



THE RELIGION AND DIVERSITY PROJECT/RELIGION ET DIVERSITÉ



James A. Beckford

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Biography

James A. Beckford, Fellow of the British Academy, is Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the University of Warwick. His PhD was awarded in 1972 by the University of Reading. He has held teaching and research positions at the University of Reading, the University of Durham, and Loyola University Chicago. He has also held visiting positions at the University of California, Berkeley; Tsukuba University, Japan; the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris; and the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris.

In addition to editing *Current Sociology* (1980-87) and serving on the editorial boards of numerous journals and book series, he has been elected to the following offices in scholarly and professional associations: President of the Association for the Sociology of Religion (1989-90), Vice-President of the International Sociological Association (1994-98), President of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion (1999-2003) and President of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (2010-11).

His most recent books are: *Religion in Prison: Equal Rites in a Multi-Faith Society* (with S. Gilliat, 1998), *Social Theory and Religion* (2003), *Muslims in Prison: Challenge and Change in Britain and France* (with D. Joly & F. Khosrokhavar, 2005), *Theorising Religion: Classical and Contemporary Debates* (edited with J. Walliss, 2006), *The SAGE Handbook of the Sociology of Religion* (edited with N.J. Demerath III, 2007) and *Migration and Religion* (2 volumes, edited 2015). *The Centrality of Religion in Social Life: Essays in Honour of James A. Beckford* was edited by Eileen Barker in 2008.

Research Statement

All my current research activities are concerned with religion and boundaries. The central questions are about the social, cultural, political and legal processes of setting, enforcing, questioning, challenging and changing boundaries.

Religion in prisons: The research questions that interest me are about the administrative principles and everyday practices that establish boundaries between the acceptable and unacceptable forms of the religions practised by prisoners. These principles and practices may involve various forms of official recognition and prohibition; but they may also involve informal concessions and prejudice. Cross-national comparisons can help to explain the shifting location of boundaries and the conditions in which they are enforced or resisted. My personal research in the UK and France is connected to networks of scholars in Germany, Switzerland and the Nordic countries.

Religion and the state: The focus of my long-standing interest in the institutional frameworks of law and administrative practice governing the expression of religion has been on the emergence of 'partnerships' in the UK between the state and 'faith communities.' This represents a reconfiguration of boundaries and a re-framing of religion as a public utility with special reference to social welfare. The central research questions are about the risks of thereby reifying religion as an object of public policy and of using religion for the purpose of achieving policy objectives. Some of this work was conducted with the 'Mercia group' of scholars who produced in 2006 a 'Review of the evidence base on faith communities' for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Other questions reflect my scepticism about fashionable claims that religion is 'resurgent' in the public sphere of many so-called post-secular societies.

Religion, development and migration: My current research interest is in the twists and turns of sociological thinking about religion in relation to international development and to migration. The central argument is that researchers tend to approach religion as a dimension of international development and migration by focusing too narrowly on religious organizations and individual motivations. My aim is to show the value of thinking about the concept of religion in terms that highlight its more elusive, ambiguous and informal aspects.