

**RELS 239 & 314:**  
**Religion and Identity**  
(updated June 20b, 2020)

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## Course Overview

What is religious identity and how does it differ from other types of identity? How is religious identity formed? How has it changed with modernity? How is religious identity linked to law, economics, politics and violence? This paper explores these and other questions using case studies from all of the world's major religious traditions.

In the coming weeks, you will come to understand the nature of religious identity in the world, while also gaining a decent grounding in important thinkers and theories of religious identity. Rest assured that no expertise in the academic study of religion is required for this class—only an eagerness to learn and a commitment to working hard.

If you get lost and/or need more context or background information about a particular religious tradition, just talk to me. (Odds are that you're not the only one.) As we will be exploring a number of different religions, places and times, extra reading online and in the library, is encouraged. Do this on your own as needed. (Don't underestimate the power of 15 mins spent reading Encyclopaedia Britannica online, if you need more information about a particular issue.)

## Important information on the readings

The readings for this paper include some of the most influential and important academic texts on religion and religious identity in the last century. I have also added and removed readings based on the feedback of previous students. (Occasionally I also do this during the semester, as the seminar progresses, based on the feedback from you.) So this is, I hope, a 'greatest hits' list of works that's worth spending time on, which is good because *you must do the required readings* for this class. When lecturing, I assume you've read them before coming to class.

To help you read, the course outline contains some useful elaborations:

1. The readings are **numbered** sequentially. I suggest you read them in that order.
2. Each week, I've highlighted some **general questions** that we'll be thinking about in class. Those questions can help guide your reading.
3. There is also a "**helpful info**" section that contains more specific questions as well as general information about the authors. Make sure you look at that first!
4. In some weeks we will be looking especially closely at one or two readings. I have **marked** those in the course outline. Please read those especially **carefully**.

The **page-length** of readings changes from week to week. Some weeks we read as little as 25 pages, other weeks I expect that you will read closer to 50 pages. Do **plan ahead**. Also try to **read actively**: look for the main thesis, sub-points, concepts and examples used by the authors; think about how the various texts you're reading for each week relate to each other and the texts from previous weeks. I have included some tips for effective reading on the Blackboard side. In some weeks I've assigned movies in addition to the readings.

## A Quick Word on Class Discussions and Distance Participation

Distance Students can participate in the lectures and discussions for this class in one of two ways.

(1) For those who are able, I invite Distance Students to log-in to attend the class 'live' via **Otago Capture** live streaming or **Zoom** (depending on which technology is better). *Questions can be posed by phone, text or Zoom, as appropriate.*

(2) For those who cannot participate during class time, video **recordings** of the lectures/discussions will be made available online on Blackboard, so that students can catch up on the discussions in class.

In addition, I will hold a special fortnightly **tutorial/discussion for Distance students** (dates marked in the calendar). These will occur at 7:30pm on Wednesday in the weeks marked below, with the exception of Week 2, when it must occur on a Tuesday. A special writing workshop for Distance Students will be held on Aug 19.

### Must read: Your Responsibilities as a Student

This is a short list of non-negotiable, minimal responsibilities for students. As a student in this paper, I expect that you will:

1. Make sure you've **read and understood** this course outline, including the **technology policy**.
2. **Access course materials through Blackboard and the Otago Library e-reserve site.** ((If you have issues, contact the ITS through AskOtago, <https://www.otago.ac.nz/its/contacts/index.html>)
3. **Make sure that you are receiving and reading all electronic communication** sent through Blackboard. (This may mean updating your communication preferences so that you receive the emails and announcements sent to the entire class through Blackboard.) "I never read that email" is not viable excuse in this paper.
4. Complete all **assessments** on time. I almost never grant extensions.

### **In-Class Technology Policy**

To help minimise the temptation of web browsing and in order to create a participatory and fair environment in our class, the following technology policy applies:

1. **I encourage you to leave laptops and phones in your bags** during our two-hour class. This means brining the readings in print and taking notes by hand. Studies have shown that students who engage in this kind of physical engagement with learning retain information better. (Lectures will be recorded and lecture slides will be provided by PDF after class, meaning that you don't need to 'transcribe' things in calss.)
2. **If, for various reasons, you need to use a laptop in class** the wifi must be turned off and you should use it only for class purposes. Research shows that doing other things will not just distract you, but your classmates.
3. **Class recordings may only be done with the permission of the entire class.** If you want to record the discussion please ask me before class and we will get the consent of everyone present. Because we want the discussions to be open, honest and safe for all involved it's important that all of us consent to be recorded. This is standard practice for all academic classrooms, even if it's not always explicit

<b>ASSESSMENTS</b>
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**RELS 239**

In-class Quizzes	(15%)
Debate Assignment	(15%) in-class, reflection due Oct 4, 5pm
1,500-word Identity Essay	(30%) Sept 11, 5pm
2 hr. open-note Exam (200-level)	(40%) Exams week

**RELS 314**

In-class Quizzes	(15%)
Debate Assignment	(15%) in-class, reflection due Oct 4, 5pm
2,000-word Identity Essay	(30%) Sept 11, 5pm
2 hr. open-note Exam (300-level)	(40%) Exams week

**In-class Quizzes**

There will be SEVEN in class quizzes over the course of the semester. These quizzes will be short multiple-choice quizzes that test your knowledge of the assigned readings. Your two lowest quiz grades will be dropped. In other words, of the 7 in class quizzes, only 5 will count towards your final mark (3% for each of your 5 highest quiz grades). You will get 50% marks for each question that you answer, even if your answer is wrong. The goal of these quizzes is to encourage reading and discussion and to reward students who are prepared and keep up with the material. Some quiz questions may appear on the final exam.

