



# *UnSSEESing*

The Alumni magazine  
from SSEES

*Featuring...*

*Food blogging, recipes,  
populism, learning Georgian  
and scholarships.*

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## Welcome



*This issue we've got a real treat for you in store. SSEES Alumna **Ren Behan** has very kindly shared with us her recipe for blueberry pierogi with cinnamon cream! We can assure you they are delicious. If you want to feel extra warm and fuzzy inside, we recommend rustling up a batch and enjoying them as you read the testimonials from the recipients of the SSEES centenary bursary. We're not sure which tastes better – pierogi and cream, or the satisfaction of charitable giving. We also celebrate the launch of SSEES's new research programme, FATIGUE.*

**Felicity Probert**

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## Interview with Ren Behan

*What did you study at SSEES, and can you tell us a bit about what your time was like here?*

I studied Contemporary East European Studies at UCL/SSEES, graduating in 2001. At the time, the SSEES classrooms were still within Senate House Library and so I remember spending lots of time there. I lived at Campbell House Halls on Taviton Street. A particular highlight during my time at SSEES was writing a dissertation during my final year on Poland's role in NATO, under the supervision of Professor George Kolankiewicz. I had to spend some time in Warsaw at the Institute of Political Science to do some research and remember it fondly. I think my parents, who had re-settled in Britain following the Second World War, were both pleased that I was able to spend some time in Poland during my studies.

*What inspired your career change from law to food writing?*

After leaving SSEES, I went on to take a Graduate Diploma in Law and took the LPC at the nearby College of Law to become a Solicitor. I trained for two years with a criminal law firm and later became a Crown Prosecutor in Hertfordshire. It wasn't until I had had my second baby, following an extended leave of maternity, that I decided to begin writing about food. I found that it offered me a contrast to staying at home and an opportunity to pursue a creative outlet. I completed a Diploma in Food Journalism and also started a food blog as a hobby and my career developed from there.



*How did you get yourself established as one of the most important food bloggers on the scene at the moment?*

I started my food blog over 7 years ago and throughout the years, I became quite active on social media, which enabled me to form a community alongside my blog and to meet people with similar interests. My food writing led me to contribute articles and recipes to food magazines, such as BBC Good Food and delicious magazine and for websites, such as **JamieOliver.com**. I also became a member of the Guild of Food Writers and began to seek advice from other food writers on how to write a cookery book. I had always particularly enjoyed sharing food stories around my Polish heritage and there seemed to be a growing interest in the food of 'lesser known cuisines'. With Polish ingredients becoming more widely available, I began coming up with some ideas around a book on Polish food. In 2015, having worked hard to build up an audience and interest in my ideas, I secured a commission to write a modern Polish cookery book for Pavilion Books. As a debut author, I think it helped to have had a solid platform, which really began when I started my food blog.

### *What inspires you most about Polish food?*

I have always enjoyed the comfort factor and the nostalgia tied to Polish food, particularly as I had grown up eating Polish food as a child and speaking Polish with my parents and siblings at home. However, in more recent years, I have been particularly interested in the developing food scene in Poland, with cities such as Warsaw being recognized for their standards by the Michelin Guide. Each time I go back, I find more and more places to explore, such as the breakfast markets during the summer, as well as new restaurants and chefs focusing on Polish ingredients and provenance or re-generated market places. I also enjoy visiting other parts of Poland, where I still have family, to see what changes are happening.

### *Do you have a secret ingredient that you swear by in your cooking?*

I love the Polish tradition of mushroom hunting – I think it is something that was ingrained within the older generations, but that perhaps we are losing. Certainly my grandmother was a keen forager and would always tell me about her pursuits. So, I would say that my secret ingredient would be dried Polish forest mushrooms, which can add a wonderful depth of flavour to soups and stews, particularly in the winter months.



