

Sociology of Religion

Fall 2012

So 0151a (35515)

Class Time and Location: 12:30-1:45 PM Tuesday and Friday, TBD

Instructor: Jeff Guhin, Doctoral Candidate

jeffrey.guhin@yale.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday and Friday 2:00-5:00 pm, location TBD.

What You Can Expect

This is going to be a great semester. If you're here because you're interested in sociology, or religion, or the *sociology of religion*, you came to the right class. You also came to the right class if you want to explore the idea of religion within your own life or the lives of people very different from you. We'll be reading books and articles that have been part of important conversations about what religion is, what it does, and how it relates to other parts of social life. We'll begin the class by looking at some of the most important theorists of religion, and we'll then weigh their ideas throughout the rest of the semester as we read more empirical work and engage in our own research. Each class will begin with a brief quiz and a short lecture, followed by about an hour of discussion. One of the most important questions to which we'll regularly return is whether or not we can meaningfully study a category called 'religion' at all.

Attendance

There might well be a few times when you have good reasons not to go to class this semester. I trust you to use discretion in those moments, and remember that a large percentage of your grade is composed of in-class participation and daily quizzes, neither of which you can make up. Also remember that I will drop three quizzes (as well as three days of poor participation).

No Laptops Except During Lecture (and No Phones At All)

Unless you're moonlighting as an obstetrician, turn off all phones and laptops while we talk. If for some reason you *need* to be contactable, tell me before class. During the lecture section, you may take notes on a laptop, but then put it away (I will let you know what's 'testable' in discussion).

Participation

We're here to have a conversation. You need to come to class able to discuss the required texts. If you don't understand the readings, please don't be afraid to ask for clarifications, either in my office hours, over e-mail, or in class. A good participant, like a good human being, is thoughtful and considerate, neither intimidated by her own errors nor eager to find them in others; she is eager to share her own thoughts and loathe to suppress someone else's. Or, more succinctly: Don't try to be perfect. Speak your mind. Don't be mean. Say something smart, but don't try to prove you're smart. If you've been talking a lot, let others talk. If you haven't talked, talk. Bringing cookies is good; not sharing cookies is bad. Etc.

The Books

You don't need to buy anything for this class, though I'd recommend getting many of the books, especially Weber, Durkheim, and Said, for your own libraries. All readings will be uploaded to the class server.

The Work Load

Readings: I promise never to assign more than two and a half hours of reading for each class, which, depending on the text, usually comes out to between 40 to 60 pages.

Class Participation: You have to say at least one thing every class. I would prefer this not be ‘Hey, how’s it going, did you see the latest episode of Downton Abbey?’ both because this is not related to the class and I might spend the whole period talking about it. So just talk. About the readings. I’ll drop three days of poor participation.

Daily Quizzes: These are just to ensure that you’ve read. They’ll take no more than five minutes, and they happen right at the beginning of class. You can’t make it up if you’re absent or late. I’ll drop three quizzes.

Ethnography: This is the most important part of the course. Near the beginning of the semester, you’ll choose a religious or quasi-religious site in the area where you can regularly conduct ethnographic fieldwork (these can include online communities). You’re required to make at least four field visits to this site for a minimum of ten total hours on the site. You also need to write field notes about each of these experiences, all of which should be at least three double-spaced pages (though more is better). We’ll talk more about what field notes and ethnography entail later. You will send each of the field notes as you write them to me via e-mail, and I will write back within a few days with a very specific critique of your work. In your final paper, you’ll need to write a 10 to 15 page essay that incorporates some of the readings from the semester with your fieldwork. You and I will be in touch throughout the semester about this project, which I hope will lead to a product you’re excited about. *I recommend you do more than just four days of observation and four units of field notes; however, four is all that is required.* The project is due the last day of class.

Midterm: You’ll have a short, in-class, half-hour mid-term, just to make sure you know the theorists.

