MORNING PROGRAMME

8:30am – 9:15am – Arrival, Registration, Tea/Coffee & Welsh Cakes

9:15am – 9:30am – Welcome & Introduction: Professor Sophie-Gilliat Ray / Dr Riyaz Timol

9:30am - 10:30am – Panel 1 – *Pecha Kucha Format*

Chair: Professor Sophie Gilliat-Ray, Director, Islam-UK Centre

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10:30am – 11:00am – Break / Refreshments / Networking

11:00am – 12:15pm – Panel 2 – *Training Muslim Leaders in the West*

Chair: Laiqah Osman, Jameel PhD Scholar, Cardiff University

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12:15pm – 12:30pm Panel Q&A

12:30pm – 1:00pm

**Keynote Lecture 1: Professor Ataullah Siddiqui**

*(Markfield Institute of Higher Education)*

Chair: Mawlana Dr Mansur Ali, Lecturer in Islamic Studies, Cardiff University

1:00pm – 2:30pm

Lunch / Networking / Prayer / Poster Displays
Leadership, Authority and Representation in British Muslim Communities
21st January 2019

AFTERNOON PROGRAMME

1:00pm – 2:30pm
Lunch / Networking / Prayer / Poster Displays

2:30pm – 3:30pm – Discussion Panel: The Future Role of Imams in the UK

Chair: Saleem Kidwai OBE, Secretary General, Muslim Council of Wales

| Discussant 1 | Dr Shuruq Naguib |
| Discussant 2 | Dr Atif Imtiaz |
| Discussant 3 | Mufti Dr Abdur Rahman Mangera |
| Discussant 4 | Dr Myriam François-Cerrah |
| Discussant 5 | Imam Qari Asim MBE |
| Discussant 6 | Rehanah Sadiq |

3:30pm – 4:00pm

Keynote Lecture 2: Shaukat Warraich (Faith Associates)
Chair: Dr Michael Munnik, Lecturer in Social Science Theories & Methods, Cardiff University

4:00pm – 4:30pm – Break / Refreshments / Prayer / Networking

4:30pm – 5:30pm – Panel 3 – Changing Loci of Authority in British Islam

Chair: Laura Jones, Jameel PhD Scholar, Cardiff University

| Professor Gary Bunt | University of Wales Trinity Saint David | The Net Imam Paradox: Contesting Leadership, Religious Authority and Representation in Cyberspace |
| Dr Giulia Liberatore | University of Edinburgh | ‘Women as natural guides’: A New Generation of Female Islamic Authorities in Britain |
| Dr Abdul-Azim Ahmed | Islam-UK Centre | Leadership From Below: Congregations and British Mosques |
| Harun Khan & Hassan Joudi | Muslim Council of Britain | Muslim Umbrella Bodies: Effective Representation or Unfair Gatekeepers? |

5:30pm – 5:40pm Panel Q&A

5:40pm – 6:00pm – Reflections, Close & Thanks: Prof Sophie-Gilliat Ray / Dr Riyaz Timol

This conference has been organised in conjunction with a special issue of the international journal Religions jointly edited by Professor Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Dr Riyaz Timol. Click here for more details.
This conference has been organised in conjunction with a special issue of the international journal *Religions* jointly edited by Professor Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Dr Riyaz Timol. Click here for more details.

**Keynote Speakers**

**Professor Ataullah Siddiqui**

Ataullah Siddiqui is a Professor in Christian-Muslim Relations and Inter-Faith Understanding at the Markfield Institute of Higher Education where he was also the Director of the Institute from 2001 to 2008. His interests include formation of religious leadership in Islam, especially with respect to chaplaincy and ulema. As well as his 2007 report *Islam at Universities in England: Meeting the Needs and Investing in the Future*, Professor Siddiqui has published prolifically on Islam and Christian dialogue and mutual relations.

**Shaukat Warraich**

Shaukat Warraich is an award-winning social entrepreneur and Chief Executive Officer of Faith Associates. He was instrumental in the 2006 launch of the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Body, comprising over 600 Mosques and Islamic centres in the UK, and has authored the *Mosque and Islamic Centre Management Guide*. He has established the Beacon Mosques standards kite-mark and is the chief editor of Imamsonline.com, a blog platform showcasing good practices of Imams globally.


