

NONRELIGION AND SECULARITY
RESEARCH NETWORK
CONFERENCE 2025

September 8-10, 2025
Bratislava, Slovakia

Nonreligion and Secularity at Cultural Crossroads

Book of Abstracts

Edited by:

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Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network

The Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network (NSRN) is an international and interdisciplinary network of researchers founded in 2008. The NSRN aims to centralise existing research on the topic of nonreligion and secularity and to facilitate discussion in this area.

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CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Monday, Sept 8

1:00–2:00 PM	
REGISTRATION	
2:00–2:30 PM	
OPENING CEREMONY	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atko REMMEL, NSRN President • Radomír MASARYK, vice-rector of the Comenius University in Bratislava • Tatiana ZACHAR PODOLINSKÁ, director of the Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology, Slovak Academy of Sciences 	
2:30–4:00 PM	
SESSION 1 (Room no 1) Rituals, death and mysticism in post-religious societies	SESSION 2 (Room no 2) Author-meets-critics session. Families and Religion. Dynamics of Transmission across Generations (2025)
4:00–4:30 PM	
Coffee break	
4:30–6:00 PM	
CLOSED SESSION 3 (Room no 1) Nonreligion and the environment	CLOSED SESSION 4 (Room no 2) Varieties of nonreligion around the world
6:00–8:00 PM	
Welcome party	

Tuesday, Sept 9

9:30–11:00 AM	
SESSION 5 (Room no 1) Ethics, morality, and nonreligion	SESSION 6 (Room no 2) Central and Eastern European perspectives
11:30 AM–12:30 PM	
Keynote: Eva Patzelt (Room Plus)	
–	
Lunch	
2:00–3:30 PM	
SESSION 7 (Room no 1) Childhood and youth in (non)religious contexts	CLOSED SESSION 8 (Room no 2) Conceptualizing and measuring nonreligion
3:30–4:00 PM	
Coffee break	
4:00–5:30 PM	
SESSION 9 (Room no 1) Teaching and learning (non)religion	SESSION 10 (Room no 2) Historical and discursive shifts
7:00 PM	
CONFERENCE DINNER at Dunajsky pivovar (The Danube Brewery) Google Maps	

Links for online participation (UTC+2):

Teams link for [even-numbered sessions, opening and keynote](#)

Teams link for [odd-numbered sessions and closing](#)

Wednesday, Sept 10

10:00–11:30 AM	
SESSION 11 (Room no 1) Re-emerging and minority secularisms	SESSION 12 (Room no 2) Global patterns of (non)religious change
11:30–12:00 AM	
Coffee break / Lunch	
12:00–1:30 PM	
CLOSED SESSION 13 (Room no 1) Flipsides and shadows. The secularist project in Belgium, 19 th -20 th century	
1:30–2:00 PM	
Closing	

KEYNOTE SPEECH

BETWEEN GODLESSNESS AND INDIFFERENCE: NONRELIGION IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE, PAST AND PRESENT

Eva Guigo-Patzelt

Tuesday, September 9th 2025, 11:30 AM

Research on nonreligion in Central and Eastern Europe has gained momentum in recent years, connecting studies on atheism in its recent history with the larger nonreligious and secular studies. The significance of the communist era in the history of East- and Central-European nonreligion but also for its present situation is worth considering. The regimes of so-called real socialism had a tendency to impose a single, specific form of atheism, often subsumed under the keyword scientific atheism, at the expense not only of religious belief but also of a variety of freethought and irreligion (Bubík, Rimmel and Václavík 2020). This ideal of atheism however has experienced variations over time – best seen in the Soviet Union (Gleixner 2020) – and between countries. The image that emerges is rather one of diversity of nonreligious identities, ranging from militant Soviet “godless” to wide-spread indifference towards the whole issue of religion vs. atheism, anticlericalism inherited from the 19th century and emotional atheism conflicting with a more intellectual one, to name just some phenomena. One may ask whether this diversity has been arranged in a specific, “Central-Eastern-European” way by a comparable political and ideological framework in recent history. It is true, however, that the relevance of the East-West divide for studying today’s spiritual landscape has been called into question (Ładykowska,

Teisenhoffer and Testa 2024). How specific is the CEE region, how lasting was the mark of the communist period, or might elder common regional features prove even more important (Buchenau 2024)? By its common heritages and its intern variations, Central and Eastern Europe yields interesting impulses for the reflection on nonreligion.

Eva Guigo-Patzelt studied political sciences, history and theology in France and Poland and is now attached to the CéSor research group (École des Hautes Études en Sciences sociales/Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) in Paris. The PhD she earned at Sorbonne University was published in Routledge's "Studies in Religion" series in 2025 under the title *Scientific Atheism in East Germany (1963–1990): How to Turn a Hare into a Lion*. As part of a project funded by the Explaining Atheism programme she organised an international conference in 2023 and edited a collected volume on *Communist Perspectives on Atheism in the Twentieth Century* (Routledge, 2025).



