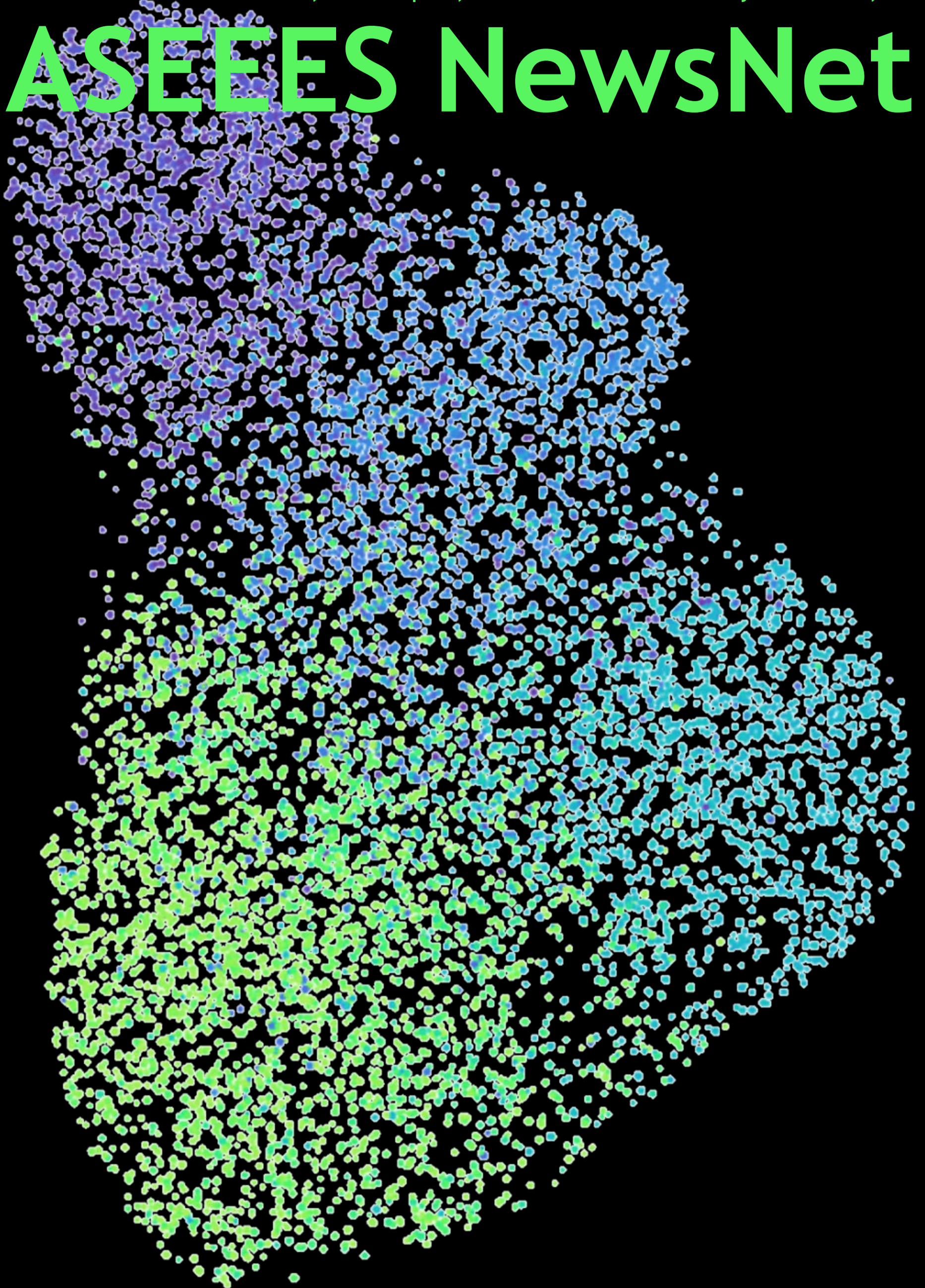


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Cover Photo: Visualization of embeddings, or numerical representations of semantic text features, for Ukrainian texts. Image courtesy of Andrew Janco.

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Russia-Oriented Digital Humanities: Decentralizing Our Field

By Edith W. Clowes

Although digital humanities (DH) projects enjoy a certain “wow” factor, Russianists often shy away from exploring the possibilities of DH. Traditionally, DH has done great service for archiving and mapping, and now is being used increasingly for analysis. In that way, it is starting to expand and decentralize our field.

[Linguists have been using DH methods for decades](#). As Marijeta Bozovic and others pointed out in a 2021 forum in *Russian Literature*, there is a strong Slavic intellectual heritage in Formalism and Structuralism that anticipated many uses of DH. More recently, in the last twenty years SEEE-area historians have been [developing digital archives and research projects](#). Online fora such as H-Net have started several East European listservs, among them Ukraine, Romania, Georgia, and Bulgaria (for example, [H-Ukraine](#)). Now, some of us in the Slavic literary world are using digital tools to teach literature and explore exciting research questions. The 2023 ASEEES Convention in Philadelphia featured an unusual number of noteworthy, digitally-related projects. They range from innovative approaches to teaching history and culture to making visualization tools for larger data analysis. These ongoing projects are asking important questions and are finding digital pathways that may well enhance our interpretive capabilities. One of the great benefits of DH is the chance to shift research foci, and, in particular, to decentralize our perspectives.

The first spike of interest in Russian-Studies DH came mainly in the form of open-access literary and historical archives. Starting at the turn of the 21st century, full-text collected works of major writers came online. We could filter and search [Dostoevsky's](#) and Tolstoi's works. Then came more expansive databases like [Prozhito](#), the enormous collection of diaries, starting with Mikhail Prishvin's brilliant, decades-long diary. In the world of

historical mapping, Kelly O'Neill's [Imperiia](#) project (Harvard University) has been online since the late teens.

Text-analysis, mapping, graphing, and other visualization tools allow us to extend our research horizons.

In the last couple of years, we have been seeing a new spike of both historical and literary activity. Teaching techniques increasingly involve using Voyant, ArcGIS, StoryMaps, and Omeka, among other open-source tools. In research, new results promise to come from text-analysis, mapping, graphing, and other visualization tools, which allow us to extend our research horizons and embrace a much larger volume of material, ask innovative questions, and formulate different kinds of hypothesis. Interpretive results are gradually appearing. While some of these projects pertain to traditional Russian literary hubs of activity—Moscow and St. Petersburg—most decentralize our vision.

Digital humanistic techniques are becoming an important part of the Russian literature classroom in ways that help students perceive the subject matter more broadly. Elena Murenina (East Carolina University) brings DH into her student-centered learning environment by mentoring undergraduate research projects on cross-cultural semiotics. She teaches digital mapping of Pushkin's and Dostoevsky's literary spaces. To these ends, she encourages students to use Omeka and ArcGIS Story Maps. She incorporates into her teaching interactive websites, for example, Elizabeth LaFave's [Word as Image in 1820s Imperial Russia](#) and MaKenna Johnston's [City as a Space: Dostoevsky's "Crime and Punishment"](#).

Two researchers are using computational text analysis to answer interesting literary and historical textual questions, again focused primarily on major texts and St. Petersburg. [Digital Dostoevsky](#), started in 2019 by Kate Holland (University of Toronto) and Katherine Bowers (University of British Columbia), is a computational text analysis project that uses the standards of text markup developed by TEI (Text Encoding Initiative) to encode and conduct research on a corpus of seven Dostoevsky novels (*The Double*, *Notes from Underground*, *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *Demons*, *The Adolescent*, and *Brothers Karamazov*). Team members encode texts interpretively, identifying and marking the speech, characters, locations, and formal aspects of each novel, as well as elements related to specific research questions. This encoding creates an edition of a text that a computer can parse and extract information from, allowing scholars to examine textual elements in different configurations. TEI is particularly useful for revealing deep structural patterns that would be challenging to identify using methods like close reading. One of the planned outcomes of Digital Dostoevsky is a web resource where scholars can download and use the TEI editions created by the team for their own research. More information about the project and a link to its associated Github repository can be found [here](#).



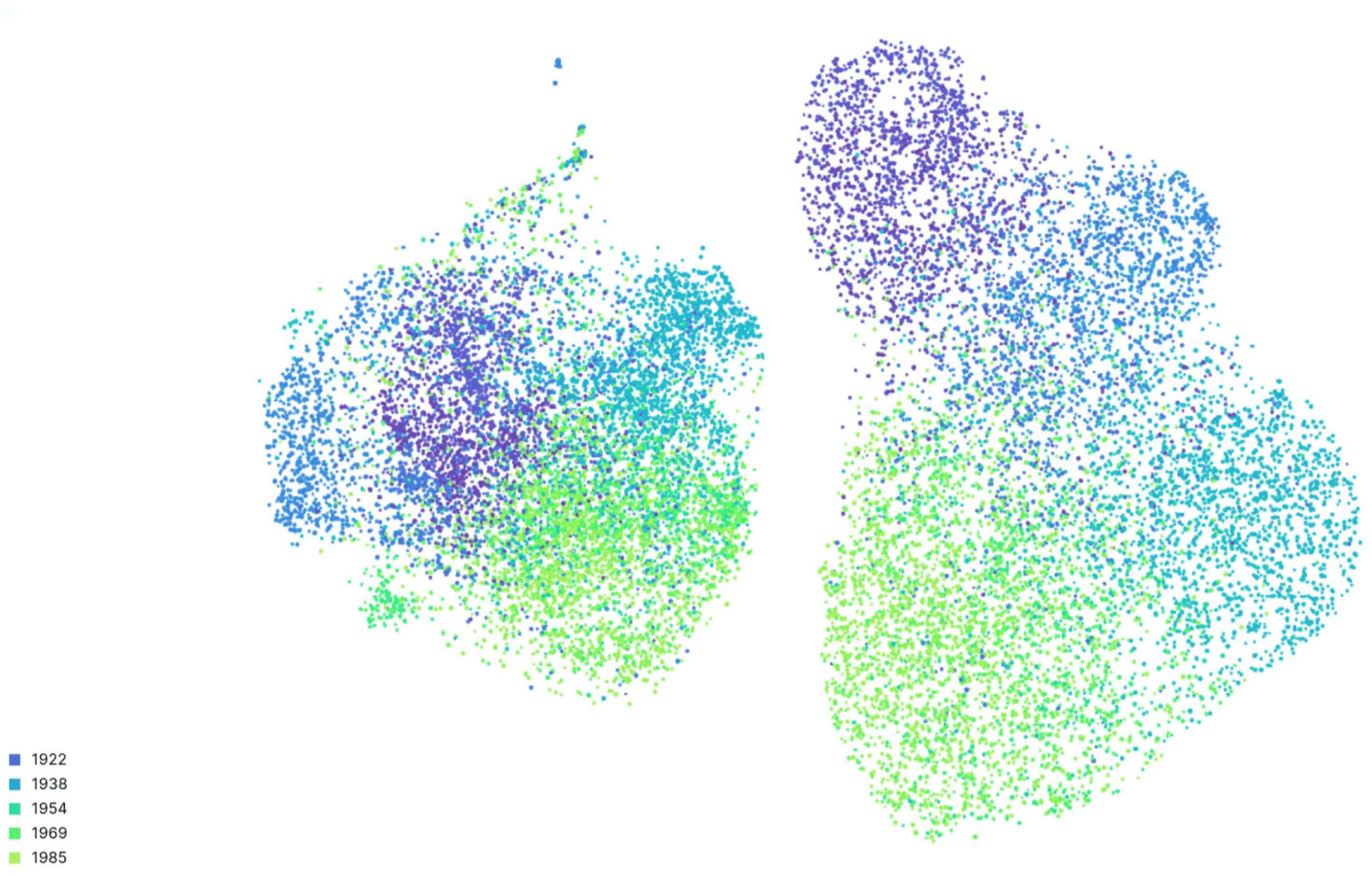
The front page of Digital Dostoevsky. Image courtesy of Kate Holland and Katherine Bowers.

