

Cultural Construction in the Soviet Empire

HIS 315, Fall 2020

Mon/Weds 2:20-4:05, Burnett 015

<http://culturalconstructioninthesovietempiref20.theleahgoldman.com/>

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Office Hours: Weds 10-12, Thurs 2:45-3:45 **All office hours meetings will take place on Zoom*

Office: Old Main 204C

Course Description

This course explores how Soviet leaders used culture to legitimize their authority and create a unified sense of identity across the vast territory they inherited from Imperial Russia. As an explicitly anti-imperialist regime, the Soviet Union faced a dilemma in asserting its governance over non-Russian lands after the revolution. Its leaders sought to mark their difference from the previous imperial regime and gain the loyalty of its diverse peoples by employing the rhetoric of national liberation and advancement. They supported the flourishing of national self-expression, yet their methods could be destructive and even violent. Their project also rested on a Eurocentric notion of “modernity” that denied the value of non-Western ways of life. We will begin by investigating the development of Soviet nationalities policy, including questions of how to define a “nation” and what constitutes acceptable “national” expression. Then, we will explore clashes between tradition and modernization in Soviet Central Asia. Finally, we will focus on specific cultural genres, including literature and theater, music, and architecture, and explore efforts to bring these cultural products into conformity with Stalinist norms. Through close engagement with primary and secondary sources, we will discover the Soviet state’s motives for transforming minority cultures and methods for doing so. Further, we will learn how minorities resisted or repurposed Soviet nationalities policy to serve their own ends.

Course Requirements

Modality: We are using the **hybrid model** this semester. On **MONDAYS** we will meet **face to face** in our classroom. On **WEDNESDAYS** we will meet **online via Zoom**. This will probably not be comfortable at first, but we will work together to get it right. If we have to shift to remote learning at some point, this will help us make a smoother transition. I’m new at this, too! Please feel free to share your thoughts on how it’s going and how we can improve.

Attendance: Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I do not want anyone to feel pressured to come to class if they are unwell! We are going to use the honor system this semester. I will take attendance, but I won’t count it against you if you are absent. This is a discussion-based class, and it will work best if everyone attends as often as they can. If you miss a day, you can make up for it by writing an additional short post on the blog. If you are too ill to do that, please email me when you are able, and we will find a solution. Our number one priority this semester is taking care of ourselves and each other. In that spirit, I have two special requirements:

- When we meet face to face, **you must wear a mask**
- When we meet online, **you must keep your camera on**

Let’s think like a community, so we can have as safe and fulfilling an experience possible.

Participation: Whether we are meeting face to face or online, everyone must contribute to the discussion. You should do the reading before class on the day it is assigned and be prepared to discuss it. Bring the assigned materials with you, along with your notes. Even more important, bring your thoughts, ideas, and questions, and be prepared to share them with your colleagues. If you feel anxious about speaking in front of a group, please contact me during the first week so we can work out a plan for your success. All comments must be respectful, constructive, and to the point. Ad hominem attacks and rambling digressions have no place in my classroom.

Blog Posts: Starting in Week 2, the class will work together to create a blog, which will help shape our intellectual journey. There are two types of posts you can make. A **conversation starter** is a new post. It should be at least one paragraph long, include a properly cited quotation from one of the sources, and pose a discussion question (one that requires analysis, not a yes/no question). A **response** is a nested post that you write in the “Comment” box under an existing post. It should be at least three sentences long and respond to the post in a substantive way. You may give an answer, pose a related question, disagree, share a meme, etc.

You must post on the blog for every class! You must post EIGHT conversation starters over the semester. When you do not write a conversation starter, you should write a response.

- Conversation Starters are due at 10pm the night before each class. Responses may be posted before class or up to 24 hours after class.
- Pro Tip: The reading assignments are heavy in this class, and you might not always get to everything. Make sure you read one part carefully, so you can write about it.
- If you had to miss class and want to make up points: You can write one extra response, but you must respond to someone else’s thread.

Discussion Leadership: Starting in Week 3, each student will take **two turns** leading our discussion. You should plan to use the blog to get things started. You may use your own post or anyone else’s that you find interesting. It is a good idea to come up with 2-3 additional questions to keep the conversation going.

