

**TWO CENTURIES
OF RUSSIAN-AUSTRALIAN
RELATIONS 1807-2007**

**ENCOUNTERS
UNDER THE
SOUTHERN
CROSS**

EDITED BY
**ALEXANDER MASSOV
JOHN McNAIR
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GLIMPSES OF RUSSIAN AUSTRALIA

Elena Govor

Russian perceptions of Australia go far beyond *Captain Grant's Children* and *Crocodile Dundee* – two Russian favourites – for they reach back 200 years. Nevertheless, each Russian generation continues to 'discover' Australia on its own, often unaware of its predecessors. The thick bluish paper of *The Son of The Fatherland*, published in the time of Tsar Alexander I, with the first Russian accounts of New Holland, was followed a century later by the tattered yellowish pages of *Echo of Australia* – the first Russian-language newspaper published by Russian émigrés in Brisbane, and finally by dozens of bright, dynamic Russian web pages giving the impressions of the latest arrivals. These form a long chain of recollections that reveal Russia's fascination, and disillusionment, with Australia, so different and so similar at the same time.

Australia as a construct of Russian perceptions, images, and dreams is an important part of the history of Russian-Australian contacts. The 'tyranny of distance', combined with the restraints of political regimes, hindered true mutual understanding, replacing it with perceptions and stereotypes. While the Germans or Chinese might come and inhabit this land, Russians would speculate and argue about it. But perhaps what they created was no less important and, of course, the Russian mirror was constantly being turned, sometimes reflecting the view and sometimes the viewer.

Two conflicting images have been struggling for dominance in the Russian mind for two centuries – Australia as the quintessence of remoteness and wilderness versus Australia as an outpost of Western civilisation.

The first perception was always persistent because Australia perfectly suited the Russian longing to escape Russian reality. 'A day lasts an eternity. You live as in Australia, at the end of the world, your mood is calm, contemplative...', reflected Anton Chekhov in 1892 during a happy span in his life when he had just purchased his famous estate, Melikhovo (Yarmolinsky 1974: 204). In 1919 Ivan Bunin, trapped in an Odessa occupied by the Bolsheviks, would write in his diary, *The Accursed Days*: 'The heaviness on the soul is unspeakable. The crowd that fills the streets now is physically unbearable, I get tired of this brutal crowd to the point of exhaustion. If one could have a rest, escape somewhere, go away, for instance, to Australia! But it is already a long time since all the ways, all the roads were forbidden' (Bunin 1977: 52). Pavel Florensky, the Russian religious philosopher, imprisoned in the Solovetsky Islands of the GULAG archipelago, would write in 1935 letters to his young children with fascinating tales of Australia's topsy-turvy nature, which were recounted to him by his cellmate, Eugene Gendlin, who once had tramped Australia's roads as a swagman (Florensky 1998: 326, 332-3, 335-6, 340, 354-5, 365). Florensky was to be executed in 1937. Much later came Nikita Khrushchev's so-called thaw and the heart-rending song 'Delphinia' by the Russian bard, Novella Matveeva, which elevated Russian dreams of an Australian escape to the level of poetic symbolism (Govor 1998b).

By contrast the second image — Australia as a country of genuine socio-economic achievements — was tightly bound up with Russian reality and directly or indirectly indicated answers to questions confronting Russian society. Its culmination came in the years of Russian upheaval a century ago. At that time no other nation looked so eagerly towards Australia in the hope of finding a way to solve its own problems; no other nation discussed Australian achievements in order to speak about its own drawbacks under conditions of political censorship; and finally, no other nation produced a political group that sought to disparage Australian reforms so bitterly in an attempt to protect its own ideological tenets. This group — the Bolsheviks led by Vladimir Lenin — finally triumphed and deprived Russians of a chance to choose the Australian way. The Soviet

‘Ministry of Truth’ and its professional propagandists for decades would misrepresent Australian socio-economic conditions, but Russian-Jewish immigrants in the 1970s knew from the grapevine that Australia – if only they could get there from their Italian transit camp – would be their Eden.

Now that Russians have an abundance of information about Australia, these two images – wilderness versus civilisation – have gained new currency. I have already explored the early history of Russian perceptions of Australia in my book, *Australia in the Russian Mirror: Changing Perceptions, 1770-1919*. The evolution of Russian perceptions in the decades to come may provide a new field for special study. This chapter, which does not claim to be comprehensive, offers no more than an overview of developments in this promising field.

Russian perceptions of Australia were the product of three distinct categories of reportage – by armchair writers, by Russian visitors to Australia and by Russian émigrés living there. In the pre-revolutionary period the general tendency was for the attitudes of émigrés to be the most ‘Russian’ in nature, although often narrow-minded and critical, and the images of visitors to be more profound though limited by the circumstances of the particular visit, to a degree critical and specifically Russian. By contrast the images created by the armchair writers were of a broader character, and less critical and closer to general European perceptions, although their ‘Russianness’ did increase with time.