SESSION 1

RITUALS, DEATH AND MYSTICISM IN
POST-RELIGIOUS SOCIETIES

Monday, September 8th, 2025, 2:30-4:00 PM

Chair: David Herbert

NON-CHURCH DEATH RITUALS IN GERMANY AS
NON-RELIGIOUS FUNERAL?**Manuel Volkmann**

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Funerary services and mourning rituals which take place outside of the Christian-church in context in western societies are often assumed to be counter-religious or non-denominational, in the least, ideologically unbound. This can lead to (aspects of) such ceremonial observances as being alluded to as secular or non-religious; even more, these allusions often remain almost entirely unquestioned. Such attributions are accepted by many, even within the Studies of Religion, as intuitively meaningful statements and thus non-church funeral culture remains uncritically associated with a counter-religious or secular positioning. As part of my doctoral project, I critically explore the aforementioned themes. For my project, I do not, however, definitively position non-church funeral culture as opposed to religion as described above, but rather, I propose the terminology of non*religion as a working concept in order to better grasp the complexities contained within non-church funeral culture; interacting with, and adjacent to, broader discourses on non-religion and secularity, but not in direct opposition to religion.

DANCING WITH DEATH IN POST-CHRISTIAN SOCIETIES: NEGOTIATING THE SOCIAL ORDER THROUGH NONRELIGIOUS USE OF CHRISTIAN FUNERAL PRACTICES IN NORDIC POPULAR CULTURE

David Herbert, Patrycja Pankau

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Nordic societies are characterized by very low regular participation in religious services or other religious practices in global terms, and a majority of the population does not identify with any religion. Yet culturally they are deeply marked by a Christian (Lutheran) legacy, state churches play a significant role in marking rites of passage, including funerals, and appeals to Christian heritage play a significant role in contestations around national identity. In this context we examine how nonreligious actors use Christian funeral practices to negotiate and narrate nonreligious meanings of death and to make social commentary, using comedic forms such as satire and parody on broadcast and social media platforms (e.g Takk for Alt series on VG tv, TikTok, and Instapoetry). In our interpretation we are influenced by Charles Taylor's concept of the 'secular social imaginary' with its genealogical dependence on Christian cultural forms.

AS IN LIFE, SO IN DEATH: THE LIFEWAYS AND DEATHWAYS THAT SHAPE GREEN BURIAL IN CANADA

Chris Miller

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Green burial describes an alternative to conventional burial or cremation which seeks to minimize environmental impact. Principles of green burial include no embalming and using only natural, biodegradable materials. Drawing on conversations with stakeholders

in the green burial movement, this paper analyzes how this practice is informed by people's nonreligious identities as well as their relationships with nature.

With an emphasis on sustainability, this practice is partly shaped by outlooks on the nature. From avid gardeners and hikers to eco-activists, many who want natural burial have lifelong commitments to protecting and admiring the earth. Green burial offers a practical extension of these motives. Green burial is also shaped by religious transformation. Customary death rites reflect Christian beliefs regarding death and heavenly resurrection. As Christian affiliation declines, people increasingly view such traditions as unnecessary. Instead, many yearn for rituals which they find personally meaningful. Through death practices that foreground relationships to nature, I argue that green burial represents a ritual act that expresses both reverential naturalism and immanent understandings of what happens after death.

SESSION 2

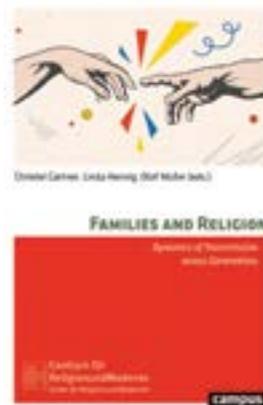
AUTHOR-MEETS-CRITICS SESSION

Monday, September 8th, 2025, 2:30-4:00 PM

Chair: Roberta Ricucci

FAMILIES AND RELIGION. DYNAMICS OF
TRANSMISSION ACROSS GENERATIONS, 2025,
CAMPUS**Editors: Christel Gärtner, Linda Hennig, Olaf Müller**

This AMC session will discuss the following book “Families and Religion. Dynamics of Transmission across Generations”, which examines comparatively the transmission of religion in families in Germany, Italy, Hungary, Finland and Canada. The authors rely on the widely shared argument that religious change can primarily be understood as an intergenerational process. Based on a mixed-methods design, the question is investigated of how, when exactly and under what conditions the subsequent generations become less religious than the previous ones. From the perspective of familial and historical generations, the authors examine the significance of (religious) socialization for the transmission of (non-) religious worldviews, affiliations, practices, and identities. According to a central finding, religious change takes place primarily in the phase of adolescence against the background of the respective social context.



Session organizer and introduction:

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CLOSED SESSION 3

NONRELIGION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Monday, September 8th, 2025, 4:30-6:00 PM

Chair: Patrycja Pankau

The shift to nonreligion is having profound impacts on our attitudes and practices in all areas of life. This panel explores in particular how this shift is shaping views and practices around the environment. The panel considers questions such as: Why are more and more people opting for “green burials” and what does this tell us about their attitudes toward the afterlife and their relationship with the environment? How do community gardeners deal with pests in their gardens and what does this reveal about their lifestyles? How do nonreligion lifestyles shape understandings of climate change? And how do religious and nonreligious people collaborate in environmental activism?

UNDERSTANDING LIFESTANCES THROUGH NONRELIGIOUS VIEWS ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Lauren Strumos

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This paper applies the concept of ‘lifestyles,’ formulated by researchers of the Nonreligion in a Complex Future project, to explore how nonreligious individuals articulate their perspectives on climate change. Empirical data is drawn from semi-structured interviews with settler or non-Indigenous individuals actively opposed to an oil pipeline project in British Columbia, Canada. The paper highlights how participants with nonreligious lifestyles use science to frame their views on climate change, while evoking a

social imaginary that has been shaped by a history of majoritarian Christianity. In analysing this dynamic, this paper aims to contribute to a growing body of social scientific research that explores the association between science and nonreligion or the secular in modern western societies. It further aims to complicate a binary approach to religion and nonreligion, while demonstrating how 'lifestances' can be used to capture the contours of (non)religion in climate change discourse.