Midterm Project: You and a partner will take on the role of a Soviet officials making a report to the Central Committee on an element of Soviet culture. You may choose an object (such as a traditional craft or item of clothing), a genre (such as literature, music, or cuisine), an institution (such as a school or union), or a policy. Your task is to discuss the origins of this cultural product or policy, explain how it works, and make an argument for how it strengthens Soviet power. You will create a **page on our class blog**, where you are welcome to incorporate images, audio, and video alongside text, and you will give a **10-minute presentation** in class to your colleagues, who will ask you follow-up questions in their role as members of the Central Committee. This is a flexible assignment, so please be creative!

Final Paper: You will write a **3000-word**, independently researched paper on a topic of your choice related to the theme of this class. We will go over requirements for the papers and writing strategies in class. We will also visit the Library to acquaint ourselves with available resources and research methods and devote a day of class to rough draft peer critiques. This assignment has three components:

- 1) A **Proposal** (thesis statement, abstract, annotated bibliography) (Week 10)
- 2) A **Rough Draft** (Week 12)
- 3) A **Final Draft** (Finals Week)

You **must** meet with me twice during this project. In our first meeting, we'll discuss your research question, sources, and writing strategy. In our second meeting, we'll discuss your proposal. Don't skip these meetings! They help ensure that you're on the path to success and prevent you from having to do extra work. If you would like to meet more often or discuss your rough draft one-on-one, I am happy to do so.

Academic Integrity: My policy on **plagiarism** is simple: **Don't do it!** Plagiarism is a very serious offence, which can destroy your academic career and professional prospects. If you plagiarize, rest assured that I will catch you, and **you will automatically fail my class**. In addition, W&J upholds academic honesty in the College community by pursuing cases of academic misconduct. Please read the College's Academic Honesty Policy here: <https://wiki.washjeff.edu/display/CATALOG2018/Academic+Honesty+Policy> . You are responsible for abiding by this policy. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or about the Academic Dishonesty Policy, please talk to me before your work is due!

Resources for Student Success: This is a challenging course, and there are many helpful resources available to you on campus:

- **PAL (Peer Assisted Learning) Tutors**, located on the ground floor of Alex Hall, can help you with all stages of the writing process. You don't need to make an appointment. Just drop by Sunday -Thursday, 7-9pm. You can check their schedule and other information here: <https://www.washjeff.edu/pal>
- **Information and Technology Services** can help you with hardware, software, and more. Visit the Help Desk in Technology Center Room 121 and learn more here: <https://wiki.washjeff.edu/display/IT/Information+and+Technology+Services>
- **Clark Library** can help you with books, information, research help, and more. We will also spend one day of class familiarizing ourselves with library resources.
- **Office of International Student Initiatives** provides a variety of support services for international students: <https://www.washjeff.edu/international-student-services>
- **Office of Diversity & Leadership Initiatives** offers programs that work to strengthen cultural awareness, diversity education, and leadership development: <https://www.washjeff.edu/diversity>

Grading

Participation	10%
Blog Posts	15%
Discussion Leadership	15%
Midterm Project	20%
Final Paper	40% (10% Proposal, 10% Rough draft + Peer critique, 20% Final draft)

Course Policies

Office Hours: I welcome you drop in on my virtual office hours to discuss our class! I will be on Zoom Wednesdays 10-12 and Thursdays 2:45-3:45 unless otherwise noted. If you know you want to talk with me, you can make an appointment; otherwise, just drop in. If you have a conflict with my regular office hours, we can make an appointment for a different time.

Email: Please feel free to email me any time with questions about the class or to schedule an appointment for office hours. I will respond within 24 hours. You must SIGN your email with

your name. I won't write back if I can't figure out who you are. In the professional world, you will be expected to communicate via formal emails, so this is good practice for the future. **You are responsible for checking your W&J email at least once per day.** Email is my only way to communicate with you outside of class, and I need to be able to reach you.

