BASR bulletin

British Association for the Study of Religions

141: November 2022

contents

WWW.BASR.AC.UK

ABOUT THE BASR

The British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR) was founded in 1954. It is a member association of the International Association for the History of Religions (founded 1950) and of the European Association for the Study of Religions (founded 2001). The object of BASR is to promote the academic study of religion/s, understood as the historical, social, theoretical, critical and comparative study of religion/s through the interdisciplinary collaboration of all scholars whose research is defined in this way. BASR is not a forum for confessional, apologetic, or similar concerns. BASR pursues its aims principally through an annual conference and general meeting, a regular Bulletin, and a Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions. Membership of BASR is open to all scholars normally resident in the United Kingdom.

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COMMITTEE

editorial

Welcome to the November issue of the BASR Bulletin. The Executive Committee continue to work hard for the membership, and this issue contains some exciting updates and news.

The major announcement is confirmation of details for the 2023 conference. We're delighted to be hosted by Clare College, Cambridge from the 11th to 13th of September, which is exactly twenty-two years since we were last at the university. The event will be run in partnership with the Centre for the Critical Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements (CenSAMM) and the conference theme will be ***Environmental Endings and Religious Futures***. Cambridge is a very expensive city, so the BASR Exec, the Trustees of CenSAMM and the Faculty of Divinity have worked together to use our budgets to subsidise costs for all attendees, alongside an increased in bursary awards for PGRs and ECRs. Full booking details will be released in 2023, but this collaborative work will bring the cost to attendees down within the price-range charged for other recent conferences. We are particularly grateful to Alastair Lockhart and James Crossley for their work with the Trustees, and Joe Webster for his work with the Faculty, alongside his other wider work on the conference. Please see the full announcement later in this issue for more details.

As I noted at the AGM, conferences are now significantly more difficult and expensive to run than they were even just a few years ago. The rise in commercialism within the HE sector, focused on profits rather than services, has increased costs significantly and, with staff teams being stretched more thinly than at any time most of us have known, person-power to run the logistics is also at a premium. Marketing to other external organisations by University commercial services departments seeking to fill their order books also means dates are far more difficult to book with certainty. Our traditional slot of the first week in September is becoming increasingly difficult to arrange. With this in mind, the Exec are now working on a two-year cycle of conference planning and are already in the final stages of discussion before formal agreement with the proposed host institution for 2024. This has put even more workload upon members of the Exec team, and I repeat my call at the AGM for members to ***please*** come forward with offers to host conferences. In the last ten years or so, only two or three conferences have ***not*** been held at the institutions of Exec members. This isn't sustainable, and the BASR needs your support going forwards.

Our promise to engage as fully as possible with diversity in all its forms continues to be implemented. Since the last issue, the consultation questionnaire has been sent out, and responses have been received. This is helpful, especially as we can now engage in a wider conversation with interested members, but we are still very keen for more responses, particularly from scholars who identify as belonging to traditionally excluded groups. In my time on the committee (goodness, it's twelve years now…) we have had diverse representation with regard to age, gender, sexuality, religion, disability, nationality and career-stage. We should be proud of this, but there are always ways to improve, and that is our sincere aim.

We also committed to providing greater support for PG initiatives, and we are pleased to have supported Hina Khalid (University of Cambridge) and colleagues with their two-day post-graduate symposium entitled '***Conversations: Searching for the Sacred in South Asia***', by way of travel grants. We actively seek opportunities to support all members, not just PGs, and have a budget set aside. Please ask for financial support for your events and initiatives – we are likely to say 'yes'!

In addition to AGM paperwork, the issue is full of conference reports, symposium updates and our Teaching and Learning article from Joe Webster. We also include a proposal from Paul-Francois Tremlett regarding de-carbonisation. We welcome this particularly timely discussion as we navigate ways of working to meet our charitable aims in ways less impactful on our planet.

Stephen Gregg, BASR President

news, etc

2023 BASR TEACHING AND LEARNING FELLOWSHIP

Each year, the BASR Exec awards a single Teaching and Learning Fellowship to a colleague in recognition of their contribution to the student learning experience in the study of religions. This Fellowship includes an award of £300 plus a funded place at the BASR Annual Conference. The expectation of the person receiving this Fellowship is to write a short piece reflecting on current issues and experiences of teaching Religious Studies in HE for the BASR Bulletin and help the Teaching and Learning Rep on the BASR Exec, Steffi Sinclair, organise the teaching and learning panel for the 2024 BASR conference. However, there is a lot of flexibility in how this could be approached.

If you would like to be considered for the 2023 BASR Teaching and Learning Fellowship or would like to nominate a colleague (or have any questions about this Fellowship), please get in touch with Steffi at stefanie.sinclair@open.ac.uk. Your application will need to be supported by a brief statement that outlines the contribution the nominee has made to the student learning experience in the study of religions in HE with reference to any of the following four themes:

- Influencing and inspiring students' learning;
- Influencing and inspiring colleagues' teaching;
- Innovation and development of practice;
- Personal reflection on practice.

This statement can be provided either by the applicant themselves or by a colleague supporting the application. The deadline for nominations/ applications is the 1st of June 2023. We welcome applications from/ nominations for colleagues at all stages of their careers.

GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

News Items	Up to 150 words
Conference Reports	500-1500 words
Conference Announcements	Not more than a single page
Book Reviews	700-1000 words
Features	Around 1000 words
Members' Recent Publications	Maximum 5 items

PLEASE SEND MATERIAL FOR INCLUSION TO tw36@soas.ac.uk
DEADLINE FOR THE MAY 2023 ISSUE IS 30 APRIL 2023

BASR ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2023:

ENVIRONMENTAL ENDINGS AND RELIGIOUS FUTURES

In collaboration with CenSAMM
Clare College, Cambridge
11 – 13 September

Religions have long offered frameworks of meaning for concepts of world ending. Amid the contemporary social and political importance of climate change and fears about environmental degradation, ideas of world ending and widespread cataclysm have become pressing in both religious and secular contexts. Equally, as apocalyptic discourses proliferate, so too do human imaginations of the future, with optimistic and pessimistic narratives of the post-apocalyptic world jostling for attention. Reflecting on these overlapping strands, the theme of this year's annual conference is "Environmental Endings and Religious Futures."

Held in collaboration with the Centre for the Critical Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements (CenSAMM), BASR 2023 will be inviting submissions reflecting on how religion interacts with narratives of environmental decline, catastrophe, hope, and renewal. We also invite submissions reflecting on the connections and tensions between religious practice, environmental activism, and climate justice (as well as passivity and injustice). In addition, we welcome critical and methodological studies of the ways Religious Studies scholars might seek to understand and evaluate the complex ways that religious beliefs and practices interact with contemporary concerns about imminent environmental cataclysm.

Topics might include, but are not limited to:

- Method and theory in the study of contemporary apocalyptic discourse
- Ethnography as an approach to environmental movements and religious movements
- Religious themes in the politics of environmentalism
- Quietism and passivism in the face of the Apocalypse
- Rethinking ritual in the context of climate change
- Religion, climate crisis, and hope: human imaginations of good and bad endings
- Religion, environment, and gender
- A human-led apocalypse? Religion during the Anthropocene
- Stewardship, extractivism, and the spirit of capitalism
- Religion, environment, racism, and privilege
- Religion, climate activism, and climate change denial
- Environmental endings and indigenous religion
- Lived religion in a dying environment
- Environmental healing and alternative religious futures
- Religion and environmental policy
- Understanding "renewal": millennial, environmental, technological
- Responses to the climate crisis within New Religious Movements
- Religion and climate injustice in the Global South

As usual, papers unrelated to the conference theme that are related to the discipline of religious studies will also be considered.

A call for papers with details for submission will be issued in due course.

BASR ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – 16.00-17.30 - 31/08/22
THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

1. Welcome

2. Apologies - Steve Sutcliffe; Hugh Goddard, Wendy Dossett, James Cox, Dawn Llewellyn; Peggy Morgan, Molly Kady, Bettina Schmidt.

3. Minutes of the previous AGM.

3.a. No matters arising.

4. President's Report (Stephen Gregg) – The late conference change of venue involved a lot of work. Thanks to John Maiden and the Open University team, and particularly Chris, for doing this. This led to the suspension of the proposed May online event. Plans are underway for next May – a two panel event, one on the BASR History Project and one on another theme, and BASR are looking for a volunteer to help organise it. There are also plans to tidy up the BASR archive at the Bodleian.

Departments being threatened: we're aware of six which we've supported. The latest was Wolverhampton – all religion and philosophy was closed-down without consultation. SO and colleagues in TRS-UK and SST wrote letters of support. Another challenge is the diminishing of departments – roles are not replaced after retirements, etc. We need to think how we can respond to this and position ourselves. The recent benchmarking activity highlights this issue. SG was in the minority of 2 or 3 out of 16 for religious studies, outnumbered by theology, biblical studies and vocational colleges. We need to be pragmatic and be part of a conversation or brand we may not be happy with.

The REF results meeting: Positives were the impact case studies. However, there was no differential in the metrics between large and small departments. The league table was skewered against small departments. Many scholars of religion were simply not entered. Others went into Area Studies.

Our attempt to further EDI: a statement of intent will be provided before Christmas. A questionnaire was sent out via the BASR list, thanks to MP and TW, and needs more members to respond. We have diversity in many aspects and want to do better. We also plan to increase support for ECR and PGRs. Full and partial bursaries were awarded for this conference. We had also supported a postgraduate symposium at Cambridge. Please ask for money to support scholarly activities.
Welcome to Aled Thomas as the new Web Officer and we thank Angela Puca heartily for her work.

