



UTS  
ePRESS

PORTAL Journal of  
Multidisciplinary  
International Studies

Vol. 18, No. 1/2  
Sep 2022



© 2022 by the author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), allowing third parties to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format and to remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially, provided the original work is properly cited and states its license.

**Citation:** Goldenberg, N. 2022. The Contemporary Deconstruction of Religion: How Current Scholarship in Religious Studies is Changing Methods and Theories. *PORTAL Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*, 18:1/2, 70–78. <https://doi.org/10.5130/pjmis.v18i1-2.7807>

ISSN 1449-2490 | Published by UTS ePRESS | <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/ojs/index.php/portal>

RESEARCH ARTICLE (PEER REVIEWED)

## The Contemporary Deconstruction of Religion: How Current Scholarship in Religious Studies is Changing Methods and Theories

Naomi Goldenberg

**Corresponding author(s):** Professor Naomi Goldenberg, Faculty of Arts, University of Ottawa, 55 Laurier Ave. E, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, Canada, [naomi4339@rogers.com](mailto:naomi4339@rogers.com)

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5130/pjmis.v18i1-2.7807>

**Article History:** Received 02/07/2021; Accepted 27/02/2022; Published 27/09/2022

### Abstract

My paper has three goals: 1) to introduce and outline the field of 'critical religion'; 2) to set out my contribution to this field by explaining how and why religions should be considered 'vestigial states'; and 3) to suggest ways in which the approach to the topic of religious synthesis in India might be influenced by critical religion in general and vestigial state theory in particular. I argue that 'religion' as an ahistorical, eternal, indefinable category—what Roland Barthes called 'depoliticized' speech—warrants energetic critique. To this end, I survey a variety of theorists whose work deconstructs 'religion' and attendant binaries such as religious/secular and religion/politics. I maintain that religions function as vestigial states within contemporary states. By 'vestigial states' I mean practices and institutions originating in particular histories as survivals of former sovereignties. These remnants are tolerated as attenuated jurisdictions within fully functioning states. These vestigial states (religions) are always somewhat problematic because they compete with contemporary states—especially if they challenge the present state's right to control violence. However, religions also work to ground the governments that authorize them by recalling earlier, mystified forms of sovereignty. Moreover, religions are useful because they can be depicted as less progressive versions of power. Thus do 'religions,' understood as vestigial states, both disturb and maintain current regimes. I conclude with some speculations on how insights derived from critical religion might impact work on conceptualizing 'religious synthesis' in India specifically and 'interreligious' interactions more generally in a global context.

### Keywords

**Critical Religion; Religion as Vestigial State; Deconstruction of Religion; Religion as Modern Category; Religion as Political Category; Modi's Use of Religion**

**DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTEREST** The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

‘The concept of religion,’ writes S. N. Balagangadhara, ‘is “inapplicable” because that which is designated by the term “religion” in the West is absent from the cultures of Asia’ ([Balagangadhara 1994](#): 314). Such is the central contention that Balagangadhara proposes in his substantial book titled *The Heathen in His Blindness...: Asia, the West and the Dynamic of Religion*. In this volume, and in his and his colleagues’ subsequent writings, Balagangadhara elaborates his thesis that ‘religion’ is an alien category that is inaccurately applied in Asian contexts. Some of the related arguments advanced in these works are: that the ‘religion’ of Hinduism is a creation of the West; that Christianity is the model into which Indian culture is forced, distorted and then judged; that Western secularism is another version of Christianity and is not applicable to Indian culture; and that the West spreads ‘religion’ by eroding the otherness of the other ([Balagangadhara 2012](#); [Bloch et al. 2010](#)).

Balagangadhara’s work can be considered a benchmark in the discipline of religious studies, near the beginning of what Daniel Dubuisson refers to as ‘a veritable scientific revolution in many North American universities along with their British counterparts’ ([Dubuisson 2019a](#): 1). Although Balagangadhara was teaching in Ghent at the time he wrote his *magnum opus*, his thinking about India and the trajectory of theory in which he participates has, as Dubuisson writes, mostly developed in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. In *The Invention of Religions* ([2019a](#),) and in his original French version, *L’Invention des religions* ([2019b](#)), Dubuisson synthesizes the principal themes of ‘the revolution’ and emphasizes its importance in order to enlarge the purview of this way of thinking and to bring it to the attention of a greater number of religious studies scholars.

