Religious Diversity in Post-Soviet Society. Ethnographies of Catholic Hegemony and the New Pluralism in Lithuania, edited by Milda Ališauskienė and Ingo W. Schröder. Ashgate, 2012. 212 pp., 5 b&w illustrations. £50, ISBN 9781409409120.

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There are several valuable studies of religion in post-Soviet republics, but none including anthropologists and sociologists in the same conversations, and none on Lithuania covering both the Catholic Church and religious minorities. This is why *Religious Diversity in Post-Soviet Society*, jointly edited by a sociologist specializing in new religious movements, Ališauskienė, and an anthropologist well-known for his studies on the Catholic Church, Schröder, is an important addition to the growing body of literature on religion in the former Soviet Bloc countries. What is also original in the volume is the use, as a meeting ground for anthropologists and sociologists, of cognitive tools derived from Italian Marxist political theorist Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), which have been studied in Lithuania before and after the fall of the Soviet regime.

Three concepts of Gramsci offer an orientation to the whole book: hegemony, common sense, and counter-hegemony. Hegemony is perhaps the key idea of Gramsci. Although only occasionally applied to religion, Gramsci's hegemony appears to Schröder "uniquely well-suited for a situation where a dominant institution has established a culture of consensus over time that marginalizes other institutions and cultural expressions" (19). That institution is the Catholic Church, which exerts its dominance by claiming that its role is at the heart of the national identity of Lithuania, and by having this claim accepted by a significant portion of the political elite. This does not mean, nor in fact requires, that the majority of Lithuanians are active Catholics. Only one third of them claims to attend Mass "at least once a month" (7). But the idea that Lithuania is a Catholic country remains rarely challenged.

The second of Gramsci's notions largely used by the book is "common sense." For Gramsci this is the view of the world of the subaltern classes that, although perhaps shared by a majority of citizens of a given country, neces-

sarily remains fragmented and disorganized, and is normally not capable of challenging hegemony. To use Gramsci's common sense as a tool for studying religion is not new. Anthropologists have relied on Gramsci to study folk religiosity and its interaction with mainline religion. Examples of Gramscian common sense in the field of religion have normally been found, in different areas of the world, in "folk practices" whose threat to mainline religions remains merely potential. Although widespread, these common sense practices in fact are comparatively spontaneous and are not codified or promoted by organized social agents. And indeed *Religious Diversity in Post-Soviet Society* contains a chapter in this tradition by Lina Pranaitytė-Wergin (57–77), based on her fieldwork in rural Southern Lithuania focusing on funerals and other practices concerning the dead. Pranaitytė-Wergin finds here "the long-term coexistence of hegemonic and common-sense practices," i.e. of an orthodox Catholicism and a not so orthodox folk religion, without the second challenging the first. Although the author introduces the further category of bricolage, the degree of dissonance between the folk practices and the Catholicism of the parish priests should not be exaggerated. Most practices can be, and indeed appear to have been, domesticated by the Church through a quasi-orthodox interpretation.

There are, however, in the book more original explorations of how common sense interacts with hegemonic Catholicism in Lithuania. In her very important chapter on the New Age milieu in the Baltic country (151–167), Ališauskienė explores two Lithuanian new religious movements, the Academy of Parapsychology founded in 1994 in Vilnius by Vytautas Kazlauskas (who died in 2005) and the group gathering near Druskininkai around Povilas Žėkas and his so-called "pyramid of Merkinė." A key feature of these two groups is that they do not accept the label of new religious movements, and indeed their leaders claim to remain part of the Catholic Church, although perhaps interpreting some of its teaching in a quite unorthodox way. Most of the visitors gathering at the pyramid built by Žėkas regard themselves as good Catholics. The fact that the Catholic Bishops have warned the faithful against the pyramid of Merkinė and other "syncretistic and New Age" (155) phenomena apparently does not deter them. On the one hand, in Lithuania "the disseminators and followers of New Age ideas never effectively challenge the Catholic hegemony..., but rather interpret their beliefs as a kind of popular Catholicism" (165). On the other hand, they slowly build a common sense worldview which dilutes and erodes the hegemony of Catholicism without openly confronting it. In their introduction to the book, the editors explain that, although in 1999 75 per cent of the Lithuanians identified themselves

as Catholics (79 per cent in 2001), “at the same time 43 per cent expressed their belief in reincarnation and 79 per cent in telepathy, 25 per cent believed in the protecting power of a talisman, and 51 per cent were consulting horoscopes” (7). The percentage of those believing in reincarnation may well be the highest in the world in countries with a Christian majority.

