DFG Emmy Noether-Project

"The Diversity of Nonreligion"
Closing Conference

&

NSRN
Annual Conference 2016

July 7 to 9, 2016
Zurich, Switzerland

Organized and hostey by

**"The Diversity of
Nonreligion"**

**Department of Social
Anthropology & Cultural
Studies (ISEK)**

**Nonreligion & Secularity
Research Network (NSRN)**

Conference Program

Overview

Thursday, July 7, 2016

14:00 - 14:30	**Opening ceremony** Johannes Quack (University of Zurich)

	Session I	Session II
14:30 - 16:00	**Session I** Mastiaux Scheidt	**Session II** Gutkowski Schulz

16:00 - 16:30	Coffee break

	Session III	Session IV
16:30 - 18:30	**Session III** Bullock Lundmark & LeDrew Schutz	**Session IV** Hartmann Kasapoglu Remmel

20:00	**Dinner & Drinks** **in Zurich Downtown** (optional)

Friday, July 8, 2016

09:00 - 10:30	**Session V** Emmy Noether Project **"The Diversity of Nonreligion"** (Part I) Discussant: Peter J. Bräunlein (University of Leipzig)	
10:30 - 11:00	Coffee break	
11:00 - 12:30	**Session VI** Emmy Noether Project **"The Diversity of Nonreligion"** (Part II)	
12:30 - 14:00	Lunch break	
14:00 - 15:30	**Session VII** Königstedt Pöhls	**Session VIII** Lanman Turpin
15:30 - 16:00	Coffee break	
16:00 - 17:30	**Plenary Session: "Understanding Unbelief"** Lee, Lanman, Bullivant & Farias[1]	
17:30 - 18:00	Coffee break	
18:00 - 19:00	**Conference Keynote Lecture** "The Demarcation of Boundaries: How to Approach Secularity and Non-Religion" Monika Wohlrab-Sahr (University of Leipzig)	
20:00	**Conference dinner**	

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[1] Co-authors Stephen Bullivant and Miguel Farias will not be present.

Saturday, July 9, 2016

09:30 - 11:00	**Session IX** Ben Slima Lee	**Session X** Begum Popp-Baier
11:00 - 11:30	Coffee break	
11:30 - 13:00	**Final discussion**	
13:00	**End of conference**	

Conference Papers

Overview

- Individual papers -

#	Author	Title
1	Begum, Halima	British Ex-Muslims: Constructing and negotiating the "essential and revolutionary"
2	Ben Slima, Yosr	Methodological challenges in conducting research on irreligious Tunisians
3	Bullock, Josh	Reimagining the Secular: The Sunday Assembly - Belonging without Believing
4	Gutkowski, Stacey	Cultivating the reasonable hiloni self: a case of secular self-fashioning?
5	Hartmann, Nicole	Being areligious in Antiquity – Individual Dimensions of Disbelief
6	Kasapoglu, Tayfun	Politics and Religion in Contemporary Turkey: Perspectives of Atheists
7	Königstedt, Christiane	Making implicit nonreligious attitudes visible: secular criticism of religion and spirituality within societal institutions
8	Lanman, Jonathan A.	On the Necessity of Fractionating "Atheism"
9	Lee, Lois	Jewish Atheists, Protestant Humanists and Nonreligious Agnostics: Existential Culture, 'Hybridity' and Nonreligious Diversity
10	Lundmark, Evelina & Stephen LeDrew	Grassroots Atheism and the Atheist Movement
11	Mastiaux, Björn	Interpreting Active Forms of Atheism and Secularism as a Social Movement
12	Pöhls, Katharina	Non-Religious Individuals' Life Satisfaction: Examining the Role of Belief Certainty and Context Factors
13	Popp-Baier, Ulrike	The Varieties of Personal Orientations to Religion: Dynamics of Religious and Nonreligious Positions in Self-Narratives of Well-Educated Young Adults in the Netherlands
14	Remmel, Atko	Secular identities in a secular context and an "atheism-shaped hole"
15	Scheidt, Hannah	"Authorizing Atheism: Leadership, Gender, and the Cult of Personality"
16	Schulz, Mascha	Contested Secularism(s) in Bangladesh
17	Schutz, Amanda	Pathways to Organizational Involvement Among Nonbelievers
18	Turpin, Hugh	Failing God? The effects of Church scandals on Catholic belief and affiliation in Ireland

