



Healing and Harms

British Sociological Association
Sociology of Religion Study Group
Annual Conference 2026

Monday 29th June – Wednesday 1st July 2026

Monica Partridge Building
Lenton Hall Drive
University Park Campus
University of Nottingham
Nottingham

Sat Nav postcode: NG7 2RD

What3Words: porch.props.bells

Welcome

On behalf of the committee, we welcome you to our Study Group's annual conference. We meet this year at the University of Nottingham, to consider the complex nature of religion, spirituality and non-religion and the capacity of these to be both constructive and destructive. The conference theme *Healing and Harms*, invites us to reflect on the most transformational and challenging aspects of our work, as indeed gathering at the University of Nottingham likewise encourages reflection as to the rewarding and testing nature of our sector at this time.

Against a background of religiously motivated global conflicts, this year's theme encourages us to focus our attention on the changing role of religion within contemporary culture and to consider more deeply how scholarship and scholarly communities may contribute to raising awareness and supporting change.

As such, this year's programme boasts a wide variety of sessions on a diverse range of topics, cultures, communities and faith backgrounds in order to reflect the complex nature of religion in the present day. As we hear these sessions, we hope this will be a time of critical reflection for our Study Group, as well as offering avenues for connection and community building. Whether we are welcoming you back or for the first time, we hope you will find this year's conference to be a stimulating one.

This year, we received a record number of abstracts for the annual conference, and as such the programme grid reflects not only the wide ranging and diverse specialisms of our study group but the ongoing commitment to the annual conference by the SocRel community something for which, in the current climate of UK higher education, we are deeply grateful.

We would also like to thank our keynote speakers, Dr Anna Halafoff and Dr Rahmanara Chowdhury for joining us this year, to share their most vital work. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank Dr Andrew Graystone, who will kindly be joining us to screen his BAFTA award winning film and take questions from our community on Monday night.

Thanks also go to our Study Group Chair, Dr Sarah-Jane Page, and Conveners Dr Sharon Jagger and Dr Tim Hutchings, who have stepped into post since our last conference and been an

excellent source of support. Further gratitude is to be expressed to the other members of our committee, Dr Clare Hughes, Dr Renasha Khan, Dr Krysia Waldock, Dr Ellie Atayee-Bennett and Morgana Loze-Doyle, for their support and tireless hard work. Lastly, to Dr Jennifer Riley, who usually shares the role of Events Officer and who supported the organisation of this conference in its early stages before taking a period of maternity leave from post, we offer our deepest gratitude and many congratulations.

With thanks and solidarity,

Dr Alex Arthur-Hastie and Dr Céline Benoit

Events Officers

Industrial Action

Dear SocRel delegates,

As you may be aware, the University of Nottingham (our host for this year's annual conference) has entered a very complex summer of industrial action in response to [proposed compulsory redundancies](#). Our annual conference is going ahead as planned, so this brief note is intended to give you some context for the situation and to reassure you that our annual conference is not impacted.

In the current phase of restructuring at Nottingham, 2700 academic staff have been notified that they are at risk of redundancy, and 609 job cuts are planned across all faculties, subject to consultation. Several of the SocRel committee members are based at UoN, and some of those have received notifications of risk of redundancy.

The University and College Union (UCU) has now begun a marking and assessment boycott. Our conference is not affected by this kind of industrial action and so will be going ahead as planned. No request has been made by UCU or the other campus unions to begin a general boycott of the University of Nottingham. The unions have not asked academics from other institutions to withdraw from events here. No picket line will be operating on the days of our conference.

We recognise that colleagues working in the sociology of religion at many universities across the UK are facing similar situations. Our conference programme includes a Solidarity Panel, entitled "Precarity and Challenges in the Higher Education Landscape", intended to encourage information sharing and mutual support.

If you have any questions about the situation at Nottingham, please contact SocRel Co-Convenor Tim Hutchings (tim.hutchings@nottingham.ac.uk).

As always, we encourage colleagues concerned about course closures or redundancies at their institutions to contact the SocRel committee. If we can help, we will!

The SocRel Committee.

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Key Information

Getting Here

Monica Partridge Building (West Entrance)
University of Nottingham
University Park Campus
University Park
Nottingham
NG7 2BF
(Sat Nav NG7 2RD)



A Campus Map is on page 80 of this document. The Monica partridge Building is number 58 on the map.

Please see the SocRel social media for a short video guiding you from Rutland Hall accommodation to the Monica Partridge Building. This should take approximately 5 minutes, but please note that this is slightly up hill and may take slightly longer.

By Car

The campus is located 2 miles to the west of Nottingham City Centre. It can be accessed from the north or south via the M1 and the A52.

University Park is the University of Nottingham's largest campus and there are 3 entrances onto the site. You should aim for the **West Entrance** which is accessed from the A6464 (Woodside Road). Sat nav users can use NG7 2RD for the quickest and most accurate journey.

Parking

There is parking available at Rutland Hall and on Beeston Lane. You can download and print your parking voucher from Page 80, or collect one on arrival from Welcome Point West. A Campus Map is on Page 80 of this document. **Your voucher must be displayed for the duration of your visit.** There are disabled parking spaces at the Monica Partridge Building and at the East Midlands Conference Centre (adjacent to Rutland Hall).

By Bus

There is a bus stop within 150 metres of the campus.

There are several bus services which run through the University Park Campus. These include; St Peter's Court Shuttle, 34C, 34, N34 Night Service and 36U.

Bus stops can be found in; East Drive, Portland Hill, Library Road and Beeston Lane.

There are bus stops along Derby Road including North Entrance (Stop UN15) and Lenton Hall (Stop UN16) which serve routes 21, 35, 35A, 35B, 26 and i4.

For more information on bus services for the University Park campus please visit <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/Sustainability/Transport/PublicTransport/Busservices.aspx>

By Train

The nearest Railway Station is Beeston .

University Park Campus North Entrance is approximately 2.1 miles to the north east of Beeston Station which is an approximately 40 min walk or can be done using public transport.

This station is served by the CrossCountry and East Midlands rail companies.

The University Park Campus North Entrance is approximately 2.1 miles from Nottingham Station, approximately a 40 min journey or a short journey by public transport.

This station is served by the CrossCountry, East Midlands and Northern Rail companies.

A tram goes directly from Nottingham Train Station to University Park.

By Tram

The nearest tram stop is Queens Medical Centre.

Nottingham Express Transit's (NET) tram service links University Park Campus directly to Nottingham city centre - including Nottingham Train Station.

Line Three of the tram service includes two stops on University Boulevard - at the South Entrance to University Park, as well as adjacent to the Highfields Sports Ground.

The nearest Tram Stop to the North Entrance is the Queens Medical Centre stop.

Registration and Participation

Badges and Communication Cards

Delegates will be offered a name badge which gives you access to the conference. We request that your conference badges be worn at all times for security reasons and the provision of meals. Should you have any queries please ask a member of staff who will be available at the registration desk wearing a lanyard.

There will be the option to add a sticker to your badge which specifies your pronouns. We ask that you respect others' pronouns.

We will also have some communication cards available for those who would like to use them. You can pick up these cards when you register and change them need.

- Red – listening only, please don't talk to me
- Yellow - only happy to talk to people I already know
- Green – happy to talk to anyone

No card also means green card.

Please ensure you follow the cards other delegates may be using. Please also return these cards at the end of the conference.

It is OK to participate as is most comfortable for you. If there is a group or pair discussion, there is no pressure to take part.

If you don't want to take part in a discussion, you can use a red communication card to let people know you'll only listen.

Breaks and Quiet & Regulation Room

We have tried to schedule regular breaks throughout the conference programme, and will aim to stick to proposed timings as closely as possible. We will aim to communicate any changes to the programme as early and clearly as we can.

You can take breaks at any time that you need to, and you do not need to let anyone know.

You can use the Quiet and Regulation Room during the hours of the daytime schedule. The room is D06 on D Floor of the Monica partridge Building.

We have provided some fidget toys and other materials, and you are welcome to bring whatever you find useful and helpful to use in this space. We ask that you return anything you use or borrow from this room before the end of the conference.

Schedule

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

A copy of the [Outline Programme](#) is in this pack on Page 23 and the Programme Grid is in a separate document.

Accommodation

If you have booked accommodation through the BSA, this will be at:

Rutland Hall of Residence
Beeston Lane
University Park Campus
University of Nottingham
NG7 2QZ
What3Words: object.longer.range

Rooms are a single study bedroom with en-suite bathroom with the following included:

- Full English breakfast each morning
- Towels and bedding provided
- Mini-toiletry pack
- Kettle and in-room refreshment tray (additional tea/coffee is available in the pantries and replenished daily)
- Complimentary Wi-Fi
- Complimentary car parking

Check-in is available from 3:00pm on day of arrival. Room keys and parking permits can be collected from Welcome Point Central (what 3 words: [tribune.submit.force](#)). Check-out is by 10:00am on day of departure with keys returned to Welcome Point Central. Breakfast is served each morning from 7am in the Dining Hall, and shared social spaces are available throughout the event.

A delegate welcome pack will be available in your room (via QR code), with additional information about the Halls of Residence and the facilities available on site.

There is a [Rutland Hall Accessibility Guide](#) which contains information on facilities and access.

Luggage

You can leave your luggage in Room C15. Please note that this may be left unattended and items are left at your own risk.

Food and Refreshments

During the daytime programme, lunch, tea, coffee, and refreshments will be served in the C Floor Foyer. All conference registrations include daytime catering.

Evening meals must be pre-booked and are indicated on your name badge.

Dinner is served in Rutland Hall and is a 2-course counter-served meal. Please see the Outline Programme for times.

Evening Activities

On Monday 29th June we welcome Andrew Graystone for a viewing and Q&A of the BAFTA winning film *See No Evil*. See the Abstract Book for details.

Tuesday 30th June sees the return of the hugely popular SocRel Quiz, hosted by Rob Barward-Symmons, former Committee Member. All are welcome, no booking required!

We will provide soft drinks, snacks and paper cups, and you can bring your own alcohol if you wish.

Wellbeing

Due to the sensitive nature of this year's conference theme, and in our capacity to ensure the wellbeing of our delegates, please approach a committee member should you need to discuss or decompress from potentially triggering or upsetting content you encounter at the conference this year. Additional provisions are in place for you to speak to us privately, in a dedicated space. We also have an on-call multi-faith chaplaincy service and quiet room available.

Chaplaincy & Faith Support

Room C10 on C Floor of the Monica Partridge building has been reserved for a Prayer and Reflection Room for the duration of the conference.

We are pleased to welcome members of the Chaplaincy Service from the University of Nottingham as attendees at our conference. They will be available for the majority of the conference and will be indicated by their name badge.

There is also a range of rooms on every campus for prayer and religious observances. Please see the [website](#) for details.

Access and Inclusion

As a committee, we are keen to ensure that SocRel is a welcoming, friendly community for all, and are mindful of the myriad and intersecting ways in which Equality, Diversity and Inclusion ought to be embedded.

Following the hugely successful 2025 Response Day, led by SocRel EDI officers Renasha Khan and Krysia Waldock, this year we have taken steps to integrate advice, information and suggestions which take into account attendees' processing styles and need, including diverse processing and communication styles. Many of these are reflected in this delegate pack. We also warmly invite anyone to reach out ahead of the conference if there is a particular need or adjustment you would like to discuss with the conference organisers

Moreover, we are conscious that this conversation surrounding neurodiversity, disability and accessibility is, necessarily, an ongoing and evolving one, and that we will not have got everything right. Please do reach out to either the SocRel Events Officers (Alex Arthur-Hastie, Céline Benoit) or EDI Officers (Renasha Khan and Krysia Waldock) with feedback and suggestions, ahead of the conference, during it, and afterwards. We would be pleased to hear from you.

Access Information – University of Nottingham

There is a comprehensive but easy to read [Access Guide](#) which includes text and pictures of the spaces we will be using during the conference.

There is a hearing loop in all the conference rooms.

All rooms are step-free.

Discord

SocRel is now on Discord - join [here](#)!

Discord is a free social communication platform that facilitates community building online. Set up your profile via an Internet browser or download the app on your smartphone or tablet.

We have different channels set up including one for the annual conference, which we will use to circulate information during our time together in Nottingham.

We have also created a private PGR/ECR channel which will be dedicated to supporting postgraduate and early career researchers and which we hope will become a valuable, collaborative space. Join [here](#).



Breastfeeding Room

Room E02 is a dedicated breastfeeding room for the duration of the conference. This is on E Floor in the Monica Partridge Building. There is a kitchenette with mini-fridge and comfortable seating.

WiFi

The University WiFi is easy to connect to and is available across the building. There will be instructions on the notice board by the Registration Desk.

Photography

Please note that SocRel Committee Members will be capturing images during the conference. These may be used by the BSA and or SocRel for marketing and promotional purposes, including in print and digital platforms.

By attending, you consent to being photographed. If you prefer not to be included, please speak to Anna-Marie at the registration desk, or a member of the SocRel committee, or you can contact us after the event at events@britsoc.org.uk

Shop

There is a Spar convenience store in the Portland Building, a 6 minute walk from the Monica Partridge building. This is open from 08.30 – 16.30 Monday to Friday and 11.00 – 17.00 on Sunday.

There is also a OneStop Premier on Woodside Road, NG9 2SB, a 15 minute walk from the Monica Partridge building. This is open from 07.00 – 22.30 Monday to Friday and 08.00 – 22.00 on Sunday.

Football World Cup

We understand that some delegates may wish to watch the football match on Wednesday, 1 July, at 5:00 PM. Below are the closest venues to do so:

The Orchard Hotel & Restaurant (Nottingham Venue)

Located on campus, 5 minutes' walk from the Monica Partridge Building. The bar area will be open for delegates to enjoy the match.

The Star Inn, Beeston

Situated at 22 Middle Street, Beeston, NG9 1FX, this venue is:

A 6-minute drive from campus or a 30-minute walk from the Monica Partridge Building.

Sponsorship

We are delighted to welcome Bloomsbury Academic and SCM Press who are exhibiting at the event over lunch and refreshment breaks. Please make sure you visit their stand when you are available.

Bloomsbury Academic



Bloomsbury Academic's mission is to provide an inclusive global approach to Sociology with a critical and decolonial focus, accessible for scholars, students and the general reader. Our books cover a diverse range of subjects and are written by some of the world's leading social scientists. Aimed at a global audience, our publishing covers everything from introductory textbooks to in-depth discussions of current issues in areas including education, gender, race and the environment.

SCM Press



SCM Press is an independent UK academic publisher with a long-standing reputation for producing high-quality books that connect academic scholarship with the wider church and society. We publish around 35 new titles each year covering theology, sociology, philosophy, and ethics, including ethnographic research and other resources for academics and practitioners.

Who's Who



Sarah-Jane Page

Chair

Sarah-Jane Page is a white woman with brown wavy hair. She occasionally wears glasses.



Tim Hutchings

Co-Convenor

Tim Hutchings is a tall white man with mostly grey hair.



Sharon Jagger

Co-Convenor

Sharon Jagger is a white woman with long brown hair.



Alex Arthur-Hastie

Events Officer

Alex Arthur-Hastie is a white woman with long black hair. Alex has her nose pierced and does not wear glasses.



Céline Benoit

Interim Events Officer

Céline (pronounced Seh-lin) is a white woman with blonde hair (shoulder-length). Céline wears glasses.



Krysia Waldock

EDI Officer

Krysia Waldock (pronounced kri-shah) is white with long dark red hair, and often wears red or purple lenses and 'Lucy and Yak' dungarees.



Renasha Khan

EDI Officer

Renasha Khan (pronounced ren-Ay-sha) is a brown (South Asian) woman with long black hair. Renasha does not wear glasses.



Ellie Atayee-Bennett

Communications Officer

Dr Ellie Atayee-Bennett is a white woman with long brown hair, which she often wears tied back, and dark brown eyes. She does not wear glasses. She has her ears and nose pierced.



Morgana Loze-Doyle

Communications Officer

Morgana Loze-Doyle (pronounced mor-gan-uh) is a white woman with brown hair in a bob. She has a nose ring and sometimes wears glasses.



Clare Lesley Hughes

Membership Officer

Clare Lesley Hughes is a white female with very short clipped grey/brown hair. She has two nose rings and tattoos on her arms and neck.



Anna-Marie McGlanaghey

BSA Events Team

Anna-Marie has dark, shoulder-length curly hair and usually wears glasses and bright trainers

Guidance for Presenters, Chairs, Panel Hosts and Discussants

Computer stations and linked electronic display equipment will be available for your use. Each room is equipped with computers for presenters and will be running the Microsoft Windows operating system and Microsoft Office software. Please use Microsoft PowerPoint for visual aids. Presenters, Chairs, Panel Hosts and Discussants should attempt to arrive 10 minutes prior to the commencement of their sessions to discuss the running of the sessions and check that visual aids are displaying correctly.

You can bring your presentation on a USB stick or bring your own laptop. There are connection points available to connect laptops to the display systems, but if you use a Mac, please bring the required cables to connect to a PC as these will not be available at the venue.

We encourage you to incorporate BSA and SocRel branding into your slides. If you need a printed version of your slides or notes, you will need to bring them with you.

Chairs

We are extremely grateful to all those who have agreed to chair one or more sessions. If you have agreed to chair and are now not able to make the session, please let us know at registration so we can make alternative arrangements. If you find yourself in a session without a chair we would be very grateful if someone in the audience could volunteer to take this role. Chairing guidelines are on Page 17.

Oral Presentations

It is essential that presentations run in accordance with the scheduled times. This will allow delegates to move between presentation rooms during the parallel sessions. We ask that Chairs place due emphasis on timing when running parallel sessions. The general expectation of an oral presentation is that a 30-minute paper slot should consist of a 20-minute presentation followed by a 10-minute opportunity to answer questions.

In An Emergency

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

BSA Guidelines for Session Chairs

Thank you for agreeing to act as chair for a session at this conference. If at any point you have any difficulties please don't hesitate to contact a member of the BSA events team.

BEFORE THE SESSION

- Please check the time and location for your session carefully, and arrive promptly. If possible arrive five minutes early to identify your presenters, and introduce yourself to them.
- Check that all speakers are present and are aware of the order in which their papers are to be presented, and that any slides are ready to display.
- Check whether the presenter would like you, as the chair, to introduce their paper (title) and institution, or if they would prefer to do this themselves. If they would like you to introduce them, ask them, for example, which institution they are representing, how they pronounce their name, and whether they would like you to indicate their pronouns (we kindly ask that you avoid assuming the pronouns of speakers in your introductions). Where a presenter is an early career or postgraduate researcher, we discourage you from drawing attention to this, as it may add to existing nervousness.
- Check whether any of the speakers require any adjustments or accommodations, such as seats. Out of consideration for those with sensory sensitivities, you may wish to consider alternatives to clapping, such as 'flappause' or clicking after each speaker, or encourage audiences to clap once for all presenters at the end of the session, rather than after each paper.
- Check there is water available.

DURING THE SESSION

- At the start of each session, please briefly introduce yourself and, if you feel comfortable doing so, please give your own pronouns (as this establishes an environment in which presenters can state their own pronouns should they desire), and welcome delegates to the session. State the session title in case anyone is in the wrong room.
- Each paper has been allocated 30 minutes. Presenters have been asked to prepare to speak for 20 minutes and allow 10 minutes for questions/discussion after each session. We

encourage you to stick to this structure, and keep time as strictly as possible, such that those wishing to swap between parallel sessions have the opportunity to do so.

- Not every room has a clock, so we recommend you bring a watch or phone to keep time.
- Cards will be provided for you to pass/show to the presenter to let them know how much time they have left (indicating “five minutes to go” and “stop please”). When additional discussion takes place at the end of a session it is important that the chair ensures that each speaker has the chance to respond to questions and not only the last speaker. It is also important to remember that papers which have more than one speaker aren’t allocated time per speaker, but time per paper.
- It may be useful to think of some questions to ask about the papers if the discussion is slow to get started. Questions like ‘what findings surprised you?’ and ‘what could be some future directions from this work?’ are sufficiently flexible across papers and also sufficiently discrete for speakers who prefer more structure.
- Act as the moderator of panel or floor discussions. When taking questions, ensure that the widest participation is achieved. Encourage people asking questions to say who they are. Please try to avoid using names of people you know during questions/discussion time. This can seem excluding to those who do not know the speakers or other members of the audience.
- For accessibility reasons, please encourage those asking questions to ask them clearly and one at a time.

AT THE END OF THE SESSION

- Thank the speakers and audience. Adjourn the session in sufficient time to allow the room to be cleared for the participants of the next session to arrive in time for the next session.

IN THE CASE OF AN EMERGENCY, PLEASE MAKE SURE THAT YOU KNOW WHERE THE FIRE EXITS ARE IN THE SESSION ROOM

We greatly appreciate the contribution of chairs to the smooth running of the conference and we hope you enjoy the conference!

BSA Anti-Harassment Policy

The British Sociological Association believes that every person should be treated with dignity and respect. Activities held under the BSA umbrella should be welcoming, supportive and respectful. As a community of sociologists, the BSA aims to maintain a high standard of mutual respect with all those who come into contact with the organisation, its members and staff.

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

1) Positive behaviours to embrace:

- Collegiate, welcoming, inclusive
- All allowed a voice
- Productive discussion
- Efficient – Chair or Convenor moves meetings on politely
- Positive energy
- Respect
- Leave status and credentials at the door thus no perceived hierarchy
- All members have an equal opportunity to speak
- Only one conversation at a time during meetings
- Follow BSA procedures and terms of reference
- Responsibility and accountability needs to be clearly articulated
- Keep meetings enjoyable
- Invite counter views/opposing views explicitly
- Listening
- Conscientiousness regarding language to avoid inadvertently framing a conversation or importing power structures

2) Negative behaviours to avoid

- Marginalisation on the basis of status
- Perceived power of individuals
- Not engaging or engaging but in a disruptive manner
- Overly strong/lengthy/loud interventions in meetings
- Approval or disagreement noises
- Inclusion/exclusion behaviours

Outline Programme

Monday 29 June 2026

10:00 Registration Opens and Refreshments

10:30 PGR and ECR drop-in/welcome

11:15 Formal Welcome

11:30 Parallel Session A

13:00 Lunch

14:00 Keynote Plenary – Dr Rahmanara Chowdhury

15:00 Refreshment Break

16:00 Parallel Session B

17:30 Parallel Sessions finish

18:30 Dinner (must be pre-booked)

19.45 Film Screening – BAFTA Best Factual Series *See No Evil* followed by Q&A with Andrew Graystone

Tuesday 30 June 2026

From 09:00 - Day Registration

09.30 Parallel Session C

11:00 Refreshment break

11:30 Parallel Session D

13:00 Lunch & AGM

14:30 Parallel Session E

16.00 Refreshment break

16:30 Getting Published in the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion

18:30 Dinner (must be pre-booked)

20:00 SocRel Quiz

Wednesday 1 July 2026

From 09:00 - Day Registration

09:30 Parallel Session F

11:00 Refreshments

11:30 Keynote Plenary – Anna Halafoff

12:30 Lunch

13:30 Parallel Session G

15:00 Refreshments

15:30-17:00 Parallel Session H

17:00 Close

SocRel Annual General Meeting (AGM)

Day 2 – Tuesday 30th June 2026, 13.15 – 14.30

Room C14

Join us for the AGM to receive an overview of the past year's achievements, financial performance, and strategic direction for the coming year. This session provides an important opportunity for members to engage with leadership, participate in governance decisions, and contribute to the future direction of the organisation. All are welcome, but voting rights are only for SocRel Study Group Members.

Keynote Speakers

Abuse in Muslim Contexts - Healing and Harms in an anti-Muslim Climate

**Dr Rahmanara Chowdhury,
Nottingham Trent University**

Monday 29th June 2026, 14.00,



**Nottingham Trent
University
Room C14**

Victim isolation both within the experiences of abuse and help-seeking is well documented. These are compounded for ethnically minoritised communities. This paper seeks to explore the impact on Muslim communities when facing the issue of abuse within domestic contexts, within an anti-Muslim climate. It outlines parallel journeys of exclusion held by researchers both within and external to their communities. Alongside this, drawing on research with domestic abuse survivors and practitioners working with them, it explores the psychological impact of anti-Muslim climates on Muslim communities whereby silencing of both victim and communities collectively occur. Despite these challenges, victims will often return to their faith and key leaders, to carve a way out of abusive situations. This however does not reduce the burden placed on victim/survivors or researchers.

About Dr Rahmanara Chowdhury

Dr Rahmanara Chowdhury is a Chartered Psychologist and Senior Lecturer in Forensic Psychology at Nottingham Trent University. Her research focusses on understanding all forms of abuse within minoritised and marginalised communities, with a particular focus on spiritual abuse in Muslim contexts. She developed the Web Model of Domestic Violence and Abuse, designed to support practitioners to work more holistically with clients. She is a collaborator with Scotland based community organisation Sacred (body:mind:space), The Hurma Project, Canada, and Muslim Women Australia. Alongside her academic publications she has published several community orientated books on domestic abuse.

Spirituality, Healing and Harms

Anna Halafoff, Deakin University

Wednesday 1st July 2026, 11.30, Room C14



Spirituality was the subject of substantive sociological research at the turn of the twenty-first century, focused on the New Age and New Religious Movements. Scholarly attention then turned more towards religious diversity and the rise of the 'nones', with spirituality typically not taken as seriously as religion. This has changed in recent years, with substantive interest in spirituality among Gen Y and Gen Z, and due to the burgeoning wellness industry, infused with spiritual modalities such as yoga, breathwork, and sound baths. Research globally is currently examining spirituality's contributions to wellbeing and risks, particularly since the uptake of 'conspirituality' during the Covid-pandemic and due to high profile cases of abuse by spiritual teachers and gurus. This lecture presents theory and data from Australia on spiritual healing and harm arising from a national study, with Canadian and Spanish research partners, funded by the Australian Research Council. It focuses on the 'alternative', 'holistic spirituality' stream of the project, presenting survey data and a selection of case studies, which reveal both benefits and dangers within the mainstreaming and mediatisation of spirituality. It concludes, drawing on feminist scholarship on religious abuse, that trauma-informed and survivor-centred research is critical for understanding, preventing, and healing from the harms caused by spiritual influencers, leaders, and communities. Australian research is also revealing that greater religious literacy, rights literacy, and legal literacy are also crucial elements of harm prevention strategies, particularly stressing that spiritual freedoms should not impinge on the rights and freedoms of others.

About Anna Halafoff

Anna Halafoff is a Professor of Sociology of Religion and leads the Spirituality and Wellbeing (Swell) Research Network, based at Deakin University, Australia. She has been a Chief Investigator on three recent Australian Research Council Discovery Projects on the Worldviews of Generation Z Australians, Religious Diversity in Australia and on Australian Spirituality: Wellness, Wellbeing and Risks. Her other research interests include interreligious relations, religion and education, and Buddhism in Australia. Anna is the author of *The Multifaith Movement: Global Risks and Cosmopolitan Solutions*, co-author (with A. Singleton, M.L. Rasmussen, and G. Bouma) of *Freedoms, Faiths and Futures: Teenage Australians on Religion, Sexuality and Diversity* and co-editor (with Douglas Ezzy, Rebecca Banham and Greg Barton) of *Religious Diversity in Australia: Living Well with Difference*.

Abstract Book

Day 1 – Monday 29th June 2026

Parallel Session A, 11.30 – 13.00

Room C11 - ConSpirituality, Fascism and The Far Right

The Second Coming of Donald Trump: Charismatic and Apocalyptic Populism on Truth Social

Daniel Nilsson DeHanas

(King's College London)

This paper investigates how spiritual memes on the social media platform Truth Social galvanized support for Donald Trump's 2024 presidential campaign. Although Truth Social has only about one percent the number of users of rival platform X, it remains important as Donald Trump's own platform where he posts frequently. This paper provides an overview of key categories in Trump's "spiritual" support base who are active on the platform, ranging from prophecy-oriented charismatic Christians to conspiracy believers. It discusses the subversive political importance of internet memes. It then provides a content analysis of 100 spiritual image posts on Truth Social from the height of the campaign, exploring their wider memetic significance. Many of these image posts portray Trump as an awe-inspiring divinely anointed leader. The main argument put forward is that Truth Social is a "charisma factory" in which Trump supporters perpetually work to renew his charismatic authority. Trump's charismatic status then grants him moral license in the eyes of these supporters to act as an apocalyptic figure who seeks vengeance. This paper, therefore, serves as an explanation for the particular roles Truth Social played in Trump's electoral success and in the legitimization of his apocalyptic—and prospectively violent—populism.

Substantiating mainstream harm and alternative healing: UK conspirituality and the conquest of scientific legitimacy as victory over the status quo

Jo Banks

(King's College London)

This paper examines the way millenarian communities associated with alternative spirituality and conspiracy theory present evidence for claims about medical treatments – the harms of mainstream medicine and the healing effects of alternative medicine.

Drawing on articles published in 'Freedom Movement' media, qualitative interviews, and participant observation, I argue that this mode of argumentation represents the exercise of a form of power over the status quo.

Advocates of alternative therapies dismissed by the medical establishment routinely cite the same types of sources mainstream science uses to assert epistemic authority, including databases, expert testimony, and documents. Rather than attacking empiricism, members often appropriate the aesthetics of the medical authorities by whom they feel disempowered.

In substantiating the benefits of vibrational healing or the harms of vaccines, adherents seek to displace the legitimacy of mainstream medicine. They aspire to win territory from the establishment in the sphere of healthcare and subvert their marginalisation.

Millenarian conspiracists hope for and work towards the ascendancy of a new age of prosperity and freedom over the current age of corruption and authoritarianism. This parallels their exaltation of the grassroots, folk, and accessible treatments of alternative healing over the established allopathic model.

These findings build upon scholarship exploring strategic, contextual, and positional dimensions of knowledge justification processes. I suggest that the popularity of conspiracy theorising may be driven more by its offer of empowerment to those who feel powerless than by scientific illiteracy, cognitive deficiency, or a lack of critical thinking skills, questioning assumptions behind anti-disinformation measures.

'Nothing left but the Flag': Neo-Fascism, Impurity and End Times Capitalism

William Pawlett

University of Worcester

Whilst it is surely correct to emphasise continuities between neo-liberal capitalist governmentality and the current neo-fascist/populist turn, one area where these two destructive forces diverge is in their attitudes to religion, and more specifically to the sacred. It is no longer the case that the means to once religious ends of Protestant reformism fade into the mere ends in themselves of capitalist control and capture. As paid work no longer delivers prosperity or even hope, a supposedly 'Judeo-Christian' identity is increasingly proudly asserted by those most damaged by neo-liberalism. However, this allegedly 'Judeo-Christian' culture reveals, on closer analysis, a mystical and mythological dimension which is far removed from the de-mythologising tendencies of mainstream Protestantism. It is as if the perspectives of great Protestant philosophers, such as Schelling, Hegel, Feuerbach and Barth have been thrown into reverse: mythological narratives of origin and end, and symbols imbued with mystical significance (the Cross of St. George, 'historical' statues) are felt to embody the last kernel of truth to be defended at all costs against the 'woke' ideology of universality, care and compassion. This paper draws upon Durkheim's notion of the ambiguity of the sacred – as harmful healer and impure purifier, along with Georges Bataille's writings on mythology to attempt to

understand something of the symbolic ground (or non-ground, ungrund) of neo-fascist formations, primarily in the UK. The analysis aims at a non-reductive, critical and evaluative understanding of these disturbing trends.

Room C12 - Religions, Spiritualities and Gender

The Problem of Recognition: Muslim Men, Spiritual Abuse, and Gendered Ontologies of Harm

Maariyah Adam

(University of Glasgow)

In public and scholarly discourse, Muslim men are often positioned as religious authorities, perpetrators or as a threat. I argue this has limited how the Muslim male experience of spiritual abuse is researched: Muslim men's experiences of spiritual abuse are not absent, but often difficult to recognise within religious ontologies and invisible to external agencies.

Using data collected from the first stage of my doctoral research, I examine how spiritual abuse is experienced but not readily named by Muslim men. Muslim men describe the misuse of religious language, authority, and practice to control behaviour and meaning-making, but emphasise the complexity of recognising these experiences as abuse. Rather than naming spiritual abuse directly, men often spoke through adjacent concerns such as mental health. Decisions about whether to speak are shaped by shame, loss of status, and reputational risk. Alongside these concerns is the fear that naming intra-community harm can be misrecognised through Islamophobic or securitised frames.

This points to a patterned problem of recognition rather than individual silence. Gendered expectations shape how Muslim men are able to speak and whether this harm is taken seriously, particularly where abuse involves sexual harm or religious authority. By centring recognition, this paper shows how dominant assumptions about religion and masculinity shape what can be named, heard, and recognised as harm. It contributes to debates on harm and healing by highlighting how epistemic exclusion shapes responses to spiritual abuse.

"We exist to help men heal, connect and find deeper purpose": Healing the Masculine in Contemporary Mythopoetic Men's Work

Justine Chemin

(University of Edinburgh)

This paper examines how the contemporary mythopoetic men's movement frames masculinity as wounded and in need of healing. The idea of "toxic masculinity" popularised by Shepherd Bliss, an eminent figure of the movement in the 1990s, implies the existence of an "antidote" to heal the masculine. The mythopoetic men's movement promotes the idea of transformation through its efforts to 're-mythologise' and 're-image' masculinity. The shift from toxic to healthy is supported by a

diverse set of psycho-spiritual practices, as well as a men-only setting. By supporting the development of a masculine spiritual journey, the men involved shed light on a new masculine ideal, which they name the 'Sacred Masculine'.

Drawing on semi-structured interviews with men members of mythopoetic men's organisations and textual analysis of mythopoetic writings, I argue that the transformation based on the Sacred Masculine relies on psycho-spiritual practices, turning men's healing into a spiritual journey. Central to this process is the idea of a masculine wound, caused by both inner psychological fragmentation and broader social causes.

By analysing how masculine healing is framed as a spiritual journey toward healthy, mature masculinity, this paper contributes to religious and masculinities studies. It inquires into how psycho-spiritual language and practices are mobilised to reconfigure masculinity through self-transformation and with the aim of also "bringing healing to others and the world."

Room C17 – Harm, Healing, Ritual and the Body

Sacrifice in the Shiite Context

Hind Fatfat

(The American University in Cairo)

This article examines the Shiite Muharram ritual of Matam as sacramental sacrifice. The ritual practice of Matam, especially acts of self-flagellation and blood shedding, is systematically analysed through classical anthropological theories of sacrifice. Drawing on the work of Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, this study contends that Matam does not follow the logic of the Gift Theory, which treats sacrifice as a reciprocal exchange between humans and the divine. Instead, Matam operates as a ritual process of moral transformation in which participants use their own bodies as both sacrificer and victim.

Through carefully structured and controlled acts of bodily wounding, performed after emotional and narrative preparation, participants symbolically bridge the gap between sacred history and present time. The ritual does not function as a request for divine favour or appeasement. Rather, the shedding of blood expresses solidarity with Al-Husayn and serves as a form of purification and renewed allegiance. By applying classical sacrifice theory to Shiite devotional practice, this article shows how Matam generates sacred identity through embodied reenactment. Its enduring political and communal significance lies in this transformative structure, which strengthens moral commitment and reinforces collective belonging.

The "Healing Crisis" as Theological Currency: Obfuscating Harm in a 'Halal-Adjacent' MLM in Turkey

Ahmet Zahit Ekren

(Central European University)

In the turbulent economic landscape of authoritarian "New Türkiye," Global Mushroom International (GMI)—a transnational Multi-Level Marketing firm selling Ganoderma-infused products—recruits pious, lower-middle-class Muslim women by promising both financial salvation and physical healing. Drawing on a multimodal ethnography that triangulates social media content analysis, portal architecture analysis, and corporate document analysis with in-depth interviews in Ankara, this paper investigates how the structural harms of the gig economy are obscured through a specific "somatic theology", e.g., the one through which the ingestion of the Ganoderma mushroom co-produces a "healthy, pious femininity" that mediates the tension between medical pluralism and reliance on the Unseen (Gayb). Crucially, the paper explores how the structural harms of the gig economy—debt, precarity, and the monetization of kinship—are obscured through a theological-economic transformation. Through discourse analysis of Zoom training sessions and portal metrics, I demonstrate how distributors mobilize vernacular concepts of rızık (divine sustenance) and hayır (charity) to reframe predatory pyramid schemes as a theological Maussian bargain of "mutual aid." In this context, financial loss is interpreted as spiritual investment, and the recruitment of family members is presented as "market-enhancing charity." By triangulating the discursive, the corporeal, and the economic, this paper demonstrates how the promise of holistic healing is weaponized to sustain a system of extraction, turning the 'worshipping worker' into the primary resource of an occult economy.

Healing and Harms in Spiritual Seeking: Meditation Sickness of Transnational Lay Buddhist Meditation

Ngar-Sze Lau

(The Chinese University of Hong Kong)

Based on previous ethnographic research of recent lay meditation movement in contemporary Chinese societies, this paper examines healing and harms in spiritual seeking of transnational lay meditation movement. With the influence of Buddhist modernization, Chinese are attracted to learn various kinds of transnational meditation practices in the Theravāda tradition, such as samādhi and vipassana, with explicit ways of spiritual attainment or a remedy for both mental and physical suffering. In the past two decades, following the Western spiritual seekers, there is increasing number of Chinese monastics and lay people travelling to Southeast Asian countries, such as Myanmar and Thailand to learn meditation. Some even ordained as a monastic staying away from home. From my research, some are able to alleviate afflictions through the practice of meditation. However, some would experience harmful physical and mental effects, so called 'meditation

sickness' from the practice. Rarely this topic is discussed in the community. What have attracted these people to learn the practice with the aim of healing? How have practitioners been informed about healing and harms of the meditation practices by meditation teachers or gurus? How do some practitioners manage to deal with meditation sickness? Drawing from recent ethnographic study with cases, this paper will discuss spiritual attainment of lay Buddhist meditation, meaning of healing to lay meditation practitioners, possible causes of medication sickness of lay meditation practices, suggestions from lay meditation teachers and practitioners.

Room C14 – Roundtable

Spiritual Abuse and Minority Religion: Scholars and Service Providers in Conversation

Sarah-Jane Page, Ann Gleig, Carrie Ingersoll-Wood, Terri O'sullivan

(University of Nottingham)

Drawing on the expertise of UK and US scholars and service providers, this panel reflects on using spiritual abuse as a conceptual framework for understanding abuse in minority religion, particularly in high-cost contexts. In *Escaping the Maze of Spiritual Abuse*, Lisa Oakley and Justin Humphreys define spiritual abuse as “a form of emotional and psychological abuse...characterized by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour in a religious context. Spiritual abuse can have a deeply damaging impact on those who experience it.” This framework is emerging as a model across the social sciences and humanities to articulate the distinctiveness of harm and abuse in a religious context, but less attention has been paid regarding whether it applies in minority religious contexts. For various complex reasons, spiritual abuse can be heightened in minority contexts, especially where the social experience is relatively closed. The panel will be organized around a series of questions including:

- How does each participant understand and apply the concept of spiritual abuse in their respective area?
- What are the strengths and limits of spiritual abuse as a concept for naming abuse in minority religions?
- How has the field of Religious Studies, and particularly New Religious Movements, addressed abuse in minority religions?
- What are the challenges of mapping abuse in minority religions?
- How can the voices and lived experiences of people within minority religions be prioritised?
- How are those leaving minority religions and having experiences of harm supported? Are there enough resource/support structures to support this specialist need?

Parallel Session B, 16.00 – 17.30

Room C11 – Disability and Chronic Illness

'If you're healed you can come to church every week': The Ideal Worshipper and Compulsory Non-Disability

Naomi Jacobs

(Manchester Metropolitan University)

Disability theologians have argued that religious institutions can be "cults of normalcy" (Reynolds, 2008). However, they have less often considered how normalcy is actively constructed through "acts of exclusion" (Waldock, 2024), creating barriers to belonging for disabled and neurodivergent people. This presentation will explore the concept of the "ideal worshipper" in religious spaces (Jacobs, 2019), influenced by the "ideal worker" in occupational studies (Acker, 1990).

Drawing on data from two qualitative studies with disabled and autistic worshippers in churches and mosques (Jacobs, 2019; Waldock, 2024), I demonstrate how normalcy (Davis, 1995) is constructed in faith communities in the interplay between modern ableist norms and religious and theological ideals. Our studies with autistic congregants in churches and mosques, and with disabled people in churches, found that both groups struggled to embody the ideal worshipper. The autistic or disabled bodymind fails to meet the normative identity standards of a performed Christian or Muslim identity. In healing ministry, disabled and autistic bodyminds met with expectations of compulsory non-disability (McRuer, 2006) and were marked out as disruptive. Curative prayer functioned as evidence of God's divine power to restore an eschatological ideal.

I will also explore how participants resisted these ideals, including through lived theologies of healing as distinct from cure, reclaiming agency over their own bodyminds. Even in the face of ideologies of the ideal - and ideally embodied - worshipper, both groups of participants affirmed that disabled and neurodivergent people belong in religious communities, just as they are.

'You can't possibly know': the positional labour of disabled sociologists of religion researching disability and neurodivergence

Krysia Waldock

(Swansea University)

The study of disability and neurodivergence within the sociology of religion is emerging, reflecting the pattern set by the field of religion and gender about 20 years ago. Researcher positionality and social position are key facets of tension, especially in relation to power and harm. Little attention has been paid to the positions of disabled and neurodivergent scholars and how our positions shape our experiences and perceived epistemic authority. Scholars have argued the harms and

dehumanisation faced in autism research, but parallel discussions have not taken place in the field of religion and disability. While disability theology exists, it has often been dominated by the perspectives of non-disabled scholars, more recently taking a critical approach to power and inequality (Jacobs, 2019).

This paper combines autoethnographic reflections and field notes using a bricolage approach (de Certeau, 1984) by two queer, disabled and neurodivergent scholars. We reflect on our power (or lack of) and harms within our research contexts. We encounter a double empathy problem (Milton, 2012; a bidirectional mutual misincomprehension) in how we as disabled sociologists of religion interact with non-disabled scholars. This is intensified by our dispositional differences, paternalism and epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007). Differences in disciplinary perceptions of epistemic authority can involve further testimonial injustice.

We outline positional labour to describe the harmful labour we undertake as marginalised scholars, both in terms of social position and disciplinary expertise. We will also consider parallel experiences of other marginalised groups in the sociology of religion, and call for further intersectional reflexivity.

Evolving Religio-Cultural Identities of South Asian Disabled Young Adults: Reconnection, Resistance and Unresolved Belonging

Krishan Anil Chadha, Rittika Dasgupta

(University of Gloucestershire)

Five years on, where do they belong? This paper returns to the South Asian disabled young people of London whose journeys away from their initial faith and cultural practices were first documented in a postcolonial world that had long failed to accommodate them (see Chadha and Dasgupta, 2024). Now navigating early adulthood and having received the faith and cultural education that emerged directly from that original research, this study asks whether it made a difference to those young people's sense of self. Drawing on the same reflexive ethnographic framework and the longitudinal participant relationships at the heart of the foundational study, this paper employs diaspora studies and postcolonial theory alongside critical disability studies to examine the longing, among many participants, to find their way back. Findings reveal a nuanced and deeply human process of re-engagement, hopeful yet unresolved. Whilst structured access to religio-cultural learning has reignited a desire to reconnect with inherited faiths and practices, persistent barriers created by their earlier Christian ties complicate their return. The accessibility and community participants once sought in Christianity, though seldom found, have not been forgotten, and their shadow falls long over their negotiations with belonging. This paper argues that reconnection requires more than faith-based education; it requires structural accessibility, attitudinal transformation, and sustained advocacy within diasporic faith communities. Reengaging with one's original identity as a disabled ethnic minority, this paper finds, does not solely heal. It is continuously and cautiously renegotiated against the enduring legacies of colonialism, disablism and racialisation in British society.

Room C12 – Abuses, Healing and Safeguarding in Religion

The Heart of it All: Towards Contextual Safeguarding in the Church

Carlene Firmin

(Durham University)

For over a decade safeguarding in Christian church has been subject to multiple inquiries and investigations. This work routinely identifies that children and young people have been abused in church contexts and communities, by both adults and their peers, and that such abuse was enabled by organisational structures and cultures. In this oral paper I draw upon both Bourdieusian Social Theory and Gilligan's care ethics examine the response to these inquiries; a response that has prioritised safeguarding structures and processes, and use qualitative data collection from a Catholic Church (interviews, observations and documentary analysis) in the North East of England to draw attention to the contextual features of safeguarding that initial responses have failed to consider. Specifically - the ethos of the church, its connection to local community, and the attitudes and behaviours that are normalised or challenged. In doing so, I will demonstrate that moving beyond process, to consider relationships and the social fields in which those relationships exist, can create the conditions in which safeguarding in churches is achieved through cultural and not solely structural reform. Moreover, I will argue that to do so would embody a care ethics in how a church safeguards - as ethics that is more aligned to the theological foundations of Christianity than the rules-orientated safeguarding frameworks that have characterised practices to date.

New Religiosities, Abuse and Correlating Variables: Using the Database of Religious History for Theory Testing

Sarah Harvey

(Inform)

In *Abuse in New Religious Movements* (2025) I outlined factors which could potentially contribute to abuse in new religions. These include 1) a movement's relationship with wider society, including whether members are physically or socially isolated, and its teachings on unique legitimacy, exclusivity and superiority; 2) authority structures including forms of leadership, membership hierarchies and "blurred boundaries" between different spheres of life and interpersonal relations; 3) teachings on gender and sex and their regulation, including body disciplines, purity practices and health and healing practices; 4) forms of punishment, threats and pressures, including whether there are spiritual consequences for disobedience or for dissent and whether there are barriers and high exit costs to leaving the movement, or more formal mechanisms of shunning, exclusion, or disfellowshipping.

A new research project of which I am a part, *New Religiosity and the Digital Study of Eudaimonia*, is seeking to develop the world's largest open-access dataset on contemporary religious movements,

examining how new forms of religiosity impact or hinder human flourishing. Through the creation of a new poll on the Database of Religious History, we are gathering both quantitative and qualitative information on 400 new religions. The poll includes numerous questions pertinent to the factors of abuse outlined above including questions around each movement's teachings on gender, sex, purity, health, punishment, isolation and more. It will hence allow for comparison of variables. I will present the exploratory framework for analysis offered by the Database, using the issue of abuse as a case study.

Healing, Harm and Hope in the Catholic Church in Ireland: Exploring the Experiences of Evangelical Catholics

Gladys Ganiel

(Queen's University Belfast)

The decline of the Catholic Church in Ireland has been shaped by multiple factors, most notably the abuses and harms perpetrated within the Church. Churches across the island have been criticised for failing to do enough to address violence during the Troubles or to promote reconciliation in the post–Good Friday Agreement era. In Northern Ireland, a strongly anti-Catholic strand of evangelical Protestantism has often been regarded as particularly divisive. Against this backdrop, a 2023 Savanta poll commissioned by the Evangelical Alliance in Northern Ireland produced surprising findings: 38% of practising Catholics identified as evangelical. This marks a dramatic increase from 2004 (NI Life and Times), when only 4% of Catholics described themselves in this way. Given evangelicalism's long-standing association in Northern Ireland with anti-Catholicism and figures such as the late Rev. Ian Paisley, the result was unexpected. This paper draws on research conducted in 2025–2026 among evangelical Catholics in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, including 13 semi-structured interviews and an online questionnaire with 63 respondents. It examines what Catholics mean when they identify as evangelical, highlighting themes such as a personal relationship with Jesus, engagement with the Bible, the “baptism of the Holy Spirit,” and the importance of sharing faith. It also explores narratives of personal healing, often described as miraculous, alongside accounts of social healing, including reconciliation with evangelical Protestants. Finally, it considers participants' hopes for church renewal and greater cooperation among Catholic and Protestant evangelicals, sometimes extending to shared political activism around moral issues.

Room C17 – Community, Agency and Power

Passive or Pragmatic or Resistance? Responses of Second-Generation Nigerian Christians to racism in Britain

Bisi Adenekan-Koevoets

(University of Roehampton)

This paper examines how second-generation Nigerian Pentecostals in Britain draw on Pentecostal beliefs and practices to cope with racism, asking whether these coping strategies are best understood as passive, pragmatic or resistant. Drawing on empirical data, it explores how participants interpret racist experiences through faith practices and beliefs rooted in endurance, forgiveness and communality. Similarly, it investigates how socialisation into their parents' tradition and Christian faith, alongside British culture, shapes identity construction and belonging.

Participants described experiences in which their blackness was frequently central to interactions in educational, occupational and other public spaces. However, rather than allowing these encounters to define their outcomes, many develop Pentecostal-informed ways of being that enable them to negotiate the interstices of race, religion and integration. Some common responses include silence, avoidance and ways of 'excusing whiteness', which can be understood as religiously informed practices rooted in values of restraint and endurance, aimed at fitting in, avoiding confrontation and maintaining emotional wellbeing and socioeconomic mobility.

Although often viewed as passive, participants consider these responses as pragmatic and shaped by Pentecostal values such as longsuffering, humility and discipline. Others adopt more open forms of resistance like speaking out against racism, participating in anti-racist activities and leveraging their social and religious networks to challenge discrimination. These responses are flexible and context-dependent, influenced by age, socioeconomic status, individual ambition and forms of religious socialisation. This paper argues that Pentecostal moral frameworks complicate secular understanding of agency because faith teachings promote both tolerance and resistance to racism.

Healing and Harm at the Limits of Whiteness: Religion, Racialised Governance and White Women Converts to Islam in the UK

Soraya Beg

(University of Salford)

This paper examines how religion operates as a site of both harm and resistance for White Women Converts to Islam (WWCI) in the United Kingdom. Drawing on doctoral research, it explores how conversion to Islam disrupts normative whiteness, rendering it conditional, unstable, and contingent through visible Muslim identity. While whiteness is often understood as an unmarked position of privilege, this study argues conditionality produces cultural and epistemic harm when whiteness is socially illegible.

Situated within Critical Race Theory and Postcolonial Theory, the paper conceptualises WWCI as occupying an emerging subaltern positionality shaped by structural and gendered Islamophobia, hyper-visibility, and racialised governance. WWCI encounter harm through surveillance, exclusion, and suspicion, epistemic erasure, symbolic degradation, and the de-legitimisation of religious agency within liberal, secular, and feminist discourses. These dynamics reflect enduring colonial continuities that position Islam as culturally incompatible and politically suspect.

Using qualitative and arts-based methods, including interviews and participant writing workshops, the research foregrounds the affective and embodied dimensions of harm extending beyond material disadvantage. The paper simultaneously highlights how religious meaning-making functions as a space of epistemic resistance, where imposed narratives of victimhood, betrayal, or pathology are contested. Rather than presenting religion as inherently healing, the paper conceptualises healing as partial, situated, and collective, emerging through recognition, narrative agency, and the reworking of epistemic harm. By centring WWCI, the paper contributes to sociological debates on healing and harm, showing how religion functions as a contested terrain through which racialised governance, marginalisation, and resistance are negotiated.

Managing Harms, Producing Healing: Prophetic Authority and Communal Negotiation in Bakhan, Western Himalayas

Asaf Sharabi

(Peres Academic Center)

This paper examines bakhan, an annual prophetic ritual in the Western Himalayas where village deities deliver public forecasts through human mediums. These divine pronouncements address domains marked by collective vulnerability, including epidemics, crop failure, weather instability, and dangers villagers associate with ritual negligence, which they treat as signals of potential harms. Drawing on long-term ethnographic research (2018–2024), the paper shows how communities mobilize these prophecies as frameworks for ritual and social healing, using them to guide practical responses to mitigate danger and alleviate distress.

Rather than conceptualizing prophecy as a deterministic technology for managing uncertainty, the paper develops the concept of performative accountability to explain how sacred authority is continually enacted, questioned, and negotiated in public. Prophetic claims undergo scrutiny and are sometimes openly challenged, revealing that divine legitimacy rests on perceived efficacy and on the deity's ability to speak convincingly to collective vulnerabilities.

The analysis highlights a relational model of divine sovereignty where gods and communities are mutually dependent: divine authority requires human recognition and evaluation, while communal resilience emerges through ongoing interpretation and scrutiny of divine speech. Healing and harm, therefore, are not opposites but intertwined processes enacted within the ritual itself.

By foregrounding negotiation and moments of ambivalence alongside the vigilance shaping the reception of prophetic speech, the paper contributes to the sociology of religion by tracing the social co-production of prophetic authority and the ways ritual dialogue enables communities to regulate uncertainty, mediate risk, and reinforce social cohesion during moments of collective vulnerability.

Room C14 – Early Career Workshop

Situated Feeling: Emotion, Ethics, and the Researcher's Role

Renasha Khan, Jonathan Abernethy-Barkley, Jo Banks

(King's College London)

Traditional Western research paradigms have long framed emotion as an impediment to knowledge, privileging rationality, distance, and detachment as markers of scholarly rigour. Feminist and post-positivist scholars challenge this assumption, arguing that all knowledge is situated and shaped through values, even when it claims neutrality or objectivity. From this perspective, emotion is not external to research but fundamentally embedded within it.

For early career researchers, this tension is particularly acute when working with vulnerable or marginalised communities. While ethical frameworks rightly prioritise participant wellbeing, far less attention is paid to the emotional impact of research on the researcher. Many scholars are underprepared for the emotional labour involved, especially when research encounters intersect with personal lived experience, creating potential sites of both harm and healing.

Renasha Khan, Jo Banks, and Jonathan Abernethy-Barkley propose this 90 minute workshop as an invitation to early-career researchers to reflect critically on the emotional dimensions of research practice. Drawing on their own distinct positions as researchers of religion and new religious movements, they explore how emotion is negotiated in fieldwork, analysis, and ethical decision-making.

Grounded in feminist epistemologies and reflexive approaches, the workshop considers how unacknowledged emotion can contribute to harm through burnout, ethical blind spots, and emotional silencing. At the same time, it asks how recognising emotion as integral to scholarship can support healing, accountability, and more ethically attuned forms of knowledge production.

Film Screening – *See No Evil*

Room C14, 19.45

The two-part film *See No Evil* was made by Passion Pictures for Channel Four in December 2025. It won the 2026 BAFTA for best Factual Series. The film documents the crimes of abuser John Smyth QC and the Christian network that enabled him, exploring the impact on his victims and his family. This session will include a screening of the first film, followed by discussion with Andrew Graystone, who acted as consultant on the film.



*****Please be aware that this film deals with themes of physical, sexual and spiritual abuse. *****

Andrew Graystone's career has been divided between the church and the media. In 2017 he uncovered the story of serial abuser John Smyth QC, and the decades-long cover-up within the Church of England. Since then Andrew has been a prominent advocate for victims and survivors of abuse in the church. His latest book *Bleeding for Jesus: John Smyth and the Cult of Iwerne Camps* was published by Darton, Longman and Todd in 2025. Andrew has a PhD from Durham University for his work on the theology of touch in digital culture.

Day 2 – Tuesday 30th June 2026

Parallel Session C, 09.30 – 11.00

Room C11 – Religiosity, Non-Religion, Migration and Asylum Experiences

From Criminalisation to Recognition: Apostasy, Asylum, and Pathways to Healing

Lucy Potter

(University of York)

This research examines how legal, social, and institutional regimes surrounding blasphemy and/or apostasy produce profound harms for individuals who leave religion and subsequently seek asylum in the United Kingdom (UK). Drawing on in-depth qualitative interviews with ex-Muslim refugees (n=12) and their support networks and advocacy spaces (n=22), the study explores how criminalisation and social surveillance in participants' countries of origin expose individuals to threats of violence, imprisonment, and social exclusion. These harms frequently persist beyond migration, shaping applicants' vulnerability and self-presentation within asylum systems. The research further explores how UK asylum processes can reproduce and intensify harm. Credibility assessments, evidentiary demands, and narrow understandings of belief often require applicants to perform coherent narratives of non-belief, placing emotional and psychological strain on individuals whose experiences are fragmented by trauma. Inconsistent decision-making and prolonged uncertainty contribute to ongoing precarity, undermining wellbeing and trust in institutional protection. Alongside these harms, the study highlights pathways to healing and belonging. For many participants, the granting of refugee status represents a moment of recognition and safety. Engagement with non-religious communities, secular organisations, and human rights networks enables the reconstruction of identity beyond fear and stigma, fostering belonging, agency, and emotional recovery. By foregrounding apostasy as a site where religion, law, and migration governance intersect, this research advances sociological debates on harm, protection, and recovery. It demonstrates how non-religion can function as a resource for healing within post-asylum lives, while also calling for more trauma-informed and contextually sensitive institutional practices.

Spiritual Leadership Between Healing and Harm: Islamic Reform and Diasporic Belonging in Sydney

Mehrnosh Lajevardi Fatemi

(Western Sydney University)

This paper examines Islamic leadership in Sydney, Australia, focusing on how imams negotiate spirituality as a site of both healing and potential harm within Muslim immigrant communities. Drawing on qualitative interview data, it explores how reform-oriented leaders position themselves as ethical and spiritual guides who move beyond ritualistic and legalistic interpretations of Islam toward an applied spirituality that integrates the sacred and secular. In the context of migration, these leaders frame spirituality as an inward, ethically grounded force that fosters belonging, resilience, and social responsibility, particularly for younger generations navigating pluralist Australian society. The findings suggest that while Islamic rites and communal structures remain central, leaders express concern that excessive emphasis on ceremony risks hollowing out Islam's spiritual core. They therefore advocate a model of spiritual leadership that foregrounds ethical monotheism, personal transformation, and social engagement. Spirituality is understood not as external imposition but as an internalized moral compass that supports identity formation, community cohesion, and constructive participation in broader civic life. In doing so, imams act as intermediaries between Muslim communities and wider social institutions, translating Islamic values into a language of shared ethics and wellbeing.

The paper contributes to broader debates on religion, non-religion, and spirituality by demonstrating how faith leadership in diasporic contexts can respond to experiences of marginalisation and fragmentation, mitigate communal harm, and cultivate spiritually grounded forms of healing, solidarity, and inclusion within multicultural societies.

Healing in Exile: Islamic Ritual and Emotional Repair among Shi'a Migrants in Postwar Britain

Jaffer Mirza

(King's College London)

Migrants frequently encounter layered pressures in their settlement trajectories, including insecure employment, housing precarity, visa anxieties and family separation. Scholarship on South Asian migration in the 1960s further highlights the emotional strain of living between two worlds and sustaining the "myth of return". Migrants were therefore negotiating not only material uncertainty but also psychological and existential dislocation. How, then, did they cope? Where did they find refuge, and what practices enabled healing amid structural constraint?

This paper examines the role of Islamic ritual practices in mediating stress and cultivating forms of emotional and spiritual repair among Shi'a migrants in Britain between 1950 and 1980. Drawing on oral histories across nine British cities and focusing on migrants from South Asia and the Middle East, I show how early Shi'a migrants actively sought and created ritual spaces upon arrival. Weekly

gatherings and the recitation of supplications enabled familiarity with the new land and provided spaces for collective catharsis. These practices functioned as meditative and affective mechanisms through which migrants stabilised emotions, processed loss and nurtured belonging in unfamiliar environments.

The paper argues that these gatherings operated as sites of social healing within contexts shaped by diasporic strain and marginalisation. In doing so, it challenges migration studies' relative neglect of ritual and spirituality, demonstrating how embodied religious practices can serve as resources for resilience, solidarity and the reconstitution of self and community under conditions of displacement.

Room C12 – Religion, Harm and Domestic Abuse

Harm & Healing: The Response of Religious Organisations to Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse Since 1950 in Scotland

Jonathan Abernethy-Barkley

(KCL)

This paper examines how Christian religious organisations in Scotland have responded to allegations of child sexual abuse since the 1950s, framing these responses through the intertwined dynamics of harm and healing. Rather than treating abuse as merely administrative failure or legal crisis, it conceptualises it as a profound moral and theological rupture that reshaped religious understandings of responsibility, authority, and repair.

Abuse is analysed as institutionally mediated harm, intensified through clericalism, gendered hierarchies, sacralised authority, and cultures of silence. Drawing on lived religion theory, the paper explores how theological concepts eg. sin, forgiveness, repentance, grace, justice, and accountability, functioned ambivalently: at times obscuring harm, at other times offering fragile resources for healing. Archival research and qualitative interviews with clergy, safeguarding professionals, and survivor advocates trace how these meanings were negotiated, revealing tensions between official narratives of contrition and the lived experiences of those harmed.

Historically, the study identifies a reconfiguration of religious authority. Earlier responses prioritised institutional preservation, compounding trauma. More recent decades reflect the erosion of clerical dominance and the influence of survivor testimony and safeguarding regimes, yet new tensions emerge where grace and reconciliation risk premature closure without structural transformation.

By constructing the first cross-denominational socio-oral history of these conversations in Scotland, the paper theorises harm and healing as relational, contested, and ongoing processes within religious institutions.

Preaching and Domestic Abuse

Susanna Morris

(University of Chester)

This study comes in direct response to the work of Aune and Barnes (2018) and their research into responses of UK churches to Domestic Abuse. Amongst the recommendations Aune and Barnes made, were calls for some evangelical denominations to urgently do more to address Domestic Abuse, and for preaching, training and awareness to be increased on the subject of Domestic Abuse and related theology within churches. Therefore, I conducted a study titled 'The role of preaching in addressing Domestic Abuse in UK Evangelical Christianity: An evaluation of the experiences of Baptist Ministers in preaching (or not) on the subject of Domestic Abuse'. I identified that inviting those who preach in Evangelical settings to share their perspectives and experiences was an important part of enabling Aune and Barnes' recommendations to be met. By developing new understanding of any barriers would therefore assist in the development of solutions. Conclusions drawn from this study are that as Aune and Barnes identified, preaching on Domestic Abuse does not occur as often as necessary, and that some Evangelical churches need to do more to address the issue, in partnership with specialist agencies. Furthermore, there are significant initial and ongoing training needs for ministers around theological, practical and pastoral responses to Domestic Abuse. Whilst there is evidence of some good practice and commitment to prevention and awareness work, this is not as widespread as is necessary. The study also recommends regular specialist supervision to be offered to ministers in particularly challenging contexts.

'Teach the Younger Women': Scripture, Authority, and Harm in Christian Responses to Intimate Partner Violence

Gabriella Mwedzi

(Newcastle University)

This paper examines how biblical mandates positioning older women as moral and spiritual guides shape African migrant Christian responses to intimate partner violence in the UK. Drawing on feminist theological analysis, it foregrounds the experiences of two women, Sisya and Kesandu, whose compliance with advice from older women, intended as guidance, led to harm in intimate relationships and compromised their bodily autonomy. Through their narratives, alongside interviews with the older women themselves, the paper explores the tension between care and control: the older women understood their counsel as support, mentorship, and spiritual formation, yet younger women experienced it as obligation and constraint. Compliance was framed as a moral or spiritual duty, limiting younger women's capacity to prioritise safety or assert autonomy.

The analysis highlights how religious authority can simultaneously provide community and reinforce vulnerability, showing how scriptural authority operates as a mechanism of control under the guise of care. Attention is given to intersections of age, gender, and migration, demonstrating how

spiritually sanctioned guidance can reproduce self-blame, silence dissent, and delay exits from abusive relationships. The paper concludes by advocating for theologically reflexive approaches that foreground safety and agency over doctrinal conformity. By confronting the gap between intention and impact, it urges faith communities to rethink guidance practices so that spiritual mentorship supports dignity, choice, and protection for survivors.

Room C17 – Religion and in Education Contexts

Provocative encounters and religious difference: tackling misinformation in UK universities

Mathew Guest, Kristin Aune, Lucy Peacock

(Durham University)

In a global context framed by populist and post-truth tendencies, religious identities are increasingly at risk of being weaponised in service of divisive agendas. Guarding against consequent harm demands a robust approach to misinformation, and universities are in a uniquely advantageous position to make a positive difference in this regard. In this paper, we argue that religion as manifest in UK universities is especially vulnerable to misinformation and distortion. A legacy of secularisation, decline in trust in religious institutions and suspicion directed at religious convictions has reinforced a tendency to treat religious identities as eccentric, illegitimate, irrelevant or risky. At the same time, we argue that, paradoxically, engaging with religious diversity also presents valuable opportunities for challenging misinformation via the facilitation of what we term ‘provocative encounters’, experiences that lead students to reflect critically on their own worldview and develop a more contextualised understanding of the worldviews of others. This argument is based on a national survey of worldview diversity among university students which identifies where provocative encounters most occur. We conclude that engaging with religious diversity within the university classroom is not only a guard against religious misinformation, but a powerful means of sustaining critical reflexivity among students more generally.

Overlooking the power of religion for healing and harm in the lives of Young People: Dominant (non)religious beliefs as a limiting factor on student wellbeing in British Secondary Schools

Evie Haywood

(University of Sussex)

In UK Secondary Schools, substantial work to address student harms and promote student healing on an individual and group level is hindered by unreflexively held liberal ‘nonreligious’ values that generate various degrees of secular management of religious diversity.

Interview, observation and focus group fieldwork with students and staff from two non-religious, one Church of England and two Catholic Secondary Schools conducted in 2025 found three ways in

which normative liberal principles incorporated by schools of faith and none limited those schools' ability to fully engage with the role of religion in generating and addressing wellbeing. 1) Liberal delegitimisation of illiberal religions hinders staff's readiness to hear young people share harms caused by their religious contexts 2) The secular liberal concept of religion as individual and private limits awareness of religion's relevance for students' wellbeing at school 3) The normalisation of liberal values leads schools to view religion as irrelevant to school life, in turn hindering staff's readiness to discuss the religious lives of all members of the schools. Opportunities to heal social divisions by addressing harmful essentialising narratives are consequently overlooked.

Recognising the subjectivity of liberal values and their associated concepts of religion, as well as challenging the working assumption that religiously 'neutral' settings are fairer settings, would empower the already plentiful goodwill of staff to support their young people's wellbeing by enabling them to more wholly engage with the harms and healings that can and do arise from students' religious and spiritual lives.

Pathways to interfaith learning and interreligious peace in UK Muslim and Christian higher education colleges

Kristin Jane Aune, Hafza Iqbal, Lucy Peacock, Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor
(Loughborough University)

A small but significant minority of UK higher education students attend religious colleges. On the face of it, such institutions might be regarded as segregating students from people of other worldviews, potentially deepening existing religious conflicts. Mainstream universities, with a more diverse profile, might be considered more likely to further interfaith relations. Yet our survey research in universities (via the IDEALS UK project funded by Porticus, Durham University and the Spalding Trust) and religious HE colleges (via the Interfaith Learning in Christian and Muslim Higher Education Colleges project funded by Sir Halley Stewart Trust and Westhill Endowment) indicates that, on certain measures, religious colleges are more effective than universities at developing students' interfaith learning. This paper explores this surprising finding via analysis of 34 semi-structured interviews conducted with students and staff at four religious colleges in the UK, two Muslim and two Christian. Asking how religious higher education colleges help students develop positive interfaith attitudes, we propose four pathways or mechanisms prompting growth in students' appreciation of people of different religions and worldviews: academic study, interfaith visits, placements and intra-faith engagement. We argue that interfaith learning is particularly successful in religious colleges because colleges' commitment to interfaith is intentional, unlike in universities where it is assumed that demographic diversity will automatically create good interfaith relations. Moreover, interfaith learning succeeds in religious colleges because faculty members work to build 'moral communities' (Davignon & Thomson 2015) where students develop holistically as part of their training or formation as religious leaders and practitioners.

Room C14 – Workshop

An exploration of the role of religion, spirituality and socio-cultural factors that shape how pain is understood.

Dore Young (Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust), Michelle Briggs (University Hospitals of Liverpool Group), Frin Lewis-Smith (East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust)

The International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP) define pain as “an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with, or resembling that associated with, actual or potential tissue damage.” Although acknowledging an emotional dimension of pain, the definition gives insufficient weight to spiritual, religious and cultural facets of pain, and the role that a person’s meaning making has in how they experience, express, and manage pain.

Whilst pain is always personal it is not private; pain is influenced by socio-cultural factors and how we communicate. Cicely Saunders concept of Total Pain acknowledges that pain is a complex experience including :

1. Physical Pain: The direct, somatic experience
2. Psychological Pain: Emotional distress, anxiety, depression
3. Social Pain: Impact on social roles, and support systems.
4. Spiritual Pain: Existential concerns, loss of meaning, and the search for purpose in the face of dying.

Care pathways routinely utilise pharmacological, psychological, and physiological modes of addressing pain. Religion and spirituality are underutilised therapeutic resources yet impact a person's ability to cope with, tolerate, and accept disease and pain.

This workshop explores how cultural, spiritual, and religious contexts influence both the lived experience of pain and the systems that respond to it. Drawing the on model of “total pain”, we will consider how this approach, originally developed in palliative care, can be applied across broader health contexts to encompass the biological, psychological, social, religious and spiritual dimensions.

Parallel Session D, 11.30 – 13.00

Room C11 – Religious Boundaries

Identity work and ethics for Christian practitioners in Europe when supporting refugees and asylum seekers' inclusion

Andrew Orton

(Durham University)

Churches and related 'diaconal' organisations make significant contributions to supporting asylum seekers and refugees across Europe. This presentation explores different ways that Christian activists engage with aspects of their own and others' identities (particularly those relating to religion) when supporting the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in local communities. It does this through sharing findings from research conducted through a reflective learning programme with 17 Christian activists working with refugees and asylum seekers from diverse contexts across central, eastern and northern Europe, including the UK. This research was co-ordinated by an international team including Prosvirina, Brooke, Addy, Zitting and Orton; it was inspired by Väekäs' initial reflections, and incorporated aspects of a reflective learning methodology previously developed by Addy.

The resulting learning highlights interactions between activists' biographical narratives, contextual relationships, and wider organisational, political, social and theological debates. Religious and wider identities are found to play important but complex and changing roles in this work. Those involved undertake reflective "identity work" as they interact with diverse others, engage with different life stories, provide support, and respond to prejudice and conflict. This identity work proved particularly important when making everyday decisions over how to respond to situations involving ethical challenges relating to power, discrimination and inclusion. We conclude that supporting activists and organisations to engage in reflective processes like those used in this research can offer ways for learning more about and addressing the identity-related challenges they face in this work.

Going Beyond the 'Us vs Them' Narrative: A Reconfigured Islamic View on Multiculturalism

Ghada Mohamad

(University of Sheffield)

The 'Islam vs the West' ideological narrative has been promoted since the early decades of colonialism; on one hand, it aimed to create imbalance in the power dynamic to facilitate the subjugation of the colonized populations, and on the other, it ignited the spirit of anti-colonial resistance in the locals. This was accompanied by geographical divide where the encounters between 'us' and 'them' were limited to those between the indigenous people and the invading

military personnel and those who accompanied them. This has changed in the past few decades as large numbers of immigrants from previously colonized regions have arrived in Western cities. As a result, debates about the integration of immigrants and the incompatibility of Islamic values with the Western value system have ensued. Meanwhile, new scholarly voices related to Islamic studies have risen both in the West, such as Khaled About El Fadl, a legal scholar in the United States, and in non-Western regions, such as Yusuf Abou Awad, a linguist in Jordan, that have been exploring new readings of Islamic scriptures. In this presentation, I highlight a significant aspect of their work, which is the role of multiculturalism in social reform in light of the increasingly diverse and extremely troubled world in which we live today. This is also central to my own research on Muslim immigrants in the Western city where I conclude that it is important to reconfigure interfaith relations in the West, aiming at creating multicultural societies that foster worldwide social justice.

Religion, Harm, and the Demand for Nigeria's Partition

Emmanuel Ossai

(Lancaster University)

The Republic of Biafra was created out of Nigeria on 30 May 1967. Consisting mainly of Igbo Christians, Biafra officially ceased to exist on 15 January 1970, after Biafran forces surrendered to the Nigerian military government following a 30-month war. In recent years, there has been a rise in the demand among some Igbo people for Biafra's restoration. Studies that examine this renewed call rarely consider how religion possibly interacts with the perceptions about outgroups that drive support for the restoration of Biafra. This paper presents the findings of a study that examined this aspect of public support for Biafra's restoration. This dimension should be examined partly because of the seemingly substantial influence of religion in Nigerian society. This study finds that a population of the Igbo who demand Biafra's restoration do so because they believe that a mainly Igbo and majorly Christian Biafran state will protect the Igbo people from perceived realistic and symbolic threats emerging from Islam and the Muslim population in (northern) Nigeria. Christianity has been an essential component of Igbo identity for decades, and when the Biafra War broke out in 1967, it was already the major religion in Eastern Nigeria. This paper suggests that addressing contemporary Biafran separatism requires organised responses to these perceptions and the factors that enable them.

Room C12 – Healing and Transformation in Spirituality and Religion

From Church Hurt to Calling? Adverse Experiences, Vocational Formation, and the Ambivalent Power of Religion

Erin Johnston

(Duke University (USA))

How do experiences of harm shape religious commitment and vocational aspiration? Drawing on 75 in-depth religious life history interviews with first-year Master of Divinity (M.Div.) students at a Mainline Protestant seminary in the United States, this paper examines how adverse life experiences – including Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), trauma, loss, and “church hurt” – inform trajectories into religious education and ministry. Building on prior survey findings that seminary students report elevated rates of some ACEs when compared to the general population, we analyze how participants narrate negative experiences both within and beyond religious institutions and how these narratives intersect with vocational plans and demographic identities (especially gender and sexuality).

We show that adverse experiences function in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways. For some, harm produces distancing from institutional religion; for others, it becomes a catalyst for vocational commitment framed as repair, advocacy, or pastoral care. We find that sexual and gender minority students are more likely to recount negative religious experiences and to describe these experiences as central to their ministerial aspirations, often positioning their future work as explicitly justice-oriented or trauma-informed.

Rather than treating religion as either inherently healing or inherently harmful, this paper conceptualizes religious institutions as ambivalent sites where injury, meaning-making, and vocation are co-constituted. By situating seminary formation within broader life-course narratives of harm and resilience, we contribute to sociological debates on religion’s dual capacity to wound and to heal, especially for sexual and gender minorities.

Towards a Ritual Grammar of Healing in Religion

Martin Stringer

(Birmingham Newman University)

Drawing on ethnographic work among, primarily women, in inner urban areas of the UK, I established a distinction between coping religion and transformative religion. In my most recent book on the Story in Religion, I used the work of Thomas Tweed and Nasrallah to separate transformative category into strands of transition (van Gennep’s rites de passage) and transformation (what I called rites de métamorphose), the later of which might cover both conversion (transformation to a new

space) and healing (transformation within the same space). In this paper I want to anticipate a new direction in my thinking towards religious experience by outlining what I am referring to as a ritual grammar of religious healing, an attempt to look at the underlying transformations and growth within the individual or the community, drawing on a wide range of examples from work on lived religion to illustrate my thinking.

One of my key interests has always been what might be described as the 'sociology of prayer'. Drawing on ethnographic work among, primarily women, in inner urban areas of the UK, I established a distinction between coping religion and transformative religion. In my most recent book on the Story in Religion, I used the work of Thomas Tweed and Rima Nasrallah to separate transformative category into strands of transition (van Gennep's rites de passage) and transformation (what I called rites de métamorphose), the latter of which might cover both conversion (transformation to a new space) and healing (transformation within the same space).

In this paper I want to build on my previous work on the sociology of prayer, and anticipate a new direction in my thinking towards a sociology of religious experience, by outlining what I am referring to as the ritual grammar of religious healing. This is an attempt to look at the underlying transformations and growth within the individual and the community, situating the structures and processes of ritual healing within its wider sociological context. In the paper I will draw on a range of ethnographic examples from my own, and others, work to illustrate my thinking.

Room C17 – Death and Dying

Multidimensional Religiosity and the Awareness of Death: The Results of Correlational Findings

Nikita Bogachev

(Higher School of Economics)

With the beginning of the post-secular era, the previous theoretical frameworks on the relationship between religiosity and the awareness of death have become no longer fully accurate in describing contemporary understandings. Due to the blurring of religious and so, the afterlife, expectations our current comprehension of this relationship requires empirical reconsideration. Accordingly, this study investigates the relationship between multidimensional religious identity and attitudes toward death using a sample of Moscow youth aged 18–35, a distinctive case of the post-secular religiosity, where the legacy of Soviet anti-clerical policies intersects with the specific Christian heritage associated with right-wing political reaction.

The data were gathered through a survey of 768 participants, representative by age and sex; we employed the CRS-15 (Central Religiosity Scale-15) and the DAP-R (Death Attitude Profile—Revised) to classify respondents by their level of religiosity (non-religious, weakly religious, moderately religious) and to assess their attitudes toward death across five coping dimensions.

The results demonstrate that, contrary to previous classical sociological theories, higher religiosity is associated with increased fear and avoidance of death, whereas non-religious individuals exhibit greater fatalistic acceptance. Our findings imply that secular and syncretic beliefs, rather than traditional religious dogma, shape contemporary death perceptions. The research highlights the inability of once widespread theoretical approaches to describe death attitudes following the post-secular shift observed in modern developed societies and could be useful for future researches in the related fields of Death, Religious and Health Studies in order to advance our understanding of death attitudes as a contemporary social phenomenon.

Changing Rituals Surrounding Infant Loss.

Yvonne Bennett

(Independent Researcher)

My research on funeral rituals brought two main themes to the fore. The first being 'doing the right thing' for the deceased and the second was that of children; both children attending funerals and the funerals of children

The topic of child death is a difficult one to broach. The death of someone so young complicates our traditional use of funeral rituals as a means to transition between life and death, to mourn and to make sense of the loss.

In this paper I will examine some of the changes that have occurred in Britain over the past sixty years in relation to babies who were stillborn or died shortly after birth. A topic which until recently was not spoken about, one where stillbirths were considered a medical impediment not a tragedy. Until the late twentieth century stillborn children were not afforded a traditional funeral, one where the parents and family of the baby could come together in a time of grief and find some comfort in traditional funeral rituals. Fortunately, times have changed and today parents who suffer such a loss have their grief acknowledged, no longer silenced.

The funeral of an infant seems contradictory with the natural order of life progression, their death puts at odds the usual funeral rituals, especially a wake or a celebration of life. When an adult dies a piece of the past is lost; however, when an infant dies a piece of the future is lost.

Spiritual Care Beyond Religious Affiliation: Chaplaincy, Trauma and the Reconfiguration of the Sacred in Palliative Care in Northern Ireland

Anna Burcombe

(Queen's University Belfast)

The growth of individuals who do not identify with any religious tradition across the UK has intensified sociological attention to the persistence of spirituality beyond institutional religion. However, the spiritual lives of this population remain underexamined, particularly in Northern Ireland. This paper examines spiritual care in palliative settings shaped by histories of sectarian conflict and institutional

religious authority. Drawing on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of semi-structured interviews with seven palliative care chaplains, it explores how spirituality is articulated and addressed among patients identifying as having no religious affiliation.

Findings challenge binary classifications of religious and non-religious identity. Participants described patients who distanced themselves from organised religion while expressing spiritual concerns through memory, moral reflection, relational repair and embodied practices. Chaplains also encountered religious trauma including coercive belief systems, fear-based teaching, institutional betrayal and moral injury associated with the Northern Irish conflict. Spiritual care emerged as relational practice attuned toward the recognition of harm, the cultivation of trust and the possibility of reconciliation within interdisciplinary care.

The paper argues that chaplaincy functions as a mediating role in which forms of spirituality are negotiated between patients, clinical teams and institutional structures. Northern Ireland's entanglement of religion with violence and politics highlights dynamics less apparent in more secularised contexts, challenging linear secularisation narratives. These encounters point to a reconfiguration of the sacred within professional care settings, contributing to debates on lived religion, post-secular healthcare and the fluid boundaries between religion, non-religion and public institutions.

Room C14 – Early Career Roundtable

Researching Harm and Healing in British Evangelicalism

Roundtable participants: Chrissie Thwaites (University of Leeds), Lensa Woodcock (University of Chester), Susie Triffitt (University of Oxford), Morgana Loze-Doyle (University of Chester)

Moderator and respondent: Dawn Llewellyn (University of Chester)

This roundtable brings together four postgraduate and early-career researchers exploring modes of healing and harm in the context of contemporary British evangelicalism. Their research ranges from investigation of the impact of evangelical purity culture, to ongoing fieldwork on the disclosure and non-disclosure of spiritual abuse, and the complicated potential for healing and hope in evangelical ministry with the homeless. This discussion will consider questions such as, what factors shape experiences of harm within an evangelical context? What is the role of religious and non-religious researchers in navigating harms? How can academic work explore and provide pathways for healing for both researcher and interlocutor? What are the ethical and practical challenges for the researcher when conducting sensitive research in this context - both for themselves and their interlocutors? How do we negotiate the ethics and implications of researching wounds and scars - and research from wounds and scars? How can evangelical structures be spaces of hope and healing? How do we hold both harms and healing together in the same context? In this discussion, we hope to nurture a

safe space to discuss these issues openly and with care, share how they relate to our respective research projects, and productively draw on relevant sociological, anthropological and theological theory, particularly in relation to feminist methodologies, navigating silence, trauma, and hope discourse.

Parallel Session E, 14.30 – 16.00

Room C11 – Illness, Health and Healthcare

Recasting Ayurveda: First-Generation Christian Physicians of Kerala and the Turn to Yukti

Sreeparvathy S

(Indian Institute of Technology Delhi)

The paper examines the contemporary practice of Ayurveda among first-generation practitioners from the Christian sect in Kerala, particularly focusing on the students and physicians, and contrasts their approaches with those of Ayurvedic practitioners from hereditary lineages and monastic backgrounds. Situated within the institutional context of the Bachelor of Ayurvedic Medicine and Surgery (BAMS) program, an educational model shaped by postcolonial adaptations of biomedical pedagogy, the paper explores how distinct socio-religious and epistemic backgrounds influence practitioners' engagement with Ayurvedic knowledge and practice.

Focusing on the philosophical underpinnings of Ayurveda, which are grounded in classical Indian Darshanas, the research investigates how first-generation Christian practitioners, who enter the Ayurvedic medical system from a secular, biomedical-oriented school curriculum and a non-Hindu cosmological worldview, navigate these epistemological tensions. Drawing on ethnography, the paper argues that this group strategically emphasises the Yukti-based (rational, logical) dimension of Ayurveda. In doing so, they consciously foreground elements of reason, science, and modernity, often distancing themselves from the spiritual or cosmological aspects traditionally associated with Ayurvedic healing.

Unlike nuns or lineage-based practitioners who integrate Ayurveda into broader frameworks of spiritual discipline or cultural inheritance, these first-generation practitioners approach Ayurveda as a profession through an economic node. Their clinical orientation often aligns with discourses of rationality and scientific legitimacy. The paper thus contributes to the anthropology of medicine and religion by highlighting how the intermingling of medical rationalities, pedagogical frameworks, and religious identities shape divergent modes of practicing and imagining Ayurveda today.

Health and Healing after a Near-Death Experience: Exploring the Meaning-making and Wellbeing of the Non-religious after a Brush with Death

Alex Fry

(Bournemouth University)

Near-death experiences (NDEs) are experiences associated with death or impending death. Those who have an NDE report substantial changes to how they find being in their bodies after a period of apparent disembodied consciousness either during clinical death or between death and

resuscitation. They also report viewing the world in a radically different way to how they did previously. These changes are especially true for those who had no religious convictions prior to their NDE. Such a shift in worldview has profound implications for individuals' wellbeing—the equilibrium between challenging events and the ability to deal with them. Such near-death survivors must undergo a process of meaning-making as they re-evaluate their worldview in an attempt to make sense of their experience, something that is often entwined with and complicated by recovery from physical trauma. Meaning-making can be beneficial for their wellbeing and involves drawing on different culturally-embedded belief systems and practices, particularly those widely present in one's own society.

This paper therefore reports how NDEs come to shape the way non-religious near-death survivors engage with culturally-embedded belief systems and practices as they seek to formulate a new worldview that can help them make sense of their NDE. This paper will also show the impact that this has on the wellbeing of these individuals. To do so, it will compare a thematic analysis of 17 semi-structured interviews with UK citizens and inhabitants, and 16 semi-structured interviews with US citizens and inhabitants, who have had a near-death experience.

Room C14 – Workshop

Working with Sensitive Subjects and Creative Methods

Sara McHaffie

(Northumbria University)

Researchers working with sensitive topics with groups might be reluctant to employ creative methods out of worry that participants might disclose difficult experiences which might be difficult for other participants to hear. While this is a valid concern, my research has explored ways of creatively exploring sensitive topics with care for all participants. This enables participatory methods which can increase inclusivity of research (Fletcher-Watson et al 2019).

I will refer to two projects. Our Edinburgh explored how women from different faith and ethnic backgrounds engaged with public space, using film. An Affirmation of Autistic Women has used drawing, collage, embroidery and creative writing to explore and express how autistic women might engage with feminist ideas. Both projects employed dialogical groupwork within a brave space (Arao, Clemens 2013) with community guidelines co-created to safeguard participant wellbeing. Participants later developed complementary approaches such as the use of Humitas (Fox 2017).

This workshop will offer a framework for dialogue alongside creative methods to co-create a space in which participants can be safely vulnerable and share and co-analyse resonant experiences. We will celebrate the “messy” (Phillips & Kara 2021) approach which can be seen as an aspect of neuroqueering (Walker 2022) research practices.

We will discuss how to co-create community guidelines, building in time for group formation, time for reflection, benefits of various creative methods, and the use of existing creative work as provocation. We will also explore the significance for an interfaith project such as Our Edinburgh in increasingly polarised times.

xx is an autistic and disabled public sociologist using creative and dialogical methods, whose doctoral research at Northumbria University is concerned with co-producing articulations of autistic women's feminist consciousness. She is using an approach informed by public sociology and Feminist Participatory Action Research, alongside creative methods. Her MSc project was titled "The lived experience of accessing public space within a group of Muslim and/or Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women in Edinburgh: Attitudes and Activism expressed through film". She was an invited speaker at the University of Helsinki's gender studies department, and for Dundee's Violence Against Women Partnership.

Room C12 – Methods and Fieldwork Experiences

The Sampling Challenges, Data Collection Limitations, and Structural Constraints in a Pan-Scotland Study of Perceptions of Quakerism

Maggie Stewart Dickenson

(University of Birmingham)

This paper sits within a wider mixed methods study examining contemporary perceptions of Quakerism among non-Quakers across Scotland, mapping and analysing the cultural narratives, religious binaries, and social forces that shape public understandings of a small and ageing faith community. The broader project explores how these perceptions influence the long-term sustainability of Scottish Quakerism.

Focusing on the methodological and structural challenges of conducting a geographically dispersed population study, this paper examines the implications of Scotland's uneven population distribution for sampling integrity. Urban centres risk dominating the dataset, limiting the generalisability of findings and obscuring the perspectives of rural and remote communities. By utilising soft quotes to create a more balanced approach to participation, targeting nine recruitment sites – Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Dumfries, Alloa, Applecross, Wick, Comrie and Galashiels – the wider study seeks to ensure representation of urban, town, rural and remote settings within Scotland. Post survey weighting provides an additional corrective mechanism, though its effectiveness is constrained when remote areas yield minimal responses.

The paper also interrogates the benefits and limitations of varied recruitment strategies, with each endeavour bringing benefits but also challenges, which this paper seeks to navigate. For example, whilst places of worship and community groups increase localised reach, this comes at the risk of over-representation of participants who are religiously aware and socially or civically involved.

Street-based surveys provide an invaluable means of including those who are digitally excluded; however, this method of sampling raises ethical, safety, and environmental complexities.

Anchoring Practice, Narration, and Memory: Rethinking Digital Ethnography in the Study of Religious (De)Conversion

Metin Koca

University of York

In the study of religious (de)conversion, digital ethnography has been treated as a corrective to post-hoc rationalisation in interview-based research. Yet digital environments are not neutral observational fields. Much of the nonreligion literature, largely grounded in (post-)Christian contexts, presumes relatively liberal online settings. In practice, however, digitally mediated spaces operate under uneven regimes of surveillance, platform volatility, and moral regulation. Drawing on fieldwork in Turkey, a Muslim-majority context that reflects both the structural constraints of illiberal settings and the tactical freedoms individuals carve out within them, this paper shows how online activity can create the appearance of coherent nonreligious publics that dissolve when traced offline. Accounts with significant digital visibility may lack durable social infrastructure beyond the platform itself, reflecting tactical anonymity, risk management, and temporally unstable forms of doubt. This instability necessitates methodological triangulation. The paper advances a three-pillar design combining digital ethnography, interviews, and conversational journals. Digital ethnography captures practical culture—tacit knowledge and improvisation embedded in everyday online hierarchies. Interviews access interpretive culture, revealing how individuals retrospectively order and rationalise their trajectories. Conversational journals access retrospective culture, shedding light on fragmented, morally charged recollections and moments of hesitation, concealment, and recalibration that evade both platform performance and narrative coherence. By aligning practice, narration, and memory as such, the article moves beyond treating (de)conversion as a singular decision and instead reframes it as a process of back-and-forth shifts, in which real-time enactments, retrospectively ordered narratives, and fragmented, affect-laden memories take turns structuring religious change.

Room C14 – Workshop

Getting Published in the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion

David Eagle

Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion

The mechanics of publishing in JSSR, what makes a strong paper.

Day 3 – Wednesday 1st July 2026

Parallel Session F, 09.30 – 11.00

Room C11 – LGBTQ+ Religiosity

Interpreting Religious Difference and Geopolitics: Queer Epistemologies in Contemporary Turkey

Hakan Sandal-Wilson

(London School of Economics)

How do movements organised around gender and sexuality analyse and respond to histories of religious difference, minority identities, and the politics surrounding them? What sociological and epistemological insights might we gain from marginalised communities' engagement with national and regional politics? What knowledge is available to them, and how do they mobilise, engage and critique that knowledge?

This paper takes as its focus Turkey's LGBTI+ movement, and maps its engagements with both Jewish identity and history in Turkey, and with the State of Israel since the 1990s onward. It conceptualises these histories and engagements as socially constructed and capable of producing both harm (through marginalisation and exclusion) and healing (through solidarity and epistemic repair). Harm emerges, for instance, through the unintended reproduction of the Turkish nationalist narratives in which violence against minorities is rendered invisible; and healing arises through explicit and critical engagement with such histories. In this case, these dynamics unfold across distinct periods: the former between 1994-2003, and the latter, after 2003, when the movement increasingly engaged with anti-militarist solidarities.

As part of a developing project, this paper traces how Jewish identity has been referenced and interpreted within Turkey's LGBTI+ movement since 1990s, while also analysing the distinct, though complexly related, issue of shifting perceptions of Israel. Drawing on archival materials, in particular Turkey's oldest LGBTI+ magazine *Kaos GL*, it brings together Turkey's Jewish minority history, regional geopolitical narratives, and the reflections of LGBTI+ activists. In doing so, it explores how situated epistemologies engage with, reproduce, or reframe dominant geopolitical, historical, and identity-based narratives.

Religious freedom and LGBTQ+ equality rights in Canada: How conservative Christians engage with state representatives

Marie-Eve Melanson

(Université du Québec à Montréal)

The last few decades have seen growing recognition of LGBTQ+ equality rights, not only in Western societies at large, but also within various religious communities. Nevertheless, much of the resistance to full recognition of sexual diversity still comes from religious groups. This paper explores the argumentative strategies used by Christian organisations in Canada to convince judges and legislators to protect their religious interests when they conflict with the recognition of LGBTQ+ equality. Since 2001, despite the recent rise in popularity of anti-LGBTQ+ views, the ten leading organisations that have submitted briefs in legal disputes and legislative proposals have been unsuccessful in most cases. Based on an analysis of these briefs, I suggest that this situation prompted these groups to adapt their argumentative strategy to include arguments that resemble those advanced organisations that support LGBTQ+ rights. Three categories of arguments will be examined. First, diversity claims. These claims present robust protection of religious freedom as the only position truly compatible with respect for pluralism/multiculturalism. Second, anti-discrimination arguments. Here, the principle of non-discrimination is invoked to justify tolerance of intolerance towards LGBTQ+ people. The third strategy is to restore the respectability of claims based on traditional morality by presenting them as being just as acceptable as other “more popular” views. By clarifying how Christian actors engage with state representatives, my goal is to provide an opportunity to reflect on how subjects of law respond to norms they do not share, and how these responses can perpetuate harm or create opportunities for healing.

I Have Friends Who are Queer: How Peer Networks Impact Support for LGBTQ+ in a Seminary Environment

David Eagle, Cassie McMillan

(Duke University)

A large body of research demonstrates that intergroup friendships reduce stigma and increase acceptance. Using longitudinal data on the friendship networks between students in a seminary where there is increasing acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals, the authors seek to test the relative strength of several competing hypotheses about the mechanisms that underlie these changes. A baseline model measures how simply perceiving LGBTQ+ people as in your friendship network influences changing attitudes on same-sex marriage and the ordination of gay clergy. Subsequent models explore whether reciprocated ties, tie strength, the number of ties, the centrality of ties, and homophily alter this association. We also explore whether these associations hold for students with strongly negative attitudes at baseline. In a time when LGBTQ+ individuals are facing increasing

social exclusion - especially in religious contexts - this research helps inform important debates about the factors that increase acceptance.

Room C12 - Religion and Culture

Muslim Joy: Digital Connection, Healing, and Everyday Agency among British Bangladeshi Women

Renasha Khan

(King's College London)

This paper explores Muslim joy as a form of everyday healing and ethical world-making among British Bangladeshi Muslim women navigating racialised harm, gendered scrutiny, and the affective pressures of contemporary digital life. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in Tower Hamlets during the COVID-19 pandemic, I examine how Muslim women cultivate connection, care, and belonging through both online and offline practices that challenge dominant narratives of Muslim womanhood as either oppressed or endlessly resilient.

While digital environments are often framed as spaces of surveillance, misogyny, and Islamophobia, this paper attends to the ways women also use social media to generate intimate infrastructures of support: sharing faith-inflected reflections, humour, beauty practices, friendship, and everyday storytelling. These practices produce forms of healing that are relational rather than individualised, grounded in community, religious sensibility, and diasporic intimacy.

At the same time, I consider the ambivalences of digital visibility, where platforms can amplify both harm and possibility. Muslim joy emerges here not as escapism, but as a political and spiritual resource - an affective refusal of marginalisation and a mode of ethical self-fashioning within hostile public landscapes.

By foregrounding joy as an analytic lens, this paper contributes to scholarship on digital Islam, feminist anthropology, and the study of religion as lived and mediated. It argues that attending to joy expands how we understand healing beyond trauma, locating it instead in everyday practices of connection, agency, and collective life.

The aesthetics of the Internet Hindu

Rucha Ambikar

(Bemidji State University)

What roles do religion, nationalism and the need for identity and solidarity play in the behavior of the internet Hindu?

This question is at the crux of my paper that examines the online behavior of the Internet Hindu. The internet Hindu, often a young, middle class, Hindu living either in India or abroad is characterized by aggressive support for the policies of Hindu supremacy espoused by the current Indian government.

Testimony of this support is often found in their behavior online which veers into various forms of negative commentary, insults, nicknames, doxing and social flak against others who do not espouse the same socio - political views. Is such trolling simply performative or does it operate within larger intersections of religious and national identity?

Using the American philosopher John Dewey's notion of aesthetic experience as a framework to analyze the behavior of the Internet Hindu, I argue that the emotional satisfaction derived through such internet trolling offers an aesthetic or meaningful experience. It is this experience that provides an emotionally fulfilling connection to the larger enterprise of Hindu nationalism and allows the Internet Hindu to locate their own identity within the context of domination and share in the power of the Hindu nationalist state.

Ultimately this paper asks whether locating internet trolling within the context of Dewey's aesthetic experience - and not simply at the intersection of religion and nationalism - offers any avenues for redirecting this behavior into more democratic forms of civic participation.

Public Religiosity and the Vernacular Politics of Religious Coexistence: The Case of an Islamic Shrine Festival in Kerala, South India

Navaneeth Harindranath

(University of Edinburgh/Indian Institute of Technology Madras, India)

Emerging scholarship on public religiosity in South Asia highlights how religious processions and spectacles often reproduce spatial domination and exclusionary forms of space-making, thereby intensifying religious marginalisation, social othering and segregation. However, there are also instances where public religiosity performatively enacts convivial sociality and shared ways of living in religiously plural contexts. Taking Veliyancode chandanakkudam nercha, a carnivalesque Islamic shrine festival in Kerala, South India, as an ethnographic case, this paper examines how notions of public religiosity and communal belonging are actively performed and contested in contemporary Kerala. This shrine festival, which attracts thousands across religious boundaries, is marked by religious performances and affective atmospheres of celebration that generate spaces where lower-middle-class consumerism, entertainment and leisure, religious fervour, and communal belonging become inseparably intertwined.

Critically exploring the narratives and practices associated with the nercha, the paper explicates how such performances of public religiosity contribute to an emerging discourse of religious coexistence in Kerala. It traces how different actors interpret the nercha and inhabit the spaces it generates, negotiating religious difference and cultivating reciprocity and conviviality among communities in everyday life. The paper argues that coexistence in religiously plural contexts emerges neither organically from religious syncretism nor solely from state protection, but through sustained political labour and ethical cultivation. Although such practices and spaces constitute crucial but often overlooked sites of resistance to religious nationalism, the forms of coexistence they produce remain

fragile, unevenly distributed, and marked by hierarchies and exclusions shaped by broader regimes of governance and polarising public discourses.

Room C17 - Contemporary Witchcraft, Paganism and Spiritualities

Witchcraft, Healing and The Magic of Change

Alexandria Arthur-Hastie

University of York

This paper presents original qualitative data from a four-year project exploring the role of wellness, healing and change for witches in contemporary Britain. The intersection of wellness, healing and contemporary witchcraft has faced some scholarly critique, particularly focusing on neo-liberal imperatives toward 'self improvement' and self management (Carrette and King, 2005; Ezzy, 2006). In responding to, and advancing, these prior observations, this paper focuses on the presentation of novel data collected using semi structured interviews and Participant Driven Photo Elicitation which explores the lived experiences of women who practice witchcraft in Britain today.

It is the findings of this paper that witchcraft practice plays a significant role in helping women to heal from past traumas, manage neurodiversity and can be an important mechanism through which to flee intimate partner violence. Rather than experiencing the imperative to 'heal' the self as a burdensome responsibility, participants in this study instead relayed narratives of strength, happiness, resilience and improved wellbeing. These novel findings respond to existing scholarship which is often critical of the healing or radical potentials of contemporary spiritualities like contemporary witchcraft, instead shedding new light on the ways witchcraft practice can be radical and transformative to the individuals who practice it, who then extend this focus on healing into other social causes.

Navigating harm, cultivating care: Women's circles as contested antidotes to late modern crisis

Madeleine Castro

(Leeds Beckett University)

Western societies are often depicted as being 'in crisis,' grappling with mental health struggles, community fragmentation, and systemic inequalities exacerbated by neoliberal individualism (Henning, 2025; Rosa, 2016; Watts, 2019). Some sociologists are exploring alternatives framed as collective care (Segal, 2023), social love (Cataldi & Iorio, 2023), and resonance (Rosa, 2016, 2020). Women also face heightened pressures from a 'triple burden' of paid work, caregiving, and self-

optimisation within a context of voracious misogyny (Gill, 2017; Hochschild, 1989/2012; McRobbie, 2020).

This talk explores women's circles as spaces to navigate these harms. Research suggests they offer community, emotional catharsis, and gendered reimagining (Castro, 2020; Leidenfrost, 2012), providing sanctuary for stigmatised experiences (Sitar, 2024). While sometimes framed as incubators of new femininities (Longman, 2018) or as retreats from neoliberalism (Castro, 2020), their role as an antidote to modern harms for some western women has not been fully excavated. This paper analyses circles' potential, successes, and tensions regarding enabling resistance through collective care, while acknowledging their entanglement in neoliberal self-optimisation. It highlights tensions between empowerment and depoliticisation, asking how they foster solidarity or exclusion. Advocating for intentional care as critical praxis (Segal, 2023; Rosa, 2020), the paper contends that, despite contradictions, the circles' emphasis on resonance, cyclical time, femininity, and collective vulnerability offers a fraught yet fertile ground for 'critical femininities' which acts as an imperfect partial counter to late modern alienation.

'We are not charlatans!' A Critical Discursive Analysis of Identity Construction Among Spiritualist National Union Mediums in the United Kingdom.

Samantha Morgan

(The Open University)

Spiritualist mediums (SMs), as members of the Spiritualism religion, communicate with the deceased. Prior research identified SMs separate their identities from the deceased, and that Spiritualist church attendees were members of other social groups and had grown tired of Christianity. Little research explored how SMs use discourse to construct identities and intergroup relations. Critical discourse analysis was applied to a focus group with four SMs to address this gap. This facilitated naturalistic conversation around the question of 'How do spiritualist mediums working on platforms at the SNU use discursive practices to negotiate, resist, or reinforce dominant societal constructions of their identities?'. Analysis identified two distinct interpretative repertoires: 'Spiritualist mediumship is an altruistic, professional job that requires development', and 'Spiritualist mediumship is a misunderstood job that faces scepticism'. These shaped subject positions, reinforcing positive identities for SMs of 'Eternal student and teacher', 'professional', 'misunderstood', and 'I have free will'. People who failed to recognise SMs as ethical, religious group members were resisted and constructed as 'ignorant others'. Whilst untrained and unethical mediums were positioned as 'charlatans'. SMs framed that negative media and societal representations fail to recognise them as educated professionals working within a religious community, separate from charlatans. In conclusion, participants used discourse to negotiate their complex identities in response to broad societal discourses, which can misrepresent SMs.

Room C14 - Roundtable

Remedy and Redress after 'Soul Murder': An Inter-religious Roundtable

Alana Harris, Jane Chevous, Yehudis Fletcher, Sarah-Jane Page, Clare Watkins

(King's College London)

This roundtable brings together Survivor-Researchers (and their allies) to discuss several collective redress and restorative justice initiatives responding to child sexual abuse (CSA) and spiritual and psychological harms (Oakley et al, 2024) within diverse religious settings. Seeking to shift academic agendas beyond mostly individual-focused and fiscally orientated accounts of damage, compensation, and recovery – which have been shown to leave unaddressed survivors' desires for wholesale culture change and collective visibility – we consider from our different positionalities what healing after 'soul-murder' (Shengold 1991; McPhillips 2018; Clites 2019) might require.

The mending and repair work that we are each advocating, theorising, and theologising about centres CSA harms as both corporate and corporeal, explores healing and redress through creative and literary expression, memorialisation practices, somatic praxis, and wrestles with the ethical conundrums of testimony and the archive.

We explore who is undertaking this mending work, where it is happening (often outside church organisations), and contend that communal and imaginative strategies must respond to broader structural, collective, and systemic enablers of abuse. These include common emotional short circuits and silencers (e.g. shame and taboo) and deflection and disavowal tactics (e.g. fetishisation of individual perpetrators, media sensationalism and tacit voyeurism) such that any healing from harms inevitably requires critique of enabling ecosystems and power disparities.

As a collective of female-identifying scholars and feminist activists studying Anglicanism, Catholicism, Orthodox Judaism, and minority Christian religions, we bring both an inter-religious and secular optic to our critical consideration of how 'healing' should be conceptualised and realised.

Parallel Session G, 13.30 – 15.00

Room C11 – Secularisation

From Sectarian “Isms” to Ecumenical Islam: British Muslims’ Shifting Religio-Political Identities

Iman Dawood

(London School of Economics & Political Science)

Since the 1960s, when large numbers of Muslims began migrating to the UK, transnational Islamic reform movements in South Asia and the Middle East have overwhelmingly structured British Muslims' religious activities and institutions. These movements have also largely shaped the way that British Muslims understand and practice Islam, as well as their relationships with the state and other social and religious groups. The literature has thus mainly studied “Sufis,” “Salafis,” “Islamists,” “Barelvis,” and “Deobandis.”

During the last decade, however, a few accounts have noted that some British Muslim activists have become disillusioned with, and at least partially departed from, transnational Islamic movements, with some British Muslims coming to feel that movements like Salafism, are unable to speak to the unique social, political, and economic circumstances of the British Muslim community (Dawood 2021; Amin, 2022; Lewis and Hamid 2018). These developments raise important questions about the religio-political subjectivities of British Muslim activists who no longer neatly fit into, or identify with, these movements. It also calls into question long-held assumptions about the significance of transnational Islamic movements that have historically structured British Islam, while considering the possible advent of an “Ecumenical Islam.”

Based on participant observation in Muslim cross-community spaces and in-depth interviews with a diverse group of British Muslim activists, this paper examines the factors driving this shift. This paper thus contributes more broadly to our understanding of the relevance of contemporary transnational religious movements and to the making and unmaking of the religio-political subjectivities of Muslim minorities in Europe.

From Secular Ethics to “Religion”: Confucianism’s Religiousisation, Diaspora Healing, and the Reproduction of Otherness in Southeast Asia

Zhengxin Huang, Tian Zhang

(University of Oxford)

Confucius’s philosophy is profoundly secular in nature, yet in Southeast Asian countries it has given rise to religiously charged rituals, sites, symbols and ideologies such as “Confucius temples” and

Confucius worship. In Indonesia, it has even been institutionally recognised as a religion. What drives and influences the religious transformation of secular schools of thought? This paper employs digital ethnography to conduct comparative research on the religiousisation of Confucianism across Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, identifying several pathways through which Confucian religiousisation interacts with contemporary politics. On one hand, this religious transformation provides Southeast Asian Chinese communities with a distinctive bond, healing historical traumas and addressing a sense of rootlessness. During historical waves of anti-Chinese sentiment, Confucianism provided a mystical identity shield for Chinese communities, enabling them to evade accusations of being 'communist atheists'. Today, Confucianism continues to play a positive role in community cohesion, education, and intergenerational transmission. Conversely, its religious transformation exacerbates 'othering' by reinforcing 'religion-ethnicity boundaries,' potentially intensifying ethnic divisions and distrust towards Chinese communities. To circumvent accusations of religious ideological infiltration, Malaysia's Confucius Institutes replaced 'Confucius' with 'Kongzi' in their nomenclature. The phenomenon of Confucianism's religiousisation reflects mysticism's role in political activities and ethnic relations. Drawing upon reflections concerning the harm and healing brought by the religiousisation of non-religious factors, this paper proposes actionable pathways to bridge divisions. These include enhancing the inclusivity of Confucian rituals and symbols, and reducing the risk of religion being politicised.

Here We Go Again? Secularism 2.0 in Québec

Ian Morrison

(The American University in Cairo)

In late November of last year, the Québec government announced what has been dubbed "secularism 2.0". Building on 2019's Bill 21, which, among other measures, banned public servants from wearing religious symbols, Bill 9 seeks to further purify the secular public sphere through a number of measures, most notably a ban on "collective religious practices" (read: prayer) in public spaces and prayer rooms in post-secondary institutions. This marks the latest round of an ongoing struggles over secularism and national identity in Québec, since at least the later 1980s (Morrison 2021, 2020, 2019). The bill is presented as a continuance of efforts to 'protect' Québec's secular public sphere in order to protect Québec's secular national identity. At the same time, what instigated the drafting of this Bill, as openly admitted to by the government, was anger towards pro-Palestinian protests that were taking place in a square in front of the Notre Dame Basilica in Montréal – both a national and religious space – in particular collective Muslim prayer that took place during these protests. Through an analysis of recent media and government discourse, as well as a comparison of this moment of concern over public religiosity with earlier moments analyzed by Barras (2016, 2018, 2021), Laxer (2019), Morrison (2021, 2020, 2019), Zubrzycki (2016) and others, the paper addresses how this recent controversy over religion and religiosity is revelatory of the contradictions

inherent in this image of secular post-colonial national identity in Québec: first, in terms of the manner of a failure of identification with the anti-colonial demands and aspirations of others, and, second, the continued importance of Catholic spaces, symbols and 'heritage' within the ostensibly secular national imaginary.

Room C12 – Queer Experiences

Queer Muslim practices and Reconfigurations across Southeast Asia: Contemporary Kaleidoscopic Hybridizations

Ali Kassem

(National University of Singapore)

Centering the beliefs and practices of over 30 young queer Muslims professionals across Southeast Asian cities through interpretive qualitative research, this paper analyzes how they navigate tensions between Islam's wounding normative structures and their queer subjectivities while engaging with broader sociopolitical landscapes particularly marked by nationalism and postcolonial modernity. Within this, the paper focuses on developing participants' articulation of a 'queer Islam' drawing on diverse traditions and imagined/imaginable histories as a strategic selective worldmaking. From this, it challenges dominant Eurocentric paradigms that equate queer emancipation with a linear rupture from religious tradition as it develops their hybridized form of Islam that incorporates practices ranging from yoga to therapy as specifically 'sacred' practices. These, the paper argues, are strategies of healing and reconciliation participants deploy across sites and scales of their everyday lives. Proposing a kaleidoscopic prismatic lens attuned to epistemic affective 'reworking', I accordingly trace how queer Muslims operate both alongside and against the grain of hegemonic religious and secular harm to assert themselves as 'makers of Islam'. Through this, the paper illuminates decolonial possibilities and contributes to critical debates on sexuality, secularity, and the making of contemporary religion.

"We'll help you to fix this": LGBTQ women of faith and narratives of conversion therapy

Christine Jackson-Taylor

(University of York)

Conversion therapy is a harmful practice in which LGBTQ people are 'helped' to change, modify or suppress their sexuality or gender identity. Conversion therapy, positioned as difficult to define, takes myriad forms in healthcare and religious organisations. In religious settings it can include healing prayer, exorcism and spiritual/pastoral counselling. The UK Government's National LGBTQ Survey (2018) found 5% of respondents had been offered conversion therapy, and 2% had undertaken it. The government pledged to 'ban' conversion therapy. To this date no legislation has been forthcoming and instead, public debate has become increasingly polarised.

Research on conversion therapy is largely centred in psychology and counselling. Literature stresses the harms, including isolation, marginalisation and negative mental health outcomes, for LGBTQ religious people. Vitally, research emphasises that these practices simply do not work. Sociological attention, however, remains limited, particularly in UK contexts.

This paper opens sociological dialogue on conversion therapy. Using concepts of narrative identity, lived religion and intersectionality I draw on participant stories from my research exploring lived experiences of religious LGBTQ women. I demonstrate ways conversion therapy is framed as emanating in love and acceptance but with an engrained necessity to “fix” unwanted feelings and identities. I then demonstrate how narratives of being “true to yourself” are central to overcoming some of the harms of these practices. Finally, my participants voice reflections on potential policy, safeguards and protections. This paper introduces much needed sociological explorations of conversion therapy which can inform academic, political and public understanding.

Room C14 – Solidarity Panel

Precarity and Challenges in the Higher Education Landscape

Time to share and voice experience to build solidarity and community in the context of precarity and current challenges in the HE landscape.

Room C17 – Christianity and Contemporary Cultures

“Ye Shall Know Them by Their Fruits” A Mixed Methods Study on Corruption, Competitiveness, and Christianity in Europe and the Americas.

Jason Garcia Portilla

(University of Winchester)

The research presented in this paper investigates the relationship between religion and sustainable development. The historical institutional influence of religion, rather than its current adherence, is a key factor in determining a country's level of development.

The study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse data from 65 countries in Europe and the Americas. The findings suggest that countries with a strong historical influence of Protestantism tend to have better development outcomes, while those with a strong influence of Roman Catholicism or Orthodoxy tend to have lower performance. Other factors, such as political non-religious influences and geography, also play a role in shaping a country's development path.

The research highlights the importance of considering the historical context of religion when studying its impact on development. This finding challenges traditional views that emphasise the cultural influence of religion as the primary driver of prosperity and transparency.

A seminal contribution of my work is that the historical institutional influence of religion has been a crucial factor in development (more than the current proportion of adherents). In contrast to common views in economics and sociology on how religion impacts prosperity/transparency via its cultural influence (i.e. à la Weber), my research demonstrates that, instead, the core variable influencing prosperity is the institutional influence of religion. Several pieces of evidence corroborate this finding: 1) the abundant historical, theological, and theoretical information; 2) the empirical results on State religion, Concordats, and Legal origin; 3) the analysis of specific cases.

Moderating Christianity in Midwestern America

Rebecca Catto

(Kent State University)

In the contemporary United States, Christianity has become associated in the public imagination with a particular form of right-wing politics. However, many American Christians are not aligned with Christian nationalism. Smith and Holmwood (2013) proposed the sociology of moderation, coming out of Smith's ethnographic research with moderate Republicans in Kansas, observing how they were being crowded out by more extreme perspectives. As Evans (2016) found with science and religion in America, the moderates evacuated debates in the public sphere as it became too vicious and hostile. Moderate voices appear unable to generate a successful counteracting discourse to extreme moral entrepreneurs (Griera et al, forthcoming).

The former Bishop of Exeter and Norwich Joseph Hall published a book in 1880 entitled 'Christian Moderation'. However, modern research on religious moderation has tended to focus upon Islam, and the call for a sociology of moderation yet to be fulfilled. Frequently religion is framed as a problem rather than resource in social scientific research. For example, Christianity's contribution to political polarization is well established. Less attention has been paid to the resources religion (in this case, Christianity) provides for depolarization (Cavendish, 2023).

The proposed paper draws upon pilot data gathered with churches in Ohio, USA, to examine the applicability and usefulness of a moderation framing. In a rapidly shifting context geopolitically, culturally, and economically, are these institutions across denominations sites for collaboration rather than division? They can function as sites of faith-based inclusion, yet such work is limited by structural factors including race and class.

The Quiet Revival: What happened, what's left, and what's next

Rob Barward-Symmons

(Bible Society)

The Quiet Revival research, undertaken by YouGov and published by Bible Society in April 2025, has become one of the most discussed and contentious pieces of sociology of religion research in recent times. Despite a modest launch and intentions, it's resonance within the church and beyond took it to national and even global mainstream coverage, triggering a wider conversation around youth religiosity and the role of Christianity in modern Britain – as well as strong criticism from some. The name of a research report was adopted to cover an apparent cultural and religious moment, seemingly supported by qualitative accounts and other data such as baptism rates and Bible sales. Then, in March 2026 – after more than a year of reassurances – YouGov informed Bible Society that a large proportion of respondents had been identified as fraudulent on a scale never previously made publicly known in a YouGov survey. Again, the study of religion in Britain was in the headlines. In this paper, we will provide a deeper insight into what occurred, what it tells us about the state of religious research and who controls the story of modern religion, and the urgent lessons that need to be learned for future quantitative studies of religion. As well as reflecting on the decisions made prior to publishing, the experiences of the research in the world, and the challenges of different quantitative approaches, we will propose essential safeguards and protocols to increase transparency and call for higher standards across the polling industry.

Parallel Session H, 15.30 – 17.00

Room C11 – Religion, Sexuality and Gender

Beyond purity culture: the laboured healing process and the durability of evangelical identity

Chrissie Thwaites

(University of Leeds)

This paper examines the long-term impacts of evangelical Christian purity culture on young women in Britain, focusing on how harm arising within this context can persist long after exit, and the often lengthy and laboured healing process that follows.

Purity culture is a movement within evangelical Christianity promoting sexual abstinence until heterosexual marriage, and has received most attention for its impact in the United States during its height in the 1990s and early 2000s. Despite its international impacts, the presence of purity culture in Britain has received little sustained attention. My PhD constituted the first substantial study to investigate evangelical purity culture in Britain, and this paper introduces that research.

Drawing on survey and interview data, this paper argues that the values and expectations associated with purity culture are not confined to personal belief or institutional settings, but become embodied as dispositions. Using Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus, I develop the concept of the 'habitus of purity culture' to explain how evangelical sexual ethics are internalised and carried forward in the long-term through the body, shaping women's relationships to their bodies, sexuality, partners, communities, intimacy and self-worth - even after religious exit. I also use this concept to explain the varied experiences of purity culture (including experiences of shame, anxiety, trauma and harm, but at the same time of resistance, re-evaluation and healing) and demonstrate how both harm and healing can coexist, even if uncomfortably so.

Performing Mary Magdalene: Embodiment, Feminist Theology, and Post-Exit Healing

Lindy Lovett

(University of Chester)

This paper examines burlesque performance as feminist theological praxis through an embodied portrayal of Mary Magdalene. Drawing on my experience of leaving the Jehovah's Witnesses, I explore how performance functioned as a site for my healing, reclamation, and resistance. In traditions that regulate women's bodies and spiritual authority, Mary Magdalene is often constrained by patriarchal interpretation. Through performance, I reclaim Magdalene as a complex, authoritative figure whose body becomes a source of theological meaning rather than moral suspicion. I argue that embodied performance offers an alternative mode of feminist theology grounded in lived experience, where trauma, memory, and belief are reworked somatically and creatively.

The Price of a Godly Life – Trans-religious Placements in Evangelical Foster Families as a Complex Challenge for Foster Children

Noemi Van Oordt

(University of Zurich)

Foster children are in a vulnerable position, requiring to adapt to a different family culture, grapple with questions of identity and cope with disruptions to their lives. Given the shortage of foster families, authorities are involved in placing children in Evangelical foster families, regardless of their religious beliefs. It is particularly challenging for foster children when their religious background and the problems faced by their families of origin are subject to the dichotomous worldview of Evangelical foster families.

The study examines Swiss Evangelical foster families by using grounded theory. It is based on data collected in the research project "Images of the foster family and their effect on the cooperation processes in foster care", funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation. In answering open questions about images of the foster family, Evangelicalism emerged as an important issue. Nine group discussions with foster care professionals and 19 individual interviews with members of Evangelical foster families form the dataset.

While the Evangelical way of life draws on resources like stability, reliability and community, trans-religious placements in Evangelical foster families increase the vulnerability of the foster child: The discrepancy between the religious practices and worldview of the foster family and the child's family of origin poses a challenge. Additionally, foster children must deal with this discrepancy in relation to mainstream society, e.g. at school. The study highlights the vulnerable subject perspective between a burdened background and the aim for a godly life, as a basis for a critical reflection on placement practices.

Room C12 – Feminist Epistemologies and Women's Experiences

Caste, Gender and Epistemic Marginalization: A Grounded Theory of Healing in Academic Space through an Intersectional Feminist Lens

Anamika Yadav, Dheeraj Yadav

(University of Allahabad)

The intersectionality of caste, gender, and epistemic marginalization in Indian academic space is discussed in this paper using the prism of intersectional feminism based on the theory of Judith Butler and Kimberle Crenshaw. Though, academic spaces are commonly considered as the arenas of knowledge creation, they also support the systems of caste and gender exclusion, thereby marginalizing some epistemologies and bodies. The grounded theory method is used in this study

to gain an insight into how marginalized caste and gender individuals perceive and navigate these spaces and how these experiences help develop their healing and resistance strategies. Drawing on qualitative data, such as interviews and narratives, the paper explores the compound structures of discrimination that are formed in the intersection of the caste and gender with the emphasis on how these identities interact with the epistemic norms that dominate academia. The paper focuses on the performative aspect of identity as constructed by Butler, and how the exclusion of non-dominant knowledges in the academia is not only a structural, but also an existential, experience. This paper, through the theory of intersectionality developed by Crenshaw, offers a theory of healing that transcends inclusion as it suggests that there should be a transformative change in the epistemic requirements of academic spaces. This paper will provide an idea of how academic spaces can be envisioned as a place of resistance and recovery by focusing on marginalized voices and experiences to appreciate the multiple knowledges and identities.

Messianic Healing

Irit Koskas

(Bar Ilan University)

I present findings from an ethnographic study exploring the concept of Redemption as a lived, embodied experience among Chabad Hasidic women in Israel, conducted over two years of prolonged national crisis, using in-depth interviews, participant observation, and studying Hasidic texts. I analyze how the wide-ranging Messianic ideal is experienced not merely as an abstract theological concept, but as an existential force operating through the female body, sexuality, motherhood, and daily practices.

The findings indicate that Redemption functions as an interpretive framework that organizes experiences of anxiety, threat, and uncertainty into a sense of mission, value, and moral order. Women describe themselves as "creatures of redemption" (*hayot ge'ulah*) and portray their bodies as sacred spaces where "labors of redemption", childbirth, joy, and Torah study and dissemination are performed – perceived not as private acts but actions of cosmic *tikkun* (mending) and historical continuity.

The study proposes understanding "redemptive consciousness" as a cultural healing mechanism: a system of meaning that enables the processing of fear and trauma through Messianic language. This language imbues bodily experience with significance and converts a sense of powerlessness into one of responsibility and agency. Rather than viewing redemption as an escape from reality, this paper demonstrates how Messianic consciousness functions as an embodied form of life that generates resilience and regulates emotional and physical experiences amidst crisis and pain. The research contributes to the sociology of religion by illustrating how religious ideals are manifested in the female body to serve as a mechanism for healing and hope.

‘I now understand there’s certain things you’re not allowed to talk about’: How women navigate spiritual abuse disclosure in independent evangelical churches

Lensa Woodcock

(University of Chester)

This paper draws on feminist qualitative interviews with 21 women sharing their experiences of spiritual abuse (SA) disclosure and non-disclosure in independent evangelical churches in the UK. Oakley et al (2024) define SA as ‘emotional and psychological abuse characterised by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour in a religious context or with a religious rationale’ (p. 2). By contrast, Gray et al’s (2021) definition, developed through their work on spiritual abuse against Native American elder communities, highlights SA as systemic and spiritual, negatively impacting on a person’s spiritual practice and subjective experience of the sacred.

In this paper, firstly, I explore the range of ways of participants understand SA. Many participants note the negative impact of SA on their mental and physical health and well-being, whilst also sharing how the spiritual and systemic nature of abuse contributes to feelings of alienation from themselves and their communities, and creates barriers to engaging with spirituality, sacred spaces, practices and texts. Secondly, I focus on disclosure to capture participants’ experiences of engaging in formal and informal processes of confiding, reporting, and sharing with others. Finally, drawing on Sorensen and Snow’s model (1991) of child sex abuse disclosure as processual and tentative, I suggest for the women in this study, SA disclosure emerges as tentative and iterative. I identify shifting boundaries across experiences of disclosure and non-disclosure that challenge dichotomous understandings, and reveals a costly, iterative, and carefully navigated process.

Room C12 – Author Meets Critic

Spirits of Extraction: Christianity, Settler Colonialism and the Geology of Race

Claire Blencowe, Renasha Khan

(University of Warwick)

Spirits of Extraction revisits the troubling history of socially-reformist, ostensibly anti-racist, Christianity and its role in the expansion of the extractive industries, British imperialism, and settler colonialism. The book explores key moments in the history of the evangelical Methodist movement. Colonial fears, and the attempt to ‘civilise savages’, were crucial to the movement’s foundation in eighteenth-century industrialising Bristol, England. Through the culture of the Cornish mining diaspora of the nineteenth century, Methodism enmeshed with all the complexity of race and labour-structures of the British empire facilitating racialised exploitation and helping to birth white labourism. At the same time, in Anishinaabewaki/Upper Canada/Ontario, Methodist missionaries laid the foundation of abusive education and racialised ideas of redemption that enable the advance of mining industry. Through these histories of our present, the book theorises the relation of religion

and education to racism, modernity, biopower, extractivism, and the geology of race. A key thread in the book that speaks to the 'harms and healing' conference theme, is the abusive pedagogy that was forged by John Wesley and others in 18th Century Bristol – wherein relentless work, sexualised shaming, and a life of suffering were claimed as elements of a 'truly Christian education'. Later, in the wake of the abolition of slavery, this abusive pedagogy helped to inscribe a new humanitarian metaphysics of race that would characterise dispossession, genocide and the extraction of minerals as the healing work of exorcism and redemption. The evangelical extractivist-exorcist resonance machine continues to help legitimise dispossession and quasi-deify the mining industry.

Room C17 – Slavery, Forced Marriage and Human Trafficking

Encountering slavery-linked memorials in the Church[es] of England

Bethany Elce

(University of Lincoln)

This paper is drawn from a project which uses ethnographic methods to examine what it looks like for the Church of England (CofE) to reckon with its colonial pasts, questioning whether their efforts at reckoning can help create a more racially just present and future. In recent years calls for the CofE to address its history of involvement with transatlantic chattel slavery have grown louder and more persistent. In response, at the national level, the CofE has announced a project of reparatory justice which responds to findings of its financial investment in the trade in enslaved Africans. At the local level increasing numbers of churches and cathedrals have been taking stock of their monuments with links to chattel slavery with some seeking, and others achieving, removal of these items from church buildings.

In this paper I think about the nature of different types of encounter with slavery-linked memorials in a church building. Rahul Rao (2024) writes that sculptures in public spaces are “lively” objects that demand our attention by acting as proxies for the individual enslaver or colonizer being celebrated. When encounters with lively objects like these trigger trauma in some, is this racialized harm being taken seriously by the CofE? How are Church leaders currently encountering and responding to what is often called contested heritage? In this paper I argue there is potential for slavery-linked memorials to act as portals into a more embodied understanding of the CofE's responsibility to respond to calls for reparations for African chattel slavery.

Measuring and Understanding Faith-Based Responses to Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

Mariana Crespi De Valldaura

(The Rights Lab (University of Nottingham))

Faith-based organisations and religious actors are significantly involved in contemporary global anti-slavery and anti-trafficking efforts, constituting a substantial proportion of the sector. However, research examining their distinctive roles and the underlying drivers that shape their orientations, actions, and outcomes remains limited. Moreover, very little scholarship has explored faith-based responses beyond Christianity. Moving beyond a focus on roles and activities, this study investigates the beliefs, worldviews, and motivations that inform such engagement.

Adopting a global and multi-faith approach, this paper offers an in-depth analysis of faith-based actors' motivations, theological orientations, and operational priorities, identifying both commonalities and divergences across faith traditions in their approaches to modern slavery and human trafficking. Drawing on early results from an in-progress, large-scale global multi-faith survey (with an expected final sample of c.20,000 respondents) and complementary qualitative analysis of academic and grey literature, the paper discusses empirical and conceptual insights into the scope, motivations, theological foundations, and theories of change underpinning faith-based responses to modern slavery and human trafficking. In doing so, it advances both scholarly and practice-oriented knowledge on religious anti-slavery action.

This paper forms part of a larger Templeton-funded research project examining the pro-social contributions of faith to anti-slavery and anti-trafficking work.

Between Covenant and Contract: An Analysis of the Multilateral Relationship between Forced Marriage, Religion, and Law

Amelia Watkins-Smith

(Rights Lab, University of Nottingham)

Child, early, and forced marriage continue to thrive in our global society, with estimates suggesting that 22 million people were living in situations of forced marriage on any given day in 2021. Research regarding forced marriage has grown in recent years and includes several empirical studies that consider the role of either religion or the law. This paper seeks to bring these two fields of enquiry together.

I argue that the institution of marriage holds a unique space between the legal and religious spheres of society as both a legally-binding contract and – for many – a holy covenant. I situate forced marriage within this intersection and posit that to better understand this social problem, we must examine the multilateral relationship between forced marriage, religion, and law.

This paper will explore these dynamics by drawing on a review of existing literature, analysis of a new religion and forced marriage database, and an evaluation of global domestic legislation

concerning forced marriage (comprising of over 550 domestic statutes). I will present initial findings to argue that while forced marriage is the result of a range of intersectional factors; religion, the law, and the relationship between them, play a fundamental role in both the perpetuation of and protection from these human rights violations.

This work has implications for Sustainable Development Goal 5.3 which asks UN member states to 'eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early, and forced marriage'.

END OF SESSIONS

MAP AND PARKING PERMIT ON NEXT PAGE