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INTERVIEWER: Welcome back to the Student Hub Live. This next session is about A227, Exploring Religion. I'm joined by John Maiden, Marion Bowman, and Paul-Francois Tremlett. Thank you for joining us to talk about this exciting module. And I'm delighted that you've brought some religious artefacts along with you, because typically when we talk about religious studies, we don't often talk much about religion.

So we've got some widgets on the screen at home, and we'd like to know your thoughts on the following-- "are you interested in funding religious education?" "Yes, no, not sure." "Someone is religioning when they" and we've got a list of options. And "religion is." And that's a word cloud.

So for those of you who haven't done one of those before, we need three things or your answers won't send. But if you could only think of one or two, that's cool. Just put a full stop or a cross there. So let us know what you think religion is.

Now, I want to ask each of you, starting with you, Marion, why this is so interesting.

MARION
BOWMAN: We're really excited about this module because it plays to the strengths of this department, and our department is very committed to religion as it's lived. So we're not about just cold theory. We're about practise. And that on the widget about religioning, it's religion as it's lived. It's people doing religion. So it's not just the theory. It's the practise. It's not just about institutions. It's about what people do in everyday life.

What they eat, what they have around them in their home, who they socialise with, how they're seeing the world. And so what we've tried to do is to capture this very exciting, multi-sensory world of religion and the different ways in which people are religioning now.

INTERVIEWER: And this is a term you use in the module?

MARION
BOWMAN: It is, it is. Because "religioning" gives it that active feeling. It's not a dead thing. It's happening now. It's what people do, and it's that doing of religion, that living religion, that we're really focusing on in this module.

INTERVIEWER: Paul, what makes it so interesting for you?

PAUL-FRANCOIS TREMLETT: I think one of the things I think is key about it is it's about religion in local, national, and international contexts. So one of the modules, one of the units in the module concerns cargo cults. Cargo cults are particular to Guinea, Papua New Guinea. So we have that religion in a local place, but also in a national place, in a new country emerging from colonialism, but also internationally, because we can't separate the emergence of the cargo cults from, for example, missionary, Christian missionary activity, colonialism, and economic globalisation as well.

The local cargo cult phenomena is wrapped up in these different layers, different contextual layers. And through understanding those, we get a closer understanding of the cargo cult and what was going on there.

INTERVIEWER: And John?

JOHN MAIDEN: I think going back to Marion's point about lived religion, an aspects of lived religion is materiality. And so when people are religioning, when people are doing religion, they use different senses. It's about taste. It's about sounds. It's about the ways in which sounds construct religious experiences.

So this is a really kind of multi-sensory module. And there are various assets that allow people to experience religion in different ways.

INTERVIEWER: Excellent. We asked people at home what they were doing when they were religioning. Now, apparently this is a little bit unfair, which I think it is, but it would arguably not be as interesting. So someone is religioning when. You can only choose one of the options. "Going to a place of worship, eating, or voting." So I guess the question, then, should really be "which is the most religioning type thing," or "what sort of things do you think about when you are religioning?" So let's see the results of that widget.

OK, very split here. So I'm 57% say going to a place of worship, perhaps unsurprisingly. Paul, you might have something to say about the high number of people who put voting as--

PAUL-FRANCOIS TREMLETT: I saw that number, and I thought, "oh, I hope Karen doesn't ask me about that."

TREMLETT:

INTERVIEWER: But is this about ninja and Jedi religions?

PAUL-FRANCOIS No, because I would've thought eating would have would have scored better. Because let's
TREMLETT: face it, we all like eating. We all like sharing food with one another. That seems to me to be a very religioning kind of thing to do.

INTERVIEWER: That's why we have fish and chips on a Friday.

PAUL-FRANCOIS Fish and chips, yes.

TREMLETT:

INTERVIEWER: They're delicious.

PAUL-FRANCOIS And other foods. And other foods.

TREMLETT:

MARION And what we don't eat. What do eat and what we don't eat and when.

