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Feature

Public Housing and Civic Activism in Bishkek

By Charles Buxton

This article was created out of a discussion with two civic activists, Anara Moldosheva, a women's movement leader and chair of a Bishkek residents' association; and Diana Ukhina, a cultural worker and founder of a new artistic non-governmental organisation (NGO), Laboratoria CI. Our conversation was wide-ranging: about housing policy in the Soviet period and post-independence in Kyrgyzstan, about the response of civil society to the changes that have taken place in the urban environment, and about the re-evaluation of the Soviet heritage that has begun to take place in the region.

The sudden privatisation of publicly-owned housing that took place across the USSR after 1991 has received less attention in the West than the voucher schemes through which enterprises were privatised. However, the consequences were no less far-reaching for individuals, families and the state itself.

Publicly-owned housing stock included houses and flats built and managed by factories, government departments, education institutions and others. On the one hand, there was new flexibility in the housing market, on the other, the game was wide open for mafias and the new middle class to squeeze poorer groups out of their homes.



Street scene in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

In Soviet Central Asia, as in other parts of the USSR, urban housing consisted of a mixture of blocks of flats and individual homes. Very little was done by development agencies in the first twenty years of independence to maintain or improve the housing stock. Blocks of flats were placed in the care of newly created, privately owned housing management companies. Many home owners struggled to pay electricity, water or heating bills, even though these communal services were quite low by Western standards. Businessmen bought up the ground floor flats for their shops and cafes, extending them at will into the wide streets created by Soviet town planners. The issue of social housing for the new poor only emerged properly at the end of the 2000s when it became clear that they were a permanent phenomenon for whom the public authorities had no ready housing

provision. Around the same time mortgages became available for the better-off and social divisions continued to widen. So civic activists are working in a crisis situation where social issues have been chronically ignored.

In Kyrgyzstan, residents of Bishkek's housing blocks have reacted to the free-for-all under 'wild capitalism' in different ways. In general, new property relations have broken up the open city spaces inherited from the Soviet period. The entrances to staircases were gradually closed off with entry phones; inside the staircases, residents defended their flats with well-armoured doors. At the same time as staircases were closed up, so were the entrances to many a courtyard. Across the city residents' associations came into being to take this kind of defensive action against commercial developers, burglars or city vagrants.

As for NGOs funded by international agencies, such as my own organisation INTRAC, most of our attention was focused on rural development. The Kyrgyzstan Government had allowed its Soviet-era industries to be sold up and dismantled; there was little interest in the restructuring of publicly-owned companies or the refurbishment of urban infrastructure; an exception was the small grants that community groups won for youth clubs or play areas on city estates.

It was thus a radical innovation when an NGO called Shtab opened a new project called 'Utopian Bishkek' with the aim of re-evaluating the Soviet heritage of the city, using socialist ideas emanating from Constructivism and recent work on urban issues by David Harvey. The result of this research project, which used participatory methods, was the production of a collection of articles¹ and three maps to be used by visitors to the city, entitled 1) Proletarian Internationalism, 2) Science and Technology, 3) the Socialist City.

One of the Shtab studies focused on the 6th *microraion* (housing estate), built on the gentle slopes leading up from the Chui River

valley to the sudden 3,500-metre wall of the Tien Shan Mountains, analysing the use of space and distribution of collective and public services. The city was divided into four main tiers, planned so as to offer all citizens access to 'material and cultural needs'. On the first tier, the *microraion*, daily facilities such as schools, cafes and convenience stores should be within 500 metres from the home; at the zero tier, the residential group, laundries and playgroups should be only 150–200 metres away. The intersection of art and city space was another theme – for example, the widespread use of murals to promote socialist ideology.

I asked Diana Ukhina how Laboratoria CI is trying to engage young people in a reassessment of the urban Soviet heritage using an artistic lens. Her answer was that we need a complete rethink of public spaces – how they look and what they are used for. One of Laboratoria CI's first artistic projects included a study of a typical hostel in Bishkek, examining Soviet and post-Soviet discourses regarding these spaces. In many hostels (whether workers' or students') the privatisation of individual rooms has transformed the building: out go shared kitchens, bathrooms and toilets, and in come individual ones.

