

## Welcome from the NZASR

Welcome to Otago, and to Queenstown. We are delighted this year to be meeting jointly with the Australian Association for the Study of Religions. While meeting together necessitates parallel sessions, there will be ample time during the conference for interaction and discussion with our colleagues from across the Tasman. We are grateful to the members of the AASR organizing committee for their friendly and efficient collaboration in planning the conference.

Ben Schonthal and Will Sweetman  
University of Otago



## Welcome from the AASR

Welcome to the 2015 Australian Association for the Study of Religions conference held concurrently with the New Zealand Association for the Study of Religions conference. It is wonderful that we can meet and build on what is already a strong collaborative relationship. I am particularly encouraged by the quality of papers in the program and look forward to meeting and discussing the presentations. I am extremely grateful to Ben Schonthal, Will Sweetman and the other members of the NZASR organizing committee for their work and effort to make the conference possible. It has been a pleasure to work with them and I look forward to an excellent conference.

Douglas Ezzy  
University of Tasmania

## **Notes for Presenters and Session Chairs**

Each conference room will be equipped with an Apple laptop and a data-projector. If you wish to use them, please bring your presentation on a flash drive or other device and copy it to the desktop *before* the session begins, so that the progress of the session is not delayed by technical difficulties. Each presenter has 30 minutes, which includes 5-10 minutes for questions. Papers should therefore be about 20 minutes long (25 minutes at maximum).

Session chairs are asked to ensure that sessions begin promptly and that presenters do not run over their allotted time.

## **Registration**

The conference will begin with tea and coffee served in the Manata Room from 12noon. Registration packs, including printed copies of the programme, will be available at the entrance to the Manata Room.

## **Refreshment and Meals**

Morning and afternoon tea and coffee are provided for all registrants. Lunch is provided on Wednesday and Thursday. All meals offer vegetarian and non-vegetarian options.

## **Conference Dinner**

Those who have registered for the cruise on the TSS Earnslaw to dinner at Walter Peak High Country Farm should gather in the lobby at 5.00pm Wednesday. Transport to the steamer wharf will be provided. The boat returns at 10.00pm and you will need to make your own way back to where you are staying.

## **AASR Women's Caucus Networking Breakfast**

The AASR Women's Caucus warmly invites delegates to a Women's Networking breakfast at 7.30 am, Wednesday 9 December. The Women's Breakfast will be held in Mercure, Queenstown Aspen Room at a cost of \$23 (if you have not already paid for breakfast for that day with your registration). Breakfast is followed by discussion about women's work in the academy and submission of names for the next Penny Magee keynote lecture. Please RSVP to [angela.coco@scu.edu.au](mailto:angela.coco@scu.edu.au) ; +612 6620 3038, if you would like to join us.

Tuesday, 8 December

---

1.00–1.15	Welcome	Manata
1.30–3.00	Inside and Outside Representing Religion, Managing Diversity	Manata Aspen
3.00–3.30	<i>Afternoon tea</i>	
3.30–5.30	New Zealand Attitudes and Values Survey Contemporary Religions	Manata Aspen
6.00–7.30	AASR Presidential Address	Manata

Wednesday, 9 December

---

7.30	AASR Women's Caucas Networking Breakfast	
9.00–11.00	Religion and the State Atheist Aesthetics	Manata Aspen
11.00–11.30	<i>Morning tea</i>	
11.30–1.00	NZASR Keynote Address	Manata
1.00–2.00	<i>Lunch</i>	
2.00–4.00	Naming Islamism Buddhist Tales and Territories	Manata Aspen
4.00	<i>Afternoon tea</i>	
5.00	<i>Depart for dinner</i>	

Thursday, 10 December

---

9.00–10.30	Religion in/and Politics Muslim Identities in the West	Manata Aspen
10.30–11.00	<i>Morning tea</i>	
11.00–1.00	Charles Strong Trust and Penny Magee Memorial Lectures	Manata
1.00–2.00	<i>Lunch</i>	
2.00	AASR AGM NZASR AGM	Manata Aspen
3.15	<i>Afternoon tea</i>	

## Plenaries

**AASR Presidential Address**  
**Religious Symbols and Aesthetics: Morality and Ritual**  
**Performance in Japanese Religions**

Douglas Ezzy, University of Tasmania  
douglas.ezzy@utas.edu.au

Some religions prioritise practice, with little concern for creeds and belief. In these religions, ethical obligations are communicated through aesthetic and emotional responses to symbols. Sociological theory has tended to characterise the aesthetic and emotional aspects of religious symbols as encouraging delusions or as ‘primitive.’ Such characterisations misunderstand the communicative significance of aesthetic responses to symbols. A sophisticated cultural sociology of aesthetics and morality provides a more nuanced understanding of religious symbols, and of responses to the uncertainty, and suffering, that are facilitated by such symbols. A range of ethnographies of Japanese religions are reviewed to illustrate the argument. Aesthetics, and ritual performance are central to many Japanese religions. These generate a strong sense of relational and communal entwinement and are associated with an ambivalent or pluralistic moral ontology.

## **NZASR Keynote Address**

### **Worlds of Wonder: Creativity and Ethical Life in India**

Tulasi Srinivas, Emerson College

Tulasi\_Srinivas@emerson.edu

Why are we here? What is a “good” life? Can we imagine a different future? These are the most enduring and bewildering of existential questions. I tell one tiny ethnographic fragment of a story of existential creativity through the everyday practice of Hindu priests and their congregations in Bangalore who co-create new wondrous experiences through creative temple rituals. Ritual creativity here is a crucial means of engaging the contingent and uncertain ‘happening’ of ritual, seeking thereby to encourage a broader shift in scholarly examinations of ritual process and creative expression: from the subjective intentions of creator-auteurs, to the immanent potential of the situations in which they come to encounter newness. It argues for taking emerging ritual practice seriously as theory building rather than as an anomaly or an addendum to a textual philosophico-historical exegesis of a culture. Secondarily yet vitally, wonder in non-western societies has rarely been acknowledged or understood. Acknowledging wonder as an imperative has significant repercussions on our interrogation on the nature of the real of non-western religions such as Hinduism. I argue that for Hindu ritual participants in Bangalore the attunement to wonder is cast as imperative, to resist, appropriate and recast modern capitalism giving them agency to express their futures in their own practices and theologies. Ritual creativity allows for an extension of the virtual horizons of imagination—of perceptions, actions and affections—towards an unseen, yet boldly imagined, wondrous ethical futurity. How can we then rethink the category of wonder in religious studies? How does it illuminate what “counts” as religion? Through rethinking wonder I move towards the consideration of an indigenous ethical theory of ritual where both the contemporary and the comparative are at stake.

