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UG Conference Program (2024)

TWENTY-SEVENTH ANNUAL UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
UNDERGRADUATE CONFERENCE
ON SLAVIC AND EAST/CENTRAL EUROPEAN STUDIES
Saturday, April 27, 2024

8:00-8:45 am Check-in. Coffee and pastries

8:45-9:00 am *Opening Remarks by Igor Pilshchikov, Chair of Slavic, East European and Eurasian Languages and Literatures, UCLA*

Panel 1: 9:00-9:55 am (all virtual)

Mirroring the Paradigm of 18th-19th Century Russian Culture

Chair: Elena Makarova (UCLA)

Maya Shkolnik (Columbia University / Visiting Student at Oxford University) –
“Anna Karenina’s Decline: Her Self-Enclosure as a Decadent Parable”

In his chapter “Tolstoism” in *Degeneration*, Max Nordau writes that “in the organism deranged by disease, degenerate appetites exist which cannot be satisfied or of which the gratification injures or destroys the individual.” If this suffering is stronger than the feeling of pleasure “then they do not hesitate to kill themselves” (150-151). Tolstoy, being “no less a student of decadence” (Kahn 2015), weaves *Anna Karenina* with answers to the question which almost brought him to suicide: “Wherefore am I alive?” Across both *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy makes a moral judgment of the despondent unbeliever, Prince Andrei and Anna, who deviate from life’s natural purpose in order to live because of, and as long as, life gives them gratification and happiness. Anna’s story is not only a parable of egoism and self-indulgence, but, through understanding her decaying mind, is a moral tragedy of self-enclosure (Gustafson, 132). Anna creates a life of lies and isolation in order to avoid the truth. Tolstoy illustrates the parable of Anna’s story in his own words: “When we are in God, i.e., in truth, then we are all together; when we are in the Devil, i.e., in falsehood, then we are all separate.” Contextualizing Anna’s story within the common themes of the Decadent literary tradition makes clear that her demise is a parable not about a woman’s failed liberation or social opposition, but of Anna the Decadent indulging in sex, lies, and a life far from God.

Madeline Muller (Bryn Mawr College) – “Concurrent Polyphony through Combat in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Demons* and Toni Morrison’s *Paradise*”

Brutal and deadly assaults, unexpected by the victims yet foreshadowed and deviously planned by the attackers, are the climaxes of both Toni Morrison’s *Paradise* and Fyodor

Dostoevsky's *Demons*, novels written more than a century apart and in climates far-flung from the other. Both books tackle the divide between generations, explore the political questions of their time period, and are written in decadent, moving prose that serves to distinguish the world that the author creates and to attack the reader with the brutality of the actions taken throughout the novel. However, from their basic text, the two attacks that serve as the basis for this comparison seem odd to place with each other. In *Paradise*, the assault on the Convent is perpetuated by multiple men upon the women, targeting both the women's philosophy but also their perceived negative impact upon the wives of Ruby, while in *Demons*, Pyotr Stepanovich and his fellows' efficient assassination of Shatov is meant to unite them while eliminating a traitor to the cause. Despite their differences, I claim both of these texts as "Polyphonic" novels, a label termed by Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian-Soviet philosopher, literary critic, and theorist, to describe solely Dostoevsky's poetics. By exploring how each text fulfills the requirements of "Polyphony" during conflict, one realizes how similar both texts are and how they communicate across the chronological bounds of time. Rather than having "Polyphony" only serve as a method to explore Dostoevsky's body of work, one can transfer this philosophy as a way to read Morrison and to engage both texts as communicating despite time and authorship.

