

When Race Is a Language and Empire Is a Context

MARINA MOGILNER

The essay considers a twofold question: Why, until recently, has our field remained so reluctant to engage with racial epistemology, and what higher form of understanding does “race” offer to students of Eurasia? The answer to the first part of the question is located in the divergence between the “imperial” and “modernity” paradigms in Eurasian studies. With regard to the second part of the question, the essay suggests viewing “race” as one of the languages of self-reflection and modernization in the imperial space. It concludes that the discovery of “race” becomes tantamount to the rediscovery of Eurasia as an imperial space—irregularly hierarchical and heterogeneous, characterized by entangled exceptionalism and a constant renegotiation of differences, as well as the realignment of principles of belonging, subjectivities, and networks of solidarity.

Key words: race, empire, modernity, Foucault, authenticity, nationalism

A Moment of Reckoning: Transcending Bias, Engaging Race and Racial Formations in Slavic and East European Studies

SUNNIE RUCKER-CHANG AND CHELSI WEST OHUERI

Race and racial formations and categories define global systems of power and are not bound by history or culture. Nevertheless, with few noted exceptions, race as a category of analysis has largely been rejected and rendered inapplicable within Slavic, east European, and Eurasian Studies. This unwillingness to expand categories of critical analysis has created a void in our area and field of study, shaping a false sense of racelessness. Without the inclusion of race critical theories into our classrooms and scholarship, our students are left with minimal tools to address difference and social exclusion. In this article, we turn to critical perspectives to highlight some ways that race is being meaningfully incorporated into scholarship about the region. We illustrate why engagement with race and racialization is helpful for analysis, urgent, and necessary. Finally, we also address how our field can better prepare students as they engage these subjects.

Key words: Bias, Race, Racialization, Southeast Europe, Whiteness

The Invisibility of Race in Sociological Research on Contemporary Russia: A Decolonial Intervention

MARINA YUSUPOVA

This essay provides a critical decolonial intervention into the prevalent state of racial exceptionalism in mainstream sociological research on contemporary Russia. Following critical race theory’s understanding of race as relationally constituted and rooted in discourses of Europeanness, modernity, and civilization, the essay shows that race is highly prevalent but unacknowledged in sociological studies of Russia. It is argued that dismissing race as analytically irrelevant in Russia seriously limits the

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sociological ability to explain social inequalities, engage with current global challenges and inadvertently gives racism new legitimacy. Drawing on postcolonial and decolonial critiques of sociology as a form of knowledge production, the essay points towards some ways of decolonizing sociological research concerning the inequalities associated with race and ethnicity in Russia and overcoming racial exceptionalism.

Reading Race in Slavic Studies Scholarship through a Digital Lens

KATHERINE M. H. REISCHL, SUSAN GRUNEWALD, ANDREW JANCO,
HILAH KOHEN, AND ANTONINA PUCHKOVSKAIA

This article asks, on a systemic scale, how published articles in “Slavic Studies” do and do not reflect critically on race and other cultural constructions of identity. Digital Humanities methods provide a digital bird’s-eye view of over 100,000 scholarly texts, primarily in Russian and English, through three computational approaches: frequency analysis, topic modeling, and perspectival modeling. The authors demonstrate that there is an absence of critical tools for conducting research about race in our field, despite a prevalence of racialized subject matter. These results offer a data-based refutation of the common misconception that race is outside the scholarly concerns of our field. Rather, the data affirms student accounts of the field’s inadequacies in grappling with race and racism, both in historical objects of study and in the world that scholars navigate. Digital methods also locate scholarship inside and outside Slavic Studies that offers positive guidance for future work.

When Pushkin’s Blackness Was In Vogue: Rediscovering the Racialization of Russia’s Preeminent Poet and His Descendants

KOREY GARIBALDI AND WANG EMILY

This essay investigates interconnections between the novelist, Henry James, Ivan Turgenev, and Aleksandr Pushkin and identifies the racial subtext of these associations. Several scholars have connected Pushkin and James. But none of this scholarship has speculated on whether it was the poet’s African heritage that was at the root of hidden connections between these authors. Moreover, though most scholarship on Pushkin’s reception in the United States focuses on twentieth-century African American literature, his African heritage was publicized much earlier. In fact, nineteenth-century commentators on both sides of the Atlantic frequently discussed Pushkin’s racial heritage as a canonical European writer of African descent. This essay recovers how Henry James used Pushkin’s daughter, the morganatic Countess Merenberg, as a model for the racially ambiguous “morganatic” Baroness Münster in *The Europeans* (1878). A decade later, James seems to have invoked the Countess Merenberg once more in his rewriting of Pushkin’s “The Queen of Spades” (1833) in *The Aspern Papers* (1888). While James publicly attributed Byron and Shelley as inspirations, the discourse surrounding the African heritage of Pushkin and his heirs helps explain why the novelist minimized and erased the racial lineage at the center of *The Europeans* and *The Aspern Papers*.

