

Preface

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This is the third volume of the trilogy on exploring pathways to reform in post-Soviet Siberia. The series brings together outcomes of the work of the Siberian Project Group at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle (2000–2002) and later discussions with other international experts based elsewhere. The project resulted, primarily, from two major conferences, *Postsocialisms in the Russian North* and *A World of Cultures: Cultural Property in Anthropological Perspective*, that were held at the institute in 2000 and 2002. Concentrating on the Russian North, while keeping the even broader comparative circumpolar perspective in sight, has been an objective throughout the entire series. (See the full list of titles and contributors to the series at the end of this chapter.)

The first volume, titled *People and the Land*, deals with indigenous ways of knowing and linking to the land, and with the new power dynamics of resource use under conditions of dramatic and rapid political and economic transformation in the Russian North. Market reforms and non-market strategies were another important topic in the contributions to that volume, as were the challenges involved in striking the right balance between the increasing exploitation of the region's natural resources and concerns about environmental impacts and the long-term survival of local groups.

From the outset, property relations have been at the center of our research into post-Soviet Siberia's transforming economies and societies. That focus was later expanded to encompass the newly emerging theme of cultural and intellectual property, which has commanded considerable attention in recent years. Hence, the second volume, *Properties of Culture – Culture as Property*, explored recent trends, in which – in addition to material objects and practices – knowledge itself is increasingly claimed as the exclusive heritage of specific groups. Much of the discussion in that volume centered on legislation to protect native culture, ways of preserving cultural heritage in museums, and the return by foreign researchers of relevant knowledge and other outcomes to the local communities where they originated.* In addition, new and complex realities were critically reviewed, such as the commodification of culture as a form of property, and ways in which culture is celebrated, and also manipulated, today. This led us to take a closer look at current processes of rebuilding collective identities, to which this third volume is devoted.

The mobilization strategies of activists often involve manipulation of the criteria for group membership and switching between criteria, while

simultaneously cultivating “cross-cutting” and multiple identities. Identity construction can empower hitherto unprivileged local groups, just as these processes entail risks and the potential of new social conflicts. In exploring these controversial trends, close attention has been paid to the diverse social backgrounds of the inhabitants of Siberia.

In the introduction to this volume, Joachim Otto Habeck raises the question of whether the rebuilding of identities is confined to proceedings and negotiations about ethnicity, and he reminds us that there are more dimensions of identity than just the ethnic one. In reviewing scholarly trends, in particular those in Soviet ethnology, he seeks to explain why identity has almost always been discussed along the dimension of the “ethnic.” With examples from his own fieldwork in the Komi Republic, he then draws attention to the existence of additional sets of identities and how these relate to each other.

The first section of the book deals with worldviews and their expressions in ritual behavior, and with the particular identifications these have provided, and still provide, to the people of the North in shifting historical and local contexts. Based on his fieldwork in Chukotka and on historical sources dealing with that area and Alaska from the 19th century, Nikolai Vakhtin presents a thorough analysis of certain similarities between Native traditions, Orthodox Christianity, and the practices of old and modern sects. For him, the powerful concept of double identity helps to explain the enormous popularity of new religions in the Far North.

The following chapter by Virginie Vaté provides fascinating matching insights into how other communities and individuals of the same area currently link in different ways to Chukchi traditional worldviews in a variety of spatial, social and political contexts. She does this by comparing the prominent spring festival of Chukchi reindeer herders, *Kilwèi*, as it is conducted in the original setting of the reindeer camp, and in its more constructed form in the urban context. This leads her to important conclusions, particularly with regard to the expression of social networks and identities at different scales.

Maintaining and reinforcing one’s identity through ritual practice that links humans and local groups to their natural environment is also a central theme in the contribution by Peter Jordan and Andre Filtchenko, which concentrates on Khanty hunting and fishing societies in Western Siberia. As with the findings by Vaté, and those by Kasten in a later chapter, they see the danger that these deeper, enduring relationships between humans and sacred spaces may be displaced by external projections of identities as political instruments coming from the outside, such as *via* the larger orchestrated festivals.

Territoriality is a key issue in the other two chapters of this section. Both deal with the re-organization of boundaries and socio-spatial identities in their more economic and political sense, a development that followed in the wake of new legislation on the establishment of clan communities (the *obshchina* movement) in the Russian North. Based on extensive interviews with representatives of new *obshchiny* in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), Gail Fondahl raises the question: To what extent do the social consequences of the *obshchina* and other forms of land claims, and specifically their boundaries, encourage divisions between communities of aboriginal people? And to what extent will the *obshchina* achieve primacy in the nested hierarchy of identities, possibly at the expense of larger-scale socio-spatial ones?

Florian Stammler expands on some of these questions in his analysis of the *obshchina* movement in Yamal. Like Fondahl, he shows that opinions vary as to how land rights and indigenous identity-building should be combined in the political and social restructuring of the Russian North. He focuses on how indigenous representatives can successfully become cultural brokers and adopt a defensive posture to protect their communities from outsiders. In pursuit of this goal, reindeer herders in northern Yamal became convinced of the need to defend their land and opted for restricting access to it through membership in the *obshchina*. Stammler sees such social boundary defense as less controversial than other possible strategies, because the Yamal Nentsy are urged to draw a line between their own identity and that of outsiders to protect the bases of their livelihood.

Although ethnic affiliation underlies much of the new legislation dealing with indigenous re-territorialization (just as northern worldviews and their particular rituals are specific to certain local ethnic groups), ethnicity is not an overtly mobilized phenomenon in the cases described in these early chapters. The next chapters show, however, how ethnic identity remains an important issue in the (re-) building of identities of social groups, and how it is manipulated in the political sphere, particularly in the new trans-ethnic and transnational contexts. First, in a collaborative study, Peter Schweitzer, Nikolai Vakhtin and Evgeniy Golovko compare the identity politics of three “Old-Settler” communities in northeastern Siberia. For them, “Old-Settler” social groups represent an important contemporary ethnic and cultural reality in the Russian and circumpolar North. Its emphasis is on “mixedness,” in contrast to frequently applied binary classification schemes (with people defined as either native or non-native), which can actually be discriminatory or even racist. They view their three examples as falling along a continuum of cultural forms ranging from the ideal-type “culture as lived” to “culture as declared.” They show how people in each of these communities have developed a variety of strat-

egies enabling cultural reproduction. What one group achieves through spatial and social isolation, others may do through declaration and active ethnic self-definition.

This raises the important question of the difference between outside classification and self-definition. The chapter by Tsypylma Darieva that follows next provides most informative comparative examples from areas beyond Siberia of how ethnicity is mobilized in transnational politics in the course of “recruiting for the nation.” By portraying two individuals, she compares the national “ingathering” policies of two countries, Germany and Kazakhstan, that invite or encourage ethnic Germans or Kazakhs to resettle in their respective homelands. According to Darieva, the purpose of these recruitment projects is to mobilize “extended” cultural and ethnic identities that transcend territorial affiliations and boundaries. However, rather than developing a homogenous national homeland identity, migrants then tend to build a new minority group identity or establish alternative ways of belonging, even to the extent of revitalizing the overarching identity concepts of the Soviet past. Maintaining cross-border relationships with the old homeland gives rise to new multiple identifications.

Inter-ethnic identifications among steppe and taiga Buryats and Evenks to the west of Lake Baikal are examined by István Sántha. Through extensive field research, he discerned a multi-ethnic picture in which there are no clear ethnicities. He noticed distinct variations in the role that ethnic identity still plays for groups in different regional contexts. Among the upper social circles of the region’s center, ethnic identity continues to be important in communications with the Russian state, whereas, on the fringes of the steppe, individual origins and ancestors are more relevant. On the edges of the taiga and the steppe, where there is much interaction between Evenks and Buryats, ethnic boundaries fade away, because in their everyday practice local solidarity, coexistence, understanding and the acceptance of others are enhanced as the most significant values.

The final section includes chapters that look at some of the possible future implications of recent developments. For example, does rebuilding territorial and/or ethnic identities (or creating new ones) represent a likely pathway to reform in post-Soviet Siberia, or not? Can these identities provide a social framework for self-government by indigenous groups? For Anna Sirina, the lack of true self-government is one of the main problems confronting the peoples of the Russian North. Until now they have continued to be regarded as unequal partners in cooperation with state authorities. Current legislation dealing with clan communities (*obshchiny*) in the Sakha Republic does not state clearly that the territory is an economic base that should provide a livelihood. Under federal law, the

communities are non-commercial public organizations, which inevitably makes them subject to pressure to cooperate with the mining companies in that region.

