Recent events in Ukraine have put Russia and the socio-political development of the broader post-Soviet space into the international limelight. And unfortunately the image is uncomfortably clear: while the Soviet bloc might have collapsed two decades ago, many geopolitical and ethno-political issues remain unresolved, let alone fully known and understood in the West. Despite some pioneering investigations that appraised the chaotic transition of society in the 1990s, the dearth of anthropological perspectives on the socio-political realities of life inside Putin’s ‘sphere of influence’ refrain us from fully understanding Russia’s discourse and agenda.

Drawing on six years of ethnographic fieldwork, this paper will attempt to provide some insights how the unfolding ‘Russia vs. the West’ conflict is lived inside Russia and its interconnectedness with the Kremlin’s ethno-cultural agenda. The locus of the study is the Altai Republic, a semi-autonomous federal subject that has a large indigenous population and is striving for more independence. The perception of the conflict and interrelated sense of ‘Russian citizenship’ will be investigated through exploring four remarkable ‘cultural memory texts’. Produced by the Kremlin and the Indigenous people themselves, these texts give unique insights how heritage and memory is used on the one hand in a formative way to negotiate a strong Russian Federation and on the other hand heritage plays a normative role enabling indigenous people to make sense of the socio-political landscapes in which they are caught up.

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