

Majors Colloquium in Religious Studies

Reli 398, spring 2018
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Religion office 103
office hours: Tues 10-11 a.m.
Weds 3-4 p.m.
& by appointment

Our goals:

- (1) To improve the self-reflexivity in our practice of trying to understand religion, religions, and religious communities.
- (2) To deepen our comprehension of how the discipline of the study of religion creates knowledge.

Please read each day's material in the order indicated, prepare a response to the focus question, and (once a week) provide a journal entry

THE PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATION, CLASSIFICATION, AND DEFINITION

- Jan 28 Moodle: Jonathan Z. Smith, "I am a Parrot (Red)"
Moodle: Nancy M. Henley and Cheris Kramarae, "Gender, Power, and Miscommunication"
- Jan 30 Reader: Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious"
Reader: Russell McCutcheon, "The Jargon of Authenticity and the Study of Religion"
Reader: Jonathan Z. Smith, "Map Is Not Territory"

February 4-7 individual meetings to discuss field site & particular tradition choice

- Feb 4 Baker, "World Religions and National States"
Reader: Peter Gottschalk, "A Science of Defining Boundaries: Classification, Categorization, and the Census of India"
Reader: Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism'"

WHAT AND WHO GETS LEFT OUT: THE PARANORMAL

- Feb 6 Kripal, Introduction and ch. 1
- Feb 11 Kripal, ch. 3 ®
- Feb 13 Noon – *lunch with Kripal*
Kripal, ch. 5 + pp. 329-334

Feb 15 **Annotated bibliographies due**

RITUAL AS A WAY OF PAYING ATTENTION & RELIGIOUS SPACE AS FOCUSING LENS

Feb 18 Reader: Talal Asad: “Toward a Genealogy of the Concept of Ritual”
J.Z. Smith, chs. 1

Feb 20 J.Z. Smith, chs. 2-3

February 25-28 individual meetings to discuss your field visits

Feb 25 *No class – PG @ conference*

Feb 27 Seminar conferral

Mar 1 **First analytic paper due**

Mar 4 J.Z. Smith, chs. 4-5 ®

Mar 6 Reader: Francis Ching, from *Architecture: Form, Space, and Order*
Reader: David Robb & J. J. Garrison, “Architecture of the Early Middle Ages”
NOTE!!!: *Meet outside of University Chapel*

March 9-24 **Spring Break: yaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa-hooooooooooooooooo!**

BODIES, SELVES, AND OTHERS

Mar 25 Lamb, pp. 9-23 + ch. 1 + pp. 42-58

Mar 27 Lamb, rest of ch. 2 + ch. 3

Apr 1 Lamb, chs. 4 & 5 ®

Apr 3 Lamb, chs. 6 & 7 (not 207-212; stop at page 233)

INSIDERS, OUTSIDERS, & THOSE BETWEEN: WHO SPEAKS FOR HINDUISM?

Apr 8 Reader: Vasudha Narayanan, “Diglossic Hinduism: Liberation and Lentils”
Reader: Brian Smith, “Who Does, Can, and Should Speak for Hinduism?”
Reader: Rachel Fell McDermott, “New Age Hinduism, New Age Orientalism, and
the Second-Generation South Asian” ®
Reader: John Thatamanil, “Managing Multiple Religious and Scholarly Identities”

Apr 10 Reader: James Laine, from *Shivaji: Hindu King in Islamic India*
 Reader: Sandhya Jain, “Demeaning Shivaji, Denigrating Dharma”
 Reader: Arvind Sharma, “Hindus and Scholars”
 Moodle: Dilip Chitre, “Lord Vishnu As Shivaji Maharaj”
 Reader: James Laine, “Resisting my Attackers, Resisting my Defenders:
 Representing the Shivaji Narratives”
 Optional background resource: Moodle: Complete Review on Laine Controversy

Apr 15 *Pay those taxes, Americans!*
 Reader: Talal Asad: “What Might an Anthropology of Secularism Look Like?”
 Mahmood, Preface + ch. 1

Apr 17 Mahmood, ch. 2 + pp. 79-100

Apr 19 *Second evaluative paper due*

Apr 22 Mahmood, rest of ch. 3 + ch. 4 ®

Apr 24 Mahmood, ch. 5 + Epilogue

NO SECULARISM WITHOUT RELIGION; NO RELIGION WITHOUT SECULARISM

Apr 29 Fernando, Introduction, Field Notes I, & ch. 1 (to p. 49 only)

