

JOHN SOBOSLAI

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Degrees

- 2016 Ph.D. Sociology and Anthropology of Religion, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA. Certificate in Global Studies. Dissertation: "Performing One's Own Death"
- 2004 M.A. Religions in Late Antiquity, Columbia University, New York, NY
- 2002 B.A. Philosophy, Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, CT

Experience

- **Associate Professor**, Department of Global Cultural Studies, Montclair State University, 2026 - present
- **Associate Professor**, Department of Religion, Montclair State University, 2023 – 2026
- **Assistant Professor**, Department of Religion, Montclair State University, 2016 – 2023
- **Instructor of Record**, Department of Religious Studies and Department of Global Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2011 – 2016

Academic & Professional Leadership

- **Director**, Immersive Religion, immersivereligion.com, 2023 – present
- **Founding Co-Director**, Humanities+ Lab, Montclair State University, 2025 – present
- **Steering Committee**, Teaching Religion Unit, American Academy of Religion, 2024 – present
- **Program Committee**, Immersive Learning Education, Arts & Design Stream Immersive Learning Research Network, 2026 - Present
- **Owner / Operator**, Downtown Detectives Santa Barbara, LLC, 2018 - present
- **Principal Investigator**, Seeing What Takes Place, NEH Digital Humanities Advancement Grant, 2022 – 2023
- **Steering Committee**, Comparative Approaches to Religious Violence program group, American Academy of Religion, 2019 – 2022
- **Review Editor**, *The Journal of Religion and Violence*, 2019 – 2022
- **Advisory Board**, *Global Spheres Journal*. April 2018 – present
- **Founding Editor-in-Chief**, *Global Societies Journal*, 2013 –2016
- **Project Manager**, Indigenous Sovereignty Project, Dr. Eve Darian-Smith, Project Director,

National Science Foundation grant, 2011 – 2015

Awards, Grants, and Fellowships

2022-23	National Endowment of the Humanities Digital Humanities Advancement Grant (PI)
2016	Sherman Emerging Scholar, UNC Wilmington
2014-15	Predoctoral Fellowship, UCSB Interdisciplinary Humanities Center
2012-13	Dean's Fellowship, UCSB Central Continuing Fellowship
2010	Philip J. Hammond Memorial Scholarship, UCSB Department of Religious Studies

Research

Books

Constructing Religious Martyrdom: A Cross-Cultural Study, Cambridge University Press, 2024.

God in the Tumult of the Global Square, co-authored with Mark Juergensmeyer and Dinah Griego, University of California Press, 2015.

Peer-Reviewed Articles and Book Chapters

"Martyrdom and Sovereignty: Lessons from Buddhism and Sikhism," *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence*, 2nd ed. Andrew Murphy, ed. Forthcoming 2026.

"Immersive Religion: Using Extended Reality Resources for Teaching the Academic Study of Religion." *The Journal of Interactive Learning Research* 36:1 (January 2025), 101-112.

"Onward Christian Soldiers: Christian Violence in the Twenty-First Century." In *Religious Violence Today: Faith and Conflict in the Modern World*. Edited by Michael Jerryson. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2020.

"Categorizing Contrariety: Narrative and Taxonomy in the Construction of Sikhism." In *Constructing "Data" in Religious Studies: The Architecture of the Academy*. Edited by Leslie Dorrough Smith. Sheffield, UK: Equinox Publishing, 2019.

"The Bodhisattva, the Dharmarāja, and the Dalai Lamas: Evaluating the Religious and Political Causes of Tibetan Self-Immolation." With Joel Gruber. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 86:3 (September 2018): 759-788.

"Sikh Self-Sacrifice and Religious Representation During World War I." *Religions* 9:2, (2018): 55-73. Part of special issue: *The Public Face of Death: Mapping the Social Impact of Religious Beliefs*.

"Varieties of Martyrdom." *Global-e: The Journal of 21st Century Global Dynamics* 10:23 (April 4, 2017). Accessible at <http://www.21global.ucsb.edu/global-e/april-2017/varieties-martyrdom>.

"Violently Peaceful: Tibetan Self-Immolation and the Problem of the Non/Violence Binary." *Open Theology*, Vol. 1 (2015), 146-159.

