



Symposium Programme University of Edinburgh

MONDAY 19th January 2026

1:30pm Registration

(**Informatics Forum**, University of Edinburgh, 10 Crichton St, Edinburgh EH8 9AB)

2pm Welcome (Informatics Forum)

Christos Kakalis (Newcastle University), George Tsourous (Newcastle University), Giulia Liberatore (University of Edinburgh), Cinde Lee (RfPUK)

2:30pm Film Screening (Informatics Forum)

Laura Cuch (Goldsmiths, University of London), *Spiritual Flavours*, followed by a Q & A.

3:30-5pm Exhibition Opening (The Chaplaincy Centre, 1 Bristo Square, Edinburgh EH8 9AL), Christos Kakalis (Newcastle University).

Light Reception in the Chaplaincy Centre

TUESDAY 20th January

9:00-12pm Live Drawing Performance (G.07 Informatics Forum)

Matilde Gliubich Tomat (Bangor University), *Drawing as Encounter: Creative Practice and the Sacred*.

10am- 12 noon (Informatics Forum)

Panel 1: Making Suburban Faith

Katy Beinart (University of Brighton/Open College of the Arts). *The Fabric of Faith*

Laura Cuch (Goldsmiths, University of London). *Spiritual Flavours*

David Gilbert & Ali Mangera. *Title tbc*

Chair: Christos Kakalis (Newcastle University)

LUNCH 12-1pm

1-3pm (Informatics Forum)

Panel 2: Learning through Making

Giulia Liberatore (University of Edinburgh) & Kate Stanworth. *Islamic Traces: a digital installation*.

Floriana Sciumé (Accademia di Belle Arti di Palermo & Officina di Studi Medievali). *Luce da Luce – Luce su Luce*.

Rosa Lin, Nikoleta Tsiamas, George Tsourous, Christos Kakalis, (Newcastle University), *title tbc*

Maggie Roe (Newcastle University), *Sacred Spaces, Sacred Stories: Collaborative Creative Practices in the Sundarbans*.

Chair: Tom Lea (University of Edinburgh)

Coffee break

3:30-5pm (Informatics Forum)

Panel 3: Thinking Bodies

Sabina Sallis. *Dance of Commoning: Embodying Composition of Vitalities and Analogies*.

Matilde Gliubich Tomat (Bangor University). *Drawing as Encounter: Creative Practice and the Sacred*.

Gabrielle Heller. *Solitude*.

Chair: George Tsourous (Newcastle University)

WEDNESDAY 21st January 2026

10:30-12 noon (Informatics Forum)

Panel 4: Mediating Encounters

Milja Radovic (University of Vienna). *Cinematic Spaces of Memory*.

R. Santhosh (IIT Madras) and Navaneeth H. (IIT Madras/University of Edinburgh). *Between a Muslim Dargah and Hindu Temple: Religious Coexistence and the Discourse of Communal Harmony in Kerala, South India*.

Marcelo de Medeiros Reis Filho (Instituto de Estudos de Sociais e Políticos, IESP/UERJ). *Sounds and the divine: mediation, connection and artistic practices in a carioca favela*.

Chair: Giulia Liberatore (University of Edinburgh)

12:30-2pm (Informatics Forum)

Panel 5: Shaping Encounters

Birgit Meyer (Utrecht University). *Dynamics of urban-religious world making in Madina, Accra*.

Joseph Fifi Fosu-Ankrah (University of Ghana). *Religious Images, Lorry Parks, and the Dynamics of Coexistence: A Social History of Urban Encounters, Ecological Discourses, and Interreligious World-Making in Madina, Accra (2000s–Present)*

Frederico Dinis (Universidade Católica Portuguesa). *Performing Memory, Shaping Belonging: Site-Specific Art in Religious Contexts*

Chair: George Tsourous (Newcastle University)

Lunch 2-3pm

3-4:30pm

Panel 6: Placing Encounters (Informatics Forum)

Susanna Trotta (Humboldt University). *Religious encounters in shared spaces: the case of the St. Georgis Eritrean Orthodox community and the St. Paul's congregation in Berlin, Germany*
Way Weng Hew (University of Edinburgh). *Cosmopolitan Islam and Its Limits: Chinese-style mosques in Malaysia and Indonesia*

Isabelle Christine Somma de Castro (University of São Paulo, Nupri-USP). *From social threat to tourist attraction: the mosque Omar Ibn Al-Khattab in Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil*

Chair: Christos Kakalis (Newcastle University)

4:30-5:30pm Closing Remarks (Informatics Forum)

George Tsourous (Newcastle University) and Cinde Lee (RfPUK)

Abstracts & Biographies

Katy Beinart, *The Fabric of Faith*

Abstract:

The Fabric of Faith project was a collaborative arts project commissioned by AHRC funded research project Making Suburban Faith. The project emerged from research on creativity within faith communities in Ealing and Hanwell, and particularly the significance of textiles for different faith groups. Katy ran a series of creative workshops in July to September 2016 with Project Lead Professor Clare Dwyer and Researcher Dr. Nazneen Ahmed, with women from different faith groups in the Ealing and Hanwell area. The group, led by Katy, co-produced a collaborative textile artwork and individual pieces along the theme of prayer. Katy, Clare and Nazneen collaborated in producing a series of exhibitions and other outcomes from the workshops with the participants, including exhibitions at St Thomas Hanwell, UCL and Gunnersbury Museum. A book was produced as an outcome of the project which included images of the participants with their work taken by Laura Cuch (who was also working on the wider project), as well as images of the artwork and poems by Nazneen Ahmed. A journal article and a book chapter co-written by Clare, Nazneen and Katy were subsequently published in 2019.

