



Whiteness, Racialization and (Post-)Soviet Pasts

Symposium

*Study Circle 5: “Racialization, Whiteness and Politics of Othering in Contemporary Europe”
Nordic Summer University (NSU)*

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Andreja Mesarič

RELIGION AND THE WHITENING OF EASTERN EUROPE: SLOVENIA'S CELEBRATION OF THE COLONIAL LEGACIES OF TRANSCONTINENTAL CATHOLIC MISSIONARY NETWORKS

The racialisation of Muslim refugees and migrants, and the tenuous inclusion of formerly Ottoman territories in the Balkans into symbolic geographies of Europe evidence the role played by religion in demarcating Europe as a space of whiteness. My paper focuses on the flipside of these process of exclusion, namely the role of Christianity in affirming Europeaness-as-whiteness, especially when it comes to marginal selves asserting their 'proper' place in Europe. It does this by exploring how a range of institutional actors in Slovenia engage with the legacies of 19th century Slovene overseas missionary activity. Recent anniversaries related to two Slovene Catholic missionaries active in Sudan and North America were marked by a series of events, exhibitions and publications organised by the Catholic Church and secular public institutions. This included the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, which holds indigenous objects collected by the missionaries. Although these missionaries were not direct agents of major colonial empires, their work envisioned as a civilising mission as well as their scholarly endeavours regarding indigenous customs and languages, and geographical exploration clearly implicate them in colonial power structures. Furthermore, missionary discourse disseminated through the Catholic press contributed to mid-19th century Slovenes beginning to see themselves as not only Christian but also as civilised, European and white. The recent revived interest in missionaries has not served as an opportunity to engage with Slovene implication in European overseas imperial expansion but instead applauds them as great men of religion, science and, crucially, the Slovene nation. I therefore argue that the celebration of 19th century missionaries serves the contemporary purpose of reasserting European civilisational superiority and whiteness as inherent components of Slovene nationalism. Although I use a case study approach, the paper has broader relevance for the Central and Eastern European context, with

a focus on how highlighting one's "national" achievements outside the European space serves to mediate one's relationship with the notion of Europe and to deflect one's own position of marginality structured by the coloniality of power permeating relationships between Europe's East and West.

Sonja Pietiläinen

POLITICAL GEOGRAPHIES OF THE FAR-RIGHT: SPACE, NATURE AND WHITE NATIONALISM

Colonial, racial, and patriarchal ideas and hierarchies have played a fundamental role in constructing the imaginary geographies of European nationalism, and these logics still play a crucial role in defining the terms of belonging, inclusion, and exclusion in contemporary Europe. During the last decade, the new wave of far-right parties, movements and individuals have transformed the political space of the West by advancing even more openly racist and xenophobic politics, the hardening of borders, restoring social hierarchies, and purification of spaces and the national body politic from the 'unwanted' others, such as racialised and sexual minorities. Ultrationalism, the myth of national rebirth, and securitisation of the imaginary idea of European whiteness form the core of the far-right's politics. As such, the far-right's ethno-nationalist, authoritarian and racist politics offer an analytically and politically important possibility to study how racialisation, national identity construction and whiteness are intertwined in contemporary Europe. At the symposium, I will present my research, where I have investigated how the far-right's racialised and gendered notions of national identity are produced through discourses and practices regarding nature and the natural environment. The relationship between environmentalism and racism is not a surprise. Indeed, our modern conceptions of nature are formulated in parallel with the ideas of European civilisation, whiteness and modern rationality. Furthermore, these conceptions are woven into racial ideas of biological difference and nature is being used to legitimate social and sexual hierarchies and norms of human conduct. I will present two cases from my PhD research. In the first case, I discuss how Russia's far-right mobilises sentiments of national unity in the context of their politics on the Arctic, and yet, how the nation is defined in exclusive and illiberal terms as the members of the nation are defined basing on class, race, and gender lines. In the second case I discuss how the far-right in Finland has intertwined nature with their fascist and nationalist politics and drawing on Malthusianism, German romanticism, and ecofascism is promoting solutions for ecological crises, such as border walls, population control of the 'undesired', and revitalizing blood-and-soil connections between 'the nation' and 'nature'.

