

**INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD
SPRING SEMESTER 2015**

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DEPARTMENTS OF RELIGION & ANTHROPOLOGY

REL3988 SECTS. 07H4;
ANT3930 SECTS. 2315

T 7 / R 7-8 AND 13

Office Hours: T/R 9-12 a.m.
Anderson Hall 107C

Objectives of the course: This course seeks to understand comparatively the religious traditions of indigenous peoples from selected areas of the globe: the Pacific, Melanesia, and the Americas. The central objective of our studies of different indigenous religious traditions is to comprehend the principles by which cosmogonies (the creation) are founded, cosmologies (worldviews) are constructed, the variety of beings that populate the cosmos are inter-related, and eschatologies (views on the end-of-times) are envisaged. The course will begin with readings on the ways in which scholars have approached the study of traditional religions. Then, we will discuss the ways in which native peoples understand the cosmos, their place in it and the moral responsibilities humans have in relation to each other and to all other living entities. We will also discuss how religious traditions have shaped the histories of relations with non-indigenous peoples (the West), which can often be seen in religious movements such as prophetism.

Following this introduction, the course enters into a reading and discussion of ethnographies and comparisons among the religious traditions of the following indigenous peoples: native Hawaiians; the Maori of New Zealand; native peoples of Fiji; traditional peoples of Papua New Guinea; and Andean South America.

A series of central themes and questions will guide our readings, discussions and paper-writing:

- Cosmogony, or, the beginning of the cosmos: how is this understood ?
- Systems and properties of inter-related temporal and spatial structures of the cosmos;
- The importance of sacred geography (especially, sacred sites) and astronomy in traditional cosmologies;
- How do indigenous religious traditions actively incorporate notions of history and change into their spiritualities ?
- How do the different peoples understand their “place” and moral responsibilities in the cosmos as well as relations to other beings ?

- How is the relation between body and soul understood, and projected onto spatial and temporal structures of the cosmos ?
- How do traditional peoples conceptualize illness and health, the process of healing, within the wider context of beliefs about spiritual power in the cosmos ?
- What have been the influences of Christianity and more importantly, what has been the nature of conversion from the perspectives of native peoples ?
- What ideas exist of an end-time, or millennium, both in the 'traditional' context and in the post-Christian context ?
- How have Western views of indigenous religious traditions denigrated and misrepresented them in the history of colonialism ? How has the Christian understanding of history prevented the West from respecting indigenous religious traditions ?

Reading List

The basic readings for the course are:

1. Richard Katz, *The Straight Path of the Spirit. Ancestral Wisdom and Healing Traditions in Fiji*. Park Street Press: Vermont, 1999). Kindle edition.
2. Frédérique Apffel-Marglin, *Subversive Spiritualities. How Rituals Enact the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.*
3. Joel Robbins, *Becoming Sinners. Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004.*

Those marked with an asterisk are available for purchase at the UF Bookstore; those not marked can be found on reserve in Smathers. The book by Richard Katz is a Kindle e-book available through Amazon.com. Besides these, the most important Readings on Hawaiian and Maori religious traditions are posted on the Canvas course website. A series of films will also be screened to complement the Readings.

Course Requirements

The course requirements are:

- 1) Do Readings on time, according to course schedule; any changes in the readings will be announced in advance on the course Canvas e-learning website; pop-quizzes may be given to determine whether students are keeping up with the Readings (10%);
- 2) A mid-term take-home exam, worth 35% of the final grade;
- 3) Two (2) short Reflection Papers (750 words apiece) on films viewed in the course, worth 20% of final grade. Questions for reflection will be distributed prior to screening;

- 4) A final paper, 10 pp. in length, worth 35% of the final grade; topics to be announced shortly after the mid-terms have been returned.

Course Regulations

1. Plagiarism or cheating: Students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Students caught plagiarizing or cheating will automatically receive a grade of zero on the assignment in question and will fail the course. In addition, they will be reported to the appropriate university authorities. Please keep in mind that plagiarism does not consist only in copying verbatim someone else's material and presenting it as if it were yours. It also includes taking ideas (even paraphrased!) from an author without according him/her proper recognition (through a footnote, for instance). Other forms of cheating (particularly downloading material from the Internet and presenting as if it were yours) will also be subject to the same action. See <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/honestybrochure.htm> <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/academic.htm> for more information on UF policies.
2. Incompletes are strongly discouraged and will be given only when students who have finished most of the assignments satisfactorily cannot complete the final requirements due to unforeseen events. If this is the case, students must arrange for the incomplete before the end of the semester.
3. Make-up exams and quizzes will be given only under very special circumstances, such as a medical emergency. In that case, students must bring a doctor's note.
4. Students engaging in disruptive behavior will be asked to leave the classroom. Please turn phones and pagers off during class.
5. Students with Disabilities. Students requesting classroom accommodation or special consideration must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation or special consideration.
6. Attendance will be taken every class and discussion session; more than three unjustified absences will result in points taken off final grade. All absences should be justified with appropriate documentation. Consistent, late arrivals to class or consistent, early departures from class will also mean points deducted.