

CLRS W4190

Race, Ethnicity, and Narrative in the Russian/Soviet Empire

Spring 2012
TR 10:35-11:50
306 Milbank Hall
Fulfills Global Core (CC); LIT, CUL, ICORE/MORE (BC)

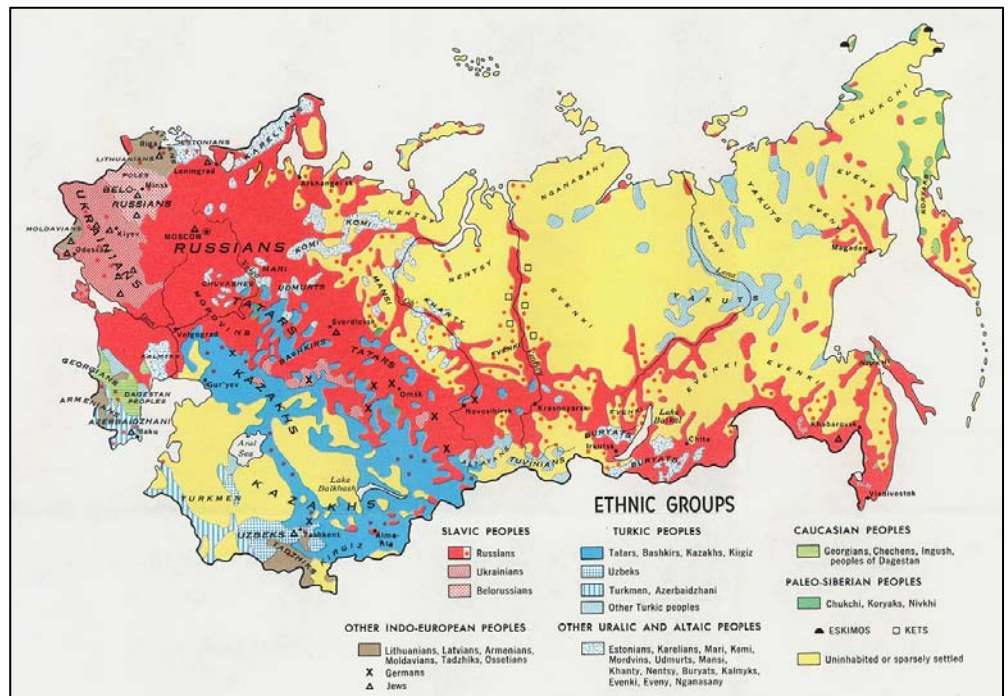
Prof. Rebecca Stanton
226 Milbank, x4-3313
rstanton@barnard.edu
Office hours: T 4-6 and by appt.

Course Description

Rarely is it mentioned that the country we call Russia – a gigantic land mass stretching all the way from Finland to the Sea of Japan – is, even today, not really a “nation” but an “empire,” encompassing peoples of many different ethnic, racial, and linguistic backgrounds. According to a 2005 report by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, more than 170 distinct ethnic groups live with the borders of the Russian Federation’s 6,592,800 square miles. For most of the past two centuries, this empire was even larger and more diverse; as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, it spanned 8,649,538 square miles, including several countries that today are independent. While, inside the Soviet Union, this diversity was often celebrated as proof of the “friendship of peoples” underlying the Communist state, the voices, literatures and cultures of the empire’s ethnic and national minorities were selectively silenced even within the USSR, and remain virtually unknown outside its borders.

In this course we will read works by authors representing Chechen, Circassian, Daghestani, Abkhaz, Bashkir, Tuvan, Chuvash, Chukchi, and many other ethnic minorities on the territory of modern Russia, as well as works by writers from former Russian and Soviet colonies such as Georgia, Armenia, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. These texts, often eclipsed in the cultural imagination by the long shadow of the Russian literary canon, not only include numerous treasures of world literature, but offer valuable glimpses into the lives of an ethnically, geographically, and culturally diverse range of peoples. Organized around three major regions—the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Far East—our primary texts will be read through several “lenses,” as we attempt to account for their rhetorical and poetic effects while also paying due attention to the historical and political contexts in which literary discourses surrounding ethnic, cultural, and racial, particularity develop, and the conditions under which they are marketed to (or suppressed from) different groups of readers.

The readings for each region are anchored by one or more “classics” by the canonical authors Chingiz Aitmatov, Yuri Rytkheu, and Fazil Iskander, which will be read alongside lesser-known literary texts—some officially celebrated, others from the “censored” category. Where appropriate, the primary readings will be supplemented with short selections from the scholarly literature on colonialism, human rights, theories of race and ethnicity, Russian/Soviet nationality policies, and the politics of literacy under Communism. All readings are provided in English.



Student Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- Identify points of similarity and difference among the varied cultures gathered under the aegis of the Russian Empire/Soviet Union, and discuss the relationship of the ethnic parts to the imperial whole.
- Apply techniques of close reading and literary analysis to the comparative study of cultures and ethnic identities, as these are constructed and offered for consumption in works of literature.
- Analyze a literary text, identifying the significant poetic or rhetorical strategies it employs.
- Compare, contrast, and/or synthesize ideas presented in disparate texts, with appropriate attention to historical, political, and literary context, in an extended comparative essay.