Tessa Lippmann (Bryn Mawr College) – "The Winter Palace: Its Symbology throughout Russian and Soviet Eras"

Over its history, Russian Tsars and Soviet leaders have used the Winter Palace to demonstrate their rule. Through their architecture and design choices, they have imposed their priorities onto this pre-existing symbol of Russian power. While it had long been a winter home for the royal family, it wasn't until Tsaritsa Elizabeth started (and Catherine the Great completed) the remodel that it became such an influential building. Specifically, Tsar Nicholas I used the destruction of the fire of 1837 as an opportunity to rebuild the palace in his vision. He used the design and reconstruction process to prove his ties to God, which reinforced his separation from Tsar Alexander I, whose rule was defined by secularization. His choices of what to preserve, what to adapt, and how demonstrated who and what he wanted to be associated with. Following the 1917 revolution, Soviet leaders changed the building's usage to prove the supremacy of communism. In contrast to the home of royalty it once was, it became a place for everyone: a military hospital, orphanage, museum, etc. A once shining symbol of Russian tsarism became the ultimate demonstration of Soviet rule. Because of its pre-existing monumentality, leaders used the building to further associate themselves with Russia.

Panel 2: 10:00-10:40 am

Issues in Bilingualism

Chair: Emma Montilla (UCLA)

Tadas Račkauskas (USC) – “Exploring the Interaction of Lithuanian-English Code Switching with Case Declension and Syntactic Structure: A Matrix Language Frame Model Analysis”

This paper investigates the dynamics of Lithuanian-English code-switching (CS), focusing particularly on its interaction with case declension & word order while evaluating these phenomena through the lens of the Matrix Language Frame Model (MLF). For the study, two corpora were created: a Lithuanian-English CS corpus (n=450) and a comparative-monolingual Lithuanian corpus (n=205). Each corpus is made of informal Lithuanian produced in written form on various social media websites. Results suggest that 60% of code-switched nouns and adjectives in the corpus were integrated with Lithuanian grammatical norms; i.e. correct case declensions, verb conjugation, etc. Regarding word order, a comparative corpus was utilized to verify the flexibility of Lithuanian syntactic structures. Results indicated that monolingual Lithuanian sentences, in the absence of code-switching, exhibit flexible word order, with approximately 60% adhering to the subject-verb-object (SVO) pattern, while the remaining 40% display a varied array of structures including subject-object-verb (SOV) 35.12%, object-subject-verb (OSV), 1.95% , verb-subject-object (VSO) 1.95% , and object-verb-subject (OVS) 0.49%. Crucially, in the Lithuanian-English CS corpus, approximately 92% of CS instances exhibit SVO word order. Given that English is rigidly SVO, this suggests a noteworthy influence of English on Lithuanian word order in utterances containing a code-switch into English. This observation challenges conventional notions posited by the MLF model, hinting at a potential bidirectional influence between embedded and matrix languages, whereby the embedded language may exert some impact on the grammatical structure of the matrix language.

Amy Cabrales (UCLA) – “Motivations and Identity Relationships with the Russian Language Among UCLA Heritage Speakers of Russian”

My study focuses on heritage Russian language spoken by the second generation of Russian-speaking immigrants. Heritage language has been defined as “the incompletely learned home language arising from the phenomenon of language shift and the switch to the dominant language, which is characteristic of the journey of the immigrant and their descendants” (Polinsky & Kagan, 2007). My identity as a child of Mexican immigrants and a heritage speaker of Spanish, as well as the attitudes I hold towards Spanish and English motivated me to explore the Russian-English relationship experience of heritage speakers of Russian part of the Russophone diaspora in Los Angeles. Heritage speakers vary by their level of proficiency, attitudes towards the heritage language (HL), degree of motivation to speak the HL, and opportunities to use the HL. To study this variance, I conducted structured interviews with UCLA students currently enrolled in Heritage Russian Language courses within our department. Upon analysis of results, I decided to focus on participants' relationship with their heritage Russian language: their motivation to study it at UCLA and the role it plays in their identity. Common motivational

factors include the desire to improve communication with native Russian-speaking family, increase proficiency in order to feel closer to their Russophone culture, and maximize job opportunities. As for identity, participants varied in how much they felt either more Russophone, more American, or both. This project addresses the ever-changing dynamic that language holds with self-identity among children of immigrant families, especially in the complex context of Russophone history.

