MAGIC AND RELIGION:
ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES

ANTHROPOLOGY 373
Spring 2012

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00-3:20
Eggers 010

Instructor: John Burdick
My e-mail: jsburdic@maxwell.syr.edu
Office phone: 443-3822
Office location: 209 Maxwell Hall
Office Hours: MW 4-5

Through lectures, readings, films, discussion, and your own field project, this course will apply an anthropological perspective to the following questions: how do people around the world conceptualize the spiritual realm and act in relation to it? What are the differences and similarities between “emic” (insider) and “etic” (scientific outsider) understandings of spiritual power and action? How are beliefs and action in relation to the spiritual realm shaped by human social, political, and cultural forces? In what ways do spiritual belief and action exert influence on human society, politics, and culture?

SU class in a Brazilian umbanda temple, 2009
Readings
• Sabina Magliocco, Witching Culture (please purchase at University bookstore)
• Sherine Hafez, An Islam of Her Own (please purchase at University bookstore)
• All other readings are posted on the course Blackboard site.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Due date</th>
<th>Percent of final grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance..................</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation..................</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<td>Segment paper 1..................</td>
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<td>Segment paper 2..................</td>
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<td>Segment paper 3..................</td>
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<td>Ethnographic paper..................</td>
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COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1) Attendance (10%).

An attendance sheet will be circulated during each class meeting. Excused absences are for documented illnesses, deaths in the family, and direct participation in SU team events. They are not for anything else.

1-2 unexcused absences.......................... A
3 unexcused absences.......................... B
4 unexcused absences.......................... C
5 unexcused absences.......................... D
6 or more unexcused absences.......................... F

2) Participation (5%)

I note participation in class discussions and exercises. Being in college means honing your skill in making your ideas, questions and doubts known in public. I do not expect you to be brilliant all the time, but I do expect you to be engaged and to articulate your questions and points in public. I do not expect you to jump into every session all the time, but I do expect regular involvement from you.
3) **Five papers on classroom material (10% for the first; 15% for the subsequent four)**

Near the start of each course segment, I will pass out a set of questions and guidelines. **Choose one question from the list, and answer it.** Papers will synthesize reading, lectures, films, and discussion. Each paper is 5-6 pages, double-spaced. No rewrites.

4) **An 8-10 page ethnographic paper about a religious or spiritual ritual or practice (20%)**

4.1 **The assignment**

“Ethnographic” refers to writing which describes a cultural activity or practice based on the writer’s *direct participant observation* in the activity or practice, and her *in-depth interviews* with regular participants in the activity or practice. “Religious or spiritual ritual or practice” refers to any activity engaged in by people that is intended to intensify communication between humans and spiritual entities. This may be something as simple as a solitary prayer or meditation or something as elaborate as a bar mitzvah, wedding, mass, shamanic séance or Wiccan circle-casting. By participating, observing, and interviewing people about the ritual or practice, your goal is to come to understand better the meaning of the ritual or practice to the people who engage in it.

4.2 **Rules of the assignment**

1) The paper must be based on at least one (1) session of direct participation by you in the ritual or practice and at least two (2) face-to-face interviews with other participants in the ritual or practice. Each interview must be at least 30 minutes long.

2) Please do not choose a ritual or practice which is socially or physically inaccessible, highly dangerous, or requires you engage in illegal behavior.

3) Choose a ritual or practice which is interesting and challenging to you. I prefer that you take this assignment as an opportunity to experience a religious tradition with which you are unfamiliar and/or in which you do not have much experience as a participant. If you wish to deepen your understanding of a tradition with which you are already very familiar, and/or in which you are a regular participant, you must ask me first. This course is about experiencing cultural realities that are new to you. Being unfamiliar with the activity or practice allows you to maximize the “cross-cultural” experience. Here are some examples:

- Attend a Wiccan ceremony or circle-casting, and interview two self-professed wiccans about what is involved in the ceremony
- Attend a Quaker meeting (on Euclid Avenue) and interview two people who attend such meetings regularly
• Attend a service at the Islamic Center of Central New York (on Comstock Avenue) and interview two people at the mosque about what the service means to them.
• Attend a Jewish service at temple, shabat ceremony, bar mitzvah, wedding, or any similar ritual
• Attend a Catholic mass, wedding, First Communion, prayer group, or other such session
• Attend a Protestant and/or Pentecostal prayer meeting, service, healing, etc.
• Attend a Zen meditation session at Hendricks Chapel, and interview two people who participate

4.3 The steps to preparing the paper:
1. **Identify a ritual or practice that interests you.** You can do this in one of two ways. You may already be aware of a practice you would like to witness; or begin by identifying a group in which you are interested. In either case, you obviously can only pursue a project if you have access to the activity and/or group.
2. **Determine whether you have a way to gain access.** The best is to think of someone who can help introduce you to the activity or ritual. Begin with someone – a friend, relative, roommate, co-student -- who can be your contact and guide and who may become your key informant.
3. **Permission.** It is courteous, responsible and ethical to seek permission before making observations. In situations in which participants have a reasonable expectation of privacy (e.g., a private religious ceremony), the courteous and ethical thing to do is to ask permission from those who are responsible for the activity (e.g., a pastor, rabbi, host, etc.).
4. **Write a 1-page project proposal.** On Thursday, February 16, you must give me a one-page summary of your proposed project. In it, you must identify the group you are going to be studying; the name or names of persons who will serve as your initial guides; the practice that you will be trying to describe; and a schedule for completing the research and writing the paper. **This report is not graded; however, failure to hand it in will result in a full grade deduction from the final paper.**
5. **Research the paper.** You must participate directly in the practice you are studying, and interview insiders to the group about the practice. Do your best to find out what you will be seeing in advance. The interviews must be no briefer than 30 minutes in length and should be closer to an hour long.
6. **Write a 1-page progress report.** On March 22 you must give me a one-page summary of your progress on the project, stating what you have accomplished so far and your plan to complete the observation and two interviews. **This report is not graded; however, failure to hand it in during this week will result in a full grade deduction from the final paper.**
7. **Hand in the paper.** The paper is due in class on Thursday, April 5th.
General policies

Class courtesy: Please come to class on time. Once class begins, refrain from personal conversations. Please put away all non-course reading materials (e.g. newspapers). Turn off and put away all cell phones and text-messaging devices. Please avoid premature preparations to leave class.

Laptop policy: Laptop use in class is not permitted.

Plagiarism: I will not tolerate plagiarism or any other forms of cheating. If I find a case of cheating, you will receive an F on the assignment, possibly for the course, and will be reported to the relevant college administrator. I will go through plagiarism issues in class.

Paraphrasing: Avoid using long direct quotations of readings and/or lecture notes. Instead it is better to paraphrase those ideas, that is, to explain the ideas from the readings or the lectures or films using your own words. However, when you paraphrase, you MUST STILL CITE THE SOURCE of the idea. If you fail to cite the source, you are implying that it is your own idea, and that is plagiarism.

Direct quotations: If you use direct quotations, then you must put the quotation within quotation marks and use the correct citation following the quotation. The format to be used for citations will be handed out with the first paper assignment.

For more information on plagiarism and the Syracuse University Compact on Academic Honesty please see http://www-hl.syr.edu/cas-pages/PromAcademicHonesty.htm

Students with disabilities who have registered with the Office of Disability Services should see me about accommodations to your needs.
PART 1:

SPIRITS AND MAGIC
EMIC AND ETIC PERSPECTIVES

Spirit mediumship

Reading:

- Aline Oliveira, “Incorporating a Pomba Gira”
- Kelly Hayes, “Feitiçeiras and donas-de-casa: the afro-brazilian spirit entity Pomba Gira and the cultural construction of femininity in Brazil”

T., Jan 17

Introduction to course

Th., Jan 19

Spirit mediumship from different points of view

“Macumba” clip

Shamanism

Readings:

- Phua Xiong et al, “Hmong Shamanism: Animist Spiritual Healing in America’s Urban Heartland”
- Kevin A. Peterson, May Lee Vang, Yer Moua Xiong -- "I tell you this story of healing" : a Shaman's perspective”
- Michael Winkelman, “Shamanistic Therapies”

T., Jan 24

Hmong shamanism

Th., Jan 26

If shamanic healing works, how does it work?

“The Split Horn”
PART 2:
RITES OF PASSAGE:
PUBERTY, PILGRIMAGE, DEATH

Coming of age rituals

Reading:
- Richard Dunham et al, “Rites of Passage at Adolescence”
- Carol Markstrom, “Adolescent Identity Formation and Rites of Passage: The Navajo Kanaaldá Ceremony for Girls”
- _____________, “The Sunrise Dance”

T., Feb. 7
Female puberty rituals

Th., Feb 9
The Apache Sunrise dance
“The Sunrise Dance”
Pilgrimages

Reading:
- Sean Slavin, “Walking as Spiritual Practice”
- Paula Holmes-Rodman, “They Told What Happened on the Road”

**T., Feb 14**
The inner logic of pilgrimage

**Th., Feb 16**
Movement through space and the sacred

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Placing the dead

Reading:
- Robert Kastenbaum, “The Funeral Process”
- Sheila Harper, “The Social Agency of Dead Bodies”
- Samuel Bonsu, “Consuming the Dead: Identity and Community Building Practices in Death Rituals”

**T., Feb 21**
Interpreting funerals cross-culturally
“Split Horn”

**Th., Feb 23**
Interpreting death rituals in the US
PART 3:
THREE PARADOXES FROM INDIA:
SACRED SEX, SACRED VIOLENCE, SACRED COWS

Sacred sex

Reading:
- Doug Renfrew Brooks, “Encountering the Hindu Other”
- Sthaneshwar Timalsina, “Encountering the Other: Tantra in Cross-Cultural Context”

T., Feb 28
An insider’s view of Tantra: Video conference with Jishnu Shankar

Th., March 1
Sex and Tantra

Sacred suicide

Reading:
- ____________, “The Satimata Tradition: The Role of Volition”
- Sunny Singh, “Sati: A Question of Religious Freedom” (Please find the following)

T., Mar 6
Sacred suicide: sati
  Video: “The Far Pavilions”

Th., Mar 8
Entering into the symbolic world of the satimata
Sacred cows

Reading:
- Marvin Harris, “Sacred Cow”

T., Mar 20
Eco-materialist analysis

Th., Mar 22
Religious and social meanings of food taboos in India
Guest lecturer: Sue Wadley

PART 4:
SPIRITUALITY AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY:
THREE EXAMPLES FROM CHRISTIANITY

Witch-hunts and Gender Inequality

Reading:
- Elaine Barstow, “From Healers into Witches,” “Controlling Women’s Bodies,” “Keeping Women in their Place”

T., March 27
The European “Witch Craze”
“The Burning Times”

Th., March 29
Witch-hunts in America, past and present
Liberation Theology and Class Inequality

Reading:
- Mev Puleo, *The Struggle is One*, excerpts

T., Apr 3
Liberation Theology at the Grassroots
“The Journey”

Th., Apr 5
Liberation Theology and the Struggle of the Poor in Brazil

A Black Saint and Racial Inequality

Reading:

T., April 10
Anastacia and Racial Inequality in Brazil

Th., April 12
The popular image of Anastacia
Film: “Anastacia”
PART 5: Islam and Secularism in the Middle East

Women, Islam and Ideological Struggle in Iran

Reading:
- Fatemeh Sadeghi, “Foot Soldiers of the Islamic Republic’s ‘Culture of Modesty’”

T., April 17
Women, Islam, and the State in Iran

Th., April 19
Ideological trends among Iranian women today

Women, Islam and Secularism in Egypt

Reading:
Sherine Hafez, An Islam of Her Own, 27-162

T., April 24
Islamist women in Egypt

Th., April 26
Islam and secularism in Egypt

T., May 1
Women and Egypt’s Arab Spring