Panellists

An accountant by profession, Saleem Kidwai OBE is the Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Wales and a long-standing member of the Cardiff Muslim community. He has spearheaded numerous initiatives aimed at bettering understanding of Muslim communities and convenes workshops and training for Imams and Mosque teachers across Wales. In 2006, he was awarded the Order of the British Empire for "services to Diversity and Business in Wales".

Saleem Kidwai OBE (Chair)

Dr Shuruq Naguib is a lecturer at the department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion at Lancaster University. Her research interests include Qur’anic hermeneutics, ritual law and the response of Muslim women scholars to modernity. She was the lead researcher on a project entitled Muslim Women Reading Religious Texts in Britain and Egypt and is the interim co-chair of the British Association of Islamic Studies (BRAIS).

Dr Shuruq Naguib

Dr Atif Imtiaz was, until recently, Academic Director of the Cambridge Muslim College. He completed his PhD in social psychology at the London School of Economics on Muslim identity politics among Bradford youth. He has worked as an Equality and Diversity advisor to NHS Bradford and Airedale and is the author of Wandering Lonely in a Crowd: Reflections on Muslim Conditions in the West.

Dr Atif Imtiaz

This conference has been organised in conjunction with a special issue of the international journal Religions jointly edited by Professor Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Dr Riyaz Timol. Click here for more details.
Mufti Dr Abdur-Rahman Mangera is a graduate of the Darul Uloom seminary in Bury, England, where he received formal authorization in the Islamic Sciences. He later specialized in legal judgment (iftā’) at Mazahir Ulum Saharanpur, India, followed by a Masters and PhD in Islamic Studies from SOAS (University of London). He has worked as an imam both in Southern California and London, has authored, edited and translated numerous publications at White Thread Press and is the Principal of White Thread Institute.

Shaykh Abdur-Rahman ibn Yusuf Mangera

Dr Myriam Francois is a journalist, academic and television documentary presenter whose career has spanned the BBC, Al Jazeera, TRT World and the Huffington Post. Several of her documentaries have been shortlisted for awards and her translation of Asma Lamrabet’s book, *Women in the Qur’an: An Emancipatory Reading*, won the English Pen Award. In May 2010, Myriam co-organised and hosted the Rethinking Islamic Reform conference at Oxford University featuring Shaykh Hamza Yusuf and Professor Tariq Ramadan.

Dr Myriam Francois-Cerrah

Qari Asim MBE works simultaneously as a Legal Director at DLA Piper UK LLP and a senior imam at the award-winning Leeds Makkah Mosque. In 2012, he received a MBE for his ground-breaking initiatives in enhancing community relations and for his work in engaging young people. He is Chair of the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board, an executive member of the British Muslim Forum and author of *Our Children: Our Future*.

Imam Qari Asim MBE

Rehanah Sadiq is a Muslim chaplain in Birmingham NHS hospitals, meeting religious, pastoral and spiritual needs of its service users. She trains and mentors chaplains and is an Honorary Visiting Chaplaincy Fellow at Markfield Institute of Higher Education in Leicestershire. Her experience extends to West Midlands Police Chaplaincy and to the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games. She project-managed the award winning *QEHB Mihrab*, installed in the Birmingham Queen Elizabeth hospital.

Rehanah Sadiq

This conference has been organised in conjunction with a special issue of the international journal *Religions* jointly edited by Professor Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Dr Riyaz Timol. Click here for more details.
Abstracts and Bios

Panel 1 – Pecha Kucha Format

Exploring alternative forms of leadership in British Muslim communities: the contested case of Muslim Religious Education teachers
Matthew Vince