Some of the research topics that interest the team include the nature of the double in *The Double*, the fragmented chronology of and gossip in *Demons*, comparing the confessional voice in *Notes from Underground* and *The Adolescent*, and uses of quotation in *Brothers Karamazov*.

In addition, the team is extending the study of the Petersburg Text, asking what the relationship is between location and affect.

Increasingly, DH teaching assignments expand students' cultural awareness beyond Moscow and St. Petersburg. Barbara Henry (University of Washington) has been involved in building a [website on Yiddish theater](#) that is a treasure trove for related courses and research. Tatiana Saburova (Indiana University) uses StoryMap, travelogues, and historical maps to investigate probable routes that explorers took through the Altai Mountains bordering today's Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and Russia. Susanna Weygandt (Sewanee) has developed a new course introducing digital approaches to literature and history. Her theme is the hot topic of American slavery and Russian serfdom. Weygandt bases her introduction on the 2021 *Palgrave Handbook of Digital Russia Studies* edited by Daria Gritsenko and others. The course draws data from various related American sites, such as Sewanee's Roberson Project and other universities' platforms on race and reconciliation. Students learn basic coding to use ArcGIS and employ digital tools, including Omeka, to exhibit their work.

Several compelling research projects deploy DH tools. Andrew Janco (University of Pennsylvania) is working to connect recent innovations in machine learning with humanities research to study large document collections, such as the Prozhito diary archive with over 3,000 diaries. At the 2019 ASEEES Convention, scholars from various disciplines gathered to work with the collection and to explore the potential of a text collection spanning more than 400 years. Phil Gleissner, for example, used named entity recognition to find mentions of journals and articles in the diary entries. Given that many of the journals had common names like "Neva" or "Oktiabr," the group trained a model that uses the surrounding text to predict when "Neva" is a river and when it is a journal name in the text. At the 2023 ASEEES Convention, Janco presented ongoing work with the collection to address questions about temporality in the text. While some words indicate when a text was written, most of the 200,000+ diary entries in the collection contain few or no textual clues that would signal time. His paper combined text embeddings of the diary entries with metadata from the collection using an [embedding fine-tuning approach pioneered by Vincent Warmerdam](#). Embeddings are learned numerical representations of the semantic features of a text. Text embeddings are particularly useful because they allow us to use computational methods on unstructured text in



Comparison of embeddings for Ukrainian texts before and after fine-tuning with entry dates. Image courtesy of Andrew Janco.

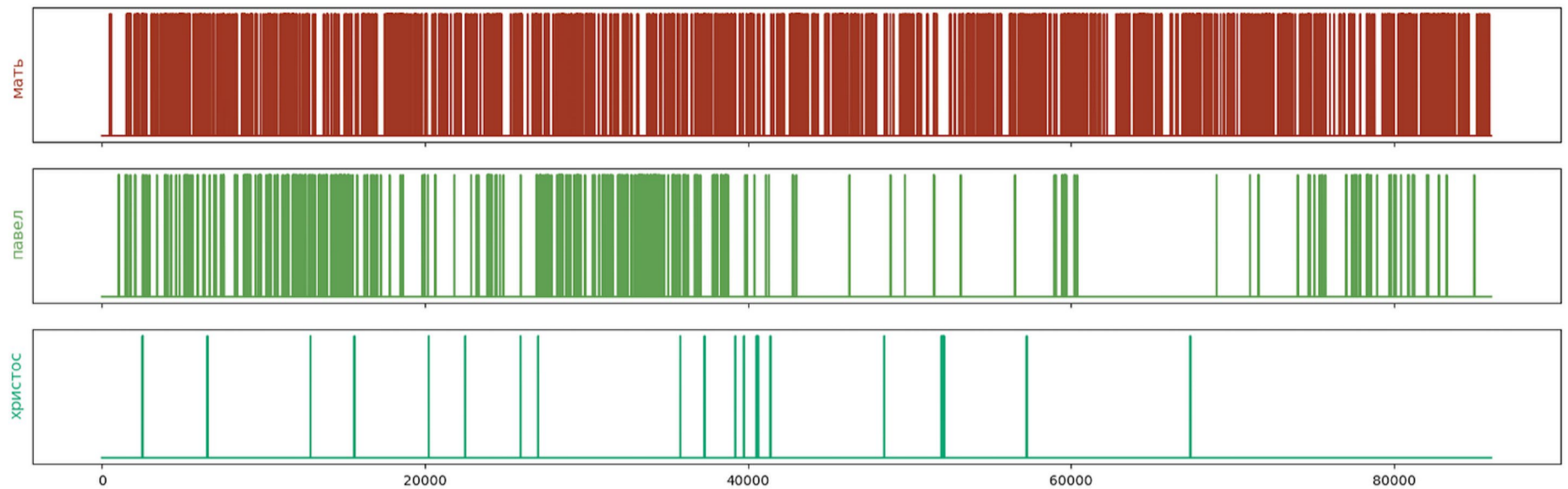
ways that preserve the complexity of language. Thus, texts of diary entries are transformed by a large language model into numerical representations of their semantic contents. One can add temporal information to embedding by fine-tuning the entry's date, if it is known.

Janco then derives a representation of the contents of the entry and a bearing on when it was written. The resulting text embeddings can be clusters to identify significant topics and ideas in the texts. For example, there is a clear cluster of diary entries related to the October Revolution. Embedding fine-tuning makes this cluster more coherent and allows for a clear distinction between diary entries written during the Revolution and those that reflect from a distance on those events. These methods make it possible to ask new questions of large corpora of historical sources and open new methods for historical research.



Projection of 2,748 diaries in Russian using RuBERT and Nomic Atlas. Image courtesy of Andrew Janco.

Appearance of vocab in Mother



The appearance of vocabulary in Maksim Gorky's revolutionary novel, *Mother* (1906-1907). Photo courtesy of Aaron M. Thompson.

Aaron M. Thompson's research (University of Virginia) draws from textual analytics, digital archiving, and learning interfaces for scholars and students of Russian intellectual history. His dissertation project, "A Revolutionary Gospel," features an online compendium of the relationship between radical politics, literature, and Russian Orthodox culture before the Bolshevik Revolution in a way that expands both intellectual and geographical awareness. With a particular focus on Maxim Gorky's revolution-era works, Thompson is building an interactive, searchable Synodal Bible that intersects with digital full texts of Gorky's major stories and novels. Using Python and two interfaces, the computer produces examples of the ways in which Gorky and other politically engaged writers borrowed from the Orthodox tradition to position revolutionary socialism as the worldview to succeed Christianity. The project provides visualized data to explain how Gorky and others "transposed" biblical discourse and rewrote biblical stories and characters for political purposes.

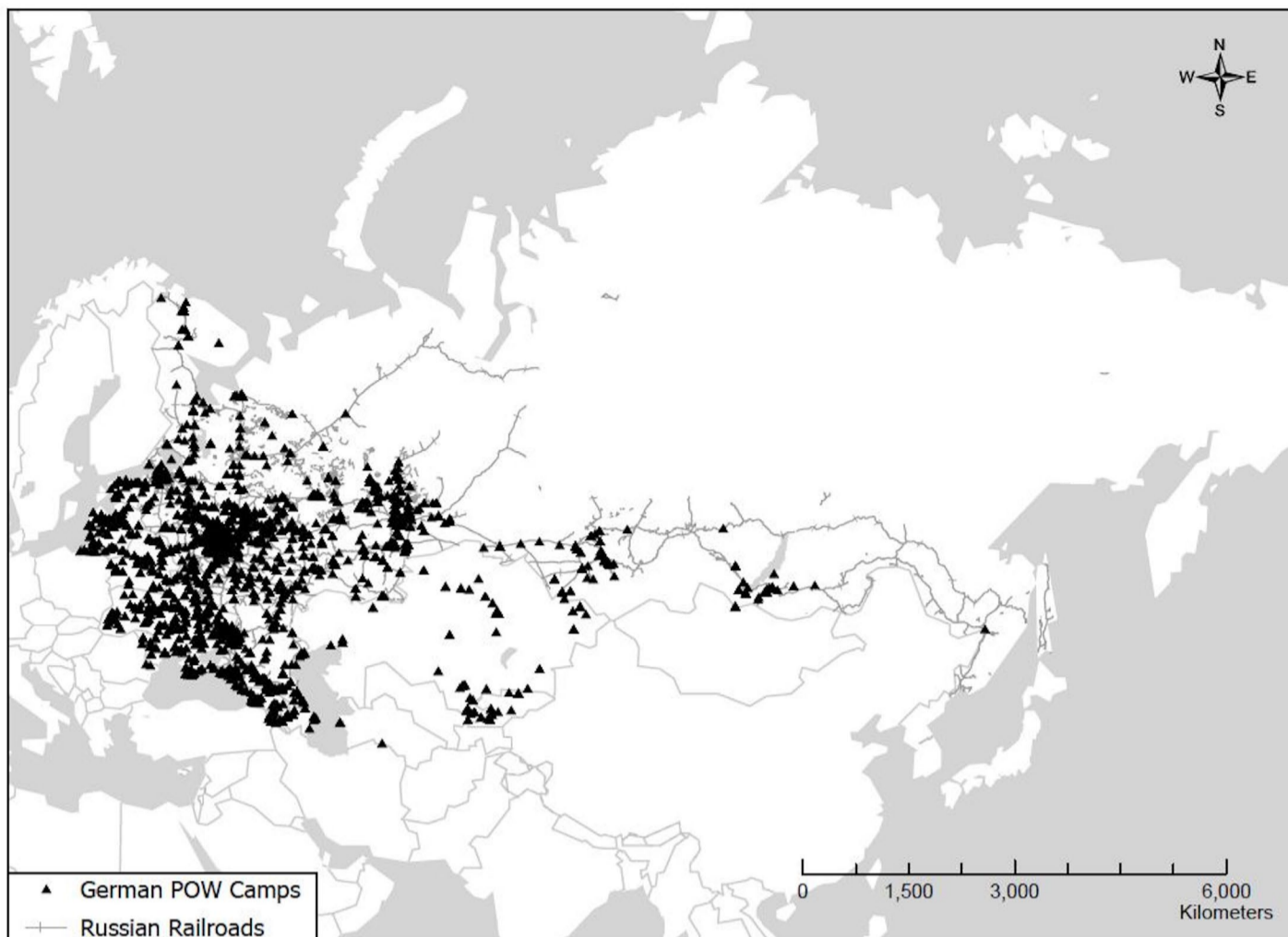
Mapping and map-related graphing decentralize our awareness of Russia in its various iterations and empires.

This project also offers a virtual archive of Gorky's life in Italy during the pre-revolutionary period as he and fellow socialist authors articulated their revolutionary use of religious feeling to inspire Russian readers and transform the Russian state.

