

Calgary Institute for the Humanities *Newsletter*



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ATOM AND COSMOS EXPOSED: *Cold War and Future Energy in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan*

Saulesh Yessenova, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, Annual Fellow 2014-15

Saulesh Yessenova's research centres on political and cultural economy of oil. She is particularly interested in a critical conjunction of nation/state-building and crude oil, the key endeavours that Kazakhstan, the country where she conducts her research, launched upon independence.

“Future energy” is a proud theme of the EXPO to be held in Astana, the new capital of Kazakhstan, in 2017. EXPO-2017's vision boldly links energy use to sustainable development: in promotional videos, the slogan “Energy is Life” is repeatedly inverted to read “Life is Energy.” But there is another inversion related to this EXPO designed to showcase technological advances. In 2014, Kazakhstan pumped 1.6 m barrels of crude per day, which ranked it as the 14th largest oil producer in the world. Before the oil price fell in 2015, the country's annual revenues from the export of hydrocarbon amounted to nearly \$30 billion, which is a significant sum for a nation of just over 17 million people. Already in 2005, President Nursultan Nazarbaev, who has spearheaded both Kazakhstan's oil bonanza and its projected “green revolution,” candidly stated that “oil works for the nation;” five years later, Kazakhstan submitted a successful bid to host the EXPO.

In itself, the recent semantic inversion of Kazakhstan's energy dreamworld (achieved without shutting down its oil projects) is interesting but not so puzzling. In recent years, the United Arab Emirates, for example, one of the world's top oil producers, divested significant revenues in solar energy, intending to build “the world's first zero-carbon city” in Abu Dhabi. But “Future Energy” is not merely an attempt to diversify the country's energy portfolio and garner international attention as an environmentally responsible nation. The very possibility of imagining Kazakhstan's potential in energy transition was created by the country's violent

past as a key staging ground during the nuclear arms race.

On 29 August 1949, an atomic mushroom cloud – “a cultural symbol of fear” – rose over the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site (Polygon) situated in northeastern Kazakhstan. This first successful Soviet test ended



the American monopoly over nuclear weapons. It also inaugurated a new regime in the arms race during which this Soviet Republic was transformed into a nuclear-cum-biochemical weapon jewel in the Soviet military crown, including uranium mines and enrichment facilities, biochemical weapon research and production lines, and nuclear storage facilities that by 1989 contained a thermo-nuclear arsenal larger than those of France, China, and the UK combined. The arms race soon led to the space race. Situated in southwestern Kazakhstan, the Baikonur Cosmodrome is often associated with Sputnik and the smiling face of Yuri Gagarin, the first human to orbit the Earth. But the first test launch there was of an intercontinental ballistic missile intended to transport a hydrogen bomb, which had been tested earlier at the Semipalatinsk Polygon. During the arms race, Baikonur was first and foremost a long-range missile base whose military goals in fact obstructed Soviet exploration of the cosmos for peaceful purposes.

It is the former Semipalatinsk Polygon and the

Baikonur Cosmodrome that catalyzed state ideas in post-Soviet Kazakhstan about “future energy,” and both are to play an important role at the EXPO. Promotional material for this event features wind turbines, futuristic-looking buildings, electric cars, people riding bicycles and rollerblades around central Astana where national pavilions and other EXPO landmarks will be concentrated. At the same time, the state committed major investments to developing a national space program, setting Baikonur as a prime attraction for foreign visitors during the EXPO, and transforming the obsolete Soviet military and research facilities at the Semipalatinsk Polygon (near which the state has declared its intention to build a nuclear power plant) into an artifact of modern industrial-cum-scientific glamour.

