

EDITORS' FOREWORD

The backbone of this sixth issue of *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* is two important discussions about the status of academic discussion. We begin with Forum 9, in which participants were invited to respond to Mikhail Sokolov's article about the difficulties of assessing academic quality in Russian academic life, and conclude the issue with Forum 10, which addresses the place of discussion in a scholarly world that is becoming increasingly globalised, yet which can often seem remarkably parochial and quiescent in terms of the problems that are (or are not) of pressing concern. It should be said that both discussions do much to undermine the pessimism that was a motivating factor in their organisation — both are remarkably varied and lively, and the capacity for vigorous but thoughtful criticism is much on display.

Alongside these quite strictly methodological and conceptual discussions, No. 6 also contains a striking example of academic discussion that has a precise object in focus — two diametrically opposed reviews of Marina Mogilner's study of physical anthropology in Late Imperial Russia, which is furiously attacked by Aleksandr Kozintsev, and vehemently defended by Ekaterina Melnikova. The clash between the two reviewers

is in part related to a discussion topic that features in Forum 11 (to appear in our next issue), which asked participants to discuss the extent to which generational affinity is significant in academic life. However, the argument about Mogilner's work is also directly connected with the questions about academic authority and about reviewing practice that are engaged in the two Forums here.

This number also includes two important articles on popular religion and beliefs about the sacred in Latvia and in Russia. Svetlana Ryzhakova examines the modulations in Latvian understanding of the sacred over more than two centuries, from folk beliefs to the highly politicised massed choral movement that emerged in the late Soviet period. Jeanne Kormina and Sergei Shtyrkov look at how the Russian Orthodox Church, which now has to compete in a religious 'marketplace' with various other faiths and with beliefs in faith healers etc., has made use of the grassroots cult of St Xenia of Petersburg in order to foster contact with ordinary believers and associate the church hierarchy with trust in the saint's cult.

Finally, we publish here a collection of papers on migrancy in post-Soviet Eurasia that were presented at the conference, 'National Identity in Eurasia II' held at Wolfson College, Oxford, in July 2009, which was organised by Dr Andy Byford, now at the University of Durham, UK, and which acts as a kind of foretaste of our next issue, No. 7, which will be devoted to the topic of urban culture.

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