



ANSC 120
Anthropology of Religion

Tuesday - Thursday 3:30 - 4:50 PM
HSS 2321

Aftab S. Jassal
Office: SSB 265
Email: afjassal@ucsd.edu
Office Hours: 2:15 - 3:00 PM TuTh

I. Course Description

This course attempts to understand religion in relation to culture, society, politics, psychology, and aesthetics. In our everyday lives, we perform a range of different roles—as university students, family members, citizens, members of a religion, and so on. What rituals do we perform in each of these roles, and why? What does it feel like to participate in such rituals? What stories do we tell about ourselves and the world? What do they mean, and what do they do for us?

In this course, we will attempt to answer these questions by looking at the ways in which religious narratives and practices communicate meaning and emotion, while transforming people, places, and things in the world. We will investigate how religions mediate immanence and transcendence; life and death; continuity and change; the local and the global; inner, subjective experience and our environment. Clearly, religion, a ubiquitous feature of human existence, *does* a lot.

In addition to engaging with *theories* of religion, this course focuses on narrative, ritual, and performance *practices*. For instance, as part of the writing assignments for this course, you will participate in and observe rituals and performances around you—such as, religious services; social and academic rites of passage; musical, theatrical, political, and sporting events; eating, shopping, socializing, attending class, or going out in the evening. In so doing, you will approach anthropological theories and methods as ways of relating your subjective experiences to class readings and the broader world outside the classroom.

II. Course Requirements

The requirements for this class consist of a midterm exam and a final research paper.

Active class participation will be an important component of your overall grade for this course. Class participation includes attending class on time; reading the assigned material carefully and bringing it to class; completing in-class writing assignments and activities; and participating in class discussions. The reading and writing assignments will be due before each class period, to be submitted via email, unless I notify you otherwise. You are allowed one absence in this course without penalty, but you must inform me by email that you are taking a pass *before* the class period. If you are absent without informing me, or if you submit any of your assignments late—this includes later the same day—you will receive half a grade deduction (for example from an A- to a B+) to your overall grade for the course.

Your grades for the course will be weighted accordingly:

Class participation and attendance	20%
Midterm Exam	30%
Final Research Paper	50%

Percentages and letter grades correspond as follows:

A+	97-100	A	93-96	A-	90-92
B+	87-89	B	83-86	B-	80-82
C+	77-79	C	73-76	C-	70-72
D+	67-69	D	63-66	D-	60-62
F	0-59				

III. Course Design and Writing Projects

In the midterm exam, you will compare and contrast the writings of multiple anthropologists encountered in class. For the final research project, you will participate in and observe a “performance” of some kind and write an argumentative essay based on your observations. Research questions will pertain to how anthropological theories of religion can be brought to bear on familiar, real-world behaviors, actions, and events, in fresh and exciting ways. In order to successfully execute this assignment, you will compile performance journals consisting of fieldnotes, interviews, photographs, audio and video recordings, research proposals,

analyses of performance events, drafts of essays, etc. These portfolios will constitute living archives of your journeys as anthropologists.

IV. Course Materials

All the required readings and resources for this course will be posted online on our course website in TritonEd. Please check the course website and your email daily, since reading and writing assignments may be updated.

Always bring copies (preferably hard copies) of the assigned readings that are due on a particular day with you to class. You may not use a cellphone to do readings, but laptops and mid-size tablets are permissible. Make sure you underline and annotate the texts as you proceed. Organize all the reading and writing assignments chronologically in a folder, for easy and fast access at any point during the quarter. Please bring your laptop, a dedicated notebook, and a pen and pencil to class. I ask that you refrain from cellphone use and other electronic communication in class (this includes laptops, unless I have specified their use).

V. Broader Goals for the Course

Through learning about anthropology and religion, this class is designed to develop your skills as critical readers, writers, and thinkers, which you can use across courses and disciplines. The broader learning goals for this course include:

Engaging the work of others—this includes the scholarly texts we will read in class as well as the work of your peers. I ask that you treat the ideas of your peers with the same level of care and thoroughness that you would expect to receive.

Articulating a position—this means being able to effectively communicate your ideas to others, and developing clear and complex arguments. In this course, you will not only learn to deconstruct scholarly arguments but also become proficient in making and supporting your own claims as scholars.

