

RASCEE *Editorial*

In 2014, the Western world celebrated the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. For the last quarter of a century, the development of various forms of religious expression in the region of Central and Eastern Europe has been rapid, and so has the research into religion. Over the last 25 years, a new generation of scholars has matured and entered the academies – and it is this generation of young scholars whom we have invited to contribute to the two issues of RASCEE, in 2013 and 2014, which we have had the honour of guest-editing.

The idea to gather a volume of contributions of voices from the younger generation of scholars was fostered at the Open Society-supported HESP (Higher Educational Support Program)/ReSET (Regional Seminars for Excellence in Teaching) seminar Religion: Maximalism and Minimalism, which took place biannually from 2010 to 2012. Most of the contributors to this issue of RASCEE were participants and faculty in this seminar, including the two guest-editors.

The contributors to this issue use different theoretical and empirical approaches to the study of religion to show how the Soviet past has influenced contemporary religious life and its forms in the region. The contributions also show that 25 years ago this region had distinctive traits, but today it is clearly part of a globalized world, where one can trace the common traits of religious individualism and the increasing role of religion in the public sphere.

Rasa Pranskevičiūtė and Tadas Juras' contribution is aimed at untangling the history of the ISCKON society in Lithuania, through an examination of archival sources supplemented by interviews with members of the community. Pranskevičiūtė and Juras show how the Soviet period specified the development of the NRM, as the repressive politics toward religious organizations meant that ISCKON members could not formally organize. As a result, the membership at ISCKON became a form of resistance towards the Soviet government.

Dina Daen and Maria Eflova analyse the multidimensional concept of religious identity, dealing with the bicultural Republic of Russia, Tatarstan, on the basis of quantitative data analysis. The authors show how religious affiliation is more closely connected to ethnic identity than to individual choice; that tolerance towards changing religion is low, especially if an individual is changing affiliation to a religion other than Orthodox Christianity and Islam; but that confirmed religious affiliation does not result in high attendance to practice or strong knowledge about confessional beliefs.

Finally Anna Yudkina and Anna Sokolova's article explores the concept of spontaneous shrines by analysing roadside memorials of untimely deaths, from fieldwork conducted in the Tula and Vladimir-regions of Central Russia. The authors show that while roadside memorials draw heavily on Orthodox burial customs, the religious changes during the Soviet period have introduced new forms of religious practice. Untimely death is no longer stigmatized; instead, we now see individualized rituals of grief, which are competing with official church traditions and rituals.

Taken together, the contributions to this issue of RASCEE show how much religious expression is taking place outside organized and traditional religions. Thus, this issue leads up to the theme of next year's journal: Unchurched Religion in Central and Eastern Europe.

As guest-editors, we hoped to include an article from one more participant and enhance the issue with a contribution from a promising younger Ukrainian scholar. Dr. Nathalia Gavrilova's much too early death prevented this. Therefore, this issue is dedicated to Nathalia in loving memory.

Milda Ališauskienė

Annika Hoithamar