ENVIRONMENTAL COLLABORATION BEYOND BELIEF: EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF RELIGIOUS AND NON-RELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT IN CANADA

Hinna Hussain

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Religious worldviews profoundly shape how individuals perceive environmental issues, yet their motivations for environmental action are not solely rooted in religious beliefs. This paper aims to explore how people from religious and non-religious backgrounds come together to work on environmental causes beyond their association or dissociation with religion. It seeks to determine whether environmental concerns can serve as a common ground for interaction and collaboration among these individuals. Through a combination of interviews and participant observation, the paper intends to gain insights into the motivations, perspectives, and challenges of people contributing to environmental initiatives in Ottawa, Toronto, Victoria, and Vancouver. By employing the concept of "lived religions," the paper explores how the experiences of religious and non-religious individuals differ in their terms of engagement with environmental issues.

CLOSED SESSION 4

VARIETIES OF NONRELIGION AROUND THE WORLD

Monday, September 8th, 2025, 4:30-6:00 PM

Chair: Zsuzsanna Szugyiczki

Much research on nonreligion has centred on North America and Europe, resulting in rather Eurocentric and American imaginaries of nonreligion. Yet, nonreligion varies from context to context and so too does the conceptualization of nonreligion. This panel brings together scholars working in different geographical areas, particularly South America and the Middle East, and considers questions like: How does nonreligion appear through feminist identities and in education systems in Brazil? And how do nonreligious Arabs and Turks navigate their identities in a majority-Muslim context?

NONRELIGION ON INSTAGRAM: THE CONSTRUCTION OF ANTIFEMINIST POLITICAL IDENTITY IN BRAZIL

Olivia Barbosa

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This paper explores the concept of nonreligion through an analysis of antifeminist activism on Instagram in Brazil, emphasizing how religious repertoire is mobilized in a diluted or generic form. Drawing on digital ethnography conducted between 2020 and 2024, I examine how self-proclaimed antifeminist activists use the aesthetics and functionalities of Instagram to construct and stabilize a political identity distinct from explicitly religious activism. By combining a religious repertoire with “secular” ones in politics, these activists shape a generic Christianity, emphasizing traditional family values

and domesticity. The concept of nonreligion can be a critical analytical tool to understand identities that position themselves at the intersection of religion and public life without conforming strictly to established religious doctrines. This analysis contributes theoretically to discussions about nonreligion by challenging clear-cut distinctions between religious and nonreligious identities in contemporary digital environments.

“RELIGION WAS IMPOSED ON ME SINCE DAY 7”: ARAB NONES AND THE CONCEALMENT OF THEIR (NON) RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

Saqib H. Khateeb

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This paper explores the experiences of nonreligious young Arabs, focusing on the reflections shared by participants about how religion (Islam) was imposed upon them from infancy. Drawing on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews, the research explores how respondents recount their experiences of being socialized into a religion without their consent and knowledge, often subjected to religious practices and beliefs since childhood. The study highlights how these early encounters with Islam shaped their eventual rejection of the faith and their continued concealment of nonreligious identities. Participants reveal how fear of religious punishments, which have political ramifications, compels them to hide their nonreligious beliefs in a religiously dominant society, where being a none can lead to social ostracism and even punitive measures. This research contributes to the understanding of nonreligion within the Arab/Muslim contexts, shedding light on how religious imposition from an early age influences identity formation and the complex interplay between religion, politics, and social conformity.

UNVEILING THE PATH TO NONRELIGIOSITY: (NON) RELIGIOUS SOCIALIZATION AND RELIGIOUS EXITING FACTORS THROUGH A BIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CASE OF FUAT

Mehmet Ali Basak

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This study investigates the life trajectory of religious exit within the socio-cultural context of Türkiye through a biographical analysis of Fuat, a 29-year-old psychological counseling and guidance teacher raised in a devout Muslim family. It explores the role of (non) religious socialization and the interplay of push and pull factors in shaping the transition from religion to nonreligion. The study proposes a two-tiered model of religious transformation. The first tier emphasizes early religious socialization, rooted in familial practices and institutional religious exposure. The second tier, emerging in adolescence (around age 14), introduces alternative forms of (non) religious socialization shaped by schooling, peer groups, and lifestyle changes. The analysis highlights that religious exit is not solely driven by external structural factors, but also involves a reflexive, agentic process in which individuals critically interrogate and reconfigure their beliefs and practices. In a context like Türkiye, where Islamic norms are deeply embedded in social life, such a shift toward nonreligiosities illustrates the complex negotiation between traditional religious frameworks and modern pluralistic influences.

SESSION 5

ETHICS, MORALITY, AND NONRELIGION

Tuesday, September 9th, 2025, 9:30-11:00 AM

Chair: Kirsten Lesage

NONRELIGION, ETHICS, AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH NATURE

Douglas Ezzy, Genevieve Burley

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In this talk we draw from the Nonreligion in a Complex Future Project's research to map people's understandings of their relationship to nature while walking in nature. We argue that ethics, care, and 'meaning' emerge through the relational practice of walking in nature. We apply Beaman, Cragun, and Ezzy's concept of 'beyond the binary' of religion and nonreligion and Beaman and Ezzy's concept of 'a space of becoming' to conceptualise the nonreligious aspects of practice, relationships (human and other-than-human), and meaning that emerge through this practice.

