

Boston University Niger

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AN 341 Syllabus

Topics in Culture and Society in Niger: Human Ecology, Identity and Social Values

Introduction

Understanding life in Niger demands a vast survey of diverse peoples and social customs. This course explores Nigerien concepts of identity as a composite of many inter-connected and inter-related elements. An examination of Nigerien culture and society in this way provides a more informed stance for exploring aspects of life in Niger. Sahelian and Saharan communities live with strong connections to the natural and physical environment (seasons, livelihood, and terrain) as well as the social environment (family, village, and neighbors near and far). This socio-cultural study often uses comparative analyses to enrich our understanding of the many ways in which Nigeriens define their place in the world.

Overview

The course will provide a foundation for understanding Nigerien culture by combining a study of important historic social influences with major socio-cultural environments in both rural and urban settings. Next, there will be a two week focus on intra-cultural diversity in two pastoral cultures followed by a special topic class: a comparative analysis of urban street children. Finally, an analysis of rural education, rites of passage, and spiritual beliefs in two sedentary populations will examine how various socio-cultural institutions shape concepts of identity and social values. This three part study includes the influential social layers of the historically important past, contemporary livelihood strategies, and examples of socio-cultural institutions to demonstrate the interdependent struggles and strengths of Nigerien culture and society.

Research Project

An important aspect of this course is an independent research project which includes traditional media research as well as field research. Each student chooses an aspect of Nigerien culture to explore. There should be a discussion of how concepts of identity, social organization and social values are imbedded in the research topic. At several times during the semester short meetings or written updates will provide opportunity for coaching and advice. The final product will be a journal or notes, a written report, and an oral presentation outlining your study. There is a list of research topic examples following the course schedule. More details on format to be provided in class.

Oral Presentation of Reading

Four times during the semester a combination of readings will be assigned to the class to facilitate a more participatory approach to our lecture and discussion. We can cover more literature if everyone has a different reading to contribute to a discussion. Each student will have a reading to report and/or comment on in outline form for a brief oral presentation. Weeks with a reading list marked: *******Reading Reports******* are weeks where students prepare oral presentations for class and are asked to contribute concepts learned from the readings as part of the discussion.

Course Format

This is a constructive course which uses a variety of sources to build knowledge. The class includes reading summaries and lectures combined with visits, guest speakers/interviews, a weekend field trip, maps, pictures, video and an independent research project. Classes with no readings will have a mandatory video showing or short field trip in addition to class hours.

Grading

Participation and Attendance	10%
Oral Presentation of Reading	20%
Mid-term	25%
Research Project	20%
Final Exam	25%

Course Schedule

Theme One – Foundations: empires, colonization, and urban and rural environments

Week 1 – Focus on History

Empires in Niger: Historical and Socio-Cultural Perspectives

Mali, Bornu, Songhai, and the Hausa Caliphates influence on regional centers, migration, social organization and historic socio-cultural change.

Readings

Hunwick, John. 1985. Sharia in Songhay: The replies of al-Maghili to the questions of Askia al-Hajj Mohamed.*

Last, Murray. 1967. The Sokoto Caliphate.*

Louis, Brenner. The Shehus of Kukuwa: A History of the Al-Kanemi Dynasy of Bornu.*

Hall, Bruce. 2006. Seminar Paper at Johns Hopkins African Seminar 12/1/06: *Land, social status and questions of 'black-ness' in the Songhay-speaking Niger Bend, c.1893-1940.*

Colonization, Post-Colonization and Modernity

The French impact, post-colonial life, and syncretic modernities with special attention to conflicting ideas of nationalism and ethnic identity and the concept of becoming modern.

*****Readings*****

Fugelstad, Finn. (1983) *A History of Niger 1850-1960*. chap. 3 and 4.

Stoller, Paul. 1995. *Embodying Colonial Memories*. chap. 7 and chap 10.

Week 2 – The City

Niamey, Urbanization and Urban Migration

The city's history, growth, neighborhoods, and present dynamics. Concepts of status in urban employment, the porous rural-urban boundary, and the development of national and international-migration patterns as coping strategy turned lifestyle.

Reading:

History of Niamey*

Video: Rouch, Jean. Jaguar.

Markets

A comparative analysis of rural and urban markets focusing on the rural market network as the basis of social and economic exchange and the development of Niamey's urban markets, old and new. Themes of socio-economics and culture-specific participation patterns will form the basis of the analysis.

Readings

Beckwith, Carol and Marion van Offelen. 1993. *Nomads of Niger*. Pgs. 89-95.

Masquelier, Adeline. 2001. *Prayer Has Spoiled Everything*. Pgs. 197-217.

