

Implicit Religion seeks contributions for a special issue on "**The Return of the 'Cult': Bad Religion in the Age of Trump and COVID**".

The last several years have seen an upswing in the use of normative religious language in political rhetoric and the media. Perhaps driven by the social, ideological and economic strains put on societies by the restrictions to control COVID-19, as well as the increased polarization between a traditionalist, conservative Right, and an identitarian and progressive Left, pejorative terms like 'cult', 'brainwashing' and 'ritual abuse' have found new currency.

This currency extends to shaping political narratives, particularly surrounding 'cults of personality'. The Guardian's recent description of the Conservative UK Government as a 'dangerous cult', and Alan Johnson's (former Labour Cabinet Minister) dismissal of left-wing activist group Momentum as a 'cult', demonstrate the political power of cultic rhetoric. These accusations mark a significant shift in conversations surrounding 'cults' from the term's common association with minority religious movements.

At the same time, there has been a new prominence for normative statements about traditional religious values in the media and political discourse – from the reaction to Lil' Nas X's 'satanic' shoes to the growth of 'cult' and 'true crime' documentaries and podcasts, revived claims of Ritual Abuse, new laws designed to regulate new religions and/or spiritual networks, or to restrict blasphemy or promote specific religions.

This issue welcomes interdisciplinary critical approaches to the use of normative religious language in contemporary narratives, whilst identifying implicit religious themes that have emerged, or become entrenched, in popular and political discourses. There will be particular focus on debates surrounding the pandemic, vaccines, and political movements.

Abstracts of up to 250 words should be sent to Aled Thomas (aled.thomas@wlv.ac.uk) until 30 August 2021. Papers should be 6-8,000 words long, although we welcome proposals for different lengths and novel formats which we will consider on a case-by-case basis.

Timescale:

- 30 August 2021: All abstracts received
- 30 October 2021: Drafts of full papers received by guest editors
- 30 November 2021: Submission of drafts to IR
- 15 February 2022: Final post-review papers to copy-editor
- March 2022: Publication

Implicit Religion offers an international platform for scholarship that challenges the traditional boundary between religion and non-religion, the secular and the tacit assumptions underlying this distinction. It invites contributions from a critical perspective on various cultural formations that are usually excluded from religion by the gatekeeping practices of the general public, practitioners, the law, and even some scholars of religion. Why is this data boundary-challenging? What do such marginal cases tell us about boundary management and category formation with respect to religion? And what interests are being served through acts of inclusion and exclusion? Furthermore, *Implicit Religion* welcomes contributions that focus on the micro-politics of this boundary work, the production of identities and their interplay with (other) socio-cultural dynamics.

Full details for submission and formatting can be found at <https://journal.equinoxpub.com/IR/about/submissions>