**Charles Strong Trust Lecture**

**Two Disconnected Narratives of Disconnection: Anti-West and  
Anti-Islamic Discourses**

Gary D. Bouma, Monash University  
[gary.bouma@monash.edu](mailto:gary.bouma@monash.edu)

Narratives like paradigms offer explanations of some aspect of life which are largely self-contained, self-sustaining, self-validating and impervious to disconfirming evidence. Anti-Islam discourses in the West and Anti-Western discourses among Muslims are two such discourses. That such discourses can legitimate violence is clearly evident in the rhetoric, actions and rationales given for violence among such groups as the Islamic State, Boko Hara, The Lord's Liberation Army, The Spanish Inquisition, and Anti-Islamic movements in Europe and other parts of the West. Narratives of difference, of disconnection from some 'other' exist for centuries with minor variation as there is no real contact between those maintaining them. Real encounters would lead to disconfirmation while violent acts by some members of the 'other' group are taken as proof that the stereotypes held about them are true. In each age it must be asked, 'Who Benefits?'

## Penny Magee Memorial Lecture

### “Pretty strange karma!”: Personal and Anthropological Entanglements in Antipodean Buddhism

Sally McAra, University of Auckland

sallymcara@gmail.com

The delicate task of researching a religious group entails challenges regarding one's position *vis-à-vis* the beliefs and practices of that group, even when both researcher and interlocutors identify as Buddhist. While both Buddhism and anthropology are concerned with the human condition, at some points, the two strands seem to unravel, and the act of engaging in academic analysis of my interlocutors' activities created an unavoidable difference. In this paper I reflect on the challenges involved in conducting research from such a position, attempting to balance sympathetic engagement with critical analysis. This requires weaving together “native” and anthropologically-informed analytical perspectives, while negotiating the entangled threads of “multiplex identities” (Narayan 1993).

Inside and Outside

## **Both Outside and Inside: ‘Ex-Members’ of New Religions and Spiritualities and the Maintenance of Community and Identity on the Internet**

Carole Cusack, University of Sydney

[carole.cusack@sydney.edu.au](mailto:carole.cusack@sydney.edu.au)

This paper considers two ‘ex-member’ communities with web presences regarding the groups to which they once belonged, Kerista Commune ([www.kerista.com](http://www.kerista.com)) and the School of Economic Science Forums ([www.ses-forums.org](http://www.ses-forums.org)). The Kerista Commune site is where members post memories and honour deceased friends, in a spirit of warmth and support, with the aim of healing those who were injured by the group and of continuing friendships between those who are at peace with their history. The SES Forums site is used by ex-members who perceive themselves as ‘harmed’ by the SES (a Gurdjieff splinter group that now teaches a form of Vedanta). These people left, or were expelled for infringements of SES rules. Crucial factors that affect the mood of these online ex-member groups include Kerista being a local, Californian phenomenon that disbanded in 1991, whereas the School of Economic Science (SES) has a global reach, and still exists. Thus, Kerista ex-members tend to know each other in the ‘meat world’, and SES ex-members do not. The two online communities differ, but the common theme encountered is that when people physically ‘leave’ new religions and spiritualities, they often remain deeply engaged with the issues of what the group taught and why they left, and thus to identify as an ex-member and to find community with other ex-members is an almost infallible sign of being both inside and outside the group, paradoxically belonging without belonging.

## **‘Tacit Disaffiliation’: Disaffiliation in the Absence of an Explicit Conversion**

Sara Rahmani, University of Otago  
rahma444@student.otago.ac.nz

While substantial contributions have been made towards understanding the process of affiliation to New Religious Movements, the field that explores the evolution of its counterpart, disaffiliation, remains relatively underdeveloped. Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews conducted with 27 former (and continuing) practitioners of Goenka's vipassana movement in New Zealand, this paper explores an implicit pattern of disaffiliation that has been widely neglected by previous studies. More specifically, this paper explores the process of disaffiliation in a movement where association with religion has been constantly denied by the organization, hence creating a paradox where participants actively overlooked the notion of conversion, despite identifying with a set of newfound beliefs and values tightly associated with Buddhism.

## **Capital and Conversion: The Role of Social, Cultural and Religious Capital in Religious Conversion from Islam**

David Radford, University of South Australia

david.radford@unisa.edu.au

Social innovation such as religious conversion contests accepted community practices and transforms issues of identity, especially where religion and ethnicity have deeply felt historic connections. Utilising both qualitative and quantitative methodology this paper explores how Kyrgyz Christians have responded to accusations that they have betrayed their religion (Islam), their families and their Kyrgyz community; and how Kyrgyz conversion to Protestant Christianity in Kyrgyzstan has challenged the commonly held view that “to be Kyrgyz is to be Muslim.” This paper contends that in religious conversion from Islam to Christianity investments in and attachments to social, cultural and religious capital are important factors in understanding how conversion has taken place and to what extent it is accepted in the wider community.

