

**Preliminary Conference  
Program**

**[Nonreligion and Secularity  
Research Network](#)**

**7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> June 2023**

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## Message from NSRN President Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme

It's going to be truly wonderful to see many of you in person in Ottawa this year for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic and since our last in-person conference in Rome in 2019. I'm already looking forward to some great sessions and some great exchanges, as well as getting to showcase my



home region to many of you. A big thank you to Lori Beaman and the Nonreligion in a Complex Future team for hosting the NSRN conference this year at the University of Ottawa, and to Cory Steele for putting together an exciting conference program. While we will be having some of the conference in person, us members of the NSRN Advisory Board also thought it was important to keep in a virtual component. Many of you had reached out to me over the past couple of years to express the advantages a virtual conference has for you, notably requiring fewer monetary and time resources to take part in the activities. Consequently, the 2023 NSRN conference is an attempt to include the best of both worlds: in person presentations, discussions, meals, socializing,

networking, and exploring a beautiful city that is Canada's national capital; and integrated virtual talks and sessions throughout the whole conference as well for those who can't make it in person this year.

The theme of our 2023 hybrid conference is *Towards Substantive Understandings of Nonreligion and Secularity*. There have been calls over the past couple of decades to move research and scholarship towards positive understandings of nonreligion and secularity, i.e. the worldviews, life stances, identities and behaviours distinct from yet potentially in tension with religion, present among the less or nonreligious and which shape their lives and realities. Many of us in the field now feel we are reaching a critical mass in both theoretical and empirical works on substantive nonreligion for this to be our conference theme in 2023. I look forward to many presentations on the topic.

Looking ahead, the NSRN Advisory Board is maintaining both continuity and adding new voices. I'd like to welcome Christel Gärtner to the NSRN Advisory Board. Cory Steele and Lauren Strumos are co-editing the NSRN blog, ensuring that it remains dynamic and relevant. The NSRN is growing and evolving, and in order to do so we need diverse voices to help us ensure an inclusive and welcoming organization. Please let us know if you are interested in contributing.

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

Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme

Associate Professor, Sociology and Legal Studies, University of Waterloo

E-mail: [sarah.wilkins-laflamme@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:sarah.wilkins-laflamme@uwaterloo.ca)

## Details and instructions for the running of the conference

1. **Registration:** If you are presenting at the conference, then you should have already registered via the online registration form that was open in February and early March 2023. If you did not register for the conference on that online form, but do plan to present at and take part in the conference, then please email program chair Cory Steele as soon as possible: [cstee023@uottawa.ca](mailto:cstee023@uottawa.ca)

If you are not presenting at the conference, but would like to attend one or a number of the sessions either virtually on Zoom or in person at the University of Ottawa, then please register at: <https://forms.gle/TV7HpU68XRptSes2A>

Registration to attend the conference is free, and once registered you will be contacted by e-mail with further instructions. Registration deadline for conference attendees is Friday the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 2023.

2. The conference will be in a **hybrid format in person at the University of Ottawa and virtually on Zoom** as a series of synchronous (non-recorded) sessions.
3. **Attending the conference virtually:**
  - a. Using Zoom for the first time? It's free to use! Check out the online tutorial: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOUwumKCW7M&ab\\_channel=NaturalvitaTutorials](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOUwumKCW7M&ab_channel=NaturalvitaTutorials)
  - b. We will have two Zoom 'rooms' set up each day of the conference where the sessions will be run. To enter a Zoom 'room', just enter the provided meeting ID/web link and the password into your Zoom app/web browser for the desired session. Meeting IDs, web links, and passwords will be shared in the final version of the program released in May 2023.
  - c. Please have your full name as your Zoom user ID if possible.
  - d. Please arrive a few minutes before the start of the session you wish to attend, especially if you are chairing or presenting during that session. The Zoom meeting rooms will always be open at least 15 minutes before each session, and you can use the morning and afternoon break times as well as the end of the lunch break to arrive a few minutes early to your next session.
  - e. If you are a presenter for a session and would like to share slides with attendees, then please have those slides ready on your computer before the start of the session to screen share once you present. When you screen share, it is good practice to "Disable annotation for others" in Zoom.

- f. If you are not presenting, then please remain muted during the session presentations to cut down on background noise. If there are a lot of attendees for a given session, you may also be asked to turn off your video by the room's host Zoom Master.
- g. To ask a question during the Q&A, please post your question (or just an indication that you would like to ask a question) in the chat at any time during the session. Once the session presentations have been given, the session chair will prompt you to ask your question during the Q&A in order of posting in the chat.
- h. The room host Zoom Masters will also offer technical support during each session.
- i. None of the sessions will be recorded.
- j. Have a question about attending the conference virtually? Please email Cory Steele anytime: [cstee023@uottawa.ca](mailto:cstee023@uottawa.ca)

**4. *Attending the conference in person:***

- a. For those attending in person, the conference sessions as well as registration desk and meal meeting points will be on the University of Ottawa campus. Final room details, campus map, meal recommendations, and nearest public transit stops will be provided in the final version of the program (to be released in May 2023).
- b. Please arrive a few minutes before the start of the session you wish to attend, especially if you are chairing or presenting during that session. The rooms will always be open at least 15 minutes before each session, and you can use the morning and afternoon break times as well as the end of the lunch break to arrive a few minutes early to your next session.
- c. If you are a presenter for a session and would like to share slides with attendees, then please have pdf versions of those slides ready either on a USB stick you bring with you or on a cloud/email platform you can easily log into from the podium computer (which will have internet).
- d. There will always be someone present during sessions in each of the two conference rooms to offer technical support.
- e. No food nor drink will be provided at the 2023 NSRN conference (that's the trade off for having no conference fee). Instead, during the conference days attendees and participants can purchase meals, coffee, snacks, etc. at nearby sites. Free water fountains and water bottle refill stations will be available.
- f. Anyone who would like to have dinner with other conference participants will be able to meet next to the conference registration desk at 6:30pm EDT on Wednesday the 7<sup>th</sup> of June and Thursday the 8<sup>th</sup> of June to then go find a restaurant of their choosing in groups.

- g. Have a question about attending the conference in person? Please email Cory Steele anytime: [cstee023@uottawa.ca](mailto:cstee023@uottawa.ca)
- 5. Each presentation (either in person or virtual) in regular paper sessions should be no longer than 15 minutes. A Q&A period will follow after all the session presentations.
- 6. Please note that the program schedule provided in the following pages is in **Eastern Daylight Time**.
- 7. We encourage critical discussion at the NSRN conference. This said, we ask that this discussion take place in a collegial and respectful manner. If anyone makes any inappropriate or disrespectful remarks either in the Zoom chat, during the Q&A or in any other way during one of the sessions, that person will be removed from the session and barred from all subsequent conference sessions. Thank you for your cooperation.
- 8. If you notice any mistakes or serious issues in this version of the program, or if you are no longer able to present in your session, then please e-mail the program chair Cory Steele as soon as possible to let him know: [cstee023@uottawa.ca](mailto:cstee023@uottawa.ca)

## Overview of the Conference Schedule (in EDT)

	Wednesday June 7 <sup>th</sup> , 2023		Thursday June 8 <sup>th</sup> , 2023		Friday June 9 <sup>th</sup> , 2023	
<b>8:30-10am</b>	8:30-9am: registration 9-10am: NSRN President's welcome address		Session 9: Health and Well-being (1)	Session 10: Censuses and Surveys	Session 19: Discursive Studies of Nonreligion (1)	Session 20: Nonreligious Activism
<b>10-10:15am: Morning break</b>						
<b>10:15-11:45am</b>	Session 1: Nonreligion on the Global Scene	Session 2: Nonreligious Identities (1)	Session 11: Exploring Nonreligion in Turkiye	Session 12: Nonreligion, Migration and Discrimination	Session 21: Discursive Studies of Nonreligion (2)	
<b>11:45-1pm: Lunch break</b>	Lunch		NSRN Grad Student Lunch		NSRN Advisory board lunch	
<b>1-2:30pm</b>	Session 3: NCF Results Report	Session 4: Nonreligious Identities (2)	Session 13: Health and Well-being (2)	Session 14: Interviews, and New Methodologies		
<b>2:30-2:45pm: Afternoon break 1</b>						
<b>2:45-4:15pm</b>	Session 5: Nonreligion and Education (1)	Session 6: Nonreligion and Law (1)	Session 15: Environment and Nature	Session 16: AMC - <i>Nonreligion in Late Modern Societies</i>		
<b>4:15-4:30pm: Afternoon break 2</b>						
<b>4:30-6pm</b>	Session 7: Nonreligion and Education (2)	Session 8: Nonreligion and Law (2)	Session 17: Practitioner Panel	Session 18: Gender and Feminism		

Wednesday June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023

8:30-9 AM

Conference registration

9-10:00 AM

Welcome address by NSRN president Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme

10-10:15AM

Morning break

10:15-11:45AM

**Session 1: Nonreligion on the Global Scene**

Session chair: TBD

***Distancing from religion and its social representations in Morocco***

Adam Benyachou, French National Centre for Scientific Research), [adambenyachou@gmail.com](mailto:adambenyachou@gmail.com)

*The rise of the non-religious is not a phenomenon unique to secularized societies. Countries with a state religion also have actors who claim to be atheists, agnostics, or indifferent to religion. Morocco constitutes a case that is both emblematic and particular: a large part of society remains attached to its Muslim identity, renunciation of Islam is assimilated to blasphemy. Yet, surveys show a decline in religious belief among Moroccans over the last decade. In this context, the question of “making society” between religious and less or non-religious arises. Based on 18 interviews with Muslim Moroccans living in the city of Meknes, we identify five main types of social representations (religion as the unique reference of values; atheist Moroccans as a figure of the “monstrous”; non-religion as proselytism; non-religion as foreign interference; non-religion as a trend in urban areas) as well as three typical behaviors (hostility; pity-condescension; compassion-benevolence).*

***What are ‘secular objects’? Using an aesthetic and material approach to facilitate substantive understandings of secularity***

Mascha Schulz, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, [mschulz@eth.mpg.de](mailto:mschulz@eth.mpg.de)

*Based on my long-term ethnographic research on secularity and atheism in Bangladesh, I suggest an approach to secularity that takes seriously the aesthetics and materiality of nonreligion and secularity. While we all seem to have an idea about religious objects, we have a hard time naming secular objects. This is because the secular is often conceptualized as the absence of, or the opposition to, religion. However, in Bangladesh, where public discourse on secularity has to be managed within several tensions and seeks to avoid the accusation of being anti-religious, secularists have developed a rich tradition of secular aesthetics, practices, and material culture. Thus, secularist activists seek to transform society not necessarily through public discourse but engagement with certain Bengali performative art genres and*

*the celebration of Bengali culture, language, and script. Dwelling on these aesthetic practices, I discuss how we can conceptualize certain objects, practices, or aesthetics as secular and highlight the potential of such an aesthetic and material approach for developing a more positive or substantial understanding of secularity.*

**Multiple Secularities in Kosovo and Albania (2009-2019). Secularity for the sake of what?**

Jeta Abazi Gashi, Department of Journalism. University of Prishtina, [jeta.abazi@uni-pr.edu](mailto:jeta.abazi@uni-pr.edu)

*Western Balkan states are largely secular. The most peculiar secular instances are Kosovo and Albania. These two countries are the only ones where Islam is the predominant religion, aside from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Focusing in Kosovo and Albania (2009-2019), this project uses a three-pronged theoretical framework: state and church models; it seeks to examine the boundaries between religious and secular as well as specific models of secularity; and, finally, it examines differences in national identities, which is particularly significant given that Albanian national identity has been promoted as purely secular. Secularity debate has been accompanied by the global polarisation of Islam, local transitional post-communist battles, and their political ambitions to enter the European Union. The initiative shed light on ambiguities on four levels: normative, institutional, discursive, and public space.*

**Science as One of the Pillars of the Positive Content of Nonreligion in Turkey**

Nazmiye Yağcı, Istanbul University, Ph.D Student in Philosophy of Religion, [nazmiyeyagci@gmail.com](mailto:nazmiyeyagci@gmail.com)  
Önder Küçükural, Ibn Haldun University, Department of Sociology, [onder.kucukural@ihu.edu.tr](mailto:onder.kucukural@ihu.edu.tr)

*This paper aims to contribute to the scholarly debates on capturing the positive content of nonreligious imaginaries (Stacey and Beaman, 2021). Drawing on the qualitative data we collected through in-depth interviews (55) in seven cities in Turkey, science discourse provides one of the pillars of nonreligion in Turkey. The participants who identify themselves with a wide range spectrum of nonreligion (spiritual but not religious, agnostics, deists or atheist or indifferent or others who are in between, and still others who refrain from any label) tends to appeal to a quasi-scientific worldview (Taves, 2018) in their attempt to explain or account for the big questions. Surprisingly, scientific discourse and sensibilities do not only manifest themselves in the cognitive and discursive engagements of our participants, but also in performative struggles or imaginaries. These are strategies used to distinguish the non-religious from the majority religious other. They inform the ethical, esthetic, and bodily preferences of our participants and can be traced in a wide range of issues such as dietary choices, the definition of beauty, and environmental concerns.*

**Session 2: Nonreligious Identities (1)**

Session chair: TBD

***“Piecing Everything Together Again”: Exploring How ex-JWs Construct New Identities and Worldviews After Leaving Religion***

Dr. James Murphy, The Open University, [james.murphy@open.ac.uk](mailto:james.murphy@open.ac.uk)

*Former members of high-control religions can face numerous challenges after leaving their religious groups. Using qualitative data from the ‘Supporting and Understanding Ex-JWs’ project in the UK, this paper explores how some of these individuals develop and sustain new nonreligious worldviews. Participants described slow and often painful processes of developing new identities, relationships, and worldviews after leaving the Jehovah’s Witnesses. They grappled with existential questions and searched*

*for new ways of meaning-making beyond the religious frameworks they had been taught. These processes were complex, idiosyncratic, and embedded in the participants' social and cultural contexts. The experiences of these participants demonstrate why any comprehensive understanding of nonreligiosity and secularization must account for not only the wide range of nonreligious worldviews and identities individuals can adopt, but also the divergent paths that can lead to them, and the often-contradictory ways about which they are spoken and categorized.*

**What makes an atheist, according to the religious?**

Dr. Petra Klug, University of Bremen, Institute for the Study of Religion, [Petra.klug@uni-bremen.de](mailto:Petra.klug@uni-bremen.de)

*Both the nonreligious and the academics who study them debate whether there is something substantive about atheism and what that could be. In contrast, many believers already know. They think atheists worship money and success, that they are immoral and immature rebels, or that they have suffered a tragedy so intense that they have lost their innate belief in God. The atheist and academic concepts of nonreligion are inevitably related to these religious prejudices, and they must also confront them. Therefore, my presentation gives an overview of the various stereotypes surrounding what makes an atheist. The presentation is based on my book *Anti-Atheist Nation: Religion and Secularism in the United States*.*

**The weight of the religion inside Brazilian non-religion imaginaries**

Lucas da Cunha, Scientific Initiation Researcher at the Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning (CEBRAP), University of São Paulo, Brazil. [ramoslucasdacunha@usp.br](mailto:ramoslucasdacunha@usp.br)

*In the opposite way of developed countries around the world, contemporary Brazilian society is seeing a renewed growth of its religious population. The way in which religions have been introducing themselves in the public space demonstrates a curious form to mark the place of religious pluralism in Brazilian cultural diversity. In turn, non-religious people are not oblivious to these recent social changes. A survey I have been working on has shown the potential of religions in shaping non-religious imaginaries. Nevertheless, non-religious people seem to find in daily life renewed inspiration to elaborate the world and its events. Thus, the question is whether and how frequently religion appears in the non-religious' everyday life. The weight of religion depends on its continued presence in the life of non-religious people.*

**The politics of labelling: from personal to collective (not-so) nonreligious identifications in Argentina**

Hugo H. Rabbia, Instituto de Investigaciones Psicológicas - CONICET (National Scientific and Technical Research Council), Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, and Universidad Católica de Córdoba, [hrabbia@unc.edu.ar](mailto:hrabbia@unc.edu.ar)

Juan Marco Vaggione, CIJS - CONICET (Legal and Social Research Center - National Scientific and Technical Research Council), Co-Investigator Non-Religion in a Complex Future, Main Researcher (CONICET), Associate Professor (National University of Córdoba, Argentina), [juanvaggione@yahoo.com](mailto:juanvaggione@yahoo.com)

*Some works have questioned the notion of 'nonreligious identifications' because they are defined by their negative characteristics and their lack of content. In turn, several 'positive' identifications that are proposed in the Northern context present problems of cultural translation in the Global South. This paper analyzes the labels used by individuals and groups in Argentina to identify themselves as different than 'religious' and compares them with the process of public identifications (based on qualitative research and national surveys reports, and press). On the one hand, there are marked differences around several levels of analysis of identities: personal, social, and collective. On the other hand, this paper describes*

several efforts to resignify in positive terms 'nonreligious' identities in the public space (such as 'laicistas'), which also includes 'religious' identifications. Finally, we reflect on the consequences of religio-normativity (mostly Catholic) in the process of establishing 'nonreligious' identities in public debates.

11:45-1pm

Lunch break

1-2:30pm

### **Session 3: NCF Results Report**

Session chair: TBD

*A number of the team members from the Nonreligion in a Complex Future (NCF) research project will present results stemming from their studies over the past two years on the topics of health, law, education, the environment, and migration.*

### **Session 4: Nonreligious Identities (2)**

Session Chair: TBD

#### ***The paradoxes of being nonreligious in Brazil: why atheism remains negative***

Sabrina Testa, Post-doc CAPES-COFECUB at GSRL (CNRS-EPHE), [sabritesta@yahoo.com.ar](mailto:sabritesta@yahoo.com.ar)

*Based on an ethnography of Brazilian atheistic networks, this presentation argues that there is a systematic and constant refusal to endow atheism –deliberately understood in a broad sense– with substantive content in this country. While insisting that nonbelievers believe in many (earthly) things and that they do not lead meaningless lives, committed nonbelievers agree, at the same time, that atheism as an existential stance and political cause must remain negative and empty. And it must do so in order not to become, precisely, a religion or, worse, a church. From these observations we seek to reflect on the difficulties in marking a position of non-religion in Brazil. Indeed, social scientists insist that, in Brazil, "nonreligion" almost always means "believing without a church", true nonbelievers being an insignificant minority. In this configuration, being an atheist requires, paradoxically, assuming a markedly affirmative position and, at the same time, avoiding defining it positively.*

#### ***Dealing with the Gods of one's parents: construction of an atheistic and non-cynical humanism***

Niels De Nutte, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, [Niels.De.Nutte@vub.be](mailto:Niels.De.Nutte@vub.be)

*How should we use nonreligious concepts? Belgian humanist Michel Oukhow (1926-1997) did not use any to identify himself, but his life as the son of a Russian immigrant was nevertheless shaped into that of an atheist. In dealing with the Lutheran God of his mother and the Orthodox God of his father, his inquisitive nature comes to see both of these deities as human constructionism. As a young man in the postwar period, Michel resembles his generation of Belgian seculars in being disillusioned with the great ideals of the -isms. A historian and philosopher, he becomes the owner of a difficult humanism. Not a positivist, hooray humanism, but one that cherishes history as an archive of well- intended trial and error. The misery of his time needs no grand solutions, it is in itself enough to demand action. His*

*humanism is non-cynical and Michel was never separate from the other. His atheistic humanism is developed in his biographical book 'het verbrande testament' [the burnt will] and serves as the basis for this paper.*

**No faith in the city, no faith outside the city? Few remarks on nonreligious identities in urban and suburban spaces**

Juraj Majo, Comenius University in Bratislava, Faculty of Sciences, Department of Economic and Social Geography, Demography and Territorial development, [juraj.majo@uniba.sk](mailto:juraj.majo@uniba.sk)

Marcela Kacerova, Comenius University in Bratislava, Faculty of Sciences, Department of Economic and Social Geography, Demography and Territorial development, [marcela.kacerova@uniba.sk](mailto:marcela.kacerova@uniba.sk)

*This contribution aims to examine certain aspects of non-religion in urban and suburban spaces of the religious landscape of Central Eastern Europe in Slovakia. We try to compare the dynamics of nonreligious identities in certain life periods (with a specific aim at the deconversion process at a young age) and attempt to approach different demographic aspects and value stances that might be revealed from the ISSP Religion survey in 2018 or Census 2021. The optics of urban/suburban dichotomy reflects specific societal processes in a post-Socialist space where urbanization took place mostly in the Socialist period and suburbanization processes emerged only afterward. It created a specific space with a distinct religious/non-religious landscape totally different from the Western European or American experience. Since nonreligious studies are only an emerging discipline in our cultural space, the definition of who they are rather than who they are not from the perspective of sociodemographic data is an important contribution to the overall knowledge of this group.*

**How to Think like an Atheist: Atheist-Produced Educational Content on YouTube**

Robin Isomaa, Åbo Akademi University, [robin.isomaa@abo.fi](mailto:robin.isomaa@abo.fi)

*Atheism has had a strong presence on YouTube since its founding, which coincided with the rise of the New Atheism movement. YouTube not only allows atheists to engage with religious people and share their experiences in video form; it also provides a way for atheists to share knowledge on subjects deemed to be of interest to other atheists. Drawing from a sample of 63 atheist YouTubers, and taking a discourse-analytic approach, this paper investigates the ways in which educational videos from atheist content creators engage with subjects like religion, science, and philosophy, and the ways of understanding these subjects that are promoted to an atheist audience. Collectively, they construct an idea of what an atheist is expected to know and a normative 'atheistic' approach to acquiring knowledge and interpreting the world.*

2:30-2:45pm

Afternoon break

2:45-4:15pm

**Session 5: Nonreligion and Education (1)**

Session chair: TBD

### **Diversity in the educational programs of Brazilian traditional religious schools**

Dirceu Gerardi, School of Law of Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FGV), post-doc,  
[andregerardi3@gmail.com](mailto:andregerardi3@gmail.com)

*The confessional schools describe in their websites that the traditional teaching consists of the intellectual and moral preparation of students to assume a position in society. This investigation analyzes the values described by schools from their websites and pedagogical programs. In this research, I selected 20 religious schools from the States of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais founded since the 18th century. This investigation used a Ministry of Education database about private schools, and in this analysis I aim to apply Data Science methods to find the websites of religious schools, extract and analyze the information on their values and pedagogical programs. I aim to examine how the theme of diversity appears on the websites, especially in the mission of these schools and the educational programs.*

### **(Non)Religious Education in Brazil: An Analysis of Five Training Sessions Offered to Teachers**

Guilherme Borges, Research Assistant for the Nonreligion in a Complex Future Project, PhD Candidate in Sociology at the University of São Paulo, [guilhermeborges1914@gmail.com](mailto:guilhermeborges1914@gmail.com)

*The state of Paraná, in Brazil, is a reference in the country regarding the training of Religious Education teachers. Annually, the state offers a series of face-to-face training sessions for teachers of the subject. However, throughout the years 2020 and 2021, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Secretariat of Education of Paraná had to offer these trainings remotely. In this context, dozens of videos were produced to show teachers how they should conduct Religious Education classes. From the analysis of five of these videos, we will observe what these guidelines are and how they relate to the contemporary national reality. More specifically, we will examine whether and how the state of Paraná wants its teachers to address not only the religious diversity that characterizes Brazil, but also the country's growing nonreligious diversity.*

### **Religious Education and Citizenship: The Case of the State of Parana in Brazil**

Henrique Antunes, Researcher, International Postdoctoral Program, Brazilian Center of Analysis and Planning (CEBRAP), [henrique.antunes@cebrap.org.br](mailto:henrique.antunes@cebrap.org.br)

Guilherme Borges, Research Assistant for the Nonreligion in a Complex Future Project, PhD Candidate in Sociology at the University of São Paulo, [guilhermeborges1914@gmail.com](mailto:guilhermeborges1914@gmail.com)

*In Brazil, the transformation of confessional religious teaching into a school subject in recent decades has allowed religious pluralism to be inserted into the wide range of Brazilian cultural diversity. In this process, the notion of religion underwent a process of ethical reification, becoming related to what is considered a universal principle of the practice of good. This use of the notion of religion is crucial to the contemporary tendency in the Brazilian state of Paraná to associate religious ethics with citizenship. In addition, this reification of religion is part of a larger and official proposal led by the state of Paraná to develop a non-religious Religious Education.*

### **Citizenship and the Place of Nonreligion in Everyday School Life**

Anna Strhan (Senior Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of York)  
[anna.strhan@york.ac.uk](mailto:anna.strhan@york.ac.uk)

Peter Hemming (Senior Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of Surrey)  
[p.hemming@surrey.ac.uk](mailto:p.hemming@surrey.ac.uk)

Sarah Neal (Professor, Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield)

[s.neal@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:s.neal@sheffield.ac.uk)

Joanna Malone (Postdoctoral Research Associate, Department of Sociology,  
University of York) [joanna.malone@york.ac.uk](mailto:joanna.malone@york.ac.uk)

*This paper draws from a three-year study examining the significance of religion in how schools in Britain foster notions of citizenship – at national, local, and global scales, as well as how these intersect – and how children experience these processes. The question of how schools should prepare children to be citizens of a society that is both increasingly nonreligious and increasingly religiously diverse is subject to ongoing contestation. Yet while there have been numerous studies oriented towards the content and practice of religious education, we know little about how religion, nonreligion and citizenship become interrelated through everyday practices in schools, or what this means for children’s sense of belonging or exclusion. Drawing on ethnographic research and interviews conducted with children, parents, and teachers in primary schools in four different areas of the UK, we explore how these schools seek to promote particular nonreligious values and ideas of citizenship, and examine how this relates to the children’s own citizenship practices.*

### **Session 6: Nonreligion and Law (1)**

Session chair: TBD

#### ***Vegan Practice and the Law Under Secularism***

Allison Covey, Ph.D., Assistant Teaching Professor, The Ethics Program, Villanova University,  
[Allison.Covey@Villanova.edu](mailto:Allison.Covey@Villanova.edu)

*In 2015, the Ontario Human Rights Commission updated its policy on discrimination, removing its previous exclusion of secular and ethical belief systems from the legal protections afforded creeds. This paper considers the case of ethical veganism as an illustration of the “impossibility of religious freedom” and an iteration of a distinctive formation of secularism that picks and chooses what counts as “legitimate” ethico-religious practice. Construing veganism as primarily a philosophy from which a subordinate set of practices is derived runs contrary to vegan self-understanding, which emphasizes the primacy of ethical practice. Secularist and legal dualisms of belief and practice, mind and body, essence and expression, are a distinct challenge for communities in which practice is constitutive rather than symbolic of belief. For ethical vegans, to be guaranteed freedom of belief but not of practice is no guarantee of religious freedom at all.*

#### ***Thinking about Morality in Canadian Law***

Cory Steele, University of Ottawa, [cstee023@uottawa.ca](mailto:cstee023@uottawa.ca)

*Since the 1960s, Canada has experienced a rapid growth in the number of people who identify as having “no religion.” This increase in the nonreligious has prompted various social institutions to reconsider social policies to ensure this growing population is afforded full and equal participation in society. One such institution that has been called on to resolve conflicts associated with the growth of nonreligion is that of law. The intersection of law and nonreligion not only provides insight into how the law is utilized by the nonreligious, but also acts as a window through which to explore the beliefs, values, and practices of the nonreligious. This paper explores the beliefs and values of the nonreligious as articulated in law in relation to morality.*

***A pioneering case: The request for an agreement under Article 8 of the Italian Constitution between the Union of Rationalist Atheists and Agnostics (Uaar) and the Italian State***

Silvia Baldassarre, Post-doctoral researcher in Law and Religions, University of Florence  
[silvia.baldassarre@unifi.it](mailto:silvia.baldassarre@unifi.it)

*Since 1979, constitutional jurisprudence has included non-theist beliefs in the application of Article 19 of the Italian Constitution (religious freedom); however, as the “Uaar case” demonstrates, non-denominational philosophical organisations are still precluded from the agreement (“Intesa”) provided for in Article 8.3 of the Italian Constitution. The agreement is necessary to make many rights concrete (e.g. public financing, non-denominational philosophical teaching in state schools, non-denominational moral assistance in compulsory structures). The Union of Rationalist Atheists and Agnostics (Uaar) asked the Italian government to enter into negotiations for an agreement several times since 1991. The government’s repeated refusal is based on the argument that the Uaar is not a “religious denomination”, therefore is not entitled to receive equal treatment. However, the legal definition of a “religious denomination” is controversial (the government itself has entered into an agreement with an atheistic religion such as Buddhism); furthermore, this justification does not take into account national and supranational legal and jurisprudential developments. The “Uaar case” is currently at the European Court. The paper intends to analyse the legal concepts of “religion” and “religious denomination”, focusing on the pioneer “Uaar case”, also from a comparative perspective with other States, such as Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, which provide equal legal status between religious denominations and philosophical and non-denominational organisations.*

4:15-4:30pm

Afternoon break

4:30-6pm

**Session 7: Nonreligion and Education (2)**

Session chair: TBD

***Religion, non-religion and education in Canada: an overview (1)***

Solange Lefebvre, Professor, Chair for the Management of Cultural and Religious Diversity, University of Montreal, [solange.lefebvre@umontreal.ca](mailto:solange.lefebvre@umontreal.ca)

*Drawing on results from quantitative and qualitative analysis of hundreds of schools’ websites in Canada, this paper presents findings on the role and place of religion and non-religion in several types of schools (public, private, provincial and more). Our overarching research question being “What kind of person do schools aim to train?”, this presentation will look at the different features of the discourses concerning pupils in this regard, in relation with religion, spirituality and non-religion. This research makes it possible to compare provinces and draw attention to their particularities, and will address the different provincial settings of secondary public and private schools.*

***Religion, non-religion and education in Canada: an overview (2)***

Joseph Mikhael, Ph.D. Candidate, University of Montreal, [joseph.mikhael@umontreal.ca](mailto:joseph.mikhael@umontreal.ca)  
Mathieu Colin, Ph.D., research agent, University of Montreal, [mathieu.colin@umontreal.ca](mailto:mathieu.colin@umontreal.ca)

*This paper presents the methodology employed to do substantial and comparative research on education in Canada, using netnography, theme analysis, and quantitative as well as qualitative approaches. From June 2021 to December 2022, the team collected data from more than 400 schools' websites in four provinces of Canada (Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick and Alberta). This presentation will focus on values and the way they are framed differently in each province. If the values are most often designated as being common in several secularized societies, it appears that they retain links with religious heritages and historical particularities.*

### **Secular Liturgies: Nondenominational Spiritual Gatherings**

Reverend Rob MacPherson, Chaplain of the Pembroke school in Adelaide Australia,  
[RMacPher@pembroke.sa.edu.au](mailto:RMacPher@pembroke.sa.edu.au)

*Many schools serve multifaith publics, as well as a significant and growing public that is avowedly secular, even antipathetic toward the notion of faith itself. In this contemporary context, how and why might educational communities offer ritual spiritual gatherings that add value? How might such gatherings address consensus reality and moral values, and provide a means by which those of diverse faiths, as well as those of none, can share common humanity and cultural cohesion? Building on years of trial in a large Australian independent school, this paper will consider the opportunities and challenges of offering secular liturgies in school settings. The paper argues that a fully inclusive liturgical language can benefit the spiritual development of students, while helping to quell religious sectarianism in schools and the wider culture, and that a space for such reflection offers a pastoral counter-point to the vocational pressures of the contemporary curriculum.*

### **Session 8: Nonreligion and Law (2)**

Session chair: TBD

#### ***The (de)imbrication of religious and (non)religious normativities. The legal debate on same-sex marriage in Argentina***

Guadalupe Allione Riba, CIJS - CONICET (Legal and Social Research Center - National Scientific and Technical Research Council), Latin American Social Studies PhD Candidate, National University of Córdoba, [allioneguada@gmail.com](mailto:allioneguada@gmail.com)

Juan Marco Vaggione, CIJS - CONICET (Legal and Social Research Center - National Scientific and Technical Research Council). Co-Investigator Non Religion in a Complex Future, Main Researcher (CONICET), Associate Professor (National University of Córdoba, Argentina), [juanvaggione@yahoo.com](mailto:juanvaggione@yahoo.com)

*The process of recognition of sexual and reproductive rights that characterize contemporary Latin America is both the result and cause of the growth of the presence of nonreligious identities and imaginaries in the region. Within this process, the main purpose of this presentation is to consider the legalization of same-sex marriage in Argentina as an analytical window to understand the different ways and levels in which nonreligion is produced during moments of public debates. By examining legislator's public discourses, we discuss the multiple ways in which the connections between religion, nature and law are constructed during the parliamentary debate that took place in 2010. We propose the concept of (de)imbrication in order to capture the complex ways in which religious and non-religious normativities are recreated and contested when debating sexual legal regulations.*

### **Religious School Education in Brazilian Supreme Federal Court voting: religion as a belief**

Paula Montero University of São Paulo and Cebrap researcher, Full Professor, [pmontero@usp.br](mailto:pmontero@usp.br)

*This paper examines the arguments made by the eleven Justices of the Brazilian Supreme Federal Court who, in 2017, decided on the constitutionality of offering Religious Education in public schools. We analyze how disputed ethical and legal values are rearticulated in these votes concerning the notion of belief. It is not a matter of harking back to secularism as a social process, legal norm, or political doctrine. The discursive analysis of the minister's votes formulations aims, on the contrary, to unveil the different religious constructions implied in their uses of the terms religion and rights and to understand how they operate when putting forward an idea of citizenship and/or the nation. The aim is to clarify the configuration of common legal sense when issuing value judgments about religion and its protection. Therefore, our primary focus will be to circumscribe what counts as religion in these legal narratives.*

### **Nonreligion at “the church of human rights” in Brazil**

Renata Nagamine, Visiting scholar at the University of California, Berkeley, [renagamine@gmail.com](mailto:renagamine@gmail.com)

Aramis Luis Silva, Postdoctoral researcher at the Federal University of São Paulo, [aramisluis@uol.com.br](mailto:aramisluis@uol.com.br)

*In a piece on the uses of notions of time in the regulation of same-sex relationships in Brazil, my co-authors and I have showed that nonreligion is an effect of the uses of rights and religious forms, rites, and rituals. This paper aims at giving one step further and argue that nonreligion is a language effect of the uses of two *linguae francae*: human rights and religion. When we speak in terms of *linguae francae*, we are dealing with social conventions and aesthetic forms contextually used, i.e., we are in the domain of communication. To advance our argument we will analyze narratives of leaderships and members of the Metropolitan Community Church in Brazil on marriage. An analysis of their narratives might be of interest since MCC presents itself as “the church of human rights”; and has been prominent in the process of inscribing same-sex marriage in legal order in Brazil.*

### **Desacramentalization without desacralization: same-sex marriage regulations in Brazil**

Camila Nicácio, Adjunct Professor at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, UFMG; Brazil,

[cnicacio@ufmg.br](mailto:cnicacio@ufmg.br)

Renata Nagamine, Visiting Researcher at the University of California, Berkeley-CA,

[renagamine@gmail.com](mailto:renagamine@gmail.com)

Paula Montero, Full Professor at the University of São Paulo, USP, Brazil, [pmontero@usp.br](mailto:pmontero@usp.br)

Luma Góes, Bachelor in Law, Federal University of Uberlândia, UFU, Brazil, [lumalaura@gmail.com](mailto:lumalaura@gmail.com)

*In the history of marriage regulations in Brazil, the terms marriage (formal act of civil registration) and matrimony (Catholic sacrament) have always been associated. This article analyzes the Supreme Federal Court’s decision in 2011 that legally recognized same-sex unions in the form of stable unions. The aim is to understand how this debate shifts the tension around the sacred/civil marriage index to the field of the family. We assume that the legal recognition of same-sex relationships as a stable union, forming a homosexual family nucleus, sparked off a former debate on the place of time (or length) when defining the conditions that authorize two people to be declared spouses, that is, persons who are legally bound. This decision has heightened the tension around same-sex marriage by bringing the historicity of this recognized basic cell of society as the core debate, that is, the legal institute of the family.*

Thursday June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023

8:30-10am

**Session 9: Health and Well-being (1)**

Session chair: TBD

***Some Bodies are Temples, Others are Amusement Parks: Differences in Substance Use Rates across Religious and Nonreligious Identities***

David Speed, University of New Brunswick, [dspeed@unb.ca](mailto:dspeed@unb.ca)

Allyson Lamont, PhD student (Clinical Psychology), University of New Brunswick, [alamont@unb.ca](mailto:alamont@unb.ca)

Stanford Yang, Honours student (Psychology), University of New Brunswick, [yangyuzhi.stanford@unb.ca](mailto:yangyuzhi.stanford@unb.ca)

Emily Earle, Honours student (Psychology), University of New Brunswick, [Emily.Earle@unb.ca](mailto:Emily.Earle@unb.ca)

*There is an extensive literature suggesting that religion positively predicts mental and physical wellness. These eclectic relationships are broadly known as the 'Belief-As-Benefit Effect' (BABE). While BABE has experienced increased criticism during the past decade, there appears to be consistent evidence that religious individuals are more likely to take care of their bodies particularly by avoiding alcohol and tobacco. Using the Cycle 30 of the General Social Survey, we explored differences in prevalence for smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol in a representative sample of Canadians. Results indicated that there were few differences between atheists and nominal members of religious categories for either tobacco or alcohol consumption. However, practicing members of non-mainstream religious communities (e.g., Mennonites) were less likely to consume tobacco or alcohol. While these differences are somewhat consistent with BABE, we provide several reasons why we should be cautious about this generalization.*

***Cultivating the self or tending others? Well-being, relationality, and nonreligion in community gardens***

Anna Sofia Salonen, University of Eastern Finland, University lecturer, [anna.salonen@uef.fi](mailto:anna.salonen@uef.fi)

Giovanna Paccillo, University of Campinas, Ph.D. Candidate, [paccillo98@gmail.com](mailto:paccillo98@gmail.com)

Lauren Strumos, University of Ottawa, Ph.D. Candidate, [lstru054@uottawa.ca](mailto:lstru054@uottawa.ca)

Rebecca Banham, University of Tasmania, Research Fellow, [rebecca.banham@utas.edu.au](mailto:rebecca.banham@utas.edu.au)

*In today's world, well-being and ethics are closely intertwined. Well-being discourse is one of the major frameworks that people draw from when they make sense of and seek meaning in their life and display themselves as ethical beings. However, in the context of therapeutic culture that relies on popular psychological knowledge and fosters the pursuit for authenticity and self-development, well-being is perceived as a highly individualized matter. We draw from a multi-site qualitative study of community gardens to investigate nonreligious relational approaches to well-being. Our study asks: Whether, how, and to what degree community gardens challenge individualistic views of well-being, and (how) do they provide alternative, relational ways of approaching well-being? By doing so, our study provides insights into understanding the positive content of nonreligion and secularity.*

### **Case studies from healthcare offer a window on nonreligion and secularity**

Sheryl Reimer-Kirkham, PhD; Trinity Western University, Dean and Professor of Nursing,

[Sheryl.Kirkham@twu.ca](mailto:Sheryl.Kirkham@twu.ca)

Sonya Sharma, PhD; University College London, Lecturer in Sociology at the Social Research Institute,

[Sonya.Sharma@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:Sonya.Sharma@ucl.ac.uk)

*Healthcare settings in Canada are characterized by biomedical and neoliberal priorities of cure and efficiency. Since the administration of most hospitals was handed off by religious organizations to the state some 3 - 4 decades ago and religious pastoral care shifted to generic spiritual care, the ethos is by and large that of nonreligion and secularity. At the same time, the illness circumstances of hospitalization often involve crisis or suffering, which can raise religious, spiritual, or existential questions and see a turning to ritual or sacred practices. This presentation leverages off this context to explore meaning systems, contemplative practices, and organizational values as positive content of nonreligion and secularity. Case studies derived from health research in palliative care, spiritual care, and workplace spirituality provide insights into this emergent field of study.*

### **Session 10: Censuses and Surveys**

Session chair: TBD

### ***Religion as Supplementary Flourishing – Nonreligion as Common Denominator: Preliminary Results from the NCF Social and Cultural Values Survey in Eight Countries***

Peter Beyer, Professor Emeritus, University of Ottawa, [pbeyer@uottawa.ca](mailto:pbeyer@uottawa.ca)

*Much of the literature and research on nonreligion has thus far used ‘religion’ as the primary conceptual reference: religion vs. nonreligion. Some scholars have even suggested that what counts as nonreligion in this research should necessarily have some reference to religion. The Nonreligion in a Complex Future Project is seeking to obviate this religion-centred way of identifying the nonreligious to find ways to measure nonreligion positively, in terms of what it ‘is’ as opposed what it is not. To this end, the NCF team has designed and implemented a survey instrument which seeks to operationalize nonreligion without reference to religion. The Social and Cultural Values Survey was launched in 2023 in eight countries. In this paper, we report preliminary results from this survey and ask if the survey has been able to achieve this end: measuring nonreligion positively. A primary hypothesis that is explored in this regard is that the unity in terms of which distinction can be made is better conceived in nonreligious terms like lifeways or life-stances, than as religion. Religion in this view then becomes supplemental rather than foundational.*

### ***Hail Satan: Who Holds Satanic Values?***

Ryan T. Cragun, The University of Tampa, Professor of Sociology, [ryantcragun@gmail.com](mailto:ryantcragun@gmail.com)

*While primarily focused on various forms of activism, The Satanic Temple has developed seven tenets or values that are espoused by the members. Drawing on a large convenience sample (n = 959), this paper is a preliminary investigation into how to measure Satanic tenets or values and explores the correlates of holding Satanic values in a sample primarily made up of US adults. The results suggest that both religious and nonreligious people hold Satanic values. Additionally, the values are contrasted with Schwartz’s values in order to determine whether Satanic values overlap with other values.*

### **Media responses to increasing nonreligiosity in Australia**

Rebecca Banham, University of Tasmania, Research Fellow, [Rebecca.Banham@utas.edu.au](mailto:Rebecca.Banham@utas.edu.au)

*2021 Australian Census figures show that for the first time, almost 40% of Australians identify as having 'no religion' while fewer than half (43.9%) identify as Christian. This marks a significant social change in a nation which is often considered ostensibly 'secular', while being profoundly shaped by Christian normativity and privilege. In this context, the Census figures have sparked considerable response from conservative commentators concerned about what the rise of nonreligion means for Australia. This presentation draws on my 2022 article for the NSRN blog and further accompanying research. It used media responses to the Census figures to explore various assumptions and misconceptions underpinning views of nonreligion in Australia. In doing so, I advocate for the complex and profound contributions that nonreligious people can make to social inclusion and identity in Australia, and insist that those with prominent voices do the same.*

### **Nontheism and supernatural beliefs: What non-religious people believe and why only some of them are strict unbelievers**

Jonas Bonke, TU Dortmund University, Germany, Research Associate, [jonas.bonke@tu-dortmund.de](mailto:jonas.bonke@tu-dortmund.de)  
Alexander Unser, TU Dortmund University, Germany, Assistant Professor, [alexander.unser@tu-dortmund.de](mailto:alexander.unser@tu-dortmund.de)

*In this paper, we aim to contribute to a better understanding of nonreligious nontheism by exploring what beliefs may be associated with nontheism and asking what makes a complete absence more likely. Therefore, we draw on data from the ISSP Religion IV (N=5,267) gathered in 2018 in German-speaking European countries (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland). We will focus on the subsample of those who defined themselves as non-affiliated, nonreligious, and without believing in God (N=1324). To distinguish a broad from a narrow nontheistic position, we test if a nontheistic person does not believe in supernatural aspects of religions like miracles and does not believe in scientifically unsupported practices like astrology. Finally, we test possible factors influencing whether a person belongs to one of these types of nontheism using logistic regression.*

10-10:15am

Morning break

10:15-11:45am

### **Session 11: Exploring Nonreligion in Turkiye**

Session chair and organizer: Dr. Önder Küçükural, Munazara and Argumentation Ethics Research Center, Ibn Haldun University, Istanbul, Turkiye [onder.kucukural@ihu.edu.tr](mailto:onder.kucukural@ihu.edu.tr)

This session aims to share the preliminary findings research project “Nonreligious Beliefs And Practices in Turkiye” funded by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBİTAK). The project started on 15 November 2022. So far, we interviewed 55 individuals in seven cities all across Turkiye. It seems nonreligion is not a reserved domain of secular segments of the society anymore as increasing numbers of sympathizers are seen even among the children of conservative Muslim families. The issue is more complex than being captured only as an ‘identity’ but it demands a new perspective that embraces

relational aspects of the phenomenon, everyday life experiences and practices, and researchers' own self-reflexive accounts. The papers in this panel have not been concluded yet but are products of our year-long intensive debates within our project team.

### ***Feeling the Field: Encounters Between the Opposites***

Betül Tozlu, Ibn Haldun University, Department of Sociology, PhD Student, [betul.tozlu@stu.ihu.edu.tr](mailto:betul.tozlu@stu.ihu.edu.tr)  
Zeynep Aslan, Istanbul University, Department of Sociology of Religion, PhD Student, [zynp.aslan34@gmail.com](mailto:zynp.aslan34@gmail.com)

*As part of the project "Nonreligious Beliefs and Practices in Turkiye", we have been conducting in-depth interviews in seven large cities in Turkiye. Getting to know people in one-to-one conversations in a safe space is known to create an intimate relationship between the researcher and the interlocutor. In the case of interviews on nonreligiosity, having women wearing hijab in the research team made our study different from the previous studies conducted in Turkiye. Some of our interlocutors had never sat and chatted with a veiled woman before, despite the fact that Turkiye is a Muslim-majority country where women in hijab are visible and part of the social sphere. This turned the context of the in-depth interviews itself into a topic of discussion and contemplation. Most of the time, finding a space for themselves to prove their 'righteousness' and worldviews in front of a person who is wearing a religious symbol seemed to change the tone of the interviewee. Affirming one's worldview (in our case nonreligiosity) in front of "the other" (in our case religiosity) seemed to pose a challenge not only for our interlocutors but also for the interviewers as this changed the way they choose to interact with the interviewer in the interview context. In this article, we will analyze the data from a self-reflexive point of view, and will explore the dynamics that arose during these encounters.*

### ***The Politics of Nonreligiosity: Agency, Resistance and Negotiation in the Process of Leaving Islam***

Nesibe Demir, Ibn Haldun University, Department of Sociology, PhD Student, [nesibedemir@stu.ihu.edu.tr](mailto:nesibedemir@stu.ihu.edu.tr)  
Zeynep Kübra Kılıç, Ibn Haldun University, Department of Sociology of Religion, MA Student, [zeynep.kilic@stu.ihu.edu.tr](mailto:zeynep.kilic@stu.ihu.edu.tr)

*In recent years, there have been discussions about the increase in non-religious tendencies such as atheism and deism, particularly among young people in Turkiye, compared to previous periods. Especially during the rule of a government that openly expressed its goal of "raising a pious generation", such speculations or data began to occupy the public's agenda more. Moving out of Islam is not just about leaving the faith but also related to belonging (Van Nieuwkerk 2018) and the whole fields where social, political or gender relations intersect (Vliek 2019). Thus, in a Muslim-majority context, complex issues brought by the idea of moving away from Islam was inevitable. The individuals who reject 'their religion' are faced with the danger of losing their family, friends, and social environment, and risk being excluded from society. That is why, while individuals manifest their agency in expressing their opposition by resisting religious discourses and practices, they adopt a more reconciling attitude in certain situations. Based on qualitative research on nonreligious individuals in Turkiye, this paper reveals in which areas this resistance or negotiation emerged. This paper claims that while individuals have more radical decisions and practices in their private spheres, they often try to seek ways for negotiation in social or public spheres, that is they follow a politics of nonreligiosity.*

### ***The View of Religious Education in Turkiye***

Elif Yönden, Ankara University, Department of Sociology, MA Student, [elifyndn0658@gmail.com](mailto:elifyndn0658@gmail.com)  
Dr. Kurtuluş Cengiz, Ankara University, Department of Sociology, [kurtuluscengiz@yahoo.com](mailto:kurtuluscengiz@yahoo.com)

*'Religious education' is a compulsory course for primary and secondary school students in Türkiye. However, studies show that compulsory religious education is often used as a propaganda tool for Sunni Islam, is not inclusive, and creates discrimination against minorities (Genç et al. 2017, Yıldırım 2021). This is also clearly stated in the report "Compulsory Religious Education in Türkiye: A Human Rights-Based Evaluation of Religious Culture Ethics Lesson and Books" published within the scope of the project carried out in cooperation with the Association for Monitoring for Equal Rights (ESHID) and the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC). The Atheism Association in Türkiye launched a petition on the change.org website demanding the compulsory religion course to be abolished. Similarly, The Freedom of Belief Initiative also launched a campaign called #OurLessonIsNotReligionReligionsandBeliefs. This article aims to discuss what compulsory religious education means for nonreligious citizens based on a qualitative field search conducted in seven different regions of Türkiye with seventy nonreligious individuals.*

### **Religious Nones and Aftermath of 'Dead Body' in a Muslim Majority Context**

Mehmet Ali Başak, University of Ottawa, Department of Classics and Religious Studies, PhD Student, [mbasak@uottawa.ca](mailto:mbasak@uottawa.ca)

Hande Gür, University of Alberta, Department of Anthropology, PhD Student, [gur@ualberta.ca](mailto:gur@ualberta.ca)

*For many religious people, especially followers of Abrahamic religions, death does not seem to be an annihilation or an end, but a transition to a new life (Walter 2008, Bracke and Aguilar 2020). But what about for religious nones? What does a dead body mean to them? Even if they do not believe in the afterlife, do they participate in death ceremonies and rituals in their daily lives? These questions get even more complex as we explore how diverse nonreligious people are (Quack et al. 2009). Based on semi-structured interviews with 20 self-identified nonreligious people living in Türkiye, this paper examines how dead body and post-mortem ceremonies are perceived and experienced by religious nones in Türkiye. It argues that the perceptions and practices of religious nones towards the dead body and afterlife are not uniform. Preliminary findings show that some do not care what happens to their bodies after their death, some desire to be disposed of through non-Islamic methods like cremation, and some others desire to be buried according to Islamic principles even though they do not believe in an afterlife. It also suggests that the attitudes of religious nones towards death and the treatment of the dead body have been influenced by a variety of factors, including cultural and societal norms, personal preferences, and the beliefs of their loved ones.*

### **Session 12: Nonreligion, Migration and Discrimination**

#### **Ritual life among the secular and nonreligious: The impacts of context and secular debates among French migrants to Toronto and Montréal, Canada**

Jennifer A. Selby, Associate Professor, Memorial University of NL, [jselby@mun.ca](mailto:jselby@mun.ca)

Amélie Barras, Associate Professor, York University, [abarras@yorku.ca](mailto:abarras@yorku.ca)

*This paper takes up initial findings from qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted with secular and/or nonreligious migrants of French origin in Montreal and Toronto. Since 2006, French immigrants have been Québec's most significant source of immigration (Statistics Canada 2016, 2018); narratives circulate that QC legislation on secularism has motivated some to prefer settling in Toronto. We compare their experiences in 'Anglophone' Toronto, located in 'multicultural' Ontario, with 'Francophone' Montreal, located in 'secular' Québec, to analyse the habitus of these immigrants' non-religiosity. Engaging with Fadil (2009), Frost (2022) and Blankholm (2022) on secular sensibilities, we document how their nonreligiosity and Frenchness are ritualized (or not), and whether this ritualization changes*

*according to their location. We ask: what are their ritual priorities? How does their secularity shape their interactions with the state? Do provincial debates matter or does their foreignness impact their nonreligious lives to a greater extent?*

### **Non-religion in Norwegian refugee receiving institutions**

Inger Furseth, Professor, Department of sociology and human geography, University of Oslo, [inger.furseth@sosgeo.uio.no](mailto:inger.furseth@sosgeo.uio.no)

*This paper presents tentative findings from a research project that examines religion and nonreligion in Norwegian refugee receiving institutions. Forced migration is growing across the world and, simultaneously, there is an increase of people who identify as having no religion. We ask: To what extent is religion used to shape and obscure nonreligion and nonreligious identities in refugee receiving institutions? Data consist of interviews with administrative staff at different levels in five Norwegian refugee receiving institutions in 2022-2023. The findings suggest an ambiguous role of nonreligion. The general policy in these institutions is to be neutral when it comes to religious and nonreligious life-stances. Yet, there is peer pressure among residents to attend religious services, taboos regarding nonreligion, and loss of social status for nonreligious residents. This study is part of the Nonreligion in a Complex Future project.*

### **Love Thy Neighbour? Acceptance of Stigmatised Minorities by Nones in Europe**

Nadia Beider, University College London, Postdoctoral Fellow, [nadia.beider@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:nadia.beider@ucl.ac.uk)

*Religious nones tend to be more accepting of members of stigmatised minority groups such as Muslims, Jews, and immigrants relative to those who are religiously affiliated. However, variations among nones have not yet been fully explored. Analysis of data from the 2017 round of the European Values Study indicates that lifelong nones and disaffiliates differ significantly in their willingness to have members of stigmatized minorities as neighbours. These minority groups include those marginalised on the basis of religion, ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality. Variations in attitudes among nones demonstrate the need to recognize heterogeneity of attitudes within the unaffiliated and the importance of religious residue from childhood religious socialization in determining attitudes among adult nones. It also contributes to our understanding of the elements of (non) religion that are associated with tolerance and those that linked with prejudice.*

### **The Rhetoric of Microaggressions: Perceptions of Nontheist Discrimination**

Niki Dolfi, an M.A. of Sociology student at East Tennessee State University (ETSU), [HallNN@etsu.edu](mailto:HallNN@etsu.edu)

*There has recently been increased interest in using theories of microaggressions as a framework for studying subtle forms of discrimination. Due in part to decades of research consistently showing negative mental health outcomes are strongly correlated to covert forms of discrimination. Although research shows nontheists are a disliked outgroup, there is a dearth of research on the microaggressions that nontheists face. This qualitative study reveals how some religious Christians in America use rhetoric to frame microaggressions towards nontheistic Americans. Through interviews with religious Christians, microaggressions were categorized and analyzed for thematic patterns between the rhetoric used and the type of microaggressions employed. These relationships revealed assumptions of the characteristics of nontheists, the prevalence of discrimination they face, and the perceived social roles of religion and secularism in the public sphere. The findings also show how personal experiences of discrimination affected perceptions religious Christians have of the discrimination nontheists may experience.*

11:45-1pm

Lunch break

NSRN graduate student lunch

1pm-2:30pm

### **Session 13: Health and Well-being (2)**

Session chair: TBD

#### ***Exploring the global meaning system of nonreligious individuals and their attribution of meaning to the Corona pandemic: What can we learn for a positive understanding of nonreligion?***

Alexander Unser, TU Dortmund University, Germany, Assistant Professor, [alexander.unser@tu-dortmund.de](mailto:alexander.unser@tu-dortmund.de)

Jonas Bonke, TU Dortmund University, Germany, Research Associate, [jonas.bonke@tu-dortmund.de](mailto:jonas.bonke@tu-dortmund.de)

*In this paper, we explore the potential of a meaning system framework for the study of nonreligion (Taves 2018). Building on Crystal Park's (2010, 2013) Meaning Making Model, we analyse whether nonreligious individuals differ from religious individuals regarding their global meaning system and their attribution of meaning to the Corona pandemic. We draw on quantitative data (N=2,670) gathered in April 2020 in Germany and compare members of religious and nonreligious groups via ANOVAs. The general meaning system is explored by items typically used to measure religiosity and by the Spiritual Attitude and Involvement List (SAIL) (Meezenbroek et al. 2012) – the latter to address types of 'horizontal transcendence' (Coleman et al. 2013). The attribution of meaning to the Corona pandemic is measured by the RCOPE reappraisal subscales (Pargament et al. 2000) and secular equivalents to these subscales that were newly developed and validated for this study (Riegel & Unser 2021).*

#### ***Prayer, a 'wounded word'***

Rev. Nicholas Rundle, [Rev.nj.rundle@gmail.com](mailto:Rev.nj.rundle@gmail.com)

*Jean-Louis Chretien (quoted by Caputo JD Truth p 83 London 2013) describes prayer as a 'word sent up from a cut or wounded heart.' In March 2020 in response to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic searches for 'prayer' surged to their highest level ever <https://trends.google.com> while the Australian Census 2021 <https://abs.gov.au> continued to chart the decline in those claiming religious allegiance. Yet, in the author's experience as a hospital chaplain working alongside frontline healthcare professionals in critical care, people still value the wounded word of prayer even though their own frame of reference is naturalistic or a very weak theism. Is prayer simply a response to life's finitude and contingency, 'an activity that nonreligious individuals engage with in relation to their worldviews and beliefs'? Prayer, the author suggests, is a natural human practice and as such can be valued and promoted as a secular practice.*

### **Death and dying in atheist narrative**

Rafael Quintanilha, Doctoral Program in Social Anthropology at the University of Sao Paulo, PhD candidate, [grafael@gmail.com](mailto:grafael@gmail.com) or [rafael.quintanilha@usp.br](mailto:rafael.quintanilha@usp.br)

*Death is the main theme, after the denial of the existence of deities, faced by the atheist conviction that is forced to order the individual-world relationship through rationalistic and materialistic perspectives. From the publications and debates present in Brazilian atheist social networks, the aim is to analyze the impacts originated from the adoption of an atheist repertoire on the way people deal with their own deaths and that of others. Thus, we will explore how the circulation of different sources, research evidences correlates with the constitution of a unique atheistic perception that evokes images of the world and its relationship with it. As we will argue, when narrating one's relationship with life and death through naturalistic images and rationalistic processes, atheists present numerous difficulties in expressing their suffering or dealing with another's by limiting his sensorial framework in thinking.*

### **'Positive' autonomy and the non-directiveness of secular humanist moral counselling in Flanders, Belgium**

Prof. dr. Adelheid Rigo, Free University Brussels, [Adelheid.Rigo@vub.be](mailto:Adelheid.Rigo@vub.be)  
Prof. dr. Johan Stuy, Free University Brussels, [Johan.Stuy@vub.be](mailto:Johan.Stuy@vub.be)

*Flanders (Belgium) is a region that is historically Catholic as reflected, even today, in the predominance of religious care institutions. Since the 1950's secular humanist organizations have offered free counselling for those seeking help or struggling with life or existential questions. Western counselling, committed to respecting the autonomy of individuals, seeks not to steer or even influence those seeking help towards the values and norms of the caregivers/counsellors, conform to the ideal of non-directiveness. One could conclude that this is difficult to achieve in humanistic moral guidance, as it's a practice with an outspoken philosophical background, a value-loaded self-identity and with an institutional anchoring. Our concept of non-directivity is founded in a positive concept of respect for the clients' autonomy: enhancing the autonomy and self-direction of the client to enable him/her in giving meaning to one's own life. We'll argue that humanistic practice can explicitly articulate its identity and philosophical background while counselling clients non-directive. In doing so we we'll make use of i.a. J. Katz concept of psychological autonomy.*

### **Session 14: Interviews, and New Methodologies**

Session chair: TBD

### **Nonreligion in Turkey: Doubts, Strategic Maneuvers in Argumentation, and Rhetorical Preferences**

Önder Küçükural, Ibn Haldun University, Munazara and Argumentation Ethics Research Center, [onder.kucukural@ihu.edu.tr](mailto:onder.kucukural@ihu.edu.tr)

*The literature generally agrees that the concept of nonreligion is an ambiguous one. This concept surpasses the confines of identity. It makes its appearance in everyday life practices, in bodily dispositions, and yet its nature can be characterized as haphazardous because it depends on the context and specific life circumstances. As an umbrella term, nonreligion covers a wide range of phenomena from atheism, deism, and agnosticism to spiritual - but not religiousness and indifference. Drawing on the qualitative data we collected through in-depth interviews (55 so far) in seven cities in Turkey, we observe all these varieties and ambiguities in the Turkish context also. However, this paper will focus on a specific issue of deconversion. I will share our preliminary observations on the specific instances where*

*individuals, who were raised in conservative religious families discuss their renouncing of religion. We know that especially in conservative sections of society in Turkey being a nonbeliever is constructed as a deviant identity. This makes the issue highly sensitive. In this paper, I will analyze how nonreligion dares to appear in the context of our in-depth interviews and our social media observations. I will discuss the expressions of doubt, strategic maneuvers in argumentation, and rhetorical preferences of our interlocutors.*

***An ultimate meaning of practice: a radically immanent approach to illustrating nonreligious lives***

Timothy Stacey, Researcher, Urban Futures Studio, Utrecht University, The Netherlands,  
[t.j.stacey@uu.nl](mailto:t.j.stacey@uu.nl)

*When seeking to surface the positive content of nonreligious imaginaries, it is best to put religiously reifying questions (“well what do you believe?”) to one side, and focus instead on people’s practice. We need to stop looking for things that sound like religion. It is also important to not only explore practices that look like religion (birth, marriage, death), thinking as well about people’s everyday habits, their work, and (the focus of my research) the causes they commit themselves to. When we do this, we swiftly become acquainted with a radically immanent sense of meaning derived from the way that people relate to others; how they carry themselves in social situations; and the process by which decisions are made in their work and meetings: what I call “an ultimate meaning of practice”. I illustrate these ideas by dwelling in the stories of a group of activists.*

***Post-paradigmatic And Qualitative Turn in The Nonreligion Studies***

Tatiana Zachar Podolinska, Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology, Slovak Academy of Sciences Bratislava, Director and senior researcher, [Tatiana.podolinska@savba.sk](mailto:Tatiana.podolinska@savba.sk),  
[tatiana.podolinska@gmail.com](mailto:tatiana.podolinska@gmail.com)

Juraj Majo, Comenius University in Bratislava, Faculty of Science, Department of Economic and Social Geography, Demography and Territorial Development, Assistant Professor, [juraj.majo@uniba.sk](mailto:juraj.majo@uniba.sk)

*The core of research on religious nones is aimed at statistical analysis, using the combination of variables from a limited set of survey questions. In-depth analysis grounded in qualitative multi-sited ethnographies remains still very rare. In this regard, we conducted 4-year qualitative research in 4 different regions in Slovakia, collecting more than 180 life stories and religious paths to, within, and out of religion. During the research, we realized that the generally used labeling categories (nones, dones, agnostics, atheists, etc.) are fuzzy, or even absolutely do not fit the “field”. In our contribution, we offer the qualitative analysis of selected profiles of religious, spiritual, and secular people aiming at disclosing the intricate nature of being irreligious and declaring none in surveys. In this regard, we would like to contribute to refining the labeling classification system in order to understand what nonreligion is and what roles it plays in modern societies.*

***Practicing and passing on secular and humanist values, identities, and worldviews in German families***

Christel Gärtner, Prof. Dr., University of Münster, [cgaer\\_01@uni-muenster.de](mailto:cgaer_01@uni-muenster.de)

Linda Hennig, Dr., University of Münster, [hennigl@uni-muenster.de](mailto:hennigl@uni-muenster.de)

*Our data are drawn from the qualitative part of the research project “Explaining religious change across generations: an international study of religious transmission in families”. We conducted 16 in-depth interviews with (non-)religious families in which three generations participated, and analyzed the interviews as well as the corresponding genograms (socio-demographic data of five generations). Using two case reconstructions, we will analyze the social conditions under which secularity is established in*

*the grandparents' generation (born 1933-1951): in the West German family out of a freethinking milieu and in the East German family through the decision not to continue church ties in the anti-religious context of the GDR (1949-1990). In addition, our focus will be to reconstruct the relevant positive values, identities, practices, and beliefs that were established and passed on across generations. We will also consider whether and how contact with religion leads to boundary demarcations.*

2:30pm-2:45pm

Afternoon break

2:45pm-4:15pm

### **Session 15: Environment and Nature**

Session chair: TBD

#### ***Trading Spirits for Science: Planetary Ethics Among Reverential Naturalists in the “Age of the Anthropocene”***

Sarah Best (Doctoral Student in Religious Studies), Wilfrid Laurier University, [best2590@mylaurier.ca](mailto:best2590@mylaurier.ca)

*This paper considers the complex convergences between spirituality, science, and environmentalism in North America, asking what these convergences mean for those who occupy the liminal spaces between religion and nonreligion. Specifically, the paper focuses on the increasingly popular phenomenon of reverential naturalism and the related rise of “science-based nature religions”—spiritual orientations towards the natural world rooted in materialism and scientific rationality, thus moving away from traditional notions of divine transcendence to instead embrace a kind of “mundane transcendence” (Beaman 2021). Based on virtual ethnographic research and fieldwork conducted in British Columbia, the paper explores how reverential naturalists navigate various tensions between a commitment to rigorous scientific reason on the one hand, and a desire for wonder and enchantment on the other, and how such tensions shape relationships with the nonhuman world. Ultimately, this research asks what kinds of planetary ethics reverential naturalists embody, and how shifting (non)religious landscapes may open new avenues for addressing ecological crises.*

#### ***Nonreligion in a more-than-human world: An analysis of memorable experiences in nature***

Lauren Strumos (PhD Candidate, University of Ottawa) [lstru054@uottawa.ca](mailto:lstru054@uottawa.ca)

Lori G. Beaman (Full Professor, University of Ottawa) [lbeaman@uottawa.ca](mailto:lbeaman@uottawa.ca)

Hallie Robinson (Student, University of Ottawa)

*There are many studies that examine human beliefs about nature, but there are few that capture their actions in nature. There is also limited research on how the nonreligious experience nature and their attitudes towards it. Addressing these gaps, our study asks: how do the nonreligious experience their encounters with nature, including non-human animals? To answer this question, we analyze responses to a survey question that asks individuals, both religious and nonreligious, to describe a memorable experience they had while walking or hiking. We aim to offer insights into how nonreligious people experience and orient themselves toward nature. For instance, can some memorable encounters with non-human animals be situated in a stewardship framework, while others reflect more egalitarian views of nature? Survey data for this study was previously collected by research team members of*

*'Experiencing Nature During Physical Activities,' a subproject of the Nonreligion in a Complex Future Project.*

***"The Forest is my Church": how nature contributes to secularization***

Atko Rimmel, Associate professor of Religious Studies, University of Tartu, Senior researcher, University of Tallinn, Estonia, [atko.remmel@ut.ee](mailto:atko.remmel@ut.ee)

*The importance of nature for the nonreligious has been highlighted in many previous studies. Based on ethnographic data from Estonia and Sweden, this paper examines the adoration of nature in Northern Europe - a region known for its widespread secularization. The findings indicate that nature can be considered a so far overlooked aspect of the secularization process. This paper offers a brief historical explanation for this seemingly weird claim, considers some theoretical approaches to the entanglement of nature and (non)religion, and proposes an alternative.*

**Session 16: Author Meets Critics - Nonreligion in late modern societies - institutional and legal perspectives, 2022, Springer (Boundaries of Religious Freedom: Regulating Religion in Diverse Societies)**

Session chair: TBD

*This volume presents results from new and ongoing research efforts into the role of nonreligion in education, politics, law and society from a variety of different countries. Featuring data from a wide range of quantitative and qualitative studies, the book exposes the relational dynamics of religion and nonreligion. Firstly, it highlights the extent to which nonreligion is defined and understood by legal and institutional actors on the basis of religions, and often replicates the organisation of society and majority religions. At the same time, it displays how essential it is to approach nonreligion on its own, by freeing oneself from the frameworks from which religion is thought. Despite growing scholarly interest in the increasing number of people without religion, the role of nonreligion in legal and institutional settings is still largely unexplored. This volume helps fill the gap and understand the changing role of nonreligion in modern societies.*

***Authors:***

Anne-Laure Zwillling, research centre DRES-Droit, Religion, Entreprise, Société (UMR 7354, joint unit of the CNRS and the University of Strasbourg), PhD / established CNRS researcher, [anne-laure.zwillling@cnrs.fr](mailto:anne-laure.zwillling@cnrs.fr)

Helge Årsheim, Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, PhD / Associate Professor, [helge.arsheim@inn.no](mailto:helge.arsheim@inn.no)

***Critics:***

Anna Strhan, University of York, Senior Lecturer in Sociology, [anna.strhan@york.ac.uk](mailto:anna.strhan@york.ac.uk)

Solange Lefebvre, Université de Montréal, Titulaire de la chaire Religion, culture et société, [solange.lefebvre@umontreal.ca](mailto:solange.lefebvre@umontreal.ca)

Amélie Barras, York University, Associate Professor, Law and Society Program Coordinator, [abarras@yorku.ca](mailto:abarras@yorku.ca)

4:15pm-4:30pm

Afternoon break

### **Session 17: Practitioner Panel**

Session chair: Dr. Teale Phelps Bondaroff, Research Coordinator, BC Humanist Association, [tealepb@gmail.com](mailto:tealepb@gmail.com)

Building on the success of our practitioner panel from the 2021 NSRN conference, this panel spotlights advocacy-oriented research being conducted by non-governmental organizations fighting for the separation of religion and government in Canada. The panel features research conducted by the BC Humanist Association (BCHA) and allies, on issues relating to legislative prayer and reproductive justice, and it outlines how this work is being used to achieve societal change as part of broader advocacy campaigns. Two papers explore components of a broader campaign by the BCHA to end legislative prayer across Canada. These papers focus on municipal prayer in BC and Ontario and the BCHAs efforts to increase compliance with the 2015 Supreme Court decision in *Saguenay*, which found including prayer in municipal councils to be unconstitutional and a violation of the state's duty of religious neutrality. The final paper synthesizes two reports that examine the world of crisis pregnancy centers, which proselytize and deceive while purporting to support people experiencing unintended pregnancies.