### **Blueberry-filled Pierogi**

In Krakow, the old capital city of Poland, there is an annual pierogi ‘street food’ festival, now in its sixteenth year. Each year, more and more interesting flavour combinations are showcased, and even though I had tasted sweet pierogi many times before, these blueberry pierogi, lightly fried and drizzled with honey were particularly memorable. At home, we often made blueberry-filled pierogi, topped with whipped cinnamon cream. Pitted cherries make another wonderful seasonal filling.

*Makes around 20 pierogi.*

#### **For the pierogi**

*350g / 12 oz / scant 3 cups plain (all-purpose) flour or ‘00’ pasta flour, plus extra for dusting*

*1 whole egg, plus 1 egg yolk*

*1 tbsp icing (confectioners’) sugar*

*125ml / 4fl oz / ½ cup lukewarm water*

*1 tbsp vegetable oil*

*For the filling and topping*

*350g / 12oz fresh blueberries*

*2 tbsp unsalted butter*

*100ml / 3½fl oz / scant ½ cup runny honey*

*50g / 1¾oz / ¾ cup pistachio nuts, finely chopped*

# RECIPE

Mix the flour, whole egg and yolk, icing sugar, warm water and oil together in a large bowl. Tip the dough out onto a lightly floured work surface and knead for about 5 minutes until the dough is no longer sticky and feels smooth. Put the dough back into the bowl, cover with a damp tea towel or cling film (plastic wrap) and leave to rest for 30 minutes.

## To fill:

Divide the dough in half and keep one half covered with a damp tea towel to prevent it from drying out. Sprinkle your work surface with flour, then roll out the dough until it is about 3mm / 1/8in thick.

Have a floured tray or board to hand. Using a pastry cutter or an inverted glass tumbler, cut out 8cm/3in circles of dough. Place 2-3 blueberries in the centre of each circle. Fold the dough over to enclose the fruit. Using your thumb and finger, pinch the dough along the edge so that the pierogi is well sealed. Place each dumpling on the floured tray and cover with a damp tea towel while you make the rest.

## To cook the pierogi:

Bring a large pan of water to the boil. Carefully drop the dumplings in, a few at a time. They will sink at first, but will float up to the top when cooked – this will only take a minute or so.

Lift them out using a slotted spoon and place on a plate to cool. If you have sealed them well, none of the filling should have escaped!

Heat the butter in a large frying pan and gently fry the pierogi on both sides until slightly golden. To serve, drizzle with honey and sprinkle over the chopped pistachio nuts.

## Cinnamon whipped cream

*250ml / 9fl oz / 1 cup double (heavy) cream*

*1 tbsp icing (confectioners') sugar*

*1 tsp ground cinnamon*

*caster (superfine) sugar or vanilla sugar, to sprinkle*

Whisk the cream with the icing sugar and cinnamon until thickened.

Serve the warm pierogi with a sprinkling of caster sugar or vanilla sugar and a spoonful (or two) of the cinnamon whipped cream.



## SSEES wins major EU grant to study the rise of right-wing populism

In the past few years, politicians and political parties usually labelled ‘right-wing populists’ have enjoyed remarkable success. In the 2014 European Parliament elections, far-right parties increased their representation by 15 seats compared with 2009 and now have 52 MEPs. The rise of right-wing populism is most noticeable in post-communist Europe – especially Hungary and Poland. As a result of several years of rule by Victor Orban’s FIDESZ in Hungary and two years of the Law and Justice party’s rule in Poland, we have seen media pluralism, the protection of minorities, sovereignty of civil society and the independence of the judiciary challenged and weakened.

To seek to understand and respond to the rise of right-wing populism and illiberalism in Eastern Europe, SSEES and its partners in Estonia, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Serbia have been awarded EUR 3.5 million by the EU to train the next generation of scholars working on this most pressing of issues. Our approach to understanding the rise of illiberal and populist politics in Central and Eastern Europe is based on the concept of ‘delayed transformational fatigue’. It is designed to capture the gradually intensifying disappointment with the results of the initial period of reforms, the pace and direction of cultural evolution and particularly with the performance of the dominant post-communist elites. The latter are increasingly blamed for the shortcomings of the new system and many undesired outcomes of the transformations, such as rising level of unemployment in some periods.