Biography:

Katy Beinart is a visual artist based in Brighton, UK whose artworks include sculpture, installation, public art, textiles, film, drawing and performance. Recent projects and commissions include *Re-Enchanted* for Walk the Chalk Festival (2024); *Acts of Transfer* (with Lizzie Lloyd) research project funded by Arts Council England (2021-22); *A Difficult Place* (2023) and *2 Metre Conversations* (2020) (with John Edwards), commissioned by Phoenix Art Space; and *Hybrid*, a permanent public art work in Braintree, Essex (2022). Recent exhibitions and screenings include *The Power of Residents* (2023/ 2024), *Wriggle Room: Open Studio* (2023) at Towner Eastbourne, *Correspondences* (with Rebecca Beinart) at the Jewish Museum London (2021) and *Five Years London* (2020). She is a Senior Lecturer in Architecture at the University of Brighton, a Fine Art Tutor for Open College of the Arts. Her book, *Salted Earth: Poetics of place and migration through four artistic journeys*, will be published by Intellect Press in 2026.

Laura Cuch, *Using creative practice to explore food, religion, and spaces of conviviality in a multi-faith suburb.*

Abstract:

This paper draws on interdisciplinary research investigating the relationship between food and religious material practices of several faith communities in Ealing, a suburb in West London. These include a Synagogue, a Sri Lankan Hindu Temple, a mosque, a Sikh Gurdwara, an Anglican church, a Roman Catholic church and an ethnically diverse Pentecostal church. The research developed through an arts project, *Spiritual Flavours*, which comprises a photographic series, a short film, and an artist cookbook. Whilst the photographic series uses a formal approach, devoid of people, to explore the spatial arrangements of (often multicultural and multi-faith) commensality within religious buildings. In parallel, the

cookbook and the film focus on participatory engagement, biographical narratives, and multi-faith exchange. The paper draws on debates on material and lived religion, on food, memory and the senses, and on material performativity, to explore how embodied food practices occasion and are occasioned by religious practices, as well how these intersect with other personal and socio-cultural dimensions. The research shows, *in practice*, how the affective and storytelling affordances of food, recipes and cookbooks are key for supporting and negotiating gendered religious identities, as well as intergenerational and transnational connections. Further, the research reveals how food practices constitute an important dimension of suburban multi-faith identity, creativity and heritage, and, in so doing, play a key role in developing positive multicultural and multi-faith relationships – which are also enabled through the creative research process itself. This informs the analysis of how the creative outputs yield new ‘multi-faith’ relationships and imaginations of suburbia, as well as understandings of culinary religious practices as sensory, affective and embodied (spiritual) practices. In so doing, the research addresses how creative methodologies can produce knowledges that are accountable and meaningful to the participants and communities involved, as well as to wider publics.

Biography:

Laura Cuch is a cultural geographer and visual artist engaging with sociocultural food issues, material practices, migration, as well as urban (religious) communities and identities. Her practice-based research explores the affective and performative potential of visual and participatory methods, involving individuals, communities and cultural institutions. Laura is a Lecturer in the departments of Sociology and of Media, Communications and Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London, where she also co-directs the [Kitchen Research Unit](#). She has recently gained an ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowship for the project 'Food and Faith: Material Practices in a Multicultural Suburb of West London'.

Frederico Dinis, *Performing Memory, Shaping Belonging: Site-Specific Art in Religious Contexts*

Abstract:

This contribution examines how non-verbal mediation in site-specific performance can foster interfaith dialogue and coexistence through creative practice. Developed within a postdoctoral research project in Religious Studies, the work is grounded in three artistic interventions in distinct religious places, each marked by spiritual and ontological qualities that intensify sensorial perception and the performativity of memory. These places, imbued with symbolic and affective resonance, provided the framework for exploring how audiovisual performance can activate embodied memory, evoke emotional and spiritual responses, and invite new modes of collective belonging.

The research situates memory as a phenomenon of presence-in-absence, where its performativity emerges through sound and image as live, embodied processes of remembrance. By incorporating narratives and sensory elements connected to the places, the performances produced immersive experiences that reconfigured the perception of sacred places. Sound and visual elements operated not only as aesthetic components but as catalysts for autobiographical memory, reinforcing a sense of spatial “self” and fostering re-interpretations of religious atmospheres. These dynamics highlight the transformative potential of performance as a means of engaging with contested or plural religious

imaginaries, offering alternative ways of inhabiting and understanding sacred places. The research-driven approach emphasises that site-specific audiovisual performance can contribute to rethinking religious coexistence by creating moments where communities collectively negotiate memory, identity, and belonging. The live performative moments enabled social and artistic reconfigurations, shaping new representations of religious symbolism and ritual while respecting the specificity of the places. As such, the work demonstrates how creative practice can interrogate dominant narratives of religious difference, while cultivating places of encounter that are multisensory, affective, and inclusive. This project thus proposes that performative memory in religious places operates not only as an artistic gesture but also as a mode of relational practice, opening pathways for interfaith understanding through the shared embodiment of sound, image, and space.

