



THE WORKING GROUP ON LIVED RELIGION
IN EASTERN EUROPE AND EURASIA
PRESENTS

9th Annual Conference

THE MATERIALITY OF LIVED RELIGION:

EVOCATIONS,
PERSUASIONS,
OUTRAGE

22-24 June 2022

WEDNESDAY, 22 JUNE

17:00-18:30 UTC/GMT+4

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

WELCOME:

Catherine Wanner

*Convenor, Working Group on Lived
Religion in Eastern Europe and Eurasia
The Pennsylvania State University*

KEYNOTE:

Florian Mühlfried

Illia State University, Georgia

How do Metahumans Govern?
Reflections from Georgia

ALL ARE WELCOME TO ATTEND THE RECEPTION
FOLLOWING DR. MÜHLFRIED'S KEYNOTE ADDRESS

The Working Group on Lived Religion in Eastern Europe and Eurasia is an ongoing research network that unites anthropologists, sociologists, and historians to advance the critical study of religion and support original research and publications on how religion affects contemporary social and political life. Our focus on lived religion centers on the encounters, exchanges, and entanglements that religious practices, beliefs, and sentiments create. We consider contemporary forms of vernacular religiosity and the experiences of the transcendent they offer as well as institutional forms of religion and their transnational and global connections.

THURSDAY, 23 JUNE

9:30-11:15 UTC/GMT +4

MATERIALITIES OF
SHRINES

CHAIR: Tamara Gdzelaide
Iliia State University, Georgia

Ketevan Gurchiani
Iliia State University, Georgia
Caring for the Dead

Marc Roscoe Loustau
*McFarland Center for Religion, Culture, and Ethics,
College of the Holy Cross, USA*

Humiliating Materialities: Renovation, Demolition,
and the State Politics of Local Belonging at the Our
Lady of Csíksomlyó Hungarian National Shrine

Brinton Ahlin
University of Chicago, USA

Vital Circulations: Theories and Theologies of
Materiality at a Tajik Shrine

DISCUSSANT: Alexander Panchenko

PANEL I

THURSDAY, 23 JUNE

11:30-12:45 UTC/GMT +4

READING RITUALS
AND RUINS

CHAIR: Sophia Zviadadze
Ilia State University, Georgia

Mariam Darchiashvili
Ilia State University, Georgia

Reading the Ruins of Tao-Klarjeti

Yulia Antonyan
Yerevan State University, Armenia

Ritual materiality and social interplays in an
Assyrian village (on zoom)

DISCUSSANT: Ketevan Khutsishvili
Tbilisi State University, Georgia

PANEL II

THURSDAY, 23 JUNE

14:30-15:45 UTC/GMT +4

LANDSCAPES OF
MEMORY

CHAIR: Tetiana Kalenychenko

European Center for Strategic Analytics, Ukraine

Zuzanna Bogumil

*Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish
Academy of Sciences, Poland*

Postsecular memory landscapes of Soviet
repressions: On the uses of religion in
transformations of traumascapes in Russia

Jeanne Kormina

The Tsar's Road: invisible infrastructure and
collective devotional labour in the Orthodox
Processions of the Cross

DISCUSSANT: Marat Shterin

King's College, United Kingdom

PANEL III

THURSDAY, 23 JUNE

16:00-17:30 UTC/GMT +4

SOUNDS & SIGNS

CHAIR: Laura Mafizzoli

University of Manchester, United Kingdom

Stefan Williamson Fa

Lund University, Sweden

Communities of Listening: Sound, Media and Devotion in Translocal Shi'i Islam

Nataliya Bezborodova

University of Alberta, Canada

"Flying Community": Connections and Disconnections to Places and Geographic Affiliations

Konrad Siekierski

King's College, United Kingdom

When a Sacred Text Becomes a Sacred Being: The Veneration of Gospel Books in Armenian Christianity

DISCUSSANT: Brinton Ahlin

University of Chicago, USA

PANEL IV

FRIDAY, 24 JUNE

9:30-10:45 UTC/GMT +4

SECULAR COMMUNITIES
CARING FOR THE
SACRED

CHAIR: Nutsa Batiashvili
Free University Tbilisi, Georgia

Tea Kamushadze
Georgia Institute for Public Affairs

New Forms of Religiosity - Civic Dimensions of
Yard-Chapels

Agnieszka Halemba
IAE, Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland
Materiality of Religion Lived by Few

DISCUSSANT: Catherine Wanner
The Pennsylvania State University, USA

PANEL V

FRIDAY, 24 JUNE

11:00-12:45 UTC/GMT +4

INTERRELIGIOUS
EXCHANGE

CHAIR: Ketevan Khutsishvili
Tbilisi State University, Georgia

Boris Komakhidze
Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Georgia

Negotiating Urban Religious Space in Batumi: The
Case of Catholics and Protestants (on zoom)

Viktor Yelenskyi
*Kuras Institute of Political and Ethnic Studies /
National Academy of Sciences, Ukraine*

Persistence of Judaism on Ukrainian Soil: The
Phenomenon of the “intellectual Giur”

DISCUSSANT: Marc Roscoe Loustau
*McFarland Center for Religion, Culture and Ethics,
College of the Holy Cross, USA*

PANEL VI

FRIDAY, 24 JUNE

14:30-15:45 UTC/GMT +4

POLITICAL LIVES OF
ANCESTORS

CHAIR: Tamta Khalvashi
Ilia State University, Georgia

Önder Çelik
Forum Transregionale Studien, Germany

An Abandoned Armenian Cemetery in Turkish
Kurdistan: Memory, Materiality, and Genocide

Sergei Shtyrkov
Archaeological Excavations and Bones of
Forgotten Ancestors in North Ossetia: How the
Insulted Feelings of Believers Create a Religion

DISCUSSANT: Tsypylma Darieva
ZOiS, Germany

PANEL VII

FRIDAY, 24 JUNE

16:00-17:45 UTC/GMT +4

SHARED SITES IN
FROZEN CONFLICTS

CHAIR: Catherine Wanner

The Pennsylvania State University, USA

Tatiana Cojocari

University of Bucharest

The Many Shapes of Orthodox Representation in
Disputed Territories: The Case of Transnistria

Nikolay Mitrokhin

*Research Center for East-European Studies, Bremen
University, Germany*

"Leontievites" against "RUKHovites": A Soviet-era
Religious Movement in Modern Ukraine

Tetiana Kalenychenko

European Center for Strategic Analytics, Ukraine

Meeting the Other: Dialogue with Religious Actors

DISCUSSANT: Bruce Grant

New York University, USA

PANEL VIII

FRIDAY, 24 JUNE

18:00 UTC/GMT +4

DISCUSSION

ALL ARE WELCOME TO
JOIN IN AN OPEN
DISCUSSION:

Led by Marat Shterin
King's College, United Kingdom

REDEFINING OUR FIELD:
DECOLONIALIZING NETWORKS,
COMMUNITIES, AND ALLEGIANCES
IN RELIGION AND THE ACADEMY

*This conference has been generously funded by
The Center for Governance and Culture, University of St. Gallen,
and The Pennsylvania State University*

PANEL IX

ABSTRACTS

KETEVAN GURCHIANI

Iliia State University, Georgia
ketevan_gurchiani@iliauni.edu.ge

CARING FOR THE DEAD

This paper looks at cemeteries in Tbilisi to analyze how lived religion produces spaces and shapes urban landscapes. In particular, the paper asks what are the practices that construct the meaning of gravesites, how does the symbolic override the materiality of funeral infrastructure, and what does the material presence of cemeteries do in the city? My paper focuses on gravesites in Tbilisi to look at the “bundling” between material and immaterial as practiced in lived religion (Keane 2003). It looks at how the understanding that the deceased maintain of bodily qualities shape practices and places. The ethnography for this paper has been carried out during the pandemic, which made the porousness of material and immaterial problematic when matter became possibly contaminating. One of the most vivid pictures from that time is a drone carrying an Easter egg to a cemetery. As visiting cemeteries was prohibited, creative solutions emerged to continue practices associated with proper care of the dead. Cemeteries in Georgia are embedded in complex rituals of remembering the dead and act as a continuation of the home. Years after a burial, families attend to the deceased as a combination of body and soul. In this dialogue between the home and the gravesite, the space of cemeteries mostly eludes state control. Using the example of an informal cemetery, the paper analyzes how cemeteries exercise agency and create an untouched space.

ABSTRACTS

MARC ROSCOE LOUSTAU

McFarland Center for Religion, Culture, and Ethics, College of the Holy Cross, USA
mloustau706@gmail.com

HUMILIATING MATERIALITIES:

RENOVATION, DEMOLITION, AND THE STATE POLITICS OF LOCAL BELONGING AT THE OUR LADY OF CSÍKSOMLYÓ HUNGARIAN NATIONAL SHRINE

In 2019, Pope Francis, leader of the global Catholic Church, celebrated an outdoor Mass at the Our Lady of Csíksomlyó Hungarian national shrine in Romania. When the Franciscan Order that runs the shrine published renovation plans for the altar where the pope would appear, the Facebook post received over 800 outraged comments, including one man who asked, "How can such a beautiful Hungarian symbol, so perfectly integrated into the landscape, be humiliated like this?" Another speculated that the Romanian government was behind the plan. "I'll be curious to see," he said, "whose flags will be on the new flagpoles beside the altar?"

By situating these expressions of outrage in the history of Eastern European material politics, I argue that the aesthetic value the commentators were defending – a locally integrated built environment – is actually the product of a complex history of the appropriation and reappropriation of material forms that binds the Csíksomlyó shrine into the material politics of the right-wing Hungarian nation-state. Based on fieldwork, interviews, and archival research conducted at Csíksomlyó beginning in 2009, this paper will describe the design of the outdoor altar at three different periods. From 1993 to 1996, it looked like a kaliba, the haymeadow huts used by members of the Szekler subregional ethnic group. In 1996, architect Imre Makovecz, a favorite of Hungary's right-wing nationalist government, designed a structure meant to evoke the unity of Transylvania and Hungary. In 2019, this altar was then replaced by the current structure designed to meet Vatican requirements.

Each time the altar changed, heated expressions of public opposition followed. I analyze the political meanings of this outrage and find signs of the Hungarian state's efforts to impose its value of a locally integrated built environment. Indeed, Makovecz's altar was part of a broader effort, coordinated through NGOs ostensibly run by local Transylvanian Hungarians, to construct multiple shrine structures as spaces both legible to and politically defensible by citizen representatives of the Hungarian nation.

ABSTRACTS

BRINTON AHLIN

University of Chicago, USA
ahlin@uchicago.edu

VITAL CIRCULATIONS: THEORIES AND THEOLOGIES OF MATERIALITY AT A TAJIK SHRINE

What can an organic theology of materiality contribute to recent theories of materiality in the study of religion? At the sacred shrine and mineral spring of 44 Springs (Chiluchorchashma) in Tajikistan, Muslims developed a robust theological defense of shrine pilgrimage centered on the notion of sabab, a theory of divine agency as something that only becomes perceptible via the material world. While Tajik Muslims directed this theoretical apparatus towards elaborating a distinction between correct Islamic practice and disavowed forms of nature worship, the method of attributing causation that they developed shares many key qualities with materialist approaches in the social sciences. In this paper, I argue that the Islamically-informed Tajik notion of sabab effectively provides a theoretical model for understanding how the vivacity of religious life at this shrine was sustained both during the Soviet period and in its aftermath. By shifting focus from the inherently inscrutable will of the divine to the effects of material objects in the world, sabab makes it possible to see the movement of material forms themselves as the fundamental organizing principle of an extra-social world with deep continuities across the Soviet/post-Soviet historical divide. At 44 Springs, for example, the circulation of water and other substances became a vital means to recruit Soviet government initiatives into Islamically-inflected practices and projects. Water, dirt, papers, and other material manifestations of sabab, became the vehicles through which Tajik Muslims articulated how government officials could (often unexpectedly!) facilitate rather than undermine the vivacity of religious life at the shrine.

PANEL I

ABSTRACTS

MARIAM DARCHIASHVILI

Ilia State University, Georgia
mariam.darchiashvili@iliauni.edu.ge

READING THE RUINS OF TAO-KLARJETI

Tao-Klarjeti was a historical territory of Georgia, now part of Turkish jurisdiction. Monasteries build there in Middle Ages have different symbolic meaning for Georgians. For some these decaying buildings are fields of religious practices, for others they have historical, archeological, scientific, nationalist or esthetic significance. I want to analyze the ruins of Tao-Klarjeti through concepts of 'social life of things' (Appadurai, 1986) and 'bundling' (Keane, 2003) - the co-presence of different qualities of materiality. They can be looked through: oldness, sacredness, greatness and other qualities. This field is a space of 'presentification' (Vernant, 1991) of the Georgia's historical, cultural, political and religious past. There are different Georgian communities engaged in diverse 'mediation processes' (Meyer, 2009) with these remains, reading the ruins as 'portals to other worlds' (Grant, 2011), not self-revealing but reconstructed through interpretations. One dominant interpretation is religious, involving pilgrimage practices. In 2010 I participated in a several-day trip to Tao-Klarjeti which the Orthodox priest guided. He mediated between ruins, tour participants and the past via devotional acts of praying, singing and lightning candles (see picture: Bana Cathedral). In this paper I want to elaborate on Tao-Klarjeti ruins as 'material hybrids' (Manning, 2008) valuable to different contexts, mediating multiple systems of classification. I want to observe how religious, political-nationalist and historical-scientific communities read and communicate with these ruins. I am also interested in whether these narratives can be separated or boundaries between them are blurred.

ABSTRACTS

YULIA ANTONYAN

Yerevan State University, Armenia
yuliaantonyan@ysu.am

RITUAL MATERIALITY AND SOCIAL INTERPLAYS IN AN ASSYRIAN VILLAGE

Verin Dvin is a small Assyrian village in the very heart of the Ararat valley. Assyrians migrated here from the region of the lake Urmia in Iran after 1828, when, according to the Turkmenchay treaty, the Eastern Armenian provinces were handed over to the Russian Empire. Assyrians as Christians hoped for better life under the Christian rule. Following the multiple attempts of converting Assyrians into the Russian Orthodox faith undertaken by the Russian authorities, most Assyrians ended with practicing a vernacular, "Assyrian" version of Orthodox Christianity. The Soviet antireligious campaign put an end to institutional religion. Like their Armenian neighbors, during the Soviet period, the Assyrians developed a practice of vernacular worshiping of local shrines, most of which appeared since 1960-s. Currently there are several shrines in the village and the vicinity and two of them, Mar Zaya and Mar Mariam are considered to be central by location and by the social and cultural significance. Each of them is owned by a particular family and has its special holyday. The core part of the holiday is the collective cooking of "mrtukha", a ritual food, made of flour, oil, eggs and milk. Usually everyone present is trying to make his/her material or physical input. After the mrtukha is ready, blessed by a priest and tasted by the present folk, the rest of it is divided into parts to give out to those, who could not come for any reason, so everyone in the village gets his/her share. The romantic picture of incredible ethnic and social integrity, mutual help, and cultural continuity is distorted, when one goes deep into the web of relationships unfolded around the materiality of the ritual. Who is the host and who is the guest, who pays for what, who brings what and how much, who makes what, who attends and who does not and why, who gets the mrtukha first, who is given a share and who is not, etc.: all these practical issues, which may go unnoticed by an outsider are important details for understanding the social underwear of the community such as hidden hierarchies, social conflicts, competitions and the nature of relationships between families and clans. In reality, the annual cycle of rituals of cooking the "mrtukha", besides its obvious religious and ethno-cultural meanings and symbolism, is also a continuous social "game" of statuses, power and influence.

ABSTRACTS

ZUZANNA BOGUMIŁ

Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology,
Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland
mitregaz@wp.pl

POSTSECULAR MEMORY LANDSCAPES OF SOVIET REPRESSIONS: ON THE USES OF RELIGION IN TRANSFORMATIONS OF TRAUMASCAPES IN RUSSIA

The Soviet repressions left thousands of mass graves all around Russia. When at the end of the eighties the transformation of the social perception of those laying in the mass graves started, it became urgent to organize landscapes inhabited by dead. The Russian Orthodox Church was not active at the beginning, but if we look on a texture of memory of the sites – symbols of the mass Soviet repressions such as Butovo, Komunarka, Katyn, Sandarmokh, Levashova or Solovki, they all have some religious character. Does it mean that these sites were symbolically appropriated by the Russian Orthodox Church? In my presentation I propose a more complex approach to the way religion affects the contaminated landscapes of the Soviet repressions. I propose a postsecular approach and focus on religious and secular intertwinements in the sites of mass violence to show how much the nature of this relation affects the role and significance of religious transformations of the traumascaples.

PANEL III

ABSTRACTS

JEANNE KORMINA

jkormina@hse.ru

THE TSAR'S ROAD: INVISIBLE INFRASTRUCTURE AND COLLECTIVE DEVOTIONAL LABOUR IN THE ORTHODOX PROCESSIONS OF THE CROSS

Religious infrastructure is not limited to a specific material environment which makes functioning of a religion institute or community possible (buildings, heating and electricity, baking bread for Eucharist) but includes an invisible infrastructure as its integral part. This heavenly infrastructure consists of agents (like angels or saints) and logics which rule the world inhabited by believers. When travelling to sacred sites or participating in other religious rituals people connect these two worlds in their prayers and other devotional practices, making the invisible visible, tangible and real not only for themselves but for the outside observers as well. By doing this collective devotional labour (Bielo 2020) they themselves become the part of this wholistic religious ecosystem, the knots which bind these realities with their own bodies.

