Anthropology / Religion 200 (Section 1)

Morality and Community

Fall 2010
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MWF 10:35-11:30
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Course Overview

In this course, we will examine what it means to be part of a community and how communities are both conditioned by and lead to the creation of moral systems.

At one time, anthropologists studied small, closed societies (or societies that the anthropologist wrote about as though they were closed). In their accounts of these societies or “cultures” (as they were sometimes called), anthropologists often treated “community” and “society” as synonymous entities: one associated oneself with the group to which one belonged and one’s role in that group was prescribed by the structure of relationships by which the group lived. One could not move or belong to another group (except, perhaps, through marriage). Changing one’s community was certainly not a matter of individual choice and the composition of a community was presumed to be static over time.

At present, however, owing to both changes in the way societies interact in the world and changes in the way that anthropologists perceive and write about those societies, group belonging and identity are in flux. This course will define “community” as a group to which one is conscious of belonging in that its members could imagine belonging to a different group and, in some cases, have the power to do so. The composition, character, and strength of communities can change; communities can lose or gain members; they can alter in composition; they can be more or less powerful than other communities. Individuals can imagine their participation in communities in different ways, they can belong to more than one community at the same time, and they can also belong to “imagined communities,” that is, groups of people who have not met face-to-face yet perceive themselves as belonging to the same community.

Morality, for this course, is defined as a totalizing system of meaning and being that both regulates the behavior of the social person and situates his or her place within the community and that community’s place within a larger cosmos. Just as there are diverse communities, there are also diverse moralities. This course will explore the idea that rather than existing as unchanging systems of belief created by “tradition” (or divine will), moralities change based on the changing circumstances of communities. While some social scientists have suggested that as communities increasingly come into contact, their diverse moral systems will lead them to “clash,” this course will explore the idea that, in most cases, the reverse is true: communities adopt various “moralities” as an assertion of
their identity as a community and may manufacture moral diversity to create conflict with other communities if that conflict helps to strengthen community solidarity.

We will explore the relationship between morality and community through detailed case studies of six different communities in the contemporary world (plus short treatments of other related communities). These are: (1) new converts to Buddhism in Beijing, China; (2) indigenous Americans in Oaxaca, Mexico; (3) (mostly urban) participants in Neo-Pagan festivals held in rural settings throughout the United States; (4) teenage girls in the Lubavitch Hasidic community of Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York; (5) evangelical Christians in the United States, including participants in the “Ex-Gay” movement; and (6) the imagined community of contemporary France as it confronts the question of Muslim girls who wear headscarves to school. These communities vary not only geographically or in terms of “religious” affiliation, but also in terms of status and power; whether their members choose to belong to their group or are raised into it; and in relationship to other communities. In addition to these six texts, you will select one additional case study to write about and analyze on your own.

Lastly, while this is a course in “religion” in that the subjects of study are members of what are often defined as “religious” communities, we will not assume them to be representative of particular religions per se (even though they may assume this for themselves). In dealing with religious communities rather than religions, we may explore the relevance of the category of “religion” in understanding diverse expressions of morality and religiosity in the world today.

Course Texts

The following texts are required reading for the course. They are available for purchase from the university bookstore:


In addition to readings from these texts, several course readings will be available on Blackboard [BB].

Course Assignments and Requirements

1. Class Participation (20%).
   This course is based on critical reflections of course readings and lectures and how they relate to questions of the relationship between morality and community. Much of this reflection will take place during class. As such, class is not a time for you to passively absorb outside material but to actively work through it in your conversations with others. Your participation will be assessed from two types of activities:
   
a. Critical workshops (usually Wednesdays) where you will be assigned to small groups and asked to work through a set of case problems related to the themes of the week in conversation with your classmates. At times, these will be fictional dilemmas provided by me; at other times, you will be asked to share and think through some of your own experiences.

   b. Student-led discussions (usually Fridays) where you will be asked to take the discussion of course material in a direction that interests you related to course themes.

   Because active participation requires your presence, attendance will also be taken during workshop and discussion days. Students missing four or more sections will not receive a passing grade in the class participation section of the course.

2. Discussion Paragraphs (20%).
   To facilitate the student-led discussion, a discussion paragraph is due on the Thursday of each week marked by a star (*) (a total of eleven weeks).

   Your paragraphs should be submitted to me via e-mail no later than 8 pm. You should also bring a printed or handwritten copy of the paragraph with you to class for your reference. The discussion paragraph should focus on your analysis of aspects of the week’s readings and lectures that interest you and conclude in an open-ended question. References to the readings should be focused and specific. Higher graded paragraphs will be those that succeed in integrating multiple themes and ideas in a coherent and thoughtful fashion.

