



## NONRELIGION IN A COMPLEX FUTURE

### LA NONRELIGION DANS UN FUTUR COMPLEXE

#### NCF CONSULTATION WORKSHOPS

22<sup>nd</sup> November 2019

Below is a summary of the discussions that took place during five consultation workshops (each related to a project focal area), which were held in conjunction with the November 2019 Nonreligion in a Complex Future team meeting at the University of Ottawa. Each workshop was comprised of a group of 9-13 students, postdoctoral fellows, academic and partner experts, and invited international expert guests.

#### **Education**

Led by Linda Woodhead (Lancaster University) and Solange Lefebvre (University of Montreal), this workshop considered the questions: How does education (in all its different forms) impact people's perception of religion and nonreligion? How do religious forms of education deal with nonreligion and how do nonreligious forms of education deal with religion? What are some instances of conflict and harmony between religion and nonreligion in education systems, specifically as they are experienced by parents, teachers, and children? The group discussed examples of conflict, such as the challenging of religious school practices (e.g. daily Christian school assemblies) by nonreligious parents and equality concerns around excluding nonreligious children from faith schools based on the religious views of their parents, which may exclude children from the best schools in a given area as a result. The group also explored the relationship of nonreligion to the apparent religion/science divide and considered the extent to which perceived tensions between religion and science are upheld in nonreligious people's understandings of the world.

#### **Environment**

Led by Douglas Ezzy (University of Tasmania) and Lori Beaman (University of Ottawa), this workshop began with a presentation from Jason McKinney (Trinity College, University of Toronto) on his idea of the Urban Spiritual Commons. This idea is exemplified by the Milky Way Garden, a space in Parkdale, Toronto, where community members with diverse religious and nonreligious worldviews have gathered and organized in an environment of increasing gentrification. The presentation led to a discussion about how urban eco-collectives can serve as negotiating spaces between nonreligion and religion. They discussed the value of looking at religion and nonreligion indirectly and instead studying how people without the same worldviews find commonality, including environment-related activities such as coastal clean-ups, ecotourism, multi-day festivals, eco-burials, and climate strikes. They concluded their discussion by considering questions of ethicality, responsibility and activism related to environmental research, and how these ideas might factor into future NCF projects related to nonreligion and the environment.

#### **Health**

Led by Ryan Cragun (University of Tampa) and Juan Marco Vaggione (National University of Cordoba), this workshop discussed instances of conflict and co-operation between religion and nonreligion primarily in hospitals. For patients, how does religion/nonreligion impact their definition of health and ideas of the purpose of life, and how does this in turn affect the way they engage with a range of situations in the healthcare setting, such as genetic counselling, the



## NONRELIGION IN A COMPLEX FUTURE

### LA NONRELIGION DANS UN FUTUR COMPLEXE

decision to extend life with ventilators, or death rituals? For healthcare professionals, how do professional vs. personal values come into play in the healthcare setting? They discussed how hospitals set up policies and manage diversity, and the difficulty of developing inclusive language and practices that remains meaningful to patients. For instance, with all religious or spiritual symbols removed from chapel-esque spaces in hospitals, does that make them potentially meaningless spaces that offer no comfort to patients? They explored nonreligious health practices that look like religion, such as CrossFit, homeopathic practices, the language of spiritual practice, spiritual hiking or pilgrimages, etc. The group concluded that there are an abundance of topics worth exploring related to reproductive rights, mental health, palliative care, and a general mapping of the varieties of nonreligious caregiving.

#### **Law**

Led by Lori Beaman (University of Ottawa) and Paula Montero (University of São Paulo), this workshop explored the intersection between law, religion and nonreligion. The group discussed the way that the language of law is used by religious and nonreligious groups to mobilize various social movements, and conversely considered how the language of religion/nonreligion is used in the law. How does law think about religion? How does that affect the way it thinks about nonreligion? They considered existing literature, legal cases and other sources that showcase the deployment of religious and nonreligious language in the context of law. They examined country differences in perception of religion and nonreligion and the place of religion in the public sphere, particularly between Brazil, Argentina, and Canada. The group also discussed the re-appropriation or strategic deployment of religious or nonreligious language to achieve different goals or adapt to specific contexts. They explored legislation and places where we see collaboration and conflict between religious and nonreligious groups in legislative issues, such as Catholic groups working with nonreligious groups on certain issues. They also considered how they might study the experiences of the actors and interveners in these contexts, for instance the experiences of evangelical or nonreligious lawyers.

#### **Migration**

Led by Peter Beyer (University of Ottawa) and Mia Lövheim (Uppsala University), this workshop discussed the complexity of studying religion and nonreligion among migrant groups. The group spoke about how the definitions and boundaries of religion and nonreligion may change in the context of migration, and discussed a number of research questions including: How do migrants themselves define nonreligion within their own groups and cultural communities? What does nonreligion look like, especially for those who are nonreligious and not visible because it is socially undesirable to be visibly nonreligious? The group discussed atheist Muslims, the intra-religious differences in perceiving and defining that idea among Muslim migrant communities and how atheist Muslims may be perceived by others outside of those communities. The group also explored generational differences in attitudes towards religion and nonreligion among migrant groups and instances where conversion or assimilation for migration purposes might signify a shift between private and public expressions of religion or nonreligion. They concluded by discussing how they might conceptualize and research different potential projects, as nonreligion looks different within different migrant groups.