Race-ing the Russian Nineteenth Century

EDYTA M. BOJANOWSKA

The article offers a methodological reflection on the practical work of reading race in Russian literary texts, especially from the nineteenth century. It makes four key

arguments. First, “racialization,” in the sense of an interactive process, is a more productive lens than an essentially static concept of race. Second, race is not only, and not always, a question of perception or meaning-making, but also ideology. Third, the concept of race typically engages notions of class, gender, and sexuality, an intersectionality that merits particular attention. Fourth, critiquing race can be productively furthered by paying attention to anxieties and insecurities that underlie racial hierarchies and biases, which can be revealed through readings against the grain. As we cast new light on Russia’s engagement with race, it is essential that the culture of the Russian nineteenth-century become part of this reappraisal.

Keywords: Race, empire, nineteenth-century Russian culture, ideology, class, gender, intersectionality

Exotic Aesthetics: Representations of Blackness in Nineteenth-Century Russian Painting

MARIA TAROUTINA

This article focuses on a series of both iconic and little-known paintings, examining the diverse ways in which some of Russia’s most prominent nineteenth-century artists such as Karl Briullov, Vasilii Polenov, and Il’ia Repin depicted Black subjects. Through a combination of close formal readings and broader analyses of the specific contexts in which these images were produced, the article probes a number of complex and interconnected topics such as Russian exceptionalism, imperialist aesthetics, and nationalist versus cosmopolitan pictorial sensibilities. The article likewise pays close attention to the conceptual and material continuities and discontinuities between the first and second halves of the nineteenth century and considers how these paintings might have contributed to the evolving Russian discourses on race, nationality, and empire in the “long” nineteenth century.

A Sphinx upon the Dnieper: Black Modernism and the Yiddish Translation of Race

ELI ROSENBLATT

This article examines the context and content of the 1936 Soviet Yiddish publication of *Neger-Dichtung in Amerike*, which remains to this day the most extensive anthology of African-Diasporic poetry in Yiddish translation. The collection included a critical introduction and translations of nearly one hundred individual poems by twenty-nine poets, both men and women, from across the United States and the Caribbean. This article examines the anthology’s position amongst different notions of “the folk” in Soviet Yiddish folkloristics and the relationship of these ideas to Yiddish-language discourse about race and racism, the writings of James Weldon Johnson and W.E.B. Du Bois, with whom Magidoff corresponded, and the Yiddish modernist poetry of Shmuel Halkin, who edited the book series in which the anthology appears. When placed alongside Du Bois’s and others’ visits to the Soviet Union in the 1930s, the appearance of African-American and Caribbean poetry in Yiddish translation shows how a transatlantic Jewish avant-garde interpreted and embedded itself within Soviet-African-American cultural exchange in the interwar years. Magidoff served as a Soviet correspondent for NBC and the Associated Press from 1935. He was accused of espionage and expelled from the USSR in 1948.

Racism, the Highest Stage of Anti-Communism

ROSSEN DJAGALOV

There are many and different types of racism in contemporary Russia: institutional racism, far-right racism, everyday (*bytovoi*) racism, and a fourth kind to which this essay will be devoted, the racism of the liberal intelligentsia. Russian liberal media's reaction to the BLM protests of 2020 has offered abundant material for the study of its social base, main tropes, and underlying logic. This article attempts to historicize it, locating its origins in the anti-Soviet pro-western dissidence of the stagnation era and illustrating its workings through some statements made by Joseph Brodsky and his milieu. Furthermore, the article identifies the intersection of two main ideas from which this racism emerges. In the first place, this is Cold-War rejection of real or perceived Soviet alliances with newly decolonized countries of Africa and Asia or with African Americans during the Civil Rights era. In the second place, this is dissident civilizational hierarchies that placed the west at the top and saw the east or the south as a backward space best avoided.

A Cold War Cold Case: What Huldah Clark Can Teach Us About Teaching Soviet History

BRIGID O'KEEFE

This short article reconstructs the forgotten story of Huldah Clark, a Black American teenager who studied in Moscow in the years 1961–1964 on a scholarship offered her by Nikita Khrushchev. It deploys her story to explore the complexities of Cold War racial politics and how ordinary people mobilized the superpowers' competing slogans in creative ways. It shows how ordinary Black Americans found hope and even tangible support in Khrushchev's Soviet Union as they struggled for civil rights at home and sought avenues for asserting Black power and anti-racist protest on the global stage. Whereas the historiography on Black American sojourners to the USSR has focused on the interwar period, this article shows how the avowed Soviet commitment to racial equality and global anti-racism still had the power to inspire ordinary Black Americans in their struggle against Jim Crow and in their global pursuit of Black liberation.

Rereading Russia through the Contact Zone of HBCUs

KELLY KNICKMEIER CUMMINGS AND B. AMARILIS LUGO DE FABRITZ

This article examines contributions Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have made and continue to make to the interdisciplinary fabric of Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies (REEES). HBCUs are a uniquely American phenomenon and reminders of the history of enslavement and segregation in the United States. But HBCUs are also vibrant intellectual contact zones, which Mary Louise Pratt defines as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power.” Contact zones result in intercultural competencies, multilingualism, new methodologies, and critical reassessments. Faculty and alumni have described the extent to which HBCUs function as cultural and discursive sanctuaries. As such, HBCUs are places where legally, culturally, and racially segregated communities develop(ed) alternate ways to engage, experience, and (re)envision “Russia.”