3. One mini-paper on the film Jesus Camp due September 20 (5%).
   An initial short (three-page) writing assignment on the film Jesus Camp as a case study of an emerging group using morality to draw the boundaries of community.
4. Two five-page analytical papers (15% each) relating course readings, lectures, films, and discussions due October 18 and November 29. A list of paper questions will be distributed in class no later than one week before the paper due date.

5. A review and analysis of a selected ethnographic text (6-8 pages) (20%) due during the final examination period (December 16).

You will choose one of the following texts:


By the third Monday of class, (Sept. 13), you will submit your first two choices for ethnographies to me and I will assign you one.

Your paper will consist of (1) a summary of the text (1-2 pages), (2) your own critical analysis of the text (1-2 pages), and (3) your answer to a question (provided by me) that relates the text to course readings and discussions (2-4 pages).

6. A group presentation of your text (5%) (December 6, 8, or 10).

Together with other classmates reading the same book, you will prepare an in-class presentation during the final week. The purpose of the presentation is to share the book and your collective analyses with the rest of the class. While each member of the group should speak, the resulting presentation should be organized into a coherent whole. You are encouraged to make creative use of audio-visual resources in your presentation.

Please note that there are no in-class examinations for the course. You will not be asked to memorize and regurgitate terminology. You will be expected to *think through* and use key terms and concepts *very precisely* in your written assignments.
University Requirements and Recommendations

**Academic Integrity:** The Syracuse Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort.

For more information, see Academic Integrity Office, http://academicintegrity.syr.edu.

**Students with Disabilities/Special Needs:** If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services, http://disabilityservices.syr.edu located at 804 University Avenue, room 309, or call (315) 443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities “Accommodation Authorization Letters,” as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

If you have already been issued an Accommodation Authorization Letter, it is your responsibility to provide the instructor with a copy during the first week of class.

**Course Readings and Assignments**

M. Aug. 30, Sep. 1 – Course Overview (no assigned readings)

**I. INTRODUCTION**

1. What is Anthropology? What do anthropologists study? How do anthropologists understand morality and community?

F. Sep. 3

2. Theoretical Perspectives on Morality and Community

W. Sep. 8

M. Sep. 13
Film (in class) (and discussion): Jesus Camp

II. BUILDING THE MORAL COMMUNITY: Two Case Studies

1. Making Morality in Beijing

Sep. 15, 17 *

M. Sep. 20
JESUS CAMP MINI-PAPER DUE

Sep. 20, 22, 24 *
Fisher, Chapter 3, “The Pre-Destined Relationship” and Chapter 4, “Consequence” [BB].

2. Class, Privilege, and Redemption in Mexico

Sep. 27, 29; Oct. 1 *
Norget, Days of Death, Days of Life, pp. 1-6, 27-89.

Oct. 4, 6, 8 *

III. COMMUNITIES OF RESISTANCE / RESISTING COMMUNITY

1. Individuality and Resistance to “Religion” in Rural America

Oct. 11, 13, 15 *
Pike, Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves, pp. 1-40; 155-67; 172-90; 205-17.

M. Oct. 18
ANALYSIS PAPER #1 DUE

2. Religious Experience, Community Survival, and Escape in Brooklyn

Oct. 18, 20, 22 *
Levine, Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers, pp. 1-66 (plus one additional short profile to be assigned).
3. *Struggling with Morality, Struggling with Community: the “Ex-Gay” Movement*

Oct. 25, 27, 29 *

Erzen, *Straight to Jesus*, pp. 1-18; 52-55; 91-109; 160-79.

Nov. 1, 3, 5 *
Erzen, pp. 66-91; 121-25; 183-90; 216-30.

**IV. COMMUNITIES IN CONFLICT**

1. *Religion, the State, and the Citizen in France*

Nov. 8, 10, 12 *
Bowen, *Why the French Don’t Like Headscarves*, pp. 1-33; 65-98 (read first paragraph of p. 98 only).

W. Nov. 11
Film (*in class*): *Young, Muslim, and French*

2. *Communities in Parallel / Peril*

Nov. 15, 17, 19 *
Pike, pp. 87-113; 123-44.

M. Nov. 22
Preliminary discussion of small group presentations.

W. Nov. 24 and F. Nov. 26
NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Break

M. Nov. 29
ANALYSIS PAPER #2 DUE

**V. THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY**

Nov. 29, Dec. 1, Dec. 3 *

Dec. 6, 8, 10 – Group Presentations
No Assigned Readings.

Thursday, Dec. 16 at 5:00 p.m. – Ethnographic Review Due to Hall of Languages 202.