

## NAKED SOUL ON NAKED SOIL Economics and the Ethnogenesis of “Džan”

Since Andrej Platonov’s “Džan” [1935, first published in 1964] was first reviewed, many scholars have rightly paid attention to the mythopoetic components of the novella. Vladimir Turbin, in particular, derived the composition of “Džan” from the medieval genre of mystery play (Турбин 1965). Later intertextual research has focused on the impact of Biblical (Bodin 1991), Gnostic (Ingdahl 2000), Zoroastrian (Жунжурова-Фишерман 2000) and Sufi (Ismailov 2001) allegories incorporated in the story. Some recent interpretations of “Džan” analyse the artistic techniques, self-referentiality and gender semantics of Platonov’s novella (Hutchings 2002; Livers 2004). Much research has highlighted the crucial analogy between the protagonist, Nazar Čagataev, and the mythic Prometheus that culminates in the impressive scene when Čagataev uses his body to lure vultures in the desert. He thus provides sustenance for his people, the Džan – a multiethnic, nomadic-like tribe starving while searching for a place to settle down. That the fractal personality of Čagataev incorporates patriarchal Moses, ascetic Jesus, romantic Prometheus and Stalin himself has been observed in detail in the works cited above.

Here it is my purpose to examine Čagataev’s embodiment as Hermes, by using the figurative language of Greek mythology but then switching from a mythological reading of “Džan” to an (ethno-) sociological exploration of the Džan as a people. Even if such perspectives turn out to be closely related, this approach allows us to illuminate the economic and organizational activities of Čagataev – the house-builder and founder of a nation.

### 1. From Prometheus to Hermes

As the messenger of the Olympic gods, Hermes is also traditionally the guide to the underworld and the patron of boundaries and those who cross them. These include shepherds, travellers, thieves, liars, and – in a broader sense – all outcasts (such as the Džan people). He also serves as the guardian of weights and measures, invention, and commerce in general. These few classical functions of Hermes already evoke some key scenes from “Džan”, such as the opening of the novella where Čagataev is introduced as a graduate of the Moscow Institute of Economics. In this sense, Čagataev stands under the aegis of Hermes, for his mission is to

convey the cultural and economic achievements of the Soviet state to its outer margins. It is also an allusion to Hermes when Čagataev leads the souls of the ‘dead’ through hell. Platonov himself explains that the word ‘džan’ means ‘a soul in search of happiness’ in Turkic languages. The members of Džan are consequently uncertain if they are alive or dead. As claimed by Nur-Mohammed, Čagataev’s administrative predecessor, adversary and double:

Мертвых должны хоронить живые, а здесь живых нет, есть не умершие, доживающие свое время во сне, ты им не сделаешь счастья, и даже своего горя они уже не знают, они больше не мучаются, они отмутились (Платонов 2010, 156).

This atmosphere of death is intensified by the constant motif of blindness: the Džan people are (nearly) blind like the souls of the dead in Greek mythology. (Numerous scholars have already noted that ‘Nazar’, by contrast, designates ‘vision’ in the Turkic languages.) Where the plot takes place is described in the novella according to a Persian/Zoroastrian legend, as “hell for the entire earth” (Platonov 2007, 31). Like Hermes, Čagataev is a psychopomp, and he recovers of lambs neglected in the desert in order to feed his people<sup>1</sup>. Following those remaining lambs like a compass, Čagataev and the Džan cross the desert and finally locate a place to live, where Čagataev organizes a settlement with (apparently) unexpected help from the Soviet administration. Surfacing in the desert like a *deus ex machina*, this humanitarian aid of food and everyday supplies recalls the Roman name of Hermes – *Mercurius*, derived from the Latin word *merx* (‘merchandise’).

Certainly, a detailed survey could uncover more references of Čagataev to Hermes, but those listed should suffice for the moment. In addition to the Promethean motifs of self-sacrifice, there are as many others of divine beneficence exemplified by Čagataev. This ‘hermeneutic’ reading is supported by the fact that none of the anti-tyrannical, rebellious components associated with the Prometheus myth are present in the character of Čagataev. Instead, Čagataev acts under the orders of the Soviet administration, as a messenger of the *bureaucratic* gods. He is therefore related not only to Hermes but even more to the head of the Soviet ‘pantheon’: Stalin himself.

