

Book Reviews

Kaarina Aitamurto and Scott Simpson (eds): *Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*. Durham: Acumen, 2013, x+358 pp.

Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe is the first book that focuses on phenomenon of contemporary paganism in this particular region. This focus makes the volume valuable, as there is still a lack of internationally available books on this region, which has undergone dramatic social changes during the past century. The starting point for this book stresses the importance of contemporary paganism for the study of the role of religion, both in this region and in its new manifestations in contemporary society more widely. Interestingly, neither of the editors of this book is from the region, but they both have a deep interest in the processes that are currently taking place in Central and Eastern Europe. Kaarina Aitamurto is a well-known Finnish scholar of contemporary pagan movements in Russia, and Scott Simpson is an American scholar who currently lives in Poland and is studying paganism there.

The volume consists of twenty chapters, organized in three parts. In the Introduction, the editors present the idea of the book and make a short excursus into the specific historical events of the past century that have created the context for

the emergence of pagan movements within the post-communist societies. Another goal in inviting scholars of this region to contribute to the book is the hope that in this way a scholarly comparison of data from different countries might be achieved. This has not been easy, due to the multilinguality of the region. However, it must be said that in this volume Poland is statistically the most represented.

The first part of the book gives an overview of the situation of pagan movements in Central and Eastern Europe. It consists of four chapters, written by Piotr Wiench, Scott Simpson and Mariusz Filip, Agnieszka Gajda, and Victor A. Shnirelman. Wiench suggests that the rise of paganism should be related to the romanticism that emerged in the early 20th century in many Central and Eastern Europe countries and led to the foundation of the modern states; thus he challenges the assumption that contemporary paganism is primarily related to the re-emergence of religion after the fall of the totalitarian Soviet regimes in these countries. His ideas are later echoed by Gajda in her chapter.

In their chapter, Scott Simpson and Mariusz Filip discuss the problem of the definition of contemporary paganism, mainly in linguistic terms, and conclude that there is no one satisfactory label for the phenomenon. The authors thus open a space for discussion as to

what we define as paganism, and why. I would disagree that there is no one adequate term, but suggest that the difference between emic/etic terms should be invoked. As I know from some members of the Lithuanian native faith movement, however, they tend to experience the term 'paganism' as alien, as it has connotations deriving from Christianity. On the other hand, it is a well-known term, and broadly understood by scholars and the rest of society. The alternative term, 'native faith movements', is probably mostly welcomed by the movements themselves, and it is therefore probably appropriate to use both of the terms referenced in the title of this book. However, I would also have suggested to the editors and some of the authors to reconsider using the term 'neopaganism'; in my opinion, this term has an evaluative connotation which treats the origins of these movements, their doctrines and practices as non-authentic, implying that during ancient times there were 'real' pagan religions, but that what we currently encounter are replicas, and thus of less value.

The second part of the volume presents country-specific studies of contemporary paganism. The spectrum of countries includes Armenia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovenia and Ukraine, and this variety significantly enriches the volume. The contributors to this part of the book are Rasa Pranskevičiūtė, Ga-

tis Ozolinš, Mariya Lesiv, Kaarina Aitamurto and Alexey Gaidukov, Anna-Marie Dostalova, Aleš Črnič, Vladimir Dulov, Laszlo-Attila Hubbes, Reka Szilardi, Boris Knorre, Yulia Antonyan and Konrad Siekierski. Collectively, they provide a valuable set of empirical data for comparison between the phenomena of contemporary paganism, its doctrines and practices, and their interrelations with other religions and the rest of society in Central and Eastern Europe. The conclusion which emerges from this material is that we are talking about paganisms in the plural rather a single phenomenon of paganism across this region. Such diversity is highly dependent upon the socio-historical context where these movements operate.

The third part of the book consists of three chapters of thematic studies, by Maciej Strutynski, Maciej Witulski and Alexey Gaidukov, which analyse various pagan ideas, certain leaders, and the relations of pagan movements with other social institutions. These chapters richly supplement the second part of the book and give more insights into the varied manifestations and influences of the contemporary paganism movement.

