

*Zelikovitz Centre for Jewish Studies Annual Student Colloquium*

An Interdisciplinary Discussion on the Academic Study of Religion

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# Bridging Gaps: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Study of Religion

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April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018  
Carleton University • Ottawa, ON

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Carleton University  
Graduate Students Association

Max & Tessie Zelikovitz  
Centre for Jewish Studies

Religion Department,  
College of Humanities

# Zelikovitz Centre for Jewish Studies Annual Student Colloquium

An Interdisciplinary Discussion on the Academic Study of Religion

**10:00-10:30**

*Coffee/Tea, Reception*

**10:30-11:00**

*Welcome Address*

**11:00-12:00**

*Session I: Religion and Public Life*

**12:00-1:00**

*Lunch*

**1:00-2:30**

*Session II: Religion and Social Institutions*

**2:30-2:45**

*Closing Remark*

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**11:00-12:00**

*Session I: Religion and Public Life*

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**Rosa Saba**

*BA, Journalism and Humanities, Carleton University*

**Ignoring Post Secular Society:**

**How Mainstream Journalism is Misunderstanding Global Religions**

A dominant narrative in academia until recently was that modernization is synonymous with secularization. However, this began to change in the 1990s and early 2000s, when scholars began to realize that this secular bias led to the overlooking of the intersection between religion and many societal issues, including the mobility of peoples belonging to diasporic or otherwise exilic communities. If academia is following a dominant narrative, it follows that this narrative should cross over into popular culture and media. However, I will argue that, in the case of the secular bias and its equation of modernization with secularization, North American journalism has failed to follow suit, in part due to the Protestant foundation of its founding and the subconscious equation of post-Enlightenment Protestantism with modern secularism. I plan to argue that misunderstanding of religion's role in global cultures, combined with the current political climate, has resulted in overall public ignorance of world religions and their role in society. I will use the example of Muslim communities in North America and the challenges they face in Canada and the United States due to their religion, as well as the effect that both their religion and the Western reaction to it has on their identities. I will then argue that this misunderstanding of post secular society is largely enforced, if subconsciously, by mainstream journalism's own ignorance to post secularism as a global phenomenon, recognized by academia but not yet accepted in public discourse.

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**Lena Saleh**

*Ph.D., Political Science, Carleton University*

**The Politics of Arab Pop:**

**Arab Pop Music, Islam, and Gender Norms in Lebanon**

In April 2008, the Islamist Parliament of Bahrain voted to ban Lebanese pop music diva Haifa Wehbe from performing a sold-out concert in Manama. Justifying the decision, one Parliamentarian explained that Wehbe was a "sexual singer who spoke with her body, not her voice" (Harrison 2008).

No stranger to controversy, Wehbe stirred up controversy once more in November 2014. Wehbe performed on Egyptian satellite television wearing a tight, curve-hugging black gown with sheer panels, exposing much of her rear and arms. Comments on YouTube and Twitter criticized the 'scandalous' nature of the dress, accusing her of 'crossing a line' (BBC 2014).

These controversies, however, are larger than Wehbe's risqué dance moves or choice of dress. They serve to connect the Arab pop music industry to the on-going struggle within Arab (Islamic) culture between 'tradition' and 'modernity.' In this struggle, Wehbe becomes something more

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than a singer; she can be seen as an 'anti-Islamic agent of an invading culture' or, alternatively, as a symbol of female empowerment.

Using Lebanon as its case study and referencing interview data collected during the summer of 2017, this paper begins with an overview of the religious and gendered arguments favouring the condemnation of popular music in the Arab (Islamic) world. This paper then turns its attentions to the 'alternative' perspective, arguing that pop music may in fact be promoting liberal changes to gender and religious norms in Lebanon through its dissemination of 'new' (or 'empowered') female figures.

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**Bridget Wittla**

*MA, Religion and Public Life, Carleton University*

### **An Examination of American Civil Religion**

In his influential 1967 essay "Civil Religion in America," Robert Bellah argued of the existence of an American civil religion, describing it as a public religious dimension "expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals" (Bellah 1967/2005: 42). Since then, a wealth of scholarship has been introduced on the topic, and the term "civil religion" and its meaning and existence has been debated by scholars of religion, historians, theologians, political scientists, and sociologists. This project identifies useful vocabulary and frameworks used by previous scholars of American Civil Religion (ACR), offering analyses of the strengths and weaknesses of those frameworks, and thus pointing the scholarship in a forward moving direction. It addresses recent scholarship that applies the thesis of ACR to the present and recent past. The paper concludes with a call to continue utilizing the lens of American Civil Religion, arguing that ACR is a necessary sociological concept, and the frameworks discussed here provide much needed tools to analyze not only the overlaps between religion and the political system, but also to gain insight into American myths and American exceptionalism.

