

EDITORS' FOREWORD

The latest issue of *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* focuses particularly on cultural 'otherness'. In our introductory discussion, leading specialists on what is alternatively known as 'Central' and 'Middle' Asia (Russian *Srednyaya* and *Tsentrlnaya Aziya*) debate the coherence or otherwise of the region and its relations with Russia as the politically and economically dominant nation-state in Eurasia during the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. Among issues central to the discussion here is migration across Eurasia, and particularly into Russia, a question also raised in Elena Borisova's case study of Tajik migrants and of the transnational family relations imposed upon them under circumstances where dependant children often remain behind with other family members when mothers or fathers, or sometimes both, are performing seasonal or long-term work in Russian cities. Yuri Berezkin's study of the transnational dissemination of folklore motifs not only picks up on issues of cultural mobility, but also looks at the ways in which international motif indices, for all their status as supposedly neutral repositories of information, have often suffered from significant blind spots with relation to entire areas of the world, particularly beyond Europe, a further indication of the 'regionalisation' of specific areals.

The precise mechanisms by which ‘othering’ may take place in the modern information society come under scrutiny in another group of articles, this time dedicated to the significant impact of conspiracy theories on contemporary Russian society. As Jeanne Kormina shows, in circumstances where suspicion of cultural outsiders is widespread, even an age-old foodstuff such as yeast may come to seem a conduit for possible moral pollution. Alexander Panchenko looks in detail at the equally tenacious aversion to electronic recording systems such as bar codes. Sergei Shtyrkov and Anna Razuvalova, on the other hand, examine more elaborately intellectualised forms of conspiriologically coloured suspicion: the nationalist films of the actor and director Nikolay Burlyayev, in the latter case, and the promoters of so-called ‘ethnic Ossete’ religion, in the former. In both cases, the ‘native’ becomes the touchstone of authenticity and a bulwark against the percolation into the culture of insidious foreign influences. These case studies reveal how the upsurge of interest in the paranormal that emerged during the late Soviet era has become intertwined with the national self-assertion that also began to appear with the retreat of the overarching Soviet identity.

The number concludes with four reviews of important recent publications in the field of Central Asian studies, including two collections that debate the issues of (supra-)regional classification that are also raised in our ‘Forum’.

Long-standing readers of the journal will notice some small changes in the conventions used, for instance the presentation of citations in the bibliographies and footnotes, which have come about to harmonise the English-language numbers with the transliterated lists of references in our Russian parent journal that are required in order to converge with the standards required by international citation indices (Web of Science, Scopus, etc.). We are grateful to the editorial staff, particularly Alexandra Kasatkina, for coping serenely with the extra work that the new formatting has demanded, and as always, we express our thanks for the excellent work of our translators — in this case, the entire work of rendering Russian into English has been undertaken with great skill by Professor Ralph Cleminson.

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