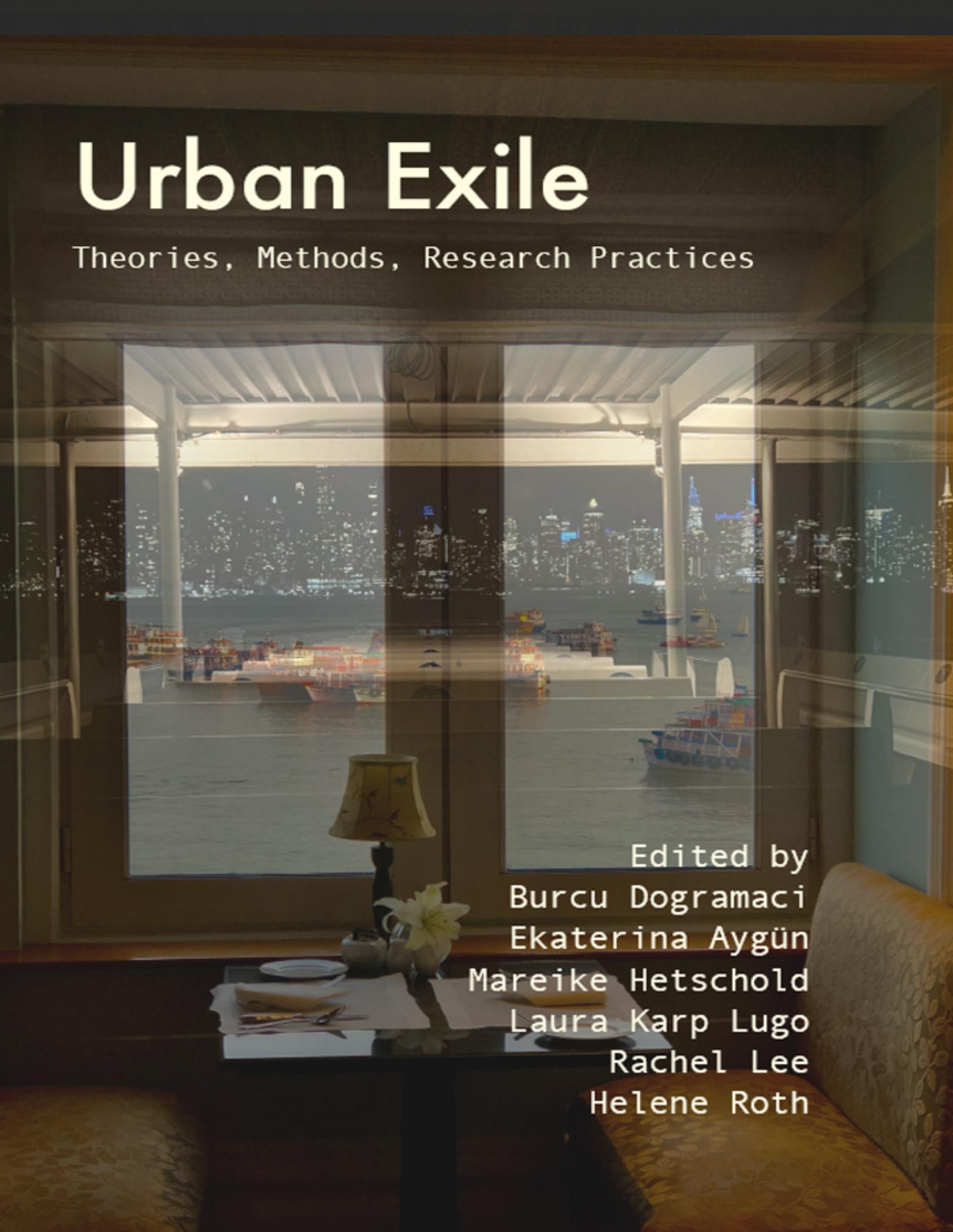


Urban Exile

Theories, Methods, Research Practices

A photograph of a dining table in a restaurant with a view of a city skyline at night. The table is set with a white tablecloth, a lamp, a vase of flowers, and a plate of food. The view through the window shows a city skyline with many lit-up buildings and a body of water with several boats.

Edited by
Burcu Dogramaci
Ekaterina Aygün
Mareike Hetschold
Laura Karp Lugo
Rachel Lee
Helene Roth

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EDITED BY

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Mareike Hetschold, Laura Karp Lugo,
Rachel Lee and Helene Roth*



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Mapping the Russian Diaspora in Shanghai

Katya Knyazeva

Introduction

For 30 years, between 1919 and 1949, Shanghai was home to a large community of ex-Russian subjects who came from the Far East, Siberia, Central Russia and the Western regions of the dissolved empire. Composed mostly of refugees from the 1917 revolution, the Shanghai Russian¹ diaspora eventually absorbed thousands of stateless compatriots from North China. Despite their different origins, legal status and religious affiliation, the Russians had in common their language and culture, as well as the shared experience of emigration. This chapter examines photographic and cartographic evidence of their presence in Shanghai and highlights the avenues of interaction with Chinese and international communities. By looking at visual and geographical data, we bring to the foreground the spatial dimensions of historical narrative, in line with spatial history's argument that the past exists in space, not in time, and that history is nothing but a map of places made by human action (Ethington 2007, 465).



FIGURE 13.1: Harrison Forman, *Street scene in front of a restaurant*, Shanghai, 1937. Pedestrians on Avenue Joffre are shown walking past stores with Russian, Chinese, and English signage. (© American Geographical Society Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries, digital image ID fr203002).

A scrutiny of detailed city plans reveals the spatial distribution of Russian entrepreneurship throughout the city vis-à-vis non-Russian businesses. It showcases clusters of increased density of émigré businesses and helps identify their commercial profiles. The photographic evidence from the era, while not necessarily centered on the Russians, almost inevitably includes them and the aftereffects of their activities. There are journalistic images taken by visiting newspaper reporters, records of foreign brands' representation in the context of local commerce, staged portraiture created for private use and visual records of the émigrés' individual and collective achievements. We focus on those documents that put in high relief the manifold ways of communication between the diaspora, the host culture and other foreign groups. This communication takes the form of multilingual

store signage, distinct window dressing, the display of personal appearance and fashion, the insertion of national architecture into the city's skyline and the religious, social and consumer practices in the public place.



FIGURE 13.2: *Aerial view of the French Concession, with Avenue Joffre running in the center, Shanghai, 1949 (© AP/Wide World).*

Characteristic urban landscape anchors Russian entrepreneurship in the French Concession

As the largest non-Asian group in the city, the Russian community counted more than 35,000 people by the end of the 1930s (Ristaino 2003, 5; Flamm et al. 2018, 61). They moved freely between Shanghai's three independently governed urban territories – Chinese City, International Settlement and French Concession. The latter offered the most opportunities for Russian residency and entrepreneurship, thanks to its growing pool of housing and easy paperwork and low taxes for businesses (Fedoulenko 1967, 82). It is in the French Concession that the diaspora built a dense and vibrant neighborhood with a European self-image that radiated throughout the city and gave this district a reputation for its goods, services and urban culture.

The aerial image illustrates an element of the French Concession’s urban layout that proved very conducive to the Russian diaspora’s participation in the growth of this district – it shows the lively variation of street trajectories and sizes and shapes of city blocks which brought together high- and low-income residences and commerce and encouraged mutual awareness and cross-cultural influence.



FIGURE 13.3: Street map showing the predominance of the Russian enterprises on Avenue Joffre, including Baranovsky’s store, from Shanghai Street Directory, 1939, p. 66, Virtual Shanghai (© 2003–2021 IrAsia).



FIGURE 13.4: Family and employees outside Baranovsky's store on Avenue Joffre, Shanghai, c.1938 (© Antonina Baranovsky).

