

Conference Programme

**Nonreligion and Secularity
Research Network**

16-18 June 2021

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Message from NSRN President Lori Beaman

A great deal has changed since the last NSRN meeting in Rome in 2019, not least our ability to meet face to face. While we will miss the opportunity to share meals and the informal exchanges that are part of in person meetings, there are positive impacts in this format, including the reduced travel impact on our planet and the more democratic



opportunity to participate. The NSRN has embraced the potential benefits of virtual meetings and continues to thrive and change to respond to the challenges of the last year. Our 2020 Annual Lecture, featuring Sikivu Hutchinson, took place online in December and we have spent the past few months planning our upcoming conference.

The theme of our 2021 virtual conference is *Nonreligion in a Complex Future*. Sarah-Wilkins Laflamme has been an extraordinary programme chair: organized, creative and enthusiastic. Thank you, Sarah, for your incredible contribution to the conference and the NSRN. The conference is supported by

the Nonreligion in a Complex Future project, including its project coordinator Vanessa Turyatunga and its financial coordinator Peter Cameron, who have offered their time and advice to help us sort out online conference logistics.

Looking to our future, the NSRN Advisory Board is maintaining both continuity and adding new voices. I'd like to welcome Sarah Wilkins Laflamme and Ryan Cragun to the NSRN Advisory Board. Cory Steele and Joanna Malone are co-editing the NSRN blog, ensuring that it remains dynamic and relevant. Cory also worked with Peter Cameron to revamp the website and has also been an active and engaged contributor to the organization of the 2021 conference.

The NSRN is growing and evolving and in order to do that well we need diverse voices to help us ensure an inclusive and welcoming organization. Please let us know if you are interested in contributing.

We hope that you enjoy this opportunity to meet with friends and colleagues who share an interest in research on nonreligion and secularity.

Lori G. Beaman
Professor and Canada Research Chair, Classics and Religious Studies,
University of Ottawa
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Message from 2021 NSRN Conference Programme Chair Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme

What a fabulous and engaging programme we have lined up for this year! I read all our presenters' paper and session proposals with great interest back in February, and am now really looking forward to our conference in June.

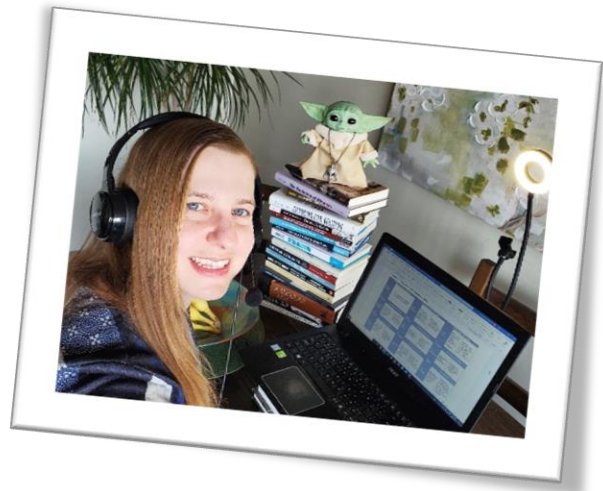
This was my first time putting together a programme for a virtual conference, and has it ever been an experience! It has been great to see so many papers and sessions from researchers across North and South America, the UK, Europe and Oceania. With no travel costs or fatigue to reckon with, and no logistics to plan for an in-person venue, there are some real advantages to the virtual format. This said, the main challenge with this type of programme planning is to give all presenters a timeslot that works with their world time zones. In the call for papers, I promised I would find 'reasonable' time slots for everyone to present in. I put in a lot of work and did my best to achieve this in the programme according to presenters' home institutions. This said, as you will see in the schedule below, I had to interpret 'reasonable' somewhat liberally for some presenters. Some of you will have to present at an earlier or later hour than you are used to. I appreciate your understanding in this and hope it does not cause too much of an inconvenience. Break out the caffeine, and I will especially owe the Aussie presenters a few extra beers next time we get to meet in person at future conferences!

As well as the many exciting paper and author-meets-critics sessions we have in the programme, we also have a few other special sessions and activities for you this June. The Nonreligion in a Complex Future research team, hosts for this year's NSRN conference, will present some of their key methodologies and findings throughout a number of sessions, but especially during the late afternoon session on Wednesday the 16th of June. We have also tried to create some opportunities for socializing and networking during the conference, notably during our informal lunch breaks.

If you notice any mistakes or serious issues in this preliminary version of the programme, or if you would like to volunteer as a session chair, please e-mail me ASAP to let me know. I will then make the necessary updates to the final programme that we will release a few weeks before the start of the conference.

I wish you all a very happy spring, and I look forward to seeing you all in June.

Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme
Assistant Professor, Sociology and Legal Studies, University of Waterloo
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Details and instructions for the virtual running of the conference:

1. **Registration:** If you are not presenting at the conference, but would like to attend one or a number of the sessions, then please register at <https://forms.gle/pcTNXoHWMBfpmCCW7>
Registration to attend the conference is free, and once registered you will be contacted by e-mail with further instructions. Registration deadline is Friday the 11th of June 2021. All presenters, session chairs and respondents listed in this programme have already been registered for the conference.
2. The whole of the conference will take place on **Zoom**, as a series of synchronous sessions and lunch rooms.
 - a. Using Zoom for the first time? It's free to use! Check out the online tutorial: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOUwumKCW7M&ab_channel=NaturalvitaTutorials
 - b. We will have two Zoom 'rooms' set up each day of the conference where the sessions will be run (programmed as recurring meetings by the hosts). To enter a Zoom 'room', just enter the provided meeting ID/web link and the password into your Zoom app/web browser for the desired session and/or lunch time. These meeting IDs, web links, and passwords will be e-mailed to you in the final version of the programme by the start of June 2021 if you are a presenter or registered attendee for the conference. These meeting IDs, web links, and passwords are not provided in the present public version of the conference programme.
 - c. Please use the same Zoom user ID to enter the conference as you registered with if you are a conference attendee. Please have your full name as your Zoom user ID if possible.
 - d. Please arrive a few minutes before the start of the session you wish to attend, especially if you are chairing or presenting during that session. The Zoom meeting rooms will always be open at least 15 minutes before each session, and you can use the morning and afternoon switch break times as well as the end of the lunch break to arrive a few minutes early to your next session.
 - e. If you are a presenter for a session and would like to share slides with attendees, then please have those slides ready on your computer before the start of the session to screen share once you present. When you screen share, it is good practice to "Disable annotation for others" in Zoom.
 - f. Each presentation in regular paper sessions should be no longer than 15 minutes. A Q&A period will follow after all the session presentations.

- g. If you are not presenting, then please remain muted during the session presentations to cut down on background noise. If there are a lot of attendees for a given session, you may also be asked to turn off your video by the room's host Zoom Master.
- h. To ask a question during the Q&A, please post your question (or just an indication that you would like to ask a question) in the chat at any time during the session. Once the session presentations have been given, the session chair will prompt you to ask your question during the Q&A in order of posting in the chat.
- i. The room host Zoom Masters will also offer technical support during each session. A special thank you to all our dedicated Zoom Master volunteers, including Peter Cameron, Cory Steele, and Vanessa Turyatunga.
- j. Each day during the lunch break, there will be another Zoom room provided for informal socializing and networking if you wish to join. Bring your lunch/dinner/snack and chat with fellow conference presenters and attendees! The following individuals will be present and hosting conversation in the lunch break room each day:

Wednesday June 16th, 12:45-1:15pm EDT lunch

- 1. Ryan Cragun, University of Tampa
- 2. Jacqui Frost, Rice University
- 3. Cory Steele, University of Ottawa

Thursday June 17th, 11-11:30am EDT (early) lunch

- 1. Amélie Barras, York University
- 2. Jennifer Selby, Memorial University
- 3. Cory Steele, University of Ottawa

Friday June 18th, 12:45-1:15pm EDT lunch

- 1. Chris Cotter, University of Edinburgh
- 2. Isabella Kasselstrand, University of Aberdeen
- 3. Cory Steele, University of Ottawa

- 3. **We are currently looking for session chairs** for all the sessions that have 'Session chair: TBD' below the session title in the detailed schedule below. If you would like to volunteer as a session chair, please e-mail programme chair Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme by the 30th of April 2021 at sarah.wilkins-laflamme@uwaterloo.ca
In that e-mail, include the top three sessions you would like to chair (you will only end up chairing one session), in rank order, and Sarah will try and match preferences as much as possible among volunteer session chairs. First e-mailed, first served for hotly desired sessions!

