

REL 3148: Religion and Violence
Lecture: T and R 10:40 AM – 11:30 AM
Venue: FLG 0220

Friday Breakout Sessions:

1641: 9:35 AM – 10:25 AM (meet in LEI 0242)
9238: 10:40 AM – 11:30 AM (meet in MAT 0005)
9327: 12:50 PM – 1:40 PM (meet in LEI 0207)

Instructor: Dr. Ali Altaf Mian

E-mail: alimian@ufl.edu

Office Location: Anderson Hall 107-B

Office Hours: Wednesdays 3:30-5:30 PM

Teaching Assistant: Mr. Mukhtar Sanni

E-mail: msanni@ufl.edu

Office Location: Anderson Hall 123

Office Hours: Fridays 3:30-5:30 PM

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 Objectives:

- To develop critical 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. Mukhtar will take attendance and so please check-in with him. You can miss five sessions without penalty (this includes both the T/R lectures and the Friday breakout

session). 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.

In-Class Essays: 200 points

In-Class Essays will take during the Friday sessions that are marked by a single asterisk. Sometimes, the prompt will be open-ended (you get to write on something that struck you as being interesting about the reading), but other times the prompt will be given by the instructor. These essays must be completed within 30 minutes. They should be polished and written on paper in class without the use of computers and/or other devices. The writing should be eligible for Mukhtar to grade your essays. The essays themselves 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. If you miss an essay assignment, it is your responsibility to schedule a time with Mukhtar to complete the essay. Missed essays should be completed within two weeks. No Extension permitted.

Friday 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. Quiz Fridays are marked by a double asterisk. The students will have 30 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 Mukhtar 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).

Oral Exam: 200 points

Oral Exams will take place during exams week (December 9-13) and the sign-up sheet will be made available a month prior to this week. Please do not travel away during this time period, as the oral exam needs to be done in person on campus. The oral exam will be a 10-minute exam that will be conducted in Dr. Mian's office. A pool of questions will be provided to students beforehand (at least two weeks in advance). The oral exam will be recorded and students are not allowed any notecards.

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**)

Writing Requirement:

The University Writing Requirement (WR) ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning. This course carries 2000 words that count towards the University Writing Requirement. You must turn in all written work counting towards the 2000 words in order to receive credit for those words. The writing course grade assigned by the instructor has two components: the writing component and a course grade. **To receive writing credit a student must satisfactorily complete all the assigned written work and receive a minimum grade of C (2.0) for the course.** It is possible to fail to meet the writing requirement and still earn a minimum grade of C in a class, so students should review their degree audit after receiving their grade to verify receipt of credit for the writing component.

I encourage you to seek help from the university's Writing Studio (www.writing.ufl.edu), which offers support for writing in all fields and can be very helpful both in developing your first drafts and in polishing those drafts. I recommend the Chicago manual of style (<https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>) as a guide for writing format and style. However, if you are used to following a different style guide, that is acceptable, as long as you check with me first and make sure to use the same format consistently throughout your paper.

Make-ups and Attendance:

Make-up assignments will only be allowed in unavoidable circumstances or for compelling reasons that can be convincingly documented. Similarly, absence(s) will detract points except unavoidable ones proven with satisfactory explanation/documentation.

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 feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals/Default.aspx>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these evaluations are available at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/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 22—Course Introduction

Friday August 23—Course Introductions, continued...

T August 27—“Staying with the Violence,” in Adi M. Ophir, *In the Beginning was the State: Divine Violence in the Hebrew Bible*

R August 29—“Afterword: The Pentateuchal State, and Ours,” in Adi M. Ophir, *In the Beginning was the State: Divine Violence in the Hebrew Bible*

Friday August 30*—Discussion of Lectures on Ophir and In-Class Essay Assignment #1

T September 3—Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas,” pgs. 79-121.

R September 5—Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas,” pgs. 121-153.

Friday September 6**—Short Discussion of Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” followed by Quiz #1 (questions can come from both the Ophir and the Derrida readings).

T September 10—Jacques Derrida, “Violence against Animals,” in *For What Tomorrow...A Dialogue with Elisabeth Roudinesco*, pgs. 62-76.

