

# CULTURES AND COMMUNITIES IN THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF EASTERN EUROPE AND THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

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■ **Abstract** Ethnographies and anthropological analyses of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union published in the last decade have been shaped by two major circumstances. First, they reflect the discursive possibilities opened up by the political upheavals of November 1989 in Eastern Europe and of August 1991 in the Soviet Union; second, they express and represent the theoretical heterogeneity of contemporary American anthropology. We can characterize anthropological work in the former Soviet Union as attempts to use and explore the concept of culture in various sites of social, economic, and political transformation. By contrast, anthropologists studying postsocialist societies in Eastern Europe have turned from analyses of the cultural practices of groups on the margins of modernizing state projects to accounts of how communities are shaped by systemic changes in the political economy of states.

## INTRODUCTION

Within the diverse subdivisions of American anthropology, the anthropology of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (hereafter EeFSU) has in the past decade experienced significant growth. It is now commonplace to see not one but several panels on the formerly socialist societies at the American Anthropological Association annual meetings. Anthropologists now regularly appear in such area studies journals as *East European Politics and Society* and in discipline-wide journals such as *Cultural Anthropology*. Their "own" journal, *The Anthropology of Eastern Europe Review*, edited by Robert Rotenberg, has taken its place as a key platform where young and established scholars alike can make public their research. Equally significant, it is no longer surprising to see in the *Anthropology Newsletter* advertisements placed by departments seeking anthropologists specializing in Eastern Europe or the former Soviet Union.

This growth, moreover, is something that those who joined the post-Soviet field in the late 1980s have watched with pleasure and satisfaction. When Nancy Ries, Cathy Wanner, and Bruce Grant organized the first Soviet Cultural Studies Conference in 1992 at Columbia University, its participants could fit comfortably around three small tables in a coffee shop on Broadway. Only 8 years later, in 1999, the annual get-together of the *Soyuz* (Russian for union) group, anthropologists working in the former Soviet Union, filled a meeting room at the Chicago Hilton. Present were not only scholars of Russia and the former republics of the Soviet Union, but also anthropologists of Eastern Europe, cultural as well as medical and biological anthropologists, and a number of archaeologists. This growth is remarkable. It is not only evidence of easier access to fieldwork sites in formerly socialist states and of the intrinsically fascinating issues that have formed around the exits from socialism, it is also testimony to the collegial atmosphere fostered by the founders of *Soyuz*.

This very growth, however, complicates the task of reviewing the anthropological literature on postsocialism. Although Berdahl (2000), in her introduction to a recent edited volume, is correct when she writes that the “ethnographic corpus of postsocialist transitions is sparingly small,” it seems to me that there is a large and growing number of “anthropologically informed” accounts of events and lives in the former Eastern Bloc. By anthropologically informed accounts, I mean descriptions of postsocialist societies that explore the terrain of everyday life in order to make claims about the nature, process, or essence of postsocialist transformations. And there is no doubt the overall volume of works will continue to grow, judging both by the number of graduate students working in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and by the increasing presence and visibility of Eastern European scholars in the evolving transnational discussions of changes in their own societies.

This literature has grown sufficiently in recent years to generate a number of useful surveys, reviews, and reflections on the subfield of postsocialist anthropology. Rethmann (1997) has examined the field of post-Soviet ethnographies with particular focus on Siberia, and Hann (1994) has provided a useful survey of the anthropological literature on Eastern Europe that appeared in the decade since 1985. Hoppal (1990) has examined the development of visual anthropology in the context of formerly socialist states, and Verdery (1996b) and Borneman (1998), in their reflections on the development of their own research, have provided helpful descriptions of the evolution of the field as a whole.

The heterogeneity of the subfield is remarkable. A number of genres are represented, from long monographic assemblages of familiar anthropological themes, to brief ethnographic descriptions of events. We have reports from sites as varied as Slovak urban synagogues (Bohlman 2000), local markets in Moscow and Siberia (Humphrey 1991, 1995), and the offices of German academics and town planners (De Soto 2000); we have descriptions of individuals as varied as former East German Tupperware consumers (Berdahl 1999) and amateur museum curators in Dresden (Ten Dyke 2000). Individual works use a number of theoretical

discourses and registers, employing many different forms of evidence, styles of argument, and modes of authorial presence. It is impossible to find clusters of work that together would represent a tightly formed school of thought or constitute an intellectual movement within the subfield.

If we add to the books and articles produced by trained anthropologists, works written by practitioners in neighboring disciplines who have turned to anthropology for help in describing and analyzing complex situations on the ground, the literature about the transformation of EEfSU becomes still greater. References to the value of ethnography in the context of postsocialism are made by scholars in women's and cultural studies departments, in languages and literature departments, not to mention in anthropology's immediately adjacent departments of sociology and political science (Bunce & Csanadi 1993, Burawoy & Krotov 1992). If we broaden our field still more to consider the historical scholarship that illuminates the dilemmas of postsocialist transformation, the task of "review" becomes unmanageable. The field of postsocialist historiography is undergoing its own transformation as archives have opened up and as scholars turn their attention to the history of socialism without the immediate distorting field of ideological polarities [see Hanson's (1997) excellent work on the importance of time in the structuring of Soviet history]. Thus, a full account of the shift in the knowledge produced by American academics about EEfSU would take us far beyond the limits established for an article of this kind.

In this review, I focus narrowly on a relatively small number of recent anthropological works about EEfSU. I define a work as "anthropological" according to its implicit or explicit commitment to the methodology of ethnographic fieldwork, which is seen as generating a unique and valuable form of knowledge. I consider this article only a first take on what would necessarily have to be a broader intellectual project that would account for how the discipline of anthropology described and analyzed the societies that constituted the ideological adversary of the West during the Cold War. Such a work would need to describe the connections between scholars' intellectual and professional trajectories, and it might examine how the ideas that served as the intellectual currency of this field in the course of the past four decades emerged out of a complex matrix of institutional, philosophical, and political interests.