BOWMAN:

PAUL-FRANCOIS Fish on a Friday, yeah.

TREMLETT:

INTERVIEWER: Absolutely. Now, we can see how this might appeal to a lot of students. So who might be interested, then, in taking this module?

JOHN MAIDEN: Well, we find that students come from a range of backgrounds. So sometimes when students come to religious studies at level 2, they may have done no religious studies before at undergraduate level. They may have done religious education or something at GCSE, but this may be their first experience at undergraduate level, and this module is very accessible as an introduction to religious studies if you've not done it before.

But also there may be students who are coming to this from having doing, say, A-100 at level 1, where you've had a taste of religious studies. And also this module is something that is for you and builds on the skills that you've already developed.

INTERVIEWER: Can one of you tell us a bit about the pathway? Because we've got this BA Honours Arts and Humanities with Religious Studies, but also our Open Degree students, I can imagine, this would really appeal to. And of course, I mean, just the way you're talking about things make it seem that this is a very interdisciplinary module, which is very in right now, isn't it?

JOHN MAIDEN: Absolutely. Religious studies, I mean, we sometimes call it an interdisciplinary discipline. I'm a historian. Paul's a sociologist.

PAUL-FRANCOIS Yeah, more or less.

TREMLETT:

JOHN MAIDEN: Marion a folklorist.

MARION Ethnologist.

BOWMAN:

JOHN MAIDEN: Ethnologist.

MARION Religious studies.

BOWMAN:

JOHN MAIDEN: So we're all coming at the discipline from different perspectives, different angles. And you'll find that there are all kinds of crossovers with other disciplines that you might choose to study as an undergraduate.

INTERVIEWER: Let's look at what people said religion is. So we asked you for three ideas or three words about what religion is, and let's see what you said. Philosophical, path to self-improvement, more than the physical, social, culture, politics, controlling, sport, nonsense, loving you neighbour, individual, controversial, whole, faith, active, oppressive, controlling, Corbynistas.

So it's a very interesting and very creative words out there as well. OK, we're going to talk about the blocks, but before we do that, we've been spending a lot of time focusing on skills. Because one of the things that students are very keen on is this employability aspect. So where there's a choice, sometimes skills will be quite a driving factor, and especially when something is very interdisciplinary. So what are some of the key skills that students would then learn through this module, especially at level 2?

MARION I think one of the things we pride ourselves on is really developing skills of critical reading, for example. Because we're asking students quite often to analyse and synthesise quite varied materials. And those skills of analysis and learning to stand back and look as far as possible, objectively sometimes. That is, not to put your own views foremost but to look at a range of materials and engage with that in a critical and analytical way, is actually a very key skill that we do develop in our modules.

INTERVIEWER: What about methods, then, and approaches?

PAUL-FRANCOIS I think there's a range of methods in the module. I mean, when you asked us our disciplinary

TREMLETT: backgrounds, if you like, I mean, that pointed towards historical methods in the modules-- sociological, anthropological kinds of methods in the module. So there's a range of methodologies and a range of activities and assessments around equipping students and taking them towards those kinds of skill sets around critical analysis, observational skills, listening skills, those kinds of things.

JOHN MAIDEN: And we really want to emphasise the relevance of religious studies. A term that we use is "religious literacy." And one of the questions that we ask throughout the module is "why we study religion?" How is what you are learning, the knowledge and understanding that you're building up, useful for good citizenship but also for employability? And that's another key theme of the module.

INTERVIEWER: Now, this is a replacement module, which was-- I think one of you described it as an A-101 of religions. This is very, very different. And the way you sectioned it, as you say, is looking at key themes and the application of those themes to everyday lives. So could you talk us through, then, how these blocks work, what's in them, and then, I guess, how they might inspire students who are maybe not so sure about whether this is the right thing for them to look at?

So could we talk through each of the blocks, then? I mean the orientation is the first one.

