



Religion, Justice, and Social Action

British Sociological Association
Sociology of Religion Study Group Annual
Conference

8th July to 10th July 2024
Northumbria University, Newcastle, UK

Welcome

We are delighted to welcome you to the 2024 BSA SocRel Annual Conference.

This year we are gathering at Northumbria University in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, to connect again with old friends and colleagues, and to welcome new ones.

This year's conference theme is **Religion, Justice and Social Action**.

Driven by teachings, philosophical ideals, or socialized norms, religion can galvanize change, limit social and political freedoms, and serve the suffering. Religion, when intertwined with justice and social action, can be observed in the organization of events and activities, participation in protests, marches and targeted campaigns, the sharing of information among local and global communities, and in the bringing of individuals and groups together to provide food, shelter, care, connection, and subsistence.

Yet religious, spiritual, non-religious and anti-religious movements alike can also act as a barrier to social and ethical progress, hindering justice, obstructing action, and delegitimising dissent, discouraging followers – and seeking to actively stop others – from enabling change.

Religion can be a mechanism for transformation and a means of bolstering the status quo, with some movements jostling for influence at the heart of institutions while others seek to build new social structures set apart from the world according to their own frames of justice. As society has experienced and witnessed the pandemic, cost-of-living and climate crises, and government decisions on war and violence, how have religion, justice and social action converged to bring about change and alternate responses? The conference will explore these dynamics, and religions' role in creating and hindering opportunities for response and action as well as the critiques they conjure. Falling shortly after a UK general election this is a timely conference for exploring these crucially important themes.

We received a fantastic array of abstracts and proposals for SocRel 2024, which are reflected in the wide-ranging papers, parallel sessions, workshops and panels on offer in this year's programme. Our presenters represent universities from all over the world, richly varied disciplinary backgrounds, and the full spectrum of career stages, from Master's students to Emeriti. We are so looking forward to hearing from such a diverse group of scholars.

Alongside all our delegates, we are very pleased to welcome our keynote speakers: Professor Nandini Deo and Professor Peter Hopkins, as well as the contributors to our keynote panel - Dr Val Barron, Revd Dr Chris Howson, Taj Khan and Jaswinder Singh.

A huge amount of work goes into making a conference like SocRel happen.

A special thanks to all who have contributed towards making this conference happen. Firstly, to all of you attending as presenters and delegates. With funding often in such limited supply, we are acutely aware that it is not easy to decide on which conferences to attend, so we are of course delighted that you have chosen to attend SocRel this year. Thanks must also go in particular to all of our session chairs, for helping to ensure an environment in which all ideas can flourish and be explored by presenters and audiences alike.

At Northumbria, we would like to thank Faye Harland for her support and liaison in advance of the conference. We are also especially grateful to all those at the BSA who have helped to coordinate this event, particularly Kirsten Boucher, Anna-Marie McGlanaghey and Georgina Sailes.

A note from Jennie:

Last, but by no means least – this will be Rob’s third and final year coordinating our annual conference in his capacity as SocRel events officer. He has worked with tireless enthusiasm, an exceptional eye for detail, and unfailing good humour to bring these events about, even amid the rollercoaster of the pandemic. If you catch Rob during the conference, do pass on your heartfelt thanks. I could not have hoped for a better colleague and friend to show her the ropes as I take over his role from summer 2024.

A note from Rob:

In hindsight it is quite clear that the best decision I made in the past twelve months was ~~tricking~~ encouraging Jennie to start in her role early, under the guise of ‘shadowing me’ to better understand what lay ahead. Without her wisdom, remarkable organisational capabilities, creativity, and most of all her friendship it’s obvious to me that this year’s SocRel would be in a much weaker position. You can trust me when I say we’re in incredibly safe hands in the coming years.

We hope you enjoy SocRel 2024!

Rob Barward-Symmons (SocRel Events Officer) and Jennie Riley (incoming SocRel Events Officer), on behalf of the SocRel Executive Committee: Saleema Burney, Mathew Guest, Isabella Kasselstrand, Lois Lee, Dawn Llewellyn, Lucy Potter, Sonya Sharma, Ruth Sheldon, and Krysia Waldock.

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Key Information

Getting Here

City Campus East 1 (CCE1)

12 Falconar Street

Shieldfield

Newcastle upon Tyne

NE2 1XA

For more information on getting to Northumbria via bus, train, Metro or car, please visit their [Getting Here](#) page.

For guests coming by car, we recommend the following car parks in Newcastle City Centre:

NCP – John Dobson Street - John Dobson Street, Newcastle, NE1 8HL

Argyll Street – Car Park - Argyll Street, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 6PF

There are also Blue Badge spaces available across campus, these are available on a first come first service basis and therefore do not require reservation ahead of your visit.

A campus map is [available here](#) – CCE1 is building number 5 on the map.

Conference Registration

At registration you will be provided with your name badge which gives you access to the conference. We request that your conference badges be worn at all times for security reasons and the provision of meals. Should you have any queries please ask a member of staff who will be available at the registration desk wearing a lanyard, or our student helpers who will be wearing a BSA t-shirt.

As part of the BSA's ongoing green initiative, we are moving away from hard copy programmes, although some hard copies will be available to look at whilst you are at the registration desk.



Accommodation Check In

If you have booked accommodation at the Claude Gibb accommodation, check-in is available from 3pm on Sunday 7th July, directions are available [here](#) on Google maps.

The reception is staffed 08:30-17:00, if anything is needed outside of those times a contact number for Claude Gibb security will be displayed at the reception and they will be able to assist with any late check-ins or queries on 07788 326765.

For bookings at Motel One Newcastle or other alternative accommodation, please refer to your booking confirmation for check in details or contact the hotel directly.

Luggage

Check in for your accommodation will be available during registration, and you will be able to drop off your bags before the start of the conference.

There will be a cloakroom in the foyer area for coats etc. but there will be limited space for bags, so we would ask that these are taken to your room if possible.

Food and Refreshments

Lunch, tea, coffee, and refreshments will be served in the main registration area of on the 8th, 9th and 10th July throughout the day.

Evening meals will be available on the 8th and 9th of July for those delegates who have booked this optional extra as part of the online registration process. You will receive a token on entry that entitles you to the evening meal, and your choice of either one alcoholic or two non-alcoholic drinks.

A packed lunch is provided for all delegates on Day 3 of the Conference.

Evening Activities

On the evening of Monday 8th July, after an informal dinner, we'll have our annual opportunity to enjoy the acclaimed, peerless SocRel Pub Quiz (with prizes to be won!)

On Tuesday 9th July, dinner is another relaxed opportunity for conversation and networking. Afterwards, delegates can choose between continuing conversation over board games in the conference venue, or joining colleagues for a tour of Newcastle city centre provided by Newcastle Ghost Walks (<https://www.newcastleghostwalks.co.uk/>). The Newcastle Witchery Tour, led by practising traditional witch SJ Taylor, will begin at 9pm and last

approximately ninety minutes. Additionally, there will be a cash bar available until 11pm for additional alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.

Prayer Room

There will be a prayer room available for anyone who wishes to use it for prayer and quiet reflection in **223A**. Please see Page 14 for times.

Breastfeeding Room

There is a breastfeeding room available in Room **041**. Please see Page 14 for times.

Quiet Room

There will be a quiet room available in **223B**. Please see Page 14 for times.

WiFi

Visitors to the University can use the free Cloud WiFi network WiFi Guest to access the Internet via their own equipment while on campus.

Here are the steps to get connected:

- From the device connect to the network WiFi Guest
- Open a web browser (Note: If you receive a Certificate notice, select Proceed Anyway to continue)
- On The Cloud landing page locate the box Get online at Northumbria University and click Go
- Scroll down to select Create Account
- Enter some details and the account will be created.
- The device will then be connected to WiFi Guest

If you'd like to get setup ahead of time, you can register for an account beforehand then all you'll need to do is login: <https://wifi.sky.com/login>.

Bloomsbury

Thank you to Bloomsbury Plc who are exhibiting at the event over lunch and refreshment breaks. Please make sure you visit their stand when you are available.

Guidance for Presenters, Chairs, Panel Hosts and Discussants

Computer stations and linked electronic display equipment will be available for your use. Each room is equipped with computers for presenters and will be running the Microsoft Windows operating system and Microsoft Office software. Please use Microsoft PowerPoint for visual aids. Presenters, Chairs, Panel Hosts and Discussants should attempt to arrive 10 minutes prior to the commencement of their sessions to discuss the running of the sessions and check that visual aids are displaying correctly. Please have your PowerPoint presentation available on a USB flash drive or an online storage space (for example Google Drive) and ensure that you are easily able to locate it. There are connection points available to connect laptops to the display systems, but if you use a Mac, please bring the required cables to connect to a PC as these will not be available at the venue.

Chairs

We are extremely grateful to all those who have agreed to chair one or more sessions. If you have agreed to chair and are now not able to make the session, please let us know at registration so we can make alternative arrangements. If you find yourself in a session without a chair we would be very grateful if someone in the audience could volunteer to take this role. Chairing guidelines will be available in each conference room.

Oral Presentations

It is essential that presentations run in accordance with the scheduled times. This will allow delegates to move between presentation rooms during the parallel sessions. We ask that Chairs place due emphasis on the importance of adhering to the schedule in running the parallel sessions. The general expectation of an oral presentation is that a 30-minute paper slot should consist of a 20-minute presentation followed by a 10-minute opportunity to answer questions. Oral presentations labelled as 'Short Presentations' should consist of a (maximum) 10-minute presentation followed by a 5-minute opportunity to answer questions.

Telephone Numbers

For conference enquires, the BSA Events Team can be contacted on the following numbers should a member of staff not be available at the registration desk.

- **Main office: 0191 383 0839**

- Events extension: 0191 370 6633
- Email: events@britsoc.org.uk

In a fire, health or crime related emergency, your first point of contact should be **Emergency Services on 999**, which is the emergency number in the UK for fire, ambulance or police.

BSA Anti-Harassment Policy

The British Sociological Association believes that every person should be treated with dignity and respect. Harassment of colleagues or staff is unacceptable conduct. The highest standards of conduct are required of everyone regardless of seniority.

The British Sociological Association recognises that harassment may take many forms. It may be directed towards persons of either sex. It may be related to ethnic or national origin, age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partner status, pregnancy or maternity, race, colour, nationality, religion or belief, sexual orientation, physical or mental attributes or some other personal characteristic.

An essential characteristic of harassment is that it is unwanted by the recipient and that the recipient finds the conduct offensive or unacceptable.

Harassment may involve action or inaction, behaviour, exclusion, comment or physical contact that the recipient finds objectionable or offensive. It may result in the recipient feeling threatened, humiliated, intimidated, patronised, demoralised or less confident in their ability. Condoning such conduct may be harassment in itself. The test of harassment is, at least in part, subjective.

Examples of unacceptable conduct:

- verbal abuse, or insulting behaviour
- shouting at, being sarcastic towards, ridiculing or demeaning others;
- the ridicule or exclusion of an individual, for example, for cultural or religious differences, on the grounds of sex or sexual orientation or on the grounds of disability;
- comments, jokes or gestures of an offensive, insensitive or intimidating nature, for example of a sexist or racist nature, about an individual's sexual orientation or about an individual's physical or mental attributes;
- the display or circulation of sexually suggestive or racially abusive material (including e-mails, text messages, video clips and images sent by mobile phone or posted on the internet);
- physical or psychological threats;
- unwanted physical conduct or "horseplay" and unsolicited or unwelcome sexual advances or suggestive behaviour (which the harasser may perceive as harmless), including touching, staring or commenting, pushing, grabbing, invading their personal space and more serious forms of physical or sexual assault; comments of a sexual nature about a person's appearance or dress.

The British Sociological Association will take allegations of harassment seriously. Harassment by a member or delegate could result in termination of membership or exclusion from further BSA events/activities.

Equally, an allegation of harassment must not be made lightly. If it is found that an allegation of harassment has been made without foundation and maliciously then this may also result in termination of membership or exclusion from further BSA events/activities.

All complaints of harassment should be made to the event lead/ Chair of Journal Board unless the complaint is regarding this person when you should complain to the Chief Executive, Judith Mudd. If the event lead/ convenor or Chair of Journal Board needs to escalate the complaint this should be to the Chief Executive, Judith Mudd (judith.mudd@britsoc.org.uk).

