

**Religion as Emotion Knowledge:
Religious Knowledge Systems and
Emotions from the 18th to the 21st
Century**

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The study of religions as well as emotions has increasingly gained scholarly attention during the past decade, both as separate and as entangled phenomena. The questions what religious feelings are and what feeling religious might mean have sparked a multi-disciplinary debate, in which historians in particular have claimed these concepts and experiences vary over space and time. By exploring how religion, as a body of knowledge, shapes emotions not just within the religious itself but also in other knowledge systems in modern societies, the conference conceptualised religion as emotion knowledge and focused on its interaction with other bodies of emotion knowledge. Set up as a hands-on workshop, the conference covered papers that were diverse in themes and source material, but united in the methodological questions their authors posed. The contributions unfolded over four panels.

The first panel engaged with the (re)transmission of religious emotion knowledge into therapeutic cultures. ALEXANDRA BROWN (Amsterdam) identified three knowledge systems at a Yoga studio in contemporary Amsterdam, including the religious, the therapeutic and the neoliberal system. Through religious teachings, explained Brown, the practicing body can remain within and sustain the neoliberal system and is led to ethical and transcendental goals by using the body to go beyond the body. The practice's aim is to generate openness and flexibility – characteristics which were discussed as a generation of potentially new emotions specific to the neoliberal self.

DENISE WELSCH (Buenos Aires) explored the impact of the Buddhist practice of *Soka Gakkai* on the self in contemporary Buenos

Aires. She argued that a specific morality and related emotions shape members' subjectivity. Thus, *Soka Gakkai* provides not only an ontological description for its members, but also guidelines for social and cosmological interactions, which enable members to change the emotional perception of their lives. Feeling and acting in a *Soka Gakkai* sense, Welsch showed, means to generate consciously a new knowledge of emotion, which is tied to the path of a brighter future.

Rather than focusing on the individual self, BETHANY ROWLEY (Leeds) looked at the role of institutionalised emotion knowledge. She examined its operationalisation in the Ex-Services Welfare Society (ESWS), a charity meant to support mentally wounded veterans of the First World War in Britain. Rowley analysed a case of a shell-shocked man and claimed that the actions taken by ESWS, which provided a grant for the visit of the veterans' family, were deeply informed by Christian emotional conceptions – a powerful tool to influence public opinion regarding the veterans' stigmatisation as mad or degenerate.

The second panel was dedicated to the intersection of religion, emotions and the secular state. SHARON HALEVI (Haifa) gave insights into diaries of American girls between 1780 and 1835 and focused on what she called *Small Tours* – informal extracurricular activities meant to further social education and solidify bonds with the nation. According to Halevi, the attendance of other faiths' religious services as part of the tour served two purposes: the delineation of the polity's boundaries and a strengthening of the girls' individual denominational allegiances. While the girls understood a religious emotion as a shared emotion among all, religious differences were converted into bodily distinctions of expression, allowing for a better understanding of one's own religious identity. Halevi suggested that these implemented experiences can shed light on the origins of religious toleration.

MATTHEW KERRY (Stirling) explored the (dis)continuities between Catholic and anti-clerical ideas in Spain between 1899 and 1909. He claimed that the moral critique, the class-based condemnation as well as the pornographic and erotic expressions of the anti-

clericalist movement, which was undergirded by a vibrant print culture, were more complex than simply anti-statements towards church and religion. Catholic emotion knowledge, he proposed, was not abandoned but reframed and used as a vehicle to mobilise the masses and shape Spanish politics.

JULIA WESOŁOWSKA (Krakow) dived into Polish legal debates on the conceptualisation of religious emotions. The Polish penal regulation, which punishes the offence of religious feelings, constitutes the ground for her investigation. By outlining negotiations in legal commentaries, Wesolowska showed how the production of a definition of religious emotions affects society and relates to – challenges, undermines, or reinforces – values such as artistic freedom and respect.

The third panel looked at ways in which ideas of religions, emotions and the economy are co-informed and intertwined. RORY MCCARTHY (Pittsburgh) placed the Sikh male farmer in contemporary Woolgoolah, Australia, at the centre of his research. He claimed that looking at the farmers' selves and their work helps understand the complex ways in which the farmers enact diasporic religious identity on a daily basis. Their identity is fuelled by emotional connections between the individual, the collective, and the physical landscape locally and in Punjab, India – their ancestors' homeland in the 19th century. Even if it is economically reasonable for Sikh farmers to sell their land, it is not an option. Maintaining farmland, argued McCarthy, would mean that Punjab and Australia, the 19th and the 21st centuries, all exist simultaneously in a nostalgic moment that is constantly being re-enacted through the person and the work of the farmer.

TSITSU AGATHA ZVINGOWANISEI (Tokyo) analysed Pentecostalism in neoliberal Zimbabwe as a strand of religious knowledge, which is deeply affected by economic practices and heavily impacts people's lives. To guarantee blessings and protection through particular prophets, followers of the movement are encouraged to purchase icons such as portraits, oil, and divine cloths. As an example, „sowing a financial seed“ is supposed to rescue them from life-threatening diseases. However, this often leads to finan-

cial problems. Zvingowanisei illustrated that such Pentecostal practices act as converters of emotions; for example, by making a financial contribution, fear turns into hope.

The first three panels addressed the question to what extent the religious is a means to an end or an end in itself. Panelists pinpointed the translations and transitions of emotions therein, while scrutinizing the multidirectional mechanisms and contexts that undergird them. The contributors of the fourth panel presented views on (ir)rationalities, critiquing the dichotomy of reason and faith as a result of Western enlightened philosophy.

RADHIKA GUPTA (Leiden) gave insights into the Twelver Shi'i tradition of *Muharram* in Mumbai and Kargil. She focused on understandings of 'aql – the rational faculty – in the modernist discourse that developed around this heightened but regulated emotional practice after the Iranian Revolution. Indian scholars returning from Iran stressed the significance of 'aql. Gupta marked out that the emphasis and shift towards rational thinking did not mitigate emotional engagement in Shi'i practices, but rather became an element in their structure of emotion. Emotions, according to Gupta, became central to the critique of *Muharram* even if they were not expressed, criticised or denied. Thus, the exercise of 'aql did not devalue emotion but gestured to affective complexity.

RAJESH KUMAR (Kanpur) looked at the intersection of religion and emotion through the lens of Bollywood movies. According to him, the movies promote an image of a universal kind of religious emotion to be found in all faiths; only its performance differs in respect of the gurus. Respectively, Kumar stated, Bollywood places the idea of a rational logic of religion into Indian society: superstitions are discarded and instead science is presented as integral to religion.

KRISTOF SMEYERS (Antwerp) looked at particular embodied manifestations of emotional religiosity and stigmata in Britain and Ireland during the evangelical revival of 1859 and analysed both emotional practices and their representations. Tracing the formation of „inner lives“, he set the experiences of individuals on whose bodies the supernatu-

ral manifested itself into dialogue with antagonistic – anti-Catholic and pathological – sources. Thus, by identifying the range of emotion knowledge at work, Smeyers highlighted the zone of mutual significance between individuals who conceived of their religiosity as profoundly emotional and anti-emotional voices within societies that defined themselves as rational, civilized, and disenfranchised.

In addition to the four panels, the artists ANNA SCHAPIRO (Berlin) and MEHDI MORADPOUR (Berlin) introduced the participants to the presence of religion and emotions in their work in fine and literary arts. As part of the collective „Ministerium für Mitgefühl“ („Ministry for Empathy“), they invited the participants to think differently about their work, particularly the impact of religious backgrounds and emotional involvement in relation to historical sources, interactions and communication within a seemingly secular world, through a method called „Sprechstunde“ („consultation hour“).

