

Theory and Method II
Spring 2024
RLG 6036

Meeting Time & Location:

W | Period 10 – E1 (5:10 PM - 8:10 PM) | MAT 251

Instructor: Benjamin Soares

Office: 107B Anderson Hall

Telephone: 352/273-2945

Email: benjaminsoares@ufl.edu

Office Hours: Wed., 3-5 PM & by appointment

Course Description

This course is the companion course to Method & Theory I and provides an overview of the contemporary landscape in the academic study of religion. Following various critiques of the essentialist, foundationalist, teleological, and totalizing pretensions of classical methods and theories, considerable fragmentation, contestation, fluidity, and cross-fertilization characterize this landscape. This polycentric topography both accompanies and is a response to post-coloniality, globalization, and the emergence of new information and communication technologies, which have decentered taken-for-granted cartographies of religion, generating increased awareness of religious hybridity, innovation, diversity, and conflicts over orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

The course begins with an examination of the struggles around the legacy of the history of religions approach and the Geertzian phenomenological-hermeneutics synthesis, which dominated the study of religion until the mid-1980s. We will devote particular attention to debates around the viability of the category of religion, as well as the implications in power dynamics ranging from colonialism and imperialism to nationalism and capitalism through the close reading of key theorists. The second part of the course will center around the close reading of a series of monographs that highlight emerging directions, themes, tropes, and methods that are likely to help to define the field of religious studies in the coming years.

Course Objectives:

1. To map out some of the contours and main lines of debate on the contemporary theoretical landscape in the academic study of religion;
2. To sharpen students' capacity to identify and critically evaluate the epistemological and ontological assumptions behind current debates about the "nature" of religion and its place in context;
3. To offer students some hands-on experience in the use of methods and theories in the preparation of syllabi and written work that might eventually be publishable in some format.

Requirements and Format:

The seminar is organized around class discussions based on the weekly assigned readings. We will usually read a monograph or several articles per week. Since this is a small advanced seminar, active and engaged participation is required. Students will make presentations and help to lead discussions.

Students will write **8 critical commentary papers** (500-600 words) on the readings and in consultation with the instructor will develop a specific program of writing related to their particular interests and needs. One option is to write a research paper around a theme related to the course. Another option is

to negotiate with the instructor a plan of work that gets one closer to preliminary examination preparation.

Practicum: Two Annotated Syllabi (at the undergraduate level): Students will create two full-fledged syllabi, one for an introductory course and another for an advanced course of their choice. For the introductory course students may select from the following: Introduction to World Religions, Religions of Asia, Introduction to Islam, Introduction to Christianity, New Testament, Hebrew Scriptures, American Religious History, Religions of Latin America, Religion and Science, Environmental Ethics, Religion and Nature/Ecology, Religion and Society, and Anthropology of Religion. In addition to the syllabi (each with its course description, objectives, required readings, assignments, etc.) students will offer a one to two-page précis for each course, presenting the theoretical and methodological reasoning behind the choices made (e.g., the textbooks selected, the thematic organization of the course, the type of assignments, etc.).

In addition to the critical commentary papers, the annotated syllabi, and participation in the seminar discussions, students will meet at least once with the instructor, make oral presentations, write a final paper/writing assignment proposal, and workshop the paper/writing assignment during the seminar.

Method of Evaluation:

- Regular, active participation in seminar discussions (15% of the final grade)
- Critical commentary papers on readings: 8 papers (500-600 words each) (25%)
- Practicum (syllabi) (10%)
- Class presentations (10%)
- Research paper (6,000 to 7,500 words) or other agreed-upon written work (40%)

Final grades will be computed on this scale:

A = 94-100%; A- = 90-93%; B+ = 87-89%; B = 84-86%; B- = 80-83%; C+ = 77-79%;
C = 74-76%; C- = 70-73%; D+ = 67-69%; D = 64-66%; D- = 60-63%; F = <60%

Required Texts:

Alatas, Ismail Fajrie, *What is Religious Authority? Cultivating Islamic Communities in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

Bloomer, Kristin C., *Possessed by the Virgin: Hinduism, Roman Catholicism, and Marian Possession in South India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Hurd, Elizabeth, *Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

Orsi, Robert, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Taylor, Sarah McFarland. *Ecopiety: Green Media and the Dilemma of Environmental Virtue* (New York: NYU Press, 2019).

Additional readings will be made available through e-Learning: <http://elearning.ufl.edu>

SCHEDULE

Week 1 (1/10): Introduction & Orientation

Week 2 (1/17): World Religions as Colonial Constructs

Chidester, David, "'Classify and Conquer': Friedrich Max Müller, Indigenous Religious Traditions, and Imperial Comparative Religion," in *Beyond Primitivism: Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity*, edited by Jacob Olupona (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 71-88.

King, Richard, "Orientalism and the Modern Myth of 'Hinduism.'" *Numen* 46, 2 (1999): 146-185.

Lopez, Donald, "Foreigner at the Lama's Feet," in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, edited by Donald Lopez (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 251-296.

