



4" 3/4"

16"

Dome cluster

# Rethinking Public Religion in Africa and South Asia

## TIME, SPACE, MEMORY

Columbia University  
October 3rd & 4th, 2019

34.5"

3"

20"

4"

12 1/2"

5 1/2"

18"

8"

4"

26.5" - Pillars

47" - window height

26" - Base

height

27

3"

9.5"

13.5"

32"

K

Y

Institute for Religion, Culture and Public Life  
Sponsored by the Henry R. Luce Foundation

### Thursday, October 3<sup>rd</sup>

Riverside Church  
Room T-20

- 9:15 – 9:30 AM     **Mohamed Amer Meziane, Columbia University**  
Introductory Remarks
- 9:30 – 10:30 AM     **Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Columbia University**  
*Dahr and Transcendance*  
Respondent: Irfan Ahmad
- 10:30 – 11:30 AM     **Ali Benmakhlof, Université Paris-Est Créteil**  
*From Ibn Khaldoun to Contemporary Issues: Historical Discontinuities*  
Respondent: Souleymane Bachir Diagne
- 11:30 – 11:40 AM     Coffee Break
- 11:40 – 12:40 PM     **Deepti Misri, University of Colorado, Boulder**  
*Imagining Crip Futures in Kashmir*  
Respondent: Rajbir Singh Judge
- 12:40 – 2:00 PM     Lunch
- 2:00 – 3:00 PM     **Bruno Reinhardt, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Brazil**  
*Immaterial Labor in a Pentecostal Denomination from Ghana*  
Respondent: Samia Henni
- 3:00 – 3:10 PM     Coffee Break
- 3:10 – 4:10 PM     **Irfan Ahmad, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Germany**  
*Beyond Mother Goddess: Imagining India as a Bouquet, Bride and Garden*  
Respondent: Prathama Banerjee

4:10 – 4:20 PM     Coffee Break

- 4:20 – 5:20 PM     **Rajbir Singh Judge, Columbia University**  
*Conceptual Aspects of Temple Insurgency: The Law's Threshold and Darbar Sahib*  
Respondent: Alex McKinley

### Friday, October 4<sup>th</sup>

Riverside Church  
Room T-20

- 9:30 – 10:30 AM     **Samia Henni, Cornell University**  
*French Colonial Domesticity and Religion: On How to "Francize" Algerian Women?*  
Respondent: Deepti Misri
- 10:30 – 11:30 AM     **Prathama Banerjee, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi**  
*Sovereignty, Insurgency and the Question of Time*  
Respondent: Ali Benmakhlof
- 11:30 – 11:40 AM     Coffee Break
- 11:40 – 12:40 PM     **Alex McKinley, Colgate University**  
*Making a Mountain Like a City: Accelerating Pilgrimage and Abbreviating Memory in Sri Lanka*  
Respondent: Bruno Reinhardt
- 12:40 – 2:00 PM     Lunch
- 2:00 – 2:30 PM     **Mohamed Amer Meziane, Columbia University**  
Concluding Remarks
- 2:30 – 3:30 PM     Wrap-up Discussion

## Concept Note

Religious traditions have been re-conceptualized as embodiments and discourses through which multiple temporalities and multiple spaces can be encountered, lived and remembered beyond the homogeneity of secular time and space. If religion is re-conceptualized as tradition, does it mean that public religions become a way of challenging the specific articulation of space, time and memory which defines imperial progress as “secular”? What distinguishes secular and religious time, space and memories? If secular time, space and memories are not neutral, to what extent do they include or conflict with religious embodied memories in the public sphere?

The notion of the public sphere should itself be questioned with regards to questions of time, space and memory. Indeed, the public sphere is often defined as a public *space* to which citizens are supposed to have equal access regardless of religion, race and gender. Nevertheless, one might ask: what kind of space is the public sphere and what kind of time is “public time”? And, how do they differ from religious time and space? How do commemorations of national history through architecture overlap or conflict with Temples, Mosques or Churches in the public? How are religious embodied memories of trans-historical events transformed by colonial and post-colonial states in North Africa, Africa and South Asia?

By raising these questions, this workshop is intended to produce dialogues between philosophers and social scientists thinking both from and about Africa and South Asia.