If the sanction is exclusion the final decision rests with the Board.

Your Responsibility

It is your responsibility to ensure your own conduct conforms to the expected standards and reflects this policy.

If equal opportunities are not applied then valuable talent and potential are wasted. More over when unfair discrimination, harassment or victimisation take place they bring about a climate of fear, insecurity and poor performance. As well as being illegal it affects morale. It is therefore vital that you understand your responsibilities.

The aim of this policy is to encourage harmony and respect amongst individuals so as to promote good working practices with a view to all having the best experience possible at a BSA meeting / event.

Outline Programme

Monday 8th July 2024

10.00	Registration and Networking Open
11.00	PGR and ECR drop-in/welcome
11.45	Formal Welcome
12.00	Keynote Plenary - Professor Peter Hopkins
13.30	Lunch
14.30	Parallel Session A
16.00	Refreshment Break
16.30	Parallel Session B
18.00	Prayer and quiet space close
18.30	End of sessions
19.30	Dinner and SocRel Quiz

Cloakroom open 09.00-19.00

Prayer and Quiet Space 09.00-18.00

Tuesday 9th July

08.30	Day Registration Opens
09.00	SocRel committee meeting PGR/ECR Coffee and Catch Up
10.00	ECR and PGR Workshop
11.30	Refreshment Break
12.00	Parallel Session C
13.30	Lunch
14.30	SocRel Annual General Meeting

15.30	Parallel Session D
17.00	Refreshment Break
17.30	Keynote Plenary - Professor Nandini Deo
19.00	Dinner and evening activities

Cloakroom open 08.30-18.30

Prayer and Quiet Space 08.30-17.30

Wednesday 10th July

08.30	Day Registration Opens
09.00	ECR and PGR coffee and catch-up
09.30	Parallel Session E
11.30	Refreshment Break
12.00	Panel - Religious Communities and Social Action
13.30	Lunch
14.30	Parallel Session F
16.10	Final remarks and Close

Cloakroom open 08.30-16.30

Prayer and Quiet Space 08.30-16.00

ECR and PGR Workshops

Day 2 – Tuesday 9th July 2024, 10.00 – 11.30

Lecture Theatre 3

This year's workshop aimed at early career and postgraduate researchers looks at two complementary activities at the heart of contemporary academic work: getting published and reviewing for journals and publications.

Getting Published and Funded: the 3 critical success factors

Professor Abby Day, Goldsmiths, University of London

Most journal articles and funding research proposals are rejected, representing a waste of everyone's time, energy and spirit. Fortunately, it doesn't have to be like that. There are only three things that really matter.

This presentation covers the three most important success factors in getting published and funded, drawing on original research with editors, funders, and successful academics, plus two decades running international workshops on publishing and funding. Professor Abby Day inspires new and established academics, helping them overcome fear and confusion, leading to publishable papers and successful research proposals. The workshop draws from her recent book *How to Get Published and Win Research Funding*, Routledge, 2023, 3rd edition, available to Socrel members with a 20% discount using code EFLY01.

About Abby Day

Abby Day is Professor of Race, Faith and Culture in the Sociology Department, Goldsmiths, University of London, UK where she focuses on religious identity, religion crime and law, gender and generations.

She is Executive Editor of the Brill/Association for the Sociology of Religion series *Religion and the Social Order* an editorial board member of *Religion and Secularism* and *Non-Religion*. Latest books: *How to Get Published and Win Research Funding*, Routledge, 2023, 3rd edition; *Why Baby Boomers Turned from Religion: Shaping Belief and Belonging, 1945-2021*, Oxford University Press, 2022; *Sociology of Religion: Overview and Analysis of Contemporary Religion*, Routledge, 2021; *Diversity, Inclusion, and Decolonisation: Practical Tools for Improving Teaching, Research and Scholarship*. Edited with Lois Lee, David Thomas and Jim Spickard, Bristol University Press, 2022.

The Gentle Art of Reviewing

Dr Jennie Riley, University of Aberdeen

Reviewing for journals and publishers is one of the many artforms academics at all career stages are expected to have mastered, yet there is somewhat scant training or guidance available. This part of the workshop will introduce this artform for those starting out as reviewers, focusing on strategies for managing reviewing as part of your workload and writing rigorous but gentle reviews.

About Jennie Riley

Jennie Riley is a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow in Divinity at the University of Aberdeen, the postdoctoral representative for the Association for the Study of Death and Society, and the incoming SocRel events officer. Her research takes an interdisciplinary approach to exploring death and dying, deathcare and healthcare and religion, particularly in the context of contemporary Britain. Her current project uses mixed qualitative and quantitative methods to explore 'grave goods' practices in the UK, in light of the presence, absence and complexity of 21st century afterlife beliefs.

Panel: Religion and Activism in the North East of England

Day 3 – Wednesday 10th July, 12.00 – 13.30

Lecture Theatre 3

Chair: Mathew Guest

Panel members:

Dr Val Barron, Community Organiser, Tyne & Wear Citizens

Revd Dr Chris Howson, Lead Chaplain, University of Sunderland

Taj Khan, Leader of the multifaith chaplaincy team at Derwent Immigration Removal Centre
Jaswinder Singh

Across the UK, people of faith are inspired to express their religious convictions in attempts to bring about social change in their communities. The north east of England is no exception, and this region hosts a range of activists and movements whose work begins with a faith commitment, which is then channelled into efforts to tackle some of the most pressing challenges of contemporary British society. We welcome three such activists to our conference to speak about their lives, values and activism.

About Dr Val Barron

Personally and professionally, Val has tried to create change within the communities she lives and works. This has included being a health promotion specialist, a community development worker and conducting postgraduate research into the role that social enterprises can play in responding to poverty. She trained as a community organiser 7 years ago and has worked on campaigns in the North East to help tackle the issues facing our communities. She has co-chaired the Living Wage action team, worked with local mums to ensure their local park can be used and helped to tackle hate crime on public transport. Working with faith communities she is passionate about moving from charity to justice.

About Revd Dr Chris Howson

*Chris's background is as a Liberation theologian, trying to tie up Christian ministry with the Gospel's desire to be good news for the poor. This has continually led him to work with the marginalized within the communities in which he has lived and served. He wrote *Just Church: 21st Century Liberation Theologian in Action* to argue the need for Christians to be involved in local and international issues and to support those involved in 'direct action' to protect people and planet. He has an interest in campaigning against the arms trade and protecting the rights of those seeking sanctuary.*

About Taj Khan

Representing Newcastle Central Mosque as a member of the Tyne and Wear Citizens network, Taj is passionate about women's issues and dedicated to making the world or at least her city safe for women and young girls. She works with local communities and organisations on racial justice in education and in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion for all. As a community organiser, she has campaigned for women's safety on public transport and on misogyny as a hate crime. She founded an all-female group - "suffrage sisters alliance" – which welcomes all women from all walks of life and backgrounds to come together, share experiences and support one another to build our communities towards a better and a fairer society.

About Jaswinder Singh

Leading and representing a number of organisations in the North East, Jaswinder Singh works to advance community development within the Sikh population and via wider initiatives focused on religious and cultural diversity. He is the Director of North East Sikh Service, providing a Sikh voice through workshops in schools and other organisations to better understand Sikh faith and deliver diversity training. He is also a director of Divercity Hub in Newcastle, which seeks to build health and wellbeing across a range of communities; is Director of The Little Lotus Nursery, a non-profit project helping young ones through meditation and yoga, play, song and dance; and he is Pastoral care supervisor and events coordinator at the Sikh Gurdwara in Newcastle. Jaswinder is also Sikh chaplain at Newcastle University and NHS Newcastle Hospitals.

Keynote Speakers

Keynote 1: Professor Peter Hopkins

Newcastle University

Monday 8th July 2024, 12noon

Lecture Theatre 3



Understanding everyday Islamophobia

In this paper, I explore the complex ways in which Islamophobia pervades the daily lives of Muslims and those mistaken for being Muslim. The focus here is upon key domains of everyday life such as encounters at school or work, experiences of social media and online contexts, and negotiations of using public transport or engaging in everyday mobilities. However, I also consider broader factors influencing everyday Islamophobia such as those associated with global issues, national politics, and state-level policy making. I draw upon first-hand accounts of everyday Islamophobia including case study examples from North America, Europe, and Australasia. I explore the multiple factors shaping the nature of everyday Islamophobia and consider the complex ways that this works and how it enters everyday life in ways that may be unexpected or surprising. I conclude by pointing to the worrying impacts of everyday Islamophobia and consider suggestions about how it can be addressed.

About Peter Hopkins

Peter Hopkins will be making the short journey from Newcastle University to be with us at SocRel this year. He is a Leverhulme Major Research Fellow and Professor of Social Geography at Newcastle, exploring social inequality, intersectionality, oppression and justice, particularly in relation to Islamophobia and refugee experience.

Keynote 2: Professor Nandini Deo

Lehigh University

Tuesday 9th July 2024, 17.30

Lecture Theatre 3



Religion, Gender, Activism: Below the Surface

The most contentious debates surrounding religion and gender frequently involve clashes between religious conservatives and feminist progressives. Does this mean that religion is inherently patriarchal? I propose some strategies to move beyond the common trope of opposition between religion and feminism by examining areas of common ground between feminist and religiously motivated activists.

However, it is undeniable that religious conservatives often seem particularly preoccupied with issues of gender. Why is this the case? I argue that understanding the construction of nationalism and the role of nationalist mobilization is crucial to understanding the intertwined nature of religion and gender. This is especially relevant for postcolonial societies but also shapes politics in imperial states.

Finally, I explore how religious activists in India are navigating the reality of a religious nationalist government. This situation serves as a lens through which we can reflect on the diverse ways religion manifests in the political sphere, showing its potential to be both repressive and liberatory. By considering these various dimensions, we can better understand the complexities of the religion-gender dynamic and the multifaceted roles religion can play in political contexts.

About Nandini Deo

Nandini Deo joins us from Lehigh University in Pennsylvania where she is an associate professor of Political Science. Her research explores South Asian politics, civil society, gender and religion and secularism, focussing particularly on how these important themes interface with activism in India. She is currently undertaking a year at the SNDT Women's University in Mumbai as a Fulbright Scholar.

Abstract Book

Day 1 – Monday 8 July 2024

Parallel Session A – 14:30-16:00

Author Meets Critic, Lecture Theatre 003

Cool Christianity: Hillsong and the Fashioning of Cosmopolitan Identities (OUP 2024)

Cristina Rocha, Mathew Guest

(Western Sydney University, Durham University)

Christianity is changing in a global, digital and postsecular age. The explosion of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, particularly in the Global South, is simultaneously shifting the geographies of Christianity away from the Global North and creating porous cultural and religious communities across borders. Importantly, new and reconfigured forms Christianity in both the Global North and South are increasingly digitally mediated, engaged with youth and celebrity cultures, and involve new forms of consumption, branding and identity. This book grapples with these transformations by investigating the creation of a transnational Pentecostal field between Brazil and Australia, two countries that have been peripheral in the history of Pentecostalism but which more recently have been at the forefront of its new global forms. It analyses the ways in which the aesthetic style of the Australian megachurch Hillsong, which I call 'Cool Christianity,' has been adopted by young middle-class Brazilians as a way of performing social distinction in Brazil and becoming cosmopolitan. Furthermore, following the material turn in the study of religion, this book seeks to understand how assemblages of peoples, materialities, affect, infrastructures and practices co-constitute one another and are sensitive to regimes of power.

