

**Religion and/as Media**  
**Graduate Seminar: Syllabus**

Department: Media, Culture and Communication

School: Steinhardt

**E58.2284 (section 001)**

**Thursday 0455PM-0705PM**

**Instructor: Arvind Rajagopal, 555 Pless Annex; ar67 @ nyu.edu**

**194 Mercer room 308 or department conference room**

Description

In this course, we will begin with an overview of some of the problems in thinking about religion in the context of what Derrida has identified as ‘globalatinization.’ We will consider the extent to which many of our ideas about religion are shaped not only by historical legacies, but as well by material cultural practices and conditions, and techniques of mediation that are irreducible accompaniments and constituents of the beliefs in question. We will consider how the narrative arc of the Enlightenment sought to place religion, in ways that shifted over time. An influential self-conception about the European Enlightenment was that it expressed the triumph of secular reason over the *ancien regime*, and the defeat of inherited privilege of all kinds. the relegation of religion to the private sphere was in effect to declare religion to be free from politics; such a gesture could only be a prelude to a new form of politicization. We will observe the playing out of an interesting set of contradictions: religion is widely present, but understood in terms that fail to grapple with what is properly religious, due variously to Enlightenment conceits, imperial reasoning, nationalist self-fashioning, and the deification of technology. No definitive statement or argument can be attempted on religion as a result, although we will read authors who essay authoritative definitions.

We will consider early modern mobilizations of religious identity, and oppositions between Jewish and Christian, Christian and Islamic, and religious and secular identities, and assess how religious beliefs and practices can be rendered into a historical telos, racialized and/or nationalized. We will also examine how religious identities can be mapped onto language, and onto technology. Last but not least, we will consider how what was recently hailed as the End of History soon led to a theological display of power with Operation Shock and Awe, and a global war against Evil, a.k.a. “Islamic fascism.” We will conclude by examining the sacralization of democracy, and the profane quality of the terror it opposes itself to, and what appears in their wake as a serious challenge to Enlightenment conceits about the separation of church and state, and about the ability of reason to defend itself by purely reasonable means.

Unless mentioned, all readings are or will be posted on Blackboard.

Course Requirements

Participation in class discussions and presentations on assigned readings: 30%

Research Paper: 70% (Preliminary Outline: 10%; Final paper: 60%).

The topic for the research paper will be selected in consultation with the instructor.

The research paper will be judged in terms of

- a) its ability to interpret and apply concepts and theories from this class.
- b) clarity and originality of expression
- c) organization of paper.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

1. Régis Debray, *God: An Itinerary*. Tr. Jeffrey Mehlman. Verso 2004.  
REMAINDERED AT STRAND BOOK STORE (Hurry while stocks last!).
2. Bruce Lincoln, *Holy terrors : thinking about religion after September 11*. Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2003.

### **Week One: Introduction**

Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge at the Limits of Reason."

### **Week Two: A Materialist Interpretation of Western Religious History**

Régis Debray: *God: An Itinerary*. Zone Books 2005.

### **Week Three: The World Spirit in World History**

GWF Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*.

### **Week Four: Conceptualization and Critique**

Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (extract).

Clifford Geertz, *Religion as a Cultural System* (from *The Interpretation of Cultures*).

Talal Asad. *Genealogies of Religion* (selection).

### **Week Five: Capitalist Mediations: Aura, Fetish, Spirit**

Marx on the Commodity, *Capital* Vol. 1. (selection)

Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (extract); and *From Max Weber* eds. Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills (selection)

Walter Benjamin – *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*

[http://web.bentley.edu/empl/c/rcrooks/toolbox/common\\_knowledge/general\\_communication/benjamin.html](http://web.bentley.edu/empl/c/rcrooks/toolbox/common_knowledge/general_communication/benjamin.html)

### **Week Six: Seeing, Believing, Modernizing**

Lorraine Daston *Miraculous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe* *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 18, No. 1. (Autumn, 1991), pp. 93-124.