Final: You’ll have a pretty straightforward final with a combination of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, short answer, and essay questions. If you’ve read and studied a bit, you’ll be fine.

How it Works Out:

15%:	Participation
20%:	Quizzes
35%:	Ethnography Project
10%:	Midterm
20%:	Final

Contacting Me

Please let me know if you need help with the class or if you’re confused (about the class that is, though you’re welcome to talk to me about more general existential confusion; however, Fairfield employs people much more qualified to discuss this with you than I). You can contact me at the e-mail above and in my office hours. We will be in touch about your ethnography throughout the semester, including a required early consultation—whether in office hours or over e-mail—in which we decide where you will conduct your fieldwork. If you contact me, I will get back to you within 24 hours. Don’t send a “where are you? the world is ending!” e-mail until 24 hours have passed, in which case I will have either e-mailed you back or the world will have ended.

The Schedule

Section One: Introduction

Introduction

- Fri. Sep. 7: 1. Introduction to the Course
 2. Overview of Expectations and Requirements
 3. Description of the Ethnographic Project

Section Two: What is Religion?

Week One: What is the relationship between religion and classification?

- Tue. Sep. 11: 1. Jonathan Z. Smith (1998) "Religion, Religions, Religious." In *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. (pp. 269-284)
 2. Thomas Luckmann (1990) "Shrinking Transcendence, Expanding Religion?" *Sociological Analysis* 50(2): 127-38.
- Fri. Sep. 14: Edward Said (1979) *Orientalism* (selections)

Week Two: What is the relationship between religion and social groups?

- Tue. Sep. 18: Max Weber (1991/1922). *The Sociology of Religion* Tr. Ephraim Fischhoff. (selections, part 1)
- Fri. Sep. 21: Max Weber *The Sociology of Religion* (selections, part 2)

Week Three: What is the relationship between religion and meaning?

- Tue. Sep. 25: Emile Durkheim (1995/1912) *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* Tr. Karen Fields (selections, part 1)
- Fri. Sep. 28: Emile Durkheim *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (selections, part 2)

Week Four: What is the relationship between religion and tradition?

- Tue. Oct. 2: Clifford Geertz (1977) "Religion as a Cultural System" in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (pp. 87-125)
- Fri. Oct. 5: Talal Asad (1993) "The construction of religion as an anthropological category" in *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (pp. 27-54)

Week Nine: What is the relationship between religion and modernity?

Tue. Nov. 6: Lynn Davidman (1993) *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism* (selections)

Fri. Nov. 9: 1. In-Class Ethnography Workshop (come prepared to discuss how you can craft an argument out of your research using the readings)
2. Fourth Set of Field Notes Due

Week Ten: What is the relationship between religion and gender?

Tue. Nov. 13: Jamillah Karim (2008) *American Muslim Women: Negotiating Race, Class, and Gender within the Ummah* (selections)

Fri. Nov. 16: R. Marie Griffith (2000) *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (selections)

Week Eleven: What is the relationship between religion and ethnicity?

Tue. Nov. 20: Robert Orsi (2010, 3rd ed.) *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (selections)

Fri. Nov. 23: Thanksgiving Break. No class.

Week Twelve: What is the relationship between religion and immigration?

Tue. Nov. 27: Fenggang Yang and Helen Rose Ebaugh (2001) "Transformations in New Immigrant Religions and Their Global Implications" *American Sociological Review*, 66(2): 269-288

Fri. Nov. 30: Wendy Cadge (2004) "Gendered Religious Organizations: The Case of Theravada Buddhism in America" *Gender and Society*, 18(6):777-793

Week Thirteen: What is the relationship between religion and evolution?

Tue. Dec. 4: David Sloan Wilson (2003) *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society* (selections)

Fri. Dec. 7: Robert Bellah (2011) *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (selections)

Week Fourteen

Tue. Dec. 11: 1. Review for Final Exam
2. Ethnography Project Due

Final Exam