

Title: Renegotiating the 'Communal Apartment': Migration and Identity in Contemporary Eurasian Cinema

Author: Elena Monastireva-Ansdell, Colby College

Abstract:

In the 2000s-2010s in Russia, a mass influx of former neighbors from what Yuri Slezkine has aptly described as the "Soviet communal apartment," especially from Central Asia, has caused significant cultural and social tensions resulting in a reciprocal need to renegotiate the terms of the intercultural encounter in the new historical setting. In his study of Soviet nationality policy, Terry Martin identifies such ethnic identity-shaping notions as primordial ethnicity, backward nations, friendship of the peoples, and Russian cultural and linguistic dominance. This paper investigates to what extent contemporary Eurasian filmmakers on both sides of the divide have internalized these formative principles and how they draw on common Soviet-era myths, shared experiences, and, frequently, ethnic stereotypes to make sense of the post-Soviet socio-cultural dislocation as one instantiation of global migration processes. The analysis of the two representative examples, Uzbek director Yusup Razykov's *Gastarbaiter* (2009) and Russian filmmaker Larisa Sadilova's *She* (2012), reveals both differences and similarities in approaching the issue. If Razykov emphasizes the mutual influence of the Russian and other ethnic cultures in the Soviet Union, foregrounding shared historical experiences and myths, Sadilova takes a more imperial approach, downplaying the role of the common Soviet past and of non-Russian contributions. Razykov's post-colonial critique of post-Soviet Russia that sees itself as the sole heir of the Soviet Union's achievements, while simultaneously denying responsibilities for Soviet abuses and promises, aims to restore non-Russians' contributions to all-Union culture and history thus contesting the new republics' greatly diminished places in the radically reconfigured but enduring communal apartment. At the same time, Razykov's hybrid identity as a Russified urban Uzbek from a predominantly rural decolonizing state informs the ambiguity and utopian nature of his proposed solutions for improved interethnic relations.