was commemorated in Belgrade in 2021, historian Tvrtko Jakovina commented on the meeting from the Croatian point of view by saying that the fear of Tito and Yugoslavia still prevails in Croatia, and therefore everything related to those times is automatically seen as negative.

– Here, the legacy is erased. I can compare the situation only with Belgrade, where I have worked with my colleagues. Belgrade has two institutions working with the memory of the Non-Aligned Movement: the Museum of Yugoslavia and the Museum of African Art. They also have a rare collection of African art. It was originally offered to Croatia, but they did not want it. It is one of the few collections in Europe that has not been looted, but received as gifts.

There are still some visible traces of this period in Croatia. There are squares named after Nehru and Nasser in Zagreb. The Institute for Development and International Relations (IRMO), which was founded as the Africa Research Institute in 1963, still conducts research and focuses on global development processes. Many foreign students are rooted in their new home country and have families.

– So far, the legacy has been intertwined with shame and concealment. This is not strange when you think about the 1990s, when it was not desirable to be different in any sense or to have an affiliation with the preceding state. But as an independent researcher, I would say that we are about to discover more about the legacy of the Non-Aligned Movement.

“В чём главное?  
В том, что мы не  
были никогда  
колонизаторами  
нигде”

(V.V.Putin, 2023)



In September 2023, the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, participated in the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok. In his speech, he claimed that Russia has never been a colonizer, anywhere.

In reality, Russia truly has a colonial past and, as I also argue, a somewhat colonial present.

I recently went through a bunch of articles from the 2010s and 2020s for my doctoral dissertation, where the main focus is on the problems of realization of Indigenous rights in Russia. From these reviewed articles and my recent study, it becomes clear how the commercialization of Indigenous peoples' traditional land and waterways, the exploitation of hydrocarbons and minerals, and the construction of the infrastructure related to the aforementioned in the Russian High North have a regressive effect on the realization of Indigenous rights. In most of these cases, someone other than the Indigenous

community ends up having the biggest slice of the cake.

To my own surprise, this connection has not often been addressed as colonial in nature, even though it underlines the exploitation of natural resources in certain areas at the expense of Indigenous people's lands and way of life, as well as emigration from traditional areas (*Перечень районов проживания коренных малочисленных народов Севера*), as the opportunities to practice a traditional way of life narrow down. In the case of Russia, the actions in question also resemble the colonial history of the Soviet Union, which is referred to by the following terms: settler colonialism, internal colonialism, and resource colonialism.

The Russian Arctic has already faced two waves of colonialism. The first period of expansion, called rightfully imperialist colonialism, occurred during the Russian Empire. The second period took place during the Soviet era, when the Indigenous peoples of the

colonized Arctic region experienced collectivization, forced relocations, industrialization, Russification policies, and, with these, the deprivation of their rights. Many became estranged from their ancestors' homelands, cultures, traditions, language, and traditional way of life.

Contrary to several prejudices, the Indigenous peoples of the Russian North have a relatively promising and protective formal legal framework, which is structured by certain articles of the Constitution and Federal Laws. Indigenous peoples are constitutionally recognized in Article 69 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation (1993). This article was legally implemented through the adoption of three Federal Laws that were added in 1999-2001. Formally, these laws provide Indigenous peoples with a number of individual and collective rights and guarantees. However, in today's Russian Arctic, one can find several colonial practices reminiscent of the Soviet era, for example, in connection

# *In my research, I examine how geographic location affects the Indigenous legal framework and the realization of their rights in the northern regions of Russia.*

with the obstacles in realizing Indigenous rights. In addition, the lack of law enforcement constitutes a major problem for the realization of these rights.

**D**uring the last two decades, namely when Putin took office, Russia has started to treat its Arctic region as a so-called geopolitical hotspot and frontline of resources. This Arctic resource boom manifests itself as the exploitation of marine and continental raw materials, especially hydrocarbon and mineral resources.

The auctioning or renting of traditional Indigenous lands and their purposeful exclusion from decision-making related to, for example, natural resource infrastructure projects, narrow the opportunities for practicing Indigenous rights. These opportunities should be protected within the

framework of Indigenous rights. I argue that activity that harms sensitive Arctic nature and ecosystems and excludes Indigenous peoples from decision-making, should be discussed as colonial by its nature. Kara K. Hodgson calls this, in the lack of a better term, neo-settler colonialism.

**T**he problems presented in this short text and the use and finding of a suitable term are part of my dissertation at the Aleksanteri Institute. In my research, I examine how geographic location affects the Indigenous legal framework and the realization of their rights in the northern regions of Russia. My research aims to conceptualize the aforementioned issues to support the decolonization of Russia's Indigenous peoples. Thus, examining the colonial nature of Putin's Russia forms a meaningful part of my research.





# How to Approach Kosovo:

*18 Essential Things to Know*

Opinion piece  
by Dritëro Ferri

*In 1913, the Kingdom of Serbia conquered Kosovo. From Serbia's perspective they were liberating ancient Serbian holy land, but from those on the ground, the majority of whom were ethnic Albanians, it was a bloody conquest. One which engaged in expulsions, rape and massacres from day one. In the ensuing Conference of London in 1913, tasked with establishing the borders of the new state of Albania, the Great Powers ignored demographics and decided to award Serbia the fertile plains of Kosovo. In the words of the late scholar Robert Elsie, "It was a tragic mistake that haunted the Balkans right to the end of the twentieth century."*

*I believe that it continues to haunt us in the twenty-first.*

**This piece honors the memory of Martti Ahtisaari, the former president of Finland and a peacemaker in Kosovo.**

Pictures — Dritëro Ferri  
Illustration — Anna Koryukova



**1** Of the few things generally known about Kosovo is that it entered the scene fairly recently, with its declaration of independence on 17 February, 2008. But what if I told you that this was not the case? **In reality, Kosovo declared independence long before this, on 22 September 1991, at around the same time as other federal units of Yugoslavia such as Croatia.** However, this declaration was ignored by the International Community, along with the human rights violations that were documented in the province throughout the 1990's. Kosovo was governed by the United Nations after liberation in 1999, thus marking that year as the end of Serb rule.

**2** Kosovo's existence is perfectly legal. **In 2010, the International Court of Justice ruled that Kosovo's declaration of independence years prior did not violate international law.** Kosovo is recognised by over half the UN, and nearly all EU member states (except for Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain). Its statehood is challenged by Serbia and its allies Russia and China.

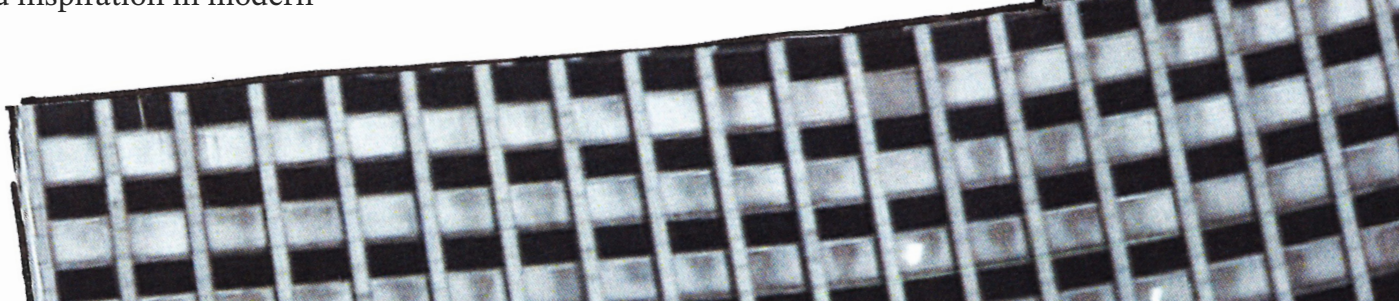
**3** According to the 2023 report by International IDEA on the 2023 Global State of Democracy (GSoD), **Kosovo is the most democratic country in the Western Balkans**, and Serbia is one of five non-democracies in Europe. In a speech to the European Parliament in June, president **Vjosa Osmani** further emphasized that Kosovo is the most-pro EU country in the region (with support among 95% of the population). Europe's youngest state is also the youngest on the continent in terms of its population, over half of whom are under 30 years old.

**4** One common misconception about Kosovo's recent history is that the infamous conflict of the late 1990's arose when Albanians started an armed uprising against Belgrade in 1998, through the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). Interethnic tension began in fact long before this, with **Slobodan Milošević's** forceful abolishment of Kosovo's autonomy in 1989, through which the "Butcher of the Balkans" sought to secure all votes in the Yugoslav federal assembly. What followed were years of apartheid where Albanians were dismissed from their jobs and saw their universities, schools, and newspapers shut down for many years to come. Under President Rugova, Albanians pursued peaceful resistance by establishing parallel structures, such as university classes in private basements, and tax collection to fund healthcare. That Kosovo wished to be free from Serbia simply because it was ethnically Albanian, is thus a simplistic interpretation of the situation; a lived experience of repression, not demographics, served as the primary justification behind Kosovo's drive for independence.

**5** During the Kosovo War, Kosovo Albanians comprised 80% of all civilian deaths. **Serb forces expelled 90% of Kosovo Albanians from their homes, sexually assaulted an estimated 20,000 women, and killed over one thousand children.** In 2001, a mass grave of 744 Albanians was found near Serbia's capital; the corpses had been trucked over 500 km from the crime scene in an attempt to erase the evidence. Serbia's systematic atrocities are yet to be officially categorized as a genocide, which tells us more about the limitations of the genocide definition than the level of horror committed in Kosovo.

**6** The NATO bombing campaign of 1999 is frequently cited by Serbian politicians today as evidence of their victimhood in the 1990's, with amnesia regarding the actions of their state that provoked the bombing campaign. It can therefore come as a surprise that, despite the importance of NATO's intervention to the official Serbian narrative, the country has refused to form a government commission tasked with making lists of the victims. However, the Humanitarian Law Centre, an NGO in Belgrade, together with HLC Kosovo took it upon themselves instead and published such a list in 2014. It counted **452 civilian deaths** as a result of the bombing, **204 of whom were Serbs and 218 Albanians.**

**7** The NATO bombing of Serbia was cited by far-right terrorist **Anders Breivik** as the turning-point that radicalized him against the West. Breivik even referenced Serb intellectual **Srđa Trifković** several times in his manifesto. Christchurch terrorist **Brenton Tarrant** also deplored NATO's defense of 'Muslim Albanians' against Christian Serbs. During his killing spree, he chose to play the song "God Is a Serb and He Will Protect Us", an anti-Bosniak and anti-Croat song from the Yugoslav Wars that openly advocated genocide. It is important to highlight the relevance of Serbian nationalist narratives outside of the Balkan context – for many white nationalists, Serbia's atrocities against Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo serve as an unrivaled inspiration in modern history.



*“At a time when Germany can expel tens of thousands of Jews...the shifting of a few hundred thousand Albanians will not lead to the outbreak of a World War”.*

**8** In a letter to the Great Powers in 1913, Serbia’s justifications for incorporating Kosovo were as follows: 1) **the Serbs’ moral right to the territory as a more civilized nation**, 2) the territory having been a part of the Serbian Empire in the fourteenth century and containing important churches and 3) Serbs had been the majority at some point in history, and that Albanians had recently ‘invaded’.

**9** The conquest of Kosovo by the Serbian army during the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 saw wide-scale massacres of Albanians, claiming the lives of 120,000. These events were documented by various foreign journalists including Leo Trotsky. According to one report, only three Muslim Albanians over the age of 15 had survived in the city of Ferizaj. The founder of the Serbian Social Democratic Party and soldier in the Balkan Wars, **Dimitrije Tucovic**, wrote in 1912: *“We have carried out the attempted and premeditated murder of an entire nation. Unlimited enmity of the Albanian people against Serbia is the foremost real result of the Albanian policies of the Serbian government.”* This was not the beginning nor the end of large-scale systematic violence by the Serbian state towards the Albanians. These massacres were preceded by the 1877–1878 expulsion of Albanians from what became southeastern Serbia (an episode regarded by historians as the beginning of Serbian-Albanian antagonism) and succeeded by episodes throughout Yugoslav rule, culminating in the horror of 1999.



**10** The interwar period saw brutal suppression of any Albanian cultural expression for the majority population of Kosovo. **In the 1930's, there was not a single Albanian-language school or newspaper in all of Kosovo**, at a time when even the comparatively miniscule Russian and Czech minorities of Yugoslavia had newspapers of their own. More infamously, the period saw the implementation of an official colonization project to alter the demographics of the newly-acquired territories of Kosovo and Macedonia through the settlement of Serbs, some of whom were brought all the way from North America. This costly initiative ultimately failed, but not before increasing the percentage of Serbs in Kosovo from 24% in 1919 to 38% in 1928. Realizing its failure in 1937, University of Belgrade historian **Vaso Cubrilovic** considered other 'solutions' to the Albanian question, namely an organized expulsion – a mass deportation of Albanians to Turkey. He wrote: “At a time when Germany can expel tens of thousands of Jews...the shifting of a few hundred thousand Albanians will not lead to the outbreak of a World War”.

**11** In 1974, the new Yugoslav constitution granted autonomy to Kosovo and ushered in an era of self-determination at the cost of centralization and Serb hegemony. The years 1974–1981 are remembered fondly by Kosovo Albanians as ‘the good years’. For a brief period, ethnic Albanians finally enjoyed much of the same rights as Yugoslav citizens. Kosovo enjoyed

considerable autonomy, becoming one of eight federal units in the assembly, with many of the rights of a republic. Well into the 60's, the Serbs had comprised nearly 70% of administrative positions in the province despite constituting around a fourth of the population, but the dissolution of this inequality over the course of the 60's and 70's (as well as economic factors) resulted in increased Serb emigration to Serbia. The demotion to equal status vis-à-vis the inferior Albanians generated resentment and feelings of victimhood among members of the once privileged minority, in a manner typical of colonial minorities after the collapse of colonial structures.

