
A NOTE FROM THE GUEST EDITOR

Sascha L. Goluboff
Washington & Lee University

The collection of papers in this volume of *The Anthropology of East Europe Review* comes from a panel that Nancy Ries and I organized at the 98th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association held in Chicago, Illinois. The title of this double-panel session (which is the title of this special issue) was “Why Post-Socialism is Good to Think: The Anthropology of Transforming States.” We asked panelists to investigate how lived experiences of post-socialism might challenge the tenets of anthropological knowledge. Does post-socialism undermine common (both popular and academic) modes of theorizing modernity and post-modernity, empire and post-colonialism, capitalism, globalism, law, and community? We hoped that the papers would reveal the variety of unexpected ways in which local narratives are employed to negotiate these categories and would explore the often convoluted (and contested) practices through which alternative forms of citizenship and community come into being.

In outlining this agenda, we followed the path forged by C.M. Hann (1993), Rubie S. Watson (1994), David A. Kideckel (1995), Katherine Verdery (1996, 1999), Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery (1999), and Daphne Berdahl, Matti Bunzl, and Martha Lampland (2000). These volumes and similar works have critiqued the canonical social science literature on history and memory, ethnicity, and social and economic change, as well as public policy regarding post-socialist transitions. When our session was finished, it was clear that although the papers touched on the issues outlined in our abstract, the theme of the state – its invention and reinvention on institutional, bureaucratic, and everyday levels – was the central organizing principle of each paper. This situation reiterates the cultural salience of the crisis of statehood and citizenship occurring now in Eastern Europe.

Each contributor to this special issue investigates the practices of the post-socialist polity in different contexts – Paula Garb on legal reform in Abkhazia, Liesl Gambold Miller on the bureaucratic restructuring of a Russian village, Petra Rethmann on the intersection of land, democracy and indigenous rights among the Koriaks, myself on the struggles of disabled and elderly Russian Jews to reclaim their citizenship rights, Julie Hemment on the “third sector” between the state and society, Thomas C. Wolfe on rethinking the concept of governance, and Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov on re-evaluating the relationship between socialism and capitalism. Nancy Ries and Bruce Grant, the two discussants from the session, have also included their remarks in this volume. I hope that you, the reader, will enjoy these papers. They do not claim to be the definitive authority on post-socialist transformation, but they do provide food for thought about the ethnography of the former Soviet Union and the trajectory of anthropology today.

References

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