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Editorial Note

Academics sometimes lament that they are pressed to write more than they read, but what happens when we actually do that and overlook a text we should have read in our writing, and nobody points it out before it is too late? What can we learn, not only as individuals but as a community of scholars, from such incidents? These are some of the questions dealt with in the first two texts of this issue of Temenos, a discussion between Professor Margit Warburg, University of Copenhagen, and Dr Ruth Illman and Mercédesz Czimbalmos MA from Åbo Akademi University. Illman and Czimbalmos had overlooked the work of Warburg in their recent Temenos article (2/2020), a mistake not noticed by the reviewers or by me as the editor. As such mistakes are often silenced or blown out of proportion, at Temenos we are happy to see how this particular one resolved itself in a more general discussion about the visibility of research.

This issue of Temenos continues with last year's Temenos lecture, 'Legitimizing Claims of Special Knowledge: Towards an Epistemic Turn in Religious Studies', delivered by Dr David G. Robertson from the Open University, United Kingdom on 3 December 2020. In his eloquent and thought-provoking lecture, Robertson argues that rather than operating within the epistemes they should be criticizing, scholars of Religious Studies could focus on the ways in which various types of special knowledge are claimed, constructed, and maintained.

All this is followed by four regular articles. Following the principle of ex oriente lux, we begin in Finland with Professor Terhi Utriainen's work on otherworldly relations in complementary and alternative medicine – a topic hotly debated and contested in contemporary Finnish society. Drawing on two distinct ethnographic projects, Utriainen proposes that engagement with otherworldly relations might be understood in terms of what she calls 'possibility work', when conventional healthcare and therapy are seen as insufficient or even unavailable in complex life situations.

Moving west to our dear neighbour Sweden, we next find Professor Tomas Lindgren and Hannes Sonnenschein MA taking another look at the problematic category of 'religion', here in the context of religiously inspired conflict. While some empirical studies demonstrate that religious conflict

is more violent, durable, and more difficult to resolve than its secular counterpart, Lindgren and Sonnenschein contend that such conclusions are unreliable, as they fail to provide clear criteria for the difference between the two types of conflict. Rather, the authors argue, religious conflict is an ideologically charged concept, and the study of the religion-and-conflict nexus reinforces the current systems of power.

Remaining in Sweden, we next move back in time for Dr Paul Linjamaa's article on how the decline of the concept of Fate in late antiquity was connected with the decline of the idea of a feminine divinity, and how the disappearance of Fate from the prevailing world was seminal in the birth of a new 'technology of the self', as understood by Michael Foucault and others. Linjamaa argues that the transformations that occurred during this extremely important historical period extend to the realm of power, the view of the human body, and ethics, as can be seen in a new focus on self-governance.

Continuing with the rich field of the history of religions, we next move another step to the west, to Norway and Dr Jan Kozák's text on the idea of a literal or structural echo connecting the Old Norse cosmogony and eschatology. Kozák's thoughtful analysis sheds light on the sacrificial pattern hidden behind the two events and contextualizes the motif of the mighty sound reappearing at both the beginning and end of the world.

The topic of the end of the world may seem a gloomy one with which to end, especially given that despite several vaccines, we still cannot see an end to the Covid-19 pandemic, raging as it is with renewed fury in India as I write these lines. Nevertheless, the end is apposite on a personal level, as this issue of Temenos is the last that I will edit. Working with Temenos has been a great privilege and delight for me, not least because of the excellent team I have had: Malin Fredriksson MA as editorial secretary; Mr Rupert Moreton as language editor; Dr Sofia Sjö as review editor; and Dr Pekka Tolonen as copy editor. With the exception of Sjö, who will be replaced by Dr Alexandra Bergholm from Helsinki University, they will all continue to serve Temenos in the same capacities. I offer my heartfelt thanks to them, to our editorial board, to the reviewers, to the authors and naturally to you, dear reader. Temenos would not exist without you.

When I took over as editor of Temenos at the end of 2014, a senior colleague and previous editor reminded me of the phrase noblesse oblige. As the grandson of a small farmer from Ostrobothnia, I knew that my colleague was naturally not referring to any nobility in me personally, but to the prestige of this important journal. As editor, I have tried to take these

words seriously, and from the outset I felt that part of this responsibility was to pass on the task of editor before too long. After six years, and with funding secured for the next two, I feel that the time is right. It is therefore my great joy to introduce Dr Minna Opas from Turku University and Dr Sofia Sjö from Åbo Akademi University, who will take over as editors from the next issue. As they are both excellent scholars and well acquainted with the journal, I have no doubt that Temenos will flourish under their guidance. *Śubham astu!*

Måns Broo

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Knowing, Being, Doing – Perhaps Not So New: A Comment on Illman and Czimbalmos, *Temenos* 56 (2)

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The previous issue of *Temenos* 56 (2), contained an article by Ruth Illman and Mercédesz Czimbalmos entitled 'Knowing, Being, and Doing Religion: Introducing an Analytical Model for Researching Vernacular Religion' (2020, 171–99). The article's authors analyse data from interviews with 101 members of the Jewish communities in Finland to map 'how individuals in the various datasets describe personal and institutional ways of knowing, being, and doing Jewish' (Illman and Czimbalmos 2020, 182).

I would like to congratulate Illman and Czimbalmos for a fine and interesting article, which among other things shows that it can be fruitful to structure such interview data according to the three concepts of *knowing, being,* and *doing*. However, it surprised me that the authors did not refer to any previous research using the three concepts; this indicates that the authors' use of *knowing, being,* and *doing* is new in religious studies, as well as in other fields of research.[1]

Illman's and Czimbalmos's article interests me partly because of a long-standing research interest in contemporary Jewish communities, and partly because I have long used the three concepts of *knowing, being,* and *doing* in the study of the Danish Baha'is. I have analysed interviews with 120 members of the Danish Baha'i community, and presented quotations and other data from the interviews, showing among other things how their religious belonging can be structured by using the three concepts of *knowing, doing,* and *being* (the order in which I used the terms) (Warburg 2006, 331–73). The

1 Before I wrote this comment I contacted Ruth Illman in her capacity as first and senior author. We agreed that I should write a comment on their article to which she and her co-author could respond, and that our texts should be published as two separate entries in the same issue of *Temenos*. I wish to thank the editor, Dr Måns Broo, for giving us the space for this exchange.

characterization of the three concepts is similar in content in Illman's and Czimbalmos's article and in my publications. A careful reading of Illman and Czimbalmos compared to the presentation and use of the three concepts in my monograph on the Baha'is, *Citizens of the World* (Warburg 2006), shows parallels (see Table 1) that would normally call for a reference to this work.

Tracing knowing, doing, and being in scholarship

When I first used *knowing*, *doing*, and *being* in 1988 to structure belonging in religious minority groups, I was inspired by sociolinguist Joshua A. Fishman's theoretical discussion of ethnicity. Fishman's suggestion was to apply *knowing*, *doing*, and *being* sociologically to characterize ways of belonging to an ethnic group (Fishman 1980). My own contribution was to transfer Fishman's approach to the study of religion, to elaborate on the characteristics of the three dimensions, and to stress that they could be manifested in both attitudes and behaviour (Warburg 1988; Warburg 1997; Warburg 2005; most fully in Warburg 2006, 331–73). The three concepts were also used in a monograph characterizing Danish identity (Gundelach, Iversen, and Warburg 2008, 159–64); this was followed by another article (Warburg 2008). There are some later scholarly works on religious attitudes and behaviour that reference both Fishman's chapter and my exposition of the three concepts (Rosen 2009; la Cour and Hvidt 2010; Andersen et al. 2011; Moestrup and Hvidt 2016; Prinds et al. 2016; Leth-Nissen 2018).

More generally, *knowing*, *doing*, and *being* have long been used in many disciplines. For example, a leadership training textbook from Harvard Business School bears the title *The Handbook for Teaching Leadership: Knowing, Doing, and Being* (Scott, Nohria, and Khurana 2012). The whole textbook is organized according to the headlines *knowing*, *doing*, and *being*, and the connection between the three is depicted in a graphical model which, according to the authors, was developed for leadership training in the American army.

The three concepts are also proposed as a paradigm for 'dynamic conceptual frameworks that can adequately represent the complexities of everyday CYC [Childhood and Youth Care] practice' (White 2007). The author's reflections on the praxis of *knowing*, *doing*, and *being* lead her back to Aristotle's three different forms of knowledge: *episteme* (theoretical and contemplative knowledge); *techne* (action-oriented, pragmatic, and productive knowledge), and *phronesis* (value-oriented wisdom). She employs a graphical model depicting *knowing*, *doing*, and *being* as three overlapping ellipses.

Table 1. A comparison of the use of the three concepts of *knowing*, *being*, and *doing*

Illman & Czimbalmos 2020	Warburg 2006
'The analytical model presented in the following proposes a conceptualization of vernacular 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' (176f.).	'In the present chapter, I show how belonging to a Baha'i community was manifested among the Danish Baha'is in the beginning of the 1980s' (332). 'I can now introduce three dimensions of belonging – "knowing", "doing" and "being"' (333).
'The three modalities – "knowing", "being", and "doing" religion – should not be regarded as mutually exclusive categories or as necessary conditions for vernacular religion' (181).	'The dimensions of "knowing", "doing" and "being" are manifested in both attitudes and behaviour, and they are not mutually exclusive, instead, they supplement each other. Sometimes one dimension is particularly emphasised, sometimes another, depending on the specific context' (333).
'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' (193).	'The terms "knowing", "doing" and "being" were originally proposed by the sociolinguist Joshua A. Fishman in a theoretical discussion of ethnicity' (333).
'The goal is thus to develop it into a more generally applicable analytical tool for structuring and elucidating contemporary ethnographies' (173).	'I suggest, however, that the terms may also be useful in an analysis of belonging to any group with a strong feeling of identity, and they therefore can be applied in an analysis of belonging to most religious minority groups, including the Danish Baha'i community' (333).

The literature above is among several other examples of the use of *knowing*, *doing*, and *being* in a different context than analysing religious identity or belonging. The concepts are commonly used in educational research; another example where they are used is in brain and consciousness research (Clarke 2013).

Within the study of religion I have traced the three concepts of *knowing*, *doing*, and *being* back to the philosopher of religion Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). In his famous treatise *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (1799, rev. 1806, 1821) Schleiermacher saw *knowing*, *doing*, and *being* as an expression of piety, a grasping of the love of God with all your human faculties of being (or feeling), doing, and knowing (Merklinger 1993, 60f.). Schleiermacher's own allusion to the three concepts is found in the epilogue to *On Religion*:

> I was sure you would there find, what I would willingly show you, that, in the very type of religion, which in Christianity you so often despise, you are rooted with your whole knowing, doing and being (Schleiermacher 1893, 177).

The combined concepts of *knowing*, *doing*, and *being* in Schleiermacher's use is a Christian ideal, and they cannot be said to lead directly to Fishman's sociological use. Fishman saw the three concepts as a way to systematize informants' various expressions of their ethnic belonging.

Since Schleiermacher *knowing*, *doing*, and *being* have had a continued use in theology. An example is a British PhD thesis on the Salvation Army with the title *Knowing, Being and Doing: The Spiritual Life Development of Salvation Army Officers* (Shakespeare 2011). The author concludes that 'spiritual life development is concerned with understanding and facilitating the interaction between knowing, being and doing in the life of Salvationists' (Shakespeare 2011, 131).[2]

2 I have also noted the use of *knowing*, *doing*, and *being* in modern Islamic theological thinking: 'Religion that is free from all coercion refers to belief in God as embodied in the verse of the Throne. The word for religion, and Islam's own self-description, is *deen*. As these verses make clear, *deen* is a way of knowing, being and doing, a way of life. What is more, this way of living, based on God's consciousness, brings God near to us, it illuminates our lives' (Sardar 2011, 180f.).

The claim of novelty

The theoretical core of Illman's and Czimbalmos's model is the three concepts of *knowing*, *doing*, and *being*. This is also indicated by the title of their article and the analyses of the empirical material with repeated references to *knowing*, *doing*, or *being*.

Illman and Czimbalmos claim that their approach using the three concepts is *new* or *novel*. This claim is made in the abstract and in the concluding section (193). The word *Introducing* in the title and 'introduce' (172f.) also indicates a claim of novelty.

However, in the light of the above brief literature survey there is little basis for calling Illman's and Czimbalmos's use of *knowing*, *doing*, and *being* as new. Nor is their presentation of the three concepts in a graphical model with overlapping circles showing their interplay new in light of White (2007). Illman and Czimbalmos have added an outer circle with *continuity*, *change*, and *context*; however, this alone hardly justifies calling the model new.

Why is it so important to discuss whether the idea of using *knowing*, *doing*, and *being* and its derived graphical model is new? The problem is that the claim of novelty in Illman's and Czimbalmos's article signals that there is no need to look elsewhere for scholarship on *knowing*, *doing*, and *being*. Without drawing on previous scholars' contributions, the reader therefore has less basis for a stimulating discussion of the three concepts. Furthermore, whenever scholars are applying the three concepts on any empirical material – at least within the study of religion – they are now obliged to refer to Illman and Czimbalmos 2020, even in cases where it is irrelevant, because of the authors' claim of novelty. If they do not, a third-party reviewer would have good reason to question the state of the art.

The above problem may be augmented by the widespread use of electronic algorithmic literature search tools. Illman and I discussed this briefly by mail. When I last tried a simple search through Google Scholar using the obvious keywords, *religion – knowing – doing – being*, the search resulted in close to a million references, because these keywords are extremely common. The search caught the article by Illman and Czimbalmos among the first ten references, which is unsurprising, as its *title* contains all four key words. No other literature mentioned above was caught among the next hundred. However, if the search was confined to books, Schleiermacher's *On Religion*, Warburg's *Citizens of the World*, and Clarke's monograph on

consciousness studies popped up in the first ten results.[3] It is generally fruitful to make an additional search on *books* to comply with the tradition in the humanities that we publish much of our primary work in monographs or anthologies. In all circumstances claiming novelty places extra demands on the exposition of the state of the art.

* * *

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3 However, one should remember that such literature searches are not completely reproducible, because the search algorithms differ and change over time, meaning a subsequent try may give a different result.

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Temenos Lecture 2020

Legitimizing Claims of Special Knowledge: Towards an Epistemic Turn in Religious Studies

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Abstract

A significant function of the category 'religion' is demarcating and insulating particular claims of special knowledge – but too often, Religious Studies serves to mystify and defend this function, rather than critically analysing it. Drawing on categories in which claims of special knowledge are central, including Gnosticism, conspiracy theories, and esotericism, this paper will look at the history of Religious Studies scholars operating within epistemes which they should be critiquing. Yet a focus on multiple and overlapping knowledges, and competition over epistemic capital, suggests a possible future for the social-scientific study of religion.

Keywords: *social epistemology, Gnosticism, conspiracy theories, knowledge, decolonialization*

My first conference paper, while I was still a PhD candidate, was given at the 2011 BASR conference in Durham, UK. It looked at UFOs in New Age conspiracy theories – a very basic version of what would eventually evolve into my doctoral thesis, and then first book, *UFOs, Conspiracy Theories and the New Age: Millennial Conspiracism* (2016). As has almost always been the case, the paper was part of an 'odds and ends' session made up of papers that didn't fit into any of the themed panels. Towards the end of my presentation, I made a comment to the effect that, despite how widespread these ideas are, and how long they have been around, this material was still not being taken seriously by scholars. Here, the chair – a senior scholar whom I will not name – interjected, 'That's because these people are crazy!'

This was an impromptu humorous remark, of course, rather than a considered scholarly opinion. Nevertheless, I was struck that the comment appeared during my paper in particular, rather than during papers on Spiritualism, Candomblé, the Jehovah's Witnesses, Pagan healing rituals, Egyptian funerary magic, or indigenous worldviews in which animals, rocks, and invisible persons might be regarded as persons. I will be forever grateful that I had the wherewithal in the moment to respond with a riff on *epoché*: 'I don't evaluate truth claims – I'm a Religious Studies scholar!' But thinking it over later, I realized that this taken-for-granted methodological maxim might not be entirely correct. Religious Studies scholars do not always bracket off truth claims impartially or equally. In fact, Religious Studies – despite its self-identification as entirely social-scientific and non-confessional – mystifies and even defends *certain* claims to special knowledge.[1]

It is not very controversial to point out that Religious Studies is, as Paul-François Tremlett puts it, 'a field of enquiry that lacks any clear or singular definition of its object or a specific procedure, method or set of assumptions by which [it] might claim for itself the (dubious) status of a "discipline"' (2008, vi-ii). The issue is often presented in definitional terms – do we approach 'religion' functionally, as beliefs and behaviours which serve particular purposes for individuals and/or societies, or substantively, as a particular *sui generis* thing-in-itself, irreducible to any other mode of analysis? This apparently simple definitional division obscures an epistemological gulf, however, because substantive definitions frequently posit non-naturalistic explanations, and special knowledge based on accessing them.

Alternatively, we might take Religious Studies as indicating non-confessional approaches to the study of religion – that is, the study of religion without making claims that run contrary to the scientific, naturalist episteme of the modern academy – with theology indicating confessional approaches. But Religious Studies as a discipline is deeply invested in authorizing claims to special knowledge, and in mystifying the processes of this authorization. In fact, all attempts to present 'religion' as a cross-cultural category of analysis ultimately relies on theological distinctions (Fitzgerald 1997). More than this, Religious Studies is the caretaker of the category 'religion', which itself serves as an ideological tool by which certain types of special knowledge are authorized, and certain others stigmatized.

1 Or studies in religion, *Religionswissenschaft*, and other variants. I will stick with Religious Studies here for simplicity, while making no normative distinction between them.

This conclusion emerged from the two major research projects I completed over the last ten years. My doctoral research focused on the social function of conspiracy theories, and particularly the role of different forms of stigmatized knowledge. It presented conspiracists as a *counter-elite*, where 'the liberation of the oppressed is constructed as being realized through a revolution in knowledge, a seizing not of the means of production but of the *means of cognition*' (2006, 207). The second, *Gnosticism and the History of Religions* (2021), similarly concerns elite claims of special knowledge, though this time focusing on scholars of religion. In this paper I will explore the similarities and differences between these two examples of how special knowledge is claimed and legitimized, and what it shows about the economy of knowledge in which we academics are stakeholders.[2] In particular, it will show how Religious Studies, and the social sciences more broadly, work to differentiate and defend 'religion' against other forms of merely 'irrational belief'. In elevating certain kinds of special knowledge, and demonizing others, these categories are revealed as gatekeepers in what Timothy Fitzgerald has called the discourse on civility and barbarity (2007). Although he was writing about religion, his remarks apply to conspiracy theories just as well:

> far from being a kind of thing or an objective and observable domain around which an industry of scholarship can flourish, religion is a modern invention which authorises and naturalises a form of Euro-American secular rationality. In turn, this supposed position of secular rationality constructs and authorises its 'other', religion and religions (Fitzgerald 2007, 6)

In concluding, I will suggest a way forward—an 'epistemic turn' in the study of religion, which makes claims of special knowledge explicit and indeed central to our analysis. As well as potentially helping to address the methodological issues of Religious Studies, it might also help to decolonize an inherently colonial category.

2 This paper forms a diptych with 'Analytic categories and claims of special knowledge' (forthcoming in *Religion and Society*). While the case studies and mode of analysis are the same, the latter focuses on issues of special knowledge in boundary maintenance and the resulting confusion over first- and second-order categories. They represent my thinking at the end of this formative stage of my development as I begin to sketch out some new areas of research.

Poor person's cognitive mapping

Like 'religion', 'conspiracy theory' is a loaded category. There have undoubtedly been many conspiracies in political history, at least as far back as the Roman Republic. Some were correct; others were not. At certain times, theories about conspiracies which turned out to be incorrect have been an accepted and public part of political discourse; for example, a Jewish or Masonic plot behind the French Revolution in the late eighteenth century, Senator McCarthy's Red Scare in the 1950s, or the Satanic Ritual Abuse scare of the 1990s. None of these were referred to as a conspiracy theory at the time, however. There must be something more to the category than simply 'a theory that (incorrectly) posits a conspiracy'.

Most often, this difference is presented as a deficit of thinking. The association of conspiracy theories with paranoia largely derives from Richard Hofstadter's famous 1964 article, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, although it should be noted that Hofstadter didn't mean paranoia in the clinical sense. Rather, he was referring to a rhetorical style based on a polarized Manichaean worldview and an entrenched ideological position. In the wake of McCarthyism there was a move towards a less divisive consensus politics, and conspiracy theories were portrayed as counter to this aim, being instead totalizing, antagonistic, and capable of mobilizing minority groups. Hofstadter then used conspiracy theory to construct a new, unified United States identity in the context of the Cold War, but the connection with mental illness has persisted. There have been a number of attempts by psychologists to quantify belief in conspiracy theories according to a 'Conspiracy Mentality scale' (Bruder *et al*, 2014), or to relate it to schizotypal tendencies or 'cognitive illusions' (Kruglanski, 1987), but there are significant issues with these approaches. Like all quantitative research, there are issues about how, in reducing the field to binary questions, such data can reflect the concerns of those doing the study. Moreover, their data set typically includes a number of patently implausible examples of conspiracy theories, but does not deal with either those that are accepted and promoted by power brokers (e.g. McCarthyism, Satanic Ritual Abuse, etc.) nor those that later turned out to be true (Tuskegee, Iran-Contra, P2 scandal, etc.), nor other beliefs that do not stand up to scientific reason but are never stigmatized (religion, for example). If we start with the assumption that conspiracism is necessarily paranoid and/or incorrect, then base a survey on that assumption, the results of that survey cannot help but reinforce our initial assumptions.

The idea that conspiracy theories are necessarily irrational is similarly difficult to sustain under scrutiny. Despite Frederic Jameson's oft-quoted aside

that conspiracy theories are the 'poor person's cognitive mapping' (1990, 356), it is by no means clear that there is any systemic flaw in conspiracist reasoning that renders it *a priori* unjustified.[3] For example, it is often claimed that conspiracy theories are non-falsifiable; yet, as Brian Keeley points out, falsifiability is a poor criterion in the social sciences where actors may be concealing their motivations, deliberately or unconsciously, wholly or in part. Moreover, while it is certainly true that many conspiracy theories do not stand up to scientific standards of proof, they are by no means unique in that respect—neither do human rights, political ideologies, support for football teams, love, or identification with different national identities, yet these are deeply held by actors and profoundly affect human behaviour as much as scientific materialism, if not more so. Indeed – and as shown by the aforementioned psychological studies, to give them their due – conspiracy beliefs are not marginal, nor gendered, nor uniquely modern or Western. The category may be new, but the ideas to which it refers are not. Yet that there is today a perceived *need* for such a category, however, may be significant in itself.

Perhaps it is as important to consider what is *not* held subject to these analyses, and scrutinized for motivated reasoning, lack of falsifiability, entrenched ideology, and so on. For this discussion, we need to question why religious beliefs are not included. There is nothing *a priori* less rational in the claim that reptilian extraterrestrials run the political system than the claim that Satan and his minions do. Indeed, as Brian Keeley has noted, Christian beliefs that a hidden being is manipulating events according to a plan that they won't reveal sounds a lot like a conspiracy theory to outsiders, with evidence that points to the non-existence of said agents inverted to become evidence of the agents deliberately concealing their actions (Keeley 2007, 148). So, while it may be true that many conspiracy theories exhibit flaws of reasoning, they are far from unique in this. Flawed reasoning is simply a feature of human thought, from conspiracy theories to religions to political positions and beyond.

As Dyrendal and Asprem have argued, in both conspiracy theories and esoteric religions, history is conceptualized as a struggle between the majority and those in possession of an elite, transformative knowledge (2018). It is for this reason that we find gnosis so frequently appealed to in scholarship in Western esotericism too, by scholars including Wouter Hanegraaff, Roelef van den Broek, Arthur Versluis, and others. Indeed, there is a direct line between these scholars and the Eranos group through Henri Corbin and Gilles

3 See, for example, Dentith (ed., 2018) and themed issue 4(2) of *Episteme: A Journal of Social Epistemology* (2007).

Quispel (Robertson 2021, 122–36). Before we turn to gnosis and Eranos, however, I want to underline the point I have been making – conspiracy theory, as a category, is about epistemic power. A conspiracy theory is that which we are not permitted to think. The religious examples are familiar parts of the hegemonic episteme, and as such, they are ideas you are permitted to think. Indeed, in most modern states the right to hold such irrational beliefs is protected by law, even unto the right to break certain laws that apply to others. That we have internalized that these ideas deserve such protections but that other equally irrational ideas deserve ridicule, censorship or legal penalties is, of course, exactly how hegemony (in Gramsci's understanding) works – and scholars are not immune. Latour writes:

> What's the real difference between conspiracists and a popularized… version of social critique…? In both cases again it is the same appeal to powerful agents hidden in the dark acting always constantly, continuously, relentlessly… I find something troublingly similar in the structure of the explanation (2004, 229–30).

Conspiracy theories – and the Post Truth condition of which they are an expression (Fuller 2020, 117) – are a democratization of knowledge, and as such they are a direct challenge to the epistemic hegemony of the academy. And this is why we are so troubled by them.