**12** Today, Serbs in Kosovo around 5% of the country's population and constitute the majority in ten municipalities, four of which comprise what is referred to as Northern Kosovo. Serbian is a co-official language in all of Kosovo, and the Serb minority alone boasts 10 reserved seats in parliament, meaning Serbs occupy 8% of parliament no matter the outcome of elections. Furthermore, only seven ‘minority members’ of parliament (out of 120) are necessary to block a change in the constitution. Before the war, there was only one majority Serb municipality in all of Kosovo, but after the war, the Ahtisaari Plan shifted borders to create ten. With ten out of 38 municipalities, Kosovo Serbs govern a fourth of the country's municipalities. In these areas, Serbs are not required to study Albanian nor do they even have the opportunity to do so.



**13** What about the equally numerous Albanian minority in Serbia? Unfortunately, they do not enjoy the same rights as Serbs in Kosovo. They are undergoing what has been referred to as administrative ethnic cleansing, as 6,000 of them have been erased from the population register in recent years, and thus prohibited from voting or receiving healthcare. This issue has been raised in the European Parliament but it is yet to be included in Brussels' Kosovo-Serbia negotiations.

**14** Mineral wealth, mineral wealth, mineral wealth. The factor nobody talks about. **Kosovo boasts the most mineral wealth in all the Balkans.** Lead, zinc, silver, bauxite, chrome, copper, iron ore. When Yugoslavia was among the world's top producers of magnesite, half of that magnesite came from Kosovo. Most notable is the Trepça mine in northern Kosovo. However, while Kosovo was the wealthiest Yugoslav region underground, it remained the poorest on the surface – calling to mind comparisons with the wealthy but looted continent of Africa. Kosovo Albanians in the Yugoslav era bemoaned this through the popular expression *Trepça punon, Beogradi ndërton* – Trepça works, Belgrade builds. Today, Belgrade is fixated on North Kosovo under the guise of protecting Serbs there (sound familiar?).

**15** Kosovo's role in Serbian history is often taken for granted. Serbian nationalism views Kosovo as the heart of Serbia, the birthplace of Serbia and even the Jerusalem of Serbia. This largely stems from medieval expansion into the area, most notably under the Serbian Empire (which also encompassed much of modern Greece), and that Kosovo is dotted with impressive Orthodox churches and monasteries from this period as a result. Needless to say, no place holds the same significance for Orthodox Christians as Jerusalem does for Jews, and the first medieval Serbian state was founded in Raska (what is now Sandzak), not Kosovo. However, if we wish to examine the country's history, it is only fair to examine it as a whole, including the period before the arrival of the Serbs. **We know that at the time Slavic tribes settled the Balkans, the region was already inhabited by the ancestors of Albanians — indigenous Paleo-Balkan peoples.** What is true, however is that Kosovo is mystified in a way it is not by Albanians (despite the Albanian national movement having begun there in 1878, and the Albanian ethnogenesis in the Middle Ages as well); so instead of asking why two peoples covet the same land, we should reframe the discussion so as to ask how and why a piece of land has come to hold such mythical importance in Serbian identity.

*The men in the pictures are the husband and four sons of Ferdonije Cekrezi. They were killed by the Serbs in 1999. The bodies still haven't been found.*

**16** The negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia, or rather Serbia's denial of reality, is often depicted as a tug-of-war between Albanian and Serbian nationalism. It is in fact a struggle between an aggressive Serbian ultra-nationalism and the advocates for a multi-ethnic Kosovan state. Kosovo's (predominantly ethnic Albanian) politicians are not even motivated by Albanian nationalism (Kosovo as Albania) whereas Serbia is blatantly chauvinistic, in demanding the return of land they committed atrocities to keep, whilst showing no remorse for having done so.

**17** The prospect of unification between Kosovo and Albania enjoys perhaps the highest mutual support out of all unification movements in Europe. So why do we not hear about it? Despite this case being inherently democratic, border changes are frowned upon by the International Community, due to the fear of setting off a chain-reaction of border changes in the region (ironically, the status quo, i.e. human rights abuses towards minorities in North Macedonia or Serbia aren't any more peaceful). It is thus deemed irrelevant if Albanian unification lacks the same context as a hypothetical unification of Serbia and the Serbian entity in Bosnia (i.e. genocidal baggage). Although heads of state on both sides of the divide naturally expressed their support for such a scenario - achieved peacefully through referendum, the absence of an official policy indicates that it is not a priority of either state. However, unification, even through a referendum, is not permitted under Kosovo's constitution.

**18** A particular case of political leadership last year illustrates the absurd asymmetry between the leadership of these two neighbouring states, expected to compromise on the negotiating table. In August 2022, Kosovo elected **Saranda Bogujevci** as Vice-President of Parliament. When she was thirteen years old, Bogujevci survived, with sixteen bullet wounds, the massacre of 21 family members (women and children) by Serb forces. At the same time as Bogujevci's election, the new vice-president of parliament in Serbia became **Bozidar Delic**, an army general personally responsible for the murder of thousands of Kosovo Albanians.

**W**ith legal legitimacy, broad recognition, a just cause, and a leadership committed to democracy and EU integration, Kosovo's independence is here to stay. And we, in the West, have a duty to defend both it and Bosnia-Herzegovina. With Serbia's refusal to support Ukraine and impose sanctions against Russia, the rest of Europe has had yet another opportunity to see its true face, the one its neighbours saw in the 90's. With that said, it has never been easier for us to take sides.

#### Further reading

Kosovo. A Short History by Noel Malcolm

TedX 'Why I choose to relive my family's massacre, Saranda Bogujevci

Kosovo wants to decide its future—but will history hold it back? National Geographic April 2023, Robert Draper

We Need to Talk about Serbia, Vjosa Musliu, KosovoTwoPointZero

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# Decolonizing Identity

## A Path to Finding My Ingrian Roots

Text — Maria Filippenkova

Growing up, I often felt the need to categorize myself for the comfort of others. I suppose my name was a dead giveaway that prompted people to ask where in Russia I am from, why did I leave Russia or otherwise share their feelings about Russia-related things. It felt conflicting - I was born in Finland, my family always spoke Finnish (with a funny dialect, however) and I had been to Russia less than 10 times in my life. Living in Finland for my whole life made accepting “Finnish” as my identity easier than “Russian”.

However, the Finnish side of my identity was often challenged - sometimes because of my name, sometimes because of the languages I spoke, sometimes

because elements of my family traditions diverged so much from Finnish ones. I felt like I did not belong anywhere, and identities “assigned” to me were not accepted or didn’t feel like my own. At some point it felt easiest to just say “yes, I’m partially Russian and partially Finnish” to make things clearer for the curious inquirers - and myself.

In high school, I began questioning my identity. Ingrian and Karelian music, languages and cultures had always been present in my life, from my mother dancing and singing in an Ingrian/Karelian folk ensemble to using Finnish-sounding words in our daily communication that other Finns don’t use. I remember asking my mom why these things were so

present in our family, and from there on started a personal journey of questioning and finding my Ingrian roots.