As Platonov scholars have already postulated, Čagataev can be read as an allegorical embodiment of Stalin (Жунжурова-Фишерман 2000, 684; Hutchings 2002, 66). And in both Platonov’s notebooks of 1933-1935 and the first handwritten version of “Džan”, we actually find some strong indications for such a reading:

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Lamb-bearer’ is a primary epithet of Hermes (Hermes Kriophoros).

Истина в том, что в СССР создается семья, родня, один детский милый двор, и Сталин – отец или старший брат всех, Сталин – родитель свежего ясного человечества, другой природы, другого сердца (Платонов 2000, 157).

Чагатаев давно уже жил чувством и воображением Сталина, сначала он любил его нечаянно и по-детски за то, что он стал есть пищу в детском доме [...] Без него, как без отца, как без доброй силы, берегущей и просветляющей его жизнь, Чагатаев бы не мог ни спастись тогда, ни вырасти, ни жить теперь [...] (Платонов 2000, 383).

Clearly, Stalin plays an important role in the understanding of “Džan” in general and the figure of Čagataev in particular. It is not so much that Čagataev represents Stalin himself but rather the dictator’s man-child and delegate, thereby figuring a relationship such as that between Hermes and his father Zeus. Čagataev is evidently sent to the desert to adopt the lost children of Džan into the Soviet family of nations and to “inscribe his people into the Stalinist narrative” (Livers 2004, 34). Or, to use the classical term of Katerina Clark (2000, 115), to tell them “The Stalinist Myth of the ‘Great Family’”. Hermes is also the patron of orators and wit, and an eponym of hermeneutics, the science of interpreting and retelling myths<sup>2</sup>. Although Čagataev’s mission is to provide economics and social organization to Džan, his means to this end is to communicate to Džan people some basic metaphors of ‘social sense’ and narratives of ‘cultural intimacy’ (Herzfeld 1997), thus rendering their divergent ethnic groups one nation.

## 2. From money to language

In his “Communist Postscript”, Boris Groys argues that “the Communist Revolution is the transcription of society from the medium of money to the medium of language – a linguistic turn at the level of social praxis” (Groys 2006, 7). This shift appears to be realized in the world of “Džan”. In the beginning, the economist Čagataev spends almost all of his money to buy gifts for Ksenja, the little daughter of his new girlfriend Vera in Moscow, before commencing his mission. His journey in the desert becomes a consequential process of getting rid of all kinds of media and symbolically-generated values. He thus leaves his suitcase in the train and travels without any baggage. In addition, he donates the remaining money and goods to his mother Gjul’cataj, whom he meets in the desert:

В шалаше делать было нечего, все же мать долго ровняла камышовые стебли в наклонных стенах, собрала все былинки с земли, вычистила ко-

<sup>2</sup> Hermes is incidentally also the eponym of Michel Serres’ comprehensive project on communication theory that regards communication as ‘voyage’, ‘translation’, and ‘exchange’ under the sign of Hermes, god of paths and crossroads, messengers and merchants (Serres 1982, xxxviii).

тел изнутри, оправила и свернула циновку и делала все это с глубокой тщательностью и усердием, заботясь о том, чтобы цело было ее хозяйское добро, потому что, кроме него, у нее не было связи с жизнью и прочими людьми. [...] Она попросила у сына, чтоб он дал ей что-нибудь. Попросила она робко, без надежды и без жадности, лишь для того, чтобы у нее стало больше вещей и увеличилась, посредством них, житейская занятость, – тогда время жизни проходит лучше. Назар правильно понял мать и отдал ей плащ, кобуру от револьвера (револьвер он переложил в карман брюк), блокнот и сорок рублей денег и заодно велел накормить Айдым (Платонов 2010, 153).

Entering the living space of Džan, Čagataev leaves behind the sphere of modern social interaction and returns to the pre-modern communication system of symbolic exchange, the principle of *kula* described in Bronisław Malinowski's study "Argonauts of the Western Pacific" [1922] (Smirnov 2006, 129). Čagataev first exchanges his possessions for a mother, then that mother for a daughter – Ajdym, the little girl Čagataev adopts and the daughter of the blind old man Molla Čerkezov. After having given everything he owns to his mother, Čagataev asks her to become Molla's new 'wife' and assist him in his daily life. The economic pragmatics of Gjul'čataj, standing for the Džan motherland, are highly significant at this point. For Čagataev's possessions, being of practical value (a raincoat, a holster, and a notepad), are transferred first into a symbolic gift, whereupon the symbolically-generated value (money) is transformed into a practical object. The money, raincoat and holster – things that are of no use in the desert – are Gjul'čataj's "only link with life and other people" (50). The gift is the founding of a history (Smirnov 2006, 152), the creation of "a universally memorable narrative" (Hutchings 2002, 66) that is the main objective of Čagataev's mission to Džan. Earlier, when Čagataev remembers his childhood, Džan is portrayed as entering history in the manner of a suicidal act of rebellion against market rule:

Назар спрашивал тогда мать: А когда же будет смерть? Я хочу! Но мать сама не знала, что будет сейчас, она видела, что все еще живы, и боялась опять возвращаться в Сары-Камыш и снова там вечно жить. На хивинском базаре народ стал брать разные плоды и наедаться без денег, а купцы стояли молча и не били этих хищных людей. Назар ел медленно, он глядел кругом, ожидая убийства, и успел съесть только одну дыню (Платонов 2010, 140).

The founding struggle of the Džan nation prior to the Russian Revolution exposes the old feudal-capitalist market under which the 'pre-historical' Džan are exploited day labourers. The symbolic exchange economics of Džan and the market economics of the Xiva bazaar are two rival models within the novella. They function under the third model: a totalitarian command economy ('Befehlswirtschaft'), the socialist 'planned

economy' (Smirnov 2006, 134)<sup>3</sup>. After launching a new settlement for the Džan people, Čagataev visits the new socialist market in Xiva where all three economic models are fused:

и далее сидели старики на земле – они положили против себя старинные пятаки и неизвестные монеты, железные пуговицы, жестяные бляхи, крючки, старые гвозди и железки, солдатские кокарды, пустые черепахи, сушеные ящерицы, изразцовые кирпичи из древних, погребенных дворцов, – и эти старики ожидали, когда появятся покупатели и приобретут у них товары для своей нужды. Женщины торговали чуреками, вязаными шерстяными чулками, водой для питья и прошлогодним чесноком. Продав что-нибудь, женщина покупала для себя у стариков жестяную бляху на украшение платья или осколок изразцовой плитки, чтобы подарить его своему ребенку на игрушку, а старики, выручив деньги, покупали себе чуреки, воду для питья или табак. Торговля шла тож на тож, без прибыли и без убытка; жизнь, во всяком случае, проходила, забывалась во многолюдстве и развлечении базара, и старики были довольны (Платонов 2010, 216).

This passage reveals the subversion of money markets and their transformation into an entertainment market. It thus marks a shift from the economics of abstract signs and symbolically-generated media to an unmediated social communication, characterized by a redistribution of pleasure. In Platonov's 1935 notebook we read:

Базар это не только торговля, это и общество и дружба. Пустынный человек приходит на базар из своего одиночества и трется среди людей под солнцем [...] Тут же, на базаре, начинается и любовь (Платонов 2000, 163).

Visiting the renewed Xiva bazaar, Čagataev meets Xanom – the third girl in the story. The three wives in Čagataev's would-be seraglio are: the fatherless Ksenja from Moscow, the motherless Ajdym from the Džan tribe and the homeless Xanom from the Xiva market. These young women are all integrated within Čagataev's sophisticated gender economics and priced according to the economic models listed above. Čagataev buys presents for Ksenja, spending three hundred rubles (plus another four hundred rubles for living expenses). Here Čagataev redistributes the allowance allocated to him by the administration. For Ajdym's subsistence, he gives his mother forty rubles and some symbolic gifts, in this case exchanging his goods for tribal kinship. To pay for Xanom's board and lodging in the *čajxana* (tavern) he sells his padded jacket, in that way