Quizzes will be administered at the beginning of class and you cannot make up quizzes if you miss class. There are no exceptions to this rule, so please do not ask. Distance students will have a 24-hour window in which they must take the quiz, and these quizzes will be timed (usually 5 minutes).

**Essay on Religious Identity**

The first 60% of this class analyses how and why religion produces a sense of identity among a certain group of people. It gives you theories, explanations and case studies. In this assignment, I want you to take some of these theories and apply them to other case studies. That is, I want you to use the ideas from class to analyse the world around you. To do this you will write an essay – 1,500 words for 200-level and 2,000 words for 300-level – in which you chose a particular group of people and answer the following question:

What rituals, myths, doctrines, bodily practices or other religion-like techniques does this group of people use to generate a sense of collective identity and/or a sense of difference from other groups of people?

Students can choose any group they like. These groups need not describe themselves as religious. Any social collective may be analysed: e.g., a residential college, a sports team, etc. Please bear in mind, though, that some portion of your mark will reflect my perception of whether or not you engaged honestly and purposively in research. So, a detailed analysis of drinking in the pub will, alas, not be treated equally to participant observation of a Buddhist meditation session. This is not to say that you shouldn't think of 'fun' groups to examine, but I *strongly suggest that you check-in with me* about the groups you plan to analyse first!

You may choose from a variety of modes of research. You could read texts produced by that group (online or print). You could attend the rituals or meetings for that group. You could interview group members about their experiences. I am very flexible and want to support you in finding exciting and fun research methods, which fit your interests. Please come and talk to me, if you're having trouble thinking of a topic. This should be a chance for you to indulge your interests, not a burden!

In **Week 7**, I will host a **writing workshop**—peer-led and (usually) fun—that will help you advance your projects, so please start thinking about your essays early in the semester so that you get the most of out of it.

**Bonus option:** Students who so desire can take the essay one step further. Rather than simply analysing the various 'religious technologies' used by other groups, students may also engage in informal experiments that use various technologies (e.g. ritual, myth) to enhance the feelings of cohesion and solidarity among social groups. For example, could you use myth or ritual to deepen feelings of solidarity among flatmates or classmates? Or, to take another particularly relevant example, you could try to enhance feelings of solidarity among internet users who don't know each other! Given the work involved in planning and executing these experiments, you are welcome to work in **groups if you choose**. However, the analysis essays must be written individually. These essays will address the following questions:

Why did you choose the interventions you did (i.e. what theories were you drawing on)? In what ways did your experiment embody/test those theories? What was missing from your experiment that may have improved it? What are the implications of your findings for religious studies and how might you further test your hypotheses in the future? Where else (beyond the social group you examined) might you apply those interventions and how?

If you choose this option *please see me* to talk about the proposed experiment and about how you might measure solidarity before and after your intervention.

### **General Requirements and Guidelines for the Essays**

No matter what you do, the essay must fulfil three requirements:

1. It must draw upon primary sources. These are sources that act as 'direct witnesses' to the events/groups that you analyse. These may be myths, rituals, interviews (that you conduct), field notes (based on your observation of members of group), books, speeches and many other things. What makes a source a primary source is how you use it: you treat something as a primary source when—rather than relying on what it says as an authoritative account of that group/event—you do some of the following things: dissect it, critique it, think about who wrote it and why, consider how the source shapes or undermines identity, etc. In general you treat a primary source with

cautious and detective-like attitude of (among other things) needing to interpret it, clarify it, scrutinise it, question it, historicize it, contextualize it, or translate it.<sup>1</sup>

2. In examining these primary sources and analysing the groups, you engage deeply with theories and theorists from this class. To do this, I expect you to **look again** closely at the texts you read for this class and/or related texts written by those authors. (Putting it another way, it is not enough to simply use your lecture notes; I expect I expect you to engage deeply with the original texts.)

**A note on internet sources:** These must be used with EXTREME caution. In some cases, e.g. if you're working on contemporary movements, one might use some internet sources as primary sources. However, websites should almost never be used as secondary sources. Wikipedia can be helpful in the initial stages of research but does NOT count as an academic source!

**Length:** Do not count footnotes or bibliography in this total. You may go over the limit 10% or under the limit 10% without a grade reduction.

**Format:** This matters. Essays must be double-spaced, Times New Roman, include page numbers. At the top must be your name, student ID number, date and word-count. Footnotes and bibliography must follow Chicago footnote citation style. All citations for specific ideas, quotes or facts must have page numbers. (Citing a whole book or article is not OK unless you are clearly and obviously referring to the authors' overall argument.) A helpful and compact [style guide](#) can be found under the tab "Improve your reading and writing" on Bb.

**Submitting:** Essays must be uploaded to the appropriate link on Blackboard (so we can run it through TurnItIn). It is your responsibility to make sure that your essay has been submitted properly. If there is a problem you must send me an email that same day with a copy of your essay in PDF or MSWord format. Telling me two days later that "Blackboard lost my submission" is not a legitimate excuse. Late papers are marked down 5% per day. Extensions are almost never given, except in the cases of medical emergencies. We take plagiarism very seriously, so please do review our plagiarism policy (below). Or, better, just don't do it.

