

Indigenous Religions and Ecology
F&ES 876, RLST 873/ EVST 270/ REL 877
Tuesday 2:30 - 5:20 p.m.
Lecture-Discussion Format

Instructor: John Grim

Classroom: ISPS 77 Prospect Street, A002 / or Kroon 321

Course Overview:

Opening with an examination of such terms as “indigenous,” “religion,” “traditions,” “lifeways,” and “ecology” we will consider the implications of these terms in the study of local peoples many of whose ways of life have been significantly altered by encounters with more developed societies. The course is focused on indigenous relationships with life-in-place, and the many ways that cultural values associated with lifeways are articulated in symbols, myths, rituals, and other embodied practices. Early on, we will also consider the “Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples” in an effort to understand the resurgence of indigenous voices in national and international settings.

A foundational approach in this study of religions among small-scale societies is lifeways. As an interrogative approach lifeways inquires into indigenous religious concepts and practices as both culturally differentiated, and cosmologically integrated. It suggests that religion should not be studied as separated from other indigenous social expressions, structures, subsistence practices, symbols, rituals, cosmologies, and ethical behaviors. Lifeway should not be understood as an unchanging concept, but as a means of social adaptation to historical interactions.

Using ethnographies this course explores how particular small-scale societies relate to local bioregions and specific sacred sites in the formation of identity and sovereignty. For example, the regard for sacred sites among indigenous peoples can be considered as nested realms, for example, kinship extends from human communities into biodiversity, bioregions, and/or stars and planets. Indigenous societies in such different settings as Asia, Africa, and Australia, relate to, and differ in their attitudes towards, the natural world.

This course triangulates religious studies, ecological studies, and ethnography to investigate ways in which small-scale societies approach their surrounding world. There are also contemporary questions about environmental justice related to indigenous peoples such as biopiracy, as well as pressures on some indigenous peoples to commit to mining, logging, and other extractive projects. We will attempt to understand the spiritual implications of place-based knowledge (IK/indigenous knowledge and TEK/traditional environmental knowledge) and religious ecology.

Another objective in this course is a cross-cultural and comparative examination of the ways in which native thought differs from text-based traditions. What are the contributions and differences of small-scale societies to the “world religions?” In short, this course on indigenous ecologies explores embodied human-Earth relations as an ongoing question having meaningful input into environmental discourse.

Course Goals

To consider the reflexive meaning for students of terms (e.g. lifeway, religion) used in the study of indigenous peoples as well as such diverse approaches as orality, stories, sharing knowledge, comparative religions, ritual studies, religion and ecology, and ecojustice/environmental justice.

To examine both local and global contexts in which indigenous peoples variously named as Minorities, Aboriginal Peoples, First Peoples/Nations, Adivasi, Orang Asli, Native Americans/American Indians, or Dayaks struggle to maintain their cultures, languages, and homelands despite assimilation, removal, and genocide by dominant societies, and resource extractors.

To become aware of differences both between and within indigenous societies, especially cultural differences related to local environments. Some attention will be given to discussions of ethnography and the questions relating to outsider's reporting on indigenous culture.

To study the relationships in particular indigenous societies between experience, narrative, elders, ritual performance, land, and biodiversity.

To explore indigenous ways of knowing person/self, community/society, and place/cosmology. To examine indigenous practice as embodied knowledge.

To reflect on the importance of "decolonizing methodologies" for indigenous peoples evident in such international settings as the United Nations, IUCN, Climate Change, and REDD forums, as well as Interreligious Dialogues.

Course Grading

Undergraduate requirements may differ from graduate requirements -

Undergraduate: there will be a Mid-term exam and a Final exam in this course. Each exam will be a Take-Home with three essay questions each, and a week is given for completion.

Graduates: **Option 1** - two papers of 12-20 pages on topics determined by the graduate student and the instructor. They may be used accumulatively to explore a single topic and/or Native American people; **Option 2** - a Mid-term

exam and a Final exam, each exam will be a Take-Home with four essay questions each.

Course Texts

Diane Bell, Daughters of the Dreaming (Minnesota University Press)
 John Grim (ed.), Indigenous Traditions and Ecology (CSWR and Harvard Press)
 David Guss, To Weave and Sing (Univ. of California Press)
 Marina Roseman, Healing Sounds from the Malaysian Rainforest (U of CA Pr)
 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies (St. Martin's Press)

Course Articles - hopefully, all up online in classes V2-

"Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples" available on the web site for the Indigenous Environmental Network

Jacob Olupona, "The Study of Yoruba Religious Tradition in Historical perspective," in Numen Volume 40, Number 3, 1993 , pp. 240-273(34).

Nurit Bird-David, "'Animism' Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology," Current Anthropology 40, Supplement (February 1999): S67-S91.

David M. Smith, "An Athapaskan Way of Knowing: Chipewyan Ontology," American Ethnologist 25, 3, 1998: 412-432.

Tony Swain, "Dreaming, Whites and the Australian Landscape: Some Popular Misconceptions," The Journal of Religious History 15, 3, (June 1989): 345-50.

Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, "Cosmology as Ecological Analysis: A View From the Rainforest," from Rainforest Shamans: Essays on the Tukano Indians of the Northwest Amazon, pp. 7-20.

Rauna Kuokkanen, "The Logic of the Gift: Reclaiming Indigenous Peoples' Philosophies," Re-Ethnicizing the Mind? Cultural Revival in Contemporary Thought. pp. 251-71. Ed. T. Botz-Bornstein. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2006.

- Additional Texts, Journals, Web sites, Articles -

Cultural Survival magazine and web site - www.cs.org

Survival International web site - <http://www.survival-international.org>

Indigenous Environmental Network web site - www.ienearth.org

Catherine Bell, Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice (ritual studies)

Fikret Berkes, Sacred Ecology (excellent text on indigenous knowledge)

Julian Burger, The Gaia Atlas of First Peoples (overview of indigenous social justice issues)
 Sam Gill, Beyond the Primitive (a study of indigenous religious themes)
 John Grim, The Shaman (A study of Ojibway/ Anisinabe shamanism)
 Graham Harvey, (ed) Indigenous Religions: A Companion (study of persons, powers, gifts)
 Caroline Humphrey and Urgunge Onon, Shamans and Elders (Daur Mongols)
 Melissa Nelson, (ed) Original Instructions: Indigenous Teachings for a Sustainable Future
 Richard Nelson, Make Prayers to the Raven (Koyukon environmental ethics)
 Roger Moody (ed.), The Indigenous Voice: Visions and Realities (indigenous eco-justice issues)
 Jacob Olupona, Beyond Primitivism: Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity (Routledge)
 Wilmer, Franke, The indigenous voice in world politics : since time immemorial

Ronald Berndt, "Australian Religions: An Overview" in The Encyclopedia of Religion (Macmillan)
 Catherine Berndt, "Australian Religions: Mythic Themes" in The Encyclopedia of Religion (Macmillan)
 Rita Gross, "Tribal Religions: Aboriginal Australia," in Women in World Religions
 Terence Turner, "History, Myth, and Social Consciousness among the Kayapo of Central Brazil," in Rethinking History and Myth
 Van Beek, Walter E.A., "Dogon Restudies: Field Evaluation of the Work of Marcel Griaule," Current Anthropology 32,2,(April 1991), 139-167.

Course Readings

September 6th Introduction, terms, approaches, syllabus

[The opening class provides an overview of issues in the study of religion when used as an approach to study indigenous peoples. Terms, such as "indigenous," "religions," "traditions," and "ecology" are briefly explored.]

Sept. 13 All read: "Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples" And "Introduction" and "Prologue" from John Grim (ed.), Indigenous Traditions and Ecology (CSWR and Harvard Press) pp. xxxiii-lxiv.

Questions for consideration:

What is your own working understanding of "lifeways," "ecological imaginaries," and indigenous knowledge (IK). What does "the cosmological context" have to do with religion and ecology? In what ways can religions reclaim and reconstruct themselves in response to the environmental crisis?

Sept 20 All read: Nurit Bird-David, " 'Animism' Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology," Current Anthropology 40, Supplement (February 1999): S67-S91

Graduates read: Henare in Indigenous Traditions and Ecology pp 197-221

Questions for consideration:

How do you understand “relational epistemology?” How does the western notion of “person” relate to a particular indigenous people’s notion of “person?” How does Henare develop humanism and reciprocity in Maori philosophy?

