Performing 'Community': Russian-speakers in Contemporary Britain

Andy Byford

Introduction

During the early 2000s Great Britain has witnessed a considerable rise in numbers of the Russian-speaking former-Soviet migrant population.[1] This has been the result of the greatly increased opportunities for migration in most former Soviet states, the eastwards enlargement of the European Union, and the economically driven relaxation of immigration regulations under the UK's Labour government between 1997 and 2008.[2] Although they patently form a linguistically cohesive group, the Russian-speaking migrants discussed here are not easy to define as a group in ethnic, national or diasporic terms. They include individuals arriving from different post-Soviet countries in several successive migrant waves, in a whole range of changing personal, professional and socio-economic circumstances. Their ethnic self-identifications, national loyalties, generational experiences and expressions of mutual solidarity remain complex and flexible, as do their migrant statuses and trajectories.

Conceptualizing the 'Russianness' of this population is far from straightforward since many of these migrants' identifications with Russian language, culture and history point to their common upbringing and roots in the former Soviet 'empire' rather than to either a particular ethnicity or citizenship. Indeed, both the term *rossiiane*, meaning 'citizens of the Russian Federation', and *russkie*, meaning 'ethnic Russians', are much too narrow and specific to apply to this migrant population as a whole. The term *sootechestvenniki* (compatriots), deployed by the Russian government in its legislation and policy documents in reference 'Russians outside Russia' as a form of 'diaspora', is even more problematic on account of its politicized nature (Byford 2012; see also Muradov 2007). The term used most commonly for this migrant body is *russkogovoriashchie* (Russian-speakers or Russophones), since it encompasses – with deliberate, euphemistic and politically correct, vagueness (Byford 2009b) – a much wider and more mixed group of former Soviet citizens.[3] One should also not neglect the influence that the host environment has in simplifying the 'Russianness' of this migrant population, if only as an unwitting effect of shorthand forms of mutual cultural identification in the pragmatics of everyday interactions.

Whether a *'community'* of Russian-speakers as a migrant group exists in the UK, and in what sense, is one of the principal concerns of the only full-scale ethnographic study of this population

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[1] Reports from 2007 cite the figure of 300,000 as the estimated size of this migrant population. See the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) 2007 Mapping Exercise for 'Russians' in the United Kingdom (p. 6) and related reports for UK-based migrant communities from the Ukraine and other countries of the former Soviet Union: http://www.iomlondon.org/publications.htm. For work on post-Soviet Russian-speaking migrants in Britain see (in chronological order): Darieva (2004), Kopnina (2005), Morgunova (2006), Morgunova (2007), Morgunova & Morgunov (2007), Black & Markova (2007), Byford (2009a), Byford (2009b), Makarova & Morgunova (2009), Pechurina (2009), Pechurina (2010), Pechurina (2011), Byford (2012). See also the BBC 'Londongrad' project: http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/hi/russian/in_depth/2007/londongrad/default.stm. (All URLs in this paper were last accessed 15 May 2012).
[2] Needless to say, the expansion of this migrant population has been a worldwide phenomenon. This paper focuses on the case of Great Britain and will not, for lack of space, include a comparative dimension. For just a few examples of work on post-Soviet Russian-speakers in other Western countries see Dietz (2000), Münz & Ohliger (2003), Darieva (2004), Laitin (2004), Zaionchkovskaia (2004), Kolstø (2006), Isurin (2011).
[3] Many non-Russians who grew up in the former Soviet Union still take active part in events organized by and for 'Russians', although their identifications with Russian history and culture are both varied and ambivalent. Of course, non-Russian former Soviet nationalities (Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Georgians, Kazakhs, etc.) also have their own distinct migrant networks and associations in Britain.

published thus far – Helen Kopnina's *East to West Migration* (2005).[4] 'Community' has been a much used and much criticised concept, deployed in numerous, often only vaguely related and sometimes even contradictory, ways (Suttles 1972; Anderson 1991; Cohen 1997; Delanty 2003). Particularly problematic has been the ambiguous use of the concept of 'community' simultaneously as a *practical* and an *analytical* category. Kopnina herself is guilty of this 'mixing of registers' in her work on Russian migrants in the UK. Her ethnography focuses initially on the social actors' *own* references to and definitions of 'community'. In analysing these she shows that in the late 1990s Russian-speaking migrants were vague and sceptical about the existence of any kind of *wider* 'community' among them. However, in her attempt to then describe these migrants' subgroups and subcultures in an objective way Kopnina reaches the conclusion that Russian-speakers in the UK did, in fact, form what she terms '*sub*-communities' – small social networks based on narrower shared geographies, predicaments, interests and exchanges. The relationship between seemingly quite real, objective '*sub*-communities' and an apparently non-existent, merely subjectively posited, wider 'community' of Russian-speakers in the UK (what I shall, for convenience, call a 'community-*at-large*') is often rather unclear in Kopnina's analytical schema. However, this does not greatly affect her ethnography as such, since the discourses that she examines invoke this 'community-at-large' only as a dubious hypothesis or at best a hopeful potentiality.

