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**Madeleine Reeves (Ed). Movement, Power and Place in Central Asia and Beyond: Contested Trajectories. London: Routledge, 2012.**

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**Madeleine Reeves (Ed). *Movement, Power and Place in Central Asia and Beyond: Contested Trajectories*. London: Routledge, 2012.**

Central Asia is a region of “entangled” landscapes, historically interdependent yet marked by considerable tensions and border contestations. Traditionally, the region has been defined as being mapped by movements, flows, and the circulation of people and goods. For centuries, the region has served as a nexus for trade routes and cultural exchange and, hence, has been perceived as a “Silk Road in miniature” (17). Spatial tropes have primarily concentrated on Central Asia’s geopolitical position, with the region having historically been defined as being trapped in between dominant neighboring powers, as a result of which it has been subjected to external ideological flows. The region has been frequently viewed through the prism of orientalism, and little attention has been paid to its internal tensions such as internal movements of populations, be they voluntary or forced, and the lack of material infrastructures.

*Movement, Power, and Place in Central Asia and Beyond* is an edited volume of essays that seeks to connect the histories of various movements (i.e. itinerant, sedentary, labor, migratory, gendered) to places through contested borderlands and power plays. The volume contains eleven case studies that draw on a diverse scope of sources, including archival Party, border, and OGPU<sup>1</sup> documents from the Russian, Tajik, and Kyrgyz State Archives, as well as oral histories and interviews. The essays demonstrate how the histories of movements within the region contribute to the processes of place-making and argue that place is produced through movement. The edited collection questions the metaphorical use of “flow” as it is typically used in the social sciences to refer to the movement of peoples; rather, the text examines such movement vis-à-vis the material infrastructures through which mobility is unequally distributed. By employing the methods of critical human geography, particularly the works of Doreen Massey, the contributing scholars seek to apply a “dynamic approach” to place in relation to the social and political situation in Central Asia and the contested trajectories thereof. By concentrating on a contested set of ethnic, territorial, and gender dynamics that produce place, they treat space not as a fixed or static entity within the socio-political arena. Rather, they recognize that space is a dynamic entity and employ empirical tools to explore unmediated existing tensions and dynamics of movement in relation to power and place.

The essays in *Movement, Power, and Place in Central Asia and Beyond* are organized thematically rather than chronologically. They revolve around two themes: *incomplete spatialization* and *doing place*. The theme of *incomplete spatialization* examines “the workings of power in the transformation of place” (8). It also investigates limitations and restrictions on human movement as the result of government intervention, as is reflected in Madeline Reeves’ example on the Kyrgyz-Tajik borderland. *Doing place through movement* recognizes the premise of place as always changing; within this framework, place is understood to be an unfinished outcome of “heterogeneous trajectories of people, things and ideas” (8).

The edited volume emphasizes three areas, *taming space*, *infrastructures of mobility and immobility*, and *multiplicity of doing place*, as analytical tools through which to explore the intricacy of various tensions in the region with respect to the movement of peoples. Charles Shaw and Botakoz Kassymbekova focus on the “political and practical” implications of territorializing space in early Soviet Central Asia. Shaw examines the Soviet efforts to (1) secure and regulate the movement of people and goods at the Central Asian border shared with Iran, Afghanistan, and Xinjiang from 1918-1934 and to (2) project an image of friendship between people, modernity, and progress to southern neighbors. By focusing on the forced resettlement of human bodies and the artificial ethnicization of Tajiks and Uzbeks as tools to “tame” physical geography in the making of Soviet

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from its Russian moniker meaning “Joint State Political Directorate” or “All-Union State Political Administration,” the acronym OGPU identifies the Soviet Union’s secret police, in operation from 1922-1934.

Tajikistan in 1920-38, Kassymbekova's study demonstrates a different kind of mobility in which bodies are distributed as means of state power and control.

This same type of state-controlled mobility is examined in the essays of Ian Campbell and Robert Argenbright, who seek to demonstrate how certain kinds of movements are facilitated by material infrastructures in the effort to transform space. Campbell explores the process of "sedentarization" (68) in the Kazakh nomadic steppe by the Shcherbina Expedition of 1896-1903.<sup>2</sup> The goal of the expedition was not to simply cultivate another Russian imperial spatial transformation project in which a sedentary lifestyle (in this case among Russian peasant resettlements) was identified with civil order and economic productivity. Rather, it sought to promote a sedentary lifestyle that was explicitly portrayed as superior to mobile pastoralism. Still, argues Campbell, the Shcherbina expedition ultimately sought to reconcile sedentary and nomadic lifestyles by also recognizing the "continuing value of mobile pastoralism in the steppe" (66) and allowing Kazakh nomads to participate in transforming their own steppe. Argenbright continues the theme of spatial transformation by focusing on a different expedition in the context of "socialist colonization" in the early Soviet period in the 1920s. *The Krasnyi Vostok*<sup>3</sup> was an "agitational" (79) train that carried Bolshevik propaganda to Turkestan. This particular effort sought to transform Central Asian places by implementing changes in accordance with the Party's policies as well as enabling local populations to participate in state-building by taking into consideration the complaints of the "rural proletariat" regarding the abuses and corruption of Soviet officials. However, the project was limited by a deficiency of native cadres and limited knowledge of local peoples and cultures.

