

**All Postgraduate, Honours and Undergraduate Students are invited to  
A Masterclass on  
'Critical Religion' – How Theory that Deconstructs the Category of 'Religion' Can Lead to  
Better Research**

**With Visiting UoN Fellow**

**Prof Naomi Goldenberg, Professor of Classics and Religious Studies  
University of Ottawa, Canada**

**10am -12.30pm (X301) NeW Space City Campus, University of Newcastle, December 4,  
2019**

This Masterclass is free to all students and is supported by the Centre for the Study of Violence, University of Newcastle.

Register by email to Dr Kathleen McPhillips ([Kathleen.mcphillips@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:Kathleen.mcphillips@newcastle.edu.au))

***Description of Masterclass***

Over the last two decades, a growing number of academics who study 'religion' have noticed that the idea that is foundational for their scholarship is fiction. I mean fiction in the Latin sense of *factus* as signifying something that is made, built, or constructed. This insight opposes notions of 'religion' as a thing or phenomenon that has always existed everywhere in one form or another and that continues to manifest itself in different traditions and configurations throughout the globe. Proponents of "critical religion" understand religion to be a somewhat incoherent, rather recent concept that is projected as an anachronism onto history. According to this view, 'religion' is a modern, discursive product of differing, context-specific, dynamics of power with particular relation to the politics of colonialism and statecraft. Attendant terms and ideas such as 'secular' and 'sacred' are looked at similarly.

"Critical religion" is sometimes dismissed as mere semantics and/or as irrelevant to 'the real world' in which religion is assumed to exist and is treated as a powerful force in law, culture and experience. Professor Goldenberg disagrees and will argue that better thinking about government, public policy and scholarly research depends on recognizing the confusion adhering to 'religion' as a category of analysis and rejecting it in favor of more coherent concepts.

Prof Goldenberg will use her own work on government and feminism to demonstrate how critical religion can be productively applied. To prepare for the masterclass, participants will be

asked to read two of her papers and then during the Masterclass be invited to think about their own research projects in terms of this deconstructive approach.