

**Converting History into “Cultural Treasure” in  
Post-1991 Kaliningrad:  
social transitions and the meaning of the past**

Olga Sezneva  
Fellow  
International Center for Advanced Studies  
New York University

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New York University  
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“...[A]ll associations of place, people, and culture are social and historical creations to be explained, not given natural facts.”<sup>1</sup> This essay demonstrates that the making of place, i.e. the enabling the meaningful relationships of people with a particular locale, evokes the construction and naturalization of particular visions of past. The idea of being ‘in-rooted’ in place -- time-depth of a community -- powerfully shapes the modern vision of a world of ‘peoples.’ This historical association appears natural and unproblematic in the most cases but is exposed as an obvious construction and contested product in Kaliningrad, the former German city Königsberg.<sup>2</sup>

I examine the discourses and practices of the Königsberg Dom restoration in Kaliningrad as a case of place-making with the focus on how the interpretations of the

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<sup>1</sup> Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson 1998. ‘Culture, Power, Place: Ethnography at the End of an Era’ in Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Cultural Anthropology. Duke university Press. P. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Kaliningrad had been the German city Königsberg until 1945 when the East Prussia was annexed by the Soviet Union. (Another part of the bisected Prussia went to Poland; and the new Soviet republic Lithuania received a third, small part of the territory, the Memel region.) In 1946-1948 Königsberg not only was renamed ‘Kaliningrad’ but its entire German population was deported and exiled. The former East Prussia came under the Soviet control and was integrated into the space of the Soviet Union. At the on-set of the Cold War, the region was heavily militarized and the entry restrictions were imposed, first for unauthorized Soviet citizens and foreigners, and later, for foreigners only. A permanent character of the city’s belonging to the Soviet Union remained a disturbing concern of the local population until 1957 when Khrushchev confirmed its status as the subject of the Russian Federation at a public assembly. By 1962-1963, a massive rebuilding of the city with the aid of the central state, began.

The territorial integration of Kaliningrad was coupled with historical revisions. The Soviet state sought to eradicate the German past which was in part achieved by removing the native population from the territory. Another important way was the introduction of ideological control over the historical writing and imageries of the pre-war past. The city’s Germanness expressed in the architecture and urban landscape motivated the state demolitions of buildings and monuments. Reacting to the state effort to deprive the newly integrated city of its historical character, groups of Kaliningraders started a subtle and hidden from the eye of the state historical ‘discovery.’ The rise of the unofficial historical research began in 1966-1968, and by the 1970’s to retrieve the city’s non-communist, German and ‘European’ past became a form of dissent with the centralized state and the regime, even though this past was neither of the current Kaliningrad residents nor their ancestors.

This paper looks at the period of the end of the Cod War, the demise of the Soviet Union and the de-militarization and opening of the Kaliningrad region, now the Russian enclave in Europe. The widening interest of the local population in the German history, its legitimization, and its contemporary meaning are inseparable from the development of the Soviet period, and sometimes are the expressed legacies of the Cold War when the region was transformed from being located in the historical construct called the ‘West’ (and Europe) into another one, the ‘East’.

German past have changed in accordance with the needs of the local community, and the changing supra-local context. The past in Kaliningrad is a careful negotiation, the weaving in between and among various problematics involving the Russian federal state, the local bureaucracy and the grass-root cultural activism. Rather than holding to a premise that local histories are matters of ‘localities’, and are independent realities in which identities of local communities are rooted, I argue that both the local pasts and local identities are inevitably constituted by a wider set of social and political relations, yet remain influenced by the experiences of people in their day-to-day interaction with the particular location. In the case of Kaliningrad, the supra-local realities are the Soviet and, later, Russian Federal states, the politics of the Cold War, and ‘Europe’ -- both, a socio-spatial reality and a cultural master-symbol.

Methodologically, the focus on architecture (and on a particular landmark) is important – the assumed isomorphism of space, place and culture is challenged in Kaliningrad by the very physical presence of German buildings and landscaping that cannot be easily incorporated neither into the all-Russian historical narrative, nor narrowly national identity. Second, the *Königsberg Dom*, the restoration of which is analyzed here, is both, the subject of developing historical narratives, i.e. *a discursive construct*, and a part of the everyday experience, i.e. *experiential site*. Diverse populations realize their conceptions of history in their everyday life and their ‘historic memory’ is not merely an ideological or discursive phenomena. Identity is acquired through narrative as much as through visual images and physical structures. The materiality of the object is as principal trope in identity construction as narrative.

