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Urban Religious Pluralisation

Challenges and Opportunities in the post-Soviet South Caucasus – Introduction

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Special issue: Urban Religious Pluralization: Challenges and Opportunities in the post-Soviet South Caucasus - Introduction

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In the spring of 2020, tough measures imposed in the South Caucasus to manage the coronavirus pandemic coincided with some major religious holidays, including Orthodox Christian Easter and Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting. In all three countries of the South Caucasus (Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia), governments called on their citizens to stay at home and not to gather in churches, attend mosques for Friday prayers, visit holy sites or go on pilgrimages. Most religious institutions indeed remained closed and offered online alternatives, such as the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia. However, the dominant Georgian Orthodox Church largely continued to hold its traditional services in person. Moreover, despite the government's exhortations, the churches kept their doors open for Easter celebrations in Georgia, and the government-imposed restrictions were largely ignored by the Church and faithful alike. Holy Communion and the associated practice of using a common spoon for the distribution of wine to communicants were sharply criticized, especially by members of the opposition and the liberal churches, due to the high risk of infection.

This continued adherence to traditional religious practices in churches has cast the special role and authority of the Orthodox Church in Georgia into sharp relief. By contrast, the leaders of Georgia's Muslims suspended prayer meetings during Ramadan, while the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia opted to livestream Sunday services. Despite the increased risk of the virus being spread by tra-

ditional religious practices, the Georgian government was reluctant to impose emergency rules on the Orthodox Church. In contrast, in Azerbaijan, all the mosques, churches, synagogues and holy sites were closed on government orders as part of an initial package of measures to control the virus. On 17 March 2020, the Administration of Muslims of the Caucasus (QMI) announced that the faithful had a duty to comply with this decision. The strictly observed quarantine regime remained in force even after the start of Ramadan, which, since 1993, has been regarded as Azerbaijan's most important Muslim holiday. The breaking of the fast each evening (*iftar*) took place at home, and restaurants that would have normally served holy food during Ramadan remained closed. The different responses of faith leaders in Georgia and Armenia to coronavirus crisis control measures, as well as variations in how these measures were set and enforced by the respective states, reflect not only the religious diversity of the South Caucasus and differences in the relationship between religion and the state, but also the different tactics religious minorities used to mediate their religious expressions and practices of religious place-making.

This special issue focuses on the ways in which religious plurality unfolds in the South Caucasus and more precisely how religious minorities cope with uncomfortable situations by finding and developing religious spaces and places in the post-Soviet urban environment. Cities in the South Caucasus have had a long history of religiously diverse populations, the presence of

which has marked the cities in important ways, including the vibrant presence of multiple, religiously defined neighbourhoods (Humphrey and Skvirskaja 2012). During the socialist period, however, the limitations placed on religion and the support for scientific atheism circumscribed the space for public expressions of religion and the concomitant ability of religion, and of religious diversity, to shape urban environments (Khalid 2007). The ties between religion and ethno-national belonging were strengthened, even though the practice of religion was significantly circumscribed, producing 'majority' religions that matched the titular nationalities of the republics, the largest proportions of their populations and religious minorities with other ethno-national-religious backgrounds. While ethno-national identity thrived in urban spaces, public expressions of religion declined dramatically under socialism without ever disappearing entirely.

With the end of socialism, the space for public expressions of religion has increased, including in urban settings. Post-Soviet urban spaces are now religiously shaped and textured in ways that were previously unimaginable. Yet, in the literature, post-Soviet cities have mostly been viewed as secular settings (e.g., Alexander and Buchli 2007). The economic, political and infrastructural changes that accompanied the collapse of socialism and the way this impacted on urban environments and their dwellers has been explored (e.g. Nazpary 2002, Collier 2011, Fehlings 2016). Portraits of chaos and breakdown, followed by depictions of the growth, spectacle, ruralisation, illegality and inequality wrought by capitalism, pepper the literature (Bissenova 2017, Trevisani 2018, Isabaeva 2021). Only recently has research begun to address what is variously discussed as the urban 'religious revival', 're-sacralization processes', or the 'nationalization' of religious belief and practice in urban spaces (Bissenova 2016, Nasritdinov and Esenamanova 2017, Nasritdinov 2018, Kormina 2020). Much attention has been paid to the dynamics of restoring religious worlds in urban spaces by the largest religions of the former Soviet Union (Orthodox Christianity,

