

Migrants in Cities or Cities of Migrants: Frontiers of Central Asian Migration in Russia

Central Asian Studies Institute Faculty Research Grant Application

Abstract

This research explores the heterogeneity of Central Asian migration experience in the cities of Russian Federation. It builds on the comparison of ways in which Central Asian migrants inhabit, negotiate and make sense of Russian cities with the ways in which residents of Russian cities perceive, accommodate and deal with Central Asian migrants. It emphasizes the importance of contextualization of migration discourses by comparing two cities with very different migration experiences, which can be projected on a geographic and historic continuum ranging from almost complete acceptance (Kazan) to almost open forms of racism (St Petersburg). The research explores the issues of ghetto formation, stereotyping and border crossing. It portrays migration as a powerful institution changing the form of these cities and remapping its physical, economic and socio-cultural landscapes. It draws on the complex images of "other" constructed on two distinct sides of culture, which used to be well-shared only twenty years ago during the time of the Soviet Union. Finally, it looks at the ways that border zones between residents and newcomers are created, how borders are penetrated and what factors become elements of the new shared present. This research is partly based on two sociological and ethnographic fieldworks conducted in three Russian cities (Kazan, Yekaterinburg and Moscow) in 2010 and 2011.

Theoretical Foundations

This paper continues the tradition of comparative urban ethnographies. Publications with similar approach include for example Doug Sanders' (2010) "Arrival City", where he gives description of 20 cities in different parts of the world, with special kinds of transitional urban places formed to host arriving migrants. Another example is a book by Ramesh Kumar Biswas (2000) titled "Metropolis Now" – a collection of essays describing large cities around the world; the unifying theme is "walls" as spatial barriers segregating urban communities and "gates" as opportunities for exchange and transformation between them. In a book "Cities after the Fall of Communism", Czaplicka, Gelazis, and Ruble (2009) portray processes of rapid transformation and construction of "new sources of place and new place-based identities" in the former Soviet and Polish cities. Finally, in several chapters of the book "Urban Life in Post-Soviet Asia" Alexander, Bulchi and Humphrey (2007) describe the issue of migrants in the Post-Soviet cities of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Russian Siberia. Themes discussed in these publications are relevant to the main themes of this research proposal. What is often missing in such collections of urban ethnographies is the focus on comparison and cross-city analysis. Our research continues the tradition of individual cities as case-studies, but it also has major emphasis on the comparison of three cities as a main source of analytical insights.

Ethnographies of urban communities trace their origins to the studies of the Chicago School of Urban Sociology. Robert Park (1952) in his book "Human Ecology" established the directions for urban research, which did not lose their significance until now. He described city as a "mosaic of little social worlds". He used the concepts of racial colonies and ghettos to portray racial and ethnic urban neighborhoods, which he characterized as "cities within cities" with their own social rituals, leaders, sentiments, and morals. He placed these neighborhoods, which he also called "moral regions" in the spatial and temporal context of urban "unstable equilibrium" leading such communities to live in the condition of a "chronic condition of crisis". Park showed how physical and sentimental distances reinforce each other and further isolate urban communities. Deborah Stevenson (2003) sixty years later, claims that contemporary cities still foster segregation and creation of "enclaves of homogeneity" while Vincenzo Ruggiero (2001) portrays cities as "battlefields" and makes a case for the continuous social conflict between such segregated communities because the "access to resources and opportunities is constantly contended and negotiated" (p.6).

Kay Anderson (1987) shows how such conflicts are often culturally and socially constructed. In her study of Vancouver's Chinatown she portrays it as a racial cognitive category and as a "social construction with a cultural history and tradition of imagery and institutional practice that has given it a cognitive and

material reality in and for the West" (p.221). She uses concepts like "spatialities of race" and "imaginative geographies" to show how "our landscape concepts, as symbolic resources, have a critical structuring role in the making of wider social processes." (p.227) Using various examples of racial discrimination of Chinese migrants in Vancouver she shows how ideology embedded in space can in fact reproduce itself.

This process of social construction can be projected on the broader discussion of the construction of "self" and "other", especially when applied to Edward Said's notion of orientalism, and it can take all kinds of forms. For example Rivke Jaffe and Eveline Durr (2010) in their work on cultural meaning and social practices of urban pollution describe how

The fortification of cultural boundaries is accompanied by portraying outside influences as invasive threats that will contaminate the 'pure' ethnonational identity... Ethnic groups, often new migrant groups ... tend to be depicted as dirty and different. Defensive local or national identities are conveyed in environmental terms, while the protection of economic and territorial interests may be based on claims of (ethnic or national) purity and authenticity. (p.6)