Includes important places in Niamey tour and market visits.

Week 3 - The Countryside

The Environment, Culture Mapping and Ethnic Diversity

The natural and cultural environments from a human ecology perspective concentrating on the inappropriateness of country borders in terms of influential cultural centers. Identify socio-cultural regions while identifying the diversity of cultures within cultures and concepts of cultural cohesion.

Livelihoods, Subsistence Lifestyles, and the Environment

Lifestyle as the subsistence economies people have created to survive in the Sahelian and Saharan landscape while interacting with the rhythms of the seasons. (Farming, Herding, Fishing, Gardening, Commerce, Crafts)

*******Readings*******

Charlick, Robert. 1991. Niger: Personal Rule and Survival in the Sahel. Pgs. 1-17, 27-33, and 98-110.

Franke, Richard W and Barbara H Chasin. 1980. Seeds of Famine: Ecological Destruction and the Development Dilemma in the West African Sahel. Chap. 4.

***Think about research project topics for next class.

Theme Two - Pastoral Lives: values, social organization and lifestyle.

Week 4- The Fulani-

Fulani Lives Across the Nigerien Landscape

A comparative look at pastoral lifestyles among the Jelgoobe of Liptaako, The Hausa Fulanis of Arewa, the Wodaabe of Damergou, the Fulani of the Ayorou area, and the transitory Ouda of the Western Lake Chad Basin).

Readings:

Bovin, Mette. 2001. Nomads Who Cultivate Beauty: Wodaabe Dances and Visual Arts in Niger.

Beckwith, Carol and Marion van Offelen. 1993. Nomads of Niger. Pgs. 29-31.

Reisman, Paul. Freedom in Fulani Social Life. 1-25.

DUE ***Ideas for research project*******

Being Fulani

The concept of Pulaku and Fulani values as it relates to identity, behavior, and Fulani social organization.

*******Readings*******

Beckwith, Carol and Marion van Offelen. 1993. Nomads of Niger. 17-29, 113-124

Iro, Ismail. 2004. Chapters 3, 5, 6, and 8 from Zumunta Conference. Abuja, Nigeria.

Reisman, Paul. Freedom in Fulani Social Life. 52-73, 116-141, 245-256

Week 5- Mid-Term and Kel Tamasheq

Mid-term

Tuareg Societies of the Northern Sahel and Sahara

Tuareg social life with a focus on position within the community and society in different regions of Tuareg country today.

Readings:

Rasmussen, Susan. 1997. The Poetics and Politics of Tuareg Aging: Life Course and Personal Destiny in Niger. Pg 13-69

Baier, Stephen and Paul Lovejoy. 1977. The Tuareg of the Central Soudan: Gradations in Servility at the Desert Edge.*

Week 6 –Kel Tamasheq continued and Urban Street Children

Social Boundaries, Resistance and Authority in Kel Ewey Society

Discussions about the influence of kinship, gender, age, and class on social conduct. Defining social roles and the constant verbal and non-verbal dialogue that occurs as individuals from different social categories interact.

Readings:

Rasmussen, Susan. 1997. The Poetics and Politics of Tuareg Aging: Life Course and Personal Destiny in Niger. 110-159

The Street Children

Deconstructing the lives of poor, urban children who spend their days and sometimes nights alone in the street with a categorical analysis of different groups of children while discussing the various paths that led them to work, beg, or live in the street.

Readings:

De Sardan, Olivier, et al. 2007. *Interviews with Street Children in Niamey*. Pgs 1-12

Nowak, Brian. 2006. Home Has Left My Heart. Unpublished case study. Pgs 1-35

DUE **Notes from first couple of visits, plan, outline ideas******

Theme Three – Socio-cultural traditions in farming communities

Week7 – Concepts of Education and Marriage

Zarma/Songhai - Rural education, language and cultural knowledge

Zarma children construct knowledge, in their daily life and play, on a continuum of learning to refine their understanding and ability to participate constructively in their community. There is a focus on values concerning social responsibility, livelihood, language, and cultural knowledge are major themes of rural learning.

Readings

Bisilliat, J. 1972. Les Zamu ou Poemes Sur Les Noms. Selections.

Moumouni, Abdou. Education in Africa.

Hausa Marriage in the Arewa Region

Gender, youth, and socio-economics in Mawri marriage in Dogon-Doutchi. Hausa concepts of family, inter-dependence, and the socio-economics of becoming mature. Including a comparison with trends in urban weddings.