So that I'm very clear with you about my expectations, let me tell you at the outset that essays will be marked according to the following **rubrics**:

Basics and polish: Did the author follow the prompts listed in the reader and is the piece free from careless errors (grammar, spelling, citation style). The best pieces will carefully provide all things asked for in the course outline (e.g. word count, page numbers, plagiarism declaration, etc.).

Argument/Structure: Does the piece make a clear argument and have a clear structure? Does the argument flow logically and draw upon ample and well-analysed evidence? Is it clear what 'work' the paragraphs are doing and are there strong transitions between paragraphs? (**The first sentences of paragraphs** are especially important in this regard. Make sure these sentences do two things: (1) introduce the content/point of that paragraph and (2) make plain how the content/point of that paragraph relates to the overall argument of the essay.) Does the essay have a clear **introduction** that lays out

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<sup>1</sup> You may use primary sources that are embedded within secondary sources. E.g., if an academic source contains a translation of a religious myth, use it! If there are art historical images in a journal article, analyze those. This may all seem a bit fuzzy now, but please talk to me about finding appropriate sources if you have trouble. I am sure it will become clear

the argument in a direct and clear way and explains why the argument is important, controversial or otherwise should be of interest to the reader? Does it have a **conclusion** that recaps briefly the key points of the essay and explains the significance of the argument for scholars, policymakers or others?

Content: Does the piece show evidence of time spent researching and thinking? Does it build upon, critique and advance ideas presented in lectures, required readings and/or recommended readings (rather than simply summarize)? Does it present original ideas? Does it show sophistication in locating, digesting and engaging with a number of appropriate primary new secondary sources? The best pieces will engage deeply with multiple secondary and primary sources beyond those in the required readings. (Note: Mere citation of works does not count as ‘engaging’ with them.)

### Debate Assignment

Student evaluations in previous years have called this assignment a highlight of the course. I really hope it will be again!

In Week 12, we will have an in-class debate in which members of the seminar will argue about the identity of yoga in the modern world and/or those who practice it. I will split the class into **two or three teams** (depending on enrolment). Each team will conduct research and prepare arguments. However, the main points of the debate are to help you consolidate your learning, prepare for the exam and have a bit of fun. Each team will debate one of the following positions:

If three teams:

- Team 1: Modern postural yoga is both religious and Hindu
- Team 2: Modern postural yoga is neither religious nor Hindu.
- Team 3: Modern postural yoga is religious, but not specifically Hindu.

If two teams:

- Team 1: Modern postural yoga is religious.
- Team 2: Modern postural yoga is not religious.

The debate will run in a manner similar to a courtroom trial (or formal debating competitions). **First, one team will introduce an argument** that supports its position, along with the reasoning and evidence that supports that argument. **Second**, the other team(s) will have a chance to **challenge** that argument by finding faults in its reasoning and/or by challenging the validity evidence used. **Third, the first team** will have a brief chance to respond with ‘a **Third Word**’ in which they defend their argument/evidence against the challenges of the opposing teams. The debate will therefore take place as a series of rounds of arguments, challenges and third words.

Generally, teams will each present roughly 4-6 over the course of the debate (not including the challenges). This means that, in preparing for the debate, teams should think about coming up with **4-6** major arguments to support their position. The very best arguments will join together theories/theorists from our class with information/evidence gathered from independent research. The best teams will also give clear reasoning and defend the validity of the sources they use. As the moderator of the debate, I will keep time, allowing for **5 minutes** for main arguments, **3 minutes** for challenges and **3 minutes** for third words. During all transitions (e.g. from arguments to challenges or challenges to third words) teams will have 3 minutes of “**huddle time**” to plan their moves.

A typical set of rounds will, therefore, look as follows:

**Round One**

**Team 1:** (5 minutes) introduce one of their main arguments for their position

Huddle time (3 mins)

**Teams 2 (and 3):** challenge (3 mins each)

Huddle time (3 mins)

**Team 1:** Third word (3 mins).

**Round Two**

**Team 2:** (5 minutes) introduce one of *their* main arguments for their position

**Team 1 (and 3):** challenge...etc.

This all sounds overwhelming right? Don't worry, we will do a test run during the semester so that you know what to expect. It feels more natural when you're doing it, please trust me!

All members of the group will be expected to contribute—although, if students are not on-campus or are particularly anxious about public speaking, alternative arrangements can be made (e.g. having others read a statement, or present ideas on their behalf). I do not expect students to deliver memorised, polished speeches—a la Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Students are welcome to present however they feel most comfortable: from reading off a page, using cue cards, or simply riffing on a few points they've written down. Again, they can even ask another student to read for them. I do not want the debate to be a source of anxiety!

In preparing for the debate, students (in their teams) will be provided with a **list of primary and secondary source readings**. This list will be distributed in class, later in the semester. From this list, each student will choose *at least three* sources (you can, of course, choose more!), which they will read and use to argue their case. By 'source,' I mean a single article or chapter in a book or legal document or other primary source. As with your essays, a primary source could also be an interview or participant observation of a yoga class. Closer to the debate, teams will hold a **short initial meeting** at which they will fill out a **Group Work Contract** (see below, and on Bb) and email to **me**. After that meeting, the group should meet **at least one more time** to discuss strategy and prepare their series of arguments. Those arguments should bring together the yoga research with the theories and themes we've discussed in class to make a persuasive case. (Naturally, the theorists you read for this class will be particularly helpful in making arguments about religious identity!)

Each team will also be given the **opportunity to meet with me for up to an hour** so that I can answer questions and help in honing strategies. I anticipate that much of the work preparing for the debate will happen in the three weeks before the debate occurs, so this is something to think about until after you've handed in your essays. And, most importantly, it's not something to stress about: a key goal of this exercise is to have fun!

