

Abstracts for ISMRC Conference: Media, Religion and Culture in a Networked World

Monday panels starting at 1 pm:

New Movements and Identities

Ann Hardy

University of Waikato

'Conspirituality' – a web-based movement?

'Conspirituality' is a term coined by Ward & Voas in 2011 to identify an increasingly influential early 21st century spiritual and cultural worldview derived from the mixing of New Age and conspiracist precepts, beliefs and forms of rhetoric. The identification of this worldview seems to us a valid, useful addition to the spectrum of secular spiritualities, pointing to the possible intersection of certain configurations of political, economic, gender and ethnic positioning. A key premise of Ward & Voas's discussion is that conspirituality exists largely because of the affordances of the Internet and is therefore primarily a web-based movement. One of several examples provided by them as exemplars of this web-based conspiritual milieu is the work of leading conspiracy theorist David Icke.

This paper, which draws on completed Ph.D research on the 'logics' of conspiracy theories and their instantiation in the Internet (Ballinger, 2011) focuses on the case of David Icke in greater detail. We link it to other theorizations of the relationship between contemporary forms of religiosity and digital media (e.g. Campbell ed. 2013), with the aim of assessing the validity of the proposition that conspirituality is primarily a web-based movement. We examine broader relationships between the web and other media, particularly the ways in which the technological affordances of the web can be seen to support forms of community and authority conducive to the development and dissemination of conspirituality beliefs. However, the fact that Icke also makes public appearances on the speaking circuit and is invested in the publication of traditional media forms also leads us to propose that presence on the Internet is not a sufficient condition for the circulation of conspiritual ideas.

Sofija Drecon

University of Arts, Cultural policy and management, Belgrade, Serbia

Internet based religions: Alternative and deregulated systems of belief in new media environment

The main topic of this paper is exploring the phenomenon of internet based religions, as a society's response to the development of technology and the creation of new media. New media landscape together with philosophy of interconnected society has affected our everyday life rituals, one of the key ones being religion. The aim of this paper is to identify and describe these phenomena, the surroundings and influences that have led to its establishment, as well as present rituals, symbols and dogma behind this newly formed religion and compare it to the traditional religious practices. Thus, the research presents a comparative case study analysis of three Internet based churches: The Church of Google, Missionary Church of Kopimism and The Church of Reality. The conclusion of this work implies that internet based religions encourage the development of new community models, in this way contributing to a more pluralistic and diverse society, through redefinition of traditional dogma's and rituals adjusting to new types of communication and behavior of the modern society.

Maggie Webster

PhD student University of Wales Trinity St David, Lampeter, Senior Lecturer in Education, Edge Hill University

Do social networking spaces attract or repel people of faith?

Religion on the internet has been widely researched in recent years and postmodernism has been a topical point in religious studies (see for example Campbell 2013). Bauman (2007) suggests however that modernity is something that is transient. Rather than following a predictable trajectory, change can be affected by social attitudes and behaviours and hence can follow a chaotic model that can return to an old rather new ideology.

Noting Bauman's concept of 'liquid modernity', the author of this research suggests that one of the reasons people use social networking spaces for religious purposes is because they are attracted to the sense of community and collective identities within them. This sense of '[religious] mixophilia' (Bauman 2007:90) encourages the creation of communities and collective identities which adheres to innate personal interests, however similar to Bauman's concept of 'mixophobia' (ibid) individuals also feel repelled from large groups within social networking spaces and consequently are in conflict with themselves hence become a 'lurker' (Kozinets 2010:33) rather than a religious participant. Individuals feel the need to be part of an online community so to practice online or to learn more about a faith tradition religion (Helland 2005) but also feel concerned about being pigeon-holed into one collective way of thinking and being.

This PhD study explores the expressions of individuals within identified social networking spaces such as godtube.com, wiccaneopagan.com, secondlife.com and facebook.com with a view to try to understand what compels participants to take part in online faith communities and what they gain from them.

Tentative conclusions are that participants seem to use social networking spaces as a way to 'pick 'n' mix' their personal faith and belief systems. They create their own reality of what religion is through choosing to be part of a community for a fixed length of time and then moving on thus possibly adding gravity to Bauman's concept of modernity being liquid.

Jack Laughlin

Department of Religious Studies, University of Sudbury, Sudbury, Ontario, Canada

Do social networking spaces attract or repel people of faith?

Insofar as personalities like the so-called Four Horsemen have defined the movement popularly identified as the New Atheism, that movement might be said to be the product of traditional media: Dawkins-Dennett-Harris-Hitchens anti-theism is best known through published works and televised appearances. While this High-Church atheism has a substantial presence within new media (eg. the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science internet portal) I would argue that the movement's reach is far greater at a more grassroots level and decidedly via new media (eg. blog networks, YouTube channels, etc.).

My paper examines the atheist presence on the internet – some history, some major players, its form and function, and of course its content with respect to religion. This vast body of material is a rich source for the examination of contested identities (religious and atheist), the politics of the New Atheism, and popular discourses about religion, reason, science and culture (among others). My main sources (particular blogs within particular networks) appear to project an atheist identity constructed as to: reject every attempt to analyze it from without; inevitably leading to progressive positions on social and political issues; insistent upon science as the only model for the creation of knowledge; and, fundamentally incurious about culture (especially outside of the Anglo-American world) while consuming, contesting, criticizing and constructing it.

Christian Practices

Clive Marsh (University of Leicester, UK)

Salvation and Happiness: Theological Change in a Media Age

Building on empirical work undertaken amongst music fans (to be published in the Journal of Contemporary Religion in 2014), and linking to musicological research into the affective impact of music, this paper explores the contemporary religion-like significance of everyday use of music. It recognises the declared search for 'happiness' and 'joy' as dominant in music use, whilst recognising also the range of major emotions (including 'sadness') at work in the mood management being experienced by everyday use. In noting the dedicated ('devoted') way in which committed listeners engage in their regular practices, the paper explores and analyses users' descriptions of their habits. It probes the cognitive work undertaken within the 'affective space' (Marsh and Roberts 2012) which music creates for the listener. The paper argues that any attempt to articulate theological ideas, or to identify a religious framework, relating to contemporary Western living needs to take account of such cultural practices. It goes on to develop programmatically the critical encounter between the search for happiness (as evidenced in such artistic and popular culture use) and the discourse of 'salvation', as a case-study in theological exploration (and potential theological change) in a media age. Whilst noting that a clear distinction has to be drawn

between happiness and salvation, it is argued that current articulation of the latter requires attention to the former in order to be comprehensible and accessible. This case-study in media-related theology thereby presents a potential challenge to existing authority structures within a faith community.

