

Contents

President's Report	1
BASEES Prizes	2-3
Spotlight on BASEES Non-Residential Fellows	4
Book Reviews	4-5
Study Group Corner	6
R&D Funding Reports	6-7

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 British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies

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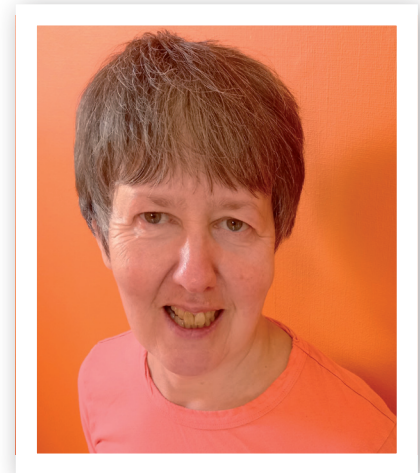
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President's Report

'Disruption' has recently been announced as the theme for the [ICCEES World Congress](#) to be organised by BASEES in London in July 2025. It is a theme that seems peculiarly appropriate for our times, our field of study, and for the state of higher education in the UK.

Over the last few months several universities have announced plans to cut courses and jobs in a range of disciplines across the social sciences, the humanities, and the arts. It is clear that we face a good deal of uncertainty in the sector, particularly when it comes to subject areas which are seen as being a 'minority' interest or of questionable value when it comes to students' employment prospects. Yet Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine a little over two years ago has shown the importance of having experts who can respond by using their specialist knowledge to interpret and explain events for a wider public. In the current unpredictable environment, the UK needs to maintain a breadth of expertise in area studies; it would be a brave (or foolish) decision to designate study in any of the areas in which our members are active as surplus to requirements.

In February this year I represented BASEES at a meeting of the Alliance of Heads of Modern Languages, Area Studies and Linguistics Subject Associations (AMLUK) at which the recommendations of a recent report by Wendy Ayres-Bennet, on collaboration between policy makers and academics, was discussed. The report follows on from the 'Thinking Strategically' workshop held in October 2023 at the Institute for Languages, Cultures, and Societies (ILCS), in collaboration with the Cross-Government Languages Group. It's worth a look if you would like to see some valuable suggestions about how collaboration between academics and policy-makers could be facilitated. The report recommends that researchers interested in getting involved in policy matters make themselves familiar with the [Areas of Research Interest \(ARIs\)](#), a list of questions or topics that



government departments and agencies are interested in knowing more about. There is willingness to collaborate on both sides, it seems, but uncertainty over how to make contact with the policy-making sphere has proved to be a stumbling block in the past.

There are occasions when disruption can actually be a trigger for questioning, creative thinking and innovation. BASEES has given its support to a couple of events which are part of an ongoing process of rethinking Russian studies. A detailed report of this event by Andreas Schönle is included in this newsletter. I shall therefore simply observe that the presentations and conversations ignited there demonstrated ways in which researchers might go about questioning conventional approaches and critically assessing the applicability of theoretical considerations developed in other fields of study or regional interest.

Russian studies developed in the UK largely in the context of the Cold War; looking beyond the paradigms of that era has the potential to contribute to work on challenging and dismantling geographical, linguistic, and temporal boundaries that have been used to define cultures and bolster narratives of exceptionalism. There is a growing body of literature engaged in critically reassessing the discipline, including the latest issue of *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*. At the end of May there will be another event in London, '[What does the war in Ukraine mean for us?](#)', co-funded by the ILCS, the University Council for Languages, and BASEES. Speakers' contributions to this event will appear in a forthcoming special issue of *Forum for Modern Languages*. >>

>> The prospect of the next iteration of research assessment might arguably be experienced by colleagues as a disruption of an altogether different kind. Following last year's consultations on initial decisions, there is now a further REF 2029 consultation on a revised open access policy concerning outputs submitted for assessment. In addition to existing requirements for journal articles to be published under open access

arrangements, there are now plans to extend open access requirements to monographs, book chapters, and edited collections (publications that do not appear immediately as open access to be made freely available to read, download, and search within 24 months of the date of publication). A response from BASEES to these proposals will be provided: the deadline for responses is midday 17 June.

Conference offers the rather more enticing prospect of a break from the routine of a busy teaching term and the chance to catch up with colleagues. I am looking forward to a little spring sunshine in Cambridge and, with any luck, to a conference where no sessions are disrupted by a fire alarm, as happened at last year's splendid conference in Glasgow.

