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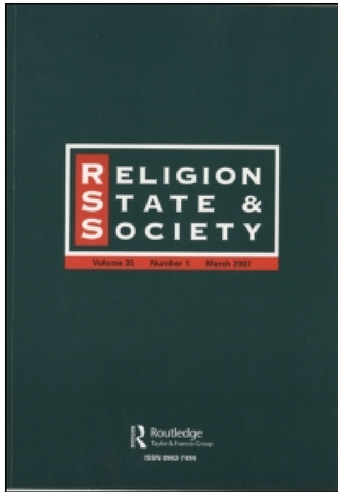

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Introductory Essay: The Anthropology of Religion after Socialism

DOUGLAS ROGERS

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Since the revolutions of 1989, increased public interest in religion across the former Soviet bloc has helped to generate new topics of investigation in a variety of disciplines, from history to sociology to literary studies. Sociocultural anthropology has been no exception. At the 2003 Meetings of the American Anthropological Association in Chicago, a number of anthropologists who have worked on the topic of religion in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union gathered to discuss the state of the field. The four articles published in this theme issue of *Religion, State & Society* are substantially revised versions of papers originally delivered on this panel, entitled 'Religion, Power, Political Economy: Postsocialist Views'.[1]

The Call for Papers for the panel set out dual questions for potential contributors to address, above and beyond the narrow context of understanding or interpreting their disparate field sites. First, what perspectives could the anthropology of religion contribute to the study of postsocialist transformations more broadly? (The implicit claim here was that religion had been a relatively marginal topic of interest among anthropologists working in the region.) Second, what could the study of religion in the postsocialist societies of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union contribute to the anthropology of religion as a whole? In the course of introducing the four papers that follow, I return to these initial questions to situate the contributors' work and point to some areas of potentially productive research in the future.

The Anthropology of Religion in the Late Socialist Period[2]

Before the Eastern European revolutions of 1989 and the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, the number of western anthropologists who had completed field research in Soviet-bloc countries was vanishingly small. There exist precious few western ethnographies of the socialist world on any subject, let alone on the politically risky topic of religion in the region. As readers of this journal well know, the study of religion was at best difficult and at worst impossible in the socialist period. This was especially the case for the research methodologies preferred by social and cultural anthropologists: long-term residence in a particular community, participant observation, wide-ranging interviews and oral histories. Nevertheless, among those few pre-1989 studies, a surprising number turned their attention, at least in part, to matters of religion and, especially, to the study of ritual. These early works, together with some of the research completed under trying conditions by Soviet and Eastern European

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ethnographers themselves, form the ground on which the post-1989 anthropology of religion in the region stands.

If there was a central concern in western anthropologists' pre-1989 studies of religion in the Soviet bloc, it was to theorise the relationships between religion and the socialist party states' drives to build socialist modernity. Was socialist ideology replacing religious belief? Were secular socialist rituals substituting for older religious rites across the region, as their Communist Party architects hoped? How did the 'two cultures' of religion and socialism interact (the binary was often assumed in the very phrasing of these research topics)? With what outcomes? As it turned out, the route to answering these questions frequently lay through the study of ethnic and national identities, for the elements of religion that anthropologists explored were often asserted – both by their practitioners and even more vocally by ethnographers in the socialist academy – to be essentially national in character.

Anthropologists most often analysed the connections and misconnections between religion and socialism-in-practice by working from the detailed analyses of ritual that held sway in the broader anthropology of religion of that era. Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer's early work, for instance, focused on the ways in which rituals of burial and healing among the Siberian Khanty contributed to shifting senses of ethnic identity and figured prominently in Khanty responses to decades of sovietisation (1980, 1981, 1983). Tamara Dragadze's important article on the 'domestication of religion' in Georgia and Azerbaijan (1993) drew attention to the great extent to which religious rituals had shifted, in the face of antireligious campaigns, to the spaces of the home and the domain of women (a point also made by Tone Bringa in her work on Muslims in socialist Yugoslavia (1995)). Chris Hann demonstrated the full complexity of the issue of religion and ethnic identities in an article on Uniates in the Lemkovia region of southeast Poland, where 'it is quite possible to be a ''Lemkian'' at one level, a Ukrainian at another, an Orthodox Slav at another, and a loyal Polish citizen in yet other contexts' (1988, p. 12).[3]

Two socialist-era ethnographies are worthy of particular note, for they integrated the analysis of religion and ritual directly into their influential understandings of the workings of socialist systems. The first of these is Caroline Humphrey's *Karl Marx Collective: Economy, Society, and Religion in a Siberian Collective Farm*, published in 1983 but based on fieldwork in the late 1960s and mid-1970s; the second is Gail Kligman's *Wedding of the Dead* (1988).

Humphrey's monograph is most often recalled for its pathbreaking analysis of the workings of Soviet political economy and of the centrality of wheeling and dealing in the 'unofficial sector' to the functioning of the system at all levels. Those harking back to Humphrey's ethnography less frequently note the last part of her subtitle: religion. Indeed, Buryat rituals and shamanism stood near the centre of Humphrey's understanding of social life in Soviet Buryatia. After discussing political and economic life, Humphrey turned to ritual, addressing the blending of traditional Buryat practices and the organisation of rural Soviet agriculture. She showed, for instance, that although Buryat ritual itself was not disappearing in the Soviet period, the production units of the local collective farms were gradually taking over the role that Buryat kin groups had once played in those rituals. With respect to shamanism, Humphrey made the innovative argument that shamans were the '*bricoleurs* of the here and now' who worked to piece together meaning in the gaps 'between Buryat and Soviet consciousness' (1983, p. 375). Shamanism, and especially the explanations of suffering and misfortune it offered, provided a necessary space for reflection in a Soviet system that allowed 'no locus for reflection on itself' (p. 417) and could not

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admit its own fallibility.[4] Humphrey suggested that shamanism would, therefore, continue to exist in Buryatia, and that it would have local functional analogues across the socialist world. For those who continue to debate whether and how the socialist system contained the seeds of its own destruction, it might still be instructive to return to Humphrey's ethnography.

Karl Marx Collective appeared on the cusp of radically shifting approaches to ethnicity and national identity in anthropology. Throughout the 1980s, under the influence of such works as Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), anthropologists working in all corners of the world began to attend to the role of intellectuals as participants in the process of constructing ethnic and national identities. In other words, anthropologists and others began to ask whether scholarly pronouncements on the authentic nature and characteristics of ethnic groups simply described an existing reality in the world or, as they increasingly argued, whether these pronouncements played an important role in creating that reality. The next step in this train of thought was not a large one: wittingly or unwittingly, intellectuals and their research on national character could be used in the service of the state. In the Soviet bloc, this meant socialist party states and their attempts to shore up legitimacy among their populations. Gail Kligman's *Wedding of the Dead* (1988), a superb ethnography of religion and ritual in the Romanian countryside, is the best example of this line of investigation as it applied to religion in the late socialist period.

After a comprehensive study of the rituals and poetic verses accompanying Transylvanian weddings and funerals in the village of Ieud, Kligman turned her attention to the broader context of the socialist state.[5] She argued that one of the prime reasons that the rituals she described continued to exist was that agents of the state found them useful in the construction of socialism. 'The state', Kligman wrote, 'has needed to construct its own traditions. To do so, [it] has called upon its historical tradition bearers – the peasants – to contribute their experience to the building of socialism .... The complex conjunction of religion, ritual, and nationalism presently keeps the "peasants" of Ieud alive and well' (Kligman, 1988, pp. 280–81). Kligman's analysis, that is, moved away from the dichotomies between traditional religion and socialist modernity, with their associated questions of assimilation and acculturation, that informed earlier work on religion in the region. Rather than beginning from an assumption of hostility between religion and socialism, she pointed to the ways in which socialist state building could *rely* on religion, at least in the project of ideological construction and usually when religion was dressed in the garb of national identity. Ethnographies of religion and state building in the postsocialist period would be well advised to return to Kligman's analysis. New historical studies of the socialist period might further explore this paradox, asking how the sometimes contradictory demands of state building (that, as Kligman argued, could make use of religion and ritual) and antireligious campaigns (that were bent on the extermination of religion) played out in particular circumstances and communities.

