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DRINKING IN THE NORTH OF EUROPEAN RUSSIA: FROM TRADITIONAL TO TOTALISING LIMINALITY

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ABSTRACT
This article* explores the topic of alcohol consumption in Russia. My fieldwork was conducted in the north of European Russia between 2010 and 2014 in Arkhangelskaya and Vologodskaya oblasts. The main idea of the paper is to look at alcohol drinking through the lens of rites of passage and especially liminality. I argue that the traditional festivities, and alcohol consumption with the traditional type of liminality, were based on a small amount of sugar and money and also the long period of time required to make beer. In 1960s, after *ukrupneniye* and the urbanisation of villages, money and spirits came to the villages. Together with an existing prohibition on ceremonies and rites they created a new permanent liminality of drinking. This new liminality included getting dead drunk and was paradoxically approved by Soviet ideology.

KEYWORDS: North of European Russia • drinking • community • liminality • Vologodskaya oblast • post-Soviet village

INTRODUCTION: WHAT ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION MEANS FOR RUSSIANS AND NON-RUSSIANS?

Alcohol consumption plays an important role in Russian culture. This feature is distinctly recorded both by culture bearers and by foreign observers. For the majority of Russians the issue of alcohol consumption is associated with a quote from an ancient Russian chronicle. According to the legend, when choosing a state religion Prince Vladimir turned down Islam on the grounds that "happiness in the Russ means drinking". Recorded around the year 987 it is one of the most famous quotes from the chronicle in contemporary Russia.

The idea vividly manifests itself in the anecdotes of the late Soviet period. One of the main themes of such anecdotes is the Russian ability to drink alcohol without limit. One

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joke concerns an international drinking tournament where the participants compete to drink the most alcohol. The joke is told on the part of the sports commentator.

> A German athlete enters the arena. 1, 2, 3 … 45, 46. The German athlete cracks. He managed to drink 46 bowls. And where is uncle Vanya? Uncle Vanya is in the bar warming up with red wine. An American athlete enters the arena. 1, 2, 3 … 95, 96, 97. The American athlete cracks. He managed to drink 97 bowls. Uncle Vanya enters the arena. 1, 2, 3 … 150, 151, 152 … 200, 201, 202. Crack! It came apart! The bowl! Comrades, the bowl came apart!

In the joke the Russian appears as a person whose ability to consume alcohol is only limited by the boundaries of the environment. The special relationship of Russians with alcohol is considered a unique Russian feature.

The significant role of alcohol consumption in Russian culture is obvious to a foreign researcher. In 2001 the journal *Geographical Review* (the "Doing Fieldwork" section) published the work of Melinda Herrold, an American researcher who studied the attitude of the residents of Amurskaya Oblast towards the construction of a nature reserve for birds built with the participation of American NGOs. The text is full of notes such as the following: "Rare is the gathering of two or more people at which no alcohol is consumed" (Herrold 2001: 301). The main idea of such notes is that the answers people give to anthropologist's questions differ depending on the amount of alcohol consumed. Finally the researcher observes:

> Should I have just not interviewed people when they were or had been drinking? Had I done this in Muraviovka and Kuropatino, I'm not sure that I would have gotten very far with my research – and my year in those two villages would have been very long and very lonely. (Herrold 2001: 303)

Again, alcohol consumption becomes the centrepiece of Russian culture.

Anthropologists' approaches to the research of alcohol consumption in today's Russia vary. I would like to single out three of them. First, a study of alcohol serving as currency that looks at how it is used to establish and maintain social relationships within a group. Second, emphasis on the political aspect of alcohol consumption and how it is used by the state to control 'indigenous peoples' of the Russian North and Siberia. And thirdly, a study of situations in which drinking becomes a symbol of the degradation of the population and the decline of public relations.

