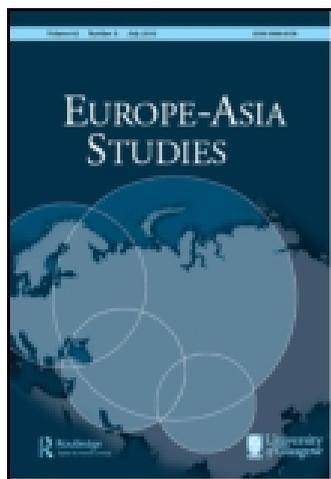


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Changing Urban Landscapes. Eastern European and Post-Soviet Cities since 1989

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Russia's adversarial courtroom was not merely the setting in which empathetic jurors often acquitted 'unfortunate' murderers. It also proved a stage for the theatrical talents of a new professional class of defence attorney. Relatedly, it served as a lecture circuit of sorts for forensic experts eager to make a name for themselves and their emerging scientific disciplines (criminology, anthropology, psychology and sociology). These defence attorneys and forensic experts, McReynolds explains, worked hand in hand in contributing mightily to Russia's popular legal culture. They, too, focused on the criminal and his or her extenuating circumstances more so than on the crime. In particular, they invoked degeneracy theory and promoted the insanity plea as reliably just cause to set free 'unfortunate' killers and spare them punishment at the hands of the autocratic state.

As McReynolds shows, Russia's courtrooms could not contain the sensationalism of murder and the complex emotions it aroused in Russian society. Sensational murder saturated all manner of Russian popular culture. It inspired the rise of Russia's own genre of crime fiction as well as many of Russia's earliest movies. It is in McReynolds's analysis of Russian crime fiction and early movies that the comparative approach she applies throughout the work produces perhaps its most striking results. In the West, detective fiction dominated. With its focus on the 'whodunit', Western detective fiction implicitly (if not explicitly) expressed 'the bourgeois instinct for law and order' (p. 114) and exhibited a preference for morality tales. By contrast, Russian crime fiction obsessed over the 'whydunit'—the personality and motives of the killer. It also betrayed a distinctive predilection for tales that refused to conclude with what in the West would be regarded as a reassuring restoration of order and the capture and successful prosecution of the criminal. Russian crime fiction, McReynolds demonstrates, was unique in its reliable willingness to let the guilty go without paying for their crimes—a willingness, in other words, to prevent the state from punishing the criminal.

In her analysis of the inter-revolutionary years of 1907–1917, McReynolds highlights the ways in which heightened emotional responses to sensational murders articulated wider Russian worries about political violence, urbanisation, societal alienation, commercialisation, shifting gender norms, and geopolitical contests over the relative superiority of empires, nations and races. Russian society was on edge, its confidence desperately shaken. Murder trials prompted Russians to anxiously vent about the instabilities seemingly inherent to the *fin-de-siècle* period—to vent, as it turns out, still more so than to acquit.

As they engaged in sensationally deadly crimes and participated variously in late imperial politics, Russians revealed their 'passive-aggressive' attitude toward the autocracy in the courtroom, print media and on the silver screen (p. 234). Yet their 'passive-aggressive' and 'low-level subversion' did not free them from the patriarchal and capricious autocratic order. Against the backdrop of an ever-worrying modernity, society and autocracy locked themselves into a protracted stalemate that inspired 'feelings of helplessness' and 'stunted the emotional maturity of many Russians', but that did not offer either side a means with which to 'arbitrate a peaceful resolution' (p. 268). In trying to understand why tsarist Russia failed to become a rule-of-law state, McReynolds argues, historians must appreciate not merely autocratic obstinacy, but also the 'passive-aggressive' popular legal culture and societal frustrations that she describes so vividly in this book.

Recommended to scholars and students alike, this book is an absolute pleasure to read. McReynolds's dexterity as a historian is as impressive as is her energetic, delightful and witty prose.

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BRIGID O'KEEFE © 2014

Marco Buttino (ed.), *Changing Urban Landscapes. Eastern European and Post-Soviet Cities since 1989*. Rome: Viella, 2012, 212pp., €25.00 p/b.

COMMUNIST SYSTEMS ELABORATED AND IMPLEMENTED HOUSING POLICIES to promote regime legitimacy and to homogenise their societies. The crisis of those societies redefined their political and economic systems and instigated huge migratory flows that changed the social, cultural, demographic

and urban landscapes in just two decades. After the collapse of communism, the public housing concept dissolved and new opportunities for consumption and investment occurred. New buildings and reconstructions transformed the urban landscape reshaping grey communist cities in a Western-like style—‘occidentalism’ (p. 8).

Nowadays, the urban and social changes in post-communist countries seem to be messy, unknown and often misunderstood phenomena; and the study of these fast evolutions remains limited. Marco Buttino has collected an interesting selection of six essays presenting different stories and similar dynamics that highlight the common features of urban transitions in post-communist space and the link between migratory issues (and the relative cultural assimilation problems), urban development, ethnic demography and the new regime’s housing policies. These policies have an impact on political legitimacy and the creation of a national culture or identity through the pursuit of either inclusive or exclusive policies depending on different national characteristics.

Urban changes became a crucial issue for new post-communist regimes. With regard to systemic ‘policies of integration and assimilation aimed at erasing previous cultural heritage’ (p. 9), the new governments maintained the soviet housing tradition as a tool of political authority to achieve popular consensus. Standardised housing was functional, even for the assimilation of minorities and the building of social and national cohesion.