Nearly all western anthropologists who studied religion in the socialist era benefited enormously from the scholarship and patronage of ethnographers in the universities of the region. One might easily dismiss the large body of literature on religion these scholars produced as methodologically questionable for being caught up in attempts to eradicate its subject and theoretically hamstrung by strict constructionist interpretations of Marx and Lenin on religion. As always with socialist academic production, however, a closer look yields significant rewards. For one thing, reading between the Marxist–Leninist lines of Soviet ethnographies of religion and ritual could bear significant fruits: Christel Lane (1981) and Christopher A. C. Binns (1979,

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1980) produced large-scale theories of ritual and power in Soviet-type societies based entirely on readings of this secondary literature. For another, those scholars who did manage to carry out fieldwork also drew on quiet kitchen table conversations with their host academics, productive interactions that often led to intellectual cross-fertilisation invisible in footnotes and bibliographies.

To these points about the anthropology of religion under socialism, I would add a third: the overt antireligious efforts of socialist party states were unevenly applied to the study of religion. To use the example I know best, antireligious authorities afforded scholarship on 'sectarians' such as Old Believers a comparatively wide degree of lenience in the late Soviet period. Religious dissenters of past centuries could be cast, when necessary and useful, as heroic resistors to feudal exploitation and forerunners of the Bolshevik Revolution. Under this banner, Soviet expeditions of the late 1960s and 1970s collected thousands of manuscripts and other documentary sources from Old Believer communities and published extensively on religion in the feudal period. In the mid 1970s, this research quietly turned away from exclusively historical study and toward expedition-style field research on Old Believers in the contemporary Soviet Union as well (e.g. Koval'chenko, 1982; Pokrovsky, 1984). These scholars generated a massive amount of data on religious practice under Soviet socialism, although only some of it made it into print. As Kligman's analysis would predict, the publications based on this material preferred the language of 'spiritual tradition' or 'national tradition' to that of 'religion' and did not even mention new Soviet life-cycle rituals or antireligious campaigns. However, their intent was clear: to demonstrate, through expedition-style fieldwork, that much older religious practices – putative Russian national traditions in the case of Old Believers – continued well into the Soviet period.

Whether they emerged from the Anglo-American or the late socialist academic world – or from some level of interchange between the two – these studies worked within the social and cultural theories of their time. For western anthropologists, this meant symbolic approaches to ritual and social structural analyses of religion. For ethnographers in socialist states, it meant at least notional service (in print, anyway) to religion as ideology and the role of religious ideas in class struggle. For both groups of scholars, it meant the discussion of national and ethnic identities, although not usually in a manner that would satisfy most western anthropologists today, a point to which I return shortly.

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The Anthropology of Religion after Socialism

The end of Soviet-style socialism in 1989–91 transformed nearly every aspect of scholarship on (and in) the region, including anthropological studies of religion. On a very basic level, extended field research on religion and open collaboration between western and local scholars of religion became possible and productive. But this is hardly the end of the story. At the largest scale, the collapse of Soviet-style socialism played a role in global reorganisations of religion: western missionaries rushed East and, a decade or so later, formerly Soviet Central Asia became a breeding ground for stereotypes about religion and terrorism, as Zanca's article in this volume powerfully reminds us. At the same time, western social and cultural anthropology substantially retooled in order better to comprehend a world transformed in the wake the Cold War. Gone now, for instance, is anthropology's older near-exclusive focus on the third of the Cold War's three worlds; the erstwhile Second World has become an important locus for the development of new approaches and theories.

In sum, although the pieces scattered by the end of socialism and the Cold War have not all fallen into some new shape (or been fully 'recycled', to borrow the term used by Luehrmann in her article in this volume), it is clear there are both new dynamics out there in the world of religion and, relatedly, new approaches to religion within anthropology. In the remainder of this introductory essay, I set out four broad themes that have been of interest to anthropologists of religion working in postsocialist states: continued studies of religion and ethnic/national identity; considerations of religion and economic transformation; analyses of missions, conversion and selfhood; and emergent efforts to write ethnographies of atheism, secularism and desecularisation. These are not meant to be exclusive or exhaustive categories. Each of the four papers in this issue of *RSS* addresses more than one of them, and key topics such as gender, the nature of the postsocialist state, globalisation and transformations of morality might be approached from within any of them. I want to argue, however, that these are especially productive routes by which the anthropology of religion in this region might make contributions to the broader study of the postsocialist world and to the anthropological study of religion as a field of inquiry.

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Religion and Ethnic/National/Racial Identities

Attention to the links among religion, ritual and ethnic/national identities – so important in socialist-era scholarship – continues to be prominent in the postsoviet period. However, the many new studies that address the links between religion and various sorts of identity-formation work with somewhat different theoretical tools than did their socialist-era predecessors. Following the path initially taken by Kligman, most scholars attend in some fashion or other to the continuing significance of socialist nationalities policies and practice for the shaping of the postsocialist 'revival' of religion. They do not, for the most part, see ethnicity or national identity as given or authentically 'traditional' in any simple way. The papers by Balzer, Luehrmann and Zanca in this volume join an expanding group of other studies in touching on this area of investigation.

Exemplary contributions on this theme abound, surely because it has been of such concern to many policy-makers and religious practitioners in the region. For example, Sascha Goluboff's recent monograph (2001) on a Jewish synagogue in Moscow deals directly with the intertwined issues of religious practice, ethnicity and race after socialism. Through careful attention to rituals, conversations and conflicts during and after services, Goluboff explores specifically postsocialist overlaps and exclusions among the identity categories of Russians, Jews, Mountain Jews, Georgian Jews and Bukharan Jews at the synagogue. Daphne Berdahl, in her ethnography of the borderlands of a reunited Germany (1999; see also 2000), takes up the dynamic between popular and institutional Roman Catholicism as a prime site for the recovery of identity after socialism. Her study was also one of the first to consider religion in the broader context of new patterns of postsocialist consumption, a theme taken up in Caldwell's article in this volume. Robert Hayden (2002a, 2002b) has used ethno-national competition over religious sites as a way to approach the thorny issues of tolerance and sovereignty in the former Yugoslavia. Chris Hann, informed by fieldwork in several locales and cutting across the themes I outline here, has continued his extensive work on religion, economy and the formation of nation-states in Eastern Europe (1993, 1997).[6] Finally, Caroline Humphrey's updated version of *Karl Marx Collective* (1999) returned to the topic of

Buryat religion, this time demonstrating how deeply ingrained cosmologies influenced the ways in which local agriculturalists conceptualised decollectivisation in the 1990s (see also Humphrey, 2002).

Balzer's recent work on ethnicity and religion, including her article in this issue, strikes out a somewhat different path, dissenting from those scholars who rely on theories of ethnicity that give substantial weight to the role of intellectuals or states in constructing identity. Her major work on the topic (1999) traces the links between Siberian Khanty religion and ethnicity deep into the presoviet past. Moreover, Balzer's work speaks strongly to her connections and collaboration with local scholars and intellectuals, whose quiet preservation of knowledge and ritual practice during the Soviet period enabled them to participate in its public re-establishment after 1991 (see especially Balzer, 1995). In her contribution to this issue, Balzer analyses the ways in which religion has been drawn into competitions over national pride and definitions of the Sakha homeland: the question of whose steeple is higher has become another way of arguing over who better represents the Sakha nation. Furthermore, as Balzer insists throughout her work, these debates are not taking place only in provincial Siberia. They are part of a global movement that stakes the claims of indigenous peoples on combined ethnonational and religious grounds. When anthropologists think of globalisation and religion in the postsocialist context, the question should not be confined to the evidently global monotheisms. Postsoviet shamanism is now global as well (see also Vitebsky, 2002).

In taking up the intersections of religion and ethnic/national/racial identities, anthropologists of the postsocialist period build on a long line of existing work, both by western scholars and by those from the formerly socialist states. The anthropology of religion as a whole has also moved in new directions, and scholars of the postsocialist world are poised to contribute to these developments. The remaining three themes I discuss have much shorter pedigrees in the western anthropology of religion in this part of the world. To date, they have not attracted as much attention from scholars located in regional universities as have questions of religion and nation.

Religion and Economic Transformation

The overall religious environment after the end of socialism has often been called a 'marketplace' (e.g. Pankhurst, 1998). This term is usually used for two purposes: to draw a contrast to the historical 'monopoly' of Orthodox churches in much of the region, and to indicate that religion has become intimately – and often controversially – tied to business and the circulation of money. However, in much of the literature that relies upon the language of religious monopoly and marketplaces, the discussion goes no deeper than this. Anthropologists, as part of their fine-grained analyses of markets in everyday life, are in an ideal position to go beyond these surface claims and investigate how new patterns of production, exchange and consumption have been tied to (and at times painstakingly distanced from) religious practice. This line of inquiry began shortly after the end of socialism; it is represented in the present volume by Caldwell's article on 'a new role for religion' in the context of the new age of consumption in Moscow.

In a perceptive essay linking religion and precipitous economic transformation, Katherine Verdery (1996) focused on the ways in which the Caritas pyramid scheme in Romania deployed religious imagery – especially by borrowing and trading on the name of the international Catholic charity – to create a sense of trust in its shaky operations. Verdery argued that religious imagery was drawn into the process by

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which Romanians struggled to come to grips with the ability of money to reproduce itself invisibly and seemingly without human intervention in capitalist systems. (Many lost a fortune in the process.) Quasi-religious claims about faith, belief and invisible nonhuman agency thus proved effective tools for Romania's emergent elites to improve their lot at the expense of those less well positioned and less familiar with the workings of capital. 'Caritas', Verdery argued, 'was teaching people not market rationality but its mystification' (1996, p. 193).[7]

Galina Lindquist (2000a) has devoted similarly detailed attention to the place of religion and magic in marketplace exchanges in Russia. Her ethnography of small-time traders in Moscow demonstrated the embeddedness of economic transformation in existing cultural expectations about human and nonhuman agency associated, in the case she selected, with magical practices. Lindquist took aim at theories of risk and trust, two kinds of social relationship often asserted by economists to be essential to the creation and smooth functioning of markets. Her ethnography showed that these categories, so valued by the designers of economic reform packages, did not hold up well at the level of the streetcorner market. Better, Lindquist argued, to think about danger and hope, categories of experience that were both more salient to small traders and, at least among Lindquist's interlocutors, mediated by expert practitioners of magic. By availing themselves of this magic, traders attempted to exert a measure of control over the unequal and unfamiliar business exchanges in which they were participating. Using only the analytic terms of western economics – such as trust and risk – obscures the ways in which actual exchanges and 'marketisation' have been magically taking place in Moscow (see also Lindquist, 2002).

Both Verdery and Lindquist show to great effect how the detailed ethnography of religion (and magic) after socialism can point beyond itself to central questions about the shape of economic transformation. Adopting a similar approach, Caldwell's article in this issue joins others (see especially Lankauskas, 2002) in focusing on the consumption side of markets and market exchange. Caldwell asks what Moscow's competitive religious marketplace looks like from the perspective of several sometime participants in CCM, a mission church that has also set up a soup kitchen in postsoviet Moscow. On the basis of her interviews and observations, Caldwell suggests that these Muscovites adopt an approach to the religious marketplace similar to that adopted in other domains of postsocialist social life: foraging, improvising, and piecing together material and moral goods where and when opportunities present themselves.

Much remains to be investigated on the broad topic of religion, magic, ritual and economic transformation. In a recent article, for instance, Gerald Creed mapped out a schema for linking the rise and decline of ritual activity to shifting economic fortunes (2002). What happens, Creed asks, when there is simply no money to hold a wedding or a funeral? What are the implications for ritual activity when the broader orbit of relationships shifts from socialism – a social order heavily dependent on personal and often ritualised ties – to the more impersonal links and capital accumulation characteristic of market economies? Elizabeth Dunn (2004) has suggested still another line of questioning in her ethnography of production in working-class Poland, where women on the shop floor draw on Roman Catholic models of personhood and human dignity to blunt some of the harsher aspects of their new place in the postsocialist labour force. As often unpredictable economic shifts continue to characterise much of the region, analyses of religion and economic transformation should remain among the top priorities for ethnographic research.

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Missions, Conversion and Shifting Concepts of Selfhood

A third area of growing common concern among anthropologists of religion working in the former Soviet bloc is the study of missionaries and religious conversion. In this issue, the active presence of Protestant missions informs the contributions by Balzer, Caldwell and Luehrmann, but, as the discussion of proselytism in Zanca's article makes clear, the topic of missionaries does not end with Protestantism by any means, as the discussion of proselytism in Zanca's article makes clear. Missions of all denominations, and the real or perceived 'threat' of foreign missions in particular, have been at the heart of scholarly analysis of state religious policy and new legal codes across the region. Anthropologists, however, have usually taken a somewhat different tack, viewing policy or law as only part of much broader dynamics. As elsewhere in the world, the study of religious conversion has been a particularly useful arena in which to explore shifting conceptions of selfhood and subjectivity. I want to suggest here that, if analyses of religion and economic transformation of the sort I discussed above have the potential to throw new light on the overall study of the postsocialist 'transition to capitalism', then the study of missions and conversion might productively engage central items of concern in the anthropology of religion far beyond the study of the former Soviet bloc.

Among recent ethnographies of religion in the region, Catherine Wanner's ongoing work takes up the issue of missions and conversion most directly. On the basis of her interviews with members of Baptist, Pentecostal and Charismatic communities in Ukraine, Wanner has argued that religious conversion has been a key domain for the reformulation of morality after the end of socialism (2003). Through conversions to evangelical religious faith and practice, Wanner's interviewees accomplish a transformation of the self that at once makes them participants in newly global possibilities for religious practice and facilitates the reinterpretation of Soviet-era models of moral reflection and action. Following other anthropologists of religion, Wanner demonstrates that conversion is not an either/or prospect; it is a domain of creativity from which hybrid forms of religiosity and affiliation are likely to emerge (see especially Wanner, 2004). Like Wanner, Caldwell (this volume) draws attention to the benefits that flow from some degree of participation in comparatively resource-rich global religious communities. However, the Muscovites we meet in Caldwell's article seem to stand at arm's length from the transformation of selfhood so important to Wanner's Ukrainian evangelical converts. These Muscovites, in Caldwell's analysis, are far more utilitarian: they approach the religious marketplace for bits and pieces of aid in the improvement of selves that remain largely disengaged and, in the end, unconverted (although not untransformed).[8]

As studies of missionaries and conversion in the former socialist world expand, one might hope that they will engage still more specifically with the anthropological literature on missionaries in other times and places. Evoking Max Weber's Protestant ethic, for instance, one recent study of missions in European colonial contexts linked missions, selfhood and the incorporation of new areas of the globe into the capitalist world system: 'it is under capitalism that the entrepreneurial bourgeois self with his urge for self-improvement becomes the bearer of modernity. ... I would argue that both Catholic and Protestant missions carry this new conception of the self ... to the rest of the world' (van der Veer 1996, p. 9).[9] How might this proposition fare in the postsocialist transformation, the world's most recent large-scale expansion of capitalism? What might this tell us about

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postsocialist transformation, and about religion and capitalism on the cusp of the twenty-first century?

Addressing these questions fully would require the synthesis of several elements: deep understandings of regional concepts of selfhood such as those explored in Dale Pesmen's *Russia and Soul* (2000); further investigations of contexts of religious conversion (and *lack* of conversion) of the type represented here by Wanner and Caldwell; and a more systematic evaluation of this material in light of the theories of religion, power and political economic transformation generated in the study of the European colonial and postcolonial worlds. This sort of large-scale comparison, backed up by thorough ethnography, would help to refine what is similar and different about colonial and postsoviet transformations. Might it be the case, for instance, that capitalism itself is different these days, that its interaction with religion in the self-transforming crucible of conversion no longer produces van der Veer's 'entrepreneurial bourgeois' selves? Here, in other words, is a useful way for anthropologists of religion in the region to contribute to the many debates about political economy, religion and selfhood in late capitalism.

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Ethnographies of Atheism, Secularism and Desecularisation

A final area in which anthropologists of religion in this region have begun to make significant contributions is in ethnographies of atheism, secularism and desecularisation. I include in this umbrella category a number of topics, including 'civil society' and the public sphere (see especially Hann, 1997); religious tolerance and intolerance in liberal and illiberal states; and, at the highest level, reconceptualisations of the analytic categories of 'religious' and 'secular' as they are used in the anthropology of religion. The general issue might be framed as follows. The socialist states of the Soviet bloc joined other modern states in declaring the official separation of church from state, but added to this the (inconsistent) policies of forced secularisation and state-sponsored atheist propaganda. Given this illiberal starting point, what can we make of the various ways in which religious and secular have been reformulated across the region since 1989? Once again, anthropologists have often taken a different tack than those scholars who have trained their primary attention on laws and constitutional guarantees, or even on the uneven enforcement of these principles in practice.[10] In this issue, Zanca, Balzer and Luehrmann devote some of their attention to this theme.

Zanca's article is framed by the efforts of state representatives in Uzbekistan to wrestle with the demands of declared state secularism and competing revivals of religious practice. These negotiations are far from easy, particularly as stereotypes about terrorism and overly sharp ethnic distinctions threaten to shut down any conversation at all, much less one that might ease the global-scale conflicts in which Zanca's interlocutors find themselves enveloped. The situation has become extreme enough that Zanca ends up pleading for *any* kind of talk at all. Balzer, working in circumstances perhaps less dire, also points to the centrality of state secularism and religious tolerance in postsocialist contexts. She suggests that an evaluation of degrees of toleration – one of the cornerstones of religious policy in secular liberal states – has become and should continue to be a concern in the resolution of conflicts such as that over whose steeple is higher (compare Hayden, 2002a and 2002b, on the former Yugoslavia). But, Balzer shows, this very toleration can be drawn back into religious competition, as different sides debate its usefulness and faithfulness to their visions of the religious elements of Sakha identity.

Luehrmann's article on the Russian republic of Mari El is centrally concerned with issues of atheism, secularism and desecularisation. On both theoretical and ethnographic levels, her article is a model for how the anthropological study of religion and secularism might proceed, in this region and elsewhere in the world. Rather than relying on abstract categories of 'the secular' or 'the religious', Luehrmann stays close to the ground, asking what, concretely, were the ingredients of Soviet-style secularisation drives and how have they been transformed since 1991? She terms this process 'recycling' and, focusing on culture workers and pedagogues, traces the fate of three central elements from the socialist period into the postsocialist: skills, habits of thought, and built structures such as Palaces of Culture. In Luehrmann's analysis, for instance, Soviet manuals of instruction for atheist campaigns, far from being relics of another era, become key sources informing culture workers' attempts to recycle their earlier secularising competencies into religious practice. Perhaps Luehrmann's most important contribution is to provide an effective analytic model of religious transformation that does not rely on the old functionalist notion of the 'substitution' of religion for communism (or vice versa) that undergirded so much earlier work on the region.

The so-called 'secularisation thesis' is on the ropes in contemporary social science. Increasing modernisation has not, as many proponents of the thesis once predicted, led to the decline or disappearance of religion. The fall of the secularisation thesis enabled both the emergence of new approaches to religion (e.g. James, 1995) and, somewhat later, the provocative suggestion that 'the secular' itself had curiously evaded ethnographic attention (e.g. Asad, 2003). The literature in both of these 'postsecularisation' streams has yet to incorporate the significant insights that might be garnered from research on socialism and its transformations. (Among anthropologists and others, for example, one of the primary arenas for recent discussions of modernity and religion has been Islam in the Middle East.) What might ethnographies of religion, secularisation and desecularisation in the former Soviet bloc contribute to broader theory, and how might they help to expand our understandings of what it has meant to practise religion and practise secularism in the 'modern' world? As Luehrmann shows, the question is far more complicated and intriguing than evaluating the extent to which postsocialist states have enshrined liberal notions of tolerance in their constitutions.

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Conclusion

To date, the anthropology of religion in the former Soviet bloc has been a rather ad hoc enterprise. While there is a substantial amount of solid research going on in the field, studies remain disparate and linked to each other only tenuously. Their insights are not always appreciated in the broader anthropology of the region and are even less recognised in the global anthropology of religion. The hope of the authors represented in this volume, as well as those on our panel in Chicago whose work has been published elsewhere, is that this situation will shortly begin to change. With this goal in mind, I have sketched out one way to conceptualise the history and current state of the anthropology of religion in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. I suggested that the majority of anthropological analyses of religion in the late socialist period concentrated on the links among ritual, socialist modernisation and national identities. In introducing the present volume, I then highlighted four themes that seem to be emerging in the literature on religion in the postsocialist period: religion and ethnic/national identity; religion and economic transformation;

missionaries, conversion and self-transformation; and ethnographies of secularism and desecularisation.

There is doubtless much to debate in the ways I have framed the issues. Does it still make sense to think of one postsocialist region in discussions of religion, or should Central Asia, for instance, go its own way? What new shapes will collaborations with ethnographers in postsocialist universities take? How can we best make use of ethnographies of religion and ritual situated in other socialist and postsocialist contexts, whether they be Asian, Latin American or African? These are large questions, but the further development of the field will depend in key part on our willingness to engage questions of this scale collectively.

Notes

[1] In addition to the papers published here, the Chicago panel included presentations by Sascha Goluboff (a co-organizer) on Mountain Jews in Azerbaijan, by Galina Lindquist on religion and charismatic healing in Moscow, and by Douglas Rogers on Old Belief in the Urals. Catherine Wanner chaired the panel and William Kelleher and Eriberto Lozada served as discussants. For the purposes of this introductory essay, I adopt a fairly narrow definition of anthropology: scholarship produced by researchers who are affiliated with anthropology programmes or who have published in anthropological journals. I take it for granted that all of this work is impressively interdisciplinary. However, adequately addressing the full range of perspectives that have shaped the field would simply be unwieldy in the present context. My thanks to Sonja Luehrmann and Philip Walters for suggestions that improved this essay.

[2] Among anthropologists of the region, it is customary to refer to the states in question as 'socialist' rather than 'communist'. 'Socialism' picks up on the self-description of these states themselves (none of which actually declared success in reaching the historical stage of communism) and also points to a range of commonalities across the region, including single-party rule and centrally-planned economies. Our panel addressed only the socialist and postsocialist states of the former Soviet bloc.

[3] See also Lockwood, 1975, for an early approach to religion and ethnicity in the region.

[4] Piers Vitebsky takes this claim as the point of departure for a study of postsoviet shamanism in Siberia, asking whether the postsoviet situation has made things any easier (2002, p. 191).

[5] See also Kideckel, 1983, and Sadomskaya, 1990.

[6] Hann is also the director of a large project investigating religion after socialism at the Max Plank Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle, Germany. The project promises to produce a large and collaborative body of work, both on the topics I outline here and others. See the description at www.eth.de/research/postsocialist-eurasia/religion/civil-religion.html.

[7] In a separate study, Verdery (1999) worked from conflicts among religious elites over the remains of an eighteenth-century Romanian archbishop to illustrate her claims about the ways in which attention to 'the political lives of dead bodies' can illuminate a broad spectrum of postsocialist transformations.

[8] Lindquist's recent work has also focused on religious practice, healing and transformations of the self (see especially 2000b).

[9] The literature on missions in historical anthropology is large and growing, and Peter van der Veer is not alone in pursuing this line of argument. Comaroff and Comaroff (1991), for instance, explore at length the Protestant ethics inculcated in British nonconformist missionaries who set off to convert Southern Africa in the nineteenth century. Taking place in parallel with the expansion of capitalism, the route by which many South African Tswana came to identify themselves as Christian is also one of the primary ways in which modern European modes of understanding took root in the consciousness and personhood

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of non-Europeans. See also Keane, 2002, on Protestant missions to the Indonesian island of Sumba.

[10] This is not, of course, to say that these elements have been or should be excluded from anthropological analysis. Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, for instance, effectively incorporate anti-abortion laws enacted with the support of religious conservatives into their analysis of shifting gender regimes after socialism (2000, p. 15–36; see also Zielinska, 2000).

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