Although unfamiliar, me being “Ingrian” felt like it made a lot of sense. Being labeled Russian constantly felt like I was reduced to something I couldn’t fully identify with; something that discounted who my family and I are. I had felt great sorrow and even shame for not knowing fully where I come from. On the other hand, it is no wonder that there are so many gaps in my knowledge about Ingrians - outside the ever-growing discussion within the academic community, there are a lot of Finns who have never even heard about Ingrians.



“We are not Russians, we have never been Russians”, exclaimed my mother and my grandmother. I was confused. I had obviously heard about Ingrians many times, but somehow never really registered it as something that applied to me. As is the case for many others with Ingrian roots, the Ingrian part of our background is often diminished or not spoken about at all. The reasons for this are different for everyone, but historical generational trauma does explain a lot as to why things are being left unsaid. Being Ingrian has cost my family their homes, their culture, even their lives - as well as facing forced

deportation to Krasnoyarsk and Chelyabinsk. These kinds of experiences easily become experiences younger generations adopt when forming their identities, thus resulting in generational trauma.

My family’s Ingrian identity has paradoxically been veiled simultaneously in trauma and celebration - trauma starting from Stalin’s genocides and being forced to fade out being Ingrian and celebration for the beauty of our culture and traditions. The path to decolonizing my Ingrian identity is long, but worthy. Decolonization of one’s identity is a process that looks

different for everyone, especially when access to learning about such identities is often still restricted or blocked.

I have set myself a goal to start reclaiming parts of myself and my culture to embrace and feel connected to something that feels like home. The actions towards decolonizing my Ingrian identity don’t have to be huge from the get go. Maybe the next steps will be something like going to see an exhibit or a concert that showcases our culture. And I’ll be taking my mom and grandmother with me.

## Who are the Ingrians?

- Today, Ingrians live in a **diaspora** in different parts of Russia, Finland, Sweden, and Estonia, for example.
- Originally, Ingrians lived in **the area surrounding contemporary St. Petersburg**. They were the largest Finnish-speaking group in the Soviet Union.
- **In the beginning of 1990s, around 30 000 to 35 000 Ingrians moved to Finland** when they were recognized as returnees by the Finnish state.
- Ingrians’ identities are often hybrid. Most Ingrians speak multiple languages and have a sense of not belonging. Some feel that they belong in several places because of Soviet and Russian assimilation, but also assimilation that has happened in their new places of residence.
  - For example, **Finnishness of Ingrians has been questioned and disputed in Finnish society**, too.
- Ingrians’ history is often linked to the **Great Terror, persecution and displacement during Stalin’s rule**. On an individual level, this is related to losing one’s mother tongue, culture, and home.
- The Ingrian diaspora was first created through deportations in the late 1920s based on their social class as ‘kulaks’ and later dispersed during Stalin’s terror.
- The years in exile, repressions, and constant movement led to shame and a period of silence.
- The Russian state’s ways of remembering WWII and the Great Terror, and it’s habit of “smoothing” the past, continue to silence Ingrians and what happened to them.

Text — Maria Roivas

# Study Trip to Qazaqstan

## *Thoughts on (Linguistic) Decolonization*

Text — Maarit Kiiskilä and Juho Pitkänen  
Pictures — Juho Pitkänen

**W**hen we landed in Astana last spring, the city felt breathtaking – quite literally, as the April days scorched us with 25 degrees Celsius, the dry air scraped our noses, and the steppe wind blew dust against our faces.

As it was a study trip organised by the ExpREES programme coordinated by the Aleksanteri Institute, we naturally visited several museums, organisations and institutions. A highly striking experience was the Museum of the First President of the Republic of Qazaqstan, right on the bank of the river Ishim. When you enter the cream-white museum's exhibition, a gargantuan wall fills with a movie depicting the natural scenery of Qazaqstan. The Qazaq flag's eagle is shown

flying over the mountains and the vast steppe, and the country's first president **Nursultan Nazarbayev** – who is still alive, by the way – appears. A spectacle fit for a dictator.

As the exhibition moves on, a visitor gets acquainted with Nazarbayev's childhood photos, accolading his school grades and accomplishments, alongside a room filled with diplomatic gifts to Qazaqstan from other countries. A truly bizarre experience.

While the museum opened almost 20 years ago in 2004, it displays the decolonial nature of our time – the Qazaq eagle, the Qazaq steppe, the Qazaq dictator, in a city that **Nikita Khrushchev** renamed to Tselinograd, The Virgin Lands City. As if the Qazaq steppe

were maiden, fit for Moscow to further settle and oppress. While Nazarbayev's personality cult felt monotonous and depleted, on the streets of Astana we saw a fresher form of decolonization.

*Born Qazaq.*

*Est. 1465.*

*Modern Identity. Modern Society.*

These clever slogans appeared on many trendy 20-somethings' shirts and hats. After a quick Google search, we found out about the clothing brand Qazaq Republic, founded by a local film director **Saken Zholdas** in 2017.

# *Decolonization meant claiming one's own territory, space, and identity.*



Simple designs - such as the use of Q instead of the Russian K when referring to your own nationality, or going back to 1465 when the independent Kazakh Khanate was founded – felt rebellious. Even calling your own identity and society modern somehow came across as revolutionary, maybe because we all know who is to blame for the erasure of Qazaq national and cultural identity.

**F**rom Astana we moved on to Almaty, a much greener landscape. After a sweaty day trip to the Charyn Canyon, we got a chance to see the Russian DJ **Kedr Livanskiy** performing at a club in Almaty. For us, pretty much all the interaction between locals was in Russian, as well

as the concert, taxi drives from our accommodation and asking for directions. The club was filled to the brim with young local and Russian-emigree adults, singing along to the lyrics in Russian and enjoying the warm Saturday night.

Unlike in partly Russian-occupied Georgia, where restaurants hang notes on their doors saying they don't speak the language of the aggressors, the Qazaqs seemed to speak Russian without the language having as strong of a connection to Russia, its war crimes and history of colonization. In Qazaqstan's case, as it seemed to us, decolonization meant claiming one's own territory, space, and

identity. Qazaqstan is also in the process of important language planning, one of which is changing the K's to Q's. The change from Cyrillic to Latin alphabet is scheduled to be gradually implemented from 2023 to 2031, and the previous president Nazarbayev has described the use of Cyrillic alphabet as political. Besides Qazaqstan, the Soviet-era change was implemented in other Turkic language speaking Central Asian states to distance the countries from Turkey and without a doubt, get closer to Russia. The Qazaq language is a Turkic language that had previously used Latin script from 1929 to 1940 and prior to 1929 it was written in Arabic script.



A bottom-up approach to language policy doesn't sound as essential as it can be. In Qazaqstan, it starts from simple changes to the everyday routine, like the above-mentioned, and continues its way to translating phone applications such as Telegram into Qazaq, organising meetings for overcoming the fear of speaking the language and other volunteer-based activities, as well as installing a new Qazaq-language operating system on your smartphone.

