

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Oxford
Unit of Assessment: 28 Modern Languages and Linguistics
Title of case study: Understanding collective and personal identity in Russian culture: a challenge to received opinion
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Professor Kelly's studies of national identity in Russia seek to challenge stereotypes about enduring traditions of political oppression and social decay as the culture's main characteristics. Focusing on everyday life rather than high politics, they work towards an understanding of change within Russian culture, and of the part played by factors such as generation and locality in producing often very diverse forms of self-expression and self-understanding. A central topic is the role of social memory, whether as a force of solidarity or as an engine of argument. Kelly's work draws directly on collaborations with Russian scholars and informants and has been widely noted in media and online discussions within the country, as well as informing media discussion of Russia and social policy work in the UK and elsewhere in the West.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p><i>Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution</i> [§3.1] and <i>An Introduction to Cultural Studies</i> [§3.2], two innovative interdisciplinary studies co-edited by Kelly, which appeared two years after Kelly's appointment to her position at the University of Oxford in 1996, have made a major contribution to the transformation of study of Russian and Soviet culture in the twentieth century. The books moved beyond the fixation on political resistance versus conformity, that preoccupied researchers during the Cold War, to look at the way in which Russian (and later Soviet) identity was shaped by specific social practices such as consumption.</p> <p>Kelly's later research has also employed interdisciplinary methodologies, and has focused on two key areas. 'Childhood in Russia: A Social and Cultural History, 1890-1991' (2003-2006; supported by the Leverhulme Trust, Principal Investigator Kelly, post-doctoral fellow Andy Byford) addressed the centrality of children's welfare and development to the legitimacy of Soviet rule, and the creative interest in childhood that transformed the social sciences, particularly psychology, and the arts in twentieth-century Russia. In Taubman's review (see §3.3), 'She [Kelly] combed government archives for information on education, orphanages, social services, juvenile delinquency, and the changing legal status of children; conducted personal interviews; mined memoir literature; and studied children's literature, theatre and film, children's games and leisure activities, and childbearing/child rearing'. Combining massive historical and archival data with imaginative empathy, the studies produced by the project – Kelly's <i>Children's World</i> [§3.3], Byford's articles on the early history of Russian pedagogy [e.g §3.4]– encompassed a range and depth of research that was entirely new. A by-product of this work was <i>Comrade Pavlik</i> [§3.5], in which Kelly dismantled the myths surrounding Pavlik Morozov, the boy who was said to have denounced his father to the Soviet authorities, and whose murder in 1932, almost certainly as the result of a family row, was exploited as 'evidence' of the malign activities of a ring of kulaks opposed to collectivisation.</p> <p>'National Identity in Russia from 1961' sponsored by a major grant from the AHRC (2007-2011; Principal Investigator Kelly, Co-investigator Professor Hilary Pilkington, U. of Warwick), brought together a core team of 9 academics from the UK and Russia in a range of different fields (anthropology, sociology, and history, as well as literature and cultural studies); there were also two doctoral students attached to the project, one based in Oxford. Two major international conferences in 2009, 'National Identity in Russia 1: Traditions' and 'National Identity in Russia 2: Migration' brought academics from Western Europe, America, Australia, China and various parts of the former Soviet Union (including Armenia and Kazakhstan as well as Russia) to Oxford for discussions. There were also several workshops, and participants in the project presented conference papers and lectures at a range of other venues (the total number of outputs stands at well over 100, and publications are already in the pipeline). Key outputs include Kelly's own <i>St Petersburg: Shadows of the Past</i> [§3.6], a study of the relationship between memory and city identity in the country's former capital, 1957-present, and the essay collection, <i>Soviet and Post-Soviet Identities</i> [§3.7], with articles by a number of the project participants. Fundamental to both projects also was the development of a large digital archive of interviews, 'The Oxford Archive of Russian Life History' [§3.8], which is available (upon application) to researchers and others with interest in this corpus of oral history.</p>

