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# RELIGION, STATE & SOCIETY

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## Editorial

The articles in this issue of *RSS* deal with very various subjects, but share common themes: the question of how religious identities are developed in response to changes in the environment, and conversely the question of how they are preserved by promoting such changes.

Francine Banner looks at how the persona of the female suicide bomber in Chechnya has developed as a result of the contingent formation of Chechen identities over history: such identities are tribal, Soviet (class-based), ethnic, nationalist, gendered, rural, urban and of course religious. Identity is not static, but emerges at a given historical moment within the context of narrative debates. 'Concepts such as religion and tradition, in this view, are not unchanging referents but are "embodied arguments", which means that standards for what constitutes their meanings are established in relation to rival and competing claims both locally and from without.' Banner argues that Chechen history may best be viewed as series of 'moments' in which collective identity has undergone significant shifts rather than as a monolithic construction that is resurrected in times of external threat. She identifies four such key 'moments' in recent history: the Bolshevik Revolution and advent of the Soviet state; the Second World War, the deportation of the Chechen populace, and ill-executed reintegration; the fall of the Iron Curtain, Chechen demand for sovereignty, and the first modern Russo-Chechen war; and the second Russo-Chechen war. Banner argues that at each of these moments what it means to be Chechen has been an object of competing narratives, and that at the present time it is gendered, national and religious identities that appear most centrally in the persona of the Chechen woman suicide bomber. Banner also argues that the recent surge of Islamism in the republic should be seen as the outcome of a local historical process rather than as a manifestation of external 'Wahhabist' influences. Other scholars have identified broad factors such as globalisation, democratisation or fundamentalist resurgence as root causes of global suicide terrorism, but Banner argues that it is equally important to study the specific historical and geographical contexts.

Olessia Vovina considers the strategies adopted by the Mishar Tatar Muslim minority in Chuvashia to preserve its identity. This involves 'the conscious and purposeful creation of sacred space... endowing places with spiritual significance and ritual functions'. 'Space' is of various types: physical (nature), mental (logical abstraction) and social. Social space is a product of the encounter between space perceived and space conceived, and as a social product it must reflect the multiple meanings emanating from within a society. Spaces are therefore often contested. Moreover, space as a socio-cultural construction can be transnational, refusing to conform to the established boundaries of nation-state and territory. These considerations are important in a study of how the Mishar Tatars are setting about

recovering an imagined past. In recent years they have been in competition with the Chuvash majority with its Christian and pre-Christian traditions. Many of the sites to which the Mishars lay claim are subject to alternative interpretations on the part of Chuvash groups. Both Mishar and Chuvash, moreover, lay claim to sites beyond the borders of the Chuvash Republic, in Tatarstan, which they regard as critical to their historical visions of lost heritage and statehood.

Esther Peperkamp looks at another type of contested area: that of leisure time. In communist Poland the Catholic parish-based Oasis movement organised retreats for children and young people as an alternative to state-organised sport camps and children's villages. When Catholicism faced an atheist ideological opponent, two 'pedagogical projects' contested with one another. Since 1989 the situation has changed, and the aims of Oasis are now defined not in relation to an alternative pedagogical project, but in the context of the absence of such a project. Since the end of communism a new individualist model of leisure has become the norm. It is clear that leisure is still as contested an issue as it was during communism: indeed, perhaps even more so, since for many Catholics the autonomy of the 'market', the freedom to choose, is deeply ambivalent: people can choose the wrong things. Peperkamp argues that 'contestation about leisure is the result of current market and consumption conditions, which give rise to a discourse on morality which is new but which nevertheless also draws on continuities with the past'. The conflict over free time in Poland has been redefined: it is no longer a struggle of 'freedom against oppression' but a struggle of 'freedom against freedom'.