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<sup>3</sup> In a broader sense, the three economic models of Džan refer to Socialist Realism as a mechanism that produces social reality by substituting economics with aesthetics, as described in Evgenij Dobrenko's "Political Economy of Socialist Realism" (Добренко 2007, 28). It, by the way, opens with an interpretation of Andrej Platonov's "The Innermost Man" (Сокровенный человек) [1927].

becoming involved in the barter trade of the Xiva market. Ćagataev's investment politics reach back to a specifically Eastern system of gender values which Platonov (in his notebook) elaborated on during his 1934 journey to Turkmenistan:

Оч<ень> важно

Женщина в Туркм<ении> лишь символическое место социально-хозяйственных страстей, а не сама по себе драгоценность; она условный узел общественных битв (Платонов 2000, 138).

This gender pragmatics is represented in the novella by Nur-Mohammed's slave trade economics: "Женщины ценятся дороже мужчин, они служат одновременно и для работы и для утешения, но мужчин тоже можно продать хорошо, если они не перемрут за долгий путь" (Платонов 2010, 178). The opposing social practice is the gender philosophy of Džan introduced in the novella by means of an intimate dialogue of a couple Ćagataev overhears at night.

Дешевле жены ничего нету, – ответила женщина. – При нашей бедности, кроме моего тела, какое у тебя добро? Добра не хватает, – согласился муж, – спасибо хоть жена рождается и вырастает сама, нарочно ее не сделаешь: у тебя есть груди, живот, губы, глаза твои глядят, много всего, я думаю о тебе, а ты обо мне, и время идет [...] (Платонов 2010, 152).

The feminine body is both the most – and least – expensive thing in the world of Džan. There love has become a kind of private politics that undermines capitalism and state economics. According to Smirnov, the symbolic is inseparable from the corporeal in a love affair, in distinction to the plutocracy and bureaucracy of *corps social* (Смирнов 2002, 362). The language of the body and the economy of the soul are the two semantic paradigms that structure the expressive techniques of Platonov's novella.

### 3. From society to community and back

Ćagataev's investment in female bodies eventually brings profit to the domestic economy. Ajdym is the first one to become conscious of this new economic policy. She is not just the housekeeper of the Džan's settlement but also provides the new ideology with her fertile body as a kind of ultimate argument:

Айдым хорошо вела хозяйство и заставляла всех искать и приносить пищу [...] Кто забывал свою обязанность жить и кормиться, тем Айдым говорила при всех, что когда она подрастет немного, то нарождает совсем других людей, не таких, как эти, ничтожные, которых приходится кормить ей, малолетней; ведь их матери кровью заливались, а они родились и живут, как из одолжения; вот она вырост завтра с Назаром боль-

шую яму – пусть туда ложатся все, кому не нравится на свете! (Платонов 2010, 152).

After this, Ajdym assigns her role to the homeless Xanom, who not only finds a new homeland in Džan but also becomes the new matriarch of Džan, her new homeland. Čagataev returns to Moscow intending to marry Ksenja, his adoptive daughter, who thereby becomes a new mother to the (previous motherless) Ajdym. This compensatory redistribution of kinship is linked to the novella's main theme: house building and house-keeping, i.e. economy [‘Haushalt’] in the literal sense. As Clark and several other scholars have proposed, the sphere of the state *polis* regulated by abstract-formal institutionalized relations in mature Stalinist culture is projected onto the sphere of the house *oikos*, in which natural biological kinship predominates (Мурашов 2007, 47). To this end, the official rhetoric of state economy is transferred onto the artistic narratives of domestic economy, consistent with the tradition of “Domostroj” (‘Domestic Order’): a Russian set of household rules from the sixteenth century<sup>4</sup>. The publishing and reception history of “Domostroj” in Stalinist culture has yet to be written; nonetheless, some strong references point to this text as a central model of Soviet economics and family policy, as well as a legitimation of power. In one of his interviews, Vladimir Sorokin claimed that, while Russian men were mentally broken by Stalinist rule, the self-image of Russian women could be saved thanks to the traditional gender roles upheld by the “Domostroj” (Сорокин 2010).