In this project, I attend to these ongoing state efforts conveying the re-calibration of strategic priorities from crude oil to space and atomic industries with the purpose of critical reflection on the Cold War and its *longue durée*. During the Cold War, Western historiography followed the vicissitudes of diplomatic relations, the arms race, and nuclear crises. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, however, scholars have increasingly acknowledged the global character of this “undeclared state of war,” widening research beyond a narrow focus on the White House and the Kremlin. The inclusion of perspectives from regions perceived as marginal to international affairs complicated the Cold War narrative. These studies testify to how the Cold War furthered colonization and deflected pathways to decolonization. They highlight the influence of transnational, anti-imperialist, postcolonial visions – pan-Africanism, pan-Islamism, and the Non-Aligned Movement – all of which crystallized during the Cold War. This scholarship also draws attention to the localities that hosted (or continue to serve) “the nuclear war machine.”

Studies in the Marshall Islands, Alaska, Nevada, Scotland, Russia’s Ural region, Korea, Vietnam, and northeastern Kazakhstan expose the magnitude of the disaster that the arms race generated on the ground. Arguments developed in these studies challenge a prevailing view among military historians that the buildup of nuclear weapons kept the war “cold” since “the unacceptability of nuclear war [was] ‘common knowledge’ among those who had the authority to launch nuclear weapons” (Holloway 2010). For those who lived adjacent to nuclear ground zeros or worked at “uranium mines, mills, and enrichment plants; weapons production facilities; military “proving” grounds; battlefields; and nuclear waste dumps – the ‘cold’ was truly ‘hot’” (Johnson 2007).

These experiences of the arms race bred new forms of sociality, identity, and politics that mobilized sentiments in service to collective action against destruction, abuse, and humiliation. In Kazakhstan, collective action against nuclear militarism did not merely increase public awareness of the consequences of nuclear testing on health and the environment; state-building and national identity formation in post-Soviet Kazakhstan came to be profoundly informed by an antinuclear agenda, as the new government sought to justify itself and break with the Soviet past through a rejection of everything the arms race seemed to signify: nuclear genocide; a reckless disregard for human life; the destruction of the environment and of Kazakh culture. Scholarly assessment of the glasnost era acknowledges the impact of the antinuclear movement (understood as “ecological nationalism and transnational peace activism”) on state formation in Kazakhstan. This important discussion became subordinated, however, to a nuclear non-proliferation agenda driven by global security concerns or what Gusterson (1999) calls “nuclear Orientalism.”

In this project, I examine Kazakhstan’s shifting relationship to nuclear technology in the twenty-first century against the backdrop of its antinuclear experience. In the early post-Soviet years, Kazakhstan gave up the nuclear weapons it had inherited from the USSR, an act that gained both national and international legitimacy for the new state. In contradiction to this antinuclear heritage, at present the government seeks to pivot toward nuclear energy. The state has embraced the nuclear logic and launched an expansive program, including uranium mining and nuclear fuel production, nuclear fuel bank, waste dumps, and power plants, space travel and scientific research on nuclear energy. In this project, I explain the state’s behavior as an effort to demonstrate the nation’s technological prowess and potential for sustainable growth as a way of creating an internationally recognized identity for Kazakhstan as an advanced nation in the post-Cold War world.

Gusterson, Hugh (1999) *Nuclear Weapons and the Other in the Western Imagination*. *Cultural Anthropology* 14/1.

Holloway, David (2010) *Nuclear Weapons and the Escalation of the Cold War, 1945-61962*. In *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, v.1: 376-397.

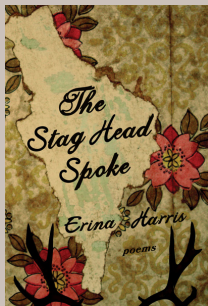
Johnston, B. Rose (2007) *Half-Lives and Half-Truths: Confronting the Radioactive Legacies of the Cold War*. School for Advanced Research Press, NM.

“During the penultimate year of my PhD in progress, I was working on a critical stage of my thesis. Having completed a lexicon of speech and language patterns used by infants and children (which had taken almost four years of research), I was able to work with great focus and freedom during the Fellowship, enabling me to move to the writing stage of my project. This experience furnished me with a home for my work, and inspiring intellectual accompaniment from the other Fellows (or “Fellowines” as was the case that year). This year was transformative, in part because this supports a Graduate student in the metamorphosis from student to colleague. My thesis and I benefitted enormously.”



