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BOOK REVIEW

Jamie Freeman, *From German Königsberg to Soviet Kaliningrad: Appropriating Place and Constructing Identity*, Routledge, 2021

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The book discusses the aftermath of the Red Army's capture of the German region of Königsberg in 1945. Its impact was so great that within a few years, the former capital of East Prussia and the home of Immanuel Kant had ceased to be a German soil. It became 'Kaliningrad'. After this capture, Königsberg became solely inhabited by Soviet citizens. These Soviet citizens had no connection to the land they now occupied. Despite various attempts to redraw the region's topography and appropriate its symbolism, today's Kaliningrad continues to highlight the difficulties faced by this region in the process of constructing identity in the absence of a national heritage.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union's hegemony during the late 1980s exposed the shortcomings of the Bolsheviks' bold and ambitious vision for Kaliningrad, confirming the fact that the reconstruction of the city along socialist lines had failed to eradicate the region's former heritage. During this period of upheaval, the city was once again forced to form a new identity from the remnants of its fractured past.

Kaliningrad became symbolically significant with the decision to treat the land as *terra nullius* i.e. it was made to serve as the melting pot into which people of different national backgrounds could enter and become Soviet citizens. When reform policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* were implemented, it had, by that time, become increasingly clear that collectivization and shock industrialization had dislocated the economy beyond repair.

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The first chapter, 'The banner of the Soviet Union is now forever established', discusses the ways which were used by the Soviets to envisage and build a model socialist city. The incorporation of the region into the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) and the renaming of Königsberg as Kaliningrad on July 4th, 1964 further signaled Moscow's shift with regards to the region. Efforts were made to imprint the Soviet terminology upon the landscape. The new historical narrative had to be disseminated and then also adopted by the new settlers. Promoting Kaliningrad's place as part of the wider USSR was made most explicitly through the school's cultural enlightenment work.

In the second chapter, the author highlights the fact that 'Kaliningrad has been transformed beyond recognition'. The author sheds light upon the massive restructuring of the city. With the active participation of the local populace, the proposed city plans welcomed the idea of a new homeland. Khrushchev visited the region in 1957 and initiated the programme of residential development that prioritized the construction of a multitude of 'micro districts' over the redevelopment of the city centre. The '1974 General Plan' also proposed the complete dissolution of the former street pattern of Königsberg that had so far served as an appropriate basis for the new roads in the centre. When the Soviet Union began to crumble, Kaliningrad had found the heart of its city still tuned to static. Far from becoming the orientating point of the city, the uncompleted centre provided a suitable metaphor for the USSR's ensuing disintegration.

The third chapter, 'Cataclysms or a political crisis', takes into account the region's experience of the policies of glasnost and perestroika. Kaliningrad's new exclave status promoted the emergence of the region as an economic and political entity, separate but still a part of Russia. By 1999, the promotion of a specific regional identity that encompassed the region's exclave status and pre-war German heritage had become well-refined. This served to enable closer engagement with and access to German and the EU's cultural institutions which had remained less feasible in Russia proper. However, after the disintegration of the USSR and its hegemony, the planned socialist towns of the wider Eastern bloc – conceived of as projects of social engineering designed to develop a new type of community and personality, faced a particularly complex process of re-orientation. Yet, the reorientation of Kaliningrad in this way marks a change of direction in the formation of its geographical identity. It moves away from the utilization of the pre-Soviet,

German past towards the adoption of a more stable form of territorial community which is rooted in the present. By now, an identity has emerged amongst different segments of the society which is reflective of the fact that the Soviet project, though left unfinished, had put a significant and lasting impression on the region and its inhabitants.

The last chapter, 'Words are articulated from afar', discusses how the very attempt to stress Baltic unity by the political elite encouraged some to realize the lack of unity in the littoral states. Similarly, the link between Kaliningrad and Russia proper was made even more emphatic through the erection of the Orthodox Church of Christ the Saviour in Kaliningrad's Victory Square. The author mentions that despite the positive intentions, the celebration of '75 years of Kaliningrad' served to reinforce the difficulties of constructing a post-Soviet geographical identity in the absence of natural inheritance.

In conclusion, the author states that the restoration project meant that the architecture and urbanism of Soviet Kaliningrad had to further represent the 'physical manifestation of the societal transformation brought about by communism'. In other words, it had to simultaneously become both a 'corporal paradigm of the triumph of socialism over capitalism' and 'a laboratory and home for the new Soviet man'. But at present, the city still appears to exist in a state of flux, lacking a clear direction or affirmation of its character and struggling with the image of its 'identity'. At the same time, it is developing on its terms and reconciliation.

Finally, this book is an in-depth study of Kaliningrad's transformation. It takes into account those various phases and policies that had a profound impact on this region. The role of the locals in the making of those policies shows the strength possessed by masses. It has taken many years to make Kaliningrad establish its own identity, especially, when it has still not completely severed its links to its ancient past.