Politics 132A – Religion, Nationalism, and Violence in Comparative Perspective
Syllabus: Spring 2014

Instructor:
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Office Hours: Th 12:00-3:00, Olin-Sang 122

Course Description:
Recent events across the globe have drawn attention to the complex relationship between religion, nationalism, and ethnic violence. While the bulk of popular attention has been paid to the role of religion in the Middle East, the past several decades have seen a dramatic resurgence of religious conflict across the globe. This course examines the relationship between religion, nationalism, and violence globally with a particular focus on violence in Sri Lanka, India, Northern Ireland, and Nigeria. Though all of these are cases of ethnic violence, the role of religion in these conflicts differs significantly. In each of these cases, students will consider the mechanisms linking the virtues of individual religious belief with the tragedy of large-scale ethnic violence. This course also considers a series of topics unique to religious conflict, including the politics of holy space, the logic of religious violence, and the volatility of public religious imagery.

The course is divided into three units:
- **Unit 1: Theoretical Approaches to Religious Conflict (Weeks 1-5)**
  - The first unit introduces the topic of “religious conflict” and considers theoretical approaches to the study of nationalism, religious politics, and ethnic violence.
- **Unit 2: Comparative Analysis of Religious Conflicts (Weeks 6-10)**
  - The second unit investigates the ways in which these theoretical concepts can be seen in a series of conflicts worldwide. We will consider whether or not a universal framework for religious conflict can be applied to different cases and will attempt to tease out the implications of each case for the theories we’ve considered.
- **Unit 3: Topics in Religious Conflict (Weeks 11-13)**
  - The third unit examines a few special topics of interest in the study of religious conflict, particularly the importance of holy sites, the logic of religious violence, and the use of religious images in the public sphere. The course concludes with a brief overview of the nature of religious politics and presentation of student research.

Learning Goals:
This course aims to improve critical thinking skills by exposing students to abstract concepts and theories related to religion and conflict. The course also aims to improve writing and research skills by encouraging students to critique and evaluate these abstract concepts and theories in their own work.

Substantively, the course aims to investigate the following broad questions:
1. How can we define “religious conflict”? What does it mean for a conflict to be "religious" or "ethnic" in nature?
2. Is religion itself a primary cause of religious conflict? Or are conflicts over religion more likely to be motivated by instrumental factors and/or elite manipulation?
3. When do religious organizations and leaders support violence and when do they condemn it?
4. Are religious organizations subject to the same motivations as other sorts of civil society organizations?
5. What lessons can be drawn from the history of religious conflict in our cases that can inform other violent and non-violent religious conflicts across the globe?

Course Requirements and Grading:

Class Attendance, Participation, and Informal Presentations (20% of final grade)
Attendance is mandatory. Students must come to class prepared to discuss all assigned readings. Three absences will result in a lowering of your grade by one full letter. More than five unexcused absences will result in an F in the course. If you must miss class for a valid reason or have an emergency, please contact me (before the fact if possible!).

Each each student in the class will be required to give an informal, ungraded presentation on one set of readings at some point during the semester. These presentations should be approximately 10 to 15 minutes and will consist of a brief overview of the substantive content of the day’s readings and consideration of how the readings relate to the week’s discussion questions. A sign up sheet will be circulated at the beginning of the semester.

Two Short Papers (each 20% of final grade, 40% total)
Students will complete two short papers of approximately 5 double-spaced pages (size 12 font with one-inch margins). The first short paper will focus on theoretical issues covered in Unit 1. The first paper will be due on Thursday, February 13. The second short paper will bring one of these theoretical issues to bear on a case covered in Unit 2. The second paper will be due on Tuesday, April 1. More detailed assignments will be distributed as the semester progresses.

Final Paper (40% of final grade)
Students will complete a research paper of approximately 15 double-spaced pages. This paper is your chance to further investigate a topic covered in the course or to consider a relevant topic not covered in the course, including new theoretical inquiries or consideration of other cases of conflict. In addition to the completed paper, students are required to submit a brief paper prospectus (one page, ungraded) on Tuesday, April 8. This prospectus must contain a research question and a preliminary bibliography to help you begin conducting research. Students must also prepare a brief (approximately 10 minute), ungraded presentation of their research for our final class meeting. The final paper is due on Tuesday, May 6.

Disability Statement:
If you are a student who needs academic accommodations because of a documented disability, please contact me and present your letter of accommodation as soon as possible. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting academic accommodations,
you should contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in Academic Services (x6-3470 or brodgers@brandeis.edu.) Letters of accommodation should be presented at the start of the semester to ensure provision of accommodations. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

**Academic Integrity:**
Do not plagiarize. The university policy on academic honesty is distributed annually as part of the Rights and Responsibilities handbook. Instances of suspected dishonesty will, without exception, be forwarded to the Office of Student Affairs for possible referral to the Student Judicial System. Potential sanctions include failure in the course and suspension from the university. If you have any questions about this, please ask.

