

RELIGION AND THE RE-IDENTIFICATION OF ETHNIC GROUPS

PREFACE TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

The current special issue of the *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* is dedicated to studies of religious and identity changes in post-socialist regions.

The authors grouped together here aim to provide some interpretation to the dynamics of the contemporary religious landscape in Estonia and the Russian north as they appear after the collapse of the Soviet system. The researchers attempt to approach some distinctive features of religious phenomena in multicultural and ethnic urban, rural, taiga and tundra communities.

The obvious actualisation of local ethnic identity, and substitution for the common identity that in some cases comes with it, occurs under the influence of economic factors and the political and socio-religious changes of recent years. However, today it is complicated to speak of the presence of a clearly elaborated identity discourse in the case of several groups that attempt to achieve official status in Russia.

Several recent research projects conducted by the Department of Ethnology at the University of Tartu were related to the problems of new religious developments and identity issues in Russia, especially in the northern regions: the ESF BOREAS programme's project "New Religious Movements in the Russian North: Competing Uses of Religiosity after Socialism" (2006–2009); and the INTAS programme's project "Ethnic Fragmentation and Re-identification as a Form of Social Adaptation of Local Communities (Setus, Ingrian Finns, Pomors, Izhma Komis)" (2006–2008). This collection of articles has benefited from earlier research that generated initial ideas for continuing cooperation in the field.

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