

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Shari'a in everyday Muslim life

Associate Professor Adam Possamai and Professor Bryan Turner of the Religion and Society Research Centre, Dr Selda Dagistanli of the School of Social Sciences and Psychology and Professor Malcolm Voyce of Macquarie University are examining multiculturalism and post-secularism by looking at Shari'a in the everyday life of Muslim communities. This project is funded by the Australian Research Council through the Discovery Projects grant scheme.

'Where there are large communities of Muslim migrants, there are demands for the practice of Shari'a in the resolution of domestic disputes,' explains Associate Professor Possamai. 'This traditional Muslim law not only covers public issues such as crime, but also more personal religious matters such as diet, fasting, prayer and sexual relationships. Within multicultural western societies, should recognition of cultural difference imply recognition of legal difference? Recognising Shari'a in a country such as Australia is controversial, not only with the wider Australian community but within sections of the Muslim community including feminist groups within Islam. The desire of many Muslim Australians to abide by Shari'a confounds an understanding of the law as determined by the established legal system and it highlights how communities may abide by their own version of law and order, sometimes using the internet to seek rulings from scholars, Imams and Mullahs. To ban Shari'a will simply push it underground, so can these laws be used side by side?'

This socio-legal research will examine Muslim experiences of Western and Shari'a courts. The researchers will also compare legal policies and experiences in Australia and the USA which all have different traditions of citizenship, secularism and common law. They will interview Muslim lawyers and Imams, and Muslims who are using a mixture of



Shari'a and conventional law. Researchers will also examine court cases and conduct online ethnographic research.

In an era of heightened concern about the fit of Islamic practices and customs with secular democracy, law and citizenship, it is important to understand how ordinary Australian Muslims live their lives according to secular law and Shari'a. This may assist politicians and legal experts in responding to Australia's multicultural society and contribute to well-informed debate about Islam in Australia.

Project Title: Testing the limits of post-secularism and multiculturalism in Australia and the USA: Shari'a in the everyday life of Muslim communities
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