

ABSTRACTS

Steppes to Health: How the Climate-Kumys Cure Shaped a New Steppe Imaginary

MAYA PETERSON

This paper examines the rise of the “climate-kumys cure” in late imperial Russia and how it shaped perceptions of the steppes as a “curative place.” By positing that kumys (fermented mare’s milk), a traditional food produced by steppe nomads, interacted with unique qualities of the steppe climate—including aromatic air, abundant sunshine, cool forest groves, rich feathergrasses, and brilliant wildflowers—to cure tuberculosis patients of their symptoms, the climate-kumys cure produced an imaginary of the steppes that contrasted with traditional Russian views of the steppes as barren, monotonous, and even dangerous. Knowledge about the steppe climate produced by proponents of the climate-kumys cure harmonized with Soviet medical professionals’ ideas about forging workers’ bodies and restoring their minds. An understanding of the steppes as healthy, however, did not stop the spread of disease, nor did it lead to preservation. Even as the climate-kumys cure rose in popularity, the steppes that had given rise to kumys were vanishing.

Reinventing the Steppe: The Agromeliorative Complex in the Russian Periphery

TIMM SCHÖNFELDER

For centuries, the steppe had served as a frontier and as a borderland to the Russian empire. In the 1930s, however, the semi-arid fields to the northeast of Stavropol became the object of intensified agricultural reclamation. Following the Central Asian example of dryland irrigation, the Soviet leadership dreamed of transforming the steppe biome into an oasis of high-modernist progress. Promises of plentiful yields fueled the planning of new hydro-infrastructures devised to counter the destructive forces of nature and to make the steppe bloom. Poverty, hunger, and natural disasters were to be threats of the past. As large swaths of land in the North Caucasus were re-imagined on the drawing boards of Soviet hydro-engineers, an *agromeliorative complex* evolved that favored large-scale solutions over locally adapted means. From 1965, this complex was represented by the Ministry of Melioration and Water Management (*Minvodkhoz*). It was supported by leading members of the nomenklatura like Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev, and Mikhail Gorbachev. However, their one-sided reclamation policies ignored ample warnings on soil erosion and agricultural degradation that were caused by excessive irrigation. As a result, yields declined whereas state investment continually increased. This paper shows how the vision to convert semi-arid lands into blossoming oases of progress created a path dependency with largely devastating consequences, as the hydro-engineers did not acknowledge the fragile ecosystem of the

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steppe. This reveals a deep and systemic sustainability crisis within Soviet agriculture that contributed to the economically fueled collapse of 1991.

The Alien Republic: Narratives of Deterritorialization in Imaginations of Turkmenistan from the Late Nineteenth to the Late Twentieth Century

CLEMENS GÜNTHER

Turkmenistan holds a special place in the Russian and Soviet imagination. At the turn of the last century, especially, Turkmenistan appeared as an imaginative object shaped by both nineteenth century tropes and images of the steppe and by the modernist's revaluation and displacement of these very tropes. This article traces this intellectual history from the late nineteenth century to the fall of the Soviet empire and elicits three main narratives through which the republic was rendered alien: Turkmenistan as a "republic from outer space," as an "arctic desert," and as a republic whose southern border is constantly threatened by various forces that can never be successfully defeated. Based on a wide body of literary works and films, mainly from the 1920s–30s and the late Soviet period, the paper points to intertextual references that betray both shifts and continuities within these narratives. The analysis shows how notions of political integration and climatic transformations were constantly countered by alternative imaginary boundaries, contributing to an "imaginative geography" of the republic that shaped the way Turkmenistan was perceived. The development of such an "imaginative geography" of Turkmenistan as an "alien republic" was thereby inextricably linked to its steppe and desert geography, marked by a threefold dialectic between concrete and imaginary geography, a rhetoric of appropriation and of alienation, and between present and mythical time.