Articles by Myriam Hivon (1998) and Douglas Rogers (2005) illustrate very well the first of the approaches mentioned above. Canadian researcher Myriam Hivon (1998: 516), who worked in Vologoskaya Oblast, specifies the importance of vodka in the everyday life of the village: "Vodka is not always consumed immediately, rather it is used in different transactions." Vodka is viewed by the author on the one hand as a traditional payment instrument common in mid-20th century, and on the other hand as a special "non-inflationary" currency (ibid.: 519). American scholar Douglas Rogers (2005: 67) expresses similar views, explaining the financial role of moonshine (homemade spirit) in a contemporary village in the Ural mountains. As a metaphor for moonshine he uses the word liquidity, which has two meanings: a) liquid and b) currency. Rogers points out that these circulations of money and alcohol depend on gender. If women primarily use money as a payment instrument, men use moonshine for this

purpose. Both observations are based on qualitative field research and contain large amounts of factual evidence.

Articles by David Koester (2003) and by Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov (2000) can serve as examples of the second approach. David Koester from Alaska University of Fairbanks treats alcohol consumption as a way to facilitate the expression of honour, respect, friendship in the context of colonial encounters. This is how he sums up his article:

> […] the status and power in Russian drinking patterns has social, political implications in the asymmetric power situations of interethnic encounters in minority indigenous communities. The obligation to receive in the form of accepting a drink was heightened by the legacy of threat and violence against those who resist or stand out and by the assumption of colonized status. (Koester 2003: 46)

In other words, the author highlights that the aim of drinking practices in Siberia is to perform colonisation in everyday life. Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov (2000: 349–350) from the University of Cambridge considers drinking as a complicated, polyfunctional social process that includes such aspects as demonstrating respect and at the same time prepaying for future deals, re-actualisation of friendships, and at the same time making gifts by one side to another that create relations of mutual obligation. He depicts a situation in which transferring a bearskin when drinking together becomes the main means of turning a sale into a gift, and he stresses that drinking practices often play a very important role in interethnic relationships. I should also note that these studies pertain to drinking among indigenous communities in Russia, and therefore it seems natural to highlight the colonial aspect of relations between drinkers.

An example of a totally negative attitude towards excessive drinking is Boris Segal's book *The Drunken Society*. The author concludes that binge drinking in Russia is a "result of a spiritual crisis, in particular by a post-Christian denial of immortality, which is associated with erosion of the basic foundations of our civilization". This causes "the growing feelings of uncertainty, dissatisfaction and apprehension". (Segal 1990: 521) Thus, excessive drinking may be explained in many ways depending on the interests of the researcher. American anthropologist Lynn Attwood (1985: 73) thinks that one of the reasons for binge-drinking practices in male groups is "erosion of traditional masculinity and femininity". The papers in support of this approach are numerous, but they only link alcohol consumption with their major preoccupation and do not really explore the many implications of drinking practices in society.

To sum up, the best-researched issue is the power relations between drinkers. But such emphasis presents a problem. On the one hand, it is justified because anthropologists should always be attentive to questions of power, but on the other it can also be seen as somewhat Eurocentric. I think in the generally defined 'West', power is hegemonic. Hegemonic power is defined by Antonio Gramsci (1971: 5–10) as invisible power, power that has saturated social relations to the degree that it becomes naturalised, and hence invisible, to people. Therefore, it makes sense to a European anthropologist to uncover the relationships of power and hierarchy. In Russia, especially in rural areas, power has never been hegemonic, it has never been hidden. It has been quite 'in-your-face', supported brutally, physically, for example by *prodarmeytsy*[1] in the 1920s or by collective farm chairmen in the 1930s and 1960s, or promoted forcedly by political agitators. It was never far away from the gun and enforced political propaganda.

Therefore, I find an interpretative approach, which looks at power relations through the lens of meaning, more appropriate from both an ethical and epistemological point of view. Yes, the discourse and practice of drinking is a discourse about egalitarianism, of liminal *communitas*, here in the Turnerian sense (Turner 1995: 94–130), but egalitarianism should not immediately drive an anthropologist to the issue of power relations. In the Russian North at any rate drinking is about the active reproducing of an ideal of egalitarianism that does exist in reality.

