

# Maria Kurbak, PhD

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Tel: 314-398-9526 | [kurbak@wustl.edu](mailto:kurbak@wustl.edu) | [mariakurbak87@gmail.com](mailto:mariakurbak87@gmail.com) | St. Louis, MO | [linkedin.com/in/maria-kurbak](https://www.linkedin.com/in/maria-kurbak)

## Professional Profile

Historian of Russia, the USSR, and Eastern Europe with interdisciplinary expertise in global history, nationalism, propaganda, gender, and memory. Research examines the cultural and political forces that shape war, violence, and collective identity, with a forthcoming monograph (*Destructive Imagination: Male Fantasies and the Emotional Roots of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine*, Palgrave Macmillan 2026) and multiple peer-reviewed publications. Experienced teacher of Russian, Soviet, and European history, as well as courses in international relations, conflict resolution, and global studies. In addition to Russian and Eastern European history, doctoral research on South African–Russian ties adds comparative and transnational breadth to teaching fields. Committed to inclusive pedagogy, mentoring of diverse students including first-generation and students with disabilities, and building academic community through service and leadership.

## Education

- PhD, World History – Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of World History, Moscow, 2012
- MA, BA, History – State Academic University of Humanities, Moscow, 2010

## Teaching Fields

- Modern Russia
- Eastern Europe in the 20th and 21st Century
- Russian and Soviet History
- European History
- History and Theory of International Relations
- International Conflicts, Peace, and Reconciliation
- Memory, Propaganda, and Nationalism
- Global History and Interdisciplinary Approaches
- Comparative African–Russian History (20th– 21st Century)

## Academic Appointments and Teaching Experience

Washington University in St. Louis, St. Louis, MO  
Instructor & Postdoctoral Fellow, Global Studies Program (2024–present)

- Designed and taught Global Futures (core Global Studies course, 43 students) and Understanding Today's Russia (15 students), integrating historical and cultural analysis.
- Developed interdisciplinary curriculum modules on propaganda, nationalism, gender, and memory within historical frameworks.
- Created inclusive learning environments supporting international, first-generation, and underrepresented students, including students with disabilities.
- Mentored undergraduate research and writing-intensive assignments emphasizing historical methods and global awareness.
- Author of forthcoming monograph *Destructive Imagination* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2026); co-author of a chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Memory* (Oxford University Press, 2026).
- Organized faculty colloquia and international speaker series to foster community and intellectual exchange.

Washington University in St. Louis, St. Louis, MO

Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences, Lab of Memory Studies (2023–2024)

- Conducted research on anxiety and disinformation in Russian historical narratives.
- Published peer-reviewed articles on memory, propaganda, and antisemitism in Russia.
- Contributed to interdisciplinary seminars bridging psychology, memory studies, and history.

National Research University – Higher School of Economics, Moscow

Faculty, Department of International Affairs (2016–2022)

- Taught History and Theory of International Relations (150–200 students) and International Conflicts and Peacemaking (25–35 students), grounding courses in historical case studies and historiography.
- Designed syllabi that promoted critical thinking, ethics, and cross-cultural awareness.
- Supervised student research and served on the Graduate Committee, advising on curriculum development and historical methodology.

Institute of World History, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow

Senior Research Fellow, Center for Regional Studies (2013–2022)

- Published 10 peer-reviewed articles and a book on South African–Russian historical ties.
- Presented historical research at 16 international conferences.
- Coordinated national educational initiatives and public history projects.

## **Service and Leadership**

- Global Studies Colloquium Convenor, Washington University in St. Louis (2024–present): Curated interactive faculty-student colloquia fostering interdisciplinary dialogue.
- Speaker Series Co-Chair, Washington University in St. Louis (2024–present): Coordinated international guest visits and campus-wide events expanding access to global perspectives.

- Graduate Committee Member, Higher School of Economics (2020–2022): Reviewed applications, mentored graduate students, and advised on curriculum development.

## **Selected Publications**

### Books

- *Destructive Imagination: Male Fantasies and the Emotional Roots of Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine* (Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming 2026).
- John Maxwell Coetzee. *Reflections by an Outsider*. Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2015.

### Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles (Selected)

- “The Great Replacement of Narrative: Conspiratorial Thinking and Collective Anxiety in Wartime Russia.” *Memory, Mind & Media* (submitted, 2025).
- “‘Men Must Fight, Women Must Wait’: The War in Ukraine and Russian Traditionalism.” *Memory, Mind & Media* 4 (2025).
- “Imagining the Future - Rejecting the Present: Future Thought and Defensive Discourse Strategies in Russian Society During Wartime.” *Memory, Mind & Media* 3 (2024).
- “‘Living the Last Chapter of History’: Anxiety as a Force for Rewriting History Textbooks in Putin’s Russia and Before.” *Memory, Mind & Media* 2 (2023).
- “Silenced Generation: South African Emigrant Writers and Their Fates (1950–1960s).” *Asia and Africa Today* 4 (2023).

### Book Chapters (Selected)

- “National Remembering” (with J.V. Wertsch), in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Memory* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2026).
- “Reconcile the Past and the Future: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa.” In *Pacifism and Peacemaking in Africa*. Moscow: Ves’ Mir, 2019.
- “Official Policy on Freedom of Speech in Russia and South Africa.” In *Nation and State Building in South Africa and Russia in the Late 20th-21st Century*. Moscow: Institute of World History RAS, 2018.

## **Campus & Conference Talks (Selected)**

- ‘Men Must Fight, Women Must Wait’: The War in Ukraine and Russian Traditionalism. ASEES Annual Convention, Washington DC, November 20-21, 2025.
- War and Fantasy: Russia’s War in Ukraine and Male Fantasy Narratives. Central Slavic Conference, St. Louis University, 2024.
- Russia-Ukraine Memory Wars. Guest lecture, Introduction to Memory Studies, Washington University in St. Louis, 2024.
- Putin’s Gender Policy. Guest talk, Global Futures, Washington University in St. Louis, 2024.
- Eurasianism: From a Bookish Philosophy to the Official Ideology of Putin’s Russia. Eurasian Studies Seminar, Washington University in St. Louis, 2023.

- Changing Past - Influencing Future: Rewriting Historical Textbooks in Putin's Russia. McDonnell Collective Memory Conference, 2023.

## **Grants and Fellowships**

- Institute of International Education - Scholar Rescue Fund, \$50,000 (2023–2025).
- Russian Foundation for Basic Research, \$5,000 (2018–2020).
- Russian Science Foundation, \$3,000 (2016–2018).

## **Languages**

- Russian (native)
- Belorussian (native)
- English (advanced)
- German (intermediate)
- Ukrainian (intermediate)

## **Professional Societies**

- American Historical Association (AHA), since 2023
- Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES), since 2023
- James S. McDonnell Memory Studies Group, since 2022
- Frankfurt Memory Studies Platform, since 2022