

ABSTRACTS

Alain GUYOT

Night, Cold and Fog: What Did the West Know About the Siberian Far North in the Late Eighteenth Century?

At the end of the 18th century, Westerners had substantial information about Siberia, but what did they know about the Siberian Far North? Not much, considering the difficulty in accessing these remote regions, the risk of confronting their extreme climate and especially the withholding of information by the Russian authorities. This explains the often fragmented and unreliable testimonies on this icy, misty, windy, dark and reputedly uninhabitable desert. But the obstinacy of the explorers, whatever their motives or nationality, gradually led to better knowledge of this still virgin space and its “savage” inhabitants, who were not viewed with objectivity until the dawn of the 19th century.

Angelina KALACHNIKOVA

Conquest, Appropriation, Colonisation of Siberia? A historiography of the Expansion to the East of Muscovy

The historiography of the incorporation of Siberia into the State of Muscovy begins in the 18th century with *The History of Siberia* written by Gerhard Friedrich Miller. The debate on this issue oscillates

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between two radically opposing views: according to the first view, Siberia was conquered, which meant brutal exploitation and the end of local communities; according to the second view, the annexation of Siberia to the Russian State was a mutually beneficial process. This article is devoted to the notion of colonialism applied to 17th-century Siberia. It studies the arguments of historians who attempt to determine whether Russian colonisation was a phenomenon like no other or whether it is possible to draw parallels with the experience of other European colonial powers. Was Russia already a colonial empire in the 17th century?

Nadejda ZAMIATINA

**The paradoxes of the Russian Arctic and its population:
Between Decline and Resilience**

Cities of the Russian Arctic are exceptional due to the speed of their urbanisation, size, population, and extreme difficulty of everyday life and working conditions. The transformations undergone since their construction, and especially since the 1990s, are multifaceted. At the macro level, we examine the consequences of the construction of Arctic cities and the achievements of the Soviet era to understand the repercussions that the end of the Soviet Union had on this unique area (population decline, end of polar subsidies, collapse of certain productions, as well as growth of younger extractive cities). At the micro level of individuals working in these cities, we will try to decipher their reaction to the policies implemented (or not) in these cities; we also point out their often paradoxical, yet deep attachment to these hostile and unusual environments. Finally, the paper addresses the economic and political strategies for the development and reformation of the Arctic which require new ways of organising work (rotational work, for example), and tackles such questions as population resettlement, among the more sensitive issues related to the transformations of the Arctic.

Vera KOUKLINA & Roman FIODOROV

Public Spaces in the Arctic City Between Dynamism and Constraints: The example of Nadym in Western Siberia

Although the very concept of public space remains quite vague in scientific debates, it is essential for understanding the social fabric of an urban environment. This paper is devoted to understanding the characteristics of public spaces in Arctic cities using the example of the city of Nadym, in Siberia. For the inhabitants of Nadym—as for many non-indigenous inhabitants of other Arctic cities—the harsh natural and climatic conditions are very unusual and are perceived as an obstacle to inhabiting urban spaces. The paper aims to answer the following questions: for these settlers, what are the opportunities for meeting people and for socializing outside the restricted circle of family, friends and colleagues? What limits do residents see in the development of open public spaces? What new public spaces are being formed by and for the city's inhabitants? The paper is based on observational data and on interviews carried out with residents remotely and during the authors' stays in 2020 and 2021.

Sophie HOHMANN

**Russia's Far North: A New “Suburb” of Islam?
The Arctic Urbanity of Muslim Communities**

The history of migration during the Soviet and post-Soviet eras helps to explain the structuring of communities in the Far North and the emergence of Muslim diasporas. The extreme climatic conditions, remoteness and large-scale industrialisation of the cities of the Far North accentuate certain characteristics which shape the social landscape Muslims live in. This study offers an original regional case study of the development and adaptation of Islam, and of the transformation of the Arctic urban landscape around the production of material symbols (mosques, prayer rooms, clothing habits) and immaterial symbols (notion of permissibility, halal practices). The concept of polar Islam experienced here refers to the specific ways Muslims live and function in the Far North and the Arctic, and the affirmation of Islam in an unusual setting. This occurs in the midst of socio-economic and political transformations shaping a new Arctic identity

and a whole new set of meanings for Muslim communities originating from countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Sophie GLEIZES

**“We Must Make the Law of the Tundra”.
Cosmopolitical Strategies and Territorial Ethics
Among the Nenets of the Pur Forests**

The accounts of Forest Nenets reindeer herders and villagers on which this article is based reveal the arduous coexistence of several laws: the “law of the tundra”, Russian legislation and the law of the market. Despite translation efforts made by “cultural brokers”, it is an ecosystem caught between competing human concerns: the perpetuation of an ancestral lifestyle for the Nenets and the exploration of energy resources for Russia. In fact, the socio-ecological upheavals affecting subarctic Western Siberia since the 18th century have given rise to conflicts, negotiations and adaptations between the Forest Nenets, the Russian state, and the oil and gas industry, related to conceptions of nature and land-use rights. This article focuses on the territorial strategies carried out by our informants in the face of growing exogenous pressure, and touches upon the evolution of cosmopolitical relations between the Forest Nenets and those they perceive as “foreign incomers” since the conquest of Siberia.

