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Periodization as Decolonization

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Abstract

This piece argues that a greater understanding of the role of regions in Russian history could lead to different ways of writing Russian history that need not center the state. By including a wider range of intellectual and political actors from the regions, as well as tracing the long connections between them and Ukrainian thinkers, such a history would make regions subjects rather than simply objects. The original post and the significant number of responses provide an important snapshot of the thinking of the field of Russian history about questions related to the territorial integrity of Russia and Ukraine. The responses also deal with related topics concerning the role of indigenous peoples and the processes of colonization in the narrative of Russian history.

Keywords

regional history – regionalism – local history – Siberian regionalism – Crimea – colonialism – War in Ukraine (whatever phrase you use)

Blog Post by Susan Smith-Peter*

My earlier blog, "How the Field was Colonized," argued that Russian history in the United States was founded as an outpost of the V.O. Kliuchevskii school. As a result, the field inherited a blind spot regarding Ukraine, which was only sporadically integrated into the narrative and was seen as an object, not a subject, of history. This blog focuses on how the same way of looking at Russian history has also obscured the Russian regions, primarily Siberia, but also the Russian North and the Urals, which are largely ethnically Russian but outside the boundaries of European Russia. As a result, these important regions that experimented in alternate forms of government have been less studied and,

* This blog post, and the comments that follow, were originally posted on H-Russia between January 4, 2023 and January 24, 2023 at the following link: https://networks.h-net.org/node/10000/blog/decolonizing-russian-studies/12148542/periodization-decolonization. This has been reproduced with permission of H-Russia, the original author, and all commenters and in accordance to a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.

therefore, today relatively few scholars can speak to the history of federalism and other issues that might contribute to centrifugal forces in the Russian Federation. This blog post aims at outlining an alternate periodization of Russian history that integrates the experience of the Russian regions as part of the process of decolonizing our field.

Decolonization also requires admitting that Russia was a colonizing power. Ukrainian scholars such as Myroslav Shkandrij have argued this for some time now, but the understanding has not become widespread in Western societies.[1] This leads to major opportunities for Putin's Russia to continue to claim the anti-colonial mantle of fighting against the imperialist West. The unwillingness to see Russia as colonial means ignoring Ukrainian scholars who have been arguing this for a long time.

Colonization, however, was coupled with provincialization, as George Grabowicz argued.[2] In both cases, it meant that the center tried to downplay and sometimes to silence the colonized and the provincial, even as the latter groups resisted these attempts. In the nineteenth century, Ukraine, like the rest of the Russian Empire outside the two capitals, was termed provincial. The provincial meant a zone of territory that was inauthentic and could not speak for itself; it was first introduced by the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin in the 1830s and was quickly taken up by other authors.[3] Russian literature largely took a view from the center and denied meaning to the provinces, even as the provinces eagerly chronicled their history, economics, and hopes for the future.[4] The desire to silence Ukrainian voices has not been part of the discussion as to why this line of thought evolved, but such an approach could contribute to a greater understanding of the political uses of the provincial.

The call for decolonization should not lead to calls for the silencing of non-Ukrainian scholars, however, as has happened on Twitter. Those who have gained expertise on Russia should be able to use that expertise to critique it. Calling for silence at a moment where qualified agencies and scholars have shown that Russia is committing a genocide is not morally justifiable. This is the very moment when critical speech is the only honorable act.

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1 Myroslav Shkandrij, *Russia and Ukraine: Literature and the Discourse of Empire from Napoleonic to Postcolonial Times* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001).

2 George Grabowicz, "Ukrainian Studies: Framing the Contexts," *Slavic Review* 54, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 674–690.

3 Anne Lounsbery, *Life is Elsewhere: Symbolic Geography in the Russian Provinces, 1800–1917* (Cornell: Northern Illinois University Press, 2019).

4 Susan Smith-Peter, *Imagining Russian Regions: Subnational Identity and Civil Society in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

With a different periodization, historians could ask different questions. Such questions would not once again recreate a narrative where the development of the centralized, authoritarian Russian state is the inevitable background. Instead, it could lead to new ways of interpreting Russian history that do not assume the necessity of empire.

This sketch draws upon my earlier work on the six waves of Russian regionalism from 1830 to 2000. Unless specifically noted otherwise, material is taken from this source.[5] I would welcome other suggestions for rethinking periodization of earlier times from those who are experts in those eras.

The 1830s was a time when followers of Romanticism throughout Europe discovered peasants, folk songs and folklore as important sources for art and history. This also led to the discovery of the regions as a source for these things. In Russia, what I call the era of small reforms led to the creation of a series of institutions to discover the provinces everywhere other than Siberia. The provincial statistical committees and newspapers worked together to uncover local chronicles, folklore, archaeology, history and economics and, in the process, created provincial identity where before there often had been merely administrative divisions.

Ukrainian historian Mykola Kostomarov, influenced by Romanticism, focused on federalism and a freedom-loving Southern Rus' (read: Ukraine) that was characterized by federalism and had its golden age in Kyivan Rus and Cossack Ukraine. In contrast, Northern Rus' (Russia) was "stiff, formal, and intolerant."[6] Using Ukrainian folk songs, Kostomarov argued these two nationalities made up the Russian nation; it is possible that Russian censorship would allow him to go no further.

By the 1860s, Siberia had gained the newspapers denied to them earlier, which were used to spread a sense of Siberian distinctiveness. In particular, a group of Siberian intellectuals, influenced by Kostomarov and regionalist historians, began to imagine a history of Siberia separate from Russia. In 1863, these intellectuals wrote a proclamation, "To the Patriots of Siberia," which

5 Susan Smith-Peter, "The Six Waves of Russian Regionalism in European Context, 1830–2000," in Edith W. Clowes, Gisela Erbsloh and Ani Kokobobo, eds. *Russia's Regional Identities: The Power of the Provinces*, (London: Routledge, 2018), 15–43. Other important works include: Mark von Hagen, "Federalisms and Pan-movements: Re-imagining Empire," in Jane Burbank, Mark von Hagen, and Anatolyi Remnev, eds. *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700–1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 494–510 and E. Boltunova and W. Sunderland, eds. *Regiony Rossiiskoi imperii: Identichnost', reprezentatsiia, (na)znachenie* (Moscow: NLO, 2021).

6 Thomas Prymak, "Mykola Kostomarov as a Historian," in Thomas Sanders, ed. *The Historiography of Imperial Russia: The Profession and Writing of History in a Multinational State* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 332–343.

celebrated Siberia's population of rebels and exiles and stated: "Siberia may be the first Slavic nation to achieve the great popular deed – a democratic republic." It ended with, "Long live the Republic of the United States of Siberia! Long live Siberian freedom – from the Urals to the shores of the Pacific Ocean!"[7] Once discovered, the proclamation led to the intellectuals being exiled away from Siberia. There was a parallel school of provincialist historians in Russia who saw Kyivan Rus as a federalist state and criticized Muscovy for destroying the freedoms of the medieval republic of Novgorod.[8]

In 1875, an important debate took place between A.S. Gatsiskii and D.L. Mordovtsev. Gatsiskii was a zemstvo activist and thinker from Nizhnii Novgorod who should be more studied. Mordovtsev compared eight different regional literatures, including that of Nizhnii and Kyiv, but ended by saying that all the effort would come to nothing, as centralization in literature, as in life, was irresistible. Gatsiskii disagreed, saying that the provinces were Russia's future.[9] He grounded his calls for a politically engaged local population in history, arguing that the provinces could provide an alternate historiography, with the end of the early freedoms of Novgorod being reborn in the work of the zemstvo, the local elected body that gave locals the chance to do collective medical and educational work. For example, instead of focusing on 1612 as a moment when the Russians defeated the Poles, he argued that it showed the ability of the provincial population to organize itself to defend the state and their own interests.[10] The state that was saved, however, was not just the autocracy but one that had the seeds of local self-government that, he hoped, could lead to a different form of governance for Russia. Similar interests were found among Siberian regionalists as well.

