



Call for Papers

Future of Salafism

Conference, University of Oxford, 5-6 December 2018

(Jointly hosted by Oxford Department of International Development, University of Oxford, and the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies)

Like all ideologies and movements, Salafism— one of the most influential Islamic movement of the last century— is not monolithic. Not only have Salafi inspired groups evolved in different ways across different countries and contexts, in the same space Salafi reasoning can find multiple expressions or one mode of Salafi reasoning can give way to another in response to the changing context. Scholars widely recognise four visible expressions of Salafism: scholastic Salafis (those who focus on the scholarship); Salafi jihadis (those who use aspects of Salafi thought to justify militant Islam); political Salafis (those who use the Salafi thought to justify political action such as Surooris or Sahawis in Saudi Arabia or Al-Nour Party in Egypt), and Madkhalis (the quietest Salafis who accept the secular form of government). Right now, however, all these multiple expressions of Salafism are exposed to new pressures due to changing contexts. We have seen the impact of the Arab Spring on Salafi groups in the Middle East and Gulf regions especially Yemen, Libya and Syria; in the first two the Madkhalis have adopted a more jihadist approach and developments in the latter have created a space for merging of Salafi jihadists of different orientation. Juxtaposed against the recent shifts in Saudi Arabia¹ — which along with Qatar is the only state to officially endorse Salafism — the future of Salafism is unpredictable. This conference is aimed at bringing together established scholars, post-doctoral researchers, as well as doctoral students who can offer original insights into how Salafi thought, and the diverse set of groups inspired by it, are evolving in different contexts in light of the post-Arab Spring developments and the changes unfolding within Saudi Arabia. This conference thus welcomes empirically rich case studies from different country contexts, which can shed light on any of the following questions:

- What changes has the Arab Spring triggered within different categories of Salafi groups in the Arab world? What lines of reasoning have different groups adopted to justify change in their approach or strategies? Have Salafi groups in one country context been influenced by groups in another country or region or have their responses to the Arab Spring been very localised?

¹ In 2017, the Saudi state has moved towards reversing many of the socially restrictive policies associated with Salafi-Wahhabi thinking (ban on women driving; restrictions on entertainment, etc.) and has called for a return to ‘moderate Islam’.

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- What is the Saudi state's conception of 'moderate Islam'? How does this conception of moderate Islam relate to Salafi and Wahhabi teachings? How are the leading Salafi and Wahhabi scholars within Saudi Arabia and beyond responding to the Saudi state's call for a 'return to moderate Islam'? Papers that can draw on detailed interviews with leading Salafi scholars in different contexts or on their writings or speeches to analyse how Salafi scholars and other Salafi movements are responding to changes within Saudi Arabia are very welcome.

The conference is being jointly hosted by the Oxford Department of International Development, University of Oxford and the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies and will result in an edited volume.

Those interested to participate in the conference are requested to submit a 500 word abstract to Professor Masooda Bano, Associate Professor, Oxford Department of International Development (masooda.bano@qeh.ox.ac.uk) and cc Dr Abdullah Bin Khalid Al-Saud, Director of Research, King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies (a.alsaud@kfcris.com) by 15th June 2018. Selected participants will be informed of the outcome by the end of June 2018.