Parallel Session A, Classroom 007

Religion, Gender, and the Law

Tearing Up to Tear it Down: Lament in womanist, feminist and liberation theologies of dignity and penal abolition

Isabella Gregory

(University of Oxford)

Contemporary criminal justice takes place as a largely technical affair (Griffith 1993, 95). The well-oiled machines of the legal system consolidate deviance and harm in the idea of the criminal, who is to be normalised through punishment (Foucault 1975, 299). What remains are the 'cadaverous, dehumanised bod[ies]' of the incarcerated (Smith 2009, 6), spectral figures which haunt the corridors of 'justice'. Womanist, feminist and liberation theologies reanimate these in visceral critiques of the penal society. Focussing on the embodiment of Christ as a criminal, these theorists draw a line of continuation which renders the text and experience of contemporary law as written in the blood of the historic crucified (Robert 2016). Through imagining the incarcerated to hold a special salvific quality, these theologies not only counteract the making of punitive invisibility which is so central to modern punishment (Derrida 2000, 191); they also illuminate those constructive relationships of care, obligation and flourishing which are violated by modern 'justice' systems (Gorringe 1996, 249, 264-5). Through an emotional and bloody theological aesthetic of lamentation, these theorists problematise establishment conceptions of criminal, victim and community (Latimore 2020). In lament, these theorists awaken truth and hone critical responses to the violence of the technico-penal state. But they also develop abolitionist alternatives, asking what it might mean for victims of crime to themselves be allowed to lament, rupturing judicial silence, as they 'groan' towards liberation (Russell 1974, 27, 135). Lamentation is an imaginative, emotional and practical tool in the pursuit of dignity and penal abolition.

Sacrificing Piety for Critique: Irish Pro-life Feminism Beyond Religion

Ann Burke

(South East Technological University)

Locating the abortion debate within the emerging landscape of pro-life feminism in Ireland, this paper focuses on the move to eschewing religious frameworks in favour of considering morality more broadly, establishing modes of critique and advocacy more credibly justified and legitimised. Set against a background of the historical hegemonic control of the Catholic

Church in Ireland and the move to a more secularised left-wing society, this paper considers the motivations, challenges, and implications of prolife feminists who pragmatically distance themselves from traditional religious rhetoric.

Utilising Boltanski and Thévenot's justifications model which foregrounds the critical capacities of actors and takes their arguments at face value permits a consideration of different forms of reflexivity on gendered issues and considers moral communities beyond religion. The framework further facilitates an examination of alternative forms of justification such as appeals to rights, care and justice which not only legitimise the prolife feminist position but delegitimise mainstream feminist stances.

The study that informs this paper involved in-depth qualitative interviews with self-identified prolife feminists in Ireland coupled with a justificatory analysis of prolife movement media content. The study elucidates the modes in which subjectivities and beliefs are negotiated and constructed in relation to normative discourses in an increasingly polarised public sphere.

This paper ultimately considers the reception of prolife feminist arguments within the broader sociopolitical landscape where refusal of justifications is endemic and permission for critique is only granted to those on the side of 'right', whatever that is deemed to be.

The hegemonic “neutrality” of hospital spaces: How Indigenous spiritualities are re-shaping colonized health services in Canada

Sheryl Reimer-Kirkham, Sonya Sharma

(Trinity Western University, University College London)

Healthcare settings in Canada, a settler colonial nation, are characterized by biomedical and neoliberal priorities of cure and efficiency. Since the administration of most hospitals was handed off by religious organizations to the state some 3 - 4 decades ago and religious pastoral care shifted to generic spiritual care, the ethos is by and large that of nonreligion and secularity. Spiritual health departments are small and oriented toward providing generic spiritual care. This model of spiritual care has recently come under scrutiny as perpetuating colonizing, homogenizing attitudes toward diverse, multi-faith populations. In Canada, the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission, with its 94 Calls to Action to public institutions and all citizens, has served as impetus for changed policies and practices such as required courses for healthcare providers to become culturally safe, and apologies from faith organizations for their involvement in Indigenous Residential Schools that caused great intergenerational harm. Meanwhile, at a grassroots level, Indigenous peoples' expression of Indigenous spiritualities, healing practices and ceremonies are everyday sites of resistance and decolonization. In this presentation, we draw on data from health research and

pedagogical and policy experience in Canada to interrogate contemporary spiritual care practices, and to consider ways forward for decolonizing health services.

Parallel Session A, Classroom 008

Islamophobia and Justice

Muslim Interventions in Journalism Practice

Michael Munnik

(Cardiff University)

Scholars and civil society groups have long noted the injustice done to Muslims by media representations that distort their religion, homogenise their co-religionists, and associate them uncritically with terrorism and extremism. Interventions from Muslim civil society in journalism practice are a form of social activism that seeks justice for Muslims to correct these harms. I examine three related activities that seek to do this work in the context of Muslims in Britain. This summer saw the publication of *Media Language on Islam and Muslims: Terminologies and Their Effects* (2023), edited by Salman Al-Azami and composed of scholarship by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars (including myself) on various terms that frequent British media texts. The volume provides academic ballast for a style guide on Muslims for journalists, prepared and released this spring by the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB). Separately, the Centre for Media Monitoring, a wing of the MCB, released its report on UK coverage of the recent conflict in Gaza, critiquing the framing of mainstream journalism through the lens of Muslims in Britain. I assess these documents and their public dissemination activities as acts of social activism, advocating within a pluralistic, secular society from a position of religious motivation and on behalf of communities defined by their religion.

British Muslims and the Census: The need for statistical visibility vis-a-vis government surveillance concerns

Serena Hussain

(Centre for Trust Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University)

Contemporary criminal justice takes place as a largely technical affair (Griffith 1993, 95). The well-oiled machines of the legal system consolidate deviance and harm in the idea of the criminal, who is to be normalised through punishment (Foucault 1975, 299). What remains are the 'cadaverous, dehumanised bod[ies]' of the incarcerated (Smith 2009, 6), spectral figures which haunt the corridors of 'justice'. Womanist, feminist and liberation theologies reanimate these in visceral critiques of the penal society. Focussing on the

embodiment of Christ as a criminal, these theorists draw a line of continuation which renders the text and experience of contemporary law as written in the blood of the historic crucified (Robert 2016). Through imagining the incarcerated to hold a special salvific quality, these theologies not only counteract the making of punitive invisibility which is so central to modern punishment (Derrida 2000, 191); they also illuminate those constructive relationships of care, obligation and flourishing which are violated by modern 'justice' systems (Gorringe 1996, 249, 264-5). Through an emotional and bloody theological aesthetic of lamentation, these theorists problematise establishment conceptions of criminal, victim and community (Latimore 2020). In lament, these theorists awaken truth and hone critical responses to the violence of the technico-penal state. But they also develop abolitionist alternatives, asking what it might mean for victims of crime to themselves be allowed to lament, rupturing judicial silence, as they 'groan' towards liberation (Russell 1974, 27, 135). Lamentation is an imaginative, emotional and practical tool in the pursuit of dignity and penal abolition.

Parallel Session A, Classroom 021

Religion and Social Media

Unlikely Feminisms: the efforts and strategies of evangelical Christian women towards gender equality

Elsa Pereira

(IS - UP)

Gender Equality is the 5th Sustainable Development Goal of the 2030 Agenda. UN highlights that actors within faith communities are critical for dismantling the stereotypes that structure inequalities between men and women.

This presentation arises from the reflections already conducted within the scope of our doctoral research on the theme "The role of women in evangelical Christian communities in Europe." We will thus bring a new sociological approach which allows us a multidirectional data collection revealing examples of how, in recent decades, feminism in international evangelical Christian circles has proliferated in various directions, paving the way for the democratization of theology, woven with a reformulation of religious discourse to include an egalitarian dimension.

We will present the main ideas gathered through a focus group with women. The lucid and multifaceted perspectives of these women on (in)equality between men and women in evangelical churches manifest the diversity of practices in these religious communities in this regard, from the most democratic and egalitarian to the most traditionalist and patriarchal.

We will also talk about a new space/territory, impossible to overlook in the study of feminism(s), also within religious contexts, where the voices of equality rise when they are silenced in the physical spaces of faith communities. This new space we speak of is the Internet, with all its online statements, the networks established on social media and beyond, and how this cause, the fight for equality between men and women was and continues to be constructed in evangelical communities.

Digital activism as justice-making. Evaluating decolonial public theologies on Christian social media platforms

Steve Taylor

(AngelWings Ltd; Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, University of Edinburgh)

There are widespread examples, both positive and negative, of digital activism among religious communities. Methodologically, digital ethnography provides ways to understand the mundane aspects of everyday digital life (Hine, 2015) and analyse the interplay between online and offline performativity. Theoretically, salon, contentious, law-abiding and Ghandian typologies have been used in evaluating digital activism (Neumayer and Svensson, 2016). However, Oceanic scholars have challenged theoretical categories circulating in the Global North, arguing that indigenous approaches to activism centre identity, well-being, and kinship (Tupou et al., 2023).

This paper presents initial findings from a Visiting Research Fellowship with the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, University of Edinburgh, June/July 2024. To better understand the limits and possibilities of religion, justice, and social action, this paper analyses digital activism by selected Christian groups in Oceania. The place of race is foregrounded by analysing groups that are active in ways that express indigenous ways of knowing. The paper will draw on data from interviews with key leaders of digital activist organisations and participant observation of digital activist campaigns. Content analysis of emojis as representations of digital emotionality and interviews with key participants/retweeters/commenters will be used to clarify motivations and analyse what might be distinctive about Christian approaches to digital activism.

The research has the potential to impact decolonial discourse through the study of lived practice and provide insights for organisations working in digital spaces to facilitate online justice-making.

Parallel Session B – 16:30-18:00

Oral Presentations, Classroom 007

Religion, Sexuality, and Justice in Global Society

Homosexuality, Same-Sex Marriage, and the Greek Orthodox Church

Efstathios Kessareas

(University of Erfurt)

The recent legislative initiative on same-sex marriage of Greece's center-right government sparked heated public debate over the legal and moral implications of the proposed law. The Orthodox Church of Greece expressed strong opposition to the proposal, portraying it as a threat to morality, society, and sacred order. Using Bourdieu's theoretical insights as well as discourse and framing analysis (e.g., diagnosis, prognosis, and motivation), the paper will demonstrate the church's perception and portrayal of homosexuality, the sources of legitimation of its argumentation, its strategies for delegitimising opposing positions, its actions against the proposed law, and the reaction of more rigorist Christian circles. The paper will argue that the church's condemnation of homosexuality and of same-sex marriage is related not only to its pre-modern view of morals but also to its defensive ethnocentric political theology, which fuses Orthodoxy with modern nationalism. The paper will discuss the types of social action that this theology favors as sacred and those that condemns as profane. Moreover, it will outline the stance of the Greek Orthodox church and of theologians in non-Orthodox countries, who promote a globally and other-oriented political theology. Finally, for comparative reasons, the paper will briefly present the position of the Russian Orthodox Church, which is a strong promoter of traditional values and of anti-Westernism in the international sphere. Throughout this analysis, I will attempt to show how the major ideological and structural changes of late modernity can shed light on the character and intensity of this value conflict.

Religion, Media and Gender in Lithuania and Latvia: a Comparative Media Discourse Analysis

Gintare Poce, Ilva Skulte

(Vytautas Magnus University)

The cultural wars of values and opinions in today's society encourage us to talk about the role of religion in public life. Although religion should be a private matter for members of society, there is increasing evidence of a quite active role for religion in state and public affairs. More specifically, in the Baltic States, Lithuania and Latvia, one can see the relatively active role of religious actors in discussions on the family concept. Therefore, this paper presents the main results of the Lithuanian and Latvian news media analysis between 2011 and 2021 on the cases related to the meaning and understanding of the family concept (for instance, the Istanbul Convention, Sex Education and the discussions on the concept of family). The results of the research show that religious actors are using the news media to influence political decisions related to the usage of the term gender, family definition and the implementation of the sex education curriculum. These cases have shown that religion can be an active actor in the public sphere, in this case, on gender policy issues, and can seek to influence political decisions, which indicates a certain level of religious politicisation.

Dope Divine Feminism: Exploring religion, sexuality and race in South African hip hop

Megan Robertson

(University of Leeds)

Despite being known as Africa's 'pink capital', Cape Town, South Africa, is still an exclusionary space, which limits how queer people of colour navigate and negotiate access, identity and belonging. In this paper, I explore hip-hop music as a space for identity negotiation and sacred practice in this context. I focus in particular on the life and work of Cape Town-born MC, Dope Saint Jude (DSJ). Scholars have framed DSJ's work as a hip-hop artist as a resource for constructing African feminist narratives on gender and sexuality, and for reclaiming the cultural and social structures and heritage of Cape Town for queer people of colour. Lacking in the analysis of her work thus far has been an examination of how DSJ's music is embedded in her spiritual practice as well as the broader religious landscape of Cape Town. This is particularly relevant in South Africa, where religion plays a contradictory role as it is used both as a justification for anti-queer sentiment and as a resource for liberatory action and politics. I draw on work which has conceptualised rap as a spiritual practice, birthed in liberation theology and counter-hegemonic movements to argue that DSJ's art embodies a form of African queer spirituality which is grounded in challenging social injustices and advocating for radical inclusion and equality. This paper draws on a life history interview and an analysis of DSJ's music to position hip-hop in South Africa as an alternative avenue for (re)constructing religious narratives of queerness in South Africa.

Parallel Session B, Classroom 008

Religion and Climate Justice

Motivating Climate Change Concern Amongst Christians

Finlay Malcolm

(University of Manchester)

Given their large number of adherents, religious communities could make a positive and sustained influence on mitigating the effects of climate change. But whilst there have been studies showing which beliefs can demotivate religious concern for the environment, it is yet to be shown which beliefs are effective in motivating environmental concern and action.

This paper presents results from a survey of over 300 Christian activists concerned with climate change. It identifies which theological beliefs are most motivational amongst samples from six Christian environmental activist and advocacy groups in the UK. It then discusses the extent to which these beliefs are either continuous with mainstream Christian teaching, or indicate a break from traditional theological thinking.

We find that a number of traditional ideas continue to remain well-supported by our activist groups. This is especially true of ideas focused around neighbour-love, social justice, imago Dei and stewardship. Each of these ideas are in some way anthropocentric, and hence, we find that anthropocentric views are not necessarily a hindrance in motivating environmental concern amongst some Christians. We also explore certain traditional ideas that are now becoming far less widely supported.

The survey also discovered a number of less traditional themes appearing popular with our activists, including drawing from indigenous sources, worshipping in and with nature, and holding radical views of the divine, including the work and role of Christ.

The paper will discuss how these results will be useful in seeking to promote a greater pro-environmental stance within Christian communities more widely.

Religion and Climate Activism: Christian Theological Creativity, Prophecy, and Injustice Frames of Protest

Gemma Edwards

(University of Manchester)

This paper takes a social movement approach to examine the ways in which theological creativity on the part of Christian groups in the UK is forging powerful 'injustice frames' (Gamson, 1992) that are providing religious motivation for climate activism. It also argues that innovations in the way in which Christians are thinking about the climate are being forged through their practical engagement with activism, both in Christian climate activist groups specifically, and the related groups of Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil. The paper draws upon data from the Religion, Theology and Climate Change project (AHRC, 2022-5), including a survey of Christian climate advocacy and activist groups (n=354), and 62 interviews. It focuses in particular on the narrative accounts of those involved in two major UK Christian climate activist groups, and the role played by 'prophecy' in participation in what can often be 'high risk/cost' (McAdam, 1986) forms of climate activism.

Climate justice and faith-based action: a case study of the Hong Kong Catholic Church

Nok Yin Ma

(The Chinese University of Hong Kong)

Anthropogenic activities are causing major ecological and environmental issues at all scales; the range of problems is diverse, yet they will all be accelerated due to climate change. In the literature of sustainability studies, the theme of climate justice has received an increasing amount of attention. In fact, most religions are strongly motivated to participate in climate change by leveraging their core principles of peace and justice to influence individual lifestyle choices and conduct communal activities. However, religious institutions and congregations are an underresearched unit in this field. Hence, using the Hong Kong Catholic Church as a case study, this paper proposes that religion has specific forms of tradition, worldviews, values, and organization that could be mobilized effectively for sustainability action. In terms of the research methods, interviews were undertaken with Catholic individuals, including staff from religious charitable organizations, church leaders, priests, and regular churchgoers, who have actively engaged with pro-environmental and social action. To complement the interview results, document analysis was also conducted to capture how the Church relates to the Catholic social teaching on "justice" in the context of environmental challenges. The findings highlight certain barriers to religious engagement with sustainability, such as limited resources and institutional constraints, despite the significant reasons for environmental action. This paper further identifies the bridges to overcome these barriers and promote greater environmental awareness and action within the Catholic community in Hong Kong. Last, it shed insights into the potential contribution of religious communities to the city's efforts towards sustainable development.

Faith Vegan Stewardship: Responding to Climate Change and Caring for God's Creation through Veganism and Ethical Consumption

Ellen Atayee-Bennett

(University of Southampton)

Modern ethical crises, such as climate change, environmental degradation, and industrialised animal agriculture have inspired a small, albeit growing population of Muslims, Jews, and Christians in the UK to incorporate veganism and ethical consumption into their religious stewardship practices. In the absence of studies exploring how religious stewardship may be enacted through veganism, my findings fill this research gap and provide insight into how religious principles are interpreted in response to injustice, as well as enacted as part of social action. In this paper, I explore how stewardship becomes veganised and in turn, how it becomes a unique expression of social action among Muslim, Jewish, and Christian vegans. This qualitative study, which employed semi-structured interviews, WhatsApp diaries, and virtual participant observation, explored the perceptions and experiences of 36 faith vegans, all of whom were over the age of 18 and lived in the UK. Whilst veganism is rarely associated with Abrahamic beliefs and practices, my participants made strong connections between the two, emphasising in particular the links to stewardship. In turn, stewardship, or what I term faith vegan stewardship, became an individualised form of activism that not only sought to encourage positive social action, but it also facilitated deeper religious observance. Given their concern for social justice and environmentalism, faith vegans extended their expression of care beyond veganism however, also engaging in ethical consumption, anti-consumption, and self-sufficiency practices, thereby articulating their faith in new ways in response to climate change and other ethical concerns.

Parallel Session B, Classroom 021

Religion and Citizenship in Global Perspectives

Repertoires of Respect: Religion, Respect, and Diversity Cultures in British Primary Schools

Anna Strhan, Joanna Malone, Peter Hemming, Sarah Neal

(University of York)

Developing 'respect' is widely accepted as an important purpose for schools, implicated in pupils' citizenship, responses to difference, and wellbeing. In England, all state-funded schools are required to promote 'mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs' as a 'fundamental British value' (Vincent 2019). The Curriculum for Wales likewise situates 'respect' as core to schools' purpose, stating that pupils should develop as 'ethical, informed citizens who ... respect the needs and rights of others, as members of a diverse society' (Education Wales 2020). Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (2017) links 'respect' to pupils' health and wellbeing, with all schools expected to provide an ethos 'characterised by care, respect, participation, responsibility and fairness for all.' Given this emphasis on 'respect', how, in practice, do schools articulate and develop particular repertoires of respect for religious difference? And what does this mean for children's belonging, within schools and wider society?

Addressing these questions, this paper draws from a three-year qualitative study examining the role of religion in how primary schools foster notions of citizenship, with ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with children, parents, and teachers conducted in primary schools in four contrasting areas of England, Wales, and Scotland. We reveal how 'diversity cultures' (Laryea et al 2023) took different slightly forms in each school, with pupils expressing a strong ethic of respect for religious diversity in two fieldsites, while respect for other aspects of diversity were more foregrounded in the other sites, and consider the implications of this for issues of justice and in/equality.

‘Are They Not Also Citizens of South Korea?’: Shincheonji Church of Jesus Members as Problematic Citizens

Mary Briggs

(The University of Edinburgh)

Studies of citizenship in contemporary South Korea have addressed how ethnic, sexual, and cultural differences impact individuals’ sense of belonging and access to citizens’ rights in a country that has experienced rapid demographic changes in the last two decades. While the above-mentioned categories of difference are all critical aspects of citizenship discourse in South Korea and of individuals’ citizenship experiences, religious differences are often overlooked in the academic literature. In this paper, I draw on my research on the new millenarian Christian movement Shincheonji Church of Jesus (hereon Shincheonji) to demonstrate how the public discourse surrounding this minority religious community reveals anxieties regarding citizenship in a changing South Korea that are obscured by focusing on ethnic and cultural differences. To accomplish this, I will explain how Shincheonji members are portrayed as problematic citizens in mass media, described as posing a threat to society while conforming to the country’s ethnicised model of citizenship. I will then discuss how my participants in Shincheonji challenge this portrayal by asserting they are good, productive citizens who have been let down by the very state meant to protect them. Through this discussion, I will show how the case of Shincheonji illuminates anxieties and disagreements over who can be considered a virtuous and productive citizen in South Korea. To conclude, I show how religious minority communities have found a way to combat being treated as problematic citizens: leveraging their constitutional right to freedom of religion alongside their economic contributions to the state.

Workplace Religious Discrimination Disputes in the Changing Irish Religious Landscape: An Empirical Analysis

John Cullen

(Maynooth University)

Within the scholarly research literature on workplace discrimination, religion has been described as the ‘neglected diversity dimension’ (Gebert et al., 2014: 543). Although many countries have laws and mechanisms to prevent workplace discrimination, scholarly researchers continue to draw attention to the scant amount of empirical data and analysis that has been done on workplace discrimination on the grounds of religion.

No scholarly research has been published on workplace religious discrimination in the Irish context despite data from the Irish Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) indicating that the number of such complaints is growing (2020). This presentation will aim to address this by sharing an analysis of all workplace religious discrimination referrals received by the

WRC from 2001 to August 2023 in order to explore workplace religious discrimination disputes in an Ireland that is undergoing rapid changes in demographics as a result of the recent and rapid loss of the hegemony of the Roman Catholic Church.

The analysis will explore occupational and religious groups, and organizational types and sectors in the cases. The nature of the claims and their outcomes will be explored. It is hoped that this work will contribute to the theory on the nature of religious experience and identity in the context of a rapidly changing socio-economic landscape.

Parallel Session B, Classroom 024

Responding to Conflict and Injustice

Enlisting Religion in Conflict Resolution: Notes from Cyprus

Evgenia Mesaritou

(University of Cyprus)

Cyprus has been divided ever since the 1974 Turkish invasion and subsequent occupation of approximately one third of the island. The 'Cyprus Problem' as it became known, is not a religious problem. Yet, religion(s), their leaders as well as sites, have been 'enlisted' by non-religious actors in the process of its resolution. The paper looks at how religion has been made part of the peace process by focusing on the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process, a peacebuilding initiative which is under the auspices of the Swedish embassy in Cyprus, and the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage and its restorations of religious sites. It asks how 'religion' and its role in the resolution of the conflict is defined, redefined and negotiated through these two initiatives and the ways in which the latter are reported upon by international actors such as the US State Department, and the Special Rapporteurs in the field of cultural rights and on freedom of religion or belief (Human Rights Council).

Religion, Social Justice, and the Islamic Caliphate

Simon Wood

(University of Nebraska-Lincoln)

This conference on religion as enabling or impeding social progress coincides with the 100-year anniversary of the abolition of the caliphate in 1924 by the Turkish Republic. This paper builds on the premise that the social and political legacies of that event endure. Following the caliphate's abolition, many Muslims, particularly those of influence, came to feel that secular ideologies would enable the creation of prosperous and just societies. A turn occurred towards the end of the last century as a result of a growing sense that secularisms had, so to speak, failed to deliver. This has led to a renewed interest in the idea of the caliphate, and the works of those who promoted it, or rejected it. Such interest is seen in but not limited to extremist cases, such as ISIS. But how might the caliphate, or a reimagined version, enable or undermine social justice? This paper illuminates that question by

examining how it was answered by two key figures at the time of the caliphate's demise: Rashid Rida, who argued that the caliphate provided a means for Muslims to take their place at the table as citizens of a modern, egalitarian society, and 'Ali 'Abdel Razek, who argued that the caliphate was an inherently unjust structure that had been a catastrophe (nakbah) for Muslim societies. The paper addresses the implications of how the two understood the idea of a society organized around the caliphate so differently, and how their theses bear on contemporary debates.