Diana compared the 6th and 7th *microraions* in terms of citizens' engagement in caring for the city environment. In the 6th *microraion* a grove of trees was preserved in the middle of the estate by the Soviet planners in the late 1950s and is still there today, stoutly defended by local residents. In the 7th *microraion* many of the open spaces are run down, untidy and full of rubbish – a kind of no-man's land. Both these estates are close to a popular market and therefore vulnerable to commercial development.

Anara Moldosheva is chair of a residents' association in the centre of Bishkek. "Our block tells the story of city housing", she said. "It was built for Communist Party Central Committee workers and from 1991–2014 no repairs were carried out on it at all. All that happened was that part of the space

it was located on was sold off to private developers who built an elite block opposite us. The city authorities have a scheme for major renovations – for example, our block needs a new roof and piping – on a 50:50 basis, but how are we to collect our 50 per cent? The roof could cost 2 million soms (USD 30,000) but it would take us fifteen years to collect this sum from residents' contributions."



Street scene in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

At the same time, Anara has raised wider questions with the Agency for City Development. "We began a discussion with the Agency about how to train activists in the residents' associations. They provided us with information showing that most residents' groups are struggling with basic questions around membership and urgent maintenance of infrastructure. These are the kind of problems that are familiar to us from NGO training workshops but we hadn't engaged in housing issues before. Also, as residents we have an interest in the streets and social, health or educational facilities around our blocks but most residents' groups haven't yet found an effective way to liaise on this with the authorities." In some run-down areas, nobody seems to care. Thus, a report on housing management produced by the Agency in 2017 noted that one fifth of the city's 2,675 housing blocks was not being managed by anyone at all.

Another major development in Bishkek over the past ten years is the explosion of car ownership and the consequent traffic and pollution problems – now being taken up actively by citizens' groups. A major grant was provided recently by the Chinese

Government for the repair and widening of city streets. Diana Ukhina carried out a study into four urban campaigns (conflicts) that took place in 2017–18, two of them concerned with the cutting down of trees to make way for cars². Despite street protests, publicity on mainstream and social media, and court injunctions by local residents, these were major plans already in their implementation phase and eventually went ahead.

A third protest had better results. This was a scheme promoted by Omurbek Tekebaev, head of the Ata Meken political party, to begin the wholesale development of the central part of Bishkek, demolishing the many individual one-storey dwellings, plus the old Soviet housing blocks that occupy valuable land. Here activists like Anara and other residents' leaders mobilised quickly and were able to stop a development as it began the process of discussion in parliament. And a fourth case study by Diana was similar: the plans to build a new laboratory in Bishkek's Botanical Gardens, owned by the Academy of Sciences. This was halted in the discussion stage after lobbying by environmentalists and an intervention by the country's president.

At present, Diana concluded, the two main sources of public opposition to developments are, first, individual economic or environmental interests³, and second, the inputs of a small number of experts on urban issues. As yet the wider collective interest has not found an effective channel. One of the most active groups, Nashe Pravo (Our Right), is quick to respond to any privatisation and demolition threat, but the public meetings called are very often chaotic and no clear alternative strategy to elite flats and private-car-oriented development has yet been put together. Citizens' groups have tried to influence the city's general plan, but when they did gain access to it, they found it was expressed in an engineer's and planner's language that did not easily permit public discussion.

A big priority is improving Bishkek City Council's consultative mechanisms. Diana's report notes that these have improved: there

are now quite a lot of channels for citizens to use. But arguments and actions are often at the technical level, while many residents and professionals alike challenge the overall plan – or lack of a plan – that is affecting the social organisation of space and the quality of life so negatively. Here the analysis made in ‘Utopian Bishkek’ is quite interesting: while many criticise the mathematical foundations of Soviet city planning for ‘standardising’ and ‘depersonalisation’, in the *microraisons* today services are provided by a chaotic private sector that is often fouling up the environment. The criticism of Soviet rationalism has therefore become ‘anachronistic’, faced with the need to plan better. In addition, the general citizens’ interest can only be represented by residents’ and other local activists’ groups ready to put pressure on the public authorities.