Residences, organizations and commercial enterprises established by the Russian émigrés occupied a variety of buildings, including apartment blocks, terraced houses, individual structures and commercial strips. The latter, among the most common buildings on public promenades, were made up of two or three stories, with enterprises occupying the lower floors and the proprietors' private apartments located on the floors above. The Russian stores and service venues formed a continuous row along Avenue Joffre and adjacent streets. One of the oldest businesses – L.J. Baranovsky's store – had five large shop windows spread over Nos. 850 and 852, and remained in place for over seventeen years. A feature article about this store, with portraits of the personnel and images of shelves with textiles and accessories, was included in V.D. Jiganoff's 300-page volume *Russians in Shanghai* (1936) – a guidebook for and a chronicle of the diaspora. Jiganoff included exterior and interior photographs of 65 largest Russian enterprises to illustrate the émigrés' exceptional entrepreneurial zeal and their

commitment to physical presence and visibility in the commercial landscape of Shanghai.



FIGURE 13.5: *Multilingual signage on the corner of Route Voyron and Rue Tillot, Shanghai, 1940s (© Coca Cola Archives).*

Entrepreneurship opens routes to diasporic women's self-realization

All sorts of food and hospitality businesses were especially prominent. The smaller and more specialized venues – delis, dairy stores and meal delivery services – targeted the compatriots by advertising in Russian and by mentioning low prices, familiar flavors and special products like the traditional Easter pastry. Larger cafés, restaurants, cabarets and tearooms appealed to all groups by advertising in the local English, French, Russian and Chinese newspapers. The multilingual signage and the décor offered a feeling of the familiar to members of the diaspora, and the promise of the exotic to other consumers. Russian women, firmly associated with the food, hospitality, décor and beauty industries, further strengthened their employability by attending vocational courses and study groups, such as the Women's Section of the *Shanghai Zaria* newspaper.

Commerce thrived inside semi-private residential blocks as much as on public promenades and at thoroughfares. Since its construction in 1924, Linda Terrace, at 833 Avenue Joffre (fig. 13.6), was populated almost

exclusively by the Russians (The North-China Desk Hong List 1925–1941). Such terraced compounds, threaded by public alleys (*lilong*), were mostly comprised of commercial rentals. The primary lessees – often described as fairly wealthy and entrepreneurial women – turned individual units into boarding houses with in-house meals (Ilyina 1985, 223; Smolnikov 2001, 14; Slobodchikov 2005, 185). Rooms in boarding houses doubled as offices, studios and workshops for craftsmen, jewelers, doctors, teachers, interpreters, beauticians, tailors and fortunetellers.



FIGURE 13.6: Jack Birns, *Entrance of the Linda Terrace, with Russian, Chinese and English signs for a mechanic, a plumber, a house-keeping agency, a typography and a food delivery service, Shanghai, 1949* (© Life).



FIGURE 13.7: George Silk, *Dressmaker Eleonora Garnett (center) in her showroom, with a client and a model, Shanghai, 1946* (© Life).

Fashion industry was a well-developed area of Russian entrepreneurship, created by hundreds of refugee women in search of employment (Jiganoff 1936, 153; Paci Zaharoff 2005, 136). Engaged in the designing, tailoring, knitting, modeling, importing, marketing and selling of garments and accessories, these artisans essentially created and guided fashion consciousness in Shanghai. A combination of affordability with a prestigious European aesthetic ignited the interest of local and foreign clients who wanted to adhere to the 'Parisian' lifestyle. Images of trendy urbanites promenading along modern storefronts in the foreign settlements

fed into the global perception of 1930s Shanghai as a fashionable and dynamic city, comparable to Paris and New York.