This essay is an elaboration of two convictions that have emerged from consideration of these varied works. The first is that anthropologists are doing crucial work in seeking the essential aspects of the current transformation at the heart of the multiple forms of everyday life. But equally vivid is the sense that a reflexive concern with disciplinarity, that is, with the ways the discipline functions to both provide us with already formed questions and channel us toward already proven answers, might serve to focus this knowledge and enable a new kind and quality of communication among the practitioners of anthropology working in EEfSU.

The question of the nature of the discussions internal to the subfield is that much more important because many recent ethnographies offer a powerful critique

of the discourse of “transition.” Ethnographic work can function as profound critiques of ideology, in this case exposing the discourse of transition to be both a regime of signs employed to justify the subordination of these nations to the imperatives of global trade and finance, and a poorly designed and executed blueprint to bring about a new social order (Berdahl 2000, Verdery 1996b). Ethnographies also have the virtue of reminding us what the discourse of transition really is, a theory, which in the euphoria of 1989 received the force of fact; reports from the ground report back on the theory. The lives and predicaments of the people who appear as informants in these anthropological accounts bear witness to the immense efforts at social engineering that lay beneath ostensibly technical plans and policies in the reorganization of national economies, and they reveal this engineering to have resulted not only in the “unintended consequences” familiar to students of historical sociology, but also in the deepening and hardening of a pervasive anomie.

I explore these issues in the rest of this article by arguing that the subfield is dominated by two broad issues, roughly corresponding to the geographic division between the states of Eastern Europe and the states of the former Soviet Union. Anthropologists of Eastern European societies, it seems plausible to argue, have been grappling with different ways of analyzing the shaping and reshaping of community across the divide of 1989, while anthropologists of the former Soviet Union have been struggling with the anthropological concept of culture. I should be clear that I do not intend to fit all recent anthropological works into these two categories. Indeed, we might understand Burawoy’s use of ethnography and of political economy as a way of inquiring into the material conditions of working class communities in postsocialist Russia (Burawoy 1994, Burawoy & Krotov 1992). After describing how these two key terms might be seen as operating in a number of works, I conclude by briefly arguing that the choice of genre anthropologists use to present their work to the public is an immensely important issue. I discuss the advantages and problems with what has become an important genre in the subfield, what might be called the ethnographic report.

In concerning myself with the ways these texts represent the problem of disciplinarity, I am imposing on them my own particular interests. I deliberately choose not to take up the claims these ethnographers make about specific practices in specific places, such as decollectivization, marketization, or consumption; nor do I discuss the extremely important and timely issue for anthropologists of EEfSU of the relationship between the disciplinary practice of American anthropology and those practitioners of the discipline in the countries of EEfSU. [See the discussions in *Current Anthropology* by Tishkov (1998) and several of his Russian and Western colleagues, and the account by Kürti (1996) of anthropology’s disciplinary difficulties as it engages with Eastern European societies.] I have sought instead to make explicit many of the ethnographies’ implicit links to and support derived from these two broad concepts that occupy nodal points in the discipline.

## REFRAMING CULTURE(S) IN THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

The prominence of the problematic of culture in recent anthropological works about post-Soviet society has a number of sources. The one most relevant to my interests is the sense that culturally framed analyses would provide a useful counterweight and even corrective to the dominant modes of describing Soviet society. Indeed, by the late 1980s, ethnographic research in the Russian regions of the Soviet Union became possible, and researchers began delving into issues outside the purview of the dominant disciplines of sociology and political science. For example, Lempert's (1996) exhaustive ethnography of "pepsistroika" provides many valuable insights into the ways that Soviet institutions experienced the unraveling of the logic that held the Soviet system together, thus providing depth to more macro analyses, such as those by Lewin (1991), Lane (1996), and Dallin & Lapidus (1995). Key intellectual interlocutors for these cultural analysts have been not only anthropologists but also Russian (and Soviet) writers, historians, literary scholars, and philosophers who have examined the particularities of Russian culture (Condee 1995, Williams 1970). A number of contemporary Western ethnographers have brought to this task of defining the difference of Russian culture an analytic vocabulary grounded in the centrality of linguistic processes in the ongoing construction of culture.

Ries (1997) examines the everyday conversations she heard primarily among the intelligentsia in Moscow and discovers such speech acts to be performances in which storytelling genres appear as essential shapers of the transaction of meaning. These genres establish nothing less than the boundaries of what is thinkable; thus, in the context of perestroika, she found these deep narrative patterns around suffering, powerlessness, and oppression to be impediments to popular engagement with the official agenda of social change. She comes to the conclusion that this linguistic dimension of cultural process played a largely negative role in political reform.

Pesmen, too, examines the cultures of everyday life in Russia, focusing predominantly on the terms that Russians used to articulate their understandings of the predicament of Soviet society in the late Gorbachev era (Pesmen 1995, 1998, 2000). She turns her attention in particular to the recurrence in conversation of the term *dusha*, or soul. By examining the linguistic power of *dusha* and its deployment as a key explanatory figure that reveals the essence of a person or situation, she is able to construct a kind of architecture of Russian emotion, affect, and feeling. This inner structure of feeling reproduced in conversational practices appears—as suffering does in Ries' work—as the predominant lens through which their informants understand the world. For Pesmen, *dusha* defines Russian-ness and, thus, is a "key actor" in the transition because the metaphors that describe capitalism, democracy, and pluralism are apprehended through this agency that already frames key terms such as "openness," "access," "secrecy," "honesty," "fairness," and "loyalty."

