Forget worldviews: Towards a Deleuzian religious studies[1]

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ABSTRACT

In this essay I engage in a close analysis of three documents central to the push to place the worldview concept at the front and centre of Religious Studies in schools and universities - the 2018 Commission on Religious Education Report *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward, Worldview: A Multidisciplinary Report* (2020) and *The Worldview Project: Discussion Papers* (2020). I argue that the documents paint a picture of a subject caught between an objectivist account of a fixed field of really existing religions and a postmodern or Deleuzian mélange of lived interactions and flows. I advocate for a Deleuzian transformation of Religious Studies and the embrace of decolonisation and critical religious literacy, based in a vision of the study of religions as the study of relations and assemblages.

KEYWORDS

Worldviews; postmodernism; Gilles Deleuze; assemblages; relations.

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Introduction

It has been suggested that the 2018 Commission on Religious Education Report *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward* is as significant a document as the 1971 Schools Council Working Paper 36, which marked the end of confessional, Christian Religious Education in England and Wales (Cooling 2020a). With its partner documents *Worldview: A Multidisciplinary Report* (2020) and *The Worldview Project: Discussion Papers* (2020) which respectively situate the history of worldviews as a concept and reflect on the implications of it for teaching in schools, these documents present worldviews as a 'paradigm change' (Cooling 2020b, 404) that marks a movement away from the World Religions Paradigm (WRP) which defined the teaching of the subject in schools and universities from the 1970s. In this essay I engage in a close analysis of these documents to suggest that they paint a picture of a subject caught on the one hand between an objectivist account of a fixed field of really existing religions for which religions are discrete containers into which can be poured collections of beliefs, practices, founders, sacred texts and institutions and on the other, a postmodern or Deleuzian *mélange* of lived interactions and flows in which there are no containers only unstable assemblages of religious and secular elements. I argue that a Deleuzian point of departure promises a much-needed epistemological transformation of Religious Studies away from the study of religions as discrete objects or substances and towards the study of religions as relations, and that decolonisation and critical religious literacy constitute important steps towards that goal.

Why worldviews and why now?

Religious education in schools and universities in Britain has, until recently, focused on teaching the big, world religious traditions on the assumption that this would constitute a social and even spiritual or moral good in and of itself. As such, and arguably as a result of the undue influence of a particular interpretation of elements of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology at all levels of the subject area, religions have tended to be represented as static essences, defined by unchanging institutions and beliefs and practices, set apart from each other and from shifting historical and social contexts such as colonialism, racism and capitalism, with the role of the student of religions cast naively in terms of avoiding prejudice and reductionism by staying faithful to the religious insider's account of her practice, regardless of what her practice actually is. Although teachers of religions in schools have conventionally seen themselves as contributing to the wider social aims of education, such as instilling tolerance, empathy and respect for difference and thereby contributing to social cohesion, there has been a growing sense that religious education is failing to meet its social aims because it is not representing religions accurately (see Jackson 2016). According to Barnes, '…current representations of religion in British religious education are limited in their capacity to challenge racism and religious intolerance, chiefly because they are conceptually ill-equipped to develop respect for difference' (2006, 396). More specifically, according to Panjwani and Revell, representations of Islam in textbooks, examinations and syllabi are essentializations, 'leading to stereotypes and unsubstantiated generalizations' (2018, 269).

Coupled with this crisis in representation is the decline in the numbers of pupils pursuing religious education at GCSE and A-Level in England and Wales and in the

recruitment of students to undergraduate courses and qualifications in Theology and Religious Studies. For example, a 2019 report by the Religious Education Council (REC) found that entries for GCSE Religious Studies (combined short and full courses) in England and Wales had peaked in 2011 at 461,795. More recent figures show a decline in entries of 42.6% in eight years, with almost 200,000 fewer pupils achieving a qualification in Religious Studies at the end of key stage 4. A report by the British Academy (2019) paints a comparable picture of decline in higher education: in 2017/18, there were around 6,500 fewer students on Theology and Religious Studies courses in higher education institutions than there had been in 2011/12.