By the 1880s, Siberian regionalists, whose experience as exiles in the Russian North had sharpened their understanding of regionalism, were writing more theoretically about it. They began to use the term regionalism (*oblastnichestvo*) rather than the looser terms such as Siberian patriot used earlier. Siberian regionalist Nikolai Iadrintsev wrote his magnum opus, *Siberia as a Colony* (1882), which argued that Siberia was a "poorly run colony" and that the racial mixing that he and other Siberian regionalists had earlier decried actually

7 Smith-Peter, "Six Waves," 22.

8 Smith-Peter, "Six Waves," 23.

9 Catherine Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province: Economy, Society, and Civilization in Nineteenth-Century Nizhnii Novgorod* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), 210–212.

10 A. Gatsiskii, "Suzdal'sko-Nizhegorodskoe torzhestvo nashikh dnei," *Nizhegorodskie gubernskie vedomosti*, 1885, n. 20: 2.

was creating a new Siberian type that was better fitted for the environment and geography.[11]

However, one of the weaknesses of the Siberian regionalists was that they were unable to reach the masses of Siberians. This became a particularly serious issue with the rise of political parties after the 1905 Revolution. While the regionalists' party reached professionals, Siberian peasants and workers flocked to the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs). As a result, when there came an opportunity to create an autonomous Siberia at the First Siberian Regional Conference August 2–9, 1917, regionalists were in a weak position compared to the SRs. During the course of the Civil War, they sided with the Whites in order to outflank the SRs. This disunity led to the defeat of Siberia and the reinstatement of central control by the Bolsheviks.[12] This led to the collapse of the Siberian regionalists as a group and as a continuing influence.

Somewhat surprisingly, the 1920s were what I call the regionalist feast in the USSR and in Europe. A variety of exciting new approaches to the study of the regions emerged. They were all cultural in their focus, however, and served to shift the focus of the regional imagination from political parties to house museums and commemorations. This was the emergence of *kraevedenie*, a state-sponsored approach to the regions that amplified the cultural approach.[13] This era was cut short by the "academicians' trial" of 1930–31, a fabricated criminal case targeting the Academy of Sciences, which ended the new approaches to the region.[14]

After a long hiatus due to Stalinism and its aftereffects, a new approach to regionalism in the Soviet Union emerged only in the 1970s, but it echoed the cultural line of the 1920s. In the 1990s, there were attempts at creating a new political regionalism, but they were cut short by Yeltsin and especially by Putin. At the present moment, there is a new upsurge in regionalist movements in Siberia due to the Russian war in Ukraine, but these have received only sporadic attention by Western media and scholars. This is partly due to the lack of

11 David Rainbow, "Racial 'Degeneration' and Siberian Regionalism in the Late Imperial Period," in David Rainbow, ed. *Ideologies of Race: Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union in Global Context* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), 179–207.

12 Tanja Penter and Ivan Sablin, "Soviet Federalism from Below: The Soviet Republics of Odessa and the Russian Far East, 1917–1918," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 11, no. 1 (January 2020): 40–52; Jonathan D. Smele, *Civil War in Siberia: The Anti-Bolshevik Government of Admiral Kolchak* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Smith-Peter, "Six Waves," 24–25.

13 Emily D. Johnson, *How St. Petersburg Learned to Study Itself: The Russian Idea of* Kraevedenie (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2006).

14 A.N. Akin'shin, "Sud'ba kraevedov (konets 20-kh – nachalo 30-kh gg.)," *Voprosy istorii* 1992, no. 6–7.

attention to this topic among historians. The longer history has been obscured by the tendency of the field to look at things from the center's point of view.

What would Russian history look like if a survey of Russian intellectual thought included the works of Siberian regionalists as well as the usual suspects? If a history of the state included regionalists in Siberia and the Russian North as its interlocutors? If the work of Gatsiskii to create a more democratic narrative was found in textbooks?[15] Such a history would question assumptions that a central, imperial state has been the only viable form for Russia.

Response of Alexander Hill

I'm not known for being 'trendy' and so may be missing something here, but I get the impression that Dr Smith-Peter is keen in a relatively subtle way to jump on the current anti-Russian state bandwagon that has seen some Western academics all but call for the dismemberment of Russia (see for example David Marples here, https://www.e-ir.info/2022/12/22/opinion-the-rationale-of-russias-special-military-operation-in-ukraine/). Taking her approach, the vast majority of states in the world can be seen as colonizers – with Britain (led by the English) colonizing the Scottish and Welsh and Irish, France colonizing Burgundy and Gascony and so forth. If seeing Siberia as colonized by Russia, then one might even go as far as to suggest that the north of England was colonized by a dominant south – and to what end? Aren't we all aware that Russia (as the United States and others) were and often still are empires that gradually incorporated (often forcibly) territories and their populations – with varying degrees of ethnic similarity to the core? Haven't we all been teaching the growth of modern Russia through Muscovy and the incorporation of territory such as Siberia for decades? I'm intrigued about what exactly is new here that enhancing our understanding of history rather than using history for contemporary political ends? I am genuinely open to being enlightened on this.

Response of Susan Smith-Peter

I would like to thank Dr. Hill for his comment and for the link to the article, which I found quite interesting, although I didn't see an argument for

15 A possible approach toward this is found in Catherine Evtuhov, David Goldfrank, Lindsey Hughes and Richard Stites, *A History of Russia: Peoples, Legends, Events, Forces* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), although Gatsiskii is not specifically mentioned.

the dismemberment of Russia in it, unless being expelled from Crimea and the occupied territories would be included under this, which I hope is not Dr. Hill's intention.

It is true that the majority of states in Europe certainly were colonizers and that there are regions within those states that are presently attempting to gain independence. Dr. Hill mentions that England colonized Scotland. This is true and there is a Scottish movement for independence that is quite well known. The North of England is an interesting case as well. Many have made the argument that the North of England has been colonized and there have been some agitation for greater representation and some rumblings of independence. Frank Musgrove, in *The North of England: A History from the Roman Times to the Present* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990) goes so far to say that the North of England would be independent if it were not for the need to defend against Scotland. An interesting edited volume that brings together work on centrifugal forces in the North of England, the Basque Country and elsewhere is: Neville Kirk, ed. *Northern Identities: Historical Interpretations of 'the North' and 'Northernness'* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000). In France, there has been a Provencal cultural and political movement known as the Feligrige, which culminated in uprisings in Marseilles and Lyon that were put down at the same time as the Paris Commune.[16]

The study of regionalism, including its political manifestations, is well-developed in British, French and Spanish history. In particular, the study of Catalonia and its independence movement is a major part of Spanish history.[17] One scholar has argued that the EU has encouraged the development of regional political parties and regionalism more broadly, as the costs of exit are lower.[18]

However, study of regions in Russia has lagged behind, with some important exceptions I mention in my blog. We are aware that Siberia was conquered, yes, but far fewer are aware that Siberian regionalists have, since the 1860s, with notable gaps, argued against the terms of that incorporation. It seems that this field of study is indeed new to many people, including to Dr. Hill. As historians, it is important that we be open to the study of new fields of history as they arise, even (especially?) if they challenge our assumptions.