The paper analyses the work of Orthodox religious infrastructure in a particular place and on a special occasion. This place is an old road near Yekaterinburg where the bodies of Nikolas II and his family were driven along in July 1918 in a deep secret to a clandestine grave outside the city. This road becomes visible every Sunday when a group of Orthodox believers led by a female Orthodox activist go by this path in the procession of the Cross to commemorate the Royal martyrs. A Procession of the Cross is simultaneously a parade and a collective pilgrimage with its own visual and aural characteristics, order and aesthetics. Some Orthodox observers compare procession of the Cross with the army which has more participants than are seen to an ignorant eye - Jesus Christ, Orthodox saints and the Birthgiver to whom the participants are singing prayers on their way and whose icons they carry in their hands or on their necks.

The paper discusses the Tsar Procession of the Cross as a vernacular historical practice which allows participants 'to "perform" the relationship between the past and the present (and the future)... through embodied forms of worship and mission' (Coleman 2011, 434). Following calls to do anthropology of history "without reimporting Western historicism as the framework through which all other past relationships are viewed" (Stewart and Palmie 2016), the paper aims at studying "intimations of the past" as they are experienced in the performances of the processions. In doing this, I focus on temporality of everlasting past with sound millenarian overtones (see: Haynes 2020) shared by the participants in the processions.

PANEL III

ABSTRACTS

STEFAN WILLIAMSON-FA

Lund University, Sweden
stefan.williamson_fa@ctr.lu.se

COMMUNITIES OF LISTENING: SOUND, MEDIA AND DEVOTION IN TRANSLOCAL SHI'Ī ISLAM

The recitation of poetry and laments in honour of the Prophet Muhammad and his family, collectively known as the *Ṭhli-Beyt*, is at the centre of Twelver Shi'ī ritual and devotional life. Since the rise of the cassette in the 1970s, recordings of Azeri-Turkish language devotional recitation have circulated amongst Shi'a living between the Caucasus, Iran and Anatolia. Today, the growing accessibility of new media and digital technologies has vastly increased the quantity and speed of production of audio recordings by amateur, semi-professional and professional reciters, known as *maddah*. People listen to these recordings in multiple ways – at times, blurring the boundaries between ethics and entertainment. Recordings are listened to privately by individuals, amplified in public spaces, shared and commented on online through social media networks. Sound offers a way of knowing, living with, and relating to others. The aesthetic and affective qualities and relational affordances of sound allow Shi'ī Muslims to cultivate relationships of intimacy with both their co-religionists across borders as well as with the saint-like figures of the *Ṭhli-Beyt*. Based on fieldwork carried out with Shi'ī Muslims in Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Germany and Iran, I argue that such devotional recordings foster the formation of translocal religious communities made up of both human and more-than-human beings. Tracing the circulation of these recordings across a wide geographical area, their production, and accompanying practices of listening, provides important insights into the formation of translocal religious communities which challenge ideas of presumed religious centres and authority.

ABSTRACTS

NATALIYA BEZBORODOVA

University of Alberta, Canada
Nataliya.bezborodova@ualberta.ca

“FLYING COMMUNITY”: CONNECTIONS AND DISCONNECTIONS TO PLACES AND GEOGRAPHIC AFFILIATIONS

“Flying Community” is a group that unites Orthodox and Catholic Christians from Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, and Italy of different ages and ethnic origin, with its epicenter in Ukraine. It has been formed in the circumstances of the evolving political conflict, in 2012-2015, and the group breaks several patterns typical for structure, denominational variety, and stable geographical affiliation of religious organization in both Catholicism and Orthodoxy. “Flying Community” is driven by lay members that are actively and politically engaged in the reappraisal of the Soviet past in the post-Soviet spaces. Jose Casanova suggests that globalization of Western secularism leads to a paradox: instead of being eliminated from the public sphere, religion manifests itself in a variety of forms in different parts of the world, and Ukraine is one of recent examples of what he calls de-privatization of religion. The ongoing armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine followed the anti-governmental protests of 2013-2014 in Ukraine, and fueled religious tension in the country and the Orthodoxy worldwide. “Flying Community” members call their experience as steps forward to post-institutional Christianity. Their practices can be seen as an example of the fuzzing national boundaries in Europe for a community formation caused by cultural flow, when a group is tied together not by one geographic affiliation but connections to a several charged places through self-developed calendar cycle. In my paper, I will review the main points of unusual patterns for an Orthodox lay organization and “Flying Community” response to a situation in turmoil in post-Soviet space.

ABSTRACTS

KONRAD SIEKIERSKI

King's College London, Department of Theology and Religious Studies
konradsiekierski@gmail.com

WHEN A SACRED TEXT BECOMES A SACRED BEING: THE VENERATION OF GOSPEL BOOKS IN ARMENIAN CHRISTIANITY

In this presentation, I discuss the Armenian Christian veneration of Gospel Books building on James Watt's recent work on the material and iconic dimension of religious texts. As in other strands of Christianity, the Bible plays a central role in the teaching and rituals of the Armenian Apostolic Church. However, its role in Armenian Christianity goes much beyond the sacred text to be read by priests and believers. In fact, the widespread practice in Armenia has become that all Gospel Books are powerful, but some are more powerful than others. The books which have obtained this special status function as miraculous sacred objects-beings endowed with agency and social lives. I will discuss this phenomenon based on two examples from my ongoing ethnographic fieldwork in Armenia. The first is the series of five annual feasts for which the Armenian Church loans powerful Gospel Books from the Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (the Matenadaran) in Yerevan. The books are then transported from secular museum space to religious space and venerated by crowds of pilgrims. The second example is the veneration of some privately owned Gospel Books as the so-called home saints in several regions of Soviet and post-Soviet Armenia.

ABSTRACTS

TEA KAMUSHADZE

Georgian Institute of Public Affairs, Georgia
t.kamushadze@gipa.ge

NEW FORMS OF RELIGIOSITY - CIVIC DIMENSIONS OF YARD-CHAPELS

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, religion and religiosity acquired a special significance throughout Georgia. Religious visibility in public space became a part of the political process.

In Rustavi, where orthodox temples were intensely built and found in almost every district, yard- yard-chapels became very popular. Yard-chapels turned out to be the best way to mobilize the neighborhood community. In many cases, in addition to its religious significance, the arrangement of a chapel is directed against the state policy, which may decide to bring investor to this land and built “ugly buildings”. They are also related to security issues. In this way, the place becomes more protected and also provides an opportunity to prevent crime. Moreover, the arrangement of the chapels is also related to the issue of ecology, as the place becomes greener and more aesthetically pleasing. From building a chapel to taking care of it, the neighborhood acts together and makes decisions based on the interests of the local community.

The paper discusses the civic functions of the chapels that society assigns to them based on their specific needs, thus creating different interpretations of religiosity in the city of former workers.

ABSTRACTS

AGNIESZKA HALEMBA

IAE, Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland
a.halemba@uw.edu.pl

MATERIALITY OF RELIGION LIVED BY FEW

In anthropology of religion materiality is most often analysed in the context of making the otherworldly present. Materially is what allows religion to become palpable part of social life. The religious has a material form, which not only expresses religious convictions and sentiments but also shapes experiences, communities, and political agendas of religious organisations.

In this presentation I ask what happens with religious materiality when in a given context there are few people left for whom relations with the otherworldly powers are of prime importance? The most obvious and so far most often explored framework is in such cases the one of heritage – churches, religious objects, pilgrimage routes become protected sites because of identity-related, aesthetic and economic considerations. Still, in some situations the upkeep of such places becomes contested – for example they are considered too costly to maintain and other options for their future are being considered, including their privatisation.

On the basis of fieldwork carried out in eastern part of Germany, I argue that in some cases religious dimension is mobilised by nonreligious actors, while faith-based organisation and communities are often more sceptical and see religious materiality as an economic burden.

I argue that materiality should be considered as religious also when it is rejected by religious actors as a tool for making otherworldly palpable; in such cases it can still be accepted and needed as a site of religious practice and influence by nonreligious actors.

ABSTRACTS

BORIS KOMAKHIDZE

Ivane Javakhisvili Tbilisi State University, Georgia
komakhidze95@gmail.com

NEGOTIATING URBAN RELIGIOUS SPACE IN BATUMI: THE CASE OF CATHOLICS AND PROTESTANTS

The presentation addresses the way post-Soviet religious visibility and materiality are taking place in the Georgian port city of Batumi through the organization of sites of worship by the Christian religious minorities. In particular, it attempts to understand the strategies of Catholic and Protestant religious communities to materialize their religious identities in post-Soviet Batumi, something which predominately proceeds alongside the arrangements of the majority religious community. The topic is based upon ethnographic research in Batumi where political ideologies have constantly determined the religious identity of the city. Focusing on the small Christian communities in Batumi and their strategies of post-Soviet religious revival through materializing sites of worship in the city, I investigate post-Soviet public religiosity in the multi-religious urban area, where encounters of mainstream faith and religious minorities characterize the religious identity of the city. More specifically, I argue that increasing the power and dominance of the major religious organization determines the public religious landscape of post-Soviet Batumi where organizing Catholic and Protestant places in the urban area of the city is characterized by the consequences of the public visibility and materiality of power of the Georgian Orthodox Church.