Footnotes

1 Georgy Mamedov, Oksana Shatalova, *Bishkek utopicheskyy: sbornik tekstov*, Bishkek, Shtab, 2015

2 Diana Ukhina, *Osnovaniya vovlecheniya gorozhan v politiku uzmeneniya goroda Bishkek*, Bishkek, 2018, URL: <http://ci.kg/citizens>

3 Sometimes called NIMBY (not in my back yard) interests, though they can be progressive as well as reactionary.

Illustrations

Illustrations are reproduced from Diana Ukhina's research article *Osnovaniya vovlecheniya gorozhan v politiku uzmeneniya goroda Bishkek* (see footnote 2). Copyright: Joshik Murzakhmetov, Toto Murzakhmetov and Karina Tolmacheva.

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SCRSS News

Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SCRSS

SCRSS AGM 2019

The Society held its AGM on 18 May 2019. The Annual Report and Accounts were discussed and approved, and subsequently sent to all members on our email list. If you're not on our email list, or would like a copy by post, please contact the Hon Secretary.

The meeting re-elected Mel Bach, Christine Barnard, Christine Lindey, Charles Stewart, Diana Turner and Jean Turner to the SCRSS Council for further three-year terms. Following the AGM, the Council met to appoint the Executive Committee (EC). The full list of the Society's Honorary Officers and Council Members is as follows. Honorary Officers – Professor Bill Bowring (President); Robert Chandler, Professor Robert Davies, Dr Kate Hudson, Dr David Lane and Dr Rachel O'Higgins (Vice Presidents). SCRSS Council – Philip Matthews (Chair*); Kate Clark and Charles Stewart (Vice Chairs*); Ralph Gibson (Hon Secretary*); Jean Turner (Hon Treasurer*); Christine Lindey (Exhibitions Officer*); Andrew Jameson (*); Len Weiss (*); Bethany Aylward; Mel Bach (Hon Librarian); Christine Barnard; Michael Costello; Diana Turner. [*] indicates member of the EC.

The AGM was followed by a talk from Jane Rosen and Kimberley Reynolds on their book *Reading and Rebellion: An Anthology of Radical Writing for Children 1900–1960*, which includes material from the SCRSS children's literature collection. Attendees had the opportunity to view this collection together with Jane, who has been instrumental in getting it sorted and shelved on the top floor.

Library News

Good progress is being made sorting the books in the basement, thanks to our

growing band of library volunteers, led by Hon Librarian Mel Bach. The aim is to get the collections on this floor sorted and properly shelved by the end of this year. If you can spare some time on the first Saturday of the month between 11.00 and 16.00, we could accomplish this much sooner! As well as shelf-sorting, volunteers are needed for basic library reception duties during these Saturday openings (helping visitors, recording loans and returns, etc). This assistance would free up our other library volunteers to concentrate on sorting, cataloguing and classifying. All volunteers would agree that it is immensely satisfying to see the results of their efforts leading to a more organised and accessible library. Contact the Hon Secretary if you would like to help.

SCRSS-MML

A full update was given to members at the AGM on the possible joint approach to the Heritage Lottery Fund by the Society and Marx Memorial Library. It is now clear that the first step would be separate bids by both organisations. The SCRSS Council will continue to look at this whole question, beginning with its meeting in July. If any members have experience in drafting funding bids, or would like to know more, please contact the Hon Secretary.