16 Louis Greenberg, *Sisters of Liberty: Marseille, Lyon, Paris and the Reaction to a Centralized State, 1868–1871* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

17 A useful introduction to this history is: Xose M. Nunez Seixa and Eric Storm, eds. *Regionalism and Modern Europe: Identity Construction and Movements from 1890 to the Present Day*. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

18 Seth Jolly, *The European Union and the Rise of Regionalist Parties* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).

Response of Sean Pollock

How stimulating it is to read Smith-Peter's "Periodization as Decolonization," which builds on her outstanding work on Russian regionalism. In my response to Smith-Peter's earlier post, "How the Field Was Colonized," I emphasized the complexity of scholars' influence in the development of the field of Russian historical studies in the United States.[19] My intent was to suggest that it would be helpful to know much more about the evolution of Karpovich's thinking concerning Russian empire and non-Russian peoples' place in it, who trained whom, and how the trainees viewed both their own and their advisers' contributions to the field. Jonathan Daly, among others, has shown that this can be done with profit. It's good to see some history departments posting on their web sites the names of doctoral students and their advisers. (If a central data base comprising this information already exists, please advise.) This comment is offered in response to the author's invitation to suggest other ways of "rethinking periodization of earlier times" in the study of the territorialization of Russian empire.

Diverse agents of Russian empire have been studying the territories and peoples claimed by Russia's monarchs since the seventeen century. The following focuses on the Caucasus in the eighteenth century, which is the part of the empire I know best, and is meant to suggest ways to approach the subject of territorial and ethnographic study of the Russian Empire prior to the 1830s, about which there exists a vast literature.

In 1768, with Russia preparing for war against the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Academy of Sciences launched a series of expeditions to explore the empire of Catherine II (r. 1762–96). Initially conceived as part of an international effort to observe the 1769 transit of Venus, the Academy expeditions of 1768–74 were unprecedented in ambition and scope. Unlike the ad hoc explorers and untrained mapmakers of Muscovite times, the academicians who led the expeditions sought to use the latest scientific knowledge and technologies to develop the country's resources and strengthen the state. The Orenburg and Astrakhan expeditions were charged with investigating much of Russia's steppe frontier, which in the eighteenth century included territories and populations claimed by Russia and its imperial rivals in the region. Unlike the Orenburg expedition, which only briefly traversed part of the northern Caucasus, the Astrakhan expedition focused on exploring the Caucasus region. The Astrakhan expedition comprised two detachments. Samuel Gottlieb

19 See also Francis King, "Soviet Studies, Russian Studies, Ukrainian Studies … Politics, war and 'horizons'," *New Area Studies* 3, 1 (2022): 1–19.

Gmelin led one detachment down the Don River and across the steppes to the Volga River, before continuing downstream to Astrakhan, and from there to the Caucasus and Persia. Gmelin's expedition ended in tragedy; he was taken prisoner in Dagestan where he died in captivity. Johann Anton Güldenstädt led the other detachment from Astrakhan across the Caucasus Mountains to Georgia, where it spent a year. The Astrakhan expedition produced the first systematic scientific descriptions of the region. Güldenstädt in particular made significant contributions in the fields of botany, ethnography, geography, geology, linguistics, and zoology. He is rightfully considered one of the founders of academic Caucasus studies.

More needs to be done to document eighteenth-century efforts to explore, survey, map, and describe a region that Russian rulers then identified – and today still identify – as one of great strategic importance for the country. The question of the relationship between the Caucasus-related interests of Russia's ruling elite, on one hand, and those of the Academy's scientists, on the other, should be important aspect of future work. It could be argued, for example, that the origins of both a self-consciously "Russian Empire" and the academic study of the Caucasus in Russia can be traced to the reign of Peter I (1682–1725), and that the cameralist science of government embraced by Peter and his successors meant that the political interests of the Russian government and the scholarly interests of its scientific community would be tightly intertwined.

Historians of the Academy expeditions of the eighteenth century have tended to treat them in the context of the development of scientific institutions in Russia, the Russianization of the Academy over the course of the eighteenth century, and the production of scientific knowledge about the territories and peoples of the Russian Empire. The Enlightenment impulse to explore, classify, and order the world's diverse lands and peoples inspired Russia's rulers and the (mostly) German scholars they hired to survey, map and describe the world's diverse lands peoples, including those of "European Russia" and "Asiatic Russia," concepts introduced and reproduced beginning in the first half of the eighteenth century. Most recent scholarship in this area has focused on Siberia, northeastern Eurasia, and parts of the Pacific world.[20] In contrast,

20 Examples of recent work are Irina Vladimirovna Tunkina, ed., *K 300-lettiiu nachala ekspeditsii Danielia Gotliba Messershmidta v Sibir (1719–1727)* (St. Petersburg: Renome, 2021); Georg Wilhelm Steller, *Eastbound through Siberia: Observations from the Great Northern Expedition*, trans. and commentary Margritt A. Engel and Karen E. Willmore (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020); Wieland Hintzsche and Joachim Otto Habek, *The Exploration of Siberia in the Eighteenth Century. Proceedings of the German-Russian Meetings in Franckeschen Stiftungen* (Halle: Franckeschen Stiftungen,

historians have yet to provide a comprehensive picture of Russia's scientific investigation of the Caucasus in this period, much less to explain the significance of the Caucasus-related scholarship that the Academy produced and sought to popularize in its scientific-popular journals, such as *Ezhemesiachnye sochineniia k pol'ze i uveseleniiu sluzhashchie* (1755–64) and *Novye ezhemesiachnye sochineniia* (1786–96).[21]

Research along the above lines has the potential to contribute to three bodies of scholarly literature, and should also be of interest to U.S. policy makers. First, it addresses important questions about the history of Russian science and exploration. What was the relationship between the imperial ambitions of Russia's rulers, on one hand, and the scholarly ambitions of its scientists in the age of Enlightenment, on the other. In what ways did the government, through law or other mechanisms, regulate the Academy's operations? How did scientists make sense of the great diversity of the empire's territory and population, and in what ways did they communicate their findings to the broader educated public?

Second, such research raises important questions about the history of Russian empire building in the Caucasus in the eighteenth century. What interests drove Russia's rulers to build their empire in the region, and to what extent did they use Caucasus-related scientific research in crafting policy and informing administrative practices there?

Third, it can profitably engage with scholarship surrounding Edward Said's seminal and controversial *Orientalism*, and test whether the Caucasus-related work of the Academy's scientists can be viewed as a Western style of thought for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. Recent scholarship on the development of orientology (*vostokovedenie*) in Russia has focused on the late Imperial and Soviet periods.[22] But as Yuri Slezkine and

2012); Peter Ulf Møller and Natasha Okhotina-Lind, eds., *Under Vitus Bering's Command: New Perspectives on the Russian Kamchatka Expeditions* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2003); Stephen Haycox, James K. Barnett, Caedmon A. Liburd, eds., *Enlightenment and Exploration in the North Pacific, 1741–1805* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997); Alexey Postnikov and Marvin Falk, *Exploring and Mapping Alaska: The Russian America Era, 1741–1867*, trans. Lydia Black (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2015).

