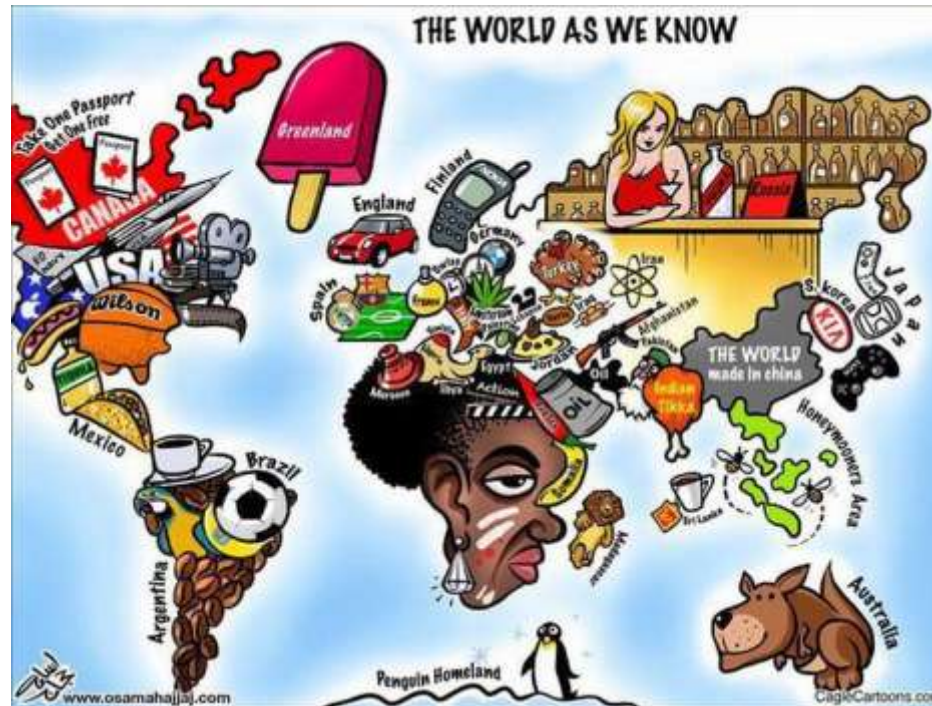


# Challenging ethnic stereotypes and prejudices: theories and practices



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Международная летняя молодёжная школа «Поликультурная медиация в образовании»  
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# Stereotype

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- Fixed idea associated to a category;
- Hard and persistent categorization of human groups, which impoverishes and over-simplifies the reality;
- Accentuation of the differences between the members of the in-group and the members of the out-groups, but also the similarities between the members of the same group.

(Pierre-Andrè Taguieff, 1999)



# Prejudice

*Praeiudicium* (*prae - iudicium*) = opinion given before the experience, without reliable data that can support its validity.

Preconceived opinion, socially learned and shared with the members of the in-group, favorable or hostile to a certain category of people;

It often results in unfavorable attitudes and rigid beliefs, based on improper generalizations and misjudgments, attributing stereotypical traits to all the members of a certain group.

(Pierre-Andrè Taguieff, 1999)

# Children's stereotypes

## Research:

8 focus groups with children 9-11 years old:  
Total 58 children (7/8 for each group):  
from Italy (39), Morocco (4), Ghana (2),  
Tunisia (2), Albania (2), Montenegro (2),  
Russia (1), Ucraina (1), Moldova (1),  
Switzerland (1), Philippines (1), Sri-Lanka (1)

