

## SUMMARY

### EXILE – MIGRATIONS – DIASPORA

The 12th volume of the *Debates of Artes Liberales* contains the texts resulting from the international seminar *Exile – Migrations – Diaspora* organised on 8th February 2022 by the Polish-Siberian Research Group, which is based at Faculty of Artes Liberales of Warsaw University. The hybrid seminar was attended by more than forty participants, including a large group of specialists representing several scientific disciplines. Speeches were delivered by participants from the United States, Great Britain, European Union and Mongolia – the seminar became an important event, bringing together the Siberian diasporas and allowing them to speak in public space.

Our aim was to create a scientific platform for the *Meetings* to research the importance of diasporas and the situation of indigenous inhabitants of Siberia and Asian countries of the former Soviet Union, who, as a result of various migrations, including mobility related to war, found themselves out of the country. The seminar was an example of cooperation between the academic community and actively involved representatives of indigenous Siberian peoples, who now live outside Siberia. A discussion was initiated on developing precise terms and methods of conducting field research in Siberia when the Russian Federation is politically isolated.

The topic of migration is not unknown to the indigenous Siberian peoples – let us recall the nomadic traditions of civilization circles: the polar and the Mongolian. They are also united by the will to survive as separate nations despite the experience of the influence of migration waves of the imperial and Soviet times (including voluntary settlement, various types of deportations and repressions across Siberia).

The book is divided into three parts. In part one we present the results of research on a fairly diverse subject in order to show the causes and circumstances of the escapes, migrations, expulsion of the population from places of residence, small homelands and regions. The texts are an introduction to the problem of population movements in specific areas and the consequences of these migrations.

In the introduction to the debate, Professor Jan Kieniewicz drew attention to the importance of examining the identity problems of the Asian part of the post-Soviet area. He emphasised the importance of creating nations and the fact that it is a very complicated process. He pointed out that migrations can be forced, whether due to the state oppression or climate warming, nevertheless, they are always associated with cultural transfers, which leads to social change. The migration experience is also well known to Polish society as it was common during the period of partitions of Poland.

The subsequent voices in the debate crystallize this observation.

Doctor Kamil Wielecki presented an overview of the research based on the media reports on the participation of mercenaries from Central Asian countries in the ongoing war in Ukraine – in the context of the general international order in the region and the mass migratory movements to Russia from the countries of Central Asia. This comparison allows us to see that behind the decisions to join the Russian army is the desire to earn money and other premises, including an ambivalent attitude to the ongoing conflict,

which results from strong political, economic and cultural ties between Central Asian countries and Russia. This overview was placed at the beginning of the publication on purpose – it allows to see the current reality and verify information about overrepresentation of participants from Asian regions in the Russian invasion of Ukraine when the world media excessively report on this subject.

Zbigniew Szmyt, PhD presented the material about the relationship of the Russian state with ethnic minorities in the face of aggression against Ukraine and general mobilization. Depicting the economic situation of ethnic regions in Russia, he pointed out that the overrepresentation of ethnic minorities in the army is the result of structural racism. He explained how different historiographical concepts shape politics and ideological attitudes by mythologising the Great Patriotic War. According to the speaker, many representatives of ethnic minorities are loyal to the state, but resent ethnic Russians. The speaker also made an important statement about the ethos of researchers – their duty to seek the truth and raise the awareness of society.

Albert Jawłowski, PhD, who does field research in Buryatia, presented materials on social memory of repressed lamas. The most intense religious persecution in the Soviet Union lasted from the 1930s to the Khrushchev Thaw. The lamas who survived often came back to their homeland and were engaged in astrology or Tibetan medicine. Their descendants often did not know that there had been repressed lamas in their families – some learnt about it from the archives. Today, repressions and having lamas among relatives are still a sensitive subject which people keep silent about.

Another article in the volume was written by Tatiana Vasilyeva, a member of The Sakha diaspora, who on her own initiative, began to collect historical materials about Sakha in Finland, where she lives. She explored the biographies of the Yakutians, who in the 1930s escaped from prison on the Solovetsky Islands to Finland. The text shows

the diversity of political views among the Yakutians in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The second part of the volume has journalistic character – it contains personal statements dealing with difficult, painful and sensitive issues. Knowing these voices is valuable because it allows to better understand the processes of formation of emigrant communities, which are diverse and specific to the political culture and history of Asian nations of Siberia.

Radjana Dugarova, PhD talked about the Free Nations League to show that the only way out of the socio-political crisis is decolonization of Russia and full autonomy of the regions. She showed in what situation the indigenous communities of Siberia are, and described Russian language policy as *linguicide* (crime against language, extermination of language) aimed at ethnic minorities.

Kyunney Takasaeva, PhD (in Sakha: Künnej Takaahaj<sup>1</sup>) focused on Sakha contemporary migration trends (relocations), analysing demography and the socio-economic situation of the Yakutians. Meticulous attention was given to the geographical and environmental conditions of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), including the idea of polar civilisation to which belong the nations inhabiting the North. She also discussed the importance of natural resources in the Republic of Sakha as a resource necessary for Kremlin, which allows to understand why the Republic has no real prospects of gaining independence in the near future. Additionally, she raised the issue of the existence and functioning of various worldviews, lifestyles and future projects within one community that may be contradictory.

Vera Solovyeva, PhD described the situation of the Yakutian diaspora, referring mainly to the experience of

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<sup>1</sup> The name and surname of the editor appears in the volume in different forms. This is because in the original language, Sakha, it is spelt differently (this spelling will be used in this volume) than the official spelling in Russian used in publications.

the United States from the last two decades. As a result, we can see how much the way of getting to know expats, communicating and consolidating a group has changed. The presented material suggests that the Ministry of External Relations and Affairs of Nations of the Republic of Sakha tried to interfere with the formation of diasporas and their lives, which polarized the positions in the Sakha diaspora.

Maria Yakovleva presented the material on Sakha in Fort Ross in North California. The author shares her own experiences from volunteering at Fort Ross. She describes how the attitude to the role of indigenous people employed by the Russian-American Trade Company in 1799–1867 changed over the years.

The last article in this part was written by Vladislav Ammosov – the author conveys in it his own understanding of the division into supporters and opponents of war in Ukraine among the Yakutians.

The second part closes with the interview with Klawdia Henke, in which she talks about her work in the Sakha diaspora in London.

The third part of the volume contains a record of the final discussion, which closed our seminar *Exile – Migrations – Diaspora*. This part of the meeting was particularly valuable due to the voices of activists and non-governmental organisations' workers. The discussion concerned the processes of formation of emigration communities, their attitudes towards the Russian invasion in Ukraine, as well as identity changes among the indigenous peoples of Siberia. We asked various questions, such as: what is the contemporary significance of the elites and how exactly are they defined (this specific problem directly affects the indigenous population of Siberia, but at the same time is of universal character as it refers to all of us); whether the key aspect of determining them should be the impact they have on human communities or their ability to formulate ideological, social and cultural projects? The discussion proved that

discussing identity issues of the Asian part of the post-Soviet area is needed.

The presented book is an outline of research issues, which indeed deserve to continue the work understood as the creation of a research project and as an attempt at theoretical reflection and defining the field of discussion.

More on the Polish-Siberian Research Group can be found in the previous texts of *Debaty Artes Liberales* – volume VII (2013), volume IX (2015): <https://al.uw.edu.pl/series/debaty-artes-liberales/> and in the series „Monografie LIBAL” <https://al.uw.edu.pl/40488/>.

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(Künnej Takaahaj)

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