Abstracts

- Individual papers -

British Ex-Muslims: Constructing and negotiating the "essential and revolutionary"

Halima Begum (Birkbeck, University of London)

The phenomenon of people leaving their religion is a common feature of many post-Christian Western societies. However, the investigation of the phenomenon of apostasy has mainly been restricted to Christian apostates. Apostasy in minority communities, specifically the Muslim community, is not well understood. This study investigates the why and the how of the construction of the "Ex-Muslim" identity, defined as atheists and agnostics who have left Islam. A small-scale study with a qualitative, grounded theory approach within a social constructivism paradigm was used to explore the construction of the Ex-Muslim identity, and how Ex-Muslims managed and negotiated the stigma attached to their identity. Ten semi-structured interviews and one focus group (five participants) were conducted to investigate why participants chose to call themselves 'Ex-Muslims' and what the consequences of embracing this identity were. Results revealed two dimensions to understand this identity. The first category conceptualises the stigmatisation from Muslim and the non-Muslim society, and a displacement of the self, lack of parental acceptance and gendered experiences as the defining factors in the realities of Ex-Muslims. The second category showed the strategies used to navigate the Ex-Muslim identity, consisting of a complex set of performance acts to manage social interactions as well as the construction of an Ex-Muslim community. The results show that the conditions of stigmatisation of apostasy can stimulate the displacement of the self, resulting into an evolving Ex-Muslim identity. The findings are discussed in the light of the concept of negotiation of identities through performances (Goffman, 1963) as well as the concept of the 'ex' role identity (Ebaugh, 1988).

Methodological challenges in conducting research on irreligious Tunisians

Yosr Ben Slima (King's College London)

This presentation will examine the methodological difficulties related to the study of the nonreligion phenomenon within Tunisia (a Muslim-majority country). I argue that the problem stems from the difficulty of defining and locating nonreligion, especially in the absence of any forms of organization. Certain material manifestations of nonreligion can be signs of unorthodox Islam rather than material signs of nonreligion ,while abidance by some Islamic rituals is not necessarily a sign of piety and belief. I propose the neologism 'practicing irreligious Tunisians' to refer to irreligious individuals who consciously choose to continue performing Islamic rituals. Abiding by certain Islamic rituals has become for these irreligious Tunisians living with traditional Muslim families, a manner to develop more empathy, by refusing to inflict pain on their beloved ones. This moral consideration is shaped by what these irreligious Tunisians refer to as 'humane values' or in a more ironic manner ' ethics of Kofar'[2]. The methodological challenge resides in distinguising between unorthodoxy and

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[2] Ethics of Kofar, or 'irreligious ethics' is a notion developed by irreligious Tunisians who mockingly counter the notion that irreligious persons cannot be moral.

nonreligion .Who is a real irreligious Tunisian ? To understand the subversive nature of the irreligious performance of Islamic rituals , I rely on the virtual sphere which presents an outlet used by many irreligious Tunisians to express their 'authentic selves'. I combine both virtual ethnography and long-term relationships with irreligious Tunisians to explore nonreligion in a context where the fear of social rejection and the ambivalence of the legal system vis-à-vis nonreligious Tunisians make it difficult to openly approach the subject in the public sphere.

Reimagining the Secular: The Sunday Assembly - Belonging without Believing.

Josh Bullock (Kingston University London)

Grace Davie (1994) famously wrote over two decades ago that 'the overall pattern of religious life is changing. For it appears that more and more people within British Society want to believe but do not want to involve themselves in religious practice.' Hence, the catchphrase 'believing without belonging' was coined. Twenty-two years later has the (non)religious landscape changed once again?

My doctoral research follows the Sunday Assembly, a secular congregation that celebrates life, with the motto: live better, help often and wonder more. Their vision is: to help everyone live life as fully as possible. The Sunday Assembly entered the non-religious market place in January 2013 with their flagship London congregation. Now, 68- franchised chapters of the Godless congregation exist in 8 different countries, attempting to provide community, belonging and wonder to the religiously unaffiliated market.

Once described as 'the best bits of church but with no religion and with awesome pop songs!', *the best bits* literally borrow established successful terminology, practices, liturgies and models of building community found within Christian churches. Often labelled oxymoronically the 'atheist church' - it parallels and mimics the functionality of church life without the need for a deity.

Therefore, studying the Sunday Assembly may offer a new variation to Davie's 'believing without belonging' that is '*belonging without believing.'* As more and more people now identify as being non-religious in the United Kingdom and America, this paper will aim to answer what factors are enticing people towards the Sunday Assembly and their non-religious practice.

