

Jeff Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge: Southern Migrants in Leningrad and Moscow*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2019, pp. 273, ISBN 978151738203

'The Soviet Union set in motion peoples from all corners of the state and beyond (p. 11)' This sentence opens Jeff Sahadeo's fascinating account of Caucasian and Central Asian migration to Soviet Moscow and St Petersburg (Leningrad) between 1950s and 1990s. Based on seventy oral histories of students, traders, migrant workers, engineers, university professors, factory workers and homemakers from Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan, both men and women, Sahadeo writes the much-needed history, the *prequel* to contemporary labour migration into Russia's European cities. The scholarship on migration to Russia – the third largest destination for migrants globally – has moved in recent years well beyond dry facts and figures. Human stories of Central Asian migrants in Russia have a great currency among researchers. These are special kind of stories – they give the greatest prominence to individual migrant experiences, both physically and emotionally. Yet in the majority of recent scholarly publications – let me mention the works of Madeleine Reeves, Caress Schenk, Sergey Abashin, Sergey Riazantsev, Bhavna Dave, Anna-Liisa Heusalla and Kaarina Aitamurto, Rustamjon Urinboyev or even my own – these stories all start, inconspicuously sometime around the early 2000s. The Soviet Union as 'a society on the move' (p. 198) receives a polite nod, a mention, but not an in-depth attention. The super-important and much needed monograph by Jeff Sahadeo fills in this void with meticulously gathered and reflexively analysed first-hand accounts of those migrants who ventured from the edges of the Soviet Union to its global cities (p. 12), supplemented by a careful research of Russian state archives and available statistical material.

This book – all seven chapters – deserves attention of all area studies scholars interested in the everyday experiences of migratory movements, adaptation, belonging, networks, social capital and specific forms of transnationalism ('in one country', Siegelbaum and Moch, 2016) in the late Soviet Union. However, Sahadeo's monograph is also hugely important at the theoretical level to the interdisciplinary scholars of migration. It provides a unique account of the dynamics of migratory movement through the focus on the pioneers of migration: those first migrants – men and women – who left their localities of origin and set in motion networks, diaspora organizations, and served as example for others to follow in their footsteps. The available theory has long struggled with the question what makes migration start. Why do some initial movements tail off and stagnate while others set in motion profound migration networks? Who are the pioneer migrants? To what extent do they determine the shape and scope of future migration? Given the complex and contextual nature of migration as a global phenomenon, one answer will never satisfy everyone. However, Jeff Sahadeo's book addresses these questions perfectly in the context of post-Soviet migration system. It demonstrates the subtle links between migration and development, challenging the oft-assumed position by policymakers and practitioners alike that more development leads to less migration. Sahadeo turns this statement on its head and demonstrates that development through increased living standards and demonstration effects initially leads to more, not less migration.

This thesis comes across most clearly in Chapter 1, which situates Moscow and Leningrad as Soviet global cities and historically analyses the different processes of development, industrialisation and urbanization of the Soviet Union in the post-Second World War era. Chapter 2 interrogates the sentiment and emotions as ideological and cultural determinants of movement. It focuses on the old propaganda slogan 'Friendship of Nations' – now cynically devoid of any meaning. The chapter

revives it by infusing it with real-life experiences, memories and understanding of Soviet migrants *and* Soviet citizens. Wistfulness does not give way to a blind nostalgia, as Sahadeo's interviewees keep the narrative in place by astute comments comparing the friendship to that 'of Robinson [Crusoe] and Friday' (p. 59). Chapter 3 focuses on place making practices, ambivalent welcome, and settling in. It tells the story of new beginnings, gender relations, cultural adaptations in spaces that officially lacked any form of social or ethnic segregation, but deep down were perfectly segregated (p. 91). Chapter 4 reveals how a Western concept of 'race' will not do to explain the intersectionality of subordination experienced by 'Southern' migrants, and how ethnicity, nationality, social class, gender and social position help to reevaluate and open up the discourse of Russian 'racism'. Chapter 5 demonstrates the different forms, modalities and experiences of belonging in Soviet Moscow and St Petersburg and becoming *svoi* via personal networks or work collectives. Chapter 6 reviews the organizing analytical themes of the book – the journey, early adaptation, social mobility, links with home – through the lens of personal stories of four different traders, while Chapter 7 gives a migrant perspective to the turbulent years of perestroika, rising ethnic and linguistic tensions fuelled by extremist politics, volatile economics and bewildering legislation. Sahadeo's excellent book firmly situates late Soviet migration as an intrinsic part of global change and development.

by Agnieszka Kubal

School of Slavonic and East European Studies

University College London