As some students will be participating by Distance, teams will have to find technologies and strategies to maximize their involvement (e.g. Skype or Zoom). Technical help is available for those who cannot find a suitable technology. (It bears saying here that working in global teams and via internet is something you will be doing a lot in your post-university lives!)

I realise that students will have various backgrounds in Hinduism and Indian religions. Some will have no background. For this reason, participants in the debate will be expected to explain and defend their positions to someone who has little or no background knowledge of Hinduism.

(Imagine that I'm a judge in a NZ court.) This doesn't require giving an entire history of Hinduism, nor does it require dumbing things down. It means presenting your ideas in a way that is accessible to any audience while also making clear *why the evidence, authors and sources you rely upon are, in fact, reliable*. (Explaining religion to those without prior knowledge is an important skill to cultivate, and it's a role that you –as scholars of religion –will be called upon to play in the world.)

**Marks** will be allocated in two ways for this assessment. I will allocate some of the marks (5 pts.) based on the overall performance of the team on the day of debate. These will reflect my perception of how effective the team was in offering a range of clear, reasoned, well-coordinated and well-supported arguments. (By the way, teams are not competing for a limited set of marks; I am quite happy to give all of the teams 5s, and have in the past.)

The other part of the marks (10 pts.) will be allocated by the individual students him/herself, based on the student's own perception of his or her contributions to the group. Students will submit their self-marks along with a **400-word statement** explaining why they give themselves that mark. Statements must do four things: (1) describe briefly the student's individual contributions to the team including the research they did, (2) reflect on what strategies or methods worked well for working together in the team, (3) comment on the challenges faced by the team and (4), most importantly, propose a set of strategies for how to improve group-work next time. (These strategies will be shared with debate teams in the future, so please be as specific as possible!) This self-reflection will be **due on the Sunday following the debate**.

Please know that I am aware of your potential anxieties about group work and marks and will be sensitive to this. However, I am assigning marks for this assessment because I know it will take some of your time and I want to make sure that time is recognised and rewarded.

### Exam (Open-Note)

So that I don't have too many assessments during the semester, when you're already overworked, 40% of your marks will be assessed during exam week in the form of a final exam administered by the examinations office. However, this is not your usual exam. The exam will consist of two parts:

- (1) a series of *short answer questions* which will examine your success in completing the readings, attending/viewing the seminars and digesting the key ideas and examples.
- (2) *An essay question* which I will give you ahead of time.

Exams will differ for **200-** and **300-level**. The 300 exams will have more short answer questions and I will expect a higher level of mastery over the materials as well as a higher level of sophistication on the part of the essay.

The exam is **open note**. This means that you will be able to take a **single double-sided sheet of notes into the exam**. If you want to write out your entire essay on that sheet and copy it into the exam book, that's fine with me. If you want to take comprehensive notes on the class and use that for the short-answer section, that's also fine with me.

You learn by studying for exams and that's all I care about. I'm not trying to test how well you perform under pressure!

## Other Information

### Plagiarism

Students should make sure that all work submitted is their own and should fill in and attach a signed coversheet to their essay. Plagiarism is a form of dishonest practice. Plagiarism is defined as ‘copying or paraphrasing another’s work whether intentionally or not and presenting it as one’s own’ (University of Otago Calendar, 2006, p.193). In practice this means that plagiarism includes any attempt in any piece of submitted work (e.g. an assignment or test) to present as one’s own work the work of another (whether of another student or a published authority) including work from the Internet.

Any student found responsible for plagiarism in any piece of work submitted for assessment shall be subject to the University’s dishonest practice regulations which may result in various penalties, including forfeiture of marks for the piece of work submitted, a zero grade for the paper, or in extreme cases exclusion from the University. For more advice on this policy see “Academic Integrity: A Brief Guide for Studies” at <http://www.otago.ac.nz/study/academicintegrity/> and the ‘Study skills’ section in Blackboard.

## Copy of Group Work Contract

We, the members of .....(group name)..... agree to the following plan of action:

- Agree that we are aiming to get a \_\_\_\_\_/5 for our presentation.
- Choose \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ (a 300-level student) to be the Group Leaders, with responsibilities for organizing meetings.
- Choose \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to record notes and responsibilities (as needed)
- Will meet again on \_\_\_\_\_ to discuss who will read what and/or how we should argue our case.
- Hope to meet at least \_\_\_\_\_ times for the following amount of time \_\_\_\_\_
- Will facilitate participation of Distance Students in the following way \_\_\_\_\_
- Hope to meet for an hour with Ben, yes or no: \_\_\_\_\_
- Additional terms of agreements here:

Signed...

## OUTLINE OF LECTURES

\*\* = Quizzes

<b>Week 1: Introduction to the Class (July 7)</b>
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*No reading due*

<b>Week 2: What is (religious) identity? (July 14) – practice quiz</b>
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*Distance tutorial: TUESDAY{just this week} July 14 at 7:30-8:30 pm*

**Reading Questions:** What is (religious/Jewish) ‘identity’ and who decides?

1. Appiah, Kwame Anthony. “The Demands of Identity.” In his *The Ethics of Identity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005. 62-71, 110-113.
2. **[Read closely]** Mark Galanter. “A Dissent on Brother Daniel,” *Commentary* Vol. 36, No. 1 (July, 1963). **ONLY pp. 10-14** (But you’re welcome to read the whole thing)
3. J.H.H. Weiler, “[Discrimination and Identity in London: The Jewish Free School Case](#),” *Jewish Review of Books* no. 1 (Spring 2010). ~4pages.
4. Watch: [Where Do Jewish Laws Come From?](#) (Short introduction Torah, Talmud, and Halacha)
5. Eric K Ward, “[Skin in the Game: How Antisemitism Animates White Nationalism](#).” Political Research Associates, June 2017.