Katharine Hodgson

The rapidly approaching BASEES

BASEES Prizes

The Stephen White Prize

In recognition of the outstanding contribution to the field of study made by the late Professor Stephen White, BASEES is launching a new book prize. The Stephen White Prize for the Best First Book in Slavonic And East European Studies will be offered annually for an author's first published monograph in any of the disciplinary and geographical areas which fall within the BASEES remit. This prize is open for nominations.

[Full details are on our website >>](#)

2022 Nove Prize

Winner:
Rory Finnin, *Blood of Others: Stalin's Crimean Atrocity and the Poetics of Solidarity* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2022).



Rory Finnin's *Blood of Others* represents a truly monumental feat of research across a remarkable array of Ukrainian, Turkish, Crimean Tatar and Russian sources. It offers the definitive account of how the Crimean Tatars' deportation has been remembered, revealed and recounted from late Stalinism to the present, when the fate of Crimea is once again at the centre of global attention. Through evocative, empathetic and elegant close reading, Finnin teases out traces of Crimean Tatar memory buried in nineteenth-, twentieth- and twenty-first-century texts, while

showing how others more actively raised national and international awareness of trauma and atrocity.

This rich and lucid account of transnational transformation and contestation of memory and identity is a landmark achievement in and of itself. Of even greater importance, though, are its insights into how personal and collective empathy with others' suffering can develop and be developed, even across vast historical or geographical distances. *Blood of Others* makes a powerful and path-breaking argument for the power of literature to bear witness, foster solidarity and ignite activism across national and ethnic boundaries. This profound and profoundly moving book resonates sharply with the present, but it will be read and appreciated within and outside our field for years to come.

Honourable Mention:
Jennifer Keating, *On Arid Ground: Political Ecologies of Empire in Russian Central Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

On Arid Ground is a path-breaking history of unstable and shifting environments: arid landscapes crossed by railways, rivers channelled for irrigation projects, steppe land once managed by pastoralists settled by migrating European peasants. It examines the close relationship between environment, ecology, and empire in Russian Central Asia, revealing the environmental dimensions of empire-building and empire-breaking in Russian Turkestan in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

[Read the rest of the article >>](#)

Honourable Mention:
Alessandro Iandolo, *Arrested Development: The Soviet Union in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, 1955-1968* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022).

Alessandro Iandolo's *Arrested Development* presents a ground-breaking and compelling study of Soviet development assistance in West Africa, shedding new light on the rise and fall of Soviet

ideas on the African continent. Through meticulous multi-lingual archival research in six countries and nuanced storytelling, Iandolo navigates the intricate dynamics of Soviet engagement with newly-independent Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, unravelling the motivations behind Moscow's economic programmes in the region. The book elucidates how under Nikita Khrushchev's policy of 'peaceful competition' with the West, the Soviet Union adopted pragmatic approaches to economic development, tailoring its assistance to suit the realities of West African economies.

[Read the rest of the article here >>](#)

George Blazyca Prize



Winner:
Ewa Stańczyk, *Comics and Nation: Power, Pop Culture, and Political Transformation in Poland* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2022).

Exploring Poland's century long love-hate relationship with the global comic book industry, Ewa Stańczyk's *Comics and Nation* captures the myriad ways in which the medium interacted with and shaped Polish society, from the establishment of the Second Polish Republic in 1918 to the post-socialist contemporary state. The extent of interaction between this 'peripheral' outpost and the transnational comic book phenomenon has ebbed and flowed, from the largely 'rhetorical' engagement of Stalinist era isolationism, when the state dismissed comics as an imperialist threat, via the socialist-era exports to the West of the 1970s, to the rampant free market conditions of the 1990s, when many in the Polish scene felt flooded with 'foreign junk'. Yet, regardless of the prevailing domestic political situation, Polish comic book producers, publishers, readers, critics, and state officials have always been >>

BASEES Prizes

>> active participants on the global stage. Stańczyk's ambitious, carefully researched, and highly accessible account foregrounds a medium long dismissed as marginal to Polish culture. This enables her to provide the reader with an innovative new perspective on modern Polish history in transnational context.

Honorable mention:

Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatcă, *Creolizing the Modern: Transylvania across Empires* (Cornell University Press, 2022)

A remarkable collaborative experiment between a literary critic and a sociologist, *Creolizing the Modern* casts Transylvania as an inter-imperial and multilingual semiperiphery. Taking one of world literature's numerous 'great unread' novels as its point of departure, this boldly interdisciplinary and methodologically stimulating monograph contributes to and problematises a wide range of theoretical debates. In part, it does so by posing an intriguing question: 'What does the world look like from the standpoint of a small village in Transylvania, a region in East-Central Europe?'