Next Events

Saturday 1 June 2019, 11.00-16.00

Event: SCRSS Saturday Library Opening for Members

Friday 14 June 2019, 19.00

Talk: Caroline Walton on My Cossack Family – And Other Remarkable People in Russia and Ukraine

Saturday 6 July 2019, 11.00-16.00

Event: SCRSS Saturday Library Opening for Members

Saturday 3 August 2019, 11.00-16.00

Event: SCRSS Saturday Library Opening for Members

Saturday 7 September, 2019, 11.00-16.00

Event: SCRSS Saturday Library Opening for Members

Events take place at the SCRSS, 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB, unless otherwise stated. Admission fees: films and lectures £3.00 (SCRSS members), £5.00 (non-members); other events: as indicated.

Up-to-date details for all events are available on the SCRSS website at www.scrss.org.uk/cinemaevents.htm. Please note: dogs are not permitted on SCRSS premises, with the exception of guide dogs.

Soviet War Memorial Trust News

Latest news by Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SWMT

Victory Day 2019



Wreaths laid at the Memorial (Photo: Karl Weiss)

On 9 May, the annual Victory Day Act of Remembrance at the Soviet War Memorial, organised by the Soviet War Memorial Trust (SWMT), once again attracted hundreds of participants and spectators, including significant numbers of veterans from Russia and the UK, and, for the first time, from Norway and Canada.

Earl Howe, Defence Minister and Deputy Leader of the Lords, represented the UK Government and spoke about the importance of the event, and the Memorial at its heart. “We stand here firstly to commemorate an immense victory and to remember the remarkable men and women who inspired it from London to Leningrad. A victory years in the making – a victory which required a level of courage and co-operation that even from this distance in time takes one’s breath away. But, secondly, we stand here to mark a quite unprecedented level of sacrifice... 27 million citizens and soldiers from the Republics of the former Soviet Union lost their lives in World War II, each one a son or daughter, father or mother, brother or sister, someone who left behind a mourning family that never forgot their loss... [The Memorial] stands today as a profoundly moving statement of solidarity against an unspeakable tyranny and, for all the loss and tragedy it commemorates, as a statement of hope in the way nations can put aside differences in pursuit of a common good. Those whose bravery and sacrifice this Memorial marks will never be forgotten.”



Earl Howe speaking at the Victory Day event
(Photo: Karl Weiss)

The Russian Ambassador, HE Alexander Yakovenko, addressed the veterans directly: “I want to take this opportunity to express our boundless gratitude to those who brought freedom and peace to their countries – to the veterans of the Second World War. You are the pride of our

generation and an inseparable part of our history.” He also drew attention to the significance of the day for the Memorial itself: “This year Victory Day is of special significance. It marks twenty years since the opening of the Soviet War Memorial in London – a place that reminds us so powerfully of the value of life and the high cost of our freedom paid by all those who fought against Nazism. It also symbolises the unity of our countries, our common history, victory and respect for the heroic deed of our ancestors.”



Soviet veterans laying a wreath at the Memorial
(Photo: Karl Weiss)

Following the speeches, the Mayor of Southwark, Earl Howe, Admiral Lord West, local MP Neil Coyle, veterans and veterans’ organisations, and UK and Russian groups and organisations laid wreaths, ahead of a moving performance of the song *The Final Chord* by a student from the Russian Embassy School in London. The Last Post and Exhortation were followed by a two-minute silence. Former USSR embassies concluded the event with an outdoor reception near the Memorial, where veterans and other participants were asked to raise a toast: “To Victory!”

Fundraising for the Future

At a reception at the Russian Embassy in March 2019, the SWMT launched a major

fundraising initiative to renovate the Soviet War Memorial ahead of the 75th anniversary of Victory Day in 2020. The Trust relies on donations for all its activities, and welcomes support from many individuals and organisations. See the SWMT website at sovietwarmemorialtrust.com for more information and use the Donate link to the Trust's online donation page. Alternatively, cheques (payable to the Soviet War Memorial Trust) can be sent to: SWMT, 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB.

The Soviet War Memorial, dedicated to the 27 million Soviet men and women who lost their lives during the fight against fascism in 1941–45, is located in the Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, Lambeth Road, Southwark, London SE1 (adjacent to the Imperial War Museum). The SCRSS is a founder member of the Soviet War Memorial Trust (SWMT).

