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Robert P. Geraci. *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2001. Maps. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. xi + 389 pp., \$52.50 (cloth).

Recent scholarship has begun to examine the tangle of empire, geography, religion, and nationality in the eastern portions of the Russian Empire. Geraci's fascinating book uses a variety of well-documented analyses and examples to examine the ambiguities of nationality and assimilation in the late imperial period. He weaves material from local archives, contemporary periodicals, ethnographic texts, and memoirs to present a multi-layered analysis of ethnic life in the Kazan region. Because Kazan occupies both a central and peripheral location in Russian history, it provides a social laboratory to examine "how Russians transferred their conceptions of self onto the peoples of their 'Eastern' or non-European domains" (3), in an attempt, not always successful, to make nationality a stable category of identity.

Geraci's theoretical focus is nationality, not nationalism, in order to study the "tensions between the categories of nation and empire as manifested in views of the peoples of the so-called East and the prospect of their cultural integration into Russia" (343). He contends that the emphasis on nationality allows an examination of the "variety of criteria — political, psychological, racial, linguistic, historical and so on that [Russians] have employed to define the category of 'Russian'" (12) and, by extension, non-Russian.

The book's first chapter provides a historical overview of ethnic relations and tsarist rule in the Kazan region. Geraci provides thumbnail sketches of the various ethnic groups, such as the Mordvins, Chuvash, Muslim Tatars (the focus of the book), Votiaks, and Cheremises, and how Russian attitudes toward them varied according to how well each was believed to have assimilated. By the late nineteenth century the Mordvins had become largely Russified and were much less of a concern to the authorities (33–34) than the Votiaks, who were believed to have maintained some of their traditional religious practices (34), and the Muslim Tatars, who were described in "ways that made them appear mysterious and menacing: hard-to-navigate streets, houses with windows facing an interior court rather than the street, large numbers of stray dogs" (35). Geraci covers a wide range of topics, such as missionary activity, conversion, apostasy, schooling, and the differing levels of repression and autonomy accorded the Muslim population under various rulers. The strength of his analysis, however, can be found in the chapters which present detailed case studies and highlight the different and sometimes contradictory methods used to promote and determine the level of assimilation of non-Russians.

The second chapter focuses on the career of Nikolai Ilminsky. Geraci shows how Ilminsky's knowledge of local languages led to the development of the "Ilminsky schools," Christian institutions in which children would be taught in their native languages, but in a way that would lead them to become good citizens of the Russian Empire. Ideally, converted native speakers would become teachers, which would make assimilation not a passive experience, but one that engaged the native population. Although Ilminsky's system was later attacked, its initial approval shows how the tsarist government could be flexible regarding nationality policy if a plan seemed workable. It approved teaching in native languages in the Kazan region to promote assimilation, but did not do so in other parts of the empire, such as the Polish areas in the west. Chapter 5 analyzes the role of Kazan University in creating and disseminating ethnographic knowledge about the peoples of the East. Its Department of Oriental Languages was founded in 1835 not only to study languages, but also to promote "Russia's political, commercial, geographic, and cultural interests in Asia as well as the pursuit of academic prestige" (161). However, as Geraci illustrates in an analysis of the "Bulgar Controversy," an attempt to determine the nationality of the Bulgars, whose tenth-century ruins could be found in Kazan, the collection and interpretation of ethnographic data were often framed by questions that were political rather than academic.

One of Geraci's most interesting studies analyzes the 1892 "Multan case." The discovery of a

mangled body led to accusations of ritual human sacrifice against seven members of the Votyak community. While the convictions were overturned in 1896, underlying the trial was a debate over how Christianized the Votiyaks actually were. The case is a microcosm of life in a multiethnic, stratified community, illustrating that some groups have better access to and understanding of the legal system; that a crisis can exacerbate existing community tensions; and that in the case of religion, converts are not always seen as true members of the community.

Finally, Geraci analyzes assimilation's contradictions in a study of Nikolai Katanov, a professor at Kazan University. Katanov was born into a Christian Tatar family and spent his youth in the steppes. He attended gymnasium in Krasnoiarsk, where he read ethnographic texts and conducted ethnographic research. With the help of, among others, Ilminsky, he enrolled at St. Petersburg University in 1884. After finishing, he conducted well-regarded ethnographic research in Siberia, Mongolia, and China. However, his *inorodets* origin prevented him from being appointed to a position at St. Petersburg University. Instead, he was sent to Kazan because of the state's belief that he would be more useful in an area populated by people of his background. Instead of bringing his considerable scholarship to St. Petersburg, he would lure *inorodtsy* into the Russian educational system.

This thought-provoking and extremely well-written book should be on the reading list of anyone interested in the ambiguities created when nationality, identity, and the goals of empire intersect. Geraci raises a number of questions about Russianness and convincingly shows how assimilation was difficult to achieve and define. A slippery slope existed on the journey from non-Russian to Russian, and changing circumstances could define to which group a person belonged.

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Christoph Neidhart. *Russia's Carnival: The Smells, Sights, and Sounds of Transition*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002. Bibliography. Index. viii + 264 pp., \$70.00 (cloth), \$26.95 (paper).

The author of this volume so promisingly titled is a senior columnist for the Swiss weekly *Die Weltwoche*. Having covered Russia for almost a decade, Neidhart wrote *Russia's Carnival* during his time as a visiting scholar at Harvard University's Davis Center of Russian Studies. Invoking the Bakhtinian concept of carnival, Neidhart sets out to describe Russia's transition to the post-Soviet condition, as perceived by the outsider's "sight, sound, scent, taste, and touch" (3) and the related "senses" of time and space. Neidhart draws extensively on his personal experience, but he is also well-read in contemporary philosophy, sociology and anthropology, and in the rapidly growing field of postsocialist studies.

Neidhart is undoubtedly a gifted journalist, capable of summing up the essence of numerous phenomena of Russian life in a concise paragraph or two, and of vividly reporting many events that are now history. His weekly columns must have been brilliant. Unfortunately, these insightful observations do not seem to have fared so well when transferred into book format. The quality of the result is uneven, with textual inconsistencies, questionable statements, and an underdeveloped closing argument in the final chapter.

This being said, many pages in *Russia's Carnival* make fascinating reading. Some of the most stimulating discussions include the issue of whether or not Gorbachev was able to distinguish between appearances and reality (Chapter 4), as well as the author's reflections on the parallel processes of the state pulling down "walls and fences" and private citizens and companies putting new ones up. The account of the Russians' changing attitudes to time, joined with the presentation on the uses of executive cars, with speed representing power