

TEMENOS

.....
NORDIC JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION
.....

VOLUME 56 No. 2
.....



THE FINNISH SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGION
.....

2020

The journal is supported by
Nordic Board for Periodicals in the
Humanities and the Social Sciences.

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ISSN 2342-7256

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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL NOTE	167
ARTICLES	
RUTH ILLMAN & MERCÉDESZ CZIMBALMOS Knowing, Being, and Doing Religion: Introducing an Analytical Model for Researching Vernacular Religion	171
RINGA TAKANEN Religious Affects and Female Subjects in the Altarpieces of the Finnish Artist Alexandra Frosterus-Sältin: A Case Study of the Jepua Altarpiece 'Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene' (1906)	201
NELLA VAN DEN BRANDT & SANDRA WALLENIUS-KORKALO Negotiating Religion: Cultural Representations of Conservative Protestant Women and Girls in Northern and Western Europe	227
IGOR MIKESHIN 'A Prophet Has No Honour in the Prophet's Own Country': How Russian Is Russian Evangelicalism?	251
BOOK REVIEWS	
Éva Pócs (ed.): <i>Body, Soul, Spirits and Supernatural Communication</i> . (TUIJA HOVI)	269
Pål Ketil Botvar, Ann Kristin Gresaker, and Olav Hovdelien (eds): <i>Ingen Spøk – en studie av religion og humour</i> . (MARIE VEJRUP NIELSEN)	272
Daniel Enstedt, Göran Larsson, and Teemu T. Mantsinen (eds): <i>Handbook of Leaving Religion</i> . (EVELINA LUNDMARK)	275
Gavin Flood: <i>Religion and the Philosophy of Life</i> . (ULF ZACKARIASSON)	278
CONTRIBUTORS	281



Editorial Note

When I wrote my last Temenos editorial, summer was just beginning, and all that Covid-19 madness seemed to be fading away. Finnish society had just emerged from lockdown, and people were looking forward to returning to a more normal life after a relaxing summer holiday. Alas, while the summer holidays were relaxing, life did not return to normal, and the future looks much less bright now than it did in May. While waiting for the vaccine to come and save us like a Maitreya in a syringe, all the long-term questions that already haunted us then remain. What will be the lasting impact of all this?

Nevertheless, when we look at the pandemic philosophically, we can see a silver lining. After the kneejerk reaction of cancelling everything last spring, we have become better at making things virtual instead. Yes, a virtual seminar is so much more boring than a live one, but it saves a lot of money and time. Since the spring, I have given several guest lectures in India, Sweden, and Great Britain and have also been able to engage guest lecturers to teach at my department. Science has always been international, but never as much as now. Personally, I very much look forward to being able to meet colleagues, friends, and family in other countries in real life again, but the pandemic will have taught me many new skills that I hope to be able to use in the future as well.

It is too early to draw any big conclusions from the pandemic, but some things seem clear. A time when many university libraries are closed underscores the need for open access publishing. Temenos is proud to have been an early proponent of this trend – thanks to the keen foresight of my esteemed predecessors, Dr Ruth Illman and Dr Tiina Mahlamäki, and the generous funding of the Nordic Board for Periodicals in the Humanities and Social Sciences. We are one of the only diamond open access periodicals in our field, and we are consciously strengthening our position, most recently by updating our Creative Commons attribution licence (to CC BY 4.0) and providing every article with a unique digital object identifier (DOI) that will always lead the person looking for it to the right page.

This issue of Temenos is rich in Finnish material. The first article, by Ruth Illman and Mercédesz Czimbalmos, presents a new way of researching ver-

naacular religion. The classic “World Religions” paradigm has already been criticized for some time, but at least to me much of that criticism has been more interested in pulling it down than in creating anything new and is often shockingly out of touch with the world that it purports to explain more clearly. Illman and Czibalmos take a constructive approach, presenting an analytical model that looks at vernacular religion as a dialogue between the three modalities of *knowing*, *being*, and *doing*. This model is then applied to rich ethnographic data collected among Jews in Finland, bringing out a variety of promising findings.

In our second article, Ringa Takanen takes a close look at the altarpieces of the Finnish artist Alexandra Frosterus-Sältin (1837–1916), whose hand is responsible for most such paintings in Finnish churches featuring essential women figures at the turn of the twentieth century. In her last altarpiece of ‘*Christ appearing to Mary Magdalene*’, Takanen considers Alexandra Frosterus-Sältin’s influence on developing the position of women’s agency in the Finnish altarpiece tradition. Takanen positions this altarpiece in relation to the cultural and political atmosphere of the first years of the twentieth century, especially with regard to changing gender roles and the rise of the women’s movement.

Third, Nella van den Brandt and Sandra Wallenius-Korkalo take half a step outside Finland with their examination of the ways in which gendered subjectivities are created in contemporary cultural representations of women and girls belonging to conservative protestant communities in Finland and the Netherlands. The authors start out with case studies of two Finnish and Dutch female novelists to see how their novels represent the negotiations of women and girls from conservative protestant faiths and traditions. Key notions are those of creativity, imagination, and gendered embodied experiences.

Finally, in our fourth article, Igor Mikeshin moves away from Finland altogether to discuss how the history of forced marginality and the isolation of Russian-speaking evangelical Christians has shaped their theology and social ministry. Russian evangelicalism is often accused of western influence, proselytism in the canonical land of the Russian Orthodox Church, and mistreating and misleading people. Taking a strong position, Mikeshin argues against such accusations by emphasizing the history, hermeneutics, and social ministries of Russian evangelicalism. Rather, Mikeshin argues that Russian evangelicalism is indeed very ‘Russian’ in many ways, not the least in how its very narrative is constructed through the language of the Russian Synodal Bible.

I ended my last editorial note with a hope for a successful transition to the unknown after the Covid-19 situation. I will continue doing so. Despite the doom and gloom surrounding us – particularly at this dark time of the year up here in the North – we will not give up the hope of a better year ahead. To cite Thomas Hardy's (1840–1928) Song of Hope:

O sweet To-morrow! –
 After to-day
 There will away
 This sense of sorrow.
 Then let us borrow
 Hope, for a gleaming
 Soon will be streaming,
 Dimmed by no gray –
 No gray!

While the winds wing us
 Sighs from The Gone,
 Nearer to dawn
 Minute-beats bring us;
 When there will sing us
 Larks of a glory
 Waiting our story
 Further anon –
 Anon!

Doff the black token,
 Don the red shoon,
 Right and retune
 Viol-strings broken;
 Null the words spoken
 In speeches of rueing,
 The night cloud is hueing,
 To-morrow shines soon –
 Shines soon!

Måns Broo



TEMENOS

NORDIC JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION

Temenos Vol. 56 No. 2 (2020), 171–99

DOI: 10.33356/temenos.97275

Knowing, Being, and Doing Religion: Introducing an Analytical Model for Researching Vernacular Religion

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Abstract

This article introduces a new analytical model for researching vernacular religion, which aims to capture and describe everyday religiosity as an interplay between knowing, being, and doing religion. It suggests three processes that tie this triad together: continuity; change; and context. The model is envisaged as a tool for tracing vernacular religion in ethnographic data in a multidimensional yet structured framework that is sensitive to historical data and cultural context, but also to individual narratives and nuances. It highlights the relationship between self-motivated modes of religiosity and institutional structures, as well as influences from secular sources and various traditions and worldviews.

The article is based on an ongoing research project focusing on everyday Judaism in Finland. The ethnographic examples illustrate how differently these dynamics play out in different life narratives, depending on varying emphases, experiences, and situations. By bringing together major themes recognized as relevant in previous research and offering an analytical tool for detecting them in ethnographic materials, the model has the potential to create new openings for comparative research, because it facilitates the interlinking of datasets across contexts and cultures. The article concludes that the model can be developed into a more generally applicable analytical tool for structuring and elucidating contemporary ethnographies, mirroring a world of rapid cultural and religious change.

Keywords: vernacular religion, Jewish studies, Jews in Finland, doing religion, ethnography, everyday religion

In his 2017 address to the American Academy of Religion, Russell McCutcheon notes that the study of religions has parted ways in recent decades with many of its classical analytical paradigms, shaped over centuries by the

Enlightenment heritage, Christian supremacy, and colonial power structures (McCutcheon 2018). Perhaps the (still) most influential, and contested, of these is the World Religions Paradigm (WRP): that is, the perception of religious traditions as monolithic entities separated by clear-cut borders; a static understanding of religions, directing the focus at knowledge and creed, treating religions as consistent and mutually exclusive theories of the world built primarily on words and genealogy (Cotter and Robertson 2016, 2; Enstedt 2020, 64). In response to such approaches, which have increasingly been recognized as narrow and skewed, several alternatives have taken shape, seeking to create more nuanced understandings of religion by increasing the attention paid to ethnography – a ‘move toward appreciation or at least consideration of the vernacular’ (Goldstein 2015, 126).

Common to such ‘religion-as-lived’ approaches, as Kupari and Vuola (2020, 10) describe them, is the aim of capturing religion as a complex, contextual, and changing component of life. Researching religion-as-lived means exploring the tangible life of human beings with emotions, bodies, thoughts, and mundane worries. It also means relating this intimate perspective to the larger social, historical, and institutional structures that set the conditions for and shape the personal religious trajectory, paying attention to power relations and the physical milieu (Kupari 2020, 182; Kupari and Vuola 2020, 9). The alternative avenues for researching religion provided by such ethnographic approaches have supported a critical dismantling of the WRP, which seems to have set (Protestant) Christianity as the default template for all religions, and thus to have placed traditions in hierarchical orders and marginalized localized expressions (Enstedt 2020, 65; Owen 2011, 255). While the WRP is still strong in education, media, and public debate, furnishing talk of religions with political ramifications and hegemonic overtones (Sutcliffe 2016, 24–5), researchers have turned to religion-as-lived paradigms to create counternarratives to the normative epistemologies (Taira 2016, 79), often supported by conceptual analyses of materiality, embodiment, and sensory apprehensions of religion (Illman 2019, 92–3; Whitehead 2013, 23–5; Enstedt 2020, 65).

This article seeks to contribute to this ongoing conceptual development by tapping into one of its strands: vernacular religion, which offers a way to account for ethnographies of everyday life, including mainstream believers, as well as the deeply engaged and the thoroughly indifferent (Bowman and Valk 2012; Fingerroos et al. 2020; Goldstein 2012, 2015; Whitehead 2013; Tieteen termipankki). Our aim is to introduce an analytical model that explores vernacular religion as a dynamic dialogue between three inter-

dependent modalities: 'knowing'; 'being'; and 'doing' religion. The model also suggests three processes that tie this triad of vernacular religiosity together: continuity, change, and context. Taken together, these variables form a three-part scheme for tracing vernacular religion in ethnographic data. The model is developed and tested in an ongoing research project on everyday Judaism in Finland. It contributes to the study of vernacular religion by bringing together major themes recognized as relevant in previous research in a structured framework, and by offering an analytical tool for detecting these themes in ethnographic materials. Furthermore, the model has the potential to create new openings for comparative research in the field, because it facilitates structured comparisons across contexts and cultures. However, future research is still needed to establish how the model can be used to interlink datasets through the consequent comparison facilitated by the analytical model. The goal is thus to develop it into a more generally applicable analytical tool for structuring and elucidating contemporary ethnographies, mirroring a world where cultural and religious identifications and self-designations are in turmoil. Today, several significant boundaries of religion and secularity, culture, and identity, previously perceived as self-evident markers of belonging, are challenged and changed (af Burén 2015). Static conceptions of identity, based on fixed ideas and hereditary traits, give way to more flexible ways of perceiving boundaries and creatively challenging and crossing them, both in the Jewish world (Ochs 2005; Popkin 2015) and across cultures (Nynäs and Illman 2021).

The vernacular framework has attracted growing interest in recent years in research on Indigenous and Pagan groups, alternative spiritualities (Bowman 2014; Harvey 2000; Lassander 2014; Whitehead 2013), Muslim (Purewal and Kalra 2010; Thurffjell 2019), and Christian communities (for example, Howard 2011, Hovi and Haapalainen 2015; Romashko 2020), but has not been applied to Jewish contexts to any greater extent. Recent discussions of the complexities of Jewishness, highlighting the often contested and reinterpreted nature of Jewish identity and practices (Glenn and Sokoloff 2010; Bronner 2014), present interesting ground for researching vernacular Jewish practices, and the Jews of Finland offer a unique yet representative sample due to their special migration history, responses to the Holocaust, social situation, and religious customs (Banik and Ekholm 2019; Czimbalmos 2020; Muir and Worthen 2013; Vuola 2019).

Vernacular religion

The research framework of *vernacular religion* originates within folklore studies. The term was coined by Leonard Primiano as the study of ‘religion as it is lived: as human beings encounter, understand, interpret, and practice it’ (Primiano 1995, 44). In recent decades the approach has been developed and expanded by several researchers in the study of religions (Bowman and Valk 2012, 2020; Bowman 2014; Fingerroos et al. 2020; Goldstein 2012, 2015; Hovi 2014; Hovi and Haapalainen 2015; Howard 2011; Illman 2019; Kupari and Vuola 2020; Whitehead 2013). The concept serves as a tool for researching religion as part of everyday life in a theoretically and methodologically systematic way that questions a dichotomous pre-understanding of religion in which official and popular, intellectual and emotional, institutional and personal are placed as opposite, incompatible extremes on a mutual scale (Bowman 2014, 102; Riccardi-Swartz 2020, 124). The intention is thus to offer a tool for studying religion without (or at least mindful of) the dualistic and pejorative point of departure included in regarding everyday religion as a more or less distorted version of ‘pure’ religion, contaminated by its exposure to human thought and action (Whitehead 2013, 15). Following Primiano (2012, 384), ‘vernacular religious theory understands religion as the continuous art of individual interpretation and negotiation of any number of influential sources’.

Within ethnographic research on religion several corresponding terms are used in parallel, summarized by Kupari and Vuola (2020, 9) under the umbrella term ‘religion-as-lived’. With their roots in different academic disciplines, the various approaches facilitate slight but significant variations in research focus (Kupari 2020, 177–8, 182). Among them the most widely applied approach is *lived religion*, which stems from the sociology of religion and focuses on religious activities that take shape outside organized institutions and the many ways in which religion feeds into personal life narratives (McGuire 2008). In comparison, vernacular approaches tend to emphasize the characteristically folkloristic aspects of everyday religion, such as narrative structures, local practices, and oral history (Goldstein 2015, 126; Romashko 2020, 195, 203). The vernacular implies a sensitivity to societal hierarchies. The entanglement with oral history approaches leads it to mirror a shift in analytical attentiveness from the narrators and their position to the narrative itself, its form, and implications in relation to cultural and societal power structures (Fingerroos et al. 2020, 5–6). In vernacular religion, the interplay – and conflicts – between individual experiences, preferences, and perspectives on the one hand, and larger, formal, or informal

contexts on the other, are in the limelight (Whitehead 2013, 15). In weaving together dimensions of personal experience and expression with historical structures and theological conceptualizations, it pays specific attention to local and contextual, and often marginalized, perspectives (Howard 2011, 7; Riccardi-Swartz 2020, 124). In this capacity the ‘vernacular welcomes the neglected into the study’ (Goldstein and Shuman 2012, 116). An analysis of the vernacular is thus at its core relational; this characteristic can be singled out as a relevant contribution of the vernacular approach to the study of religion and culture (Fingerroos et al. 2020, 7).

The vernacular approach is also characterized by a careful maintaining of the dialectic between the institutional structures and everyday practice, official and personal, encompassed by the original linguistic meaning of the word (Howard 2011, 5–6). A look at the dictionary is revealing here. It starts from the linguistic meaning, defining the adjective ‘vernacular’ as a regional dialect specific to a particular place, period, or group – the ‘normal spoken language’ as opposed to the literary standard. The noun is defined as a ‘mode of expression that occurs in ordinary speech rather than formal writing’, also used as an ethnic or class marker. In examining synonyms and antonyms, hierarchies and values become evident. Among the synonyms are relatively neutral expressions such as ‘colloquial’, ‘informal’, and ‘regional’, but also negative connotations such as ‘vulgar’, ‘incorrect’, and ‘uneducated’. Among the antonyms – what the vernacular is *not* – are normative descriptions such as ‘correct’, ‘educated’, ‘proper’, and ‘learned’ (*Merriam-Webster*). Against this linguistic background, Goldstein and Schuman (2012, 116) note, the vernacular holds the potential to deal with ‘stigma’: the ambivalent, even conflicting, aspects of everyday narratives and practices.

The Finnish translation of the term vernacular religion, suggested by Tuija Hovi and Anna Haapalainen (2015) as *omaehtoinen uskonto*, adds an alternative angle to the description. *Omaehtoinen* can be translated as ‘self-motivated’, ‘spontaneous’, and ‘voluntary’; something that is done on one’s own terms. Synonyms include ‘unforced’, ‘unguided’, and ‘self-evolving’, and are often related to educational praxis and learning. In this interpretation *omaehtoinen* implies that general rules and structures have been shaped by the individual to her own liking; a positive process requiring maturity, self-realization, and adaptiveness (*Kielitoimiston sanakirja*). In the research on vernacular religion the relationship between this self-motivated mode of religiosity and institutional structures is especially focal, as is the dialogue with secular sources and influences from other traditions and worldviews incorporated in personal religious practice (Hovi and Haapalainen 2015,

160). Thus, this definition taps into another, equally viable, interpretative strand, shifting the focus from substance to function. By de-emphasizing the juxtaposition created by a definition of the vernacular as the obverse of something more proper and formally established, the vernacular comes forward in its own right (Fingerroos et al. 2020, 5–6).

In sum, the vernacular religion approach facilitates a broad take on the study of religion in everyday life (Bowman and Valk 2012, 5). The approach favours multidimensional analyses that are sensitive both to the overarching sociocultural power structures and to the inner world of individual subjects (Goldstein and Shuman 2012, 117). It is also essential to include the parallel dimensions made visible by regarding it as a self-guided process of learning in which the individual continuously forms her ways of being and doing religion in everyday life as facilitated by the structures of society. Some researchers even describe a ‘vernacular turn’ in the general interest in religion, stressing both prospects and perils (Fingerroos et al. 2020, 5). In recent decades, Diane Goldstein contends, ‘our intellectual context has pretty radically changed in light of a growing populism in the intellectual, bureaucratic, and popular world around us that (for better or worse) now pays greater attention to the voices and knowledges of vernacular culture’ (Goldstein 2015, 126). While the vernacular has ‘largely changed in connotation today’, receiving recognition and influence, claims to know and represent ‘the voice of the people’ can also be used for undemocratic and hegemonic ends (*ibid.*, 138).

The analytical model

Vernacular religion does not constitute a separate, clearly distinguished aspect of people’s lives. Rather, it is acted out in various ways as part of everyday life and emerges as relevant in different ways for different individuals, often situationally. For some, religion is the basis of all important life choices, offering moral guidance and existential reliance that structure reality and create confidence. For others, religion is an aspect of one’s culture or history, intertwined with family life and traditions, foodways, profession, or place of residence (Illman 2019, 102–3). Understanding what religion means to individuals and what they do with it therefore requires a multidimensional analytical model (Fig. 1) that integrates the plurality of perspectives stressed by the vernacular, which holds non-binary thinking and contrastivity in high regard (Fingerroos et al. 2020, 7). The analytical model presented in the following proposes a conceptualization of vernacu-

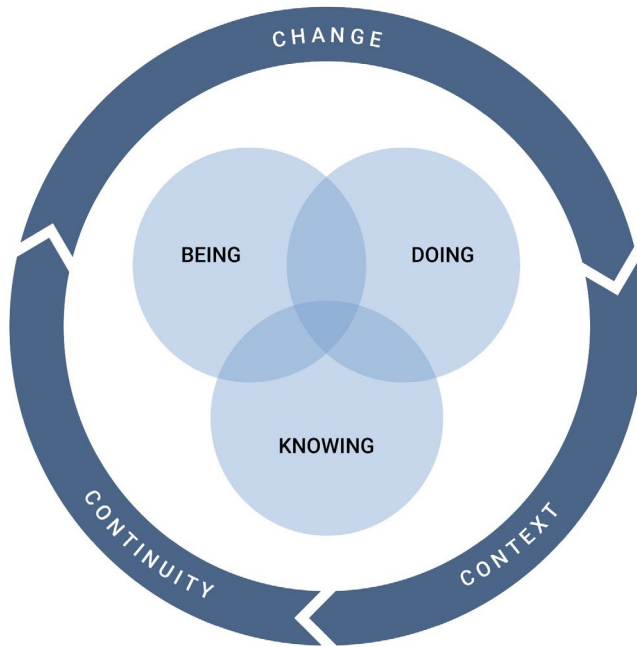


Figure 1. The Visualized Analytical Model

lar religion as an interplay between three dimensions: ‘knowing’; ‘being’; and ‘doing’ religion. Moreover, it proposes that this triad of dimensions or modalities are tied together by the dynamic forces of continuity, change, and context.

Knowing

In line with the WRP described above, knowledge has traditionally been seen as the core aspect of religious identifications and belongings, involving the truth claims, theological propositions, and historical narratives that one needs to know and accept to be regarded and confidently act as an adherent of a certain institutional tradition. This ‘emphasis on religious beliefs and texts’ (Enstedt 2020, 64) has generated a widespread critique of a ‘bias towards textuality’ in the study of religions (Owen 2011, 255; Riis and Woodhead 2010, 3–4). In contrast, the vernacular framework can illuminate the modality of knowing as vastly more nuanced, including various dimen-

sions essential to people's religious engagements in everyday life: embodied practices; aesthetic factors; and the sensorium at large (Whitehead 2013, 23–6). Focusing merely on aspects of religious life that can be observed and measured results in a neglect of the emotional, bodily, and relational aspects of religion (Riis and Woodhead 2010, 3–4) – traits that often lie at the heart of vernacular religiosity, and now step out of the shadows of texts and beliefs.

The concept of material religion has recently been explored through a variety of concepts and disciplines (see, for example, Hutchings and McKenzie 2016). This research has contributed to the growing interest in how religious knowledge is influenced by those who harbour this knowledge, their experiences, bodies, and tangible life-worlds (Lassander 2014, 31–4). Understanding vernacular religion is a complex task that involves physical and psychological processes, material objects, and the environment, as well as socially and culturally constructed patterns of interpretation and value (Hovi 2014). The role of vernacular knowledge is thus a question of interplay and contextualization, directing attention to the relationships between persons, objects, and beliefs, where texts, thoughts, and sensory apprehensions function as mediators invested with value and significance (Whitehead 2013, 99–101). We therefore propose that emotions also need to be accounted for in mapping vernacular religiosity. Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead describe emotions as constructed in the interplay between individuals, social structures, and symbols that are shaped by the subjective world of the individual, interpersonal relations, cultural symbols, and material settings. Thus, emotions 'belong to the situation as a whole' (Riis and Woodhead 2010, 6–7). This inclusion does not diminish emotions to mere inner psychological states, social symbolic systems, or neurological scripts. By questioning the 'deep binaries' between reason and emotion (*ibid.*, 17), it bridges the gap between different ways of knowing that are relevant to the vernacular approach. 'As a response to positivist perspectives on knowing and experiencing, and as a rival voice to master narratives and dominant top-down story lines, personal narrative is simultaneously powerful and vulnerable', Goldstein (2015, 137) contends in relation to vernacular knowledge; 'embedded in the ordinary', it can be both persuasive and manipulated. To map the modality of knowing in the ethnographies, we thus seek narratives of study and scripture, adaptations of creed and certainties, but also other ways in which informants talk about 'knowing' their tradition through the body, emotions, experiences, practices, and so on, attempting to capture the significance attached to this modality in their reflections.