My objective in this essay is somewhat similar to Dubuisson’s. I want to promote what I refer to in my title as the contemporary deconstruction of religion to researchers and theorists outside the field of religious studies. I contend that both research projects and public policy initiatives would benefit if work that dismantles the idea of religion as a universal and ancient phenomenon were more widely known. In order to further this aim, I will set out the framework of what has emerged as a controversial sub-field of religious studies, now often referred to as ‘critical religion,’ explain the focus of my own contribution to it, and briefly speculate on the possible relevance that this critical approach to ‘religion’ might have on scholarship about contemporary politics in India.

My appreciation of critical religion began in 2001 when I heard Robert J. Baird refer to Balagangadhara’s work at a panel titled ‘Religious History and the Construction of Modernity.’ Baird cited *The Heathen in His Blindness* to support his view that ‘religion’ is not ‘really real,’ but rather is constructed by historical discourse that warrants energetic critique ([Baird 2001](#); [Goldenberg 2019a](#)). My understanding of the scope and implications of realizing that religion is a fiction—in the Latin sense of the verb *ingere*, meaning to fashion, to shape, to compose—soon became the focus of my academic work.

Perhaps I should stress that not believing that religion is a given fact is different from not believing in God or gods. Both atheists and theists tend to maintain that there is something called ‘religion’ that has, in one form or another, forever been a part of human life and that now is expressed in different ‘traditions’ throughout the world ([Touna 2017](#)). The contemporary critical approach to religion, i.e. critical religion, takes issue with this characterization of religion and religious traditions as phenomena that have existed throughout the centuries. Theorists of critical religion see ‘religion’ as a modern category that is used to impose an order on ideas, behaviours and groups for various, largely political, reasons. This could be considered a first tenet of critical religion.

The website of my Department of Classics and Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa recently stated that religion has existed ‘since the dawn of time.’ This is not an uncommon descriptive phrase that expresses the conventional idea that religion has always been present in some variety or other everywhere that human beings have lived. Prehistoric cave paintings, burial customs and various architectural configurations are often cited as evidence that the earliest peoples who have left traces of their existence had

‘religion.’ Critical religion, on the other hand, maintains that ‘religion’ is a recent idea that is read back into history as an anachronism.

If ‘religion’ is assumed to be a universal, timeless and infinitely varied phenomenon, evidence for it is easy to find in ancient texts and artifacts that are imputed to demonstrate ‘religion’ in its earlier forms. However, there are several authors who effectively contest the presence of ‘religion’ in ancient texts. For example, in *Imagine No Religion: How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities* (2016), Carlin Barton and Daniel Boyarin dispute the claim that early Latin and Greek writers who use the words *religio* and *threskeia* are expressing any idea that even roughly corresponds to ‘religion’ as the term is currently used. An especially accessible book titled *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (2013) by Brent Nongbri makes the same point more generally. Nongbri shows that the oldest texts in Greek, Roman, Jewish and Muslim literature that supposedly mention ‘religion’ are in fact referring to rules, regulations, customs or ceremonial practices that do not at all correspond with the present-day notion of religion. He urges historians to verify the translations of the texts they use in research to avoid distortions. ‘Religion,’ he insists, ‘was not a concept in ancient cultures’ (Nongbri 2013: 152). Similarly, Balagangadhara points out that writings—‘from Vedas through Upanishads to Puranas’—first became classified as ‘religious’ texts through the efforts of Christian missionaries (Balagangadhara 1994: 116).

The ‘religionization’ of non-European cultures throughout the globe is a burgeoning area of religious studies research (Chidester 1996; Fitzgerald 2007; Horii 2018; King 1999; Wenger 2009). That ‘religion’ is a term and technology of Eurocentric colonialism that has been exported through conquest and colonial encounters can be usefully thought of as a second tenet of critical religion. Among theorists of critical religion, analysis of the British presence in India serves as a template for this genre of Religious Studies scholarship in which detailed histories of the interface of European colonists with the elites of indigenous social strata are investigated and unravelled. Dubuisson’s summary of Richard King’s thesis about the construction of Hinduism as a religion is an example of how ‘colonial encounters’ that produce ‘religion’ tend to be theorized:

... for King, what catalyzed and finished this movement [i.e. ‘national’ Hinduism] remains the encounter with the British Empire and the fact that European colonists favored the ideas of a unique Indian society and religion. ... [T]he modern notion of Hinduism, he writes, was initially conceived by foreign observers ... but ... it emerged from the colonial encounter between Indians and Europeans, especially the British. The expression ‘colonial encounter’ is there to forcefully underline the fact that Hinduism is not a unilateral European invention that was plastered onto a passive Indian reality, but rather a result of the dynamic encounter of, on the one hand, urbanized and cultivated social groups belonging to the Indian elite and, on the other hand, the influences brought by Western missionaries, administrators, and scholars. (Dubuisson 2019a: 131)

A process similar to the ‘religionizing’ of India described by Dubuisson and King has been proposed by religious studies scholars who work in other regions. For example, in *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in South Africa* (1996), David Chidester shows how religion developed in southern Africa in stages. At first, Europeans arriving in Africa remarked on there being no religion in such a ‘primitive’ place. After a time, however, they found African practices that roughly resembled religion. Next, they decided that Africans did indeed have a rudimentary form of religion. And finally, missionaries worked to convert Africans from their crude ‘native’ religion, to Christianity, the one true faith. In this narrative, Christianity is posited as the pinnacle of religious evolution in a preordained progression that attests to Christian superiority and fundamental, eternal truth.

The conjectured evolution of religion to its proposed highest form in Christianity relates to a third tenet of critical religion: namely, that a ‘world religions discourse’ favouring Christian hegemony is now dominant in political, academic and ecclesial contexts. According to world religions discourse, there are at present

myriad forms of 'religion' whose existence testifies to the universality of the concept. Although new world religions are always appearing, there are basically the big five—Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism—each of which has some commonality with Christianity, in regard to texts, personnel, ideology or sets of practices. Historians differ as to when this notion about the ubiquity yet underlying similarity of religions began as a nascent trope in European intellectual history. Nongbri traces it to the work of Samuel Purchas and Alexander Ross in the seventeenth century ([Nongbri 2013](#): 119); while Tomoko Masuzawa attributes it to the writings of Ernst Troeltsch in the nineteenth ([Masuzawa 2005](#): 319–320).

The result of this widespread and seemingly well-intentioned world religions discourse is a homogeneity of historical and political discourse that a growing number of scholars find intellectually stifling ([Cotter & Robertson 2016](#)). In her widely-quoted book, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (2005), Masuzawa calls world religions discourse a:

well-rehearsed terrain ... where historians strive to recover the genius of each "tradition," where comparativists attempt to demonstrate diversity, plurality and affinity among traditions, and where theologians seek to confess and to confirm the absoluteness of their limited particular tradition when they are among their own kind and, when with others, speak the language of ecumenical empathy, and where, in the end, all parties claim to believe in the authenticity of experience and in the deep unity of all religions in their universal yearning for spirituality and for something like world peace ... such is the state of the world maintained and suspended by the discourse of world religions. ([Masuzawa 2005](#): 320).

Masuzawa's insightful description of the sanguine uniformity and stasis that is enforced by world religions discourse gives rise to the question of what the paradigm might be hiding. What possible avenues of inquiry and analysis are foreclosed by assuming that religion is a given, 'natural' and fairly consistent fact that exists in an array of forms throughout the globe? Tenet number four of critical religion theory addresses this question.

A cogent statement of what I am calling tenet number four is provided by William Cavanaugh in *The Myth of Religious Violence* (2009). Cavanaugh writes: 'What counts as religious or secular in any given context is a function of different configurations of power' ([Cavanaugh 2009](#): 4). If theorists or researchers take Cavanaugh's statement as their starting point instead of the conventional framework of world religions discourse, the categories of religion and secularity are de-essentialized and approached as contingent and historical discursive classifications that are determined by politics. Religion, accordingly, becomes a narrative taxon, a strategic technology of order that confers power and serves the interests of specific groups depending, as Cavanaugh implies, on the particular context in which it has meaning and impact. This is different from saying that religion can serve political purposes; it is rather an assertion that religion exists only as a political creation. In other writing, I have stated the principle as 'the religious is political' ([Goldenberg 2021](#)). Following this line of argument, what is hidden by world religions discourse are the 'different configurations of power' that are made invisible by attributing a non-contingent, ahistorical *thereness* to religion as an omnipresent phenomenon.

My contribution to the analysis of religion as a wholly political category is to develop the hypothesis that religions ought to be imagined and discussed as vestigial states ([Goldenberg 2021](#); [2020](#); [2019a](#); [2019b](#); [2018a](#); [2018b](#); [2015](#).) I am suggesting this far-reaching and ambitious argument as a path to building better theory. Of course, specialists who find the hypothesis useful will have to assess it in relation to specific histories and ideological contexts. Nevertheless, there is value in what I am proposing as a way of illuminating the conditions and motivations that give rise to the continued creation, re-creation, citation and performance of 'religion' along with its putative cognates and opposites.

The two key words in the phrase 'vestigial state' warrant comment and deconstruction. I am using 'state' in a general sense to mean government, sovereignty, or ruling authority. I rely on an oft-cited and frequently

re-issued benchmark text in international law by James Crawford titled *The Creation of States in International Law* (2007) to support my usage. Crawford defines a state with six broad criteria that can be condensed down to two: 1) jurisdiction in regard to territory and/or population and 2) effective authority over such jurisdiction (Crawford 2007: 37–95).

The word ‘vestigial’ falls short of what I would like it to convey. I want the term to conjure a Janus-like quality that references both the past and time to come. ‘Once and future state’ comes closer to the meaning I’m seeking. Colleagues and correspondents have suggested ‘states in waiting,’ and ‘states in hibernation’ as other possibilities. For now, I’ll stay with vestigial and its connotation of something that remains after being superseded by other structures. Ideally, I want ‘vestigial’ to convey a dynamism, a quality of aspiration based on former, either real or imagined, status.

The key difference between vestigial states that I am naming religions and the fully-functioning states in which the vestigial varieties exist is the control of physical violence. As Max Weber pointed out a hundred years ago, dominion over legalized violence is the one power that a state always reserves for itself (Weber [1919] 2004). Fully-functioning states have jurisdiction over police violence, military violence and also violence-in-waiting, such as that required to enforce the decisions made by courts of law. In contemporary western democracies, when institutions termed religious turn to violence, the label religion is applied to them only reluctantly. Note how words and phrases like Islamist, political Islam, militant Islam and fundamentalist Islam are used to separate the so-called religion of Islam from something else that is not Islam because it employs violence.

There is more to be said when and in what cases fully functioning states permit religions, i.e. vestigial states, to use violence. Governments sometimes cede specific jurisdiction pertaining to what is called ‘family law’ to religious tribunals, panels or quasi-courts. Such a practice actually gives the vestigial state some influence concerning legalized violence in two ways. First, the mechanisms of enforcement of court decisions pertaining to divorce, child custody and marital property are placed at the disposal of the state within the state; and second, instances of ‘family’ violence such as spousal assault may be addressed according to interpretations of what is called ‘religious’ law. Jurisdiction over the familial thus becomes an important (and at times jealously guarded) power base for religious authority (Goldenberg 2020).

Viewing religions as vestigial states disturbs the highly problematic but continually reiterated notion that state and religion, however defined, refer to distinct and separate spheres of ideation and activity. By highlighting the unstable and contradictory power dynamics behind the evolution and classification of what is thought of as religious in particular contexts, as opposed to what isn’t, I hope to clarify how the term religion has become part of the machinery of contemporary statecraft. Demystifying religion in this way could foster clearer and more effective thinking in both scholarship and public policy.

In classes and public lectures in which I set out my theory of religions as vestigial states, I frequently begin with this statement: ‘There is no religion in the Bible’ (Goldenberg 2018b).<sup>1</sup> Although biblical texts describe events, activities, laws and functionaries that have come to be grouped under the heading of ‘religion,’ this classification is imposed long after the creation and compilation of the texts themselves. Religion, like automobiles, airplanes and computers had not yet been invented. Rather than narratives about individuals and groups interacting in arenas of life that we now might try to delineate as secular or religious, clerical or political, ecclesial or governmental, in the Bible we are presented with stories and reports in which these distinctions have no meaning.

---

1 In one sense, this sentence is an accepted truism in biblical studies since Hebrew Bible and New Testament scholars state freely and often that religion as a separable category of identity, behavior and/or ideology did not exist in biblical times. However, paradoxically the same scholars then usually blithely proceed to ignore their own insight and continue to use the word religion as if its meaning has been unchanged throughout the centuries (Goldenberg 2018b: 14–19).