# *Representing Religion, Managing Diversity*

## **Is that What You Believe? Examining Some Religious Beliefs and Practices of Students in Catholic Schools**

Richard Rymarz, Broken Bay Institute

[rrymanz@bbi.catholic.edu.au](mailto:rrymarz@bbi.catholic.edu.au)

Discussion of religion and young people can be homogenized with a tendency to report from homogenized samples. In response, examining cultural sub groups can lead to a more focussed discourse. One such group are students who attend Catholic schools. Approximately one in five young Australians are in this category. As such they represent an important sample. What can an investigation of this group tell us about the interface between religion and young people? This paper reports on an ongoing study of students in Sydney schools. It provides valuable information on Australian young people and how they see themselves, their involvement in Church and their religious expression. Results that emerge from the study show nuanced responses that invite sophisticated analysis of young people and religion. One clear trend to emerge is the changing perception of students as they progress through the school system. This finding is in accord with a view that describes religious engagement of young people reaching a plateau at a relatively early age. Some of the implications of this study for the broader discourse on religion and young people will be raised.

## **‘Unbearable Knowledge’: Managing Cultural Trauma at the Royal Commission**

Kathleen McPhillips, University of Newcastle  
kathleen.mcphillips@newcastle.edu.au

This paper reports on a current research project I am undertaking investigating a number of case study hearings involving the Catholic Church before the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Over the last 20 years, the exposure of significant levels of abuse against children across Australian organizations has shocked many people and raised the issue of the creation and transmission of individual and cultural trauma and their significant consequences. Using the work of sociologists working in the field of cultural trauma, I address the ways in which groups, communities and indeed the nation, has expressed a symptomatology of cultural trauma.

Drawing on the work of Jeffery Alexander and others, I argue that cultural trauma is best approached as a social construction that is qualitatively different to the experience of individual trauma. Using a number of key terms, I construct a schema for analyzing how affected communities have dealt with the revelation of child sexual abuse by trusted clerics and teachers across the Catholic milieu. In particular, I draw on the evidence from Case Study 28, which, during 2015, looked at the widespread sexual abuse of children in Catholic schools in the Victorian town of Ballarat and the impact on local communities. I will argue that the Royal Commission is both announcing a cultural trauma and providing a language with which to build programs of restorative justice.

## **The Critical Analysis of Religious Diversity: The CARD Network Experience**

William Hoverd, Massey University  
w.hoverd@massey.ac.nz

This presentation discusses the proceedings of the two meetings of the *Critical Analysis of Religious Diversity Network* (CARD) that were conducted in Denmark in 2013 and 2014. The network aimed to shift the social scientific discussion of religious diversity out of specific context located research into the comparative realm, as well as, to improve the methodological and theoretical approaches related to the field. This talk will set out the problem/s that the CARD network set out to address, detail the responses that were generated in the two network meetings before concluding to review the state of the field as it stood at the end of the meetings.

# Contemporary Religions

## **Universal Medicine: An Overview**

Angela Coco and Des Tramacchi, Southern Cross University  
[angela.coco@scu.edu.au](mailto:angela.coco@scu.edu.au), [des.tramacchi@gmail.com](mailto:des.tramacchi@gmail.com)

Universal Medicine (UM) was established by Serge Benhayon in 1999 in the Northern Rivers of New South Wales. Its activities centre around two major themes; esoteric teachings and complementary healing therapies. UM's religion entitled 'The way of livingness' is said to be inspired by past masters who are collectively referred to as the 'Hierarchy'. Complementary therapies, such as esoteric healing, chakra-puncture and esoteric yoga have all been devised by the founder who has also instituted The Esoteric Practitioners Association for accrediting people who train and become experts in UM healing modalities. UM has grown to international proportions with outreach organisations in the United Kingdom and Germany and Benhayon frequently travels to deliver public lectures. To date, UM has not been registered as a religion in Australia however the strong and pervasive teaching on realising one's own 'inner-most' as God, and other themes that appear to find a provenance in a strand of western esotericism, suggests it is worthy of attention from scholars of religion. Particularly, UM could be understood as an organisational manifestation of the holistic milieu now so characteristic of contemporary spirituality. This paper provides an overview of UM organisation and activities and draws on the works of Hanegraaff, Faivre and Melton to invite a discussion on the possibility of understanding UM as a new religious movement.

## Buddhism and Psychedelic Spirituality in America

Douglas Osto, Massey University

d.osto@massey.ac.nz

This paper is based on the author's forthcoming book, *Altered States: Buddhism and Psychedelic Spirituality in America* (Columbia UP, 2016). This study is the first of its kind to investigate the intersection of two modern modes of religious expression in the United States of America: convert Buddhism and psychedelic spirituality. Although part of the folklore about the origins of American Buddhism and an important aspect of American convert Buddhist culture, psychedelic use among American Buddhists has not been addressed to date in a serious and scholarly fashion. This paper outlines the histories of both "The Psychedelic Revolution," and "The Buddhist Revolution" in the United States from the 1950s to the present time, and investigates a broad spectrum of American Buddhist attitudes toward psychedelic drugs. Employing data collected from an online survey and formal interviews, the author demonstrates that there is an American Buddhist subculture, which began in the 1960s, whose members continue to use psychedelics as part of their religious practice. The paper also enquires into the debates and the philosophical issues involved in American Buddhism concerning the use of psychedelics, drug-induced mysticism and altered states of consciousness. The paper concludes with some explanatory models for how Buddhism and psychedelics may be related addressing such issues as the limits of rationality, the biochemical and psychosocial basis of altered states of consciousness, re-enchantment, and the nature of subjectivity.

## The Secret World and the Gate to Heaven: Funcom's *The Secret World* and Its Use of Real World Religions and How They Shape Its Online Game

Lauren Bernauer, University of Sydney

lauren.bernauer@gmail.com

History, and its tales, is routinely used to help embellish and enliven the stories told by popular culture, regardless if it actually a work representing that historical period or not. For instance the popular television series A Game of Thrones (and its novel series A Song of Ice and Fire) draws upon the War of Roses to help tell its tale. However more often, we see our religious history up on the big and little screens, or the pages of traditional and graphic novels alike, and computer games are no exception. Released in July 2012, *The Secret World* is a Massively Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Game (MMORPG) that is set in the modern world. *The Secret World* has drawn players in with the concept of "Everything is True", and while some areas of the game world might look like our physical world, there is a dark horror-fantasy undertone. The players actively join conspiracy factions such as the Illuminati or the Templars as they vie for power, interacts with figures from various mythologies, or battle beings from folklore across the world. But lurking in the shadows is a self-help group with similarities with real world groups. The smiles, the paying for enlightenment, "Oppressive Persons" and how the group combats them. However in the latest story developments this group has been influenced by a different real world group with a mass suicide, and this paper will look at both the story leading up to this and the new information regarding this development and how the group in-game portrays the real world religious groups they are based on.