5. Secretary's Report (Suzanne Owen) – I attended the British Academy meeting on 28 April 2022. It focussed on two things: the REF and support for ECRs. In the REF discussion, I mentioned how our subject area is decreasing in HE with often only a couple of staff having to put together a UoA submission or be included within another unit, especially as a growing number of BASR members are not in TRS depts or are on sessional contracts excluding them from the REF. Someone from literature echoed my fear with the closure of humanities depts. One in philosophy said he'd like to see the impact of small subjects like religion highlighted by the BA. Many others mentioned concern about the lack of visibility of their subject area and how institutions punish small depts no matter how productive they are. In the ECR discussion, they asked about how they can benefit ECRs. Several attendees said the main issue is the postdoc stage as there are few jobs. The BA are developing an ECR Network, so watch this space.

I also attended the Arts and Humanities Alliance (AHA) meeting on 25 May 2022. There was some REF discussion alongside the closure of departments. There was concern that universities will receive QR funding from the REF even when those units would no longer be there.

I became an admin for the BASR Facebook group and receive many requests to join from people who have little or no connection to the BASR. After a discussion of the options among committee members, we may restrict the Facebook group membership to BASR members.

6. Treasurer's Report (Chris Cotter). There's a healthy financial picture in the accounts. We've had two years of no conference expenses. This year we have bursaries and travel expenses. The high level of subs last year was largely from being part of the online conference registration, compared with this year. RSP hadn't asked for the contributions from BASR two years running so will be back paid. Society membership fee has gone up to TRS-UK and EASR as our membership has increased. Liam Sutherland and Marion Bowman gave 1st and 2nd approval of the accounts. This is CC's 7th year as Treasurer. At end of his 3rd term (in two years' time) he would like to hand it on.

7. Other Reports

7.a. JBASR (Suzanne Owen and Mel Prideaux) – There have been some technical issues with the website, which we are addressing. The Teaching and Learning edition of JBASR will be out soon. Then SO will hand-over JBASR to MP as coordinating editor. A call for the Open University edition will follow.

7.b. BASR Bulletin (Theo Wildcroft) – TW asks members to read it and contribute to it. There are two editions a year. More conference reports welcome, statements of the field, reviews of books, etc.

7.c. Social Media and Website (Aled Thomas) – Regarding the rethinking of Facebook for members, there is an opportunity to have conversations there. AT is live-Tweeting the conference.

7.d. Teaching and Learning (Steffi Sinclair) – Last year's recipient of the fellowship went to JW, with his panel on tomorrow. It is good to see lots of TL panels. We had one nomination this time – SG. A statement from nominator Steve Jacobs was read out. SG says pedagogy hs been at the heart of everything he does – in publications, too. He highlights the value of small-scale ethnography (rather than 'fieldtrips'). SS says we are accepting nominations for next year and want to encourage nominations of junior colleagues. It highlights the value BASR puts on TL.

8. BASR Conference 2023 – SG is hoping to make an announcement soon. Increasingly difficult to organise – less time, less institutional support, the commercialisation of universities. We seek volunteers for a future conference. We are already planning for 2023 and 2024.

9. Any Other Business

9.a. Proposal on decarbonising research (Paul Tremlett) – PT suggests we carbon audit BASR activities, including bursary recipients' travel, catering at conference. We should develop a BASR strategy. TW suggests we offer bursaries that cover travel based on this, to help people with lower income. SG says the committee are committed to this. We can make an immediate change to the ethics guidelines and conference catering. David Robertson – the biggest carbon impact is the conference, though virtual is not a direct equivalent. We can continue to have hybrid options. SG says all BASR committee meetings are online now. The May event will be online. There was discussion about different shapes of conferences, e.g. a shorter in-person and a follow-on online, and the need to bring in other organisations. It is less effective doing this in isolation. Douglas Davies – collaborations are more important than ever. Include a 'friendship footprint' to provide support for people. The question is how to make right compromises.

10. Date, time and location of next AGM – Cambridge, September 2023. Further details tbc.

Registered Charity No: 801567

BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS
ACCOUNTS as at 15 AUGUST 2022

Inland Revenue Ref: XN79047

	Notes	2021-22	2020-21		Notes	2021-22	2020-21
Balance at 16 August 2021		22964	19026				
RECEIPTS				**PAYMENTS**			
Subscriptions	i	**4708**	**5938**	Printing & Postage Bulletin		**0**	**0**
Bank Interest		**7**	**1**	RSP	ii	**0**	**0**
				Committee Expenses	iii	**0**	**0**
				Society Subs	iv	**-1209**	**-766**
				BA Report		**0**	**-480**
				Insurance		**-418**	**-418**
				Journal		**-203**	**-398**
				Cambridge Conference	v	**-250**	**0**
				Teaching Fellowship		**-300**	**-300**
				Website		**-115**	**-103**
2021 Conference Receipts		**0**	**465**	2021 Conference Expenses		**0**	**0**
2022 Conference Receipts		**40**	**0**	2022 Conference Receipts	vi	**-100**	**0**
Total		**4755**	**6404**	Total		**-2596**	**-2466**
Balance at 15 August 2022		**25123**	**22964**				

BALANCE SHEET as at 15 August 2022

Cash Funds: Bank Accounts		
Lloyds Current	9022	8714
CAF Gold	10978	10971
PayPal	5099	3253
Petty Cash	25	25
Total	25123	22964

FINANCIAL SUMMARY UP TO 15 AUGUST 2022

Balance as at 16th August 2021			**Conference 2022**	
Total Receipts		4755	Total Receipts	40
Total Payments		-2596	Total Payments	-100
Net Receipts/Payments	vii	**2160**		
Balance as at 15th August 2022		**25123**	Deficit/Surplus	**-60**

NOTES TO ACCOUNTS

i We've only had 7 new members join this year, but a few more are waiting. Last year we had 72 new members (40-50 conf. related). Quite a few of these will have defaulted, and last year also included chased payments. We currently have 208 paying members, and 13 life members. 2020/21 we had 251 paying members.

ii As with last year, RSP forgot to ask for sponsorship this year, and Treasurer forgot to pay.

iii No travel to any committee or BASR-related meetings/conferences.

iv Higher subs for EASR and IAHR due to our higher membership. Also £250 for TRS-UK (new)

v Committee approached by Vishal Sangu (BASR Member) to provide financial support for symposium.

vi Bursary paid out

vii This was a fairly typical year, with high income explained by negligible expenses due to Covid-19 and large increase in membership subscriptions. Hopefully some of this can be retained.

Apologies for not preparing a narrative report, but hopefully the above suffices. We're doing well! Dr C. Cotter

De-Carbonizing Research on Religions

Paul-François Tremlett

The Covid pandemic forced us all to re-evaluate the way we work. This meant, for many of us, working from home rather than in our offices, and interacting with colleagues and students primarily online. At the Open University it also precipitated a shift in the authorisation processes for research with human subjects. During the height of the pandemic, research proposals had to include measures to mitigate against transmission of the virus, such as holding workshops or conferences remotely and/or conducting research with human subjects in online, rather than face-to-face settings. I was awarded research funds on this basis to interview activists in Filipino civil society organisations in Europe and the UK, and part of the award included training in online research methodologies.

As the worst of the pandemic recedes, those requirements have been discontinued and many of us are now making the most of opportunities to travel to conferences and to re-connect with friends and colleagues, as well as return to our old ways of researching. However, what we learned during the pandemic about remote working needs to inform radical changes in our research practice to enable us to address the threats of climate change. These changes need to be made at a variety of scales, including international and national research councils, universities, and learned societies such as the BASR, and they need to be made quickly. We do not have time for half measures.

Recently, I travelled to Belfast for the Critical Research on Religion conference. I made a decision not to fly, which meant travelling up to Liverpool from Oxfordshire by train and taking the ferry on to Belfast. The journey was slower and more expensive than flying but, in terms of its carbon footprint, was made at far less cost to the environment. Calculating the carbon footprint of our research and activities such as conference attendance needs to become embedded into our everyday thinking and planning and, if one does take the decision to fly to a particular conference, one should not do so without off-setting at least some of the carbon accrued and even then, only within a wider, carbon literate travel strategy, that limits the number of flights typically to one per year, for work purposes.

As a body that organises an annual conference, funds research student attendance at conferences and funds research projects, the BASR must at the earliest opportunity consider the following actions:

- to urgently revise BASR research ethics guidance to provide guidance on carbon-neutral research strategies;
- to urgently revise BASR conference and event planning processes to include a carbon audit of travel, catering and other elements to minimise the carbon footprint of these activities;
- to urgently revise BASR processes for funding awards to include a carbon audit, to ensure recipients of awards minimise the carbon footprint of their activities;
- to work urgently with TRS-UK, Socrel and other learned societies to develop a shared strategy to insist on the importance of taking steps to minimise the carbon-footprint of research and teaching on religions to our universities and funding councils.

By decarbonising our research on religions we will be contributing to the mitigation of the climate crisis. We need to do so quickly and publicly.

This proposal was put to the BASR AGM 31/08/22 at its recent annual conference.

Broken Glass and the Feline Anal Gland: Teaching Social Anthropology to TRS Students

Joseph Webster

What does it look like to teach Social Anthropology to Theology and Religious Studies students? More specifically, what does good research-led teaching in the Anthropology of Religion look like if the audience sitting in front of you – all first year TRS undergrads – have signed up for your module on 'Modern Religion' without really knowing what Anthropology is? More specifically still, what does good research-led teaching in the Anthropology of Religion look like if that same TRS audience carries with them into the lecture hall a fixed and very specific (but largely erroneous) definition of what 'counts' as religious?