Technology: On face to face days, you may bring computers or tablets to class for taking notes and viewing pdfs. If you fool around online instead of paying attention, you are only failing yourself. It's up to you to take responsibility for your own learning process. However, if you use your device to distract your colleagues, I will make you to put it away for the rest of class.

On Zoom days, **you must keep your camera on.** Nonverbal cues are a big part of how people communicate, so we need to be able to see each other.

I will be recording our meetings to promote equity of access. These videos will be shared in a way that is password protected. They are *only for use of students enrolled in this class*. You may not post them online or share them with anyone else. Violating this policy will be treated as a break of W&J's Academic Honesty Policy (see above).

Cell Phones: Turn them off or set them to vibrate. Please do not take a call unless it is an emergency. If you must do so, leave the room quickly and quietly. You may not use your cell phone for course work. You may not use your phone for any reason in office hours.

Student Support and Accommodations: To serve our mission to promote academic excellence, W&J is committed to providing appropriate accommodations for students with documented physical, learning, and psychological disabilities. The College's goal is to make its programs and facilities available to all students so that students with disabilities can be integrated as completely as possible into the W&J community. Ensuring equal access for all students is a collaborative effort between the Director for Academic Success, students, and faculty. All participants have a role in making education accessible. It is your responsibility to self-identify to the Director for Academic Success as early as possible when accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids are services are needed and to seek information, counsel, and assistance as necessary. Once I have been informed of your approved accommodations, it is my responsibility to provide them in a timely manner. Please help me help you by letting me know about any documented disabilities as early as possible in the semester. For more information about how to obtain documentation, please contact the Director for Academic Success Richard Barber by email at rbarber@washjeff.edu, by phone at 724-223-6008, or on the ground floor of Clark Library. You can find more information here: <http://wiki.washjeff.edu/display/disabilitysupport>

Notice of Nondiscrimination: W&J does not discriminate on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, sex, religion, age, marital status, national origin, the presence of any physical or sensory disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or any other basis prohibited by applicable federal, state, and local laws, and has a firm commitment to promote the letter and spirit of all equal opportunity and civil rights laws. W&J is committed to creating an environment in which every student feels safe and empowered to learn, and I, too, am strongly committed to this goal. That doesn't mean we won't argue with each other in this class, sometimes intensely. We will do so often! But we will do so respectfully. To ensure that respect, I reserve the right to intervene as I deem necessary, while doing my utmost to safeguard your right to free speech. If something happens in class that upsets you or makes you feel unsafe, *please* come talk to me about it, or if you prefer, leave an anonymous note on my office door.

Course Materials

The following books are required for HIS 315 and are available for purchase or rental at the W&J Bookstore. You are welcome to purchase or rent your books elsewhere, but you are responsible for ensuring you have the **correct edition**. You can also find reserve copies in the Library. Shorter readings, links to **eBook** versions of required texts, and all other materials are available to you on the blog. Always bring the text under discussion to class.

Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Harvard University Press, 2005)

Mayhill Fowler, *Beau Monde on Empire's Edge: State and Stage in Soviet Ukraine* (University of Toronto Press, 2017)

Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Cornell University Press, 2003)

Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930-1966* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010)

Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, eds. *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford University Press, 2001)

Robert Weinberg, *Stalin's Forgotten Zion: Birobidzhan and the Making of a Soviet Jewish Homeland: An Illustrated History, 1928-1996* (University of California Press, 1998)

Course Schedule

Unit I: Creating the Soviet Empire

Week 1: Theories of Empire

Aug. 24:

What is an empire? What is a nation? What role does culture play in politics?

