

Syllabus

Transformations and current developments of Armenian Religious Identities

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Course Description:

The course is designed to discuss issues surrounding Armenians' current religious identities in light of the political and cultural transformations of the last decades. The Armenian case is a good illustration of how religious identities are closely intertwined with other types of identities (national, ethnic, social, and cultural), how religion can influence the ways and processes of national and cultural development, and how external realities can challenge religious, national, and cultural stereotypes. The course also explores different levels and types of religiosity within the confessions and movements currently existing among Armenians of Armenia and Armenian Diaspora, levels. It also examines the specifics of religious discourse unfolding in Armenia and pan-Armenian cultural space.

The course is intended for students focusing on Armenian Studies, Post-Soviet studies, and Middle Eastern Studies. It is based partly on my own field research, partly on the literature listed below.

Content:

1. Introduction to the course. What is religious identity? Where does it stand with regard to ethnic, national, social, and cultural identities? What does religious identity mean in a secular state, and what cultural and social connotations does it imply? What are mechanisms and boundaries of shaping a religious identity?
2. Soviet heritage. Politics of military atheism, secularization processes and specific relationships of dominant churches with Soviet government under the Soviet rule. What crucial changes and modifications of religious consciousness and identity occurred in the

Soviet period? What was the religious situation just before the collapse of the Soviet Union?

3. From national religion to state religious ideology/institution. The Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC) as a national institution, faith, symbol of Armenianness, reification of Religion. This week will examine facets of religious and secular in perception of the AAC. What do institutional changes the AAC is currently undergoing inflict upon its role, status, content and meaning? Choice between spirituality and ideology as a social, cultural and political process. Strategies of “Reconquista” that is re-establishment of dominance or at least ideological priority of the AAC in the religious and public spheres. Current public discourse on AAC: re-considering its meaning as a key religious ideology and community institution in Armenia. Religiosity and religious involvement patterns within the Armenian Apostolic Christianity.
4. “Other” Armenians. Armenian Catholics and Armenian Evangelical Church. Short introduction to history of the Armenian Catholics and Armenian Protestants. How the ethnic and national identities are refracting through the alternative religious identity: Diaspora and Armenia cases. Secular mechanisms of reconciliation of different religious identities: charity practices and pan-Armenian philanthropic organizations. Shaping and constructing “Armenianness” as the “sacred” which is upon all religious, political, and ideological discrepancies.
5. New religious movements. Intellectual ambiance and New Age-type movements in Armenia: religious mysticism, western healing and divination practices, shamanism, and Eastern religion practices. Search for national identities beyond the Christianity and opposed to Christianity. Armenian neo-paganism: cults of the “Ancient Gods,” invented

rituals and symbolism, neo-paganistic spiritualism and theodicy, religious interpretation of nationalistic ideology. The Ancient Armenian History as a Myth and Myth as a re-born History. Arianism as a new identity. Armenian neo-pagans (“Arordis”) as a community: current developments and processes.

6. New protestant movements in Armenia: “Sects or religions?” What does “sect” mean in post-soviet Armenian cultural environment? Mechanisms and ways of intrusion and scattering of western protestant movements: views and interpretations from inside and outside. Motivations and incentives of people’s involvement into the different protestant churches and religious movements. Modifications of religious and national identities of adherents of those movements. Public and clerical discourse on contemporary religious movements in Armenia. New protestant-type religious movements in Diaspora: search for spirituality versus nationalism and ethnicity focuses (case of the Armenian Community in Lebanon)
7. “Folk faith”: the newest developments of the Armenian vernacular Christianity as models of religious identity and religiosity. Vernacular religious practices as ways of constructing and shaping worlds and identities (recent migrations cases). Local pilgrimages and religious tourism as a way to shape identity. Archaic healing, witchcraft, and divination practices in a system of soviet and post-soviet Armenian vernacular religiosity.
8. Discourses on religion, religiosity, secularism, and Church among soviet and post-soviet Armenian intellectuals and intelligentsia (changing facets and edges of religious and secular consciousness and identities). Rationalism versus spirituality and mysticism. Clericalism versus secularism. Religious freedom versus religious monopolies. Secular

mythology of religion related phenomena. Mythological and religious implications in secular practices meant to search for and re-gain identities (exemplified in touristic trips or “pilgrimages” to the Western Armenia, current territory of Turkey).