In this context, it is interesting to examine Tamara Kondrat’eva’s survey on the relationship between “Domostroj” and Stalinist culture as having a common basis in the ‘feeding function’ (*кормленческая функция*) of power (Кондратьева 2006, 57). According to Kondrat’eva, the ‘feeding system’ (*система кормлений*) – a specific, ritualized form of power communication in Russian autocracy where the patriarch (Tsar, clergyman or simply a homeowner) represents ‘the feeder’ (*кормилец*) – was re-actualized in the Soviet social praxis of food ration cards and exclusive redistribution points for the Soviet nomenclatura. Such an approach explains the figure of Čagataev, who constantly feeds his women and furnishes his people with food. The ethical system of “Domostroj” not only establishes a code of behaviour for daily life but also a social hierarchy. The father-homeowner has absolute power in his household, legitimated by the absolute power of his landlord and that of the autocrat – whose power is

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<sup>4</sup> It is not clear whether “Domostroj” was perceived as instructive didactic work without literary pretensions or as an artistic text by contemporary readers. However the analyses of “Domostroj” have shown that it is a carefully organized piece of writing, with a strong tendency to lapse into verse by using typically literary devices as alliteration, anaphora, meter, and rhyme (Karlinsky 1965, 502).

ultimately legitimated by the Church and God. Every man along this scale assigns the spiritual responsibility for his *oikos* to his superior. The woman, for her part, is responsible for the *oikos* as functioning organism. She is thus the economist of the 'house-body', whereas the husband is the economist of the 'house-soul'. This also includes the sphere of social hygiene – since a clean and healthy social body entails a clean and healthy social 'soul'. In official Soviet rhetoric and its propaganda-mediated mass consciousness, this social order was portrayed by the perpetuated metaphor of the 'family as the primary cell of society' (Clark 2001, 115). This *topos* has its roots in the "Domostroj" tradition, on the one hand, and in Ferdinand Tönnies' early modern sociology, on the other:

Living in families is the usual basis of the Community way of life. This keeps on developing in villages and towns. The village Community and the town can themselves be regarded as large families, the various clans and kinship networks forming the basic organisms of the common body; the guilds, corporations and offices are the tissues and organs of the town. Original blood relationships and inherited fortunes remain an essential or very important condition for sharing fully in the communal property and privileges (Tönnies 2001, 253f.).

Even though it seems unlikely that Platonov could have taken notice of "Community and Civil Society" [1887], Robert Hodel (influenced by contemporary Kafka research) notes the possibility of reading Platonov through the key-texts of European sociology such as Tönnies and Max Weber, a prevalent feature of the *Zeitgeist* of Russian philosophy (Hodel 2009, 86)<sup>5</sup>. Such an approach is even more persuasive if one bears in mind that the ontological monism claimed for "Domostroj" (Аверинцев 2000, 173) might also describe the method of "Community and Civil Society". There, the sociological argumentation is intrinsically linked to basic operations of human cognition (preferences, habits, language and memories). And in the end, Tönnies develops the concept of an ethical culture based on family values. In significant contrast to "Domostroj", where the world order is determined by God's will, in "Community and Civil Society" a secularized concept of human willpower is held to be the core

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<sup>5</sup> Perhaps we can identify this ghost as the embodiment of Friedrich Engels' influential treatise "The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State", first published in 1884, and as having been instructive for both Tönnies and Platonov. With respect to 'primitive Communism', Engels claimed that "Communitistic housekeeping, however, means the supremacy of women in the house; just as the exclusive recognition of the female parent, owing to the impossibility of recognizing the male parent with certainty, means that the women – the mothers – are held in high respect" (Engels 2010).



foundation for social behaviour<sup>6</sup>. The will is thought of as a sort of cultural force that is conveyed from the center to the periphery:

If we then picture a model of development in which a centre or core radiates spokes in different directions, that centre itself signifies the unity of the whole. The whole is held together by force of will, and such will must be particularly powerful in the centre. But along the spokes points for new centers will develop; and the more they require energy to maintain themselves and to expand into their periphery, the more they will draw away from their original core. The latter will necessary grow weaker and less able to extend its influence in other directions unless it can continue to draw on its original resources (Tönnies 2001, 38).

