

Anthropology / Religion 221

Morality and Community

Fall 2015
TTh 9:30-10:50
Bowne 125

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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 identities as communities 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 five different communities in the contemporary world (plus short treatments of other related communities). These are: (1) residents of rural Meixian County in southern China; (2) members of a Botswana church whose community and country are racked by AIDS; (3) Ultra-orthodox Hasidic girls and women seeking to create their own religious community in New York City; (4) evangelical Christians in the United States, including participants in the “Ex-Gay” movement; and (5) 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 five 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 many of 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).

Course Texts

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

Bowen, John R. 2007. *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Erzen, Tanya. 2006. *Straight to Jesus: Sexual and Christian Conversions in the Ex-Gay Movement*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Fader, Ayala. 2009. *Mitzvah Girls: Bringing up the Next Generation of Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Klaims, Frederick. 2010. *Death in a Church of Life: Moral Passion during Botswana's Time of AIDS*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Oxford, Ellen. 2010. *Drink Water, but Remember the Source: Moral Discourse in a Chinese Village*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

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 concerning 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.

Because active participation requires your presence, attendance will also be taken during class. Students missing four or more classes 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 each week marked by a star (*) (a total of ten weeks). Your paragraphs should be submitted to me via e-mail no later than **5 pm** on the Wednesday evening prior to the Thursday discussion. You should also bring a printed, electronic, 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. A list of sample paragraphs from previous semesters will be discussed in class before the first one is due.

In addition to the ten required discussion paragraphs, you must also submit by e-mail to me one discussion *question* for our guest speaker, Prof. Klaitis, by Monday, Oct. 5 at 9 a.m.

3. One mini-paper on your experience of a community and its moral systems (5%) due Sept. 22.

4. Two five-page analytical papers (15% each) relating course readings, lectures, films, and discussions due Oct. 20 and Dec. 18. A list of paper questions will be distributed in class two weeks before each paper due date.

5. A review and analysis of a selected ethnographic text (6-8 pages) (20%) selected from the list below, due on Dec. 8:

Bringa, Tone. 1995. *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Fisher, Gareth. 2014. *From Comrades to Bodhisattvas: Moral Dimensions of Lay Buddhist Practice in Contemporary China*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Kelner, Shaul. 2010. *Tours that Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage, and Israel Birthright Tourism*. New York: New York University Press.

Nabhan-Warren, Kristy. 2005. *The Virgin of El Barrio: Marian Apparitions, Catholic Evangelizing, and Mexican American Activism*. New York: New York University Press.

Norget, Kristin. 2005. *Days of Death, Days of Life: Ritual in the Popular Culture of Oaxaca*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Zigon, Jarrett. 2011. *"HIV is God's Blessing": Rehabilitating Morality in Neoliberal Russia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

By the third Tuesday of class, Sept. 17, 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 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.

Classroom Technology Use

The use of laptop computers or tablets is encouraged to take notes in class and to consult discussion paragraphs. Use of technology for e-mail, texting, or non-class-related purposes, however, is not permitted. Students engaged in these activities may have their electronic devices confiscated until the end of class and/or receive deductions to their class participation grade. We will also make occasional use of laptops and tablets for in-class activities; in these cases, you will be asked ahead of time to bring one to class. If you do not own either type of device, please let the instructor know right away so alternative arrangements can be made.

Academic Integrity

Syracuse University's academic integrity policy reflects the high value that we, as a university community, place on honesty in academic work. The policy defines our expectations for academic honesty and holds students accountable for the integrity of all work they submit. Students should understand that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as about university-wide academic integrity expectations. The university policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same written work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. The presumptive penalty for a first instance of academic dishonesty by an undergraduate student is course failure, accompanied by a transcript notation indicating that the failure resulted from a violation of academic integrity policy. The presumptive penalty for a first instance of academic dishonesty by a graduate student is suspension or expulsion. SU students are required to read an online summary of the university's academic integrity expectations and provide an electronic signature agreeing to abide by them twice a year during pre-term check-in on MySlice. For more information and the complete policy, see <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 (ODS), <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 "Accommodation Authorization Letters" to students with documented disabilities as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

Faith Traditions and Observances Policy

Syracuse University does not have non-instructional days for any religious holiday and students must notify instructors by the end of the second week of classes when they will be observing their religious holiday(s). SU's religious observances policy, found at http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm, recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to

observe religious holy days according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors no later than the end of the second week of classes. Student deadlines are posted in My Slice under Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances/Add a Notification.

Course Readings and Assignments

T. Sep. 1 – Course Overview (no assigned readings)

I. INTRODUCTION

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

Th. Sep. 3

Bourgois, Philippe. 2001. "Understanding Inner-City Poverty: Resistance and Self-Destruction under U.S. Apartheid." In McClancy, Jeremy, ed. *Exotic No More: Anthropology on the Front Lines*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp. 15-32 [BB].

2. *Making Morality, Making Community*

T. Sep. 8

Experiential Anthropology Exercise (No readings assigned)

Th. Sep. 10

Fisher, "Making Morality" and "Making Community" [BB]

II. Sustaining Community: Two Case Studies

1. *Locating Morality and Community in a Changing China*

Sep. 15, 17 *

Oxford, *Drink Water*, pp. 1-28; 45-64; 114-16 (end of third paragraph); 123-39.

Sep. 22, 24 *

Oxford, pp. 152-71; 197-224.

Sep. 22 – Mini-paper due in class (hardcopy only)

2. *Spreading "Love" in Botswana*

Sep. 29, Oct. 1 *

Klaits, *Death in a Church of Life*, pp. 1-12; 37-78; 100-06; 146-53.

Oct. 6, 8 *

Klaits, pp. 213-78.

Oct. 6: Guest Lecture: Prof. Frederick Klaitis, University of Buffalo.

Discussion Question for Prof. Klaitis due Monday, Oct. 5 at 9 a.m.

III. COMMUNITIES OF RESISTANCE / RESISTING COMMUNITY

1. *Preserving Alternative Community in Brooklyn*

Oct. 13, 15 *

Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, pp. 1-3, 7-31, 34-48, 62-85.

Oct. 20, 22 *

Fader, pp. 118-21; 125-38; 142-44; 145-50; 164-70; 179-210.

Oct. 20

First analytical paper due in class (hardcopy only)

2. *Struggling with Morality, Struggling with Community: the “Ex-Gay” Movement*

Oct. 27, 29 *

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

Nov. 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. 10, 12 *

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

Nov. 17 – Group Presentation Meetings (*no assigned readings*)

Nov. 19 – No class – GF and SS away at American Anthropological Association conference.

2. *Communities in Conflict 2015: Current Events*

Dec. 1, 3 *

Religious Conflict in the European Refugee Crisis (readings TBA)

Dec. 8, 10 – Group Presentations

No Assigned Readings.

Tues., Dec. 8 – Ethnographic Review Due

Friday, Dec. 18 at 5:00 p.m. – Second Analytical Paper due to Hall of Languages 501 (Religion Department Office).