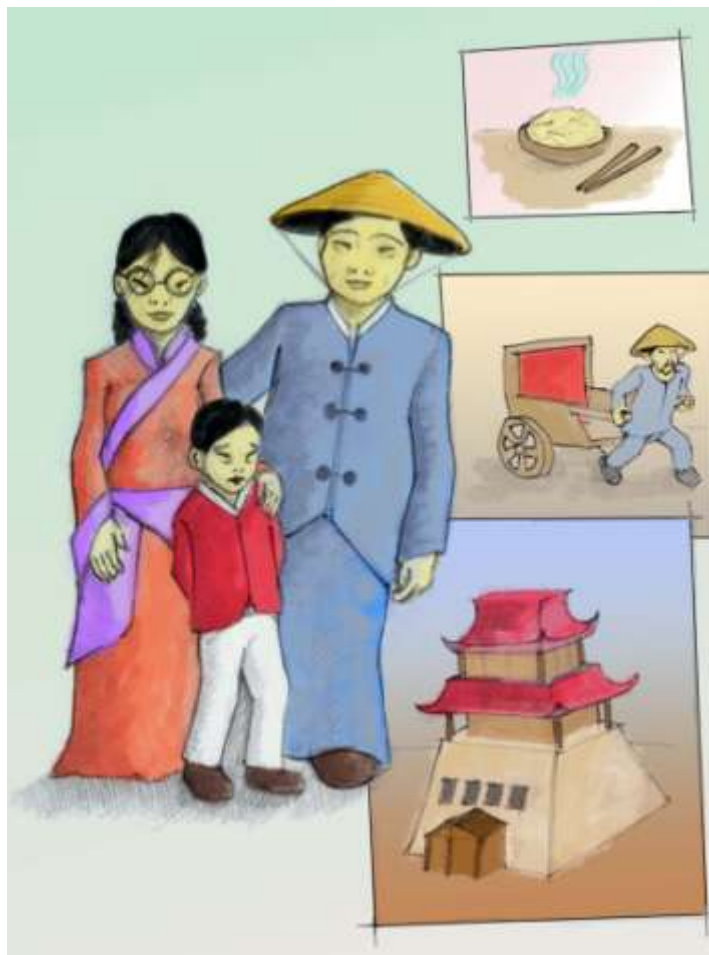
2 focus groups with 11 Chinese children





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# “What do you think when you hear the words *Russia* and *Russians*?”

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30 people: 25-45 years old, Italian, workers, graduate

Short written texts answering the question “What do you think when you hear the words *Russia* and *Russians*?”



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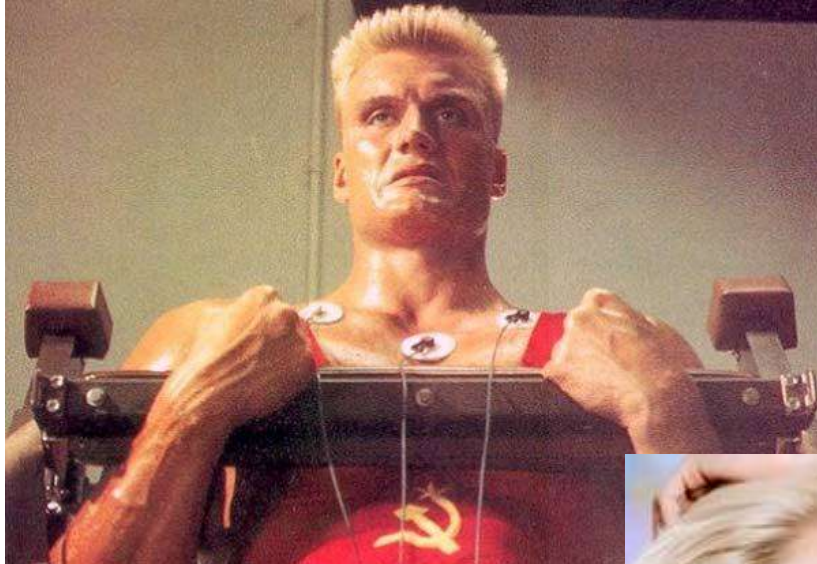


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А Б В Г Д Е  
Ё Ж З И Й  
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“The Russians do not consider civil rights, freedom of expression is reduced to a minimum, they are homophobic and intolerant. On holiday they spend a lot of money and are a bit arrogant, they mistreat people. They are cold and distant. They drink a lot. A friend who has been there told me that in Russia no one speaks English.” (*N., 27, master degree in intercultural education*)

“In my opinion, Russia is a nation populated by a few fat and ruthless oligarchs and by a depressed and alcoholic mass, all subjected to a dictator that is ridiculous and midget (but with a terrific gaze).” (*F., 36, philosopher*)



“The social climber Russian woman is a girl that, out of desperation, to achieve a better life with little effort, becomes a geisha for the man that can assure her a rich life! Very often this is not true love, but pure convenience ... In a few simple words I would describe Russian women as beautiful, glacial women, always ready to warm the hearts to achieve a goal.” (S., 34, employer)



“I sympathize with Putin! We would need him in Italy! I feel a great inner movement of affection towards the Russians. In my opinion the sanctions decided by the "West" are demented, appropriate to this European Union in which I cannot identify.” (S., 45, musician)

“I respect very much Russia and the Russians, I consider them a population much more attached than us to its history and culture, that strongly defends. They do not make compromises with other cultures or religions that consider invasive, and Putin well represents them with his charisma. They try to defend their identity at least! I would like a Putin in Italy!” (G., 44, employer)





