

Warner, Elizabeth and Svetlana Adonyeva. *We Remember, We Love, We Grieve: Mortuary and Memorial Practice in Contemporary Russia*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2021. Notes. Bibliography. Index. 304 pp. \$79.95 (cloth). ISBN 9780299330705.

There are two ways of studying practices associated with care for the deceased, depending on the location of the research object. In the Global North, such practices are seen as a consequence of the funeral business in a particular region. Researchers seek to show how the phenomena of modern funeral culture (embalming, cremation, grief and so on) are associated with economic, legal, and demographic variables (see, for example, Tony Walter [“Three ways to arrange a funeral: Mortuary variation in the modern West,” 2005] [“Why different countries manage death differently: A comparative analysis of modern urban societies”, 2012]). On the other hand, in the Global South, funeral practices are studied through local religious beliefs and the participation of local communities in care for the deceased (see, for example, Piers Vitebsky [“*Living without the Dead: Loss and Redemption in a Jungle Cosmos*,” 2017]). Researchers show what social functions a funeral rite performs in a particular community. Such a polarity in the explanation of funeral practices lies in the peculiarities of the formation of the anthropological discipline, or, more precisely, in a specific pathway of the colonial world system and the place of anthropological knowledge in the world order in the second half of the 20th century. At that time, scholars tended to group countries into big clusters: *modern* countries, i.e., the Global North (consisting of the United States, Western Europe, and their allies), and *archaic* countries, i.e., the Global South (consisting of the ex-colonial countries). Though such a division might seem simple and outdated, it continues to inform conceptual oppositions in the comparative understanding of culture, including the funeral.

However, this simple binary division does not allow for some countries to be classified as either the first or the second type; for example, the countries of the former socialist camp, including Russia, are difficult to place in either type. The Soviet and post-Soviet world took not only a “middle” position between two different systems (Western ex-Empires and their ex-colonies) but also had a unique experience in the building of a socialist state. Understanding this “intermediate” position allows researchers to describe Russia *alternatively*. Thus, some explanatory models depict the Soviet/post-Soviet world as an “alternative modernity” or as a complex interweaving of archaism and modernity (see Michael David-Fox or Stephen Kotkin). This approach is also relevant to the funeral practices of modern Russia. Is it about funeral business (modern) or religion and local communities (archaic)? Could we see it as something else (alternative)? This third approach is adopted in Warner and Adonyeva’s *We Remember, We Love, We Grieve: Mortuary and Memorial Practice in Contemporary Russia*. This book does not belong to either of the two traditions and allows us to see the fine interaction of the archaic and the modern.

The book’s dual attention to the modern and archaic is informed by its descriptive nature. There are few theoretical anthropological discussions. This is

not surprising considering that Adonyeva and Warner are recognized ethnographers/Russianists who have been collecting field material for more than a decade. Additionally, the descriptive orientation of the book is beneficial, as it serves as a type of methodological rejection of theory, while also directing the reader's attention toward the meaning of the material. Finally, all fieldwork was carried out in rural post-Soviet Russia, rather than in large cities, which allowed for unique, detailed descriptions of the relationships between the living and the dead in post-Soviet villages and rural spaces.

Warner and Adonyeva's work shows numerous important facets of mortuary and memorial practice. First, there is the surprising absence of any funeral businesses in the regions studied, where it is rare to see the role of funeral directors and funeral infrastructure (cemetery management, mortuaries, transportations) during organization of funerals and commemoration. It is interesting that this could happen; on the one hand, Russia appears to be a country that has implemented many technological breakthroughs for decades, but at the same time it preserves archaic elements in social life. Considering this, Warner and Adonyeva depict not only the controversial world of funeral rituals in rural Russia (including small towns), which were not affected by market relations, but also the failures of the Soviet urbanization project.

The authors also address the stability of traditional ideas about the role of the dead in the life of the living (from pagan to Christian, although they avoid such genealogies (247). These descriptions are surprising to anyone interested in Soviet culture and ideology. How have these practices and beliefs remained so pervasive over the decades? Why and to what extent were they left untouched by the Soviet ideology? How do they intertwine with modern life? The book answers a number of these questions. The chapter "The Cross, the Birch, and the Kawasaki Motorbike: The Visual Rhetoric of Russian Rural Cemeteries in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries" draws our attention to the interweaving of archaism and modernity of the material world, characteristic of the cemetery culture of rural Russia. Chapters on the role of eternal flame, destructive wars, and human losses in the memorial culture of the USSR are also devoted to this topic.

Warner and Adonyeva's work is a unique source. Unfortunately, there are still too few materials on practices related to death and dying in Soviet and post-Soviet culture, a fact which is also noted by the authors in the introduction. One can list books and articles by Nina Tumarkin, Catherine Merridale, Catherine Verdery, Anna Sokolova, and the author of this review. In this regard, *We Remember, We Love, We Grieve: Mortuary and Memorial Practice in Contemporary Russia* is an excellent source to complement future research, which presents many more unanswered questions. This book is an important contribution to the field for scholars interested in funerary practice in these regions.

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