Our knowledge of Slavic languages compared to Turkic was (even embarrassingly) overpowering. The Russian language was our only possible bridge to Qazaq culture. Luckily, during the night train

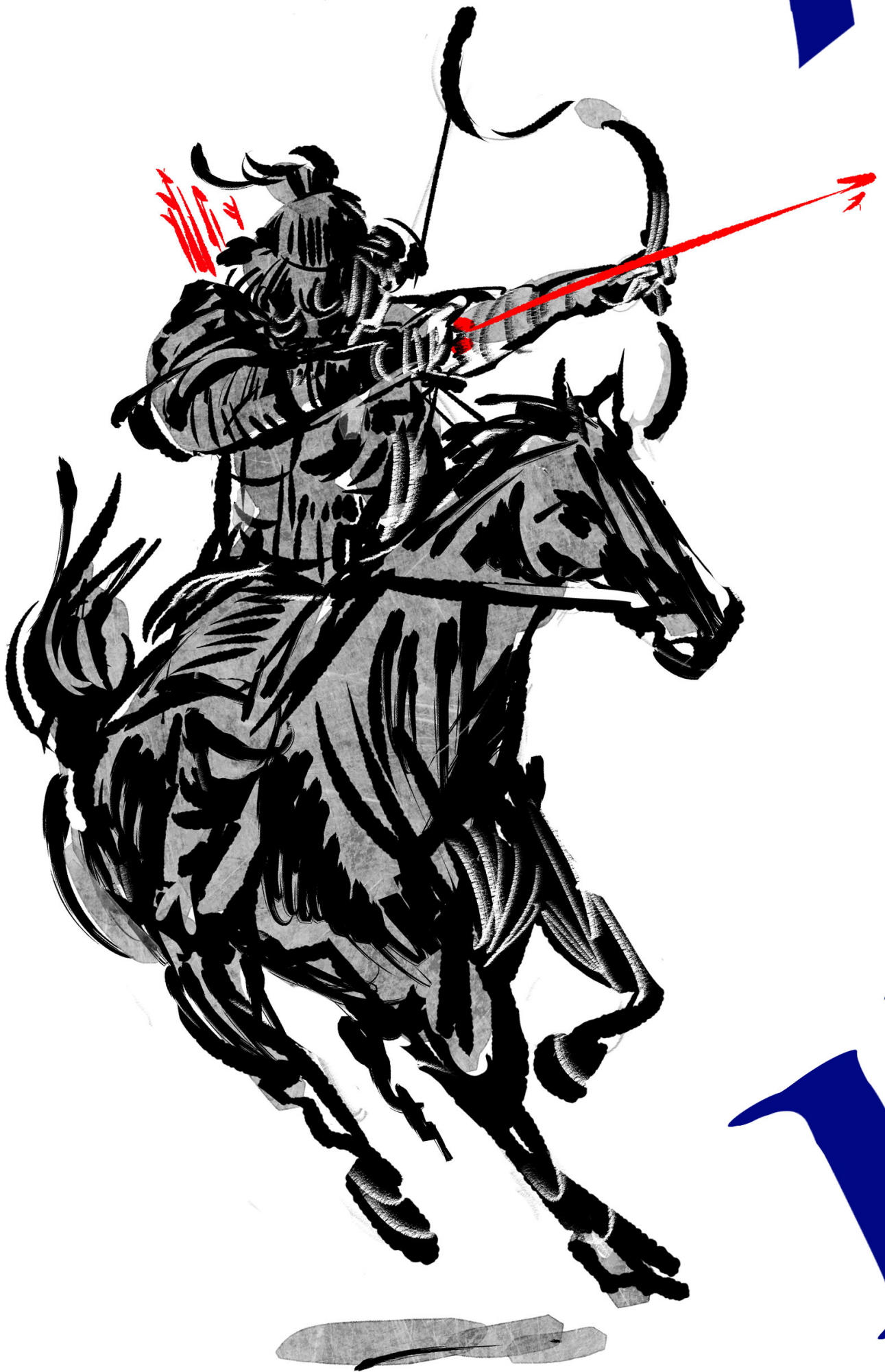
trip for Astana to Almaty we had a chance to learn Qazaq vocabulary from local travellers. They taught us in Russian, as it was the simplest way to get the points across. Apart from that, we didn't get to learn much Qazaq during our stay. However, we felt the presence and pride of Qazaq culture, and due to the 2021 law on visual information, we could see road signs, advertisements, and menus in the Qazaq language.

Despite the popularity and success of Russian music in Russian-speaking countries, a ride from the mountains left us positively surprised, as the bus filled with contemporary Qazaq-language music – the Qazaq culture was physically present as the bass buzzed

under the travellers' tired feet. While enjoying Qazaq nature, views and food, we got a glimpse to see what everyday decolonization looks like.

While Russian authorities see decolonization attempts as an attack on Russian historical interpretations and memory politics, decolonization does not stem from displacement nor hate; it stems from reclaiming what has been previously repressed, being honest about your past and allowing history to be properly scrutinised. Often the smallest steps can lead to a path towards national healing (and to a great learning experience for a 20-something group of ExpREES students!).