This paper will present findings from my analysis of the Sunday Assembly. Drawing upon 36 in-depth semi-structured interviews and a year-long ethnography spent with the London Sunday Assembly congregation.

Bibliography:

Davie, G. (1994) Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging. Oxford: Blackwell.

Cultivating the reasonable *hiloni* self: a case of secular self-fashioning?

Stacey Gutkowski (King's College London)

As a contribution to debates on the emotional dimension of the secular, I look at practices of self-fashioning, particularly the cultivation and performance of the self as 'reasonable'. Using the case of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, I argue that 'secular' self-fashioning may sometimes have little to do with individuals engaging the secular-religious boundary in a particular society through processes of self-differentiation. I also argue that *hiloni* cultivation of reasonableness is an emotio-political outcome of a long-standing and unresolved ideological problem within Zionist thought. Reasonableness is not simply an emotional practice of self-cultivation but has also – indirectly and often unintentionally – facilitated and rendered opaque practices of Israeli state sovereignty over many aspects of Palestinian life. Secularity has facilitated sovereign governance of Palestinian social life but not through political secularism per se, which further illuminates the intersection between individual 'secular affect' and state sovereignty.

Being areligious in Antiquity – Individual Dimensions of Disbelief

Nicole Hartmann (Humboldt-University of Berlin)

Studies on Antiquity are mostly stuck in their dependence on literary sources. Philosophical, antiquarian, judicial or theological reflections, tragic, satirical, polemical or apologetic texts were mostly produced by 'organizational men' (Jörg Rüpke). They set the agenda of proper behaviour, norms and practices and, what they consider to be deviant. They create the dichotomy of 'religion' and 'atheism'. „Battling the Gods. Atheism in the Ancient World" (2015) by Tim Whitmarsh is just the latest example of how difficult it is for scholars to look beyond these dominating discourses. The project I am thinking about aims at individual aspects of disbelief and personal reasons for denying to participate in rituals and cults or merely being indifferent towards 'religion'.
So far my approach is informed by the 'Lived Ancient Religion' concept of the ERC funded Research Group at the Max Weber Kolleg Erfurt and the theoretical framework of the 'Multiple Secularities' project at the University of Leipzig. The biggest methodological challenge will be the quest for sources and testimonies, since there are no ego-documents of 'confessing' sceptics or atheists. One has to analyze indirect sources as, for example, *leges sacrae* and will meet a lot of difficulties to distinguish wilful disregard from unintentional transgression etc. Nonetheless, in my point of view, it is about time to conceptualize these individual dimensions of non-religion for the ancient world (namely in the time and space of the Roman Empire) and ask about the dynamics it set free in groups responses.

Politics and Religion in Contemporary Turkey: Perspectives of Atheists

Tayfun Kasapoglu (Vytautas Magnus University)

In a society where religion is very present in public life, conducting research on atheists itself may become an act of contestation, especially if atheists constitute a small minority and are perceived as deviant in the society. In my on-going qualitative research on self-identified atheists in contemporary Turkey, I aim to investigate atheists' perceptions on relations between politics and religion, as well as to understand how this relationship affects atheists' personal experiences in society. As a part of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with atheists from different backgrounds in Turkey. In these interviews, atheists based their perspectives on personal experiences and did not strictly differentiate between religious and nonreligious. The informants often perceived current politics and religion as closely linked to each other and underlined an increasing religiosity and polarization in society drawing on examples related to media, gender, politics and education. While there were significant differences between opinions of atheists from religious and secular families, almost all the informants regarded religion as an expansionist power that is becoming more visible in every area of social life with the policies imposed by the current right-wing government. They recommended limiting religion to the private sphere and thus creating secular spaces in which not only religious Muslims but everyone could thrive.

