



SAINTS & MEDIATION IN LATIN AMERICA (ANTH428)

McGill University • Winter 2021

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Seminar: Friday 8:30-11:30am, to be delivered remotely, via Zoom

Office hours: by appointment

OVERVIEW & OBJECTIVES:

This course examines religion in Latin America by means of a focus on the cult of the saints, a phenomenon central to religious, cultural and social life across the continent and key to the endurance of the institutional Catholic Church itself.

The beliefs and practices encompassed in the cult of the saints made it a vehicle for Spanish and Portuguese colonization of the so-called New World, and developed into the core of popular religiosity throughout the region. The worship of the saints has marked Latin America's politics and history, shaping cultural sensibilities, sociality, nationalism, race, class, gender, and sexuality. Paintings, wooden statues and other images of Catholic saints offered to European and Creole missionaries anthropomorphic representations of sacred figures, and Christian history and mortality that had a didactic (teaching) role in evangelization. It is impossible to understand religion outside of a dialogue of power; saint hagiographies (personal biographies) modeled subservience and ideal behavior, but also redemptive narratives of endurance and resistance. The particular ways that saint images and representations were received, understood, loved, feared, or even reviled afford a richer reading of how colonial processes affected the mixing of religious forms or 'syncretism'. Saints also helped to literally emplace senses of belonging and identity by means of colonizers who brought patron saints from their places of origin, and by Catholic religious orders who cultivated new saintly devotions. Religious and political leaders used saints, including the Virgin of Guadalupe and San Martín de Porres, to replace Eurocentric devotions with more readily familiar American saints. Yet the worship of particular saints—whether Church-created or popular (non-official)—has always been difficult to control. Cults of indigenous or black populations in the New World bore clear signs of pre-Conquest or African styles of sacred worship—characteristics sometimes disapproved of or condemned by the Church. Saint apparitions also spurred messianic movements and/or acted as a catalyst of social or political mobilization. At various historical junctures, including the Council of Trent (mid-16thC) and the Inquisition, the Catholic Church has attempted to define and manage Church acceptable saintly

eneration. Today the institutional Church is using the canonization of new saints to renew and secure its presence on the global stage, especially in locales far from Rome.

While we will learn about religiosity as a central thread of people’s lives in Latin America, we will also explore the diverse dimensions of that significance through a focus on the concept of *mediation*. A tension between the image of the ‘universal’ in Catholic Church teachings and local popular Catholic understandings and practices is intrinsic to Catholicism the world over, and is manifest in interesting ways in Latin America. The spread and maintenance of many saintly devotions involves actors ‘from above’ (e.g., representatives of the Catholic Church, political leaders) inscribing saintly devotions with particular meanings that will compel followers; ‘from below’ people also rework and reinterpret ‘universal’ religious forms through adaptations within local contexts. This course will address the modes of interpretation and signification and communication (e.g., iconicity, mimesis, metonymy, ambiguity, affect) through which these appropriations and re-workings take place. Images are a unique kind of material object, as they mediate imaginary, visual, emotional, affective, sensory, linguistic, intellectual and material domains; *sacred* images are especially powerful in this regard. How do images serve on the occasion of rituals, or in practices of worship such as pilgrimages? How do saints’ images shape individual and collective memory? How can an attention to the sense of sacrifice, sensuality, and passion that surround the worship of saints offer us a more dimensioned understanding of their cultural significance and how they mediate critical social and cultural processes and events? How are realities of globalization, migration, gender/sexuality, political violence, and new technologies transforming elements of the cult of the saints?

Course goals:

- *To learn about history and contemporary culture more broadly in Latin America through the focus on the cult of the saints and the theme of religion*
- *To gain a better understanding about anthropological approaches to religion, especially contemporary emphases on material culture and materiality, affect, media, and performance*
- *To become more familiar with the terms and concepts in the interpretative analysis of culture and symbolic aspects of culture*
- *To develop your skills and comfort at discerning critical points from course readings, synthesizing information quickly, and effective oral presentation of information*

Students must be of U3 standing and have completed one 200-level course and one 300-level course from the following list: ANTH 204 or ANTH 209 or Hispanic Civilization 226; and ANTH 352 or ANTH 355 or ANTH 326 or History of Latin America 360. Students who have not completed these prerequisites require special permission of the instructor.

READINGS:

All readings listed below will be available through MyCourses Coursepage.

EVALUATION: There are **seven** components of the course evaluation, weighted as follows:

General Participation/attendance (weekly attendance will be taken)	10%
Reading Commentaries	15%
Reading Presentation (individual, begin on January 22)	15%
Saint Altar (due Feb.19)	10%
Term paper abstract and annotated bibliography (due Feb.28)	5%*
Term Project Presentation (scheduled for last sessions of course)	10%
Term Paper/Project (due April 23)	35%* (=40%)

This course meets once a week (Fridays, 8:30-11:30 am). My expectations are higher in this upper level seminar course than in a general lecture course in terms of the time and effort you invest in class discussions and in your personal reflections on the ideas generated in class. The general format for class sessions will be as follows: at the beginning of each week's session, I will introduce and offer theoretical and other background context and questions to orient your thinking about the week's readings; we will then open the floor to discussion of themes and materials for that unit. **Class members will take responsibility for presenting one of the course readings for that week (as of Jan. 22).**

1. Participation (10%)

The success of this course depends a great deal on the quality of our discussions. All students are expected to take part in discussion.

2. Reading Commentaries (15%)

You will prepare for class by taking notes on the readings, and coming to class ready to discuss the main points they raise. To facilitate this, every week you are asked to write a brief (about 75 words *per reading*) reflection on **each** of the assigned readings; these are **due** latest **noon on Thursdays, to be submitted via the Discussion section on MyCourses coursepage** (this function has been set up for you).

3. Reading Presentation (15%) (PRESENTATIONS WILL BEGIN ON JANUARY 22)

Each member of the class will be assigned **one** of the readings for which they will summarize the main arguments and offer a critical reflection on them. (See p.7 for Presentation Guide).

4. Saint Altar (10%)

This course emphasizes the mediation of devotion by means of material objects, and the inherent creativity of popular religiosity. As a way of giving you a chance to explore this aspect of worship, I will ask you to choose your own saint of devotion, and make a small altar (this pandemic year altars will be composed of images and other materials you can find on-line). This may be a saint recognized by the Catholic Church (the Virgin of Guadalupe, Señor de los Milagros), a popular saint (María Lionza; Santa Muerte; Sarita Colonia, etc.); or may be a new, 'composite' saint of your imagination but made material. These are due *in class* on Feb.19, when I will ask you to present your saint briefly to the rest of the class.

4. Term Project (5 + 35=40%) (Please note that your grade for this assignment includes 5% for your paper/project abstract and annotated bibliography mentioned below)

This component of your work in this course represents your own more sustained exploration of the themes we have covered. You have a few options for the form this can take:

- a) A **research term paper** (should be 4000-5000 words in length, or roughly **15** double-spaced pages in 12-pt. Times font, excluding notes and bibliography) is due on **April 23**. To facilitate the research process, I ask that submit a **proposal abstract** (200 words) with **annotated bibliography** right before Reading Week on **Feb.26 (Please use 'Chicago' author/date style** (Social-science, not Humanities version)

OR

- b) A **multimedia research project** on a particular saint: this is still a research project, but I am flexible re its presentation format; you may want to make, a film or short video composed of from material on the Internet, or simply experiment with a text combined with photos, video, artwork, maps, etc.

5. Term Project Presentation (15%)

You will each have a chance to **present your term project** in class during the final weeks of the semester, beginning in late March. Presentations will follow an academic conference format (20-minute presentations), with a small period for questions and comments on all papers at the end of that class. The term paper presentation schedule will be determined after Reading Week.

Attendance and Extension policies.

Attendance and lateness will be noted at each session. You can have, at most, one unaccounted absence. More than one such absence will result in a downward adjustment of your final grade. Please note that extensions for turning in your work will be given only under exceptional circumstances (i.e., family emergencies or illnesses corroborated by written evidence), and on a case-by-case basis. Unexcused late assignments are penalized by half a grade per day (e.g., the paper that otherwise would earn an A would go to A-). All papers must be submitted on **BOTH** MyCourses and in hard copy on the date they are due.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity.

University regulations stipulate that students must comply with the rules and regulations concerning cheating and plagiarism. For more information on how to avoid plagiarism, please consult <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity/>

OUTLINE:

Jan.8	Course introduction Brown, Peter 1981 <i>The Cult of the Saints: its rise and function in Latin Christianity</i> , 'The Holy and the Grave' (Chapter 1)
Jan. 15	I. EVANGELIZATION, MEDIATION & LOCALIZATION -evangelization, 'experiential scripts', religious dialogue; embodied devotion; affect, materiality, mediation Morgan, David. 2015. 'Religion and Embodiment in the Study of Material Culture', <i>Oxford Research Encyclopedia, Religion</i> , 1-18. Clendinnen, Inga. 1990. 'Ways to the Sacred: Reconstructing religion in 16th century Mexico', <i>History and Anthropology</i> , vol.5: 105-141. Meyer, Birgit. 2011. 'Medium', <i>Material Religion</i> , vol.7: 58-65.
Jan.22 (individual reading presentations begin)	II. THE IMAGE WORLD Visual piety, mimesis and the sensory Morgan, David 2005. 'Visual Practice and the Function of Images', <i>The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice</i> ; 48-74. Taussig, Michael 1993. <i>Mimesis and Alterity</i> (Chapters 1-3); 1-43 Gruzinski, Serge. 2001. <i>Images at War</i> (Chapters 1-2)
Jan.29	III. ICONS of DEVOTION Gruzinski, Serge. 2001. <i>Images at War</i> (Chapters 3-4) Rubial García, A. 'The Appropriation and Use of Saints in New Spain', in M. Nesvig (ed.) <i>Local Religion in Colonial Mexico</i> , 37-61. Taylor, William. 'Mexico's V. de Guadalupe in the 17 th Century'. In A. Greer, J. Bilinkoff (eds.), <i>Colonial Saints</i> , 277-298. Garces, Chris. 2014. 'The Interspecies Logic of Race in Colonial Peru: San Martín de Porres's Animal Brotherhood'. In <i>Sainthood and Race</i> . 82-101.

Feb.5	<p>IV. THE POPULAR, THE LOCAL, THE LIVED... 'local religion'; iconographies of suffering</p> <p>Eire, Carlos M.N. 'The Concept of Popular Religion' in M. Nesvig (ed.), <i>Local Religion in Colonial Mexico</i>; 1-35.</p> <p>Graziano, Frank 'Introduction', in <i>Cultures of Devotion: Folk Saints of Spanish America</i>, 3-76.</p> <p>Graziano, Frank. 'Sarita Colonia', in <i>Cultures of Devotion</i>; 141-166.</p> <p>Graziano, Frank. 2016. 'Petitionary Devotion', <i>Miraculous Images and Votive Offerings in Mexico</i>, p. 59-99.</p> <p>2011, 'Seeking the Help of the Saints to Care for her Grandchildren', <i>NY Times</i></p>
Feb.12	<p>V. POPULAR DEVOTIONS: MEDIATIONS OF SEXUALITY, VIOLENCE, NATION, I Focus: la Santa Muerte</p> <p>Roush, Laura. 2014. 'Santa Muerte, Protection and <i>Désamparo</i>: a view from a Mexico City Altar', <i>Latin American Research Review</i>, 129-148.</p> <p>Lorentzen, Lois. 'Santa Muerte: Saint of the Dispossessed, Enemy of Church & State', <i>Hemispheric Institute</i>, 13:1</p> <p>Lamrani, Myriam. 2019. 'Transintimacy': Necro/Narcopolitics in Postrevolutionary Mexico'. In <i>From Saints to the State: Modes of Intimate Devotion to Saintly Images in Oaxaca, Mexico</i> (PhD thesis), 214-267.</p>
	FILM: 'Santa Muerte' by Eva Aridjis (59 minutes) (to watch via Vimeo)
Feb. 19	PRESENTATION OF SAINT SHRINES & 'CHECK-IN' RE TERM PAPERS/ PROJECTS
Feb. 26	<p>[TERM-PAPER/PROJECT ABSTRACTS DUE]</p> <p>Images and Transformations.</p> <p>Belting, Hans, 2005. 'Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology', <i>Critical Inquiry</i> 31 (2); 302-319.</p> <p>Bosca, Robert. 'Evita: A case of Political Canonization'. In <i>The Making of Saints</i>, 59-74.</p> <p>Schwartz Margaret. 2010. 'Proper Corruption: Index and Metaphor in Photographs of the Embalmed Corpse of Eva Perón'. <i>Framework</i> 51(1), 7–32.</p>
Mar.1-Mar.5	•••••READING WEEK... READING WEEK... READING WEEK•••••
Mar. 12	<p>VI. TRANSNATIONALISM, TRANSLOCALISM & THEOPOLITICS</p> <p>Vásquez, Manuel 2003. 'Theorizing Globalization and Religion', in <i>Globalizing the Sacred</i>, 34-64.</p> <p>Napolitano, Valentina. 2017. 'On Bone Relic Assemblages', <i>Material Religion</i>, 13:4; 524-526.</p> <p>Norget, Kristin. 2021. 'Bones, Blood, Wax, and Papal Potencies: Neo-Baroque relics in Mexico', <i>Material Religion</i>, 17.4</p>
Mar. 19	<p>Norget, Kristin. 2017. 'The Virgin of Guadalupe and the Spectacle of Catholic Evangelism in Mexico'. In <i>The Anthropology of Catholicism: A Companion Reader</i>, 184-200.</p> <p>Napolitano Valentina. 'On a Political Economy of Political Theology: el Señor de los Milagros'. In <i>The Anthropology of Catholicism: A Companion Reader</i>, 243-255.</p>
	STUDENT PRESENTATIONS OF TERM PROJECTS
Mar. 26	STUDENT PRESENTATIONS OF TERM PROJECTS
April 2	EASTER (no class)
April 9	STUDENT PRESENTATIONS...
April 16	STUDENT PRESENTATIONS... (Last day of class, term paper due on April 23)

- 1) McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).
- 2) If you have a disability please contact the instructor to arrange a time to discuss your situation. It would be helpful if you contact the Office for Students with Disabilities at 398-6009 or online at <http://www.mcgill.ca/osd>) before you do this.
- 3) Additional policies governing academic issues which affect students can be found in the Handbook on Student Rights and Responsibilities, Charter of Students' Rights (online at <http://www.mcgill.ca/files/secretariat/greenbookenglish.pdf>).
- 4) In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

GUIDE FOR READING PRESENTATIONS.

One of the objectives of this seminar course is to improve your ability to communicate material and ideas orally to a small audience. (Developing this kind of skill will help you even outside of academia!) To this end we shall ask you to make a short (20 minute) presentation at some point during the semester.

Effective oral presentation depends on three things:

- Your ability to select and synthesize the key substance of the article
- Effective preparation so you can communicate in a relaxed, fluid and clear way
- Appropriate use of audio-visual material or written handouts

1. Selection and synthesis: Remember you have only 20-25 minutes to tell your audience about what may sometimes be quite long and complex readings. Don't try to cover the **whole** article or assigned book chapter(s). Use your judgment to pick out the key ideas that were put to the test, describe the key study and its findings, and, **most importantly**, leave yourself a minute or two at the end to offer some personal evaluation of the reading. Your ability to evaluate critically what you have read is one of the criteria upon which you will be marked. It will also be a useful stimulus for discussion with the rest of the group.

It is often helpful to begin by providing background material ('the big picture') on the content of the article. For example, speaking briefly about the author's background, and other works he/she has written, is a good way to give people an idea of the theoretical thrust of the article, and often provides interesting contextualization for the substance of your presentation.

2. Preparation: Once you know which parts of the article/chapter you wish to focus on, prepare your talk so that you can engage the interest of your audience. It is greatly preferable if you can avoid reading a prepared script verbatim because this usually makes it harder for the audience to follow you. Instead, try to have summary notes (or cards) that contain the key points you wish to convey and speak about these extemporaneously (you may wish to use a powerpoint presentation instead of written guides). This will make your talk much more interesting to listen to, and will also allow you to monitor your audience's reactions, to judge whether you need to speed up (rarely), slow down (probably!), or repeat something (occasionally). With a couple of rehearsals before the seminar you should be able to gauge the duration of your presentation reasonably accurately. During your presentation, remember to talk more slowly than you would in normal conversation because there is a tendency for people to speed up when they are nervous. If you find yourself getting very nervous, try taking a few deep breaths. A drink of water can also help with 'dry mouth syndrome' (another common effect of nerves).

3. Presentation aids: Key ideas or research data are often best presented visually, on either in a powerpoint presentation or a written handout. Don't try to cram too much information on each slide, and make sure you write (or type) using large, legible script. Careful use of such visual aids will also help you to speak 'on' your material rather than reading directly from a card or piece of paper. Don't be afraid to invite your audience to participate, especially at the end of your presentation where it can be valuable if you finish with some provocative questions or comments for them to respond to.