So-called knowledge

Elsewhere, however, the academy is happy to protect and mystify other forms of irrational, non-falsifiable knowledge. The study of religion is a case in point, but while theology is explicit in its relationship to the metaphysical, Religious Studies presents itself as secular, non-confessional, and social-scientific, so it is perhaps surprising to find the same processes at work. This is clear in many of the categories which Religious Studies has inherited from the phenomenological History of Religions school – shamanism, esotericism, and perhaps most clearly, Gnosticism. In the work of Roelef van den Broek, April DeConick, Jeffery Kripal, and others, Gnosticism continues to be presented as heretical, transformative, salvific knowledge. Not only do they use the first-order term Gnosis as if it were a second-order tool of analysis, but Gnosticism has come to indicate that Religious Studies scholars are not mere social scientists, but the guardians of special knowledge.

I cannot do full justice to an archaeology of the category 'Gnosticism' in the space I have here,[4] but the broad sweep is as follows. The catalogue of groups assembled by Irenaeus of Lyons in the second century CE was concerned only with identifying heresy at a time when Christians were beginning to institutionalize. Although better known by the title of a later Latin translation, *Adversus Haereses,* the 'Unmasking and Overthrow of So-Called Knowledge' is not concerned simply with something called 'gnosis', but simply 'knowledge', as Osborn's translation without later theological accretions makes clear (2004, 2–7). More importantly, it is not knowledge per se that is the issue – in fact, gnosis was widely used by Christian writers, including within the New Testament – but rather 'so-called' knowledge. In other words, it is not gnosis, but illegitimate gnosis that is the problem – Irenaeus is essentially labelling certain teachings as 'fake news'. Note too that for Irenaeus, gnosis is not a special or unique *type* of knowledge is its own right, as it will later come to be understood.

Following the ascendency of Protestantism in the sixteenth century, theologians who were very interested in separating Christian Truth from the mythology of the Bible rediscovered Gnosticism. At first it appears as a polemic against Catholicism – indeed, in the first printed use of the term in 1669, Henry More refers to Catholicism as 'a spice of the old abhorred Gnosticism' because of its idolatry and false prophecy (1669, preface). But around the turn of the eighteenth century the script flips, and Protestant theologians, including Ferdinand Baur and Adolf von Harnack, begin to present Gnosticism in a more positive light, as an original, unadulterated Christianity that could be separated from later Catholic accretions. Gnosticism as heresy was transformed into Gnosticism as proto-Protestantism – a move that was highly influential on nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship.

Around this time we also see Gnosticism beginning to be used as a self-identifier. Several gnostic churches appeared in France in the latter nineteenth century, where there was a lively market for independent churches, especially those with connections to local heresies like the Templars and the Cathars. In Germany interest was more literary, with gnostic-themed novels by Thomas Mann and Hermann Hesse widely read. In the UK Gnosticism was closely connected to Theosophy. Blavatsky's knowledge of it was drawn from Charles William King's *The Gnostics and their Remains,* which presented Gnosticism as a link between Vedic and Christian teachings. For

4 My forthcoming monograph *Gnosticism and the History of Religions* (2021) is an attempt to do so.

King Gnosticism could be 'traced up to Indian speculative philosophy, as its genuine fountain-head' (1887, vi), and survived in Freemasonry, the Rosicrucians, and the Knights Templar. As Theosophy under Blavatsky was primarily constructed from Vedic and 'occult' sources, this narrative provided her with a way to link Indian philosophy historically to nineteenth-century esotericism. Blavatsky presented the Gnostics as the forerunners of the Theosophical society and indeed the entirety of the nineteenth-century 'occult revival':

> But if the Gnostics were destroyed, the Gnosis, based on the secret science of sciences, still lives… the Gnosis or traditional secret knowledge, was never without its representatives in any age or country (1887, 163).

Although Blavatsky was strongly opposed to Christianity, arguing that the Gnostics were suppressed – 'destroyed' – allowed her to separate their Christianity from the institutions of her day. As well as giving succour to the many Theosophists who wanted to reconcile Theosophy and Christianity, this helped to give Theosophy historical legitimacy. For my argument, however, the most important outcome was the popularizing of a separation between a group called the Gnostics, and gnosis, a supposed category of secret, special knowledge.

Later, Blavatsky's construction of Gnosticism played an important role in how Carl Jung reconciled his psychological and spiritual projects. Jung's doctoral thesis drew from popular books on Gnosticism written by Blavatsky's assistant, G.R.S. Mead. Jung saw the Gnostics as the counterparts of his contemporary analytic patients, seeking to overcome their sense of alienation from their unconscious selves. Gnosticism became more central to his thinking following his visionary breakdown or 'creative illness' in 1913, and when he became interested in alchemy, he began to think of it as historically connecting Gnosticism to analytical psychology. The gnostics, he claimed, were 'the first thinkers to concern themselves (after their fashion) with the contents of the collective unconscious' ([1958] 1969, 60).

From 1933 until his death in 1961 Jung was deeply involved in the annual Eranos meetings in Ascona, Switzerland. The participants included many notable scholars who were active in the development of the History of Religions school and the establishing of the IAHR in 1950, and also many who wrote about Gnosticism, including Henry Corbin, Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, Henri-Charles Puech, and Gilles Quispel. Quispel was profoundly influenced by Jung's model of Gnosticism – though a fierce

defender of Gnosticism having a Jewish origin, Quispel Gnosticism was a perennial and universal tradition in its own right, a third epistemological 'component' of European culture distinct from both 'faith' and 'reason'. This tripartite epistemological model was later a central component of Wouter Hanegraaff's influential *New Age Religion and Western Culture* (1996).

In *Gnosis als Weltreligion* (1951) Quispel argued that Gnosticism began in Alexandria and spread throughout the Mediterranean during Late Antiquity, to become a proto-World Religion independent of, and predating, Christianity. This historical account is underpinned by an essentialist narrative of which this Weltreligion was but one expression. For the Eranos participants Gnosticism was essentially esotericism – the search for a secret, universal Truth fundamental to all religions. Indeed, the Eranos circle were often described as Gnostics, by themselves as well as by their critics. In Steven Wasserstrom's words,

> Their form of 'pure' religiosity… ironically expressed an ambivalent attitude to the monotheistic message. They rejected the Masters of Suspicion, especially Marx, Freud, and Durkheim. Yet they themselves remained positioned in their own ironic posture, implying as they did a religious authority, but one esoterically occultated out of reach of ordinary believers (1999, 234).

The Eranos scholars saw themselves as the paragon of *Homo Religiosus*, with a firm stress on individual experience and a tendency to posit mysticism and esotericism as the pinnacle of religiosity. Their Gnosticism, then, was elite knowledge in both senses. A unique and irreducible special knowledge reached through transformative experience, Gnosticism was presented as *sui generis* religion *par excellence*. Which is why it was so tied to the development of the History of Religions school, and indeed, continues to be so.

A similar construction was being developed at the same time by Hans Jonas, a student of Rudolf Bultmann and Martin Heidegger. Demythologizing Mandaean texts, Hermetica, and New Testament apocrypha through existential analysis, Jonas found that the essence of Gnosticism was a sort of spiritual existentialism. In *Gnosis und Spatantiker Geist* (1935), and later in accessible English in *The Gnostic Religion* (1958), Jonas presented Gnosticism as an ahistorical existential religious current which survived by adapting itself to fit other traditions. Though Jonas was a philosopher, more interested in ethics than in religion, his existentialist construction was incorporated, along with Jung's, into the definitions presented as part of the IAHR's 1966 Messina Congress.

The discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts in the Egyptian desert in 1945 showed that these understandings of Gnosticism were completely at odds with the primary sources. They transformed how scholars understood the category, although it took until the 1970s for the texts to be widely available to scholars and the public. What they showed, as Michael Williams famously argued in *Rethinking "Gnosticism"* in 1996, was that no such religion ever existed historically, and the groups considered Gnostic by Irenaeus and the scholars who drew from his data set had no single thing in common other than that they were considered heretical in those formative days of Christianity.

A quarter of a century after Williams' critique this position is the norm in Biblical Studies, although it is not without its challengers. Among scholars in Religious Studies, however, it retains its currency. In the writings of April DeConick,[5] Jeffery Kripal, Roelef van den Broek, and many others Gnosticism continue to be presented as heretical, experiential, salvific, and transformative. In most cases this is done by separating Gnosticism (a historically-bounded religious tradition) from gnosis (an ahistorical religious type or essence) – a strategy which found its way into the History of Religions through Jung and Hans Jonas, and was codified at the Messina Congress. For some scholars today Gnosticism has come to indicate a new Great Heresy – that scholars of religion should indeed make appeals to special knowledge. In the work of Jeffery Kripal, for example, Gnosticism is presented not only as a matter of self-transformation, but as a revolution in the academic study of religion – albeit one which looks a lot like a return to the phenomenological essentialism of the History of Religions school.

Kripal's work since *The Serpent's Gift* (2006) has increasingly vocally critiqued the epistemic strictures of the academy, and of science. He seeks instead a 'gnostic methodology' (2006, 175) in which scholars 'do not so much "interpret" religious "data" as they unite with sacred realities' (2017, 104). Drawing from Eranos scholars, including Quispel, Gershom Scholem, and Mircea Eliade, he describes this approach as 'academic Gnosticism' (2017, 114). As Hanegraaff puts it, 'Kripal's "gnostic study of religion" is not so much a methodology for studying religion(s), but rather a religious and normative (meta)discourse about the nature of religion' (2008, 269).

5 DeConick is primarily a biblical scholar, but her more recent work has moved into a more comparative framework with a focus on contemporary alternative religions, so I think it is fair to count this later work as having moved beyond Biblical Studies, at least for the sake of argument here.

Why does Kripal use the term 'Gnosticism' for this approach? I think the answer is in his quotation from Victoria Nelson's *The Secret Life of Puppets:*

> 'The greatest taboo among serious intellectuals of the century just behind us,' she writes, 'proved to be none of the "transgressions" itemized by postmodern thinkers: it was, rather, the heresy of challenging a materialist worldview' (Kripal 2017, 131).

This challenge to naturalism, and return to an enchanted scholarship, is so great a heresy that it has become equated with the archetypical heresy, Gnosticism itself.

Towards an epistemic turn in Religious Studies

The scholars of the History of Religions were drawn to Gnosticism because they found in it a kind of experiential elite knowledge common to various esotericisms, and perhaps all 'authentic' religion – a Third Pillar, neither faith nor reason, but somehow transcending them both. As such, it represents a tradition of scholarship which is committed to a *sui generis* religious experience, while at the same time critical of religious institutions. These scholars see themselves as both scholars of religion and religious scholars, and as such see no conflict in mystifying or openly defending claims of special knowledge in Religious Studies.

On the other hand, the category 'conspiracy theories' seeks to defend (or construct) an inviolable colonial 'rationality' against (some) claims of special knowledge. It lionizes the scientific materialist position by portraying conspiracy theories as primitive, while ignoring other equally 'irrational' claims of special knowledge – specifically, religious – which are defended by institutions implicated in the existing power structures. Conspiracy theories were beyond the pale for scholars of religion in 2011 when I presented at the BASR, and I have the peer reviews to prove it. Thanks to the work of scholars like Asbjørn Dyrendal, Egil Asprem, Stef Aupers, myself, and others, this has changed considerably in the intervening decade, although political events have certainly helped.

The implications for the study of religion more broadly are only beginning to be accepted, however. It is incumbent upon the social sciences, and especially scholars of religion, to address how we are implicated in perpetuating this colonial episteme by defending certain claims of special knowledge and demonizing others. If we challenge some claims, some

beliefs, but not others, in whose interest are we acting? Despite our supposed expertise in 'bracketing off' the legitimation of the truth claims of those we study, this paper has argued that in fact this is something that is not universally applied. Indeed, in the case of conspiracy theories scholars seem happy to mock their irrationality, and motivations, in ways we do not often see in the case of those things we deem to be religions – perhaps because then we might be at risk of undermining the episteme from which our authority derives. The parallels with how Victorian anthropologists viewed 'primitives' is striking.

How do we deal with the claims of special knowledge which so many put as being at the core of the category? A potential answer might be to make these claims of special knowledge central to our analysis. In other words, such claims of special knowledge would no longer be something we seek to legitimize or mystify, but rather we could make these claims (whether by practitioners or scholars) the focus of our study. This could potentially free us of the framework inherited from Christianity and colonialism, without losing a distinct object of enquiry and the unique insights afforded by scholars trained in the study of religion specifically. As such, this would see Religious Studies moving to an approach influenced by social epistemology (Fuller 2002) or the sociology of knowledge (McCarthy 1996). These differ from philosophical epistemology in that they are collective rather than individual, and differ from the philosophy of science in not being concerned with the justification (or lack thereof) of particular forms of knowledge. Rather, the concern is with how knowledge claims are mobilized in the particular episteme of different groups, societies, and cultures. The unique contribution of Religious Studies would be to incorporate claims of special knowledge.

To do so, we might usefully adopt a little-noted aspect of Bourdieu's field theory of social capital – epistemic capital. For Bourdieu, the two principal currencies for the distribution of power are economic capital – wealth, what you own – and symbolic (or cultural) capital – what you know, including skills and use of language.[6] Each of these, in different ways, provides advantages in how easily one might influence other agents in the field to work towards particular ends. Epistemic capital, on the other hand, does not map *what* you know, but *how* you know. As defined by Karl Maton, epistemic capital is 'the way in which actors within the intellectual field engage in strategies aimed at maximizing not merely resources and status but also epistemic profits, that is, better knowledge of the world' (2003, 62). When

6 Most of the dubious forms of capital which are used in Religious Studies, such as spiritual capital, are actually forms of symbolic capital.

an agent cites research, invokes their 'lived experience', or claims that God told them, they are mobilizing particular forms of epistemic capital in order to influence others, and thereby gain an advantage within the field.

The dominant forms of epistemic capital in the contemporary world are scientific, tradition, experience, channelled, and synthetic knowledge. Scientific knowledge became, from the eighteenth century, the most prominent form of epistemic capital in European culture and its colonies, even though in practice tradition and channelled knowledge remained as powerful. Scientific knowledge is collective and relies upon the criterion of reproducibility, although as Kuhn, Latour, and others have shown, the boundaries of scientific knowledge are less clear-cut than is generally acknowledged. Tradition is essentially 'people like us do things like this', and like science, it is collective, and can be found both in institutional (top-down) forms and looser social groups (bottom-up). Experience, as Olav Hammer has noted, has become an increasingly important form of epistemic capital since the latter half of the twentieth century (2001, 339). It is individual (though of course that individual has a socially-constructed habitus, and the contents and interpretation of the experience is shaped by broader discourses), and its criterion is an emotional response of 'truthiness' – one *feels* that it is true, often with a hand laid on one's heart. Channelled knowledge differs from experience in that it comes from an external source, be it a vague Higher Power or Intelligence, a specific supernatural agency such as a god, angel, or demon, or from extraterrestrials. Its truth criterion rests in its claimed 'miraculous' nature, most commonly that it foretells the future. This is the source of charisma in Weber's famous model – 'exceptional powers or qualities… not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as divine in origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader' (1964, 328). This would also allow us to integrate Weber's model into a critical framework, without recourse to the essentialist, *sui generis* implications of charisma. Finally, synthetic knowledge links numerous smaller pieces of data across time, space, and context (and sometimes incompatible forms of epistemic capital) to create a 'bigger picture'. This practice of 'dot-connecting' creates highly suggestive narratives in the linkages, the blurring of the specific details, and the mystification of the selection process. While it is often presented as typical of conspiratorial thinking, it is far more widespread than this, and indeed was widely employed by scholars of religion including James Frazer, Carl Jung, and Mircea Eliade.

Which particular strategies are deemed acceptable is contingent on the particular field in which the discourse takes place. The specific configura-

tions are historically and socially contingent, tied to regimes of power. Drawing from Foucault, I refer to these specific configurations of epistemic capital as an *episteme* (1966 [1970], xxii), though von Stuckrad's description, 'power-knowledge systems', is also helpful (2010, 159). However, strategies are not exclusive to particular discourses, nor are fields usually defined by recourse to a single, specific form of epistemic capital. Take, as a pertinent example, a powerful religious institution such as the Catholic Church – here, both channelled knowledge and tradition are taken as paramount over other forms, though experience will also be important, and science is by no means stigmatized. Other religions may be similar, but not identical; evangelical churches will put a comparatively higher stress on channelling and experience than tradition, and New Age networks may put even less stress on tradition. And of course, each of these is set within a broader sociopolitical discourse in which science and tradition are presented as authoritative, with other claims controlled either through domestication via religious institutions and legal protections for 'faith' communities, or stigmatization via categories such as 'conspiracy theories'.

Conclusion

Such an epistemic turn offers a number of opportunities. Focusing on how knowledge is claimed and justified could potentially help to bridge the gap between the social and the individual, between belief and practices, and potentially between scientific and social-scientific research into religion. Indeed, the distinction between 'belief' and 'knowledge' as scholarly categories – inherited from colonial anthropology – disappears. 'Belief' presently functions as a marker of 'irrational' and 'illegitimate' knowledge (with 'faith' functioning as domesticated 'irrational' knowledge) and carries the implication of 'primitive'. Rather than using these categories as natural, settled, and universal, Religious Studies might instead turn to how the boundaries of these different forms of knowledge are maintained in different systems.

From this position the differences between terms like culture, nation, religion, ideology become less important or disappear altogether, revealed instead to be mystified hierarchies of knowledge. As such, the epistemological turn would fit well with the move towards a 'religion and worldviews' Religious Education curriculum currently being mobilized in the UK. We would no longer need to justify how we include Humanism or Confucianism or New Age or Roman festivals or capitalism or UFOs within the category 'religion'. All epistemes would be equally available for analysis.

The way that categories like Gnosticism and conspiracy theories operate as gatekeepers of knowledge show how the critical deconstruction of our own categories is vital to the decolonization of contemporary academia. While 'making space around the table' for marginalized groups is indeed important, this by itself is not enough – it is the table itself that is the problem. Allowing for a proliferation of claims of special knowledge will only go so far to decolonize the discipline – especially because which marginalized claims are permitted is still subject to colonial ideas about religion – unless we simultaneously develop a new awareness of how such claims operate, in society at large, and within our own discipline. Indeed, the deconstruction of both 'religion' as a category and Religious Studies itself as a gatekeeper for special knowledge must take place before we can hope to affect the broader colonial episteme. Claims of special knowledge are at the heart of problems with contemporary religious studies – but this paper has suggested that they may also offer a potential way forward.

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Otherworldly Relations in CAM Practice: Towards an Ethnography of Non-Secular Possibility Work

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Abstract

The globalizing culture of health and wellbeing flourishes both as demand and supply, posing multiple intriguing and critical questions both to the individuals who face distress and suffering and to the surrounding society. In the spirit of vernacular religion, this article enters the discussion of 'de-differentiation' between religion and health, focusing especially on the role of otherworldly relations that may become part of complementary and alternative medicine and care and its healing agency. I propose that engagement with otherworldly relations may be understood in terms of 'possibility work' in complex life situations when conventional healthcare and therapy are apprehended as insufficient for some reason, or alternatively unavailable. I draw on two distinct ethnographic projects to exemplify the argument: care of the dying and contemporary angel spirituality. These two examples demonstrate how intimate otherworldly relations may work as important and powerful, albeit also ambivalent and socially vulnerable, non-secular possibility work in the face of various forms of anxiety, distress, and suffering in contemporary lives.

Keywords: *healing, CAM, de-differentiation, otherworldly relations, destiny, animism, care of the dying, angel therapy*

> I kind of see this… healing process… this spiritual path so that you will always receive one piece of the puzzle or a key to the next thing.

The above quotation is from an interview with a Finnish woman in her thirties, who describes her engagement in complementary and alternative practices such as energy healing, angel meditation, and past-life therapies, which she combines with more conventional therapies and wellbeing practices. In reflect-

ing on the role of what she describes as a 'spiritual path' and 'healing process' in solving the 'puzzle' of life, she exemplifies many people's concerns and outlooks today. The popularity of complementary and alternative healing and spiritual therapies is a global fact. It is estimated that approximately eighty per cent of the world's population use some form of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) for their primary healthcare, and an even larger number as supplementary care, though there can be noticeable national and local differences in its popularity (see Midden and Stokols 2004, 74; Ernst 2000, 1133). Against this backdrop it is understandable that the need for multidisciplinary research into the complex topic that is the appeal and use of CAM practices is increasing. As part of the picture, a 2003 review article in *American Psychologist* stated that an important research field of religion and health was beginning to emerge (Miller and Thoresen 2003), and research on religion and both physical and mental health, as well as more general wellbeing, has since grown in volume and in the variety of approaches. My article contributes to this research field from the perspective of vernacular religion by paying special attention to how otherworldly relations may appear in CAM practice.

Entering the multidisciplinary field of religion and health

Various aspects of and attitudes to religious healing and CAM have been studied using several but usually quantitative methodologies in medical and nursing research (see e.g. Koenig 2009; Koenig et al. 2012; Miller and Thoresen 2003; Ross 2006; Williams 2006; Krause and Pargament 2018). More often than medicine and nursing research, the social sciences and humanities approach healing and wellbeing practices and cultures through qualitative and ethnographic methodologies that in different and important ways take into account the experience and interpretations of the individual practitioners, as well as the changing cultural and social contexts involved (Gale 2014; see also e.g. Basu, Littlewood, and Stenforth et al. 2017; Lambert and McKevitt 2002). As an example of this sociocultural paradigm, a recent sociology research project approached a range of globally travelling therapeutic practices as culturally and politically complex and multi-layered lived experience. The cases of this project include life coaching, wellbeing in organization cultures, self-tracking technologies, trauma narratives, alternative healing, and spiritual self-care. This project draws attention to how the therapeutic practices, despite often following a global model, develop distinctly local assemblages and contextual applications in the societies and contexts in which they are adopted (Salmenniemi et al. 2019).

In the anthropology and sociology of religion, health and wellbeing research has targeted several complex conjunctions and dynamics. Changing forms of ritual healing in charismatic Christianity, indigenous religions, and new religious contexts, with a special emphasis on meaning, transformation, and embodiment, constitutes one fruitful research area (e.g. Csordas 2000; Hovi 2012; McGuire 1988; Utriainen 2017). Furthermore, there is research in CAM and spiritual healing in complex pluralizing and mediatized societies, postcolonial and transnational contexts, and the overlapping practices and categories of folk and alternative healing, as well as healing and the emerging neoliberal market (e.g. Basu, Littlewood, and Steinforth 2017; Bowman 1999; 2000; Hiiemäe 2017; Hornborg 2013; Kalvig 2012; Knibbe 2018; Tiilikainen 2011). The intersection of gender and CAM has also received appropriate attention, and it has been noted that many practices appeal especially to women, both as providers and consumers inside and outside official healthcare (e.g. Fedele 2016; Sointu 2011; Sointu and Woodhead 2008; Trzebiatowska and Bruce 2012; see also Vuolanto 2013; Utriainen 2014).

A recent edited volume by European religion scholars makes an important contribution to this research field and discussion. It approaches traditional, spiritual, and alternative healing methods from the perspective of their cultural and historical differentiation, and again, partial de-differentiation, from institutional academic medicine (Lüddeckens and Schrimpf 2018b). The analytical notion of 'de-differentiation' as used by Lüddeckens and Schrimp (see also Utriainen 2010), captures a critical counterpoint to the modern process of the differentiation of social and cultural institutions and knowledge methods. While differentiation has occupied a central place in secularization theories, de-differentiation is becoming one perspective in recent discussions of the changing relations and blurring boundaries between religion and other social spheres (Gauthier 2020).

I seek to complement and nuance Lüddeckens's and Schrimpf's (2018a) approach to de-differentiation, as well as that of Lüddeckens (2018, 179), who attempts to understand 'why CAM is attractive in certain medical contexts'. She argues that engaging in CAM, and through that engagement de-differentiating religion and medicine, may provide health professionals, and especially often female nurses, more self-empowerment and authority than they possess by default in the hierarchically organized field of (male dominated) medical knowledge and action. Similarly, I emphasize the perspective of mostly female practitioners, both professional caregivers and especially women in their private lives, to highlight how their perspective of de-differentiation may integrate human-otherworld relations in CAM

practice. My examples suggest that it is also possible to give space to otherworldly relations while being well aware that this not only empowers the individual but can also cause serious tensions in her social world. Other scholars have also noted that contact with the spirit world and ideas about reincarnation, for example, are sensitive topics in meetings with healthcare personnel, as well as with religious officials (Kemppainen et al. 2018: 449). I regard this fragile combination of both agency and empowerment and social vulnerability as an important yet under-studied aspect of CAM practice.