Key words: Atheism, politics, religion

Making implicit nonreligious attitudes visible: secular criticism of religion and spirituality within societal institutions

Christiane Königstedt (University of Leipzig)

The study of nonreligion is, besides analyses of state secularism, very often concerned with nonreligious persons in the minority position, who are themselves perceived as contestations to religious world-views. For the opposite case, i.e. secular societies where nonreligious world-views are also dominant, Charles Taylor and José Casanova (2011) stated, that the latter would have the tendency to "naturalize" and thus become unconsciously held attitudes. Since what is taken for granted is rarely mentioned explicitly as well as there is by no means a canonized set of nonreligious beliefs collectively shared, those are difficult investigate beyond visible conflicts provoked by either religious groups or by perceived transgressions of taken-for-granted secular realms. Contestations and resulting negotiations may constitute a chance for the researcher (Knott 2007) to investigate 'naturalized' assumptions, when it is explicated in order to explain the criticism groups, beliefs or practices. While it has shown that collective actors, groups, are more likely to be differentiated from the "in-group" through evoking a secular collective identity, subtle punctual transgressions of boundaries may reveals details about more diffused nonreligious – and implicit – attitudes and opinions. In this paper I will analyse examples for the latter case, precisely a sample of criticism(s) expressed in German online-newspapers towards perceived transgressions of legitimate (often medical) science by religio-spiritual world-views. Testing Taylor's and Casanova's claim in this practical area, the pivotal questions are 'what is precisely perceived as challenge and how is it characterized'? What is, on the other hand, perceived to be in need of protection, what are the feared dangers? What singular arguments and values are explicated in that defence? The findings from the material shall be discussed concerning their significance and surplus value for the study of nonreligion.

On the Necessity of Fractionating "Atheism"

Jonathan A. Lanman (Queen's University Belfast)

Can "atheism," be an object of scientific analysis? Academics and other social actors approach "atheism" with a range of interests, producing substantial diversity in how the term is defined, analysed, and utilised.   Given the importance of such interests in conceptual construction, one may ask whether "atheism" exists as an independent phenomenon amenable to scientific analysis, or, rather, following the supposed fate of "religion" (Smith, 1998; Fitzgerald, 2000) and the "secular" (Asad, 2003), as a mere social construction. This question is not without consequence. If "atheism" only exists as a socially constructed concept and not as an independent object, then analysis of its supposed causes and effects becomes, like astrology, folly.

I will argue that "atheism" is indeed a social construct. This would seem to doom any scientific study of atheism and leave us only to document how the term is experienced and utilized by various social actors. However, I will argue that a science of atheism is still possible.   To do so, I will utilize the metatheoretical principle of "fractionation" developed by cognitive anthropologists (Boyer, 1994; Whitehouse & Lanman, 2014) in their scientific studies of "religion." Fractionating a constructed object of analysis involves breaking it up into distinct phenomena about whose independence we are more confident and which may have divergent causes and effects. Based on my field and survey research with atheists in the US, UK, and Denmark, as well as insights from the cognitive and evolutionary sciences, I will propose three (non-exhaustive) fractionated elements of "atheism:" 1) absence of (implicit/explicit) belief in the existence of God/gods, 2) moral judgement of the immorality of "religion," and 3) social identities that prominently feature "atheism" or other forms of "nonreligion." I will argue that each exists in the world beyond our scholarly conceptions and with distinct sets of causes and effects.

Works Cited:

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Boyer, P. (1994). *The naturalness of religious ideas: A cognitive theory of religion*. Univ of California Press.

Fitzgerald, T. (2000). *The ideology of religious studies* (p. 3). New York: Oxford University Press.

Smith, J. Z. (1998). Religion, religions, religious. *Critical terms for religious studies*, 269-284.

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Grassroots Atheism and the Atheist Movement

Stephen LeDrew & Evelina Lundmark (Uppsala University)

In this research we examine research done on the (at the time) unmoderated and hugely popular online atheist forum – reddit.com/r/atheism – in relation to the ideology new atheism and the atheist movement in North America. The study on /r/atheism was a qualitative study conducted in early 2013, which traced discursive practices on an online space with no official ties to atheist or humanist organizations. The methodological framework was Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's discourse theory, and the discussion was placed primarily within critical discussions on the category of religions prevalent within the anthropology of religion. We have found four major correlating themes in our paper: conceptions of authority and human nature; the 'practice' of atheism and modes of engagement with religion; and the purposes of the forum and of public expressions of atheism more generally. These themes have also featured prominently in research on atheist beliefs and identity in formal organizations and among atheist leaders and public figures (including, but not restricted to, the New Atheists). Our aim is to compare these public expressions of atheism in order to identify consistencies and also diversity of opinion within and between these levels. This study thus contributes to a growing understanding of atheist cultures, especially with regard to their diversity and dominant versus oppositional trends and discourses. Placing the research on /r/atheism in relation to research on the atheist movement grounds the study in social theory, which exists in tension with discourse theory. Our cooperation has thus impelled us to ask questions regarding the use and construction of atheism in our respective work, as well as questions on which scientific research inform our different choices, and how this is reflected in the write up process.