Matan Flum

THE ISRAELI SHIKUN: HOUSING DISCOURSE IN SUPPORT OF NATION-BUILDING

This research aims to critically analyse and theoretically explore post-socialist Israeli society and politics by delving into the Israeli housing block ('shikun'). By studying spatial, political and cultural aspects of housing provision, this research explores the methods that the shikun's repetitive materiality and form use to constitute the spatial logic of 'militarised whiteness'. This

research further aims to examine East/West geopolitics through the dialogical exchange between architecture and 'whiteness'. I seek to address these issues by examining the political and cultural discourse in Israel regarding the housing blocks during two periods: 1948-1961 and 1977-1992. Israel was established in 1948 mainly by Jews immigrants from the Soviet Union, that constituted a socialist economic regime. In 1977, after the right-wing party "Herut" won the elections, Israel went through massive neo-liberal processes. Since 1989 approximately 1 million Jews from former Soviet Union immigrated to Israel, most of them were settled in housing blocks. The study hypothesizes that Israel's perception of its location in the Middle-East has long been mirrored as a certain perspective in Israeli political culture, which has aimed to differentiate between Israel as a 'Western'- 'European' society and the Arab states around it (Shohat, 1988; Kimmerling, 2000). This perspective in turn greatly influenced the discourse around the shikun and shaped Israel's spatial design and policy. Methodologically, I will use a qualitative research method – the Cultural Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (Gavriely-Nuri, 2013). I will create a corpus from varied cultural representations, and analyse it entirely.

Kitija Mirončuka

ABSENT HISTORY OF DECOLONIALIZATION – FROM FANON TO CASE OF LATVIA

The paper discusses the experience of Sovietization in Latvia during the 20th century. It outlines how the Soviet Union affected the lived experience of Latvia and whether it holds similarities with the colonization and decolonization, as described by French West-Indian thinker Frantz Fanon. Although Sovietization relates to a process of Occupation and Frantz Fanon focuses mainly on the Algerian Revolution and decolonization of colonial law, I argue, the experience of Latvia during Sovietization and the downfall of the USSR holds two main similarities with colonial and decolonial processes: the problem of defining the identity of nation and discrimination towards the others. In a way, I am trying to show how my Ph.D. topic on racism as structural violence in colonialization can apply to a broader frame, arguing that there are many racisms and each of them share something common and yet different.

Jolita Buzaitytė-Kašalynienė

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD JUVENILE DELINQUENCY IN LITHUANIA: RACIALIZATION AND OTHERING OF YOUNG OFFENDERS

Results of the national study carried out in summer 2021 will be discussed in this presentation. Attitudes toward juvenile delinquents remain essential to investigate, given their potential to influence policy within the criminal justice system. Therefore, our research aimed to examine the Lithuanian population's attitudes toward juvenile delinquents and applicable intervention and crime prevention; whether the public supports measures oriented to help, rehabilitation or punishment, and the repression of juvenile delinquents. The method: 1500 computer or tablet assisted personal interviews with 18+ Lithuanian residents. It was employed multistage probabilistic sampling using geographical stratification by residence size. The Attitudes measurement is built on the idea that the internal structure of an attitude consists of three elements: affect; cognition; and behaviour (Fabrigar, MacDonald, Wegener, 2005). Facts based on registered crime statistics and stereotypes (17 items) were included, e.g. crimes committed

by juveniles are becoming more severe and more violent at a younger age and is increasing every year, including beliefs about the misbehaviour of youths from ethnic minorities (Roma, Russians, Poles) and refugee families. Results: The 'others' who are different from the general population are more often accused for doing wrongs, e. g. juveniles living in various care institutions, growing up in families at risk. Also, youth from refugee families and Roma ethnic minority were blamed much more often compared with youth from Polish and Russian minorities: accordingly, 30.3%, 44.2% and 9.7%, 11.0% of the total sample. The results show that discrimination in Lithuanian society based on race is stronger than on ethnicity. Demographic characteristics of the population with discriminatory beliefs; and their links with punitive attitudes towards juvenile offenders will be discussed in the presentation. These results connect our study with the topic of the Symposium on two aspects as it represents research on post-Soviet society and discriminating attitudes.

