



# NEWSLETTER

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## Letter from the President

Greetings from the ISA Research Committee for the Sociology of Religion. Our newsletter has a bundle of information for you, particularly about our upcoming **World Congress of Sociology, to be held from 15-21 July, 2018, in Toronto, Canada.** Though that seems a long time away, we are already beginning to organize sessions for the conference.

The overall World Congress theme will be “Power, Violence, and Justice”. This continues the ISA’s recent concern for making sociology a force for positive social change. Page 2 of this newsletter has a complete description and a calendar of important dates.

Our Research Committee’s theme will be “Religion, Power, and Resistance: New Ideas for a Divided World”. As described on page 3, our Program Coordinators Anna Halafoff, Sam Han, and Caroline Starkey are now accepting session proposals. To submit one, please visit [the ISA website](http://the ISA website), click on the RC-22 box (about half-way down the page), log in, and fill out the form. The deadline is 15 March at 24:00 GMT.

Paper proposals open on 25 April, and are due by 30 September. For the first time, we will offer the Ivan Varga Prize for New Generation Scholars. This monetary award recognizes an outstanding new paper by a scholar who is at most three years beyond the PhD. We’ll have details in our next newsletter.

On another front, recent events in the U.S have disrupted international travel and threaten international scholarship and the free flow of ideas. As I write this, a court has blocked the U.S. president’s original order banning refugees and visitors from seven Muslim-majority nations, including those who have dual citizenship elsewhere. News reports tell us to expect a revised ban, but also recount harassment of others seeking entry, including returning U.S. citizens.

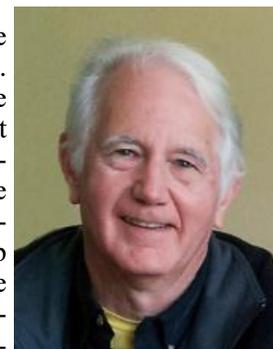
The ISA is firmly opposed to such travel restrictions. The RC-22 Board approved a statement opposing the ban, which I mailed to members last week.

You can find the text on page 4. We shall continue to speak out against any attempts to stifle international contact. Scholarship depends on the free flow of people and information. We particularly protest against religious discrimination.

This newsletter contains four other items of interest. On page 5, Adam Powell, from Durham University, assesses the contemporary relevance of the writings of Hans Mol, the third president of our Research Committee (1974-1978). Powell argues that Mol’s analysis of the relationship between religion and identity is deeply relevant to our time. It can, he writes, possibly help us understand the recent emphasis on identity politics and the recent political fights over whose identities will receive state support. This is a different approach to what we sometimes call “the culture wars”. Mol was important to our RC’s early development. I think it is worth reminding ourselves of his intellectual contribution.

Page 6 contains recent news from four members of our Governing Board. Page 7 outlines several ways that you can contribute to our next newsletter. And page 8 contains a list of our current Board members. Let me remind you that our terms expire at the next World Congress. We will be seeking candidates for several posts, including President and Secretary/Treasurer. Please let me know if you are interested in serving

Finally, send us your news items. Go to the [“News and Events”](#) section of our website and follow the instructions. While you’re there, sign up to get our weekly summary of what others have sent in. Best wishes to you all,



Jim Spickard  
University of Redlands  
[president@isa-rc22.org](mailto:president@isa-rc22.org)



## Moving towards the 2018 World Congress

The next ISA World Congress will be held in Toronto, Canada, from July 15-21, 2018. It's not too early to start planning.

The ISA conference website is at <http://www.isa-sociology.org/congress2018/>. The Call for Session Proposals is open (see page 3 of this newsletter), but the Call for Paper Proposals is not. It opens on 25 April, once the sessions titles have been chosen.

As you can see from the poster, the conference theme is "Power, Violence, and Justice: Reflections, Responses, and Responsibilities". On the website, ISA President Margaret Abraham describes the theme as follows:

Since the inception of the discipline, sociologists have been concerned with power, violence and justice. Current social, economic and political challenges enhance their relevance.

