

EDITORS' FOREWORD

This issue of *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*, the fifth to be published, focuses on 'traditions': Soviet history and the legacy of the Soviet past in today's Russia (addressed by the group of articles, 'Soviet Culture in Retrospect'), and the everyday practices and perceptions of modern Russian urban and rural society (the subject of a second block of articles).

A contribution to the analysis of issues of grass-roots identity is also made by Forum 8, which discusses the difficulties presented to scholars who are working on social groups committed to the expression of extreme nationalist views. As our contributors make clear, extremism is not an issue only in the Russian Federation (we also have contributions addressing Western Europe, Georgia, and former Yugoslavia), and exchanges of views across national boundaries (in defiance of the isolationist spirit advocated by the groups that some of the participants are studying) can make a significant contribution to the understanding of the mechanics of 'othering' and exclusion. Alongside this Forum, Mikhail Sokolov's article turns to the more familiar ground of organised nationalist politics, but from an unexpected angle, asking why political nationalism has, in the recent past, been a kind of 'dog that didn't bark'.

Other topics common to the issue include political rhetoric and its effects, and the place of ritual in Soviet culture – and the possible transformation of this over time. Recently it has become common to speak about Soviet Communism as ‘a political religion’, yet such assertions are often made on the basis of untested assumptions about the ubiquity of Christianity and other forms of religious belief, and the necessity to find an alternative belief system to replace this. Yet, as Vitaly Bezrogov shows, with the disappearance of Orthodoxy the norms of socialisation were subject to marked changes; equally, Soviet Communism became subject in time to its own sort of ‘secularising process’ that meant people did not necessarily understand turning up to political demonstrations and other collective events as an expression of support for the system – though they might not necessarily feel they were being coerced into attendance either.

The issue also contains a report on a recent conference about the future of Russian ethnography, and four reviews, all in one way or another addressing the legacy of the Soviet past and its impact on post-Soviet reality.

We much regret that one of our contributors – the well-known St Petersburg historian Oleg Ken, who died in 2007, aged only 47 – did not live to see this issue in print, and lament the passing of the distinguished folklorist Kirill Chistov, a contributor to *Antropologicheskii forum* in the past, an obituary of whom also appears in this issue.

Our thanks, once again, to the translators and editors, particularly Edmund Griffiths, Thomas Lorimer, Arkady Bliumbaum and Olga Boitsova.

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