The last set of essays deals, primarily through ethnographic research, with the *multiple ways of doing place* that contest or challenge socio-spatial projects. The ethnographic research conducted in these chapters includes participant observations, indigenous oral histories, and interviews that present an "alternative spatial imaginary" (14), a marginalized narrative that is often concealed from the official government records. Judith Beyer demonstrates how the socio-spatial project, imposed from the outside, was adapted into local geographical understanding. By tracing the genealogies (*uruuu*<sup>4</sup>) of the inhabitants of two villages in Talas, Kyrgyzstan, Beyer contends that despite sedentarization and the subsequent efforts of collectivization as a part of "colonial technology" in the 1930s, villagers were able to alter and adapt reforms as part of their geographical identity. The villagers' identities in this case remained attached to their genealogical landscapes. Eva-Marie Dubisson and Anna Genina expand on Beyer's argument about genealogy's centrality to place by exploring the competing notions and constructions of "homeland" and Kazakh cultural identity (*Kazakhshylykh*) among groups of Kazakhs living in Kazakhstan and Mongolia. The authors seek to demonstrate the different ideas of national belonging and historical narratives that became apparent with the emergence of the Kazakh nation-state in 1991 and the consequent repatriation of the Kazakh diaspora from Mongolia and elsewhere. The authors' goal is to contest the "binary of state domination versus subordinate resistance" (113) and emphasize the variant complexity of individuals' understandings of their own ancestry, movement, and landscape. The idea of movement is also central to Jeane Feaux de la Crouix's work on water and flow in the Toktogul region of Kyrgyzstan. She explores people's interactions with water in mountain pastures, hydroelectric dams,

<sup>2</sup> The Russian imperial expedition to Kazakhstan, under the leadership of the statistician F.A. Scherbin, that was sponsored by the Siberian Railroad Committee and the Ministry of Agriculture. It aimed at gathering necessary data to calculate the amount of land in order to facilitate new agricultural settlements (Campbell, 2011)

<sup>3</sup> During the Russian Civil war, special trains carried political activists, propaganda, films, and other forms of entertainment to the frontier regions of the state in an effort to "agitate" for policy change. Activists on such trains often met with local peoples in order to "[solicit] their complaints and [attempt] to reform local governance regimes." The *Krasnyi Vostok* train spread Bolshevik propaganda and encouraged changes that were in line with central policy (Argenbright, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> The term in Kyrgyz is often associated with the concept of "tribe" in English respectively. According to the interviewed informants in Talas, KG, *uruu* is comprised of the group of relatives that came from a common ancestor (Beyer, 2011)

and sacred sites, where moving water wields a different power in each. In case of hydroelectric dams, water provides political and economic capabilities, whereas in instances of mountain pastures and sacred sites, water bestows natural and spiritual agency. Based on this example of local people's interactions with water and its unbalanced courses, Feaux de la Crouix critiques the social sciences metaphor of "flow," in this case, calling it a "romanticized idea" of movement as an abstract process, an image that is often invoked when characterizing movement within Central Asia.

Jeff Sahadeo, Eliza Isabaeva, and Madeline Reeves' essays revolve around the themes of long-distance migration and the meaning of "home." Sahadeo's article explores the informal trade networks, shaped along ethnic lines, between Moscow, Caucasus, and Central Asia, which emerged during the Brezhnev-era years of economic stagnation. The participants viewed mobility as "a remedy for social and economic problems" (150). The collected oral histories presented in these chapters demonstrate the complex dynamics of the migrants' connections not only to home and metropole but also to "global-core periphery imbalances" (147). The recent phenomenon of external migration and labor remittances in Söpu Korgon, Kyrgyzstan is the focus of Isabaeva's work. By examining the effect of labor away from "home," Isabaeva contends that remittances go beyond supporting families. She claims that they also enable remaining family members to maintain livelihoods and sustain local community. Furthermore, she asserts that labor migration processes are "distinctly gendered" (180). Reeves, in her concluding essay of the volume, examines "gendered out-migration" (179) in Sokh, Uzbekistan. She examines gender dynamics among women who are "staying put" while their husbands are away. Mobility in this case, argues Reeves, is relational. Male absence, in the context of migration, transforms female mobility, while enabling opportunities outside of the home for some women and restricting such opportunities for others. Gender perspective could have been integrated more, especially in the essays on labor and migration. Reeves was essentially the only scholar in the entire volume who emphasized gender as a decisive, not "additive," element to politics of migration and mobility.

Overall, the edited volume provides a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary analysis that challenges the flawed imagination of Central Asia as a region of "flows," movements, and people and instead emphasizes the social complexity of the region as a place of contested borders and heterogeneous trajectories. The edited collection brings together a variety of U.S., European, and Central Asian scholarly voices to provide a valid critique of "how Central Asia is researched and written about" (19). By employing spatial turn and, in particular, a dynamic approach to place, the volume develops "a more creative and critically effective balancing of the spatial/geographical and the temporal imaginations" (3). The goal of the volume is to "facilitate conversation between literatures concerned, on one hand, with historical and contemporary dynamics of large-scale movement and, on the other, with the micro-politics of making and transforming place" (7). The intersection of the political and social trajectories that lead to different meanings of place is the main argument made in these case studies. The volume's interdisciplinary approach greatly contributes to the advancement of scholarship on Central Asia.

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