Russian architects contribute to the city's skyline and leave a tangible legacy



FIGURE 13.8: *Engineer and architect V.A. Kooklin (second from left) supervising the completion of the Hanray Mansions, Shanghai, around 1939 (© Kooklin family).*

The diaspora's relationship with the city's built environment was not limited to inhabiting and using spaces created by others. Various Russian architects, engineers and decorators worked on construction sites in China, Hong Kong and Singapore. Over 70 of their architectural creations are still standing in Shanghai, like the works of Vladimir Kooklin (1903–77), who was active in the late 1930s and early 1940s. The image from the family archive shows Kooklin working on the construction of a luxury apartment building, the Hanray Mansions, designed by his compatriot Emmanuel Gran, for which

Kooklin's construction firm was the general contractor. Close connections among the diaspora architects, engineers and builders led to professional alliances (Knyazeva 2020).



FIGURE 13.9: *Architecture studio of Lafuente & Yaron, 1926* (Leonardo Pérez 2019, p. 243).

Russian professionals in the construction industry capitalized on the knowledge and expertise they had acquired during their study in Imperial Russia. Among the earliest émigré architects was Alexander J. Yaron (1874–1935), who worked in tandem with the Spanish architect Abelardo Lafuente before embarking on a solo career (Leonardo Pérez 2019). Yaron's designs of a commercial warehouse, the mosque for the International Settlement and the cathedral for the Catholic mission in Fuzhou were displayed on the walls of Lafuente & Yaron studio on Bubbling Well Road. Yaron created his projects in a wide variety of international styles; only two of his known buildings, designed for the Russian Spiritual Mission, had a recognizable Slav appearance.



FIGURE 13.10: *Bishop Apartments*, designed by Alexander Yaron, and the site prepared for the construction of the Orthodox Cathedral, Shanghai, c.1933, Russian Spiritual Mission in Beijing.

The Bishop Apartments (1932) and the two Orthodox churches – one designed by Yaron and another by his colleague Jacob Lehonos – are the only buildings in a distinctly Russian style that still survive in Shanghai. The Russian architects tended to embrace international trends and adapt to the demands of their Chinese and foreign clients. The majority of their creations were in the modernist (or Art Deco) style – the preferred aesthetic in Shanghai in the 1930s.