It is against this rather bleak backdrop that the Commission on Religious Education published *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward*. As the Report acknowledges, there are a number of critical challenges facing Religious Studies today, including the question of how to make the subject field more attractive to and more attuned with, the lived experience of young people, and more relevant to a range of issues from climate change to economic inequality to racism. But as well as seeking a basis for the revitalisation of the subject field in schools and colleges through curriculum change, the Report also recognises the acute structural problems in the provision of Religious Studies as a result of the increasing fragmentation of the school's landscape following academisation, as well as barriers to the recruitment and training of quality staff in the subject area, although these latter issues are beyond the scope of the discussion here.

Having established some of the immediate context to the report's publication and the wider debate about worldviews, in what follows I engage in a close analysis of the three worldviews documents, *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward* (2018), *Worldview: A Multidisciplinary Report* (2020) and *The Worldview Project: Discussion Papers* (2020).

Worldviews and paradigm change?

My analysis of *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward* is framed in terms of two questions: (i) what counts as a worldview? and (ii), are worldviews distinct and bounded or are their boundaries blurred? The first is a policing question, and the report engages in some intriguing border work to flesh out which worldviews fall under the purview of Religious Studies and which do not. As well as the big world religions, the report provides an 'illustration of the scope of the subject that teachers and curriculum planners may draw from', which includes

> ancient (and still living) traditions from China (e.g. Daoism, Confucianism), Japan (e.g. Shinto), Africa, Australia and New Zealand, and the Americas as well as Zoroastrianism and Jainism. These may have fewer identified adherents in the UK, but they are important globally and have influence beyond their identified adherents. Historical and contemporary paganism in the UK may also be included, as this is both growing and influential beyond those who identify as Pagans. The range of worldviews may also include groups formed more recently that pupils may meet or belong to themselves, including Baha'i, Latter Day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses and Rastafari (REC 2018, 75).

The report then goes on to state that the

> … worldviews to be included should be those which make ontological and epistemological claims … as well as political and moral ones. Humanism, existentialism and Confucianism are examples of suitable non-religious worldviews [note that Confucianism appears both as a religion and as a non-religion] for study … nationalism, global capitalism and Communism are examples of worldviews which are not … (ibid).[2]

Although the list is diverse and reflects a welcome desire to be inclusive, this police work is nevertheless questionable, and I will use the report's own example of 'global capitalism' to illustrate why. The very opening lines of the report's 'Foreword' states that 'Young people face many challenges in the modern world. Amongst these is learning to navigate the world of religion and belief. Controversy abounds and, in the midst of this, young people are seeking to understand the complex issues that are debated and to make their own decisions on these controversial matters' (REC 2018). Worldviews, then, pertain to decisions – choices if you will – and Religious Studies can enable young people to make those choices by providing them with the information they need. But the very idea that worldviews – 'the world of religion and belief' – can be rendered into a 'system of equivalence' (Fisher 2009, 4) which can be studied as if they are equal and as if they are a matter of individual, rational choice is, not accidentally, also constitutive of global capitalism. Capitalism is, after-all, epistemologically and ontologically premised upon the practice of assigning different things, 'whether they are religious iconography, [or] pornography' (ibid) value within a single value-system, in the process rendering them equivalent entities. So, what does the report's policing achieve? The exclusion of global capitalism ensures that the report's own ontological and epistemological foundations – and those of the global capitalist system within which we all live, and which are clearly reflected in the idea of equivalent worldviews about which choices must be made – remain beyond critical scrutiny.

If the policing decisions of the report are remarkable, my second question – are worldviews distinct and bounded or are their boundaries blurred? – takes as its point of departure the frequent recourse to statements that stress interactions and flows among and between religious and secular worldviews. For example, the report states that

> Deeper academic study of the experience of those who hold both religious and non-religious worldviews suggests that the distinction between religious and non-religious worldviews is not as clear-cut as one might think. Individuals may draw on aspects of both religious and non-religious worldviews in their own personal worldviews (REC 2018, 6; it is also repeated verbatim on p. 30).