In the work of both Ries (1997) and Pesmen (1995, 1998, 2000), culture is shown to be a process operating at a deeper level than the public spheres of political and economic change. Socialist or capitalist policies may have changed the physical circumstances of people's lives, but they appear as a veneer above something one might describe as more profound and enduring. The implication is that such cultural patterns underlie, and in part determine, political possibilities and outcomes. They also construct the attitudinal poles of optimism-pessimism. Ries (1997) has shown how Russian culture provided ready-made narrative forms of pessimism. In recent work (1999), she is exploring the linguistic resources of adaptability, flexibility, and improvisation that might provide Russians with the resources for a more productive engagement with the transformation of their own society.

For ethnographers of non-Russian nationalities in the former Soviet Union, culture must be thought of in the context of political domination. Lemon describes the cultural coherence of a group of Roma outside Moscow, members of a culture that for centuries has been the target of Russian animosity and political persecution (Lemon 1996). Her work shows how Romani culture is constituted within a field of political conflict, and how a shifting cultural boundary is formed both by practices of resistance to the hegemonic culture and by practices of assimilation to it. In later work, she shifts from a concern with language to a broader concern with the marks, forms, and images that constitute sense making, focusing less on the coherence and the logic of linguistic process in constructing cultural unities than on the flux of signs that conditioned public life for city dwellers in Moscow during the early 1990s (Lemon 1998, 2000). She suggests that whatever might be visible as Russian culture is taking place within a larger process of the reordering of key spaces, such as the Moscow metro, or key objects on which processes of cultural semiosis depend, like money. She makes us think about the nature of the flux that has engulfed the semiosphere of urban Russia in the atmosphere of political apathy and uncertainty.

Culture is also an important reference point for students of Siberian societies. In Balzer's (1980, 1981, 1996) work on Siberian shamanism, culture is conceived as practices and beliefs reemerging from the Soviet past. Shamans and shamanistic practices represent the return of something authentic that offers a critique both of Soviet attitudes and policies toward Siberian people and of western concepts of the person and of the processes of illness, healing, and health (Balzer 1980, 1981, 1996; Van Deusen 1998). The effort to legitimize shamanistic practices by describing them through an ethnographic lens raises the issue of what we might awkwardly call the reculturization of Siberian peoples, the reappearance of a culture that lay buried beneath generations of Sovietization. Balzer, like many anthropologists of cultures in an analogous position in other parts of the world, has taken on the complicated role of mediating this reappearance, in part through her own research, and in part through the translation and dissemination of the research produced by Russian scholars during the Soviet period (Balzer 1989, 1990).

If Balzer is participating in the revitalization of a cultural practice, Rethmann, on the other hand, has described the tortuous process of the uncoupling of the person

from culture (Rethmann 1999, 2000a, 2000b). Her research among the Koriak of Kamchatka during the early 1990s documents what we might call the devitalization of cultural practices in the wake of the collapse of the political, economic, and social networks that gave coherence to Koriak ways of life. The historical background to Rethmann's work is provided by scholars such as Humphrey (1983) and Grant (1995), who provide nuanced historical accounts of the experience of native peoples. They recount how the modernizing Soviet project imposed structures of power and authority on indigenous peoples at the same time these peoples assimilated this power in order to assert their own identities. Rethmann documents (1999, 2000a, 2000b) the erosion of these vital networks that connected Koriak life to the Soviet system, and the hollowing out of the sense of identity that grows from these connections. She grapples with the extraordinarily complex task of communicating the ways Koriak women, in particular, construct whatever available cultural coherence they can, at the very time that such cultural raw material is fading into the mists of poverty and alcoholism. Despite, or perhaps because of, her deep respect for the Koriak, Rethmann expresses no ultimate faith in the durability or latent vitality of Koriak culture to somehow redeem the situation. She refuses the temptation of appropriating the despair of her informants and making their cause her own, bringing to light instead what de Certeau called "the art of the weak," the effort of those who suffer to use whatever is at hand to displace and deflect the sources of suffering (Rethmann 1999).

Even from this brief summary of various accounts of culture in the former Soviet Union it is clear that there is no single sense of culture being referred to. In fact, culture appears between familiar intellectual poles: the one pole representing the assumption that culture is something coherent that can be discovered by means of ethnographic fieldwork, and the other representing the view that culture is not a thing possessed by "them," but a concept invented by "us." Ries (1997) and Caldwell (1998) seem closer to the former position, whereas Lemon (1998, 2000), in recent work, seems inclined toward the latter. The former can be seen as emerging from within a more confident center of the discipline, whereas authors in the latter vein write from the more suspicious margins. The question raised here is how all of these different contexts and uses of the idea of culture fit together. Does the reliance by anthropologists of the former Soviet Union on a concept of culture inhibit a common critical project?

Another paradox that this literature raises is how to value the concept of culture when, as Verdery & Burawoy (1999) point out, culture has been one of the key terms used by those transitologists to dismiss the failure of Russians to grasp the opportunities offered them by the lifting of socialist constraints and the introduction of liberal freedoms. They refer to the fact that a number of commentators have "written off" Russia because of its essentially "Eastern," communal, and slavish mentality. Culture in the discourse of geopolitics becomes a list of generalized personality traits or dispositions. No ethnographer would sanction this kind of essentialized view, and yet as soon as one identifies or even gestures toward a "culture," one immediately wants to know about its boundaries, its depths, and the

unities that make it a relevant term to bring together very different kinds of people. This raises questions about the representativeness of the informants from which one has constructed a sense of culture. What cultural blanket could cover Ries's (1997) Moscow intelligentsia, Yurchak's (1999) rave kids, and Lemon's (2000) metro riders? Is the predilection to powerlessness described by Ries located in analogous positions within the habitus of the three groups? Are the individuals who comprise these groups equally susceptible to the action of suffering, only in different ways? That is, might Yurchak's rave kids embrace suffering not through narrative but through overloads of sensuality and irony (Yurchak 1999)? Or is this younger generation of Muscovites in the process of escaping from their parents' subjection by culture? Is the hold of culture falling away in Moscow in the same way that it is falling away in Kamchatka, with the difference being that in place of culture, the social site of Moscow offers a deep reservoir of signs with which to do the self-constructing that was formerly accomplished by the deep workings of culture beneath the surface of Soviet society?