These are the questions I've been forced to consider over the last few years since taking up a lectureship in 'The Study of Religion' within the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Cambridge. Having previously inhabited something of an anthropological silo, it's been an odd – but pedagogically stimulating – position to find myself in. Studying Social Anthropology at undergrad, Masters, PhD, and Post-doctoral level, it's fair to say that I've been fully indoctrinated into the anthropological canon, especially in its British empiricist guise, starting with Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, before moving to Evans Pritchard, Raymond Firth, Edmund Leach, Mary Douglas, Edith and Victor Turner, Rodney Needham, and Marilyn Strathern, among others.

Having emerged from this decade-long intellectual rite of passage, in 2013 I took up my first lectureship in Anthropology at Queen's University Belfast, and unashamedly set about the task of imparting this self-same canon to the next generation. In doing so, the aim was always to open students up to anthropology's own Maussian "total social fact", namely that the real world doesn't operate in accordance with (nor can it be accurately described by) the taken for granted essentialisms of the modern, Protestant, patriarchal, West. Undergirded by an unshakable commitment to cultural relativism, comparative ethnography was deployed (in the words of one colleague) as a kind of analytical "stun gun", wielded to shock Anthropology Freshers out of cherished ethnocentricities by confronting them with the reality of alterity.

When I was a Fresher, it went something like this. Do you think the moment of biological death occurs quickly, even in an instant? Zap. You're wrong; the Sa'dan Toraja live in houses alongside the decomposing bodies of their kin ***for years***. They feed them, and wash them, and regard the stench of their rotting flesh to be proof of life, as the new voice of the (still present) loved one. Do you think that believing in witches is irrational? Zap. You're wrong; the Azande have arranged their entire society around a highly ordered system of witchcraft accusation and verification achieved by administering poison oracles to chickens. Do you think that it's unusual, perhaps even impossible, for cisgender males to become pregnant? Zap. You're wrong; Hua men routinely run the risk of experiencing unwanted pregnancies whenever they eat possum meat. And on it went, across dozens of case studies, all sharing the same take-home message. You've unthinkingly assumed for your whole life that the world is governed by rules A, B, and C, but… zap, zap, zap, you're wrong! For communities in

Indonesia, Sudan, Papua New Guinea, or any number of other places, everyday life is governed by ***profoundly*** different rules, and lived in ***profoundly*** different ways. It's time to face reality: your universalisms are not universal at all – they are, in fact, ***utterly parochial***.

For me and the vast majority of my fellow students who came to university having made the deliberate choice to study Anthropology, this pedagogical method of the ethnographic stun gun was utterly captivating. What's more, within days of being subject to the disorientating shock and awe of comparative ethnography, as neophyte Anthropology students, we found ourselves newly able to take up this analytical mode ***on our own terms*** by zapping into relativist submission whatever culturally hegemonic norm seemed to oppress us most, be it neoliberal capitalism, heteronormativity, or something else entirely.

Having taught a somewhat milder version of this comparative ethnography approach to my own TRS students for several years now (less "stun gun", more "mix tape"?), I've found that the learning curve is generally a bit steeper, and the intellectual resistance usually a bit a greater, than I typically encountered among my previous cohorts of Anthropology students. Of course, neither of these reactions should be seen as negative, since Anthropology is not immune to the relativizing 'ways and means' of its own epistemology. Indeed, the intentional analytical disorientation of comparative ethnography can (and should!) be turned on the cherished assumptions of Anthropology too, and just as directly as it is applied to its interlocutors in the field. But more on this below.

For most of my TRS students, the cultural relativism of the Anthropology of Religion appears to present particular challenges, especially when considering what 'counts' as religious. When Hilary Pilkington asked an English Defense League activist what his religious affiliation was, why did he answer with the words ***"English. That's my religion"***, and what might it mean to take his answer seriously, in its own terms? Equally, what might we learn from a Swedish Charismatic Christian's suggestion that using a credit card to buy an otherwise prohibitively expensive business suit can bring about God-ordained prosperity? And why might it be entirely reasonable for Traveller-Gypsy spirituality to be taken up with a deep loathing of housecats? The answer – that religion might have ***very little*** to do with belief and ***everything*** to do with passports, money, and the feline anal gland – has been a challenge for some of my TRS students to even countenance, let alone 'take seriously'.

The reasons for this hesitation are reasonable enough, and have to do with the inherent logocentrism of TRS as a subject area, especially (but not exclusively) as it is taught in schools. Many TRS students, as a result, enter the lecture hall on day one of their university career already primed to assume that the task of understanding religion begins (and possibly even ends) with understanding scripture. Conversely, when I attempt to demonstrate to my students that understanding religion must begin (and might even end) with understanding human embodied experience as rooted in everyday ritual, I watch as their brows furrow in confusion and annoyance. In these moments, the best antidote I know is not to reenact ***Dead Poets Society*** by asking students to stand on their desks (as tempting as that may be), but instead to confront them with ethnographic film, that is, with images from different cultures, which, at first glance, might as well be from different worlds.

Furrowed brows quickly turn to wide-eyed wonder as students watch ***Dervishes of Kurdistan*** as Qadiri ecstatics eat broken glass and skewer their faces without seeming to come to any harm. By turning to the (ostensibly) more familiar Christian tradition, a similar reaction of wonderment is elicited as, in ***Holy Ghost People***, students watch Pentecostal worshippers drape writhing venomous Copperheads around their necks as they dance to tambourines in rural Appalachia. Even the very logocentrism of the Christian scriptures comes to be questioned, as, in ***Salesman***, students follow four door-to-door hawkers as they attempt to sell large, expensive Bibles in low-income Boston neighborhoods, primarily by marketing them not as books to be read, but as aspirational ornaments and family heirlooms to be displayed in glass cabinets.

Such films, while certainly not a replacement for ethnographic fieldwork, still seems capable of opening up a (surprisingly panoramic) window onto the daily religious practices of others, and does so in a way that powerfully circumvents the tendency to conflate religion with holy writ. Encouraging students to treat each viewing as an exercise in 'virtual fieldwork', as they sit in the dark, ideally quite close to the screen, they are told to take fieldnotes, not just on what they see and hear, but on what they can 'smell', 'taste', and 'touch' – as if they were a live, in-person participant observer, watching and recording as the skewer bloodlessly punctures the cheek, as the copperhead hisses, as the doorbell is rung. Of course, at this moment, as we watch and scribble, the written word stubbornly reasserts itself, albeit in a non-inspired form, and as a means to an end, rather than as an end in itself.

Regardless, if we ***were*** to attempt to take a leaf out of John Keating's book of poetic pedagogy, it would simply be to assert the need to remind ourselves "that we must constantly look at things in a different way". When it comes to teaching Social Anthropology to TRS students, the irony here seems two-fold. First, Social Anthropology has a largely undisputed written canon, generally starting in 1922 with ***Argonauts of the Western Pacific*** and ***The Andaman Islanders***, meaning that the discipline is hardly free of its own holy writ. Second, with the anthropological imperative to "constantly look at things in a different way" should come a recognition that comparative ethnography, and its attendant aversion to belief-centric and scripture-centric understandings of religion, is itself a habituated (and therefore potentially static) way of looking at things. As such, for the Anthropology of Religion to see things differently, it might occasionally need to get off its desk, and stand on the floor – for example, it might need to stop obsessing about serpent-handling, and actually open the Bible to see what's inside, without limiting any search to Mark 16.18.

Clearly, looking at things "in a different way" means something different to TRS students than it does to many Anthropology students. For the theologically inclined, seeing religion differently means seeing it outside of the confines of scripture, via credit cards, housecats, face skewers, and so on. And for the anthropologically inclined, seeing religion differently might mean taking a deep dive into the unashamedly logocentric doctrines of pre-millennial dispensationalism, as my current ethnographic research among Jehovah's Witnesses has required. Crucially, if my aim is to provide my TRS students with really good research-led teaching in the Anthropology of Religion, then this might require that my students and I switch places, by my 'standing on the floor' as I puzzle over the meaning of Revelation 14.1 while simultaneously encouraging my students to 'stand on their desks' as they marvel at the fact that some humans find real joy in the religious experience of eating broken glass. That we can help ***each other*** to do this – by pointing out each other's blind spots and challenging each other's assumptions – will surely make the project all the more exciting.

Image credits:

BASR conference photos - David Robertson

Cover image, page 9, 24- Krimulda Evangelical Lutheran Church, near Sigulda, Latvia, 2022, Marion Bowman

BASR ANNUAL CONFERENCE, 30 AUGUST - 1ST SEPTEMBER 2022, OPEN UNIVERSITY, MILTON KEYNES

This year's BASR conference was co-sponsored by INFORM and was the society's first in-person conference for three years. The panels at this conference were split into three streams, two of which were purely in person and a third stream made up of online papers.

On the morning of Tuesday 30th, the panel on 'Fieldwork' reflected on some emerging areas of ethnographic research and its challenges. This included a reflection on 'hardly researched communities' such as British Travellers, what to do when research projects are ultimately unviable (Mel Prideaux) as well as changing death rituals in Britain; including the cutting-edge phenomenon of 'water cremation' or alkaline hydrolysis (Douglas Davies). It was also encouraging to be presented with thorough empirical research on the interfaith movement which analysed the gender imbalance between the roles of men and women within interfaith circles (Suzanne Vernon-Yorke).