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**12:00-1:00**

*Lunch*

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**1:00-2:30**

*Session II: Religion and Social Institutions*

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**Lauren Van Geffen**

*BA, Law, Policy & Government, Carleton University*

## **Denominational Schools and Students in Quebec and Ontario**

This is an exploratory paper about the relationship between denominational schools and their relationship to students. It explores s.93(1) and its limitations. It is narrated through case explorations. *Hall v Powers* [2002], explains the relationship between s.93(1) and the Charter, and the impact this has on students. *Erazo v Dufferin-Peel Catholic School* [2001] shows how the court have favored student rights over s.93(1) even when a student is not catholic. *S.L v Commission Scholaire des Chenes* [2012] is a Quebec case involving a publically-funded school and a religious student. This is a discussion about the Charter, the Constitution, students and religion.

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**Allison Dunne**

*MA, Religion & Public Life, Carleton University*

## **The Case of the Jumbo Glacier Ski Resort: Adjudicating Notions of Religious Freedom in Canada**

In the fall of 2017 the Supreme Court of Canada addressed the Ktunaxa First Nations' disagreement with the proposed development of a ski resort in southeastern British Columbia. The community claimed that development of the Jumbo Glacier Resort would cause the Grizzly Bear Spirit, an important part of their religious tradition, to leave the sacred land on and around the mountain where the resort would be located. The case became a highly publicized issue, calling into question whether religious freedom is properly safeguarded by the Canadian Constitution. After significant deliberation, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the development of the resort. However, despite the Supreme Court's ruling, the case remains contentious. This paper uses the case of the Jumbo Glacier Resort as a starting point for a discussion concerning the limits of religious freedom and accommodation in Canada. It examines how, similar to legal cases involving the kirpan, media framing plays an important role at the intersection of religion and public space in Canada. The paper therefore suggests that the case of the Jumbo Glacier Resort surfaces dominant conceptions of what constitutes legitimate religious beliefs which inform legal decision-making in land disputes in Canada.

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**Sharon Angnakak**

*MA Religion & Public Life, Carleton University*

## **Assume Rationality: An application of the sociological theory of religious economy to understand religion in Nunavut to challenge colonial mindsets.**

Indigenous methodologies highlight the way Western knowledge constructions were used by colonialists to delegitimize Indigenous populations by assuming and purporting them to be

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irrational, childlike and primitive. It was only through a colonial context did many theoretical concepts in the academic study of religion develop because of colonial literature that detailed encounters with Indigenous populations. Colonial knowledge constructions, informed by the scientific revolution that championed the theory of evolution, argued that Indigenous populations were “primitive” versions of colonizing empires who placed the Indigenous people as un-evolved versions of themselves. In order to challenge the longstanding position of the academy as a pillar of colonialism, we must at the very least assume the people we study are rational. Examination of Inuit conversions to Christianity and a survey of religious change and activity since the advent of colonialism in the North reveals Inuit agency at the center of religious conversions and relegates the foreign Christian missionary’s power over Inuit community and thus culture as colonial mythology. Rather than assume the erasure of Inuit culture by Christianity, I posit that Inuit made conscientious decisions to effectively adapt to colonialism. As a case study, this paper focuses on the conversion from shamanism to Christianity in Inuit history. Conscientious choices were made by Inuit based on their needs and preferences that ultimately has shaped the religious economy now found in Nunavut.

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**Amelia Brownridge**

*BA, Humanities & Religious Studies, Carleton University*

### **Distinguishing a People: Remembering Exodus and Egyptian Bondage**

For the biblical writers, the story of Exodus is a self-conscious reconstruction and refashioning of history so as to distinguish a people: the ancient Israelites. My paper will attempt to characterize Egyptian rule and its oppressive and dictatorial nature, and determine how this authoritative regime translated into a story of Egyptian bondage. Thus, I seek to understand Exodus not as a historical reality but rather a subjective fictional story of victimization, which would eventually advance into a recognizable framework for the purpose of collective identity. First, I endeavor to examine the historical records within Egyptian sources in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties in Canaan so as to suggest a historical memory of Egyptian subjugation, which would provide a foundation on which the identity of a people could then be constructed. Second, I will discuss the memory theories of Ronald Hendel, Jan Assmann, and Donald B. Redford, through which I will illustrate that the story of Exodus is not a historically monolithic narrative, but rather an aggregation of individual and collective experiences and memories.

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**2:30-2:45**

*Closing Remarks*

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**Chair**

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**Alyssa MacDougall**  
*Ph.D. Student, Communication & Media Studies*  
Carleton University

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**Special Thanks**

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**Dr. Deidre Butler**  
*Director*  
Zelikovitz Centre for Jewish Studies

**Dr. Susan Landau-Chark**  
*Associate Director*  
Zelikovitz Centre for Jewish Studies

**Arden Hody**  
*Senior Administrative Assistant*  
Zelikovitz Centre for Jewish Studies

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