Russian Emigration to Norway after the Russian Revolution and Civil War

Victoria V. Tevlina (*UiT The Arctic University of Norway;
Northern [Arctic] Federal University, Arkhangelsk*)

Russian people emigrating to Norway and, indeed, other countries, too, is a fairly typical phenomenon that can be observed throughout the twentieth century as a consequence of socioeconomic, political, and cultural upheavals in their homeland. Norway has been Russia's neighbor in the North since time immemorial, but has only had an officially established border, almost two hundred km in length, since 1826. This means that Norway and Russia are neighbors of several centuries' standing.¹ This article deals with Russian emigration to Norway, which to a great extent went across this northern boundary between the two countries—but not just the northern boundary. The analysis of each of the three major and minor waves of emigration by Russians to Norway over nearly a hundred years is an important task, but not a simple one. Russian emigration to Norway fits into the broader picture of the Russian diaspora, and is a branch of the larger Russian migration to Scandinavia in general. This particular branch has been studied, but far from sufficiently.²

In essence, the three waves of emigration to Norway coincide, more or less, with the three periods of development of the Russian state: pre-revolutionary (1900–1917); Soviet (1917–1991); and post-Soviet Russia (beginning of

1 Konstantin Zaikov and Jens Petter Nielsen, "Mot en ny grense. Traktaten av 1826," in *Russland kommer nærmere. Norge og Russland 1814–1917*, ed. Jens Petter Nielsen (Oslo: Pax Forlag AS, 2014), 58–59.

2 See Bjørg Morken, *Kvite russiske emigranter i Norge. Master thesis in history* (Oslo: The University of Oslo, 1984); Vladislav I. Goldin, Tatiana P. Teterevleva, and Nikolai N. Tsvetnov, "Russkaia emigratsiia v Norvegii (1918–1940)," in *Strakh i ozhidaniia. Rossiia i Norvegii v XX veke*, ed. Vladislav I. Goldin and Jens Petter Nielsen (Arkhangelsk: Izdatel'stvo Pomorskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 1997); Aleksandr M. Kadakin (ed.), *Russkie v Skandinavii: Daniia, Norvegiia, Shvetsiia [Pravitel'stvennaia komissiia po delam sootchestvennikov za rubezhom]* (Tallin: Avelista OU, 2008).

1990s until today).³ In the present article, however, we are going to concentrate on the first wave that took place immediately after the turbulent events of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the civil war that followed. It was during this time that Norway, and its northern region in particular, first encountered the problem of accepting a large number of emigrants from Russia. In actual fact, it was Norway's first refugee problem.

A wide range of people arrived, most of them with their families—including people from categories that had earlier never shown any propensity for leaving their own country:

1. Representatives from commercial and industrial circles who wanted to leave after the troops from the Entente countries had evacuated from Arkhangelsk and Murmansk in September 1919 (see Vladislav Goldin's article in this book);
2. Officers, government officials of the Russian Northern province, and military commanders from the Northern Front who left Arkhangelsk on the icebreaker *Kozma Minin* on 1 February 1920;
3. Fishermen and tradesmen from the White Sea area who had had close trade links with Norway from before the Russian Revolution;
4. Norwegians who for a long period had lived and worked in Russia and had become familiar with the culture, had learnt the language and even taken Russian citizenship. For example, among this category of emigrants were the owners of sawmills in Arkhangelsk and Onega and their workers;
5. Scientists, people from the arts community, and social activists from different political parties and cities across the country (particularly from northern towns).⁴

In the late 1930s, another group of migrants were those who had left Russia after 1917 for Turkey and the Balkans. Because these countries were unable to cope with the large influx of refugees from Russia in the long run, people were later sent to other countries, and some of them were accepted by Norway.

3 As for the post-Soviet Russian emigration to Norway, see Victoria V. Tevlina, *From Russia to Norway and to its North. Real and Potential Migration: Children, Adults, Families* (Arkhangelsk: Pravda Severa, 2015).

4 See Tatyana P. Teterevleva, "Russkie emigranty v Norvegii (1917–1930 gg.)," in *Rossii-Norvegiia. Skvoz veka i granitsy*, ed. Daniela Büchten, Tatiana Jackson, Jens Petter Nielsen (Moscow: Khudozhnik i kniga, 2004), 183–184; Sven G. Holtsmark (ed.), *Naboer i frykt og forventning. Norge og Russland 1917–2014* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2015), 198–203.

The majority of the Russian emigrants who arrived in the first years after the revolution took up residence in and around Kristiania (present-day Oslo), the Norwegian capital, while only a small fraction settled in the north of Norway. After the Second World War, groups of Russian emigrants who had lived for many years in China and Yugoslavia, but for political reasons could not stay there, also received permission from Norway and other countries to settle. In total, approximately 700 former Russian citizens, who had initially left Russia due to the Bolshevik Revolution, settled permanently in Norway.

Of course, this number seems insignificant if one considers that after the 1917 Revolution approximately 700,000 people left Russia for various countries around the world.⁵ That means that only one in a thousand Russian emigrants settled in Norway, despite the fact that Russia and Norway shared a common border. The largest group that came to Norway consisted of those who evacuated from Arkhangelsk on board the *Kozma Minin*, a voyage which has been called “one of the most bizarre episodes in Arctic marine history.”⁶ This group included the entire government of the Russian Northern province, many officers, and other people who had tied their fate to the White cause. Altogether, around 1,000 individuals were aboard the ship, and approximately 300 of them were women and children.

Only one tenth of them came to stay in Norway on a permanent basis. A few went back to Russia, but most of the people on board the icebreaker continued southwards in Europe, either immediately after arriving in Norway or after a period of internment. They headed to the large centers of Russian emigration— Berlin, Prague, and Paris—which soon became the capitals of Russian emigration. France was particularly attractive, since this was the only large country in Europe with a real shortfall in labor supply.⁷

It seems reasonable to expect that many more refugees from Russia would have chosen to settle in Norway, especially in northern Norway, which had long-established trade links with the White Sea area and Arkhangelsk. This was the so-called Pomor trade, which essentially took the form of the barter of Russian grain, flour, and forest products for Norwegian fish. In all, 300–400 Pomor vessels, and several thousand sailors and traders, visited the coast of Finnmark, the northernmost county of Norway, to barter with the

5 Katrin Guseff, *Russkaia emigratsiia vo Frantsii. Sotsial'naia istoriia (1920–1939)* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2014), 62–63.

6 William Barr, “General Miller’s flight from Arkhangel’sk, February 1920,” in *Polar Record* 20 (1980): 119–125.

7 Guseff, *Russkaia emigratsiia vo Frantsii*, 103–124.

local population in the summer. We know that between 1860 and the First World War, many Norwegians—maybe as many as 1,000—established themselves or tried to establish themselves on the Russian Murman coast bordering Norway. However, the Russian Pomors—that is, the native population in the White Sea area—showed no inclination to settle in Norway, even if they had a good opportunity to do so because of the Pomor trade. Very few Pomors decided to “defect” from Russia to Norway during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries.

Characteristically, after the Russian Revolution, fewer than fifty Pomors settled as emigrants in Finnmark. Only one or two Russians established themselves in the largest fishing villages, and we never saw a Russian “colony” in northern Norway to compare with the size of the Norwegian settlement on the Murman coast.⁸ Part of the explanation for this could be that the Pomors, who had earlier engaged in the trade with northern Norway, belonged to a stratum of the population that was apolitical: sailors, peasants, and peasant traders. They were probably less affected by the revolution than those who came to Norway on board the *Kozma Minin*. However, many Russian Sami living in the border zone (Skolt Sami) had to seek refuge on the Norwegian side of the border in 1918, due to the war which was underway in the Pechenga (Petsamo) area. A group of Finnish activists were trying to take control over this part of Russia.⁹ The Skolts, who were Russian Orthodox believers, later returned to their homeland.¹⁰

