

# Knowingness, Agency, and Authority

## Implicit Religion UK – 2026 Conference

15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> May 2026, Online (BST) IR48

Keynote: S. Jonathon O'Donnell

Call for Papers Deadline: 27<sup>th</sup> March 2026

Decisions Communicated: 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2026

### Call for Papers

“[K]nowledge is bound up in the formation of a community, that is, with the formation of a ‘we’ that knows through (rather than against) the stranger...knowledge is based on the knowability of strangers and the desire to accumulate knowledges about those who are already recognised as strange(rs).”

(Ahmed, 2023: 48)

The 48th Implicit Religion conference will explore the variety of ways in which people and communities survive, thrive or struggle in a world where knowingness is being constructed, deconstructed, utilised as resistance, misused, and attacked.

Sara Ahmed's conceptualising of knowledge, or more accurately, knowingness indicates that at its core are two aspects: agency and authority. Whilst the subaltern often has the agency to speak, or be recognised, they lack or are denied the authority to be seen or heard (Spivak, 1988). Consequently, when we read, hear about or watch a video that, at its core, asserts to provide knowledge of those deemed 'stranger' or subaltern we either assume or challenge the authority of the content creator by seeking to assert our 'knowingness' as readers/viewers/listeners. This raises important questions for us as people, as citizens, as well as scholars of religion: how do we understand our agency and/or authority within our 'knowingness'? What power relations are overtly at play, and which are disguised and why? What power relations are at stake? What role is assimilation undertaking, and to what end(s)?

In their book, *Passing Orders: Demonology and Sovereignty in American Spiritual Warfare*, S. Jonathon O'Donnell notes that knowingness, agency, and authority can be usefully explored through the lens of demonologies. They argue that "demonologies are not merely tools of dehumanization but ontological and biopolitical systems that create and maintain

structures of sovereign power, or orthotaxies: models of the “right ordering” of reality that create uneven geographies of space and stratify humanity into hierarchies of being and non-being. (2020: 24) Consequently, their work demonstrates the theological foundations that seek to, or are used to, justify the dehumanizing practices of the current political order in multiple countries. Queer- and transphobia, Islamophobia, antiBlackness, and settler colonialism are bound up with knowingness, and its corollaries of agency and authority.

Within, and without, religious communities or communities who coalesce around “something deemed special” (Taves, 2009) people are engaging with knowingness in regards to those they consider strangers which is resulting in action(s) that places some ‘strangers’ in danger, at risk, or unwelcome. Therefore, this conference is seeking to learn from, listen to, and engage with scholars and students who are working on the conceptual and empirical interactions and usage of knowingness, agency, and authority.

We invite abstract proposals on but not limited to:

- Critical analysis and/or methodological reflection on knowingness, agency and/or authority as categories of inquiry in empirical approaches to the study of religion
- The weaponisation of knowingness, agency, and/or authority
- Resistance through knowingness, agency, and/or authority
- Knowingness, agency, and/or authority as religious practice(s), orthodoxy, or behaviours
- Knowingness, agency, and/or authority as practice, beliefs, or behaviours in groups or communities who coalesce around “something deemed special” (Taves, 2009)
- Re/production and knowingness, agency, and/or authority
- Knowingness, agency, and/or authority within mystical traditions and languages
- Co-option, appropriation and assimilation within or through knowingness, agency and/or authority
- Feminist and/or Queer perspectives on knowingness, agency, and/or authority of religious, syncretic, or “special” experiences in communities, groups, subcultures, traditions, or institutions defined regionally, or globally (Taves, 2009).
- Knowingness, agency and/or authority across leadership within or without regard for either religious communities, or communities shaped by an experience deemed religious or special (Taves, 2009)

Please note successful proposals will incorporate an Implicit Religion perspective in the design of the underlying study and address in part or in concert: Commitment, Integrating Foci, & Intensive Concerns with Extensive Effects (Bailey, 1997)

## REFERENCES

Ahmed, Sara (2000) Who Knows? Knowing Strangers and Strangeness, *Australian Feminist Studies*, 15:31, 49–68

Bailey, Edward I. (1997) *Implicit Religion in Contemporary Society*. Leuven: Peeters.

O'Donnell, S. Jonathon, (2020) *Passing Orders: Demonology and Sovereignty in American Spiritual Warfare*. New York, Fordham Scholarship

Ann Taves, (2009) *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things*. Princeton University Press

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1988) 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (University of Illinois Press) Urbana, pp. 271–313.

## Proposal Submission

We invite submissions for proposals for either a paper or a scratch session on the themes elaborated above, by 27 March 2026 for IR48, with the conference taking place online, 15th–17th May 2025.

The proposal form is available. You will be asked to indicate if you are submitting either a paper or scratch session, and to provide a 300 (or 250) word abstract; an abridged, short-form bibliography with references to secondary literature and sources; and other information as specified below, including what we need to know in order to accommodate your participation if your proposal is accepted.

Please note while you can edit and format your entries before you select the submit button, the form does not allow the submission to be saved and edited later. We suggest looking at the form for context and then composing the abstract and the notes regarding accommodat-

ing your participation in a word processing document and then cutting and pasting these elements of the proposal into the form.

## PAPERS

Please select the option “ UK Paper” on the form. Those submitting papers are asked to submit an abstract of no more than 300 words, and an abridged, short-form bibliography.

## SCRATCH SESSIONS

Please select the option “ UK Scratch Session” on the form. There will be a dedicated panel for advanced undergraduates, MA, and early stage PhD students to present at – called a scratch session. These will be shorter papers and rather than the usual practise of asking questions of the presenters, the audience will make suggestions for further reading, pathways for improvement, scholars to explore etc. If you wish to apply for the scratch session, please select that option on the submission form and submit a 200–250 word abstract, and an abridged, short-form bibliography.

## Queries?

Please contact **Francis Stewart**.

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