Feature

The Social Impact of the 1950s Russian Courses for National Servicemen

By James Muckle

In the 1950s, roughly the last decade of compulsory military training, over 4,000 servicemen were trained as Russian linguists: to reinforce the security of the realm. However, the side-effects of studying a fairly difficult language in the company of other young men were as significant as the military purpose. Learning a language implies coming into contact with the culture it encapsulates: professional contacts, the arts, politics, education, social attitudes. The demobilised serviceman takes into civilian life many more things than he realises. Now that six decades and more have passed, we may attempt to assess the impact on individuals and society of this exercise. Many people may have forgotten that such training took place all those years ago. Some surviving alumni of the courses have

been approached to discover what Russian has meant to them (if anything) in their lives, careers, and indeed to their personalities. Evidence was sought through a questionnaire, personal contact, published sources, friendship and ex-service groups. It was, of course, quite impossible to communicate with four or five thousand men, but a sample of about 150 provided informative responses.

The project was intended to explore the *aftermath* of Russian language training, not to describe the courses themselves, which has been done in several publications. We shall refer to all the courses as 'JSSL' (Joint Services School(s) for Linguists), although various other names were also used. In passing, we may note that the satisfaction of trainees with the teaching they received was overwhelmingly positive. The expertise of the British instructors was greatly admired, but contact with the greater number of Russian and East European teachers was valued to a surprising extent. It was not that their expertise in teaching was particularly high: indeed, it is not clear that they had any particular skills or that they received any training or guidance. It was the fact of contact with people from another very different background which the trainees found valuable.

What became of the servicemen after their relatively short two-year stint in the forces? They were, of course, exclusively *men*, as women were not conscripted for national service (NS). Most returned after demobilisation to the career they had already planned or begun. The project set out to discover to what extent study of Russian had a residual effect on the linguists themselves and whether the relatively sudden appearance of several thousand trained Russian linguists had any consequences of importance to British society.

It proved possible to make contact with about 150 of the surviving alumni of the courses. One cannot be sure that these men were typical of the rest; this small total is better than nothing. Sources used were three: a report based on one cohort of

trainees compiled about forty years after the event, secondly about fifty questionnaires designed by me, completed in the last two or three years, and a DVD now held in the Imperial War Museum which bears relevant communications from many ex-servicemen.

Messages and completed questionnaires reveal that a fair number maintained an interest, sometimes even lifelong, in matters Russian. Some, indeed, used the Russian language to a greater or lesser extent in their eventual professional lives. Others expressed regret that they did not have such an opportunity, and others again revealed a lack of interest in so doing. About 20 to 25 per cent of informants had no contact with matters Russian after training; this means 75 to 80 per cent had not completely forgotten their experience. In one cohort of linguists who offered an opinion, twenty-five were enthusiastic. Five were largely favourable, with the odd reservation, four regretted the lack of opportunity in later life to develop their knowledge (which in itself implies a favourable attitude), and five were hostile to Russia or to its language or to their experience of military service in general. All the comments are recorded in the full report.

How was interest manifested in the lives and careers of these men? Teaching: in the 1950s and 60s JSSL alumni served to provide universities with staff and with students who wished to continue their study of Russian after NS. However, this supply began to dry up as NS ended, a factor which should have been foreseen, but was not. Nevertheless, our British higher education sector eventually established an excellent reputation for research. Moreover, Russian-speaking academics in various areas set up links or joint projects with Russian universities: in applied science, geography, education, even theology. At the same time, secondary schools were recruiting teachers of Russian from ex-JSSL *kursanty* in the belief that Russian was the foreign language of the future. Some teachers in schools and higher education became propagandists for Russian in both sectors; several of them were authors of teaching materials, and at least three were

awarded Pushkin medals for work of this nature.

