

ANTHROPOLOGY OF RELIGION

Course Syllabus

Time and venue: Tuesday, 10.50, r. 1/229 and Thursday, 10.50, r. 1/216

Instructor: Dr. Emil Nasritdinov, r.404 (Office hours: Tuesday and Wednesday, 14.00-16.00) emilzn@gmail.com

Course abstract

Religion has always been one of the most important topics in anthropology. Since the earliest expeditions, anthropologists have sought to understand the often-unusual religious practice they encountered. People's views of their origins, the supernatural, and a moral life are based on a set of shared ideas they learn as they grow up in a given society. Anthropologists call these shared ideas culture and see religion as a central part of people's culture. Within this course the students will look at themes that have guided the anthropology of religion throughout the centuries. It also aims to present, analyze and discuss various religious phenomena, such as rituals and sacred sites, witchcraft and sorcery, death and spirit possession. The aim of this course is to give students an idea of the anthropological approach toward religion. The course will concentrate on traditional religions and the non-formal practices of major religions.

Grading

Attendance = 10%

Participation in class (10X2%) = 20%

Three film reflections (3X5%) = 15%

Presentation on ethnographic case study on religion = 10%

Presentation on one theoretical perspective on religion = 10%

Research paper and presentation on religious perspective or religious practice in Kyrgyzstan = 20%

Final exam = 15%

Attendance

If you don't miss classes, you automatically receive 10% for attendance. For each class missed without a reason - you will lose 2% of your grade. If you miss 4 classes without a reason - you automatically receive X for the course. If you are sick you should inform our office manager before the class and then bring the note from your doctor. Without a call to the office manager and without a note, your absence will not be excused.

Participation

Participation is the discussion of readings and participation in class exercises. There will be 10 seminar classes where we will discuss texts. Questions for readings will be posted online at the e-course system. For each class you will receive 2% if you participate and give evidence that you have read the text.

Film reflections

Every quarter of the term you will have to watch an online film and write a short reflection on it.

Presentation about religious case study

You will make a presentation on the ethnographic case study on religion from anywhere around the world. This can be an interesting ritual, concept, social practice, etc. You have to approach this case as anthropologist/ethnographer to vividly describe its details, think about its meanings, and analyze its role in the life of community that practices it.

Presentation on one theoretical perspective on religion

You will also make one presentation related to our weekly topics. I will provide with necessary texts/materials for that.

Research paper and presentation on religious perspective or religious practice in Kyrgyzstan

During the semester you will conduct a research on any religious practice or on interesting question related to religion in Bishkek or in some other place in Kyrgyzstan (if you have time to travel). Your research must include interviews or observations as main methods. Try to be more creative in the choice of your topic, so that we don't repeat traditional "Role of women in Islam" kinds of titles. One way to do it is to make the research question more personal and explore issues, which might not be so blunt and straightforward, but more intricate. Research paper must be 6-8 pages long. It should be submitted online according to the deadline and you will also make a presentation on it.

Final exam

Final exam with three essay questions: two theoretical and one on world religions will be worth 15% (5% per question).

Reading materials

The main textbook will be the course reader Anthropology of Religion: The Unity and Diversity of Religions, by Richley Crapo, Utah State University. You have to borrow a course reader at the department and return it back when the course

is finished. You will not be given a final grade until you return the reader. So, don't lose it or you will have to make another copy. Other sources include: 556 16 95 37

Hicks, D (2002) Ritual and belief, McGraw-Hill publishing

Bowen, J. (1998) Religions in Practice: an Approach to the Anthropology of Religion, Allyn and Bacon

Bowie, F. (2006) The Anthropology of Religion: Introduction, Blackwell Publishing

Lambek, M. (2008) A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion, Blackwell Publishing