Erina Harris, Doctoral Student, Department of English
Frances Spratt Graduate Fellow 2014-15

The Stag Head Spoke



Erina Harris, former graduate fellow at the CIH and doctoral student in the Department of English, published her first full-length work of poetry in 2014, *The Stag Head Spoke* (Buckrider Books, 2014). It was short-listed for the Canadian Authors Association Poetry Prize and has been described as “world-class poetry of the highest order. Harris has upturned the tables of poetry, and reset them exquisitely, all while digging deep into the reader’s heart” (E Martin Nolan, *Lemon Hound*).

Working Groups

The Calgary Institute for the Humanities' Interdisciplinary Working Groups bring together faculty and graduate students from different disciplines to explore common research interests and to encourage collaborative research projects. CIH is hosting three working groups for the 2015/2016 academic year. These groups will allow scholars from diverse backgrounds such as nursing and art, or medicine and history to share their knowledge and work collaboratively.

For information on joining a working group, or to contact the conveners, please visit our website at arts.ucalgary.ca/cih/programs/working-groups.

THE FORCED-MIGRATION OF GERMAN-SPEAKING NEUROSCIENTISTS AND BIOMEDICAL RESEARCHERS, 1933-1989

No other single migratory event in modern global history has shaped today's landscape, practice, and system in the neurosciences and the biomedical life sciences as the large-scale forced-migration of approximately 3,000 oppositional scientists and 6,000 physicians and health care researchers — among them approximately 600 in psychiatry and neurology — during the rise of Fascism in Europe starting in the 1920s that resulted in the Nazi regime up to the mid-1940s (Weindling, 1996). A critical and rigorous socio-historical and cultural exploration of the impact of this forced migration on all levels of science and postsecondary research and education in the United Kingdom and North America has yet to be conducted. This research project looks at one of the most powerful interdisciplinary areas of the empirical and natural sciences, being the lived experiences of the scientists and their subjective identities as they sought support and help from international colleagues. When many of these displaced scholars successfully emigrated out of Europe, their lives changed dramatically as they struggled to be accepted into foreign societies and academic cultures, but eventually made lasting and integral changes in the efficacy and power of scientific and indeed humanistic academic and intellectual worlds, including in Canada. By examining the history of these scientists and professors, we challenge pre-conceived interdisciplinary notions of the nature of research, teaching, and intellectualism, and the acceptance or non-acceptance of difference and diversity, and hegemonic thought, in the historical and modern university campus, classrooms, and laboratories.

Convenors:

Frank Stahnisch, Associate Professor, Community Health Sciences

Paul Stortz, Associate Professor, Department of History

CREATIVE RESEARCH

Creative research is an umbrella term that distinguishes two primary areas of activity from scholarly research that takes artistic practices as its subject matter (art history, textual studies of drama, music criticism, etc.): 1. art-based research that involves the methodological use of artistic media to research or to represent social experience (Boal's theatre of the oppressed, applications of Photovoice, digital storytelling, or ethnodrama that creates visibility and voice for disenfranchised communities); 2. practice-based research that involves knowledge generation by artist researchers grounded in the experience and processes of their creative work (advancing creative practices through new media, technologies or materials, or providing insight into aspects of the creative process).

Convenors:

Bruce Barton, Director, School of Creative and Performing Arts

Brian Rusted, Department Head, Department of Art

VISUAL RESEARCH

Visual research is a growing interdisciplinary movement across the social sciences, arts and humanities, and applied health and human service disciplines. Visual research takes different forms, for example, photographs or films created by researchers/artists or research participants, or research that utilizes archival and found images. Images may be used as intermediary data or conversational aids in interview research – but also, and increasingly, still and moving images are considered the research itself. Rather than illustrate research findings, images are used in presentations, publications and exhibitions, and valued for their expressive as well as informational qualities. Visual research recognizes the unique contributions that images can make to knowledge production. In this research arena sharp boundaries between art, literature and science are deliberately blurred in search of new forms of exploration and knowledge.