21 See *Sobranie sochinenii, vybrannykh iz mesiasteslov na raznye gody*, 10 vols. (St. Petersburg: Izhdiveniem Imp. Akademii nauk, 1785–1793); see also Anastasiia Gennad'evna Gotovtseva, *"Sie est' naipolezneishee dlia rossiiskogo obshchestva": Zhurnal "Ezhemesiachnye sochineniia" kak rossiiskii integratsionnyi prosveshchencheskii proekt serediny XVIII veka* (Moscow: Izayki slavianskikh kul'tur, 2019).

22 See, for example, Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (New York: Oxford University Press,

others have shown, the academic study of "Russia's Own Orient," including the Caucasus, has its origins in the eighteenth century.[23]

Future research needs to do more to document and assess the legal and practical relationship between the Academy and other state agencies with interests in the Caucasus; the extent to which the Academy was required or voluntarily sought to fulfill state commissions to investigate the Caucasus; the roles of foreigners, Russian subjects, and native informants in the Academy expeditions to the Caucasus; and the role of scientists in producing knowledge about the Caucasus and facilitating its transfer into Russian consciousness. Finally, it should seek to explain how part of the Caucasus became an administrative unit within Russia for the first time in the country's history as early as the 1780s.

Scholars have made considerable progress in explaining the processes and historical agents involved in studying Russia's regions prior to the nineteenth century. Since states have two objects of rule – territory and people – political anthropologists and historical sociologists like Michel Foucault, James Scott and Benjamin de Carvalho have emphasized that "seeing like a state" means attending to the related but distinct historical processes of territorialization and political subjectification.[24]

Historians have made important contributions to the study of these aspects of early Russian empire. Valerie Kivelson, for example, has shown that early modern Russians conceived of themselves and their realm in spatial terms, and that mapmaking served important instrumental and expressive functions,

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2011); Austin Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845–1917* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2002).

23 Yuri Slezkine, "Naturalists versus Nations: Eighteenth-Century Russian Scholars Confront Ethnic Diversity," in *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917*, ed. Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 27–57; Giulia Cecere, "Russia and Its 'Orient': Ethnographic Exploration of the Russian Empire in the Age of Enlightenment," in *The Anthropology of the Enlightenment*, ed. Larry Wolff and Marco Cipolloni (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); David Moon, "The Russian Academy of Sciences Expeditions to the Steppes in the Late Eighteenth Century," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 88, no. 1/2 (January/April 2010): 204–236; and Sean Pollock, "'Supreme Fictions'? Early Modern Russian Accounts of the Ottoman Empire," review of Victor Taki, *Tsar and Sultan: Russian Encounters with the Ottoman Empire*, H-Empire, H-Net Reviews, October 2019, accessed January 5, 2023, http://www/h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=53879.

24 Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8, 4 (1982): 777–95; James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Benjamin de Carvalho, "The Making of the Political Subject: Subjects and Territory in the Formation of the State," *Theory and Society* 45 (2016): 57–88.

allowing the Muscovite empire to claim subjects, and subjects to claim membership in the empire.[25] By the second half of the eighteenth century, Russia developed, what Chandra Mukerji called in an early modern French context, "a political culture of territoriality."[26] The reign of Catherine II, as Willard Sunderland has shown, was a period of "high territoriality," when "Russian ideas of national and imperial territory" merged to become "one of the abiding elements of Russian national consciousness."[27]

Vera Gnucheva's work on the history of the Russian Academy of Sciences expeditions demonstrates that the Caucasus region increasingly came to figure in the minds of Russia's scientific community in the second half of the eighteenth century.[28] Her pioneering and important work, however, is highly descriptive, and its encyclopedic quality leaves undone much of the work of analyzing and interpreting the relationship between Russian political and scientific institutions in general and the Caucasus-related activities of the Academy in particular. More recent work on the anthropology of Russian empire in the age of Enlightenment and the Academy expeditions of 1768–74 treats the exploration of the Caucasus as little more than a footnote.[29]

Thus, while there is much more to learn about the territorialization and political subjectification of Caucasian lands and peoples by Russia in the eighteenth century, it seems clear that the study of "Russian regionalism" can profitably be moved backward in time from the 1830s.

Finally, it's worth remembering that research concerning the territorialization and political subjectification of lands and peoples in the eighteenth century has significant policy implications because of the way Russian policy makers and scholars of international relations today view both the history of the Caucasus and Russia's geostrategic interests in the region. Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin on ceremonial occasions has traced the origins of the incorporation of Caucasian lands and peoples to the sixteenth century. More serious students of Russian history trace the country's political claims in the

25 Valerie A. Kivelson, *Cartographies of Tsardom: The Land and Its Meanings in Seventeenth-Century Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

26 Chandra Mukerji, "The Political Mobilization of Nature in Seventeenth-Century French Formal Gardens," *Theory and Society*, 23, 5 (1994): 656.

27 Willard Sunderland, "Imperial Space: Territorial Thought and Practice in the Eighteenth Century," in *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700–1930*, ed. Jane Burbank, Mark von Hagen, and Anatolyi Remnev (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 45, 55.

28 V.F. Gnucheva, *Materialy dlia istorii ekspeditsii Akademii nauk v XVIII i XIX vekakh: khronologicheskie obzory i opisanie arkhivnykh materialiov*, Trudy Arkhiva, vyp. 4 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1940); idem, *Geograficheskii department Akademii nauk XVIII veka*, Trudy Arkhivy, vyp. 6 Moscow: Izdatel'svto Akademii nauk SSSR, 1946).

29 For example, Cecere, "Russia and Its 'Orient'."

region to the eighteenth century. According to Vladimir Degoev, who teaches international relations and Russian foreign policy at the Moscow Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) under the auspices the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia incorporated much of the northcentral Caucasus, including Ossetia, in the second half of the eighteenth century, laying the foundations for the conquest and colonization of the entire region. And political scientist Komaludin S. Gadzhiev appears to be speaking for Russian policy makers when he claims the Caucasus as "an inalienable part of the history and fate of Russia," a region where Russia has "existential interests" of "strategically critical significance for Russian national security."[30] Because research in this area poses enduring questions and frames urgent challenges – for example, the challenge of integrating diverse peoples into the Russian state – it can help U.S. policymakers understand Russia's longstanding interests in the Caucasus, and assess the veracity of Russian claims regarding the history of the incorporation of the region into the Russian state.

Response of Susan Smith-Peter

I'm glad to be able to respond to Dr. Pollock's comment and to have a chance to write and think about the 18th century. Dr. Pollock notes that there are many works sponsored by the central state that define and catalog the empire before 1830. This is quite true, and the citations he brings in are useful. However, my blog, and the article it is based on, focuses on the responses from the people in the regions themselves and particularly their understanding of the cultural and political nature of regionalism. As a result, expeditions and topographical descriptions initiated from the center belong to a different history, although they do provide a larger context.

When thinking about the 18th century, it is important to consider the different eras found within it. I originally considered including it in my periodization, but I found that it did not fit. The early 18th century had fascinating examples of regional identity, but they were more early modern in nature and so did not fit with the stages I discuss. The later part of the century was deeply

30 Vladimir Degoev, *Bol'shaia igra na Kavkaze: istoriia i sovremennost'* (Moscow: Russkaia panorama, 2001); idem, "The Caucasus in the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire," October 15, 2021, accessed January 5, 2023, https://ssrn.com/abstract=3993676; K. S. Gadzhiev, *"Bol' shaia igra" na Kavkaze: Vchera, segodnia, zavtra* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2010), 318, 7, 200.

influenced by the Enlightenment, which, as received in Russia, saw the regions as an empty space upon which the center could write what it wanted.