Some of Kopnina's analysis of Russian-speaking migrants' equivocal discourse on 'community' (2005: 91-95), especially when it comes to their invocations of the apparent failures of social or national solidarity among them, still holds true in some respects (Byford 2009a: 102-103).[5] However, given that Kopnina did her fieldwork at the end of the 1990s, when the size of the Russian-speaking population in Britain was still relatively small, her study does not deal with what, in the second half of the 2000s, became a veritable boom in all kinds of highly public enactments of 'community' among them. Indeed, her conclusion that a Russian 'community' in the UK is somehow 'invisible' (Kopnina 2005: 83-84) is no longer the case. The attainment of a certain critical mass has led many members of this immigrant population to start engaging very actively in various modes of institutional self-organization and collective identity-(re)invention. Considerable amounts of different kinds of resources are now being invested in the *theatrical enactment* of a 'community', involving unprecedented levels of mobilization and stagecraft.

In this chapter I examine some of the key features of this particular activity among contemporary Russian-speakers in Britain. Using a variety of sources, including ethnographic participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews,[6] the Russian-language migrant press, and some internet material, I analyse a range of different practices, discourses and ideologies of 'community' developed by Russian-speakers in contemporary Britain. In particular, I examine the ritual and the rhetoric through which a 'community-at-large' in the above sense is socially and symbolically constructed and deconstructed *in performance*.

The usefulness of 'performance' as a concept in this context lies in the fact that it does not model 'community' as necessarily based on or created through particular networks of social connectivity

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[4] Other work on Russians in the UK also refers to the problem of defining 'community': on 'Russians in Britain' as an 'imagined community' see Pechurina (2010); on the significance of online 'communities' see Morgunova (2007): 116-118.

[5] However, my fieldwork suggests that there is now a much greater variety of positions among Russian-speaking migrants on this matter than was the case in Kopnina's ethnography, ranging from complete denials to emphatic affirmations of the existence of a wider community among them.

[6] More detail on my fieldwork and interviews is available in the *Newsletter* no. 1: 7-9 (June 2008) of the project 'National Identity in Russia from 1961: Traditions & Deterritorialisation': http://www.mod-langs.ox.ac.uk/russian/nationalism/newsletter.htm. The transcripts of formal interviews are archived at the Oxford Life History Archive: http://www.ehrc.ox.ac.uk/lifehistory/index.htm.

(e.g. material and symbolic exchange), ties of social solidarity, or even some imagined collective identity, all of which emerge as problematic when analysing the manifestations of a 'community-at-large' among the geographically dispersed and socially fragmented population of former-Soviet Russian-speakers currently living and working in Britain. 'Performance' instead conceptualises 'community' in terms of particular *moments* of theatrical display, enactment and experience in which 'community' emerges primarily as a *performative effect* of complex situations of theatrical (self-)observation.

My use of the concept of 'performance' here draws on a number of distinct but interrelated traditions. Firstly, on Erving Goffman's dramaturgical sociology of social interaction (Goffman 1990) and Victor Turner's anthropology of ritual performance (Turner 1987), although without the experiential and at times mystical dimensions of his and his wife Edith's work on the concept of *communitas* (Turner 2012). Secondly, my understanding of 'performance' draws in significant ways on the notion of 'performativity', as introduced by J. L. Austin's speech-act theory (Austin 1975) and then developed in poststructuralism (e.g. Jacques Derrida) and feminism (e.g. Judith Butler). For an overview of the latter tradition see especially Loxley (2007). For a survey of literature on 'performance' that includes other traditions as well, such as those of 'performance art', see Carlson (2004).

As will become clear in the analysis that follows, performances of 'community' among UK Russian-speakers are, in the first instance, acted out by and for the purported members of this 'community' themselves, who engage in them simultaneously as dramaturges, actors and audience; as their producers, protagonists and interpreters. At the same time, these performances are invariably acted out amidst and for 'the other' (in this case typically the UK 'host' environment), in interaction with which, often against which, but also through the eyes of which, a 'community' emerges in performance. What I argue here is *not* that 'performances of community' are stylized mimetic representations of some pre-existing 'community' (whether actual or imagined); nor do I see such performances as ritual-like ceremonies that somehow forge or strengthen community solidarities and identities as part of 'community-building'. The point that I develop is rather that 'community' in this specific context manifests itself and acquires meaning *in the act of performance itself*; in other words, that 'community' here *is* its performance. And crucially, as work on performativity and the ontology of 'performance' makes abundantly clear (e.g. Butler 1990), this does *not* mean that 'community' is *'just an act'*, a mere 'pretence' or a theatrical 'illusion'.