READING LIST:

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Agadjanian, Alexander. 2006. The search for Privacy and the Return of a Great Narrative (Religion in a Post-Communist Society), *Social Compass*, Vol. 53, pp. 164-184.

Asad, T. 2003. Formations of the secular: Christianity, Islam, modernity. Stanford, Calif., Stanford University Press.

Beeman, William O. 2001. Fighting the Good Fight: Fundamentalism and Religious Revival. in: *Anthropology for the Real World*. Edited by Jeremy MacClancy. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp. 129–144.

Beckford J., 2003. *Social Theory and Religion*, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

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- Casanova J. 1994. Public Religions in the Modern World, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
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<http://iseees.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/u4/2009-08-Charles.pdf> (last visit 12.02.2010).
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- Hastings, Adrian. 1997. The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism. Cambridge University Press.
- Herzig, Edmund and Marina Kurkchyan (eds.). 2005. The Armenians Past and Present in the Making of National Identity. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 229-244
- Hobsbawm, Eric. 2003. Introduction: Inventing Traditions, in: Ed. Hobsbawm, Eric and Ranger, Terence. The invention of Tradition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
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- Panossian, Razmik. 2002. The Past as a Nation: Three Dimensions of Identity // Geopolitics, Vol. 7, No. 2, p.126-130.
- Primiano Leonard. N. 1995. Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklore // Reflexivity and the Study of belief, Western Folklore, Vol. 54. No. 1 (Special Issue), pp. 37-56.

Religion and Identity in Modern Russia. The Revival of Orthodoxy and Islam. Ed. by J. Johnson, M. Stepaniants, B. Forset. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005.

Anthony Smith D. 2001. Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History. Cambridge: Polity Press

Tchilingirian Hratch. 1998. Religious Discourse on the Conflict in Nagorno Karabakh //

„Religion in Eastern Europe”, Vol. XVIII, No. 4 (August)

www.georgefox.edu/academics/undergrad/departments/soc-swk/ree (last visit 12.02.2010).

In Armenian:

Antonyan Yu. Yerb herosy darnum e Astvats. Garegin Nzhdehy ev hay nor hetanosnery (When the Hero becomes God: Garegin Nzhdeh and the Armenian neo-pagans), Problems of Armenian Ethnology and Archeology, vol. 3, Yerevan, 2007, in Armenian

Antonyan Yu. . Qahanan mtnum e gyugh. Araqelakan ekeghetsu verahastatman ardi gortsyntacneri vorosh aspektner (Priest enters the village: some aspects of re-institutionalization process of the Armenian Apostolic Church)//Armenian Folk Culture, vol. XIV, Yerevan, 2007, in Armenian

Hayots srbery ev srbavairery (Armenian saints and sactuaries). 2001. Eds. Harutyunyan S., Kalantaryan A., Yerevan: Institute of Archeology and Ethnography of National Academy of Sciences of RA.

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Antonyan Yu. Vossozdanie religii: Neo-yazychestvo v Armenii (Re-building of a religion: neo-paganism in Armenia), *Laboratorium*, #1, 2010, [www](http://www.laboratorium.ru).

Antonyan Yu. Religiozno-magicheskie i tselitel'skie praktiki v sovremennoj gorodskoj srede Armenii (Magical and healing practices in Armenia's contemporary urban environment) // *Figuring out the South Caucasus: Societies and environment*, collection of papers supported by H. Boel Foundation South Caucasus, 2008

Antonyan Yu. Witchcraft in Modern Armenian culture // *Zhivaya Starina* (Moscow), #4, 2006

Shnirelman V. A. 1998. Neoyazychestvo i natsionalizm. Vostochnoevropskij areal (Neopaganism and nationalism. Eastern European region) // *Issledovaniya poprikladnoj i neotlozhnoj etnologii* 114. Moskva: Institut etnologii i antropologii RAN.

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