ANTH 80A: Anthropology of Religion
TF 11a-12:20p
Shiffman Humanities Center 216

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Office Hours: Tuesday 12:30-1:30p & Thursday 10-11a

Course Description:
As religious scholar Thomas Tweed argues, “religions designate where we are from, identify whom we are with, and prescribe how we move across.” Religion, although contested in definition and as a category of analysis, is a significant part of many individuals’ lives. In forming religious communities, one defines their individual and collective identities. By embodying religious practices and communities, one is motivated to move and act in society in distinct ways. And through religious practices, one’s past, present, and future are communicated, embodied, and enacted.

In this course, we will explore how the discipline of anthropology has approached/is approaching the study of religion. From the earliest studies of religious and ritual practices in small-scale, non-Western contexts to recent examinations on the impact of globalization and concerns of religious fundamentalism, this course will explore the following questions:

★ What is religion? What is sacred?
   ○ Are they universal concepts?
   ○ Are they analytically productive?

★ What is the relationship between religion and society?
   ○ How has colonialism, migration, and globalization impacted religion?
   ○ How do race, gender, and sexuality intersect with religion?
   ○ How do politics, war, and violence impact religion?

★ How do anthropologists study religion?
   ○ What/who do anthropologists study as religion?
   ○ What tools do anthropologists use to understand how religion works?
Learning Goals:
By the end of this course you will master the following:

Core Skills:
★ critical thinking
★ ability to analyze, interpret, and synthesis a diverse variety of materials across several disciplinary boundaries including anthropology, religious studies, sociology, visual and performative arts, psychoanalytic theory, and literature
★ assess the value of top-driven and disciplinary informed analysis

Knowledge:
★ a broad interdisciplinary understanding of cultural formulations of what constitutes religious process and experience cross-culturally (anthropology, sociology, religious studies)
★ an understanding of ritual process and interpretation (anthropology, psychology/psychoanalytic theory)

**FYI: Success in this four-credit course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class.**

Course Requirements and Evaluation

Class participation (15%)
Class participation in this course is highly valued. Your education, background, and experience contributes to our learning. **Your perspective matters.** Obviously to participate and contribute to our conversation you’ll need to attend class. I expect you to attend class, but I will not take attendance. Instead, you will be assessed according to your contribution to our class conversation and the completion of participation assignments.

To contribute, be an enthusiastic, prepared and considerate member of our learning community:
★ Come to class with prepared notes and questions.
★ Bring your reading (hard/electronic copy).
★ Express your thoughts on the topic covered, but also be mindful of how you might be dominating the conversation.
★ Listen to your colleagues’ insights and respond respectfully.
★ If you are not comfortable speaking in class, meet with me. We can come up with other ways you may contribute to the conversation.

Besides your thoughtful participation in class and attending prepared you will complete 7 participation assignments. Participation assignments offer you the opportunity to express your thoughts and questions on the readings or lectures. These assignments will be submitted prior to class to facilitate our conversation. Also, these assignments will be graded as complete or incomplete. Prompts and further instructions will be provided when assigned.

Fieldwork Portfolio (20%)
The fieldwork portfolio is an opportunity to apply some of what you are learning in the classroom. Each assignment will provide you with personal insight into what anthropologists do, some of the challenges and
dilemmas of fieldwork, as well as insights that anthropological research generates. For your fieldwork portfolio, you will complete 3 fieldwork assignments. Detailed instructions will be provided later.

**Synthetic Statements (30%)**
Each student will write two synthetic statements on the readings and films that we view in class. A synthetic statement is a 3 to 5-page essay (double spaced) where you provide your thoughtful analysis and critical evaluation of the material covered. Students will select at least 4 readings or films from class to engage in a statement. After providing a succinct statement of the authors’ arguments, the student will then discuss how the readings and/or film connect to each other and what insights they provide to the topic of religion. Students should also offer their own evaluation of the material.

**Final Paper (35%)**
For the final paper of this course, you will have two options.

**Option #1: Final Paper**
This is a 6 to 8-page paper that addresses a few of the issues we will explore in this course. To write this paper, you will draw upon the readings, films, and lectures from the entire semester. Final exam prompts will be distributed the last day of class.

**Option #2: Independent Research Paper**
This is a 10 to 14-page research paper to explore a topic of your choice. You will select a topic in consultation with me and conduct independent research.