Being

As clarified above, the vernacular approach places at its heart the dynamic dialectic between personal dispositions, experiences, and emotions on the one hand and overarching societal structures, theological systems, power-relations, and historical developments on the other. Consequently, personal identities are regarded not as isolated and enduring characteristics, but as evolving and open-ended modalities connected with numerous circumstances and contexts. Every person harbours a collection of multiple identities, foregrounding specific identities in given contexts formed by external and internal factors. Thus, everyday life takes place within a power-infused interactional web in which varying aspects of these multiple identities – cultural, religious, secular, gendered, ethnicized, and so on – emerge in varying situations (Popkin 2015, IX–XII). Bearing an identity implies both perceived likeness and uniqueness. At the individual level one may differentiate oneself from others, but at the social level one may experience likeness with others who share the same collective identity in contrast to the surrounding society. Thus, the individual draws different lines between ‘us’ and ‘them’, depending on the situation and the interpretative patterns evoked (Bekerman and Zembylas 2016, 210–13). This interactional or relational approach stands in clear contrast with the WRP perception of subjects as autonomous objects that can be measured and explained with reference to clear-cut schematic tables (Cotter and Robertson 2016, 12–3).

Ann af Burén’s (2015) conception of ‘simultaneities of religious identities’ can specify this vernacular approach. It describes the ‘both-and’ character of vernacular religious identifications: how people ascribe meaning to and interpret religiously significant events of daily life, and see themselves in relation to religious and cultural designations. Simultaneities do not necessarily signal a lack of consistency or coherence; instead, they display a complex and situated interpretation of the boundaries of the subject and her/his surroundings, through which the individual can ‘relate to the many meanings of the concept of religion selectively’ and ‘appreciate and appropriate religious aspects from a variety of contexts’ (af Burén 2015, 212). People today often combine elements from various religious traditions in their personal outlooks, ranging from the self-conscious combination of two or more traditions to a sense of belonging to no specific tradition at all. By attending to simultaneities, the complexity and incongruity of vernacular religion can be uncovered (Bekerman and Zembylas 2016, 218; Nynäs and Illman 2021).

The dynamic concepts of identification and simultaneity are utilized in structuring the analytical model. The vernacular focus on everyday

life turns the spotlight from stable monolithic entities of identity to the unfinished evolving processes of identification in traditional and historical forms, as well as in modern, hybrid, and personalized practices. In ethnographies we trace how 'people make sense of experience and claim identities by telling their stories' (Goldstein 2015, 137). We pose the following questions: how do they talk about who they are? and how has this changed over time and in relation to significant experiences, institutions, persons, places, and practices?

Doing

If religions are regarded as parallel systems of ideas and practices that can be clearly identified and placed side by side for comparative purposes as the WRP proposes, religions also appear to have historical agency; they can interact, dialogue, and clash with each other as fairly consistent entities of texts and rituals (Owen 2011, 254). However, from an ethnographic perspective it is human beings who engage with each other in daily life, not abstract systems. Religious agency, the capacity for action, is thus seen as shaped and framed by the myriad ways in which a person adopts, adapts, and applies religious norms in her own life (Kupari and Vuola 2020). This is more complex than merely 'being' religious, Orit Avishai claims: it also entails a project of 'becoming' through practice against the image of a religious or secular other (Avishai 2008, 423). Hence, she introduces 'doing religion' as an analytical approach based on postcolonial and interactionist theories that focus on religious agency, and on how individuals perform and 'become' within power relations and normative structures of tradition and expectation. Doing religion is seen as a strategic undertaking – to achieve social, gendered, political, or personal goals otherwise unattainable for the individual in a certain place and time (*ibid.*, 413). It is a semiconscious, self-authoring project of cultivating a religious subjecthood through practice – in line with vernacular perspectives that pinpoint religiosity as a complex identification constructed and acted out by the individual in relation to social norms and historical structures (Bowman 2014, 102–3). Religion is not done in a vacuum, but is shaped in relation to both personal and structural religious and extra-religious ends; it is an orientation and an aspiration, an existential undertaking framed by bustling day-to-day life (Avishai 2008, 428).

Adam Yuet Chau outlines different modalities of 'doing religion' to serve as anchor points in the wide spectrum of possible activities. These

include discursive-scriptural, personal-cultivational, liturgical, immediate-practical, and relational modalities – dimensions available for adoption by individuals and groups as they craft their ways of doing vernacular religion in changing circumstances (Chau 2011, 67–8). It is important to acknowledge that factors such as age, gender, class, education, coincidences of time and place, position in social networks, and personal dispositions influence how persons form patterns of vernacular practice (Fingerroos et al. 2020, 10). In this respect tradition functions as a ‘constraining and enabling structure, which individuals artfully employ to navigate their lives and realize religious aspirations’ (Kupari and Vuola 2020, 12). To summarize, we will look for the very practical ways in which our informants engage with their tradition: what do they do when they ‘do religion’? Do they mention formal rituals or personal routines of daily life, such as eating, working, engaging with family and friends, objects, visiting places, and so on? What kind of situations make them reflect on religion, and how does this affect what they do?

Summing up the proposed analytical model

The three modalities – ‘knowing’, ‘being’, and ‘doing’ religion – should not be regarded as mutually exclusive categories or as necessary conditions for vernacular religion. When applying the model to ethnographic data, the different aspects emerge in different ways in different life narratives as individuals place varying emphases on them in their everyday lives and in their ways of talking about it with a researcher. It is important for our purposes to offer an alternative to the scholarly tendency to make ‘belief the measure of what religion is understood to be’ (Cotter and Robertson 2016, 7) and draw attention to different ways of relating to and adapting religion in daily life. The dimensions we have conceptualized as knowing, being, and doing are equally important intertwined aspects of the vernacular repertoire – but they are precisely that: conceptual tools. In developing our analysis, we therefore recognize that people do not match abstract categories, and are mindful of the gap between ‘pristine textbook descriptions and messy practices’ (Taira 2016, 82).

Hence, we propose the triangulation of knowing, being, and doing as a methodological tool that at best can form a prism through which vernacular religion can be studied in greater detail. This article tests its usefulness in relation to a specific ethnographic context, vernacular Judaism in Finland, but in the future we hope to be able to show how the analytical structure can

also enable comparison over time and between traditions. To acknowledge the dynamism inherent in the model (Fig. 1), it is envisaged as a constantly spinning wheel, in which focuses shift, and new connections are created between the different modalities. We regard continuity, change, and context as important and interlinked relations between the three modalities, shaping and reshaping the wheel of vernacular religion as it is adapted for various ethnographies. Furthermore, these movers are interchangeable, and the possibilities are therefore as numerous as the three key dimensions are intrinsically entangled.

In our ongoing research we strive to demonstrate how this model can be applied to ethnographies relating to the Jews of Finland. We map how individuals in the various datasets describe personal and institutional ways of knowing, being, and doing Jewish that feel historically and religiously embedded, yet meet their personal needs and correspond to the secular Finnish lifestyle (Czimbalmos and Pataricza 2019, 1, 4–5). Longstanding established minority communities such as the Jews of Finland seldom advocate a total rejection of the surrounding culture but rather ‘creatively straddle both worlds’ (Kupari and Vuola 2020, 8). This is illustrated by the following examples that demonstrate how the model can illuminate ethnographic accounts.

Analysis: Tracking patterns of vernacular Judaism in Finland

The subject of Jewishness and how to understand who and what is to be considered ‘Jewish’ is under constant discussion. More than in many other religions, ethnicity and ancestry have been important indicators of belonging in traditional religious definitions of who is a Jew (Glenn and Sokoloff 2010, 3). However, contemporary, critical, and secular apprehensions contest the decisiveness of genealogy alone. Framing Jewishness as a matter of genes and upholding ‘a belief in biological uniqueness [...] offers an ethnic anchor when boundaries between Jews and non-Jews blur’, Tenenbaum and Davidman (2007, 444) contend. One can thus be, and be perceived as, Jewish in a variety of ways, connected to one or all of the three modalities described above. In line with the transfer in terminology from identity to identification, the following account strives to enable an open-ended understanding of multiple – practical, personal, existential – liaisons in everyday life. Following Avishai’s suggestion, the analysis focuses on how individuals ‘make sense of the complexity, ambiguity, and transience of religious traditions’ in personal life narratives (Avishai 2008, 429). The analysis aims to demon-

strate different ways of relating to and expressing vernacular Judaism by applying the proposed analytical framework.¹

Eve's story

Eve's narrative answers most clearly the questions raised in relation to the modality of being. She is conscious of her (self-)identification(s) as a Jew, reflecting on how different contexts affect her, and on situations where her Jewishness is emphasized or minimized – for example, when she does not feel comfortable claiming it. Nevertheless, the modalities of knowing and doing are far from irrelevant in Eve's narrative. She grew up in Helsinki with a Jewish mother from a family originating in the earliest Jewish settlement of Russian soldiers in Finland in the nineteenth century, and a non-affiliated father with a Lutheran background, whom she describes as 'very sympathetic' to Jewish ways and instrumental in upholding Jewish family traditions. They were secular and not particularly active in synagogue life; Eve did not attend the Jewish school. As long as her maternal grandmother was alive, holidays were celebrated with all the Ashkenazi² foods and traditions, which have receded since her death and are today adapted creatively in the family. Eve remains an inactive yet committed member of the local Jewish Community.

Being born of a Jewish mother, the traditional religious definition of a Jew, Eve's Jewish identity has never been questioned. However, as she has neither received a traditional Jewish upbringing nor undergone a conversion process, which includes obligatory studies of Judaism, she has not seen the need or had the opportunity to expand her knowledge. Because she lacked an 'institutional anchorage' in the Jewish school, Eve feels she can create a more independent or 'self-motivated' understanding of Judaism; a choice of

1 For the research project *Boundaries of Jewish Identities in Contemporary Finland* (in short the *Minhag Finland* project), 101 members of the Jewish communities in Finland, aged eighteen or over, were interviewed during 2019–20. The interviews were conducted in a number of languages, and the quotations from the Finnish or Swedish interviews used in this article have been translated by the current authors. To meet the requirements of academic detail while honouring the personal integrity of the participating research subjects, a reasonable and functional balance between descriptive detail and generalization has been sought to present the interviewees. They have therefore been given aliases, common Jewish names, and no specific details concerning age, occupation, family ties, or international connections are disclosed. In a small and tightknit community like the one under study, such details would easily compromise the interviewees' anonymity.

2 Ashkenazi Jews – that is, Jews of Central and Eastern European origin. Sephardi Jews, by contrast, are from the areas around the Mediterranean Sea, including Portugal and Spain.

wording resonating with the vernacular framework. 'Because I'm born of a Jewish mother, I don't have to prove anything,' she declares, self-conscious of the internal power structure that works in her favour: 'For a convert to say that I don't know anything and I don't do anything [Jewish] would be impossible.' Yet Eve describes her Jewishness as a 'strong aspect of [her] entire way of being', something she thinks about 'almost all the time' but does not primarily experience as 'religious'. She struggles to find the right description and concludes: 'It's just there; it's a part of me [and] there's nothing left if you take it away.'

Eve also associates a general feeling of estrangement with being Jewish. When still at school, she experienced antisemitic comments and stereotypical remarks concerning her dark looks, temperament, and intellectual skills, all seen as 'typically Jewish'. In professional life she is reluctant to publicly bring out her Jewishness: 'It's not something I usually say when I meet new people, [...] I don't like to always have to position myself.' She thinks her caution is simply part of her outlook on life, but she acknowledges a partly Jewish aspect: 'How much of this is just my own neurosis, and how much is something you feel as a result of generations of estrangement?' Her identification as a Jew varies, depending on the situation and in relation to her social interactions. For her, being Jewish means having a connection with Jewish contexts and narratives, more than with strict criteria of genealogy, observance, or faith.

Eve regrets knowing so little about religion in general and Judaism in particular: 'I'd like to know more so that I could argue better and understand more,' she admits. Institutional ways of doing Jewish, such as synagogue rituals and observance of Jewish law in daily life, are unimportant to Eve, who visits the synagogue a few times a year for special occasions. She dislikes the strict approach of the Helsinki synagogue and refers to experiences from abroad, where a more liberal and informal Jewish community life has appealed to her: 'It was an eyeopener for me that Judaism could be something else.' Although Eve does not uphold a strict Jewish lifestyle, she associates choices and habits of everyday life with her Jewishness. 'I would never buy ham,' she declares, confessing a deep resentment of Christmas but seeing these as rather 'unreflected' reactions: 'just a feeling from somewhere'.

Food memories are an important positive link to tradition for Eve, who orders traditional Ashkenazi dishes for the holidays and vividly describes the happiness she felt when she managed one year to recreate the tastes of her grandmother's dishes herself. Today, she belongs to an international group of Jewish friends, who at times celebrate Shabbat and holidays in an

inventive fusion of customs and foods from all over the Jewish world. These informal and improvised celebrations are deeply meaningful to her, serving as an example of how doing Jewish innovatively strengthens the modality of being without, depending on knowing as the basis for its meaningfulness: 'It's been so much fun,' Eve concludes, 'I have this multikulti gang, it's broadened my thoughts of what is possible and what is ok.'

Materiality figures prominently in Eve's narrative: 'When I think about my being Jewish, the role of objects is important.' This feeling is not limited to formal religious objects: many artworks and textiles from her grandmother's home carry a Jewish association for her at a personal level: 'To me, they have a Jewish meaning, though they're just regular beautiful things.' Although she does not keep Shabbat regularly in her home, she has ordered *havdalah*³ candles for herself, because she misses their smell. Similarly, she has incorporated aspects of Jewishness that comfort and sustain her in her secular life: humming liturgical melodies as lullabies for her child and repeating Hebrew verses to herself. These personalized rituals are so ordinary to her that she almost fails to mention them during the interview: 'Daily life is daily life; it's hard to see it and put it into words.'

As for the dynamics of Eve's vernacular Judaism, the power of context is well established in the examples above, both in her careful selection of situations where she displays her Jewishness and in her positive acknowledgement of how Judaism is done elsewhere. Continuity and change are intimately connected with her apprehension of what being Jewish means and are verbalized in relation to her role as a mother; a link in the chain of traditions and heritage. When asked if her child is Jewish, her answer is ambivalent. She has introduced her child to Jewish things and hopes that a natural interest will come with time, but has not let the child go through institutional rites of passage. Since becoming a parent Eve has thought about tradition in a more complex way. She values the work done by the community to uphold the Jewish heritage in Finland but struggles to accept many of its practices and attitudes. Currently, she cannot find activities that could become natural gateways to more active participation. 'It would have to be something that blends in with everyday life, which is already kind of full and demanding.'

'Things change as you age,' she contends: 'Previously, I thought that it goes naturally, that it's no big deal if I don't keep up traditions so much,

³ *Havdalah* is the ceremony that marks the symbolic end of Shabbat and the start of the new week. Its ritual involves lighting a special *havdalah* candle, blessing a cup of wine, and smelling spices.

and that all this hybrid stuff is ok. But now I've realized: what if everything just withers away?' She hopes that one day her child will experience Jewish traditions as meaningful, as something that binds people together across time and place, a context in which to feel at home. Eve's approach to being, knowing, and doing Jewish in everyday life is summarized in the story of her *mezuzah*.⁴ Moving into a new home, she wanted to hang a small case with a *mezuzah* by her door, as is customary in Jewish homes. She did not know how to do it correctly or what should be inscribed in the scroll. 'Of course, I was in a great hurry, and I live a quite chaotic everyday life,' she laughs. Yet she wanted to get it done and decided to do it her own way, at least as a temporary solution:

So, I just wrote on a piece of paper, and I thought: what's most likely to be written on the real ones? So, I wrote [in the vernacular]: 'Dear, kind whoever you are, protect our home and create all good things for me and my [child],' something like that. And I thought, that has to work.

As time passed, Eve decided to stick to this personal *mezuzah*. The real prayers are usually full of 'oddities' when you start thinking about what they actually say, she reflects: 'So maybe you even get a more reasonable one if you write it yourself.' Who the addressee of the prayer is remains unarticulated: maybe a supernatural, cosmic power, maybe just 'tradition': 'It's a bit like my not buying ham, it's just how it's supposed to be.'

Elijah's story

Elijah's story centres most clearly around questions associated with the modality of knowing – both in a traditional theological sense and in the more vernacular sense of knowing through objects and practices, for example. In his narrative Elijah's Jewishness is tightly bound to the aspect of knowing, strongly influenced by changes, both in his own life and in society at large, and by the local context in which he decided to claim his Jewish identity. Elijah was born abroad and moved to Finland as a child. His father was Jewish, but practising Judaism was not important in his family, and he 'did not have a very Jewish childhood'. However, Judaism was present as an 'identity'. His wish to ensure Jewish continuity by 'securing' their Jewish identity encouraged him to convert to Judaism as an adult with his Lutheran

4 A small parchment scroll upon which the words of the *Shema* are handwritten by a scribe in Hebrew. *Mezuzah* scrolls are rolled up, put into a *mezuzah* case and affixed to the doorposts of Jewish homes, designating the home as Jewish, and reminding those who live there of their connection with God and their heritage.

wife and their children. The Jewish community they joined in Finland does not accept patrilineal ancestry as a basis for membership: they were required to convert to join the congregation and become part of organized Jewish life in Finland. Shortly after the lengthy conversion process was completed, Elijah accepted responsibility for important positions of trust within the community. Contextuality plays a crucial role in this decision: if the local congregation had accepted his patrilineal ancestry, he might have decided not to convert, because it would not have been necessary for claiming an official Jewish identity. However, from Elijah's perspective it was a mere formality, because he regarded himself as Jewish anyway.

Elijah describes Judaism as a 'strange combination of religion and identity'; the most central aspect of who he is, something he 'thinks about every day'. He is aware of what *halachah*⁵ stipulates as necessary criteria for 'being' Jewish, that is: being born of a Jewish mother or having converted through a formal process.⁶ Yet in his narrative the modality of 'knowing' emerges as an additional and crucial aspect of Jewishness. He describes the Finnish community as 'diluted', pointing out that being Jewish to him is not a simple matter of 'bloodline' and heritage, but is above all about knowledge and doctrine, and 'understanding what you do'. He compares the situation to a fiddler's grandchild, who claims to be a fiddler because his grandfather was one, but who cannot play a single note. His analogy is intended to show that knowing takes precedence over 'merely' being: 'If you want to be a fiddler, it isn't enough that your grandfather was a fiddler, you have to know how to play the violin, so you can say that you are a fiddler.'

According to Elijah many people consider ancestry the most important aspect of their Jewish identity, so they do not study the Jewish law or learn about Jewish customs. They are therefore 'unable to read Hebrew' or 'understand anything about synagogue services'. Unlike those born Jewish, converts to Judaism need to study significant amounts of religious law and practice to be accepted as Jews, both formally and socially, in the community.

5 Jewish religious law. Judaism acknowledges the development of *halachah*, but this acknowledgement varies, depending on the denominational context. For example, Conservative or Reform rabbis tend to adapt certain aspects of *halachah* to fit the conditions of the modern world.

6 The halachic expectations concerning who is considered Jewish and what a conversion process entails depend on the specific denomination. For example, Orthodox Jewish congregations do not accept patrilineal descent as a basis for Jewishness, and their conversion processes are generally longer and require strict observance of Orthodox Jewish law from future converts, whereas Reform Jewish congregations may accept patrilineal ancestry, and require the converts-to-be to live in accordance with 'less strict' regulations.

To claim Jewish belonging, he therefore does not consider kinship ties to be 'enough' without sufficient knowledge of Judaism. Like ancestry, belief is a less important aspect of being Jewish to Elijah, who does not describe himself as a religious person with a personal faith and devotion: 'People are paradoxical creatures,' he contends with reference to his own position. 'They can relate to religious things even if they aren't believers.' The modality of doing seems to be insolubly tied to the primary aspect of knowing. Elijah values formal religious rituals and practices, both as practised in the synagogue and at home. Thus, while not considering himself a believer, he is an active and meticulous doer of Judaism. To him, all practices that 'keep up Jewishness' and 'set it apart' are important; he specifically mentions dietary traditions and keeping Shabbat with the family. Previously, when Elijah had formal responsibilities in the community, the family participated more actively in synagogue services, but today the focus has shifted to everyday family life, which he considers an equally important arena for doing Jewish. Regardless of how you practise, the important thing is that you know, he emphasizes, thus underlining the supremacy of this modality in relation to the others.

Context, continuity, and change are all relevant aspects of Elijah's narrative. Perhaps due to his international background, he observes Finnish Jewry somewhat from the outside, criticizing the tendency to cling only to local practices – melodies, liturgical customs, wordings – at the expense of welcoming the growing diversity among Jews living in Finland today. Elijah is well aware of the challenges inherent in being a small peripheral community, and how the local circumstances and context of the diaspora limit the possibility of living an everyday Jewish life. However, he is both pragmatic and open to change: 'We have to compromise.' To him the community's increasing 'internal diversity' is positive, because the norm of what it means to be Jewish in Finland is thus broadened, and Jews with different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds can feel respected and at home. Moreover, Jews from abroad are often 'more knowledgeable' than local Jews, he notes with respect. He acknowledges that his congregation is affected by the surrounding society and its traditions. He mentions flowers brought to the Jewish cemetery as an example; a tradition rooted in the surrounding society, heavily dominated by Lutheran Christianity. Today, most Jewish families in Finland have both Jewish and Christian relatives, so if you bring flowers to Grandma's grave, why would you not do the same for Grandpa, even if he's Jewish, Elijah ponders.

While Elijah welcomes change in how Judaism is done in Finland, continuity is also close to his heart. Like Eve, entering parenthood triggered

reflections on continuity and a wish to 'secure' the tradition for his children. He does not want them 'to be all question marks' about their Jewish belonging, and therefore urges them to learn about the services in the synagogue and Hebrew to 'learn and understand deeply what these [practices] are'. He has 'studied a lot' himself because 'as a child' he 'didn't know a lot about synagogue practices' and is content to see that his children today have 'strong Jewish identities'. Elijah's understanding of Jewishness is aptly concluded in the following account:

Blood can't define who is a Jew. [...] In my opinion you need to self-identify as Jewish, and you need to belong to a Jewish community – that's a Jew for me. But I think it's also essential that you understand the Jewish culture, which includes basic skills. [Not having them] doesn't take away a person's Jewishness, but I think Jews have the obligation to study and acquire a knowledge of Judaism.

Esther's story

For Esther, Judaism is mainly connected with what you do: with rituals and rules of everyday life. Her story shows how the dynamic processes of continuity, change, and context become especially important when 'doing' Judaism – which is the most prevalent modality in her narrative. Judaism for Esther is not only a learned system of religious thought, but primarily a lived practice performed in a context affected by change and continuity. These three movers were all at play, defining and influencing how she observed Jewish traditions in Israel, where she was born, and the – sometimes very different – ways in which she observes them now in Finland. Esther was born to a converted Finnish mother and a Jewish father of *Mizrahi*⁷ ancestry. She received a Jewish upbringing and kept kosher throughout her life, and was enrolled in a religious-public (*mamlachti-dati*) primary school in Israel. She received a Jewish education and had a *bat mitzvah*, which she describes as 'more like a clubbing thing' with a DJ invited to their house; 'there was nothing religious about it,' she says. Yet she describes her father as 'very

⁷ *Mizrahi* Jews are the descendants of the local Jewish communities that existed in the Middle East or North Africa.

religious' but 'not Orthodox, but *Bnei Akiva*⁸ style'. In terms of Jewish practice the family followed the customs of her father's family. Esther moved to Finland as an adult and married a man who was also an immigrant with an ethnic and religious background different both from her own and the Finnish Lutheran majority.⁹ Esther lives in Helsinki and is a member of the local Jewish community.

She has changed her ways of doing Jewish in response to the challenging new context, in which she no longer represents the majority but a small and often unknown minority. She has adapted her everyday life to the new context, accommodating some of the customs of local Jewry and the secular mainstream in her own vernacular practice. Both her Jewish practice and her day-to-day life in a religiously mixed family have changed significantly over the years. In Finland she says it feels she 'sees Judaism from the side' and is 'not into it any longer'. This does not mean that it has become a less important part of her life, she clarifies, 'but I had to adjust'. Esther grew up with certain Finnish traditions – primarily culinary ones – in her family, but her father's *Mizrachi* traditions dominated their household. Having moved to Finland, she found that observance of certain practices in the diaspora was harder and that 'doing religion' was tightly framed by the Finnish mainstream, that is, a secularized society deeply rooted in Lutheran Christianity. In Finland Shabbat comes in early, and the infrastructure is not built to facilitate an observant Jewish lifestyle, at least not the kind she experienced in Israel. Esther mentions several examples of how clashing contexts have imposed change. For example, the Finnish calendar is not adjusted for Jewish holidays, which makes it difficult to harmonize the requirements of working life and religious life; and the Finnish winter weather complicates the religious demand to walk to synagogue on Shabbat.