The Russian Winter Festival: 'Community' as Spectacle

A model example of such a performative spectacle of a 'community-at-large' of 'Russians in Britain' would be the so-called Russian Winter Festival, staged annually on the second Sunday in January, on Trafalgar Square in London.[7] My account is based on fieldwork observations that I carried out at this event in 2008. The staging of this Festival involves (for health and safety reasons) the creation of what is essentially a two-tiered audience. An 'inner audience' is corralled into the middle of Trafalgar Square around a stage, which is located at the square's lower, south

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[7] This event ran over a period of several years in the late 2000s. It was organised by the business networking company Eventica as an extension of the Russian Economic Forum, in conjunction with the London and Moscow mayoralties. For more detail on the 4th Festival in 2008 see http://www.eventica.co.uk/?p=283. See also reports in the Russian diaspora newspapers (*London-Info* 2007b; *London-Info* 2008c; *Angliia* 2008a; *Pul's-UK* 2008). In 2011 this event was in some ways supplanted by the springtime Russian Maslenitsa (Lent) Festival: http://www.maslenitsa.co.uk/. The latter is organized by Ensemble Productions Co. (http://www.ensembleproductions.co.uk/), and was originally staged at a different location (at Tower Bridge in 2009 and 2010), but moved to Trafalgar Square in 2011.

side. This 'inner audience' is encircled by relatively low metal barriers and thereby separated from an 'outer audience' of passers-by who circulate around this 'corral', observing what goes on both inside the barriers and on the stage, mostly from the elevated positions on the north side, towards the National Gallery.

The 'inner audience' is not merely a body of spectators, but a key part of the public display of the 'UK Russian community'. The barriers, controlled by security guards, become the symbolic boundary of this 'community on display': deciding to enter the middle of the square (which can be done for free, if with periodic queuing) works as a way of ritually joining it, or more precisely, of becoming part of its performance. In reality, of course, both the 'inner' and the 'outer' audiences are mixed and include 'Russians', 'Brits', other nationalities, and random tourists, although 'Russians' generally predominate in the 'inner audience', especially in areas closest to the stage. Nonetheless, it is the divisions created through stage management and choreography, rather than the objective nationalities or subjective identities of those assembled, that determine the attribution of roles in this enactment of 'community'.

Most importantly, within the corral, the 'inner audience' is not just watching the performance on stage but is itself performing – it is performing a 'community' (and is constantly invited to do so) by flag waving, by singing and dancing to Russian folk, pop and rock music, by consuming Russian food and drink, and by actively interacting with the performers and presenters on stage. While a great part of this performance of 'community' is devised as an exhibition for an observing 'other' (here taking the form of the 'outer audience') and involves familiar, stereotypical national cultural forms as key components of the event's scenography, some elements in the programme (e.g. certain nostalgia-generating music numbers and culturally-specific stand-up comedy sketches) are made deliberately obscure to the non-Russian public, becoming instead a performance of strictly 'insider' ties. However, exactly *who* is here performing *what* and *for whom* remains at all times plural and ambiguous. The meaning of every element of this performance is, in fact, multiple and equivocal. I shall give just one example to illustrate this point. During the 2008 Festival, the first flag to emerge above the heads of the assembled crowds was the red Soviet flag, waved vigorously by a youth who was born, at the earliest, in the USSR's dying years. A little bit later it was joined by the flag of the Russian Federation and then the black, yellow and white flag of the Romanov dynasty.

What is the meaning of such a demonstrative display of specifically the *Soviet flag* in this setting?[8] The three flags fluttering together might be seen as symbolizing the reconciliation of the different eras of Russian history, reflecting, among other things, the strategic rehabilitation of the Soviet past and its reincorporation into a more assertive Russian national identity under Putin in the 2000s. But in what way does the Soviet flag speak *to* and *of* the crowds assembled on Trafalgar Square? Is it perhaps a way of signalling that this event, though called the *Russian* Winter Festival, is by no means a performance of the 'community' of only those with civic loyalties to the Russian Federation, but evokes, inclusively, the shared cultural and historical background of all former Soviet citizens who currently reside in the UK?

Or is this banner, just like the veteran Soviet-era rock band *Alisa*, whose music concluded the event, a part-nostalgic, part tongue-in-cheek invocation of 'times gone by', which these migrants have left behind in more ways than one? But what precise meaning does such nostalgia carry when the flag is waved alongside the scarves of the football club Zenit St Petersburg (which dominated world football at that moment as the 2008 European champions and winners of the UEFA Super Cup), to the Westernised inflections of the latest pop hit by Dima Bilan (Russian

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[8] For an interpretation of the raising of the Soviet flag at this event in the context of performative constructions of an 'imaginary Soviet Union' in the discourse of UK post-Soviet Russian-speakers see Byford (2009a).

Eurovision song contest star), and against the background of the National Gallery, Admiral Nelson and the statues of the British lions that adorn Trafalgar Square? And all of this on the day that New Year is celebrated according to the pre-Communist, Russian Orthodox, calendar?

Or is the Soviet flag simply one of a number of stereotypical props, no different to, say, some giant Russian dolls, which were also on display at the event – in other words, a motif of 'exotic Russia' that Londoners could absorb, despite its anachronism, as yet another contribution to their city's 'vibrant diversity'? But if so, is this dressing up in cultural stereotypes done flirtatiously or ironically? In fact, what *does* the Soviet flag signal to the British 'other'? The Cold War, the idea of which, to the annoyance of Russian diplomacy, had at that time been dominating UK media representations of Russo-British relations in the wake of the Litvinenko affair (the mention of which everyone at this event was at pains to avoid)?[9] Or did the flag refer to the Anglo-Soviet alliance during the Second World War, which Ken Livingston – London Mayor in 2008, notorious as 'Red Ken' for his socialist sympathies – dwelt on in his speech at the Festival, evoking the struggle against fascism as, it seems, the only era in the history of Russia's relations with Britain worth remembering?