#### ***'We yelled at them until they stopped': The impact of advocacy around prayer in municipal council meetings in BC***

Teale Phelps Bondaroff, Director of Research, BC Humanist Association

Ian Bushfield, Executive Director, BC Humanist Association, [exdir@bchumanist.ca](mailto:exdir@bchumanist.ca)

Olivia Jensen, Researcher, BC Humanist Association

*This paper evaluates compliance levels of BC municipalities with the Saguenay decision and how compliance has changed over time and as a result of advocacy from non-governmental organizations. In 2020, the BCHA published a report that found that despite this ruling, 23 BC municipalities (of 162) had included prayer in their 2018 inaugural council meetings. The report also found that all the prayers were delivered by members of Christian clergy, and most (73.9%) were delivered by men. The report was part of an advocacy campaign, run by the BCHA, which included lobbying municipal staff, publicity, and encouraging grassroots outreach. This paper seeks to evaluate the impact of this advocacy and overall compliance with Saguenay by comparing the number of BC municipalities that included prayer in their 2018 inaugural meetings with those that continued the practice at their 2022 inaugural meetings. The paper concludes by contextualizing Saguenay compliance rates in BC with those of other provinces (Manitoba, Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Alberta).*

#### ***Losing god and finding religion: The changing nature of prayers and civic religion at Ontario municipal council meetings***

Teale Phelps Bondaroff, Director of Research, BC Humanist Association

Olivia Jensen, Researcher, BC Humanist Association, [olivia@bchumanist.ca](mailto:olivia@bchumanist.ca)

Pratigga Chowdhury, Researcher, BC Humanist Association

Ian Bushfield, Executive Director, BC Humanist Association

*Since Saguenay, there has been a marked increase in ostensibly secular practices to open municipal council meetings in Ontario. We identified 156 (47.6%) (n=328) that opened their 2018 inaugural meetings with prayer(s) and 21 (6.4%) that opened with 'moments of silence.' We also found nine (2.5%) (n=360) councils included prayer in their regular meetings and 62 (17.2%) opened with a 'moment of*

*silence.’ Our recent report documenting these findings showed a dramatic change occurred following Saguenay, as prior to the ruling, 176 (69.3%) (n= 254) municipalities included prayers in their inaugural meetings and 68 (24.9%) (n=276) opened regular meetings with prayer. In this qualitative exploration of these changing practices, we examine how municipalities appear to be constructing new secular civic religions through practices such as moments of silence, reflective statements, and other ritualistic practices. We also found that in addition to some municipalities continuing to open meetings with overtly religious prayers, a number appeared to be attempting to circumvent Saguenay through the use of ‘stealth prayer’ and prescriptive moments of silence.*

### ***Pregnancy choices in crisis: A look at the state of the religious anti-choice movement in British Columbia and Canada***

Joyce Arthur, Executive Director, Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada, [joyce@arcc-cdac.ca](mailto:joyce@arcc-cdac.ca)

Teale Phelps Bondaroff, Research Coordinator, BC Humanist Association

Annaliese Downey, Volunteer Researcher, Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada

Angela Katelieva, Volunteer Researcher, Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada

Olivia Jensen, Researcher, BC Humanist Association

Katelyn Mitchell, Volunteer Researcher, Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada

*Crisis pregnancy centres (CPCs) lure people experiencing unintended pregnancies into their doors, with the intention of manipulating their reproductive decisions. This is achieved through deception tactics such as offering medicalized services (pregnancy tests, sonograms, and STI testing), proximity to real health clinics, ambiguous wording on websites, and obscuring their religious intentions. While they mimic real health facilities, their goal is to dissuade people from getting abortions, while at the same time proselytising. As part of their advocacy, the BCHA and Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (ARCC) released two reports on CPCs. The first inspected the websites of CPCs across Canada: 146 CPCs, 143 websites, 110 unique websites, examining them to identify instances of misinformation and deception. These results are compared with a previous 2016 website review to identify changes in practices over time. The second report zooms in on the 23 CPCs found in BC, analyzing the services they offered, their locations, religious affiliations, and funding streams. This talk summarizes the findings of these reports and situates them within the broader advocacy effort to protect people from these ‘fake clinics.’ It concludes with a number of policy recommendations aimed at disrupting the flow of government funding to CPCs and restricting their ability to prey on people in vulnerable situations.*

### **Session 18: Gender and Feminism**

Session chair: TBA

#### ***Australian Women’s Non-Belief***

Katja Strehle, Western Sydney University, PhD candidate, [k.strehle@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:k.strehle@westernsydney.edu.au)

*This paper will discuss women’s approaches towards their non-religiosity among those who are or who have been part of an Australian atheist or humanist group. Issues with gender imbalance have long plagued the non-religious movement. One often repeated explanation for this is that women centre their social groups around practical everyday purposes and that they seek a ‘different’ kind of community, focused on ‘meaning making’, compared to men who seek to reaffirm their opposition to religion. Drawing on interviews with over 30 women affiliated with humanist and atheist groups in Australia, this paper will discuss how these women define their atheism or humanism, the importance non-*

*belief has in their everyday lives and if it has any effect on the way they socialise. This paper argues that women are less likely to strive for constant reassurance of their non-belief by attacking religions and are more open and respectful towards religious people.*

***Secular ontologies: feminists and human rights on social media***

Olívia Barbosa, Ph.D. candidate at the University of São Paulo, Brazil, visiting student scholar at the University of California, Berkeley, [oliviabarbosa@usp.br](mailto:oliviabarbosa@usp.br)

*I propose a digital ethnography of the political action of Brazilian feminists on social media. I will look at feminists' defense of abortion and secularism as well as at their understanding of human rights. The growing tension around gender issues in Brazil's various social environments makes the feminist's discursive and imagery practices a privileged place to observe the interactions of religious-political subjects and secular subjects. We have a good understanding of the doctrine of political secularism, but little understanding of the ontology of the secular and the practices, sensibilities, and knowledge it makes accessible. For secular subjects, human rights operate as a form of mediation and create communities that materialize in artifacts, discourses, and aesthetics. Although human rights seem to establish and operate from an abstract moral category of the human, this only exists as a reading grid of social life. Movements against abortion and feminists have different conceptions of human rights subjects: both movements use the concept of humanity to justify the existence of inviolable rights, but their subjects are distinct. For this reason, it seems pertinent to look at how secular subjects and the language of human rights are modeled simultaneously in social media actions and interactions.*

***Rationalism, Patriarchy, and Identity: Understanding Lifeworlds of Yukthivadi Women Activists***

Meera Gopakumar, Doctoral Candidate, Religious Studies, School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh, [M.Gopakumar@sms.ed.ac.uk](mailto:M.Gopakumar@sms.ed.ac.uk)

*Yukthivadi (rationalist) activism in the south-Indian state of Kerala has a long history of countering religious, caste and superstitious practices since the 1920s. While these activists have predominantly been men who have had economic, social, and cultural capital which granted them access to the public sphere, women's presence as activists have grown only gradually over the years. Today, the Kerala Yukthivadi Sangham (organization formed in 1967) has women activists in leadership roles at least in two districts in the state. This paper draws on my field-based study of Yukthivadi women in Kerala in 2022. Beginning with the premise that disengaging from any religious identity is more difficult for women than men, owing to prevailing patriarchy, I engage with two primary questions. First, how did women characterize their lifeworlds as nonbelievers and as activists of a rationalist organization? Second, does their presence change the political language of Yukthivadi activism in Kerala?*

Friday June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023

8:30-10am

**Session 19: Discursive Studies of Nonreligion (1)**

Session chair: TBD

***Historical changes in the public discourse of militant non-religious organizations in the US and the UK***

Dominik Balazka, Joint PhD Candidate, University of Milan, University of Turin, KU Leuven,  
[dominik.balazka@unimi.it](mailto:dominik.balazka@unimi.it)

*For over a century, the history of sociology of religion revolved around the concept of secularization. This theoretical heritage resulted in an emphasis on the decline of religion. Consequently, international survey programs focused on mapping the decline of various indicators of religiosity, neglecting the issue of non-religion. As such, the available data offer a relatively clear picture of the changing religious landscape but remain suboptimal for the analysis of the changes occurring within non-religion itself. Analyzing a large historical collection of magazines published by militant non-religious organizations in the United States and the United Kingdom between 1881 and 2019 with text mining techniques, this presentation will offer an overview of the preliminary results of an ongoing research project. How did the public discourse of organized non-religion evolve over time? Are there substantive differences between the non-religious discourse observed in the secular Britain and the one observed in the religious America?*

***Remembering the Dead: Canadian Obituaries and Immanent Understandings of Death***

Chris Miller, Postdoctoral Fellow, Nonreligion in a Complex Future project, [cmiller5@uottawa.ca](mailto:cmiller5@uottawa.ca)  
Hannah McKillop, Doctoral Candidate, University of Ottawa, [hmcki030@uottawa.ca](mailto:hmcki030@uottawa.ca)  
Sohini Ganguly, Doctoral Candidate, University of Ottawa, [sgang087@uottawa.ca](mailto:sgang087@uottawa.ca)  
Achintya Shree Vijay Sai, Undergraduate Student, Vaishnav College for Women, India,  
[achintyashree@gmail.com](mailto:achintyashree@gmail.com)

*Obituaries serve important social functions: they announce death, but more importantly, allow the living to shape how the dead are remembered. Originally reserved for the elite, the democratization of the death notice has made obituaries more common and detailed over the past century. Changes in this genre interact with the rise of nonreligion. As declines in affiliation complicate the relationship between death and religious structures, obituaries reveal a shift in understandings of death, from transcendent to immanent life stances. Based on analysis of obituaries across six Canadian newspapers over the past fifty years, this paper explores the relationships, activities, and values people express in such documents. We argue that the growing appearance of family members left behind, favourite hobbies, or community associations indicate changes in how death is understood and made meaningful. Parallel to the rise of nonreligion, death is increasingly commemorated through the relationships people form in life.*

***The Anatomy of Meaning: A Historical-Philosophical Account***

Donovan Schaefer, University of Pennsylvania, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies,  
[doschaef@upenn.edu](mailto:doschaef@upenn.edu)

*Secularism studies scholarship often attends to acts of secular “meaning-making.” (For a cross-section, see: Coleman; Taves; Taylor) But what does meaning mean? In contemporary humanistic and social*

scientific discourse, it is not “semiosis” or “signification” but something like “existential meaning.” The existential sense of meaning is, in fact, relatively new, with Google Ngram results showing its widespread emergence in English starting only in the 1930s. In this paper, I offer a brief genealogy and critical assessment of this concept of existential meaning. My finding is that it is effectively a translation of the German *Sinn* and the French *sens*, and stems from the synthesis of existentialist philosophy (especially Martin Heidegger) and French (Émile Durkheim) and German (Max Weber) sociology in the mid-twentieth-century Anglophone academy. “Meaning,” I argue, is a linchpin term in a conceptual ecology that represents human experience as essentially intellectual rather than affective and embodied.

### **Popular Existentialism as a Secular Worldview. The Case of Contemporary Survivalism**

Dr. Robert Schäfer, Universität Basel, [robert.schaefer@unibas.ch](mailto:robert.schaefer@unibas.ch)

*The distinction between religion and non-religion presupposes a commonality that makes the distinction meaningful in the first place. The commonality of religious and secular worldviews lies in the problem of contingency. Both religious and secular worldviews refer to the question of why the world is not as it could be or, from a normative perspective, ought to be. An especially relevant aspect of the general problem of contingency is the problem of mortality. My presentation reports on the results of my investigation into contemporary survivalism, considered as a secular way to deal with the fundamental interrelation of life and death. My empirical analyses identify popular existentialism as a secular worldview, which is based on a vehement interest in the elementary conditions of human existence and the conviction that these conditions become particularly clear in experiences of liminality – which is why such experiences are sought out.*

### **Session 20: Nonreligious Activism**

Session chair: TBD

#### **From protests to street performances. Ethnography of anti-clericalism in Krakow, Poland**

Jacek Skrzypek, Ph. D, Cultural Anthropology, independent scholar, [jacek.m.skrzypek@gmail.com](mailto:jacek.m.skrzypek@gmail.com)

*"Enough of silence - Stop the clericalization of Poland. Civic Initiative" is a group of Polish activists founded in 2018. Members of the "Enough of Silence" defy the restrictions regarding reproductive rights in Poland, discrimination of LGBT+ people and address the problem of pedophilia among clergy. Actions taken by activists are usually performances which are organised on the streets of Krakow (the performances carry simple and provocative messages). The group was established as an alternative to activities which are undertaken by other Polish secular organizations (e.g. Krakow's University of Enlightenment and Rationalism Association) – activities that are a local variant of “the atheistic identity politics”. The anti-clerical performances which are organised every month become a permanent part of the public space in Krakow. In my presentation, I will talk about some social contexts conditioning this type of activism and try to outline the repertoire of activities developed by the activists.*

#### **Nonreligion as political activism: Mobilizing against the Catholic Church in Argentina and Spain**

Julia Martínez-Ariño, Assistant Professor of Sociology of Religion, University of Groningen (The Netherlands), [j.martinez.arino@rug.nl](mailto:j.martinez.arino@rug.nl)

*This presentation contributes to the study of nonreligion for what it is rather than for what it is not. Drawing on empirical research with Argentinean and Spanish apostates, I explore how these people, who formally left the Catholic Church, understand their nonreligiosity and anticlerical stance as a form of*

*political activism. More specifically, I argue that apostasy in these two Catholic-majority countries, and the confrontation with the institution of the Church it entails, constitutes a central element of activist and nonconformist political identifications. Next to other forms of contestation, such as feminism, LGBTQI+ rights mobilizing and union membership, apostatizing adds content to these people's political subjectivities. Apostates do not mainly define themselves in reference to what they lack (faith, religious beliefs and practices, etc.) but rather in relation to their opposition against the Church, their rebelliousness in many facets of their lives and their being the black sheep in their families.*

***In the Name of Women, Life and Freedom: How and Why the Iran's Gen Z Protests are Distinct from its Predecessors?***

Mojtaba Rostami, Department of Sociology, University of Calgary, [mojtaba.rostami1@ucalgary.ca](mailto:mojtaba.rostami1@ucalgary.ca)

*While the Islamist Theocracy in Iran has faced intermittent social and political uprisings throughout its history, the most recent protests have taken many by surprise, capturing the attention of social and political scientists and activists worldwide. This study attempts to enumerate the dissimilarities of the current unrests to its predecessors and to present explanations based on sociological theories of nonreligion and secularity. Based on a content analysis of the slogans, photos and videos posted on popular social media, the author argues these uprisings are unprecedented not only in their scale and longevity but also in having a fully secularized Gen Z as the main driving force behind them. It is further contended that a full understanding of this anti-Islamist 'revolution' cannot be reduced to an absence of religion, and requires its own substantive secular concepts as it is shaped by a particular secularity that permeates the Zoomers' worldview, identity, political ethics and language.*

***The League of Education, from anticlericalism to dialogue with religions***

Anne Lancien, Sciences po, post-doctoral fellow, [anne.lancien@gmail.com](mailto:anne.lancien@gmail.com)

*The Ligue de l'enseignement is a French popular education movement that has long denounced clericalism and vigorously opposed the existence of religious education. In the late 1980s, however, its position changed. The Ligue changed its enemy and favoured dialogue with religions, especially with the Catholic Church. This paper aims to understand why the Ligue made this opening to religions, what were the doctrinal evolutions that followed, what were the results of the dialogue undertaken with religions. Finally, we will try to put this example into perspective with the evolution of all secular movements in French society. Have they all evolved towards openness to religion? What doctrinal and axiological proposals do they put forward? These are some of the questions we will try to answer in this paper.*

10-10:15am

Morning break

10:15am-11:45pm

**Session 21: Discursive Studies of Nonreligion (2)**

Session chair: TBD

### ***Secularism and political secularization in Polish and German online media – an advantage or danger?***

Andy Christian Körber, University of Lodz (Poland), doctoral candidate, [andy.korber@edu.uni.lodz.pl](mailto:andy.korber@edu.uni.lodz.pl)

*The COVID-19 pandemic was a period of anomie that changed peoples' behavior and habits. Statistical data show a significant decline in the attendance of religious services and individual devotions. The aim of this presentation is to outline how those phenomena were covered by online media in both Poland and Germany during the pandemic, and especially, to what extent religious practices respected the law imposed by the government to protect people from contracting the virus during religious ceremonies. The presentation is based on a framing analysis on 590 articles published between the 1st of October 2020 until the 30th of September 2021. Since elements of secularism and political secularization have been registered, another goal of the presentation is to examine the way they are presented and what consequences such a significant period can have for changes of religiousness.*

### ***Mediatization, Consumption and Meditation***

Gabriela Pimenta Martins, PUC-Campinas, Brazil, [gabriela.pm8@puccampinas.edu.br](mailto:gabriela.pm8@puccampinas.edu.br)

Marcelo Pereira, PUC-Campinas, Brazil, [marcelo.pereira@puc-campinas.edu.br](mailto:marcelo.pereira@puc-campinas.edu.br)

*The world has been re-outlined by technological and digital experiences. With the advancement of technologies and the accessibility of smartphones and online networks, social relationships and connections today are permeated by the virtual ecosystem and digital representations of the human spectacle. This article seeks to analyze the justifications for no longer focusing primarily on material consumerism, but also on life experiences, well-being and spirituality. The mediatization of meditation techniques reformulates how we understand and sell spirituality, now also as a digital product. Through teachings available on virtual social networks, any human being becomes able to meditate, regardless of their level of education on the subject or even their religion. We hope, through this research, to understand how the discourse about spirituality and meditation is constructed and how it becomes a salable product through digital social networks such as TikTok.*

### ***Popular Culture and the Study of Nonreligion. "Is that even a thing?"***

Ilaria Bianco, PhD, Independent, Religious and Cultural Studies Scholar and Historian,

[ilariabiano@gmail.com](mailto:ilariabiano@gmail.com)

*The aim of this paper is to explore the state of the art of a possible sub-field of nonreligion and popular culture studies, its categories and approaches, its specificities or overlapping dimensions with other related fields. I dealt with these issues at the 2021 NSRN Conference and in a forthcoming article. I explored some examples of nonreligious representations in contemporary TV seriality and I argued that, in the last years, not only nonreligiosity emerged in an unprecedented way (quantitatively and qualitatively) depicting a non-homogeneous and variegated nonreligious landscape, but also nonreligiosity has been represented in its relational dimension, through discursive spaces, more than in its lived and everyday aspects, thus presenting it as belonging to the same space as conventional religiosities. Starting from this first study, what the presentation will explore is how (and how much) nonreligion has been studied in a more broader context of popular culture and what emerges from these studies. Making the case for the possibility of thinking and developing an autonomous field of research, the presentation will propose a reflection on specific aspects and the general framework for such a field.*

**Growing Non-Religiosity and the Spiritual-But-Not-Religious as Emancipative Opportunity:  
Combating Hegemonic Orientations Driving the Neoliberalisation of Global Capitalism**

Faris Bin Ridzuan, National University of Singapore, [faris.ridzuan@gmail.com](mailto:faris.ridzuan@gmail.com)

*Much akin to how Asia is a Western social construct, religion as a universalistic academic concept is also a Western social construction that had imposed elements of Western Christianity onto other phenomena in the world, turning the descriptive into the prescriptive, and subsequently distorting truth claims and indigenous or autonomous constructions and agencies of non-Western Christians in defining and shaping their own lived realities outside of the framework of "religion" and "non-religion". Through intellectual imperialism and academic dependency, the universalism of religion as an academic concept was globally imposed through Western colonialism and imperialism and this imposition continues in the Global South's knowledge production centres, exacerbated by colonially introduced hegemonic orientations such as Eurocentrism and Orientalism. For example, this resulted in the largely colonial creation of Hinduism based on the Western Christian notion of religion that lumped together the plurality of spiritual, cultural and social traditions such as the worship of different deities and spiritual practices in India into one singular religion, Hinduism, to serve colonialism's vested material interests of creating a common unified market in India to be exploited under colonial capitalism. In Singapore, the world's most religiously diverse nation where Hinduism is recognised as a significant religion, the decline of religion and religiosity and the growing number of the spiritual-but-not-religious can be seen as an emancipative movement against the universalist imperialism of the Eurocentric and colonial concept of religion and colonially introduced legacies such as the Singapore state's Islamic government institutions, the Syariah Court and the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore. These colonial and Eurocentric/Orientalist constructions institutionally mediated by the Singapore government's multicultural policies and philosophies and idiosyncratic brand of secularism that shaped non-Western religious institutions and state management of multi-religiosity in Singapore had resulted in the inefficacy of these religious institutions in addressing contemporary ethico-moral concerns such as human rights, minority rights, oppression, capitalist and neoliberal injustices and the problem of nihilism leading to the disenchantment of the masses with the relevance of institutionalised religion. Furthermore, growing non-religiosity is also an emancipative movement towards dealing with pre-colonial hegemonic orientations that predate colonialism such as sectarianism, culturalism, traditionalism, heteronormativity and androcentrism. Singapore's growing non-religiosity and the spiritual-but-not-religious movement present an emancipative opportunity to simultaneously unshackle society from colonial and pre-colonial hegemonic orientations. This might lead to a plurality of epistemologies and ontologies that allow not only the invention of traditions but the possibility of a truly plural, egalitarian, inclusive and universal fusion of horizons that does not lapse into nihilism and brings out universal values, human rights and humanism, and that reconciles unity and plurality rooted in ethico-moral philosophical relational truth claiming that is not relativistic. This pluralising and inclusivist emancipation will also address the dominant ideologies of the ruling classes and institutions driving the global, regional, local and communitarian inequity, injustice and oppression rooted in the current glocal political economy and its dominant neoliberalisation.*

10:15am-11:45pm

NCF Reproductive Rights Consultation

11:45-1pm

**Lunch break and end of conference**

NSRN Advisory board lunch

## About the Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network (NSRN)

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



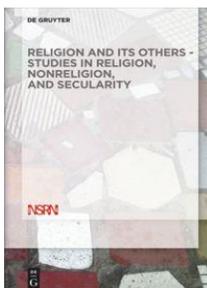
The [website](#) is our home on the internet. The editorial team manage NSRN Online, the network's online resource for academics, students and anyone interested in nonreligion and secularity. The NSRN website features the following resources: an extensive [bibliography](#) of academic research published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



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



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



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

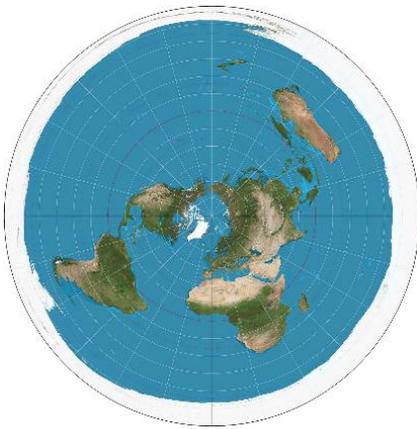
In addition, the NSRN runs an email list for the announcement of relevant events and publications, and for anyone requiring specialist advice or discussion. To sign up to the NSRN-ANNOUNCE mailing please visit <https://jiscmail.ac.uk/> or click the following link for direct access: [NSRN-ANNOUNCE](#).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

## About the Nonreligion in a Complex Future Project

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



- Over 50 researchers in seven research sites: Canada, Australia, the Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland), the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil, and Argentina.
- Five focal areas: Health, Law, Education, Environment, Migration.
- Five research objectives:



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

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

