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# Contact Zones: Articulating and Practicing Difference

Seton Hall University, Department of History

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**Seton Hall University  
Department of History**

**Contact Zones: Articulating and Practicing Difference**

**A Symposium in Comparative History  
January 23, 2015**

Notions of shared humanity or fundamental difference among nations, races, and sexes have histories. Since the early modern era countless philosophers and scientists, agents of church or state, and ordinary women and men have attempted to ground fluctuating categories—appearance, language, spiritual beliefs, mode of subsistence, technology and material culture, bodily strength, gender roles, and sexuality—in a divine or natural order to explain existing or desired hierarchies, social relations, and political arrangements. Other individuals have actively resisted such scholarly theories, legal or religious categories, and popular prejudices, implicitly or explicitly putting forward their own understandings of individual and communal identities. These encounters and contests, be they in distant borderlands or urban spaces, have been shaped by individual experiences and aims as well as broad historical processes of exchange, migration, conquest, and sexual contact. The Department of History of Seton Hall University will be hosting a symposium, including scholars whose work addresses these issues through diverse historical methodologies as they pertain to regions around the world. This symposium will provide a comparative view of the varied physical places where diverse peoples and ways of life have come into contact as well as the myriad ways through which individuals and groups have defined, maintained, and undermined categories of difference.

**Program:**

9:00-9:30 Coffee and Introductions

9:30-11:00 **Panel 1: VIOLENCE AND COLONIALISM**

Kate Grandjean, Wellesley College, *Publishing Terror in Early America*

Yuko Miki, Fordham University, *Violent Terrains: Black and Indigenous Legal Regimes*

11:00-11:15 Coffee Break

11:15-12:45 **Panel 2: EMPIRES, HYBRIDITY, AND IDEOLOGIES OF RACE**

Sean P. Harvey, Seton Hall University, *"A Hybrid Origin?" Classifying Peoples in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Fiji and Oregon*

David Rainbow, Columbia University, *“In Us and in Our Children”*: Race Mixing and Political Critique in Late Imperial Siberia

12:45-1:30 Lunch Break

1:30-3:00 **Panel 3: GENDER AND SEXUALITY, PRINT AND THE STATE**

Christine Varga-Harris, Illinois State University, *Turning “Swamps” into “Flowering Gardens”*: Soviet Woman as Contact Zone between Women in the Soviet Union and those Transitioning from Colonialism in Africa and South Asia

Alison Lefkowitz, New Jersey Institute of Technology, *“Homosexual Households” and the Right to Live Together*

3:00-3:15 Coffee Break

3:15-4:45 **Panel 4: MIGRATION AND HIERARCHIES**

Éric Allina, University of Ottawa, *Solidarities and the Self: African Workers in East German Industry in the 1970s and 1980s*

Jeff Sahadeo, Carleton University, *Black Snouts Go Home: Racism and Reaction in Late Soviet Leningrad and Moscow*

4:45-5:00 Coffee Break

5:00-5:30 Closing Remarks and Roundtable Discussion

**Seton Hall University, Department of History, Center of Excellence Organizing Committee:**

Sean Harvey, Assistant Professor, Colonial America, Early Republic

Maxim Matusevich, Associate Professor, African and Transnational History, Cold War.

Vanessa May, Assistant Professor, American Women’s History.

Nathaniel Knight, Associate Professor and Department Chair, Russian History.

Kirsten Schultz, Associate Professor, Latin America, Atlantic World.

## **ABSTRACTS:**

**Kate Grandjean, Assistant Professor of History, Wellesley College**

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### ***Publishing Terror in Early America***

This is a paper about terror and its spread, in early American media. It explores two concurrent stories: the wars plaguing New England's northern frontier around the turn of the eighteenth century and, in the same years, the rise of the press. Between the 1670s and 1710s, the borderlands of northern New England were repeatedly convulsed by violence. French and Indian raiders doggedly punished English towns, snatched captives, ambushed farmers in their fields. And, for better or worse, the news spread widely. That, after all, was the point.

The great fact of life in northern New England, during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, was imperial war with France. (Or, more precisely, the intermittent raiding that came with it.) With a remarkable economy of violence, northern enemies visited fear upon New England. On the part of New France and its Indian allies, this was a concerted campaign of terror. It was also very effective. Raiding worked because, as all terror does, it used communications to multiply its effects. Inhabitants of early America practiced difference through violence, especially in the borderlands, and that violence was underlined, circulated, and reinforced in print. This paper tells that story.