Miranda Klaver

VU University Amsterdam

The online/offline connection: religious practices in Hillsong Amsterdam

Since the start in 2008, Hillsong Amsterdam has grown remarkably into a church that holds four services with an average of around a 1000 visitors on a regular Sunday. Church services have an event-like character as the high quality and vibrant style of worship music and preaching is supported by extensive multimedia technologies. The launch of the church was largely promoted through Facebook and directed at Christian students.

The powerful online presence of the Hillsong megachurch in Sydney, including the Hillsong TV channel, the websites of the local Hillsong church together with the presence of Hillsong leaders and groups on social media like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram create a complex of myriad connections that are at play in processes of community formation and the construction of religious identity. Based on my current research focussed on everyday media practices of Hillsong worshippers, I will discuss the relationship between the online and offline practices in the context of Hillsong Amsterdam, a local church being part of a global multisite network that applies new media technology in its liturgies and integrates online and offline sites in religious practices.

Wendi Bellar and Kyong James Cho

PhD Students, Dept. of Communication, Texas A&M University

Please Open Your Digital Bible to Today's Passage: An RSST Approach to Studying Media Technology Use in Church Settings

Research focusing on new media and religion has often looked at websites, social networking, mediated rituals, and virtual settings. Studies of church community use of new media technology use has been limited to surveying church activities such as web site creation and maintenance and the use of email. Very few studies, however, have looked specifically at how new media technologies are being used at brick and mortar church events, such as worship services and Bible studies. Therefore, this co-authored paper uses the Religious Social Shaping of Technology approach (Campbell, 2010) in order to fill this gap in the literature. Two research questions the study poses are: a) how do church leaders strategically utilize the Internet and media technologies during worship services and church activities, and b) how do church attendees utilize the Internet and media technologies during worship services and church activities? Data was collected through the ethnographic methods of participant observation at church events and in-depth interviews with church leaders and members at two churches over a one-year period between 2013 and 2014. The churches were located in a southern region of the United States. Both were Protestant Christian churches with more than 1,000 members who participate in multiple services, Bible studies, and fellowship groups. Findings contribute to the theoretical underpinnings of how the church community deliberately shapes their use of media technologies within worships services, Bible studies, and other events. Several key themes have emerged from preliminary thematic analysis of the data. A key concern of church leadership in terms of adopting new media technologies is whether or not the technology will specifically further the goals and mission of their church. Church attendees seem to have mixed responses to, and varying levels of engagement with new media technologies.

Bex Lewis

CODEC, Durham University

#DIGIDisciple: Issues and Opportunities for the Christian Sector in a Digital Age

A frequent topic in the British newspapers is the declining numbers in church membership. For many churchgoing is no longer the 'cultural norm'. People don't actively ignore the church: they don't even think about it, whilst literally billions are in the digital spaces and the social networks. Those in the Christian sector, including churches, have been slow to recognize the value of online spaces, largely through relationships with church members, rather than the church itself.

Technologies have changed what is possible, and for many churches over the last few hundred years we have adopted a model of passive, presentation-piece services, heightened even more by a broadcast mode of media that we all got used to with the TV and the radio. Social media, however, offers much more

space for questioning, and for congregations to actively engage with sermons through tweeting along, checking something on their online Bibles or Google, sharing photos of church activities, or being encouraged to continue discussions throughout the week through a Facebook group.

Since 2011, The BIGBible Project has created a network of #DIGIDisciples who contribute to a blog questioning what it means to be a Christian in the digital age and in the digital environment. As Elizabeth Dresher would point out, the churches natural style fits the pattern of the social media world - that of participation and creativity rather than a broadcast hierarchical structure. #DIGIDisciples look to see what digital technologies allow us to do differently, as well as how they may impact our behaviours online. #DIGIDisciples subscribe to the belief that our spiritual lives are 24/7, and that we need to take seriously our Christian presence both online and offline, questioning whether we are we the same person, living by the same values in both environments, modeling Christlike behaviour. Voices are from across the ecumenical spectrum, and at all levels of online expertise (or none) have participated.

The conference paper will draw from the rich collection of over 2,500 #digidisciple posts to demonstrate the potential that the digital has offered churches, whilst also highlighting some of the issues that have been raised.

Gender and Representation

Doris Jakobsh

Sikh women's religio-cultural visuality and identity: historical prescriptions and contemporary manifestations

This paper examines how Sikh female religio-cultural materiality and visuality, contra distinct to the normative Khalsa male body, are located and legitimized through prescriptive texts, but also how they have come to be reinterpreted within contemporary understandings of Sikh identity. Central to this discussion is the question of how Sikh women's clothing as identity signifier but also as visual object, especially vis-à-vis head covering norms, is essential in the development of a deeply ingrained system of religio-cultural honour for women. How has this notion of 'Sikh femaleness' diverged from the visual 'otherness', the *raison d'être*, of the Khalsa male? This study examines how these historical manifestations of Sikh women's identity and materiality translate into contemporary interpretations of Sikh female identity within online realms, in images, narratives and prescriptive texts.

Kristin Peterson

University of Colorado Boulder

The Affective Labor and Hybrid Style of Islamic Lifestyle Videos on YouTube

Although the expansion of access to the internet and global interconnectivity have not solved all the world's problems or united people, the digital realm still offers a new space in which religious meaning and identity can be contested and created. Among young female Muslims, YouTube, in particular, has provided a third space in which women can experiment with a new hybrid Islamic style that blends the Western and Neoliberal forms found in many YouTube lifestyle videos with Islamic values and aesthetics. This paper examines the YouTube channels of Muslim women to understand how the women perform their Islamic identity within the Western media form of YouTube. These videos share a similar aesthetic style, and the women discuss similar lifestyle topics, such as fashion, makeup, relationships, and personal advice.

The videos of these Muslim women resemble other mainstream, mostly American-produced, lifestyle videos on YouTube, but the Islamic videos are distinct because the women attempt to incorporate Western, Neoliberal topics like fashion, makeup and beauty, with Islamic ethics and piety. The fluidity and elasticity of the YouTube space allow for the women to perform within the particular aesthetic style of YouTube while also embodying Islamic forms. This third space of YouTube exists between the normal dichotomies of public vs. private, Islam vs. the West, and traditional vs. modern. YouTube provides a space for the women to experiment and combine these different elements to create a new Islamic aesthetic style.

