

Religion, Nationalism and Ethnic Conflicts

Course syllabus

Fall 2019

Prof. Alexander Agadjanian
Center for the Study of Religion

Course description

This course is elective, 4 credits, 152 hours course that explores the interaction between religion and ethnic/national identities in the modern world. The class draws upon a variety of particular cases belonging to different religious traditions as they are intertwined with ethnic and national identities through sacralization, symbolic legitimation and/or motivation to action. The conflicts, involving religious actors and rhetoric, will be analyzed and monitored throughout the class. The students are supposed to pick one of the complex cases and prepare portfolios that will eventually put together into a final essay. The special focus of the course will be the social and political processes in the areas of the former Soviet Union.

Learning Objectives

The main learning objectives are as follows:

- ✓ students acquire theoretical knowledge of major approaches in the studies of religion, ethnicity, national identities and nationalism;
- ✓ students learn to use currently recognized tools and methods in the social scientific study of religion ;
- ✓ students are supposed to search and read relevant academic texts in the English language;

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the class students will develop the following competences

Universal competences and skills:

- ✓ Understanding complexity of social interactions;
- ✓ Searching and analyzing primary sources such as mass media, analytical reporting, qualitative narratives, quantitative and statistical data;
- ✓ Basic knowledge of conflict theories; theories of nationalism and ethnicity; theory of secularization and de-secularization;
- ✓ Structuring continuous multi-leveled portfolios drawing on both mass media reporting and academic literature.

Special competences and skills:

- ✓ Understanding the nature and forms of ethnic and national identities,

combining constructivist, historical *longue durée*, and postmodern/poststructuralist approaches;

- ✓ Understanding basic differences between “nation” and “ethnos” as social-scientific signifiers, and its applications to various current cases;
- ✓ Knowledge of geopolitical and local conflicts and the role of religious and nationalist actors in these conflicts;
- ✓ Ability to analyze complex relationship between religious, ethnic, and national identities, as they are interacting with political, economic and broader cultural development of particular regions.

Class content and assignments:

Themes that form the basic content of the class:

Ethnicity and religion
Nation, Nationalism and religion
National identity and religious identity
Globalization and religion
Diaspora, Nationalism and Religion
Multiple modernities and religion
The logic of religious violence
Religious nationalism in Post-Soviet states

Assignments: During the class the students are supposed to make three assignments: two oral presentations; one written essay, with a literature review; developing a portfolio of a particular case. The cases are to be chosen by the second weeks of class. These are particular cases where religion, national identity and ethnicity interact in one or another way. Here below you one can find a tentative list, though each student can pick any other relevant case beyond this list.

A tentative list of cases

Europe: Former Yugoslavia: Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Kosovo; Northern Ireland; Poland; Greece; Muslims in Europe.

Middle East: Iran, Egypt, Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Kurds, “Islamic State”

Asia: India, Indonesia, Tibet (China), Xinjiang (China), Sri Lanka, Myanmar

Americas: United States, Quebec (Canada), Latin America: Chile, Peru, Mexico, Brazil

Africa: Nigeria, Sudan

Former Soviet Union: Northern Caucasus (Russian Federation), Baltic States, Tatarstan (Russian Federation), Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Central Asia.

Assignments and criteria of evaluation:

Oral presentations: One presentation is introductory to the chosen case, based on generally available data and material. The second presentation includes results of an

academic, in-depth study of the case. The criteria of assessment include ability of presenting and interpreting data: clarity, logic, responsiveness (when questioned).

Written essay: The written essay is assigned by the end of the class; it must basically include a review of the academic literature on the chosen case. The criteria of assessment are: clarity of writing style, thorough documentation/reference style, creating logical structure of the essay.

Portfolio: Each student, after picking up a particular case, starts working on a portfolio that he/she continues to develop until the end of class. The portfolio includes different “layers” starting with general, introductory material; moving then to mass media reports and primary source material, including mass media, analytical reporting, blogs and forums, statistical data, qualitative studies of narratives,; moving then to a review of academic literature and analytical literature; finally, the elements of independent analysis of the case under study. Here the criteria are: completeness of various “layers” of the portfolio, and interconnections between them.

Grading:

As a maximum, each students gets 100 points, including:

Class attendance: 10 points

2 oral presentations: 30 points

Written essay: 20 points

Case portfolio: 40 points

Literature (required and optional, to be specified by the lecturer):

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Community: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso Press, 1983

Appleby, John. *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*. Notre Dame University Press, 1999

Armstrong, Karen. *Fields of Blood. Religion and the History of Violence*. 2015

Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*. Anchor Books, 1990.

Brubaker, Rogers. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. New York; CambridgeUniversity Press 1996

Hobsbawm, Eric J. *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. 2nd ed. New York: CambridgeUniversity Press, 1992

John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds. *Nationalism*. Oxford UP, 1994

Jurgensmeyer, Marc. *Terror in the Mind of God. The Global Rise of Religious Violence*. 2003

Jurgensmeyer M. and M. Kitts, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, 2015.
Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival*. (Norton, 2007).

Renard, John. *Fighting Words: Religion, Violence and the Interpretation of Sacred Texts*. 2012

Stephen Prothero, *God Is Not One*. Harper One, 2011.

Van der Veer and Lehman, eds. *Nations and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia*. Princeton 1999.

Zubrzycki, Genevieve, *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland*. Chicago UP, 2006

Nationalism website: <http://www.nationalismproject.org/what.htm>

Nationalism: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nationalism/>

Race: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/race/>

State, Nation and Religion in the Muslim World (A project by Swedish Institute in Istanbul) <http://www.srii.org/page/state-nation-and-religion-in-the-muslim-world>

Relevant journals to be consulted:

Ab imperio, Ethnicities, The Journal of Conflict Studies, National Identities, Nationalities papers, Nations and Nationalism, Religion, State and Society, State, Religion and Church (Государство, религия, церковь в России и за рубежом), Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism.

There are many other journals dealing with particular *regions*, such as Europe-Asia Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, Modern Greek Studies, Asian Studies etc.

Course Outline:

Lecture 1: Introduction to the class.

Lecture 2: Basic theoretical frames of understanding religion in a “secular age”

Seminar 1: Discussing the cases chosen by the students.

Seminar 2. First oral presentations by the students of the chosen cases.

Seminar 3. First oral presentations by the students of the chosen cases (cont'd)

Lecture 3. Nation, national identity, and ethnicity in the modern world: an overview of major theoretical approaches.

Lecture 4. Understanding current religious and national conflicts: An example of the Post-Soviet developments.

Lecture 5. Understanding connections between religious and national identities: the concept of “civil religion” and the multicultural/multireligious setting.

Seminar 6. Second oral presentations by the students of the chosen cases.

Seminar 7. Second oral presentations by the students of the chosen cases (cont'd)

Lecture 7. Re-inventing ethnicity and religion in the age of globalization.

Seminar 8. Presenting and discussing portfolios developed throughout the class.
Written essays due at this point.