

Religion 600
The Anthropology of Religion



Fall 2016
Hall of Languages 504
TTh 2-3:20

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Hall of Languages 505
Office Hours: Monday 1-2 pm or by appointment

Overview

This course will survey contributions by anthropologists to theories about religious experience and the function of religion in society from the founding of the discipline in the early twentieth century to the present day. The first two-thirds of the course will survey seminal anthropological theories on ritual, myth, symbol, and the relationship between religion and cultural change. The latter third of the course will examine trending theories in the anthropology of religion over the last decade focusing on (1) the anthropology of morality and ethics; (2) mediated religion in the public sphere; and (3) the growing interest by anthropologists in affect and the sensory.

Course Texts

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

Cassaniti, Julia. 2015. *Living Buddhism: Mind, Self, and Emotion in a Thai Community*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Hirschkind, Charles. 2009. *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Lambek, Michael, ed. 2008. *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*. 2nd ed. London: Blackwell.

Mahmood, Saba. 2005. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Robbins, Joel. 2004. *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Village*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

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

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

Course Assignments and Requirements

1. Class Participation (30%).

As this is a seminar, you are expected to come to class prepared to participate actively each week.

2. Weekly Questions (10%)

Following your initial completion of the week's reading, you should compose at least one short (1-2 sentences) question related to what you have read. This question can reflect your desire for clarification of certain aspects of the reading or it can take the form of a challenge to one of the authors of the readings to rethink, reframe, or expand arguments or findings, as one might pose as part of the Q&A following an invited talk or conference presentation. Please post your question under the appropriate folder in the discussion tab on blackboard no later than 9 a.m. on the day of the first class for which new readings are assigned. This will generally be the Tuesday of the week. Exceptions are the first week of classes when your question will be due on Thursday, Sep. 1 and Tuesday, Nov. 15 when no question is due. You should have access to your question during class either in print or electronically and be willing to share the question if you are called on to do so.

3. Weekly Responses (20%).

Prior to final day discussing each reading unit (usually Thursday), you should post a response on aspects of unit that interest you to the discussion board on the class blackboard page. You should consider in your responses both the assigned reading material and our initial discussion of it (usually on Tuesdays). Your responses should contain your original analysis and intellectual reflections on the material. They should also reflect the main themes and issues for the week's readings as defined under the subject headings for each week and discussed at the end of the previous week's class. You are encouraged to relate the material with outside scholarship that interests you, but you should take care to define any outside theories or concepts clearly and not assume that your readers have prior knowledge of them. Please post your response under the appropriate folder in the discussion tab on blackboard no later than 9 a.m. on the day of the last class for which new readings are assigned. This will generally be the Thursday of the week. Exceptions are the first week of classes when no response is due and Tuesday, Nov. 15 when your response will be due on that date. Responses should range between 250 and 500 words. Please submit your responses directly into the text editor and not as an e-mail attachment. You are expected to read over and familiarize yourself with your classmates' responses prior to the beginning of class; you may also refer to them in your response, but you are not obligated to do so.

4. Analytical Paper(s) (40%)

In addition to the weekly responses, you are required to submit formal analytical writing. For the completion of this analytical work, you have two options:

(a) *The seminar paper option.* You will write one article-length paper (5,000 to 10,000 words including notes and bibliography) relating the readings and discussions from the course to an intellectual area of your interest. At least one half of the sources in your paper should come from outside of the class. A brief abstract (c. 100 words) and annotated bibliography of your sources is due by 5pm on Wednesday, Oct. 27. Your final paper is due no later than Wednesday, Dec. 13 at

5:00 p.m. to Hall of Languages 501. Students taking the seminar paper option will be asked to give a brief, informal presentation of their research on the final day of class (Dec. 8).

(b) The conference paper option. You will write three papers of 2,000 to 3,000 words in length presenting your analysis of the material we cover in class in response to question prompts that I will distribute one week prior to the due dates. You will have a choice of two questions to answer for each paper. You may use outside sources or scholarship but this is not a requirement. The three papers will be due on September 29, November 10, and December 13 by 5:00 p.m. to Hall of Languages 501.

