



**FROM THE EDITORS**

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## FROM THE EDITORS

In our last issue, published in December 2020, we anticipated a time when the COVID-19 pandemic might become the subject of our analytical reflections, rather than our lived experience. Not in 2021, it turns out. Certainly, travel restrictions have significantly eased (partly because of an appreciation that the disease is unaware of citizenship distinctions and spreads efficiently even when borders are closed). But impediments to normal association and peregrination have persisted, on a stop-start principle that intensifies frustration. The two countries where *Forum* is produced, Russia and the United Kingdom, have haunted top-five places in the world in terms of case and fatality numbers (all the while, vaccination uptake in the RF has stayed significantly below world averages; in the UK, the impressive success of the vaccination programme in its early stages was partly vitiated by complacency later on, and a sluggish roll-out of the booster vaccine during the autumn of 2021).

All the same, academic discussion and dialogue has continued through electronic channels, and by the autumn of 2021, a few face-to-face events had hesitantly restarted. An example was the annual congress of the Association of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies in New Orleans, 18–21 November. Numbers of panels might be down and the hybrid format widespread, but some, at least, of the informal discussions were particularly lively because participants were grateful to be off Zoom. It was interesting to watch the return to real-life engagement, as presenters relearned how to communicate without electronic amplification, and audiences to raise actual, rather than on-screen, hands.

The contents of this issue of *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* are once again at least obliquely related to the peculiar new reality. Addressing ‘changes in the scholarly landscape’ for the ‘Forum’, most contributors ignored the long-distance presentation (though Alexander Kozintsev made some useful points in favour: you save time (and money) on journeying to the venue, and have a better chance of avoiding, not just COVID, but all the low-level respiratory viruses that plague Northern Europe every winter). However, if our contributors weren’t, at the time they wrote their contributions, particularly exercised about Zoom, they expressed higher levels of frustration with the entrenchment of bureaucratic control over academic production that has become still more evident in pandemic conditions. Just as Stalin in the postwar years was most dangerous when at his dacha, so those who govern through the indexisation of research productivity have generally become more vocal in the virtual world. Whatever the success in raising Russian science and scholarship to the highest international levels when it comes to the content of papers and articles, Russian academic bureaucrats are certainly world leaders in their devotion to Scopus, Web of Science, and other instruments measuring citation.

As issues of migration become ever more vexed (this issue went into production against the tense stand-off on the Belarus border as desperate refugees were caught between one side attempting to export them as an instrument of political leverage and another denying responsibility to provide them with shelter), we note that two of the articles in this number are concerned precisely with migrancy. While Evgenia Zakharova looks at the position of migrants into Russia from Georgia in conditions where links between the two countries have often been tense in recent years, Ekaterina Kapustina is concerned with migration from the Caucasus inside the Russian Federation, which, as she illustrates has complexities of its own. For his part, Sergei Shtyrkov examines questions of national self-determination and religious affinity in North Ossetia, showing how proclaimed allegiance to ‘local faiths’ mounts an assault on conventional European definitions of ‘religion’, and a critique of their hegemonic pretensions that resembles the anticolonial or postcolonial standpoint of theorists such as Talal Asad.

Once again, we thank all the authors represented in the issue for their contributions, our translator, Ralph Cleminson, and the editorial team, particularly Daria Mishchenko, for their dedicated work in difficult circumstances.

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