The section on what pupils must be taught includes the 'ways in which worldviews develop in interaction with each other, have some shared beliefs and practices as well as differences, and that people may draw upon more than one tradition' (2018, 12), while elsewhere the point is made that '… worldviews are not fixed, bounded

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[2] I remain bemused by the elevation of a niche European philosophical movement – Existentialism – to the lofty status of worldview.

entities. The landscape of religious and non-religious worldviews is fluid and dynamic, and there is much more cross-fertilisation and interaction than is usually accounted for' (2018, 36). This meshes well with another of the report's oft-repeated suggestions, namely that the curriculum addresses 'lived experience' (2018, 76) because 'in practice, there are interactions and blurred boundaries between religions, and … individuals may not see religions as bounded entities' (2018, 73). Schools are recommended 'to engage with those who identify with various worldviews, including those with dual or multiple identities' (2018, 76) and to make use of historical and contemporary case studies of communities and individuals whose lives draw from multiple religious, social and cultural resources so that students encounter religions in context, a move that constitutes a critical step towards ensuring that religions are not reduced to beliefs and propositions or essentialised.

What is one to make of these suggestions and recommendations? On the face of it, there are some good ideas here to connect the study of religions with religious lives lived out in a range of contemporary settings. However, the report is also by extension making a case for a kind of postmodern or Deleuzian Religious Studies focused on lived interaction and fluidity rather than discrete views contained within frozen religious objects, but it is one that is haunted by the spectre of really existing religions and religious identities, the kinds with clearly defined edges and impermeable boundaries. The report's authors cleverly re-cast this epistemological and ontological question to one of focus and scale, that is between attention to 'personal worldview[s]' (2018,4 and 26) on the one hand, and 'institutional worldview[s]' on the other (ibid). Attentiveness to these different scales – the individual and the institutional – can certainly enable elucidation of the lived and improvised character of ordinary religious and social life on the one hand, and the ways institutions work to produce boundaries and distinctiveness through specific, historically and culturally situated policing regimes of interpretation and power. But I would argue that the worldview concept does little substantive to move the subject field in a new direction given that its principal effect in the classroom will likely be to expand the number of religions to include 'ancient (and still living) traditions from China (e.g. Daoism, Confucianism), Japan (e.g. Shinto), Africa, Australia and New Zealand, and the Americas as well as Zoroastrianism and Jainism' (REC 2018, 75), which will in turn continue to be taught as containers for particular beliefs, practices, founders, texts and so forth. This in turn will largely reproduce the discredited pedagogy of the WRP because it is not enough to simply expand curriculum coverage – the shift has to occur at a more fundamental level.

Worldviews and disciplinary histories

The 'Foreword' to *Worldview: A Multidisciplinary Report* describes it as a 'multidisciplinary literature review' that has been written to 'provide clarity as to the historical and contemporary use of the term [worldview] in a number of academic disciplines' (Cooling 2020c, 1). It is an ambitious document that begins by situating itself vis-à-vis *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward* as an intellectual partner, and the WRP as the paradigm-to-be-overcome. In particular, by affirming the critique of the latter for its ethno- and Christo-centrism and for ignoring 'the complexities and the diversity within traditions' and 'the permeability of their boundaries' (Benoit, Hutchings and Shillitoe 2020, 7), *Worldview: A Multidisciplinary Report* implicitly sets

up the concept of worldview as a long overdue alternative and corrective to the WRP, and the authors proceed to examine its history in a number of disciplines including Philosophy, Anthropology, Sociology, Religious Studies, Christian Theology and Biblical Studies, a well-chosen though not exhaustive list of disciplines that make up the religions field. I am not at all qualified to comment on some of these disciplinary snapshots, but the fact that the majority of citations for the term worldview in Anthropology are 1984 or earlier – all bar one to be precise – suggests a problem. I do not wish to be unfair to the authors, but surely what this section of the document demonstrates is that the term worldview has no contemporary currency in Anthropology. The Anthropology of Religion is a thriving field (see for example the work of David Berliner 2009 or Fenella Cannell 2006) and the fact that it has not worked with worldview as a concept for some time is surely the point that should have been remarked upon. The same could be said of Sociology, where relevant contemporary work with the concept is similarly sparse to non-existent.

If worldview turns out to have a somewhat disappointing disciplinary history, it is of note that the authors also rehearse the tensions that are played out in *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward*, between on the one hand religions as a 'series of discrete entities that can be studied in silos' (Benoit, Hutchings and Shillitoe 2020, 25) to religions as 'unfixed, unbounded, and heterogeneous' (2020, 27). I should add, here, that I agree entirely with the critique of the WRP represented in this document, and I agree squarely with the sentiment that pedagogy in Religious Studies needs to have more nuance and subtlety and that it 'is important not to give pupils the notion of fixed -isms' (ibid). However, it is not clear to me what new work worldviews is doing to deconstruct past modes of approaching and teaching religions.

Reflecting on worldviews

The Worldview Project: Discussion Papers is a summary document of a series of debates among academics and advisers that took place around the concept of worldviews. The document consists of four papers which constitute an extended commentary on those discussions, and which are described in the Introduction as offering 'a wide range of views on the usefulness of the worldview idea' (Cooling 2020a, 4) although that idea is also introduced as a 'game-changer' (2020a, 3) and the discussion more generally as potentially contributing to 'the professional development of teachers and others involved in RE' (2020a, 4). In common with *Worldview: A Multidisciplinary Report*, the discussion papers are situated in relation to *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward* as an intellectual partner, and in relation to the WRP, which is discussed directly in the second discussion paper, 'Fruitful understandings of worldview in the classroom' (Tharani 2020, 10-11). In this paper what emerges is an uneasy if by now familiar picture of the field as consisting of 'unitary and monolithic' (Tharani 2020, 5) religious objects that contain 'founders, sacred texts, specific places of worship, church-like organisational structures and systems of doctrine' and which all 'conform to the same pattern' on the one hand, and the need for a new paradigm that can offer a 'more nuanced' approach, on the other (Tharani 2020, 10). Tharani's language choices as she describes the kind of approach to Religious Studies that the worldviews concept allegedly offers are revealing: 'opening', 'interplay', 'blurring', 'interactions', 'complexity', 'overlapping'

and 'change' all indicate an implicitly postmodern or Deleuzian view of a subject field defined less by a discrete class of objects than ever shifting assemblages and relations of combination-articulation on the one hand, and disintegration-separation on the other. I will say more about these later on.

Tharani closes *The Worldview Project: Discussion Papers* by discussing some of the ways in which worldviews are implicated in debates about decolonisation. Firstly, she notes the importance of learning to critically evaluate representations of religions and religious lives to, 'interrogate … the power dynamics that created the models we now take for granted' and secondly, she highlights the extent to which the decolonisation of the subject field can 'highlight perspectives that have historically been silenced, for example those of women, minority groups and rural populations', and concludes by suggesting that decolonising the curriculum 'should support pupils to develop not just functional religious literacy but a critical-historical religious literacy' (2020, p. 20). Tharani's remarks are important not just because decolonising pedagogy and curricula in schools and universities happen to be, however belatedly, a priority today, but because the introduction of decolonisation and critical religious literacy to the conversation point to some of the steps that need to be taken to realize a postmodern or Deleuzian Religious Studies.

