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Begins at Home

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# The Ethical Imperatives Deriving from War

## Decolonization Begins at Home

JEREMY MORRIS

This piece is written from the perspective of interdisciplinary Russian studies. It will be more descriptive than analytical. I want to talk about four broad issues specifically from the position of an interdisciplinary scholar—my work lies at the confluence of anthropology, area studies, and political studies. These issues are, first, how the war makes the question of hidden labor and extractivist modes of scholarship more acute. Second, I wish to highlight the ethical question scholars face who have long-standing professional contacts in Russia. Third, as a researcher whose work is based on ethnographic immersion in a Russian fieldsite, what does the end of such access mean not only epistemologically but also professionally, ethically. Finally, I discuss the unprecedented political attacks on the discipline of “Russian” studies, and how, in my view they are as dangerous as they are ingenuous. In the conclusion I ponder how we can resist the deglobalization of scholarship more generally, regardless of our disciplinary identities.

### A Chance to Reflect on Extractivism

There is, of course, no “typical” scholar when it comes to describing engagement with academic culture in the Russian Federation, as others in this forum have shown. The stereotype of the exploitative Western scholar building a reputation on the backs of precarious locals digging up archival work is just that—a stereotype.

Having said that, I admit that there must be few scholars who do not reflect on how publication is by nature extractive. The logic of the generation of knowledge, historiographic or otherwise, is little different from that

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Four colleagues contributed to this article from history and other disciplines. They wish to remain anonymous, but I thank them.

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of workers engaged in other types of production: raw material requires refining, there is waste in the process, and the unpleasant sausage making in the hidden abode usually remains invisible. That is not to say a book's acknowledgments section will not repeat some humorous anecdote from "the field" and express, perhaps tellingly, voluminous thanks to the archival curator. But especially in the anglophone university, the relentless Fordist logic (another groundbreaking monograph! another neat regression! another hybrid conceptualization!) means that even junior scholars are engaged in pulling knowledge by the teeth from yet more subordinated people for their own projects. This is well documented in social science research on post-Soviet contexts.<sup>1</sup> But history is no exception, even if it is the case that, because it does not usually deal with living human subjects, it is easier to brush over the inevitable fact that knowledge is still co-produced with other, unacknowledged actors over the life cycle of a research project. It seems to me that the open secret of extractive research in Russian studies will get worse, not better, because of the war. If co-publication and joint projects were beginning to better reflect the collaborative nature of knowledge production in the humanities and social sciences, the strong sanctions against institutional connections between scholars in the European Union (EU) and in Russia has already led to an exacerbation of power differences, with Russia-based scholars now forced to physically move (often to lower-status positions), hide even their credentials in interactions, publish anonymously, or just put up with being ejected from the global scholarly conversation entirely.

More or less, with the advent of the truly large-scale international conference, the ease of publishing collaboration, and the like, most people working on topics relating to Russia had over the last 20 years begun to be imbricated as never before with the ecosystem of Russian academia. At the same time, we should remember that Russian scholars faced internal challenges connected to politicized research and self-censorship long before the war. Like the extractive moment, it seems we were happy to defer confronting these issues and how they affected our engagement with colleagues. We should be much more reflexive than we currently are that this moment of the total subjugation of Russian universities to the purpose of the regime has laid bare our sometimes childlike perception of soft repression. In a sense, we should all have been ready to deal with the fact that our colleagues would be forced into silence, submission, collaboration, or exile long before February 2022. But we were not. In this respect, like the

<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Morris, "Political Ethnography and Russian Studies in a Time of Conflict," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 39, 1–2 (2022): 92–100.

Western world in general, we avoided facing the ethical implications of Russia's political trajectory, because it was preferable not to have to deal with it—until we had to deal with it.