Čagataev, who brings the message of the will to live to Džan, is himself the medium for transmitting this force. Becoming nostalgic for Moscow and the civilization in the desert, he regains an awareness that “Moscow’s here too!” (Platonov 2007, 45). What Čagataev supposes has moved from Moscow to the Džan people is “at least a little of a sense that all nations except themselves were richly endowed with: the sense of egoism and self-defence“ (Platonov 2007, 112). But Džan’s often highlighted lack of willpower turns out to be an authentic self-defence and survival strategy, as confessed by Suf’jan, the bearer of Džan’s spiritual culture and collective memory:

– Я слышал, – равнодушно сказал Суфьян, – мы знаем – богатые умерли все. Но ты слушай меня, – Суфьян погладил старый московский башмак Чагатаева, – твой народ боится жить, он отвык и не верит. Он притворяется мертвым, иначе счастливые и сильные придут его мучить опять. Он оставил себе самое малое, не нужное никому, чтобы никто не стал алчным, когда увидит его (Платонов 2010, 200).

Džan’s paradoxical politics of mimicry, of appearing dead in order to survive, is the last step on its journey from a community to a society. Following that, the members of Džan come together at night to sing their final song. In the morning, they disperse and return to Soviet civilization with a strong sense of society, while at the same time having lost their cultural identity. Suf’jan’s confession is performed as a ritual devotion to Soviet power. Stroking the conqueror’s ‘Moscow’ shoe, Džan, represented by Suf’jan – the oldest in the community – accepts and honours the sovereignty of Soviet Russia and its cultural leadership, represented by Čagataev<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> The ‘will’ is one of the central concepts in European nineteenth-century philosophy and culture, underlying (among others) the projects of Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche. It is closely related to literature of naturalism and realism that shape modernist, artistic self-awareness (Stöckmann 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Compare Nariman Skakov’s reading of “Džan” as (post-)colonial novel (Скаков 2011).

But this is not the end of the story; it is merely the end of Džan's history.

The subjugation ritual performed by Suf'jan and Čagataev encapsulates a Gordian knot, which might also be described as a relationship between 'bare life' and 'sovereign power'. In fact, the Džan's philosophy of surviving through dying evokes the concept of 'bare life' outlined in Giorgio Agamben's "Homo Sacer" [1995]. Starting out on his desert mission, Čagataev forfeits his political life, becoming more and more involved in the 'bare life' (by literally shedding his clothing) of the Džan – who in turn function as the *gens sacer*, which can be systematically killed (see the program realized by Nur-Mohammed) but not sacrificed. Čagataev's self-sacrifice for Džan can therefore be read as Agamben's figure of *devotus*:

What unites the surviving devotee, *homo sacer*, and the sovereign in one single paradigm is that in each case we found ourselves confronted with a bare life that has been separated from its context and that, so to speak surviving its death, is for this very reason incompatible with the human world (Agamben 1998, 100).

Čagataev is part of bare life not just as a member of Džan and 'surviving devotee' but also on the deepest level as a sovereign standing above human society and law.

The ban is the force of simultaneous attraction and repulsion that ties together the two poles of the sovereign exception: bare life and power, *homo sacer* and the sovereign. Because of this alone can the ban signify both the insignia of sovereignty [...] and expulsion from the community (Agamben 1998, 110f.).

In Agamben's view, moreover, the banishment of sacred life is the basic systemic operation, which makes every localization and territorialization possible and which regulates the norms and values of human societies.

At first glance, Čagataev's function is to incorporate the Džan community in Soviet society. Yet after completing his mission – after being banned, sacrificed, resurrected and sanctified – he returns to Moscow where he meets Ksenja again. The reunion is marked by the disastrous scene of a failed feast.

Ксения усадила гостей, сняла скатерть с закусок и сейчас же стала уговаривать их съесть ее пищу, но вилки, ложки, ножики валялись у нее из рук на пол, вдобавок она зацепила красное разливное вино, налитое в какую-то масленую, должно быть керосиновую, бутылку, и вино разлилось по столу бесполезно. Ксения убежала в коридор, спряталась в уборную и там заплакала от мучительного жалкого стыда. Айдым без нее устроила порядок и даже слила со стола вино обратно в бутылку, так что сохранилась четверть прежнего количества. Ксения вернулась с темными кругами под глазами и просила все же скушать, что она купила и настряпала; больше она ничего не знала, что говорить. Она не

могла объяснить, почему ей совестно иногда быть живой [...] (Платонов 2010, 234).