Gražina Rapolienė

LONELY POST-TOTALITARIAN SOCIETIES – LOW TRUST SOCIETIES?

Cross-national studies in Europe reveal sharp regional differences in the prevalence of loneliness among older adults, with the highest prevalence in Eastern European countries. The totalitarian regimes undermined people's trust, potentially leading to higher loneliness prevalence. Using data from the ESS (2012), we estimate a path model with trust in people, trust in the system, and social engagement included as latent variables and one dichotomous outcome (lonely or not). We control for age, gender, health limitations, marital status, income adequacy, and education. The results reveal that loneliness is partly constructed by the social-cultural and historical-political characteristics of the countries, as the higher prevalence of loneliness in the Eastern-European post-totalitarian countries can be linked to a low level of trust in other people through social disengagement.

Veronika Hermann

VICTIMS OR WARRIORS? SELF-COLONIZATION OF EASTERN EUROPE IN CONTEMPORARY TELEVISION SERIES

There has been an increasing number of locally developed but globally distributed Eastern European quality television series during the last decade. They seem to have constituted an imagined version of Eastern Europe which feeds Western audiences' expectations and features backwardness, bureaucratic chaos and substance abuse issues. They illustrate television's capacity to address issues of collective memory and amnesia and its role in structuring 'otherness'. As Larry Wolff famously argued, Eastern Europe is a product of the culturally hegemonic process of Eastern Europe's orientalizing (Wolff 1994). The hierarchic relations between East and West has reached its peak during the Cold War and the division – sustained and symbolized by the Iron Curtain – is still intact, if not more severe than before. This division is a result of an internalized geopolitical hierarchy and patterns of self-colonization, a 'hegemony without domination.' (Kiossev 1995) Self-colonialization operates with stereotypes and self-verification and often produces racist and nationalist discourses. It evokes the popular idea that Eastern Europe is more racist than the West and promotes 'permanently unfixed

Eastern European national identities in a relationship to Western Europe that has been characterized as colonial and selforientalizing.' (Dasgupta-Imre 2021) Since my main research interests are Eastern European identity politics and Cold War popular culture, my aim is to present how strategies of self-colonialization – e.g. promoting capitalist individualism instead of socialist collectivism by highlighting private moral compassion – produces narrative structures in television series by analyzing the following: Hackerville (HBO-TNT, 2018), 1983 (Netflix, 2018), Golden Life (HBO, 2015-2018) and Chernobyl (HBO-Sky, 2019). The latter will serve as a counter example since it was created by a Western production company. All of these products are concerned with the region's troubled past, using state socialist regimes as contemporary allegories of alarming political tendencies such as white nationalism, right-wing populism and xenophobia. Another paradox on the production side is how unabashedly authoritarian governments provide tax cuts and cheap below-the-cut staff in order to serve global streaming companies. In my presentation I intend to keep this production paradox in count as well.

Vilius Mačkinis

WHERE/WHAT/WHY IS EASTERN EUROPE? IN NEED OF THE NEW CONCEPTS TO DEFINE EUROPEAN EAST

I've been teaching a course titled "Inventing Eastern Europe: Explorations of the European East" to international group of students for 10 years. The course encourages students to engage and critically assess various identifications and conceptualisations of Eastern Europe. For the past couple years I've noticed a growing dissatisfaction between students due to misalignment of their own experience and stories we tell about European East. Majority of them have been born years after Soviet Union collapsed, making the whole soviet experience non relatable. They struggle to fit the whole Eastern European region/post-communist countries under one encompassing definition as their own (traveling, living, meeting people) encounters with the region do not match the identifications we are using. The economic or political aspects so important in the past are becoming not unifying, but differentiating factors, allowing for several "Eastern Europes" withing the region. However, the tools allowing for differentiation within the area or discussions suggesting the new identification entirely are missing. The still prevalent narratives rely mostly on labels of (former) backwardness and cultural otherness. Numerous popular culture cliches (from Marvel 'fictional country of Sokovia to SNL's sketch placing Baltic countries at losers table) are perpetuating the old image. In addition, the images of "Easternness" are reused by the Eastern European countries themselves as they appeal to western audiences and can be sold (think of vampire tours in Romania or Eurovision song contest with babushkas and "Wild dances"). Academic narratives, questioning the old divisions and labels are lacking as well and academic overhaul is needed. Though our personal stories and experiences do not fit academic discourses we still have several high ranking scholarly journals perpetuating the old and contested identification of the region with their titles "Post- Soviet Affairs", "Communist and Post-Communist Studies" or "Post-Communist Economies". Relying on historical narratives and popular culture, and reflecting on my own teaching experience I want to engage in a discussion about how we could (if) change the current story about Eastern Europe and the new labels we could offer.