When an anthropologist tries to uncover power relations behind drinking, s/he does precisely the opposite of what my informants attempt to do by drinking: specifically to form, to create, an ideal picture of society both in the flow of everyday life and during festive occasions. The egalitarianism of liminality is not the naturalisation of power relations, nor some sort of blindness or oversight on the part of the drinkers, but first and foremost an attempt to mask, to cover up the absolute matter-of-factness of the presence of power relations and inequality in their lives.

So I offer an alternative approach. My hypothesis is that today drinking practices in rural areas are the result of the transformation of function, and hence the meaning of liminality, a dislocation that followed when traditional drinking encountered the demands and the realities of Soviet modernity. My hypothesis is that that the liminality of drinking became totalising: fulfilling numerous functions and becoming somewhat self-sufficient in its meaning.

MY FIELD: THE NORTH OF EUROPEAN RUSSIA

Before I proceed directly to my argument I have to say a few words about my data and experience. I performed fieldwork in this region from 2006 until 2013, mainly in rural areas, so I cannot extrapolate my conclusions to include the practices of alcohol drinking in the towns and cities. I would also like to point out that when I was in the field drinking was not the focus of my research. But naturally, it was something that interested my informants, and my notes contain numerous references to drinking.

In the Russian explorative tradition the Russian North is an alternative name for North European Russia. By saying the Russian North, I do not mean the circumpolar regions of Russia, which have come to be associated with this notion in the English language. In Russian ethnographic tradition the Russian North is the north of the European part of Russia. This consists of Arkhangelskaya and Vologodskaya oblasts and also the Republic of Karelia. Murmanskaya Oblast is also considered a part of the Russian North but will be out of our focus in this paper as its population is mainly urban. The region studied is populated primarily by Russians, who according to the 2010 census amount to 93% of the population in Archangelskaya Oblast, 92% in Vologodskaya Oblast and 78% in the Republic of Karelia.

These regions are viewed as a separate ethnographic area due to their specific historic development. Russia has two areas of taiga colonisation located to the North East of Central European Russia, the 'Vladimir High Plains', where the shaping of the Moscow Russ took place. The first one is the Novgorod colonisation area and the second is the Moscow area. In this article we will closely look at the first one. Novgorod colonisation was carried out primarily by water. Novgorod fur buyers carried boats between

Lake Onega and the White Sea roughly along the route of the present-day Belomorsko-Baltiyskiy Kanal. Further from the White Sea they moved along major rivers – the Onega, Severnaya Dvina, Pinega, Mezen, Pechora and even the Ob – deeper into the land domain. What is peculiar about the Novgorod colonisation is that Novgorod residents brought in and sustained the traditions of the Novgorod medieval republic and escaped omnipresent state control. I mention these historical facts to show that the North of European Russia was a region on its own, where Moscow officials appeared very seldom: less than once a year. State power here was always something alien.

This very remoteness and isolation – as those settlements were not only far away from the mainland but were also very difficult to reach – led to the development of a distinct culture. This culture preserves a number of features that could be called archaic and obsolete. At the same time, the Russian tradition somehow romanticises them: they are viewed as signs of integrity, old traditions and a lack of sophistication. In the early 21st century the Russian North still preserves the traditions of village co-operation as opposed to just one neighbour helping another, village festivities, and a very detached attitude towards state authorities and officials. They are treated as infrequent visitors totally irrelevant to everyday life. I shall use the term *Zapinezhie* for the three the most remote districts of Archangelskaya Oblast located to the east of the Pinega river.

The same remoteness of the Russian North created a special vector in its development, which can be also traced throughout the Soviet period. And this is essential for this paper. The year 1917 is not an important critical point. And the collectivisation years are described calmly by one of the villagers as follows: "In 1930 newspapers published an announcement that collective farms must be organised. We got together and organised Leninetz collective farm." In the other village a villager was sent to the city of Archangelsk to attend Communist Party School as a part of the late 1920s programme to improve villagers' awareness of the new order. In the 1930s he returned as one of the 25,000 urban workers (*dvadtsatipyatitysyachniki*), who were sent to the villages to oversee the organisation of the collective farms. These facts show that the period of the 1920s–1930s was not as destructive for the Russian North as it was for Central Russia. In central regions the *dvadtsatipyatitysiachniki* were people who really destroyed the traditional, communal way of life in the villages.

