

- Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines
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From civil religion to human rights: arguments against structural racism in disruptive times ? (2SC2147)

Filières concernées	Nombre d'heures	Validation	Crédits ECTS
Pilier principal M ScS - anthropologie	Cours: 2 ph	Voir ci-dessous	5
Pilier principal M ScS - géographie humaine	Cours: 2 ph	Voir ci-dessous	5
Pilier principal M ScS - migration et citoyenneté	Cours: 2 ph	Voir ci-dessous	5
Pilier principal M ScS - migration et citoyenneté (EuMIGS)	Cours: 2 ph	Voir ci-dessous	5
Pilier principal M ScS - psychologie et éducation	Cours: 2 ph	Voir ci-dessous	5
Pilier principal M ScS - sociologie	Cours: 2 ph	Voir ci-dessous	5
Pilier secondaire M ScS - anthropologie	Cours: 2 ph	Voir ci-dessous	5
Pilier secondaire M ScS - géographie humaine	Cours: 2 ph	Voir ci-dessous	5
Pilier secondaire M ScS - migration et citoyenneté	Cours: 2 ph	Voir ci-dessous	5
Pilier secondaire M ScS - psychologie et éducation	Cours: 2 ph	Voir ci-dessous	5
Pilier secondaire M ScS - sociologie	Cours: 2 ph	Voir ci-dessous	5

ph=période hebdomadaire, pg=période globale, j=jour, dj= demi-jour, h=heure, min=minute

Période d'enseignement:

- Semestre Automne

Equipe enseignante

Gianni D'Amato
Assistante: Chiara Lanfranchi

Contenu

This seminar emerges from a longstanding concern with how societies articulate collective values and responsibilities in moments of crisis. In the late 20th century, the notion of civil religion—whether in Rousseau's formulation, Robert Bellah's interpretation, or in republican French variants—offered a way to bind citizens together through shared symbols and rituals. Yet such “moral glue” has always been double-edged: it can inspire solidarity but also mask exclusionary practices and sustain structural inequalities and discrimination. Structural discrimination, and in particular our focus on structural racism, refers to a social system of historically evolved discourses, norms and representations in institutions that reproduce unequal relations to the detriment of racialized groups, regardless of individual intent or an explicit racist ideology. The post-World War II human rights project was conceived as an answer to the catastrophic failures of nationalism and state-centered moralities, establishing a universalist language of dignity and equality. However, as historians like Samuel Moyn have argued, human rights have often been invoked without dismantling the social and political structures that perpetuate discrimination. In recent decades, crises—economic shocks, migration surges, terrorism, pandemics—have tested both civil religion and human rights discourse, revealing their potential and their limits in addressing structural racism.

This seminar positions itself at the intersection of political theory, sociology, and critical race studies. It draws on debates about laïcité in France, the transformation of American civil religion under polarization, and the tension between national myths and universal legal norms. Building on comparative case studies, we will examine how these frameworks can be mobilized—separately and together—to confront institutional racism in “disruptive times,” when political uncertainty and populist narratives challenge inclusive democratic ideals.

By the end of the seminar, participants will not only understand the theoretical and historical underpinnings of civil religion and human rights, but also develop the analytical tools to evaluate and design arguments against structural racism in today's contested public spheres.

Forme de l'évaluation

Presence, readings, and participation in class (50%)

Students will be divided into groups during the seminar to discuss different aspects of the week's readings. The groups will have to deepen the problematic through an internal reflection on specific questions posed by the teacher. The group discussions will be followed by a discussion in the plenary.

The group will present their conclusions in a written summary at least five days after the presentation (Tuesday midnight at the latest). This synthesis must refer to the following: elements discussed, applied approaches, arguments used, elements that most “touched” them, questioning the argument, elements that they would find interesting to deepen. The synthesis should not be too long (max. 2 pages) but should

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make the links between the source, the theoretical elements and the discussion in the plenary (it can be written in bullet points).

The success of the seminar depends on the active participation of the students and their presence. We expect them to contribute to the group discussions and to speak up in plenary.

Written work (50%)

Students wishing to earn credits for this seminar will be required to deliver a 15-pages essay at the end of the semester. The choice of a topic is up to the student but the essay should have a clear connection with the discussed literature. The essay can be theoretical or draw on some kind of empirical data (see Instructions for written work on our website:

https://www.unine.ch/sfm/wp-content/uploads/sites/100/Consignes-relatives-au-travail-ecrit_2022.pdf).

Students must submit their essay topic in advance until December 11th at the latest. Deadline for the final essay: 31 January 2026. The text can be written in English, French, German or Italian.

Documentation

The detailed program, list of references, texts and sources will be available on Moodle.

Pré-requis

This course is open to all social science students (MA courses) interested in the relationship between human rights, civil religion and the challenge to (Western) civilisation by structural racism. I use to have open discussions, and like to challenge "la pensée unique".

Forme de l'enseignement

Introductory session by instructor; reading, group discussion of the seminar literature and its presentation; written term paper.

Objectifs d'apprentissage

Au terme de la formation l'étudiant-e doit être capable de :

- Evaluate critically and reflectively one's own position on the readings
- Develop arguments that lead, or are the result of, an empirical or theoretical analysis
- Discuss your position within the team and make a consolidated presentation

Compétences transférables

- Explore your intellectual creativity
- Write a comprehensive essay able to confront different positions and come to a personal conclusion