Students who choose this option:
- will complete only 1 synthetic statement & the independent research paper will count for 50% of the final grade
- by the end of week 10 will submit a 1 page abstract of the designated topic, outlining the main thesis, theoretical approach, and primary data.
- will submit an annotated bibliography of approximately 6-8 outside sources, as well as 3-5 sources from class reading by the end of week 12. (“Annotated” in this context means a brief explanation of how you anticipate this source will contribute to your final paper project—you do not have to have read all the possible sources—but some familiarity with a possible source will help).

**Course Due Dates:**

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**All assignments will be submitted through LATTE unless otherwise stated.**

**Late assignments** will only be accepted under exceptional circumstances, at the discretion of the instructor, and if accepted, will be penalized. Students who submit assignments late are asked to email BOTH the instructor and TA about the circumstances.**

Writing Center @ Goldfarb 232 (http://www.brandeis.edu/writingprogram/writingcenter/)
Please take advantage of the writing center. They can provide feedback on your writing before you submit it for grading. The writing center is an amazing resource at the university. You may drop in or make an appointment. They are open M-F 10:30a-9p. Do take advantage of this opportunity to further develop your writing skills.

Course Policies

Cultivating a Safe Learning Environment:
In this class we will sometimes be talking about divisive, controversial and important issues – religion, caste, sexuality etc. — I expect students to show respect to themselves and other members of our learning community in these discussions. Please be considerate of one another. All perspectives are welcome in this course if presented with civility and scholarly rigor.

Two standards of expectations regulate student responsibility in this course—these standards are non-negotiable.

1. **Respect yourself and others:** a diversity of views should be expected and protected. You are expected to engage the issues in a mature, reasonable, and respectful manner, and to show respect for other students and the instructor at all times. I reserve the right to ask you to leave the room if you have disrupted classroom dynamics or disrespected your instructor and classmates. I must ensure that the classroom is a safe space for all.

2. **Bring your minds:** This course is an intellectual, not an experiential, endeavor. Therefore an informed discussion of the problems and issues addressed in this course is required.

E-mail Etiquette:
Your relationship with me and your TA is a **professional relationship**. When corresponding by e-mail, always include a salutation (e.g. “Dear Dr. Pillai” or “Dear Doug”) and a closing that identifies who you are (“Sincerely, María Rodríguez”).

Also, **please include a subject line that includes the course number (ANTH 80A).** If I have not replied to e-mail, within a day or two, do not hesitate to follow up in person or with a second e-mail.

Electronic Devices:
Laptops, tablets, and cell phones are allowed in our classroom. Remember you are enrolled in this course to learn. Please limit your use of this technology to course material. The moment your use of technology distracts and disrupts our class you will be asked to either stop using the technology or to leave the classroom. Respect our classroom. Leave emailing, Facebook, texting, etc for your own personal time.
Academic honesty and plagiarism:
All work submitted in this course must be your own and produced exclusively for this course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly acknowledged and documented. Please be careful to cite precisely and properly the sources of all authors and persons you have drawn upon in your written work. Plagiarism (from published or internet sources, or from another student) is a serious violation of academic integrity. Violations will be taken seriously and are noted on student disciplinary records. Please review the University’s policies at: https://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/srcs/academicintegrity/index.html.

Accommodations:
If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please contact me as soon as possible. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

Religious Exemptions:
Please inform the instructor as early as possible about any anticipated absences due to religious holidays, and be prepared to make up the work missed on those days. For a full description of Brandeis’s regulations governing coursework and religious observance, please see http://www.brandeis.edu/das/downloads/AcademicCourseworkandReligiousObservations.pdf.

Athletic Exemptions:
Participation in an intercollegiate sport must be documented in a letter from the Athletic Director and presented to the instructor at the beginning of the semester, accompanied by a schedule for the season. Class sessions missed due to travel for athletic events should be made up in consultation with the instructor. For the full guidelines on conflicts between coursework and intercollegiate athletic competition, please see http://www.brandeis.edu/das/downloads/GuidelinesforAthletes.pdf.

For more on campus regulations regarding academic dishonesty, classroom disruption, alcohol and drug violations, theft, physical assault, and sexual misconduct, see the website of the Department of Student Rights and Community Standards: http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/srcs/.

Course Schedule

Required Texts:
- ★ Michael Lambek’s (editor) A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion (note: abbreviation in syllabus is RAR)
- ★ Ahmed Afzal’s Lone Star Muslims: Transnational Lives and the South Asian Experience in Texas
- ★ Karen Fjelstad’s and N. Hien’s Spirits Without Borders: Vietnamese Spirit Mediums in a Transnational Age

All texts are available at the bookstore.

