



The Unmaking of Soviet Life: Everyday Economies after Socialism (Culture and Society after Socialism)

By Caroline Humphrey

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In order to understand today's Russia and former Soviet republics, it is vital to consider their socialist past. Caroline Humphrey, one of anthropology's most highly regarded thinkers on a number of topics including consumption, identity, and ritual, is the ideal guide to the intricacies of post-Soviet culture. The Unmaking of Soviet Life brings together ten of Humphrey's best essays, which cover, geographically, Central Russia, Siberia, and Mongolia; and thematically, the politics of locality, property, and persons. Bridging the strongest of Humphrey's work from 1991 to 2001, the essays do a great deal to demystify the sensational topics of mafia, barter, bribery, and the new shamanism by locating them in the lived experiences of a wide range of subjects. The Unmaking of Soviet Life includes a foreword and introductory paragraphs by Bruce Grant and Nancy Ries that precede each essay.

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Editorial Review

Review

"In her stimulating book *The Unmaking of Soviet Life*, Caroline Humphrey—one of the few anthropologists with substantial field experience in the old Soviet Union—explores changing attitudes to consumption. Consumer desire, she argues, was both aroused and frustrated in Soviet-type societies and 'acquiring consumption goods and objects became a way of constituting . . . selfhood.' . . . One of the virtues of Humphrey's book is that the words 'democracy' and 'capitalism'—so enthusiastically invoked by Western commentators in the early years of Russia's 'transition'—are used sparingly."—*London Review of Books*, 9 October 2003

"Humphrey provides fascinating insights into the dynamics of the social and economic transition in Russia since the collapse of communism. . . . This important collection should be in all research libraries and will interest political scientists, economists, and sociologists, as well as anthropologists. Lower-division undergraduates and above."—*Choice*, January 2003

"Particularly valuable is her dissection of 'corruption.' She argues that people make clear distinctions between the bribe direct, 'generally understood to be reprehensible' because it takes advantage of weakness; other equally 'extralegal' acts, such as the use of personal connections to bypass regulations, which are seen as morally legitimate forms of reciprocal support even when 'favours' are exchanged; and pilfering from the workplace, which decades of 'predatory socialism' made people look on almost as a personal 'right.'"—*Rosemary Righter, Times Literary Supplement*, 22 November 2002

"Having long studied the people of Mongolia and Russia, Humphrey knows well how to tell the new from subtle variations on the Soviet past."—*Foreign Affairs*

"These essays have a lot to offer scholars in other disciplines, since they show how anthropological work, even when focused on apparently unrepresentative phenomena at the micro level, can illuminate general processes of social change. . . . Humphrey is concerned to understand how people construct meaning in their lives, and she demonstrates repeatedly that the legacy of the socialist world remains extremely strong, for example, in the value system that leads to strong prejudices against 'traders' of all types, those who do not 'produce' goods useful to society."—*Chris Hann, Slavic Review* Summer 2003

"This collection of essays attempts to capture the lived experience of change in the history of post-Soviet peoples, who invested radical, western-style reforms from above with meanings that were rooted in the values and practices of the Soviet era. Their confrontations with harsh contemporary practices of privilege and power reveal a process of transformation manifest not through uncompromising and dramatic breaks with the past, but in unexpected combinations and recombinations of the old and the new."—*Esther Kingston-Mann, Focaal: European Journal of Anthropology*, 2003

"Caroline Humphrey is the world's foremost anthropological student of the socialist and postsocialist Soviet Union. The socialist past is critical to understanding Russia today, and Humphrey shows why better than anyone I know."—*Katherine Verdery, University of Michigan*

"*The Unmaking of Soviet Life* offers a rich, nuanced, and thought-provoking analysis of the extra-legal side of Russian economic life in the 1990s, including barter, bribery, and the privatization of protection and

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From the Back Cover

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About the Author

Caroline Humphrey is Professor of Asian Anthropology at the University of Cambridge, author of several books, and winner of the J. I. Staley Prize for her landmark book *The Karl Marx Collective: Economy and Society in a Siberian Collective Farm*.

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