ABSTRACTS

VIKTOR YELENSKYI

Kuras Institute of Political and Ethnic Studies,
National Academy of Sciences, Ukraine
Vloz2630@gmail.com

PERSISTENCE OF JUDAISM ON UKRAINIAN SOIL: THE PHENOMENON OF THE “INTELLECTUAL GIUR”

Today's Judaism in Ukraine is a complex mixture of more than 20 centuries of Jewish history in Ukrainian lands with an omnipresent outburst of identities and stunning activity of Israeli and US-based Jewish religious centers, primarily from Chabad-Lubavitch. Despite the intensive emigration of Jews from Ukraine, which peaked in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Judaism has a considerable demographic base in Ukraine. Demographers and social psychologists argue that in Ukraine, as in some other post-Soviet countries, there is the so-called Jewish "ethnic core" (for Ukraine it was 50,000 at the beginning of the 2020s) and "enlarged Jewish population." They attribute to this "enlarged Jewish population" to a large community of "supporters of the Jewish people." These are people of different ethnic backgrounds, who feel that they belong to this community, willingly attend Jewish events, and have some signs of Jewish identity, although they have little understanding of why they are Jews. The proposed paper deals with an amazing phenomenon that emerged in recent years in Ukrainian religious life, which can be conventionally called "intellectual" or "cultural" giyur (the conversion process by which non-Jews adopt the Jewish religion and become members of the Jewish ethnoreligious community). This paper examines the situation when groups of young, urban professionals, who are non-Jews but interested in Jewish history and the Old Testament, immerse themselves in Jewish civilization through Jewish culture in the broadest sense of the term by studying Jewish history, Hebrew, customs, cuisine, participating in Jewish religious holidays and, in fact, become members of Jewish communities.

ABSTRACTS

ÖNDER ÇELİK

Transregionale Forum, Germany
onderscelik@gmail.com

AN ABANDONED ARMENIAN CEMETERY IN TURKISH KURDISTAN: MEMORY, MATERIALITY, AND GENOCIDE

Today in Malazgirt, a small town in Turkish Kurdistan, the locals call an abandoned Armenian cemetery *şehîd*, meaning the martyrs' cemetery. Despite the crosses and Armenian letters carved on the gravestones, the Armenianness of the cemetery appears to be forgotten by the town's Muslim Kurdish residents, who now assign an Islamic sacredness to it. However, this misnaming and misrecognition of the remnants of the Armenian cemetery is not the result of a simple fallacy in the collective memory of the town's inhabitants. On the one hand, the misnaming of the cemetery effectively folds the official denial of the Armenian genocide and the criminalization of its recognition in Turkey into the very texture of the everyday life. On the other hand, this misrecognition is closely tied to an intrinsic knowledge of the Kurds that the houses they inhabit and the fields that they harvest once belonged to the victims of that denied genocide. The uncanny presence of the abandoned Armenian cemetery in the town and its naming as the martyrs' cemetery should be read through this matrix.

Instead of considering this misnaming and misrecognition as an error in historical memory and explaining it through the possible reasons how this erroneous naming emerged, I look at what this misnaming does. In doing so, I turn to Ludwig Wittgenstein's critique of rationalization and historization of rituals by anthropologists in early twentieth century—especially in his *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*. The "error" of misrecognition of the cemetery demonstrates how locals deal with uncanny remnants of the Armenian genocide in the context of the official denial and navigate the limits of ethical life in a post-genocide landscape.

ABSTRACTS

SERGEI SHTYRKOV

shtyr@eu.spb.ru

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS AND BONES OF FORGOTTEN ANCESTORS IN NORTH OSSETIA: HOW THE INSULTED FEELINGS OF BELIEVERS CREATE A RELIGION

In 2020, at the initiative of the Orthodox Diocese, archaeological excavations began around a medieval chapel in the village of Nuzal (North Ossetia-Alania). This place is very important for the local historical imagination as it is considered the tomb of the last king of the medieval state of the Ossetian ancestors - the Alans. This small building turns out to be an important element for competing narratives about Ossetian ethnic history. The central question is the religious "identity" of this building. This is due to the fact that there is a heated debate about which religion is the real ethnic religion of the Ossetians - Orthodox Christianity, adopted by the Alanian state in the 10th century or some original pre-Christian monotheism, which has survived to this day. Although this nativist faith has registered congregations, Orthodox activists do not consider it a religion, but a kind of newly created parody of it.

When the excavations began, the nativists demanded that they stop. They suspected that archaeologists might plant evidence that the medieval Alans buried here were Christians. They publicly stated that the excavations desecrated the graves of their ancestors and thus offended their religious sensibilities, and if their religious sensibilities were offended, then their religion was real. Paradoxically, in this context they, who usually understand religion in terms of the patrimony of the whole people, use the modern interpretation of religion as an inner belief and a deeply personal psychological phenomenon in order to gain legitimacy for their project in the eyes of the public.

ABSTRACTS

TATIANA COJOCARI

University of Bucharest
Tatianna.cojocari@gmail.com

THE MANY SHAPES OF ORTHODOX REPRESENTATION IN DISPUTED TERRITORIES: THE CASE OF TRANSNISTRIA

The so called “frozen conflicts” from Eastern Europe represent very rich sources of studying diffuse identity and the brand-new types of nation-building processes. One such case is the Transnistrian region. Known as a conflict sparked by ethnic and linguistic issues, today the Transnistrian conflict is perceived by the Republic of Moldova’s public agenda as a political issue with no ethnic, religious, and linguistic distinctions. Nevertheless, the unrecognized states’ political representatives are constantly invoking that the Transnistrian region has its own future path based on different values, multiculturalism, and political identity. The Church there, the only international recognized institution, is presented by church officials as “the binder of society and actor in construction of the “nation-state.” Thus, it anchors a diffuse Transnistrian identity into a wider “Russian civilization.”

The aim of this paper is to discuss the ways in which religious institutions from disputed territories have become identity makers whose symbols and values are weaponized in hostile representations of Others. For these societies, Orthodoxy is used to emphasize the distinction between “us” – we who identify with Russian values represented by the Russian Church, and “others” who are associated with European values, and thus Romanian. The paper is based on a quantitative and qualitative research conducted in 2017, 2018- 2019 in the Transnistrian region and archive documentations. The data provides insightful inputs on how in the disputed territories, religious institutions are seen rather biased than neutral, feeding the national ethnic division, and contributing to the building of distinct identity.

ABSTRACTS

NIKOLAY MITROKHIN

Research Center for East-European Studies,
Bremen University, Germany
mitrokhin@uni-bremen.de

"LEONTIEVITES" AGAINST "RUKHOVITES": A SOVIET-ERA RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT IN MODERN UKRAINE

In 2018-2019, President Poroshenko created a religious conflict in right-bank Ukraine. There, regional administrations and public organizations tried to achieve the transition (often by violent methods) of the communities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to the newly created Orthodox Church of Ukraine. However, they faced unexpected resistance from Ukrainian-speaking church activists and clergy at the micro-level (village, monastery, city parish). In general, coercion to transfer to the "national" (quasi-state) church failed, and many of the approximately 400 "transferred" parishes split into two parts. One of the reasons for this was the role of unofficial and virtually undescribed religious movements existing in the Ukrainian province, especially in the west of the country.

The subject of the report will be the religious movement "Leontievites" dominant in the southern part of the Rivne region, but also influential in three neighboring regions. Based on field research from 2018-2021 and numerous interviews, we will talk about how a powerful structure was created from the religious dissident movement of the Soviet era, influencing the overall activities of the Russian Orthodox Church.

In the south of the Rivne region, where the movement was formed, this led to the materialization of the cult. Thanks to the presence of a single universally recognized center of the movement, a single style of decoration of the graves of the leaders of the movement was formed, museums (minimum three) were created in their homes. Monasteries (near 20, all for women) and temples were also organized and restored, which are a clear confirmation of the power and influence of the movement.

ABSTRACTS

TETIANA KALENYCHENKO

European Center for Strategic Analytics, Ukraine
Soc.injener@gmail.com

MEETING THE OTHER: DIALOGUE WITH RELIGIOUS ACTORS

This paper presents more than five years of active field work in restorative practices and peacebuilding initiatives in Ukraine during the active phase of armed conflict in Donbas. The author engaged religious actors from different denominations who joined mixed groups to discuss hard topics, dilemmas, and possible cooperation. This gives a sense of lived religion and its interconnections with the public sphere. In this paper I focus on data gathered while engaging religious leaders in their own territorial communities; religious narratives and cooperation in the frames of one confession; experiences of inter-religious groups and their reflections; and processes of cooperation among mixed groups of secular and religious actors. All of these data were gathered as part of several peacebuilding projects led by national and international organizations as well as the Dialogue in Action initiative led by author of this paper. Such projects reveal intra- and inter-religious dynamics and explore the role of religion in Ukraine as part of civil society.