

Review of Galvanizing Nostalgia? Indigeneity and Sovereignty in Siberia

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Citation for published version (APA):

Ulturgasheva, O. (2023). Review of Galvanizing Nostalgia? Indigeneity and Sovereignty in Siberia. *Slavic Review*, 82(1), 254.

Published in:

Slavic Review

Citing this paper

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for Muminov not a historical fact but “a Cold War trope” (19). Siberian winters are “an easy cliché” (90–91). The survivors’ “mythology of victimhood” (30) created “myths” about “a backward, brutal, and threatening Soviet Union that was not averse to using violence and subversion in its attempts to destabilize Japan” (32). Soviet violation of international treaties is not a historical fact but a “discourse” (37–38; 89). The shortage of food in the camps is “an impression” (96). The survivors’ memories of cold, hunger, exhaustion, death, and disease are characterized throughout as “simplistic.” Muminov discusses the leitmotifs of “cold, hunger, and labor that make up the so-called Siberian trinity of suffering” merely in order to challenge “the popular perception that the internment was only about suffering, injustices, and deprivation” (80).

Muminov explains that forced labor in the Soviet Union was “to compensate for the labor scarcity and supply the economy with workers” (120). The Gulag is justified as the “rapid industrialization of a backward nation, a task of epic proportions that required heroic sacrifices of the Soviet people” (118). Of course, Japanese detainees were not part of the “Soviet people.” Their captors’ “widespread belief in the moral superiority of the Soviet people in dealing with the former enemy,” according to which “the soldiers of former enemy armies. . . had gotten what they deserved” (40), delineates Muminov’s moral judgment. Muminov’s relativization of prisoner suffering in the service of national goals is in line with the recent turn in Russian public memory which, at the Perm-36 site for example, highlights the achievements of camp guards alongside the experience of the victims. Giorgio Agamben’s analysis of the “suspension of law” in Nazi extermination camps is cited once in the book—approvingly (101). “Along with memoirs that focused on misery and hardships, there were accounts whose authors were willing to see the good as well as the bad” (104).

Muminov doesn’t suppress historical facts or research but glosses over the findings of scholarship ideologically so that his interpretation contradicts his own evidence. The appalling death rate (roughly 60,000) and the eleven years of well-documented captivity shrink to the status of mere details, while the propaganda lens of the camp re-education program (produced by the camp paper *Nihon Shimbun*) is foregrounded and incorporated in his own analysis. While promising the reader a transnational perspective, the book is written from the perspective of the Soviet (specifically, the Stalinist) state. Slavacists who study this perspective and its contemporary legacy will find in this book an interesting case.

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Galvanizing Nostalgia? Indigeneity and Sovereignty in Siberia. By Marjorie Mandelstam-Balzer. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021. xvi, 254 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Maps. \$31.95, paper.
doi: 10.1017/slr.2023.145

Recent decades have seen a proliferation of social science studies focusing on nostalgia in post-socialist countries. The number of nostalgia-driven takes on post-socialism has grown substantially, turning nostalgia into a dominant paradigm for understanding experiences of the social upheavals following the collapse of socialism. A range of scholarly discourses on post-socialist nostalgia with all its shades, twists, and turns is exhilaratingly wide ranging, from the politics of memory and past-oriented nostalgia to social action, cultural production, and affective futurities. In my view the most recent book by Marjorie Mandelstam-Balzer, presenting profiles of the three Siberian Republics of Buriatia, Tuva, and Sakha, stands out for its environmental

and ethnonational focus that helps unpack the ways nostalgia produces a galvanizing effect for environmental activism: activism that has been formed in response to the decades of communal spiritual revitalization efforts, “encroachment of political, cultural and human rights alongside erosion of territorial guarantees, and unprecedented industrialization without adequate ecological oversight” (165). The book’s inquiry constitutes the author’s lifelong research agenda pertaining to identity, inter-ethnic relations, ethnonationalism, tradition, and sovereignty among three large Siberian groups of Turkic-Mongolic heritage: Sakha (Yakut), Tuvans, and Buriat, who suffered varied degrees of political repression during the Soviet era. However, this time the discussion centers on the figure of a charismatic leader to galvanize nostalgia “defined as the conscious search for a usable past that can help unite an ethnonational group and enable its members to focus on cultural change and social reform” (9). Each republic receives a detailed consideration of the aforementioned issues in a separate chapter providing a complex overview of the sociopolitical and economic tensions between the Russian colonial center and three non-Russian peripheries.

At the heart of the book is a meticulous engagement with the dynamics of political and charismatic leadership among the three ethnic groups. Several profiles of potential leaders discussed by the author illustrate that the autocratic regime of President Vladimir Putin’s Russia has been actively suppressing charismatic leadership, despite the initial emergence of potential leaders in the chaos of the immediate post-Soviet period. The most recent case of a Sakha New Age internet-viral shaman, Aleksandr Gabyshev, who has “touched a nerve in Russia’s body politic” by his intention to exorcise the Kremlin of its current occupant and who, as a result, was incarcerated by the authorities in a psychiatric clinic, is considered to suggest that the value of such ambiguous figures as he has been the ability “to raise consciousness and stimulate open debate about the precarious condition of Russia’s society and leadership” (157). Accidentally or not, “he managed to tap into amorphous simmering resentments and gelled them into simply expressed coherence” (157). Mandelstam-Balzer suggests that the degree to which Aleksandr’s prominence will politically affect and mobilize the public in the future will depend on what trajectory his agency will take. This may take the form of religious martyrdom or may lead to acquisition of stronger political influence if affirmed by a conscious desire of the shaman to take “his social and political critique to a new level of programmatic ethical principles and practice (ritual), as have many new religious movement leaders before him” (157).

While contextualizing political conditions at the time when the centralizing state is getting increasingly less federal and more authoritarian, the study offers the most up-to-date scholarly report on the genealogy of historically and culturally inflected political means potentially generative for mobilization of civil society and broader senses of collective self-worth across three republics. The author argues that while such politically and genealogically unifying discourses as Eurasianism, pan-Turkism, and pan-Mongolism posit a “phantom” threat for Russian federal authorities, the cross-republic solidarity symbolism has been helpful for “ethnonational mobilization, enabling limited and uneven advocacy for social, cultural, and ecological rights” (96). The political aspirations for ethnonational sovereignty within these republics are widespread but difficult to realize in Russia’s current political climate. But, as her consideration of the Tuvan case shows, if and when sovereignty bids are suppressed harshly, the situation may quickly spiral into out-of-control political violence. Patterns concerning “increased public anger over election falsification at various levels, fear of police discrimination against those of Asian appearance and cynicism about Russia’s role in local histories,” as well as relentless despoliation of Siberian natural resources at the expense of the local population’s public health and safety, constitute deep rifts in the already unstable ground of interethnic relations

throughout Siberia. This monograph, offering fine-grained analysis of interethnic relations, represents an important milestone in the anthropology of Siberia and anthropological approaches to the politics of ethnonationalism.

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Demontazh kommunizma: Tridtsat' let spustia. Ed. Kirill Rogov. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2021. 445 pp. Notes. Figures. Tables. ₰1039, hard bound. doi: 10.1017/slr.2023.146

More than three decades of fruitful academic co-operation between western and Russian scholars, even in areas of political sensitivity, have enriched our understanding of Soviet and post-Soviet Russian politics and society. This collective volume is a worthy addition to that corpus of work. The editor, Kirill Rogov, has assembled a strong team of authors. In addition to Rogov, the Russians, who numerically predominate, are Vladimir Gel'man, Evgenii Gontmakher, Lev Gudkov, Vladimir Magun, Andrei Melville, Nikolai Mitrokhin, Andrei Riabov, Maksim Rudnev, Georgii Satarov and Dmitrii Travin. East-central Europe is represented by the Bulgarian Ivan Krastev and Hungarians Bálint Madiar and Bálint Madlovics, and the US by Samuel Greene, Henry Hale, and Daniel Treisman.

The authors are all critical of Russia's retreat over the past quarter century from the political pluralism that emerged in the late 1980s. Yet, this volume appeared in Moscow in 2021 with a *tirazh* of 1,000—a reminder that in book-publishing, at any rate, the pre-2022 Russian political order remained a lot freer than the Soviet Union prior to perestroika. Heterodox material got past the censor even in Leonid Brezhnev's time, but usually between the lines, whereas in this volume it is there in plain sight. The tightening of the authoritarian screws accompanying the war on Ukraine makes it hard to envisage a similar collaborative work of political analysis being undertaken any time soon.

The book contains stimulating discussion of, inter alia, nationalism and ethno-federalism, the notion of political generations, the merits and limits of the “transitological” literature, and debates over the scope and applicability of the concepts of “Soviet man” and “post-Soviet man,” drawing on sociological literature (with the work of the late Yurii Levada much referenced), and social psychology, as well as political science, the discipline of the majority of the contributors to the volume. It is a work that is less about the political history of recent decades than about the social scientific literature that tries to make sense of post-communism, with particular reference to post-Soviet Russia. Apart from the absence of an index, the book is a credit to its Russian publishing house.

Gel'man draws (121) on Thomas Remington's work to note that, though inequality greatly increased in post-Soviet Russia, this is an inadequate explanation of the reversal of the democratization process, given that there is no shortage of politically democratic Latin American countries with still higher levels of inequality. Satarov, with a somewhat Monty Pythonesque “look on the bright side of life,” notes a rich resource at Russia's disposal that should not be neglected—“our social and political experience, especially the negative experience,” for to “squander this unique resource” would be as immoral, he adds, as squandering natural resources (114). Gudkov draws on the Levada Center's survey research over the past three decades to summarize the attitude to democracy and authoritarianism of “post-Soviet ‘Soviet man’”: “He is not an opponent of democracy (but will not make sacrifices to establish it in Russia), he