“When I think of Russia, the image in my mind is blurred, distant, unknown and "cold", very cold. When people say "Russia", they often say or think "Siberia". I image endless winters and thick blankets of snow, placed to dampen the vibrant colors of the only two cities that I can remember: Moscow and St. Petersburg, with their cathedrals shaped like onions. Everything else is nothing but an endless wasteland, so extensive as to border the coast of Alaska.” *(R., 26, turistic guide)*



“If I think of Russia a word comes to mind: discordance! On the one hand widespread poverty, enormity of spaces and cold and not too dense places, closed villages, hostility to strangers, poor communication with those who are not local, but also great humanity, alcohol, fireplace and festive atmosphere in submission and solidarity among the poor. On the other hand I think of Moscow and St Petersburg, their high wealth and coldness. I think of the social class disgustingly rich that doesn't care about everything else, and the exaggerated corruption.” (*G.*, 35, *PhD in Sociology*)



“The Russians have replaced the ideal of communism with the ideal of consumerism.” (*M.*, 34, *employer*)

“The New Russians are more capitalist than Americans. Many Russians have no values except the God Money. Sometimes education and respect for the others are absent. For the New Russians appearance is all, regardless of anything.” (*E.*, 36, *computer programmer*)

The authentic Russian doesn't sell out his smile, doesn't sell out his friendship. The values are much more intimate and real than those between Italians, and therefore much less manifested.” (*E.*, 36, *computer programmer*)



“RUSSIA is a word that fascinates and frightens because we have grown up with the “fear” for Russia.” (S., 33, *employer*)



# Representations of Russia

None of the respondents has been to Russia, and none has deep relation with Russian people.

They have **not direct contact**.

Their opinions and ideas are developed from the information learned from television, newspapers and internet.

They develop their vision from Western representations of Russia.





# Contact hypothesis

*The Nature of Prejudice*, Gordon Allport (1954, p. 281):

“Prejudice (unless deeply rooted in the character structure of the individual) may be reduced by **equal status** contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of **common goals**.

The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by **institutional supports** (i.e., by law, custom or local atmosphere), and provided it is of a sort that leads to the perception of **common interests** and **common humanity** between members of the two groups.”



# ALLMEET participants are experiencing:

- Equal status (considering the roles in the project)
- Common goals
- Institutional support
- Common interests
- Common humanity

...and have many opportunities for contact....



# Visiting places



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# Culture, education and food



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# Friends



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# Working together



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# Imagined **contact** hypothesis

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In a review of 203 studies from 25 countries - involving 90.000 participants - Thomas Pettigrew and Linda Tropp (2000) found that 94% of studies supported the contact hypothesis

The problem with using contact to reduce prejudice is not that the contact hypothesis is wrong, but that it is so difficult to meet the conditions Allport outlined.



Imagined intergroup contact (Crisp & Turner, 2009) is a new indirect contact strategy for promoting tolerance and more positive intergroup relations.

Research has shown that mentally simulating a positive interaction with an out-group member can elicit more favorable explicit and implicit out-group attitudes, less stereotyping, and enhance intentions to engage in future contact.

The fruition of worth cultural products can stimulate positive mental interactions, broaden horizons and help to deconstruct stereotypes.