However, the 1960s brought about much more serious changes, i.e. merging of collective farms (*ukrupneniye*). During the Khrushchev period the state made an attempt to turn collective farms into agricultural factories. For this purpose smaller villages were wiped out while larger villages were further enlarged. New urban infrastructure was created: kindergartens, schools, hospitals, grocery and department stores, car repairs shops, etc. If previously the villagers were paid 'points' for a certain amount of work performed and those points were exchanged for a proportional share of the crops at the end of the year, now they were paid (increasingly in money) by the hour. Hourly pay did not depend on the amount of work performed. As the residents of Samogora village told me: "You came to work, started the tractor – and – and you were already being paid." The cultural shift relating to the agricultural reforms of the 1960s will be a turning point in my reasoning. I divide the 20th century into the pre-1960s and post-1960s periods. In short, I shall argue that the shift in the liminal function of alcohol consumption took place in the Russian North in the 1960s.

Rural culture of the first half of the 20th century was primarily based on manual labour. A lack of machinery was compensated for by an extremely complex system of mutual co-operation that included redistribution of physical resources between households, between brigades in a collective farm and between neighbouring villages (Milov 1998: 418–434; Paxson 2005: 271–275; Rogers 2005: 68–71).

Before I begin to describe the types of work involved, the idea of the collective farm deserves a short explanation. Until the merger (*ukrupneniye*), both in the Russian North and in the rest of Russia a collective farm or *kolkhoz* was a collectivised village. As a rule, villagers were divided into several working groups – brigades – frequently formed on a geographical principle. In the Russian North a brigade consisted of the residents of one *okolok*, part of the village separated from the rest of the village by a natural barrier: a stream, a ravine or a grove. In central or southern Russia a brigade was a group of villagers living in the same street. Thus, one can single out several layers of the collective organisation of the village: household, brigade and kolkhoz (on this see Humphrey 1983; Arkhipova and Tutorskiy 2013).

To have a clear understanding of the agricultural cycle in the Russian North, one should take into account that this is a risky area for farming: the first ground frost can happen in mid-August, and the last in mid-June. Thus, the growing season is very short, and the period from June 15 to August 15 should be used very efficiently. I would single out three elements in the working process essential to the present paper: working time, festivals, and alcohol consumption during holidays.

I would start with a few words about what kind of alcohol was common in the Russian North in the first part of 20th century. Home brewed beer was a traditional drink. It was made of malted rye with the addition of yeast and flavoured with hops. Beer preparation and brewing took from seven to ten days. After two or three days of fermenting the beer was ready to serve. The whole process was very labour intensive and required special equipment. Many respondents noted that a huge 300–400 litre wooden vat was needed for brewing and thus the very same people who owned such utensils were the ones who brewed the beer. One could borrow a neighbour's bowl, but a return service would be expected (as a rule some type of work). It was compulsory to give the owner of the bowl freshly brewed beer as a treat. Second, the process of beer brewing (in large volumes in particular) required the presence and work of several people. In this process one or two people would be making a fire where stones would be heated. One person would put them in the bowl with the help of wooden tongs, one more person would be stirring the mash to ensure it was warm enough but did not boil. It turns out that the beer brewing process took around two weeks and required several pairs of hands and special equipment. I go into this detail in order to demonstrate that beer brewing was only possible through the co-operation of several households. It was not possible to brew beer at home in the same way home-brew spirits are made. The amount of beer was often limited because the more beer one makes the more guests one should invite. And last but not the least, the process of consumption included a ceremony at which the master of the beer would treat guests. This meant natural limits to the amount of beer each person could consume. One of my informants said that, "usually, we got one glass

of beer for two [people]". In other words, the beer brewing process required publicity, cooperation and the mutual effort of many villagers.