**Class Schedule:**
This schedule outlines topics and discussion questions to be covered each week. Discussion questions are meant to guide our conversations and inform your consideration of the readings. All assigned readings must be completed prior to class on the date listed. All readings will appear on the course LATTE page. **Note: There are no required textbooks for this class.**

**Unit 1: Theoretical Approaches to Religious Conflict**

**Week 1: Introduction**
What is religious conflict? What is the difference between “religious” and “ethnic” conflict? How does religion relate to ethnicity and nationalism? What social functions does religious identity serve?

- **Tuesday, January 14:**
- **Thursday, January 16:**

**Week 2: Nationalism and Religion**
What is nationalism? What is “religious” nationalism? What factors account for the resurgence of religious nationalism across the globe?

- **Tuesday, January 21:**
  - Walker Connor, “A Nation is a Nation, is a State, is an Ethnic Group, is a…,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1978), 377-400.

**Thursday, January 23:**

**Week 3: Theories of Social Mobilization and Ethnic Conflict**
What causes an ethnic or religious group to mobilize for conflict? When does conflict turn violent? What is the role of religion in this process?

• Tuesday, January 28:

• Thursday, January 30:
  o **First Paper Assignment Distributed Today**

**Week 4: Bottom-Up Mobilization: Religion as Substantive Conviction**
When and how do religious groups mobilize for protection of their beliefs? Does religion motivate mobilization as a set of values and beliefs? In other words, does religion itself motivate religious conflict? If so, under what conditions and how?

• Tuesday, February 4:

• Thursday, February 6:
Week 5: Top-Down Mobilization: Religion as Political Resource
When, how, and why do elites encourage mobilization of religious groups “from above”? What sorts of political resources do religious organizations control? Do religious leaders and secular political elites have the same access to religious political resources?

- Tuesday, February 11:

- Thursday, February 13:
  - **First Paper Due Today**

Unit 2: Comparative Analysis of Religious Conflicts

Week 6: Case Study – Civil War in Sri Lanka (1 of 2)
What were the underlying causes of the 1983-2009 Sri Lanka civil war? To what extent was this conflict a “religious” war as opposed to an “ethnic” war? What role did “religious nationalism” play in this process?

- Tuesday, February 25:

- Thursday, February 27:

Week 7: Case Study – Buddhist Nationalism in Sri Lanka (2 of 2)
To what extent were religious organizations or leaders involved in the mobilization of ethnic enmity in Sri Lanka? What role did Buddhist leaders play in the mobilization of Sinhalese nationalism?

- Tuesday, March 4:

- Thursday, March 6:
Week 8: Case Study – Hindu Nationalism in India
What accounts for the decline of secularism and rise of Hindu nationalism in India? Is religious nationalism in India a function of the design of political institutions, the nature of political culture, a response to rapid socioeconomic development, or something else entirely? What effects has the rise of Hindu nationalism had on religious minorities in India?

• Tuesday, March 11 (Class canceled):
  o **Second Paper Assignment Distributed Today**

• Thursday, March 13:

• Tuesday, March 18:

Week 9: Case Study – The Role of Religion in Northern Ireland
What role did religion play in the conflict in Northern Ireland? Can we call this a “religious” conflict? What factors might explain differences in the role of the Catholic Church in Republican identity compared to the role of Protestant churches in Unionist identity?

• Thursday, March 20
  o Film Clip: Scene from *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* (2006) (1:43-1:46)

• Tuesday, March 25:

Week 10: Case Study – Ethnicity and Religion in Nigeria
How do ethnicity and religion overlap in Nigeria? What other sources of ethnic affiliation are prominent in Nigerian society? Are all of these dimensions of identity politically salient? Can we confidently label this a case of “religious” conflict?

• Thursday, March 27:
Unit 3: Topics in Religious Conflict

Week 11: The Political Value of Holy Sites
What explains the political value of “place” in religion? How do secular or religious leaders make use of holy sites to gain political notoriety (or infamy)?

- Tuesday, April 1:
  - Second Paper Due Today

- Thursday, April 3:

Week 12, Meeting 1: The Logic of Religious Violence
What explains the use of violent tactics by religious groups? Is the use of suicide terrorism logical in the context of religious conflict? Can “religious logic” be used to justify non-religious goals?

- Tuesday, April 8:
  - Final Paper Prospectus Due Today

Week 12, Meeting 2: Religious Imagery in the Public Sphere
What role does religious imagery serve in the public sphere? When do political leaders use religious imagery? Does religious legitimacy make a difference?

- Thursday, April 10:

**Week 13: Conclusions (Final paper due May 6)**

- Thursday, April 24:
  - No readings. First half of class will present and discuss the status of their final research paper (presentation is ungraded).
- Tuesday, April 29:
  - No readings. Second half of class will present and discuss the status of their final research paper (presentation is ungraded).

**Other Resources:**
Students may find the following resources of use when crafting their research papers or of general interest for inquiry into the study of religion and conflict:

- The Immanent Frame, prolific blog about secularism run by the Social Science Research Council (SSRC): [http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/](http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/)
- The Minorities at Risk (MAR) Project contains a large amount of historical information on religious minorities around the globe: [http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/](http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/)
- The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University: [http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu](http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu)