

## Thursday Sociological Seminars

1/6/2023  
14:00

HYBRID FORM  
room 207  
Jilská 1, Praha 1  
and ZOOM

# ZUZANA BÁRTOVÁ, AGATA ŁADYKOWSKA, VIOLA TEISENHOFFER

## Religion beyond religion? Conceptual and methodological perspectives on locating religion in the modern world

Empirical data suggests that religious attitudes and values are thriving outside of organized and institutional forms of religion in Western societies. A striking example is the case of the former Czech Prime Minister Babiš, who recently attracted attention by publicly assuming his confidence in astrology and his respect for Mother Earth amidst the uncertainty stirred by the Covid-19 pandemic. Another compelling case is that of the widespread use of mindfulness and visualization techniques to achieve personal goals, such as healing, prosperity, intimate relationships, and the like, based on popular understandings of quantum physics as a means of inflecting reality. The emergence of these diverse elusive religious forms evolving outside any clearly identifiable institutions defies the conceptual frames of the current social scientific study of religion. The dominant sociological approach proposed by the secularization paradigm based on the discrimination between the “religious” and the “secular” proves thus to be problematic. Indeed, in this perspective, the religious is conceived as pertaining to religious institutions and as separated from other spheres of social life. This theoretical model, which also feeds into common-sense thinking, overlooks the possible religious valence of social practices usually regarded as being dissociated from religion.

Presenting the outline of our Primus project “Uncertain futures. Exploring Religious Experience in the Age of Neoliberalism and the Anthropocene”, we will reflect upon these issues in a twofold manner. On the one hand, we will discuss the limits of the secularization paradigm. On the other hand, we will explore the hypothesis that theological categories and representations related to transcendence are not necessarily limited to religious phenomena “proper”. In order to illustrate our point, we will focus on two empirical cases: (1) personal development in managerial settings in Slovakia, (2) neo-nationalist practices and discourses in Hungary related to official as well as informal celebrations of the national past. These seemingly disconnected phenomena are, in our view, influenced by ultimately soteriological and eschatological ideas, suggesting that these are not mere secular practices, but may perhaps be salient analyzers of the place of religion in the modern world.

*Zuzana Bártová is a researcher at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Charles University and an assistant professor at University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice. She completed her PhD in Religious Studies at the University of Strasbourg in France in 2019. Her research is focused on Buddhism as a lifestyle in consumer culture. Since her doctoral studies, she has also worked on the relationship between religion and personal development at work.*

*Agata Ładykowska is the PI of the Primus project “Uncertain futures. Exploring Religious Experience in the Age of Neoliberalism and the Anthropocene” at the Institute of Sociological Studies at Charles University. She holds a PhD degree in social anthropology from Max-Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Germany. She is interested in anthropology of religion and atheism, historical anthropology, anthropological theory, political anthropology, economic anthropology, anthropology of postsocialism/social change, and post-humanist and relational social sciences, and has been working on multiple international projects addressing religious change.*

*Viola Teisenhoffer holds a PhD degree in anthropology from Université Paris Nanterre. She is currently a research fellow at the Institute of Sociological Studies at Charles University. She also teaches anthropology of religion and fieldwork techniques at the Cultural Anthropology MA program of Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Budapest. Her research interests include ceremonial devices, ritual experiences, and identity constructions in Neopaganism and in contemporary spiritualities in general.*