May 1 Fernando, rest of ch. 1 + ch. 2

May 3 *Third evaluative paper due*

May 6 Fernando, Field Notes II & ch. 3 ®

May 8 Fernando, ch. 6 + Epilogue

Wednesday, May 12:

10 am – Fieldwork Engagement, Analysis, and Reflection Project (FEARP) paper due

2-5 pm – FEARP presentations & discussion

• • • *Participation is mandatory* • • •

REQUIRED TEXTS

Mayanthi Fernando, *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism* (0822357488)

Jeffrey Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics: Science Fiction, Superhero Comics, and the Paranormal* (9780226271484)

Sarah Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes: Aging, Gender, and Body in North India* (9780520220010)

Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (0691149801)

Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (978-0226763613)

All of the texts above are also on Reserve in the library

Reader (course pack) available through your student portfolio

Our Learning Community

We endeavor to create a **learning community** in which you discuss the issues that are of concern to you and hear those of others, even as we all share our questions. **Class attendance is mandatory and students are expected to be punctual and participate** in discussions. In addition, each student will participate in one small group discussion with the professor. Students who plan to miss class due to a religious holiday must notify the professor two weeks in advance.

*Your participation grade relies heavily on your **familiarity with the readings** & your **insightful, critical engagement** with them & the other content shared in the seminar.*

Classroom etiquette

Our time together is an opportunity to forge an environment and community of learning. The more focused and respectful we are of that time and place, the more intense our experience and the greater the possibilities for discovery. To that end, please observe the following courtesies during class.

- **Disagree** with your seminar mates and professor, but **do not disrespect** anyone.
- Have **no communication with anyone outside** of class during class.
- Go to the **bathroom before class**: folks coming and going disrupt others.
- If you're loquacious, **be mindful** of allowing others the chance to speak; if you're the strong silent type, **rise to the occasion** of helping carry the conversation.

Reflective journal

Each student once a week will submit **by 10 am the morning of class** three to six sentences (only!) regarding that day's reading **that references specific parts of the reading (include page numbers)**. The first two sentences will offer **an analytic observation about the reading**. The third will be **one analytic question regarding the reading**. These will be submitted on Moodle and assessed according to the seriousness and intention given to them.

***Grades are as follows:** 0 – not completed; 1- insufficient effort or unclear meaning; 2- sufficient; 3 – demonstrative of refined critical and/or integrative thinking.*

Note: Critical analysis is not just the act of criticizing (although it can lead to this). Rather, it is the methodical application of theoretical tools in order to see more in a text than the text explicitly states.

Reading Analysis Presentation

Each student will help begin conversation on a reading of his choice with one prepared, **10-minute presentation** that offers **critical** insights into the reading relative to at least one other reading we have completed. **Not a boring summary** of what we've all read, this **uses our**

previous readings and discussion as well as your own insights to say something about the reading that it doesn't explicitly say itself. See this as an opportunity to prepare for the final research presentation, the grade for which counts for 10% of the final grade.

*Your presentation grade relies on your **familiarity with the readings & your insightful, critical engagement** with them & the other content shared in the seminar. It also relies on your **thoughtful effort to communicate** your argument clearly and convincingly to your seminar mates.*

All written work must:

- be **double-spaced** and in **12-point font**
- have the page numbers noted for all **references** to class readings
- be submitted in either **PDF or Word format**
- be submitted to **TurnItIn.com** (accessed through WesPortal)
- **not feature your name anywhere** on the paper or in the document's name at all. Please just list your student number at the top of the first page.
- include **no more than one quote** of full sentence length per page (quoting words or phrases is fine within reason).

Note: Our **Research Librarian is Kendall Hobbs**. He's an incredible resource to help you research papers. Contact him at x3962 or khobbs@wesleyan.edu

Analytic Papers

Two papers (5 pages each) give students the opportunity to critically engage readings and draw their own arguments about them. Students choose from two of the three analytic paper assignments offered. Papers will be submitted on Turnitin.com.

***These papers will be evaluated according to** (a) the strength of their argumentation, (b) how well they reflect understanding of and ability to apply pertinent class readings and lectures, and (d) the cogency of the writing.*

Rewrites are allowed for any of these papers so long as they are turned in within a week after the graded original was returned. The rewrite grade will be averaged with the original grade for a final grade.

