

■ The Immanent Frame

In October 2007, the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) launched The Immanent Frame, a collective blog publishing interdisciplinary perspectives on secularism, religion, and the public sphere (see <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/>). Structured around thematic discussions, The Immanent Frame hosts contributions from leading scholars across the humanities and social sciences, as well as from up-and-coming junior scholars. Contributors have included Arjun Appadurai, Talal Asad, Akeel Bilgrami, Robert Bellah, Wendy Brown, Craig Calhoun, José Casanova, Dipesh Chakrabarty, John Esposito, Nilüfer Göle, David Hollinger, Mark Juergensmeyer, Joan Wallach Scott, Charles Taylor, Mark C. Taylor, Michael Warner, and dozens more. Since its inception, The Immanent Frame has featured a variety of scholarly debates. These range from critical exchanges about *A Secular Age* and Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im's *Islam and the Secular State* to extensive discussions of the complex role of religion in the public sphere, in American politics, in cognitive science, in debates about sexuality and marriage, and in political and intellectual criticism.

In addition to its ongoing discussion series, The Immanent Frame features interviews with scholars and public figures; an “off the cuff” forum that invites leading experts to respond to current issues and public controversies related to religion and public life; and “here & there,” a filter blog featuring regularly updated web resources on religion in public life, with excerpts and links to noteworthy research reports, opinion polls, editorials, news analyses, and longer online essays, as well as new books and upcoming conferences. As with all of The Immanent Frame's features, “here & there” serves as a resource for the blog's readers, as well as an online community among its participants. In these ways and others, The Immanent Frame has pushed the boundaries of the emerging genre of academic blogging, asking how scholars can use web-based platforms to produce and disseminate new knowledge about religion and secularism while forging stronger connections across disciplinary boundaries.

The Immanent Frame has recently introduced three major new series. Launched in May 2009 with an initial contribution by historian Martin E. Marty, “These Things Are Old”—a title drawn from President Obama's Inaugural Address—responded to suggestions that Obama's public rhetoric marks the dawn of a new American civil religion. Scholars and public intellectuals interrogated this moment by responding to Obama's invocation of new—yet “old”—civic virtues rooted in an ethic of the common good. In December 2009, the “Christian Moderns” series featured critical discussion of Webb Keane's *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter*, featuring a lead essay by Keane himself. In January 2010, David Kyuman Kim launched “Rites and Responsibilities,” a new dialogue series published in conjunction with the SSRC's project on Religion and International Affairs. The series will engage scholars, religious leaders, and other public figures in discussions concerning the public life of religion in an age of globalization, especially with regard to questions of sovereignty, accountability, and authority. The inaugural conversation featured the renowned anthropolo-

gist and critical theorist Jean Comaroff of the University of Chicago. Conversations with Tariq Ramadan, Joan Scott, Andrew Bacevich, Michael Sandel, and others are forthcoming.

Jonathan VanAntwerpen, Editor

Ruth Braunstein, Editor-at-Large

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■ Max-Planck-Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity

The Department of Religious Diversity at the Max-Planck-Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Göttingen, Germany (http://www.mmg.mpg.de/english/departments/religious_diversity/rd/van_der_veer/index.html) has started in 2009 and aims to do path-breaking research on religious diversity focusing on two themes that are inter-related: Religion in Asian Mega-Cities and Globalization of Religious Networks in Asia. On the Institute's homepage, readers are invited to follow working papers, blogs, photo galleries, power point presentations and posters. Visiting fellows are invited as speakers in the regular seminar series. The department organizes a series of workshops and international conferences. Regularly there are openings for postdoctoral fellowships.

The projects include the following:

Comparative Study of Urban Aspirations in Mega-Cities

Peter van der Veer; Co-Director: Arjun Appadurai, New York University

This is a five-year project that studies the effects of the urban environment in globalizing mega-cities on the formation of ethnic and religious aspirations. The project aims to explore Asian postcolonial mega-cities—Mumbai, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. This project will directly examine the extent to which mega-cities have contributed to the paradox that modernization has not produced secularization. Furthermore, it will provide a comparative lens on those features of life in the mega-cities that most contribute to this paradox in different national and regional settings. Specifically, to distinguish the role of fantasy-machines (such as cinema); political movements (especially those that have utopian or radical tendencies); new occupations (such as those involved in new sectors such as software, tourism, entertainment, and finance) that may facilitate new religious identifications; and new neighborhood demographics, which may redefine the self and the other, present and future, hope and despair. The project is conducted in collaboration with the Tata Institute for Social Studies and the Partnership for Urban Knowledge and Research, both in Mumbai, and the National University of Singapore.

