



# Russia and the Russian Worlds International, Multinational, Transnational

Round table chaired by A. Byford, featuring:

M. N. Katz, S. Hutchings, K. Zamyatin, P. Kliuchnikova & G. Yusupova

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# Russia and the Russian Worlds

## International, Multinational, Transnational

**Round-table, co-organised by Professor Anoush Ehteshami (SGIA) and Professor Andy Byford (MLAC) on behalf of the Transnational Strand of the Cross-Language Dynamics programme of research, part of the AHRC-sponsored Open World Research Initiative (<https://www.dur.ac.uk/owri/>).**

**Professor Mark N. Katz** (George Mason & Durham, SGIA)

### America First: Putin's Strategic Priorities

Moscow sees itself as facing three main external threats (America and the West, Islamic – primarily Sunni – jihadists, and China), but Putin in particular sees America and the West as the greatest threat Moscow faces. This results from several factors, including his fear of their supporting democratic 'colour revolution' aimed at overthrowing his regime. Although they pose other challenges, neither Sunni jihadists nor China present this sort of threat to him. This has two important policy implications: 1) Putin's focus on America and the West as the primary threat he faces risks his not paying sufficient attention to countering the threats that Sunni jihadists and China pose to Russia; and 2) Putin is unlikely to be able to both make geopolitical gains for Russia at the West's expense on the one hand and persuade the West to accept his actions and go back to doing business as usual with Russia on the other.

**Professor Stephen Hutchings** (Manchester)

### What is Russia's Game? Two Challenges to the 'Information War' Model – Two Russian Worlds

In this analysis of the contemporary Russian state's international media operation, I use two global 'media events' to challenge standard, instrumental accounts of the 'information war' that Russia is purportedly conducting in its near abroad, as well as further afield. Beginning with the controversy surrounding Russia's exclusion from Eurovision 2017, I argue that Russian state television's preferred narratives gained little traction in Russophone Twitter responses to the scandal, and that online debates significantly reconfigured the 'information war' battle lines. I then examine the multi-platform project through which the international broadcaster, RT, commemorated the centenary of the 1917 revolution. Discarding domestic Russian television's negative depiction of Bolshevism, RT's 1917 centenary project exploits the cultural capital the revolution retains among progressive leftists, fostering a cosmopolitan, participatory audience community which further enhances that capital. Thus, the respective Russian 'worlds' created by these two events do not submit readily to linear 'information war' models but reflect the multi-layered global ecology which Russian media actors inhabit.

**Dr Konstantin Zamyatin** (Durham, MLAC)

### The Russian Language and Russian Nation-building

The Russian Federation's language policy is currently being actively developed as part of a concerted nation-building project. Data shows that in recent years Russia's policymakers have increased efforts to strengthen the position of Russian both in Russia, as a multi-ethnic and hence in principle multi-lingual, federation, and abroad, beyond its own political borders. Policy analysis reveals that the intention is not simply to promote the Russian language as a cultural asset, but to use language as a marker of nationhood and hence a tool of fostering a 'Russian' national identity that does not necessarily coincide with the existing political borders. At the same time, the development and deployment of language policy along these lines pre-determines the route of nation-building by problematically narrowing it down to an emphasis on and pursuit of monolingualism.

**Dr Guzel Yusupova** (Durham, MLAC)

### The 'Russian World' in a Multi-Ethnic Federation: Negotiating Russia's Cultural Diversity under Putin

Vladimir Putin's long-established strategy of nation-state building based on the cultural homogenisation of Russia's citizens has reached a critical point. Its final step was to be the enactment of the draft law 'On the Unity of the Russian Nation', which emphasised 'the unifying role of the Russian people, its culture and language as the historical foundation of Russian statehood'. The law was to lay the new ideological foundations of the Russian state based on the inauguration of a 'Russian World' within its otherwise multi-ethnic borders. However, the discussion of this law, scheduled for 20 July 2017, was postponed till after the 2018 presidential elections. In the meantime, Putin announced the demotion of the second official language in Russia's ethnic republics. This paper discusses the contemporary resistance to this move by Russia's ethnic minorities – a resistance which has taken the form of a spontaneous social movement in defence of Russia's official multilingualism, including online campaigns and grassroots activities aimed at linguistic revivalism.

**Dr Polina Kliuchnikova** (Durham, MLAC)

### The 'Russian World' and the 'Russian Word': Presence, Power and Potentiality in Contemporary Dushanbe

One of the ways the Russian government manifests the presence of the 'Russian World' in other post-Soviet countries is by highlighting the (declared) importance of the Russian language presence and provision in these countries, especially in their capitals and large cities. In this sense, Russia's international cultural policy re-establishes hierarchical relations with these countries as less apt to provide the 'language standard', requiring therefore Russia's own control over the process. At the same time, the sociolinguistic context in many of the former Soviet states has undergone crucial changes since the collapse of the Soviet Union in terms of forming new, emerging variants of 'localised' Russian, which are being normalised as part of everyday communication. Based on the example of Dushanbe in Tajikistan, this paper outlines the ways in which these contrasting discourses on the Russian language beyond Russia's borders coexist and interact in the urban environments of former Soviet states.