What lies behind or beyond such a performance of 'community', as either the latter's social referent or its cultural signified, is evidently highly elusive. Different members of the migrant population in question, who engage in these performances as performers, spectators or more remote observers, would subscribe to the cultural identities and community representations enacted in this way to very different degrees, if at all; and if they did so, their identifications are likely to be accompanied by multiple layers of ironic distancing. Yet this elusiveness is not due to some inherent ambiguity of the social and cultural identities of the individuals in question or of this migrant group as a whole, but is a consequence of the unpredictable situational contingencies of these performances *as performances*. Put slightly differently, the ambiguities of *who performs what and for whom* in every such performance does not lie in the elusiveness of either the 'who' or the 'what' or the 'for whom' in and of themselves, but in the 'thickness' of their interweaving in the dynamics of the performance itself.[10]

Between 'Sub-Community' and 'Community-at-Large'

Over the past decade or so, publicly performing 'Russians in Britain' as a 'community-at-large' has become not just an especially *visible* (even exhibitionist) 'practice of community' among UK Russian-speakers, as evidenced in the above example, but also an *underlying* dimension of community enactment as such in this migrant field. What I mean by this is that performances at the level of what Kopnina (2005: 99-128) calls '*sub*-community' are now commonly tied to and even dependent on a *simultaneous* (explicit or implicit, direct or indirect) enactment of a 'community-at-large'. While most performances of 'community' among UK-based Russian-speakers are, indeed, staged by and for some concrete group of people (who might, in Kopnina's terms, identify their practices of community only with some relatively narrow 'sub-community'), these are now invariably inscribed into an extended network of related performances taking place across the country and incorporate (almost by default, and if only by association) a 'community-at-large' as an indispensible *part* of their performative dynamic.

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[9] On Alexander Litvinenko see, for example, his obituary by Tom Parfitt in *The Guardian*, 25 Nov 2006: http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2006/nov/25/guardianobituaries.russia.

[10] I allude here to Clifford Geertz's notion of 'thick description' (Geertz 1973: 3-30), namely the complex layering of meaning structures and the inter-crossing of interpretations as fundamental to the ethnographic understanding of social and cultural expression.

This does not entail the forging of any kind of coherent overall socio-cultural identity or unitary communitarian consciousness within this migrant field. How such a 'community-at-large' is enacted in any given performance and to what effect varies widely from one case to the next. Indeed, if one examines the cultural content of the variety of 'performances of community' among Russian-speakers in the UK today one is struck by the remarkable hodgepodge of ritual forms and contradictory meanings embedded in them, just as we have seen above in the example of the Russian Winter Festival. 'Performances of community' can range from weekend community folk dancing of by no means always clear regional origins to exhibitions of 'nerdy' familiarity with the details of Soviet-era general knowledge in quiz competitions (e.g. *London-Info*, 2006c); from performances of Orthodox Christian piety in church rituals and post-service tea-drinking gatherings to ironic displays of Soviet military paraphernalia at fancy dress parties; from mock-tsarist balls for the jet-set (e.g. *London-Info*, 2004b; *London-Info*, 2008b) to the obligatory 8 May Women's Day celebrations (e.g. *London-Info*, 2008a; Smirnova 2008); from the vodka-themed hard partying of the overworked City professionals to children's staging of traditional fairytales at Russian-language Saturday school matinees.

Concrete performances of 'community' at a local level can, of course, project some fairly specific identities of 'Russians in Britain' *qua* 'community-at-large'. For example, a certain performance might, through its discourse and stage props, emphasize a (strategically deterritorialized and dehistoricized) *former Soviet* identity of this 'community', presenting the disapora in question as the coming together, in Britain, of people from the entire former Soviet space, regardless of their precise ethnicity or current, post-Soviet, nationality. Another performance might, by contrast, emphasize the *Anglo-Russian* character of this diasporic 'community', displaying it as a kind of 'marriage' of 'the best' of the Russian and British cultures, usually presenting these in a romanticized and essentialized way; this is common in contexts where mixed, Russo-British, couples predominate or where there is a substantial presence of British 'Russophiles'. Some other performance might enact 'Russians in Britain' as only one cell of the *global Russian-speaking diaspora* – for example, by staging 'transnational' poetry, quiz or sports competitions in the UK, in which Russian-speakers from across the world arrive as representatives of their respective country's Russian-speaking 'community'. While certain performances might enact a community of *ex-pats of the Russian Federation*, patriotically showcasing the latter's newfound wealth, power and respectability on the international stage, others would, in complete contrast, present 'Russians in Britain' as an *immigrant minority community* on the *British* multicultural model (Betts 2002) – something characteristic of performances that are staged as part of British local council endeavours and that are dependent on grants coming from these sources. Any given enactment of 'community' is most likely to combine elements of different identities of 'Russians in Britain' as a 'community-at-large' in varying ways and proportions, and to manoeuvre between them depending on the specific performative context, target audience and pragmatic purpose.

As should be clear from these different examples, local performances usually enact a 'community-at-large' *in their own image*. However, a 'community-at-large' can also be performed more indirectly, through a certain performative *embedding* of a 'sub-community' into a 'community-at-large' in a variety of ways, often by creating a relationship of *mutual spectation* between the two. I shall give a couple of contrasting examples to illustrate what I mean by this.