COFFEE BREAK: 10:40 - 10:50 am

Panel 3: 10:50-11:45

Conceptualizing Early 20th Century Russian Literature

Chair: Lydia Roberts (UCLA)

Ava Ratcliff (UC Berkeley) — “Reconceiving the Marian Mother in ‘We’ by Yevgeny Zamyatin and ‘*The Mother*’ by Maxim Gorky”

This paper explores how Maxim Gorky and Yevgeny Zamyatin employed biblical narratives and motifs of the Virgin Mary in their novels *The Mother* (1906) and *We* (1924). Drawing upon Julia Kristeva’s essay “Stabat Mater,” as well as recent work by scholars such as Amy Singleton Adams and Vera Shevzov, this paper demonstrates how both Gorky and Zamyatin refigure the relationship between Mary and Christ in order to further their distinct revolutionary goals. The authors’ incorporation of recognizable, biblical archetypes into their novels allowed them to tap into a shared cultural vocabulary while radically reimagining the roles of women and families in twentieth-century Russia. In Gorky’s *The Mother*, the protagonist Pelageya Nilovna transforms from a conventionally maternal figure into a revolutionary partner who, through a metaphorical birth, humanizes the words of her son Pavel. Similarly, Zamyatin’s *We* uses biblical archetypes in its reimagining of traditional family structures. Within the web of biblical characters, the rebel I-330 embodies a Christ-like martyr, the love-interest O-90 serves as a Marian figure carrying the seed of future revolutions, and the protagonist D-503 is the author of a new, revolutionary “gospel.” Ultimately, this paper argues that Gorky and Zamyatin used these familiar structures to demonstrate the necessity of revolutionary ideals transcending an individual and inspiring a collective.

Joshua Darrish (UC Santa Barbara) – “Healing the Imperial Scar: Exploring the Role of Jewish Diasporic Tikkun Olam in Babel’s *Konarmiya*”

Isaac Babel: an Odessan Jew who romanticized his people’s oppressor, the Cossack. The irreconcilable cultural, political, and religious tensions between both groups defined Russia’s eastern borderlands. While writing prose about Jewish-Cossack contacts seems counterproductive, Babel advances the image of Jewish strength in *Konarmiya* (“*Конармия*”), or *Red Cavalry* (1926). He specifically employs the Babylonian Talmud’s

principle of tikkun olam that obligates the Jew to heal the world. I argue that “My First Goose” (“Мой первый гусь”) (1926), as a case study, presents the Jew’s ascent from perceived victimhood to empowerment by way of tikkun olam. The narrator Lyutov ideologically converts the Cossack from Tsarism, a regime that perpetuated mass violence against Jews, into a protector of the emergent Soviet Union that promised multiethnic collectivity over shtetl-like segregation. I first discuss existing literature on Konarmiya to find gaps in Jewish cultural comprehension where tikkun olam manifests. Then, I establish Lyutov’s consistent Jewish morality that allows him to pursue tikkun olam in the Cossacks’ space. Next, I employ a contemporary “queer theory” model to explain how non-normative Cossack descriptions secure Jewish agency. Finally, I outline Jewish-socialist symbiosis through a historical-ideological reading. It illuminates why tikkun olam gained a revolutionary Soviet character. I interweave “Gedali,” “The Rebbe” (“Ребе”), “The Story of a Horse” (“История лошади”), and “The Rebbe’s Son” (“Сын Ребе”) with “My First Goose” to bring analytic depth. My work contributes to the Babel scholarship, informing the reader of the responsibilities and power Babel believed borderland Jews held during the Bolshevik Revolution and Civil War.

