

Call for Application: ENIS Spring School 2023, ‘Shifting Boundaries in Muslim Worlds’, Catania (Italy), 13-16 June 2023



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ENIS Spring School 2023, Catania, Italy *Shifting Boundaries in Muslim Worlds*

Date: Tuesday 13 June till Friday 16 June 2023

Location: Premises: University of Catania, Department of Human Sciences (Piazza Dante Alighieri, 24, 95124 Catania)

Application Deadline: Tuesday 28 February 2023

The 2023 Spring School ‘Shifting Boundaries in Muslim Worlds’ is organized at the University of Catania (Sicily, Italy), by the European Network for Islamic Studies (ENIS), which includes among others the Netherlands Interuniversity School for Islamic Studies (NISIS), the Institut d’études de l’Islam et des sociétés du monde musulman (IISMM, France), the Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies (CNMS, at the University of Marburg, Germany) and El Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC: the Spanish National Research Council, Spain).

Theme

It is the perception of “the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses”. This is the famous dictum formulated by Fredrik Barth back in 1969 in the introduction of the much-acclaimed volume *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. The contributors to this book all refuted cultural, ethnic, or religious essentialism, the assumption that ethnic (or religious) groups are neatly bounded communities defined by objectified shared cultural or religious characteristics. This was a genuinely innovative approach in those years. Barth and his associates developed an actor-oriented processual approach in social and political science and history, better known as ‘transactionalism’,

and argued that historical process, social, political, and economic context, and even volatile circumstances, determine to a large extent how and why people consider themselves a group or are considered a group by others. 'Boundary' does not refer to taken-for-granted cultural or religious differences between 'us' and 'them', but to the perception of difference. Boundaries are not inherently given dividing lines based on prefabricated cultural or religious features. This works in two ways; (1) boundaries are altered and reconstituted under ever-changing circumstances, and (2) the perception of boundaries is a situational dynamic that is constituted through interaction between actors.

While Barth primarily focused on ethnic boundaries and political actors based on his fieldwork in New Guinea, Pakistan, and Iraq, his approach has also been applied in the study of Muslim groups. Ethnic or religious consciousness and community building are thus the outcome of the complex interplay between ascription and attribution on the one hand and self-making on the other. Actors, individual or collective, may be associations, movements, parties, and states. They articulate how boundaries are perceived and what particular features are crucial and decisive, resulting in forms of (social, cultural, religious, or economic) inclusion and exclusion.

The ENIS Spring School embarks on this actor-oriented approach to explore and discuss its multiple applications in the study of Islam. The title of the Spring School 'Shifting Boundaries in Muslim Worlds' refers to these processes in all places and contexts where Muslims live or where their presence is at stake. In the contemporary world in flux, there are on the one hand, forces that are actually strengthening boundaries and essentializing differences in response to increasing globalization, but, on the other hand, new modes of community building are taking place, thereby transgressing 'old' boundaries, and reconstituting new ones. The growth of digital media has without a doubt accelerated this process. This means that scientists have to relate to new shifting realities in the post-truth era and engage with these realities.

The study of Islam is unthinkable without taken into consideration the dynamics of boundaries. Be it the study of (historical or contemporary) state-formation, minority policies, discrimination or repression, the continuous dynamics and the crossing and redefinition of existing boundaries as a result of developments and changes, such as sectarian divides and merges, inter and intra-religious interaction and community building, or acts of religious self-making and identification; they all bear relevance to the perception of boundaries and to processes of construing and shifting boundaries. We welcome work that address these and adjacent topics and themes, and we welcome work that critically engages with essentialist understandings of boundaries in a more conceptual sense.

Requirements for applications

The Spring School is addressed to Master 2 or PhD students.

Applications must include the following:

1. a title and abstract* of 300 words (max., in Word format) of your presentation (15 minutes) to be given at the Spring School
2. a short biography* of 50 words max. in the third person (in Word format)
3. a CV
4. a cover letter
5. one-page description of your PhD or MA project

* If your application is successful these will be used in the digital program booklet.

Please send your abstract and biography in Word format (.doc or .docx).

The length of the presentation should be no more than 15 minutes. After the presentations there is 15 minutes reserved for questions and answers. Please note that we invite you to act as discussant for one of the other presentations. The aim of the discussant is to give some brief feedback and ask the first question.

All the Spring School is in English. Thus, it is mandatory to apply in English and to specify in the application: Application Spring School 2023.

Master 2 or PhD students registered in an Italian university have to send their application, according to the procedure mentioned above, to: Prof. Mirella Cassarino (mirella.cassarino@libero.it) and Prof. Daniela Melfa (melfa@unict.it).

Available grants

The Society for Middle Eastern Studies (SeSaMO) puts at the disposal of Italian Master 2 or PhD students three grants of 500,00 € each. Applications will be selected by the Italian members of the Scientific Committee.

Scientific Committee

- Pascal Buresi (CNRS, EHESS-CIHAM)
- Mirella Cassarino (Catane)
- Maribel Fierro (CSIC, Madrid)
- Albrecht Fuess (CNMS, Marburg)
- Daniela Melfa (Messine)
- Thijl Sunier (Amsterdam)
- Joas Wagemakers (NISIS)