Linda Lapina

LOOKING FOR THE SMELL OF LOST HYACINTHS

Performance paper

My paper at the workshop will draw on a performance that I will conduct at a conference in Paris in March 2022 dedicated to the material cultures of 1990s from a Post-Soviet perspective. The performance will evolve around the embodied memories of hyacinths grown by my grandfather. In the paper presented at the symposium, I want to reflect on the process of (re-)animating the traces of these hyacinths, with a focus on temporality, affectivity and differentiated whiteness. In the last years of the Soviet era, my grandfather and father traveled from Ķegums, a small town in Latvia to the central market of St Petersburg, then called Leningrad, each spring. There, they sold fresh spring flowers, mostly tulips and hyacinths. My father, who also worked as a caretaker at a kindergarten and as a scientific assistant at the university, earned a third of his annual income on these trips. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, in the early 1990s, my grandfather continued growing flowers in wooden boxes in the veranda of his apartment in Ķegums where he worked as an engineer in the hydroelectric power plant. These flowers were sold in the market in Rīga, until inflation, monetary reform and all-year-round import of flowers made flower growing bad business. Each February and March, the smell of hyacinths enveloped the whole apartment whenever the veranda door opened. Around 7 years old, I used to sneak in and linger in the fragrant air despite the cold seeping through the poorly isolated glass windows. The performance paper will analyse my quest for these fragrant home-grown hyacinths. What role does my positionality as a white inter-EU migrant-researcher play in my attempts to trace the smell of my grandfather's hyacinths? What role do the "disposable" supermarket hyacinths in tiny plastic pots on my windowsill play in remembering the flowers grown in wooden boxes to be sold in markets in Soviet Russia; and in my family's and my own (hi)stories of migration? How can intergenerational sensory relationships with plants shed light on migration and racialization?

Wiola Ujazdowska

GOOD AND BAD BODIES. IMAGES OF MIGRANT WORKERS FROM POST-SOVIET REGION IN NORDIC AREA

Padraic Kenney in his book "Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists" describing a strikes in Poznański Factory in Łódź that took places from 1945 till 1949 mention a incident when 27 women staged fainting during a strike. This event is a base to the reflection onto a body of the Other - worker and women. A bold decision of using fainting as tool of a protest which seems to be replaying idea of the revolutionary mass. Mass that is hysterical. Worker body needs to fulfill same tasks everyday needs to be healthy and strong, masculine or female nothing in between. Hysteria and fainting is anarchy. I would like analyze based on public narration and images in the media reception of workers from post-soviet area and those transgressive bodies that doesn't fit -queer or disable. Bodies that "are fainting" in the public imaginary of post-soviet worker and do they exist and where? As well I would like to present examples of strong division of gender roles and connected to it economical aspects in the narration of migrant workers from previous East block. in presentation i will also show artworks that I created regarding topic of bodies, gender and performative aspect of work.