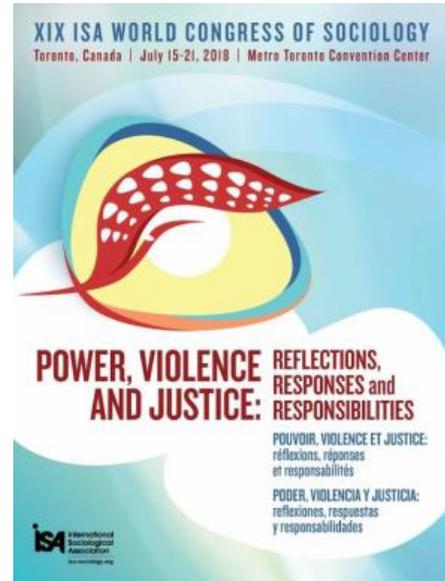
As capitalist globalization expands and deepens, corporate power increases along with global, national and local inequalities. New geo-political power configurations and confrontations are emerging, with violence being used as a tool to oppress and also to resist oppression. Colonial histories and contemporary land appropriations reflect the structures and cultural processes that perpetuate violence against indigenous and minority communities. States' failures to meet their responsibility to provide basic resources are often deflected by blaming the most vulnerable.

Both global economic and geo-political processes create crises and massive displacements of people and, at the same time, fuel racism, nationalism and xenophobia. We have also seen an increasing buildup of a culture of fear as a powerful tool used by states, corporations and other institutions to generate popular support for curtailing freedom in the name of security. Efforts to curtail the flow of desperate refugees, attest to the reinforcement of national and racialized borders.

Despite visible progress on equality issues, violence against women and intersectional violence point to the entrenchment of the gender border around the world. Equally significant is the need to consider the role of state and institutional power relations to ongoing everyday violence.

In response to disempowerment, violence, and injustice we have also witnessed nonviolent movements, humanitarian interventions, and peace processes that have empowered communities, reduced violence, and promoted justice. These diverse communities have built solidarities outside the neo-liberal frames of state-global capital nexus.

This XIX ISA World Congress of Sociology will focus on how scholars, public intellectuals, policy makers, journalists and activists from diverse fields can and do contribute to our understanding of power, violence and justice.



### Timetable for Proposing Sessions and Papers (as of January, 2017)

#### 2017

15 Jan:

- RCs choose Program Coordinators
- Proposal submissions for Integrative Sessions, Ad Hoc sessions, Author/Critics sessions, and sessions by national, regional, and other groups

**2 Feb–15 Mar:**

- **Call for Sessions announced, including Invited, Presidential, and other RC sessions**

16 Mar–7 Apr:

- Program Coordinators create final list of sessions

25 Apr–30 Sept:

- Call for Papers. Participants submit abstracts to CONFEX (online)

5 Oct–15 Nov:

- Session organizers choose papers and organize sessions.
- Unchosen papers either rejected or transferred to the Program Coordinators.

16 Nov–24 Nov:

- Program Coordinators reshuffle sessions, assign transferred papers, create roundtables, etc, so as to include as many good papers as possible.

30 Nov:

- CONFEX sends our notification letters to all authors, informing them of their acceptance or rejection

#### 2018

20 Mar:

- Registration deadline for presenters

14 Apr–30 Apr:

- Session Organizers and Program Coordinators modify sessions based on final registrations.

**Call for RC22 Session Proposals — Due before March 15th****RC22 Theme: Religion, Power, and Resistance:  
New Ideas for a Divided World**

Program Coordinators:

- ◆ Anna Halafoff, Deakin University, Australia [anna.halafoff@deakin.edu.au](mailto:anna.halafoff@deakin.edu.au)
- ◆ Sam Han, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore [Hansam@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:Hansam@ntu.edu.sg)
- ◆ Caroline Starkey, University of Leeds, UK [C.Starkey@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:C.Starkey@leeds.ac.uk)

Current environmental, economic, social, and political challenges indicate that people are losing faith in existing power structures and mechanisms for coping with crises. This creates increasingly divided societies, riven by ideological battles for the future of the human and the more than human world. Religion has a place in this picture. Not only is it often a source of divisions; it can also be a source for alternative means of addressing them.

These divisions take new and as yet unclear shapes, which sociologists are only now beginning to comprehend. It is not enough to refer to the struggle between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’, terms that dominated sociology through the 1970s. Nor do the tropes ‘colonialism vs. anti-colonialism’ and the ‘clash of civilizations’ adequately explain what is going on. Nor, arguably, does ‘populism vs neo-liberalism’ fully capture such things as the recent clashes between cosmopolitan and antic cosmopolitan actors in the major Western democracies. Each of these has a piece of the picture; none of them captures it all.

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?

**We invite proposals for RC22 sessions that focus on religion, power, intersectional violence, and social divisions, and also resistance to power, violence, and division.**

We encourage sessions that explore the nexus between:

- ◆ religion and global capitalism;
- ◆ religion and colonialism;
- ◆ religion and nationalism;
- ◆ religion and racism;
- ◆ religion and violent extremism;
- ◆ religion and gender inequality;
- ◆ religion and sexuality inequality;
- ◆ religion and environmental crises;
- ◆ religion and resistance to power and violence; and
- ◆ other topics that speak to religion’s role in a divided world.

We particularly encourage a focus on new ideas. We thus encourage sessions on:

- ◆ post-colonial, Southern and Eastern social theories;
- ◆ gender and sexuality equality;
- ◆ violent and nonviolent social movements;
- ◆ human rights and peacebuilding;
- ◆ third spaces, digital activism, and other new phenomena.

**Above all, we seek new ways of understanding religion in our divided world.**

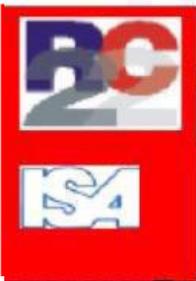
**The ISA CONFEX website site is now open to session proposals:**

<https://isaconf.confex.com/isaconf/wc2018/rc/cfs.cgi?>

**Please propose sessions before 15 March, 2017 24:00 GMT**

We welcome both pre-organized sessions and topical sessions that will be open to paper proposals by individuals. Once the sessions are chosen, individuals will have an opportunity to propose individual papers for those sessions: from April 25 to September 30, 2017 24:00 GMT, also at the CONFEX website.

Please address any questions to the Program Coordinators.



## **RC-22 Statement of Opposition to U.S. Restrictions on Visas and International Travel**

*The RC-22 Board released the following letter in response to the recently announced restrictions on visas and international travel to the U.S.*

January 31, 2017

The Board of the International Sociological Association's Research Committee on the Sociology of Religion expresses its opposition to the restrictions on international travel, visas, and immigration that have been imposed by the President of the United States and his administration. We join with many other scholarly associations to protest this restriction on the free movement of people and ideas across national borders. As scholars of religion, we particularly protest the unjust singling out of Muslims and the residents of Muslim majority countries.

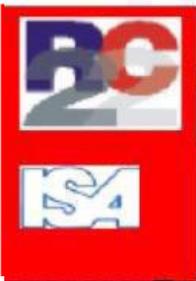
As sociologists, we oppose this Executive Order because it affects our colleagues and students as well as the conditions for knowledge production. In addition, sociologists have documented and analyzed the ways in which symbolic boundaries are made more rigid and result in the social exclusion of specific groups. This Executive Order targeting specific groups of individuals has effects not only on its immediate victims, but also on how our society understands itself and its orientation toward diversity and human rights.

We are an international scholarly organization with members from all over the world. Some of our members come from the targeted Muslim countries. Others come from the 38 countries that are affected by the suspension of the Visa Interview Waiver Program – including members of the European Union. Banning or hindering their travel threatens to prevent them from attending our conferences and participating in our workshops and other intellectual exchanges. Retaliatory travel banning by the affected countries will isolate U.S. scholars as well, weakening their contribution to our society.

As scholars, we know the importance of maintaining the free flow of information and persons across national borders. Shared knowledge helps the public understand society's workings. It reduces international tensions. It reduces prejudice. It creates stronger social institutions. And it increases international prosperity. The Executive Order does not increase safety; it increases discord and indeed endangers people around the world. We call on the American government to reverse the order immediately and restore the free flow of people and ideas between the U.S. and other countries.

On behalf of the Research Committee

James V. Spickard, PhD, President  
Professor of Sociology,  
University of Redlands  
California, USA



## The Contemporary Relevance of Hans Mol's Identity Theory

Adam J. Powell  
Durham University

Over the past five years, a number of academic organisations have expressed growing concern for the state of sociology of religion in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Whether from the American Academy of Religion, the British Sociological Association, or our own research committee within the ISA, the reflections have been univocal: the field of sociology and the sub-field of sociology of religion need to take each other seriously. Furthermore, both need to reclaim theory and explanation as central to the sociological enterprise.

In pursuing theory/explanation, of course, it might be tempting to 'reinvent the wheel' – especially as we attempt to counter the criticism that our discipline has been too reluctant to move beyond the founding theorists. However, useful analytical tools and theoretical frameworks – building on the classics whilst avoiding the fragmentation of postmodern theory – do exist. One example, of potentially very incisive relevance for contemporary analyses of religion and society, is the theory of identity outlined by one of the early presidents of the Sociology of Religion Research Committee, Hans Mol in his 1976 book *Identity and the Sacred*.