Jewish Atheists, Protestant Humanists and Nonreligious Agnostics: Existential Culture, 'Hybridity' and Nonreligious Diversity

Lois Lee (University College London)

The existential dimension of human life has been a minor theme in contemporary social science, in line with the dominant view in social theory (e.g. modernization theory, secularization theory) that the decline of religion, detraditionalisation and other processes of social transformation serve to diminish existential experience in modern and late modern societies. In contrast to such theories, this paper presents evidence that existential life is *reformed* rather than *reduced* in contemporary societies. It draws on qualitative research exploring nonreligious identification in southeast England to demonstrate the ways in which informants engage with the existential and metaphysical, not only through thought and belief, but also through rituals, symbolic forms and social interactions. It shows how the variety and cultural contingency of these existential cultures can provide new ways to understand the diversity of nonreligious beliefs and cultures. It also points to commonalities and opportunities for cultural exchange between religious, spiritual and nonreligious existential cultures, and the ways in which individuals may draw on and sometimes combine these different traditions. I argue that a cultural turn in understandings of atheism, nonreligion and secularity help us to understand these complex or 'hybrid' existential cultural formations.

Interpreting Active Forms of Atheism and Secularism as a Social Movement

Björn Mastiaux (University of Düsseldorf)

In the wake of so-called „New Atheism", especially organized forms of nonreligion, atheism, and/or secularism have attracted an unprecedented degree of scholarly attention (see e.g. Cimino and Smith 2014, LeDrew 2016). These studies, mostly on the North American spectrum of atheist, humanist, and secularist organizations, have treated their subject, quite matter-of-factly, as a social movement.

In my presentation, I would like to apply theoretical insight from the sociology of social movements to the study of nonreligion and secularity – more specifically to atheist, humanist, and secularist activism in the United States and Germany. On the one hand, I would like to analyze systematically in how far the field of organized and non-organized atheism, humanism, and secularism meets definitions of a social movement and in how far it can justifiably be called that.

Most definitions of social movements place emphasis on the existence of formal and informal networks of collective and individual actors, a shared identity, a battle against political or cultural enemies, and the use of non-institutionalized means. So, on the other hand, I am going to portray the formal and informal networks in this field as well as recent dynamics and divergencies with respect to identity, opponents, and strategy using theories of collective action and collective identity.

The aim of my paper, therefore, is both theoretical as well as descriptive: bringing theory from the sociology of social movements to fruition in the context of a new subject matter and broadening the empirical treatment of that subject matter to a European case.

- Cimino, Richard and Christopher Smith: *Atheist Awakening – Secular Activism and Community in America*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

- LeDrew, Stephen: *The Evolution of Atheism. The Politics of a Modern Movement*. Oxford University Press, 2016.

Non-Religious Individuals' Life Satisfaction: Examining the Role of Belief Certainty and Context Factors

Katharina Pöhls (University of Cologne)

Based on the assumption of a curvilinear effect of belief certainty instead of belief content on psychological well-being, this individual paper explores the influence of belief certainty on non-religious individuals' life satisfaction with regard to the context factors social norm of non-religiosity and societal development. Self-identification as atheist is used as an indicator for non-religiousness with a high belief certainty. The social norm of non-religiosity is indicated by the national level of individuals identifying as not religious or atheist and the level of societal development is indicated by the level of a population's health, education, and standard of living. The World Values Survey is used as data source for a quantitative intercultural comparison across 31 countries (N=49,611). Results of a multilevel regression analysis suggest that religious individuals are on average more satisfied with life than atheist and non-religious individuals when only including individual-level variables in the analysis, but that they do not differ in their average level of life satisfaction when interactions with the context factors social norm of non-religiosity and societal development are considered. Additionally, the difference between atheist and religious individuals' life satisfaction

decreases with higher levels of non-religiosity in society. It will be discussed why these results challenge the assumption of religiosity being related to a general advantage concerning individuals' well-being.