I argue that God in the Hebrew Bible is a vivid personification of communal allegiance and governmental authority. The same argument applies to the New Testament. For decades, scholars have pointed out that given the extant narratives about the life of Jesus, the Romans got him right: Jesus was challenging their sovereignty. Matthew 22:21, the text that advises rendering to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is 'His,' is only anachronistically interpreted as a directive to separate 'religion' from the 'state.' The passage is more accurately construed as a call for sedition ([Aslan 2013](#): 146–159, 240–241).

Key to the hypothesis that thinking about religions as vestigial, or once and future, states is that the term and concept of religion evolves as a way of coping with an important shift in governing structures. Such changes have often taken place when a territory is invaded and conquered by another group. If the aggressors do not completely drive out or kill all of the local population, the conquered people might be allowed to continue with their cultures and institutions in attenuated and monitored forms. Prior governmental arrangements are granted limited recognition and circumscribed power. The now marginalized group can live on practicing what gains traction over time as the notion of 'religion.'

This process has roots that pre-date biblical history. For example, in Hesiod's *Theogony*, Uranos becomes a remote and well-meaning counsellor after he is literally castrated by the Titans. In Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, Athena disempowers the Furies but gives them a limited jurisdiction below the ground and promises that they will be acknowledged with ritual honours. To use the word religion in reference to the succession of deities described by Hesiod and Aeschylus would be anachronistic. Nevertheless, the process of displacing while continuing to reference weakened deities who represent former sovereignties pertains to the development I'm tracing ([Goldenberg 2015](#): 284).

The diminishment of the Druids from being masters of Gaul as recounted by Julius Caesar to their present status as conveners of a minor religion in the U.K. is another illustration. Caesar describes the Druids as arbiters of 'public and private' disagreements as well as authorities over sacrifices and 'divine' matters. His writing shows that in Gaul what he thought of as 'religion' was not distinct from government ([Goldenberg 2015](#): 285). Several scholars, such as the aforementioned Brent Nongbri, have pointed out that so-called religious rites and practices in Greece and Rome are co-extensive with the governing state ([Nongbri 2013](#): 138–139).

After the Romans invaded Gaul, the Druids retained power only over Iona and other small territories. Their spheres of influence were limited to whatever a succession of Roman authorities allowed. Over the centuries, Druidism evolved into being considered a 'religion,' although it lacked official recognition as such. The Druid Network had to wait until 2010 to be legally named a 'religion' in England and Wales ([Owen & Taira 2015](#); [Goldenberg 2015](#): 285).

Jewish history illustrates the usefulness of the category of religion for both dominant and subjugated states. I cite the work of scholars such as [Leora Batnitzky \(2011\)](#) and [Daniel Boyarin \(2004; 2019\)](#) to show that the creation of Jewishness as religion was brought about by the vanquishing, displacement, marginalization and colonization by successive empires of a group that then loosely and ambiguously coheres around the evolving category of Judaism. As the institutional mechanism of religion became available, both Jews and their imperial rulers used it for containment and survival. The discursive production of theological and philosophical differences should, I think, be seen as secondary to the uneven and complicated political manoeuvrings that take place over centuries between Jews and a sequence of empires— i.e. Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Egyptians, Romans and more contemporary dominating sovereignties.

In this account of the origins of religion, a group becomes a religion because of displacement by a governing authority that grants it the status of attenuated – i. e. 'vestigial' – state. Contemporary Israel demonstrates that a vestigial state can be transformed into a dominant state with formidable military capability ([Goldenberg: 2015](#), 286).

Curiously, so-called 'secular' governments often ritually cite the deified authorities of vestigial states to justify contemporary power. President Eisenhower's move in 1954 to add the words 'under God' to the US pledge of allegiance is an instance of how a generalized reference to a deity as a previous and more exalted sovereign is employed to validate a government in contrast to 'godless' communism. The Canadian constitution, adopted in 1982, opens with the words 'Whereas Canada is founded on principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law ...' ([Constitution Act 1982](#)). This statement shows that in 1982, although Canada was ready to distance itself from Britain by enacting an independent, foundational document, in order to take that mature step, language indicating subordination to a different yet putatively superior entity, was still necessary. The words 'supremacy of God' function in the Canadian constitution as a metaphor for Britain. The theistic reference that now authorizes the Canadian state is thus a nostalgic substitute for Canada's former colonial master.