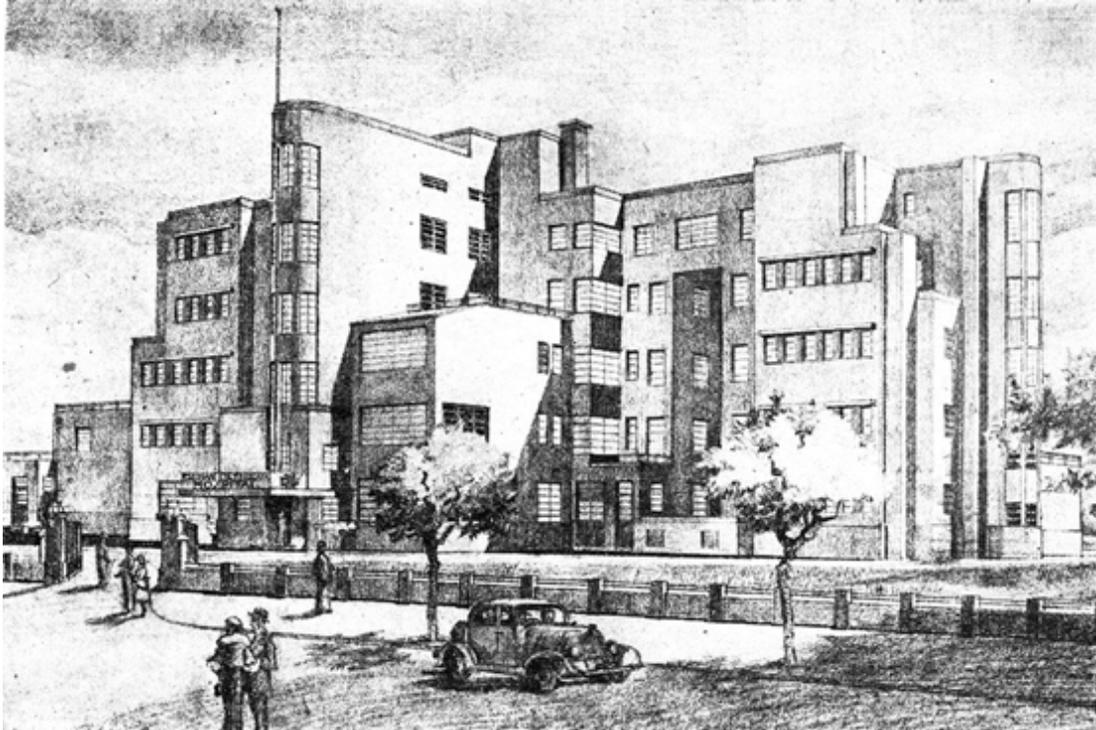


FIGURE 13.11: Vsevolod Kirkor, *Project of a hospital for the French Concession*, 1934, Drawing, in: *Shanghai Sunday Times Industrial Section, Supplement to Special Christmas Issue*, 15 December 1935, p. 28.

Having established themselves in the building industry during the construction boom of the early 1930s, the Russians readily filled the void left by the outflow of Western architecture studios at the precipitous onset of the Japanese occupation (1937–1945). Working individually and in partnerships, the Russians were instrumental in developing the Western French Concession, populating it with an innovative housing form – so called ‘midget apartments’ – which adhered to the irregular trajectories of the streets and small lot sizes. A typical midget apartment was a walk-up building not exceeding four stories in height, which employed ‘economical, and in some cases ingenious planning’, including built-in furniture and roof gardens (Anonymous 1941, 19). Because thus far only a fraction of such apartment buildings in the French Concession have been identified and associated with their creators, visual analysis and research on location remain instrumental in the ongoing enquiry into these buildings’ provenance and their architects’ identity.



FIGURE 13.12: Katya Knyazeva, *Art Deco apartment buildings on Yongfu Road*, designed by (left to right) I. Tomashevsky, V. Kooklin and N. Emanoff respectively, Shanghai, 2018.

Conclusion

Clues taken from maps and photographs help enrich the methodology of the enquiry into Shanghai Russians and expose the vectors of their engagement with the city. Such a spatial approach helps dispel perceptions inherited from migration studies and national histories, with their emphasis on the loss of identity, the trauma of exile and cultural degradation. Instead, the rich geography of Russian entrepreneurship in Shanghai shows diaspora members in positions of authority and expertise, far from the image of a hermetic and nostalgic society at charity's receiving end. Russian women's agency and visibility in the labor market ensured their decisive role in shaping the global image of the city. The prolific and international style of the Russian architects testifies to their motivation to overcome the boundaries of ethnicity and faith. And despite the diaspora's dispersal to other countries, its built legacy in Shanghai serves as a tangible monument and an integral part of the urban environment.

NOTES

1. The term ‘Russian’ here includes all former subjects of the Russian Empire and their children, as well as all those identifying with Russia by birth, faith, language or self-description.

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Urban Exile

Theories, Methods, Research Practices

Migration has transformed urban spaces around the world as new residents form communities, neighbourhoods and art spaces, changing perceptions of these cityscapes among migrants and locals alike. Yet exile research rarely adopts an urban perspective. *Urban Exile* fills this gap, anthologizing research on exile, cities, and modernities with a focus on the first half of the 20th century. Drawing on examples from a wide range of urban centers in both the Global North and South, contributors from various disciplines share novel approaches and research practices for investigating how exile and urbanity intertwine. Their work illuminates the challenges and benefits surrounding the nexus of exile and urban research, discussing mapping, oral history, queerness, photography and more.

By selecting exile as a central category for methodological and theoretical investigations of urban culture, the book rethinks the application of this term in a transnational and historical context. Intersectional and international in its approach, *Urban Exile* collects transformative research on a pressing contemporary issue.

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