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Introduction to the Special Issue: Religion, Power, and Resistance: New Ideas for a Divided World

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The world is currently gripped by pressing environmental, social, and economic challenges. Many people have lost faith that existing power structures can handle them, but they have come to no consensus on solutions. We thus find ourselves in increasingly divided societies, riven by ideological battles for the future of the human and the more-than-human world. In its myriad forms, religion plays many roles in this picture. It can be an underlying source of divisions as well as a powerful means of addressing them.

The sociology of religion is also changing. Scholars no longer see religion as centred only on churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and so on, nor do they see it as simply focused on supernatural beliefs. Therefore, they now investigate folk religions, indigenous knowledge systems, contemporary spiritualities, and non-religious worldviews as well as formal religious life, and they look for new concepts to help them grasp this religious diversity. They discover that the old binary frameworks of 'private' vs. 'public' religion and 'religious' vs. 'secular' no longer so easily apply. Theoretical frameworks derived from one context cannot so simply be transposed to another. Lived experiences of diverse religious forms do not always match up with ideological or theological underpinnings. In short, we are living in a time of religious complexity, where religion plays a role in both creating and ameliorating conflict and division.

The articles in this Special Issue were drawn from the July 2018 World Congress of Sociology—the International Sociological Association (ISA)'s 19th quadrennial meeting. They come from sessions organised by the ISA's Research Committee on the Sociology of Religion (RC22). The RC22's theme was 'Religion, Power, and Resistance: New Ideas for a Divided World' and it explored the following questions: What is religion's role in this situation: as a creator of divisions, as a locus of power, and as a ground of resistance? How does religion influence our divided societies? How is religion influenced in turn?

The RC22 papers focused on religion and power, intersectional violence, social divisions, and also resistance to power, violence, and division. They included the following themes: religion and nationalism; religion and social theory; religion and diversity; religion and violent extremism; religion and gender inequality; religion and sexuality inequality; religion and environmental crises; and religion and violent and nonviolent social movements.

The editors invited a selection of RC22 World Congress participants to contribute to this Special Issue, as a way to share their ground-breaking, recent research on religion. We chose both established and emerging international scholars, in order to make the best use of the high-quality, open-access platform that the journal *Religions* provides. As a part of the RC22's commitment to decentering the

sociology of religion from the Global North and West, we selected participants from a wide range of regions. We thus included case studies and/or scholars from Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, the Middle East, and North and South America.

James V. Spickard's 2018 RC22 Presidential Address, on 'The Sociology of Religion in a Post-Colonial Era: Towards Theoretical Reflexivity' argues that the discipline of sociology remains shaped by its 19th century European historical-cultural origins. He calls for sociologists to interrogate these inherited concepts, uncover their limitations, and understand how the current social, political, and economic situation continues to shape contemporary sociology. He also contends that a post-colonial sociology needs to expand its theoretical canon to include scholarship from non-Western locations, for epistemological as well as for ethical reasons.

Federico Settler's article focuses on how university staff and students in South Africa's campaigns to decolonise higher education were met with violent repression, yet how they used that conflict as an opportunity for critical reflection on resistance and religion. He examines three 'curatorial moments' created by himself and his colleagues: a *Prisoners' Memorial*, the *Poetics of Protest* event, and *Public Sculpture*. These events enabled students and staff to reflect deeply on their own experiences of violence, power relations, and decolonial pedagogy.

Terry Tak-ling Woo's contribution explores how to use Chinese religious phenomena to expose the inadequacy of applying Western theories, such as secularisation, to Chinese experiences. Woo stresses the diversity of religious thought in China, spanning Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, newer religious movements, and pan-Chinese quasi-religious practices. She contends that this variety of religions and attitudes towards religion lends itself to a more flexible and indeterminate theoretical approach rather than seeking one overarching theory.

