

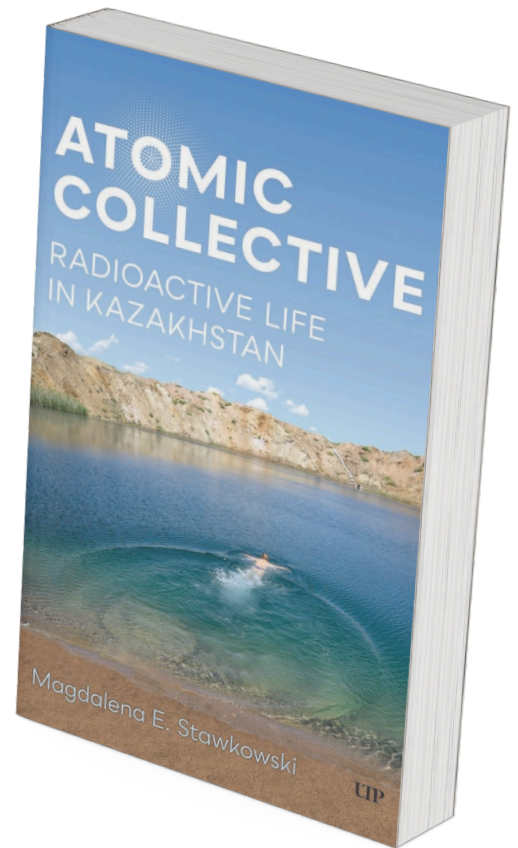
Slavic, East-Central European, and Eurasian Studies presents...

Dr. Magdalena Stawkowski

BOOK TALK

Atomic Collective: Radioactive Life in Kazakhstan

In the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse, Kazakhstan inherited the remnants of one of the world's most contaminated landscapes: the Semipalatinsk Test Site, known locally as the Polygon. *Atomic Collective* examines life in Kazakhstan's Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site through a decade-long ethnography of the village of Koian. Amid radiation, isolation, and uncertainty, residents choose to remain, sustaining pastoral lives and collective resilience. The book reveals overlooked human consequences of Cold War nuclear testing.



Associate Professor in
the Department of
Anthropology at USC

- Thursday, February 12th
- 4:30-5:30pm.
- Gambrell 429



Dr. Magdalena Stawkowski's Book Talk on... **Atomic Collective: Radioactive Life in Kazakhstan**

ATOMIC COLLECTIVE: RADIOACTIVE LIFE IN KAZAKHSTAN

In the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse, Kazakhstan inherited the remnants of one of the world's most contaminated landscapes: the Semipalatinsk Test Site, known locally as the Polygon. Resigned to dispossession, residents have chosen to remain on the abandoned nuclear test site, despite the isolation and the radioactive environment, rather than face marginalization or the rigors of a neoliberal world.

Atomic Collective examines this nuclear legacy through a decade-long ethnographic examination of the village of Koian, situated on the border of the test site. Facing residual radiation all around them and isolation, Koianers persist, reshaping their pastoral existence among the ruins and scientific debates surrounding genetic damage. Drawing on first-hand accounts and archival research, this book explores the resilience and everyday survival strategies of a community left behind to fend for itself in the shadow of nuclear testing. It offers a unique perspective on life in a nuclear zone and poses fundamental questions about human resilience and the impact of historical events on a collective identity. **Atomic Collective** sheds light on a community overlooked in the larger Cold War histories of atomic testing.

MAGDALENA STAWKOWSKI

Magdalena Stawkowski is an associate professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of South Carolina. She earned her PhD from the University of Colorado Boulder in 2014 and has held roles at the Danish Institute for International Studies; the Center for Slavic, Eurasian, and East European Studies at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill; and the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University, as a MacArthur and Stanton Nuclear Security Fellow. Specializing in cultural and medical anthropology, Stawkowski focuses on militarized and nuclear spaces, the political economy of health, and the socio-cultural legacies of Soviet era nuclear testing in Kazakhstan, where she has conducted more than a decade of fieldwork.

Her recent book, **Atomic Collective: Radioactive Life in Kazakhstan**, examines how communities near the former Semipalatinsk Test Site navigate contaminated landscapes. Her work has been recognized with the Anthropological Responses to Health Emergencies Policy Award from the Society for Medical Anthropology. She has collaborated on international projects examining Cold War radioactive legacies in Kazakhstan, the Marshall Islands, and French Polynesia. Currently, she is engaged in collaborative and comparative research on tritium bioaccumulation and biomagnification in the Semipalatinsk Test Site region and the Savannah River Site in South Carolina.