Kelly Nguyen (UCLA) – “A Utopian Mirage: The Disconnect Between Theoretical Ideals and Practical Realities of Socialism in Andrei Platonov’s *Chevengur*”

Despite its completion in 1928, Andrei Platonov never saw the complete publication of his novel *Chevengur*. The first publication of the entire novel was in 1972, twenty-one years after his death in 1951. The reason it was suppressed for so long? Its controversial depiction of socialism. In the novel, Sasha Dvanov leaves his hometown to pursue the meaning of socialism. Accompanied by Stepan Kopionkin, Dvanov’s travels are directly impacted by the Russian Revolution taking a hold of the nation. Eventually, the two come across the town of Chevengur that claims to have perfected socialism. Platonov employs various ironies to challenge the Chevengurians’ assertions which rely on the people’s suspension of disbelief rather than actual merit and results. Despite their boasts about conquering time, Chevengurians’ lives continue to be dictated by their fear of it. Their implementation of socialism is crippled by individual interests and human selfishness. Kopionkin’s character draws parallels with the titular character of *Don Quixote*, the 1605 satirical Spanish epic by Miguel de Cervantes, cluing readers in on the futility of searching for spiritual fulfillment through socialism. Platonov directs blame for the failure of socialism onto its enforcers, arguing that the promises of socialism fail in their assumption of inherent good and selflessness within these individuals. With this condemnation in mind, *Chevengur* paints a contentious image of socialism: a beautiful concept stained by the selfishness of leaders who take advantage of people’s faith.

LUNCH: 11:45-12:45 pm

Panel 4: 12:45-1:40 pm

Soviet Prose Challenging the Regime

Chair: Sasha Razor (UC Santa Barbara)

Guy Yegudin (UC Santa Barbara) – “Out of Place and Out of Time: The Plight of the Intellectual Under Totalitarian Regimes as Depicted in the Novels of Bulgakov and Nabokov”

During the first half of the 20th century, the Soviet intelligentsia was isolated and persecuted by a brutal and anti-intellectual regime. Facing these miserable conditions, some Soviet and émigré intellectuals expressed a peculiar sentiment of existing out of place and out of time by writing fantastical works that feature intellectual protagonists transcending their limited worlds and finding places in which they finally belong. Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* and Vladimir Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading* and *Bend Sinister* exemplify this trend. I argue that the striking similarities between these three novels—from their critiques of totalitarian regimes to their characterizations of intellectuals' plight to their comparably transcendent endings—are not a coincidence but rather emblematic of the broader struggles and desires of a Soviet intelligentsia living under a regime hostile to their very existence. Specific topics that will be examined in this paper include the characterization of totalitarian regimes, and the Soviet regime in particular, as extraordinarily brutal and anti-intellectual by nature—a critique that is seen in all three novels to a significant degree of similarity. The similarities continue with each novel's exploration of how brutality and anti-intellectualism in a regime isolates the intellectuals living under it, placing them under such torment that their only escape becomes transcendence into “otherworlds” where they find peace.

Alina Tszyan (UC Santa Barbara) – “The Self in Peril in *Invitation to a Beheading* by Vladimir Nabokov”

When the self is in peril, fleeing becomes a necessity. In this presentation, I propose that the political persecution of individuality by an oppressive regime, creates a performative society of puppets, and therefore, in order to protect oneself from said degradation, it becomes imperative to flee. *Invitation to a Beheading* by Vladimir Nabokov is set in a two dimensional universe, where human-like creatures devoid of emotions and imagination reside within an oppressive society of conformity. As Cincinnatus C. attempts to hold on to his individuality amidst the ostracization of his peers, the novel draws parallels to Nabokov's own experience fleeing his home country following the establishment of the USSR. Under an oppressive regime, the existence of an individual self becomes an affront to the hammer of collectiveness by political intimidation. In *Invitation to a Beheading*, Vladimir Nabokov establishes the necessity of fleeing in order to preserve one's identity and life as an individual, despite the nostalgia one may feel for their home, through the parallels between Nabokov's exile from Russia and Cincinnatus C's refusal to participate in his own performative society. A home is typically a place of belonging, however when in the land which one calls home, an oppressive alien regime

takes control, an individual can no longer safely exist there, and thus, the only path forward is to escape.