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### About FATIGUE

#### What is 'Delayed Transformational Fatigue'?

In the last few years, the politicians and political parties usually labelled 'right-wing populist' enjoyed a remarkable series of successes. Donald Trump in the United States and Jarosław Kaczyński and his party, Law and Justice (PiS), in Poland have come to dominate the political scenes in their respective countries. Nigel Farage played a major role in convincing fifty-two per cent of British voters to vote for Brexit. In the 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections, far right parties increased their representation by 15 seats compared with 2009, and now have 52 MEPs. According to most observers, a rightward shift in the political climate of Europe and the USA is now beyond a doubt, although the scope and depth of the phenomenon are debated. For example, Cas Mudde commenting on the EP elections observed: 'As has been the case since the emergence of the so-called "third wave" of far right parties in the early 1980s, the successes of individual parties differed significantly across the continent. [...] Overall, far right parties gained additional seats in just six countries, while they lost seats in seven others.' (*Washington Post*, 30 May 2014). The more recent elections in France and Holland demonstrated that the populist wave in Europe is not unstoppable. In Poland the counter-mobilisation of liberal and centrist forces is noticeable, making for an increasingly intense period of political contestation.

Several years of rule by Victor Orban's FIDESZ in Hungary and almost two years of Law and Justice party's rule in Poland show that the 'populist' political formations are much more interested in the majoritarian rather than liberal dimensions of modern democracy. Orban openly talks about 'illiberal democracy' and Kaczyński, after losing the 2011 election,

The sense of political exclusion, economic defeat and cultural estrangement has been slowly growing among some sectors of the populace after 1989, prompting eventually the search for novel interpretations of the situation and reassuring political solutions.

The FATIGUE programme was officially launched on 27 August, when SSEES welcomed 15 Early Stage Researchers to take part in a week of lectures, presentations and discussions. In addition to having the opportunity to meet each other and develop a sense of a community and to attend training sessions on research design, academic English and writing literature reviews, the ESRs met and exchanged ideas with two of the world's leading authorities on populism (and members of the FATIGUE Expert Advisory Board): Cas Mudde and Ruth Wodak.

For further information about the FATIGUE programme, go to: [www.ucl.ac.uk/ssees/research/funded-research-projects/fatigue](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ssees/research/funded-research-projects/fatigue)

## Introducing Georgian Evening Language Courses!

We are really excited to announce that for the first time ever, UCL SSEES will be offering Georgian evening language classes! Beginners, Lower and Upper Intermediate classes started in October 2018. Take up this chance to learn a language that is unique in its alphabet, vocabulary and syntax and gain a glimpse into a different culture. Enrolment is now open!



„ყოველივე საიდუმლო ამას ენასა  
შინა დამარხულ არს.“

ბერი იოანე-ზოსიმე, სინას მთა X ს.

‘Every mystery is buried in this language.’

Monk Ioane-Zosime, Mt. Sinai, X c.

**SSEES  
ALUMNI  
EVENT**

**Why bother studying the Russian Federal Assembly? Dr Ben Noble, Lecturer in Russian Politics, March 7, 2019, 16 Taviton Street, 6pm.** Join us afterwards for drinks and nibbles. Keep an eye on your inbox for your invitations!

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/ssees-alumni-why-bother-studying-the-russian-federal-assembly-tickets-54520543413>

EVENT

## SSEES Centenary Scholarship recipients continued

In 2015 many of you contributed generously to the SSEES Centennial Scholarship Fund. The happy recipients are two BA students, two MAs and a PhD candidate. The BA students were selected on academic ability and financial need, the PhD and MA candidates on ability, though they also needed to be UCL-SSEES graduates. Two students were introduced in our last issue. Here the remaining recipients introduce themselves.