Food stands out as the single most important symbolically significant practical concern of her day-to-day Jewish life in Finland. Keeping kosher at home is easy, she reports, 'because it depends on you and your house', but other things 'depend on the public', which makes it much more difficult to accommodate, because 'nothing here is kosher'. Esther finds it

8 According to their website 'Bnei Akiva is a Jewish religious Zionist youth movement, which inspires and empowers young Jews all over the world with a sense of commitment to the Jewish people, the Land of Israel and the Torah, placing an emphasis on the value of Aliyah to the State of Israel'. <<https://www.worldbneiakiva.org/>>, accessed 21 July 2020.

9 According to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, as of 2019, 68.6 per cent of the Finnish population belonged to the church. <<https://evl.fi/the-church/membership/the-church-in-numbers>>, accessed 22 July 2020.

difficult to prepare the dishes she associates with some Jewish holidays when ingredients are unavailable and the local Jewish customs favour completely different foodways, based on the dominant Ashkenazi rather than her own Mizrahi traditions. Esther not only represents a minority in Finnish society, but within her own congregation, which has led to her mostly doing Jewish at home with her family. The Finnish synagogues mainly follow Ashkenazi customs, which differ significantly from the Mizrahi customs to which she is used. She therefore finds it 'weird' and 'pretty unfamiliar' to visit the community, because holidays 'did not feel like celebrations, and it wasn't as fun' – echoing the common stereotype of Finns as serious and reserved. The melodies of the prayers were different, and the food was 'horrible'. Her solution to this discomfort was to celebrate the holidays at home, preparing the dishes and following the customs that she misses and 'still loves'. Over time, she has become more creative in her ways of doing Jewish, 'adjusting' her traditions to Finnish life and buying local ingredients to be used innovatively in her Middle Eastern recipes. While Esther embraces change, she clearly also yearns for continuity, both foodways that nurture her sense of Jewish belonging and the customs she associates with practising her religion.

In Esther's practical Judaism, knowing is given little attention. This may be a natural consequence of her upbringing in a predominantly Jewish society, complete with Jewish education and socialization as part of the majority culture. Like Elijah, however, she notes that the local community could be more open to different ways of reciting the liturgy and reading the Torah, based on other Jewish traditions of knowledge than the dominant Ashkenazi practices. The modality of being Jewish has required some rethinking on Esther's part. Being Jewish in Israel was different, because 'if you live in Israel, you don't have to think about how to define a Jew'. Being Jewish is unusual in Finland, where 'nobody cares about religion that much' and many people have 'never met a Jew before'. Switching from a majority status to a minority one influenced her self-perception and made her more conscious of her own Jewishness. When asked what being Jewish means to her, Esther answers that Judaism is 'a way of life' and that a 'Jew is a good person, like in any other religion'. However, here also she emphasizes the doing part in remembering that there are many ways to practise: 'The *halakhah* is created by rabbis' and interpreted in many ways, and there are thus many ways to be and do Jewish. Esther makes her point by saying: 'There is no being

Jewish to me. [...] There is *tzedakah*¹⁰ in any other religion in the world too, [...] so it's being a good person.'

In addition to the change of context, Esther's changing life situation has also required her to reconsider what being Jewish means to her. Esther lives in an interreligious marriage, but says her husband is 'not a religious guy' and does not observe any formal religious customs. However, as a personal vernacular adaption of his tradition, 'he sings some prayers' sometimes, for good luck, 'and I sing my Jewish prayers for him'. She hopes that he will teach their child about his religion to enrich their child's understanding of its diverse ethnic and religious heritage. While open to plurality in her family life, Esther wishes to ensure Jewish continuity and has agreed with her husband to let their child go through Jewish childhood rituals and become part of the covenant. However, she does not want to enrol the child in the Jewish kindergarten or school, because she feels 'it wouldn't be fair to him [her husband] that it's only about my religion'. Instead, they have decided that the child 'can choose whatever [s/he] wants to be'. All in all, Esther regards herself as religious while not believing in strict rules. She jokes she is 'eighty per cent' on the 'scale of Judaism'. However:

If I go back home [to Israel], people will say maybe I'm not religious at all, but I keep my Jewish identity by passing it on to my [child]. I still light candles on Shabbat, and keep kosher food and separate dairy and meat, and have *mezuzot* in the house, and read *Tehillim* [Psalms] sometimes, and say *Shema Israel* before sleeping, I guess? Stuff like that. So, for me, it's a big part of my Jewish identity. [I know it] isn't acceptable in some communities, but it's enough for me.

Conclusions

This article started with the widespread critique of the World Religions Paradigm and other similar schemes that seek to place religions side by side as mutually exclusive monoliths for theoretical comparison. As recent research has convincingly revealed, such epistemologies can be regarded as biased, essentialising, decontextualized, and ahistorical (Cotter and Robertson 2016, 7, 9–10), thus 'running the risk of reductionism and of a failure to recognize expressions of religion that do not fit this framework' (Enstedt 2020, 57).

10 Hebrew, meaning righteousness, justice, charity.

In line with the many ethnographically based approaches that have been developed to broaden the scope of the research field, this article has sought to introduce a novel analytical model for the study of vernacular religion, using an ongoing research project on everyday Jewish identifications in Finland as a pilot study. The model is grounded in the complex interplay between the modalities of being, knowing, and doing religion that are bound by the dynamic movers of continuity, change, and context. It thus identifies and describes the persistent elasticity of religious belonging, practice, and identification. The Jewish context is well suited to demonstrate the constantly ongoing negotiation between the three vernacular modalities, and how varying simultaneities shape the process at societal and individual levels. It is hoped that future research can explore its usefulness in other ethnographic contexts than the one analysed in this article.

In today's pluralistic, complex, and constantly changing world, few individuals maintain a single unified identification throughout their lives. Being, knowing, and doing are conceptual relatives, and manoeuvring between them can be regarded as the manifestation of a person's vernacular religiosity. Identifying such patterns is a valuable analytical asset, we conclude, and to understand the complexity of religious (self-)identification and practice, ethnographies need to be studied in a fully contextualized manner. A model for studying vernacular religion should uncover its dynamics and capture its abundance in a structured methodological frame, but needless to say, lived reality is always more complex than the structures any model can capture. Returning to Russell McCutcheon, whose statement opened this article, we conclude: 'our object of study is the doings of historical human beings and both they and the field that studies them, unlike fossils, are not locked in amber' (McCutcheon 2018, 310).

The divergent narratives of vernacular Judaism in Finland show that individuals may have varying reasons for maintaining their connections with Judaism and may do so in a variety of ways. They highlight the three key modalities of being, knowing, and doing, but also exemplify the importance of situational investigations, reflecting on the dynamics of continuity, context, and change during the – partly conscious, partly unconscious – formation and re-formation of practices and attitudes. As Eve's example demonstrates, secular Jews may feel attached to their ancestry as an assurance of their Jewishness without feeling the need to engage in any specific ritual observance. This allows them to be selective with their practices and form their own traditions, like Eve in creating her own *mezuzah*. This emotional, embodied, and materially concrete act contributed

to her feeling of belonging and confidence, as well as to the building and maintaining of her own Jewishness. Elijah's narrative, especially his fiddler analogy, shows how the conventional boundaries of Jewishness are questioned and contested. He viewed Jewish identification as a matter substantiated in knowledge, while connecting religious practices with the importance of preserving Jewish culture and continuity. He was committed to raising his children as Jews and spoke articulately about the conscious decision to observe traditions to transmit knowledge to them. By referring to people as 'paradoxical creatures', who may perform religious traditions without considering themselves religious in the sense of being 'believers', he verbalized the evasive relationship between culture and religion. Esther, who sought affiliation with the local Jewish community after moving to Finland, found herself to be in a minority in her new country – as well as in her new community. Her practices and attitudes were affected by the changing conditions, making her realize that to live a Jewish life that was meaningful for her, she had to 'adjust' and adapt to the new context. Taken together, the three narratives show how differently the three modalities of vernacular religion can be combined and accentuated in life narratives, and how the movers of continuity, change, and context uphold the perpetual spinning of the wheel chosen as the visualization of the analytical model.

As Steven Sutcliffe contends, the ordinary 'stuff' of which religion is made often 'operates below the radar of "religious entities" and is often portrayed pejoratively by academics and journalists alike: as ephemeral, faddish, and consumeristic – in sum, not "real" religion' (Sutcliffe 2016, 27). In response to such assessments the vernacular perspective can offer a counternarrative that highlights the extraordinary value of ordinary life, including previously marginalized and belittled voices in the conversation. Nevertheless, it can also be employed to strengthen normative discourses of indigeneity and authenticity (Goldstein 2015, 138). Like any other analytical concept, therefore, it must be applied critically and reflectively (Fingerroos et al. 2020, 7).

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Religious Affects and Female Subjects in the Altarpieces of the Finnish Artist Alexandra Frosterus-Sältin: A Case Study of the Jepua Altarpiece ‘Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene’ (1906)

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Abstract

Before the mid-nineteenth century there were few subjects in the altarpiece tradition of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland in which the central figures accompanying Christ were female. Seldom used or new motifs involving female characters now emerged behind the altar. Most of the altarpieces with central women figures were painted in Finland at the turn of the twentieth century by the artist Alexandra Frosterus-Sältin (1837–1916).

In the nineteenth century Frosterus-Sältin was the only artist in Finland who realized the motif of ‘*Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene*’ in her altarpieces. In her final representation of the theme, the altarpiece in the church of the Finnish Jepua commune, she chose an unusual approach to the motif. My interest in the subject lies in the motif’s affective nature – the ways in which altarpieces in general have been actively used to evoke feelings.

Moreover, I consider the influence that Alexandra Frosterus-Sältin, a significant agent in Finnish sacral art, had on consolidating the position of women’s agency in the Finnish altarpiece tradition. I examine the motif in relation to the cultural and political atmosphere of the era, especially the changing gender roles and the understanding of women’s social agency as the women’s movement emerged.

Keywords: affect; Alexandra Frosterus-Sältin; art history; Christianity; emotion; fin-de-siècle; Finland; iconography; religious art; women artists; women’s history

In the mid-nineteenth century the circumstances surrounding the composition of altarpieces changed, as seldom used or new motifs involving female characters began to be seen behind the altar. There were few subjects in the

altarpiece tradition of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland in which the central figures accompanying Christ were female. Most altarpieces in Finland whose main figures are women were painted at the turn of the twentieth century by the female artist Alexandra Frosterus-Sältin (1837–1916).

In this article I discuss Frosterus-Sältin's altarpiece '*Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene*' in the church of the Finnish commune of Jepua. In the nineteenth century Frosterus-Sältin was the only artist in Finland who realized this motif in her altarpieces.¹ In her last representation of the theme, the Jepua altarpiece, she chose an unusual approach. My interest in the subject lies in the ways in which the altarpieces have been actively used to evoke feelings. I investigate the motif's affective nature, and how it conveys a message that aimed to turn the emotions of insecurity, fear, and despair stemming from rapid societal change in a more positive direction, benefiting the church and society.

Moreover, I consider the influence that Alexandra Frosterus-Sältin had on consolidating the position of women's agency in the Finnish altarpiece tradition. Frosterus-Sältin was generally a significant agent in Finnish sacral art, as her production covers nearly a third of the era's altarpieces.² I examine the motifs in relation to the cultural and political atmosphere of the era, especially the changing gender roles and the understanding of women's vocation as the women's movement emerged.

The role of female subjects in shaping the Finnish altar painting tradition

Altar painting is a subgenre of monumental history painting. The artworks were therefore expected to be exceptionally sublime and distinguished. However, at the turn of the twentieth century, the attitude to altarpieces changed.³ This was partly due to artistic Modernism, which emphasized the originality and autonomy of art. Altar painting and church art in general have often been considered inferior to other public art, due to its nature as commissioned work and the religious content of the genre (see, for example, Hanka 1988).

1 I have come to this conclusion based on a list of altarpieces in Finland between 1800 and 1919 in Jorma Mikola's dissertation (2015, 360–79).

2 There have been different estimates of the exact number of Frosterus-Sältin's altarpieces. Jorma Mikola's (2015, 102, 104, 365–7) dissertation lists a total of sixty-five paintings, including not only Evangelical Lutheran altarpieces, but Methodist ones. The article by Heikki Hanka (1992, 137–57) supports these figures.

3 First, in the second half of the nineteenth century in Finland the old craftsman's tradition of church art was replaced by professional artists painting the altarpieces (see, for example, Hanka 1995, 20–4). However, by the end of the century, religious art in general was already seen as outdated and peripheral. The decline in the value of altar painting can be seen in the contemporary press response (see, for example, Mikola 2015, 176).

Fields dominated by women have also frequently been subject to disparagement. In the latter part of the nineteenth century altar painting in Finland saw an increase in women, both among its producers and in its motifs. Alexandra Frosterus-Såltin painted the great majority of such artworks, but other women artists, such as Elin Danielson-Gambogi (1861–1919) and Venny Soldan-Brofeldt (1863–1945), were also interested in the genre. In Frosterus-Såltin's oeuvre the most frequently used motif picturing a central female figure was '*Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene*', which she painted as many as six times.

In the tradition of Protestant altar painting in Finland, few female subjects were seen behind the altar for a long time.⁴ Yet in the late nineteenth century occasional motifs with female figures emerged, such as '*Jesus and the Canaanite Woman*', '*Christ and the Samaritan Woman*', and '*Christ Visiting Martha and Mary in Bethany*' – as well as '*Christ and the Fallen Woman*' and '*Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene*' in more numerous representations. Women also play an important role in the motifs '*Jesus Blessing the Children*' and '*Come unto Me*'.

This change in motifs is interesting and seems especially prominent in Finland. I have compared the motifs of altarpieces with those in Estonia. It is remarkable that in Estonian altarpieces of the same era no such change is apparent. As in Finland there are many depictions of '*Gethsemane*' and the '*Transfiguration*' in Estonian Evangelical Lutheran churches, but only one painting on the theme of '*Jesus Blessing the Children*', and no motifs with women in the central position have been preserved.⁵ In Sweden I could find no comprehensive study or extensive database on the subject, and I therefore could not draw similar conclusions.⁶ Nevertheless, few female figures seem to be depicted behind the altar in Sweden.⁷

4 In general, Erik Erikson (1958, 22) has stated that in Luther's theological formulations the father and son roles were transformed and revitalized, but feminine roles, identity, and theological presence were ignored. The role of the Virgin Mary was impoverished, and almost erased (Doyle 1974, 30–1). Yet in the context of marriage women and sex came to be seen as fundamentally good (Douglass 1974, 292–3).

5 See the database of the Estonian National Registry of Cultural Monuments (accessed 22 May 2019).

6 Hedvig Brander Jonsson's study *Bild och fromhetsliv i 1800-talets Sverige* (1994) offers a good general introduction to the religious visual culture in nineteenth-century Sweden, but it does not discuss altar paintings. Mabel Lundberg's *Kristen bildkonst under 1800-talet och det tidiga 1900-talet. Ett urval av bilder och idéer* (1984) also offers some insight into the religious art of the era.

7 However, concerning the emerging representation of women in Christian art generally, it is important to note that French academic art introduced themes with biblical women from the 1860s. In the Paris Salon of 1864 there were several motifs with biblical women, such as '*Christ and the Samaritan Woman*' by François Charles Savinien Petit (1815–1878) and '*Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene*' by Amédée Beaumes (1820–?), (Website of Moteur Collections, French Ministry of Culture. Accessed 30 June 2020).

Between 1860 and 1919 twenty-seven altarpieces were produced in Finland with a woman as a central figure, according to the preserved evidence (see, for example, Mikola 2015, 360–79). I have not included here the motifs of ‘*Jesus Blessing the Children*’ and ‘*Come unto Me*’, in which women play a minor role. Eleven of the motifs with women were painted by Frosterus-Sältin, and four by other female artists. Frosterus-Sältin’s depiction of women deviates from that in other artists’ works. Furthermore, she introduced entirely new motifs to Finnish altarpieces: ‘*Jesus and the Canaanite Woman*’, the two realisations of which remain the only ones in Finland, and ‘*Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene*’, which the artist painted six times between 1879 and 1906.⁸ In addition to Frosterus-Sältin only Kaarlo Enqvist-Atra (1879–1961) seized on the latter subject. He used the motif in the Lempäälä church, pairing it with ‘*Gethsemane*’.

When the statistics about altar painting in Mikola’s research are examined, it seems that the first altarpiece of the century representing a central female figure was ‘*Widow’s mite*’ (1847) in the Nummi-Pusula area, which, as far as is known, remains the motif’s only realization (see Mikola 2015, 375). Artist Carl Gustaf Söderstrand donated the painting to the parish, but it seems to be the work of an unknown painter from St Petersburg.⁹ The painting was not therefore a premeditated ordered work, and the motif was

8 Researcher Jorma Mikola has interpreted the Harjavalta altarpiece ‘*Christ and the Canaanite Woman*’ as ‘*Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene*’, even though the contemporary press repeatedly referred to the painting as the former motif. He argues that the painting differs from the artist’s other painting on the same theme, which is in Messukylä in Tampere, because the Harjavalta painting does not include the disciples, there are white lilies in the painting, and the sky resembles the sky at sunrise. Mikola *Alttarilta alttarille*, 116–7, 177. I do not find Mikola’s suggestion convincing; indeed, I think it is highly unlikely. First, Frosterus-Sältin herself refers to the Harjavalta painting as the ‘*Canaanite Woman*’, ‘*Christos och caneiska qvinnan*’, in her letter to her brother, as also does the press, as Mikola himself has also noted (see Alexandra Frosterus-Sältin’s letter to August and Tullia Frosterus 21.5.1872, the Private Collection of Kurt and Tora Segercrantz; concerning the press reaction, see, for example, *ÅU*, 30 April 1878; *Morgonbladet*, 2 May 1878; *Satakunta*, 8 June 1878.) Second, the gestures and the painting’s mode do not resemble the motif of Christ appearing to Mary Magdalene in Frosterus-Sältin’s oeuvre. There is no tomb or angel, and the woman has grabbed Christ’s garment in a fashion similar to that in the Messukylä painting. In ‘*Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene*’ there is no physical contact between the figures. The basic rule is ‘*noli me tangere*’, ‘do not touch’. I therefore posit a counter-argument that the Harjavalta painting is indeed the ‘*Canaanite Woman*’. Moreover, researcher Heikki Hanka (1995, 22) has noted that the Harjavalta painting was sometimes also called ‘*Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene*’, but this was a misunderstanding caused by the artist’s use of the same figures in different motifs.

9 Church inventory by H.A. Reinholm, April 1, 1887. Pusula. Index of historical topographic materials. The Archives of the Finnish Heritage Agency; ‘Pusula’. The card index of altarpieces. University of Jyväskylä.

probably a mere coincidence. Before Frosterus-Såltin's paintings a woman appeared as a central figure behind the altar only in the motifs '*Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*' (John 8:2–11) and '*Christ and the Fallen Woman*' (Luke 7:36–38). Robert Wilhelm Ekman (1808–1873) presented the former subject twice in the 1860s, and Bernhard Reinhold (1824–1892) painted the subject once in the following decade. Frosterus-Såltin painted each of the motifs once between the 1870s and 1880s. Nina Ahlstedt (1853–1907) produced one representation of the '*Fallen Woman*'. In addition Elin Danielson-Gambogi (1861–1919), Eero Järnefelt (1863–1937), and Väinö Hämäläinen (1876–1940) painted the motif of '*Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*' once. The number of women artists producing the motifs is considerable when the total number of women altar painters is considered.

In late nineteenth-century European art women were often generally represented as mystical and irrational creatures like merciless Salome or fallen Eve. For example, the thematic of a sexually active woman generally fascinated the imagination of nineteenth-century artists, writers, and social critics in England. The masculine viewpoint of such representations has been underlined by art historians, and their models were found in the Bible, Greek mythology, or in the Finnish context, in the national epic *Kalevala* (Konttinen 1998, 10–23; Nochlin 1982, 221). In contrast, at the same time the female figure was also considered a symbol of purity. In Victorian England a woman's passivity and inability to defend herself against physical violence were seen as tokens of purity and feminine heroism.¹⁰ It is also noteworthy that at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the human soul was increasingly depicted as either a fair young woman or a child. Good examples of the former in Finnish art are Venny Soldan-Brofeldt's *Angel Taking a Human Soul to God* (1906), which was painted after the artwork *Towards a Better World* (1894) by Spanish artist Louis Falero (1851–1896), and Akseli Gallen-Kallela's (1865–1931) painting *Ad Astra* (1894), in which a young girl with flaming red hair can be interpreted as the soul of the male artist himself (Hätönen 1992, 65; Kokkinen 2020, 21; Takanen 2016).

However, a character that serves as an allegory or symbol represents something other than her inner self. According to the early feminist art historians from the 1980s, women artists in the same era represented their own sex differently. They pictured realistic and compassion-evoking suf-

¹⁰ For example, in paintings such as *In Memoriam* (1858) by Sir Joseph Noel Paton (1821–1901), which was dedicated to 'Commemorate the Christian Heroism of the British Ladies in India during the Mutiny of 1857'. The women were considered martyrs for kneeling down and stoically letting themselves be violated and killed (Nochlin 1989, 4–5).

fering, and the subjective feelings of women.¹¹ Yet, according to Riitta Konttinen (1998, 17), the mourning and remorseful female figure in Finnish art differed from the figure represented in Victorian England, for example. It is noteworthy that the female figure in Finnish art often mourned death, loss, or disappointment in life, whereas her English equivalent was more often a fallen wife, driven from the domestic paradise, as Konttinen states, referring to Lynda Nead (1988). Furthermore, Konttinen (1998, 18–9) finds it remarkable that a great number of the pictorial representations of women in Finnish art seemed to promote their intellectuality and the need for their own space; she gives images of women absorbed in a book as an example.

In my view it is reasonable to argue that women artists represented female figures in their own ways in a similar manner; Frosterus-Sältin emphasized women's role in the altarpieces, and powerfully raised women to the site of the Finnish altar. She also underlines the significance of the female figures in the motifs of 'Christ blessing the children' and 'Come unto me' (see Takanen 2016). I will next introduce Frosterus-Sältin's perspective on the motif 'Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene' and then return to an analysis of the Jepua altarpiece.

A shift in focus and affectivity in Frosterus-Sältin's oeuvre

In this paper I present two main features of the artist's approach. First, my Finnish case, the artist Alexandra Frosterus-Sältin, reflects a more general shift in the representation of Jesus, shifting the emphasis from his divine essence and miracles to his human nature and social activity. Second, her performance of this shift represents a distinctive approach, which can be related to the role of women in the kinds of Christian social work that emerged as a response to the anxieties associated with modernization, paralleling the rise of the women's movement and the increased call for women's social agency (for women's social activity in Finland, see, for example, Markkola 2000; Ollila 1998).

I approach the altarpiece from the perspective of contemporary iconographic research and place the artworks in the social, political, and cultural contexts of the era. The basis of my methodology is the Warburgian school's

11 In Barbara Eschenburg's terms for a male artist woman represented 'a different species' (Konttinen 1998 11; Ehrenpreis, 1997, 33–5). Such pioneers of the Anglo-American feminist art history as Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (1981), as well as Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (1982, 7), have stressed the possibility of women artists depicting the female figures in their paintings differently from their male colleagues. Konttinen (1998, 16) highlights that in the late nineteenth century Finnish women artists represented even nude women as agents instead of objects, without emphasizing eroticism.

tradition of comparative cultural studies (*Kulturwissenschaft*), the purpose of which is to understand art in relation to its social, psychological, religious, and philosophical motives (Vuojala 1997, 36–7; Forster 1999). The theories should be subject to critical examination, as a researcher can never gain a complete insight into a past era and its worldviews. A researcher must also construct the context from the premises of our own time and place. Nevertheless, the approach offers essential tools for the interpretation of images – particularly in this case study.