Critical religious literacy and decolonisation

One of the defining myths of the West has been the association of reason and modernity with religious decline. The secularization thesis has been and arguably remains the dominant frame for understanding religions, not just in the West but globally, predicting the inexorable retreat of religion from the public sphere to become a matter of private conscience, if not eventually extinct. Importantly, the Reformation emphasis on the individual as an autonomous, rational, moral being also implicated Christianity in the secular settlement, implicitly positioning other religious traditions as somehow outside or to the side of reason. In a series of essays gathered together under the title *Between Naturalism and Religion* published in English in 2008, Jürgen Habermas sought to address the contemporary conjunction of reason, secularism and religion – the post-secular – in the West. In his major work *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas had set out to diagnose the structural and systemic problems characteristic of modern societies, which he framed in terms of a conflict between the 'system' on the one hand, and the 'lifeworld' on the other. Habermas argued that the bureaucratic-administrative and economic system was characterised by a means-end, purposive rationality that prioritised action based on scientistic calculations of utility and success. For Habermas, the system and its operating rationality was at odds with the life-world (which included religion and the public sphere), an arena of implicitly shared values, norms and symbolic meanings responsible for social reproduction, integration and socialisation. Describing the life-world as a 'reservoir of taken-for-granteds' (1985, 124) and as an 'intuitively familiar, preinterpreted reality' (1985, 132), Habermas claimed that the life-world was constituted by what he called 'communicative action', a form of action where individuals oriented themselves towards others not according to scientistic criteria of utility or success but rather in terms of ethical and moral reasoning oriented towards reaching consensus and agreement with others. But could Habermas' claims about communicative action form the basis for an intervention formed around the concept of critical religious literacy? Adam Dinham's

advocacy of religious literacy as a 'chain of learning that is connected up across the spheres in which publics converge and learn' (Dinham 2021, 3) draws sustenance from Habermas' work, in particular his idea that communicative action is something akin to a form of pre-modern wisdom capable of re-enchanting society (2021, 1). However, according to Braidotti et al, although Habermas' 'post-secular turn offers a counter-discourse to the myth of secularism' (2014, 1), his attempt to re-think the secular through the lens of the Western sociological tradition arguably does not do enough – beyond the observation that religions are (still) implicated at all scales of the social field – to create spaces for critical reflection on the presuppositions and prejudices underpinning modernity. For example, how can Habermas' idealistic insistence that the telos of language is toward consensus, address issues such as racism in contemporary societies?

According to Diane Moore, critical religious literacy can enable school pupils to analyse the intersections of religions with the different scales and dimensions of the social, using multiple lenses, enabling learners to develop

> a basic understanding of the history, central texts (where applicable), beliefs, practices and contemporary manifestations of several of the world's religious traditions and religious expressions as they arose out of and continue to shape and be shaped by particular social, historical and cultural contexts; and the ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social and cultural expressions across time and place (Moore 2010, 4).

Moore's definition of critical religious literacy points, in particular, to the importance of context: religions are embedded within local, national and global scales of social life, but not as impermeable objects inhabiting distinct local, national or global containers but as entities entangled and inseparable from complex social, political and economic ecologies. Similarly, according to Walker, Chan and McEver, 'religious literacy is academic in nature not confessional' and, as a skillset, can enable learners 'to identify and perceive the internal diversity within religious groups' as well as 'recognise the influences of religions in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres of society, and the ability for these spheres to influence religion in turn' (2021, 7; see also Moore 2010 and Rosenblith and Bailey 2008). Critical religious literacy, then, cultivates empathy and understanding without sacrificing a critical lens.

Decolonial approaches make similar moves, seeking to generate respect for diversity and empathy with difference through exposure to critical 'multicultural literacies' (Esau 2021, 63) and attention to historically embedded inequalities. It is of a piece with Wanda Alberts' demand for a 'framework for integrative RE' which is obligatory, 'attended by all children of a class together' and regulated by agreed standards 'so that it really serves the general educational task of the school and is not instrumentalised by any religious or anti-religious group' (2010, 283). But not everyone sees these moves as straightforwardly positive developments. For example, the objections to critical religious literacy raised by Hannam et al (2020), are based in a particular conception of Religious Studies as a subject with distinct learning objectives. According to them

> [religious literacy] … as the ability to navigate the complexities of modern multi-religious and multi-cultural societies well, is an important ambition for the whole

of education … and therefore just to see it as a task for RE would be to narrow the broader importance of religious literacy too much. The second reason is that although we do think that there is something important in functional religious literacy, it should not take over the "agenda" for RE. This is because we consider that RE needs to "work" on other educational dimensions as well. We are sure that "useful" religious literacy is important in RE but that "really useful" religious literacy is even more important. Critical religious literacy also brings the domain of literacy itself into question and operates across them, therefore it cannot be contained within the specific curriculum of space of RE. Religious literacy then becomes a way forward for the whole of education, and would leave more curriculum space allocated to the educational exploration of religion in RE (Hannam et al 2020, 223-4).