## *Sangje and Samkye: The Cosmology of Daesoonjinrihoe in East Asian New Religions*

David Kim, Australian National University  
davidwj\_kim@yahoo.co.uk

When the early modern Korea confronted the political conflict between the cultural enlightenment and the isolationist policy, the condition of the local religions were not exempt from the colonial influences. The various new religious movements also appeared in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Among the post-1860 movements of *Donghak* (later called *Cheondogyo*), *Jeongsangyo*, *Daejonggyo*, and *Wonbulgyo*, *Daesoonjinrihoe* of *Jeongsangyo* was the most successful movement in its social impact. The Deasoon new religious community delivered a progressive voice over the traditional religions of contemporary Korea. They believed that the God of the Universe himself (unlike the Son of God in Christianity) came down from the ninth heaven to recover the corrupted *Samkye* (three worlds of earth, human beings, and heaven) of the Universe. Then, what are their teachings on the Daesoon God (*Guchun Sangje*)? How do they understand the primary principle of the Cosmology? How is it different in comparison with the other East Asian new religions of Japan and China (Taiwan)? This paper explores the mystical relationship between the Daesoon God (*Jeungsan Kang*) and its Universe (*Samkye*) in regarding to the Chinese Yugandao and Japanese Tenrikyo and critically interprets the cosmology of the Korean new religion in relation to the concepts of the Tower of *Cheonggye* which embraced Asian traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism, Shintoism, Shamanism and Taoism.



# New Zealand Attitudes and Values Survey

## **The New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study: A Focus on Religion**

John H. Shaver, Victoria University of Wellington  
[john.shaver@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:john.shaver@vuw.ac.nz)

This talk introduces the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study and showcases several recent findings relevant to the study of religion in New Zealand. The NZAVS is a 20-year longitudinal national probability study of social attitudes, personality and health outcomes lead by Associate Professor Chris Sibley (University of Auckland). The NZAVS has now been running for six years, and is currently following close to 18,000 participants across the country. Recent studies have focussed on the prevalence of belief in God(s) and spirits at the national level, different types of faith signatures and how religion impacts fertility. This talk will conclude with a discussion of the benefits and limitations of complex multilevel and longitudinal data for understanding religion in modern societies.

## **Who are the NFDs?**

Geoff Troughton, Victoria University of Wellington  
[geoff.troughton@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:geoff.troughton@vuw.ac.nz)

Recent New Zealand census data indicate a continuing decline in identification with Christian denominations; however, some denominations appear to be growing. These growing groups include the Christian NFDs, or those who do not identify with a particular tradition. This talk examines the NFDs in the context of wider patterns of Christian identification, drawing upon an analysis of survey responses from the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study (NZAVS). The NFDs are characterised by high levels of religious identification across age groups, and share other various distinguishing features. Though the characteristics of this unaffiliated Christian cohort are currently not well understood, in the coming years they seem likely to represent an increasingly significant section of Christians in New Zealand.

## **Christianity and Tolerance towards New Zealand's Immigrants**

John H. Shaver, Victoria University of Wellington

[john.shaver@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:john.shaver@vuw.ac.nz)

New Zealand ranks as one of the most tolerant countries in the world; however, national-level tolerance masks substantial intra-cultural variation. This talk uses data drawn from the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study (NZAVS) to explore the major drivers of tolerance and prejudice towards immigrants. Analyses reveal that religious New Zealanders are more accepting of immigrants than their secular counterparts, but there exists substantial variation across denominations. We focus on variation across Christian churches, and conclude with discussions about the cultural and historical sources of these differences.

# Religion and the State

## **Miraculous Modernity: The True Jesus Church and the Communist Party-State in the 21st Century**

Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye, University of Auckland  
[m.inouye@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:m.inouye@auckland.ac.nz)

This paper explores the role of miraculous discourse within the contemporary True Jesus Church in China with a particular focus on how Chinese society is present within this discursive space as both the best and the worst of all possible worlds. Miraculous discourse within the True Jesus Church is not confined to an otherworldly sphere of personal salvation, but engages directly with this-worldly affairs. The True Jesus Church's exclusivist claims, native history, and habituation to a fecund religious environment unfold within the context of a China overseen by an atheist party-state in an age of widening economic disparity, globalization, and rising nationalism. The permeability of the miraculous and the mundane within the church's Chinese history and Biblical teachings draws church leaders into simultaneously critiquing and affirming Chinese society (and by implication, the stewardship of the party-state).

## **Neo-nationalism, Japanese Catholics, and the State: A Church Divided Over Yasukuni Shrine, Patriotic Education, and the Constitution**

Mark Mullins, University of Auckland  
m.mullins@auckland.ac.nz

Since the end of the Occupation period (1945–1952), the Association of Shinto Shrines (Jinja Honchō) has worked closely with leaders of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to restore Shinto influence in public life. These “restoration” efforts have been reinvigorated in connection with the resurgence of neo-nationalism in the wake of the social crisis precipitated by the 1995 Kobe earthquake and sarin gas attack by Aum Shinrikyō, and the threefold disaster—earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown—in 2011. In post-disaster Japan, the close relationship between the LDP and Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership (Shinto Seiji Renmei) has been strengthened and eight Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) governments over the past two decades have renewed their efforts to promote Yasukuni Shrine visits, pass legislation to restore patriotic education in public schools, and revise the Constitution of Japan. These developments represent serious challenges for religious minorities in Japan. This paper examines how one of these minorities, Japanese Catholics, has been responding to this cluster of issues and documents the emergence of deep divisions between the “prophetic” and critical Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Japan and some pro-nationalistic lay Catholics.