Recent Conference Presentations

- "Teaching Lived Religion Through XR," Immersive Learning Research Network International Conference. University of Athens, Greece. June 27-30, 2026.
- "Immersive Religion: Enhancing Religious Literacy through Extended Reality," Meaningful XR annual conference. University of California, Davis. May 23, 2025.
- "Using XR in the Religious Studies Classroom." IMMERSEcon 2025 Virtual Conference. February 27, 2025.
- "Immersive Religion: Harnessing Extended Reality in Teaching about Religious Practices," Co-presented with Dr. Martha Smith. Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, San Diego, CA. November, 23, 2024.
- "Using Immersive Media to Teach about Religion." THATCamp Workshop, Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, San Diego, CA. November 22, 2024.
- "How to See What Takes Place: Dilemmas in the Creation of Educational XR Experiences of Religious Rituals." Humanities, Arts, Sciences and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory (HASTAC) Annual Conference, Brooklyn, NY. June 8-10, 2023.
- "Witnessing to Truth: Foucault's Concept of *Parrhēsia* in the Early Christian Context." Annual Meeting of the Foucault Circle, St. Louis, MO. April 21-23, 2023.
- "Teaching Angry Christians." History of Christianity program group, American Academy of Religion Annual Conference, Denver, CO. November 18-21, 2022.
- "The Martyr as Friend: Inverting the Scapegoat's Sacrifice." American Academy of Religion Annual Conference, San Antonio, TX. Colloquium on Religious Violence. November 20-23, 2021.
- "Dying Subjects: Martyrdom, Suffering, and Sovereignty." Association for Political Theory annual conference, Irvine, CA. October 24-26, 2019.
- "Sacrifice for the Raj?: Global Sikh Voices during World War I." Society for the Scientific Study of Religion annual conference, October 23-25, 2019.
- "Concerning Subjects." North American Association for the Study of Religion annual conference, Boston, MA. November 17, 2017.
- "Purifying Thought, Purifying Society," Academy of Religion Annual Conference, San Antonio, TX. Comparative Approaches to Religion and Violence Program Group. November 20, 2016.
- "On Sacred Understandings of the Law," West Coast Law and Society Retreat, Irvine, CA. February 27, 2016.
- "On *Building God's Kingdom*: Julie Ingersoll on Christian Reconstructionism," American Academy of Religion Annual Conference, Atlanta, GA. Religion and American Law Group. November 21-24, 2015.
- "Performing 'Tibet': The Martyrdom of Tibetan Self-Immolators," World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions Quinquennial Conference, Erfurt, Germany. Part of "Martyrdom Disputed" Panel, Hans Kippenberg, chair. August 23-29, 2015.

Public Scholarship, Reviews, Encyclopedia Articles

"Does Apple's Vision Pro Promise a New Future for Virtual Reality and Religion?"

ReligionDispatches.com, forthcoming.

"The Martyr's Many Faces." Fifteen Eighty Four: Academic Perspectives from Cambridge

University Press, August 19, 2024. <https://cambridgeblog.org/2024/08/the-martyrs-many-faces/>.

"Five Books for Dinner Party Conversations about Religion and Politics." Shepherd.com, June 10,

2024. <https://shepherd.com/best-books/conversations-about-religion-and-politics>.

"Virtually Seeing What Takes Place Next," Jan. 19, 2022.

<https://religionmatters.org/2023/01/19/virtually-seeing-what-takes-place-next/>.

"Ritual Selections: Deciding to See What Takes Place," Dec. 9, 2022.

<https://religionmatters.org/2022/12/09/ritual-selections-deciding-to-see-what-takes-place/>.

"What Takes Place: Virtual Reality and Teaching about Religious Rituals," Nov. 4, 2022.

<https://religionmatters.org/2022/11/04/see-what-takes-place-virtual-reality-in-teaching-about-religious-rituals/>.

Review of "Confronting Religious Violence: A Counternarrative." Richard A. Burrige and

Jonathan Sacks, eds. *Journal of Religion and Violence*, 8:1 (2020).

Review of "Competing Fundamentalisms: Violent Extremism in Christianity, Islam and

Hinduism," Sathianathan Clarke. *Journal of Religion and Violence*, 7:1 (2019), James Lewis guest editor.

Review of "Sacred Suicide," James R. Lewis and Carole M. Cusack, eds. *Journal of Religion and*

Violence, 4:1 (2016), p. 113-116.

Multiple Entries in *The Encyclopedia of Global Religion and Societies*, Mark Juergensmeyer and Wade

Clark Roof, eds., SAGE Publications, 2011.

Review of "Christian American and the Kingdom of God," Richard T. Hughes. *Religion*, 41:2

(2011), p. 294-297.

Interviews and Invited Lectures

"Mapping Foodways Together: Cross-Course Collaboration in the Digital Humanities." With

Megan Moran. Building and Benefitting from Collaborative Infrastructures in the Publicly Engaged Humanities panel, HumanitiesX of DePaul University and Public & Applied Humanities of Arizona State University. July 16, 2026.

"Rest In Peace" Interview for Holy Wonders with Dennis Quaid, History Channel. October 2024.

["Sikh Soldiers in WWI: Loyalty, Sacrifice & Identity."](#) Interview with @Ramblings of a Sikh podcast. October 7, 2023.

["Coffee Talk with John Soboslai."](#) Digital Media CoLab, Montclair State University, April 19, 2023.

Interview with Romaine Brethes for *Le Point Pop: Game of Thrones: Mythes et Origines*, "Le Marche

de la Honte: God Shave the Queen." March-April 2019, pp. 60-64.