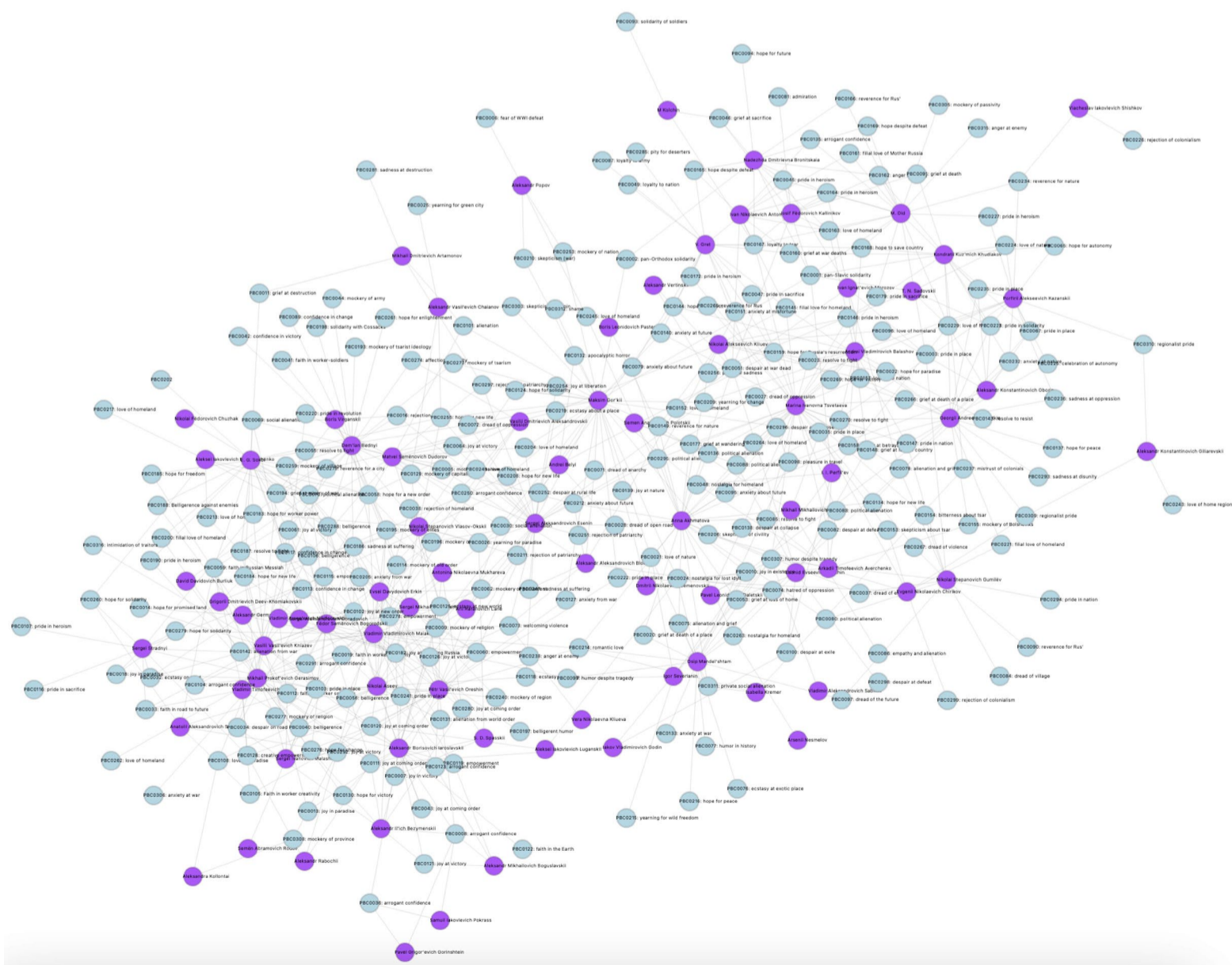
Other approaches that are gaining ground and supporting interpretive projects in Russia-focused DH are mapping and map-related graphing that decentralize our awareness of Russia in its various iterations and empires. Historians have done the most digital work for the longest time, so far, although literary research is also producing suggestive results. All of them feed into the strong interest in decolonization and decentralization that is now dominant in Slavic studies. In Philadelphia, Kelly O'Neill presented a [new Imperia project](#), using GIS, pre-revolutionary maps, and 1890s data from a local botanist to create an approximate map of the pre-revolutionary botanical environment of the Odesa region. This project offers a partial visualization of the biodiversity in this region in the late 19th century. As with many of the digital projects presented at ASEES, this project draws attention to Ukraine and offers comparative data for any current research focused on environmental change in southern Ukraine.

Susan Grunewald's research on post-World War II Soviet prisoners of war uses GIS to map the camps where specifically German POWs were incarcerated between 1941 and 1956.

Grunewald's mapping supports the hypothesis that camps were located strategically to use German POWs for economic reasons, namely to rebuild Soviet infrastructure after the war, and suggests that economic interests in this case predominated over ideological interests. Her findings, as well as many of her GIS maps, can be found in her book, [From Incarceration to Repatriation: German Prisoners of War in the Soviet Union](#) (forthcoming July 2024).



Map of German POW Forced Labor Camps in the USSR, 1941-1956. Image made by Susan Grunewald.



This force-directed graph shows writers (purple dots) connected through textual expressions of place feeling, political inclination, and place type (blue dots). The writers at one end of the graph are more densely packed than at the other end, which means that their texts share more geo-emotional perceptions relating to some textual image of place. Note, also, that “left” and “right” in this graph have no political meaning. Source: maprr.iath.virginia.edu/authors.

Another recent development, this time in literary mapping, is the 2022 publication of [Mapping Imagined Geographies of Revolutionary Russia](#), a University of Virginia database of place-related Russian literary works from the 1914-1922 period of war and revolution. Although I spearheaded the project, it was assembled and mounted by a team of Internet architects, web designers, and Russianists. My goal in developing this body of revolution-era literature was twofold: to analyze feelings about geographical place, broadly speaking, across a large range of texts written in a turbulent time and to add greater interpretive capability to the database. The team at the Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities used Ruby on Rails to construct the database and Leaflet to facilitate mapping. Using XML/TEI, the graduate student team and I tagged (and are continuing to tag) textual images of place for place type and scale, place-related feeling, and political attitude. Two kinds of mapping and graphing tools embedded in the MAPRR site enable individual interrogation and exploration. MAPRR contains maps of hundreds of geographical locations, either mentioned in texts from the war era or related to known composition or publication sites. Graphs show networks of the 90 writers currently in the database and the feelings about place(s) expressed in their texts.

These tools suggest networks and fabrics of perception that open to view more fine-grained topographies of place-based identity across European Russia and Siberia. More about this project and its interpretive results can be found in my online book, [Shredding the Map: Imagined Geographies of Revolutionary Russia](#) (forthcoming September, 2024).

Over the last 30 years, digital humanities have proven to be a game-changing asset for database and archive development. Now opportunities are opening for interpretive design that will add important new opportunities and perspectives for Russian and Slavic studies. The time commitment for DH projects is considerable but the payoff in the end will be well worth the effort.



Edith W. Clowes holds the Brown-Forman Chair in the Humanities in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Virginia, where she teaches Russian and Czech literature and culture. Her research and teaching interests span literature, philosophy, geography, and utopian thought.

She is a past director of the Center for Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies at the University of Kansas. She is author of *Russia on the Edge: Imagined Geographies and Post-Soviet Identity*

(Cornell, 2011); *Fiction's Overcoat: Russian Literary Culture and the Question of Philosophy* (Cornell, 2004); *Russian Experimental Fiction: Resisting Ideology after Utopia* (Princeton, 1993); *The Revolution of Moral Consciousness: Nietzsche in Russian Literature, 1890-1914* (Northern Illinois, 1988, 2018); and, recently, co-editor of *Russia's Regional Identities: The Power of the Provinces*, with G. Erbslöh and A. Kokobobo (Routledge, 2018) and *Area Studies in the Global Age: Community, Place*, with S. J. Bromberg (Northern Illinois, 2016). She serves on several editorial boards, among them *New Area Studies* and *REGION*.

ASEEES Board Elections

Voting ends September 1, 2024

The elections for the ASEEES Board of Directors are held annually in the summer. In 2024, there are three seats up for election: the President-Elect/Vice President, and the two Members-at-Large serving three-year terms from January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2027.

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Paper ballots available by request via email at aseees@pitt.edu.

56th ASEEES Annual Convention

Boston Marriott Copley Place, Nov. 21-24, 2024
Virtual Convention, Oct. 17-18, 2024

Theme: [Liberation](#)

2024 ASEEES President: Vitaly Chernetsky, University of Kansas

Important Dates

August 9 – [Early Bird Registration](#) ends

September 1 – Deadline for [ancillary event space requests](#)

September 10 – Deadline for [session changes](#) (subsequent changes may not appear in print program)

Online Program

View the [online program](#) for the most up-to-date schedule!

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All participants (paper presenters, discussants, roundtable members, and chairs) MUST become members and register for the 2024 Convention. Early registration ends on **August 9** and regular registration closes on **October 14**. There is no late registration for the virtual convention.

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DEADLINE SEPT 1

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Trust and “Corruption” in Eurasia: Toward an Un-colonial Approach

by Morgan Y. Liu

The cultivation of trust seems central to how power and wealth operate in Eurasia. Across businesses, governmental structures, neighborhood organizations, religious associations, and other institutions, *personal* relations of trust and obligation enable, to an important degree, how things get done in the region. To be sure, state laws, institutional rules, and social norms also stabilize and routinize a level of trust and mutual expectation necessary for the conduct of affairs in society. But those constraints always exist in productive tension and fluidity with respect to more ad hoc, interpersonal arrangements in Eurasia. In some cases, Western and other observers call the latter “corruption,” imposing a judgement that relations of personal fealty are always less ethical or efficient than a “rules-based system,” where personal allegiances and arrangements defer to objective procedures.

Imposing a normative framework that dismisses prevalent practices as “corrupt” risks blinding analysis to what is really going on.

The intent of this piece is not to argue for the opposite (that clientelism is somehow better than something called the “rule of law”), but rather to foreground the centrality of interpersonal trust in understanding how power and wealth operate in Eurasia, and what that means for field-based research in the region. Imposing a normative framework that dismisses prevalent practices as “corrupt” risks blinding analysis to what is really going on from the actors’ points of view. Avoiding the corruption framework may also help nudge research toward “un-colonial” methodologies and approaches to writing about the region. By “Eurasia,” I refer to not only the territory of the former Soviet Union, but the entire Asia-Europe continental space where people, finance, ideas, and practices circulate; and political projects are imagined, as [Jane Burbank and Fred](#)

[Cooper recently wrote about](#). This use of “Eurasia,” as a family of political-economic practices across a geographical expanse, attempts to claim the term away from those very imperial projects that are being asserted to this day. It asserts an un-colonial meaning for “Eurasia” for the sake of scholarly analysis. I employ “un-colonial” in the modest sense of stepping away from a conceptual subjection to not only Russian geopolitical imaginaries, but also 21st-century liberal standards of markets and governance as applied to Eurasian ways of conducting social, economic, and political



Inside a rural Kyrgyz home, Jalal-Abad, Kyrgyzstan. Photo by Morgan Y. Liu.

affairs. This piece is not a refutation of those standards, but rather an appeal to give more consideration to the world as actually seen and inhabited by billions of humans today.

That is where scholarship in an attempted un-colonial mode comes in. Un-colonial research in the region seeks to incorporate into methodology and analysis more Eurasian ways of inhabiting the world. This includes worldview, ideas, ethos, sensibilities, and embodied practices. The goal below is to sketch out how one might take an un-colonial approach to understanding power and wealth in Eurasia. My argument is that *interpersonal* trust is central to how power and wealth operate. But if trust is glue and lubricant for Eurasian affairs, it is also a basis of an un-colonial ethnography seeking to understand it. Finally, trust might be the means by which Eurasians imagine better futures for themselves. Trust can be topic, method, and solution.

Trust in Eurasian Power and Wealth

Trust in economic and political affairs embeds specific, culturally-inflected understandings about how personal relations structure mutual obligations to deliver goods or perform deeds, and about how those relations are cultivated, maintained, strained, or broken. Ethnography on Eurasian wealth and power today thus needs to unpack those culturally-specific assumptions and practices of trust.

How can scholars incorporate more Eurasian ways of inhabiting the world?

One place to see the centrality of trust is a largely unnoticed trend in Central Asian political economies since the early 2000s. Local leaders are assembling private businesses, institutions, and networks that mobilize people and resources in order to accumulate power and dispense benefits to their constituencies. In a [few documented cases](#), these (male) businessmen work hard to cultivate a relation of general patron to an entire city or village. Some operate almost as a micro-state providing goods and services. They build and run businesses, bazaars, universities, mosques, medical clinics, theaters, and newspapers, which offer jobs, infrastructure, arts, communitas, and stability. They provide social protections for pensioners, widows, the unemployed, and the poor. These patrons make themselves indispensable to the

community amidst pervasive doubt about the capacity of states to secure the commonweal. They also tap into cultural tropes of a beneficent, selfless benefactor of the common good. Every society has its patrons and philanthropists, but there are culturally-specific ways that these “Big Men” perform their exemplification of “good wealth,” and there are specific features of the Central Asian political economy that demand certain kinds of arrangements to stay successful. The latter includes obtaining the consent of and offering benefits to relevant state officials, especially if the local patron belongs to an ethnic minority under default suspicion of disloyalty to the state, such as Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan. And so, Central Asian patrons need to be both economic and political entrepreneurs, requiring both material and discursive labor.

