



# Russia on the Edge: Imagined Geographies and Post-Soviet Identity

*Edith W. Clowes*

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## **Russia on the Edge: Imagined Geographies and Post-Soviet Identity** Edith W. Clowes

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russians have confronted a major crisis of identity. Soviet ideology rested on a belief in historical progress, but the post-Soviet imagination has obsessed over territory. Indeed, geographical metaphors—whether axes of north vs. south or geopolitical images of center, periphery, and border—have become the signs of a different sense of self and the signposts of a new debate about Russian identity. In *Russia on the Edge*, Edith W. Clowes argues that refurbished geographical metaphors and imagined geographies provide a useful perspective for examining post-Soviet debates about what it means to be Russian today.

Clowes lays out several sides of the debate. She takes as a backdrop the strong criticism of Soviet Moscow and its self-image as uncontested global hub by major contemporary writers, among them Tatyana Tolstaya and Viktor Pelevin. The most vocal, visible, and colorful rightist ideologue, Aleksandr Dugin, the founder of neo-Eurasianism, has articulated positions contested by such writers and thinkers as Mikhail Ryklin, Liudmila Ulitskaia, and Anna Politkovskaia, whose works call for a new civility in a genuinely pluralistic Russia. Dugin's extreme views and their many responses—in fiction, film, philosophy, and documentary journalism—form the body of this book.

In *Russia on the Edge*, literary and cultural critics will find the keys to a vital post-Soviet writing culture. For intellectual historians, cultural geographers, and political scientists the book is a guide to the variety of post-Soviet efforts to envision new forms of social life, even as a reconstructed authoritarianism has taken hold. The book introduces nonspecialist readers to some of the most creative and provocative of present-day Russia's writers and public intellectuals.

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