Masuzawa, Tomoko, "Preface" and "Introduction," in *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. ix-36.

van Klinken, Adriaan, "Studying Religion in the Pluriversity: Decolonial Perspectives." *Religion*, 50, 1 (2020): 148-155, DOI: 10.1080/0048721X.2019.1681108

Supplementary reading:

Chidester David, *Empire of Religion: Imperialism & Comparative Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

Locklin, Reid, Tracy Tiemeier, & Johann Vento, "Teaching World Religions without Teaching 'World Religions.'" *Teaching Theology and Religion* 15, 2 (2012): 159-181.

Omer, Atalia, "Decolonizing Religion and the Practice of Peace: Two Case Studies from the Postcolonial World." *Critical Research on Religion*, 8, 3 (2020): 273-296.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2050303220924111>

Week 3 (1/24): Reading Week/Work on Practicum

Week 4 (1/31): Anti-Essentialism and the Struggle over the Category of Religion

Smith, Jonathan Z., "Introduction," in *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. xi-xiii.

Smith, Jonathan Z., "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Relating Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 179-197.

Lincoln, Bruce, "Theses on Method." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 8 (1996): 225-227.

Fitzgerald, Tim, "Bruce Lincoln's 'Theses on Method': Antitheses." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 18 (2006): 392-423.

Lincoln, Bruce, "Concessions, Confessions, Clarifications, Ripostes: By the way of Response to Tim Fitzgerald." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 19 (2007): 163-168.

Tweed, Thomas, "Marking Religion's Boundaries: Constitutive Terms, Orienting Tropes, and Exegetical Fussiness." *History of Religions* 44, 3 (2005): 252-276.

Supplementary reading:

Fitzgerald, Timothy, "Critical Religion: 'Religion' is not a Stand-Alone Category," in *Religion, Theory, Critique: Classic and Contemporary Approaches and Methodologies*, edited by Richard King (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), pp. 435-454. <https://doi.org/10.7312/king14542-042>

Smith, Jonathan Z., "When the Chips are Down" in *Relating Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

van der Veer, Peter, "Religion in South Asia." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31, 1 (2002): 173-187.

Week 5 (2/7): Sociology of Religion, Pierre Bourdieu & Religious Field(s)

Bourdieu, Pierre, "Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field." *Comparative Social Research* 13 (1991): 1-44.

Bourdieu, Pierre, "The Economy of Symbolic Goods," in *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998 [1994]), pp. 92-126.

Echtler, Magnus & Asonzeh Ukah, "Introduction: Exploring the Dynamics of Religious Fields in Africa," in *Bourdieu in Africa: Exploring the Dynamics of Religious Fields* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 1-32.

Quack, Johannes, "Outline of a Relational Approach to 'Nonreligion.'" *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 26, 4-5 (2014): 439-469.

Supplementary reading:

Bourdieu, Pierre, "Structures and the Habitus," in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 72-96.

Bourdieu, Pierre, "Legitimation and Structured Interests in Weber's Sociology of Religion," in *Max Weber, Rationality, and Modernity*, edited by Scott Lash and Sam Whimster (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), pp. 119-136.

Silverstein, Paul & Jane E. Goodman, "Introduction: Bourdieu in Algeria," in *Bourdieu in Algeria*, edited by Jane Goodman & Paul Silverstein (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), pp. 1-45 (not complete introduction).

(<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1017&context=unpresssamples>).

Week 6 (2/14): Michel Foucault

Foucault, Michel, "Preface" in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), pp. xxi-xxvi (not whole preface).

Foucault, Michel, "Method," in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* (New York, Pantheon, 1978, (part IV, chapter 2), pp. 92-102.

Foucault, Michel, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry*, 8, 4 (Summer, 1982), pp. 777-795.

Foucault Michel, "Governmentality," in *Power/ Michel Foucault*, edited by James D. Faubion (New York: New Press, 2000), pp. 201-222.

Supplementary reading:

Carrette, Jeremy R., *Foucault and Religion* (London: Routledge, 2000).

Godrej, Farah, "Gandhi, Foucault, and the Politics of Self-Care," *Theory & Event* 20, 4 (2017): 894-922.

Laidlaw, James, "Ethics," in *A Companion to the Anthropology of Religion*, edited by Janice Boddy & Michael Lambek (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), pp. 171-188.

Mahmood, Saba, "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival." *Cultural Anthropology* 16, 2 (2001): 202-236.

Pandya, S. P. "Governmentality and Guru-led Movements in India: Some Arguments from the Field," *European Journal of Social Theory*, 19, 1 (2016): 74-93

(<https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431015579977>)

Zavala-Pelayo, Edgar, "Colonial Pastoralism in Latin America: New Spain's Bio-political Religious Regime," *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 17, 2-3 (2016): 172-190, (DOI: [10.1080/21567689.2016.1222941](https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2016.1222941))

Week 7 (2/21): Talal Asad and the Secular Modern

Asad, Talal, "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category," in *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 27-54.

Asad, Talal, "What Might an Anthropology of Secularism Look Like?" in *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 21-66.

