

The Triad of Post-Socialism, Post-Colonialism, and Postmodernism?: Fragmentary Memoranda from Southern Siberia

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#1 Have you [H.W.] been in India? I've seen Indian movies. They were very beautiful. Especially the actresses. In former days movies used to be shown in the club. Two times in a day! From six o'clock for children, from nine for adults. But now there is nothing, because of the shortage of gasoline. This is why we didn't receive our pensions yesterday. That reminds me ... Recently, I heard, someone dies every ten days. A maintenance man was drowned in the river. A teacher had been suffering from hypertension, and died. And most recently, chabanka (a shepherd woman) died. How old was she ... not beyond fifty... yes, forty-nine years old, I think. Of cancer. She would have soon been able to receive her pension, for she had five children; but didn't live her life. She had worked as chabanka in otara (flock)--where you also have been--it's very hard work [informant crying]. Her youngest child is still a baby. The rate of deaths increases while the rate of births is low. In this year only ten children have been born so far. Everyone will die. No future. Until what age are human beings able to be active? Until childhood, teens, twenties, thirties ... Not until fifties. [Woman, fifties]

#2 In former days there were public bathhouses. But there are none now. How do people who don't have any baths live? People have become susceptible to disease. In former times sanitation was widespread. Nothing works now. The goods are Chinese. And the toilet paper Czech! Where have our goods gone? There's nothing among us. A terrible time has come. Ah, how terrible! [Woman, fifties]

While I was conducting my anthropological fieldwork during the summers of 1996 and 1997 summers in the Selenga District, Republic of Buriatia, Russian Federation, I was always forced to think about the end. This impression was inspired mainly by daily discourses presented to me by many informants in two villages, Tokhoi and Noekhon, where I researched my theme, "The socio-cultural transformation among the Buriats after perestroika." Many villagers have a strong sense of the end, living in the current socio-economic situation. In that case, the end of

what? If asked, they would loudly give an answer: "the end of the Soviet Union" or "the end of communism!" How can we capture the sense of "the end of something" in the context of social theories?

It goes without saying that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of the Cold War have had an enormous impact upon social theories and intellectual thought. One may recall here immediately, for example, the well-known article by Francis Fukuyama entitled "The End of History?" (1989). In that short article he expressed with Hegelian nuances the final triumph of Western democracy which had been the only rival of socialism until then. His standpoint nevertheless does not suit the Selenga Buriats. This is not because they have not obtained a democratic regime and stability, but because they think that the democracy, which should follow the end of "totalitarian" Soviet-type socialism--as defined by numerous Soviet watchers--has not come to them.

#3 Under Lenin, Socialism was a good idea. Everything was transformed and changed after Stalin. I, of course, don't exactly read the books of Lenin, and so this is my opinion. If it means a previous one, I don't want to return to communism. The current situation is neither socialism nor capitalism: mere disorder. There is no expression other than it. Perestroika is just a word. The situation turned out to be worse. [Perestroika is] An empty word. [Man, twenties] Instead of an opportunistic opinion such as Fukuyama's, we can find other frameworks which are intricately intertwined: post-socialism, post-colonialism, and postmodernism. This triad of post-ness is one of the most popularized concepts used in the literature of human sciences now. If this assumption is useful for analyzing contemporary societies after perestroika, what will be the implications of "post-ness," in the scope of modern anthropology?

Fragment I: Change or continuity in economic reforms?

The first point to be discussed concerns post-socialism. Regarding the disintegration of the socialist bloc in Eurasia as an advent of post-socialism means not the replacement of it by capitalism or Western democracy, but reconfiguration of still existing socialist structures in nonsocialist regimes. Thus, what we can perceive through them is not just change which occurs now, but continuity which may be called the legacy of socialism. In other words, as Steven

