Editors’ introduction

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If we were to try and identify the crosscutting themes of this issue of *Religion, State & Society*, we could say that these are about the discourses of power and the power of discourses. In a range of important works from Norbert Elias’s *The Civilizing Process* (2000) to Michel Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969, English translation 2002), these themes have long fascinated those interested in forces shaping human behaviour. Because religions are richly complex discursive traditions, they can be especially valuable as sources of political power, validation, and resistance. The articles in this issue, each in their own way, investigate how discourses within religious traditions or discourses about particular religions are being developed, refined, mobilised, or contested.

This issue begins with Jakob Schwörer and Xavier Romero-Vidal’s article on populist political parties, building on the journal’s continuing interest in religion and the rise of populism (see DeHanas and Shterin 2018). The authors have undertaken a rigorous investigation of how Populist Radical Right Parties (PRRP) use religion in their campaigns and political messaging. They study the manifestos and Facebook pages of a total of 36 political parties in a sample of Western European democracies, including the well-known Alternative for Germany and the National Front in France, alongside comparison cases of mainstream parties. With a computer-structured content analysis, Schwörer and Romero-Vidal provide evidence that European PRRP seldom employ a ‘positive’ vision of Christianity or secularism in their messaging, but instead primarily rely on negative images and rhetoric on religion – predominantly Islam. Their findings confirm a key insight put forward by Olivier Roy (2016,186) among others, that populist radical right parties are ‘Christian largely to the extent that they reject Islam’.

Sofya Ragozina continues the theme of the representation of Islam by focusing on some of the ways this religion is portrayed in six main Russian newspapers. Deploying a combination of discourse analysis and a ‘corpus linguistics’ method with over 18,000 texts, she shows that Russian print media’s portrayal of Muslims and their religion is largely framed by the juxtaposition of ‘radical’ with ‘traditional’ Islam (see also Dannreuther 2010). This leads to the vast variety of Muslim identities, beliefs, and practices being channelled through four main ways of thinking about and representing Islam, thus contributing to its negative public image. First, the Russian print media tend to presume the existence of ‘correct Islam’. Second, Muslims are portrayed as a numerically overwhelming homogenous mass. Then, the biased selection of events covered by these newspapers contributes to normal expressions of Islam being misrepresented as criminal and threatening (see also Croft 2012). Finally, this threatening image is further reinforced by misrepresentation of specific Islamic terms that are used as evidence of the religion’s propensity for violence.
In another Russia-focused article which invites us to scrutinise public discourse more closely, Kathy Rousselet engages with the notion of *dukhovnost* that is widely used in Russia. She contends that the common English translation of this word as ‘spirituality’ does not adequately represent its meanings in the Russian context – precisely due to its complex etymology and fluidity. While retaining the connotation of being something distinctively ‘Russian’, its meaning has mutated during the pre-Soviet and Soviet periods, with both legacies now being reframed to meet the aspirations and needs of post-Soviet cultural and political elites. Although infused with, and in some cases focused on, references to Russian Orthodoxy, in its current political usage *dukhovnost* is meant to express the uniqueness of Russian civilisation, to transcend the boundaries between its constitutive religions, to point to its superiority over secularised western culture, and to make it the key ingredient of Russian patriotism. Rousselet’s analysis seems an interesting counterpart to Robert Bellah’s (1967) conceptualisation of the American ‘civil religion’.

While Rousselet’s exploration is focused on the construction of a public discourse from above, Tamas Lestar and Steffen Böhm interpret ‘spirituality’ as capable of offering alternative visions of humanity’s ecologically sustainable future and thus shaping social movements from below. They call for more scholarly attention to be paid to ‘ecospirituality’ as a distinctive worldview, rooted in spiritual and religious beliefs, that motivates people to use their agency and make a tangible difference in solving these problems. Drawing on an extensive literature review, the authors argue that ecospiritual beliefs and, increasingly, practices are becoming pervasive within and across established religious traditions and New Religious Movements, from Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam to the Bahá’í faith and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. It is then logical to imagine new boundaries being drawn between more ecologically aware and engaged forms of religion (‘Eco-Christianity’ or ‘Eco-Buddhism’) and their less ecologically progressive counterparts.

Finally, this issue draws to a close with two book reviews. Etta Madden offers her reflections on Timothy Miller’s *Communes in America, 1975–2000*, a comprehensive analysis of the groups and movements that offered alternative discourses on, visions of, and solutions to, the individual, social, and political problems of the late twentieth century. Kristina Jonutytė reviews Justine Buck Quijada’s *Buddhists, Shamans, and Soviets: rituals of history in post-Soviet Buryatia*. This monograph on Buryat religion and society demonstrates how rituals can be used to conjure up the past – whether Soviet, Shamanic, or Buddhist – and give it a renewed life in the present.

**References**


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