What is hard for Ksenja to explain is that living in the society means losing the sense of community and communication. Eating together is, according to Tönnies, essential for the *sensus communis* (2001, 40). Shame and the risk of ridicule nonetheless indicate the “Limits of Community” [1924], as mapped out by Helmuth Plessner in the context of his philosophical anthropology<sup>8</sup>. In Plessner’s thinking, shame is the psychic defense mechanism that perpetuates the limits of the individual self. Ksenja’s shame also implies an expression of the increased ‘improbability of communication’ in modern societies (Luhmann 1981) – in addition to her anxiety of communicating her ‘soul’ to others.

This is what happens with regard to that intrinsically inscrutable ridiculousness of all uninhibited expression of emotion, indeed, of all pronouncements of psychological being in general. The visible rage, the visible mourning, the visible resistance of the will – all too obvious signs of the content of soul in thought and action – betray always too much and betray, therefore, the entire soul (Plessner 1999, 118f.).

This realization comprises the narrative’s (happy?) ending. Ksenja’s hysterical outburst divulges her naked, unprotected soul to Čagataev, and it is this breakthrough that makes the formation of the community *possible* and communication *probable*, independent of any symbolically-generated media and social conventions. The next day Ksenja, Čagataev and Ajdym eat together in a dining hall, and by evening they form one contented familial community.

Perhaps this is the fulfilment of Čagataev’s true mission. It aims not to socialize the Džan community but to bring communication to the society in Moscow – or even to recover the lost paradise to Soviet civilization from its outer margins, i.e. from their utopian dream of primitive communism. This reading also implies a subversive transcription of the Stalinist patriarchal narrative, a transformation of the acculturation process from the centripetal power of Moscow to the centrifugal power of a multicultural periphery<sup>9</sup>. For, one might say, “Džan is here too!”

#### 4. From Džan to Birobidžan

In Tönnies’ developmental scheme of social will, quoted above, centralized willpower is highly entropic and (only) diminishes when it ex-

<sup>8</sup> For a reading of Platonov through the lenses of philosophical anthropology, cf. Григорьева 2009.

<sup>9</sup> In his “Discourse in the Novel” (Слово в романе) [1934-1935], Mikhail Bakhtin derived the historical origins of the novel and related prose-forms from such decentralizing, centrifugal forces of language (Bakhtin 1981, 273).

pands to the periphery (Tönnies 2001, 38). Similarly, in the first handwritten version of “Džan”, Čagataev imagines Stalin sacrificing the power of his soul to the Soviet family of nations.

Сталину еще труднее, чем мне, – думал в утешение себе Назар Чагатаев.  
– Он собрал к себе всех вместе: русских, татар, узбеков, туркменов, белорусов – целые народы, он соберет скоро целое человечество и потратит на него всю свою душу [...] (Платонов 2000, 383).

This suggests that all the divergent cultural traditions become incorporated into Stalin’s soul, of which Čagataev is also a part. He ‘conducts’ the will and power of Stalin’s soul to the people and then ‘returns’ with their souls to regenerate the Stalinist cultural energy circuit through inductive feedback. It is like extending Moscow to the banished Džan and then recycling the ban in Moscow, as “if in our age all citizens can be said, in a specific but extremely real sense, to appear virtually as *homines sacri*, [which] is only possible because the relation of ban has constituted the essential structure of sovereign power from the beginning” (Agamben 1998, 111). The bare life of Džan is described in the dialogue between Čagataev and the secretary of the Central Committee in Tashkent who assigns Čagataev his mission.

