

# Doing fieldwork in Russia and the former Soviet Union: Challenges and Opportunities

Organised by the Russian & Eurasian Security Research Group,  
Department of War Studies, King's College London  
Sponsored by the Russian & Eurasian Security Working Group,  
British International Studies Association (BISA)

**Venue:** War Studies Meeting Room K6.07, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, King's Building,  
Strand Campus, King's College London

**Date & time:** 22 May 2015, 10 am – 5.15 pm

## Workshop programme

10.00 – 11.30	<b>Panel 1: <i>Elite interviews</i></b> <b>Chair:</b> Dr Stefanie Ortmann (University of Sussex) <b>Speakers:</b> Dr Catherine Owen, Dr Heather Williams, Ann Tsurtsunia-Zurabashvili, Maria Shagina
11.30 – 11.45	Coffee break
11.45 – 13.15	<b>Panel 2: <i>Surveys, questionnaires, interviews &amp; focus groups</i></b> <b>Chair:</b> Dr Natasha Kuhrt (KCL) <b>Speakers:</b> Dr Joanna Szostek, Dr Eleanor Bindman, Prof Judith Pallot, Eleanor Knott
13.15 – 14.00	Lunch
14.00 – 15.30	<b>Panel 3: <i>Ethnography &amp; participant observation</i></b> <b>Chair:</b> Yulia Kiseleva (KCL) <b>Speakers:</b> Kristiina Silvan, John Kennedy*, Dr Satenik Mkrtchyan, Dr Assylkhan Bikenov
15.30 – 15.45	Coffee break
15.45 – 17.15	<b>Panel 4: <i>Ethics of doing fieldwork in Russia &amp; the former Soviet Union</i></b> <b>Chair:</b> Filippo Costa Buranelli (KCL) <b>Speakers:</b> Ofer Fridman, Kaneshko Sangar, Dr Katharina Buck, Imogen Wade

## List of participants

**Dr Catherine Owen** completed her PhD at the University of Exeter in November 2014 on civic participation in governance in contemporary Russia and is currently Associate Research Fellow at the University of Exeter. Her primary research interest is the neoliberal reform of the public sector in non-democratic countries, including the extent to which authoritarian states rearticulate the global norm of increased citizen engagement in the provision of public goods and services. She has conducted semi-structured elite interviews with members of state-organised civic organisations, as well as participant observation of non-state civic organisations in Russia. As Associate Research Fellow, she will be conducting elite interviews with current and former FCO members in Central Asia.

**Dr Heather Williams** is a MacArthur Postdoctoral Fellow in the Centre for Science and Security Studies in the Department of War Studies, KCL, where her research focuses on trust-building in international relations along with revisiting concepts of nuclear deterrence. Heather completed her PhD, 'Negotiated Trust: U.S.-Russia Strategic Arms Control', in the Department of War Studies in December 2014. Her research included 50 elite interviews with treaty negotiators and policymakers in Washington and Moscow.

**Ann Tsurtsunia-Zurabashvili** is a Marie Curie PhD Fellow at Dublin City University and her research focuses on counter-recognition and reintegration strategies towards de facto states in the post-Soviet space. Previously, she led, among others, the Parliamentary Communications Centre at the National Democratic Institute in Georgia and served as a Policy Fellow at the Georgian Foundation for Security and International Studies. Ann has conducted elite and expert interviews for a number of projects, including: Gender Equality Index of Georgian Political Parties (2014) and Policy Formulation Process among Georgian Political Parties and NGOs (2011).

**Maria Shagina** is a PhD Candidate at the University of Lucerne and the University of Zürich. Since September 2014 she is a PhD visiting researcher at CREES, University of Birmingham. Her dissertation project focuses on the Europeanization of party politics in non-EU member states. During her fieldtrips to Belgium, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia she conducted more than 90 elite interviews with party officials, NGO representatives and experts. Her research interests are party politics with a particular focus on Eastern Europe, Europeanization, policy diffusion, and international party assistance.

**Dr Joanna Szostek** is a postdoctoral fellow at the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies. She completed her doctorate at the University of Oxford in 2013. The focus of her research is the role of mass media in relations between states, particularly in the post-Soviet region. Joanna has conducted fieldwork in Moscow, Kyiv and Minsk. In 2011–2012 she conducted around 50 interviews with the managerial and editorial staff of Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian newspapers and television stations. In autumn 2014 she implemented a survey (n = 450) and conducted interviews among students at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow to find out about their media use and views of the West.

**Dr Eleanor Bindman** is currently a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at Queen Mary, University of London. Her PhD in Russian and EU Politics, which was completed at the University of Glasgow in 2013, looked at the role played by economic and social rights within EU-Russia relations. Her PhD fieldwork involved a number of in-depth interviews with representatives of various NGOs and local officials in various locations in Russia and with EU officials in Brussels. Her research interests include social policy,

citizenship and welfare in the post-socialist context, the politics of the Former Soviet Union, particularly Russia and Ukraine. Her current three-year research project explores social rights, governance and the outsourcing of social service provision in Russia and Ukraine. As part of this project, Eleanor is currently conducting interviews with socially oriented NGOs in Russia (Moscow, St Petersburg and Perm) and will do the same in Ukraine in early 2016.

