

**RELIGION AND NON-RELIGION. AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE TO THIS SPECIAL ISSUE**

*If you are used to reading analysis on the state of religion in today's societies, you probably know these titles all too well: the interrogative ones with "or" in the middle ("Decline or revival?", "Secularization or de-secularization?") and the affirmative ones incorporating the word "between" ("Secularization, between myth and reality"). This special issue of Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe (RASCEE) has decidedly opted for the use of "and," relinquishing all "betweens." Reading the four articles presented here, the portrait emerging does not embody an "either/or" situation, neither is it about "something in the middle;" each with its own methodological angle and level of analysis, they all point to the simultaneous presence of religion and non-religion in present-day Central and Eastern Europe.*

*In communist countries, atheism was long enforced as part of the official ideology. After the regimes' demise, observers were quick to point to a recrudescence of religion as well as to the tense relations between religion and non-religion. Arguing from today's vantage point, the authors of this issue nuance such sharp distinctions: the non-religious landscape has changed, as has our take on the official discourse promoted by the regimes.*

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*The issue opens with Marjan Smrke's article, "Toward a Sociology of Irreligion in Post-Yugoslav States." Combining statistical evidence and illustrations from the countries under study, he subsumes the work he conducted on the region over the past 15 years. Starting with Colin Campbell's concept of irreligion, he presents some of the many forms of (ir)religion: secular, civil, invisible, organized. In each case, he outlines different trends and then goes on to explain them against the backdrop of several theoretical frameworks. What emerges is a picture in which "religion exists in irreligion and irreligion in religion."*

*On the basis of interviews and official statements, Stefan Schröder examines in "Humanist Organizations and Secularization in Germany" the case of the Humanist Association (Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands). He shows that the narrative and practice of this secular association is modeled on established religious organizations in Germany, which stress education and welfare services provision. This, it turns out, stands in contrast with other secular associations, which see their mission as agents of secularization or critiques of the prevailing institutional arrangements.*

*Francesco Molteni's "Religious Change among Cohorts in Eastern Europe. A Longitudinal Analysis of Religious Practice and Belief in the Former-Communist Countries" analyses the complex processes at work in Central and Eastern Europe, which include both an increase and a decrease of (non)religion. Using data from the European Values Study, Molteni establishes that "regular religious practice is declining cohort after cohort whereas religious belief shows a revival" (our emphasis), with the notable*

exception being some Orthodox countries where younger cohorts practice more than the elderly.

In “The Sense of Uniqueness of the Kalisz Middle Class. A Sociological Essay,” Anna Kurpiel investigates a group of people in a mid-sized Polish town, Kalisz. Going beyond the statistics that portray Poland as a highly Catholic country, she observes that while the town’s inhabitants do not necessarily practice religion, nor get married in the church, they tend to favor Catholic schools for their children. Where one could see a desire to elevate and distinguish oneself, Kurpiel shows that such ambitions are held in check by a desire not to be perceived as *nouveaux riches*. Instead of drawing on Bourdieu to account for her observations, she prefers to read them through a Simmelian lens, one stressing the desire to be at once unique and part of what are perceived as middle-class traditions.

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This special issue is partly the result of a conference of the International Study of Religion in Eastern and Central Europe Association (ISORECEA) and of the Sociology of Religion Network of the European Sociological Association (ESA), dedicated to non-religion (“Religion and Non-religion in Contemporary Societies: Theoretical, Empirical and Methodological Challenges”) and held in April 2016 in Zadar, Croatia. Marjan Smrke (University of Ljubljana) and Lois Lee (University of Kent) gave the keynote lectures. Absent from the issue, Lois Lee’s work sets forth an ethnographic approach to what she terms “existential cultures,” which notably stresses the presence of religion in non-religion. During the conference, Anna Kurpiel was awarded the 2016 Miklos Tomka Award for Young Scholars. Stefan Schröder and Francesco Molteni responded to a subsequent call for papers.

Although calls for studying non-religion have been made, with the publication of stimulating research in recent decades, it is time for scholars working on Central and Eastern Europe to take up the challenge more widely. With this issue, the authors hope to make a contribution to this field in this particular part of the world.

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