Globalization of Religious Networks

Peter van der Veer

This project aims to develop the comparative study of the globalization of religious networks in Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Daoism, and Islam. The initial focus will be on patterns of regional and global expansion from India and China, but the project will not limit itself in geographical terms. Religious movements are connected to patterns of (forced) migration and humanitarian aid that are increasingly globalized. New methodologies have to be developed to be able to study the pathways of religious globalization. Important in this project will be the study of missionaries, missionary societies, their support structure and modes of communication. Such missionary activity has to be studied comparatively across religions. The project thus complements and enriches the project on mega-cities as it will produce data

on the clergy, missionization in the borderlands and the City, the global networks of missionary churches, and the organization of people.

■ Afterlife Research Centre

The Afterlife Research Centre (ARC) is a research network and virtual forum which aims to generate, disseminate and communicate research into the afterlife. It was established in 2009 by Fiona Bowie, a social anthropologist at the University of Bristol, UK. Our focus is ethnographic and anthropological, although we also want to explore ways in which these approaches interact with others. We welcome submissions of short research papers, conference proceedings and book reviews for the ARC website: <http://afterliferesearch.info/>.

The Members Forum has a network area hosted by Ning, at <http://afterliferesearchcentre.ning.com>, and live chat facility to encourage an exchange of news and views. Individuals can use the Ning forum to post news, comments, and links, and to communicate with other members. There have been lively debates on topics such as materialization, mediumship, and transpersonal anthropology, as well as many individual conversations between academic researchers and practitioners (psychologists, hypnotherapists, mediums, and others).

Although the ontological status of the afterlife is a matter of great importance, and is an area in which anthropology can make a contribution, the focus of our efforts is on the *meaning* and *relevance* of afterlife beliefs in people's lives. We have coined the term cognitive empathetic engagement to describe the methodology we apply to the study of the afterlife. It requires the ethnographer to make an imaginative leap in order to see and interpret the world through the eyes of those they are studying. This is an act of cognition, an intellectual exercise. To do this effectively requires empathetic engagement with the people or material studied. There must be a willingness on the part of the ethnographer to enter another world, to try out a different way of understanding, and to see how the world looks through the eyes of others. This requires imagination and integrity, openness to new perspectives and to other ways of thought. It demands of the ethnographer both humility and curiosity. Our methodology does not suppose any particular background of belief on the part of the ethnographer, but does demand an effort to honestly report the results of this ethnographic experiment. Nor does it necessarily imply participation, although the ethnographer will often take part in the activities he or she describes. It is based on an assumption of respect and a willingness to enter into a dialogue with people and ideas, without predetermining any particular outcome.

The first face-to-face meeting of ARC members was during a workshop in Bristol on 12 April 2010 (see <http://afterliferesearch.info/events.html>). We plan to follow this up with a one-day event in early 2011, and to launch an on-line peer-reviewed journal. Any one interested in contributing to any of these areas by submitting items for the website or future journal, or by joining the forum, is welcome.

■ The Non-Religion and Secularity Research Network

Religion and secularism have tended to have their different moments of scrutiny in the social sciences, moments in which the one has often become a question posed by sympathizers of the other. The contemporary situation is somewhat different: today religion and secularism are being subject to similar scrutiny at the same moment. This development is enabling

researchers to ask new questions of both as well as to transcend the old model of aggressive/defensive debate and move toward reflexivity within their own traditions and toward collaboration with those from others.

New questions demand new and innovative empirical and theoretical approaches, and one significant innovation has been the emergence of *nonreligion* as an object of study, seen in anthropology and other social sciences. This program of research has noticed the great number of questions to which nonreligion research might speak. Cognitive anthropologists and psychologists, for example, have begun to notice that their work on the cognitive conditions for theism is incomplete unless they consider likewise the cognitive conditions of nontheism. In social anthropology and sociology, the exploration of symbolic and communal aspects of nonreligious life stand to provide important insights into the nature of symbolism and community in human life in general, as well as open to scrutiny the classic theory that such phenomena have a particular relationship with religion. For those involved in political and normative projects, urgent reasons for better understanding how the nonreligious perceive and interact with religious people are beginning to be recognized. Moreover, in religious studies in general, the study of nonreligion is important to fundamental questions pertaining to the nature of religion itself, following the question, what, if anything, makes non-religion *not*religious?