I'll briefly mention one last example of how 'religion' can be deployed to manage and negotiate the dislocation of a people. Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, is currently making brilliant use of the concept of 'religion' in his dealings with China. August 8, 2011 marked the official recognition of Lopsang Sangay as Kalon Tripa or Prime Minister of the Central Tibetan Administration in Dharmshala. On this occasion, the Dalai Lama declared that his 'religious' functions were now separated from the duties of a political leader who had been democratically chosen. 'This is in keeping with the trend everywhere around the world to move towards democracy,' he said ([Gyatso 2011](#); [Goldenberg 2015](#): 289). He no longer retained the 'political leadership' that he 'inherited' at the age of sixteen. The Tibetan people, he proclaimed, were now 'the masters of Tibet and not—[that is, instead of]—the religious heads or their heirs. ... I always state that it is wrong for religious leaders to hold political positions. ... I will continue to strongly speak about the importance of the separation of religion and politics' ([Gyatso 2011](#); [Goldenberg 2015](#):289).

The swearing in of the Kalon Tripa as a 'political' leader transforms the position of the present Dalai Lama who now becomes a wholly religious authority. An intended result is that the powers of future Dalai Lamas will be confined to what is considered religion. Even if the Chinese government accomplishes its objective of influencing the choice of the next Dalai Lama by manipulating the Panchen Lama, the stature of the now merely 'religious' leader will be lessened. The Dalai Lama as head of a 'religion' will have authority over a variety of Tibetan Buddhism that is no longer recognized as equivalent to Tibet as a state in exile. In this way, contemporary Tibetan Buddhism is being presented as what I would call a vestigial state, i.e., a 'religion,' in order to contest the Chinese claim to sovereignty over the Tibetan people ([Goldenberg 2015](#): 289).

At the beginning of this essay, I promised to speculate on the relevance of the deconstruction of religion in general and the theory of religions as vestigial states in particular to current politics in India. Indologists who find this trajectory of thinking useful will of course be able to provide more productive lines of argument than I. Nevertheless, I offer three possible applications of the theories I have outlined here to contemporary India.

1. Narendra Modi is employing the 'religion' of Hinduism as a nostalgic referent to a mystified, glorified and supposedly ancient sovereignty in order to strengthen his authority and that of the government he heads. By claiming an authenticity that transcends current legal frameworks, he is attempting to garner popular support for policies that favour Hindus as constituents of a grand and deified ruling order. This use of 'religion' warrants deconstruction and critique.

2. By undertaking the suppression of Muslims as a minority, Modi is, in a sense, acknowledging that he considers the 'religion' of Islam to be a competitive sovereignty. Perhaps realizing that clashes between Hindus and Muslims pertain to types of governance would clarify what is at stake in particular contexts and make conflicts seem more manageable and amenable to compromise.

3. On a utopian note, if religions were more widely understood as contingent, historical constructions of alternative governments rather than as fundamental, rigid and essential components of personhood and community, individuals and groups might be encouraged to be less defensive and more open to those who are now portrayed as representing unique and mystified differences. Such an outcome would require scholars, journalists and policy-makers to think more critically and sceptically about 'religion.'

