**CONCURRENT SESSION #1**

PANEL: New Religions & Violence

*New Age to New World Order: Red Ice Radio*

David G Robertson

The Open University

[david.robertson@open.ac.uk](mailto:david.robertson@open.ac.uk)

Sweden’s Red Ice Radio podcast is a fascinating case study in interpretive drift, moving from a spiritual/millennial discourse in 2008 to a right-wing, nationalist and racialist one, culminating in their involvement in the violence of the Unite the Right march in 2018. I will discuss how common discursive units such as alternative healthcare and whole foods act as common fulcrums in a broader alternative milieu, how these concerns become entangled in larger conspiratorial narratives (for example, where “big pharma” leads to “New World Order” leads to open antisemitism), and the ‘globalisation’ of American millennial conspiracism in today’s media sphere.

*Life Reform and the Alleviation of Animal Suffering: Religious vs Humanitarian Motives in the Early Vegan Society*

Steven Sutcliffe

University of Edinburgh

[S.Sutcliffe@ed.ac.uk](mailto:S.Sutcliffe@ed.ac.uk)

The Vegan Society was formed in 1944 as a campaigning organisation against animal cruelty, which advocated avoiding using animal products altogether. In this, Vegans set themselves apart from lacto-Vegetarians who continued to use milk and cheese and leather and wool (for example), although in practice there was much traffic between these two positions. Vegans’ grounds for eschewing animal products included both religious and ethical-humanitarian reasons, leading to different emphases in the emerging philosophy of Veganism. This paper teases out these tensions and their ideological concomitants, based on debates between the ‘simple life’ activist Dugald Semple (1884-1964) and Vegan Society founder Donald Watson (1910-2005) within Life Reform circles in the mid-twentieth century.

*Violence and the Demise of New Religions: Raids, Suicide, Genocide and Murder*

Carole M. Cusack

University of Sydney

carole.cusack@sydney.edu.au

As part of the Demise of Religions project (2018-2019), Stuart A. Wright proposed eight rubrics under which the various ends of religion could be grouped: collective suicide; failed prophecy; organizational crisis (intergenerational, economic, leadership); state actions (raids, litigation, repression and control); conversion to a missionary religion; transmutation (schism, splintering, change); language death or change (relexification, reanalysis, dialect levelling); and war (genocide, territorial expansion and cultural absorption by a dominant power). This paper focuses on violence – suicide, state raids, and war (including genocide and colonialism) – as the direct cause of the demise of new religions (Heaven’s Gate, Peoples Temple, Order of the Solar Temple, and the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God), and argues that the types of violence involved are murky and less clear-cut than non-academic (particularly journalistic) accounts would generally admit. Wright’s general contention, that violence (broadly conceived) is a significant cause of the demise of new religions, is upheld.

PANEL: Institutional Religious Violence

*The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) and the Church of England: Denials, Apologies and Accountability in a Sacred Institution*

Sarah-Jane Page

Aston University, UK

[s.page1@aston.ac.uk](mailto:s.page1@aston.ac.uk)

IICSA is the independent statutory inquiry into child sexual abuse, for England and Wales. Numerous religious organisations are currently under examination; the Church of England is one of the Inquiry’s case studies. This paper offers a thematic analysis of a 15-day hearing from 2018, concerning the Chichester diocese, where significant safeguarding failings were found. A number of clergy from this diocese – including a former bishop – have been prosecuted for child sexual abuse offences. The Inquiry heard from survivors of Church abuse as well as representatives of the Church, including clergy, bishops and archbishops. Utilising Cohen’s (2001) states of denial, the paper will analyse the role that denial played in the accounts of Church officials, and the extent to which Church officials made themselves accountable for institutional failings, through examining the ways apologies were deployed as an attempt to redress the abuse suffered.

*Mapping Historical Paedophile Networks in the Christian Brothers Western Australia*

Jodi Death

QUT

[jodi.death@qut.edu.au](mailto:jodi.death@qut.edu.au)

International evidence of the mismanagement of violence against children in Roman Catholic institutions has continued to grow. This violence includes physical, emotional and sexual abuse of children. The mismanagement of clergy perpetrated child sexual abuse (csa) by Roman Catholic hierarchy has been extensively established through civil litigation, criminal prosecution, and public inquiry. This paper explores the construction of clergy perpetrated csa and its management to establish whether they can be understood as a paedophile network. Applying social network analysis (SNA) to records of historical csa perpetrated by in Christian Brothers institutions in Western Australia, the functioning of dark and grey networks of abusers can be mapped within light network resources and structures. This work demonstrates that all forms of violence against children are significant in a SNA analysis of clergy paedophile networks.

*Pawns Take Bishop. Advocacy, Activism and Self-actualisation in the Hunter Valley*

Peter Gogarty

University of Newcastle

[sevengeckos@gmail.com](mailto:sevengeckos@gmail.com)

In 2009, long before the announcement of the child abuse royal commission, an orchestrated meeting took place between two survivors of childhood sexual abuse within the Catholic Church. Each, without knowledge of the other, had been trying to meet then Adelaide Archbishop Philip Edward Wilson. Each believed that Wilson, while an official of the Church in the Maitland/Newcastle area, knew for decades of their abuse at the hands of two Catholic priests. Rather than protecting them and other children, each argued that Wilson protected his church. What followed was a controversial public campaign, the establishment of a police strike force, a NSW government Special Commission of Inquiry, the conviction and acquittal of Wilson for concealing child abuse and two major changes to “conceal” laws under the NSW Crimes Act. A decade later, this community activism holds immediate relevance for extracting accountability for child sex abuse offenders and their enablers.

*Survivor Stigma and the Impacts of Institutional Violence*

Kathleen McPhillips

University of Newcastle

[Kathleen.mcphillips@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:Kathleen.mcphillips@newcastle.edu.au)

This paper considers stigma as it is constituted in institutional settings and its amplifying effects on survivor trauma. Stigma, as defined by Irving Goffman (1963), is the psycho-social process of allotting difference to particular social cohorts. It is a resilient form of social ascription and can have devastating impacts on individuals and communities. Stigma creates a spoiled identity from which it is extremely difficult to recover. During the tenure of the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, thousands of survivors gave evidence of the impact of their disclosure of institutional sexual abuse on their lives, their families and communities, describing powerful forms of social isolation and the accompanying emotions of guilt, shame and self-hate. Stigma is a powerful social construction and I suggest that the quality of stigmatization in institutional settings is related to particular organisational mechanisms that induce isolation creating forms of survivor stigma. A case study of the Towards Healing redress protocol utilized by the Australian Catholic Church provides insight into how such mechanisms work. The Royal Commission, also an example of an institution, provided a vehicle for the remediation of spoiled identities for survivors, suggesting that institutions can successfully respond to imperatives protecting organizational self-interest and create social cohesion.

PANEL: Online Religion & Violence

*From Atheism plus to far-right: The “Rational Skeptic” Community, the Internet, and the Real World*

Raymond Radford

PhD Candidate, University of Sydney

[rrad2012@uni.sydney.edu.au](mailto:rrad2012@uni.sydney.edu.au)

The rational sceptic community in the 2000s, aided by the surge of Atheism+ and YouTube, were at the strongest the community had been. Numerous commentators became ‘YouTube famous’ as voracious supporters of free speech, reasoned debate, and “purveyors of the truth”. However, in 2015 many in the atheism+ community changed their voice, they started spouting anti-feminist rhetoric, and their videos quickly adapted to maintain a “red pill” tone, changing “reason and science” to “Feminism is poison”. The online atheism community, the far-right, and their connection to religion, will be explored through ‘the great replacement’. An analogy which sees men fear that they will lose their position at the top of the social hierarchy, most often tied to religious freedoms, and the dominance of the Christian church. This talk will explore this paradigm through a non-religious lens, since the ‘skeptic’ community still purport to be atheistic.

*The Lizard Prophet: Religious Charisma and Attracting the alt-right in the Performances of Conspiracy Theorist David Icke*

Tara BM Smith

PhD Candidate, University of Sydney

[tsmi5200@uni.sydney.edu.au](mailto:tsmi5200@uni.sydney.edu.au)

After David Icke’s Australian visa was revoked prior to his 2019 live shows due to controversial beliefs, Icke as a conspiracy theorist has been thrown into the international spotlight. This paper will examine Icke as a religious leader drawing on his online and real-life persona. Icke attracts people from both ends of the political spectrum; a phenomenon which will be explored. I will draw on Max Weber’s theories of charismatic leadership by comparing two live shows (2003 and 2014). As Icke’s audience has grown, his style of presentation has changed and how he uses certain methods to increase his popularity. This paper will explore how violent rhetoric is used to bring a wide range of followers into a complex web of conspiracy theories.

*Caught in the Crossfire: The Misuse of Online Culture, Memes, Religion and Gaming in the Christchurch Massacre*

Benjamin Jozef Banasik

PhD Candidate, University of Sydney

[bban9216@uni.sydney.edu.au](mailto:bban9216@uni.sydney.edu.au)

This presentation will focus on the misuse of online culture, memes and gaming towards the end of religious violence perpetrated in the Christchurch Massacre in 2019. The shooter prior and during the attack cited motivation and influence from the children’s beloved video game Spyro the Dragon, the modern popular shooter Fortnite and Felix Kjellberg, known as PewDiePie. These seemingly unconnected sources melded into a stream of consciousness by the shooter, flowing directly from the meme hive mind of 4Chan and 8Chan. In an effort to stop ‘shitposting’ and make a ‘real life effort post’, the shooter would continue to game the media in brief appearances at court in an effort to break through to the online world. The ends of this exhibition, largely unexplored, will be explored in this presentation, examining the reason for the type of engagement and showing a mode of religious intolerance, fabricated superiority and invented notoriety.

*‘Funeral for Coal’: How Multifaith Organisations are Going Online*

Geraldine Smith

PhD Candidate, University of Tasmania

[Geraldine.smith@utas.edu.au](mailto:Geraldine.smith@utas.edu.au)

Multifaith organisations are highly adept at fostering spaces in which people from different religions can encounter one another, have dialogue, share experiences, and develop positive relationships. However, the rise of advanced internet technology raises questions about how the multifaith movement will adapt to the new ways in which individuals and communities are engaging online. Drawing from Steward M. Hoovery and Nabil Echchaibi’s interpretation of ‘third spaces,’ this presentation explores how multifaith organisations are using the online realm and, more broadly, how this may impact interreligious interactions. The multifaith environmental group, Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC) have embraced the online world and are using it to facilitate new forms of cooperation between religious communities. Using ARRCC as a case study, I will highlight the potential advantages and disadvantages of using the online realm for multifaith interactions and projects.

PANEL: Political Spaces & Religious Discourse

*Harassment of Women in Humanist / Atheist Spaces and the Response of the Community*

Katja Strehle

Western Sydney University

k.strehle@westernsydney.edu.au

This paper will address the topic of harassment of women in humanist and/or atheist spaces. In such spaces, arguments against religion are often linked to the idea that sexism is caused by religious beliefs with humanists and atheists mostly claiming to support gender equality. However, the non-religious internet is also full of misogynistic comments about women. Drawing on six months of preliminary online observations, I will present cases where misogynistic behaviour and verbal violence against women have been issues in non-religious circles. I will show that there is a big discussion within the community on how to handle these incidents and the underlying patriarchalism, especially regarding the adoption of explicit policies on gender and sexual harassment in order to combat the problems of gendered violence.

*Why is the ‘M’ word – Multiculturalism, the problem?*

Mersina Papantoniou

Social Science, UNSW

mersina.papantoniou@students.mq.edu.au

In explaining recent massacres, both Tarrant and Berwick (Breivik) manifestos cite and evidence ‘the Multiculturalists’ as the problem. So much so, they are prepared to commit targeted political and religious violence to prove their point to the world. Another example, (though different in form) was former Australian conservative Prime minister, John Howard who refused to use the “M” word in public discourse, despite over a decade of his ‘conservative’ leadership in Australia (1996-2007). The American supporters of President Trump display a religious component fused with white nationalism. For example, 81% of American ‘white, born again’, self-identifying evangelicals were Trump voters in the 2016 US election. The impact of this cohort has awakened social scientists. The ever-growing racism/racist taunts/incidents documented since the Trump ascendancy are overt symptoms of social malaise. The question however remains, what are the catalysts? Particularly as policies of social inclusion, such as multiculturalism become slowly and steadily unstitched. Is ‘cosmopolitanism’ the answer? If it is, as S. Grant argues, does it flatline the ongoing struggle for recognition of minorities and the Indigenous? Are minority populations merely relegated to what a Monty Python sketch portrays: ‘We are all individuals’?

*Urban Politics and Religious Communities*

Rosemary Hancock

University of Notre Dame, Australia

[rosemary.hancock@nd.edu.au](mailto:rosemary.hancock@nd.edu.au)

Manuel Castells’ (1978) classic study of urban social movements argued that the structure of the modern city, connected as it is to global flows of capital and governed by complex political bureaucracies that divest much decision making from the local level, means urban movements for social change ultimately stand little chance of winning significant political concessions or changing the structure of the city itself. Although written in the 1970s, Castells’ characterisation of the modern city remains largely true today, especially for a large ‘global’ city such as Sydney. Meanwhile, the modern city has been theorised, both within urban studies and the sociology of religion, as a ‘secular space, resulting in a “conceptual void” between “the City” and “religion”’ (Berking, Schwenk, and Streets 2018, 1–2). Despite this theoretical lacuna, urbanisation, modernisation, and globalisation have made cities into *the* space of ‘religious super-diversity’ (Becci, Burchardt, and Giorda 2016). This paper examines where urban politics meets religion in Sydney – a ‘global’ city with high levels of religious diversity. Through an examination of the Sydney Alliance – an urban political coalition of trade unions, religious groups, and community groups – I will analyse how religious networks and infrastructure diffuse political action across geographical space and offer promising, alternate modes for grassroots politics in Sydney.

**CONCURRENT SESSION #2**

PANEL: Publishing Roundtable – Publishing in the Study of Religion

Cristina Rocha (Chair)

Western Sydney University

c.rocha@westernsydney.edu.au

Steven Sutcliffe

University of Edinburgh

[S.Sutcliffe@ed.ac.uk](mailto:S.Sutcliffe@ed.ac.uk)

Carole Cusack

University of Sydney

carole.cusack@sydney.edu.au

Alex Norman

Western Sydney University

a.norman@westernsydney.edu.au

This roundtable will bring together four journal and book series editors to discuss publishing in the area of religion. They will explore the publication process; why they knock back some papers and manuscripts upfront; big no-nos when submitting academic work to editors; and what editors are looking for when they receive submissions. In addition, they will comment on how they got the position as editors, and reflect on how their career was affected by this editorial work. Finally, they will also discuss open access and online publishing. This session is envisioned to be of interested to seasoned scholars as an opportunity to exchange experiences and ideas. It also intended to assist HDR students and ECR scholars learn more about the inner workings of journals and book series so that they may be enticed to serve as editors in future.

PANEL: Rene Girard: Religion & Violence

René Girard (1923–2015) was a French-American thinker, former professor at Stanford University, and an *immortel* of *l’Académie française*. He honed a significant account of human culture, violence and religion over fifty years of research across the humanities and social sciences. He began with modern realist fiction in the 1950s to uncover a novel account of human DESIRE as *mimetic*; he went on to engage with foundational texts in anthropology, sociology, and ethnography in the 1960s, venturing a new approach to culture and religion that recalls the sociopsychological phenomenon of *l’esprit de corps*, in terms of an ersatz peace that SCAPEGOATING a victim introduces to human communities; then he set out an alternative account of religion, seen to emerge in the Judeo-Christian scriptures. This panel is a critical engagement with and application of Girard’s “mimetic theory” to the conference theme of violence and religion.

*René Girard on Violence and Religion*

Chris Fleming

Western Sydney University

[C.Fleming@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:C.Fleming@westernsydney.edu.au)

This paper provides a critical overview of Girard’s insights into violence and religion, particularly with regards to mimetic rivalry and the scapegoat mechanism. Girard’s body of work―both in its methods and in its conclusions―is largely out of step with current theoretical trends in the humanities and social sciences; and yet in itself it is hard to see this as a disrecommendation. Perhaps Girard’s greatest potential as a theorist of culture is the extent to which his work sheds welcome light on the vexing question of how and why violence seems central to many religious practices and expressions. Girard’s somewhat paradoxical formulation suggests that religion provides a mechanism for defusing and controlling violence through violence; it “contains” violence in both senses of the word: it deploys so-called “good,” sanctioned violence against “bad.” Girard’s work also points to the continued presence of the “archaic”―the violent, the “tribal”―in the so-called civilized, secular present.

*Violence in the Name of God: The Militant Jihadist Response to Modernity*

Joel Hodge

Australian Catholic University

[joel.hodge@acu.edu.au](mailto:joel.hodge@acu.edu.au)

In this paper, I analyse the way in which militant jihadism is a modern form of sacred violence, as Girard defines it, which justifies indiscriminate violence against the enemy/other. I present how militant jihadism follows a modern trajectory of violence identified by Girard, as a form of totalitarianism that seeks to re-sacralise violence in the name of God. This re-sacralised violence is a distortion of and assault on the Abrahamic traditions, which reveal the innocence of the victim, in what Jean-Pierre Dupuy calls “the revenge of the scapegoating logic”. Militant jihadism takes possession of the consciousness of the victim and uses it for rivalrous purposes, which becomes identified with the struggle of Muslims in jihad. In this view, for example, suicide bombers and jihadist combatants are transformed to become semi-divine martyr-victims who fight unjust persecutors.

*Scapegoating on the Australian Doorstep: East Timor and the Case of Monsignor da Costa Lopes*

Susan Connelly RSJ

Australian Catholic University

[Susan.Connelly@sosj.org.au](mailto:Susan.Connelly@sosj.org.au)

René Girard developed an anthropological theory which provides a rigorous method of interpreting human situations. As a case study of the relationship between Australia and East Timor, this paper analyses interactions in the early 1980s between ex-Prime Minister Whitlam and the Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Dili, Monsignor da Costa Lopes. It draws on René Girard's "stereotypes of persecution” to understand Lopes’ experience as scapegoat. Girard details four features of scapegoating: crisis, crime, criteria for the choice of a scapegoat, and finally the violence done to the victim. This fourfold schema of persecution can be demonstrated when considering the treatment of Lopes concerning an expected famine in Timor.

*Redefining Violence in Scapegoating: Sacral Cleansing and Social Exclusion in the Ramayana*

Suvarna Variyar

Dept of Studies in Religion. University of Sydney

suvarna.variyar@sydney.edu.au

In this conference paper, I consider a range of “violences” in the Ramayana, one of the two most significant narrative religious texts in Hinduism, with increasing relevance in a religiously conservative India. Specifically, I examine the concept of social exclusion and mental harm as a form of violence inflicted by a society on a chosen scapegoat – the character Sita. Rene Girard’s construction of sacral violence as a tool for social cleansing is a valuable approach to the practice of scapegoating. However, this construct is established without any true parameters of what may be considered to constitute violence beyond the inflicting of physical harm. This paper addresses the following questions: To what extent might the process of social exclusion as portrayed in the *Ramayana* fit the overall construction of sacral violence within Girard’s methodological framework? And what are the implications for broadening a definition of violence in applications of this framework?

PANEL: Intimate Partner Violence & Faith Communities

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is now recognised to be a serious and widespread problem in Australia, with enormous individual and community impacts and social costs. According to the 2016 Personal Safety Survey, 23% of women and 8% of men in Australia have experienced violence from an intimate partner since the age of 15 (AIHW, 2019; ABS, 2017). IPV is the greatest health risk factor for women aged 25 to 44 and is the single largest driver of homelessness for women, a common factor in child protection notifications, and results in a police call out on average once every two minutes across the country (Our Watch, undated). Church communities are not immune to IPV. While efforts to raise awareness of these issues in the churches date back decades (e.g. Last and Gilmore, 1994), recent journalistic work by Baird and Gleeson (2017a, 2017b, 2018) has played a strong role in giving greater profile to the problem. Fledgling initiatives are underway to develop policies, training and resources for churches to better recognise, respond to and prevent IPV. However there is little baseline empirical research to support the efforts of such groups (Priest, 2018).

*The Response of Churches to Those with Experiences of Domestic and Family Violence: Church Attender and Clergy Attitudes and Actions*

Miriam Pepper and Ruth Powell

NCLS Research/CSU

[rpowell@ncls.org.au](mailto:rpowell@ncls.org.au)

[mpepper@ncls.org.au](mailto:mpepper@ncls.org.au)

This paper draws on data from the 2016 National Church Life Survey to answer the following questions:

How are Australian clergy responding to domestic and family violence situations?

To what extent do Australian church attenders feel they could go to their church for help if they or someone they know were experiencing domestic and family violence?

It will analyse data from Catholic and Protestant churches, collected in 2016 and weighted to represent the clergy and churchgoing populations as closely as possible. The results are discussed within the Australian context and in relation to the international social scientific literature on clergy responses to domestic and family violence.

*The National Anglican Family Violence Project: A Work in Progress*

Ruth Powell and Miriam Pepper

NCLS Research/CSU

[rpowell@ncls.org.au](mailto:rpowell@ncls.org.au)

[mpepper@ncls.org.au](mailto:mpepper@ncls.org.au)

Following significant church and media attention to abuses of Anglican women in Australia, and to aspects of Anglicanism that may be implicated in such abuses, the Anglican General Synod Standing Committee has formed a working group to address matters related to IPV and the Anglican Church. The working group has commissioned NCLS Research to undertake the National Anglican Family Violence Project (NAFVP) to help the General Synod to understand the nature and prevalence of IPV (which the General Synod is calling “family violence”) among those with a connection to the Anglican Church, and to equip the General Synod to respond through policy and practice in ways that foster safer family environments. The NAFVP comprises three studies and this paper will describe the background and methodological approach for each one:

Study 1: The nature of experiences of family violence for those with a connection with Anglican churches

Study 2: Attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and practices regarding family violence among Anglican clergy

Study 3: Prevalence of family violence among Australians who identify as Anglican.

*Muslim Women and Domestic Violence: Developing a Framework for Social Work Practice*

Nafi Ghafournia

University of Newcastle

ngha6128@uni.sydney.edu.au

There is a great deal of research on domestic violence, but few studies investigate the role of religious values on domestic violence or faith-based prevention and intervention strategies in Muslim community. This paper draws on a study of 14 abused Muslim immigrant women in Australia and aims to contribute to the understanding of how religion intersects with culture, gender, and immigration. The contemporary climate for Muslims in the West, including Australia, has become increasingly volatile since September 2001 and more recently with the emergence of the so-called “Islamic State” (ISIS). In this context, the Muslim community has been stereotyped as a violent community whose religious teachings support and enforce violence, especially against women. Yet abused women’s narratives provide a different view of the effect of religious values and spirituality on the experience of domestic violence. The paper focus on positive role of religion; negative role of religious leaders and the intersection of culture and religion.

*Watching the Watchmen: How does Song of Songs speak to Australia’s Problem with Gender-based Violence?*

Erin Sessions

Australian College of Theology

erin@commongrace.org.au

In Australia, one woman a week is killed by a current or former partner. But what has this got to do with Song of Songs, an ecstatic exploration of love and the bodies making it? While the Song is sublimely romantic and suggestively erotic when it comes to the mutually respectful lovers, there is violence in the Song. Building on my previous research into Song of Songs 1:1-6 and intimate partner violence, and using the same interdisciplinary approach combining feminist biblical interpretation and Australian social research, this paper analyses the perpetration of violence against the woman of the Song by the city’s night watchmen, and then explores the significance of these findings for an Australian context where violence against women is rife. The Song of Songs is difficult poetry with a deliberate density of poetic devices which requires careful consideration, but there is much Australians can learn from this rhapsody.

PANEL: Culture, Religion & Violence

*Two Sides of the Same Coin: Pursuing Reconciliation by Initiating Violence in Papua New Guinea*

David Troolin

University of Adelaide

david.troolin@adelaide.edu.au

Villagers living in Buan village, in the Astrolabe Bay region of Papua New Guinea, value unity and reconciliation, which they call wanbel. Though desiring wanbel, Sam villages often are involved in disagreements and hostility among their members. This paper interrogates the desire for reconciliation that sometimes leads Buan people to act in ways that will amplify violence and misfortune in the short term in order to create the opportunity to initiate local mediation to secure the wanbel that, they hope, is long-lasting. Using ethnographic research, I detail the factors leading to a clan dispute over someone’s clan affiliation. When the two clans in the disagreement could not find the answer by revealing their pari (“insides, feelings, dispositions”), they resorted to sorcery. Thus, they employed violence by spirits to bring about deaths which ultimately led to gaining knowledge only their ancestors possessed, allowing them to resolve their conflict and become wanbel.

*The Embodied Researcher: Violence and Tenderness in the Field*

Emma Quilty

University of Newcastle

emma.quilty@uon.edu.au

Writing out or intellectualising trauma that occurs during fieldwork does not adequately capture or help us to process the embodied nature of these experiences. There are limits to how we can express moments of violence and tenderness in the field. In this paper I will be discussing the impact of the #metooanthro collective in a broader sense as well as the salience of their work in the context of my own. #metooanthro is a collective of anthropologists from around the world committed to making the discipline a safer and more just space by combatting sexual assault and harassment (#metooanthro.org). In this paper, I will explore some of the dynamics around violence and tenderness that emerged through my study of young people’s perspectives of witchcraft in Australia, with a focus on young women in the contemporary Pagan movement of Reclaiming.

*Lost Saints: Desacralisation, Spiritual Abuse and Magic Mushrooms*

Anna Lutkajtis

University of Sydney

[anna.lutkajtis@gmail.com](mailto:anna.lutkajtis@gmail.com)

Maria Sabina (1894 – 1985) was a Mazatec curandera and iconic figure in modern psychedelic culture who became a reluctant celebrity when she inadvertently introduced psilocybin containing ‘magic mushrooms’ to the West. Unfortunately this introduction led to tragedy and misfortune for Sabina when vast numbers of Western tourists flocked to her home town in search of a psychedelic experience. To Sabina, the mushrooms (‘little saints’) were a powerful sacrament to be used only for healing. However, Western ‘hippies’ viewed the mushrooms as psychedelic drugs which they consumed as desired, with little regard for cultural sensitivities. As a result, Sabina believed the mushrooms had been desacralised; they had lost their purity and power to heal. This paper argues that the desacralisation of Maria Sabina’s ‘little saints’ constitutes a form of spiritual abuse. Additionally, it argues that this spiritual abuse has had far-reaching and long-lasting consequences at individual, local and global levels.