Day 2 – Tuesday 9 July 2024

Parallel Session C – 12:00-13:30

Panel Session, Lecture Theatre 003

Giving to God or to the State: a comparative approach of Muslim humanitarianism in Muslim majority and minority contexts

Lucas Faure

(Sciences Po Aix - Mesopolhis)

Islamic humanitarian organizations have become a growing topic of study by scholars working in the social sciences, particularly in the past ten years (Petersen, 2015; Benthall, 2016; Siddiqui, 2022). In Muslim majority countries, the anthropology of giving in Islam provides contextualized examples of Islamic charity, whether individual or institutionalized (Mittermaier, 2019; Schaeublin, 2023). Conversely, research into Muslim humanitarianism in Europe has focused on politically-motivated attacks on and distrust of the Islamic charitable sector (May, 2021). In both cases, Muslim NGOs remain unknown and relatively sidelined in their actions, which is probably the most recurring obstacle they face. They suffer from a lack of recognition, and from mistrust by governments, humanitarian organizations, and European public opinion.

This panel will reflect on the forms that Islamic humanitarianism takes, with special attention to the national contexts in which it takes place. By comparing empirical cases (France, UK, USA, Turkey, Jordan, Indonesia), the research aims to nuance the typical opposition between minority and majority context by focusing on two major trends: different approaches to the government management of Islam, and distinct charitable traditions. This panel compares and contrasts how Muslim humanitarian organizations deal with these issues. Our argument is that there is no universal definition of Islamic humanitarianism. While the Islamic charitable space is global, the national context of Islamic humanitarianism shapes how local, national, and international NGOs operate. It thus seems more promising to think of how the Islamic obligation to give manifests itself across these different historical, social and political contexts.

Parallel Session C, Classroom 007

Researching Witchcraft and the Paranormal

Researching the Researchers: an exploration into the experiences and beliefs of investigators of paranormal phenomenon

Urszula Wolski

(Buckinghamshire New University)

Paranormal phenomena are very much a part of society, that is evident by the number of studies and research that has been carried out over the years across different disciplines, but predominantly within psychology and parapsychology. Very little has been carried out from a sociological perspective, for as stated by Castro, Burrows and Woofitt (2013), paranormal experiences are not something that sociologists concern themselves with, and if they do, the focus tends to be on social and cultural factors (Irwin, 2009).

Moreover, there is little empirical research that exists that looks at the researchers themselves and their own experiences and beliefs whilst carrying out their investigations. Some researchers may write about their experiences as part of their investigations, but this is a largely reflexive account, rather than based on empirical research.

From a social world theory perspective, the aim of research was to explore in-depth the community of paranormal investigators, those actively investigating over a set period.

Using a mixed methods approach, comprising of a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and participant observation, the aim of research was to:

- Explore the experiences of investigators of paranormal phenomena and their reasons for doing so. For example, was this the result of their own experiences that they have had, such as early childhood experiences.
- What they make of such experiences
- To provide a 'voice' to those interested and who experience such phenomena.

Key findings from the research will be presented at the conference.

The Good Witch: Empowerment and Morality in Contemporary Western Witchcraft

Amy Francis

(University of York)

This paper presents original qualitative data from a three-year project exploring the construction of contemporary Witch identities, how these identities are lived, resourced and experienced by women in the UK. The subject of contemporary witchcraft practice is one of increasing socio-cultural interest, yet the current body of scholarship in this area is limited. This project brings a novel perspective to the field of witchcraft research by conducting ethnographic research to more deeply explore the lived realities of women who identify as Witches in Britain today.

This project has utilised feminist research practices in its combined implementation of ethnographic interviews, participant directed photo elicitation and participant observation in order to generate a rich, holistic data set which foregrounds the lived experiences of witchcraft practitioners and seeks to generate participant empowerment. Through successful implementation of this methodology, the data generated presents the intersections between contemporary western witchcraft practices and women's empowerment, the women's liberation movement, environmentalism, community engagement (both online and in person), consumer capitalism and social media's increasing role in the commodification of spirituality. This paper seeks to respond to existing scholarship, which is critical of contemporary western witchcraft's tendency toward neoliberal ideals and lack of the environmental and social activism which was evident within earlier iterations of western witchcraft traditions. This paper responds to this scholarship with the presentation of novel data which explores the contemporary relationship between empowerment, women's oppression, and social action.

Weekday Worldviews: The Patrons, Promise and Payoff of Psychic Nights in England

Caroline Starkey, Josh Bullock, Adam Powell

(University of Leeds, Kingston University, University of Durham,)

'Weekday Worldviews: The Patrons, Promise, and Payoff of Psychic Nights' is the first mixed-methods sociological study of those who attend psychic nights in England. Psychic nights, events typically held on weekdays at local pubs or social clubs in which a psychic offers tarot card readings and/or opportunities to connect with deceased loved ones, are becoming increasingly popular in Britain and beyond, particularly attracting women in working class areas. Employing a person-centred approach, this study combined participant observation, an online survey, and semi-structured interviews to gather both first-hand accounts of the motivations and outcomes of attending such events as well as the

paranormal beliefs and scientific worldviews of those in attendance. In this paper, we discuss this data, and ask: why are psychic nights increasingly popular? What are the epistemological commitments of those who attend? Is the phenomenon a case of “suspension of disbelief” in the name of entertainment or is there something more profound, more existential, driving contemporary (working class) Brits to attend? We argue that better understanding the audience of public psychic events will shed much needed light on how belief is cultivated in an era of declining institutional religion, the role of class, locality, and gender, and whether fixed binaries of ‘science’ and ‘spirituality’ in relation to worldviews are unrepresentative of lived reality.

Parallel Session C, Classroom 021

Navigating Gender Justice in Conservative Religion

The organizational dimension of religious activism and change: Torah reading by women in French Orthodox Judaism

Beatrice De Gasquet

(Université Paris Cité)

Religious activism for gender equality in ritual exemplifies women's agencies within religious contexts, and it also exemplifies how gender may drive religious organizational change. This paper tries to identify mechanisms of religious organizational change in the case of contemporary French Orthodox Judaism. Two conflicting trends have developed within French Judaism since the 1970s, making gender into a salient and polarizing issue: on the one hand a trend towards a stricter separation between men and women in Orthodox synagogues, and on the other hand, a trend towards increased female ritual participation in synagogues. In the 2010s, a new activism emerged, trying to both enable Torah reading by and for women, and to stay within the boundaries of Orthodox Judaism by maintaining a separation between men and women during ritual. This religious grassroots movement faced extremely hostile resistance by French Orthodox rabbis. However, activists managed to rely on elite interstitial spaces – both online and offline – in French Judaism to find a physical space, symbolic legitimacy and visibility, and to build itself a religious audience. Their mobilization helped pave the way for the ordination of the first French Orthodox female rabbi in 2023. Breaking the glass ceiling went hand in hand with religious organizational change: her newly created congregation belongs to Modern Orthodox Judaism, which until then didn't exist in France. Through the analysis of these mobilizations, this paper will analyze how organizational and social transformations within French Judaism enabled such religious change.

Gender in African Religious Culture: Igbo Women “To Be Seen and Not Heard,” Decolonisation of Misconception

Nduka Udeagha

(University of Leeds)

This study explores the dynamics of Igbo traditional religious culture and the persistent misrepresentation of the female gender. The misconception of the female gender introduced by western colonial and religious enterprises has been further amplified by indigenous scholars. The phrase “to be seen and not heard” reflects the continued misconception that Igbo women are passive, voiceless, and subservient to men. Such assertions devalue the place of the female gender and undermine their potential and contributions to societal development. There has been a growing body of literature on gender and decolonization, but little is known about the contemporary misrepresentation of Igbo women by indigenous scholars. This paper aims to bridge the gap by deconstructing the misleading vestige of colonial perception, which has cloaked the original Igbo thought on gender. It engages qualitative content analysis to examine how Igbo women are depicted with the phrase “to be seen and not heard” in a set of contemporary texts. I argue that in Igbo religious culture, the female gender is a powerful supernatural force, and Igbo women have always played proactive roles as essential members of the group in traditional, socio-political, and community development. It demonstrates the influential place of the female gender in shaping the Igbo religious worldview and sociocultural norms. The Igbo religious culture is dynamic, providing a platform for complimentary gender roles that respect women as sacred specialists, leaders of thoughts, and custodians of Igbo cultural values. Igbo women have continued to evolve and transform the contemporary world through various roles.

The Gender Revolution in an Islamic Society. Can Cohort Dynamics in Gender Role Attitudes in Pakistan from 1945 to 1994 be Explained by Changes in Religiousness?

Saba Aslam Khan

(Vrije University Amsterdam)

The recent literature on gender role attitudes (GRA) in western societies suggests that after achieving greater egalitarianism, the upward increase in GRA has plateaued. It has been debated to what extent the “stalled gender revolution” is related to recent religious revivals. A higher degree of religiousness is often argued to strengthen traditional gender norms. To date, there is little to no evidence from developing Islamic societies regarding the plateauing of gender role ideologies. In this paper, we study how, in an Islamic society—Pakistan—gender role ideologies have developed over the cohorts 1945-1994. We examined to what extent changes in GRA are explained by educational expansion and changes in religiousness. Pakistan is an interesting case due to two contrasting processes in the country: educational expansion has unfolded over past decades, while Pakistan has been exposed to religious revival during the Islamization (1979–1988) period. A comparison is made across cohorts using a pooled cross-section analysis of the World Value Survey (WVS) in which Pakistan has participated four times (1997-2018, N=5400). We trace how GRA and religiousness changed for women and men separately over cohorts to test whether differences in attitudes have narrowed or widened over cohorts. Our study highlights that

change in GRA cannot be explained through cohort replacement in a linear way -- due to educational expansion--, as we observe a trend reversal in GRA for cohorts born after 1975. However, the backlash in GRA cannot be fully explained either by an increased religiousness induced by Pakistan's Islamization since the early 1980's.

Parallel Session D – 15:30-17:00

Workshop, Lecture Theatre 003

Teaching sociology of religion in a social work classroom

Helo Oidjarv

(Greenville University)

This workshop showcases a variety of creative strategies and assignments this author is currently using in teaching an online undergraduate course in Social Work, Spirituality, and Religion at a small private university in Midwestern United States. The topics linked to sociology of religion and relevant for social work practice—including practices and beliefs of major world religions and their diverse perspectives on forgiveness; the functions and practices of prayer, meditation, and gratitude; the characteristics of toxic religion; spirituality and social justice; creating a spiritually sensitive environment for a helping relationship; and the role of spirituality and religion in the prevention of compassion fatigue—are highlighted in the course. These topics are presented using a variety of strategies and techniques for online teaching, such as experiential learning activities, one-on-one videoconferences, group learning, and others. The workshop concludes with an evaluation and recommendations for teaching an online social work course that integrates concepts from sociology of religion.

Parallel Session D, Classroom 008

PGR/ECR presentations - (Inter)faith religious pluralism and secularity

The Post-Catholic Experience: Investigating the Middle Condition in an Age of Secularity

Nadine Sadler

(University of Portsmouth)

This thesis explores the recuperative project in Charles Taylor's account of declining religion in the contemporary age. Using qualitative data from men and women who have rejected Catholicism, the thesis asks how belief in the middle condition – as a bulwark against modern alienation – informs the unbeliever's ethical sense. I ask how the unbelieving self manages the cultural trauma of institutional discipline that is associated with religious doctrines about personal identity. The focus is on discovering whether a post-religious norm of character formation, in which human fulness no longer relies on the cosmological order of religious doctrine, moral practice and ritual, can meet the ethical challenges of a disenchanted modernity.

The future of the UK interfaith youth movement: Will it survive the post-pandemic new normal?

Sophie Mitchell

(King's College London)

Though it is generally agreed that the 1893 Parliament of World's Religions marked the formal beginning of organised 'interfaith' work, 'interfaith' only gained wide attention in the UK after World War II. Since then, interfaith organisations have been established to create opportunities for dialogue, policy development and social action amongst people of different faith backgrounds.

The Covid-19 pandemic put most interfaith work on pause. Now that we have entered an era of post-pandemic 'normality', we must reflect on the long-term effects of the pandemic on the interfaith sector. Many interfaith organisations (like all charities) have faced significant issues around funding and recruitment. A key question going forward is whether these organisations will survive the post-pandemic new normal.

There is very little research on the interfaith youth movement in the UK, particularly since the pandemic. Drawing upon my MA thesis research on four UK-based interfaith youth organisations and programmes, this presentation will outline some of the current challenges and possibilities facing the interfaith youth movement. Through analysis of interviews and focus groups, it will argue that the future of the movement (and specific organisations) will depend on its/their ability and willingness to adapt to new conditions of the post-pandemic new normal. This presentation will also draw upon my personal experience of being both a participant and facilitator in the interfaith youth movement, as well as my experience researching it, asking questions about how to do research well in a sector in which you are emotionally invested.

Parallel Session D, Classroom 021

Religion, Disability, and Neurodiversity

Exploring belonging: the narratives of autistic people who currently and previously attend(ed) Churches and Mosques

Krysia Waldock

(University of Kent)

Religious groups have been found in some literature to be highly normative, and individuals who do not meet these normative standards, or have counternormative identities may face prejudice. Much literature has focused on LGBTQIA+ people's experiences, and other identities (e.g., autistic people's experiences) remain understudied. In this light, I posed 3 research questions: 1. What are the lived experiences of autistic Christians and Muslims, and those who have attended Churches and Mosques in the past regarding social inclusion and belonging? 2. What differences exist between the experiences of those who attend and currently do not, if any? 3. How do religious identities and being autistic interact in regards to social inclusion and belonging? Narrative interviews were done with 8 autistic people (4 had previously or currently attend a Church, and 4 had previously or currently attend a Mosque). The data was analysed using thematic narrative analysis and the critical incidents of each narrative compared. Three themes were discovered: a pastiche of identities, navigating expectations and doing what's right for me. There was no one way that my participants navigated their way through church or mosque spaces. It depended on how close the expectations of their church or mosque was to their own identity standards to if they made changes to their environment. Expectations appeared to be highly normative, echoing ideas of an 'ideal worshipper' and not understanding of what it meant to be an autistic Christian or Muslim.

From Silence to Storytelling: Activist Research to Resource a Disabled Christian Movement

Naomi Lawson Jacobs

(University of Leeds)

This presentation will tell the story of my activist research with a new but growing activist movement of disabled religious practitioners, and discuss the relevance of activist research methods with other marginalised groups in religious institutions.

Activism and research can inform each other to transform ableist social structures (Gillberg, 2020). My PhD research with disabled Christians found that churches and theology were sites of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007) where participants were silenced. Yet until recently, disability activism has been largely absent in churches. Research has not been a resource for activism; there has been little social research into the experiences of disabled Christians, and religion is under-researched in disability studies.

Activist methods and aims were emergent in my research, as I came to ask whose “side” my research was on (Becker, 1967). I was initially reluctant to engage with my insider positionality as a disabled Christian. However, through the research process I came to realise the importance of reciprocity with a disempowered community. I worked with a co-researcher and community to transform research findings into a book to resource a disabled Christian activist movement (Jacobs and Richardson, 2022). The book centres disabled Christians' narratives; as storytellers, their theological agency stands in defiance of epistemic injustice and silencing. Through the book and other accessible knowledge exchange, disabled Christians have used the research findings as a resource for activism.

A feminist lens on autistic women's experiences of faith

Sara Mchaffie

(Northumbria University)

Recently, there has been a proliferation of discussions on autistic women's experiences (Gould 2017, Sedgewick et al 2020) but to date, little academic work explores ways autistic women engage with faith from feminist public sociological perspectives. One theme identified was faith as a source of oppression and another, faith as a source of community. This paper explores tensions between these themes.

This paper considers how autistic women conceptualise faith through a feminist lens. The first phase of data co-generation involved dialogical interviews with autistic writers and academics who engage with feminist ideas. The second involved a year-long group project with a group of autistic women local to Tayside in Scotland who had an interest in discussing feminist ideas, using dialogue and creative methods. Provisional themes indicate autistic feminist women may have ambivalent relationships with faith and religious community.

This data recalls literature by Waldock (2023) and Van Ommen (2022) who suggest autistic people who belong to faith-based communities often have to negotiate others' prejudice, but that when there is a sense of belonging, it can be a source of strength for autistic people. A

feminist approach aligns with this work as it takes into account the power dynamics at play, and also awareness that religious communities are a context where abuses of power can disproportionately impact on women and girls.

Sharing analysis to date of participants' perceptions and experiences with faith using an intersectional feminist lens, I will also suggest directions for feminist study of autistic women's engagement with faith.

Parallel Session D, Classroom 024

Short Presentations 1

Tackling moral questions in secular terrains: Minority Christian migrants in Denmark

Astrid Krabbe Trolle

(University of Copenhagen)

In this short presentation, I argue that the topic of morality as a fruitful object of analysis is becoming more and more relevant in sociology of religion. I exemplify the usefulness of morality (or what people consider right and wrong) by drawing on studies of minority Christian migrants. Religious migrants are often united across faith traditions in opposition to secular norms regarding various aspects of the intimate such as child rearing, sexuality, and the body. These areas speak directly to individual and collective notions of morality. I build my analysis on survey material and semi-structured interviews with (migrant and non-migrant) Catholics in Denmark in the period 2015-2019 and 2021-2024.

Exploring the experience of natural green space among South Asian Muslim people in the UK

Mohammed Hamza, Annette Stride, Thomas Quarmby

(Leeds Trinity University)

Visiting Natural Green Spaces (NGS) is an important lifestyle factor that contributes to quality of life. Whilst NGS can be used to combat health issues, many of which are experienced by South Asian Muslim communities in the UK, it is concerning that such communities face the largest disparities in access to NGS compared to other ethnic minority groups. This paper responds to the paucity in research of South Asian people's experiences of NGS. Data were generated through individual semi-structured interviews with 20 South Asian Muslim men and women. Using Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital, data underwent thematic analysis. This paper reports on the key findings of the study: defining the field of NGS; enhancing wellbeing in NGS; and challenges of accessing NGS. The study concludes that we understand NGS as fields in which capital is shaped by race, religion and gender, and provides suggestions for how policy and practice can consider NGS in health enhancing interventions.

Challenges to Congregant Safety: Identifying Barriers to Implementing an Effective Safeguarding Culture in Gurdwaras across Greater London and Kent

Jeeves Rohilla

(National Multifaith Youth Centre)

The deep significance of Gurdwaras across the UK cannot be overstated, as evidenced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic when they provided thousands of meals to those in need every day. As a Regional Coordinator of the Strengthening Faith Institutions (SFI) Programme (a government-backed initiative aimed at supporting minority faith Places of Worship with safeguarding and governance support) that focused on Sikh engagement, for many years I had the privilege of visiting a significant number of Gurdwaras that varied in size, capacity, and resource. Wherever my travels took me, I would always be greeted with warmth, friendship, and a hot meal.

Gurdwaras continue to leave a positive imprint on society. However, due to the vast array of community support they provide and the resulting engagement with children and vulnerable adults susceptible to harm and abuse, ensuring they remain safe places is a necessity.

Through the in-depth assessment of five Gurdwaras across Greater London and Kent, I identify and evaluate the challenges Gurdwaras encounter in creating a healthy safeguarding culture within their sacred walls. The findings in this study aim to build on the themes spotlighted within the widely covered Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) Investigative Report: Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings (2021). However, unlike the IICSA Report, I delve deeper into the obstacles Sikh temples encounter when implementing effective safeguarding practices. I consider the practical constraints that faith institutions are likely to face due to their size, capacity, and resource, whilst briefly touching on broader cultural challenges.

Day 3 – Wednesday 10 July 2024

Parallel Session E – 09:30-11:30

Oral Presentations, Classroom 007

(Non-)Religion and Migration

Migration, Ancestry, and No Religion in Australia

Adam Possamai, Alanna Kamp, Rhys Gower

(Western Sydney University)

Australia has witnessed a significant rise in people claiming 'No-Religion' in recent censuses with the percentage having more than doubled in the last two decades. Academic literature addressing Australian non-religion focuses on explaining this rise and/or investigating the inherent diversity of the substantial religious 'none' category. Existing research also tends to refer to two broad categories of non-religious people in Australia: those who become non-religious while living in Australia and those who were born non-religious. There is little understanding of the migration of non-religious people to Australia. Similarly, current migration literature abounds with analyses of religious migrant groups who contribute to the religiosity of Australia, but there is minimal investigation of non-religious migrants. The 2021 Australian national census identified that close to one-quarter of non-religious people were born outside of Australia, but it is unclear if they came with their non-religion or if they lost their religion after migration or settlement. This article seeks to understand the increase of the no-religion category by focusing on those born overseas or identifying with an ancestry other than Australian. This investigation finds that migrants are greatly contributing to the 'non-religious' population. These findings challenge much of the migration scholarship that characterises migrants as religious and complicates understandings of migrants solely driving increased religiosity in Australia.

Religious Diasporic Intangible Heritage: Bridging Faith, Culture, and Social Justice

Anna Catalani

(University Of Lincoln)

The purpose of this paper is to explore the multifaceted relationship between religious diasporic intangible heritage (primarily from non-Western diasporic groups in the UK) and

social justice as well as the ways in which these elements intersect and contribute to fostering equitable and inclusive societies.

Grounded on the theories of religious pluralism (Champion, 1999) and intersectionality (Walby et al. 2012), this presentation aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the role of non-Western religious intangible heritage in advancing social justice agendas and in relation to African diasporic communities in the West (specifically Yorubas in the United Kingdom).

The paper's starting point is twofold. I will firstly acknowledge the coexistence of diverse religious beliefs (traditional religion, Christian, and Islamic) and practices within diasporic African communities in the West; and I will then recognise the complex interplay between religious identities and other social categorizations such as race, gender and socioeconomic status. The focus of this paper will be the Yoruba diasporic communities in the UK and the ways in which they have been using religious websites and social networks to create conditions for new religious experiences, practices and beliefs.

I will argue that by being communicated via social networks, Yoruba traditional intangible heritage in Western societies can reflect and shape pluralistic dynamics as well as bridging interfaith dialogue, mutual understanding and collective actions towards social justice.

Too Gay to Leave, Too Straight to Stay- Navigating the UK Immigration System as a Bisexual Asylum Seeker

Alexander Wainwright

(Nottingham University)

Sexual minority asylum applicants in the UK receive excessive scrutiny in relation to every detail of their relationship history, sexual orientation and experience of persecution. Bisexuality is a very complex, nuanced and largely misunderstood umbrella of contemporary sexualities that are not typically part of Global South vocabulary. However, on entering the UK asylum system there is an expectation that within a sexual minority claim the applicant will explicitly align themselves to a formally recognised orientation label- that can be critiqued in a court of law. Alongside the immigration system is a new and unfamiliar queer community that opens its arms to the asylum seeker but with an unwritten assumption that religion will either take a less important role or even cease to exist. How can an asylum seeker continue to remain religious after escaping homophobic persecution on the grounds of religious attitudes?

This PhD research was conducted part time between 2021 and 2023 through a multi-methodological approach with a particular focus on semi-structured interviewing. Alex interviewed 15 asylum seekers who either self-identified as bisexual or disclosed a

relationship history which has gone on to be interpreted by support workers and solicitors as bisexual. Alongside this he interviewed 13 representatives from LGBT asylum organisations across England, Scotland and Wales to explore how professionals support the different needs of bisexual asylum seekers. The findings of his research highlight how many asylum seekers grapple with the reality of being both openly queer in their new host country and still devoutly religious.

The Persecution of Apostates and Non-Religious Individuals: Exploring Justice and Social Action in the Context of Asylum Claims

Lucy Potter

(University of Sheffield)

In societies marked by the preference to conform to the religious beliefs and practices of the majority, the issue of apostasy—a decision to renounce one's faith—remains deeply contentious. Religious beliefs are highly sensitive and politicised topics, and states actively limit and restrict Freedom of Religious or Belief (FoRB) for apostates and non-religious individuals. Apostates face discrimination, marginalisation, and persecution in their countries-of-origin leading some to seek sanctuary in the United Kingdom (UK). However, apostasy as a ground for an asylum claim is absent within academic research and asylum determination processes for such cases are flawed. This presentation will discuss early ontological and conceptual reflections from interviews conducted with non-religious refugees and human right advocates working around FoRB to understand how their asylum claims are handled. It will reflect on individuals journeys to leaving religion, the persecution they face from state and non-state actors, the manifestation of non-religious identities once in the United Kingdom (UK), and how the Home Office assesses and understands these complex claims. This paper will begin to explore how religion in this context has hindered social action and examine how non-religious refugees form a social movement of support in the UK. As people identifying as non-religious is swiftly increasing and threat against them is growing, it is essential to study this group within its own right. This presentation underscores the importance of recognising apostasy as a basis for asylum and highlights the social construction of the refugee through various legal, societal, and emotional aspects surrounding these claims.