For example, in the late 17th and early 18th century, S.U. Remizov, Siberian cartographer and architect, created beautiful maps that elevated Tobol'sk as a new Jerusalem.[31] Under Peter the Great, Remizov created a series of buildings that served the same function, particularly the creation of a triumphal gate in the tradition of early modern views of Jerusalem. However, this activity stopped abruptly with the execution of Matvei Gagarin, Siberia's governor, supposedly for corruption. However, the methods of his execution were such that treason seemed the more likely crime. There were rumors that he was considering making Siberia independent – particularly dangerous, given the presence of Swedish prisoners of war there at the time.[32]

In the late 18th century, a new approach to Siberia appeared in Tobol'sk. Two journals argued that Siberia had been erased and a new land had appeared due to Catherine II's enlightened rule. In a journal titled Irtysh become the Hippocrene, a poem from 1790 stated that "We no longer see Siberia in you/ But a garden of the sciences," while another imagined that the last Khan of Sibir', Kuchum, would not recognize Siberia in its new enlightened guise. Similarly, another Tobol'sk periodical from 1790, The Historical Journal, revised Johann Eberhard Fischer's *Siberian History* (1774 in Russian) so that Kuchum's political activity was erased, leaving only an ethnographic description.[33]

This shift from an early modern celebratory Siberian identity to an acceptance of Siberia's status as a blank sheet of paper, along Enlightenment lines, is striking. Anne Lounsbery has noted that the tradition of seeing the provinces as empty and meaningless unless touched by the center continued with 19th century Russian literature.[34] By the 19th century, Siberian regionalists created new visions of Siberian identity that drew on different sources.

This tradition of seeing territory as blank continued to evolve and change, but these origins can still be seen in the present-day approach to Ukraine as an empty space that can be reshaped by the Russian invasion, as I argued

31 Valerie A. Kivelson, *Cartographies of Tsardom: The Land and Its Meanings in Seventeenth-Century Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

32 Susan Smith-Peter, "Siberian journalism in the Era of Catherine II." In V.M. Dobroshtan et al., eds. *Dinastiia Romanovykh: 400 let v istorii Rossii: materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii* (St. Petersburg: SPGUTD, 2013), 9–11.

33 Susan Smith-Peter, "Making Empty Provinces: Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment Regionalism in Russian Provincial Journals." *REGION: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia* 4, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 7–29.

34 Anne Lounsbery, *Life is Elsewhere: Symbolic Geography in the Russian Provinces, 1800–1917* (Ithaca: Northern Illinois University Press, 2019).

recently in a blog titled "Ukraine as Whiteboard: The Genocidal Implications of Russian Ideas of Territory."[35] Questions of the 18th century are thus still very much with us.

Response of Alexander Hill

Thank you Dr Smith-Peter for your elaboration. I am perhaps in a minority (at least of those willing to voice such an opinion) that believes that it makes sense (based on the ethnic composition of its population and what evidence we have of the wishes of that population) that Crimea remain Russian – regardless of how it ended up back as part of Russia. Based on what we know, many Russians would see the loss of Crimea as 'dismemberment of Russia' – a loss felt back in 1991.

For Marples in his piece to argue the need 'to support Ukraine until it has liberated its lands' - including Crimea, would, by your decolonization arguments mean replacing one colonizer with another that would be even more 'colonial' (given the very small number of 'Ukrainians' in Crimea) given that nobody is suggesting that Crimea should be independent on the basis of the few Crimean Tatars remaining there. Perhaps you are suggesting that Ukraine should move in large numbers of Ukrainians – as the English did with Protestants Scots and English people in what became Northern Ireland – in order to make Crimea meaningfully Ukrainian? So if one is to pick one's colonizer, then the obvious one is Russia (where as historians we should all know that Crimea ended up administratively as part of Ukraine not because it was seen as Ukrainian, but for other reasons). Perhaps Crimea should be allowed to determine its own future – I am certainly one for allowing such self-determination – although we all know that Crimea would likely vote to remain part of Russia.

I also had in mind when suggesting that the Marples' piece was in support of the dismemberment of the Russian state that 'a period of political and social chaos for the world's largest country' would almost inevitably (if the past is any indicator) lead to inflamed tensions in the Caucasus. I don't know whether you would argue that the likes of Chechnya or Dagestan should be separated from Russia, but should that happen there might be significant consequences for wider regional stability that might not be in the interests of either Russia or the West.

35 http://newfascismsyllabus.com/contributions/ukraine-as-whiteboard-the-genocidal-implications-of-russian-ideas-of-territory/.

Response of Alexander Martin

I want to thank the contributors to this thread for their contributions. This is an important discussion for our field to have.

It seems to me that two fundamental points need clarifying.

(1) What is it that actually needs "decolonizing"? In our research, we collectively approach the Russian Empire/Soviet Union every which way – from the top down and the bottom up, from the center and from the peripheries. There is always room for new ideas, but I see no fundamental, pervasive imperial bias.

Undergraduate teaching is a different matter. I certainly plead guilty to an imperial bias in my survey course. The problem is that I need an organizing principle to structure how I introduce students to vast, unfamiliar eras, spaces, and peoples. The material is overwhelming even if I keep the themes simple. The more I complicate them, the worse it gets. I can solve the problem by covering only shorter time spans or select topics, but then I'm giving up other important pedagogical goals. It's an intractable problem without a real solution.

(2) What is "colonialism" with regard to Ukraine? It seems to me that the term creates more heat than light. It derives from overseas empires that essentialized the distinction between colony and metropole and exploited the former to benefit the people of the latter. The charge against Russia is the opposite: that it refused to accept any distinction at all between itself and Ukraine, and that the center oppressed all the people everywhere. As we have seen in this thread, attempts are made to resolve this contradiction by stretching the term to cover pretty much any form of domination, but that leads to the banal conclusion that all organized entities are colonial.

I think we would be better off abandoning the term "colonialism" for Ukraine and asking about domination and nation-formation. As Alexander Hill rightly points out, European nations are historical constructs. Why should Germany include Bavaria but not Austria, or the Low German regions but not Holland? And, aren't those places themselves historically constituted through a process of domination?

This brings us to the important idea that nations are constructed. The question isn't whether Ukraine or Russia are somehow objectively nations "s drevneishikh vremen," but whether people at any given moment have thought and acted as though they were. As Ernest Renan put it in "What is a Nation?," a nation is a daily plebiscite. Ukrainians have cast their votes in that plebiscite pretty unambiguously over the past year; those votes, not the history of past centuries, hold the answer to the question of modern Ukrainian nationhood.

Response of Sean Pollock

Alexander Martin and Alexander Hill make important contributions to this discussion. Perhaps the most important is to emphasize that states and nations are historical constructs.

Recall the excesses of Marxist-Bolshevik critiques of imperial situations in general and of the Russian Empire in particular. To view Russia at any time merely as a "prison of nations," to borrow the Leninist trope, would be at best retrograde.

How are state and nations constructed? One way to avoid the politicization of the study of relations between state and society in the Russian Empire is to attend carefully to context-specific processes of territorialization and political subjectification, and to understand that non-Russians could and sometimes did play significant and diverse roles in both processes.