Daniel Boyarin "This We Know to Be the Carnal Israel": Circumcision and the Erotic Life of God and Israel," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 18, No. 3. (Spring, 1992), pp. 474-505.

Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, *Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity*, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Summer, 1993), pp. 693-725

Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity and Belief*. Princeton 1998 (selection).

### **Week Seven: Word, Voice and the Spirit of Nationalism**

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso 1983. (extract)

Frantz Fanon, "This is the Voice of Algeria," in *A Dying Colonialism*.

Rudolf Mrazek, "Let Us Become Radio Mechanics": Technology and National Identity in Late-Colonial Netherlands East Indies. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 39, No. 1. (Jan., 1997), pp. 3-33.

### **Week Eight: American Religion: Civil and Uncivil**

Robert N. Bellah *Civil Religion* (essay).

Orlando Patterson, "Feast of Blood: Race, Religion and Human Sacrifice in the Postbellum South," in *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries*. Washington DC: Civitas Counterpoint, 1998, pp. 169-232.

### **Week Nine: Modernizing Religion and its Transformations - I**

Michael Taussig, *The Magic of the State* (selections).

Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "The Colonization of Consciousness."

Robert Weller, "Living at the Edge: Religion, Capitalism, and the End of the Nation-State in Taiwan," *Public Culture* 12(2): 477-498.

Philip Jenkins, "The Christian Revolution," in *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. Oxford, 2002, pp. 1-14.

### **Week Ten: Modernizing Religion and its Transformations - II**

Kajri Jain, "The Efficacious Image and the Sacralization of Modernity," from *Gods in the Bazaar: The Economies of Indian Calendar Art*. Duke University Press, 2007.

Arvind Rajagopal, "'Prime Time Religion,' and 'A Split Public in the Making and Unmaking of the Ramjanmabhumi Movement,'" from *Politics After Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India*, Cambridge 2001.

### **Week Eleven: Modernizing Religion and its Transformations - III**

Nilufer Gole, "Islam in Public: New Visibilities and New Imaginaries." *Public Culture* 14(1), 2002, pp. 173-190.

Joan W. Scott, "Symptomatic Politics: the banning of Islamic head scarves in French Public Schools," *French Politics and Culture*, vol. 23, no. 3, Winter 2005, 106-127.

Charles Hirschkind,

Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Gender and the Sexual Politics of Public Visibility in Iranian Modernity," in Joan Scott and Debra Keates, *Going Public: Feminism and the Shifting Boundaries of the Private Sphere*. University of Illinois Press, 2004.

## **Weeks Twelve and Thirteen: Sacred democracy, profane Islam, holy terror**

Bruce Lincoln, *Holy terrors : thinking about religion after September 11*. Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Klaus Milich, "Fundamentalism Hot and Cold: George W. Bush and the "Return of the Sacred," *Cultural Critique* - Number 62, Winter 2006, pp. 92-125.

Melani McAlister, "Prophecy, Politics, and the Popular: The Left Behind Series and Christian Fundamentalism's New World Order," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* - Volume 102, Number 4, Fall 2003, pp. 773-798.

Jodi Dean, "Evil's Political Habitats," *Theory & Event* - Volume 8, Issue 2, 2005 [online]

Peter Yoonsuk Paik, "Smart Bombs, Serial Killing, and the Rapture: The Vanishing Bodies of Imperial Apocalypticism," *Postmodern Culture* - Volume 14, Number 1, September 2003.

Allen Feldman, "Abu Ghraib: ceremonies of nostalgia," [opendemocracy.net](http://opendemocracy.net), Oct 18 2004.

Faisal Devji, "Osama bin Laden's message to the world." <http://opendemocracy.net> 21 Dec. 2005

----. "Spectral brothers: al-Qaida's world wide web." From <http://opendemocracy.net>. 19 Aug 2005

Faisal Devji: "Back to the future: the cartoons, liberalism, and global Islam." From <http://opendemocracy.net> 13 - 04 - 2006.

Eyad El Sarraj; Linda Butler, "