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Hippies in the Soviet Union

Although hippiedom emerged first in the 1960s in the United States, attracting scholarly attention from early on, there is a rising interest in contemporary academia in exploring the hippie phenomenon as a global one.[1] For instance, by focusing a few years ago in their book, The Hippie Trail: A History, 1958-1978 (2017), on British hippies and their travels to Morocco, Persia, Afghanistan, and India, Sharif Gemie and Brian Ireland dispelled the myth that American hippies were at the center of everything. Similarly, looking at the international influence of the London-based psychedelic magazine OZ, Andrew Hannon had argued that the countercultural elements of the hippie phenomenon, which connected America to Britain and Australia, "can only be fully understood by looking beyond boundaries both disciplinary and national."[2] In the same vein, works published over the past two decades on hippies in the Soviet bloc have challenged the belief that hippies were to be found only in the capitalist world. [3] Within this broader scholarly context, Julianne Fürst's Flowers through Concrete: Explorations in Soviet Hippieland is the first academic monograph in English to provide the well-deserved analytical attention to a topic that some early American ob-

servers in the 1970s described anecdotally as a colorful but inconsequential aspect of living under socialism.[4]

Preceded by several journal articles and a book chapter in a co-edited volume that she published prior on the topic, Fürst's book is based on an extensive set of interviews conducted since the mid-2000s with the surviving members of the successive incarnations of the sistema, the concept coined by Soviet hippies to describe their community as it existed between the late 1960s and the early 1990s.[5] The content of the book is divided into two parts. As their titles indicate, the four chapters of the first part cover the history of the Soviet hippie movement from the perspective of its origins, consolidation, maturity, and ritualization. By calling this part "Short Course in the History of the Soviet Hippie Movement and Its Sistema," in reference to the dogmatic textbook History of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks)—Short Course, commissioned by Josef Stalin in 1938, Fürst wants to emphasize the complex imbrication between the worldviews of Bolsheviks and hippies as the latter "were in constant conversation with the system" around them, which they continuously "rejected, differentiated, aped, compromised, and tried to escape and conquer" (p. 35).

Soviet hippies first emerged during the midto late 1960s not just in Moscow and Leningrad but also in several cities in the Baltic and Ukrainian republics, including in places as far away from the center as Irkutsk in Siberia and Magadan in the Far East. Ironically, many of them learned about the hippie lifestyle from reports on Western hippiedom in the Soviet press. Another factor in their coming together was their interest in Western music and fashion, which after Nikita Khrushchev's Thaw started to seep in more consistently within the Soviet Union. Once the first hippie groups emerged in Soviet urban centers, their striking sartorial appearance made others want to join them. Yet, when discussing the creation of these groups, it would have been helpful if the author would have mentioned that while in the United States hippies numbered in the millions, due to widespread social opprobrium and intervention against them by the authorities, the number of Soviet hippies was limited to several thousand.

Although relatively small as a group, their existence was significant in that it represented a break from the publicly involved youth movements of the Khrushchev period. The first hippie groups emerged between 1965 and 1969, during a period when the domestically repressive tendencies of the Leonid Brezhnev regime were not yet apparent, within a temporal space that Fürst equates with the period of "post-ideology and prestagnation" in the Soviet Union (p. 37). Unlike the previous generation of Soviet youth, recalled in public memory as that of the shestdesiatniki (sixties-ers), whose social ideals were embodied by bard poets like Vladimir Vysotsky and Bulat Okudzhava and who had access to and cultivated the public sphere, instead of working within the ideological parameters of the Soviet system, hippies tried to carve out a space for themselves outside of it. In this they were inspired by the rhythms of Western rock and roll, and especially the music of the Beatles, along with other aspects of Western hippie lifestyle like pacifism and experiments with easy sex and drugs, which they were aware of but which they absorbed through imaginary lenses shaped by their own Soviet reality. By contrast to the politically involved Soviet dissenters, and unlike their American counterparts alike who joined many radical political movements, Soviet hippies simply ignored the system rather than openly criticizing and fighting it.

