Anthropology 430/530           Office: 141 O Cramer Hall
Prof. Sharon Carstens          Office Hrs: M 10:15-11:15
Fall 2012                      W 11:15-12:15
or other times by appointment
725-3315 or b5sc@pdx.edu

MYTH, RITUAL AND SYMBOL

This course explores anthropological approaches to the study of symbol, myth, and ritual, with particular attention to the historical development of theoretical modes of interpretation. It assumes that all students have prior background in sociocultural anthropology, with Anth 304/305 (Social and Culture Theory) particularly useful. Class sessions will follow a seminar format with detailed discussions of assigned readings by instructor and students. It is therefore imperative that you read each assignment carefully before each class period. Regular attendance is required and daily attendance will be taken. However, if you are ill or have an emergency, please notify me by email or telephone and you will receive an excused absence.

COURSE EVALUATION:
Evaluation will be based on class participation (20%), two essay exams (25% each) and an 8-10 page paper: observation and analysis of a ritual (30%). All students are required to take the first essay exam and may choose to write either the second or the third essay exam. There will be no final exam for this class.
Late work will be penalized one half letter grade per calendar day except in the event of serious illness or emergency. Requests for extensions on deadlines should be made ahead of the due date. You must attend class regularly and complete every assignment to pass the course. Students with a documented disability needing accommodations in this course should immediately inform the instructor.

Graduate students will be held to a higher standard of performance on exams and other coursework. Graduate students are also required to write an additional research paper worth 30% of their final grade. A separate sheet of related assignments for this paper will be provided.

READINGS:
All class readings are available for download and printing from the Web based system D2L, which students access with their Odin account. If you do not have an Odin account, you can sign up to get one at https://www.account.pdx.edu. Please contact the instructor if you encounter difficulties in accessing this resource. I recommend that you download and print as many articles as possible ahead of time to avoid last minute glitches.

OTHER ANNOUNCEMENTS:
Plagiarism (intellectual theft) is a very serious academic offense. You are responsible for reading and understanding the
department handout on plagiarism, available on the Anthropology Department website at [http://www.anthropology.pdx.edu/docs/plagiarism.pdf](http://www.anthropology.pdx.edu/docs/plagiarism.pdf). Please ask the instructor if you have any questions about this information. Any assignment containing plagiarized material will receive a failing grade, and cases of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Office of the Dean of Student Life.

Academic Advising: Anthropology majors should seek advising at least twice a year from faculty members in the Anthropology Department for advice related to meeting graduation requirements and achieving career goals.

**OUTLINE OF TOPICS AND READINGS:**

**I. Classic Theories of "Primitive Religion"

Sept 24  Introduction

Sept 26  Tylor, "Animism"
          Frazer, "Sympathetic Magic"

28  Durkheim, "The Elementary Forms of Religious Life"
    Evans-Pritchard, "The Nuer Conception of Spirit and its Relation to the Social Order"

Oct 1  Malinowski, "The Role of Magic and Religion"
          Radcliffe-Brown, "Taboo"

3  Homans, "Anxiety and Ritual"
    Evans-Pritchard, "Witchcraft Explains Unfortunate Events"

5  Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System"

Oct 8-12 Film: Dead Birds (see last page of syllabus)

**Oct 15  In Class Essay Exam

II. Symbol, Structure, and Ritual Analysis

Oct 17 Catherine Bell, “Basic Genres of Ritual Action”

*Discuss Ritual Projects*

19 Victor Turner “Symbols in African Ritual” and “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage”

22 Sherry Ortner, “Gods’ Bodies, Gods’ Food”

24 Claude Levi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth"

*Ritual Analysis Topics Due*

26 Levi-Strauss, “The Effectiveness of Symbols”
          Jane Atkinson, “The Effectiveness of Shamans in an
Indonesian Ritual

Oct 29  Maurice Bloch, "Symbols, song, dance and features of articulation: Is religion an extreme form of traditional authority?"