**Helpful info:**

This week we’re going to think about the complex entanglements of religious identity with politics, law and race by considering the topic of Jewish identity. Is it a religious identity? Is it racial? Is it fixed? How do other identity categories influence religious identity and who decides what counts?

**Appiah** provides an overview of some helpful ways to think about identity. He’s a very famous philosopher from Princeton who specialises in this topic. **Weiler’s** short article discusses an important court case concerning Jewish identity in the UK, the Jewish Free School Case in which school administrators were accused of racism for denying entry to a particular student. **Galanter** also gives you a living, breathing sense of just how complex religious identities can turn out to be! He describes a fascinating court case in Israel in the 1960s. We’ll be talking about it in class, so make sure to read the first part of it. The short **video** above will help you understand the basics of Jewish law in both these articles. **Ward** bring the discussion of religion and race into more expansive territory, thinking about white nationalism in the US.

**Optional:**

Sen, Amartya. *Identity and Violence: the illusion of destiny*. Norton, 2006. Pp. 18-39.

<b>**Week 3: Ritual and the enacting of identity Part I (July 21)</b>
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**General Questions:** What is ritual and how does it work on society? How would Durkheim interpret a graduation ceremony?

1. **[Read closely]** Durkheim, Emile. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Translated by Karen E. Fields. New York: Free Press, 1995 [1912]. Pp 216-225.
2. Fischer, Ronald, Rohan Callander, Paul Reddish, and Joseph Bulbulia. “How Do Rituals Affect Cooperation?” *Human Nature* 24, no. 2 (June 1, 2013): 115–25.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12110-013-9167-y>.

**Helpful info:**

For many scholars of religion, this books by **Durkheim**—and the one by Turner (next week)—are among the most important books on ritual ever written. To cut a long story short, Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms* is a book about how religion operates in societies and why it is important. Most people consider Durkheim to be one of the first, if not the first, sociologist. (Durkheim felt this way himself). Over his career, Durkheim wrote about topics as diverse as economic production, suicide and many other things. Yet he was always concerned with why and how societies hold together. In this book, he asks that question with respect to religion: what role does religion play in holding society together? Pay attention to the details of the ritual he describes and ask yourself what parts does he consider important and why. The second article by **Fischer et. al.** tries to apply some of Durkheim’s theories to various social groups in NZ. It’s a really interesting experimental application of ritual theory (hint, hint: bonus option essay people!). But does it change the way we read Durkheim?

**Optional:**

Whitehouse, Harvey, and Jonathan A. Lanman. “The Ties That Bind Us: Ritual, Fusion, and Identification.” *Current Anthropology* 55, no. 6 (December 2014): 674–95.  
<https://doi.org/10.1086/678698>.

**Week 4: Ritual and the enacting of identity Part II (July 28)**

*Distance tutorial: Wed, July 29 at 7:30-8:30 pm*

**General questions and info:** How is Turner’s view of ritual different to Durkheim’s? How might *he* interpret a graduation ceremony?

1. **[Read closely]** Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968. Pp. 94-107.
2. Marriott, McKimm. “The Feast of Love.” In *Krishna: myths, Rites and Attitudes*. Edited by M. Singer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966. Pp. 200-212

**Helpful info:**

Victor **Turner** is a well-known anthropologist who worked and wrote mostly from the 1960s to the 1980s. This text comes from his most famous work on ritual, cited widely, called *The Ritual Process*. In it, he tries to take his ethnographic research from Africa and piece together a total theory of ritual and how it works. This theory has tantalising similarities to Durkheim. But it's also different in many ways. When reading, ask yourself several things: (1) What ritual does Turner choose as emblematic of 'the ritual process'? (2) How does that ritual work? (3) What do you think this reveals about the different approaches that Durkheim and Turner take to ritual and its work on society? **McKimm Marriot** is an American anthropologist who wrote about India and did work in the 1950s-1960s. His article is a fun read (an academic getting high for his fieldwork?!). It also gives you an example of how one might use Turner's theories in another context.

<b>**Week 5: Myth, discourse and the narration of identity (Aug 4)</b>
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**General Questions:** What is myth and how does it generate or consolidate identity?

1. **[Read closely]** Malinowski, Bronislaw. "Myth in Primitive Psychology." *In A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*. Edited by Michael Lambek. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002 [1922]. Pp. 176-84.
2. Lincoln, Bruce. *Discourse and the Construction of Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989. Pp. 15-26.
3. Holy Bible, *The New Revised Standard Version*. Genesis 1-12.\*\*see note below.

**Helpful info:**

In the same way that some sociologists consider Durkheim to be the 'father of sociology,' some anthropologists consider **Malinowski** to be the 'progenitor of modern anthropology.' His formative work, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, laid the foundation for what has become the modern ethnographic method. In this reading, Malinowski explores the importance of certain myths in Melanesian society. In short, he sees myths as functioning like law or, in his words, serving as a 'social charter' for societies. What does he mean by this? How does his example of animals coming out of holes prove that point?

