

It is apparent that Clark has problems navigating both the history of the Caucasus and its present day. She notes that the Caucasus is a region inhabited by a “diverse group of non-Slavic peoples” (17). In this manner of presentation, excluded are, for example, the Greben Cossacks, who formed mainly out of Slavs coming to Chechnya and Dagestan in the sixteenth century. The author’s claim that Chechens were the most numerous and warlike among those Caucasian peoples fighting the Russian army in the nineteenth century (17) must also be rejected. Much more numerous were the Circassians. In Imam Shamil’s forces, too, the majority were Avars, which we know from the account of one of Shamil’s naibs, Iusuf-Khadzhi Safarov. As for the weak grasp of Chechnya’s contemporary situation, this can be seen in Clark calling Urus-Martan a “village” (79), when it is a town of 60,000 inhabitants, or by using the term “current president of Chechnya” (20) for Ramzan Kadyrov, when no such office has existed since 2011. Kadyrov is instead Head of the Chechen Republic.

The topic of Russian literature towards the war in Chechnya is a fascinating one. It can be analyzed from a multitude of perspectives. One such perspective seems to be offered by studies under the umbrella of Comparative Literature. It would assist one in analyzing, for example, the analogies and differences within Russian literature between the late twentieth-century wars in Chechnya and the nineteenth-century Caucasian conquests, or between American literature in the context of the invasion of Afghanistan. The possibilities within this scope are many, and it is to be hoped that research in this field will develop and produce interesting pieces in the future.

Dmitry Gromov. *AUE: Kriminalizatsiia molodezhi i moral'naia panika.*

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Mikhail Suslov

University of Copenhagen

Email: mikhail.suslov@hum.ku.dk

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Russian criminal culture has always been a propitious research topic. It works as a time machine for understanding primitive societies; it is a titillating continuation of the gothic novels about a forbidden world of violence, tragic heroes, and raging passions; and it is used as props for statements about Russia in general, as well as its history and current political structure. A number of pro-Kremlin ideologists, such as Vladimir Medinsky and Vladimir Iakunin, who attack “Russophobic stereotypes” about special connections between Russia and prison, indirectly confirm the importance of the topic. The book by anthropologist Dmitry Gromov provides an empirically rich examination of the latest fashion in Russian criminal culture, mysteriously abbreviated as “AUE.”

The author delves into the history of the term, arguing that it first emerged quite recently, around 2007, and since then has absorbed several different interpretations, from a battle cry to the deciphered slogan “the criminal way of life is one” to the self-name of the organized

gangs “the union of prisoners and bandits.” Gromov chooses, however, a research strategy that differs from the usual ethnographic study. While the ethnography of the phenomenon was not in focus, Gromov claims that AUE does not constitute a new threat of Biblical proportions, as it is portrayed by Russian journalists and law-makers, being rather a typical internet-based game for the youth. Moreover, AUE has been elevated to a position of a national security problem, despite the fact that in recent years the actual crime rates visibly dropped. One of the chapters specifically discusses manipulative gimmicks, which journalists use to exaggerate the danger of AUE. Gromov persuasively contends that criminalization of AUE as an extremist movement in 2020 caused more problems than it solved. First, the campaign against AUE is carried out oftentimes to detriment of other, more urgent problems in the fight against crime. Second, it gives the state, already wielding a plethora of repressive laws, yet another instrument that can easily be misused, for example, to suppress the opposition. Third, when society’s full attention is be turned to AUE, it inadvertently bolsters the popularity of criminal culture.

The optic, adopted by Gromov, is the theory of moral panic. He convincingly shows that AUE is primarily a media phenomenon, politically amplified in the present-day atmosphere of security concerns among the Russian rulers. Grounding on the foundational studies by Stanley Cohen, Erich Goode, Nachman Ben-Yehuda, and some others, Gromov adopts the definition of a moral panic as a combination of five elements: 1) exaggeration of the problem’s scale; 2) lack of the factual evidence about the problem; 3) salience of the folkloric structures in the narratives about moral panics; 4) fighting the problem at the expense of other, actually important societal issues; and 5) public attention to moral panic goes through ups and downs, depending on the media coverage. With this instrument at hand, Gromov anatomizes AUE, zeroing in on the sense of uncertainty and lack of information, created by, among other things, Russia’s spatial size, disconnectedness of different groups of its population, and murkiness of the criminal world.

These factors have created an atmosphere, in which AUE emerged as a disproportionately large challenge to national security. The book briefly mentions that the very digital medium of informing people about AUE is a separate factor of anxiety. Indeed, the internet-based communication, providing for anonymity, transnationalism, and unlimited freedom of speech has become a target for both cultural-theological criticism and securitization policies in Putin’s Russia. Another central, but tantalizingly underdeveloped line of argumentation in the book is the connection between the moral panic around AUE and Russia’s political culture of conspiracy theories, discourses about a “fifth column,” and self-representation as a besieged fortress. Gromov mentions several instances in which members of the political elite interpret AUE as part of western hybrid warfare against Russia, or connect AUE to protest activism among the youth.

While the analytical apparatus adopted by the book is neither conceptually innovative nor completely new in Russian area studies, it serves the purpose quite well, demonstrating the heuristic potential of the moral panics theory in interpreting mediated phenomena. Gromov uses an unconventional book structure with the theoretical part in the middle and an insightful historical contextualization at the end. It is hardly the most satisfying solution, as it creates the impression that the book is made of disconnected essays whose cross-cutting theme is a fairly shallow statement that all socio-political anxiety about AUE is just another moral panic. The study would have gained from a more in-depth contextualization within the political and ideological processes in Putin’s Russia, or from a greater engagement with cultural implications of digital media, or from the ethnographic research on how the “really existing” criminal world relates to this moral panic. In any case, the book’s empirical richness and conceptual awareness makes it a good read; it is also useful in the classroom as part of a supplementary list of literature for a course on contemporary Russian society, media, and culture.