Some of the early Soviet hippies acquired a mythic status in later recollections by those who participated in the movement. One of them was Iura Burakov, aka Solntse, who became a hippie when he was sixteen and later influenced many to follow in his footsteps. Other early hippies who stood out among their peers were the nonconventional couple Sveta Markova and Sasha Pennanen, whose parents belonged to the Soviet elite. Svetlana Barabash, alias Ofelia, who was a student at Moscow State University and moved in various artistic circles, also came from an intelligentsia background. Yet hippies were a diverse bunch of people. Many became hippies when they stopped attending high school, like Azazello (Anatolii Kalabin), or when they moved to Moscow and Leningrad from provincial cities. Some hippies had grown up in privileged families, who, because their parents belonged to the Soviet elite and either were posted to or traveled abroad as diplomats or bureaucrats, were exposed to Western music, clothing, and information about the West.

Soviet hippies congregated in many different urban spaces. Foremost among them was Maiakovskaia Square, in central Moscow, known for the Maiakovski statue erected in the middle of it in 1957. The square served as a place for many public readings, and by the late 1960s it turned into a favorite hippy hangout. Another place where they congregated was the Psikhodrom within the precincts of Moscow State University. Other hippie hangouts in Moscow were the lower stretch of

Gorky Street (known in hippie argot as the strit), the underground passage connecting Hotel Natsional to the opposite side of this street and Red Square, and two cafes, Moskovskoe and Sever, both on Gorky Street. By the 1970s, Cafe Aromat (aka Babylon), located somewhat farther away from the center, became another important meeting spot. Cafes were also important gathering places in other cities, such as Café Saigon in Leningrad and Café Kaza in Riga. In Kaunas and Tallinn, they gathered in public spaces, both centrally located, with the one in Kaunas located just across from the headquarters of the local Communist Party Committee. There were also other places, like the beach at Palanga in Lithuania, as well as private apartments, basements, and on occasion camps in the forest. Hippies found each other in all these places, and with the emergence of increasing awareness among them that they existed in various Soviet cities, they started referring to the people connected with them as belonging to the hippie sistema.

Several neighborhood sistemy emerged first in Moscow, among which the Tsentrovaia sistema, located in the very center of the city, a mile and a half from Maiakovskaia Square, was the dominant one. The members of this sistema were connected to each other through the ebullient personality of Solntse. Sistemy existed in other cities, together comprising a USSR-wide network. In her work, Fürst defines the hippie sistema as a "loose network of like-minded people in various Soviet towns and cities," seeing themselves as being outside of the Soviet system (p. 64). This is not just an academic definition but one that Soviet hippies applied to themselves to the point that by the 1980s the use of the word sistema eliminated the need to talk about themselves as hippies. It was the consolidation of the hippie movement in the Soviet Union in the form of this spatially dispersed yet unified sistema that drew the attention of various authorities (ranging from the police and the Komsomol to the KGB) to the countercultural youths involved in them. Initially authorities saw domestic hippies as professing a creed aligned in many ways with the tenets of Soviet ideology, but once hippies started showing initiative by organizing peace marches as they did sometime in 1968 and 1969, and planned to do again on June 1, 1971, authorities clamped down on them. Given researchers' lack of access to the central Soviet KGB archive, Fürst does a remarkable job in piecing together information about these marches from the testimonies of her interviewees and documents from the publicly available Estonian, Latvian, and Ukrainian KGB archives. What she shows is that, after a period of ambiguity and tolerance, as the late 1960s gave way to the 1970s, repressive measures against hippies were on the increase. She also engages in a fascinating discussion of the complexities of being both a hippie and an informer for the KGB, as Solntse and various other hippies might have become, an issue not easily answered in the affirmative mode given the lack of concrete proof in this regard.