Biography:

Frederico Dinis is a lecturer and artist-researcher exploring the intersection of performance and visual arts. He holds a PhD in Art Studies – Drama and Performance Studies from the University of Coimbra and completed a postdoctoral fellowship in Religious Studies at the Portuguese Catholic University and the Research Centre for Theology and Religious Studies. He is an Invited Adjunct Professor at the School of Education at Viana do Castelo, and a research fellow at ID+ -Research Institute in Design, Media, and Culture. His site-specific, practice-led research investigates memory's role in shaping individual and collective identities, engaging critically with place and performativity.

Joseph Fifi Fosu-Ankrah, *Religious Images, Lorry Parks, and the Dynamics of Coexistence: A Social History of Urban Encounters, Ecological Discourses, and Interreligious World-Making in Madina, Accra (2000s–Present)*

Abstract:

This study presents a historical examination of how religious images in lorry parks have influenced the urban religious world-making and dynamics of interreligious coexistence in Madina, Accra, from the early 2000s to the present. As a multiethnic and multireligious peri-urban settlement, Madina serves as a significant site for examining the intersection of religious material culture, spatial practices, and everyday encounters in Ghana's urban history. Anchored in the broader transformations of post-2000 urban governance, migration, and religious pluralisation, the study traces how Christian, Islamic, and Indigenous religious posters and symbols have mediated social interactions, structured moral economies, and contributed to forms of shared urban religious life. Central to the analysis is the historical emergence of ecological discourses—how religious posters and relics have generated contestations and negotiations over space, legitimacy, and urban belonging. The study examines the evolving techniques of coexistence that have emerged in response to these religious entanglements, including silent accommodation, strategic avoidance, unfriendly tolerance, and symbolic spatial demarcation. These techniques are situated within the longue durée of Madina's urban and religious development.

Combining historical reconstruction with ethnographic fieldwork and spatial analysis conducted between 2018 and 2022, the study advances interdisciplinary debates on religion and the African city. By foregrounding the historical evolution of religious images and the social practices they engender, the study contributes to scholarly conversations on plural worlds (interreligious entanglements), livable worlds (religion and urban habitability), and

abiding worlds (religious heritage and urban change). It ultimately reveals how religious actors and symbols have shaped—and continue to reshape—the socio-spatial fabric of Madina and contemporary African urbanism more broadly.

Biography:

Fiifi Fosu-Ankrah is a Social and Cultural Historian and a Research Fellow in African History at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon. He holds a PhD in African History from Leiden University, the Netherlands. His doctoral dissertation, *Common Grounds: Urban Spaces, Everyday Religious Encounters, and the Dynamics and Techniques of Coexistence in Madina, Accra (1959–Present)*, examines how ordinary people negotiate coexistence in complex urban religious environments. His research interests include Conflict, Diplomacy, and Peacebuilding History; the histories of social encounters in urban spaces; and the histories of materiality and urban social relations, among others. His is part of the Madina Project which examines Modalities of Coexistence in a Diversifying Urban Community:<https://religiousmatters.nl/new-the-madina-project/>

Gabrielle Heller, *Solitude*

Abstract:

Solitude is a 40 min audio play that enquires themes of spirituality, loneliness, communal living and solitude existences. In my work I am exploring how religious, spiritual and philosophical values from the past and present influence our contemporary life style and the way we want to shape our individual lives as well as the communal structures we depend on. What part do religious values, philosophical questions or political structures play in the way we live our lives and in the way we connect with architecture, public spaces and the environment we inhabit? One of the key quotes in my piece is a sentence spoken by the anchorite: 'I want to be alone but I can't do it on my own.' We live in a society where individual choice and personal freedom is highly valued. But with more and more uncertainties and an increase of threats from an unstable world we slowly realise that societies need to refocus on questions about coexistence, social dependence, democratic structures and simply ask how we as individuals choose to live together. I use my audio piece *Solitude* to invite various audiences to communal listening events in different churches. Some are in the centre of big cities others are in more rural settings. These communal listening situations where people sit and listen together in a specific architectural space seem to have a profound effect on how the audience reflects on their own choices of living as well as their relationship with the environment they inhabit and the structure of the society they live in.

Biography:

[Gabriele Heller](#) is a German/British artist working across theatre, radio art, music, and performance. She uses ambiguous and paradoxical forms of text and improvisation to explore social, cultural and philosophical concerns of society. Her experimental narration techniques and site specific presentations offer spaces for the audience to intuitively engage in. Gabriele is a member of various music and theatre ensembles. She holds an MA in German Literature and Theatre studies, and is a founding member of the Fast-Food Theater, Germany. Gabriele worked as an assistant audio director for the Bavarian Radio Broadcast and as an acting tutor at Northumbria and Newcastle University. Her work was presented and broadcasted at a

range of institutions and festivals, including BBC 3 Free Thinking Festival; International Radio Drama Festival, UK; Radiophrenia, UK; Deutschlandfunk Kultur; Bayerische Theatertage; Faith in the City Festival, London,; Akustik-Sommer-Special, City Basel, Switzerland; and Open Heritage Day, UK.

