

EDITORS' FOREWORD

The past few years have seen increasing interest in the study of cultural spaces, and particularly those of the modern city. Departing from our customary focus on methodology, the round table in this issue of *Forum of Anthropology and Culture* directly addresses the effects that this interest in urban life has had on the study of Russian, and more broadly socialist, culture. How do socialist cities fit into recent discussions of the 'world city' (by Doreen Massey and others)? What are the peculiarities of perception when a language (as with Russian) cannot distinguish between 'city' and 'town'? Which are the key issues for the various disciplines that make up 'urban studies'? Anthropologists, historians, sociologists, and specialists in cultural studies have all contributed to the debate here, as they have to the emergence of the study of cities at the national and international level.

The issue also brings together a number of case studies of urban, or more broadly, urbanised material. Victoria Donovan and Paul Manning provide thought-provoking analyses of life in non-metropolitan cities and towns, which are complementary both in chronological terms, and in terms of the approach taken. Manning discusses how café life was seen, during the course of the twentieth century, as a crucial

requirement for the (by stereotype remote and peripheral) Georgian city of Tiflis/Tbilisi to lay claims to 'European' and cosmopolitan status. Donovan's article addresses the rise of interest in local history (*kraevedenie*) in cities of the Russian North-West during the post-Stalin era, at which point the command of an appropriately dignified *local* past began to be a way of underlining a particular place's importance in the rising narrative of *national* heritage. As the title of the article suggests, the paradox was that recovering history became an essential part of 'being modern' at this period (whereas in the framework discussed by Manning, it was the command of an *alternative*, Western European, cultural heritage that mattered).¹

Alongside these articles, we also have two pieces discussing the folk culture of the recent past. Irina Nazarova examines the ambivalent attitude to beliefs in portents and omens, basing her discussion on work with informants in St Petersburg. Anna Sokolova addresses the transformation of the funeral ritual in the Soviet period and beyond, coming to the conclusion that the recent past has seen a far more fundamental shift in funerary practices than did the decades of Soviet power, despite the relative brevity of the period since 1991. Our Reviews section picks up the urban theme too, with comments on Olga Gurova's study of Soviet underwear, Yulia Gradszkova's work on Soviet femininity, and Caroline Humphrey's analyses of post-Soviet urban culture (recently translated into Russian), as well as discussions of Central Asian culture and of a collection on the social and cultural history of the Khrushchev 'Thaw'.

As always, we are extremely grateful to our translators (Ralph Cleminson, Thomas Lorimer, and Rosie Tweddle), and to the authors whose work appears here for their help, and to the editorial staff of *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*, particularly Olga Boitsova and Alexandra Piir.

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¹ The Russian issue on which this issue draws, no. 12 (2010) also included articles by Pavel Kupriyanov and Larisa Sadovnikova and by Levon Abrahamian that have now appeared in the anthology, *Russian Cultural Anthropology after the Collapse of Communism*, edited by Albert Baiburin, Catriona Kelly, and Nikolai Vakhtin (London: Routledge, 2012).