Finally, the cathedral is where the symbolic dimension and the profane “fuzzy property” (Verdery 1999a) collide, making the cathedral an intellectually rewarding point of entry into the phenomenon of monumentalization of the past conducted by the actors of different, local and non-local, levels. As a landmark, the cathedral is inseparable from the state’s regulations and the local knowledge, the culture of the state and the culture of the locality, and the international concern and the local interests. The condition of the monument is a subject of people’s discussions and the judgment of the authorities. Like elsewhere in Russia today, the urban planning in itself is a site of reforming, of new visions of self-images inseparable from notions of globalization, technological advancement, liberalization of economy and the urban land reform. The importance of the heritage arises around conceptions of how to develop cities in the new economic realities and the weakening of the all-Russia state structures. In this sense, the discourse of the past and its monumentalization is an arena through which the state, its properties and dysfunctional aspects, are conceptualized (imagined) from the ground. So is the globalization now reaching the region with the expansion of the European Union.

In addition, the Kaliningrad society is particularly troubled by the Cold War legacies. The impact of ideological restrictions were felt particularly heavily in the third dissected part of the divided Germany. The problematic nature of the region was determined by the strategic concerns of the Soviet Union. The relations of the current people with the prior population, the Germans, who were labeled ‘fascists’ and deported, is embzzled into the personal experience of the war and the communist propaganda. The proximate past, the Soviet, is also delegitimized. Its ‘command heritage’ felt burden even under socialism, and is increasingly unfit with the current aspiration to be a part of ‘Europe’ and the

‘global world.’ The Königsberg Dom restoration which, although effectively began only in the late 1980s, bears legacies, ideologies and discourses of the communist past and the Cold War.

### **1. Living past of a foreign country.**

In her recent book on nostalgia, Svetlana Boym recalls her Berlin encounter with Mr. Dühning, an exiled Königsberger (Boym 2001: 174-175). He rejects the very existence of his home town under its new name, Kaliningrad. “I’ve heard that the Soviets opened the grave [of Immanuel Kant] and dispersed the bones, so that there would be nothing left in the ground of Königsberg,” mourns the craftsman (175). The history of Königsberg for Dühning had its closure in 1945, or in 1948 for many other Germans from East Prussia, and for a good reason – a different people, utterly new to the region, had moved in and displaced the German population. The new administration announced that the city would have no other history than the one “created by the Soviet people.” A son of the city living only in memories and photographs, Mr. Dühning “meticulously” reconstructs miniature cathedral interiors and vanished buildings, “never mind that these were not the interiors of his native city, nor the interiors he remembered”. “The only way he knew how to ‘manage the past,’” comments Boym, “was with his hands.” (176)

In 1998, in Kaliningrad, I met another person, a Russian, who “manages the past” in a paradoxically similar way. A team led by the construction manager Mr. Igor Odintsov began its 10<sup>th</sup> year of the Königsberg Dom restoration—a project that started with the goal of conservation and later evolved into full scale restoration. In the year of the Boym-

Dühring encounter, the restoration works moved inside the building to the stained-glass windows, curved capitals and carved wood pillars. The heart of the building and its major attraction is a tomb of Immanuel Kant at the South East portal of the Dom.

While Mr. Dühring, a former Königsberger, builds miniature buildings and hopes to never see what became of his city after it was occupied by the Soviets and colonized by Russians, Mr. Odintsov no less meticulously produces a monument to symbolize “history put outside of politics and ideological judgments.” The Cathedral will be a memory of the rightfully returned past, an official monument of the former Königsberg preserved for future generations—those who never saw the city and could never remember it. The restoration is also for those Germans who choose to return to visit. These gestures have proved popular. Most residents are pleased, although some dislike, that their city is taking place in the monumentalized history of Europe.

The making of history by the Russian settlers out of Dühring’s past is an extraordinary act of creating a new community and its association with the territory through appropriation of a foreign past. History being a cultural resource for identity construction is extensively analyzed in the literature on nationalism and national identity: history is a biography of the modern nation-state. In Kaliningrad, however, pre-1945 history is not used to produce a national historic narrative and a national identity. Rather, this history is mobilized as a *local resource*, and its foreign character is intentionally used to produce difference rather than similarity with the nation.

The significance of the past in society has less to do with its reality than with the culturally established modes of interpreting and relating to it – different socio-historical formations cope differently with questions of the past. In the western modern tradition we

differentiate among the *past* -- the totality of events that happened, *history* -- a selected totality of facts and events organized in some logical narrative fashion, and historic *heritage* – relics of the past legitimized by history and revised, catalogued and managed in the present. Conceptualization of *memory* has also transformed from an individual capacity to record and store stimuli in the brain in some fashion, to that of the quality of the collective. In modernity, questions of past imprinted in memory became entwined with the construction of individual; and those written into a history accompanied the creation of nation and state.