The cultivation of trust runs through all of these endeavors. These efforts rely on networks of allies and subordinates to build and run, who are bound to the patron in relations of trust, dependence, and obligation. The patron also builds trust with his wider constituencies by “serving the people.” Interestingly, these patrons do all this by building institutions (schools, media, etc.). Yet, in the cases reviewed in the studies cited above, public trust is directed primarily at the personhood of the Big Man in question, rather than to the institutions. People talk about “his” business acumen, his political savvy, his intelligence, his ruthlessness, his generosity, his religious piety, his reliability, his record of performance. For example, Kadyrjan Batirov’s suite of institutions in Jalal-Abad, Kyrgyzstan during the 2000s were admired or despised because of the man himself, and he was often seen as metonymic of them: the Batirov university, the Batirov Friday mosque, etc. He and the other Central Asian patrons are what I have called [a Khan figure](#): leaders who generate thick, passionate discourses about their personal qualities that make them seem eminently fit to rule.

Trust, loyalty, obligation, and performance are therefore due fundamentally to the person of the patron, and conversely, the patron owes these things in different forms to his clients and constituencies. Institutions, norms, and laws have their place as quotidian frames for the conduct of affairs, but those can be subordinated to, or at least inflected by and viewed in the light of, personal allegiance and arrangements with one’s patron.



Batirov University in Jalal-Abad, Kyrgyzstan, in December 2009, months before its destruction during widespread violence in 2010. Photo by Morgan Y. Liu.

Another place to witness this kind of personal trust and obligation are the networks of wealthy and powerful people across the Eurasian continental space. These are informal, personal relationships that span beyond work hierarchies within one institution and may connect between multiple units of state, corporation, NGO, and other organizational forms. These networks can also cross economic sectors, country, and possibly region, spanning Eurasia and beyond with a host of different kinds of relationships that express the financial, legal, property, philanthropic, educational, recreational, artistic, and other elite interests. To speak more concretely in a fictitious example, a Eurasian businessperson's regular circuit of concern may include a house in London, yacht in Cyprus, companies incorporated in the Cayman Islands and operating throughout Eurasia, a sports team in the United States, a museum board meeting in Germany, kids at Harvard, vacations in Turkey or Switzerland, and shopping in Dubai or Paris. Each interest on the Eurasian and world map expresses bundles of personal relationships with partners, employees, family, handlers, and professional service providers (lawyers, accountants, bankers, property managers, yacht crew, etc.). Personal relations of trust are key to operating across far-flung geographies and heterogenous people.

The question becomes, how is trust established and maintained for peripatetic Eurasian elites when working relations are needed between people who are not relatives, work in other sectors, live in other countries, and

operate under other political-economic systems? On what basis should one begin to trust such a potential business partner or service provider? An ethnographer may hypothesize that cultural capital is central to trust establishment, and that cultural capital is manifest in the display of consumption tastes. Economic elites live distinctive lifestyles. Conspicuous consumption is partly about claiming prestige in the eyes of peers. But I think it is also about displaying aesthetic refinement in order to signal to potential partners one's *trustworthiness*.

The hypothesis here is that Eurasian elites operate with an assumption that aesthetic judgement is deeply linked with moral constitution. Particular choices of dress, jewelry, interior decoration, art,

cuisine, and hobbies may set up conditions where elites are more inclined to trust and perform promises to each other. Material tastes enact shared [distinction in Bourdieu's sense](#), and may be seen as revealing a person's secure elite status (not "new money") and [reliable character more generally](#). Performing the role of benefactor in community-building or philanthropic work, as noted above, could also add to one's bona fides. Fieldwork-based research on Eurasian elites needs to look at the aesthetics and performativity of assessing, offering, or accepting trust in concrete venues (a resort party, a museum fundraiser, a yacht excursion), the very moments and sites where loyalty is cultivated, alliances forged, ventures initiated, and interests become aligned. However, the motivations for loyalty for a Tashkent businessperson raised with certain practices of social obligation and notions of moral personhood, say, may diverge from that of counterparties in Beijing, Moscow, or London, with a consequential bearing on the function of transnational business networks. Exactly how cultural assumptions about trustworthiness may differ among elites, and with what implications for the operations of wealth and power across Eurasia, remain open questions for research.

Un-colonial Research on Eurasian Power and Wealth

What would it mean to take an un-colonial approach to this task? And why? In the following modest yet necessary steps toward a reply, trust turns out to weave throughout.

First, researchers should avoid immediately writing off prevalent Eurasian economic and political practices as “corrupt” when they fail to conform to rules-based standards surrounding free markets and democratic governance. Dismissing much of Eurasian life as problematic or illegitimate tends to blind the observer to what is actually going on. Avoiding this does not require denying the value of those standards in some form, but it does require suspending judgement long enough to design and conduct research that seeks to see Eurasian practices from the points of view of the actors themselves. Conducting business according to “informal” personal networks of trust and obligation that may supersede “formal” state laws and institutional norms does create its own moral dilemmas. Those dilemmas are more complex than an outsider’s metric along a context-free corruption index. Eurasian elites navigate multiple and variegated pulls of obligation in their networks. With every decision, they may weigh trade-offs between allegiance to their clients, family, allies, company, state agency, and publics. Divulging how they actually experience the tug of each kind of obligation and exercise moral reasoning to navigate them is what un-colonial ethnographic research can contribute.



Girls biking outside a local school in Jalal-Abad, Kyrgyzstan. Photo by Morgan Y. Liu.

It means avoiding imposing grids of interpretation that lack self-reflection and the essential practice of checking with field interlocutors. Interpretive frames can be “colonial” in the sense that they often reflect the political, economic, and intellectual interests of the states and institutions where the investigator is raised, trained, paid, or situated. Typical ones in Eurasia include reading the complex, multi-directional transformations since 1989 in terms of a linear “transition” to markets, democracy, or rule of law. Researchers need to be keenly aware of whose interpretive

grids are being used, with what justification, to what ends, and serving whose interests. The goal should be to employ grids of interpretation in a more context-sensitive, interests-aware, dialogic, and consultative manner.

An un-colonial ethnography eschews a project set-up where the investigator fully controls the methodology.

Second, building consultation into research also allows for the building of trust between the investigators and interlocutors. This is necessary for research. If trust is glue and lubricant in Eurasian interpersonal networks, then studying their operations requires fieldworkers themselves to enter those networks on the basis of trust. Ethnographic knowledge is gathered by not an aloof scientist testing subjects in a box, but rather human investigators in social interaction with equally human interlocutors. Trust-building via mutuality must be built into fieldwork. The best ethnography is done when mutuality is embraced not only as a means to data collection but as worthy in itself. This posture requires reciprocity, keeping in mind the needs of one’s hosts while pursuing a research agenda. Perhaps they want to hear stories about where the researcher is from or has visited as much as the researcher wants to hear their stories about their neighborhood or life course. Perhaps they want access to information, language partners, outside opportunities, or help in publishing in international journals or applying for schools outside their country. It means taking genuine interest and appropriate, practical action in their struggles and aspirations. Because some Eurasians prioritize becoming good at recognizing trustworthy partners in their affairs, the researcher must actually become a trustworthy partner to whatever extent possible.

Differences in power between scholar and interlocutor in fieldwork research encounters are inevitable. Mutuality does not erase power differentials, but it constitutes a necessary measure against exploitation in the research relationship. It is also a basic step toward forging an un-colonial ethnography. Mutuality entails moving the scholarly enterprise away from an extractive, instrumental posture that leverages from and reproduces power advantages. And so, an un-colonial ethnography eschews

a project set-up where the investigator fully controls the methodology, exclusively holds the theoretical tools, takes the raw materials from the “natives,” and processes those into insights which benefits only the researcher. A better arrangement would be if the scholar’s power and knowledge were used to produce insight in dialogue with interlocutors, and results were thoughtfully and appropriately assessed and shared with host communities. Every step of such a research process requires much mutual trust, which begins when parties treat each other in their common humanity seeking common interests. The result, I believe, would be more ethical and better scholarship—better, because analysis would have been put through dialogic negotiation among multiple stakeholders. Ultimately, of course, write-up and presentation in academic circles are the prerogative of the investigator. But the research process itself would have been built to seriously consider the ways by which others inhabit the world on their terms, as much as that is possible.

A take-away is that it is not enough to conduct interviews and participant observation for research to count as un-colonial ethnography. The latter involves clear choices in posture and disposition shaping the conception, fieldwork, analysis, write-up, and dissemination – every stage of research. Only then, I have argued, could the world as inhabited by certain humans be best divulged.

One big-picture goal for studying Eurasian power and wealth in such an un-colonial mode is, in my view, understanding Eurasian solutions to Eurasian problems. Elites are, by definition, the people with the means to get things done. The local Central Asian patrons and the continent-wide networks considered above are just two varieties of elite formations for making things happen, possibly on a wide scale or deep structural level. They represent “indigenous” approaches to acting on the dilemmas facing individuals and societies of the region. That observation does not validate patronage or personal trust networks as the best way to conduct affairs in Eurasia – there are certainly very dysfunctional, exploitative, unjust, and inefficient aspects to them, as seen by Eurasians themselves. But if the continent’s economies, politics, and societies are to see something better, it will have to come from Eurasians themselves, in dialogue with others. Un-colonial research on how power and wealth operate is a good start.



Morgan Y. Liu is a cultural anthropologist developing ethnographic approaches to how Eurasia’s financial elites forge informal networks of trust and obligation across Central Asia, Russia, China, the Middle East, Europe, and beyond. He is Chair and Associate Professor of Near Eastern & South Asian Languages & Cultures at The Ohio State University, with a Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Michigan. He was a Junior Fellow at the Harvard University Society of Fellows and served 2019-2022 in the Presidency of

the Central Eurasian Studies Society. His 2012 book *Under Solomon’s Throne: Uzbek Visions of Renewal in Osh* won a CESS book prize. This piece benefited from comments from Emily Channel-Justice and Bruce Grant, and elaborates a 2021 article in *Current History*, [“Trust and informal power in Central Asia.”](#)

New ASEEES Initiative! Managing Mid-Career Milestones

ASEEES is pleased to launch a two-semester initiative designed to support and empower scholars navigating the pivotal mid-career phase of the academic trajectory.

In Fall 2024, **Managing Mid-Career Milestones** will kick off with two **panel discussions** on the big picture questions and practical strategies for success including:

- second book projects
- scholarly collaborations
- advising graduate students
- balancing research, teaching, and service
- navigating tenure and promotion

If you are a **mid-career scholar interested in participating** in this initiative or a **senior scholar volunteering as a panel speaker**, please fill out the form below to help us gauge interest and gather feedback!

INTEREST FORM

NEW FROM SLAVICA PUBLISHERS

Linda Mëniku and Héctor Campos. *Advancing in Albanian*, textbook 451 p., workbook 324 p. (978-089357-518-2, set), \$94.95.

The authors' introductory textbook of Albanian (*Discovering Albanian 1*, U. of Wisconsin Press, 2011) received the AATSEEL award for best annual contribution to language pedagogy. Now Slavica presents their intermediate-advanced textbook, *Advancing in Albanian*, to provide enhanced access for students to one of the major, but less commonly taught European languages. Albanian has been on track to join the EU since 2014, and there are 5 million speakers of this language. The textbook and accompanying workbook transition from English to Albanian as the language of instruction over the course of the year, and are supported by substantial online downloadable

audio files, making it more feasible to achieve proficiency in Albanian without extensive in-country experience.

Wojciech Wencel. *"Imago Mundi" and Other Poems*, ed. and trans. Michael J. Mikoś, xvii + 118 p. (ISBN 978-089357-526-7), \$22.95.