Although Muslim leadership has long been the focus of academic attention, this gaze has tended to prioritise “official” Muslim leaders, such as the local Imam and leadership organisations (Birt, 2006; Geaves, 2009). However, the notion of what constitutes a “Muslim leader” is increasingly contested (Jones, O’Toole, DeHanas, Modood, Meer, 2014). Gilliat-Ray et. al.’s (2013) work with Muslim chaplaincy has brought attention to a new sphere of Muslim leadership in the UK. They highlight how these actors represent a ‘new category of religious actor’ in their capacity to blend Islamic notions of pastoral care with the policy frameworks of British public institutions. To do so, they demonstrate the capacity to engage with and renegotiate aspects of the Islamic tradition to meet the requirements of these organisations, and the needs of their users, creating contemporary expressions of Islam. In this paper I make a similar case, demonstrating a need to consider other spaces for leadership, by exploring the experiences of Muslims who work as non-confessional Religious Education teachers in English secondary schools. Often positioned as ‘role-models’ to young Muslims in their schools, and mostly women, these Muslim RE teachers had considerable influence over their pupils’ understanding and embodiment of religion. Recognising their authority in this way, these teachers were aware that they were often in contention with the other “official” local Muslim leaders, and provided valuable critiques of these wider “official” religious discourses.

Dr Matthew Vince completed his PhD in 2018 at the Islam UK-Centre in Cardiff University. His interests include Muslims and education, Religious Education, and the intersections, conflicts, and tensions between them. Prior to his doctorate, Matthew worked as a secondary school Religious Education teacher.

A Palimpsest of Pedagogies: Making Mullahs in Modern Britain
Dr Alyaa Ebbyari

This paper examines continuity and change in Islamic higher education, in particular in institutions or seminaries that train scholars and teachers. There are a number of such Islamic colleges in the UK, mostly linked to mother institutions in India, called the Darul Ulooms. However many of them end up in mosques unable to relate to the community or appeal to their peers. Consequently many of the Imams and religious teachers who serve Britain’s Muslims are considered poorly-educated or ‘out of touch’. Two colleges have emerged in the last ten years with innovative solutions to these issues. My ethnographic research focuses on these two case studies, which are innovating and pushing the boundaries in the training of religious professionals in the Muslim community. One of these is a ‘finishing school’ for students who have undertaken the traditional Indian-style Darul Uloom seminary education, allowing them to contextualize and update their knowledge. The other is...
a development of the Darul Uloom curriculum, streamlining and repackaging it for inner-city London. Both institutions are trying to forge a cohort of informed, active and engaged Islamic leaders, as confident as they are with the Islamic literary canon as they are with social media. I explore the personal and pedagogical experiences of the students, as well as staff, forming this emerging trend.

Dr Alyaa Ebbiary has recently completed a PhD at the Department of Anthropology in the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. Her research is about Islamic education and advanced religious training institutions within the British Muslim community, with particular attention to pedagogical practices and knowledge transmission.

**Clash of authorities in a relational mosque**
*Amin El-Yousfi*

While there is an important literature on the role of imams inside mosques in the UK, studies that focus on the role of mosques’ committee members are scarce. In this paper, I intend to present some of my key findings regarding mosques in the UK as a relational space of both change and resistance. I suggest that rather than experiencing a decline in religious authority as argued in the previous literature, mosques have become controlled by the legal-rational authority of the committee members who constantly emphasise the position of the imam as an employee who should respect and comply with the committee’s rules and decisions. Building on observation and in-depth interviews with local Muslim leaders in London, and drawing on the Asadian framework that looks at Islam as a “discursive tradition”, I explore in this paper the way how the opposition between the committee members, and the community of believers who perceive the imam as the representation of the “apt performance” of the prophet of Islam, produces an “imamat” in continuous adaptation and resistance. I will discuss through several examples and case studies the way how the imam might resist to the mosque committee’s attempts to shrink his role by seeking legitimacy elsewhere within the realm of both modern and Islamic discursivities.

*Amin El-Yousfi is a PhD candidate in Sociology at the University of Cambridge and a Woolf Cambridge Scholar.*

**The future of Muslim religious leadership in Scotland**
*Muhammad Belal Ghafoor*

According to the 2011 Census there are over 76,000 Muslims living in Scotland with almost 70% of them concentrated in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen. Just under a third of Muslims in Scotland are aged below sixteen and almost 90% are younger than fifty years old. These two elements make Muslims the youngest religious group in Scotland. This paper will explore the authorities young Scottish Muslims are turning to for their religious guidance. It will explore the reasons behind young Scottish Muslims turning towards and away from particular authorities, what they envisage religious authorities to possess in terms of qualifications and person skills and whether the Scottish context is significantly different from the rest of Britain. The results of the study will hopefully contribute towards the training of future religious leaders at educational institutions.

*Muhammad Belal Ghafoor is a Jameel Scholar at Cardiff University reading for an MA in Islam in Contemporary Britain. His background includes traditional Islamic studies at two Islamic seminaries in Jamia al Karam (Retford) and Suffa Tul Islam (Bradford). This was followed by a BA in Islamic Studies at the University of Leeds and a Diploma in Contextualised Islamic Leadership at Cambridge Muslim College.*
Shi'a Female University Experiences Shaping Religious Authority Conceptions

Muhammed R. Tajri

The particular analysis of women’s experiences, in religious spaces, is a growing aspect of ethnographic research that has arisen from appreciating the gender-specific dynamics that exist within any social space. This paper brings to light some of the findings resulting from an ongoing research, which explores Shi’a Muslim university student organisations in the UK, the AhlulBayt Societies (ABSocs). From amongst the key finding stemming from the analysis of the collected data, is that some of the experiences of female ABSoc affiliates on campus, are specific to them and identifiable as such; largely not felt by the male research participants, or perhaps not realised in the same way. Whilst the challenges they face often involve cross-gender contact, they are not limited to this dilemma. The wider research explores the concept of religious authority in Twelver Shi’ism, and the performances thereof, among this very distinct segment of UK Muslims. As such, this paper discusses how, because of their gender-specific experiences, some female participants, in practice, adopt their own religious/jurisprudential agency independently of authorities recognised within Shi’i orthodoxy; and how their gender-related contexts may have impacted upon shaping their perceptions of the said established authorities.

Muhammed Tajri is currently a senior lecturer, in Arabic and Islamic studies, at the Al-Mahdi Institute. He completed a BA in Islamic Studies at Middlesex University (2007) whilst simultaneously studying the traditional Islamic Sciences at the Imam Khomeini Shi’a Islamic Seminary, Damascus, Syria (2007-2008). He completed an MA in Islamic studies at Middlesex University (2010) and a second MA at Cardiff University (2013). He is also a PhD candidate at Lancaster University’s Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion.

The Mosque as a Gendered Arena: Women’s Accommodation and Resistance to Traditional Gender Norms and the Importance of Male Allies

Line Nyhagen

Women’s presence and role in mosques in Western Europe is debated both within and outside Muslim communities, but research on this topic is still scarce. Applying a feminist lens on religion and gender, this study situates the mosque as an arena for Western European Muslim women’s religious formation, identity-making, participation, belonging and activism. Based on qualitative interviews with twenty Muslim women in Norway and the United Kingdom, the article argues that women’s reflexive engagement simultaneously cements and challenges male leadership and authority in the mosque. It contends that a complex practice of accommodation and resistance to traditional gender norms is rooted in the interviewed women’s understanding of ‘authentic Islam’ as gender equal. While contemporary mosques can be portrayed as bastions of male power, the article also demonstrates the importance of male allies in women’s struggles for inclusion in the mosque.

Dr Line Nyhagen is Reader in Sociology at Loughborough University. Her research expertise covers religion, citizenship, gender, feminism and women’s movements. Her book Religion, Gender and Citizenship: Faithful Women, Gender Equality and Feminism (with B. Halsaa), is a comparative study of Christian and Muslim women in Europe (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
Sobia Razzaq

What defines a ‘sacred space’ and how are these spaces represented in the diverse Muslim landscape across the UK, especially for women? The concept of a safe, religious space where devout worshippers perform their ritualistic obligations has of recent, developed into a wider need to embody a sense of spiritual nourishment where the devoted can grow in religious literacy as well as emotionally and intellectually to enable an extended sense of community. For women, these spaces have been hard fought with nearly two thirds of mosques in the UK still either denying women use of their local mosque or having no provision; largely due to ‘(mis)understanding’ of what these sacred spaces represent to its trustee board, management and congregation. What are the constructive means by which this can be addressed? Sacred spaces are important for men and women, privately and publicly, it’s where the fullness of community bonds are formed. Hence, the significance of these sacred spaces to be inclusive, as was historically illustrated in the practice of the Prophet (PBUH) in Medinan society. What efforts and collaborations are taking place, or are still required in order to return the sanctity of the sacred space to the centre of our lives where it belongs?