For Mol, religion was not a static cultural object but a social process by which individual and group identities are 'sacralised'. This 'sacralisation of identity' entails four mechanisms whereby identity is buoyed in the face of life's vicissitudes: objectification, ritual, commitment, and myth. Essentially, Mol believed that both the natural and the social sciences point to a dialectic between stability and change, or identity and forces of differentiation. He understood religion, therefore, as an interminable balancing act in which systems of meaning that offer stable identities implement the sacralising mechanisms to incorporate forced changes and uncertainties. In this way, Mol connected personal and group identity with a 'stable niche' that is cloaked with sacrality in the process of neutralising potential threats to the collective and to the self.

Now, decades later, Mol's identity theory seems rather insightful. Not only did his concept of religion as any meaning-system capable of conferring and sustaining an identity with associated emotions, rituals, and narratives presciently suggest an alternative to the secularisation thesis back in the 1970s, but it also underscored the indissoluble links between identity, meaning, and transcendence. As religiously-inflected passions and political volatilities collide across the globe (viz., Trump, Brexit, and sundry forms of Islamism), and as social commentators and experts betray their own inadequate understandings of social conflict, it may be of some use to reflect on Mol's theoretical contributions. Indeed, Mol equated identity not simply with stability but with

'the stable niche that man occupies in a potentially chaotic environment *which he is therefore prepared vigorously to defend*' (my emphasis) (1976: 65). What is more, he emphasised the fragility of identity, hence the beneficial role of religion as it reinforces identity through sacralisation.

Of course, that identity-reinforcing endeavour follows, and implies, a previous transition from an old mode of being, thinking, and feeling to a new mode of being, thinking, and feeling. Mol likened this to the religious conversion. He stated unequivocally, 'Detachment from any established identity pattern is painful...' (1976: 50).

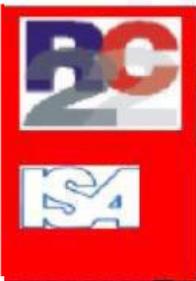
If Mol was on to something about the relationship between identity and stability – about the spirited defence of an identity by a group or individual who intuitively feels the potential agony of conversion – perhaps current events should cause less surprise. Indeed, identity may very well be a zero-sum game. When a political ideology or religious worldview impinges on an already sacred identity, we may be witnessing what social anthropologist Douglas Davies has called 'identity-depletion'. This includes 'life circumstances...where otherness becomes malevolent and reciprocity constricted' (2011: 68).

For example, the American political scene has witnessed a significant trend toward identity politics (i.e., gender, sexuality, race, and religion) over the past few decades, a pattern that has challenged all three branches of government (judicial, legislative, and executive) to legislate a sort of morality based on liberal values of human rights. In doing so the state seems to have entered the fray of private religious attitudes, challenging (inadvertently?) the supposed private/public bifurcation at the heart of the modern West. More importantly, however, this means that many Americans perceive a pressure to convert to an unfamiliar (but state-sanctioned) identity, or at least feel the anguish of their once-stable identity being depleted.

Will individuals and groups not defend against this anticipated pain? Is there a replacement to fill the void? Mol suggested that in such circumstances charismatic leaders emerge 'as the catalysts for the kind of change that...is already in the air' (1976: 46). Such leaders may ease the conversion process or help reintegrate the old disrupted identity. Just maybe, such leaders sometimes look like a Trump or a Farage.

### References

- Davies, D. *Emotion, Identity, and Religion: Hope, Reciprocity, and Otherness*. (Oxford 2011)  
Davies D. & Powell, A., eds: *Sacred Selves, Sacred Settings* (Ashgate, 2015)  
Mol, H. *Identity and the Sacred*. (Blackwell 1976)



### News of our Board Members

#### Jualynne Dodson

The Association of Black Sociologists held its 46th Annual Meeting in Memphis Cook Convention Center in Memphis Tennessee. With some forty sessions around the theme, “#BlackSociology Matters: Scholarship and Activism in Response to Injustice,” participants gathered October 6-8, 2016 to give the theme a full review.

**Jualynne Dodson**, MSU Professor of Sociology and African American & African Studies, was awarded the A. Wade Smith Award for Teaching, Mentoring, and Service. As its name implies, the award is recog-



nition of a Distinguished Academic Career in teaching and mentoring.

Dodson, Founding Director of the African Atlantic Research Team and has been a member of the RC-22 Board since 2014.

#### Per Pettersson

RC-22 Vice-President **Per Pettersson** is developing a research partnership between the University of Uppsala (Sweden) and the University of Western Cape and SANORD university network in South Africa.



Pettersson has been a director of the IMPACT program at Uppsala since 2011. That program studies the role of religion in contemporary challenges for society, law, and democracy.