*******Readings*******

Masquelier, Adeline. 2004. How Is a Girl to Marry Without a Bed? Women's Value, Wealth, and Domesticity in Niger. Situating Globality. W. van Binsbergen and R. van Dijk, eds. Brill editions. *

Masquelier, Adeline. 2004. The Scorpion's Sting: Youth, Marriage, and the Struggle for Social Maturity in Niger. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (Man)*.*

Week 8 – Possession in Niger

Animism, Sorcery and Spirit Beliefs

Ethnography of spirit possession in Niger including music and video. The influence of spirit beliefs on concepts of being human, social organization and individual lives.

Readings:

Masquelier, Adeline. 2001. Prayer Has Spoiled Everything. Pgs. 134-153.

Stoller, Paul. 1995. Embodying Colonial Memories. chap 3, 8, and 9.

Musicians and a Priest: The Sounds of Possession and Life Stories

Performance and interviews with musicians and possession priest.

Readings

Masquelier, Adeline. 2001. Prayer Has Spoiled Everything. Pgs. 100-119.

Stoller, Paul. 1989. Fusion of the Worlds. Pgs. 100-125

DUE **notes, plan, draft, outline******

Week 9 – Area Study

Weekend Trip to Designated Area [Ayorou (or somewhere else TBD)]

Focus on livelihood, social organization, ethnic diversity, and interdependency of local communities. Includes journal writing and market activities. Possible alternate dates for this trip to be determined based on semester scheduling.

DUE **notes, plan, outline******

Week 10 – The Final Week

Presentations of Independent Research Projects

Final Exam

Research Topic Ideas

Symbolism of the Kola nut	Girl’s education
Women groups	Games and sports
“Foyandi”	Fashion
Caste systems	Superstitions and beliefs
“Cousinage”	Talibize
Henna	Koranic schools
Islam	Street Food as business
Baptism, marriage, funerals	Transportation
Women’s rights	Garage as micro-enterprise
Possession	Child birth
“Sorkos”	Household economics
Craft in Niger (pottery, leather, music, jewelry)	Jewelery

Plagiarism - All students are responsible for having read the ‘Boston University Statement on Plagiarism, which is available in the Academic Conduct Code. Students are advised that the penalty against students on a Boston University program for cheating on examinations or for plagiarism may be ‘expulsion from the program or the University or such other penalty as may be recommended by the Committee on Student Academic Conduct, subject to approval by the Dean.’

Bibliography

- *Baier, Stephen and Paul Lovejoy. 1977. The Tuareg of the Central Soudan: Gradations in Servility at the Desert Edge. Slavery in the Sudan. Ed. Igor Kopytoff.
- Beckwith, Carol and Marion van Offelen. 1993. Nomads of Niger.
- Bisilliat, J. 1972. Les Zamu ou Poemes Sur Les Noms. Centre Nigerien de Recherche en Sciences Humaine : Niamey.
- Bovin, Mette. 2001. Nomads Who Cultivate Beauty: Wodaabe Dances and Visual Arts in Niger.
- Charlick, Robert. 1991. Niger: Personal Rule and Survival in the Sahel. Westview Press. Boulder, Colorado.
- De Sardan, Olivier, et al. 200?. Interviews with Street Children in Niamey. LASDEL: Niamey, Niger.
- *Franke, Richard W and Barbara H Chasin. 1980. Seeds of Famine: Ecological Destruction and the Development Dilemma in the West African Sahel. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield,. Chapter 4
- *Fugelstad, Finn. 1983. A History of Niger 1850-1960. Cambridge University Press: New York.
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- *Masquelier, Adeline. 2004. How Is a Girl to Marry Without a Bed? Women's Value, Wealth, and Domesticity in Niger. Situating Globality. W. van Binsbergen and R. van Dijk, eds. Brill editions.
- *Masquelier, Adeline. 2004. The Scorpion's Sting: Youth, Marriage, and the Struggle for Social Maturity in Niger. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (Man)*.
- Nowak, Brian. 2006. Home Has Left My Heart. Unpublished case study.
- Stoller, Paul. 1989. Fusion of the Worlds. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL. Pgs. 100-125
- *Stoller, Paul. 1995. Embodying Colonial Memories. New York: Routledge.
- Reisman, Paul. 1977. Freedom in Fulani Social Life. University of Chicago Press. Chicago, Illinois.
- *Rasmussen, Susan. 1997. The Poetics and Politics of Tuareg Aging: Life Course and Personal Destiny in Niger. Pg 13-69
- Rouch, Jean. Jaguar. Video. CCFN Niamey.
- *Reading: History of Niamey. PhD Dissertation? University of Wisconsin-Madison? Will ask my friend for details.

* Books and journal articles I recommend that BU supplies for the program for this course and for the CFCA student library. Page numbers will be included in the syllabus when books arrive in Niamey. Other books and articles are in the library or in my possession.