
Introduction

A Decade of Religion and Society

Memory, Epistemology, and Religious Pluralism

This volume of *Religion and Society* is a special one. First, with this edition we celebrate our 10th anniversary. While our personnel have changed to some degree,¹ our remit has remained largely the same. We present theoretically and methodologically challenging studies of religion through a variety of formats that place religion at the center of analysis and enable those who study religious phenomena to engage in debate and dialogue with each other. In recent years, our approach has also cemented ties with the Society for the Anthropology of Religion, a subsection of the American Anthropological Association. Over the entirety of the last decade, we have continued to publish exceptional interdisciplinary scholarship in social and cultural analyses of religion.

Second, the portrait of this volume is dedicated to one of the foremost scholars in the anthropology of religion over the last 20 years, Saba Mahmood, who passed away in March 2018. We honor Professor Mahmood's memory with the contributions of three colleagues, each of whom recalls her acuity, her work, and her wit with tenderness and sadness at the reality of her life cut short.² Amira Mittermaier, Susan Harding, and Michael Lambek each discuss a poignant personal history with their friend and colleague, as well as a profound professional respect for her. As Mittermaier, a fellow ethnographer of Egypt, expresses it, both students and colleagues have come to experience a "sense of indebtedness" to Mahmood for how she laid the groundwork to create a new kind of discussion about the role of religion in political life and self-cultivation. A mentor to many, Saba Mahmood changed the field with her critical discussions of secularism, religion, and, in particular, Islam.

Third, this volume marks the first time we publish the Rappaport Lecture, the keynote lecture delivered at the biennial meeting of the Society for the Anthropology of Religion. We are delighted to print Joel Robbins's 2019 talk, "On Knowing Faith: Theology, Everyday Religion, and Anthropological Theory," in these pages. Robbins calls for using emic knowledge—in this case, theological knowledge of a new generation of Christians from Papua New Guinea—as one form of theoretical epistemology through which we can undertake the anthropology of religion. Indeed, we always need to take the epistemology of our informants at face value in some way, Robbins argues, no matter what form it takes or however recently it may seem to have arrived in a particular cultural context or religious landscape.

Our articles section includes three characteristically complex and richly detailed case studies that also elucidate larger themes in religion and its political cast in contemporary societies. Galina Oustinova-Stjepanovic describes in an astonishing ethnography two competing factions in the Macedonian Rifai Sufi community, with one group arguing for a 'traditionalist' or mystical interpretation of rite, and the other arguing for a kind of reform that challenges 'wonder', calling instead for a 'demystification' of the region's historical rituals. These competing discourses about



wonder take place not only against the backdrop of Yugoslav socialism, but also against that of global modernity, and in particular the tensions between textual and lived religion. The intra-group debates, Oustinova-Stjepanovic argues, center on what may legitimately be experienced in a public, post-socialist Islamic context.

Don Seeman and Michael Karlin investigate seemingly contradictory—but in practice apparently reconciled—discourses of secular ‘mindfulness’ and Chabad Hasidism. Here, mindfulness does the work of bringing Chabad practitioners’ awareness to the processes of mental focus, discipline, and consciousness, even if this form of religious practice technically derives from another religion. Casting mindfulness as a secular practice allows it to be imported effectively into what Seeman and Karlin call ‘Hasidic modernism.’

Valentina Napolitano investigates Pope Francis in light of his role as a Criollo, or Creole. Despite a theological premise prominent in Latin America that all humans share the blood of Christ, Francis’s literal and symbolic role as a Criollo—both as a child of Italian parents in Argentina and, in the political sense, as an advocate for those marginalized by dominant or elite groups of society—has marked and continues to inform his papacy. Through an analytical lens directed at Pope Francis’s affective relations with his congregants—touch and the ‘embrace,’ the washing of feet, the smell of incense—Napolitano suggests that Francis challenges dominant race relations discourses inherent in contemporary Catholicism, and thus serves the role of a social and political ‘disrupter’ of established power dynamics.

Our special section, “Siting Pluralism,” edited by Jeremy F. Walton and Neena Mahadev, takes up a central theme in the contemporary social sciences of religion: how do different religious groups articulate their identity, and how do collectives negotiate the spatial politics of religious difference? In short, how is ‘interreligious pluralism’ possible, especially in places that privilege majority religions? Following on from the three articles above, which each consider the role of dominant and minority religions, the articles in this section consider religion as a social form that is almost always multiple, and whose plural forms are usually navigated in shared space. In their introduction, the special section editors argue against the simplicity of religious plurality understood as a set of discrete groups who wish to contest historical dominance or hierarchy. Instead, interreligious pluralism is offered as a way of contextualizing relations between groups in particular historical periods and places, with an eye to the interaction, negotiation, and often mutual influence that typically come into play.

The four essays that follow take up remarkably diverse case studies. First, Elina Hartikainen addresses the role of courts in adjudicating religion in the legal sphere in Brazil. She shows that, in the Brazilian context as in many others, majoritarian religions tend to have the upper hand even in legal rulings that are designed to protect religious freedom of expression and minority religions. Here, the law is in a position to define religion (along with secularism) and to assess its appropriate relation with—and locations in—the state. Hartikainen’s cases consider the implicit conflict between Evangelical Christians and Afro-Brazilian religions: caught in the in-between spaces of the state, Afro-Brazilian (minority or Criollo) religions fall through the legal cracks that are ostensibly there to protect religious expression and freedom.

Melissa Caldwell then takes up the famous case of Pussy Riot, the feminist punk rock band that set itself up in the largest Russian Orthodox cathedral in Moscow, to consider multiple forms of pluralism. Caldwell suggests that the band “did not transgress a religious space so much as they transgressed norms about the appropriate nature and use of that religious space,” as well as transgressing normative notions about women’s appropriate conduct in supposed religious contexts. This case is but one example through which to consider how religious and political settings may give way to each other in contemporary Moscow. Each encounter requires a set of public negotiations in the city’s space and among its multiple religious institutions.

Neena Mahadev's article assesses the politics of sacrifice within minority religious movements in Sri Lanka, based in a Buddhist soteriology rather than a Christian theology, and including Girardian interpretations. She argues that the navigation of sacrifice is necessary in the pluralist religious ethos of Sri Lanka if it wishes to hold to a post-civil-conflict peace. As with the other articles in this special section, the case she describes is carefully situated in its particular context, paying attention to the exigencies of specific historical legacies of interaction.

Finally, Jeremy F. Walton and Piro Rexhepi look at pluralization within a so-called singular religion in multiple sovereign states following the break-up of the previously unified state of Yugoslavia. As a minority religion, Islam might have been cast precisely as a monolithic entity once the federal republics became sovereign, but the authors show that a multiplicity of nations here have exhibited a consciousness about the social, cultural, and historical reasons for differences that have developed in their Islamic institutions as well. Winnifred Fallers Sullivan concludes the special section with a capstone commentary.

This volume represents some of the finest work of anthropologists and other scholars of religion working in the field today. We are proud to feature this material, and we are grateful to our readers for looking to us as a steadfast scholarly endeavor to support our field—the social science of religion. We look forward to our next decade.

Sondra L. Hausner, Ruy Llera Blanes, and Simon Coleman

■ **NOTES**

1. We must thank Ramon Sarró for his efforts in helping to found the journal.
2. The contributions by Michael Lambek and Susan Harding were originally presented at the 2018 American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, held in San Jose, California, for the memorial event entitled “Honoring Saba Mahmood,” organized by Mayanthi Fernando. We are thankful for the organization of the event, and we are grateful to the authors for agreeing to revise and publish their contributions in this journal.