Zachary Richardson (UCLA) – “*Doctor Zhivago*, Alexander Blok’s *The Twelve*, and Boris Pasternak’s Philosophy of a Great Artist”

Boris Pasternak was a beloved Russian Jewish poet. As a revolutionary and original man both before and after the October Revolution, he was always outside the bounds of what censors wanted. His most celebrated novel, *Doctor Zhivago*, proved scandalous in his homeland largely due to its unashamed individualism. To this day its themes and motivations are greatly debated, especially the philosophical views of the author. For example, Jewish and Christian thinkers alike have sought to praise the work’s spiritual character, while the more canonically minded of those same traditions denounce the work as foreign and hostile. This presentation will discuss the protagonist of the novel, Yuri Zhivago, as a composite of Blok and Pasternak, and how Pasternak’s philosophy of art and a great artist is revealed through the character. Pasternak himself described the hero of the novel Yuri Zhivago as a “resultant” of himself and the poet Alexander Blok, later adding Sergey Yesenin and Vladimir Mayakovsky to the mixture. More than just a celebration of dead friends, Pasternak wanted to make his hero someone truly great. In the process, he reveals his philosophy of what it means to be a great artist. This presentation will examine Yuri’s originality, indomitability, honesty and eventual quasi-sainthood. At every step Yuri and his actions will be interpreted through Pasternak’s autobiographical works and letters, as well as Blok’s *The Twelve*.

Panel 5: 1:45-2:40 pm

Cross-Cultural Relationships: In Search for Identities

Chair: Cooper Lynn (UCLA)

Michael O’Connell (Haverford College) – “‘The smell of the Rus’ is in the air’: White emigres and the American Rus’ at ROVA Farms, 1934-1976”

White emigres arriving in the United States after 1917 encountered a diverse Russian community consisting mostly of immigrants from the borderlands between the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires, i.e., present-day Ukraine, Belarus, Slovakia, and Poland. Spurned by the Catholic Church in the United States, many of these Slavic immigrants entered Russian Orthodox churches where they underwent a religious and national conversion. I analyze the rhetoric of the Russian Consolidated Mutual Aid Society (known more commonly as ROOVA or ROVA, an acronym derived from the organization’s Russian name: *ruskoe ob’edinennoe obshchestvo vzaimopomoshchi v Amerike*), a fraternal organization established in Philadelphia in 1926. In their writing, White emigres argued that ROVA’s success depended on disowning Russia’s communist present and embracing the styles and ideas of the Tsarist past. ROVA’s

leadership endeavored to create an American Rus', unifying all Russians in the United States under one banner, thus revitalizing 19th-Century Russophile aspirations to unite so-called Great, Little, and White Russians into a *triedinyy russskiy narod*, or triune Russian nation. ROVA Farms, the organization's 1400-acre resort property in central New Jersey, realized the territorial component of this plan. I investigate the transformation of ROVA Farms during the Cold War, as it transformed from the focal point of the American Rus' into a meeting place for Russian-Americans, where embracing the traditions and leisure pursuits of their adopted nation became the primary means of distancing themselves from communist Russia.

Katharina Hass (UC Berkeley) – “The Monument to the Treaty of Georgievsk: a Georgian Monumental Mosaic and the Soviet Friendship of the Peoples”