Galina Diatchkova expands on this by exploring the conditions that might strengthen the participation by indigenous organizations in the decision-making process on socio-economic and political affairs in the Russian North. She does this by conceptualizing models of how indigenous peoples have adapted, in their own particular ways, to natural and changing social environments in the Russian North. She emphasizes that all numerically small indigenous peoples of the Russian North share certain general characteristics relating to how they manage natural resources and their livelihoods, as well as certain mental sets and behavioral patterns. She sees the need to build a common trans-ethnic (or pan-ethnic, in analogy to pan-Indian) identity for the indigenous peoples of the Russian North, or to “institutionalize” their ethnic identity in order to create the infrastructure for their indigenous movement.

The epilogue by Erich Kasten aims to pick up some threads of the foregoing discussion and put its outcomes into perspective, mainly by citing some of his own examples from comparative case studies based on earlier fieldwork in northern Scandinavia, the Canadian Northwest and Kamchatka. The focus of this closing chapter is on the dynamics of identity management, in particular those between “lived” and “declared” identities. On the basis of the contributions to this volume, the role of ethnicity, which was questioned at the outset as an allegedly over-represented dimension of identity in anthropological research, is reassessed, and suggestions are made as to how it might be discussed in a more balanced way.

Contests over identity have become highly politicized; and identity is now seen by many native groups in the Russian North as an instrument useful in securing access to resources and cultural property. This means that questions of identity management link directly back to key issues in this series on pathways to reform that were investigated in the two previous volumes. Thus, the goal of this book is to wrap up and round off the current debate. This vigorous discussion will no doubt continue, and probably much along the lines indicated by leading scholars in their contributions to this series. For this, all of us should be grateful. As for myself, the editor, I would like to express my sincere thanks to all of those who responded to my invitation to participate in these discussions.

* For the most recent update of this discussion, see Erich Kasten (2005). Culture as Property: Returning Knowledge to Native Communities. In *Property Relations: the Halle Focus Group, 2000-2005*, C. Hann (ed.). Halle/Saale: Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. (forthcoming)

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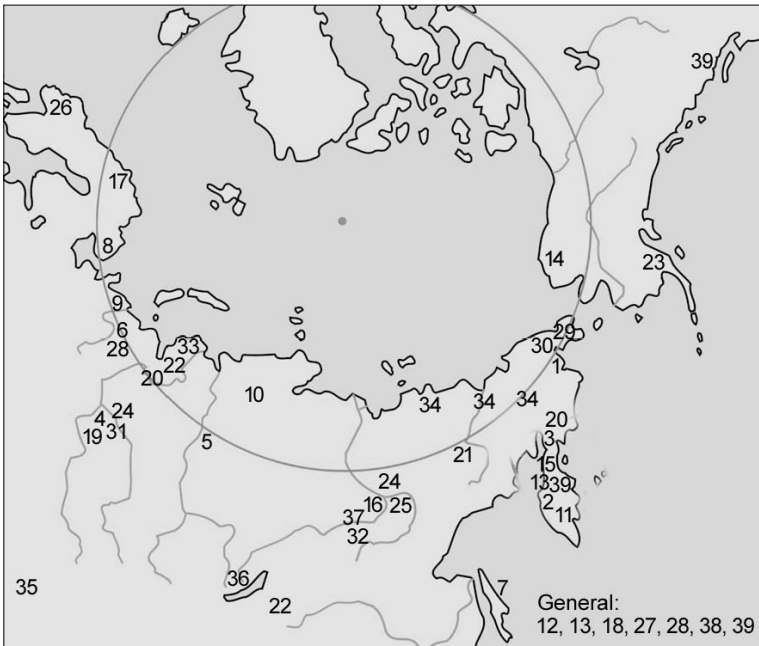
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Note on transliteration

Two coexisting systems of Cyrillic transliteration will be used in this volume: the Library of Congress system for bibliographical references, and the system of the National Image and Mapping Agency (NIMA) for geographical and ethnic names.

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