TRUST AND MORAL EVALUATION OF ATHEISTS: INSIGHTS FROM A VIGNETTE-BASED SURVEY WITH GERMAN YOUTH

Jonas Bonke

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This paper investigates trust-based prejudice against atheists among adolescents and young adults in Germany, drawing on the Anti-Atheist Prejudice framework (Gervais et al., 2011), which pos-

its that religious belief serves as a heuristic for moral trustworthiness. Using a vignette-based survey conducted among students aged 14–20 (N = 989) from secondary schools and vocational programs in North Rhine-Westphalia, the study examines how atheists, Christians, and Muslims are perceived in scenarios related to trust, moral integrity, rule-breaking behavior, and moral competence. Participants responded to standardized moral vignettes involving lost wallets, norm violations, and collective decision-making, each including predefined religious identifiers. Preliminary findings indicate that atheists are evaluated differently from religious targets, particularly when moral authority or decision-making is involved. While overt negativity was rare, subtle forms of distrust and reduced attributions of moral competence emerged. The study critically reexamines core assumptions of the Anti-Atheist Prejudice approach in the sociocultural context of secularizing German youth.

CONTEMPORARY LAMENTATIONS ON THE DEMISE OF MYSTICISM - UNDERSTANDING MODERN MYSTICISM AS NONRELIGION

Zsuzsanna Szugyiczki

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The category of non-religious mysticism is well-known in the study of mysticism, but recent developments in the field suggest viewing modern mysticism altogether as non-religious. Similar narratives are often based on dichotomous comparisons between traditional and modern mysticism and take a derogatory approach to the latter. Modern mysticism is seen as muddled and superficial, or not mysticism at all; its disappearance is predicted through the theory of secularization, or its overwhelming diversity is a source of consternation to scholars. The consequence of these narratives is a

partial or total disregard for the scientific study of modern mystical phenomena, which is considered untraditional, nonreligious, and therefore unworthy of attention. This study aims, firstly, to categorize contemporary narratives of the demise of mysticism. Secondly, it aims to reopen the conversation before adequate alternative interpretive frameworks.

SESSION 6

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN
PERSPECTIVES

Tuesday, September 9th, 2025, 9:30-11:00 AM

Chair: Michal Uhrin

BEING NONRELIGIOUS IN A RELIGIOUS CONTEXT:
CASES FROM RURAL ENVIRONMENT IN SLOVAKIA¹**Michal Uhrin***Comenius University in Bratislava (Slovakia), michal.uhrin@uniba.sk*

It is well known that religion and rituals have the potential to promote intra-group cohesion, solidarity and cooperation. In addition, they also provide a variety of benefits to their members under conditions where members sufficiently declare and communicate their adherence to the group. Many rural areas in Slovakia are characterized by a high percentage of members of a particular Christian denomination and a relatively small percentage of non-practising believers, non-believers or atheists. The data presented were obtained through long-term ethnographic research carried out in four rural localities in Slovakia. I will pay attention to the attitudes of the inhabitants of these localities, who identify themselves as believers, towards the inhabitants who identify themselves as non-believers. In this context, I will also examine the strategies of individuals who identify themselves as non-believers or non-practising believers living in rural localities that are characterized by high numbers of

¹ Funded by project: APVV-22-0063 – Reproductions of Religious and Worldview Structures in Slovakia. One hundred and fifty years of changes. Funded by the European Union (ERC project DEAGENCY, № 101095729). Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

members of Christian denominations. In this context, by strategies I mean how individuals resolve the contrasts between their beliefs and the prevailing religious beliefs in a particular locality. In this paper, I will also analyse the potential negative implications that would result from openly declaring atheism or self-identifying as a non-believer. This paper presents an exploratory ethnographic study, and therefore, the aim is to outline possible trends in the mentioned research problems and to open questions for further research.

SECULAR ACTIVISM IN AUSTRIA. ORGANIZED NONRELIGION AND ITS EFFORTS FOR POLITICAL SECULARISM, EQUAL TREATMENT AND VISIBILITY

Elisabeth Waldl

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There exists a small but active community for secular activism in Austria. Various collective and individual actors are engaged intensively in the establishment of a strict separation of state and religion. They criticize the privileged position of religious communities – especially of the Roman Catholic Church – on a societal, political and legal level and one of their objectives is to make the discrimination of religiously unaffiliated people more visible. Substantive arguments in their critique are the neutrality of the state concerning worldview and religion, human rights and the ever-growing share of unaffiliated people within the Austrian population. My master's thesis in religious studies focuses on these secular collective actors and their commitment to political secularism. In my lecture, I would like to present the results based on my extensive empirical fieldwork and discuss the diverse demands, self-conceptions and strategies of secular activism in Austria.

GLOCALISING THE DISCOURSE OF NEW ATHEISM: CULTURAL MEMORY AND PRACTICES OF THE POLISH SECULARIST MOVEMENT.

