Anthropology 308:
Anthropology of Religion

Monday and Thursday, 9:15 - 10:35, Bio-205, Douglass Campus

Prerequisite: Intro to Cultural Anthropology 01:070:101

Instructor: Assaf Harel
Email: assaf@rutgers.edu
Phone: 848-932-4107
Office Hours: Tuesday, 4:00 – 5:00
Thursday, 12:00 - 1:00
or by appointment
Ruth Adams #313

Course Description:

What does it mean to study religion anthropologically? This course introduces students to anthropological approaches of studying religion. We will explore multiple religious beliefs, meanings, experiences, expressions and practices across diverse sociocultural environments. For example, what may be the relations between spirit possession in Malaysia and our consumption habits here in the U.S.? What is modern about witchcraft? Can secular people be religious? In what ways New Media influence experiences of faith? Through an engagement with anthropological works on ritual, sacrifice, death, healing, religious activism and identities, to name a few, we will learn how religion is understood, experienced and expressed across different sociocultural environments, in the past, and within the contemporary moment. In addition, throughout the course, you will pursue individual research projects that will allow you to deepen your understanding of a specific question pertaining to religion and gain training in research, writing and presentation skills. In accordance, by the end of this course, you will gain theoretical knowledge and analytical tools that will enable you to critically examine sociocultural dimensions of the religion and situate them within historical and global context.

Course Objectives:

- To introduce students to theories of religion within anthropology such as structuralism, symbolic interpretation, representation, practice theory and phenomenology [CITE 1 see http://anthro.rutgers.edu/undergrad-program/department-learning-goals]
- To provide students an awareness of religion within diverse cultural environments at the U.S., international and global scales
- To encourage critical thinking on a range of dilemmas posed by readings and films [CITE 2]
- To develop students’ proficiency in speaking critically and effectively about the religion, its cultures and politics [CITE 5]
- To develop students’ ability to research and write cogently and/or persuasively about the sociocultural dimensions of religion [CITE 3 & 4]
Key Texts:

- Readings on Sakai
- A few more readings might be added during the course. This syllabus is thus subject to a few minor changes.

Assignments and Grading Structure (see schedule below for due dates):

Attendance and Participation 25%

Class attendance is required. No more than two absences will be accepted. If you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/ to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me. Active participation entails contributing thoughtful comments regarding presentations, readings, films, and group discussions during each class meeting.

Reading Notes 25%

Without a serious commitment to the readings, you will not learn as much about the anthropology of the religion as you hoped and deserve. Students are expected to complete all of the weekly readings before the first class and come to class prepared to discuss the material. In addition, students must bring the weekly readings to each class. Furthermore, to help your learning, each week you will prepare readings notes that should not be longer than one page. These notes can include summaries of readings and main arguments; questions that probe into the author’s arguments and methods and/or draw connections between that week’s readings or the previous week; general questions concerning the readings; reflections. The notes will be used to facilitate class and group discussion. You are expected to bring the notes to both of the weekly classes and submit them at the end of Thursday’s class. I will grade the reading notes as +√/√/-√. More specific instructions will be handed out in class and posted on Sakai.

Research Paper 30%:

Beginning in the first few weeks of the course, you are required to think about a final research project to be conducted during the semester. The final paper - which should be around 10 double-spaced pages - is to be a written analysis that illustrates how anthropological approaches for interpreting a particular religious phenomenon can be useful, or not, for further understanding a social issue of interest to you. The paper must demonstrate a grasp of the concepts you engage, contain a clearly stated research question, and provide a discussion of findings in relation to course readings. In addition, the paper must meaningfully cite at least 6 course readings. It is fine if you have no idea of what to explore. I will help you identify a topic that matches your interests. More specific instructions will be handed out in class and posted on Sakai. On Thursday, 02/09, you will submit a brief research proposal, of no more than one or two
paragraphs, in which you present a research topic. On Thursday, 03/23, you will submit a preliminary draft, which should be no longer than 2 pages and will include a clear research question, a rough outline, and an initial list of sources. In addition, you are encouraged to meet with me at least once to review your research project. The final paper is due on May 7th.

