

REL 2085: Religion and Violence

T: 11:45-1:40 PM (Periods 5-6)

R: 12:50-1:40 PM (Period 6)

Venue: NRN 1037

Instructor: Dr. Ali Altaf Mian

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Office Location: Anderson Hall 107-B

Office Hours:

Course Description:

Religion has a paradoxical relationship with violence. On the one hand, we can easily find numerous examples of religious discourses authorizing and religious actors as well as institutions carrying out violence. On the other hand, religious traditions elaborate antidotes to violence. But what is violence? The use of brute force? Injustice? Terrorizing tactics? The outbursts of radical evil? The bifurcation of humanity into us versus them? Hurting someone's feelings? What is the relationship between these forms of violence and historical and contemporary religion? This course draws on philosophical, historical, and anthropological studies of violence to highlight the paradox named above, deepening students' understanding of religion as a complex historical phenomenon.

Course Learning Objectives:

- To develop capacious thinking skills
- To introduce students to philosophical discourses on religion and violence
- To introduce students to religious studies questions and methodologies
- To develop analytical writing skills
- To develop analytical speaking skills

A Note on the Syllabus: This syllabus is like a contract that is semi-binding. It is binding insofar as the assignments and points allotted to them, rules about grades, and the grading scale. It is also binding in terms of attendance policy. However, it is not binding in terms of the reading schedule and reading assignments. The instructor reserves the right to cancel or amend the reading schedule based on the class's performance.

Course Requirements and Grading Criteria

The final grade for this course is based on 1000 possible points.

Attendance and Participation: 200 points

Class attendance and participation are mandatory. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class session. You can miss two T and three R sessions without penalty. Each additional unexcused absence will detract 50 points from your grade (5% of the grade). Excused absences are consistent with university policies as listed in the undergraduate catalog (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>) and require appropriate documentation. Class will begin and end on time. Three late arrivals (anything over 5 minutes) will be considered one absence.

A Note on the Readings: The readings for this class are dense, and you should spend at least 2 hours preparing the readings for each lecture session. Failure to complete the readings will slowly deteriorate your performance in this course, since the questions in the quizzes and the prompts of the essay assignments will really test conceptual comprehension.

Essays: 200 points

The essays will be assigned, submitted, and graded on Canvas (E-Learning). The essays can be organized either as one long paragraph (7-10 sentences) or three short paragraphs (each consisting of at least 3 sentences). Each essay is worth 50 points. There will be five essays in total, and the lowest grade will be dropped for each student. Missed essays should be completed within two weeks. No Extension permitted.

Quizzes: 300 points

There will be seven total quizzes in this class. Each quiz is worth 50 points. The lowest score will be dropped. Thus, each student must take 6 quizzes. The quizzes will be unannounced. The students will have 20 minutes to complete the quiz. The quiz will consist of only multiple choice, fill-in-the-blanks, and True or False questions. There might be multiple versions given out to the different break-out sessions. If you miss a quiz, it is your responsibility to schedule a time with me to re-take the quiz. Missed quizzes should be completed within two weeks. No Extensions permitted.

Film Review: 100 points

The film review is a 500-word essay on a film of your choice that addresses the themes covered in this course. You are welcome to go with either a film or a documentary. The essay on your film/documentary should be both descriptive and analytical. In the descriptive part, you should discuss the director, the work's plot and character development, cinematography, and reception. In the analytical part, you should relate the film's content to the course's themes. While you are not required to consult outside sources beyond the class readings, you are permitted to do so. Please use Chicago style for citations. Please make sure that the essay has a clear conceptual focus (for example, it should pertain to only 3-4 main concepts and not be vague in terms of relating the film to the course themes).

Final Paper: 200 points

The final paper for this course will be an argumentative essay in which you take an ethical and/or a political position. Student-specific prompts will be issued two weeks in advance of the due date for the final paper. Detailed instructions will be posted on Canvas a month prior to the due date.

Grading Scale

Score	Percent	Grade
945-1000	94.5-100	A
900-944	90.0-94.4	A-
867-899	86.7-89.9	B+
834-866	83.4-86.6	B

800-833	80.0-83.3	B-
767-799	76.7-79.9	C+
734-766	73.4-76.6	C
700-733	70.0-73.3	C-
667-699	66.7-69.9	D+
634-666	63.4-66.6	D
600-633	60.0-63.3	D-
0-599	0-59.9	E

Additional information about UF's grading policy can be found here:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

General Education Description and Student Learning Outcomes

HUMANITIES DESCRIPTION: Humanities courses provide instruction in the history, key themes, principles, terminology, and theory or methodologies used within a humanities discipline or the humanities in general. Students will learn to identify and to analyze the key elements, biases and influences that shape thought. These courses emphasize clear and effective analysis and approach issues and problems from multiple perspectives.

HUMANITIES SLOs:

- Identify, describe, and explain the history, underlying theory and methodologies used in the course (Content).
- Identify and analyze key elements, biases and influences that shape thought within the subject area. Approach issues and problems within the discipline from multiple perspectives (Critical Thinking).
- Communicate knowledge, thoughts and reasoning clearly and effectively (Communication).

INTERNATIONAL DESCRIPTION: International courses promote the development of students' global and intercultural awareness. Students examine the cultural, economic, geographic, historical, political, and/or social experiences and processes that characterize the contemporary world, and thereby comprehend the trends, challenges, and opportunities that affect communities around the world. Students analyze and reflect on the ways in which cultural, economic, political, and/or social systems and beliefs mediate their own and other people's understanding of an increasingly connected world.

INTERNATIONAL SLOs

- Identify, describe, and explain the historical, cultural, economic, political, and/or social experiences and processes that characterize the contemporary world (Content).
- Analyze and reflect on the ways in which cultural, economic, political, and/or social systems and beliefs mediate understandings the students' and others' realities in an increasingly contemporary world (Critical Thinking).

Reflecting these Gen Ed designations, after taking religion and violence students will be able to:

1. Identify, describe, and explain how the resources available in the humanities (and social sciences) can help in understanding the notion of religion and violence (**Content SLOs for Gen Ed Humanities**).
2. Identify and analyze the relations among different theoretical frameworks in humanistic traditions of thought relevant for understanding religion and violence as a concept and phenomenon (**Critical Thinking SLOs for Gen Ed Humanities**).
3. Identify and analyze divergent instances of religion and violence in different parts of the world (**Content and Critical Thinking SLOs Gen Ed Humanities and International**).
4. Apply relevant theoretical perspectives and analyze how they can be applied with regard to current representations of religion and violence in different parts of the world (**Critical Thinking SLO for Gen Ed Humanities and International**).
5. Critically analyze different aspects of religion and violence in relation to nationalism, race, gender, etc. as these appear in different contexts of the world (**Critical Thinking SLO Gen Ed Humanities and International**).

Student Honor Code:

As a UF student, you have agreed to follow the university's Honor Code, meaning you will not give or receive unauthorized assistance in completing assignments. Violations can result in failing an exam, paper or the course. For more information, see:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/studentguide/studentrights.php>. On all work submitted for credit by University of Florida students, the following pledge is implied, "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." Please note that acts of plagiarism include:

- Turning in a paper or assignment that was written by someone else.
- Copying verbatim a sentence or paragraph of text from the work of another author without proper citation and quotation marks.
- Using and copying verbatim a sentence or paragraph of text from Chatgpt or any other AI software for any kind of course assignments.
- Paraphrasing or restating in your own words, text or ideas written by someone else without proper citation.

For more info, see <http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/students.html>

Disabilities:

"If you are a student with a disability and would like to request disability-related accommodations, you are encouraged to contact me and the Disability Resource Center as early in the semester as possible. The Disability Resource Center is located in 001 Building 0020 (Reid Hall). Their phone number is 392-8565."

Course Evaluations:

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online. Students can complete evaluations in three ways: [1] The email they receive from GatorEvals; [2] Their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals; or [3] The central portal at <https://my-ufl.bluera.com>. Guidance on how to provide constructive feedback is available at <https://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens. Summaries of course evaluation

results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Recording of Class Sessions:

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

Critical Thinking

Students are encouraged to employ critical thinking and to rely on data and verifiable sources to interrogate all assigned readings and subject matter in this course as a way of determining whether they agree with their classmates and/or their instructor. No lesson is intended to espouse, promote, advance, inculcate, or compel a particular feeling, perception, viewpoint or belief.

Schedule of Class Meetings

Note: All readings are provided in PDF form on Canvas (E-Learning). Please print out the readings and/or read them on either a laptop or tablet. Please do not access and read on your smart phones.

R August 21—Course Introduction

T August 26—Uday S. Mehta, “Violence,” from *Political Concepts*
<https://www.politicalconcepts.org/violence-uday-s-mehta/>

R August 28—Claudia Baracchi, “Force,” from *Political Concepts*
<https://www.politicalconcepts.org/force-baracchi/>

T September 2—William T. Cavanaugh, “Religious Violence as Modern Myth.” *Political Theology* 15, no. 6 (2014).

<https://doi.org/10.1179/1462317X14Z.00000000094>

R September 4—Isaac Blacksin, *Conflicted: Making News from Global War* (excerpt)

T September 9—Étienne Balibar, “Exploitation,” from *Political Concepts*

<https://www.politicalconcepts.org/balibar-exploitation/>

R September 11—Kiarina Kordela, “Horror,” from *Political Concepts*

<https://www.politicalconcepts.org/horror-kiarina-kordela/>

*****Friday September 12—ESSAY 1 DUE by midnight**

T September 16—Adi Ophir, “The Political,” from *Political Concepts*

<https://www.politicalconcepts.org/the-political-adi-ophir/>

R September 18—Jacques Rancière, “Occupation,” from *Political Concepts*

<https://www.politicalconcepts.org/occupation-jacques-ranciere/>

T September 23—Andrés Fabián Henao Castro, “Necropolitics,” from *Political Concepts*

<https://www.politicalconcepts.org/necropolitics-andres-fabian-henao-castro/>

R September 25—Barbara N. Nagel, “Domestic Violence,” from *Political Concepts*

<https://www.politicalconcepts.org/domestic-violence-barbara-n-nagel/>

*****Friday September 26—ESSAY 2 DUE by midnight**

T September 30—Talal Asad, “Pain and Truth in Medieval Christian Ritual,” in *Genealogies of Religion*, pgs. 83-124.

R October 2—Talal Asad, “Reflections on Cruelty and Torture,” in *Formations of the Secular*, pgs. 100-124.

T October 7—Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing*, pgs. 1-38.

R October 9—Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing*, pgs. 39-64.

*****Friday October 10—ESSAY 3 DUE by midnight**

T October 14—Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing*, pgs. 65-96.

R October 16—Thomas Sizgorich, “The Dancing Martyr: Violence, Identity, and the Abbasid Postcolonial.” *History of Religion* 57.1 (2017):2-27.

T October 21—Beatrice Marovich, “The War with Death,” in *Sister Death: Political Theologies for Living and Dying*, pgs. 59-85.

R October 23—Jacques Derrida, “Violence against Animals,” in *For What Tomorrow...A Dialogue with Elisabeth Roudinesco*, pgs. 62-76.

T October 28—Jacques Derrida, “Death Penalties,” in *For What Tomorrow...A Dialogue with Elisabeth Roudinesco*, pgs. 139-165.

R October 30—Jacques Derrida, *The Death Penalty, Volume 1* (excerpt)

T November 4—Jacques Derrida, *The Death Penalty, Volume 2* (excerpt)

R November 6—Agata Bielik-Robson, “Religion of the Finite Life? Messianicity and the Right to Live in Derrida’s *Death Penalty* Seminar.” *Political Theology*
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1462317X.2017.1421605>

*****Friday November 7—ESSAY 4 DUE by midnight**

T November 11—No Class (Holiday)

R November 13—A. Azfar Moin, “Sovereign Violence: Temple Destruction in India and Shrine Desecration in Iran and Central Asia.”

T November 18—Milad Odabaei, “The Bewitched City: Psychopolitics in the Wake of the Social.” *Public Culture* 37:2 (2025):243-261.

R November 20—John Protevi, *Regimes of Violence: Toward a Political Anthropology* (excerpt)

*****Friday November 21—ESSAY 5 DUE by midnight**

T November 25—No Class (Thanksgiving Holiday)

R November 27—No Class (Thanksgiving Holiday)

*****Sunday November 30—Film Review Due by midnight**

T December 2—Hans Harder, “Between Bourgeois Existence and Violence.”
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1462317X.2021.1905390>

*****T December 9—Final Paper Due by midnight**