Eviatar Zerubavel coined a term “mnemonic transitivity” to define a meaning of the heritage as a social site of memory (Zerubavel 1996). Architectural remnants underly the preservation and transmission of social memories -- “[w]e purposefully design ‘future ruins’ to capture our memories and preserve them for posterity” (292). Material culture is *how* the collective memory is constructed and reproduced. It is a means of “mnemonic socialization” taking place through the adoption and consumption of “mnemonic tradition.” *Who* remembers comes with different “mnemonic communities,” that are the formations of which we are members sharing contents and forms of what and how to be remembered. Zerubavel lists the family, the workplace, the ethnic group and the nation as such “mnemonic communities.” They all represent a different kind of group membership of a diverse scale. The role of the “mnemonic community” is that it “delimits our mental reach into the past by setting certain historical horizons beyond which past events are basically regarded as irrelevant” (286). Thus it has power to define a meaningful place to the past events in the culture, or deny it.

However, it is also true that individuals possess multiple and simultaneous group memberships, and not all of them produce co-extensive boundaries of memory. In the case of Kaliningrad, a discontent between “historical horizons” is produced along the boundaries of the nation, one mnemonic community, and the place whose past is of another’s nation and, therefore, mnemonic community.

Secondly, the important role in constructing the “collective memory” belongs not only to the content of memory, the imagery of the past, but by the relationship that the “mnemonic community” develops to this imagery. The Soviet state ideological apparatuses, for instance, broadly propagated an image of Königsberg as a “nest of fascist aggression” but with a little success – this kind of imagery was critically reassessed by the majority of Kaliningrad population during the communist rule, and from the late 1960s and on in particular. On the other hand, a contemporary imagery of the German city as a cosmopolitan multinational place is readily embraced by the growing immigrant population of the city.

Selective forgetting, counter-memory or nostalgia characterize, among others, different possible relationships to the past. The differences are not absolute but when recognized, allow us to draw a line between the relations which privilege a past-free future prohibiting retrospections; *"restorative nostalgia"* which aims to "patch up the memory gaps " and "rebuild the lost home" (most often in a course of nationalist revival), and *"reflective nostalgia"* which "lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history" (Boym 2001: 41-49). While ruins and patina could be metaphorical, when they are actual, they are tangible evidence of the past and their preservation encompasses the range of strategies used to maintain and manipulate the past (Barthel 1998).

The past, however naturalized it appears, changes its significance for the society and its place in the cultural logic. This dynamic may be produced by shifts of paradigmatic character (i.e. from modernity to post-modernity speeding up social transformations) or changes in politics and political economy. The analysis of the restorative project in contemporary Kaliningrad, the former German Königsberg, addresses the question of production and transformation of hegemonic forms of the knowledge about the past under condition of rapid social and cultural transformations. Different modes of coping with the past are evidently present in the restoration of the Königsberg cathedral. They are represented by different groups and motivated by their diverging orientations.

Many of the usual mechanisms of the past-building are made problematic in Kaliningrad: the narrative of origins cannot go before 1945 which makes the relationship between the Soviet/Russian society and the territory less 'natural'; the canonical actors of the past, the state, the church and the people, are delegitimized and compromised by the historical revisionism of perestroika; and there are no conventional institutions – education, professional historiography, and literature – that transmit the knowledge of the past across generations. Kaliningraders have to construct their own history with their understanding of what makes up 'the past.' Kaliningrad in general, and the Dom restoration in particular, make 'a problem case' that exposes with maximum clarity what is present in other, 'normal' and uncontested productions of past, but in a less explicit form.

## **2. The Case: *Königsberg Dom*.**

Describing Königsberg of 1945 and 1946, and commenting on the Soviet occupation, Baldur Köster writes that “The future fate of the city remained uncertain; and authorities in Kaliningrad had no understanding of what to do with city's ruins. The conception of care for landmarks at that time was unknown” (Köster 2000:13). In an important way the commentary points to the lack of a certain cultural understanding of the past that has become an important attribute of contemporary societies—the distinct value placed on its relics. It is less clear whether Köster attributes this lack to the culture of the post-war period or to Soviet and Russian cultures more broadly. Nevertheless, he identifies the fifty-year long path of the local Russian-speaking population from its animosity towards the the German past, through the misrecognition of German landmarks as cultural property to rebuilding and preserving what remains of them today. *Der Dom*, The Königsberg Cathedral, is the most prominent and celebrated products of this evolution. And Igor Odintsov is among most contested and conflicted figures of the local cultural landscape.

