



Moving in the USSR

Western anomalies and Northern wilderness

Edited by Pekka Hakamies

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Joensuu 4.2.2005

Pekka Hakamies



PEKKA HAKAMIES

Introduction

Migration and local identity in former territories of the USSR

The book at hand is a result of a project which had been financed by the Finnish Academy during the years 2000–2003. The aim of the research project “Conditions for Constructing a New Russia: Interactions of Tradition and Europeanness in the Development of 20th Century Russia” was to examine developmental processes in contemporary Russia and conditions delimiting its choices in the light of the central turning points of twentieth-century Russian history. The central question deals with the westward interaction between Russia and Europe from a Russian perspective. In other words, how has the tradition of Russia’s culture and history set the conditions for its developmental and political choices.

The project concentrated, in particular, on the changes in Russia’s relationship with Europe during the 20th century. The issue of the clash between Europeanness (the *Zapadniks*) and traditional Russianness (the *Slavophiles*) concretely highlights the two central factors that have affected Russia’s development. The question of Europeanness and its ideals linked to the Enlightenment, often interpreted as universal, has divided Russian society for centuries. Ultimately, the question deals with the problem of whether Russian development leads towards modernization, in the European sense of the term, or whether Russia will continue on its own developmental path, unifying, once again, European influences with Russian specificity. Is there only one way to achieve the modernity which the western European countries have shown to the rest of the world, or are there alternatives (cf. Kumar 1988:5–10)? This problem also involves the question that deals with the aims of western politics towards Russia and how realistic these aims are. Thus, what are the conditions that stem from, and which are determined by, the reality of Russia, its history and culture that fundamentally affect its future development and political choices?

Common threads and particular traits of this collected edition

From this viewpoint, it is natural that the topics of the articles within this publication focus on the western borders of the former Soviet Union. This area has been a contact zone between Russia and Europe, but also a battle-

field. The World War Two changed borders in several regions in eastern Europe, and these changes offered a channel for new influences to penetrate into Russia and the minds of Russians. During the initial stage of the second world war, the Soviet Union had already annexed the eastern part of pre-war Poland, according to the Molotov-Ribbentrop treaty, and a little later the Baltic states as well as the Northern Bukovina from Romania had also been annexed. The secret part of this treaty that dealt with the “spheres of interest” of Nazi Germany and Soviet Union allocated Finland to the Soviet sphere of influence. The Soviet-Finnish border was one to be moved, but as the political leaders of Finland were unwilling to consent to the demands of the Soviet Union the latter tried to reach this goal by force. The Winter War period of 1939–1940 and its historical consequences are presented in detail in the article of Antti Laine.

One result of the border change drawn up in the Moscow peace treaty of March 1940 was the evacuation from the ceded territory to the remaining Finland of 400,000 Finnish citizens, more than 10% of the entire population of Finland. During the “Continuation War” of 1941–1944 in which Finland fought as a co-belligerent of Germany against the Soviet Union, many of the Karelian emigrants were able to return to their old homes, but the conditions of the armistice in the autumn of 1944 sealed the fate of the territory, in that it became a part of Soviet Union, so the Finns, once again, had to leave the region.

The process of settlement and incorporation of new territories by the Soviet Union is the topic of many articles of this book. New settlers brought their economic and social structure, culture and toponyms with them to areas that were left practically totally empty by Finnish inhabitants. Analogies to the processes of culture and place formation can be found in the former East Prussia, which suffered a similar fate as the ceded Finnish Karelia. Both areas were incorporated into the Soviet society and received new, Russian-speaking inhabitants as a result of decisions at a high level of Soviet administration and an active recruitment campaign.

The main differences between the former Finnish Karelia and the former German East Prussia seem to be in the war-time history of the territories: East Prussia was heavily devastated in the battles in the final stage of the war, whereas a large part of the territory of Karelia, ceded by Finland to Soviet Union, mainly regions on the West coast of Lake Ladoga, were almost intact except for some bombing by the Soviet air force and some battles in the summer of 1941. Another significant difference was the total evacuation of Finnish inhabitants from the ceded territory. In East Prussia, approximately 130,000 Germans stayed in 1945 but they were deported to Germany until the beginning of the 1950s. So, the new settlers did have an opportunity to familiarize themselves with Germans and their way of living and the Germans did engage with the Soviet society. (*Vostochnaya Prussia*, 185, 224.) Another difference was the repetition of the evacuation of the Finnish inhabitants in 1944, and in the meantime, in 1941, the evacuation of the newly arrived Soviet settlers. So, the former Finnish Karelia has created several layers of evacuation recollections and refugee stories.

This book deals with 20th century resettlements in the western areas of the former USSR, in particular the territory of Karelia that was ceded by Finland in the WWII, Podolia in the Ukraine, and the North-West periphery of Russia in the Kola peninsula. Finns from Karelia emigrated to Finland, most of the Jews of Podolia were exterminated by Nazi Germany but the survivors later emigrated to Israel, and the sparsely populated territory beyond the Polar circle received the Soviet conquerors of nature which they began to exploit. The empty areas were usually settled by planned state recruitment of relocated Soviet citizens, but in some cases also by spontaneous movement. Thus, a Ukrainian took over a Jewish house, a Chuvash kolkhos was dispersed along Finnish khutor houses, and youth in the town of Apatity began to prefer their home town in relation to the cities of Russia.

Everywhere the settlers met new and strange surroundings, and they had to construct places and meanings for themselves in their new home and restructure their local identity in relation to their places of origin and current abodes. They also had to create images of the former inhabitants and explanations for various strange details they perceived around themselves.

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