The idea for this special issue in *Ethnos* grew out of a AAA conference panel in fall 2003. The aim of the panel was to stimulate new thinking on ‘postsocialism,’ geographically and theoretically, and to include a range of voices in the conversations. Participants included specialists on contemporary issues in Russia, China, Ukraine, Poland, Cuba, Vietnam, and Ethiopia, and the diverse material they presented sparked a stimulating debate about the future of postsocialist studies in anthropology. We all felt challenged (and were encouraged by our insightful discussants, Ann Anagnost, Daphne Berdahl, and Gerald Creed) to further expand the conceptual framework of postsocialist studies and move toward a more comparative and integrated approach to this field. The need for a comparative approach has been observed by others (Hann 2002). It quickly became apparent, however, that a promising way to theorize comparative postsocialisms was to privilege Foucaultian questions of governmentality and subjectivity, rather than the traditional focus on practice and ideology. This theoretical move, we believe, allows us to extend the analysis of post- and late-socialist states, socialities, and persons in productive directions.

The papers of this special issue therefore engage work that destabilizes the ‘market transition’ model of postsocialist studies (Burawoy & Verdery 1999; Dunn 2004; Mandel & Humphrey 2002; Verdery 1996, 2003; Yurchak 2002) by considering broader sociocultural spaces surrounding concepts of governmentality and subjectivity. In the wake of the collapse of the former Soviet bloc, governments throughout the ‘socialist’ sphere have introduced a variety of novel policies in response to the pressure of global economic and political forces. However, as postsocialist and late-socialist states implement these policy initiatives, they act upon complex and established social and...
cultural systems that respond in unpredictable ways. Drawing upon intensive ethnographic methods and theory that seek to understand various forms of present postsocialism(s) across Eurasia and the other parts of the globe, these papers offer a critique of neoliberal visions of the ‘free market,’ privatization, and ‘civil society.’ In this way, the papers all seek to explicate the complexity and variation of the relationships currently developing between state institutions and citizens under postsocialism.

The papers presented here aspire to bridge two fissures in the study of postsocialist and late-socialist countries that have resulted from arbitrary academic conventions. They question, first, the geographic division between ‘Europe’ and ‘Asia’ (papers focus on Ukraine, Vietnam, Russia, and the Siberian city of Akademgorodok) and second, the thematic split between the ‘postsocialist’ former Soviet sphere and other reforming/late socialist states (here, especially, Vietnam). By challenging these conventional geographical and thematic divisions, these papers attempt to achieve a broader anthropological understanding of states, peoples, and growing transnational fora for exchange of goods and norms of social worth and moralities in (post)socialist contexts. They also explore how the problems and promises produced by post- and late-socialist processes of emerging market structures and globalization reverberate very differently in specific historical and socio-political contexts. Within these discussions, questions of the state and the structures of power that govern people’s lives are central. The authors examine a range of important, contested ‘cultural sites’ in which processes of globalization, governmentality, and subjectivity are shaped in particular ways: business, consumerism, civil society, and science.

Amy Ninetto and Elizabeth Vann share a common interest in questions of conceptual boundaries and the movement of people and goods across them. Focusing on two scientific institutions in the Siberian science city of Akademgorodok, Ninetto examines the shifting and contradictory role of the post-Soviet state in science and in the lives of scientists. Here she is concerned with the ever-changing boundary between the laboratory and society; she also tracks the movement of migrating scientists and the meanings attached to such movements (see also Ninetto 2000). In her provocative comparison of consumer narratives in Ho Chi Minh City, Moscow, and St. Petersburg, Vann explores the fuzzy boundaries between understandings of ‘foreign’ and ‘domestic,’ and argues that popular concerns about these distinctions in both Russia and Vietnam might be attempts to re-erect borders that the practices of global capitalism seem to blur. She shows how consumer goods

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move through ‘real’ space and also through sets of conceptual categories as they are variously classified as ‘foreign’ or ‘domestic.’

Amy Ninetto’s exploration of intersections of the state and the market within contemporary Russian science challenges the common view that Russian scientists are overly ‘nostalgic’ for the glories of Soviet science past. Instead, Ninetto demonstrates how scientists and scientific institutions creatively forge a range of relationships with state and market structures. In fact, Ninetto argues, the privatization of Russian science in the scientific town of Akademgorodok requires the active participation of state actors. In this inquiry she highlights the power relations that move knowledge production in the supposedly ‘non-ideological’ sphere of science. In her examination of postsocialist forms of governmentality, Ninetto argues that, in transforming ‘structures that were available under socialism into hybrid state-private ventures,’ scientists have ‘reconfigured, and in some cases even strengthened, the relationship between state power and the production of knowledge’ (p. 443). Ninetto’s piece also contributes to research that tracks the unexpected results of market reforms in arenas such as industry, science, and medicine (Dunn 2004; Rivkin-Fish 2005).