Dr Sobia Razzaq is a senior lecturer in Law at the University of Westminster as well as a certified chaplain. She is an accredited family mediator and currently working as part of HWSF (Herts Welcomes Syrian Families) in her locality with a number of resettled families.

Loci of Leadership: The Quasi-Judicial Authority of Shariah Tribunals in the British Muslim Community
Amin Al-Astewani

Leadership and authority were two central themes in the mission statement of the first ever Shariah tribunal to emerge in the UK. When the Islamic Shariah Council was established in 1982, it noted that its founding meeting had been attended by Muslim scholars “representing the major schools of Islamic jurisprudence” who also represented “a number of mosques in the UK”. This ensured in its own words that it was “widely accepted as an authoritative body with regards to Islamic law” and that it was therefore able to “cater for the basic Shari’a needs of the Muslim community”. This emphasis on authority is easily explained by the fact that Shariah tribunal decisions are not recognised as legally enforceable by the English courts (with certain exceptions) and thus a Shariah tribunal can only function effectively if the community entrusts it with authority. Since 1982, several Shariah tribunals have been formed in the UK and play an important role in guiding the Muslim community through the provision of religious services. This paper critically assesses how Shariah tribunals have used their expertise in Islamic law to wield quasi-judicial authority in the British Muslim community, within a legal system which does not recognise their jurisdiction.

Dr Amin Al-Astewani’s research focuses on the role played by religious tribunals in Western legal systems. Over the past few years, he has led cutting-edge research on Islamic Shariah tribunals. He has advised both policy makers and the UK Board of Shariah Councils on the legal status of Islamic Tribunals.
Panel 2 – Training Muslim Leaders in the West

Moral, Spiritual and social wellbeing requires a special kind of leadership: how British Imams can be trained to guide the millennials

Musharraf Hussain

There are more than 50 Muslim Institutions of further and higher education involved in the education of future religious leaders. This includes colleges that offer degrees in Islamic studies that are accredited by British universities as well as traditional seminaries, and mosque-based teaching of Darse-Nazami and its hybrids. Together, annually they produce more than two hundred graduates. However, few take up official Imamat in mosques, consequently Mosque committees are crying out for Imams in Britain. What's happening? My theory is that these institutions while providing good knowledge and understanding of Shariah, proficiency in Arabic, and familiarity with culture and rituals of Islam fail to train Imams, because they do not focus on important competences. In this paper I will highlight ten most important competences that if delivered in these institutions could produce the required Imams fit for the twenty-first century. These include: understanding British society; gender, equality and pluralism; development of a strong character and spirituality; understanding science of human relationships; pedagogy; youth and community work; leadership and management; da’wa; the art of effective communication.

Dr. Musharraf Hussain OBE, DL is the chief Executive of Karimia institute Nottingham and trustee of Muslim Hands. The translator of Majestic Quran in plain English, he initially trained and worked as a scientist, then later studied Arabic and Islamics in a Seminary and at the university of Al-Azhar Cairo. He is the author of many books including Seven steps to moral intelligence and ‘Let’s learn Islam’ a popular series of textbooks taught in mosques.