After the June 1, 1971, clamp down, many high school- and college-educated hippies abandoned the movement, reintegrating in society. Hippiedom, however, did not disappear. It became stronger, since for those who stayed within its ranks, being a hippie turned into a lifetime choice. Due to their dropping out from Soviet society, many hippies were periodically interned in psychiatric asylums. Others, such as long-timers Markova and Pennanen, were forced in 1974 to permanently leave the Soviet Union and settle in the United States. Hippie artists were also persecuted, forbidden to publicly display their works, or in the few cases when they exhibited in open air exhibitions organized in forests, they had their works confiscated. During the 1970s, confrontations with the authorities and the frequent arrest, beating, and intimidation of the remaining hippies became more frequent. As provincial hippie groups in Sevastopol, Ivano-Frankovsk, and Kirovograd tried to organize meetings and demonstrations, they were dispersed and shut down. Despite constant surveillance, hippies in Grodno, Belorussia, were more successful at first and were able to receive in August 1971 like-minded visitors from Vilnius and Tallin before their meeting was broken up, with bloody clashes between hippies and the police occurring in its aftermath. An even bigger clash took place in Kaunas, Lithuania, in May 1972, with the hippies supported by several thousand local youth in their fight against the police. Some of these clashes occurred because hippies wanted to listen publicly to banned Western rock music. A concert with leading Western rock and roll singers that was scheduled to take place on May 28, 1978, in Leningrad but then failed to materialize led to thousands of music fans marching in protest to the city center. The demonstration was broken up by the police with the use of water cannon. Many participants were arrested. Fürst argues that it is likely that it was this event that prompted the Leningrad KGB to open in 1981 a local rock club, the first in the Soviet Union, which aimed to provide a setting for playing rock music legally and thus control the city's rebellious youth through close surveillance and co-optation.

The mid- to the late 1970s also saw the rise of a younger generation of hippies, with standout figures like Azazello and Sergey Moskalev in Moscow, Gena Zaintsev in St. Petersburg, and Misha Bombin in Riga. These new recruits saw themselves as distinct from surviving members of the older generation, like Solntse and others, turning Soviet hippiedom into a better organized and intellectually more involved movement. The last three "were involved in a flurry of actions that characterized the years 1976-80 and cemented the sistema as a fixed structure with history, rituals, spaces, and legends. Its tentacles reached everywhere: into communes and cafes, the underground art scene, the trade in drugs, the rock musicians, the wheeler-dealers, the yogis, Krishnas, and other exotics. The sistema, while always predominantly a hippie organization, created a quasiumbrella that covered all these 'others.' The sistema became a broad church, infused with a variety of knowledge, beliefs, and skills" (pp. 145-46).

Members of the second-generation sistema were indeed aware of their historical precedents, which they memorialized and ritualized in their own lives. Similar to the American model, many of them also created their own Peoples book, recording in photographs different members of their community whose images they shared among themselves. Beginning in 1978 and continuing for the next decade, and despite being surveilled by the authorities, they also congregated in an annual summer camp on a beach on the Baltic Sea at Gauia, near Riga. Without access to travel like their Western counterparts who visited the Middle East and India, they established their own hippie trails throughout the Soviet Union. For Soviet hippies, it was Central Asia that became their Afghanistan and India by way of the exotic landscapes, drugs, and shamans whom they could access there. The intensity of their presence within the Soviet system made Bombin even claim in 1980 that they had established a "state within a state" (p. 182).

By contrast to this chronologically organized survey of Soviet hippiedom's trajectory from the 1960s to the 1980s, the second half of the book looks thematically at their ideology, their concept of kaif (pleasure), their material culture, their experience with being interned in psychiatric asylums, and the role of hippie girls within the ranks of the sistema. In the chapter on hippie ideology, Fürst examines in more detail Soviet hippies' complex positioning regarding the concept of ideology. As she astutely observes, "hippies could combine the tenets of their Soviet socialization with the imported hybrid ideology, creating a hybrid that was a quasi-revolutionary boomerang: it was left-wing-inspired Western rebellion imported back into the very state which had once fostered the thinking that underpinned the rebellion in the West" (p. 187). Yet, for them, ideology was boring since it was what they had been taught in school, by the Komsomol, in the army, at the university, and through the press, radio, and TV. Their search was for a space free of ideology. Despite wanting to forget about ideology, "they did think about their role in society, international relations, and personal responsibility," which makes Fürst argue that "Soviet hippie ideology was both a bastardized (and, even worse, from the viewpoint of the Soviet state, Americanized) form of revolutionary ideals and the result of a constant conversation and engagement—sometimes hostile, sometimes imitative—with the norms and structures created by the Bolshevik/Soviet project" (p. 189). The wealth of examples that she provides to support this point, together with her exploration of the generational differences between Soviet hippies and their elders, turns this chapter into a key one to understand the different articulations of hippie identity in the world of late socialism and the role they played in exposing the hypocrisy of the Soviet system.