One reason for the fact that rather few Russian fugitives chose to settle in Norway was that the Norwegian authorities followed fairly strict rules for accepting emigrants, and one of the regulations was that emigrants were not allowed to live in Oslo or the vicinity. Obviously, it was not too tempting to move to Norway, which is evident from the fact that out of 200 Russians that the Norwegian government was ready to receive from Finland in 1919, only one family used this opportunity. On the other hand, the regulations were maintained somewhat flexibly by the Norwegian authorities. The prohibition against settling in Oslo and its neighboring municipalities were not enforced in

8 Nielsen, *Russland kommer nærmere*, 219–253.

9 From 1920, Petsamo became part of the new, independent Finland and remained so until 1944.

10 Marianne Neerland Soleim, “Russian emigration from Murmansk to Varanger before and after the revolution (1800–1920),” in *Rossii. Murman. 1917: Materialy Vserossiiskoi nauchnoi konferentsii s mezhdunarodnym uchastiem (7–8 noiabria 2017 g.)*, ed. Julia P. Bardileva and Maria B. Ilicheva (Krasnoarsk: “Nauchno-innovatsionnyi tsentr,” 2018), 162.

practice, and more than half of Russian emigrants took up residence there. Not a single Russian was returned to Russia by the Norwegian authorities.¹¹

Despite their small numbers, Russians in Norway tried to maintain their cultural community, to retain their traditions, and to acquaint Norwegians with Russian culture. A few months after their arrival, in April 1920, there were ecstatic reviews in the Norwegian newspapers about a concert that had been given by Russian refugees in Kristiania: "It is impressive that among the Russians there are so many people with good voices and an artistic education," stated one newspaper in the capital, adding that the concert bore witness to the intensity and freshness of current musical life in Russia.¹² Almost straight after the concert, the Russian émigré musician, Boris Borisov (Hoffmann), established the subsequently highly acclaimed Norwegian Balalaika Orchestra, which came to consist predominantly of Norwegian musicians who were fascinated by the Russian instrument. Spectacular concerts became an almost annual occurrence in Oslo. For example, a program from a concert in 1927 shows how a touring émigré Cossack choir performed with Issay Dobrowen, a famous Russian composer and musician who was living in Norway.¹³

Almost immediately after arriving in their new country, Russians established organizations that would keep them connected with one another. In 1919, *Russkoe sodruzhestvo* (Russian Fellowship) was founded, principally a closed club for former high-ranking "White" officers and people who had previously worked in the Russian diplomatic mission in Kristiania. As time passed, the organization started to accept other members of lower military rank.¹⁴

In 1927, another organization was set up, *Russkii emigrantskii kruzhok v Norvegii* (Russian Émigré Circle), which gathered emigrants from a broad range of political and social strata. The circle aimed to improve the material conditions of Russians in Norway, look for worthy employment for them, and strengthen the national feelings of the emigrant community through cultural education. The Russian Émigré Circle had its own letterhead with the name of the club in Russian and Norwegian, and the date when it was established. Members of the circle were Russians, but there were also some Norwegians with a Russian background and who spoke Russian. The group had its meetings in the building of the Chamber of Commerce in Oslo, St. Olavsgate 27. Regular "Russian Talks" organized by

11 Morken, *Kvite russiske emigranter i Norge*, 149.

12 GARF (State Archive of the Russian Federation), F. 5867, Op. 1, D. 105, L. 1, 13–14.

13 National Library in Oslo, Private Archives, F. 4199:16; Goldin, Teterevleva, Tsvetnov, "Russkie emigranty v Norvegii (1917–1930 gg.)," 184.

14 Morken, *Kvite russiske emigranter i Norge*, 215–216.

this circle became well-known events in Kristiania, with discussions about history, culture, and political life in Russia. The main organizer of these talks was Valerii Carrick, possibly the most outstanding representative of post-revolutionary emigration in Norway.¹⁵ The Russian Emigré Circle dissolved in 1940, when Norway was occupied by the German forces. The reason for its dissolution was disagreement among the members about Nazism and diverging attitudes towards the German occupation.¹⁶

