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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Nature and National Identity after Communism: Globalizing the Ethnoscape by Katrina Z. S. Schwartz

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have their lived experiences both reproduced and transformed Soviet and Russian society after 1953?' The book has no conclusions, however: Raleigh suggests that to answer these questions himself would be to 'limit what readers might otherwise see' (p. 22). Considering that the book's readership will probably consist mostly of academic and graduate students, such abstinence is probably fair enough and may enhance the collection's usefulness as a teaching tool. (A bevy of obvious essay questions immediately suggest themselves.) As well as conveying important general points, for example about the comfortableness and optimism of the 1960s, relative to the Stalinist period, the book contains a mass of fascinating detail on all sorts of subjects from the purity of the River Volga — whose water children drank when at school camp on an island near Saratov in the 1960s — to the intertwining of school and criminal gangs in the city. (Raleigh comments that he is reminded of his own schooldays in Chicago.)

All in all, this is an extremely informative book. It is also highly readable, partly because of its novelistic qualities: the characters of both Raleigh and his informants shine through the text. The introduction to each interview includes a lively account of the interviewee's behaviour during the event as well as a narrative of Raleigh's various adventures, such as getting lost on the way, in the labyrinth of Moscow University, or being jumped on by an unannounced pet rat. The book is beautifully illustrated with photographs of the informants, for example, at May Day parades, on the beach, or dressed for graduation ball. At the very end, hiding beyond the Index, are photographs of Raleigh himself in 1967 and 2005. A valuable feature of the book is its sparing but deft drawing of parallels between Russians and Americans of the same generation, leading the reader to reflect on how far the book tells a specifically *Russian* story or, conversely, one more universal.

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Schwartz, Katrina Z. S. *Nature and National Identity after Communism: Globalizing the Ethnoscape*. Pitt Series in Russian and East European Studies. University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, PA, 2006. xvii + 288 pp. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$27.96 (paperback).

THE trees of Latvia, branches spreading far and wide, trunks standing firmly in the ground and in history, create the stage for the narratives and discourse in Katrina Z. S. Schwartz's book of changing landscapes and altered lives in post-Communist Latvia. It is appropriate that in this time of increased awareness and concern about global climate changes a book should be published highlighting the intersection of national identity, globalization and the environment. This monograph surprises, however, in the utter honesty and complexity of the vision Schwartz brings us from postsocialist Latvia. The current message of environmental responsibility bandied about in North America is puerile in light of the ideas and actions of the Latvian people.

Latvia is a land where the primordial relationship between people and nature has never been far removed from the everyday. Schwartz outlines the historical integrity of a Latvian ethos centred on the preservation of the primeval wilderness. This is no politically correct move by politicians or left-wing radicals; it is a common thread uniting Latvians from pre-Christian times when the deities worshipped dwelled in nature, to the Ulmanis days between World War One and World War Two characterized by the growing importance placed on individual farm ownership and labour, to membership in the European Union (1 May 2004) and negotiating a future between a 'post-productivist [European] paradigm' reassessing rural land use and a Latvian tradition of locally inspired and developed eco-movements. In the early 1990s, Latvia was peppered with environmental groups inspired by an anti-dam movement that succeeded in halting Moscow's plan to build a hydroelectric dam on the Daugava River. Schwartz rightly illustrates throughout the text that these and other environmentally oriented turns in Latvia's history are certainly about more than simply land, trees and lakes. However, in a nation where trees that were 'old and large, or notable for ritual, cultural, historical, or other reasons' (p. 61) would be added to the list of state protected trees — growing to include 635 trees by 1977 — one could argue that in Latvia, perhaps more than in other places, nature is of great national importance.

Many authors have dealt with issues of national identity in a post-socialist context as it is played out in terms of socio-political arenas, agricultural work, social policy and economic development, but Schwartz offers a new stage where the various levels of discussion meet in the national parks, among herds of wild horses, and in the biodiverse forest lands covering almost half of Latvia's territory. It is a very perspicacious analysis of the micro effects of macro level political manoeuvres. All of the Baltic States, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia have been struggling to transform existing political and economic systems. They were not building new infrastructures from scratch, but had to deal with the fractured legacies of the old system. Emerging from an environment in which ideology was at the heart of their Soviet national identity, the many post-Soviet states must redefine themselves in an international environment. Some shared issues include defining territorial borders, defining national identity or what it means to be a citizen, and defining and allocating priorities to national interests.

The book is organized in two sections. Part One, 'Imagining Nation, Nature, and Homeland', paints a vivid portrait of the historical background of Latvia's political and cultural identification with the landscape. Part Two, 'Contesting Nature after Communism', magnifies the ways in which the struggles for an independent national identity were played out in the national parks, the forests and lakes of the Latvian countryside. While there are other ecologically positioned books on the former Soviet Union, Schwartz goes one step further by clearly, convincingly and eloquently laying out the strong integration between environment and identity in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse. Her book highlights the importance of national identity creating and strengthening in the aftermath of a complete political restructuring. In the late 1990s, Latvia found itself simultaneously reflecting back on its Communist past and peering into the future with membership in the EU. The

resulting task was trying to maintain that delicate new nationality within a union of European nations. One of the most interesting commentaries Schwartz draws upon is the involvement of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in the strategic social and political developments in post-socialist Latvia. With the establishment of a Latvian office in 1993, the WWF became instrumental in shaping Latvian ideas about their own natural environment. Recognizing Latvia as a richly biodiverse country, the WWF (and many smaller conservation NGOs) began attempting to steer the nation towards an acceptable path of environmental management and conservation. The issues, however, were complex as some European interests diverged from those of many Latvians. Readers of Schwartz's book will reap rich benefits from this exploration of the nexus between wilderness, nation, globalization and identity. For those who have spent time in Eastern Europe, the themes will puzzle and delight as only those things post-Soviet can.

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