Way Weng Hew, *Cosmopolitan Islam and Its Limits: Chinese-style mosques in Malaysia and Indonesia*

Abstract:

Since 2000, at least twenty new Chinese-style mosques have been constructed in both Malaysia and Indonesia. Most of these newly completed mosques adopt the architecture of old mosques in China, yet they are reconfigured within local contexts. Such mosques play a crucial role in manifesting Chinese Muslim cultural identity, upholding the universality of Islamic principles, and promoting religious tourism. The architectural designs of these mosques are forms of intentional hybridity, where elements of Islam and “Chineseness” are strategically combined to declare that “there can be a Chinese way of being Muslim.” However, a closer examination of the activities conducted within these mosques reveals them as spaces of identity contestation, where Chinese Muslims from diverse backgrounds negotiate their identities, not only between Islamic and Chinese identities but also among various Islamic and Chinese traditions. To a certain extent, these mosques are cosmopolitan spaces where Muslims and non-Muslims come together, where local Chinese Muslims and Hui migrants interact. Nonetheless, there are limitations to this cosmopolitanism, especially in Malaysia, where state religious authorities and popular online preachers determine whether events are permissible. Earlier this year in Malaysia, following enormous pressure from a Salafi Chinese preacher, some Chinese New Year celebrations organised by religious authorities cancelled the Yee Sang tossing ceremony and lion dance performances. Some state religious departments have even prohibited Chinese New Year and Mooncake Festival celebrations within mosque compounds. Focusing on the recently established Klang Chinese Muslim Mosque, based on online and offline ethnography and interviews, this paper examines: 1. how and under what conditions different state and social actors contribute to the development of such a mosque; 2. various debates surrounding whether Chinese New Year celebrations and lion dances are allowed within the mosque. This points to the potential and limitation of the visual approach to the study of religion – it can reveal what is permissible, yet controversial and contentious practices remain invisible.

Biography:

Dr Hew Wai Weng is Alwaleed Fellow in Contemporary Muslim Societies in the Globalised World at the Alwaleed Centre, The University of Edinburgh. His research interests include the intersections between ethnicity, religiosity, class and politics in Malaysia and Indonesia. He writes about Chinese Muslim identities, Hui migration, social media and Islamic preaching, and urban middle-class Muslim aspirations in Malaysia and Indonesia.

Giulia Liberatore (University of Edinburgh) and Kate Stanworth
Islamic Traces: presentation & screening

In our presentation, we will be presenting our online digital installation *Islamic Traces* and screening a short multimedia piece drawn from the project. *Islamic Traces* follows a small

number of Palermo's inhabitants – both Muslim and those of other faiths or none – as they search for remnants of the city's Islamic past. Through architecture, landscape, sensory experiences, religious practices, language and the arts, they bring their imaginaries of the past to life, recounting it and giving it meaning in the present. Drawing on their own research and personal discoveries, the historical accounts they provide are infused with their feelings, narratives, forms of nostalgia, hauntings, resonances and sensory experiences. In doing so, they revive this Islamic past, emphasizing its centrality to present-day Sicily while also challenging dominant, linear, totalizing and objective modes of history-making. *Islamic Traces* prompts reflection on the absence of this history in official heritage-making and in many contemporary representations of the city and its Muslim populations. What emerges from this work are visions of Palermo in which the Islamic presence is central both to narratives and memories of the medieval past and to people's present experiences and sense of belonging in the city.

Biographies:

[Kate Stanworth](#) is a London-based photographic artist who explores themes of human resilience, identity and the search for belonging. She is motivated by a desire to understand the emotional reality of the people she photographs, their struggles, aspirations and sense of connection to their environment. Her work has been exhibited and published internationally, including in the BBC, The Guardian, The Sunday Times, Al Jazeera and Internazionale. She studied Fine Art at Norwich School of Art, and has a Masters Degree in Visual Cultures from Goldsmiths College, University of London.

[Giulia Liberatore](#) is a Lecturer in Social Anthropology and Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at Alwaleed Centre, University of Edinburgh, U.K. She researches, teaches and writes about religion (Islam and Catholicism), migration and the politics of difference in Europe. She is author of [Somali, Muslim, British: Striving in Securitized Britain](#) (Bloomsbury, 2017) and is currently co-writing, with Eugenio Giorgianni, an experimental ethnography on Palermo, saints and encounters with and across difference.

The project was made possible thanks to the collaborations of Stefano Edward Puvanendarajah, Noemi Gaudesi, Boulallam Abderrahmane Mustafa, Sirus Nikkhoo Sari Gieh, Tehseen Nisar, Abdulkarim Fabio Crisà, Helena Russo, and Cesare Tinì.

Marcel de Medeiros Reis, *Sounds and the divine: mediation, connection and artistic practices in a carioca favela*

Abstract:

This work is based on fieldwork conducted in the Santa Marta favela, in the South Zone of Rio de Janeiro. The research is constructed among two groups with different religious practices and affiliations, the Penitentes do Santa Marta and the Baptist Church in Santa Marta. The first group is a Folia de Reis present in the community for around seventy years, while the other is a church established in the favela in the last thirty years. Through participant observation and interviews, I access listening regimes, histories and techniques (Feld, 2020) produced by their members and leaders during rehearsals and events. I then unravel how

these two groups rehearse, produce, and reproduce sounds that create interactions and locations with the divine (Eisenlohr, 2024). Furthermore, I analyze how to build repertoires of sensory abilities (Hirschkind, 2021) and the possibility of accessing different identities and moralities through listening to others (Oosterbaan, 2008).

Biography:

Marcelo Reis Filho is a PhD Candidate at the Sociology Program of Instituto de Estudos de Sociais e Políticos (IESP/UERJ), with a Master's degree from the same institution and a Bachelor's degree from the Escola de Ciências Sociais da Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV-CPDOC). His research and work interests include urban sociology and anthropology, urban planning, memories in favelas and peripheral areas, sounds and musicalities in cities, and mobility. Marcelo is currently working on his doctoral thesis in the Santa Marta favela, investigating the intertwining of sounds, memories, and spaces with different local groups.

