



CEDEJ Tuesday Seminar

May 12, 2026

Book Talk:

Martyrs and Migrants:

Coptic Christians and the Persecution Politics of U.S. Empire

By **Candace Lukasik**

Coptic Orthodox Christians comprise the largest Christian community in the Middle East and are among the oldest Christian communities in the world. While once the objects of American missionary efforts, in recent years Copts have been in the spotlight for their Christianity. A spate of ISIS-related bombings and attacks have garnered worldwide attention, leading to a series of efforts from US politicians, think tanks, and NGOs to re-channel their efforts into “saving” these Middle Eastern Christians from Muslims. The increased targeting of Copts has also contributed to the moral imaginary of the “Persecuted Church,” particularly among American evangelicals, which embraces the idea that Christians around the globe are currently being persecuted more than any other time in history.

Drawing on years of extensive fieldwork among Coptic migrants between Egypt and the United States, *Martyrs and Migrants* examines how American religious imaginaries of global Christian persecution have remapped Coptic collective memory of martyrdom. Transnational Copts have navigated the sociopolitical conditions in Egypt and the global consequences of the US “war on terror” by translating their suffering into the ambiguous forms of religious and political visibility. Candace Lukasik argues that the commingling of American conservatives and Copts has shaped a new kind of Christian kinship in blood, operating through a double movement between glorification and racialization. Occupying a position between threat and victim, Copts from the Middle East have been subject to anti-terror surveillance in the US even as they have leveraged their roles as “persecuted Christians.” Through Lukasik’s careful examination of the everyday processes shaping Coptic communal formation, *Martyrs and Migrants* broadly reveals how ideologies of spiritual kinship are forged through theological histories of martyrdom and of blood, demonstrating the global dynamics and imperial politics of contemporary Christianity.

Dr. **Candace Lukasik** is Assistant Professor of Religion and Faculty Affiliate in Anthropology and Middle Eastern Cultures at Mississippi State University. She is the author of *Martyrs and Migrants: Coptic Christians and the Persecution Politics of U.S. Empire* (NYU Press, 2025) and co-editor of *Anthropologies of Orthodox Christianity: Theology, Politics, Ethics* (Fordham University Press, 2025) and *American Examples: New Conversations about*

Religion Volume IV (The University of Alabama Press, 2025). Candace Lukasik is currently researching and writing a new book that extends her interest in the imperial politics of religious belonging by tracing how Assyrians in Iraq and in the diaspora articulate claims to sovereignty and presence through the language of indigeneity. Previously, she was a Faculty Leave Fellow at the Crown Center for Middle East Studies at Brandeis University, an AAUW American Postdoctoral Research Leave Fellow, and a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University in St. Louis. She received her PhD in Sociocultural Anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley.



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