The perspective of vernacular religion is concerned with contemporary lay practices in their complex and often tense relations between individual everyday life concerns and social, cultural, and religious power. This perspective pays special attention to 'doing religion': practices and beliefs that happen in what are often ambiguous and ambivalent intersections of creativity, agency, and power in the various conjunctions of 'religious' and 'secular' culture (Primiano 1994, 47; see also, e.g. Bowman and Valk 2012; Pureval and Kaira 2010; Illman and Czimbalmos 2020; see also Fingerroos et al. 2020). I suggest that from the vernacular perspective acts of de-differentiation of religion and health could be approached as *possibility work*. Possibility work can be aligned with such forms of cultural work as identity, boundary, kin, or emotion work. It is also close to what anthropologist Stefanie Mauksch (2017, 133) calls 'enchantment work', which is like a 'dance' that balances 'between the secular and the spiritual'. These modes of cultural work are performative and in different degrees reflexive practices of adjusting and simultaneously resourcing and sustaining the subject in the face of social and cultural structures, and often complex situational concerns. The concept of possibility work makes visible the ways in which individuals recognize vistas of potentiality and hope, and seize them in otherwise often straitened circumstances, as will be seen in the ethnographic examples of care for the dying and angel therapy. Though important for the individual, possibility work that engages with otherworldly relations may simultaneously be precarious and fragile, especially in modern life settings.[1]

The controversial world of de-differentiated and non-secular healing

The modern and increasingly globalizing health and wellbeing culture includes an attraction to various therapeutic orientations and methods, many of which include religious or spiritual references. These healing practices go

1 I have theorized possibility work by linking it to the subjunctive mode of thinking that in important ways operates in ritual action (see Utriainen 2020).

under such names as holistic, alternative, or faith healing, and they can be found in charismatic settings, new religious milieus, and existing traditional (folk) medicine. They are also filtered into the wider nursing and caring cultures, as well as the culture of self-help and self-improvement. For those defending the scientific medical system of knowledge and its authority, these often hybrid and boundary-crossing healing methods appear suspect cultural blends that troublingly mix spiritual healing and care with scientific therapeutic ideas and language. These hybrid methods are non-secular in that they are understood by both practitioners and critics as somehow transcending the boundaries of modern and secular empirical thinking.

There are several ways to discuss and label the variety of hybrid non-secular health and healing methods by various interest parties, and the given attributes mirror important social and cultural power relations (Caldwell 2017; Gale 2014; Lüddeckens and Shrimpf 2018a, 14; Vuolanto et al. 2020). From the official healthcare perspective CAM can be seen either as a positive or negative phenomenon. The positive potential is especially reflected in the term 'complementary' (as something that can be used with conventional medicine), whereas 'alternative' may more easily be understood as treatment used in place of conventional medicine. 'Alternative medicine' is therefore often used more critically, because it can (be seen to) build on premises and use methods that contradict standard empirical and evidence-based approaches (see Gale 2014; Green 2018).[2]

Understandably, the value given to CAM can vary considerably between insiders and outsiders, the latter (including many medical doctors) being often markedly more critical than many clients or patients seeking treatment (e.g. Midden and Stokols 2005). Although there are differences in relating to CAM within the medical and nursing establishment, both between countries and within single countries,[3] differences ranging from exclusion to moderately positive attitudes (see e.g. Ernst 2000; Midden and Stokols 2004; Lüddecekens and Shrimpf 2018a), it is also true that only a hint of religious language is often enough to provoke suspicion and social and/or professional concern. This is especially true concerning institutional and less familiar religion. Words such as 'supernatural' and 'New Age' es-

2 See also: <https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/complementary-alternative-or-integrative-health-whats-in-a-name>, accessed 26 March 2021.

3 European societies have taken different views concerning CAM. Countries like France, Germany, Switzerland, and Hungary have been more open and accepting, and medical doctors may provide various CAM treatments. The picture is different in the UK and Scandinavian countries, for example (Ernst 2000).

pecially, as well as related notions such as 'energy', may be used by critics as immediate and almost indisputable disclaimers that label the treatment as 'humbug'. This issue is discussed, for example, by Pia Vuolanto (2013), who studies the debates around the status of nursing science in Finland. The topic is also addressed by Elizabeth Caldwell (2017) in an article that analyses media campaigns against training homeopaths in UK universities, as well as by Reet Hiiemäe and Terhi Utriainen (2021) in their recent research on the representations of CAM in the Estonian and Finnish mainstream media. Vuolanto condenses this tension in her research as follows, using the lens of boundary work:

> Boundary work between science and other knowledge systems concerns the relationship of science with non-science, religion, magic, irrationality, New Age, and other systems of knowledge considered unscientific (Vuolanto 2013, abstract; see also 246–69).

All this ensures CAM is a much-debated topic, in some countries more than in others. Finland exemplifies such a social and cultural milieu, in which medical doctors have publicly expressed very open criticism of CAM. An example of this is that the category 'belief medicine' (*uskomushoito*) is widely used and often applied to any non-evidence-based form of therapy, ranging from acupuncture and homeopathy to Reiki healing and silver water (see Vuolanto 2013, 78, 183). While it is difficult to compare the popularity of CAM internationally, its use in Finland is estimated to be at the level of the Scandinavian average, which is around thirty per cent of the population. Research also clearly reveals the importance of CAM to those who engage with it (Vuolanto et al. 2020).

Sensitive points between medicine and religion: otherworldly relations

Religion and health are old and odd bedfellows, with a long shared history. The first mentions of religion already involve healing as an important context and traditional aim of religion (Lüddeckens and Shrimpf 2018a; Koenig et al. 2012). Despite common roots and many forms of contact and crossovers concerning ritual form and imaginaries between religion and conventional medicine, there is also a long and increasingly globalizing history of differentiation between them (see Lüddeckens and Shrimpf 2018b; also Basu, Littlewood, and Steinforth 2017). However, we can also increasingly see trends of the partial bridging or breaking of this differentiation, as well

as reactions to it from the medical establishment which are exemplified by sometimes intense boundary work. The result is that the picture of the relations of religion and conventional health is currently anything but simple. The present multiple and complex entanglements, and a certain circularity, of the relations between religion and medicine are articulated by Lüddeckens and Shrimpf:

> [T]he notion of differentiation and the hegemony of an allegedly non-religious biomedicine is reproduced not only by those who support it, but also by those who deny it or who claim their own superiority over it. This is often done by criticizing biomedicine as non-holistic, as lacking any spiritual or religious dimension, and as dealing only superficially with symptoms, instead of curing the (spiritual) causes of illnesses. This reproduction leads to a circular process, being reflected in discourses, terminologies, regulations, professions, social structures, and so on, which simultaneously condition forms of self-positioning and are shaped by them. In this sense, the differentiation between 'religion' and 'medicine' can be described as a social reality that is constantly negotiated, that is, produced and dissolved by the actors involved. (Lüddeckens and Schrimpf 2018, 14)

De-differentiation may cause unease and concern, especially when it involves non-empirical and otherworldly presences and relations in the midst of a modernist and secular this-worldly setting. Secularity often blends with scientifically informed knowledge seeking and validation that has no need of the religious otherworld, aiming instead to free humans from its historical universes of meaning and power structures (cf. Orsi 2005; Aune et al. 2017). It may be especially important to emphasize the secular approach and orientation in such modern contexts as conventional medicine and institutional healthcare, as the research by Caldwell (2017) indicates (see also Vuolanto 2013; Tiyainen-Quatari et al. 2021). Anthropologist Talal Asad (2003, 67–99) has pointed out that the ways in which religious experience, practice, and worldviews can attach transcendent meaning and value to pain and suffering are especially difficult for the modernist approach – something we can observe both in many traditional and some contemporary religious cultures and healing methods.

Through my research, and from the perspective of vernacular religion, I see two key features as potentially important and sensitive aspects in the de-differentiation of religion and medicine. They seem to offer a promise of special kinds of subjectivity and agency, which may be particularly difficult

for the modern secular healthcare perspective to understand and appreciate. These features confront and challenge the ideal image of the modern subject and agency, and they are often related to attitudes to suffering, and what we can know about it and do for it. Both involve often intimate and affective relationships of humans with some kind of otherworld. One is what we could call a sense of fate/destiny as a sense or take on life that there are larger than human forces – guiding forces – at work in life. The other is animism as relation making with otherworldly powers or entities that can affect people and be communicated with, by, and through rituals, for example. Both the sense of fate/destiny (the extreme form of which is fatalism) and animism collide with the modern notions of empirical scientific knowledge and its subject. Furthermore, both are commonly held in tension with the notion of modern agency as bounded, rationalist, and this-worldly – and are thus not easily accommodated in secular life.

Fate, destiny, and fatalism are often understood as contrary to individual choice and agency (e.g. Bagnoli and Ketokivi 2009; Utriainen et al. 2012). They are taken to refer to subjugation under divine, traditional, economic, or biological powers beyond human or individual control; moreover, they are easily likened to a depressive or passive outlook on a life that simply happens to us. However, a religious understanding of destiny can also assume that powers beyond the human can be more ambivalent and even (at least partly) benevolent, as in the Christian idea of providence or the Hindu notion of karma. An even more adaptable idea of destiny can be found in the thinking that is popular in new spirituality and esotericism, and expressed through such figures of speech as following 'one's own star' or 'one's own path', or that 'things are meant to happen'. These expressions may be used in performative ways to transform crisis, sickness, and suffering into crossroads or turning points in life (see also Bagnoli and Ketokivi 2009, 317). Embedded in these vernacular idioms is the idea that life may be somehow, or to some extent, given or guided by superhuman forces. This idea may entail more or less enduring or situational trust in the course of life, simultaneously allowing agency to the individual as a follower or 'seeker' of her own star or path. It is also possible to see the quotation at the beginning of the article in this light: the woman on her 'spiritual path' and in her 'healing process' seeks and finds possible 'pieces' to her 'puzzle of life'.

Relations with the otherworld can sometimes be experienced as effective, live, and animate. Following anthropologist of religion Martin Stringer, animism can be understood as a take on life that acknowledges non-empirical things and events as alive and effective, and in concrete interaction with

human beings. Animism is often related to folk or indigenous religion and primitive magic, but it may also work as an important aspect of contemporary everyday vernacular religion, especially in stressful life situations, such as when facing loss or suffering (Stringer 2008, 107–9). Anthropologist Nurit Bird-David writes that animism has been approached from the modernist perspective largely as a failed epistemology; in an already classic text she notes the importance of asking why and how the modernist project estranged itself from the general human tendency to animate things and

> [w]hy and how (…) it stigmatize[d] 'animistic language' as a child's practice against massive evidence (...) to the contrary (...) regarding it as an incurable disease (Bird-David 1999, 79).

It is also often difficult to relate animism not only to secular thinking, but also to modern liberal Christian institutional religion, which understands such otherworldly figures and powers as angels mostly only metaphorically. However, both secular and religious critical positions may miss the very important point that animism can work as a subtle and fluctuating attitude in the course of life events in opening new perspectives and possible frames of interpretation when a situation otherwise looks impossible. In his introduction to a handbook on animism Graham Harvey (2005) stresses that animism is perhaps less about believing than we have been accustomed to think than it is about situationally varying ways of performing and relating.

The ethnographic cases that serve as my examples (the care of the dying and angel healing) suggest that animism and a sense of destiny are not necessarily understood simply in terms of stable belief, identity, or worldview. Instead, they may be approached as relational and situational takes or attitudes that can in different degrees and often subtle ways cross and interact with more clearly secular ways of acting and knowing. Moreover, they may become particularly important in fragile life situations, as when facing illness, loss, and suffering, and thus provide what Martin Stringer (2008) has called basic elements of situational 'coping religion' – closely related to what I call here non-secular possibility work. In critical phases of life talking to a deceased family member or turning to horoscopes (Stringer's examples) can offer religious and healing devices, even if on other occasions the latter especially are considered merely a form of light entertainment. Similarly, the (guardian) angel, which is a widespread popular image and figure of speech, can become animate and 'real' for a passing important moment, after which it can soon resume its more metaphorical cultural form of existence.

I will now turn in more detail to the two ethnographic examples, the first concerning Finnish women caring for the dying, the second women interested in angels, to demonstrate how de-differentiation and otherworldly relations can become important aspects of possibility work. As will be seen, traces or hints of the work of destiny or animism are often somehow in play in the reported experiences of those engaging with non-secular healing practices.

Examples of non-secular practices

The empirical examples come from two independent ethnographic case studies that are related in various ways to therapeutic and caring cultures, as well as to religion and spirituality. The first example is that of care for the dying in Finland in the 1990s. This project comprised more than five hundred texts written by Finns (85% of them women) who were involved with the care of the dying as professional caregivers, volunteers, or family members. These texts were collected in the context of the nationwide 'Good Death' project, and they voiced a strong call for more humane circumstances and active 'holistic care' for the dying than had become the standard during the decades of rapid healthcare modernization and the hospitalization of death following the Second World War. This textual material was complemented by ethnography in a hospice (see also Utriainen 2010).[4]

The second example is angel spirituality in Finland in the early 2010s. The aim of this project was to map and analyse the specifics of this emerging vernacular and very gendered religious culture – more than ninety per cent of the interested individuals were women. The material consisted of a questionnaire survey (n=263), individual and focus group interviews, and observations in various contexts, books, websites, and other material, which the research participants shared with one another and the researcher. In combining Christianity and new spirituality, angel spirituality is still thriving, and there are thousands of Google hits for 'angel healing' and 'angel therapy', revealing a global phenomenon[5] (see also Utriainen 2014, 2017).

In the frame of the present article these cases and their materials serve as examples from the mid-1990s to early 2010s of how de-differentiation

4 The writing competition was part of the 'Good Death' research project organized by the Finnish Ministry of Health between 1991 and 1995.

5 The material was collected as part of the 'Post-secular culture and the changing religious landscape in Finland' project at Åbo Akademi University between 2010 and 2014. The data is archived at the Åbo Akademi University archive: https://www.abo.fi/en/library/archive-collections/

and intimate otherworldly relations can take place in healing and caring practices in Finland. The examples differ in that the first portrays more conventional Finnish religiosity, while the second manifests new spirituality. More clearly than the first example, the second also portrays tensions between vernacular CAM practices and the surrounding society that mostly favours differentiation between secular and religious knowledge.

De-differentiation and otherworldly relations in the care of the dying

The perspective of de-differentiation captures some key observations of people acting in the care of the dying as nurses, volunteers, or family members. The texts written by Finns (mostly women), who were in different ways involved in the care of the dying in the 1990s, voiced a very strong ideal of the then thriving hospice movement in Finland. They called for more 'holistic care' for the dying than had been the standard in the modern hospitalized management of death.

Important stress throughout the texts and fieldwork observations was placed on the idea(l) that medical knowledge and care, in adopting an increasingly specialist orientation to the human being as a patient, needed to be complemented by other forms of knowledge and care. Holistic care has always somehow been inscribed in the ethos of the nursing profession, even if 'holism' is today sometimes debated as being at the limit of 'humbug', as is discussed by Vuolanto (2013) in her doctoral dissertation about the debates around the scientific status of nursing science. Yet the voices in my materials called for more space for 'spiritual', or 'mystical', orientations (mostly from Lutheran and Orthodox Christianity, but also from various mystical traditions and to some extent new spirituality). The following quotation from the written material highlights the importance of combining a concrete corporeal presence and support with a possible religious presence:

> My principle is that if we know that a patient is dying and that there is no more hope [of recovery], I will not leave her to die alone. I will be present, ease her position, hold her hand until the end. I will stroke her hair, talk quietly, and if I know that she is religious, I will speak of God, of forgiving and being forgiven.

In another account, it is a family member of the dying patient who notes how a nurse makes space for situational animism in the form of angels:

> This is a valuable moment. There are angels in the room. Angels always come when someone is dying. I'm very relieved I accepted these words by the nurse. I held them deep inside me.

Even if many of the caregivers were professionally educated nurses who had undergone long and intensive biomedical training, they spoke for medical or nursing pluralism (Baer 2011), and multiple and complementary epistemologies – that is, for the possibility of combining medical, religious, and spiritual perspectives, thus unravelling their differentiation. Furthermore, even if in the research materials there was little direct criticism of the hospital as the default space for dying, there was a clear wish that this modern institutional and highly scientific space should accommodate plural and complementary approaches to death and dying. This plural approach might include a sense of destiny by imagining the permeable and yielding border between life and death, as one nurse recounted:

> By being present and holding hands, I believe crossing the border becomes a less frightening experience, and I also believe that there are those on the other side who, holding each other's hands, receive the dying, who will not be alone for one moment.

In calling for holistic care, the caregivers' accounts made space for something that was for them beyond the modern differentiation and cultural division of labour between healthcare and Christian pastoral care. This was possibility work that made space for the plurality of human-otherworld relations and the permeability of the borders between life and death. While potentially risking the professional and scientific credibility of nursing, de-differentiation and possibility work, as analysed from the materials and voiced by medically trained professional nurses (also noted by Lüddeckens 2018), made space for a plurality of epistemic orientations in a single caring gesture. It depicted and promoted the idea(l) that facing death and dying could and should be possible within a purely medical approach, even if it was embedded in the medical institutional frame.

The next example takes us into the private lives of Finnish women. However, the two examples also intersect, since among the women interested in angels there were also health professionals who introduced spiritual healing practices to medical contexts.[6]

6 According to the survey (N≈263) 15 per cent of the women worked in healthcare professions.

Animism and destiny in the ritual frame of angel spirituality

Angel healing was one of the central rituals learned and practised by people engaging in angels and other new spiritual notions and beliefs when I was conducting my ethnography with Finnish women in the early 2010s. As part of the fieldwork, I participated in an angel healing course, in which the participants learned several ways of contacting angels and engaging their healing powers and 'energies'. Meditations and healings (rituals bearing these names) were the most formalized rituals in this vernacular subculture, and entering the ritual frame and process took the participant closer step-by-step to contacting what was conceived of as the healing otherworldly powers (see also Utriainen 2017). According to William Sax (2008) ritual is often believed and felt by ritualists to give space to a plurality of actors, including non-human ones. Moreover, the ritual process is commonly understood as bearing an agentic power of its own – in the sense that entering the ritual frame launches a quasi-automatic process leading to some effect, even without the fully conscious action of all the participants (Rappaport 1999; Hornborg 2016). There is thus something fateful or guidance-like that is often attributed to the ritual process as part of how ritual performs its work.

Within the ritual frame and process the usually passive or invisible otherworld and its agentive and animate powers ('healing energies', as they were often called) became intimately available to the participants. In angel meditations learned and rehearsed in peer group meetings, the women were taught how they could meet their own angels and receive their 'touch', that is, support, guidance, and healing. I heard several narratives about healing from depression through spontaneous or ritualized contact with angels and other otherworldly powers, spirits, and energies. Depression could be described as the 'deep waters' from which the angels and their 'energies' helped them 'escape'. (Utriainen 2017; 2020.)

Approached from the vernacular perspective, it is noteworthy that this mode of spirituality and ritual healing contained several features that collided not only with secular scientific thinking but also with institutional Christian doctrine. The frequently arising notions of reincarnation and karma, and especially the idea that angels could be invited by humans to participate in any situation in life, differed from the traditional Lutheran or Christian interpretation. The notion of karma was used to provide an understanding of illnesses such as recurrent depression in ways that included more than just one individual lifespan, thus creating a frame of destiny or a path with cosmic meaning or purpose. There were special rituals (such as 'karmic operations' or 'regression therapy') for identifying and healing such

health issues, which were thought to originate from previous lives and were thus beyond the reach of conventional therapy methods. This articulated the idea that even if individual destiny could not be denied or escaped, it might somehow be negotiated and redirected (Utriainen 2014; 2017).

Between empowerment and ambivalence

Some accounts, especially in the case of angel spirituality, expressed how the combination of secular and spiritual agency was not only supportive and sustaining, but even extremely empowering, thus echoing Lüddeckens's (2018) interpretation. One woman, a hospital nurse, recounted how she used to secretly invoke the angels to purify the operation room with their powerful energies to protect the surgery to be performed. In this example the otherworldly powers were invited to interact in a highly secular space of healing to secure and enhance the operation's success. As we have seen, the intertwinement of the secular and religious in a secular medical space was also found in caregivers' accounts of the dying.

However, angels and otherworldly energies were more often sought for intimate companionship and friendship, and especially as an antidote to the suffering caused by depression or loneliness, both common forms of suffering in Finland today (Saari 2016). As we studied together in the angel healing course, and as the women narrated to me and to one another, angels were sometimes asked to provide very concrete help and support in daily life, or when making difficult choices with regard to health issues, problems at work, or family relations. The women recounted how they faced these issues by practising small tending rituals (Bell 2008) that they often kept in secret from their significant others.

Even if personal non-secular engagements were often described in positive terms as healing, sustaining, and even empowering, they were ambivalent and not without cost when people had to manage their social credibility. My own and others' research presents people who are either casually attracted to or more active practitioners of non-secular therapies, revealing the extent of their awareness of the critical secular or institutionally religious gaze (e.g. Hulkkonen 2017; 2021, 242–9; Kemppainen et al. 2018, 449). They may also partly embody this gaze themselves, because this is how stigma and 'social abjection' work, according to Imogen Tyler (2009).

Possibility work with angels became especially important when secular or institutional religious support in life failed. Many women recounted having sought but rarely received recognition and support in critical life situ-

ations from healthcare institutions, social support services, or institutional religion (see also Kemppainen et al. 2018). Some reported that repeated denial of recognition and support, especially negative if they had been open about their otherworldly contacts, had eventually strengthened and even cemented their will to turn instead to CAM either as an alternative or complementary support. This reveals how sensitive the connection between secular and non-secular healing cultures can be in the complex fabric of lived reality. Non-recognition, mistrust, rejection, and stigmatization may sometimes also enhance the appeal and use of an alternative that makes possible sustenance and at least some opening to possible new interpretation and action.

Despite this, however, many were willing to take the risk because of something important they gained or wished to gain from their engagement. Yet most also spoke of their need to retain their foothold and credibility in the surrounding secular society or in the church. This quite often resulted in a partial or complete concealment of their experience and practice from the secular or religious gaze of society, or even from significant but sceptical and sometimes to different degrees concerned significant others.

Discussion: Towards an ethnography of non-secular possibility work

The perspective of de-differentiation opens an approach to studying how the differentiated fields of religion and health are sometimes blurred in the practices of complementary and alternative or 'holistic' therapies and care (e.g. Lüddeckens and Shrimp 2018a; Utriainen 2010). This article and the two examples from which it draws (care for the dying and angel therapy) suggest that an important aspect of de-differentiation may be situational takes on life that give space to intimate otherworldly relations. For example, this can happen in the sense of destiny or animism that articulates and makes space for agency beyond the individual and the human. Such a realignment of knowledge and agency can be considered and experienced as a promise of healing, or even as healing itself. However, these realignments form hybrid epistemologies and practices that can become very ambivalent and vulnerable, and even stigmatized and abject, in the frame of a largely secular life.

Naturally, the point of this article is not to take a stance for or against the power of religion to heal; this is not the religion scholar's task. Instead, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of understanding the *appeal* of de-differentiated and non-secular therapies in contemporary culture. The engagement with non-secular healing methods may in part reflect the quite

paradoxical combination of the contemporary culture of great hopes for yet frequently felt disappointment and disenchantment with increasingly specializing therapeutic knowledge that does not take into account the entirety of individual lives – even in the context of death and dying. Moreover, specialist medical knowledge does not always translate to an even availability of care, healing, and support, as some of the research participants clearly expressed when suffering from depression and loneliness, for example.

A paradox can also be seen in the double standard of how the proactive take people have on their lives and wellbeing is or is not encouraged. Contemporary culture very much encourages its subjects to engage their own agency and imagination in finding creative solutions to life problems – to find creative means of possibility work, we might say. Yet society may be quite normative about the advocated forms of such engagement. Perhaps particularly difficult for modern medical and scientific authority (but also for modern institutional religion, with its largely metaphorical understanding of religious language and belief) are those vernacular CAM activities that openly involve even a drop of religion and the otherworld. Moreover, it may be difficult to understand and accept their appeal even to modern educated and emancipated adult white women.

The scholar of vernacular religious practices can understand engagement in de-differentiated non-secular therapeutic practices as a way of exercising the creative imagination that seeks openings and ways forward in complex and critical situations. This may be an enactment of empowering healing agency in the face of medical power, as Lüddeckens (2018) suggests, or it may be for more everyday personal sustenance. It should also be emphasized that what for the outsider may seem alternative to conventional therapeutic approaches can instead for the practitioner be a complementary practice in a precarious life situation. This view is also supported by research findings showing that people often combine CAM with conventional medicine (e.g. Lüddeckens and Schrimpf 2018a; Kemppainen et al. 2018). From this perspective the contemporary attraction of non-secular therapies and spiritually flavoured CAM can thus be interpreted and approached as a special kind of the vernacular cultural work that has been called possibility work here.

Possibility work is akin to other forms of cultural work such as identity, boundary, kin, emotion, and enchantment work. These are performative and in different degrees reflexive practices of adjusting but simultaneously resourcing and sustaining the subject in the face of changing social and cultural structures and situational concerns. In the examples discussed in this article possibility work was non-secular in being enacted against

– but simultaneously very much entangled with – the modernist notions of knowledge and agency as individualistic, rationalistic, and narrowly this-worldly. The alternative or complementary forms of healing agency created in non-secular possibility work by engaging situational animism and sense of destiny, for example, may be very ambivalent. They can be personally compelling, empowering, or at least sustaining and provide situationally important 'pieces' to the never completed 'puzzle' of life that enable a change of perspective and moving on even a little – to refer to the quotation that begins this article. Simultaneously, such possibility work with otherworldly relations may be quite a socially and culturally vulnerable and risky engagement in a relatively secular society like Finland. The relationship of this fragility and ambivalence with gender and other differences and inequalities such as social and economic standing and precarious life conditions, as well as the versatility of tools used in non-secular possibility work, require further research.