BASEES Women's Forum Prizes 2024

Book prize, for books published in 2022 Judges:

Dr Rachel Morley (UCL SSEES) and
Dr Elizabeth White (University of the
West of England)

Winner:

Neringa Klumbytė, *Authoritarian Laughter: Political Humor and Soviet Dystopia in Lithuania* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022)

Neringa Klumbytė's absorbing monograph is a refreshing, truly engaging and sophisticated account of the attempted imposition of the Soviet state project of authorised satire and humour in Lithuania from 1956 to 1985, as well as of resistance and accommodation to this project. Grounded in extensive original archival work, it is both a fascinating micro-history of the official satirical magazine *Broom* and a macro-history of political authoritarianism and the commonplace experiences of power that took place within it. The author deftly weaves in history, anthropology, ethnography, cultural criticism and political science to create a nuanced and unforgettable portrait of Lithuanian society in the late Soviet period, while also offering a compelling account of the research journey she undertook to create this book.

Honorable mention:

Ana Grgić, *Early Cinema, Modernity and Visual Culture: The Imaginary of the Balkans* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022)

This impressive monograph makes a major contribution to the emerging field of early Balkan cinema history as well as to early cinema studies more broadly, providing a fascinating account of how moving images were both made and consumed in the Balkans. Adopting a transnational and cross-cultural approach and drawing on materials from archives in thirteen countries (Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Greece, Hungary, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, Romania, and the United Kingdom), the author challenges the traditional approach of early cinema studies, which often focuses on the 'national', and instead shows how the multiculturalism of the Balkan space influenced visual culture and cinema between the 1890s and the mid-1910s.

Article/Chapter Prize

Judges:

Dr Katy Turton (University of the Highlands and Islands) and Dr Tamar Koplataдзе (University of Oxford)

Winner:

Verita Sriratana, 'I Burn (Marx's) Paris: "Capital" Cities, Alienation and Deconstruction in the Works of Bruno Jasieński', in *Temporalities of Modernism*, ed. by Carmen Borbély, Erika Mihálycsa and Petronia Petrar, *European Modernism Studies*, 9 (Milan: Ledizioni, 2022), pp. 147–71.

This is an impressive article. Sweeping in scope and fascinating in topic, it sets its close analysis of Jasieński's *I Burn Paris* in the turbulent context of interwar Europe and the various intellectual, cultural and political movements of that time. The exploration of *I Burn Paris* as a response to and critique of Marx's romanticisation of the Paris Commune is deftly handled and the article brings home bleakly the perils of being a writer who supported, but also critiqued, socialism.

Honorable mention:

Julia Mannherz, 'Piano Music, Fantasy, and Elizaveta Ivanova's Ambivalent Feminism', *Women's History Review*, 31.3 (2022), pp. 408–28.

This well-researched article engagingly reconstructs the story of a little-known figure in late Imperial Russian history, Elizaveta Ivanova, and convincingly prompts us to rethink how we interpret women's feminism, as well as musical pieces, thus simultaneously contributing to the fields of Russian studies, women's history and musicology.

Postgraduate prize 2024

Winner:

Szinan Radi, 'Do-It-Yourself Socialism: Home Construction Credits, Private Property and the Introduction of the Self-Build Programme in Hungary, 1954–1956', *Contemporary European History* (2023)



Radi's article makes an important contribution to several interlocking fields: area studies, sociology, economics and political science. Although it is focussed on just one aspect of Hungarian social and economic history – housing policy – its topic is far from narrow: it argues against a wide-spread assumption, typical in many fields, that socialist societies have 'behaved' as our theoretical knowledge of socialism tells us they should have. In fact, across the post-socialist world, the economic and political reality was far more complex than the theoretical models could account for. Radi's article argues convincingly that primary sources and raw data reveal that economic and monetary constraints trumped ideology and state control when it came to housing policy in post-Second World War Hungary, paving the way for significant political changes in 1956. The jury would like to commend Radi's careful and informed use of primary sources, exemplary clarity of argument, and ability to present findings in a clear, accessible way that easily crosses disciplinary boundaries.

Highly commended:

Mariia Shynkarenko, 'Compliant Subjects? How the Crimean Tatars Resist Russian Occupation in Crimea', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* (2022), 55.1, 76–98

The jury would like to commend this excellent article which analyses Crimean Tatars' complex means of resistance to the state following the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. Challenging the common association of resistance to communist and post-communist authoritarian regimes through open political subversion, the author puts a spotlight on less visible forms of resistance and agency, convincingly arguing that Crimean Tatars have undermined Russian oppression through 'tactics that are not covert, overt, or liberal' – namely laughter and patience (or *sabr*). The article undoubtedly prompts future studies to consider other similar cases of resistance, although these might pay additional attention to some of the central questions in ethnographic research around positionality and the use of sources not only in dominant, but also local languages.

