

# Religion, Decolonization and the Planetary Community

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Religion, if nothing else, is about the critical process of re-reading and re-connecting human beings into some sort of meaningful narrative about reality. In this sense, religion is part of what it means to be human: regardless as to whether one is atheist, agnostic, or a believer that identifies with some sort of faith tradition, we all, as human beings, make meaning out of our daily lives. As such, “religion” is not confined to the narrow definition of “world religions.” Furthermore, religion has historically shaped societal institutions such as economics and politics and therefore, the study of these religious influences is important. Finally, religions matter bodies in the world: they shape what become societal norms for eating, dressing, sexuality, gender, race, and relationships to the rest of the natural world. This course is a **lecture and seminar-style, hybrid, COIL** course aimed at introducing students of religious studies to decolonial and critical theories of the study of religion.

Religious studies is a “field” and not a “discipline,” which means that it uses a variety of disciplines to study the central subject: in this case, religion. In this course, we will explore the ways in which the idea of “religion” is connecting with colonization, and what it might mean to decolonize religion. As such we will look at various perspectives that critically examine what concepts such as “religion,” “science,” “the human,” and “nature,” might mean for living in globalized worlds affected by climate change. A decolonial strategy might benefit then from examining queer theories, feminist theories, indigenous studies, and other ideas and voices that attempt to break out of the modern western colonial mindset. Accordingly, we will be joined online by students and faculty members studying these issues from within the context of Indonesia in order to gain more perspective on how these concepts and terms are understood by and shape their contexts.

It is not just enough to deconstruct, however, but we must begin to think about how to co-create decolonized worlds. Toward this effort, we will examine the idea of the “planetary” as a “common grounds” from which we might think together toward a decolonized, multi-centered flourishing future for the Earth. In doing so, students will hear from and read a variety of perspectives, including those from the Indonesian archipelago. .

## COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. Students will develop critical approaches to religious studies and in a way that attends to issues of pluralism and sustainability
2. Students will be able to analyze concepts of religion based on contemporary theories from multiple different perspectives

3. Students are able to analyze religious complexities: belief systems, practices, organizations based on perspectives of their adherents, religious transformation, and their relations to other public lives (culture, politics, economics, environment, etc.)
4. Students will develop presentation, written and oral skills through the course requirements

## **MODALITY**

This course will be a hybrid, seminar and lecture based course. There will be some lectures, of course, but it is important that you prepare by doing the weekly readings. The course will take place on Zoom, and we will utilize google classroom for readings, collecting resources, and the like.

This will also be a COIL course (collaborative online international learning) and we will be joined by religious studies graduate students from the University of Gadjah Mada in Indonesia.

## **TEXTBOOKS**

As this will be a OIL course with students from Indonesia as well as FIU, there are no texts for the course. The resources listed under each week are examples of the materials that will be provided for free.

## **ASSESSMENTS AND RUBRICS**

### **1. WEEKLY PARTICIPATION—25%**

Students should come prepared for class discussion each week. As part of that preparedness, students should submit a question about the weekly reading and relate it to some current issue or historical context of their own choosing. In other words, provide a link to a text, news story, article, book, film, poem, artwork, etc. that helps you to think about the weekly reading from within your own context. These should be turned in prior to class each week, and will be the basis for our discussions.

### **3. BLOGS—50%**

There are 4 major sections to the course—Decolonial Theories, Queer Theories, Indigenous Studies, and Ecofeminisms and New Materialisms (NM's). At the end of each section, students should write a blog post of no more than 1000 words on some topic related to that section. For instance, you may want to write a blog on the importance of decolonial studies for thinking about religious identities in Java. Or, how western queer theory doesn't quite map on to issues of gender in sexuality in Indonesia. Or, unique problems indigenous communities in Sulawesi

face and how their ideas might be helpful to others outside of that context. Or, decolonizing the human-earth relationship from the perspective of Hindus in Bali. These are just examples, but the idea is that you come up with 4 blogs throughout the semester and we will post these on our website. In addition, some may be chosen to be published on the website of Counterpoint: Navigating Knowledge:

<https://www.counterpointknowledge.org/category/publications/blog/>.

#### **4. Final Case Study—25%**

Building upon some of the resources you have gathered throughout the semester, each student will write a final case study. This case study can deal with any aspect of the issues we have addressed in the course. The point is to find a specific group, place, person or thing and then use that to bring the reader into the complex issues surrounding religion, decolonization and the planetary community. Each case study should be about 1200 written words, and include: a picture, 5 discussion questions, and 5 further readings/resources (can be web resources, articles, books, videos, etc.). If you need an example of how to develop a case study, see:

<https://writing.colostate.edu/guides/guide.cfm?guideid=60>. This will be due the final week of the class. These will also appear on the course website.

For all written assignments, please follow the Turabian Guide and follow the “Notes and Bibliography” style. <https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/turabian/turabian-notes-and-bibliography-citation-quick-guide.html/>

#### **PLAGIARISM POLICY**

This course adheres strictly to the following plagiarism policy:

This Policy views plagiarism as one form of academic misconduct, and adopts the definition of the university’s Code of Academic Integrity, according to which plagiarism is:

the deliberate use and appropriation of another’s works without any indication of the source and the representation of such work as the student’s own. Any student who fails to give credit for the ideas, expressions or materials taken from another source, including internet sources, is guilty of plagiarism.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

1. Term papers acquired online or from other sources;
2. Copying of original material without attribution;
3. Use of other students’ work;

4. Copying and pasting, verbatim, information from Internet sources, without quotation marks and correct citation.

**Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course.**

## **Course Schedule**

### **Week 1: Introductions to Decolonial Theory, Critical Theories, and Religion**

**Readings:** “Decoloniality and the Study of Religion”:  
<https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/decoloniality/introdecolonial/>.

### **Week 2: Decolonial Theory: Science, Secularity and Religion**

**Readings:** Walter Mignolo, *Darker Side of Western Modernity*: Intro, chapter 2 & 7 /

### **Week 3: Decolonial Theory: Decolonizing the University / Study of Religion**

**Readings:** Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom  
Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, chs. 1 and 3.

### **Week 4: Queer Theory: Rituals, Habits and Bodies**

**Readings:** Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*: Intro, Chapter 1, and chapter 8  
Queer/Religion, “In this Issue” section, and “Part 1: Theories and Theologies”:  
<https://sfoonline.barnard.edu/queer-religion/>.

### **Week 5: Queer Theory: Borderlands and Hybridity**

**Readings:** Anzaldúa, *Borderlands, La Frontera*: chs. 1, 2, 7.  
Bauman, *Meaningful Flesh*: Intro and chapter 4.

**Week 6: Queer Theory: Archipelagic Identities**

**Readings:** Tom Boelstorff, *The Gay Archipelago*: Intro, 2, 4, 6.

**Week 7: Indigenous Studies: Animisms “old” and “new”?**

**Readings:** Graham Harvey, *Handbook on Animisms*, chs. 1, 6, 9, 17

**Week 8: Indigenous Studies: The Pluriverse and Perspectivism**

**Readings:** Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*: Intro, 5 & 6.

**Week 9: Indigenous Studies: Indigenous Science and Environmentalism**

**Readings:** Kyle Powys-Whyte, “Indigenous Futures, Decolonizing the Anthropocene”

**Week 10: Eco-feminisms and NM’s**

**Readings:** Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, chs. 4 and 10

Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God*, chapter 7

**Week 11: Eco-feminisms and NM’s**

**Readings:** Catriona Sandilands, *Queer Ecologies*: “Intro and chapter 6”

Carol Wayne White: “Black Lives, Sacred Humanity”

**Week 12: Eco-feminisms and NM’s**

**Readings:** Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*: Intro and chps 1&2.

Julia Watts-Belser: Privilege and Disaster

**Week 13: New Materialisms**

**Readings:** William Connolly, *Facing the Planetary*, selections

**Week 14: New Materialisms**

**Readings:** Catherine Keller, ed., *Entangled Worlds: Religion, Science and the New Materialism*, selections

**Week 15: final projects**