

BOOK REVIEWS

BOOK REVIEW: THEORY, TRADITION AND TEACHING: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CONCEPT WORK

Jackson, Jason Baird. 2025. *Concept Work: Constructing Frameworks for Folklore Studies*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. 204 pages.

The histories of disciplines and their landmarks can be viewed in different ways. Usually, we think about pioneering scholars and their grand monographs, leading the way and sometimes laying the foundation for certain schools or trends. Often, great scholars become legends; we might know their standing in international scholarship, but we hardly think about where exactly they studied or made their professional careers. There are only a few academic centres in the world of folkloristics that stand out high above the many others and have, through the decades, guided the discipline. The Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology at Indiana University is one such legendary environment where folklore studies have thrived and continue to thrive, with an impact that goes far beyond American folkloristics. Jason B. Jackson is one of the former folklore students at Indiana University and today is among its distinguished folklorists – the Ruth N. Halls Professor of Folklore and Anthropology and the current president of the American Folklore Society.

His new book offers insight into the state of the art and current trends in folklore scholarship at Indiana University, as well as the theoretical and methodological developments unfolding in the 2020s. As the alma mater of multiple PhD students, the monograph also sheds light on possible future trends and tradition dominants in scholarship – folklore scholarship in the making. It is a book about a set of new, incipient, and rising concepts in folkloristics, i.e. paradigms, categories and guiding ideas characterised by Jackson as “markers of professional identity” (p. 6) and epistemic tools that are “interme-

diate between broad theories and empirical and, sometimes, applied and public-facing engagements” (p. 7). The book deepens and expands the conceptual terrain mapped in the earlier manual *Eight Words for the Study of Expressive Culture* (Feintuch 2003), which covered the keywords group, art, text, genre, performance, context, tradition and identity. As Jackson notes, while he admires and values theorymaking, he shares Dorothy Noyes’s (2008) “humble theory” orientation. The outcome is a book that relies strongly on disciplinary history, draws inspiration from adjacent fields, and is both theoretical and remarkably accessible, a combination that is rare in academic writing.

The first chapter opens the topic of colonialism, which has emerged as one of the major concerns and research foci in 21st-century folkloristics. It uses the example of tale type ATU 927C* (Uther 2004) about measuring ground with an ox hide. Among Native American peoples, it has been a story about the dishonesty of white colonisers as they purchase a piece of land from the locals, to be measured with the size of an animal skin. Through trickery, the hide is cut into a long strip, and a huge area is encircled. Often, the classical international novelle tale is told as a true story to address historical injustice. Jackson analyses the tale in comparative context and engages with classical scholarship, such as the works of Jacob Grimm and James Frazer, who have shown the connection of this storyline to ancient systems of measurement. The chapter reveals differences between the etic and emic frames of interpretation. For scholars, the story is an example of diffusion, adaptability, and the persistence of narrative

plots. According to Hans-Jörg Uther (2004: 566), the oldest version of the tale is found in the ancient Indian text *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, an early source about Indian mythology from around 700 BCE. For tradition carriers, the story is oral history about unfair treatment and oppression. Jackson shows how sensitive consideration of indigenous perspectives enables us to understand the meanings of colonisation.

The next chapter (coauthored with Johannes Müske and Lijun Zhang) addresses the concepts of innovation, habitus and heritage and takes the reader into large-scale processes of cultural change and transformation, offering a heuristic tool for analysis. The examples and schemes presented show the dynamism between cultural innovation, normative culture and heritage. Heritage in this chapter emerges as a central concept in metacultural discourses today and a focal point of cultural awareness during the age of modernity.

The third chapter offers an extensive and critical discussion of cultural appropriation as a current global phenomenon. Jackson approaches the concept, outlining its emergence and relationship with kindred concepts of cultural change: diffusion, acculturation and assimilation. Appropriation refers to a situation in which “the powerful group takes aspects of the culture of the subordinated group, making them its own” (p. 74). Cultural appropriation is always marked by the aggrievement of the group that is colonised or marginalised. The examples that Jackson provides concern clothing and adornment – cases “of ‘playing’ embodied identities that are not our own” (p. 82). Useful additions for understanding cultural appropriation are ideal typological schemes that illustrate modes of cultural circulation (p. 75) and of global transformations of culture and property (p. 88). The chapter offers a subtle, thoughtful and ethical manifesto to “foster more sensitive and respectful forms of intercultural contact and cultural change” (p. 91).