Daria Tarkhova

BORDERSCAPES BETWEEN ‘THE EAST’ AND ‘THE WEST’: RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE URBAN PUBLIC SPACES AND CROSSBORDER IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Russian-speakers is the largest foreign-language group in Finland. It is important to note the diversity of the group. Nevertheless, most Russian-speakers have emigrated from a Post-Soviet space. Arguably, that is more than crossing a border between nation-states, but crossing a border between ‘the East’ and ‘the West’. As nation-state is based on exclusion, migrants are intruders that are expected to adapt to a hegemonic ‘master identity’, a ‘Western identity’. Assumably, migration from ‘the East’ to ‘the West’ transforms selfidentification because of the prescribed integration process linked with their tactics of adaptation. Whiteness is a factor of many (not all) Russian-speakers, that gives privilege in the integration process compared to migrants of colour. However, since the migrant has entered from outside the hegemonic ‘West’, their claim to the ‘Western identity’ is always lacking. Therefore, Russian-speakers exist on the edge of ‘Westernness’, and ‘whiteness’ (Krivonos, 2019). A border is much more than a physical entity. Borders need to be constantly recreated in peoples’ minds in order to sustain the nation-state. For instance, border aesthetics study how borders are brought in everyday lives through visual and audial experiences (Schimanski & Wolfe, 2017). Border aesthetics can create ‘pockets’ or ‘bubbles’ of somewhat ‘Other’ spaces. For instance, urban public spaces, such as stores, restaurants, social centres and events, can be dedicated to a culture different from the dominant one. Therefore, such spaces for Russian-speakers in Finland not only create a foreign-language space inside a Finnish-language nation, they create a small ‘East’ within ‘the West’. Therefore, the identity construction of users of such spaces can reveal the complexity of both cross-border identity construction as well as the everyday reconstruction of ‘the East’ and ‘the West’.

Kilian Schmidt

IDENTITY NARRATIVES OF POST-SOVIET MIGRANT COMMUNITIES IN GERMANY: EXPLORING THE INTERSECTIONS OF RACISM AND MIGRATION

The research project I am currently conducting and intend to present here is meant as a decolonial examination of racism and whiteness in contemporary German ‘post-migrational’ society, differentiating nuances of migrationizing and racializing structures and their necessary interplay and overlap, thus seeking to highlight the complexity of identity narratives and negotiation within the flattening tendencies of dominant culture. Focus is placed onto the so called “(Spät-)Aussiedler*innen”, a group of migrants from the former Soviet Union with German ethnic backgrounds, whose history is characterized by stark (forced) mobility and exclusion from various directions. Part of their migration and ‘inclusion’ into German society is based on a narrativization ‘by law’ of a German identity and thus whiteness. However, while the relationship of post-Soviet identities/bodies with whiteness is a highly contested and ambivalent one, the promise of ‘Germanness’ has never been open for everyone within this community that is comprised of various ethnicities and embodiments. Given the materialization

of race 'onto the surface/skin' within a racist and colonial system that privileges the visual, migration and an always 'being outside' is ascribed to those bodies that are not read as German/white (enough). A thorough insight into the workings of racism within the context of migration is necessary to attend to the various and conflicting interpellations these "(Spät-)Aussiedler*innen" of Color are facing. This research project consists of a group discussion with biographical and argumentative elements between three people including myself as I do identify myself within the spectrum described here. The participants can be described as 'experts' through their own experiences and scientific/activist engagements. This research aims to engage with the quotidian resistant practices, politics of representation and (counter-)discourses of/within this community and asks, where mattering happens: what is/becomes important and materializes (or not) within the space created by the discussion, its recordings/transcription and the interpretative work conducted as a close reading at the end.

Špela Drovšek Zorko

WHAT'S 'POSTSOCIALIST 'ABOUT EASTERN EUROPEANS? UNTANGLING MIGRANT NARRATIVES OF WHITENESS, EASTERN EUROPEANNESS, AND (POST)SOCIALISM IN THE UK

Studies of racialisation and whiteness in relation to migrants from the East of Europe in Western and Northern European countries, including the UK, have proliferated in recent years, contributing to academic debates on global whiteness, the race-migration nexus, and context-specific studies of 'race'. While research on how recent milestones such as the 2004 EU expansion or the Brexit referendum have mobilised new or re-animated existing forms of exclusion and visibility of 'Eastern European migrants 'provides a valuable lens on changing contexts of racialisation, there is a dearth of research on whether and how Cold War histories of state socialism play into these contemporary dynamics. Based on interview-based and ethnographic research conducted with migrants from a range of countries in Central and Eastern Europe living in the UK, including from post-Soviet contexts, this work-in-progress presentation teases out some of the ways that migrants refer to socialism or postsocialism when making sense of their positionalities vis-à-vis the wider British society. Rather than privileging the (post)socialist past as an analytical frame above all others, it seeks connections between the 'postness 'of Central and Eastern European migrants and the particular racialised dynamics of the present, including intra-European hierarchies and the legacies of the British past inherent in political projects such as Brexit.