Now we are in a position where we have been forced to confront reality. In the EU, where I write from, we have national-level injunctions to cease all institutional contact. Danske Universiteter puts it this way:

Universities will suspend bilateral, institutional collaborations on research, education and innovation with state actors in Russia and Belarus. This means, among other things, that there will be no exchange of scientific staff and students going forward. This also means that conferences and other scientific meetings on Russian and Belarusian soil will be held without the participation of researchers employed at Danish universities.<sup>2</sup>

Further guidance states that if researchers are “in doubt” about the ethics of co-publication, they should seek advice from a supervisor—which, if you think about it, is pretty absurd. A more prescriptive list was published in Finland, including guidance that “researchers at the University are advised not to initiate new co-authored publications involving researchers affiliated with Russian or Belarusian universities or research institutes.”<sup>3</sup> However, not only do even careful injunctions like those in Finland leave many things ambiguous.<sup>4</sup> They have hazy legal status and delegate the ethical moment to individuals, because many of our collaborators *de facto* maintain dual affiliations. Thus many find work-arounds and are not required to cease individual contacts and collaborations. But this means individuals have to effectively second-guess their own decisions about seemingly straightforward questions like peer review, conference panels, co-authoring, and even citation.

We have been delegated to conduct political hygiene tests, and this puts us in an invidious political and professional position. We should be

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<sup>2</sup> Danske Universiteter, “Universiteter Indstiller Samarbejde med Rusland og Belarus,” <https://dkuni.dk/pressemeddelelser/danske-universiteter-indstiller-samarbejde-med-rusland-og-belarus/>.

<sup>3</sup> University of Helsinki, “The War in Ukraine—University of Helsinki Guidelines,” <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/news/war-ukraine>.

<sup>4</sup> I reviewed the University of Oslo's statement about research collaboration, which is unclear but also more conciliatory than the others. Swedish official advice is very similar to that in Denmark, citing the need for researchers to assess collaboration with individuals on a case by case basis. Notably no scholars with area expertise have been invited as experts to advise rectorates, as far as I am aware. Uppsala University, for example, has not invited any researchers from its Area Studies Research Centre, despite it being the largest in Scandinavia.

more honest with ourselves about this and start discussing it much more seriously. Now I discount for a moment the end of the spectrum of opinion that says (often quite loudly) that this position can be overcome by a blanket ban. I have heard this said in all seriousness at an academic conference in the last year. In fact, the proposal was more radical: a pause of Russian studies altogether. Many colleagues blink incredulously when I report this, and I have to say it seems as if they think this problem will just go away on its own. But they should remember that loud voices tend to get heard, even (in fact, especially) if they propose only extreme solutions. But for the purposes of this discussion, let us set that aside.

What I will say is that radical solutions leave a residue, and it is an unethical one. Because of misperceptions about what “suspending bilateral collaboration” means, we have case after case of Russia-based researchers being excluded from discussions and the public sphere of our profession. In fact, I am not at liberty to cite these cases, because even highlighting them is too politically sensitive for the researchers affected in historical studies, sociology, and anthropology. Once again, I do not express an opinion on whether that is justified, merely that the delegation to individual researchers, editorial boards, and scholarly associations means two things. The first is unjust and ad hoc decision making—a lack of due process and consistency. Second, activist scholars, justifiably or not, practice hygiene tests on their colleagues. This does not make for a healthy profession. Once again, it seems we are in denial about the fact that Russian citizens have been arbitrarily removed without any justification in law, or indeed according to any criteria of discrimination, from subgroups of scholarly associations. Regardless of one’s political position, that Russian scholars felt they had to “voluntarily” withdraw from the 2023 British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies (BASEES) conference should give cause for reflection.<sup>5</sup>

The fact that a public discussion on social media was leveraged into a test of worthiness to attend an academic conference shows how ethically problematic the issue of delegation is. BASEES tried to come up with an equitable solution. Scholars who “opposed” the war were welcome to attend. But it was on the grounds of the harassment policy that a conflict

<sup>5</sup> These details of the case are not in dispute. To summarize further, scrupulously reporting facts only, a letter addressed to the chair of BASEES and signed by a large number of people protested the attendance by two scholars of Russian origin. The letter argued that there is no place for hate speech and misinformation about the “russian” [sic] war in Ukraine at an academic conference. While the mechanism of “voluntary” withdrawal by the two scholars is a matter of debate, without the letter and pressure on BASEES these two scholars would have no doubt attended.

arose between different delegates. These policies are clearly stated on the association's webpages. The letter of denunciation that was the proximal cause of the withdrawal alleged, *inter alia*, that one of the Russian researchers was not a genuine "independent researcher" but was living in Russia.<sup>6</sup>