Australia was by no means terra incognita for Russians before the November 1917 revolution, as around 1630 articles and books had been published in Russian about the ‘Fifth Continent’. Initially these were translations from European languages; Russians were very quick to translate, for instance, the chronicles of Captain Cook’s voyages and accounts of the participants in the First Fleet of 1788, not to mention later explorers (see A. Massov, ‘Russian Voyages to Australia’, in this volume). By 1820 the first truly Russian accounts about Australia had been published and by the 1880s original Russian accounts outnumbered translations into Russian (Govor 1985; Govor 1997a; Poole, McNair & Morgan 1993).

The impressions of the first Russian naval visitors to Australia, reaching its shores after the long, harsh journeys in cold southern latitudes, were often emotionally coloured by their thirst for land. Captain Faddey Bellinsghausen, in his account of the 1819-21 voyage to the South Seas, depicted graphically the mood of expectation that seized all the crew at the sight 'of the high hills of New South Wales' (1945, vol. 1: 158-60). The first Russian seafarers invariably referred to the Australian land as 'desired', 'beloved', 'alluring', 'charming' or as 'the kingdom of the eternal spring', even 'paradise'. Australia for them was the first stop on the way to the South Pacific, a place with an 'almost tropical climate', and that is why they perceived it as part of the stereotypical image of the South Seas, rather than as part of a vast continent with predominantly harsh conditions. Aleksey Rossiisky, for instance, described Sydney's environs as 'flowery dales, shaded by sweet-smelling groves, whence came the most delightful birdsong' (Simonov n.d.: 137; Rossiisky 1820 (12): 133-4).

Australian Aborigines were perceived by the first visitors through the stereotype of South Sea Islanders established by Louis Bougainville's and Cook's accounts and the Russians' own encounters with Polynesians and Micronesians in 1804 and 1816. The Aboriginal society which the Russians encountered – 'repulsive', half-naked natives living on fish and crustaceans, sleeping by a fire under the open sky, and having little respect for authority – obviously did not conform to their expectations, so the Russians did their best to reconcile their model with reality. For instance, Pavel Mikhaylov in his 1820 drawing – 'Natives of New Holland' – chose as the dominant element of his picture a stick-and-grass hut, which is disproportionately large in comparison with the human figures near it. The irony is that the travellers did not see a single hut, but their belief that dwellings were an integral part of human habitation made them correct the picture. Similarly, they paid exceptional tribute to 'King Boongaree' (Bungaree). While the colonists, although awarding the Aboriginal elder a brass chest plate, would portray him with a certain degree of humour – colonial artists pictured him with a grim and cunning mien dressed in ridiculous

cast-off European clothes – the Russians seemed to treat him with genuine sympathy. Mikhaylov's paintings of Bungaree and his wife are even distinguished by a romantic-heroic idealisation of their appearance. The Russian visitors were apt to treat Bungaree as the personification of their image of a 'noble savage'.

Symptomatically, as the Russians' contacts with the Aborigines developed – and many of them had opportunities for this, living in a tent camp on Kirribilli Point close to Aborigines or going there on excursions – their initial negative attitude gave way to the image of a kind and friendly community well-adapted to its life style. Russians, probably more easily than other Europeans, were inclined to enrich the image of the 'primitive native' and adopt a specifically Russian and compassionate attitude towards their 'younger brother'. It was not surprising that the Russians, when discussing the conflict between Aborigines and settlers, took the side of the former. In fact, the atrocities which the Aborigines experienced at the hands of the colonists were the only point of criticism of the Russian visitors when writing about Australian life.

In 1820 Ivan Simonov, the astronomer aboard the *Vostok*, reflected on two dance parties – one a ball in Sydney in honour of the Russian visitors, and the other an Aboriginal corroboree not far from his tent on Kirribilli Point:

I ... walked up on the cliff by which our tents were standing. I looked now at the distant lights of the town of Sydney, now at the woods, where I had lately seen the darkness of half-demons and their wild amusements. ... It seemed to me that the mouth of the little Parramatta River separated two quite distant planets.
[Simonov n.d.: 153]

The other planet – the personification of progress and civilisation – was the infant British colony. While in those years, for people in the United Kingdom, Botany Bay and Van Diemen's Land were synonyms for disgrace and dishonour, the attitudes of the Russians towards the colony's achievements were almost invariably approving or even rhapsodic. Their sympathies had their roots not only in the real achievements of the colonies but also in the shortcomings of the political and socio-economic situation in Russia itself. Against that

background, even life in a penal colony at world's end could seem a paradise. Such attitudes were already entrenched on the eve of the *Neva's* maiden voyage to Australia in 1807, under the command of Leonty Gagemeister (Hagemeister). The leader of Russia's first circumnavigation of the globe in 1803-6, Senior-Lieutenant Ivan Kruzenshtern, was of the opinion: 'The great distance ought not, however, to be adduced as an excuse for leaving Kamtschatka in this miserable condition ... Port Jackson, which requires a voyage of at least five months from England, has, notwithstanding its great distance from the mother country, risen in the space of twenty years from nothing to a most nourishing colony' (Krusenstern 1813: 219-20). Nikolay Rezanov, inspecting Russian-American colonies, conceived a plan of convict colonisation similar to that in Botany Bay, arguing that in the British colony, 'The state on the one hand gets rid of pernicious "elements", but on the other hand benefits from them and establishes towns by the work of their hands' (Avdyukov 1995: 295). Visiting the colony, Russians admired the straight, wide and clean streets, beautiful public buildings, 'comparable with the finest in England', and private houses built of stone with front gardens (Unkovsky 2004: 91). Russians felt that here the ideal of the English way of life was realised to a higher degree than in Britain itself, and that the reasons for this lay in the absence of a highly stratified society, and in opportunities for a decent life style for people of different social backgrounds.