Assessment

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|------------------------------------|------------|
| ▪ Blog postings* | 25% |
| ▪ Class participation | 10% |
| ▪ Paper(s)† | 40% |
| ▪ Final exam (non-cumulative)..... | 25% |

* All students will be expected to write one front-page post for [the course blog](#) and (in other weeks) comment on the blog at least once a week, for a total of **15** contributions over the course of the semester. Comments on the blog may respond to study questions posted by the instructor, or to comments posted by other students, or they may raise a question or an analytical point of the student's own choosing. Regardless of inspiration, they should address specific features of the text(s) under discussion, citing relevant examples and/or page numbers as appropriate. Postings should be 100-200 words long, and will be used to jump-start and enrich our in-class discussion.

† One 10-page paper (due on April 23) or two 5-page papers (one due on February 27, the other on April 23). Topics should be agreed with me in advance. Graduate students should plan to write the longer final paper; undergraduates may choose to write one longer paper or two shorter ones. Papers will be graded according to a three-part rubric available on Courseworks, which assesses each paper in terms of three main criteria: Argument (the quality of the logical reasoning set out in the essay), Evidence (the quality and depth of the research and/or textual evidence supporting the argument), and Readability (style, grammar, mechanics, usage, and elegance).

Textbooks

The following books have been ordered into Book Culture, on 112th St. between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue, and placed on reserve at the Barnard library. Other readings (including shorter texts, and those that are out of print) will be supplied via e-reserves on Courseworks; these are marked with an asterisk in the schedule.

German Sadūlaev, *I Am a Chechen!* (Harvill Secker; ISBN 978-1846552632)
 Chingiz Aitmatov, *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years* (Indiana; ISBN 978-0253204820)
 Chingiz Aitmatov, *Jamilia* (Telegram; ISBN 978-1846590320)
 Hamid Ismailov, *The Railway* (Random House; ISBN 978-0099466130)
 Kurban Said, *Ali and Nino: A Love Story* (Anchor; ISBN 978-0385720403)
 Yuri Rytkheu, *A Dream in Polar Fog* (Archipelago; ISBN 978-0977857616)
 Yuri Rytkheu, *The Chukchi Bible* (Archipelago; ISBN 978-0981987316)

Schedule

Date	Topics and readings
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January

Tu 17	Introduction: Race, ethnicity, nationality and literature in the Russian and Soviet empires.
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I. The Caucasus: a hotly contested territory

Th 19	*Mikhail Lermontov (Russian), <i>Bela</i>
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- Tu 24 Kurban Said (origin uncertain), *Ali and Nino*, pp.3-153
 Th 26 *Ali and Nino*, pp 154-275
 Tu 31 *Stories and poems by Georgian, Armenian, and Azeri writers

February

- Th 2 *Fazil Iskander (Abkhazian), "Sandro of Chegem," "Prince Oldenburgsky," "The Story of the Prayer Tree" (from *Sandro of Chegem*)
 Tu 7 *Iskander, "Belshazzar's Feasts," "Tali, Miracle of Chegem" (from *Sandro of Chegem*)

Interlude: Beyond the Empire (A Dialogue between Subcontinents)

- Th 9 *Afanasii Nikitin (Russian), *Journey Beyond Three Seas*
 Tu 14 Film: *Journey Beyond Three Seas* (Bollywood/Mosfilm co-production, 1957)
Special Event: Talk by Anindita Banerjee, Professor of Comparative Literature, Cornell
 "The Journey of the 'Russian Columbus' from Victorian England to Bollywood" (6pm, Sulzberger Parlor)

(back to the Caucasus)

- Th 16 *Alim Keshokov (Kabardino-Balkaria), "The View From White Mountain"; Tembot Kerashev (Adyghei), "A Tale of the Three Most Important Things for an Adyghei"; Khalimat Bairamukova (Karachai-Cherkessia), "Airan"; Khizgil Avshumalov (Dagestan), "Shimi Derbendi Moves in."
 Tu 21 German Sadūlaev (Chechen), *I Am a Chechen!*, pp. 1-122
 Th 23 *I Am a Chechen!*, pp. 123-243

II. Central Asia

- Tu 28 Chingiz Aitmatov (Kirghiz), *Jamilia*

March

- Th 1 Hamid Ismailov (Uzbek), *The Railway*, pp. 1-87
 Tu 6 *The Railway*, pp. 88-201
 Th 8 *The Railway*, pp. 202-275
 Tu 20 *Stories and poems by Chuvash, Udmurt, Mansi, and Komi writers
 Th 22 Aitmatov, *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years*, pp. 9-120
 Tu 27 *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years*, pp. 121-282
 Th 29 *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years*, pp. 283-352

April**III. The "Russian" Far East**

- Tu 3 *Stories and poems by Kalmyk, Tuvan, Buryat, and Bashkir writers
 Th 5 Yuri Rytkheu (Chukchi), *The Chukchi Bible*, pp. 3-125
 Tu 10 *The Chukchi Bible*, pp. 129-232
 Th 12 *The Chukchi Bible*, pp. 233-362
 Tu 17 *Stories and poems by Nivkh, Udeghe, Yukagir, and Yupik writers
 Th 19 Yuri Rytkheu, *A Dream in Polar Fog*, pp. 7-99
 Tu 24 *A Dream in Polar Fog*, pp. 100-237
 Th 26 *A Dream in Polar Fog*, pp. 238-337

- May 8 Final exam, 9am-noon**