Almaty is a good example of a changed urban landscape. In the first chapter, Giulia Pannicciari analyses the evolution of the former Kazakh capital and the contradictory aspects of the Kazakhstani nation-building process. After the USSR’s collapse, the economic crisis created competition between several social groups for scarce resources like jobs, public administrative positions and houses; and a cautious Kazakhstani nationalist policy was implemented all over the country as ethnic Kazakhs started to be preferred to other groups. This mechanism strengthened the Kazakhs’ position, as they became ‘the masters of the country’ (p. 15) over other minorities, claiming to standardise a very heterogeneous national people. The rejection of the Soviet past and the imposition of new national landmarks pushed other minorities—mainly Slavs—to emigrate from Kazakhstan. Interregional migration flows occurred as the city was ‘refilled’ by Kazakh nationals from the countryside in search of better opportunities. However, the national rhetoric of ‘rights of the Kazakhs’ and ‘kazakhness’ that rural Kazakhs claimed to better represent failed to create new civic and universal patterns. The urban demography changed while preserving former inequalities between peasant settlers in the Almaty outskirts and the urban Kazakhs who had settled and been sovietised during the 1930s. Shanyrak is the case study that most highlights this marginalisation.

In Uzbekistan, similar evolution occurred in a different social and urban context. Compared with the Almaty case, the changes in Samarkand originated in a similar nationalistic environment: when the Uzbek titular nation began to receive better treatment—comparatively even over the Tajik majority—large numbers of urban Slav settlers abandoned the city, leaving places for peasants and reshaping the urban landscape of Samarkand. Here, the editor and author Marco Buttino investigates the dynamics inside *mehallas*—district communities united by different kinds of tie—and the role of the new minorities in Samarkand. The author reconstructs micro-stories of three small communities—Bukhara Jews, Lyuli (local gypsies) and Koreans—that just a century ago were groups with ‘clear culturally distinctive features’ (p. 92) and that, after the soviet experience, tried to recover their identities.

Minorities and identity issues within the same national group are discussed in Liza Candidi’s chapter on post-communist and reunified Berlin. The author focuses on the main urban minorities after the GDR collapsed. After 1990, Eastern Germans became a new minority that remained—positively or negatively—attached to its *Ostdeutscher* shape. Their assimilative ‘cultural *Anschluss*’ (p. 122) and the transformation of names, places and buildings is still changing the Berlin urban and social landscape and denying its recent past.

The cross-border dimension is discussed in the fourth chapter in which the author, Pietro Cingolani, analyses the relations between Roma and non-Roma (*gagé*) communities related to urban and social change in post-communist Romania. During the Ceausescu regime, a system of asymmetrical

interdependence between Roma and *gagé* at the local level was created; but after 1989 this compromise was dissolved and the Roma lost their position and started to emigrate to urban centres (or countries such as Italy), which created a need to renegotiate a new compromise with urban settlers.

In the next chapter, Francesco Vietti analyses the Ksamil case and the redefinition of minorities related to migration. Confrontation among ‘old’ and new settlers in this Albanian village increased during the last years of high urbanisation and emerging tourism, where many thought the landscape was being ruined by the tourist industry. A legal confrontation—among *kanun* traditional rules and new inadequate legislations defining property—was resolved in 2006 with the ‘clean up campaign’, further reshaping a city that had already experienced an uncontrolled urban development.

Parallel to transitions, tragic events can also reshape the social and urban landscape. In the last chapter, Zaira Tiziana Lofranco deals with post-war Sarajevo and the effects of conflict (and ethnic cleansing) that deeply affected the Bosnian city and its society. War radically broke with the past and deeply divided Sarajevo society between majority and minority groups; furthermore, institutional changes in the Dayton Agreement defined the new shape of BiH state, its repatriation policies and the return of refugees.

In this book, Buttino has made a concise and effective selection of stories that analyse urban change through a comparative approach towards post-communist transition countries, similar social dynamics related to migration flows and the need to renegotiate the social pact with minorities. However, any context presents its own specificities and Buttino rightly avoids easy theoretical conclusions about transitional urbanisation. He provides a wide argumentation, combining multidisciplinary approaches and methods, interpreting histories through the tools of urban, social and cultural history; anthropology, sociology, demography, geography and town planning. This approach offers a new perspective to understand the transitions’ dynamics through physical urban change and it provides an excellent starting point for further studies on other (even non-post-communist) transition cities and societies in Africa, South America and Eastern Asia.

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G. S. Sultanbayeva, S. N. Velitchenko & O. P. Lozhnikova, *Intellektual’nyi kapital-osnova razvitiya obchestva znaniya*. Almaty: Kazakh Universiteti, 2013, 227pp.

G. S. Sultanbayeva, A. T. Kulsariyeva & Zh. A. Zhumashova, *Ot intellektual’noi natsii-k intellektualnomu potentsialu*. Almaty: Kazakh Universiteti, 2014, 184pp.

THE BOOKS UNDER REVIEW ASSESS ONE OF KAZAKHSTAN’S NEW NATIONAL programmes, ‘Intellectual Nation 2020’, focusing on the educational and cultural aspects of the programme. In addition they analyse the major steps of the government in implementing this programme and ‘modernising the country’. The concept of political, social and economic modernisation through a specific set of state-led initiatives and policies was quite popular in developing countries in the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1980s and 1990s the paradigm shifted and policy-makers in many countries began reassessing the role of the state in the context of free market reforms and the ‘neo-conservative revolution’ in economic thought (which postulated the absolute role of the market, rather than the state). Most of the countries in Central Asia underwent a similar transition, although rejecting the neo-conservative approach and radical ‘shock therapy’ reforms. However, Kazakhstan has probably been the only country which attempted to conceptualise its reforms within the framework of modernisation theory.

The authors of the books acknowledge the major features of modernisation theory, attempting to answer several questions including the following: what would this approach (and national programme) offer to Kazakh society, and what values should be promoted in the framework of this programme? The authors of these monographs have been working together in developing studies on the concept of