The strength of this volume lies in the empirical data which is presented in the case studies from various countries of Central and Eastern Europe. This data allows the reader lots of space for interpretation, comparison between countries, etc. I expected more theoretical insights

in trying to explain why the paganism phenomenon is so important for this region, and how it differs or maybe supplements the scholarship on paganism in general. Perhaps this might have been done in the concluding remarks by the editors. I have already suggested that the use of many parallel terms in defining paganism may confuse the reader, and I would also add that the use of the term 'modern' in conjunction with paganism leaves me confused, too. Bearing in mind some of the recent discussions about modernity and multiple modernities, it is actually not clear what the editors had in mind when using this term here, and I think that it would have been more clear to use the term 'contemporary'. From a sociological perspective, the term 'modern' implies specific social conditions which, as I see it, are not usually met or are not at the same level in Central and Eastern Europe as in the rest of the 'modernised' world.

My critical comments about this book should be seen as suggestions for the editors of this book and to their future work in the studies of contemporary paganisms. In general I see this book as a very valuable contribution to the study of religions in Central and Eastern Europe, and I think that it will be very useful, not only for university teachers and students, but also for anyone interested in contemporary paganisms and the recent developments in religion in this particular region.

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Catherine Cornille (ed.): *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, 490pp.

This impressive volume seems to be a sign of the times, when the emerging field of inter-religious studies and inter-religious dialogue is being established more firmly in the academic field of theology in the broad sense. Cornille, who is a professor of Comparative Theology and a highly respected scholar in the field, has edited the volume and contributed both an Introduction and a separate chapter ('Conditions for Inter-Religious Dialogue'). The list of contributors is long and impressive. Among them are Leonard Swindler ('The History of Inter-Religious Dialogue'), Francis X. Clooney ('Comparative Religion and Inter-Religious Dialogue'), Marianne Moyaert ('Scriptural Reasoning as Inter-Religious Dialogue'), Paul Knitter ('Inter-Religious Dialogue and Social Action') and Jeannine Hill Fletcher ('Women in Inter-Religious Dialogue').

The book is structured in two parts. The first part consists of contributions addressing different aspects of inter-religious dialogue ('Focal Topics'), including the abovementioned chapters. The second part is a cluster of case studies, seventeen in all, addressing inter-religious dialogues between (usually two) religious traditions. Seven of these include the Christian tradition – in one case, it is solely the Evangelical tradition, in

the encounter with the Church of the Latter Day Saints. However, to include chapters on Muslim-Hindu dialogue, Buddhist-Jewish relations, and Shinto-Buddhist dialogue is a refreshing approach to the field, which is heavily dominated by Christian theologians. This helps in promoting the recognition that inter-religious dialogue goes way beyond Western, Christian approaches to the world. The strength of the overarching perspective in this volume is the historical frame of reference present in many of the contributions. To have access to the history of religious relations in specific contexts, as well as the history of inter-religious dialogue in more general terms, proves to be both valuable and useful beyond its immediate academic relevance: How is it possible to enter into Jewish-Christian dialogue without knowledge of the history of Jewish-Christian relations? Similarly, to learn about the monastic encounter and its history between Buddhist and Christian monks and nuns seems extremely relevant in order to understand the specific development of Buddhist-Christian dialogue.

The contributors include many different Christian theological positions, as well as authors from other religious affiliations and backgrounds. This diversity strengthens the volume, and the reader finds different patterns of argumentation and theological reasoning around the theme of inter-religious dialogue. For instance, the contribution of Tinu Rupurell ('Inter-Religious

Dialogue and Interstitial Theology') establish one of the poles in the discussion in reclaiming the contested notions of syncretism and religious hybridity as valid elements in the discourse. The variety of positions represented may give an impression that the book aims to exhaust the field, or the theme. In the introduction, however, Cornille states that 'the experience of genuine dialogue or constructive engagement between religions is still in fact in its infancy' and that 'the possibilities for inter-religious dialogue are virtually infinite', entailing that the book 'cannot represent a summary or an afterword to the history of inter-religious dialogue, as much as a preamble' (p. xvi–xvii).

Nevertheless, the book appears to be deeply situated in the broad Roman Catholic theological discourses on inter-religious dialogue, with many contributors from this discourse, and the many historical references made by them. This is particularly the case in the first part of the book, which in many ways establishes the theoretical/theological perspectives. The views represented are also dominated by North American debates on religious plurality, with the strengths and limitations this entails. This does not make the volume unimportant or uninteresting for, for example, European protestant theological debate on the theme, or other discourses – but the work would have profited from being more explicit about its own overall situatedness. One of my expectations in reading this book was

to learn more about how the fields of comparative theology and inter-religious dialogue relate to each other. This expectation was only partly met by Clooney's chapter, since he mainly argues that the theoretical, textual world of comparative theology is something completely different from the practise of inter-religious dialogue. Reading this, I missed reflection on the complex relationship between 'theory' and 'practise', as well as reflection on the emerging field of inter-religious studies, which aims to be an academic, theoretical reflection closely (but not exclusively) connected to the practical field of dialogue. On the other side, several of the other contributions addressed what I missed in Clooney's chapter, concerning the relationship between practise and theory, but in the context of various other perspectives, such as peace building and social action.

The value of this volume is considerable, because it covers a vast historical, geopolitical, theological and thematic field. Throughout the book you will find surprises, such as the chapter on 'Art and Inter-Religious Dialogue' by Mary Anderson, and interesting case studies (e.g. 'Dialogue between Islam and African Religions', or 'The Implicit Dialogue of Confucian Muslims'). At the same time, the overall approach of inter-religious dialogue and the identified 'Focal Topics' could have included not only feminist critique (Hill Fletcher), but also postcolonial and other critiques. Some critical reflections of this kind are included

in some of the case studies. For such an extensive volume on the theme, however, it would have been valuable to further address the claim that inter-religious dialogue is the new project of Christianity attempting to dominate the religious world after the colonial era by reproducing a religious hierarchy (through organized dialogue) where Christianity in more or less subtle ways is always on top. (for elaboration of this argument, see Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, SCM Press 2005).

It is impossible not to be enriched and inspired by many of the contributions in the book, particularly for those working in fields relating to inter-religious relations and dialogue. Whether this book will emerge in the future as *the* reference book on inter-religious dialogue remains to be seen, but it might well do so, particularly within the North American and to a certain extent the European Roman Catholic discourse on the theme. At the moment the volume is beyond competition, but this may change. It may be wiser to take Cornille's words in the Introduction literally, that the book is a preamble, although an ambitious and comprehensive one – opening up for further critique, case studies, and theological reflections of all kinds and from different places on inter-religious dialogue and inter-religious encounters.

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David Thurfjell: *Faith and Revivalism in a Nordic Romani Community: Pentecostalism Amongst the Kaale Roma of Sweden and Finland*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2013, 216pp.

The Romani population is one of the oldest minorities in the Nordic countries (apart from the indigenous Finno-Ugric Sámi people), with a history dating back at least to the 17th century. Historical policies and attitudes have ensured the isolation and the non-assimilation of the Romani people. This in turn is reflected in their culture and their ways of practising religion within their communities. As David Thurfjell demonstrates in his book, one outlet for emotions and a way of living their history and experience for the Romani people has been Pentecostal religiosity.

Thurfjell has done a good job in painting a clear picture of the culture and religiosity of the Kaale Roma. This previously neglected group has in recent years attracted more attention in academic research, and this work provides a much-needed and important resource for both scholarly purposes and general public interest. Although Thurfjell concentrates in his book on the Romani community, his work also sheds light for the study and understanding of Pentecostalism in general, and his ethnographic approach captures the lived religion in its processes. Since Pentecostalism is a religion strongly centred on the oral transmission of tradition and the inter-

pretation of bodily experiences, this study significantly expands our understanding of the dynamics of Pentecostal religiosity.

Thurfjell emphasises that Pentecostalism gives the Romani people a worldview, language and emotional experiences through which to express themselves (p. 159). Here I would have addressed and highlighted the case of language even more than Thurfjell does. The free interpretation and narrative construction characteristic of Pentecostal religiosity enables every group – and every individual – to construct their own interpretative tools for their purposes, whether consciously or unconsciously. Although the other methods that author mentions are also important, flexible language enables the group to redefine their worldview and interpret or explain their experiences. Nevertheless, this comment does not annul the fact that the book gives a good description of the case in question.

In Thurfjell's words, his work is 'about how religion may provide a stage upon which the dream of a possible solution to problems caused by cultural incommensurability can be performed and experienced.' Furthermore, he states that it is a 'book about the way beliefs and ritual practices sometimes provide means of meaning-making and aesthetic expression to individuals; and [...] how the same beliefs and practices at times may lose their relevance entirely' (p.7). In this task he succeeds well, although the emphasis in the book is more on living the religion,

than on losing it – which could be a topic for another book.

The Romani communities in Nordic Countries are mainly divided into two groups, Kaale and Kalderash, which can be distinguished by their language, history, and traditions. The Kaale Roma, with whom this book is concerned, are (usually) Finnish-speaking, living in Finland (10 000) and Sweden (3 000). Furthermore, there are differences between the Kaale and Kalderash Romani languages or dialects. Thurfjell explains, all Romani people have struggled for centuries to become accepted and integrated part of the society. Many of the programmes and projects initiated by the state have left the impression and suspicion of aiming to merge the Romani people into the majority culture to the point of losing their cultural identity and history. This, as Thurfjell demonstrates, has affected how the Romani people approach and view all institutions, both governmental and religious. As a result, many Romani find consolation and answers to their needs from outside the state churches, from a minority religious movement that places more emphasis on the free expression of emotions – although this connection is not unproblematic either.

Thurfjell is well aware of the sensitive nature of his research, and of portraying a picture of a minority culture, and expresses well the ethical choices he has made. Although he does explore the question of taking a subjective side, the overall

feeling of the book is of a neutral inquiry into the subject, weighing the arguments from all sides. Prejudice and attitudes of distrust towards Romani are still strong in the majority population, even when they are expressed silently. This has ensured the isolation of the Romani people – in some respects, also in the churches. The Romani people have a nomadic past and identity, and they are often very sceptical about the majority culture, thus reinforcing a cycle of distrust, where there is not much dialogue between the groups.

The book is constructed around an interplay between ethnographic description and theoretical reflection. Thurfjell opens and closes the study with well-chosen examples from his fieldwork, giving a glimpse of the world and context that his informants live in. Starting from a revival meeting with its emotional fervour, and finishing with a private meeting on a low key with one individual and his subdued thoughts, Thurfjell paints a wide picture of the emotional scale of his informants' world. This enables the reader to experience on some level the emotional worlds of the Romani people.

Something is usually lost in translation, as has happened also in this book. This is understandable in the light of the fact that the author has to deal with three languages, including one which he does not speak. Translating informants' words from Finnish into English (or from English into Finnish) loses some nuances, although the main points remain intact and clear.

There are couple of minor details of misinformation, which are not important for the main topic of the book, but noticeable for an expert in local histories. These minor errors are concentrated mostly on one page (39), and deal with the background history of Finnish Pentecostalism. To name a few, the first Finnish Pentecostals were not Norwegians, although two preachers visited Finland in the 1910s: the first Finnish Pentecostals were Finnish Lutheran revivalists, who also organized the revival to become the Finnish Pentecostal movement. Prior to the Second World War, the movement was small, and the summer conferences of 30 000 people that Thurffjell refers to weren't possible then (not until the 1970s); moreover the Pentecostal movement before and after WWII was not called *Helluntaikirkko* (Pentecostal Church), but *Helluntaiherätys* (Pentecostal revival movement, literally 'awakening') – *Helluntaikirkko* is the name of an officially registered Pentecostal Church founded on the basis of the *Helluntaiherätys* in 2002. In addition to these small details, there are couple of words translated incorrectly – for example, in page 89, in Finnish 'spirit baptism' is not *pyhäkaste* ['holy baptism'], but *henkikaste*; but these minor errors do not compromise the main argument of the study.

What, then, are the benefits from this book? First, it portrays in a fair manner an often neglected minority. By doing so, it broadens the picture and therefore our understanding

of the Kaale Roma people. Having been targeted by official programmes and projects largely based on political ideology and prejudice, this minority has remained a public mystery for most, ensuring the ongoing isolation and non-assimilation of the Roma in the Nordic countries. By offering a wider and analytical picture of the group, this study can help public officials, academics and students, but also others – both in the majority and minority cultures – to understand not only the culture and religion, but also the social and historical situation of the Roma. Secondly, the book illustrates Pentecostal religiosity through a specific case-study. In so doing, the dynamics of this type of religiosity are made visible, and explained by ethnographic examples. Although this is not a book about Pentecostalism in general, it can profitably be used alongside other books dealing with Pentecostalism more widely, to illustrate and explain the phenomenon. Thirdly, the book is a well-constructed analysis of how a religion can serve cultural and ethnic objectives, as well as fulfilling personal needs.

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Marjo Buitelaar & Hetty Zock (eds): *Religious Voices in Self-Narratives: Making Sense of Life in Times of Transition*. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2013, 280 pp.

Today, it seems to be a generally accepted understanding that identity is constructed like a story. In psychology, human psychic functioning has been understood as storylike at least since Jerome Bruner's inaugural work, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (1986, Harvard University Press), and since then, the idea of identity as narrative has spread even to disciplines in which the findings of the humanities are usually disregarded. The neurologist Antonio Damasio, for example, in his book *Self Comes to Mind* (2010, Pantheon Books) has a chapter devoted solely to the 'autobiographical self,' thus exemplifying the broad appeal of narrative identity theories.

In a similar vein, the book *Religious Voices in Self-Narratives* discusses how religious narratives are employed in the construction of a personal identity. The contributors to the book represent a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, including history, anthropology, and psychology. Considering this, the articles in the volume form a remarkably coherent and unified whole. This is achieved first and foremost through a common theoretical framework: most of the articles draw on the theories of Dan P. McAdams and Hubert J. M. Hermans, both of whom have proposed a comprehensive theory of narrative identity construction.

Together with Gary S. Gregg, who has contributed to the book with an article of his own, McAdams and Hermans are probably the most important names in the contemporary narrative psychology of identity. The book thus serves also as an introduction to the main approaches within this field.

The book is divided into three main parts. The first part is the most theoretically and methodologically oriented, including an overview of Hermans' theory and his religious views (by the volume editor Hetty Zock), as well as Froukje Pitstra's methodological reflection on using the theories of Hermans and McAdams in the study of biography. James M. Day, in turn, attempts to link the narrative approaches with cognitive-developmental theories, such as those of Kohlberg, Fowler, and Oser. The first part closes with Gary S. Gregg's article in which he outlines the basics of his own personality theory and summarizes some of the key findings from his book *Culture and Identity in a Muslim Society* (2006, Oxford University Press).

The second part of the book focuses on transitions. In their articles, Robyn Fivush and Tania Zittoun concentrate on adolescent identities and religious elements in these. Both articles are based on a subsample from a larger interview study. Ulrike Popp-Baier and Barbara Henkes, in turn, both study an individual life in more detail, the former analyzing the cancer diary of the German artist Christoph Schlingensiefel, and

the latter investigating the overall life-course of one German migrant to the Netherlands.

The third part of the book is named 'Religious Positioning in Diaspora,' but it might as well be called 'Muslim identities in Diaspora' because each of the articles is related to Islam in some way or other: In her article, Ellis Jonker depicts a family crisis triggered by a daughter's conversion to Islam. Marjo Buitelaar explores a somewhat similar subject, namely, the continuities and discontinuities between the religious identities of Muslim parents and their adult daughters. Sunil Bhatia, in turn, adopts a wider perspective and investigates how 9/11 has affected the cultural citizenship of religious minorities in the US.

If one were to summarize the message of the book, one could say that the Dialogical Self Theory (DST) of Hubert Hermans is a fruitful way to conceptualize how religion functions as part of personal identity. As the name of the theory suggests, Hermans claims that even individual selves are best understood as ongoing debates between concrete and imaginary others. In other words, the self is a continuous dialogue among a variety of voices, some of which are related to a religious tradition. In this book, the authors analyze these 'religious voices' in order to understand, for example, how such voices maintain agency (Fivush, Henkes, and Buitelaar), support well-being (Fivush), exemplify religious innovation (Gregg and Zittoun) or provide meaning in

times of crisis and transition (Fivush, Zittoun, and Popp-Baier).

The book in general and the third part in particular are valuable because of a multireligious perspective: As a number of authorities in the field have remarked, the psychology of religion has for the most part been a psychology of Christianity alone. Thankfully, there are signs that this state of affairs may be slowly changing, of which this book is one. Besides Christianity, the authors also discuss other faiths, including Judaism (Zittoun), Islam (Gregg, Jonker, Bhatia, and Buitelaar), Hinduism (Bhatia), and Sikhism (Bhatia).

As I see it, the main problem with the book is the same as the main problem with narrative psychology more generally. The book is, for the most part, based on qualitative case studies of individual life stories, and other methodological solutions are lacking. As an interesting exception, Robyn Fivush has also employed methods of statistical hypothesis testing, but as she herself acknowledges, her data does not really meet the requirements of the tests used. The value of the statistical results is therefore, in this case, questionable.

Even though qualitative studies of individual lives are most certainly needed to reveal the elaborate composition of self and identity, it is a sad state of affairs if this is the only kind of methodology available. The goal of psychology is not just to understand individual cases, but to provide general descriptions of human psychic functioning. Further-

more, even though the case studies exemplify the background theories well, they can be hardly said to test the validity of these theories. For these purposes, one needs to move beyond a single-case approach and apply, for example, experimental designs and statistical methods.

Designing experiments or other quantitative designs that would tap into the narrative construction of identities is difficult. I nevertheless believe that such designs could, and should, be employed more than they are at the moment. After all, McAdams, Hermans, and other grand figures of the narrative study of identity did not limit themselves to qualitative methods and small samples, so why should their followers?

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