JOHN MAIDEN: Yeah, the orientation is really introducing you to the questions at the heart of the module. And the questions are, "what is religion?" "How do we study religion?" It goes back to the questions about methodology and approaches. And "why do we study religion?" Religious literacy. But actually with the orientation, we're going to encourage you to begin with what you know. How have you experienced religion? How have you observed religion?

And there's a big activity in the orientation called "Take a picture of Religion," where we get you to-- if you want to go out into your locality to take a picture of a place or an object, something that says something about the category "religion" and then to share that with other students using a platform called Open Studio. And you can comment on each of those images. And actually the first assessment, the first TMA, is based partly around reflecting on that activity. And then we go to block 1.

PAUL-FRANCOIS Which bases?

TREMLETT:

INTERVIEWER: Places.

PAUL-FRANCOIS So my unit in that block is about religious change and really this contrasting two different

TREMLETT: theories of religious change. One we're probably all familiar with is the idea of secularisation. We live in a Western society that's become progressively more secular. And that equates, according to the theory of secularisation, with the decline of religion, the decline in public and private participation in belief.

On the other hand, though, the unit challenges that narrative or that story of religious change and suggests another one-- liquid religion, which is about religion moving out of the institutional places of worship that we all know about, we've all seen them in our neighbourhoods, and leaving those spaces to occupy other kinds of spaces. And connected with that is the activity John was talking about.

If we look around our neighbourhoods, we sometimes see churches have been converted to blocks of flats, for example. But sometimes we also see secular buildings, such as cinemas or even warehouses and factory units that have been converted to religious places of worship. And it's these kinds of transformations that are of interest to us and help us understand the processes of religious change but also wider societal change alongside that.

MARION And I think one of the things that we keep seeing is, religion doesn't necessarily look like it
BOWMAN: used to or how you might expect it to, but it's still there.

INTERVIEWER: I wanted to ask you as well on this whole idea about the sensory aspect, because we're not covering exactly how one does this, but you've got these wonderful 360 degree videos all about places. And they offer a different insight and a different way for students to be able to interact with places at a lot more convenient time. Paul, tell us briefly about those.

PAUL-FRANCOIS Well, I mean, actually John made those, the 360 degree--

TREMLETT:

[LAUGHTER]

But the idea was to create an immersive sense in those films, and to try and get students to experience religion in different ways. And that's not just in that first block but across the blocks.

As well as improving, if you like, religious literacy, we're also trying to defamiliarise what we think religion is in order to get closer to what's actually really out there.

INTERVIEWER: I just like being able to scroll around them, to be completely honest. And I just think it's amazing to be able to get a sense of a place in that sort of really interactive way. I think they're brilliant.

JOHN MAIDEN: Yeah, I mean you can look at-- you can listen to the guided tour if you like and look at what the guide is showing you, but also you can look around, and they're fantastic. And actually you can go on OpenLearn and have a quick look at them, if you want to.

INTERVIEWER: Well, we'll get those links up in the chat for you, so do take a look at those 360 degree videos from Religious Studies. Right, let's go on to the three, which is the practises, which is religioning. So what does religion taste like?

[LAUGHTER]

JOHN MAIDEN: So block 2 is about practise. Very often-- actually, it was really interesting looking at the comments about what religion is. Often, we think of it in terms of belief, in terms of faith. And in this block, we're deconstructing that a little and saying, actually, religion is as much about what people do, about as much about what people-- how people act as it is about internalised beliefs, although belief is important.

So for example, there's a unit called "what does religion taste like," in which I think one of the points that's being made in that unit is that when we eat or when we don't eat something, we're saying something very often about our identity. And in that block as well, there's some really great video footage as well of religion being done. Some fantastic video footage.

INTERVIEWER: Excellent. Then the next one moves on to texts. So we've had places, practises, and now we look at texts. Which I guess is a little bit more religious than the other aspects. But again, this relates to some really interesting forms of assessment.

