

Atalia Omer

“Interfaith Violence: Judeo-Christian Zionism, Muslim Zionism, and Antisemitic Zionism”

One of the key oversights in the study of “interfaith dialoguing” and “interreligious peacebuilding” is its lack of accountability to the study of race and racism. Decolonial and critical scholarship in religion offer tools to question the construction of “religion” as a comparative anthropological and social category, which has been racialized and mobilized to dehumanize certain humans in the context of Christian European colonialisms and their afterlives. However, most scholarship in religious and peacebuilding often promotes a simplified view of good “religious actors” speaking “prophetically” to power, while largely ignoring how they are embedded in power structures and how “secular” ideologies are also based on political theological imaginaries and ideas about belonging and exclusion. The paper will center the analytic of interfaith violence in interrogating the convergences of Islamophobia, antisemitism, Euro-American white Christian ethnoreligious “civilizational” nationalisms, and Israeli settler colonial nationalism. I will investigate the civilizational Islamophobic themes in Israeli rhetoric by examining archives of speeches and media in English and Hebrew. I will correlate this analysis of what I call “Judeo-Christian Zionism” with an examination of four key moments/documents: Project Esther, the Abraham Accords, Trump’s “Peace Plan” for Gaza, and the fracturing of MAGA on Israel.

Davide Marino & Giovanni Maltese

“Falun Gong and the Far-Right Question”

This paper approaches the Far Right through the trajectory of the religious group Falun Dafa 法轮大法 (also known as Falun Gong 法轮功, FLG). Following its persecution in China in the late 1990s and the subsequent establishment of a significant international diaspora, FLG has increasingly aligned itself with discourses often associated with reactionary politics, including anti-science rhetoric, homophobia,

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opposition to “wokeism,” and racism, while also forming ties with religious groups deemed ultra-conservative, particularly U.S. Evangelicals, and with global political actors often associated with the far right. Rather than taking “Far Right” as a self-evident category, the paper uses this case to ask what may be obscured when the term is applied too readily: the heterogeneous political logics at work, the shifting reasons for alignment, and the broader failures of critics of extremist political actors (including academia) to address as political the asymmetries and discontents on which such formations draw. Not only were FLG’s reactionary agenda and system of alliances shaped in opposition to the “non-Far Right (?)” authoritarianism of the Chinese Communist Party, but an unsettling ambiguity is also evident in the discourse surrounding FLG. While, especially in the U.S., the movement receives support through conservative networks, its cause is also often framed globally (and most notably in academia) through progressive discourses, such as the defence of “human rights” and “religious freedom.” This paper argues for the potential of Religious Studies to provide a critical framework for identifying and cautioning against strategies of what we call “moral exoticization,” employed by both far-right actors and some of their adversaries in constructing hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives. With this aim in mind, we propose a model that aligns conceptual analysis with close attention to the sites of contestation where political and ideological positions are shaped, thereby seeking to overcome both overemphasis on conceptual reflection at the cost of empirical analysis and vice versa.

Davide Marino is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Göttingen, Germany. His research examines the interplay between East Asian religions - particularly Chinese traditions - and European esotericism, with a special focus on Traditionalism. More recently, he has been investigating various forms of “alternative spirituality” in continental China, with particular attention to processes of translation and the reconfiguration of contemporary religious life. He is currently working on a project on Chinese criminalized religious movements (xiéjiào 邪教) within global religious and political discourses.

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Giovanni Maltese, Professor of Religious Studies and Intercultural Theology at Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU), works on politics and Pentecostalism, Islamic reform, and esoteric movements, with Southeast Asia as primary field site. He has contributed to shaping the emerging field of global religious history, especially by systematically integrating queer studies into it. Maltese is Director and PI of the DFG Kolleg-Forschungsgruppe “Alternative Rationalities and Esoteric Practices in Global Perspective”.

Fabian Schäfer

“Disinformation and Conspiracy Narratives in the Online Media Strategy of Happy Science (Kōfuku no Kagaku): Pathways into the Global Far Right”

This paper examines how the Japanese new religious movement Happy Science (Kōfuku no Kagaku) and its political arm, the Happiness Realization Party, operationalize a far-right digital playbook. Using a mixed-methods design - a quantitative analysis of two affiliated online news sites and a qualitative close reading of a high-traffic YouTube channel - I show how the group leverages right-wing framings, conspiracy narratives (including pro-Russian disinformation), and anti-media rhetoric to exploit platform logics, secure algorithmic visibility, and cultivate affective followings. I situate this “media mission” historically (as a long-standing antagonism toward mainstream media) and strategically (as an adaptation to today’s attention economy), and assess its interoperability with the global far-right media sphere. Although centered on Japan, the case maps onto a broader transnational pattern: religious-political actors converge on similar digital repertoires - culture-war signaling, cross-border disinformation tropes, and networked virality - raising comparative questions for religion-and-media studies and research on the global far right.

Sushmita Nath

Emerging as Bharat: 'Greater India' and the New Hindutva's Post-national Pedagogical and Transformative Agenda

The contemporary crisis of the global liberal order is visible in the rise of popularity of far right movements and populist parties and governments, such as the MAGA and Trump, Brexit and UKIP, Hindutva and Modi. By drawing attention to the ideology of Hindutva, the notion of 'Greater India,' and Modi's populism, the paper argues that the 'new Hindutva,' with the state machinery at its disposal for over a decade (since 2014), has a post-national pedagogical and transformative agenda of reshaping nominally liberal and secular norms and institutional structures in India. In their rhetorical insistence to call India through its Hindi designation Bharat, the Hindu nationalist party, BJP, under the leadership of prime minister Modi, has put forward an idea of a 'new' India, which stands in direct contrast to and in confrontation with the nation's originary Nehruvian ideals of liberal democracy and secular citizenship. The paper argues that the BJP's new Hindutva seeks to reshape nominally liberal institutions and norms that became globally hegemonic in the aftermath of the second world war into non-liberal and illiberal ideas and institutions: from territorial sovereignty of the nation-state to 'Hindu sovereignty,' from secular to ethno-national citizenship, and democracy reduced to its electoral form of participation. By focussing on contemporary India, the paper attempts to answer the question why do anti-liberal worldviews and politics stand as main contenders to today's crisisridden liberal political order?