The Muslim Seminary: A case study of Ebrahim College

Shams Ad-duha Muhammad

Ebrahim College (EC), a traditional Muslim seminary situated in the busy East End of London was established in 2003 as a seminary with the core aims of the traditional Darul Ulooms but with a firm commitment to be different. Drawing on the shared experience of its founders and core team, EC set out to redesign the Darul Uloom curriculum; balancing the core objectives of the Darul Ulooms and the obvious need to be contextual and in line with the UK education and curriculum framework. In doing so, it sought to prove that a Darul Uloom could produce graduates who were better suited to serve and lead the community in Britain, and progress academically through higher education at post graduate level as well as professionally in diverse sectors. In this presentation, I will discuss what innovative steps were taken in order to realise this ambitious vision; the difficulties faced, and – 15 years on – what outcomes were achieved. Furthermore, I will evaluate whether EC and its graduates carry the religious authority enjoyed by the Darul Ulooms and their graduates. I will also examine how EC’s universal and community based approach to its work has given it deep roots - and authority - in the community far exceeding what is to be expected of a young institution that has only now begun producing graduates who are finding their feet in the real world.

Shaykh Shams Ad-duha Muhammad is co-founder and director of Ebrahim College, an Islamic seminary in East London that trains Muslim faith leaders of the future. He studied in traditional Islamic seminaries in the UK such as the Jamia Taleemul Islam in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, and he studied the canonical texts of hadith in Bangladesh. He also has a Masters in Islamic studies from the University of London. He has worked as an Imam in East London and continues working as a faith leader in the community alongside his work at Ebrahim College.
Developing Research Agendas for British Muslim Intellectual Leadership

Usaama al-Azami

The ulama are often viewed in modern Britain as a distinct class of Muslims, overwhelmingly male, sartorially distinctive, and madrasa trained, who provide authoritative guidance to the ‘laity’ on religious matters. Alongside ulama, one finds Muslims specialising in Islamic studies in a secular academic setting. Increasingly, Muslim scholars are combining these two traditions of scholarship. These classes of people are likely to be the source of tomorrow’s British Muslim intellectual leaders, as, indeed, some such figures play this role today. But what is the basis on which British Muslim intellectual leadership deserves this name? In what areas do British Muslims need intellectual leadership and why? Who has the right to decide what is to be deemed intellectually useful, and on what basis? Should British Muslim scholars develop research agendas that are driven by the needs of the Muslim community? What role does empirical social science research and polling have in deciding what are the relevant needs of the Muslim community’s intellectual leadership, and how could such research be conducted? In the course of this paper, I hope to explore these questions as a hybrid ‘alim-academic who recognises the dearth of empirically guided research agendas for Muslim intellectual leadership in Britain.

Dr Usaama al-Azami is a British scholar teaching at the Markfield Institute of Higher Education — one of Britain’s oldest Muslim higher education institutions. He read his BA in Arabic and Islamic Studies at Oxford University, and his MA and PhD at Princeton University. While at Oxford, he also pursued Islamic seminary studies.

Young Ulama as Custodians of Change

Haroon Sidat

Drawing upon extensive fieldwork as an insider in a British Deobandi Dar al-Uloom, this paper explores the concept of religious authority in modern Britain. For Muslims, a living connection to an authentic past brings for them a sense of authority, authenticity and legitimacy (Asad, 1986). However, the traditional ulama have received scant attention in the study of religion (Zamir, 2014). This paper argues that authority is consensual in that it is based on social perception, perceived expertise and trust. It will analyse the various modalities of authority in a traditional Dar al-Uloom and situate them in the broader social context of inter-generational shifts, increased pluralistic and diverse intra-religious context and technology. What emerges is a particular tradition or maslak, that is undergoing change and adaptation driven by internal and external forces. Reflective of a rethinking tradition (Brown, 1999) the paper argues that a process of evolution is taking place by the custodians of change (Zaman, 2002), in this case, the younger generation of ulama. The Dar al-Uloom tradition, however, is undergoing a transformation from a republic of piety to a republic of letters (Moosa, 2015) which will have implications for religious authority in Britain.

Haroon Sidat is a recipient of the Jameel scholarship for postgraduate study at Cardiff University’s Islam-UK Centre. He has a background in Economics, Education and Traditional Islamic Studies and is a part-time imam. His thesis explores processes of intellectual, spiritual, and cultural formation that take place in a British Dar al-Uloom.
Marrying Text with Context: A Case Study of White Thread Institute

Abdur Rahman Manger

White Thread Institute was founded with the primary intention of catering for Muslim scholars, the ‘alims and ‘alimas who are seen as religious leaders of the Muslim community and who have graduated from Islamic seminaries in the UK and abroad. One estimate indicates that at least 500 graduates reside in certain London suburbs. Many more graduate each year from the thirty or so seminaries and universities located in the United Kingdom, while others seek religious education abroad. While a rigorous theological training encompassing Arabic grammar, Qur’anic commentaries, medieval tomes on jurisprudence and extensive engagement with hadith studies leads to a deep grounding in the Islamic tradition of sacred knowledge, there can sometimes develop a disconnect with the evolving paradigms of a constantly changing world. Thus, it becomes a pressing need for graduates to continually update their knowledge, develop new experiences and learn better ways to impart and apply their wisdom. To date none of the UK seminaries have provided post-graduate courses and advanced Islamic learning. White Thread Institute was founded in September 2017 with precisely this purpose in mind. This paper discusses the vision and goals of the Institute elaborating on how it empowers existing and future graduates to become more effective and relevant carriers of Islamic sacred knowledge in the modern world.

Mufti Dr Abdur-Rahman Mangera is a graduate of the Darul Uloom seminary in Bury, England, where he received formal authorization in the Islamic Sciences. He later specialized in legal judgment (iftá’) at Mazahir ‘Ulum Saharanpur, India, followed by a Masters and PhD in Islamic Studies from SOAS. He has worked as an imam both in Southern California and London, has authored, edited and translated numerous publications at White Thread Press and is the Principal of White Thread Institute.

Panel 3 – Changing Loci of Authority in British Islam

The Net Imam Paradox: Contesting Leadership, Religious Authority and Representation in Cyberspace

Gary Bunt

This paper explores the contestation on issues of representation, leadership and religious authority in cyber Islamic environments, with a specific emphasis on British Muslim communities. In an era where authority networks transcend geographical boundaries, and when digital proficiency can be more important than religious status, there has been an evolution of notions of authority and leadership. Digital technology is shaping how Muslims across vast territories relate to religious authorities in fulfilling spiritual, mystical and legalistic agendas. Millennials and digital natives may respond more to aspects of online authority than ‘analogue’ equivalents, impacting on everyday concepts of religious knowledge and identity, and also raising concerns regarding radicalisation. Online environments often challenge traditional models of authority. One result is the result of digitally literate religious scholars and authorities whose influence and impact go beyond traditional boundaries of imams, mullahs, and shaikhs. This paper looks at how diverse religious perspectives contest for audiences in the UK, reflecting on multimedia approaches from a variety of players. It questions the impact of social media pronouncements, and explores how organisations and platforms in the UK might respond to contemporary concerns in the light of continually shifting religious and media contexts.

Professor Gary R. Bunt’s research area focuses on Islam, Muslims and the Internet. His most recent book is ‘Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority’

This conference has been organised in conjunction with a special issue of the international journal Religions jointly edited by Professor Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Dr Riyaz Timol. Click here for more details.
'Women as natural guides': A New Generation of Female Islamic authorities in Britain
Giulia Liberatore

This paper is based on ongoing ethnographic research with Islamic female leaders who are offering Islamic classes, as well as forms of advice and guidance in Britain. The first section traces the rise of a new generation of female Islamic authorities, while the second addresses the ways in which young scholars have come to establish distinctively female modes of authority. Building on the literatures on Islam and gender, I argue that many young female teachers, preachers or scholars draw on ideas of women’s natural caring abilities and female embodied piety to suggest that they are best suited to offer guidance on problems and difficulties encountered by young Muslim women in Britain by drawing from within, but contextualising, the Islamic tradition. In so doing, they also develop, embody and model a notion of Islamic womanhood that emphasises pious forms of public engagement, and places women at the centre of communities in the British context.

Giulia Liberatore is a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow and Lecturer in Muslims in Europe at Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies/Alwaleed Centre and Sociology working on a project on female Islamic scholarship and guidance in the UK. In January 2019 she will be teaching a new course on Muslims in Europe. Giulia has a PhD in Anthropology from the London School of Economics (LSE), and her recent monograph is entitled Somali, Muslim, British: Striving in Securitized Britain (Bloomsbury, 2017).

Leadership From Below: Congregations and British Mosques
Abdul-Azim Ahmed

The majority of British mosques are, to borrow a phrase from the Christian tradition, congregationalist. They are institutions established by and financed through their congregation. Despite this, the literature on British mosques has at times focused exclusively on the “imams and committee” as the primary agents involved in mosque leadership (see Philip Lewis (2006, 175), Stephen Jones et al. (2014, 216), Ron Geaves (2008, 103), and Dervla Shannahan (2013, 1)). This paper seeks to redress this by considering the role of the congregation as agents involved in the running of British mosques, and as such, stakeholders in British Muslim leadership. My key contention is that leadership, in so far as it is based on individuals influencing and shaping others, is also a product of the “led”, namely the congregations (physical, virtual, geographic, denominational) who shape the criteria and conditions under which leadership is possible. Drawing on Weber’s ideal type of “traditional leadership”, leaders emerge as embodiments of the values and epistemological frameworks of the congregations they lead (or rather, who choose to follow them). Observing these values and frameworks, it is possible to discern hitherto unconsidered denominational fault lines, which may predict the future direction of British mosques.

Dr Abdul-Azim Ahmed is the Jameel Research Associate at Cardiff University’s Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK. He completed his doctorate, an ethnography of a British mosque, in 2017 – the first ethnography of its kind. He has since continued his research and is currently authoring a book on British mosques.
Muslim Umbrella Bodies: Effective Representation or Unfair Gatekeepers?
Harun Khan and Hassan Joudi

The 2011 census found that there are approximately 2.7m Muslims in Britain - 5% of the British population - whilst latest projections indicate the current figure in 2019 is at least 4m. With a vast and expanding number of British Muslims, membership-based Muslim umbrella bodies at different levels have emerged over the last few decades as a means for providing a strong voice to represent the interests of various sectors of British Muslim communities. They include (a) unions of University ‘Islamic Societies’ representing Muslim students, (b) regional Council of Mosques bringing together mosques across a specific town, city or region, (c) nationwide umbrellas for Muslim-led organisations sharing a similar ethnic background or school of thought, as well as (d) umbrellas bodies for specialist sectors such as Muslim faith schools, supplementary schools, Muslim-led charities and Muslim professional networks. This paper will explore (a) to what extent these umbrella bodies have been successful in uniting their respective sectors, lobbying for the interests of their members and sharing best practice, and (b) what factors affect how they are perceived from the outside and lead some to be criticised as unfair "gatekeepers" whilst others are praised as credible and respected voices for their sectors.

Harun Khan, 48, is Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain, having been re-elected for a second term in July 2018. Hassan Joudi, 28, is Deputy Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain and is the youngest ever person to be elected to the post.

Conference Registration Closes 5pm, Wednesday 9th January 2019

This conference has been organised by Cardiff University's Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK and will be held in Cardiff University on Monday 21st January 2019. The conference is open to anyone, academic or practitioner, with an interest in the conference themes and has been organised in conjunction with a special issue of the international journal Religions jointly edited by Professor Sophie-Gilliat Ray and Dr Riyaz Timol. We extend an especially warm welcome to imams or those otherwise engaged in the training of Muslim religious leadership in the West.

You do not need to present a paper on the day in order to attend and participate in the conference. However, you must register your details via our online portal by the registration deadline. We will not be accepting payment on the day; therefore, you must have registered and paid in advance of the registration deadline. The conference fee is £30 which includes a vegetarian lunch and refreshments. However, a concessionary rate of £15 is available for imams, students and the unwaged. Please select the appropriate option when completing your registration.

Registration is open until 5pm on Wednesday 9th January 2019. After this date you will not be able to register to attend the conference. Please start the registration process by following the instructions from this link: https://www.eventsforce.net/cbs/frontend/reg/thome.csp?pageID=107785&ef_sel_menu=2076&eventID=441

For all registration and conference enquiries, please contact MuslimLeadership@cardiff.ac.uk. We look forward to seeing you on the day!

Dr Riyaz Timol
Professor Sophie-Gilliat-Ray

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