This hybridization shapes the individuals who are making the videos, the viewers who respond to this blended aesthetic style, and the assumptions about what it means to be Muslim in the contemporary global society. This paper incorporates Birgit Meyer's understanding of "aesthetic formations" and how

religious aesthetics and sensational forms mold religious subjects into communities. In addition, the paper includes theories from Saba Mahmood and Charles Hirschkind to understand how Islamic subjects are constituted through the disciplining of emotions, actions and physical appearances. Through the space of YouTube and this particular hybrid Islamic style, these lifestyle videos constitute the Islamic female subject and form her into a larger community.

Anna Piela

Leeds Trinity University, Leeds, United Kingdom

Normalising the niqab: constructions of the niqab in British niqabis' online interactions with readers and viewers on photo-sharing websites.

The niqab – the all-enveloping Islamic dress – continues to attract the attention of politicians and the media in reductive debates on immigration, assimilation, and extremism (Meer, Dwyer, and Modood, 2010). The question whether the niqab should be banned in the UK as incompatible with ‘British values’ arises frequently (Kiliç, 2008). This attention is reflected in a considerable body of literature across social sciences and law discussing the place of the niqab – and niqabis (the niqab wearers) – in the contemporary West. In the latest ‘niqab controversy’ in September 2013 the reporting underwent a significant change, that is, niqabis were interviewed for articles and in several instances authored articles commenting on the matter (for example, Al Faifi, 2013). However, there is paucity of academic literature to date that engages niqabis themselves in the generation of data which results in a lack of balanced and fair discussion of niqab in the UK.

In order to address this gap, this paper highlight niqabis’ constructions of their identity based on their own accounts. By focusing two types of data: a) texts published by niqabi authors in mainstream media, and readers’ comments that follow up and b) online textual interactions between niqabis and the viewers, accompanying niqabis’ self-portraits published on photo sharing websites such as Flickr, it throws light on niqabis’ contextualised and relational interpretations (Byrne, Canavan, and Millar, 2004) of the niqab and its place in the British society. Moreover, it demonstrates a variety of positive ways in which these self-portraits are received by the audiences. The advantage of a method based on online data collection is that it allows insight into mundane, ordinary interactions which are in sharp contrast to conflictual frameworks encountered in British media and policy texts discussing Muslim women. The analysis of the data so far indicates that niqabis exercise their agency by making visual references to the everyday, and establish intimacy with the audience. These actions disrupt the normalised associations of the niqab with passivity, hostility, and otherness.

Christie Omego

University of Port Harcourt

The Media, Women and Religious Crisis in Nigeria

Religious crisis have characterized Nigeria since the late 1970s and has been witnessed in various parts of the country. But the major ones have occurred in the Muslim-dominated northern parts of the country. Currently, the country battles with attacks perpetrated by the Islamic extremist group – Boko Haram. Religious crisis, like other forms of crisis has implications for the mass media. Often time, they are implicated in fanning or heightening religious tension in the country. On the other hand, the media are necessary for bringing to public attention issues surrounding the different forms of crisis, such as the actors, the sources of the crisis etc. In many religious crises, as presented in the mass media, the place of women is not very clear. There is paucity of research on the gender dimension of religious crisis in the context of the media This study aimed to discuss, with a substantial amount of data, the media presentation of women in the current religious crisis in Nigeria. The major question it seeks to answer is: how do women figure in the media reportage of the Boko Haram religious insurgency in Nigeria? The data for the study were chiefly drawn from the content analysis of leading national newspapers such as The Guardian, The Punch, ThisDay. The content categories will include media presentation of women as actors, victims or agents of reconciliation in the religious crises. It will also see if women are involved as reporters in covering the areas of the religious crisis. It is expected that through this media portrayal of the place of women in religious crises in Nigeria will provide much needed insight into an aspect of this socio-religious phenomena.

Papal Strategies Towards Cinema

Davide Zordan

Senior researcher in Theology, Fondazione Bruno Kessler, Trento, Italy

Blessing and Controlling: The Pope vis-a-vis the Cinema

The figure of the Roman Pontiff, so unique in his appearance and so expressive of Catholicism itself, has fascinated filmmakers since 1898, when William Dickson, a British inventor and cinematographer, was permitted to enter the Vatican and film several scenes of the elderly Leo XIII, one of which shows the Pope blessing the camera while being filmed. Popes, too, have often appeared to be intrigued by cinema and by its ability to have a cultural impact. They have tried to define the way to make an instrument as secular as cinema not just unproblematic for believers, but even how to use it to further the cause of faith. This paper reflects from a theological perspective on Leo XIII's blessing of the camera as a gesture that is highly symptomatic of the complex relationship between papacy and film and provides a brief overview of how much the cinematic representation of the Pope has changed over the years.

Cristina Formenti

PhD Candidate in Film History, Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy

An Inspired Invention: Pastor Angelicus and its American Model

On December 1941, in the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico the idea was conceived to create a biographical documentary about Pope Pius XII with the aim of spreading the knowledge of the Pontiff's life and mission: *Pastor Angelicus* (1942, by Romolo Marcellini), the first of a series of Catholic films produced by Orbis-Universalis and approved by the Church. Although presented as a biographical documentary about Pius XII, Marcellini's seems more interested in the sights of Vatican City. Drawing on unpublished documents, this paper will demonstrate that this is due to the fact that *Pastor Angelicus* was modeled on March of Time's documentary *The Story of the Vatican* (1941, by Jean Pages), a film narrated by Reverend Fulton J. Sheen, whose existence and success among American viewers was acknowledged by the Vatican itself and by Marcellini, who even re-used some of its shots in *Pastor Angelicus*.

Tomaso Subini

Assistant Professor of Film History, Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy

Pastor Angelicus as a Political Text

Drawing on documents from several Italian archives unexplored until now, the paper will read *Pastor Angelicus* (1942) as a political text. The film was intended as a powerful political instrument by Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, which produced it, and understood as such by Fascism which, considering it a threat, banned it from cinemas. Indeed, filming the Pope as a promoter of peace, the film presented him as an alternative leader to Mussolini. Six years later, in a completely different political and social context, characterized by the 1948 election campaign, the same film becomes the main attraction of the numerous shows organized by Azione Cattolica Italiana using the so-called "carrozzoni di propaganda" (i.e. propaganda's wagons), which spread the cinematic image of the Pope in Southern Italy's poorest regions. The paper focuses on the reports written by the person in charge of projecting the film.

Mara Affinito

Art Historian, Independent Scholar, Italy

Giovanni Battista Montini, Cinema and Contemporary Art

This paper studies the controversial relationship between Giovanni Battista Montini (first as Archbishop of Milan and subsequently as Pope Paul VI) and cinema during the 1960s, contextualizing it within the broader issue of the relationship with art in general. Montini was very sensitive to contemporary art but rather biased against cinema. His relationships with three institutions specialized in contemporary sacred art will be taken into account: Milan's Centro San Fedele (guided by the Jesuits), Assisi's Pro Civitate Christiana and Milan's Galleria d'arte Sacra dei Contemporanei. Montini collaborated with the third in the project of creating a contemporary sacred art section at the Vatican Museum (opened in 1973), whereas he always had bad relations with the other two. The paper will try to determine the role played by cinema in Montini's attitude toward them, in order to verify if the fact that Centro San Fedele and Pro Civitate Christiana compromised themselves with Federico Fellini's and Pier Paolo Pasolini's cinema wasn't without effects in his choice to involve only the third gallery (and not the first two, much more significant institutions) in the important project at the Vatican Museum.

Production Values

Adam Copeland

Concordia College, Moorhead, MN, USA

Analyzing the Spiritual Rhetoric of Kickstarter.com in Theory and Practice

This project analyzes spiritual and religious rhetoric related to Kickstarter.com, incorporating and expanding upon two previous approaches to describing spiritual language. A web-based crowd source funding platform, Kickstarter has successfully funded more than 50,000 creative projects with gifts nearing \$1 billion from approximately five million donors. While many have considered Kickstarter as a business venture and alternate project funding model, tracking its viral success and failure, few have considered its language from the standpoint of the rhetoric of spirituality. This paper considers an initial approach to considering the rhetoric of Kickstarter as spiritual.

In his article “Imagination and the Life Force: Toward a Theoretical Foundation for Spirituality and Communication,” John L. Hochheimer presents a theory for the “life-breath” or “Life Force” that flows among individuals. Building upon this theoretical foundation in “Voice from Rikers: Spirituality in Hip Hop Artist Lil’ Wayne’s Prison Blog,” Sharon Lauricella and Matthew Alexander code and categorize the frequency of Life Force language in 10 blog posts and comments. While this Life Force methodology has the benefit of conveying quantitative data in broad categories (e.g. frequency of topics surfacing such as “encouragement” and “admiration”), it proves incomplete and impractical when met with such a large research field as Kickstarter where users have launched more than 117,000 projects.

Another approach to measuring spiritual concerns was modeled by the Higher Education Research Institute in their 2003 to 2010 significant longitudinal survey considering college students’ “search for meaning and purpose.” The study identified five measures related to “spiritual qualities”: equanimity, spiritual quest, ethic of caring, charitable involvement, and ecumenical worldview. The researchers’ description of “spiritual quest” suggests significant connections to the rhetoric of Kickstarter.

Using three Kickstarter texts—public statements and interviews from the Kickstarter co-founders, language from the “About” page at Kickstarter.com, and the rhetoric of Kickstarter projects themselves—this paper analyzes the language of Kickstarter, and finding it spiritual, argues that the spiritual quest theoretical category identified by the Higher Education Research Institute lends itself to hermeneutical analysis in ways more advantageous than Hochhemier’s Life Force theory, at least as conceived by Lauricella and Alexander.

Jeanette Solano

"Swimming (Very Fast) with Sharks with a Little Knife": Muslim and Christian Reflections on Religiously-Inspired Filmmaking Today

There is a new wave of Christian and Muslim independent filmmakers today, inspired by their faith traditions and third wave cinema who, despite their minority status, are reclaiming their power as storytellers and shapers of culture. My research is based on personal interviews with these writers, producers, actors and directors as well as filmic and reception analysis.

Actor/ writer/producer Eduardo Verástegui compared creating value-based faith-inspired films in Hollywood today to "swimming with sharks with a little knife," while Muslim filmmaker Sultan Sharrief echoed this sentiment, comparing his immersion with Hollywood insiders at Sundance akin to "being thrown into a pool of sharks and needing to swim very fast." Both Muslim and Christian filmmakers are cognizant of their minority status in Hollywood today; however several new movements (such as As1.org) and production companies are boldly creating new standards and thoughtfully producing popular feature films which critique and inspire, while unabashedly tackling social issues as diverse and Islamophobia and abortion.

Filmmakers inspired by their faith date back to the start of Hollywood and chronicling early Christian filmmakers (Lindvall) has been done. My research advances this work by including contemporary Muslim filmmakers and including writers and producers. I use two Hollywood production companies, Metanoia Films and Beyond Blue Productions, companies headed by devout Catholic and Muslims respectively, as my main comparative locus. Although inspired by their theological tradition's aesthetic, these are *not* religious production companies like Sherwood Pictures (*Fireproof*, etc) or Ummah Films.

Their independent films (*Bella, Bilal's Stand*) are more nuanced realistic narratives designed to inspire or challenge a general audience.

Kofi Asare

University of Edinburgh

Religious Construct in Ghanaian/Nigerian Video films: Making a Case for Audience Studies

Religion and Ghanaian/Nigerian video films have been bedfellows since the low budget video technology was discovered in the late 1980s. In Ghana, *Zinabu 1 & 2*, the first video film which precipitated the mass production of the medium was overtly steeped in religious elements. The case is not different in Nigeria where *Living in Bondage 1&2*, which is not only seen by some scholars as inaugurating Igbo video production but opened up a larger space for the urban video film in Nigeria was overwhelmed with religion.

It is however intriguing that with the exception of few film producers who are admirers or members of Pentecostal groups, the majority of filmmakers do not share the religious views projected on the screen for the audience. The aim of this piece of work is to explore the incompatibility of filmmakers' religious affiliation and those expressed in their films. In addition to the varying religious views expressed by most filmmakers in relation to those infused in their films, I draw on the various positions scholars have advanced on the religious representations in films in general with special reference to Ghanaian/Nigerian video films. I conclude by making a case for greater focus on the audience in reception studies.

Enqi Weng

Religion in the Australian Public Sphere: A Media Analysis through 'Conventional Religion', 'Common Religion' and the 'Secular Sacred'

Despite the prominent view that religion will eventually decrease in importance, an observation of the vibrancy of religion today has recently led Jürgen Habermas to acknowledge the need for its inclusion in the public sphere (2006). Given that it is a space that is commonly assumed to be 'secular' or non-religious (Taylor, 2011), it may mean potential tension between the 'secular' and the 'religious', which may emerge within public discussions (Benson, 2010). Also, there have been debates among scholars about how religious voices can co-exist with others given that public discussions tend to be based on rational arguments and religious discourses are inclined towards having their own coded vernacular (Taylor, 2011).

Within the sociological study of religion, scholars have recently studied the 'sacred' as a common factor within religions and non-negotiable secular values (Lynch, 2012; Knott, 2013). From that, the concepts of the 'religious sacred' and the 'secular sacred' were viewed to have 'potential mutualities' and should be studied as separate categories (Knott, 2013). Similarly in Australia, sociological scholars of religion have suggested a possible commonality between the 'secular' and the 'sacred' (Frame, 2009; Seal, 2009; Tacey, 2009).

This paper reports on a project that aims to find out the ways in which religion, spirituality and the 'secular sacred' emerges in the Australian public sphere by observing how they are being discussed on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's *Q&A* talkshow program. It will adopt the theoretical framework of 'conventional religion', 'common religion' and 'secular sacred', which was applied in a recent research on British media's representation of religion and spirituality (Knott et al., 2013). This paper will present findings from a pilot study conducted on 10 *Q&A* episodes. Preliminary findings show that all episodes raised significant references to the categories of 'conventional religion' and 'secular sacred' even though eight of the programs were topically unreligious. Findings also show that the theoretical framework can be further enhanced through a study in the Australian context.

Monday panels starting at 2:45 pm

Contemporary Issues in Islam

Mona Abdel-Fadil

Senior Researcher at Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies

'Frustration Creates Miracles': Islamist Women Activists before, during, and after the Egyptian Uprisings

Surprising little scholarly work has been published on actual participants in the political uprisings. In fact, human actors, and their various attempts at pushing forward democracy and freedom from economic and social ills and political oppression in a range of activities, before, during, and, after the ousting of Mubarak have been remarkably absent from many studies. Put bluntly, much scholarship on the Arab spring has lacked focus on actors, women and analysis and empirical data, beyond the revolutionary snapshot moments. In contrast, this article seeks to address such gaps by focusing on a group of women activists, and their usages of a range of media. I do so by drawing on empirical data from fieldwork in 2009-10, and supplementary interviews conducted in 2011, 2012 and 2013, providing a unique longitudinal delve into how a particular group of Egyptian female activists and professional journalists grappled with and promoted democratic thinking before, during and after the ousting of Mubarak. This presentation also aims to demonstrate that critiques of this not being 'a women's revolution' are far too simplistic, and lack empirical backing and/or thorough analysis. The paper is based on a forthcoming article for a special issue of *Cyber Orient* entitled 'Arab Women in a Changing Region: Revolutionizing the Political, Social, and Communication Landscapes'.

Ibrahim Abusharif

Northwestern University in Qatar

Arab Spring, Media and Islam

In the last three years, "Arab Spring" has become a phrase to conjure with. When the so-called "Jasmine Revolution" of Tunisia in December 2010 spread to Egypt, monikers of wider import were bandied about in the press, which attempted to frame or at least describe the unrest and the symbolism it represented, applying terms such as "Arab Awakening," "Arab Revolts," "Arab Uprisings," and "Arab Revolutions." Out of the mix, however, the hopeful-sounding and ideologically packed "Arab Spring" prevailed and has managed to retain its wide usage even as the tumult in the region has taken twists and turns that seem to confront the histrionic pitch of "spring" and its connotation as a force for democratization.

Ibrahim N. Abusharif shares his recent study and press review of the "Arab Spring" descriptor: its origins, its widespread use in the news media and among policymakers, the controversies it has stirred, and a bibliometric study of the phrase's usage. He also discusses how the phrase eventually found acceptance in the region itself (that is, in Arabic language media), which, in part, is the result of the linguistic and cultural resonance that "spring" shares in the Arab and Muslim experience. Abusharif's study (Parsing "Arab Spring") is published by Northwestern University's series on media studies in the Middle East

Gary R. Bunt

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Islamic 'Big Data' – the Fatwa Machine and Religious Authority Online

This paper discusses how the immediacy and searchability of the internet are impacting on notions of Islamic religious authority online, and discusses how different internet hierarchies of authority have developed specifically in relation to social media. Traditional authorities have in some cases been challenged and usurped online by contenders, whose authority in some cases is based as much on digital proficiency and online networks as on traditional training and values. The algorithms of 'Sheikh Google' mediate amongst the information overload of 'fatwas' and religious opinions: when #Islam is 'always on', does this aid or impede clarity and understanding of religious values by Muslims, particularly in 'western' contexts?

Vit Sisler

Charles University, Prague*Playing with Representation of Islam in Arab and American Video Games*

This paper analyzes mainstream video games produced in the United States, Europe, and the Arab world and explores the ways these games deal with the representation of Islam and Muslim identity. It is based on a content analysis of more than 80 games developed between the years 2005-2011, alongside interviews with 8 different game producers.

It analyzes audiovisual signifiers, narrative structures, and rule-systems utilized by these games in order to construct the “virtual representation” of Islam. The research methodology encompasses recent trends in Islamic studies, cultural studies, and game studies. Substantive portions of the materials considered in this paper were gathered during fieldwork trips to Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon. Essentially, this paper analyzes how various genres of mainstream European and American video games have portrayed Islam and Muslim identity. It then compares these representations with portrayals of Islam found in existing Arab games of similar genres. Capitalizing on the Bogost’s notion of “procedural rhetoric,” this paper specifically discusses how Islam is embedded into the rule systems governing the player’s interaction with the game.

Negotiations of Religion and the State**Seung Soo Kim****University of Colorado at Boulder, USA***Lady Gaga Controversy, the Ideology of Secularization, and Digital Space: The Emerging Discursive Attack of Secular Liberalism on South Korea*

This paper reconstructs 2012 South Korean controversy on Lady Gaga concert as a symptomatic scene in which imperial formations of American liberalism are revealed with its secularly liberal rhetoric, categorizing cultural power, and discursive attack on conservative Korean Protestantism through pop culture celebrity and digital space. This paper conducts dual analysis of South Korean online news’ discursive and pictorial representation of the conservative Protestants opposing the Lady Gaga concert. The analysis captures a symptomatic scene in which South Korean online media delineate conservative Protestants against Lady Gaga concert as irrational, unfamiliar, and dangerous ‘others’ standing against the liberal, civilized, and modernized ‘South Korea.’

Through these observations and delineations, this paper offers some thoughts on the relation between Korean society, conservative Christianity, and digital space as global media: First, South Korean online media appear to reiterate the Western thesis of secularization which in fact, however, does not correspond to the history of South Korea whose modernization is, rather, closely intertwined with Western missionaries mainly from the United States and Britain. Second, this emerging public discourse of secularization in Korean society can be better understood as a normative moral claim of secular liberalism closely interwoven with imperial formations of the United States which successfully moves Korean Protestantism from the category of modernity to that of pre-modernity in favor of Lady Gaga – the evangelist of secular Liberalism and American pop culture. Lastly, such categorizing power of secular liberalism considerably depend on digital space in which digital media users not only voluntarily share and disseminate the news and cultural objects related to liberal issues in favor of human rights but also experience the empowerment of their autonomy, which coincides with the ideology of liberalism, through and in the active practices of sharing and making their own meanings beyond any confinement of geography, media oligopoly, and religious/social authorities.

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu**Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Ghana***“Let the Cedi Rise”: Religion, Media and Prosperity Economics in African Pentecostalism*

This paper examines the relationship between Pentecostalism and economic prosperity using the media as the context for the discussion. At a recent event a popular Ghanaian Pentecostal archbishop, Nicholas Duncan-Williams, prayed to resuscitate the dwindling fortunes of the country’s currency. This religious drama and the media discussions that came with it, forms the main case for the study. An important characteristic of the sort of contemporary Pentecostalism studied here is the preaching of material prosperity and there is a relationship between the prayer over the currency and the new gospel of human wellbeing. We will look at how the media enables this sort of Christianity to negotiate a high public

profile using its media presence and working within popular worldviews of spiritual causality in modern African life.

Elena Zhosul

Dean of the Media and Public Relations Department of Russian Orthodox University
Advisor to the Chairman of the Synodal information Department of Russian Orthodox Church
Orthodox Christianity and mass media in Russia after socialism

In my paper I would like to compare the current relationship of the Church and media in Russia with what it was in Soviet times and to analyse this relationship in some historical perspective. Have Russian people reached any civilized practice of the Church and media relations through the shaky way of building civil society in Russia? What is freedom of speech in relation to the ethics of a journalist writing about religion?

In the socialist period the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and media has been patchy. Official media reflected the official policy toward religion, their view of the Church varied from aggressively atheistic to neutral. Interest of media towards religion woke up at the end of the 1980 's and continues to be quite remarkable. Looking at the past 14 years, since the millennium of Christianity in Russia, we can see this interest then increases, then decreases slightly.

But there is no certainty that the periods of that growing interest of media towards Church and religion turn out to be profitable, good for the Church. For example, current agiotage around the church theme starting with the series of anticlerical scandals - did it contain more risks or benefits for the Church?

Can we say that the expectations of media and the Church from each other coincide with reality? These are the open issues of interest to all researchers of public relations. Because the media and social networks today are some kind of electronic pulpits through which the audience can learn actual news and solutions for a variety of church affairs. By my opinion, this question of mutual expectations of the Church and the media is the key issue that defines the background of discussion about religion in public space, which is now underway.

Obviously, the media image of the Church is not what the Church really is. It's very profane and far from a sacred, mystical perception of the Church. The way of perceiving of the Church by secular media is rather different even from the way it is seen by members of parish communities. It is normal because it corresponds with the laws of the genre of the modern information society. At the same time, the way of perceiving of the Church proposed by secular media is very important - this is the matrix of meanings and characteristics by which society develops its own attitude toward the Church.

Christoph Guenther

University of Leipzig

The Visualization of an "Islamic State in Iraq and greater Syria" – Religio-political conflict mediated

The Syrian uprising is increasingly shaped by religious language. Not so much the call for freedom and self-expression dominates the public sphere but rather attempts at religiously framing the conflict between the Baath regime and the Syrian people. Images seem to be a key instrument among the different actors in mutually contesting their interpretation of reality as they allow conveying information much more direct than lingual descriptions as well as to simplify complex contexts and do not pose as high a risk of objection as lingual communication does. These images, still or moving, can act as support for an ideology on a formal as well as structural level and thereby fulfil tactical and strategic purposes. They have to be regarded as (artistic) treatment of socially dynamic processes which shall create a personal relation of the audience with the depicted subjects.

The paper will analyze the media representation of the "Islamic State in Iraq and greater Syria" (ISIS), an extreme Islamist (or Jihadist) group linked to al-Qa'ida. It argues that Jihadist groups are foremost able to operate for a long time in unstable environments like Iraq and Syria because they communicate effectively with their audience in and out of the battlefield-country. The paper will particularly analyze means of visual communication and look at which motifs, subject matters, themes and typologies the ISIS applies to access the horizon(s) of experience and the cultural memory of its recipients in manifold ways and poses its ideological framework as a basis for the interpretation of the ongoing violent conflict. It will show how specific traditions of motifs are rebuilt, reconstructed or even changed and how a convergence of image and word are employed in order to support the group's ideology and political goals.

Practicing Religion and Media: Authority and Integrity In the Era of Clicks, Eyeballs and Marketing Strategies

1. Ruth Gledhill
2. Diane Winston
3. Anthea Butler
4. William Crawley

This panel explores the impact of expanded media platforms and delivery systems on religion coverage with three journalists, all religion PhDs. Each panelist has pioneered multimedia coverage of religion--reporting on religion both in its institutionalized guises and as a cultural product intersecting with politics, the arts, economics etc.. Each also has experimented with different online platforms to extend audiences and enhance storytelling. The conversation will cover how the media shapes religious and cultural understandings (including which media does what, how and why; how the panelists perceive their own role in shaping understandings) and the impact of media interventions like theirs on individuals, religious communities and society, the panelists' own interest in religion; and the challenge of reaching diverse audiences in a highly competitive, globalized marketable place (how does this affect content and delivery).

Diane Winston holds the Knight Chair in Media and Religion at USC Annenberg. She is publisher of ReligionDispatches and has written for online religion publications including Immanent Frame, reverberations, frequencies, The Revealer, Killing the Buddhas, Patheos, Beliefnet, and OnFaith. She teaches multimedia coverage of global religion at the University of Southern California. Winston is editor of The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the American News Media and Small Screen, Big Picture: Television and Lived Religion among other publications. She has a MTS from Harvard Divinity School and a PhD in Religion from Princeton University

Butler, a professor at religion and Africana studies at the University of Pennsylvania has written for numerous online religious magazines including Religion Dispatches, The Grio and MSNBC. She also is a frequent commentator on the Melissa Harris-Perry Show. She is the author of the forthcoming The Gospel According to Sarah Palin.

Perspective Formation

Sofia Sjö

ThD, Comparative religion, Åbo Akademi University, Finland

Transformative spaces? Churches as settings for drama and change in contemporary Scandinavian cinema

Space has been a central theme in many studies of religion of late. To understand religion we need to understand space and the way space is created, challenged and shaped. What is a religious space is nothing set in stone, but something tied to the actions and motivations of people. Consequently a movie theater too can possibly become a religious space for some. But the way films create and recreate religious spaces also constitutes a note-worthy area of inquiry. How, for example, do films use, shape and reshape ideas about religious space to tell a certain story and what happens with popular notions of traditional religious spaces when these spaces are transferred to the silver screen? This paper focuses on the shaping and reshaping of churches in three contemporary Scandinavian films: Adam's Apples (2005), Troubled Water (2008) and Letters to Father Jacob (2009). Building on theories of architecture and film and the mediatization of religion, the way genre and narrative requirements configure the different spaces is discussed and the way the actions influence the spaces and the spaces influence the actions are explored. It is suggested that the films reconfigure and challenge some traditional understandings of church spaces by among other things connecting the spaces to death and acts of violence, but importantly also present the churches as spaces for essential transformations and change. The question that this fact raises is who these transformations are for. In all three films the main characters who occupy the churches are convicts (or former convicts) and clergy. This circumstance it is argued to construct the churches as in a sense simultaneously peripheral and central, which is considered to perhaps be suggestive of contemporary understandings of traditional religious spaces as well.

Rachel Wagner

Gaming the Apocalypse: Gun Culture, Video Games, and Religious Intolerance

The power of many first person shooter video games lies in their ability to propose simple if violent solutions to global problems. The drive to enter gaming worlds is driven in part by a wish to escape the

complexity of globalization and difference, to a place where – at least temporarily - things make sense, where enemies are clearly recognized and can be defeated, where “winning” is a possibility. Furthermore, the elements of implicit religion in today’s gun culture have fused with overlapping elements in video game culture, especially the celebration of the “first person shooter” to produce a contemporary mode of apocalyptic meaning making that demonizes enemies, preventing real interreligious dialogue.

Tomas Axelson

Religious Studies, School of Humanities & Media, Högskolan Dalarna University, Sweden

The Soft Side of Mediatization: Fiction as a symbolic inventory for vernacular meaning making challenging the ‘banal’ notion in mediatization theory

The outcome of a case study about contemporary viewing habits in a Swedish audience will support claims about viewers as active and playful (Höijer 1998, Hoover 2006, Plantinga 2009). In line with mediatization theory it is argued that spiritual meaning making is taking place through mediated experiences and supports perspectives that media has become the primary source of religious ideas (Lynch 2007, Hjarvard 2008, 2012). The soft side of mediatization processes is illustrated where results from in-depth interviews show how adults are developing moral and metaphysical ideas by reflecting on themes developed in fiction films (Zillman 2005, Partridge 2008, Oliver & Hartmann 2010).

Vernacular meaning making beyond institutionalized religion, embedded in everyday life, such as viewer’s dealing with fiction narratives such as Pulp Fiction, Love Actually or Gladiator, highlights the need for a more complex understanding of elevated enchantment experiences. An overly cognitive understanding of these processes is challenged, questioning the ‘banal’ notion in mediatization theory (Hjarvard 2008, 2012, Lövheim 2011, Nybro Petersen 2012). Instead of sticking to the ‘banal’ notion adopted in the mediatization theoretical framework, indicating something predictable, trivial or even dull, the paper strongly argues for a less pejorative concept, giving a more adequate and nuanced description of the interplay between cognition and affects creating emotional response in the audience.

The presentation contributes to a development of concepts which combines aesthetic, affective and cognitive components in an investigation of spectator’s moves from emotional evaluation of intra-text narration to extra-textual systems of beliefs and moral assessments (Marsh 2007, Johnston 2007, Axelson 2011). It calls for new ways of understanding audiovisual cinematic input as a form of ‘film thinking’, not equivalent to illustrated philosophy (Frampton 2006, Brodén & Noheden 2013), providing symbolic narratives stirring cognition, powered by affect.

Stephen Brown

PhD, Programme Executive, Globethics.net, Geneva

Creating an “Ethical Space” for information ethics: the role of communication rights

In their article, *In search of a code of global information ethics*, Rafael Capurro and Johannes Britz speak of the need for an “ethical space” as an “open space of reflection” about the visions and options in the digital age, against the background of the influence of information and communication technologies on local cultures within a globalizing world. This paper develops this insight against the background of the discussion within the ecumenical arena in such organizations as the World Council of Churches on the development of an “ecumenical space” for open discussion to help develop an alternative to increasingly worldwide structures of communication, finance and the economy. In such a perspective, civil society is seen as an indispensable part of the “ethical space” within which a global ethic needs to be elaborated, alongside the institutional political system of government and the institutionally orientated political society. This paper will explore how the idea of communication rights encourages civil society to play a constitutive role in advancing such a communication ethic, by becoming active in claiming and reclaiming spaces of debate and dialogue to engage in transparent, informed and democratic debate. At the same time, churches and religious organizations, as belonging to worldwide communities, are themselves challenged by such a perspective to not claim for themselves absolute and universal authority, but rather to engage in dialogue with each other and with the secular public sphere.