Parallel Session E, Classroom 008

Religious Communities and Social Action

Ecumenical networks of Christian social activism across Brazil and Britain: Navigating difference and power in practice

Andrew Orton

(Durham University)

This presentation explores practitioner accounts of ecumenical networks of Christian social activism connecting across Brazil and/or Britain. The analysis draws on narratives from interviews conducted with practitioners involved in these networks. These narratives were collected in research led and conducted by Joanildo Burity (funded by grants from the National Scientific and Technological Development Council, Brazil, and the Joaquim Nabuco Foundation, Brazil), and analysed collaboratively with the presenter for this presentation. We explore how relationships within these networks of ecumenical social activism are understood by practitioners and developed through their practice, focusing on how practitioners seek to generate different forms of power through these relationships that support their social activism. We highlight how generating these different forms of power frequently involves creative and reflexive engagement across dimensions of similarity and difference with others, both within and between these contexts, and across local, national and wider global scales. Through this analysis, we consider how such narratives contribute insights for understanding how these forms of religious social activism navigate engagement across different identities, contexts and scales of action within their work.

Social Action and Social Justice: The motivations and practices of British Evangelicals

Greg Smith

(William Temple Foundation)

Coventry University's Life on the Breadline research project (Shannahan and Denning, 2023) has concluded that that "the Church remains nervous of moving beyond welfare-based responses to poverty" and offered a "critique (of) the individualising of poverty by successive British governments who have attributed it to so-called moral inadequacy, rather

than structural injustice". This paper engages with these ideas, and expands their qualitative research findings, by drawing on survey data from the 21st Century Evangelicals Research Programme. Wave 13 (Are we Good Neighbours) and wave 16 (Good News for the Poor?) provide evidence that Evangelical Christians have specific understandings and theological priorities that limit the scope of their social action and prevent them addressing the causes and the politics of poverty and injustice. Many evangelical Christians are involved in social action and have personal commitments to justice, and many churches have set up local projects, sometimes in partnership with other Christian and secular agencies. However, the majority of the action takes place within a safe and bounded Christian environment.

Reflecting on these findings in the light of my long term insider "verstehen" of the field, and recent online discussions triggered by online discussion of Jon Kurht's recent blog Justice, Empowerment & Faith: the future direction for Christian social action I will propose some possible scenarios for the future of Christian social involvement in Britain.

The multidimensional landscape of hardship: understanding the current climate for UK faith-based social action

Jennifer Johnson

(Coventry University)

This paper will explore how the concept of 'hardship', to which faith groups in England often seek to respond, is experienced in multidimensional and context-specific ways.

Austerity measures, the COVID-19 pandemic and the so-called 'cost of living crisis' have all widened inequality in the UK, disproportionately impacting the most economically vulnerable. Faith groups have, historically, played significant and varied roles in responding to hardship – from providing immediate, practical support, to campaigning for social justice. The helpfulness of these responses, and their motivations, has not gone unchallenged, with questions raised about the pitfalls of power imbalances and complicity with stigmatising, hegemonic discourse about poverty. While church responses have been well-researched, less has been written about the action of other faith groups - particularly about how people directly enduring hardship experience those responses. The second-year, part-time, doctoral research upon which this paper draws will explore and analyse how far the aims and motivations of faith groups are coherent with, and beneficial to, the experiences of people themselves facing hardship. Its focus on the west of Newcastle, a community that is economically-deprived but rich in faith diversity, will provide insights relevant more widely as faith groups continue to use their enduring social capital to further the common good.

This paper will present the complex landscape of hardship within which faith groups are acting and propose a participatory methodology that will be used to hear and amplify the voices of people experiencing hardship at a grassroots level.

Relationality and faith to tackle exploitation: Uncovering Catholic religious sisters' response

Mariana Crespi De Valldaura

(University of Nottingham)

Religious communities play a significant role in the anti-trafficking movement; however, little is known about the impact of their labour. While the emergence of a global faith alliance against modern slavery and human trafficking has been investigated by some scholars, the role of faith actors in community settings in building antislavery resilience has still received little sociological attention.

Intending to break with the normativity of exploitation, Pierpaolo Donati argues for the need for positive solutions seeking to foster the promotion of human dignity – that is a “relational good”. As morality is understood as a relational phenomenon – not individual or systemic – in which normative changes are sustained by the social networks implementing them, he recommends looking at how normativity can be changed where trafficking in persons is fostered, and how through relational steering it is possible to enhance processes of social inclusion respectful of human dignity (Donati, 2016).

Arguably, relationality stands out at the heart and mission of Catholic religious communities when aiming to challenge and transform the hierarchies of power perpetuating human trafficking. Therefore, this paper explores the relationship between social morality, social resilience, and faith in the work of Catholic religious sisters fighting sexual exploitation. Through ethnographic research, it focuses on the work of the sisters Adoratrices, who over 160 years, have been procuring women's liberation from exploitation.

Parallel Session E, Classroom 021

Gender, Power, and Abuse

Intersections of Faith, Gender, Violence, and Migration: Understanding Intimate Partner Violence in African Christian Communities in the UK

Gabriella Mwedzi

(Newcastle University)

This ethnographic study, conducted within an African Christian community in the UK, provides a comprehensive exploration of intimate partner violence (IPV) among Black Christian African migrant women. It emphasises that IPV experiences within this community are complex outcomes shaped by the intricate interplay of multiple marginalised identities. This research uncovers that IPV experiences among these women are intertwined with their African heritage, migration status, gender, and Christian faith. These components converge to mold perceptions and rationalisations surrounding IPV occurrences across the community.

Using Black feminist, theological feminist, and African feminist theories, this study illuminates the deep-rooted reasons behind women's hesitancy to disclose instances of IPV both within the church community and the wider community. Their reluctance is embedded in internalised commitments to the sanctity of the nuclear family and marriage and literal interpretations of biblical teachings. As such, seeking help outside the church community and clergy members is discouraged due to fears of religious-cultural erosion, societal stigma, and community expectations, thus creating a barrier to addressing and seeking support for IPV.

Drawing from this ethnographic exploration, the paper advocates for tailored, culturally sensitive interventions that value lived experience as the criterion of meaning. The research emphasises the urgent need for resources that acknowledge and embrace their socio-religious and cultural identity, countering existing approaches that inadvertently pressure women to compromise their faith or cultural values to seek help for IPV. This study underscores the pressing necessity for increased academic attention and resources attuned to the multifaceted experiences of these marginalised women.

Negotiating Femininity: Intersections of Religion, Culture, and Spiritual Abuse in African Pentecostal Churches in the UK

Mabel Alkali

This research examines the multifaceted dynamics of spiritual abuse within African Pentecostal churches (APCs) of West African background in the UK, with a focus on the abusive use of the Bible in perpetuating harmful gender norms and reinforcing patriarchal structures. Drawing from sociological feminist, womanist, and theological lenses, this study examines how religious teachings intersect with cultural norms to sanction and perpetuate forms of spiritual abuse, particularly targeting women's sexuality and agency.

Through qualitative research methods, this study analyses the narratives and theological hermeneutics of 30 women from APCs across the UK. Through thematic and narrative analysis, it illuminates the ways in which the Bible is manipulated to demonise women's sexuality, uphold patriarchal norms, and justify oppressive practices such as marital submission and prayerful endurance in the face of domestic abuse.

Contrary to the liberative potential often associated with the Bible, findings underscore the pervasive misuse of the Bible as a tool of spiritual coercion and control within APCs, perpetuating cycles of abuse and subjugation. Male-dominated church leadership further exacerbates these dynamics, as interpretations of scripture are wielded to disempower women and restrict their autonomy.

By foregrounding the experiences of women within APCs and highlighting the abusive use of religious teachings, this research contributes to a critical understanding of the intersections between religion, culture, and gender-based violence. It underscores the urgent need for theological and pastoral interventions to challenge and dismantle abusive interpretations of scripture, promoting a more inclusive and equitable religious discourse that prioritizes justice, compassion, and empowerment.

Power, gender and ritual in UK Red Tents

Madeleine Castro

(Leeds Beckett University)

Women's circles are popular gatherings in the contemporary holistic milieu and wellbeing sphere. Red Tents are one particular type of women's circle that has identifiable roots and an online presence, connected at least in part to *The Red Tent* by Anita Diamant. Diamant's novel retells 'the rape of Dinah' from the Hebrew Bible through a feminist lens, offering the female protagonists both voices and agency. In the book, the Red Tent is a sacred place for feminine wisdom-sharing, polytheistic rituals, birthing and menstruation. The women value this space as sacrosanct, a place where they are knowledgeable and have power.

This paper draws on the qualitative responses from survey research into the UK Red Tent Movement to explore how matters of femininity, rituals and power are conveyed. In reviewing one theme – ‘Tent Goddesses: Manifesting and revering sacred feminine power’ I consider how the women construct power as an internal matter derived from various possible sources (including ancestors or the Divine Feminine), that can be manifested by the rituals of the Red Tent. I argue that there is evidence of the gendered and sacred nature of this power, and a sense of reclaiming lost traditions and revaluing femininity. Drawing on critical feminist works, including the sociology of religion and goddess feminism, I begin to tease out the implications for our understanding of gender and power in these spaces.

Speaking For and With Survivors: Methodological Reflections on Researching Sexual Abuse in Transnational Buddhism

Ann Gleig

(University of Central Florida)

Since the 1980s, Transnational Buddhist communities have been the site of recurring sexual abuse and misconduct cases. In light of institutional deflection, survivors of abuse and their advocates have led the way in advocating for accountability and reform. In this paper, I discuss how survivor-centered activism has shaped my collaborative book project with Dr. Amy Langenberg on sexual violence in contemporary Buddhism. I explain how we reoriented our research focus to become more survivor-centered after encounters with survivors of sexual violence in contemporary convert/nonheritage Buddhism made us realize our initial project design, which focused on doctrines, community responses, and institutions, unintentionally but automatically moved survivors to a secondary position.

This process illuminated the naivety of so-called “objective” or simply “descriptive” scholarship and its complicity in perpetuating rather than problematizing power and abuse in Buddhism.

Parallel Session E, Classroom 024

Religion, Identity, and Justice in Contemporary Britain

Belonging and Believing in British Quakerism: dual spiritual identities

Ben Pink Dandelion, Shena Deuchars

(Centre for Research in Quaker Studies, University of Birmingham)

Decennial surveys of British Quakers, beginning in the 1990s, with response rates of more than 80% mark this group out as both highly researched and highly responsive. This paper reports on the 2023 British Quaker Survey, which sought to survey the total population of 17000 using an online tool. This approach brought with it methodological challenges connected with a group averse to technology as well as the way in which online surveys constrain the ability to add unsolicited data. However, it also resulted in over 4700 responses.

In 2013, latent class analysis revealed a very high probability of British Quakers falling into one of three discrete theological categories with different styles of belonging. However, qualitative work revealed a highly permissive attitude between these distinct sensibilities confirming earlier work on British Quaker 'orthocredence'. The key findings from the 2023 survey will be shared, in particular the high prevalence of Quakers with dual spiritual identities (about 15% also identify as pagans, Muslims, Jews or Hindus). The main focus of the research considers the way they navigate Quakerism, which emerged from the tumult of seventeenth-century English Christianity but persists as an inclusive, liberal, post-Christian faith group.

Finally, the paper will detail the impending World Survey of Friends. This first attempt to survey Quaker traditions globally is being supported by the BSA SOCREL Seedcorn funding. The global survey respondents will be far fewer in number although they represent the vast majority of Quakers worldwide who are less likely to express a post-Christian, liberal faith.