All analytical papers should be submitted in double-spaced, 12 point font, with numbered pages, and in print hardcopy form.

You must inform me no later than Wednesday, Sep. 15 which of these two options you plan to take.

Per religion department policy, if you are planning to take an incomplete for this course, you must submit all relevant paperwork to me no later than the last scheduled day of class. Incompletes will only be granted for late submission of the seminar paper or the conference papers and not for missing weekly responses. Students whose work is incomplete who have not submitted paperwork will receive a failing letter grade; no grades will be left blank.

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), 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 as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

Faith Tradition Observances

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 before the end of the second week of classes.

Course Reading and Assignment Schedule

I. Introduction

A. Contexts for the Anthropology of Religion in our department – 8/30

B. Precursors to the Anthropology of Religion

Sep. 1

1. Durkheim, Émile, “The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life” in Lambek, *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, Ch. 2.
2. Weber, Max, “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism” in Lambek, Ch. 3.
3. Marx, Karl. 1977. “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof.” In *Symbolic Anthropology: A Reader in the Study of Symbols and Meanings*. New York: Columbia University Press. Pp. 245-53 [BB].

B. Magic, Religion, Science, and Problems of Categories and Research

Sep. 6, 8

1. Frazer, James G. 1915. “Sympathetic Magic.” In *Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach*. William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt, eds. 4th ed. New York: Harper and Row. Pp. 337-52 [BB].
2. Tambiah, Stanley, “The Form and Meaning of Magical Acts,” in Lambek, Ch. 25.
3. Geertz, Clifford, “Religion as a Cultural System,” in Lambek, Ch. 4.
4. Asad, Talal, “The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category,” in Lambek, Ch. 9.
5. Turner, Edith. 2001. “The Reality of Spirits: A Tabooed or Permitted Field of Study?” Paper presented at the Society of the Anthropology of Consciousness [BB].

II. Classic Themes in the Anthropology of Religion

A. Ritual, Structure, and Function

Sep. 13, 15

1. Radcliffe-Brown, A.R. 1945. "Religion and Society." *Man* 75(1/2): 33-43 [BB].
2. Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1937. "The Notion of Witchcraft Explains Unfortunate Events." In *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*. London: Clarendon Press. Pp. 63-85 [BB].
3. Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1948 [1925]. "Rational Mastery by Man of his Surroundings." In *Magic, Science, Religion, and Other Essays*. Boston: Beacon Press. Pp. 25-35 [BB].
4. Rappaport, Roy A. 1967. "Ritual Regulations of Environmental Relations among a New Guinea People." *Ethnology* 6(1): 17-30 [BB].
5. Whitehouse, Harvey. 1996. "Rites of Terror: Emotion, Metaphor and Memory in Melanesian Initiation Cults." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2(4): 703-15 [BB].
6. Sangren, P. Stephen. 1991. "Dialectics of Alienation: Individuals and Collectivities in Chinese Religion." *Man* 26(1): 67-86 [BB].

B. Exchange

Sep. 20, 22

1. Mauss, Marcel. 1990 [1950]. "The Exchange of Gifts and the Obligation to Reciprocate" and "The Extension of this System." In *The Gift: the Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. New York: W.W. Norton. Pp. 8-46 [BB].
2. Parry, Jonathan. 1986. "The Gift, the Indian Gift, and the 'Indian Gift.'" *Man* 21(3): 453-73 [BB].
3. Laidlaw, James. 2000. "A Free Gift Makes no Friends." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6(4): 617-34 [BB].
4. Simpson, Bob. 2004. "Impossible Gifts: Bodies, Buddhism and Bioethics in Contemporary Sri Lanka." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 10(4): 839-59 [BB].

C. Myths and Structure

Sep. 27, 29

1. Malinowski, Bronislaw, "Myth in Primitive Psychology," in Lambek, Ch. 14.
2. Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1967. "The Story of Asdiwal." In *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism*. Edmund Leach, ed. London: Tavistock. Pp. 1-48 [BB].
3. Leach, Edmund R. 1964. "Anthropological Aspects of Language: Animal Categories and Verbal Abuse." In *Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach*. William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt, eds. 4th ed. New York: Harper and Row. Pp. 153-68 [BB].
4. Sahlins, Marshall. 1981. "Reproduction: Structures of the Long Run." In *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: Structure in the Early History of the Sandwich Islands Kingdom*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. Pp. 9-32 [BB].

