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VLADIMIR DAVYDOV, NIKOLAI KARBAINOV, VERONIKA SIMONOVA,
VERONIKA TSELISHCHEVA: AGINSKAYA STREET, TANETS S OGNEM
I ALIUMINIEVYE STRELY: PRISVOENIE KUL'TURNYKH LANDSHAFTOV
[AGINSKAYA STREET, FIRE DANCE, AND ALUMINUM ARROWS:
CLAIMING CULTURAL LANDSCAPES], KHABAROVSK: DVO RAN, 2006,
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This collection of articles seeks to understand how traditional culture becomes a commodity and how a commodity can be claimed as traditional culture in everyday life among post-Soviet indigenous peoples. The authors, four young sociologists and anthropologists from Vladivostok, Ulan-Ude, and Saint Petersburg, call for a thorough re-evaluation of the emerging process of cultural commodification in Siberia and offer fresh ethnographic insights into contested social processes reconfiguring group identity and new claims to cultural heritage. These Russian scholars, who trained at Western academic centers such as the Department of Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen (United Kingdom), look at their own societies and localities in Southeastern Siberia and the Russian Far East through the new lens of critical constructivism. Relying on recent theories of ethnicity, cultural geography, and anthropological approaches to locality (Akhil Gupta, James Ferguson, Arjun Appadurai, and Tim Ingold), each author performs a separate study of a specific group, such as students from “the North” in Saint Petersburg, shamans in Ulan-Ude or Nanai and Nivkhi communities in the Amur River region.

Although, given their differing approaches to theory and the collection of field data, each chapter can certainly be read separately, the contributors all focus on the impact of a radical transformation in the ideological system on cultural practices among small post-Soviet communities. The first two articles include a theoretical overview of western anthropological studies of space, place, and cultural landscape (Veronika Simonova). The next part opens with a chapter by Vladimir Davydov and Veronika Tselishcheva, who discuss the instrumentalist perspective on the reinvention of ethnicity and a sense of locality in the Russian Far East. In addition, Davydov offers a critical discussion of the meaning and role of Soviet technologies (legal governance and the system of collective farms), in combination with Russian ethnography, as an instrument in maintaining the structure of Russian and, later, Soviet imperial domination. If one compares Western colonial and postcolonial discourses about the tasks of anthropology and archaeology in analyzing the traditional and modern ways of life of a subject population to the Russian varieties, one is left with the impression that the role of Russian ethnographers as experts in the production of ethnic politics was much more significant than it was in the cases of Western colonies. According to Davydov, Soviet legal stabilization and institutionalization were the main mechanisms in the construction of ethnic identity among small peoples of the North (*malochislennye narody Severa*). It heavily shaped the rhetoric of group identity representation among the *severiane*. Similarly, by analyzing the role of ancestral graves in the ideology of nationalist movements across different historical periods (p. 78), Veronika Tselishcheva shows the dramatic mutability of life in the Khabarovsk region, and the loss of traditional ways of life. Russian readers will discover innovative insights into the dynamic transformations of provincial identity and struggles for cultural property, which is often considered to be unchangeable and frozen.

Aginskaya Street is a welcome addition to the Russian anthropological landscape because of its new approach to a “paleo-traditional” subject of ethnographic observation—indigenous communities in Siberia. In-

deed, like other social groups in former socialist societies, the indigenous inhabitants of Siberia have experienced significant diversification, fragmentation, and individualization of cultural and social belonging. Moreover, they have faced a radical change in the nature of self-representation and of cultural symbols, which increasingly come to be perceived as an economic resource. Observations of global cultural commodification should prompt us to ask how Siberians experience that process. Some answers can be found in Veronika Simonova's essay (pp. 165–173), where she analyzes a painful experience with the changing image and semantics of a shaman drum in the village of Sikachi-Alian (Khabarovsk region), in particular during the recently reinvented ceremonies of "Bear Festival" and "Guzzling Fire." She shows the interplay between the two parallel worlds of sacred and profane drums, whereby the authentic piece will be challenged by a "new" industrially manufactured item (*fabrichnyi buben*) from neighboring Yakutia. Processes such as these increase uncertainty in ways of belonging among small peoples.

A different perspective is offered by Nikolai Karbainov in "Ulan-Ude`s *Nakhalovki*. No Man's Land, Wrong Shamans, and the Right to the City," where he draws attention to the creative role of social and cultural memory in the political struggles over squatters in Buriatia. Using substantial ethnographic data and profound media analysis, the author discusses highly contested urban districts with unauthorized housing, called *nakhalovki*. He shows how locals and migrants in Ulan-Ude claim their human right to pieces of "seized land and transferred houses" (p. 129) by referring to the informal practice of *vbivanie kolyshkov* (hammering in pegs) and spontaneous self-governing meetings (*sobraniia*). This study of the *nakhalovki*, or the phenomenon of transitional housing, should not be overlooked by serious scholars of post-socialism and emerging civil society in Eurasia.

The book's strongest feature is the centrality of the legal framework used to analyze performative practices and their level of legitimization. The studies use concepts such as cultural authenticity, performance of ethnicity, cultural commodification, primordial interpretations of culture, and the role of mythical pasts in post-Soviet urban political contests to demonstrate the pertinence of new ethnographic approaches to the study of post-Soviet Siberia.

Most of the chapters include reviews of the same set of classic anthropological texts, which gets somewhat tiresome. Some of these sections are just re-tellings of classic western texts in social anthropology; these chapters would have benefited from greater attention to the Russian school of ethnography. However, the body of research presented in this book makes an interesting case for rethinking the history of indigenous cultures outside of the academic constructs that profoundly contributed to the frozen image of the indigenous *tuzemets*. Instead, the evaluation of social and economic changes and their significant impact on everyday practices should be of key interest for future anthropological and sociological studies. The collection teems with interesting facts about Siberia's Soviet past and makes a valuable contribution to the body of theoretical and empirical studies of the transformation of culture into a political instrument in small local communities in the Russian provinces.