Aug. 26:

Terry Martin, "An Affirmative Action Empire: The Soviet Union as the Highest Form of Imperialism," *A State of Nations*, pp. 67-90

Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53:2 (Summer 1994), 414-452

Week 2: Categorizing the Nations

Aug. 31:

Francine Hirsch, "The Soviet Union as a Work-In-Progress: Ethnographers and the Category Nationality in the 1926, 1937 and 1939 Censuses," *Slavic Review* 56:2 (Summer 1997), pp. 251-278

Vladimir Lenin, "Lenin on the National Question (Speech at the All-Russian Navy Congress)"

Joseph Stalin, "The Political Tasks of the University of the Peoples of the East"

Sept. 2:

Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland*, Introduction, chapters 1-2

Week 3: Reconceptualizing the Western Borderlands

Sept. 7:

Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland*, chapters 3-5

Sept. 9:

Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland*, chapters 6-8

Week 4: Non-Territorial Nationalities

Sept. 14:

Robert Weinberg, *Stalin's Forgotten Zion: Birobidzhan and the Making of a Soviet Jewish Homeland*, pp.1-71, 82-85

Sept. 16: Library Day—Meet on Zoom with librarian extraordinaire Kelly Helm

Week 5:

Sept. 21:

Brigid O'Keeffe, *New Soviet Gypsies: Nationality, Performance, and Selfhood in the Early Soviet Union*, chapter 5 and Epilogue

UNIT II: Empire as Modernization

Sept. 23: Central Asia and Modernization

Adeeb Khalid, "Nationalizing the Revolution in Central Asia: The Transformation of Jadidism, 1917-1920," *A State of Nations*, pp. 145-162

Matt Payne, "The Forge of the Kazakh Proletariat? The Turksib, Nativization, and Industrialization during Stalin's First Five-Year Plan," *A State of Nations*, pp. 223-252

Week 6: Central Asia and Gender

Sept. 28:

Adrienne Edgar, "Portrait of Lenin: Carpets and National Culture in Soviet Turkmenistan," *Picturing Russia: Explorations in Visual Culture*, pp. 181-184 and Image 36.1
Film: *Turksib*

Sept. 30:

Doug Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia*, chapters 1-2

Week 7: Central Asia and Gender Continued

Oct. 5:

Doug Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia*, chapters 4-5

Oct. 7:

Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism*, chapters 4 and 6

"Jahon Obidova," *Russia's People of Empire: Life Stories from Eurasia, 1500 to the Present*, pp. 308-315

Week 8: Human Consequences

***Research Question Meetings this week!**

Oct. 12:

Mukhamet Shayakhmetov, *Silent Steppe: The Memoir of a Kazakh Nomad Under Stalin*, Introduction, Prologue, chapters 1-4, 8-9, 14-17

Oct. 14: Midterm Presentations

Unit III: Empire and Creativity

Week 9: Theater

Oct. 19:

Mayhill Fowler, *Beau Monde on Empire's Edge: State and Stage in Soviet Ukraine*, chapters 1-2

Oct. 21:

Mayhill Fowler, *Beau Monde on Empire's Edge: State and Stage in Soviet Ukraine*, chapter 3-4

Week 10: Theater Continued

***Proposals due 5pm, Sunday, October 18!**

Oct. 26:

Film: *The Twelve Chairs*

Oct. 28: Paper Proposal Meetings

Week 11: Music

Nov. 2:

Marina Frolova-Walker, "'National in Form, Socialist in Content': Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51:2 (Summer 1998), 331-371

Soviet National Music Playlist

Nov. 4: No class. Work on your rough drafts!

Week 12

***Rough Drafts due 5pm, Sunday, Nov. 1!**

Nov. 9: Rough Draft Peer Critique Day

Nov. 11:

Andy Nercessian, "National Identity, Cultural Policy and the Soviet Folk Ensemble in Armenia," *Soviet Music and Society under Lenin and Stalin*, 148-162

Michael Rouland, "A Nation Onstage: Music and the 1936 Festival of Kazak Arts," *Soviet Music and Society under Lenin and Stalin*, 181-208

Matthew O'Brien, "Uzeyir Hajibeyov and His Role in the Development of Musical Life in Azerbaidzhan," *Soviet Music and Society under Lenin and Stalin*, 209-227

Week 13: Architecture

Nov. 16:

Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930-1966*, chapters 2, 3, 6 (pp. 145-160)

Nov. 18:

Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930-1966*, chapters 6 (pp. 160-172), 7, 8

Wee 14

Nov. 23: Final Paper roundtable discussion

***Final Papers due at 10pm, on Thursday, December 3*
Good luck!!!**