Carrick was one of the few Russian intellectuals who settled in Norway after the revolution. Even before 1917, he was renowned in Russia as a caricaturist, writer, illustrator, and publisher of collections of folk tales for children. After emigrating to Norway at the end of 1917, he continued with his professional life. As early as 1918, he was placing caricatures of politicians in a Norwegian newspaper. He also published tales for Norwegian children in Norwegian, which appeared in newspapers and later in separate books. At the same time, he continued publishing tales in Russian, but now they were books that were intended for émigré children wherever they lived in countries outside Russia.¹⁷

Despite the material difficulties and frequent discord within the Russian emigrant community, Valerii Carrick enthusiastically tried to unite, educate, and help Russian emigrants in Norway and in other countries, right up until his death on 27 February 1943. Consequently, he undertook several journeys around the world, giving lectures on Russian culture, literature, philosophy, and the life of Russians in Norway. He also corresponded with editors of émigré journals, newspapers, and publishers, as well as with publishers in Soviet Russia.¹⁸ For instance, he discussed Russian folk culture in a British newspaper in 1930, and he often appeared in the Norwegian press in connection with his tireless work promoting Russian culture.¹⁹

Furthermore, while living in Norway, Carrick corresponded for many years with countless Russian emigrants in France, Germany, Czechoslovakia, the US, and even in South America. There were a great many celebrated individuals among his correspondents: the writer Alexander Kuprin; Pavel Rimsky-Korsakov, a relative of the composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov; Maria Wrangel, the mother of General P. N. Wrangel (she was renowned

15 Goldin, Teterevleva, Tsvetnov, "Russkaia emigratsiia v Norvegii (1918–1940)," 119.

16 Morken, *Kvite russiske emigranter i Norge*, 219.

17 See National Library of Oslo, Private Archives, F. 4199:16.

18 The largest part of these materials are contained in the National Library of Oslo, Private Archives, F. 4199 (the Carrick Archive).

19 National Library of Oslo, Private Archives, F. 4199:64 (Part 1) and F. 4199:66 (Part 1).

for her organizational and educational work among Russian emigrants); General Anton Denikin; and the last ambassador to Christiania from tsarist Russia, Konstantin Gulkevich.²⁰ It is also worth mentioning that Valerii Carrick communicated for many years with the eminent historian and fellow émigré, Sergei Melgunov, and his wife, who lived in Paris. The letters contain a unique exchange of views on topical subjects connected to Russia's destiny and revolution's impact on other nations.

From 1929, Russian emigrants in Norway joined in the annual celebration of the Day of Russian Culture. Carrick was involved in the decision, made in Prague in 1925, to fix this day for Russian emigrants throughout the world. The date was set as June 6, Alexander Pushkin's birthday. In different countries, program designs for these cultural days were made. They show how seriously they were planned. For instance, the 1927 Paris celebration and the 1935 Helsinki celebration were particularly impressive.²¹ The purpose of this celebration was clear: "The day of Russian Culture was not essential for promoting Russian culture, which can so triumphantly promote itself. It is essential for the spiritual unification of our emigrants, who are torn apart from one another."²² Russian organizations in Norway valued their contacts with Russian emigrants in other countries. They took every opportunity to highlight the fact that, while living in Norway, they were also part of the larger Russian diaspora.

Thus, the Day of Russian Culture was celebrated in Oslo for the first time on 14 June 1930. Greetings were read out from other émigré communities in France, Australia, the United States, Bulgaria, Finland, and Canada. Carrick gave a lecture about Russian culture and emigration. A two-part program from this day has been preserved. The festivities consisted of various events, and both Russians and Norwegians participated. The following year, Carrick made the opening address and then gave a lecture on Russian literature, and later the Norwegian Balalaika Orchestra performed a concert.²³ This festival took place in Norway every year until the German occupation in 1940.

Emigrants in Oslo opened a Russian Sunday school for their children. In April 1931 a Russian Orthodox congregation was established in

20 Konstantin Gulkevich served in Norway and Sweden in 1916–1917 and later emigrated to Switzerland after the October Revolution.

21 See National Library of Oslo, Private Archives, F. 4199:24 (Part 76) and F. 4199:26.

22 From the description and reports about "The Day of Russian Culture" in different countries (the beginning of the 1930s), National Library of Oslo, Private Archives, F. 4199:26.