Sampson (1991: 19) and Katherine Verdery (1996: 11) point out, it is after the breakdown of socialism that we can understand more precisely in what way actually existing socialism worked. For example, I would like to focus attention on the kolkhoz (a collective or corporate farm. Under the Soviet system, see Humphrey 1983). In the Soviet period, kolkhozes were all-encompassing institution: they functioned not just as a productive unit in rural areas but also as one of infrastructure for cultural activities. They helped villagers to build a museum, to organize of folklore contests, and still remained a linchpin of collectivization--by which I mean here the formation of collective or communal mentality of villagers other than the very Soviet policies in 1920-30s. However after perestroika these kolkhozes were forcibly refashioned. In the village of Noekhon the "Twentieth Party Congress" kolkhoz was reorganized in May, 1992, into the "Noekhon Collective Enterprise (kollektivnoe predpriyatie)," according to the Russian "Code of enterprises and enterprise activities" adopted in December of 1991. In Noekhon this resulted in the privatization of 52% of land and of 73% of productive funds. In reality, however, this new enterprise drastically lost its productive force and means, and was 1,307,000 rubles in the red in 1996. Economic and cultural activities became more individualistic than they had been. The villagers nevertheless emphasize even now the collective or communal way of life at the discursive level. Here we can conjecture what village life was like in the socialist era.

But, I somewhat doubt whether we can reconstruct the real way of life under socialism from the data collected in post-socialist days, because information about the socialist way of life narrated by the villagers is a reassessed one in terms of the current socio-economic difficulties. In Soviet times kolkhozes were a state institution, one of the cells directed for total management and control of economic society, and one of the devices of "colonialization of lifeworld by system," if I may echo David Anderson's argument (1992) based on the Jurgen Habermasian problematic. The Soviet kolkhoz, however, is now remembered by the villagers as a working place where labor was fully provided, and where workers were able to receive proper wages. Let us hear an informant's narrative about the kolkhoz in Tokhoi.

#4 Everything was common in the Commune. So were houses. In contrast the kolkhoz was good. We earned wages according to how much we worked. Everyone made efforts also in the private sector and saved money. Everyone worked for all his worth. But now, the situation has changed. The number of alcoholics are increasing, and people don't want to work seriously. Even if you find work, you can't receive any money. [Man, fifties]

That is to say, the kolkhoz is remembered in their now-existing worldview as like a security zone of private life, not like a state apparatus which restricted personal economic activities in private plots. We can here put our finger on the reconfiguration of remembering after perestroika, and therefore, many scholars of (post-) socialist studies embrace the problem of memory as a core theme (e.g. Grant 1995; Skultans 1998; Watson ed. 1994).

Needless to say, I am not of the agnostic opinion that we cannot inquire into Soviet society on the basis of fieldwork carried out after its complete collapse. The point I want to make is that in order to investigate the contemporary atmosphere in the post-socialist societies we had better emphasize aspects of change rather than continuity. The collectivity-oriented discourses by the villagers of Noekhon are not so much the byproduct of the socialist socio-cultural structure but rather a representation of the villagers' sense of community reshaped and re-imagined in present circumstances--circumstances which they think have been caused by the "from above" transition or transformation. Approached in this way, post-socialist study may be defined as the study of societies wherein a generative process of a new kind of community or collective society occurs which had been until now understood by Soviet watchers--whose discussions are criticized by Chris Hann with ethnographic sensibility (ed. 1990; ed. 1993)--merely as socialist mentality (collectivism) contrasted strikingly with its capitalist counterpart (individualism).

Fragment II: Soviet and ethnic cultures

The post-socialist conditions, secondly, could be labeled post-colonial in the former Soviet periphery, because the Soviet Union had in itself more than 130 ethnic groups, and because it is usually believed that the Russian-dominated Moscow government, as the center of a multinational empire, oppressed non-Russian nationalities, who in turn demanded national autonomy and proclaimed independence in the name of perestroika. This is why Carrere d'Encausse titled her monograph as *L'Empire Eclate* (1978), which has nowadays become a prophetic naming. When Soviet ideology and national policies aimed for ethnic consolidation through cultural colonization of non-Russian territories (characterized as Stalin's notable phrase "socialist in content, nationalist in form") broke down, this post-socialism also meant post-colonialism.

Although compared with European Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia, ethno-national movements in Siberia were rather weak, noteworthy among Buriat intellectuals is their emphasis on the Asianness and the Orientalness of Buriat culture and traditions (cf. Humphrey 1991). Such regional orientation towards the East and even Occidentalism contrasts with the so-called Euro-centrism one of the common landmarks of post-colonialism all over the world the peculiarity of the stress by Buriat intellectuals lies in the fact that their viewpoints are anti-Soviet, but not anti-Russian. According to arguments by I. S. Urbanaeva (1992; 1993), historical philosopher and ethnographer, the twentieth century is an age when human beings became contradictory to their own nature, when many nations have been in conflict with each other, and when the West and the East have opposed each other. The supra-national concept of "Baikal culture" gives an alternative--where humanity and nature have coexisted as a kind of a biological niche. She argues that this Baikal culture is an Inner Asian one, and that the Baikal region is not on the periphery of it, but, on the contrary, is central. Thus Urbanaeva attempts to show a perspective by which she thinks the Buriats could overcome their ethnic isolation. Her arguments go beyond Russia, for she proceeds to say that Europeanization is dangerous to Russia as well as to Buriatiia.

