

sächlich ihre mentale Anerkennung durch die betroffenen Gesellschaften. Keine politischen Postulate, die polarisierten, sondern die Akzeptanz der Nachkriegsrealitäten durch die deutsche Bevölkerung war für die katholischen Bischöfe der Schlüssel für eine künftige friedliche Nachbarschaft mit Polen. In diesem Sinne auf die deutsche Gesellschaft, vor allem auf die Ostvertriebenen, geduldig einzuwirken, umschrieb die langwierige Kernaufgabe des deutschen Episkopats im deutsch-polnischen Versöhnungsprozess. Vor diesem Hintergrund ließe sich auch die Zurückhaltung des deutschen Episkopats in der Oder-Neiße-Frage in das theologisch-religiöse Konzept der Versöhnung einschreiben.

Das letzte Kapitel beschäftigt sich mit den Querverbindungen zwischen den beiden Versöhnungsprozessen. Dabei rückt P. die europäische Ebene in den Mittelpunkt und veranschaulicht, dass es den deutschen, französischen und polnischen Bischöfen gelang, dem jeweiligen Versöhnungsprozess eine europäische Dimension zu verleihen. Letztere war gesamteuropäisch gedacht, d. h. die Ost-West-Teilung überbrückend. Diese Querverbindungen beziehen sich primär auf die späten 1970er und die 1980er Jahre. Dabei wird deutlich, wie viel an Substanz und gegenseitigem Vertrauen die beiden Prozesse inzwischen gebildet hatten. In der Öffentlichkeit hin und wieder verunglückte Aussagen oder Missverständnisse konnten die Bischöfe so untereinander stets unaufgeregter und „brüderlich“ ansprechen und ausräumen.

P. hat eine ausgesprochen ertragreiche Arbeit vorgelegt, die sich durch umfangreiches Quellenstudium, dichte Beschreibung, analytische Schärfe und Reflexion auszeichnet. Diese gut lesbare Studie setzt Maßstäbe für künftige Forschungen zum Thema.

Essen

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**Neringa Klumbyte: Authoritarian Laughter.** Political Humor and Soviet Dystopia in Lithuania. Cornell University Press. Ithaca 2022. XIV, 306 S., Ill. ISBN 9781501766695. (\$ 32,95.)

Neringa Klumbyte's book is a good study of the history of humor in the Soviet Union from the point of view of a former Soviet colonial state, Lithuania. Previous research on Soviet humor was conducted mostly by Russian American scholars, like Serguei Oushakine, who reflected the prevailing Russia-centered approaches to the history of this subject.<sup>1</sup> As a social historian, I was especially impressed that her anthropological study is based on solid historical sources, not just on an oral history approach involving mainly personal interviews. K. used Communist Party and KGB archives, and especially the personal archive of Juozas Bulota, who was the editor-in-chief of the Lithuanian satire and humor magazine *Šluota* (Broom), which was under his leadership from 1956 through to 1985.

The book covers the story of this journal during this post-Stalin socialist period in Soviet Lithuania, using mostly Bulota's materials. K.'s major goal as a cultural anthropologist is to analyze what she calls "authoritarian laughter, the Soviet government's project of satire and humor." Her main idea is to show the "paradoxical" character of this project: "[W]hile it aimed to serve Communist Party ideological agendas and involve editors, artists, writers, journalists, and readers in creating communist society, it encompassed opposition that undermined the government's initiatives" (p. 2). At the same time, she emphasizes that her focus is to demonstrate how multidirectional this project was: "[I]t was communicative exchange among artists and different audiences that was both ideologically correct and oppositional." As she explains, the ambiguous and contextual essence of the authoritarian laughter allowed her to use "the concept of multidirectionality," which

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g.: SERGUEI OUSHAKINE: "Against the Cult of Things": On Soviet Productivism, Storage Economy, and Commodities with No Destination," in: *The Russian Review* 73 (2014), 2, pp. 198–236. See his Princeton University's website as well: <https://anthropology.princeton.edu/people/faculty/serguei-oushakine> (2024-08-22).

shows “its circulation and reception and underscore[s] the fact that the same jokes were often meaningful in different ways to different audiences—authorities, censors and readers” (p. 3).

In the six chapters of her book, K. covers the different subjects of the authoritarian laughter in *Šluota*, namely the “banality of Soviet Power,” “political intimacy,” “censorial indistinction,” “political aesthetics,” “satirical justice,” and “Soviet dystopia.” She describes how Communist ideologists supported *Šluota*’s fight against “unresponsive, inept bureaucrats or the shoddiness of industrial production,” and how ordinary readers “could generalize Broom’s criticisms to the socialist system itself.” As “authorities read depictions of criminals, robbers, homeless people, or sexualized images of women in the West” as a criticism of “rotten capitalism,” at the same time, those same images “aroused some readers’ fascination with the West and desire to visit it” (p. 3). K. finishes her book with a post scriptum “Revolution and Post-authoritarian Laughter” and a conclusion “Lost Laughter and Authoritarian Stigma,” which demonstrates how the satirical traditions of the *Šluota* magazine not only undermined and discredited ideological and cultural practices of late socialism in Soviet Lithuania, but also prepared the political anti-Soviet revolution there.

Unfortunately, this wonderful study of the Lithuanian satirical magazine still (with a few exceptions) reflects the methodological and historiographical situation before 2014, the first Russian war against Ukraine, which eventually became (after 2022) the Russian war against the West. K. was inspired by Russian-American scholars, such as Oushakine, who always ignored the national problems of non-Russian nationalities of the Soviet Union. Like many Western scholars of late socialism, she still uncritically follows Alexei Yurchak’s anthropological concepts, which are based on his Russian-centered (in his case, Leningrad-centered) research (see pp. 17, 43, 48, 80, 86, 155, 189, 216, 223). K. overlooks the fact that Yurchak completely ignores problems of regional, national, and religious identities that were shaped by the consumption of Western cultural products in various parts of the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> Yurchak also disregards the importance of the idea of the West for political dissent in the USSR, including Lithuania and Ukraine. (His entire book about late socialism in the Soviet Union never mentions the inspiration of the idea of the West for all Soviet dissidents). His interpretation exaggerates the role of discursive practices while ignoring how visual elements, especially comics, Soviet satirical magazines, such as *Šluota*, and Western films, influenced both ideological discourse and local identity among Soviet consumers.

Overall, K. correctly describes the role of the Soviet political police (KGB) in monitoring the Lithuanian satirical magazine and its readers. At the same time, the archival collections of the KGB in Kyiv (SBU Archives), not consulted by K., still contain the documentary files (in fond 16) about the special ideological and political operations against the national humor magazines, like *Perets* (Pepper) in Soviet Ukraine and *Šluota* in Soviet Lithuania between 1956 and 1981. Paradoxically, these facts could strengthen K.’s major arguments and widen the readership for her book.

Despite these minor critical remarks, this book is a major contribution not only to the studies of the Lithuanian cultural history and anthropology of late socialism but also to the field of Cold War culture. It demonstrates and reminds us of how the political practices and traditions of this authoritarian laughter are still alive and are needed to undermine post-Soviet authoritarian regimes such as Putin’s Russia.

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<sup>2</sup> ALEXEI YURCHAK: *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton, NJ 2005.