Birgit Meyer *Dynamics of urban-religious world making in Madina, Accra.* (online)

Abstract:

As urban spaces are plural by default, the making and imposition of one total world on a city is impossible. Cities are laboratories in which differences and tensions are continuously negotiated, and always in flux. Taking religious plurality as a starting point for research on how religions – literally – “take place” in cities brings into focus the margins of religious traditions, where they rub against, conflict and partly accommodate each other. Doing so calls attention to people’s actual practices of co-existence and the encounters, entanglements and relations ensued by them. In this presentation, I will explore such practices against the backdrop of a collaborative research project on modalities of co-existence of Christians, Muslims and traditionalists in the multi-religious suburb of Madina, Accra. My conceptual and methodological anchor-point to theorize these practices is the concept of the interstice (*Zwischenraum*), which I understand as an in-between space in which connections and relations are shaped.

Biography:

Birgit Meyer (PhD, 1995) is Professor of Religious Studies at Utrecht University. Trained as a cultural anthropologist, she studies religion from a material, corporeal and postcolonial angle. Most of her research takes place in Ghana, where she explored a broad range of themes, including the study of religious coexistence. She directs the research program *Religious Matters in an Entangled World* (www.religiousmatters.nl) and co-directs the collaborative Madina project on modalities of religious coexistence (<https://religiousmatters.nl/projects/madina/>), as well as the Legba-Dzoka research project (<https://religiousmatters.nl/the-legba-dzoka-project-tracking-and-unpacking-the-collection-carl-spiess-ubersee-museum-bremen/>).

Maggie Roe and Swastik Pal, *Sacred Spaces, Sacred Stories: Collaborative Creative Practices in the Sundarbans*

Abstract:

The sacred stories of the Sundarbans express relationships between landscapes and people and the myths and legends that have grown up as a result of the interaction between natural processes and people's lives. These tell of lives in the watery landscapes of the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna delta that is in a constant state of flux, with hundreds of islands that shift and change. Home to approximately four million people and described as a 'syncretic' landscape, the Sundarbans is the largest single-tract mangrove forest in the world, covering 10,000sqkm (40% India; 60% Bangladesh). Large parts are protected for the rich cultural heritage and biodiversity.

This work is based on collaborations between researchers from Newcastle University UK, Swastik Pal, a Visual Artist working with photography and video, based in Kolkata, India, and communities in the Sundarbans during a five year project, 'Living Deltas'. Engaging with creative methods encouraged to challenge the relevance of stories from the past in considering the contemporary lives of wild honey-gathering communities. We examined the goddess *Bonbibi*, worshipped across national and faith boundaries, revered as protector of the forest and its many dangers, providing a balance between fear and respect, peace and danger, gain and loss. The 'cult' of *Bonbibi* endures, despite increasing challenges to the existence of the people and landscapes of the Sundarbans.

Our findings, told in visual and textual forms, through co-creative methods working with interpretive photo-journalism, indicate how *Bonbibi* worship has been, and continues to play, an important role in the culture of the Sundarbans, resisting religious divisions, crossing national political boundaries and reflecting both the sanctity of the forest and its ever-present dangers. The sacred rituals are intrinsic to the lives of these communities in this fluid, dynamic environment whose inhabitants are familiar with the need for adaptation and resilience to change.

Biographies:

Maggie Roe and Swastik Pal came together to work on the International GCRF 'Living Deltas' research Hub. Maggie Roe is Professor of Landscape, Newcastle University, UK. Funded by national and international research bodies, she has published widely. Her research focuses on participatory working, landscape ecology, cultures and change. Recently on collaborative approaches/transdisciplinary methods based on landscape values, community cultures and creative practices. Swastik Pal is a visual artist working with photography and video, based in Kolkata, India. His first solo show, 'The Hungry Tide Project' opened at the India Habitat Centre, 2016 (National Media Fellowship). Published in many prestigious international outlets including The Economist, BBC, Financial Times. His visual stories have been exhibited globally including the Angkor Photo Festival, Siem Reap, Academy of Fine Arts, Calcutta, Alliance Francaise, New Delhi. He received the Murthy Nayak foundation fellowship for *Documentary Practice: Visual Storytelling Online* (2025), International Centre of Photography, New York.

Milja Radovic, Cinematic Spaces of Memory

Abstract:

A vibrant world surrounding us, and an equally dynamic world residing within us, as articulated by Slavko Vorkapich, has been for the first time explored through the medium of film - the unique art form in which time manifests as space. Moreover, for the first time, this

spatial aspect of cinema granted us the ability to perceive the experiential memory of the past as inherently our own. With the advent of the 'moving image,' filmmakers engaged with historical and ontological realities via the mechanical device of the 'camera eye,' capturing diverse communities, their spiritual beliefs, and the profound meanings of religion. Film enabled novel and authentic avenues for engaging with history and spirituality, allowing representations that are both artistic and factual. Cinematic space has been meticulously built - poetically, artistically, and factually - to document and convey the shared spaces, histories, and faiths of peoples within their specific temporal and cultural contexts.