In the Russian Empire, diverse peoples, including those who identified as "Russian," were subject, in various ways and to varying degrees, to the process of political subjectification to the country's ruling monarchs.

Response of David Marples

Responding to Alexander Hill

Hill's comment that I was calling for the "dismemberment of Russia" is spurious. I wrote the following as a conclusion to my comment on E-IR. "And the inconceivability of coming up with a solution that can satisfy the desires of Vladimir Putin and his acolytes leaves open only one option: to support Ukraine until it has liberated its lands, whether or not that also signifies a change of regime in Moscow following Russia's defeat or whether it results in a period of political and social chaos for the world's largest country. The alternative is the end of independent Ukraine." There is no advocacy here, simply a statement that such an outcome is possible. It also seems self-evident that Britain, France, and Russia, among others, were colonizers. The key fact is that Britain and France were completely decolonized by the 1960s. Does one imagine that France today might reclaim Vietnam or Britain might renew colonial rule in India? That era is over, but the current Russian leadership refuses to recognize the fact.

David Marples withdrew from the conversation after some of the responses below, believing it would begin an argument that would go nowhere.

Response of Susan Smith-Peter

I want to thank my colleagues who took the time to comment on my "Periodization as Decolonization" blog. I am glad it is provoking debate.

I also want to clarify some things. First, my blog set out to decolonize the narrative of Russian history, rather than to claim that all regional history should be considered under the heading of colonization. Where colonization came directly into the regional history covered in my blog was in the writings of the Siberian regionalists, who argued, with much evidence, that Siberia was colonized. As a whole, however, my blog was proposing a focus on regions as a way to bring in different questions and historical actors, some of whom argued against a focus on the central state.

Second, I see decolonizing the field as a period of self-reflection that will result in a stronger and more self-aware field. Other fields have gone through this process and have emerged the better for it.

Third, the main reason I am taking up the debate is because many of our colleagues in Ukrainian history are dissatisfied with us in the field of Russian history and feel that we are not hearing them. My work is trying to find the deeper reasons for this non-meeting of the minds so that relevant action might be taken.

One thing that has emerged from this discussion is that there needs to be a stronger distinction made between colonialism and high imperialism. Colonialism is a process that took place over a long period of time and that involves the cooptation of local elites, intermarriage, and the creation of mixed cultures. This was true in the British, French, Spanish and other empires. For the British Empire, it was particularly marked in the early modern period, but it continued in some places to the 19th century.[36] This is in contrast to the period of high imperialism from roughly the 1870s to 1914, which saw the more "classic" system of direct rule over colonies by the colonizing people, a ban on intermarriage, and rejection of hybrid systems that already existed, such as the Anglo-Indians and "countryborn" children of Hudson's Bay Company trader fathers and Canadian indigenous mothers.[37]

36 Some examples: Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670–1870* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984); Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

37 A useful introduction is Scott B. Cook, *Colonial Encounters in the Age of High Imperialism* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 1997).

In our field, we tend to compare the Russian Empire to Western empires in the era of high imperialism, rather than to the rather more similar colonialism. Willard Sunderland has been an important exception, as he has argued that the Russian colonization of the steppe is quite similar to the "middle ground" experiences of Western and American colonialism, as distinct from high imperialism.[38] What may make Russia distinct is something that will not be new to any of us – that Russia did not make changes as quickly as Western European states did.

However, what I call "everyday exceptionalism" is widespread and informs the comments to the blog. This is a claim that Russia is exceptional in that it has not been a colonial power. It is everyday in that it tends not to be theorized, although there have been attempts to do so. For example, Alexander Etkind argued that the Russian Empire was an example of self-colonization as much as colonization of others.[39] Although Etkind notes that the Russian Empire colonized other peoples in a parallel process of external colonization, his work and the argument that Russians were also colonized has been used to argue that the Russian experience was not a colonial one.

Everyday exceptionalism suggests that Russia is a part of Europe when it comes to culture, the arts, the Enlightenment and other (generally) good things, but is exempted from being a colonial power. It was not so easy to take some parts of European culture and not others, although there were many attempts to do so.

This exceptionalism can be seen in Dr. Pollock's comments. None of his statements preclude us from analyzing Russia as a colonial power. Non-Russians indeed did play an important role in the creation of empire, but this is common to colonialism as distinct from high imperialism in Western European countries. His statement that Russia was never a prison of nations is one that Ukrainians, Estonians, Poles and others would contest, I suspect.

Dr. Martin's comments are to be commended for noting that his teaching does have an imperial bias. I think that some solutions are possible, however. In the spirit of encouraging such self-reflection, I will admit to writing an article titled "How to Found a Colony without Colonization" that itself took part in the everyday exceptionalism I am critiquing here. The sense that Russia was a non-colonial power was so widespread that even though I was working on the

38 Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

39 Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011). An interesting extended critique of this work and a discussion of the historiography of colonialization may be found in Alexander Morrison's review of it in Ab Imperio, 2013, no. 3: 445–457.

topic of Russian America, which provides a wealth of evidence for colonization, I failed to see it.[40]

Like Dr. Pollock's statement, the arguments that Dr. Martin has presented for why colonization does not fit Russia are based on a comparison with high imperialism, rather than the more similar colonialism. The "middle ground" approach of the earlier colonialism certainly is not one "that essentialized the distinction between colony and metropole," as Dr. Martin states. In addition, nation-formation is not something that can be separated from the question of empire and colonialism, as Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper have noted.[41] And, certainly, nations and states are constructed. If this disqualified states from being considered empires, then there would be no British Empire or any other. Empires, like nations, are constructed, sometimes through the processes of colonialism and other times through different means.

Finally, Dr. Hill's response provides a useful, though concerning, reminder of the real-life implications of this everyday exceptionalism. Dr. Hill suggests that Crimea is "really" part of Russia. If this argument is followed, then the rules-based order built after the Second World War no longer has any meaning. Mexico could claim the American Southwest, Germany Alsace and so on. Russia does not get an exemption from this order based on its history, just as other states should not. In addition, to say that Crimea belongs to Russia means ignoring or accepting the repression and dispossession of the Crimean Tatars, who have cast their lot with Ukraine.[42] Russian propaganda works very heavily on Russia's supposed anti-colonial past, which can, but should not, find an echo in the everyday exceptionalism discussed here.

Response of Sean Pollock

According to Dr. Smith-Peter, "[everyday] exceptionalism can be seen in [my] comments." She defines "everyday exceptionalism" as the "claim that Russia is exceptional in that it has not been a colonial power." In commenting on

40 Susan Smith-Peter, "How to Found a Colony without Colonization: Conflicts between Social Control and Colonial Expansion in the Russian Empire in the early 19th century," *Arktika: Istoriia i sovremennost'* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2016), 251–256.

41 Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). A useful Oxford Bibliography on the topic of empire and state formation may be found here: https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199730414/obo-9780199730414-0020.xml

42 https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/05/ukraine-war-crimean-tatars-stalin-soviet-union/629824/.

Russian attempts to study the Caucasus in the eighteenth century, however, I make no such claim. On the contrary, in pointing to the work of Vladimir Degoev, I suggested that "the foundations for the conquest and colonization of the entire region" can be traced to the eighteenth century. Indeed, I have attempted to make a modest contribution to the study of this question, where I address "Russian military colonization of Northern Caucasia and attempts to subjugate Kabarda" in a section so titled.[43] Elsewhere I document Russia's cooptation of local elites,[44] which Dr. Smith-Peter appears to consider a feature of "colonialism" but not "high imperialism." In fact, such cooptation has been a characteristic feature of Russian state-building in every period.

