

Religion in an Entangled World

My experience at the International Association for the Psychology of Religion Groningen, Netherlands, August 21-25, 2023

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I went into this experience with an open mind, excitement to learn, and an irrevocable fear of losing my passport while solo across the Atlantic Ocean. The International Association for the Psychology of Religion (IAPR) hosted its biennial research conference the week of August 21-25, 2023 in Groningen, the Netherlands.

Due to my prior experience doing research and literature reviews involving religion as a psychological and sociological factor for behavior with professors [Adam Cohen](#) and [Kathryn Johnson](#), I was encouraged to apply for this opportunity.

The [Ansari Travel Scholarship in Religion and International Affairs](#) is awarded to one Arizona State University student per academic year to support attendance in specialized training programs relating to religion and international affairs, and I am beyond grateful to have received the 2023 funds for this life-changing opportunity through the [Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict](#).

On my two-hour train ride from Amsterdam to Groningen in the north, I continued my academic research regarding prior publications of the keynote speakers. I scribbled down my curiosities on an ever-growing list tucked into my backpack, awaiting the moment when timing and my confidence would converge amongst the expert scholars.



The first day of the official conference was considered a pre-conference, curated for younger academic students in their careers (mainly doctoral candidates) providing panels speaking to their academic career journeys, advice for interdisciplinary research, ethnographic research practices, and overarchingly a chance for the younger students to meet one another.

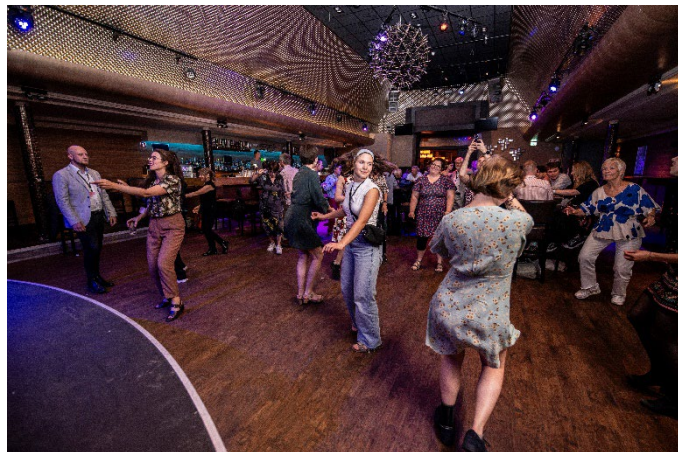
The students came from all around the world, all in their early 30s, and each with their own set of experiences and missions they hoped their research would achieve. I met army chaplains

(spiritual counselors) from the front lines, as well as Turkish students attempting to understand the effects of religion concerning coping with the recent Turkey/Syria earthquake on first responders. I was amazed by the weight of the life/death research that they were taking part in, with hopes to help soothe the pain of others experiencing traumatic events. I delved into conversations and thought-provoking research relating to religion as a way to bring people together, as well as a mechanism to keep us separated.

The next three days of the conference were filled with established scholars, presenting their latest research in themed panels, all looking at how religion, or lack thereof, has influenced the well-being of individuals and communities. The goals of the research from all around the world were incredibly diverse, and it challenged me to think about the impact of research, and the methods to do it in a whole new light in regards to AI as well as university and community collaboration.

As the youngest and least experienced student at the conference, and knowing no one in attendance prior, I was welcomed with open arms. Between sessions, and after each day, we would come together and talk until late hours into the night at the local tea shops and restaurants.

My fondest memories include the organized IAPR conference dinner, with a local band that encouraged us onto the dance floor. I never could have expected to be dancing in a conga line, with people of all ages, backgrounds, and walks of life. What brought us together was our intrigue in the divine, and in the way it shapes the decisions of humanity. I learned that the world of academia, which appeared so unattainable and far away, is a world that I am both invited to and encouraged to participate in.



There is a certain beauty in the act of *becoming* something, in the potential of what *may* be. There is an exhilaration in the paths that *could* be traveled while in the critical window of being an undergraduate at university. While I am not yet sure if I am ready to take the plunge on a doctoral path just yet, I am grateful for the knowledge that there are people in this world with the same unyielding curiosity and intention to understand this world, to make it a better place for us all.