R September 12—Jacques Derrida, “Death Penalties,” in *For What Tomorrow...A Dialogue with*

Elisabeth Roudinesco, pgs. 139-165.

Friday September 13*—Discussion of Lectures and In-Class Essay Assignment #2

T September 17—Walter Benjamin, “Toward the Critique of Violence.”

R September 19—Julia Ng, “Afterword: Toward Another Critique of Violence,” pgs. 113-136.

Friday September 20**—Short Discussion of Walter Benjamin and Julia Ng, followed by Quiz #2 (questions will be restricted to Benjamin and Ng).

T September 24—Julia Ng, “Afterword: Toward Another Critique of Violence,” pgs. 136-160.

R September 26—Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’,” in *Acts of Religion*, pgs. 230-258.

Friday September 27**--Short Discussion of Ng, “Afterword” and Derrida, “Force of Law,” followed by Quiz #3 (questions will be restricted to Ng, “Afterword” and Derrida, “Force of Law”).

T October 1—Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’,” in *Acts of Religion*, pgs. 258-298.

R October 3—Gil Anidjar, “The Idea of an Anthropology of Christianity.” [Recommended: Talal Asad, “Response to Gil Anidjar.”]

Friday October 4*—Discussion of Lectures and In-Class Essay Assignment #3

T October 8—Talal Asad, “Pain and Truth in Medieval Christian Ritual,” in *Genealogies of Religion*, pgs. 83-124.

R October 10—Talal Asad, “Reflections on Cruelty and Torture,” in *Formations of the Secular*, pgs. 100-124.

Friday October 11**—Discussion of the Asad readings and Quiz #4 (questions will be restricted to the Asad readings).

T October 15— Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing*, pgs. 1-38.

R October 17— Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing*, pgs. 39-64.

Friday October 18*—Discussion of Asad and In-Class Essay Assignment #4

T October 22—Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing*, pgs. 65-96.

R October 24—Kenneth Surin, “The Religious Transcendent,” in *Freedom not Yet: Liberation and the Next World Order*, pgs. 226-240.

Friday October 25**—Discussion of the Asad and Surin readings and Quiz #5 (questions will be restricted to Asad, *On Suicide Bombing* [the whole book] and the Surin reading)

T October 29—In-Class Film Viewing (Film TBD)

R October 31—In-Class Film Viewing (Film TBD)

Friday November 1*—Discussion of Film and In-Class Essay Assignment #5

T November 5—Beatrice Marovich, “The War with Death,” in *Sister Death: Political Theologies for Living and Dying*, pgs. 59-85.

R November 7—An Yountae and Eleanor Craig, “On Violence and Redemption, Fanon and

Colonial Theodicy,” in *Beyond Man: Race, Coloniality, and Philosophy of Religion*,” pgs. 204-225.

Friday November 8**—Discussion of the Marovich and the Yountae and Craig readings, followed by Quiz #6 (questions will be restricted to the Marovich and the Yountae and Craig readings).

T November 12—David Simpson, “The Displacement of Civility: Violence in a Widening World,” in *Engaging Violence*, pgs. 119-155.

R November 14—Aaron Frederick Eldridge and Basit Kareem Iqbal, “A Tropics of Estrangement: *Ghurba* in Four Scenes.”

Friday November 15**—Discussion of the Simpson and the Eldridge and Iqbal readings, followed by Quiz #7 (questions will be restricted to the Simpson and the Eldridge and Iqbal readings).

T November 19—Darren Byler, “Dispossession,” in *Terror Capitalism*, pgs. 95-131.

R November 21—No Class (Dr. Mian is presenting at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion)

Friday November 22—Review Session with Mukhtar for your Oral Exams

T November 26—No Class (Thanksgiving Holiday)

R November 28—No Class (Thanksgiving Holiday)

T December 3—Wrap-Up Class Discussion

Wednesday December 4: **Film Review** Due by midnight.

Oral Exams will take place during exams week (December 9-13) and the sign-up sheet will be made available a month prior to this week. Please do not travel away during this time period, as the oral exam needs to be done in person on campus.