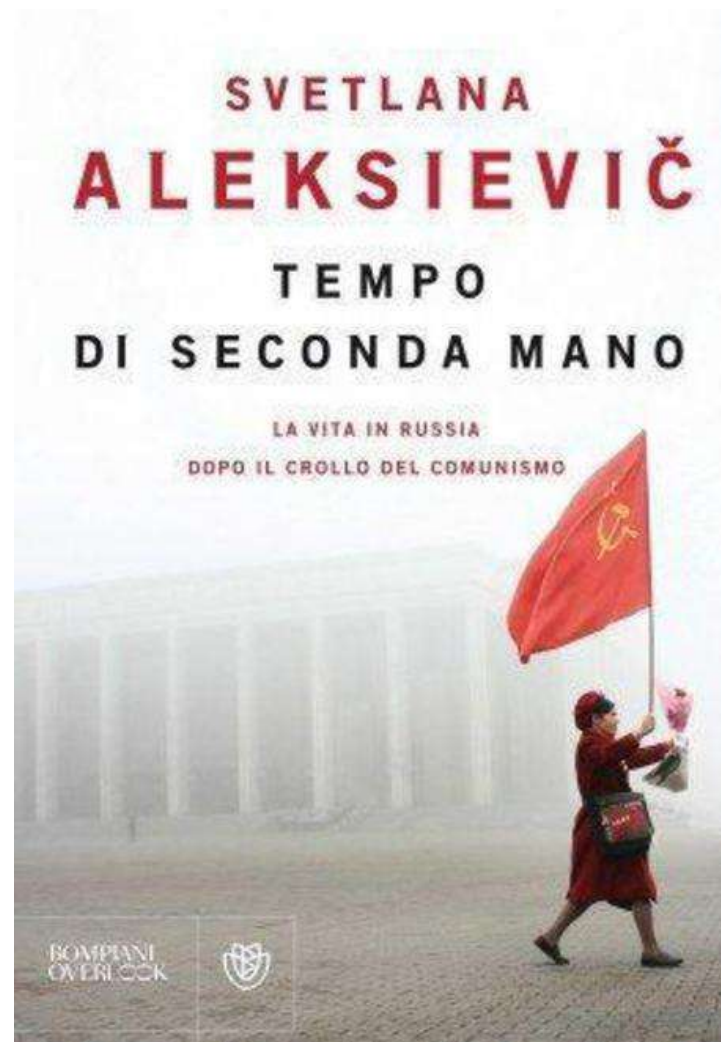


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# Svetlana Aleksievic

## *Second-hand Time (2013)*

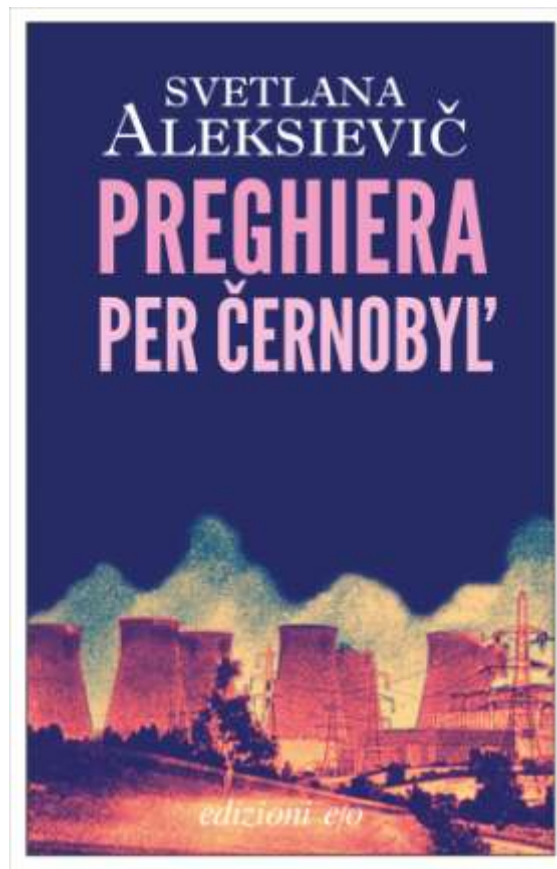


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# Svetlana Alexandrovna Alexievich

- Born 31 May 1948 in the west Ukrainian town of Stanislaviv (since 1962 Ivano-Frankivsk) to a Belarusian father and a Ukrainian mother
- Grew up in Belarus
- Worked as a reporter in several newspapers and as a correspondent for the literary magazine *Neman* in Minsk
- Wrote oral histories of several dramatic events in Soviet history: the Second World War, the Afghan War, the fall of the Soviet Union, and the Chernobyl disaster
- After political persecution by the Lukashenko administration, she left Belarus in 2000 and lived in Paris, Gothenburg and Berlin. In 2011, she moved back to Minsk
- She was awarded the 2015 Nobel Prize in Literature





*“For the past 30 or 40 years she’s been busy mapping the Soviet and post-Soviet individual. But it’s not really a history of events. It’s a history of **emotions**. What she’s offering us is really an emotional world. So these historical events that she’s covering in her various books – for example the Chernobyl disaster or the Soviet war in Afghanistan – are, in a way, just pretexts for exploring the soviet individual and the post soviet **individual**. She’s conducted thousands of interviews with children, women and men, and in this way she’s offering us a history of a human being about whom we didn’t know that much.”*