Cristián Parker's article, which focuses on Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, argues that theoretical approaches that focus on lived religion and symbolic action offer a better framework for understanding popular, ethnic, and folk religions in the Global South than do approaches based on multiple modernities. He thus challenges the notion that Western theories are universal theories and evokes a new sociology of religion informed by an emerging post-rationalist paradigm.

Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo's contribution examines the ideologies and power dynamics of Ghana's New Churches. Drawing on media analysis and interviews, he presents case studies of strategies that two Pentecostal–charismatic organisations used to gain political access and influence in Ghana's increasingly socio-culturally diverse society.

Rafael Cazarin's article examines how Pentecostal churches in South Africa and Spain create a social architecture of belonging for members of the African diaspora in these societies and globally. Cazarin argues that they do so by providing a religious narrative that transforms them from a marginalised minority to a more powerful group that occupies a higher moral ground.

Hossein Godazgar's contribution examines a movement from 'Islamism' to 'Spiritualism' in contemporary Iran. Through the analysis of media and interview data, he argues that while the influence of mosques is waning, there has been a rise of interest in less institutionalised and politicised spaces of shrines and places of pilgrimage over recent years. This shift is evidence for the growth of a more individualistic spirituality.

Anna Clot-Garrell and Mar Griera's article analyses public, political, and collective forms of contemporary spirituality in Catalonia. It questions the dominant view that spirituality takes place in the private sphere and is linked to consumerism and narcissistic individualism. Instead, the authors discover that it is far more public and is socially and politically engaged, demonstrating an ethics of responsibility.

Peter Beyer and Lori Beaman's contribution presents the findings of the Religion and Diversity Project, which was centred on Canada and included evidence from the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia and France. It argues that religious diversity is becoming both more complex and more intersectional, particularly regarding sex and gender diversities. They also conclude that the category of non-religion requires further investigation in contemporary societies.

Alan G. Nixon's article examines the rising persecution of the 'non-religious' in the context of how 'non-religion' is treated as part of the category 'religion' in International Human Rights instruments and laws. He argues for the need to examine and challenge the privileging of religion, to counter discrimination and persecution of the non-religious and to advance their rights globally.

Anna Halafoff, Heather Shipley, Pamela D. Young, Andrew Singleton, Mary Lou Rasmussen, and Gary Bouma's contribution problematises the claim that young people are apathetic towards religion. The authors present their research findings on young people's diverse religious, spiritual, and non-religious worldviews in Australia and Canada. They argue that these young people negotiate their worldview identities—including religious and sexuality identities—in complex, critical, and caring ways, which are often characterised by hybridity and questioning.

These articles focus on religion, power and resistance in multiple ways and contexts. A prevalent theme among them is the decolonising and decentering of sociology written from Northern and Western perspectives, as discussed in Spickard's, Woo's and Parker's theoretical articles and Settler's contribution focussed on pedagogy. Another theme is disrupting our discipline's dominant emphases on the study of conventional religions, by focusing on the spiritual and non-religious, as is evident in Godazgar's examination of 'Spiritualism' in Iran, Clot-Garrell and Griera's work on contemporary spirituality in Catalonia, and Nixon's article on the non-religious and human rights law. A further theme is the strategies used by newer and popular forms of religion to challenge existing power structures, such as Okyerefo's case study of Ghana's New Churches and Cazarin's examples of Pentecostal churches in South Africa and Spain. Finally, themes of complexity, intersectionality, and inclusion emerge in the articles by Beyer and Beaman, and Halafoff et al., who argue that to gain deep insights into a situation, research must engage with diverse participants' views and experiences in ways that both centre them and accurately reflect their complex and lived realities.

As this Special Issue's editors, we hope that these articles generate robust discussion and critical reflection on the nexus of religion, spirituality, and non-religion with power, violence, and justice, resistance and responsibility. We hope that these contributions from diverse settings can disrupt dominant paradigms and contribute to the creation of new ideas that advance the discipline of the sociology of religion.