

ANT 356H1S: Anthropology of Religion
Winter 2014
University of Toronto, Department of Anthropology
Instructor: Mahiye Secil Dagtas

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Office Hours: Thursdays 10am-12 pm or by appointment

Course Meeting Place & Time: SS1083, Wednesdays 6-8pm,

Prerequisite: ANT 207 (Core concepts in Social and Cultural Anthropology) or 204 (for UTM)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to introduce students to key themes in theoretical and ethnographic writings on religion and ritual, from the early work of Emile Durkheim, Mary Douglas, Max Weber, and Victor Turner to more recent contributions on the relation between religion, embodiment, language and materiality. At the offset it is important to state that the course has a particular focus on **Abrahamic religions**, in particular **Islam and Christianity**. Although we will briefly explore anthropological debates on indigenous religions, this is not the focus of this course.

Where religion is normally thought of as a spiritual process, in this course it is examined in its social embeddedness. Until recently it has often been assumed that in 'Modern Western' society, religion was no longer an important factor in social life. The course questions this, both theoretically and ethnographically, and shows how anthropology of religion needs both a focus on the local and the global as well as an attention to new forms of mediation, materiality and ethics. In fact thinking of religions as rigid sets of rules or dogmatic statements about morality or the nature of society may not be useful anymore, but instead we see how religions are practiced, embodied and linked to ethical orientations and the returns and sedimentation of histories. Religion as a practice is gendered and racialized and can both reinforce orthodoxy as well as change the rule of the same doctrine. The focus of this course is also on selected key ideas in critical theory which underlines the study of religion and an emphasis is given to both classical and new approaches.

This course is not oriented to the study of native religions and their related shamanic practices and consciousness, nor it focuses on anthropology of religion in sub-Saharan Africa (focus of much of classic ethnographies in anthropology of religion). Those students who are particularly interested in these themes are advised to take other courses given at the University of Toronto.

COURSE READINGS

Recommended:

Michael Lambek, 2002. **A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion** Malden: Blackwell. The text is available at Amazon and the University of Toronto Bookstore. This is a good reader to explore further issues on anthropology of religion.

You will be provided with legal access to electronic versions of the course material readings and links through Blackboard. You can also have access to the articles on electronic journals through <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/robarts/>. The direct links to the articles are also provided in the

syllabus but in the likely event that they do not work, please find the articles manually on the library webpage. The three ethnographies for book reviews are available through the UofT bookstore

COURSEWORK

Please use the class questions as a guide in preparing for the reading each week and for the tests. Use the questions to explore different aspects of the week's reading. Keeping detailed notes of your preparation for classes will be useful when it comes to preparing for revision. Please note there will be a time for discussion during the class. It is expected you will have **done the reading assigned** that week to be able to participate to the discussion.

MODE OF ASSESSMENT

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| • Participation | 5% |
| • Five weekly responses | 10% |
| • Midterm (Feb 26) | 25% |
| • Picture Assignment (before April 2) | 5% |
| • Book Review (due March 26) | 30% |
| • Final Exam (TBD) | 25% |

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Participation (5%) Although the course is build on lectures, your active weekly participation will increase the success of this class. To this end, students are expected to keep up with weekly readings, come to class prepared and contribute to class discussion. Class discussions will be in the form of small group activities and general discussion, and participation will also involve in-class writing in certain circumstances. Our goal is not to read and memorize, but to reflect on and engage with the ideas presented in the material. Please come to class prepared to discuss each week's readings in a lively and **critical** manner. You can draw on your weekly response or a discussion question or comment on the weekly readings.

Weekly Responses (to be posted on Blackboard) (10%): I ask each of you to upload a short paragraph about the readings of that week (**5 responses in total for 9 weeks** for which you are assigned readings). Your responses can take the form of a short commentary or a question, **not longer than a paragraph**. Make sure that it is not just a summary of the texts but a commentary or questions deriving from your critical engagement with the texts in relation to a particular theme, example or problem. It has to be uploaded **no later than noon on the day of the class**. Contributions uploaded later than 12pm and before 6pm (which is the start time of the class) will be marked out of 1 rather than 2. I will not mark responses submitted after the class starts.

Please upload your contribution on the **Discussion board** (under the file for the week) of the **UofT Portal**: <https://portal.utoronto.ca/>

Picture Assignment (5%): You are expected to take a picture in Toronto on the theme "seeing religion in everyday life" and attach it to the **Discussion Board** on blackboard, together with a 1 page long analysis that explains/discusses

- what is in the picture

- in what way you think it relates to the course themes and to the general theme of “seeing religion in everyday life”
- if any of the conceptual frameworks that you become familiar with throughout the course help you to analyze the content of the picture

This assignment can be considered as a very small-scale field activity. It aims to help you to apply some of the key concepts in anthropology of religion to first hand-state. You can submit your picture assignment anytime after the reading week until noon on April 2. Feel free to comment each other’s picture assignments. Further instructions will be provided with regard to the use of human subjects in the pictures.

Book Review: (30%) [5-6 pages, double spaced and 12p font] You can choose any **one** of these three ethnographies listed below (available at UofT Bookstore if you wish to acquire them):

- [Engelke, Matthew. 2007. Beyond Scripture in an African Church. Berkeley: University of California Press.](#)
- [Amira Mittermaier. 2011. Dreams that Matter: Egyptian Landscapes of Imagination. Berkeley: University of California Press.](#)
- [Susan Martha Kahn. 2000. Reproducing Jews: A Cultural Account of Assisted Conception in Israel. Durham: Duke University Press.](#)

Please note this review is not merely a summary of the content of the book, but it is a reflection of what are, in your view, the strengths and weaknesses of the book; how it relates to other material you have read in this or other courses; how ‘well’ is written and how poignant are the anthropological themes that it presents. **You should cite at least 3 of the articles in the reading list for a passing grade on this assignment (excluding the movies shown in class).** They will be submitted to blackboard through **turnitin.com**

Midterm and Final exam (each 25%): The exams are in essay form, answering 4 of the 5 questions on the major themes of the course. Midterm covers all material, including lectures, films and discussions until February 26, and Final covers all material, including lectures, films and discussions between March 5 and April 2.

Policy on Late Review

In order to ensure fairness to those who complete their work on time, a penalty of 5% per working day (including weekend days) will be added on the book review handed in after the due date. Please do not ask for an extension.

COURSE SCHEDULE

1. Jan 8 Orientation and Introduction to key conceptual frameworks

2. Jan 15

What ‘is’ religion?

What is Geertz's definition of religion? Why does Asad criticize Geertz? If religion is a cultural system, how does it differ from other cultural systems? What is the tension and relationship between religion as culture and religion as power?

- Geertz, C. 1993 'Religion as a Cultural System'. In *The Interpretation of Culture*. (Also in Lambek)
- Asad, Talal 1983 Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz. *Man* 18(2): 237-259 (Also in Lambek)
<http://www.jstor.org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/stable/info/10.2307/2801433?Search=yes&resultItemClick=true&searchText=talal&searchText=asad&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Dtalal%2Basad%26amp%3Bfilter%3Djid%253A10.2307%252Fj100268%26amp%3BSearch%3DSearch%26amp%3Bwc%3Don%26amp%3Bfc%3Doff%26amp%3BglobalSearch%3D%26amp%3BsbBox%3D%26amp%3BsjBox%3D%26amp%3BspBox%3D&>

3. Jan 22

Rituals, the Sacred and the Social

Why does Durkheim focus on rituals? Do rituals produce society? Is there a clear-cut distinction between the sacred and the profane? How does religion become the sites of contestation? What does Turner mean by liminality and communitas? What are the similarities and differences between Turner's Durkheim's and Douglas's approaches to rituals.

- Turner, V. 1969. Liminality and Communitas. In *Readings in Ritual Studies*. (Also In Lambek)
- Durkheim, E. 1912 - 'The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life' (In Lambek)
- Douglas, Mary. 1996. *Ritual Uncleaness. In Purity and Danger*. London and New York; Routledge. Pp. 7-29

4. January 29

Religion in National and Transnational Contexts

Is 'modern' society dominated by a secular view of the world? How is transnational subjectivity affected by changing religions and lifeworld? What does Weber mean by "the spirit of capitalism"? What is the relationship between globalization and religion? What does the "world" imply in the concept of "world religions"?

- Weber, Max. 1930. *The Spirit of Capitalism In The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Routledge.
- Hefner, Robert. 1998 Multiple Modernities: Christianity, Islam and Hinduism in a Globalizing Age. *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 27:83-104.
- Csordas, Thomas 2007. Introduction: Modalities of Transnational Transcendence. *Anthropological Theory*, Vol. 7(3), pp. 259 – 272

5. Feb 5

Spiritual Economies and Economic Theologies

What is the relationship between economy and religion? Are religion and modernity mutually exclusive? Can we decouple modernity from secularism? In what spaces do secular and religious converge?

- Navaro-Yashin, Yael. 2002. The Market for Identities: Buying and Selling Secularity and Islam. *In Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey*. Pp. 78-113.