Media Coverage of Religion & Religious Icons:

Pauline Weseman

Buddhism in the Dutch media

Within only a few decades Buddhism has become the third largest religion in the Netherlands, after Christianity and Islam. Buddha sculptures pop up in every garden centre, Buddha statues and paintings are standard household decoration items, and rock artists don't hesitate to say they are Buddhist. Recent academic research has revealed profound differences between western and Asian Buddhism. History shows that Dutch subgroups adopted Buddhism selectively from Asia to the Netherlands since the 19th century and created their own Buddha (Poorthuis & Salemink, 2009). Paul van der Velde, professor Eastern Religions, defines at least ten misconceptions about eastern Buddhism and sees many differences between Buddhist principles of the East and West (2013). The western Buddhist for example aims for happiness and rest as a result of meditation where the goal of the Asian Buddhist is to reach nirvana or absolute absence of desire; meditation is just one of the many ways to get there. The specific role of the media in this respect is unknown, due to a lack of profound research on this matter. What we do know is that the number of magazines that focus on spirituality and Buddhism increases in the Netherlands. These media often report on Buddhism and seem to inspire thousands of people.

In this research four leading magazines on spirituality and Buddhism (Happinez, exists since 2003), BoeddhaMagazine (renamed and restyled in 2011), Boeddhistisch Dagblad (since 2012) and Openboeddhisme.nl (since 2012) will be analysed about the way they covered Buddhism in 2013 and compared to the coverage of national daily newspapers on this subject.

From a religious perspective these media will be analysed on how they write about Buddhism: their view on Buddha, rituals, doctrine, history, ethics, and experiences. This part of the analysis will be based on Ninian Smarts (The World Religions, 1998) seven religious dimensions.

Secondly, the method of journalism will be analysed: what sources are used, what kind of pictures are used, how is balance and objectivity organized and how are facts checked?

First results show that Dutch media struggle in their reports on Buddhism: a – in the West - young, relatively unknown religion with much diversity. The thirteen national Dutch newspapers published only 206 articles about this topic in 2013, mainly rather ad hoc and superficial. The four researched magazines do report on Buddhism but seem to lack a fully objective, balanced approach. In both cases the Dutch reader don't seem to get the complete and right information to develop a proper understanding of Buddhism.

Giulia Evolvi

Resignation of Pope Benedict XVI and Election of Francis

The study explores the representation of the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI and the election of Pope Francis in Italian media. The paper employs a content analysis of news from four national Italian daily newspapers: "Corriere della Sera", "La Repubblica", "Il Manifesto" and "Il Giornale". The first two are the leading national newspapers in Italy and tend to represent the mainstream media discourse; the second two have strong political biases, being the former liberal and the latter conservative.

Using media sociology theories as theoretical framework, the study explores some features of the Italian press system (defined as "polarized pluralist" by Hallin and Mancini) and media contents; freedom of press is lower in Italy than in other Western countries and the media system has some idiosyncrasies.

The paper analyzes also the media representation of Italian religiosity. Even if the majority of Italians self-assess as Catholic, many of them do not express a strong commitment to religious beliefs. Sometimes, Italians tend to syncretize Catholic practices with other beliefs that come from popular religiosity.

In particular, the study takes into account the similarities and differences of the four newspapers in reporting the same news; it examines the number of articles and the frames used for the two events. The differences in reporting the news were linked to the political ideologies of each daily. However, some features of the news were reported in a similar way by the four newspapers. First, there was a strong tendency to separate the figure of the Pope, analyzed more in his personal characteristics, from the institution of the Church, described as an abstract entity. Second, many articles insisted on features of

popular religiosity, like prophecies and cult of the saints. Third, even if Pope Francis is the first non-European Pope, he was presented as an “Italian Pope” because of his Italian origins. In general, all four newspapers published so called “soft news” and did not present a deep analysis of the Italian religious situation.

In conclusion, even if the newspapers have different biases, some features of Italian culture and representations of Italian lifestyle emerge in patterns of news reporting found in all newspapers.

Sheila McCreanor, PhD

Media Coverage around Canonization of Mary MacKillop

In the late 1990s I submitted a doctoral thesis entitled: Sainthood in Australia: Mary MacKillop and the Print Media. It was a study of Australian popular culture and endeavoured to explore how Mary MacKillop, an Australian Catholic nun, had become a religious icon and had affected the Australian search for identity. I incorporated into the thesis an analysis of political cartoons from mainstream Australian print media that dealt with Mary MacKillop.

Since then Mary MacKillop has been canonised by the Catholic Church in October 2010 and has received even more public acclaim in the print media. She has continued to be of interest to political cartoonists and more than 20 examples have appeared in Australian newspapers since 2009.

This paper will revisit themes from the earlier study and, using the additional cartoon data, explore how these reflect Mary MacKillop as an inspirational element in Australian religion and culture.

Judith Stander

PhD-Student University of Münster, Department of Religious Studies

The representation of religion in the magazines Stern and Spiegel and their role in shaping the understanding of religion

The “Bishop of Bling”, newest findings of meditation or reports concerning Pope Francis – religion is no longer only covered in the theological media but also in the mainstream media such as Germany’s largest print journals Spiegel and Stern. Contrary to current theories of secularization (Bruce 2002, 2011, Inglehart/Norris 2004, 2011, Pollack 2003, 2013a) religion is therefore a much more visible factor in public life (Casanova 1994). Media are not just as a mirror of social processes; they also influence the image and the discourse on religion via communication (Luhmann 2009): “Decisive for the attitude towards a religion is first of all the image that is spread by it in the media” (Pollack 2013b, 38). Based on the sociological change to pluralization and individualization, as well as the increased interest in religion in public and the significance of the representation of religion in the media, I will focus on two sets of questions:

1) Which religious topics are represented on the covers? Which processes of change can be analysed?

By analysing selected religious strands of discourse from 1960 to today based on the covers of Stern and Spiegel various differentiation processes and discursive entanglements become clear. The publicist Wilmont Haacke pointed out: “It is not just the power of idea that influence the effect of the language of the mass media. Moreover, it is the power of words” (Haacke 1962, 16). Consequentially the second set of questions is derived:

2) What impact has the “power of words” in selected subject areas? How are opinions subtly or offensive expressed by linguistic-communicative means and strategies? And how are thereby evaluations about religion designed and sold as “true”, while taking different decades and their historical and social contexts into account?

Using examples from the corpus of materials, the paper will demonstrate the importance of the representation of religion in the media and their role in shaping religious understandings. Moreover it will compare past and present discourses of religion in Stern and Spiegel in an interdisciplinary approach, considering sociological and linguistic perspectives. With a content analysis focusing on the surface of the text, and detailed linguistic studies on reports of religion, it can also be shown how the material can be analysed methodically on the basis of the critical discourse analysis of Siegfried Jäger (2012).