A monumental tribute to a transnational friendship, the Monument to the Treaty of Georgievsk represents a Georgian emphasis on a Soviet conception of the friendship of the peoples. Constructed in 1983, the Monument extends friendly expression to Slavic cultures and Soviet achievements by including bilingual (Georgian-Russian) text and placing it alongside distinctive Georgian motifs and national literature. The Monument builds on both conventions of monumental Soviet mosaics while also referencing traditions of Georgian and Byzantine cloisonne enamels with brilliant colors and delicate patterns. By incorporating recognizable themes such as friendship and collectivity, the Monument can effectively transcend language and nationality, as partaking in friendship is universal and legible to all. This friendship extends beyond individuals and to the historic relations of states. In commemoration of the bicentennial of a 1783 treaty that brought Georgia and Russia into closer relations and helped facilitate continued interaction between states, the Monument establishes the treaty as a contemplation of shared relations in history. Located on the old Georgian Military Highway, the placement of the Monument along the road emphasizes connectedness between nations, as the route has served as a significant passage for transport through the Caucasus Mountains for centuries. The Monument to the Treaty of Georgievsk is an impressive visual realization of the Soviet friendship of the peoples, featuring the sharing of Georgia's cultural heritage with other Soviet Republics.

Tyler Armstrong (UCLA) – “‘You Sent for Me, Comrade Leader?’: How Marvel's Black Widow Characterizes Russian Identity as Inferior to American Identity”

In modern American pop culture, the superheroes created by publishing juggernaut Marvel Comics are ubiquitous in mass media. One such character is the Russian-born Natasha Romanoff, better known by her pseudonym “Black Widow.” Black Widow is an ex-KGB spy who defects to the United States to become a superhero, with most of her stories centering around nationalism, freedom, and personal struggle. As a result of this thematic focus, depictions of Black Widow in comics and film provide ample opportunity to analyze the changing interpretation and portrayal of Russian identity by the predominantly American creators who created them. Thus, this paper explores both

various Black Widow comics and the 2021 *Black Widow* film to argue that these works cast Russian identity as inferior while simultaneously extolling the virtues of American exceptionalism. In both mediums, while Russian characters are depicted as amoral, selfish, and presumptively hostile, Americans are righteous, altruistic, and caring. Russia is, by default, the preeminent source of all of Natasha's trauma and pain, while America represents promise and security. Even as Natasha's aesthetics, allegiances, and conceptions of identity evolve, there remains a firmly established contrast between Russia's villainy and America's heroism. This narrative constant offers insight into American society's understanding of "Russianness," and how American creators use fiction to center pro-American messaging.

COFFEE BREAK 2:40-3:00 pm

Panel 6: 3:00-4:10 pm

Focus on the Balkans: Politics, Migration, Youth

Chair: Sylvie Vidan (UCLA)

Kenan Čačković (UCLA) – "Environmental Implications of Political Mismanagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina"

Over 3,300 premature yearly deaths secure Bosnia and Herzegovina's spot as one of the worst polluted countries in Europe. Powerless lawmakers, aging infrastructure, and stubborn citizens impede efforts to improve air quality in the country's biggest cities. I am analyzing the region's complex history and data from international organizations to create a holistic view of Bosnia's modern-day environmental implications. Bosnia has significant renewable energy potential through biomass, solar, wind, and hydroelectricity but elects to invest in nonrenewable energy production, poisoning thousands with hazardous air. Three rotating presidents oversee the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and the Republika Srpska (RS), Bosnia's two main entities. Regulations and environmental improvement efforts vary between both territories, with RS lagging behind FBiH. As Bosnia takes strides towards EU membership, pressure from the global stage mounts to align the country with European emission and environmental standards. Many citizens have little hope for the future. They can't leave their homes during the winter months, and when the weather gets warmer and the air cleaner, passionate youth rise to demonstrate but receive minimal support from national leaders. Bosnia and Herzegovina's political and ethnic divisions continue to affect the daily lives of those who call the country home with no end in sight.