Penal servitude and transportation, and especially the colonisation of new territories by means of these institutions, have played an important role in the history of both Australia and Russia. Russians were interested in the Australian experience from the early days and exhibited a peculiar attitude to it. Their general conclusion was unanimous:

Every person deported for crime lives better here than the common people in England. Under strict guard, having no need for anything, he has become a good and useful citizen. Only a few, on the expiration of their term of exile, decide to return to the homeland. On the contrary, each wants to end his life at the place where he has found prosperity and sweet tranquillity. [Rossiisky 1820 (12): 252]

In Russian eyes, the conditions which the convicts enjoyed looked very favourable. The Russians dwelt on the humane side of Australian transportation. They emphasised that the main goal of colonial administration was not only the isolation of criminals, but their reform. As early as 1807 Gagemeister remarked that the work of the released convicts was so well paid that many of them made a fortune.

In contrast to the political reality at home, the Russians saw the role of the colonial authorities in a similarly favourable light, approving even the absolute power of the governor if he was a humane and wise autocrat. For instance the future Decembrist, Dmitry Zavalishin, after visiting Tasmania in 1823, wrote: 'Now I understand the success of the colonization and development of those parts, where the authority neither stifles nor exploits, but protects and co-operates, where people work sensibly ... where education and culture can live alongside the roughest and heaviest work' (Zavalishin 1877: 45).

In the following decades the general attitude was similarly enthusiastic. Alexander Herzen, one of the first Russian socialists, who lived in London from 1852 and often criticised the faults of the old regime in Europe, extolled the Australian experiment, where 'civic life is forming in a quite different way' (*Polyarnaya zvezda* 1966: 302). The Russian visitors of the second half of the 19th century might be critical of 'paper' colonisation in Western and South Australia based on the Wakefield system (the systematic sale of small tracts of land to settlers), but when the Russians discussed Victoria which, they believed, was based on the real labour of individuals, the tone of their writings changed completely and resembled the rosy views of Sydney at the beginning of the century. Admiral Andrey Popov considered that 'the fabulous success' achieved by the Australian colonies was facilitated by 'the government's thoughtfulness' and admired 'the judicious way of developing this land'. He believed that here the colonists would establish 'a Fatherland of their own', obviously contrasting it with the more haphazard ways of Russian colonisation: 'Melbourne has existed no more than twenty years and already the bare ground which

it occupies is covered with gardens and parks ... Any comparison [with Russia] in this respect is extremely disadvantageous' (Popov 1863: 35-9).

The success of individual farming and private ownership of land in Australia proved, according to Nikolay Kryukov, an official from the Department of Agriculture, who visited Australia with a special mission in 1902-3, the necessity for the destruction of the Russian commune system and redistribution of property to those who would like to work on their own land. He argued:

The success of the Australian economy is based not on the favourable physical conditions of the country ... but on the organization of the human society; all successes of agriculture in Australia are due to the labour of its solid, educated and patriotic population ... In Australia a farmer working on his own land with the members of his family is the salt of the earth. [Kryukov 1906: 620-1]

He considered that emulating the 'Australian way' would bring prosperity to Russia. Kryukov's ideas, reinforced by his Australian impressions, could possibly have influenced Premier Peter Stolypin's agrarian reforms, which began in the early 1900s. The reforms aimed to encourage Russian peasants to leave the communes and to become individual proprietors, implementing improved farming methods.

Since the 1890s, historians, sociologists, specialists in law and legislation, journalists of different persuasions, translators and popularisers had brought abundant information about social developments in Australia to Russian readers. For instance Leo Tolstoy, who claimed a deep interest in Australia, wrote in a draft letter to the Australian socialist Samuel Albert Rosa in 1895: 'Your country has the most favourable conditions for establishing a way of life free from the sins of the Old World, a truly Christian, fraternal order' (Tolstoy 1928-58, vol. 68-69: 111-12). It is significant that the two peaks in the numbers of Russian publications on Australia occurred after the two Russian revolutions of 1905 and March 1917. During these years Russian society looked for the best options for social reform, and perceived the Australian experience as an ideal

model. The main figure in this quest was Pavel Mizhnev, a historian, sociologist and writer. He discussed Australian issues in at least five books, the most famous among them being *Lucky Australia*.