In her comparative piece, Elizabeth Vann focuses on varying constructions of locality in relationship to production and consumption of goods: because of the different roles Russia and Vietnam play in the global economy – one as consumer of ‘foreign’ goods, the other as site of production for foreign and multinational corporations (MNCS) – Vann argues that consumers have developed different preferences based on complex notions of locality. The contrasting understandings that Russian and Vietnamese consumers have about ‘domestic’ goods are therefore indicative of the different positions Vietnam and Russia occupy in global capitalist production. Local understandings of consumer goods in Vietnam and Russia become ways of reflecting on the impact of global capitalism on their respective societies and on their own lives. By criticizing the goods produced by foreign companies and MNCS in Vietnam, for example, Vietnamese consumers comment on their own perceived (and real) inferior status in the global economy. Vann draws on Foucault’s notion of ‘technologies of self’ to argue that the Vietnamese and Russian consumers she describes have developed a subjectivity as citizen-consumers that is more informed by notions of collectivity and sociality than by neoliberal ideas of individuality. Vann’s close reading of studies by Caldwell (2002), Humphrey (1995), and Patico (2001) highlights the contributions that these researchers have made to the study of economic change and consumption
patterns in postsocialist Russia. The success of her effort should encourage anthropologists of postsocialism to look beyond their regions of expertise for points of comparison.

The papers by Catherine Wanner and Sarah Phillips, both of which are based on ethnographic fieldwork in Ukraine, focus on the changing nature of collectivities, and issues of class. The approach of the two authors, however, is quite different. Thus, Wanner examines how the atomization of individuals has become the norm in Ukraine’s fraught new business climate as a kind of backlash to the Soviet ideology of collectivism. Phillips, by contrast, explores how some groups of citizens have found refuge in NGO collectivities to weather postsocialist crises, and argues that participation in such groups is often productive of a kind of emergent personal autonomy. Wanner and Phillips both explore how new discourses are being wielded in postsocialist Ukraine to calculate the social worth of persons and groups. Wanner concentrates on the notions of wealth and morality used to evaluate consumption and entrepreneurial practices, while Phillips examines the narratives taken up by powerful groups (including representatives of the state) to devalue certain categories of citizens. She also tracks the organizing strategies taken up by marginalized populations when faced with economic crisis. These two papers thus contribute to a literature on postsocialism that has been largely reluctant to raise discussions of class difference after socialism.

Catherine Wanner builds on another line of inquiry only recently taken up by anthropologists of postsocialism (Mandel & Humphrey 2002) when she explores the intersections between market practices and constructions of ‘morality.’ She examines how market reforms in postsocialist Ukraine – and the inequalities they produce – have engendered competing notions of morality, and different ways of calculating what constitutes ‘moral compromise’ under new and often harsh economic conditions. Wanner demonstrates the range of outcomes (some of them violent) produced by the intersection of economic practices and the power of the state. She argues that the corrupt state and the uneven application of laws splinter any shared notion of moral consensus, leading to opposing concepts of ‘justice’ among citizens.

In her article, Phillips also takes up the discussion of ‘justice’ by studying the social justice struggles of women NGO leaders in Kiev. She utilizes the insights of critical-interpretive medical anthropology to argue for a new approach to understanding the long-term effects of women’s NGO participation in postsocialist Ukraine. Phillips demonstrates how, even as NGO organizing is personally empowering for many women, through it they are subjected
to new forms of governmentality in a changing welfare state. Phillips thus argues for new ways of conceptualizing ‘civil society’ in postsocialism that critically assess the fraught interconnections between political, social, and personal change that civil society practices engender.

In addition to a common focus on questions of globalization, governmentality, and subjectivity in post- and late-socialist sites, the papers in this special issue all examine how the socialist ‘past’ bleeds into the post- or late-socialist ‘present’ in ways that are both predictable and unexpected. The authors’ conclusions all confirm that socialism ‘still matters’ for the ways in which people think of their societies, experience institutions of the state and the market, shop, seek out support networks, engage in entrepreneurial practices … in short, for how they live their lives. On the other hand, as Ninetto points out in her paper (following Burawoy & Verdery 1999:i–2), it is not always easy to tell what is a socialist ‘legacy’ and what is an innovative response to new circumstances. Nevertheless, these articles seem to echo each other in a resounding ‘Yes’ to the question that has recently been asked by several anthropologists: ‘Does the category “postsocialist” still make sense’ (Humphrey 2002; Humphrey & Mandel 2002:3; Verdery 2002)? Similar questions were raised at the 2005 meetings of soyuz, the Post-Communist Cultural Studies Interest Group of the American Anthropological Association. Responding to the provocative conference theme, ‘Post Post-Socialism?’ most participants agreed that, while research in the field is taking new directions – such as an increased focus on European integration – the socialist past continues to reverberate throughout the post- and late-socialist milieu. The contributors to this special issue seek to capture these reverberations more fully by coupling questions of economic transformation and global capitalism with those of governmentality and subjectivity across post- and late-socialist spaces.

Note

1. The session, organized by Andrew Asher, Junjie Chen, and Sarah D. Phillips for the 2003 meetings of the American Anthropological Association was entitled ‘Where Capitalism and Socialism Meet: Opening up a Comparative Anthropology of Post/Late Socialism(s).’ We are grateful to the discussants who provided stimulating commentary on possibilities for such a comparative anthropology – Ann Anagnost, Daphne Berdahl, and Gerald Creed. This special issue also continues conversations initiated during a conference session at the 2003 American Ethnological Society meetings (organized by Junjie Chen and Sarah D. Phillips), entitled ‘Tunnel Vision: Re-envisioning the Ethnography of Post- and Late Socialism(s).’ We are grateful to Ralph Litzinger and Mayfair Yang for their insightful responses to the papers. Finally, the contributors would like to thank the editors, Nils Bubandt and Mark Graham, and also A.C. Lagercrantz, for their careful work and encouragement.
References

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