

**Academic Study of Religion**  
Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies  
Graduate School, Gadjah Mada University  
2011

***Tuesdays, 10.30 – 13.00***

**Instructor: Zainal Abidin Bagir** (zainbagir@gmail.com)

The main objective of this course is to stimulate critical thinking about religion and the study of religion in the academic context. What does it mean to study religion? How do we locate religion or the religious? Considering the vastness of the field now called “religious study”, this course tries to understand some important facets of academic study of religion.

We will start with Thomas Kuhn and Michel Foucault to understand how knowledge is produced. Their ways of thinking, which have been very influential in contemporary discourse about knowledge, shows the relation between knowledge and extra-cognitive factors, which is expected to form a basis of critical thinking toward the notion of religion and study of religion. The main point is not to take for granted that we *know* what religion—as the subject of our study—is, or regards the very category of “religion” as unproblematic. Two main issues that will be discussed here concern the political construction of religion (how [political] power defines religion) and the academic construction of religion (how religion is “invented” in the act of studying it). More concrete examples will be taken from the history of religions in Indonesia.

The next unit will center on different forms of subjectivities and the politics of scholarship in the study of religion. This unit is intended to stimulate critical self-reflection in the study of religion. The course will be closed with a discussion of social and ethical aims of the study of religion.

In addition to attendance, active class participation is required. To be an active participant, students need to come to the class prepared, having read the readings, submit a response, and bring a copy of the text to the class to discuss it. Evaluation of students’ performance is based on:

- 30%: Submission of ***weekly responses*** to the readings (from 1 paragraph to a maximum of 1 page); no late submission is accepted. Submitting less than 10 responses will result in subtraction of grade.

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- 10% : One *presentation* and *a more extended response* (up to 3 page) based on one of the designated readings.
- 30% for each of the *two exams*.

Weekly responses as well as the extended response (for the presentations) should not be only a summary of the week texts, but critical responses to them.

### UNIT I. Introduction and overview of critical perspectives on knowledge

#### **WEEK #1 (Sept 20, 2011): Introduction (No response paper)**

This session will introduce study of religion, today's state of religion as its context, its early development in Indonesia, and give an overall survey of the topics discussed in the course.

1. Donald Wiebe, "Religious Studies", in John R. Hinnels, ed., *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, Routledge, 2005.
2. Jose Casanova, "Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective", *The Hedgehog Review*, Spring & Summer 2006, 7- 22.
3. Karel Steenbrink, "The Study of Comparative Religion by Indonesian Muslims: A Survey", *Numen*, Vol. 37, Fasc. 2 (Dec., 1990), pp. 141-167.

#### **WEEK #2 (Sept 27, 2011): Thomas Kuhn**

This meeting looks at Thomas Kuhn to understand how non-cognitive factors influence the production of knowledge. Kuhn's historical investigation looks at natural science, more specifically Copernican revolution in early modern astronomy, but his theory of knowledge is influential in many other disciplines.

4. A. F. Chalmers, *What is This Thing Called Science*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Hackett Publishing Company, 1999 – Ch. 8: "Theories as Structures I: Kuhn's Paradigms", 104-129.

[OPTIONAL: for some background, you may read Ch. 1 of Chalmers, 1-18]  
Or: the chapter on Kuhn in Samir Okasha, *Philosophy of Science: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press].

FURTHER STUDY: Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution*, Harvard University Press, 1957, esp. Chs. 5 and 7.

### **WEEK#3 (Oct 4): Michel Foucault**

This meeting will survey Foucault's investigation into knowledge. Some of the key concepts we will discuss here is: *discourse*, *archaeological* and *genealogical* frameworks, and what he means by *problematization*.

5. Gary Gutting, *Foucault : A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Ch. 3 "Politics" (esp. on "problematization", which is continued on the last chapter "Ancient Sex"), Ch. 4 "Arcahelogy" and Ch. 5 "Genealogy"

## **UNIT II. Constructions of Religion: Power and Scholarship**

### **WEEKS#4- 8 (Oct 11, 18, 25, Nov 1): What is "religion"? Religion as political and academic construction**

The next two meetings will look at the political construction of religion and how it changes throughout history, influenced by, among other things, Western colonialism, secularism and the rise of nation-state. After studying the influential works of Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Talal Asad, we will look at some specific cases of construction of "state religions" in Indonesia (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Bali Aga and the religion of the Wana people).

#### Week # 4: Wilfred Cantwell Smith

This meeting looks at an early historical study of how "religion" is constructed by one of the most prominent and influential scholars of comparative religion, Wilfred Cantwell Smith. He questions the essentialist tendency in study of religions (and the reification of the so-called "religion"), and how the Western world imposed this category for the reality they found in the colonized lands. Talal Asad, however, worries that Smith himself is trapped in an essentialism. Asad investigates, among other things, religion as an anthropological category and as the epistemic hegemony of the secular.

6. **Wilfred Cantwell Smith**, Excerpts from *The Meaning and End of Religion* (The book was translated to Bahasa Indonesia, *Memburu Makna Agama*, Mizan, 2005)
7. [Optional: Talal Asad, “Reading a Modern Classic: WC Smith’s *The Meaning and End of Religion*”, *History of Religions*, 2001.]