The Russian liberal writers saw the Australian political system as the foundation stone of Australian democracy. The Russians were interested in the practical advantages that democracy brought, particularly in relation to labour legislation and conditions, and claimed that Australia was the freest, most democratic and enlightened country in the world, where just social relations satisfied the material and spiritual needs of the whole population. The contrast with Russian conditions invariably struck these writers. K. Nevsky wrote: 'If our worker lives in accommodation attached to a factory, it is not a flat but a bug-house, a prison-cell; if he has his own flat it is a wretched hovel on the outskirts of the city ... In Australia it is quite different'. The Russians' general conclusion was that workers in Australia had reached 'a high general standard of living' (Konstantin Kuznetsov) and even 'enjoyed creature comforts inaccessible to some of the middle class in Europe and especially in Russia' (Mizhnev). Nevsky claimed that if one compared the living and working conditions of Russian and Australian workers, one 'would involuntarily exclaim: we have hell, they have paradise'. They believed that Australia 'enacted political and social reforms which were only discussed in other countries including England itself' and 'laid the foundations for a just social organization of the future'. They argued that here 'the demands of the socialists of all the world are fulfilled already ... and thus we can see that socialism is not only a dream or a fairy-tale' but the real future of all the world. And all Russian writers agreed that Australia was the 'luckiest country' in the world (Mizhnev 1909: 197-227; Nevsky 1917: 6-15; Kuznetsov 1917: 13-14; Piotrovsky 1917: 4, 28-9).

Another field of Russian interest was Australian social behaviour. Egalitarianism, respect for the lower classes, and self-respect among all classes were the features that increasingly caught the attention of Russian visitors and writers, obviously because these were features different from their own experience and, in Russian eyes, distinguishing marks of Australian and British society.

Such enthusiasm was resisted by radical writers and increasingly by Russian émigrés. The former could not accept this rosy view because the Australian way denied the dogma of the class struggle, the latter because of the difficult conditions they suffered as unqualified foreign labourers, and by anti-Russian sentiments that were aggravated during World War I.

Perceptions did play an important role in the surge of Russian immigration to Australia during 1909-14. They played a part before that, too. Suffice to recall Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay's plan for a utopian Russian colony in the South Pacific, which Russian newspapers termed 'Russian colonization in *Australia*'; it provoked an enormous response from those who might be called romantic democrats. (See A. Massov, 'N.N. Miklouho-Maclay in Australia', in this volume.) The situation in the early 1910s was quite different. The attractive image of Australia had spread among ordinary Russian people, especially in Siberia and the Far East; it was created by the letters of the first successful Russian settlers to their relatives and friends, reports in the press, and by the tireless propaganda of emigration agents. Characteristically, the official warnings against this exodus had the opposite psychological effect on potential emigrants suspicious of everything that came from the authorities. 'They write it to discourage us from going there', the Russian workers and peasants concluded, and left in growing numbers for Australia, Hawaii and the USA (Puk 1910). The mood was very similar to that in Soviet society in the 1970s!

Nikolay Blinov, a peasant, remembered how in 1914, in the company of dozens of other Russians in the Dairen emigration bureau, he read the collection of glowing 'letters of emigrants from Tsarist Russia who lived in Australia. And we left, persuaded that soon we would meet our compatriots in the country of freedom and sun, where it is always green and there is no winter' (Blinov 1933: 6). This image fitted well the popular Russian utopian belief in the existence of a faraway land where each peasant could obtain free as much land as he needed and enjoy justice and freedom from oppression. To counter this idea, journalists warned that 'land is not given free and one has either to buy it or to take it on lease'

(Marakuev 1913: 406-7). The Bolshevik Artem wrote that, when he left for Australia, he had 'only the haziest idea' about it:

My only notion of Australia as a free country, the most democratic in the world, was based on a book by P. Mizhnev, *Progressive Democracy*. That aside, my head was filled with the most astonishing stories about that distant land. I had heard that Australia was a 'workers' paradise, a country governed by God himself, the luckiest of countries, an ideal of democracy' etc, etc. [Windle 2004b: 164-5]

Thousands of Russian émigrés scattered throughout the country could verify by their own experience the enthusiastic appraisals of liberal armchair writers. Some of them, and especially intellectuals, at first evaluated the conditions positively. Nicholas Illin, farming on the Atherton Tablelands in northern Queensland, wrote to a popular St Petersburg newspaper that colonisation in Australia 'is built on principles that have nothing in common not only with our primordially Russian ones but also with the foreign, European and American ones'. By these 'principles' he obviously meant progressive social and economic legislation. He asserted that 'life here, given the wages, is not expensive ... A worker in general enjoys the same comfort as a Russian intellectual on an average income'. The intellectual Konstantin Vladimirov enthused: 'No poverty exists anywhere in Australia. Everyone is "Mister"; that is a common title'. Even Artem at first wrote with enthusiasm: 'This is one of the best countries for a worker' (Illin, N. 1912; Vladimirov 1912: 61; Artem 1983: 83).