While Soviet hippies imitated their Western counterparts, their concept of pleasure was derived not from Western sources but from Islamic civilization. The word kai is derived from the Arabic word keif, referring originally to the "pleasurable state of mind that is granted to rightful Muslims in paradise." By contrast to this, for Soviet hippies, "kaif was foremost a state of high even though not all hippies achieved this high through drugs, but lost themselves in sex, spirituality, or simply community" (p. 229). Fürst goes on to explore in a separate chapter the different aspects of Soviet *kaif* that hippies found by listening to the music of the Beatles, and rock music generally, by cultivating a strong sense of belonging and spiritual community, or by engaging in a spiritual quest that on occasion brought them close to Christian Orthodoxy. Kaif could be also achieved with the use of drugs. While access to LSD was extremely limited in Soviet society, other drugs, like morphine, hashish, marijuana, and a variety of amphetamines, were available to them either through their stays in hospitals, purchases in pharmacies, or visits to Central Asia. The "mystique and power of Kaif" that these drugs induced was significant for them only as long as it was the result of noncommercial transactions, illustrating, once again, that Soviet hippies saw their search for *kaif* as another important aspect of their "antagonistic relationship with official culture" (p. 289).

As the search for *kaif* fulfilled a key tenet in Soviet hippies' spiritual quest and emotional lives, the materiality of jeans, bags, bracelets, music records, guitars, embroidered flowers, and peace symbols represented another core component of their self-identity. While these material signifiers could be easily acquired in the West, they had to be procured on the black market or made at home in the Soviet Union. Wearing jeans was seen as an antidote to the drabness of Soviet clothing. Soviet hippies acquired them from Western tourists or African students studying in the Soviet Union. In some cases, they were made at home by tailors connected to hippie circles, like Sass Dormidontov in Tallinn or Sveta Markova in Moscow, the latter both a famous hippie and a talented seamstress who created bell-bottom jeans with a distinct look. Given their use of locally available materials, which they used to turn into hippie symbols, "the reality of hippie material culture," showed, as Fürst explains, "less that hippies dropped out of the late Soviet material culture" and more "that they tapped into it, exploited it, manipulated it, and created their own thing-system on top of it" (p. 342).

Hippies also exploited madness as a strategy against the Soviet system. They "celebrated their craziness, while they considered normal people and their desperate struggle to live in the system the true 'abnormals'" (p. 345). Madness, however, was also used against them by the authorities. Soviet hippies were often subjected to arbitrary internments in psychiatric asylums, where they had to undergo intense courses of medication to cure them of their "madness." In these asylums many hippies became addicted to drugs, while others committed suicide. Some, however, turned their frequent psychiatric hospital admissions into a

badge of honor that by the 1980s inspired many others to realize the carceral nature of Soviet society. Indeed, "authorities could withdraw the self-declared mad from society, they could attempt to cure them, they could convince them of their illness but at some level all their measures only confirmed what they meant to fight: the affirmation and existence of an outside community" (pp. 375-76).