**Yuko Miki, Department of History, Fordham University**

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### ***Violent Terrains: Black and Indigenous Legal Regimes***

Two parallel cases of extravagant violence from the first half of the 1880s form the core of this chapter: one, the settler massacre of an entire Indian community; the other, a slaveowning family's castration and execution of Seraphim, a slave who impregnated his white mistress, Rita. In both cases, the victims' bodies were disappeared and the perpetrators denied their crimes. I analyze the murders' highly ritualized violence in their respective historical contexts—*matar uma aldeia* (settler massacres of entire indigenous villages) and slave punishment—to show that far from representing frontier anarchy, these acts embodied the perpetrators' specific ideas about legitimate violence and power. The intersection of violence with gender, race, and honor are also addressed through the attack on Seraphim's masculinity and Rita's irreparable dishonor. Yet if Seraphim's executioners were condemned for their brutality, flagrant judicial misconduct acquitted the Indians' killers. This chapter argues that the outcome of these two cases reveals the diverging legal regimes governing black slaves and Indians in the later nineteenth century. For Indians, the state's presence manifested itself in the blurring of legal and extralegal authority that effectively placed them outside legal protection and abrogated their citizenship, while for slaves, the state increasingly intervened in, instead of abetted, masters' private violence against their slaves in an era of growing anti-slavery agitation across Brazil.

**David Rainbow, Post-Doctoral Fellow, Harriman Institute, Columbia University**  
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***'In Us and in Our Children': Race Mixing and Political Critique in Late Imperial Siberia.***

The paper considers how Siberian intellectuals from the 1860s on made sense of the long history of mixing between Slavic colonists and indigenous peoples in Russia's eastern borderlands. I advance the thesis that the category of the "Siberian mestizo," understood in terms of race, became an important element of prominent Siberian critiques of Russian colonial policies in the region. Siberians blamed the empire for the Russian settlers who had "gone native," and at the same time asserted that the process had generated a new, positive, Siberian racial "type" that should be the basis for autonomous regional self-government. The paper is among recent reassessments of the category of race in the Russian field, and suggests that race is a fruitful avenue for comparing Russian imperial expansion with that of other empires in modern history.

**Sean Harvey, Assistant Professor of History, Seton Hall University**

***'A Hybrid Origin?' Classifying Peoples in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Fiji and Oregon.***

**Christine Varga-Harris, Associate Professor of History, Illinois State University**  
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**Turning "Swamps" into "Flowering Gardens": *Soviet Woman* as a Contact Zone between Women in the Soviet Union and those Transitioning from Colonialism in Africa and South Asia**

Set within the context of Soviet cultural outreach to "developing" countries during the 1950s and 1960s, this paper explores how *Soviet Woman* – the chief publication of the Committee of Soviet Women – rhetorically and visually mapped the life and work of women in the Soviet Union onto those undergoing a transition from colonialism in Africa and South Asia. As I will argue, this magazine did not strictly present "(Soviet)self-other(peoples)" in a clear binary fashion in the mode of (Western) European Orientalism. For one, it portrayed women sharing common concerns like disarmament and motherhood, while also celebrating certain unique aspects of their culture. As significant are the ways in which *Soviet Woman* depicted difference. To elaborate, features on "European" Soviet women tended to describe their jobs, family and community contributions, while those on women from the "Orient within" (the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the far north and east) depicted them with the addition of commentary on their battle against traditions that had curtailed their participation in the public realm. Although articles on "non-European" Soviet women did not predominate, they were nevertheless striking in the context of efforts to nurture relations between the Soviet Union and decolonizing countries. Essentially, amid the other kinds of pieces that appeared in *Soviet Woman*, they served to intimate a kinship that affirmed the value of the Soviet model as a path to success for the "Third World." Meanwhile, stories on women in countries at various stages of decolonization cast them as admirable "little sisters" – engaged in their own struggles, praising

Soviet women and endeavoring to follow their lead. Overall, *Soviet Woman* reflected a world in which women around the globe could situate themselves along a continuum of emancipation – one that would best be secured by a universalizing communist ideology.