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Bloody, Intense, and Durable: The Politics of 'Religious Conflict'

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Abstract

A growing number of scholars argues that we are witnessing a resurgence of religion in world politics, accompanied by an increase in religiously inspired conflict. Empirical studies demonstrate that religious conflicts are more violent, more intense, more durable, and more difficult to resolve through negotiated settlements than their secular counterparts. In this paper, we argue that these conclusions are unreliable, because they fail to provide convincing criteria for separating religious conflicts from non-religious ones. Our main concern is with the categorization problem. What characteristics or factors make a conflict party, conflict issue, or identity religious, and what characteristics or factors frame a conflict party, conflict issue, or identity as non-religious? A basic assumption behind much of this research is the contested idea that religion is a universal phenomenon embodied in various forms such as Islam and Christianity. The majority of scholars simply assume a sharp division between religion and the secular without problematizing or justifying such a distinction. In this article, we argue that religious conflict is an ideologically charged concept, and that the study of the religion-conflict nexus reinforces the neoliberal status quo and current systems of power.

Keywords: *religious conflict, secular conflicts, identity, conflict issue, critical analysis, neoliberal status quo.*

There is a growing recognition that there has been a resurgence of religion in world politics over the last four decades (e.g. Juergensmeyer 2008; Toft, Philpott, and Shah 2011), and that this resurgence has been accompanied by an increase in religious conflicts (e.g. Juergensmeyer 1997; McTernan 2003;

Fox 2004a; Toft 2006; Basedau and Koos 2015). Monica Duffy Toft (2013), for instance, claims that the percentage of civil wars with a religious dimension more than doubled between the 1960s and the 1990s. In a study of the role of religion in ethno-nationalist conflicts and revolutionary wars between 1945 and 2001, Jonathan Fox argues that the role of religion 'changed over time, from religion being unimportant or even a negative influence on conflict at the start of the period to becoming an increasingly significant cause of conflict either in 1965 or the early 1980s, depending on which dataset is analyzed' (Fox 2004a, 715). A global study of religion and domestic conflict from 1960 to 2009, based on the Political Instability Taskforce dataset, demonstrates that '[r]eligious conflict began increasing around 1977 with the beginning of the Iranian revolution and became a majority of all conflict in 2002' (Fox 2012, 155). In light of this, it is not altogether surprising that one author concludes that '[r]eligion is central to much of the strife that is taking place in the world today. Whether it is the root cause of a conflict, as it appears to be in the Middle East, where there are competing claims for the same piece of territory, or merely a mobilizing vehicle for nationalist and ethnic passions, as has typically been the case in the Balkans, religion's potential to cause instability at all levels of the global system is arguably unrivalled' (Johnston 2003, 3f.).

Some scholars, such as Hector Avalos (2005), René Girard (1977), and Walter Burkert (1992), argue that violence is intrinsic to religion. In empirical studies, scholars of religion and conflict demonstrate that religious conflicts are more violent (Basedau, Pfeiffer, and Vüllers 2016; Breslawski and Ives 2019; Toft 2007; Henne 2012b; Hoffman 1998), more intense (Bercovitch and DeRouen 2005; Fox 1999; Henderson 1997; Pearce 2005; Roeder 2003), more enduring (Horowitz 2009; Toft 2007; Tusicisny 2004), and more difficult to resolve peacefully than their secular counterparts (Hassner 2009; Svensson 2012; Toft 2007). However, these conclusions rely on their ability to provide convincing criteria for distinguishing religious from non-religious conflicts. Are these scholars successful in this regard?

This study, informed theoretically and methodologically by William T. Cavanaugh's critical examination of the literature on religious violence (Cavanaugh 2009), aims to ascertain the research implications and validity of the concept of religious conflict as distinctly different from non-religious counterparts. Through a critical analysis of the social scientific literature on religion and conflict we examine the historical, social, political, and economic settings in which this concept is used. We argue that the distinction between religious and secular conflict is highly questionable and often

misleading, because research consistently fails to provide coherent criteria for distinguishing religious from secular conflicts and often ignores the political dimensions of conflict. Finally, we argue that religious conflict is an ideologically charged concept, and that scholarly engagement with the religion-conflict nexus reinforces the neoliberal status quo and current systems of power.

We begin by unpacking the categorization and definitional problem of conflict as religious or secular, and the identities attached to such conflicts. Next, we problematize the very definition of religion, the term's supposed essence, and the scholarly implications of casually defining religion in terms of common-sense knowledge. Finally, and in regard to Cavanaugh's scholarly findings, we conclude that this definitional ambiguity offers secular liberal states a convenient justification to use force to neutralize those who challenge the hegemony of the prevailing political status quo.

Conceptualizations of religious conflict

It is impossible to draw the boundaries of the concept of religion without simultaneously drawing the boundaries of the concept of the secular, which by itself is the foundation of the idea that there are two different types – or categories – of conflict: religious and secular. Thus, religious and non-religious conflicts are in some vague sense out there, and we only need to be more precise about their characteristics and functions to study them. Students of religion and conflict proceed from this assumption when they conceptualize religious conflict either in terms of identity or as a conflict issue.

Conflict can be defined as 'a social situation in which a minimum of two actors (parties) strive to acquire at the same moment in time an available set of scarce resources' (Wallensteen 2012, 16). Religious conflict is typically operationalized as religious differences between combating adversaries. Identity-based conceptualizations categorize a conflict as religious when the conflicting parties have different religious/denominational identities (e.g. Christians vs Muslims or Catholics vs Protestants), regardless of the depth and intensity of the combatants' religious beliefs and practices, and regardless of whether or not these identities have an impact on the conflict. Identity-based conflicts occur across religious boundaries, but they are typically not fought over religious issues. Religion thus functions primarily as a marker of difference, but it may also have an impact on conflict dynamics (Toft 2007; Fox 2004a; Ellingsen 2005), for instance, by serving as an instrument of mobilization (De Juan 2008).

Most scholars of religion and conflict believe that religious identities are essentially (or substantially or functionally) different from secular identities (e.g. Fox 2000; Reynal-Querol 2002; Ellingsen 2005; Grzymala-Busse 2012) because, according to at least some scholars, they are 'connected to particular religious ideas' and therefore 'hardly subject to negotiation and compromise given the accepted supernatural origin' (Basedau, Strüver, Vüllers, and Wegenast 2011, 754).

For example, Kristian Berg Harpviken and Hanne Eggen Røislien, who contend that 'religion is a multifaceted phenomenon, impossible to pin down in a single definition' (Harpviken and Røislien 2008, 352), argue that religion has a peculiar tendency to form strong exclusive identities that divide people into *us* and *them*, making religious identities particularly prone to generating conflict.

> Religious belief systems have a particular identity-forming potential. Religion is not just *individual;* it is also *social,* offering each believer a sense of belonging to a community of fellow believers. With its reference to a transcendent source of truth and codification of shared norms, religion serves as a compass for the individual and the religious community alike, locating all believers within an extended ontological setting. An identity with a religious source may, therefore, be exceptionally robust: religion tells you where you belong and where to proceed (Harpviken and Røislien 2008, 354, emphasis in original).

Here, as in most definitions of religious identity in the field, the conceptualization of religious identity is based on a substantive understanding of religion – religious identity refers to a 'transcendent source of truth and [a] codification of shared norms'. Thus, what distinguishes a religious identity from a non-religious one is described in terms of the content of religious belief. However, the criterion used to distinguish between religious and secular identities – the transcendent – is so vague that it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to exclude identities normally understood as secular from the category of religious identity, such as ethnic or nationalist identity. Indeed, most scholars fail to provide a convincing criterion for distinguishing religious identities from non-religious ones. Without a coherent distinction between religious and secular identities, how can we know what scholars are talking about when they make claims about identity-based religious conflicts?

Religious identities, in other words, are represented as separate and distinct from secular identities, even though the boundary between them is

arbitrary and shifting. The unreflective use of the terms religion and secular casts doubt on their conclusions about religious – and secular – identities and their influence on human behaviour. Functionalist approaches are virtually non-existent in this context, which is not particularly surprising, since they would make the category of religious identity so all-encompassing and inclusive as to be of little analytical value.

The fact is that no sound and well-established definition of religious identity has yet been found in the religion-and-conflict literature. It is often unclear why, for instance, a Muslim identity is categorized as a religious identity, while a nationalist identity is categorized as a non-religious identity (e.g. Svensson and Nilsson 2018). Is it because Muslims and nationalists say so themselves? Or is it simply taken for granted as common-sense knowledge? Whose identity are we talking about: that of the elites or that of the rank-and-file combatants? On what grounds can we privilege the identity of one social category over the other? For instance, how should we define the United States and the United Kingdom during the war in Iraq? The leaders of both countries at the time were confessional Christians, and they were 'reported to have prayed together in 2002 at [Bush's] ranch at Crawford, Texas – the summit at which the invasion of Iraq was agreed in principle' (MacAskill 2005). Why are the United States and the United Kingdom rarely if ever classified as religious conflict parties in the research literature?

Identities – whether religious or secular – are relative, fluid, context-dependent, 'and patrolled on account of [their] porosity' (Hughes 2015, 8). Timothy Fitzgerald has rightly noted that the 'policing of the boundaries between religion and politics is a matter of state power and even a contributory excuse for war' (Fitzgerald 2011, 191). It is typically the liberal secular state that affirms what a secular identity is, and what a (tolerable as well as intolerable) religious identity is. Religion-and-conflict scholars tend to reproduce and thereby sanction binary classifications of identity that, to borrow an apt phrase from Noam Chomsky, 'serve the interests of state and corporate power' (Chomsky 1989, 10). Deciding what counts as religious identity and what counts as secular identity is never indisputable, but always contested and negotiated, and thus political and ideological. How religious identity is defined, what is included or excluded from the definition, depends on the underlying arrangements of power and the interests of those defining it (see also Cavanaugh 2009). We suspect that many actors defined as religious (or non-religious) in the literature may be religious (or non-religious) only because scholars categorize them as such.

Interreligious conflicts are often described as binary conflicts between unitary and bounded factions, but conflicting parties are rarely homogenous groups. In the interreligious conflict in Maluku (1999–2004), for instance, the conflicting parties – Muslims and Christians – were divided into several subgroups such as Muslim vigilance groups and Christian vigilance groups, and Muslim criminal gangs and Christian criminal gangs. Members of these subgroups, recruited from a wide range of social categories, used violence to achieve multiple, overlapping, and sometimes mutually contradictory goals (Lindgren 2014). Religious identity labels therefore tend to obscure the plurality of identities that exists within the parties to the conflict. Even if it could be demonstrated that a conflict group were religiously homogeneous, it would be by no means clear that religious beliefs were the reasons for their conflict behaviour (Lindgren 2018).

In sum, while it is possible to conceptually distinguish religious identities from non-religious ones, it seems impossible to coherently separate them, as evidenced by attempts to do so in the research literature. Indeed, religious identities can never be separated from other domains of social, cultural, and political life. To understand a particular religious identity, we must take into account the contextual factors and processes through which that identity is constructed and maintained over time (Schwedler 2001). Moreover, religious identities are ephemeral phenomena that depend on what counts as religion in particular historical contexts. The widespread (and Protestant-informed) assumption, shared by most scholars of religion and conflict, that everyone has a singular religious identification is patently false, as many people do not identify as adherents of any particular religion (as it is colloquially understood) but follow more than one religious path at a time (Fitzgerald 2000; Smith 2000).

At the heart of every conflict is an incompatibility of goals between the parties to the conflict (Galtung 1996). Issue-based conceptualizations categorize conflicts as religious when the 'issues at stake between conflicting groups are religious in nature' (Isaacs 2016, 212). This means religion can be an issue in the conflict, but not necessarily the only or even the most important one, as in conflicts over sacred spaces. Religion, in other words, is part of the incompatibility of a conflict when belligerents make religious claims. In contrast with identity-based conflicts, issue-based conflicts mainly occur within religious boundaries (Svensson 2012). The idea that a conflict issue can be religious in nature raises questions about what it is that makes conflict issues religious, and how to separate religious issues from non-religious ones. Some scholars of religion and conflict have grappled with

these questions on the surface. Fox, for instance, who considers religious beliefs to be core issues in many conflicts, defines religion in terms of the supernatural. Accordingly, it is the supernatural that marks the crucial distinction between religion and non-religion. Fox writes:

> Religion seeks to understand the origins and nature of reality using a set of answers that include the supernatural. Religion is also a social phenomenon and institution which influences the behavior of human beings both as individuals and in groups. These influences of behavior manifest through the influence of religious identity, religious institutions, religious legitimacy, religious beliefs, and the codification of these beliefs into authoritative dogma, among other influence (Fox 2018, 6).

Based on this definition, Fox argues that attributions to supernatural sources make religious worldviews qualitatively distinct and different from – functionally equivalent – secular worldviews, which are attributed to human sources. Fox thus assumes that religion is a distinct and substantive reality that manifests itself in beliefs, identities, institutions, legitimations, as well as dogmas, doctrines, or theologies, which influences behaviour, and contributes to intergroup conflicts (Fox 2018, 57; see also Fox 2004b; Fox and Sandler 2005). Why it is important to distinguish between religious and secular worldviews, particularly when they, as he writes in an article on the impact of religion on domestic conflicts, 'can perform the same social functions' and 'similarly contribute to conflict' (Fox 1998, 48), remains a mystery.

There are several problems with Fox's attempt to distinguish religion from non-religion by reference to a dualistic view of reality. First, defining religion in terms of the supernatural raises the question of what this concept, which Fox takes for granted, really means. The supernatural is such a notoriously open-ended concept that it becomes impossible to exclude systems of meaning that are colloquially understood to be non-religious from the category of religion, for example, nationalism – which has been aptly described as 'a lingering trace of transcendence in a secular world' (Eagleton 2005, 94). Second, when the supernatural is conceptualized as a being or an entity, it excludes systems of meaning that most people – Fox included – would consider religious, such as Theravada Buddhism.

In a somewhat tautological fashion Isak Svensson conceptualizes religious incompatibility conflicts as 'conflicts where at least one side has made explicit claims relating to the religious sphere' (Svensson 2012, 19). (Similarly, 'a religious conflict' is conceptualized by Svensson as 'a conflict where at least one

side has raised explicit demands […] relating to religious issues' [Svensson 2013, 412]). Religious incompatibility is thus defined by the religious sphere (and a religious conflict is defined by religious issues). But what is the meaning of the religious sphere (and religious issues), and how do we separate religious spheres (and religious issues) from secular ones? The problem is that Svensson provides no convincing answers to these questions. His definition of religion, 'a system of thought and practice aimed at giving basic meaning to existence, invoking conditions beyond strictly human affairs' (Svensson 2012, 6), is so broad that it encompasses a whole host of beliefs and practices that are not typically categorized as religion, such as neoliberalism. What counts as a religious issue and what does not is most likely based on common-sense conceptions of religion, which are typically too vague to be analytically productive. The argument that religious beliefs define or frame conflict issues presupposes that religion is distinguishable from non-religion. As far as we know, no one has been able to offer a definition that clearly separates religious meaning systems from secular meaning systems. Students of the concept of religion like Talal Asad argue that all attempts at a universal definition of religion are doomed to fail, 'not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes' (Asad 1993, 10).

Even if scholars of religion and conflict could find a coherent way to distinguish between religious and non-religious issues, we doubt that this distinction would tell us anything of value about the conflict issues categorized as such. The real challenge, after all, is not to conceptually distinguish between religious and secular issues, but to separate them from each other – as one scholar notes: 'most religious terrorists promote a mixture of religious and material objectives' (Stern 2003, xx). Armed conflicts are complex social processes, and the issues in contention, which are rarely singular or unambiguous, can always be described in both secular and religious terms, depending on the perspective of the observer. The very act of challenging the state's monopoly on morally sanctioned killing has political significance, even when the motivation is cast in religious terms. The issues that motivate religious parties to conflict are thus as much political as those of any secular party.

'Religion' and religious conflicts

If one argues that religious conflicts are more violent and intractable than other conflicts, one should be clear about what religion is. However, a brief

review of the research literature reveals that the most frequent and common practice is to simply use the term religion without ever defining it, as if the meaning of the term is self-evident (e.g. Breslawski and Ives 2019; Fox 1997; Isaacs 2017; Pearce 2005; Roeder, 2003 Selengut, 2003; Svensson 2007; Svensson and Harding 2011; Wellman and Tokuno 2004), or to cite one of the standard – typically substantivist – definitions of religion at the beginning of the text, sometimes placed in a footnote, and then effectively overlook the implications of the chosen definition in the remainder of the text (e.g. Basedau, Pfeiffer and Vüllers 2016; Henne 2012a; Horowitz 2009; Tusicisny, 2004).

Ron E. Hassner, for instance, who argues that religious conflicts are more intractable than secular ones, writes in *War on Sacred Grounds* that he has 'dodged altogether the responsibility of grappling with the definition of "religion"' (Hassner 2009, 5). How are we to know what he counts as a religious conflict, and what he counts as a non-religious conflict if he does not provide a definition of religion? By what criteria are 'actors', 'leaders', 'rivalries', and so on considered either religious or secular? Where is the thin line that separates religion and politics (and vice versa) in statements such as 'the religious elements of [conflicts over sacred spaces] are inextricably intertwined with their political elements' (Hassner 2009, 3), and 'religion and politics are inextricably intertwined' (Hassner 2009, 5)? The conclusion that 'the concentration of religious, political, and economic resources at or near temples creates significant temptations for violence' (Hassner 2009, 27) assumes that religion pre-exists in the world and is somehow separate and distinct from politics and economics. Where is the boundary between them? (To be fair, in another publication Hassner defines religion as 'a system of beliefs, a collection of symbols and practices, and a social structure' [Hassner and Horowitz 2010, 204], but this definition hardly solves the problem of distinguishing between religious and non-religious conflicts, or between religion and politics/economics.)

Mattias Basedau, Georg Strüver, Johannes Vüllers and Tim Wegenast, acknowledging the complexity of the definitional question and explicitly stating that they have no intention of solving the problem of defining religion, assert, without giving particularly good reasons, that 'it is useful to distinguish between different dimensions of religion' (Basedau, Strüver, Vüllers, and Wegenast 2011, 754). They then rush into examining these dimensions as if they were, in the words of Russell T. McCutcheon, 'self-evidently meaningful realities that exist outside the scholar, much as ripe fruit sits on the tree waiting to be picked' (McCutcheon 2001, 87). Indeed, the very talk

of religion in terms of dimensions that is common in the literature points to a dubious reification and essentialization of religion (Fitzgerald 2000).

In an oft-cited study of the role of religion in civil wars Toft offers a definition of religion inspired by William P. Alston's polythetic definition:

> Definitions [of religion] typically include some of all of the following elements: a belief in a supernatural being (or beings); prayers and communication with that being; transcendent realities that might include some form of heaven, paradise, or hell; a distinction between the sacred and the profane and between ritual acts and sacred objects; a view that explains both the world as a whole and a person's proper role in it; a code of conduct in line with that worldview; and a community bound by its adherence to these elements (Toft 2007, 99).

In another work on religion and politics, co-authored with Daniel Philpott and Timothy Samuel Shah, in which Toft uses the same definition, she adds: 'Though not every religion includes all of these elements, all religions include most of them, such that we understand that religion involves a combination of beliefs, behavior, and belonging in a community' (Toft, Philpott and Shah 2011, 21). Furthermore, Toft asserts that 'all religions by definition seek understanding of, and harmony with, the widest reaches of transcendent reality – the quality that distinguishes them from political ideologies such as Marxism and secular nationalism that are sometimes thought to be functionally equivalent to religion' (Toft, Philpott, and Shah 2011, 21).

There are some fairly obvious problems with this definition and her arguments, for instance, the Western (Protestant-informed) bias to conceptualizing religion in terms of beliefs, and the use of highly controversial, contested, and inherently vague terms such as supernatural being, sacred, and transcendent. It is unclear, at least to us, how belief in something transcendent such as a divine being is essentially different from belief in the invisible hand of the market. Moreover, Toft provides no good reasons why the listed religion-forming features are important characteristics of religion. Most critically, the proposed definition of religion does not provide delineation principles, which is indeed acknowledged by Alston (1972). To claim that religious conflicts are essentially different from non-religious conflicts would undermine the fundamental idea behind a polythetic definition of religion. Without a clear delineation of religion from non-religion how can we know, as Toft claims, that religious conflicts are more violent and more durable than secular conflicts?

The study of religion and conflict is in fact, and perhaps surprisingly for some, thoroughly saturated with theologically loaded concepts and ideas (primarily of the liberal kind) such as the sacred (e.g. Appleby 2012; Hassner 2009; Jones 2008), the transcendent (e.g. Harpviken and Røislien 2008; Toft 2007), world religions (e.g. Appleby 2000; Bormann, Cederman, and Vogt 2017; Svensson 2007; 2012), Abrahamic religions (e.g. Toft 2007), and even the contested ecumenical idea that Jews, Christians, and Muslims 'believe in the one and same God' (Svensson 2013). However, scholars rarely move beyond a common-sense understanding of the concept of religion and turn to a more critical analysis of the term. As recent advances in the study of the concept of religion demonstrate, the concept is a social construct with a great deal of ideological baggage (e.g. Arnal and McCutcheon 2013; Dubuisson 2003; Fitzgerald 2007; Smith 1998). The concept of religion would certainly not exist without the specific historical and sociopolitical conditions in which it emerged. It is a product of social practices, discourses, and shared agreements. As a social construction, religion requires human subjectivity to exist, but as an intersubjective construction, it exists independently of what any individual believes (Schilbrack 2010). The same argument is equally relevant to the concept of religious conflict. It is a product of human creativity and sociopolitical processes. The concept was invented by people for specific purposes and is maintained through convention, performance, and language. As social constructions, religious conflicts are real – if only for those who recognize them as such.

Religion is an ideologically charged concept, invented to serve the interests of those who need it. Academic study of the concept of religion has shown that it has been used extensively as a legitimation of Western imperialism (e.g. Chidester 2014; Fitzgerald 2000; Josephson, 2012; King 1990). 'Defining religion is thus not innocent or apolitical but grows from and serves material interests' (Schilbrack 2010, 1116). The concept of religious conflict is also an ideological construct that has been used – and continues to be used – to assert and advance power interests. To label a conflict religious is to arbitrarily isolate it from other types of conflict that are usually seen as more rational, pragmatic, and benign – perhaps even constructive and civilizing (Mamdani 2004). The mere identification of some conflicts as religious is itself a political move in a post-Cold War era in which, according to one author, 'religion has become too critical to Western interests to permit its continued marginalization in the policymaker's calculus' (Johnston 2003, 5).

Discussion

Consistent with Cavanaugh's findings in his study of the literature on religious violence, we show that scholars of religion and conflict are unable to make a coherent distinction between religious and secular conflicts. The definitional ambiguity reflects and reinforces – some would say confirms – conventional wisdom about 'the dark alliance between religion and violence' (Juergensmeyer 2017, xiv). As a result, claims that so-called religious conflicts are particularly vicious, brutish, and intractable are unreliable. It is bewildering that the observed similarities between religious and non-religious conflicts and the difficulty in clearly distinguishing them (e.g. Appleby 2000; Fox 2012; Philpott 2007; Stern 2003; Svensson 2012) do not lead to a serious questioning of the assumed difference between religious and non-religious conflicts.

To us most of these studies look like concealed ideological enterprises that aim to make the secular state appear necessary to tame, discipline, and domesticate those actors who challenge the state's monopoly on violence and the neoliberal hegemony – or the 'new world order' (Hardt and Negri 2004). The concept of religious conflict implies a link between religion and conflict, and many scholars of religion and conflict rhetorically reinforce the popular notion that religious conflicts somehow emerge from religious beliefs and sectarian identities. However, the literature fails to demonstrate a causal relationship between adherence to (radical/extreme or moderate) religious beliefs (whatever that may mean) and violent conflict behaviour (see also Basedau, Strüver, Vüllers, and Wegenast 2011; Sageman 2017).

Academic and non-academic discourses on religious conflict typically portray combatants as driven by uncompromising (extreme, radical, or totalitarian) beliefs, heavenly rewards, fanaticism, extremism, status, thrill, or friendship, rather than rational political motivations. The violence perpetrated by religious actors is thus portrayed not only as particularly bloody, intense, and enduring, but also as meaningless, because it cannot be rationally justified. Prioritizing religion effectively removes politics from conflicts and reduces them to personal predispositions and/or social processes such as beliefs, emotions, and group dynamics. Although most of those involved in religious conflicts are (also) motivated by political objectives such as liberation from foreign occupation (e.g. Karakaya 2015; Pape 2005; Pape and Feldman, 2010; Roy 2004), the literature typically defines them as religious rather than political actors. The focus on disembodied religion, reflecting the assumption that all conflict groups labelled religious are essentially the same, also downplays the sociopolitical context and obscures the role

that state agents – and corporate and state-sponsored global capitalism – have played and continue to play in violent intergroup conflicts around the world (e.g. Chomsky 2004; Chomsky and Herman 2015; Chomsky and Waterstone 2021; Herman and Peterson 2012; Hook and Ganguly 2000; Illas 2016; Klare 2002; Mills and Miller 2017; Mueller 2007; Rogers 2016). Religion and conflict studies thus tend to overlook how the interaction between state and non-state actors influences their choice of means, tactics, and strategies.