The unintended consequence of this policy, regardless of that particular dispute, is obvious. Just as in Russian universities today, an ambiguous political loyalty test is implied. What does opposition to the war mean? How can it be measured? Many argue that scholars remaining in their positions in Russia are passively supporting the war and therefore *de facto* do not "oppose" it. Others argue that merely attending such a conference would render those scholars liable to criminal penalties in Russia for "discrediting the armed forces." Third, Russian scholars' absence from global spaces of communication allows others to impute to them various failings—from an inability to contribute to agendas to support for the war. Furthermore, requirements (such as at the European Association of Social Anthropologists conference) for Russia-based scholars to attend as "unaffiliated" researchers mean they are discouraged to attend, because such status means their contribution is not bureaucratically acceptable to their (actual) mother institution back in Russia. "Big deal," "suck it up," one might reasonably retort. It is a small price for Russia-based scholars to pay, given the nightmare inflicted daily on Ukraine (and Ukrainian scholars remaining at home). But then we come back to the fact of imbrication. There is hardly a scholar who does not rely on some contact with Russian colleagues, be it even for some informal help with access to archives, advice, and so on. If we accept that total isolation is practically impossible and even undesirable, then we should also acknowledge we have utterly failed to ethically address the challenge of our obligations to our colleagues.

### **The Uncertainty of Ethical Treatment of Human Research Subjects**

The Catch-22 of sociological and anthropological work goes like this: you want to do ethnographic work in Russia. You apply for ethical clearance to your American or British university. The committee asks you: "Are human subjects involved?"; "Will subjects be presented with a written informed consent form and be apprised of the right to withdraw their consent?" You hit a brick wall explaining how you cannot get subjects to sign pieces of paper because of the historical context of denunciation and mistrust. The committee—if you are lucky—eventually relents when you assure them you will act ethically. Once again, we essentially find a delegation of ethical

<sup>6</sup> The letter was publicly available as a Google Doc in March 2023. I choose not to publicize the names of any involved.

responsibility. As an anthropologist initially visiting working-class rust-belt towns, I always felt uncomfortable about this but persuaded myself that it was somehow okay. I could look out for my “guys” by employing the tried and trusted methods of obscuring and more than anonymizing them in my writing. Also, most of my writing was in English; any risks to them were minimized.

If this was ever really tenable, it is not now. Mere contact with a foreign researcher is potential kryptonite. The research subjects do not always understand this, which underlines how we should seek to avoid becoming the case that sets the precedent. Many anthropologists who use extensive quotation and portraits of real people from very specific locales would privately acknowledge that if some representative of the security or law-enforcement services wanted to figure out who was being described, it would be possible to reverse-engineer the person’s real identity. If nothing else, telecom laws on retaining records in Russia make any actual contact of this type recoverable, if not the content of messages and calls. Personally, in writing my current book about Russian society before and after the war, I have no better solutions. Because my work is longitudinal—that is, I go back again and again to the same towns and villages, the same people, there is no realistic way to thoroughly obscure identities. At best, I have more recently “spread” the risk by using what are called ethnographic composites.

So, for example, instead of an account of an individual research interlocutor—let us say a citizen journalist from the town of A. who documents pollution, I weave together a number of accounts of similar activists. You can immediately see not only the scholarly problem with this but the ethical one also. It would not matter to a keen representative of the security services or “anti-extremism” police that this is not one person. Proving my contact would be enough. More importantly, the onus is on me. We cannot expect interlocutors to anticipate the negative repercussions of contact with foreign researchers. Things are also arguably much worse than in Cold War 1.0. Why? Because of the transparency of even semiprivate speech—whether in a text message or Telegram message or social media post, even in a locked profile. I continue to reflect on the choices I make about contact and noncontact, the individuals who are more or less vulnerable merely because of their association with me.