Asad, Talal, "Free Speech, Blasphemy, and Secular Criticism," in *Is Critique Secular?*, edited by Talal Asad et al. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), pp. 14-57.

Asad, Talal, "Thinking about Religion through Wittgenstein," *Critical Times* 3, 3 (2020): 403–442 (<https://doi.org/10.1215/26410478-8662304>).

Tayob, Abdulkader, "Decolonizing the Study of Religions: Muslim Intellectuals and the Enlightenment Project of Religious Studies." *Journal for the Study of Religion* 31, 2 (2018): 7-35 (DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2413-3027/2018/v31n2a1>).

Supplementary reading:

Asad, Talal, *Secular Translations: Nation-State, Modern Self, and Calculative Reason* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

Asad, Talal, "Secularism, Nation-State, Religion," *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 181-201.

Asad, Talal, "Thinking about Tradition, Religion, and Politics in Egypt today." *Critical Inquiry* 42, 1 (2015): 166–214.

Bangstad, Sindre, "Contesting Secularism/s: Secularism and Islam in the work of Talal Asad." *Anthropological Theory*, 9, 2 (2009):188–208.

Casanova, José, "Secularization Revisited: A Reply to Talal Asad," in *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors*, ed. by David Scott & Charles Hirschkind (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 12-30.

Week 8 (2/28): Lived Religion

Orsi, Robert, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Supplementary reading:

Orsi, Robert, "Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live In?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42, 2 (2003): 169–74.

Orsi, Robert, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale, 2002 [1985]).

Orsi, Robert, "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion," in *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, ed. David Hall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 3-21.

Orsi, Robert, "Everyday Religion and the Contemporary World: The Un-Modern, or What Was Supposed to Have Disappeared but Did Not," in *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes*, edited by Samuli Schielke & Liza Debevec (New York: Berghahn, 2012), pp. 146–61.

Week 9 (3/6): Gender

Bloomer, Kristin C., *Possessed by the Virgin: Hinduism, Roman Catholicism, and Marian Possession in South India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Week 10 (3/13) Spring Break

Week 11 (3/20): Rethinking Tradition in the Study of Religion

(guest seminar with Dr Ali Altaf Mian)

Mian, Ali Altaf, "Introduction," "Tradition as Form of Life," and "Therapy and Governance," in *Genres of Tradition: Sufi Ethics and Affects in Modern South Asia* (forthcoming).

****Practicum due by Friday, March 22, 2024, 5 pm****

Week 12 (3/27): Religious Authority

Alatas, Ismail Fajrie, *What is Religious Authority? Cultivating Islamic Communities in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

Week 13 (4/3): The State

Hurd, Elizabeth, *Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

Week 14 (4/10): Media/Cultural Studies

Taylor, Sarah McFarland, *Ecopiety: Green Media and the Dilemma of Environmental Virtue* (New York: NYU Press, 2019).

Week 15 (4/17): Bodies, Objects, Subjects: The "Fetish" in Question

(guest seminar with Dr Agnès Kedzierska Manzon, EPHE/PSL/IMAf, Paris)

Kedzierska Manzon, Agnès, "Humans and Things: Mande 'Fetishes' as Subjects," *Anthropological Quarterly*, 86, 1 (2013): 1115–1152.

Kedzierska Manzon, Agnès, "The Fetishes: Those 'Persons who are not Persons'" & "Flesh to Flesh with Fetishes," in *Ritual and Embodiment: Making Religion in Contemporary West Africa* (English translation of *Corps rituels. La fabrique du religieux en pays mandingue (Mali, Guinée, Côte d'Ivoire)*, (Paris: Editions de la FMSH, 2023).

Pels, Peter, "The Spirit of Matter: On Fetish, Rarity, Fact, and Fancy," in *Border Fetishisms*, edited by Patricia Spyer (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 91-121.

Supplementary reading:

MacGaffey, Wyatt, "The Personhood of Ritual Objects: Kongo Minkisi," *Etnofoor*, 3, 1 (1990): 45-61.

Gell, Alfred, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 17-23, 96-154.

Ingold, Tim, "Materials against Materiality," *Archaeological Dialogues*, 14, 1 (2007): 1-16.

Week 16 (4/24): Student Presentations & Final Wrap Up

****Final paper/written work due by Friday, April 26, 2024, 12 pm****

Policies, Rules, Expectations, and Resources:

1. **Attendance** is mandatory
2. Active discussion of the **readings** by each student during every meeting.
3. **Handing in Assignments:** Critical commentary papers and final writing assignments should be uploaded to elearning.
4. **Late Assignments:** You may receive an extension only in extraordinary circumstances.

5. **Completion of All Assignments:** You must complete all written and oral work and fulfill the requirement for class participation in order to pass the course.
6. **Honor Code:** UF students are bound by the Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>), and all students have agreed to follow this Code, meaning they will not give or receive unauthorized assistance in completing assignments.
7. **Course Evaluation:** Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>.
8. **Students Requiring Accommodation:** Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter, which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.