The study of religious conflicts is enmeshed in a variety of social, economic, and political forces that pull it in certain directions, including, of course, the politics of research funding, such as state and military funding of research projects, which has an impact on the kind of research that is done, and the kind that is not done (see also Sageman 2017), and the politics of publishing, which affects the kind of research that is published, and the kind that is not published (see also Kundnani 2015). The 'view from nowhere' that many of the scholars explicitly or implicitly profess is in fact a 'view from somewhere', since most of them take a problem-solving approach, and therefore take 'the world as [they find] it, with the prevailing social and power relationships and institutions into which they are organized, as the given framework for action' and strive to 'make these relationships and institutions work smoothly by dealing effectively with particular sources of trouble' (as Robert W. Cox [1981, 128-129] puts it). This – conscious or unconscious – obedience to those in power is, in the words of Stanley Milgram, 'the psychological mechanism that links individual actions to political purpose' (Milgram 1974, 3). In a secular context the distinction between religious and non-religious conflicts functions as a rhetorical device – or a sociopolitical management technique – to delegitimize some actors – those labelled religious – and legitimize others – those labelled non-religious, particularly liberal secular states. Since religious combatants are portrayed as especially violent and unwilling to negotiate, the study of religion and conflict provides secular states with a convenient justification to use force to neutralize religious actors who challenge the political status quo.

To conclude, most studies of the religion-conflict nexus reinforce the prevailing status quo and current power systems of power – even if the individual scholar has no such goal in mind. Some scholars are more eager than others to assist liberal states in the project of creating a 'new world order'. Hassner, for instance, advises US military commanders in Iraq to 'carefully consider the time and date chosen for military action', because believers 'will respond with greater vehemence to attacks that display a lack of sensitivity to prescribed times of prayer, dates of fasting and celebra-

tion, anniversaries, and holy days, regardless of whether congregants are actually present at the mosque when military operations commence' (Hassner 2006, 158). In a world, then, where, as Talal Asad puts it, 'cruelty is an indispensable technique for maintaining a particular kind of international order' (Asad 2007, 94), scholars of religious conflict tend to focus on how to solve problems for the dominant elite at the expense of liberation from the political status quo. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the research on religious conflict has grown tremendously since the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003.

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The Diminishing Importance of Fate and Divine Femininity During the High and Late Roman Empire

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Abstract

Weaving and femininity are historically intimately connected with the concept of Fate. In antiquity Fate was portrayed as a powerful female principle controlling the cosmic system humans inhabited. However, as the antique religious world gave way to a new era, the role of Fate subsided under Christian dominance. This article examines how this change played out, and how the worldview that won prominence as Christianity prevailed gradually lost touch with the presence of powerful female cosmic principles. It shows that the disappearance of Fate from the prevailing world was seminal in the birth of a new 'technology of the self'. In conclusion, the article places the disappearance of Fate in the context of a discussion of how the view of the self changed in the aftermath of Christianity, which had become dominant. This discussion is related to the scholarship of Peter Brown, among others, as well as a newly published posthumous work by Michel Foucault (2018).

Keywords: *Fate, technology of self, Michel Foucault, free will, femininity*

The idea of Fate as a powerful female cosmic principle has been present as far back as we can see into the religious world of the Mediterranean basin (Eidinow 2011; DeConick 2011; Christ 1997). A popular portrayal of Fate was as a figure weaving and spinning the life thread of humanity, a task intimately associated with femaleness.[1] When Christianity finally took

1 Homer depicted Penelope as weaving her father-in-law's funeral shroud and unweaving it every night to postpone her promise to remarry when the work was done: the weaving was connected with Odysseus's life. There are other myths: Ariadne, the daughter of Minos of Crete, managed the Labyrinth where Theseus fought the Minotaur. With her spun thread she guided Theseus in the labyrinth, saving his life. Ovid tells of Philomena who, by weaving a loom depicting the crime committed against her, thus sealed the Fate of her assailants (*Metamorphoses* VI, 575–87). Arachne, the most skilful of all spinners, was turned into a spider and sentenced to weave for all time when she insulted Zeus and failed to recognize that her skills came from Athena.

over as the only sanctioned religion in the Roman Empire – an empire in decline but still in control of much of the Mediterranean world – things had changed. The importance of Fate – and thus a powerful female cosmic principle – had subsided and ultimately disappeared. This article outlines the steps in which Fate's slow disappearance occurred between the high and late Roman Empire,[2] and traces it to the birth of a new morality and view of selfhood.

The article is divided into four parts. First, a short contextualization is offered into the image and function of Fate in classical antiquity. Second, the early Christian receptions of Fate as a powerful feminine deity are analysed. It is argued that these receptions took two very specific forms: one affirming the importance of powerful images of female deities; the other rejecting them. The third part of the article begins to explore the reasons the versions of Christianity that would prevail in the theological struggles of the first centuries rejected Fate and divine femininity. The article ends by reading the disappearance of Fate in light of prominent scholars' views of the changes occurring in relation to the view of the self in the period of the high and late Roman Empire. It will be argued that a 'technology of the self', which Michel Foucault and other scholars have imagined, is introduced with the rise and prominence of Christianity, and that it is made possible in part by the disappearance of Fate.

Turning the cosmic spindle: fate and femaleness

In Graeco-Roman culture Fate came in many shapes, for example, Ananke (ἀνάγκη), Tyche (τύχη), and the Moirai sisters (μοῖραι). Clotho (κλωθώ), one of the sisters of Fate, was depicted with a spindle in her hand, aided by her sisters in the making of the yarn which symbolized the destiny of humans (Hesiod, *Theogony* 217, 904). This image was no mere story created to entertain the masses. Destiny, or necessity (ἀνάγκη), was the power 'on which all the revolutions turn', Plato said (Plato, *Republic* 10.616–617). In the *Republic* Plato inserts the same sentiment into a story abouts the soldier Er, who, after he is killed on the battlefield, ascends to encounter Fate. Er

2 This is a period at the beginning of which Rome gained dominance of the Mediterranean (from ca 30 BCE, when Egypt was conquered) until the time when the Roman emperors started to convert to Christianity. During this period Christianity became dominant, but at the end of it Jews, Christians, and Pagans – whether orthodox or heterodox, patrician or plebian – 'still breathed the same heavy air of a common civilization', as Peter Brown once put it in the influential work *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Brown, Bowersock & Grabar 1999, xi).

observes Fate at work, weaving the human souls of the deceased into new bodies with new and different destinies (*Republic* 10.614–21). Plato's story of Er was based not only on myth but on the very scientific foundations of his time (Pollitt 1994; Buriks 1950).

Yet Fate was not depicted uniformly in antiquity. She often appeared as a goddess, as real as the other deities; however, just as often, she was portrayed in a more metaphorical sense, as the predisposition of a human being's lifespan. Fate appears as a power that Zeus used when confirming a certain plan of action. Nevertheless, what is clear is that once the wheels of Fate were in motion, one could not escape them – as long as one existed in a body consisting of matter, that is. Fate was closely associated with the orderliness and predictability of the cosmic system, the structure that defined human life, as it was understood in antiquity (Martin 1991, 151–69).

Fate was from the outset associated with the heavens and the motions of the planets,[3] and as the Ptolemaic worldview became more firmly established, the circular movement of the spindle became an even more natural expression for the predictability of the ever-turning planets. Zeno called Fate 'a power in motion' (δύναμις κινητική) (SVF 1.175), and this was the very concept that defined – indeed, named – the planets: the Greek word πλανήτης, 'wandering'. Fate turned the circular spindle of time and was thus intimately associated with the predictable and inescapable motions of the cosmos. The concept of Fate was not therefore used as a reference to something occurring without cause or by chance; Fate permeated the scientific worldview in Graeco-Roman society (Denzey Lewis 2013, Chapter 1). For the uninitiated and those who lacked all the facts and a cosmic perspective – that is, mortals and all those who were not omniscient sages – an accident or an untimely event might look like chance. But the cosmic system was closely interconnected, from the smallest piece of an atom to the motions of the planets. Humans, just like everything else in the cosmos, consisted of the four elements (five counting ether) associated with four different fluids (bile, blood, phlegm, and water), which generated four basic attributes (heat, cold, wet, dry). And Fate ruled them all, from the smallest animal and plant to the whole of humanity; as Herodotus said, not even Zeus himself could turn the wheels of destiny once they had been set (Herodotus, *The Histories* 1.19; Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes* 1.11, 1.13; Stobaeus, *Eclogues* 1.152, 1.170) (Pleše 2007, 237–68).

Just as the structure that held the predictability in order in the heavens was associated with a female power through the weaver Fate, so the most

3 Clotho's sister Lachesis is sometimes depicted as pointing to the horoscope on a globe, and Atropos with a sundial (Paus. 1.19).

basic material attributes of human existence were associated with femininity. Women gave birth to the material body, and the sensations associated with the basic human drives like lust, hunger, and sleep were often named female emotions (or passions) (Knuuttila 2004). More often than not this was expressed in misogynic terms, a famous example being Aristotle's description of women as men who were not fully developed (*On the Generation of Animals* 728a13–27). Consequently, women fell prey to base emotions associated with the body more easily than men. The combination of Aristotelian natural speculations and the Ptolemaic worldview accorded the sublunary realm with feminine attributes, like dampness and cold. In short, the terrestrial realm was inseparable from femininity (Sambursky 1962).

It is far from surprising that the novel religious structures born in the context of the Mediterranean basin at the dawn of Hellenism – the mystery cults – often included a promise of concurring Fate. The deity, often a goddess to whom the cult was devoted, had found a way of controlling or escaping the restraints of a perpetual wandering, the image representing the circular motion controlling human life. Isis had long wandered about in search of her husband's dismembered body and fooled death by bringing Osiris back to life; Demeter, Orpheus, and Kybele were all powerful gods/goddesses engaged in sorrowful wandering and searching for dead loved ones (daughter/mate/mother) (*Metamorphoses* XI; *Orphic Hymns* 4, 7). Ultimately, they had all overcome the rule of Fate, and the mystery cults thus offered a release from the tireless wandering attached to materiality.

This context saw the birth of Christianity. As its dominance began to show and finally took over completely, the antique worldview ruled by Fate began to subside (Brown 1972). A world in which the spinning goddess was at the centre of time and causality gave way to one that would take human free will as self-evident. The power to choose one's own destiny was guaranteed by an almighty and good Father and his son, the Logos, who gave order to the world. However, this transition – which, in light of the above depiction of the world of Fate, must sound like a shift between two totally opposing worldviews – did not happen overnight. For centuries Christianity debated the nature of human will, as well as the role the female principles associated with the governance of the cosmos and the human body should have (Linjamaa 2019). The following will be devoted to exploring Christian attitudes to Fate and will trace the process that finally led to her rejection. As I will argue, she was not simply denied but was instead replaced slowly with other feminine religious symbols, as well as the introduction of a new view of the self.

Providence and the reception of Fate in early Christianity[4]

No obvious female principles or a Fate goddess were mentioned in the Genesis creation story. Nevertheless, as Fate played a central role in the most current scientific worldviews of the time, Jewish and Christian intellectuals were prone to integrate Fate – at least for a time – in their particular cosmologies (Miller 2016).

Christians and Jews developed their own take on Fate, and this was partly done by developing the image of Providence (προνοια) (Frick 1999; Bergjan 2002; Miller 2016). Apart from Fate, in several of his writings Plato had mentioned another female figure associated with the foundations of cosmic life, a world soul which the Demiurge had created. This world soul defined what it meant to be made up of a substance spatially and temporally bound to Fate (*Laws* 10.896a; *Timaeus* 35a, 37a–c, 34c; *Phaedrus* 246b–c). It was this concept that would influence Stoics and Middle Platonic thinkers, as well as Christian and Jewish writers, to develop notions concerning a female principle called Providence (πρόνοια) around the second century CE. Providence was closely associated with Fate, but she retained a more elevated position (Apuleius, *De Platone er eius dogmate*; Pseudo-Plutarch, *De Fato*). While Fate was associated with the sublunary spheres, as well as the bodies of and the passions stirring within humans, Providence was associated with the creation and governance of the highest realms (Apuleius, *De Platone er eius dogmate* 1.12; Denzey Lewis 2013).

Pseudo-Plutarch and Apuleius separated Providence and Fate. The highest Providence had Fate inside it, according to Psuedo-Plutarch, and was the primary God's wholly beneficial will. Middle Providence and Fate acted between the highest plane and the cosmos, while lower Providence was included in Fate and acted with the *daimons* in the cosmos, the 'lower gods', as Plato called them in *Timaeus.* These lower powers could induce irrational passions within humans (Pseudo-Plutarch, *De Fato* 572f–574b; Plato, *Timaeus* 42d–e). Apuleius viewed Fate and Providence as corresponding. He divided Providence into three parts, where Fate was a lower aspect of Providence. Notions of higher and lower forms of Providence developed too, the lower one often directly identified with Fate (Apuleius, *De Platone er eius dogmate*).

Among Jews and Christians Providence was considered the personification of the will of God in action, associated with divine reason (λόγος), thus representing God's benevolent will in the universe (Miller 2016; Frick 1999).

4 I have written about the topic in the beginning of this section, in much the same manner, in Linjamaa 2016.

Clement of Alexandria, for example, wrote that the true ruler and director of the world was the Word of God and his Providence (πρόνοια), and that by the will of the Almighty the Son had taken flesh so humans might see and handle him (*Stromata* VII.2:8). According to Philo, whose ideas would influence many Christians, God was the father of all rational creatures and exercised his Providence (πρόνοια) for the protection even of those who sinned against him (*On the Embassy to Gaius* 24.3, 25.1–27.2).

As Middle Platonist thinkers had done, Christian authors also experimented with dividing Fate and Providence into higher and lower forms to distance the will of God (most often considered benevolent) from the more deprived aspects of cosmic life, such as the baser drives of the human body and low passions (Frick 1999; Williams 1992; Perkins 1980). Athenagoras of Athens, for example, wrote that it was through a lower form of Providence that malevolent angels stirred up 'irrational movements' in humans, causing them to act on passions which drew them away from God.

Some Christians associated Fate and Providence with Wisdom (המכח/σοφία), the creative power of God mentioned in the Jewish Scriptures (Psalms 104:24; Proverbs 8:22–31), a character that was at times personified. In the *Apocryphon of John*, a very popular second-century Christian text that was heavily inspired by Platonism and allegorical readings of Genesis, the cosmos is a tragedy occasioned by the fall of Wisdom from heaven. She gives birth to a creator god, who, along with his base angels, controls humans through Fate. In the *Apocryphon of John*, Fate is closely connected with a character called the 'counterfeit spirit' (ⲟⲩⲡⲉⲡⲛ̄ⲁ ⲛⲁⲧⲓⲙⲓⲟⲛ/ⲡⲁⲛⲧⲓⲙⲓⲟⲩⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲁ) (BG 73) (Pleše 2007). However, the benevolent Providence governed with Wisdom in a higher realm, and it was by imitating her that the evil angels found inspiration when creating Fate and the 'counterfeit spirit' associated with her (BG 73). While Fate and the evil counterfeit spirit enslave people through introducing sexual lust and the need to procreate, Providence plays a salvific role in the *Apocryphon of John*. Fate was more often than not represented as a negative character; Providence was her opposite, portrayed as a saving force in many early Christian texts. But even Providence was at times drawn down by the negative connotations of Fate. In a Christian text associated with the *Apocryphon of John* called *On the Origin of the World*, we encounter a malevolent lower form of Providence which is responsible for introducing sexual desire and corporeality, subjected to Fate (Denzey Lewis 2013, 37ff.) This is just one example of the fact that the role of Providence and Fate in relation to God and the structures of the cosmos was anything but firmly established among early Christians.

In some other early Christian texts – for example, in the third-century work *The Interpretation of Knowledge* – Wisdom is divided in the same way as the providential powers. The lower Sophia used Fate as a tool to restrict humans, while the higher form retained her place in heaven with God. [5]

Just as in Graeco-Roman culture in general, the early Christians appropriated the view of Fate and femaleness as being typically associated with materiality and the circular motions that life in the cosmos entailed.[6] In one third-century text, *The Tripartite Tractate*, we read that people should strive to avoid being coerced by material life, because it was a 'sickness… which is femaleness' (94.17–18: ⲡⲱϣⲙⲉ ...ⲉⲧⲉ ⲧⲁⲉⲓ ⲧⲉ· ⲧⲙ̄ⲧⲥϩⲓⲙⲉ).[7] In another third-century Christian text, *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, quoted by Clement of Alexandria, this is put in still more emphatic terms:

> Now he says that he means by flesh that weakness which was an offshoot of the Woman on high… On her account the Savior came down to drag us out from passion and to adopt us to himself. For as long as we were children of the Female only as if of a base intercourse, incomplete and infants and senseless and weak and without form, brought forth like abortions, we were children of the Woman.
>
> Fate is a union of many opposing forces and they are invisible and unseen, guiding the course of the stars and governing through them. For as each of them arrived, borne round by the movement of the world, it obtained power over those who were born at that very moment, as though they were its own children. Therefore, through the fixed stars and the planets, the invisible powers hold sway over them direct and watch over births. Until baptism, they say, Fate is real… So long, they say, as the seed is yet unformed it is the offspring of the Female, but when it was formed, it was

5 Linjamaa 2016, 29–54. For more see Irenaeus's depiction of a similar system in *Against Heresies* 1.4. The lower form of Wisdom (also called Achamoth/Wisdom) resembles the Platonic World Soul and the 'receptacle' in that she is accountable for, and associated with, the elements that make up the cosmos and the human limitations within it. However, the Higher Wisdom remains with the Pleroma, and the Wisdom of the highest Father is thus partly spared the humiliations of passion and the disturbing parts of the corporeal realm.

6 The misogynic implications of this have been studied by April DeConick (2011), although I have previously argued that the conclusion she reaches that the 'Gnostic' traditions differed from proto-orthodoxy by promoting a more friendly theology with regard to women is unlikely (Linjamaa 2019, 108–109; Linjamaa 2021).

7 In *The Interpretation of Knowledge* the feminine cosmic life under the sway of Fate is defined as a constant 'toil' (ϩⲓⲥⲉ). This Coptic word, ϩⲓⲥⲉ, means *work*, *toil*, *trouble*, *suffering*, but it can also mean *to spin* (Crum 1939, §713; Smith 1983, 51). Spinning, as in spinning cloth or the spinning of the planetary spheres, symbolized human life on earth.

> changed into a human and becomes a son of the bridegroom. (Transl. Pierce Casey 1934)

Here, Fate is associated with the 'Female' (θηλείας) and the 'Woman' (γυναικεῖον) who brings flesh into existence. The human is likened to a seed (σπέρμα) which the Female controls through the movements of the cosmos. The birth of the Saviour and baptism is said to have 'released us from *becoming* and Fate' (76:1).[8] As in the mystery cults, initiation and protection by a divine figure who had mastered death gave protection from Fate and the everchanging existence in the cosmos (Martin 1987, 21–6, 41–5, 82f., 157–60).

Above, we see how many early Christians adopted much the same views that permeated the antique world concerning the symbol of femaleness and its association with the governance of material life in the cosmos. Fate was a powerful cosmic force that could not be ignored (Martin 1987). Human action, will, and the causality of the world were interlinked and inseparable from Fate. The divine cause, law, or prime mover behind all existence was by many (if not most) thought to be benevolent; what took place on earth was according to the best of plans.[9] This had to be squared with the baseness of some aspects of material life, like death and suffering. Speculations about Providence, Fate, Wisdom, and other powerful female cosmic forces were attempts to address this inconsistency, by distancing the highest law/god from these evils. Christians also speculated concerning this, but the forms of Christianity that ultimately came to dominate the religious scene from the fall of the Roman Empire and beyond would resolve the question of evil in another way (Scott 2012). What was decided to be required doctrine at the great Church Councils, beginning with Nicaea in 325, would deny the existence of Fate. The Wisdom of God and Providence were still acknowledged but were not viewed as separate entities from God; they were indistinguishable extensions of God himself. Fate was rejected outright. This view became the norm and has recently been rearticulated by Pope Francis himself:

> The Christian does not believe in an ineluctable 'Fate.' There is nothing haphazard in the faith of Christians. There is, instead, a salvation that awaits manifestation in the life of every man and woman, and fulfilment in eternity. If we pray it is because we believe that God can and wants to transform

8 This is a reference to what looks to be the Platonic concepts of Becoming. Becoming was the cosmic copy of the eternal Being, infringed by time, materiality, and perpetual change: an existence in motion (Plato, *Timaeus* 2dff).

9 Of course, there are exceptions to this rule – for example, the Epicureans.

> reality by overcoming evil with good. To this God it makes sense to obey and abandon oneself even in the hour of greatest difficulty. (Hattrup 2019.)

How did the simple rejection of the existence of Fate become a core Cristian doctrine when so many early Christians struggled so hard to overcome her influence in other ways, as Middle Platonists and other philosophers had done?

The Christian invention of human autonomy: new weavers appear

The philosophical schools in antiquity did not accept the idea that humans were endowed with free will; it was considered quite implausible (SVF 1:176; 2:1118; 2:913; 2:937; 2:933; Diels 1961, 324a4; Denzey Lewis 2013, 89–91). People acted against their own benefit all the time, which was something they would not do if their free will was not controlled by some false beliefs or passions. This was how free will was understood in antiquity, before the advent of Christianity. While some Christians attacked the question of evil and human weakness with complex doctrines of Fate and Providence, others like Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tatian, and Origen applied a straightforward doctrine of free will (Origen, *On First Principles* I.8.1–2, II.1.1, II.6.3–6, II.8.3–4, II.9.1–6; Justin, *First Apology* 43; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV.37, 39; Tatian, *Address to the Greeks* 7.1; Clement, *Stromata* II.5.26.3, V1.7.1–2).

It is here, among certain early Christian theologians, where we first encounter a doctrine stating that humans are endowed with a divinely given free will to choose between good and evil in every given situation. The doctrine did not lend itself easily to the complex ontological or epistemological questions attached to the nature of human decision making, but it did resolve the difficulty of imagining a just and caring God in charge of a world full of suffering. What had often been attributed to Fate was viewed as the result of the actions taken by free individuals. If one fell victim to unexplainable events like disease or accident, they were probably the results of the influence of demons and foul angels who,[10] just like humans, had been attributed with a free will of their own, and just like humans, would be judged for their actions in the end time (Karamanolis 2014; Frede 2011).

While some, as we have seen, tried to mitigate the influence of Fate by downgrading her to the lower position in a hierarchy of providential goddesses, others simply rejected her existence. We see an example of this in

10 Thus, the production of protective amulets and spells warding off malicious spirits associated with the body did not subside with the dawn of the Christian doctrine of free will.

the writings of Methodius of Olympus, who stated in his text *Banquet of the Ten Virgins*[11] – from the end of the third century, possibly the beginning of the fourth – that the thought that one could blame one's sins on Fate was pure insolence:

> …of all evils the greatest which is implanted in many is that which refers the causes of sins to the motions of the stars, and says that our life is guided by the necessities of Fate, as those say who study the stars, with much insolence (*Banquet of the Ten Virgins* 8.13, Transl. Clark 1886).

Later influential theologians, like Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine, were of a similar opinion to Methodius (Augustine, *City of God* 5.1; Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Fatum*) (Scott 2012). The popularity of the doctrine of free will thus had ramifications for the views held within Christian systems, which favoured cosmologies and theories of the mind that included Fate and Providence. In Methodius's writings we find another revealing example, this time of how Fate was not simply denied but replaced by another female figure:

> Now she who brings forth, and has brought forth, the masculine Word in the hearts of the faithful, and who passed, undefiled and uninjured by the wrath of the beast, into the wilderness, is, as we have explained, our mother the Church. And the wilderness into which she comes, and is nourished for a thousand two hundred and sixty days, which is truly waste and unfruitful of evils, and barren of corruption, and difficult of access and of transit to the multitude; but fruitful and abounding in pasture, and blooming and easy of access to the holy, and full of wisdom, and productive of life, is this most lovely, and beautifully wooded and well-watered abode of Arete. (8.11) (Transl. Clark 1886)

Methodius goes on to critique the ideas of astral determinism and the notions of Fate. Methodius rejects Fate – the idea of a powerful Providential goddess is not mentioned – and instead we find Mother Church. The image

11 *Banquet of the Ten Virgins*, which became immensely popular in medieval times in literature and art, centred on a parable found in Matthew 25:1–13 about ten torch-bearing virgins who awaited the arrival of a bridegroom for a wedding feast. Five virgins came carrying lamps with oil, while the other five brought lamps with insufficient oil and had to leave in search of more. Thus, they missed the coming of the bridegroom and the wedding. Methodius connected the doctrine of Fate with erroneous doctrines one had to abandon so as not to miss the feast of the end time. Instead of giving into the idea of the goddess of Fate, one should follow the lead of another female power.

of the Church as a mother has been studied thoroughly before (Plumbe 1943; Lubac 1983), but the connection with past female images – not to mention Fate – is seldom discussed. If people chose to follow Mother Church, the bride of Christ, she would give them access to the feasts of the end time (8:11). In Methodius's words, she is placed on earth by the Father to fight the corruption in which some people chose to engage, and through her and her bridegroom Christ people were offered the bounty of eternal life. One female figure (Fate/Providence) is here replaced by another (the Church).

As the doctrine of free will developed and finally became established as orthodoxy within the growing and more centralized church, the need for complex theories of female cosmic principles like Fate and Providence began to subside. Mother Church was not the only female principle that mitigated the loss of powerful female principles attached to the basic structures of life. Eve, the originator of all humans (Anderson 2001), and Mary, the mother of God, were potent female figures,[12] but docile compared with Fate/Providence.[13] Let us end by placing the above survey of this shift in femininities in the light of another historical transformation which occurred at the same time as the one that has hitherto engaged us, one that has been discussed by many famous historians and intellectuals: the birth of a new view of the self in late antiquity.