Baring Bodies, Baring Souls: Health and Beauty Professionals as Secular Priests

Abby Day

(Goldsmiths, University of London)

This research explores the complex role of the 'body/beauty' professional as, perhaps, secular priest. Clients regularly 'bare their souls' during their interactions with the professional, whether that occurs during a manicure, haircut, tattoo or training session at the gym. They share their problems and sometimes confess worries and misdoings in ways they conceal to even their best friends, and partners. Interviews conducted with professionals revealed how such experiences follow the classic pattern of transformative ritual journeys. This intimate, therapeutic relationship mirrors religious frameworks and dynamics, considering especially the dynamics of place, moral authority and relationality. From confession to absolution, the professional may be performing a priestly role that has diminished in societies of the Global North where Christianity is fading and the beauty/body industry growing.

Veiled and Victimised? British Muslim women negotiating secular spaces

Saleema Burney

(SOAS, University of London)

In the face of frequent discrimination against and damaging caricatures of Muslims, and of Muslim women particularly, sociological research on Muslims in the last two decades has now begun to document the voices and concerns of individual Muslim women themselves. Based on two years of fieldwork in SE England with a sample of publicly active Muslim women who also contribute to social causes, this study aims to rebut the 'veil and victimhood' caricature of Muslim women with first-hand narratives of their lives and their contribution. Results reported include the centrality of faith as an intrinsic motivator, the unique observance of a 'generational trajectory' in their lives and their expansive visions for the future of British Muslim women. The research also highlights methodological limitations in the application of social science theories and approaches to the study of religious minorities generally, and Muslims more specifically. It is argued that the public interactions of these women, and in particular the 'weak ties' they seek to foster as religious women living in a liberal secular society, provide hope for a plural Britain, built on an interactive and necessarily bi-directional model of integration.

For the Salvation of Souls: Catholicism on UK University Campuses

Bernadette Durcan

(St Mary's University)

Conservative religion is known for its attempts to protect a particular means and ends of salvation. The survival of such belief systems in the contemporary (non-)religious marketplace proves to be a constant challenge. As the scarcity of regularly practicing Catholics grows in the UK, the battle for distinctiveness sees young Catholics responding in creative ways to transmit the faith *ad intra*, to themselves and their co-religionists, and *ad extra*, to their non-Catholic peers. Given the popularly held assumption that the university necessarily secularises, this paper will examine the methods being used to communicate the faith, and the worldview from within which they operate, in order to gain and retain the commitment and interest of emerging adults. If it is the case that future trends about religion will be seen in the habits of youth of today, then attention should be paid to these 'highly religious young Catholics'. Drawing on ethnographic data from 3 UK campuses, this paper aims to explore the ways in which traditional religion is continuing in settings that have been historically associated with having an inescapably liberalising influence. It will consider the ways in which this particular religious minority navigate the extremes of cultural accommodation and of insularity, whilst hoping to save their own souls and society's.

Parallel Session F, Classroom 007

New Religion, Suspicion, and Action

'Cult' Rhetoric in the 21st Century: Rethinking approaches to 'new religious movements'

Aled Thomas, Edward Graham-Hyde

(University of Leeds)

While sociological studies of minority religions have often distanced themselves from the use of the term 'cult', it appears to have gained a new cultural currency in the 21st century. Recent discourses surrounding the 'Cult of Trump', anti-vaxxers, and QAnon have suggested a visible rise in the use of normative 'cultic' language surrounding intersections of religion and politics. These intersections and hybridised understandings of the term mark a departure from the moral panics of the 1970s/80s associated with minority religious communities. Accordingly, this paper seeks to explore how contemporary 'cult' rhetoric presents a new set of questions for sociologists of religion, including theoretical approaches to how minority religions (broadly conceived) should be approached. To this end, we will argue that the field should move beyond the so-called 'Cult Wars' that has dominated our paradigms, and seek to embrace a collaborative multi-disciplinary study (of both 'Cult Studies' and 'New Religious Movements Studies') of 'cultic' language - measuring the (in)direct impact that this has on social structures and individuals. Additionally, we will present early findings from innovative research investigating 'cult' rhetoric in popular vernacular and political discourses.

New Religions, Justice, and Social Action

Eileen Barker

(London School of Economics)

For centuries new religious movements (NRMs), oftentimes just because they are new, have been at the receiving end of social injustices. The NRMs themselves have only rarely had the social status or access to those with sufficient social status to remedy the situation. Since the 1970s, however, an increasing number of sociologists studying NRMs have found themselves involved in social and legal actions in support of (or, to a lesser extent, opposed

to) increasing the rights of minority religions. Moreover, today we can find some of those NRMs that were among the most unpopular of the 1970s initiating movements that embrace a number of other, more established, religions and, to a somewhat lesser extent, other NRMs in order to achieve justice, not only for themselves, but also for minority religions in general. The paper will examine some of these organisations and discuss some of the reasons for their successes and failures.

Apocalyptic vigilantism through 'Satanic moral panic': an online discourse analysis

Bethan Oake

(University of Leeds)

Conspiracy theories allege that secret groups are responsible for unexplained circumstances. If escalated, they can contribute to an intensified and disproportionate state of fear known as a 'moral panic', which exaggerates and misrepresents perceptions of moral threat. Paradoxically, moral panics actually prevent the resolution of any underlying social concerns through instead promoting misinformation. And they also lead to the unjust blame, scapegoating, and demonisation of communities and individuals. Crucially, conspiracy theories and moral panics do not occur in a vacuum but interact with and reflect existing societal fears, concerns, and prejudices. This paper analyses online conspiracy theory rhetoric that alleges the existence of Satan-worshipping cults who threaten society. This specific conspiracy theory has re-emerged in moral panics across history, leading to false accusations, convictions, and murders of innocent people – from medieval antisemitic conspiracy panics, the early modern witch trials, to the notorious 'Satanic panic' of the 1980s. This last decade has seen yet another resurgence of these same hoax allegations. Notably, its theorists today present themselves as moral vigilantes, fighting to save society from moral subversion. As this paper will demonstrate through case studies and discourse analysis, these conspiracy theories have already again demonstrated their capacity to mobilise individuals into harmful action. This paper analysis this contemporary Satanic cult conspiracy theory discourse across social media, demonstrating how conspiratorial moral panics present themselves in the modern day: What, exactly, is seen as the current social threat? Who is being scapegoated? And – importantly - why do these demonologies appear legitimate?

Parallel Session F, Classroom 008

Death and Dying

Cultural Betrayal: The Pathology of Religion, Justice, and social action

Douglas Davies

(Durham University)

Developing my original 'Theory of Offending Death' (Richard Fenn, ed. Blackwell's Handbook to the Sociology of Religion, 2000), this paper sketches some major social-theory work in progress on the notion of 'cultural betrayal'. Such cultural betrayal accounts for the offence caused to victims' well-being and to cultural trust, and for the mass popular reactions triggered when agents of major social institutions do betray the trust vested in them. This includes religious-ecclesiastical, medical, and malicious law enforcement, including the current case of The Post Office and what has been deemed the greatest miscarriage of justice in British legal history. Rooted in a cluster of concepts including trust, fear, identity, and dual sovereignty, cultural betrayal engages with reciprocity theory and processes of community integration, their fracture, and attempted reparation. It moves from classical 'betrayal' and its transcendence in earliest Christian sectarianism, through international cases including the death of Princess Diana (1997), the Breivik murders in Norway (2011), sexual and clerical and medical abuse, and today's UK miscarriage of justice in the case of the Post Office Horizon accusations, with brief allusion to the NHS and its potential betrayal of a person's 'right to' assisted death.

It seemed like the "rite" thing to do – choices about religious content in everyday celebrant-led funerals in the UK

Naomi Thompson

(Goldsmiths, University of London)

This presentation will share research findings from the 'Faith in Funerals' project, which has explored the fusion of religious, spiritual and/or non-religious content in everyday funeral ceremonies led by independent celebrants in the UK. Civil funerals in the UK differ from civil wedding ceremonies which are entirely secular - as funerals are not a legal ceremony and there are no legal restrictions to using religious content in civil funerals conducted by non-religious officiants. Funerals conducted by independent celebrants fall into categories created about the proportions of secular or non-religious funerals. The reality is far more complex than such divisions suggest and they misrepresent the engagement with religion,

belief and spirituality by people planning these funerals for their loved ones. Our project challenges narratives of secularisation and binarized notions of funerals being religious and non-religious. The research found that over 70% of funerals led by independent celebrants included at least one of a prayer, hymn, or reading from scripture (predominantly Christian) based on an analysis of 1000 services. Interviews with celebrants, arrangers and those who have organised funerals for their loved ones suggest that incorporation of popular resources like The Lord's Prayer represent a funeral rite that provides a sense that the right thing has been done. Overall, the research suggests that everyday funerals are a balance of personalisation and religious and spiritual resources – and that the incorporation of such resources is more important than the ceremony being led by an ordained minister.

Parallel Session F, Classroom 021

Short Presentations 2

Managing Ambiguity: Religious Intolerance and Policy in Indonesia

Alamsyah Muhammad Djafar

(Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia)

This paper expands the existing knowledge on how actors construct frame ambiguity in policy formulation. This study elaborates on the discursive strategies used to manage ambiguity through arguing, framing, and blame avoidance, based on an analysis of case studies of policy formulation aimed at addressing religious intolerance in Indonesia. The findings demonstrate that actors utilize discursive strategies to achieve two main objectives: preserving majority values and maintaining dynamism and heterogeneity in response to evolving demands. The paper argues that ambiguity serves as a temporary mechanism to overcome impasses and differences in values and demands among actors. The findings of the study fill the gap in the limited number of studies that examine ambiguity in religious policy, especially regarding the relationship between religion and the state. Additionally, the findings provide insights for the application of analytical tools in understanding ambiguity and its role in promoting institutional change.

Bridging Faith and Identity: A Turning Point

Maryam Bham

(University of Cambridge)

This presentation delves into a unique experience: my journey as the first Muslim teacher to join a Catholic school since its establishment in the 1960s. It examines the psychological, discursive, and pedagogical dynamics encountered during this tenure, shedding light on the intricate web in which educators navigate their sense of self within the broader landscape of British society and educational institutions.

Central to the exploration is the pivotal question: is change an inherent purpose of dialogue within such settings? The presentation seeks to unravel the complex fabric of identity negotiation and representation. It offers insight into the construction of a coherent self-narrative, illustrating the mechanisms by which personal identities are reconciled with professional responsibilities. The success of this negotiation is portrayed, not solely on individual perceptions of compatibility, but also reliant on multifaceted considerations of personal and professional duties.

By reflecting on this experience, the presentation illuminates the broader implications for religious practices and social integration in a multicultural society. It serves as a testament to the transformative power of dialogue and adaptation in educational institutions, highlighting the capacity for individuals to bridge cultural and religious gaps while upholding personal and professional integrity. Ultimately, it showcases that navigating multiple identities is not only a personal endeavour but a significant societal dialogue that necessitates a delicate balance between change and tradition.

Stigma in non-religious families: hidden micro-aggressions and discrimination and non-religious identity construction across Humanist family generations in Western and Eastern Europe

Morena Tartari, Hamide Elif Üzümcü

(Babes-Bolyai University)

From a sociological perspective, the construction of non-religious identities and its connections with stigma and discrimination in the everyday life is still largely unexplored.

This paper aims to fill in this gap by discussing the results of two research studies on secular Humanist movements in Western and Eastern Europe, which explore the everyday life of non-religious families with humanist, atheist and agnostic members.

This paper is based on the data collected through two research projects, RE-Green and WHosGreen, which are still in progress, and which involve six countries (United Kingdom, Norway, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary). These projects share the critical sociological approach of Dorothy Smith as a research orientation.

The data discussed in this paper come from textual analyses of Humanist and atheist associations' websites and published materials, and from in-depth interviews involving Humanist grandparents, parents, and adult children, which investigate several themes concerning their everyday life and intergenerational transmission of values. Some questions focus on the experience of stigmatization and discrimination as non-believers for them and the next generation.

Results allow for a discussion of how non-religious identities are constructed through the institutional discourses from the Humanist and atheist associations and the everyday experience of their members. The analysis of the documents and interviews points out negotiations and strategies to manage hidden micro-aggressions and discrimination and reduce stigma across generations. Furthermore, the paper discusses the role of individual and collective activism in countering forms of discrimination and hidden micro-aggressions against families with non-believer members.