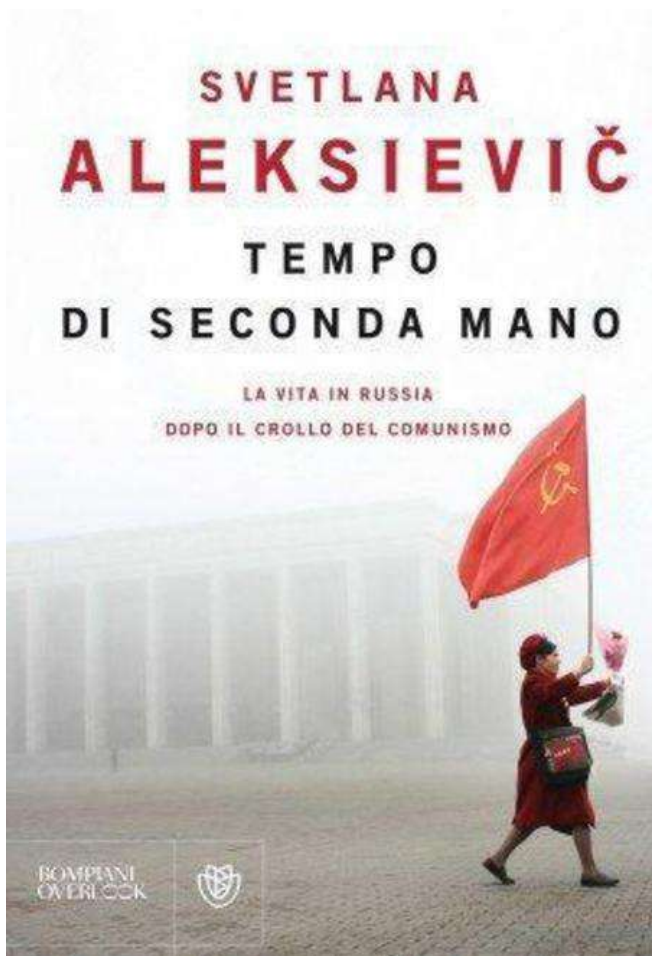
(Sara Danius, Permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy)



*“The moment that I always wait impatiently in all the conversations, public or private, is the one in which life, the simple life becomes literature. But occasionally I am unprepared, while the "literature" fragment can flash everywhere, sometimes just in the most unexpected places.”*

(Svetlana Aleksievic)







From the 1990s, Svetlana Alexievich recorded hundreds of conversations with Soviet people.

The book is translated into dozens of languages, and have been brought out in more than a hundred editions world wide.

Main topics:

- The demise of the empire
- The world post-perestroika, from Socialism to Capitalism



## The idea:

- to follow the course of Soviet and post-Soviet history and of “Homo Sovieticus”, and to document literarily the last twenty years of Russian history.
- ‘the little people’ telling about themselves, the confessions of hundreds of human beings
- macro and micro history interlinked

## The aim:

- reflect on what is a Russian and what is Russia



## Part one: “The Comfort of the Apocalypse”

- how it all began
- Capitalism with Gorbachev’s human face
- portrait of the new Russian world.

Common people stories are combined with a choir of voices from a Russian kitchen to create a portrait of the people and the country and the times.



## Part two: “The Enchantment of Emptiness.”

- how Russia has changed, what is going on in the country and in the minds of its people today
- socialist utopia replaced by a monetary utopia
- nationalistic conflicts (Armenia, Chechnya), migration and everyday xenophobia

The author scrupulously assembles the Russians’ new and old characteristics both for historians and so that Russians themselves can comprehend who they are.





# This book can reduce stereotypes and prejudices because:

- **WIDE RESONANCE:** written by Belarusian writer, it describes Russia, but it is read and translated all over the world
- **COMPLEXITY:** it offers a complex, dynamic and multidimensional picture of the past and the present of Russia, ranging in its vast territory
- **MULTICULTURALITY:** it offers a portrait of a multicultural Russia: the histories and the geographies of the common people represent the history and geography of the whole of Russia and of the USSR



- **EMPATHY:** Listening to the direct voices of the protagonists, the reader becomes familiar with them, understands their point of view, experiences the feelings they express, perceives similarities and differences with himself/herself, going beyond the surface.

(Empathy is the experience of understanding another person's condition from their perspective. You place yourself in their shoes and feel what they are feeling. Empathy is known to increase prosocial (helping) behaviors).



# Decostructing stereotypes

Stereotypes	In the book
Russia is very cold and the landscapes are homogeneous	Several different landscapes and weather conditions are described
Corruption	Corruption is described in its deep roots, and also honesty is presented
Vodka	Reading about their own story we can deeply understand why some people drink so much; at the same time, the book describe many Russian that don't use to drink alcohol
Homogeneous ethnic and somatic features	In the book the stories of common people from different ethnic background and somatic features are presented, reflecting the wide multiculturalism of Russian society
Conflict with Western world	Russian reasons and faults are described, but also positive links



# To conclude

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*“There are so many rumors about our people. Some idealize, others consider it underdeveloped. A people of sovki. But we do not really know it. Between us there is an abyss...”*

*I always take stories and each story is a separate universe in which, however, always two essential elements can be found: these are love and death.”*

(Irina Vasileva)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Alzn4aNzZfk>



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