Fieldwork Engagement, Analysis, and Reflection Project (FEARP)

Fieldsite: Each class member will **choose a local religious community to observe** over the course of the semester. This can be neither part of a religion with which ze has participated previously nor a community on campus. Before beginning visits, the class member **must obtain permission from an appropriate community leader** and read the section relevant to that religion in *How To Be A Perfect Stranger*. The student must observe a **minimum of one hour of religious activity every two weeks** (for a *minimum of seven contact hours*), although more observation will be best. **Failure to follow any of these steps will result in a lower grade on related writing assignments.**

Annotated bibliography: Since the religious tradition chosen by the student will serve as his subject for the practical assessment of the methods and theories that we are reading, each student will **provide a list of four scholarly productions** that have **contributed significantly** to the academic understanding of the religious community under consideration. One of these books may be an overview about the general tradition, but the others must be focused on methodological and/or theoretical matters with one preferably providing a history of the study of the tradition. **A paragraph for each source will describe (1) its methodological or theoretical approach and (2) its contribution** to scholarship on that community. A good place to start for determining which sources have been particularly significant are the bibliographies of authoritative reference sources (e.g., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, John Esposito's *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*). Students might benefit from discussions with department members who specialize in that tradition.

FEARP paper: This provides each student an opportunity to **assess** some of the existing scholarship on the particular religious tradition of his focus while exploring issues of interest to him. The paper (**15 pages**) **develops a thesis in regard to any theme** (e.g., ritual, embodiment, secularism) that **critically engages some of the scholarship on the chosen religious tradition using a selection of at least three of the scholars whom we have considered**. It will also **include a 2-3 page critical reflection** on the student's own **scholarly** experience observing one community within the religion and attempting to engage it interpretatively.

The paper will be evaluated according to (a) the strength of its argumentation, (b) its ability to describe with clarity the tradition under consideration, (c) its success in critically engaging what has been seen and read about the tradition, (d) its demonstrated mastery of class readings, and (e) the cogency of the writing.

FEARP presentation: The presentation (**15 minutes**) will share with the class **select** results of the final paper. These may **either** be in the realm of the critical engagement with the scholarship **or** the reflection on the student's scholarly experience of engagement.

Your presentation will be evaluated according to (a) its insightfulness and (b) its clarity.

BASIS OF GRADE

The following elements comprise each student's grade: participation (including seminar discussion and in-class presentation) – 10%; annotated bibliography – 10%; each assessment paper – 20%; FEARP paper – 30%; FEARP presentation – 10%.

Accessibility resources

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a disability as defined by the ADA. Since

accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact [Accessibility Services](#), located in North College, rooms 021/022, or call 860-685-5581 to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

PLEASE! Once you have obtained documentation, don't hesitate to discuss with me your needs for accommodation.

Curmudgeonly notice

The use of computers, tablets, and cell phones is not allowed in the class. While I appreciate that some students find it easier to type, the unfortunately inevitable web surfing, social networking, and texting by a few students distracts the rest, and the prof. Plus, if you have seen *Westworld*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Ex Machina*, or any number of *Star Trek* episodes, I think you'll agree with me that we don't want to bring computers into our classrooms and make them any smarter than they already are. Students with documented need are exempt from this anti-modern diktat.

Honor System

Students are expected to abide by the Honor System in regard to all work and participation in this class. For details, see pages 4-7 of

<http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/studenthandbook/StudentHandbook.pdf>

Tips for Better Writing

Before you write anything, you should know **who your audience is** and what style best suits their expectations.

Unless instructed otherwise, you should assume that university papers need to be formal. Avoid a conversational style. Do not use contractions (“I’ve,” “it’s,” “they’re”).

Introduce your essay with **a single paragraph** within which you **succinctly describe your thesis in a single sentence**.

Spellcheck is not enough. You must **proofread** your work and can best accomplish this by it reading aloud. Your ear often picks up mistakes your eye misses.

The key to successful writing is **SIMPLICITY** and **DIVERSITY**. Clearly express yourself in ways that makes reading enjoyable.

Introduce your essay with **a single paragraph** within which you succinctly describe your thesis in a single sentence.

Avoid passive and ‘-ing’ verbs. **Active verbs** give power to a sentence.

- e.g., Babe was acting like a dog => Babe acted like a dog.

Avoid ‘to be’ verbs in favor of **active verbs** which express more.

- e.g., She is courageous => She works courageously.

Spellcheck is not enough. You must **proofread** your work and can best accomplish this by reading aloud to yourself. Your ear often picks up mistakes that your eye will not.