

Call for Papers: *Religion as a Changing Category of Muslim Practice*

One-day workshop on Friday 24th May 2019 at Pembroke College, Oxford

Deadline for proposals: 28th February 2019

This workshop will focus on ‘religion’ as a changing category in modern Muslim practice. Participants are invited to share case studies from their research as a basis for discussion of the possible insights to be gained by bringing critical approaches to the category ‘religion’ to bear on our study of Islam. The aim of the meeting is to support and encourage such fledgling studies, sharing both methods and findings in order to identify: effective methodologies; a useful conceptual vocabulary; common patterns among diverse case studies; degrees of variation across contexts; and potential new avenues for research. To this end, participation will be open both to researchers already focusing on these themes and those interested in exploring these aspects of their empirical work further.

Rationale: A critical school has emerged in the Study of Religion that identifies the category of ‘religion’ as a modern concept inseparable from its post-Enlightenment twin, ‘the secular’ (Asad 1993; Fitzgerald 2000; for more information on this school, see the [Critical Religion Association](#) website). Pioneering work has been done on the invention of ‘religion’ in various colonial contexts (Chidester 1996; King 1999; Masuzawa 2005; Josephson 2012; Horii 2018), but few sustained studies have been undertaken for Islam. An early study by WC Smith (1964) identified a modern shift toward using ‘Islam’ as a reified category, but nevertheless concluded Islam to be a special case. Certainly we see classical formulas such as ‘*din wa dunya*’ that seem to suggest an existing, perhaps even original, distinction between religion and non-religion. Whether or not ‘religion’ has been invented wholesale in Islam as in Hinduism, Buddhism, etc, initial studies of such discourse among Muslim intellectuals by Smith and Abdulkader Tayob (*Religion in Modern Islamic Discourse*, 2009) have highlighted significant modern innovation. Against the backdrop of these studies of discursive change at an elite intellectual level (see also e.g. Armando Salvatore’s *Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity*, 1997; Carool Kersten’s *Cosmopolitans and Heretics*, 2011), this workshop will focus on case studies of ‘religion’ as a practical category performed, institutionalised or legislated in new ways.

Suggested questions for consideration:

- In what changing or varied ways do we see ‘religion’ as a bounded category of practice operationalised, institutionalised or legislated by or for Muslims in recent centuries?
- How is a bounded category of ‘religion’ articulated or performed in popular or everyday Islam?
- What distinctive characteristics and functions (e.g. rights, freedoms, authority, privatisation) does ‘religion’ have as a reified subject in Islamic practice, that distinguish it from the ‘non-religious’ or ‘secular’?
- How is ‘religion’ operationalised as one side of different conceptual pairings, for instance with ‘the secular’, ‘politics’, ‘culture’, etc?
- Does a ‘religion-secular’ dichotomy operate also – implicitly or explicitly – in contexts where ideological secularism is rejected as un-Islamic?
- Who is empowered or disempowered by new articulations of ‘religion’ in Islam?
- What role have colonial, post-colonial or Western states played in Muslim (re)formulations of ‘religion’?
- Do such trends in Islamic practice compare to the invention of ‘religion’ in other colonial contexts, or should we see Islam as exceptional in some way?
- What methodologies may best shed light on these dynamics?

Submission guidelines: Paper proposals should be sent to nabeelah.jaffer@pmb.ox.ac.uk by 28th February, including the following:

- Paper title and abstract up to 300 words.
- Brief bio including any relevant publications.

We will aim to notify applicants of decisions within three weeks of the deadline.

Travel and accommodation: We expect to be able to cover advance train fares within the UK and to arrange accommodation in Oxford for one or two nights. We ask that participants seek alternative funding from their home institutions wherever possible.

Organisers: Dr Alex Henley (alex.henley@theology.ox.ac.uk) is a Marie Curie Fellow at Oxford's Faculty of Theology & Religion, a Senior Research Fellow at Pembroke College, and a tutor at Mansfield College. Nabeelah Jaffer (nabeelah.jaffer@pmb.ox.ac.uk) is a DPhil candidate in Oxford's Faculty of Theology & Religion.

Sponsors: This workshop is co-sponsored by the [British Association for Islamic Studies](#) (BRAIS) and Pembroke College, Oxford. It is held in conjunction with the Research Network '[Categories of Religion and the Secular in Islam](#)' (CRSI). The aim of the CRSI Network is to create a space to foster a new sub-field at the intersection of critical theory in Religion and Islamic Studies.