A simpler way to put it is to ask to what degree is the culture identified by ethnographers in the context of the former Soviet Union something fundamentally historical? If we privilege the theoretical stance that views culture as an artifact of historical processes, and of changing institutions and relations of power, then we cannot speak of culture as an independent entity, an autonomous force whose logics are uncovered by fieldwork. The point is that the tensions between historicist and ethnographic orientations that have long been apparent in other anthropological subfields now exist in the study of the former Soviet Union.

In this section I have suggested that anthropologists of the former Soviet Union are in the midst of dealing with the multiple meanings and possible uses of the idea of culture as they focus their attention on specific ethnographic sites. A concern with community rather than culture is one I now turn to in the context of recent ethnographies of Eastern Europe.

## PROBLEMS OF COMMUNITY

Above I suggest that the importance of the idea of culture for anthropologists of the former Soviet Union was a response both to the newfound possibility of fieldwork and to the dominance within the field of Soviet studies of other social scientific disciplines. In a similar way, we can think of recent work in the anthropology of Eastern Europe as a response to the dominant practices and issues that shaped the subfield in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Put schematically, we might suggest a transformation from an interest in identity to an interest in community. We note, first of all, that in contrast to the severe restrictions placed on fieldwork in the Soviet Union, a number of governments of Eastern Europe allowed Western anthropologists to do fieldwork for many decades. The review of the field by Halpern & Kideckel (1983) shows both the historical depth and social scope of anthropological work in the region since World War II. They note that the intellectual roots



of the majority of this work lay in peasant and ethnic studies. Fieldwork took place in rural communities, and theoretical interests centered on the cultural processes by which ethnically defined social groups maintained their identities and ways of life, even as they were buffeted by the policies of modernizing states. These were topics that Eastern European governments both tolerated and encouraged, as they fit with their interest in those backward pockets of society that were to be brought into the fold of socialist development and national culture. Studies that appeared in the 1980s, however, broke this mold.

The background to this shift in anthropological attention was provided by the markedly different trajectories followed by Eastern European states in their social, political, and cultural development, so that by the 1980s, these states comprised the weakest of geopolitical “blocs.” What we might call the individualization of socialist regimes opened up for discussion the topic of socialism as a distinctive strategy for organizing social, economic, and political life. The dominant question changed from inquiring into how groups maintained themselves within a socialist regime to how socialism existed as a series of policies, choices, and decisions that shaped everyday life. Ethnographic research enabled the exploration of essentially Durkheimian questions about how communities travel along historical trajectories whose extremes are normalcy and pathology, often (implicitly) capitalist normalcy and socialist pathology.

There was one other important source for the focus on community that we see in this work: the revalorization that occurred in some Eastern European societies of Marxist-inspired political economy as a useful analytic discourse with which to analyze the various crises of socialism. A number of East European intellectuals and academics turned to this discourse to help them understand how socialism worked not as a philosophical system, but as a distinctive kind of social system. In particular, Hungarian intellectuals like Kornai and Szelenyi influenced Western anthropologists to shift their focus from the study of culture and ethnic identities to the workings of economic and political structures that constrained and determined daily life on the ground (Kornai 1980, 1986, 1992; Szelenyi 1983). Thus, the intellectual framework of political economy became available to anthropologists as they took up the question of the particular ways that the policies of the socialist state actually functioned in social reproduction. This led to such questions as the following. How did socialist communities really function? Who held power in such communities and how did it operate? How did people respond to “socialist” policies? Was the “sense of community” strengthened or weakened by socialism? How did people in their daily lives redefine the idea of community that was imposed on them?

By the mid-1980s, anthropological research into these and other questions was well underway, and given the significant differences in how socialism was transformed into policies in different societies, the descriptions and judgments of anthropologists about socialism vary greatly. Kideckel, who did his fieldwork in Romania during the 1980s—arguably the most repressive decade in the history of any Eastern European country—found that socialism “created people who were of

necessity self-centered, distrustful, and apathetic to the very core of their beings” (Kideckel 1993, p. xiii). This necessity was created by a series of oppressive state policies that steadily constricted the range of action of *Olt*-land villagers, creating endless frustrations and demanding morally ambiguous compromises. Ultimately, Kideckel bestows an overwhelmingly negative judgment on socialism because it disrupted the processes that reproduced the community’s *Olt*-land identity. The end of socialism, on the other hand, allowed *Olt*-landers to finally proclaim, in Kideckel’s words, “I am somebody!”

Lampland, too, in the course of her fieldwork in a Hungarian village, discovered that socialism had turned the inhabitants into self-centered, distrustful people, precisely the opposite of the image of optimistic, collectivist, and generous peasants promoted by socialist propaganda (Lampland 1991, 1995). She takes upon herself the task of explaining the gap between socialist ideals and the actual values that animated rural society in Hungary in the 1980s, locating the source of this distance in the treatment of labor by socialist bureaucrats. By conceiving of work as a mere input to be manipulated according to the requirements of systematic planning, they unwittingly alienated farmers from their labor, just as workers are alienated from their labor under capitalism. Her ethnography is a case study in unintended consequences, as socialist policies brought a capitalist ethos to the Hungarian countryside.

In contrast to Kideckel and Lampland, Creed’s (1998) study of the Bulgarian village of Zamfirovo presents a very different picture of socialism. Here, identity is not hijacked by socialism, distorting personalities and personal relations. Rather, socialism made possible an overall improvement in the quality of villagers’ lives. “Villagers not only managed to adjust to socialism, but also adjusted socialism to their own requirements and needs. The resulting articulation between the Bulgarian state and Zamfirovo households provided a degree of self-actualization for villagers missed in macro-level views of socialist society” (Creed 1998, p. 276).