'Russians in the City' – an exclusive network of young Russian-speaking high-flyers working for London-based investment banks and hedge funds – could be understood as a '*sub*-community' par excellence of 'Russians in Britain', its boundaries being circumscribed quite clearly and patrolled

extremely carefully.[11] At the same time, in many of their internal exchanges (e.g. newsletters), the organizers of this network comment, with varying degrees of sarcasm, on certain public performances of 'Russians in Britain' as a 'community-at-large' by fellow migrants 'out there' (beyond the 'walls' of the City of London). Thus, in this instance, the performance of 'sub-community' ties includes turning this 'sub-community' into a distanced *audience* (of observers and commentators) of the performances of a 'community-at-large'.

A very different example would be the school-cum-community called Druzhba (Friendship), based in Erith in Kent, on the outskirts of Greater London.[12] This is one of a number of weekend schools for the children of Russian-speaking migrants that have mushroomed across the UK, especially around the mid-2000s.[13] The setting up and running of such schools has depended greatly on their self-promotion as key sites of diasporic 'community'. For this purpose, the schools invariably hardwire into their educational and extracurricular practices a wide repertoire of 'performances of community', including school matinees, celebrations of traditional Russian holidays, art exhibitions, concerts, song and dance competitions, sports tournaments, cultural excursions, and so forth, often seeking to involve parents as well as children.

In the case of the group at the core of Druzhba, performing 'community' became arguably even more significant than running the school. In 2008 one of its most prominent, trademark activities, in which both adults and children took part, was amateur folk dancing. Significantly, however, the enactment of '*sub*-community' in this case took place not only in after-school weekly rehearsals in the privacy of the school's own rented premises, but also in a series of very public performances, in which this dancing was turned into a distinctively choreographed 'community on display'. The most ambitious of these performances at the time was Druzhba's participation in the 2008 New Year's Day Parade in London – a noisy and colourful carnival procession of various representative UK 'sub-communities' (not necessarily national or ethnic ones), all together exemplifying British multiculturalism and communitarianism.[14]

While Druzhba's performances of 'community' (at this and other events) enact in the first instance, and very effectively so, the authenticity of particular '*sub*-community' ties, and while these enactments do not in themselves entail any direct reference to a 'community-at-large', the latter is, nevertheless, generated *implicitly* as a significant part of the *audience* of these performances, alongside the audience of the British 'hosts'. Indeed, the 'community-at-large' of 'Russians in Britain' emerges – specifically as audience – in the promotion of Druzhba's participation in the New Year's Parade (both prior to this event and after it) in the London-based Russian-language diaspora newspapers. The latter create a *second-order* performative context for this event introducing an additional spectatorial perspective on it. This new spectatorial position

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[11] See http://www.russiansinthecity.org/. My fieldwork in 2008 included interviews with one of the organizers and a few members of this network, one of whom provided access to some newsletters and social networking web-links. It was not, however, possible to become a participant-observer of this group due to strict criteria of membership (professional as well as native-cultural). See also articles on this group in *Biznes-Info* (2004) and *London-Info* (2006a).

[12] This school has seen expansion in scope since 2008 when I carried out my fieldwork. For more detail on the current range of activities see http://www.druzhba.org.uk/.

[13] The first school to emerge was the London School of Russian Language and Literature, established in 1999: http://www.russian-school.co.uk/. Most larger cities in the UK have at least one such school. For just a few examples, see: http://www.znaniye.com/; http://camrusschool.co.uk/; http://www.russianedinburgh.org.uk/. My fieldwork involved several visits to six schools in London and two in Oxford over the course of 2008. This included observations of class and extracurricular activities (including performances and celebrations) as well as formal and informal interviews with staff, parents and students.

[14] On the 2008 New Year's Day Parade and Druzhba's participation in it see *Angliia* (2007a) and *Angliia* (2008b). A similar event at which this group performed later in 2008 is the London Thames Festival (*Angliia* 2008c). They also perform at Russian diaspora events, such as the Pushkin in Britain Festival (Bevan 2006). For an anthropological study of similar events in the UK (specifically the Notting Hill Carnival) see Cohen (1993).

transforms Druzhba's choreography of 'sub-community' solidarities into an *exemplum* of 'community practices' of 'Russians in Britain' in general.

'Community' on Display: The Migrant Press

Performances of 'community', the theatricality of which is quite literal in most of the above examples can, and indeed must, be understood more broadly. Performing a migrant 'community-at-large' does not take place only in staged celebrations, cultural events and social gatherings, but also in various other forms of display.[15] Especially important in this context, as suggested in the previous example, are Russian-language weekly newspapers for the diaspora, a number of which serve as important vehicles for showcasing 'community', both through their editorial, discursive and representational strategies and by their material presence on the streets of London.[16] The years 2007-2008, during which I did my fieldwork, proved something of a heyday of this type of press – a dynamic period of burgeoning activity, marked by considerable competition for readership.

