

ANTH 6391: The Anthropology of Religious Movements Spring 2014

Monday 4:10-6:00pm- Hortense Amsterdam House Seminar Room, Room 202

Prof. Attiya Ahmad
Office Hours Wednesday 11am-1pm
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Course Description

This course takes as its point of departure today's global proliferation of religious movements and media, and explores the following questions: What are the similarities and differences between India's Hindutva movement, Christian Evangelical groups in the US, the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East, and protests led by Buddhist monks in Myanmar? What role does mediation—in the form of the human body, religious texts, cassette sermons, television serials, and the internet—play in promoting, shaping, spreading and containing religious practices and belief? What are the interrelations between these religious movements and forms of mediation? What role can anthropology play in addressing these questions?

A seminar designed for students who want to learn about the myriad forms of religious expression in today's world, this course consists of three thematic sections. In the **first** section we will explore various theorists' attempt to carve out a universal category of religion and the ways in which this categorization has been problematized. We will examine writings that historicize the emergence of ideas such as 'natural religion' and 'world religion', and the ways in which uniformity and difference is established between phenomena encompassed by these terms, for example, how Islam and Christianity are both designated as religions but different forms thereof. As a counterpoint, we will examine how religious syncretism and conversion both reinforce and subvert distinctions drawn between different religious traditions. Through discussions of these issues, we will tease out how processes of colonial modernity and how western conceptual and analytical categories play a hegemonic role in shaping our understanding and approach to what is constituted and demarcated as 'religion'. Our class will also examine how 'religion' comes to be separated out analytically from other categories of experience such as politics, economics, and the secular, and we examine how interrelations between these categories are reestablished. In the **second** thematic section, students will bring their sharpened analytic faculties to bear on contemporary religious expressions, and examine a variety of contemporary religious movements and media including the television serialization of the Ramayana and its influence on India's Hindutva movements, cassette sermons and the ethical formation of subjects in Egypt, labour and Islamic piety in Indonesia, and Baptists use of speech to preach in the US.

Assignments and Grading

Grade Distribution

Participation	15%	Ongoing
Initiating Class Seminar	15%	Once a semester
Reading Responses (7-10, one page)	20%	Once a week (blackboard by 12pm the day before class)
Research Paper and Related Work	50%	
Topic and Outline (3 pages)-	(10%)	March 24 (beginning of class)
Presentation to the Class	(10%)	April 28 and 30
Final Paper (15-18 pages)	(30%)	May 2 (my mailbox by 5pm)

Participation (15%)

Your **active participation** in class is crucial not only to your own learning, but also to those of your peers, and to me, your instructor and fellow scholar. For class, please come prepared with your thoughts and questions about the readings, as well as when appropriate and possible, materials (e.g. a newspaper article, advertisement, etc.) related to the topic we will be addressing in class. Active participation also includes making connections between different class topics and readings. That said, participation doesn't necessarily mean speaking a great deal in class. The ability to listen attentively, respond thoughtfully to

others' comments and ask questions—including not being afraid to say 'I don't understand'—are productive to class discussion and our collective learning. Attendance is therefore required and failure to show up to class without a valid excuse or proper documentation (e.g. physician's note) will adversely affect your final grade. In class, no issue is off the table or banned, but I ask and urge that you think about and phrase your comments judiciously, and show respect and consideration to your peers in the questions they—and you—ask.

Initiating the Class Seminar (15%)

You will each be responsible for initiating a class seminar. For this assignment you will present for **up to 30 minutes**, and outline the major themes or arguments presented in the readings, and **prepare 2-3 questions** to begin our class discussion.