**Alison Lefkowitz, Assistant Professor of History, NJIT/Rutgers Newark**  
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### **‘Homosexual Households’ and the Right to Live Together**

This paper will trace how gay couples tried to win the benefits of marriage in the wake of the gendered revolution in marriage. In particular, no-fault divorce, the vanguard of eliminating men and women’s gendered obligations, seemed like an equally adept vehicle for gay couples to gain the benefits of marriage. For instance, in 1975, Washington D.C. Councilman Arrington Ward proposed a no-fault bill that allowed for marriage between two individuals—a measure that would deliberately create a right to marriage for gay couples. Conservatives quickly crushed these ambitions, but gay marriage activists continued to fight. Some couples even passed as straight couples to gain a marriage license. With these licenses in hand, these couples sued to have them recognized by the state in the hopes that the courts would grant the right to marry to all gay couples. These methods, however, proved as inconsequential as the fight in the D.C. council.

The state prohibited gay marriage. But its real target was the homosexual household. While appellate courts and other government agencies protected some of gay men and lesbians’ individual liberties, they deliberately broke up gay households. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), judges determining child custody and visitation rights, and the Supreme Court all denied gay couples the benefits of cohabitation, with or without a marriage license. What gay couples lost was not only the civil right of marriage but also the very right to live together. In doing so, various government workers drove gay couples into the closet even as gay individuals began gradually to win rights. In the 1970s and 80s, gay couples did yet not benefit from the rights revolution that had begun to reorder gender and even sexual hierarchies.

**Éric Allina, Associate Professor of History, University of Ottawa**  
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### ***Solidarities and the self: African workers in East German industry in the 1970s and 1980s***

This paper examines an unlikely contact zone: the East German factory floor. East Germany’s (the German Democratic Republic, or GDR) enclosure behind the Berlin Wall evokes the iconic isolation of the Cold War. Moreover, for most of the GDR’s existence, foreign travel was illegal and the foreign population barely exceeded one percent. Yet the GDR saw itself as a champion of the global south (or third world, as it was then called) in the eastern bloc, and welcomed citizens of the south as ‘guests of the socialist nation.’ This paper examines the experiences of Africans from Mozambique who worked in East German industry. Over the GDR’s last decade

of existence, a state-to-state cooperation agreement between the two countries sent more than 20,000 young Mozambicans to Berlin, Dresden, and dozens of small towns throughout East Germany's industrial heartland, where they received training and worked in textile, electronics, chemicals, and food processing factories. In gaining new skills and new experiences in a 'brother' socialist nation, they were to become 'new men of the revolution' and then return home to continue the socialist transformation of their own society. The agreement's motivating principles—socialist internationalism and the 'friendship of peoples'—articulated a shared, nearly universal set of values, even as the logic of the agreement simultaneously posited a hierarchy of difference. The paper examines the tensions between these principles, as well as the ways in which Africans and Germans alike tested, contested, and undermined the notions of self and solidarity implied therein.

**Jeff Sahadeo, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Carleton University**  
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### **“Black Snouts Go Home: Racism and Reaction in Late Soviet Leningrad and Moscow”**

Seeking economic or professional opportunities, hundreds of thousands of ethnic non-Russians from the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Soviet East journeyed to the late USSR's "two capitals" of Leningrad and Moscow. Encounters with the host Slavic population generated a broad spectrum of discrimination, from catcalls of "Black" (*chernye*) to racial violence. This essay places Soviet migration and intolerance in a global perspective of enduring late twentieth-century postcolonial inequalities. Using oral histories, it constructs the everyday interethnic contacts of peoples from Soviet south and east in 1960s-1990 Leningrad and Moscow. The essay challenges Soviet discourse, existing scholarship, and the words of the informants themselves to argue that significant, though not ubiquitous, racism, connected to other forms of discrimination along ethnic and national lines and linked to global patterns, did emerge in the late Soviet era. Oral histories also reveal the importance of reactions to manifestations of intolerance. I argue that discrimination should be best understood as a relationship, where the interpretation of individual acts was as important as their perpetration. Victims of late Soviet racism and other forms of discrimination maintained their agency. Many used a number of attitudinal and social mechanisms—some unique to the Soviet context, others similar to other postwar global cities—to emplace themselves within the socially and professionally mobile worlds of Leningrad and Moscow. Complicated hierarchies of privilege that implicated class, occupation and place of residence emerged alongside those of ethnicity and race. The essay shows how the Soviet state produced a particular pattern of discrimination and reaction from a global phenomenon of south-north migration to former imperial capitals that has important implications for how we view postcolonial relationships and personal reactions to intolerance.