23 Program of "The Day of Russian Culture" in Norway in the 1930s, National Library of Oslo, Private Archives, F. 4199:26.

Oslo, which subsequently took up residency in the Church of the Priests (later named Majorstuen Church). By 1940, the Orthodox Chapel of Saint Nicholas had been founded in Oslo, and it eventually became the principal assembly place for the Russian emigrant community. This congregation is still active, and now uses a chapel on the Graveyard of Our Savior. Elderly people in the congregation still recall when the well-known philosopher Father Alexander Rubets came from Stockholm in the early years of emigration to hold services.²⁴

The majority of those who left Russia after 1917 to settle in Norway were people of distinguished rank. This shaped how Russian refugees were received in different areas of Norwegian society. The following view concerning the Russian refugees appeared in one of the bourgeois newspapers at the time: "If we behave in an alienating fashion when they need assistance, then we will leave an impression of being unwelcoming and selfish. During events such as these, people have strong memories of the bad as well as the good."²⁵ On the other hand, the political left in Norway demonstrated little sympathy for people whom they considered counter-revolutionaries. In 1920–1921, the main newspaper of the Norwegian Labor Party, *Social-Demokraten*, considered the refugees from Russia to be "work-shy and not positive, being accustomed to living at the expense of others, in the lap of luxury, and unable to live in a country where they have to work to survive."²⁶

In general, it is possible to talk of a humane attitude towards Russian émigrés by the Norwegian authorities. To a great extent, this was enhanced by the support the refugees received from the well-known Norwegian polar explorer and diplomat, Fridtjof Nansen, who was appointed high commissioner for Russian refugees by the League of Nations in 1921. Nansen was highly respected in his own country, and he succeeded in obtaining assistance for refugees from the Norwegian Government in the early years of the Russian exodus. On the strength of his arguments, Norway became one of the first countries to issue "Nansen passports." At the same time, however, Nansen was criticized by Russian emigrant leaders for his work on repatriating Russian refugees to Soviet Russia.²⁷ Their argument was that former soldiers and officers

24 Goldin, Teterevleva, Tsvetnov, "Russkaia emigratsiia v Norvegii (1918–1940)," 123.

25 *Tidens Tegn*, September 20, 1918.

26 *Social-Demokraten*, May 1920 and November 1921.

27 Jens Petter Nielsen, "Tilbake til Russland! Kampanjer blant russiske 'hvite' emigranter for å vende tilbake til Lenins og Stalins Russland (1920–1945)," in *Årbok 1982 for Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi* (Oslo, 1984), 32–46.

of the White armies would not be safe in Soviet Russia. Nevertheless, Fridtjof Nansen was welcome to take part in meetings of the Russian Émigré Circle, and he did so several times. In addition, he corresponded with Valerii Carrick. There are letters from 1924–1926 in Carrick's archive, regarding support for Russian emigrants on numerous issues where the Russian Émigré Circle was active together with the Norwegian Red Cross.²⁸

There can be no doubt that most Russian emigrants understood that they had to change their old way of life and accept a certain social decline in Norway. The people who left Russia during this first wave of emigration settled in Norway to a life that was very different from the one to which they were accustomed. There were twenty-eight officers and ten senior officials among those who came to Norway on the *Kozma Minin* in February 1920. Of these, two (including a former member of the government of the Northern region, S. N. Gorodetskii) received work as night watchmen, four became shoemakers, three house painters, and two drivers. The remainder became factory workers, tram conductors, sales assistants, or concierges/caretakers. Ivan Bagrinovskii, who had previously been mayor of Arkhangelsk, found work at a sawmill. Others set up their own small businesses as hairdressers, cobblers, and photographers. Kristofor Kristy, once the Russian consul in Oslo, remained in the city and opened a guesthouse in the building of the former imperial consulate.²⁹

Some of the Russian emigrants made notable careers on a national level. For example, Anatol Heintz became a leading paleontologist and Issay Dobrowen an internationally recognized musician and composer. Others included the musician Boris Hoffmann (Boris Borisov) and Nikolai Tsvetnov (Nicolaus Zwetnow), a neurologist. It is most likely that this social deterioration was painful for those affected. Valerii Carrick, however, believed that, in general, Russians fared well in Norway. The reason for this, as he said, was "the lack of arrogance among people who had held high positions of authority, as well as the perception that any work was valued."³⁰ In any case, Russian aristocrats could not expect to maintain their status in a country where the nobility had been abolished in 1821.

