

**ANTH 311/RS 361**  
**Department of Anthropology**  
**Winter 2020**  
**T, Th 1:00-2:20, ML 349**

**Instructor:** Secil Dagtas

**Office:** PAS 2019

**Office Phone:** 519-888-4567 x32991

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays 2:30-4 pm or by appointment

**Email:** [sdagtas@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:sdagtas@uwaterloo.ca)

**TA:**

**TA email:**

### **Course Description**

This course will introduce you to the anthropological study of religion and its key themes, definitions, and approaches. While religion is normally thought of as a spiritual process or a set of beliefs and practices with clear and identifiable boundaries, in this course we examine religions in their social and political embeddedness. While we will consider the belief-centered approaches to religion, we will primarily attempt to understand “religions in practice,” as they are lived, embodied, felt, gendered, racialized, and politicized. Although our examples will be from a diversity of a number of religious traditions, the aim of this course is not so much to provide an extensive survey of religions in the world. Instead, we will use these examples to reflect critically on the meaning and usefulness of key terms such as “belief”, “religion,” “God,” “magic,” “modernity,” and “ritual.” We will learn about different anthropological approaches that have been used to understand a variety of practices, communities, texts, experiences, languages, and material cultures across the globe. We will discuss the kinds of questions anthropologists ask while studying religion, whether and how anthropology of religion differs from other disciplinary approaches, and how contact, conflict, and exchange among religions have shaped the world in which we live. In short, this course is meant to help you cultivate anthropological ways of thinking about and studying religion.

Please note that our purpose in this course is not theological, but ethnographic. Students taking this course are asked to leave aside their own beliefs about religion (including atheism) and focus instead on what religion means today to the studied individuals and groups, and how it is lived, embodied, and materialized in relation to contemporary forces of modernity.

### **Course Goals and Learning Outcomes**

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Understand key anthropological concepts on religion and have the ability to apply them to diverse contexts
- Identify and analyze different anthropological approaches to religion and their historical and theoretical context
- Develop anthropologically-oriented critical reading, research, and thinking skills
- Observe and write analytically about religious aspects of culture with which you are familiar and critically engage scholarly sources
- Better understand how religion shapes and is shaped by global communities and cultures and the ethical connections between our own lives and those of others who are marginalized due to their religious affiliations

## Required Readings

The readings are the foundation for our in-class work and your writing projects and assignments this term. You are therefore responsible for completing the readings before class, preparing to discuss the readings before class, and bringing the readings with you so you can refer to them.

- All journal articles and book chapters assigned between Week 1 and Week 11 are available to download from the library website or courseserves  
<https://www.reserves.uwaterloo.ca/ares/ares.dll>
- The course also requires you to purchase (or borrow) one of the following books to be discussed between Week 11 and the end of the term, and to form the basis of your final paper submission:
  - 1) Mittermaier, Amira. 2019. Giving to God: Islamic Charity in Revolutionary Times. Berkeley: University of California Press.
  - 2) Ramberg, Lucinda. 2014. Given to the Goddess: South Indian Devadasis and the Sexuality of Religion. Durham: Duke University Press.
  - 3) Arkin, Kimberly. 2014. Rhinestones, Religion, and the Republic: Fashioning Jewishness in France. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
  - 4) Josephson, Jason Ananda. 2012. The Invention of Religion in Japan. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
  - 5) O'Neill, Kevin Lewis. 2015. Secure the Soul: Christian Piety and Gang Prevention in Guatemala. Berkeley: University of California Press.

The books are available at University of Waterloo Bookstore and on course reserves at Dana Porter Library for a one day loan. If access to the books is a problem, please let me know!

<b>Course Requirements and Assessment</b>	<b>Date of submission</b>	<b>Weighting</b>
1) Participation	Week 1—13	10%
2) Midterm	February 11	20%
3) Online Discussion Q. posts (10 in total)	Weeks 1—12	10%
4) Short Essay	March 17	20%
5) Presentation	Week 13	10 %
6) Book Review	April 9	30%
Total		100%