*Der Dom* was founded in 1333, in the Germanic Knights' settlement Kneiphof, an island of the Pregel River. Conceived in the beginning as a fortress church, the Dom had a wall depth of 3 meters on the east facade which then was reduced to 1,28 m as the building developed upwards. Throughout the centuries that followed, the Dom underwent multiple changes as a result of fires, evolution in architectural style or personal ambitions of rulers. Immanuel Kant was the last University professor buried in *Der Dom* in 1804. Later, in the 1880, his remnants were moved outside of the cathedral to a neo-Gothic chapel near the north-east corner of the cathedral. The construction of a new pantheon was begun at the beginning of World War I (under the direction of architect Friedrich

Lahrs) and finished in 1924, the year of Kant's 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The latest restoration of the *Dom* itself (1901-07) sought to recover an original look of the cathedral dating back to 1400. In the 1944 bombings, the cathedral interior burnt out; the north tower and most of the roof vaults collapsed. In this status the Dom was left open and vulnerable to the environment, weather changes and human assaults. It received no attention from the city's administration. In the first few years after the war, iron-tipped fences, granite parts of wall furnishing and grave stones disappeared (Köster 2000: 48-57).

In 1972 the cathedral was registered as an official landmark at the Russian Ministry of Culture and in 1976 conservation work began. The steel of heavy tracks and excavators ripped through the floor paving, walls were stripped of the remaining ornaments, epitaphs of the in-wall burials were hammered down, and arched window and door boxes cemented. By these means, the city government waved its liability for any accidents inside and near the structure. In 1987-88 the conservation project was taken over by Igor Odintsov, at the time a military engineer. A firm, "The Königsberg Cathedral," was registered in January 1992 as a state enterprise (*gosudarstvennoe predpriyatie*) with the Regional Governing Office of Culture as a founder. This status ensured support from the regional government as well as federal investment in the project. The firm was made eligible to conduct commercial activities, including tourist services. It had its own hard currency banking account. By 1992, the goal of conservation had become that of full restoration—a projected result of which would be a complete reproduction of the cathedral's exterior as it was designed in the 1903-1907 German restoration.

The head of the regional administration declared that “the historic monument will become a center of spiritual and cultural life of the city, its main historic site, a place attracting tourism, a monument of sacral architecture, a symbol of a rich historic heritage of the territory filled with museum, memorial and antique rarities preserving in themselves the spirit of the centuries passed” (*Yantarnyi Krai* 11.10.1994). To that end, a Russian Orthodox chapel opened on the first floor of the north tower and an Evangelic church in the north end. Second and third floors were given to the Historic museum, the Museum of the *Dom* Reconstruction, the Immanuel Kant museum and a future library containing the Wallenrodt's library collection.<sup>3</sup>

A group of local intelligentsia represented by historians, architects and journalists attacked the proposed restoration. “Stop the barbarism!”, “Condemn the stupidity of the government!” were slogans of the public protest organized at the scaffolding around the cathedral in April 1992. About one hundred “representatives of the local public” led by a group of architects and a university professor distributed fliers to the passing by public describing the restoration in the following terms: “the works are conducted without an approved plan of restoration, in the absence of technical documentation,” “the missing fragments of the walls are replaced by cheap contemporary materials that destroy the medieval tradition,” “asphalt paving of the inside floor of the cathedral will destroy the only monument of the XIV century North Germanic Gothic on the territory of

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<sup>3</sup> The book collection of Wallenrodt family was founded by Count Martin von Wallenrodt, 1570-1632, from Eastern Prussia by origin, representative of the ancient aristocratic family, who occupied a position of Chancellor in 1619 - one of the highest state positions of the Prussia principedom. The library was hosted in the Cathedral since 1650.

Russia.”(KP 30.04.1992). The federal government and the local administration are held liable and their action critically interpreted. This on-the-ground encounter with the state

The motivations of the restoration firm's management and its economic interests were regarded with suspicion by the opposition, which accused it of corruption, large-scale financial manipulation and fraud. The manager was accused, by the opposing architects and historians, of exploiting both public interest in the local pre-war history and collective guilt on a part of local intelligentsia for the Soviet-era destruction. This group sought proof of illegal profit making elsewhere; the firm, it was alleged, cut costs by using poor quality construction materials and by hiring un-skilled alcoholic workers, who were paid in vodka and then fired.

Other concerns involved the sources of financing – was it German or Russian money, private or public, municipal or federal? In a public presentation in 2000, a German guest and a grantor confirmed German support of the restorative project and underlined the high return of the investment, if not in financial then in symbolic form: “One hundred thousand visitors came to the cathedral last year; all official representatives visiting the region came to the site, and illustrated calendars printed *Der Dom* on their front pages. Königsberg did not die – because the Dom continues to live.” Interviewed in the same year, the project director denied the German financing – “ we did not work with German money; we worked with Russian money. We earned it ourselves.” Odintsov spoke about the German assistance in a different way – “Germans helped with information; with archives; ...with the roof [to install].” As for “the money,” he preferred to emphasize the local small and large business donations and the local patriotism that made fund raising successful.

In 1997-1998 the roofing was complete. On the exterior, freshly stripped red-orange brick complemented a new copper roof and a peculiar spire. Whether the spire's oddness is the authentic design of the North German Renaissance tradition, or, as my commentator, an architect, suggested, should be attributed to a Russian hand more accustomed to the roundness of the Orthodox cupola than the sober refinement of the Prussian spires, remains unclear. The Dom has been open to the public as a “multicultural center” following the model projected by the city administration in 1994.

#### **4. The Dom: Actors.**

I examine the monumentalization of the German past as “the site and stake” (Hall 1982) of struggles for cultural meaning of history among the actors identified as the centralized Russian state, the local authorities and the grass-root cultural activists. The question is to be approached as a process of legitimation and authentication of particular visions of the past in the production of a new social order and in forging particular identities. This will enable us to ask why certain kinds of histories become salient while others are adopted as authentic; and what basis for identity is formed by some marks of difference rising from these histories.

##### *The State.*

One obvious change in the local politics has been in the position of the local elected authorities and the state representatives toward the German period of history of Kaliningrad. It was literally a discovery of the past and a public realization of the longer historical existence of the locality than it was officially recognized by the Soviets.

The position of the government and its input into the restoration of the Dom in 1991-1995, however, was obscure not only for the public but for the government itself. One way to interpret the post-communist revival of the German past in Kaliningrad is to see it as a crisis of legitimacy of the state and its hegemony. John Borneman suggests that the state's long-term legitimacy "is dependent on the extent to which the state can claim to represent a specific ... identity unique to it, which means it creates people with characteristics it can call its own" (Borneman 1997: 97). Elsewhere, I demonstrated that the Soviet state failed to do so in Kaliningrad, where it suppressed the local history as a basis for forming a legitimately distinct locality.<sup>4</sup> Part of the post-*perestroika* transformation of Russian society was the reconfiguration of state authority. As many commentators observed, the wish to return to pre-communist values was a powerful force in most communist bloc countries. The search for the means to symbolize new regimes' anti-communism drew heavily on such resources. Among other, a historic narrative was chosen as a subject of reformism. The view that the state had transformed its corrupt history into a self-celebrating biography of the communist party was widespread, as was the counter position that "a normal life" required a different historic narrative. While, as it is broadly recognized, many people in former communist countries of Eastern Europe expressed their anti-communism by drawing on and constructing nationalist memories 'national histories', in Kaliningrad a major way in which memory was mobilized was to retrieve a non-Soviet, German past, that is, to reach outside of the 'iron curtain.'

The situation had changed in the early 1990s and the historical past took another meaning by being reproduced in the official sphere and public culture. The importance of

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<sup>4</sup> Indeed, this failure was not the only and decisive one. Together with economic hardship, unequal goods distribution and geopolitical situation, it became an important symbolic weapon against the centralized state even in the Soviet time.

the German historical heritage beginning 1989-1992 played a part in the mobilization of the *local resources* under conditions of the restructuring of the federal state ‘verticality’ – a ‘top down’ principle of the state domination. A particular operational principle of the socialist economy – the emphasis of distribution of resources -- converged into a foundation of the post-communist regionalization.

Power was determined under socialism by control, accumulation and subsequent redistribution of resources<sup>5</sup> becoming not merely a stage in the economic cycle but a definitive characteristic of the social life in general. Bargaining and “hoarding” were important strategies that the local actors used against the central state machinery. The ‘resource’ was both, an ultimate goal of the bargaining process, and the foundation of the bargaining power (Verdery 1996). The lower level geographic scale has emerged as an important actor. As much as the central apparatus fought for the monopoly over resources and their distribution, its policies and action were always negotiated and modified at the lower level of production. In the 1990s, the realization of the redistributive principle of socialism in the spatial structure, combined with a particular principle of identity formation defined by the necessary positioning of oneself vis-à-vis the state, gave rise to a plethora of localisms. These localisms exist at district, county, and province levels and have deepened and become mutually competitive in recent years with the weakening legitimacy of all-Russian structures. Soviet organization of production and distribution gave each locality the ideal character of a self-

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<sup>5</sup> I use the word ‘resource’ in the broadest sense: raw materials, labor power, services (from a beauty parlor to the train attendants), access to the above – in other words, anything that can be exchanged or be effective in valorizing status and power position. I believe, such a reading of the term to be in accord with Verdery’s conceptual apparatus.

reproducing social whole, a tendency emphasized by the local 'self-government' rhetoric of Yeltsin's program. (Humphrey, 1999: 27-28)

The Russian crisis economy of 1991-1993 prompted territorial formations to become more self-sufficient, bounded and akin to their local *valuables* (Humphrey 1999). An increasing sense of detachment from and unjust treatment by the remote Russian state, felt in the Kaliningrad enclave, escalated tendencies to localization. Things and immaterial entities received a special, not always related to profit, value, and became *local valuables*. In the spirit, Kaliningraders grasped an opportunity to convert the German relics into the regional "treasure." Their unique heritage was seen as not only a promise of international tourism but a smoother integration in the European community.

And yet, there were restrictions on the actions of the local government, first as a local representative of the Russian state, then as a representative of the population groups holding the Soviet-style anti-German ideology. The government was concerned that official liberalization of the pre-war past did not produce the other extreme and signaled separatism and political preference for the unified German state to the Russian state. Contained by the state, historical revival required a gross reinterpretation of the past to ensure that it remained within the orbit of the Russian state and Russian national identity. Once dominant image of Königsberg as a center of the Third Reich aggression was countered by the European Enlightenment and a personality of Immanuel Kant. Although the militaristic interpretation did not vanish from the public discourse completely, it was mainly held by the older population represented by the early settlers to the territory, and the radical nationalist groups. Conversion of the Dom, a Evangelistic church, into a "multicultural center" hosting a Russian Orthodox church was the historical

reinterpretation applied to a concrete monument. A narrative of the Cathedral clerics' resistance to Hitler is now offered by the tourist guides to the visitors.

What exactly were the Russian state and its local representatives held accountable for by the Kaliningrad local public? First, for representing Kaliningrad as a subject of the Russian Federation to the international community and countering potential restitution claims, thus protecting the rights of the current population to the territory. The concern over belonging resurfaced in the debate over who was financing the Königsberg Cathedral's restoration. Foreign investment was a reminder of the insufficiency of the Russian economy, a humiliation of the war winner, and a bleak comparison to the "western" way of life. It was believed to undermine the property rights to the cathedral. German sponsorship was viewed by some as an intervention into local politics. I witnessed an occasion on which a German grantor for the restoration publicly appealed to the audience to support a referendum mechanism for changing the name back to "Königsberg". The incident occurred at the opening of a museum exhibition dedicated to Königsberg, which attracted about two hundred viewers at the opening. The museum director responded by softly saying that "no one had to agree with Mr. Deutsch but every one has to thank him for his contributions." A reaction to the renaming proposition was published in the local newspaper a week later where the author, a war veteran and a politician, used it as an evidence of the German effort to influence local affairs under cover of heritage preservation (*Kaliningradskaya Pravda*, July 12, 2002). A guarantee from the former owner, Germany, that it would not impose any restitution claims has been the international prerequisite of the official legitimization of the German history – a guarantee readily provided by the German government. The negotiation with the local

population groups proved to be more difficult as the structure and organization of the state changed, and as peoples' expectations of the state's accountability evolved.

The momentum of anti-German politics in the region had not yet dissolved in the late 1980s, and the open support of German restoration went against a half-a-century long policy and the will of some population groups—including war veterans, who formed a powerful grass-root organization. At the same time, the critical drive of *perestroika* shed a doubtful light on the Soviet historiography and practices of suppressing the past. This pressured the local government to act against the established Soviet historical norms if doing so could be construed as a democratizing gesture. In addition, but importantly, the early Yeltsin period, in 1991-1994, with its politics of decentralization and the rise of regions and localities, deepened the schism between national 'all-Russia' historiography and local historical investigations. The redefinition of the relationship between national and subnational politics led to a multitude of localized identities. These circumstances resulted in latent governmental support of the cathedral restoration with a gradual turning of unofficial into official historical representations. This two-fold position of the local government agitated both the pro-German and anti-German heritage activists.

*The local opposition.*

Competition between the government and local activists for rights to the past is evident in the Dom debates. Because the official city government “did not intervene to prevent the destruction,” the “educated public” took responsibility for protecting the landmark. The anger of the opposition was expressed in architectural terms, often in the technical language of the restoration profession, and translated for a broader public into

the rhetoric of historical truth and authenticity. Nevertheless, this seemingly objective talk of norms and regulations could not obscure the highly subjective motivations driving the resistance and producing alternative visions of the restoration. For the generation of people between 30 and 50 years old who cultivated their relationship with the German past in the years of Soviet regime, the Dom restoration has been allied with the government and corrupted by the state's appropriation of their symbol of the non-official non-Soviet existence within the communist regime. These “residual” politicized memories of the rejected by the Soviet state landmark today create a climate which makes the current revival of the past full of conflicts.

An important source of unrest was the personal experience of the generation for whom the ruins were literally a playground, an unreconstructed reminder of the transformed city, a truth about themselves. The “usurper” in the cultural opposition opinion, the General manager Odintsov, monopolized not only the rights and license to restore, not only the profit, but also the very “heart” of the former Königsberg. The official inattention to the site in the past made the cathedral a part of daily life of the city residents, familiar and domestic, while preserving its symbolic status as "Other" to the regime and its ideology. The restoration symbolically ended the freedom to imagine and remember the city in diverse and highly personal ways; it closed off an ostensibly more direct experience of the site acquired by climbing the broken stairs and imagining in its shadows another times in another place.

These individual memories shed a romantic light on the neglected cathedral and informed contemporary social activism against the methods of restoration. Converted into a heritage and partly privatized, the Dom ceased being “authentic.” It was not merely the

inauthenticity of the appearance, the poor restoration. It was the inauthenticity of the experience that vanished behind the newly installed stain glass windows, hidden under the red carpets of the floors, and whitened out from the painted walls. “I felt the past when Dad took me to the cathedral ruins, and I climbed down the wells risking at any moment to break my neck,” recalls Tatiana, a tourist guide in her late 30s, “and they took away my Königsberg by doing the restoration.” “The Dom is lost because one does not have to be an architect to see the low quality and lack of knowledge [involved in the restoration]. I come in – it is dead for me,” expressed his regrets a local translator from German. The state's effort to monumentalize the Dom illuminates a space for personal experience of the past and the sense of place that arouses from it. Converted into a museum, a form that imposes restrictions on interactions with the past by disciplining the subject who enters it (Bennett 1995 ), the Dom ceases to be democratic and pluralistic for its long time admirers.

One of the most vocal opponents, Yurii, 42, a photographer born in Kaliningrad, describes his feelings against the restoration: “I will use a tale from Tarkovsky's film *Nostalgia*. There is an episode when a *muzhik* passes a swamp and sees another fellow right in the middle of it neck deep in mud. Terrified for the fellow and feeling heroic, muzhik rushes in to rescue. Struggling to pull the man out, muzhik finally succeeds and then falls exhausted on the bank next to the saved man. 'What did you do?!' the man asks in anger. 'What did I do? I rescued you!' replies muzhik. 'You're fool. I live in there.'” The restorative plan in its “rescuing” effort goes against people's feeling about the old cathedral as a familiar environment, however messy it seems, and a vital detail of their day-to-day experience, however imperfect it appears. Not all of my interlocutors had

comparable cultural knowledge or the ability to evoke literary parallels in their conversation. But they did not differ much in the sentiment illustrated in the tale.

An imaginary trip to Königsberg was for Kaliningraders a passage through a foreign land into a foreign culture available for everyone's desires. It did not require visas, passports, background checks or hard currency. That nowadays every Russian can formally travel abroad to the "real" German land to experience "European culture" did not undermine the significance of Königsberg. It merely shifted to a different strata of population. If a member of the new Russian bourgeoisie does not experience difficulty traveling abroad, there are many more of those who are trapped in place by economic hardships of contemporary life in Russia. For them, the fantasy of Königsberg retains its power and actuality. As a young boy commented, "I would vote for re-naming Kaliningrad Königsberg if it made us live like Germans."

### **5. The Meaning of the German Past for the Russian Population.**

If the association between the Russians and the Russian national culture and the former German city Königsberg is fragmented when it comes to national unity, and unity with the Russian state, what association is produced by embracing the pre-war past? In Kaliningrad, concern for the German heritage is the means by which the people seek recognition by the Western community. Playing by "the European rules"—themselves a product of the cultural imagination of Kaliningraders – is part of a quest for dignity and respectability by a people living simultaneously in a Russian exclave and a European enclave.

Katherine Verdery identifies a contemporary trend toward returning cultural treasures to places from which they were taken. In the Eastern European world, she observes, it became particularly important to bring cultural treasures back “home” where they “belong” (Verdery 1999: 49). The turn in the politics of history in Kaliningrad can be seen as a version of this “bringing back,” of paying a cultural debt which, however, goes straight back to the local cultural treasury. The imagery of possession is used so often in regard to these practices that I tend to view them as acts of binding to a territory through cultural artifacts, and to a (European) culture by the way of territorial possession. Such binding allows for stronger claim of belonging and (European) kinship, which in Kaliningrad's case are vital for the region's economy and the residents' survival.