Russian emigrants were employed, they were housed, and many of them still had energy to engage actively in education and culture to preserve their traditions. By the late 1930s, they had integrated relatively well into

28 National Library of Oslo, Private Archives, F. 4199:15 (Part 1).

29 Morken, *Kvite Russiske emigranter in Norge*, 236–237; GARF (State Archive of the Russian Federation), F. 5867, Op. 1, D. 109, L. 1, 2.

30 See Valerii Carrick's article in the Paris-based Russian newspaper *Poslednie Novosti*, February 16, 1922.

Norwegian society. Their descendants have done equally well, and live in Oslo, Lillehammer, Bergen, Alta, Tromsø, and many other places in Norway.

After the Second World War, there was another small wave of Russian emigrants to Norway; and after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, there was a new, and much larger, migration to Norway. Today, some 18,350³¹ Russians live in Norway. But it is still the case that preserving “Russianness” in the full meaning of the word, which is what the majority of post-Soviet emigrants wanted and still want, is no easy task.³²

Undoubtedly, the post-revolutionary wave of Russian emigration is a peculiar chapter in the history of Russian-Norwegian relations that, despite its modest size, merits further study.

Bibliography

- Goldin, Vladislav I., Tatyana P. Teterevleva and Nikolai N. Tsvetnov. “Russkaia emigratsiia v Norvegii (1918–1940).” In *Strakh i ozhidaniia. Rossiia i Norvegiia v XX veke*, edited by Vladislav I. Goldin and Jens Petter Nielsen, 103–124. Arkhangelsk: Izdatel'stvo Pomorskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 1997.
- Guseff, Katrin. *Russkaia emigratsiia vo Frantsii. Sotsialnaia istoriia (1920–1939)*. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2014.
- Kadakin, Aleksandr M., ed. *Russkie v Skandinavii: Daniia, Norvegiia, Shvetsiia [Pravitel'stvennaia komissiiia po delam sootchestvennikov za rubezhom]*. Tallin: Avelista OU, 2008.
- Morken, Bjørg. *Kvite Russiske emigranter in Norge. Master thesis in history*. Oslo: University of Oslo, 1984.
- Shcherbakov, Aleksandr. “Emigratsiia iz Rossii v Norvegiu v postsovetiskii period.” In *Rossiia-Norvegiia. Skvoz' veka i granitsy*, edited by Daniela Büchten, Tatiana Jackson, and Jens Petter Nielsen, 273–274. Moscow: Khudozhnik i kniga, 2004.
- Teterevleva, Tatiana P., “Russkie emigranty v Norvegii (1917–1930 gg.).” In *Rossiia-Norvegiia. Skvoz' veka i granitsy*, edited by Daniela Büchten, Tatiana Jackson, and Jens Petter Nielsen, 183–185. Moscow: Khudozhnik i kniga, 2004.
- Tevlina, Victoria V. *From Russia to Norway and to its North. Real and Potential Migration: Children, Adults, Families*. Arkhangelsk: Pravda Severa, 2015.
- Zaikov, Konstantin, and Jens Petter Nielsen, “Mot en ny grense. Traktaten av 1826” in *Russland kommer nærmere. Norge og Russland 1814–1917*, edited by Jens Petter Nielsen, 38–59. Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2014.

31 This summary figure is based on the data from *Statistics Norway* (<http://ssb.no/en/befolkning/statistikker/utlstat>) and collected by the author for the years 1990–2018.

32 See Aleksandr Shcherbakov, “Emigratsiia iz Rossii v Norvegiu v postsovetiskii period,” in Büchten, Jackson, and Nielsen, *Rossiia-Norvegiia. Skvoz' veka i granitsy*, 273–274; Tevlina, *From Russia to Norway and to its North*.