However, the émigrés' appraisals of the workers' conditions changed quite dramatically as soon they considered their own situation. Even during the pre-war economic boom when, according to Leandro Illin, 'a fellow could leave a job and pick up another 10 chains away on the same day' (Illin, L. 1937), Russians found much to criticise, for example the punishing work practices (as they saw them), unknown in Russia. The Australians' attitudes to newcomers, ranging from suspicious curiosity to xenophobic prejudices, contributed to a feeling of alienation. '[Australian] workers treated

us with distrust and semi-hostility. The upper class looked down on us as an inferior race. And we felt like hunted wolves in an unknown forest', the Russian newspaper *Echo of Australia* wrote (25 July 1912).

Unlike middle class visitors and liberal writers, some émigrés saw Australian society as xenophobic, individualistic, formalistic, lacking compassion and even as having deep class divisions. The Russian peasant P. Pavlenkov lamented in 1909, 'If someone appears dressed untidily (because of his poverty) all doors will be locked against him ... They turn away from you if you do not know the language, regarding you as a person of a lower race'. Nevertheless, after an initial period of adjustment, some of the Russians were able to appreciate Australian values. N. Kalashnikov, a Russian émigré who spent three years in Australia and New Zealand, disagreed with Pavlenkov. He said that although people may actually judge you first according to your clothes, Australian workers had every opportunity to dress well and tidily if they were not drunk or lazy. Moreover, he enjoyed a system where 'all offices and institutions were for the public, not the other way round ... and would provide fast and exact answers without any bribes' (Pavlenkov 1910; Kalashnikov 1910).

Russian intellectual radicals suffocated in the Australian atmosphere of 'wholesale satiety', as Nicholas Illin put it. Artem reflected, 'It is rather hard for me, a Russian, to live here. Everything here is too simple, too elementary. We have intellectual demands which cannot be satisfied here'. Radicals did not see any value to be gained by assimilation into Australian society. The Socialist Revolutionary and former Russian political prisoner, Hermann Bykoff (Rezanoff), argued: 'Horse races, the silliest "pictures", bars and penny dreadfuls with bright flashy covers, boxing – these were the psychological results of acclimatisation, inevitably leading to individualisation of life, to escapism from the communal ... Russian lifestyle with its heated arguments about "how things ought to be" '. (Illin, N. 1913; Artem 1983: 87-8, 94; Bykoff [1919]: 3).

The rapid deterioration of the Russian émigrés' economic, political and psychological situation during the war, and especially

after the Bolshevik Revolution, contributed greatly to their increasingly negative attitude towards Australia. Bykoff portrayed the psychological aspect of this disillusionment: ‘“Here’s freedom for you!” – a cry escapes a man ... And as before we were fascinated, now we begin hastily to condemn “democratic” countries, which have not lived up to our bookish ideas of them and dispelled the illusions implanted by those who sang the praises of this foreign El Dorado ... Eden has turned out to be a Hell’ (Bykoff [1919]: 2).

The short-lived romance of Russians with the Australian ‘workers’ paradise’ seemed to confirm Bolshevik views of Australia as an undemocratic, petty bourgeois country with an ‘under-developed’ working class, dominated by nationalistic, xenophobic sentiments instead of internationalist class solidarity. As the Australian phenomenon did not fit the Marxist dogma of class struggle, it was a stumbling block for Russian Marxists, theoreticians and practical workers alike. Lenin argued:

Those Liberals in Europe and in Russia who try to ‘teach’ the people that class struggle is unnecessary by citing the example of Australia, only deceive themselves and others. It is ridiculous to think of transplanting Australian conditions (an undeveloped, young country, populated by liberal British workers) to countries where the state is long established and capitalism well developed.

He considered that in Australasia ‘the imperialist bourgeoisie is buying the workers by social reforms’ (Lenin, vol. 19: 217; vol. 39: 533). Artem’s own opinion, based on his practical involvement in Australian politics, was similar: ‘The workers here are not socialists ... All they want is to be elected to parliament, to become a majority and then there will be no strikes, no unemployment and Australia will become a true Christian country’ (Artem 1983: 102-3). That was not the Marxist way!

After the revolution, full of hope, and suffering from xenophobia in Australia, hundreds of Russians left the ‘Australian hell’. Back in Russia, however, many soon became disillusioned and began to see Australia as ‘paradise lost’. John Paul Gray, a former secretary of the Union of Russian Workers, wrote to Australia in 1918 after repatriation: ‘I am quite sick with ... Russian affairs and am anxious

to return to our sunny Queensland' (quoted in Evans 1992: 136).

By the 1920s direct immigration to Australia from the Soviet Union had practically ceased. From now on Russian perceptions of Australia were to take two different forms – by those locked behind the borders of the USSR and by Russian émigrés who reached Australia by emigrating from China and, after World War II, as Displaced Persons (DPs) from Europe.