#### Seyed-Hossein Serajzahed

**Seyed-Hossein Serajzahed** has been elected President of the Iranian Sociological Association.

He is organizing a conference on the theme “Two Decades of Discourse about Globalizing Social Sciences”, to be held in at Kharazami University in Tehran on 25/26 April 2017.

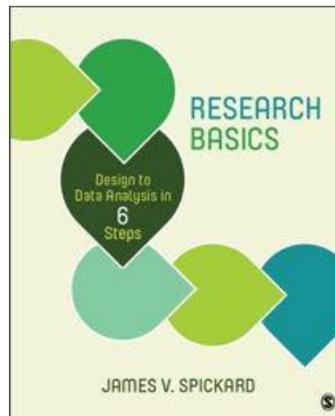
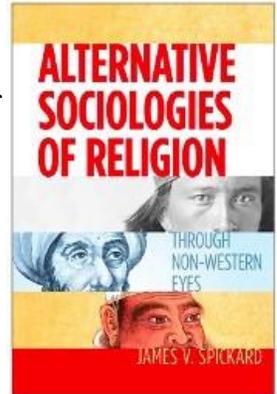


Hossein has been an RC-22 Board member since 2010.

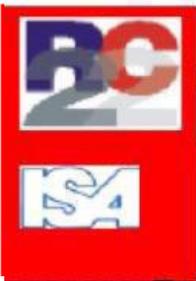
#### Jim Spickard

RC-22 President **Jim Spickard** published two books in recent months.

Alternative Sociologies of Religion: Through Non-Western Eyes (NYU Press) shows the Western Christian origins of the standard concepts used in our discipline. It then explores what new things we would learn about religions, were we to approach them with a grounding in Confucian philosophy, in Navajo religion, or in the writings of the great 14th-century Arab jurist Ibn Khaldūn.



Research Basics: Design to Data Analysis in Six Steps (Sage) presents a new way of teaching research design. It focuses on the connection between the type of data that a project needs to answer its research question and the data-gathering techniques that best produce this data.



## Opportunities for You

### Three Ways to Contribute to Our Next Newsletter

#### 1) Tell us about the sociology of religion in your part of the world:

In our September newsletter, we heard about the sociology of religion in Latin America. What's happening to religion in your part of the world? What's happening in your country? We'll publish short pieces in future newsletters: 500-750 words. Please send them to [newsletter@isa-rc22.org](mailto:newsletter@isa-rc22.org).

#### 2) Write a think-piece about the sociology of religion

What direction do you think our discipline needs to go? What are the cutting-edge issues? What projects do you find most exciting? We'd like short essays (up to 1250 words) that are scholarly but also provocative. Please send them to [newsletter@isa-rc22.org](mailto:newsletter@isa-rc22.org).

#### 3) Tell us about your books and awards

We'll publish significant news from members as space allows. [newsletter@isa-rc22.org](mailto:newsletter@isa-rc22.org)

### Send us News for Our Blog.

Yes, RC-22 publishes a blog. We post calls-for-papers, conference and book announcements, job openings, and many other things of interest to sociologists of religion worldwide. Visit [www.isa-rc22.org/news-events](http://www.isa-rc22.org/news-events) to get a sample. Then send your events and news to [BlogSubmit@isa-rc22.org](mailto:BlogSubmit@isa-rc22.org). We can't do attachments, so put your text in the body of your email. We'll post it and spread the word..

A weekly summary goes out to over 800 scholars worldwide. If you're not getting it, go to the [blog page](#) and sign up.

### Keep Your Membership Up-To-Date

As you know, there are two parts to membership in the ISA:

1. Membership in the ISA as a whole (\$35-\$225 for 4 years, depending on your country; half that for students)
2. Membership on the Research Committees. (\$10-\$30, depending on your country)

The ISA does a good job of making sure that conference participants join the ISA, paying the rather large 4-year dues that keep the organization going.

It does not, however, make sure that conference attendees join the Research Committees themselves. Nor do we: you can participate in our programs without being an RC-22 member. This increases the number of people who can attend.

Unfortunately, that can cause a problem. **The number of sessions that we have at the next World Congress will depend on how many members have joined the RC.** We had 19 sessions in Vienna because we did such a good job in Yokohama of increasing our membership. We won't have that many the next time around, unless more people join. So:

***If you're not an RC-22 Member, please join!***



**RC22—International Sociological Association (ISA)**

**2014-2018 RC22 BOARD MEMBERS**

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- President** Jim Spickard, University of Redlands, USA  
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