

Anthropology / Religion 200 (Section 1)

Morality and Community

[Draft: June 11, 2009]

Fall 2009
MWF 12:45-1:40
Hall of Languages 202

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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 treat “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

moralties are adopted to justify either co-existence or conflict based on the community's concern for its own well-being or aims to expand beyond all those who wish to belong to it.

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) indigenous Americans in Oaxaca, Mexico; (2) evangelical Christians in the United States, including participants in the "Ex-Gay" movement; (3) new converts to Buddhism in Beijing, China; (4) (mostly urban) participants in Neo-Pagan festivals held in rural settings throughout the United States; (5) teenage girls in the Lubavitch Hasidic community of Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York; 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 its members choose to belong to their group or are raised into it; and relationship to other communities. In addition to these six texts, you will select one additional ethnography to write 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:

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.

Levine, Stephanie. 2003. *Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers: An Intimate Journey Among Hasidic Girls*. 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.

Pike, Sarah. 2001. *Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves: Contemporary Pagans and the Search for Community*. 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 (25%).

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. Each student will be responsible for facilitating or co-facilitating the discussion once throughout the semester.

Because active participation requires your presence, attendance will also be taken during workshop and discussion days. Students missing four or more sections cannot receive credit for the course and will be asked to withdraw.

3. 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 ten weeks) with the exception of the week beginning Sept. 28 when you should submit your paragraph on the following **Sunday**, October 4.

Your paragraphs should be submitted to me via e-mail no later than **12 noon**. 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.

Once I have received your discussion paragraphs, I will copy them to the discussion facilitators whose job it is to select paragraphs and themes for discussion. The facilitators will meet with me briefly in my office sometime before the class.

4. Two short (five-page) papers (15% each) relating course readings, lectures, films, and discussions due October 19 and November 30. A list of paper questions will be distributed in class no later than one week before the paper due date.

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

You will find in the bookstore copies of the following texts:

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

De La Torre, Miguel A. 2003. *La Lucha for Cuba: Religion and Politics on the Streets of Miami*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Guest, Kenneth. 2003. *God in Chinatown: Religion and Survival in New York's Evolving Immigrant Community*. New York: New York University Press.

Kwon, Heonik. 2006. *After the Massacre: Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

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

By the third week of class, 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 (distributed during the last week of class).

5. A group presentation of your text (10%) (December 7, 9, or 11).

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: Syracuse University's Office of Disability Services (ODS) authorizes special accommodations for students with disabilities. Students who believe they may need academic accommodations due to a disability must register with the Office of Disability Services at 804 University Ave., Room 309, 443-4498 or 443-1371. Any such students should see the instructor during office hours or make an appointment as soon as possible to discuss their needs.

For more information see Office of Disability Services,
<http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>.

Course Readings and Assignments

I. INTRODUCTION

1. *Course Overview* [Aug. 31, Sep. 2] (no assigned readings)

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

F. Sep. 4

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].

M. Sep. 7

NO CLASS – Labor Day

3. *Theoretical Perspectives on Morality and Community*

W. Sep. 9

Durkheim, Emile. 2002 [1912]. "The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life." In Lambek, Michael, ed, *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*. London: Blackwell. Pp. 34-49 [BB].

F. Sep. 11

Foucault, Michel. 2000. "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress." In Rabinow, Paul, ed. *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. London: Penguin Books [BB].

Zigon, Jarrett. 2008. "Morality and Ethics." In *Morality: An Anthropological Perspective*. New York: Berg Publishers. Pp. 162-66 [BB].

II. BUILDING THE MORAL COMMUNITY: Three Case Studies

1. *Class, Privilege, and Redemption in Mexico*

Sep. 14, 16, 18 *

Norget, *Days of Death, Days of Life*, pp. 1-6, 24-89, 101-09.

M. Sep. 21

NO CLASS – Eid Ul-Fitr

Sep. 23, 25 *

Norget, pp. 151-224.

M. Sep. 28

NO CLASS – Yom Kippur

2. *Evangelical Christianity, Identity, and the Making of Nationhood in the United States*

Sep. 30, Oct. 2, 5 *

Chen, Carolyn. 2006. "From Filial Piety to Religious Piety: Evangelical Christianity Reconstructing Taiwanese Immigrant Families in the United States." *The International Migration Review* (40)3: 573-602 [BB].

Ebel, Jonathan H. 2009. "Jesus Freak and the Junkyard Prophet: The School Assembly as Evangelical Revival." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77(1): 16-54 [BB].

W. Sep. 30

Film (in class): *Jesus Camp*

F. Oct. 2

GUEST SPEAKER: Prof. Carsten Vala, Dept. of Political Science, Loyola University, Maryland.

(Please note that this unit's discussion will take place on Monday, Oct. 5. Please submit your discussion paragraphs no later than 12 noon on Sunday, Oct. 4).

3. *Making Morality in Beijing*

Oct. 7, 9

Fisher, Gareth. 2006. *Universal Rescue: Re-making Post-Mao China in a Beijing Temple*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Virginia. Chapter 1, "Introduction;" Chapter 4, "Yuanfen: the Pre-Destined Relationship" [BB].

Oct. 12, 14, 16 *

Fisher, Gareth. 2004. "Mao and the Lotus: New Interpretations of the Sutra in Modern Beijing" [BB].

Fisher, Gareth. 2008. "The Spiritual Land Rush: Merit and Morality in New Chinese Buddhist Temple Construction." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 67(1): 143-70 [BB].

M. Oct. 19

FIRST SHORT PAPER DUE

III. COMMUNITIES OF RESISTANCE / RESISTING COMMUNITY

1. *Individuality and Resistance to "Religion" in Rural America*

Oct. 19, 21, 23 *

Pike, *Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves*, pp. 1-40; 155-67; 172-217.

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

Oct. 26, 28, 30 *

Erzen, *Straight to Jesus*, pp. 1-18; 52-55; 59-102; 121-25.

3. *Religious Experience, Community Survival, and Escape in Brooklyn*

Nov. 2, 4, 6 *

Levine, *Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers*, pp. 1-66 (plus one additional short profile to be assigned).

M. Nov. 9

NO CLASS – American Academy of Religion Meeting

IV. COMMUNITIES IN CONFLICT

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

Nov. 11, 13 *

Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves*, pp. 1-33; 65-98 (read first paragraph of p. 98 only); 110-27.

W. Nov. 11

Film (*in class*): *Young, Muslim, and French*

2. Communities in Parallel / Peril

Nov. 16, 18, 20 *

Pike, pp. 87-113; 123-54.

Clarke, Richard. 2000. "Self-presentation in a Contested City: Palestinian and Israeli Political Tourism in Hebron." *Anthropology Today* 16(5): 12-15 [BB].

M. Nov. 23

Jenkins, Richard. 2001. "Imagined but not Imaginary: Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Modern World." In McClancy, Jeremy, ed. *Exotic No More: Anthropology on the Front Lines*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp. 114-28 [BB].

W. Nov. 25 and F. Nov. 27

NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Break

M. Nov. 30

SECOND SHORT PAPER DUE

V. THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY

Nov. 30, Dec. 2, Dec. 4 *

Pike, pp. 219-26.

Bowen, pp. 155-68; 171-81.

Dawson, Lorne L. 2004. "Religion and the Quest for Virtual Community." In *Religion Online*, Douglas Cowan and Lorne Dawson, eds. New York: Routledge. Pp. 75-92 [BB].

Dec. 7, 9, 11 – Group Presentations

No Assigned Readings.

FINAL EXAMINATION PERIOD – Ethnographic Review Due.