## References

- Aslan, R. 2013, *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*. Random House, New York.
- Baird, R. J. 2001, 'Religious History and the Construction of Modernity.' Panel presentation at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion. 20 November. Denver, Colorado.
- Balagangadhara, S. N. 1994, *'The Heathen in His Blindness...': Asia, the West and the Dynamic of Religion*. Brill, Leiden. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004378865>
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2012, *Reconceptualizing India Studies*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- Barton, C. A. & Boyarin, D. 2016, *Imagine No Religion: How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities*. Fordham, New York. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780823271221>
- Batnitzky, L. 2011, *How Judaism Became a Religion: An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Bloch, E., Keppens, M. & Hegde, R. 2010, *Rethinking Religion in India: The Colonial Construction of Hinduism*. Routledge, New York. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203862896>
- Boyarin, D. 2004, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia. <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812203844>
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2019, *Judaism: The Genealogy of a Modern Notion*. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, N.J.
- Cavanaugh, W. T. 2009, *The Myth of Religious Violence*. Oxford University Press, New York. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195385045.001.0001>
- Chidester, D. 1996, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa*. University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville.
- Constitution Act 1982, *The Constitution Act*. Online, available: [www.solon.org/Constitutions/Canada/English/ca](http://www.solon.org/Constitutions/Canada/English/ca) 1982. html [Accessed 24 May 2019].
- Cotter, C. R. & Robertson, D. G. (eds) 2016, *After World Religions: Reconstructing Religious Studies*. Routledge, Oxford & New York.
- Crawford, J. 2007, *The Creation of States in International Law*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Clarendon Press, Oxford. <https://doi.org/10.1093/law/9780199228423.001.0001>
- Dubuisson, D. 2019a, *The Invention of Religions*. (trans) Martha Cunningham. Equinox, Bristol, CT.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2019b, *L'Invention des religions*. CNRS Éditions, Paris.
- Fitzgerald, T. (ed) 2007, *Religion and the Secular: Historical and Colonial Formations*. Equinox, London.
- Goldenberg, N. R. 2015, 'The Category of Religion in the Technology of Governance: An Argument for Understanding Religions as Vestigial States' in *Religion as a Category of Governance and Sovereignty* (eds) T. Stack, N. Goldenberg & T. Fitzgerald. Brill, Leiden: 280–292. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004290594\\_013](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004290594_013)



- \_\_\_\_\_. 2018a, 'Forget About Defining "It": Reflections on Thinking Differently in Religious Studies' in *Method Today: Redescribing Approaches to the Study of Religion* (ed) B. Stoddard, Equinox, Sheffield, U.K. & Bristol, CT: 79–95.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2018b, 'There is No Religion in the Bible,' *Implicit Religion*, vol. 21, no. 4: 13–29. <https://doi.org/10.1558/imre.39758>
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2019a, 'Timothy Fitzgerald and the Revival of Religious Studies,' *Implicit Religion*, vol. 22, no. 3-4: 309–318. <https://doi.org/10.1558/imre.40964>
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2019b, "'Religion" and its Limits: Reflections on Discursive Borders and Boundaries,' *Journal of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions*, vol. 7: 1–15.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2020, 'Toward a Critique of Postsecular Rhetoric' in *Hijacked! A Critical Treatment of 'Good' and 'Bad' Religion*, (eds) L. D. Smith, S. Fährding & A. Hermann. Equinox, Sheffield, UK: 41–47. <https://doi.org/10.1558/equinox.35417>
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2021, 'The Religious is Political' in *The End of Religion: Feminist Reappraisals of the State* (eds) N. R. Goldenberg & K. McPhillips. Routledge, Oxford: 7–25. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315616063-2>
- Gyatso, T. 2011, 'His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Speech at the Swearing-in Ceremony of the Kalon Tripa Lopsang Sangay.' Online, available: <http://tibet.net/2011/08/12/his-holines-the-dalai-lamas-speech-at-the-swearing-in-ceremony-of-the-kalon-tripa-lopsang-sangay> [Accessed 29 March 2013].
- Horii, M. 2018, *The Category of 'Religion' in Contemporary Japan: Shukyo and Temple Buddhism*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- King, R. 1999, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East.'* Routledge, London.
- Masuzawa, T. 2005, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226922621.001.0001>
- Nongbri, B. 2013, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept*. Yale University Press, New Haven. <https://doi.org/10.12987/yale/9780300154160.001.0001>
- Owen, S. & Taira, T. 2015, 'The Category of "Religion" in Public Classification: Charity Registration of The Druid Network in England and Wales' in *Religion as a Category of Governance and Sovereignty* (eds) T. Stack, N. Goldenberg & T. Fitzgerald, Brill, Leiden: 90–114. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004290594\\_006](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004290594_006)
- Touna, V. 2017, *Fabrications of the Greek Past: Religion, Tradition and the Making of Modern Identities*. Brill, Leiden. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004348615>
- Weber, M. 2004 [1919], 'Politics as a Vocation' in *The Vocation Lectures*, (eds) D. Owen & T. B. Strong (trans) R. Livingstone, Hackett Publishing Co., Indianapolis: 32–94.
- Wenger, T. J. 2009, *We Have a Religion: The 1920's Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom*. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill.