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After newspeak: language culture and politics in Russia from Gorbachev to Putin

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forced labor not only to economic goals, but ideological ones as well, arguing that labor was central both for output and for personal transformation. He also highlights prisoner patriotism during World War II to show the “power of the Gulag’s indoctrination system” (107) and reveals the use of Soviet-style language and demands even when prisoners resisted authorities, as in the case of the post-Stalinist Kengir uprising, to underscore the “overwhelming power of the Soviet system to control political discourse” (232).

Yet there are also instances when the details – and some curious lack of detail – call into question Barnes’ overall argument. For instance, he notes that most releases occurred simply at the end of a prisoner’s sentence, and that those released were often not allowed to move back to their home towns (72–73). Had these prisoners achieved redemption and, if so, how would we know? He also discusses early release for those who had over-fulfilled their work norms or during mass amnesties, but he barely mentions the frequent early releases of invalids or pregnant women and nursing mothers, hardly categories that speak to the redemption of prisoners. Moreover, Barnes makes much of the Gulag’s propensity to monitor and categorize prisoners, but he says little about the very important labor categorizations, whereby camp physicians assessed prisoners not on ideological grounds (i.e. type of sentence), but on the prisoners’ physical capabilities. These labor categories determined what type of work a prisoner would conduct in the camps, and thus had a direct impact on a prisoner’s ability to survive. In other words, much work remains to be done precisely on the question of who was released, why, and what happened to those prisoners after release, in order to be able to prove that redemption was a key element of the Gulag.

Death and Redemption is a crucially important book for our understanding of the Gulag, Stalinism, and the post-Stalinist transition. It reintegrates the Gulag into the broader history of the Stalinist era, underscoring the importance of ideology both in the camps and in Soviet society at large. At its most fundamental level, Barnes presents a nuanced and detailed account of the multi-faceted Gulag system, providing incredibly useful information for specialists and non-specialists alike, while also offering an overarching argument that all current and future historians of the subject will have to address. *Death and Redemption* should be required reading for graduate and upper-level seminars on Soviet history, and non-specialists will also benefit from Barnes’ clear and engaging style.

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After newspeak: language culture and politics in Russia from Gorbachev to Putin,

Michael Gorham, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2014, 198 pp., + appendix, index, bibliography, US\$75 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0-801452628

In *After Newspeak*, Michael Gorham offers a thorough analysis of the language of politics and politics of language in the late-Soviet era and post-1991 Russia. Drawing upon discourse analysis of a rich collection of political speeches, public and academic discussions, and media broadcasts, Gorham explores the evolution of Russian language usage in political discourse, particularly under the rule of Vladimir Putin. The author argues that the way the Russian language is used in modern day Russian politics is conditioned by the legacy of the late-

Soviet campaign of *glasnost*, or political liberalization, followed by the penetration of vulgarities and terms, phrases, and expressions from criminal lexicon into the mainstream political discourse.

Gorham states that strong and assertive language was an enduring element of imperial-era Russian and Soviet political culture. Embracing Gogolian principles of discourse, Russian rulers were always expected to express themselves assertively leaving no space for political debate. The *glasnost* campaign, launched by Gorbachev in the mid-1980s, marked a break from this framework and led to “the unprecedented show of open and contentious debate over the past, present and future of the country” which “had as profound an impact on the contemporary language culture as it did on the political one” (76).

The atmosphere of relative political openness in the late-1980s and early 1990s and the transition to a market economy relaxed the formerly tight political controls over and censorship of mass media outlets, while at the same time introducing them to the challenges of the market. Due to a lack of experience and unfamiliarity with critical analysis, media outlets found it too hard to resist broadcasting low-quality content, such as cheap soap operas and sensationalist news. This change in format led to the general vulgarization and tabloidization of the media space, giving rise to the public acceptance of profanity (80) and linguistic lawlessness (93). Under Vladimir Putin, this vulgarized linguistic political culture became even further institutionalized within the mainstream political discourse.

After an introductory chapter, Chapters 1 and 2 discuss the Soviet legacy and changes that the Soviet linguistic realm experienced under the era of *glasnost*. Gorham explores how in the early Soviet period, the Soviet regime engaged in the campaign of *yazikovorchestvo*, or “linguistic engineering,” to mark the break from the imperial past and to establish a new linguistic realm and a new speech culture.

