DEPARTMENT OF GLOBAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL STUDIES
Myth, Ritual, Mysticism, ANT 3241

Fall, 2011
M,W,F, 10:00-10:50
Professor Ida Tafari
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Office hours: to be arranged

Course Description:

Myth, ritual and mysticism are traditional topics in cultural anthropology and their study has played an important role in the development of anthropological theory. They are important elements found in all societies, and constitute a part of the ethnographic articulation. This course will focus on a variety of belief systems, experiences and practices associated with religion and the supernatural including the religious use of drugs, divination, magic, and what the western world calls ‘witchcraft’, and sorcery. We will also assess secular myths. We will examine a wide range of cultures, small-scale societies and complex, globalized societies. Through readings, films, lectures and discussions, we will explore some of the theoretical frameworks anthropologist have used to account for religious behavior, as well as the modes of research and analysis that attempt to document such behavior. Students will conduct ethnographic or archival research on myth, ritual, and mysticism.

Students are urged to suspend their own cultural judgments about “true” versus “false” knowledge while recognizing at the same time, that anthropological research and writing are inherently political activities. Students are reminded that cross-cultural study not only provides us with a broader, more global perspective on the human condition, but also allows us to deepen our understanding of our own culture(s). The knowledge gained is a part of human development, and should deepen your perspective on life, your own social order, and how you live.

Course Requirements and Grading:

Research paper:

Students may work in groups. The group will select a topic in the area of ritual, myth, witchcraft, religion or mysticism and develop a presentation for the class. The presentation will cover work done in the area, the various approaches to the study, the theory on why it exist today, perhaps the function it provides, and an analysis of the event or behavior. What are its psychological functions? How does the ritual reflect, support or oppose the values of the broader culture in which it is embedded? This research paper is an ethnographic writing, that is, it is descriptive. It will cover the data collection experience in carrying out the research, or if archival, the research agenda, theoretical basis, a bibliography of sited works, encounters and
informant, and references should be included. Students may research secular behaviors as well as religious behaviors. Popular culture rituals continuously emerge in society, and are worthy of analysis. Students are expected to talk with the professor about topics selected and their perceived method of collecting data. The work may be ‘field oriented’ or archival. The research can not contain all internet references. The paper must contain scholarly academic references in the areas of Sociology and Anthropology. That is students are expected to use the anthropological scholarly literature in their work. Papers should be 5 to 7 pages, double space, and at least three primary references.

Two Events:

Each term FIU Programs in Africa and African Diaspora Studies, Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and student clubs bring scholars to campus, films, cultural events which lend to our studies. From time to time events are scheduled in Miami which compliment the course criteria. These may be used as events for the course. The event descriptive assessments should be 2 to 3 pages, descriptive and written in an ethnographic format. Attendance at two events is required.

Student Evaluation

There will be at least three multiple-choice exams. They are not cumulative. The exams are based on class readings and films. Films are a valued source of information for this course. They are not shown for entertainment, but rather the scholarly content they present and lend to our text. Most films shown are documentaries or in some way ethnographic representations of culture.

Students are encouraged to ask questions and contribute comments to the class discussion. Students should use the Center for Excellence to review their research papers for grammar and appropriate sentence structure if you know this will benefit your writing. It is critical that students listen to one another respectfully and avoid interruption and overly digressive comments. Credit is given for participation, and it is one of the only ways I get to know you. It is expected in a third year course that you come having read the work, and prepared to comment on it, and respond to it in class. The structure of the class allows a space for lecture, for film and for commentary and discussion from students.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. To gain an understanding of the nature of mythology and the importance of rituals in human societies.
2. To gain a deeper insight into one's own worldview and perspectives.
3. To evaluate the causes and effects of mysticism; upon individuals, religious traditions and cultures.
4. To integrate understandings of mysticism with analysis of human experience.
5. To assess the role of mystical experiences in various cultures.
6. To become a contemplative and critical thinker.