Winzeler, R. (2008) Anthropology and Religion, Altamira Press

Grading scale

100-96 = A

95-91 = A-

90-86 = B+

85-81 = B

80-76 = B-

75-71 = C+

70-66 = C

65-61 = C-

60-56 = D+

55-51 = D

50-46 = D-

45 and lower = F

Schedule of classes

Week 1	
Tue, Sep 3	Course introduction
Thu, Sep 5	Course Introduction (lecture)
Week 2	
Tue, Sep 10	Anthropology and Religion (lecture)
Thu, Sep 12	Discussion of reading - John Bowen - Studying religion through practice - Edward Burnett Tylor - Religion in Primitive Culture Student presentation: - Emile Durkheim - The elementary forms of religious life
Week 3	
Tue, Sep 17	Definitions (lecture)
Thu, Sep 19	Discussion of reading - John Bowen - The twin transformations of "religion" Student presentations: - Talal Asad - The construction of religion as an anthropological category - Clifford Geertz - Religion as a cultural system
Week 4	
Tue, Sep 24	Human Body (lecture)
Thu, Sep 26	Discussion of readings: Required reading - Fiona Bowie - Body as Symbol Student presentations: - Beth Conklin - Thus Our Bodies, Thus Our Customs - Gananath Obeyesekere: Medusa's Hair
Week 5	
Tue, Oct 1	Ritual (lecture)
Thu, Oct 3	Discussion of readings: Student presentations: - Victor Turner's Ritual Symbolism, Morality, and Social Structure among the Ndembu
Week 6	
Tue, Oct 8	Myth (lecture)
Thu, Oct 10	discussion of reading - Fiona Bowie's "Myth" Student presentations: - Alfred Gell's "Closure and Multiplication: An Essay on Polynesian Cosmology and Ritual" - Edmund Leach's "Genesis as Myth"
Week 7	
Tue, Oct 15	KurbanAit – No classes
Thu, Oct 17	Discussion of readings: Fiona Bowie – Religion, Culture and Environment Students presentations: - Donald Crosby "Transcendence and Immanence in the Religion of Nature" - Byron Earhart "The Ideal of Nature in Japanese Religion and Its Possible Significance for Environmental Concerns"

Week 8	
Tue, Oct 22	Sex and Gender (lecture)
Thu, Oct 24	Discussion of readings: Fiona Bowie – Sex, Gender and the Sacred Student presentations: - Peggy Reeves Sanday - Epilogue - Serena Nanda - The Hijras of India
Week 9	
Tue, Oct 29	Witchcraft (lecture)
Thu, Oct 31	Discussion of reading: Winzler – Witchcraft and Sorcery: Past and Present, Far and Near Student presentations: - Evans Pritchard - Men Bewitch Others When They Hate
Week 10	
Tue, Nov 5	New Religious Movements (lecture)
Thu, Nov 7	Discussion of readings: Seminar, student presentations: - John Hall - Jonestown Apocalypse - Lorne Dawson - SokaGakai
Week 11	
Tue, Nov 12	New Global Context and Change(lecture)
Thu, Nov 14	Required reading for discussion: Robert Winzeler – Anthropology and Religion in a Global Context: The World Religions, Conversion and Complexity Student presentations: - Anthony Wallace - Revitalization Movements - Peter Worsley - Cargo Cults
Week 12	
Tue, Nov 19	Religion in Central Asia (lecture)
Thu, Nov 21	Discussion of readings: Foltz - Religions of the Silk Road) Student Presentations: - Foltz, Buddhism in Central Asia - Foltz - Nestorians in Central Asia
Week 13	
Tue, Nov 26	Religion in Central Asia (lecture)
Thu, Nov 28	Discussion of readings: Ismailbekova, Nasritdinov: Transnational Religious Networks in Central Asia Student presentations: - Marina Tolmacheva - Women and Atheism in Soviet Central Asia
Week 14	
Tue, Dec 3	Student research presentations
Thu, Dec 4	Student research presentations
Week 15	
Mon, Dec 10	Review for exam
Wed, Dec 12	Final Exam