Hannam et al distinguish between 'RE' and 'the whole of education' and see critical religious literacy as a task for the latter that is, as 'an important ambition for the whole of education'. Although the skills enabled through critical religious literacy are productive, they suggest that 'RE needs to "work" on other educational dimensions', specifically the 'exploration of religion', although what that is, is never explained. Hannam et al want to demarcate a 'specific curriculum space' for Religious Studies, but the very insistence that there is a fixed domain occupied presumably by something called religion reproduces the discredited idea of religions as discrete objects and containers and pushes back against the need for a contextualised, decolonial approach to religions committed to deconstructing essences, stereotypes and cliches and the cultivation of critical religious literacy to address, among other things, religious intolerance.

Towards a postmodern or Deleuzian religious studies

I started this essay with the provocation that a Deleuzian or postmodern point of departure for Religious Studies promises a much-needed epistemological transformation away from the study of religions as discrete objects or substances and towards the study of religions as relations. Such a move has precedent in related disciplines such as anthropology where a shift took place when a patch-work quilt theory of discrete cultures was abandoned in favour of a focus on cultural flows and mobilities:

> Both earlier and more recent works on the idea of world religions … have argued that the notion of distinct religions might end up in somewhat the same predicament that anthropology has experienced with regard to the idea of distinct cultures: that it is the product of a certain type of analytical observation made by the scholar rather than empirical reality. When approaching the contexts in which people actually live their lives, such distinct entities tend to dissolve… (Johansen 2013, 13).

The shift to a relational approach to religions has two levels: first of all, religions are to be apprehended bi-focally, up close in their messy, lived aspects but also from the kind of distance adopted by astronomers when studying phenomena taking place over vast periods of time. In short, if an ethnographer's perspective can illuminate the extent to which individuals and groups create religious lives from whatever comes to hand, an astronomer's perspective can shed light on the emergence of

religions through the articulation or combination of new or newly associated ideas and practices, but equally the processes through which religions decompose and die, as their different elements separate and disintegrate, either disappearing entirely or being drawn into the orbit of other assemblages of socio-religio-culture.

If the first level is concerned with exploring religions as complex assemblages of relations with a wider socio-cultural context or milieu both in the moment and historically, the second level is concerned with Religious Studies and how we as researchers, teachers and learners relate to it. For example, are we cartographers of knowledge, extracting it and putting it to work to generate value or, alternatively, are we participants and co-inhabitants of a world that we wish to understand? I will call the first level '*assemblages*' and the second level, '*nomads vs. sovereigns*'. If these words and terms seem obtuse, please bear with me: they are drawn from Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (2014) and I hope that, in what follows, their drift and import for Religious Studies becomes clear.

Assemblages

In simple terms, an assemblage is a multiplicity of interconnected things. For example, my fieldwork around Mount Banahaw in the Philippines focused on Filipino religious groups and churches that emerged amidst complex historical encounters between Catholic and Protestant missionary activity in the context of Empire and revolution, gendered Southeast Asian conceptions of power and healing as well as more recent post-colonial, nationalist, urban and diasporic imaginaries and networks. Banahaw is situated at the margins of the state and the Catholic Church, but what it reveals is less the limits of these institutions than the fact that on-going asymmetric interactions at this site have generated what I will call here, a 'Rizalist assemblage'. As I have argued elsewhere (Tremlett 2021), the materiality of the mountain with its pilgrim paths, shrines, caves, waterfalls, amulets and churches, discloses the aggregation of the figure of the national hero of the Philippines José Rizal with Spanish and American urbanisms and vernacular Biblical exegesis into a Rizalist assemblage which connects and combines these particular religious and secular elements and gives them a new form that includes churches with their own Rizalist architectures and modes of Biblical interpretation.

A further example from the Philippines concerns El Shaddai, which is neither Catholic nor Protestant and is both local and global. El Shaddai is a Catholic charismatic-Pentecostal group that, through mass rallies, radio and television programmes, digital media and a mega-church complex, links various locales across the archipelago with Manila and numerous Filipino diasporas in Asia, Europe and the Americas. Traditional Catholic religiosity in the Philippines is centred on the defined space of the parish church, mediated through the priest. El Shaddai generates a new kind of communication chain that links together domestic spaces, virtual spaces and numerous locales with rallies and worship in Manila, by broadcasting the latter live on various media platforms, creating 'a direct experience of sacredness, ritual and the Holy Spirit in the home … unmediated by traditional Catholic channels such as priests, saints, the Virgin Mary, the Eucharist, statues, or rosaries' (Wiegele 2011, 173; see also Wiegele 2005). The 'El Shaddai assemblage', then, likewise combines and connects a host of elements and gives them a new form.

An ethnographic approach to El Shaddai and the Rizalists of Mount Banahaw as assemblages of heterogeneous elements, opens out the lived and improvised, do-it-yourself dimensions of these religiosities. An astronomer's view makes visible how each assemblage has coalesced as a result of a series asymmetrical, historical 'generative interactions' (Tremlett 2021) between missionaries, technologies, landscapes and more. To adopt this perspective brings into view on the one hand complex processes of combination-articulation by which different things arrive in each other's orbit to become an assemblage and, on the other hand, it also reveals those processes of disintegration-separation wherein those orbits are disturbed and the elements are pulled apart, perhaps to decompose altogether or to fall into the orbit of something else. A postmodern Religious Studies curriculum interested in Christianity would begin precisely with such groups because they demonstrate the existence not of a single world, religious tradition but rather a series of locally assembled christianities articulated with a host of other elements and things. To re-deploy an arguably underused and under-estimated metaphor, religions are not solid objects or substances with essential cores. Rather, they are diffuse (Guo forthcoming), entangled with and through other institutions, imaginaries and practices which includes inter-religious diffusion (e.g. Pentecostalism, Catholicism and vernacular Filipino religiosity into El Shaddai) as well as secular-religious diffusion (e.g. nationalism, urbanism, Catholicism and vernacular Filipino religiosity into Rizalism). In short, religions – as assemblages – are agglomerations of elements that are held together through relational tension or, more economically still, religions are relations.

Sovereigns vs. nomads

A postmodern Religious Studies curriculum would also shift the relationship of pupils and teachers to their field of study. Following Deleuze and Guattari, much of science functions according to a model of sovereignty: a knowing subject with royal powers insists on policing borders and making laws. That is to say, in the case of Religious Studies, Religion is clearly defined as an object of study in a well-defined territory, and knowledge of the territory and its objects becomes a matter authorizing laws, axioms and theorems and the legislating of the territory and its population as quiescent before the all-powerful gaze of the sovereign, knowing subject, with the next step being the extraction of value from this domain and population. A nomad science of religions proceeds quite differently because the nomad knower does not play god tricks (Haraway 1991) and is embedded from the outset in the world it seeks to understand. As a co-inhabitant, the nomad begins not with the discreteness of things but with the events through which connectedness is generated. The nomad wanders not because it is lost but because its journeys open out the world as always on the move and in a state of becoming. This means that the knowledge articulated by a nomad science of Religious Studies has common value and enriches the common interest.

Concluding remarks

In this essay I have engaged in a close analysis of three documents central to the push to place the worldview concept at the front and centre of Religious Studies in schools and universities. I have argued that the documents paint a picture of a subject caught between an objectivist account of a fixed field of really existing

religions and a postmodern or Deleuzian *mélange* of lived interactions and flows. I then advocated for a Deleuzian transformation of Religious Studies and the embrace of decolonisation and critical religious literacy, based in a pedagogy founded not on the listing of religions and non-religions as containers for specific beliefs and practices but in the study of religions as relations.

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