**Prof Judith Pallot** is the Professor of Human Geography at the University of Oxford. She has published on the social history of the Russian peasantry, post-Soviet land reform and household production, and the Russian prison system. In the past two decades she has led three projects that have involved interviewing in the field in Russia. In 1999-2002 she interviewed c. 300 rural inhabitants in villages from Perm' Krai to Stavropol Krai about their personal food production practices, which also involved 'elite' interviews with chairs of Large Farm Enterprises and Local Authorities. From 2007 Judith worked in collaboration with the Russian Prison Service and interviewed juvenile and adult women prisoners in three correctional colonies in Mordovia and Ryazan Oblast. Another project was on women who are the wives, daughters, mothers and siblings of Russian prisoners. Judith's current project is a pilot study on the ethnic dimension of the Russian carceral system.

**Eleanor Knott** is a PhD Candidate at the Department of Government, LSE. She researches kin-state relations between Crimea and Russia and Moldova and Romania from the bottom-up, based on fieldwork interviews conducted in Crimea and Moldova (2012, 2013) with everyday actors. Eleanor uses interviews to examine the meanings of kin identification (e.g. what does it mean to be Russian in Crimea?) and engagement with kin-state practices (e.g. Romanian citizenship in Moldova) in order to have a better understanding of how these communities are comprised and how they interact with the kin-state.

**Kristiina Silvan** is currently a postgraduate student at the Department of International Relations and European Studies at Central European University, Budapest. Her research interests include contemporary Russian civil society, pro-government social movements in the post-Soviet space, and the Russian-speakers in the Baltic states. Kristiina conducted her fieldwork at the government-organised Youth Forum Seliger in Russia in summer 2013. The aim of her research project was to map out how politically active young Russians understand the concept of civil society. It turns out contemporary Russian 'grazhdanskoe obshchestvo' comprises a slightly different conceptual space to Western 'civil society'.

**John Kennedy\*** is a PhD Candidate at CREES, University of Birmingham. His research interests include everyday society and culture in Russia, ethnography, political economy, actually existing post-socialism. His doctoral research focuses on the everyday experience of doing business in Russia. John is interested in the contemporary practice of business in Russia, especially if compared to the first post-Soviet decade, in what it is like to be an entrepreneur after fifteen years of Putin's rule. His fieldwork was a multi-sited ethnography, undertaken over 12 months ending in November 2014. He was a participant observer within three small businesses, each in a different Siberian city.

**Dr Satenik Mkrtchyan** is a researcher at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography at the National Academy of Sciences, Armenia. She received her Doctorate in Anthropology – "Formation of National Identity through Primary Education (Tbilisi and Yerevan schools)" – from Tbilisi State University in 2014. Her dissertation was based on two years' ethnographic fieldwork in schools of Tbilisi and Yerevan. Satenik has ten years of experience in ethnographic research. Some of her recent studies are: "Daily Nationalism and Ethnicity in Armenia", "Migrant Groups in Armenia (1940-2012): Parameters of

Complex Identities (interdisciplinary linguistics and anthropological study)”, and policy-oriented project “School Boards in Armenia: Problems of Parent Participation”. Satenik’s research interests include ethnography/anthropology of schools, ethno-national identity construction through general education, and Diaspora Studies.

**Dr Assylkhan Bikenov** is an Assistant Professor of Archaeology and Ethnology at Gumilev Eurasian National University and is currently a visiting researcher at the division of social anthropology, University of Cambridge. His research interests include the political system and the institutions of power of traditional Kazakh society (18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries), inter-ethnic relations in Kazakhstan, theories of cultural change, indigeneity, nationalism and ethnicity. Assylkhan has conducted ethnographic fieldwork, among others, for the following projects: “Eurasianism as a basis for the development of civilization in Kazakhstan and neighboring countries in the context of globalization”, “Migration and Security in Central Asia”, “The material culture of Kazakhs”, “Political idea of Kazakhstan”.

**Ofer Fridman** is a PhD Candidate at the University of Reading. His current research analyses the socio-political aspects of military innovation in Russia, the US and Israel, focusing on the influence of collateral damage on the political decision-making process and military concepts of operation. Last year, during his fieldwork, Ofer spent several months at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), first as a Visiting Research Fellow and then as a Visiting Lecturer, and conducted interviews with various officials and high-ranking decision-makers in military-industrial companies.

**Kaneshko Sangar** is a PhD Candidate at UCL, School of Slavonic and East European Studies. His research examines the whole spectrum of relationships between Russia and major state and non-state actors in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Kaneshko’s fieldwork, conducted in the last two years, has included semi-structured elite interviews in Central Asia and Russia, as well as interviews with members of radical movements such as *Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan* and *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, both considered terrorist organisations in Russia. Kaneshko has previously conducted fieldwork in conflict and post-conflict zones and in countries with a tense political environment as part of his work for a number of NGOs in Central Asia, Russia, Ukraine, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

**Dr Katharina Buck** is a Lecturer for the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) at Buketov Karaganda State University, Kazakhstan. Her research interests include questions of nationalism and ethnic conflict with a focus on the post-Soviet space, as well as inter-state relations and power relations in the region with a particular regard to the emerging Eurasian Union. Katharina obtained her PhD from the University of Bristol (‘Nationality and National Identity in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan’), for which she spent several extended periods of field research in Kazakhstan.

**Imogen Wade** is a PhD student in the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, UCL. Her PhD research concerns the governance of innovation in different regions of Russia in the period of transformation after the end of the Soviet Union. Imogen’s broader research interests include comparative innovation systems, institutional economics, industrial strategy, technological development and federalism. Her fieldwork has involved semi-structured elite interviews and surveys of science parks in Russia. More information is available on her personal blog: <http://imogenwade.wordpress.com/>.

\*Due to unforeseen circumstances, John Kennedy is unable to come to London for the workshop. However, he is happy to be contacted in person on the subject of his project and ethnographic research in general.