# Lost in Colonization: The Invisible Influence of Turkic Languages on Russian

Text — Yenlik Dairova  
Pictures — Johanna Porkkala

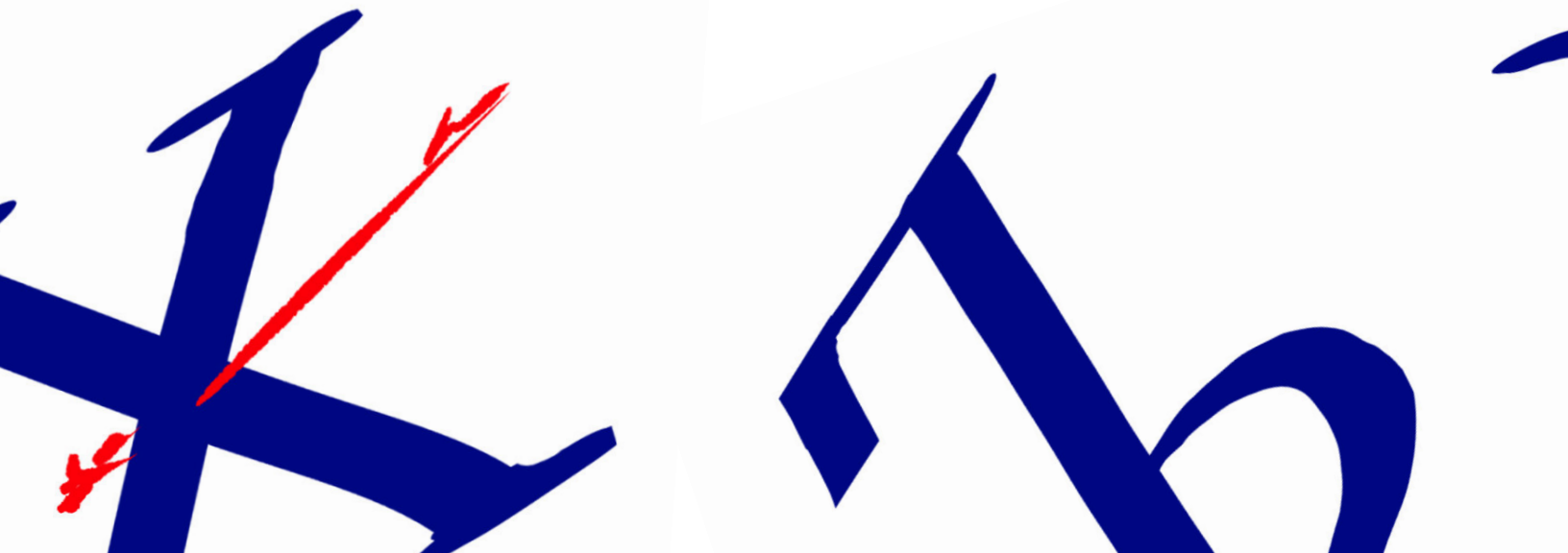
**H**istory can be rewritten to fit the narrative of those in power, but the language carries the ethnographic and cultural legacy that the modern history books could not erase. [With the ongoing narrative on social media](#) that the Russian empire taught Central Asians the ABCs of “civilization” and culture, it is ironic to recount how the way Russian speakers express themselves was actually influenced by the “minority cultures” in the past. Even though there was no monolithic stance on the issue, Soviet scholarship had constraints on the narrative of influence of the Tatar-Mongol language and culture on Medieval Rus. Alas, the attitudes towards the languages and their respective cultures

are dictated by the voices of power, and it is one of the goals of decolonization to reclaim the power and revive the native identity.

When analyzing the impact of the linguistic influence of Turkic language on Russian, “*The Lay of Igor’s Campaign*”, a medieval Rus’ epic, is often brought up. The story, written presumably between 1187 and 1188 in Old East Slavic language, recounts the unsuccessful campaign of **prince Igor**, accompanied by his son **Vladimir** and his nephew **Svyatoslav**, against the nomadic tribes of Polovtsians who raided the southeast Rus. In the subsequent century of the original authorship of the text, the Mongol Empire gained

prominence over the steppe and launched a full-scale campaign against Russian principalities under the leadership of **Genghis Khan’s** grandson, **Batu Khan**.

**W**hat makes this literary relic remarkable, among its historical and cultural significance, is its linguistic accumulation of history. Considered to be a classic literary relic of the Medieval Rus, it being tainted by the Tatar-Mongol influence, is unacceptable. The way patriotic defenders of authenticity of the manuscript resisted any speculations of Qazaq writer, poet, and political activist **Olzhas Suleimenov’s** implications of the bilingualism present in the



“Lay” demonstrates how deeply rooted the cultural polarization between Slavic and Turkic people was.

## Unveiling the Hidden Turkisms in Russian Language

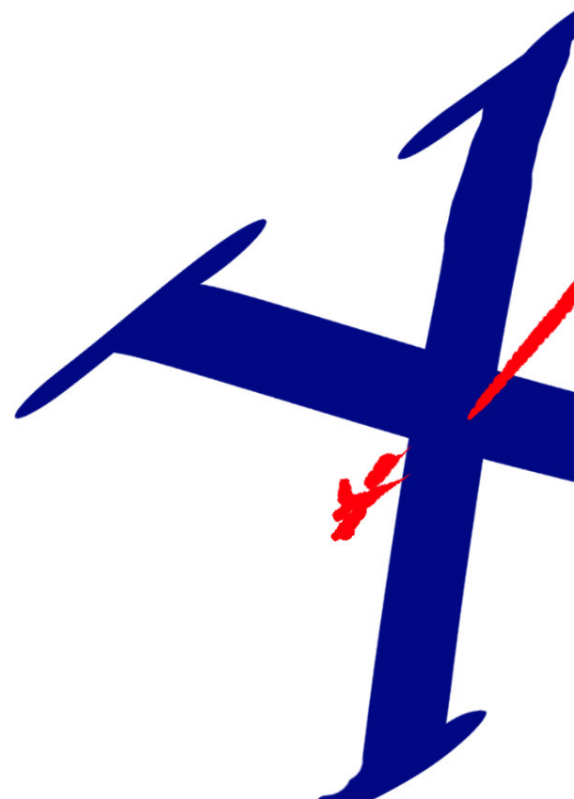
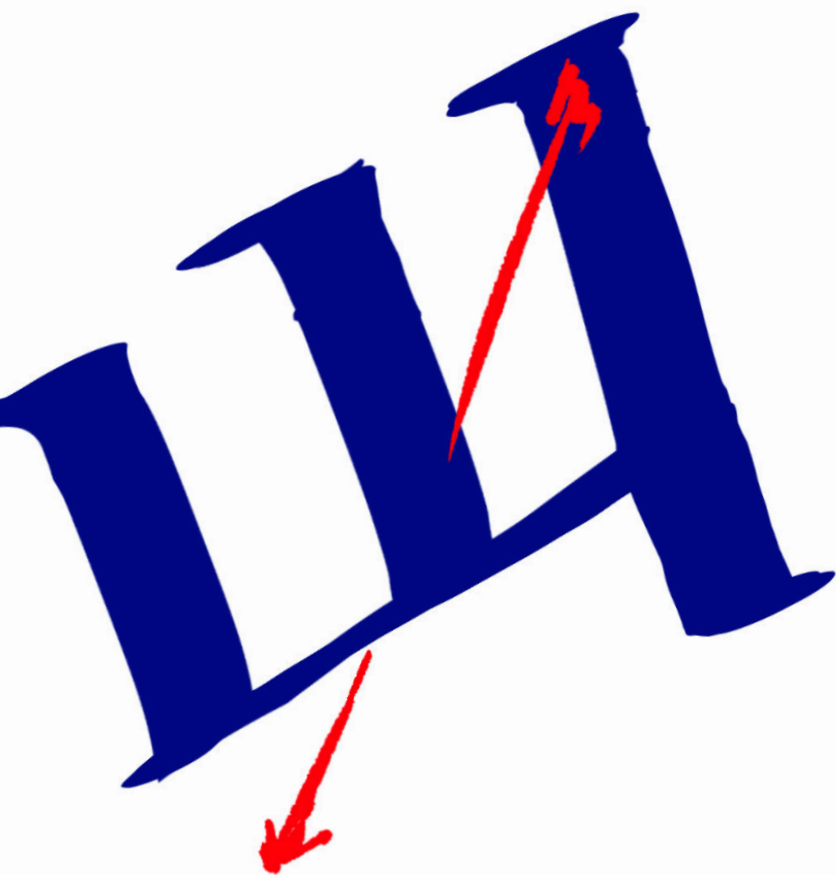
Invisible Turkisms signify the level of amalgamation between Rus and Turkic tribes that are found in contemporary history textbooks. It was unacceptable for Soviet rulers, who opposed Suleimenov's ideas, that the nations from the periphery (barbarians) influenced the center (civilized). Suleimenov defends his point by providing an etymological analysis, tracing words used in the

source to Turkic words today. Some of the wordings in the latest translations of “Lay”, if carefully analyzed through the prism of Turkic origins, become clearer.