Interview with Montclair State University's NewsLab on the Catholic Church sex abuse scandal, March 7, 2019. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HneP8DHQA7A>.

Interview with Dr. Remonda Kleinberg, for UNCTV. Wilmington, NC, October 12, 2016. Available at <https://vimeo.com/188726130>.

"Dying For God?: Martyrdom Across Time," Sherman Emerging Scholar 2016 lecture at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington. October 12, 2016, and attached panel discussion Oct. 13 with Mark Juergensmeyer, James Benn, Anatheia Portier-Young, Herb Berg responding. Available at: <https://vimeo.com/188853759>.

Select Campus and Public Talks

"Afterlife Imaginaries," Santa Barbara Hospice, July 16, 2026.

"Why Small Grants Matter," CHSS Conversation on Grant-Seeking, May 11, 2026.

"Faith at the Founding: Gamifying Learning." Faculty Showcase, Montclair State University, May 6, 2025.

"Religious Approaches to Death and Dying," Santa Barbara Hospice, February 20, 2025.

"Promises and Perils of XR in Higher Ed," Instructional Technology and Design Services (ITDS) Summer Institute, June 5, 2024.

"Virtual Reality in Teaching about Religion," EdTech Expo, Montclair State University, April 17, 2024.

"Seeing What Takes Place: Virtual Experiences of Religious Ritual," 2023 Summer Institute for Teaching, Learning, and Technology. June 8, 2023.

"Muslim Representation in the Media," Montclair State University. April 12, 2023.

"Virtual Worship: Exploring Immersive Videos of Religious Practices." Research on Interdisciplinary Global Studies working group. May 26, 2021.

"Rioting for Resurrection: Masculinity, White Supremacy, and Religion at the U.S. Capitol Insurrection." MSU virtual panel moderator. Part of Montclair State University's "Is this what democracy looks like?" series. March 31, 2021.

Interview with Samie Brosseau: Cults and Extreme Beliefs. Campus event. November 14, 2019.

"'They are us' – A Panel Discussion on the New Zealand Mosque Shootings," Montclair State University, March 21, 2019.

Interview with MSU's NewsLab: Catholic Church sex abuse scandal. March 7, 2019.

"No More Old-Timey Religion: How Globalization Shifts Religious Practices, and Vice Versa," World Cultures Day, Montclair State University, April 13, 2018.

"The Religious Imagination," Creative Research Center, Montclair State University, April 26, 2017.

"The Fundamentals of Islam," presentation for Montclair Institute for Lifelong Learning, January 25, 2017.

Teaching Experience and Training

At Montclair State University, classes taught include:

- Seminar on Religious Violence; Religion and Global Politics; Death, Dying and Afterlife; Understanding Religion; Religion in the Arab World; Religion and Economics; International Studies Proseminar; Religions of the World; New Testament; Podium Education's Global Career Accelerator

At University of California, Santa Barbara, classes taught included:

- Global History, Culture and Ideology (Department of Global Studies); Religious Approaches to Death (Department of Religion); Academic Writing (Writing Program)

Certificates and Trainings: Empowering Online Teaching and Learning certificate, Montclair State University; Montclair Unbound, designer, Reimagining Online Education; FERPA 2026; Title 19 2026

Other Academic Service

Subject Matter Expert, Introduction to World Religions, EBSCO Learning DSST prep test. Fall 2025 – Present.

Keeper of the Multifaith Religious Observances calendar at Montclair State University, Summer 2024 – Present.

Advisory Board Member, Institute for the Humanities at Montclair State University, Spring 2024 – Present.

Reviewer for *Religions*, *Ethos*, *Presence*, *Immersive Technologies*, and Oxford University Press.

Curriculum Advisor, Virtual Reality for Character Development, Dr. Jennifer Urban, PI.

Personnel Action Committee, Chair, Department of Religion, Fall 2024 – Spring 2026.

Curriculum Committee member, College for Humanities and Social Sciences, Montclair State University, Fall 2020 – Present.

Taylor-Benfield Scholarship Committee member, Department of Religion Representative, Spring 2019 – Present.

Assessment Liaison, Department of Religion, Montclair State University. December 2018-Present.

Career Development Committee, College for the Humanities and Social Sciences representative alternate, Spring 2024 – Present.

Montclair Unbound Program developer, Montclair State University. January – December 2024.

Revitalizing the Humanities Working Group, College for the Humanities and Social Sciences, Montclair State University, Fall 2023 – Spring 2024.

Faculty Advisor, Religion Now!, Student group of the department of Religion. March 2017 – Present.

Professional Memberships

American Academy of Religion

Humanities, Arts, Sciences, Technology, and Collaboratory

Immersive Learning Research Network
EDUCAUSE Extended Reality Group
North American Association for the Study of Religion
Society for the Scientific Study of Religion