### Maryam Ejlali Valestan – BA Student



The privilege of receiving the SSEES Centenary Scholarship has helped me incredibly in my studies so far. I am studying Politics, Sociology and Eastern European Studies with International Relations and Russian Literature modules. Coming from an unprivileged background with parents who were asylum seekers from Iran, I've

never grown up with the most lavish lifestyle as both my parents were unemployed and I had always struggled with financial issues.

One of my main concerns with coming to university in fact was how I would ever be able to afford my tuition fees and living costs, to the far extent where I was reluctant on even going to university. Applying for this scholarship I didn't expect to be accepted as I was aware of the competition for scholarships. But when I saw the acceptance email, I truly felt a weight lifted off my shoulders as the burden of such a great amount of debt (especially with the rising fee prices) had been reduced.

Having a SSEES Centenary Scholarship has allowed me to focus more on my studies rather than difficulty in finances which has made me perform better in my studies. I look forward to completing my degree at UCL and hopefully entering the sphere of diplomacy. I'm so grateful for having this scholarship available to me, and will remain thankful not only for the rest of my degree, but also when I enter the working world.

### Angus Mcwhirter – MA Student

I want to say a huge thank you to donors of the SSEES scholarship fund. It was a lovely surprise to be awarded the Centenary Postgraduate Scholarship. I am doing a Master's in Politics, Security and Russian, having focused on literature during my Bachelor's.

The scholarship has given me the opportunity to travel in Eastern Europe during my studies. During reading week I visited Krakow, a place rich with history and culture, and it was made all the more interesting for me having recently studied contemporary Polish nationalism and identity at SEESS. I am planning a trip to Georgia

in the summer to research my dissertation. Thank you very much, this scholarship has opened up many opportunities for me.

## Paris Pin-Yu Chen – PhD Student



As the recipient of the SSEES Centenary Scholarship, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude for those who made this generous provision possible. The award helps to alleviate my financial distress as a PhD student here in London. I use this stipend to pay for my rent and TfL travelcards. Apart from my studies, I am a columnist for *UDN Global*, a subdivision of the largest Taiwanese media group UDN, providing commentaries and analyses on current affairs in the Baltics and Eastern Europe. I also work as a part-time translator to cover London's high living expenses. The £3,000 scholarship will allow me more time to focus on my doctoral research project — and perhaps more coffee from UCL Students' Union cafes too.

My research focuses on inter-war Estonian student fraternities' and their members' involvement in the appropriation and dissemination of scientific racism and eugenics in radical right-wing ideology.

It builds on my master's thesis, which was awarded a first prize in the 2017 Estonian National Contest for University Students by the Estonian Research Council. I see my doctoral trainings at SSEES as the path towards a successful academic career. I am grateful that your prestigious scholarship provides for the badly needed necessities on this treacherous road: recognition, honour, and financial support.

## Did you know?

Have you ever wondered about the plaque to Sir Samuel at 21/22 Russell Square? In 1818, the eminent lawyer and prominent reformer, Sir Samuel Romilly, committed suicide there just four days after his beloved wife had died. Though it is unlikely to be any reflection of this unhappy history, in the novel *L'Assassin habite au 21* (1939), by Belgian writer Stanislas Andre Steeman, it was 21 Russell Square where the murderer resided too.





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## SSEES – contact us

### **Do keep in contact.**

Please don't forget to tell the Development Office if you change your contact details:

**<https://aoc.ucl.ac.uk/alumni/alumni-community>.**

If you have any questions about our activities or events, please contact Claudia Roland:

**[Claudia.roland@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:Claudia.roland@ucl.ac.uk)**

Join our SSEES Alumni association facebook group – we have over 350 members.

Don't miss out on exclusive news and events.

Newsletter edited by **Felicity Probert** with thanks to **Hannah Connell**, **Christine Krogfoss**, **Amy Hodgkin** and **Ellen Sowerby**.

[www.ucl.ac.uk/ssees](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ssees)