

Challenging Narratives

2026 Implicit Religion US Conference

28th - 29th May 2026 - Online US CST

Keynote: Marwa Abdalla

Call for Papers Deadline: 3rd April 2026

Decisions Communicated: 10th April 2026

Call For Papers

“Demographic and cultural changes have meant that the New World histories which turned the counter-memory of racial slavery into an interpretative device that could be any example of injustice and exploitation have lost much of their power and appeal.”

(Gilroy, 2002:12)

Narratives surround us, sustain us, and shape us. Narratives can be powerful, inspiring, uplifting and the catalyst for needed change. Of course, narratives can also be manipulative, damaging, false, and prevent change. Narratives can challenge us, and be themselves challenged, in a multitude of ways. However, as Gilroy notes above, the power and capacity of narratives is always contingent upon appeal to readership or good faith engagement, which is never a guarantee or a constant. The current mainstreaming of racism, transphobia, and misogyny, alongside a growing emboldened visibility of the far right creates narratives that rewrite history to remove accountability, accuracy or even cultures and communities. Narratives are fragile but by focusing on them as scholars of religion we can better understand our field, those we study, and the world we seek to understand, explain, and impact. This is particularly true of narratives that relate to or force a confrontation with complacency on genocide, abuse of power, migration, and national security.

The study of religion has its own narratives that it must confront, reckon with, develop, sustain, or imagine. For example, Marwa Abdalla’s work on Black Muslim experiences in

the US. Drawing on the work of Suad Abdul Khabeer, Abdalla notes that “[h]istorically, the assumption that Muslims were Arab or South Asian compounded the challenges facing many Black Muslims by rendering “Blackness” as “lacking in religious authority and authenticity” in Muslim American communities”, leading to “intersectional invisibility” or “the seeming erasure and marginalization resulting when dominant discourses [or narratives] privilege prototypical group members—those who typically come to mind when group identity is invoked—at the expense of non-prototypical ones.” (2023: 10; Abdul Khabeer, 2016; Purdie-Vaughans & Eibach, 2008)

Implicit Religion was initially developed in the late 1960s as an approach, or set of analytical tools, to challenge the then dominant narrative of secularisation (Bailey, 1997). Implicit Religion is an approach that explores the sacred aspects of people's passions, commitments, and identities that are often located in the narratives they construct about themselves, and others. By focusing on the complexities of religiousness and things deemed special in communities, this conference will explore the role, impact and potential purposes of challenging narratives (Taves, 2009)

Presenters are invited to submit proposals for consideration on the theme of “Challenging Narratives”. These might include but are not limited to:

- Narratives/contested narratives and their outcomes/impacts in **relation** to environmental justice; intersectional and/or Indigenous environmentalism; climate denial; ecology and religious nationalism; and faith based eco-activism.
- Narratives/contested narratives on universal rights frameworks, including but not limited to reproductive rights, gender, sexuality, migration, and war crimes and the approaches of religious and non-religious communities, and activist groups or movements
- Narratives/contested narratives and their role(s) in the social, cultural, and religious construction of disability/race/sexuality/gender or other protected characteristics
- Narratives/contested narratives of religious nationalism and their impact on communities/policies/practices

- The role/use/misuse of narrative frameworks and/or approaches on the relationship(s) between politics and religion; and politics and communities that coalesce around something deemed sacred/special
- The role/use/misuse of narrative frameworks in shaping spiritual or sacred identity; Digital/AI influences on narratives relating to spiritual formation and role modelling
- Narratives, rituals and aesthetics framed by religious, syncretic, or experiences deemed special in communities, groups, subcultures, traditions, or institutions defined regionally, or globally.
- Feminist and/or Queer perspectives on challenging narratives within/for/about/through religious communities, groups, subcultures, institutions or those shaped by an experience deemed religious or special
- Methodology and/or analytical approaches to the study of the role of narratives within and/or by societies and communities where organised religion has declined or changed significantly

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

References

- Abdul Khabeer S. (2016). *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion and Hip Hop in the United States*. New York University.
- Bailey, Edward I. (1997) *Implicit Religion in Contemporary Society*. Leuven: Peeters.
- Gilroy, Paul. (2002) *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*. Routledge
- Marwa, Abdalla. (2023) ““My Islam be Black”: resisting erasure, silence, and marginality at the intersection of race and religion,” *Communication, Culture and Critique*, Volume 16, Issue 1, pp 9–16
- Purdie-Vaughns V., Eibach R. P. (2008). “Intersectional invisibility: The distinctive advantages and disadvantages of multiple subordinate-group identities.” *Sex Roles*, 59(5–6), 377–391.
- Taves, Ann (2009) *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things*. Princeton University Press

About Implicit Religion US

All are welcome and encouraged to apply, regardless of academic stage or affiliation, priority will be given to students and scholars who are marginalised through any combination of race, gender, sexuality, disability, migration status, visa status, socio-economic status or based in the global south.

There is no expectation that your presentation will be based on a finished or complete piece of work. We strongly encourage and support you presenting on a work in progress, especially if you have reached a stage in which further ideas or different voices on it would help you.

Proposal Submission

Please submit an abstract and a brief short form bibliography, per the specifications for either a paper or a scratch session noting the instructions in the next section. Please include if you are an undergraduate or master's student applying for the scratch session (scaffolded support and mentorship for your presentation) or if you are a PhD student, academic, independent scholar applying for a full session presentation. [Abstracts and bibliographies must be submitted via the proposal form by the 3 April 2026.](#)

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

You will be asked to indicate if you are submitting a paper or scratch session, and to provide an abstract as specified below, and what we need to know in order to accommodate your participation if your proposal is accepted.

PAPERS

Please select the option “US 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 “ US 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.

There is no registration fee. Please note we are a small organisation and as such are not in a position to provide bursaries for participation. We can provide you with an official letter of invite and after, a letter of participation if required by your university or funding body.

Queries?

Please contact **Francis Stewart**. Director, The Edward Bailey Centre

Lecturer: Sociology, Social Theory, Postcolonial Sociology, University of Stirling, UK