In my reply to Dr. Smith-Peter's first blog post on the theme of "Decolonizing Russian Studies," I commended the author for initiating "a potentially productive discussion." I said "potentially" because as ASEEES issued statements condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine, possibly in violation of its own advocacy policy, and colleagues framed "decolonization" as "a profoundly political act of re-evaluating long-established and often internalized hierarchies, of relinquishing and taking back power,"[45] I worried about the creeping politicization of the study of the region. In any case, if the discussion is to be productive, particularly in these times, it is essential that we characterize each other's claims accurately and avoid politicizing the study of the region. Perhaps the latter concern explains why the posts have so far generated relatively little discussion, as the discursive territory can be dangerous to navigate and coopted by others pursuing non-scholarly agendas.

Response of Filiz Tutku Aydin

I do not mean to further politicize this discussion, however now that Crimea in the context of present-day politics has been brought up, I feel the need to reply

43 Sean Pollock, "Friend and Foe: Religious Toleration in Northern Caucasia in the Age of Catherine the Great" *Princeton Papers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, XVII (2016): 25–61; reissued in Michael A. Reynolds, ed., *Constellations of the Caucasus: Empires, Peoples, and Faiths* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2016), 25–61.

44 Sean Pollock, "Who Spoke for Russia's Muslims? Turki Letters and Russian Empire in the North Caucasus between the 17th and 20th Centuries," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 53 (2019): 387–413, on cooptation of 403–13.

45 According to the policy: "As a non-political organization, ASEEES does not issue collective statements regarding foreign policy or particular events in the region," accessed January 17, 2023, https://www.aseees.org/programs/aseees-advocacy/aseees-advocacy-policy; the quotation is from the call for proposals for the 2023 ASEEES annual convention, accessed January 17, 2023, https://www.aseees.org/convention/2023-aseees-convention-theme.

to this blog. And I have some points that I trust will be useful for the general discussion of decolonizing/decentering Russian historical studies.

Dr. Hill is hasty in dismissing the concept of colonialism in Russia, on the grounds that Siberia's relation to Moscow is comparable to North England's relations to London. I assume that Dr. Smith-Peter's call to bring Siberia more into the scope of Russian studies recognizes the need for more focus on the "incorporation" of indigenous peoples of Siberia. Dr. Hill does not comment on non-Russian regions or peoples, but I hope he would not object to the utility of the concept of colonialism in understanding the incorporation of non-Russian regions. Dr. Pollock's examples of how the "incorporation" of the Caucasus occurred suggest that the process was no less a colonial project than the "incorporation" of India into the British Empire. Here I think Russian historical studies would benefit from a conversation with scholars studying Muslim peoples of the Russian Empire who view them as also belonging to the scope of Middle Eastern studies. A few scholars that come to mind who conceptualize Russian "domination" as colonialism are Adeeb Khalid, Ronald G. Suny and Deniz Kandiyoti and surely there are more.[46]

Dr. Hill's claims that "it makes sense (based on the ethnic composition of its population and what evidence we have of the wishes of that population) that Crimea remain Russian." It would be prudent to be more cautious. In 2014, more than 200 scholars whose work relates to Eastern Europe, Eurasia, and the Middle East signed a statement that presented evidence that the purported "wishes of that population" were far from obvious (https://scholarsforqirim.com). Not only was the referendum in Crimea not conducted in a democratic manner, but also its results were falsified – even by the admission of the Russian Presidential Council on Civil Society and Human Rights that reported that the turnout for the referendum was 30–50% rather than the official 83% and 96% for the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol respectively (in the meantime the report has been wiped from its website but it can be retrieved). Isn't it curious that there was no significant separatist movement before Russia's invasion of Crimea, or that the Russian Levada Center's surveys made just prior to the 2014 invasion did not register any "wish" for unification with Russia? It is also rather disturbing that in talking about Crimean

46 See Laura L. Adams, 2008, "Can we apply postcolonial theory to Central Eurasia?" CESR 7(1). pp 2–7; Khalid, A., 2007. Introduction: Locating the (post-) colonial in Soviet history. *Central Asian Survey*, 26(4), pp. 465–473; Khalid, A., 2000. Russian history and the debate over orientalism. *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 1(4), pp. 691–699; Khalid, A., 2009. *Culture and power in colonial Turkestan* (No. 17/18, pp. 413–447). Institut Français d'Études sur l'Asie centrale, pp. 865–884; Finnin, R., 2022. Blood of others: *Stalin's Crimean atrocity and the poetics of solidarity*. University of Toronto Press.

self-determination Dr. Hill dismisses the Crimean Tatars, an indigenous people of Crimea who had been deported by Stalin. Dr. Hill, who is an expert on the military strategies of the Soviet Union in WW2 must know very well that Stalin deported the Crimean Tatars as part of his planned attack on Turkey and wanted to move this potential fifth column out of the way. Were it not for the replacement of Crimean Tatars with Slavs, mostly Russians, if one takes into account demographic processes, it is not so obvious that there would be such a significant Russian population in Crimea today. In any event, to recognize Russian sovereignty over Crimea would mean to reward a historical pattern of colonization and genocide that has been going on since the Russian annexation of Crimea in 1783 until today.[47] The Crimean Tatars demonstrated their preference to remain a part of Ukraine many times and self-determination for the Crimean Tatars need not necessarily mean independence as Dr. Hill seems to suggest. It should be obvious to all that Crimean Tatars have no chance for national survival in today's Russia given that genocide against them has been in full swing since 2014.[48]

Aside from the spuriousness of Dr. Hill's claim to know the wishes of ethnic Russians in Crimea, his claim that Ukraine would have to import ethnic Ukrainians were it to take back Crimea smacks of false equivalency that is part and parcel of Kremlin propaganda. Compared to Russia, Ukraine's human rights record is stellar including the rights of non-ethnic Ukrainians, and to assume that Ukraine would act in the same colonial manner (read ethnic cleansing) as Russia is preposterous. Millions of Russian-speaking Ukrainian citizens, ethnic Russian or not, have demonstrated loyalty to the Ukrainian state rather than a yearning for Russia's protection. The case of ethnic Russians in Crimea is more complicated, though I would hope that Dr. Hill is not advocating on behalf of those RF citizens imported to Crimea since 2014 in order to enhance a desired ethnic makeup of the Russian Federation (the same sort of ethnic cleansing has begun in newly occupied territories). Dr. Hill assumes ethnic Russians of Crimea overwhelmingly wish to stay in an authoritarian, some scholars would say fascist, Russia rather than be a part of democratic Ukraine. It should be noted that when judging where Crimea belongs, one should take

47 Glyn Williams, B., 2002. The Hidden Ethnic Cleansing of Muslims in the Soviet Union: The Exile and Repatriation of the Crimean Tatars. *Journal of Contemporary History, 37*(3), pp. 323–347; Williams, B., 2021. *The Crimean Tatars: the diaspora experience and the forging of a nation* (Vol. 2). Brill.

48 Coynash, H. and Charron, A., 2019. Russian-occupied Crimea and the state of exception: repression, persecution, and human rights violations. *Eurasian Geography and Economics, 60*(1), pp. 28–53.

into account the realities of geography and Ukraine's strategic interests, rather than only Russia's.