Joachim Willems examines the strategies whereby the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) seeks to promote its influence in society. He notes that while some experts argue that the ROC is successful in exerting political influence, others argue just the reverse. His own view is that in its power struggle with other political and social actors the ROC is in fact most successful when it pursues a strategy of influencing public discourses. He examines how the ROC promotes various theses – that religion and morality are intimately interconnected; that Orthodoxy is an essential element in culture – and how it gives its own gloss to key concepts in traditional Russian culture such as '*dukhovnost*' ('spirituality'), '*pravostvennost*' (morality) and '*mirovozzreniye*' ('world-view'). Willems finds that 'to a significant extent the political activity of the ROC is characterised by redefining politically relevant concepts'. At the same time the programme of the ROC remains attractive to political and social actors who do not necessarily consider themselves Orthodox believers. 'On questions of identity creation and the raising of moral standards the interests of church and state coincide, and synergy can produce results welcome to both parties.' Willems concludes with some caveats. The ROC's aim is apparently that the Russian state should be shaped by Orthodoxy. 'For the development of a democratic society,' however,

it is necessary that civil society institutions should emerge which will keep themselves at a certain distance from the state in order to monitor it and suggest reforms. The definition of Russian culture, morality and 'spirituality' as essentially Orthodox is problematic in view of the fact that Russia is in many respects a pluralist state as far as religion and belief are concerned.

## Notes on Contributors

**Francine Banner** is an attorney and a PhD student in the School of Justice and Social Inquiry at Arizona State University, USA. Her research interests include international law, capital punishment and terrorism, specifically the study of female suicide bombing. Recent publications include 'Comparing testaments on terrorism' (co-authored with Annamarie Oliverio and Pat Lauderdale) in *Terrorism: A New Testament* (de Sitter Publications, 2005) and 'Rewriting history: the use of feminist narratives to deconstruct the myth of the capital defendant' (2001).

**Esther Peperkamp** is a research fellow at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale, Germany. She defended her dissertation *Being a Christian – 'Being the Same Everywhere': Teenagers on Religion, Self, and Society in Post-Socialist Poland* at the University of Amsterdam in 2006. Her research interests include: religion and the self; religion and morality; postsocialism; the anthropology of consumption; and the media. She has published in *Ethnologia Polona* and *Postscripts*.

**Olessia Vovina** teaches anthropology at Montclair State University in New Jersey. She is currently studying religion and national revival among the peoples of the Middle Volga region of the Russian Federation. She has recently published in *Nationalities Papers* and *Etnograficheskoye obozreniye*.

**Joachim Willems** was born in 1974. He studied theology in Neuendettelsau, Bonn and Hamburg, and his doctoral dissertation was on empirical surveys of Lutherans in postsoviet Russia. Since 2003 he has been a postdoctoral research and teaching fellow at and held the Chair of Religious Education in the Faculty of Theology at Humboldt University in Berlin. His current research interests are: religion and churches in postsoviet Russia; the interdependence of religion and politics; standards for religious education in German schools; and intercultural and interreligious education. His recent publications include *Religiöse Bildung in Russlands Schulen: Orthodoxie, nationale Identität und die Positionalität des Faches 'Grundlagen orthodoxer Kultur' (OPK)* (Münster, 2006) and 'Das Verhältnis der Russischen Orthodoxen Kirche zum Islam in Russland und auf dem Gebiet der GUS: ein Beitrag zur differenzierteren Wahrnehmung der Orthodoxie im Kontext ökumenischer Konflikte', *Ökumenische Rundschau*, 1 (2005), pp. 66–83.

**Evert van der Zweerde** studied philosophy and Russian in Nijmegen, Moscow and Fribourg. He obtained his PhD (on the Soviet historiography of philosophy) in 1994. He is currently associate professor at Radboud University, Nijmegen,

The Netherlands, where he directs the Centre for Russian Humanities Studies. His fields of interest are political philosophy (civil society, globalisation, religion and politics) and Russian philosophy (including Solov'yev and Mamardashvili). His main publications are *Soviet Historiography of Philosophy* (Kluwer, 1997), and (with Gerrit Steunebrink as co-editor) *Civil Society, Religion, and the Nation* (Rodopi, 2004).