I do not mean to overstate my importance. More likely than not, no one will ever have the slightest interest in me or my research from the perspective of using it for purposes of punishment in Russia. But I am equally sensitive to the impossibility of anticipating the future and the

“what if?”—the “unknown unknowns,” in the inimitable philosophizing of Donald Rumsfeld. In fact, this famous phrase was just a tortuous way of expressing a basic aspect of cognitive psychology we rarely consider in terms of our research: not a blind spot in research but aspects of collective ignorance concerning the heuristic apprehension of reality, known as “Johari window” number 4 in psychology research.<sup>7</sup> This creates an imperative of ethical imagination—and an imagination open to bad faith, bad luck, and further political deterioration within Russia. As with the previous question, we need more open discussion about what this means for research involving the reproduction in written or other forms of the potentially self-damaging life worlds of real human beings. Should anthropologists, especially Western ones, stop talking to Russian citizens? I quite often ask this of my colleagues. I mean it genuinely, if faux-naively. Usually the answer is silence. Finally, does this mean we are to regard historical Russians in archival and other documents as the only valid interlocutor now that living ones are off-limits? What are the ethical implications of that for historians, I wonder?

### **Decolonization Begins at Home**

My last section reflects on the uses and abuses of the term “decoloniality” as overlaid on Russian studies and as it pertains to the two other ethical quandaries I have too briefly discussed. Decoloniality is often cited as a major challenge to Russian area studies, whether in historical or any other research. There are numerous articles since the invasion of Ukraine that make the serious and sustained charge that Russian studies and its Western scholars are crypto-imperialists, sympathetic to Russian aggression, or even guilty of indoctrinating the young and the “left” as to the benign nature of the Soviet project.<sup>8</sup> Russian literary studies comes in for repeated attacks. I know from experience that many of my colleagues shrug this off as fundamentally unserious posturing or “letting off steam.” I take these charges seriously and have responded a number of times to what I consider harmful mischaracterizations, slander even of the profession in general. For example, in EU-funded media supporting European integration we get this intervention: “Western universities and research centres focusing

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<sup>7</sup> Sandy Oliver and Sophie Duncan, “Editorial: Looking through the Johari Window,” *Research for All* 3, 1 (2019): 1–6.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Susan Smith-Peters, “How the Field Was Colonized: Russian History’s Ukrainian Blind Spot,” H-RUSSIA, 14 December 2022, <https://networks.h-net.org/node/10000/blog/decolonizing-russian-studies/12015665/how-field-was-colonized-russian-history's>.



on Russian cultural studies often end up in a way glorifying the Russian empire both in its Czarist, Bolshevik, and current forms instead of uncovering and condemning the track record of dictatorship, mass repressions, mass murders, deportations, and genocide.”<sup>9</sup>

I will not go into much more detail here, but further interventions published in visible outlets, and often amplified or written by colleagues, were intimations that Russia is governed by a corpse ideology, that Russians are a fish-people with gills that can breathe only underwater (in an autocratic stew), and that our profession “makes generations of US students largely unaware of non-Russia in Eastern Europe,”<sup>10</sup> or that “Russia studies in the West” (sic), are “contaminated by Russian propaganda.”<sup>11</sup> These articles struck me as parody. No doubt in some corners of our profession there are some unreconstructed curricula. Decolonizing the epistemological frame of teaching in Russian studies has been going on for a long time—indeed, so long it makes me feel quite old. I wrote in a little detail about such efforts at my previous institution, the University of Birmingham.<sup>12</sup> In my present institution, students read an incredibly diverse set of scholars. But, and here is the point, “diversity” is not about the ethnic or national origin of those scholars but about their viewpoints, the kind of evidence they provide, and so on.

Now, it is true, as Victoria Donovan recently wrote for the Association of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES), that there is a “sorry state” to our profession.<sup>13</sup> But it is on the knowledge-production side and the valuing of expertise as much as the teaching one. This is because of academia’s extractivist, exclusionary practices and fetishization of the achievement and work of the individual researcher. It is also about the exclusion of voices that do not come with the approval of (usually male and white) patrons. Donovan does a much better job at getting to the root of the actual meaning of “decolonizing” our studies regardless of

<sup>9</sup> Artem Shaipov and Yuliia Shaipova, “Russian Cultural Offensive in the West,” *Euractiv*, 15 February 2023, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/opinion/russian-cultural-offensive-in-the-west/>.

<sup>10</sup> Yuriy Gorodnichenko, Ilona Sologoub, and Tatyana Deryugina, “Why Russian Studies in the West Failed to Provide a Clue about Russia and Ukraine,” *VoxUkraine*, 21 June 2023, <https://voxukraine.org/en/why-russian-studies-in-the-west-failed-to-provide-a-clue-about-russia-and-ukraine>.