4. Please note that the programme schedule provided in the following pages is in **Eastern Daylight Time**. Also note the different start times each morning for the conference to accommodate different world time zones.

5. If you notice any mistakes or serious issues in this preliminary version of the programme, please e-mail the programme chair Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme ASAP to let her know: sarah.wilkins-laflamme@uwaterloo.ca
She will then make the necessary updates to the final programme that will be released a few weeks before the start of the conference.

Overview of the Conference Schedule (in EDT)

Wednesday June 16 th , 2021		Thursday June 17 th , 2021			Friday June 18 th , 2021			
10:30-11am	Welcome address by NSRN president Lori Beaman		7:45-9:15am	Session C.1: Nonreligious Organizations, Gender, and Political Action	Session D.1: (Non)religious Coexistence and Discrimination	9:30-11am	Session E.1: Cultural and Fuzzy Fidelity Among the Less Religious	Authors-meet-critics F.1: <i>None of the Above: Nonreligious Identity in the U.S. and Canada</i>
11-11:15am	Morning switch break		9:15-9:30am	Morning switch break		11-11:15am	Morning switch break	
11:15am-12:45pm	Session A.1: Nonreligion and Secularity in Popular Culture	Session B.1: Nonreligion, Ethics and the Environment	9:30-11am	Session C.2: Nonreligious Identities	Author-meets-critics D.2: <i>Governing Cemeteries</i>	11:15-12:45pm	Session E.2: Secular Spiritualities	Session F.2: Pluralism and (Non)religious Diversity
12:45-1:15pm	Lunch break		11-11:30am	(Early) lunch break		12:45-1:15pm	Lunch break	
1:15-2:45pm	Session A.2: Health and Wellbeing Among the Nonreligious	Session B.2: The Secular Communities Survey	11:30am-1pm	Author-meets-critics C.3: <i>The Critical Study of Non-Religion</i>	Session D.3: Religious Freedom and State Secularism	1:15-2:45pm	Practitioners session E.3: Legislative Prayer in Canada	Session F.3: Theoretical and Methodological Developments in the Study of Nonreligion and Secularity
2:45-3pm	Afternoon switch break					2:45-3pm	Closing remarks by NSRN president Lori Beaman	
3-4:30pm	Nonreligion in a Complex Future special session							

Wednesday June 16th, 2021

10:30-11am

Welcome address by NSRN president Lori Beaman

11-11:15am

Morning switch break

11:15am-12:45pm

Session A.1: Nonreligion and Secularity in Popular Culture

Session chair: TBD

Lived Nonreligions on Screen. Popularizing Nonreligiosity in Contemporary Seriality

Ilaria Bianco, independent researcher, ilariabiano@gmail.com

*In 2009, anthropologist S. Elizabeth Bird wrote in Diane Winston's volume *Small Screen Big Picture. Television and Lived Religion* "TV drama is demonstrably hostile to atheism, which is essentially seen as an extreme and immoral philosophy" arguing also that atheist or nonreligious characters were portrayed only or principally in comedies and in most of the cases in a negative way "as almost a form of pathology." In the last decade, however, the portrayal of religion in television (American, but not only) has changed in significant ways and one of the most interesting aspects is not only a new interest in discussing in a more or less open way religious or spiritual aspects of everyday life, but most of all the growing presence of nonreligious arguments and characters in central roles as well as confrontations among different worldviews. Building, on the one hand, on the concepts of everyday and lived nonreligion and, on the other, on a critical approach to the representation of (non)religion in the media and specifically in seriality, this paper will examine some examples from series of different genres (such as *True Detective*, *Community*, *Sense8*, *Orange is the New Black*) showing how they manage to depict different ways of being religious and nonreligious and how these differences are represented and mediated.*

The Good Place: A Case Study for How Non-Religious Ethics is Conceptualized in the United States

Hannah McKillop, University of Ottawa, hmckio30@uottawa.ca

Over the last 30 years the number of Americans who identify as non-religious has increased by 200%. Many assume that "nones" do not share a specific ethical ideology. This project hypothesizes a) that Levinas' notion of the Other is central to nonreligious

moral ethics, and b) that contemporary popular culture, including television, both reflects and shapes the ethical stance of “nones” in North America. When television programs engage with nonreligious questions like “how can I be a good person if I am not religious?,” their responses offer insight into how nonreligious Americans make moral and ethical decisions. This paper will argue that the television show *The Good Place* offers insight into how nonreligious Americans understand nonreligious morality and ethics outside of a strictly religious framework due to its nonreligious representation of the afterlife.

Irreverence and its Role in the Atheist Awakening

Richard Cimino, SUNY-College at Old Westbury, relwatch1@msn.com
Christopher Smith, independent researcher, contactsmith@gmail.com

This paper examines the role of humor and irreverence in the growth and public confidence of atheism. Humor has been used in a wide variety of contexts to debunk religious beliefs, but we argue that comedy and humor was strategically used by atheist leaders to advance their goals of secularizing a largely religious America at the turn of the millennium. We will focus on professional atheist and agnostic comedians and how their routines have influenced the discourse of atheist leaders and laypeople. Using the methods of textual analysis of comedy performances and a survey of atheists involved in secularist organizations, we will show how such performers used irreverence as an emotion as well as an attitude seeking to break taboos and challenge perceptions of the “establishment” and consensus reality of religion.

Session B.1: Nonreligion, Ethics and the Environment

Session chair: TBD

What We Find in Nature: Comparing the Religious and Nonreligious

Ryan T. Cragun, University of Tampa, ryantcragun@gmail.com
Christina Pasca, University of Tampa, christina.pasca@spartans.ut.edu

Prior research suggests both similarities and differences between the religious and nonreligious in their attitudes toward the environment. Both groups value the environment but there are some differences in how religious and nonreligious individuals conceptualize nature. We examine these differences drawing on a convenience sample of individuals 18+ in the US. We find that religious individuals are more likely to believe humans are stewards of nature while nonreligious individuals are more likely to see humans as part of nature or that nature is in control. We find very few differences between the religious and nonreligious when examining what they obtain from the time they spend in nature walking, hiking, or trekking. There are no differences in obtaining peace of mind, connection, escaping from normal life, or socializing with others. There are minor differences in desiring to protect the environment, finding time to reflect, and feeling a sense of enchantment.

Creator, Saviour, Garburator: (Re)Imagining the Role of Human in Food Waste Relations

Anna Sofia Salonen, Tampere University, anna.salonen@tuni.fi

This study asks how ordinary people portray the role of human in food waste relations. The data consists of interviews with 42 people living in Canada and Finland. I analyse food related talk as an ethical narrative that articulates moral subject positions. By putting empirical data in dialogue with new materialist food waste research, the findings illustrate that humans are assigned roles as both creators of food waste and saviours of food that is in danger of going to waste. Further, in order to trouble these anthropocentric notions, the study detects a third role: the garburator role illuminates the corporeality of humans in food waste relations; the specific human bodies that bear responsibility in food waste relations; and the embodied limits of humans in these relations. The findings point out the persistent anthropocentric tendencies in human/non-human relations in increasingly nonreligious societies, as well as potential ways to complicate these tendencies.

Ethical Veganism and Nonreligion in Casamitjana Costa v The League Against Cruel Sports

Lauren Strumos, University of Ottawa, lstru054@uottawa.ca

In January 2020, an employment tribunal in the United Kingdom decided that ethical veganism qualified for protection from discrimination as a philosophical belief under the UK's Equality Act 2010. This paper explores the reasoning behind this judgement, as presented in the preliminary hearing decision for *Mr J Casamitjana Costa v The League Against Cruel Sports*, to argue that ethical veganism in this context can be conceptualized as a form of nonreligion. It specifically uses relational theories of nonreligion to demonstrate how the tribunal constructs ethical veganism to be distinct from religion, while also positioning it into various relationships with religion. This relational approach offers insights into how the law draws on religion to imagine and define beliefs that are not explicitly or essentially religious. Further, this paper considers the diversity of ethical veganism as an identity and practice, paying particular attention to the ways in which veganism as lived intersects with religion and nonreligion.

12:45-1:15pm

Lunch break hosted by Ryan Cragun, Jacqui Frost, and Cory Steele.