Convenors:

Liza McCoy, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology

Dona Schwartz, Associate Professor, Department of Art

Current Fellows

ANNUAL FELLOWS

Cheryl Dueck
 Department of Linguistics, Languages and Cultures
 “National Pasts, Transnational Presence: Post-Communist Cinemas of Central Europe”

Ishtiyaque Haji
 Department of Philosophy
 “Luck’s Influence on Obligation and Responsibility”

Elizabeth Rohlman
 Department of Classics and Religion
 “Telling the Stories of Geography: Compositional Process, Narrative Design, and Communal Identity in the Sarasvatī Purāṇa”

FRANCES SPRATT GRADUATE FELLOW

Mark Harding
 Department of Political Science
 “Debating Dialogue: Judicial Review and Elected Responses in Commonwealth Regimes”

POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWS

Aleksandra Loewenau
 Cumming School of Medicine

Matthew Oram
 Cumming School of Medicine

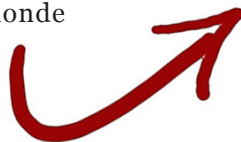
“The Impact of German Physician Émigrés on the Development of Neuroscience in North America”
 Project’s Prime Investigator: Dr. Frank Stahnisch

VISITING FELLOWS

Fabio López-Lázaro
 Department of History
 University of Hawaii

Eric Savoy
 Département de littératures et de langues du monde
 Université de Montréal

Peter Busch
 Department of War Studies
 Kings College London



“The CIH provides a welcoming place for visiting scholars. The Institute facilitates access to the rich resources of the University’s archives and other research opportunities. Visitors benefit from contact with the diverse and interdisciplinary scholarly community at the University. It’s an oasis of calm in the active campus, a perfect place for reflection and writing. It is a model for all Canadian Universities interested in promoting scholarly dialogue.”

Lecture Series

August 31st at 3 pm - Fabio López-Lázaro
 Department of History, University of Hawaii
 Visiting Scholar 2015

“Nationitis: Analytical Imprecisions in Mercantalism, Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, and the Current International Culture of Capitalism”

October 12th at 3 pm - Eric Savoy
 Département de littératures et de langues du monde, Université de Montréal
 Visiting Scholar 2015

“After Derrida: The Archive and Reparative Reading”

November 24th at 3pm - Susan Franceschet
 Department of Political Science
 Annual Fellow 2014/15

“Rules and Norms: Gender and Cabinet Appointment Around the World”

February 2016 TBC - Richard Zach
 Department of Philosophy
 Annual Fellow 2013/14

March 2016 TBC - Saulesh Yessenova
 Department of Anthropology and Archaeology
 Annual Fellow 2014/15

April 2016 TBC - Peter Busch
 Department of War Studies, King’s College London
 Visiting Scholar 2016

“As we approach our fortieth year, the CIH is pleased to play host to a number of fellows whose work demonstrates the variety and the quality of humanities based research. Scholars are looking at the transmission of twelfth-century religious texts, post-communist European cinema, the philosophical status of luck, and the relation between Bills of Rights and parliaments. Visiting fellows are exploring piracy and nationalism, the archive after Derrida, and war propaganda in the age of social media. This is work that exemplifies the best of the humanities: bringing new questions to older works, and old questions to new phenomena. Above all, it is work that continues the conversation about what it means to be human, on whatever platform and in whichever setting it occurs. We hope you’ll join us in this inquiry.”




Jim Ellis, Director, CIH



For almost forty years, the Calgary Institute for the Humanities has worked to foster humanities research of the highest order, to encourage interdisciplinary conversations between scholars, and to communicate the results of Humanities research to the greater community. The humanities as traditionally conceived encompass the study of languages, literature, history, philosophy, religion and the arts. At the CIH, we take a broader approach to the humanities, to include all forms of study that illuminate what it means to be human.

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