

***Conjuring Hope: Healing and Magic in Contemporary Russia.* By Galina Lindquist. New York: Berghahn Books, 2006. vi, 251pp. Bibliography. Index. \$27.95, Paper.**

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In memory of Galina Lindquist, who passed away in 2008 after an illness. Conjuring Hope could not have been a better work to present innovative scholarship on people's search for healing strategies.

From the very beginning of the book, Lindquist sets her discussion of magic and healing in Russia in the context of disorder in the society, or what she calls “*bespredel*... the limitlessness of the new lawlessness, ruthlessness and cruelty that appeared to reign everywhere” (xiv, 210). She discusses how magic helps people deal with this unpredictability and its effects on their health. The author argues that in Russia – where the sheer physical being is not a given and the channels for materializing rational plans are often beyond the individual's control, people develop alternative ways of gaining more reassurance in their present and future. Lindquist uses Bourdieu's concept of *illusio* to analyze the intrinsic quality of humans to hope – or have a stake in the social game. Her main argument is that contemporary Russians use magic to change their subjective feeling of control and infuse their lives with hope, which the author refers to as present “pregnant with future” (8).

Lindquist presents to us an encounter of magic in “postmodern urban” Russia (2). We learn of the transformative qualities of magic for both the charismatic practitioners whom she calls the “icons of power” (113), and their clients. The former are able to tap into their exceptional qualities and the cultural logic of practice (117) to relationally transform themselves into a “symbolic type... a person who no longer needs to modify her behavior in response to others” (127). When healing is successful, the clients are able to modify their perception, which in its turn then may bring material changes (72).

Just how exactly this transformation happens, we learn in Chapter 2, where Lindquist invites us to look at this process through the lens of Charles Peirce's semiotic model (12-17, 70-71). His tripartite model looks at the sign in its three forms: representamen (form of the sign), object (referent), and the interpretant (the sense that people make of sign). Such a system allows the anthropologist to use the representational mode, which goes beyond the discursive meaning (12), and allows her to focus on the native interpretations. Lindquist presents the process of healing with the help of magic essentially as a process of naming: semiosis. The magus helps her clients by generating signs in their consciousness – a diagnosis. It becomes a piece of puzzle that fits – therefore connecting the broken semiotic chain, “providing representamina for the nameless state is a mechanism that forms the basis of healing” (87).

Throughout the book, the author deals with two main conceptual domains: emotions/affect and power. For Lindquist, emotions are based on the socially accepted

patterns of language and practice. They are also embodied by socially and culturally constructed subjects (85). These body-mind states can therefore be influenced by the magus – providing the language to talk about the experiences of turmoil.

The concept of power is unpacked by the author on both macro and micro levels. Lindquist tackles the issue of legitimacy of magic healing, construction of charisma, and the power of consciousness to shape perceptions and bodies. At the same time, her focus on these micro-patterns opens the window into the macro-processes that govern people's lives. We see how magic thrives where disorder and violence abound: "In the jungle of the brave new Russia, magic can be seen as a way of lending illusion to those playing tough social games more akin to Russian roulette" (199).

Lindquist's careful discussion and ethnographic situating of the concepts of hope and agency deserve special notice. The author challenges the Western concept of agency as inadequate for understanding the realities of life in Russia. When people's will is rarely sufficient for persevering, and the rules of the game constantly change, an anthropologist must look at "the cultural tools to change people's subjectivity in ways that makes their lives livable" (4). The author argues that the Western idea of agency conflates two notions: intention, desire or will to act; and the capacity to implement this desire. For some people, the constraining qualities of larger structures are predominant, and for others the enabling qualities are more salient (7). The book is ultimately about hope – "the existential and affective counterpart of agency that replaces it where channels for agency are blocked and presence in the world becomes precarious" (4).

Lindquist's other great contribution is introducing the formative influence of culture into the Peircean semiotic model. Here she utilizes Bourdieu's approach to culture as practice, the logic of "accepted cultural order, logic of desirable" (117). While Lindquist's work focuses so prominently on the period of great transformations in Russia, her tackling of the concept of culture is somewhat static, underlining some of its aspects such as being shared, being agreed upon, being accepted, rather than its dynamic qualities. After all, the "accepted" logic of practice is also subject to change. One might expect that this attention to the established cultural patterns would trigger more detailed historical excursions into the magic in Russia, yet Lindquist's discussion of the roots of contemporary magic is quite succinct (30-43). She, however, returns to some of the historical aspects later in the book during her discussion of various cultural concepts that lack direct translations, such as *obida*, *gnev*, etc., even though these discussions focus more on linguistic aspects.

Lindquist's work is theoretically rich and memorable. It will be a great thought-provoking piece for graduate students and scholars. It might not be accessible for the general audience or undergraduate students due to its very detailed theoretical excursions, although the topic of magic itself could certainly attract a broader pool of readers. All in all, it is an excellent, ethnographically rich and theoretically innovative writing. *Conjuring Hope* will enrich the horizons of the interested readers.