Therefore, I do not think there is a case for Crimea to join Russia in terms of international law or decent notions of justice and fairness. On the contrary, Crimea's remaining part of Ukraine would be Russia's medicine. It could be a starter not for the dismemberment of Russia, but rather for a beginning to an end of the Russian neo-colonial relationship pattern with regards to Chechnya, Dagestan and the rest of the North Caucasus, Tatarstan, Bashkiria, and other ethnic territories including many indigenous peoples of Siberia, and even Central Asia, the southern Caucasus, Moldova and Belarus all of which have to various degrees been unable to free themselves from Moscow's colonialism.

Finally, it is highly problematic, one could even say orientalistic, to assume that non-Russian territories of Russia will not be able to govern themselves and will devolve into chaos and instability if they are not controlled by Moscow. This is actually one of Putin's underlying odious arguments regarding Ukraine and other independent states of the former Soviet Union – that only in union with Russia can there be stability and prosperity. Interestingly, it is Russia that has been creating instability, conflict, and war in the former Soviet geography. And it is Russia that devolved into an adolescent identity crisis harmful to itself and those around it, while its neighbors, despite imperfections, seem more advanced than Russia in their state- and nation-building.

My reply is not intended to distract from the important and interesting historical discussion in this blog and I am especially grateful to Dr. Smith-Peter for asking difficult and long overdue questions. Since we are in the middle of a cataclysmic war, the politics of which largely stem from understandings of history, it is indeed difficult to avoid a discussion of the present day; this need not be cast as unnecessary "politicization." However, Dr. Hill's concern that the entire venture to decolonize/decenter Russian historical studies may be part of a political project is in my opinion a manipulation of the original intent.

Response of Geoffrey Roberts

There is a serious danger that the 'decolonization' of Russian history being sought by some within the Russian Studies community will be used as a vehicle for anti-Russian political ends rather than the academic goal of seeking to foster a deeper understanding of the past in all its complexity.

Alexander Hill goes too far when he places David Marples among those western academics "all-but calling for the dismemberment of Russia". But having

read Professor Marples's piece on 'The Rationale of Russia's 'Special Military Operation' in Ukraine',[49] I can see why Dr Hill would make such a claim.

According to Marples, Russia is an authoritarian terrorist regime, bent on ethnocide and the complete destruction of the Ukrainian state. Putin is conducting a barbaric war in Ukraine with goals that preclude diplomacy or the possibility of peace negotiations to end a conflict that has already claimed the lives hundreds of thousands of people, destroyed Ukraine's economy, and forced millions of its citizens to become refugees. The only choice, writes Marples, is to fight the war to the bitter end, even if that results in 'political and social chaos' in nuclear-armed Russia.

With that mindset, it makes perfect sense to seek Russia's dismemberment, or, better still, the extirpation of the Russian state, just in case its people decide to elect another Putin.

Marples's critical fire is directed against western academics seeking to understand the Ukraine conflict from the Russian perspective, scholars like myself, who believe the war is limited and defensive, and that a ceasefire, peace negotiations and some kind of a settlement will be extremely difficult but not impossible to achieve – a settlement that would preserve Ukraine as an independent, sovereign state (albeit at the cost of lost territory), satisfy Russia's security demands, and, not least, avert calamitous escalation into an all-out NATO-Russia conflict. Similarly minded scholars also think the war could have been avoided by (a) implementing the Minsk agreements on the reintegration of rebel Donbass into Ukraine as regionally autonomous provinces and (b) significant western concessions to the Russian security proposals of December 2021.

Marples namechecks John Mearsheimer, Marlene Laruelle, and Alexander Hill, and I am glad to add my name to those he identifies as advocates of the view that Russia sees itself as fighting a defensive war provoked by Ukraine and the West.[50]

Marples's response to our views is a series of dubious assertions that read more like propaganda talking points than scholarly analysis. His article displays little or no awareness that each and every one of his assertions is disputed by other scholars who read the evidence differently.

Take, for example, the vexed question of Putin's attitude to Ukrainian independence and sovereignty. Marples asserts that Putin "has never recognised

49 https://www.e-ir.info/2022/12/22/opinion-the-rationale-of-russias-special-military-operation-in-ukraine/

50 See G. Roberts, "'Now or never': The Immediate Origins of Putin's Preventative War on Ukraine" https://jmss.org/article/view/76584/56335.

Ukrainian independence or the very concept of Ukraine as an independent state". The problem is that Putin has done just that on numerous occasions.

"We respect the Ukrainian language and traditions. We respect Ukrainians' desire to see their country free, safe and prosperous", writes Putin in his now notorious essay 'On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians', "I am confident that true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia [which] has never been and will never be 'anti-Ukraine'. And what Ukraine will be – it is up to its citizens to decide."[51]

Unable to prove his point directly, Marples resorts to arguing around it, highlighting statements showing that Putin wants to limit Ukrainian sovereignty and independence. About that he is right. Putin has repeatedly said that Ukraine's 1991 borders were an artificial construction of the Bolsheviks and their communist successors. He has been adamant that he won't allow Ukraine to become an anti-Russia and nor will he stand for political and ethnic discrimination against Russian-identifying Ukrainians. He has also characterised Ukraine as a corrupt state controlled by criminals, oligarchs and ultra-nationalists who have shamelessly exploited the Ukrainian people and turned the country into a western catspaw against Russia, And, of course, he has vowed never to return to Ukraine the occupied and incorporated territories of Donets, Lugansk, Kherson and Zaporizhia.

Clearly, Putin envisages a severely circumscribed version of Ukrainian sovereignty (which he sees as advantageous to Ukraine as well as Russia), but his views are not incompatible with an independent Ukraine exercising a meaningful degree of freedom in foreign and domestic policy. Limited sovereignty is and has been the fate of many states. Ireland would never have been allowed to separate from Britain had its independence threatened British security. Finland, having side with Nazi Gemany during the war and lost a lot of territory to the USSR, had to aligned itself Moscow during the cold war. The United States would not countenance Canada or Mexico doing anything that imperilled its security. In 1962 the US was prepared to obliterate Cuba and start a third world war if Soviet nuclear missiles were not removed from that independent sovereign state. In 2003 the British and American pre-emptively attacked Iraq, supposedly to stop Saddam Hussein from acquiring nuclear weapons. China would go to war to stop Taiwan over-exercising its sovereignty. Limited sovereignty is the norm in the current system of international relations. Not even the greatest of power exercises unbridled sovereignty: the US was forced to shelve it plans to invade Cuba and remove its rockets from Turkey in order to rid Soviet missiles from its doorstep.

51 "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians", 12 July 2021. http://www.en.kremlin.ru/misc/66182.

Marples seems to prefer a forever war to win Ukraine's complete and unrestrained independence. He may well get his wish as far as the war is concerned. But I fear the result will be the further destruction and dismemberment of Ukraine.

The tone of Marple's furious philippic contrasts markedly with the measured discourse of this thread. De-colonising Russian Studies is a complex topic of discussion in which there are some sharply opposed views, but all the contributors (including Marples himself) have treated each other with respect and scholarly decorum.

I have nothing against scholars taking a political stand on the Russia-Ukraine war – I have done so myself.[52] I understand the depths of emotion stirred by the war. But I feel strongly that our primary mission as academics is to throw light on the subject, not add heat to the already intense polemics.

52 https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/2022/07/13/ukraine-must-grasp-peace-from-jaws-of-unwinnable-war/