Wojciech Wencel, born in Gdańsk in 1972, is one of the most important contemporary Polish poets. He is the author of many volumes of poetry, literary biographies, and essays, and the recipient of several prestigious literary awards, most recently the 2022 Oskar Halecki Prize in Polish and East European History. *"Imago Mundi" and Other Poems* is the first extensive translation of his work into English, which contains over eighty poems, beginning with his first book, entitled *Poems* (1995), and ending with *Polonia Aeterna* (2018).



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Three String Books is an imprint of Slavica Publishers devoted to translations of literary works and belles-lettres from Central and Eastern Europe, including Russia and the other successor states of the former Soviet Union.

Maxim Gorky. *"The Old Man" and "The Counterfeit Coin": Two Plays*, trans. and with an introduction by Barry P. Scherr, xxxvii + 98 p. (ISBN 978-089357-525-0), \$22.95.

Although *The Old Man* has been performed only rarely and *The Counterfeit Coin* has not even been translated into English until now, both works are deserving of far more attention than they have received. Here, Gorky moves beyond the social themes that predominate in his earlier plays to probe deeply into such matters as what constitutes justice, whether one individual has the right to judge another, the clash between reality and illusion, and the difficulty

of distinguishing the false from the genuine. As

Barry Scherr notes in his wide-rang-

Three String Books



ing introduction, this is a Gorky for whom Ibsen has become more of a presence,

who not only polemicalizes with

Dostoevsky but cannot escape his influence,

and who, by the mid-1920s, has absorbed lessons from Pirandello.

Anna Starobinets. *Look at Him*, trans. Katherine E. Young, xii + 151 p., 2020 (ISBN 978-089357-503-8), \$19.95.

In this groundbreaking memoir, Anna Starobinets chronicles the devastating loss of her unborn son to a fatal birth defect. A finalist for the 2018 National Bestseller Prize, *Look at Him* ignited a firestorm in Russia, prompting both high praise and severe condemnation for the author's willingness to discuss long-taboo issues of women's agency over their own bodies, the aftereffects of abortion and miscarriage on marriage and family life, and the callousness and ignorance displayed by many in Russia in situations like hers.



Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History

<https://kritika.georgetown.edu>

Kritika is dedicated to critical inquiry into the history of Russia and Eurasia. The quarterly journal features research articles as well as analytical review essays and extensive book reviews, especially of works in languages other than English. Subscriptions and previously published volumes available from Slavica—including, as of 16, no. 1, e-book editions (ePub, PDF). Contact our business manager at slavica@indiana.com for all questions regarding subscriptions and eligibility for discounts.

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2024 ASEEES Distinguished Contributions to Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies Award Honoree

Lewis Siegelbaum

Jack and Margaret Sweet Professor Emeritus of
History at Michigan State University

Established in 1970, the Distinguished Contributions to Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies Award honors eminent members of the profession who have made major contributions to the field through scholarship of the highest quality, mentoring, leadership, and/or service. The prize is intended to recognize diverse contributions across Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies.

A social historian of extraordinary breadth, a supportive mentor to many cohorts of graduate students and early career scholars, a steadfastly generous colleague, and a firm believer in bringing history and historical analysis to a broader audience, Lewis Siegelbaum embodies the qualities celebrated by the ASEEES Distinguished Contributions Award. His sweeping set of publications, from monographs to memoirs and from conference volumes to collections of historical documents, reflects theoretical sophistication, lively empirical detail, and engagingly crafted prose. A highly productive scholar often operating at the cutting edge of developments in the field, Dr. Siegelbaum has carried out path-breaking work on wide-ranging topics from Stakhanovism to Soviet state responses to disability to the Soviet car industry and the complex relationship between communism and consumerism. His scholarship is frequently collaborative; his regular co-authorship and promotion of younger scholars' work in edited volumes has enriched the scholarly landscape of Soviet history.

His impressive body of work includes: *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935-1941* (Cambridge University Press, 1988); *Soviet State and Society between Revolutions, 1918-1929* (Cambridge University Press, 1992); *Workers of the Donbass Speak: Survival and Identity in the New Ukraine, 1989-1992*, co-edited with Daniel J. Walkowitz (SUNY Press, 1995); *Stalinism as a Way of Life: A Narrative in Documents*, co-edited with Andrei Sokolov (Yale University Press, 2000); *Cars for Comrades: The Life of the Soviet Automobile* (Cornell University Press, 2008); *Stuck on Communism: Memoir of a Russian Historian* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2019); *Making National Diasporas: Soviet Migration Regimes and Post-Soviet Consequences*, co-authored with Leslie Page Moch (Cambridge University Press, 2023); and *Reflections on Stalinism*, co-edited with J. Arch Getty (Cornell University Press, 2024).

Dr. Siegelbaum is renowned for his close and continuous mentorship of graduate students and for building their mutual sense of community by, for example, holding a monthly *kruzhok* and supporting MSU's annual graduate student conference on Migration With(out) Boundaries. Never attempting to reproduce himself in his students, he has instead helped them flourish as themselves. He has supervised more than a dozen dissertations on topics as diverse as US-Soviet relations, ballet, and migration. Dr. Siegelbaum's career is also distinguished by his role in fostering public understanding, from co-founding the key digital resource and teaching tool, "17 Moments in Soviet History," to documenting the paradigm-shifting Donbas miners' strikes of 1989 for public television. Finally, he has been a dedicated contributor to the profession, chairing ASEEES prize committees, serving on editorial boards, and lending his insights to the Midwest Russian History Workshop for decades.

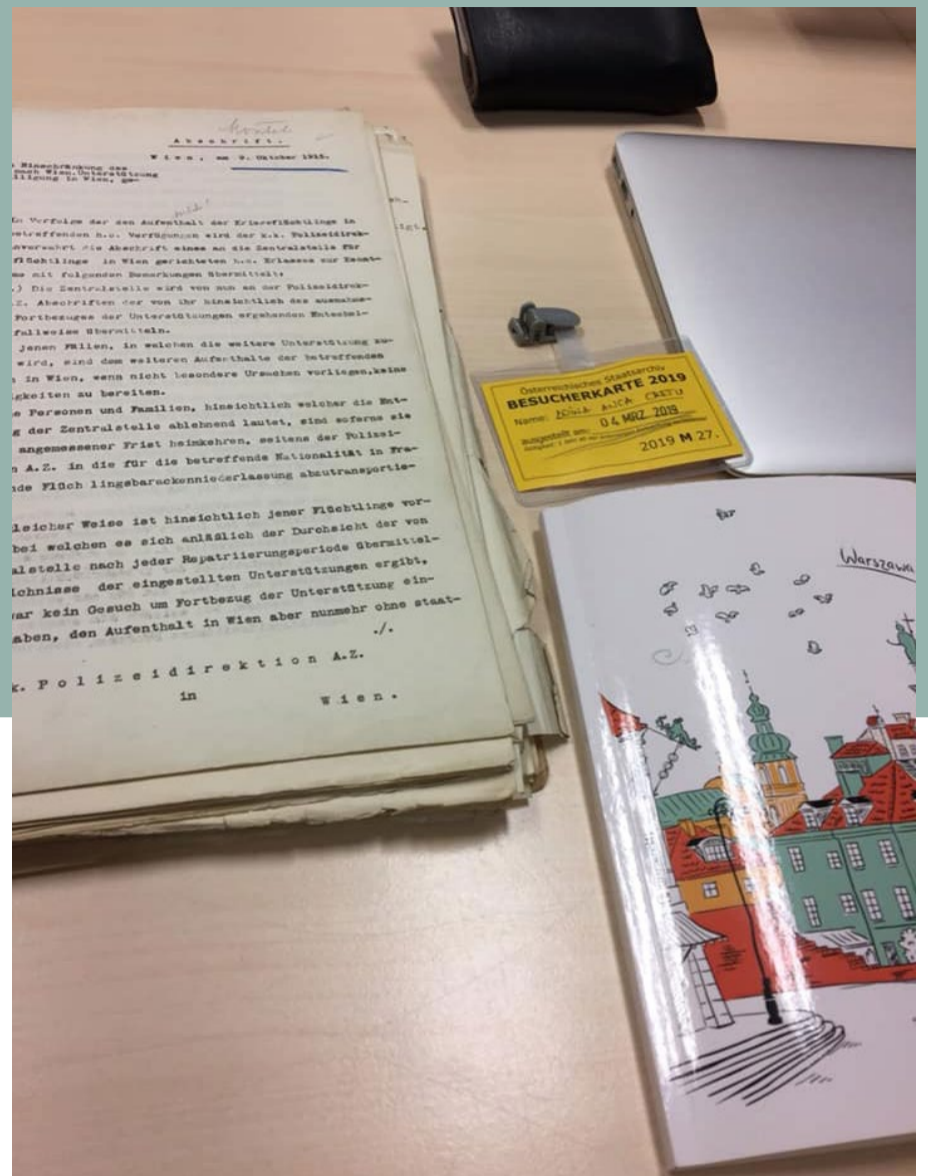
For the depth and breadth of his professional achievements, ASEEES is proud to honor Dr. Lewis Siegelbaum with the Distinguished Contributions to Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies Award.

Thinking Internationally in Eastern European History: A Conversation with Doina Anca Cretu

Your work centers refugees, refugee camps, and foreign humanitarian aid. How does the history of displacement and aid in Eastern Europe relate to and differ from other contexts? What does the historical record help us understand about these subjects in their contemporary manifestations?

In my work, I like to think in more relational terms; namely, I like to think through the history of displacement and foreign aid in Eastern Europe *in relation to* histories of other contexts. I am cautious about highlighting exceptionality in general and rather prefer to highlight the ways actors in Eastern Europe shaped trajectories of foreign aid and/or addressed displacement in contexts of war, in particular, and what this means for broader histories of refugees, for instance. More specifically, in my forthcoming book, [*Foreign Aid and State Building in Interwar Romania: In Quest of an Ideal*](#) (Stanford University Press, 2024), I look at the ways various Romanian state builders established their own rapport with foreign aid organizations in a period of transformation in the interwar period. The current iteration of my second project is related to the development of modern refugee encampments. I place this narrative in the context of the First World War and in Austria-Hungary. This proposes a re-thinking of chronologies in terms of the history of refugee policy more broadly. In this context, I interpret the history of displacement and of aid in Eastern Europe as important pillars in the broader understanding of humanitarianism, development, refugee movements and their “management.”

Indeed, these are two historical topics with contemporary echoes. If we look at the ways I approach the history of foreign aid in Eastern Europe—namely, primarily in terms of the ways recipient actors determined humanitarian and proto-developmental processes in the interwar



Cretu's work station in the Austrian State Archives. Photo by Doina Anca Cretu.

period—it can be argued that this is an instance of a historical record that sheds light on the ways international and non-governmental organizations could strengthen local structures of power. By contrast, in my view it is vital to understand mechanisms of responses to issues of displacement in their particular context. While this has become a topic that lends itself to transhistorical analyses, I am cautious about drawing broad conclusions that relate the landscape of refugee policy in the First World War in a moribund Austro-Hungarian monarchy to current border policies, for instance. I seek to understand the geneses of refugee containment and assistance mechanisms and propose an opening of discussion and future projects that compare or build on this particular historical record.

What does it mean to think internationally in area studies? How would you characterize our field's overall engagement with how international forces have shaped Eastern Europe – and what new trends are emerging? What can these trends tell us about the future of area studies?

In my own work, I try to use different angles of reading what can be called “national histories.” “Thinking internationally” certainly has a content component: the

inclusion of Eastern European narratives and actors in international history. However, it also has a methodological component: I believe that there is value in exploring archives outside national boundaries and putting them in conversation with local and domestic stories. For example, my book uses material from archives of the American Red Cross, the American Relief Administration, and the Rockefeller Foundation, which, in turn, gives new insights in terms of how various political leaders, but also experts or architects of a burgeoning civil society, conceptualized and shaped meanings of state building in the interwar period.

Historians of the region
have started to look at
Eastern Europe in an
“anti-periphery” way.