For example, the line “*синее вино с трудом смешено*” (blue wine mixed with struggle), although sounding poetic, barely makes any sense. If translated considering the Turkic origins of these words from the Turkic ‘*турта-осадок*’ or “sediment”, making it “*вино с осадком смешено*”, “wine mixed with sediment”. Many invisible Turkisms hint at the scribes being bilingual in old Russian and Turkic languages, perhaps due to their professional occupation that allowed them to travel from one principality to another. As

the most recent scribes spoke Russian, which diverged from the Turkic languages, some of the meaning got lost in translation.

Suleimenov states that “no other language has preserved Turkisms as precisely as Russian” but most of them are invisible to our eyes now. This philological significance is crossed with cultural one, as it shows how far and deep into history the cultural interactions between Turks and Slavic people go. Our cultures were intertwined through intermarriages, trade, and travels, so the mixture of languages was imminent. The fact that speculations on this work raise such heated historical, cultural, and even political debates shows the





°T-R3v 🇷🇺  
@Brother\_Kat

Follow



## Kazakhstan language

 **King** 👑 ✓ @Steez0147 · 10 Sept

Guess the language he was typing...? 🤔 🙋 😂



negative attitude of the Russian historians and cultural experts towards even a remote hint of the Turkic influence.

## Russification of the Languages in the Soviet Union

During the Soviet Union years, despite the initial post-revolution period's idea to give equal opportunities to all native languages to combat Tsarist oppression, the self-determination and pluralistic language policy transformed into Russification and denationalization after the 1930s. Soviet identity heavily relied on language planning and policy. Estonian linguist **Mart Rannut** concisely puts how the languages and cultural rights to speak them were shuffled aside 'for an ideal that was clearly an attempt at linguistic genocide'. This language policy was aimed at the erasure of indigenous identities and building of a novice Soviet or, to put it more accurately, Russian-centered, identity.

One of the first steps was standardizing the local languages by switching to Cyrillic written system, even though some of the languages, like Georgian and Qazaq, already had their own written forms. This way, the languages in the 'periphery', or non-Russian, were considered of

lower culture, while Russian was mostly associated with being in the center, cultured, and "civilized". Russian, in the boldest dreams of **Lenin** and **Stalin**, was to become a new *lingua franca* for international communication. Steadily, Russian became preferred over native languages in educational systems, academia, culture, and other spheres of life in non-Russian countries.

## Erasure of the Tatar-Mongol Influence

During the implementation of the language policy, there was also a tendency of erasing Turkic-Mongol influence on Russian history, as it was considered a humiliating "black mark" in the past. This negative interpretation of the Mongol invasion was constructed and propagated by the Soviet scholars, who showed complete disregard for the positive impact like participation in international commerce and replication of political, military, and fiscal models of governance through the development of relationships with Tatar nobility, like marrying Tatar princesses. This is apparent from the extensive list of Russian nobility's family names, like **Suvorov**, **Kutuzov**, **Turgenev**, **Pushkin** and many others, having Turkic origins, as

explored by Soviet turkologist **Nikolai Baskakov**.

Both Slavic and Turkic languages influenced each other, making this linguistic relationship synergetic even well before the invasion, as the two societies lived in proximity to each. However, scholars such as **Halperin**, **Nazanov**, **B.D. Grekov**, and **A. Iu. Iakubovskii** pushed this idea of Mongols halting Russia's societal development, referring to the former as "uncivilized barbarians". Granted, the invasion by Batu Khan did bring hardships, by the very nature of how colonization works, this is not at all how other colonizations are portrayed in the West. This way, Western colonial influence is synonymous with enlightenment and development, while Russian historians blame Mongol influence as being "set back in development" in terms of culture and technology.

## Decolonizing Central Asian Identities

Moving away from the Soviet past while maintaining close geographical and political proximity with the Russian Federation certainly has a say in decolonizing the Turkic cultures and rebuilding their post-Soviet state's national and cultural identities.

**F**rom the dawn of times, Central Asia has been the hub to multitudes of cultures, languages, religions, and political quandaries. The linguistic relationship with old Eastern Slavic itself began during the very beginnings of both neighboring ethnoses, continued with Tatar-Mongol invasion of the Medieval Rus principalities, and was cemented during the Soviet period. Switching to Cyrillic prompted the influx of Russian words into Turkic languages. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, native languages in Central Asian countries regained prominence but to different extents among them. In Qazaqstan and Kyrgyzstan, Qazaq and Kyrgyz languages were declared as native, whereas Russian was the

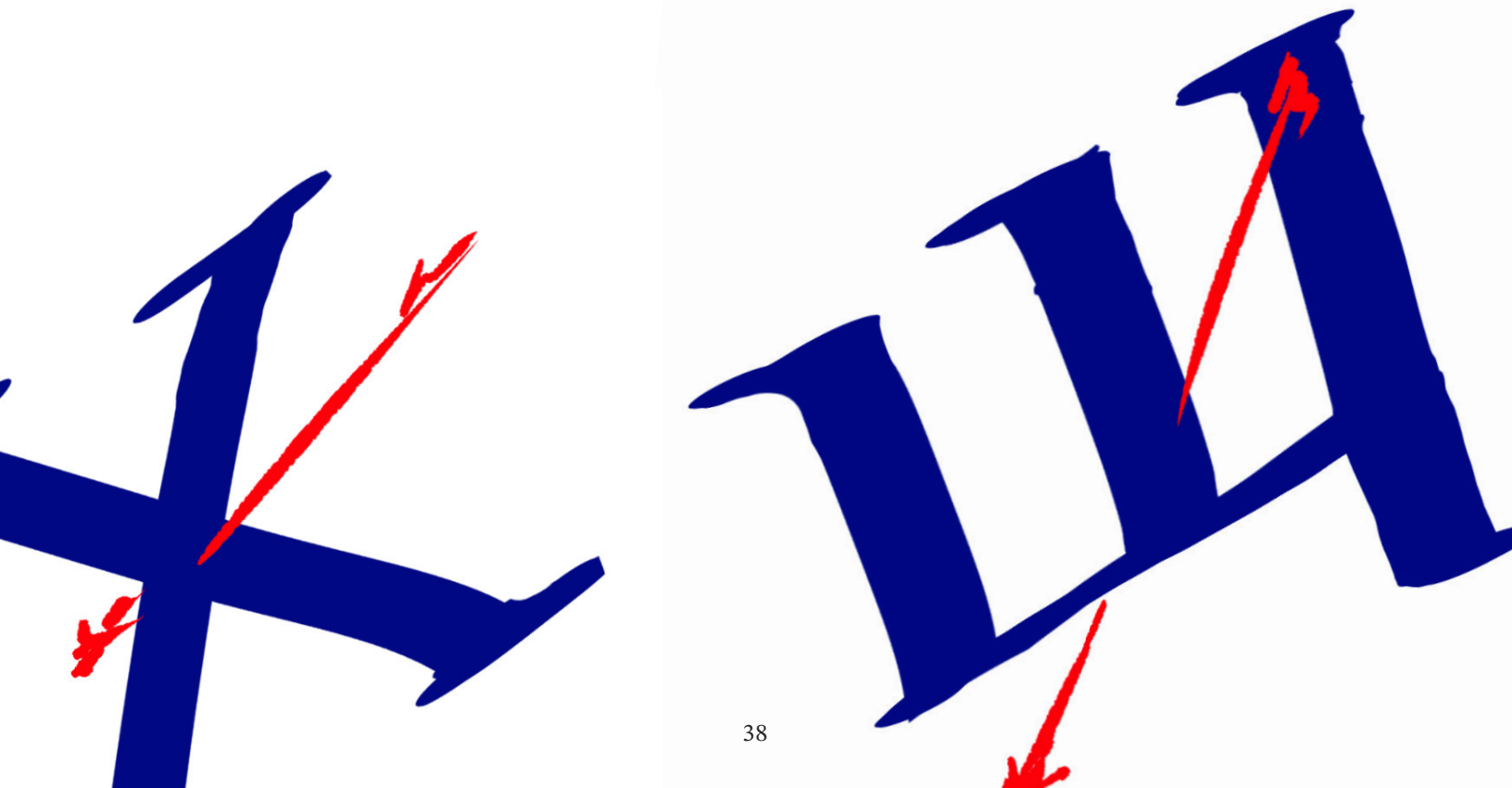
official language of the Republics, which explains a rather slow de-Russification. In rural areas in Qazaqstan, Qazaq is more prevalent than in two most populous cities, Almaty and Astana, the capital. There are Russian and Qazaq language schools, but Russian language and literature remain compulsory in both curricula. Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan cut ties with the Soviet-instilled linguistic legacy and Cyrillic alphabet promptly after the dissolution.