Now let's move to the liminal function of alcohol. The most important structural element of labour activity during the summer season were festivities at which residents from neighbouring villages would get together. Village festivities would take place alternately in villages located not far from each other. The village hosting the festivity would have to prepare treats in the form of beer and food. A village festivity enabled people to join in larger groups on a short-term basis, while smaller brigades performed the majority of agricultural activities. One of the important functions of such village festivities was the exchange of information on the completion periods for certain types of agricultural activities. Village festivities were like milestones that allowed the public to see if a person or a brigade managed to meet the deadlines. For example, the harvesting of spring crops should be finished before the Assumption Fest, or August 28 according to the Orthodox church calendar. After the Assumption the sowing period for winter crops commenced. Such festivities delimited farming operations and hence performed a liminal function.

Here and after I use this term rather in Van-Gennepian than in Turnerian sense, as *limen*, meaning between two stages of life – for example childhood and adulthood or as in this case between two types of work. In other words the middle of the three stages of every *rite de passage*. A state of ritual chaos between two different cultural statuses, a condition of "non-existence", when ritually all social restrictions were removed. It is also important to stress that this stage of this rite of passage was rather short. In this case with the festivals, one or two days of festivity was a threshold between two agricultural jobs: harvesting of the spring crops and sowing the winter crops.

However, in the eyes of informants the most important part of the festivity was the consumption of alcohol. After looking into my notes, I have noticed that when people talk about alcohol, every second conversation mentions some sort of festivity. For instance, "The adult man climbs a tree and makes a *zalaz'*.[2] Then a young man puts a bottle on the table." In this case *zalaz'* is a ritual of introduction into adulthood that has alcohol consumption as an integral part. Or another example from peasant remembrances: "In spring young women helped each other to clean their houses. After cleaning they drank tea, or wine." Here we can also clearly see that drinking practices were closely connected community work.

There is a narrative that specifically mentions that there were some festivities "without drinking": "There were *besedki*.[3] This was a special kind of feast, but without dancing and beer." These are examples of memories of the traditional meaning of drinking. I should repeat that by writing traditional, I mean the practices of drinking as they were between the 1920s and 1950s, before *ukrupneniye* was extended to the Russian North.

In the course of the festivities, alcohol consumption also played a liminal role, separating various events within the festivity itself. Informants give the following example. "The guests will get together, drink and go out with an accordion to *gulyat'* ['to walk around']" – meaning some sort of a merry communal parade. The goal of drinking was to cheer up the festivities so that people danced better or sang more. After such a walk through the village with dancing and singing, festivity participants could visit their neighbours or return home for more drinking. Drinking therefore had a function of

time structuring: it was a marker with which the festivity commenced and a boundary that separated different stages of the fest.

In summary, alcohol consumption fulfilled a liminal function on two levels. On one level, the festivities and holidays were perceived as drinking time. Festivities divided various stages of the agricultural cycle. On the second, deeper level, alcohol consumption divided various stages within the festival. Notwithstanding the importance of beer, it was not the main idea of the festival. Dancing, songs and conversations were much more important; there was a "culture of laughter" or even a "laughter counter-culture" that had a significant place in traditional culture (see Bakhtin 2010: 5). Such a traditional cultural model aimed at intensive labour during the summer months and the activation of various forms of mutual cooperation existed in more or less recognizable form until the early 1960s.

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN RUSSIA AFTER 'UKRUPNENIYE' AND THE APPEARANCE OF STATE FARMS

In the 1960s after the program of merging villages (*ukrupneniye*) was accomplished, alcohol consumption patterns changed considerably, which resulted in widespread binge drinking in the 1970s and later. Binge drinking in the villages of North Russia does not have to be connected with similar practices in the cities and the villages of Central Russia. The connection of such a shift with the 1960s is characteristic of the region under review.

In order to understand the meaning of the shift that took place in the 1960s when the villages turned into collective farms, the following factors should be taken into consideration.