Presentation 20%:

You will present in class your research project. The presentation assignment is aimed to allow you to share your project with the rest of the class, further conceptualize your research project, receive critical feedback, and gain the opportunity to develop your public speaking skills. The presentation needs to incorporate visuals or audiovisual elements that enrich and/or support the main argument. The topic of your presentation will be determined and approved along with your research project. More specific instructions will be handed out in class and posted on Sakai.

Course Policies:

Academic integrity: The work you submit must be your own. Cheating and Plagiarism will not be tolerated. It is the students’ responsibility to be familiar with the rights and obligations associated with academic integrity. You are encouraged to read the full policy on academic integrity at the following website: http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-at-rutgers and to consult these resources for guidelines on producing academic work: http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/resources.

In Class: Please arrive on time for all class meetings. While in class, all mobile phones, iPods, etc. must be silenced. Laptop usage is permitted only as long as it is not bothersome to other students. For example, do not surf through your private information while sitting in front of other students who may be distracted. If you miss a class, contact another student in the course to find out what you missed and how to prepare for the next meeting. I encourage active debate and exploration of complex issues. At the same time, the classroom environment must be one of respect for conflicting views.

Submitting work for Evaluation: I will accept late work, but with a one grade reduction for each 24 hours period it is late.

Learning differences and support services: Any student with a disability requiring accommodations in this course is encouraged to contact me after class, during office hours or by email at the beginning of the semester. In addition, students will need to contact Disability Support Services in the Allen Center.

Note: Some of the material may be troubling to some students. If you have concerns about this, please speak with me early in the semester.
Course Schedule

Week 1 – Introduction – Th 01/19

Week 2 – Insider/Outsider – Mo 1/23, Th 1/26

Firth, Raymond

Jackson, Michael

Miner, Horace

Turner, Edith B.

Week 3 - Symbolism and Interpretation – Mo 1/30, Th 2/02

Daugherty, Mary Lee

Geertz, Clifford

Ortner, Sherry B.

Wolf, Eric R.

Recommended:
Asad, Talal
**Week 4 – Ritual – Mo 2/06, Th 2/09**

Heiko Henkel  

Kapchan, Deborah  

Myerhoff, Barbara G.  

Turner, Victor  

* Research Proposal Due

**Week 5 – Sacrifice – Mo 02/13, Th 02/16**

Halbertal, Moshe  

Hicks, David  

Hubert, Henri and Marcel Mauss  

Mason, Michael Atwood  

Recommended:  
Lienhardt, Godfrey,  
Week 6 – Specialists – Mo 2/20, Th 2/23

Bilu, Yoram and Eyal Ben-Ari

Hall, John R.

Margery, Wolf

Turner, Victor

Week 7 – Altered States – Mo 2/27, Th 3/02

Furst, Peter T and Coe, Michael D.

Harener, Michael

Hartogsohn, Ido

Ong, Aihwa

Week 8 – Healing and Disease – Mo 3/06, Th 3/09

Fadiman, Anne F.
Foster, George M. 1977 “Disease Etiologies in Non-Western Medical Systems,” American Anthropologist 78(4): 773-782


Kenyon, Susan M 1995 “Zar as Modernization in Contemporary Sudan,” Anthropological Quarterly 68(2): 107-120

**Spring Recess**

**Week 9 – Witchcraft, Sorcery and Magic – Mo 3/20 Th 3/23**

Evans-Pritchard, Edward 1939 Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande, Oxford Clarendon Press, pp. 63-83


* Preliminary draft due *

**Week 10 - Death – Mo 3/27, Th 3/30**


Conklin, Beth A. 1995 “‘Thus Are Our Bodies, Thus Was Our Custom”: Mortuary Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society,” American Ethnologist, 22 (1):75-101
Lock, Margaret  

Metcalf, Peter  

**Week 11 – Identities – Mo 4/03, Th 4/06**

Bowen, Donna Lee,  

Lewis, William F.  

Myerhoff, Barbara  

Rouse, Carolyn and Janet Hoskins  

**Week 12 – Activism – Mo 4/10, Th 4/13**

Darlington, Susan M  

Erzen, Tanya  

Juergensmeyer, Mark  

Harding, Susan F.  
Week 13 - The Contemporary – Mo 4/17, Th 4/20

Early, Evelyn A.

Klin-Oron, Adam

Luhrmann, Tanya M.

Week 14 and 15 – Conclusion and Presentations - Mo 4/24, Th 4/27, Mo 5/01

Final Paper Due May 7th