Making the New Post-Soviet Person: Moral Experience in Contemporary Moscow. By Jarrett Zigon. Leiden: Brill, 2010. viii, 257 pp. Bibliography. Index. $167.00, hard bound.

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In *Making the New Post-Soviet Person*, Jarrett Zigon takes us into the moral worlds of Putin-era city dwellers, Muscovite by Muscovite. Zigon's book is an intimate look into the moral conceptions and personal experiences of five inhabitants of Russia's biggest city against the backdrop of rapid social change.

This is a project undergirded by a theoretical approach to the anthropology of morality that Zigon has developed in a series of recent publications. Zigon is most interested here in how individual people "actually conceive of and articulate morality" (19) and sees people's moral narratives as keys to gaining some access to their "embodied morality" (25), a set of largely unreflective moral dispositions accumulated over a lifetime of experience. Thus, although he sees morality as partially social in origin, Zigon's focus in this book remains squarely on individuals and their "moral worlds" (3). In theory, this is a de-centering move, designed to challenge essentialist conceptions of societal morality and make apparent the "range of possibilities" (242) for shaping moral personhood and experience in a given society. It is particularly apropos in the Post-Soviet context, which has intensified normal processes of "moral breakdown" (29) in which people consciously question and reflect upon their usually unremarked upon moral dispositions.

Correspondingly, Zigon presents us with five "moral portraits" (44) drawn mainly from lengthy interviews about morality and moral dilemmas. All of Zigon's interlocutors might loosely be described as middle class, and most were in their late twenties to mid- thirties at the time of his research in 2002-2003. We meet Olya (Chapter 2), a 28-year old Orthodox believer and teacher, whose God-centered morality strongly resonates with the teachings of the church. We also meet her best friend Larisa (Chapter 3), a young professional who once struggled to be a "good person" (76) from an Orthodox perspective, but eventually finds a comfort zone in "the public discourse of capitalist morality" (87), which values bluffing as a way of getting ahead. A chapter devoted to their friendship and their views on lying in the workplace once they begin working together (Chapter 4) makes vivid both the different moral orientations available in contemporary Moscow and the processes of intersubjective understanding that make connection possible across difference. A third young woman, Anna, a secretary and poet, exhibits yet another moral orientation, centered on a vision of the family as the foundation for a moral and happy life (Chapter 6).

The other two portraits showcase people whose moral influences have shifted significantly over time. Dima, the only man of the group, is an ethnic Armenian in his mid- 30s (Chapter 5). Once a heavy participant in the 1990s drug culture and member of the Hari Krishna, Dima eventually became a professional in an international AIDS prevention program. Aleksandra Vladimirovna, Zigon's oldest interlocutor at 51, passed through phases as a Party member devoted to the Moral Code of the Builders of Communism and a participant in the spirituality groups of the late 1980s-early 1990s (Chapter 7). By the 2000s, she is a staunch member of the Orthodox church who cites obedience to God's laws as the reason why, despite considerable misgivings, she forced herself to give money to her estranged husband.

In many ways, *Making the New Soviet Person* is a refreshing retreat from the over-generalizing tendencies that often plagues scholarship on morality in Russia and elsewhere. Zigon's characterization of the postsocialist period as a time of visible moral breakdown is an important reminder of the different moral frameworks jostling for attention in the region. It is also a worthwhile exercise to step back, slow down, and dwell on how individuals sift through varying sources of moral reasoning amid the small but important dilemmas of everyday life. One of the surprises here is how much Zigon's interlocutors share despite their differences, from a Soviet-style ethic that values "work on the self" to an emphasis on the highly intersubjective communication known as "*obshchenie*" for constituting moral personhood.

Still, several aspects of this approach gave me pause. Why study the moral worlds of these people and not others, especially in a city as sprawling as Moscow? Although most anthropologists make no pretense of representative sampling, the distribution here is quite uneven, comprising, for instance, four people under 35 and one over, four women and one man, and three people affiliated with development programs. It would have been instructive to choose a more diverse group, or conversely, a narrower one, focused on, perhaps, the young professionals of the new urban middle class. I also questioned Zigon's approach to narrative, which, while ostensibly attuned to process and intersubjectivity, seemed to view talk about morality in interviews as a fairly transparent guide to "Olya's" or "Dima's" morality with little consideration of the influence of the interview itself (Briggs 1986).

Most importantly for the study of postsocialist morality, however, the focus on individuals apart from social context makes it hard to see the semiotic richness of the larger moral discourses that shape individual moral conceptions. While Zigon speaks often of "global assemblages" (4), his analysis tends towards one-dimensional references to discrete moral arenas such as "Russian orthodoxy" (61) and "capitalist morality" (87) with little attention to how these moralities might interact in the larger social milieu. Indeed, it is worth noting in this respect that Zigon's other recent book, "*HIV is God's Blessing:" Rehabilitating Morality in Neoliberal Russia* (2011), provides a rather eloquent example of moral convergence in a St. Petersburg drug rehabilitation program that is as strongly influenced by neoliberal rationality as by Russian orthodoxy.

Nonetheless, *Making the New Post-Soviet Person* is an important contribution to the anthropology of morality in general and the anthropology of postsocialist moralities in particular. The book is also quite accessible and would be well-worth excerpting for undergraduate courses on the anthropology of postsocialism and Russian everyday life.

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References

Briggs, Charles. 1986. Learning How to Ask: A Sociolinguistic Appraisal of the Role of the Interview in Social Science Research. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Zigon, Jarrett. 2011. HIV is God's Blessing: Rehabilitating Morality in Neoliberal Russia. Berkeley: University of California Press.