The first 'White Russians' from China came to Australia in the early 1920s (see G. Kanevskaya in this volume). Nina Maximova (Maksimoff), a schoolgirl at that time, remembers: 'Our knowledge of Australia was limited, but our geography teacher was most enthusiastic about its advanced social legislation, its democratic institutions, its flora and fauna'. Her father, Mikhail Maximov (Maksimoff), a captain in the Russian merchant navy and devoted monarchist, had some reservations: 'I remember how I was warned in Harbin: "You are going to Australia, but they have a labour government there. They have communists there. They won't give any job to White Russians, they'll eat you alive'. That turned out to be the least of his concerns and, although his impressions of Australian society on arrival were quite favourable, soon he and other new arrivals despaired of finding work. Captain Maximoff expected that their sojourn in Australia would be brief, and he and his generation of émigrés hardly became involved at all in Australian life. His daughter Nina, on the other hand, while treasuring her Russian heritage, accepted Australia as her own country (Grimshaw and Strahan 1982: 63; Maksimov 1925).

As a rule, the image of Australia was not of much importance for Russian refugees arriving between the wars and for those coming after the war, both from China and as Displaced Persons from Europe. For them resettlement was simply a matter of survival. But Australia still had its appeal. For instance Yuri Domansky, a DP in Europe, made his choice within minutes before his interview with migration officials:

There were two doors. One had 'Canadian consul' on it, the other 'Australian consul'. There were posters next to the doors – the Canadians had snow, ice, forest covered with snow, icy cold river

with floating logs, bears and moose. Next to it was Australia, with sun, beaches, lemonade, swimming suits and sun, sun, and more sun. My wife and I decided in one voice – we go to Australia. [Melnikova 2004: 146]

Anatoly Karel put forward another motive: ‘Australia is a young country. They need people there, so we’ll be useful there too. And after all we were sick of living on charity’ (Melnikova 2004: 142). For those coming from China the determining factor of choice was the presence of relatives and friends in Australia (Melnikova 2004: 156, 161). The Australian Russian writer Lydia Yastrebova (Yastreboff), who came to Australia from China in 1957, succinctly captured the appeal of Australia in her novels: Senia, living in Sydney in 1953, invites his friend to emigrate from China with the words – ‘Come here, my friend! There aren’t many Russians here and it’s so lonely, but there’s plenty of grub and the pay’s good’ (Yastrebova 1999: 53).

First impressions were often unfavourable. On her first evening at the Bonegilla camp (near Albany, Victoria), looking out at the countryside, Lydia Karel exclaimed, ‘If it weren’t for the sea I’d walk back to Europe’. It was many years before she could call Australia home (Melnikova 2004: 145). According to Natalia Melnikova (Melnikoff), who came to Australia from China when she was eighteen, ‘Australia in the late 1950s seemed to be to us a quite alien country and culturally dull and backward’. The barrier was not easy to cross and although they had no hopes of returning to a Russia liberated from Bolshevism, as Captain Maximov’s generation had, they were in no hurry to accept Australia as their home. Their hearts belonged to Russia. Melnikova graphically describes these attitudes: ‘Russians adjusted to Australia ‘on their feet’, never bending, never giving up, never sitting idle, and they achieved prosperity and built their Russia in this country, invariably following their faith, ideals and customs’ (Melnikova 2004: 211, 212). They perceived Australian society as part of materialistic Western culture in contrast to the Russian spiritual world of their memories. For instance Archpriest Illarion, in his introduction to the *History of Russians in Australia*, wrote:

Alas, many people born abroad, due to different circumstances, have completely assimilated and joined the cultural and national life of the country where their fate has brought them. They entirely immersed themselves in material wellbeing of that country forgetting their roots and language, losing touch with Russian society. Often this is a symptom of a spiritual malady because these people accepted the way of life and mentality of a society which as a whole is indifferent to spirituality. [Quoted in Melnikova 2004: 3]

Official Soviet attitudes to Australia also underwent a transformation. When Australia demonstrated that it was not the weakest link of capitalism (Windle 2004a) and apparently immune to socialist revolution, direct contacts between Australia and the USSR were severed, it was marginalised in Soviet publications. Occasional reports about the workers' struggle and translations of Katharine Susannah Prichard's novels were almost all that appeared in the USSR until the mid-1950s. But nevertheless Australia found its way into Russian hearts. The film *Captain Grant's Children*, made in 1936 and based on Jules Verne's novel, was one of the few that told Russians about the attractive world beyond the closed Soviet borders. It was followed by the more intimate, but no less telling novel, *The Dingo: A Story of First Love* (1939), by Ruvim Fraerman, which was made into a film in 1962. Fraerman did not write anything about Australia in it, but the heroine of the story, a problem teenager named Tania, who lived in a god-forsaken township in Siberia, dared to dream about a strange faraway land where dingoes roamed. It was a far cry from 'Australia the working man's paradise', the image which was so popular just two decades before the book was written, but even this reverie was enough to open a mental avenue to a world beyond Stalinist propaganda and terror.