*This workshop is organized by the Institute for Religion, Culture and Public Life at Columbia University. It is part of the Rethinking Public Religion in Africa and South Asia project, funded by the Henry R. Luce Foundation.*

## Abstracts

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Columbia University**

*Dahr and Transcendence*

From the two occurrences of the word in the Quranic text to its significance and function in the philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal, the concept of dahr presents multiple meanings that will be examined. What does the transformation of dahr from being the name of a pre-Islamic deity to being one of the names of the one God mean? What does that say about the significance of human life and transcendence? Those are the main questions examined in the presentation.

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**Ali Benmakhlouf, Université Paris Est Créteil**

*From Ibn Khaldun to Contemporary Issues: Historical Discontinuities*

Having in mind contemporary issues in Africa as the extraordinary development of towns, and the superposition of many memories (colonial and non-colonial), I'll try in this lecture to read Ibn Khaldun as a historian who was 1) aware of the way discontinuities and disparities that make history and 2) the way memory is embodied in cities. What he called “Al Umrân” (urbanity) is as well an idea of time as of space. In that perspective, the criteria of historicity is less an acceleration of time (a very modern criterium) than a “modification”. This notion, which is not only a temporal one, connects history and politics and allows Rhetoric to play its part: the circulation of signs of power.

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**Deepthi Misri, University of Colorado, Boulder**

*Imagining Crip Futures in Kashmir*

This paper examines the shape of time for those living in Indian-occupied Kashmir, which was until very recently Hindu-dominated India's only Muslim-majority state. I focus particularly on two calendars that became embroiled in a “calendar war” in the year 2017. Situating these calendars against a larger backdrop of visual representations of time in occupied Kashmir, I examine how each mobilized narratives about the past, present and future in Kashmir—narratives that were negotiated through competing gendered images of youth via rhetorics of ability and disability. Specifically, I take up the tensions between two strands of disability studies: liberal approaches that emphasize the celebration of disability, and biopolitical critiques that foreground the violent production of debilitation, to consider how Kashmiri visual production offers a vision of crip futures for the vast population now living with disabilities in Kashmir.

**Bruno Reinhardt, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Brazil**  
*Immaterial Labor in a Pentecostal Denomination from Ghana*

In this paper I reflect about space, time, and memory as components of Pentecostal institution building in contemporary Africa. My focus will be on the organizational aspects of religious publicity, the particular strategies whereby a transnational denomination originated in Ghana has acquired a discernible corporate personhood. Avoiding deprivation, epiphenomenal, and culturalist approaches to religion and the economy, I propose to frame LCI's discipleship structures as a large-scale provider and producer of immaterial labor and human capital for God. I show how this power strategy mobilizes capillary and insular time-spaces. Despite its marked focus on temporal discontinuity, LCI's pedagogy does not reject memory per se, but transfigure it into mnemonics, techniques of Bible memorization that reflect the entanglements of Christian ethics and self-management in global Pentecostalism.

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**Irfan Ahmad, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Germany**

*Beyond Mother Goddess: Imagining India as a Bouquet, Bride and Garden*

Emergent in the nineteenth century, imagination of India as a Hindu mother goddess (Ramaswamy 2003) has enjoyed currency across the divides of revivalist, traditionalist, modernist, Hindu nationalist, secular nationalist, socialist and more. This paper drafts an alternative imagining of India by Muslims, including 'ulema. By outlining the imagining of India as a bride, bouquet and garden, it lays bare the unexplored relationship amongst time, tradition, nation, and religion.

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**Rajbir Judge, Columbia University**

*Conceptual Aspects of Temple Insurgency in Colonial Amritsar: The Law's Threshold and Darbar Sahib*

This paper explores a central Sikh institution, Darbar Sahib in Amritsar, in the 19th Century and its relation to colonial law. More specifically, this paper examines the colonial state's violent attempt to control Sikh sites and institutions through Act XX of 1863, which created a foundational law for the management of religious endowments. But Darbar Sahib caused much trouble for the colonial state, as officials noted Darbar Sahib refused effective management and functioned as the threshold of colonial law. Therefore, colonial officials continually suspended the law at the site and explicitly produced Darbar Sahib as an exception

to the law. Taking a parallax view, I examine both this reach and the absence of colonial law by considering how Sikhs became situated temporally and spatially within the colonial imagination and, simultaneously, how Darbar Sahib refused this adjudication.

