ANTH 5: Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion  
Spring 2012

Professor Debbie Klein  
Section 40028, SS 205, M/W 12:50-2:10  
Office hours: M/W 11:30-12:30, Tu 2:10-3:10, & by appt. @ LS 113  
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Course Description

This course examines religious practices and beliefs from a cross-cultural and comparative perspective. Together, we will define the key concepts of this course—magic, witchcraft and religion. We will relate course issues to contemporary religious, political and economic contexts. We will examine connections among the concepts of race, nation and religion. Are certain nations religious while others are secular? Do certain groups of people look to magic while others look to science? We will examine a number of traditions—from fundamentalisms to Nigerian spirit possession to Neo-paganism to Haitian vodou. We will study anthropological themes: cultural difference, ritual, identity, gender, folklore, modernity and globalization. We will explore these topics through ethnographic readings, discussions, films, short papers, and a final research paper based on your fieldwork in a local community of your choice. By getting a chance to conduct your own project, you will practice skills you learn from the course: research methods; descriptive and reflexive writing; and cultural interpretation and analysis.

Though we live in a mass mediated world (Internet, Facebook, blogs, Wikipedia, YouTube) where vast amounts of information (of varying quality) are at our fingertips, this type of “reading” is very different than learning to read in an intellectually curious and critical manner. In this spirit, I have tried to assign reading and writing that I think you will enjoy. No matter the length of the assignment, I expect you to approach all reading and writing with deep inquiry and academic integrity.
Course Learning Outcomes

- Analyze and explain the major theoretical approaches of the Anthropology of magic, witchcraft and religion.
- Analyze and explain particular human behaviors involved in religion and the supernatural.
- Assess various histories and politics of religions in western and non-western cultures.
- Compare, contrast, and evaluate particular monotheistic and polytheistic religions.
- Analyze and explain religious traditions as they are embedded within systems of race, class, and gender.
- Identify and demonstrate the importance and limitations of a culturally relativistic outlook in today’s world.
- Examine and analyze a local religious/spiritual community through ethnographic research and reflexive, descriptive and analytical writing.
- Each of the above outcomes will be measured by: response papers, quizzes, exams, discussion participation and a semester-long research project.

Course Requirements

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<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>Class Participation</td>
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<td>Response Papers</td>
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<td>Midterm</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Research Paper &amp; Presentation</td>
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Class Participation & Attendance (20%)
Attendance at all class meetings is **required**. If you miss 3 classes, you will be dropped from the course. The college policy on attendance is that students missing one more class hour than the unit value for that particular course may be dropped without possibility of credit. Do not be late: lateness is disrespectful.

You are expected to read the assignments before each class and come prepared to participate in class discussions and exercises. Be prepared to read between 40 to 130 pages a week. Please read critically and take notes, making sure you understand the authors’ main points. Also, I encourage you to keep a personal reading journal in which you write down your reflections and questions for class discussion.

Response Papers (20%)
Response papers based on specific readings or films will be assigned in advance. There are no make-up response papers; be sure to keep up with these weekly assignments.

A response paper is 2-3 pages, typed and double-spaced. Your paper should make an argument or claim about the material. Support your claim with two to three main examples offered by the author or film. I am interested in your critical thinking here: tell me what you think about the piece and why. While some summary is fine, I do not want a summary paper. For example, you might consider these questions before you write: Given what the author or film was trying to convey, do you agree or disagree? Why or why not? Do you have lingering questions about the material presented?
Midterm (25%)
The take-home midterm consists of two essays. Based on assigned readings, topics covered in class and videos, the first essay will require synthetic and critical thinking. The second essay gives you the opportunity to begin the process of formally writing up your fieldwork experience, using ethnographic writing techniques of thick description and analysis.

Final Exam (15%)
The final will be a take-home essay exam. Based on assigned readings, topics covered in class and videos, questions will require synthetic and critical thinking.

Final Research Paper and Presentation (20%)
Your 6-8 page final paper is due on the last day of class. The paper is based on your original ethnographic research in a local community of your choice. You will begin field research for this paper early in the semester. Throughout the semester, you will conduct two rounds of fieldwork for a total of four hours. However, you may conduct more fieldwork if you are inspired! You will give a brief oral presentation on your research during the last weeks of class. Please select a paper topic from the choices at the end of the syllabus.