In this paper, I focus on the early cinema of the Balkan Peninsula, spanning from 1896 to 1939, examining how pioneering filmmakers – the first architects of cinema – depicted spirituality, religious diversity, and societal life amid periods of peace and turmoil. I approach film as a primary source, rather than merely supplementary, employing the concept of frame as a critical analytical method, with space as the central object of inquiry. By 'frame,' I refer to the means through which content is conveyed via film language – mise-en-scène, cinematography, montage, and sound, or their absence. By 'space,' I refer to the cinematic and filmic space - what is visually captured on the 'reel' through the camera's lens.

This paper seeks to examine how the intersections of diverse spaces – sacred, geographical, urban, and private – both in front of and behind the camera, contribute to the layered fabric of cinematic space. Ultimately, this analysis aims to enrich scholarship in Media, Representation, and Visual Culture by introducing innovative frameworks for examining religion within one of the world's most culturally rich cinematic traditions.

Biography:

Dr. Milja Radovic is a Principal Investigator on the FWF-funded Projects "Reframing Space: Film as History" and "Religion and Cinema in Yugoslavia 1945-1989" at the University of Vienna. An international interdisciplinary scholar in religion, media and culture, Dr. Radovic conducts specialized research in theology and film and her scientific work traverses theology of ascensis, history, visual arts, citizenship, nationalism, conflict and peacebuilding, and Yugoslav cinema. She is the author of numerous scientific articles and authored monographs (Routledge, Ashgate, DeGruyter, JRFM, Edinburgh University Press). Dr Radovic is actively engaged with the public sector, being an active member of Interfilm and serving as both president and member of the Ecumenical Jury at leading international film festivals, including Cannes, Berlinale, Locarno, Karlovy Vary, Cottbus, and Oberhausen.

Sabina Sallis, *Dance of Commoning: Embodying Composition of Vitalities and Analogies*

Abstract:

This participatory performance addresses the conference theme of Religious Encounters through Creative Practice by disrupting conventional academic formats with embodied collective practice. It animates hand-crafted objects and reimagines religious coexistence through embodied and somatic land-based ritual, improvised ceremony, and multispecies kinship. In the context of climate crisis and accelerating extractive logics, the work asks how creative practice might cultivate non-extractive, earthbound forms of spiritual encounter and community building. *Dance of Commoning* is a research-driven exploration of how artistic

practice can invite others into sacred cohabitation and function simultaneously as ritual and inquiry. Drawing from forest garden ecologies and ephemeral land practices, the performance activates the artwork One Vegetal Body: Resonant Composition. Participants will engage with foraged ritual objects and hand-crafted ceremonial devices made from materials grown in my forest garden, transforming the installation into a speculative common of shared spiritual presence and imagination. This work connects spiritual lineages such as Hildegard of Bingen's *viriditas* (greening power of life) with avant-garde methodologies of indeterminacy and transformation (Beuys, Cage, Cunningham). Through somatic movement, sound improvisation, and collective ritual, participants are invited to recontextualize esoteric traditions into exoteric practice, cultivating a space of embodied participation rather than detached spectatorship. The research situates art as anthropotechnics (Sloterdijk): a cultural and environmental technique for shaping ways of living and knowing. It interrogates technocratic epistemologies and colonial legacies of extractive knowledge, proposing instead an intuitive, foraging-based methodology that is relational, seasonal, and attuned to place. Through durational acts of sensing, movement, and sonic practice, the workshop resists reductionist frameworks while reanimating the esoteric undercurrents of radical pedagogy. In this way, *Dance of Commoning* positions creative practice as a form of interfaith encounter, where religious coexistence is enacted through shared rituals of care, attention, and ecological renewal.

Biography:

Sabina Sallis is an artist, researcher, and educator working at the intersection of land-based practice, speculative world-building, and radical pedagogy. Through expanded art practices, she investigates entanglement of nature-culture and alternative knowledge systems rooted in connection, cultivation, and care- engagement with plants, healing and cosmology. Sabina graduated with MA from University of Arts in Poznan, Poland (2005) and with a practice-based PhD on the Aesthetics of Sustainability from Newcastle University (2023). She has exhibited nationally and internationally, gaining competitive residencies and commissions for significant projects, e.g. Multispecies Visionary Institute (Berwick Gymnasium Gallery, 2021) and Greetings from the Mother of Herbs (BALTIC, 2022-2023), attracting 80,000+ visitors. She co-founded and co-lead Albion Row Studios in Newcastle. Her practice extends into decentralised co-creation with organizations like the International Community Organization of Sunderland and Gem Arts, facilitating experiences that encourage care and multispecies engagement.

Joseph Sallis has been a maker of traditional and experimental musical instruments for over 30 years. He works as a woodwork technician at Fine Art NU. Sabina and Joseph have been collaborating on many projects for last 20 years.

Floriana Sciumé, Luce da Luce

Abstract:

The video installation Light from Light (phōs ek phōtós) – Light upon Light (nūr 'alā nūr), first presented on September 25, 2020, at the Riso Museum in Palermo, formed part of a broader project and of the exhibition Teofania della bellezza, which brought together iconographic, documentary, and photographic materials alongside the installation itself. The engagement with texts, rituals, and artistic production revealed a profound connection between

otherness, tradition, and the aspiration toward a pure vision of existence. Within this framework, light emerged as a central symbolic archetype, articulated as a spectrum rich in metaphors and closely connected to contemporary art. The footage, shot between Calabria and Sicily, explores ritual gestures and materials, recovering distant spiritual identities. Structured in six sections, the video installation examines the ascetic doctrines of Christian hesychasm and Islamic dhikr, highlighting the role of the soul and the heart as instruments of purification and access to divine light. In dhikr, the repetition of the shahāda purifies the heart and leads to gnosis; in hesychasm, continuous prayer enables the vision of the uncreated light. Prostration symbolizes repentance and humility in both traditions, while the call to prayer is expressed through the Orthodox tantalon and the Islamic adhan, instruments that mark spiritual rhythm and summon the faithful. The installation thus constructs a visual and spiritual dialogue between two distant traditions, united by a shared aspiration to guide the believer through the purification of the heart and participation in divine light.

