

WINTER 2015 COLLOQUIA SERIES

Date: Wednesday, February 11

Time: 3:15–4:45PM

Location: Humanities 1, room 202



Dr. Noah Salomon

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When the State is Everywhere: Rethinking the Islamic Public Sphere

Studies of the post-colonial state in the Muslim world have relied too often on a hard and fast distinction between state and civil society, official discourse and the public sphere. Questioning both the gloomy premise of an absolute space of discipline in the former and the utopian idealism of an unfettered democratic space of deliberation in the latter, my paper seeks to interrogate the continuing salience of the state/public sphere distinction on both conceptual and empirical grounds. Drawing off recent literature on the state from anthropology and political theory, while adding ethnographic observations from the Sudanese experiment with the Islamic state into the mix, my paper seeks to challenge the apotheosis of state sovereignty on which such theories of the public sphere are based, resituating the state within the political practice of everyday life. Through a close ethnographic reading of a movement in contemporary Islamic poetry in Sudan—an under-examined dwelling place for both the state and the public sphere—I will examine how state projects become spaces of creative deliberation and how the public sphere comes to rely on modes of subjectivation central to state ideology. In doing so, I hope both to put into question the coherence of these central categories of political analysis, as well as to lay bare the complicated inner-workings of the Islamic state as it seeks at once to monopolize political power and to extend it into new domains.

Noah Salomon is Assistant Professor of Religion at Carleton College. He is the author of several articles on the intersection of Islamic ways of life and modern modes of political power in Sudan and South Sudan. His book manuscript, *"The People of Sudan Love You, Oh Messenger of God:" An Ethnography of the Islamic State*, is under contract with Princeton University Press.