Ethnographers who had been working in Eastern Europe throughout the 1980s were in a particularly advantageous position to examine both the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe in 1989 and the introduction of market reforms and democratic political systems (Agocs & Agocs 1994). They were in a position to comment on the end of socialism as a distinctive strategy of organizing social, political, and economic life, which reigned in Eastern European societies during a finite historical epoch. At the same time, they were in a position to examine how the structures of everyday life under socialism would persist after 1989, decisively shaping the supposed transition to capitalism.

Building on the work of Hungarian sociologists and political economists referred to above, Verdery (1991), for example, took up the task of “theorizing socialism.” Her influential article argued that in spite of the variety of cultural contexts in which socialism was introduced in the 1940s, and despite the national improvisations that evolved in subsequent decades, it was possible to make a theoretical description of how the socialist organization of the economy operated. She identified its different logics and described how it formed different kinds of

people and therefore different kinds of communities. She argued that in order to understand both specific national histories and the various national trajectories of exit from socialism, it was important to analyze socialism as an abstract system of institutional and psychological structures that shaped social reproduction.

Her attempt at providing such a theory has been controversial. Hann (1994), for example, doubts that it is possible or desirable to construct such a theory, because it risks homogenizing the complexities of life on the ground. He does not deny that such retrospective, and ultimately historical, analyses are important. Indeed, in the context of the transformation of rural life between the establishment of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and their collapse, he makes the argument—against Lampland (1991, 1995) and Kideckel (1993) and in support of Creed (1998)—that socialism unequivocally improved the quality of peasant and rural life. And yet it is also possible to read Verdery's construction of a "theory" of socialism as an effort to reassert the power of a Marxist style of critique, in the face of the common sense that conflates Marxism with the collection of catastrophic social upheavals that have dotted the national histories of EEFsU.

Together, these works that straddle the collapse of socialism reveal that it is difficult to use ethnography to produce a judgment about "socialism," rather than about the specific implementations of socialist policy in the varied contexts of specific Eastern European states. Although ethnography helped Creed (1998) understand better the incorporation of the aims of the state within the daily life of rural communities, he also suggests that judgment about the overall nature of villagers' lives under socialism is the work of historians, not anthropologists. Socialism, even of the "actually existing" kind, is a historical phenomenon that a synchronic analysis cannot fully make sense of. This is the lesson of Creed's work [as well as the work of Grant (1995), whose compelling ethnohistory of the Nivkhi of Sakhalin Island leaves the reader with the sense that, for Grant and his Nivkhi informants, a simple judgment about socialism is neither possible nor desirable (Grant 1995)].

The anthropological research that has taken place since 1989 has built upon this earlier work, but ethnographers have taken as their object of interest a greater variety of communities than those they identified under socialism. And scholars who have chosen to examine a more traditional kind of anthropological community, the kind circumscribed in a village or town, have taken up different conceptual vocabularies to describe the rearrangement of everyday life performed by the introduction of market forces and the appearance of the social logics of capitalism.

Berdahl's (1999) work in a small, formerly East German rural community located on the now-erased border between East and West Germany is perhaps the most intimate ethnography we have about the aftermath of the collapse of the East German state. She looks to the theoretical literature about borders, borderlands, and hybrid identities to make sense of the life of a community that, both before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent incorporation of the GDR into the Federal Republic, felt itself to occupy a particular kind of liminal space between East and West. Berdahl shows how daily life in Kella post-1989 was shaped by many villagers' attempts to understand the new economic conditions

that governed their lives as a result of the absorption of their state by its capitalist big brother. She documents the appearance of what Sampson (1999) has called the “structural nostalgia” felt by many East Europeans in the context of their experience of sudden poverty and instant inequality. Berdahl (1999) shows how a number of her informants were baffled not only by unemployment and the *Wessies* disdain of their old way of life, but by Western styles of consumption, display, and appearance.

Her work also helps us think about the formation of the judgments about socialism referred to above. Socialism appears both in villagers’ memories and in their cultural habitus as a reservoir of thoughts, feelings, and gestures with which to express their identity. It is recognized as being the medium in which one’s former self lived. The socialist past described by Kella villagers is neither completely black and white and neither a nightmare nor a fairy tale. On the one hand, they were acutely aware of the constraints placed on them by the state. On the other, however, Kella villagers’ commitment to Catholicism—one of the themes Berdahl returns to again and again—enabled a kind of community life that provided both a social fabric of identifications and a base from which to formulate criticisms of the state. Most interesting, perhaps, is the relatively minor place villagers gave to the East German state in their conversations with Berdahl about their past. Certainly, given Kella’s sensitive location on the border, the state dominated villagers’ comings and goings; but Berdahl shows convincingly how the state’s very interest in Kella brought forth even stronger articulations of local, regional, and religious identities.

Berdahl’s (1999) ethnography of Kella is one of the few works of post-1989 anthropology to focus on the village community. The significant expansion of the concept of community, by contrast, is perhaps best exemplified by Verdery’s research. In her pre-1989 work (Verdery 1983, 1991a), she examined the history of agricultural communities in Transylvania, as well as the intellectual communities in Bucharest in the 1980s. These represent more or less distinct social groups or classes, relatively easy to locate in time and space. But among the objects of her post-1989 work are such diverse communities as the hundreds of thousands of investors in “Caritas,” the pyramid scheme that dominated Romanian public and private life in the early 1990s (1996a), the communities of memory attempting to establish a stable national past (1996a), and the community of women all over Eastern Europe who are enduring the reengineering of their place both in daily life and in the ideology of the Nation (1994a). These are hardly the familiar kinds of communities studied by anthropologists. They are communities defined less through physical proximity than through discourse. Indeed, one of the challenges of anthropological work in the coming decades will be to find a way of dealing with the claims of new discursive communities as they grow in the uncertain circumstances of crony capitalism.

Gender communities are well represented in anthropologically informed accounts of contemporary Eastern Europe (Berry 1995, Chalmers 1997, Corrin 1992, Einhorn 1993, Gal 1994, Huseby-Darvas 1991, Occhipinti 1996, Pine 1993). These studies build upon ethnographically informed monographic descriptions of

the treatment of women under socialism, such as the analysis by Borneman (1992) of shifts in East and West German family policy in the postwar era, and the exhaustive study by Kligman (1998) of the Romanian state's politics of reproduction. Both works reveal the flimsiness of the commitment by the ruling party in each state to shape the lives of women on the basis of socialist visions of equality and parity. State policy lurched between the two discursive extremes of understanding women as economic agents, on the one hand, and viewing them as reproductive mechanisms on the other, and ethnographic accounts testify to the everyday brutality entailed in these policies. We should not forget, however, that although these two discursive poles existed in all countries, the individual historical trajectory of their transformation varied, both by country and by sociological strata within each country. More recent accounts testify to the fact that the end of socialism has not meant the end of East European states' interests in determining the kinds of lives women should lead within both the family and the nation.

Finally, I must mention that anthropologists have in the past decade also addressed what has long been of central concern to Eastern European societies, the community of the nation (Buchowski 1994, Doi 1998, Hubinger 1992, Lingle 1992, Niedermuller 1994). Wanner's (1998) work on the Ukraine is an attempt to demonstrate how since 1990, the political and cultural production of Ukrainian national identity has undergone a profound shift. No longer is this identity subordinated to the larger aims and interests of the state in which the Ukraine was one of 15 equal parts. Definition of the boundaries of the Ukrainian community during the early years of postsocialism became a pervasive imperative that insinuated itself across a variety of social sites, from pop music concerts to history classes, from the political platform to the workplace. Wanner shows how this imperative is, on the one hand, the result of years of accumulated grievances and, on the other, a product of a very contemporary manipulation of cultural performances and processes by groups for whom a national ideology represents the only adequate response to social and political turmoil.

## ETHNOGRAPHIC REPORTING

The anthropological works discussed in this article not only document the remarkable transformation of EEFsU both under socialism and in the course of the dismantling of one-party, state socialist regimes, they also document the multiple tensions and pressures within the discipline. Although this discussion of the subfield has focused on the issues of the concept of culture in studies of the former Soviet Union, and the importance of changing definitions of community in anthropological works about Eastern Europe, in this final section I focus on a development internal to the discipline. I call attention to both the importance and the problems of the genre of ethnographic reporting. I define ethnographic reporting as article-length descriptions of social processes produced by analyzing a handful of sites or episodes. A full discussion of the relationship between the

state of anthropological knowledge of EEfSU and the evolution of the system of scholarly production is not possible, but we might hypothesize that this genre of anthropological writing has become more important not simply because of the imperative of publish or perish within the academy. Also at work is a shift in the structural conditions that enable knowledge and information about European societies to circulate. Steady improvements in the technical means of communication between anthropologists and their circles of informants, friends, and colleagues and in the conditions of travel to Eastern Europe have resulted in a general increase in information and an acceleration in its overall circulation. Today it is easier than ever both to stay in touch with one's informants and to follow developments in their town, region, or state from a distance.

This represents a tremendous possibility for anthropologists to become involved in what William Connolly (1995) has described as the transnational diplomacy necessary for the gradual amelioration of conflicts over identity. There is no doubt that the transformation of communications technologies is making possible far reaching changes in how individuals define themselves as members of cultures, groups, and nations, and in how states are managing problems of citizenship. The possibilities and complications represented by this kind of diplomacy deserve serious attention. At the same time, the particular identity of texts that comprise edited and conference volumes cannot help but have an impact on the broader nature of anthropological discourse.

In order to understand how ethnographic reporting is operating within anthropological discourse, we must note first that the genre possesses certain strengths, strengths that are the same as those of the best journalism: They provide compelling and immediate descriptions of complex cultural and social milieus. But by the same token, I argue that works in this genre can sometimes display the same faults that anthropology has been quick to denounce in journalism, namely the absence of a reflexivity that involves the careful consideration of the relationship between one's material and the concepts one uses to establish and elucidate its meaning and significance. Furthermore, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that the source of these difficulties in ethnographic reports are the same as the sources of less-than-compelling journalism, the pressures of deadlines and the definition of news value that together force journalists to use a template with which to reduce or ignore the complexity of what they are describing.

I want to emphasize that my comments below are not meant in any way as critiques of individual authors' commitments to anthropology; rather, the works briefly analyzed below evoke for me the difficulty of finding the right representational strategy within the condensed form of the report that would do justice both to the ethnographic material and to the theoretical complexities of the issues they raise.

The ethnographic work on EEfSU contains a number of examples of such reporting, and here I have chosen to highlight a few so as to suggest how the genre requires a trade-off between the compelling description of an ethnographic present and the elucidation of an intellectual problem.

An ethnographic report by Lass (1999) reveals these tensions between the material and the theoretical discourse used to uncover the ethnographic material's importance. He presents an account of the attempted computerization of the Czech and Slovak national library systems. It is a narrative of the dysfunction of institutions directed by formerly socialist bureaucrats, who see opportunities as threats and collaboration as attempted usurpation. Lass seems torn as to whether he is witnessing simply the foibles of elderly men seeking to maintain their grip on the institutions they control, or something deeper, namely one of the pernicious effects of socialism, the distortion of human relations. These questions, however, seem not nearly as interesting as the questions Lass passes briefly over: about the transformation of the meaning of information from being a political object to a commodity judged according to its costs of production, storage, and circulation; about the shift in the view of the library as a national resource; and about the multiple meanings overlaid by all parties on the object/artifact of the computer. Even more important, the computerization project seems an ideal context in which to examine the interventions made by Western institutions in formerly socialist societies. This project gestures toward an analysis of the operation of a certain kind of power central to contemporary western societies, a power marked by a way of speaking of information as if it existed free of any network of economic or political control, as if it inhabited its own social space.

Bunzl's (2000) account of gay Austrian sex tourism in Prague is another good example of both the strengths of ethnographic reporting and its difficulties—difficulties that Bunzl implicitly acknowledges. The existence of sex tourism is one of those troubling phenomena of contemporary life, one that is often described and understood in terms of a Marxist political economy: It represents another example of the productive power of global capital to find ever more human beings to submit to the logic of commodification. And yet embedded within such a dry explanation is a much more compelling problem of the normalization of violence within what appears to be an economic phenomenon. In a nutshell, this industry destroys the life chances—and, given the pandemic of AIDS, often the lives—of the young men and women who are forced to satisfy the desires of men who come from the wealthy centers of the global economy to take possession of the sexuality of those on the periphery. And it is yet another arena where the general human debasement both of the buyers of sex and of those who organize the supply and keeping of the human merchandise is apparent.

And yet even these multiple ways of thinking about the phenomenon are off the mark in the context of Bunzl's report. His topic is not exploitation, but rather the fulfillment of the desires of Austrian men, whose voices are present throughout his account, and whose graphic and disarming descriptions of sex with Czech boys suggest an aura of liberation. Yet Bunzl's ethnography gestures far beyond itself to a maze of complex issues, including the emotional constitution and experience of gayness in Austrian society, and the means by which Austrian men appropriate descriptions of Czech culture as particularly sensuous and "free." Most disturbing, perhaps, is the absence of reporting about the lives of boys and men whose bodies

are the goal of this tourism, an absence that Bunzl, to his credit, highlights. And yet the absence of their subjectivity is crucial, as it leaves us with only half a picture: of Austrian men frustrated with their own national erotic economy, preying on (or just taking advantage of the available supply of?) young Czechs whose desire for Western goods demands that they fulfill the wishes of Austrian men. Bunzl has painted this half picture with an arresting postmodernist kind of realism that leaves the reader with a disturbing uncertainty about the role of anthropology in explaining such a phenomenon.

## CONCLUSION

The snapshots of anthropological works I have discussed here evoke, among other things, the larger question of the place of theory in contemporary anthropology. In this review, I have suggested that, on one hand, all of these works are informed by theoretical discourses in the social sciences; it is impossible for ethnographers not to have a theory they work with and within, because theories are both signs of disciplinary belonging and the means by which evidence from one place can be made meaningful for ethnographers in other places. Theories also supply larger narrative frames, which, in the context of the dramatic transformations of EeFSU, provide actors with ready-made ways to orient themselves to incomprehensible systems and events. Verdery's masterful ethnographic report on the Caritas pyramid scheme in Romania (1996b) is a case in point. After describing how this classic extortion scheme became a vital part of the lives of millions of Romanians shortly after the fall of Ceausescu, she turns to analyses by Romanian writers and journalists that suggest that this magical system for the appearance and disappearance of wealth is "really" about the reorganization of the Romanian economy. They argue that all of the Romanian pyramid schemes that sprang up after the fall of socialism, of which Caritas was the largest, were financial mechanisms for the redistribution of capital from beneath the mattresses of the masses to the pockets of political capitalists, that the pyramid schemes represent one important stage of the early phase of capitalism in postsocialist Romania. Basic economic theory that describes the way private accumulation and the pursuit of profit operate in a context where a class of rulers has to become a class of capitalists provides a powerful narrative that not only explains the recent past, but also helps us map out possible paths of further transformation of communities in the EeFSU. Such a theory predicts that the dichotomous structure of pre-1989 Romania—party vs people—is being recast in the postsocialist context as financial adventurers vs innocent, manipulable masses. It leaves us, however, with difficult questions about agency and the teaching of agency by capitalism, questions that, as Verdery acknowledges, require more long-term research.

It is obvious, however, that theoretical discourses other than the political and economic circulate within the discipline of anthropology to make the particular daily life of a place or group of people comprehensible to those looking from



a distance. I have suggested that the anthropological literature on postsocialism reflects the development of theoretical discussions around the key concepts of culture and community. What is so far absent from the literature is an attempt to construct, focus, and conduct a conversation across these theoretical discourses. This is no doubt a function of a number of factors: the newness of postsocialism, the rapid growth of the field, and the contemporary pressures within academia that shape departments and careers. It may also be a function of our historical proximity to existing socialism's actual shortcomings, inefficiencies, and injustices and of the complexity of the intellectual ground of late capitalism, which tends to commodify even moral, intellectual, and emotional commitments.

There is what we might call a meta-discussion in which anthropologists of Eastern Europe are excellently positioned to engage. This is the discussion around what Michel Foucault termed governmentality. Governmentality is certainly not a theory in the conventional sense of the term, one that seeks to subsume data to a single explanatory framework; it is by no means the social scientific analog to the unified-field theory. Governmentality is simply a term that stands for a set of assumptions about the conditions under which human beings live their lives. These assumptions include the claims that we not only construct our own histories, but we also make the means by which we understand ourselves. Knowledge is the constituting medium of everyday life, and it is the peculiar legacy of the modern era to make possible the creation of a kind of knowing about knowledge, to make possible the rigorous examination of the unreflected and profound ways of knowing that act upon the world.

Studies of governmentality are, in Nikolas Rose's words, "studies of a particular 'stratum' of knowing and acting. Of the emergence of particular 'regimes of truth' concerning the conduct of conduct, ways of speaking truth, persons authorized to speak truths, ways of enacting truths and the costs of so doing. Of the invention and assemblage of particular apparatuses and devices for exercising power and intervening upon particular problems. They are concerned, that is to say, with the conditions of possibility and intelligibility for certain ways of seeking to act upon the conduct of others, or oneself, to achieve certain ends" (Rose 1999, p. 19). Approaches focused on the effectivity of knowledge are especially appropriate in the context of postsocialist societies, where knowledge techniques from shock therapy to speed-reading have been imported from the West to transform daily life. In fact, we might think of the entire Western project to bring socialism to an end and to bring the freedoms of market and democracy to EeFSU as a vast knowledge project that continues to operate after the achievement of the proximate goal of destroying socialism. Indeed, the subject of interventions by Western institutions is being studied by Hemmet (1999), who is concerned with the nature of the power of nongovernmental organizations in the Russian transition from socialism.