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**Samia Henni, Cornell University**

*French Colonial Domesticity and Religion: On How to "Francize" Algerian Women?*

During the Algerian Revolution (1954–1962), the French colonial authorities launched a colossal socio-economic development plan in colonized Algeria, which included the construction of housing for one million people. Algerian colonized women, called "Muslim Women," were expected to adapt their domestic space to French requirements prescribed by French colonizers, as well as to allocate the family budget to household expenditures. The French colonial regime stated that: "The Muslim woman... is the one who will require a house that is properly exposed, allowing good exposure to sunlight in winter, and also to open the windows to the outside. This woman will also very soon require the removal of any opaque walls that are not based on Koranic recommendations, and she will quickly consider that her house and small courtyard are too cellular in form." Algerian women were expected not only to demand and lead the modifications of the spatial configuration of their domestic spaces, but also to disremember their traditional ways of living and being, which the French authorities deemed inappropriate. To achieve its goals, the French authorities issued specific directives, created special military and civil units, and hired French women from France to discipline Algerian women in colonized Algeria. Based on archival sources and accounts of Algerian women, this paper examines the protocols and processes with which the French colonial authorities attempted to denigrate Algerian ancestral values and to impose a colonial domestic space rooted in the rhetoric of "modernization" and "assimilation."

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**Prathama Banerjee, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi**

*Sovereignty, Insurgency and the Question of Time*

The modern colonial state ruled by virtue of the temporal principle of progress and modernization is well known. Equally well known, though less discussed, is the fact that the postcolonial developmental state, in regions such as south Asia, also continue to wield a temporal principle – that of development of backwards and primitives – as the ground of its

governmental technologies. In this paper, I discuss other forms of what I call 'temporal sovereignty', drawing examples from pre-colonial South Asia, such as early Indian kingships, the medieval Mughal state and the south east Asian Buddhist regimes. I also argue – drawing upon the work of modern South Asian thinkers, such as Tagore, Iqbal and Aurobindo – that historically, insurgency too has often been thought of in terms of the work of time.

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**Alexander McKinley, Colgate University**

*Making a Mountain Like a City: Accelerating Pilgrimage and Abbreviating Memory in Sri Lanka*

What happens to the collective memories preserved on a pilgrimage trail when travel on its route is accelerated? At the Sri Pada mountain in Sri Lanka, where millions of Buddhists journey annually to worship a footprint on the summit, common stops along the trail were commemorated in Sinhala verse, as the slow pace of traditional pilgrimage was an opportunity to unite groups in song and recount myths about the space. Modern infrastructure that eases travel to and from the mountain, and facilitates ascents and descents in only several hours, has changed the collective culture of Sri Pada. The public memory and rituals preserved in poetic traditions and trail stops are now abbreviated with the time constraints of contemporary devotees. The mountain thus absorbs certain attributes of a city, with increasingly impersonal crowds, and its own particular rush hours. Lost among all these people in haste are the reflections on mindfulness, virtue, and unity that were once part of the performed memories within pilgrimage poetry. Sri Pada is now left with more political and corporate slogans than collective songs, yielding shallower identities that measure the public good of pilgrimage by value rather than virtue.

## Biographies

**Irfan Ahmad** is Senior Research Fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen, Germany. Irfan is the author of *Islamism and Democracy in India: The Transformation of the Jamaat-e-Islami* (2009) and *Religion As Critique: Islamic Critical Thinking from Mecca to the Marketplace* (2017), and his numerous articles have appeared in leading international journals. He is a contributor to the prestigious *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*. Irfan is on the Editorial Committee of *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*.

**Mohamed Amer Meziane** is a philosopher whose current research projects and teaching activities involve IRCPL, the Department of Religion, and the Institute for African Studies. He is also a research associate at the Sorbonne Institute for Law and Philosophy and a member of the governing board of the CNRS-based Research Network *Islam et chercheurs dans la Cité*. His new research project analyzes the ways in which imperial transformations are challenged within African spaces and questions the boundaries of Africa and the Middle East through the religious, racializing and ecological effects of political geographies.