The Non-Religion and Secularity Research Network (NSRN) was set up in 2008 in recognition of such questions and the momentum building about the task of answering them by Lois Lee (founding director, University of Cambridge). Taking the concepts of nonreligion and secularity to demarcate this work was intended to recognize a specific but under-researched, under-theorized, and therefore necessarily general subject field. Thus, the NSRN's research agenda is inclusive of a range of perspectives and experiences, including the atheistic, agnostic, religiously indifferent, or areligious, as well as various forms of secularism, humanism and, indeed, aspects of religion and religious experience itself. Our agenda also addresses theoretical and empirical relationships among that which can be demarcated as religion, nonreligion, and secularity.

Aiming to consolidate research from what was, in 2008, still a diffuse subject field, the NSRN has been building a body of resources to help consolidate, communicate, and inspire research in the area. The NSRN website—attracting some 900 unique users each month (to take the recent quarterly average)—is chief among these resources (www.nsrn.co.uk). With directories of researchers, postgraduate projects and institutes within the field, as well as a subject bibliography and events information, the website aims to make nonreligion research centrally available, to academic and nonacademic users alike. The website is currently being expanded to provide practical resources for those conducting empirical work in the field and to provide more information about current and forthcoming taught programs on nonreligion and secularity.

Communication between nonreligion and secularity researchers is supported by email lists, for announcement and discussion, and by our events program. Our inaugural conference was held in December 2009 at Wolfson College, Oxford, with an international and interdisciplinary group of researchers and practitioners discussing “Non-Religion and Secularity: New Empirical Perspectives.” We look forward to our second conference in 2011, and a number of smaller events in the coming months.

Anthropological approaches stand to make some of the most significant contributions to the field: secularity and nonreligion in practice are often noninstitutionalized phenomena and their qualitative and ethnographic study therefore present one of the greatest and most interesting challenges to Non-Religious and Secular research. In our upcoming projects, therefore, the NSRN is particularly interested to work with anthropologists to support this research.

If you would like to participate in the NSRN—to be listed on the website, involved in email lists, to make suggestions for how we can improve our work, or participate more actively in the running of the NSRN—please visit our website for information and contact details.

■ Teaching Religion in the Social Sciences

Teaching Religion in the Social Sciences special interest group was established by the Centre for Sociology, Anthropology and Politics (C-SAP); one of twenty-four subject centers within the UK's Higher Education Academy, which aims to improve the quality of all involved in the student learning experience in higher education. The aim of the group is to explore the relationship between the teaching and learning of social science approaches to religion in general and religion in the public sphere in particular, including the exercise of religious identities, which raises important questions for students, teachers, and researchers. The group was launched with a workshop at Church House in London on 4 July 2008. Since then discussion among the group members has developed around a number of themes.

When approaching a topic as emotive as religion, it is all too easy to get tied into traditional disciplinary debates rather than engage with contemporary issues that may be difficult, but require attention. These include religion in the media, religion and violence/terrorism, or religion and youth culture. The issues that are raised when discussing religion in the classroom sometimes reflect, but often challenge the world that we live in. Academics conducting research on religion recognize that the social and political meanings of the category are complex and fluid. Teaching about religion therefore needs to keep pace with change to avoid static or essentialist readings. An important question that has been raised is whether the incorporation of film and other media into teaching can help to convey the religious experience of others to students or merely serves to exoticize it.

Another issue is whether it is possible, or even appropriate, in the social sciences, to create communities of practice in which students and teachers feel free to share their personal views on matters of religion, particularly when classes include students who belong to a particular faith tradition and may experience a tension between critical study and loyalty to their tradition. This raises familiar questions about whether we can understand a religious tradition better from the perspective of the believer or the observer, but the issues regarding the study of religious behavior from a social science perspective are more complex than can be fully captured in discussions about 'insider/outsider' problems or 'methodological agnosticism'.

In 2009 it was decided that the group should have an online presence and this resulted in the development of the Teaching Religion in the Social Sciences (TRiSS) wiki. The wiki is intended to act as a virtual forum to share experiences, resources, and good practice as well as to discuss issues with other teachers and students. Members are encouraged to discuss issues they have encountered in their own teaching and learning practice and to comment on or add to the wiki as they see fit. In order to join the wiki visit <http://triss.pbworks.com>.

■ Network of Anthropology of Religion

Simon Coleman and Ramon Sarró run an Anthropology of Religion list-serve under the auspices of the European Association of Social Anthropologists. Traffic on the List-serve is deliberately kept at a manageable level, and provides news of jobs, conferences, publications, and other developments related to the topic. To subscribe visit <http://lists.easaonline.org/listinfo.cgi/religion-easaonline.org>