Jacek Skrzypek

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New Atheism is a global phenomenon. Its influence is particularly interesting in countries like Poland, where the continuity of the secular movement has been repeatedly disrupted by moments of historical bifurcation. In Poland, the early 21st century saw the emergence of atheist associations, the introduction of new practices aimed at securing a secularist presence in the public sphere, and efforts to establish symbolic foundations for their activities. In this last aspect, a certain tension becomes apparent. While New Atheism remains a vital source of inspiration for many Polish atheists, its vocabulary emerged in a different cultural context; it both inspires and uproots what is local. The peripheral position of Polish secularist organizations within global discourses means that activists seek ways to anchor their activities within frameworks they construct as distinctly Polish. One such anchor is the figure of Kazimierz Łyszczyński. My presentation will focus on cultural memory and the commemorative practices surrounding this figure

SESSION 7

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH IN (NON)RELIGIOUS
CONTEXTS

Tuesday, September 9th, 2025, 2:00-3:30 PM

Chair: Atko Rimmel

(NON)RELIGIOUS CHILDHOODS?: CONTEXTUALIZING
EARLY EXPERIENCES OF RELIGION, NONRELIGION,
AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN FLANDERS, GREECE,
AND NORWAY

Sofia Nikitaki*KU Leuven (Belgium), sofia.nikitaki@kuleuven.be*

Childhood experiences of (non)religion are embedded in particular cultural and institutional contexts, shaping the formation of (non)religious identities later in life. This paper examines how nonreligious adults from different national contexts recalled their childhood encounters with (non)religion and religious education (RE), drawing on qualitative research with 64 nonreligious Millennials from Belgium, Greece, and Norway. The findings indicate that the different cultural and institutional settings of RE significantly impact childhood experiences of (non)religion: while Belgian and Norwegian participants generally described RE as 'neutral' or 'informative' within secularized school systems, Greek participants overwhelmingly recalled their RE as 'catechetical,' 'indoctrinating,' and 'restrictive.' Beyond formal education, broader cultural dynamics also played a crucial role in shaping early (non)religious identities. By examining these contextual influences, this paper contributes to discussions on how different educational and cultural settings shape (non)religious worldviews, offering insights into the long-term impact of childhood encounters with (non)religion.

THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILIAL, SOCIAL AND SOCIETAL CONTEXT ON NON-RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

Christel Gärtner

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Based on interviews with non-religious three-generation families from West and East Germany, I would like to argue that both the adoption of non-religion and one's own positioning depend on the family, social and societal context. Initially, a non-religious identity is shaped by familial socialization. Later, in adolescence, one's own positioning is strongly influenced by the peer group. We have to bear in mind that both developmental stages are embedded in a social framework for which the degree of secularization is crucial. In my paper, I would like to show how different generations are confronted with different contextual conditions that influence their respective ties in different ways.

GENERATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE NEVER RELIGIOUS

Atko Remmel

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Based on the interviews with the nonreligious in Estonia, the paper takes look at the generational differences of people, who have never been religious, and explores their their sets of ideas and attitudes. As it turns out, the key factor in shaping the attitudes and ideas is the (lack of) visibility of religion. Cultural religion, fuzzy fidelity or vicarious religion suit better for describing the first generation of nones, who have been exposed to religion in their formative years. However, the 2nd and 3rd generations, who have lived their entire lives in a (seemingly) nonreligious environment, are much more affected by secondary socialization that is also responsible for the endurance of nonreligion as a "chain of memory".

CLOSED SESSION 8

CONCEPTUALIZING AND MEASURING NONRELIGION

Tuesday, September 9th, 2025, 2:00-3:30 PM

Chair: Manuel Volkmann

One of the central scholarly debates in the field remains how exactly to define, conceptualize, and measure nonreligion. How does nonreligion relate to other categories like religion? Is nonreligion simply an absence or a lack of religion? What does a nonreligious identity consist of? This panel brings together scholars working in different areas to examine these questions, moving from conceptual questions to practical results of measuring nonreligion. Linguistic approaches to nonreligion may open novel possibilities for thinking about this phenomenon. Survey measures can also reveal the extent of (non)religiosity, but as data from the Cultural and Social Values Survey shows, using different measures can meaningfully impact the level of nonreligion we find. Using the same survey data, panelists also explore how (non)religious identities are conceived in relation to nature, and the effects of migration on (non)religious transmission across generations.

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL LINGUISTIC APPROACH TO NONRELIGION

Renata Nagamine

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In a work in progress within the project Nonreligion in a Complex Future, my co-authors and I argue that nonreligion can be considered an analytical category that captures the effects of the ideology

of secularism on what is marked as religion. My proposal is to further develop this argument by reflecting on the category of “nonreligion” through the concepts of register and marker.

A register is a semiotic artifact that functions metapragmatically by linking spheres of action under a single label. As an operation, enregisterment typifies objects and people. A marker is also a label that functions metapragmatically, classifying and ordering what is indexed through enregisterment. Both concepts are useful for understanding what we mean when we speak of “legal language,” “religious language,” or the “ideology of secularism,” as well as for developing a language-based approach to nonreligion.

MEASURING NONRELIGION AS ABSENCE: TESTING VARIOUS APPROACHES

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We examine the strengths and weaknesses of different “absence measures” scholars use to classify individuals as religious or non-religious. Drawing on a novel dataset with data from eight countries (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Finland, Norway, the UK, and the USA), we analyze how many people would be considered nonreligious based on four common measures: religious affiliation, religious service attendance, belief in a monotheistic god, and religious salience. We find that different measures lead to substan-

tially different estimates of the number of nonreligious people in a country. The single measure that identifies the highest percentage of nonreligious people is never attending religious services, while the measure that identified the lowest percentage was those who report they are not at all religious. We also show that self-reported religiosity is a stronger predictor of attitudes toward religion than the other measures. Our findings suggest that scholars need to consider carefully the implications of using different measures of non-religion, as this decision can have a meaningful impact on research findings.