As I think about the history of the concept of appropriation, the discussion also illustrates how meanings shift over time and

how flexible words become as we load them with theoretical weight. Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), used ‘appropriation’ to refer to the creative tactics through which people transform, use, and sometimes subvert cultural forms produced by dominant institutions. Instead of being passive consumers, people thus become active users and creative agents. In this sense, appropriation has also become a concept in discussing local and indigenous responses to colonisation (see Dijkstra 2021: 8–10). Jackson’s chapter focuses on different cases and warning examples of cultural encounters of domination, abuse and boundary transgressions.

The fourth chapter addresses the macrosociological theory of world-systems, formulated by Immanuel Wallerstein (1930–2019), and its potential applications in folkloristics (Wallerstein 2004). On one hand, Jackson shows the usefulness of Wallerstein’s conceptual tools for folklore studies, focusing on the notions of households, semiproletarian status, national identity and colonisation (pp. 107–111). On the other hand, Jackson expands Wallerstein’s approach to disciplinary history and his formulation of historical social science as a single discipline by adding folkloristic and ethnological perspectives. The chapter is a call for crossdisciplinary dialogue and exchange, considering not only theories and methods but also institutional cooperation within the academy.

The fifth chapter provides a context for all the preceding discussions and, once again, indicates the implied audience: folklore students and fellow folklorists engaged in shaping the theoretical framework of the discipline and its range of research topics. Jackson offers an insider’s perspective on the curriculum and teaching practices of folkloristics at Indiana University. He outlines the history and contents of one of the basic classes, “Folklore Theory in Practice”, which was established (under a different title) by Richard Dorson (1916–1981), the founder of the folklore department, and later developed and transformed by Henry Glassie, Jason B.

Jackson, Ray Cashman, and others. Jackson reflects on the key topics, problems, and conceptual foci of the class, shedding light on the basic features of folkloristics at Indiana University, which has for over four decades been a flagship site of the “communication-centred, context-minded paradigm” (p. 142), which today also dominates international folkloristics. Jackson’s relationship with the history of the discipline and former scholarship is deeply engaged and intellectually generous. He offers a brief survey of the basic readers and texts in his folklore class, mainly representing US folkloristics, but he is well aware of the international scope of today’s folkloristics. *Concept Work* offers cross-disciplinary perspectives, although it can also be seen as an instrument for promoting disciplinary identities.

In the spring semester of 2026, we are using the book as the basic reader in the PhD seminar of folkloristics and ethnology at the University of Tartu. 15 young scholars participate in the seminar, and their research topics range from the formation of folklore archives to placelore, humour, folklore about technology, vernacular knowledge and death culture, from heavy metal and instrumental folk music to textile design, tattoo culture, heritage studies, and beyond. Their research addresses a variety of cultures and subcultures in Belarus, China, Estonia, Finland, India, Latvia, Lithuania, Mongolia, South Africa, Tibet and Ukraine. How easy would it be to find a common reader that fits this intradisciplinary range, inspiring students and bringing them together for reflection and discussion? Jason B. Jackson’s *Concept Work* manages this challenge very well. Even though the roots of the book are in American folkloristics – and in the academic traditions of Indiana University in particular –, it is a contribution to folkloristics and ethnology as a rapidly developing international field.

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Mieder, Wolfgang. 2025. *Worth a Thousand Words: Cultural, Literary and Political Proverb Studies*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi. 401 pages.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14325/mississippi/9781496858283.001.0001>.

Wolfgang Mieder's new book addresses old and contemporary proverbs through several overarching dimensions: politics, literature, culture and American identity. The book consists of 13 very diverse chapters and at times resembles a 17th century cabinet of curiosities, as it amalgamates so many interesting artefacts that are brought together under a very broad umbrella of proverbs. Another thing that unites many of the topics and ideas that can be found in the book is the author's personal interest: as he notes himself in the Introduction, "some chapters have a personal meaning for me" (p. 4). This makes the book more relatable for the reader as examples from politics, literature, history and other somewhat elevated spheres of life are interspersed with personal anecdotes, and references to family matters and everyday life.

The backbone of the book consists of two substantial and interrelated quests. The first is Mieder's search for the origins of proverbs. As he analyses particular examples, he traces their origins from the first recorded mentions, some of which might be in the Bible or in the ancient Roman texts, while others can be derived from famous peoples' speeches or from literature. The second quest is the exploration of the historical trajectories of proverbs. Mieder carefully looks into translations and adaptations of proverbs, their changes as they travel through time and space, and in some cases into the causes of their abandonment if the proverbs are no longer in use. He also efficiently argues against the idea that all proverbs are pieces of old wisdom by pointing out that "the time of proverb making is by no means over!" (p. 5). In the Introduction Mieder also uncovers the rationale for studying proverbs: according to him, they reflect the worldview of the society that has created and shared them (pp. 6–7).

Apart from the Introduction, the volume contains four sections: "American Proverbs", "Proverbs in Politics", "Proverbs in Literature" and "Proverbs in Culture". The first section starts with a chapter titled "'Think Outside the Box': The Wisdom and Nature of American Proverbs". In this chapter Mieder both comments on the increasingly globalised environment that proliferates the spread of proverbs and looks for "truly American" proverbs, i.e. those proverbs that originate in the USA (he remarks that these are mainly proverbs of different groups who had migrated to America, as unfortunately very few proverbs of indigenous people have been collected, p. 21). He also comments on the defining features of contemporary settler American proverbs – their relative brevity (seven words on average) and the decline of their didactic nature (p. 31). The second chapter, "'Proverbs Are Worth a Thousand Words': The Global Spread of American Proverbs", takes a closer look at the ways some American proverbs have metaphorically conquered the world. With the help of his international colleagues, Mieder has done impressive work searching for analogues of several American proverbs in 29 other languages. He acknowledges the role of the media in their worldwide spread and emphasises the increased speed of this spread in contemporary societies. The third chapter focuses on a single proverbial topic, namely, friendship. It is titled "'A Friend (Not) in Need Is a Friend Indeed': Friendship in Old, Modern and Anti-Proverbs", and as the title suggests, it analyses not only proverbs but also anti-proverbs, i.e. "parodied, twisted, or fractured proverbs that reveal humorous or satirical speech play with traditional proverbial wisdom" (Mieder 2004: 28; see also Litovkina et al. 2021). The analysis of proverbs and anti-proverbs on

this topic concludes with emphasis on their significance in modern, and also future, societies. The final chapter of this section, “Freedom Is Not Given, It Is Won’: Democratic Principles in Modern American Proverbs”, draws the link between the core values of contemporary society – freedom and democracy – and their reflections in American proverbs. It cites several well-known American politicians and traces how some of their slogans became proverbial (cf. Obelkevich 2015 on slogans and proverbs).

The section on proverbs in politics opens with Chapter 5, “Do unto Others as You Would Have Them Do unto You’: The Humanistic Value of Proverbs in Sociopolitical Discourse”. The chapter contains an important message that proverbs can be, and in fact are, as “contradictory as life itself” (p. 90) and “are not based on a logical philosophical system” (ibid.), but nonetheless carry humanistic value as illustrated by their use in inspiring political speeches. The next chapter, “Freedom Is Indivisible’: John F. Kennedy’s Reliance on Proverbs”, again uses a zoom-in technique and analyses the proverbs in John F. Kennedy’s speeches. Mieder notes that “Kennedy was clearly fond of formulaic statements based on parallelism and antithesis” (p. 124) and cites ample examples to illustrate this idea. In Chapter 7 the author to some extent moves away from the predominantly American context that informed many of the previous chapters. The chapter is titled “*Concordia domi, foris pax*’: Willy Brandt’s Non-German Proverbial Rhetoric”. Mieder shows how skilfully Brandt wove not only German, but also English proverbs into his rhetoric and claims that Brandt familiarised Germans with several American proverbs (p. 187).

The next section, “Proverbs in Literature”, starts with a chapter on proverbs in a masterpiece of Spanish literature. The title “Stringing Proverbs Together’: The Proverbial Language in Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*” already implies that the analysis will not focus on single proverbs, but on the use of their compilations by the characters in *Don Quixote*, primarily Sancho Panza. Indeed,

Mieder reestablishes Sancho Panza’s reputation as a wise fool (cf. Close 1973) by showing that his prolific use of proverbs – often piled on top of one another – is in fact an indicator of his wisdom and humour. Chapter 9, “All Roads Lead to ‘Perverbs’’: Harry Mathews’s Selected Declarations of Dependence”, will be especially interesting for those who speak French and German as some curious examples from literature in these languages remain untranslated. However, most of the chapter focuses on the English-language work of American novelist, poet and translator Harry Mathews titled *Selected Declarations of Dependence* (1977), chosen by Mieder because it skilfully dissects proverbs and combines their parts in various ways, playing with the reader’s imagination and expectations. The section’s final chapter “Black Is Beautiful’: Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi’s Proverbial Autobiography Destined to Witness (1999)” uncovers the masterful use of proverbs in the autobiography of this Afro-German migrant journalist to the USA and shows that not only Massaquoi himself but also his mother were fluent in proverbial language. Mieder takes particular interest in the ways in which Massaquoi’s multi-ethnic and multi-lingual background has affected his use of proverbs.

The opening chapter of the “Proverbs in Culture” section is titled “You Have to Kiss a lot of Frogs Before You Meet Your Handsome Prince’: From Fairy-Tale Motif to Modern Proverb”. It is situated on the crossroads of paremiology and fairy tale studies as it researches the motif of kissing a frog in the Frog King fairy tale type (ATU 440) and the above-mentioned proverb. The motif is nearly absent in German versions of the tale but present in the American versions, a fact that inspires Mieder’s conclusion that “the proverb is not so much a ‘reduction’ of the fairy tale but rather an imprecise (!) ‘allusion’ or reminiscence to it” (p. 326). Chapter 12, “The Word (and Phrase) Detective’: A Proverbial Tribute to OED Editor John A. Simpson”, is dedicated to one of the key compilers of the Oxford English Dictionary, who also published the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of*

Proverbs (Simpson 1982) and an autobiography titled *The Word Detective: Searching for the Meaning of It All at the Oxford English Dictionary* (Simpson 2016). Mieder draws upon both Simpson's study of proverbs and his skilful use of proverbs in the autobiography to show that he used proverbs not only to compile the dictionary but also to make his writing more vivid and relatable. The final chapter of the book is titled "'Injustice Anywhere Is a Threat to Justice Everywhere': From Classical to Modern Law Proverbs". Similarly to the third chapter on friendship, this chapter singles out proverbs on a particular topic that has indeed inspired a lot of proverbs in the Western world and beyond (Pirie 2021). Mieder shows that many of the proverbs on legal issues stem from the classical and medieval periods, although new proverbs on this topic have continued to be created and used in modern times.

The book allows its reader to explore the world of proverbs from different angles, such as outstanding personalities, pertinent topics and seminal works of literature. Much of the data analysed in the book derives from American literature and folklore, though references to German, British, French, Spanish and other cultures also appear in the volume. The prevalence of American data reflects both the author's personal circumstances as an immigrant American scholar and the dominant position of American culture in the globalised world. Mieder, nonetheless, does not attempt to extrapolate his conclusions onto the entire world of proverbs but rather embeds them in the contextual information relevant to the particular case studies that he describes. Newcomers to the field of paremiology may be perplexed by some of the terminology and may wonder about the difference between proverbs, proverbial sayings, proverbial phrases, proverbial expressions and maxims (all of which are used extensively in the book), as well as about questions such as when anti-proverbs become – or fail to become – proverbs. While the book does not give ready-made answers to these questions, it stimulates readers' curiosity and encour-

ages them to engage more deeply in the study of proverbs. Therefore, I suggest that *Worth a Thousand Words: Cultural, Literary and Political Proverb Studies* would be a welcome addition to folklorists' and cultural scholars' shelves as well as a welcoming introduction for anyone who is developing an interest in proverbs.

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BOOK REVIEW: *FAMILY, SEX AND FAITH: THE BIOPOLITICS OF
THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH*

Kolstø, Pål. 2025. *Family, Sex and Faith: The Biopolitics of the Russian Orthodox Church*. Ithaca, NY: Northern Illinois University Press. 324 pages. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501779435>.

Pål Kolstø has written a book that sheds light on the concerns of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) with the private sphere, including marriage, divorce, child upbringing, domestic violence, reproduction and sexuality. He interprets these issues through Michel Foucault's (2007 [2004]: 1; 2020 [1976]: 138–141) notion of biopolitics and maintains that the ROC's involvement in the private sphere is deeply entangled with law, politics and ideology in Putin's Russia. Fieldwork in Russia was limited; instead Kolstø surveys church documents, secondary literature, the Church's online publications and public statements by key figures. This study will be useful for anyone interested in the production of narratives by the ROC, guidelines for church members, and the normative statements, writings and actions of activists. However, it is weak on lived practice, on the reception of normative ethics by individual believers, and on dynamics at the level of the family and parish. The studies of specific communities and regions and in-depth interviews would have strengthened this research.

Chapter 1 focuses on biopolitics, a discursive regimentation of sexual behaviour, as a theoretical framework for the book. However, the concept has only limited interpretative potential in the following chapters. Chapter 2, "Confessions and Confessors", examines the institutions of confessors (*dukhovniki* and *mladostartsy*), who impose conservative values on believers. The data Kolstø uses seem more relevant to the 1990s than to the first quarter of the 21st century. I am not convinced that the practices he describes can be treated as typical mechanisms for regulating most believers' intimate lives, because regular one-to-one communication with an authoritative *dukhovnik* or *starets* is an elite phenomenon. The majority of believers participate in rou-

tine confession before communion, which often does not delve deeply into a believer's life. Research on contemporary practices is lacking.

Chapters 3–5 deal with marriage, feminism and sexuality. While the book does not explicitly use feminist ethics, it provides numerous examples showing how widespread misogynistic views are among the clergy and hierarchy – striking, given that the majority of church members are women. On the other hand, the book includes examples of women expressing dissent or questioning authoritative positions (p. 97). Likewise, it demonstrates a male bias in discussions of cases where clergy take the side of frustrated men married to overzealous neophyte women who interpret canons on sexual abstinence too rigorously (p. 99). Sex, as a crucible between chastity and hierarchy, clearly reveals the strongly patriarchal stance of the ROC. Yet, it remains unclear on what level patriarchy operates: as doctrine, practice or discourse?

The general point Kolstø makes in these chapters concerns the porous boundary between the private sphere and ecclesial authority: the Church seeks to provide guidelines and to enforce them through pastoral guidance and confession. "The priest is not only allowed, but, it seems, also expected to ask questions, even rather probing ones" (p. 102).

Chapter 6, on juvenile justice, offers a balanced and well-informed account of the legislative debates on family violence, focusing on key actors, debates and documents. Kolstø points out that the very notion of domestic or family violence contradicts the ROC's view of the family as the "small church", an institution in which children are naturally protected. He distinguishes between conservative and

moderate critics of the law and traces shifts in positions between the early 2000s and 2015. Within the discourse analysed, legal intervention in family life is framed as destructive.

Chapter 7 addresses violence against intimate partners. As noted in Chapter 6, the Church objects to the use of the terms ‘family violence’ and ‘domestic violence’, as the Patriarchal Commission on Family, Motherhood and Children states unequivocally: “these expressions should not be used in state regulations at all” (Luk’yanova 2018). Kolstø begins with statements by moderates, including Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeev), who opposed the decriminalisation of violence in close relationships. The book presents evidence of domestic abuse cases and cites the well-known statements by priest Andrey Tkachev, who advised parishioners on how to deal with ‘insubordinate’ wives. Kolstø surveys discussions in liberal Orthodoxy and beyond, pointing to widespread victim-blaming and anti-feminist attitudes among the clergy. As elsewhere, however, he allows cases to accumulate without always fully theorising their implications, and a critical approach to gender violence is missing.

Chapter 8 deals with abortion. Kolstø follows scholars in religious studies and anthropology who have examined the ROC’s pro-life campaigns. He emphasises the contrast between the ROC’s ‘heavy artillery’ in opposing abortion and the relatively lukewarm response of the Russian state to calls for prohibition. Despite strong moral and religious arguments, abortion rates remain among the highest in the world.

Chapter 9 examines family planning. Even before the pandemic and the war, the ROC actively promoted large families using demographic arguments. Methods of family planning and the organisations supporting them are portrayed as suspicious and anti-Russian; questioning large families (*mnogodetnyye sem’i*) is deemed non-Orthodox, and the childfree movement is presented as scandalous. While Kolstø engages with major debates, in the final section, he relies too heavily on particularly extreme figures such

as Irina Medvedeva and Tatiana Shishova, who voice ultra-conservative views and do not represent mainstream views.

Chapter 10 addresses LGBTQIA+ rights, demonstrating that homosexuality is one of the least controversial moral issues within the ROC. The Church resolutely opposes any attempt to present such behaviour as a norm, and even more strongly as an object of pride. This monolithic stance contrasts sharply with theological revisionism among liberal Western Orthodox thinkers (Arentzen et al. 2022). At the same time, recent sexual scandals involving ROC hierarchs, such as Hilarion (Alfeev), illustrate discrepancies between official positions and private behaviour.

Chapter 11 turns to sex education in schools. Kolstø writes (p. 189):

The Orthodox activists maintained that the introduction of sex education in schools would not only have a negative impact on the moral and ethical integrity of young people but also, and no less important, it would be ruinous for the future of the entire population.

However, this contradicts survey evidence suggesting that most parents in Russia support sex education. Kolstø interprets opposition to sex education as part of a broader biopolitical struggle (p. 190), linking it with Western values and framing it as anti-Russian and anti-Orthodox. As an alternative, the subject of ‘family studies’ is promoted for grades 10–11, so far mainly at the regional level. Textbooks are authored by Orthodox activists, some connected to controversial figures such as Sergei Romanov, a spiritual leader in a female convent near Yekaterinburg who is currently serving a prison sentence for inciting hatred and encouraging suicide. Although presented as non-confessional, the course aims to “prepare high school students for creating strong, happy families by introducing them to a system of family values that are traditional for our Fatherland” (p. 197). These textbooks often promote non-scientific and ultra-conservative views (such as teleology, a pseudo-scientific theory that the wom-

an's body 'remembers' her previous partners and that this has genetic consequences for her children), sometimes diverging even from the ROC's official Social Concept, which does not display an adamant position on the use of contraceptives and does not promote telogony.

After these eleven chapters, the reader is left with an impression of highly intrusive moral governance in contemporary Russia, evoking associations with the dystopian world of *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood 1985). Chapter 12, however, complicates this picture. This chapter is based on the LegitRuss 2020 survey conducted by the Russian Public Opinion Research Centre as part of a project led by the author. It stands out as the only chapter addressing social attitudes that might reflect, or correlate with, normative moral theology. On key moral issues such as abortion, premarital sex and divorce, self-identified Orthodox believers differ only slightly – or not at all – from the general population (p. 214). In some cases (for example, attitudes to spanking children and wife-beating), Orthodox respondents are even less tolerant than the unchurched (p. 216). Surveys also show a lukewarm response to the introduction of religion in schools.

Two seemingly contradictory conclusions emerge. First, Kolstø argues that the agreement between public opinion and ROC teaching does not necessarily indicate the Church's influence; rather, the Church may be reproducing dominant social attitudes (p. 213). Second, he concludes that the ROC is out of step with its own flock and has failed to impose its social-conservative agenda (p. 215). These points, and the survey analysis more broadly, would benefit from deeper discussion. Key questions remain: what is the purpose of the ROC's discourse, and who is its primary audience, society or the state? If it targets ordinary believers, why is its impact so limited? Could it instead function as an ideology aimed at ruling elites?

The study of Orthodox family ethics, in my view, requires grounded, grassroots research using diverse methods. Even within internet-

based research, more innovative approaches could be employed, such as analysing discussion groups, online forums, high-traffic sites, user engagement or book sales.

Chapter 13 situates family ethics in a broader global context. Kolstø analyses the ROC's discourse on 'traditional values' as addressing both domestic and international audiences. He observes that the opposition between individual (or human) rights and collective rights associated with the Church and family reflects an ideological mixture rooted in the conservative turn of the late 1930s, when earlier Bolshevik ideas of collective child-rearing were abandoned. Drawing on Oleg Kharkhordin's (1999) study of the individual and the collective in Russia, he highlights slippages between notions of the community and the state. At the same time, he acknowledges persistent suspicion toward state institutions, especially evident in debates on family violence legislation. The result is a paradox: while the family is presented as foundational to the national community, it must also be "protected from encroachments from outside, not least from overweening state authorities" (p. 233).

In his conclusion, Kolstø engages with dominant interpretations of contemporary ROC narratives, including 'traditional values', bringing together key themes: discrepancies between norms and reality, the relationship between community, nation and state, and the alignment of conservative religious rhetoric with authoritarian political frameworks.

However, the argument that the Orthodox campaign for traditional values has been absorbed into Putin's ideological agenda is not entirely new, and several questions raised in the book remain unresolved. In particular, the gender dimension is less convincing. The analysis of normative statements about women's roles does not sufficiently engage with extensive scholarship on Russian feminism and post-Soviet debates on women's emancipation (Murav'yeva 2014; Gradskova 2020; Davidenko and Utkina 2024). Likewise, the suggestion that modern working women

broadly support patriarchal gender models risks oversimplification.

Nevertheless, Kolstø's study provides a substantial body of material and offers a useful foundation for future research on the politics of family values and the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in shaping debates on gender, sexuality and social order in contemporary Russia.

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