**Bruce Lincoln** is a scholar of religion from the University of Chicago, and a former professor of mine. His work is synthetic, drawing from a wide variety of sources and languages. However, he does have a central concern: he is interested in how religion justifies and rationalises the social order in particular times and places. His theories are similar to Malinowski, but he gives us much more detail on what, exactly, makes a myth a myth. When reading, ask yourself, can any story be a myth? Under what conditions does narrative become myth?

**\*\*Important note on the Bible passage:** Please use the version I've uploaded to Blackboard. Have general look at this. You do NOT need to absorb all the details. Ask yourself: could you read this as social charter (as Malinowski might), or as a particular type of authorised narrative (as Lincoln might)?

<b>**Week 6: Symbols and beliefs and ‘religious’ violence: identity as worldview (Aug 11)</b>
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*Distance tutorial: Wed, Aug 12 at 7:30-8:30 pm*

**General questions:** What is the relationship between belief, symbol and religion? What might make violence ‘religious’?

1. **[Read closely]** Geertz, Clifford. “Religion as a Cultural System” *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*. Edited by Michael Lambek. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002. Pp. 205-216
2. Juergensmeyer, Mark. *Terror in the Mind of God*. LA: University of California. 1-15.
3. “Final Instructions to the Hijackers on September 11,” In *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion After September 11*. Bruce Lincoln. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: pp. 93-98.

**Helpful info:**

**Clifford Geertz** could be, and probably is, the most well-known anthropologist of our generation. And, when it comes to the anthropological study of religion, this essay probably is the best-known treatise on what religion is and why we should study it. When reading, think about how Geertz’s approach to the study of religion—and, especially, his approach to symbols—differs from that of Durkheim or Turner or Malinowski, etc. Also ask yourself how Geertz might think about the corroboree or a graduation ceremony?

If you’ve studied anything about the relationship between religion and violence or religion and terrorism in the last two decades, chances are you’ve read the work of **Mark Juergensmeyer**. He was trained as a political scientist and sociologist initially, but has turned his attention to religion for most of his academic career. This book came into print shortly after the 9/11 attacks in the US. And many people consider Mark to be the scholar who first made the study of violence and religion a viable academic field, now populated by numerous authors. When reading this, I suggest that you think about how Juergensmeyer draws from and/or builds upon the work of Geertz.

The final reading is a translation of the “**final instructions**” found among the possessions of the 9/11 hijackers. How might they serve to generate or reinforce a particular worldview for Geertz or Juergensmeyer?

**Optional:**

Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger*. New York: Routledge, 1966.

Sosis, Richard, Erika J. Phillips, and Candace S. Alcorta. “Sacrifice and Sacred Values: Evolutionary Perspectives on Religious Terrorism.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Evolutionary Perspectives on Violence, Homicide, and War*, edited by Todd K. Shackelford and Viviana A. Weekes-Shackelford. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199738403.013.0014>.

White, Cindel J.M., John Michael Kelly, Azim F. Shariff, and Ara Norenzayan. "Supernatural Norm Enforcement: Thinking about Karma and God Reduces Selfishness among Believers." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 84 (September 2019): 103797. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2019.03.008>.

<b>Week 7: Writing Workshop (Aug 18)</b>
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*Distance writing workshop: Wed, Aug 19 at 7:30-8:30 pm*

NO READING DUE

**Aug 25– Mid Semester Break**

<b>**Week 8: Religious identity beyond belief: power, discipline and practices (Sept 1)</b>
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**General questions:** How is the body important in forming religious identity? How does this change the way we think about the identity-making work of religion?

1. Lebnor, Ashley. "The Anthropology of Religion: Historical and Contemporary Trends." In *Handbooks on Religion Volume 2: Social Religion: Historical Consciousness and the Social Sciences*, edited by William B. Parsons, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. Read only: 235–242.
2. Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton University Press, 2005. 118-139, 155-161
3. **SKIM** "Bhikkhu Patimokkha: The Bhikkhus' [Buddhist monks'] Code of Discipline" Translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/vin/sv/bhikkhu-pati.html>

**Helpful info:**

**Lebnor's article** describes one of the most important debates in Religious Studies in the last four decades. It's between Geertz and an anthropologist named Talal Asad, who has some beefs with Geertz's definition of religion. What are those beefs? Read and find out!

**Mahmood's** book is a personal favourite. She is writing about *da'wa*, or religious revivalist movements in Egypt, particular among urban, middle class Egyptians. The examples she refers to in this section are taken from her anthropological work with that group. When reading, ask yourself: what is Mahmood's argument about the relationship between 'exterior' practices (e.g. rituals) and 'interior' mental states (e.g., moral virtues such as humility or the desire to worship) as it relates to the practices of the Muslim women she studies? What is '*habitus*'? What

perspectives is she arguing against? What are the implications of this viewpoint for the way we look at the ‘agency’ of women who wear the veil?

#3 is simply a list of the 227 rules that Buddhist monks in Theravada Buddhist countries are supposed to follow. It is called the "The Bhikkhu Patimokkha." Once you've read Lebnor and Mahmood, scroll through these rules and think about what they might ‘do’ to generate collective identity among Buddhist monks.

### Optional:

Griffith, R Marie. *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. 160-205.

Samuels, Jeffrey. "Toward an Action-oriented Pedagogy: Buddhist Texts and Monastic Education in Contemporary Sri Lanka." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72, no. 4 (2004): 955–971.

Sosis, Richard. "Religious Behaviours, Badges, and Bans: Signalling Theory and the Evolution of Religion." In *Where God and Science Meet: How Brain and Evolutionary Studies Alter Our Understanding of Religion*, edited by Patrick McNamara, 1:77–102. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2006.