Nomadic Nobles: Pastoralism and Privilege in the Russian Empire

GULMIRA SULTANGALIEVA, ULZHAN TULESHOVA AND PAUL W. WERTH

Probing the manner in which Kazakhs attained noble status in the Russian empire, this article explores a neglected aspect of the country's social history. Recognizing that nobility is typically associated with landowning in a feudal order, we explore how this status also found application in the steppe. Based on diverse sources and comparison with other ethnic elites, we regard Kazakh ennoblement not only as a way of recognizing a traditional nomadic aristocracy, but also as a method of creating a new native elite beneficial to Russia's colonial project. We likewise propose that the distinctive character of nomads' pastoral lifeways differentiated the Kazakh nobility from their Russian counterparts and prevented them from making full use of noble privileges. The article thus explores the nature of Russia's social order by interrogating its margins and contemplates both the possibilities and limits of social inclusion for Russia's ethnically and culturally diverse population.

Migration and Rebuilding in the South Caucasus after World War II

KRISTA GOFF

Mass population movements of Soviet residents—deportees, evacuees, accused kulaks, refugees, soldiers, and others—are a characteristic feature of early Soviet history. Some of these forms of migratory violence peaked during the experience of total war in the 1940s, but others continued well past the cessation of wartime hostilities. This was the case in the South Caucasus, which narrowly avoided German occupation and the mass civilian upheaval that stalked other parts of the Soviet Union, but nonetheless hosted successive wartime and postwar migrations that disrupted local communities.

“A Colony of Alien Capital”: French Investments, Polish Identity, and a Story of Murder in 1930s Warsaw

JERZY ŁAZOR

This article explores public reactions to a murder of a foreign managing director running a French-owned textile factory in interwar Poland. The 1932 killing provoked an intense discussion in the press, which sheds light on Polish identity and narrative strategies used by the elites to rationalize the consequences of Poland’s peripheral economic status. The study is based on discourse analysis of over 200 press articles. I argue that commentators saw the killing as the result of French policies in the factory, and interpreted these in turn as the result of either the Polish government’s negligence, influenced by Paris’s diplomats, or of global capitalism. The most dramatic arguments framed French policies in Żyrardów as a form of colonialism or slavery. This framing was based on the journalists’ perception of French actions as transgressions of two imagined hierarchies: a geo-racial division of the world, and the local hierarchy of labor.

Marriage, Gender and Demographic Change: Managing Fertility in State-Socialist Poland

NATALIA JARSKA AND AGATA IGNACIUK

This paper explores fertility management practices in state-socialist Poland and investigates post-war demographic change through the lenses of gender and modernization. Using personal narratives from oral histories and memoirs, we examine reproductive decision-making processes from the 1940s to the 1980s, focusing on motivations, norms, and the means employed to achieve desired family size. Our analysis reveals the ambiguous nature of both modernization and women’s emancipation in regard to reproduction. We argue that acceptance of the two-child model and the need to effectively manage fertility increased in Poland through the second half of the twentieth century, but was highly dependent on levels of spousal communication and equality. Personal narratives demonstrate how social pressure shaped women’s reproductive choices, and how at times these choices were considerably limited by male violence and domination.

As our analysis shows, gender relations in marriage and the modernization of fertility management in state-socialist Poland were deeply interrelated.

Keywords: history of the family, history of sexuality, state-socialist Poland, history of contraception, gender history

Low Spirits and Immoderate Meditations in Venedikt Erofeev's Moskva-Petushki

JULIA VAINGURT

My article analyzes Venedikt Erofeev's cultivation of weakness via alcoholic intoxication in *Moskva-Petushki* against the grain of its standard interpretations. The critical consensus holds that the protagonist (and by extension, the author, with whom he shares his name and autobiographical details) is a sober drunk and a holy fool. By contrast, I read the protagonist's failure to reach his destination and his untimely death in a less celebratory light. Intoxication functions as a means of spiritual seclusion, of finding oneself through the process of "falling out" of all social systems. Via this categorical renunciation of any affiliation, the protagonist aims to escape conscription into any acts of cruelty or destruction ranging from historical atrocities to the most quotidian application of force. The protagonist makes a superhuman effort to avoid any form of belonging out of the ethical imperative not to injure, but ends up inflicting harm upon himself and his loved ones anyway. My point here, then, is that the *poema* does not celebrate the protagonist's attempt to reach salvation via weakness and solitude, but ambivalently explores the aesthetic and ethical possibilities and limits of his choice as well as the feasibility and desirability of such radical freedom.