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## Preface

The public debates about religious diversity and the challenges it poses to contemporary Lithuanian society began in the nineties when conditions to practice one's freedom of religion were formed and the state turned towards democratization, along with the other countries of the post-communist bloc. One might remember the public debates about the Word of Faith, Krishna Consciousness or the Unification Church, often called the Moonies, their alleged harm to the community and the individual. In around 2000, Lithuanian public debates on so-called non-traditional religious activities and their threat increased again, but eventually they subsided. The beginning of negotiations for accession to the European Union marked a new trend in the debates on religious diversity. This new trend is the context of human rights that has formed and is a new topic for discussion about religious tolerance and religious discrimination. In the context of Lithuanian scientists, these topics drew attention to the religious minority communities in a society in which the dominant religious community was the Roman Catholic Church. In 2011 the Ashgate (UK) publishing house published a book on religious diversity in post-Soviet society in Lithuania that was edited by Milda Ališauskienė and Ingo W. Schröder. This book concluded that in Lithuania Catholicism became the background for the discourse on religion and morality, secularism and diversity. How can analysis of the problem of religious diversity be possible and what directions should it take within this discourse? Lithuanian scholars are still searching for the answers to this and other questions.

In the period of 2013–2014 a group of scholars led by Milda Ališauskienė carried out the Lithuanian Research Council's project "Awareness of Religious Diversity in Lithuania: Alternative Forms of Religiosity". The project received funding on the basis of a first-ever invitation for groups of scholars to have their cultural development projects published. The aim of the project was to increase awareness of religious diversity with the help of academic and artistic knowledge and to boost its dissemination within Lithuanian society with the aim of promoting social inclusion and the development of religious tolerance. The project's participants were scholars and artists who performed studies on religious diversity based on historical, sociological and anthropological perspectives and from the perspective of visual sociology. This issue of the journal *Culture and Society* is dedicated to the presentation of the results of this project.

The first articles of this journal analyze and present the theoretical discussions of religious diversity, alternative religions and their expressions in

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contemporary societies. Ingo W. Schröder examines the ongoing debate about the phenomenon of religious diversity, its expression and controversy within the contemporary anthropological field. The author argues that the analysis of power relations between the state, religious organizations and the political system in a given society is crucial for the understanding of the expression of religious diversity and its public perception. Rasa Pranskevičiūtė in her article discusses the formation of a socio-cultural, spiritual search for alternatives in the post-communist region. The author claims that after the rise of religious life, or activation of the so-called “traditional” religions in the post-communist societies in the 20th century, later the religious processes in these societies corresponded to the religious processes taking place in Western societies.

In the following pages of this issue of *Culture and Society* move the debates about the challenges of religious diversity into the Lithuanian context. Aušra Pažeraitė in her article examines the phenomenon of the Catholic majority in Lithuania. The author argues that pragmatism determines being a part of the Catholic majority in Lithuania, i.e., not for the benefit of existential issues, but for the symbolic capital and provided benefits. Milda Ališauskienė and Gintarė Markauskaitė examine how online media portals in Lithuania represent religious diversity. The authors argue that Lithuanian media in texts about religious diversity usually focus on so-called non traditional religious communities, their negative representations, and marginalize and stigmatize these groups. Empirical data suggests that the researched media participated in the construction and maintenance of the process of Catholic hegemony in Lithuania. Eglė Aleknaitė examines a contemporary religious phenomenon – Neoshamanism – and its relationship with the modern media. The author reveals the importance of films in the practice of Neoshamanism. These films become an alternative to written sources, and thanks to them Neoshamans become familiar with history of Neoshamanism, its practice and begin to identify themselves with it.

The last part of this issue is dedicated to works by young sociologists. In her article “The Emergence of the Context and Role of Social NGOs that Generate Income in the Lithuanian Welfare State,” Živilė Kėrytė discusses the emergence of the context of social NGOs generating income and conditions of their activity in Lithuania. Marius Kalantaš article “Institutional Change of Labor Relations in Lithuania from the Viewpoint of Institutional Actors” focuses on labor relations from the new institutionalist perspective. He analyzes the formal regulation of hiring, firing and working conditions, the informal institutions of hiring, firing and working conditions, wage setting, employee collective representation and labor market policy instruments. In her article entitled “Social Representations of Non-Monogamous Practices in the Internet Comments of the News Portal *lyttas.lt*” Darja Lyzenko analyses how non-monogamy is represented in online comments.

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