The book's last thematic chapter, exploring the role of women and gender in the ranks of Soviet hippies, is the book's most personal. In it, the author focuses on hippie women and their differences from their male counterparts. Among them, Maria Izvekova (alias Masha Shtatnitsa), Olesia Troianskaia, and the already mentioned Ofelia and Sveta Markova (alias Tsarevna Liagushka) stood out as strong personalities who had an important impact within hippie circles. Yet, unlike the case of male hippies and many other hippie women, they could not be interviewed by the book's author because they had passed away by the time Fürst started her project. Their standing in hippie memory is therefore based on the recollections of others, which recognized their importance but are often marked by prejudice toward women, a stance that despite claims to equality was a reality not just in Soviet society but in hippie circles as well. In this chapter, the author also talks about the tension between being both a historian and a feminist in search of a specifically female hippie voice. After hundreds of hours of interviews with the surviving members of the hippie community, she realized that "the female hippie memory tells a story that is often more explicit about the emotions underlying hippie life" (p. 402). Indeed, women experienced hippie life differently. They bonded with each other, gossiped more often than men, and played both a nurturing and organizing role within hippie communities. By being able to practice free love and choose their own partners, they also freed themselves from expectations that limited their sexuality to monogamy or what was seen as a male prerogative. This also gave them power over their male counterparts, because "at times men suffered from the free love hippie girls bestowed freely on others" (p. 411). Yet emotions and love were still important to them. Fear of pregnancy and the attendant burden of raising a child alone was often present in their minds. Female anxieties such as these were just too often filtered out from hippie memory. Time and aging were also more keenly experienced by women than men. "Female hippie lives were often shorter and resulted in family and children rather than legendary status" (p. 425). The ambiguities of women's experience as hippies meant that they often "censored themselves to silence," thus writing themselves out from hippie history and ceding the ground to having it shaped mostly by male recollections (pp. 425-26).

This chapter, and many others, brilliantly explore the many facets of Soviet hippies' lives. Although Fürst's narrative is always interesting, well written, and, as she had grown up in a reunited Germany after 1990, constantly self-aware of the distance between her authorial presence in the text and the experiences of Soviet hippies in a society considerably different from her own, what I found missing in the book is a more consistent exploration of the differences and similarities between the long-term impact of American and Soviet hippies. An obvious difference between them, as the author rightly highlights in the book, was that while American hippies both rejected and wanted to change society in the 1960s, Soviet hippies tried to ignore their society and create an alternative structure for themselves within it, which was still embedded in Soviet realities. Yet what Fürst does not say is that, although hippies disappeared in the United States by the early 1970s, their core beliefs (such as their strong sense of individualism, experimentation with sex and drugs, environmental consciousness, do-it-yourself ethos, embrace of the Other, and multicultural values)—even if rejected by a segment of the

American population nowadays—have reshaped American society into what it is today.

By contrast, Soviet hippies, who lasted much longer than their American counterparts, had difficulty adjusting after the fall of the Soviet Union to the spread of capitalism and the rise of new authoritarianisms in the post-Soviet space, having had almost no impact on liberalizing the values of contemporary Russian society, and, in many cases, even flocking into the ranks of those who support Russian nationalism, the Orthodox Church, and Vladimir Putin. Was this because, unlike American hippie lifestyles that were popularized through radio programs and on TV, psychedelic music recordings, and widely attended public events like the free concerts given by various music bands at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco and later Woodstock, including through the commercialization of hippie culture itself, the lifestyle of Soviet hippies was embraced by only those who wanted to belong to the sistema and rejected by the sovok people, who were passive victims of their ideological brainwashing during Soviet times? Or was it because, unlike the American hippie movement that grew out of antecedents like the Beat poetry movement and was connected to the civil rights struggles and the broader counterculture of 1960s America, Soviet hippiedom rejected domestic antecedents like the youth movements inspired by the Thaw and the political activism of the refuseniks and political dissidents of the 1960s and 1970s, establishing itself in the Soviet Union as separate from them? They might have played a role, as Fürst argues, in the dismantling of the Soviet system, but did they influence post-Soviet society afterward? Similarly, although Soviet hippies shared their American counterpart's romanticism and emphasis on authenticity, they did not share their fascination with the Third World. Does this mean that they were less globally oriented and less interested and involved in Cold War politics than Western hippies, their passivity contributing,

once again, to their limited relevance as a movement outside the Soviet Union?

These are just some of the many questions that a more comparatively minded exploration of the global meaning of Soviet hippies' history and experience would have had to answer. Even if the book does not provide sufficient insights into these issues, Fürst's findings are truly remarkable. The author has recreated a lost world, a world that exists now only in the minds of the survivors and in a few physical places, like the Wende Museum in Los Angeles, where many of the former Soviet hippies' personal archives have found a final place to rest. Her ability to rescue this important aspect of Soviet history from oblivion is commendable as a major scholarly and intellectual achievement. Together with other books on dropouts, alternative lifestyles, and noncompliant behaviors in the Soviet bloc, Flowers through Concrete will be an essential reference work for many students and scholars, as well as for anyone else interested in learning more about the history of nonconformity and individualism in the socialist world.