Session A.2: Health and Wellbeing Among the Nonreligious

Session chair: TBD

Health and Wellbeing Among the Nonreligious: Accounting for the Nonreligious Life Course

Jacqui Frost, Rice University, jlf8@rice.edu

Penny Edgell, University of Minnesota, edgell@umn.edu

Mahala Miller, University of Minnesota, mill8570@umn.edu

There is a long history of research in the sociology of religion that links good health and wellbeing to religious affiliation and participation. When compared to a catch-all category of “nones,” the religious are often found to be happier, healthier, and to have a greater sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. Recent research by nonreligion scholars that accounts for the diversity of the nonreligious has upended these assumptions, showing that some subgroups of nonreligious people, particularly atheists, are just as happy and healthy as religious people. In this paper, we contribute to these discussions by analyzing how the nonreligious life course matters for health and wellbeing. Drawing on new survey data that includes measures of respondents’ comfort with their nonreligion and how recently they became nonreligious, we show that much of the variation in health and happiness among the nonreligious is moderated by how long a respondent has been nonreligious. We find that the longer someone has been nonreligious, the more comfortable they are with their nonreligion, and that the more comfortable a respondent is with their nonreligion, the more likely they are to report good health and wellbeing.

Vulnerability and Human Relations: Non-Religious Responses to Religious Requests in Emergency Departments

Bertrand Lavoie, McGill University, bertrand.lavoie@mcgill.ca

Emergency Departments (ED) are critical care units that receive hundreds of patients every day with different life paths and who share religious and non-religious values. The daily life of an ED is complex because of three major imperatives: the management of entries and exits in order to maintain an acceptable level of care, the need to respond adequately to critical cases involving situations of high vulnerability, and the time constraint, which conditions the clinical activities of the teams. The objective of this presentation is to detail the non-religious responses given by ED workers to requests made by vulnerable patients in relation to the respect of their religious obligations (e.g. compliance with prohibitions on religious holidays, religious diets or on-site rituals). This presentation is based on two years of ethnographic research (2018 to 2020) conducted with 50 participants (22 nurses, 19 physicians and 9 interveners) from four EDs in Montreal and the Eastern Townships (Canada), including nearly 250 hours of in situ observations.

Recovering In and From a Crisis: Productions of Secular Affect in Online Alcoholics Anonymous Meetings

Zachary A. Munro, University of Waterloo, zamunro@uwaterloo.ca

Brian R. Schram, University of Waterloo, brschram@uwaterloo.ca

The circumstances and restrictions on social gatherings that emerged in response to Covid-19 have necessitated the suspension of in-person meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous, forcing a migration to Zoom-based meetings. This migration has posed new challenges, including accessibility to applicable technologies, potential for technological illiteracy, and privacy concerns. It has also introduced a new international network of online meetings to nonreligious populations that were previously restricted from participating due to their location. We extend our analysis with new lines of enquiry into secular affect, contrasting pre-Covid-19 observational and interview data with newly collected data from the same participants after their move to online meetings. Leveraging current conditions, we explore the affective dimensions of online secular AA meetings, and consider how telecommunication platforms may impel productive integration into existing recovery programs.

Created Sick, Commanded to be Well: The Relationship between Atheism and Disability

David Speed, University of New Brunswick, dspeed@unb.ca

Individual differences affect a person's likelihood of reporting a disability, but it is unclear how religious or theistic beliefs affect this reporting. Using representative data from the 2015 Canadian General Social Survey (cycle 29), I explore the association between disability status and religious affiliation (atheist, agnostic, None, Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Eastern religions, and other religions) in a sample of Canadians (N > 15,000). Our results suggest that people identifying as atheist were inconsistently more likely to report having a visual, hearing, mobility, memory, or psychological impairment than people who were non-atheists (trivial-to-small effects). However, when comparing respondents on their level of impairment for activities of daily living, we found that atheism was not associated with severity. Atheists were comparably healthy to non-atheists, which is inconsistent with the widely accepted 'belief-as-benefit effect' (i.e., religion/spirituality is salutary).

Session B.2: The Secular Communities Survey: Comparing Secular Affiliates and the Religiously Unaffiliated

Session Chair: Dusty Hoesly, University of California, hoesly@ucsb.edu

This panel introduces the Secular Communities Survey, the largest-ever study of members of local nonbeliever groups. The survey relies on a database of over 1,400 local secular communities in the U.S., ranging from affiliates of national organizations to Meetup groups. The study is also novel in comparing these secular joiners with a wider set of the religiously unaffiliated to investigate differences in social, political, and religious attitudes, behaviors, and modes of belonging. Papers in this panel address several themes

from the study. The first paper presents an overview of the survey and discusses trends in religious, spiritual, and secular identifications among respondents. The second paper examines political attitudes and behaviors among the two study groups as well as comparisons with prior studies of similar populations. The third paper analyzes respondents' attitudes toward and relationship with religion. The fourth paper investigates secular attitudes towards death and life-cycle rituals.

Religious, Spiritual, and Secular Identifications among Secular Joiners and Religiously Unaffiliated Americans

Dusty Hoesly, University of California, hoesly@ucsb.edu

This presentation introduces the Secular Communities Survey (SCS) and examines patterns in identifications among secular and religiously unaffiliated people in the U.S. First, I present the survey's methods, an overview of our findings, and comparisons with previous studies of secular group affiliates and the religiously unaffiliated. Second, I analyze trends in how secular joiners and religiously unaffiliated Americans identify themselves regarding religious, spiritual, and secular labels, as well as their racial and political identifications. As institutional religious affiliations have declined among the general population, diversity within the nonreligious has increased, and it has become ever more important for scholars to understand this group in ways that are religion-related but not religion-centric. By comparing the various identifications of secular joiners with more broadly religiously unaffiliated people, this presentation explores patterns in the tensions, ambivalence, fluidity, and hybridity within the nonreligious discursive field.

Identity, Attitudes, and Engagement: The Politics of Secular Affiliates and the Religiously Unaffiliated

Juhem Navarro-Rivera, Socioanalítica Research LLC, juhemnr@socioanalitica.com

This presentation compares and contrasts the political attitudes and political engagement of the religiously unaffiliated (people with no religious identity) and secular affiliates (people who join associations whose membership consists of atheists, humanists, and other secular identities) in the U.S. Election polling generally shows that religiously unaffiliated people have a preference for the Democratic Party over the Republican Party, but differences between secular affiliates and the religiously unaffiliated who do not join have been generally unexplored. Using the Secular Community Survey and the Secular Voices Survey, the former a poll of secular affiliates, and the latter a representative sample of religiously unaffiliated, we explore the extent to which membership in secular movement organizations influences or hinders political engagement and influences political views, partisanship, and ideology. We also explore how distinct cohorts of secular peoples such as atheists, humanists, and skeptics vary in their attitudes, political leanings, and political engagement.

Religion-like and Not-at-all-religious: Ambivalence Toward Religion Among the Very Secular

Joseph Blankholm, University of California, blankholm@ucsb.edu

Relying on data gathered from the Secular Communities Survey, this paper explores secular ambivalence toward religion. It argues that secular people face a special challenge: they need to avoid religion to be secular, but living in the remainder of a broad definition of religion is very restrictive. How do secular people negotiate this tension between avoiding religion and not allowing the need for its absence to structure their lives? Are anti-religious people willing to engage in religion-like behaviors if they seem sufficiently secular? What are the characteristics of the very secular people who are most likely to embrace a secularized form of religion, and what sort of secular people are likely to avoid anything that remotely resembles religious belief or behavior? The Secular Communities Survey is the first attempt to answer these questions with quantitative methods, and this paper will present its findings.

Ritual Without the Ritual? Secular People at Birth, Death, and In-Between

Courtney Applewhite, University of California, applewhite@ucsb.edu

This paper considers how secular people engage with life-cycle rituals. In many societies, importance is placed on rituals at birth, coming-of-age, marriage, and death. In the United States, these events often have a religious tint. Secular people also experience life-cycle transitions and must make choices in how they mark these events. Drawing on data from the Secular Communities Survey (SCS), we explore how secular people adapt what may be viewed as religious ritual to accommodate their secular beliefs and values. In particular, death rituals are instances in which the transition from living to dead is acknowledged. I argue that this ontological moment is a window into the nexus of belief, practice, and sociality that secular people must reconcile. Using the SCS's quantitative data, I examine how factors such as organizational involvement, familial preferences, or personally-held beliefs contribute to the choice to participate in, modify, or avoid certain life-cycle rituals.