### Week # 5: Talal Asad on genealogies of religion and formation of the secular

8. **Talal Asad**, “Secularism, Nation-State, Religion”, in *Formations of the Secular*, 181-201.
9. **Talal Asad**, “The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category”, in *Genealogies of Religion*, 27-54.

### Week # 6: “Agama” and the Construction of State Religions in Indonesia – I

10. **Sita Hidayah**, “How the world would have to be if there is no “Agama” in Indonesia” (unpublished)
11. **Nur Ichwan**, (Excerpts from *Official Reform of Islam in Indonesia*, unpublished dissertation – included here with the Author’s permission) [student presentation 1]
12. **June MacDaniel**, “Agama Hindu Dharma Indonesia as a New Religious Movement”, *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Volume 14, Issue 1, 93–111. [student presentation 2]

### Week # 7: “Agama” and the Construction of State Religions in Indonesia – 2

[student presentations 3-6]

13. **Iem Brown**, “Contemporary Indonesian Buddhism and Monotheism”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Mar., 1987), pp. 108-117;  
**Hudaya Kandahjaya**, “Via Kong Hoa Sie to Borobudur” (Draft Presentation – included here with the Author’s permission)
14. **Charles, Coppel**, “Contemporary Confucianism in Indonesia”, in Coppel (2002), *Studying Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia*, 243-255

15. **Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin**, “Bali Aga’ and Islam: Ethnicity, Ritual Practice and “Old-Balinese” as an Anthropological Construct”, *Indonesia* 77 (April 2004)
16. **Monique Atkinson**, “Religions in dialogue: the construction of an Indonesian minority religion”, *American Ethnologist* 10: 4 (1983)

Week # 8 (Nov 8): Orientalism: Power/knowledge in the study of religion

17. **Richard King**, *Orientalism and Religion – Postcolonial theory, India and the Mystic East*, Routledge, 1999, Ch. 2 “Disciplining religion” (35-61)
18. **Arndt Graf**, “Structural Orientalism, Contested Orientalism, Post-Orientalism: A Case Study of Western Framings of “Violence in Indonesia” in Arndt Graf, Schirin Fathi and Ludwig Paul, Ed., *Orientalism & Conspiracy, Politics and Conspiracy Theory in the Islamic World: Essays in Honor of Sadik J. Al-Azm*, 2011, 164-141.

[OPTIONAL: Chapter 8 of Richard King’s; Sadik J. Al-Azm, “Orientalism and Conspiracy” in Graf, et.al., eds. 3-28; “Is there any religions...?": CR perspective, AAR 2011]

**Exam 1 – Take Home, Nov 8 - 15 (Nov. 14)**

### UNIT III. Everyday religion: locating the religious in everyday lives

#### **WEEKs#9 -11:**

The enterprise of “everyday religion” does not bother much with defining religion but tries to locate religion or the religious not (only) in sacred scriptures, or religious institutions, or religious “authorities”, but in everyday lives, in the forms which may not always follow the “normative” expressions of religion. The question of how religion is constructed is seen *not* through the views or theories of the experts in religious studies, but through research on everyday lives. How do (lay) people define “religion”? How do they experience it? How do they understand what they regard as their religiosity? Questions which arises in the first part concerning how religion is defined will come back again here in a different way, and will be dealt with differently.

Week #9 (Nov 15): (NOTE: response paper for this week may be submitted late)

**Nancy T. Ammerman**, *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*:

19. Foreword (Peter L. Berger)

20. Ammerman, “Introduction: Observing Modern Religious Lives” 3-18

**Attention:** *there’s no class on Nov22; you may use the week to prepare for the coming two books: Everyday Religion and Identity and Politics of Scholarship)*

Week # 11(Nov. 29)

[student presentations 7- 9]

**Nancy T. Ammerman**, *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*:

21. Lynn Davidman, “The New Voluntarism and the Case of Unsynagogued Jews”, 51-69 [student presentation 7]

22. Ziad Munson, “When a Funeral Isn’t Just a Funeral: The Layered Meaning of Everyday Action, 121-136 [student presentation 8]

23. Meredith McGuire, “Embodied Practices: Negotiation and Resistance”, 187-200 [student presentation 9]

24. Ammerman, “Studying Everyday Religion: Challenges for the Future,” 219-237

### UNIT IV. Subjectivity and Scholarship

Weeks # 12 and 13 (Dec 6): Identity and the politics of scholarship in the study of religion

(student presentations 10- 18)

25. Choose one of the chapters (1-9) of the book edited by José Ignacio Cabezón & Sheila Greeve Davaney, eds., *Identity and the politics of scholarship in the study of religion*.

*Week #12:* Presentations of Chs. 1- 5

*Week #13:* Presentations of Chs. 6-9, followed by class discussion of Ch. 10

### **WEEK#14: Ethical Aims of Social Studies of Religion (Dec 13)**

26. Diana Eck, “Dialogue and Method”, in *The Magic Still Dwells*

27. Scott Dunbar, “The place of interreligious dialogue in religious studies”

28. Robert N. Bellah, “The Ethical Aims of Social Inquiry”

**Exam 2 – Take Home: Writing a short essay, due the last week of the class. (Instruction will be given later, after the last week, due December 20)**