EDITH A. SZANTO
Curriculum Vitae

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PROFESSIONAL APPOINTMENTS

2019 – present  Assistant Professor, University of Alabama
2019          Associate Professor, American University of Iraq, Sulaimani
2012 – 18    Assistant Professor, American University of Iraq, Sulaimani
2011 – 12    Lecturer, American University of Iraq, Sulaimani
2009 – 11    Instructor, University of Toronto

EDUCATION

2006 – 12  PhD, Religious Studies, University of Toronto
           Dissertation title: “Following Sayyida Zaynab: Twelver Shi‘ism in
           Contemporary Syria”
           Dissertation adviser: Amira Mittermaier
           Comprehensive exam areas: Anthropology of Islam and Twelver Shi‘ism
2004 – 05  Visiting Student, University of Damascus, Jami’a Abu Nūr and AMIDEAST
2002 – 04  MA, Middle Eastern Studies, University of Texas at Austin
           Thesis title: “Women’s Religious Groups in Cairo”
           Thesis advisor: Kamran Aghaie
2002       Semester Abroad, American University in Cairo, Egypt
1999 – 02  BA, Summa cum Laude, Religious Studies, Arizona State University

PUBLICATIONS

Monographs

In progress  “Transgressive Traditions: Violence, Healing, and Magic in Twelver Shi‘ism,”
            proposal is under consideration by Manchester University Press.

Edited Volume

In progress  “Islam in 5 Minutes,” under contract with Equinox.

Journal Articles

Submitted  “Developing Iraq: Christian Missionaries, English Teachers, and Aid Workers,”
           The Muslim World.
2018       “Mourning Halabja on Screen: Or Reading Kurdish Politics Through Anfal
2018 “‘Zoroaster was a Kurd!’: Neo-Zoroastrianism among Iraqi Kurds,” *Iran and the Caucasus* 22 (1): 96-110.
This article was translated into Kurmanji Kurdish and published by Fahriye Adsay for the Kurdish online journal, *Zarema.*

**Chapters in Edited Books**


“Contesting Fragile Saintly Traditions: Miraculous Healing among Twelver Shi’is in Contemporary Syria,” in Politics of Worship in the Contemporary Middle East: Sainthood in Fragile States, edited by Andreas Bandak and Mikkel Bille (Leiden: Brill), 33-52.

Book Reviews


Film Reviews

2017 Film review of Julia Meltzer and Mustafa Rony Zeno, “Dalya’s Other Country, Anthropology Review Database.

2013 Film review of Julia Meltzer and Laura Nix, “Light in Her Eyes,” Anthropology Review Database.

Academic News Articles and Field Reports

2020 “The largest contemporary Muslim pilgrimage isn’t the hajj to Mecca, it’s the Shiite pilgrimage to Karbala in Iraq,” The Conversation News Source (9 September 2020).

This article was translated into Spanish and into Malay and published.

This article was translated into Arabic and published by the World Institute, Istanbul.

2012


This article was translated into Arabic and published by the World Institute, Istanbul.

2008


2008


2007


AWARDS AND GRANTS

2018

AUIS Faculty Research Award

2014

AUIS Scholar (course load reduction and research funding)

2011 – 13

Faculty Development Grant, American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

2008 – 10

Ontario Graduate Scholarship, University of Toronto

2009

School of Graduate Studies Travel Grant, University of Toronto

2008

Hartcourt Brown Fellowship, University of Toronto

2007 – 08

Less Commonly Taught Languages Study Elsewhere Award, University of Toronto

2004 – 05

US Fulbright Fellow, Syria

2003 – 04

Burton Continuing Fellowship, University of Texas at Austin

2003 – 04

Foreign Language Area Studies Fellowship for Arabic, University of Texas at Austin

2000 – 02

Dean’s Honor Roll, Arizona State University

1999 – 00

Freshman Achievement Scholarship, Arizona State University

INVITED TALKS

2020

“Redefining Religion: Development and Voluntourism in Iraqi Kurdistan,” presented and discussed a pre-circulated paper on the Zoom Workshop for Authors: Muslim World Special Issue on Development sponsored by Butler University

2018

“The Widows of Karbala: Studying Women in Contemporary Shi‘ism,” presented at LUCIS Annual Conference 2018: Approaching Shi‘i Islam in the Academy, held at Leiden University, the Netherlands

2018

“Iraqi Necropolitics,” a paper presented as part of a speaker series at the Department of Religious Studies at St. Mary’s University in Halifax, Canada

2017

“Iraqi Necropolitics: Sovereignty, War Machines, and the Question of Agency,” a paper presented at The Middle East in Danger: The State of Exception, a workshop held at Lancaster University
2017 “Hiding the Truth in Plain Sight: Spiritual Healing and Jinn in Contemporary Syria,” a paper presented at The Islamic Multiverse, a conference held at New York University Abu Dhabi

2017 “Mourning Halabja – or the Kurdish Holocaust Industry,” a paper presented at History and Society on TV in the Middle East, a conference held at the University of Maryland

2016 “When Kurds doubt Islam,” a paper presented at Doubt and Certitude in Islam, an international research seminar held at Aarhus University, Denmark

2016 “The Widows of Karbala,” a paper presented at the Mainstream Muharram: Exploring Political, Religious, and Cultural Expressions of Shi’a Islam series at the University of Houston

2016 “On the Trail of Tears: Pious Bodies, Affective Economies, and Sacred Space in Contemporary Iraqi Arba’in Practices,” a paper presented at Lamenting Karbala, a conference held at the Warburg Institute by the Shi’ah Institute

2016 “Victims, Hero(in)es, and Pawns: Imagining the Syrian Uprising,” a paper presented as part of a lecture series entitled The Crisis in Syria: Past, Present, and Future held at NYU Abu Dhabi and sponsored by the Arab Crossroads Program

2016 “The Never Ending Tragedy: Appropriations of Karbala Among Iraqi Shi’is in Prerevolutionary Syria,” a paper presented at Reimagining Muslim Pasts, a workshop held at Sabanci University in Istanbul and sponsored by the Aga Khan University

2015 “From Faith to Family: Religion and Tribes in Modern Kurdistan,” paper presented at The Middle East and its Tribes: A useful resource or a troubling legacy?, a workshop held at the Institut français du Proche-Orient in Erbil

2015 “The Kurdish View of Shi’i Politics in Iraq,” paper presented at Shi’i Political Theology and Mobilisation in Contemporary Iraq, a workshop held at the University of Exeter

2015 “Provincializing Shi’ism in Modern Syria,” paper presented at Arab Shi’ism vs. Wilayat al-Faqih, a workshop held at Oxford University

2014 “Challenging Transnational Shi’i Authority in Ba’th Syria,” paper presented at Center and Periphery in the Muslim World: De-Centering Traditional Religious Authority, a workshop held at the Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies


2011 “Mourning Hussayn in Contemporary Syria,” paper presented at the Max Planck Institut für Bildungsforschung in Berlin

2005 “Material Culture around Damascene Mosques,” paper presented at the CEMAT Fulbright Conference, Tunisia

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

2021 “The Making of Shi’ite Sacred Space in Syria,” paper presented at a Zoom conference, “Religious Minorities, Sacred Space and Heritage in Transition in the Middle East” hosted by the Central European University
2021  “Iraq and a Secular Age Beyond the West,” paper presented as part of a panel of “A Secular Age Beyond the West” at the Association for Asian Studies Virtual Annual Conference
2020  “Sayyida Zaynab: From dolorosa to rebel and back,” paper presented at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting
2018  “Zoroaster was a Kurd!”: Neo-Zoroastrianism in Contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan,” paper presented at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting
2016  “Patronizing Shi‘i ‘Ulama in Contemporary Syria,” a paper presented at the 23rd Annual Congress of DAVO held at the University of Tübingen
2016  Panel Organizer, “Patronizing Twelver Shi‘ism: Religious Authority and Worldly Powers,” at the 23rd Annual Congress of DAVO held at the University of Tübingen
2016  “The Final Tear: Pious Bodies, Affective Economies, and Sacred Space in Contemporary Iraqi Arba‘een Practices,” a paper presented at Migration, Change and Continuity: Kinship, Religion, Politics, Visual, in Retrospect and Beyond, a conference held by the IUAES Commission of Anthropology of the Middle East at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland
2016  “Zoroaster was a Kurd!”: On the Rise of Neo-Zoroastrianism in Contemporary Kurdistan,” paper presented at Conflict and Living Heritage in the Middle East: Researching the Politics of Cultural Heritage and Identities in Times of War and Displacement, a conference held at AUIS and sponsored by the Institut Français du Proche-Orient in Erbil
2016  “Learning Piety in Sayyida Zaynab: Women’s Hawza Education in Syria,” a paper presented at The Acquisition and Transmission of Knowledge: The Role of Shi’i Institutions of Learning in the Spread and Defense of a Tradition, a conference held at the University of Chicago
2015  “Depicting Gender in the Syrian Conflict,” paper presented at *Syria: Moving Beyond the Stalemate*, a conference held at St Andrews University

2014  “Contesting Charismatic Authority: Qadiri Sufism in Iraqi Kurdistan,” paper presented at the Middle East Studies Association Annual Meeting


2013  “Economies of Piety,” paper presented at the Middle East Studies Association Annual Meeting

2013  “Challenging Transnational Shi‘i Authority in Ba‘th Syria,” paper presented at *De-Centering Shi‘ism*, a workshop held at Princeton University

2013  “Preaching Piety in Sulaimani,” paper presented at *Kurdistan – Between Past and Future*, a conference sponsored by Soran University and Lund University

2012  “Discourses on Barbarism in the Contemporary Middle East,” paper presented at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting


2011  “‘That Which Your Right Hands Possess’: Liberation, Otherness, and Religion in a Syrian Soap Opera,” paper presented (in absentia) at the Middle East Studies Association Annual Meeting

2011  “Healing Shi‘i Bodies: Cupping, Flagellation and Saintly Intercession in Contemporary Syria,” paper presented at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting

2011  “Beyond the Karbala Paradigm: Affect in Syrian Twelver Shi‘i Mourning Rituals,” paper presented at the Middle East History and Theory Conference, University of Chicago

2010  “Heterodoxy on the Periphery: Magic and Twelver Shi‘ism in Contemporary Syria,” paper presented at the Middle East Studies Association Annual Meeting


2010  “Sayyida Zaynab: A Saint and Her Followers in States of Exception,” paper presented at *Sainthood in Fragile States*, a conference sponsored by the Danish Institute of Damascus and the University of Copenhagen.
2008  “Pious Sensations in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Basim al-Karbala’i and Mourning Rituals among Twelver Shi‘is,” paper present at the American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting

2008  “Self-Flagellation and the Cultivation of Piety: Tradition, Connection and Ethics,” paper presented at the American Academy of Religion Eastern International Regional Meeting

2007  “Shi‘i Children’s Books: The Formation of Twelver Shi‘i Identity, Community and Practice,” paper presented at the Middle East Studies Association Annual Meeting

2007  “Performance, Power and the Possibilities of Change in Islamic Practice,” paper presented at Evolution Devolution Revolution, the Graduate Symposium of the Centre for the Study of Religion, University of Toronto


2005  “Fulla: An Arab Muslim Doll for Arab Muslim Girls,” paper presented at the Middle East Studies Association Annual Meeting

2004  “Sacred Space and Privacy: Sufi Orders and Questions of Control,” paper presented at the American Research Center for Egypt Annual Conference

CAMPUS TALKS AND INTERVIEWS

2020  “#ExeterConvos 7 May with Professor Edith Szanto on Islam and Development,” participated in a thematic conversation with Prof. Sajjad Rizvi for a Video Blog posted by the Exeter Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies

2020  “SEPADPod with Edith Szanto,” participated in a thematic conversation with Prof. Simon Mabon for the Sectarianism, Proxies & De-sectarianisation podcast series published by the Richardson Institute, University of Lancaster

2020  “REL 590 Guest Lecture on the State of the Field in Islamic Studies,” participated as a guest lecturer in the capstone course REL 590, University of Alabama

2019  “Women, Gender, and Early Islam,” participated in a thematic conversation with Prof. Lynn Rose for a podcast series by the Center for Gender and Development Studies, the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

2013  “Sectarianism and the Syrian Uprising,” paper presented at the Sulaimani Forum, American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

2012  “Material Piety in Syria and Iraq,” paper presented at the Second Annual AUIS Conference on the Middle East, American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

2012  “Rethinking Revolution and Redemption in Contemporary Syrian Twelver Shi‘i Mourning Rituals,” Brown Bag Lecture, American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

2012  “Iraq,” participated in a thematic conversation on CIUT, the University of Toronto radio station

2012  “History of Tattooing in the Middle East,” guest lecture, American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

2011  “Religion and Refugees,” participated in a thematic conversation on CIUT, the University of Toronto radio station
2011
“El-Tawhid Juma Circle,” participated in a thematic conversation on CIUT, the University of Toronto radio station
2011
“Following Sayyida Zaynab: Shi‘i Female Sainthood, Contested Authority and Possibilities for Healing in States of Exception,” paper presented at the JHI Islamic Studies Workshop, University of Toronto
2010
2007
“Women in Islam,” guest lecture, University of Toronto Mississauga
2004
“Women’s Religious Groups in Cairo,” paper presented at the Graduate Student Symposium, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, University of Texas at Austin

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

At the University of Alabama

REL 100 “Introduction to the Study of Religion”
REL 236 “Islam”
REL 336 “Islam and the West”
REL 436 “Making Islam”
REL 523 “Discourse and Practice”

At the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

REL 202 “Comparative World Religions”
REL 422 “Gender in Islam”
CIV 101 “Civilization 1 – Ancient World”
CIV 102 “Civilization 2 – Medieval World”
CIV 203 “Civilization 3 – Humanities of the Ancient World”
CIV 204 “Civilization 4 – Modern World”
HST 101 “World and European History I”
HST 202 “History of the Middle East”
HST 321 “Islamic Religious Traditions”
HST 421 “Religion in Iraq”
POL 400 “Independent Study: The History of Islamic Political Thought” (one section)
BUS 401 “Business Ethics”

At the University of Toronto

RLG 204 “Introduction to Islam”
RLG 251 “Women in Islam”
RLG 355 “Anthropology of Islam”

RESEARCH AND FIELDWORK EXPERIENCE

2016 – 19 Fieldwork on Evangelical Christians, Sulaimani, Iraq
2014 – 17 Fieldwork on Zoroastrianism, Sulaimani, Iraq
2011 – 19  Fieldwork on Qadiri Sufism, Sulaimani governorate, Iraq  
2011 – 19  Fieldwork on Shi‘ism, Sulaimani, Iraq  
2006 – 10  Fieldwork on Shi‘ism, Sayyida Zaynab, Syria  
2006 – 11  Research Assistant to Prof. Mohammed Fadel, University of Toronto

CONSULTANCY EXPERIENCE

2015 – 16  Co-Investigator, Female Genital Mutilation Baseline Survey for Heartland  
           Alliance and UNICEF, Iraq  
2012  Co-Principal Investigator, Social Impact Assessment Project for Western Zagros  
       (Oil Company), Iraq (17,000 USD)  
2006  UNV Human Development Advocate at UNDP Damascus  
2006  Intern at UNHCR Damascus

SERVICE

To the University of Alabama

2021 – 2022  Member (Faculty Senate Delegate), Curriculum Committee  
2021 – 2022  Member (Faculty Senate Delegate), Undergraduate Council  
2021  Member (Alternate), Curriculum Committee  
2021  Member (Alternate), Undergraduate Council  
2021 – present  Faculty Coordinator, Events  
2021 – present  Faculty Coordinator, Undergraduate Research  
2021 – present  Member, Religious Studies Rewards Committee  
2021  Member, Day Lecture Series Speakers Committee  
2021 – present  Member, Religious Studies Scholarships Committee  
2020 – present  Member, Faculty and Senate Governance Committee  
2020 – present  Member, Faculty Senate  
2020  Member, Aronov Lecture Series Speakers Committee  
2019 – present  Member, Religious Studies Undergraduate Committee  
2019 – 2021  Faculty Adviser, Religious Studies Student Association

To the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

2017 – 18  Chair, Faculty Handbook Committee  
2016  Chair, Hiring Committee for the Social Sciences Department  
2015 – 16  Faculty Adviser, German Club  
2014 – 17  Chair, Curriculum Review Committee  
2013  Member, Curriculum Review Committee  
2013 – 14  Member, Provost Search Committee  
2013 – 16  Faculty Advisor, Manga Club  
2012 – 16  Organiser, Brown Bag Lecture Series  
2012 – 13  Faculty Advisor, FirstStage (volunteer teachers for children from the Qalawa  
           Refugee Camp)  
2012  Organiser, the Second Annual AUIS Conference on the Middle East  
2012  Member, Core Review Committee
2012 Faculty Volunteer, Film Club

To academia at large

2021 Peer Reviewer, *British Journal of Middle East Studies*
2021 Peer Reviewer, *Journal of Religious History*
2021 Peer Reviewer, *Islamic Inquiry*
2021 Peer Reviewer, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*
2021 Grant Reviewer, Israeli Science Foundation
2020 Peer Reviewer, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*
2020 Peer Reviewer, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*
2020 Book Manuscript Reviewer, Oxford University Press
2020 Peer Reviewer, *British Journal of Middle East Studies*
2020 Peer Reviewer, *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies*
2020 Peer Reviewer, *Kurdish Studies*
2020 External Doctoral Committee Member for a PhD student at the University of Pittsburgh working on Syrian refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

2019 – present Member, Religious Conversions Unit Steering Committee, American Academy of Religion
2019 Peer Reviewer, *Critical Research on Religion*
2019 Peer Reviewer, *Kurdish Studies*
2019 Peer Reviewer, *British Journal of Sociology*
2018 – present External Doctoral Committee Member for a PhD student at Arizona State University working on female Syrian refugees in Michigan
2018 Peer Reviewer, *Review of International Studies*
2017 – present Editor, *Syrian Studies Association Bulletin*
2017 Peer Reviewer, *Ethos: Journal for the Society of Psychological Anthropology*
2016 Peer Reviewer, *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*
2015 – present Member, Class, Theology and Religion Group Steering Committee, American Academy of Religion
2015 Peer Reviewer, *Middle East Critique*
2015 Peer Reviewer, *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies*
2015 Peer Reviewer, *Critical Research on Religion*
2014 – 18 Field Adviser and External Doctoral Committee Member for a PhD student at Kennesaw State University working on art and identity in Kurdistan
2013 Peer Reviewer, *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly*
2010 – 16 Member, Contemporary Islam Group Steering Committee, American Academy of Religion
2008 – 11 Review Editor for *Symposia*, University of Toronto

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENTS

2018 “Islamic Law: What is it?” lecture given at the Prescott Public Library in Arizona
2018 “Religious and Social Change in the Middle East,” participated in a panel organized by the Center for Religion and Conflict, Arizona State University
2018  “Making a Difference in Iraqi Kurdistan,” presentation at Pecha Kucha Night organized by Women4Women Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Prescott


2014  “Displacement and Suffering: From Anfal to ISIS,” organized and participated in a public panel held at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

2012  “Iraq,” participated in a thematic conversation on CIUT, the University of Toronto’s radio station

2011  “Religion and Refugees,” participated in a thematic conversation on CIUT, the University of Toronto’s radio station

2011  “El-Tawhid Juma Circle,” participated in a thematic conversation on CIUT, the University of Toronto’s radio station

2002 – 04  Individually led outreach events by visiting Middle Schools and High Schools in Austin, TX as part of the K-12 Outreach Program, University of Texas at Austin

LANGUAGES

Native speaker of English, German, and Hungarian
Fluent in reading, writing and speaking in Arabic (Modern Standard Arabic, Syrian and Iraqi dialects)
Advanced reading ability in French and Spanish
Basic knowledge of Hindi, Farsi, and Sorani Kurdish

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

American Academy of Religion
Middle East Studies Association
Shi’ah Institute
Southeast Regional Middle East and Islamic Studies Society
Syrian Studies Association

REFERENCES

Prof. Lynn Rose, Chair of the Promotion Committee, the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani, lynn.rose@auis.edu.krd

Prof. Elizabeth Campbell, former Chair of the Social Science Department, the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani, ecampbell@daemen.edu

Prof. Amira Mittermaier, Associate Professor at the Centre for the Study of Religion, University of Toronto, amira.mittermaier@utoronto.ca
Prof. Walid Saleh, Associate Professor at the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, University of Toronto, walid.saleh@utoronto.ca

Prof. Karen Ruffle, Assistant Professor at the Centre for the Study of Religion, University of Toronto, karen.ruffle@utoronto.ca

Prof. Juan Cole, Professor at the Department of History and Director of the Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies, University of Michigan, jrcole@umich.edu