The conference ended with a final discussion chaired by LUCIAN HÖLSCHER (Oslo/Bochum). He embedded his remarks into the German context, highlighting the conceptual interconnectedness of the emotional and the rational within the religious. Hölscher traced this link from enlightened rational theology, to the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher and his notion of religion as a „Gefühl schlechthiniger Abhängigkeit“, and finally to the threshold of the 20th century, when religion and science seemed to be untangled to such an extent that they opened up views to different realities. Hölscher pointed out that religion is neither confession nor faith, but a language – a system that allows talking about the secular, and vice versa. Seen from that angle, he stated that believers and non-believers define religion which always remains emotionally ambivalent. For Hölscher, one of the main insights of the conference was: emotionality and/or rationality cannot be denied but are always present, since even in their negation they are both involved in and evolve out of reflection.

Indeed, tracing emotions while reaching in and out of the religious allowed for a differentiated view on their presence and form

in a world that has arguably been secularising since the Enlightenment. The conference underlined the fluidity and plurality as well as the historicity of knowledge – regarding both its content and understandings of what classifies as knowledge. Thus, analytically speaking, it turned out to be a fruitful conceptual addition in the research context of religions and emotions. In many papers, emotion knowledge in motion between the religious and other knowledge systems materialised in the body – relating to individuals, collectives as well as institutions – marking out continuities and ruptures with past and future identities. Moreover, despite the challenges to unite the variety of approaches on how to weigh and methodologically tackle the conference’s three central concepts – religion, emotion, and knowledge – their entangled interrogation allowed participants to sketch a nuanced picture of related ascriptions such as the secular, the irrational, and the rational. Rather than reinforcing the Western enlightened relict of binary visions, experimenting with these concepts in varying socio-cultural frameworks showed their proximity, links and points of intersection. The conference shed light on the dialogic nature of the religious and the secular, and the complex rather than one-dimensional interdependence with their oscillation points in the irrational and the rational, which allowed participants to put the very structure of emotion to debate. In that line, the conference served to ask broader theoretical questions about religions, emotions and modernity, such as what the concept adds to the „decolonisation of religion“ (Gupta) and how it challenges the idea of a linear progress, which has increasingly diminished the religious and reinforced the regulation of emotions.

Conference overview:

Panel I – Therapeutic Cultures

Alexandra Brown (Amsterdam University College and Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis): Teaching the Feeling-Body: Performativity and Pedagogy at Tattva Yoga Amsterdam

Denise Welsch (University of Buenos Aires): The Role of Emotions in Soka Gakkai’s Bud-

dthism in Buenos Aires: An Anthropological Approach

Bethany Rowley (University of Leeds): The Influence of Christian Knowledge and Emotion in the Treatment of Mentally Wounded First World War Veterans in Inter-War Britain (1918-1939)

Panel II – The Secular (?) State

Sharon Halevi (University of Haifa): „We were very much surprised at their Worship“: American Girls and Religious Tourism in the Early Republic, 1780-1835

Matthew Kerry (University of Stirling): Emotions and the Interaction of Anticlericalism and Catholicism in Spain

Julia Wesolowska (Jaggiellonian University, Krakow): Of Pope Sculptures and Torn Bibles: Polish Law's Struggle with Religious Emotions

Panel III – Economy

Rory McCarthy (University of Pittsburgh): Punjab in Motion: Land, Nostalgia and Movement as a Nexus for Religion and Emotion

Tsitsi Agatha Zvingowanisei (International Christian University, Tokyo): „Spiritual Deception of Feelings with the Supernatural Activities of God“: Pentecostalism in Neoliberal Zimbabwe

Panel IV – (Ir)rationalities

Radhika Gupta (Leiden University): Reason and Emotion in Discourses of Modernist Twelver Shi'i Reform in India

Rajesh Kumar (Pandit Prithi Nath College, Kanpur): Religion, Emotion Knowledge and Rationality: A Case Study of Bollywood Cinema

Kristof Smeyers (University of Antwerp): Contagious Raptures and Irrational Ecstasies: The Production of Supernatural and Emotion Knowledge in Victorian Religious Communities

Final Discussion

Lucian Hölscher (Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, Oslo/Ruhr-University Bochum): Observations and Final Remarks

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