



REGULAR SESSION INFORMATION

Title of Session: Sacrality: Agents and Configurations

Name of Session Convener(s): *Nora Inés Machado des Johansson*, ISCTE, Lisbon University Institute, and University of Gothenburg

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I) The Contemporary Sacred: A Data-driven Account from the Swedish Blogosphere

Erika Willander, Uppsala University

Sverker Sikström, Lund University

II) The Secular Sacred and Democratic Politics

Jon Wittrock, University of Södertörn

III) Fatima and the Governing Sacrality

Nora Inés Machado des Johansson, Lisbon University Institute

IV) Protecting against Diminishment: On the Relationship between Sacrality and Enchantment

Peik Ingman, Åbo Akademi University

Session description:

This session will consider diverse perspectives on sacrality, its religious as well as secular forms. The session takes as a point of departure that sacrality emerges from, and is maintained, in particular configurations of cultural, social, and material conditions. Key questions to address concern the agents and processes relating to the governance of sacrality including its “integration” into societal realms. Not all agents achieving or co-composing sacrality are recognized as sacred. It therefore follows that the achievement and maintenance of sacrality is a compositional issue, demanding that we focus not only on co-composers of sacrality, but also on complementary relations among them (in achieving an emergent and precariously maintained sacrality). Recognizing nonhuman and non-sacred agents as co-composers of sacrality problematizes contemporary notions of governance and control. It also opens up for the possibility of new and potentially fruitful inquiries concerning the ways that our world is configured (as an ongoing process).

Abstracts:*I) The Contemporary Sacred: A Data-driven Account from the Swedish Blogosphere*

Erika Willander, Uppsala University

Sverker Sikström, Lund University

What is regarded as sacred? Throughout time this question has generated different answers. While some answers have been recognized by societies as common ways of referring to the sacred, others have not. In today's society, the Internet is one medium where people can communicate about the sacred in various ways (e.g. blogs). In the present paper we subjected a comprehensive sample of the Blogosphere written in Swedish (n=220 000 blog posts written between 1998-2009) to Latent Semantic Analysis, which is a statistical method for studying meaning. The result indicated that the meaning and usage of the word “sacred” may be summarized in three themes: (1) a heavenly father, (2) ideological principles and (3) the present time. In conclusion, the “sacred” does not merely denote belief in a personal God but does also include immanent meanings.

II) The Secular Sacred and Democratic Politics

Jon Wittrock, University of Södertörn

Categories such as ‘taboo’ and ‘the sacred’ are often studied within the confines of what is commonly called organised religion. However, similar practices and categories exist outside of the confines of organised religion. Firstly, there is the continuously relevant question of collective ritual and political symbolism, typically in conjunction with nationalism. Secondly, the rituals and symbols of the nation exemplify the more general function of withdrawing certain spatial and temporal domains from ordinary usage and circulation. The actual, but too often un-reflected, presence of these elements within contemporary liberal democracies, implies important normative questions: ought such functions, which are actually present, to be extended or restricted; publicly endorsed, enforced, or forbidden?

III) Fatima and the Governing Sacrality

Nora Inés Machado des Johansson, Lisbon University Institute

This article analyzes how one of the largest Catholic Marian apparition shrines, Fátima, became collectively “recognized” as sacred, as result of the configuration of socio-political rule regime processes with important associated emotional and cognitive regimes. Key contextual factors in the Fatima case: (1) Time of turbulence, challenge, even provocation of the Catholic Church in Portugal: in the form of secularization, scientific ethos, and general skepticism (2) Political shift. The Portuguese Republic was established in 1917, and secularization became an even greater powering force; church and state were to be separated, the status of religion was questioned and challenged. (3) The children seers were part of a poor, uneducated, highly religious population (4) The transcendental agential power of these small children – had to be constructed and carried forward. Local believers, pilgrims, witnesses, local church clergy, national clergy, and eventual Vatican authorization played a role in a matter of several decades (most such visitations do not receive the Vatican authorization and legitimation). (5) A bureaucratic church does not fit well with common churchgoers encountering visitors from heaven, especially those delivering apocalyptic but also relevant political messages. Yet, Fatima received a degree of Church sanction and legitimation. (6) Particularly important on a global level was explicit support by several Marian popes, beginning with Pope Pius XII, who canonized the apparition at Fatima, giving the shrine a special place in the Catholic scheme of sacrality. Also, several popes made pilgrimages to Fatima, e.g. Pope Paul VI and Pope Benedict.

IV) Protecting against Diminishment: On the Relationship between Sacrality and Enchantment

Peik Ingman, Åbo Akademi University

My presentation explores the relationship and tension between sacrality and enchantment. Sacrality can be approached in terms of potential – the potential to enchant. The sacred is protected and controlled in large part to guard and manage a precarious potential of enchantment. (I am not claiming that this is the only relevant perspective.) In the wake of the so-called Subjective Turn, we have witnessed the proliferation of means to enchantment as well as a displaced sacrality. How has sacrality been displaced? It has become re-focused to protecting (the sacrality of) the personal experience. While the old form of (institutionalized) sacrality is increasingly frowned upon, sacrality re-enters the picture every time that the means to enchantment demands protection. Whenever someone devalues another’s means to enchantment they are met with objections which focus not so much on justifying the content of enchantment as on sacralizing ‘the individual right to cultivate enchantment’. Sacrality is a ‘public affair’, about negotiating boundaries (“you are not allowed to do this or that because something is sacred”); enchantment is private (although it is usually achieved collectively). Keeping the two terms together, we find that it is not quite true that ‘religion’ has become ‘private’. The protection of enchantment still demands public negotiations of sacrality. Conversely, these negotiations reflect what is deemed to hold the potential to enchant. These negotiations go far beyond ‘the religious’, but they also serve to shed light on what is happening to

'religion'. Perhaps we could conclude that sacrality is then about 'control' and 'enchantment' about 'the ability to be moved'. They are not the same, yet they are rarely completely disconnected. In this presentation I will explore these questions through some interviews I have done in my research on the family dynamics of (post-) Christian queers.