A number of JSSL alumni went into the diplomatic service. And, of course, we should not forget that some trained linguists remained in the services and continued their essential duties there. Commerce is strongly represented: one businessman visited Russia or other East European countries as many as eighty-six times on commercial duties. Journalism and the arts figure prominently among alumni, particularly the theatre. Publishers: a prize-winning translator (and others who won no prizes, but whose published work has been of great value). And conference and other interpreters, workers at GCHQ, two university librarians with a distinct interest in Russian publications and others in librarianship who have found Russian 'useful', an academic musicologist, a specialist on Rimsky-Korsakov (and another semi-professional enthusiast for Russian church music). All these and others figure in the roll of JSSL alumni whose work in matters Russian reinforces the contention that services Russian had a significant impact on British society. And we have barely touched on ex-trainees who pursued Russian as a hobby, joining U3A groups, attending refresher courses, and continuing with private reading and study.

To conclude, to what extent did ex-JSSL linguists have any impact upon British society? The British public came to realise that some of their sons and grandsons were learning Russian seriously, that this was not a remote and impossible tongue, and that we were learning more about Russia than ever before.

Dr James Muckle studied Russian at Cambridge and Leeds after National Service; he then taught Russian in schools and universities, and was a teacher-trainer. He has written widely on education in Russia, and also published three volumes of translations from and a study of Nikolai Leskov. His 'The Russian Language in Britain' surveys centuries of study of the language. Most recently he issued a biography of James Heard, the teenage

emigrant to Russia in 1817 who made a distinguished reputation as an educator there.

Please note: It is impossible here to estimate fully the contribution of NS linguists to British understanding of Russia. To request a copy of the full report of over 15,000 words in electronic format as an email attachment, free of charge, please contact jymuckle@gmail.com.

Report

London Russian Ballet School

By Valeria Vinogradova

London Russian Ballet School (LRBS) was founded in 2010 by Artistic Director Evgeny Goremykin, a leading soloist in Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet for almost twenty years, and Director Harriet Pickering, to offer training in professional Russian ballet. LRBS offers a different approach to vocational education. Unlike other conservatories, alongside outstanding ballet training in the Sixth Form, LRBS insists on rigorous academic study, from a full choice of A-Level options. It views this as vital for the artistic and professional fulfilment of an individual. A vocational artist should not require re-training at the end of school or their dancing career. The ability either to contribute to theatre life or to walk down different avenues is possible for a confident and educated individual with a historical appreciation of their craft.

The aim of the school has remained constant throughout its short history: to offer access to the knowledge and traditions of the Russian school. The Russian system relies on a chain of knowledge being passed from one generation to the next. LRBS, therefore, recognises the importance of teaching from those who have themselves been taught by highly experienced renowned artists. It is

unique in providing teachers who all have backgrounds dancing at leading soloist level or above on the Russian stage, and who were all trained in Russia at the great Russian schools. It is only in this way that the art and skill of professional Russian ballet may be transferred from teacher to student, and it is this methodology that makes Russian ballet unique.



Marianne Allen, graduating scholarship student at London Russian Ballet School (Copyright: Igor Zakharkin)

Having started with just two students, LRBS's numbers continue to increase each year. As the student body has grown so has the roster of exceptionally qualified ballet teachers. Evgeny Goremykin's career in the Bolshoi Ballet lasted over twenty years, during which time he was fortunate enough to work with such great Russian teachers as Raisa Struchkova, Galina Ulanova, Marina Semyonova and Boris Akimov. Irina Prokofyeva, Honoured Artist of Russia and Head of Girl's Technique, was a student of both Galina Ulanova and Marina Semyonova during her career as a ballerina at the Bolshoi Theatre. Marina Kamburova was a principal dancer of the Mikhailovsky Ballet in St Petersburg. She danced all pas de deux, pas de trois and pas de quatre parts in all main classical ballets, namely

The Sleeping Beauty, The Nutcracker and Swan Lake; Tsar Maiden in The Little Humpbacked Horse; and all main parts in all ballets choreographed by NN Boyarchikov, Artistic Director of the Mikhailovsky Ballet.