Final Grades
YOU MUST COMPLETE ALL OF THE ABOVE REQUIREMENTS IN ORDER TO PASS THE COURSE. Your grade in the course will be based on: class participation & attendance (20%); response papers (20%); midterm (25%); final (15%); final research paper & presentation (20%).
90%-100% = A; 80%-90% = B; 70%-80% = C; 60%-70% = D; below 60% = F

Important Notes

• If you require special services or arrangements because of hearing, visual, or other disabilities, please contact your instructor, counselor, or the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 848-4865.
• You are expected to exercise academic honesty and integrity. Violations such as cheating and plagiarism will result in disciplinary action which may include recommendation for dismissal.

Classroom Etiquette

I aim to create and facilitate a productive, comfortable and exciting learning environment for each student. In order to do this, I need your cooperation and willingness to take this learning environment seriously. Here are some of my requirements:

• Walk into the classroom each day with an open and focused mind.
• Turn off ALL electronic devices, including computers and phones. No texting. If you text during class, you will be asked to leave and will be marked absent for the day.
• No leaving early unless you have cleared it with me.
• Be 100% present in body and mind.
Required Texts

Texts are available at the Gavilan bookstore, various websites, and the Gavilan library on reserve. You can buy an electronic version of Religions in Practice: An Approach to the Anthropology of Religion at CourseSmart. You are required to read and keep track of all articles and chapters posted to iLearn and distributed in class. You are required to view all videos; all videos are on reserve at the library, and many can be found on YouTube.


Weekly Topics and Assignments

**Week One**
- **W Feb. 1**
  - Review Syllabus and Course Expectations

**Week Two**
- **M Feb. 6**
  - Reading due: Bohannan, L. (1966). Shakespeare in the bush: An American anthropologist set out to study the Tiv of West Africa and was taught the true meaning of Hamlet. Natural History, 75, 28-33. [pdf]

**Week Three**
- **M Feb. 13**
  - Reading due: Chapter 10, Speech and Power. In Religions in Practice.

**Week Four**
- **M Feb. 20**
  - President’s Day holiday

**W Feb. 22**
- Film: Hell House (2001) by George Ratliff
  - Reading due: finish Harding article, p. 1291-1303
  - Writing due: field project proposal
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<th>Week Five</th>
<th><strong>Spirit Possession in Niger</strong></th>
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<td><strong>African Religions</strong></td>
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<td>M Feb. 27</td>
<td>Exercise: Life history interviews</td>
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<td>Reading due: Chapters 1-2, <em>Embodying Colonial Memories</em></td>
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<td>W Feb. 29</td>
<td>Reading due: Chapters 3-4, <em>Embodying Colonial Memories</em></td>
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<td>Film: <em>Les Maîtres Fous</em> (1955) by Jean Rouch</td>
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<th>Week Six</th>
<th><strong>Ritual and Resistance</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Colonialism and Niger</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>M Mar. 5</td>
<td>Reading due: Chapters 5-6, <em>Embodying Colonial Memories</em></td>
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<td>W Mar. 7</td>
<td>Reading due: Chapter 6, Sorcery, Witchcraft, and Modernity. In <em>Religions in Practice</em>.</td>
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<th>Week Seven</th>
<th><strong>Spirit Possession, Islam, and Gender in Postcolonial Niger</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Islam</strong></td>
<td>Reading due: Chapters 7-8, <em>Embodying Colonial Memories</em></td>
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<td>M Mar. 12</td>
<td>Reading due: Chapters 9, 11, Epilogue, <em>Embodying Colonial Memories</em> Hand out take-home midterm</td>
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<th>Week Eight</th>
<th><strong>Witchcraft and Modernity</strong></th>
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<td>W Mar. 21</td>
<td>Film: <em>Oss Tales</em> (2007) by Sabina Magliocco Writing due: take-home midterm</td>
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<th>Week Nine</th>
<th><strong>Folklore and Neo-paganism</strong></th>
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<td>M Mar. 26</td>
<td>Reading due: Introduction, <em>Witching Culture</em></td>
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<td>W Mar. 28</td>
<td>Reading due: Chapter 2, <em>Witching Culture</em></td>
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<th>Week Ten</th>
<th><strong>Ritual and Experience</strong></th>
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<td>M Apr. 2</td>
<td>Reading due: Chapter 4, <em>Witching Culture</em></td>
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<td>W Apr. 4</td>
<td>Reading due: Chapter 5, <em>Witching Culture</em></td>
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| Week Eleven       | Spring Break! |

