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Panel: The Pragmatics of Religious Rhetorics in Politics: Perspectives from the Global South and North

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The intersection of politics and religion has increasingly been at the centre of sustained scholarly attention, with researchers approaching the phenomenon from multiple theoretical and methodological vantage points. This intersection has become more pronounced with the emergence of different forms of religious-inspired nationalisms over the past decade (Miller, 2023; Goldberg 2006; Clarkson, 2019; Cesari, 2018; Jong & Ali, 2023, etc.). Even in societies that once asserted strict policies of secularism, there is a burgeoning movement to reclaim a national, cultural-religious heritage in response to rising multiculturalism. At the centre of this shift is political discourse, where language is used to construct or deconstruct national realities. While there are numerous studies on the facets of politics and religion, pragmatics has traditionally been used in the analysis of religious discourse, just as pragmatic theories have been applied to the analysis of political discourse (Pan, 2024). However, the aspect which requires further empirical and theoretical attention are pragmatic perspectives on religious rhetorics within the political sphere in all parts of the world.

'Religion' is defined in a very broad sense as a unified system of beliefs and practices oriented toward the supernatural or ineffable (Durkheim, 2008 [1915]; Hjarvard, 2008). Specifically, 'religion' is understood and defined by its use in a *functional* – as opposed to substantive – sense; the function of religious discourse to assert a political-religious position. For instance, religious discourse has been used to construct powerful political myths around morally charged binaries such as good and evil (Charteris-Black, 2011). Often, these result from a sense of 'ontological insecurity' (Kinnvall, 2004), where the persuasive *function* of religious discourse in politics extends beyond explicit theological arguments. Dontcheva-Navratilova et al. (2020) identify persuasion as a central mechanism through which religious ideology, analogously to political ideology, seeks to shape social norms and behavioural standards. In this way, language operates as a vehicle of ideological construction and contestation. From a pragmatic standpoint, speech act theory is particularly illuminating: the capacity of language to enact new or reinforce hegemonic social realities.

This panel seeks to explore language use in political contexts across the Global South and North. The objective is to highlight and expand the contribution of pragmatic theory understandings of the intersections of religious rhetorics in politics. Central to these religious expressions are rituals and speech acts used to connect with the supernatural to influence socio-political agendas.

The following and further related research questions can be addressed:

1. What is the pragmatic nature of religious discourse in political contexts?
2. What similarities and divergences exist in the use of these speech acts within and across different religious ideologies and cultures?
3. How is political religion weaponized through faith-based stances to assert or challenge religious identity and secularity?

By examining how language is used to claim heritage or construct secular nationalism, this panel aims to illuminate how the invocation of 'religion' serves as a performative intervention, ultimately determining whether religion acts as a unifying force or a divisive factor in national cohesion.

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