The course will consist of lectures and group discussions, and most importantly, you are expected to keep-up with the readings and be an active participant. Attendance is mandatory.
Required Texts:


On Reserve: Readings from:


*To keep the cost of books down, I have put #3, #4 and #5 on reserve at the circulation desk. I have placed some articles electronically on the course reserve list for ANT 3241. You can go into Course Reserve and download these papers. Readings are assigned from these texts and are included on the test. They are also excellent references for project topics. Although my focus is Africa and the African Diaspora, students do not have to limit their work to these populations.*

Associated text which may be useful:

*The Old and New Testaments*
*The Koran*
*The Torah*

**The I Ching: The Book of Changes**

*An additional reading list of suggested work will be handed out.*

**Check the reserve shelf to see what else has been added. These books are for your reference and to assist in guiding your work.**

**GRADING CRITERIA:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>10% (extra credit)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Test 1</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>Test 2</td>
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<td>Test 3</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Presentation/</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Summary paper and bibliography</td>
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Attendance at two events achieves: extra credit. The events will be identified during the term.

No make-up exams!!!
No late research papers will be accepted!!!
Research papers must be submitted prior to the Thanksgiving Holiday.

GUIDELINES ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Students have an obligation to exhibit honesty in carrying out their academic assignments. Students may be found to have violated this obligation if they plagiarize or cheat. Plagiarism is presenting the work of others as one’s own and cheating is taking or accepting any illicit advantages for any course work inside or outside of the classroom. Refer to Florida International University’s catalog for further information.

Class Schedule:

Week 1 Aug. 22-26
Course Introduction
The Anthropological Study of Religion
Stein, pp 1-27

Film: Strange Beliefs, Evans Pritchard in Africa (Nuer and Azande)

Aug. 29-Sept. 2
Myths
Stein, pp 28-54
SUNDIATA: An Epic of Old Mali, D.T. Niane, pp.1-59
Assignment: Write a two page description of how you got your name.
Film: Keita: The Story of a Groit


Sept. 5-9
Religious Symbols
Stein, pp 56-81
(Alternative read)
Film: Africa Unite/ Coping with Babylon
Ritual: Stein pp 83-109
Sept. 12-16  Film: Guardians of the Flutes (50min) GN671, .N82  1994
Victor Turner, “Betwixt and Between” 46-55. (on reserve). Lehmann and
James E. Myers (2001) In; Magic, Witchcraft and Religion:

Optional Reading (on reserve). Some, Malidoma Patrice (1999), Chapter 15, “Initiation: a
response to challenges of the west. (Hand out). In: The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding life
purpose through nature, ritual, and community. (if you are interested in this reading check with
the Professor)

Sept. 19-23  The myths, rituals, and symbolic meaning of controlling reproduction.
Female Circumcision (see) Lehmann and James E. Myers (2001) on
reserve In; Magic, Witchcraft and Religion: pp 56-63
Film: Monday’s Girls (Africa)

Sept. 26-30  Altered States of Consciousness and Religious Specialists
Shaman Priest and Prophets
Stein: pp110-135
Film: The Peyote Road (60 min) UNIV PARK AV

Oct 3-7  The Religious and Indigenous Use of Substances
Chapter 6 from “Jamaican Folk Medicine” on reserve. (hand-out)
Medical Dilemma: Africa and Europe
Pharmaceutical cultures of the western world (a discussion)

Oct 17-21  Magic and Devination pp. 136-160
Film: Native American Spirituality. UNIV PARK AV L 80.2 N39  1998

Oct. 24-28  Souls, Ghosts, and Death  161-187

Oct 31-Nov.4  Halloween: Come in Costum…
Film, Witches. UNIV PARK AV BF 1566. 148 1999
Witchcraft and Sorcery
New Age Culture in the U.S.

Nov. 7-11  Gods and Spirits
Stein, pp 194-223
Revitalization Movements, Stein, pp 247-278
(Santeria, Vodou, Pocomania, Shango Baptist, etc/
Anthony Wallace, Synchronized Traditions of the Diaspora, Spiritualism.
Brown, Vodou. (Lehmann and Myers). The Occult
See: Internet link: Living Vodou, Transcript or Audio Program, Sunday
July 1, 2007 NPR Speaking of Faith . Dr. Bellegarde-Smith.
Film: Divine Horseman
Nov. 14-18  Rituals of Migration, Deportation, War, and so on…
Identity rituals of trans-nationalism, migration, and citizenship. Reading to be assigned
Films: Bronx Princess, and Paper Dreams

Nov. 21-25  Other topics permitting there is time: It differs from one term to the next.
Stein, pp 136-163
Witchcraft Among the Azande (52 min.) BBAY DT 155.2. A93 W58 1986

Thanksgiving:

Nov. 28-Dec. 3  Student Presentations