The hybrid 'Feminism and Gender' panel included both in person and online papers. Eleanor Tiplady Higgs' paper explored the intersections between feminism and Christianity in African Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) discourse, offering a fascinating exposition of the implications of this debate for both African YWCAs and within the World YWCA. This was followed by an exploration of masculinity amongst British Wiccans via Wicca's male deity, the Horned God, presented by Shai Feraro. Lastly, Chrissie Thwaites rounded off the panel with an insightful and engaging paper introducing her PhD research examining British women's experiences of purity culture. Thwaites' paper unpacked several hard-hitting themes, including the concept of religious trauma, the use of shame as method of control, and the dissonance that can arise between teaching and belief.

Later in the afternoon the 'Religion and Public Engagement' session focused on different ways the public have engaged with religion or vice versa. These talks focused on Muslim religious leaders and their engagement with science (Saleema Burney), touching upon the use of online spaces; the public and private practice in a British Ashram (Stephen Gregg), where the relationship with the public for this monastic community is strenuous; bringing forward the importance of the ethnography of trust, and the focus of Muslim and Jewish responses to welcoming newcomers (refugees), where this was seen as empowering by the communities (Katya Braginskaia).

The 'Scholarly Positioning' panel began with Theo Wildcroft who offered an exploration of the conflict between the public's interest in yoga, the precariat economics of the yoga teaching industry, and the ongoing challenges faced by Yoga Studies within the current Higher Education setting. Next Eileen Barker drew on her extensive research of new religious movements, in order to challenge the ideal of value free ethnographic research and to highlight the benefits of 'getting our hands dirty'. The panel ended with George Chryssides' recognition of the multitude of stakeholders that academics encounter (from readers to grant-awarding bodies and from publishers to religious communities) and as a result, the need for an awareness of the different approaches required and potential pitfalls. He ended with the suggestion that, perhaps, the motivation behind our work should be shifting towards public interest instead of academic impact.

The panel on 'Lived Religion' offered case studies on the ways in which religious communities have adapted to changing social conditions. This included the ways in which specific religious communities in the USA and Indonesia respon-

ded to the pandemic (Hesron H. Sihombing), the ritual use of online spaces by Hindus (Deepak Ojha) and the manner in which Irish Bahá'ís have integrated their humanitarian ethos to work within local communities (Tova Makhani-Belkin).

Tuesday's keynote, 'Becoming an Accidental Activist' was from Dr Jasjit Singh. Jasjit talked about how he viewed himself as an 'accidental activist'. This talk was told from the perspective of how Dr Jasjit Singh entered the academic world throughout his studies, doctorate, post doctorate, and current research, whereby there was a link between the public in his studies. The talk touched upon how scholars can engage the public through media (evident through Jasjit's work with the Sikh PA), reports (e.g., the CREST report), and empowerment (engagement with the local community) though the community. The talk also proposed ways in which activism and the field of religious studies can combine to influence educational engagement. In the evening the Religious Studies Project organised another fun (but challenging!) team-based quiz on the history of the field, "The Institutional Factor."

Day two began with the 'Politics and Knowledge' panel and David Robertson's (also presenting on behalf of Katja Valaskivi) consideration of the legitimacy of knowledge, religion as a gatekeeper of special knowledge, and the distinction of belief and knowledge within religious studies. Lots of phones were out so pictures could be taken of a slide which neatly illustrated different forms of epistemic capital. Next James Crossley identified how many histories of organised socialism overlook religion. Through a careful consideration of socialist newspapers from the late 1910s and early 1920s Crossley demonstrated that religion was certainly a frequent object of discussion and point of reference. Finally, Stuart McAnulla explored the politics of the UK 'culture wars', identifying the positive and negative use of the discourse of religion on both sides and the need to recognise the prevalence of theological issues in these debates.

Day two continued with lots of educational offerings, beginning with a panel organised by Kathryn Wright, chief executive of Culham St Gabriel's Trust, exploring the 'Public Perception of an Education in Religion and Worldviews'. In her paper, Wright explored the public perceptions of religion and worldviews education. This followed by a paper from Tim Hutchings, outlining three different models of research in schools. In particular, Hutchings outlined the innovative use of Nottingham University's 3D printer to print religious artefacts for use in a SEND (special educational needs and disability) school. Lastly, the session was rounded off by Sarah Harvey, outlining data collected as part of the recent research project 'Promoting the Exploration of Religion and Worldviews in Schools'.

The educational offerings continued with a second panel session focused on 'Education' more broadly. Douglas Davies unpicked the debate surrounding 'worldview' or 'religious studies' in universities and schools, and offered his own formula for defining religious belief (a belief that frames a sense of destiny). His paper gave a taste of his recent publication, Worldview Religious Studies (Routledge 2022), an engaging text which is well worth adding to your reading list. An exploration of 'Bash camps' was offered by Joseph Diwakar, a PhD student from the Open University, outlining his research exploring Eric 'Bash' Nash and the evangelical summer camps he led for boys from top public schools. The session closed with a paper from Elizabeth Munro arguing that contemplative pedagogy should be used as a vehicle to re-vitalise the teaching of religious studies in schools. Her pa-

per included opportunities for audience participation, as she modelled examples of contemplative exercises that can be used to engage and inspire learners.

On Wednesday the 'New Frontiers in the Study of Religion' session, which was on stream four focused on new ways to approach the study of religion. These talks varied upon context from the ways in which religion/spirituality can help people cope with challenging life events (James Murphy and Nicole Holt), to the challenge of a lack of humour and a privilege of 'seriousness' within religious studies (Nicole Graham); bringing forward a proposal to study humour and religion, to bringing together nationalism within the study of religion; and bringing a critical reflexivity to the understanding of the term 'nationalism' as not entirely negative (Liam Sutherland).

Chaired by Aled Thomas and Edward Graham-Hyde, the afternoon kicked off with a roundtable on 'Cult' Rhetoric in the 21st Century (panellists included the chairs alongside Suzanne Newcombe, Sarah Harvey, George Chryssides and Donald Westbrook). There was lively debate amongst panellists and audience members with important questions being raised such as: why is there a resurgence of normative cult rhetoric? Are there agreed alternative terms? And should academics police the publics' and particularly ex-members' use of the term cult? Anyone who feels like they missed out will enjoy the forthcoming volume of the same name!

The 'Nation' panel reflected on how different religious groups have negotiated changing national spaces and ethnic identities. This included a presentation on how followers of the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization, an NRM with Sikh origins but primarily made up of western converts presented themselves to Punjabi Sikh diaspora and broader American publics (Philip Deslippe and Stacie Stukin). The other papers in this session discussed the manner in which Latvian Old Believers preserved their ritual practices under Soviet rule (Maija Grizane) and a discussion of the ideological positions of different Orthodox and Greek (Uniate) Catholic Churches in Ukraine following the Russian invasion (Iuliia Korniichuk, also presenting on behalf of Anna M. Solarz).

The BASR's AGM was held later on in the afternoon and after other matters had been attended to, the importance of making future conferences more environmentally friendly was raised by the Open University's Paul Tremlett. This led to a fruitful and even-handed discussion of the need to address these concerns while keeping conferences attractive and affordable to postgraduate students and early career scholars.

Day two drew to an end with a roundtable that examined the work of INFORM, an independent charity which has sought to combat ignorance and the spread of misinformation about minority religions and sects through the provision of up-to-date evidence-based information, since its founding over 30 years ago. As a network the work of INFORM is certainly not finished and a number of opportunities for the future, including the role of the internet as a tool to disseminate accurate information about minority religions were discussed.

Day three of the conference opened with one final panel session exploring 'Nationalism'. The panel opened with Dayal Paleri's examination of Hindu nationalist social service organisations and their use of the language of 'Seva' (i.e., the concept of selfless service) aligned with Hindu nationalist politics. This was followed by a topical paper presented by Vishal Sangu exploring how Colonialism has shaped modern Sikh identity through an in-depth critique of the terminology used to define and describe 'Sikhism' in Britain (including exposing the problems with the term Sikhism itself!). Lastly, Thomas Dolan offered a fascinating paper

drawing upon his extensive, and impressive, research into unpublished manuscript materials exploring John Hume's education at St Patrick's College, the National Roman Catholic Seminary of Ireland, demonstrating how Hume's schooling informed his formula for Irish unity - a utopian vision of 'unity in diversity'.

The closing session of the conference included a discussion of the theme of the conference. Discussions were held amongst panellists and audience members of the necessity and importance of public engagement within religious studies. Discussions included, but were not limited to, how to achieve public engagement of religious studies. These included the role of using media. Discussions also included how public engagement, in certain contexts, despite being necessary can sometimes be dangerous to the researcher and participants in global contexts. The conference ended in good spirits, touching upon the importance of public engagement. Public engagement is one of the ways in which the discipline can grow, by allowing more focus on the research that is done by many individuals/institutions about small-scale, worldwide, or global issues – some of which can be and is extremely beneficial to the political scheme of this country, as noted in the keynote by Dr Jasjit Singh in his work with British Young Sikhs.

Vishal Sangu (Open University), Liam T. Sutherland (Edinburgh), Nicole Graham (King's College London) and Elizabeth Munro (University of Winchester)

EASR, 27 JUNE – 1 JULY 2022, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK

The annual conference of the European Association for the Study of Religion was the first major conference held by the society since the pandemic and was lively and packed with content. It provided opportunities to get re-acquainted with colleagues from across Europe and beyond, to experience the dynamism of Irish Religious Studies but also unfortunately for many of us, to develop a full dose of Covid. I can appreciate the desire begin anew with a bang but in hindsight the decision to abandon any hybrid or online components seems unwise.

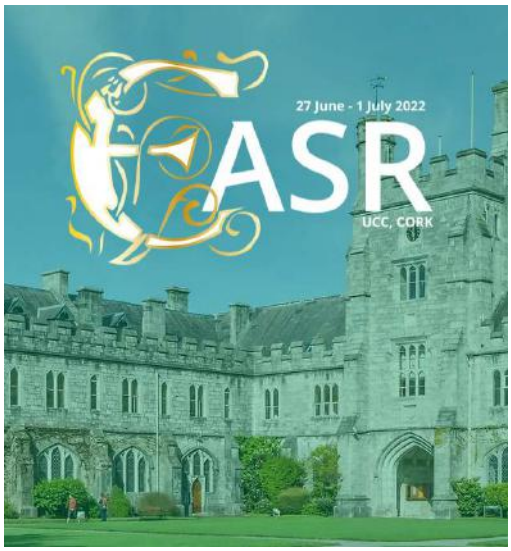
Despite these unfortunate circumstances it was a rich and stimulating conference. Readers should also be advised that as I was not initially planning on writing up a report on this conference, I have had to rely on a copy of the programme to jog my memory. Any mistakes, aberrations or omissions are my own (there were a few also last-minute dropouts or changes to the programme as well). Due to this and the sheer scale of it, I did skip some of the sessions and some of the keynotes but that still left me with a busy schedule all the same!

The first session that I attended on Monday the 27th of June was the panel on "Religious Fundamentalist Discourse." Hannes Sonnenschein presented on the Chabad Lubavitch movement's construction of national identity in Israel. From my recollection, this paper provided valuable analysis of the organisation's educational materials aimed at young children, which encouraged stereotyping and othering of Arabs. In the same panel and carrying similar themes Johann Eriksen discussed the Swedish security services' involvement in the closure of Muslim Schools.

The session titled "Free Captives: The Creative Practices of Christian Ascetics on the Way to Freedom" drew me to it by the inclusion of content on "interfaith dialogue". Nataliia Pavlyk presented a comparative study of the ascetic practices of Jain Yoga and Orthodox Christian Hesychasm. This was not based on any relations between these communities as the phrase "interfaith dialogue" would have indicated. I was also not especially convinced by what this comparison was meant to illuminate. Sergi Castellá-Martínez spoke about the multi-religious context of the Medieval Catalan mystic Ramon Llull and how the context of dialogues and competition between Muslims, Christians and Jews shaped his work. The panel overall seemed to convey a common perennialist ethos; the vastly different cosmologies, histories and aims of analogous ascetic practices

were treated as something to be explained away. Nonetheless, despite my scepticism I was able to engage in a fruitful discussion with the attendees and presenters of this panel for which I am grateful to the organisers.

On Tuesday the 28th of June I opted to begin with the second session on Tantra. Liwen Liu analysed the tension between conformity to orthodoxy and heteropraxy was continued through the practice of animal sacrifices in the Tantrāloka. Paolo E. Rosati focused on magical practices within tantra at the temple of the Goddess Kamakhya in Assam. In the afternoon there was a shared keynote between Alicia Turner, Brian Bocking and Laurence Cox which focused on the connections forged between Ireland and Burmese Buddhism in the British colonial period. I finished the day with a session on "Native Faith Movements in Europe between Deep Ecology and Nationalism." Rasa Pranskevičiūte discussed the campaigns of the Lithuanian Pagan movement (Romuva) to gain state recognition from the country's parliament. Davide S. Amore continued the focus on Romuva, exploring the relationship with the Lithuanian Muslim community and especially the perceptions of the latter about the former. Amore pointed to the fact that the relationship between different minority religious communities is largely ignored by scholarship.



On the morning of Wednesday the 29th of June, I began by presenting my own paper in the "Religion and Challenges of Pluralism" session, in which called for more critical scholarship on the interfaith movement and analysis of its considerable influence on the representation of religions in the 21st century public square. I also pointed to the fact that the interfaith movement contains many aspects which would be of considerable interest to critical RS, from distinct gender imbalances to a role in determining how or what 'religious representation' entails. Teemu Pauha presented a paper on the dialogical theory of the self to analyse individuals' development of religious commitments or movements away from religion, bringing the psychology of identity into the study of religion. The panel ended with Nella van den Brant's presentation on how women talk about leaving religion and freedom from religion in UK and Dutch contexts.

Sa'ed Atshan's keynote discussed the variety and vitality of Palestinian Christian communities. The final panel which I attended on Wednesday was the first session of "Religion, Law and National Identity." Only one presenter was actually able to attend the panel but thankfully his paper left much to discuss. Joakim Gunnar Björkelid offered an analysis of Islamophobic propaganda produced by Hinduttva operatives, especially the trope of 'love Jihad' whereby interreligious romances were cast as ploys to convert Hindus.

On Thursday the 30th of June began with the panel on "feasts." Marianne Fibiger opened with an analysis of the differences between 'feasts' and 'festivals' within Hinduism, drawing on fieldwork in Mauritius and Denmark. Emma Cecilie Soerlie Jørgensen discussed the role of feasting in Norse myths, focusing on the ways that they were gendered. Prowess in eating and drinking was associated with masculinity but the fact that women were charged with hosting said feasts gave them a degree of subtle power that they would not have had in other contexts. This was followed by a keynote by Yafa Shanneik on Syrian Muslim refugees and gender within European states. A particularly striking aspect of this presentation was the agency expressed by Syrian Muslim women through artwork.

This was followed by a session on Irish mythology and folklore. John Carey queried the refer-

ences to Irish Epic Literature as 'mythology', pointing to the fact that these were not transcriptions of oral narratives but deliberate literary works drawing on pre-Christian mythology. Stiofán Ó Cadhla presented a paper on 'hagiography, folklore and mythology' while Catrióna Ó Dochartaigh discussed the local mythic/fokloric figure of the Cailleach of Bérri (one example of a class of witches or possibly former goddesses in Irish and Scottish folklore, indeed as a Scot myself I had mistakenly assumed they were exclusively Scottish). This fascinating session was closed by Ciarán Ó Gealbha on the evidence for 'rat charms', magic used to repel rats in the west of Ireland. Thursday evening was rounded off with the launch of the book ***The Study of Religions in Ireland*** edited by Brendan McNamara and Hazel O' Brien, which celebrated the rise and rise of RS within the country and with chapters covering all manner of approaches and specialisms.

The final day, Friday the 1st of July began for me with a session on representations, depictions and imagination of the Viking Age. Jane Skjoldli discussed the particular forms in which historic Norse culture was represented in the recent computer game ***Assassins' Creed: Valhalla***. Anna Økstra presented ethnographic research among historic reenactors, especially those that engage in fairly technical historic crafts. This especially focused on the ways in which engaging in the activities of historic peoples (or as close as can be achieved) are emotionally experienced by participants. Fredrik Gregorius ended the panel with an analysis of the manner in which nationalist uses of Norse myths, especially the figure of Loki, reflected racialised anxieties around miscegenation (Loki was after all canonically of half-giant parentage).

The final panel I attended in the conference was one I had the privilege of chairing: the second session on "Religion, Law and National Identity". Thomas White presented the little-known cases of the trials for sedition of Ra and Nadroga-Novoso activists who attempted to create small Christian secessionist states to protest the official secularism of the current government of Fiji. Ernils Larsson discussed the fraught boundary between the secular Japanese state and private religious practices, especially of Shinto. These tensions particularly came to the fore during the visit of Japanese Prime Ministers to prominent Shinto Shrines, especially the 'Shrine to the War Dead' (Yasakuni). The panel was closed by a presentation from Manuel Stadler on the Marquis de Sade, pointing out that he was surprisingly not sanctioned by the state for his sexual misconduct but due to the perceived blasphemous nature of some of his acts. Unfortunately, this paper was on the receiving end of some rather poor behaviour from some senior scholars in the room. I doubt the intentions were malicious, but it was certainly inappropriate to subject a PhD student to uncharitable and pedantic critiques based on a short, but very interesting 20-minute paper. To end on a more positive note though, this was a very rich and varied conference which was hopefully evident even from the small sample of scholarship I have discussed.

Liam Sutherland
University of Edinburgh

CRITICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION, 10-13 JUNE 2022, QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

This was a very enriching experience for me on several counts. Firstly, it was the first full-fledged academic conference I could attend after the long and tiring virtual engagements since the Covid pandemic. Secondly, the conference came as the best opportunity to meet and engage with religious studies scholars worldwide, soon after my arrival to the UK as a commonwealth split-site fellow at the University of Edinburgh. The conference consisted of scholars working on varied aspects of religion in different regions, bringing an essential comparative element to the event.

The CASRC was the first-ever conference by the Center for Critical Research on Religion, and being a regular reader of the CRR journal, I was fortunate to be part of this landmark conference.

The conference began at 4 PM on 10th June with a plenary session titled "Religion and Politics in Northern Ireland" that looked at the conceptual and methodological challenges of researching religion in the contested context of Northern Ireland. The plenary was chaired by Prof Gladys Ganiel, with presentations from Dr Jamie Pow, Dr Veronique Altglas and Cathal McManus, all from the Queen's University of Belfast, with extensive research experience on Northern Ireland.

The conference was rich in presentations by over a hundred scholars under 24 themes that covered all the significant aspects of contemporary research on religions in different contexts. While all the sessions were interesting, it was impossible to engage with them all, as the conference was scheduled with three parallel sessions with three to four papers in each. While I attended numerous other exciting sessions that dealt with aspects of the study of religion, such as Religion and Environment, Religion and Digital, Social Justice, Secularism, Science, Gender and so on, I would like to highlight a few of the sessions that I found the most interesting. Given the breadth of the conference, I could get only a partial view of the event.

The first session I attended, titled "Social theory and religion", was beneficial as it simultaneously dealt with issues of theoretical and empirical concerns. I was particularly captivated by the paper by Prof Paul Gifford (SOAS), who very convincingly demonstrated the fault lines of empirically unfounded theoretical speculations of several works that have already attained a canonical status in the sociology of religion. The paper titled "The ideology of Religious Literacy" by Titus Hjelm (Study of Religion, University of Helsinki) discussed the theoretical issues in understanding the concept of 'religious literacy' in the context of the empirical insights taken from his project Religious Literacy in Action (RELIACT). Seyed Javad Miri (Institute of Humanities and Cultural Studies, Iran) brought a different dimension to the session by engaging with the sociological thought of Ali Shariati. Seyed's formulation of Shariatian social theory has provoked engaging discussions that laid bare some of the crucial problems of social theory and its Eurocentric moorings.

The session titled "Critical Methodology on Religion" was primarily conceptual and grappled with some of the pressing methodological challenges in the study of religion. Joshua S. Lupo (University of Notre Dame, USA) presented a robust defence of the phenomenological approach to studying religion and emphasized how a phenomenological approach could enable engaging with the insider/outsider question in studying religion. Given my own interest in the field of studying religious nationalism, I got particularly interested in the paper "Theorizing Religion and Nationalism: The Need for Critical Reflexivity in the Analysis of Overlapping Areas of Research" by Dr Liam Sutherland (University of Edinburgh). Liam's argument for giving the same critical reflexivity on "nationalism" as much as on "religion" was very significant as the form that "religious nationalism" takes varies from context to context. Liam brought examples of diverse sets of the relationship between religion and nationalism from various contexts, urging scholars of religion to avoid an unreflective and essentialist approach to studying religious nationalism.

Three sessions were dedicated to exploring the dynamic relationship between religion and gender. Amongst the paper that I attended, the paper titled "Second-sentence to second-chance: An exploration into models of justice and rehabilitation for Muslim women in prison" by Faatimah Jeelani (University of Leeds) was exceptional. The paper looked at the possibilities of overlaps with the idea of restorative justice and rehabilitation presented in Islamic jurisprudence through an empirical study of Muslim women convicts in the United Kingdom. The paper by Ruth Flanagan (Sociology, Queen University Belfast) that explored the relationship between religious socialization and the nature of sexual narratives and perceptions of gender norms has also provided important insights into the study of religion and gender. The session that I was part of, titled "Religion and Politics", was very illuminating as the discussions brought the much-needed comparative perspective on the emerging structure of the religion-politics relationship. I particularly benefited from the array of questions and feedback that I received

from scholars from different contextual and disciplinary standpoints.

The conference came to an end with the closing discussion led by the conference organizers, Dr Veronique Altglas and Dr Warren S. Goldstein. Dr Goldstein emphasized the possibility of developing the presentations into research papers for the journal Critical Research on Religion (Sage Publications) and edited volumes (Brill Academic Publishers and Haymarket Books). Both the organizers have highlighted the need to sustain the scholarly network that was founded through the three days of enriching academic engagements and to take forward new directions on the critical research on religion. It followed a sumptuous dinner held at the historic Great Hall. The conference ended with a memorable political tour of the city of Belfast that was led by the former political prisoners of the conflict on 13th June. The tour that brought together intimate accounts of the history of the religious and political conflict in Northern Ireland was the most appropriate closure to a conference that dealt with various complex aspects of the life and realities of religion in the contemporary world.

Dayal Paleri
University of Edinburgh

YOGA DARŚANA, YOGA SĀDHANA, 18 - 21 MAY 2022, JAGIELLONIAN INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS, KRAKÓW

The second international yoga conference: ***Yoga darśana, yoga sādhana*** (yoga philosophy and practice) was a long overdue opportunity for yoga scholars to reconvene after the inaugural conference held back in 2016. A combination of post-pandemic freedom to travel, the warmth of our hosts at the Jagiellonian University, and a little performance anxiety for first-time presenters (including myself), all contributed to making this a memorable occasion.

'Methods, migrations, and mediations' were the overarching themes for the conference with eighty papers delivered over three and a half days. Apart from four keynote presentations, twenty minutes was allotted for each paper followed by a ten-minute Q&A, with two or three panels running consecutively. The necessity of consecutive panels could have led to two conferences running in parallel, with scholars working in translation and exegesis of pre-modern texts in one camp, and social scientists in the other. Some thoughtful programming avoided this, accommodating the diversity of papers and the natural interplay between historical, philosophical, and contemporary interests. For me, this is an important characteristic of yoga studies as a field and when combined with the opportunity to meet in-person, valuably fostered the exchange of ideas and expertise. On this point, the encouragement offered by established scholars to postgraduate presenters was a pleasant surprise for this conference novice, and I believe was significant in fostering a genuinely collegiate atmosphere throughout the event.

Several panels spoke to the socio-political entanglements, technological factors, and non-anglophone mediation of yoga in culturally diverse communities such as Native American communities in Saskatchewan, Mexico, Sweden, South America, South Africa, former communist-bloc countries and prison communities. Other panels took a more subjective turn. For example, Finnian Gerety's paper (Brown University) offered an exegetical analysis of mantra systems and the sonic division of OM, alongside subjective practices of chanting, listening, and the perception of ever quieter, smaller units of sound; reaching for liberation through states of silence and timelessness. Laura von Ostrowski's paper (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität) described the inter-relationship between textual knowledge of Patañjali's Yoga Sūtra and the aesthetic experience of corporeal processes for German yoga teacher trainees. Her methodology applies Anne Koch's body knowledge categories alongside long-term participant observation and autoethnography.

Absent from the conference was any input from the health sciences, though the social and historical inter-relationship between health, wellness, and the mediation of yoga was explored in several papers. Christopher Miller's paper (Loyola Marymount University) contrasted the invisible

and toxic effects of air pollution in Mumbai with the soteriological benefits of ***prāṇāyāma***, the practice of yogic breathing. Miller juxtaposed the projection of yogic ideals inside trans-national neoliberal and middle-class values of self-responsibility, privileged access to clean air, healthcare, ***and*** yoga, versus access to none of the above for the majority of Mumbai's population. Marleen Thaler's paper (University of Vienna) explored the Theosophical Society's early nineteenth century (re-)interpretation of ***kuṇḍalinī***. Thaler described how in a trans-national reverse-flow, physiological properties of the subtle body were incorporated in the twentieth-century Indian transmission of yoga, such that these energetic physiological properties are still being "scientifically" investigated in India and beyond. As Shameem Black (Australian National University), the first keynote speaker reminded us; "the story of yoga is multilingual and whilst English has served as a conduit, it has also served as a symbol of imperial and capitalist power." One might add the same for broader power relations including academia.

Through her examination of yoga in contemporary popular (pulp) fiction, Black considered the question of manufactured texts, both fiction and non-fiction, pointing to examples that contributed to a wider project of yogic and Hindu exceptionalism, rhetorically posing the question; "How much of Yogananda's ***Autobiography of a Yogī*** is fiction?" Black set the overarching themes of the conference within her fiction-based project, arguing yoga is not only a practice of inquiry and experimentation, but it is also a practice of ***projection***. The second and third keynote presentations also elaborated on the mediation and projection of yoga. Amanda Lucia (University of California - Riverside) reflected on the reception of White Utopias (2020) amongst both academics and yoga's spiritual entrepreneurs, expanding on her thesis of white possessivism and its relationship to religious exoticism in yoga. As a catalyst for personal and social transformation, Lucia juxtaposed the "self-breaking" of the physical practice and bodily knowledge with the negative social effects of this myopic attention to self. In this commentary, she echoed Vivekananda's concerns that ***haṭha*** yoga promotes a false body consciousness. Left to run amok it justifies irresponsibility.

Meera Nanda (formerly IISER, Pune) contrasted post-truth worlds in her keynote. In Trump's America, her adopted country, she argued everyone is a liar, so you choose your liar. In India, the country of her birth, state-sponsored national identity and Hindu exceptionalism has created a different post-truth world. Quoting Mackenzie Brown's 2013 survey that 69% of Hindus agree with the statement that yogic powers can reveal all knowledge, Nanda argued "Patañjali's Yoga Sūtra has cast a long and dark shadow." She accused Vivekananda, "the chief architect of mystical empiricism" of developing the idea that as "all our knowledge is based on experience" yoga as a subtle 'science' meets and exceeds the standards of empiricism. Nanda argued these truth claims are now baked into the 1949 Indian Medicines Act, exempting ayurvedic medicines from clinical trials, leading to the widespread use of giloy/guduchi as preventer/cure of Covid despite its potential for causing liver damage. She accused religious studies of sidestepping the issue by suspending judgement, concluding "academia has a responsibility to change the world, not just to understand it".

The final keynote was Swami Medhananda's (Ramakrishna Institute of Moral and Spiritual Education, Mysore) presentation of his new work on ***Swami Vivekananda's Vedantic Cosmopolitanism***. Challenging conventional academic tropes that Vivekananda either championed a Neo-Vedāntic philosophy shaped more by Western

outlooks than indigenous Indian traditions or that he simply gave a modern ethical twist to Advaita Vedānta, Medhananda argued the majority of scholars have misrepresented Vivekananda's mature doctrine of the harmony of religions by taking it to be based on the three stages of Vedānta rather than on the four Yogas. His diachronic reconstruction of Vivekananda's philosophy builds on Alan Race's typology of inclusivism, exclusivism and pluralism (1983), along with McKim (2012) and Griffith's (2001) work on doctrinal truth and salvific efficacy, arguing that Vivekananda promoted both salvific and doctrinal pluralism from 1895 onwards – a radical cosmopolitan approach – extending Ramakrishna's world-affirming and ethically-oriented embrace of *all* religions, thereby accommodating both the personal and impersonal God within a panentheistic metaphysics.

On the final evening of the conference, I believe there had been a plan to explore Kraków's historic Jewish quarter, but the evening started in a cellar bar, complete with life-size pink unicorn. As is often the case when pink unicorns are involved, time warped and a new day had started before many left the subterranean world. Strong empirical evidence suggests most of us managed to make Saturday morning's closing sessions, though it remains highly contested whether this remarkable turnout can be attributed to yogic powers or unicorn magic.

Although this was primarily an in-person event, the organisers worked hard to make this an interactive and accessible event for online participants. A sensible contingency in uncertain times. Whilst nothing beats the value of meeting in-person, I'm sure hybrid conferences will increasingly become the norm as we grapple with the environmental and financial costs of international travel. For those of us presenting in person, some adjustments had to be made: sitting down behind a monitor to make sure we were visible to the online audience, and holding onto our nerves during the one or two minor technical glitches with Microsoft Teams (mostly operator error!). This was a small price to pay for expanding the conference to online participants and the organising committee did an excellent job of managing cameras and slide-decks for everyone. My sincere thanks to them all; Vicky Addinall, Matylda Ciolkosz, Borayin Larios, Suzanne Newcombe, Raphaël Voix, Ruth Westoby, Theodora Wildcroft, and Amelia Wood, for working so hard to create an extraordinary event. I hope we don't have to wait quite so long for the third ***Yoga darśana, yoga sādhana***.

Nick Lawler
Lancaster University

'CONVERSATIONS: SEARCHING FOR THE SACRED IN SOUTH ASIA', 2-DAY POSTGRADUATE SYMPOSIUM, 30 SEPTEMBER-1 OCTOBER 2022, UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

The first day took place online (to accommodate international speakers) and the second day took place in person at the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge. The event was imagined and organized by a committee of graduate students - Hina Khalid (University of Cambridge), Tilak Parekh (University of Cambridge), Hershini Soneji (University of Cambridge), Nirali Patel (University of Cambridge), Namrata Narula (University of Cambridge), and Imran Visram (University of Oxford) – with the generous support of the Faculty of Divinity (Cambridge), the Faculty of Theology & Religion (Oxford), The Woolf Institute, Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme, The Spalding Trust, and The British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR). Over the two days of the conference, participants – in the online format and on the in-person day – energetically discussed and debated a wide range of themes relating to the intersections of religious visions and socio-political processes across South Asian landscapes. Speakers were from a variety of academic institutions across the world: including, University of Cambridge, University of Oxford, Cambridge Muslim College, University of Edinburgh, University of York, LSE, SOAS, Jawaharlal Nehru University (India), Ambedkar University (India), University of California, Australian National University, University of Queensland, and University of Toronto. Our aim was to host an interdisciplinary forum in which graduate students would engage with one another's work in a

spirit of friendly critique. The motifs of homeland, exile, emancipation, categorisation, imagination, and translation recurred through the conversations – during the panels, the teatime breaks, and the symposium dinner. The positive feedback we have received from participants indicate that for them the symposium was an intellectually stimulating exercise.

The academic telos of this conference was to foster inter-disciplinary conversations around the theme of religious expression in South Asia, and to explore how 'abstract' theological or philosophical ideas are concretely worked out, embodied, and lived on the ground. Our papers addressed the manifold enmeshments of religion, aesthetics, and politics, across different regions and historical periods, and thus afforded an insight into how ideas of the 'sacred' in South Asia are expressed in both physical space (i.e. in places of worship, museums, ritual gatherings) and in imaginative space (i.e. in conceptions of nationhood, literary universes, a community's memories). The phrase "searching for" in the title of this conference highlights that these expressions of the 'sacred' are fluid, dynamic, ever-embedded in their regional and historical contexts, and so tantalizingly resist any neat systematization.

The two days followed a consistent thematic structure – with four panels on each day, oriented broadly around the themes of sacred space, religio-political belongings, and aesthetic expressivities. The first panel on Day 1, entitled 'Sacred Spatialities', explored the plurivocal character of place and space, with their capacities to curate, construct, and contest conceptions of the sacred. Our panellists operated with distinctive, though not divergent, conceptions of 'space', with two speakers addressing the potential for both openness and ossification that attends the static space of the museum; whilst others addressed the devotional dynamisms of space as mediated through the practices of embodied ritual and nature rites. The second panel ('Ritual Rootings and Re-Imaginings') continued this thematic thread of ritual and religiosity, by attending to the ways that diverse types of devotional sensibilities are enacted through public and private practices. One talk addressed the ways that the COVID-19 pandemic has re-configured and re-'styled' a popular festival in West Bengal, wherein the physical modalities of touch and togetherness hold a vital soteriological role. Our third panel ('Identities Inscribed') had a more socio-political orientation, as the speakers discussed the variegated foundations, formulations, and fragmentations of identities across lines of religion, region, caste and others. We ended with a panel entitled 'Aesthetic Articulations', which explored the expressions and enactments of religious belonging across myriad forms of art and textual material, and the generative possibilities latent in the narrative form.

Our second day took place in person, for which we also had a substantial online audience. Around 30 people attended in person – among them were other graduate students, undergraduate students, and faith practitioners. Our first panel ('Embodied Entanglements') featured talks that ranged across diverse faith traditions: namely, Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism. What united these reflections, however, was the shared analytical consideration of how the body, and the symbolically charged realities made possible by the condition of embodiment (such as artefact construction and preservation, photography and its function as a memorial of meaning, the art of communal service), are understood to mediate and reflect either an immaterial, spiritual reality (such as God) or a temporally distant historical event (such as the martyrdom of a saint which remains constitutive of a community's self-understanding). Our second panel ('Literary Landscapes') addressed the theme of aesthetic expression of the sacred – taking three rather different artistic forms as their point of departure: tragic mythology, a philosophical-spiritual manual, and contemporary world literature. The final talk on the literary rendering of a religious minority in a Pakistani novel elegantly dovetailed with our following panel, namely 'Sacred Secularities', wherein a recurring theme was the way in which colonial powers employed demography as a tool with which to quantitatively sequester, and thus categorially demarcate, the subcontinent's religious groups from one another. The encounter between 'East' and 'West' was the unifying topos of our final panel, which addressed the ways that South Asia

'spills over' beyond itself, and shapes identities, imaginaries, and institutions outside its geographic bounds.

Overall, the 2-day symposium proved immensely fruitful – not only did participants get a chance to meet other postgraduate students from around the world working on similar themes/themes of interest, the gathering also catalysed certain crucial conversations that are at the methodological forefront of many humanities disciplines today. How do we, as young scholars, address colonialism not only as a topic of academic exploration but as a perspectival reality that often shapes how we engage ***with*** our scholarly material (and indeed, what scholarly material we engage with at all)? Can analytical categories applied to the religious traditions of the West be straightforwardly transposed onto the theological topographies of South Asia? Is the distinction between 'aesthetics' and 'politics' a conceptually meaningful one? How are scholarly endeavours imagined and practised differently in settings where the operating paradigm is not logical rigour but spiritual sensitivity? We are now considering generating a publication from the conference proceedings, possibly as part of the Routledge 'South Asian History and Culture' series.

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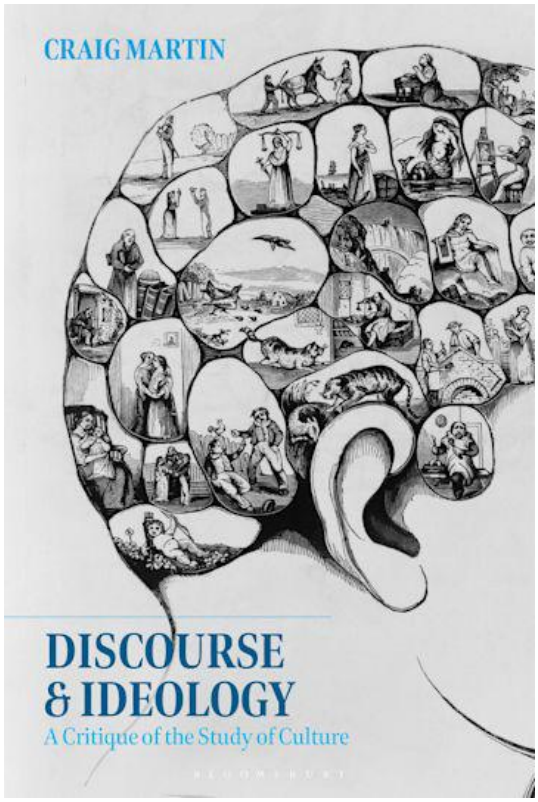
reviews

MARTIN, CRAIG. *DISCOURSE AND IDEOLOGY: A CRITIQUE OF THE STUDY OF CULTURE*. LONDON: BLOOMSBURY, 2022, ISBN: 978-1-3502-4628, XIX + 273PP, PBK, £22.49.

Despite having never met him, my guess is that Craig Martin and I would see eye to eye on the big issues of the day, and any disagreements would amount to matters of detail. But I nevertheless find myself frustrated by his latest book which stitches together Foucauldian discourse analysis with an almost Popperian conception of ideology to support what he calls "a ***post-structuralist critique*** … of the knowledge of ***discourse and ideology***, both of which are … used in the service of reproducing relationships of ***domination***" (6; italics in original). Martin brings together post-structuralist and broadly Marxist concepts in an original and interesting way, but at what cost?