Additional articles are available on LATTE.
*Please note that I reserve the right to change this schedule to accommodate guest speakers, films, and other educational needs. You are responsible for knowing these changes announced ahead of time in class and through LATTE.

**Every day in the media, you will encounter articles and news stories related to themes of this course. Watch and read the news in some form daily. Also, consider how the music, movies, and tv shows you listen/watch are impacted by religion. You are encouraged to bring these to class and to briefly discuss their relevance.

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**Week 1  Why Study Religion?**

9/1  Introduction: Course Organization, Goals & Why Study Religion  
Readings:  
★ OPTIONAL: Raymond Firth’s “An Anthropological Approach to the Study of Religion” (LATTE)

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**Week 2  What is Religion?**

**Participation Assignment #1 due 9/4 @ 6p**

9/5  Defining Religion and How to Study It  
Readings:  
★ Emile Durkheim’s “The Elementary Forms of Religion” (RAR)  
★ Clifford Geertz’s “Religion as a Cultural System” (RAR)  
★ Talal Asad’s “The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category” (RAR)

9/8  Defining the Secular  
Readings:  
★ Talal Asad’s *Formations of the Secular*, pp. 181-201 (LATTE)  
★ Michael Lambek’s “Facing Religion, From Anthropology” (LATTE)  
★ OPTIONAL: José Casanova’s "Secularization Revisited: A Reply to Talal Asad" (LATTE)

**Fieldwork Assignment #1 Assigned**

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**Week 3  Symbols & Symbolic Actions**

9/12  What Makes a Symbol?  
Readings:  
★ Sherry Ortner’s “On Key Symbols” (RAR)  
★ Eric Wolf’s “The Virgin of Guadalupe” (RAR)
9/15 The Ritual Process
Readings:
★ Victor Turner’s “Liminality and Communitas” (RAR)
★ Barbara G. Myerhoff’s “Return to Wirikuta: Ritual Reversal and Symbolic Continuity on
the Peyote Hunt of the Uichol Indians” (LATTE)
★ Roy A. Rappaport’s “Enactments of Meaning” (RAR)

Fieldwork Assignment #1 due 9/15 @ 3p.
Fieldwork Assignment #2 & #3 Assigned

Week 4 Taboo

Participation Assignment #2 due 9/18 @ 6p

9/19 Sacred Animals, Polluted Meats
In-class screening of Master of None “Religion” episode (30 mins)
Readings:
★ Mary Douglas’ “Land Animals, Pure and Impure” (RAR)
★ Marvin Harris’ “The Cultural Ecology of India’s Sacred Cow” (LATTE)
★ OPTIONAL: Radhika Govindrajan’s “The Goat that Died for Family” (LATTE)

9/22 NO CLASS (ROSH HASHANAH)

Week 5 Power & Resistance

9/26 The 3 Cs: Colonialism, Capitalism and Christianity
Readings:
★ Michael Taussig’s “The Genesis of Capitalism amongst a South American Peasantry:
Devil’s Labor and the Baptism of Money” (RAR)
★ John and Jean Comaroff’s “The Colonization of Consciousness” (RAR)

9/29 Women’s Bodies
Readings:
★ Barbara Myerhoff’s “Jewish Comes Up in You from the Roots”
★ Rebecca Lester’s “Female Bodies and the Touch of God”

Synthetic Statement #1 due 9/29 @ 3p

Week 6 Race, Class & Religion

10/3 NO CLASS (BRANDEIS THURSDAY)

Participation Assignment #3 due 10/5 @ 6p
10/6 Muslims in America
Readings:
★ Lone Star Muslims (Intro, Chapters 1-3)

Week 7 Sexuality, Nationalism & Transnationalism

Participation Assignment #4 due 10/9 @ 6p

10/10 Queering Religion
In-class screening of A Jihad for Love
Readings:
★ Lone Star Muslims (Chapters 4)
★ Tom Bollerstorf’s “Between Religion and Desire: Being Muslim and Gay in Indonesia” (LATTE)

10/13 Homeland
Readings:
★ Lone Star Muslims (Chapters 5-6)

Week 8 Religion in Motion

10/17 Pilgrimages
Readings:
★ James Preston’s “Spiritual Magnetism: An Organizing Magnetism for the Study of Pilgrimage” (LATTE)
★ Oren Kosansky’s “Tourism, Charity, and Profit: The Movement of Money in Moroccan Jewish Pilgrimage” (LATTE)

Fieldwork Assignment #2 due 10/19 @ 6p.

