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### 3. The ‘Post’ in Perspective

#### Revisiting the Post-socialist Religious Question in Central Asia and Central and Eastern Europe

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This chapter revisits the ‘post-socialist religious question’ twenty years later, reflecting on its theoretical import and contribution to broader debates on religion, modernity and social transformation. It draws on the comparative work produced by the MPI research group on ‘Religion and Civil Society’ focused on the ‘religious revivals’ in CEE and Central Asia. Observing the fast re-emergence of religion in the public space, its rapid pluralisation and its entanglement with secular politics, this ambitious project managed to simultaneously interrogate the aftermath of secular-atheist experiments in the region and the ‘post-secular’ deprivatisation of religion and its global reordering. In this chapter we argue that while some of the trends identified by the Civil Religion Group were ephemeral products of the ‘transition period’ others proved more durable, like the thorny ethno-national-religious knot and its impact on national, regional, and global politics. Moreover, methodological impulses important to the group, like the inclination to start from an analysis of religion’s internal logics in the interrogation of social and political phenomena, contributed significantly to broader anthropological discussions and developed new directions of research. Ultimately, we argue that the Civil Religion Group’s attempt to answer the ‘post-socialist religious question’ proved that the post-socialist context was a true laboratory for anthropological theorisation.

## Introduction

If, fifteen years ago, Chris Hann conceded that the title of the book—*The Postsocialist Religious Question*—was a conceit for its simplification of the variegated questions raised about the new relationship between religion and power across the former socialist world, then our attempt to reflect on those findings in light of more recent literature and transformations in the field is even more limited. Yet we will do so, for the trends Hann identified in his analysis of the research performed by his fourteen co-authors, the Max Planck Focus Group “Religion and Civil Society”, are worth reexamining; many characterisations remain salient and have been taken further, in new research directions, while those that have not are still worth exploring for the transformations they reveal. As the book’s abstract points out, until the volume’s publication in 2006, investigations of religion and secularisation had primarily, if not exclusively, been focused on capitalist versions of modernity; the socialist experiment with atheism had been left out of these analyses. While the research presented in the book had been undertaken after the collapse of the Soviet Union, not more than a decade had passed since its fall and the majority of the region’s adult inhabitants had matured during socialism. Moreover, the ideas, institutions, and infrastructure that were still influential in everyday life had been formed under socialism; its legacies profoundly impacted the shape religion took in the newly independent states, whether as an element in ethno-nationalist narratives, in institutional politics or in personal religious experiences. The socialist experiment with atheism and its impact on contemporary religious and secular landscapes became one of the unifying themes of the work in the team and hence of the volume. The formal focus of the Civil Religion Group, as it came to be called in the creation of the volume, was “religion and civil society” and though most of us did not engage specifically with either the term or the phenomena of civil society, we were nearly all concerned with the politics of religion in one form or another. Few of us, however, addressed religion in its own right, an omission partially inherited from the anthropology of socialism, where religion mostly featured as a condition of Soviet modernity (Rogers 2005), but also from the theoretical models we employed. The anthropology of Christianity with its call to foreground religion’s

cultural logic in the analysis of social change was still incipient; Hann would go on to critique this emerging field based on this group's work and his own research (Hann 2007; Robbins 2007).

Hann's attempt to work with the notion of 'civil society' was at least partly rooted in a desire to critically engage with political scientists and development professionals working in the region at the time. 'Civil society' was the buzz-term for post-socialist societies among them. In asking us to utilise the term, Hann endeavoured to establish a common field of interest and dialogue across disciplinary boundaries, while also demonstrating to those in other fields the value of sustained ethnographic research. There were, however, problems with the terminology. To get around both the restriction and difficulties of a term like 'civil society', which he himself criticised in earlier work (Hann 1996), Hann proposed the concept of *civility*. Many of us were wary of the ethnocentrism we read in the term, but Hann spent much time making a case for why *civility* productively engaged the phenomena pointed to under the related terms 'civil society' and 'civil religion'. Moreover, he argued, if taken as a basic mode of peaceful co-existence, *civility* was much less loaded with the troublesome normativity found in connected notions like *civil*, *civilised* and *civilisation*, most notably in the form of Norbert Elias's *civilité* (1982).

For Hann, the term *civility* was important not only to provide a common research theme, but because it also gave a framework for interrogating questions of plurality and diversity, which must have been for him one of the hallmarks of the new religious terrain across the post-socialist world. His interest in 'civility' at the time also resonated with other intellectuals searching for a common ground in societies where secular, multicultural models seemed to fail, such as Charles Taylor's reinterpretation of Rawlsian 'overlapping consensus' (1999) or Jürgen Habermas's (2006) proposal for an ethics of citizenship based on mutual recognition and institutional translation. Hann's intervention, motivated by similar questions about the return of religion and the challenges of religious pluralism, assumed a different starting point—socialist modernity. In this sense, it was an early comparison of two 'posts', but rather than the 'post' of post-colonialism (Chari and Verdery 2009) it was an interrogation of post-socialism and post-secularism (though a critique of modernity was common to all three posts).

Our research group was intended to follow Hann's interest in *civility* by investigating the premise which prompted his initial interest, namely that a new alignment of religion and power in the post-socialist period produced a wider scope for the practice and presence of religion, including a more diverse religious field. Understanding this new positioning of religion and power was central to the post-socialist religious question and, for Hann at least, civility was a potential answer to the challenges these new arrangements posed. The 2006 collective volume therefore started by cataloguing the various legal, political and institutional situations of religion in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and Central Asia, the regions under consideration in the volume, by devoting a substantial section of a chapter each time a new country was introduced. From there, the contributions diverged, pursuing the questions that were relevant to the researcher and their interlocutors, producing finally the diverse field of inquiry Hann hinted at in his opening sentences. Despite the variety found in the volume, there were, in retrospect, several throughlines in our collective work. First, beyond engaging with Hann's questions about civility, thinking about religion and power necessitated the consideration of secularism, both past and future. This meant engaging with the incipient literature on post-secularism and the question of how socialist secularism compared to its counterparts in Europe and the US, but also places like Turkey or Egypt. Instead of asking how socialism repressed religion, an important political question of the Cold War, we began to ask how socialist modernity transformed religion and how this compared to other secular modernising projects.

Second, while the focus on religion and power laid these processes bare, it may have also blinded us to the internal logics of the religious traditions we faced. The majority of us were not primarily concerned with inherent religious dynamics *an sich*, and here, we argue, our investigations may have fallen short. Yet, when we did examine religious phenomena more fundamentally, our initial insights became productive directions for research on religion in the discipline more broadly, like the renewed attention to religious institutions and collective dynamics (Handman and Opas 2019), the focus on conversion and the agency of religious actors (Pelkmans 2009), and the contemporary interest in morality and ethics. Indeed, if the post-socialist religious question was, for our group, mostly about politics and institutional dynamics, the

following group led by Hann in the Religion, Identity, and Postsocialism cluster (2010), focused on 'Religion and Morality', looking at individual transformation and modes of self-cultivation. Our combined efforts made a significant contribution to what was to become the anthropology of ethics and morality (Heintz 2009; Rasanayagam 2011; Zigon 2007; 2010; 2012). Third, the push towards the politics of religion inherent in Hann's interests in religion and civility led us to examine belonging and community more broadly, while the focus on secularism demanded that we ask questions about power, governance, and belonging at the nation-state level, past and present. What quickly became apparent as a result was that religion and ethno-national identity were extraordinarily tightly woven together across the post-socialist landscapes. Despite the diversity of locations in which we worked, the religions we investigated, and the questions we asked, none of us could escape the ethno-national-religious knot. It was, perhaps, the most ubiquitously shared finding across all of our work and it stands as one of the most enduring qualities of the post-socialist landscape identified by the Civil Religion Group. Its persistence indicates the lasting impacts of socialist transformations on contemporary social, religious and political landscapes and provides critical insight into pressing political developments across the region, making us rethink, once again, the relevance of post-socialism as an analytical trope.

In this chapter, we discuss the post-socialist religious question, and the collective labour it represents, following the three themes just discussed as a guide: 1. Secularism reconsidered; 2. Religious transformations and collective dynamics; 3. Ethno-national religious belonging and political movements. We set our discussion of the volume against a review of the literature on religion in CEE and Central Asia, brought together for the first time since the volume's publication, to evaluate the state of the field and the role that the post-socialist religious question played in shaping it. We argue that the empirical findings highlighted in this volume have proven to be some of the most salient and durable qualities of religion across the post-socialist landscape. Beyond this, we argue that our fieldwork provided the ground upon which the Civil Religion Group was able to contest dominant paradigms in the anthropology and sociology of religion and secularism, and post-socialist studies, both in this 2006 volume and beyond, retrospectively showing our collective fieldwork to have been a laboratory for anthropological theorising.

## Secularism and Religion between the 'Posts'

The Civil Religion Group started by questioning the obvious: 'religious revivals' were sweeping across the former socialist region with both 'new' and 'old' actors making claims on public space. Their visible publicness aside, we wanted to uncover the structural changes that led to such 'revivals', the new religious forms emerging in this process and their interaction with the post-socialist state and other social actors. The term "post-secular" was not yet established (Habermas 2008) but sociologists of religion had already signalled the resurgence of religion globally (Berger 1999) and its "deprivatization" as Jose Casanova (1994) put it. Could one talk about a similar process in the post-socialist region, as Hann (2000) suggested? What difference had Soviet/socialist atheism made to the post-socialist vs. the post-secular conditions?

By nature, terms that start with 'post-' gain their meaning with reference to an implied previous condition; 'posts' compel comparisons between what came before and what came after. Our research was no different. But unlike the literature on secularism and post-secularity that had developed in sociology, our reference points were not Western modernity, Protestantism, and liberal notions of secularism. Rather, focused on post-socialist transformations, our research engaged with the Soviet and socialist variants of secularism, how they reshaped religion, and their aftermath. This position allowed us to start from different premises than the sociological literature of the time and the emerging post-secular debate, circling around normative models of both modernity and secularism (Berger 1999; Casanova 1994; Davie 1994; Hervieu-Léger 2006). Our ethnographies thus approached the religious revivals in light of the socialist experiment to create a society without God. Through in-depth ethnographic studies, we documented the shifting place of religion in post-socialist European and Asian societies, a large part of which was observing the decay, transformation and, in some cases, continuity of socialist-era notions, practices, and institutions in the early post-socialist years. Most of us, for example, uncovered ways in which religion, however muted and altered, persisted during the socialist period, and became entangled with other logics at work in post-socialist political programs, one effect of which was the further entanglement of religion and nation. These findings contributed to a broader rethinking

of the relationship between religion, modernity and secularism, and continue to provide rich material for further comparisons with other secular (modernising) projects across the world and their aftermath (Bielo 2015; Ngo and Quijada 2015; Bubandt and van Beek 2012; Cannell 2010; Warner, Van Antwerpen and Calhoun 2010). Building on work Hann, Goltz, and their contributing authors would produce on Eastern Christianities (2010), and the work on Islam carried out by the Civil Religion Group, among others, McBrien (2017) asked questions about the nature of the category of religion within (post)Soviet secularism. If Western secular articulations of religion grew from Protestant notions of individuality and interiority, might not the Soviet formation, rooted as it was in Orthodoxy, and later influenced by Islam, have crafted a notion of religion more bound up with collective practice and belonging? McBrien's work, like that of Martin's (1969; 2017) and Hann's (2011), questioned the prominence of Protestantism and Western European political histories in theory formation.

This line of research was likewise pursued by other anthropologists of post-socialism who, asking similar questions, at times in conversation with us, dug deeper into the nature of Soviet secularism (Luehrmann 2011; Rogers 2009; Wanner 2012). Through archival research, they were able to provide the empirical substantiation of the secular-religious configurations we observed mostly through reflection on the ethnographic present. Sonja Luehrmann (2015) for example pointed out that the "exclusive humanism" of Western secularism described by Charles Taylor (2007) resonated with Soviet secularism and its attempt to forge a social transcendence by stressing faith in people over gods and reclaiming human agency as an engine of social transformation. The Soviet state in practice, however, she argued, used secularisation to manage ethno-religious differences and build new communities, an important corrective to the idea that secularism and liberal individualism are inherently linked (Luehrmann 2011: 6-7). Even if Hann had not sent us out to the field (explicitly) to interrogate the post-secular condition, he wanted us to address the resurgence of religion and challenges of religious pluralism in the post-socialist context. In an article anticipating our project, and a comparison of the 'posts', "Problems with the (de)privatisation of religion", he drew a comparison between the shifting place of religion in Poland and Turkey based on



the Polish-Ukrainian conflict over Przemsyl Cathedral in eastern Poland (Hann 2000). He used this analysis to criticise the Western liberal model of governance that was at the time being projected on to post-socialist Europe, a model which promoted civil society and the public sphere, and which assumed that the separation of church and state would lead to the desired “marketplace of religion”.

Hann argued instead for the conceptual melding of civil religion and civil society into something he described as ‘civility’. Civility, he then argued, could serve as a potential solution to religious monopolies and post-secular conflicts he (and we) witnessed in the field. This move simultaneously broadened Robert Bellah’s concept of “civil religion” beyond the US context, where Christian symbols and myths continue to provide the basis of a civil religion despite the formal separation of church and state, and challenged the generalisation of the Western concept of ‘civil society’ (see also Hann and Dunn 1996). Hann’s push for an empirical study of forms of ‘civility’ in concrete localities proved more fruitful for our work than the influential models in the sociology of religion at the time. It provided an excellent entrypoint for investigating the constituency and quality of relationships among citizens and between citizens and the state. It also allowed us to explore the underlying moral norms and expectations that constituted the grounds for social interaction and coexistence, even if we each gave it different names at the time, or only addressed it in subsequent work: “Orthodox imaginary” (Naumescu), “agrarian tolerance” (Buzalka), “rural civility” (Foszto), “cosmopolitanism” (Richardson), “charity” (Mahieu), “tolerance” as conformity to civic (rather than religious) norms (Heintz), “temperance and tolerance” (Kehl-Bodrogi 2010), “solidarity” (McBrien 2010), “morality” (Rasanyagam 2010; 2011; Stephan 2010), or “neighbourliness” (Pelkmans).

Even if ‘civility’ didn’t become an analytical concept in our research, it provided a starting point for exploring similar dynamics in the field and showing how religion could offer resources for building communities in times of radical change. Ritual revitalisation, practices of sharing and redistribution, or the rebuilding of churches, mosques, and shrines, all mobilised individuals and collectives, substituted failing state institutions and provided forms of solidarity and sociality on the ground. These acts of reconstruction competed at times with the values

and institutions inherited from the socialist state, occasionally relying on neo-liberal logics or institutions (McBrien 2017; Pelkmans 2006) but more often than that they appropriated socialist-era tools. There was a lot of “recycling” of people, spaces, institutions and skills in the post-socialist context (Luehrmann 2005) and socialist values like ‘working with people’ (*rabota s liudmi*) and doing ‘society work’ (*obshchestvennaia rabota*), or ‘culturedness’ (*kul'turnost'*) were still largely shared in the post-socialist space (Rasanayagam 2014; Rogers 2009).

In this competition between state-sponsored ‘traditions’ and ‘society work’ the latter seemed to resonate more with communities, not least due to the resilience of socialist patronage networks, which were more able to mobilise local resources than the weak post-socialist state. Apparent puzzles, such as how the alliance of local socialist officials turned post-socialist entrepreneurs, and religious leaders, played a key role in the religious revivals, were suddenly not surprising anymore. Local dynamics, like those we described, remained largely unnoticed by post-socialist scholarship focused primarily on broader economic and political transformations even when tackling the resurgence of religion. By searching for explanations of religious change in the social-economic transformations that defined post-socialism, this literature overlooked religion as a potential drive for social change. The focus on ‘civility’ through long-term ethnographic fieldwork helped us to see it. In the intervening years, this early omission in the literature has been corrected. It has become impossible to ignore religion’s sway in society and the role it has in social phenomena formerly seen as firmly in the realm of the (secular) state is inescapable. Various social actors, rather than institutions, find new ways to insert religion in public spaces while acknowledging—even when challenging or renegotiating—the tenets of secularism. Geertz (2005) pointed out the emergence of religious persuasion as an instrument of public identity (“the religious mindedness” of people) already in the 1960s, but we see lately more concerted efforts to reclaim spheres of life that were for a long time the domain of the secular (socialist) state—for example, gender and reproductive politics (Luehrmann 2018a; Mishtal 2015), life-cycle rituals (Cleuziou 2019; Cleuziou and McBrien 2021; McBrien 2020; Roche and Hohmann 2011), education (Köllner 2016; Ladykowska and Tocheva

2013), economy (Botoeva 2018; Fomina 2020; Köllner 2020), and public space (Tateo 2020).

Religion's new role in public life has not been universally well received, especially as it has grown in strength and prominence. However, while in the past the state was the main regulator of religion's public presence, non-state, secular actors now bring religious-secular conflicts into the sphere of 'civility'. The 2012 'punk prayer' of Russian feminist band Pussy Riot in a Moscow cathedral challenged the sacredness of church and state and their 'symphonic' relationship, managing to disturb both religious and secular sensibilities (Bernstein 2013; Shevzov 2014). Others have taken to court their claims for public institutions to remain free of religious symbols, challenging the post-socialist alliance of church and state by appropriating the repertoire of their opponents, whether 'blasphemy' in the case of Russian courts or 'human rights' in the case of Romanian schools (Horvath 2009). Such developments do not belong to post-socialism anymore. They echo global trends and reconfigurations of the secular and the religious worldwide, whether in the Middle East, North America or Western Europe (Heo 2013; Kaell 2016; Oliphant 2012).

## Religious Transformations and Collective Dynamics

Scholars of post-socialist religiosity did not have many resources to start from when trying to account for its transformation; anthropologies of religion under socialism were scarce and local scholarship was 'biased' by atheist ideology (Luehrmann 2015). However, a visible (and ethnographically accessible) site to grasp individual and collective transformation was the religious conversion, both to historical traditions and new religious movements, proliferating after the collapse of socialist regimes. For many, religion became an opportunity for radical change; conversion provided a clear moment of rupture in their lives which resonated with the broader post-socialist transformations they were experiencing. In this sense, conversion could have become the impetus for anthropologists of post-socialism to take individual agency seriously, taking inspiration from the post-colonial literature on conversion and modernity as JDY Peel (2009) suggested in the postface of another volume emanating from our group's work. Some

in our group have tried, even if implicitly, through the lens of morality, acknowledging people's conscious orientation towards different ideas of the good, proper or virtuous, and pointing to distinct paths to moral formation and conceptions of personhood that accounted for religious subjectivities beyond utilitarian approaches (Foszto 2009; Hilgers 2009; Pelkmans 2009; Rasanayagam 2011). A focus on morality also seemed to better reflect everyday realities on the ground: the times in which old social contracts were discredited and new ones were not yet in place, when the language of change was itself moralising and the new politics were articulated in an ethics of reform (Nazpary 2002; Steinberg and Wanner 2008; Zigon 2007).

But conversion also challenged ingrained forms of civility and kin relations and the ethno-religious knot in post-socialist countries, with missionaries trying to decouple individual belief from collective belonging (McBrien and Pelkmans 2008). This meant that even when focusing on individual belief and practice, we could not ignore the politics of religion as shaped by post-socialist state-building processes. The forms of 'civility' that sustained communities also played into the politics of differentiation fuelled by ethno-nationalist mobilisations across the post-socialist space. Hann (2003) had already indicated this with the example of sacred music which, he argued, could unite and yet also separate people along confessional, ethnic, and national boundaries (see also Engelhardt 2014 and Luehrmann 2018). Our work further substantiated these findings, showing how dominant religions exerted their exclusive hold in the face of religious 'others' (Buzalka; Hilgers; Foszto; Pelkmans; Naumescu), while also suffering from competing interpretations of the same faith and of their religious past (Hilgers; Kehl-Bodrogi; Mahieu; McBrien; Rasanayagam; Stephan).

The post-socialist conflicts over property split communities and mobilised both old and newly recruited believers (Leutloff-Grandits 2006; Naumescu 2010). Most of us paid particular attention to the state-citizen nexus and the possibilities for religious faith and practice in the new institutional arrangements. The simultaneous assertion of post-socialist states as secular and as having a religious base for their national projects, a legacy of the socialist era, was the backdrop against which many of the individual and collective religious projects we investigated played out. Here, the view 'from below,' which attended to lived religion

as well as local institutional dynamics, made a difference; the relationship between religious 'revivals' and secular politics was not straightforward in the post-socialist context. Religion had been highly politicised during socialism and its publicly tolerated forms had been moulded by the state into what has been described in the literature as compliant official institutions and secularised cultural performances, part of national heritage or folklore. Many of us started out by interrogating this model of socialist-era religion, arguing against bifurcated notions like 'official/unofficial' religion, or 'secularised' religion, showing rather the spaces where, and ways in which, religion persisted in the late Soviet period and the complex ways in which secularising policies *transformed* its practice and understandings of it (Hilgers 2009; Jessa; Kehl-Bodrogi 2008; McBrien 2010; 2012; Rasanayagam 2006; 2011; Stephan).

In the post-socialist period these localised practices and institutions became the grounds for the religious 'revivals' which were however also shaped by the transnational connections that religious groups maintained, revived or formed after 1989. Kehl-Bodrogi, Naumescu, and McBrien, for example, found examples of the former. Kehl-Bodrogi's work argued that in both the Soviet and post-Soviet era, most Khorezmians expressed their Muslim identity through the observance of life-cycle rituals (2010). McBrien (2017) traced the ways that the initial interest in Islam in small towns of southern Kyrgyzstan was facilitated by networks of Islamic scholars trained during the Soviet period. Naumescu (2007) pointed to the religious practices and institutions maintaining a vibrant local tradition in Soviet Ukraine that defied both Soviet atheism and the post-socialist politics of differentiation pursued by Ukrainian churches after independence. Pelkmans's (2007) and Hilgers's (2009) work, in contrast, illustrate the latter, showing how the transnational connections of Evangelical Christians and the massive inroad of Western missionaries in the region produced unexpected synergies with socialist cultural legacies, while also triggering serious tensions. The interaction between local traditions and global actors shaped the religious landscape as much as the nation-building processes and the resacralisation of politics that post-socialist states pursued (Smolkin 2018; Verdery 1999). This implied that religious fragmentation was not just a condition of the rapid pluralisation of post-Soviet society. It was also a result of competing visions of 'religion' (as well as of 'culture',

'tradition' and 'nation') and its place in society. The whole process was in turn affected by salient beliefs and practices, people's mistrust of institutions and church-state relations (another legacy of the socialist period) and the pervasiveness of historical traditions (Islam, Orthodoxy) in society and culture. In many cases, Islam and Orthodox Christianity functioned as an 'ambient faith' (Engelke 2012) in national contexts, articulating a mode of belonging to the nation relatively independent from changing political regimes. In Ukraine, for example, a diffuse Orthodoxy remained salient during the Soviet times as much as in the post-Soviet period, defying the boundaries between private and public and the initial separation—and later alliance—between church and state (Naumescu 2007; Wanner 2014). Like the various modes of 'civility' our group depicted, an ambient faith falls in between well-defined social categories and institutional frames, defying politics of differentiation yet being potentially recruited by them to create difference. Inserting itself in secular space without challenging it directly, and being susceptible to politicisation without being explicitly political, ambient Orthodoxy remains even today an important mobilising factor in Ukraine to legitimise nationalist causes or sustain a war against an enemy that shares the same faith (Wanner 2020).

An ambient faith raises the broader question about the sharp division between (an assumed secular) politics and religion that continues to inform contemporary studies of religion and post-secularity. Their entanglement was visible in the 1990s 'revivals' as it is in the religious mobilisations of today. The establishment of a national Orthodox Church in Ukraine in 2019 and the ensuing schism between Moscow and Constantinople Patriarchates mobilised people and churches in Ukraine and Russia, and across the Orthodox world. Drawing parallels between the patterns of mobilisation around this conflict and those from the 1990s, Kormina and Naumescu (2020) observe how Orthodox Churches' struggles for sovereignty ('autocephaly') have long been entangled with state sovereignty. This relationship is reflected in disputes over 'canonical territory' which follow the post-Soviet reorganisation of state borders, and in a theopolitics of 'communion', and of belonging (or not) to the sacred community of faith and nation. As theological-political formations, 'communion' and 'canonical territory' offer a space for divinely sanctioned action that reaches beyond the religious sphere,

constituting an effective means of collective mobilisation. Without an awareness of Orthodoxy's inherent dynamics, one can easily overlook the galvanising potential of religion subordinating it to secular politics. In Central Asia, education, business, and development have been domains in which the lines between the religious and the secular have not always been clearly demarcated and in which religion, politics, national and international actors overlap in mutually constituting fields, belying easy distinctions between them and contesting notions that see religion merely as the instrument of politics (or business). From the 'Turkish' secondary schools of the 1990s and the contemporary mountain university built by the Aga Khan Development Network, to Islamically inspired development projects and Muslim entrepreneurialism across the region, Islamic actors and institutions occupy an interstitial social space in which they work out their religiously-inspired economic, educational, and humanitarian projects (Balci 2003; Botoeva 2020; Clement 2007; Mostowlansky 2017). 'Religion' in their work can neither be seen as the essential cause, as if they were only missionaries in disguise, nor merely a device for educational, economic or political endeavours; the two act mutually and both are constitutive of their efforts. The religious formations which shape the social and economic work warrant research in their own right, such as recent inquiries into Islamic economy in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan (Botoeva 2018) and Muslim humanitarianism in the borderlands of Central and South Asia (Mostowlansky 2020).

Recent anthropological work on religious-secular contestations in the post-socialist space sheds additional light on the entanglements of religion and politics beyond the common tropes of 'instrumentalisation of religion,' or the 'Orthodox symphonia' between church and state (Köllner 2020). Such ethnographies delineate several levels of relatedness between religious and political actors and a space of institutional-organisational dynamics between lived religion and the state (Halemba 2015; Doolotkeldieva 2020; Tocheva 2018). These arrangements complicate the image of 'civility' Hann proposed, pointing to the historical and institutional dynamics that allowed for 'civility' to emerge in its various forms in the first place. They resonate with recent calls in the anthropology of Christianity for a shift of focus from individual faith and ethical pursuits towards religious institutions

and (infra)structures of sociality (Handman and Opas 2019), something that should concern anthropologists of religion more broadly. It certainly applies to our regions, where Muslims and Orthodox Christians live their faith primarily through collective practice and community, the focus on which would not only produce fuller empirical renderings of religion in the region but would also continue to provide a corrective to the 'Protestant bias' of the anthropology of Christianity (see also Boylston 2013; Hann 2007; Meyer 2017).

### Nationalism, State and New Political Mobilisations

When we started our research on religion and civility, we were confronted with a literature on secularism and religion that had failed to consider socialist secularism and bypassed consideration of Eastern Christianity, which is prevalent in the region. We were also faced with a body of work on religion under socialism, which had yet to move beyond the Cold War-era frames in the way research on economy (Dunn 2004; Hann 1998; Humphrey 1998; Verdery 2003) or ethnicity and nationalism (Bringa 1995; Grant 1995) had. Western European and American researchers examining religion during the late socialist and early post-socialist era, tended towards repression/revival models to describe and interpret it (Liu 2017; Pelkmans 2006).

This mode of thinking generally posited that religion, repressed by atheism, reappeared after the demise of socialism, largely unscathed and unchanged. The model had interesting congruences with other Cold War-era frameworks, namely those developed about national identity. In this case, there were two reigning models, one which argued that ethno-national identity was repressed by the USSR, only to revive at its demise, unchanged. The other, that nations had been rather arbitrarily invented in the early Soviet period and that in the absence of a strong Soviet state, they would fall apart or devolve into ethnic conflict. The Ferghana Valley of Central Asia was often taken as an example for the potential occurrence of the latter while the Caucasus was held up as evidence of the former (Pelkmans 2006). Following the collapse of socialism, anthropologists and historians picked up the investigation of nations and nationalism first, demonstrating the ways that already existing modes of ethnic or national belonging had



been profoundly altered by Soviet-era policies and programmes. In other cases, in which early socialist-era interventions played a role in creating nations, researchers demonstrated not only the nuanced ways in which these modes of belonging were constructed but their durability after the union's collapse (Hirsch 2000; 2005; Slezkine 2000). Most of us were already aware of this research when we set out to investigate religion, and it is perhaps because of the nuanced, complicated picture this research painted about how power operated during the socialist era that we began to ask questions about the accuracy and utility of repression/revival models for understanding the post-socialist religious landscapes. The stories we heard from many of our interlocutors who reached adulthood during the socialist era added to these doubts, as they detailed for us the ways in which they attempted to live good Christian or Muslim lives during socialism. Importantly, these were not only stories of hidden, underground religion—though there were those, too as the case of Greek Catholics in CEE has shown (Mahieu and Naumescu 2008).

These were stories of how religious norms and values, for example, mingled and melded with socialist ones (Heintz; Tocheva 2011); of religious leaders who were also proud socialist workers (McBrien 2017); or of a generational specialisation in which religious/secular commitments were mapped onto different ages allowing for the reproduction of both (Naumescu 2016; Ładykowska, this volume). What we saw in the early 2000s, then, were not simply revivals of pre-Soviet religion; they were religious ideas, practices, and institutions profoundly shaped by and formed in response to the socialist experience (see also Rogers 2009; Tasar 2017; Wanner 2007). There were often marked differences between what we found in CEE and what we saw in Central Asia, despite the shared socialist experience. The regions had vastly different pre-socialist modes of economic and political organisation, and how they became socialist states or Soviet republics varied significantly, too. Importantly, we also researched different religions. While some worked on minority religions like Evangelicalism or Baha'I (Hilgers; Pelkmans), the two main religions under study were Eastern Christianity and Islam. Despite these differences, there was a striking similarity across socialist space when it came to the intertwining of religion, ethnic, and national belonging.

Our research revealed that an inadvertent by-product of the attempt to eradicate, or at least tightly control, religion under socialism was the strengthening of its ties to ethno-national identity. While certain elements of religious life had been effectively eliminated by early anti-religious campaigns and later religious restrictions, other elements of religious practice had been tacitly (or explicitly) allowed to remain and were in some cases appropriated by the state. In both Central Asia and CEE these were often life-cycle events and rituals connected to the home. For religious practitioners, these remained important religious customs and were inextricably linked to a sense of religious belonging (Kligman 1988). At the same time, in public secular life, these same elements were often celebrated as components of culture that were integrated into reinvented folk traditions to be performed on the national stage (Cash 2012). The religious quality was either left unmarked as such, denied, or tolerated as an 'in-the-meantime' step towards religious eradication. The net effect for many across the socialist region was that religion became an essential component of ethno-national identity, such that in the early post-socialist period when we conducted our research it was nearly unthinkable for our interlocutors to imagine a non-Orthodox Russian or Ukrainian, or a non-Muslim Uzbek or Kyrgyz, for example. In Ukraine, an Orthodox imaginary was inclusive only of those belonging to the same historical tradition (Kyivan Rus), supporting an ambient faith blended with national identity and excluding those of "foreign import" (Naumescu). Intriguingly, the same logics meant that in Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and all across the socialist world, many a foreign missionary, regardless of their faith, struggled with this ethno-national religious knot and worked as hard to convert people to new boundaries between religion and culture as they did to the specific religion they were proselytising (McBrien and Pelkmans 2008; Wanner 2007). When socialism ended, religion not only remained a vital aspect of national identity, it was in many ways strengthened. As the new nation-states asserted their independence, an important element was the (re) construction of their national narrative and a national sense of belonging. Religion played a key role in these nation-building endeavours in all the former socialist countries. As we explored the question of religious pluralism and forms of civility or tolerance, we quickly saw that while

there was room for religiously-based alliances among citizens and between citizens and the state, it had its limits.

Articulations of a given religion that were alternative to that endorsed by the state were criticised, discursively demonised, or violently repressed (Hilgers; Jessa; Kehl-Bodrogi; McBrien; Rasanayagam; Stephan). Even in post-Soviet countries like Ukraine or Kyrgyzstan where the state has apparently allowed for a marketplace of religions to emerge, there were clear boundaries as to what constituted acceptable religion. Minority religions that crossed ethnic-national bounds or missionaries trying to break the ethno-religious bond were not tolerated (Hilgers; Pelkmans). Co-religionists belonging to different nation-states started to draw religious boundaries when the newly established borders or political conflicts set them against one another. So while in the thirty years since socialism ended, the varying trajectories of the independent nation-states have resulted in significant divergences between the countries, this ethno-national-religious knot remains strong. It has proven to be one of the most durable effects of the socialist period. The contemporary rise of conservative populist politics across the former socialist world has seen the persistent articulation of religion in nationalist rhetoric and a potential for politicised religiosities. This includes, for example, the post-peasant populism that Buzalka (2008) described for CEE, a political discourse that draws on elements of peasant culture (values, symbols, practices) to mobilise mostly rural populations. Since religion is an integral part of this political culture (anti-modern, anti-Western/liberal, etc.), mainstream churches tend to sustain it as another opportunity to reaffirm their close ties with the nation and state. Yet the nationalist-populist movements of CEE seem to gravitate nowadays towards the global conservative trend where Christianity features as a moral and civilisational dimension rather than national-identitarian alone, a possible legacy of the Christian, anti-communist rhetoric that characterised Cold War politics (Kirby 2014). Poland and Hungary are presented as examples of this shift (Brubaker 2017; Mishtal 2015) while in Ukraine, Russia or Romania the Orthodox Churches remain closely entangled in state politics and national identity in ways that go beyond a simple instrumentalisation of religion (Köllner 2020; Laruelle 2020; Wanner 2020). In Central Asia, religion is mobilised for political manoeuvres, but then often in service of internal repression

or control. Governments have continued to utilise their self-appointed authority to assess 'correct' interpretations of Islam in order to shape, censor and sometimes violently repress alternatives by co-religionists. In addition, some states, notably Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, have used this same power to (violently) repress political opponents, whether or not religion was actually an issue in their disagreement.

Central Asia remains a predominantly Muslim region, but the diversity of ways in which Islam is interpreted and lived out has grown significantly in the twenty years since the research of the Civil Religion Group was carried out. Increased contact with other parts of the Muslim world, the proliferation of movements like the Tablighi Jamaat and the investment of foreign Muslim donors in the region, combined with an established network of local Islamic schools and greater access to Islamic materials at home, has led to a variegated religious sphere (Botoeva 2018; Doolotkeldieva 2020; Nasritdinov 2012; Nasritdinov and Esenamanova 2017; Pelkmans 2017; Stephan-Emmrich 2018; Toktogulova 2014). Labour remittances and the growth of a middle class in places like Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan has also led to the development of a religious middle class, with its incumbent consumption patterns and tastes (Bissenova 2017; Botoeva 2020; Stephan-Emmrich and Mirzoev 2016). Easy, affordable access to the Internet has facilitated the growth of popular Islamic teachers who weigh in on national trends and affairs (Bigozhin 2019). Politicians now readily proclaim their piety and their religiously-informed political positions. Yet, what has not altered, is the link between religion and ethno-national identity, even if varying interpretations of Islam and different understandings of national belonging have led to a diversity of ways this link is made and understood (Artman 2019; Toktogulova 2020).

Central Asia has seen its own form of populism, notably in the nationalist movements of Kyrgyzstan where religion has been a less visible force than in Europe. Nonetheless, as in Buzalka's notion of post-peasant populism, religion is intimately intertwined with populist notions of political community in Kyrgyzstan, especially when nationalist movements take 'anti-Western' stances in defence of 'local' norms. While the ethno-national religious knot works itself out differently in Europe and Asia, the persistence (and similarity) of these phenomena across time and space reaffirms the value of comparisons between 'posts', one

that accounts for the continuing effects of global Cold War politics in the religious and political mobilisations of today.

## Conclusion

Answering the 'post-socialist religious question' Hann raised for the Civil Religion Group revealed that the 'religious revivals' were not just outcomes of the post-socialist transformations, making us reconsider the role and impact of socialist modernity on these processes and religious forms. The work of our group proved the lasting presence of Soviet secularism and of religiously-grounded forms of 'civility' that shaped the post-socialist society and religious landscape in important ways. There were obvious continuities behind these 'revivals', especially in the realignment of religion, state and post-socialist nation-building in CEE and Central Asia (see Hann and Pelkmans 2009 for a comprehensive comparison). Yet, by becoming public, religion challenged the power of post-socialist states to define appropriate religious forms and their place in society as well as established connections between ethnicity-nation-religion at the local level. Religion became, at the same time, an agent of social mobilisation and a primary means for individual transformation across the post-socialist space. Conversion, for example, was a key site for negotiating the personal and the political and from which for us to reconsider individual agency within the broader structural processes that defined this period. This was an opportunity for our group to take religious commitments seriously rather than as a sign of self-interest exacerbated by the new market economy, identity politics or ideological commitments.

However, these investigations did not prompt a more systematic reflection on religion in its own right. While our group focused on religion's entanglement with socio-economic transformations and secular politics we did not examine, in depth, how contemporary adaptations of religious forms in the 'post' context were shaped by the theological and historical traditions of the different faiths. Hann raised this question in his Erfurt Lecture, "Eastern Christianity and Western Social Theory" (2011), reflecting on the Protestantism of anthropology and of social theories of modernity. Besides opening the possibility to rethink the genealogies of 'modernity', including religious modernities,

in a global frame, this question invites us to reconsider the relationship between religion and politics beyond the modern-secular understanding of the political as devoid of religion.

Hann's search for 'civility' is also validated by the ongoing polarisation of societies stirred by populist politics and growing inequalities, as his latest contributions attest (2020; also Buzalka, Pasiëka this volume). The illiberal discourses in the region continue to be partially structured by socialist narratives, namely an anti-Western posturing that resembles the Second- and First-World relations of the Cold War era, perceived marginalisation within the broader political structures, conspiratorial visions of multiculturalism and liberal agendas imposed by the EU, etc. These developments reflect global trends and the continued relevance of Cold War legacies, making us ask whether, despite the thirty years that have passed since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the concept of post-socialism does not still make sense. Discussions of the utility of the term 'post-socialist' remain commonplace today and some researchers are leaving the framework behind (e.g. Müller 2019; Ibanez-Tirado 2015) while others extend and embrace it as a global condition (Chari and Verdery 2009; Gille 2010; Rogers 2010). Important among the latter for our continued reflection on the religious question between 'posts' are considerations about how Cold War configurations of knowledge and power have shaped and continue to shape social theory and politics (not least through the salience of modernisation theory and secularism in the different 'posts'), how imperial legacies have shaped socialist nationalities policies and post-socialist politics of recognition as well as neocolonial claims, and the emergence of contemporary populist, nationalist movements across the region that join a global conservative surge.

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