Martin sutures post-structuralism and ideology together by arguing that both demand attention to the "conditions of possibility of knowledge" (10) by which he means, in short, that all knowledge is mediated. Martin draws on Kant, Hegel and Foucault (among others) to argue that poststructuralism is heir to phenomenology, an approach which sets out to "describe how things appear to us in the phenomenal world" and investigates "the conditions of possibility that makes those appearances possible" (28). The point Martin wants to make is that we can be anti-realists and take empirical evidence seriously. One issue Martin does not take on is whether post-Kantian cognitive theories of culture, which posit that cultural forms are expressions of allegedly innate psychological architectures – I am thinking of the writings of Dan Sperber and Harvey Whitehouse, but there are others – can be coherently synthesised with the kind of approach to culture and the body found in the writings of Derrida, Butler, Foucault and others (70-6). So let me turn to Martin's twin conceptions of ideology and the social to draw out what troubles me most about this book, and why I think it matters.

Martin defines ideology in the following terms: "ideology consists of a bundle of agonistic empirical discourses or sets of knowledge claims designed – intentionally or unintentionally – to advance a group's interests, which always depend on a logically prior constitutive discourse, but in a way that (1) violates the rules of that discourse or another discourse or (2) entails the distribution of demonstrably false or inadequately supported empirical claims, empirical claims that are false on grounds accepted by that very discourse or another discourse" (168). Note how careful Martin is to ensure that the "demon-

strably false" (elsewhere, "falsifiable") is measured not against any absolute real beyond discourse, but only the real as it is made present through discourse. But note also what is missing; Martin's conception of ideology almost completely neglects the body – there are a couple of references to affect on the very last page of the book – even though it is clear from Althusser's definition approvingly cited elsewhere, that ideology exceeds "empirical claims" and includes the visceral, affective responses of the body, for example in response to being shouted at by a Police officer (81).

Martin's definition of ideology is also part and parcel of a particular conception of the social. The discourses that constitute ideology are, according to Martin, "designed" – surely an extraordinary choice of words – to advance the interests of groups which, he suggests, are agonistically engaged in "waging war on groups with competing interests" (168-9; see also 205). Martin's version of ideology fails to account for theories for which ideology is part and parcel of the social and of culture, and as something less like a weapon wielded by groups or classes in a struggle for domination, and more like a habitus which has no outside (cf. Durkheim and Bourdieu).

Martin's version of ideology is, then, decidedly cognitive rather than embodied in focus, but it also breathes life into the world as it was imagined by Hobbes; liberalism's calculating and competitive egoism is re-imagined as endless (ideological) struggle between subject positions, groups and classes. In short, Martin's approach reproduces the classic liberal assumption that competitive self-interest animates the world. In what ways does the inscription of this imaginary create space for "other forms of socialization" and "alternate sympathies" (142)? Someone once said that the task of theory and method was to change the world.

Discourse analysis is now pretty much the method of choice for contemporary, critical religious studies, but it has clear pitfalls as well as strengths and advantages, and one of those pitfalls is its synchronism. In the chapter on ideology, Martin quotes Karl Mannheim's point that we give names to things to fix and stabilise the flux of the phenomenal field. This is exactly what discourse analysis does too: discourse analysis collects "vocabularies or collections of words, spoken or written, strung together to form phrases, slogans, sentences, monologues, conversations, paragraphs, missives, tracts, manifestos, speeches, books, and so forth" (77) and creates an object, which it then freezes for analytical purposes. This is of course a perfectly legitimate methodological procedure, and Martin demonstrates its analytical power in the final chapter in which he dissects racist ideology in the USA, but it also generates effects that Martin does not account for. One of the effects relates to how discourse analysis creates an object for investigation and, at the same time, a sovereign knowing subject. A second effect is that the synchronism caused by the freezing process makes it difficult to conceive of change. Martin frames ideology in the way that he does because change for him is on a par with winning an argument by demonstrating the empirical weaknesses of one claim in relation to the empirical strengths of another, this despite recognizing the weakness of belief as a predictor of behaviour (175) and the importance of attending to the socio-historical and material contexts in which claims are made. I'm not sure that social change occurs because of cognitive shifts. A great deal of change occurs unconsciously such as with the adoption of new technologies such as mobile phones or as the result of combinations of human and non-human agents and agencies, from storms to pathogens. We need theories and methods that enable progressive change but theories and methods that set out to control or tidy the mess of the social might not be up to the task. For example, the value of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the assemblage lies in the work it does to mitigate against the crystallizing effects of method and to sustain the animation of the elements under investigation, following their lines of flight and potential for re-combination. The research methods we choose are not simply tools for describing or representing social worlds – they also help make and unmake them. Is discourse analysis the tool for that task?

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Members' Recent Publications

Jens U. Augspurger

2022 ***International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centers.*** Database of Religious History, Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia.

Carole M. Cusack

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George D. Chryssides

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Christopher R. Cotter

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Mathew Guest

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Mie Astrup Jensen

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Michael T. Miller

2022 "Name Theology: Judaism" in ***Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception*** ed. Barry Dov Walfish et al., vol.20 (Walter de Gruyter): 659-663.

Micheal Pye

2022 ***Religionsgeschichte Japans (History of Japanese Religions)***. Vol. 22/2 in the series ***Die Religionen der Menschheit (The religions of humankind)*** published by Kohlhammer Verlag (Stuttgart), current series editors: Peter Antes, Manfred Hutter, Jörg Rüpke and Bettina Schmidt.

David R. Robertson

2022 "Crippled Epistemologies: Religion, Conspiracy Theories and Knowledge." ***Social Research*** 89:3, 651-677.

"Religious Literacy as Religion Literacy: A Response from the UK." ***Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*** 34, 475–483.

"We Need to Talk About Religion: A Response to Smith's 'A Quasi-Fideist Approach to QAnon'." ***Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective*** 11 (5): 50-57.

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2021 "Legitimising Claims of Special Knowledge: Towards an Epistemic Turn in Religious Studies" in ***Temenos*** 57.1, 17-34.

obituaries

Bruno Latour

22 June 1947 – 9 October 2022

Photo of Paul-François Tremlett and Bruno Latour at the Reassembling Democracy workshop in 2015, at the Château de Rosay in Normandy, France.

Bruno Latour's impressive, inter-disciplinary body of work has been of increasing interest to scholars in religious studies including colleagues in the BASR. His provocations included the suggestion that "no society of humans exists without the non-humans to hold it together" (1990: 73) and social scientists need to accept "a certain dose of fetishism" (1996: 230). In ***We Have Never Been Modern*** (1993) he argued that modernity's breaks, borders and purifications – indeed, its ontological certainty that our "fabric is no longer seamless" (1993:7) – was in fact a kind of self-deception. Rather, Latour insisted that the great divides of modernity – between the humans and the machines, the present and the past and the rational West as against the non-Western rest – were unhelpful reductions. In the early 1990s the ozone layer and HIV revealed, for Latour, the inter-connectedness of bedrooms, boardrooms, kitchens, government thinktanks, laboratories, prejudices, factories and social protest movements. For Latour, these things never existed in a pure state or as discrete objects; rather, they were always hybrids that combined with other things.

As such, Latour's approach to social worlds, which he laid out in ***Reassembling the Social*** (2005), was oriented not to big slabs of kinship, religion, ritual or the state as per traditional sociology, but rather conceived a flat plane of interactions and transformations and what he posed as a sociology of associations. Latour's actor network was less a fixed (social) structure than an emergent field made visible in the traces of moving actants.

If some or all of this seems obscure, Latour's thinking chimed with a wave of writings described variously as the "new materialism" and as an "ontological turn" which vivified a number of disciplines notably anthropology in the 1990s. It also fed directly into the writings of BASR colleagues such as Graham Harvey while contributing ambiently to the material turn in religious studies which has done so much productive work to turn our collective attention towards things and objects, and to a de-centring of the human that fed logically into the work of his later years on the climate crisis.

He also wrote on religion, notably ***Rejoicing: On the Torments of Religious Speech*** (2013), which is a meditation on religion and modernity. For Latour, if we are losing the capacity for religious speech perhaps it is because we have lost the sense in which religious speech is less about the transport of information between sender and recipient and more about the transformation of sender and recipient through shared communication.

In April 2015 I had the enormous privilege to participate in a workshop organised by the Ecole Pratiques des Haute Etudes, as part of the Reassembling Democracy research project. The workshop took place at the Château de Rosay in Normandy in France, and Bruno Latour was the honoured guest. I have three stand out memories; the first concerns the photograph which was taken in the gardens of the Château and which, on the evidence of the image itself, he was more enthusiastic about than I was. The second relates to the dinner that same evening; the workshop delegates were seated around a long banqueting table with Bruno at its head. Suddenly, after the main course, he stood up and offered a libation of wine – Château Latour of course – to those assembled and which he poured directly onto the table, to the surprise of all (and even to the consternation of some of those seated closest to him!). The third was an excruciating session the following day at which an esteemed Professor discussed one of his books although the discussion really did seem to be about a different book entirely, by someone else. Bruno's urbane composure never deserted him even if I, among others, struggled to maintain my own.

Bruno Latour combined being interesting, creative and erudite with a patient and kind intelligence. He will be missed.

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"I have to be able to talk about religious elaboration without threatening voices, coming from inside as much as outside, immediately asking me to choose: ‘Is it real or is it made up?’ I have to be able to answer once more: ‘Both’."

(Bruno Latour, 2013. Rejoicing: On the Torments of Religious Speech, (trans). Julie Rose, p144)