Doris Butković (UCLA) – "The Inheritance of Memory: Generational Trauma in Post-Yugoslav Communities"

The disintegration of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s and the conflicts that followed have had a profound and long-lasting impact on both the immediate survivors of the conflicts as well as subsequent generations. This study delves into the intergenerational transmission of trauma among post-Yugoslav generations, comprising both the residents of the successor states of the former Yugoslavia and those dispersed in the diaspora. Through a mixed-method approach, including a comprehensive literature review, historical context analysis, and thematic analysis, this research looks into the transference of trauma across generations as well as its influence on the psychological, physical, and sociocultural domains. This analysis focuses on the manifestation of such trauma on individuals and collective communities, including the higher rates of mental health disorders, physical health issues, fragmentation and displacement among communities. The primary objective of this research and analysis is to obtain a greater understanding of how the trauma that resulted from the Yugoslav Wars has been transmitted to subsequent post-Yugoslav generations. The theoretical implications of the study's findings not only shed light on the impact of wartime conflict in post-Yugoslav societies, but they also serve as a broader representation of the intergenerational trauma that is passed down in the aftermath of such conflicts.

Aliyah McCoy (UCLA) – “Remnants of War: The Mass Emigration of Bosnian Youth”

Nearly thirty years after the ratification of the Dayton Agreement, which marked an end to the Bosnian War and preceding conflicts, Bosnia continues to face widespread instability and uncertainty in numerous sectors. From systematic corruption and the threat of secession to a lack of investment into the public sector, fragility within Bosnia has ultimately set the stage for the current mass exodus of Bosnian youth. This paper discusses the immediate post-war political environment in Bosnia and how these issues have culminated, preventing Bosnia from making a full recovery from the war. By researching news articles and academic papers, I will also analyze the specific aspects that have created an endemic lack of educational and career-based prospects for Bosnian youth, leading to their emigration to neighboring countries. Despite a generally unfaltering number of jobs and education availability, a lack of investment to these resources by a fractured government system, along with greater promises in other European countries have led to the high youth unemployment, low wages, and lack of educational opportunities. The political issues in Bosnia are extremely complex and multifaceted and require substantial systematic reform. However, alterations to the Dayton Agreement, in addition to reallocation of political power and public service funding may provide some necessary relief to the growing tensions.

Paloma Gasparov (UCLA) – “The Brain Drain Paradigm on Bulgarian Youth”

This presentation explores the profound effects of brain drain on Bulgaria's demographic landscape. Brain drain refers to the phenomenon where highly skilled individuals migrate to more affluent countries, often in the West, leaving their home countries with a diminished pool of talent. This study focuses on Bulgaria, where there is a significant

trend of young professionals migrating to countries like Germany and the United States. The analysis reveals the multifaceted impact of brain drain on Bulgaria, including population decline, a shortage of skilled workers, economic difficulties, regional disparities, and the challenge of retaining talent. The essay argues for comprehensive political reforms to address these issues, including enhancing wages, increasing political transparency, attracting and retaining talent, capitalizing on return migration, and investing in Bulgaria's underdeveloped regions. Despite its rich heritage and potential, Bulgaria's progress is hindered by the lack of ethical political leadership, creating an unwelcoming environment for its citizens. The phenomenon of brain drain is not exclusive to Bulgaria but is a common challenge across the Balkans, highlighting the region's vulnerability and the importance of maintaining strong European ties. The essay underscores the value of democracy and its susceptibility to corruption, with brain drain serving as a barometer of its fragility. By addressing the causes and consequences of brain drain, Bulgaria and other Balkan countries can pave the way for innovation and progress, emulating their Western European counterparts.

Panel 7: 4:15-5:10 pm

“Imperial Shadow”: Some Outcomes of Russia's Politics

Chair: Yelena Furman (UCLA)

Cheyenne Hawkins (UCLA) – “Parallel Histories: A Comparative Analysis of Crimean Tatar Persecution under Stalin and Putin”