Situating your ideas within specific contexts—this means being aware of who your audience is and how you engage single or multiple authors in a conversation, in class discussions and in your writing.

Transferring anthropological knowledge into disciplines and contexts beyond the classroom—this means thinking actively about how you can apply what you learn in this class to other contexts. In other words, you will be encouraged to make connections between different academic disciplines, texts, ideas, and your own lived experiences within and beyond the university.

VI. Collegiality and Conduct

*As students at UCSD, you must at all times adhere to the highest standards of integrity, honesty, respect, and generosity. Remember that you are here to learn from each other—not just from your professors—so always engage with your fellow students thoughtfully and courteously.

*As we sharpen our critical faculties, it is necessary to remain sensitive to differences in religion, race, gender, and sexual orientation. Please contact me if you feel that anyone’s participation in the classroom is being hindered in any way.

*Any student found to be plagiarizing will face disciplinary action.

*Always follow appropriate guidelines for citing sources and acknowledging feedback in your research and response papers. We will review these guidelines in class.

*Do not be late to class.

VII. Course Schedule

The reading and writing assignments are due on the day of class, unless I notify you otherwise.

Week 1 – Introduction

Tu. 1/8

Class discussion: personal introductions, syllabus, course goals and objectives

Th. 1/10

Read: Boyer, “Religion Explained,” pgs. 1-10

Week 2 – Magic and Religion

Tu. 1/15

Read: Boyer, “Religion Explained,” pgs. 10-31 and 229-233

Th. 1/17

Read: Susan Greenwood, “The Anthropology of Magic,” pgs. 19-35

Read: Miner, “Body Ritual Among the Nacirema,” pgs. 503-7

Week 3—Anti/Structure

Tu. 1/22

Read: Susan Greenwood. “The Anthropology of Magic,” pgs. 35-58

Film screening: The Goddess and the Computer (part 1)

Th. 1/24

Read: Turner, “Liminality and Communitas,” pgs. 358-375 (in Lambek 2002)

Film screening: The Goddess and the Computer (part 2)

Week 4—Religious Effervescence

Tu. 1/29

Read: Marshall, “Behavior, Belonging, and Belief,” pgs. 360-368

Th. 1/31

Workshop: Review Session

Film screening: Holy Ghost People

Week 5—Performativity

Tu. 2/5

Read: Rappaport, “Enactments of Meaning,” pgs. 446-469 [in Lambek 2002]

Th. 2/7

Midterm Exam

Week 6—Interpreting Culture

Tu. 2/12

Read: Geertz, “Deep Play,” pgs. 56-86

In-class writing: response to prompt for final research project

Th. 2/14

Read: Komitee, "A Student's Guide to Performance Studies, pgs. 1-19

Film screening: One Precept

Write: abstract for final research project

[ethnographic fieldwork period: 2/14 – 3/5]

Week 7 – Ethnography and Aesthetics

Tu. 2/19

Bruce Kapferer. "Emotion and Feeling in Sinhalese Healing Rites," pgs. 153-164

Film screening: Sinhalese healing rites

Write: preliminary fieldwork report

Th. 2/21

Read: Saville-Troike, "The Ethnography of Communication," pgs. 108-133

Class discussion: template for ethnographic research

Week 8 – Divine Presence

Tu. 2/26

Read: Flueckiger, "When the Goddess Speaks her Mind," pgs. 165-185

In-class library research workshop

Th. 2/28

Film screening: Fate of the Lhapa

Workshop: the ethnographic process (fieldnotes; audio and video recordings; interviews)

Week 9 – Poetic Justice

Tu. 3/5

Read: Mittermaier, “Bread, Freedom, Social Justice,” pgs. 54-79

Write: completed performance journal based on ethnographic research template

Th. 3/7

Write: Introduction and Outline of final research project

In-class peer review workshop

Week 10 – Global/Local Frictions

Tu. 3/12

Read: Soares, “Islam in Mali in the Neoliberal Era,” pgs. 77-95

Th. 3/14

Write: first draft of final research project

In-class peer review workshop

Week 11 – Exam Week

Write: final research project (date and time to be announced)