

## **EASR 2022 Open Panels**

**Convenor(s): Dr Roland Clark**

### **Divine Interventions: Between Freedom and Constraint**

Although Muhammad had gone to the mountain seeking answers, he appears to have had little choice but to read/recite the words given to him by the angel Gabriel, which involved a doctrine of submission to the will of Allah. Other prophets, from Popé in seventeenth century Santa Fe to Inochentie of Balta in last imperial Russia, taught that God offers freedom from rapacious empires or repressive regimes. With a particular focus on the early modern and modern worlds, this panel examines the social and political implications of hierophanies across a variety of religious traditions. How does divine intervention make claims on the organisation of time, space, and society? To what extent does hearing from spirits, angels, or gods bring the visionary into conflict with the established power structure and how are these conflicts resolved? What do claims about supernatural support add to oppositional movements and to what extent do they become inseparable from such movements' success or failure? Conversely, when do hierophanies reinforce the establishment and constrain the freedom of religious entrepreneurs? By analysing the politics of divine intervention through a variety of individual case studies this panel aims to shed light on the relationship of religion, freedom, and constraint more generally.

**Convenor(s): Dr Igor Mikeshin**

### **Religious freedoms and COVID-19 in Russia and beyond**

The Covid-19 pandemic hit Russia severely. During the first wave, strict lockdowns were implemented, which provoked a debate on the appropriateness of closing churches, restricting or postponing religious services and rituals requiring the physical presence of congregants, and the overall interpretation of a global pandemic in the religious context. Religious communities in Russia reacted in different ways. Some willingly complied with the restrictions, transferred most of their activities online, and called on believers to obey the authorities in the situation of a global health crisis. For some religious institutions, including the majority Church, the issue of compliance became controversial and divisive. For instance, some priests and/or parishes rejected the idea that the Holy Communion could transmit the virus. There were also notorious cases of COVID-dissident groups, like the one led by infamous Schemamonk Sergius (Romanov), who rebelled against the Church with the monastery he founded. Theological responses to the pandemic were also diverse. While a small minority of religious leaders saw it as an act or a conspiracy inflicted by satanic forces or the Antichrist himself, more moderate ones still saw a direct connection between the pandemic and human vices. This panel calls for contributions exploring two major questions. First, how did religious communities in Russia and other parts of ex-communist Eastern Europe react to the pandemic-related restrictions and how did they reconcile these restrictions with their ideological and theological narratives of religious freedom? Second, how have religious groups reflected on the role and place of the global pandemic within their eschatologies and soteriologies? Contributions from any research discipline based on empirical materials are welcomed.

**Convenor(s): Dr Angela Bernardo**

**Exploring religious freedom: religious communities' relations in different historical, geographical, cultural, and temporal contexts.**

Religious freedom is a hot topic that has a central role in the ongoing debate on the place and role of religious communities in the public sphere. The debate on this topic, which could be mainly considered a matter of relations, involves the relations between religious communities and the states in which their members live and work but also the relations existing inside and outside such communities – i.e. the so-called 'intra-religious' and 'inter-religious' relations. All these relations have assumed different characteristics based on the different historical, geographical, cultural, and temporal contexts in which they take place. They also involve different individual and collective actors and topics.

Starting from the assumption that relations are one of the three key aspects, along with identity and needs, by which every religious community can be examined (Bernardo 2020), this panel intends to explore how religious communities reshape their internal and external relations across time and space. Specific attention must be paid to the following areas: a. the dynamics and rhetorical strategies that religious communities apply in changing their internal and external relations, b. the discourses and the narratives they produce in doing this, and c. the topics they choose to support such discourses and narratives.

To this end and without chronological restrictions or limits in the fields of study, applicants are encouraged to submit proposals aimed to analyse how religious communities have changed their relations in different historical, geographical, cultural, and temporal contexts and how these changes have affected and were affected by identity and needs. The proposals have to focus on case studies.

Topics of interest are: identity and belonging, visibilisation/non-visibilisation processes, majority-minority issues, ways of theorising 'values', needs, and the concepts of religious freedom and human rights, negotiation of religious assumptions, modification of institutional structures, etc.

**Convenor(s): Dr Roni Naor Hofri & PhD Candidate Sergi Castellà Martínez**

**Free Captives: The Creative Practices of Christian Ascetics on the Way to Freedom**

Ascetic religious practices, which ran the gamut from collective, pompous rituals to daily, mute, introspective prayer, gave individuals freedom to break from a given state of being in the world and reach a new state of being, both physically and metaphysically. Across time and space, we find Christian ascetics, social and spiritual reformers of all ages and latitudes, who treated their lives and practices, both mental and physical, as examples of the relation between the finite and infinite.

Whether creating new imaginative forms from inside the core of organized religion or acting regardless of its boundaries, Christian ascetics framed disciplines meant for body and mind - contemplative prayer, illumination, or the unio mystica - going far beyond simple self-mortification, abstinence or an abandonment to martyrdom.

Regardless of their particular specificities, ascetics aimed towards the expansion of knowledge and epistemic boundaries, while overcoming mental and physical limitations, by way of different means, such as apophysis, paradox, or heterodoxy. Bodily imperfections, the fallibility of intelligence, and the radical vulnerability of one's own life were used as occasions for the most creative, fruitful forms of religious practice.

Based on such insights, the panel welcomes: (a) original and comparative analyses of case studies contributing to the interpretation of the religious phenomenon of ascetic practices involving body and/or mind, and (b) assessments of representations of the phenomenon in question, pointing out the integration of ascetic practices with different methodologies and philosophical movements."

**Convenor(s): Dr Alexandra Bergholm & Professor Tuula Sakaranaho**

### **Negotiating Catholicism and Catholic identities in the 21st century**

The Roman Catholic Church is the one of the oldest and largest continuously functioning religious institutions in the world, which has had a fundamental impact on societies and cultures on a global scale during its long and varied history. Today the Church has over one billion members across the world, with numbers continually growing especially in Latin America and Africa.

The relations between the Catholic Church and the modern world were redefined in the early 1960s by the Second Vatican Council, which sought to address challenges driven by contemporary societal, economic, and technological developments. While many of the modernizing reforms introduced by the council have been welcomed as a sign of the Church's willingness to acknowledge issues such as democracy, human rights, and the freedom of religion, the progressive spirit of the council has also proved polarizing. More recently, the shocking revelations relating to the systematic abuses of power within the Church have contributed to the erosion of the Church's moral authority, causing a backlash that has led many to question the legitimacy of the institution and its future.

This session invites contributions that address the impact of these developments on either local or global level, and discuss the ways in which Catholicism and Catholic identities are being shaped by them in the 21st century. Possible themes may include, but are not limited to: the status of the Catholic Church as an institution; Catholicism as a religious and cultural tradition; the division of the Catholic community on issues such as sexual ethics, abortion, gender, or the role of the laity; Catholicism in the media; spiritual abuse and coercive control. Both historical and contemporary approaches are welcome.

**Convenor(s): Dr Jelle Creemers, Prof Eileen Barker & Dr Tatiana Kopaleishvili**

### **Cult-Watching Organizations in Europe: Comparative Perspectives**

Following the conclusion of World War II, a wave of new religious movements mushroomed throughout most of Western Europe. Some of these were indigenous, but more were imports from the USA, then India and elsewhere around the world. Following the Fall of the Berlin Wall, new religions also rapidly spread across Eastern Europe, giving rise to different conflicts there. Reactions to these new religions, often dubbed 'cults' or 'sects', ranged from unenthusiastic to aggressively hostile. Negative reactions came from the media, but some scholars and activists also contributed to their stigmatization. Quite soon and often as a reaction to particular local situations, state actors took an interest in these non-conformist groups. Since the 1970s, observatories and agencies have been established to keep an eye on them and warn the public of the religions' allegedly dangerous beliefs and actions. Often subsidized by the state, their work frequently involves state sanctioned monitoring and policing of minority religious communities which are officially recognized in other European nations. Other 'cult-watching organisations' have been established in an attempt to bring more balanced, contextualised and up-to-date information about the religions.

This panel seeks to bring together scholars working on cult-watching movements in Europe through comparative studies. We invite informed contributions which offer insight into the history and working of religion-watching organisations and other cult-watching groups in European nations, as well as critical (and/or comparative) analyses of their definitions of cults/sects/NRMs, their developing focuses, and their socio-political influence.

**Convenor(s): Mr Tancredi Marrone**

#### **Libertas Occulta: The Paths to Freedom in Occultural Discourse**

This panel will explore occultural expressions in the pursuit of freedom. Seen as liberation expressed through concepts of overcoming obstacles is a narrative frequently found in Occult and Esoteric discourse. Magical practices are aimed at transmuting, changing, mutating, or reframing under a different shape incorporates the idea of freeing from boundaries. Whether these are of the human condition meaning limits of matter, liberation from mental and spiritual constraints, expanding beyond limits it makes it an active and relevant field in the exploration of freedom in relation to mystical and spiritual practices. We can observe a multitude of expressions in what we can now consider techniques of freedom and liberation. These incorporate a blend of eastern and western traditions but also new and creative ways of artistic expression. Further, there is an emergence of extreme religious movements that promote antinomian freedoms by reconceptualizing liberation in the form of oppression. Finally, it also sees an overlap between emic and etic perspectives in the shared objective of pushing barriers of knowledge.

**Convenor(s): Prof David W. Kim**

#### **Colonial Policy and East Asian Religious Communities in 1860-1950**

After South Asia and Southeast Asia, the wave of the colonial imperialism also reached to the local societies of East Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The social transformation overwhelmingly occurred in each nation through the modernisation phenomena of politics, economic, culture, education, medicine, status system, and society. The regional people were mainly divided into two categories of conservative and reformative parities. The traditional religions of East Asia were not exceptional from the concepts of conflict, impulse, negotiation, compromise, deformation, or new ideology. The native organisations of Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, folk religions, Shintoism, and Shamanism commonly experienced the colonial ideology of reformation in each community. The local people of China (Hong Kong and Tibet), Vietnam, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Mongol witnessed the religious transition process of the society with creative teachings of new leaders.

This panel invites professional papers regarding any subject of religious transformation under the politico-military influences of colonial policy occurred between 1860 and 1950 in any region of East Asia. The unique acts of opposition, resistance, independence, abandonment, or cooperation can be explored for any indigenous belief or individual group including new religious movements. The interdisciplinary writings of history, sociology, culture, politics, anthropology, East Asian Studies, colonial studies, and religious studies should indicate not only the origin, teaching, leadership of the group but also its key policy towards external powers (Western or local authorities). What were their main strategies to survive or to create a new identity under such modern impacts? The successful papers (250 words with five keywords) after the conference will be also considered for a publication project by a European publisher including Cambridge Scholars Publishing, UK in 2023.

**Convenor(s): Dr David Zbíral**

**Computerizing Religion: Computational Approaches, Research Databases, and Quantitative Methodologies in the Study of Religions**

In recent years, quantitative and computational methods have taken hold in various branches of the social sciences and humanities. Methodologies such as quantitative text analysis, social network analysis, regression modelling, and geoinformatics attract increasing attention of study of religions scholars. Furthermore, the compilation and use of various databases destined for research into religion has increased its presence in the field and has showcased religion as a topic of quantitative, macrohistorical, and evolutionary approaches, thus paving the way towards “computerizing religion” and establishing a genuine “data science of religion”. This panel intends to explore the potential of computational methods and research databases in the study of religions in data-analytical, methodological and programmatic papers.

**Convenor(s): Prof Titus Hjelm**

**Discursive Study of Religion**

Recent years have witnessed the emergence of a self-conscious discursive study of religion (DSR). The new field has produced paradigmatic manifestos, methodological guidelines, a special journal issue, edited volumes, and sessions at previous EASR meetings. However, with increasing consolidation comes increasing diversity. DSR is a broad church for a variety of approaches differing in ontological and epistemological background assumptions and, consequently, in their methodological and interpretive implications. This session invites theoretical, methodological, and empirical papers discussing DSR and its applications and prospects in the study of religion. We encourage submissions from scholars at all stages in their career, from graduate students to established academics.

**Convenor(s): Dr Brad Anderson**

**Mobilizing Sacred Texts: Reception, Iconicity, and Performativity**

In collaboration with SCRIPT (the Society for Comparative Research on Iconic and Performative Texts), this open panel invites papers that explore the use and mobilization of sacred texts (broadly understood). While much scholarship on scriptures is focused on exegetical or interpretive work, this panel invites proposals that explore the way in which these texts have been and continue to be used -- that is, the reception of sacred texts, as well as their function as iconic and performative texts. Potential areas for exploration may include (but are not limited to):

- the iconic function of sacred texts;
- the performative dimensions of Scriptures;
- materiality and sacred texts;
- the contemporary mobilization of sacred texts, including use within religious traditions;
- the use of sacred texts during Covid-19;
- the employment of sacred texts in political and other social contexts;
- the use of sacred texts in cultural contexts (e.g., the arts);

-- Classification and categorization of sacred texts;

-- Scriptures and their cultural histories, particularly forms of reception that go beyond the mainstream exegetical and interpretive traditions.

**Convenor(s): Dr Ernils Larsson**

### **Religion, Law, and National Identity**

In secular countries across the world, religion is formally separated from the official business of the state. Whereas religion is often perceived as a private matter for the citizens, the public sphere is supposed to be distinctly non-religious, establishing a neutral playing field in which different religions are free to compete in the marketplace of ideas. Examples of this range from the U.S. constitution, which ensures that no state religion will be established, to Japan, which bans the state from participating in “religious activities,” to the People’s Republic of China (PRC), which guarantees that the state shall refrain from coercing individuals into religious belief. Secular law seeks to ensure that religion is kept far away from the public face of the nation.

Yet at the same time, in many formally secular nations religion also plays a significant role in expressions of national identity. Despite its constitution, the Pledge of Allegiance presents the U.S. as “one nation under God.” Since the 1950s, Japanese prime ministers have frequently carried out their semi-private first shrine visits each year to the Ise Shinto Shrines, after which they host the first press conference of the new year. And while the PRC remains an aggressively secular nation, new forms of nationalism favor a return to traditional values, which has led to a rise of interest in the Confucian classics in the country.

This panel will explore the theoretical implications of maintaining secular legal systems in nations where the national identity is to greater or lesser degrees tied to one or several specific religions. What happens when religious aspects of a national identity are prohibited from being expressed by a secular legal system? How can a religious majority culture be expressed under secular law? How can traditional values in a secular nation be distinguished from religious ones?

**Convenor(s): Dr Justine Bakker**

### **Hidden Presence: Race and Religion in the Academy**

This panel invites contributions on the intersections of race and religion, with a specific focus on academic knowledge production. Scholars have studied the relationship between race and religion in various ways. Some explore the racialization of specific religions in public and/or legal domains, such as the racialization of Islam in France and Germany. Others study the Christian theological origins of modern and contemporary racial categories. Some demonstrate how race shapes religious discourses and expression. Others show that racial categories are reinforced, transformed, or challenged in and through religious spaces, texts, practices, and ideas. This panel seeks to add to this varied body of work by exploring the intersections of race and the academic conceptualizations of terms such as “religion,” “spirituality,” and “esotericism” (see also: Amir-Moazami 2018; Bakker 2020; Beliso-De Jesús 2018; Hulsether 2018; Masuzawa 2005; Miller and Driscoll 2018; Nye 2019; Robinson 2019; Schneider and Bjork-James 2020; Topolski 2018; Vial 2016). As scholars in Black, post- and decolonial, and gender and sexuality studies (and other fields) have shown, academic categories and frameworks are not neutral and often informed by uneven power relationships. How have racialized ideas influenced what forms of religious expression and practice were and are studied? How has the conceptualization of “religion”

shaped racial constructs and hierarchies? To what extent do academic conceptualizations of “religion” (continue to) have implications in the wider social domain by shaping what religious phenomena are considered “good” or “bad,” “legitimate” or “false,” “civilized” or “backward”? To what extent has this informed state-sanctioned violence against minorities and limits on religious freedom? And what sources—historical and contemporary—exist that (can be used to) envision a reflective study of religion that seeks to overcome the field’s hegemonic imbalance? In sum, this panel seeks contributions that explore the various intersections of religious studies and racialized structures of domination.

**Convenor(s): Dr Tuomas Äystö & Associate Professor Titus Hjelm**

### **Religion and Politics in Contemporary Europe**

Politics usually refers to the parliamentary setting, where the primary legislative and budgetary power is wielded in a national or international context. More broadly, politics concern collective decisions and the negotiation of various interests and resources. While Europe's politics are often viewed as secularized, religion remains in many critical political debates from Islamic veils to abortion rights and from ecclesiastical law to immigration and management of religious diversity. Some voters still base their decision partly on religious values or questions, and certain parties frequently utilize Christian symbols or ways of speaking.

This session welcomes papers addressing themes related to religion and politics in contemporary Europe. The core concepts – religion, politics, contemporary, and Europe – are understood broadly, and we are happy to receive submissions from various perspectives. The presentations can be empirical, theoretical, or methodological in nature. Example topics include but are not limited to: religion among parliamentary party politics, religion and political activism, methodological questions in the study of religion and politics, political influence of religious actors, and political management of religious diversity.

**Convenor(s): Dr Elisa Manzo, Dr Elena Sol & Dr Carla Setién**

### **The Quest for Freedom in Early Christian Utopian Narratives**

Since ancient Greek novels, Utopian literature has gradually been enriched by examples that illustrate a political and social reality different from the one each author lived. Despite its current negative connotation, “utopia” had a twofold nature in the Ancient World: on the one hand, it idealized those elements which contributed to the realization of a perfect life; on the other hand, it was also a form of crystallization of a functional and perfect society.

Early Christianity drew fully from this literary tradition. The features of Utopian literature had now changed and were conditioned, in fact, by a different socio-political situation. Considered a 'superstitio', Christians were violently persecuted by the imperial power and wordily attacked by pagan literature, constraining thus their freedom of expression.

In cohabitating with different religions under the same political power, Christianity needed not only to define and shape its own identity, but also to modify the worldly reality in which it lived, so as to respond to the challenges of its own time. The heritage of an older Utopian literature is manifested in Christianity as follows: philosophy and theology offered salvific visions of a material world to which they

did not belong; the quest for freedom became a key-concept in Christian Utopian narratives, presenting an idealistic legislation, and cultic expressions of salvation as the ultimate liberation.

This panel aims at analyzing:

- 1) how Christian authors developed their ideas of the past or future, creating and/or remodeling Utopian narratives;
- 2) how this kind of narrative is strongly influenced by the concepts of political and religious freedom, and how it contributes to defining those concepts.

Proposals dealing with a theoretical approach to Utopian literature in early Christianity as a genre are also welcome.

**Convenor(s): Dr Vivianne Crowley**

### **Veneration of Deity in Contemporary Paganism**

Contemporary Paganism represents an eclectic mix of beliefs and practices derived from pre-monotheistic religions, surviving indigenous traditions, and new or revived religions. Pagan beliefs about deity can be polytheist, panentheist, animist and more besides. The popularity of different deities has waxed and waned since the nineteenth century Pagan revival and reveals changing cultural foci in Western society from classical Greek and Roman religion, to the Celtic, Nordic, Slavic and Baltic cultural revivals, and new creative syntheses drawing on cultures as diverse as Native American and African traditions and on contemporary fiction. The focus on particular deities reveals the preoccupations of that period's Pagans, evolving, for example, from the Horned God of sexual liberation, to the Goddess of women's liberation, to new cults of androgynous, hermaphrodite and homosexual deities, such as that of the god Antinous. In seeking contact with deities, contemporary Pagans weave together an eclectic mix of spiritual practices and beliefs, drawn often from more than one culture, in an individualistic synthesis that is fluid and ever-evolving. Practices may include prayer, ritual, meditation, trance, psychotropic drugs and other means of communication between what is perceived as everyday reality and a deeper spiritual reality. This panel invites contributions on contemporary Paganism and deity including, but not confined to, practices, relationships, beliefs, and the processes by which contemporary forms of deity are fashioned to meet changing spiritual, psychological, social, cultural, political and economic needs.

**Convenor(s): Prof Gregory Alles & Prof Rosalind Hackett**

### **The Festivalization of Religion: Global Perspectives**

The global emergence of large-scale cultural festivals in the last few decades has attracted much interest from scholars in disciplines such as anthropology and tourism studies, but it also provides rich opportunities for scholars of religions. Examples of such festivals include the Osun Festival in Osogbo and the Calabar Carnival in Cross River State, Nigeria, music festivals such as Burning Man in the United States, and the Mayāṇa Kollai Festival in Chennai and the Gher Mela in Kawant, Gujarat, India, but there are many others in virtually all parts of the world. This panel aims to consider both what scholars of religions can contribute to the burgeoning field of festival studies and how the study of festivals might enrich the study of religions. Presentations will consider the imbrication of religion in the creation and transformation of festivals in diverse places. They will especially highlight dynamics in these processes that are of particular interest to scholars of religions, such as tensions between religious dimensions and

secular concerns that develop in the construction and marketing of the festivals. Papers will engage with topics of current theoretical interest, such as performance, public religion, governmentality, spatiality, temporality, materiality, mediatization, identity, and the construction of heritage. The panel, if successful, is intended to serve as the initiation of a longer-term, collaborative research project.

**Convenor(s): Dr Maija K. Butters & Dr Helena Kupari**

### **Disciplined freedom: Contemporary religious and spiritual milieus as sites of learning**

In contemporary pluralistic and individualistic societies, religious learning is no longer confined to homes, schools, and the transmission of traditions from one generation to the next. Instead, more and more adult individuals choose to learn about and acquaint themselves with previously unfamiliar religious and spiritual traditions. Exercising their freedom of religion, these people try out, study, take on, adapt, and even play with different religious and spiritual practices, guided first and foremost by their personal needs and preferences.

Religious and spiritual conceptualizations of freedom and liberation are multiple and contested. Individuals often experience their newly adopted practices as empowering and adding to their sense of agency. For some, this may also include political and ecological dimensions which extend beyond the private sphere. Many religious traditions understand emancipation in a way that markedly differs from modern secular liberal valuations. Paradoxically, pursuing liberation can involve commitment and adherence to a strict discipline. Therefore, when familiarizing themselves with a new tradition, people are often introduced to a new way of thinking about and pursuing freedom. They may also have to learn to navigate between different conceptualizations of freedom or defend a tradition that, from a secular liberal perspective, appears restrictive and in violation of individual autonomy.

This panel presents case studies from the ongoing Academy of Finland project Learning from New Religion and Spirituality (LeNeRe). We also invite submissions from other scholars who investigate themes somehow related to learning and freedom in the context of contemporary religion and spirituality. The papers can address any cultural materials and cases, or present theoretical perspectives pertaining to individuals' learning processes either in their native or adopted religious or spiritual contexts.

**Convenor(s): Dr Lidia Guzy**

### **Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews - Contemporary perspectives on indigenous ontologies and hermeneutics.**

This panel offers an insight into the research work of Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews Study Center (MEWSC) (<http://mewsc.wordpress.com>) on comparative indigenous ontologies and hermeneutics at University College Cork, National University of Ireland.

The mission of the Centre is to promote the study of contemporary endangered cultures, religions and worldviews. Cultural expressions - both tangible and intangible - and the worldviews of marginalised, endangered and persecuted peoples, social groups and indigenous communities are the focus of MEWSC. The Centre has four regional priorities: South Asia, South America, Russia/Eastern Europe and Southern Europe.

**Convenor(s): Dr Eglė Aleknaitė**

**Gender emancipation within and outside religion: accepting or contesting the religious-secular binary**

Much feminist thought and gender emancipation initiatives are based on a certain conceptualization of religion and the religious-secular binary that equates religion with patriarchy and secularity with gender emancipation. Recently this understanding, as well as the conceptualization of agency and other key concepts have been challenged. At the same time, both gender emancipation and the boundary between the religious and the secular are seen as shifting and constructed in different ways by various actors, in various contexts and groups.

So far most attention has been paid to the analysis and critique of the understanding of religion and secularity established in the secular feminist thought and activism. The panel invites to consider how the religious-secular binary in relation to gender emancipation is constructed by various religious groups and actors. What do we mean when we say that religious people have accepted some (secular) feminist ideas? How do religious feminist activists construct the secular-religious binary by focusing their activities on challenging gendering of religious practices and/or engaging in broader social activism? How is the binary shaped in interactions of secular and religious feminists? How is it constructed in relation of various aspects of gender emancipation, such as reproduction rights and equal employment opportunities? Which aspects of gender are considered as falling within the scope of religion? How does the binary in relation to gender emancipation differ among religious people of various categories, for example, among religious feminists, practicing and cultural Christians? How do scholars construct the binary by their use of different approaches to religion and their focus on certain categories of religious people? To what degree and how do various religious actors and groups accept or contest the conceptualization of the religious-secular binary and equation of gender emancipation with secularity that have been established by secular feminist thought?

**Convenor(s): Dr Aušrelė Pažeraitė**

**Belonging and freedom of personal spiritual journeying: thinking about communities of alternative spirituality seekers**

Community is one of the key concepts used in many religious groups as an emic category, as well as an analytical category employed in many scholarly studies. A nostalgic grand narrative of the decline of community had a counterpart perspective on religious communities, often coupled with the secularization thesis. Questioning of the latter coincided with rethinking of the grand narrative of the community decline and looking for new conceptualizations of community, with a salient impetus given by research on online religion.

Contemporary alternative religiosity and spiritualities are an especially challenging case of religious community. They are seen as extremely individualistic and lacking the proper communality ascribed to “traditional” institutional religions. On the other hand, seekers of alternative spirituality can be seen as developing new forms of community based on loose ties connecting members, multiple belonging, occasional participation in groups’ events, strong individualism and self-validation of faith. Nevertheless, many spiritual seekers see community as an important value and engage in construction of their community, even if different than “traditional” religious communities.

The panel invites to discuss communities of alternative spirituality, a shifting nature of religious communities in general, their characteristics and diverse practices of community construction. How the

freedom to construct one's spirituality/religion is combined with restrictions and boundaries that are created by community or for its sake? How the emic usage of the concept and actual practices of community building are related to changing concepts of community and a variety of concepts existing in current political, public discourses or narratives of various revivalist or cultural activist groups? To what extent a community as an analytical category is useful and relevant in research on contemporary religiosity and how it should be conceptualized to remain useful to understand religion and spirituality?

**Convenor(s): Dr Carmen Becker & Prof. Dr Wanda Alberts**

### **Public debates and critical approaches to the study of religion**

The demand for expert knowledge, clear-cut analyses and fact-based solutions is often integral to public debates. At the same time, critical approaches to the study of religion have a lot to say about pressing current issues negotiated in the public sphere. Yet, it seems difficult to convey the benefit of critical approaches beyond what is usually perceived as mere relativism or a simple rejection of hegemonic, common-sense categories. The reasons for this perception are manifold and relate to epistemological and ontological questions that are difficult to convey, especially in the frenzy of social media communication. This panel invites contributions that link critical approaches to the study of religion to public debates. Submissions may discuss what the critical study of religion has to offer to public debates in terms of insights, strategies and alternatives. Vice versa, they may also look at how public debates challenge and/or highlight specific aspects of critical approaches, be it in educational contexts or other social fields. Furthermore, contributions may focus on specific case studies and current debates revolving, for instance, around identity/diversity, freedom, religion and the secular, the pandemic situation or climate change. They may also reflect on issues at stake when critical approaches to the study of religion "go public" and become "engaged" beyond the realms of academia.

**Convenor(s): Prof Wanda Alberts & Prof Bengt-Ove Andreassen**

### **The Critical Study of Religion in Teacher Training**

In this panel, organised on behalf of the EASR working group on Religion in Public Education, we invite papers on teacher training programmes for religious-studies based education about religion that apply a critical approach. By "critical" we understand an approach that, rather than building on established popular categories, analyses and questions the conceptual frameworks in which religion is frequently studied and represented in educational systems.

The recent Study of Religion has undergone sharp criticism of various categories which, for a long time, served to structure the field of religion and religions, above all, the world religions paradigm, but also the category of religion itself. Possible consequences for university teaching in the discipline of the Study of Religion have been discussed in Cotter&Robertson 2016. In this panel, we want to take this discussion one step further and discuss its consequences for teacher training programmes based on the Study of Religion. How is this kind of critical approach to the Study of Religion reflected in teacher training programmes for school subjects which, frequently, firmly build on the paradigms that the academic Study of Religion questions?

The panel also invites reflection on how the critical analysis of categories in which religion is conceptualised intersects with the critical analysis of other popular categories such as ethnicity or gender in school related contexts, raising the more general question of the function of education in relation to the reproduction and deconstruction of categories.

**Convenor(s): Prof Giuseppe Maiello, Anne Ferlat & Prof Rasa Pranskeviciute-Amoson**

### **Native faiths movements in Europe between deep ecology and nationalism**

Native faith movements in Europe have emerged/re-emerged during the past thirty years. Since this date they have acquired an increased visibility, some of them have even seen their legitimacy recognized (after the Asatruarfelagid, “Ásatrú Fellowship” in Island which has been granted the status as a “religious organisation” in 1973, Romuva was registered as a “religious association” in Lithuania in 1992. In the meanwhile, in Norway two associations have been legally recognized by the Norwegian government – a legal recognition that confers a legal status to the matrimonial unions they celebrate. In turn, the Greek government granted to the organisation YSEE, Supreme Council of Ethnikoi Hellenes, the status as a “known religion”.

Even though these movements were born in their own national context they all focus on the celebration of nature and ancestorship from their specific perspective. Considering the complexity of their history and expression “between deep ecology and nationalism”, this panel intends to understand the way they managed and manage their philosophical, political, religious sources of inspiration in order to reach legitimacy within contemporary society.

Prospective papers' themes include:

- Native faith movements and ecology
- Native faith movements and the idea of nation
- Case studies stressing the legitimation process of native faith movements
- Native faith movements and law
- Key figures within native faith movements in Europe
- Case studies concerning the debates & the debates concerning nature and ancestry within native faith movements

Ferlat A 2, Maiello G 1, Pranskevičiūtė-Amoson R 3

1 University of Finance and Administration, Prague, Czech Republic

2 University of Strasbourg, Strasbourg, France

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**Convenor(s): Ms Essi Mäkelä & Mrs Hanna Gebraad**

### **Proper or not – negotiating limits of religion**

What is a common denominator for science, politics, and humour? One answer is that they all are often perceived as conflicting with, or even exclusive to the category of religion. Outside the academic discourse, "real religion" is often defined as something that is - or should be - kept separate from these arenas. There are also many arenas in which the boundaries of real and proper religion are being negotiated and defined.

In Finland, for instance, the law on religious freedom defines what proper religiosity looks like. A special committee considers whether any given religious community fits the definition and can be afforded the official status of a registered religious community, a status which comes with many rights and privileges. Such a committee is bound to be defining the category of religion in general in its decisions. Meanwhile, a youth who discovers neopaganism may need to make their case to their parents repeatedly.

Negotiations concerning real and proper religiosity is not always about showing how new movements fit old categories; it is also about challenging the old definitions. Transgressive religiosity challenges the hegemony and makes space for new religious expression to develop to many directions.

This panel focuses on exploring the limits of accepted forms of religiosity. Papers concerning marginalised, or even dubious, humourous, transgressive, and other phenomena challenging established definitions of "religion", and the limits of "freedom" are welcome.

**Convenor(s): Dr Kinga Povedák**

### **Soundscapes of religion: Towards the musical epistemologies of religious communities**

The importance of the role of senses cannot be overemphasized when looking at religious experiences or trying to make sense of religion. Religion is performed through sensorial engagements, and musical engagement is probably one of the most essential participatory rituals of religions. We argue that religious musical practice can become an important point of connection, enabling individuals to locate themselves in the social and cultural space and reflect on social experiences.

With the material turn in the study of religions, there is growing attention to material and embodied practices, sensational forms, and the mediation of religion (Morgan 2010, Meyer 2009). While more and more scholars engage with the 'lived religion' approach and elevate attention to lived practices, sound is rarely privileged as a means of interrogation or methodological practice in the study of religion (Muir 2019). Surprisingly, there is still a lack of research with a specific focus on musical practices, and 'music in religion' remains a peripheral approach in religious studies. Music and extramusical sound receive scant attention despite the significance of sound and hearing in our lives (Hackett 2012).

To address this 'disciplinary deafness' (Weiner 2009) in the study of religions, we invite contributions that favour music in their methodological approach. This panel aims to raise awareness of religious musicking as a way to explore religious lifeworlds and emphasize the role of sound in methodological epistemologies (Muir 2019). The panel is open to a diversity of musical interactions with religion in different faith contexts. Therefore, we invite papers that address various aspects of the sonic dimensions of religion, such as music as religious sensation, music as a meaning-making process, music as transcendental communication, or music as embodied states of freedom.

**Convenor(s): Ms Elena Schaa & Dr Lina Aschenbrenner**

### **'Doing as if...': Simulation as Method, Theory, and Practice in the Study of Religion**

The panel aims to evaluate the potential of simulation as a key concept for the study of religion. We will examine how simulation is understood in diverse debates and across disciplines, to discuss how these can be fruitfully interlinked, and to focus on three areas: simulation as a theoretical concept; as a method in teaching and research; and as a form of cultural practice in the religious field.

Understood as creating a state of the 'as if' simulation has a firm place in thought experiments, imaginative practices, and epistemology. It is related to imitation, simulacrum, and virtuality. To act 'as if' is crucial for learning, planning, anticipating, or playing. Simulation has also been framed as the creation of something that is secondary to and interdependent from an 'original.' Nevertheless, the concept of embodied simulation suggests that, while simulation indeed relates to an original, the product is an emotional-habitual state accompanied by a sensorimotor transformation in its own right. Simulation can culminate to states beyond the agency of the simulating person, such as unconscious creation and the experience of empathy or the sense of belonging. In this sense, simulation is also linked to anticipation of future events as discussed in predictive processing theory of mind and event cognition. Another strand of debate is interested in the material and imaginative simulation of a 'natural' and social environment described as virtuality. To conceptualize simulation through different lenses allows us to grasp the creation of individual yet collective experiences and their analyses, ultimately leading to the evaluation of religious aesthetics in contemporary society.

We welcome contributions that cover these and comparable topics. We especially encourage papers that include questions of embodiment, cognition, and emotions, or which discuss the practical application of simulation in the classroom and the ethnographic field.

**Convenor(s): Dr Marie-Helene Gorisse, Dr Ana Bajzelj & Dr Tine Vekemans**

### **Tensions of freedom in the Jain tradition**

Jainism emerged as an ascetic movement around the same time as Buddhism, during a period of great social transformations in South Asia. There was a growing resistance against the power of the Brahmins, the only social group deemed worthy of conducting Vedic sacrificial rituals.

In this dynamic, several ascetic movements reinterpreted the ritual sacrifice as an inner sacrifice to overcome violence and attachment. In Jainism, individuals seek to progress along a spiritual path by eliminating passions through various practices of renunciation. A complete eradication of passions leads to freedom from the cycle of rebirths. Freedom is thus completely dependent on one's own resolution and actions.

This concept of freedom through renunciation informs the conception of the everyday life of the Jains. Upon receiving initiation, Jain ascetics give up the duties that governed their lives as householders. They enter a mendicant society, which remains inextricably bound with the lay society. Living a life which is subject to a myriad of injunctions and rules, they progressively leave behind passions and attachments in the pursuit of ultimate freedom. Some of the austerities and practices inherent to this gradual detachment in search of liberation run counter to secular laws seeking to protect individual rights and freedoms. For example, *sallekhanā* (religious fasting unto death) has repeatedly been legally contested.

This panel aims at gathering scholars of Jain studies to unpack the tensions between these various states of freedom in Jainism, and assess them on political, sociological, cultural, philosophical, and soteriological levels.

**Convenor(s): Dr Rasa Pranskevičiūtė-Amoson**

**Alternative Religiosities in the (Post)Communist East-Central European Countries: Emerging (Trans)Formations, Continuations and States of Freedom**

The panel addresses diverse alternative religiosities starting from the communist regime period up to today. It deals with the processes of (trans)formation of changeable and instable religious/spiritual ideas and groups all over East-Central Europe during this time. It also studies the past and current socioreligious processes, discussing formation, manifestations, changes of religious phenomena concerning individual religiosities in (trans)regional and (trans)national levels.

In times of Soviet regime, atheism was the officially established ideology and alternative religiosities were mostly active underground. There was as well an unofficial cultural field that was very receptive to the arrival, formation, spread and expressions of diverse alternative religiosities and spiritualities, seeking and maintaining various individual and communal states of freedom. During the post-communist period, local alternative identities were challenged to adapt to a new situation and rich market of religious demands. In addition, newly arrived religiosities, as well as locally emerged and actively borrowing variously expressed western ideas spiritualities raised current topics among post-communist societies.

The panel aims to discuss a wide range of questions related to an emerging diversity of alternative religiosities in the countries during/past the regime and their attendant fields of influence: e.g. politics and strategy of activity of communist regime towards alternative religiosities; restrictions, repressions, survival ways and resistance of representatives of alternative religiosities; seeking and maintaining of nonconventional ways of spiritual freedom of individuals and communities; (trans)forming diversities within alternative religiosities under/past the regime (individual/group alternative religiosity values, identities and practices); the milieu of alternative religiosity as a space of freedom, plurality, diversity, action and resistance; alternative religiosity networks and inter-community relations; formation and transfer of religious/spiritual ideas within the communist/post-communist societies and from the outside; oppositions and connections as a response to the past (images of tradition, traditional religious institutions, post-communist cultural heritage); memory, continuity and changes within alternative religiosities.

**Convenor(s): Dr Federica Rainelli**

**Places of worship, places of freedom**

Beginning with the so-called «spatial turn» of the 1980s, social sciences and humanities' interest in space and spatiality has grown steadily, becoming today a privileged doorway to the study of religious phenomena. Within this context, this panel aims at analyzing the relationship between space and religion starting from their articulation in relation to the notion of freedom. In particular, we propose to promote a pragmatic approach, which allows us to think of places of worship as places of freedom, that is to say as places of agency or spaces within which to affirm and manifest one's presence, to assert interests and restore spheres of action otherwise denied. Therefore, we welcome proposals aimed at analysing dynamics of re-appropriation, revitalization, patrimonialization or territorialization of sacred places; practices of sacralization and instrumental or symbolic uses of sacred places as strategies of resistance to political, economic or social changes, pressures or constraints; practices of identity claim (both personal or collective) through the management of religious spaces; among others. We welcome proposals from any geographical and chronological contexts, as well as any disciplinary perspective

within humanities and social sciences. The discussion will aim at reflecting upon the roles played by different actors within such processes, by comparing top-down and bottom-up approaches in a trans-cultural perspective.

**Convenor(s): Dr Kamila Gęsikowska, Mrs Dagmara Wasilewska PhD, DSc & Professor Anna Gomóła**

### **Methodological and historical problems of researching yoga as a cultural phenomenon**

This panel will be devoted to changes in methods of researching yoga as a multifaceted phenomenon with a long, rich, and complex history. It will primarily focus on research on yoga in Western culture.

Such a reflection cannot be conducted in isolation from the attempts to define what yoga is, or: what is sometimes called ‘yoga,’ and in what forms it manifests itself. Nowadays, in Western culture, attempts to define what yoga is are not so much related to its essentialisation, and therefore do not require a consensus regarding its essence. They are connected primarily with the reflection on the nature of the changes that led to the expansion of the concept of yoga and its appropriation of completely new areas of practice and conceptualization. Therefore, even in research of a synchronous nature, diachronic issues should also be considered, which would allow to change the point of view and perceive yoga as a process. However not exclusive to the Western culture, research focusing on the problem of change, intertwining of ideas, behaviours and objects into subsequent areas or spheres of culture is noticeably dominant in it.

Yoga is still the subject of religiological, philosophical, and culturological reflection, but it is also a subject important to sociology, economics and management studies, medical sciences, and physical culture sciences, as well as aesthetics and art studies. Meta-scientific reflection is also necessary, as the growing since the 19th century interest in yoga was the result of popularizing the outcomes of scientific research (e.g., in the field of oriental studies or medicine). Integrating knowledge about yoga requires considering various tools and research methods, and we would wish to invite researchers to discuss them during the session.

**Convenor(s): Ms Mary Briggs**

### **New Religions in Korea: Case Studies and Perspectives**

The academic study of religion in Korea, both its history and contemporary practice, includes much discussion of Korea’s new religions. These discussions are often characterized by examinations of whether terms such as “New Religious Movements” or even “religion” are appropriate since Korea’s new religious landscape encompasses a diverse and dynamic array of religious organizations and communities connected to both local and international networks. Examples of these diverse new religions that developed in Korea include national religions (known as minjokjonggyo) such as Taejonggyo along with a plethora of new Christian movements such as the Shincheonji Church of Jesus. Presently, South Korea is also home to practitioners of various new religions and spiritualities that originated outside of Korea, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Osho Meditation Movement.

Although this panel cannot fully represent the rich history and complexity of new religions in South Korea, it will aim to present several examples of these new religions and to explore their sociocultural and political impact in South Korea and beyond. This panel also aims to contribute to the growing body of research regarding new religions and spiritualities in Korea as well as the transnational impact of Korean new religions.

The following range of topics is of particular interest, although this list is by not exhaustive:

The relationship between new religions in South Korea and the nation-state.

The historical development of new religions in Korea.

News media and popular media portrayals of new religions in South Korea.

Anti-cult activism and rhetoric in South Korea.

**Convenor(s): Dr Marianne Schleicher**

### **Characteristics and functions of the phenomenon of 'feast' in the history of religion**

In pre-modern times, a feast would be the most natural element in the context of religious ceremonies. Some would consider the feast an integral, even central part of any religious ceremony, bringing people together, exciting effervescence, and commemorating a common cultural past (Durkheim 1915), while others would emphasise its ludic, inverting, and as such potentially critical elements in relation to its adjacent, highly structured ritual (Turner & Turner 1982; Grimes 2010). As such, 'feast' is a familial phenomenon in the study of religion, just as initiatives have been taken to introduce to the function of celebratory elements in the festivals of different religions (ed. Melton 2011). Still, no history of the phenomenon of 'feast' exists. In modern times, where national constitutions have granted people freedom of/from religion and led many to consider themselves secular, feasts still tie them to religion. Do feasts still serve a commemorative/affirming or ludic/inverting/critical function in relation to culture? Can other functions, not just in modern times, but also in the general history of religion be discerned?

This panel calls for paper proposals willing to discuss the phenomenon of 'feast' in ways that draw upon insights into/comparisons of historical/contemporary sources, yet commit to the purpose of generating theoretical reflections on the phenomenon of 'feast'.

- How has the phenomenon of 'feast' evolved in the history of religion?
- How does changes in the phenomenon of 'feast' relate to changes in social organisation, communication, and religious types?
- Are there any general components of a feast?
- How do the spatio-temporal positions of feasts affect their function?
- Do the particular domains of feasts in- or exclude elite/lay representatives of certain genders, ages, religiosities, or ethnicities?
- Have changes in the history of religion affected the emotional regimes produced by the feasts?

**Convenor(s): Dr Jelle Wiering, Dr Kim Knibbe & Dr Brenda Bartelink**

### **Religion, spirituality and the production of the private sphere**

This panel shifts the focus from the topic to religion in the public sphere, around which an enormous body of wonderful research has emerged, to the question of how religion is entangled with the production of the private sphere, the ethics and aesthetics of this private sphere, how these entanglements are gendered, and relate to the secular, to identifications with 'spirituality' and to colonial and postcolonial histories and modes of governance.

Contestations around religious diversity frequently occur when matters generally considered as private become a public concern. Women's dress and the integrity of their bodies, for example, often become symbolic sites over which public contestations around religion and difference are negotiated (Cady & Fessenden 2013). The division between public and private spheres, and thus also the place of religion in society, is deeply entangled with issues of gendered difference, kinship and sexuality (Mahmood 2015). In this panel, we want to investigate the acts that influence, and hence support the construction of, a private sphere.

In addition, this panel focuses on the private sphere as an important site where people experience and live their religion in ways that we do not know so much about. The role religion and spirituality play in the private sphere may hence impact social life differently than it does in the public sphere.

In this panel we are thus interested in contributions that focus on how the private sphere is constructed and lived and the ways religion and spirituality are entangled with this. This may concern studies on secular governmental practices, on religion and intimate affairs, e.g. family relations, sexuality, romantic and erotic encounters, pregnancy and the body. These ethnographic accounts can guide us into more conceptual and theoretical reflections on (and against) dominant representations of religion, secularity and the construction of the private sphere.

**Convenor(s): Dr Nita Mishra**

### **Religions, Worldviews, and Sustainable Development Goals**

In the late 1990s, the possible cutting down of a fairy bush made sensational headlines in Ireland. Elsewhere, in Iceland, an 'elf' blocked a road construction project. Ireland has its own mythologies where ordinary people have protected their environments. For example, in sixth century Wales, Melangell, the daughter of an Irish king, used her cloak to shelter a hare to prevent a king's hounds from catching it. As a token of her compassion and courage, the king gave her the Welsh valley where she was living to be a place of sanctuary over the centuries. More recently, news of Sinead Jones cutting down Sitka Spruce trees and replanting with indigenous species caught the attention of climate activist groups such as Extinction Rebellion, but the dominant narrative of climate discourse did not take much notice of it. Jones said she had rights of foraging under ancient law. She told the court she was one of Earth's protectors managing part of the forest because of her love for Ireland's native trees.

For this panel, we invite discussion papers on sustainable development goals, especially SDG 13 on Climate Action, in relation to indigenous and local worldviews. The panel aims to explore challenges posed to sustainable development goals by indigenous concerns and activities, and to examine how these sustainable development goals might be better articulated to account for ancient traditions and indigenous objectives, cultural understandings, and practices. Papers are also encouraged that address the relationship between sustainable development discourses and faith-based discourses in different regional and cultural contexts.

**Convenor(s): Prof Eva Toulouze**

### **Between animism and world religions: religious situation in the Finno-Ugric and Samoyed communities**

From the religious point of view, the Finno-Ugric and Samoyed peoples offer us very interesting case studies as these communities have lived in contact with Christianity and Islam for centuries as well as

have been influenced by the Soviet atheist propaganda, while retaining many elements from their ancestral animist religions. The Uralic communities live thus internally in very diversified religious landscapes going everywhere from full-fledged Christianity to Soviet secularism to living ethnic practices. The majority of the rural communities practice some form of well-integrated syncretic vernacular religions that combine elements from different ontologies and cosmologies. These are the phenomena this panel intends to explore from theoretical viewpoints – e.g. how today’s ethnic religions can be characterized with the vocabulary of isms we use in the scholarly discourse? - to more ethnographic case studies allowing us to get an overview of the current religious situation. How are new religious movements faring among the Uralic peoples? While Eastern Orthodoxy has been the monopolistic Christian confession in Russia (with the exception of Lutheranism in some Finnic communities), how much have different Christian denominations spread in the last decades and how have they influenced animist conceptions and rituals? How do local “traditionalists” respond to the growing proselytization by global religious movements in the Finno-Ugric or Samoyed regions? We invite papers that discuss these and related topics by scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds on the basis of fieldwork and not only of specialised literature.