

# Reviews

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*The Invention of Religion: Desecularization in the Post-Soviet Context* [Russian]. Edited by Zhanna Kormina, Aleksander A. Panchenko, and Sergei Shtyrkov. European University at Saint Petersburg Press, 2015. 280 pages. ₺230 paper.

The collection of articles under discussion includes works previously presented at a conference in 2012 held at the European University at Saint Petersburg (EUSP). Most of the authors belong to the same group of scholars that can be vaguely called the “Saint Petersburg anthropological school” based at EUSP and the *Kunstkamera* (Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography). The authors are mostly young scholars and predominately women (eight out of twelve). The editors—Zhanna Kormina, Aleksander A. Panchenko, and Sergei Shtyrkov—have already published volumes on anthropological research including research on religion. (Сны Богородицы. Исследования по антропологии религии. [Our Lady’s Dreams: Studies on Anthropology of Religion] Под ред. Ж.В. Корминой, А.А. Панченко, С.А. Штыркова. СПб.: Издательство Европейского университета в Санкт-Петербурге, 2006; Мифология и повседневность: гендерный подход в антропологических дисциплинах. [The Gender Approach in Anthropological Studies] Под ред. К.А. Богданова, Ж.В. Корминой, А.А. Панченко, С.А. Штыркова. СПб.: Алетейя, 2001.)

The title draws attention to two sides of the volume’s subject. It can be described in terms of sociology, with desecularization theory, and one can use the expression “invention of religion” for the humanities angle. The major question the collection addresses is: what has been happening in terms of religiosity and religious identity in the context of social, political, and demographical society transformation since the 1990s?

In their Introduction, Kormina and Shtyrkov examine a conventional idea of violent secularization during the Soviet era and desecularization in the post-Soviet period. They call for an alternative theoretical frame. The authors deal with Sonja Luehrmann’s idea that describes post-Communist religiosity as “recycling” evoked by contextual changes. However, these theoretical frames are based on the acceptance of the secularization thesis, which does not really correspond to the post-Soviet context because, as they show, there existed neither a religious vacuum nor such values’ devaluation for their future re-usage. In particular, they demonstrate this through the history of the “legalization” of religious monuments as cultural heritage by the Soviet state (11–24). Kormina

and Shtyrkov write about secularization in Talal Asad's terms as constructing and re-constructing the borders between the sacred and the secular (9).

The papers included in the volume analyze the construction of borders on the basis of personal as well as newly-created official narratives. The subjects under discussion vary from Orthodox Christians (Kathy Rousselet, Daria Dubrovka), and folk religions and Neopagan movements (Yulia Antonyan, Dmitriy Arzyutov, Ksenia Gavrilova), to new religious movements (Yulia Andreeva, Catherine Wanner), Pentecostalism (Aleksandr A. Panchenko), Judaizers—that is, Christians attempting to apply Old Testament law to everyday life—(Aleksander Lvov), and multilevel marketing (Daria Teryoshina). Geographically, the book covers Russian, Ukrainian, and Armenian communities. The scholars analyze multiple narratives: biographical (“success stories” in Amway), ethical (among Orthodox Christian nunnery workers and followers of the Embassy of God), constructing of sacred texts and mythology, fashioning an enemy image, etc. In addition, many authors focus on reflecting the Soviet past as presented in the accounts of the studied communities.

This volume provides unique materials to reflect on the subject of secularization and desecularization as well as the history of religion in the Soviet and post-Soviet contexts.

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*The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in South Africa: A Church of Strangers.* By Ilana van Wyk. Cambridge University Press, 2014. 306 pages. \$117.75 cloth; \$34.99 paper; ebook available.

The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG) is not winning any popularity contests. The Brazilian-born church, which emphasizes material prosperity and liturgical exorcism, remains a “repugnant” and little-understood blemish on the face of global Christianity, according to Ilana van Wyk. In *The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in South Africa*, the author offers a rare glimpse into the church's activities in South Africa. Set in one of the UCKG's most successful mission fields, the book provides a detailed ethnography of what the author calls “a perplexing church” that “lack[s] sociality,” has “thin theological content,” and “devalu[es] meaning” (23). As one might intuit from such a negative valuation, the book's most provocative feature is its author's methodological commitment to disliking her subject.

In a section titled “The Ethics of Dislike,” van Wyk elaborates on her inability to feel sympathy toward her informants. She justifies her dislike of the UCKG and its members in Durban as an opportunity for alternative ethnographic engagement. The introductory chapter establishes the