Kids Love Lambeth (KLL) and LRBS are both registered charities. KLL was founded early in 2005 by Evgeny Goremykin when he realised that too few local children had consistent access to activity or any experience of classical ballet. The organic growth of the school within the borough of Lambeth, with outreach work focused primarily on the local community, has created a strong foundation of local students taking lessons. LRBS has performed on numerous occasions in public theatres and as part of outreach programmes for literally thousands of young schoolchildren in Lambeth and London.

Valeria Vinogradova is Marketing Specialist at London Russian Ballet School. For more information about the school, visit www.londonrussianballetschool.com.

Book Reviews

Greetings From the Barricades: Revolutionary Postcards in Imperial Russia

By Tobie Mathew (Four Corners Books, November 2018, London, ISBN: 978-1-909829-12-1, Hbk, 480pp, £20.00, 220 colour & b/w illus)

Historians have underestimated the importance of political postcards as a means of articulating and spreading anti-government and revolutionary visual propaganda in Tsarist Russia. Tobie Mathew rectifies this with a study of the postcards' content, production, distribution, consumption and display. The main, highly detailed focus is on the tumultuous months prior to and following the January 1905 Revolution (known as Bloody Sunday), up until the repressions of late 1906. But he also summarises overviews of the surrounding periods from 1869–1917.

Political postcards first emerged in the Paris Commune of 1870 from whose siege they were sent by balloon post. The late 1890s brought pictorial and colour postcards which prompted the era's postcard mania. On first reaching Russia in 1872 postcards were strictly censored, and political dissent was so harshly repressed until 1905 that most political postcards were published abroad, with only a few managing to be smuggled into the country.

Bloody Sunday changed this. The international outrage at the Russian state's killing and maiming of hundreds of its own peaceful, unarmed demonstrators was so strong that numerous postcards depicting the massacre were published. Many now reached Russia, as did ones indicting the exploitation and oppression of workers and peasants. When the numerous strikes, assassinations, mutinies and protests that followed Bloody Sunday further politicised the population, political postcards acted as important educational, agitational and organisational tools for a largely illiterate population – as well as being useful fundraisers for exiled revolutionary groups.

Inspiration was provided by depictions of previous revolutions, such as Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, and by photographic portraits of socialist heroes and political martyrs, such as Karl Marx and Maria Spiridonova. Political education came from popular postcards such as Nikolai Lokhov's *The Pyramid*, 1901 which brilliantly portrays exploitative class relations as a tiered cake, with exhausted workers and peasants shouldering successive tiers of carousing bourgeoisie, menacing soldiery and hypocritical clergy, topped by the aristocracy. Depictions of atrocities and social injustices, such as photographs of Maxim Gorky's play *The Lower Depths*, had strong agitational functions. Such postcards were powerful messengers of popular discontent and shattered the perception of the Tsar's supposed benign divinity.

The Russian state's 1905 October Manifesto declaring limited, purported freedoms led to the flourishing of postcard production in Russia itself. In the ensuing

chaos these postcards now directly satirised the state and exposed its socio-political injustices; the censors were openly defied as they were often uncertain how to interpret the new, contradictory laws.

Based on extensive research, especially in Russian police and press archives, Mathew traces fluctuating official attitudes with a boyish relish for the cat and mouse activities of producers, sellers, police spies and censors. The book is entertainingly written, well organised, usefully referenced and its copious illustrations and archival quotations provide valuable resources. However, given his topic, Mathew's intention to take a non-ideological stance is curious. This belies his neo-liberal assumptions which emphasise the importance of market forces and commercial enterprises, while glossing over the crucial importance of the Marxist principles that informed the 1905 Revolution and its aftermath.