## Lingering Imperial Attitudes

The legacy of the Russification language policy has been prevalent in the post-Soviet era, continuing well into modern

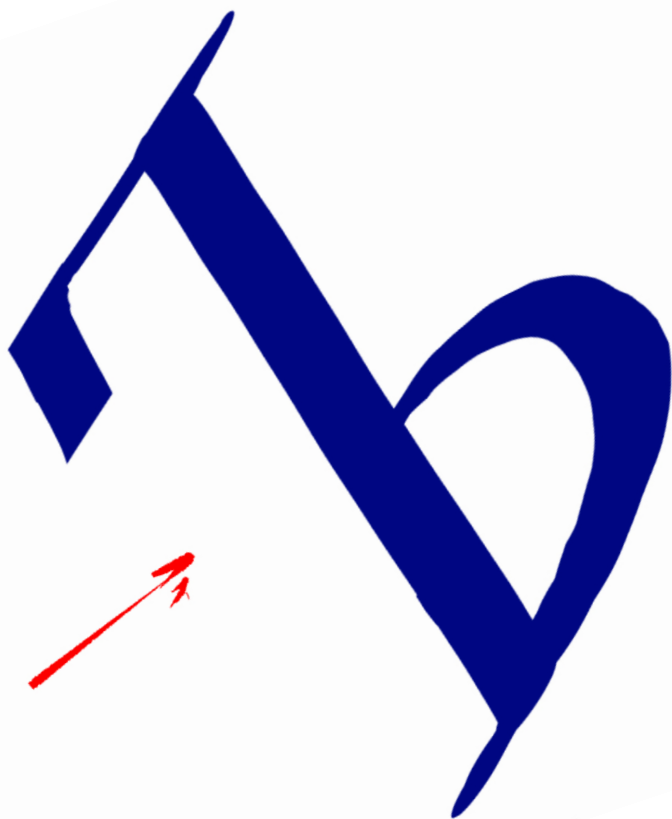
days. The condescending attitude expressed among the Russian population towards Central Asian nations has prevailed, if not intensified, due to the war in Ukraine, which caused an influx of Russian migrations to Qazaqstan, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, and other Eurasian countries.

When relocating to our countries, there was a spike of degrading comments regarding the local languages and cultures, for example dubbing the Turkic languages as “*марабарский*” or “gibberish”, as well as complaining about the level of service and lack of culture. One of the most infamous derogatory sentiments expressed by some Russians is that they taught



Central Asians how to “wipe their bottoms”, read and write, and brought culture to the steppe nomads in general.

Language is a vehicle of intercultural communications, as people of different cultures collided and meshed, so did new languages appear, and old ones went extinct. Linguistic genocide has always been synonymous with colonization. As the Russian language was propagated in the Soviet countries as the main one, while shunning others, it is interesting to think how the language that became the oppressor was heavily influenced by the languages it tried to silence.



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# გაყვანილობა

Text and pictures — Maria Filippenkova and Anna Kananen



What do you get when you combine four friends, gut-wrenching longing for Caucasian food and a bottle of Kindzmarauli?

A wonderful Georgian-inspired dinner party at the only friend's place who has an actual dinner table.





**TIP:**

You can find the right kind of cheese for Khachapuri-cheese bread, Suluguni-cheese, at Kalinka for example (Kalinka Itis in Itäkeskus, Itäkatu 1–7, Helsinki as well as Kalinka Tikkurila, Asematie 4–10, Vantaa). Stores like Eestin Extrat in Malmi or other Estonian stores might also have it.



# Dear AI, how should we decolonize Eastern Europe?

**We asked ChatGPT to decolonize Eastern Europe. Here are the solutions we got.**

The concept of decolonization typically refers to the process by which former colonies gain independence and self-determination from their colonial rulers. Eastern Europe, unlike many regions that experienced colonialism by Western powers, has a different historical context, primarily marked by imperial rule and influence from neighboring empires, such as the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

To discuss "decolonization" in Eastern Europe, you may need to reframe the question to address issues related to the region's history and contemporary challenges. Here are some key considerations:

1. Acknowledge Historical Context

2. Address the Legacy of Imperialism

3. Promote Self-Determination

4. Peaceful Resolution of Conflicts

5. European Integration

6. Address Economic Disparities

7. Protect Minority Rights

8. Encourage Cultural Exchange

9. Reconciliation and Truth-Telling

10. Promote Human Rights

It's important to recognize that Eastern Europe is a diverse and complex region, with different countries facing distinct challenges and opportunities. The specific approach to addressing historical legacies and promoting self-determination will vary from one nation to another. Additionally, any efforts in this regard should prioritize the agency and voices of the people in Eastern Europe to shape their own futures.

**Thanks, AI!**

# ITKUJUHLA



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Picture — Ano Miettinen,  
Santra Juoperi and Ella Snellman

**The theme of 4/23 is Memory / Muisti**

*gazeta sasha*