We are in an exciting moment for our field because various historians of the region have started to look at Eastern Europe in an “anti-periphery” way (if I may describe it as such). Yes, different voices have previously alerted us to the need to halt our thinking of the region as passive and backward. However, at this point, we really see historians shedding light on the ways Eastern European actors shaped, interacted, or adapted so-called international forces and their potential influences themselves. For example, there is excellent work emerging on the ways Eastern European experts shaped aspects of global governance via the League of Nations or, later on, the United Nations. So, in this sense, I believe that we are in an exciting moment of area studies, as historians are more focused on exploring Eastern Europe in terms of transnational relationships and networks and, in this way, they shed light on how this region and its actors have actively become part of various global processes.

How would you describe the position of Austria-Hungary as a subject of analysis within the larger field of SEEES? To what extent does an area studies framework either lend itself to or obfuscate the study of this subject?

I arrived to the study of Austria-Hungary from outside, so-to-speak. I had studied the region and European history in the aftermath of the demise of the monarchy. However, I have been very lucky to come into a burgeoning field of research, as historians are shifting from thinking of 1918—the year of the collapse of the monarchy—only through the lens of the fractures that it led to. There is now new



View of Rovereto (Italy), a site of forced displacement in imperial Austria during the First World War; taken during a research trip in February 2023. Photo by Doina Anca Cretu.

thinking on how facets of the monarchy and its governance were embedded in post-imperial nation-state making, as well as everyday lives. So, in this sense, understanding Austria-Hungary with all its convoluted bureaucracies, legislation, and issues of nationalism and national indifference, is becoming vital to understanding state- and nation-building in SEEES. But I would even say that the state of the field on Austria-Hungary has implications for understanding European history or the history of empires more broadly. These are two fields that somehow (and I would even say ironically) have found relatively little space for Austria-Hungary as object of analysis, as the study of the monarchy has arguably remained in its own contained historiographical microcosm. This is something I try to engage with in my own work on refugees in Austria-Hungary during the First World War: I shed light on this story not merely as one of a frail monarchy, but also as a bigger story of Europe and its refugees.

How do you approach teaching courses in Modern European History? What advantages might a historian of Eastern Europe have in this regard and what challenges might they face?

I have primarily taught history of migration, history of refugees, and history of humanitarianism, focusing on the European context. So, in this sense, I approach it from both a chronological and thematic perspective. I follow a couple of conventional starting points as I focus on narratives

surrounding the emergence of the International Committee of the Red Cross via Geneva-based men of influence in the nineteenth century or on the First World War and the making of the modern refugee in that era. Eastern Europe has been a space of production of refugees in times of war or during repressive regimes; it has also been a space of attention for Western humanitarian actors in different moments in time due to war destruction and natural disasters, but also due to inherent beliefs that this is a region that could be improved. This was certainly the case in the interwar period, the moment I have studied most. Therefore, in my view, any history of refugees, of migration, of aid in the European context cannot be disentangled from the history of Eastern Europe. This is the true advantage of being an expert on this region and its countries.

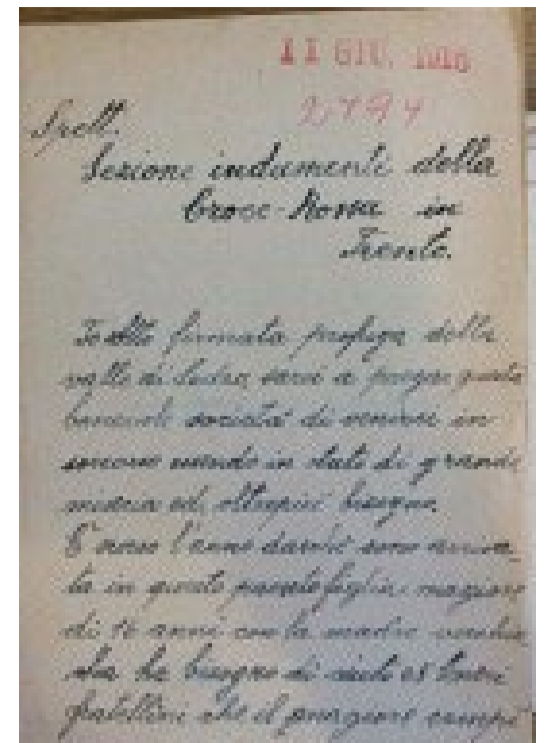
The challenge I have identified thus far is more related to the practice of teaching and students' background and baggage. In certain situations, I have been told and have observed that students have relatively limited knowledge of Eastern European history. Placing a story of migration in an easily transmitted context has been a structural challenge given that the history of Eastern Europe has been sidelined outside the countries of the region. While this might be a cliché from a research standpoint, we are still seeing teaching and courses that extricate Eastern European history from European history more broadly. This truly remains a challenge in our field, in my view.

How have contemporary events, including refugee movements, shaped your research? How have you seen these events shape historical research on refugees more broadly?

Early September 2015 was an important moment in my view. Then, a photograph of the lifeless body of 3-year-old Alan Kurdi lying face-down on a Turkish beach near Bodrum, made the rounds in traditional and social media. However, it also started to dominate historians' own approaches to how to study refugees and humanitarians. Historians reacted to Alan Kurdi's tragic end and its visual, writing studies on humanitarian photography, refugees' victimhood, and aspects of solidarity with their plights with a historical perspective. That was a moment that, in my view, marked a shift in historians' attempts to explore the experience, albeit a deeply tragic one, of the (universal) refugee.

Historical empathy is not easy to address and navigate, particularly when exposed to issues of trauma and

suffering; the sources I look at, especially first-person documents, carry these themes rather prominently. On a personal level, in early 2022, I found myself watching countless news reports about Ukrainians fleeing their invaded country, images of children crying as they left their fathers and their homes. It was about then that I realized that my work needed to involve refugees' experiences and their voices (even if in different registers); while, as I mentioned before, I caution against imperfect comparisons between current border regimes and past refugee policies, I can also say that, in many ways, observing contemporary experiences of forcefully displaced people motivated an empathetic response that drove a closeness to my historical subjects.



A refugee's handwritten petition to Segretariato per richiamati e profughi del Trentino during the First World War; photo taken in Biblioteca Civica Rovereto. Photo by Doina Anca Cretu.



Doina Anca Cretu is a historian of foreign aid and migration. Her work is at the intersection between international history and modern history of central and eastern Europe. She is currently a Research Fellow within the ERC Consolidator Grant "Unlikely Refugee? Refugees and Citizens in

East-Central Europe during the Twentieth Century" (Masaryk Institute and Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague) and a Visiting Lecturer at the University of Vienna. Anca holds a PhD from the Graduate Institute, Geneva; she was a Max Weber Fellow at the European University Institute in Florence, as well as a Visiting Fellow at the University of Oxford, the Graduate Center at the City University of New York, and at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna. In September 2024, she will start a new position as Assistant Professor of Modern European History at the University of Warwick (UK). Her first book, *Foreign Aid and State Building in Interwar Romania: In Quest of an Ideal*, will be out later this year with Stanford University Press.

2024 ASEEES Dissertation Research and Summer Writing Grantees

Dissertation Research Grantees



Yasyn Abdullaev, History, University of California, Berkeley

“Destructive Doctrines: Conspiracy Mythology and the Rise of Modern Politics in Russia, 1789-1848”

My dissertation, “Destructive Doctrines,” surveys the rise of conspiracy thinking in Russia at the turn of the nineteenth century and its impact on the country’s political culture and state-building. How did conspiracy theories evolve over time in Russia? What was the influence of anti-Western conspiracy theories on Russian politics? How did conspiracism determine the formation of the modern state in the tsarist empire? To answer these questions, I focus on the myth of conspiracy by secret societies, a powerful metanarrative concerning the plot of the Freemasons and Illuminati against the monarchy, Christianity, and aristocratic society that shaped the political consciousness of the European educated class during the Age of Revolution. My dissertation will demonstrate how the Franco-German conspiracy theories about the existential threat of secret societies were imported to Russia from the West after 1789 and how they proliferated there and became so deeply entrenched in the imagination of the governing elites within the Russian autocratic political tradition. The primary focus of the study is to reveal the ways in which the culture of conspiracy theorizing molded the development of state institutions in the Russian Empire and affected such areas of modern politics as ideology and the security apparatus (including its transnational dimension). This research will further our understanding of the phenomenon of conspiracism by reconstructing the story of its origins in Russia and identifying the historical causes for the overwhelming success of conspiracy theories in the Russian political discourse and national consciousness. Moreover, in this dissertation, I will put conspiracy thinking into the broader conversation on state formation and the emergence of governmental politics in nineteenth-century Europe, foregrounding the relevance of specific ideologies and national and political myths in this process.



Benjamin Arenstein, Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Chicago

“Underground Literature and the Remaking of Jewish Culture in the Late Soviet Union”

This dissertation explores the role of underground literature in shaping Soviet Jewish culture between 1953-1989. By close reading Jewish underground journals alongside personal correspondence, interviews, and the archives of Soviet literary institutions, I investigate how Jews living under late socialism employed underground literature to reconceptualize their notion of Jewish culture after decades of assimilation into the Russian and Soviet cultural spheres. Which texts and literary genealogies did Jews in the late Soviet Union draw on to produce an understanding of Jewish culture? What was the relationship between how Jewish culture was conceptualized in underground literary publications and the notion of Jewish culture presented in the official publication sphere? In what ways did underground literature and its cultural project serve to probe the bounds of Soviet Jewish subjectivity under late socialism? What Jewish culture was and what it meant to late-Soviet Jews was not articulated uniformly throughout the USSR. Accordingly, my project adopts a broad geographic scope. It focuses on multilingual Jewish communities in Latvia, Georgia, and Tajikistan, in addition to those primarily Russophone communities in Moscow and Leningrad. By excavating the geographically varied and linguistically diverse visions of Jewish culture articulated in underground texts, my research seeks to refine our understanding of the place that Jews occupied in the wider culture of the late Soviet Union, as well as the nature of Soviet underground and Russophone literature more broadly.



Alexandra Artamonova, Art History, Northwestern University

“The Art of Socialist ‘Friendship’ during the Cold War: Black Artists’ Encounters with the Eastern Bloc, 1950 to 1979”

“The Art of Socialist ‘Friendship’ during the Cold War” investigates the aesthetic forms and artistic practices developed by Black artists who were involved in socialist “friendship” to argue that these artists developed a revolutionary aesthetic at the intersection of two projects: the geopolitical project of antiracist and anticolonial socialist “friendship” and the antiformalist project of post-war Socialist Realist art practices that rejected the modernist or “formalist” practices of Western art. At the same time, this project reveals a contradiction at the heart of socialist cultural internationalism: as the Eastern Bloc aimed to instruct African students on the principles of socialist art and Socialist Realism, these two concepts were in theoretical crisis and undergoing internal reformation. This reformation problematizes the clear-cut division between post-war Socialist Realism and Western modernism by revealing the reintroduction of modernist elements and genres into the late art system of the Eastern Bloc and the pivotal role that Black artists played in this process. This study shows that these artists not only reinterpreted and repurposed the principles of two aesthetic systems, but also directly impacted them.



Ozlem Eren, Art History, University of Wisconsin-Madison

“Decentralizing the Architecture of Rus’”

Joseph Bradley and Christine Ruane Research Grant in Russian Studies

My dissertation explains the origins and significance of the distinctive church architecture that flourished in the Vladimir-Suzdal Principality in the twelfth century. My primary case study is the St. Demetrios Cathedral, ca. 1193-1197, in Vladimir. The architectural style in Vladimir-Suzdal, characterized by its use of white-stone materials, long drums, and carved reliefs on all façades, differs from the predominantly Byzantine style found in Kyiv. It appears to be an exception within the land of Rus’ and within the context of Byzantine and Balkan Orthodox or the Western (Romanesque) religious architecture. Thus, a wider framework beyond the “Byzantine versus Romanesque influence” debate is required. My dissertation tests the hypothesis that Northeast Rus’ (Vladimir-Suzdal) and Southwest Rus’ (Galicia-Volhynia) had developed under quite different artistic currents, namely, Eastern (Georgian, Armenian) and Western (Romanesque), while being under a predominantly Byzantine cultural umbrella. My proposed solution toward a greater understanding of the origins and reasons of the appearance of this new sculptural style lies in a re-evaluation of our understanding of the term “Rus’.” Russian chronicles suggest that “Land of Rus’” did not imply a unified state but indicated individual Rus’ principalities. Thus, my dissertation contributes to the dismantling of the Russian imperialist theory of the unbroken continuity of Kyivan heritage from Kyiv to Moscow by showing the diverse architectural developments in Galicia-Volhynia through its interactions with Western medieval kingdoms, quite differently from the Northeastern Rus’ principalities.



