

## EDITORS' NOTES: FOOD AND FOODWAYS IN POSTSOCIALIST EURASIA

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**WARNING:** Do not open this issue if you are hungry or if your pantry and refrigerator is not properly provisioned. Make sure you have some of your favorite foods in the house and that you can sit down with them immediately upon completing your reading. You will need it!

Because food is both internal and external matter, the cultural contexts of what is produced, prepared, distributed, and eaten or drunk—as well as when, how, and by whom—are all vital for our understanding of any group of people. The papers in this volume attempt to begin answering some of these important questions for many of the groups of people living in the former socialist countries of Eastern and Central Europe, the CIS, and Russia.

From production to consumption, representation to distribution, brandy to breastmilk, this issue covers most every aspect of research related to food and drink that is currently being carried out in this region. Articles range in time frame from a historical view of the socialist period to the many changes that have taken place in the region since 1989. This latter theme is particularly well developed and encompasses articles on consumption, production, and distribution from East and West Germany in the west to Siberia in the East, and most places in between.

The intimate view these papers provide of the political, social, and economic changes that have transformed the region highlights the continuing importance of anthropological research. For it is anthropology, more than most other disciplines, that provides an understanding of what it is to experience these changes in the cultural contexts of the changing societies themselves. In addition to providing “thick descriptions” of the transformation from state socialism, anthropology’s attention to local meanings and everyday life practices contributes a special perspective to policy, public health, and other

applied fields. While Gabriel specifically notes the practical value of the knowledge she provides of the differences between Russian and US-American ideas about breastfeeding, many of the other papers in this volume could provide a starting point for changing aid programs, marketing schemes, and other externally-driven action to contribute more positively to the lives of individuals in the region.

There are a number of different ways we could have organized this issue and put the papers together. In the end, we decided to begin the issue with the theme of commensality, followed by four other sections on “Food, Meaning, and Identity,” “Gender and Food,” “Food, Health, and the Body,” and “The Political Economy of Food,” borrowing the schema used in Counihan and Van Esterik’s excellent reader, *Food and Culture* (Counihan and Van Esterik 1997).

The study of “commensality,” or the social bonds formed through the sharing of food (Smith 1907), was among the earliest themes studied by anthropologists in the late nineteenth century, and so it is where we choose to begin our special issue on food and foodways. In his article on Uzbek hospitality, Zanca paints a riotous portrait of host-guest interactions. Hudgins compares three meals she shared with Siberian friends in her fascinating essay, excerpted from her new book, *The Other Side of Russia: A Slice of Life in Siberia and the Russian Far East* (Texas A & M University Press, 2003). Rounding out this discussion of meals and feasting is Susan Mazur-Stommen’s article on Christmas food rituals on Germany’s former East-West border.

Part Two, “Food, Meaning, and Identity,” points to the symbolic aspects of food and examines how food consumption shapes identity and vice versa. Writing of Papua New Guinea, Robert Foster states that the consumption of

nationally marketed commodities and brands is a crucial part of “materializing the nation,” or nesting national identity into quotidian habits and material culture (Foster 2002). The articles printed in this section demonstrate that Foster’s observation holds for the newly constituted and reconstituted nations of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union as well. Patico’s paper examines how Russians interpret imported foods in relation to Russian identity. Passmore and Passmore reflect on the importance of food in Czech national identity, from the burgeoning tables of the Good Soldier Schweik to their participants’ fears that European Union accession will result in a decline in the quality of Czech beer. Bradatan takes on the connection between food and regional identity in Southeastern Europe, posing the question, “Is there such a thing as Balkan cuisine?” Farkas delves into the role of dietary practices in establishing religious identity, studying the Krishna consciousness movement in postsocialist Hungary. Moving west to Slovenia, Kozorog discusses rural and urban identities at play in the contemporary folklore surrounding “salamander brandy,” a home-brewed drink from the countryside rumored to have psychedelic effects.

The third section of this issue, “Gender and Food,” showcases the work of anthropologists who examine food preparation and consumption as a performance of gender roles and identities. Jankauskaitė considers food imagery in Lithuanian feminist art. Drawing from research in the Czech Republic, Haukanes studies how certain foods and food practices serve as symbols of masculinity and femininity. Although women are often the main actors in food preparation, food and drink shape men’s social relations as well. Huseby-Darvas looks at the family winecellar as a key male social institution in a Hungarian village.

Part Four focuses on anthropological work on diet and health. Gabriel’s paper on Russian perceptions of diet, breastfeeding, and “weak health” begins the section, followed by Harper’s article on Hungarian environmentalists’ discourses on food, from the mad cow disease crisis to genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in agricultural production. Hall takes on the issue of alcoholism in the beer-loving Czech Republic. Kozlov and Zdor investigate changes in the health and diet of indigenous Chukchi hunters in Russia.

The last section of the issue, “The Political Economy of Food,” is a collection of articles that focus on the production, marketing, and distribution of food. These papers pay special attention to the ways in which the socialist and market economies shape peoples’ experience of work, gardening, farming, and grocery shopping. Asher’s piece takes a close look at the social world of workers in a Polish brewery. Nicholson presents research on milk producers and vendors in Albania’s informal economy. Hervouet studies the role of dachas and gardens in Belarussians’ economic and emotional lives. Thorne offers a historical perspective on domestic food production in Estonia. The final articles of the section look at household provisioning in socialist and post-socialist settings, with Smith writing about his Hungarian informants’ reflections on homemade versus store-bought foods and Burrell presenting Poles’ oral histories about life under state socialism.

We invite readers to peruse the essays in different combinations in order to discover unexpected parallels and to savor the richness of comparative research on food and foodways. Since 2003 marks the 500th anniversary of vodka’s arrival in Russia (Erofeev 2002), we would like to flag the articles on alcohol production and drinking throughout the region. Although we decided to integrate these articles into the larger themes surrounding food, we encourage readers to study the articles by Huseby-Darvas, Hall, Asher, Kozorog, and Asher side by side.

Another cross-cutting theme is that of foodways in transformation following the collapse of state socialism. A number of authors discuss the introduction of new foods coinciding with the region’s entrance into the global economy. Kozlov and Zdor discuss changes in the circumpolar diet, as the Chukchi of Northern Russia supplement their traditional diet of reindeer and sea mammal meat with foods bought at the market. Articles by Patico, Gabriel, and Hudgins examine how Russians in different parts of the country ascribe meaning to imported foods. Smith and Burrell take a historical look at household provisioning in socialist and postsocialist East-Central Europe. Essays by Haukanes, Hall, and Passmore and Passmore, taken collectively, give a highly nuanced account of Czechs’ changing foodways. Food teaches us how large-scale changes are experienced at the level of daily practice: Harper

investigates how Hungarian environmentalists perceive potentially risky food imports containing GMOs, while Hervouet examines Belarussian gardeners' perception of homegrown foods tainted by radioactive soil.

In other words, these papers are all intertwined in rich, meaningful ways that will only become apparent as the reader devours the entire issue—So, *Prost! Egészségére! Guten Appetit!* and so forth...

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CALL FOR PAPERS: For a Special Issue of AEER on music and dance, scheduled for Spring 2004. I am seeking papers dealing with any aspect of music and dance in Eastern Europe. Lynn Maners, the guest editor, would especially like to encourage post-fieldwork graduate students as well as recent PhDs to contribute to this volume, but all contributions are welcome. Please feel free to pass this notice on and to encourage interested parties to contact Lynn Maners for further information at: [lmaners@dakotacom.net](mailto:lmaners@dakotacom.net) or [lmaners@westga.edu](mailto:lmaners@westga.edu)

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