Not all such newspapers display 'community' to the same degree or in the same way. The longest established title in the UK since the collapse of the USSR is *Londonskii kur'er* (The London Courier), founded in 1994. This newspaper dominated the scene until the early 2000s; however, even at the end of the 1990s its editors were relatively modest about the extent to which their publication served as 'a kind of focal point' and 'a kind of podium for a community' (Kopnina 2005: 97). Indeed, they did not seem to believe in the enactment of such a 'community' beyond their publication (Kopnina 2005: 80-81; see also Darieva 2004: 238-250).

Londonskii kur'er's first competitor was *London-Info*, established in 1998. Although this was initially a rather modest classified ads paper, around the mid-2000s it took advantage of the considerable enlargement of the Russian-speaking migrant field and positioned itself more ambitiously as a newspaper chronicling the emergence of a wider 'community' of 'Russians in Britain'. However, since 2009, *London-Info* is no longer in existence and has been replaced by a UK version of the Paris-based *Russkaia mysl'* (Russian Thought). Indeed, this type of press has suffered a decline due to financial pressures brought on by the recession, competition, and the expansion of the role of the internet.

Around 2006 two new titles – *Angliia* (England) and *Pul's UK* (Pulse UK) – based on a different business model, that of freely distributed advert-funded newspapers, emerged on the scene. Of these two *Angliia* was the more focused on the growing 'community' activism among the Russian-speaking migrant body, featuring regular reports on an expanding network of migrant associations, enterprises and events.

The principal format for displaying a 'community' in newspapers such as *London-Info* and *Angliia* has been that of direct or indirect advertising. In addition to the classifieds posted by private individuals, this press carries advertisements for commercial enterprises and social events, while also extensively reporting on migrant cultural and community projects in a way that works as de facto advertising. For example, the head of a weekend Russian-language school might contribute a regular column on educational psychology relevant to émigrés bringing up their children in a new

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[15] This also applies to internet websites advertising Russian-speaking associations and media in the UK. Internet forums and Facebook-style networks set up by UK-based Russian-speakers similarly play a part in theatrical and exhibitionist community performance. While my own fieldwork did not involve any form of online ethnography, for an example of the latter see Morgunova (2007).

[16] For background on these newspapers see Konstantin Rozhnov, 'Gazetnyi mir russkoiazychnogo Londona', available at http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/hi/russian/uk/newsid_6394000/6394125.stm.

country, which would simultaneously work as an advert for her school.[17] A solicitor might provide general advice on immigration legislation, while at the same time promoting his or her practice.[18]

These newspapers therefore emblematize, through explicit or tacit marketing, a form of migrant 'marketplace': they display and indirectly facilitate different forms of exchange within this migrant body (commercial, social and cultural). The function of this display is not simply a mechanical one of aggregating and relaying relevant information. What these newspapers also do is display this 'marketplace' *as a 'community'*. More specifically, these newspapers exhibit a 'marketplace' and a 'community' *in juxtaposition* and *interdependently*. A 'community on display' works as an essential accompaniment, catalyst and legitimizer of exchanges that take place within the migrant 'marketplace', regardless of how provisional and of convenience such a 'community' might be; regardless of whether those involved in such exchanges (including in their roles as the writers and readers of this discourse) believe in and care about the existence of the 'community' thus performed or remain cynical about it.

Furthermore, given that these newspapers are themselves forms of commercial-cultural enterprise, they rely on enacting 'community' as part of *their own* self-promotion. However, what is important to note here is that, as a rule, the UK Russian-speaking migrant press systematically avoids acting as *'the voice of the community'*, i.e. as some sort of representative organ of the diaspora. Instead, this press prefers to turn itself into a neutral arena or *'stage'* upon which a 'community-at-large' is performed by others, by a whole cast of different characters – protagonists as well as supporting roles. The subtitle of the newspaper *Angliia* – 'nashi na ostrove' ('our guys on the island') – encapsulates well this idea of a 'community-*on-display*'.

The cast of 'characters' that represent 'Russians in Britain' and that are displayed on this 'stage' includes a whole host of 'ordinary' migrants – people of various backgrounds, some more exemplary of certain roles than others.[19] The regular 'actors' that feature more consistently on the pages of this press are the various diasporic entrepreneurs, who promote themselves and their projects, associations and enterprises, busy competing with one another. Regular 'characters' also include a number of notables and dignitaries, such as the Russian Ambassador or, say, Prince Michael of Kent (as the embodiment of Russo-British connections on account of his genealogical links with the Russian imperial family, as well as his commercial and cultural interest in Russia).[20] The oligarchs Roman Abramovich and Boris Berezovsky or Russian celebrity footballers also feature, though with an aura of unreality, as pure media entities, rather than people of flesh and blood (e.g. *London-Info* 2003; *London-Info* 2007a; *London-Info* 2007c).

Among the 'characters' in this performance one must also include the 'natives' of the island – the Britons, both 'ordinary' and 'notable', who either play the 'hosts' (often with all the clichés about British culture that this implies) or those who have in one way or another been brought into the fold of the Russian 'community' itself, through marriage, work, business or cultural interests.[21]

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[17] For example, the regular section 'Professiia – roditel'' ('Profession – parent') in *London-Info*, from 2004 till 2008, written by staff of the school Russkaia Gimnaziia No. 1.