Notes

[1]. For early evaluations of American hippies, see Joe David Brown, ed., The Hippies: Who They Are, Where They Are, Why They Are That Way, and How They May Affect Our Society (New York: Time, 1967); Stuart Hall, "The Hippies - An 'American' Moment" (occasional paper, University of Birmingham, October 1968), https:// www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/collegeartslaw/history/cccs/stencilled-occasional-papers/ 1to8and11to24and38to48/SOP16.pdf; Burton Wolfe, The Hippies (New York: New American Library, 1968); Lewis Yablonsky, The Hippie Trip (New York: Pegasus, 1968); Sherri Cavan, Hippies of the Haight (St. Louis, MO: New Critics, 1972); and Gene Anthony, The Summer of Love: Haight Ashbury at Its Highest (Millbrae, CA: Celestial Arts, 1980). Later works on the American hippie phenomenon include, among others, Timothy S.

Miller, The Hippies and American Values, 2nd ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2011); Micah Issitt, Hippies: A Guide to an American Subculture (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009); W. J. Rorabaugh, American Hippies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); John Anthony Moretta, The Hippies: A 1960s History (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2017); and Damon R. Bach, The American Counterculture: A History of Hippies and Cultural Dissidents (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2020). While all these works focus mostly on the history of hippies on the West Coast, in a refreshing change of perspective, a recent book looks at the history of hippies in Vermont: see Yvonne Daley, Going Up the Country: When the Hippies, Dreamers, Freaks, and Radicals Moved to Vermont (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2020).

[2]. Andrew Hannon, "'Hippie' is a Transnational Identity: Australian and American Countercultures and the London OZ," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 35, no. 2 (2016): 40.

[3]. See Mark Allen Svede, "All You Need Is Love(beads): Latvia's Hippies Undress for Success," in Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe, ed. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (London: Berg, 2000), 189-208; William Jay Risch, "Soviet 'Flower Children': Hippies and the Youth Counter-Culture in 1970s L'viv," Journal of Contemporary History 40, no. 3 (July 2005): 565-84; William Jay Risch, "Only Rock 'n' Roll?: Rock Music, Hippies, and Urban Identities in Lviv and Wrocłav, 1965-1980," in Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc: Youth Cultures, Music, and the State in Russia and Eastern Europe, ed. William Jay Risch (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 81-100; Bogusław Tracz, Hippiesi, kudłacze, chwasty: Hipisi w Polsce w latach 1967-1975 [Hippies, mopheads, weeds: Hippies in Poland between 1967-1975] (Katowice: Libron, 2014); Michael Rauhut, Thomas Kochan, and Christoph Dieckmann, eds., Bye, Bye, Lübben City: Bluesfreaks, Tramps und Hippies in der DDR (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 2004); and Filip Pospíšil and Petr Blažek, "'Vraťte nám vlasy!' První máničky, vlasatci a hippies v komunistickém Československu. Studie a edice dokumentů" [Give us back our hair! The first bums, hairies and hippies in Communist Czechoslovakia. Study and document edition] (Prague: Academia, 2010).

[4]. Andrea Lee, *Russian Journal* (New York: Faber, 1979), esp. 85-95.

[5]. See Julianne Fürst, "Love, Peace and Rock 'n' Roll on Gorky Street: The 'Emotional Style of the Soviet Hippie Community," *Contemporary European History* 23, no. 4 (2014): 565-87; Julianne Fürst, "Liberating Madness—Punishing Insanity: Soviet Hippies and the Politics of Craziness," *Journal of Contemporary History* 52, no. 4 (2018): 832-60; and Julianne Fürst, "We All Live in a Yellow Submarine: Life in a Leningrad Commune," in *Dropping Out of Socialism: The Creation of Alternative Spheres in the Soviet Bloc*, ed. Julianne Fürst and Josie McLellan (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), 179-207.

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