Biography:

Floriana Sciumè is a cultural heritage specialist and project designer, working across museology, Arab culture, and visual arts. She is a PhD candidate in the MEDIASCAPE program: Research and Transcultural Artistic Productions, and has worked for over ten years at the Antonio Pasqualino International Puppet Museum, also serving as an editor. As a project designer for the Officina di Studi Medievali, her most recent work presented is Costa Action T.O.W.A.R.D.S. PANGEA – Transforming Our World: Advancing Regional Dialogue and Solidarity (2025, under evaluation). She has led workshops on European project design for the Chair of Arabic Language and Culture at UniPA, teaches Philosophy, History, and Heritage Communication in high schools, and is a teaching fellow in Museology at the Academy of Fine Arts in Palermo. Together with Prof. Patrizia Spallino (UniPA), she conceived and designed the video installation Light from Light.

Isabelle Christine Somma de Castro, *From social threat to tourist attraction: the mosque Omar Ibn Al-Khattab in Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil*

Abstract:

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, both national and international media outlets accused the mosque Omar Ibn Al-Khattab in Foz do Iguaçu, situated at the Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina triple frontier, of having harbored Al Qaeda members prior to the events. In an effort to counter these allegations and promote transparency, local leaders decided to open the mosque to public visitation, seeking to demonstrate that it functioned as a worship site. Nearly twenty-five years later, the mosque has become one of the most visited tourist attractions in Foz do Iguaçu, a city that relies heavily on tourism as a primary economic driver. The increasing popularity of the mosque's guided tours in recent years prompted the construction of an expanded visitor facility, which was recently inaugurated. This study examines how tourists have engaged with the experience of visiting an Islamic worship place in a city predominantly known for its natural attractions, and how such visits influence their perceptions of Islam and the Muslim community. Adopting ethnographic and content analysis approaches, we analyze tourists' reactions, captured in YouTube videos, both during and after their visits. In addition, we investigate the architectural and organizational changes undertaken to accommodate the growing number of visitors and the reactions of the local Muslim community. The objective of this study is to examine how the modifications and

practices developed over years of guided tours have shaped the current visitation experience, with the aim of fostering intercultural dialogue and transforming public perceptions. In dialogue with the literature pointing to the materialization of Islamophobia, the mosque Omar Ibn Al-Khattab initiative illustrates the potential of the tourism experience to tackle misconceptions and, perhaps, hate discourses in Brazil.

Biography:

Isabelle Christine Somma de Castro is a researcher at the International Relations Research Center at the University of São Paulo (Nupri-USP). She holds a M.A. in Letters and a Ph.D. in Social History from the University of São Paulo (USP). She was a Visiting Student at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge, with a Capes fellowship (2012/3), and a Visiting Scholar in the Arnold A. Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies, at Columbia University, with a Fapesp fellowship (2018/9).

R. Santhosh, and Navaneeth H *Between a Muslim Dargah and Hindu Temple: Religious Coexistence and the Discourse of Communal Harmony in Kerala, South India*

Abstract:

Rather than a passive and inert phenomenon, peaceful religious coexistence is an active and negotiated process shaped by the lived experiences, collective memories, and various moral projects of religious and political communities. In the South Asian context, this process is predominantly framed through the language of communal harmony. In this paper, we problematise this framing through an analysis of the discourses and practices that celebrate the historical relationship between a popular Muslim dargah and a Hindu temple in Kerala, South India. This historical connection between these places of worship is cemented in the popular memory through local folksongs and oral histories, which recount a quasi-historical narrative of the friendship between a Muslim Saint and a Hindu Goddess. This friendship is exhibited and paraded in its fullest glory through the ritual procession associated with the annual festival at this Hindu Temple. As part of the procession, devotees seek blessings at the Muslim dargah and carry horse effigies along with huge hoardings that display religious symbols of Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam before culminating at the Hindu temple. However, with recent institutional and theological changes, the dargah and temple authorities have grown hesitant to officially support these narratives and practices. Yet, in popular discourse and media narratives, these practices are hailed as celebrated symbols of communal harmony that transcend religious boundaries. Critically examining these developments through in-depth ethnographic accounts, the paper analyses how such narratives and practices shape the understandings and expectations of religious coexistence, and thus contribute to a normative discourse of communal harmony. We argue that this normative discourse of communal harmony is predicated on a constellation of norms, practices, sensibilities, and ethical dispositions in public life, which are intricately connected with vernacular notions of secularism as understood by the masses. Through this, we also attempt to theorize secularism beyond the state-centric discourses by foregrounding the agentive role of non-state actors in shaping the vernacular formations of secularism in specific socio-political contexts.