The Crimean Tatars, an indigenous Turkic ethnic group native to the Crimean Peninsula, have faced a difficult history, having been subjected to persecution and multiple annexations by Russia. The height of this persecution was during the time of the Soviet Union when Joseph Stalin orchestrated the mass deportation of Crimean Tatars from Crimea to Soviet Uzbekistan. Decades later, in 2014, the homeland of the Crimean Tatars was targeted again and illegally annexed into Russia by Vladimir Putin. After the annexation, Putin's policies began to echo Stalin's strategies of Russification and persecution, particularly targeting the Crimean Tatars who opposed the Russian occupation. This paper aims to explore the parallels between Stalin's Soviet-era strategies of Russification and persecution of the Crimean Tatars and Putin's similar approach concerning the Crimean Tatars. The paper will delve into Stalin's methods, which involved forcibly reshaping Crimea's cultural landscape to better align with Russian culture and the subsequent forcible removal of the Crimean Tatars from Crimea. Furthermore, it will compare Putin's differing strategy of initially promising to preserve the cultural heritage of the Crimean Tatars, only to later abandon these commitments in favor of Stalin-like changes to the peninsula, effectively erasing Crimean Tatar heritage and silencing Crimean Tatar voices. Through a comparative lens, this

paper will shed light on the similarities and differences in how both Stalin and Putin address the Crimean Tatar population of Crimea.

Elise Keller and Fernanda Varelas Ramirez (UC Santa Barbara) – “A Comparison of Vladimir Putin's Interviews with American and Russian Reporters”

Following the invasion of Ukraine by Russia on February 24, 2022, the topics of Russian nationalism and the history of Russia's relationship with Ukraine have been prominent topics of discussion for Russia's President Vladimir Putin. This topic has been an increasingly relevant and routine subject of coverage for the Russian leader in domestic and international spheres. Patterns have materialized in how President Putin addresses the question of history and the Russian right to Ukrainian territory when addressing domestic political actors and international ones. This presentation observes and investigates how the attitude and behavior of Putin toward American and Russian journalists vary, how the description of progress and hindrances in the fight against Ukraine are alike and different, as well as how the history and reasons for continued conflict are explained by the president. This is done through viewing and analyzing two interviews done with President Vladimir Putin and a multitude of journalists: one with conservative American journalist Tucker Carlson in February 2024 and the other with numerous Russian war journalists and correspondents in June 2023. The findings of these examinations, which will be shared when the project is presented, uncover how variance in Putin's audiences shows the leader's multi-faceted political goals and consequently, help to shape his interview style and strategies.

Kareena Dhillon (UC Santa Barbara) – “From Cold War Legacies to Modern Ambitions: Russia's Role in West Africa”

Despite accounting for only 1% of foreign direct investment into Africa, Russia has maintained its position as a key influential player in the region. In fact, Russia's offensive in Ukraine has overshadowed its tactics in 'surrounding regions,' namely the Middle East and West Africa. Geopolitical dynamics in West Africa reflect an intricate interplay among diverse actors, including traditional Western powers, rising regional players, and local entities. As such, Russia's role in the region has developed alongside its geopolitical ambitions. Under the Soviet Union, foreign policy focused on supporting local communist political parties and military insurgencies by sending weapons, advisors, and other aid to allies. After the Cold War, the superpower began investing in mercenaries as a political loophole, namely the Wagner Group. Over the years Wagner provided security assistance to local governments, offering weapons, troops, and political consulting. Although, since 2017 the Wagner Group's engagement has fueled arms trafficking, escalating violence and instability across Africa. As such, Russia has concomitantly showcased a comprehensive strategy aimed at pursuing economic opportunities, securing access to valuable natural resources, and expanding its geopolitical influence in West Africa. In using a methodological approach to demonstrate how this pursuit underscores Russia's determination to expand its operational footprint,

this paper argues how such involvement in the region presents significant security risks, including terrorism and counterinsurgency efforts, economic instability, and the potential for ethnic conflicts. Further, the wider implications of Wagner's engagement could complicate regional dynamics, increasing the likelihood of violence, proxy conflicts, and extremism.

5:15-5:30 pm Closing Remarks & Presentation of Certificates: Tanya Ivanova-Sullivan (UCLA) and Larry McLellan (UCSB)