Spotlight on

BASEES Non-Residential Fellows

In March 2023 [BASEES awarded eight fellowships to scholars in the humanities and social sciences based in Ukraine.](#)

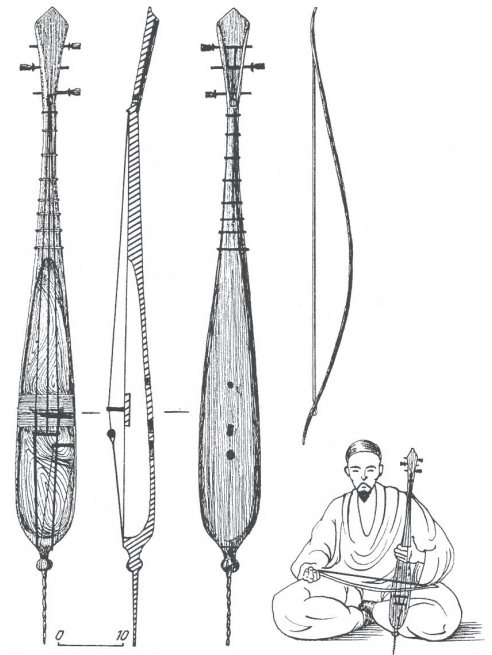
Dr Oksana Diadechko (Ancient Chernihiv National Architectural and Historical Reserve)

Early Medieval Musical Instruments of Ukraine and Eastern Europe: Research Methods and Use in Museum Practice

The musical instruments of Rus' emerged in line with pan-European developments in musical culture. Issues such as the poor preservation and attribution ambiguity of archaeological finds of musical instruments from the early Middle Ages (X-XIII century) limits the possibility of their use in museum practice. Without analogies and unambiguous examples, scientists can interpret the same archaeological find in different ways. This project aims provide a manual that will meet the need to develop and apply a certain methodology, which will be based on existing experience in the

field of archeology and museum work. The use of parallels will help compensate for some fragmentation of sources in the field of early medieval paleoorganology and ensure the creation of a coherent scientific picture in this area.

Ukraine's museum collections contain precisely defined archaeological finds of musical instruments of the 10th-13th centuries. They can serve as a basis for creating a methodological study on the attribution of similar artifacts both from Ukraine and Eastern Europe more broadly. Such instruments include clay rattles, bells, and the "hurkalo"; a children's musical toy present in small quantities in many Ukrainian museums. Jew's harps and big bells are less commonly found during archaeological excavations. Fragments of stringed instruments are extremely rare and valuable.



Reconstruction of a stringed musical instrument from a burial mound near the village of Kirovo, Kherson region and a Polovtsian musician. (Image from "Gold of the Steppe. Archeology of Ukraine" (1991)).

Book Reviews



Disbelief: 100 Russian Anti-War Poems, edited by Julia Nemirowskaya. Smokestack Books, Ripon, 2023, 220pp. £9.99

This anthology presents poems written in Russian alongside English translations. While the seventy contributors have a theme and a language in common, they are diverse in terms of their origins, citizenship, and location. These works by Russophone poets writing against war demonstrate that the language is not the sole property of the current regime in the Russian Federation, but also to those who condemn its actions.

There are relatively few poets of Ukrainian origin to be found in this anthology; most of these write from outside Ukraine,

including Boris Khersonskiy. In 'Look at our multitudes! Who could provide for us' (pp. 258-61) he evokes an existence suspended between thoughts of destruction and resistance at

home and a sense of alienated unreality abroad; the poem concludes: 'Ghosts don't have shadows. Our shadows stayed home'. Another Ukrainian abroad, Mikhailo ludovskii expresses his powerlessness, anger, and guilt in 'They bomb me from afar, although' (pp. 276-9), describing as a ghost the town in Germany where he has found refuge, rather than himself. A poem by Galina Itskovich, a New York psychotherapist originally from Ukraine, draws on her work providing support for civilians and others affected by their traumatic experiences of the war to talk about the fears that helped them survive ('Crisis Therapy', pp. 134-9).

There are several strategies repeatedly used in these poems to bring home the destruction and suffering caused by Russia's war. One such strategy is to introduce a child's perspective, representing the war through allusions to children's stories and rhymes, so that new and disturbing realities intrude on

the world playful fantasy. Mariia Remizova rewrites 'The House that Jack Built' as a litany of the war's destruction: 'This is the house/ that Jack wrecked' (pp. 225-6). Ol'ga Andreevna offers a bedtime story which recasts the war as an assault by figures from traditional Russian fairy tales ('Beddy-bye, my child, lie still!', pp. 22-23).

