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NEWS AND REPORTS

The Global Landscapes of Muslim Lives: Latin American and Caribbean Intersections

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A new collaborative research project, co-led by Dr. Kholoud Al-Ajarma (University of Edinburgh) and Dr. Ken Chitwood (Universität Bayreuth), seeks to make a timely intervention in global Islamic studies by centering Muslim communities in Latin America and the Caribbean. Despite longstanding Muslim presences across these regions — rooted in histories of colonization, enslavement, indenture, migration, trade, and conversion — scholarly engagement often remains limited, episodic, or framed through external geopolitical lenses. This three-year British–German collaboration (January 2026–December 2028) aims to document and analyze the everyday realities of Muslim life across diverse local contexts while situating them within global dynamics and transregional networks of encounter and exchange.

At its core, the project addresses a persistent imbalance in the study of Islam as a global religion. While significant attention has been paid to Muslim communities in Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, Africa, and North America, Muslim lives in Latin America and the Caribbean have frequently been approached as peripheral or exceptional cases. Existing work, including this special issue, has made clear that such communities are neither marginal nor monolithic. Rather, they are shaped by layered histories of diaspora, racialization, state formation, and interreligious coexistence. Yet systematic, comparative, and empirically grounded analyses across multiple national contexts remain scarce. This project responds to that gap through sustained ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Argentina, Barbados, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, the U.S./Mexico borderlands, and elsewhere in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Researchers from the project will collect approximately one hundred interviews and life histories across these sites in order to examine daily religious practices,

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migration trajectories, social networks, and evolving forms of religious being and belonging. By attending to how local Muslim communities are shaped by, and in turn shape, transregional flows of people, capital, materials, ideas, and technologies, the research moves beyond nation-bound or community-isolated approaches. Instead, it foregrounds dynamic relationality and transregional entanglement: the ways in which Islamic identities and practices in the Americas are produced through ongoing encounters across linguistic, racial, economic, and political boundaries.

Theoretically, the project seeks to contribute to several overlapping conversations in the study of religion. First, it engages debates on lived religion by examining how Islam is practiced, negotiated, and embodied within pluralistic societies where Muslims often represent a minority. Rather than privileging institutional or doctrinal frameworks, the project prioritizes everyday religious life: how individuals and communities navigate questions of belonging, authority, and authenticity in relation to both local environments and global Islamic discourses.

Second, the project advances scholarship on "global Islam" by exploring how Muslim communities in Latin America and the Caribbean participate in networks that connect them to the Middle East, South Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America. These connections may take the form of familial ties, educational mobility, digital media circulation, philanthropic exchange, commodity trading, infrastructural collaboration, or organizational partnerships. By tracing such linkages ethnographically, the research complicates binary models of "center" and "periphery" and highlights the multidirectional character of religious influence and innovation.

Third, the comparative design of the project offers new data for theorizing Islam in minority contexts beyond the familiar frames of secularism or integration. In many Latin American and Caribbean settings, Muslims operate within religious landscapes historically shaped by Catholicism, Protestantism, Afro-diasporic traditions, and Indigenous cosmologies. These plural environments generate distinctive modes of interreligious engagement and hybridized cultural expression that challenge assumptions derived from Euro-American contexts. The anticipated findings will therefore be of interest not only to scholars of Islam but also to those working in anthropology, sociology, migration studies, and Latin American religious studies more broadly.

Empirically, the project will produce between fifteen and twenty detailed community profiles that synthesize ethnographic observations with historical and sociopolitical analysis. These profiles will serve as a foundation for peer-reviewed journal articles, monographs, and an edited volume on Muslim lives in the Americas. In addition to traditional academic outputs, the research team is committed to developing public-facing materials that make its findings accessible to non-specialist audiences, including digital platforms that visualize transregional networks and narrate community histories through multimedia formats (e.g., via interactive story maps, videos, and other online content, to be hosted on a project website) and in collaborations with museums, artists, and other public institutions and individuals.

Beyond the above, the project also aims to strengthen the emerging field of Islamic studies in Latin American and Caribbean through capacity-building and collaborative initiatives. Partnerships with networks such as the Latin America and Caribbean Islamic Studies Association will facilitate knowledge exchange and foster dialogue among researchers working across linguistic and disciplinary boundaries. Two inter-

national colloquia, to be respectively held in Edinburgh and Bayreuth, will provide fora for presenting preliminary findings, developing comparative frameworks, and identifying avenues for future collaboration — including an edited volume. Calls for these colloquia are forthcoming.

Practical opportunities for engagement will also extend to early-career scholars and professionals beyond academia. A two-year postdoctoral fellowship based at the University of Edinburgh (2027–2028) and a research assistantship at Universität Bayreuth (2027–2028) will support emerging researchers interested in ethnographic methods, migration studies, and the study of Islam in the Americas. These positions are intended not only to contribute to the project's research agenda but also to cultivate the next generation of scholars in this growing field.

The project further seeks to involve artists, journalists, curators, and members of the public in the co-creation and dissemination of knowledge. Planned initiatives include collaborative workshops, public lectures, and digital storytelling projects that invite participants to reflect on themes of identity, mobility, and religious practice. By integrating academic and creative perspectives, the research aims to bridge disciplinary divides and encourage broader conversations about Muslim experiences in the Americas and as part of broader Atlantic worlds.

Funding for the project is provided jointly by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), underscoring the international significance of its objectives. Over its thirty-six-month duration, the collaboration will generate new empirical insights while laying the groundwork for sustained institutional partnerships beyond the United Kingdom and Germany, with plans to participate in and/or host events in Latin America and the Caribbean.

More detailed information regarding fieldwork activities, recruitment processes, and forthcoming events will be made available later in 2026. Scholars, practitioners, and interested members of the public are encouraged to follow project developments and consider opportunities for involvement as they arise.

By bringing into focus Muslim lives in Latin America and the Caribbean through comparative, ethnographically grounded research, "The Global Landscapes of Muslim Lives" promises to enrich both theoretical debates and empirical knowledge within the study of religion. In doing so, it highlights the importance of attending to underexamined regional contexts in order to develop more nuanced understandings of Islam as a truly global tradition.

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