**CONCURRENT SESSION #3**

PANEL: Religious Utopianism & Violence

*Religious Utopianism and Violence*

Tamara Prosic

Monash University

tamara.prosic@monash.edu

Religious utopianism has often been an inspiration for positive social changes, but unlike secular utopias which have a tendency to include more than to exclude, religious utopianism is implicitly underpinned by social exclusivity and us and them ideas which can easily transform into us versus them mentality and result in violence towards the perceived ‘others’ in order to achieve the projected ideal. The most prominent recent case of extreme violence inspired by projections of ‘ideal society’ based on religious precepts has been the attempted creation of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in the Middle East. The paper discusses utopias in general as a type of critique of existing social conditions and then more specifically the double-edged sword nature of religious utopianism as the ideational source and inspiration for radical political action.

*The Mindfulness Movement as a Function of Resilience and Productivity Discourse*

Alex Norman

Western Sydney University

a.norman@westernsydney.edu.au

Mindfulness, a term often used interchangeably with ‘meditation’, currently constitutes a global industry with stakeholders in religious groups, psychological practice, corporations, and scientific fields. Mindfulness also holds interest in popular discourse, being frequently referenced in media as a method of ‘self-care’ tied to notions of personal success and fulfillment. While traditions of practice that overlap with the mindfulness movement may be useful parts of personal and communal health, the mindfulness movement itself has embraced neoliberal logic to become a tool for individual productivity and resilience. Running through the discourse – popular, scientific, corporate – is the notion of mindfulness as sui generis; something unique and of its own kind, “different from all other human activities”, as John Kabat-Zinn put it. Recent literature on the claim of religion as sui generis has theorised the socio-political strategies behind the notion. This paper uses theory on sui generis religion to argue that ‘mindfulness’ and its accompanying movement has been manufactured in order to support the industry that now surrounds it. The movement’s success is a function of its coincidence with neoliberal capitalism, into which it has been subsumed. Examining the mindfulness movement in this way can help scholars and policy makers understand mindfulness more fully.

*The Heritage of Idolising Violence as a Supreme Method in Tibetan Buddhism*

Damcho

[damchodyson@gmail.com](mailto:damchodyson@gmail.com)

As the former attendant of Sogyal Rinpoche – founder and head of the International Buddhist organisation, Rigpa – and one of 8 letter writers who, in July 2017 called into question Sogyal's violent and abusive ‘training’ methods, Dyson uses her own story as a starting point to question the ways in which ‘crazy wisdom’ methods have been idealised in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. The students of Sogyal’s inner-circle who were subject to sexual, physical and psychological abuse were offered the method of ‘pure perception’ – an alchemy of devotion – to view the abuse as a spiritual teaching, purification and blessing as illustrated in textural accounts of the torturous trials of saints from the past. Rather than being a valid method for bringing a student to enlightenment, Dyson witnessed that this tradition provided the abuser with a metaphysical alibi for committing crimes which resulted in profound damage to people’s lives.

*An Epistemological Exploratory Study of the Origin of Religious Fanaticism in Islam, Christianity and Hinduism*

Sneh Bhardwaj

Federation University

[snehhrd2@gmail.com](mailto:snehhrd2@gmail.com)

This study explores religious fanaticism in Hinduism, Christianity and Islam through the application of a reasoning template model. The basic hypothesis postulates that roots of religious fanaticism and pertinent violent manifestations are common among the three studied religions. To prove so, several historical incidences about early and contemporary fanatical conflicts among Hindus, Christians and Muslims are compared. Belief in religious supremacy, manifestations of extreme divine love and seeking heaven through martyrdom are argued as some of the predisposing factors of religious fanaticism. Therefore, similar roots of religious fanaticism are shared among the religions’ teachings. Pillars of this argument are grounded in history and scriptures as well as in the theoretical framework informing the study i.e. the Uncertainty Identity Theory. The study uses corpus-based tools to infer the concordance lines from the Bhagavad Gita, the Quran and the Bible to seek references to ‘encouraged love’ among their followers to guide a reasoning template for religious violence.

PANEL: Imagine No Religion: Future Implications of the Radical Deconstruction of Religion and Related Categories

“Critical Religion” is a name sometimes applied to a growing body of scholarship and theory that argues that “religion” and “secular”, its conjectured opposite, are recent, colonial concepts that are incoherent. According to this perspective, these terms should be used neither as an analytic basis for research nor as fundaments for law and public policy. Such deconstructive work is highly controversial in Religious Studies. Nevertheless, the three panelists have made critical religion the focus of their scholarship and will explain why they remain committed to elaborating and extending this radical critique. Their conversation will address the relevance of their approach to the broad interdisciplinary study of “religion,” “secularism” and “politics” as well as to the conference theme of “religion and violence.” Particular focus will be placed on the current work of Timothy Fitzgerald whose book, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (2000), has been foundational for critical religion. Fitzgerald is now arguing for a more thorough interrogation of myriad Western categories that extends beyond “religion.” The audience will be invited to discuss the implications of this new trajectory of theory with the panelists.

Naomi Goldenberg is Professor of Classics and Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa, Canada.

[naomi4339@rogers.com.au](mailto:naomi4339@rogers.com.au)

Timothy Fitzgerald is Associate Research Professor at the Institute of Advanced Studies in the Humanities at UQ.

[timfitz10@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:timfitz10@yahoo.co.uk)

David Robertson is editor of the journal *Implicit Religion.*

[david.robertson@open.ac.uk](mailto:david.robertson@open.ac.uk)

PANEL: Christchurch & Terrorism

*‘Muslim brothers’ and ‘those people’; Christian Discourse and Embodied Responses to the Christchurch Mosque Shootings in Aotearoa New Zealand*

Catherine Rivera

PhD Candidate, Massey University NZ

c.rivera@massey.ac.nz

On 15th March 2019 Aotearoa New Zealand witnessed its first ever terrorist attack when a man, identifying as a white nationalist, shot and killed 51 Muslims worshipping in two mosques in the city of Christchurch. This paper discusses responses from a number of New Zealand Christian churches to the shootings, based on ethnographic fieldwork in the immediate aftermath, and on digital media analysis. In particular I examine the framework of ‘Imago Dei’ (the image of God) which was used by my Anglican research participants to relate to the Muslim victims, and that of ‘shared humanity’ which Charismatic/Pentecostal church sermons that I listened to online were more inclined to use. I argue these two lenses led to different types of post-shooting, embodied actions towards Muslims from these Christian communities.

*Threads of Terror; Signs of Hope*

Douglas Pratt

University of Auckland

d.pratt@auckland.ac.nz

A very particular form of terrorism struck New Zealand on Friday 15 March. It was an act of evil born of a number of threads of terror. Yet in its aftermath it has given rise to an evocation of hope. For bubbling up through the magnificent outpouring of love – aroha – compassion and support for the New Zealand Muslim community, critical questions about where this act came from remain to be answered – what motivated it? What lies behind it? What allowed it to happen? And, importantly, can be done about it? In this paper I will outline the five ‘lenses of terrorism’ (Schmid) and focus particularly on the fifth: religion. For if religion, qua religious extremism, is part of the problem then religion, qua values often found in common, is surely part of the solution. But what does that mean, and how can it be made effective?

*The Christchurch Terror Attacks: Where is the Discussion About Religion and Religious Diversity?*

William Hoverd

Massey University NZ

w.hoverd@massey.ac.nz

On March the 15th, a gunman attacked the Christchurch Al Noor Mosque and the Linwood Islamic Centre killing 51 and injuring 49 people. Since the attack, New Zealand commentary around the attack has centred on discussions of racism, extremism, terrorism, anti-migrant, or Islamophobic attitudes. Public discussion of the attack being directed at a particular religious community has been almost non-existent. In May, when Dr Negar Partow and I hosted a Religion and Security Symposium at Massey University in Wellington, over 100 government policy makers attended. This was followed by a request by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to speak at Parliament’s Beehive Theatrette around the security dimensions of religious diversity. This talk explores why despite clear government interest, the public discussion of religious diversity has been relatively absent after Christchurch. The talk argues that while immediate responses to Christchurch may have symbolically helped promote religious diversity as a global value, but that local discussion of religious diversity has been missing in subsequent discourse and practice.

*“In New Zealand we will give him nothing, not even his name”. The Risks of Spotlighting the Christchurch Shooter’s Manifesto and the Benefits of an Authoethnographic Approach*

LynFay Shapiro

University of Sydney

lynfayshapiro@gmail.com

How do we talk about dangerous ideas? Like the online rant of Anders Breivik, the Christchurch shooter’s manifesto was designed to provoke conflict along religious, political and cultural vectors. How can we engage these texts without adding fuel to the fire? In this presentation I use autoethnography to reveal the tensions inherent in discussing this manifesto. I use this dangerous material to also assess the appropriateness of the autoethnographic method. Is it self-indulgent in its inclusion of the researcher’s live experiences? But without reflexivity, how do we ethically engage risky discourse? Drawing on my experiences as a researcher of counter-radicalisation and as an Australian citizen, I investigate three levels of censorship: state, self and society. Understanding and acknowledging the rationale behind these restrictions facilitates the respectful and productive discussion of dangerous ideas.

PANEL: Literature & Religious Violence

*Social Structure and the Construction of Religion: A Sociological Inquiry of the Mahabharata*

Shukra Raj Adhikari

Tribhuvan University, Nepal

[gshakragarib@gmail.com](mailto:gshakragarib@gmail.com)

Mahabharata is a major scripture of Hindu Religion. It reflects the socio-cultural structure of ancient period. Religion is the core part of socio-cultural structure as the macro socio-cultural institution. Religious norms and values are always historically constructed, transferred and these are shaped by production system and practices. In this context, the main objective this paper is to draw out the socio-cultural structure and religious norms and values of Mahabharata period. Both primary and secondary information are gathered to gain the objective. Historical content analysis method is used to collect secondary data from text of Mahabharata and ancient historical documents. And expert interview method is used to find out primary information. Content analysis method is used to analyze both primary and secondary kinds of information. This paper concluded that the socio-cultural structure of Mahabharata period is constructed by pastoral and feudalistic production system. Religious norms, values and are shaped by patriarchal practices.

*“The sun of jihad has risen”: Jihad Doctrine in Dabiq*

Christopher van der Krogt

Massey University

[C.J.vanderKrogt@massey.ac.nz](mailto:C.J.vanderKrogt@massey.ac.nz)

Between July 2014 and July 2016, the Islamic State movement (ISIS or IS) published 15 issues of Dabiq, a glossy propaganda magazine made available online in Arabic and three European languages. Its pages include articles justifying war against unbelievers – including nearly all other shades of Islamic opinion. Dabiqhas a wealth of material on jihad and related concepts, including emigration to Islamic territory, martyrdom, apostasy, the treatment of captives, and rule over non-Muslims. Comparing Dabiq with Islamist and Salafi writing on jihad demonstrates the movement’s genealogy while underscoring its divergence from rivals. Similarly, comparison with the Qurʾan, hadith, and traditional jurisprudence shows its conception of jihad, despite having a distinctive character, to be solidly grounded in the Islamic tradition. A systematic, qualitative analysis reveals that, as others have argued, but as many have denied, IS remains thoroughly Islamic even if it can scarcely now claim to be a state.

*Jihad: Islamic Theology or Political Discourse? A Critical Literature Review*

Mohamed Ahmed Hamed Mohamed

University of Newcastle

[Mohamed.A.Mohamed@uon.edu.au](mailto:Mohamed.A.Mohamed@uon.edu.au)

Both radical Islamist groups and many influential Western politicians have utilized the term, Jihad to achieve their own agendas and aims. Among the Islamists, Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has defined the term broadly to justify their deadly actions. To attract support, they have misused and misinterpreted the Sacred Texts in ways that take them far from the context and the applications of the prophet Muhammad, and their use of Jihad is just one example of that misuse. At the same time, some influential Western politicians have taken these justifications, definitions, actions and literatures as a good opportunity to vilify all of Islam to suit their own local and international political and economic agendas. The combination of these two factors has had extremely negative impacts on Muslims and non-Muslim societies all over the world. Against this, we find 14 centuries worth of discourse and scholarship that shows that such misuse of Jihad denies its original purpose and real meaning. Examples of such discourses constitute the core of the study, looking to the ways in which both theological and political interpretations have affected its understanding.

*From Poetic Drinking Sessions to Cosmic War: The Rise of Caodaism through the Imagination of Phạm Công Tắc (1890-1959)*

Christopher Hartney

University of Sydney

christopher.hartney@sydney.edu.au

There are many ways to chart the rise of a religion. Studies of Caodaism, so far, have focused on charting its history, or calculating the religious influences that brought it into being. In this paper, I focus instead on some of the key poetic and imaginative developments of Phạm Công Tắc as he led his small group of friends in 1925 to develop what is now Vietnam’s third largest religion with adherents numbering in the millions. To do this, I compare two of his key texts. The first is from 1926 and is entitled A Visit to Celestial Realms, the second The Divine Path to Eternal Life (1949). Both are visits to heaven, but the first text is made by a man clearly aware of long-standing poetic conventions in East Asia and pays tribute to the Daoist poetry and drinking tradition established by the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove. The second text revisits these themes but is an explanation of how heaven works – an explanation that culminates in a great cosmic battle. In the comparison, I focus tightly on how poetry and genre are used by Phạm Công Tắc to deepen and dramatize religious experience.

**CONCURRENT SESSION #4**

PANEL: Historical Perspectives

*After the Soul: Capital and the New Gods*

Adam Smith

University of Sydney

[adam.malcolm.smith@sydney.edu.au](mailto:adam.malcolm.smith@sydney.edu.au)

What is the utility of the soul in the Marxian and Nietzschean oeuvres? Through examining these works in the Accelerationism genre of Philosophy, we will see that the concept of the soul has undergone a transfiguring dismemberment in the secular examination of it. It is the contention of this study that the substantive claim of Accelerationism is that, a) violence is enacted against the soul by the orientation of reason towards material accumulation, and that b) the Accelerationist’s dismemberment of the soul as a unitive higher, or non-corporeal substance, has retained the crucial elements of its concept, which is a necessary normative and universal ground upon which the reflexivity of reason can act. The perspective that Accelerationism brings begs the question: is religious violence in defence, or against the soul? With reference to contemporary Accelerationist work, this paper will illustrate the contours of Accelerationism’s relationship to the soul, and its 19th century foundations.

*Back to the Future: ‘Pagan’ Violence and Augustinian Peace*

Alex Deagon

Queensland University of Technology

alex.deagon@qut.edu.au

This paper explores the idea of violence and peace in Christian theology. In particular, it considers the idea of violence as comprised of antagonism and alienation, and ultimately a ‘pagan’ celebration of war and death. Even the famed *pax Romana* is itself the violent suppression of violence. Drawing on Augustine, the paper contrasts this ‘pagan’ violence with the Christian idea of ontological peace – the harmonious ordering and fellowship of difference between God and humanity, or what John Milbank calls ‘the reconciliation of virtue with difference’. Though this critique is historically situated, it creates an opportunity to reconceptualise our modern legal system so that we may move from a liberal atomistic individualism to a more harmonious community of being, governed by ‘the law of love’.

*The Phenomenon of “Other” in the Sectarian Weltanschauung*

Amir Moghadam

University of Newcastle

amir.mogadam@newcastle.edu.au

The current article is an effort in explaining the role of institutionalized narratives in defining the relationship between the *Self* and *Other* in the political space. This will be done in an effort to make sense of the violent events since the rise of the modern sectarian insurgency in the Middle East and the relative ambivalence of the religious institutions in condemning the violence. The article acknowledges that such a violent history needs to be understood against a variety of accumulated causes and vested interests. Nonetheless, particular focus here is on the historical formation of “the-life-without-value”, a phenomenon resulting from the Weltanschauung developed by the authoritative formative narratives. In relation to the sectarian Weltanschauung, the phenomenon of “the-life-without-value”, and the potential catastrophic outcome of such a notion, will also be discussed in this article.

*Catholic Anti-slavery Initiatives: Moral Foundations and Resources of Religious Action*

Marianne Rozario

University of Notre Dame, Australia

marianne.rozario1@my.nd.edu.au

This paper investigates the agency of Catholic anti-slavery initiatives in international relations. This investigation is grounded in research based on the Santa Marta Group (SMG) - the anti-slavery initiative of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW). The SMG is a global alliance of police chiefs and bishops from around the world working with civil society in a process endorsed by Pope Francis to eradicate modern slavery and human trafficking. This paper has two aims. Firstly, it explores the moral foundations of this initiative based on Catholic Social Teaching. Secondly, it analyses the resources of religious action of the SMG to the international society. This paper argues that Catholic actors exert agency in international relations through both their moral identity and their resources of religious action.

PANEL: Islam: From Extremism to Peace

*Cogent Religious Instruction: Critical-Analytical, Evidence-Based Education in Response to Islamist and Anti-Islam Extremism*

Halim Rane

Griffith University

h.rane@griffith.edu.au

The phenomena of Islamist and anti-Islam extremism have arisen in the late twentieth and early twentieth century time-period. The former has been driven by political Islamist ideology, religious extremism, and Western-military interventions in Muslim-majority countries, while the later has largely been a reaction to the former, particularly fears of political Islam. An underlying factor in both is how Islam has been understood and manifested over the past several decades. This paper will discuss the radicalisation of small but significant numbers of extremist Muslim Australians, the spread of anti-Islam sentiments in society, and the rise of social movements, political parties and right-wing extremists with an explicit anti-Islam agenda. It sees these as new phenomena and argues the need for cogent religious instruction on Islam. This will be examined within the framework of a critical-analytical, evidence-based approach in relation to Islamic awareness, deradicalisation/countering violent extremism, and education programs.

*The Role of Leaders in Religious Movements for Peace and Social Cohesion*

Mehrnosh Lajevardi Fatemi

Western Sydney University

18291706@student.westernsydney.edu.au

After decades of debate, some religious leaders are ready to acknowledge that strict adherence to traditional interpretations of religious texts is no longer acceptable in today’s world. From the beginning of the concept of Islam, its interpretation has varied, due to different specificities of its origin and timing and the habitus of the divergent groups of Muslims. Islam sanctified with the social and cultural capital of the agents, has meant that the universal structure of Islam has been reconstituted throughout history, influenced by factors such as nationality, and local culture. Spirituality is the goal of the Islam, its identity as a socio-cultural structure, keeps it as a protector. The core of any religion for sure is more important than the cortex and now the best tool for continuing the Islamic identity, in order to protect Islamic law and Islamic values, is maintain the “ethical values”.

Contemporary aesthetic form and technology and their contribution to Muslim social cohesion

*Contemporary Aesthetic Form and Technology and their Contribution to Muslim Social Cohesion*

Samuel D Blanch

Australian National University

sam.blanch@anu.edu.au

This paper is a reflection on artistic form and technique in contemporary Muslim life. I use my ethnographic work in Shia communities in Sydney, Australia and Qom, Iran to contest the link between modern techniques and the nation-state model of solidarity as expressed in Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined community’. I address a key theoretical source for Anderson, namely Walter Benjamin’s (1968) account of aesthetic form. Benjamin traces the links between the secularisation of social life and artistic value through modern technology, finding that modern artistic form cannot be disassociated from a capitalist form of life. Against this, I show how Shia poetry and advertising use technology and contemporary form to augment alternative understandings of ethical and social solidarity. This idea of technology as a vector of virtue and excellence rather as a symbol of the boundaries of a polity has implications for how scholars theorise belonging and exclusion in Islam.

PANEL: Gender & Harm in Christianity

*Complementarian Constructions: Gender and Evangelism in the Sydney Anglican Diocese*

Rosie Shorter

Western Sydney University

r.shorter@westernsydney.edu.au

The Sydney Anglican Diocese has, historically, been privileged as a legal and moral authority in NSW. Today, despite reduced attendance, it still seeks to engage and influence the public on both faith and ‘morality’, speaking not just of the gospel, but of gender and sexuality. The interconnections between gender, sexuality, evangelism, and authority within The Sydney Anglican Diocese are not well understood. Drawing on textual analysis and initial fieldwork, I argue that analysis of the Diocese needs to be extended beyond histories and theological critique by considering Sydney Anglicanism as a lived religion or culture, focusing on the social consequences of Complementarian Discourse. Building on work which has considered complementarian theology as a boundary marker and a possible contributing factor to intimate partner violence, I explore how complementarian constructions of gender and sexuality inform not only Sydney Anglican identity, but also congregants’ lived faith and Diocesan public engagement.

*Gen X Catholic Women: Narratives of Harm Around Reproductive and Sexual Health*

Tracy McEwan

University of Newcastle

[tracy.mcewan@uon.edu.au](mailto:tracy.mcewan@uon.edu.au)

In interviews conducted as part of my PhD research on Gen X Catholic women in Australia, participants frequently recounted narratives of harm regarding their experience of Catholic teachings on sexuality and reproduction. In particular, they reported that decisions regarding their reproductive and sexual health often became fraught as they tried to negotiate competing claims of truth and authority between discourses of women’s right to access reproductive and sexual health services and Catholic teachings on sexuality and reproduction. Michel Foucault coined the expression “technologies of self” to conceptualise a process through which individuals shape self-understanding and obtain a level of self-determination within a disciplinary network of power and knowledge. This paper will argue that the concept of “technologies of self” is useful in understanding the struggle of women in developing and maintaining a level of self-understanding that is situated beyond the disciplinary power of the Catholic Church. While the pathway towards self-determination gives Gen X Catholic women agency, it does not suggest liberation, instead competing claims of truth and authority and the space between can cause disruption and potentially harm.

*Personal and Political: Ending Theological Silence on Violence Against Women*

Tanya Riches

Hillsong College Sydney

tanya.riches@hillsong.com

Evangelical/pentecostal megachurches are critiqued for promoting traditional gender roles, reinforcing beauty culture norms, and complicity with Neoliberal economic structures. Ethnography, however, shows the situation for Sydney’s Hillsong Sisterhood is complex, with women demonstrating increased empowerment in various domains. Women’s spaces afford room for theologizing on issues such as sexuality, human trafficking, miscarriage, and infertility. In turn, however, these issues arguably become “femininized,” and therefore theological “sacrifice zones” omitted from preaching pulpits. Recently, female bloggers including Rachel Held Evans and Sarah Bessy collectivized Christian women in online forums, speaking from viewpoints and on issues silenced within the church. The power of the online forum is accessibility, allowing content to move into the mainstream. Using a theological-anthropological approach this paper investigates Christian women’s online spaces including Australia’s “Fixing Her Eyes” movement of 14,000 women who worked with mainstream journalists to expose theologies and pastoral practice protecting violent abusers (including clergy) within churches.

*’Sweet Charity – Love is what it’s all about’: Exploring the Ethical Dissonance Between Sex Worker Activists and Religious Campaigners on Sex Industry Law*

Lauren McGrow

Charles Sturt University

laurenmcgrow@gmail.com

In the last two decades, Christians have globally engaged sex trafficking and sex work as policy issues and an occasion for humanitarian action, bringing discourses of rescue and rehabilitation to bear on people at the sexual margins. Many faith-based NGOs now lobby for ‘End Demand’ legislation to be adopted by governments across the world, despite compelling evidence that violence towards sex workers increases under this framework. Religious groups are using their moral authority to enact top-down political strategies that silence some of the most marginalised people in our community. This happens through disparagement of agency; through the portrayal of sex working women as depraved victims; by discounting sex worker activists demanding human rights and by ignoring evidence-based research. In this paper, three current examples of the speech and silencing techniques of faith-based NGOs will be juxtaposed with the narrative trajectories of sex worker peer groups to show how benevolent Christians readily employ structures of oppression to maintain social control.

PANEL: The Politics of Othering & Belonging

*Exclusive Inclusion: Structural Violence, Cultural Fundamentalism and Religious Difference in the Politics of Belonging*

Aukje Muller

University of Groningen & Macquarie University

[aukje.muller@students.mq.edu.au](mailto:aukje.muller@students.mq.edu.au)

In this paper, I argue that the denial of belonging and exclusion of some religious identities from the body politic constitutes a form of symbolic and structural violence. This exclusion, which is based on racist and cultural fundamentalist notions of difference, and an additional hierarchization of people by virtue of their religious identity, can be identified at a governmental and social level. Using the Netherlands as a case, this paper suggests that migrants’ denial of belonging is constantly ‘tested’ against an idealized notion of what it means to be a good (Dutch) citizen. As analysis of interviews with refugees in the Netherlands shows, a sense of un-belonging and exclusion permeates their everyday life, as they struggle to adhere to this ‘ideal’ citizenship. The resulting structural violence they experience includes bureaucratic selectiveness, unemployment, social exclusion and isolation, and having to deal with negative stereotyping in the public sphere.

*Hate Speech, Religious Violence in Post-war Sri Lanka: A Sri Lankan Perspective Before and After the Easter Bombing*

Charitha Dissanayake

Deakin University

[cdissana@deakin.edu.au](mailto:cdissana@deakin.edu.au)

&

Melathi Saldin

Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation

Deakin University, Melbourne

m.saldin@deakin.edu.au

The Easter bombing compounded an already tense situation between the majority Buddhists and Muslims in Sri Lanka; the aftermath which has resulted in vicious consequences that parallel the loss of lives or the physical damages. This paper will explore the Easter Sunday bombings and the events immediately preceding and following the attacks from the perspective of native researchers, who utilise both lived experience and empirical data to shed light on a seemingly random terrorist attack, carried out by a local Islamist group with alleged connection to the ISIS. With the end of the civil war in 2009, Sri Lanka appeared to be well on its way to achieving economic, social and political progress, promised by successive post-independence regimes. Despite such economic progress, increased post-war triumphalism and majoritarianism witnessed the rise of fundamental Buddhist groups who targeted other ethno-religious minorities such as the Christians and Muslims, of whom the latter bore the brunt of anti-minority rhetoric and violence. Social media in particular continues to be the ‘invisible weapon’ used by the extremist groups including Buddhist monks and politicians. This paper discusses the rise in anti-Muslim hate speech on social media and related violence against Muslims using incidents which occurred at the local level, such the widespread belief among sections of the Sinhala community of Muslim attempts to sterilise Sinhala-Buddhist women through the use of sterilisation pills (wandhapethi). Moreover, this paper will discuss how increasing Islamophobia in Sri Lanka has been used by some sections of the Sri Lankan community for personal and political benefits, as well as for the furthering of economic agendas by appeals to the Sinhala majority to boycott Muslim businesses.

*The Cosmopolitan Irony of Belonging in Multicultural Australia*

Kim Lam

Deakin University

kim.lam@deakin.edu.au

While existing research shows low levels of negative sentiment towards Buddhists in Australia, little is known about their lived experiences of belonging, and what they do to facilitate social cohesion. This article addresses this gap by exploring experiences of belonging and intercultural engagement among twenty-two young adult Buddhists from a range of backgrounds living in Australia. It finds that while multiculturalism and positive portrayals of Buddhism facilitated the belonging of these young Buddhists, anti-religious sentiment and processes of racialisation contributed to experiences of exclusion. The article contends that these contradictory forces create an ambiguous context for the negotiation of religious belonging and intercultural engagement, which study participants addressed through processes of contextualisation, accommodation and reflexive community-building. It further suggests that Bryan Turner’s (2000; 2001; 2002) concept of cosmopolitan irony provides a useful lens through which to unpack these complexities.

*Violence, Religion, and Propaganda in Israel-Palestine*

Louise Katz

University of Sydney

louise.katz@sydney.edu.au

In late July this year I returned from a stay in Israel-Palestine, where I visited East Jerusalem and the West Bank – Ramallah and Bethlehem – to canvas opinions of participants from across the political spectrum with regard to directions the ongoing violent struggle is likely to take in the near future. I spoke to people working in academia, journalism, politics, and activism, including religious activists. The Israel/Palestine dispute is sometimes framed as being religion-based, even though it is fundamentally one of territory. I would like to explore reasons for this emphasis and the effect it has on how questions regarding territorial rights are seen. I have long been interested in different angles of the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the use of propaganda and rhetoric, including what might be considered misuses of the way concepts of weakness and strength are understood by the protagonists.

**CONCURRENT SESSION #5**

PANEL: Appropriating Religious Discourse

*Can Love Trump Hate?’: Marianne Williamson’s Politics of Love and New Age Spirituality as a Political Force Against Right Wing Brutality*

Alana Louise Bowden

University of Sydney

abow2587@uni.sydney.edu.au

Rising to prominence the 1990s with the publication of her New Age text A Return To Love: Reflections on the Principles of A Course in Miracles, Marianne Williamson is an activist, New Age author and spiritual teacher. She is also a Democratic Candiate in the 2020 US Presidential Election. Describing her presidential campaign as being dedicated to speaking “Big Truth” in the pursuit of “higher wisdom”, Williamson’s unconventional political rhetoric draws heavily from both New Age and Alternative spiritual discourses and seeks to ‘heal’ the soul of the nation. Although she was initially disregarded as an unlikely yet novel candidate, she has emerged in recent debates as a very real political force against what she describes as the “dark psychic forces” mobilised by President Trump and his administration. Claiming that the new politics of America is “a politics of love”, Williamson ultimately seeks to affect a new form of politics in which modalities of New Age spirituality are wielded as a political force against the rising violence and brutality of right wing, populist rhetoric. The paper will assess the impact of Williamson’s campaign on not only political discourse, but the role of politics itself. In addition to this, it will also use Williamson’s campaign to both question and explore the supposed boundaries between religion and politics, asking the question, if secular concepts of politics, ethics and morality have been shaped by religious discourse, is it reasonable, or indeed necessary to deploy alternative spiritual discourses as a counterstrategy to the racist and religious violence of right wing political populism? In doing so the paper will challenge established attitudes to New Age Spirituality and the separation of religion and politics, in its claim that Williamson’s political platform offers a very real and affective solution in which love may indeed ‘trump’ hate.

*“My Torturer Became My Remedy”: Beyonce’s Appropriation of African Spiritualities in Healing Cultural and Personal Trauma*

Britt Spry

University of Sydney

bspr6877@uni.sydney.edu.au

This paper will examine the negotiation of traditional African spiritualities and female-authored African-American socio-cultural influences as found in Beyonce’s recent body of work. Her recent albums centre around issues of healing both at a wide cultural and, through this, the manifestation of personal traumas, particularly in her marriage. Here I focus on her albums *Lemonade* and her follow-up collaboration with her husband *EVERYTHINGISLOVE* through a racial lens and also a feminist critique. Both depend heavily on issues of religion, black spirituality, and race history in the United States. I hope to show here how, under her creative influence, Hip-hop and R’n’B music and subcultures have specific and intricate relationships with gender, sex and race which transform with every new music video produced in these genres. To address the wide trauma of black American marginalisation, concepts of identity, and the infidelity of her husband, Beyonce forges a new matrix in this music style that riffs strong off spiritualities and idolatry from African cultures. From life trauma, the artist refashions herself as a new embodiment or incarnation of these deities. This makes her work exceptional in the field of religion and popular and contemporary art and I will conclude with how a wider project of study of these themes could be mapped.

Monica Alice Quirk

University of Sydney

*Spiritual Espionage: Covert Conversion, Dishonest Spirituality, and Religious Freedom in Australia*

mquirk97@gmail.com

Christalignment is a small, Victoria-based Christian sect in Australia that aims to infiltrate New Age culture by camouflaging themselves as members of the community. They adopt the language and aesthetics of these spaces - including sex positive and queer spaces - while hiding their true motivations of fundamentalist Christianity. In particular, they aim to convert “witches” and “disable” tarot cards. Their readings attempt to forge a connection between the participant and the “spirit of truth,” as well as utilising their own “destiny cards” (easily mistaken for tarot cards) to analyse the individual. This research will examine the practice of covert conversion and dishonest spirituality, and how this phenomenon fits into the religious landscape of Australia. It will specifically focus on the case study of Christalignment, but will also discuss and explore “chameleon” operations and how they may interact with current popular discourse regarding religious freedom in Australia.

PANEL: Morality & Religious Violence

*The Fetishization Effect: Using Religious Studies Methodologies in Comprehending Perpetrator Motivations in the Rwandan Genocide*

Breann Fallon

The Sydney Jewish Museum and the University of Sydney

breannfallon@outlook.com

The perpetrators of the Rwandan Genocide were the most efficient kill­ers of the twentieth century, with 8000 victims per day at a modest count. Considering the actions of the perpetrators from a Religious Studies perspective highlights an overlooked propellant behind the actions of Hutu perpetrators—the machete. Via an investigation of primary perpetrator (Hatzfeld 2003) and victim accounts (Gourevitch 1998), this paper argues for the centrality of a new spiritual, psychological, and social paradigm around the fetishizing (Ellen 1988) of the machete in the Rwandan Genocide — “The Fetishization Effect.” When fully fetishized by the perpetrators, the machete became inspirited with the voice of the Judeo-Christian God and was thus able to influence perpetrator motivations and propel violent actions. As such, this paper will delineate this new paradigm, resurrecting fetishism, and explicating the role of religious studies methodologies in more fully comprehending the actions of *genocidaire* in such cases of specified slaughter.

*From Pacifism to Tyrannicide: Bonhoeffer’s Cthics for the Anthropocene*

Di Rayson

University of Newcastle

dianne.rayson@newcastle.edu.au

Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s (1906-1945) engagement in conspiracies to assassinate Hitler represented a concrete shift from his earlier position on pacifism. This paper examines the contributing factors to this apparent contradiction and addresses Bonhoeffer’s ethical rationale for religious violence in the particular context of the Third Reich.

Bonhoeffer’s ethical frames of *Stellvertretung and Sachgemäßheit* (vicarious representative action and contextuality) will be analysed in the context of his engagement with the underground Confessing Church and in opposition to the *Deutsche Christen’s* complicity with the Reich. It then turns toward the seminal issues of the Anthropocene: climate change, mass migration, and biodiversity loss, asking whether religious, non-religious, or moral violence can be justified in the face of this existential crisis.

*Incorporating Intercultural Understanding Capability in Christian Studies Through Service-learning*

Juliet Beattie

Griffith University

juliet.beattie@griffithuni.edu.au

This conference paper will present research that examines how Lutheran schools in Australia implement the Intercultural Understanding capability, from the Australian curriculum, in their Christian Studies program through service-learning. Lutheran Education Australia developed a service-learning framework containing several interrelated learning concepts that can be found in their Christian Studies Curriculum Framework document (2015) and Lutheran schools’ units of work. These service-learning concepts include; innate dignity, boundary crossing, coming as a guest, presence, story, stewardship and community. This paper will explore each of the service-learning concepts with regards to how educators apply the concepts for students to develop intercultural understanding. The Service-learning framework acknowledges that every person has many roles and responsibilities and that mutual respect, collaboration and social responsibility are crucial to the wellbeing of the community.