Another strategy is to express horror through macabre and florid imagery in poems which do not describe war's violence directly, but represent Russian aggressors that take on monstrous and inhuman forms. In some poems evil emanates from a dangerous animal that has got out of control, as in Tatyana Vol'tskaya's 'Enter a louse', (pp. 56-7), depicting a people and a land in the grip of what was once an apparently innocuous louse which now blots out half the sky. Eugene Kluev makes a call to resist and destroy another rampaging beast, the 'evilant' (a satisfying translation of 'Zlon', pp. 156-7). Other poems confront questions of complicity by portraying the horrific transformation of seemingly normal Russian civilians into brutal killers, as in Dmitriy Kolomensky's 'Meet Vera Petrovna! She is a cannibal' ('The women in church stare suspiciously at >>

Book Reviews

>> the priest', pp. 164-7). Sergei Kruglov portrays a congregation of elderly women in a Russian Orthodox church who are dubious about the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' (pp. 174-5).

The anthology's title, 'Disbelief', is echoed throughout in poems in which the aggressors are shown to have rejected all reason. Iulia Fridman gives a voice to imagined Russian 'Z-patriots' whose absurd justifications for violence, in 'When we had liberated Ukraine from the Nazis' (pp. 248-9) include having to wipe Estonia from the map because it had been taken over by ichthyosaurs. Failed dialogues between supporters of the war and those trying to persuade them to think again feature, as, for example, in Ksenia Buksha's 'his sister writes him on whatsapp' (pp. 40-43), relating an exchange on social media in which a woman responds with a succession of memes to her brother's fruitless attempts to reason with her.

The failure of language to respond adequately to what is happening also emerges in Vera Pavlova's eight-line poem 'Who fades away underground?' (pp. 208-9) which concludes: 'Hush, my poem, that's it. We are at speech's end'. Herman Lukomnikov confesses that his poetry has failed to save anybody's children, though the use of dactylic rhymes (e.g. 'Lukomnikov/polkovnikov'; 'prodolzhenie/vyrazhenie') introduces a disturbingly playful flavour which undercuts the words of contrition. Reflections on individual guilt and complicity can be found in this anthology too. Evgenii Kluev's 'No matter what about: an ice cream float' (pp. 154-5) expresses the wish for silence and escape to somewhere off-world and declares that he, as a Russian, has lost any right to speak. Less directly, but using similarly conversational, straightforward language, Iulii Gugolev writes about a stain that he cannot wash out of his clothes, a stain that spreads inexorably on to his hand, the taste of iron in the tongue ('I washed it, I think... It's weird...', pp. 84-5). There is no need for Gugolev to offer any interpretation of this allegory of complicity, and the poem is all the more effective because of this absence.

This short review outlines just a few of the strategies adopted by the poets in this anthology, which provides a many-faceted response to the war. Just over two years since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the poems confront readers with their immediacy and emotional punch. In their introduction, the compilers, Julia Nemirowskaya and Maria Bloshteyn, state: 'poetry adds an important

dimension to our understanding of the war, exposing its inhumanity and absurdity in a form that is immediately accessible and relatable (p. 12). This anthology is a powerful

collection of poems which have been well chosen to do just that.

Katharine Hodgson

[Weblink for more info >>](#)



Sakwa, Richard
The Lost Peace: How the West Failed to Prevent a Second Cold War Yale UP, New Haven and London, 2023 .
Notes, bibliography, index. 433pp. £25

The unfolding tragedy in Ukraine is composed of many complex strands. In this essential volume Sakwa follows a key thread. Essentially the west, mainly the United States, engaged in a decades long triumphal dance since 1991 which encouraged it to persistently prefer to humiliate and threaten the Russian Federation rather than make a serious attempt to bring it into the European security system. Association with NATO, even the prospect of membership, was dangled in front of Moscow's eyes, only to be snatched away through the aggressive expansion of NATO.

The outcome is analysed by Sakwa in terms of the emergence of 'liberal internationalist' states and 'Charter states'. In Sakwa's definition the former is a club of right-thinking democratic states which claims the right to impose its values wherever it wishes. The latter, he says, look to the United Nations Charter which guarantees equal sovereignty of all states, non-intervention in internal affairs of others and the responsibility to not use one nation's sovereignty to the detriment of any other's. Underlying this Sakwa astutely perceives a contradiction between the sovereign rights of individual states and the indivisibility of security.

The two groups are often defined in less IR-related language as the supporters of a US-led global hegemony group on one hand and those who believe in an emerging multipolarity asserted by the BRICS and much of the global south on the other. The latter group has strengthened its relationship immeasurably during the conflict, though its long-term staying power may not be so impressive.

The main takeaway in Sakwa's work is that though 'Putin bears responsibility for pulling the trigger...the gun was primed by the European security impasse of the

preceding three decades.' (p.49). To put it another way, the war is not simply a fairytale struggle of, in Boris Johnson's words, 'good and evil.' Putin did not wake up one morning and decide to reconstitute the territorial limits of the Soviet Union. Russia had, and continues to have, legitimate security concerns which the west has refused to recognise since 1945. This has been tragically intermingled with one of many flaws of the pell-mell re-configuration of the former Soviet space in 1991, the cutting off from their homeland without consultation of twenty million ethnic Russian citizens, a ticking bomb warned about perceptively by Geoffrey Hosking and others ten years ago.

In the early days of this avoidable and unnecessary war there was a witch hunt against 'Putin understanders', equated with supporters of Russia, 'Putin idiots.' Unfortunately, as Sakwa and others have demonstrated with clarity and detailed evidence, the baton has fallen to 'Putin misunderstanders' – Victoria Nuland, Biden, Blinken, Sullivan, Russophobes one and all – not to mention Hillary Clinton who continues to pursue a seemingly one-sided personal vendetta against Putin. The neoliberal hegemonic views of this policy-making cluster, which exerts a worryingly complete control over the mainstream media in the west, needs to be balanced by consideration of the ideas of other well-informed but dissenting voices such as that of Chas Freeman, a veteran high-level US diplomat and overseer of intelligence, who was first to characterise US policy as 'fighting to the last Ukrainian'. Also, in his superbly documented and, rarest of all, balanced biography of Putin, the former BBC correspondent Philip Short pointed out the obvious. The US is not supporting Ukraine out of a concern for its welfare but to pursue its own perceived interest in weakening the Russian Federation.

Sakwa's book stands firmly alongside them in trying to get some kind of real dialogue and understanding of this war. Sakwa claims that his book 'seeks to explain how and why the peace was lost. On that basis the work may indicate how it can once again be found.' (p.11) As the war appears to be entering a critical phase it is necessary to have an honest, well-informed, multi-sided debate. One cannot serve the cause of resolving this crisis by prolonging the over-simplified interpretations that dominate the mainstream media. The present monologue needs to be opened up. A dialogue is needed to reach realistic objectives. Even if one disagrees, perhaps especially if one disagrees, it is important to listen to Sakwa, Short, Freeman and others before it is too late.

Chris Read, Emeritus Professor of European History, University of Warwick
[Weblink for more info >>](#)



Study Group Corner

Study Group on the Russia Revolution Annual Conference

The 49th Annual Conference of Study Group on **The Russian Revolution (SGRR)** was held at the University of Southampton on 3-5 January this year. The SGRR is now in its 50th year and an exciting programme united established and newer approaches to the study of the revolution's history. Our conference theme was 'Decolonization in the history of the Russian Revolution', and a diverse list came to discuss many different themes. 36 colleagues and friends joined us from Russia, Ukraine, the Caucasus, North America, and mainland Europe. The conference saw many people from different ages and stages of their careers, from people undertaking PhD research to emeritus professors, deliver interesting and well-received papers, and reflected a good gender balance in terms of speakers. It was especially pleasing that a number came to us from the former Soviet states: especially in the present day and age it is vital to keep open all the scholarly channels that we can – communication with colleagues in all the former Soviet states has always been important, but now, in my view, it is more than ever crucial to the long-term viability of our discipline.

The themes addressed were diverse and wide-ranging, showing the many different aspects of studying the revolution that people can take nowadays. We saw a good number of papers focused on non-Russian regions, which explored new approaches to the study of revolution in Ukraine and the Caucasus, and the impact of the First World War on the revolutions of 1917 in different regions. We also saw some well-known subjects such as Soviet power politics covered, but in new and diverse ways which marked the differing approaches scholars can take to the

subject nowadays. Two well-attended roundtables saw lively debate: these were on Russia's invasion of Ukraine and how that is likely to impact on our profession now and in the future, and a strong discussion about Lenin's legacy today, held due to the recent centenary of his death.

As organiser, I would like to say a big thank you to all participants. Like last year, the conference had a hybrid format allowing people to join us from around the world – there was, as ever, some recalcitrant IT, but generally the transitions between in person and online attendees worked quite well in terms of facilitating discussion. The conference had a collegial and friendly atmosphere throughout, and this greatly assisted in running it. The numerous interesting reports from this conference should make for some good papers for our in-house journal *Revolutionary Russia*.

George Gilbert

Study Group on the Baltic States Inaugural Workshop

On 2-3 November 2023 the relaunched **BASEES Study Group on the Baltic States** held its inaugural workshop at the University of Manchester, with financial support from BASEES and the UCL Doctoral School. The group resumes the work previously undertaken under the auspices of the UK Baltic Study Group/ BASEES Study Group on the Baltic States (2005-2015).

The aim of the workshop was to bring together postgraduate and ECRs, and to showcase the latest research on Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia undertaken across the UK and beyond. It offered the opportunity for UK-based researchers working on

the Baltic states to meet in person and to make new connections. It was also a chance to discuss the future direction of the Study Group.

There were four panels across two workshop days, capturing a microcosm of the current research activity within the UK: 'Latvian Challenges to the Centre', 'The Baltic States in Methodological and Regional Comparisons', 'Memory Dynamics in the Baltic States' and 'Authoritarianism and Democratisation in Estonia'. The panels led to fruitful discussions about the diversity of approaches and subjects within current research on the three states and their wider transnational connections.

The keynote by Dr Gražina Bielousova and the book presentation by Vincent Hunt led to productive reflections on the state and history of Baltic States Studies, including methodological and historiographical challenges as well as the potential future directions of investigation within the field.

The further aim of the workshop was to build on and to provide a platform for exploring common research interests in the region that exist among the Study Groups of BASEES. A roundtable, organised together with the members of the BASEES Eurasian Regions Group, proved to be a first step in this direction and provided a space to reflect on the conversations about the place of the Baltic states within broader East European scholarship. The Study Group on the Baltic States is looking forward to working together with the Eurasian Regions Group, Polish Studies Group and other interested groups and scholars at the future events.

Dmitrijs Andrejevs, John Freeman, Paris Pin-Yü Chen, Rasa Kamarauskaitė

R&D Funding Reports

Rethinking Russian Studies

The purpose of this workshop held at the University of Bristol on 14th February 2024 was to contribute to discussions about how to reshape the field of Russian Studies after Russia's full-fledged invasion of Ukraine two years previously. The rising scholarly interest in Ukrainian culture is

discursively and institutionally. In parallel, Russian literary and cultural studies must take urgent steps towards overcoming conceptual and political blind spots, coming to terms with Russia's imperialistic mythologies and practices over the centuries, and promoting democratic rights and respect for minorities in Russia and in the post-Soviet area. It must also

a welcome paradigm shift, given how Ukrainian Studies had been side-lined

stand critically towards approaches that idealise Russia as a viable alternative to the liberal, capitalist world order.

In her paper 'Decolonising Russian Studies: Patterns and Pitfalls', Tamar Koplatadze proposed an agenda in 14 points. She drew attention to a number of issues, from the uncritical use of terminology (e.g. Soviet Union vs Soviet empire) to the conflation of different types of decoloniality and the tokenistic use of decolonial terminology (abruptly shifting from the former prevailing rejection of post-colonial methodologies in >>

R&D Funding Reports

>> reference to the Russian, Soviet, and post-Soviet empires). She reminded us that scholars have tended to emphasise Russia's alleged own subjection to imperialising forces, thereby giving credence to its powerful victimisation narratives. Koplastadze called for flexibility and consideration of positionality in deploying decolonial methodologies, discriminating between different historical forms of colonial exploitation. Whilst Russia's orientalist discourses have been well studied, little attention has been given to the ways the empire 'writes back', in particular to Russophone literature from the Caucasus and Central Asia, as well as from ethnic minorities within the Russian Federation.

In his paper 'A New Approach to the Intellectual History of Russian Culture', Stanislav Savitskii drew on the genre of the promenade, inspired by Baldassarre Castiglione's notion of *sprezzatura* and canonised by the likes of Rousseau and Baudelaire, to make sense of a particular form of actionist art deployed in late Soviet non-conformist culture and beyond, for example in the circle of Andrei Monastyrski. The Collective Actions of Non-conformist Conceptualists straddled a fine line between the private and the public, staging aestheticised and performative promenades that transfigured social experience and affirmed inner freedom, yet unfolded in a politically apathetic underground. This form of aesthetic experience, a performance without spectators, figures as a kind of allegory of the conditions whereby art subsists in a repressive regime.

Finally, in his paper 'Russian Studies: Rethinking the Transnational Paradigm', Connor Doak revisited the transnational methodology he had proposed with Andy Byford and Stephen Hutchings in their *Transnational Russian Studies* (Liverpool 2020). While the war in Ukraine has led to a revival of the nation state, justifiably so as a form of "strategic essentialism" (Spivak), others have insisted on the continuing importance of "strategic relativism" (Mogilner and Gerasimov) to recognise the instability and overlapping of identities. Doak emphasised the need to focus on all minoritised groups within the Russian Federation, including oppressed LGBTQ+ citizens, as well as to respond critically to Russian official narratives. A transnational methodology remains valuable to track the local inflections of travelling narratives (Said), yet more self-scrutiny is required from scholars, in particular to interrogate their own (post-) imperial imaginaries.

Responses from outside Russian Studies by Erika Teichert (Latin American Studies) and Benedict Schofield (Germanic Studies) helped put our concerns in a larger comparative frame and draw out similarities and pitfalls.

Andreas Schönle

"Crossing the Slavic Atlantic"

"Crossing the Slavic Atlantic" was an interdisciplinary workshop held at the Phoenix Cinema, Exeter, UK on 3rd February 2024. It was organised by Dr Cathy McAteer and Professor Muireann Maguire (both University of Exeter) with assistance from Dr Natália Pinazza (University of Exeter) and Professor Bruno Gomide (University of São Paulo). Building on the work of an inaugural workshop held at the University of São Paulo in August 2023 (which was jointly funded by the Universities of Exeter and São Paulo), this February's event aimed to identify and bring together a wider network of scholars active in researching transatlantic cultural exchanges, specifically Slavic and Eastern European influences on both the Americas. We hosted seventeen speakers (some travelling from Brazil, the US, and Lithuania) across four in-person panels, as well as a partial screening of the film *Iván - De volta para o passado (Iván: Back to the Past)*, which was directed in 2011 by the Brazilian-Ukrainian director Guto Pasko.

Papers explored the lives, careers and networks of émigré artists, writers, literary translators, and other agents of cultural transmission, including journalists, scholars, and film directors, working in North and/or South America and involved in the transmission of Slavic, Baltic, and Eastern European languages and cultures. A key recurring theme in each panel was the regeneration and enrichment of American culture thanks to Eastern European migrants. We also discussed themes of integration, ghettoisation, and otherness, and how artists' original Slavic cultural influences were refracted in work achieved overseas. The workshop opened with Muireann Maguire's introductory remarks on transatlantic cultural odysseys, notably on the Lithuanian Jewish artist, Lasar Segall, who spent his later career in São Paulo, Brazil; and writer Clarice Lispector, transplanted from Ukraine to Brazil as an infant. Our first panel focussed on Eastern European authors' encounters with Latin American culture, featuring the Slovenian Zorko Simčič, the Polish Maria Kuncewicz, and the Croatian



Lasar Segall, Paisagem Brasileira (1920-25)

Slavko Župčić, while Exeter historian James Mark presented a paper on Hungarian emigrants to South America. In the next panel, speakers explored how scholars and translators in both Americas, like the Brazil-based Boris Schnaiderman (discussed by both Bruno Gomide and his PhD student Pedro Augusto Pinto) and translator Mirra Ginsburg, the subject of Cathy McAteer's paper, acted as gatekeepers for both texts and ideologies. After a delicious lunch catered by a local Exeter delicatessen, with coffee supplied by the Phoenix staff, our film panel turned to subjects as diverse as the Hollywood career of Czech émigré actor-director Hugo Haas (engagingly recounted by Milan Hain of Palacký University); the distribution of Soviet films in the US (described by Claudia Fiorito, University of Padua), and the fusion of Soviet and Caribbean culture in Mikhail Kalatozov's 1964 movie *Soy Cuba* (presented by Tamar Koplastadze). Our final panel featured four very Brazil-inflected papers on literary and musical reception. John Bates explored the popularity of Brazilian socialist realist novels in Poland, while Patrick Zuk fascinated us with his account of Mário de Andrade's reception of Soviet music.

It was wonderful and rewarding to co-ordinate an event uniting scholars from across the globe, interweaving diverse strands of research, from musicology to Film Studies and history. "Crossing the Slavic Atlantic" welcomed Slavists, Iberianists, and cultural historians of every type. We plan to use this successful event as a springboard for future research on translator biographies, cultural mediation, and transnational dissemination of Slavic and Eastern European culture in literature, film, and other media throughout North and South America, and as the core of the "Slavic Atlantic" researcher network.

Muireann Maguire & Cathy McAteer