These are, in post-Gramscian terms, “hidden transcripts,” as Schröder explains (29), mostly operating “below the surface.” Those openly challenging Catholic hegemony do not fare equally well. Once regarded as a dangerous “cult,” the Pentecostal Word of Faith congregation had won in the last few years some acceptance, but only—as Gediminas Lankauskas reports from his observation of recent developments (99–124)—by tuning down its original anti-Catholicism and even engaging in some tentative dialogue with Catholic priests and parishes. Romuva, a very visible movement advocating a return to Lithuania’s pre-Christian paganism, discussed quite sympathetically in the book by Michael F. Strmiska (125–150), has most recently adopted a strategy of self-legitimization insisting on the similarities between Lithuanian pagan mythology and rites and Hinduism, and establishing a relationship with Hindu organizations in India. Romuva’s founder Jonas Trinkūnas clearly relies on scholarly works about the common Indo-European roots, but Romuva also sees the advantages of the association with one of the great religions of the world, Hinduism, “to strengthen its case for legal recognition as a ‘traditional’ religious community within the current Lithuanian governmental framework” (145). Donatas Glodenis’ excellent analysis (189–204) of a typical Eastern European new religious movement, the White Lotus Movement founded in Ukraine by Vladimir Ivanovich Skubajev, as a syncretistic blend of Buddhism, Western esotericism, Slavic ethno-nationalism and the New Age, shows what may well happen in Lithuania to groups in high tension with the Catholic hegemony. While, in its first years of existence in Lithuania, the movement “avoided confrontation with the hegemonic religious tradition” (203), and “did not seek publicity” (203) for its most esoteric beliefs, once journalists started to expose its true doctrines the White Lotus was not able to sustain itself through the controversy. It closed its Lithuanian spiritual branch, maintaining only its martial arts clubs, with the religious part “de-emphasized” (204).

Egdūnas Račius shows in his chapter (169–188) that ethnic Tatar Muslims—“3235 [individuals] in 2001” (170)—are generally accepted as a sort of curiosity, as they do not challenge in any way the status quo, while the more belligerent recent Lithuanian converts to Islam are much less popular, although they occasionally align themselves with the Catholic Church on

issues such as opposition to same-sex marriage. One would have expected in the book a parallel chapter about what is left of Lithuanian Jews after the Holocaust, and the non-rabbinic and non-Talmudic Jewish community of Karaites (Karaim) in Trakai, which is also perceived as not threatening to the status quo and even cherished as a tourist attraction. Unfortunately, Lithuanian Jews and Karaites are not discussed in an otherwise quite comprehensive volume.

The third concept the book borrows from Gramsci is counter-hegemony. But the book applies it negatively, in the sense that it shows that all attempts at creating a counter-hegemony challenging the cultural dominance of the Catholic Church in recent Lithuanian history failed, as Arūnas Streikus shows in his historical chapter (37–55). For all its power, even the Soviet Union did not manage to eradicate the Catholic hegemony in Lithuanian culture. And, having successfully resisted the Soviet pressure, the Catholic Church emerged at the independence with a renewed prestige and moral authority.

Yet, all is not well for the Catholic Church in present-day Lithuania. Not only, as the introductory chapter explains, “since the mid-1990s, the initial enthusiasm for all kinds of religion has ebbed significantly” (7), a common phenomenon in post-communist countries. But the Catholic Church, specifically, although still successful in maintaining a symbolic hegemony, has to accept the fact that only a minority of Lithuanians—less than one third—now attend Mass with some regularity, and that secular ideas about morals, politics, and even spirituality are becoming predominant in the main urban areas. In addition to the folk religious common sense, Schröder suggests in his chapter about an “elusive religious field in Lithuania” (79–98), a secular common sense is now at work in Lithuania, and the country is becoming a “secular Catholic society” (93).

The reference to a religious field comes, of course, from Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002). He is another frequent presence in the book, although reconciling Gramsci and Bourdieu may appear as a sort of *tour de force*. However, it is precisely through Bourdieu’s idea of a “misrecognition” of the real hierarchies operating in a certain society (80) that Schröder is able to propose a paradoxical view of religion in present-day Lithuania. Catholicism as a set of beliefs is losing momentum. Why this exactly happened has several explanations, some an increasingly globalized Lithuania shares with other European countries, some peculiar to the local situation. Schröder suggests that in Soviet times the Church created for itself a protective shield, from which it later became quite difficult to emerge in a democratic society. The Catholic hierarchies are aware of this problem, and have tried several different strate-

gies to persuade Lithuanians that the Church has still something to say on post-Soviet and post-modern daily life, but the success remains somewhat elusive. Yet, “this elusiveness of Catholicism as a belief does not affect the societal role of the Catholic Church to the extent that could be expected” (95). As long as counter-hegemonic processes consistently fail, the Catholic hegemony continues in Lithuania, weakened as it may be.