

Panel 3: Materializing Religion: on Media, Mediation, Immediacy

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Embodied Constellations of Behavior: Buddhist Weizzā Devotees and Lived Religion in Myanmar

My paper explores the relationships that develop between men and women of Myanmar with sorcerer-saints (Burmese: weizzā) and the consequences of such connections for the everyday lives of these people. My ethnographic and textual research seeks to uncover the beliefs and practices that have developed around saints, whose cults, visible throughout the country, attract large numbers of devotees from all walks of life. The economic, medical, and political changes that have been taking place in Myanmar over the past fifty years are reflected in the relationships Burmese Buddhists form with sorcerer-saints and in the content found in popular Burmese Buddhist magazines and devotional literature. This paper specifically explores how Burmese women understand these saints to be working in their lives for purposes of healing and increasing their social and economic prestige during this prolonged period of instability in the country.

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The Face of Jose Rizal as Medium: The Intersection of Nation, Religion, and Documentary Image

Every December 30, the Philippine government officially commemorates the life and death of Jose Rizal, the national hero, in front of his “rebutlo” or monument, at the Rizal Park. After the official celebrations, a host of “millenarians” who make their annual pilgrimage to Manila, also gather around the monument to hold religious services.

Both these “official” and “folk” events center on a constant image of Rizal – his portrait taken by Edgardo Debas in 1890. This “documentary” image has been the basis of critical engagements that deal with the “local” and “foreign” configuration of the “Filipino.” This has

also been the most widely disseminated surface image that functions as a cinematic, photographic, and televisual medium of Rizal and his association with Hispanic history and of the lifestyle branding and emblemization of Rizal in popular culture today. This same image is also the basis of the icon of the “Rizalistas,” which is a folk religion that takes off from Roman Catholicism but anchors itself on the idea of a “national paradise”.

The paper is a reflection on this portrait of Rizal as a medium that ironically contains both nationalist and religious impulses and encapsulates the religious currents present in notions of heroism and martyrdom.

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Between propagation and mediation: Negotiating Islamic norms in *Forum Lingkar Pena*

The Indonesian reading forum Forum Lingkar Pena (FLP), established in 1997, has become an important producer of Islamic texts, in particular proselytizing (dakwah) literature, which serves to propagate Islamic faith. It has become prominent in a time, when the literary and media landscape changed drastically after the fall of President Suharto, providing more freedom for authors and journalists (Garcia 2004). In the face of this liberalization, in addition to an increasing number of authors raising sexual topics in their literary works, FLP, which has ties with the Islamist party PKS, serves as a counter model, placing emphasis on personal piety, morality, and education. The works of art produced are meant to worship God (Hermawan 2008). The great number of different branches in Indonesia, especially on Java, as well as its numerous activities, such as founding and organizing reading rooms, writing schools, and holding discussion forums, serve the declared aim of the forum, dakwah, which has gained importance in the Muslim world over the last years. FLP, which coordinates its activities through the mass media, addresses teenagers as its main target group, who are meant to become writers upholding and disseminating Islamic norms.

Based on multi-sited fieldwork in several FLP branches this paper examines the relation between FLP elites, its members and the media (mass media and fictional as well as non-fictional books such as guides and manuals). To what extent do FLP elites determine the forum’s Islamic norms in their writings? Which media do they consider suitable to communicate FLP’s message and how do FLP members use these to exert influence on religious contents? What role do the mass media play in coordinating the manifold FLP activities, and in which way do the authors and members deal self-critically with the religious texts produced?

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Practices of mediation in Pentecostal Charismatic Churches - Vietnam and abroad

The explosion of Pentecostal Christianity and spirit mediumship in Vietnam are part of a changing religious landscape. This paper explores the connections between these forms of religious practices by focussing on media and practices of mediation (Meyer& Moors 2006). The concept of religion as a practice of mediation contributes to an understanding of the creation and maintenance of links between believers on the one hand as well as between religious practitioners and the spiritual realm on the other hand. Instead of separating religion and technology into different domains, the focus on practices of mediation illustrates how ideas about the supernatural, the spiritual, or the transcendental are made accessible for believers, are reconfigured via media and are effective in the sense that religious entities and religious messages travel across borders.

In my paper, I argue that in Vietnamese Pentecostal underground churches mediatization, politics and mobility are intrinsically interwoven. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in underground churches in Vietnam and among Pentecostal Vietnamese migrants in Europe this paper focuses on a. the visual representation of healing sessions and trance mediums, b. the communication of sacred contents and the enhancement of the authoritative role of religious experts, c. the role of media and media teams, in particular with regard to the remembrance of flight, refuge, and migration.

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Phi Krasue – How a Postmodern Ghostly Image Re-Presents the Abjection of ‘Khmerness’ in Thailand’s Popular Culture

Starting from Pattana’s (2011: 202) suggestions that contemporary Thai ghost films contain “powerful ethnographic material”, “magic and ghosts are (re-)invented in modernity” and ghosts therefore represent “key modern social characters and cultural institutions”, I will argue that postmodern ghostly images are inextricably linked to “ethnic” and “religious” images of Thailand’s popular discourse and thus embody implicit knowledge of Thailand’s social structure. I will take Bin Banluerit’s (2002) film “Tamnan Krasue” as a case study and argue on the basis of Kristeva’s theory, that the postmodern ghostly image of Phi Krasue - as depicted (invented) by Banluerit - may be interpreted as re-presenting the continuous abjection of ‘Khmerness’ as part of Thai national identity. Though it may be argued that Kristeva’s (post-)structuralist theory rests on Eurocentric premises, I nevertheless think that

her concept of abjection may help us to partly understand postmodern conceptions of 'Khmerness' and especially its inextricable association with malevolent magical practices in contemporary Thailand.

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Images, Imaginations and Visual Regimes: Displaying artefacts of agama in Kempo Manggarai houses, eastern Indonesia

This paper deals with practices of religious mediation through different vehicles and materials, by which religion becomes a concrete and sensible experience for Kempo Manggarai Catholics and Muslims on the island of Flores in eastern Indonesia. It takes a look at the various religious artefacts on display in the front rooms of Kempo Manggarai houses. Front rooms are semi-public, highly visible realms of a house, where the omnipresent artefacts of agama perform multifarious capacities: they provide material evidence of religious identification, act as emblems of "modern" citizenship, reveal economic status, coexist with non-religious artefacts, collide with material testimonies of ancestor worship, engender polemics, establish moral boundaries, and frame the realm of the speakable in this religiously diverse setting. They are powerful devices that purify, protect, ward off, and cast out invisible forces. As forms of visual piety such as Catholic icons and Qur'anic calligraphies, they are potent surfaces mediating the sacred. Discussing several ethnographic examples, I examine the roles artefacts of agama perform in shaping religious subjectivities and collectives. My analysis is theoretically engaged with recent scholarly work that studies the formation of religious experience in relation to the material, sensory, and aesthetic worlds of everyday religious practice.