PANEL: Politics and New Religious Movements

*New Religious Movements and Peace: Help or Hindrance? A Case Study – the Universal Peace Federation of the Unification Faith*

Alexa Blonner, Independent scholar

[hablonner1@bigpond.com](mailto:hablonner1@bigpond.com)

New religious movements (NRMs) have often gotten a bad rap for extremist anti-social behaviours and some have indeed been problematic. Some also make positive contributions to peace-building. The focus of this paper is the humanitarian side of the Unification faith, founded in Korea in 1954 by Reverend Sun Myung Moon. It has been engaged in cooperative and harmony-building initiatives almost since its inception. Since 2006 these have been predominantly consolidated under the auspices of the Universal Peace Federation (UPF). Some dismiss Unification initiatives as little more than publicity and legitimacy-buying stunts. Utilising fieldwork, interviews and literature review, this paper explores the range of UPF and other Unification initiatives and considers their integrity and efficacy.

*Anticipating an Antipodean Apocalypse: Millennial Fears in Australia 1993 – 2001*

Bernard Doherty

Charles Sturt University

bdoherty@csu.edu.au

Between 1993 and 2001 five incidents occurred involving marginal religious groups which led to widespread fears about the threat posed by so-called “doomsday cults” — the siege in Waco, Texas (1993); the murder suicides of members of the Order of the Solar Temple in France, Switzerland and Canada; the terrorist attack on the Tokyo subway by members of Aum Shinrikyo; the multiple suicides of the Heaven’s Gate group in San Diego, California; and the mass murder of members of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God in Uganda. With the exception of Heaven’s Gate each of these groups had tangible links to Australia and these links, coupled with the approaching millennium, combined to create a social milieu particularly attuned to the potential for millennialist groups to engage in intra- and inter-communal acts of violence. This paper will examine how this millennial anxiety played out within an Australian context by examining how various social actors — including the media, law enforcement, and the churches — engaged in the construction and maintenance an image of a handful of home-grown “doomsday cults” as potentially violent.

*Pagan Fears: NeoFolk and the Rise of Nationalist Violence*

Sophie Roe

University of Sydney

sroe6905@uni.sydney.edu.au

Paganism has long been used as an alternative cultural system through which to understand one’s place in the world. In recent years, it has also provided inspiration for many genres of music from extreme Black Metal to Industrial NeoFolk, as artists seek to evoke a sense of authenticity while connecting to a “lost” ancestral past. With the rise of globalisation, the increasing fear of cultural loss becomes particularly evident throughout Europe as Europeans come to terms with the mass immigration starting from the middle of this past decade. As a result, Pagan themes and iconography have been adopted and absorbed by far-right and nationalist groups, becoming a rallying cry for anti-immigration and ethnonationalism. Oftentimes, musicians that have adopted these aspects, deny political affiliation for fear of backlash from their local and wider community. However, as nationalist sentiments increase amongst their fans, their influence cannot be ignored.

PANEL: Media & Digital Hate

*Media Representations and of Terrorism: the 2017 and 2018 Bourke Street Attacks and the Changing Taxonomy of Terror*

Emily Marriott

Deakin University

[esmarrio@deakin.edu.au](mailto:esmarrio@deakin.edu.au)

The recent 2017 and 2018 attacks in Melbourne’s Bourke Street are shocking examples of the public violence that is becoming disturbingly common in contemporary societies. This thesis investigates the Victorian print media’s framing and reporting of the 2017 and 2018 Bourke Street attacks, analysing how acts of terror and terrorism are represented in the media and how the classification of such events as terrorism, or not, can potentially have negative impacts on religious and ethnic minorities. This thesis found that the media reporting of the attacks emphasised the religion and ethnicity of the perpetrator of the 2018 terrorist attack, while by contrast the media reports of the 2017 attack – which wasn’t classified as terrorism – did not. Using Stuart Hall’s theories of representation and Kimberlé Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality, I propose a changing taxonomy of terrorism, and a shift of emphasis from ‘new terrorism’ that was focused on religion, to an intersectional approach, which considers more complex political and/or ideological motivations that include issues of economic, gender, sexuality, cultural, religious and environmental inequalities. I conclude by arguing that if the changing taxonomy of terror was adequately represented by the media, it could contribute to lessening these inequalities, and in this case particularly to countering negative stereotyping of religious and ethnic minorities, rather than exacerbating them.

*Countering Digital Hate: A Media Religious Literacy Response*

Enqi Weng

Deakin University

enqi.weng@deakin.edu.au

Research demonstrates that there is a correlation between bias media reporting and its effect on religious communities, such as Islamophobia because of sustained negative press coverage about Muslims (e.g. Vedder et al., 2016). Acts of violence like the Christchurch and Sri Lankan attacks are hypervisible articulations of such religionised hate. Though 20 years past 9/11, journalists continue to face criticisms about media portrayals of religions (Day, 2016). Research findings suggest that journalists are more generalists than specialists when it comes to complex topics such as religion (Weng, 2019). Religious literacy in schools is an effective approach towards increasing religious knowledge and tolerance (Halafoff et al., 2019). This paper adds that news media also play a critical role in shaping public literacy about religions since they set media agendas and drive discussions of contemporary relevance. A case will be presented for ongoing media training on broad spectrum religious literacy.

*Horror, Evil, and the Home-bound Mother*

Venetia Robertson

Sydney University

[vldrobertson@gmail.com](mailto:vldrobertson@gmail.com)

This paper interrogates the implicit “Motherhood Religion” (Judith Warner 2007) of three recent horror films that revolve around the unraveling of mothers and their families under supernatural duress: The Babadook (dir. Jennifer Kent 2014); mother! (dir. Darren Aronofsky 2017), and Hereditary (dir. Ari Aster 2018). These films are significant as they are written and directed by relatively young auteurs, have gained critical acclaim for their artistic value, and have provided fresh and challenging twists on the genre of horror, in particular, the ‘haunted house’ variety. Many of horror’s most famous films include haunted houses, terrified families, and distraught mothers—The Amityville Horror (1979), The Shining (dir. Stanley Kubrick 1980), and Poltergeist (dir. Tobe Hooper 1982), being obvious examples, however, in the films discussed here it is not the pre-possessed property that is the source of the haunting, instead, it is the mother-figures, in their perceived failure to fulfill their maternal roles, who act as the portals through which evil can manifest in the home. As though they have committed a cosmic crime in their inability to create an environment of peace and harmony for their children, to balance their life and their work, and to contain their grief and anger, as these women mentally and spiritually collapse under pressure they appear to simultaneously weaken the divide between this world and the other, letting in calamitous and unholy influences. While the mother characters are often sympathetic, they are nonetheless made culpable as their capacity for control is intimately connected to the control of the world, here symbolized in the domestic realm of the house where the chaos of the narrative unfolds. Utilising essential commentary on the cultural construction of motherhood as sacred duty from Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva, and Adrienne Rich alongside contemporary critiques of maternal monstrosity by Barbara Creed, Angela McRobbie, and Jacqueline Rose, this paper positions these films in the popular and political mindset of the West as part of an ongoing mythology of motherhood wherein mothers are responsible for not just the care and feeding of the family, but of the maintenance of worldly order and the balance between good and evil.

*“She doesn’t exist and the curse is gone”: Towards a Balanced Appraisal of the Momo Challenge*

Zoe Alderton

Sydney University

zoe.alderton-flett@sydney.edu.au

In 2018, news outlets, parents, and schools circulated panic pieces about Momo – an online demon who encouraged children to hurt and even kill themselves via the texting service WhatsApp. Momo was depicted as a gaunt Japanese woman with long black hair, an enlarged mouth, and bulbous, haunting eyes. Allegedly, Momo would respond to texts to her phone number with violent imagery and explicit threats. She also encouraged children to self-harm and showed them triggering images of gore. Rumors developed that dangerous Momo imagery was being inserted in to YouTube videos of the cartoon Peppa Pig, and that this was part of a sick plot to spread her demonic hold over an even younger demographic.

Of course, Momo was not real and no one had hurt themselves in response to her ‘challenges.’ The photo used for the Momo demon was actually a sculpture by Japanese artist Keisuke Aisawa called Mother Bird (2016). The iconic Momo picture was taken during a Tokyo art exhibition that focused on ghosts and other supernatural entities. Her avian form and haunting looks are a reference to the type of yōkai (ghost) known as ubume – the spirit of a woman who has died in childbirth. In the past year, Mother Bird has rotted and been disposed of. It is her fictional demonic counterpart who lives on. The grotesque Momo is both a contemporary folkloric spirit and an example of the moral panic that can erupt concerning young people and the perceived danger of their navigation of the online world without proper parental guidance. In this presentation, I place Momo in a context of online self-harm hoaxes and emerging internet mythologies.