Sooyeon Lee, Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Toronto

“Cultural Dialogues and Echoes Represented in the Translations of Soviet and North Korean Children’s Folktales”

James Bailey Dissertation Research Grant in Folklore Studies

North Korea’s integration into the socialist bloc in the mid-1950s is commonly perceived as a product of the Soviet Union’s support. With the framework that reads their relationship as one-sided—the Soviet Union aids and North Korea receives—extant research has heavily focused on

North Korea's literary activities and output as being an imitation of Soviet Stalinist models, and in turn having had little influence on the Soviet Union. Such historical reading persists in the context of children's literature, despite its important role in shaping both countries' political and ideological discourses. However, a closer examination reveals reciprocal translation practices that undergirded both countries' pursuit of divergent and specific objectives as they took shape within the context of importation and publication of each other's literature. My research highlights the ways in which translated literary texts, especially within children's literature and folkloric texts, created space for dynamic exchange and discursive re-imagining of both nation's statehood and their respective political and ideological goals.



Yana Lysenko, Comparative Literature, New York University

“Odesa’s Many Identities: From the Politics of Russianness to the True Ukrainian City”

Dissertation Research Grant in Ukrainian Studies

My dissertation examines the ways that city residents constitute and reconstitute ideas of their own urban identity in the Ukrainian city of Odesa. Long mythologized as an important city across different ethnic and national imaginaries (Ukrainian, Jewish, and Russian, among others), Odesa historically preferred to think of itself as a separate cultural entity within a localized sphere, rather than categorizing itself within a broader concept of nation-state or imperial identity. As a port city on the geographical margins of empire, far from the imperial cores of spaces like Moscow and Saint Petersburg, Odesa benefitted from ethnic, linguistic, and social diversity, although always within (and even because of) proximity to Russianness, frequently known even today as a “Russian-speaking city.” Defining this as the “politics of Russianness,” I argue that this proximity to Russian language and culture served as a means of maintaining autonomy and broader freedom within a context of oppression of non-Russian national identities and enforced Russification throughout the Soviet era and until Ukrainian independence. I thus interrogate the ways in which Odesans continuously defined and redefined themselves within literature, cinema, and various forms of media as a means of adapting to the tumultuous conditions the city found itself in within the 20th and 21st centuries. This includes looking at Odesa’s famous reputation as the city of humor, and the influence of the city’s public spaces (i.e., the Odesan courtyard apartments) not only on its self-definition, but on the rise of a genre I call “Odesan nostalgia” in post-independence Ukraine. The dissertation also interrogates broader cultural and political issues provoked by the Russo-Ukrainian War and the full-scale invasion, looking at contemporary Odesan poet Boris Khersonsky’s Russophone poetry as a theoretical base for understanding modes of resistance in speaking the colonizer’s tongue and the politics of self-translation, as Khersonsky began to publish in Ukrainian following 2014. I also examine wartime digital media as an important factor in Odesa’s active immersion into (and embrace of) Ukrainian national identity, no matter its language or history.



Charis Marantzidou, History, Columbia University

“From Slavic Brothers to Socialist Comrades: The Russian Emigration in Bulgaria, 1918-1954”

My dissertation explores the evolution of the Russian diaspora in Bulgaria from the period following the 1917 revolution to the spread of communism in Eastern Europe after World War II. During this time, Bulgaria became a hub for interactions among Russian refugees, Soviet state actors, Bulgarian political groups, and international organizations. The dissertation argues that the Russian emigration, rather than looking to the past, took shape through a dynamic, triangular relationship with the Soviet Union and Bulgaria—one that incorporated regional legacies of the Russian Empire, international responses to Bolshevism, and the everyday, local experiences of refugees. In the aftermath of the Russian Civil War, Bulgaria functioned almost as an extension of the front, with camps full of

demobilized soldiers and refugees sparking international debates and domestic political conflicts about their status and treatment. As Russians integrated with Bulgarian society, some contributed expertise to state initiatives, formed diasporic institutions, or engaged in anti-communist activities. However, after the arrival of the Red Army in 1944, a community of Soviet citizens emerged from the remnants of an emigration that once saw itself as representative of imperial Russia.



Helena Ratte, Anthropology, University of Chicago

“Women, War and Peace: NGO Politics and Internationalism after Socialism”
Dissertation Research Grant in Women and Gender Studies

My planned dissertation explores the paradoxes and frictions of a transnational movement for women’s rights in and after conflict through an ethnographic study of NGO in and beyond Southeast Europe. Conscripts of a global movement for women’s rights in and after conflict, Bosnian and Serbian activists find space to maneuver in this movement’s interstices, engaging archives of Yugoslav feminist internationalism and nonalignment imaginatively and practically in their work. I examine how Women Peace and Security (WPS) organizes channels of cooperation and exchange between ex-Yugoslav feminists and activists in other “conflict-affected” countries worldwide in relation to forms of solidarity that predate them. Tracing evolving conversations between global partners, I ask: how does contemporary transnational movement building structured in a liberal humanitarian idiom serve as a site of encounters that resonate historically—an umbrella under which individuals find cover to pursue a variety of political projects? How does the construal of likeness serve as actionable grounds for transnational solidarity? When and to what strategic ends do activists engage in a politics of anachronism? Finally, how do projects of international movement-building reposition politics and people in a shifting 21st-century global political geography?



Viktoriia Savchuk, Communication, University of Maryland, College Park

“Ukraine’s Nation-Branding in Response to Russia’s War”

My dissertation aims to examine how Ukraine utilizes nation branding in response to Russia’s full-scale invasion, particularly from the perspective of public relations. Notably, Ukraine was the first country to employ nation branding as a tool of warfare, challenging our understanding of the field and requiring further investigation. Additionally, this research project aims to bridge the fields of Ukrainian studies, nation branding, and public relations. While Ukraine has gained more recent attention from scholars due to its tragic circumstances, there is still a need for more comprehensive research, which my dissertation can provide.



Temirlan Tileubek, History, University of California, Davis

“The Nature of Russian Imperial Rule in Central Asia”
Maya K. Peterson Research Grant in Environmental Studies

“The Nature of Russian Imperial Rule in Central Asia” deals with the environmental history of Central Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This project started last year as a paper that focused on the history of hunting and animal conservation in Central Asia. I examined both direct and metanarrative projections of power through the study of hunting journals and actions of Russian imperial hunting societies. By emphasizing the superiority of Russian weaponry and technology and underlining the inferiority of native hunting methods and “helplessness” of native inhabitants, Russian officer-hunters claimed to protect Central Asians from constant terrors and attacks of wild animals, such as tigers and wild boars. The articles from hunting journals juxtaposed the manliness and military prowess of Russian hunters against the passivity and defenselessness of native

inhabitants. On top of that, by forming local hunting societies, Russian hunters tried to implement hunting regulations, which would conserve local animals and limit other people's access to hunting (especially "ruthless" native inhabitants'). These multi-layered projections of power underlined the "inferiority" of the Central Asian population and provided a leverage through which to exert imperial control over the natural resources of Central Asia. However, these projections of power were not always uncontested and native inhabitants constantly disrupted the attempts of Russian hunters to "rationally" supervise hunting. Moreover, native hunting methods, while lacking in their technological aspect, were not less efficient as Russian. The regulation of hunting and formation of hunting societies were just one of the venues through which imperial officials, settlers, and native inhabitants interacted in colonial Central Asia. I will build on these findings and expand the scope of my research to include larger natural elements, such as forests and water bodies, in order to understand how imperial administration tried to manage and control nature and with it, Central Asians.

Summer Writing Grantees



Fiona Bell, History, Slavic Languages and Literatures, Yale University

"Russian Forms: Race, Sex, and the Making of Russian Literature"

My dissertation retells Russian literary history as the continual rearticulation of "Russian" as a racial category. Beginning with the global debates on the abolition of slavery of serfdom in the 1850s, I explore the ways in which canonical Russian writers—Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Shklovskii, and others—write fiction about kinship and sexuality that, in turn, articulates Russian whiteness, non-whiteness, or mixed race status at key historical junctures, from the Great Reforms to the October Revolution and the first wave of emigration. By rereading Russian literary history with the disciplinary formations of gender and sexuality studies and race and ethnicity studies, I show how the elaboration of Russian racial imaginaries was coterminous with the construction of the Russian literary canon and literary theory. Oriented to the field of Russian literary studies, *Russian Forms* also represents a new contribution to race and ethnicity studies and gender and sexuality studies, introducing "Russianness," and the literature that produced this concept, as an important and undertheorized category in the global history of sexuality and racial formations.



Zachary Hicks, Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of California, Berkeley

"The Long Contemporary: Timelessness, Empire, and Aesthetic Politics in Russophone Cultural Production, 1970-2014"

My dissertation examines the works of literary authors, filmmakers, and visual artists in the Soviet and post-Soviet world who grappled with the problem of temporality when state socialism was coming to an end and as a new world was being constructed. Attending to the close affinity between the commodity form and form as an aesthetic category, I weave together historically situated close readings of cultural texts with a narrative of political economic transformation that takes us through the sudden eclipsing of a developmentalist, "Three Worlds" model of culture—within which the Soviet Union is rapidly converted from a potential alternative center to that of the West into a set of fifteen 'developing nations'—and its replacement by a single, globalized contemporaneity. I argue that aesthetic form and its mobilization in late- and post-Soviet cultural production disrupts and complicates our thinking about time, history, and globality. The story told is not one of the former Second World's inevitable homogenization under the sign of globalization, but rather of the production of difference as the region's reincorporation into global capital also grounds its historical non-synchronicity.



Olivia Kennison, Slavic Studies, Brown University

“‘О новом значении древней трагедии’: Translation and Reception of Greek Tragedy in the Russian Silver Age”

My dissertation will discuss the reception of Greek tragedy during the Silver Age of Russian literature. Literature from antiquity has been influential in the development of Russian literature from the eighteenth century onwards, but Russia’s reception of classical heritage was primarily mediated through its contact with European culture. Catherine the Great attempted to combat this situation by adding Ancient Greek and Latin to gymnasium curriculums, aiming to perpetuate the idea that Russia was related organically to Ancient Greece through their Slavic ancestor and Byzantium. This idea is present in the poetry of the Russian Romantics and emerged again in the literature and art of the Silver Age. The invented relationship between Ancient Greece and Russia, meant to evoke a mystical connection between the ancient and modern, is an example of a recurring problem in the reception of the antique in Russia: it is perpetually contaminated by other dominating frameworks which steer interpretation as well as translation. In the context of the reception of tragedy in the Silver Age, the key frameworks were Friedrich Nietzsche’s “The Birth of Tragedy,” as well as the aesthetics of medieval Christianity, which continued from the Romantic tradition. This dissertation will explore how Silver Age writers were influenced by these forces, and how that is expressed in their translations, theoretical writings, and receptions.



Lori Pirinjian, Near Eastern Languages & Cultures, University of California, Los Angeles

“An Analysis of the Domestic Violence Law in Post-Soviet Armenia”

This dissertation project focuses on the process of passing the domestic violence law in the Republic of Armenia over the period of 2013 to 2017 within the context of the political rivalry between the European Union and the Russian Federation. It will study how each of these entities seeks to exert regional power over Armenia. The introduction of this law in Armenia marked a new phase in the post-Soviet cycle of European initiatives followed by Russian backlash in this country. The EU seeks to affiliate Armenia’s political values with its own, focusing on individual rights, autonomy, and rule of law, while Russia seeks to prolong Armenia’s association with a continued focus on group rights over those of the individual. By combining theories from legal anthropology and gender studies, the goal of this dissertation is to identify the mechanisms and practices through which the EU and Russia promote their ideological agendas.