Sept 27 All read: Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies pp. 1-106; and Sponsel, Indigenous Traditions and Ecology pp 159 - 174

Questions for consideration:

How can research imply a cultural orientation and a set of values that misunderstand the environmental relationships of indigenous peoples? In what ways can indigenous fragmentation be considered a consequence of imperialism?

October 4 All read: finish Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies pp. 107-199

Graduates read: Jacob Olupona, “The Study of Yoruba Religious Tradition in Historical perspective,” in Numen Volume 40, Number 3, 1993 , pp. 240-273 (34).

Questions for consideration:

In what ways does the 2nd part of Tuhiwai Smith's work differ from the opening part? Describe survival and self-determination as openings to research agendas? Describe the importance of one of Tuhiwai Smith's "projects." Draw out the implications of Jacob Olupona's article regarding Yoruba religion and ecology.

Oct 11 All read: selected articles from Indigenous Traditions and Ecology pp 3 - 71, 103 -124, and 175 - 195

Questions for consideration:

Discuss the ways in which native communities have been fragmented, and describe how that fragmentation has extended into the natural world. In what ways are indigenous cosmologies lived and complex?

Oct 18 All read: Bell, Daughters of the Dreaming, pp. 1-182; and Bell, and Treverrow in Indigenous Traditions and Ecology pp 465 - 493

Questions for consideration:

In what ways does the *jilimi* relate to the local bioregion? Describe the significance of *jukurrrpa* in understanding the lifeways of Central Australian

indigenous peoples? In what ways does Ngarrindjeri "women's business" constitute an eco-justice project?

Mid-Term Essay Exam – due in one week

Oct 25 All read: finish Bell, Daughters of the Dreaming pp 182 - 272

Graduates read: Swain, "Dreaming, Whites and the Australian Landscape: Some Popular Misconceptions," The Journal of Religious History.

Questions for consideration:

Why were Australian Aboriginal women often marginalized or excluded from land settlement discussions? What are the implications of "singing into the dreaming" and "singing into the secret side" for understanding the gender distinctions in the "One Law." Clarify key characteristics, identified by Bell, that link gender relations to land and Dreaming.

November 1 All read: Guss, To Weave and Sing, pp. 1-91

Graduates read: Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, "Cosmology as Ecological Analysis: A View From the Rainforest," from Rainforest Shamans: Eassays on the Tukano Indians of the Northwest Amazon, pp. 7-20.

Questions for consideration:

In what ways do Yekuana peoples relate myth and history - is this a method? a theory? Discuss sacred space in terms of the Yekuana roundhouse/ *atta*. How do cosmological forces interact in the making of a basket for the Yekuana? What connections does Reichel-Dolmatoff emphasize regarding Tukano cosmology and shamanic healing/practices?

Nov 8 All read: finish Guss, To Weave and Sing pp. 92 – 170; and Wilbert, Indigenous Traditions and Ecology pp 377 - 407

Questions for consideration:

Describe how Yekuana make culture daily by interrelating design, myth, and ritual performance? In what ways do Yekuana control the toxicity of material reality, as well as the potentially harmful activities of shamans? How do the Yekuana embody the metaphor of weaving in their lifeway? How does Warao IK and technology embody and respond to their land?

Nov 15 All read Roseman, Healing Sounds from the Malaysian Rainforest pp 1 - 184; and Brosius, Indigenous Traditions and Ecology pp 125-157; and Fried in Indigenous Traditions and Ecology pp 71 - 99

Questions for consideration:

How do Temiar songs interrelate their physiology, dreams, and landscape? How does the Temiar sense of ontology/being relate to sounds and odors? What is your understanding of the etiologies of illness among the Temiar? In what ways do the Temiar understand human action as having the potential to disorder the cosmos, and song as potentially reordering, turning, transforming the cosmos? What is Brosius' central point regarding use of the term "sacred" in indigenous research? How did the needs and expectations (lifeway?) of indigenous peoples in Borneo play out in the logging of their landscape?

Nov 29 All read: Grim, Indigenous Traditions and Ecology pp 541 - 670

Questions for consideration:

Discuss the different ways in which indigenous worldviews and the values they transmit are embedded in local landscapes. In what ways can these values be liberative for indigenous peoples in light of ongoing pressures from extractive industries, settlement, and other forms of development.

Final Essay Exam handed out, due Tuesday during exam week