

Dr. Elvire Corboz – University of Edinburgh



Dr Elvire Corboz's research is centered on contemporary Shi'ism, in particular its transnational dynamics. In addition to her continued work on the Shi'i clerical establishment and the institution of the *marja'iyya*, she is currently at work with the question of state-sponsored religio-political transnationalism through a study of Iran's outreach to Muslim communities in the UK. She is also interested in the transnational history of the Khoja Ithna Asheri community. Currently, she is a Lecturer in Contemporary Islam & the Middle East at the University of Edinburgh.

ABSTRACT: "The definition of scholarly capital in Iraq's contemporary *marja'iyya* field"

Knowledge (*'ilm*) is at the heart of the Shi'i system of clerical authority known as the *marja'iyya*. At a time when more or less well-established claimants to the position are proliferating, this article explores the scholarly credentials of the contemporary *marja'* (source of emulation). I conceptualize the *marja'iyya* with Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the field in order to examine how scholarly capital is defined, and possibly redefined, by thirteen religious scholars currently competing in this *marja'iyya* field in Iraq. To do so, I use their 'official' biographies in Arabic and analyze the types of arguments put forward to claim prominence. The biographies invariably address three determinants of scholarly capital: social determinants, in particular the inherited capital of being born into a clerical family; determinants of educational capital, referring to one's religious training and certifications; and determinants of intellectual-scientific prestige capital, such as one's scholarship and teaching. Moreover, the credentials emphasized in the different biographies are much alike, and if a *marja'* does not satisfy them, 'almost-like' credentials are constructed. This indicates a high degree of both homogeneity and stability in the way capital is defined within and by an otherwise internally diverse *marja'iyya* field.