Moreover, I approach the subject through the concepts of *affect* and *affectivity*. The concept of affectivity is utilized in art history when a connection with emotional bodily experience is emphasized. In contemporary cultural studies the concept is used as a contrast to the concept of emotion, which is more culturally understood. Yet it is applied to challenge the concept of mind-body duality (Koivunen 2010, 9–14; Probyn 2005, xv; Grosz 1994, 20–1). Thus, an affect is a more primal reaction or feeling, less defined by the culture than an individual emotion. I use the concept of *emotion* when speaking of a *named feeling*, visualized in the artwork, such as sorrow or anguish. In using the concepts of affect and affectivity, I refer to the effectiveness of the artwork on the level of feeling, that is, the specific way in which affect is used in the religious context to evoke feeling.

First, I will briefly introduce the artist. I will then proceed to the motif. Alexandra Frosterus-Sältin (1837–1916) (Fig. 1) was the daughter of theology professor Benjamin Frosterus and Vilhelmina Sofia (née af Gadolin). Her mother was the first woman in Finland to pass the matriculation examination. She died when Frosterus-Sältin was only seven years old. Her father wanted to educate his daughters as well as his sons, and Frosterus-Sältin therefore received a formal art education, first in Turku in Finland (1852–1857), then in Dusseldorf (1857–1859 and 1860–1862) and in Paris (1862–1863). In Dusseldorf she took private lessons from the portrait and history painter Otto Mengelberg (1817–1890), who greatly influenced her painting style. In 1866 Alexandra Frosterus married Victor Sältin (1833–1873), a hospital doctor in the Finnish city of Vaasa. However, she became the sole provider for her three children after her husband died unexpectedly in 1873 (Juusela 1983, 3–4; Hätönen 2001, 164–5). Over the years Frosterus-Sältin taught art, for example, at the nationally well-established Turku Drawing School, and utilised a large variety of motifs in her oeuvre, which included altarpieces, portraits, genre scenes, and illustrations.

The artist created almost a third of the more than two hundred Finnish altar paintings produced in the era (see Mikola 2015, 102, 104, 365–7),



Figure 1: Aleksandra Frosterus-Såltin. Photo: Daniel Nyblin, 1870–1875. Figure: National Board of Antiquities. The Historical Picture Collection.

and had a strong influence on the genre in the country, both on the variation of motifs and even on how the altarpieces are seen today. However, her work has been little studied. In Finland only Pirjo Juusela (1983) has embraced Frosterus-Såltin's entire oeuvre in her 1983 master's thesis in art history. Art historians Heikki Hanka (1992) and Jorma Mikola (2015) have produced a basic survey of her altarpieces in their presentations covering the entire Finnish altar painting production in the nineteenth century. However, no detailed analysis of the special characteristics of her artworks has been undertaken, although research focusing on Finnish nineteenth-century century women artists in Finland has increased since the 1980s. Furthermore, most late nineteenth-century church art was perceived as uninteresting – due both to its

commissioned nature and its popular appeal and the extensive use of the well-known prints of religious paintings as its models.¹²

The Lutheran church was the state church of Finland. Religious life was therefore very uniform in the nineteenth century.¹³ Most people belonged to the church and saw their church's altarpiece regularly. The paintings reached a huge audience. Generally, since the mid-nineteenth century, the focus of Protestant altar painting in Finland moved towards a more human image of Christ. The previously popular '*Last Supper*' motif disappeared almost entirely. '*The Crucifixion*' also declined in popularity. They were replaced by motifs with different emphases, such as '*Come unto Me*'

12 Concerning copies, see, for example, Hanka 1995, 23.

13 The state church system of Finland was dissolved in 1870. Since then the state and the church have been separate actors. The Lutheran church is independent in its decision making. However, the Lutheran church continues to be the folk church of Finland, with most Finns as its members (website of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, accessed 22 May 2019).

and 'Gethsemane' (see Hanka 1995, 22, 29). The change was part of a larger international phenomenon, as the themes of charity and compassion also became more common elsewhere in northern Europe, at least at the general level of religious art, if not behind the altar itself. For example, researcher Hedvig Brander Jonsson (1994, 267) mentions that Thorvalden's famous sculpture of Christ (1921) in the Vor Frue Kirke in Copenhagen 'was to be the most admired and reproduced work of art of the Protestant North' as 'to many people embracing the religious aesthetics of the 19th century a crucifix image was objectionable'. It was understood that Christ was to be portrayed as an embodiment of mercy and beauty. Brander Jonsson (*ibid.*, 279) finally notes that the iconography of compassion was abundant in pious imagery in nineteenth-century Sweden.

Frosterus-Sältin's works at first seem conventional in this context, but a closer inspection reveals variations and nuances that have renewed the depiction of these particular motifs in Finland. The women in many of her paintings appear in an active role – affecting their fate by seeking direct interaction with Christ (see Takanen 2011). The pathos is emphasized through the individuals' gestures and facial expressions. The artist introduced motifs in which individual women faced Jesus alone, as in '*Christ and the Canaanite Woman*' and '*Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene*', and made changes to other emergent motifs. Her treatment of the subjects such as '*Come unto Me*' differed from the prevailing convention.

Mary Magdalene in Frosterus-Sältin's oeuvre

As previously mentioned, Frosterus-Sältin was the only artist in the nineteenth century in Finland who used the motif of '*Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene*' in her altarpieces, also known as *Noli me tangere* (Latin for 'Do not touch me'). The motif remained unusual well into the first decades of the twentieth century. Apart from Frosterus-Sältin only Kaarlo Enqvist-Atra realized it, once, in 1902 (Fig. 2). Yet I find it important to note that he paired the motif with '*Gethsemane*'. His treatment of the subject differs considerably from that in Frosterus-Sältin's paintings.

Frosterus-Sältin used '*Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene*' as the main altarpiece motif, rather than pairing it with another. The motif is based on a passage in the Gospel of John, in which Mary Magdalene encounters



Figure 2. Kaarlo Enqvist-Atra: Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene, 1902. The right-hand panel of the Lempäälä twin altarpiece. Photo: Parish of Lempäälä.

the risen Christ while visiting the tomb on Easter morning.¹⁴ The other gospels mention two, three, or more women visiting the grave. The artist has therefore consciously chosen the one passage in which Mary Magdalene encounters Christ alone. The motif in her paintings thus differs from the altarpieces *'The Women at Jesus's Grave'* by Alma Judén in Nuijamaa (1904) and Berndt Lagerstam in Koivulahti (1905), in which an angel is addressing the women. The Koivulahti altarpiece is in fact a copy of Axel Ender's (1853–1920) painting *Engelerscheinung* (s.a.) in Molde Cathedral in Norway. It is indeed especially valuable to examine the lithographs of famous artworks in illustrated Bibles, which influenced artists widely.

Frosterus-Sältin painted the motif six times, the first in 1879 at Ilmajoki and the last in 1906 at Jepua.¹⁵ I focus here mainly on the Jepua altarpiece, because its *gestics*,

14 'But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God'. John 20:11–17 (Authorized Version, AV).

15 She also painted the motif in Hämeenlinna (1892), Orivesi (1893, destroyed in a fire in 1958), Valkeala (1893, destroyed in a fire in 1920) and Virrat (1897).

or body language, differ remarkably from her other depictions of the motif. In Frosterus-Såltin's altarpiece for the church of Virrat, for example, she makes use of the usual *Noli me tangere* theme, where Christ forbids the awed Mary Magdalene to touch him immediately after he encounters her outside the tomb following his resurrection. According to the Gospel of Mark (Mark 16:9) Mary Magdalene was the first person to whom Jesus appeared alive after the resurrection. In the Authorized Version (John 20:17, AV) the passage reads:

Jesus saith to her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren, and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.

Mary Magdalene reaches out to Christ, who avoids the touch. Doctor of theology Turid Karlsen Seim (2013, 47–49) has pointed out that in the passage Jesus is in a liminal phase, 'betwixt and between', in the middle of a transformation. The ascension is thus in process, and there is a certain tension in the scene. However, exegetes have long disagreed about the syntax of the original expression. Some researchers argue that Christ's words may indeed mean the more abstract 'do not hold on to me' rather than the physical 'do not touch me' (Rafanelli 2013, 145). Indeed, in the New International Version (John 20:17, NIV), the passage reads:

Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'.

The Ilmajoki altarpiece (1872) (Fig. 3) is the most traditional of the artist's uses of the motif, as Juusela (1983, 69) has already noted. On the right-hand edge of the painting Christ is standing in all-white clothing. Mary Magdalene, with reddish hued hair and dressed in a green dress, is kneeling next to a rock, diagonally in front of him. She is reaching out to Christ with both hands. Christ gestures to her with his right hand, which can be interpreted either as blessing or forbidding, or both. His left hand is pointing towards the heavens. The white lilies growing next to Christ are often connected with him and purity in Christian iconography (Ferguson 1961, 41). The surrounding landscape is bare and flat; a group of buildings can be seen in the distance. As an interesting detail the ground is green and fertile where Christ is standing, but the earth under Mary Magdalene's feet is barren and



Figure 3. Alexandra Frosterus-Sältin, *Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene*, 1879, oil painting, 191 x 96 cm. Altarpiece, Church of Ilmajoki, Finland. Photo: Heikki Hanka.

over death and sin (Ferguson 1961, 46). In the Virrat altarpiece the three crosses of Golgotha are seen in the distance, contrasting with the miracle of the resurrection.

Mary Magdalene is known as one of the most devoted followers of Christ. In the European tradition she has also often been identified as the sister of Martha and Lazarus in Bethany, though views have differed on this. Moreover, it is important to note that the figure of Mary Magdalene has often been connected to that of the fallen woman whom Christ encounters at the house of a Pharisee (Luke 7:36–50, AV), though the woman is unnamed (Murray and Murray 2004 [1996], 315–6). It remains unresolved whether these women are one and the same, or three completely different women. However, it is important to recognize the connection, as it may have affected the overall representation of the figure. This understanding of the figure of Mary Magdalene was especially present at the turn of the twentieth century.

covered with reddish sand. This contrast emphasizes the duality between humanity and divinity, death and resurrection. Green as a symbol of hope, life, and growth has often marked the anticipation of resurrection in Christian iconography (Lempiäinen 1988, 30–55).

The altarpieces of Hämeenlinna and Virrat are more similar to each other in their composition than to the Ilmajoki piece. Nevertheless, the basic gestures and the mode of representation are similar. There is only one exception: in the Virrat painting (Fig. 4) Christ's left hand is no longer pointing towards the heavens but is bent against his chest. However, the main transformation in the motif is the presence of an angel leaning on a stone slab and holding a palm leaf, symbolizing victory

It is therefore noteworthy that Frosterus-Såltin seems to have separated the two figures in her paintings. Traditionally, long red hair has been essential in picturing Mary Magdalene (Loverance 2007, 114). However, the Fallen Woman in Frosterus-Såltin's painting is dark-haired, while the woman in *'Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene'* has light hair with a reddish hue. In addition, in *'The Crucifixion'* and some of her other motifs, Mary Magdalene is represented with similar reddish hair. It seems to me that the artist may not have seen the fallen woman and Mary Magdalene as the same person. Yet the Mary in her Bethany painting bears a strong resemblance to Mary Magdalene.

Frosterus-Såltin painted *'Jesus visiting Martha and Mary in Bethany'* (1912) (Fig. 5) once for the Palosaari church in Vaasa. In the passage, Jesus and the disciples visit a village and stay at the house of Martha and her sister Mary. Martha serves the guests. Mary sits at the feet of Jesus to listen to him. Martha asks Jesus to tell Mary to help her, but Jesus tells her that Mary has chosen the 'good part, which shall not be taken away from her'. (Luke 10:38–42, AV) Constance Parvey (1974, 141) states that the story of Mary and Martha enables women to choose a new alternative, to depart from their ascribed role at the encouragement of Christ himself. This reflected a change in the status of women.

In my view the Bethany motif's treatment of Mary supports my perspective well with respect to the paintings of the *'Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene'* motif in Frosterus-Såltin's oeuvre. The artist herself offered to paint the altarpiece as a gift for the new church of Palosaari, completed



Figure 4. Alexandra Frosterus-Såltin: *Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene*, 1897, oil painting, 258 x 172 cm. Altarpiece, Church of Virrat, Finland. Photo: Parish of Virrat / Anssi Nyman.



Figure 5. Alexandra Frosterus-Sältin, Jesus visiting Martha and Mary in Bethany, 1912, oil painting. Altarpiece, Palosaari church, Vaasa, Finland. Photo: Parish of Vaasa.

in 1910. She suggested the motif of 'Jesus Visiting Martha and Mary in Bethany', because the name of the prayer house at the time was Bethany (in Finnish *Betania*).¹⁶ The name, of course, partly motivated the choice, yet it remains noteworthy that this was the first time Frosterus-Sältin painted it. I assume that she preferred the theme herself, because it was she who made the suggestion. Jorma Mikola (2015, 181–2, see also Hall 1995) has observed that the motif of Martha and Mary in Bethany in the European tradition has often included the women's brother, Lazarus, and some disciples were also present. I therefore find it very typical of Frosterus-Sältin to rule the men out of the picture and focus on the relationship between the women and Christ.

The case of the Jepua altarpiece

In the Jepua altarpiece (Fig. 6) the composition is quite different from the motif's previous representations in Finland. Mary Magdalene is kneeling towards the entrance of the tomb. Her back is turned to Christ, and she has buried her face in her hands. Rather than withholding his touch, Christ has extended his left arm towards Mary Magdalene, which suggests that he is encouraging the woman to take his hand. The woman and Christ are in complete contrast, both as regards their body language and the colours of their garments. Christ is illuminated from behind by the morning sun, which blends into his aureole. The sunrise is a traditional symbol of Christ's atonement, through which the darkness of sin was overcome, and the light

¹⁶ She described the painting as follows: '*Den tafla jag talade om med ämne ur syskonens lif och hem med Jesus såsom gäst, är en skänk af mig till bönehuset Betania här*' ['The piece I talked about, with the motif of the sisters' life and home with Jesus as a guest, is my gift for the prayer house Bethany here'], Alexandra Frosterus-Sältin's letter to Vilhelmina (Minna) Helander, 12 March 1912. Gunnar Mårtensons samling. 3. Helanderska Brevsamlingen. Åbo Akademi University Library, Manuscript Collections; see also Mikola 2015, 182; *Wasa-Posten* 26.11.1910.

of redemption was brought into the world (Ferguson 1961, 54).

According to Moshe Barasch (1987, 173), in the western tradition two typical gestures are depicted in representations of the motif of Christ appearing to Mary Magdalene: Mary Magdalene's outstretched hands; and the emphasized *contrapposto* of Christ. The Jepua altarpiece is an exception to this convention. The gestures and position of Christ are calm as he reaches out to the woman. However, in the sketch the artist made for the painting (see Hanka 1995, 59) Christ is not reaching out. On the contrary, he is standing in a neutral upright position, with his hands crossed on his chest. The gesture can be interpreted as rejection, but I prefer to suggest it should be read as a neutral representation of his posture. The reason for the variation in the composition is that the painting represents the moment before the distressed and weeping Mary Magdalene notices Christ, as the note 'John 20: 11–14' on the sketch indicates. However, what is surprising is Christ's gesture of reaching out, which Frosterus-Sältin has added to the final painting. In the verse immediately following Christ explicitly says that no one must touch him. Given that it contradicts the biblical text, what could have made the artist make this change?¹⁷

The Jepua altarpiece made a great impression on the editor of the women's journal *Veckans Krönika*, who visited Frosterus-Sältin's studio in the spring of 1906. The editor praised the painting as one of the artist's best altarpieces (Mikola 2015, 127; D. S-m. 1906, 651–2). The atmosphere of the finished painting is indeed very dramatic and powerful. The despair and

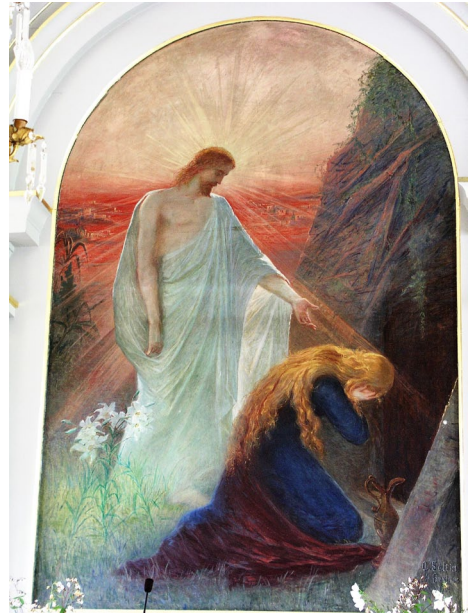


Figure 6. Alexandra Frosterus-Sältin: Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene, 1906, oil painting, 258 x 175 cm. Altarpiece, Church of Jepua, Uusi-Kaarlepyy, Finland. Photo: Heikki Hanka.

17 Juusela (1983, 69) and Mikola (2015, 194–5) have also noted the artist's exceptional mode of representing the motif. Mikola (*ibid.*, 195) has connected the Mary Magdalene figure in the Jepua painting to Frosterus-Sältin's own personal feelings of despair, on the basis of Riitta Kontinen's (2008, 116) argument that the artist felt misunderstood in her later life.

anguish of Mary Magdalene are more pronounced in the Jepua painting than in earlier depictions of this event by Frosterus-Såltin, where the artist has chosen the moments before Mary Magdalene discovered Christ's resurrection. The Jepua altarpiece was a donation made by Finnish emigrants in South Africa. In 1905 the newspaper *Pohjan Poika* (20 September 1905, 3) stated that the donors had proposed '*Jesus Comforting Martha and Mary at the Grave*' as the subject (Mikola 2015, 126). It therefore cannot be ruled out that the unusual execution was prompted by the donors' wishes. Nevertheless, the romantic sentiment was typical for the art of Frosterus-Såltin, and the details in execution were her innovations. However, the artist clearly understood the affective power of the iconographical type of Mary Magdalene she used in her Jepua altarpiece, because she used exactly the same *topos*, the iconographical type, in some of her other altar paintings such as '*The Crucifixion*' and '*Come unto Me*'.¹⁸

The reuse of such practically motivated gestural types is common in religious art. In the late nineteenth century Aby Warburg developed a theory about the useful gestural images and iconographical types describing emotion that have persisted through different periods in western Europe. They always emerge anew, though sometimes they have changed somewhat, either in appearance, content, or context. Warburg has called such images of passionate and emotionally charged gestural language the *Pathosformel* (Vuojala 1997, 107–9; Kleinbauer and Slavens 1982, 76–7; Warburg 1999 [1907], 249; Forster 1999, 15. See also Johnson 2012, 62–3; Becker 2013). I see the figure of Mary Magdalene in the Jepua altarpiece as a *Pathosformel*, because its basic emotion is very strong and communicates clearly with the viewer. The whole composition is very affective, both in the physical language of the gestures and in the immaterial connotations. The connotations relate to the implied viewer's knowledge of all the biblical passages that include Mary Magdalene. The altarpiece thus affects the viewer at an emotional level, either consciously or without a full recognition of either the affect or the biblical detail.

Mary Magdalene in the context of a changing society

Frosterus-Såltin's altarpiece provides new information about and understanding of the agency and position of women in the period. Moreover, the Jepua altarpiece can be analysed in relation to the social context of the

18 This detail has already been noted by Pirjo Juusela (1983, 69).

time. In the period between 1860 and 1914 most European societies were experiencing extensive modernisation. In Finland major transitions were also occurring in the social structure and at an ideological level. In the late nineteenth century religious sentiment was undergoing change. With the rise of individualism, the relationship between God and the individual became more of a personal matter than the previous experience of a collective faith. Everyone was responsible for her or his own salvation, and was alone before God. Contemporaries reminded themselves and each other of the importance of continuous spiritual striving and the need to beware of the danger that love of the world might lead them away from the right path (Siltala 1992, 28–9, 31, 35–8).

During the nineteenth century four revivalist movements emerged in Finland.¹⁹ According to psycho-historian Juha Siltala, the process of individualization was accompanied by anguish, as the breakdown of traditional life and a stable community made people lose their sense of direction and awakened anxiety about what would happen to the individual. At the social level an attitude of despair and the need for a state of grace in some form was common in the face of the turbulence of modernization. In his study Siltala notes how the Finnish revivalists reminisced in old age about how easily people were overcome by emotion. The mere tolling of death bells caused people to burst into tears and filled them with contrition.²⁰ The changes in society and religious life also manifested themselves in altarpieces, especially those by Alexandra Frosterus-Såltin, because they began to emphasize the compassion and mercy of Christ. At the turn of the century religion offered comfort and the promise of God's acceptance and benevolence, as long as one humbled oneself and accepted divine guidance.

This was also a guiding principle of the Christian charity and social work movement, most of which was organized and carried out by women volunteers. This domestic mission's practical social work was driven by Christian conviction, and it sought to remove or at least to alleviate societal defects, as Pirjo Markkola (2000, 2002) has asserted in her research on

19 The movements were *Supplicationism*, *Pietism*, *Laestadianism*, and the *Evangelical Movement*. In Finland revival movements have characteristically organized themselves within the church. The nineteenth-century revivals therefore did not generally lead to the establishment of free churches as in other western Protestant countries. However, they catalysed a process of renewal within the church itself (Huotari 1982, 113–23).

20 According to Siltala (1992, 28–31, 35–8), revivalism spread like a group psychosis in early nineteenth-century Finland. Farmworkers in distant fields would suddenly feel severe distress. Siltala suggests that the origins of the phenomenon are related to the changes in society towards a more individualistic culture.

Christian social work in Finland between 1860 and 1920. What is especially noteworthy in this work of mercy is that a great many upper- and middle-class women saw this work as a woman's calling. They established homes for 'fallen' women and orphaned children. They worked among the poor in towns, visited prisons, and became involved in improving the harsh living conditions endured by women and children (see, for example, Markkola 2000; Antikainen 2004). This calling was also used as a justification by and for women to work outside the home.

The position of women in Finnish society experienced a gradual change in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The 1863–1864 parliament granted sovereignty to unmarried women, which made them free to dispose of their property and earn wages. This reform made it possible for women to survive even without marriage and a family. Nevertheless, women were still at a disadvantage to men in proprietary and succession rights, and a married woman was subject to her husband's guardianship. The women's rights movement demanded equality in the new Marriage Act (Pollari and Pollari, 2009, 112–3).²¹ Furthermore, male and female sexuality was perceived very differently among the bourgeoisie. The leading Finnish sex educator, the professor of hygiene Max Oker-Blom (1863–1917), saw women as pure, fragile, spiritual, and non-sexual beings. Men, on the other hand, were more corporeal, carnal, and stronger. The sexuality of men knew no boundaries, but they were expected to learn to control their urges out of respect for their wives and families. The author Maria Furuhjelm (1846–1916), a central agent in the Finnish Women's Association, wrote that men had double standards, committing acts they would never allow other men to commit, much less their own wives and daughters. The same degree of purity should be demanded of men as of women. Most of the women's movement condemned premarital and extramarital relationships, because it was women who suffered their consequences (Pollari and Pollari 2009, 117–8, 120, 136).

This view of women and women's new calling was in a sense in line with women's expectations, because humility was especially required of them, and religion, with its requirement to submit to the will of God, was likewise seen as more relevant for women than for men (Ollila 1997, 120). However, their increasingly individual relationship with God also gave women their own personal space. Siltala (1992, 48; see also Moilanen 1987,

21 In Finland married women were liberated from the guardianship of their husbands as recently as 1930, when the new Marriage Act was passed. This was much later than the granting of the rights to vote and run for parliament, which were passed in 1906 (Pylkkänen 1992, 106–7).