Christine Lindey

Immigration and Refugee Law in Russia: Socio-Legal Perspectives

By Agnieszka Kubal (Cambridge University Press, March 2019, ISBN: 9781108417891, Hbk, 205 + xxii pp, £85.00)

Do not be put off by the rather dry title of this book. Agnieszka Kubal, who has already established herself as a leading expert on 'ordinary law' in Russia, has published a beautifully written and often enthralling account of the actual day-to-day practice of immigration and refugee law in Russia. In other words, the "complexities of the law as it unfolds in the everyday life experiences of ordinary people".

It is not generally known that Russia is one of the top five 'receiving countries' in the world, with 11.6 million foreign-born people living in its territory as of 2017. There are at least another 11 million migrants who live in Russia de facto but do not apply for a residence permit or citizenship. They come mainly from former Soviet states in Central Asia (mainly Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan) and other Commonwealth of

Independent States (CIS) countries. Migrants account for about three – four per cent of the employed population in Russia, seven per cent if undocumented migrants are included. They mainly work in the construction industry, agriculture, trade and services.

In order to research this book, Kubal spent over five months in Russia in 2014, following two shorter trips in 2013, and has kept in close touch with her informants since. She volunteered in a number of roles in Russian non-governmental organisations (NGOs), legal aid clinics and organisations that help migrants, and shadowed lawyers as they represented their clients in the courts. She accompanied migrants and refugees to state immigration agencies like the Federal Migration Service (FMS), involving a great deal of waiting in corridors. She observed the dynamics at play between FMS officers and their staff and the migrants and asylum seekers. She conducted a three-month ethnographic study in District Courts and the Moscow City and Oblast Courts, especially the "hyperbolic reality-mediating function" of the case file, which in the context of the formalism of Russian law becomes more real than the migrants and refugees who are its subject. She analysed a number of Russian court judgments for the years 2014 to 2018, as well as judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, especially the many cases of refugees from Uzbekistan, in particular, who had been kidnapped or rendered with the connivance of the Russian authorities, and returned to grave danger.

Her reader thus gets to know the story of a Kurdish-Syrian family from Iraq with four young children who spent nearly two months in the transit zone of Sheremetyevo Airport, Moscow, while the authorities intended to prosecute them for a criminal offence of illegal entry. Through the work of the charismatic chair of a legal NGO (unnamed by Kubal but well known to me), the family were finally granted temporary asylum. In several other cases Kubal got to know far more about the real lives of her subjects than appears in statistics or court

documents. This is socio-legal, ethnographic research at its best.

The characters of the often heroic, mostly female and fearless, lawyers, and their unfortunate clients, as well as FMS officials and others, leap off the page.

What is particularly good in my view about this book is the way Kubal challenges assumptions about Russia's exceptionality. Its policies and practice are not so different from other European countries. She was impressed by the way that judges at all levels of Russian courts explicitly relied on various provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights, for the benefit of the migrants and refugees, quoting provisions and case law. And others showed through their judgments that they had absorbed European human rights law. Which will make it even more of a tragedy if Russia leaves the Council of Europe and the Strasbourg Court.

In her conclusion, Kubal notes in particular the Russian cause-lawyers who "demonstrated exceptional commitment to their clients, uninhibited by the restrictionist legal environment". She quotes one of them as saying: "I much prefer to stay in St Petersburg and 'live on a volcano' than work for some legal, human rights NGO in the West and write briefs and memos. Here in Russia I have the feeling that I can change things and really make a difference to people's lives. It is not easy, but it is possible."

Kubal also emphasises that the Russian judges showed that they were a "much more plural and less ideologically monolithic group than many commentators would give them credit for".

Her final words: "The picture of access to justice and realisation of human rights for migrants and refugees in Russia is, perhaps, not as uniform or bleak as many commentators would portray it. This is not to say that migrants do not suffer from some of the structural ills of the Russian legal environment – institutional racism, xenophobia and populism fuelling the

different anti-migrant sentiments. Of course they do. However, the approach of looking at their experiences in conjunction with the experiences of immigration, refugee and human rights lawyers, FMS officers and Russian domestic judges deciding their cases demonstrates that the everyday experiences of the law are more complex, quite nuanced and subtle."

Professor Bill Bowring

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