Entire neighborhoods can be portrayed as dirty because of their association with foreign cultures and special spatial tactics of urban control are used for the removal, isolation or segmentation of such areas. The concept of pollution is also attached to various social vices, crime and violence associated with migrants: authors describe how this type of "moral geography" produces "spatial grids of morality" overlap with ethnic and social divisions. Finally, they describe how migrants become associated with "dirty jobs" including those related to the removal of garbage and how that leads to stigmatization and construction of the "low status others". Durr's research on "Tidy Kiwis/Dirty Asians" from the same volume shows how the concepts of "littering, dirt and pollution, which are transferred to the social realm and linked to cultural attributes of new immigrants" in New Zealand even when these are one of the well-educated "model citizens" working in the high-ranking jobs. She illustrates how New Zealanders portray Asian migrants as "dirty" and "polluting the environment" in order to show themselves as "advanced, clean and rightful".

This brief review of some theories reveals several themes important for this research:

- Formation of racially and ethnically homogenous Asian/Central Asian enclaves, which are common for many Russian cities, including cities, which we have already studied: *rayon Sortirovka* in Yekaterinburg and *Vakhitovskiy rayon* in Kazan.
- Varying (across cities) degree of contestation and social conflict emerging inside, outside and on the borders of these enclaves with other territories of the city.
- Meaning making and identity construction of "self" and "other" categories for both groups: locals and migrants.
- Stigmas attached to the migrant enclaves and to the migrants themselves in this process of identity construction. This includes similar stigmas of migrants doing the dirty jobs street cleaning, polluting streets and apartment buildings and working/living in often deteriorating neighborhoods.

This research proposes to look at the above mentioned discourses in the new light. We propose to use the concept and technique of cognitive mapping in order to enrich physical manifestations of spatial segregation of these cities and spatial discourses with the "images of the city" (concept proposed by Kevin Lynch) formed in the minds of both migrants and long-term residents. The cognitive theory suggests that actual image of our surroundings is often re-defined by the use of space in our minds. It is typical for human beings to perceive the environment that surrounds us on a daily basis as friendlier than other neighborhoods of the city that we may regard as "strange or alien, even dangerous" (Letenyei, 2005). The notions of what is ours or what is alien to us, are all subjective matters, determined by prior experiences, motivations and abilities. According to Downs and Stea (1973:15) mental or cognitive mapping is the product of a series of psychological processes that register, code, store, then call to mind and decode all information on our everyday spatial environment. Accordingly, the concept of cognitive mapping or mental mapping refers to the person's perception of the world

and the environment they live in. A mental map is an internal map of their known places, landscapes and locations. It has been of great curiosity for social scientists to learn about the mental maps of individuals or a group of people and see how they order the space around them, and make a practical use of the Lefebvrian “spatial triad” (Lefebvre, 1974) – a concept which includes conceived, perceived and lived spaces to show how they come into conflicting or any other disharmonious interaction with each other. Using the technique of cognitive mapping we can reveal the ways in which cognitive maps of Russian cities formed in the minds of migrants and locals intersect with real maps and visual manifestations of segregation.

The **research questions** of this study ask:

How do social, cultural and cognitive visions of the city constructed by migrants and long-term residents (documented through interviews and cognitive maps) overlap with the real physical forms and manifestations of urban segregation? How homogenous are the migrant enclaves and how penetrable are their borders?

The preliminary **research hypothesis** suggests that:

The urban structures are multilayered and that the power of urban imagination is always ahead of urban physical form and therefore we can expect much higher degree of imaginary penetrability of urban “cultural walls” between migrants and locals. At the same time, the extreme of mental exclusiveness can be much more radical than what is allowed by the physical circumstances and therefore some cognitive maps and narratives will reveal even stronger dislike and even racial hatred than what is witnessed in the real life. Finally, this research proposes that the difference between the two outcomes is significantly defined by the specific historical, economic, cultural and social context of the city. That is why this study proposes to conduct research in three cities with distinct racial attitudes towards migrants: Kazan as the most tolerant, Yekaterinburg – in the middle, and Saint Petersburg as the city with the most intolerant racist reputation. By analyzing the differences this research will show what factors contribute to such differentiation.

Methodology

The research will be consequently conducted in two cities of Russian Federation: Kazan and St Petersburg. Research in each city will take 15 days beginning from the late May until the end of June.

This study combines several research techniques. These are:

Observations and mapping

The research will observe and record on the map various manifestations of migrants presence in the cities: ethnic neighborhoods, bazaars, ethnic cafes, mosques, use of language, percentage of migrants in the bus-stops, etc. Such manifestations will be photographed, where possible filmed and summarized in written accounts.