**Prathama Banerjee** is a historian at the Centre for Studies of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi, India. Her interest lies in the intersection of political philosophy, cultural history and literary studies. Her new book, *Elementary Aspects of the Political: Histories from the Global South*, is forthcoming in 2020. Her earlier book was *The Politics of Time: 'Primitives' and History-Writing in a Colonial Society*, OUP, 2006, in which she looked at the emergence of the modern discipline of history in colonial Bengal from an encounter with 'peoples without history'—tribes, aborigines, primitives—as they were variously called.

**Ali Benmakhlouf** is Professor of Philosophy at Paris-Est Créteil University and senior member of the University Institute of France. His research interests include Arabic philosophy, the philosophy of logic, and questions of bioethics. He has published books on Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, and Alfred North Whitehead, as well as on Averroes and Al Farabi. He is editor of the Arabic edition of *The Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, and the author most recently of *La conversation comme manière de vivre* (2016), *Pourquoi lire les philosophes Arabes?* (2015), *Selon la raison* (2014), and *L'identité, une fable philosophique* (2011).

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne** is a professor in the Departments of French and Philosophy at Columbia University. His areas of research and publication include history of philosophy, history of logic and mathematics, Islamic philosophy, and African philosophy and literature. His most recent publications include *African Art as Philosophy: Senghor, Bergson, and the Idea of Negritude* (2011); *The Ink of the Scholars: Reflections on Philosophy in Africa*, (2016), *Open to Reason: Muslim Philosophers in Conversation with Western Tradition* (Columbia University Press, 2018).

**Samia Henni** is an Assistant Professor of History and Theory of Architecture and Urbanism at Cornell University. She is the author of the award-winning *Architecture of Counterrevolution: The French Army in Northern Algeria* (2017), the editor of *War Zones: gta Papers 2* (2018), and the curator of *Discreet Violence: Architecture and the French War in Algeria* (2017–19). She is working on a book provisionally titled *Colonial Toxicity: The French Army in the Sahara*. Henni taught at Princeton University, ETH Zurich, and Geneva University of Art and Design. She received her Ph.D. in the history and theory of architecture (with distinction, ETH Medal) from ETH Zurich.

**Rajbir Singh Judge** is a historian with affiliations in the Department of Religion and the South Asia Institute. His current project examines the ways in which Sikhism at the end of the 19th Century remained a generative site through which Sikhs and their diverse milieu in the Punjab contested not only British rule, but the very nature of sovereignty, refusing closures enacted by the colonial state. More broadly, he specializes in the cultural and intellectual history of South Asia, with a particular emphasis on the Punjab. His most recent publications can be found in the *Journal of the History of Sexuality* and *History & Theory*.

**Alex McKinley** has studied the religious traditions of Sri Lanka and their intersections since first visiting the island in 2006. He has earned a B.A. in Religious Studies from Grinnell College, a Masters of Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School, and a Ph.D in Religion & Modernity from Duke University. His doctoral dissertation, *Mountain at a Center of the World*, gives a comprehensive account of the Sri Pada pilgrimage site, based on extensive archival studies in Sri Lanka and ethnographic research during a full pilgrimage season at the mountain in 2015–2016. He is currently a lecturer in the University Studies department at Colgate University.

**Deepti Misri** is a literary and cultural critic whose work focuses broadly on questions of gender, violence and representation. Her areas of interest span South Asian literary and cultural production, transnational feminist studies, and feminist theory and criticism. In addition to her monograph *Beyond Partition* (2014), her articles have appeared in *Signs*, *Meridians*, *South Asian Popular Culture* and *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, among other venues. She is currently serving on the editorial board of the Himalayan Studies journal *Himalaya*. Her current work focuses on literary and visual representations of militarized occupation in Indian-administered Kashmir.

**Bruno Reinhardt** holds a PhD in anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley. He teaches at the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Brazil, and was previously a postdoctoral research fellow at Utrecht University. He is author of *Espelho ante Espelho: a Troca e a Guerra entre o Neopentecostalismo e os Cultos Afro-Brasileiros em Salvador* (2007) and has published articles on anthropological theory and the anthropology of religion and secularism in Brazil and Ghana.



3' + 4' + 4' + 6' + 4' + 3'

Dome height = 33.5'



12.5' + 5.5' + 8' + 4' + 13' + 26.5' - Pillars + 21 1/2' - Base

26.5' - Pillars

26' - Base

10' 0" 0"

22' + 19.5' + 4.5' + 3'