3. References to the research

- [1] **Catriona Kelly (ed.) [with David Shepherd]**, *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1998). Available on request. Leading academic press.
- [2] **Catriona Kelly (ed.) [with David Shepherd]**, *Russian Cultural Studies: an introduction* (Oxford University Press, 1998). Available on request. Leading academic press.
- [3] **Catriona Kelly**, *Children's World: Growing Up in Russia, 1890-1991* (Yale University Press, 2007). Available on request. **Awarded the Grace Abbott Prize of the Society for the History of Childhood and Youth, USA – 2009.**
Reviews: 'Kelly's encyclopedic history of childhood in twentieth-century Russia masterfully brings to life both happy and not-so-happy childhoods, demonstrating that many of the most intimate details of childhood experience are neither timeless nor culturally universal [...] A rich catalog of Russian childhoods in their immense variety.' Tara Zahra, *Journal of Modern History*, 81 (2009), 749-51.
 'Children's World is an encyclopedic, meticulously researched, cultural history of Russian childhood from the last years of the Russian empire through the fall of the Soviet Union. Although Kelly's subject and sources are genuinely interdisciplinary, her argument and approach are traditionally historical... A major virtue of the book is its more than 100 illustrations, ranging from rare archival photographs to propaganda posters.' Jane A. Taubman, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 39 (2009), 588-9.
- [4] **Andy Byford**, 'Turning Pedagogy into a Science: Teachers and Psychologists in Late Imperial Russia (1897-1917)', *Osiris* 23 (2008), pp. 50-81. DOI: 10.1086/591869
- [5] **Catriona Kelly**, *Comrade Pavlik: The Rise and Fall of a Soviet Boy Hero* (Granta Books, 2005). Available on request.
Reviews: Though published with a commercial publisher, this book was favourably reviewed in the academic press (see below, and also *Slavic Review*, 65 (2006), 610; *Modern Language Review*, 102 (2007), 614-16). The leading Soviet historian Sheila Fitzpatrick reviewed it prominently and at length in the *London Review of Books*, 27, no. 1 (2005).
- [6] **Catriona Kelly**, *St Peterburg: Shadows of the Past* (Yale University Press, 2013). Available on request. Leading university press.
- [7] **Catriona Kelly (ed.) [with Mark Bassin]**, *Soviet and Post-Soviet Identities* (Cambridge University Press, 2012). Available on request. Leading academic press.
Reviews: 'The collection's major strengths—strong scholarship, rigorous inquiry, and an interdisciplinary approach—are evident in its explorations of state policy, mass media, education, cinema, literature, religion, museum collections, and social practices.' A. Lanoux, *Russian Review* 72.4 (2013), 725-7.
- [8] The Oxford Archive of Russian Life History, <http://www.ehrc.ox.ac.uk/html/ehrc/lifehistory>

Research Grants

Catriona Kelly, PI. 'Childhood in Russia: A Social and Cultural History', Leverhulme Trust, October 2003-October 2006. (£93,605). www.mod-langs.ox.ac.uk/russian/childhood

Catriona Kelly, PI, 'National Identity in Russia from 1961: Traditions and Deterritorialisation', Arts and Humanities Research Council, September 2007-April 2011 (£706,000). www.mod-langs.ox.ac.uk/russian/nationalism.

4. Details of the impact

A key feature of Kelly's work on identity has been close collaborative work with Russians, both as members of the project team and as informants. The research starts from, and feeds back into, the experiences of members of the general public. The interviews were often highly significant for the participants and members of their family, for example, sometimes interviewees would air experiences they had not talked about before because they thought no one was interested. Their memories also helped to suggest new lines of investigation. For example, a chapter of Kelly's book on Petersburg [§3.6] is devoted to the importance of districts, something almost never remarked on by foreign commentators but which turns out to be very important to locals. During his work on interviewing Russian émigrés in Britain, Byford became an informant about life in the UK for interviewees who had almost no contact with locals, and so on. In turn, this new content has facilitated impact at a variety of different levels, including:

A new view of contemporary Russia for policy-makers and other professionals

In 2009, Kelly gave a keynote address on Russian national identity at the UBS Arts Forum, 'Go East: Contemporary Arts in Central and Eastern Europe', attended by gallery owners and museum staff from across the German-speaking world. This was intended to give professionals who have increasing contact with the art scene in Russia and other post-socialist countries an immersion in the cultural background ^[i]. She also addressed the Youth Policy Conference at Upshaw, County Durham, speaking about Russian childhood to an audience of social workers and other professionals involved in work with children and young people ^[ii]. Other ways in which research material from the projects has been used include a satellite investigation sponsored by Geschichtswerkstatt Europa that included a play about the life of migrants into Russian cities based on interview transcripts, performed at the British Consulate in Petersburg ^[iii]. This provided the mainly expatriate audience with a view of a side of Russian life with which they have little direct contact.

The Oxford conferences on national identity were attended by a number of policy-makers, including Elizabeth Teague, analyst of Russian Politics at the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office ^[iv]. Andy Byford was invited to a briefing at the Russian Embassy in London in order to discuss perceptions of 'Russianness' among émigrés, as part of the Russian state's efforts to engage in nation-building abroad. The interview database [§3.8] has been used not only by scholars and students for their work, but also by creative writers and by those working in applied areas of social science, such as Erica Richardson, who works for the World Health Organisation and consulted the interviews with paediatricians and other medical professionals working with children. In her words: 'Health care workers are the most valuable resource in any health system and their attitude towards changes in the system determines whether reforms will be implemented or undermined. Therefore, it is imperative to hear their voices - this doesn't always happen.' ^[1]

Contributing to public debates in the UK

The studies of Russian identity [§3.6, §3.7] have generated a good deal of media interest, and Kelly is regularly approached to contribute to discussions based on her expertise in this area, in turn raising public awareness and understanding of the topic. As well as various invitations to discuss 'Putin's lifestyle' which were turned down, there were many serious requests – for example, Catriona Kelly appeared on BBC Radio's 'The World Tonight' in order to discuss the Pussy Riot case (September 2012) and was invited to take part in a discussion of modern Russia on BBC Newsnight (August 2013, had to be declined). Public events have included an appearance by Kelly at a discussion of modern Russia at Waterstones Bookshop, Oxford (9 May 2013), to mark the shortlisting of the first ever Pushkin House Russian Book Prize in 2013 (Kelly appeared with the writer Andrew Miller and the historian Robert Service) ^[v]. A critical review written by Kelly of Oliver Bullough's *The Last Man in Russia*, published in the Guardian (7 June 2013), about the alcohol-fuelled decline of Russia, was described by the books editor of *The Guardian* as 'such a good piece' and has led to further commissions. The article provoked a heated debate in the reader comments with around 40 posts discussing Kelly's arguments, the trends in alcohol consumption in Russia compared to other countries, and if the author, or more generally, if the West was 'Russophobic' or not.

Engaging with Russians in debates about national identity

Several of the project workshops were held in Russia, and were extremely well attended, including by representatives of heritage preservation organisations, who were able to put their views forward also at 'Global Aspirations and Pastiche Identity', a conference organised by Kelly and Professor Andreas Schönle at QMUL. The conference was attended, for example, by representatives of Moscow Architecture Preservation Society ^[vi]. Kelly has also taken part (in April 2013) in a Russian TV debate about the destruction of architecture in Soviet Leningrad. Her work has a high online presence with Russians: for example, *Children's World* [§3.3] was described by the leading poet and influential blogger, Linor Goralik, as one of the best ten studies of Soviet everyday life ^[vii], and in an online interview, the famous Russian historian Evgeny Anisimov described her book on Pavlik Morozov [§3.5], translated into Russian in 2009, as a model of how to write history ^[viii]. At a different level of engagement, Kelly is a regular user of Facebook, with over 500 'friends', many of them Russian, and uses the site primarily as a resource for discussions about contemporary Russia and a way of locating research materials. Kelly's lecture talking about the history of the Museum of the History of Leningrad (December 2012) was selected as a text for dissemination on

the online portal 'Lectorium', which is a Russian non-profit organisation providing access to educational materials of outstanding quality.

Increasing knowledge and understanding among the general public

In August 2012, Kelly was invited by Dmitry Esakov, director of the cultural programme for the Volga Dream line offering high-quality river cruises for visitors to Russia, to present a programme of lectures during a cruise from Moscow to St Petersburg ^[ix]. In his letter of invitation, Esakov wrote: 'we try to invite guest speakers who are connected to Russia professionally and can speak about the subject passionately. I was very impressed about the way you chose you show life in Russia - through the attitude to childhood. This along with excellent recommendation from Geoffrey [i.e. Professor Geoffrey Hosking] makes us very interested in inviting you on the Volga Dream' ^[2]. The lecture programme attracted a lot of interest at the time, and passengers have written since to say that they enjoyed the lectures ^[3]. One of them has been in touch to ask Kelly about his family history, and she was able to put him in touch with some academic experts who would be able to tell him more about one of the documents he had (an internal passport issued by the short-lived Soviet administration in Khabarovsk at a period after the issuing of passports had been terminated by the central authorities).

Kelly has also been acting since February 2010 as a consultant to a project organised by Anthony Gould, an independent UK businessmen, to market recordings from the State Archive of TV and Radio for commercial use ^[4]. She produced a short citation about the importance of the archive for use in publicity material, and has been invited to present an introduction to a series of CDs being produced by a company in Germany using this material.

In December 2012, Kelly was contacted by the Irish artist, Gareth Kennedy, commissioned by a local authority in Petersburg to produce 'The Last Wooden House of Kupchino'^[x]. Kennedy wrote: 'I have been reading with great interest your "Making a Home on the Neva" which I came across online.' Kelly provided Kennedy with local contacts and a briefing session on Petersburg history, which informed Kennedy's installation and a film made about it.[5]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Testimonials:

- [1] Email statement from Honorary Research Fellow, European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies (London hub), 27 September 2013.
- [2] Email statement from Director of the Marketing, Volga Dream, 28 August 2012.
- [3] Email statement from a passenger on the Volga Dream tour, 14 July 2013.
- [4] Email statement from independent business consultant, 10 February 2010.
- [5] Email statement from professional artist, 6 December 2012.

Non testimonial evidence:

- [i] Keynote at UBS Arts Forum http://www.wolfsberg.com/documents/Kelly_Keynote.pdf.
- [ii] The history of youth and community work study conference, Ushaw College, 6-8 March 2009 http://www.infed.org/events/history_conference_2007.htm.
- [iii] Information about the project and theatre performance <http://www.geschichtswerkstatt-europa.org/expired-project-details/items/plough-furnace.html>
- [iv] Information about Elizabeth Teague http://www.oussg.org/main/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=30&Itemid=46.
- [v] Information about the Pushkin House panel discussion <http://www.pushkinhouse.org/single-event/events/pushkin-house-russian-book-prize-186>
- [vi] Write up of the Global aspirations and Pastiche Identity conference by the Moscow architecture preservation society http://www.maps-moscow.com/index.php?chapter_id=209&data_id=362&do=view_single .
- [vii] Linor Goralik blog post "10 non-fiction books" http://slon.ru/books/10_non_fiction_knig_ot_linor_goralik-859141.xhtml
- [viii] Evgeny Anisimov, online interview by Tatiana Chernova: "History – a natural part of the human soul" <http://www.hse.spb.ru/behse/material.php?id=1331451911>.
- [ix] Information from the website of Volga Dream about Catriona Kelly's lecture series 28 June-9 July 2013 <http://www.volgadream.com/volga/guests.php>
- [x] Gareth Kennedy's project: <http://tok-spb.org/new/en/events/vistavka-critical-mass-2013>