First, manual labour, which made mutual cooperation the only means of survival, was replaced with machinery. In the centre of European Russia this process took place earlier in the 1930s and 1940s. The introduction of machine labour, for example the use of a harvester instead of the manual harvesting of wheat resulted in joint effort being replaced by two-way relations with the operators of certain agricultural machinery. Such relations between two households was very well described by Douglas Rogers (2005: 69–71) in his work on Sepych. In such relationships a machine plays a far bigger role than the helpers.

Second, as has been already mentioned, the merging of villages also included the construction of urban infrastructure, in particular shops. From the late 1960s the workers of collective and state farms started to be paid with money instead of crop shares, so money became available and villagers were able to spend it in shops, where in particular vodka was sold. This led to a situation in which the owner and distributor of alcohol was no longer the host to whose house the guests would come, but practically everyone. As a result the village festivity of the first half of the 20th century, which included such activities as a walk along a village street with a harmonica, as well as the gathering of the whole village at one table, ceased to exist. Villagers began to get together at a table and drink with those with whom they worked in the fields.

Third, the type of alcohol has changed. In the villages of the Russian North home-brewed beer was replaced with vodka. However, this did not change the drinking rit-

ual: drinkers still use table glasses containing 150 ml of vodka. The practice of drinking in small shots of around 50 ml with toasting is not widespread in rural areas to this day. As a rule, the whole glass of vodka is drunk in one gulp, as it was previously with beer. This means that several rounds of toasting in village festivities become next to impossible. The chance that someone will sing or dance better reduces with every glass drunk.

And finally, the change of attitude towards the opportunity to get drunk as such is of paramount importance. In my view a very insightful example of the understanding of Soviet ideology is given by Cynthia Hooper (2006: 64–65):

> In one typical incident in 1937 Novosibirsk, NKVD officers denounced a colleague for having refused to participate, seven years earlier, in a firing squad to shoot his own uncle despite the fact that the lieutenant in question had been the first to turn his relative in to the police for suspected treason. The officer was saved from immediate party expulsion on grounds of cowardice and disloyalty only when the Novosibirsk regional NKVD chief intervened to argue that his subordinate's request to be dismissed from the execution team should be considered a consequence of strictly physical rather than sentimental weakness. As he explained: "Not every Chekist can carry out a sentence simply, on occasion by virtue of the condition of his health, therefore to raise that as a motive of direct political accusation would not be completely fair."

What is important in this example is the idea of the omnipotent mind, which was put forward by Soviet thinkers and finally gained a foothold in the 1930s (see Halfin 2003: 179–192), in fact turned out to be a very vague idea of insurmountable physical aspects. In the example above the intention to participate in the execution of the uncle (triumph of omnipotent mind) can be brought to nothing by physical weakness – a hand tremor – which a person is unable to control. In other words, inability to control, at least, some of one's body functions gave an opportunity to 'hide' a weaknesses of mind. This only possibility of being weak because of imperfect body is essential, if we try to apply this scheme to various stages of alcoholic intoxication.

These four factors – the reducing of the importance of collective labour, the appearance of trade in the village, the replacement of beer by vodka and the idea of insurmountable physical aspects – came into being in the late 1960s. The process was launched in different places, although the speed of expansion and its intensity varied from place to place. In the first instance the system of community festivities began to break down. There were too many reasons not to go to a fest: permanent availability of alcohol in all villages, the possibility to obtain alcohol without beer brewing equipment, etc. Besides, during the Khrushchev years religious ceremonies were under pressure. Village festivities were considered by Khrushchev (and it was translated via all Communist Party members to the villagers) as something unworthy of the workers' culture, a relic of bourgeois relationships where alcohol played the role of money, and, most importantly, a meaningless waste of time for the 'omnipresent mind of the worker', who could do something else instead.

In other words, one could no longer voluntarily make a fest, drink and then sing. However, it was quite appropriate to get drunk and collapse. This became quite acceptable, because this is where the exception comes into force: the weak body prevents the manifestation of the omnipresent mind.