Philosopher and cultural anthropologist, Z. P. Morokhoeva's discussions (1994; 1995) are more sophisticated than Urbanaeva's, which have some right-wing implications in the ethnopolitics of Buriatiia (Zhukovskaia 1994:10). Morokhoeva states that while Western civilization has lost a traditional "model of world"--as she defines culture--which can harmonize human beings with nature, personality, society, culture and nature to form an indivisible unity in the Eastern model of world. This is why the East can grapple with ecological problems more thoroughly than the West. Because Buriatiia land stands at the crossroads of the West (Russia) and the East, it is possible in Buriatiia to construct a civil society which allows for the growth of personality and respect for human rights in a European sense, and, at the same time, to have a renaissance of ethnic culture. We can find another discussion of the problematic interrelationship between ecology and moments of ethnic revival in *Ecological Traditions in Culture of Inner Asian Peoples* (Abaev ed. 1992). According to these authors, Inner Asian peoples have traditionally and historically fostered ecological culture, and because of this, their culture holds a unique position in the context of worldwide ecological issues. It provides, the authors continue, not only voices of nature preservation but also ideal or spiritual backgrounds concerning the

symbiosis of men and nature. For instance, shamanism is affirmatively evaluated as a religious form of their cohabitation, and Buddhism as an ideal of the uncertainty of human existence. Taking into consideration the pre-existing, dominant Soviet ideology one of the components of which is an ideal of rapid industrialization and modernization, we might assess these discussions as post-colonial. However, it cannot be overlooked that it is almost only the intellectual class that creates discourses which link post-Soviet ideological space and an orientation towards the East or Oriental culture. Although an acquaintance in Noekhon told me, "I believe Buddhism is a more peaceful and ecological religion than Christianity and Islam," ordinary people use the concept of culture with connotations different from the discourses of intellectuals. For the man in the street, the end of the Soviet Union connotes culture in the Soviet sense, that is, socialist modernization or enlightenment. This drives us to the third question of postmodernism.

Fragment III: Between Postmodernism and Modernization

In what manner does postmodernism relate to post-socialist phenomena? Of course the term postmodernism has various definitions. Maryon McDonald says that the "invention of 'post-modernism' and analyses of socialism have been closely linked" (1991: 20). Keeping the East European case in mind, Zygmunt Bauman argues that "what collapsed was the most decisive attempt to make modernity work," for "communism was thoroughly modern in its passionate conviction that a good society can only be a carefully designed, rationally managed and thoroughly industrialized society." (1992: 167, 222) Ernest Gellner's famous insistence on "enlightenment rationalism" (1992) derives from his assumption that the contemporary ideological map of the world has ceased to be binary (e.g. liberalism vs. socialism), and that the relativism he criticizes is fashioned as postmodernism and is a "claustrophobic and isolationist" option. In this respect, his argument is anti-postmodernist as well as post-socialist. Whatever the term postmodernism means, post-Soviet conditions may be called post-modern. But in what historical and local context?

As I have said, we notice the sense of an "end of something" among the Selenga Buriats. Their assessments of the current "disorder" (#3) are made with reference to images of the Soviet period which has collapsed. At least as far as I observed, no villagers and not even self-professed communists expressed the position that they should like to return to a socialist or Soviet regime.

They make no claims on the future based on their memory of a "stable" life in the Soviet Union. The villagers instead reassess post-Soviet conditions, and merely lament them as they witness the present decline of Soviet culture.