31  Edward Scheifflin, “Performance and the Cultural Construction of Reality”

Nov 2  Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions"
   Laurel Kendall, "A Rite of Modernization and Its Postmodern Discontents"

Nov 5  Carstens, “The Spiritual World of a Hakka Village”

7  Discuss ritual analysis projects.  
   Second essays due

III. Islamic Rituals and Practice

Nov 9  Shi‘i Islam: Web article
   Takim, “Charismatic Appeal or Communitas? Visitation to The Shrines of the Imams”

12  Veteran's Day Holiday. No Class

14  Roberts, “Toasting Uyghurstan: Negotiating Stateless Nationalism in Transnational Ritual Space”

16  Film: Muslims
   Peletz, “Ordinary Muslims” and Muslim Resurgents in Contemporary Malaysia”

19  Film: Muslims

21  Saba Mahmood, “Rehearsed Spontaneity and the Conventionality of Ritual: Disciplines of Salat”

26  Discuss Ritual Projects.  
   Third essays due

Nov 28-30  Grad Student Presentations

Ritual Analysis Papers Due Tuesday Dec.4th at 10 am in Anthropology Department, Cramer 141

Questions to consider for class discussions (and essay exams!)

1. What is the author's main concern; what key questions are being addressed? How do these questions relate to the intellectual concerns of the time?
2. How does the author define or limit consideration of rituals
or religion? How does this affect his/her interpretations?
3. How does the author go about answering the questions posed? What sort of evidence is used and how does this affect the interpretation offered?
4. How do each author's ideas compare with others we have read? What are the strong/weak points of each approach compared with others?

Interpretative Exercise: Dead Birds
This exercise is designed to help you clarify the relationship between theory and ethnographic data. You will be asked to take detailed notes on the events depicted in the film, and then to apply the different theoretical approaches of the authors we have read so far to the events you observe. Consider what each author might focus on in the analysis of Dani religion and how he might begin to explain some of the events depicted. This is a difficult exercise, but also an extremely valuable one for understanding how abstract theories work with ethnographic data. We will discuss responses in class and this topic will comprise your first essay exam.

Ritual Analysis Project
Select a ritual to observe first hand (do not do this from memory: your ethnographic observation is an important part of this exercise) and write a ten page paper describing and analyzing this ritual, drawing on theories and methods covered in readings and class discussions. You are free to select any activity which you believe serves as a ritual. However, whatever you choose, you must explain why you consider the activity ritualistic (i.e. present your definition of ritual and defend your choice within this definition). Your analysis must also identify the particular theories that you draw on for your interpretation, and should appropriately refer to theories discussed in class.

We will discuss possible activities and approaches in class on October 17 but you might want to begin to think about and discuss possibilities with me before this date. You will be required to turn in a short paragraph outlining your project on or before October 24th and should have completed at least an initial ritual observation by November 7th.

Selecting and researching a ritual
1. You may select any activity that you wish to call a ritual for this project. However, whatever you choose, you must explain why you consider the activity ritualistic (i.e. present your definition of ritual and defend your choice within this definition). You may find it easier to analyze the ritualistic nature of your activity if it falls within the rubric of what we commonly consider to be a ritual: church services, weddings, baptisms, and so forth are rich in symbolic meanings, but other types of "ceremonies" may also work well: e.g. retirement parties, honors ceremonies, initiations, etc.
2. Part of your research of this ritual should include not only direct observation, but also conversations/interviews with some of the people involved. If this is not possible, you should reconsider your choice of ritual.

3. You may need to get permission from the people involved in the ritual to allow you to observe it. Please use good judgment in this matter and consult with me whenever questions arise.

4. If you would like to work in teams or a group on this project, you may do so. This would certainly enrich the data collected! However, all papers must be individually written from perspectives chosen by individual student.

Analyzing the ritual
1. A number of class readings provide rich materials for thinking and writing about ritual interpretation. You should identify the particular theories that you draw on for your analysis, and should appropriately refer to theories discussed in class. You may also do further background reading on the sort of ritual you've chosen if this is appropriate. Please feel free at any time to consult with me about your project and paper.

2. Your paper should include a specific description of the ritual and the ritual participants. Part of your interpretation should take the specific context of the ritual into account. You should also include statements or information from informants as part of your data, but be careful to distinguish between their interpretations (as ritual participants) and the interpretations that you develop as an anthropologist.

3. Be explicit in identifying the theories that you choose to help in your interpretation. You are required to draw on at least 3 different theories in your analysis, focusing especially on theories covered in the last two sections of the course. Be sure to cite authors and texts with references (author date: page number) and include a bibliography at the end of your paper.

4. Your paper should be 8-10 pages in length, typed, double-spaced and well written. Number your pages! Proof read carefully for spelling and grammar errors. Most importantly, make the presentation of your data, and your final interpretation clear and concise. I will be happy to read drafts of papers and offer critical comments if you can submit them before Thanksgiving.

5. Papers are due at the time scheduled for the final exam: Tuesday, December 4th, 10 am. No extensions will be given unless there is a certifiable emergency (so please plan to have it completed by this time.)


