

SOC6018H1S: Sociology of Religion

Winter 2025

Wednesday 9-11 am

Location: Department of Sociology (700 University Ave), Room 17020

Instructor: Miray Philips (miray.philips@utoronto.ca)

Office Hours: Wednesday 11-12pm or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This graduate course explores the sociology of religion, with a specific focus on religious difference globally. While sociology often centers racial, class, gender, and sexual difference in the study of power, inequality and privilege, it has largely ignored the role of religion. This class is a corrective, thus, and centers religious difference and its intersections with questions of identity, conflict, politics, and freedom. The first part introduces the social scientific study of religion, focusing on the defining question of what constitutes religion. The second part focuses on religious difference, exploring topics that range from identity and groups to sectarianization and violence to islamophobia and antisemitism. The third and final part shifts the focus to the regulation of religious difference, exploring the role of the state, communities, and rights. Overall, the course equips students with theoretical and methodological tools to engage with contemporary debates and realities of religious difference globally.

ASSIGNMENTS

Class Attendance and Participation: *Ongoing, 10 points*

This class is organized as a seminar and require students to be present and engaged. Students are expected to come to class having read the readings and ready to participate in class discussions. The grade is not simply about attendance, but class participation and engagement. Your grade will reflect overall participation throughout the semester.

Reading Memos: *Ongoing, 2x10 points*

You will write two reading memos throughout the semester. The reading memos can entail some summary of the readings, but should largely be analytical, engaging with the following points:

- The key debates/questions/issues raised in the readings
- Strengths and weaknesses of the readings
- Points of agreement and disagreement between authors
- Your own critical reflections on the readings
- 1-2 questions

I encourage you to read carefully, think with the text, be creative, and think about the implications of the readings. These memos should be 1000-1500 words in length. They will be shared with the entire class. They are due the **Monday** before our class meeting. You cannot write a reading memo for the same week you will present and facilitate discussion. A signup sheet will be distributed within the first week of class.

Class Presentation and Discussion Facilitation: *Ongoing, 20 points*

For one class session, you are responsible for giving a 10-15 minute presentation on the readings and facilitating classroom discussion. The presentation should provide an overview of the readings, highlighting key themes, debates, and questions. You are also expected to come up with 4-5

questions to generate meaningful discussion, as well as facilitate the discussion itself. You can draw on your peers' reading memos for your presentation and discussion questions. But you cannot write a reading memo for the week you lead discussion. A signup sheet will be distributed within the first week of class.

Final Paper: *Multiple Deadlines, 50 points*

The final writing product is meant to allow you to engage with your own research interests and advance your own professional career. You have the option of choosing between multiple types of writing products:

- Option 1: Research Paper
 - This research paper ought to be written with the goal of either submitting it to a peer-reviewed journal, presenting it at a conference, developing it into a dissertation chapter, or serve as a first draft of your research practicum paper. This paper should analyze qualitative or quantitative data that you already have access to. The research paper should offer an argument rooted in theoretical insights and empirical data. I encourage you to explore your research interests related broadly to the sociology of religion. The final paper should be about 8000-10000 words.
- Option 2: Literature Review
 - The goal is to provide a comprehensive analysis of key scholarly works on a specific topic within the sociology of religion. You will craft a research question and select around 10 articles/books that will form the basis of your literature review. This literature review is not simply a summary or an annotated bibliography of readings, but must synthesize existing research, identify key theoretical debates, and empirical findings. The literature review should be about 6000-8000 words.
- Option 3: Grant Proposal
 - Write a research proposal for a grant that you will apply to in the field of sociology of religion. Your research proposal should identify a research question, review the literature, and outline how you will collect data. It should highlight how your research project is theoretically or methodologically innovative and how it will contribute to the sociology of religion. The length of the proposal will depend on the grant's requirements.

The final paper is broken down into the following smaller assignments:

- Meeting with Instructor and Proposal: *February 12th, February 19th - 5 points*
 - Discuss with the instructor which option you will undertake. During this meeting, we will set the terms for the proposal, which will likely be a 1-page document that includes details about the proposed final paper (e.g. option choice; research question; bibliography; grant details; length of first draft). The meeting with the instructor must happen by February 12th, and the proposal is due on February 19th.
- First Draft: *March 12th - 15 points*
 - You will submit a first draft of your final paper. This draft should be as close to done as possible. The more work you invest in this stage, the better feedback you will receive, and the more finalized your final paper will be.
- Peer Review: *March 26th - 15 points*
 - You will each provide detailed feedback on one of your peer's final paper. Giving and receiving feedback is central to academic citizenship. This exercise will help you learn how to provide constructive feedback that helps your peers' develop their own

ideas. The review will be written in the form of a memo, following the standards of the peer-review process.

- Final Draft: *April 16th - 15 points*
 - You will incorporate the feedback, finalize the paper, and submit a final version of your paper.

Total: 100 points

COURSE SCHEDULE

Part I: The Social Scientific Study of Religion

1. Introduction

Date: January 8

2. What is Religion?

Date: January 15

Readings:

- Rhys Williams. 1996. "Religion as Political Resource: Culture or Ideology?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 35(4): 368-378.
- Smith. 2017. "What is Religion?" In *Religion: What It Is, How It Works, and Why It Matters*. Princeton University Press. Pages 20-59.

Supplemental:

- Clifford Geertz. 1993. "Religion as a Cultural System." In *The Interpretation of Cultures*.
- Talal Asad. 1993. "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category." In *Genealogies of Religion*.
- Jonathan Smith. 1998. "Religion, Religions, Religious." In *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. University of Chicago Press. Pages 269-84.

Part II: Religious Difference

3. Groups, Boundaries, and Difference

Date: January 22

Readings:

- Rogers Brubaker. 2002. "Ethnicity without Groups" *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 43(2): 163-189.
- Monk Jr, Ellis P. 2022. "Inequality without Groups: Contemporary Theories of Categories, Intersectional Typicality, and the Disaggregation of Difference." *Sociological Theory* 40(1): 3- 27.
- Brubaker, Rogers. 2015. *Grounds for Difference*. Harvard University Press. Introduction and Chapter 3

Supplemental:

- Andreas Wimmer. 2008. "The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries: A Multilevel Process Theory." *American Journal of Sociology* 113(4): 970-1022.
- Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár. 2002. "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences." *Annual Review of Sociology* 28(1): 167-195.
- Mark Pachucki, Sabrina Pendergrass, and Michèle Lamont. 2007. "Boundary Processes: Recent Theoretical Developments and New Contributions." *Poetics* 35(6):331–351.

4. Sect, Sectarianism, and Sectarianization

Date: January 29

Readings:

- Rima Majed. 2020. "The Theoretical and Methodological Traps in Studying Sectarianism in the Middle East." In *Routledge Handbook of Middle East Politics*, edited by Larbi Sadiki, 1st Edition. Routledge. Page 540-553.
- Nader Hashemi & Danny Postel. 2017. *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*. Introduction and Chapter 4. Pages 1-22, 61-76.

Supplemental:

- Dawson, Lorne L. 2009. "Church-Sect-Cult: Constructing Typologies of Religious Groups." in *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, edited by P. B. Clarke. Oxford University Press.
- Rima Majed. 2020. "For a Sociology of Sectarianism: Bridging the Disciplinary Gaps Beyond the 'Deeply Divided Societies' Paradigm." *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of the Middle East*. Edited by Armando Salvatore.
- Makdisi, Ussama. 2000. *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon*. University of California Press.
- Makdisi, Ussama. 2017. *The Mythology of the Sectarian Middle East*. Rice University Baker Institute of Public Policy.
- Haddad, Fanar. 2011. *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity*. London: Hurst Publishers.
- Maya Mikdashi. 2022. *Sectarianism: Sovereignty, Secularism, and the State in Lebanon*. Stanford University Press.

5. Religion and Violence

Date: February 5

Readings:

- Mark Juergensmeyer. 2001. "Terror in the Name of God," *Current History*.
- Mark Juergensmeyer. 2003. *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*. Introduction. Pages 3-15.
- William Cavanaugh. 2009. *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*. New York: Oxford University Press. Introduction and Chapter 1. Pages 3-56.

Supplemental:

- Simon Cottee. 2017. “‘What ISIS Really Wants?’ Revisited: Religion Matters in Jihadist Violence, but How?” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 40(6): 439-454.
- John Hall. 2013. “Religion and Violence from a Sociological Perspective” In *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, edited by Michael Jerryson.

6. Islamophobia and the Racialization of Religion

Date: February 12

Deadline: Meeting with Professor

Readings:

- Todd Green. 2015. “What is Islamophobia?” In *The Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West*. Pages 9-33.
- Junaid Rana. 2007. “The Story of Islamophobia” *Souls*. Pages 148-161.
- Jennifer Cheng. 2015. “Islamophobia, Muslimophobia, or Racism? Parliamentary discourses on Islam and Muslims in debates on the minaret ban in Switzerland.” *Discourse & Society*, 26(5), 562–586.
- Chris Allen. 2010. “Towards a New Definition of Islamophobia” In *Islamophobia*. Pages 187-190.

Supplemental:

- Mahmood Mamdani. 2002. “Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism.” *American Anthropologist*. Pages 766-775.
- Damir Skenderovic and Christina Späti. 2019. “From Orientalism to Islamophobia: Reflections, Confirmations, and Reservations.” *ReOrient*. Pages 130–143.
- [Islamophobia is Racism Syllabus](#)

7. No Class: Reading Week

Deadline: Paper Proposal

Date: February 19

8. Antisemitism and Zionism

Date: February 26

Readings:

- Jonathan Judaken. 2008. “So What’s New? Rethinking the ‘New Antisemitism’ In a Global Age” *Patterns of Prejudice*. Pages 531-560.
- [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance \(IHRA\) working definition of antisemitism](#)
- Deborah Lipstadt. 2020. “Holocaust Denial: An Antisemitic Fantasy.” *Modern Judaism—A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience*. Pages 71-86.
- Neve Gordon. 2024. “On Antisemitism and Human Rights” *The International Journal of Human Rights*. Pages 578-597.
- [Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism](#)

Supplemental:

- David Feldman. 2018. “AHR Roundtable: Toward a History of the Term “Antisemitism”” *The American Historical Review*. Pages 1139-1150.
- Jonathan Judaken. 2021. “Anti-Semitism (Historiography)” In *Key Concepts in the Study of Antisemitism*. Pages 25-38.
- Brian Klug. 2003. “The Collective Jew: Israel and the New Antisemitism” *Patterns of Prejudice*. Pages 117-138.
- Neve Gordon. 2024. “Antisemitism and Zionism: The Internal Operations of the IHRA Definition.” *Middle East Critique*. Pages 345-360.

9. Methodological Approaches to Studying Religious Difference

Date: March 5

Readings:

- Katherine Marshall. 2021. “[Towards Enriching Understandings and Assessments of Freedom of Religion or Belief: Politics, Debates, Methodologies, and Practices](#)” CREID Working Paper 6. Pages 1-89.
- Judd Birdsall and Lori Beaman. 2020. “Faith in Numbers: Can We Trust Quantitative Data on Religious Affiliation and Religious Freedom?” *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 18 (3): 60–68.
- Faten Ghosn & Sarah Parkinson. 2019. “‘Finding’ Sectarianism and Strife in Lebanon.” *American Political Science Association* 52(3): 494-497.

Supplemental:

- Samirah Majumdar. 2024. “Government Restrictions on Religion Stayed at Peak Levels Globally in 2022.” *Pew Research Center*. Pages 4-18, 47-64. Skim the rest.
- Jason Bruner. 2021. “A Global War on Christians?” In *Imagining Persecution: Why American Christians Believe There Is a Global War against Their Faith*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Brian Grim & Roger Finke. 2007. “Religious Persecution in Cross-National Context: Clashing Civilizations or Regulated Religious Economies?” *American Sociological Review* 72(4): 633-658.

Part III: Regulating Difference

10. State Recognition and Regulation of Difference

Date: March 12

Deadline: First Draft of Paper

Readings:

- Charles Taylor. 1994. “The Politics of Recognition” In *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton University Press. Pages 25-74.
- Saba Mahmood. 2016. *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report*. Princeton University Press. Chapter 4. Pages 149-181.

Supplemental:

- Brown, Wendy. 2008. *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*. Princeton University Press.
- Will Kymlicka. 1995. *Multicultural citizenship: A liberal theory of minority rights*. Clarendon Press.
- Tariq Modood and Thomas Sealy. 2021. "Freedom of Religion and the Accommodation of Religious Diversity: Multiculturalising Secularism." *Religions*.

11. Politics of Religious Freedom

Date: March 19

Readings:

- Hurd, Elizabeth Shakman. 2015. *Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion*. Princeton University Press. Introduction, Chapter 3, and Conclusion. Pages 1-21, 37-64, and 109-128.

Supplemental:

- Winnifred Fallers Sullivan. 2018. *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom*. Princeton University Press.
- Winnifred Sullivan, Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, Saba Mahmood, and Peter Danchin. 2015. *Politics of Religious Freedom*. University of Chicago Press.
- Gill Anthony. 2008. *The Political Origins of Religious Liberty*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Anna Su. 2016. *Exporting Freedom: Religious Liberty and American Power*. Harvard University Press.
- Mahmood, Saba. 2012. "Religious Freedom, the Minority Question, and Geopolitics in the Middle East." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54(2): 418-446.
- Asma Uddin. 2019. *When Islam is Not a Religion: Inside America's Fight for Religious Freedom*. Pegasus Books.

12. Communal Regulation of Difference

Date: March 26

Deadline: Peer Review

Guest Visitor: Mona Oraby, Associate Professor of Political Science, Howard University

Readings:

- Mona Oraby. 2024. *Devotion to the Administrative State: Religion and Social Order in Egypt*. Princeton University Press.

13. Conclusion

Date: April 2

Deadline: Final Paper - April 16th

COURSE POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Communicating with the Professor: Students can contact the professor by email or through the Quercus inbox, see the professor before or after class, or during office hours. Under normal circumstances, the professor is able to respond within 2 business days. Please include the course title

in the subject of your email. Periodic announcements will be made using the Quercus system, so please ensure you receive email notifications from Quercus.

On Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion: The University of Toronto is committed to equity, human rights and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect where all members of our community can express themselves, engage with each other, and respect one another's differences. U of T does not condone discrimination or harassment against any persons or communities.

Late Work will incur a penalty of 10% unless the student is in communication with the professor prior to the due date. In the event of extenuating circumstances, please reach out to the professor as soon as you can and we will devise a personalized plan.

Course Extensions and Extenuating Circumstances: Students are expected to submit course work on time. Occasionally, students may not be able to make agreed upon deadlines due to extenuating circumstances. Students are required to make arrangements with their instructors about how to submit late course work. The graduate office highly recommends that course work extensions remain within the term dates in which the course was taught. Submitting work beyond the term end date (not the last day of instruction but the actual end of term, e.g., the last day of a winter term class may be April 3, but the term ends April 30) requires a discussion with the instructor and the graduate office, as well as completion of an SGS request for an extension of course work form. These forms will be considered by the graduate office and are not automatically approved.

Artificial Intelligence: Students may not use artificial intelligence (AI) tools for any component of the course material, including taking exam, drafting outlines, or writing essays and assignments. Students may not record classroom lectures either. Please understand that AI tools often fabricate seemingly credible information and produce low quality work. The only way you can do well in the course is by having a solid understanding of the course material. Students are ultimately accountable for the work they submit and any assignments/exams submitted using AI will receive a zero.

Accessibility: The University provides academic accommodations for students with disabilities in accordance with the terms of the Ontario Human Rights Code. This occurs through a collaborative process that acknowledges a collective obligation to develop an accessible learning environment that both meets the needs of students and preserves the essential academic requirements of the University's courses and programs. Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the [Accessibility Services](#) office.

Flexibility: The instructor reserves the right to modify the syllabus, including course requirements, assigned readings, and other related policies as circumstances may dictate, and with sufficient notification to all students. Even the professor can have an unanticipated emergency, and the university—or the community at large—may experience an emergency that requires changing the class schedule or requirements.