NONRELIGION AND THE ENVIRONMENT: CONVERGENT AGENDAS?

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In a context where the environment is increasingly present in the public sphere and political agendas, how do religious and nonreligious identities, practices, and beliefs relate to imaginaries about nature and the environment? Are there differences between individuals with varying religious beliefs and practices, or is sensitivity toward nature influenced by other social factors, such as age, gender, education, income level, or nationality? This paper aims to answer these questions by analyzing data from the “Nonreligion and Social and Cultural Values” project, developed under the Non-Religion in a Complex Future (NCF) initiative. The dataset includes information from the US, Canada, Norway, Denmark, England, Argentina, and Brazil. I will employ descriptive statistics to compare responses related to nature and religion across individuals with different religious identities and practices, as well as age, gender, education, income, and nationality.

SESSION 9

TEACHING AND LEARNING (NON)RELIGION

Tuesday, September 9th, 2025, 4:00-5:30 PM

Chair: Sofia Nikitaki

RELIGIOUS AND NONRELIGIOUS EDUCATION:
CONTRASTING TRAJECTORIES BETWEEN A BRAZILIAN
AND A CANADIAN CASE

Guilherme Borges

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This study examines the contrasting trajectories of religious education in the province of Quebec, Canada, and the State of Paraná, Brazil, within their public school systems. Both regions underwent significant transformations in the 1990s and 2000s, shifting religious education away from catechetical instruction toward a model that emphasized the diverse backgrounds of students. Rather than functioning as a tool for religious persuasion, the subject was reoriented to reflect the plurality of life stances in society. However, while Quebec recently decided to eliminate religious education from its curriculum, citing concerns that it remained “too religious,” Paraná has retained the subject as part of its educational framework. In Paraná, religious education is even presented as a nonreligious discipline aimed at cultivating respect for diversity. By comparing these two pluralistic approaches to religious education, this analysis seeks to understand the underlying factors that explain why they have such divergent outcomes in each context.

TEACHING NON-RELIGION? ON FRAMING RELIGIOUS AND NON-RELIGIOUS ISSUES IN GERMAN ETHICAL EDUCATION

Katharina Neef

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German schools offer ethical education for all those pupils that do not take part in confessional religious education. These can be heterogeneous classes with children from minority religions (e.g. Jehovah's Witnesses, Sikhs, or Adventists) and children with no religious affiliation and a secular background. In East Germany, however, the children in these classes are mostly non-religious. But religion remains a subject in ethical education, e.g. by teaching basic knowledge about 'world religions', the religious fundamentals of most holidays, or intercultural competence. At the same time, the world-views, meaning-making practices or life stances of the children attending these classes are occasionally discussed, but usually never named. Consequently, non-religion or secularity are not categories to describe them. Thus, one question is how they are framed. And another is how religion then is presented. Does it serve as an "other" to non-religious self-perception or is it presented in a completely other setting?

BETWEEN BELIEF AND UNBELIEF: CHILDREN NAVIGATING RELIGION AND NONRELIGION IN SCHOOL SETTINGS

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This presentation explores methodological challenges in studying nonreligion, with a focus on how nonreligious worldviews are encountered, expressed, and negotiated in everyday life—particularly among children. While much research on nonreligion has centred on adult identity, discourse, and belief, less attention has been paid to how nonreligion is lived, modeled, and transmitted in family and social settings. Children of nonreligious parents may not explicitly identify as nonreligious, yet their experiences often reflect secular, atheist, agnostic, or spiritual-but-not-religious orientations. In diverse settings such as classrooms, children are often exposed to a range of religious and nonreligious perspectives. These encounters may prompt moments of negotiation, curiosity, or even tension—for example, when atheist children challenge prayer practices, or when religious children express discomfort with secular explanations of the world. Children may adopt, reject, or rework the beliefs of their peers, teachers, and families in subtle and context-dependent ways, raising questions about agency, conformity, and belonging. How do children learn to interpret religious absence, ambiguity, or critique? What kinds of practices, silences, or narratives shape their understanding of the sacred, the moral, or the unexplained? This presentation considers these questions while reflecting on the methodological difficulties of studying nonreligion in populations—like children—who may not articulate coherent ideological positions. It calls for ethnographic sensitivity to implicit worldviews, everyday routines, and nonverbal cues, expanding the toolkit for researchers studying the lived dimensions of nonreligion beyond formal settings or declarations.

SESSION 10

HISTORICAL AND DISCURSIVE SHIFTS

Tuesday, September 9th, 2025, 4:00-5:30 PM

Chair: Jonathan Evans

SECULARIZATION IN MOTION: HISTORICAL SHIFTS IN
THE DISCOURSE OF NON-RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS
(1881-2019)**Dominik Balazka***University of Milan (Italy), University of Turin (Italy), KU Leuven (Belgium),*
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This study examines the secularization of the secular by analyzing historical shifts within non-religion. While secularization theory traditionally overlooks changes within secularity itself, this research extends its scope to non-religious movements. Using computational methods – including Topic Modeling, Sentiment Analysis, and Dynamic Word Embedding – this study analyzes 7,308 magazines published by four American and British non-religious organizations between 1881 and 2019. Findings reveal that militant non-religious groups' engagement with religion fluctuates in response to its public visibility. Atheists, compared to humanists, consistently emphasize religion more, particularly in the less secularized U.S. Furthermore, a decline of the perceived relevance of religion is accompanied by a decline of the negative sentiment and by a shift from ideological critiques to contextually situated pragmatic concerns. Despite these shifts, the demand for positive non-religious identities remained relatively stable. I argue that secularization is a dynamic process in which religion and non-religion co-evolve in tandem.

ELEMENTS OF NONRELIGION ONLINE “CULTURE”: A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE USA AND SLOVAKIA

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The presentation focuses on the identification and comparison of nonreligion online “culture” elements in the USA and Slovakia, highlighting the diversity and regional specifics that influence nonreligion online space in these two countries. The USA, as a country with significant production of nonreligion online content, plays a key role in spreading nonreligious ideas and creating cultural elements that are increasingly recognizable in the Slovak context as well. This research analyzes which aspects of nonreligion culture have transferred into the Slovak context, what the differences are between the two cultures, and why some American elements have not yet taken firm root in Slovakia. Additionally, it explores the possibility of specific regional characteristics of nonreligion in Slovakia that do not have parallels in the USA. The results show that nonreligion online culture in both countries exhibits similar patterns, but also certain cultural and historical differences that affect its formation and expansion.

THE “SECULAR” SACRED CANOPY: A PARADIGM REVISION IN THE STUDY OF SECULARIZATION

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Peter Berger famously argued that secularization and the rise of modern conditions ripped through the religious sacred canopy that once legitimated the social order of the West. This structural shift

was meant to lead moderns to live in an instrumentally-rationalized disenchanted world without moral direction, cultural integration, nor protection from anomic terror. In this paper, we seek to rework this secularization paradigm and our conception of modernity by integrating developments in Durkheimian cultural sociology, which take seriously Berger and Luckmann's contention that humans are cultural animals who inhabit symbolic orders. In contexts of late-stage secularization, where nonreligion has become the cultural norm, modernity should be understood not as devoid of overarching cultural legitimations, moral imperatives, or plausibility structures, but instead as enveloped by a secular sacred canopy where empiricism, naturalism and a romantic liberal cultural imaginary respectively hold epistemological, ontological and moral authority.

SESSION 11

RE-EMERGING AND MINORITY SECULARISMS

Wednesday, September 10th, 2025, 10:00-11:30 AM

Chair: Juraj Majo

RE-MOBILISING UNBELIEF: HOW THE ATHEIST
MOVEMENT IS REEMERGING FROM ITS ASHES IN
BRAZIL

Sabrina Testa

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Organised unbelief is a relatively recent phenomenon in Brazil, having emerged from and through the internet, specially social media, around the second half of the 2000s. After experiencing a phase of weakening –following political instabilities and the COVID 19 pandemics– the movement is now starting to re-emerge, again having the internet as its main locus but adopting different forms. This communication proposes to analyse the reconfiguration of Brazilian atheist mobilisation that happened after the near-disappearance of formal organisations and events and the disaggregation of the main nucleus of online activism around the change of the decade. The paper proposes to examine how these transformations in the modalities of publicity, the approaches to activism as well as the evolution of the technical affordances in the virtual platforms reshaped atheist mobilisation in Brazil and what these transformations mean for non-religion as a public and collective stance in the country.

NONRELIGION AMONG ROMA. DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS, DIFFERENT CONTEXTS²

Juraj Majo, Tatiana Zachar Podolinská

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From many perspectives, studying nonreligion and secularity among Roma communities is not an easy task. In Slovakia, we have identified several individuals and families who are nonreligious and feel no connection to organized religion. Their lack of participation in official religious practices, their distance from the dogmatic aspects of faith, and their own self-perceptions often lead the majority to view them as not fully integrated into spiritual life. In some communities in Central Slovakia, we encountered Roma individuals who declared themselves nonreligious in the census simply because they were not recognized as full members of their local parish. In this contribution, we look closely at the discrepancies in fulfilling the various aspects of faith—believing, bonding, belonging, and behaving—within many Romani worldviews and self-understandings. Beyond exclusion from formal religious practice, these relationships to religion may also be misunderstood or overlooked from an external (etic) perspective.

² This paper is funded by project APVV-22-0389 Research of religiosity, spirituality, and irreligiosity among the Roma in Slovakia

SESSION 12

GLOBAL PATTERNS OF (NON)RELIGIOUS
CHANGE

Wednesday, September 10th, 2025, 10:00-11:30 AM

Chair: Dominik Balazka

CROSS-NATIONAL PATTERNS AMONG THE
UNAFFILIATED: EXPLORING ATTITUDES, BELIEFS AND
PRACTICES BOTH ACROSS AND WITHIN MORE THAN A
DOZEN COUNTRIES**Jonathan Evans**

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How different or similar are the beliefs of the religiously unaffiliated today in different parts of the world? Are there regional patterns in their spiritual beliefs? And what about patterns within countries around the world? This presentation seeks answers to these questions, in part by looking at different subsets of the unaffiliated (such as those who are older or younger, and the lifelong unaffiliated as compared with those who have disaffiliated in their lifetime) to better understand the current variance within the broader group on topics including the intersection of religion and public life. We will explore global patterns among the unaffiliated across the Americas, Europe, East Asia and a few other countries using nationally representative data from Pew Research Center's 2024 global survey.

MIGRATION AND (NON)RELIGIOSITY ACROSS EIGHT COUNTRIES: THE EFFECT OF MIGRATION ON LEVELS OF RELIGIOSITY, (NON)RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION AND RELIGIOUS TRANSMISSION AMONG MIGRANTS

Jacob Legault-Leclair

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The religiosity of migrants can change, vary in intensity or be transformed as a result of their migratory journey (Beyer, 2005; Connor, 2014; Eid, 2003). In a survey conducted in 2023 among 8080 individuals from 8 countries (Canada, USA, Great Britain, Norway, Finland, Australia, Argentina, Brazil), we (Nonreligion in a Complex Future Project) asked respondents about their previous migration and their (non)religiosity (religious affiliation, practices, beliefs). The results showed that the religious profile of these respondents was influenced by their migration trajectory, and that this could vary according to their (non)religious affiliation, country of origin and host country. In this presentation, I will use statistics to analyze effect of migration on the religious profile of these migrants. I will also compare the effects of the destination on religious practice and affiliation. This analysis will deepen our understanding of the connections between migration and the religiosity of the individuals who move, and the potential (non)religious implications for these individuals and their host countries.

RATES OF DISAFFILIATION AND RELIGIOUS SWITCHING OUT OF THE UNAFFILIATED IN 22 COUNTRIES

Kirsten A. Lesage

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What share of adults in different parts of the world have left the religious group in which they were raised and no longer identify with any religion (i.e., have disaffiliated)? For those who have disaffiliated, in what religious groups were they raised? And do rates of disaffiliation differ by demographics (e.g., by age, gender or education)? Similarly, what countries have had the largest net gains for the religiously unaffiliated population (i.e., “nones”) due to people changing their religion since childhood? And what percentage of people raised without a religion are still unaffiliated (i.e., retention rates)? In countries where people were raised without a religion and are leaving the unaffiliated, what religious groups are they joining? This presentation will answer these questions using nationally representative data from Pew Research Center’s 2024 global survey done in the Americas, Europe, East Asia and a few other countries.

CLOSED SESSION 13

FLIPSIDES AND SHADOWS. THE SECULARIST
PROJECT IN BELGIUM, 19TH–20TH CENTURY

Wednesday, September 10th, 2025, 12:00-1:30 PM

Chair: Jeffrey Tyssens

The Belgian secular humanist movement, having successfully implemented a funded social service model, are often looked at as inspiration. This constellation is the product of long-term transformations in the way the secularist / secular humanist project was conceived in a social, cultural and political context with hegemonic Catholicism and a confessional political party often in power. Since the 1890s, Catholic organizations broadly dominated a 'pillarized' civil society. Attempts to make institutions "laïque" led to the 'ephemeral Belgian secular state' of 1878-1884. Then, successive Catholic governments largely dismantled it. Astonishingly, state funding of religion was only rarely on the agenda, almost as marginally as other indicators of a secular nature of the state. Focus was on the denominational character of schools, alongside bio-political matters. These raise questions about gender within the secularist movement and project. Both are often presented as men-steered. The presence of women reveals particular patterns in the way secular movement recruited. Women marked key innovations within the movement's project, even if often unacknowledged.

THE FAILURE OF THE SECULARIST PROJECT FOR THE BELGIAN STATE IN THE LONG 19TH CENTURY

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If 19th-century Belgium seemed to move in a direction similar to French laïcité, the failure of the ‘ephemeral Belgian secular state’ of 1878-1884 was followed by pro-confessional options, whether clerical or “pillarized”, by governments between 1884 and 1914. In 1914, the balance sheet showed that secular forces had only obtained equal access to death infrastructure (but no cremation) and blocked the obtention of legal personality by religious institutions, but had lost on all other battlegrounds (the education system, public hospitals, secular practices in courts, no free access to contraception etc., let alone a revision of the financial privileges of the Catholic Church or the revision of relations with the Vatican). Explanation is found in different strategies towards broadening suffrage and a less efficient use of decentralization (municipal and provincial autonomy), but also in older factors. Successes were obtained when violent tactics had not been shunned, whereas timid approaches usually failed.

SURRENDERING THE PROJECT OF THE BELGIAN SECULAR STATE

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A century after the short-lived ‘ephemeral Belgian secular state’, the Belgian secular humanist organizations of the 1970s began to leave behind secularist ideas in favour of an accommodationist approach. This shift, which led to the recognition and financing of secular hu-

manism as a worldview alongside six other cults, became the foundation for the social-service type humanism we see in Belgium today – although some of the practices are much older. Even though the financial constellation of Belgian secular humanists (vrijzinnig humanisten) is often times looked at as a good practice, the “accommodationism” of the movement was not a clean ‘victory.’ Related to the federalization of the Belgian state and the establishment of the modern socio-cultural sphere, aiming for a Kirchensteuer-type funding led to a unique worldview landscape, although in practice this shift was also the capitulation of the secular humanist sphere to pervasiveness of Catholicism and its organizations.

GENDER AND THE BELGIAN SECULAR PROJECT

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The Belgian secular movement has often been framed as a predominantly male-led endeavor. However, a closer examination reveals that women played significant, albeit often overlooked, roles within secular organizations and causes, particularly in key areas such as birth control, education, and political activism. The involvement of multiple generations of secular women - ranging from Virginie Loveling’s anti-clerical literary work and translations in the 19th century to Vogelina Dille-Lobe’s 20th century activism in reproductive rights - demonstrates the diverse ways in which women engaged with and shaped secularist agendas. Also figures like Emilie Claeys and Isabelle Gatti de Gamond were instrumental in advocating for feminist and socialist causes within secular organizations. By bringing attention to these figures, this presentation underscores the need for further research into the contributions of women in Belgian secularism and challenges the historical narrative that has largely rendered them invisible.

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