Respondent: Barry Kosmin, Trinity College, Barry.Kosmin@trincoll.edu

2:45-3pm

Afternoon switch break

3-4:30pm

Nonreligion in a Complex Future special session

The Nonreligion in a Complex Future (NCF) project is an international, comparative, interdisciplinary research project which identifies the social impact of the rapid and dramatic increase of nonreligion in Canada, Australia, the Nordic countries (Sweden,

Norway, Denmark, Finland), the United States, the United Kingdom, and Latin America (Brazil and Argentina). In this session, NCF team members will present the various projects underway which examine the impact of nonreligion in each of the NCF focal areas - health, law, education, migration and the environment. The team will discuss their key methodologies, theoretical frameworks and initial challenges and findings, with a brief discussion period at the end of the session.

Thursday June 17th, 2021

7:45-9:15am

Session C.1: Nonreligious Organizations, Gender, and Political Action

Session chair: TBD

Nonreligious Organizations in Croatia: Online Strategies

Nikolina Hazdovac Bajic, Institute for Social Sciences Ivo Pilar,

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A small community of nonreligious peoples began to organize in highly religious Croatian society about fifteen years ago. This community today is comprised of five tightly knit formal (legally registered) associations and four loosely connected informal groups. Starting from three theoretical perspectives on organized nonreligiosity and atheism (identity theory, cultural approach to social movements theory, and mediatization theory), this paper's aim is to analyze various strategies these organizations employ in the context of their online activities. The present study is based on deductive or directed qualitative content analysis which identifies key categories already described in theory and tries to apply them in the Croatian social context, seeking new insights and a deeper understanding. The analysis includes materials posted on web pages and official Facebook pages of nonreligious and atheistic organizations in Croatia. Materials were analyzed with respect to five predetermined concepts or strategies: competitiveness/cooperation, minority discourse, religious mimicry/fabrication, inversion, and association/revitalization.

“Apostatizing Together”: Feminist Collective Apostasies in Argentina and Spain

Julia Martínez-Ariño, University of Groningen, j.martinez.arino@rug.nl

In the last few years, feminist movements in Argentina and Spain have enlarged their mobilization repertoires with so-called “feminist apostasies”—group performances in local bishoprics to formally request to leave the Catholic Church. This form of collective action is used to protest against the patriarchal nature and structures of the Catholic institution and its stance on issues such as abortion, LGBTQI+ rights and sexual abuse scandals. Drawing on ethnographic and visual material and interviews with feminist apostates, in this presentation I will examine the practices, discourses and material objects around feminist collective apostasies. I understand them as political mobilizations which aim at generating an impact on public debates around the role of the Church in society. My approach, therefore, differs from that of the literature on “deconversion” that focuses on the rejection of faith, practice and community, and adopts a novel perspective on apostasy as a type of political action.

Women and Gender Imbalance in Non-Religious Groups in Australia

Katja Strehle, Western Sydney University, K.strehle@westernsydney.edu.au

This paper will address the lived experiences of women as members of non-religious organisations in Australia. The non-religious movement has a problem with gender balance—quite a visible one. Although some of the most prominent figures of non-religion in Australia are women, like the Member of Parliament for the Reason Party Coalition, Fiona Patten, most members of the Australian non-religious community are white middle-aged men. This has an impact on the dynamics, culture and reach within those groups. Drawing on preliminary analysis of interviews with 30 women affiliated with humanist and atheist groups in Australia, I will focus on the women's experiences of gender equality in local non-religious communities. I argue that despite non-religious organisations often claiming otherwise, misogyny and gender inequality is a widespread but subtle issue in these groups in Australia. This is the reason for the gender imbalance in the community.

The Atheist Movement and Politics in Brazil. Controversies over the 2018 Presidential Election

Sabrina Testa, Federal University of Santa Catarina, sabritesta@yahoo.com.ar

This presentation seeks to explore the controversies developed within the Brazilian atheist movement during the campaign for the 2018 national elections. The process and its outcome –the election of the right-wing candidate Jair Bolsonaro as the new president– highlighted a sharp polarization among the atheist activists. On the one hand, those who opposed its leadership alleging that his alliance with the increasingly powerful evangelical sector and his explicit Christian discourse were incoherent with unbelievers' rights and interests. On the other hand, those who vindicated the possibility to vote for a religious figure as Bolsonaro despite their positions and advocacy as active atheists, prioritizing their socio-economical views. In fact, since its beginnings in the first decade of the new millennium, the Brazilian atheist movement made the laicity of the State its main flag. The concept is understood as a strict separation between churches and State, and the movement struggles to reduce the historical influence of the Catholic Church and the increasing influence of evangelical churches and leaders in public affairs.

Session D.1: (Non)religious Coexistence and Discrimination

Session chair: TBD

"Let the Entire People Avenge the Crime of Blasphemy": Atheism and Moral Panic in Medieval Europe

Keagan Brewer, Macquarie University, keaganjoelbrewer@gmail.com

Because medieval Europeans did not have a word exactly equivalent to modern English 'atheism', some historians have dismissed or downplayed the possibility of atheism in the Middle Ages. The Latin terms infidelis and incredulis, 'unfaithful' or 'unbelieving'

(with connotations of modern English ‘infidel’), were indeed applied to Jews, Muslims, and Christians that believed or behaved improperly according to those making the claim. However, in this paper, I examine case studies of moral panic, abuse, and violence following atheist speech-acts, which reveals that medieval people did in fact believe that it was possible for an individual to have an enduring and deep-seated rejection of the existence of God. Medieval atheists did not need a word of exactly equivalent meaning to argue that God did not exist. I also argue that moral panic is a fundamental feature of religious group mentalities that perpetuates the group’s sociopolitical cohesion when it is threatened by atheist speech. For that reason, all atheist speech-acts in the Middle Ages were incredibly emotive for both the speaker and hearer.

The Politics of Atheism: A History

Nathan G. Alexander, independent scholar, nathan.g.alexander50@gmail.com

This paper sketches out the foundation for a forthcoming book project which examines the politics of atheism from a historical perspective. Atheism has never purely concerned ideas about God. Rather, political arguments have often flowed from atheist ones, and vice versa. The key question is whether there is any kind of “core” to atheist politics. I propose there are two interrelated aspects to atheist politics. The first is a rejection of certain kinds of authority, namely those based upon theist worldviews such as the divine right of kings. The second is an oppositional, contrarian ethos, in part because of the fact that atheists have often, though not always, been a persecuted minority group. These two aspects can lead in diverse directions, including to socialism, liberalism, and libertarianism. The paper draws upon historical examples to make these points.

The Complex Intersections of Hate: Exploring the Nonreligious and Religious Aspects of Contemporary Antisemitism

Megan Hollinger, University of Ottawa, mhollo27@uottawa.ca

Contemporary antisemitism is a form of hate that is comprised of both religious and nonreligious elements. Often, different forms of hate are separated based on monolithic motivations such as religion, race, and ethnicity amongst others. Antisemitism, as well as Jewish identity are not solely defined by religion. In other words, many Jewish people construct their identity and experience anti-Jewish hatred in nonreligious ways as well. This paper focuses mostly on the Canadian context and argues that it is vital to acknowledge the nonreligious aspects of antisemitism in order to combat it effectively. To demonstrate this, it examines several examples of nonreligiously-motivated antisemitism. Some of the areas in which we observe these complexities are law, online, and with data collection and statistics. The examples are therefore drawn mainly from legal cases and social media. This paper also highlights some of the complexities that arise from promoting monolithic conceptualizations of antisemitism.

Pandemic Non-Religion and Prayer for the Nation: Fantastic or ‘phantasmagorical’?

Anja Finger, independent researcher, anja.finger@hotmail.co.uk

In the course of the pandemic, quasi-metaphysical arguments about the anthropological necessity of religion have been revived, yet sceptical voices contend that suggestions of a religious renaissance are premature and religious wishful thinking rather than a reflection of empirical evidence. This paper analyses contemporary discourses of non-religion in the context of the Covid-19 crisis. More specifically, I am going to look at the recent Prayer for the Nation initiative: The Church of England has invited the ‘nation’ to ‘call on God in prayer’, irrespective of whether that nation’s members share the church’s faith – or any faith. While nominally all are invited, the prayer form and its contents are exclusionary. Although there is some rhetorical acknowledgment of diversity, it seems that a positive contribution to coexistence is limited insofar as the initiative does not attempt to translate its religious semantics into a more generally accessible language.

9:15-9:30pm

Morning switch break

9:30-11am

Session C.2: Nonreligious Identities

Session chair: TBD

Nonreligion and Cultural Religion as a Continuum: Understanding the Role of (Non)religion in Modern Denmark

Anne Lundahl Mauritsen, Aarhus University, anlm@cas.au.dk

The term “The Scandinavian Paradox” denotes the fact that Scandinavians remain members of their national churches, but often self-identify as nonreligious; this still puzzles researchers. I present data which explores the connection between nonreligion and cultural religion in modern-day Denmark. Based on exploratory analyses, I discuss how we may perceive nonreligion and cultural religion, inspired by new theoretical understandings of religion and nonreligion, which are increasingly focused on how (non)religious identities, beliefs and practices can be understood as incongruent, shifting and situated (Chaves 2010, Taves 2018). Rather than fitting individuals into distinct categories, I suggest that we may think of (non)religion as a broader continuum on which individuals are oscillating, depending on whether they are e.g. expressing individual, nonreligious worldviews or are participating in collective, culturally religious identities, and that such theorizing could help us understand “the Scandinavian Paradox” as well as nonreligion generally.

Atheists in Greek Society: Beliefs About Religion and Morality in a Greek-Orthodox Context

Alexandros Sakellariou, Hellenic Open University/Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences of Athens, sociology.panteion@gmail.com,
sakellariou.alexandros@ac.eap.gr

Greek society is predominantly Greek-Orthodox and the Orthodox Church still plays an important and influential role on societal and political issues. In 2012, however, an Atheist Union was founded in Greece and many people started to discuss about their atheism or non-belief in the public sphere and the media. This paper builds upon the findings of a qualitative research conducted through 59 semi-structured interviews with people self-characterised as atheists or agnostics. The main questions that are going to be answered in this paper are: Who are the Greek atheists in contemporary Greek society? Which are their beliefs about God, religion, and the Orthodox Church? How do they understand morality and how does this impact their life meaning? The main purpose of this paper is to cast light on Greek atheists' beliefs on religion and morality and understand how these beliefs shape their atheist identity as they move away from Greek-Orthodoxy.

Nonreligious Identities: A Cross-Cultural Qualitative Empirical Study with Nonreligious Individuals in Belgium, Greece and Norway

Sofia Nikitaki, KU Leuven, sofia.nikitaki@kuleuven.be

This paper will present the results of an in-depth, qualitative research containing 64 in-depth interviews with nonreligious individuals from Flanders (Belgium), Greece and Norway. The questions explored in this study focused on two main aspects: the ways that the research participants understand and define their own nonreligious positions (1) and the ways they understand, relate and react to religion-related concepts and terms, such as 'god', 'higher power' and 'spirituality', as well as various forms of religious expressions (2). Furthermore, a secondary focus of this research was to explore whether there are indications of a relation between the manner nonreligion is expressed and the cultural background of the research participants. This presentation aims into briefly discussing the aforementioned topics, paying special attention to the variations of nonreligious expressions in relation to the three countries studied.

Mapping Non-Religious Childhood

Rachael Shillitoe, University of Birmingham, r.shillitoe@bham.ac.uk
Anna Strhan, University of York, anna.strhan@york.ac.uk

As numbers of those identifying as nonreligious continue to rise in Western Europe and North America, particularly among children and young people, this paper presents findings from a multi-sited ethnographic project exploring what it means to grow up as non-religious in Britain. This paper will profile the nonreligious children (ages 7-11 years) of our study and explore the different configurations of their (un)belief as well as the ways in which these beliefs are interrelated with particular worldviews and existential cultures. We identify the key beliefs and concerns non-religious children hold and map nonreligion, secularity, spirituality and religion as they are constructed and

negotiated across the spaces of both school and family life. Overall, this paper demonstrates the multiple, complex forms nonreligion takes in childhood and the importance of attending to childhood in order to fully appreciate the nature and diversity of being non-religious.

Author-meets-critics session D.2: Governing Cemeteries: State Responses to the New Diversity in The Netherlands, Norway and France

This book compares state responses to Muslims' and humanists' burial needs in the Netherlands, Norway and France, providing a striking image of societal accommodation. It shows that policy responses follow distinctive types of logic between the various levels of governance, and, furthermore, that material solutions matter as well. In a departure from this major finding, author Rosemarie van den Breemer argues for a 'two-pronged strategy' in the study of state responses to religion and nonreligion, one that oscillates between theory development and everyday empirical analysis. On the conceptual level, her account deals with the discussion of reified state-church models in the 'religious governance' literature and with the concept of secularism in the research agenda of 'the multiple secularisms and secularities.' On the empirical level, she carefully maps out the previously uncharted institutional domain of cemeteries. Thus, the volume outlines a methodologically more coherent research agenda for the comparative study of religion, nonreligion, secularism and state.

Author and session chair:

Rosemarie van den Breemer, VID Specialized University, rosemari.breemer@vid.no

Critics:

José Casanova, Georgetown University and Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, jvc26@georgetown.edu

Veit Bader, University of Amsterdam, v.m.bader@uva.nl

Yolande Jansen, University of Amsterdam and VU University, y.jansen@uva.nl

Trygve Wyller, University of Oslo and University of Kwazulu-Natal, t.e.wyller@uio.no

11-11:30am

(Early) lunch break hosted by Amélie Barras, Jennifer Selby, and Cory Steele.

Author-meets-critics session C.3: The Critical Study of Non-Religion: Discourse, Identification and Locality

This book acts as a bridge between the critical study of 'religion' and empirical studies of 'religion in the real world'. Author Chris Cotter presents a concise and up-to-date critical survey of research on non-religion in the UK and beyond, before presenting the results of extensive research in Edinburgh's Southside which blurs the boundary between 'religion' and 'non-religion'. In doing so, Cotter demonstrates that these are dynamic subject positions, and phenomena can occupy both at the same time, or neither, depending on who is doing the positioning, and what issues are at stake. This book details an approach that avoids constructing 'religion' as in some way unique, whilst also fully incorporating 'non-religious' subject positions into religious studies. It provides a rich engagement with a wide variety of theoretical material, rooted in empirical data, which will be essential reading for those interested in critical, sociological and anthropological study of the contemporary non-/religious landscape.

Author and session chair:

Chris Cotter, University of Edinburgh, chris.cotter@ed.ac.uk

Critics:

Andie Alexander, Emory University, amanda.ray.alexander@emory.edu

Morteza Hashemi, University of Bristol, m.hashemi@bristol.ac.uk

Paul-Francois Tremlett, The Open University, paul-francois.tremlett@open.ac.uk

Linda Woodhead, Lancaster University, l.woodhead@lancaster.ac.uk

Session D.3: Religious Freedom and State Secularism

Session chair: TBD

Religious Decline since the Church-State Separation in Sweden

Isabella Kasselstrand, University of Aberdeen, isabella.kasselstrand@abdn.ac.uk

In 2000, the Church of Sweden was disestablished as a State church. As all citizens were historically members regardless of religious convictions, the Church has predominantly symbolized a cultural heritage in a secularizing society. However, since the church-state tie was severed, there has been a sharp decline in membership, from 83% of the population in 2000 to 56% in 2019. Given that Swedes now make more active choices about their religious affiliation, a reasonable assumption is that those who choose to remain are more pious than the church body was before the disestablishment. Yet,

contrary to this hypothesis, findings from ISSP data (1998-2018) suggest that not only the unaffiliated, but also the remaining Church of Sweden adherents, have in fact continued to become less likely to believe in God or a higher power, showing clear trends toward ongoing secularization both within the Church and in the population as a whole.

In Satan We Trust: The Satanic Temple's Activism

Mathieu Colin, University of Montreal, mathieu.colin@umontreal.ca

This paper aims to demonstrate how the Satanic Temple represents a new form of religious expression. They claim to be a Satanist group that belongs to the rationalist branch of contemporary Satanism (Petersen 2009); they are political activists who advocate secularism and separation of church-state; and they consider the Satanic Temple as a religious group that promotes an “atheistic religion” (Greaves 2013). Their purpose is to propose a religious alternative that fights for pluralism and religious freedom with a secularist approach, by challenging the power of organized religions in the public sphere. The provocative and religious approach of the Temple intends to challenge and to balance the power of Christianity in the US. Therefore, this paper will argue that the Satanic Temple is a unique example of the recent politicization of the non-religious minority (Cimino and Smith 2014), in order to counterbalance the presence of religion in the public sphere and its influence on public policies. It is also an original way to explore the link between secularism and power through the negotiation of tensions between the Temple and other religious groups. Moreover, it is an opportunity to study religion as a political expression, since the Satanic Temple states that their political activism is their religion. This paper will examine some of their actions as well as their views on religious freedom and pluralism that result from them.

How Transnational Debates Inform laïcité in Québec: An Analysis of European Influence in the Crafting of Bill 21

Jennifer A. Selby, Memorial University of Newfoundland, jsselby@mun.ca

Amélie Barras, York University, abarras@yorku.ca

With legal projects beginning in 2010, several Québécois political parties have reinforced a model of religious governance that is decidedly different from the remainder of Canada and shares features with the French model of laïcité. Scholars have considered the impacts of European (e.g., French 2004 and 2011 laws; a Belgian 2011 law) in framing and informing Québécois secularism. Bill 21 is the first to pass into law. Seeking to qualify this transnationalism in relation to 2019's Bill 21, we ask: which arguments from the francophone transnational sphere resonated most? Which actors (e.g., intellectuals, thinkers and activists) facilitated this circulation? We focus specifically on oral and written parliamentary interventions during the debates prior to Bill 21, and on arguments present in five Québécois newspapers: the Journal de Montréal, La Presse, Le Devoir, Le Soleil and the Montréal Gazette. Our aim is to map the influence of European debates on Bill 21.

Friday June 18th, 2021

9:30-11am

Session E.1: Cultural and Fuzzy Fidelity Among the Less Religious

Session chair: TBD

Religious Disaffiliated or Religious Indifferent? Morphology of the Unaffiliated in Argentina

Juan Cruz Esquivel, University of Buenos Aires/National Council of Scientific and Technical Research, jucesquivel@gmail.com

This article aims to characterize the socio-economic and demographic profile of the population without religious affiliation in Argentina, as well as their beliefs, practices and attitudes towards a range of issues related to public and private life. The research was based on the Second National Survey on Religious Beliefs and Attitudes in Argentina, carried out in 2019. The study's universe was made up of the population of the Argentine Republic aged 18 years or more, living in localities or urban agglomerations with at least 5,000 inhabitants. A total of 2,421 cases were selected through multistage sampling. The analysis of the data reveals that it would be inaccurate to say that the religiously unaffiliated do not convey religious beliefs. Given that those who responded do not belong to any religion but neither defined themselves as agnostics or atheists are the most numerous sub-group and with the highest growth rate within the religiously unaffiliated, it would be unwise to consider this fringe of the Argentine citizenry as a-religious.

Religious Residual: Investigating Variations in Religiosity Among the Unaffiliated

Nadia Beider, Hebrew University, Nadia.beider@mail.huji.ac.il

The number of religious nones in Western Europe has tripled in the last thirty years. Despite identifying outside organized religion, nones are not uniformly non-religious. In order to ascertain why some nones are more religious than others, this paper examines the impact of prior religious affiliation by comparing the religiosity of disaffiliates and lifelong nones. It draws on data from three waves of the ISSP religion module in four countries - France, Germany, Sweden and the UK. Multivariable regressions demonstrate that disaffiliates are consistently more religious than cradle nones, due to a religious residual from childhood, which helps explain the variance in religiosity among nones. Furthermore, religiosity declines among both groups over time, particularly in Germany, with its higher proportion of second generation lifelong nones. Religiosity among nones is temporary, weakening with each passing generation due to secularization processes, which is only slightly mitigated by countervailing individualization trends.

“Unfuzzing” the Fidelity of Secular Scandinavians: The Affective Space of Religious Nostalgia

Evelina Lundmark, Agder University, evelina.lundmark@uia.no

In this presentation the outline for a new project on the “fuzzy” (Voas, 2009) or nominally Christian populations of the Scandinavian countries will be put forth, focusing on preliminary findings on how “banal” Christian symbolism (Hjarvard, 2008) in popular children’s programming may evoke a sense of religious nostalgia, and how this nostalgia plays into conceptions of national identity. The aim of the project is to explore the affective bonds between the presumed secular (Norris & Inglehart, 2011) majorities in Scandinavia, their respective former State churches, and how ideas of a Christian heritage, culture, and national identity interlink in popular imaginings. Building on theoretical work on nominal Christianity and nationalism (Day, 2011), and banal religiosity (Hjarvard, 2008), this project will contribute to knowledge on the relationship between the perception of secularity, religious nostalgia, and nationalism in religiously indifferent, culturally Christian populations.

Authors-meet-critics session F.1: None of the Above: Nonreligious Identity in the U.S. and Canada

This book examines the nearly one-quarter of American and Canadian adults who say they have no religion. Who are they? Why, and where, has this population grown? How do religious nones in the United States and Canada compare? What are the dynamics of being a religious none in contemporary America and Canada, and how does this willful distance from organized religion impact other aspects of daily and social life? This study turns to survey and interview data to answer these questions against the backdrop of three theoretical frameworks in the sociology of religion and religious studies: stages of decline, individualization and spiritualization, as well as polarization. The authors-meet-critics session will bring together the two authors of the book along with two leading experts on religion and nonreligion for their responses and critiques.

Authors and session chairs:

Joel Thiessen, Ambrose University, jathiessen@ambrose.edu

Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, University of Waterloo, sarah.wilkins-laflamme@uwaterloo.ca

Critics:

Lori Beaman, University of Ottawa, lbeaman@uottawa.ca

Peter Beyer, University of Ottawa, pbeyer@uottawa.ca

11-11:15am

Morning switch break

11:15am-12:45pm

Session E.2: Secular Spiritualities

Session chair: TBD

Complexity and Eclecticism: Exploring the Experiences and Worldviews of the 'Spiritual But Not Religious'

James Murphy, Canterbury Christ Church University, james.murphy@canterbury.ac.uk

This study uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to investigate the lived experiences of five 'spiritual but not religious' (SBNR) individuals in England. This includes an examination of the moral and social dimensions of the individuals' nonreligious lives and the socio-cultural influences on their beliefs and practices. Semi-structured interviews with each participant were analyzed using an inductive and iterative process that examines both their experiences and how they learned to make sense of themselves and the world. This analysis develops seven themes, which are organized into two superordinate themes: 'Experiencing Transcendence' and 'Constructing a Personal Spirituality'. These participants value their own experiences and intuitions highly, actively working to make sense of the world. They reject dogmatic religious authorities and follow their own moral instincts, seeking to help others and make the world a better place. Their lives are an eclectic and complex fusion of diverse practices, relationships, and existential understandings.

Is the Door Finally Open to a Secular Christianity?

Brendon Neilson, University of Victoria, brendonneilson@gmail.com

*Prior to his execution, Dietrich Bonhoeffer corresponded with a friend from his prison cell near the end of WWII. He wondered if the time had come for a religionless Christianity in light of the clear evil the religious version had espoused and enabled. A lineage of theological works in this vein were produced throughout the decades that followed, but with relatively obscure academic acceptance, and little adoption by communities of faith. This paper engages this lineage of secular theologies (with particular attention to Ronald Gregor Smith) in light of Martin Hagglund's *This Life*, to wonder if perhaps now the door is open to a secular vision of Christian life.*

Identities, Values and Religious Rituals: A Case Study of Players from the Canadian Football League (CFL)

Mathilde Vanasse-Pelletier, University of Ottawa, mathildevanassepelletier@gmail.com

This paper explores the religious and non-religious identities of CFL players and how they impact the participation in and perception of religious game-related rituals. Semi-

directed interviews were conducted with 20 players who were asked about their rituals, as well as their religious/nonreligious backgrounds and present identifications. While most interviewees describe having a religious affiliation, some players present themselves as atheists or agnostics. Our results also show that religion is very present in the world of football, notably through group prayers on game day, and that individual prayer rituals are frequently used during preparation. Most importantly, a common set of values including respect, hard work, selflessness, loyalty, and brotherhood comes across as essential to what you could call the “spirit of football,” which brings together teammates as well as opponents – because they’re “all in this together.”

Nonreligion in Prison

Solange Lefebvre, University of Montreal, solange.lefebvre@umontreal.ca

My research project funded by the Ministry of Public Security of the Government of Quebec (2017-2021) aims to explore how incarcerated populations are characterized by a new spiritual and religious pluralism that questions assumptions made by the Ministry of Public Security (MSP) and pastoral workers. The objective of this study is threefold: to analyze the spiritual and religious needs of populations incarcerated in provincial detention centers; to evaluate programs related to chaplaincy and spiritual care; and to examine the issue of radicalization as it arises. I will present the main results showing that if the rise of spirituality manifests itself, it does so simultaneously with a persistence of inherited religions, or with non-religion. 330 staff and 950 inmates participated in the research (online and paper questionnaires, interviews), providing a surprising understanding of religion, non-religion and spirituality in prison. In view of the results, it is questionable whether the recent adoption of the concept of spirituality to define old pastoral services in public institutions is not missing something, giving the impression that spirituality is something “beyond” religions and nonreligion when it may not be.

Session F.2: Pluralism and (Non)religious Diversity

Session chair: TBD

Perceptions of Ethnic-Racial and Religious Diversity in Brazil and Argentina and Their Political-Legal Expressions

Paula Montero, University of São Paulo, pmontero@usp.br

Camila Nicácio, University of Minas Gerais, cnicacio@ufmg.br

Juan Marco Vaggione, National University of Córdoba-CONICET, juanvaggione@yahoo.com

This article aims to understand how dominant perceptions of ethnic-racial diversity, which can be apprehended through official instruments such as census surveys, are connected to religious diversity governance in Brazil and Argentina, countries where Catholicism has had a hegemonic impact. Our hypothesis is that race and ethnic definitions are crucial in the social and legal process of contestations about which

popular performances constitute religious practices. In this sense, the normative Catholic-related perspective played an important role in the design of the secular legal-political perspective of religious freedom. To demonstrate this connection we will analyze, comparatively, the constitutional framework historically given to religious and ethnic-racial diversity. We will demonstrate that the way of perceiving and categorizing diversity expresses itself in state responses to control it through state policies. We assume that the differences between the two countries in dealing with religious diversity strains in various ways the relations between freedom and equality regimes, although some parallels in the configurations of inequality are noticeable.

Not Indigenous Enough: The Voices of Indigenous Atheists in Three Canadian Cities

Jonathan Simmons, University of Alberta, jssimmon@ualberta.ca

Despite an increasing trend towards non-religious identification, limited information is available about nonreligion among Indigenous peoples in North America. To address this gap in the literature, I interviewed 16 Indigenous (i.e., First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) people, most of whom self-identified as atheists, residing in three Canadian cities: Edmonton, Calgary, and Winnipeg. The aim of my research was exploratory in that I wanted to understand how Indigenous people described religion and nonreligion and I wanted to give voice to the diversity of their experiences. My primary finding is that Indigenous atheists experience stigma because they challenge multiple social norms around religion and spirituality in Indigenous communities. This study is the first to explore the unique experiences of Indigenous atheists in Canada and highlights the need to further research minority and marginalized nonreligious populations. Implications for future research are discussed.

Rethinking Nonreligion in Canadian Law: Looking Beyond Atheism

Cory Steele, University of Ottawa, cstee023@uottawa.ca

Since the 1960s, Canada, like many other Western countries, has experienced a rapid growth in the number of people who identify as having “no religion.” This increase in the nonreligious has prompted various social institutions to reconsider a number of policies to ensure this growing population is afforded full and equal participation in society. The law has been called on by the nonreligious to decide upon the constitutionality of various social practices promoted by the State, including the use of prayer to open municipal town hall meetings, and legislation that has often prohibited access to physician-assisted dying, same-sex marriage, and abortion. Interestingly, however, most cases brought before courts by the nonreligious are done so by atheists. Thus, legal institutions have largely only addressed one type of nonreligion. Given this limited engagement, what, then, are the implications of this for nonreligion? This paper argues that the law imagines most nonreligious individuals as “atheists” and conceptualizes atheism, and therefore nonreligion more generally, as simply lacking a belief in God. Courts ignore the meaningful beliefs, practices, and values that characterize atheism and nonreligion as it is lived.

12:45-1:15pm

Lunch break hosted by Chris Cotter, Isabella Kasselstrand, and Cory Steele

1:15-2:45pm

Practitioners Session E.3: Legislative Prayer in Canada

Session chair: Teale Phelps Bondaroff, British Columbia Humanist Association (BCHA), tealepb@gmail.com

As the chief decision-making bodies in our country, legislative assemblies should be open and welcoming to all people, regardless of their religious beliefs, or lack thereof. The Canadian Supreme Court has ruled that the state had a duty of religious neutrality and that the inclusion of prayer in municipal council meetings excludes people and violates this duty. Despite this ruling and the principle of inclusion that should pervade legislative bodies, the practice of opening legislative meetings with prayer persists in Canada at every level of government. This panel explores this issue in depth, surveying the practices and controversies surrounding the inclusion of prayer in Parliament and provincial legislatures, examining the extent to which municipalities have complied with the *Saguenay* decision, the challenges faced by bureaucrats seeking to accommodate a greater number of religious traditions with the practice, and concludes with a deep dive into legislative prayer in British Columbia.

Presentations (note presenter name is bolded):

Legislative Prayer Across Canada

Dr. Teale Phelps Bondaroff, Research Coordinator, BCHA, tealepb@gmail.com

Ranil Prasad, Researcher, BCHA, ranil@bchumanist.ca

Noah Laurence, Researcher, BCHA, nochelaurence@gmail.com

Alexandre Darveau-Morin, Researcher, BCHA, alexandre.darveau-morin@bchumanist.ca

Ian Bushfield, Executive Director, BCHA, exdir@bchumanist.ca

Adriana Thom, Researcher, BCHA, adriana.thom@bchumanist.ca

*In the *Mouvement laïque québécois v. Saguenay* decision, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the state has a duty of religious neutrality, declaring prayer at municipal council meetings to be exclusionary and unconstitutional. Despite this ruling, Parliament and legislative assemblies across Canada continue to begin daily sittings with a prayer, which is most often Christian in nature. This paper provides an overview of the diverse practices that surround legislative prayer across Canada. It then surveys the historical controversies surrounding legislative prayer in Canada, along with the arguments presented for and against this practice. The *Saguenay* decision applied only to municipalities, and at the time, the court suggested that prayer at higher levels of government could be protected by parliamentary privilege. This paper concludes by exploring whether this is or should be the case.*

Whatever Happened to Saguenay? Municipal Prayer Post-Saguenay

Adriana Thom, Researcher, BCHA, adriana.thom@bchumanist.ca

Dr. Teale Phelps Bondaroff, Research Coordinator, BCHA, tealepb@gmail.com

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*In 2018, the British Columbia Humanist Association was notified that a number of municipalities in BC opened their inaugural council sessions with prayer. This was in violation of the Supreme Court's 2015 ruling in *Mouvement laïque québécois v. Saguenay* that including prayer in municipal council meetings was unconstitutional and violated the state's duty of religious neutrality. We decided to investigate further to determine the number of municipalities operating in violation of *Saguenay*. We began by surveying to top 50 municipalities (by population) in each province, inspecting agendas and minutes of regular and inaugural sessions. For provinces where prayer was identified in three or more municipalities (Ontario, BC, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta), we expanded our investigation to examine every municipality with a population over 1,000. In addition to detailing the results of this survey, we explore the particular nuance of municipal prayer in each province – for example, in BC the practice is restricted to inaugural meetings, whereas in Manitoba and Ontario, prayers can be found in regular sessions.*

The Arbiters of Faith: Legislative Assembly of British Columbia Entanglement with Religious Dogma Resulting from Legislative Prayer

Ian Bushfield, Executive Director, BCHA, exdir@bchumanist.ca

Dr. Teale Phelps Bondaroff, Research Coordinator, BCHA, tealepb@gmail.com

Daily sittings of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia begin with a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) delivering a prayer or reflection of their own devising, or reading one from a list provided by Legislative staff. This list of sample prayers was recently revised by the Office of the Clerk to include prayers from a number of religious traditions. To update this list, the Office of the Clerk needed to identify religious and belief groups in BC, select a reasonable number of those groups to include on the list, and identify prayers and reflections that are representative of those traditions. Each of these steps raises practical questions with respect to how bureaucrats can make these decisions, and to more fundamental questions regarding the appropriateness of the decisions made. We conclude that the practice of offering sample prayers be avoided, or that legislative prayer be abolished.

