

Summary

The 139th *NZ* issue is mostly centred on a single, if fairly broad, theme: the fortunes and forms of democracy as a way of state governance in the age of “late modernity”. On the post-war period, especially the era that began after the Cold War. Democracy vs. certain varieties of modernity; federalism under democracy, even if in name only – these are the key aspects of the theme.

The issue opens with a topical section titled “DEMOCRACY TODAY: CRISIS? WHAT CRISIS?”. It talks about processes interpreted by many as a decline of the democratic form of societal organisation – especially when applied to post-Soviet or post-communist societies. Many of them have established regimes that are either authoritarian or inclined to authoritarianism, with democracy replaced by populism. This is the subject of the chapter from *“The Anatomy of Post-Communist Regimes: A Conceptual Framework”* by Bálint Magyar and Bálint Madlovics, to be published in Russian by *New Literary Observer* as part of *NZ Library* series. The extract featured here, *“Secondary Trajectories after a Regime Change: Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Russia”*, attempts to formally analyse these countries’ movement towards authoritarianism while taking into account their national historical characteristics. Moving from formal conceptualisation to a concrete example, the section also includes *“Beyond Illiberal Democracy: The Case of Hungary”*, an article by András Bozóki,

a professor at the Central European University. Unlike Hungary, whose government takes a stand against liberal values while claiming to be democratic, the Ukrainian authorities speak of their ambition to become a “European country” in the sense defined by the EU legislation. Yet the political regime in the country is at odds with their stated goals and examples. Denis Yudin considers the state of Ukrainian democracy today in *“Hacking the System: Volodymyr Zelensky’s Rule and Its Prospects for Ukrainian Politics”*. The section ends with a discussion essay by our regular contributor Alexander Kustarev, who believes that the crisis of the most widespread (Anglo-Saxon, Western modern) variant of democracy might be conducive to another variant, known as deliberative democracy.

Linking this topical section to the next is *NZ ARCHIVE*, which features an excerpt from *“Embers and Ashes”* by the late Palestinian historian Hisham Sharabi (1927–2005), who was a professor at the Georgetown University. The book talks about the events of 1946–1949 in today’s Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, at the time mostly territories yet to be established as states in the post-war years. Sharabi tells the story of a young Palestinian intellectual torn between the ideas of national democracy and pan-Arabism, which are known to have defined the turbulent, conflict-ridden life of the region for decades.

A compromise between national (ethnic, religious) self-determination and the concept of unity (state unity,



first and foremost) lies in the sphere of federal organisation. This is the subject of our next section “FEDERAL TRADE AND CONFLICTS OF THE FUTURE”. Setting the theme is an excerpt from “*Federal Government*” (1947), a classical work by the Australian scholar Kenneth Wheare (1907–1979), who held a professorship at Oxford. The work has not been translated into Russian yet; NZ is planning to publish another extract from it in 2022. Next, a piece by Andrei Zakharov and Leonid Isaev offers an impressive historical survey of conflictual (to put it mildly) coexistence between the so-called “Arab idea” and federalism. Polina Maksimova narrows the scope to Lebanon in her analytic piece, while Vadim Korolkov briefly outlines the past and present of Nepal’s federal organisation.

The third NZ section “THE REALITY OF GAME REALITY: VERISIMILITUDE, NARRATIVES, MIMESIS, CENSORSHIP” focuses on complicated relationships between the reality (historical, existential, political) in which we live and the reality of games: board games like Monopoly, to go over a century back, and computer games in the past 40 years. The section opens with an analysis of board games offered in “*Revolutionary Play: Early 20th-Century Political Games*” by Daniil Leiderman, an assistant professor at Texas A&M University. Another American researcher, Phillip A. Lobo, who teaches at the Indiana Academy at Ball State University, develops the theme in “*Replaying History: The Statistical Realism of Alternate History Narratives and Games*”. Anton Romanenko considers the “realism” of games and a version of

mimesis related to computer games in his brief piece “*Detail, Landscape and Space: Notes on the Depiction of Reality in Video Games*”. The realism of censorship characterising streaming platforms – a very real phenomenon, especially in the era of cancel culture – is examined by Darya Esaulova in “*Regulating Unregulated: Russian-Speaking Streamers’ Reaction to a New Policy Introduced by Twitch.tv*”. The section concludes with “*Gnosticism in Video Games*” by Dmitry Skorodumov.

September 2021 saw the 20th anniversary of 9/11, terrorist acts that led to radical changes in almost all aspects of political, social, cultural and even private lives of a large proportion of the global population. Three pieces in this NZ issue pay tribute to it. These are Fedor Nikolai’s “*To Show Unimaginable: 9/11, the War on Terror and Anglophone Studies*” (POLITICS OF CULTURE) and two reviews: Reza Angelov on “*Fall and Rise: The Story of 9/11*” by the American journalist Mitchell Zuckoff, and Margarita Shakirova on “*Ground Zero: 9/11 und die Geburt der Gegenwart*” by Stefan Weidner.

The 139th NZ issue also contains Vadim Mikhailin’s detailed study “*«At Least the Jeans Are OK»: Playing with the Near Future and the Late Soviet Prognostic Joke*” (POLITICS OF CULTURE); Oleg Leybovich’s comprehensive review of “*Stalin: A Biography in Documents (1878 – March 1917)*”, a two-volume study just published by Olga Edelman; the RUSSIAN INTELLECTUAL JOURNALS’ REVIEW by Alexander Pisarev; and Alexei Levinson’s regular column SOCIOLOGICAL LYRICS.

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