#5 We're accustomed to the socialist meaning of culture. In the sense of lifestyle, I mean. It's about how people live, say, schools, study, films, technical colleges. The former days were good. But everything is destroyed now. Everything is destroyed. In the past life went well. Basically. I don't know what will come tomorrow. I don't know. We may know it while we live. In principle we lived our own times. For children and grandchildren ... what's coming? [Man, fifties]

Generally speaking, the core of Soviet cultural policy had two dimensions which were inseparably linked to each other: the invention of an official ethnic culture according to ethnic articulation, and the creation of a Soviet culture as a form of new civilization beyond ethnicity. The former process resulted mainly in a widespread establishment of cultural organizations (e.g. ethnic folklore ensembles, ethnic museums and so on). The latter was concerned with the socialist enlightenment (cf. Grant 1995). Among the largely illiterate Siberian native peoples at the time of the Russian Revolution, this dimension meant kul'turnoe stroitel'stvo (cultural construction); that is, education, the invention of an alphabet, and building cultural institutions for a modern way of life (e.g. reading rooms, bathrooms, krasnie ugolki ("red corner," lounges), dom kul'tury (house of culture) or clubs, libraries, schools, etc.). It is for this very reason that when they lament the current hardship, the first informant refers to movies in the club, the second to bathhouses, and the last to socialist lifestyle. The reason why studies of material culture were highly developed in Soviet ethnography lies in the foregoing definitions of culture. Soviet culture is equal in one context to cultural amenities, which have been "destroyed" (#5) and have ceased to function in the social structure.

The villagers have no alternative perspective on Soviet ideology and culture, although they severely criticize the repression of Tibetan Buddhism by the government and have a few relatives who were arrested, purged, and in some cases sent before the firing squad under Stalin's terror. For them, the collapse of the Soviet Union is experienced as the end of culture defined as a modern way of life and as material progression. On the basis of the emic definition of "better" culture, the Selenga Buriats distinguish themselves both from the Western (Irkutsk) Buriats ("lower" shamanists than Buddhists) and from the Mongols who they think are "culturally-

lower" due to the insufficiency of modernized culture. But they themselves in turn have been recently forced to undergo a malfunction of culture and have lost any coordinates for evaluating their position in a culturally-evolutionist process, the ideology of which was made during the Soviet era. Viewed in this light, post-Soviet conditions may be regarded as postmodern in the sense that the end of the Soviet Union provoked a malfunction of culture which has been defined and experienced through modernization and a modern style of life.

Concluding Remarks

Using the triangle key terms, I have sketched out some aspects of a "sense of end" among the post-Soviet Selenga Buriats. The picture given above cannot be applied to all the post-socialist areas. There is, for instance, a strong and future-oriented symbol of "Western Europe" or "Return to Europe" among the Czech masses who consider themselves to be "a highly cultural and well-educated nation" and therefore have detested being classified as "uncultured" East Europeans (Holy 1993: 208). One can hardly find such a "hopeful" goal being pursued in Southern Siberia. Nevertheless, it is misleading to say that the Selenga Buriats are now apathetic. Pointing out the Janus-faced processes of destatization and restatization in post-socialist Eurasia, Verdery (1996: ch.8) defines the atmosphere as feudalistic--a parceling of sovereignty or authoritative structure. This formulation is true (even to some extent in capitalist states). Because the terminology of feudalism to some extent suggests a historical evolutionist theory--although Verdery also rejects teleological thinking (pp. 227f.)--I prefer instead to define it more modestly from Southern Siberia as the end of rapid modernization planned and installed from the above according to the evolutionist ideology of progress and its effects and aftermath. Buriat problems are concerned with the modernization process and are common to residents in post-industrial states.

The conclusion of this report has far-reaching implications for us. Shocked by the impact of post-colonial studies and cultural studies, contemporary anthropology has shifted to the post-modernisms with an emphasis on multivocal ethnography (e.g. Clifford 1988; Marcus and Fischer 1986). On the other hand, I would like to insist that we do not need postmodern anthropology, but anthropology on modernity--postmodernity, if one wants. Social theories have been composed until now of a series of binary pairs (e.g. capitalism vs. socialism, community vs.

modernity, society vs. the state, individualism vs. collectivism, and so forth). But these dualistic frameworks, the distinction between anthropology which deals with "primitive" *Gemeinschaft* and sociology with "modernized" *Gesellschaft*, may not be useful especially for the post-socialist studies. In this light, studies of contemporary Eurasia and East Europe where such a binary or dualistic approach so far has been dominant in academic worlds mandates a radical transformation of methodological thinking of anthropology.

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