Studies of governmentality contribute to a critical understanding of the everyday, to the formation of provisional diagnoses about the operations of power and knowledge that shape people's lives at a given moment. Studies of governmentality highlight certain aspects of the ethnographic encounter, focusing on familiar

questions such as: How do one's informants come to talk the way they do? How have they come to make sense of the world in this particular way? What are the genealogies of the forms of knowledge that organize their lives? Answering these questions requires both that one achieve an intimate sense of daily life in a particular setting and, at the same time, that one seize the opportunity provided by ethnography's conditions of possibility, the senses of alienation and strangeness, in order to sort out the operations of institutions, the enabling of subjectivities, and the assimilation of identities. This distance is not an updated version of the colonial encounter, with its hierarchic relationship of Authority ranged above the Archive, for ethnographers of governmentality must of course problematize their own knowledge, techniques, and theories. I do not mean to argue that studies of governmentality should supplant the ongoing theoretical discussions I have described above or that such studies are inherently more valuable than approaches closer to anthropology's traditions. I am suggesting that a focus on knowledge, its forms and powers, can open up lines of communication between scholars working in different geographic regions and with different theoretical concepts.

Might the language of governmentality become the lingua franca of anthropology? It is far too early to tell. I believe, however, that in the context of the EEfSU, where new knowledge (microeconomics, management, and finance) are so valorized, new techniques for producing knowledge (polling, surveys, and statistical manipulation) so widespread, and new discourses for defining self and others (Evangelical Christian, Hare Krishna, and mass entertainment spectacle) so popular, the critical analytic discourse of governmentality would be very useful in making sense of such heterogeneous transformations. Finally, a common concern with governmentality might provide a base from which scholars could orient themselves towards the numerous publics of contemporary polities East and West and ask the most suppressed yet obvious questions: What kinds of societies are being created here, anyway? What kind of societies are we making? And what kind of societies might we make?

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of thumbnail sketches. This is regrettable but inevitable. I am also certain that I have overlooked some works, and I hope their authors will forgive this oversight.

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# CONTENTS

---

## OVERVIEW

- The Four Careers of George and Louise Spindler: 1948–2000,  
*George D. Spindler* xv

## ARCHAEOLOGY

- Archaeology, Property, and Prehistory, *Timothy Earle* 39  
The Historical Archaeology of Native Americans,  
*Patricia E. Rubertone* 425

## BIOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

- Australopithecus* to *Homo*: Transformations in Body and Mind,  
*Henry M. McHenry, and Katherine Coffing* 125  
Into the Light: The Origin of Anthrozoidea, *Callum F. Ross* 147  
Ancient DNA Studies in Physical Anthropology,  
*Dennis H. O'Rourke, M. Geoffrey Hayes, and Shawn W. Carlyle* 217

## LINGUISTICS AND COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICES

- Form and Ideology: Arabic Sociolinguistics and Beyond,  
*Niloofar Haeri* 61  
Gay and Lesbian Language, *Don Kulick* 243  
The Languages of New Guinea, *William A. Foley* 357  
The Individual Voice in Language, *Barbara Johnstone* 405  
Critical Discourse Analysis, *Jan Blommaert and Chris Bulcaen* 447

## REGIONAL STUDIES

- History and Anthropology in South Asia: Rethinking the Archive,  
*Saloni Mathur* 89  
Cultures and Communities in the Anthropology of Eastern Europe  
and the Former Soviet Union, *Thomas C. Wolfe* 195

## SOCIOCULTURAL: HISTORY, THEORY, METHODS

- British Social Anthropology: A Retrospective, *Jonathan Spencer* 1

## SOCIOCULTURAL, ANTHROPOLOGY: ECONOMICS, ECOLOGY, TECHNOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT

- Conservation and Subsistence in Small-Scale Societies,  
*Eric Alden Smith and Mark Wishnie* 493

**SOCIOCULTURAL: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL  
RELATIONSHIPS**

Capitalisms in Late Modernity, <i>Michael Blim</i>	25
The Anthropology of Public Policy: Shifting Terrains, <i>Anne Francis Okongwu and Joan P. Mencher</i>	107
The Commodification of the Body and its Parts, <i>Lesley A. Sharp</i>	287
“Family Values” and Domestic Economies, <i>Gerald W. Creed</i>	329

**SOCIOCULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY: AFFECT, COGNITION,  
AND MEANING**

The Visible Evidence of Cultural Producers, <i>Maureen Mahon</i>	467
--	-----

**THEME I: CAPITALISM AND THE REINVENTION OF ANTHROPOLOGY**

Capitalisms in Late Modernity, <i>Michael Blim</i>	25
The Anthropology of Public Policy: Shifting Terrains, <i>Anne Francis Okongwu and Joan P. Mencher</i>	107
The Commodification of the Body and its Parts, <i>Lesley A. Sharp</i>	287
“Family Values” and Domestic Economies, <i>Gerald W. Creed</i>	329

**THEME II: NATURE OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL EVIDENCE**

History and Anthropology in South Asia: Rethinking the Archive, <i>Saloni Mathur</i>	89
Ancient DNA Studies in Physical Anthropology, <i>Dennis H. O'Rourke, M. Geoffrey Hayes, and Shawn W. Carlyle</i>	217
The Visible Evidence of Cultural Producers, <i>Maureen Mahon</i>	467

**INDEXES**

Subject Index	525
Cumulative Index of Contributing Authors, Volumes 21–29	535
Cumulative Index of Chapter Titles, Volumes 21–29	538