

Deborah Cahalen Schneider, Being Goral: Identity Politics and Globalization in Postsocialist Poland (SUNY series in National Identities). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006. 211 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$60.00 (cloth). ISBN 0791466558.

Zywiec, a town in the Goral region of Poland, is the location of a large annual folk festival that showcases Goral music and dance, as well as Goral crafts. It attracts tourists and folk performers from Europe and beyond. But the folklore of this region is not what interests Schneider and she does not cite the work of Cooley on Goral music (Making Music in the Polish Tatras: Tourists, Ethnographers, and Mountain Musicians. Indiana University Press, 2005). Rather, the author focuses on politics. She seeks to show how the major players in post-socialist Zywiec use folklore, which she subsumes under the category of “traditionalism,” to advance their political and economic agendas.

The author makes a number of cogent observations. Nationalism is not as important a factor as once thought, she argues. Certainly in Zywiec, the Polish government has become a minor player and town residents see themselves as Goral rather than Polish. This is partially due to historical circumstances: the Goral region has been dominated by a succession of powers and the concept of nation-state is not central to the identity of its residents. The collapse of the Soviet-era centralized government has contributed to this outlook. It has meant the loss of guaranteed jobs and many social perquisites such as free daycare, medical clinics, and sports and social facilities. To fill this void, Zywiecers have either turned inward and relied on local networks to provide needed services, or gone global, seeking to attract outside capital and to make their businesses part of international corporations. The conflict between the two approaches to the post-socialism dilemma is also a class conflict, the author contends. Soviet rule did not eliminate classes. The pre-war elite maintained their status in the Soviet era, not on the basis of financial power, but as arbiters of culture and, to a certain extent, as a force in opposition to socialism. With privatization, the pre-war elite have reacquired their property, usually small local businesses, and thus gained economic clout. They are community leaders who favor a local solution to Zywiec needs because that is the one from which they would profit the most. Their opposition is what the author calls the neo-capitalists, people who favor an international approach: attracting outside investment that would make Zywiec businesses part of large corporations, creating jobs and bringing in new capital. Neo-capitalists

present themselves to the community as those best able to represent Zywiec on the global arena and try to build their power on this basis. In trying to advance their respective positions, both groups use traditionalism. The pre-war elite use Goral costumes, songs, dances, crafts to show that Zywiec is part of a unique regional culture. In their view, folklore shows that the Goral region is a unit which should remain insular and solve its problems internally. For neo-capitalists, folklore is a commodity, something to be sold, whether to attract tourists or as a corporate logo; it is a way for Zywiec to market itself. Non-elites also play a role in politics, albeit a small one. They exercise agency by supporting the vision of either the pre-war elite or the neo-capitalists.

In addition to showing that nationalism is not an important factor in all adjustments to post-Soviet life, this book makes a number of other contributions. Schneider looks at a rural area. She does not follow other scholars to urban centers, the seats of wealth and power, and she is able to show that the shock therapy that has worked well in cities does not facilitate a transition to a market economy in rural areas. She thus expands our understanding of the struggles of East Europe. The author offers case studies. She looks at two families adjusting to post-Soviet life and two businesses, the brewery in Zywiec, which was bought by Heineken and a metal factory that was also privatized and internationalized, but managed to retain pre-capitalist ideals. She thus offers a valuable glimpse into the lives of real people. There are annoying features to this book also. It is quite repetitive. Schneider tells us what she is about to do, then she does it, then she tells us what she has done. Additional case studies would have served this study better than such repetition. All in all, the book does a good job at expanding our understanding of post-Soviet life and of the processes of social change.

Still a study such as this should give folklorists pause. Are people concerned with money and power only? Is folklore but a tool in the struggle to improve one's lot in life? Do people not sing songs for the sheer pleasure of singing? Is Goral style furniture a tourist gimmick only? Can it not be used because it is aesthetically pleasing? We would all agree that the aesthetic dimension is an essential part of being human, yet there has been precious little attention to it, especially when looking at life in the post-socialist world. This is understandable. The Soviet Union was THE political antagonist in the imagination of the Western world. It is difficult not see its remnants in terms of power relations. But we diminish all humans by showing them as primarily concerned with power and money. People do strive for beauty. Folklorists, who

used to study the artistic creations of the common man, what Oring calls lore, should lead the way in refocusing on art and its aesthetic function (“Folk or Lore: The Stake in Dichotomies,” Journal of Folklore Research, Vol. 43, No. 3, 2006, pp. 205-218). They should show that folklore is not sung or told, drawn or carved, danced or acted solely to negotiate one’s position vis-à-vis one’s neighbor. Attention to the spiritual dimension needs to be brought back to folklore scholarship and post-Soviet studies.

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