EASR 2019 Open Session Topics

This is the full list of all the open sessions taking place at EASR 2019 in Tartu. One can submit their papers to pre-arranged closed sessions, to **any of these open sessions** *or* as **an INDEPENDENT individual paper**. Individual papers will be later organized into additional panels of the conference. A submission should include the title, an abstract up to 300 words in length, basic information about the presenter and a couple of keywords. All submission of abstracts takes place through the EASR 2019 ConfTool website: https://www.conftool.com/easr2019. For more information about the conference see: https://easr2019.org/. For more information about the submission of abstracts see: https://easr2019.org/call-for-individual-papers/

Please note that the **abstract submission deadline is December 15, 2018!**

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OPEN SESSION (I. MIKESHIN): Gender Strategies and Disciplinary Practices in Russian Christianities
Russian Christian communities are vastly diverse. Even the dominating Orthodox Church is to a huge extent heterogeneous and can represent different theologies, ideologies, and life-styles. The perceptions of sexuality, gender differences and hierarchies, family morals and values are oftentimes markers of religious identities. The narratives of sin, immorality, abomination, and vice more than anything else employ sexual practices and unaccepted gender regimes. Russian Orthodox, Protestant, and Catholic communities have their own understandings of gender and family issues, based on either biblical hermeneutics, interpretation of the Holy Tradition, direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, or clerical authority.

The session will focus on this diversity and heterogeneity in relation to gender and family values. The following questions are to be discussed: What is the essence of proper masculinity and femininity in Russian Christian communities? How and on which principles is a Russian Christian family formed? Which implicit and explicit rules, norms, and prohibitions regulate it? What is the role of children? What is the role of Church and its ministers in the family life? What are the theological foundations of gender strategies and family values? What is the role of inter- and intradenominational relations in a Christian family?

The study of gender in Christianity is a paradoxically marginal field. The yet existing research elaborates on the concept of lived religion, regarding Christianity and gender as practices, rather than phenomena. The narratives of doing faith, gender, and family are emphasized in religious communities. The studies of gender and family in the Christian communities of contemporary Russia inevitably faces the historical context of persecutions and hardships experienced by Russian Christians and their families in the Soviet period.

This panel follows on the successful session on the unseen forms of Russian Christianities at the EASR conference in 2018. The researchers are welcome to contribute to the panel with their papers on gender regimes and strategies, family norms, values, and practices in Christian communities in Russia and Russian-speaking congregations abroad.

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OPEN SESSION (P. MURILLO): New Religious Movements and the "no religion" affiliation phenomenon: a secular or religious disruption?

This panel will look into the articulation of New Religious Movements (NRMs) or "spiritualities" with the "no religion" affiliation (or "nones") phenomenon, and its meaning regarding the relevance of scholars' conclusions about the continuations or disruptions of the "spiritual but not religious" (Fuller, 1963) process across the world.

Indeed, the religious "nones" have been of great importance for researchers and sociologists since 1957. In the United States, the Gallup Survey introduced the "none" category for the first time after World War II. The increase in the number of Americans who choose or identify themselves as "non religious" when asked about their religious preferences in traditional surveys has been of significant interest over the past fifty years (Baker and Smith 2009; Hout and Fisher 2002, 2006; Stark 2008). This trend is also true for Europe and most of the world according to recent studies (Pew Forum Center, 2017; Drescher, 2013).

Within the scope of New Religious Movements, considering the rise of the numbers of people with no clear affiliation across the world, how do scholars should study and analyze the various responses from the surveyed population? How reliable are the different studies showing the increasing of the "nones" population, and to what extend does it correlate the supposed resulting disruption or interruption of the new religious movements across the world? Many groups among this trend observed throughout the world tend to blur the lines of reality: how should we consider the many who participate simultaneously to various spiritual or religious affiliations and declare themselves "nones"?

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OPEN SESSION (A. LÄTZER-LASAR, S. NEUMANN, J. A. STEINHAUER-HOGG): Women's Agency and Religious Networks

This panel explores the agency of women in and via religious networks from antiquity to the present, allowing for an interdisciplinary and comprehensive approach and a comparative discussion of the subject matter. Throughout the history of religions, women have initiated, shaped and maintained religious networks in their capacities as founders, priests, benefactors, dedicands, worshippers and more. Female agents were responsible for cult foundations, cult transfers and the creation of new religious organisations. Yet our understanding of female networks, agency and 'religious creativity', is limited, partly owing to the place of women on the margins of many societies.

The panel aims, on the one hand, to narrow the gap in knowledge with regard to female agency and the establishment, maintenance and decline of religious networks. On the other hand, it raises questions about current approaches to gender and religion by inviting panellists to present their studies from an intersectional perspective. This perspective allows us to see beyond the single category of gender by taking into account the various factors that shape an individual's (religious) experience, such as origin, social, and marital status.

The main focus of the panel is on religious networks or network-like structures as described for antiquity by, for example, C. Taylor and K. Vlassopoulos, or for female migrants in Europe in the twenty-first century by M. Kontos.

The main questions to be explored in this panel are:

- How did women shape their environment through religious activitieswithin and outside the framework of a religious network? Where do we find representations of women's agency and female networks in textual and material culture?

- What triggers the creation of women's religious 'networks', how do they develop and what leads to their end?

- To what extent is the creation of religious networks linked to migration?

- In what ways were female agents involved in the creation (or establishment) of new religious practices, their distribution and, at the same time, the continuation of religious traditions?

- To what extent are particular religious practices and networks socially associated with female agency?

- To what extent are gender-related practices that were marginalised by societies equally associated with other social spheres such as the household, magic and witchcraft (Eidinow 2016)?

- Can factors such as gendered (social) space, gender-related exclusions from religious activities and social caging stimulate or prevent the creation of religious networks (Massey 1994 and 1998)?

We welcome papers from the broad range of disciplines usually represented at the EASR meetings, such as history of religion, ancient history, archaeology, but also sociology etc., which focus on 1) conceptual and theoretical reflections on terms and models such as 'intersectionality', 'third-spacing' and 'social caging'; 2) actions and reactions between religion and migration and interactions between religious communities, and 3) social, political and gendered aspects of religious change as represented by the establishment of religious networks by women in the Mediterranean basin and adjacent areas within a period spanning from Antiquity until the present day.

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OPEN SESSION (J. BORUP): Postglobal Religion
Just like globalisation has been challenged by new political realities (walls, borders, boundaries, diversifications, enclavisations) in a post-global world, critical responses to globalisation also affects religious worlds. Reports from Pew Forum show more religious intolerance and less freedom of belief, and also religious voices applaud discourses of contraction. What could be termed 'post-global religion' is characterised by the strategic disruption of existing orders, and the articulation of a particularity re-enchantment. Just like post-colonial voices were critical responses to Western hegemony, post-global discourses and practices at both individual, institutional and national levels are critical reactions to globalisation, favouring the forces of centrifugal dispersion. This can be represented by anti-global religious re-nationalisation, re-ethnification, re-culturalisation, re-traditionalisation, re-racialisation, re-tribalism, re-territorialisation and re-configuration of the codes appropriating religious diversity. It can be seen in discourses and practices favouring monolithic cultural/national narratives, minority suppression, fractionalisation, downscaling of religious freedom. And it has increasingly been articulated in 'culture wars' with challenges of cultural appropriation and religionisation of political, cultural, ethnic or gender-related identity politics being turned into sacred authenticity claims.

This open session investigates disruptive responses to globalisation and articulations of strategic particularity in (the study of) religions. The session is explorative and invites scholars of religion to think with the term 'post-global religion' through both theoretical perspectives as well as empirical cases from around the world. Especially papers related to religious or cultural appropriation and identity politics (and their challenges to the study of religion) will be welcomed.

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OPEN SESSION (T. HJELM): Discursive Study of Religion
Recent years have witnessed the emergence of a self-conscious discursive study of religion (DSR). The new field has produced paradigmatic manifestos, methodological guidelines, a special journal issue, edited volumes, and sessions at previous EASR meetings. However, with increasing consolidation comes increasing diversity. DSR is a broad church for a variety of approaches differing in ontological and epistemological background assumptions and, consequently, in their methodological and interpretive implications. This session invites theoretical, methodological, and empirical papers discussing DSR and its applications and prospects in the study

of religion. We encourage submissions from scholars at all stages in their career, from graduate students to established academics.

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OPEN SESSION (M. PYE): Continuity and Change in Shinto

The history of "Shinto" has been much more turbulent than is sometimes recognized in simple presentations. Given the vicissitudes of adaptation or reinvention, there has recently been some reluctance to use the term at all with respect to earlier periods (Teeuwen). And yet there is a history of "Shinto" (Hardacre). Moreover, it is precisely by exploring the interactive dynamics of continuity and change that the real history of traditions such as this comes alive. In this panel the focus will be on major shifts in modern times, notably the dramatic, state-run disentanglement of Shinto and Buddhism (shinbutsu bunri) in the nineteenth century, the separation of religion and the state following the end of World War II, and more recent rapprochements between Shinto shrines such as Ise Jingū and leading Buddhist temples such as Hiei-zan. Among other things, attention will be paid to the twofold enthronement ceremonies (sokuinorei and daijōsai) for the new emperor (tennō), due to take place in 2019, and the way in which the relations between religion and state are navigated in this connection (paper by chairperson). There will be a call for up to three other papers which address the fields mentioned above, whether exploring changes which seem to contradict alleged continuity, or continuities which may be perceived in spite of evident change.

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OPEN SESSION (G. MOSSIÈRE, F. GAUTHIER): The regime of "spirituality" and the culture of well-being in neoliberal societies

While the role of secularization and individualism in the transformation of religions and religious patterns is now widely acknowledged, research now points to the interaction between contemporary religious behaviours on one hand, and the many facets of the neoliberal and consumerist paradigm and its diffusion in all spheres of social life on the other hand. Among them, the thriving culture of well-being probably owes part of its success to the popularization of psychological theories to which it intermingles more than often, but also to the leverage of resources offered by religious traditions. As the latter are restated under the umbrella term of "spirituality" now aimed at working on the self, bettering the individual and equipping her/him for social life, they are redesigned to meet the impetus of leading a "good life", maximizing one's potential and focusing on one's subjectivity. While critics have emphasized the social bias of this new trend towards a category of privileged actors, other accounts testify to the deep penetration of these self-realisation and well-being tropes within mainstream culture. Certainly, empirical and critical studies can bring more to this conversation, which has not been given the place it deserves as an overt thematic within the discipline.

In this session, we invite papers to discuss the dynamics between the contemporary regime of spirituality, ethics of well-being and the consumerist/neoliberal paradigm; all disciplinary lenses are welcome (anthropology, sociology, religious sciences, history, psychology, ethnology, philosophy).

Among others, the following topics could be addressed:

- Who are the actors of the culture of well-being and how do they appropriate religious rituals, prescriptions or myth?

- How does this contemporary movement lead to revisit and redefine the notion of "spirituality" beyond its Western historical understanding? What about the initial esoteric dimension of spirituality?

- How do they negotiate with religious authority and traditions, and how do religious authorities and traditions negotiate with their new presence?

- How do digital communication technologies shape and participate in this movement?

- How does the material aspect of religion contribute to assert the influence of the culture of well-being in religious behaviours?

- Is there a gendered dimension in the dynamic between well-being and religion? Does it correspond to a general "feminization" of religion?

- What kind of ethics and moralities emerge from this contact zone between well-being and spirituality?

- What are the best theoretical and analytical framework for understanding these transformations (marketization, secularisation, post-secularity, de-secularisation)?

- What consistency should we give the term "spirituality" in the analysis of this movement? Should it be kept as a purely "emic" notion, or should it be developed into a sociological concept?

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OPEN SESSION (I. PAERT): New Martyrs in the former communist countries: political violence and religious commemoration

Violence against believers and clergy, especially in countries led by radical left regimes, dramatically increased in the 20th century resulting in the phenomenon of 'new martyrdom'. The massive canonisation by the Russian Orthodox Church of those who perished under the Soviet regime has drawn the attention of scholars who focus on 'new martyrs' through the prism of commemoration, the politics of memory and 'theology after the Gulag') (Christensen, Bogumil, Dorman, Kahla, Rousselet, Kormina, Tolstaya). However, while much attention has been focused on Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church, little is known of similar phenomena in the states that emerged after the collapse of the Russian Empire, where the Orthodox church was a minority religion that included representatives of the titular nation, Estonians, Latvians, Finns, Ukrainians in Poland, who tried to forge local churches that would be independent of Russia. This session calls for proposals that will bring a comparative perspective into the study of 'new martyrdom' especially from perspective of the Eastern and Central Europe, including Balkans. The panel also welcomes an interdisciplinary approach: history, religious studies, theology, anthropology and memory studies. The problem of 'new martyrdom' raises the questions about

- religious interpretation of violent death and its impact on the community and individuals

- the role of various media, including the digital media in commemoration of the new martyrs

- construction and commemoration of new martyrdom through the religious institutions and secular discourse

- the political use of new martyrdom

- the continuity and change in the representation of martyrdom

- the vernacular practices commemorating new martyrs

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OPEN SESSION (K. GARALYTÈ, S. YENGDE): Religion as Oppression and Liberation

The question of the relationship between religion, social structure and social change has been central to the sociology of religion. Karl Marx saw religion as working to maintain status-quo and social status that supported

the order of the ruling class. In his view, religion served as opium for the exploited masses that elites used to keep in control. Thus, religion justifies injustice, inequalities and prevents people from confronting and rebelling against them. There is ample evidence from the so-called subaltern groups showing how religion functions as a source of oppression. W. R. Jones described the principles of "divine racism" (1973) that foregrounded and justified oppression of the black community in Christianity. B. R. Ambedkar (1936) highlighted casteism and untouchability in the Hindu religion as the foundation for the functioning of the Hindu society. Widespread popular understanding assumes religion-based patriarchy in Islam alongside other mono and polytheistic societies that legitimize women's subordination.

However, other sociological theories and empirical examples show a different side of the picture. Max Weber saw religion as a wheel for social change, particularly focusing on how Protestant ethic enabled the development of modern capitalism. In his view, religion encouraged people's active effort and continuing struggle. There are many historical empirical examples that demonstrate how religion has been actively employed by people seeking to transform their social position and how religion itself becomes the means of social liberation and change – Dalit and Black liberation theologies, Dalit religious conversions and Islamic feminism.

This panel seeks to develop an innovative, interdisciplinary cross-cultural understanding of social and political aspects of religion - how religion acts upon social groups and how social groups act through religion; in what contexts religion prevents and facilitates social change; when religion functions as both - that of being the oppressive and liberating force. Including but not limited to, the panel particularly welcomes original theoretical and empirical accounts from the Dalit, Black, feminist and minority studies that would critically engage with the component of religion and its ambiguous role in oppressed societies.

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OPEN SESSION (CJS LOMBAARD): More or less (of) the same? - Dis/continuities between Secularism and Post-secularism

Secularism entailed inter alia the marginalisation of (aspects of) religion from public life. The assumption was: out of sight, out of mind - and that this would be a continual process. Religion would eventually disappear from rational humanity.

However, as surveys, sociological studies and demographic projections have indicated over recent years, broadly speaking such expectations on the demise of faith as a public and personal dynamic had in many societies been overly enthusiastic. The current Post-secular awareness has lifted that veil of expectation: religion is not dead, nor had it ever been where its influence had simply not been recognised. Certainly, religion has been much altered over recent decades, as the longer-term effects of the Enlightenment played out variously in modern societies, but the phenomenon of religion, the existential meaning gained from religions by their adherents, and the socio-legal-political effects of these remain.

In the same way as the Post-modern era had in many respects not been a clean break with the Modern era, but had rather been constituted by a different orientation to the same fundamental awarenesses, the move from the Secular to the Post-secular is also characterised by continuities. Even discontinuities result substantially from a reaction to earlier philosophical and social impulses.

In this session, instances (case studies, ideological-critical analyses, terminological trajectories and other examples) of such discontinuities and continuities of expressions of faith between Secularism and Post-secularism are studied. Instances from different aspects of society, language, law, the arts and from religious life itself are welcomed. Interdisciplinarity is encouraged.

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OPEN SESSION (E. RACIUS, G. YEMELIANOVA): Muslims in Post-communist lands: between traditional and global

The proposed session seeks to explore how official Islamic leadership and grassroots Muslim communities across the wider East-Central Europe and post-Soviet Muslim Eurasia have negotiated their post-communist transition and reacted to their reintegration within the wider ummah. Presented papers will discuss the implications for institutionalised Muslim 'clergy' and state-Muslim relations of the political 'Europeanisation' (the so-called 'Euro-Atlantic integration') of countries in East-Central Europe, and the increasing political 'Eurasianisation' of Russia, the Muslim Caucasus and Central Asia. The panel will also examine the changing meanings and practices of Islam, as well as the very nature of Islamic legal authority in countries under the influence of Yusuf al-Qaradawi and other 'global muftis'. It will pay special attention to the role of self-proclaimed Islamic 'scholars' active online and in social media in shaping young Muslims' 'untraditional' perceptions of 'true' Muslim-ness and their complex relationship with 'national' Islam, constitutionally enshrined secularism and societal confessional and ethnic pluralism.

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OPEN SESSION (F. FERRARI, M. FERRARA): In and out of the canon: the making of Veda

The construction of a canon of texts and practices is a serious enterprise that requires the work of specialists and interpreters. Religious canons appear rigid and unchanging, and they aim at imposing from above a standard set of beliefs and practices. Yet, as J.Z. Smith has suggested, a canon is a quite flexible reality. It is neither entirely dependent upon the culture from which it emerges nor passively subject to external cultural innovations. From Smith's point of view, what is crucial in the construction of a canon is the element of closure, which involves the action of interpreters who open, expand and re-close the canon without interrupting the stream of traditional knowledge. Such interpreters have the difficult task to extend the domain of the closed canon over everything hiding all traces of arbitrariness, disruption, and discontinuity. To be in and out of the canon is thus a historical sign of the hidden yet dynamic work of extension of the domain of tradition over new fields, practices and relationships. European philologists received the textual tradition of Indian priestly and scholarly elites through a well-established idea of canon, which they identified with the Vedic corpus of texts. But what "Vedic tradition" has meant in the history of the systematization of sacrificial procedure and techniques as well as textual organization is a question that deserves attention.

This session invites scholars to discuss conceptions of literary, ideological and disciplinary boundaries in the making of the Vedic "canon". This will permit to reflect on how the definition of Veda has resulted from forcing its linguistic identity, vision of the world and scholarly applications in field as diverse as ritual science, astrology, mathematics, medicine, prosody, etymology, philosophy, hermeneutics, law and politics. In particular, discourses on the Vedic canon and its use in and beyond Vedic times should privilege perspectives on rupture and innovation, along with the historical analysis of the exegetical efforts conducted to validate and disseminate new authoritative worldviews and approaches. While the overall aim of this session is to answer original questions in relation to "canon-making" in Indian history, contributors are invited to consider Vedic studies not just in relation to Indology but as a way to foster methodological debates within the history of religion at large.

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OPEN SESSION (R. SAVILLE-SMITH): Continuation and Disruption in Psychiatry and Religion

In the study of religion(s) psychological methods and approaches have become familiar tools, notwithstanding the views of some of the earlier pioneers of psychology. By contrast, psychiatric approaches have proved less amenable to assimilation in the study of religion(s). Such reticence is not shared in psychiatry. There are now

enough psychiatric papers on religion, and the role of religion in psychiatric contexts, to justify three meta-analyses since 2011. It is notable that the bibliographies contained in these papers rarely include contemporary texts from the discipline of religious studies. The unintended consequence of the lack of inter-disciplinary discourse is that psychiatrists are increasingly establishing their own definitions and their own theoretical models of religion; for example, as a risk factor, as a protective factor, as a factor in medication compliance. These approaches may be both compared and contrasted with an older tradition of psychiatric interpretation in which historical religious figures are retrospectively diagnosed with various disorders.

This open panel provides an invitation for papers which address the relationships between psychiatry and the study of religion at all levels. The following suggestions provide a series of provocations which are relevant to a consideration of 'continuations and disruptions in psychiatry and religion'.

* Does psychiatry provide ways of continuing and developing understandings of religious experiences?

* Have psychiatric presuppositions subliminally affected our capacity to ascribe significance to accounts where visions and voices are primary sources?

* What are the limitations to the practice of retrospective psychiatric diagnoses of ancient religious figures like Moses or Jesus or Mohammed?

* Is the biological focus of psychiatry a way of recognising the 'specialness' of religious experience?

* Can the acute religious experiences of Shamans, Sufis, Sadhus, Spirit Possessed and Mystics survive the reductionism of psychiatry?

* The DSM-5 chapter on Dissociative Identity Disorder introduces the idea of 'disruption of self', can this be a useful term in relation to spirit possession?

* What common ground do psychiatrists and scholars of religion share?

* Is psychiatry disruptive of religions?

* Is psychiatric theory disruptive of the study of religions?

* Is psychiatry necessarily a secular approach?

* Is psychiatry a form of religion in which the disordered are redeemed?

* Should scholars of religion engage or dissociate themselves from psychiatry?

* Can psychiatry survive a post-colonial critique of its epistemology?

* Did IM Lewis do enough in the final chapter, 'possession and psychiatry', in Ecstatic Religion?

* Where are the demons in Foucault? (Midelfort).

* Do psychological approaches preclude psychiatric approaches being applied in the study of religion?

* Do psychiatrists have a sufficient understanding of theories of religion to be able to conduct meaningful research on religion?

* What could psychiatrists learn from the EASR?

* Are the prophets of today to be found in the secure psychiatric units?

This open session invites papers from scholars of religion who would like to respond to any of these provocations or who wish to present a paper that otherwise engages the continuations and disruption between psychiatry and the study of religion.

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OPEN SESSION (S. AGELIDIS, C. GRAML, K. IARA, F. GUIDETTI): Inertia versus Friction: Choice of Location and Construction of Space in Religious Practices and Beliefs

In Greco-Roman antiquity, religion was commonly perceived as a highly traditional matter, where alterations needed to be justified by religious authorities. It constituted a significant part of cultural traditions, and was per se understood as intended for safekeeping. Consequently, in analysing religious phenomena in those past societies, there is a certain reluctance to identify disruptions, changes or alterations, while the wish, often implicit, to detect continuity plays an important role in scholarship. This could be perceived as a structural weakness in the study of ancient religions, but can also be set as an initial point to reflect more on methods and aims of identifying continuity – and, along with it, disruption.

Taking a closer look at continuity in religious matters in ancient Greece and Rome, we notice that this term describes quite different patterns and only rarely denotes the unchanged persistence of religious practices and/or beliefs. The wide spectrum between continuity, modifications and disruptions can be demonstrated in the choice of locations for cults and narratives, as well as in the construction of space in religious conceptions. Since the physical environment changes in appearance yet not in localisation, specific places are potentially an important continuity factor. In the variable construction of social space through performance, imagination or memory, places – the absolute space – constitute thus an element of stability. The Acropolis in Athens was the Acropolis for people in Classical, Byzantine and modern times no matter which changes in guise or function it experienced. Moreover, continuity in this sense can be unbound from the actual physical place when this becomes e.g. a lieu de mémoire according to Pierre Nora.

This stability of places and spaces makes them suitable for the analysis of continuities and disruptions in religious practices and beliefs in manifold ways, such as their conception, transferability or their mere location. For example, the shifting of defined sacred spaces (temene) does not necessarily imply a hiatus in the worship of the deities in question, but can potentially lead to alterations of the relocated cults, as well as, in a longue-durée perspective, to a changed understanding of the deities themselves (cf. paper by Constanze Graml). The change of emplacement is again essential in the case of the Roman evocatio of a foreign deity, offering potential for continuity as well as disruption in physical and mental transfer processes (cf. paper by Fabio Guidetti). With regard to religious spaces and practices, the shift to Christianity in late antique Rome represents an undisputed disruption: however, spaces and even practices also offer a perspective on continuity within this period of changes (cf. paper by Kristine Iara). In the same era, constructed, virtual places such as the underworld show a remarkable steadiness: in order to make new ideas understandable, Christian writers adapted Greek and Jewish religious concepts and provided the old underworld with new, Christian qualities (cf. paper by Soi Agelidis).

This open session invites papers tackling the potential of mental and physical spaces for establishing, maintaining and changing ancient religious practices and beliefs.

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OPEN SESSION (J. LAHE): The so-called „Oriental Cults" in the Roman Empire: Mithras, Isis, Cybele, Attis, Sabazios, Jupiter Dolichenus

For quite some time now, the so-called "oriental cults" (Isis, Mithras, Mater Magna, Attis, Sabazios, Jupiter Dolichenus) have played an important role in the study of Roman religious history. If earlier scholars regarded these cults as separate "religions" alongside the Greco-Roman religion, the dominant paradigm of recent research has suggested that these cults must be considered within the context of Greco-Roman religion. The general term "oriental cults" has also been criticized: Why is the cult of Isis classed, for example, as an oriental cult, whereas the cult of Aphrodite, however, is not so regarded, although it is evident that this goddess has an ancient Near Eastern background? What links the gods and goddesses mentioned above with each other, apart from the fact, that they carry names that come from the East (as seen from the Greco-Roman point of view)? Do the cults of these gods and goddesses have a common characteristic and, if so, of what does that consist? The other important question concerns the continuity of these cults. While earlier scholars suggested that the

Greeks and Romans adopted the abovementioned cults in the same form as they existed earlier in Asia Minor, Egypt, Syria, and Iran, contemporary research has abandoned this view. It is evident that all these cults were first created in the Greco-Roman world, but they were created around the figures of gods, who by their name were already known in ancient times in the Near and Middle East. Do these gods and goddesses of the new cults only have names in common with ancient Near and Middle Eastern deities, or do they share common characters and myths? Are there in these new cults, ritual elements that have been taken from ancient Near and Middle Eastern Religions? This session will discuss the above questions.

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OPEN SESSION (T. TAIRA, S. OWEN): The Ideology of Religious Studies: Twenty Years Later

It has been almost twenty years since The Ideology of Religious Studies (2000) by Timothy Fitzgerald was published. It is one of the books that has provoked mixed responses from scholars of religion: while some took it as a provocation about the futility of religious studies as a disciplinary area of research, others thought that its criticism of the analytical impotence of the category of religion should be taken seriously. This panel explores the impact and significance of Fitzgerald's study in general, focusing on both its current or continuing relevance and its reception when published. By using Fitzgerald's publication as a starting point, the panel invites papers that are examining the implications and impact of such critical takes on the category of 'religion', particularly on how the study of religion is practised (conceptually, theoretically, methodologically), and how the institutional settings of the study of religion have been shaped in the past twenty years.

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OPEN SESSION (P. KOLATA, A. TROLLE): Sensing religious disjuncture across generations in contemporary Asian communities

How does religious disjuncture interact with generational transformation and economic uncertainty? From depopulating regions of Japan to a diaspora of Filipino Catholics in Denmark, this session explores how uncertainty feeds into a sense of decline and uncertain futures across religious communities in Asia and Asian diaspora. Social and geographical mobility continues to reshape the ever more global landscapes of contemporary societies, particularly in relation to shifting demographics and sociality networks. Our focus is on how diversification in the systems of values and cross-generational religious identity impacts on the institutional vulnerability of religion.

Religious disjuncture – while fostered by the need or willingness to adapt to changing configurations of power, wealth, knowledge, social relationships – is often a result of initiatives undertaken by religious institutions and individual actors alike. Here, we focus on religious practitioners and their experiences of religious change and how community level transformations pose a challenge to the institutionally enforced status quo. Uncertainty evoked through that change is partially shaped by generational conflicts reflected in divergent ideas of religious continuity (or a need for thereof). Aging membership of religious communities is thus opening new avenues for understanding religious change. For instance, elderly practitioners – albeit often heavily invested in preserving religious practices in their daily lives – tend to imagine their religious communities as future-less; whilst their children and grandchildren either become disengaged with practice or choose other ways of performing their religious identities. Such practices may not be less religious, but rather less institutional and more socially and economically diverse.

Through ethnographic examples, we intend to explore how such shifts beyond institutional frameworks reconfigure the boundaries of inclusion within religious communities across the denominational spectrum, as well as how disruption, displacement and diversity in religious practices shape perceptions and realities of precarious futures. In doing so, we wish to pay particular attention to cross-generational, gendered and minority

perspectives. At the same time, we turn our attention to the concept of 'lived religious experiences' by foregrounding the grass-root level qualitative research among lay practitioners and religious professionals in local religious communities. As such, we aim to investigate the relationship between economic fragility and creativity (or lack of thereof) in people's religious narratives and practices. We welcome contributions from scholars that work on how religious disjuncture is experienced across the generational spectrum and how uncertainty might pose a challenge to traditional religious community structures.

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OPEN SESSION (M. FUJDA): Religion and Pragmatic Strategies of Handling Every-day Life Issues

A long tradition of scholarship treats religion and magic as a matter of irrationality and belief, even superstition. Close scrutiny of using many of religious / magical practices in the context of situations of uncertainty and risk (Evans-Pritchard 1976, Douglas 1992), suffering, disease and death (Kleinman 1980, 1988, 2006, Jackson 1998), shows, however, very pragmatically rational human response to these. This led Fujda (2015) to coin these "insecure practices of pragmatic handling of unpredictabilities and ambivalence".

It means that there is much reasonably pragmatic in religious and magical practise. And this "reasonable pragmatic" aspect make it impossibly extinguishable in even a self-proclaimed modern world of rational calculation. The Max Weber's dictum that religion is an issue of this-world thus strikes back very strongly.

In the above described context we would like to invite empirical presentations dealing with religious and/or magic practices as ways of such pragmatic handling of every-day life difficulties.

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OPEN SESSION (M. KRZYWOSZ): Social aspects of miraculous phenomena in the modern world

For some time we have been witnessing a growing number of miraculous phenomena. Marian revelations (Medjugorje), weeping paintings and sculptures (Akita) and the activity of various types of visionaries and stigmatics, as Padre Pio or Veronica Lueken, are becoming more and more popular.

Thus, it can be stated with certainty that the Enlightenment belief that along with progress and modernity these phenomena will disappear has been falsified. Their increasing number means that they cannot be continuously interpreted as superstitions or survivals (folk religiosity) as if islands, enclaves of enchanted reality, in the disenchanted, modern Weberian world.

In this situation, the social sciences need to develop a new approach to these phenomena, breaking the Enlightenment paradigm. Newer concepts treat the social popularity of these phenomena as a conservative reaction to the processes of secularisation and secularism. However, they are not convincing, because they ignore the fact that in this case we often deal with phenomena of an innovative nature. Frequently, the sites of apparitions and miracles become a space where revitalisation and renewal of religious life take place. On an additional reflection also deserves a growing number of people who are interpreting even the plain empirical fact in their lives, as a miraculous event using the "Godincidences" category.

Scholars who are interested in studying miraculous phenomena in the context of social sciences and humanities are invited to participate in the panel. Papers might address the following themes but are not limited to. Any academic proposals are welcome.

- social causes of the popularity of miraculous phenomena;

- strategies of religious institutions to miraculous phenomena;

- the lay authority's attitude towards miraculous events;

- development of socio-religious movements centred around the visionaries or the site of apparitions;

- the social structure of these movements and their relations with the socio-cultural environment;

- the everyday life of the visionaries and their relationship with the social environment;

- the New Age Movement attitude to the traditional and new sites of apparitions and miracles;

- sites of the apparitions as a space for experimentation and the revitalisation of religious life;

- the mass media attitude towards miraculous phenomena and their part in popularisation;

- strategies used by visionaries to popularise religious messages;

- the similarities and differences between contemporary and pre-modern miraculous phenomena and their social reception.

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OPEN SESSION (C. FACCHINI, E. R. URCIUOLI): Urban religion and religious change. Intellectualization of religion and ritual invention

The central hypothesis of the newly established International Centre for Advanced Studies on "Religion and Urbanity" at the Max-Weber-Kolleg in Erfurt is that many features of past and present religions would be more plausibly viewed as the outcome of specific effects and uses of city-space and their social and cognitive bases rather than as inherent characteristics of a specific 'religion'. Many religious phenomena, and especially major religious changes, can be better understood by viewing them in spatial terms, that is, as a result of a dialectic of "co-production" (Day) of city-space and urban life, on the one side, and religious representations and practices, on the other. Therefore, change is not conceptualized by presupposing religion and the city as two static entities, but rather implying a "continual process in which the urban and the religious reciprocally interact, mutually interlace, producing, defining, and transforming each other" (Lanz). Designating a process in which religion and the urban are involved, 'urban religion' is the formula that defines also the state of a religion which is shaped by the interaction with the urban spatial environment and which can periodically crystallize into major changes whose assessment and naming is a responsibility of the scholar. Focusing on changing urban environments against the backdrop of long-term periodization such as the Roman empire, the rise of Islam, and the European age of explorations (with the Reformation and the development of colonial empires), this panel aims to reflect upon forms of connectivity (cooperative or/and conflictual) and target religious dynamism through the lenses of religious intellectualization and ritual invention. These are two kinds of religious changes that appear recurrently in the cross-culturally entangled, world-wide history of religion and urbanism all the way through. How and how far are religious intellectualization and ritual invention made possible by the engagement of religious communication "with the conditions of specific urban environments at particular moments in the environmental, political, and social histories of cities" (Orsi)? Divided into two subpanels dedicated to intellectualization of religion and ritual invention, respectively, we welcome papers from religious studies, urban studies, urban history, archaeology and related disciplines.

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OPEN SESSION (A. ROTA): Surveying the 1960s: Religious and Scientific Entanglements

In the study of religion, the 1960s and the 1970s are increasingly seen as a watershed with important implications not only for the history of religion in the West, but also for the theoretical reflection on the contemporary forms

of religious life. At the same time, the same decades constitute a pivotal period for the institutionalisation of the academic study of religion in many countries. Against this backdrop, this panel analyses the entangled development of religious and scientific discourses and institutions from the 1960s through today. Drawing on various case studies, it combines historical research and systematic reflection, addressing fundamental questions in the study of religion such as the functional (de)differentiation of religion and the social sciences, the "scientification" of religion, and the role of reflexive approaches in the study of religion.

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OPEN SESSION (T. MAHLAMÄKI): Literature and modern Western Esotericism: continuities and changes

Modern Western Esotericism is a thoroughly literal or text centered phenomenon. The leaders and main characters of esoteric organisations and groups have produced various kinds of non-fictional and philosophical literature, and the followers are initiated into the groups and organisations by reading texts produced by them. The practices within the organisations, e.g. in the Theosophical Society or in the Anthroposophical Society, consists very often in reading and discussing the texts, as well as in the presumption that the followers familiarizes themselves with the particular textual tradition. Both the founders and followers of esoteric traditions have also produced fiction, novels and short stories, which in part have spread the thoughts of the traditions and their followers to reach a wider reading audience. For instance, theosophical fiction, in forms of novels and short stories, was a popular form of expression in the late 19th and early 20th century – and it has not disappeared, only changed in form of style. Some authors connected with esoteric traditions have produced novels and short stories which are sending a double message to their readers: For an ordinary reader the novels appear as plainly entertaining works of fiction, while to readers familiar with the underpinnings of the tradition(s), the novels reveal esoteric ideas and teachings. Also "secular" authors uses and benefits from esoteric texts, ideas and thoughts, as resources (occulture) in creating literary art, while at the same time they make them familiar to the reading public, as for instance J. K. Rowlings Harry Potter -series or Dan Brown's Da Vinci Code. Extremely interesting is also the interaction and dialogue between fiction and esoteric traditions, the well-known example being Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novels Zanoni and Vril, both books having a huge impact on 20thcentury esoteric traditions.

This panel is focusing on modern Western Esotericism, from the 19th century up to present day by asking: What are the forms of interaction and dialogue between esoteric traditions and fiction? What kind of continuities and changes can be seen within this dialogue? What kind of examples could one find? What kind of methodological tools and theoretical perspectives can be used when studying this interaction? Papers may discuss one single author or one piece of a novel, short story, or poem, or explore the relationship between esoteric tradition(s) and literary art in broader way, for instance, from the point of view of continuity or change. Papers can also concentrate on some theoretical or methodological perspective, such as for instance gender perspective.

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OPEN SESSION (E. SHULMAN): Texts as agents of religious change

Although the study of texts may not command the same esteem it once did in the study of religion, it is still a central practice in the field; and it must, apparently, remain so, since texts absorb and cultivate important strands of religious ideology. At least one aspect of textual life is that texts are at the receiving end of processes of religious innovation and creativity, so they reflect rich historical processes of development.

Although it is obvious to scholars that texts, including foundational ones, grow and change, the image harboured in relation to them within religious traditions tends toward one of a stable, monumental truth that is deemed eternal and static. Yet although scholars are critical of this vision, they perhaps conform to it beyond what is

apparent on the surface. All too often, texts are considered flat repositories of historical and doctrinal information, while their creative dimensions – and certainly their agency - are disregarded; texts, we are told, don't do anything in the world, they are not subjects; it is only people that interpret them and imbue them with meaning. Although many scholars have acknowledged that texts have a life to them, they are considered dead agents.

This session is conceived as an attempt to revitalize the study of texts in religious studies, through a consideration of the idea of agency in religious texts. For one thing, texts are anything but static, not only in the sense that they change over time, but by being the products of continuous creative activity, they evolve and transform. Whether resulting from flexible oral tradition or through interpretive genius regarding written texts, perhaps in face of challenging or changing historical conditions, texts absorb some of the deep, reflective moments of religious life and vitality. Once they do, we may suggest that they can be considered as the receptacles for a vibrant religious consciousness – or better, consciousnesses – that continues to influence society as a whole through the specific people that engage with them. Texts are not finite sets of ideas or doctrines, but rich complexes of processes that cross from the doctrinal and philosophical, through the poetic, aesthetic and inspirational, to the social and institutional. When people engage with texts, something happens not only because people have rich imaginative capacities, but also because the texts give home to lively vectors of thinking. Although such a formulation stretches the boundaries of our epistemological comfort zone, the great conscious effort that is invested in the formation or study of a text – of which we are well aware as scholars - may allow us to conceive of texts as agents, or at least to pause before we continue to view them as nothing more than paper and ink.

This session is designed as an assessment of the creative power of texts in generating process of religious change, which will allow for a preliminary consideration of the notion of texts as agents.

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OPEN SESSION (A. SAGGIORO): Peaceful co-existence of religions: past and present

Peace among religions can be intended in many ways in the history of humanity, it depends on context and time, and the interplay between political power and social structure. This panel aims to deal with the historical events that can be or were considered as pacificatory action on difficult or dangerous relationships among religions, such as royal edicts for tolerance and peace-making, literary and philosophical works by wise rulers, or specific historical events that crashed down rivalries or fights among religions providing new assets for a peaceful cohabitation.

This panel aims also to investigate the real historical impact of such facts and examine if and how the mythographic machine has constructed or transfigured historical facts by means of hagiographical and propagandistic issues.

From this starting point, other questions arise: how has peace been mythologized within the historical flows?

Is it inserted in a chronological sequence of events or does it interrupt narration turning the plot of historical narration?

Does it take part in the chain of historically-based events or is it removed from reality?

Such questions lead us to wonder also if a mythologized peace gives rise to a new tradition that goes beyond the pacificatory action or it establishes a genuine break from the past to authorize a new order.

In order to answer to such questions, special attention will be paid to comparative approaches to religions that historically have been protagonists of the same pacificatory action, in order to compare different records on a single event.

So far as it is compatible with the submitted papers, this panel will try to compare different contexts in order to investigate if there are standard mechanisms for a conceptual construction of pacificatory action, elaboration, and creation of memories able to remove or emphasize a mythologized peace.

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OPEN SESSION (M. BURCHARDT, M. C. GIORDA): Materializing Tolerance: Multi-Religious Places between Conflict and Accommodation

During the last two decades, there has been a rising scholarly interest in the relationships between religion and space. More recently, across the world we have witnessed a sure of public and political debates and contestations surrounding multi-religious (or "multi-faith") places. Iconic sites of such as the Mezquita-Cathedral of Cordoba and the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, the shared shrines in Morocco, Macedonia and Israel, as well as new or planned multi-religious places such as Berlin's "House of One" or Turin's "Casa delle religioni" show how diverse religious belongings become spatially entangled and materialized in a synchronic and diachronic way, in terms of continuity and disruptions.

Multi-religious places have turned into highly politicized symbols of social coexistence in diverse societies as societies' ability to manage them in just and consensual ways is often viewed to pinpoint their capacities to achieve (or preserve) social harmony, peace and political stability. Multi-religious places are thus symbols of failed and successful coexistence while the immense symbolic value with which they are charged typically hinges upon the complex politics of collective memory and national imagination linked to them. Broadly, the shape these politics has to do with the question of ownership and the different ideological stakes of the involved actors. If multi-religious places are currently owned and run by majority religions, nationalist elites and segments of the populace tend to fashion them as testimonies of historical victories and religious supremacy. Conversely, former religious owners view them with nostalgia, regret over the loss of former glory and power, and sometimes as symbols as of their liminality and unfair treatment by majority societies. If multi-religious places are owned and managed by minority religions, nationalist elites often frame them as thorns in their national pride. As symbols of unjust historical defeats such places remain as stains on the image of the nation that more or less constantly provide conditions for tension or self-victimization in public discourses.

In this panel we will focus on the following questions:

(1) What are the reasons that particular places of worship become sites of multi-religious histories, encounters and engagements?

(2) What are the concrete political meanings of multi-religious places (and of their ownership and religious use) for political rulers, elites and nation-states?

(3) What are the forms of everyday organization in multi-religious places, including their management and material spatial division? What is their role in facilitating coexistence or conflict among religious communities and surrounding populations?

(4) What are the broader social and political consequences of particular arrangements and forms of organization in multi-religious places?

Papers from different disciplines are invited to discuss these topics.

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OPEN SESSION (M. C. GIORDA, N. RYCHKOVA): History / memory: the struggle for religious identity in contested places

Over the last twenty years, there has been a growing understanding among scholars that conflicts in, between or over sacred places are imbricated with political, economical, social cultural features of spaces and landscapes. A site considered sacred has a meaning involving human beliefs, emotions, values, everyday life and core identity self-perceptions; the understanding of the different layered meanings of a sacred place means taking into account the history of contested and contesting groups, and also present and past experi-ences regarding conflicts and disputes.

Robert M. Hayden (2002) invented the category of "competitive sharing" and proposed the theoretical category of the "antagonistic tolerance"; we suggest mobilizing it with the category of "tolerant antagonism". The model anticipates that when one group is dominant, or when both groups are subordinated to a higher political power such as a political government, interactions are peaceful and syncretism may be found; however, when such dominance is threatened or overturned, vio-lence occurs, as a key site is appropriated or even destroyed.

Since religious places provide access, legitimacy, meaning, identity and a sense of community, those same reasons lead religious groups into conflict with com-petitors who wish to implement conflicting rules regarding access, compete for rightful title, provoke their rival and target its population. In a historical perspective the binomial "history" and "memory" works well and it permit to go deepen in these dynamics and processes of conflict: in front of an official and formal history, there are collective and partisan memories which contribute in defining identities, emphasizing or obliterating different forms of violence (Assmann 1992).

By presenting their respective narratives of the past, religious and non-religious communities legitimize their discourses, identity practices, rights and claims.

This panel provides an analytical platform for recording and analyzing a series of case studies regarding conflicts located in contested places, with the aim of comparing these conflicts and discussing the dynamics of conflicts and possibilities for conflict resolution.

We will discuss conflicts and contestations and different forms of tolerance and antagonism, spatially localized, between religious groups (different religions or different denominations), but also between religious groups and a non–religious, secular groups, analyzing how they claim their rights and the legitimacy of their identities in a place, even building - through a collective memory - and then using the history of that place, in terms of continuity, change, disruption.

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OPEN SESSION (P. VISCARDI): Shifting ontologies and religious meaning systems' processing: practical events and mental fallout

The study of religion is by its nature and by its history multi-disciplinary. The contribution of new research paradigms such as cognitive, evolutionary, and experimental approaches in the study of religion have called attention to a much neglected but certainly fundamental aspect of human culture – the mind. Recent work in cognitive psychology applied to religion, especially that of Pascal Boyer (Religion Explained: Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought, New York 2001) and Scott Atran (In Gods We Trust: The Evolutionary Landscape of Religion, New York 2003) – both strongly influenced by Dan Sperber (Le symbolisme en général [1974], Explaining Culture [1996], Metarepresentations [2000]) – has made a strong case for the claim that practices which, bundled together, have come to be classified as "religious", can be explained in terms of human (mind) evolution. In cognitive perspective, the building of religious concepts requires mental systems and all sort of specific human capacities (such as intuitiveness, or the tendency to attend to counterintuitive concepts). We can explain religion by describing how these various capacities get recruited, how they contribute to the features of religion, with particular reference to the human capacity to represent agency and ontological shifting

into the environment, or, in other terms, «to generate meta-representations, to engage in meta-cognition» (G. Benavides, Meta-representations, labor and the rise of religion, it. transl. 2013).

According to Clifford Geertz (The Interpretation of Cultures, New York 1977), as social meaning-making creatures, humans have not only the capacity but also the compulsion to create webs of complex meaning that we call "culture". In fact, as Mary Douglas points out, humans are natural ontologists (Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology, London & New York 2003). Hence, categorization and classification are crucial to understand the human realm of meaning and meaning-making. Even more importantly, the human capacity to represent agency and ontological shifting into the environment causes humans to react quite strongly to any agent/object that causes ontologies to blur or even collapse. The means by which humans explain such emotional or functional reactions (to the blurring of the ontology) requires cultural semantic meaning and meaning-making processes.

Therefore, we take ontology to be a shifting, historically contingent, open-ended and multidirectional relational matrix for identifying subjects, their agency, creativity, mutual relations, states of being and classes of experience which permits the sudden, simultaneous emergence of new values. Specifically, we refer to the generative relationship between creative acts and contradictory ontological principles. What are the qualities of those clashing values during moments of doubt? What is the relationship between stable discursive genres and the creative contexts where actors cast ontological relations into doubt and sometimes reformulate them? The main goal of this session proposal is to analyze ethnographic examples of ritual, art, and politics showing how ontologies are the product of ongoing internal criticism in specific historical conjunctures.

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OPEN SESSION (P. VISCARDI): Axial religion and the breakdown in communication: from the practical reason of sacrificial violence to the discursive rhetoric of religious violence. Ancient reflections and modern perspectives

The idea of the Axial Age, first introduced by Karl Jaspers following the Second World War, has been garnering much attention recently. The work of Eric Voegelin, of Benjamin Schwartz, and Shmuel N. Eisenstadt's studies of the 1980s, as well as that of other scholars, have all been renewed foci of interest and different readings of the concept and its importance have contributed to a growing literature around the concept of Axial religion.

In the most basic of terms, the Axial Age refers to that period, between roughly 500 BCE and 600 CE when, in Eisenstadt's terms there emerged and became institutionalized "a conception of a basic tension between the transcendental and mundane orders, a conception which differed greatly from that of a close parallelism between these two orders or their mutual embedment which was prevalent in so called pagan religions, in those very societies from which these post Axial civilizational emerged" (Eisenstadt 1982, 294). The emergence of these Axial civilizations followed a period of institutional breakdown characterized by a similar breakdown in cosmological symbolism. This period, in Eric Voegelin's terms of "cosmological disintegration" during different "times of troubles," resulted in a new appreciation of the relations between the individual and society and the cosmic order [Voegelin 1954, 74]. This change was accomplished through the fundamental restructuring of terms of relations between mundane and transmundane orders [Schwartz 1975]. The emergence of this conception across different civilizational endeavors constituted a major force in restructuring the terms of collective life, in the principles of political legitimation, as well as in the very conception of the self.

Based on these premises, the session aims to analyze the concept of violence of god in the historical-religious perspective related with axial phenomena of religious mutations. Close to the "sacrificial violence" understood in the ancient religions as a form of communication with the divine, not only to fulfill, but also to know God's will, to influence or be reconciled with the divine, as the result of orthopraxis, "religious violence" detached from it to the extent that it presupposes a certain level of breakdown in communication. If the sacrificial violence is essentially based on the distinction between pure and impure, religious violence introduces another type of dichotomous relationship, based on the distinction between true and false. To wonder about the origins of

religious violence must go back to the Old Testament. Investigating these origins, Jan Assmann (Monotheismus und die Sprache der Gewalt, Wien 2006) relies on the distinction between history and history of memory, which are meant, the first, as the way in which monotheism has slowly imposed in Palestine and, the second, as the way the biblical text reconstructs, recalls, recounts the path of monotheism. In such a perspective, violence, hatred and sin are invested, in the canonical texts, by a religious significance and not only affect the power or authority (i.e., Gewalt, that in German has both the meanings of "violence" and "authority, or power"), but the truth, canonized and thus translated into orthodoxy.

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OPEN SESSION (A. BEINORIUS, I. PEEDU): Moving Beyond „Hinduism" – but How?

Criticisms of the World Religions Paradigm and particularly the problematic concept of "Hinduism" by now have become a well-established and accepted part of the discipline. "Hinduism" has been found lacking in historical applicability, descriptive usefulness, explanatory reliability and is more often distinguished by what it is not. The rise of the modern Hindu right nationalist movements has also evidently contributed to the essentialisation and reification of this confusing concept by building the all-inclusive, global version of "Hinduism", even in a form of "Hindutva". Of course, no one is denying the wide-ranging religious diversity present in India, rather scholars have argued over different conceptual and methodological solutions. But, oftentimes these discussions have remained largely methodological, theoretical and critical, without actually showing what kind of alternatives one could adopt to still pursue devotedly empirical, but also conceptually and methodologically credible research as well as communicate that research to the wider public.

Here we would like to a step further and look beyond such historical, theoretical, postcolonial and deconstructive criticisms of the concept. We are in demand of finding practically applicable solutions, which would enable the study of religiosity in India to move forward without the dangers and pitfalls of the particularly problematic concepts of earlier scholarship. The idea behind this panel is to explore the variegated ways in which this could be done (or has already been done) in actual academic practices. All conceptual tools, regardless of their supposed theoretical virtues, need to be usable in concrete, empirical research situations, otherwise they cannot become part of the standard scholarly vocabulary of the discipline.

Thus, we invite scholars to present how they have worked towards moving beyond this label "Hinduism". Has a particular set of alternative conceptual tools worked in one or another specific empirical research project especially well? Or, how has one solved the issue of teaching courses about the variety of Indian religiosity without falling back on the umbrella term of "Hinduism"? How can one communicate in a more accurate manner the religious situation in India? Can we escape our own cultural and intellectual biases? Or is there a way how to salvage that term by infusing it with a new semantic description? Can we separate religious and spiritual domain from social and political one? Should we take into consideration the perspectives of Dalits, anticaste activists and other oppressed/subaltern groups of Indian society and if so, in what way? Finally, what conceptual impact such reconsiderations could make on continuously shifting descriptions of the vague meaning of "religion" itself?

Papers submitted to this panel could include:

(1) challenging experiences and evidences from the original anthropological fieldworks dealing with the diverse and often marginalized local, indigenous Indian religious practices, doctrines and cults,

(2) historical and philological studies related to the religious diversity in India and the conceptual solutions utilized,

(3) more general, comparative studies and the conceptual choices made therein,

(4) descriptions of pedagogical strategies used in educational settings,

(5) communicative practices used in the public sphere, in the media, or elsewhere.

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OPEN SESSION (W. ALBERTS, B.-O. ANDREASSEN, M. C. GIORDA): Controversial issues in religious education (RE) and RE research

This panel, organised by the EASR Working Group on Religion in Public Education, invites papers on controversial issues both in religious education (RE) and RE-related research. Papers may, therefore, discuss the presentation of controversial issues in school, general issues that are discussed controversially with respect to teaching about religions in school, or controversial issues concerning national or international RE-related research.

As a working group focusing particularly on the development of an Religious Studies (RS) -based RE, independent from any kind of promotion of religion or support of religious institutions or communities, papers discussing the theoretical basis for RS-based RE and the theoretical complexity behind the representation of religion/s this kind of RE are particularly welcome.

Papers may, for example, relate to recent criticism of the "world religions paradigm" and its relevance for RE, or focus on theoretical discussions on how 'dead religions', new religious movements, popular culture or indigenous religions may be part of Religion Education in school. Papers may also discuss differences and similarities between a confessional and non-confessional RE – as well as differences and similarities between religiously motivated and religiously independent (secular) RE research, for example with a focus on insider vs. outsider perspectives. The frequent blurring of the boundaries between the latter two in the "field of RE" may be regarded as one of the main challenges for research on RE in the academic Study of Religion, because, in many contexts, the distinction between the two is difficult to communicate – not only outside academia, but also within the research community itself. This has serious consequences for the development of models for RE, not least with respect to freedom of religion and belief and human rights issues, as soon as obligatory models are being discussed.

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OPEN SESSION (M. G. VALENTA): The Political Lives of Religion in Democracy

In our public and academic debates a recurring argument – more often asserted than explicated – is that constitutional democracy must be secular in order to be just, fair, legitimate, consistent and effective. Once we look across the many political orders of the world's democracies, however, it is unclear what such secularity entails. How are we to understand Christian Democratic parties across Europe? State religious preferences in a wide range of democratic countries in both the global North and South? The influence of Evangelicals on democratic politics across the Americas and Africa? The growing influence of religious nationalism in democracies across the world, including variants – among many others – that are Protestant (US, Brazil), Catholic (Poland, France), Hindu (India), Jewish (Israel), Muslim (Turkey, Indonesia), and Buddhist (Myanmar)? And what of progressive religious politics – ranging from religiously-inspired politicians and political parties, both old and emergent (including, for example, new generations of Muslims in the West) to a vibrant host of grassroots movements addressing social justice, human rights, refugees, undocumented migrants, education, health care, housing, prison reform, ethnic conflict, climate change and military conflict?

In light of such extensive religious engagement, influence and innovation in democracies across the world – both progressive and conservative – the question arises if indeed democracy must be secular, or even can be secular? What is the political life of religion in democracy? This panel warmly invites submissions that address this question from a range of locations, histories and democracies.

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OPEN SESSION (V. KRECH, A. K. PETERSEN): New Approaches in the Study of Religious Evolution

After evolutionism in the 19th century study of religion and a prevailing abstinence in the 20th century, the evolution of religion has again become a topic frequently dealt with over the last 20 years. Respective research covers different disciplines and perspectives including biology, sociobiology, psychology, neuroscience, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, archaeology, linguistics, and, last, but not least, the study of religion. The evolution of religion is usually understood as the interplay between cognitive processes, material objects, cultural meaning systems, communication, and human behavior. However, the way in which mental perception and cognition, the socio-cultural meaning system called religion, material objects, bodily behavior, and social communication relate to each other, is, as yet, widely unclear. "Religious meaning systems appear to link environmental information, especially symbolic information, with behavioral outputs, especially social behaviors. A detailed understanding of how symbolically laden beliefs and practices that relate to superhuman powers variously affect social actions remains elusive" (Bulbulia et al. 2013. "The Cultural Evolution of Religion." In: Richerson & Christiansen [eds.]: Cultural Evolution. Society, Technology, Language, and Religion. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 381–404, here: 38). The two-part session is devoted to recent approaches in the study of religious evolution. It will discuss the advantages and limits of the evolutionary paradigm of variation, selection and (re-)stabilization for cross-disciplinary analysis of religion that intends to link different disciplines.

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OPEN SESSION (E. E. MÄKELÄ, H. K. LEHTINEN): Humour, narrative, religion

Humour and religion are both complex and often ambiguous phenomena that can have many roles in human societies. From a Western perspective, their relationship is commonly perceived as one of tension, opposition, even mutual exclusivity. Religion is often considered to centre around profound questions, ultimate concerns, unquestionable faith, or moral codes. The psychologist William James among others has described religion as involving a "serious state of mind". Humour often plays with meanings and has the potential to question authority, which seems antithetical to eternal truths and unquestioning faith. Still, it is clear that humour is found in religious contexts, old and new. It can have many roles in religious texts, practices, and everyday lived reality of religious communities. There are even religious or spiritual movements that have humorous narratives at their core. What are we to make of such movements?

This panel session focuses on the relationship between religion and humour with the aim of exploring different ways in which the two can be interlinked. We invite papers discussing themes such as humorous narratives and their role in religious contexts, humorous representations of religion in contexts such as politics and popular culture and what they tell about the role of religion in the society.

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OPEN SESSION (F. ELWERT, M. FREUDENBERG): Methodological challenges in studying digital religion

Changes and disruptions in the religious field challenge the methodological approaches of scholars studying the field, as new phenomena might require modification to traditional methods or require new methods altogether. This holds particularly true for the rapid changes due to the digitization of society and the emergence of digital religious forms. Scholars face difficulties applying traditional qualitative and quantitative methods to the Internet and other digital spaces which only partly mirror offline phenomena. For example, when it comes to

webpages, traditional methods of visual and texual analysis are of limited help given the multi-modality and non-linearity of visual, textual and audio components and the discrepancies between the user paths intended by the webdesign and the actual paths taken by users. There are, indeed, many aspects of digital spaces that can inform the study of digital religion, including networks of actions and platforms, interconnections between users, non-traditional forms of expression. Therefore, there are some questions that need to be explored: In which ways can we, as scholars, approach digital venues? What is the impact of the chosen methodology on the object of study?

Thus we invite scholars to discuss the methodological challenges they face when studying digital religion. These might include but are not limited to

* multi-mediality of websites, e.g. text and image and video,

* interactivity and usage studies,

* non-linearity and network structures of web pages,

* availability of large-scale data, e.g. web forums, YouTube comments,

* multi-method studies (ex. textual analysis combined with interviews),

* social network analysis of social media data, e.g. Twitter.

While some of the challenges can be discussed from an abstract methodological perspective, many of them become apparent through concrete experiences in studying digital religion. The panel puts emphasis on the reflection of methodological approaches and challenges rooted in empirical studies that deal with specific cases of digital religion. However, more theoretical contributions are also invited.

Case studies can include (but are by no means limited to)

* the online self-representation of minority religions,

* the appropriation of digital media by majority religions,

* digital media beyond the web, e.g. mobile apps,

* networks of religious media,

* examples of religious contact and material forms of religion on the Internet,

* hashtags as a frame for religious communication in the web (for example to foster critical discourses of religion).

We welcome innovative and interdisciplinary contributions that bring together new empirical and methodological perspectives, especially if they focus on under-researched phenomena. A possible outcome of the session is a special journal issue on methods for the study of digital religion.

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OPEN SESSION (A. DJURIĆ MILOVANOVIĆ, G. MITHANS): Interreligious Encounters and Religious Change in Yugoslavia
In recent years, historical and anthropological scholarship on Yugoslavia's religious landscape is mostly focused on the intertwining of religious and national identity and histories of particular "traditional" religious communities. Different historical periods were characterized with border shifts and often appearance of new religious groups such as neo-Protestant groups. This panel explores interreligious encounters in Yugoslavia and religious transformations in 20thcentury that brought new dynamics in interreligious relations between majority and minority religions. Contacts between religious communities across regions, largely due to internal

migrations and the return of guest workers, and regimes' policies lead to different responses – appearance of renewal movements within already existing religious traditions, conversions or movements of religious dissent. A selection of ex-Yugoslav republics is included in this panel in order to identify and reflect on regional differences with regards to religious change and mutual influences between religious groups.

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OPEN SESSION (M. RIEXINGER, C. ENDRESEN): New religiosities, Muslims and Islam

In the study of religion processes of religious change such as privatization of religion, fragmentation of religious authority and New Age spirituality have first and foremost been studied in the context of the Christian/ post-Christian West (Lambert 1999; Heelas & Woodhead 2005). Recently the reception of Western New Age concepts and their interaction with local religious traditions in Hindu and Buddhist societies in Asia has attracted much attention and been studied in a comparative perspective (Borup & Fibiger eds. 2018). Studies of the reception and adaptation of new religiosities in the Islamic world and among Muslims are few. Moreover, they rather focus on the local context than relating the observed developments to comparative discussions about new religiosities and 'spirituality' in late modernity although the societal developments and conditions beneficial to their emergence can be observed in at least some Muslim countries. Moreover Sufism has inspired new religious movements in the West, and can thus function as 'indigenous' connecting point as "Eastern religions" do in Asia.

When it comes to Muslims in secularized societies, we hypothesize that secularization processes and contacts with pluralism will foster fluid, in-between religious identities, bricolage, and hybridity that challenge hegemonic discourses and normative classifications among Muslims (Clancy-Smith 2013; Clayer 2017). As opposed to this, one may not neglect that strong normativity, a high degree of social conformity and not least institutional restrictions set limits to the expansion and open practice of new religiosities in many Muslim societies. Therefore, we assume that the reception, adaptation and formulation of new religiosities will develop along specific lines.

The panel invites contributions investigating developments in Muslim countries as well as among Muslim minority communities in order to chart and discuss the variety of "Islamicate" responses to new religiosities.

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OPEN SESSION (H. KUPARI, T. P. UTRIAINEN): Religion as a site of learning

Learning is one of the most esteemed and supported values of contemporary society. The ethos and rhetoric of life-long learning has expanded beyond the contexts of formal education, increasingly informing various spheres of culture. It has also pervaded the field of religion and particularly individual religiosity. In contemporary pluralistic and individualistic societies, even religious learning is no longer confined to homes, schools, and the transmission of tradition from one generation to the next. Rather, more and more adult individuals choose to independently acquaint themselves with previously unfamiliar religious and spiritual practices and traditions. This panel invites papers that approach religious contexts as sites of learning: environments where adults embark on various kinds of learning trajectories, developing and mastering new skills and notions. The papers can address any historical or cultural materials and cases, or present theoretical perspectives pertaining to individuals' learning processes either in their native or adopted religious contexts. The focus can be, for instance, on embodied, emotional, or material learning, or on specific learning techniques or pedagogies.

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OPEN SESSION (S. STJERNHOLM): Continuations and Disruptions in Muslim Religious Leadership in Europe

Muslim authority structures are changing globally. In many European contexts, an older generation of religious leaders, active within largely ethnically defined communities and institutions, have had difficulties reaching younger generations of Muslims. The generation gap is at once linguistic, cultural and religious. While youths born in post-migration contexts primarily speak the local language, members of older and migrating generations often prefer languages of their countries of origin. Generations are also differently culturally habituated due to varying experiences and identifications, e.g. in terms of what is perceived as 'home'. Moreover, differences are framed in religious terms: a search for 'deculturised' Islam, ostensibly purified from the varied local Muslim practices around the world, is prioritised among many reform-oriented young Muslim activists.

At the same time, advocates of global Islamic discourses compete for influence among these young Muslims, not least by establishing Islamic universities with attractive stipends aiming at international students. Moreover, non-Muslim audiences and societal institutions – for example, hospitals, schools, and prisons – require responses, engagements and task fulfilment from Muslim leaders. The necessary cultural translation of global Islamic discourses to locally situated audiences therefore requires skilled individuals with competencies in all levels of this transmission and communication: it requires a new generation of Muslim religious leaders.

The 'new generation' of religious leaders entails not only a change in personnel, but important new types of Muslim religious leaders that go beyond and mix traditionally separate roles. This involves being fluent in and habituated to the local language and culture, as well as ability to combine knowledge of Western intellectual concepts with traditional Islamic learning. It might mean being a social role model in streets and university campuses as well as leading worship, preaching, teaching, and giving personal religious advice in and outside mosques. In order to investigate the issues outlined above, the session encourages invites to consider the following questions:

* How do Muslim preachers and teachers in European contexts articulate and embody Islam with local audiences in mind, how can their religious discourse be interpreted, and how is it received?

* Why do young European Muslims pursue Islamic education abroad, what kind of universities and schools are they attending, and what impact does this have upon their return?

* How does the public sector accommodate and use European Muslim religious functionaries, how do these functionaries fulfil their roles, and what are the consequences of this accommodation?

Scholars are invited to contribute with both empirically and theoretically oriented papers engaging with the topics covered in this description.

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OPEN SESSION (C. ENDRESEN, J. SKJOLDLI, A. STENSVOLD): The Pope: Continuity, Change and Contestation in Local and Global Spheres of Meaning

This session employs the physical and symbolic relocation of the pope to reflect upon religious change and continuities in a cross-cultural perspective. Where does he go, to whom does he belong, and how is he interpreted in different webs of meaning? How does his symbolic "malleability" reflect or highlight inter- and intrareligious boundaries? The pope is a powerful leader of a global religious community of 1.3 billion people worldwide, making him an important figure both within and beyond the tradition he formally represents. The pope travels to new places, is online, and acquires new roles and functions in a range of religious and secular contexts, being cast, for example, as pilgrim, environmentalist, peacemaker or Crusader. As the pope moves he gets global media attention and the geographical places he visits seem to be (temporarily) redefined by his (holy) presence. The pope's media presence can be construed as a continuous relocation - of the pope - but does it also mean a constant relocation of meaning, or of the center of the Church? Our working hypothesis is that the

intensified "papal mobility" over the last decades, spatially and symbolically, reflects an ongoing relocation of religion, related to globalisation and new forms of interconnectedness. The session is a continuation of an EASR panel in 2016. The purpose is to publish an anthology, and it is open for proposals.

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OPEN SESSION (A. KULL): Science-and-Religion as a Field Guide to the Contemporary World of Facts and Fictions

Misinformation and rumours have had a long and (dis)honorable history for thousands of years. They are documented already in biblical times and classical Greece. The unique problem globally today is that the spread of misinformation has proliferated and it is entwined on the Internet with real information. There are many ways in which we can be led astray: neuroscience shows that faulty arguments are often more attractive than the sound ones - and mishandled statistics, photoshopped or otherwise „cured" pictorial material makes misguidance particularly easy. Since its dawn, the field of Science-and-Religion has been fundamentally concerned with squarely facing the challenge of sorting out genuine meeting points between science and religion from ideology-laden wishful thinking. It has shown that science/scientific method helps us to know the limits of what we can and cannot know, philosophy/logics helps to evaluate various reasoning practices, hermeneutics and religion-and-science together help us to detect when science assumes the role of religion, or religion masquerads for science. Growing segments of our societies in the Baltic states deny that scriptures need interpretation – yet, we cannot move from text to application without interpretation. No word, especially the word of God, is self-explanatory. Exegetes and commentators, theologians and scholars and philosophers of religion are to religion what judges are to law. In a similar way, scientific facts without interpretation are mute – they don't speak to us (and we are all „lay" people regarding majority of scientific disciplines, the other (and often our own) religions and cultures).

Misinformation is promiscuous and flirts with people of all social and educational classes. In many cases, the word „truth" has been co-opted by people who are propagating counter-knowledge (to be polite! It used to be called lies) or fringe viewpoints. As academics in different fields we can lead the public discussions on the art of statistics and probabilities, but also note when possibility and creativity (i.e., factors that can be assessed often better by religious studies and theology) transcend our down-to-earth sober routines. Critical thinking must be an ongoing process, a habit: you cannot think critically once and then drop it.

The session may focus on:

- Critical analysis of speculative theories in physics and other sciences with spiritual implications:

- Religiosity in science and misinterpreted science in religion and culture; paradoxes and practices of thinking

- Critical philosophical analysis of the scientific explanation of religion

- Technoscience, technonature and technoculture – issues where technology (including social media) makes a difference

- Science and religion as a liberating political theology (including aspects of gender theories, ecotheology and political theology)

- Scriptural hermeneutics for the livable world

- Local and global issues: gender and sexuality; refugees and religions; political culture and civility, history and its interpreters; a great unknown – our cultures and religions today, influencers, players and clowns both online and offline.

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OPEN SESSION (A. ANNESE, F. BERNO): Continuities, Disruptions, and Multiple Religious Identities in Late Antique Egypt (2nd-6th Centuries) – II

This panel welcomes contributions that, using any methodological approach (history of Christianity, religious studies, papyrology, etc.), aim to analyze the multifaceted character of Christianity in Late Antique Egypt (2nd-6th centuries), with special reference to the continuities and discontinuities that can be observed in the history of the religious traditions in that area, in several matters: theological doctrines, practices, ecclesiology, etc. This is related to the issue of the multiple religious identities in Late Antique Egypt. As is well known, the various Christian groups in Late Antique Egypt were involved in complex processes of identity construction (also with theological-political implications). Different groups had different self-conceptions and self-representations, and variously perceived or labelled other groups. Identity construction developed through both continuities and disruptions, interactions and conflicts. Papers in this panel will address issues that can include: self-perception and representation of "others" in texts or documents produced by, used by, or speaking of various groups and traditions in Late Antique Egypt, such as "Gnostic," Monastic, and other Christian groups, as well as Manichaeans and Jews, from the perspective of their stance towards continuity and discontinuity with a given religious tradition; the way in which a text (or a number of texts) was (were) produced, used, or interpreted in one or more given group(s), also through different periods – this may include, for instance, debates on orthodoxy and heterodoxy of texts and doctrines, debates on the Biblical canon, or reception/status of "apocrypha"; relationships between Christian groups – or between Christian and non-Christian groups – in Late Antique Egypt; reflections upon certain key terms and concepts attested in the sources from that context (e.g. "heresy"/"heretic," "tradition," "new doctrine," etc.). Papers could discuss literary, "semi-literary," and documentary sources.

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OPEN SESSION (P. SCHRODE, R. STEGMANN, F. PETER): Approaching the study of Muslim debates: Reasoning, relationality, and frameworks for disagreement

This double panel will examine how the analytical concept of Islam as discursive tradition has been used in research on debates inside Muslim communities. It seeks to inquire into and highlight the distinctive contribution, which studies drawing on this concept can make. The case studies to be presented ultimately serve to enhance our understanding of the conditions of Islamic discourse and the limits of what is sayable (Schrode 2016).

Anthropologist Talal Asad's proposal to conceive of Islam as a discursive tradition (Asad 1986) has been considered a game-changing intervention in academic debates (Mahmood and Landry 2017). While Asad had introduced this concept in response to a relatively narrow debate between anthropologists, the questions raised by him continue to attract attention far beyond this field.

Generally speaking, tradition as an analytical category refers to a set of "conditions that produce meanings (compelling meanings or taken-for-granted ones)" (Asad 2006:289). These conditions can be clustered into three major interrelated problematics. First, the study of tradition implies a concern for the embodied subjectivity of believers and the traditions of cultivating "the body in its capacity to sense things, to be persuaded and convinced" (Asad 2006:287). Second, tradition raises questions about its specific temporality, i.e. how the evaluation of correct practice in a given context draws together past, present and future in distinct ways (Iqbal 2017), and under which conditions new beginnings become necessary and new stories of the past and future are generated (Asad 2006:290). Third, and most importantly for this panel, the category tradition involves the examination of modes of reasoning which enable both argument and disagreements as central features of the Islamic discursive tradition. This includes the analysis of mechanisms which regulate discourse without simply rendering the tradition uniform (Asad 1986; Iqbal 2017) It also implies the study of what makes disagreement possible, i.e. "some kind of shared framework (even when this isn't entirely clear to those who disagree) that has temporal dimensions" (Iqbal 2017:198).

As demonstrated by Asad (1993) and others, this approach is eminently useful for the study of Muslim debates and more generally, of the fundamentally relational character of Muslim beliefs and practices. This panel will take cases from the rich history and present of Muslim debates to contribute to this study.

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OPEN SESSION (A. M. BASAURI ZIZINA, T. FOLIEVA): Scientific Atheism: Disruption in Religious Studies or Its Continuation?

During the communist regimes in many Eastern European countries a new academic discipline emerged, consequently named scientific atheism. The goal of scientific atheism was to study religion, to show its retrograde nature and to criticize it from a scientific perspective. Scientific atheism had an applied usage on social and political levels, it was incorporated in atheistic propaganda and education. Scientific atheists were not only theoreticians, working in academic institutions, but they also gave numerous popular lectures on various aspects of religion, propagating atheism and condemning religion. Who were those people? What religions did they study? What methodology did they use? Looking back to the communist era, how can we define the work of academic scientific atheists? Was it a period when academic research of religion seized to exist? Was scientific atheism a form of religious studies, but with Marxist approach or an ideological discipline without any serious academic background? Can we generalize scientific atheism or were there peculiarities in different soviet republics and socialistic states in Central and Eastern Europe? These, and many other issues are explored by contemporary scholars in Eastern Europe and beyond, and all of them are invited to contribute to the session.

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OPEN SESSION (A. HAAPALAINEN, J. KYYRÖ, T. ÄYSTÖ): Religion and right wing populist politics in contemporary Baltics and Nordics

During the recent decades, European politics has witnessed the growing prominence of various right wing populist agendas, including nationalism, opposition to immigration, welfare chauvinism, Euroscepticism and anti-globalism. Often these agendas are entangled with religious issues. While constructing their visions of 'the Nation', right wing populist parties display anti-Muslim opinions and defend nationally defined forms of Christianity. The papers in this panel look at the entanglements of religion and right wing populist agendas in the Baltic and Nordic political publicities, including parliamentary texts and speeches and presence of politicians and politics in the media. Exemplary themes to be addressed are the different roles of religion as part of right wing populist definitions of 'the nation', the common agendas that certain religious groups have with the right wing populists, and the challenges posed to the religious groups, especially in a situation, where the understandings of the 'national Christianities' are contested by the right wing populists. The panel welcomes both empirical and theoretical papers on such topics. The submissions may approach these themes from the perspective of political parties, politicians, religious groups or NGOs. However, the contributions should contain a firm link to the parliamentary politics.

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OPEN SESSION (M. Q. FIBIGER): Religious hotspots

All over the world we find places and localities given special religious or spiritual meaning and therefor are attracting people. Some of them have a long history and a mythology legitimizing the place as something special,

others are rather new and can be understood as part of religious tourism, as a reinvention or re-actualization of old traditions or as a trans-religious meeting place.

This panel especially invites papers having a focus (theoretically and empirically) on religious hotspots that are attracting people from different religious or non-religious affiliation. This can be different pilgrimage-spots but also places, where people in religious divided countries meets as a kind of neutral space.

The panel invites the participants to take following questions into account:

a) Are these religious hotspots somehow transcending religious affiliation?

b) Is the place inscribed in or interpreted into different systems of meaning?

c) What makes the place a religious hotspot?

d) Is or have the place become a place for struggle between different religious groups or a place for fraternization?

e) Has it become part of a political agenda

Place and space theories are welcomed.

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OPEN SESSION (M. MATTA, G. EVOLVI): Media, Marginalization, Mobilization and Religion, Representation, Resistance

Despite the importance of arts in understanding the ways artistic behaviour and creative practices can affect social inclusivity and political representation, and notwithstanding the role of cultural organizations in creating incentives for minoritized individuals and collectives to engage in artistic expressions (Martiniello 2015), there has been a paucity of research tackling the issue of art practices and strategies enacted by migrants, minorities and marginalized groups to reclaim their "right to have rights" (Arendt 1951), among which there is the right to perform religiosity and spirituality.

As Paul DiMaggio and Patricia Fernández-Kelly (2015) argue in their editorial on Immigration and the arts, "often lacking necessary linguistic skills, immigrants resort to aesthetic means – the culinary arts, music, dance, poetry, and so on – to communicate with the wider society. They also use art to assert dignity and claim national membership". However, when looking at the aesthetics means employed by migrants, subaltern groups and 'minorities', the uses of arts and creative practices are further complicated by the need to also voice generational and/or cultural disagreement, ranging from 'loyal' dissent to outrageous revolt against the 'majority'. These practices do not necessarily have a long-term social impact, but contribute creating what Nabil Echchaibi (2013) describes as a "cultural thickening" that results in religious and cultural change.

In the often-intertwined processes of mobility and marginalization, media and religion – and their complex link to strategies of mobilization and resistance – are increasingly becoming relevant to also understand the way religious and cultural change happen. Migration and diasporic communities create instances of religious encounter and contact, where two or more religious traditions confront each other and establish new patterns of beliefs and practices. As contemporary religiosity is affected by migration, scholars need new methodological and theoretical approaches to understand the politics of representation of migration communities. This includes refugees and asylum seekers, migrants, as well as members of minority religious groups.

We would argue that the study of media production of migration groups can give insights on the strategies of adaptation and negotiation of hybrid religious and cultural identities and identifications. We are interested in case studies that explore, but are not limited to, film, theatre, blogs, social media, and videos. Interdisciplinary research on every geographical area and religious group is welcome. Some possible topics of discussion are:

* Film production by migrant youth and/or ethnicized and minoritized people that address religious and social change.

* Digital spaces (e.g. blogs) where 'minority' groups negotiate their religious practices against a different religious background.

* Artistic performance, such as theatre and dance, that help diasporic communities to enter in contact with what they perceive as 'mainstream' society.

* Music, songs and video making practices that negotiate politics of recognition and representation.

By collecting relevant case studies, the panel seeks to explore media actions and reactions connected with migrants and/or 'minorities' as a way to conceptualize disruptions and changes in contemporary religion.

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OPEN SESSION (D. BARBU, F. MASSA): Classical mythologies in Christian, Jewish and Islamic sources

This panel proposes to explore the different modes of interaction with the mythological traditions of the classical world in the Jewish, Christian or Islamic literatures of the late antique and medieval periods. The aim of this panel is to engage in a reflexions on the status, place, function and role of the "pagan" past in the elaboration of a discourse articulating religious identities to a historical rupture, while at the same time becoming an important channel of transmission and reception of classical mythology. In this process, "pagan" myths, understood not only as a deceitful form of speech but also as a source of historical knowledge, came to contribute to the various ways in which Jews, Christians and Muslims thought about history, and especially, the history of religions.

This panel, encouraging a comparative perspective, grounded in rigorous historical and/or philological methodologies, welcomes contributions on case studies shedding light on the ambiguities of this relation between myth and history in specific historical contexts. Are also welcome contributions addressing the question from a historiographical vantage point, for instance by considering the place of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic discourses about the "pagan" past in the historiography of the comparative study of religion.

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OPEN SESSION (D. VILLAR): Contact(s) between religious systems: a "work-in-progress-topic"

Religions do not form an independent mosaic, but show a dynamic of interaction through contact, through the option of more competitive development models and by the identity of the human beings that use them as patterns of meaning, which makes the narrow framework of study of each culture and consolidates theoretical bridges with other cultures – neighbours or not.

It has been possible to verify how in the past the cultures which have adapted in the most suitable way to the different ecological and contact challenges are the ones that have prospered, those which have been better known and whose common features have been more redundant. In contrast, cultures with less competitive religious characteristics in the face of the challenge of contact have disappeared or are known much worse.

Today, globalization has brought into contact very different cultures and enhanced the outbreak of closed life models common among traditional societies. That is why religions that combine components of different creeds in a very dynamic way have arisen and continue to emerge. These are not syncretisms like those common in traditional and pre-agricultural societies based on acculturation or cultural destruction as a result of the clash between competing cultures. These are combinations of elements which come from different faiths and have as their goal, mostly, to achieve a perfect religion that satisfies both the aspirations of inner development and the

construction of a non-conflictive global coexistence and models of explanation of the world adapted to the present time, like the Baha'i faith.

Taking into account all these elements, the aim of this panel is to analyze the contact phenomena between religious systems of the past and present by applying the perspective and method of the History of Religions. The reasons why we propose a study of this phenomenon from the approach of the History of Religions are the following two. Firstly, because from this perspective, religious facts are cultural facts, neither are they timeless nor eternal, but they are inscribed in a defined historical framework which allows them to be explained to a large extent. Secondly, because the application of the method of the history of religions, the comparative method, makes it possible to build a bridge to overcome the temptation of religions – and those who study them - to understand themselves as unique and incomparable, relativizing information of a religious nature of a society by analyzing them in a profound way and allowing to relate different religions through the analysis of their common characteristics.

This panel, organized by members of the Universidad Complutense de Madrid and Instituto Bíblico y Oriental, wants to be a tribute to the 25th anniversary of the creation of the Instituto Universitario de Ciencias de las Religiones of the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, the only existing research institute in the Spanish state university dedicated to the study of religions and a pioneer center in the teaching, study and dissemination of the History of Religions.

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OPEN SESSION (J. C. VAN BOOM, T.-A. PÕDER, R. GRAMIGNA, T. BOYKO): Reconfiguring concepts and methods for the semiotic understanding of religious change

The past decade has seen a revival in the application of semiotic theory to religious studies. From the 1960s through the 1980s, there was a modest surge of interest among religious studies scholars in semiotic methodologies. Due to several factors, such as criticism of the structuralist premises of much of 20th century semiotics and a lack of confidence in the fruitfulness of semiotic models, this interest fell into a general abeyance (Robert Yelle, 2013). In the 2000s, a revival in semiotic studies of religion began,. Two signposts are worth a special mention: The publication of the first monograph with a title Semiotics of Religion (Robert Yelle(2013)) and Mediation and Immediacy: The Semiotic Turn in the Study of Religion, an international conference held in Turin in 2016. This session focuses on modifying or rethinking semiotic approaches and methodologies, especially for the study of religious change. Such reconfigurations are necessary to avoid the problems associated with older semiotic approaches For example, instead of attempting to establish universally valid semiotic structures, current semiotic studies of religion often look at explaining sign-making and sign-usage in particular historical periods. We invite papers by scholars in semiotics, religious studies, theology, philosophy, and cultural studies who have an interest in understanding religious change from a semiotic perspective. We welcome papers dealing with (but not limited to) the following topics in connection with religious studies: semiosphere(s), Peircean semiotics, biosemiotics, modelling systems, Greimassian analysis, cognitive semiotics, social discourse theory, somatic semiotics, and the contemporary relevance of late ancient, medieval, and early modern semiotic systems.

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OPEN SESSION (M. FALLICA, L. BATTISTA, P. TERRACCIANO): Continuity and Disruption in the Erasmian Reformation/s

No other period in the history of Christianity is more sensitive on the issue of the relationship between continuity/discontinuity, and tradition and fracture, than the Reformation/s of the European 16th century. The Reformers interpreted themselves on the one hand as violent interrupters and deconstructers of one kind of a

theological tradition, seen as a progressive corruption of original Gospel purity. On the other hand, the Reformation meant a recapturing of the form, namely the true Apostolic tradition and the original teaching of the Gospel. The claim of continuity with the "true form of Christianity" was in this sense the hallmark of every attempt at reform.

Within this context, the panel aims to focus on Desiderius Erasmus and his particular perspective of reform. On one side, Erasmus influenced the more radical movements of the Reformation with regards to his ethical, intellectual and philological opinions, in the sense that he wish to leave behind certain traditional dogmas and religious practices. On the other side, however, all of his thought centered upon God's mercy and the believer's response in Charity which sided explicitly with the anti-Lutheran and Catholic system of mediation thorough the concrete form of hierarchy and rites.

Erasmus's Origenian theology characterizes Revelation as a suasive and universally welcoming call, which offers to everyone the degree of truth which he is able to receive. In this way, Erasmus's system can accommodate (even if in a gradual progression towards perfection) the totality of interpretations of the Gospel, including the most extrinsic and ritualistic forms of religiosity, pragmatically justified in their pedagogical value. The Greek-influenced, sceptical, humanistic thought of Erasmus could therefore affect and shape both perspectives: that which was breaking with Rome, as well as the internal attempts of reform from within Roman Catholicism. This complex and dialectic nature of Erasmus's legacy is evident also in the various evaluations of different scholars, who emphasized one or the other side of his thought to the exclusions others. For instance, the attention to theological questions has sometimes resulted in a portrait of Erasmus too focused on his continuity with the Fathers of the Church, losing sight of his radical secularizing tendency. Conversely, this same radicality has sometime induced scholars to imagine Erasmus as a champion, alongside with Luther, of a, modern spiritual movement of emancipation, free from traditional religious structures, forgetting Erasmus's personal choices and links to Rome.

The panel proposes therefore to host papers that focus on one of these points:

1. The relationship between Erasmus's urgency for disruption and radical reform, and the value given by him to the tolerant universal mediation of the Church as a pedagogical community;

2. The many and varied receptions of Erasmus's proposals among his contemporaries.

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OPEN SESSION (H. PESONEN, M. KURENLAHTI): Religion and Sustainability
Global sustainability challenges – such as climate change and the on-going dramatic sixth extinction event – have led scholars of different fields to talk about the age of the Anthropocene: an epoch defined by the dominant impact of humans on the global environment. We are facing not only an ecological, economic, or social crisis, but, as economist Manfred Max-Neef (2010: 201) has stated, "a crisis of humanity" with colossal repercussions. How have scholars of religion approached the domain of religion in this research context?

In this session, we approach the topic of sustainable development from a broad angle and invite scholars of religion to share their perspective on the subject. How is the relationship between religion and sustainability issues confronted, analyzed and discussed in research conducted under the shadow of the Anthropocene? What is the relevance of the study of religion within this discussion, spanning across various fields of research? How have scholars approached religion as a changing and transforming phenomenon in the middle of a world that seems to usher societies to re-evaluate the meanings of, for example, human development, civilization and wellbeing.

We welcome a broad spectrum of proposals aiming to illuminate the relationship between religion and sustainability from different kinds of perspectives. Both empirical and theoretical approaches are very much welcome to join the discussion.

OPEN SESSION (Ü. VALK, L. GUZY): Insecurities and uncertainties at the margins of institutionalised religions: ghosts, monsters, witchcraft and other dangerous matters

For religious studies margins always have a methodological value, as it is "at the margins truth reveals itself" (Brody 2018). At the margins of institutionalised religions sociocultural continuities, ruptures and hybrid answers emerge as local and vernacular responses. This marginal sphere of beliefs, rituals and other practices is never completely controlled by religious authorities or scriptural traditions. Lacking a comprehensive doctrinal foundation it has often been trivialised and contested as a realm of irrational superstitions and overlooked as "folk religion", "little tradition" or "residual beliefs". Tensions between the institutionally prescribed norms and "lived" aspects of religion reveal the incongruities and gaps in religious traditions.

This panel will deal with the continuities of cultural idioms, metaphors and narratives of insecurities and life crises in Asia, Latin America, Europe and other regions, where institutional and indigenous religions have co-existed in contact and conflict. On the one hand discrepant belief systems and diverse ritual strategies make up a vast resource for dealing with crises, calamities and tragedies of life and conceptualising them, on the other hand co-existing but contradictory knowledge systems generate a sense of suspense and uncertainty. This is often expressed in experience narratives and other genres that apply traditional interpretive frameworks on discussing major social and political turns but also personal crises. Such periods of transformations and uncertainties have been characterised as liminal (see Horvath, Thomassen, Wydra 2018). In addition to ritual contexts, liminality has also been connected with "conditions of irrationality" and with "lived experience", which transforms human beings (ibid. 2).

The panel calls for papers that would address the belief related storyrealm and everyday life in religious traditions that is charged with dangerous and incomprehensible powers – of ghosts, spirits, demonic deities, witches and other perilous agents – that both generate insecurity and offer an interpretive framework for conceptualising it.

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OPEN SESSION (R. BERNIŪNAS, R. MCKAY): Do the Gods make us moral? Psychological, ecological and cognitive exploration

One of the questions that the cognitive science of religion (CSR) tackles is how, cognitively speaking, religion binds (cooperation) and/or blinds (conflict) people in large-scale societies. More specifically, what is the relationship between religion and morality? For instance, psychologist Ara Norenzayan and his colleagues recently suggested that a package of culturally evolved religious beliefs and practices characterized by increasingly moralizing supernatural agents (Big Gods) and other psychologically active elements promoted large-scale and continuing cooperation with co-religionists, often contributing to success in intergroup competition and conflict. The role of moralistic gods in the expansion of cooperation and trust towards co-religionist strangers has also been explored cross-culturally (e.g., Purzycki et al., 2016). However, there is still a lack of experimental and/or field studies that would test the scope of this proposal outside of monotheistic religions. Similarly, there is a lack of cognitive experimental and/or field studies from Asian cultures that endorse karmic beliefs (e.g., Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism) or do not emphasize big moralizing gods in everyday moral matters (e.g., Confucian China). So presentations of empirical studies that further explore the relation between religion and morality in the West and/or in the East (or small-scale societies, for that matter) are welcome in this session.

Conversely, stable cooperation within religious in-groups might lead towards prejudice, and often hostility, towards religious out-groups. If another group adheres to other gods, or no gods at all, then cues of

trustworthiness may be diminished. There is a relative paucity (albeit a growing body) of research that investigates the social and psychological consequences of out-group belief or nonbelief. Thus, research about the psychological dynamics of prejudice (i.e., distrust) against other religious groups or atheists, across different cultural regions (not only from WEIRD people), is also welcome in this session.

Overall, the current session will discuss experimental and/or field studies exploring the relation between religious beliefs/rituals and morality (broadly construed), be it about the stable in-group, large-scale cooperation or the dynamics of out-group prejudice and hostility.

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OPEN SESSION (U. NÕMMIK, A. RIISTAN): Bible and Politics in Contemporary Eastern Europe

Since the political and social turn in the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, religious landscape in Eastern Europe has undergone several and multifaceted changes. These affect also the practice and scope of using the Bible. Beside active use of the Bible in Christian congregations and private sphere, Bible has become part of everyday life or has gained more attention through public debates on several issues. To name only some examples: national identity, national narrative about suffering and redemption, migration and xenophobia, family values and homosexuality, political controversies with the West (EU, Brussels) and the East (Moscow), setting goals for the future. In the process of building up democratic societies, Churches and Christians have been involved in the secular sphere of legislative processes and public debates representing their religious values. Secular political parties have sometimes also relied on the Bible to advance their political, national or even religious agendas. In the debates, the Bible has been used as a tool of power to suppress dissident thought and behavior and vice versa, as a tool of liberation to advance different ideas.

The session focuses on the political hermeneutics of the Bible in contemporary Eastern Europe. Theoretical analyses are especially welcome, but since Eastern European regions represent rather varying contexts, country-specific analyses will certainly be accepted.

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OPEN SESSION (N. VAN DEN BRANDT, S. GRENZ, K. HANITZSCH, M. KIMURA, M. LIINASON, O. SASUNKEVICH): Religion, Gender and Sexuality in Popular/Populist Discourse: Transnational Perspectives

This session focuses on the role and place of religion, gender and sexuality in contemporary poplar/populist discourses in various national/regional and transnational settings, in order to question the polarised understanding of public secularity versus privatised religion. While in various contexts, Islam and Muslims are problematised in public and political rhetoric, minoritised Islamic communities and individuals find ways to 'talk back'. Christian tradition and heritage are at times aligned with liberal-secular discourses in the creation of national identities that exclude the Muslim Other. The constructed figure of the Muslim woman and the Muslim queer has come to symbolise the Otherness of Islam. The hypervisibility of Islam and Muslims, however, is underlined by the invisibility of other religious minority (gendered) identities and communities in public debates. Despite the nationalist secular-Christian alignment, (conservative or orthodox) Christian and liberal-secular discourses do sometimes confront each other in oppositional ways in matters of gender equality and sexual diversity. Currently, in several contexts, conservative nationalist discourses are on the rise that attack gender studies, feminist and LGBTQ rights and sex education. These discourses draw on, and are mobilised by, Catholic ideologies and actors, and play a role in the political and public backlash against women's and LGBTQ rights, visibility and equality. These dynamics traverse simplistic notions of secular/ised regimes as necessarily good for women and LGBTQs, versus religious regimes that oppress women and LGBTQs. This session aims at scrutinising these dynamics for the ways in which they complicate our thinking about religion, sexuality,

gender and the secular. Moreover, emphasising the need to switch the unit of analysis from the local, regional and national site to the transnational, this session also seeks to trace commonalities and varieties across sites.

The session is organised by members of the Network Transforming Values. Gender, Religiosities and Secularities across the Globe (Nella van den Brandt, Sabine Grenz, Konstanze Hanitzsch, Maki Kimura, Mia Liinason and Olga Sasunkevich). As the third public event organised by the Network, which aims to develop novel analytical concepts and methodological approaches to explore religiosity/secularity and gender across the globe, the session invites interdisciplinary and open conversations on the intricate dynamics of secularity/religiosity.

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OPEN SESSION (A. CHALUPA, D. ZBÍRAL): Network Analysis, Computational Modelling and Simulation in the Study of Religions

In recent years, quantitative methods including network analysis, computational and mathematical modelling and simulation have taken hold in various branches of social sciences and humanities. Activities and research taking place in digital humanities and computational social sciences are gradually drawing the attention of an increasing number of scholars and students of religion. This panel intends to demonstrate the potential of these methods for the study of religions. The organizers welcome proposals for papers discussing any historical period and geographical area. Topics might include, but are not limited to:

* Modelling of the social dynamics of religious groups and interactions between religious communities

* Modelling of the spread of religious traditions on networks (transportation, commercial, social, ethnic etc.)

* Agent-based modelling of the transmission of different types of ritual in a diachronic perspective

* Extraction of networks from texts, computer-assisted text mining

* Social network analysis of actors in specific historical events important for the history of religions

* Usability of conceptual and methodological frameworks of complex adaptive system science towards the study of religions

* Inter- and transdisciplinarity in the study of religions concerning computational methods

* Preparing "computational data"; tools and methods for creating and managing datasets and databases aiding research of historical religions

* Comparison of close and distant reading of historical sources in the study of religions

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OPEN SESSION (M. SHAKHNOVICH, E. TERIOUKOVA, V. KHORINA, A. BELOVA, D. WEBER, T. CHUMAKOVA): Sacred objects in academic space: researchers, collections and exhibitions

Religious artefacts being in a temple or sanctuary are included in a specific religious context, which has anthropological, cultural, historical, aesthetic and psychological elements. Its meaning is revealed only in the unity of the components associated with the peculiarities of beliefs and practices of a religion. In transferring these artefacts into museum space, the problem appears of semantic and axiological reorientation of senses and meanings, which are associated with them. The aim of the open session is to discuss actual problems of a new interdisciplinary aspect of religious studies closely linked with museology, history of material culture, anthropology, history of art and history of ideas: What sense may the religious artefact obtain, when it is pulled

out from the religious context and placed into a museum space? Does it lose its sacred meaning and become only a piece of art or an object of historical memory? What is the role of the field scholars, collectors, museum curators in gathering, obtaining and presenting the religious artefacts? What is the influence of the theoretical paradigms in academic study of religions on the presentation of religious artefacts in the temporal and permanent exhibitions in museums of the various types (art, historical, ethnographic, interactive theme parks)?

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OPEN SESSION (H. HAAS): Religious diversity in Turkey: encounters and interactions

Turkey is a country of diverse beliefs and ideologies, but often portrayed as homogenous, with a 99.8% Sunni Islamic population. In fact, as the successor of the Ottoman Empire and the Caliphate, Turkey has rather diverse communities still living in its boundaries. The politics of the modern Turkish Republic, however, has been towards a more homogenous society. In fact, the state politics have influenced religious life of different communities in a direct way through legislation and media coverage.

Though in low numbers, Turkey's population consists of Christians, Jews, Yezidis and other diverse religions. The main religious group outside of Sunni Islam is the Alevi, a group that makes up an estimated 15-25% of the population. As a result of the secularization process there is also a growing number of Turks who have adopted atheist, agnostic or deist worldview.

Social and political aspects are some of the major contributors to the religious change anywhere in the world, so in Turkey. In spite of being a secular state, religion still plays important role in political and everyday life in Turkey.

The aim of this session is to discuss the religious diversity in Turkey´s society in history and at the present, to explain the nature and purpose of encounters and interactions between different religious groups, to bring forward the effects of interactions to religious practices, traditions and relationships, to study the minority/majority status's impact to the religious life, to examine the influence of the state politics, media coverage, film making etc to the relations between different religious groups.

The study of identity boarders of different religious groups and attitudes towards the "other" is another aim of the session. How the "other" is perceived in different contexts. The possibility of mutual practices and acceptance of the religious "other" as a college, bride, workmate etc. depend on the particular neighbourhood and personalities. Researching the Turkish (religious) identity in general.

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OPEN SESSION (T. TEIDEARU, A. REMMEL): Things and Materiality in New Age Spirituality

Interest in materiality in religion and spirituality has evidently grown since the outset of 'material turn' in humanities and social sciences. Material religion as an interdisciplinary field of study concentrates on different kind of material expressions and practices linked to materiality in religions. Scholars on material religion focus on the variety of material expressions of religion, spirituality and popular religion, and consumption, that sacralizes everyday life, work, leisure, and mediates transcendental world and bringing people closer to transcendental world.

There is a vast amount and variety of material expressions, 'tools' and goods in New Age Spirituality. Paul Heelas (1996: 114), for instance, indicates that many spiritual goods have become more popular in the 1990`s: audiocassettes, videocassettes, CDs, healing potions and herbs, tarot cards and crystals. Georg D. Chryssides (2007: 5, 15) lists popular objects in New Spirituality: crystals, incense, tarot cards, and spiritual self-help books. Matthew Wood (2007: 123) claims that the most common practices among healers in New Spirituality are

crystal therapy, aromatherapy and use of herbal distillates. Materiality has attracted modest attention among researcher studying New Spirituality, but even in these cases, objects and materiality are usually not the primary objects of research. This panel concentrates on things and materiality, and sets them in the center of studying New Spirituality.

The panel proposes to think about and with objects and materiality in New Spirituality and people`s spiritual life, and everyday religion. It is evident, that a variety of beliefs, practices and spiritual techniques are linked to or based on materiality and objects. Case studies on objects and materiality in New Spirituality are welcome in this panel. What is the role of things and materiality in practices and beliefs? How people use objects in a mundane context? How are objects meaningful in the contexts of everyday life and mundane settings? Are these things 'sacred' per se? This panel also invites to re-think theoretical and methodological frameworks for studying materiality in religion. What is the role of human-object relationship in meaning-making practices and beliefs? What objects 'do' in practices and with people? How is materiality itself meaningful? Presentations on case studies and discussions from different perspectives on these questions and related questions are welcome.

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OPEN SESSION (K. KIVARI): Paranormal as a category in science-religion debate

Paranormal is an ambiguous and open category for contemporary discussion on the supernatural. Despite parallel and overlapping concepts, the category of paranormal contrasts to the normal, natural and known level of reality. Various encounters with poltergeists, UFOs, ghosts and anomalous natural phenomena are woven into the web of arguments which, in active meaning-making processes, aim to form the political agenda in the secular-scientific intellectual field.

Rooted in the research into psychic phenomena, ufology, dowsing and spiritualism, the paranormal bears the ideals of a scientific pursuit within cultural and religious field. The aim of the paranormal is to extract solid knowledge out of different details and experiences using alternative concepts which bridge different sources. In doing so, and often armed with sharp cultural criticism, advocates support an enchanted worldview where natural and self-evident rules can be broken by an unknown agent, giving additional meaning to morality and other subjective categories. The political background of paranormal research involves questioning the openness and ethics of the scientific and technological economy in which we live, and raise the question of conspiracies and concealed collaborations within the centres of global power.

In these discussions the human experience has been brought to the centre, because other folkloric notions about the supernatural encounters in the individual's life could give an additional source of authority, validation or further enquiry. In discussion of the paranormal individual experience works as the problem, as the source and as the active means of participation at three levels: 1) the supernatural experience in the naturalistic worldview; 2) the supernatural experience as the source of existential meaning-making; 3) the supernatural experience as means of participation and communication. Examining and theorising the places of supernatural encounters unites the participants into a web of communication between different stories, places, practices and authorities.

The panel welcomes papers that deal with phenomena, authorities or communities that directly or indirectly address the category of paranormal.

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OPEN SESSION (U. NÕMMIK, D. TOMINGAS): Ancient Near Eastern Text as a source for tracking change

Ideological and religious texts have always had a strong message - whether it is pronouncing the legitimacy of a new strong king, praising the power of a deity or both. However, besides their main message, the authors

bound a lot into these texts that give clues about the lives they lived - social context and value systems, scribal culture, style and literary features to name a few. Texts like the Hebrew bible or Codex Hammurapi also give us a glimpse of the changes in values and attitudes that have occurred in the Middle-Eastern context.

This session focuses on models and methods for investigating evidence of social and/or religious change in ideological and religious texts. Questions that will be in the foreground for the papers on this panel: How are social/religious changes reflected in the text, are there changes that themselves account for the emergence of texts, what methods/tools should we use to validate information we've gained from texts?

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OPEN SESSION (R. PRANSKEVIČIŪTĖ-AMOSON): Alternative Religiosities in the Communist Regime and Post-Communist East-Central European Countries: Emerging Diversities within (Trans)Formations, Disruptions, Continuations

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

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

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

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OPEN SESSION (P. KAHLKE OLESEN): Archaeologies of Religion – Temporal and Epistemological Disjunctions

For the vast majority of human history no texts are available to shed light on religious phenomena. There is little doubt, however, that what we call religion played a central role in preliterate societies. Scholars have tried to approach prehistoric religion in various ways: by analogy with religions understood on the basis of texts, by attempting to read material culture like a language, text, or discourse, or by directing our attention towards the inherent properties of the material itself. This session will ask in what ways, sense, and contexts it is meaningful to talk about 'archaeology of religion(s)' and 'prehistoric religion(s)'. Is 'religion' a useful category for contexts without verbal material, or does it add nothing further to our understanding of the material and its context?

Cultures before texts are separated from us by both temporal and epistemological divides. In what sense is it possible to bridge these? Fundamentally, can we say anything or nothing – or everything – about religion before texts? If the material itself is 'silent', this creates a paradox in which texts are needed to interpret the material, but where the material cannot determine the appropriateness of the interpretation given. Alternatively, material culture and remains may say something, but not everything. If this is the case, can we understanding what they are saying and how? Can archaeologies of religion work the other way, and contribute to our understanding of religion based on texts?

The session will focus especially on the material constitution, formulation, and recognition of dimensions of religious phenomena, such as rituals, myths, cults, and gods. Papers are welcome that theorize the relationship between religion and material culture; that explore definitions of religion and their basis relevant for the study of religion before texts; that consider the relationship between the material aspects of religion and our ability to talk meaningfully about religion before texts; that explore how archaeologies of religion can contribute to the understanding of religious phenomena derived from texts; how notions of time and change affect the study of prehistoric religion; and how terms and concepts like 'prehistory' influence our ability to talk about religion in non-verbal contexts.

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OPEN SESSION (C. BECKER): Normalising Islam/religion: Addressing the Muslim question

Diverse phenomena, attitudes and notions considered to be part of Muslim life and/or Islam have turned into contentious public issues in recent decades. The "Muslim question" contains so called Islamic clothing like the hijab, architectural structures of mosques, Islamic religious education in different contexts (e.g., public schools), homophobia, the lacking separation between the secular and the religious spheres, the repression of women and the pull towards the radical supposed to emanate from the religious sources or institutions (e.g., the Quran or sharia). Simultaneously, governments have been addressing these issues as questions of integration, security, secularisation and education targeting communities and individuals identified as Muslim. These debates, policies and dynamics do not only result into specific measures and laws to be enforced. They also generate a pedagogical regime for Muslims, or groups commonly perceived as Muslim by the majority, like integration courses and media productions. This pedagogical regime partly feeds into everyday life whenever, for instance, non-Muslim citizens demonstrate and advise Muslim migrants how to live a liberated, empowered modern life.

This panel wants to address and discuss the "Muslim question" and the diverse strategies and tactics deployed in order to find an answer in terms of "normalisation". Using Michel Foucault's understanding of normalisation as a positive technology of power based on knowledge(s), the strategies and tactics produced in order to handle the Muslim question encompass policies, authoritative interventions and subjectivities (e.g., the moderate, liberal or secular Muslim) and other elements working towards normalisation. Normalisation works towards a hegemonic norm through evaluation, categorization and correction. While normalisation does involve disciplinary measures, its power rather stems from its ability to produce "normal" Muslim subjectivities and dispositions geared towards what is considered to be accepted, legitimate and good.

Contributions analysing cases involving for instance specific discourses, social contexts and practices such as the implementation of integration courses, recurring interactions between "Muslim refugees" and volunteers, radicalisation prevention policies or "Islam" in textbooks are welcome in order to shed light on the dynamics of normalisation. Furthermore, synchronic or diachronic comparative works on the normalisation of religion are welcome in order to broaden the perspective and discuss the salience of concepts across different social settings.

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OPEN SESSION (T. JONUKS): Materiality of religion

Religion is usually studied from the narrative sources, focusing on what someone believes. However, many religious practices are somehow associated with material items, such as objects of veneration, aids of rituals or personal talismans. However, these objects are often used only as illustrations in religious studies, even though they might really be central for the practitioners.

Material objects may tell a different story about religion - how are/were the objects used and how is/was religion lived? Material objects can also help with dating certain religious phenomena and through this give a different perspective than spoken religion. But the most essential is the materiality itself – physical objects that help to understand and remember, use and express religiosity.

This session welcomes presentations from a broad selection of topics where material objects in religion are discussed. The selection is not limited to institutional religions or practices, but also welcomes examples of vernacular practices, such as the use of relics, talismans, magical objects, biographies of religious objects, concealed and sacrificed objects, or the simultaneous usage of the same object in official and vernacular practices. Approaching religion from the perspective of material objects enables us to highlight new aspects, which sometimes go hand in hand with the textual aspects of religiosity, but sometimes give a significantly different picture.

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OPEN SESSION (D. VÁCLAVÍK): Many Faces of Contemporary Atheism in Central and Eastern Europe: From State-Atheism to Apatheism and Protest

The former Soviet bloc states are often considered to be a "homogenous" region with similar problems. These include the relationship with religion, as well as dealing with state-supported atheism. In reality, however, it is a very differentiated region, with different models of relation to religion and its role in contemporary society. The same is true of atheism and non-believing, which were, for most of the second half of the 20th century, state-supported concepts. The upcoming panel would, therefore, like to focus on mapping the various forms of atheism in the countries of the former Soviet bloc in the following "spheres":

- Changes in various versions of atheism in the 20th century

- The acceptance or rejection of atheism as part of a national tradition

- Dealing with the legacy of so-called scientific atheism (Marxist-Leninist atheism)

- Contemporary and historical reflection of non-Marxist forms of atheism

- Atheism as part of political clashes

- Similarities and differences with the countries of Western Europe and North America

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OPEN SESSION (T. JENSEN): State Handling of Religion and Political Discourses on Religion in Russia and Scandinavia: Continuity and Change

This panel on continuity and change in the way(s) that Scandinavian and Russian (and Soviet) states have handled religion and discussed religion, majority and and minority religion, religious diversity and religious education, is organized by a small research group located with the Ural Federal University in Ekaterinburg, headed by Elena Stepanova and Tim Jensen.

State handling of religion(s) takes place on various levels and in various ways, e.g. in constitutional and sub-constitutional law, implementation (or not) of international human rights law relevant to religion, parliamentary discussions and discussions in public mass media, state regulations directed explicitly at religion and state regulations regarding schools and the role and teaching of religion in school.

Papers that describe, analyse and discuss the ways the mentioned states have handled and discussed religion(s) past and present are invited and welcome. Since the final aim of the research group is to discuss the possibility of different kinds of comparisons between the two 'regions' , papers that venture into any such comparison are also welcome.

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OPEN SESSION (V. SEVERINO): Re-unifying Europe: from the Establishment of the IAHR to the EASR

The panel addresses the topic of 'Religious Studies and Cold War', that is the issue of the slow disclosure of Eastern and Western blocs for a debate on the so-called scientific, non-confessional, academic studies of religions. We welcome presentations with new data concerning this matter by focusing on the history of the "International Association for the History of Religions" (IAHR) founded in 1950 under the umbrella organization of the UNESCO/CIPSH. With this panel we aim to reconstruct the process of the affiliation of Central and Eastern European national groups of scholars to the IAHR from the de-Stalinization to the establishment of the European Union. For this, a network of historians engaged in this field shall set in motion a debate on the IAHR as a world-wide open society of scholars, built across and after the Iron Curtain: on its achievements and failures and its future prospects. Special attention will be given to the birth of the European Association for the Study of Religions in the framework of the IAHR.

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OPEN SESSION (O. VARSÁNYI): Conflict and Coexistence – Christianity and Islam

The thematic strand of the EASR 2019 Conference, 'Continuations and Disruptions' provides an excellent opportunity to organize a panel on the study of the encounters and relationship between Christianity and Islam. The session 'Conflict and Coexistence' seeks to apply the general theme of the Congress either on the experiences of Christians in the Islamic world, or on those of Muslims in a society of Christian majority, from the Middle Ages up to the present day. The panel invites contributions that investigate those aspects of Christian/Muslim practice, discourse, use of liturgical language, theoretical considerations, etc. that underwent change as a result of an encounter, interaction and/or conflict; or which specify "core" elements that cannot be disrupted without the loss of identity. On the other hand, the approach of 'coexistence' seeks to explore those circumstances that allow the simultaneous 'continuations' (and inventions) of different traditions. Papers could examine, for example, encounters and interactions between religious or confessional communities, social and political aspects of change, agents and victims of disruption, and migration.

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OPEN SESSION (T. SUNIER, G. WIEGERS): Mediating Islam in the Digital Age

The high-impact of many of the current, Islam-related events and the 'super visibility' of Islam can to a large extent be attributed to the digitization of all spheres of life. But the consequences of digitization cover a much broader field than just contemporary issues, such as the sudden rise in prominence of hitherto relatively marginal

theological and ideological trends and movements, that we witness currently, or the rapid transformation of Islam in the public sphere and the emergence of Islam as a brand through the rapid dissemination of public images and imaginaries.

The proposed panel rests on the premise that digitization and technological innovation have a tremendous influence on Islam; on the modes of expression and communication of religious messages and traditions, and on the modes of engagement with society. The rapid changes that already take place generate a sense of losing control and instability among the general public, politicians, journalists, academics, and not least among Muslims themselves. Consequently it has shaken up Islam as a field of scholarly study and will impact on the ways Islam is to be studied in the future.

The organizers of the panel invite scholars to submit papers addressing (one of) the following general questions.

1. How does digitization shape Islam (i.e. beliefs, practices, societies, political organizations, social institutions, and outlooks)?

2. What are the historical parallels with past technological revolutions?

3. How does digitization and technological innovation modify the relation Muslims have with their past and with the transformations previous technological innovations had in the past?

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