Anna Smelova, History, Georgetown University

“Imagining Indigenous Siberia: Populist Ethnography of Northeast Asia Under Russian Late Imperial and Early Soviet Regimes”

“Imagining Indigenous Siberia” interrogates the state of Siberian ethnography at the turn of the 20th century, focusing on the role of revolutionary intellectuals in accumulating knowledge and shaping nationalities policy toward ethnic minorities under the late imperial and early Soviet regimes. Performing as reluctant Kulturträger, populists-turned-ethnographers approached indigenous peoples, much like they did with peasants and workers—with a mix of admiration and patronization—aiming to lead them to “enlightenment” and revolution. This interdisciplinary project intersects the history of science, anthropology, and cultural and gender studies to examine the political activities and Weltanschauung of the 1880s cohort of exiled revolutionaries-turned-ethnographers (former Zemlevoltsy and Narodovoltsy), including Vladimir Bogoras, Vladimir Jochelson, Lev Shternberg, Moisei Krol’, Nikolai Vitashevskii, and others. By constructing the first prosopographical portrait of their generational cohort, my dissertation analyzes the radical ethnographers’ “conceptual conquest” of northeast Asia, specifically focusing on the region of the present-day Republic of Sakha-Yakutia.



Merima Tricic, Urban Planning and Public Policy, University of California, Irvine

“A War of Words: Activist Narratives of Sexual Violence and Contested Public Memories of Space in Post-War Bosnia”

This dissertation’s main research question broadly inquires: how do activists and policymakers use narrative and embodied performance to construct and submerge public memories of sexual violence? It focuses on the following three key themes that emerge from the process of constructing and challenging public memories surrounding sexual violence. First, I examine the role of narratives and narrative framing in peacebuilding activism. I examine how narrative framing is used to mobilize groups about traumatic wartime memories and encourage other civilians to participate by establishing diverse activist frames that they can relate to. Second, I examine the role of embodied narratives, or how individuals make sense of their everyday lives through felt experiences and emotions that are situated from moment to moment within and across time and space. I investigate the embodied nature of narrative to understand the role of narrative in healing and the experience of policy conflict. Third, I examine the theme of narratives in relation to mobilization over space and the complex collective identity interest formation between invented and invited spaces created by survivor activists. I focus on performed narratives and examine how they relate to spaces’ empowering (or disempowering) nature. This dissertation can have important implications for understanding the complexity of peace, healing, and justice in post-war societies for unresolved grievances in specific populations. It explores the problematizations of “peace” for survivors in Bosnia and helps define how peace is conceptualized, challenged, and redefined by some activists in organizations serving sexual violence survivors. This research has implications for understanding the barriers activists face in telling narratives and the complexities involved in when and how narratives are told to frame reparations issues in post-conflict peacebuilding. This research could also provide insights into the barriers in storytelling about social transformation and the complexities that activists face in countering official approaches to storytelling.

Donate to ASEEES Research Grant Funds!



“I spent six weeks [in Prague and Warsaw] looking at and photographing a huge array of extremely useful published material [including] the Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionaries’ three main press organs over the course of the revolutionary and civil war periods...The materials I have acquired during this trip are fundamental game-changers and both their importance and the level of logistical difficulty it would take to try to get comparable materials from Ukraine (the only place where a comparable quantity and quality of materials for my project exist) cannot be overstated.”

— **Ilya Slavutskiy** (History, Rutgers University-New Brunswick)
2023 Ukrainian Studies Dissertation Research Grant Recipient

Support the future of the field and [make a donation today!](#)

For 2024, we have launched a fundraising campaign to support two research grant programs:

Ukrainian Studies Dissertation
Research Grant

Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality
Studies Dissertation Research Grant

ICCEES

XI WORLD CONGRESS

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON 21-25 JULY 2025



XI WORLD CONGRESS 21-25 JULY UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

'Disruption'

The International Council for Central and East European Studies (ICCEES) is proud to announce that its upcoming XI World Congress will be hosted by University College London around the theme of "disruption". The regions covered by ICCEES are currently navigating a period of profound

change and rupture, particularly in the aftermath of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Recent events have shown the need to disrupt conventional approaches to thinking about, studying, and researching these regions – their histories, cultures, languages, politics, economics, infrastructures, and societies. Place-specific knowledge is as vital as ever in understanding how local and regional processes interact with transregional and global dynamics. At the same time, the need to reassess our methodologies, assumptions, and perspectives has never been more urgent. It is against this backdrop of transformation that we invite scholars, researchers, and practitioners to engage in conversations that push the boundaries of conventional understandings of past events and contemporary developments.

Hosted by University College London (UCL), an institution synonymous with disruptive thinking since its establishment in 1826, and the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES), whose mission is to promote multidisciplinary, critical area studies, the ICCEES 2025 World Congress will provide an ideal setting for a conference centring on the idea of disruption. SSEES is the UK's largest institution for research and teaching on Central, Eastern, and South-East Europe, the Baltics, Russia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. The School is home to one of the world's largest concentrations of academic staff devoted to the study of this broad cluster of regions, with some 80 academics engaging in teaching and research in the fields of politics, sociology, economics, business, history, languages, literature, and culture, all underpinned by a commitment to language-based, critical area studies.

ICCEES welcomes paper, panel, and roundtable proposals with an area-specific focus as well as positioned within disciplinary and interdisciplinary frameworks. The conference especially welcomes the participation of postgraduate research students and early career scholars.

The submission platform is now open. For information regarding registration fees and available travel grants/stipends please visit www.iccees2025.org

We are grateful to ASEEEES for their support of the hybrid setup of the Congress and for the contribution to our travel grant scheme.



SSEES (Photo: Mary Hinkley, Copyright UCL Digital Media)



University College London (Photos: Mary Hinkley, Copyright UCL Digital Media)

Consortium for the Study of AI and Language in Slavic (C-SAILS)

Slavic Studies Scholars Launch New AI and Language Research Consortium

Recent developments in Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) have been met in higher education with both enthusiasm and trepidation. For instructors of world languages, literatures, and cultures, these technological advances present certain existential challenges. How can GenAI tools be utilized to the greatest benefit for our students' learning processes? And how do we make a compelling case for the continued importance of human instructors of language, literature, and culture as we move through this new technological revolution? The answers to these questions, whether you are an AI enthusiast or an AI skeptic, can only be found through active engagement with GenAI tools and research that investigates their benefits and drawbacks for learning and teaching.



In response to these research needs and the growing interest in GenAI among instructors and researchers in our field, the **Consortium for the Study of AI and Language in Slavic (C-SAILS)** held its inaugural meeting in late April of this year and continues to welcome new members. The group's mission is to investigate the affordances and limitations of AI in language learning and teaching and to facilitate collaborative, cross-institutional research on the impact of AI on language acquisition, literary studies, and student outcomes in the field of Slavic and Eurasian Studies. The group also aims to provide a forum for practical discussions and demonstrations of AI use in the classroom and will expand its scope based on the changing needs and interests of its members as the Consortium grows.

Instructors and researchers interested in joining C-SAILS can [sign up here](#) to receive an invitation to future meetings, including the upcoming meeting (via Zoom) in early August 2024.

For more information, please contact Molly Blasing (mtblasing@uky.edu) and Kit Pribble (pribblek@wfu.edu).

ASEEES First Book Subvention

ASEEES has dedicated \$10,000 per year for subvention of individually authored first books. Multiple awards will be made, with funds paid directly to the press.

Deadline: September 1

aseees.org/award/first-book-subvention-program

Member News

Fiona Bell received a 2024 [Kinsey Institute Scholars of Sexology Fellowship](#) from the Kinsey Institute at Indiana University Bloomington.

Nicholas Breyfogle (History) and **Alexander Burry** (Slavic and East European Languages and Cultures) were [promoted to Professor](#) and **Mara Frazier** (Special Collections and Area Studies) was promoted to Associate Professor with Tenure at The Ohio State University.

Michael Brinley was [appointed Assistant Professor of History](#) at Princeton University.

Brian Fairley was awarded the [2023 Ab Imperio Award for best dissertation chapter](#) for “Dissected Listening: A Media History of Georgian Polyphony” (New York University, 2023).

Mirela Ivanova published [Inventing Slavonic: Cultures of Writing Between Rome and Constantinople](#) with Oxford University Press.

Michael Katz was [awarded an honorary doctorate of humane letters](#) by Middlebury College.

Colleen M. Moore (History) was [promoted to Associate Professor with Tenure](#) at James Madison University.

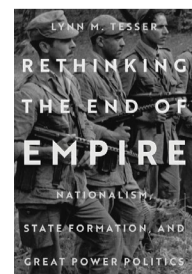
Stephan Rindlisbacher and Alun Thomas were awarded the [2023 Ab Imperio Award for best article](#) for “Paths Not Taken: How Did Nomadism Affect Border-Making during National Delimitation in Central Asia?,” *Ab Imperio* 24, no. 2 (2023): 117–141. **Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky** received Special Mention for “Letters from the Ottoman Empire: Migration from the Caucasus and Russia’s Pan-Islamic Panic,” *Slavic Review* 82, no. 2 (2023): 311–333.

Sunnie Rucker-Chang has been appointed the next [Kenneth E. Naylor Professor of South Slavic Linguistics](#) at Ohio State University.

Oscar Sanchez-Sibony was awarded the [2023 Ab Imperio Award for best book](#) for *The Soviet Union and the Construction of the Global Market: Energy and the Ascent of Finance in Cold War Europe, 1964–1971* (Cambridge University Press, 2023).

Lynn Tesser published [Rethinking the End of Empire: Nationalism, State Formation, and Great Power Politics](#) with Stanford University Press.

Taylor Zajicek was awarded the [2024 Oxford University Press USA Dissertation Prize in International History](#) from the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations for “Black Sea, Cold War: An Environmental History of the Black Sea Region, 1930-2005.”



Regional Affiliate News

2024 Student Essay Prize Winners

Midwest Slavic Association

Undergraduate: **Sophie Papp** (The Ohio State University), “The danger comes from men’: Homophobia, Misogyny, and Ableism in Country of the Deaf”

Graduate: **Mikhail Svirin** (Miami University), “Counter-Monuments, Counter-Narratives: Grassroots Commemoration of Shuttle Traders in Post-Soviet Space”

Northwest Regional Conference for Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies

Miriam Pollock (University College London), “When Urban Sustainability Fails: Drawbacks to a Collaborative Governance Approach as Illustrated by the Case of Norilsk, Russia”

Northeast Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies Conference

Ekaterina Kokovikhina (New York University), “Disco Moves in the Late Soviet Latvia: Contradictions of the ‘Relative Abroad’”

Central Slavic Conference

Natalia Kovyliaeva (University of Tartu), “Between Horror and Hope: Feminist Anti-War Resistance Strategies and Tactics in and Outside of Putin’s Russia.”

Institutional Member News

Pushkin House awarded the [2024 Pushkin House Book Prize](#) to Elena Kostyuchenko for *I Love Russia: Reporting from a Lost Country* (The Bodley Head, 2023), translated by Ilona Yazhbin Chavasse and Bela Shayevich.

FELLOWSHIPS FOR RESEARCH ABROAD

Title VIII Research Fellowships:

Funded by the U.S. Department of State’s Program for Research and Training on Eastern Europe and the Independent States of the Former Soviet Union (Title VIII), the American Councils Research Scholar Program provides full support for U.S. graduate students, faculty, and independent scholars seeking to conduct in-country, independent research for three to nine months throughout Eurasia, and Eastern Europe. For a full list of countries and to apply, visit:

researchabroad.americancouncils.org

Deadline: October 1, 2024