Chapter 3 focuses on the *glasnost* campaign and provides a historical overview of the concepts of political debates and openness in Russia. Gorham points out that ideas similar to Gorbachev’s *glasnost* were not unfamiliar to the nineteenth-century Russian policymakers. These policies were understood as “state-sanctioned means of publicizing enough information for the reading public to understand and support the policies of tsars” (51). The culmination of the *glasnost* campaign was the live TV broadcast of the First Congress of People’s Deputies in the summer of 1989, during which Soviet citizens for the first time in many decades were exposed to open political debates touching upon most of the salient issues of Soviet society. Following on this wave, new TV broadcast editions, such as *Vzgliad* and *600 Sekund*, offered a fresh format in which major events and news were commented and discussed openly by comparatively young journalists and invited experts, in sharp contrast to the censored and polished style of *Vremia* evening news edition (79).

In Chapters 4 and 5, the author illustrates some rather paradoxical developments of Russian language usage in politics. Chapter 4 analyzes how, on the one hand, there are various defensive and purist tools intended to preserve the purity of the Russian language, including a state linguistic commission, different policies, laws, and media campaigns aiming at removing loan words from Russian language and spreading knowledge about grammar rules and their appropriate usage. Chapter 5, on the other hand, details the evolution of the culture of language under Vladimir Putin, launched by his (in)famous statement at a press conference in October 1999, in which he promised “to waste the terrorists in the outhouse” (133). This and several other similar statements by Putin later on, in which he was not shy to use street-style terms and expressions, marked a notable change in Russian political rhetoric; carried on by other politicians and media, this trend quickly became a mainstream element of discourse. By changing the discourse, Putin “reflected rhetorically the general sense of desperation that had come to dominate Russian society,

while at once demonstrating a willingness to use it to do battle against the very sources seen as the prime perpetrators of corruption and instability” (136). Gorham also bolsters his argument with the detailed analysis of the “Direct Line with Putin,” an orchestrated TV show designed to demonstrate a more authoritative image of Putin as a supreme leader and benevolent “batyushka-tsar” (138, 156). Putin and his entourage, the author states, have gradually become masters of political manipulation, having understood well the power of the media (139) and carefully choreographed these media events for several years in row, albeit with some slight variations (141). One important thing noted by the author is that, on several occasions during the conversations, people were joining and asking questions from places outside of Russia – Kyrgyzstan in 2003, Latvia in 2005, Ukraine in 2006, and Kazakhstan in 2007. This was perhaps to demonstrate that Russia, at least in an ethnic and cultural sense, extends beyond the borders of the Russian Federation (148) and which obtained an entirely new meaning after the Ukraine events of 2014.

Chapter 6 touches upon the recent protest movement in Russia launched after elections to the State Duma in December 2011, which were largely considered as falsified. For the first time in many years, Putin had to deal with mass protests challenging his rule and had to justify his legitimacy (170). Since most of the “traditional” media were already state-controlled and censored, the bulk of the protest including critical discussions were held online, on various types of blogs, social networks, and other platforms, so the Russian segment of the Internet or “Runet” became the primary stronghold of the opposition.

In the concluding chapter, Gorham states that Russians eventually outgrew Putin’s tough rhetoric and that the Russian society of 2012 is rather different from Russian society of 1999, the former having less demand for macho politicians but asking for more democratic procedures and openness, which Putin and his clique took time to realize. Although absolutely credible, this argument is slightly undermined with the subsequent events of 2014–2015, where the protest movement terminated quietly without major achievements; the annexation of Crimea boosted Putin’s popularity even further, leaving the protests up to a small fraction of mostly Moscow-based liberal intelligentsia.

After Newspeak is a captivating book, which will help the audience understand today’s Russian political discourse. The originality of Gorham’s piece largely outweighs the book’s minor issues, such as somewhat abrupt transitions between themes and overly long citations at times (which, do, however, speak well for themselves). Gorham’s work is an insightful work of potential interest to anyone studying Russian politics, media discourse, and the politics of language.

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Equal recognition: the moral foundations of minority rights, by Alan Patten, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2014, xiv, 327 pp., \$38.29 (hardcover), ISBN: 978-0691159379

In 1904, Vladimir Medem, a rising young leader in the General Union of Jewish Workers in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia (the Bund), published an essay titled “The National Question