The only Australian subject that was allowed in the Stalinist press was criticism of Australian treatment of its indigenous peoples. It reached its apotheosis in Andrei Vyshinsky's defence of the Australian Aborigines at the United Nations General Assembly during the time of the Cold War. Ordinary Soviet people considered Vyshinsky, the main prosecutor at Stalin's show trials of the 1930s,

as a personification of hypocritical brutality. Still, propaganda touching upon racial equality had its positive effect on the Russian population at large. Russians, although possessing some prejudices towards their neighbours, did sincerely sympathise with indigenous peoples abroad. Australian Aborigines were little known and thus most attractive. The tradition was set in 1928 when the Russian writer Nikolay Moguchy wrote a novel about the heroic resistance of the Aborigines to the 'white invasion'. In the following decades Soviet journalists, writers and visitors to Australia produced over a hundred books and articles in which condemnation of the 'Australian colonisers' treatment of the Aborigines became a common theme. Although for some, this was just propaganda, many writers took it to heart. One such work was an unpublished cycle of poems by Galina Usova, 'The Perished Tribes'. The Aboriginal problem also became an excuse for numerous translations into Russian of Australian fiction dealing with Aborigines. As for the positive changes which had taken place in Australia in this field since the 1970s, it was suppressed as long as possible. The first to break the news was the anthropologist Vladimir Kabo. While visiting Fred Rose in Berlin in 1985, he received from him Australian newspaper cuttings concerning land claim developments; they revealed official recognition of Aborigines' spiritual ties with the land. Kabo reported this news to a surprised audience at a conference on Australia and Oceania in Moscow in 1986 (Govor 2001).

After Khrushchev's thaw, the availability of printed materials about Australia changed dramatically. Studies by Australianists in the field of history, economics, politics, culture and anthropology, Russian and foreign travel accounts, and translations of Australian fiction – these amounted to nearly 4000 articles and books during the period between the thaw and the collapse of the USSR. While the official ideology remained in force and a number of topics, such as the well-being of ordinary Australians or White émigré communities, remained out of bounds, the image of Australia was gradually fleshed out in rich detail and it would be unjust to see the Soviet image of Australia at that time merely as a construct of Soviet propaganda. Some heavy-handed propaganda still appeared,

however. For instance in the 1960s, an officer aboard Soviet merchant ships, Peter Gutsal, would describe South Brisbane thus: 'Here the working people live. There are no new houses, no palm trees, no paved roads there. Narrow, dirty streets where shabby houses stick close to one another'. On the other hand, Russian pre-revolutionary émigrés visiting the ship quite predictably complained that the Soviet sailors 'live from hand to mouth' (1972: 67, 70). In a way this sort of writing, in which ideological dogma devalues the author's account, is a parallel to that of Australian fellow-travellers visiting the USSR.

Lip-service to ideology remained *de rigueur*. For instance, Vasily Chervinsky, a professor of agriculture, whose salami was confiscated by customs officers at Sydney, believed that the officers wanted to eat it (1967: 18). The writer Rudolf Bershadsky, departing with a Soviet delegation for Australia, which ranked amongst the most attractive overseas destinations, claimed he was 'yearning already to be welcomed back ... How nice it always was to return to the motherland rather than leave her' (1967: 111). Still, the general tone of their accounts was quite favourable and informative and they occasionally allowed themselves approving comments on Australian friendliness or the beauty of Sydney harbour.

Against this ideologically correct background, the publication during the last breath of Khrushchev's reign of *A Month Down Under* by Daniil Granin, a *shestidesiatnik* (1960s) writer, was a revolutionary step. Within the limits of Soviet censorship he said what the others could not – that Australia was still a land of mystery, immensely attractive to Russians, that it was inhabited not only by members of the Australia-USSR Friendship Society and homesick Russian émigrés, but also by Australians who were similar to the Russians recovering after the Stalinist epoch. 'If something comes from above, from the authorities, it is no good. Sydneysiders cannot stand any rules and regulations', he remarked, telling about the struggle for the preservation of the Woolloomooloo neighbourhood. While writing about Australia he hinted at Russia's problems. For instance, in conversation with the Australian Russian expert Harry Rigby, Granin was amazed to discover that Australians live without

passports. They simply did not need them. 'I wonder...', Granin reflected half-jokingly, 'who invented personal questionnaires, personal files, passports' – the Soviet reader could read all the rest between the lines. Listening to the protest songs of the young Sydney bards, Granin thought of their counterparts in Russia – Bulat Okudzhava, Alexander Galich and Novella Matveeva (Granin 1966: 44, 37-9, 67).

At that time in the 1960s, the song 'Delphinia' by Novella Matveeva – 'Somewhere is the land of Delphinia and the city of Kangaroo' – reflected the other side of the Russian image of Australia, the image in the minds of those who had no hope of ever seeing it. This song does not even mention Australia by name, but not because of self-censorship. Australia is partly a symbolic entity here. In those years for many in the USSR, 'Russian Australia' was exactly that – the quintessence of a faraway, mysterious, inaccessible land which, after all, could exist only in dreams.

Mikhaylov, the hero of Alexander Khurgin's novel *The Land of Australia* (1993), is one such dreamer. A worker who has gone to seed, he has a strange cherished wish –

... to find himself one day in the Land of Australia ... But why was it Australia that came into his head, he wondered, – why? Perhaps just because it was so far away, this Land of Australia, and Mikhaylov knew nothing about it, nothing beyond a beautiful name which he remembered from high school ... Or, perhaps, it wasn't so much that he dreamt of going there; what he really wanted was to disappear from here in order not to be here ever again?