Biographies:

Dr. Santhosh R is Professor of Sociology in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at IIT Madras, India. His research explores the intersections of religion and the secular in contemporary India, with a focus on Muslim communities, intra-community contestations, Islamic activism, women's issues, development, and emerging Muslim politics. He has also examined globalization's impact on Kerala's Muslims, particularly through the internet and electronic media, and continues to study new spiritualities, Hindu identity, and political mobilization. He has held fellowships at the University of Sussex, the Centre for Modern Oriental Studies (Berlin), and the University of Ottawa. His work appears in *Modern Asian Studies*, *Ethnicities*, *Asian Survey*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology*, and *Historical Sociology* among others.

Navaneeth H is a PhD scholar at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Madras, India. His research interest lies in the domains of sociology of religion, political sociology, anthropology of secularism, and culture and public life. He is a recipient of Commonwealth Split-site Fellowship and is currently affiliated with the Department of Anthropology at Edinburgh University.

Matilde Gliubich Tomat, *Drawing as Encounter: Creative Practice and the Sacred*

Abstract:

This presentation develops insights from my MRes project, *On Encountering the Divine in the Act of Drawing*, which examines creative practice as a mode of engaging with the sacred. The work approaches drawing not as the production of a fixed artefact but as an embodied, processual act in which artist, material, and emerging form co-create a space of encounter. Through attention to the gestures, hesitations, and subtle shifts within the drawing process, the practice foregrounds the lived immediacy of spiritual experience as it unfolds in real time. Central to this approach is an exploration of how the materiality of drawing [its textures, resistances, and contingencies] intersects with what remains ineffable. While creative practice can articulate aspects of sacred experience, a dimension always eludes conventional representation, and it is precisely this tension that becomes productive for inquiry. The research therefore aligns with the conference's emphasis on creative practice as a method for understanding religious encounters, focusing on experience rather than representation, and process rather than outcome. In engaging with sacred and contested spaces, this work offers an alternative perspective on how such spaces are apprehended. By attending to the relational dynamics between practitioner, medium, and evolving image, the project considers how creative practice can mediate shared spiritual experiences, support intersubjective engagement, and illuminate permeable boundaries between self and the transcendent. Drawing thus becomes both method and site of investigation: a way of experiencing, manifesting, documenting, and reflecting upon encounters with the sacred, and of engaging with the unseen dimensions of spiritual coexistence in lived practice.

Biography:

Matilde Gliubich Tomat is a psychotherapist, artist, writer and researcher exploring the intersections of creative practice and the sacred. Drawing on Jungian psychology, phenomenology, and shamanic methods, her work examines how embodied, process-driven artistic practices open pathways into spiritual experience. Her MRes project, *On Encountering*

the Divine in the Act of Drawing, investigated drawing as a site of relational encounter between artist, material, and emerging form. Now a PhD candidate at Bangor University, Matilde is developing *paleophenomenology*, a framework for understanding the emergence of consciousness through creative engagement with ancient material. Her practice centres the experiential, ineffable, and transformative dimensions of encounter. www.matildetomat.com

Susanna Troutta, *Religious encounters in shared spaces: the case of the St. Georgis Eritrean Orthodox community and the St. Paul's congregation in Berlin, Germany*

Abstract:

This paper explores the ways in which the St. Paul's protestant congregation and the St. Georgis Eritrean Orthodox community share a religious building in Berlin. The church is owned by the St. Paul's congregation, whose membership is declining and aging. In turn, the St. Georgis Eritrean Orthodox community, founded by Eritrean refugees during the so-called "refugee-crisis", is rapidly growing, but faces systemic discrimination in German society, as well as a lack of financial resources. Both communities provide a range of services that are not strictly religious. In the case of the St. Georgis Eritrean Orthodox community, these include Tigrinya classes for children, specific activities for families living with disabilities, meetings on topics such as family and gender issues, mental health, and basic financial literacy. Since its inception in 2018, the relationship between the two communities has gone through different phases, with varying degrees of tension and cooperation and a slow but steady trust-building process. Drawing on material collected in 2023 and 2024 through semi-structured interviews, primary text analysis and participant observation as part of my PhD project, this paper focuses on transformative practices taking place within each community and through their encounter. In doing this, it refers to academic discussions on religious place-making and place-sharing (Knott 2005; Wyller 2016; Zarnow 2018), including their manifestations in public spaces. It also engages with debates around power negotiations, including in terms of (in)visibility and (in)audibility, with a specific emphasis on postcolonial approaches (Rosello 2001; Danewid 2017; Nahnfeldt & Rønsdal 2021) that highlight the agency of both groups. Additionally, it reflects on the concept of "encounters" (Tweed 1997; Ahmed 2000; Askins 2015; Heimbrock and Wyller 2019) as applied to contexts of religion and migration. This study thus contributes to conversations around religious space-sharing and spatial transformation, and on building sustainable relationships in contexts of religious coexistence.

Biography:

Susanna Trotta is a PhD candidate at Humboldt University in Berlin, within the International Research Training Group Transformative Religion. Her PhD project focuses on religious communities as key actors in the Afro-European migration context, with a specific focus on the St. Georgis Eritrean Orthodox Church in Berlin, Germany. She holds a BA in Intercultural Communication (hons) from the University of Genoa (Italy) an MSc in Global Migration (distinction) from University College London. Susanna has previously worked as a research associate at the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI) and at the Bruno Kessler Foundation. As part of her work with the JLI, she co-authored the 2019 "Guide to Action on Mobilizing Faith Communities to Welcome Migrants and Refugees," published by

Religions for Peace. Her research interests lie at the crossroads of migration and religious studies. She is also a musician and is interested in sound as a dimension of social research.