<sup>11</sup> Taras Kuzio, “Why Western Scholars of Russia Were Unable to Understand Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine,” *VoxUkraine*, 17 July 2023, <https://voxukraine.org/en/why-western-scholars-of-russia-were-unable-to-understand-russia-s-invasion-of-ukraine>.

<sup>12</sup> Morris, “Political Ethnography.”

<sup>13</sup> Victoria Donovan, “The (Sorry) State of the Field or Why Western Humanists Need to Listen in Silence and Solidarity,” *ASEEES NewsNet* (January 2023): 11–13.

the subject matter: the key is to level hierarchies and fully acknowledge our collaborators rather than keeping them in a subaltern position, whether it is as research data collectors and crunchers, translators, and a host of others who actually do the “messy and fleshy” part of generating new knowledge. Colonial relations, after all, are not just about which language and which version of history people are allowed to use. Fundamentally, the *neocolonial* moment is about the denial of power gradients, and a denial of the denial of others’ right to be equitably heard, even while maintaining such relations in plain sight. As Donovan goes on to say, research needs to foreground its “social work,” where the outputs are reconceptualized so as to avoid the extractivist traps the incentives of the profession make us gravitate toward. This is an important imperative, but as we know the decolonial moment is often used to legitimate national/nationalist narratives and retributive violence. And this too should be subject to part of a decolonial lens.

In my own small corner of social science research I wrote a piece in a similar vein to Donovan’s for *Post-Soviet Affairs*.<sup>14</sup> Writing about the preponderance of secondary survey data in political scholarship about Russia, I explored the possibilities of cultivating a more pluralist and generous environment in research. But I also argued that this was not possible without more honesty about the structural, and frankly neocolonialist, relations of knowledge production today. I reflected that the war on Ukraine may actually accelerate neocolonial relations of extraction by Western-based researchers of the labor of indigenous scholars. They may be driven into even greater invisibility, even as we rely on their data collection more than ever before. This is because the dirty secret of local fixers will become more necessary to hide (can you imagine an acknowledgment list today?). This is in addition to the already widespread difficulty in acknowledging *any* knowledge production as legitimate when it comes from the Russian Federation.

However, an alternative is possible—the showcasing of local and embedded scholars’ work and a stepping back of their more privileged collaborators and colleagues. Once again, the war actually creates a space where the profession can acknowledge the institutional and disciplinary barriers to local scholars seeking to be heard, whatever their research agenda. This, of course, does not mean “positive discrimination” on the grounds of the need to promote nonethnic Russian histories, places, and peoples but once more a sensitivity to the way the dominant wield an agenda-setting

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<sup>14</sup> Morris, “Political Ethnography.”

power in all disciplines and subdisciplines by dint of their preponderance on committees and editorial boards.

To be decolonial and postcolonial is to be in favor of a project for a positive science. As Alima Bissenova writes, it is not about “cancel culture,” but about decanonization.<sup>15</sup> To “rewrite” is not to erase or elide. For example, alongside the mythology of Moscow as the Third Rome sits the remaking of Moscow as a space of migrant labor and exploitation in platform work but also resistance and interethnic organization.<sup>16</sup> In place of yet another study of the Kremlin’s favorite fascist philosophers, scholars may work on LGBTQ culture in Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, and elsewhere as proposing an alternative queer ontology beyond the “global gay.” Madina Tlostanova wrote presciently that the realization of the post-Soviet moment as postimperial would result in bloodshed and chaos.<sup>17</sup> In her book-length treatment of the post-Soviet she was unrelentingly pessimistic about Russia’s ability to overcome the imperial syndrome as she was about the ability of former colonized nations themselves to overcome the easy version of “self-determination” entailing “surrogate memory and the simulacrum of ethnic culture.”<sup>18</sup> This was, for her, a result of the continuation of the “Soviet myth” on the part of Russians, as well as more generally how a retreat to the affective as a response to humiliation cuts off the ability to think critically.<sup>19</sup> We do not have to agree with all of Tlostanova’s diagnoses to take careful note of her warning to avoid both “secondary Orientalism” and its bedfellow, “secondary Eurocentrism.”<sup>20</sup> We can see this in effect today as a direct result of the percolation of scholarly historical narratives into public discourse on the war on Ukraine: the confirmation of Russian “horde genetics” leads to orientalist myths of the need to become “quite civilized” only via an escape to Europe for countries as diverse as Ukraine and Georgia.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Alima Bissenova, “Of Decolonization and Its Ineluctability,” <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/sice/sice-blog/of-decolonisation-and-its-ineluctability>.