By means of the possession of heritage, a symbolic capital of world significance (so it is perceived), Kaliningrad hopes to enter global circuits of culture, thus affirming the individuality of a region that is usually not accorded a distinctive identity in the eyes of the Western community. Thus this is a returned gaze and a return practice generated within the interpretation of what European culture is about.

I argue that what appears as “borrowing” of technologies in the “universal” movement is not in any clear way copying of the western heritage tradition, but rather a set of strategies, discursive and practical, that characterize, in the cultural imagination, advanced “civilized” societies. It is not a direct importation of the developed conceptions and technologies but a set of perceptions and ideas of what constitutes a proper “modern” society. It is reproducing a way of being European by taking up what is represented as a “European practice” and “European tradition.”

An interior designer, Sergei, suggests beginning a massive restoration of the remaining German buildings, accompanied by a high quality new construction in a traditional Russian style. Qualified maintenance of this “heritage” will be a sufficient response “to the West,” granting the right of the land possession not on the basis of force but of a “civilized treatment of history.” “To preserve not in the name of love for Germany but to be seen as dignified citizens of Europe, responsible in possession of European heritage.” A high school student and a creator of a first electronic encyclopedia of the local history, Illia also makes no separation between converting the past into “heritage” and gaining the status of a “civilized people” – “ I mean that there is a need for Germans to realize that Russians are not that barbaric, ... that we capable of preservation, we know how to renovate monuments ...that we are not that indifferent to this land and have interest in its history...” To view these attitudes as simply nostalgic or commercial is to refuse to recognize the dignifying quality that heritage represent for the residents.

Now retired from the military, Igor Odintsov moved to Kaliningrad in 1982, and although he settled in Kaliningrad rather later in his life, he calls it "home." From first sight, Kaliningrad "impressed" him as a "European city," "not German," but a place of "European aristocracy and nobility." Loss of major historic memorials (to Bismark and to Friedrich the III) and the demolition of other landmarks were "barbaric acts," a proof that we were savages." His personal mission is to raise consciousness of ordinary Kaliningraders as well as its powerful elites about their cultural destiny as true Russians: Königsberg's symbolic place in the heart of Western culture was passed to the Russian settlers and ought to be preserved. The political misrecognition of this destiny is what unites the former Soviet government, some members of the contemporary administration

and the "enemies of Königsberg," and places them along with "the Taliban," the "barbarians."<sup>5</sup> The reconstruction of the Dom for him is an act of redemption of Kaliningraders, their moral salvation from the " barbarism of forgetting," and represents the "planting of the seeds to become a civilized people." In restoration, an effort has been made to overcome constructed binarism of the cultural categories "Europeanness" and "Russianness" the characteristic organizations based on one's cultural belonging and membership.

## **6. Conclusion.**

Writing about the Berlin Schloss, Svetlana Boym suggests that "nowhere else in the world does the return to historicism, whether in the guise of restoration, preservation or postmodern citation, arouse more suspicion than in united Germany" (Boym 2001:183). It does in Kaliningrad. The Dom symbolically stands for something different for each group of people and yet for something common to all of them. It is conflict-ridden most visibly in the transformation of the cathedral from a trope for highly personalized memories and images into an official monument, a public trope for a historic memory legitimated by the state. A memory that was collective *in spite of* and often *against* the state, became a part of the official historic narrative fully appropriated and controlled by it. Smaller groups of residents object to the very fact of preserving German culture in a land populated by people who suffered from fascism. The commonality of meaning is that it relates a concept of Russian culture to the master-symbol "Europe" or "European civilization." This representation is embraced by the majority of population.

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5. The interview was recorded in July 2001.

In the analysis of a restoration of the Königsberg Dom I examined the multiplicity of meanings ascribed to the same past in the same culture, and a complexity of social actors and social locations from which the visions of the past originate. There required to be no organic relating to the past commonly formulated in terms of origins, traditions or 'culture'. This relationship may be constructed anew on the empty ground -- as an interpretation of the lived experience coincides or comes to a conflict with the hegemonic narrative of power. These interpretations, although take the past as their subject, are in fact the ways to construct the state, the global order and the place of self in it. The rehabilitation of the pre-war history and its relics in Kaliningrad is a part of large reordering of ideas about the state and its authority, state accountability, people's respectability and dignity, and the international relations in the post-cold war era.

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