Reading Responses (20%)

Over the course of the semester you will be responsible for submitting 8-10 reading responses. You may submit up to 10 reading responses (one for each of the 10 weeks of reading) and I will use the top 8 in calculating your final grade. Think of the reading response as your opportunity to track/record your learning as the semester progresses, and an opportunity for you to prepare yourself for class. Reading responses should provide a thematic synopsis of the major points and arguments presented in the article; should briefly discuss how the author/s support his/her point/argument; and should discuss what questions the article provokes, and/or whether it resonates with something you have experienced (e.g. reminds you of a book you read, film watched, a discussion with someone), and/or if there are connections with other readings/topics addressed in the class. **Reading responses should be no longer than 1-page single-spaced, 12pt font, and are to be uploaded to blackboard by 12pm the day before class.**

Final presentation and paper (50%)

You will be responsible for formulating a topic on your own, one that incorporates your learning of the thematic and theoretical issues addressed in the first two sections of the course and uses this learning in analyzing a religious expressions (e.g. religious media or movement). You will have the week after spring break to work on your final paper. A 3-page **outline** of your topic, a short discussion of the sections of your paper and a preliminary bibliography are due at the beginning of class on March 24th. **Presentations**, which will give you a chance to workshop your paper—both presenting the topic and eliciting your peers' feedback and comments will take place April 28 and 30. **Final papers** should be 15-18 pages long, and are due May 2nd at 5pm. Papers should be placed in my mailbox in the anthropology main office (Building HAH; first floor)

Additional Information on Bases of Assessment for Assignments

General Basis of Assessment for Presentations:

1. Subject/**Content**: Were the issues raised informative and relevant? Did the presentation have a clear focus?
2. Organization/**Clarity**: Was the presentation easy to follow? Was there a clear introduction? Did it follow a systematic and coherently trajectory?
3. Sensitivity to the **Audience**: Was the presentation engaging? Did ze make effective use of pauses, gestures, change in pace and pitch? Did ze make use effectively of AV aids?

General Basis of Assessment for Papers:

- 1- Do you clearly state your **argument**? Think of your argument as the underlying problematic or question that your paper seeks to address, and that both shapes and provides momentum to your discussion. The strength of an argument relates to how well it enables you to assess and analyse your topic.
- 2- Do you provide **compelling** grounds to support your argument? How well do you draw upon, and make connections with your materials in supporting the point(s) you are making? Do you draw on specific passages or arguments? Are there materials you did not draw on that would have addressed the issue you are discussing more effectively?

- 3- Does your paper demonstrate your **comprehension** of the materials and issues at hand?
- 4- Are you able to **convey** your argument effectively? Here I am referring to the clarity of your writing style, including your spelling, grammar, diction, syntax, etc.

Community, Communication and Caveats

No extensions will be given for assignments. If you are late with an assignment you will be penalized a part-grade for each day it is late (e.g. go from an A to A- or A- to B+). The only valid excuse for being late on assignments (including the paper and in-class presentation) is a personal medical or family emergency. Students must contact me and present an excuse in writing from a professional in order to avoid penalties. Computer failure, travel plans, and work are not acceptable excuses.

I reserve the right to not respond to email questions sent less than 24 hours before an assignment is due. Please send your questions ahead of time to ensure I have the time to respond to them appropriately.

No electronic media are to be used in class (e.g. cell phones, blackberries, laptops, itouch, ipads) and if you do bring them to class, please ensure ringers are switched off and/or that your device does not make any sound. Laptops may only be used for class presentations or related to an accommodation.

No topics are off-limits during class discussion, however, please be respectful and judicious in your phrasing of comments and in your responses to your peers' comments.

Plagiarism in any form will not be tolerated. You are expected to familiarize yourself and adhere to GWUs honour code. Any breach (e.g. papers downloaded from the internet, not citing all the sources you use in your written work) **will be severely penalized**.

If you miss one day of class because of an illness, unforeseen circumstances, etc., or if you need to take a personal development day, you will not be penalized. If you miss a second day of class, you must provide a compelling explanation (e.g. severe illness). If you miss three classes, you **must** meet with me and your grade will be lowered. If you miss four days of classes I reserve the right to drop you from the class.

Religious Holidays: please contact me two weeks in advance if you are going to miss class due to religious holidays not recognized by GWUs academic calendar.

Academic Integrity: All students must practice academic integrity. This means doing your own work, and when you use *the words and ideas of others in any written work, you must:* 1) identify direct quotations with quotation marks; and 2) indicate the source of ideas that are not your own by using social sciences notation form. If you have any questions at all about what this means, you should speak to your TAs or the instructor. Plagiarism, and all breaches of academic integrity (for example, the sale of lecture-notes from this class, or the use of content from the internet as though it was your own), will be severely dealt with in accordance with the University's policies and procedures. For more information on The George Washington University's policies on academic integrity, consult: <http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html>

Support for Students Outside the Classroom:

DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES (DSS)

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in the Marvin Center, Suite 242, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: <http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/>

UNIVERSITY COUNSELING CENTER (UCC) 202-994-5300

The University Counseling Center (UCC) offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include:

- crisis and emergency mental health consultations
- confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals

<http://gwired.gwu.edu/counsel/CounselingServices/AcademicSupportServices>

CLASSES: BREAKDOWN OF TOPICS AND READINGS

Readings will be available on blackboard

*****First Section: Towards the Categorization of 'Religion'*****

January 13- Introduction

January 13- Introduction to the course and distribution of course syllabus

January 20-

MLK DAY- NO CLASS

January 27- Towards a Universal Categorization of Religion

William James, selections from 'The Varieties of Religious Experience'

Lecture II: Circumscriptions of the Topic (pp. 35-56; Barnes and Noble Edition)

Excerpt from Lecture XIV-XV (pp. 293-7; Barnes and Noble Edition)

Emile Durkheim selections from 'Elementary Forms of Religious Life'

Excerpt from Chapter 1: A Definition of the Religious Phenomenon and of Religion (pp. 25-46; Oxford Edition)

Excerpt from Chapter 7: The Origins of These Beliefs (pp. 162-174; Oxford Edition)

Clifford Geertz 'Chapter 4: Religion as a Cultural System'-in 'Interpretations of Culture' (pp. 87-125)

February 3- Towards a Genealogy of the Universal Categorization of 'Religion' and 'World Religion'

Talal Asad 'Chapter 1: The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category'- in

'Genealogies of Religion' (pp. 27-54)

Tomoko Masuzawa 'The Invention of World Religions', Introduction & Chapter 1

February 10- Reinforcing and Subverting Religious Traditions: Syncretism and Conversion

Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart (Eds) 'Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis'

Introduction: Problematizing Syncretism (pp. 1-26)

Chapter 2: Beyond Syncretism: Translation and Diabolization in the Appropriation of Protestantism in Africa (pp. 45-68)

Irene Silverblatt, selections from "Modern Inquisitions"

In-class film- "The Longing: Forgotten Jews of South America"

February 17

President's Day- NO CLASS

February 24- Religion vs/and Politics: Debates about Secularism

Jose Casanova 'Public Religions in the Modern World', Introduction and Chapter 1 (pp. 3-39)

Talal Asad, selections 'Formations of the Secular'

March 3- Religion vs/and Economics

Max Weber 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism' Chapters 1, 2, and 5 (pp. 3-38, 102-125)

John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff 'Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism' in Public Culture 12: 2 (pp. 291-343)

March 10

SPRING BREAK- NO CLASS

*****Second Section: Religious Movements and Media *****

March 17

Work on final paper topics and outline- NO CLASS

March 24

Final paper topics and outline due at the beginning of class

The Ramayana and the Hindutva Movement in India

Purnima Mankekar, excerpts from 'Screening Culture, Viewing Politics'
in class: watch clips from Ramayana performance and television serials

March 31

Embodiment and Cassettes- Islamic Ethical Practice in Egypt

Charles Hirshkind, excerpts from 'The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics'

April 7

Work and Islamic Piety in Indonesia

Daromir Rudnyckj- excerpts from 'Islam, Globalization and the Afterlives of Development'

April 14

Baptist Preaching and Proselytizing in the US: Speech and Words

Susan Harding, excerpts from 'The Book of Jerry Falwell'

April 21

Oprah and US Spirituality

Katie Lofton, excerpts from 'Oprah: the Gospel of an Icon'

April 28 and April 30 (Designated Monday)- Student Presentations

*****FINAL PAPERS DUE May 2nd in my mailbox by 5pm*****