



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Research Programs application guidelines at <https://www.neh.gov/grants/research/fellowships> for instructions.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: Europe's Russian Colonies: Tsarist Subjects Abroad and the Quest for Freedom in the 19th Century

Institution: University of Chicago

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Grant Program: Fellowships

Europe's Russian Colonies: Tsarist Émigrés and the Quest for Freedom in Nineteenth-Century Europe

Between 1860 and 1917, hundreds of thousands of tsarist subjects left the Russian empire for the large urban centers and university towns of central and western Europe. The travelers came from every corner of the empire and from many walks of life: there were students and political radicals, proletarians and artists, Russians, Jews, Poles, and Armenians among them. Yet in spite of their differences, the émigrés gravitated toward one another in exile, creating close-knit and intellectually vibrant communities that they referred to as “Russian colonies.” The book I am currently writing, *Europe's Russian Colonies*, provides the first synthetic treatment of pre-1917 traffic between Russia and the west, reconstructing the unique cultures that coalesced in these communities. In addition, it traces how the colonies informed the world that lay beyond their borders, revealing how émigré settlements shaped the political cultures of their European host societies as well as the empire that their residents had left behind.

Europe's Russian Colonies argues that émigré settlements became laboratories of liberation—spaces that generated a series of ambitious experiments to free the Russian people from tsarist rule and to improve the human condition. The cultures of intellectual exchange and social experimentation that flourished in émigré communities were in part a result of their distance from the tsarist state, which afforded their residents the opportunity to freely mingle, debate, and publish. However, the built environment and the unique demographic composition of these spaces also informed their culture. Condensing the diversity of the tsarist empire into districts only a few square miles in area, émigré communities brought together men and women who never would have encountered one another had they remained in the Russian empire. The interactions that ensued facilitated intellectual exchanges and forged solidarities between individuals from different walks of life. The improvised nature of the colonies enhanced their experimental spirit, offering their residents unprecedented opportunities to build new communities from the ground up.

The emancipatory schemes that emerged from the colonies took many different forms. Radical intellectuals, who became the political leaders of émigré settlements, used these spaces to organize socialist, anarchist, and populist parties that advocated revolution in Russia. Female university students, who constituted a sizable proportion of these communities, formed a feminist vanguard within them. Donning attire and engaging in behavior that proclaimed their impatience with bourgeois gender norms, they insisted on the fundamental equality of the sexes and assumed an active role in the colonies' political and economic life. Non-Russian ethnic minorities—who by all accounts vastly outnumbered ethnic Russians in the emigration—formed parties and penned manifestos promoting the emancipation of Poles, Ukrainians, Armenians, Georgians, and Jews from tsarist rule.

The wealth of liberationist visions in the colonies at times fueled competition and conflict between their diverse residents. However, the utopian spirit that guided their inhabitants also served as a powerful force of cohesion. Colony residents cooperated to build dense networks of mutual aid associations, low-cost cafeterias, and even informal courts. They founded newspapers and political organizations that aspired to represent all tsarist subjects living in exile. And though the colonies were multi-lingual spaces, residents regularly gathered in large public meetings to discuss issues of common concern in Russian, the *lingua franca* of the emigration. Many émigrés took great pride in the fact that diverse populations that had been atomized under the tsarist state managed to organize themselves so effectively abroad, touting this accomplishment as the colonies' greatest feat.

The specific visions of emancipation that coalesced in the colonies were products of the openness, intimacy, and diversity of these unique spaces. Nevertheless, the cultures forged in émigré communities ultimately transcended their confines, shaping conceptions of freedom beyond their borders. Colony residents, who remained extremely invested in the homeland that

they left behind, maintained strong connections to Russia, operating smuggling networks that brought thousands of illegal volumes into Russia each year. Human traffic provided another link between Russia and its émigré diaspora. *Europe's Russian Colonies* reveals that many of the ideologies that drove late imperial politics—populism, Marxism, nationalism, and Bolshevism—were in fact products of the colonies that were later exported to Russia.

Centers of intense political activism and social experimentation, the colonies also captured the imaginations of many Europeans. Continental radicals frequented the colonies and hailed their residents' blatant disregard for bourgeois society and their determination to remake mankind as evidence that they would spearhead the regeneration of the continental left. European feminists also consorted with the Russians, pointing to their egalitarian norms and the success of the female students as evidence that women could play a productive role in public life. Though the views of most colony residents fell far out of the liberal mainstream, even bourgeois observers found something to admire in the Russians, whom they portrayed as brave freedom fighters struggling against the last vestiges of despotism—and as noble refugees deserving of European asylum. In spite of the inward-looking nature of émigré communities, these communities thus became integral participants in pan-European discussions about the meaning of freedom.

The “Russian moment” in European politics ushered in by the emergence of the Russian colonies also shaped conversations on the right. Already in the '80s, some continental observers had raised alarms about the radicalism of the emigration, on the one hand, and the strong representation of Jews in the émigré community, on the other. In the last years of the nineteenth century, the tsarist government—which had expressed continued frustration over the strength of the asylum regime in Europe's liberal nations—sought to capitalize on these concerns, launching a large-scale propaganda campaign aimed at European audiences. Tsarist publicists portrayed the émigré population as criminal conspiracy organized by Jews; Russian police officials operating abroad even used *agents provocateurs* to stage terrorist attacks that provided live performances of the threats conjured up by state-sponsored propaganda. *Europe's Russian Colonies* argues that these interventions had a tangible impact on ideology and practice, energizing nascent networks of anti-Semitic and nativist activists, shaping the behavior of European police forces, and ultimately weakening the liberal asylum regimes that had long benefitted tsarist émigrés. By the early twentieth century, the colonies—once centers of utopian thought and international exchange—had become spaces of despair as well as testing grounds for new forms of exclusion and discrimination. The loss of the émigré utopia had a profound impact on the collective life of the colonies, ushering in a rapid radicalization in their politics.

The relationship between Russia and the west is one of the most classic themes in the historiography of imperial Russia. My training and unique skills allow me to approach this familiar question from a new perspective. The classic studies of the emigration produced in the '50s and '60s are intellectual histories that focus on individual figures, circles, or parties. My approach, by contrast, is more open-ended and eclectic, examining how the colonies functioned *as communities*. My narrative is structured around case studies of the major colonies (which were located in London, Paris, Geneva, and Zurich), with supplementary materials drawn from other centers of emigration such as Berlin and Vienna. My rich source base, drawn from twelve archives located in five countries, along with my proficiency in several imperial languages other than Russian, allows me to document how the *experience* of living in these communities informed ideas and practices. I also use GIS technology to map the physical infrastructure of the colonies and the networks that their residents created, revealing how the built environment and human relationships shaped the intellectual output of émigré communities.

In addition to providing a new perspective on émigré life, *Europe's Russian Colonies* offers a new approach to understanding the exchanges that shaped the modern world. Russian scholars typically assume that the vectors of influence pointed from west to east, asking how Russians responded to and adapted models they inherited from the west. *Europe's Russian*

Colonies, by contrast, reveals more circular patterns of influence. It shows how the alternative models of living that coalesced in the colonies, which did indeed depart from continental norms, became source of fascination and even inspiration for Europeans, shaping their own conceptions of what it meant to be free. *Europe's Russian Colonies*, then, provides a new account of the Russian empire's engagement in the rapid globalization processes of the late nineteenth century.

Europe's Russian Colonies consists of six chapters, as well as an introduction and a conclusion. Chapter One provides an overview of the colonies in their golden age, between the 1860s and 1890s. It explores the unique cultures of emancipation that emerged from these neighborhoods and the institutions that émigrés created to advance their utopian visions. In addition, it traces how tsarist subjects abroad exported their emancipatory visions back to their homeland, catalyzing the rise of populism in the '70s, the emergence of nationalist movements in the '80s, and the widespread proliferation of Marxism in the '90s.

Chapter Two explores the connections between the original Russian colonies, which were anchored by students and intellectuals, and a new wave of tsarist subjects who began to arrive overseas in the '80s: working-class Jews fleeing the Pale of Settlement's poverty and pogroms. At first, these two populations established parallel existences in the same cities. Over time, however, these groups became increasingly intertwined. Russian radicals ventured into factories and sweatshops to spread the gospel of revolution among newly arrived Russian Jews; radicalized Jewish proletarians, for their part, ultimately joined the ranks of the revolutionary elite. The integration of the Jewish communities into the revolutionary culture of émigré communities represented one of the colonies' greatest accomplishments, revealing the capacity of tsarist subjects to overcome their superficial differences and to organize in common cause.

Chapters Three and Four turn to how the Russian colonies shaped European conceptions of freedom. Chapter Three documents the role that the colonies played in shaping liberal and radical understandings of liberty, but it also reveals the anxieties that émigré communities produced. Chapter Four reconstructs the public outreach campaign organized by the Russian state that aimed to capitalize on these concerns. It assesses the impact of these efforts on the continent's nascent extreme right, and it documents how Russian interventions shaped public opinion and state practice more broadly.

Chapter Five shows how growing public hostility toward émigré populations in the early twentieth century further radicalized colony politics. With the loss of the utopian spirit that had once guided the colonies, many of their residents turned to more radical forms of politics. *Europe's Russian Colonies* argues that the desperate mood that prevailed in the colonies by the turn of the century played a key role in defining the concerns of the Bolshevik party, which emerged from a 1903 schism among émigré Social Democrats. The rise of that party, which attempted to seize control of the colonies' institutions and relied on coercion and violence, deepened the discord in émigré communities and raised Europeans' misapprehensions about the tsarist subjects residing on their territory.

Chapter Six traces the collapse of the colonies during World War I. Under new pressure from wartime governments and patriotic societies, many colony residents were conscripted in foreign legions, interred, or expelled. But the war, which marked the final end of the older traditions of international exchange that had coalesced in the colonies, also marked a new beginning. After Russia's revolutions of 1917, large segments of their former residents returned to their homeland to build a new society, carrying the dreams and the resentments they had forged in emigration.

The research for this project is 90% complete, and I have completed drafts of three of the six chapters. If awarded an NEH fellowship, I will finish the remaining research as well as the manuscript over the course of the fellowship year. I plan to publish the resulting book, which will include a companion website (already partially finished—see appendix for links), in 2020.

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