Sunni Islam), including the spectacular (re)building of churches and mosques in city centres. Usually sponsored by state agencies, these extravagant buildings now mark and reshape the urban skyline, sitting alongside grand monuments and other urban prestige projects (Bissenova 2016, Serrano 2016, Wanner 2018, Darieva 2020). Pilgrimage, religious educational projects, and missionary endeavours have likewise marked post-socialist cities (Wanner 2012, Darieva et al 2018, Kormina 2020), if in less spectacular ways, as has the rise of pious forms of consumption, like halal-dining, religious fashion shops and beauty salons – particularly urban forms of capitalist leisure (Kapustina 2016, Stephan-Emmrich and Mirzoev 2016, Bissenova 2017, Nasritdinov and Schröder 2017, Puppo and Schmolter 2020).

One of the most widely shared characteristics of religion across many post-Soviet societies is the tension between the right to religious freedom on the one hand and the revitalisation of religion as an aspect of post-Socialist nation-building on the other. Both have impacted on urban landscapes and make for a new and variegated presence of public religion. Relative religious freedom has facilitated the growth of minority religions, including those practiced by long-standing, internal religious minorities, and of smaller, newer religions in the region. At the same time, this growth in minority religions is being challenged by the revitalisation of religion as an aspect of post-socialist nation-building and the incumbent re-establishment of religious infrastructure, including grand churches and mosques in the main cities, of official religious education in urban centres, and of religious and national symbolism in urban public spaces (Serrano 2016), all of which mark urban-cum-national landscapes and their national actors as belonging to the majority religion (Wanner 2020). Giving new significance to post-Socialist elites and to the reconfiguration of national identities after socialism, public displays of religious piety and religious processions are often used as tools of maintaining political regimes (Serrano 2015, Koch et al. 2018, Tateo 2020). Within

these frameworks, current debates on the return of religion often remain too bounded in the national heritage paradigms of one specific country and one specific religion. This methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) precludes attending to minority religions and religiously plural environments. Taking a comparative view and systematically investigating religious diversity in urban spaces as a modern condition and everyday experience remain largely unaddressed topics.

Only recently has there been an interest in diverse experiences of urban religious presence and lived religious multiplicity (Burchardt and Becci 2013, 2016, Mahmood 2015, Meyer 2020) as contributing to the construction of urban identities, but this has largely come from research outside the former Soviet world. Emerging research on post-socialist societies offers fruitful ground for further investigation. For example, as mentioned above, research on religious consumption and entrepreneurship (halal shops, pilgrimage infrastructure, faith-based fashion and lifestyle) sees religious observance as going beyond state-sponsored religious institutions and the domestic sphere to become an aspect of modern urban living (McBrien 2009, Stephan-Emmrich 2018, Bissenova 2017, Puppo and Schmoller 2020). Religious pluralization is emerging beyond the mainstream national faiths that are unfolding in urban spaces, producing a set of challenges for local administrations, normative orders and majority perceptions. This includes the negotiation of religion's 'proper' place in the urban environment – another field ripe for investigation.

In general, there is a lack of exploration of religiously diverse experiences in post-socialist cities, and especially in the South Caucasus. These urban centres are arenas for manifestations of multiple faiths and are shaped by both local and global forces, as well as the effects of neoliberal and authoritarian rule. Urban spaces are the sites in which practitioners of multiple faiths, including minority religions, work out their religious lives. They are likewise spaces where claims to national belonging, heritage and property are negotiated

and contested, a complex process, especially in light of the sway of institutionalized religion-state relations and spatial frameworks dominated by the secular authorities and mainstream religions. The institutionalization, regulation, and management of religious plurality on the one hand, and the ways diverse practitioners appropriate their places of worship in post-Soviet cities on the other, reveal novel forms of religious expression and control. In addition, they draw attention to the place-making functions of religious practices as mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion, to the local 'situatedness' of minorities, and to suppressed spiritualities and alternative forms of urban religiosity. Finally, they raise questions about how religious minorities are turned into new 'strangers' in the city, the nature of their symbolic and material resources, and the extent to which their visible or non-visible materiality and religious practices contribute to spiritual co-existence or tensions.