<sup>16</sup> Jeremy Morris, “Activists and Experiential Entanglement in Russian Labor Organizing,” in *Varieties of Russian Activism: State-Society Contestation in Everyday Life*, ed. Morris, Andrei Semenov, and Regina Smyth (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2023), 143–65.

<sup>17</sup> Madina Tlostanova, “Postsocialist ≠ Postcolonial? On Post-Soviet Imaginary and Global Coloniality,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48, 2 (2012): 130–42.

<sup>18</sup> Madina Tlostanova, *What Does It Mean to Be Post-Soviet: Decolonial Art from the Ruins of the Soviet Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 120.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Madina Tlostanova, “Can the Post-Soviet Think?,” *Intersections: East European Journal of Society and Politics* 1, 2 (2015): 48–49.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

The rather ironic thing about Russian studies has been the reluctance, not so much in Russia itself but among our Western-based colleagues, to look beyond Southern Theory for our own models and methodologies of studying the “subaltern.”<sup>22</sup> We find ourselves repeating the mistakes of the past: for example, “decoloniality” as a sometimes uncomfortable fitting of theories about racism and whiteness largely circulating in the Global North hardly scrapes the surface of identity politics and history of the post-Soviet space. Studies of existing racism as state capacity need triangulation with studies of creolized identities specific to the history of localities that are still emerging from a nested imperial hierarchy.<sup>23</sup> The fact that I can use only a Global South concept like “creolization,” to describe the mixing of Russian, Tatar and Udmurt, and Mari identity is indicative of the problem. I myself can only really speak about contexts within the present Russian Federation, but even here, decolonizing knowledge starts at home by recognizing subaltern voices all around us, regardless of ethnicity or “nationality.” Once more, this is as much an ethical project—relating to our research practices, as it is work in support of a political program of national self-determination.

## Conclusion

If my reflections here tend to the negative, that is not really my intention. In reality, in terms of grasping the ethical challenge to our practices, we actually have a lot of relearning we can do as a profession by examining individual cases from Cold War 1.0, and even the cases of “enemy aliens” from World War II. This Cold War 2.0 is trickier. It is worse than the “coldness” of the Cold War. It is—forgive the overused metaphor—Schrodinger’s war, after the thought experiment from theoretical physics. In the experiment, a cat in a box is both alive and dead at the same time due to the implications of quantum mechanics. It is only observation by an observer that makes one of these states true. We are both more actively “in confrontation” with the Russian Federation than at the height of the Cold War and yet our political masters also seek to allow “business as usual” to continue. Just take the unfortunate case of Estonian politicians—

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<sup>22</sup> Raewyn Connell, “Using Southern Theory: Decolonizing Social Thought in Theory, Research, and Application.” *Planning Theory* 13, 2 (2014): 210–23.

<sup>23</sup> For an example of the first category, see Caress Schenk, “Producing State Capacity through Corruption: The Case of Immigration Control in Russia,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 37, 4 (2021): 303–17. For the second, see Dilyara Suleymanova, “‘I’m Only Half!’: Negotiating Identities at School,” in her *Pedagogies of Culture: Schooling and Identity in Post-Soviet Tatarstan* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 173–89.

highly visible as champions of Ukraine, yet profiting directly from continuing economic ties to Russia.

As scholars we are also in this predicament. My superior assures me I can continue to have one-to-one professional contacts with Russia-based colleagues, but I can neither invite them to the EU nor can I go on a panel with them until they announce their simultaneous professional death and rebirth (as the now euphemistic “independent scholar” or “participant in a personal capacity”). Will someone open the box to confirm the death of international scholarship? If Russian studies is going to be deglobalized completely, we will all have to live in the continuing ethical suspension that this brings.

What would an alternative future for Russian studies look like? It would involve genuine dialogue between researchers and institutional and political leadership. It would mean those with expert knowledge on Russian history and society get to contribute to institutional and national decisions which otherwise will slip closer and closer to the normalization of collective responsibility and collective punishment on the basis on nationality.

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