Rejecting Fate: a new liable 'technology of the self' is born

During the high and late Roman Empire, a new and internalized morality takes form as Christianity wins dominance, a theme studied by many famous historians. During the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century the leading paradigm of this shift was the formulation of the influential classicist E. R. Dodds. Dodds argued that people in the high and late Roman period, and until late antiquity, were troubled by a pressing feeling of alienation, an anxiety caused by the fear of Fate and the feeling of smallness

12 In the second-century *Protoevangelion of James* Mary is in charge of the thread of the most precious colour, purple, when a group of virgins are put to the task of weaving the veil of the temple, which separates the world from the divine. In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew Mary spends her time spinning and working with wool when she is not in prayer (Nicholas 1995, 169–94; Gines 2018).

13 It is hardly an accident that Mary is closely tied to the typical act of femaleness: weaving. Mary is the one who weaves Logos's body; she is the Father's rational principle at work in the world. Like the women in Exodus 35:26 weaving the Tabernacle, Mary brings forth the container for the representation of the divine in the world. Similarly, humans are introduced to a life in the body at birth but are no longer tied to a certain Fate by the weaver, but to a fate determined by themselves.

and insignificance triggered by the growing knowledge of the vastness of the universe. These feelings subsided, Dodds argued, as Christianity began to spread, supplanting anxiety with a feeling of awe for the infinite that the idea of a pending immortal life gave people (Dodds 1965). Dodds's model was broadly accepted and supported by many prominent historians like Franz Cumont, Arthur Darby Nock, André-Jean Festugiere, and Hans Jonas (Denzey Lewis 2013, 184).

In the later work of Michel Foucault we find a very different version of the changes taking place during the later parts of antiquity. In Foucault's *History of Sexuality* he discusses the changes that occurred in the view of the self and sexuality with the dawn of Christianity:

> The Greeks problematized their freedom, and the freedom of the individual, as an ethical problem. But ethical in the sense in which the Greeks understood it: ēthos was a way of being and of behavior. It was a mode of being for the subject, along with a certain way of acting, a way visible to others. A person's ēthos was evident in his clothing, appearance, gait, in the calm with which he responded to every event, and so on. For the Greeks, this was the concrete form of freedom; this was the way they problematized their freedom. A man possessed of a splendid ēthos, who could be admired and put forward as an example, was someone who practiced freedom in a certain way. (...) But extensive work by the self on the self is required for this practice of freedom to take shape in an ēthos that is good, beautiful, honorable, estimable, memorable, and exemplary. (Foucault 1996 [1984]), 436)

The ideal was to master the will completely, a task for which only philosophers had the inclination to strive. Yet as was obvious from outward appearance, most people never got that far. Foucault's unfinished fourth volume of the *History of Sexuality* was recently published posthumously (Foucault 2018), and here he continues his examination. In his analysis of the new Christian attitudes forwarded by the early church fathers, a new morality and view of the self enabled people to engage in constant self-regulation and scrutiny of the self to ascertain that they had not fallen victim to desire and sin. One was no longer measured outwardly by others, but inwardly by oneself. The act of confession was the prime example of this, when one scrutinized and confessed one's failures. Sexual desire was an impulse that caused great distress, because it was the sign of other and graver failings. Christians were expected to lead 'a life not of this world' ('*une vie qui n'est pas de ce monde*', Foucault 2018, 234).

Dodds's paradigm about the feeling of anxiety governing people has all but been abandoned today, due largely to the very influential work of Peter Brown. As it happens, Foucault's notions are echoed in much of Brown's works on the changes taking place in the late ancient world. As Brown and Foucault both observe, moral perfection had been closely associated with excellence and absolute rationality. Most people lacked the inclination or possibility to devote their life to developing their intellect. Nor was it expected of people. One should play the part one had been given by Fate to the best of one's ability. As Plato and Aristotle had made clear, a functional society needed all classes of people. As such, there was one ethics for the public and one for those who strove for moral excellence. The Christian morality that would prevail was something different. Brown's works on the view of how the image of the philosopher is taken over by the Christian monk, and how the view of the human body and sexuality are transformed in late antiquity, confirm this (Brown 1988).

At the same time one cannot deny that the role of Fate subsided with the dawn of Christianity, as Dodds discusses. As we have seen in the above study, it was finally supplanted by the notion of human free will, which was a non-existent notion in antiquity prior to Christianity. This undoubtably had consequences for the view of the self. If we add the perspective of the diminishing importance of the goddess Fate and the birth of the notion of free will discussed in this article, I argue that we stand to gain yet another dimension to the work done on tracing the changes in the view of selfhood in antiquity.

Brown is right that it cannot have been anxiety about the rule of Fate that drove the changes in selfhood discussed and developed by Foucault. In one way the Christian worldview that was to prevail posited an even more daunting premise, because the access to complete freedom made every individual liable to shape themselves into a virtuous person who deserved salvation or doom. As Brown and Foucault have pointed out, the domain which had previously been restricted to the realm of philosophers – seeking moral excellence – was in one sense popularized, and I would contend that the supplanting of Fate by free will played a role in this (Brown 1988; Foucault 2004). This change did not merely affect how the 'technology of the self' was conducted, in Foucault's terms; it was the very premise of such a technology. A world in which Fate had given each person their particular role to play did not allow for transformations of this new kind. The focus among the population at large no longer lay on strengthening the self externally to become as effective as possible in the world, but rather

on self-examination, confession, and transformation to gain access to the life after (Foucault 2004). Guy Stroumsa has emphasized this latter part, and also points to the new importance placed on the written word and the invention of the codex (Stroumsa 2009). Blood sacrifice was given up and replaced by an internal sacrifice in the form of the spoken word, which was uttered both internally and externally to symbolize the transformation one pledged to undertake.

The new ideal of virginity which becomes prevalent in Christianity, explored by Brown, is an expression of the lengths to which the introduction of a powerful human will could reach. The will, which in antiquity chiefly restricted attitudes and appearances in the mind, was extended to a system that was also to control the body and sexuality (Brown 1985, 427–43). As we have seen, many Christians tried to attribute the problems of the baseness of the human body to various aspects of Fate and Providence that lay outside the human and could be overcome. This attempt was finally abandoned as free will prevailed, and it thus became a chiefly internal affair. Choosing virginity was the ultimate testament of a free will directed towards virtue.

But perhaps most acutely, the structure presented by an ever-present Fate in the sky lends itself to the nature of the ancient discourses of power. The ultimate expression of power – violence – was ever present in antiquity. As Brown puts it: 'wives and slaves in the household to the abject courtiers of tyrannical rulers, the lives of so many persons in so many situations appeared to depend on the whim of their superiors' (Brown 1992, 50). This exercise of power was felt at all levels of Roman society. The short period between the third and fourth centuries CE saw nearly thirty emperors and countless contenders come and go, many of whom died violent deaths. The power discourse had an arbitrariness that would easily have been explained by reference to the whims of Fate. The dawn of Christianity in no way changed the seemingly arbitrariness of the application of power – considering the flood of Germanic tribes into the western parts of the empire, it could even be viewed as yet more capricious – but Fate's exit was slowly supplanted by the equally distant will of God. Power was given by God, and the ways of God were unfathomable. However, one was free to change the course of one's own eternal destiny by forming oneself and turning one's will not outwardly towards the world, but towards oneself.

Conclusion

This article has explored how the notion of Fate and Providence subsided during the high and late Roman period. As we have seen, the Christian worldview which won prominence was slowly formed, giving way to a worldview without the presence of powerful female cosmic principles. The disappearance of these powerful female symbols coincided with the birth of new ideals in which the individual was responsible for his/her own salvation and moral formation. It was not just Fate that disappeared, but the divine female active force – like Isis, Kybele, and Wisdom. This female force had offered concrete protection against the tribulations of material life and gave way to other female characters like Mother Church that offered people moral tools to be turned inwards. The transformations that occurred during this period extend to the realm of power, the view of the human body, and ethics, exemplified by a new focus on self-governance. A fruitful way to begin to approach these monumental transformations taking place in the latter parts of antiquity is through the above discussion regarding the supplanting of Fate in favour of free will.

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The Echo of Creation: Parallels between Old Norse Cosmogony and Eschatology[1]

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Abstract

The article explores the idea of an echo, both literal and structural, that connects Old Norse cosmogony and eschatology. The motif of a bellowing sound or cry appears in cosmogony in the figure of Ymir, 'Crier', who is killed by the Æsir, and from his body the world is created. During the eschatological events the booming sound recurs when Heimdallr blows his horn shortly before the Æsir themselves are killed by their adversaries. A cry is also emitted by Óðinn when he sacrifices himself on the Cosmic Tree. The booming bellow is thus associated with death, especially in the context of implicit or explicit sacrifice.
The structural resonance between cosmogony and eschatology is composed of a series of five motifs that reappear in the same sequence at both liminal moments. The eschatology seems to be structurally a repetition of the cosmogony, but with inverted roles: the victims are the gods, and the sacrificers are the giants, which is the inverse of the situation during the cosmogony. The present analysis sheds light on the sacrificial pattern hidden behind the two events, and helps contextualize the motif of the mighty sound that reappears at both moments in cosmic history.

Keywords: *Old Norse Myth, cosmogony, eschatology, sacrifice, sound, murder, creation, Heimdall, Gjallarhorn, Ymir*

In this article I will explore the parallels between Old Norse cosmogony and eschatology from two different but interconnected perspectives – first, by focusing on the motif of the bellowing sound or cry, and second, by focusing

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on the sequential structure of events. Both perspectives are thus united by the idea of an echo, in the first case a literal one, in the second a figurative one – the structure of creation being partly repeated in the structure of Ragnarǫk.

Sources

Before we delve into the topic itself, we must first briefly mention the issue of primary sources and previous scholarship. Old Norse mythology is preserved and reconstructed from a variety of literary sources, ranging from Classical Antiquity (Polomé 1992) to the Viking Age and Early Medieval Scandinavia (Harris 1985; Lindow 1985). The overwhelming majority of these sources comes from Iceland. They were either composed or recorded from oral tradition by Christians two hundred or more years after the official change of religion from the pre-Christian tradition to Christianity (999–1000 AD). The two main sources of our knowledge of Old Norse cosmogonic and eschatological narratives are the *Poetic Edda* and *Snorra Edda*. The *Poetic Edda* is a collection of anonymous poems of uncertain age containing mythological and heroic material, preserved in a single manuscript (GKS 2365 4to) from around 1270.[2] The poems seem to be a product of pre-Christian tradition, but as they are anonymous, and there is no precise way of dating them, there is an enduring scholarly debate about their age and authenticity, with various suggestions, disagreements, and issues (Thorvaldsen 2016).

While some scholars would like to see the poems as a window into the pre-Christian cosmology, others claim some or most are products of Christian authors who are interpreting or even in some cases parodying the pre-Christian tradition. The Old Norse religion varied widely, consisting of a constantly changing family of traditions (Brink 2007) that absorbed many motifs and inspirations from surrounding cultures, including the Sámi, Irish, Slavic, and Christian, and at the same time exerted its influence on them. Conflux, syncretism, and hybridization were ongoing throughout the Viking Age and even after Christianization, especially in Iceland, where the law was considerably more lenient towards the lingering elements of paganism. The Eddic poems should therefore be understood as an authentic product of Old Norse culture in all its syncretistic character.

2 In most editions and translations of the *Poetic Edda*, poems from GKS 2365 4to (*Codex Regius*) are the core of the collection, but other poems of a similar type (metrically and thematically) are added, taken from other manuscripts, including manuscripts of *Snorra Edda*. Two particular poems from manuscripts other than the *Codex Regius* contain important information regarding cosmogony and eschatology: *Hyndluljóð* (*The Song of Hyndla*) and *Baldrs draumar* (*Baldr's Dreams*).

The second most important source for our study is the *Snorra Edda* as a prosaic (or rather prosimetric: containing many citations from Skaldic and Eddic poems) work by Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241), an Icelandic chieftain and scholar. The *Snorra Edda* is a complex work that summarizes the rules of the traditional art of poetry, including not only various metres, but also poetic diction, especially *kennings* – circumlocutions that in many cases point to mythology. The section named *Gylfaginning* (*The Beguiling of Gylfi*) contains the description of cosmogony and eschatology. In contrast with the *Poetic Edda*, Snorri's work is of clear authorship and relatively easy to date. It is the work of an educated Christian with antiquarian motivations and a love of the archaic art of poetry. Paradoxically, even if Snorri is such an expert on poetry and poetics, his Edda is very prosaic – not only literally, but also figuratively.

Snorri's effect on the material is manifold. He seeks to organize it more and to coordinate various versions, thus producing a kind of coherent cosmology. His thinking is formed by his Christian education. Henning Kure aptly summarizes Snorri's bias as follows:

> Snorri is hardly reporting Christian influences in the Old Norse religious sources, but rather consciously seeking common ground between the heathen past and his contemporary Christian age. This is revealed by the distinctive medieval blend of Christian orthodoxy and neo-platonic philosophy of nature informing Snorri's representation of the myths. This is nowhere clearer than in the myth of Ymir (Kure 2003, 315).

One of the side effects of his didactic style is that he turns the myths with all their polyvalence, metaphoricity, and suggestiveness into very concretely minded folktale-like stories of picturesque characters. In interpreting Snorri, we should therefore strive to see the polyvalent symbols behind his concrete and literal style of presentation. On the other hand, Snorri's work is of immense value. He is seeking to preserve his cultural heritage, and in many places (in contrast with his usual tidying-up) he is ready to sacrifice coherence to preserve various versions.[3] Even if he sometimes tries to make rational sense of the surreal images he presents, in most cases he still presents them in all their weirdness.

3 For example, Snorri tends to quote original poems (*Þórsdrápa*, *Grottasǫngr*) next to a prosaic retelling which contains contradictions of the quoted poems.

Old Norse cosmogony and eschatology

From the Eddic poems, with a little help from Snorri,[4] we get these basic contours of the Old Norse cosmogony: in the beginning there was *ginnunga gap* (*Vǫluspá* st. 3),[5] a giant gaping space. From primeval rivers Ymir was born, the first being, with an enormous body. Ymir was killed by the first gods (*Gylfaginning* ch. vii), and the world was created from his body (*Grímnismál* st. 40-41). His plentiful offspring died in the deluge of his blood, and only one giant, Bergelmir, survived in a wooden object called *lúðr* (*Vafþrúðnismál* st. 35). The land rose from the sea after the flood, and there the gods build their halls, play games, and live in a kind of golden age.[6] They are then confronted by the first of a series of problems that disturb their playful happiness. The gods react to the problems by first creating the race of dwarves (*dvergar*), then by building a wall around their abode, and finally by creating the first human couple – Askr and Embla. The anthropogony closes the era of world building.

The cosmic eschatology is described in even more detail than cosmogony, but again, for the sake of brevity, I will present here only a basic overview: the enemies of the gods (giants and other beings from the borders of the cosmos) are getting ready, all the shackles and bonds that the gods put in their places are broken, and the Cosmic Wolf is set free (*Vǫluspá* st. 49). The god Heimdallr blows his horn to warn the gods and their allies (*Vǫluspá* st. 46). A great battle takes place – on one side the cosmic monsters, led by the trickster Loki: the Wolf, the Serpent, and the giant Surtr; on the other side the main gods: Óðinn, Þórr, and Freyr. The gods are defeated (while killing some of their foes). The sun is swallowed by a wolf, stars fall from the sky, a deluge engulfs the cosmos (*Vǫluspá* st. 57). One human pair survives the flood by hiding in 'Hoddmímir's wood' – more on this below (*Vafþrúðnismál* st. 45). Some of the descendants of the gods and some previously dead gods reappear after the end of the deluge. The land again rises from the sea, and

4 It is important here to reiterate that using Snorri *prima facie* as a source for mythology is always risky, as he interprets traditional motifs through his lens, which is informed by Christian learning (Clunies Ross 1994, 29; Kure 2010, 20). Ymir's myth was probably not the only myth of creation: alternative traditions can be spotted through allusions in various sources, e.g. *Vǫluspá* 4 (see commentary for the stanza in Dronke 1997, 115).

5 All references to the Poetic Edda are from the edition by Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn (1983).

6 Snorri adds a number of events and motifs to this basic sequence, including two primeval realms of Múspellheimr and Niflheimr, the cosmic cow Auðhumla, the process of licking out the ancestor of the gods from salty rocks, etc., but it is impossible to include all the details of cosmogony and eschatology, and we will focus only on the core events that link these two processes.

the survivors start living their life anew, playing games, and having an abundance of everything in a new instance of the 'golden age' (*Vǫluspá* st. 61).

The scholarship on these two topics is enormous, exploring all the various details and motifs found in cosmogony and eschatology, interpreting them both within the Old Norse symbolic system and comparatively linking them to analogous motifs in other Indo-European cultures – for example, the theme of cosmogonic sacrifice and the creation of the world from the anthropomorphic body has been studied by Bruce Lincoln (1975; 1986), and the Indo-European motifs in *Vǫluspá* specifically by Åke Ström (1967). The connection of Old Norse cosmology and rituals is explored in a number of monographs and collections in the series *Vägar till Midgärd* edited by Catharina Raudvere, Anders Andrén, and Kristina Jennbert (e.g. Andrén, Jennbert, and Raudvere 2002, 2004). Others have studied the connection with Christian tradition (e.g. North 2003; Dronke 1992), as well as singular motifs or parts of the process (Lönnroth 1981 and 2002; Polomé 1969; Dörner 1993, and many others). The topic of Ragnarǫk is treated and interpreted in all the basic and influential monographs of Old Norse mythology (de Vries 1937; Turville-Petre 1975; Clunies Ross 1994), as well as in monographs devoted specifically to the topic of Norse eschatology (e.g. Martin 1972), including the recent volume *The Nordic Apocalypse* (Gunnell and Lassen 2013).

In this article I want to try a slightly different approach, which combines the standard historical and comparative methods with a tinge of what is called amplification in analytical psychology, that is, following up associative connections expanding from a certain motif while still not losing the distinction of an intracultural versus a transcultural layer.

The sound of the shofar

I will start with the passage that originally inspired this entire endeavour, which is a psychoanalytical interpretation of the sound of the shofar by Theodor Reik (1975, orig. 1920) via Slavoj Žižek:

> In a classical essay from the 1920s, Theodor Reik drew attention to the painfully low and uninterrupted trumpeting of the shofar, a horn used in the Yom Kippur evening ritual which marks the end of the day of meditations.
>
> Reik links the sound of the shofar to the Freudian problematic of the primordial crime of parricide (from Totem and Taboo): he interprets the horrifyingly turgid and leaden drone of the shofar, which evokes an uncanny mixture of pain and enjoyment, as the last vestige of the primordial father's

> life-substance, as the endlessly prolonged scream of the suffering-dying-impotent-humiliated father.
>
> In other words, the shofar is the trace of 'primordial repression', a kind of vocal monument to the killing of the pre-symbolic substance of enjoyment: the father whose dying scream reverberates within the 'non-castrated' Father-Enjoyment. As further proof of his thesis, Reik also calls attention to the similarity of the shofar to another primitive instrument, the 'bullroarer', which imitates the roaring of the stabbed bull dying in the arena: the bull-fight as the re-enactment of the murder of the primordial Father-Jouissance. On the other hand, the Jewish tradition conceives the sound of the shofar as an echo of the thunder that accompanied the solemn moment of God's handing over to Moses the tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments; as such it also stands for the Covenant between the Jewish people and their God, that is for the founding gesture of the Law (Žižek 1996, 149–150).

The shofar is an ancient musical instrument, usually made of ram's horn, used in Judaism for ritual purposes. Among other things it is used at the end of Yom Kippur, which is a moment when the old ritual year ends, and the new year begins.[7] Symbolically and structurally, it is a moment when eschatology turns into cosmogony.

Reik's/Žižek's interpretation links several pairs of elements:

> 1) First, the sound of the horn with the bellow or cry of the sacrificed victim, 'Father'.
> 2) Second, the cosmogonic sacrifice with the creation of the Order through the 'vanishing mediator' of the shout or cry: the cry that is the last breath of the dying victim, but as it vanishes, it turns into a voice, the articulated language which establishes the Order.
> 3) Third, the sound of the shofar links the End Times with the Beginnings at the point of the New Year celebrations.

I would like to show that these motifs and their pairing also have their analogues in Old Norse mythology. I do not believe these analogues are products of any specific influence in this or that way, but they are both

7 The situation is more complicated: Yom Kippur closes a ten-day period of repentance which starts at Rosh Hashanah. Both holidays are connected with the trumpeting of the shofar (Rosh Hashanah even more intensely than Yom Kippur), and both are connected with the symbolism of the ending and beginning. While Rosh Hashanah is a repetition of the day of creation, human life is reinscribed in the book of life only at the end of Yom Kippur, ten days after Rosh Hashanah.

products of human cognition, which tends to resort to certain metaphors and associations when it is confronted with the ultimate questions concerning Beginnings, Ends, and their relationship. Of course, the diffusion and borrowing of ideas is never out of the question, but we must always ask why a certain culture absorbs this or that idea into their symbolic system. In many cases it is because it fits well in the system, and there was a need for a fitting image. The explanation then lies not with the historical origin of a certain motif, but in the role and function it assumes within the target system.

Besides Žižek/Reik's interpretation of the cosmic symbolism of the trumpeting and/or scream, one other main source of inspiration for the part of this article dealing with cosmogony is the ideas presented in the book *I begyndelsen var skriget* (2010) by Henning Kure (and his summarizing English article from 2014). The reader will find his work referenced many times in the following text.

The scream of creation

The association of a scream or cry with sacrificial killing is something that would appear natural for most archaic societies that practised animal sacrifice, as 'every animal finds a voice in its violent death' (Hegel 1967, 161).

A high-pitched shrill scream was produced by women in the Classical Greek animal sacrifice at the very moment the mortal blow was dealt to the victim (Burkert 2011, 94). The scream marked the emotional high point of the sacrificial process, while covering the unpredictable sounds the animal would make with an orchestrated 'ideal' scream (Burkert 1983, 5).

Our knowledge of the Old Norse sacrificial process is unfortunately much less detailed, and the very few descriptions of animal sacrifice we have contain little acoustic or aural information. One fortunate exception is a description of a human sacrifice (as part of a funerary ritual) by the Arabic traveller Ahmad ibn Fadlān, who produces a much more detailed description of a ritual process than our extant Old Norse sources.[8]

Ibn Fadlān describes a ship burial of a chieftain. As part of the ritual one of the slave girls who belonged to the dead chieftain offers herself to accompany him to the afterlife. She undergoes a complex process taking several days, and she is finally brought to the ship where the dead warrior lies. There

8 One issue with ibn Fadlān's description is that we are unsure whether the people he met were Norsemen or Slavs, or a syncretic tribe. However, as pre-Christian Slavic and Norse religions were typologically (and geographically) very close, we can in any case expect similarities in forms and motifs.

she is ritually killed. Ibn Fadlān writes that '[t]he men began to bang their shields with the sticks so that her screams could not be heard and so terrify the other slave-girls, who would not, then, seek to die with their masters' (Montgomery 2000, 19). The explanation for the ritual roar seems to be the product of ibn Fadlān's rationalization. However, the presence of heightened noise and screams at the point of the ritual slaughter is attested to here. There are therefore reasons to expect a scream or roar as an acoustic 'explosion' accompanying the very moment of ritual killing – either the natural sounds of the murdered being, or even the heightened clamour provided by the ritual script – but what is the connection between slaughter and cosmogony?

In Old Norse mythology (and a number of other mythologies) cosmogony is portrayed as a process of the killing (or sacrificial killing) of a being.[9] Generally speaking (at least for the Indo-European and Semitic cultures), a typical animal or human sacrifice repeats the cosmogony, and the cosmogony is the archetypal sacrifice (Smith and Doniger 1989). Ymir's death at the hands of the first three gods (Óðinn, Vili, Vé) is a kind of primordial sacrifice, and the parts of the cosmos are created from Ymir's body parts:

40	Ór Ymis holdi var iorð um scǫpuð, enn ór sveita sær, biǫrg ór beinom, baðmr ór hári, enn ór hausi himinn.	From Ymir's flesh the earth was made, and from his blood, the sea, mountains from his bones, trees from his hair, and from his skull, the sky.
41	Enn ór hans brám gerðo blíð regin miðgarð manna sonom; enn ór hans heila vóro þau in harðmóðgo scý ǫll um scǫpuð.	And from his eyelashes the cheerful gods made Midgard for men's sons; and from his brain the hard-tempered clouds were all created.

9 There is some discussion concerning whether we should understand Ymir's killing as a sacrifice. While the primary sources do not tell us explicitly that the act is a *blót*, comparative studies point to a sacrifice (Lincoln 1975; 1986). In her monograph on Old Norse sacrifice Näsström also understands the act of the three sons of Búri as a sacrifice or even a prototype of it: '[d]essa tre utgör en förebild för offraren...' (Näsström 2002, 216). Her reasoning is that the act is performed by Óðinn, 'Extasy', Vili, 'Divine Will', and Vé, 'Sacred Space', which puts the whole operation into the sphere of the sacred and thus makes it a sacrificial act by definition.

The blood rushing from Ymir's veins becomes a cosmic flood that kills all his giant offspring, with the exception of one: Bergelmir, the 'Noah of the giants'.

However, where is the scream? Does it appear in the extant mythology? The answer lies in Ymir's name, which has a well-established etymology from the IE root **yem-*, with the meaning 'twin' (Lincoln 1975, 129). We find cognates with Ymir's name in the Indian *Yama*, Iranian *Yima*, and Latin *Remus* (West 2007, 357).[10] These mythical beings are the first dead among human beings. They were killed or died in the process of cosmogony (in the case of Rome it is a process of 'Romo-gony').

Nevertheless, from the vernacular Old Norse perspective this ('twin') etymology of Ymir is not transparent. Nobody knew before the complex etymological studies of the twentieth century that in ancient times, thousands of years before the Viking Age, the probable original meaning of the name Ymir was 'twin'.[11] This etymology sheds no light on the connotations of the name for the people living in the Viking Age. What then was the apparent or semantic etymology[12] for its contemporaries?

The apparent relationship[13] within the Old Norse language provides us with a clear association of the name Ymir with the verb *ymja*, 'to cry, howl', and the noun *ymr*, 'scream, noise, clang, groan', so for contemporaries the name Ymir would clearly mean something like 'Crier, Howler, Bellower' (Kure 2003, 312). Kure also points out that the meaning of *ymr* is '*uartikuleret lyd*' (Kure 2010, 135), which places it in contrast with articulated speech.

10 The Latvian deity Jumis also belongs to this group. He is connected with fertility and death, and associated with twins and things that come in pairs.

11 Ymir's hermaphroditic and parthenogenetic nature (his feet mate and can produce offspring, *Vafþrúðnismál* 33) may be a reflection of his originally dual or twin-like character. His position in cosmogony has a parallel with the figure of Tuisto, mentioned by Tacitus, who also appears to be parthenogenetic, and whose name also suggests duality or a twin-like character (Lincoln 1975, 137).

12 'Semantic etymologies are to be distinguished from historical etymologies. A historical etymology presents the origin or early history of a word. Semantic etymologies do something completely different. They connect one word with one or more others which are believed to elucidate its meaning' (Bronkhorst 2001, 147). However, Bronkhorst uses the term to speak of the conscious explanation of words by philosophers and learned authors of the past, while in the case of Ymir-ymja the connection does not have to be consciously theorized: it was probably an automatic association.

13 It is important to note that some scholars argue that the derivation from *ymja* is not a semantic etymology or folk etymology, but a direct derivation (standard historical etymology). The same etymology from *ymja* is still accepted for *ymir* as a heiti for 'hawk', and was a common opinion on Ymir before the connection with IE **yem-* was suggested. For the IE etymology to work, the 'remote r umlaut' must take place, which is not common (personal communication with Henning Kure).

The emic validity of this semantic etymology is further illustrated by the fact that Ymir has several other appellatives (*heiti* in Old Norse) which associate him with the same idea of shouting, howling, or resounding (e.g. the name *Brimir*, 'Roarer' (von See et al. 2019, 132), *Aurgelmir*, 'Sand Bellower' (de Vries 2000, 20) and others). It is difficult to tell in what exact sense the howling or roaring was connected with this primordial being – whether it was because of his dying howl, or because the oceans of blood gushing from his veins were roaring, but the close connection of a mighty sound with the primordial victim is undeniable.

One very intriguing interpretation of why Ymir's Scream is so fundamental for the cosmogonic process is offered by Henning Kure:

> When the sons of Burr did *yppa* the world, they made it come into being from the parts of Ymir. As mentioned, *yppa* may also mean 'announce' and this, I am convinced, is what the gods did. They announced Ymir's flesh to be earth, his bones to be mountains, his sweat to be sea, etc. They created the world by naming it, by putting it into words, and thus defining it in a comprehensible way. The gods announced the world by transforming Ymir – the scream – into words.
>
> The scream is the raw material of words (Kure 2014, 10; 2010, 133).

Kure's interpretation connects well with the Reik/Žižek quotation at the beginning, which describes from a slightly different angle the same process of an inarticulate scream becoming the words of language that bring law and order into the universe by segmenting the primordial continuous organic unity into distinct *articuli*, or 'limbs'.

From Kure's perspective the expression 'Ymir's scream' would be a pleonasm and misunderstanding, as Ymir himself already *is* the Scream, automatically becoming a character by the personifying discourse of myth.[14] While myth does this by itself playfully and poetically, mythographers like Snorri do it literally, thus producing a row of literal personages who ultimately inhabit stories not so different from our superhero comic books.

The Ymir/Scream is not only a mediator between the inarticulate animal sounds ('nature') and the articulate sounds of language ('culture'), but also between life and death. It is the dying of Ymir that opens up the space for the cosmos.

14 I will be less strict with the understanding of Ymir and will allow the personification to play its part in the image so the reader can find the screaming Ymir in the text below.

The cry on the tree

The moment of sacrifice and scream also appears at another point in Old Norse mythology – during the high mystery of Óðinn's self-sacrifice, when he hanged himself on the cosmic tree Yggdrasill to obtain runes:

13:8	Veit ec, at ec hecc vindgameiði á nætr allar nío geiri undaðr oc gefinn Óðni, siálfr siálfom mér, á þeim meiði er manngi veit hvers hann af rótom renn.	I know that I hung on a windswept tree nine long nights, wounded with a spear, given to Odin, myself to myself, on that tree of which no man knows from where its roots run.
13:9	Við hleifi mic sældo né við hornigi, nýsta ek niðr; nam ec upp rúnar, œpandi nam, fell ec aptr þaðan.	With no bread did they refresh me nor a drink from a horn, downward I peered; I took up the runes, screaming I took them, then I fell back from there.

Here the scream marks the high point of sacrifice, the point when death turns into life.[15] Óðinn hangs on a rope for nine nights, dead, but at the same time like a foetus hanging on an umbilical cord for nine months. At the end of the process, when the gestation is complete, he is born into his initiated state with a scream that is again analogous to a new-born child's cry, and he falls down: like a baby from the mother's womb when being birthed in a traditional squatting position.[16]

It is also important to note that the scream comes at the very moment that he grasps the runes. Runes have the double meaning of secret knowledge, but they simultaneously mean letters, markings, and graphemes that distinguish and carry meaning.[17] Here again, therefore, we find the system

15 Thus, the scream also appears at the border of life and death, as in the case of Ymir, but inverted. There will be more on the sacrificial and initiatory symbolism of Óðinn's act in my forthcoming article (Kozák 2021).

16 The birth symbolism of the hanging myth has been recognized by a number of scholars at least since the Gering-Sijmons commentary on the Eddic poems (Gering and Sijmons 1927-31, 147; cf. also Hunke 1952 and Fleck 1971).

17 There has been a longstanding discussion of the possible semantic facets of the word *rún*, with scholars stressing either the aspect (and proposed etymology) of 'written marking' (Antonsen 2011, 140:40) or the aspect and etymology of 'whispering' and 'secrets' (Price 2019, 61; Schjødt 2008).

of marking and meaning being born at the moment of the scream, and as a sacrificial victim Óðinn is in a parallel position here with Ymir.[18]

The difference is that in the cosmogony the entity is split into two opposing sides: the Óðinic triad (Óðinn, Vili, Vé) versus Ymir. The Óðinic triad is the performers and beneficiaries of the sacrifice, while Ymir is the victim. In the case of the hanging on Yggdrasill both sides are fused into one: Óðinn is his own sacrificer, beneficiary, receiver, and victim (Schjødt 1993, 270). Accordingly, these may be seen as two realizations of one background structure, and both contain a moment of a scream followed by the appearance of a symbolic system – either the system of an ordered and named cosmos or the system for ordering and describing – that is, writing.

The roar of Ragnarǫk

While in the case of cosmogony we had to resort to an interpretation of stanzas and an analysis of Ymir's name to get to the scream itself, in the case of Ragnarǫk the space is literally filled with noises and voices. It starts with a series of mythical cockerels crowing loudly to wake all the various hosts (*Vǫluspá* st. 42–43). The *Vǫluspá* refrain for the Ragnarǫk section of the poem starts with '*Geyr nú Garmr mjǫk…*' (*Vǫluspá* st. 58), 'Garm bays loudly…', reminding us again and again of the constant barking and howling that is the basis of the soundscape of the end times. Yet there is more – the eagle shrieks *('enn ari hlaccar'*, *Vǫluspá* st. 50:6), the dwarves groan *('stynja dvergar'*, *Vǫluspá* st. 48:5), and the rocks are clashing (*'grjótbjǫrg gnata'*, *Vǫluspá* st. 52:5) in tumult.

Two sounds mentioned in *Vǫluspá* deserve more attention, because they are linked with entities of cosmic importance. First, the cosmic ash Yggdrasill itself groans:

47:1–4	Scelfr Yggdrasils	Yggdrasill shudders,
	ascr standandi,	the tree standing upright,
	ymr iþ aldna tré,	the ancient tree **groans**,
	enn jǫtunn losnar;	and the giant gets loose.

Note that the verb used is the same *ymja* we discussed above in connection with Ymir. The cosmic tree forms the centre and axis of the current cosmos; its branches stretch throughout the whole world, and its roots lead to various realms. In its function this living tree is as central to the current cosmos as Ymir's living body was central to the era of giant's dominion before the

18 Näsström (2002, 245) mentions the case of the Orphic Dionysus as a comparandum for Óðinn's self-sacrifice. Dionysus was torn apart by the Titans and later reassembled by Rhea. To me this seems closer to the myth of Ymir, in which his body is also cut up and reassembled.

rise of the gods. The tree – at the moment of its imminent doom – emits a groan, *ymr*, as Ymir presumably did.[19]

However, this is not the most noticeable sound connected with Ragnarǫk. The loudest sound marking the end times is Heimdallr's horn blowing:

46:5–6	hátt blæss Heimdallr horn er á lopti	Heimdall blows loudly, his horn is in the air

Snorri tells us that the blast of Gjallarhorn will be heard throughout all worlds:

Hann hefir lúðr þann er Gjallarhorn heitir ok heyrir blástr hans í alla heima.	He has a trumpet called Gjallarhorn, and its blast can be heard in all worlds

Snorri uses the word *lúðr* to describe the instrument. Curiously, the same word also describes the object which Bergelmir used to survive the flood of Ymir's blood at the beginning of time.[20] Vǫluspá uses the word *horn*, which we would expect, as Gjallarhorn, 'the Resounding Horn' is its traditional proper name.

Heimdallr's theriomorphic representation seems to be a ram.[21] His various *heiti* point to a ram, and even the mysterious fact that 'Heimdallr's sword' (*Heimdallar hjǫrr*) is a *kenning* (poetic circumlocution) for a head makes sense when we realize that rams use their heads as 'swords' – their horned heads function as their weapons. We may therefore perhaps imagine that the horn marking the end times of Ragnarǫk is a ram's horn, like the shofar mentioned in the Žižek/Reik passage above, the ramshorn that marks when the old year ends and the new one begins.

19 The parallelization of the (cosmic) tree and (anthropomorphic) body of Ymir is not as far-fetched as it may seem: the first humans were created from trees (*Vǫluspá* st. 17-20), the standard circumlocution for humans in skaldic poetry is based on trees, and the first man is called *Askr*, 'Ash Tree', while the cosmic tree is called *Askr Yggdrasils*, 'The Ash of Yggdrasill' (*Grímnismál* st. 32).

20 We will discuss the issue of *lúðr* more thoroughly below in the section 'The sequence', in which we will explore the semantic facets of *lúðr* in the context of its use as an 'arc' or sanctuary used during the Flood.

21 This is the traditional understanding expressed in Turville-Petre (1975, 171). It has recently been critically discussed by Cöllen (2015, 259).

The echo of creation

We thus see a kind of echo of the motif of a magnificent or terrible sound both at the beginning and at the end of time. It is not literally the same sound or the same event. It is a structural rhyme, not an absolute rhyme slavishly repeating exactly the same motif. This booming and enormous sound fills the air at the moment the old order is disintegrating, and the new one is yet to be born.

This idea of repetition, the eschatology echoing the cosmogony, is not a scholarly construction. It is clearly expressed by the tradition itself, by repeating the same images, formulas, and verse structures, even saying explicitly that the events are happening again:

59:1–4	Sér hon upp koma	She sees, coming up
	ǫðro sinni	a **second time**,
	iǫrð ór ægi,	earth from the ocean,
	iðjagrœna	**once again** green;

After the bloody battle of Ragnarǫk, the same process of land emerging from the sea is happening as in the beginning. The scene of the gods playing a boardgame with golden pieces, is happening again as well:

61	Þar muno eptir	There will be found again
	undrsamligar	in the grass
	gullnar tǫflor	the wonderful
	í grasi finnaz,	golden chequers,
	þær í árdaga	those which they possessed
	áttar hǫfðo.	in the bygone days.

These are some of the very concrete instances of the end times repeating the beginnings, but I would like to examine several motifs which are much more difficult to spot, as they are – like the motif of the roaring sound – not explicit and literal repetitions, but structural and motivic rhymes or echoes.

The sequence

According to both Snorri and *Vǫluspá* in the beginning there was an immense gap or abyss called the *ginnunga gap*, which, according to Snorri, gaped wide between the two extremes of fire and ice. Then the primordial giant Ymir emerged, who was later killed by the first gods (the divine triad

Óðinn, Vili, and Vé), and his blood caused the cosmic *diluvium*, as has already been mentioned. The flood drowned all the giants except Bergelmir and his family, who survived it in or on an object called *lúðr*. *Lúðr* can mean several things, like trumpet (originally made of a hollowed out wooden branch) or flour bin (a wooden vessel used for collecting flour under the mill), but other possible interpretations presented by scholars include a coffin, cradle, or non-specifically, a wooden box or vessel, which Bergelmir then used like a dugout boat, if we want to paint a literal image. The common denominator of these various concrete instruments is the principle of a hollow wooden object or a hollowed-out tree trunk.[22]

Now let us compare the above sequence with the sequence for the end times: at the start of the Ragnarǫk the universe begins to decay, and all the bonds and shackles disintegrate, which leads to the freeing of the representatives of destruction – especially the cosmic Wolf, who, according to Snorri, has an enormous maw, which gapes wide between the two extremes of the heaven and the earth (as the *ginnunga gap* gapes between the extremes of heat and cold):

En Fenrisúlfr ferr með gapanda munn ok er hinn efri kjǫptr við himni en hinn neðri við jǫrðu. Gapa mundi hann meira ef rúm væri til.	But Fenriswolf will go with mouth agape, and its upper jaw will be against the sky and its lower one against the earth. It would gape wider if there were room.

Then comes the final battle, in which all the principal gods, the divine triad (this time they are named Óðinn, Þórr, and Freyr), are killed, the forces of destruction prevail, and the world is first scorched by fire, followed by the flood, which kills all human beings except one pair, *Lífþrasir* and his wife *Líf*, who survive the diluvium hidden in *Hoddmímis holt*, the Wood of Hoddmímir:

45:1–3	Líf oc Lífþrasir, enn þau leynaz muno í holti Hoddmimis	Life and Lifthrasir, and they will hide in Hoddmimir's wood;

22 'Die immer wieder gesuchte gemeinsame Grundbedeutung könnte "ausgehöhlter Baumstamm" sein' (von See et al. 2000, 874). According to Holtsmark the word is derived from the IE root **lu-* or **leu-*, to cut (1946, 49–65).

We know little about this mysterious place. Some scholars believe that Hoddmímir's Wood is the cosmic tree Yggdrasill itself under a different appellative: '[Hoddmímis holt] should not be understood literally as a wood or even a forest in which the two keep themselves hidden, but rather as an alternative name for the world-tree Yggdrasill' (Simek 1993, 189).

Mímir lives under Yggdrasill, and a variant name, *Mímameiðr*, is attested for the cosmic tree (*Fjǫlsvinnsmál* st. 20), which both seem to connect *Hoddmímir* with Yggdrasill. The word *holt* (cognate with German *Holz*: 'wood', 'timber') normally denotes a small patch of wood or a grove, but in this case, it would mean synecdochically (*totum pro parte*) simply one giant tree. The last human beings would then survive the flood inside the cosmic tree, hidden in the *axis mundi*. It seems that the general idea of 'hollow wood' makes it a similar image to the instrument used by Bergelmir to survive the first flood.

Now we can see the entire echo pattern consisting of a series of analogous images between cosmogony (C) and eschatology (E):

1) First, a giant **gap** yawns between the two extremes (C: fire/ice; E: sky/earth).
2) Second comes the **killing** of the representative(s) of the previous dominant order (C: Ymir of the giants; E: Óðinn and the company of the gods).
3) Third, at some point around the killing, either before or during it, we hear the mighty **sound**, whether it is a scream, roar, or blast.
4) Then comes the **flood**, which drowns most of the remaining representatives of the previous dominant order (C: giants; E: humans and other beings under the gods' protection).
5) The **last pair** survives the flood, or the universal destruction, hidden in a hollow wooden object (C: giant; E: humans).

The interesting thing about this sequence is the changed nature of the representatives of the dominant order: whereas in the previous age it was Ymir who was killed, and his giant offspring drowned in the flood, in the mythically present age it is the gods who are killed, and their human offspring and worshippers who are drowned in the flood.

Structurally, they are parallels, but the process is valued inversely: while the killing of Ymir is necessary for the creation of the ordered cosmos for the gods and humans to inhabit, the killing of the gods is a sad and tragic moment. They are perceived differently, because the cosmological drama is described from the perspective of the gods and their human worshippers. The rulers of the previous age are conceptualized as giants and monsters,

because they are opponents of the rulers of the current age. We could say it is the same story, only in the first case described through the eyes of the victors, and in the second described through the eyes of the vanquished. The cosmogony of the gods is the eschatology of the giants. We thus arrive at an interpretation of Ragnarǫk as structurally the same process as creation, only seen from an opposite, that is complementary, perspective: as if we returned to the same place on the Möbius strip, but now we are standing on the opposite side of the ribbon.

This interpretation would also explain the well-known fact that during the heroic last stand of Ragnarǫk two of the gods – Þórr and Víðarr – perform deeds that have their comparative parallels in Indian or Mesopotamian cosmogony, not eschatology:

Þórr, after killing the Serpent, before dying of his venom, strides for nine steps.[23] This could be seen as a parallel with Viśnu's cosmogonic three steps, which measure the space for *triloka*, the Three Worlds, that is, the entire cosmos.[24] The Indian Three Worlds would then correspond to the Old Norse Nine Worlds, the complete number of worlds.

However, it is Víðarr's act during Ragnarǫk that is more commonly compared with Viśnu's steps (Mallory and Adams 1997, 183). Víðarr steps into the open maw of the cosmic Wolf, and with his heavy boot and strong hand he tears the Wolf's jaws apart.[25] The motif of tearing apart a monstrous antagonist during a cosmic battle also appears in the Babylonian *Enûma Eliš*, for example, in which Marduk/Bēl tears apart the monstrous Tiāmat, 'like a dried fish' (*Enûma Eliš*, Tablet IV, iv 32, 137–140 in Lambert 2013, 92f.). Both Marduk's act and Viśnu's act happen at the very beginning of cosmic history in their respective mythologies, while the similar acts of Þórr and Víðarr take place at the end times, in the case of Þórr even as he himself is dying.

It would make sense to interpret the existence of these cosmogonic motifs in eschatology as signs that eschatology is cosmogony, only viewed

23 *Gylfaginning* ch. li: 'Þórr berr banaorð af Miðgarðsormi ok stígr þaðan braut níu fet. Þá fellr hann dauðr til jarðar fyrir eitri því er ormrinn blæss á hann' (Snorri Sturluson 2005, 50) / 'Thor will be victorious over the Midgard serpent and will step away from it nine paces. Then he will fall to the ground dead from the poison which the serpent will spit on him' (Snorri Sturluson 2008, 51).

24 The motif appears first already in *Rig Veda* (*RV* 1.22: 16–18 and other places), and then reappears many times in later sources, Brahmanas, Upanishads, epics, and Puranas.

25 *Gylfaginning* ch. li: 'En þegar eptir snýsk fram Víðarr ok stígr ǫðrum foeti í neðra keypt úlfsins. (...) Annarri hendi tekr hann inn efra keypt úlfsins ok rífr sundr gin hans ok verðr þat úlfsins bani' (Snorri Sturluson 2005, 50-51) / 'And immediately after Vidar will come forward and step with one foot on the lower jaw of the wolf. (...) With one hand he will grasp the wolf's upper jaw and tear apart its mouth, and this will cause the wolf's death (Snorri Sturluson 2008, 51).

from the inverted structural position of the losers. The same battle can be a glorious victory or a terrible defeat, depending on which side describes it.[26]

However impressive it would be to see the cosmogony fit the eschatology exactly as its inversion, in the end this is not the case. Sadly (or not!), mythology is not a machine perfectly constructed for a production of a single exact meaning or correspondence. It is a chamber of echoes and crystal of reflections, natural, with many structural flaws and idiosyncrasies, selected by the tradition to produce as many meanings and interpretations as possible. One of the typical features of myths – and dreams – is their condensed nature. The mythical images are so strange and surreal, because they try to squeeze in several independent meanings at once. Ragnarǫk is no different in this respect. There is a sketch of a corresponding and partly fitting analogy between cosmogony and eschatology. It is not a literal repetition of the same motif; it is an echo.

Conclusion

The intention of this article was to explore the idea of echo – both in the literal and metaphorical senses – in connection with Old Norse cosmogony and eschatology. The literal echo is the resounding call or shout that fills the whole world at the very beginning and at the very end. The metaphorical echo is the structural reminiscence in the sequence of motifs in cosmogony and eschatology which are somehow concomitant with the motif of the booming sound.

The sequence of motifs that repeats itself during cosmogony and eschatology, including the shout of the dying Ymir and the trumpeting of Heimdallr, connects the end with the beginning in a circle as the trumpeting of the shofar in Jewish tradition connects the end of the last year with the beginning of the new one. The psychoanalytical interpretation links the trumpeting of the ram's horn with the shout of the cosmogonic victim, thus fitting the two cosmic sounds we find in Old Norse mythology remarkably well: the *ymr* of Ymir and the trumpeting of Gjallarhorn.

26 We could illustrate the idea with 'auto-antonyms', words that mean two opposite things. In some cases the opposites are just two perspectives of the same thing, so e.g. the Latin *altus* means both 'high' and 'deep', and *altitudo* is both 'depth' and 'height': if you stand below a cliff, it is 'high'; if you are on top of the cliff, the chasm before you is 'deep', but it is the same cliff, the same precipice, and the same height. Similarly, e.g. the German *ausleihen* means both 'to lend' and 'to borrow', and the Swahili *kutoa* means both 'to add' and 'to remove', because in both cases it is the same process merely viewed from this or that perspective.

The background structure which connects

- the Reik/Žižek interpretation of the trumpeting of shofar ('killing of the Father'),
- the scenes of cosmogony and eschatology in Old Norse mythology, as well as
- Óðinn's martyrdom on the Cosmic Tree

is the structure of sacrifice. Something (a giant figure, father figure, God or gods) is sacrificed so that the ordered cosmos can be created or recreated anew. The dying body is turned into things, the dying scream is turned into words. The psychoanalytical God-Father figure parallels the position of Ymir, the primordial giant who must be killed so that the uncontrolled spontaneous organic unity of the beginnings is transformed into a controlled ordered grid of names, things and laws.

Psychoanalytical images and concepts again prove useful tools with which to think, but their position is closer to mythological images than to scholarly theories and concepts. However, this is precisely their strength – they translate mythological motifs to a language closer to the contemporary ideation and thus serve as mediators for creative thinking about mythology.[27]

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27 It was by design that I did not produce a psychoanalytical reading of Old Norse cosmogony and eschatology (and was only inspired by one insight brought from that area), because that would change the nature of the article. I firmly believe that psychoanalysis (or analytical psychology for that matter) should be used in small doses, as a source of inspirations and suggestions, but these must then be explored using the standard philological, historical, and comparative methods to provide firmer ground for the psychoanalytical insight. If we stick to psychoanalysis alone, we are in a different discourse, with different means, goals, and rules.

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Book Reviews

Helena Kupari and Elina Vuola (eds): *Orthodox Christianity and Gender: Dynamics of Tradition, Culture and Lived Practice*. London and New York: Routledge, 2020.

This interdisciplinary anthology on Orthodox Christianity and gender, edited by Finnish scholars Helena Kupari and Elina Vuola, makes an important contribution, as the topic of gender has not previously been widely studied in the Orthodox Christian context, a tradition within which feminist theology has had only a modest output. For both historical and political reasons Orthodox Christianity has generally rarely been the focus of research, which makes the undertaking even more important. As Kupari and Vuola remind the reader, previous studies of Eastern Orthodoxy were predominantly placed in the establishments of what was politically understood as the Eastern Bloc, which meant that the research could often be affected and limited by political ideologies. In Western establishments Orthodox Christianity has remained relatively unknown as a field of study. Additionally, the overall situation of gender-sensitive studies in the framework of religious studies is influenced by what the editors, following Ursula King, call 'a double blindness' – the blindness of gender studies to religion and the blindness of religious studies and theology to questions related to gender.