– Джан. Это означает душу или милую жизнь. У народа ничего не было, кроме души и милой жизни, которую ему дали женщины-матери, потому что они его родили.  
Секретарь нахмурился и сделался опечаленным.  
– Значит, все его имущество – одно сердце в груди, и то когда оно бьется...  
– Одно сердце, – согласился Чагатаев, – одна только жизнь; за краем тела ничего ему не принадлежит. Но и жизнь была не его, ему она только казалась.  
– Тебе мать говорила, что такое джан?  
– Говорила. Беглецы и сироты отовсюду и старые изнемогшие рабы, которых прогнали (Платонов 2010, 130f.).

Here is clear that the Džan do not even own their bodies. Rather, these are calculated as entities in Stalin’s ‘biopolitics’, a concept introduced by Michel Foucault to explain twentieth-century totalitarian regimes. ‘Biopolitics’ is instructive for Agamben’s *homo sacer* project, according to which “the banishment of sacred life is more internal than every interiority and more external than every extraneousness” (Agamben 1998, 111). But what can be more external than ‘extraneousness’? The answer is ‘internalization’, an idea Foucault had already delineated in his early works, to designate a social mechanism for creating a common sense in European societies (Foucault 1967).

In this respect, Čagataev’s endeavour could be described as internalising the excluded, i.e. the banished outcasts. The effect of this order is to

transfer the bare life of the internalized into Soviet society as a whole, so as to make society one big labour camp as described in Aleksandr Solženicy'n's sizable 'experiment in literary investigation', "The GULAG Archipelago" [1958-1968]. The settlement of Džan as founded by Čagataev is not to be taken literally as a Stalinist labour camp or even a Nazi concentration camp (as in Agamben) but as something in between. At the outset, the party secretary in Tashkent portrays Džan as "the nation including Turkmen, Karakalpaks, a few Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Persians, Kurds, Baluchis, and people who had forgotten who they were" (Platonov 2007, 23).

Yet this nomadic, rootless, multiethnic conglomerate lacks some 'usual suspects' such as Jews and Gypsies. This seems quite odd if considering that these ethnic groups were, by the mid-thirties, in the focus of public interest in Soviet Russia. At the time, Stalin's nationality policy changed from incorporating Jewish and Gypsy cultures into Moscow's cultural landscape, institutionalized by theatres, schools and administrative representatives, to 'externalizing' these groups from society by 'internalizing' them in collective farms according to the politics of 'rooting' (*коренизация*)<sup>10</sup>. The Jewish Autonomous Region (J.A.R), established in 1934 by the Soviet government in a remote, sparsely populated region of the Far East with Birobidžan as its administrative center, was only the tip of the iceberg. In what was called the Jewish "to the soil" movement (Dekel-Chen 2007, 69), Jewish collective farms founded in Belorussia and the Crimean region as of the early twenties became models for voluntary collective farms that cultivated the land, setting up a basic infrastructure for Soviet agricultural development<sup>11</sup>. In a specific sense, the "back to the soil" movement epitomized the internalized exclusivity of the Jewish community in the political body of the Soviet Union – much in the manner illustrated by Agamben (who hints at an identical role for Gypsies):

As the people that refuses to be integrated into the national political body (it is assumed that every assimilation is actually only simulated), the Jews are the representatives par excellence and almost the living symbol of the people and of the bare life that modernity necessarily creates within itself, but whose presence it can no longer tolerate in any way (Agamben 1998, 179).

From this standpoint, "Džan" can be read as alluding to Birobidžan. In a broader sense, it can be interpreted as a parable dedicated to the power of bare life, that power to survive in the biopolitical economy of the modern

<sup>10</sup> For the mercurian role of Jews in European and Russian Modern Age, compare Yuri Slezkine's concept of "service nomades" (Slezkine 2004). For Jewish culture in the Soviet Union and the founding of Birobidžan, see: Ro'i 1991; Weinberg 1998. For the history of Gypsies after the Russian revolution: Lemon 2000; O'Keeffe 2010.

<sup>11</sup> In this context, the movie "Jews on Earth" (Евреи на земле) made in 1927 by Abram Room, Vladimir Majakovskij and Viktor Šklovskij is relevant as a document.

totalitarian state. Andrej Platonov's acutely humanistic message to contemporary (and future) readers is finding mental sustenance, if not a home, amidst the desert of an oppressive regime – even if it entails a journey through hell.

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