- Rudnykyj, Daromir. 2009. "Spiritual Economies: Islam and Neoliberalism in Contemporary Indonesia." *Cultural Anthropology*. 24. 1: 104–141.
- Amira Mittermaier. 2013. Trading with God: Islam, Calculation, Excess. In *A Companion to the Anthropology of Religion*. Eds. Michael Lambek and Janice Boddy. Pp. 274-293.

6. Feb 12 – **DECISION ON THE BOOK FOR BOOK REVIEW**

Gender and Religion

What role does gender play in the way religion is communicated, practiced, and embodied? How do women relate to religious discourses and practices? What is the role of bodily experience in the constitution of belief? How does an embodiment paradigm help us understand the production of religion?

- Saba Mahmood. 2001. Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival. *Cultural Anthropology*, 6(2):202-236.
- Rebecca Lester. 2005. Introduction. Jesus in our Womb: Embodying Modernity in a Mexican Convent. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1-29.

Recommended:

- Boddy, Janice. 1998, Violence Embodied? Female Circumcision, Gender Politics, and Cultural Aesthetics. In *Rethinking Violence Against Women*. R. Dobash and R. Dobash, eds. Thousand oaks, California: Sage. pp. 77-110..

Showing of the film: **(Un)Veiled: Muslim Women Talk About Hijab** by Ines Hoffman Kanna (36 minutes).

7. Feb 19 – **Reading Week, no Class**

PICTURE ASSIGNMENT CAN BE UPLOADED TO DISCUSSION BOARD FROM THIS WEEK ON!

8. Feb 26- **IN CLASS-TEST**

9. March 5

MOVIE:

Showing of the Film: Persepolis.

Discussion

10. March 12

Ethical orientations, sensory and spatial registers of religion

Can religious practice be a form of self-improvement and a life-orientation? Does the way individuals inhabit a space affect their religious attitudes? Why are new technologies and electronic media important to the religious experience?

- Hirschkind, C. 2001. The Ethics of Listening: Casette-Sermon Audition in Contemporary Cairo. *American Ethnologist* 28(3):623-649.

- Oosterbaan, M. 2009. Sonic Supremacy: Sound, Space and Charisma in a favela in Rio de Janeiro. *Critique of Anthropology* 29(1): 81-104.

Showing parts of the film: New Muslim Cool, by Jennifer Maytorena Taylor

11. March 19

Belief, Language & Conversion

What constitutes a religious language? What role does it play in religious conversion? How do we know when someone has converted? Is an expression of belief the same as believing? Is belief an internal property of the person?

- Keane, W. 1997. Religious Language, *Annual Review of Anthropology* (26): 47-71
- Harding, S. 1987. Convicted by the Holy Spirit The Rhetoric of Fundamental Baptist Conversion". In *American Ethnologist* 14, 1: 167-181
- Michal Kravel-Tovi. 2012. Rites of Passing: Bureaucratic Encounters, dramaturgy and Jewish conversion in Israel. *American Ethnologist*. 39(2):371-388.

12. March 26 **BOOK REVIEW DUE**

Religious Pluralism and tolerance

What are the possibilities for different religious communities to occupy the same living spaces? What are the obstacles to it? Is it possible to decouple pluralism and liberalism? What is the place of religion in multiculturalist and pluralist policies? How does it differ from other modes and experiences of religious co-existence?

- Veena Das. 2013. Cohabiting an Interreligious Milieu: Reflections on Religious Diversity. In *A Companion to the Anthropology of Religion*. Eds. Michael Lambek and Janice Boddy. Pp. 69-117.
- Marcy Brick-Danan. 2012. Introduction. *In Jewish Life in 21st Century Turkey*. Pp. 1-26. Indiana University Press.
- Andre Levy. Notes on Jewish-Muslim Relationships: Revisiting the Vanishing Moroccan Jewish Community. *Cultural Anthropology* 18(3): 365- 397.

13. April 2 - **AND PICTURE ASSIGNMENT DUE !**

Anthropology and Religion

How do anthropologists of religion negotiate their secular stance with their desires to grasp a native's point of view? Is "believing" a necessary part of "participant" observation?

- Ewing, Katherine P. 1994. Dreams from a Saint: Anthropological Atheism and the Temptation to Believe. *American Anthropologist* 96(3): 571-583
- Lambek, Michael. 2012. Facing Religion from Anthropology. *Anthropology of this Century*. Issue 4.

Recommended:

- Cannell, Fenella. 2005. Christianity of Anthropology. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 11: 225-256.

FINAL EXAM: To be Determined