## The Impossibility of a Buddhist State

Ben Schonthal, University of Otago

[ben.schonthal@otago.ac.nz](mailto:ben.schonthal@otago.ac.nz)

A large proportion of the world's constitutions—perhaps as many as 45%—give special status and/or protection to a single religion. Within many fields of scholarship, it's been common practice to read these special constitutional protections as supporting unambiguously the dominance of the majority religious group. Constitutional clauses that declare a “state religion” or a “preferred religion”—collectively referred to here as religious supremacy clauses—have been widely seen as giving institutional and legal advantages which secure that group's solidarity and hegemony. This talk reconsiders this claim through a close analysis of legal and religious history in Sri Lanka. It shows that clauses designed to secure the solidarity and primacy of one religious community—that of Buddhism—have became vehicles for throwing that solidarity and primacy into question.

## **‘For the Serene Joy and Emotion of the Pious’: Buddhism, Politics and Violence in Post-War Sri Lanka**

Bruno Shirley, Victoria University of Wellington  
[brunomshirley@gmail.com](mailto:brunomshirley@gmail.com)

The literature on Buddhist violence in Sri Lanka has often identified its cause either as a corruption of ‘authentic’ Buddhism by the political interests of nationalists or as a logical and necessary extension of the Sinhalese Buddhist cosmology (Tambiah’s *Buddhism Betrayed?* [1992] and Kapferer’s *Legends of People, Myths of State* [1983] are examples of either extreme). I argue that this approach, taking religion as either the root cause of nationalist violence or a corrupted epiphenomenon to a nationalist agenda assumes a false dichotomy. According to this dichotomy ‘religion’ has a defined and proper sphere that is distinct from that of ‘secular’ issues and concerns, and any intrusion of religion into the public sphere is perceived to be abnormal, unwelcome, and potentially dangerous. I demonstrate the inadequacy of this approach for explaining the drivers behind Buddhist violence in Sri Lanka by examining the Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Strength Army), a new Sinhalese nationalist movement that recently came to international prominence following anti-Muslim violence in 2014. I propose instead that considering the relationships between Buddhism, politics and violence in a framework of ‘identity’ will allow us to best overcome the secularist dichotomy and more adequately explain the perseverance of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism and its hostility towards minorities in the post-war era.



# Atheist Aesthetics

## **The Visual Rhetoric of New Atheism: Creating Enchantment**

Zoe Alderton, University of Sydney

[zoe.alderon@sydney.edu.au](mailto:zoe.alderon@sydney.edu.au)

The New Atheist movement has developed over recent years into a well-defined and highly publicised faction in opposition to religion and non-scientific thought. In order to offer a noteworthy antireligious philosophy and viable community network, the New Atheist movement has established a range of powerful rhetorical strategies. The visual dimension of this rhetoric is underrepresented in scholarship surrounding the group. Yet it forms a powerful core of enchantment – not unlike the enchantment, awe, and ecstasy that are offered by the religious communities that they stand against. This particular brand of enchantment is attached to the wonders and beauty of nature including the complexities of evolution, the depths of the cosmos, and the beauty of light refracting in the form of a rainbow. The way in which these visual symbols are discussed amongst New Atheists—to confirm a faith in science and to evangelise this good news—play upon emotive strategies and a human attachment to awe, the sublime, and the grandeur of the natural world. In this paper, I will explore the role of natural phenomena such as rainbows, nebulas, and mountain ranges in the discourse of New Atheism, and demonstrate the manner in which attention to their rhetorical strategies is an important way of understanding group dynamics and processes of evangelism.

## **The Epic, Sensory Manipulated Individual: CrossFit, Art Galleries and Extreme Journeys as Instruments of Self-Transformation**

Cassandra Hastie, University of Sydney  
cassandra.hastie@hotmail.com

This paper seeks to further critically explore the religious dimensions of self-transformation in the West as explicated in Peter Sloterdijk's *You Must Change Your Life*. I compare the disparate but nevertheless insightful experiences of participating in the recently fashionable training regime of "CrossFit" with the more customary experience of visiting a state-funded art gallery. Both embody a unique, specifically structured journey. Individuals, beginning in a state of uncultured or unhealthy dissatisfaction experience a sense of withdrawal from humanity. This disengagement is characterised by a movement towards the extreme, which one might posit as monstrous, abject and nearing the incomprehensible boundaries of the human experience. The disconnection is heightened through the purposeful infliction of pain on the body in CrossFit and the framing of an art gallery experience with structured bursts of intense sensory deprivation. It is this pain and deprivation, I argue, that results in a reflection on and subsequent re-discovery of the self both in terms of its potential and ultimate meaning. Both experiences provide a transformation grounded in the physical human body, but more importantly demonstrate how these mechanisms of transformation rely on and foster a constructed Epic narrative that in turn reinforces the Atheist aesthetic. Our quotidian lives are failing to fulfil the present "heroic" quest for individuals to change and improve their selves—increasingly extreme, sensory manipulative journeys are required.

## Atheist Aesthetics and Affect: Religion and Lars von Trier's Depression Trilogy

Christopher Hartney, University of Sydney  
hartney@arts.usyd.edu.au

There is no doubt that Lars von Trier is a highly problematic artist, yet the three films of his Depression Trilogy are remarkable examples of deeply affective and effective film-making in our time. *Antichrist* (2009), and *Melancholia* (2011), if not exactly *Nymphomaniac* (2013) are in their own ways visually spellbinding. In this paper I explore their religious dimensions not in any traditional sense, but seek in their form and their stories the development of a particular early 21st Century style that I call a “new atheist aesthetic.” This is an aesthetic where the transcendent remains a central concern, and yet ultimately, and paradoxically never seeks to leave the physical reality about us. To most clearly expose and discuss this new “sacred-looking” aesthetic I view trilogy through a series of paradigms which shall include (a) extreme personal journeys, which leads to (b) considerations of the genre of the katabastic and the heroic and how this then develops (c) aspects of the personally transformative. These aspects will be discussed in relation to Goffman’s presentation of self, Tillich’s concepts of “ultimate concern,” Latour’s reflections of the constitutional structures of modernity, and finally Sloterdijk’s recent postulations on spheres of influence and smaller constitutional units.

## **They Painted the Town Red: Religiously Motivated Genocide Represented on the Artist's Canvas**

Breann Fallon, University of Sydney  
[breann.fallon@sydney.edu.au](mailto:breann.fallon@sydney.edu.au)

Genocide is often considered to be the stain of the 20th Century, and religion is a catalyst for some to wield a blade and for others to pull a trigger. Representing the phenomenon of genocide is neither simple nor amiable, with many mediums being used to communicate the atrocities of genocide. Some of these mediums are regularly considered by scholars—museums, films, fiction—yet one, perhaps the one with the most emotive power of all is rarely pondered. This is the artist's canvas. In the wake of the bloody 20th Century (and 21st Century) professional artists, amateur artists, witnesses of genocide, and victims have all taken to the canvas in a range of styles and forms in order to represent the unfathomable. It is here, in these works of art, that the relationship between genocide, religion, faith, violence, emotion, life and death is being unravelled. In this paper, I will provide an interpretation of several works, from an integrated religious studies and art history methodology, in a primary attempt at unravelling the complex relationship between religion and genocide at work in these pieces.



# Naming Islamism

## **Gender Relations in the Writings of Sayyid Qutb**

William Shepard, University of Canterbury

w.shepard@snap.net.nz

Sayyid Qutb (1906–66) has long been recognized as one of the leading theorists of the radical Islamist movement but for the first half of his adult life he was part of the secular literary movement in Egypt. His first Islamist writings appeared in 1948 and his more radical writings date from about 1958. In this paper I will describe and trace the changes over time in his views on issues related to gender, beginning with articles from 1929 and ending with the radical writings of the 1960s. What I have found so far is that, while there are interesting changes on specific matters, the main change is in the ideological framework within which they are set along with a more conscious effort to align his views with that framework. This paper is a revision and expansion of a paper on the same topic originally presented many years ago but never published. One way I hope to expand it is to deal with some poems that Qutb published in al-Misriyya (journal of the Egyptian Feminist Union) between 1937 and 1940. So far as I know little or no scholarly attention has been given to these.

## The Theological Ideology of ISIS: A Preliminary Investigation

Douglas Pratt, The University of Waikato

dpratt@waikato.ac.nz

The advent of the Islamic State of Iraq and Shams (ISIS) caught the world by surprise. Its widespread appeal attracting many, mainly young, Muslims to join has caused widespread concern. At the same time, the nascent caliphate is roundly condemned by many from within the Muslim world and beyond. Violent religious extremism predominates its methodology, even though that is not the full substance of its propagandist appeal. Extreme behaviours, including violent acts of terrorism, are born of many factors. In the case of religious or religiously motivated actors, one factor is that of the religious ideology that embeds—that is, doctrinally or intellectually undergirds—the justifying narrative. As an instance of an extreme religious ideology, in this case Islamic, the analysis and critical understanding of the ideology of ISIS is necessary for the purposes of countering it. In this paper I shall engage in a preliminary analysis, based on a perusal of the magazine *Dabiq*, the principal organ of ISIS propaganda, of the ideological motifs that provide the appeal of ISIS to those who seek to join it, and which demonstrates the attempt at a self-justifying narrative in support of it as a reality, both in fact and in substance.

## **The Islamic Credentials of the Islamic State**

Christopher van der Krog, Massey University

C.J.vanderKrog@massey.ac.nz

Declarations by anxious politicians and embarrassed Muslims that the movement calling itself “The Islamic State” (IS) is not genuinely Islamic owe more to normative assumptions about what constitutes Islam than to disinterested empirical observation of Islam as a historical phenomenon. The organization would not exist without the historic religion in which it is firmly rooted, nor can it reasonably be said to have departed from Islam. Rather, IS is a manifestation of a particular kind of Islam, namely jihadi-salafism. Assertions that it is merely a cypher for some other kind of movement taking the guise of religion rely on a misunderstanding of religion in general and Islam in particular as somehow incompatible with ordinary human aspirations and motivations. The very features of IS that most bemuse and horrify observers, such as the declaration of a restored caliphate, war on dissidents and unbelievers, and the sexual enslavement of non-Muslim women, express values and ideals accepted as normative through most of Islamic history.

## **Is ISIS Islamic? Category Formation in the Academic Study of Religion**

Will Sweetman, University of Otago  
[will.sweetman@otago.ac.nz](mailto:will.sweetman@otago.ac.nz)

The rise of ISIS/ISIL/Daesh/IS has sharpened public discussion on the whether or not the claim of those who commit violence to be acting in the name of Islam should be accepted. Barack Obama has repeatedly stated “ISIL is not ‘Islamic’.” The debate extends even to whether using the self-designation of IS as “Islamic State” implicitly accepts the religious legitimization of the violence acts carried out under its authority, with David Cameron stating “I wish the BBC would stop calling it Islamic State because it’s not an Islamic state … What it is, is an appalling, barbarous regime … It’s a perversion of the religion of Islam and many Muslims… will recoil every time they hear the words Islamic State.” This paper will argue that from the standpoint of the academic study of religion, there is no basis for denying the self-designation as Islamic, even to those who use it in relation to acts of violence.



# Buddhist Tales and Territories

## The Concept of Dharmakāya in the Tathāgatagarbha Doctrine

Chaisit Suwanvarangkul, University of Otago

chaisit.suwanvarangkul@otago.ac.nz

The concept of *dharmakāya* is an important concept for Buddhist thought. There have been many different interpretations of the meaning of the term *dharmakāya*. Most scholars (Guan Xing 2004, Zimmermann 2002, et al.) have focused exclusively on Mahāyāna texts in their discussion of the nature of the *dharmakāya*. However recent scholarship (Chanida 2007, Urkasame 2012) has shown that the term *dharmakāya* is also important for Theravāda Buddhism.

In this paper I will explore the concept of *dharmakāya* and its relationship with the Tathāgatagarbha doctrine in texts from various traditions, namely the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*, the *Aigulimālīya sūtra*, the *Dirgha Āgama*, *Samyukta Āgama* and *Egottara Āgama*, the Pāli Canon, such as *Dīgha nikāya*, *Khuddaka nikāya*.

Despite the geographical, sectarian and doctrinal differences that separate these texts, I will show that they have a common link in their portrayal of the *dharmakāya* as something inseparable from Buddha nature. Like *nirvāṇa*, the *dharmakāya* is seen as static or unchanging, something that is accessible in the tenth or final stage of the bodhisattva training. The *dharmakāya* is described as a positive term for that which like the Buddha, possesses all merit, infinite merit, inconceivable merit and ultimate pure unchanging merit: the ultimate true self-nature.

## **Sacred Places as Development Spaces: Songdhammakalyani Monastery and Gender Equity**

Anna Halafoff and Matthew Clarke, Deakin University  
[anna.halafoff@deakin.edu.au](mailto:anna.halafoff@deakin.edu.au), [matthew.clarke@deakin.edu.au](mailto:matthew.clarke@deakin.edu.au)

Religions have long played an important role in enhancing the welfare of local communities. This paper presents the findings of a research project that considers how religious sacred places, real and virtual, play an important social role as development spaces in the Asia-Pacific region. While religious places can be constructed to enforce and preserve dominant power structures, they can also be used to challenge them. Online sacred places can also support and enhance realworld activism, inspired by religious teachings, and provide therapeutic landscapes to assist with healing and spiritual development. This paper focuses on a case study of Wat Songdhammakalyani, a Thai Bhikkhuni Monastery on the outskirts of Bangkok, and its abbess Venerable Dhammananda Bhikkhuni. It explores the specific role that the sacred places at Wat Songdhammakalyani, including buildings, gardens, virtual sites and networks, have in implementing and promoting the Bhikkhunis commitment to promoting gender equity in Thai and global Buddhism. We argue that the temples, statues, and gardens of Wat Songdhammakalyani have been planned and constructed to create a harmonious space, conducive to healing, practice and higher learning, and to inspire and support the Bhikkhunis by highlighting the significance of both historical and contemporary Buddhist women.

## **Buddhist Rhetoric: The Persuasion of Sinitic Buddhist Tales**

Chiew Hui Ho, University of Sydney

chiewhui.ho@sydney.edu.au

The rhetoric of persuasion is an important element of religious discourse and an indispensable aspect of the propagation of religion. This paper examines the unique rhetoric of persuasion of a huge corpus of Sinitic Buddhist narratives of the Diamond Sutra that were produced in Tang China from the seventh to the tenth centuries. Told and circulated for the express purpose of encouraging faith, these narratives are underpinned by ingenious rhetorical devices that illustrate the wonders and benefits experienced by devotees of the Diamond Sutra as constituting proofs of the efficacy of the scripture.

## **Upagutta and Devotion to the Buddha**

Phra Akbordin Rattana, University of Otago  
ratph999@student.otago.ac.nz

“Mārabandha” is a unique chapter in the Siamese Saṅgharāja Paramanuchit (1791–1852)’s *Paṭhamasambodhi-kathā*, a biography of the Buddha well-known in Thailand. This episode receives no mention in the Pāli Canon or in the Pāli biographies of the Buddha, however it contains important information about Buddhist belief and practice during the 19th century. In this paper, I will consider an episode in the Mārabandha in which the Buddhist Saint Upagutta pays homage to a Buddha image created by Māra. I will analyse the dialogue between Upagutta and Māra and argue that this dialogue provides a model for the affective nature of Buddha devotion in Thailand during the 19th century Rattanakosin period.



# Religion in/and Politics

## **Political Manipulation of the Occult in Ghana: Embracing the Occult**

Comfort Max-Wirth, Victoria University of Wellington  
[comfort.max-wirth@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:comfort.max-wirth@vuw.ac.nz)

This paper will argue that in Ghana, although there is an anti-occult rhetoric that is driven by the Pentecostal discourse, in a smaller way, there is a resistance. This is because while some Ghanaian politicians avoid the occult by appealing to Pentecostal sympathies, others are embracing it by boldly identifying with it. These politicians who embrace the occult are provocative in the ways in which they publicly invoke it—in word and deed—as reported in the Ghanaian media. The paper will be guided by the following questions: How have some Ghanaian politicians invoked the occult through their public actions and statements? What does this invocation of the occult tell us about its place in Ghanaian society and politics? Why are these politicians embracing the occult in spite of the Pentecostal influence in Ghana? In answering these questions, the paper will demonstrate that politicians' alignment with the occult serves a dual strategic focus. On the one hand, the strategy generates controversy, which leads to publicity and an enhanced media profile. On the other hand, the strategy provides a means for building their political identity, advancing claims to trustworthiness, and asserting power, which are all central forms of political capital.

## **Ghanaian Pentecostal Political Leverage and Prophetic Politics**

Fredrick Acheampong, Victoria University of Wellington  
facheampong96@gmail.com

Prophetic politics is a key aspect of Pentecostal political engagement in Ghana. Since the burgeoning of Ghanaian Pentecostalism in the 1990s, prophetic declarations by Pentecostal ministries have also gained political prominence. ‘Divine predictions’ of future events are usually made in favour of the two largest political parties in Ghana (the National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Party). Focusing on Ghana’s Fourth Republic (1992–2012), the introductory part of this paper accounts for Pentecostal leverage within the Ghanaian public sphere. The paper then examines some political prophecies and prophetic declarations by certain Pentecostal leaders. In particular, it focuses on prophecies relating to electoral outcomes. The paper argues that prophetic politics is a form of religious politicking that aims to promote the electoral prospects of favoured candidates. In this context, prophetic politics appeals to the spirituality of the electorate, drawing on the popularity of Pentecostal Christianity that has captured the ideological imagination of the Ghanaian public sphere. The public influence of Pentecostalism is thus deployed as part of the toolkit of political suasion.

## **Rippling Outwards: Te Papa Tongarewa and the Celebration of Matariki, the Maori New Year**

Ann Hardy, University of Waikato  
yhdra@waikato.ac.nz

As Alderton has noted (2014) Te Papa Tongarewa has supported Maori culture to the degree that this state-funded museum could be seen as a ‘consecrated zone’ in which official stories of nationhood, stories that often rely on the energies of Maori religiosity, are formed and transmitted (268).

Building on this understanding of Te Papa as a site of civil religiosity, I examine the museum’s role in reviving interest in the winter rising of the Matariki constellation – an event that marks the Maori ‘New Year’. In the newly-built Te Papa a group of staff would gather to karanga to the stars, share food, and, over the succeeding month, offer a programme of seasonal activities to the general public. Over the next 15 years other communities have followed suit, until Matariki has become a part of the winter calendar: a blend of spirituality, environmentalism, humanism, and commodification, the religious underpinnings of which typically go unremarked.

A highly visible aspect of Te Papa’s proselytization for Matariki however has been its annual ‘hero’ images featuring symbolic elements in compositions that draw on New Age aesthetics. They mobilize a visual language proposing a sense of the sacred while simultaneously veiling it with the commonplaces of promotional discourse. These images reference debates about Maori art in the modern world (Panoho, 2015) and evidence the varied interests of those who support the Matariki project.

# Muslim Identities in the West

## **The Lived Experiences of Progressive Muslims: Testing the Limits of Pluralism and Cosmopolitanism**

Lisa Worthington, Western Sydney University  
lisaworthington83@hotmail.com

Abdullahi An-Na'im (2006) argues that following the September 11 attacks there was a need for many Muslims, especially in the West, to seek and craft an Islam that they believed was compatible with Western values of pluralism and human rights. Progressive groups such as Muslims for Progressive Values and El-Tawhid Juma Circle are social manifestations of this need. The varied manifestations of progressive Islam all strive to realise social justice and equality through a critical engagement with Islamic sources and rely on an inquiry into prevalent contemporary Islamic practices. Although there is considerable literature on progressive Islamic thought (Esack 1997; Safi 2003a; Duderija 2011; Wadud 2006) not much is known about its social manifestations and the implications of these materials. To discover more about the lived experiences of progressive Muslims fieldwork was conducted though twenty in-depth interviews and observations in the United States and via Skype in 2013. This paper will argue that progressive Muslim practice can be explained through theories of cosmopolitanism and pluralism, however the pluralism of progressive Muslims does have a limit.

## **The Western Mosque and Modern Muslimness: Identity Crisis and Resolution**

Christopher Longhurst, Vatican Museums, Rome & Victoria University of Wellington  
longhurst@pu.st.it

How mosques are built in the West and their meaning for modern Western Muslims is an important topic in contemporary Islam. This paper examines how contemporary design guidelines for modern mosques best conform to ideas about the original purpose of the mosque as identified in the Qur'an, al-Hadith, and juristic rulings, and therefore best serve the modern Muslim lifeway. It argues that Muslim integration into Western society depends on those guidelines meeting the needs of modern Muslim communities by focusing away from regionally grounded and non-functional architectures modules which trap mosques in Middle Eastern cultures. It proposes a design framework faithful to the original, communal, and trans-cultural idea of mosque based on the Prophet's conception of the mosque and its "eternal idea" as identified in the above three sources. Examples are provided of Muslim flourishing in modern societies outside Arabic culture where mosque architecture adopts regional designs and modern settings while remaining entirely faithful to the teaching of the Qur'an and Sunnah. The paper concludes that following such building guidelines for modern mosques provides a resolution to the mosque's current identity crisis in the Muslim West and improved integration of Islam into Western cultures.

## **'Aussie Afghans'—Negotiating Belonging(s) and Identity(ies) as Hazara Afghan Migrants Embrace Australian Citizens**

David Radford, University of South Australia  
[david.radford@unisa.edu.au](mailto:david.radford@unisa.edu.au)

Hazara Afghans migrants face a number of challenges in adjusting to the Australian way of life, coping with settlement issues around employment, education, housing and health; and dealing with the tensions and challenges of 'belonging' in their adopted homeland, becoming part of what it means to 'to be Australian'—to be 'Aussie' (CMMIPS, 2009, Kabir, 2005) while maintaining various levels of belonging to what it means to being 'Afghan Hazara'. This process of belonging strikes at the heart of issues of identity. This paper therefore explores the process and experiences of this migrant community as they navigate belonging and identity as Australian citizens, as Afghans, Hazara, and as people of a Muslim religious background. The paper is based on semi-structured interviews with 25 Hazara in urban and rural South Australia. The research took a grounded approach seeking to draw out conclusions from the data rather than imposing a preconceived notion of what identity means for the respondents involved in the research. It also utilised a phenomenological approach that sought to explore these issues from the point of the view of the respondents themselves.

## **AASR Executive Committee**

### **President**

Professor Douglas Ezzy  
University of Tasmania

### **Vice President**

Dr Kathleen McPhillips  
University of Newcastle

### **Journal Editor**

Professor Douglas Ezzy  
University of Tasmania

### **Executive Officer**

Dr Joshua Roose  
Australian Catholic University

### **Chair of Publications**

Professor Carole Cusack  
University of Sydney

### **Communications Officer**

Dr Milad Milani  
University of Western Sydney

### **Women's Caucus**

Dr Angela Coco  
Southern Cross University

## NZASR Executive

### **President**

Dr Ben Schonthal  
University of Otago  
[ben.schonthal@otago.ac.nz](mailto:ben.schonthal@otago.ac.nz)

### **Secretary**

Dr Will Sweetman  
University of Otago  
[will.sweetman@otago.ac.nz](mailto:will.sweetman@otago.ac.nz)

### **Vice-President**

Dr Geoff Troughton  
Victoria University of Wellington  
[geoff.troughton@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:geoff.troughton@vuw.ac.nz)

### ***Yana* Editor**

Comfort Max-Wirth  
Victoria University of Wellington  
[comfort.max-wirth@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:comfort.max-wirth@vuw.ac.nz)