In-depth semi-structured interviews

Interviews will be conducted with both migrants and long-term residents. The main themes for discussion will be around the ways in which migrants perceive the city, their own place in it and attitude of locals towards them and the ways in which local residents perceive migrants and their neighborhoods. Stories and real-life experiences will be solicited in the interviews along with more abstract conceptualizations and categorizations of the “self” and “other”.

Cognitive Mapping

Informants in the study will be asked to draw cognitive maps of their respective cities on the basis of their familiarity and everyday experiences. They will be asked first to draw on the blank page and indicate places where they live and work and places they frequently visit. Then they will be asked to show such places and other places, which they might have not thought of initially, on the real map of the city. The drawing process will be combined with the requests to elaborate on these daily practices,

on the significance and meanings of certain places, and to share stories associated with certain spaces. In addition, both migrants and local residents will be asked to draw the maps of the “other” – places that they consider as belonging to the contesting group.

GIS Mapping

The novelty of this research is in the innovative use of the GIS (Geographic Information System) software for the purposes of visualizing the cognitive and observational maps. GIS is a family of software that allows elaborate ways of spatial analysis. The AUCA is currently in the process of obtaining an academic license for GeoMedia – one of the most popular GIS applications. One of the researchers has fairly extensive experience of using GeoMedia for such kind of spatial urban analysis. Using GIS capabilities we will visualize cognitive maps and physical manifestations of migrants presence and we will analyze how they overlap. GIS will help us to map social and cultural categories in various dimensions. Depending on the outcomes of the cognitive mapping we can reconstruct the racial, ethnic, moral, occupational, recreational, etc. regions of the city. We also expect to be able to map migrant versus local regions, borders and border zones between them, main attractions and routes of movements connecting them.

Expert Interviews

Additionally, interviews with local administrations will be conducted with the questions of urban control and zoning regulations in regards to migrant neighborhoods and with various organizations representing migrant diasporas on the questions of their political representation and integration into the public life of the city.

Research Team

The research team consists of six researchers. Having a fairly large team we hope to accomplish all extensive tasks set in the research proposal. All researchers have strong interest in the topic and their careers intersect with the main theme of research in different ways.

For Emil Nasritdinov, migration has been the main focus of his research projects for the last four years. He participated in the number of various projects on migration and produced several policy reports. He also is in the process of publishing some of his articles in academic journals. In 2010 he traveled with a team of two students to conduct research among Kyrgyz and tajik labor migrants in Kazan and in 2011 he traveled with his colleague Ruslan Rahimov to conduct research among the Kyrgyz migrants in Kazan, Yekaterinburg and Moscow. He is also putting together all of his previous work on migration into a monograph tentatively titled “Nation in Motion: Migration and Development in Kyrgyzstan”. Emil is also proficient with the GIS software.

Nurzat Sultanalieva, is teaching at the Anthropology department and applying for a PhD program through the collaborative project on Migration and Moralities with the German and UK researchers in the frames of the Volkswagen Foundation. Nurzat has extensive research experience on cognitive mapping. This was a part of her Masters thesis written at the Central European University.

Maria Marchenko is an AUCA junior anthropology student. She has started writing her senior thesis on the role of religion in the lives of Kyrgyz labor migrants in Russia.

Aigerim Tabysheva is an AUCA junior anthropology student. She is also writing her senior thesis on Kyrgyz migrants in Russia with the focus on the youth – second generation of migrants and their formation of identity and sense of belonging.

Rashida Khasanova is a third AUCA anthropology student. Her senior thesis studies issues of Kyrgyz labor migration and development.

Tynctykbek Bakyt uulu is also a junior anthropology student. He is writing his senior thesis in the field of urban anthropology. This trip will give him an excellent opportunity to conduct a comparative study of three cities: Bishkek, Kazan and St Petersburg.

Alexey Mun is another junior student in anthropology. Alexey's senior thesis topic is not directly connected to this research, but he is an excellent fieldwork researcher and his experience will be very important for us.

Alexey Kosterin is a sophomore anthropology student. Alexey is currently involved in a similar research project on studying novostroikas and internal migrants in Bishkek. The methodology of this project is very similar – we make use of cognitive maps and GIS. The experience he obtained will be very valuable in Kazan and St Petersburg.

This research trip is a unique opportunity for all researchers to participate in the joint project and also advance their own related topics within its frames. This is particularly important for the five junior anthropology students, who all started working on their senior theses. This semester they are taking the Senior Seminar course and within the frames of this course they are conducting their literature review and designing their research methodology. This research will give them a chance to conduct the extensive fieldwork in Russia under the direct guidance of their supervisor Emil Nasritdinov. The anthropology department is currently strongly encouraging its students, especially those writing their senior theses to travel and conduct their fieldwork in distant places following the tradition of classic anthropology and this trip is a great opportunity for the department.