Change and Prayers: An Analysis of Prayers in the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, 2003-2020

Dr. Teale Phelps Bondaroff, Research Coordinator, BCHA, tealepb@gmail.com

Dr. Katie Marshall, Board Member, BCHA, kmarshall@zoology.ubc.ca

Ian Bushfield, Executive Director, BCHA, exdir@bchumanist.ca

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Adriana Thom, Researcher, BCHA, adriana.thom@bchumanist.ca
Alexandre Darveau-Morin, Researcher, BCHA, alexandre.darveau-morin@bchumanist.ca

This paper investigates the practice of opening sittings of the Legislature of British Columbia with prayer. It examines prayers delivered in the Legislature from October 2, 2003, to August 14, 2020. The religiosity, content, structure, and length of prayers, along with who is delivering them, is analyzed and changes are tracked over time and between parties. In late 2019, the BC Legislature amended its practices and changed the name of this element of routine business from ‘prayers’ to ‘prayers and reflections,’ and updated and expanded the list of sample prayers from which members can read. We examine how participation in prayer and the religiosity, content, structure, and length of prayers delivered in the Legislature have varied since these changes were made.

Respondent: Solange Lefebvre, Université de Montréal,
solange.lefebvre@umontreal.ca

Session F.3: Theoretical and Methodological Developments in the Study of Nonreligion and Secularity

Session chair: TBD

Re-Disenchanting Weber: Looking again at “Science as a Vocation”

Donovan Schaefer, University of Pennsylvania, doschaef@upenn.edu

Charles Taylor writes that “[e]veryone can agree that one of the big differences between us and our ancestors of 500 years ago is that they lived in an ‘enchanted’ world and we do not.” (“Western Secularity,” 38) But what disenchantment means is a moving target. Critics such as George Levine, Jane Bennett, and Jason Josephson-Storm have argued that the disenchantment narrative is flawed—that even in modern secularity, “we have never been disenchanted.” This paper takes a different tack. Going back to Max Weber’s “Science as a Vocation,” it argues that rather than disenchantment being a “myth,” disenchantment is not what we think it is. For Weber in this essay, disenchantment is not so much the eradication of feeling as it is a rearrangement of feeling and thinking into new affective forms. This calls on us to rethink how disenchantment fits into theories of secularization.

“How Could Rodney Stark Have Been So Wrong?”

Phil Zuckerman, Pitzer College, Phil_zuckerman@pitzer.edu

Rodney Stark has been one of the leading sociologists of religion in the USA for decades. Chief among his contributions has been a scathing attack on secularization theory. Stark insists that secularization has not occurred, cannot occur, and that the world is actually more religious than ever. However, the data is not on his side. Secularization has indeed occurred, dramatically so. How could Stark have been so wrong? In this paper, I will

show how Stark got secularization wrong, and posit some guesses as to why he was so mistaken.

From the Census to the Academic Literature: Mapping the Framing of Nonreligion in Brazil

Henrique Fernandes Antunes, Brazilian Center of Analysis and Planning (CEBRAP), hictune@yahoo.com

The results of the last censuses have sparked a growing interest in the increase of people who declare themselves "nonreligious" in Brazil, mobilizing various social segments, such as the media, academia, religious institutions, non-governmental organizations, among others, in a climate of uneasiness that seeks to understand the impacts of such growth to Brazilian society. Based on this uneasiness, this presentation intends to take a step back, analyzing the ways in which the category "nonreligion" was developed as a census terminology, being incorporated later into the academic debate, constituting a new analytical object and, at the same time, a new social segment. We intend to demonstrate that the advance of "nonreligion" in Brazil is understood by the academic literature as part of the social dynamics that have altered the configurations of the Brazilian religious field. In this movement, nonreligion is not apprehended as an alternative to religion or its opposite, but as one of the multiple options within the Brazilian religious field.

Mapping Scholarly Affinities in the Academic Study of Non-Religion and Secularity

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The Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network (NSRN) is a central organization for the emerging field of non-religion studies. As the Network grows, discovering new scholarly affinities becomes increasingly complicated. To better understand this community, an interactive [tool](#) was conceived to visualize and navigate over 250 scientific contributions (2008-2020) collected from NSRN's events, blog, book series, and journal. The distribution of scholars in the space is based on lexical distance, so spatial proximity expresses a similarity measure of authors' dictionaries. Isoclines represent an indicator of relevance based on word frequency. Unlike citation analysis, lexical proximity relies on shared verbal units rather than potentially misleading academic hierarchies. By shifting the attention from citations to discourse and word usage, lexical proximity uncovers new configurations of scholars. The work aims to present this innovative open access tool, along with its advantages for the scientific community and reflections on the limitations of NSRN's data management practices.

2:45-3pm

Closing remarks by NSRN president Lori Beaman

Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network (NSRN)

The **Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network (NSRN)** is an international and interdisciplinary network of researchers founded in 2008. The NSRN aims to centralise existing research on the topic of nonreligion and secularity and to facilitate discussion in this area. Since 2008, the NSRN has expanded with the field. The network is now comprised of several branches:



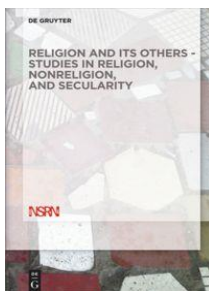
The [website](#) is our home on the internet. The editorial team manage NSRN Online, the network's online resource for academics, students and anyone interested in nonreligion and secularity. The NSRN website features the following resources: an extensive [bibliography](#) of academic research published in the field, listings of [academic events](#), and NSRN [publications](#).



[Nonreligion and Secularity](#) is the official blog of the NSRN. By combining the high professional standards associated with academic publishing with the more conversational tone of a blog, *Nonreligion and Secularity* aims to deliver an informative resource for both scholars, professionals, and a more general audience with an interest in the study of nonreligion and secularity.



[Secularism and Nonreligion](#) is an interdisciplinary journal produced in partnership with the NSRN. The journal aims to advance research on various aspects of 'the secular.' The journal is interested in contributions from primarily social scientific disciplines, including: psychology, sociology, political science, women's studies, economics, geography, demography, anthropology, public health, and religious studies.



The NSRN and De Gruyter publish a book series entitled *Religion and Its Others: Studies in Religion, Nonreligion and Secularity* (RIO). It considers the multiple relations between religion, nonreligion, and secularity. The series explores apparently nonreligious or 'irreligious' phenomena that are significantly related to religion as well as modes of differentiation between religion and its various others, often institutionalized in cultural, legal, and political orders. For more information, see the book series [website](#).

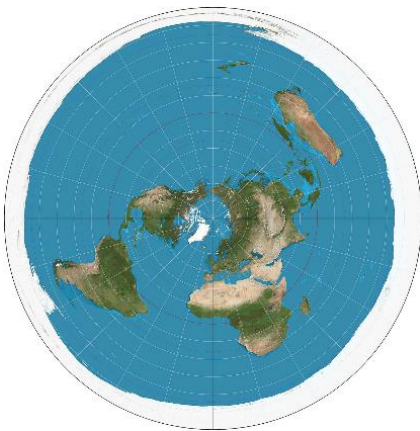
In addition, the NSRN runs an email list for the announcement of relevant events and publications, and for anyone requiring specialist advice or discussion. To sign up to the NSRN-ANNOUNCE mailing please visit <https://jiscmail.ac.uk/> or click the following link for direct access: [NSRN-ANNOUNCE](#). You can also follow us on [twitter](#).



NONRELIGION IN A COMPLEX FUTURE LA NONRELIGION DANS UN FUTUR COMPLEXE

Nonreligion in a Complex Future (NCF) is an international, comparative, interdisciplinary research project which identifies the social impact of the rapid and dramatic increase of nonreligion. The NCF project has:

- Twenty-one researchers in seven research sites: Canada, Australia, the Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland), the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil and Argentina.
- Five focal areas: Health, Law, Education, Environment, Migration.
- Five research objectives:



1. Develop new research tools to measure and describe nonreligion;
2. Analyze the social impact of nonreligion;
3. Expand the conceptualization and theorizing of diversity to include nonreligion;
4. Map conflicts and collaborations between religious and nonreligious social actors;
5. Advance new knowledge for living well together that can be used to inform public policy and practice.

The NCF project has several [projects underway](#), [upcoming events](#) and a catalogue of recorded [past events](#). Learn more and keep up with the project on the NCF website and social media.



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