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<th>Week Twelve</th>
<th><strong>Transatlantic Religions</strong></th>
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<td>W Apr. 18</td>
<td><em>Gender and Mama Lola</em> Reading due: Brown, <em>Mama Lola</em>, Preface, Introduction, Ch. 1</td>
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| Week Thirteen     | **Haitian Voudou**  |
M Apr. 23  Reading due: Chapter 2, *Mama Lola*

W April 25  Reading due: Chapters 3 & 4, *Mama Lola*

**Week Fourteen**
M Apr. 30  Reading due: Chapter 8, *Mama Lola*
Film: *Haiti: Harvest of Hope* (1994) by Kevin Pina and Stephen Most

W May 2  Reading due: Chapters 11 & 12, *Mama Lola*
Recommended: Chapters 5-10, *Mama Lola*

**Week Fifteen**  **Secularisms and Religions in Modern States**
M May 7  Reading due: Chapter 15, Secularisms and Religions in Modern States. In *Religions in Practice.*

W May 9  Concluding discussion

**Week Sixteen**  **Your Research Presentations**
M May 14  Your Presentations

W May 16  Your Presentations
Writing due: Final research paper

**Week Seventeen**  **Exam Week**
M May 21  Final Exam: 10:30am-12:30pm

Additional Note  This syllabus may be revised as the course goes on. You are responsible for noting such changes and for keeping track of events and readings in the current syllabus.

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**Fieldwork Paper Topics**

Please choose one of the following topics to research throughout the semester. You will write two papers about your topic. The first is a fieldwork “description” paper, comprising part of your midterm. This paper will be based on your first two hours (round 1) of fieldwork. Your final paper is a “description and analysis” paper, builds on your first paper, and is based on your last two hours (round 2) of fieldwork. Your first paper is mainly descriptive, while your final paper is a thesis-driven, analytical paper. Both papers will be evaluated on the quality of your original research.

**Fieldwork Paper Topics (cont.)**
1) What can a life history tell you about someone’s religious or spiritual path?

Conduct four interviews (about one hour each) with one or two people about how their religious/spiritual practices/beliefs have changed throughout the course of their lives. Pick someone you think has an interesting take on life and would enjoy discussing this topic in detail with you. Record your interviews so you can study and transcribe parts of them later. Be sure to use the ethnographic style of life history interviewing that we practiced in class.

2) How do rituals and ceremonies build a culturally specific sense of community?

Attend one or two ceremonies/rituals and conduct several semi-formal interviews with at least three of the ritual participants (at least two hours). For example, you might attend a church service, rite of passage (barmitzvah, wedding, funeral, etc.) or an event with a spiritual theme (such as an AA meeting). This option allows you to practice your participant observation skills, taking careful notes on everything you observe, as well as your interviewing skills.

3) What kinds of beliefs do people have about the relationship between gender roles and religious/spiritual practices and beliefs?

Conduct four to eight ethnographic interviews (thirty minutes to one hour each) on topics related to gender and religion/spirituality. You can also choose to attend one or two religious/spiritual events (at least one hour each) and focus on the gendered aspects of the rituals: are there specific roles for women or men?; does the language used in the ritual evoke a gendered narrative? etc. Write out a list of ten questions that you hope to discuss during your interviews. For example, you might ask a parent to discuss his/her expectations for his/her male/female children who are being raised in a particular religious tradition. You might ask a working person about how his/her spirituality has shaped (or been shaped by) work experience. Find out how your interviewees put their ideas about gender and religion into practice.

4) How do people create social change through their religious or spiritual practices?

Pick a group of people who are conscious about the links between social justice and religion/spirituality. Conduct four hours of ethnographic interviews with three or more group members about their practices—how they started, what they do, their visions for the future, etc. You can also choose to attend one or two rituals (at least one hour each) geared toward raising consciousness about social justice issues. Conduct semi-formal interviews with event participants as well as people organizing the event. These could be art events, performances, rallies, fellowship meetings, etc. What is the purpose of the event? Who is participating? Who is not participating? What sorts of social change did the event address or accomplish?