

FROM THE EDITORS

The theme running through this issue is that of discrimination — the dynamics of the process, and what practically can be done about it. ‘Forum 22’, devoted to the question of equal opportunities in academia, provoked a lively discussion, particularly among the younger participants. A couple of contributors ignored discrimination as such, or denied it might be a problem, and preferred to concentrate on the mechanics of academic progression and on the strategies and techniques helpful to younger scholars. As Revekka Frumkina reminds us, senior scholars can learn as much from their so-called juniors as vice versa, indeed more. At the same time, almost all the contributions, particularly those from Russians, recorded worrying evidence of complacency, if not outright prejudice, towards young members of the profession and those who were in other respects ‘different’ (members of ethnic minorities, female, or simply more assertive than usual). They recorded the use of graduate students as unpaid labour (and worse, punitive action against those who refused to comply with illegal exploitation of this kind), patronising or hostile attitudes to those who attempted to argue with their supposed ‘betters’, or simply complete indifference. They pointed to slowed-down or simply non-existent promotion for those who did not fit a certain social profile (male, majority ethnic), and differential attitudes in funding

bodies; a 'personality', as it turns out, is always a man. On the evidence produced here, there is no room for smugness among members of other academic cultures either: the fact is that these issues are simply more obvious in Russia (as Natalia Pushkareva puts it, 'all our rough edges are more apparent.'). Contributors from Switzerland, France, the UK and the USA also drew attention to the significant difficulties of young scholars, particularly at the post-doctoral stage, to the growing problems of casualisation, and to the striking waste of talent among those who do not fit the not always consciously recognised norms of academic society. Right across the academic cultures we describe, the proportion of women in junior positions is grossly disproportionate with those in senior positions, which provokes embarrassment more often than it does effective action. And this is to mention only the situation of the biggest and most noticeable group.

As Igor Yanovich writes in 'Forum 22', 'Since it aims to be in the vanguard of society, the academic milieu can, indeed must, do something to correct such injustices, given that they are obstacles to the search for truth, in which all of us in academic circles are engaged to the best of our abilities.' Some positive suggestions are given in the discussion as well. While patronage is at some level an inalienable feature of the academic career (as of all others), genuinely open competition in the submission of publications and the appointment of job applicants can allay some of its ill effects. Proper funding makes young scholars less dependent on their elders for favours, as well as giving them time to devote to the academic pursuits in which they ought to be engaged. (One can add that, as state support declines, institutions themselves will need to make the provision of such funding a priority, rather than dedicating all their energies to the support of new building and to scholarships for undergraduate and graduate study.) But to discuss these issues openly is a real start. Those of us from the older generations will recall the irony, if not contempt, with which issues of equality used to be regarded in academic circles during the late Soviet period, and indeed, up to the very recent past. The legacy of Soviet 'tokenism' that, for instance, placed representatives of national minorities and at least one woman on all committees of fairly (never very!) high importance had as its legacy a widespread belief that any attempt to ensure egalitarianism was doomed to equally hypocritical failure. In that context, the discussion in 'Forum 22' is radically new, and it is particularly interesting to see young Russian scholars taking the lead in voicing the need for transformation of social relations in academia.

Several other contributions in the number also deal with the issue of minority groups. They include Konstantin Bogdanov's *tour d'horizon* surveying the place of Africans in the Soviet imaginary, and a group of essays dealing with religious groups in the contemporary city.

As Natalia Shlikhta's article shows, even members of the Russian Orthodox Church, the historically majority faith, were consigned to a marginal position by Soviet ideology; yet at the same time, affirmation of loyalty was required in order to ensure survival. In the case of other groups, such as the Muslims and Jews that are the subject of Marat Safarov and Elena Nosenko-Shtein's articles, the groups were marginal both ideologically and ethnically. Victor Shnirelman, on the other hand, deals with the precarious social situation of the post-Christian religious movements in a country where adherence to so-called 'traditional faiths' is a prerequisite of social approval. The recognition that social marginalisation is driven not by the aberrant behaviour of social 'others', but by the political dynamics that bring about 'othering' in the first place, is one of the major achievements of anthropology over the last decades, and we are delighted to give voice to debates and analyses that are inspired by this insight.

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*Albert Baiburin
Catriona Kelly*