10/20 Yoga and Globalization
Readings:
★ Andrea Jain’s “Branding Yoga” (LATTE)
★ John Alter’s “Yoga, Modernity, and the Middle Class: Locating the Body in a World of Desire” (LATTE)

Week 9 Explaining the Unexplained

10/24 Fate
Readings:
★ Meyer Fortes’ “Fate in Relation to the Social Structure” (RAR)
★ Karin Barber’s “How Man Makes God in West Africa” (LATTE)
10/27  The Azande
In-class viewing of *Witchcraft Among the Azande* (1981)
Readings:
★ E.E. Evans-Pritchard’s “The Notion of Witchcraft Explains Unfortunate Events” (LATTE)
★ Michael Jackson’s The Witch as a Category and as a Person (LATTE)

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### Week 10  Witchcraft, Magic, and Death

#### Participation Assignment #5 due 10/30 @ 6p

10/31  Who is a Witch?
Readings:
★ Raymond C. Kelly’s “Witchcraft and Sexual Relations: An Exploration in the Social and Semantic Implications of the Structure of Belief” (RAR)
★ Stanley Tambiah’s “Form and Meaning of Magical Acts” (RAR)
★ Filip De Boeck’s “On Being Shege in Kinshasa: Children, the Occult and the Street” (RAR)

11/3  Understanding Death
Readings:
★ Regina Marchi’s “Mexico’s Special Relationship with Day of the Dead” (LATTE)
★ Loring M. Danforth’s “Metaphors of Mediation in Greek Funeral Laments” (LATTE)

#### Synthetic Statement #2 due 11/3 @ 3p

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### Week 11  Altered States

11/7  Understanding Spirits
Readings:
★ *Spirits Without Borders* (Chapters 1-3)
★ OPTIONAL: Janice Boddy’s “Spirits and Selves in Northern Sudan: The Cultural Therapeutics of Possession and Trance” (RAR)

#### Participation Assignment #6 due 11/9 @ 6p

11/10  Possession
Readings:
★ *Spirits Without Borders* (Chapters 4-7)
★ OPTIONAL: Kathleen Erndl’s “Possession by Durga: The Mother Who Possesses” (LATTE)
Week 12  The Senses of Religion

Fieldwork Assignment #3 due 11/13 @ 6p

11/14  Sacred Substances
Readings:
★ McKim Marriott’s “Holi: The Feast of Love” (LATTE)
★ Hugh Urban’s “Rastafari: Messianism, Music, and Ganja” (LATTE)

11/17  Sacred Sounds
Readings:
★ Charles Hirschkind’s “Passional Preaching, Aural Sensibility, and the Islamic Revival in Cairo” (RAR)
★ TBD

American Academy of Religion’s Annual Conference 11/18-11/21 @ Hynes Convention Center
(https://papers.aarweb.org/program_book)

Week 13  A Question of Authority

11/21  Charisma
In-Class Screening of Kumaré: The True Story of a False Prophet
Readings:
★ John Hall’s “The apocalypse at Jonestown” (LATTE)
★ TBD

11/22-24  NO CLASS (THANKSGIVING)

Week 14  Religious Violence

11/28  Fundamentalism & Terror
Readings:
★ John Stratton Hawley’s “Militant Hinduism: Ayodhya and the Momentum of Hindu Nationalism” (LATTE)
★ Mark Juergensmeyer’s “Religious Terror and Global War” (LATTE)

Participation Assignment #7 due 11/30 @ 6p

12/1  Dangerous Words
Readings:
★ Susan Harding’s “Convicted by the Holy Spirit: The Rhetoric of Fundamental Baptist Conversion” (RAR)
★ Galit Hasan-Rokem’s “Martyr vs. Martyr: The Sacred Language of Violence”
Week 15  Religion, Social Justice, and Change

12/5  Social Justice & Activism
Readings:
★ Susan Darlington’s “The Ordination of a Tree: The Buddhist Ecology Movement in Thailand” (LATTE)
★ Tanya Erzen’s “Religious Literacy in Faith-Based Prison” (LATTE)

12/8  (Losing) Faith in Development
Readings:
★ Gerard Clarke’s “Agents of Transformation? Donors, Faith-based Organizations and International Development” (LATTE)
★ Kurt Alan Ver Beek’s “Spirituality: A Development Taboo” (LATTE)

FINAL PAPER DUE ON FINAL EXAM DATE AS SET BY BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY REGISTRAR