81–90, 100–6) remarks that although women were expected to submit to their fathers' will and to earthly obligations, their relationship with God allowed a certain freedom and personal feelings. The idea of a social calling simultaneously broadened the conception of women's position in society, the midpoint of which had been their duties as a wife and mother. For example, Lucina Hagman (1853–1946), a central figure in the Finnish women's rights movement, criticized the female ideal that discouraged young women from being strong and active, encouraging them only to please others with their appearance and conduct. She felt that this style of upbringing for gentlewomen prevented their development as human beings and left them in a state of helplessness. She cited the strong agrarian woman, whose physical strength was not restricted by clothing and codes of conduct, as the gentlewoman's opposite (Ollila 1997, 122.) However, this new female ideal, 'a societal mother', was expected to be a fully moral and ethical figure, who also guarded the morality of others (see, for example, Helén 1997, 152–4).

The increase in the number of feminine motifs behind the altar coincided with a phase in which the debate about women's vocational status in society was in transition and the object of much attention. The 1880s especially were a time of many social changes and the rise of the women's movement in Finland. Women's great involvement in civic activity and in different organisations was especially new (see Ollila, 1998, 10; Kontinen 1988, 18, 45). In the '*Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene*' motif it is a woman who is told to spread the message of Christ's resurrection – and not just any woman, but Mary Magdalene, who was a disciple of Jesus.²² This is especially fitting in an era in which women, following Christ's example, were engaged in Christian social work and charity. I find it especially noteworthy that it is Christ who is reaching out to Mary Magdalene in the Jepua altarpiece. He is the one commencing a dialogue and paying attention to her; in the usual execution of the motif it is the other way round.

Art historian Lisa Marie Rafanelli (2013, 151) has interestingly underlined that 'in many respects, the Magdalene acts with the capabilities and authority of a man: she hears and comprehends the Word of God, recognizes Christ, and tells the male disciples that she has seen the Lord.' Thus, she assumes apostolic primacy. According to Rafanelli feminist theologians have also argued that early Christianity broke with the Judaic and other

22 There were other women with a special status, including those referred to as disciples. It should be remembered that there is no agreement in the New Testament concerning how many disciples there actually were, or who they were (see, for example, Parvey 1974, 144–5; Marjanen, 2002, 41.)

ancient traditions by encouraging women to participate more fully in the faith. Women assumed not only the roles of disciples, but ministerial and leadership positions. I find it fascinating that a passage in which a woman is an important messenger of the gospel became an important motif at a time when the proportion of women participating in the public life of society was increasing.

Conclusion

The affect conveyed by the character of Mary Magdalene on the Jepua altarpiece strongly communicates agony and sorrow. It can also be viewed in the context of shame, because Mary Magdalene is considered a penitent sinner. However, the painting represents two sides of the same coin, because Christ offers Mary acceptance and salvation by reaching out with his open hand – a gesture which conflicts with the biblical passage and the motif's conventional iconography.

In my view the fact that the artist has represented the passage in an unusual way and has given Christ a role as the comforter of the grieving and absolver of sinners is connected with 1) the psychosocial need for redemption, exaggerated by the rapid social changes of the time, and 2) an emphasis on the Christian charity and social work carried out mostly by women among the poor, the 'fallen', and others in need of both spiritual and physical help.

In conclusion I argue that it is significant in the Jepua painting that it is specifically Christ who is seeking to make contact with Mary Madgalene, not the other way round. The female figure thus becomes a link between the sacred and the profane as she is told to spread the message of Christ's resurrection. This was especially appropriate in an era in which many women, following Christ's example, engaged in Christian social work and charity. This female agency also sums up the modifications that Alexandra Frosterus-Såltin introduced to the iconography of Mary Magdalene.

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TEMENOS

NORDIC JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION

Temenos Vol. 56 No. 2 (2020), 227–49

DOI: 10.33356/temenos.79326

Negotiating Religion: Cultural Representations of Conservative Protestant Women and Girls in Northern and Western Europe¹

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Abstract

This article analyses the production of gendered subjectivities in contemporary cultural representations of women and girls belonging to conservative protestant communities in Northern and Western Europe. We take the recent work of the Finnish and Dutch female novelists Pauliina Rauhala and Franca Treur as our case study. We explore how their novels represent the negotiations of women and girls from conservative protestant faiths and traditions. Approaching the novels as narratives of sense-making, we focus on notions of creativity and imagination, and gendered embodied experiences. Our analysis thus sheds light on contemporary understandings of women in conservative religions in contemporary Northern and Western Europe.

Keywords: *representation; literary fiction; sense-making; women; conservative religion; Europe*

1 We are grateful to a number of institutions and foundations that have financially supported us in writing this article, including the Argumenta project 'Uskontolukutaito moniarvoisessa yhteiskunnassa'; the Catherina Halkes Foundation; the Erasmus+ Mobility programme; the Eemil Aaltonen Foundation ('Lestadiolaisuuden yhteiskunnalliset verkostot'); the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Lapland; and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research-funded project 'Beyond 'Religion versus Emancipation': Gender and Sexuality in Women's Conversions to Judaism, Christianity and Islam in Contemporary Western Europe'. We would also like to thank Anne-Marie Korte, Aini Linjakumpu, Lieke Schrijvers, Lucy Spoliar, and Mariecke van den Berg, as well as the anonymous peer reviewers, for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this article.

This article explores contemporary constructions of gendered subjectivities in cultural representations of women and girls belonging to conservative protestant communities in Northern and Western Europe. The protestant traditions referred to are Conservative Laestadianism in Finland and orthodox reformed Protestantism in the Netherlands. Both these communities make up about one to two per cent of the total population of their respective countries, forming relatively small but influential religious minority groups (Talonen 2016; Derks et al. 2014). Our case study is the recent work of Finnish and Dutch female bestselling and widely read novelists Pauliina Rauhala and Franca Treur. Inspired by interdisciplinary conversations in the study of religion, cultural studies, anthropology, and gender studies, we examine how their novels reflect on the lived process of negotiating religion. This article thus makes a significant contribution to the consideration of how conservative protestants are represented in contemporary popular culture and literature.

We approach popular culture as a formative space within which conceptions and understandings of religion are generated (Stone 2013, 403). We thus consider cultural productions not as merely conveying informative portrayals or constructing imaginaries, but simultaneously as potential sites of religious experience and meaning-making (Morgan 2008, 6–7). The novels that are central in this article are bestselling stories emerging from and shaping Finnish and Dutch popular culture. Through popular stories both authors and readers potentially make sense of their experiences and interpret the social world. As media and cultural theorist Michael Pickering puts it, '[i]n everyday life and popular culture, we are continually engaged in narratives of one kind or another. They fill our days and form our lives' (Pickering 2009, 6). This claim about the cruciality of stories to human life and culture (Pinker 2007, 162) assumes no causal relationship between cultural productions and people's everyday subjective understandings and experiences. It only posits a relationship between them: movies, memoirs, and novels influence how we perceive and experience the world, and vice versa. They have the potential to be memory-shaping media (Erll 2008, 395–7) or to function as mediums through which religious identities are represented, and the 'sacred' becomes manifest in the world (Meyer 2011). Moreover, cultural productions can be a platform for conveying narratives that align with dominant representations of people, objects, and events; but they may equally provide opportunities for telling 'other' stories by starting from marginalized voices, bodies, and experiences (van den Brandt 2019a).

Our main question is: how do the writings of Rauhala and Treur represent women and girls negotiating protestant faith and tradition? The notion of representation used here refers to the production and construction of meaning (Hall 1997; Wallenius-Korkalo 2013), while the term negotiation refers to dealing with mechanisms of power and difference. We thus consider these literary texts as representations that are formative cultural practices: they summon new ways of seeing and understanding (Felski 2008, 9–10) women and girls negotiating their gendered subject positions. In what follows we further situate this article in current interdisciplinary discussions of popular culture, lived religion, and agency. Second, we briefly introduce the religious communities to which the novels relate and the novels themselves. For our analysis we introduce the concept of sense-making, which helps us to focus on various aspects involved in representing female subjectivities and their lived religious practices embedded in conservative protestant communities. Third, our analysis explores how female subjectivity in conservative protestant communities is understood. Finally, we address the issue of representation in relation to the place of conservative religious communities in contemporary Northern and Western European societies.

Representations of women's lived religion

In the introduction we situated this article partly in the broad field of cultural studies. While cultural studies has developed in fruitful connection with literary theory (Bertens 2014), it has largely developed separately from and outside religious studies. However, the anthropologist Malory Nye (2004) has argued that it is relevant and rewarding to bring cultural studies perspectives into a conversation with religious studies and anthropology. We approach the novels by posing questions typically asked by cultural studies scholars, namely: how are the authors and their novels doing what they are doing within the context of their work, but also with reference to the particular traditions and societies in which they are located? The literary works we analyse somewhat blur the boundaries between fiction and autobiography/memoir. While both Rauhala and Treur emphasize that their novels are fiction, both construct their stories on the basis of their own lived experiences within the traditions and communities they describe. However, a simple 'inside perspective' cannot be assumed here. Both authors have distanced themselves from the communities in which they grew up, which means that their narratives are ways of looking back, reflecting, memorizing, and making sense of self, others, and society.

Methodologically, we assess these novels as both representations and fictive narrations of lived experience. Scholars of religion, media, and culture helpfully remind us that the two are often interrelated. Cultural productions communicate religion-as-lived or religion-as-it-has-been-lived: while creating fictive worlds, they draw on lived realities (Morgan 2008). Religious studies scholar and anthropologist Birgit Meyer argues that studying the forms in which religious life is culturally mediated is crucial to an understanding of how religious realities are constructed and maintained (Meyer 2015a, 1), or we would add, reflected on. Representations in popular culture or literary works may influence the embodied, affectual, aesthetic, and ethical basis of the religious life being portrayed (Forbes 2005, 10–6; Lynch, Mitchell, and Strhan 2012, 3). In the case of Rauhala and Treur and the reception of their work, it could be argued that representations of religion may equally function as sources for the embodied, affectual, aesthetic, and ethical basis of *secular* perspectives and lives when read by a diverse audience, including secular and religious readers of various backgrounds. We will return to this issue at the end of the article.

Our analysis discusses how the novels convey/construct women's and girls' lived experiences. We use the sociological notion of 'lived religion', the critical concept of agency, and religious studies scholars' understandings of negotiating religion to examine how the novels' female characters are embedded in their conservative protestant communities on a daily basis. Conceptualized by sociologist Meredith McGuire (2008), 'lived religion' shifts attention from religious institutions to everyday experiences that are embodied, hybrid, ambiguous, and importantly, gendered (160–161) and embedded in power relations. From the angle of the anthropology of Islam, Saba Mahmood (2005) has pushed us to broaden our appreciation of the lives of women belonging to conservative religious traditions. She urges us to consider agency in terms of the capacity to act, taking issues of morality, embodiment, and desire seriously. Mahmood helps us to ask what Rauhala and Treur convey as the discursive context in which their female characters come into being, and what these characters then consider viable, desirable, and legitimate thoughts and actions. We pose such questions about the representation of female characters *aspiring to* a pious life, as well as *struggling with* the religious traditions they are thought to value. Such an assessment of the novels will reveal what the authors consider to be conservative protestant gendered forms of agency and life.

Both novels focus on how women and girls live and sometimes struggle with protestant faith and community. Exploring women's and girls' strate-

gies of negotiating their faith and communities highlights how the novels present mechanisms of power and difference. These can be studied by focusing on moments of both lived piety and struggle, doubt, incoherence, and conflict. Research by religious studies scholars on negotiating religion demonstrates that experiences of uncertainty, doubt, and dissonance can be productive of subject-formation in diverging ways: a self-perceived 'failure' in religious life and straying from the path may invigorate lived religion (Kloos and Beekers 2017), or it may lead subjects to distance themselves or disaffiliate from their religious life and community, some with and some without reaffiliation (Streib 2014). The novels present women's and girls' aspiration for an individual pious life and striving for collective belonging. Yet they also present moments of dissonance between conflictual desires and conflict with the community. Piety, belonging, and conflict are all narrated as profoundly embodied experiences. Our analysis therefore explores the embodied dimension of the representation of religion-as-lived-and-negotiated by women and girls. Anthropologist Peter van der Veer identifies a recent turn to the study of embodiment, materiality, and power. Van der Veer observes that protestant traditions have often been considered important historical sites of thinking about the reflexive subject, unmediated access to the divine, and agency (2008, 813). We suggest it is relevant to study cultural representations of women's negotiations with protestant faith and traditions, because it sheds light on the gendered experiences of women's agentic 'lived religion', as well as on broader issues of representation.

The above discussion of theories of popular culture, lived religion, and agency helps us in what follows to draw attention to the novels' representation of female characters belonging to conservative protestant communities in Finland and the Netherlands. Our analysis explores how struggle and conflict emerge through the topics of creativity and imagination, and the gendered body. However, we first briefly introduce the protestant traditions and communities to which the novels relate.

Conservative Protestantism in Finland and the Netherlands

The protestant traditions referred to by the novels are Conservative Laestadianism in Finland and orthodox reformed Protestantism in the Netherlands. Conservative Laestadianism is the largest branch of Laestadianism, a protestant revival movement founded on the spiritual work of the Swedish-Sámi scientist and priest Lars Levi Laestadius (1800–1861). The movement is most prominent in Finland, where Laestadians constitute about two per cent of

the country's population, and Conservative Laestadians have around 90,000 members (Talonen 2016, 134). Despite its relatively small size, Conservative Laestadianism is an influential movement to which many entrepreneurs, business owners, and politicians belong (Linjakumpu et al. 2019). Conservative Laestadians are officially part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, but they also have their own religious organizations, called *rauh-anyhdistys* (peace associations).² Conservative Laestadianism maintains an exclusive view of a 'church within a church', considering their organization to be Christianity in its purest form, holding that outside their group salvation is impossible. Conservative Laestadians diverge from mainstream Finnish society in that they live by strict theological and moral codes. For example, Conservative Laestadians do not approve of premarital sex, birth control, alcohol use, or television, and they are expected to participate actively in their congregation and emphasize strong personal religious conviction (Salomäki 2010). Gender hierarchy is woven deeply into Conservative Laestadianism. The Office of Preaching is reserved for men, as are all the leading positions in the movement's organization. The role of women is to be helpmeets of their husbands and mothers for their children. Thus, Conservative Laestadian patriarchal doctrines strongly regulate the lives of girls and women, but in different ways those of boys and men as well (Hintsala 2016; Rantala 2018). While Laestadianism is considered part of the Finnish national imaginary, and Laestadians are perceived as embodying many national characteristics and virtues such as solemnity, modesty, and being hardworking, their attitudes to the role and positions of women in church and society, and to sexual minorities, are largely considered outdated – and they can therefore be considered a cultural-religious minority in Finland (Anttonen 2018).

Orthodox reformed Protestantism is an umbrella term for a variety of branches of Dutch Calvinism. The approximately 230,000 orthodox reformed Christians (about 1.33% of the country's population) share a number of characteristics, which arguably legitimizes the use of the umbrella term. Orthodox reformed Christians embrace traditional Calvinist views of theological, moral, and social issues. They think of themselves as tradition-oriented and leadership-based, in contrast with liberal reformed Christians, who understand themselves as change-oriented and dialogue-based (Watling 2002). They consider Scripture (the 1637 State Translation of the Bible) the absolute norm and authority, and embrace the 'Three Forms of Unity', the

2 See the website of the SRK, the central organization of Conservative Laestadians in Finland <<https://srk.fi/en/>>, accessed February 7 2020.

Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt as the creeds of faith (Stoffels 2008, 129). Furthermore, they emphasize the necessity of individual interior existential struggle and conversion, while holding that 'true' conversion, and therefore salvation, is not open for all but depends on God's intervention (Stoffels 2008, 129). In moral and social terms orthodox reformed Christians adopt a gendered and sexualized countercultural position by maintaining the ideal of patriarchal marriage and family life to the exclusion of ideas about the equality of women and LGBTQ people. This position may have been strengthened in the dynamic with a surrounding society and culture (Derks et al. 2014) that has increasingly implemented liberal laws and policymaking, and is secularized in its increasing disaffiliation from mainline churches. In this context the recent positioning of Dutch Evangelicals and Calvinists against homosexuality and transgender identities must be understood as functioning as an identity marker.³ Orthodox reformed Christians are moreover associated with specific geographical regions – small towns and villages across what is called 'the Bible belt' – situated outside the urbanized and politically, economically, and culturally powerful region of the Netherlands ('the Randstad'). At the same time they often inhabit a privileged position: these communities are historically established, politically and institutionally well embedded, and considered to belong to Dutch society and history. However, this belonging is placed in tension, because it is viewed in anachronistic terms: orthodox reformed Christians are considered to belong to the Dutch past, and less to the present.

The different Conservative Laestadian and orthodox reformed theological histories, and their different forms of embeddedness in broader religious, political, and social contexts, enable the construction of specific female Conservative Laestadian and orthodox reformed identities and experiences (Rantala 2018; Watling 2002). Both these protestant traditions emphasize the need for 'conversion' through an individual awareness of human nature as sinful and mourning for one's own sins. Orthodox reformed Protestantism underlines the building of a personal and humble relationship with God or Jesus, and the necessity for pietist conversion, while Conservative Laestadians believe that the congregation and its members have been entrusted with the absolution of sins. Both traditions encourage self-discipline and a sober and modest way of life, encapsulated within a close-knit and protective

³ See David Bos's essay (2019) in which he analyses and contextualizes the early 2019 issuing of the Dutch version of the Nashville Statement by Evangelicals and Calvinists in voicing their opposition to 'persons adopting a homosexual or transgender self-conception'.

community. Conservative Laestadian and orthodox reformed subjectivities cannot be conflated. However, the commonalities among Laestadian and orthodox reformed Christians regarding notions of piety, the perception of religious and secular distinctive domains, and modes of female embodiment justify an analysis of the two novels about both traditions.

Novels and sense-making

The Finnish author Pauliina Rauhala published her debut novel *Heavensong* (*Taivaslaulu*) in 2013. The novel is a bestseller, with more than 29,000 copies sold in its publication year, and a winner of several national prizes such as the *Christian Book Prize*.⁴ In 2015 the novel was adapted for a theatre play⁵ by two Finnish theatre groups, further highlighting its popularity. *Heavensong* is a contemporary story of a young Conservative Laestadian couple and their family. Vilja and Alekski grow up in the Finnish 'Bible belt'. They fall in love and marry, and children soon follow. In our analysis we focus on the female protagonist Vilja and her struggles as a Conservative Laestadian woman and mother, but also reflect on how her representation contrasts with her husband's. Although we focus on *Heavensong*, it is worth mentioning that Rauhala's second novel *Sinbearers* (*Synninkantajat*), published in 2018, continues the saga of the same family – this time centring on the previous generation and the movement's recent history during the late 1970s. *Sinbearers* was a candidate for the Finlandia Prize, the most acclaimed national literature award. Rauhala's novels are fiction. However, the author draws on her personal experience of growing up and living as a Conservative Laestadian. Her novels have had a far-reaching influence both within the Conservative Laestadian community and in perceptions of Laestadianism in Finland at large.

4 In 2013 *Heavensong* sold 29,100 copies, making it to number nine in the list of bestselling Finnish fiction. The following year the novel also made it into the top twenty, selling 10,600 copies <<https://kustantajat.fi/tilastot/>>, accessed February 7 2020). Altogether, the novel has sold more than 67,000 copies, and it has been acclaimed by both critics and readers: among various acknowledgements literature bloggers chose it as the best Finnish fiction book in 2013, and it was given a 2014 literary award by The Booksellers Association of Finland <<https://www.gummerus.fi/en/authors/>>; <<http://www.helsinkiagency.fi/heavensong/>>, accessed February 7 2020). More than 2,200 people have rated or reviewed the novel on Goodreads, giving it an average rating of 3.88 <<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/18193975-taivaslaulu>>, accessed February 7 2020). The novel has been translated to Danish and Latvian, but there are no English translations at the time of writing <<http://dbgw.finlit.fi/kaannokset/lista.php?order=author&asc=1&lang=ENG>>, accessed February 7 2020).

5 For further analysis of the *Taivaslaulu* play see Wallenius-Korkalo 2018.

The bestselling Dutch author Franca Treur has written extensively on Dutch orthodox reformed Christian experiences. In 2009 she published the novel *Confetti on the Threshing Floor* (*Dorsvloer vol Confetti*). It was a bestseller, with 150,000 copies sold on publication, and it won several prizes.⁶ In 2014 the novel was adapted for a movie directed by Tallulah Hazekamp-Schwab. In 2018 Treur published the novel *Hear Now My Voice* (*Hoor Nu Mijn Stem*). At the time of writing the author is travelling across the Netherlands to discuss her new book with her critics. Both novels are about girls and women either within orthodox reformed Protestantism or who have left it. They are fictional stories, but the author uses her own experiences of growing up as an orthodox reformed girl in Zeeland, the Dutch southwestern province known for its large presence of orthodox reformed Christians. Her work reaches a broad and diverse audience, influencing Dutch cultural understandings of this particular religious tradition and community. We focus on Treur's first novel. *Confetti* is about the life of an orthodox reformed family on a farm, narrating the parents taking their children to church and working on the farm, the children going to school, the death of their grandfather, and the marriage of one of the sons. The only girl among six brothers, Katelijne, is at the centre of the story. The novel focuses on her experiences and place in the family. Katelijne struggles with some of the dictates of orthodox reformed Protestantism and its way of life. The later novel *Hear Now My Voice* again focuses on a female protagonist, the adult Gina, and her memories of her slow but steady disaffiliation from the orthodox reformed tradition and community (van den Brandt 2019b).

We use the term 'sense-making' in analysing the novels *Heavensong* and *Confetti*. As an exploratory tool this term enables us to focus on various aspects of both stories. Sense-making intentionally refers to the creation of meaning and an understanding of the world as an endeavour that is both intellectual and embodied, and often entangled. The notion of 'sense' embraced here thus includes intellectual sense (meaning-making), as well as the corporeal

6 *Confetti on the Threshing Floor* sold more than 150,000 copies on publication <<https://webwinkel.uitgeverijprometheus.nl/book/franca-treur/9789044616262-dorsvloer-vol-confetti.html>>, accessed February 7 2020). It was well received by both critics and readers. In 2010 Franca Treur was awarded the Selexyz Debut Price <<https://www.nu.nl/boek/2327553/franca-treur-wint-selexyz-debutprijs.html>>, accessed February 7 2020). First published in 2009, the novel saw its thirtieth edition in 2015. High-quality Dutch newspapers like NRC, Parool, and Volkskrant awarded the novel with four out of five stars <<https://www.francatreur.nl/dorsvloerolconfetti/pages/ontvangst.html>>, accessed February 7 2020). Almost 1,450 people have reviewed the novel on Goodreads, giving it an average rating of 3.18 <<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/7432826-dorsvloer-vol-confetti>>, accessed February 7 2020).

and emotional aspects of senses and sensualities. While much of the current discussions of senses and the body in the study of religion do not thematize gender as a category of difference (cf. Morgan 2012; Meyer 2015b; Vásquez 2011), here we centre-stage women's embodiment in processes of sense-making. As religious studies scholar John Corrigan suggests, there is a need to 'advance the study of religion and emotion through a focus on gender' (2017, 13). With an analysis of literary representations of women's sense-making as embedded within particular religious communities, we contribute a gendered understanding of senses, the body, and emotions. Sense-making includes people's relationships with the divine, emerging 'from a multifaceted socio-bodily dynamic' (Opas and Haapalainen 2016, 180).

In the following we analyse how the novels represent women's and girls' sense-making by focusing on women's creativity and imagination, and the female body. Feminist theologian Sheila Briggs defines narrative in her analysis of popular culture as 'an alignment of characters and plot, a story in which the protagonists reveal themselves in their actions' (2011, 90). Following this definition of narrative as an alignment of characters and plot, the novels we analyse arguably construct a narrative of sense-making. One of the primary tasks of women and girls in this narrative is to make sense of their place in the world and their experiences, selves, and God. For Vilja and Katelijne the imagination and the body are some of the crucial sources that inform their negotiation of faith and the traditions of the community.

Making sense through creativity and imagination

In both novels the negotiation of faith, tradition, and community is thematized through women's capacity for creativity and imagination. The disruptive potential of creativity and imagination is considered to be based on its potential to explore other possible world-making modes. We thus suggest that the capacity – and desire – for creativity and imagination is represented as threatening the coming into being of an ideal female Laestadian or orthodox reformed protestant subjectivity. In this section we explore the theme of creativity and imagination by examining the role of storytelling and art-making, and how these are tied to gendered embodied experiences. We thus demonstrate that according to the novels making life sensible happens through embedded and embodied performances (Cunliffe and Coupland 2011).

Confetti on the Threshing Floor describes the female protagonist Katelijne's childhood until she is about twelve years old. The novel emphasizes

Katelijne's love for stories and storytelling, which sometimes takes place within and sometimes against the boundaries of orthodox reformed thought and practice. This intellectual capacity and desire is represented as at times productive of the emergence of proper orthodox reformed subjectivity, and at times transgressing it. As the author has repeatedly emphasized during lectures and discussions,⁷ she intended the novel to be a reflection on the capacity of stories: a single dominant story of truth may thrive only when it excludes other potential stories, and a multiplicity of stories will always threaten the idea of the existence of a single story of truth. The theological and moral are intertwined in this line of reasoning: the acceptance of orthodox reformed Protestantism as the single truth encompasses notions of how to live a good life, which includes a rejection of inventing stories for fun, especially when these stories are considered to encourage the so-called worshipping of other things or beings besides God. According to orthodox reformed thinking this is exactly what fairy tales or magical stories do: they distract the faithful from the single truth and may even encourage idolatry. Representing the female child with a love for stories and storytelling therefore indicates potential transgression.

The love for stories and storytelling is brought to the fore, for example, when Katelijne visits her mother's sister in The Hague, where she enthusiastically reads fairy tales before bedtime – while acknowledging that fairy tales are forbidden for her. 'Katelijne understands very well why the fairy tale is wrong. Doves do not magically make clothes and shoes appear. That is pagan. But it does seem fun to her. This is what they call temptation' (Treur 2009, 39).⁸ Her curiosity becomes an embodied experience: Katelijne indulges in the pleasure of enjoying forbidden stories. She also at times creatively invents her own stories, which have various consequences throughout the novel. When Katelijne tells her brothers about dandelions in the cows' dung, the little boys' curiosity is raised, and they fall into the cesspit. Their grandfather dies of a heart attack after his attempt to save the boys. When Katelijne finds her grandmother mourning, she hopes to comfort her by inventing a story about her grandfather's conversion experience. While she succeeds in getting her grandmother to believe that

7 See for example the 2.5-hour book presentation and discussion with Franca Treur at an event called 'Franca Treur: She Has a Point?!' (*Franca Treur: Heeft Ze een Punt?!*) hosted by the Reformed youth group 'Come to Nijkerk', which can be watched online: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63rqtUpAZcs>>, accessed February 7 2020.

8 All translations of original Dutch and Finnish quotations from the two novels are made by this article's authors.

her husband may not have ended up in hell after all, she feels guilty for having lied. 'You cannot tell lies about the things that belong to the Lord' (Treur 2009, 199). The novel thus emphasizes the disruptive but generative potential of the capacity and desire for storytelling. Katelijne has learned that she should not be distracted from the single story of truth, but through her vivid imagination she explores the potentiality of other kinds of story and their embodied consequences in lived emotions: pleasure, fear, and guilt. According to the feminist theorist Sara Ahmed (2004) it is important not to ask what emotions *are*, but what they *do*. Here, we see that pleasure, fear, and guilt are represented as the embodied effects of transgressing the boundaries of 'proper' faith and practice. These emotions can be read as potentially feeding into Katelijne's desire to put things straight and strive for proper piety (Kloos and Beekers 2017), or as potentially leading her further astray (Streib 2014). The narrative does not provide closure, and allows both interpretations.

In *Heavensong*, the female protagonist Vilja is portrayed as an imaginative and creative person with a vivid interest in art, especially painting. Early in the novel Vilja is studying visual arts at a university in Helsinki, where she meets her future husband, Aleksi. Vilja hopes to continue her art studies and work after marrying Aleksi, but the reality of their growing family and her near annual pregnancies make her surrender these dreams. 'My diploma is finished when translucent fingers become fat,' Rauhala writes in Vilja's voice, 'my doctoral thesis is ready when a suction cup mouth blossoms into a toothless laugh,' then 'God will applaud in heaven' (Rauhala 2013, 11). However, Vilja finds it difficult to abandon her plans and her bodily autonomy. Vilja's struggles are condensed into an epilogue in the novel, in which a woman is digging a hole in the ground. The woman makes a last painting and begins her excavation. Onlookers, religious leaders, fellow believers, and other female excavators spur her on. The act of excavation is at times happy and exciting for her. As time passes, and the hole deepens, it becomes more difficult, and she tires. Eventually, she hits the impenetrable bedrock, and is gravely injured. She is still encouraged not to give up. She decides to die rather than quit the excavation. It is only the intervention of her husband – who closes the excavation site – that allows the woman to return to the surface and start recovering. The epilogue is arguably a metaphor for the life of Vilja and Conservative Laestadian mothers generally. The excavation story symbolizes and attempts to encourage readers to reflect on women's struggles as they are expected to endure repeated childbirths. The 'single story of truth' for Conservative Laestadian mothers is indeed a

story of endurance and sacrifice. Vilja goes against the grain, because she is unable to endure what is expected of her, and is vulnerable and in need of help. The epilogue's symbolic portrayal of Vilja's 'straying from the path' (Kloos and Beekers 2017) is presented through notions of Laestadian women's embodied suffering and fatigue as a matter of life and death. This is followed by Vilja questioning her own notions of selfhood and a good life.

Vilja becomes severely depressed, but she eventually recovers. One sign of her healing is her taking up painting again. Such a creative agency, while frowned on in the religious community, is an outlet for Vilja; it becomes one of the ways in which the traumatic experience of repeated pregnancies and depression is healed, allowing her to gain some reflexive distance from Conservative Laestadianism. Vilja's artistic expression can be read not only as what she does, or an unfolding of who she is, but as requiring the female character's 'conscious willed effort' and wilful subjectivity (Ahmed 2014, 151) to negotiate the contradictions in her everyday life. Vilja wishes to be loyal to her faith and community while she fails at the same time to be a proper Laestadian subject. According to the novel sense-making is thus the result of a conglomeration of the intellectually embodied thoughts and experiences of the reflexive female subject in relation to her culturally situated meaningful practices.

Wilfulness can take the form of deliberate acts of loyalty or expressions of disloyalty and disaffiliation. Both novels construct a notion of the wilfulness of their female characters' imagination, represented through their storytelling and artistic creation, which points to their appropriation of and negotiation with conservative Protestantism-as-lived. The novels include fantasy and desire in accounts of agency and subjectivity (Bracke 2008, 63–64) by thematizing the role of art-making and storytelling in narratives of sense-making. Examining the ways in which art-making and storytelling are enabled, expressed, and restrained according to such narratives provides us with an insight into the fictional representation of (im)proper protestant female characters.

Making sense of women's bodies and experiences

In both novels the body, assumed to be in thrall to the cultural regimes (Richardson and Locks 2014; Foucault 1977, 25) of Conservative Laestadianism or orthodox reformed Protestantism, is a crucial area in which notions of belonging and transgression are formulated. In this section we explore how the two novels represent their female characters as experiencing their

bodies through issues of childbearing, beauty, love, and sexuality. We examine how these experiences are considered to raise moral contestations, becoming experiences that inform the female characters' negotiations with their traditions and communities.

Heavensong emphasizes the embodied experience of childbearing. Rauhala's female characters look at each other's bellies first, and their eyes only after. As birth control is avoided in the movement, the number of children in Conservative Laestadian families is noticeably high. In Conservative Laestadianism women's primary role is motherhood, and women's religiosity is tightly bound to their role of raising new generations. Children are seen as God's gifts to their parents, but repeated childbearing also significantly dictates the life choices of Conservative Laestadian women, evoking a multiplicity of emotional reactions, ranging from gratitude to weariness, guilt, and shame (Hintsala 2016; Koho 2016). Conservative Laestadian women's aspirations of faith, motherhood, and womanhood are irrevocably intertwined (Rantala 2018; Ruoho and Ilola 2014). *Heavensong* takes up the theme of childbearing and motherhood, presenting its main female character as struggling with and negotiating her embodied position within the Conservative Laestadian cultural regime. During the novel Vilja gives birth to four children and struggles to recognize, make sense of, and live with her rapidly cyclically changing body and spiralling emotions. Vilja feels like a prisoner of her body: 'I bleed, I stop bleeding, I carry a child, and I bleed again, and this is all that I am to expect' (Rauhala 2013, 38).

One of the narrative's turning points comes when Vilja falls pregnant again, this time with twins, which leads her to question the strength of her body, mind, and faith. Vilja tries to reconcile her strong Conservative Laestadian conviction and the reality of her utter exhaustion, which eventually lands her in hospital suffering from severe depression. Another important moment in the narrative is at the end, when it is not Vilja who takes the final step away from Conservative Laestadianism, but her husband Aleks. Aleks secretly undergoes sterilization to prevent the family from growing, while hoping to give Vilja time to heal. This leads to Aleks's casting out from the community, while Vilja can still remain within it.

In addition to the fundamental questions of motherhood and childbirth, another contested issue the novel presents concerns the norms of female appearance and beauty. Conservative Laestadianism adheres to an ideal of both internal and external modesty, which means the excessive adornment of the body is often considered sinful. Enhancing one's looks symbolizes not being a proper female Laestadian subject, and the lack of make-up and

revealing clothing constructs a visible boundary between Conservative Laestadian women and other women. This embodied contrast is mirrored and mediated through fictional Laestadian characters (Wallenius-Korkalo and Valkonen 2016, 43). *Heavensong* makes Vilja repeatedly reflect on the difference between herself as a Conservative Laestadian woman and the secular(ized) majority of women. When she looks at advertisements in shop windows featuring scantily clad and heavily made-up women, she concludes that mainstream society is not interested in women who have 'a naked face and a dressed body' (Rauhala 2013, 36).

A revealing moment in the narrative is when Vilja transgresses the modesty norms by painting her toenails bright red and flaunting them to her husband. He is conflicted: he feels both physically excited by the beauty of his wife's feet and appalled by her embodied transgression, while at the same time asking himself why the painted toenails should have anything to do with faith at all. His struggle to make sense of the painted toenails takes place at intellectual, moral, and embodied levels in an entangled way. However, applying nail polish continues to represent a transformation or signal an insurgency, a breaking away from the community. If discovered by other members of the community, such actions might lead, the reader is told, to exclusion from it. Vilja reminisces about her mother, who also painted her toenails to cheer herself up in preparation for her eleventh childbirth. Vilja's mother's transgression is narrated as leading to an almost unavoidable clash. Having given birth, another Laestadian mother notices Vilja's mother's transgression in the hospital showers, and a few days later she is made to publicly repent of her sins to retain her place in the community. The narration of this seemingly arbitrary act, the painting of one's toenails, thus highlights the struggle with the narrow ideal of acceptable female embodiment in Conservative Laestadianism, and the dire consequences transgressions may have for an individual (Wallenius-Korkalo 2018, 178–179).

The beauty and adornment of the female body is also a crucial theme in the coming-of-age novel *Confetti*. While staying with her aunt in The Hague, Katelijne tries on extravagant dresses and make-up, and poses for a picture. Katelijne clearly enjoys the adorning of her body, and her body being admired, while an ideal female orthodox reformed body is a humble one. At home again Katelijne finds a traditional costume that belonged to the deceased mother of her grandmother, and she tries it on. While parading across the farm, she is barely noticed by her family members. The novel thus sets up a paradox between the city and the countryside, the modern and the traditional, by emphasizing different forms of female embodiment.

In orthodox reformed discourse these distinctions are considered to collide with a secular godless as opposed to a religious domain, where salvation may be attained. The novel seems to play with notions of visibility and invisibility, as the plot conveys the message that proper female embodiment equates to invisibility. While Katelijne feels welcome and admired in The Hague, she feels almost invisible back at home. She starts to write letters to Gloria, her aunt's neighbour, and starts 'dreaming of moving to the city, where she can hear the trains passing while falling asleep in her bed. Where else is she supposed to go with her unrealistic desires?' (Treur 2009, 40).

One of the young girl's main drivers becomes her desire to be seen. Katelijne's transgressive desire to be valued as an individual and considered beautiful by other human beings is dangerous if it is not combatted and contained within the formation of a proper orthodox reformed subject. While in The Hague, Katelijne indulges in several forbidden pleasures at the same time: as described in the former section, she reads fairy tales before bedtime. She not only reads forbidden stories that trigger her imagination, but also tries out what it is like to dress immodestly and to emphasize female beauty and be admired. Both seem to feel good, though forbidden.

The increasing fascination with love and sexuality is another important theme of the novel that is worth exploring as the representation of a girl's embodied experience. Katelijne's maturing and transforming body is a source of anxiety, which is increased by her father and brothers teasing her about her body weight. Her anxiety and shame intersect with erotic desire, as Katelijne, while secretly visiting the fair in the local town with her brother and his friends, 'suddenly wants to be touched by the boy' (Treur 2009, 157). She also witnesses her elder brothers becoming involved with girls. Kathelijne's favourite brother, Christiaan, is made to marry Petra, a girl with whom he has slept. Katelijne observes that for Petra, who is clearly in love, her dream is coming true, but Christiaan is very unhappy about marrying her. The novel makes Katelijne laugh about the orthodox reformed patriarchal formulations of marriage read by the minister during the church wedding. This episode in the novel can be read as one of the experiences that makes Katelijne question the theological-moral tenets of her faith. However, the theological, moral, and communal aspects are presented as interrelated in a way that makes them difficult for readers to disentangle. If Christiaan does not live up to the dominant moral expectations that he will marry the girl, he will certainly have problems with his own family, but he may also find himself completely excluded from the

orthodox reformed church and community, which is said to be the only way to God's grace.

In both novels the key embodied experiences that inform the characters' negotiations with their faith and communities can be conceptualized as bodily transformations (cf. Brubaker 2016). These transformations are thoroughly gendered. A poignant female bodily transformation is the cycle of repeated pregnancies, over which the female characters in *Heavensong* have no control unless they or their spouses are prepared to leave the faith community. Briefer and perhaps voluntary moments of bodily transformation concern the changing of one's appearance with clothes or cosmetics. These transforming acts stem from a desire to be beautiful and feel good, and are narrated as at times taking place while negotiating faith, and at other times as directly challenging conservative protestant norms and practice. Both novels therefore consider bodily transformations to be key elements in the female characters' struggle with their traditions and communities.

Conclusion

In this article we have analysed how the novels of Rauhala and Treur represent women and girls negotiating Conservative Laestadianism and orthodox reformed Protestantism. Creativity and imagination, and the body, are important sources of women's agentic struggle with and making sense of their faith and belonging in the novels. The examples we have discussed as illustrating women's creativity and imagination, and embodied experiences, include storytelling and art-making, beauty, sexuality, and pregnancy. Our analysis has shown that creativity and imagination, and the body, are presented as entangled in the act of sense-making. Sense-making is considered the result of a conglomeration of the intellectually embodied thoughts and experiences of the reflexive female subject, which are interspersed with notions of the female body. Art is perceived as the means through which the traumatic experience of repeated pregnancies and depression is healed. Trying immodest clothing and make-up and being admired are presented as ways of imagining potential alternative femininities. The imagination and the body inform the female characters' making sense of their place in the community and tradition, but are simultaneously areas through which their faith and belonging are marked and contested.

From here we zoom out to reflect on the role these novels play in the societies in which they are produced and widely consumed. We thus address broader issues of representation and the place of conservative protestant

communities in contemporary secular(ized) Northern and Western European contexts. While cultural productions may be closely related to some individual and collective ways of being and knowing, perhaps especially when they are partly based on the authors' experiences as in *Heavensong* and *Confetti*, they are at the same time constitutive of perception. This insight highlights 'the complex intersections between public culture and private subjectivity' (Pickering 2009, 18). In stories about women and girls in conservative protestant communities, cultural productions represent female subjectivities in ways that need to be (sufficiently) legible and must therefore relate to existing discourses about women and the religious tradition being discussed. Constructing stories about Conservative Laestadians and orthodox reformed Christians in the Finnish and Dutch contexts entails representing communities that differ from mainstream values and ways of life. The fact that the stories we have studied here find broad and diverse audiences does not imply an uncritical interest in conservative protestant subjectivities. On the contrary, as religious studies scholar Sofia Sjö and sociologist Andreas Häger put it, it may entail an 'othering' of those forms of religion that do not fit the norm (Sjö and Häger 2015, 40). Conservative protestant communities in Northern and Western European contexts are often represented stereotypically, and women and girls who belong to such communities especially are often negatively portrayed as victims.

Since these novels critically thematize the role, positions, and experiences of girls and women in conservative protestant communities, they arguably easily confirm existing notions about conservative communities as rigid in their gendered regulation of the lives of girls and women, and secularized culture as free and emancipatory (Scott, 2017). The novels can thus be seen as reinforcing dominant understandings of conservative religion and women's emancipation. However, the novels' portrayal of communities and characters cannot be narrowed down to black and white stereotypes. Our analysis demonstrates that representations of conservative protestant women and girls can differ. *Heavensong* and *Confetti* present multi-layered and nuanced stories about the perspectives and experiences of conservative protestant women and girls that cannot be easily categorized as oppression, submission, or emancipation. We have revealed the novels' understanding of conservative protestant female subjectivity as a process of becoming and sense-making embedded in a tensioned terrain of creativity, imagination, embodiment, and sensibilities. They also convey an understanding of experiences of dissonance and conflict as an important arena in which women's religious subjectivities are both contested and shaped. We therefore suggest

that *Heavensong* and *Confetti* contribute interesting and relevant perspectives on the lives of women and girls in conservative protestant communities that defy the more common one-sided understandings of this type of lived religion. Such representations of everyday lived religion in fiction may challenge readers to rethink the potential agency of religious women. Nevertheless, in the secularized societies of Northern and Western Europe, we argue that constructions of the religious and gendered other can contribute to shielding secularized culture from view, and thus to strengthening its 'normality' and normativity.

* * *

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'A Prophet Has No Honour in the Prophet's Own Country'¹: How Russian Is Russian Evangelicalism?

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Abstract

The article discusses how the history of forced marginality and isolation of Russian-speaking evangelical Christians has shaped their theology and social ministry. Russian evangelicalism is a glocal phenomenon. It fully adheres to universal evangelical tenets, while it is shaped as a socioculturally and linguistically Russian phenomenon. Its Russianness is manifested in the construction of a Russian evangelical narrative formulated as a response to the cultural and political discourse of modern Russia, and to Orthodox theology and application as evangelicals see it. This narrative is constructed with the language of the Synodal Bible in its present-day interpretation. Russian evangelicals are constantly accused of western influence, proselytism in the canonical land of the Russian Orthodox Church, and mistreating and misleading people. The article also argues against these accusations, emphasizing the history, hermeneutics, and social ministries of Russian evangelicalism.

Keywords: *Russian evangelical Christianity; glocalization; quinque solae; Russian Synodal Bible*

This article is an account of Russian-speaking evangelical Christianity, and its history and impact on present-day Russia. Reviewing the one-hundred-and-fifty-year history of evangelicalism in Russia, I demonstrate how the oppression, marginalization, and isolation of evangelicals in late Imperial and especially Soviet Russia shaped its present-day theology and social ministry. I further discuss the glocal nature of evangelicalism in Russia – its universal dogma and its local implications and applications. Second, using the example of evangelical tenets and Protestant dogmatics, I explore the construction of the Russian evangelical narrative, and its historical,

¹ John 4:44 (NRSV).

sociocultural, and especially linguistic context. The major distinguishing characteristic that makes Russian evangelicalism Russian is its history of oppression, marginalization, and isolation and the particular Russian translation of the Bible they use. Finally, I elaborate on my ethnographic study of the Baptist rehabilitation ministry to provide an empirical example of the practical implementation of biblicism. I therefore use a combination of methods: historical review; theological analysis; and the examination of ethnographic data.

Evangelicals are often portrayed in the Russian media, politics, and everyday life as a movement with three derogatory characteristics. First, they are seen as something alien to Russian culture and faith. The fact that evangelical Christianity differs from Orthodox Christianity often labels it as heresy, and therefore a proselytizing sect. However, Russian Orthodox Christianity as a social phenomenon is very heterogenous, and there is therefore no general attitude to evangelical movements (Lunkin 2017a). Second, Protestantism is seen as an agent of foreign influence, mostly western. Since the times of Khrushchev's anti-religious propaganda the *sectarians* (*sektanty*) have been seen as puppets of western ideology. Researchers of Russian Christianity also link this with the legislature on the freedom of conscience of 1997, which lists Christianity (precisely, Orthodox Christianity), Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism as 'traditional' religions (Federal Law 1997). Protestantism is therefore not perceived as one of them (see, for example, Filatov and Strukova 2003). Roman Lunkin (2017c) also regards these views in the context of the overall lack of religious freedom in today's Russia. Third, evangelicals are often associated with numerous New Age and new religious movements that earned a reputation for fraud and brainwashing in the nineties. Most of their ministries and missions are therefore met with suspicion and hostility. I aim to deconstruct all these accusations against evangelicals and Russia, and discuss their role in Russian history and society.

What is Russian evangelicalism?

Three main questions about Russian evangelical Christianity are relevant to my argument. What is evangelical Christianity? What is shared, and what is specific about its Russian-speaking branch? What makes Russian evangelicalism significant, and how does it relate to the study of present-day Russia? These questions do not merely disclose the role and niche of Russian evangelicalism in Russian society; they also respond to the widespread allegations against Russian evangelical communities as 'fraudulent western

sects'. In briefly discussing these questions in this section, and throughout the whole article in detail, I will also challenge the emphasis on the western influence and sectarianism of Russian evangelicals.

To begin, I use the term evangelical Christianity in its conventional sense, defined, for example, by David Bebbington, as a movement within Protestant Christianity that is characterized by the emphasis on the Bible as a sufficient and inerrant authority for faith and practice, Christ's substitutionary atoning sacrifice, the believer's personal conversion, and evangelizing activism (Bebbington 1989). Christ is seen as the only mediator between God and humans, and through Christ alone can one attain the kingdom of heaven. Evangelicalism is commonly made visible by the most active and most conservative movements, especially in the United States, and is thus often confused or equated with its most radical wing, known as fundamentalism (Marsden 2006).

Russian evangelicals obviously lack the political influence that their fellow believers in the US enjoy, yet they are similarly conservative theologically. However, an important clarification is needed. As is obvious from my further historical overview and discussion, I focus on the 'old' groups of Russian evangelicals, leaving aside numerous and very visible neo-Pentecostal and charismatic movements in Russia that mostly emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In no way do I claim these movements are not evangelical, yet they are so diverse and complex, and differ so significantly from the 'old' congregations, that they should at least be methodologically indicated as a separate phenomenon. Such separation is not always clearly stated in sociological and anthropological studies; rather, the 'late evangelicals' are seen as descendants of the 'old' ones (Panchenko 2013; Wanner 2007). Neo-Pentecostal and charismatic communities do not generally share the theological conservatism, cultural and historical niche, and lifestyle of the 'old' communities on which I am focusing. Yet they are likewise active in the ministries of social support and are even sometimes associated with those ministries to the public, which leads to suspicion of 'dangerous sects'.

Russian evangelicalism generally fits Bebbington's model, yet its history, marginal position within the Russian religious sphere, and evangelizing and missionary narratives that have consequently been constructed have redefined its theology, dogmatics, and morals in a very specific and very Russian way (Lunkin 2017b). What does 'Russian' mean in Russian evangelicalism? In the Russian language there are two different words for 'Russian': *Russkii* roughly signifies ethnicity and language; *Rossiiskii* signi-

fies nationality. Russian evangelicalism (as well as its different variations: Russian Protestantism, the Russian Baptist movement, etc.) is conventionally defined as *Russkii* (see, for example, Mitrokhin 1997; Nikolskaia 2009). I do not imply any ethnic context, for Russian evangelicalism was never limited to a territory, or Russian ethnicity or identity. The communities and believers were very active in most of the territories that belonged to the Russian Empire, Soviet Union, and modern Russia, including, for example, Finland and Central Asia, but also beyond them – in Germany, the Netherlands, the United States, and Canada; and the prominent evangelical leaders, to say nothing of their congregants, were people of the most diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.

In using *Russkii* of evangelicalism, I emphasize the Russian language. Although Ukrainian-speaking communities played a significant role (Wanner 2007), the phenomenon formed and centred on the Russian language, even in Ukraine. Unlike the Orthodox Church (which uses Old Church Slavonic for the liturgy and Scriptures) and foreign diasporas, modern Russian has been the dominant language of worship, preaching, evangelism, and hermeneutics (with additional services held in local languages). Yet most importantly, the Russian language of evangelicals is the language of the Russian Bible. Although the Russian Synodal translation of the Bible is used by the vast majority of Russian-speaking Christians worldwide (even the Orthodox Church uses it in situations other than liturgy), the evangelical emphasis on the sufficiency of the scriptures places it at the centre of the Russian evangelical narrative of faith and practice. The language of prayer, sermons, glorification (choral singing), missions, and ministries, and even of everyday communication, thought, and reasoning, is shaped by the reading of the Synodal Bible. I have argued elsewhere that for the Russian Baptist Church, for example, the learning and internalization of the biblical narrative as it is interpreted in the particular community are the essence and mechanism of conversion (Mikeshin 2016, 159–191).

The Russian Synodal translation of the Bible has a peculiar history. It was undertaken in the nineteenth century by the Russian Bible Society. The translation took sixty years, was initiated during the reign of Alexander I, banned by his successor Nicholas I, and resumed under Alexander II. The Old Testament is based on the Masoretic Text, and the entire translation is greatly influenced by the Old Church Slavonic Bible. Despite the non-denominational mission of the Bible Society, most of its translators were Orthodox clerics (Tikhomirov 2006). Moreover, the text itself is rhythmic and poetic, which also often affects its perception and interpretation. The

creation of this translation can be compared if not to the Reformation, then at least to the history of the Vulgate, for it was the first Bible in a modern Russian anyone literate could read. The translation thus created the conditions for the emergence of evangelicals.

Before I attend to the question of the significance of Russian evangelicalism, I will briefly outline the movement's history in Russia. I will then identify the main traits of this history, and how they have shaped the evangelical movement in present-day Russia.

The history of evangelicalism in Russia

My argument focuses on three denominations: the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, Pentecostals, and Seventh-day Adventists. These three main movements, represented by various congregations and unions, have split and merged at different times and been active in Russia for roughly a hundred and fifty years, unlike the recently restored Lutheran communities, Salvation Army, Mormons, and other traditionally foreign groups, as well as the already mentioned charismatic groups that have emerged in the last twenty-five or thirty years.

Protestant communities and churches have been known in Russia for centuries, especially under Peter the Great, who integrated many foreign experts and specialists in the Russian economy, government, and culture. However, before the second half of the nineteenth century, Protestantism was mainly represented by foreign diasporas. The first Russian-speaking Protestant communities consisting of Russian citizens appeared in the 1860s. The movement emerged in three main regions. Under the influence of Dutch Mennonites and German Lutherans and Baptists in Ukraine, the communities of 'Shtundists' formed². They were known for their meticulous study of the Bible, uncharacteristic of the Orthodox Christians who relied on the authority of clergy and Holy Tradition (for both dogmatic and pragmatic reasons – a huge part of the population was illiterate). In the Caucasus the Molokans, an old anti-clerical group of Russian Christians persecuted as a dangerous heresy, were increasingly influential. Many Molokans found their teachings had much in common with Baptist theology, and a large number converted to the new faith, which was more structured and institutionalized. Finally, in the capital city of St Petersburg, the evangelical movement spread in aristocratic circles under the influence of a wealthy retired colonel

² *Stunde* means 'hour' in German. In Mennonite and Baptist communities it meant the time for a Bible study.

Vasily Pashkov and his English spiritual advisor Lord Radstock. Neophyte aristocrats soon actively engaged their servants in preaching, giving up their noble status and privileges in congregational meetings (Nikolskaia 2009).

Since the outset of its institutionalization, Russian evangelicalism has been subject to persecution, mostly for spreading 'heresy' and converting Orthodox people to a different faith (illegal in Imperial Russia). After the 1905 liberalization act and until the late twenties, Russian Protestants enjoyed a period of unseen freedom and skyrocketing growth (Coleman 2005). During Stalin's repressions, evangelicals lost a significant number of pastors and active congregants, some of whom managed to emigrate, though most perished. The liberalization of religious policy in the second half of the Second World War, when Stalin's government re-established the Moscow Patriarchate and allied itself with the Orthodox Church for ideological support, led to the registration and unification of the most loyal Protestant communities. The Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists was established between 1944 and 1945. It embraced the churches of evangelical Christians, Baptists, Mennonites, and some Pentecostal congregations.³

In 1961, after the start of Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign, the Baptists split into two camps that disagreed on the question of state registration and obedience to the legislature (Mitrokhin 1997; Nikolskaia 2009; Sawatsky 1981). The legislature prohibited missionary activities, religious education for children, the baptism of young people under thirty, and even children's church attendance. The rebellious reformed groups could not accept these prohibitions, for they saw them as contradicting the very principles of Christianity. Oppression and marginalization severely hit the unregistered groups (Sawatsky 1981), and these groups served as the basis for the frightening image of 'sectarians' as agents of western influence. During Brezhnev's 'period of stagnation' the oppression continued, including lengthy prison sentences, the deprivation of child custody, and the demolition of houses of prayer or private houses used for the purpose. Believers responded with the creation of underground networks, including printing houses and a Council of the Relatives of Prisoners – one of the most developed dissident organizations of its time. The persecution and oppression lasted until the liberalization of religious policy during perestroika (Nikolskaia 2009; Sawatsky 1981).

After perestroika began, and especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia faced a significant religious awakening. Various religious

³ Most Pentecostals, however, later left the union because of significant theological disagreements. See also Mitrokhin 1997; Nikolskaia 2009.

movements, old and new, flooded the country. The already existing congregations faced a huge influx of neophytes. Traditional evangelical churches grew in number, though now they had competitors in various Christian denominations and new religious movements. Evangelicals were at last allowed to spread the gospel, and the most active communities immediately started missions and ministries. The missions spread to the most distant areas like the far north to embrace all the peoples of Russia and thus fulfil God's call to spread his word (Vallikivi 2014).

In summary, besides some relatively short periods of growth and freedom, Russian evangelicals constantly faced persecution, marginalization, and isolation. They were perceived as a 'foreign sect' in a religious sphere dominated by Orthodox Christianity and Islam. They were represented as the most spectacular example of the 'opium of the people' in a formally atheistic Soviet society, with direct accusations of western support. The evidence of this support was seen in the constant smuggling of religious literature and Bibles, and campaigning on behalf of 'prisoners of faith' in Germany, Netherlands, the United States, and other countries in the Western Bloc (see, for example, Sawatsky 1981). Finally, in spite of this support, Russian evangelicals were profoundly isolated from their fellow believers abroad, having very little (and usually very formal) contact with foreign evangelical communities.

The marginal status of evangelicals continues in contemporary Russia, though without much persecution (at least thus far – see Lunkin 2017c). However, they often face discrimination and prejudice, and are perceived as a heretical and alien movement that is both dangerous and suspicious. They are rarely present in the media, and their internet activities mostly reach only fellow Christians. However, evangelicals no longer experience forced isolation, and they are therefore most active in areas where state services fail. Almost every evangelical community runs ministries for addicted, imprisoned, homeless, elderly, suicidal, orphaned, and terminally ill people. Along with NGOs and various twelve-step rehabilitation programmes, evangelical Christians are the most active actors in social support in Russia (Lunkin 2017a: 9; Mikeschin 2016). Their marginal status therefore helps them deal with marginal people, thus occupying an important if unseen niche.

The major narratives of Russian evangelicalism

Isolation and marginalization throughout the Soviet period naturally influenced the theology and hermeneutics of evangelicals. Their already

peculiar hermeneutics, based on the Synodal translation of the Bible, became extensively shaped and formulated as a response to the realities of modern Russia: Orthodox dominance in the religious sphere, and the challenges and moral values of Russian society. There are numerous examples of how these responses are formulated. I will provide the two most spectacular examples of glocal evangelical narratives – fully complying with the universal principles of evangelicalism, while characteristic of its Russian branch. The first example deals with theology, and I address it in this section; the second is an ethnographic case, which I address in the section entitled ‘The Good Samaritan ministry’.

The first narrative echoes David Bebbington’s four principles of evangelicalism, though it addresses them in more detail, and moreover, retrospectively relates them to the Reformation and development of Protestantism. *Quinque solae* (‘five only’) – the five principles of the Protestant faith formulated by Martin Luther – were initially formulated as a response to Roman Catholic dogma and its implementation. In the Russian context these principles are interpreted and reformulated as a response to Orthodox dogma and the sociocultural and moral problems of the Russian people. It is important to note first, that the Orthodox dogmatics formulated in the Orthodox Church itself are much deeper and more complex than their evangelical interpretation, and second, the *quinque solae* are rarely referenced. Instead, I use them to group the dogmatic statements of evangelicals and their implementation, and to emphasize the glocal nature of Russian evangelicalism and its historical succession.

The first principle, *sola scriptura* (by scripture alone), states that the Bible is the only authority for the Christian’s faith and practice. Moreover, the Bible is claimed to be consistent, inerrant, and sufficient. Evangelicals acknowledge that the translations may be inaccurate, but the original scripture (and evangelicals believe there is one initial original version of scripture) is God-breathed and therefore the true and pure word of God, which cannot be doubted or questioned, but must be misinterpreted by imperfect and sinful human beings. In the Russian context *sola scriptura* is influenced by the specificity of the Russian Synodal Bible, the Orthodox and Old Church Slavonic influence on it, and its application.

Sola fide (by faith alone) is another paramount tenet of Protestantism. It proclaims justification by faith alone, not by good works, and thus calls for personal conversion. Initially formulated as a response to the Catholic doctrine of good works, it serves the same purpose in debate with Russian Orthodox Christianity. Russian Orthodox soteriology states that men are

justified by faith in God and good works. Naturally, good works do not merely imply moral behaviour, as evangelicals often interpret them, but an orthopraxic system of proper conduct, involving, for example, association with the universal church within the context of apostolic succession. However, for evangelicals any morality, good conduct, or piety is a consequence and evidence of salvation. When a person repents and transforms their life, they begin to crave God's will, which results in good works. However, justification comes only through faith, and no matter how moral a person may be, without genuine personal conversion there is no salvation. In the response to Orthodox Christianity *sola fide* is used as an argument against infant baptism and church attempts to monopolize the Russian land and people. It is also used in response to non-believers and to common questions such as 'Why do good people go to hell?' and 'Why can't I be good for good's sake?'

Solus Christus (Christ alone) or *solo Christo* (by Christ alone) proclaims Christ as the only saviour and mediator between God and humans. Salvation can only be granted to those who accept Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross, and there is no other justification for humans. Besides the abovementioned debate on good works, evangelicals use *solus Christus* to argue against clergy and patron saints. Evangelical pastors and deacons do not play this role: the principle of the universal priesthood means every Christian can and must spread the gospel, and anyone versed in the Bible can preach it. (However, in conservative Russian churches this is a task exclusively for men⁴).

Soli Deo gloria (glory to God alone) proclaims that only God should be worshipped. This tenet argues against the doctrines of both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches concerning the worshipping of saints and the Virgin Mary. Evangelicals regard the saints as dead people, whether they were pious or not, and Mary is seen as merely a mortal woman, though appointed to one of the greatest missions in human history. Their worship is therefore considered idolatry and heresy. Moreover, Russian evangelicals commonly interpret human obsessions with money, fame, sex, or even pride as an obsession with one's own self, idolatry, and the worship of false gods. *Soli Deo gloria* therefore serves as an argument against these worldly issues.

Sola gratia (by grace alone) proclaims that humans do not deserve to be saved, but God's grace grants them salvation and forgives them their sins. This tenet complements the others in emphasizing Christ's atoning sacrifice

4 In extreme situations when men were absent, Russian evangelical women were sometimes engaged in preaching. See Beliakova and Dobson 2015, 40–79.

and sinful human nature. It calls for personal conversion, arguing against infant baptism and individual piety as justification. In evangelicalism *sola gratia* is also associated with the debate on predestination between Calvinists, who claim that God by his sovereign grace elects those to be saved, and Arminians, who argue for the freewill salvation of all who have heard the gospel message. Most Russian Baptists are Arminians. Their call for repentance and gospel message focuses on free will and accountability before God.

In the next section I continue by discussing the Russianness of Russian evangelicals, their authenticity, and ingenuity. I address these issues in the context of accusations against evangelicals, the strongest of which concern their assumed foreign influence and fraudulence.

Western sectarians or Russian Christians

I now address the history and role of evangelicals in their construction as a 'fraudulent western sect'. The oppression of evangelicals, and especially their marginalization during Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign, led to the construction of their image as sectarians (concerning the pejorative connotation of the word 'sect', see Wilson 1970). Despite their long history, cultural and spiritual roots, and long periods of isolation from global Christianity, most evangelicals are still perceived as a western-influenced movement, foreign to Russian culture and Russian Christianity, and often fraudulent. For example, the notorious anti-sectarian Orthodox apologist Alexander Dvorkin describes Baptists as 'a classical sect – it is a relatively small culturally secluded organization. The main sense of its existence lies in opposition to the country's major religious tradition' (Dvorkin n.d.). Dvorkin thus reflects the widespread take on Protestant Christianity in Russia, namely through the prism of the Orthodox Church as 'the Russian church'. However, there is no evidence of Baptist antagonism towards the Orthodox Church. Russian evangelicals do argue against Orthodox dogma and theology, and their application in everyday life: their primary goal is to preach the gospel as they see it, and such references are inevitable, given the claims to a monopoly on Christianity constantly made by Orthodox apologists.

The long history of evangelicals in Russia, especially their forced isolationism, contradicts the idea of a direct western influence. Russian evangelicals constantly sought that influence, primarily in the form of spiritual and financial support. However, this support was never substantial, and the vast majority of evangelical congregations was never fully financially

dependent on any foreign body.⁵ In Soviet times smuggled Bibles from American printing houses served as evidence of direct western influence and support; nowadays it is mostly the history and foreign origins of evangelical churches, and the simple fact that they are not Orthodox. However, evangelicals themselves claim their right to be called and perceived as Russian (Lunkin 2017b). They see Russian evangelicalism as a fact, and several generations of congregants who lived through oppression as justification for such rights (Mitrokhin 1997; Nikolskaia 2009).

The idea of *fraudulent sectarians* has much to do with a huge wave of various religious movements after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The liberalization of religious movements led to a previously unseen spiritual awakening. Many foreign and completely new religions, cults, and spiritual organizations of every kind emerged in Russia (see, for example, Lindquist 2006), and already existing communities faced an influx of neophytes. In the 1990s there were many scandals and criminal cases involving fraud schemes and the ‘zombifying’ of devotees. The ‘totalitarian sects’ (a term coined by Dvorkin) became a new threat in the Russian media and society. The persistent stigma of *sectarians* meant all minority religious movements were often associated with totalitarian sects. Hence, the paramount activities of evangelicals, namely numerous ministries of social support and missions, were and still often are associated with deception and conversion. For example, the paper advertisements of the Baptist rehabilitation facility that I studied were once marked in thick black ink, stating: ‘Beware of sect!’ Yet, as I have showed before, the evangelical ministries are often the only source of support for stigmatized and marginalized people in Russia, and missions may serve a similar purpose for larger groups (see Vallikivi 2009).

In summary, there are three main features of the glocalization of Russian evangelicalism: three aspects that place it in the global evangelical movement, while distinguishing it as a phenomenon that is inseparably linked with Russian history and culture. First, the one-hundred-and-fifty-year history of marginalization and isolation, enforced by oppression and repression, has forced Russian evangelicals to develop their own applied theology (although they did not manage to develop their own systematic theology: Bintsarovskiy 2014) and hermeneutics, their own way of life and mode of thought, without consultation, collaboration, or support from their brothers and sisters in faith abroad. Second, these ways of living and worshipping

⁵ Again, I do not include recent charismatic and neo-Pentecostal communities or Protestant churches that do not fit my definition of evangelicals, for congregations openly supported by foreign bodies are among them.

were forced under constant need to react and respond to Orthodox Christianity, as the dominant actor in the Russian religious sphere, and Russian sociocultural challenges, including Russian philosophy and literature, Soviet and post-Soviet ideologies, economic and political crises, wars and military conflicts, alcohol and substance abuse, crime, and so on. Third, Russian Christianity in general, and evangelicalism with its strong emphasis on *sola scriptura* in particular, is based on the language of the Russian Synodal Bible. This very specifically church-influenced nineteenth-century translation of is often interpreted by twenty-first century converts. At the same time Russian evangelical dogma, creed, theology, and hermeneutics remain in the framework of global evangelicalism, share its fundamental tenets such as *quinque solae*, and are commonly identified as evangelical by both secular (Mitrokhin, 1997; Coleman 2005) and Christian scholars (Sawatsky 1981; Nikolskaia 2009; Karetnikova 1999; Wiens 1924).

In the next section I offer an example of this Russian evangelical narrative, influenced by the sociocultural context of contemporary Russia. This example will demonstrate how evangelical tenets are implemented in transforming individuals not only spiritually and morally, but also bodily.

The Good Samaritan ministry

In 2014 and 2015 I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the rehabilitation ministry for the addicted people run by the Russian Baptist Church (see more on this study in Mikeshin 2016). The 'Good Samaritan' ministry runs more than thirty rehabilitation centres in northwest Russia and some other regions, including Latvia and Finland. The centres are isolated from big cities, and they are operated by former rehabilitants under a strict regime and rules. The programme lasts eight months and consists of two parts, rehabilitation and adaptation. Rehabilitation focuses exclusively on the study of the New Testament and the basics of the Christian life. Adaptation includes the study of the entire Bible and work assignments to maintain the centres' premises and earn some extra money.

Conversion and substance abuse treatment go hand in hand, representing essentially two aspects of a single complex process called Christian rehabilitation. Substance abuse can be represented roughly as a twofold addiction, chemical and psychological. Chemical addiction can be treated relatively easily, but psychological addiction remains till the end of the addict's life, because psychoactive substances cause irreversible changes to the addicted brain (Volkow and Li 2005). Conversion to the Russian

Baptist version of Christianity offers a powerful basis for moral transformation, a reason to live, and a meaning for life. Good Samaritan addicts focus on spiritual transformation, which is achieved by reading, learning, and eventually internalizing the language of the scriptures as the narrative of faith, interpersonal communication, and even thought and reasoning (cf. Coleman 2000). Roughly speaking, the more one adopts the biblical narrative, the more one is considered 'mature in faith'.

Besides the specificity of the Russian Synodal Bible, Good Samaritan rehabilitants do not simply learn the narrative it offers. Most have a very specific life experience, including prison sentences and street life, and at the end of their programme they are somewhat superficially familiar with the biblical texts. This background means they interpret scripture using the everyday logic to which they are accustomed – street wisdom, prison morality, and the 'junkie' experience (Mikeshin 2015). This *lay hermeneutics* is a spectacular example of the multiplicity of biblical *literalisms* and diversity of *evangelicalisms*, even in a single context (see also Bielo 2009).

The most spectacular example of a construction of lay hermeneutics that is heavily influenced by the 'junkie' and prison experience is provided by a man I shall call Andrei, whom I met when I stayed for two weeks in one of the centres in a rural area close to the Finnish border in November 2014. Andrei, then thirty-four, had served four prison sentences for drug-related offences, including his first in a maximum-security prison. He had spent most of his adult life injecting drugs and in and out of prison. During my stay he was an elder supervising the first stage of the programme, rehabilitation. His history of prison and addiction constantly came out in how he spoke and behaved, and the examples he gave when interpreting scripture.

Although he identified as a repentant and transformed believer, he acknowledged that his past would always be his constant struggle, for '[one's] flesh will never repent'. He was neither proud nor ashamed of his experience, yet he strove to change his life further. In his everyday routine he often used prison names for things (for example, *dal'niak* for toilet or *shkonar'* for bed), and most others (including me) naturally followed his example. However, he often emphasized the difference between prison and a rehabilitation centre. Most importantly, in supervising others he refused to see himself as a kind of guard. Prison guards are commonly despised by inmates, and in the rehabilitation context elders are regarded like anyone else, if more experienced, trustworthy, and versed in the Bible. Once Andrei noticed during the reading time two 'brothers' waking their friend so Andrei would

not notice. He became angry and told them bitterly: '[It's] like prison! Why are you making me a guard? We're here before God, not people.'

Most of the examples of sinful behaviour and vice he needed in explaining or discussing a biblical verse he naturally took from his life experience. For example, in discussing Romans 6:20–23,⁶ he explained: 'For we were never ashamed of boozing, smoking, [and] swearing. It was pretty normal for us. So now we don't have to be ashamed of being Christians, of not cursing.' Likewise, concerning Ephesians 4:29,⁷ he commented: 'Any evil talk⁸ isn't necessarily cursing (*mat*). It's these discussions, say, on wine, drugs, [or] crimes.'

In speaking about the sinful nature of humankind, he once illustrated it as follows:

Every epistle is addressed to the believers in the first place; but believers still have this bygone (*vetkhaia*) nature inside them. One day, I was going through the [prison] camp and found a thrown-in package (*zabros*). Although I was repentant already, I could not help checking inside. When I opened it, I found that it was fake, filled with flour. Someone had been tricked, apparently. I decided to check on my friend, also [a] repentant [believer], so I brought it to him. I entered the barracks and found him. 'Here,' I said, 'look what I found.' I knew for a fact he had repented and given up drugs. But when an addict sees that, his first reaction is obvious. What do you think he said? 'Whoa, [you've] got a syringe? (*baiian*)'.

Many of my interlocutors in rehabilitation settings involved their peculiar backgrounds in their hermeneutics as examples, moral standpoints, or practical implementation in the context of life in rehabilitation. They were not only from prison, but also from street life, homeless experience, and many other life situations they faced. The narrative of conversion in the context of rehabilitation is a bright example of a glocal narrative of Bible-believing Christianity. Using the context of global evangelicalism, following its fundamental tenets and principles, in Luther's and Bebbington's terms, Russian evangelicals formulate and interpret this narrative as a response to

6 'When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord' (NRSV).

7 'Let no evil talk come out of your mouths...' (NRSV).

8 In the Russian Synodal Bible, 'no evil talk' is translated as 'no rotten word' (*gniloe slovo*).

the dominant Orthodox Christianity and sociocultural, political, and moral challenges of contemporary Russia they face every day.

Conclusion

This article has discussed how oppression, marginality, and isolation have shaped Russian evangelicalism as a largely unseen yet essential feature of contemporary Russia. Russian evangelical Christianity is a glocal phenomenon. It fully adheres to global evangelical tenets and at the same time is shaped as a socioculturally and linguistically Russian phenomenon. Its Russianness is manifested in the construction of the Russian evangelical narrative, formulated in response to the cultural and political discourse of modern Russia, yet, most importantly, to Orthodox theology and its application as seen by evangelicals. This narrative is constructed with the language of the Synodal Bible in its contemporary interpretation.

Russian evangelicals are constantly accused of being western-influenced, proselytizing in the canonical land of the Russian Orthodox Church, and mistreating and misleading people. Diverse evangelical ministries for marginal groups, numerous missions, and an active moral position serve as evidence of the important role they play in contemporary Russian society. Their long tradition in the Russian lands and hardships and challenges throughout the Soviet period, both explicitly aimed against them and shared with the country in hard times, justify their role in Russian history. Despite its foreign roots, which are also true of the Orthodox Church, Russian evangelicalism is an inseparable part of modern Russian history, culture, and society, and my article is an attempt to demonstrate how Russian it really is.

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Book Reviews

Éva Pócs (ed.): *Body, Soul, Spirits and Supernatural Communication*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2019. 487 pages.

Traditions of belief around the world in both the past and present are a shared field of interest for scholars of religion, historians, folklorists, ethnologists, linguists, literary scholars, and psychologists. The conference of the International Society of the Folk Narrative Research (ISFNR) at the University of Pécs, Hungary in 2014 was undoubtedly proof of this. The massive anthology *Body, Soul, Spirits and Supernatural Communication*, published five years later, is based on the papers given at that conference. The editor of the anthology, Professor Emerita Eva Pócs, the Hungarian ethnologist and folklorist, is widely known and appreciated for her extensive work on folk religion and folk beliefs, as well as her active and broad career as an academic writer. As a cross-section of the twenty-first century folkloristic and anthropological research of religion with its twenty-six authors, this anthology reflects the research field in which Pócs herself has been one of the most remarkable pioneers in Europe.

The aim of this anthology is as fascinating as it is challenging: to outline a more subtle and detailed picture of the ways in which the concepts of body and soul are understood in European cultures. The chapters describe and discuss vari-

ous cultural views on death and the deceased, as well as analysing the ideas of communication between the human and spirit worlds. A central theme is the understanding of pre-Christian beliefs' intertwining with Christian ones which, for their part, are largely derived from Jewish and Greek traditions. Several of the anthology's chapters unwrap these roots and traces of local belief traditions mainly around Europe. Furthermore, as Pócs points out in her own chapter, it is Christian traditions which have actually maintained locally many pre-Christian traditions. The collection also includes presentations on some Central Asian traditions, as well as an overview of certain West African traditions of spiritual process which make interesting points of comparison with European ones.

As Pócs outlines the editing principles of the opus, the volume has been compiled 'without methodological, temporal or geographical limitations'. For the reader this means that the abundance of both material and methodological approaches makes it quite difficult to get a grip on the anthology as a whole. It is also a demanding task to review and evaluate such a collection because of the diverse approaches of the chapters and somewhat inconsistent structure. The authors have been quite free to compile their texts. Clearer and more coherent guidelines for the authors would therefore have been

an advantage, especially because this important work, with its rich content, is certainly considerably more than a collection of conference proceedings. Its greatest contribution is that it provides the reader with numerous detailed analyses of specific themes and phenomena. It thus offers an exciting view of what is going on in the international study of popular religious traditions at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Unfortunately, the space available only allows a few examples to be highlighted.

Most of the chapters deal with historical and/or literal material. Only six focus on contemporary culture or take an ethnographic approach. One of the most rewarding reading experiences for me was Vilmos Tánzos's chapter on the dimensions of the religious worldview in the case of a Moldavian Csángó man. By using the concept of *religious registers*, the author analyses the interlaced elements of popular, magical, and ecclesiastical or 'official' religion, illustrating their constant interaction. His chapter's message is that religious notions derived from different ages, institutions, and cultural influences never quite coalesce into a single unified and exclusive system. Instead, both individuals and communities use religion's suitable elements or activate its different aspects situationally – even opposing ones in relation to transcendence. This reasoning essentially configures the general idea of the entire anthology.

The volume's first two sections are dedicated to various concepts and understandings of the soul and its autonomy outside the human body. The remaining chapters deal with different mythological beings like fairies, werewolves, and vampires, as well as communication with the spirit world. The anthology indicates not only the rich and versatile ways of understanding human existence within folk spirituality and numerous different perceptions of the afterlife, but also the great interest of current academic research in these issues.

Supernatural experiences are an integral part of humanity, and various methods of achieving them, both in ancient times and today, are a permanently current subject of study in folk religion. Mirjam Mencej makes a very enlightening survey of the literature on the techniques of magically interacting with the other realities. Mencej especially discusses the role of circular movement like a 'spinning dance' as a facilitator of altered states of consciousness. She studies it in the context of shamanistic Siberian and Sámi traditions and compares it to the ritual whirling of the dervishes. Ilaria Micheli, for her part, compares the theme of the soul's loss and spirit possession in two different West African traditions. She also discusses the culturally relevant rationality within the relationships between the human and other worlds. These analyses, among several others, focus on the universality of transcendental experiences, their psychological roots,

and the meanings and functions in their respective cultural contexts.

The methodological diversity of the anthology's chapters includes comparison, textual analysis and linguistic etymologies, description, the historical tracing of beliefs and rituals, and the study of narratives and ethnography. For a scholar of religion it is also most illuminating to learn about the oft-covered aspects of research history. Of course, it is a well-known fact that the first collectors of pagan beliefs and rituals were clergymen who had the mission of justifying their Christian agenda. Later, the developments in modern science may have found remarkable inspiration in spiritual traditions. Júlia Gyimesi's chapter on the history of the Budapest School of psychoanalysis offers an interesting perspective on such developments by shedding light on the School's interest in the relationship between occultism and the functions of the human mind's unconsciousness.

Although contemporary culture plays a side role as such in the anthology, the chapters' historical perspectives in many cases shed light on the customs and beliefs that also exist today, despite the fact that their forms and functions may look completely different compared with earlier times. In her preface Pócs raises the 'striking lack of change', referring to the fact that studies of ancient and medieval religions give surprisingly similar results to studies of contemporary anthropology (pp. xv–xvi). This is an interesting observation, which may point the

way to fresh perspectives in the future. The anthology *Body, Soul, Spirits and Supernatural Communication* continues and in many ways complements the same broad field of study that the earlier anthology *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief* (Routledge 2012), edited by Ülo Valk and Marion Bowman, confirmed. Both these anthologies approach the endless cultural variations and idiosyncrasies of lived religion with enlightening case studies.

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Pål Ketil Botvar, Ann Kristin Gresaker, and Olav Hovdelien (eds): *Ingen Spøk – en studie av religion og humour*. Cappelen Damm Akademisk, Nordic Open Access Scholarly Publishing 2019, 297 pp.

The anthology *Ingen Spøk – en studie av religion og humour* (*No Joke: A Study of Religion and Humour*) offers a fresh perspective on the role religion plays in society and culture today. The book is edited by Pål Ketil Botvar, Ann Kristin Gresaker, and Olav Hovdelien. It focuses primarily on the Scandinavian context. The background is a joint project ‘Humour and religion – conflict, dialogue and change’ between KIFO, OsloMet, and the University of Agder. The anthology takes as its departure the sociology of religion, media studies, and theories of humour. It is structured through two themes: ‘Religion in humour’ and ‘Humour in religion’. Prior to these sections two chapters establish the publication’s framework.

In the first chapter the sensitive context for the theme is made clear – making fun of religion is connected with terrorist attacks and cartoonists living under police protection. This has placed the question of humour at the centre of the debate about religion in the public sphere. This anthology addresses the question through cases that point to the complexity of religion and humour in our contemporary context. The first chapter also establishes the anthology’s theoretical themes concern-

ing religion, media, and humour. The second introductory chapter presents an analysis of material from a Norwegian national survey of attitudes to humour and religion among the public. The analysis provides an insight into the normative framework of humour and religion in Norway. It indicates that at the same time as a majority across the board is open to humour concerning religion, there is a connection where the more religiously active people are, the less accepting they are of such humour. The analysis of this material is a strong point of the anthology, because it provides an insight into the context of most of the cases presented under the two themes.

Under the ‘Religion in humour’ theme four contributions discuss religion as it is portrayed in comedic genres and contexts. Kai Hanno Schwind analyses British and American comedies, which are part of the media consumption of many Scandinavians. Ann Kristin Gresaker examines jokes about religion, gender, and sex in a men’s magazine, showing how they strengthen stereotypical images of gender and religion. Sofia Sjö discusses the representation of Islam in two Norwegian comedies. She presents the categories of migrant cinema or diaspora cinema as part of a societal reflection on ethnicity, arguing that these movies have a potential to challenge stereotypes. In Pål Repstad’s chapter on representations of pastors of the Norwegian Church, a historical perspective is

presented, linking the development to a general diminishment of authority and a shift to a softer Christianity. Gresaker's and Hovdeliens' contribution analyses the viewpoints of stand-up comedians between the ideals of free speech and the realities of concerns about what to make fun of and whom. These contributions raise an interesting question of when and how religion in humour is a tool for solidifying stereotypes, and when it is a tool for change. As there are no concluding chapters for the sections or the anthology as a whole, these questions are not discussed across the publication.

Under the heading 'Humour in religion' seven contributions discuss humour in specific religious and life view contexts, providing an insight into the norms of humour across majority and minority contexts. The chapter by Bjarte Lee-Helgesen on the use of humour by pastors in the Norwegian Church in relation to death discusses the role of tension relief, and how the humorous portrayal of the deceased by a pastor can create room for a healing laughter. Andreas Häger discusses the difficulty of using humour as a religious organization through an examination of reactions on social media to jokes made by the Swedish church. The use of humour to gain a place in the public discourse is also present in the chapter by Olav Hovdelien in the case of two Catholic religious order brothers. The chapter by Shohaib Sultan on Muslim traditions and contemporary Muslim stand-up comedians provides an

interesting insight into how humour has played a role both in the Western world and Muslim countries, with a focus on popular culture. Gunnar Haaland analyses rules and norms about what to make fun of in the weekly Friday joke in the Oslo Jewish community's newsletter.

In analysing humour in a new age context, Irene Trynes finds a tendency to a more mild and positive humour, and a move away from the more satirical and self-critical segments that were found previously. There is no lack of smiling or laughing people in the images in this context, but it is a happy, mild laughter! A similar dilemma between harsh humour and maintaining a more positive tone is reflected in the chapter by Benjamin Eriksen and Didrik Söderlind on atheist and humanist communities. Whereas there is a tradition of atheists using harsh humour in their criticism of religion, the humanist groups are critical of this from a perspective in which all views of life should be treated respectfully. Across these contributions it is clear that understanding and navigating norms of humour can offer an advantage in both internal and external communication. However, breaking norms provokes strong reactions, and in the modern social media context it is difficult not only for individuals but religious organizations to find the right balance.

The strength of any anthology is that the reader is allowed to move through different cases and contexts following a common theme.

The weakness is that it is difficult to connect the perspectives raised in the various chapters. This anthology provides a good foundation for connecting the material in its first two chapters. Yet there are some questions across the book with which it would have been interesting to reconnect in a closing chapter.

As mentioned, this could have been a discussion of when and why humour becomes a tool for change and at other times seems to lead to a stagnation of stereotypes of religion. Are the differences primarily connected with genre norms or specific religious traditions and their place in society? And what are we seeing across the various contexts concerning religious authority through the lens of humour and religion, both internally and externally? What, for example, is going on with the constant use of Roman Catholic clergy in jokes in a context where there are relatively few Catholics? And what does the stereotype of religious people as lacking in humour tell us about the place of religion in society and culture today?

This all points to a question of norms of humour and religion as part of the Scandinavian context. This is touched on to some degree, but it would have been interesting if there had been a conclusive discussion of the norms of humour in relation to society. An example of such a discussion can be found in a recent Danish publication, *Humoursocialisering* by Lita Lundquist, which explores the national norms of humour and its consequences.

Humour can include or exclude, a well-known fact in the Scandinavian countries too. For example, there is a Danish joke that the shortest book in the world is called 'Norwegian humour'. But as Lundquist concludes in her book, Danes are not as funny as they think they are. And this anthology shows that the Norwegian context has the upper hand when it comes to research into humour and religion. The anthology provides interesting and relevant analyses of cases within a common framework linking theories of humour to theories of contemporary religion. It offers a fresh and interesting perspective on a central aspect of religion today, and I highly recommend it.

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Daniel Enstedt, Göran Larsson, and Teemu T. Mantsinen (eds): *Handbook of Leaving Religion*. Brill, 2020, 358 pp.

Edited by religious scholars Daniel Enstedt, Göran Larsson, and Teemu T. Mantsinen, the anthology *Handbook of Leaving Religion* is divided into three parts: the first focuses on historical and major debates, covering antiquity and the major world religions in six chapters; the second, consisting of thirteen chapters, on contemporary case studies; the third, consisting of seven chapters covering a variety of disciplines, on theoretical and methodological approaches.

The anthology appears to be framed in line with areas of religious studies interested in secularization theory, given that it begins by introducing Peter Berger's seminal work and later rebuttal of religious decline. In recent years we have seen a marked increase of studies on populations presumed to be 'secularized', such as work on atheist, agnostic, and humanist organizations, as well as quantitative studies on the growing presence of the 'nones', especially in the United States, as well as the breakdown of religiously indifferent majority populations primarily in Europe. The name of the anthology – *Leaving Religion* – implies that the aim is to associate itself with this body of work. However, Enstedt, Larsson, and Mantsinen are quick to specify in their introduction that the

concept of leaving religion – while often associated with irreligiosity, agnosticism, and atheism – 'can very well be about leaving one religion from another' (Enstedt, Larsson, and Mantsinen, 2020, p. 1). That is, in this volume they have aimed to collect historical overviews of world religions, contemporary case studies, and theoretical and methodological aspects on the topic of leaving religion, focusing on various forms of religiosity, as well as on cases of *switching religion* based on the Pew projection that the total number of religious adherents worldwide is unlikely to decline.

This is an interesting approach. It attempts to bridge research on the borderline of studies on avowed irreligiosity – such as studies on new atheism, for example – and borderline cases of unclear allegiances that have previously been studied as the 'fuzzy middle', believing without belonging, diffused spirituality, and banal religiosity, and combines the two from a distinctly religious studies perspective. However, this paves the way to a good deal of conceptual confusion, and the editors do indeed spend a good portion of the introduction trying to nail down the concept of leaving religion, drawing on work from nonreligious and secularity research, as well as cult studies, thus connecting the concept with theories on deconversion and apostasy. Enstedt, Larsson, and Mantsinen conclude that it is difficult to define what 'leaving' entails, arguing that a conversion or 'switch' of religious identity like-

wise entails leaving or a ‘shifting’ position similar to a deconversion. Their introduction thus highlights how shifting one’s religious identity has been associated with significant social costs in certain contexts, and that the social cost of leaving religion has not been a focus of nonreligious and secular studies generally. This volume therefore seeks to contribute to this lack by examining the complex emotions surrounding the adoption or discarding of dietary restrictions connected to particular religious traditions, for example.

This focus on the social cost of deconversion and conversion alike clarifies why it may be fruitful to combine both processes within the concept of ‘leaving religion’. The anthology takes a broad approach, encompassing historical debates on topics of conversion, contemporary case studies from a range of traditions, including established institutions like Catholicism, new religious or spiritual practices like Vipassana meditation, asylum seekers leaving Islam for Christianity, and chapters approaching the topic from a range of subfields within religious studies. It will therefore doubtless be a welcome addition to many introductory courses in religious studies. However, while devoting time to conceptualizing exactly what is and should be meant by ‘leaving’, the editors fail to define exactly what is meant by ‘religion’, thus skirting a major theoretical debate within religious studies – critical religion studies – which has irrevocably affected the contours of religious stud-

ies and deserves space in a volume used in undergraduate courses, as well as compounding the conceptual argument they make about leaving religion. If leaving religion both encompasses deconversion – which in this case would mean disavowing a religious worldview *in general* – and switching religious traditions, where ‘religion’ seemingly remains a constant, how is the latter a case of leaving *religion*? As Michael Stausberg points out in his chapter in the volume – ‘Leaving Hinduism: Deconversion as Liberation’ – leaving religion ‘is not the same as *leaving a religion*’ (Stausberg, 2020, p. 99).

Regardless of this conceptual confusion, the anthology offers a berth for studies that are topical and important. I am especially thinking of Nora Stene’s chapter ‘Leaving Islam for Christianity: Asylum Seeker Converts’, which explores the effect on the politics surrounding refugees on the individual’s faith, and how it relates to the tradition they have left in complex ways that are not necessarily highly critical or outspoken. For researchers from the field of nonreligion and secularity research lured by the title, there are some chapters in the second part of the volume that contribute especially to the emerging field of nonreligious and secular studies, given that it includes traditions that tend to be ignored in the field, which in its focus on outspoken atheism in the US and the UK tend to capture mainly former Christians, or people whose primary cultural reference is Christianity. While various forms of

Christian tradition comprise most of the case studies in this volume, there are some notable exceptions. A striking example is Masoumeh Rahamani's chapter, which focuses on New Zealand disaffiliations from the Vipassana movement, examining what it means to leave a religious movement in the West that is surrounded by a low level of tension with its societal contexts, and indeed benefits from the 'positive sociopolitical discourse surrounding meditation' in contemporary western societies (Rahamani, 2020, p. 131).

The volume's third and final part should be particularly useful for undergraduate teachers introducing the topic of religious studies as an empirical field to their students, while wishing to instil the breadth of methods and theoretical traditions that are available within the field. This includes historical, social geographical, anthropological, psychological, and sociological approaches. Of particular importance in this section is Teemu Taira's chapter 'Media and Communication Approaches to Leaving Religion', because it highlights the role of various forms of media in processes of leaving religion, a focus Taira points out is lacking in research on leaving religion and conversion, and provides the reader with a crash course in mediatization theory.

While the framing of the volume is somewhat inconsistent in that it is unclear if leaving a religion is indeed the same as leaving religion, compounded by the lack of a definition

of religion and engagement with critical religion theory, I would still recommend this book to religious studies scholars looking for a work dealing with the complexities of religious identity in historical and contemporary contexts, who are also interested in a handbook for undergraduate students introducing the available methodological and theoretical approaches within religious studies.

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Gavin Flood: *Religion and the Philosophy of Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, 464 pp.

In recent decades scholars in philosophy, theology, and religious studies have discussed the merits of concepts such as *worldviews* (for example, Ninian Smart) and *views of life* (for example, Anders Jeffner). These concepts aim to offer a more neutral umbrella that covers both religions and various secular counterparts, and their pros and cons have been the subject of lively discussion. Flood's ambitious and demanding book introduces another concept with a similar but perhaps narrower focus, *philosophies of life*. Much like worldviews and views of life, philosophies of life are both descriptive and prescriptive – they portray life in a certain way and offer guidance for how to accomplish a better state. As Flood puts it, philosophies of life have an ambition to 'articulate what life itself is and to develop ways of living that enhance life' (1). That is, they focus explicitly on what we can say about *life* (more than about the universe or God), and this means that where a student of worldviews would naturally take physics as a fundamental dialogue partner, Flood is much more interested in disciplines that particularly focus on life and its development (especially evolutionary biology and cognitive science/neuroscience). Besides these sources, he also charts the philosophies of life of several religious traditions (under the headings 'Indic', 'Chinese', and

'Greek and Abrahamic traditions') and secular Western philosophies. (If I were to add a critical comment here, it is that it would have been interesting to learn more about the various integrative attempts made from within these religious traditions in encounters with contemporary science; that is, how contemporary insights about life are treated within these religious traditions today.)

Such a project is full of hermeneutical challenges: the different scientific and academic disciplines discussed in the book, as well as the different philosophies and religious traditions that are taken up, all rely, explicitly and/or implicitly, on various conceptions of human life, and thus on philosophies of life. Secular philosophies are influenced by both Greek and (primarily) Christian thought, but they have also greatly affected Christian theology and religious studies. Any student will also have descriptive and normative conceptions that together add up to something similar to a philosophy of life, and there is no neutral ground on which to stand to handle such questions. Concerning Flood's approach, this is unavoidable, given that the human being is both the inquirer and object of inquiry, and that to understand ourselves, we need to take into account the histories of ways of understanding ourselves (and human life generally). In line with approaches such as Habermas's and Stevenson's (in *Ten Theories of Human Nature*), Flood suggests that religions typically offer a description of human life as fundamentally flawed

but capable of self-repair (but only with the help of religious insight, practices, and/or powers). However, the kind of self-repair needed and the way to achieve it differs in different religions.

Flood points out that the different Religious-Cosmic Models and their respective philosophies of life that have been developed throughout human history have been questioned by two relative newcomers on the stage: what he calls the Galilean Mathematical Model; and the Kantian-Humanist Model. Both these models suffer, according to Flood, from a one-sidedness and hence a lack of integration: the Galilean-Mathematical Model privileges the third-person perspective; the Kantian-Humanist the first-person perspective. Neither can offer a comprehensive account of life, but each is necessary for an 'integrated approach to human reality'. Hence, Flood seeks to draw on both to deepen our understanding of life, civilization, and religion – and perhaps most importantly, the interplay between the three.

In the first part of the book, Flood draws on various scientific disciplines to explain why human beings form religions that shape and are shaped by civilizations. The explanations he offers are not in terms of some simple causation but of necessary features of human beings as *religious* beings, such as the ability to use language, prosociality, and so on. These necessary features are crucial for understanding how human beings can come to shape religions but cannot – and should not

attempt to – explain religion *away*. He borrows the term 'niche construction' from biology, suggesting that just as organisms in evolution are never passive objects – since they shape the environments in which natural selection occurs – religions, too, can be seen as a kind of niche in which prosocial behaviour and other features are channelled in particular directions. However, he continues, accounts that stop there become reductionist, because they disregard the insights of the Kantian-Humanist Model, and not least how religions *appeal* to human beings; that is, how they offer something to us as the conscious beings, all too aware of our own mortality and shortcomings, that we actually are. Hence, the need for integrative approaches. The niches that religions comprise are loaded with meaning and thus appeal to beings in need of self-repair, but without integration we are left with impoverished evolutionary and cognitive science-based explanations that disregard meaning or with meaning-seeking explanations that devise religions from thin air, or pure thought, so to speak, which in turn offer an impoverished view of religions in all their complexity.

Throughout the book, Flood returns to the ambition to find explanations of religion and the problems with both the reductionist Galilean-Mathematical Model and the overly consciousness-oriented Kantian-Humanist Model. His alternative centres on the concept of 'bio-energy', which is the 'power of life itself coming to articulation through social cognition

that has material or physical effects on the brains and behaviours of social actors' (372). Communication (not least verbal) transforms agents both physically and socially and the meaning-systems with which they live, so we have a range of feedback loops between the different biological and social forces, and the systems of meaning they create. Unless we understand (human) life itself and its dynamics, we will be unable to comprehend phenomena such as religions, phenomena that simultaneously contain their own understandings of life.

In his discussion of different Religious-Cosmic Models, Flood uses the concept of sacrifice as a hermeneutical key, arguing that cathartic and gift-exchange models of sacrifice are too instrumental and overlook its character as a 'refusal of nothingness and death' (95). This refusal in turn takes different forms and helps shape civilizations in different directions, but it is consonant with the ambivalent relationship between religion and civilization that he traces. Religions affirm communal values necessary for the maintenance of civilized life, but – especially after the axial era – also *renounce* those values as obstacles to a more authentic and deeper life. Of course, *what* is renounced and the kind of goals striven for vary between the traditions that Flood discusses, but he traces a similar pattern in each: sacrifice is renunciation of certain goods for the obtaining of other goods considered more durable and worthwhile. This simultaneous upholding

and renouncing of communal values makes religious traditions dynamic elements of the civilizations of which they are formative elements.

Flood's approach to religion as a distinctly human phenomenon because of the kind of beings we are and the interactions in which beings like us typically come to engage also entails the idea that even if organized religions were to disappear, or be significantly weakened as in Europe, 'there is still the need for repair and human fulfilment, the human longing for meaning and place' (389). The form this will take depends on and simultaneously affects the political and social landscape. The New Age turn to 'de-centred and individualistic' forms of authority, for example, 'assume[s] a new kind of political order and perhaps an emergent global community' (392). This brings us back to the interplay between religions and civilizations.

Flood covers a lot of territory in this book and moves between many different disciplines. In times of ever-increasing specialization and often rather heated debates about the relationship between different scientific and academic disciplines' contributions to studies of religion, its broad scope and integrative ambitions to give many perspectives their due are refreshingly unfashionable.

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