This special issue brings together five fresh ethnographic studies of minority religions in post-Soviet urban spaces, examining the range of negotiations and struggles that practitioners face in the multireligious cities of the South Caucasus. Looking at a variety of religious minorities in Georgia and Azerbaijan, this special issue contributes to debates on faith in post-socialist countries by shifting the gaze to religious minorities, and by looking in particular at urban environments and their power relations. These cities offer fruitful arenas for the study of the dynamic, but often uncertain and nearly always contested nature of religious pluralization in a borderland region. In these post-socialist urban sites, negotiations and struggles for religious spaces merge with the Soviet legacy of secularism, post-industrial cities and national ideologies to create complex terrains for the making and living of religious lives.

Soviet Socialism and its Legacies in Southern Eurasian Cities

While the ideals of socialism were never fully realized, Soviet secularism was remarkably suc-

cessfully in altering religious landscapes in the Caucasus and Central Asia, including the production and expansion of a new kind of secularism. These changes occurred in rural and urban spaces alike, but cities, as sites perceived to be especially ripe for the cultivation of modernity, including the new socialist atheist person, were particularly targeted as loci of transformation and progress.

During the atheist campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s, in both rural and urban areas places of worship and veneration were destroyed or access to them was highly regulated. The same occurred with religious texts and sacred objects. Religious scholars and leaders were persecuted, and for those who remained the space for their learning, teaching and guiding was drastically reduced. Many public rituals and public religious practices were curtailed. The state exerted its newly enshrined legal right to regulate key life-cycle events like the legitimation and regulation of parentage or marriage. Importantly, during these attacks on religion, secular spaces and rituals were also created and expanded (Lane 1981; Luerhmann 2015, Smolkin 2018). For example, education and the sciences were transferred into the domain of the secular and came to be provided and regulated by the state. The position of the atheist was established as a real option within society (Hann, et al. 2006, Wanner 2012: 11, Pelkmans 2014).

The influence of religion in urban spaces was likewise reduced, often through the destruction, alteration and reappropriation of religious buildings. The slow modification and disappearance of certain forms of dress, like the various forms of women's head and face coverings, changed the visual texture of cities, just as the disappearance or limitation of sounds, like the call to prayer or the ringing of church bells, impacted on their aural religious texture. Places of worship were desecrated and in many cases converted to utilitarian purposes. Religious buildings were repurposed and turned into sites for storage, production or education, including as museums for atheist or local history. The Armenian Church in Batumi

and the Blue Mosque in Yerevan, for example, were used as planetariums (Darieva 2016). At the same time, new Soviet cities produced spaces for secular progress, society and belonging. Cities were sites of local, regional and national governments, hubs of scientific research and innovation, centres of culture, and generally loci for the cultivation of a modern way of life, all of which were assumed and intended to be free of religion. In urban places, the production and performance of Soviet secularism, including that of the atheist Soviet person, were particularly strong. At the same time, many museums and educational centres were located in preserved churches and mosques which served as historical monuments, in this way acquiring an ambiguous secular-religious value as part of the urban heritage.

Nevertheless, despite these changes, people across Central Asia and the Caucasus found ways to live their religions in different environments, with slightly more possibilities in the countryside and fewer in urban centres. Deaths were still marked by religious rituals, saints were venerated, and the elderly became the bearers of communal religious practice when the young and middle-aged were less inclined or unable to do so (Dragadze 2003, Grant 2011). Religion and ethno-national belonging became intimately linked such that they became nearly impossible to separate (Khaled 2007, Hann and Pelkmans 2009, McBrien 2017). Anti-religious campaigns impacted on and curtailed religion in various ways. Nevertheless, these campaigns, when combined with other profound social and political processes, also worked to change religion, which continued in unexpected ways. (Steinberg and Wanner 2008, Shtyrkov and Kormina 2015).

