

THE TENACITY OF ETHNICITY: A SIBERIAN SAGA IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE. Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer. 1999. Princeton: Princeton University Press. xvi + 326 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-691-00673-3.

This is the first monograph-length ethnographic treatment of Siberian Khanty people by Marjorie Balzer since the author's well-read and well-respected doctoral thesis in 1979. Balzer was one of a small set of North American and European scholars to break the trail in the study of Siberia when fieldwork became possible in the early 1980s. Her many articles and edited collections have played an important role in introducing Siberian ethnography to a new generation of students. With the publication of this book, she has returned in a way to her beginning, revisiting the theme of her classic journal article 'Ethnicity without power,' published in *Slavic Review* in 1983.

Tenacity of ethnicity has many themes. It is most deeply an exploration of the way that Khanty identity has adapted itself to the various pressures of collectivisation, resettlement, massive industrialisation, and, most recently, the dislocations of market reforms. The work is painted in a pan-aboriginal frame featuring snapshot comparisons between Khanty people and North American aboriginal political movements (hence the sub-title). Supplementing the author's earlier contributions are well-written and well-researched historical chapters that chart the extension of Russian trade, military, and mission relations into Khanty territory. Going beyond her original work are several chapters, most significantly 1 and 8, that review three decades of anthropological theorising on identity and apply them in a creative way to Khanty movements.

The best part of this book is the wealth of new observations of meetings between the ethnographer and Khanty people in various sites from western Siberian villages to meeting halls. Balzer has been able to reflect succinctly on her first fieldwork in 1976, contributing to the new genre of retrospective ethnography pioneered by Caroline Humphrey with the reprinting and updating of *Karl Marx Collective* in 1999. The ethnographic material is richest in the discussion of neo-shamanic movements and the role of artists in politics. However the book also balances these accounts with observations of the effect of education policy and petrochemical development on families.

Theoretically, Balzer 'revitalises' the term revitalisation, launching a defence of political movements that capture an 'idealised past in order to reintegrate it with an uncertain future' (page 75). She encourages anthropologists to go beyond deconstructivist critiques of how tradition is 'invented' or processed by Siberian intellectuals to examine instead the way in which it creatively contributes to the massive social changes that rock post-Soviet Russia. This approach, probably best represented in the works of Anne Fienup-Riordan on Alaskan Eskimos, is applied here for the first time in a systematic way to Khanty people, who arguably were one

of the sets of pioneers of the aboriginal rights movement in Siberia. With Balzer's long connection with this movement, spanning 25 years, she is in the best position to evaluate its career.

In the concluding chapter Balzer ambitiously integrates her view of Siberian revitalisation with the theories of 12 theorists of identity. Her synthesis is represented with an intriguing tree (page 205) wherein key elements of each theory (for example, Benedict Anderson's idea of print capitalism) becomes reflected in the action of Khanty or Mansi peoples through 'sap' that 'flows in varying amounts with varying saliency.' Balzer's central message, as I take it, is a bid for an ecumenical approach to theorising, wherein any author has access to a germ of the truth. This, I am sure, is true. However, it might have been more helpful to have had Balzer's authoritative view of the 'forest,' giving her opinion of which works in a growing literature on Siberian people provide the best examples of one or another perspective.

In addition to the ethnographic and theoretical arguments, the book comes with several appendices giving the reader an English language copy of one of the first aboriginal rights petitions in Siberia, a list of films (although without addresses of where to obtain some of the rarer prints), and a standard table of Siberian nationalities from the 1989 census. The index gives a complete list of Russian language terms, theorists quoted, and places. The reader should be warned that there are some misleading faults in the citations and footnotes.

The book should be a welcome contribution to the libraries of specialists to the region as well as to yet another generation of students learning about Siberia. (David Anderson, Department of Sociology, University of Aberdeen, Dunbar Street, Aberdeen AB24 3QY.)

THE BIG FREEZE. C.J. Charley. 2000. London: Puffin Books. 154 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-141-30345-X. £3.99

CONQUERING THE WORLD. C.J. Charley. 2000. London: Puffin Books. 154 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-141-30346-8. £3.99

These two books, by writer, teacher, and traveller Catherine Charley, are great fun. They're aimed at the young reader — I'd say about 10 to 12 years old, and they're certainly the types of book I'd like to have read at that age — and they look at humans pitting themselves against hostile environments all over the world. The book of more interest to readers of *Polar Record* will be *The big freeze*. It gives a capsulated history of polar exploration, and looks in more detail at some of the well-known expeditions: Hudson, Franklin, Nansen, Peary, and Cook for the Arctic; Shackleton, Scott, Amundsen, Mawson for the Antarctic; plus lots of others in briefer snippets.

In fact the book is full of snippets. How to cope with a polar bear. How to survive extreme cold. How to go to the toilet in the cold! There's just the kind of trivia guaranteed to break the ice at parties. Did you know that