Gathering experts from Russia, Canada, Finland, Estonia, the USA, Germany, the Netherlands, and Ukraine, the anthology offers a myriad of ethnographic glimpses that facilitate the comprehension of the world of Orthodox Christianity from a gender-sensitive perspective. The chapters allow the reader to visit research fields in Finland, Russia, Estonia, the USA, Ukraine, and Greece. Two of the anthology's contributions are clearly more theologically inclined, examining gender in the Orthodox theological tradition (Brian A. Butcher) and the question of gender in the Orthodox condonement of women's ordination (Peter-Ben Smit). Interdisciplinary accounts from the fields of theology, religious studies, history, art history, folklore studies, anthropology, and sociology aptly illustrate the complexity of Orthodox Christianity and the locally specific ways it is practised and lived. Observing the nuanced idea of religion-as-lived is probably the best if not only way to give a more detailed view of religious tradition, and this is a recurring perspective in the anthology.

The editors' introduction to the volume reminds the reader that because women are excluded from the ecclesiastical hierarchy, their roles within the Orthodox tradition often remain institutionally limited, and they are most likely to be met in the margins of institutional religious life. Brian A. Butcher's theological overview 'Gender and Orthodox

theology: Vistas and vantage points' is an interesting way to enter into a gender-sensitive discussion. I was particularly intrigued by the pertinent thoughts presented at the beginning of this chapter, which stated that Orthodox Christianity sought 'to eschew the traditionalism while preserving the tradition' (page 25). I would claim that this is the core where many of the negotiations concerning gender within the Orthodox Christian tradition are placed.

Nadezhda Beliakova's historical chapter 'Women in the church: Conceptions of Orthodox theologians in early twentieth-century Russia' observes the developments in Russia, demonstrating women's roles in the church, and how politics and diverse group dynamics within and outside the church have greatly influenced what has happened to women's religious communities, and the place they have occupied within the Russian Orthodox tradition. The historical overview of Finland in 'Obedient artists and mediators: Women icon painters in the Finnish Orthodox Church from the mid-twentieth to the twenty-first century' by Katariina Husso discusses women's role within the Finnish Orthodox Church as icon painters and the struggles this has previously meant for them. It is also an appealing way to approach the question of gender and explain more concretely the moulding of the Orthodox tradition in recent decades. The narratives in these more historical chapters open the interesting horizon of the entire gender-sensitive negotiation process and its historical roots. The chapters also led me to ponder the close connection between religion and politics, and the impact they constantly have on each other.

I also found Peter-Ben Smit's chapter 'What has not been assumed has not been redeemed: The forgotten Orthodox theological condonement of women's ordination in the 1996 Orthodox and Old Catholic consultation on gender and the apostolic ministry' important. It is crucial that such theological discussions and debates are made available for wider audiences, as it would otherwise be very difficult to become aware of the nuances of the interpretation of the Orthodox tradition. It is significant that there have been favourable discussions about women's ordination, and in this case they have even had actual weight on the Old Catholic side, which formally allowed the ordination of women in 1998. A step in this direction was already taken by the Old Catholic Church of Germany in 1996. The Old Catholic Churches have separated from the Roman Catholic Church and united as the Union of Utrecht of the Old Catholic Churches.

I had hoped to read more about women's roles in the field of ecclesiastic music, as it can often be very important. Some aspects are raised in the chapters that examine the situation in the US and Finland. Sarah Riccardi-Swartz's chapter 'Enshrining gender: Orthodox women and material culture in the United States' offers a rich ethnographic

account of women who are members of a rural Eastern Orthodox community, most of them converts. The chapter maps how women challenge male-dominated structures while remaining loyal to them verbally. The case study presented in the chapter "Tradition, gender, and empowerment: The Birth of Theotokos Society in Helsinki, Finland" by Pekka Metso, Nina Maskulin, and Teuvo Laitila very concretely outlines how gender-sensitivity can be transformed into ways of living in a liminal phase as a borderline community.

The volume also contains detailed reflections on the realities of ethnographic fieldwork. This is meritoriously discussed in the chapter 'How to ask embarrassing questions about women's religion: Menstruating Mother of God, ritual impurity, and field work among Seto women in Estonia and Russia' by Andreas Kalkun, who examines the challenges and opportunities of a male scholar in mapping women's religiosity. Additionally, this field study brought close the interviewees' concrete ways and choices of adapting and interpreting the Orthodox Christian tradition in their own cultural framework. I was also fascinated by the last part of the anthology 'Crises and Gender', which illustrates in multiple ways the roles religion can play in the contexts of conflict. The chapters show that religion is often a forum offering space for diverse negotiations. This means that, regardless of the apparently stiff framework, the religious context is constantly transforming and transformed over time.

The repercussions of these negotiations might be both positive or negative gender-wise, as becomes clear in the chapter 'Shaping public Orthodoxy: Women's peace activism and the Orthodox Churches in the Ukrainian crises' by Heleen Zorgdrager. A visible transformation within gender roles in the religious context itself may arise, or women may become more visible and active in the religious life because of crises, or crises may even reinforce gender segregation. This can sometimes mean that women are scapegoated during crises and suffer because of this, as Eleni Sotiriou points out in 'On saints, prophets, philanthropists, and anticlericals: Orthodoxy, gender, and the crisis in Greece'. In 'Russian icons of Chernobyl as visual narratives about women at the center of nuclear disaster' Elena Romashko describes how local iconography ambiguously depicts women's roles in the disaster. In the icons associated with the disaster women can be made invisible and passive, or given more active and professional positions. Orthodox Christianity seemed to offer tools for both ways of approaching a conflict: battling and reconciling. I was impressed by the examples presented in the final three chapters, which demonstrate very concretely how gender roles are challenged and moulded during a crisis.

The recurrence of the discussion of gender complementarity through-

out the anthology is intriguing. As it colours the entire Orthodox Christian religious tradition, it is discussed in relation to priesthood, sexuality, religious practice, and social norms, for example. I could recognize several manners in which Orthodox Christianity comes close to Islamic ways of interpreting religious tradition and negotiating with it. I never cease to be amazed by how conflicts arise from the similarities and closeness of the deeply intertwined roots of the three religious traditions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Perhaps it is here, as with siblings in general, that being close or relatively similar is not always a factor that helps maintain peace, as the need and pressure to be different, separate, and independent grows.

The anthology's chapters combine perspectives on living both as a minority and a majority. I find this crucial to understanding the various societal positions in which Orthodox Christianity can find itself, and that can affect how it is practised and understood. The strong connection of the religious tradition with the surrounding local culture, society, and history is demonstrated absorbingly and meticulously during the journey through the Orthodox world the book offers.

Orthodox Christianity and Gender: Dynamics of Tradition, Culture and Lived Practice is compiled coherently, and its structure is logical and clear. However, more detailed investigations of Eastern European and Middle Eastern ethnographic contexts, which would complete the image of the Orthodox Christian world, are lacking. I would also have liked to have read some final thoughts from the editors at the end of this felicitous ethnographic journey. As this field of research offers much to discover, I am sure this opportunity will present itself in the future.

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George D. Chryssides and Stephen E. Gregg (eds): *The Insider/Outsider Debate: New Perspectives in the Study of Religions*. Equinox, 2019. 421 pages.

The insider/outsider debate in the study of religions has traditionally referred to the role of the researcher. From the researcher's outsider perspective being the ideal to the insider view over time being increasingly privileged, the notion of insider/outsider perspectives is today thoroughly questioned. Furthermore, this is a debate that no longer concerns only the researcher's role, but just as much those being researched: who is an insider, and who is an outsider, in terms of religious identity? That the insider/outsider question has not been resolved, but that there is a need for new approaches, is made clear through the varied contributions to George D. Chryssides' and Stephen E. Gregg's edited volume *The Insider/Outsider Debate: New Perspectives in the Study of Religions*.

In the volume's preface the editors mention that they were surprised by the number of proposals their call for contributions inspired. The number no doubt underlines the currency of the topic. *The Insider/Outsider Debate* thus clearly fills a scholarly need, while not offering any simple and readymade answers – or opening up many possible ways forward.

The volume includes twenty chapters divided into two sections, the first focusing on new methodological approaches, the second on contested identities. Although the placement of some of the chapters can seem a little random given that they deal with both questions of methodology and identities, the division further underscores the richness of the volume. In the following I will highlight the chapters I find most noteworthy. This approach will allow me to dig a little more deeply into the many interesting perspectives on offer, though some of the volume's richness will thus unfortunately be ignored.

The editors begin the volume by offering an insightful introduction to the insider/outsider debate and the challenges studies of everyday and lived religion have introduced, especially in how both the researcher and researched and outsider and insider can be comprehended. One question that opens up the debate well is what is meant by belonging to a religious tradition. Does belonging entail official membership, following certain creeds, personal identification, or adhering to family traditions? And who does not belong? The one who has left, been excluded, lost interest, or moved along without cutting official ties – if official ties that one can cut even exist? To counter this uncertainty, the writers offer a relational framework for understanding religious identity, in which 'religious identity is performed in the negotiation of everyday etiquette' (22). The background of a person and the relations of which one is part will shape one's religious identity, often making concepts such as Christian, Muslim, or Jew too simple.

The volume's second instalment,

written by Steven J. Sutcliffe, brings the reader back to the discussion of the emic and etic. Sutcliffe underscores that the emic/etic distinction has often been misunderstood, and that it would be useful to revisit this discussion. The important thing to ask, according to Sutcliffe, is not who constructs the object of knowledge, but how it is constructed, and here the emic/etic divide may still prove useful. The emic/etic perspective concerns more than questions of outsider and insider, but it brings important insights to the debate and highlights that previous discussions may well be worth revisiting.

In Chapter 5, building on feminist theoretical and conceptual frameworks, Nina Hoel offers some methodological tools that take the body and relationalities seriously. Hoel argues that when the scholar takes the body and relationalities seriously, attention shifts from 'the content of research to the process of research […] and from the "object" of research to the interactive modes that constitute and facilitate complex and diverse research relationships' (89). In this situation the insider/outsider binary can be challenged and allow for important perspectives on lived religion. The analytical categories given particular attention are 'feminist standpoint epistemology', 'intersectionality', and 'reflexivity'. More perspectives are certainly to be found, but the chapter offers an important starting point for further reflection.

In Chapter 7 Lynne Scholefield discusses Ken Wilbur and his integral theory or 'theory of everything'. Scholefield suggests that Wilbur's thinking can be used as a tool in the study of religions to highlight where the research/researcher is situated, and to identify areas and perspectives sometimes missed in their perspectives. According to Scholefield we need a contemplative approach in the study of religions; rationality only takes us so far. Although I am not personally entirely convinced by perspectives that focus on hierarchies as much as Wilbur's thinking, his theory does offer tools that may well be useful in the study of many aspects of religions, as Scholefield amply illustrates with examples related to both 'believing without belonging' and conversion.

Just like the chapters in the first part of the volume, the chapters in the second part offer a plethora of views and experiences. One of this volume's many benefits is its many insights into the experiences of scholars in the study of religions. For anyone working with ethnographical methods the book is bound to offer familiar scenarios and insightful views on the usefulness of what might at one point have felt like fieldwork failures. Steven Jacobs provides an excellent example of this in Chapter 11, in which he describes his brief but insightful encounters with two gurus. The encounters provided important opportunities to reflect on his role as a researcher and insider/outsider perspectives.

In focusing on different traditions and settings, several chapters in the second part of the volume

highlight questions of definition and typology. In Chapter 12 Dan Cohn-Sherbok asks who is a Jew, continuing with a discussion of how Jewish status is understood in different denominations, and ending with an acknowledgement of the need to recognize the subjective character of Jewish existence. In Chapter 15 Claire Miller Skriletz examines the scholarly categorization of Buddhist communities in the United States, highlighting problematic issues related to ethnicity, for example. Beneath the idea of ethnic Buddhist groups is often to be found ideas of these groups being static and slow to change compared to forms of 'American Buddhism' consisting of white Western converts, which are understood to be modern and progressive.

The volume's final three chapters all deal in more detail with how to understand who is an outsider to a community, and what leaving a community can entail. In Chapter 18 Stephen E. Gregg and Aled J. L. Thomas challenge many previous studies of scientology for only focusing on official members. The writers discuss the 'Free Zone' and others who have left the Church of Scientology, highlighting what being a scientologist means to these individuals. In Chapter 19 George D. Chryssides goes on to discuss what leaving a new religious movement can entail. The focus in the media and the anti-cult movement is often on ex-members who have broken with a group, and who share stories of difficult times and being brainwashed by charismatic and exploitative leaders. However, studies show that this is only one perspective, and that leaving these movements is often much less dramatic. What it means to be a member or ex-member is often also far from clear. Carole M. Cusack, in the volume's final chapter, continues down the same track, focusing on new religions and the spiritualities of ex-member communities online. The two case studies she has chosen illustrate quite varied reactions and relations to the groups, highlighting the need to avoid the simplistic generalizing and categorizing of ex-members.

Although I feel this volume would have benefited from a little more editing, a clearer focus in some of the chapters, and more of a dialogue between the contributions, overall this is a thought-provoking volume that may be useful for both younger and older researchers in the study of religions who wish to undertake ethnographic research. Both in the methods and identities discussed and through the personal fieldwork reflections the writers share, the volume provides tools to work with and build on for insightful new scholarship.

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Elisabeth Arweck and Heather Shipley (eds): *Young People and the Diversity of (Non)religious Identities in International Perspective*. Springer, 2019.

Young People and the Diversity of (Non) religious Identities in International Perspective presents current research on young people, (non-)religion, and diversity. The particular focus the editors Elisabeth Arweck and Heather Shipley have chosen is on young people's experiences of religion and non-religion as they are related to the topics of sexual and gender identities. In fourteen well-written case studies the editors and their contributors deftly explore how young people's stances may develop, and the social or spatial contexts in which these stances may be formed. The aim of the volume is twofold: to build bridges geographically by bringing international perspectives into the developing discussion, and methodologically across academic disciplines. To fulfil the volume's ambitions, there is an obvious need for researchers with experience in gender and sexuality studies, religious socialization, formal education, ethnicity, migration, and civic engagement. The international experts, from a range of disciplinary perspectives, demonstrate that they have much to contribute to these conversations. Drawing on local, national, and international contexts, they unpack some of the complexity by exploring how these different perspectives are related conceptually, theoretically, and empirically.

Non-religion in various forms or the study of other-than-religion (L. Lee, Research Note. Talking about a Revolution: Terminology for the New Field of Non-religion Studies. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 27(1), 2012: 129–39), and particularly in relation to religion, is a new subject which has received much attention lately, while research on how these ideas play out among young people is less prevalent (see, for example, E. Arweck, 'I've been christened, but I don't really believe in it': How young people articulate their (non-)religious identities and perceptions of (non-)belief, A. Day, G. Vincett, and C. R. Cotter (eds), *Social identities between the sacred and the secular* (pp. 103–25). Farnham: Ashgate, 2013). The framing of worldviews to include non-religion, religion, 'spiritual but not religious', and how they interact with identity constructions offers nuanced insights into young people's lives. To avoid giving a false impression that young people can be easily boxed into one of a number of identity pigeon holes, the various studies show that there is considerable overlap between identities. Instead of drawing clear boundaries between religion and non-religion or defining any universal distinctions between religion and non-religion, the authors use them as categories merely for analytical purposes. Examining how non-religion and religion overlap and intersect with gendered and sexual identities brings new perspectives of identity constructions

among young people. Most significantly, it appears that the socialization agents that operate with young people with a non-religious identity are the same as those with a religious identity, even when young people report that neither religion nor non-religion is important for their self-interpretation.

Individual relations with (non-) religious institutions, and how they reinforce young people's identities invites more inquiry, not only in religious minority groups, but also in religious majority contexts. However, less attention is paid to class. Nonetheless, Amir Sheikhzadegan, Roberta Ricucci, and Shanon Shah do touch on this issue, but particularly Mathew Guest in the chapter 'The hidden Christians of the UK University Campus' and Josiane LeGall and Daniela Moisa in the chapter 'The Religious Socialisation of Young Adult Muslims in Montreal' deliver well on their promise to consider class. In his excellent study Guest shows that class structures are evident when young people negotiate their cultural and (non-)religious belonging in environments in which they have recently participated. In this collection of case studies, but also for future research, the intersectional relationship between (non-)religion and socioeconomic backgrounds is an angle that will benefit from more research.

The key question when researching young people is why we should examine this particular age group, and not (non-)religious actors in general. Why should we study young people with diverse sexual and gender identities who belong to majority or minority groups in different geographical contexts? These are particularly relevant questions, as youth and (non-)religion is an academic topic that has recently been gaining increasing attention. But these questions are not thoroughly discussed in the introduction or in any of the chapters. The answer is probably simply embedded in young people's formative years. Even in diverse Western societies, in which strong reflexivity follows individuals over the course of their lives, worldview and sexual and gender identities are mostly developed at a young age. Young people select, explore, and express their (non-)religious, gender, and sexual identities when they are moving from the (non-) faith of their childhood to adulthood. Thus, identity construction comes into sharper relief in young people's lives, which enables the researcher to better grasp the aspects of identity formation. Where religious organizations are concerned, young people also contribute to the development of a particular type of religious subject, which the international confirmation studies in Europe from Tübingen University clearly prove (Schweitzer et al. (eds), *Confirmation, Faith, and Volunteerism: A Longitudinal Study on Protestant Adolescents in the Transition towards Adulthood. European Perspectives*. Güterloher: Güterloher Verlagshaus, 2017).

This collection of chapters offers very prescient research. While much of the existing literature has focused largely on plurality at the national level and on a single point in time (snapshots), the chapters here deliberately turn their focus to the spatial dimensions of the theme and explore how the growing visibility and diversity of religion and non-religion are manifested at the local level. Thus, we learn that it is possible to conduct rigorous empirical studies into (non-)religion with the potential or explicit aim of contributing to young people's identity constructions in the contemporary global world, and various national and geographical contexts. Editors Elisabeth Arweck and Heather Shipley and the international panel of contributors offer unique international perspectives on (non-)religious identities across and within three continents. Against the backdrop of the larger global picture most of the case studies are drawn from northern Europe and North America – the UK and Quebec (Canada). Geographical contexts from the Philippines, Malaysia, Italy, and Germany are also represented. The chapters compare research insights with similar studies. The best chapters are those that critically investigate studies from other geographical and cultural contexts, and reflect on why their findings may be contradictory. LeGall and Daniela Moisa discuss the influences of parents, social background, and the degree of religiosity as significant factors explaining why the findings differ from European findings that highlight a more active role in young Muslims' religiosity.

A surprising but even more interesting point is the empirical finding that indicates that media plays such a marginal role for religious and non-religious identity constructions. Although several of the researchers have previously highlighted the interplay of religion and media in the study of young people and (non-)religion, this is downplayed here, or more precisely, this aspect is absent in the majority of the studies. Of course, it is easy to request perspectives which one considers to have been omitted, but such case studies could be important for the processes connected to religiously and sexually diverse identities, and how they intersect. Is the interaction with virtual social networks over such issues as sexuality, gender, and (non-)religion less significant than family, peers, and schools, and is media mostly used to seek religious knowledge? Both Simeon Wallis's chapter '"I'm Not Really a Non-religious Person": Diversity among Young People of No Religion' and Josiane LeGall's and Daniela Moisa's chapter 'The Religious Socialisation of Young Adult Muslims in Montreal' confirm that media is an agent for developing young people's stances, but with other agents from social spaces and contexts. Since Arweck's and Shipley's volume was written, other international studies have challenged the issues in an international context (see M. Moberg and S. Sjö (eds), *Digital Media, Young Adults*

and Religion: An International Perspective, London: Routledge, 2020). The case studies presented in Arweck's and Shipley's and in Moberg's and Sjö's volumes demonstrate the need to examine in more detail (non-) religious socialization and media, and how media contribute to the intertwining expressions of ethnic (non-)religious sexual and gender identity in minority and majority social contexts.

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Lori Beaman: *The Transition of Religion to Culture in Law and Public Discourse*. London: Routledge, 2020.

Around the (Christian/Western) world there are numerous cases in which religious symbols in public spaces are contested. Not only are there numerous debates on the hijab, or whether the burka can be banned, there are also debates on the presence of Christian majority religious symbols. A research trend in the study of contemporary religion in general and the sociology of religion in particular is the culturalization of religion. This topic can be approached in different ways, and in her new book Lori Beaman takes those cases of public religious symbols that not only cause debate but actually end up in the legal system as her point of departure.

Beaman explores the legal battles in different Western countries where various actors defend the public presence of symbols from the Christian majority religion. She seeks to examine the transformation of Christian *religious* symbols to symbols of the *cultural heritage* in the West through three case studies from Canada, France, and the United States. She also mentions several other cases that include religious symbols from other traditions like Hinduism and Islam to show that the transformation of religion to culture in many cases depends on which religion we are discussing. One aim of the book is to show how 'past preserving narratives' easily become a hindrance for what she calls a 'future forming vision' of living well together.

The case that sparked her interest in exploring these transformation processes in more detail was the famous Italian case – the Lautsi case – in which an atheist parent objected to the presence of a crucifix in public school classrooms. The case was brought before the European Court of Human Rights, which decided that the presence of crucifixes violated religious freedom. Using a cultural heritage argument, the Italian government appealed the decision to the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights. It decided that crucifixes were passive symbols that did not violate religious freedom. Indeed, some of the judges argued that it was not a religious symbol at all, but a symbol of Italy's culture and heritage. Beaman seeks to examine the various arguments used in similar cases from different countries.

Beaman has chosen to focus on a case from what we might call multicultural Canada, one from secularist France, and one from the Judaeo-Christian United States (these blunt descriptors do not do justice to her more detailed accounts of the countries). However, Beaman does not really argue for the choice of countries; nor does she show that these cases can be found in most Western countries. Nevertheless, they are probably chosen deliberately, as the choice of such different contexts fits a very different systems design logic. What can explain a common outcome in three different

cases? In other words, Beaman seeks to examine how a similar approach to the Christian majority religion and its shift from religion to culture is chosen in three societies that differ with regard to how diversity and religion in the public sphere is approached. Canada, France, and the United States could easily be expected to differ in their management of religion and diversity. It is therefore very relevant to examine why they are so similar in their approach to their religious history and the transformation of Christianity from religion to culture. In the background of this comparative logic it is possible that any similarity across these three contexts also applies to other Western countries.

The Canadian case consists of two related cases similar to the Lautsi case: the presence of crucifixes. In a Catholic hospital, a patient complained about the presence of a crucifix, which resulted in its removal, because the hospital board argued that patients had diverse religious backgrounds and were not at the hospital voluntarily. The other case is about the prayer and presence of a crucifix at meetings in the city hall in the town of Saguenay. The French case deals with the display of nativity scenes in a city hall in a French town. Again, it was a non-religious individual who complained about the public presence of religious symbols, and again, it was originally taken down because of a decision not to violate the state neutrality of the French constitution. Nevertheless, the decision was later overturned, as it was argued that it was not of a religious nature and did not violate state neutrality. The third case is the use of prayer in town board meetings in the American town of Greece, where an atheist and a Jewish board member complained about the religious nature of the prayer. Again, various courts reached different decisions before the Supreme Court found that it did not violate state neutrality and the establishment clause.

Beaman quotes extensively from the various court meetings and shows the many readings in play when it comes to the numerous ways in which these symbols can be understood (cultural, artistic, festive, religious). She convincingly shows how the symbols are often 'rendered religiously meaningless', only to reappear as culturally meaningful. Defending the symbols has to do with preserving the past, and although she documents both the past preserving narratives and the future forming alternatives that can also be found in the material, she not only documents, but also passes judgement on them. In the conclusion she writes that the 'combination of the regulation and erasure of minority religious symbols from the public sphere with the preservation of a Christian symbol as "heritage" is toxic to democracy' (132). It should probably be noted that this review is written at a time when migration studies (and other disciplines in the humanities) is hotly debated in Denmark for being activist (and that the minister of higher education and

research in France has just accused French universities of being Islamo-gauchiste). While I recommend Beaman's book to all who find the topic interesting, I also think readers should realize that this is a book that seeks to form the future in a specific way. Some readers will undoubtedly find this book too activist.

To summarize, I would like to highlight the things I found interesting. The first is related to Beaman's notion of past preserving narratives. In several cases she shows that the practices (prayers) and artefacts (crucifixes and nativity scenes) that are defended do not have long histories. The crucifix in the city hall in Canada was placed in the chamber in the 1980s, the nativity scene in the town hall in France was first displayed in 1989, and the prayer in the town of Greece started in 1999. Beaman explicitly states that it is more fruitful to examine the implications of these practices now and for the future than discussing how old they are. This has to do with her main goal of highlighting the problems of past preserving narratives when future forming visions are more necessary to the development of a tolerant, liberal, and equal democracy. Beaman is open to the consequences of the Christian religion, but it is beyond the scope of the book to delve more deeply into this. From a history of religion perspective it is noteworthy that the preservation of the cultural heritage paradoxically entails the erosion of its religious dimension. Even though it is not her ambition, the temporal aspects of the transformation could be further elaborated in another project, and the book helps formulate several questions – for example, what does a culturalization of time look like? What are the consequences of a culturalization of time where religious time is placed within this world, and transcendent time is abandoned, leaving creation/cosmology and salvation/eschatology behind?

The second point I would like to highlight is the lack of an explanation – or rather, the lack of an explanation of the explanation. Beaman argues that religion transforms itself into culture and heritage as a defensive reaction to two kinds of threat: the Muslim threat and the atheist threat. It would have been interesting to know more about why the defence takes on this particular form: why does religion appeal to culture? Beaman successfully examines how religion is transformed into culture, but I think it would have been relevant to examine why culture needs religion to protect itself as well.

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