JOHN MAIDEN: Yeah, so one of the things that we-- so this block is about text. But it's going beyond text as just sacred canon, although there are units on the Bible, there are units on the Quran. But we also think about buildings as texts. How do you read a religious building? We talk about myth and oral narratives as texts.

And the assessment for this block is partly to give an oral presentation, to record an oral

presentation for your tutor. Which is really just to develop your skills, another way of communicating for a specific audience, and a really key employability skill that you have an opportunity to develop.

INTERVIEWER: Excellent.

MARION Can I just say one more thing about texts? One of our examples is the totem pole as a text.

BOWMAN:

INTERVIEWER: Oh, right.

MARION So we are really ranging broadly with what counts as text in this block.

BOWMAN:

INTERVIEWER: Excellent. OK. Lovely. Well, that leads very nicely, Marion, to talking about experiences, which is the final section in terms of the blocks that we wanted to cover. So the question here is, is experience constructed or innate.

MARION This is one of the really knotty problems that we're trying to get to grips with. Because some scholars would see religious experience, it's universal, it's innate, it's ineffable. It happens to everyone, everywhere at all times and places. Whereas other scholars, like Durkheim, would say religion is constructed. Therefore religious experience is very much the product of different times, and cultures, and social, and political contexts.

BOWMAN:

And so we are looking at religious experience, ideas about religious experience, and experiences of religion, and then talking about the different contexts in which we might see religious experience and help people to get a feel for it. Because I think, as you've guessed, we are very much into the experiential dimension across the whole module. And so, for example, one of our assets for this particular experience part is following a group from the Glastonbury Goddess conference over a seven hour landscape pilgrimage in Glastonbury.

And the aim there is just to give people that kind of as if they're there experience. And that's what we want to do. We're also talking about pilgrimage. But the Camino to Santiago de Compostela, where you're getting-- yes, you're getting Catholics, but Protestants, pagans, new agers. So people religioning, but perhaps in unexpected contexts and having a whole range of experiences. And it's just trying to say "see how broad this is." "See how exciting is is." Because experience is one of the things that keeps people in their religious or spiritual practise. Therefore we want to understand more about it.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you so much. That's so, so interesting, and it gives us such a wonderful flavour and insight. I want to take a very quick trip to the hot desk, because I know there's a lot of questions. People are talking about religion or culting. HJ and Sophie, very, very briefly, are there any things that we need to answer right now?

HJ: I think one big question that we do want answered to go on with, we're having a conversation about religion and politics, and Ben's wondering, because we've been talking about religious-like following, Ben's question was, "with social cultural influence in mind, what does the panel think the difference is between religioning and culting?"

INTERVIEWER: Oh, are any of you able to log onto the chat there?

[LAUGHTER]

MARION This may take some time.

BOWMAN:

PAUL-FRANCOIS OK. Yeah, that would take a long time to answer, because I don't know what a cult is, which **TREMLETT:** might be strange to the chap that's asked the question, but I'd want to rethink the idea of a cult. I'm not sure what that is.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have time to go on the chat in a bit maybe, Paul, and talk to Ben about that?

PAUL-FRANCOIS All right, then, yes.

TREMLETT:

INTERVIEWER: All right, Ben. Hang on, then. We'll sort that out for you. Any? Any other questions, we will do our utmost to answer for you. But Paul, Marion, and John, thank you so much for coming and filling us in on that fabulous module. I'm sure people will want to find out more about it. And that's been a really, really useful session.

Just to end by saying, which I forgot to add, which is about the assessment, is that there are five TMAs and an exam, but you've spoken also about the varied assessment, the Open Studio, and the recording and things. But you can find out more about all the sorts of basic details on the study at the OU. So do check that out for more information on the structure of this and many other modules.

Right, that's all we've got time for now. We're going to have a short video, which is going to be

an introduction to DD310, and then a short animation after that. We'll then be back to talk to you about this third level psychology module. See you in a few minutes.

[MUSIC PLAYING]