The Varieties of Personal Orientations to Religion: Dynamics of Religious and Nonreligious Positions in Self-Narratives of Well-Educated Young Adults in the Netherlands

Ulrike Popp-Baier (University of Amsterdam)

Self-narratives are well-known resources from which to analyze the subtleties of people's orientations toward "religion". They provide the necessary biographical context for addressing individual religiousness in the context of personal concerns, experiences and orientations, thus stressing the diversity and varieties of people's religious orientations and experiences which are embedded in processes of interpretation and reflection related to activities and events in daily life, and evolving and changing in the course of a lifetime. "Religious" or "nonreligious" people are often not only addressing, adopting, or contesting various contents of belief in plural religious contexts, but also demonstrating various "modes of belief or unbelief " such as being convinced, trusting, hoping, assuming, preferring, doubting, pondering, denying etc. When we consider these varieties, clear-cut distinctions between "being religious" and "being nonreligious" will often disappear.

The main research question in our current project is: What types of religiousness are discernable among well-educated adults in the Netherlands ? We started our empirical research with a preliminary exploratory study which is still ongoing. Until yet 20 self-narratives (gained by a combination of biographical-narrative interviews with semi-structured interviews) of students at polytechnic institutes of higher learning in the Netherlands have been gathered. The purposive sample aims at maximal variation among self-ascribed religiousness, spirituality, nonreligiousness and non-spirituality. Thus far Catholics and former Catholics, Protestants and former Protestants, Muslims, people affiliated with the so-called holistic milieu and people with no religious affiliation or interest in spirituality at all have been included into the sample. Besides different constellations of religiousness, nonreligiousness, spirituality and "non-spirituality", a thematic coding analysis of the 20 interviewtranscripts also revealed two common patterns in the interviews thus far: a moral orientation to life and variations of a just-world belief (Lerner, 1980). This paper will elaborate on the different constellations and on the common patterns as well. Conceptual and methodological consequences for a psychological study of "nonreligiousness" will be discussed.

Researching the nonreligious in a secular society

Atko Remmel (University of Tartu)

Estonia, the northernmost of the Baltic states, has a reputation of being one of the most secularized countries in Europe. The visibility of religion in society is low and nonreligiosity is considered normative. Estonians are also one of the nations (along with Czechs) in Europe who's national identity is associated with atheism, in both cases expressed as "the most atheistic country in the world". Nevertheless, different beliefs and practices associated with

New Spirituality and indigenous Earth belief are very common. Thus, secularity in this context refers mostly to distance from conventional, theistic religion.

The paper draws on the data from recent quantitative survey "On Life, Religion, and Religious Life" (2015). Among other questions, the survey offered participants two different possibilities for (non)religious identification, employing also the concept of Multiple Religious Belonging. Beside the information on religiosity, the results of the analysis also give interesting information about nonreligious identities in a secular context.

Still, general results of the survey awoke serious doubts about the suitability of quantitative survey on conventional religion in a largely nonreligious society. In order to investigate the relevance of the quantitative survey, I conducted a qualitative study among the nonreligious using mainly the same questions and offering a possibility to explain one's answers. The results largely confirmed my doubts. The paper addresses the issues that became clear during the qualitative study.

Authorizing Atheism: Leadership, Gender, and the Cult of Personality

Hannah Scheidt (Northwestern University)

In this paper, I examine authority in contemporary atheism through visual culture. My sources include fan art, cartoons, and Internet memes. This paper therefore adopts a cultural studies approach to contemporary atheism, contributing an understanding of how atheism operates "on the ground" as much more than a simple lack of belief. Much has been made about the works of New Atheist leaders such as Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens, but relatively little has been done to analyze how they are consumed and reproduced, interpreted and critiqued, by everyday atheists. I address the tension between contemporary atheists' skepticism regarding traditional authority and their simultaneous acceptance of some modes and sources of authority. Atheists themselves are aware of this tension, and treat it thoughtfully, playfully, and self-reflexively (jokingly calling Dawkins, for example, the Atheist Pope). I also connect my observations about authority in contemporary atheism with a commentary about gender in today's atheist network, a subject for which my cultural sources provide rich material. This paper draws from cultural studies, religious studies, media studies, and gender studies in an effort to better understand how atheists builds narratives, community, and culture in deeply complex relationship with their understandings of religion, and not simply in reaction or opposition to religion.

Contested Secularism(s) in Bangladesh

Mascha Schulz (University of Zurich)

Secularism and the role of religion in the public sphere in Bangladesh have been highly contested issues in Bangladesh since a long period, but contestation and polarization have regained remarkable intensity in the recent past. In this context also the academic writing on the issue of secularism, national identity and religion in Bangladesh and concomitant conflicts has remerged with new impetus.