The Afterlife of Soviet Russia’s “Refusal to be White”: A Du Boisian Lens on Post-Soviet Russian-US Relations

CHRISTY MONET

In this essay I address a gap in the study of contemporary Russia-US relations. I argue that the concepts of race and racialization are active in these relations and available for analysis, but they continue to receive very little attention as compared to concepts of democratization and securitization. My main intervention is the introduction of “race-conscious reading” as a methodological approach relevant not only to the narrow sphere of Russia-US relations, but to the field of Slavic studies more broadly. Presenting the concept of “race-conscious reading” first, I then sketch out a research agenda that extends W.E.B. Du Bois’s race-conscious observation of Soviet Russia’s “refusal to be white” into the contemporary era. My goal in sketching out this research agenda is to show how a race-conscious approach to reading post-Soviet Russia-US relations can bring fresh perspectives to long-standing questions—Is Russia part of the west?—and generate new questions of urgent relevance: Is there a difference between American and Russian conceptions of “whiteness,” and how and when do they clash?

Subjects, Subjectivities, and Slavic Studies: A Design for Anti-Racist Pedagogy

ERIN KATHERINE KRAFFT

Folding together elements of anti-oppressive pedagogies and collaborative curriculum design, this contribution illuminates several possibilities for practicing anti-racism in the classroom while working with texts from Russian literature and history that do not necessarily center race. The identities and experiences of our students and ourselves, as well as the diverse forces that act upon us, are as important in the classroom as the texts in front of us, because our identities and experiences form the lens through which we interpret and interrogate. By framing this dynamic as a pedagogical tool, this contribution demonstrates that by engaging with Russian history and literature, students may gain critical perspectives on hierarchies of race, class, gender, and nation in their own lives and contexts while simultaneously discovering histories that they would not otherwise encounter, thereby broadening and deepening their sense of both global and national landscapes and their own positions and movements within them.

The Contingent Problem: A Counter-Narrative on Race and Class in the Field of Slavic Studies

LOUIS HOWARD PORTER

This essay explores the unique challenge the proliferation of adjunct labor in higher education poses to efforts at eliminating racial bias and promoting diversity in our field. Relying on published research and personal experience, I argue that the pervasive exploitation of contingent labor makes academic careers, particularly in far-flung fields such as Slavic studies, unattractive to many college graduates from the Black community, a large portion of which considers education a meritocratic means of escaping intergenerational poverty. Because the economic, social, and cultural inequalities at play in determining who obtains a tenure-track job fly in the face of this myth of meritocracy so fundamental to historic Black hopes for socioeconomic

mobility, I call for a reckoning with adjunctification as a critical first step to addressing racial bias and ensuring inclusivity in our field.

Kalmyk DPs and the Narration of Displacement in Post-World War II Europe

ELVIRA CHURYUMOVA AND EDWARD C. HOLLAND

Based on interview files and archival materials, this paper reconstructs the experiences of Kalmyk displaced persons (DPs) against the backdrop of the shifting international refugee regime in post-World War II Europe. Kalmyks came to western Europe in two waves: at the conclusion of the Russian Civil War in 1920 and during the German retreat from the Soviet Union in 1943–44. After the war, the majority of Kalmyks were repatriated; those who remained in Europe primarily ended up in DP camps in the American zone of western Germany. This paper details the strategies used by Kalmyk DPs to avoid repatriation to the Soviet Union and eventually secure resettlement in the United States in 1951. Individual histories offer insight into how the Kalmyks as a group made themselves legible to the international community in light of a changing geopolitical environment and evolving racial regimes.

The Man Who Struck the Judge with a Fly Swatter: Justice and Performance in Contemporary Kazakhstan

NARI SHELEKPAYEV

This article investigates a series of events that occurred in Quaragandy, a post-industrial city in northern Kazakhstan in the mid-2010s. These events led to Evgenii Tankov, an established lawyer, hitting a judge, Arai Alshynbekov, with a fly swatter during a routine court session. This research demonstrates that Tankov's act was not a flash of rage or a real attempt to harm the judge. It was, instead, a calculated strategy in which a political statement was concealed if not sheathed within the form of a grotesque performance. Tankov knew he would be judged for disrespect towards the court: and yet he used his subsequent trial to demonstrate the moral and intellectual impasse of Kazakhstan's judicial system. This article claims that as a performance, Tankov's case is useful because it allows one to re-think the genre itself. Moreover, it argues that the form of the trial per se became a genre of political agency in contemporary Kazakhstan. As an example of political praxis, this case allows one to question the ways in which non-political actors produce and affirm their identities and create new forms of political agency in a reality in which political behavior is bounded by a postsocialist authoritarian state.