The novel was published in 1993. By that time Australia could be referred to by name but it did not change the essence of the Russian attitude; it remained a country out of reach and beyond the limits of reality itself. In a short story by Tatiana Tolstaia, 'Somnambulist in a Fog' (1988), this attitude takes a grotesque form. Denisov, an intellectual from Orekhovo-Borisovo, a working class suburb of Moscow, expresses his feeling about the senselessness of life through a manic idea, that Australia cannot really exist. And one day 'the sight of peaceful Australia goaded him to a fury. "Right!" he thought and pulled down the map from the wall and tore out the

fifth continent together with New Zealand’.

These images of Russian Australia are built from scraps, from almost nothing, but they are no less significant for the Russian mind than the images created on the basis of factual information.

The 1990s – the collapse of the Soviet system and the accessibility of the Internet – immensely facilitated Russian contacts with Australia and consequently changed the image of Russian Australia. Books, articles, films and serials, Internet publications, forums and chat-lines – all combined to create a veritable flood of information about Australia. The lifting of bans on emigration resulted in thousands of new Russian émigrés coming to Australia – mostly educated professionals and, to a lesser extent, their elderly parents; another specific group comprises ‘Russian brides’, emigrating to marry Australian men. The genre of immigrant ‘Letters from Australia’, so popular in Russian newspapers on the eve of World War I, has been revived in the form of Internet letters chronicling the impressions and attitudes of these new arrivals. One may note in passing that the products of this ephemeral medium need urgent preservation for future historians of Russian Australia. In a way Russian perceptions of Australia are now losing their specific Russian flavour, which distinguished them in the previous two centuries. The image of Australia as a tourist destination offered by Russian tourist companies, for example, mirrors Western images of Australia.

Yet these new Russian images of Australia have their own particular characteristics. In spite of prolific publications during previous decades, many Russians chose Australia as a place of immigration with very little knowledge of the country. I. Dubrovskaja, for example, mentions that Australia claimed a place in her life when, on the way to the Canadian Embassy in Moscow, her son stumbled on a queue of potential immigrants outside the Australian Embassy. Australian consular officials were the first to give them a visa (Melnikova 2004: 165). Many simply saw Australia as a developed Western country with added exotic elements, like kangaroos and koalas. The accounts of many new émigrés suggest that initial euphoric attitudes are soon replaced

with quite critical ones. Coming from the new Russia, émigrés often see Australia as a provincial country which lacks advanced goods already available in Russia, while the casual dress of Australians is sometimes attributed to poverty. It is not surprising that hard-working Russian professionals are rather sceptical of Australian social justice 'Australia is a country of developed socialism. The rich are being plucked like chickens here' ('Julia and Victor', <http://letters.synnegoria.com/uvpism.html>. See links to other Russian accounts on <http://letters.synnegoria.com> and <http://www.australia.ru/>. The attitude from another quarter, from their parents, is quite different. An elderly man, met by a Russian journalist,

enthusiastically reported that he 'began to believe in God when he came here because 'This is such a country...' He was not afraid of the police; they were polite; government offices processed papers quickly and without any bribes; the laws were obeyed; and he added, as his last trump: 'Before I could afford to buy one banana on my pension; here I can buy them every day'. [Pustovoitova 2005]

While their predecessors were torn between assimilation and the recreation of their Russia in Australia, the latest émigré wave, in spite of all its pragmatism, exhibits a new trend. Some of them, remaining Russian, aspire to adopt Australia as their own country, and take a deep interest in Australian history, society, literature and nature. Characteristically, a chapter in *The Road to Australia* by the anthropologist Vladimir Kabo was entitled 'My Australia'. An almanac with the same title was produced by a group of enthusiasts in Sydney in 1998-99. Currently the 'Australian Mosaic', published by Tatiana Torlina, unites the champions of these new attitudes (<http://australianmosiac.narod.ru/>). Vladimir Kroupnik, a geologist from Western Australia, has built a huge website devoted to historical and military contacts between Russia and Australia (<http://www.argo.net.au/andre/>). Soon after her arrival, Natalia Golub started compiling a cross-cultural Australian-Russian dictionary and for years wrote articles about life in Australia for *Horizon* (<http://www.synnegoria.com/letters/t11.html>), a Russian-Australian newspaper. Seven-year-old Ralphie Kabo, born in Australia, wrote a Russian

ABC book based on the Australian theme, 'A – for Australia', because, he explains, 'I am sick of Russian ABC books where there is a fur coat for F and skis for S. We do not have this stuff here' (Kabo 1999).

As for the perceptions of those who stay in Russia, Australia, as before, remains an exotic faraway country, which occupies its own niche in the Russian soul. Their spiritual links with the distant land allow them to say to New Russians: 'You won't reach the Land of Delphinia, however much you pay' (Cherevchenko 2006).