In this presentation I will explore the light that recent academic writing sheds on contested secularism in Bangladesh. I will summarize the existing literature by pointing to different narratives and motives frequently presented in the literature.

This will help us to understand how these contestations around religion and secularism in Bangladesh are commonly interpreted and how various issues and conflicts are conflated within these debates. As a second step, I will discuss to which extend the scholarly works can themselves be considered as part of politics around the contested issue of "secularism" and the role of religion in Bangladesh. Therefore, I will summarize which implicit or explicit claims or political statements are made by the authors, and in which ways these statements relate to the positions of respective authors as well as academia in general.

Further, I would like to contrast the academic discourse concerning issues related to secularism in Bangladesh to the emerging scholarship that discusses ways of conceptualizing non-religion and secularism. Consequently, I will use a few selected approaches to argue that a conversation between both so far largely disconnected corpuses of scholarship can be of mutual benefit as it allows a critical review of the existing narratives and debates in both of them. I will conclude my presentation with proposing possible approaches that will allow us a deeper understanding of the politics of secularism in Bangladesh.

Pathways to Organizational Involvement Among Nonbelievers

Amanda Schutz (University of Arizona)

Previous research on non-religion has often sampled for nonbelievers via their connections to nonreligious organizations. Making assumptions about nonbelievers as a whole, then, can problematic, since only a portion of nonbelievers are likely to be involved with such groups. Joining a nonreligious organization satisfies a desire for community for some nonbelievers, but social research has not adequately explained why some nonbelievers join while others do not. If nonbelievers are looking for social interaction, intellectual debate, or secular spiritual fulfillment, they can potentially find it via a nonreligious organization; however, organizational affiliation could be a sufficient but unnecessary means of achieving personal goals. This prompts me to ask, what is the difference between the joining and the non-joining nonbeliever? Have they taken different pathways to non-belief and do they experience non-belief in significantly different ways? In order to determine why some nonbelievers choose not to participate in collective action, and to assess the actual impact of organizations on those who do, non-joiners should be compared to organization members, who may differ systematically from those who join. To answer these questions I interviewed 125 nonbelievers in Houston, Texas, most of whom were involved to varying degrees with nonreligious organizations, but many that were not. I examined respondents' religious backgrounds, journeys to non-belief, "coming out" experiences, and organizational affiliations to search for similarities and differences in these two groups of nonbelievers.

Failing God? The effects of Church scandals on Catholic belief and affiliation in Ireland

Hugh Turpin (Queen's University Belfast)

I will present on my research into the effects of perceived 'religious hypocrisy' on religious belief and affiliation, focusing on the context of contemporary Irish Catholicism. Despite collapses in trust and practice since the promulgation of the clerical sexual abuse scandals from the early 1990s onwards and a swiftly growing minority identifying as non-religious,

survey data still return unusually high levels of religious belief and affiliation in Ireland by European standards, something that has led sociologists to propose that by and large the Irish population remain 'believers' and 'cultural Catholics' despite their growing lack of institutional engagement (Davie, 1994; Donnelly & Inglis, 2009). My research examines the accuracy of this characterisation utilising a mixed-methods approach combining ethnographic fieldwork undertaken in Dublin with experimental techniques built on a theoretical standpoint taken from the cognitive science of religion. These experiments aim to directly test whether religious credence is undermined when cultural learners witness 'Credibility Undermining Displays', namely instances where religious paragons fail to 'practice what they preach' (Henrich, 2009; Lanman, 2012). My presentation will cover the preliminary data yielded by these experiments, and compliment this with the more nuanced qualitative findings drawn from my fieldwork and interviews among informants from two Dublin parishes. Together, it is hoped that these preliminary findings will suggest insights regarding how exactly the discrediting of the Church relates to contemporary Irish secularisation.

Understanding Unbelief – project launch

Lois Lee, (UCL) – project lead
Stephen Bullivant (St Mary's University, Twickenham) – not present
Miguel Farias (Coventry University) – not present
Jonathan Lanman (Queen's University Belfast)

This plenary session introduces the Understanding Unbelief project, a major new research initiative in the study of nonreligion. This session will introduce the project and the opportunities it aims to provide researchers of atheism and other forms of unbelief and nonreligion around the world. It will also introduce methodological resources newly available for researchers working in these areas.

The growth of atheism and other forms of 'unbelief' in many parts of the world is attracting increasingly wide attention, with many commentators attempting to address the causes of 'unbelief' and its effects on a range of outcomes such as personal well-being and social cohesion. Yet significant questions remain about how to understand such phenomena, and researchers and commentators still often rely on categories developed by social actors (e.g. atheism, unbelief, agnosticism, etc.) rather than social scientists. If we are to advance our scientific understanding in these areas, we need to account for the diverse psychological and social phenomena and processes subsumed under such broad terms as atheism and unbelief. We do not currently know how best to characterize the various forms of unbelief as psychological and sociological phenomena, the extent to which other beliefs – existential beliefs, or beliefs about religion, etc. – underpin these forms, how diverse they are, and how they vary across demographic groups and cultures. Yet understanding the nature and variety of unbelief is necessary if we are, in the future, to adequately answer enduring questions about the causes of 'unbelief' and its effects on wellbeing cohesion.

With generous backing from the John Templeton Foundation, the Understanding Unbelief project aims to be the first major scientific research program to address the nature and variety of unbelief. It is designed to include (i) substantial grant competitions to generate multidisciplinary research into diverse forms of unbelief across demographic groups and cultural settings, and (ii) core interdisciplinary research working across these forms, groups, and settings to build a more integrated understanding of unbelief. Moreover, the project aims to provide a range of methodological and conceptual resources for researchers and applicants, including a flourishing multidisciplinary blog on methods for investigating unbelief, state of the art literature reviews, seminar series, and a new Oxford Dictionary of Atheism (OUP, 2016).

Biography

Lois Lee is research associate at the Institute of Advanced Studies, UCL, PI on the Scientific Study of Nonreligious Belief project (John Templeton Foundation) and Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network co-director. Recent publications include *Recognizing the Non-Religious: Reimagining the Secular* (OUP, 2015) and *Negotiating Religion: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches* (Ashgate, in press).

Stephen Bullivant is a Senior Lecturer at St Mary's University, Twickenham. Among other books, he co-edited *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism* (OUP, 2013; with M. Ruse) and *Secularity and Non-Religion* (Routledge, 2013; with L. Lee and E. Arweck), and is currently writing *The Oxford Dictionary of Atheism* (OUP) with Lois Lee.

Jonathan Lanman is Assistant Director of the Institute of Cognition & Culture, and Lecturer in Anthropology at Queen's University Belfast. His research aims to utilize the tools of both cognitive and social anthropology to examine religion, atheism, morality, and intergroup relations.

Miguel Farias leads the Brain, Belief and Behaviour group at Coventry University. He has previously been a lecturer at Oxford University where he also did his doctorate in experimental psychology. His major research interests are the psychobiological roots of beliefs and the effects of spiritual practices.
EndFragment

"The Diversity of Nonreligion:" Religious-Nonreligious Entanglements in the Netherlands, Sweden, and the Philippines

Johannes Quack, Alexander Blechschmidt, Cora Schuh & Susanne Schenk
(Emmy Noether-Project "The Diversity of Nonreligion," University of Zurich)

The research project "The Diversity of Nonreligion" was funded from 2012 to 2016 by the *German Research Council* (DFG). As part of our "closing conference" and the annual NSRN conference we present selected conceptual and empirical findings. Our research focuses on four countries with quite distinct social, political, cultural and religious contexts: the Netherlands, India, Sweden, and the Philippines. In all of them, the differentiation from religion, while at the same time being related to respective religious phenomena, played a decisive role for nonreligious actors and their identity construction as well as their social and political activism. Based on the work in our project, we will firstly present our conceptual framework for researching nonreligion *relationally*, which is inspired by sociological field theory (e.g. Bourdieu). Secondly, we will describe and discuss some of our main research findings based on our empirical case studies in three countries (the Netherlands, Sweden, and the Philippines).

In the context of a changing religious field, as well as a changing nonreligious constituency, Swedish humanists are engaged in a struggle about the adequate way of relating to, or disentangling from religion. In the Philippines, in relation to a politicized opposition to the "hegemony" of the Catholic Church and a gradual integration into global nonreligious networks, freethinkers and atheists are constantly negotiating their respective forms of "collective nonreligiosity". Taking a slightly different angle, the third case study focuses on the struggles of a social-liberal party in the Netherlands for disentangling politics from religion, thereby also having to engage with questions of what nonreligious politics would be based on. We will outline such different relational assemblages, which give insights into the conjunction of these nonreligious groups' relationships to actors whom they regard as the "religious" as well as those whom they perceive to be their "nonreligious others".