[18] For example, the regular section 'Iuridicheskii likbez' ('Combating Legal Illiteracy') in *London-Info*, from 2004 till 2008, written by staff of the Law Firm Ltd.

[19] In 2003-04, *London-Info* ran a regular section called first 'Obshchina' ('Community'), then 'Nashi na Al'bione' ('Our guys on the Albion'), then 'Russkii London' ('Russian London') and then 'Russkaia Britaniia', with various features on 'ordinary' Russia-speaking migrants living in the UK.

[20] E.g., see reportage highlighting the Prince's presence at the 2007 Ivan the Terrible Polo Challenge (*Londonskii kur'er*, 2008).

[21] E.g., Stephen Dalziel, the executive director of the Russo-British Chamber of Commerce (Grigorian 2008); a British student who apparently exclaimed 'I ought to have been Russian!' (*London-Info* 2004a); the historian of Russia, Professor Dominic Liven (*London-Info* 2006b); the MP for Chelsea and Fulham, Greg Hands, who apparently stated 'Russians are my favourite nation!' (*Angliia*, 2007b).

Finally, among key 'actors' one should also mention the newspapers' own freelance columnists who self-consciously adopt specific roles as commentators on the diaspora or as those who discourse directly with it, addressing it as their readership. In doing so, however, they usually speak on their own behalf (or rather on behalf of their assumed personae), rather than as the voice of the newspaper itself.[22]

When referring to these migrant newspapers as a 'stage', one should not understand the latter in a simplistic way, as merely a form of theatrical infrastructure. The 'stage' here is a metaphor that expresses both that something is being enacted and also, significantly, that something is being *spectated*. Indeed, the very fact that these newspapers are staging a performance implies that they are also creating the space for *spectators*; that they also *perform an audience* 'watching' this performance. In fact, the reluctance that this press shows towards serving as some kind of 'voice of the community' manifests itself precisely in the enactment of a *spectatorial distance*, for instance, through the playful, lightly ironic tone of many of the reportages and editorials, especially those discussing the Russian 'community' in a general way.[23] And yet, these newspapers do not engage their readership merely as a distanced audience; rather, they invite them *both* to identify with and engage in the 'community' that is being performed on their pages *and* to assume the role of spectators observing this performance. Indeed, what takes place here is an ambivalent kind of self-observation that is an essential component of community-as-performance, as already discussed in earlier examples.

A Theatre of 'Community Politics'

As should be clear from all of the above, performing 'community' is never *just* 'a piece of theatre'. Crucial to performing 'community' is not only its theatrical or ritual enactment as such, but also the *discursive* articulation and legitimation (and in some cases *de*-legitimation) of 'community' that forms part of these performances or crystallizes around them. The performative role of this discourse in relation to 'community' emerges in the rhetoric through which the idea of 'community' and the nature of solidarity ties within a group (actual or imagined) are invoked and played out, irrespective of whether the existence of a 'community' is thereby rhetorically confirmed or denied.

Those most active in staging 'community' performances are, as is to be expected, the ones most likely to be interested in rhetorically (and thus also performatively) investing 'community' with legitimacy and reality. Their discourse, as a rule, usually presumes that the 'community' they are enacting effectively already exists. However, one can also hear among some of them lamentations about the absence of what they refer to as a *proper* 'community' among Russians in Britain. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this complaint is usually uttered by failed or disgruntled 'community impresarios' whose performances have not quite 'come off', as well as those migrants who, for whatever reason, have been marginalized and are, as a consequence, reluctant to take part in them.[24]

Moreover, the theatrical performance of a 'community-at-large' among Russian-speakers in the UK has over the past ten years developed into a veritable 'culture industry' – a socially not disinterested activity, requiring significant investment, cultural entrepreneurship and constant 'wheeling and dealing' by this industry's most ambitious activists, resulting in bitter rivalries

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[22] E.g., see the very different columns by Mikhail Ozerov, Mikhail Makarenkov and Natasha Moroz in *London-Info*.

[23] E.g. see Grigorian (2007) or *London-Info* (2005), a report on the Russian Winter festival in 2005, titled 'The Russian Spirit was there, and it smelled of Ancient Rus'.

[24] Based on interviews with over a hundred migrants, at least 75% of whom were actively involved in community endeavours of one sort or another.

between some of them and giving rise to an entire field of community micro-politics. In fact, it is precisely this increase in competition that has prompted a considerable intensification of public enactments of 'community' in the late 2000s and has made these increasingly more ambitious, with a number of organizations presenting themselves (not always successfully) as representative associations allegedly speaking on behalf of the UK Russian-speaking 'community-at-large'.[25]

The most visible event of this sort is the annual Forum of Russian Compatriots of Great Britain, staged in London since 2007, attracting representatives of a variety of Russian diasporic projects and organizations, including weekend Russian schools, migrant welfare associations, student societies, media professionals, centres of Russian culture, as well as interested Russophile Britons, while entailing a significant involvement of the Russian political establishment, whose brainchild this initiative has been in the first place.[26] What follows is based largely on (anonymous) formal and informal interviews with a range of Russian di~~assa~~pora activists and participants of these Forums carried out in 2007 and 2008.

The first Forum in 2007 led to the election of the so-called Koordinatsionnyi sovet rossiiskikh sootechestvennikov, the literal translation of which is 'The Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots', although this title has been strategically *mis*translated into English as 'The Russian-Speaking Community Council'.[27] The organization of this first Forum involved, however, some acrimonious exchanges between rival groups of diaspora entrepreneurs – specifically an association of weekend Russian language schools dubbed Eurolog and a group calling itself Obshchina (Community). These two quarrelled over who was better placed to get the Russian officialdom's backing to head the initiative of 'consolidating and unifying' the Russian diaspora in Britain, publicly denouncing each other on the internet.[28] At the 2007 Forum and in its aftermath there was further infighting, with complaints from some quarters about the seemingly undemocratic election of the Coordinating Council, whose composition apparently served the interests of certain diaspora entrepreneurs at the expense of others (Byford 2012: 727-732).

In order to raise the legitimacy of the Coordinating Council, one of the strategies in the subsequent, 2008 Forum has been to enact this body in idealized form as if made up of a series of classical diasporic 'pillars' – the Orthodox Church, the aristocracy, the newspapers, the schools, the businesses, the professionals, and the students – all of which were supposedly represented at the Forum. Despite such claims, this display was largely 'for show' and did not clearly reflect in any kind of representative way the social or professional structure of this migrant population or its interests.[29]

What is significant, however, is that the acting out of these politics and the public display of rivalries between key 'community impresarios', both at this event and in the build-up to it,

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[25] The two most obvious of these are the Russian Speaking Community Council: http://www.russian-council.co.uk/ and Obshchina (Community): http://www.obshina.org/. On the latter see especially the overview of the organisation's history presented as a series of performances: http://www.obshina.org/community/documents/download/istoriya-russkoyazychnoy-obshiny-velikobritanii,-1997-2007-gody..21/.

[26] On the first Forum see, for example Baikal'tsev (2007). For a discussion of the broader political underpinnings of this event see Byford (2012: 727-732).

[27] See http://www.russian-council.co.uk/.

[28] See http://www.obshina.org/news/----otkrytoe-pis_mo-rossiyskih-sootechestvennikov-prozhivayushih-v-velikobritanii.220/.

[29] For instance, the 2008 Forum made a great deal out of a keynote speech by an old countess as an alleged 'representative' of 'the Russian aristocracy' in the UK. Yet, 'the aristocracy', which harks back to pre-revolutionary times, is hardly a significant diasporic constituency in the UK today, especially when compared to, for instance, the 'super-rich'. The latter are a much more visible part of the contemporary Russian presence in the UK, yet this group of wealthy businessmen has no interest whatsoever in the Compatriots' Forum, and are not represented at it, preferring their own closed networking platforms.

became a major performance in its own right. Performing 'community' thereby took the form of a *theatre of 'community politics'*. Precisely by becoming lead protagonists in this very public drama, particular entrepreneurs turned both themselves, and each other, into rival 'community leaders'. And yet, since such 'leadership' is merely an effect of the theatre in question and since it thus acquires reality largely in and through similar performances, their continuous staging has retained considerable importance in the field of migrant entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the complexities and ambiguities of public enactments of diasporic 'community' among the recently expanded post-Soviet migrant population of Russian-speakers in the United Kingdom. The focus has been on the performances through which a 'community-at-large' of 'Russians in Britain' is socially and symbolically constructed and deconstructed in this context. 'Community' has here been analysed as a performative effect of complex situations of (broadly understood) 'theatrical' (self-)observation. My analysis of a variety of such situations has shown that the social referents and cultural signifiers of such performances of 'community' among contemporary Russian-speakers in the UK are highly elusive and that this needs to be attributed to the situational contingencies of these performances – to the complex set of performative relationships, which I have sought to tease out by questioning who, in any given situation, is performing what and for whom.

This questioning has also raised the issue of who is *observing* whom and to what effect. Indeed, while I have stressed the importance of enrolling 'the other' in the complex stage-management of 'community' enactments, it is the role of the audience as such that has emerged as especially significant. The 'otherness' of the audience is not rooted in some elusive social or cultural 'identity' but in a particular performative role, which can be highly mobile and reversible across the unstable boundaries between 'self' and 'other'. This paper has therefore argued that 'performing community' entails partially displaced *self*-observations taking place across a network of imbricated performances at different levels, especially through forms of ambivalent ironic distancing.

The metaphor of 'performance' has been deployed broadly in this paper's analytical and interpretative strategy, not merely as a tool for understanding the performative dynamics of actual staged events, but also as a means of examining other mediums of 'community' enactment, such as those found in the migrant press. Finally, this concept has been used to re-evaluate the rhetorical dynamics of 'community' legitimation, as well as to deconstruct the politics of the very practice of 'community performance'.

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Biography

Andy Byford is Senior Lecturer in Russian at the School of Modern Languages and Cultures, Durham University. He holds a doctorate in Russian Studies from the University of Oxford (2004) and was a Research Fellow at Wolfson College, Oxford between 2004 and 2009. He has published widely in Russian history and culture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His research includes an ethnographic exploration of the politics of Russian diasporic identity-making, community-building and self-representation in Great Britain. His publications in this area have come out in journals such as *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* and *Europe Asia Studies*.