Sep. 29 - Conference Paper #1 due by 5 p.m. to Hall of Languages 501.

D. Symbols

Oct. 4, 6

1. Turner, Victor. 1970. "Symbols in Ndembu Ritual." In *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Pp. 19-47 [BB].
2. Ortner, Sherry, "On Key Symbols," in Lambek, Ch. 12.
3. Wolf, Eric, "The Virgin of Guadalupe: A Mexican National Symbol," in Lambek, Ch. 13.
4. Obeyesekere, Gananath, "Medusa's Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience," in Lambek, Ch. 29.

E. Transgressions and Inversions

Oct. 11, 13

1. Gluckman, Max. 1973. "The Licence in Ritual." In *Custom and Conflict in Africa*. New York: Barnes & Noble Books. Pp. 109-36 [BB].
2. Turner, Victor, "Liminality and Communitas," in Lambek, Ch. 26.
3. Stallybrass, Peter and Allon White, "The Politics and Poetics of Transgression," in Lambek, Ch. 21.
4. Holmberg, David. 2000. "Derision, Exorcism, and the Ritual Production of Power." *American Ethnologist* 27(4): 927-49 [BB].
5. Boddy, Janice, "Spirits and Selves in Northern Sudan: The Cultural Therapeutics of Possession and Trance," in Lambek, Ch. 30.

F. Colonialism, Globalization, and Modernity

Oct. 18, 20

1. Comaroff, John and Jean, "The Colonization of Consciousness," in Lambek, Ch. 36.
2. Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "'Internal Conversion' in Contemporary Bali." In *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books. Pp. 170-92 [BB].
3. Taussig, Michael, "The Genesis of Capitalism amongst a South American Peasantry: Devil's Labor and the Baptism of Money," in Lambek, Ch. 35.
4. Comaroff, Jean and John. 1999. "Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony." *American Ethnologist* 26(2): 279-303 [BB].
5. West, Harry. 2001. "Sorcery of Construction and Socialist Modernization: Ways of Understanding Power in Postcolonial Mozambique." *American Ethnologist* 28(1): 119-50 [BB].

III. Recent Perspectives in the Anthropology of Religion

A. The Anthropology of Morality and Ethics

1. Morality, Ethics, and Selfhood

Oct. 25, 27

Mahmood, Saba, *Politics of Piety*.

Oct. 27 - Abstract and Annotated Bibliography for Seminar Paper due by 5 p.m. to Hall of Languages 501.

2. Morality and Cultural Change

Nov. 1, 3

Robbins, Joel, *Becoming Sinners*.

Nov. 8, 10

Zigon, Jarrett, "*HIV is God's Blessing*."

Nov. 10 - Conference Paper #2 due by 5 p.m. to Hall of Languages 501.

Nov. 15

1. Robbins, Joel. 2007. "Between Reproduction and Freedom: Morality, Value, and Radical Cultural Change." *Ethnos* 72(3): 293-314 [BB].
2. Zigon, Jarrett. 2009. "Within a Range of Possibilities: Morality and Ethics in Social Life." *Ethnos* 74(2): 251-76 [BB].
3. Robbins, Joel. 2009. "Value, Structure, and the Range of Possibilities: A Response to Zigon." *Ethnos* 74(2): 277-85 [BB].

Nov. 17

NO CLASS – American Academy of Religion meeting

B. Media, Embodiment, and the Public Sphere

Nov. 28, 30

Hirschkind, Charles, *The Ethical Soundscape*.

Dec. 6, 8

Cassaniti, Julia, *Mind and Emotion in a Thai Buddhist Community*.

Dec. 8 – *Seminar Paper Presentations in class*

Conference Paper #3 and Seminar Paper due Wednesday, Dec. 13 by 5 p.m. to Hall of Languages 501.