When the Soviet Union collapsed and its republics became independent secular nation states, one of the first reforms to be introduced in 1991 was the law of religious freedom. The majority of the post-Soviet states allowed for a greater degree of public religious expression, decreased the regulation of religion, and facilitated greater connection to global religious currents. Yet it was late-socialist religiosity that

continued and flourished immediately in the post-socialist years (McBrien 2017). Continuity in ideas about religion and the nation, which were cultivated over the long socialist period, also persisted long after the ending of the Soviet Union. For example, despite being officially secular states, most post-socialist nations promoted religion as an elemental aspect of national belonging in their national building endeavours (Steinberg and Wanner 2008, Ghodsee 2007, Hann and Pelkmans 2009, McBrien 2017), if in sometimes amorphous, ambient ways (Wanner 2020). Soviet atheism too left important traces in politics, in people's dispositions, and in understandings of everyday life in the post-socialist period (Pelkmans 2017:101).

It would take decades for the contemporary religious plurality to emerge. The diversity resulted from the complex growth of longstanding, majority religions (i.e. Orthodox Christianity and Islam) with the simultaneous arrival of regionally new interpretations of these same religions, like charismatic Protestant churches and the Tablighi Jamaat, and new religious communities like the Hare Krishna (Hann, et. al 2006, Hilgers 2009, Wanner 2012, Pelkmans 2017). Yet despite these temporal and spatial continuities, the resumption of public religious life, the regulation of religious diversity and its relationship with contemporary independent states varied, especially in the cases of Azerbaijan and Georgia under consideration here. Today the continually emerging and changing modes of religious life that grew out of the late socialist and early post-socialist period compete and co-exist with a variety of new aspirations introduced by missionaries and global religious movements.

Urban rhythms after socialism

Cities such as Baku, Tbilisi and Batumi were sites of the Soviet Russian periphery, where post-socialist city planning and urban infrastructures (*microrayon* residential structures, water and electricity supply, roads and communications, green spaces and Soviet cultural centres) uniquely shaped the secularity of public

spaces.¹ While some secularist legacies from the Soviet past persist in these urban spaces, over the last thirty years cities have become vibrant centres of religious life, drawing into question long-held assumptions about the secularising effects of Soviet urbanisation. In the context of new national politics, religion has begun to reshape these bastions of former socialist progress, altering their skylines, rhythms, populations and governance (Humphrey and Skvirskaja 2012).

Among the most profound examples of changes to the urban landscape are the construction of spectacular shrines, churches and mega-mosques in city-centre locations close to giant shopping malls and monolith parking lots (Serrano 2016, Koch et al 2018). The monumental state-funded Holy Trinity Cathedral in Tbilisi, commonly known as the Sameba Church, the Hazret Mosque in Nur-Sultan (former Astana) and the Heydar Mosque in Baku, erected in the 2010s, are prominent examples. This growth in religious urban landscapes is part and parcel of wider trends in urbanization. Urbanity has become the desirable global standard in the twentieth century, and regional metropolises such as Baku or Batumi in the South Caucasus are no different. Since 1991, they have become arenas for prestige projects and nation-branding, based on neo-liberal processes of privatisation that have turned them into attractive sites for new state-sponsored aspirations. In particular, Baku and Batumi, port cities on the Black Sea and the Caspian respectively, have become leaders in implementing new modernising (beautification) projects, at least on the level of shiny materiality. These urban centres aim to achieve global significance, as seen in Baku's new branding as 'the Dubai of the Caspian Sea' (Grant 2014, Valiyev 2014, Darieva 2015).

Radical urban change and the restructuring of urban spaces generated by privatization, includ-

¹ A microrayon is a typical Soviet urban neighbourhood structure with prefabricated five-storey or high-rise residential buildings, wide streets and squares, cheap public transportation, and some recreational facilities and green leisure spots.

ing aggressive market principles and rampant corruption, have marked the everyday landscapes of these cities over the last thirty years. Interestingly, housing, courtyards and recreational spaces are increasingly being shaped not only by the power of the city's 'growth machine' and economic elites (Valiyev 2014), but also by religious actors whose sacred symbols, ritual acts and religious observances, often sponsored by economic elites and initiated by activists, are providing these spaces with new textures. Cities face the demolition of historical buildings and vanishing green spaces, which in many cases in Georgia, like Russia, have been appropriated by the clergy and have become an arena for the exercise of the Georgian Orthodox Church's power, which has the right to seize urban parks and other green areas. Finally, the construction boom has affected the urban skyline of the city not only in terms of the new triumphal aesthetics and urban materiality, but also in respect of shifts in the topography of faith. Religiously grounded urban lifestyles and recreational activities, from diet trends and fashion to media and leisure activity, though in condensed and spatialized forms, nonetheless require an infrastructure to meet the new need for religiously textured forms of consumption.