Konstantin KLOKOV

**The Cultural Landscape of Reindeer Herders
in Southeastern Chukotka**

The article describes the cultural landscape of reindeer herders in the south-eastern part of the Chukotka Autonomous Okrug in its historical context. It shows how the indigenous people see the natural environment around them, what mental and spiritual ties unite their world and nature, and how events that took place several decades ago are embedded in the modern cultural landscape of Chukchi reindeer herders. Materials for this article were collected by the author during his travels in Chukotka between 2016 and 2023.

Amélie BARBIER

**The Words of Which Dreams Are Made: Use of the Koriak
and Russian Languages in Accounts of Dream Experiences
in Tymlat (Kamchatka, Far East)**

Set in the multicultural setting that characterizes contemporary Kamchatka, shaped by Russian colonisation, this ethnographic study attempts to understand the complex implications of dreaming about specific words, items and entities considered as belonging to the Koryak world. Based on two dreams told by Koryak women, it analyses the meaning of a switch from Russian to the Koryak language in these narratives. The text shows the existence of local classificatory systems and interpretative terminologies. By linking these dreams to their social and biographical contexts, it aims to understand their impact on the waking lives of the dreamers and those around them. Finally, the paper proposes to consider dream-sharing as a participatory process that engages the ethnographers in the fieldwork and transforms their method.

Natalia NOVIKOVA

**“Fish Island” and its Inhabitants:
Resources, Social Institutions and Identities of Sakhalin**

This article examines modern practices in the use of biological resources within the context of traditional sustainable nature management by indigenous peoples. Today, as marine and river resources are inevitably diminishing, it becomes important to tackle the issue of using them with moderation while preserving or even improving standards of living. What does an indigenous identity mean in a contemporary setting? I look at indigenous entrepreneurship, the development of ethnic tourism, folk arts and crafts, and professional art. The article is based on field materials collected on Sakhalin in 2000-2021.

Laura SIRAGUSA & Dmitri ARZIOUTOV

Nothing Is Lost: Sustainable Development in the Practices of Indigenous Communities in the Russian and Siberian North

In the last few decades, the literature on waste has soared and taken two main directions. Based on the assumption that waste is a natural category, which we need to “dispose of,” the scholarship on waste management and its sustainability offers mainly problem-solving propositions (e.g., the 3Rs—recycle, reuse and reduce—also called the “circular economy”). The scientific literature on waste takes a more critical stance from the outset and puts forward a relational account of waste. We aim to start a dialogue between these two main research streams through a presentation of two case studies among indigenous communities in the Russian North. In addition to exposing the hidden biases of the notion of a circular economy and other “innovative” problem-solving practices in waste management literature, we propose to pay more attention to non-hegemonic waste practices amongst communities, which are often overlooked in both the waste management and social studies of waste literature.

Mikhail BACHKIROV

**The Figure of the « Shaman Warrior » Aleksandr Gabyshev:
An Identity at the Crossroads of Two Cultures**

The figure of Aleksandr Gabyshev, the « shaman warrior » from Yakutsk, became the object of attention in social media in 2019-2020. Interest in Gabyshev was sparked both by the goal he declared (“to drive President Vladimir Putin out of the Kremlin”) and by his peculiar personality. This article draws on a wide range of materials gathered over the course of research work on a visual documentary about Gabyshev. The world view of the “shaman warrior” is a paradoxical tangle of native Yakut culture and Russian Orthodox tradition. Indeed, his behaviour and personality traits could be seen as meaningless and illogical contradictions in the context of shamanic tradition. Yet aspects of both neoshamanism and “blessed foolishness” were important assets that let him develop his personal identity with great creativity.

Charles WEINSTEIN

**A few words about the Chukotka region, *followed by*
My Chukchi Diary**

For almost a decade, from 1993 to 2002, the author lived in Chukotka and carefully recorded his observations and thoughts regarding one of the local communities of these northern Asian frontiers: the *Lygoravetlan* (Chukchi), traditional reindeer herders or mammal hunters. In this way, he recounts in fragments the turbulent history of a Siberian Arctic people confronted in turn with the Russian conquest and administration, Sovietization and the Cold War, State disengagement and assimilation. Through the words of his native interlocutors, one discovers how the Chukchi see their own society, as well as a little of what is being lost or maintained today.

Valentina FANOVA

Letters from the Siberian North

The relative invisibility of the realities of the Siberian North is likely to foster negative perceptions—the cold, the polar night, isolation, silence, the Russian prison system, extractivism at all costs—or exotic ones—indigenous peoples, the northern lights, giant craters. In contrast, the North is the main source of inspiration for Valentina Fanova, whose writing emphasises the sense of shared territorial belonging and cultural identity. Her “little homeland” is at the heart of essays that create a form of Nordic geopoetics in which sensitivity and intuition mingle with intimate knowledge, charting an intellectual itinerary through the landscapes, history and hearts of the inhabitants of the Septentrion.

Anastasia LAPSUI

Shamanic session

In the name of its “civilizing mission”, Russian culture has largely destabilised the communities of the Arctic, including from the point of view of religion, gender and intimacy. For instance, the *kala* woman with the toothed anus soon fell silent, as did the Creator’s wife who cut off her vulva to make a small talking dog with it, or the seven

daughters of Nga whose kisses steal the soul, causing human illnesses. These characters were succeeded by the virtuous Orthodox woman, then by the healthy kolkhozian, and today by the valiant patriot: women and “traditional” societies themselves must be liberated from taboos and prohibitions—or rather are they simply asked to espouse those of the civilizer? Based on the memories of her nomadic childhood and the stories of her elders, Anastasia Lapsui, Nenets of the tundras, restores a fragment of local shamanism through a shamanic session revolving around the body and femininity.