This new type of drinking and getting drunk at the same time achieved some of positive connotations in relation to labour and communal approval. For instance, drinking vodka – which, unlike domestic beer, could only be brought from the city – meant drinking by the approval of the state farm director, who sanctioned such imports. At the same time, if a person drinks to the point of collapsing, it means that s/he worked extremely hard and did not have the strength to dance or sing. Thus, this person could prove s/he was 'Soviet' by nature and by idea, i.e. with a weak body and a strong mind. It was not very good, but possible, although these people who did not drink a lot and kept their strength for dancing and singing were considered as weak in mind and thus unSoviet, and, class-wise, aliens. And that was much worse.

On the days off, correspondingly, the emphasis was no longer on communal dancing and singing but on the very act of drinking. This was a dislocation of liminality that also redefined its meaning: no longer a creation of communitas but of, using the expression popularised by Arpad Szakolczai (2009) and Bjorn Thomassen (2009), permanent liminality. The drunken liminality of late Soviet society was a condition without restriction that one could enter every time one wanted. This was a state of breaking rules that was accepted by the community but did not divide any life stages or work phases. That liminal stage became permanent for those people who were drinking every day or very often.

I see this permanent liminality as a form of the adaptation of traditional liminality to the challenges of Soviet modernity.

IN LIEU OF CONCLUSION

The problem of drinking in the North of European Russia can be seen from an anthropologist's point of view through the lens of liminality. The traditional model of Russian rural liminality included different agricultural festivities as a central part of the rites of passage. Inside those festivities the culture of laughter – songs, jokes, dancing – played the primary role. The role of alcohol drinking was marginal and it was linked with a small amount of sugar in the villages and a long period of preparation of homemade beer. After the 1960s the economic and cultural changes that came to the rural areas were too quick for culture to adapt to them. The amount of sugar and spirits in the shops rose precipitously, plus rural dwellers already had a salary at that time. These changes came together with another wave of ideological company against religion, traditions, ceremonies and other 'survivals' of pre-revolutionary times.

The result of that situation was a shift of the central idea of festivities from laughter culture to alcohol consumption. And that alcohol consumption was paradoxically legitimised in the socialist culture by the final stage, getting dead drunk, meaning that a person was an ardent worker and was not prepared for non-work activities and that s/he got drunk unintentionally. Getting dead drunk meant the mind lost control (forcedly, not willingly) over the body, and thus this was not punished by the authorities. And slowly, outside of traditional liminality with the environmental help of Soviet changes, the permanent liminality of late-Soviet alcoholism emerged.

Though I see this permanent liminality as a form of adaptation of traditional liminality to the challenges of Soviet modernity, at the same time this adaptation to new condi-

tions can be, at least partially, interpreted as resistance or counter-action. For instance, a drunk man was seen by local people as being transferred, or transferring himself, to another world, a world outside of the world of Soviet rationality and the Soviet order of things. Drunk people very often were not punished. They received a sort of *carte-blanch* to many activities. For instance, they could play accordion and sing songs, as indicated by a very common phrase – "got drunk and bellowed some songs". Within this permanent, total liminality one could hold onto the tradition, the relics of former past times that were banned as irrational from the modern Soviet point of view.

This new liminality spawned a new culture of drinking and new drinking traditions of which the majority of people are aware, such as having at least three people to drink, a ban on putting an empty bottle on the table, to clink or not to clink glasses while drinking. These new traditions are taken for granted, while the old customs connection to drinking are often contested as something that people 'do not believe in', for instance, the custom of colouring eggs for Easter or baking crepes for Maslenitsa (a weekly Russian equivalent of Pancake Tuesday).

NOTES

1 *Prod* – from Russian *prodovolstvie* 'foodstuff' and *armeitsy* 'militants'. *Prodarmeitsy* were those people who implemented the Bolshevik policy of grain confiscation.

2 *Zalaz'* is a anthropomorphic decoration of a tree top made for young people who come for the first time to the haymaking.

3 A youth revelry combined with work, something like wool spinning and a kind of singing evening.

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