In addition to these altered physical topographies, the impact of a post-Soviet urban public religion is felt in the constellation of the urban populations and its new kind of religious diversity. For instance, whereas in the pre-Soviet and Soviet periods Christian communities in Azerbaijan were limited to Russian Orthodoxy and the Armenian Apostolic Church, today the scope of Christian religious organizations has widened to include Protestant evangelical churches, among others.² The same is true of Georgia. Religious

² According to the State Committee for Work with Religious Organisations, as of 2017, 136 mosques, eleven churches, three synagogues, two Baha'i community centres and one Krishna community centre had been registered in the capital city, Baku, which has a population of 2.2 million. Nationally, there are approximately 2,250 mosques, thirty churches, seven synagogues and three Baha'i centres. In addition,

minorities provide a new challenge for local authorities in the South Caucasus cities. Some religious minorities in Georgia and Azerbaijan are treated with mistrust by authorities (e.g. so-called 'new' Muslims and Protestants), while others are not (Russian Orthodox Christians and Jews). Post-socialist cities thus become spaces for negotiating and living this religious plurality, where simultaneous closure and openness define uneven interactions between the authorities and religious minorities. For instance, in Baku, the state targets some Islamic prayer houses for restrictive control and persecution (as demonstrated by government officials forcing religious men to have their beards shaved), while it also celebrates its new policy of tolerance by promoting cultural acceptance and offering a staged plan for peaceful cohabitation between those who are perceived as 'traditional' Muslims, Christians and Jews.³ Although both countries have freedom of religion guaranteed in their constitutions, various amendments and restrictions are widely used by local administrations to control religious activities.

Religious minorities themselves face difficulties in maintaining their religious observances in the city, and in building and sustaining the reli-

there are at least 748 sacred folk Islamic and popular pilgrimage sites associated with the healing and veneration of saints (State Committee for Work with Religious Organisations, 2017; see Darieva 2020). In Georgia, while 83 per cent of the population belong to the Orthodox Church, about 11 per cent is made up of Sunni and Shia Muslims, 3 per cent belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church. A further 3 per cent of the population consists of Roman Catholics, Yezidis, Greek Orthodox Christians, Jews and a growing number of non-traditional religious groups, such as Baptists, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, the International Society of Krishna Consciousness and the Baha'i faith (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2018. See www.geostat.de).

³ In authoritarian societies such as Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, there is much fear of 'excessive' and 'foreign' forms of religiosity in public spaces. The 2011 Law on Religious Activities prohibited having previously existing and mainly Muslim prayer rooms in state offices and at public universities in Kazakhstan. In Azerbaijan public manifestations of religious practices have been prohibited outside houses of worship since 2015.

religious infrastructures upon which their religious worlds depend. They tend to lack educational centres and houses of worship, face legal discrimination and are unable to meet the requirements for state and city registration. In various Georgian cities, for example, Muslim, Armenian Apostolic and Catholic communities experience administrative barriers in obtaining construction permits to build new prayer houses or restore existing ones. For instance, despite multiple requests, the City Hall of the religiously mixed city of Batumi has refused to issue a building permit for a new mosque, and the dispute over the construction site remains unresolved. In another example, an attempt by Roman Catholic Georgians to build a new church in the centre of the city of Rustavi proved impossible.

Religious pluralization in the South Caucasus takes different forms, yet it is dominated by a shared history in which majority religions and their incumbent titular ethno-national populations are able to exercise large degrees of power over minority religions on the one hand, and secular projects and actors on the other. In Georgia, for example, the government cooperates closely with the Georgian Orthodox Church to interfere in the activity of alternative religious communities (Rcheulishvili 2015, Serrano 2016). So-called 'non-traditional' faiths, in particular Jehovah's Witnesses and charismatic Protestant churches, are regarded as a 'danger' and 'threat' to national identity or as a bad 'western influence' on local traditions throughout the region.

In this volume, we discuss a variety of issues relating to pluralization, including moves by the state and majority religions to control minority religious practice, as well as the negotiations religious minorities must pursue in their encounters with dominant religious and non-religious settings. Moreover, by utilizing the dual lenses of the urban and the religious, we also attempt to open up new avenues for thinking about the politics of everyday urban life and the meanings of space (Burchardt 2017). In many ways, urban spaces provide stages of observation through which to capture and show how lived religious diversity is

unfolding 'on the ground' (Burchardt and Becci 2013, Knott et al. 2016). Ultimately, our aim is to understand how growing religious plurality in the cities is regulated and experienced by practitioners, how faith-based communities within certain religious traditions re-establish and create their places of prayer and religious ceremonies, what new meanings religious architecture in the city is acquiring, and how religious activities and symbols are incorporated or not incorporated into urban and national narratives. Thus, this special issue aims to provide a nuanced perspective on lived experiences of the religious and the urban, and generally seeks to offer insights into and specific patterns of religious pluralization in the contemporary Caucasus. By taking into account political ideals of management, such as Soviet-style control, we reveal different forms of social exclusion in increasingly autocratic post-socialist societies and a variety of coping strategies of less institutionalised religiosity.

Findings of this collection

This special issue brings together five case studies based on fresh ethnographic research, which examine a range of the negotiations and struggles that are necessary for practicing less-institutionalized religiosity in post-Soviet urban spaces. Looking at a variety of religious minorities in post-Soviet cities in Georgia and Azerbaijan, it argues that these urban spaces are fruitful arenas for studying dynamic religious pluralization in borderland regions, where negotiations and struggles for religious spaces take place in the context of Soviet legacies, contemporary national projects and global urban and capitalist trends.

One of the most striking commonalities across all five papers is that the lives of religious minorities in cities in the South Caucasus are strongly constrained by the influence of majority religions precisely because of the way majority religions are inextricably tied to the titular ethno-national groups and their influence in state bureaucracies, legislation and national politics (Komakhidze). The legacies of Soviet secularism that inadver-

tently tied the two live on and are gaining new ground in contemporary religious and national politics. Moreover, the legacies of Soviet socialism shape the modalities for dealing with plurality and cultural demarcations. Nevertheless, current capitalist flows create new possibilities and new frictions, which interact with, transform and are transformed by these legacies.

Despite the difficulties and uncertainties involved, members of religious minorities develop tactics to make a space for their religious practices by appropriating places of worship and re-establishing their presence in the city. They find creative ways to cope with uncertainty, with limited access to resources and influence, and in light of the competition spurred by religious diversity (Aliyeva, Darieva). Some search for forms of co-existence by playing down ethno-religious difference and developing new patriotic spirits (Aliyeva, Fehlings), thus demonstrating their loyalty to the existing political regime and carefully observing legal regulations. Others seek cooperation with religious 'others' in everyday life, including business interactions, in order to protect themselves through practices of commensality and inclusivity. To create trust and greater acceptance for 'newcomers', they construct themselves as useful partners and peaceful communities in opposition to so-called 'non-traditional' religious communities that are regarded as dangerous and politically motivated.

Religious minorities also play strategically with their visibility or non-visibility, for example, by utilizing private places for worship or avoiding public funds to stay out of sight and thus avoid regulation or being targeted (Darieva, Kamushadze). They practice a fluid religious place-making, using religious places temporarily, or creating multi-religious or semi-religious places to avoid scrutiny or to get around prohibitive registration or building codes (Aliyeva and Komakhidze). The dynamic between visibility and invisibility can change, for example, through the use of buildings that may not have had a religious connection initially, but are subsequently used for religious practices. They practice rituals, like

prayer, in spaces that go beyond traditional and visible houses of worship (Darieva).

Post-Soviet cities have largely been neglected in scholarship on urban religion. Building on case studies in Azerbaijan and Georgia, our aim is to develop a perspective in which urban spaces are seen as tangible sites for the exploration of religious minorities and their life-worlds, as well as being, the other way around, cases in which we can examine how cities are lived and made by religious actors and how these actors, in turn, cultivate uniquely urban forms of religiosity. The five articles presented here discuss the experiences of less institutionalized, but long-standing local minority faiths, as well as new 'strangers' in the city. They attend to the reconfigurations of urban places into religious spaces, the new hierarchical interactions between authorities and religious actors 'on the ground', the legacies of post-Soviet discourses of ethno-religious majority and minorities, and the ways in which secular and religious worlds overlap and confront each other in post-socialist societies.

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