Stark, R. and Iannaccone. "[Why the Jehovah's Witnesses grow so rapidly: A theoretical application](#)" *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 12(2) (1997), see esp. pages 144-46.

### **\*\*Week 9: Rationalization and Hinduism in Bali (Sept 8)**

*Distance tutorial: Wed, Sept 9 at 7:30-8:30 pm*

**General questions:** What is rationalization and how does it affect ‘religion’?

1. **[Read closely]** Weber, Max. *Economy and Society*. Translated and Edited by Guenther Roth and C. Wittich. San Francisco: University of California Press, 1978. Vol I, Pp. 424 (subsection ii) – 429 (section 4), 437-439.
2. Geertz, Clifford. "Internal Conversion in Bali" in *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books, 1973. Pp. 170-190.
3. Picard, Michel. "What is in a Name: Agama Hindu Bali" in *Hinduism in Modern Indonesia*. Edited by Martin Ramstedt. London: Routledge, 2003. Pp. 56-72.

### Helpful info:

**Max Weber** is an early-20<sup>th</sup>-century German Sociologist and one of the most important ‘classical’ theorists of religion. These sections are taken from his magnum opus, *Economy and Society*, which he worked on feverishly in his later years, but never finished. (The pages were only put together after his death.) In these sections, Weber traces a historical and categorical shift from “magic” to “religion,” involving shifts in the key persons, key methods and key aims of (for lack of a better term) worship. He describes this process as one of ‘rationalization.’ Magic and religion are, for Weber, “ideal types,” sociological abstractions that, while not accurate to all realities, function as useful caricatures or stereotypes for understanding the world. Based on these few passages, try to see if you can piece together some of his stereotyped

portrait of “magic” and “religion”. When reading, ask yourself what’s the difference between magic and religion for Weber?

In his lively chapter, **Geertz** uses Weber’s idea of rationalization to explain changes in worship practices in Bali. He summarizes Weber nicely. His description will help you digest the sections from *Economy and Society*. Keep in mind that this article was published in the early 1960s, based on fieldwork from the 1950s. If you’re interested, it might help to read a bit about Indonesian history on Encyclopaedia Britannica online!

**Picard** is a long-time observer and analyser of changes to Balinese life. In this essay, he complicates Geertz’s portrait of religious change in Bali, by attending to the colonial origins of Balinese religious reform and ‘rationalization.’ He mentions a lot of Balinese/Indonesian-language journal names here, so don’t be put off. To help you keep track: Following a split in Bali’s intellectual elite between Balinese nobility (*triwangsa*) and commoners (*jaba*), some members of the nobility started a magazine called *Bali Adnjana*, while commoners started a magazine called *Surya Kanta*. Do your best to keep track of the differences between how the two journals understood and named Balinese ‘religion.’ That is, to quote from his title, what’s the important of the name preferred by the nobility, Agama Hindu Bali (the ‘Balinese Hindu religion’) as opposed to the name chosen by the commoner group, Agama Bali Hindu (the ‘Hindu Balinese religion’)? Moreover, ask yourself, when reading, what causes rationalization in Bali?

-Essays due at 5pm on Fri, Sept 11-

**\*\*Week 10: Syncretism, Hybridity and Religious Change (Sept 15) Practice debate (no pre-set teams)**

**Reading questions:** *Be prepared to debate both sides of the following question: Is Rosalind a Catholic?* What are the different models of religious complexity examined in these readings (e.g. hybridity, syncretism, etc.)? In what ways do they challenge the understandings of religious identity we’ve examined so far??

1. **[Read closely]** Kristin Bloomer, “Rosalind” in "Possessed by a Goddess: Hinduism, Christianity, and the Virgin Mary in South India," Ph.D. Dissertation in History of Religions for the University of Chicago. Pp. 73-101.
2. Walters, Jonathan "Multireligion on the Bus: Beyond 'Influence' and 'Syncretism' in the Study of Religious Meetings." In *Unmaking the Nation*. Edited by Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail. Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 1995. Pp. 24-54

**Helpful info:**

**Bloomer** is a scholar of religion in Tamil-speaking India. She did ethnographic work in and around Chennai, Tamil Nadu. In this piece, she describes her experiences at a Pentecostal Christian worship service in Chennai. Try to think about the ways Christianity and/or Hinduism have or have not changed in this context.

**Walters’** piece provides an interesting theoretical counterpoint, in which he critiques the ideas syncretism presented. Using examples from Sri Lanka—including discussions of deities, rituals, pilgrimage, travel and sacred sites—he rejects use of terms such as influence,

‘interactionism’ and syncretism. Why does he do this? What examples does Walters’ use and how does each one, in particular, show the limits of these terms? Is there a certain model of religious complexity that *you* prefer?

<b>**Week 11: Capitalism, Commodification and Spirituality (Sept 22)</b>
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*Distance tutorial: Wed, Sept 23 at 7:30-8:30 pm*

**Readings questions:** How has modern consumer capitalism changed religious life and religiosity? Has it diminished the effects of ritual, myth, etc., which we discussed in the first part of the class?

1. King, R. And J. Carrette. *Selling Spirituality*. New York: Routledge, 1-29, 114-120.
2. Sanger, Annette. “Blessing or Blight: The Effects of Tourist Dance Drama on Village Life in Bali” in *Come Mek Me Hol Yu Han*. Edited by Lewin and Kaeppler. Kingston: Jamaica Memory Bank, 1988. Pp. 89-102.

**Helpful info:**

*Selling Spirituality* has become something of a standard for thinking about changes of religion in the modern world, and the rise of “spirituality.” This is the introduction to book, plus a couple of sections that deal with yoga. When reading this, try to figure out the nitty gritty of King and Carrette’s arguments. What exactly is ‘spirituality’ (in their definition) and how does it change religion? What’s wrong with spirituality?

We saw the Barong dance before, remember? When we discussed rationalisation. This is a follow up to that. Recall that we discussed the Barong (and viewed a barong dance in class) as an example of non-rationalised religion. How do things look now? When reading this, think about how capitalist incentives changed Balinese ritual. Compare **Sanger’s** piece with our discussions about Bali so far: how does tourism complicate the picture of ‘religious’ change in Bali? How does Sanger’s perspective differ from Carrette and King?

**Optional:**

Lofton, Kathryn “Practicing Oprah; or, the Prescriptive Compulsion of a Spiritual Capitalism” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 39, No. 4 (2006): 599-621.

Helpful info: Kathy Lofton is one of the most exciting scholars of religion in the academy right now. Her area of expertise is American religion, and in this piece she thinks about Oprah as an American religious icon. What’s interesting about this piece, vis-à-vis, the others is that Lofton is showing how, under the conditions of modern capitalism, an ostensibly non-religious thing can become religious. When going through it, think about how Lofton’s approaches to Oprah differ from King and Carrette’s approaches to yoga.

Picard, Michel, “Cultural Tourism in Bali: Cultural Performances as Tourist Attractions” *Indonesia* 49: 37-74.

Helpful info: This will give you more on the practice of “cultural tourism” in Bali that can amplify what’s in Annette Sanger’s piece.

Watch: “Who Owns Yoga?”

Helpful info: This is a documentary put together by Al Jazeera Media that looks at the ‘Yoga business’ in the US and UK. It is reasonably balanced, but certainly lacks a wee bit in scholarly analysis. I introduce it here for two reasons: (1) to help us think about commodification in a more grounded way; (2) to get our juices flowing for the debate next week on yoga!

<b>Week 12: Class Debate: Is Yoga Hindu? Is Yoga Religion? (Sept 29)</b>
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**Reading questions** (for the debate): Is modern postural yoga religious? Hindu? Neither religious nor Hindu?

**Readings:** See Folder on Blackboard

**Helpful info:**

Modern postural, asana-based yoga (the Lululemon-type of yoga) owes its origins largely to the influence and activities of a small number of early-twentieth-century Indian “gurus,” all of whom had as their main teacher the southern Indian brahmin T. Krishnamachariya (1888-1989[that’s right, 101 years old!!]). These gurus—which include BKS Iyengar and K. Pattabhi Jois (who are ‘cult figures’ in the yoga scene)—have a complex relationship with Hindu traditions and innovation. The issue of modern yoga, therefore, provides an interesting topic for investigating and debating what Hindu/religious identity is and how it works. The question isn’t merely one of academic interest. In recent years, the question of ‘Hinduness’ of yoga has been at the centre of very acrimonious and important legal disputes in the US and India. There is information on these on the Bb site, and we’ll talk a bit about them pre-debate. The complexity of this question along with its growing salience make it an ideal debate topic. For a general introduction to the ‘modern yoga scene’ see the following article written by a well-respected scholar of yoga, and practitioner himself, Dr. Mark Singleton:

<http://www.yogajournal.com/article/philosophy/yoga-s-greater-truth/>

Please bear a few of things in mind:

- (1) It doesn’t matter whether you have taken any classes on Hinduism; you will be expected to present your arguments the class in a way that doesn’t assume or expect any background knowledge of the tradition. That is, I expect that you will both summarize your reading and mobilize it as part of your argument (this is, after all, what one does as an academic, lawyer, business person, etc.)
- (2) If you DO have some background in Hinduism, please consider making use of that background and working with arguments and sources that explain and analyse the pre-modern Hindu ideals and texts: e.g. the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, Vedic sources, the Bhagavad Gita, etc. That would be very helpful for the class.
- (3) Have fun! The goal here is to use everything you’ve learned so far in this class to make a public argument. Think about ritual, myth, techniques of the body, worldview, othering, syncretism and capitalism and commodification. If done responsibly and with vim, this will be an excellent way to review and synthesize the main themes and ideas of this class.

**Optional viewing:**

### “Yoga Unveiled”

I have not viewed this documentary in its entirety, but I include it because it gives a counter-perspective (I am hoping[!]) to the movie you viewed for last week. There is one copy of this film in the library on close reserve, but I will look for an online version for you to view in the comfort of your computers. Although a bit cheesy (oh, you’ll see), this documentary does summarize somewhat nicely some arguments for the continuity of modern postural yoga with older Indian traditions. The filmmaker interviews some important academics here and introduces some important texts, ideas and historical events and persons.

### “Who Owns Yoga?”

Week 11’s optional viewing if you haven’t seen it.

<b>Week 13: Summary and Recap: Religious ‘Nones’ and the end of identity (Oct 6)</b>
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*Distance tutorial: Wed, Oct 7 at 7:30-8:30 pm*

**Reading Questions:** Use the NONES article to come up with a theory for the lack of religious identity in America. Is this the absence of identity? If so, why??

1. Pew Forum on Religious Life, “Nones” on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation” Pp. 1-80. (You can read this quickly!)
2. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2016/04/160422-atheism-agnostic-secular-nones-rising-religion/>