

Religion, Myth, and Magic

ANTH 2506
Fall 2022

Dr. Susan Johnston
1957E 214

- Textbooks: Shieffelin, Edward L. 2005. The Sorrow of the Lonely and the Burning of the Dancers. Palgrave Macmillan. 2nd edition. ISBN 1-4039-6606-0
- Stoller, Paul and Cheryl Olkes. 1987. In Sorcery's Shadow. University of Chicago Press: Chicago. ISBN 0-2267-7543-7
- Gilmore, Lee. 2010. Theater in a Crowded Fire. University of California Press: Berkeley. ISBN 978-0520260887

All readings except for the three books listed above are on Blackboard.

Reading:

August	31	Introduction
September	2	What is religion? Eller; Henniger-Rener
	7	Where did religion come from? Henig
	9	Religious specialists Fobes Brown; Vitebsky
	14	Symbols Stevens; Santino
	16	Ritual: definition McGraw; Turner
	21	Ritual: function Myerhoff; Gluckman; Farrer There is also video here that shows the Apache girls' ceremony (sorry about the ads, blame NatGeo!)
	23	<u>The Sorrow of the Lonely and the Burning of the Dancers</u> Ch. 1-3
	28	<u>The Sorrow of the Lonely and the Burning of the Dancers</u> Ch. 4-5
	30	<u>The Sorrow of the Lonely and the Burning of the Dancers</u> Ch. 6-8

October	5	<u>The Sorrow of the Lonely and the Burning of the Dancers</u> Ch. 9-10
	7	Death Metcalf; Barber; Norget
	12	Cannibalism Conklin; Conklin (yes, there are two Conklin readings!)
	14	MID-TERM EXAM
	19	Non-human agents Harris; Rashed; Messenger
	21	Magic and its practitioners McPherson; Gmelch; Thomas
	26	<u>In Sorcery's Shadow</u> Prologue, Section 1 (Ch. 1-21)
	28	<u>In Sorcery's Shadow</u> Section 2, 3 (Ch. 22-32)
November	2	<u>In Sorcery's Shadow</u> Section 4, 5 (Ch. 33-41)
	4	Religion and the government Olson; Barkun; Bromley & Shupe
	9	Religion and politics Magliocco; Juergensmeyer
	11	New religious forms Butler; Zeller
		PAPER DUE
	16	Religion and archaeology Finn; Pluskowski; Rathouse There is also video here which shows some of the stuff talked about in the Finn article
	18	<u>Theater in a Crowded Fire</u> Introduction, Ch. 1
	23-25	THANKSGIVING BREAK

	30	<u>Theater in a Crowded Fire</u> Ch. 2
December	2	<u>Theater in a Crowded Fire</u> Ch. 3
	7	<u>Theater in a Crowded Fire</u> Ch. 4, 6
	9	Final thoughts

Learning Objectives

- * to get some idea of how religions fit into society and culture and what they mean to those whose religions they are;
- * to challenge your assumptions about what you think religion is;
- * to learn something about religions other than your own

Average minimum amount of independent, out-of-class, learning expected per week for this class (as per federal regulation 34 CFR 602.24(f)): 5

Course Requirements:

This syllabus represents the basic framework of this class. However, **I RESERVE THE RIGHT TO CHANGE IT IF IT BECOMES NECESSARY**. This would only happen if we get behind or want to pursue a topic for more time than I have allowed for that topic. You will get plenty of warning if I do have to change the syllabus.

All of the reading listed in this syllabus is required. You are also responsible for anything which happens in class. It will make this class both more interesting and more useful for you if you will **PLEASE DO THE READING**. That will make it easier for you to enter discussions, which will be numerous in this class. **IF I GET THE SENSE THAT A LARGE NUMBER OF YOU ARE NOT DOING THE READING AND ARE INSTEAD RELYING ON OTHERS DURING CLASS DISCUSSIONS TO LEARN WHAT THE READINGS SAID, I WILL START CALLING ON PEOPLE RANDOMLY FOR YOUR OPINIONS.** So be prepared.

Rules for discussion

This class will focus on discussions of the readings and other issues related to the anthropological study of religion. Please keep in mind that 1) religion can be important to people in the class and 2) I take seriously my responsibility to represent other people and cultures fairly. So I expect you to think critically about the topics under discussion, to frame your opinions on the basis of evidence, and to be respectful when discussing these topics. I hold myself to this standard and I will also hold you to it. You are allowed to disagree, with others in the class or with me (and I am also allowed to disagree with you), but you are not

allowed to mock, ridicule, unfairly characterize, or demean others' religious beliefs (whether they are in class or somewhere else in the world). The goal here is to learn how to talk about difference without being insulting. So in general:

- Think about how others might interpret what you're saying before you say it, and think about rephrasing it
- Listen to what others say—don't start formulating what you want to say when they are halfway through, you might miss something important
- It's okay to be wrong—if you knew everything, you wouldn't be here and life would be a lot more boring. This class is about learning and you can't learn if you're never wrong.
- While religion is partly rooted in experience, there are factual aspects of religion that are also important. Consider both of these when evaluating others' religious lives.
- Language matters! There are ways to say most things that won't insult either people in the classroom or the people whose cultures we will be discussing.
- It is okay if we agree to disagree!

Laptops. There has been considerable discussion of late about the use of laptops in class. Some studies have shown that they are a distraction, not only to the people using them but also to others around them: http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2011/05/18/professors_spy_on_students_to_see_how_they_are_using_laptops_in_class; <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/elements/2014/06/the-case-for-banning-laptops-in-the-classroom.html?mobify=0>; <http://msutoday.msu.edu/news/2014/surfing-the-web-in-class-bad-idea/>; <http://chronicle.com/blogs/linguafranca/2014/08/25/why-im-asking-you-not-to-use-laptops/>)

Despite this, I feel that part of the college educational experience is to encourage you to make the choices that work best for you. I am not your mother. Therefore, I am not going to ban laptop use. However, if I see that you are distracting yourself or others around you, I reserve the right to ask you to close your laptop in class, and if it becomes a continuing problem, you will not be allowed to bring your laptop to class at all.

Cellphones are another thing entirely. Keep it on vibrate and out of sight or I will confiscate it at the beginning of class and return it at the end.

Exams and papers

There are two exams and a paper for this course. The exams are worth 70 points each and so will each be 35% of your grade. The paper is worth 60 points and so will be 30% of your grade. You must take both exams and turn in the paper in order to pass the course.

The first exam will be held in class during the semester and the second during the final exam period. Each will cover the section of the course which precedes it; the second exam is not cumulative. **FAILURE TO APPEAR AT AN EXAM WITHOUT LETTING ME KNOW IN ADVANCE WILL GET YOU AN F ON THAT EXAM.** If you must miss an exam, you will have until I hand back the graded exams to make it up. This is usually about a week. If this becomes necessary, please see me as soon as possible to arrange a time. If you are ill and therefore miss an exam or have to turn in the paper late, **I WILL REQUIRE YOU TO TURN IN DOCUMENTATION TO SHOW THAT YOU SAW A HEALTH CARE PROVIDER**

OR RECEIVED A POSITIVE COVID TEST. If you are sick enough to miss class, you are sick enough to see a health care provider. Also, **I WILL CALL AND VERIFY THAT YOUR DOCUMENTATION IS LEGITIMATE.** I don't need to know any details of why you saw a health care provider, but I have received fake health notes before so I will make sure that anything you provide is real.

As noted, there is also a short paper for this course. It is described in more detail below, but the idea is to think about your ideas about religion in the context of some of the other religious experiences we have read about in class. The paper is due **IN CLASS ON NOVEMBER 11.** Late papers may be accepted under some circumstances, but I will deduct **two points per day that it is late.** Also, if it is late the reason should be something more serious than "I just ran out of time" or "I had a lot of other things to do that week." You know about this paper well in advance—schedule your time accordingly!

If you want to discuss any details about this paper with me, please come to my office hours or email me. Also, I would be happy to read a draft version of your paper, and make comments on it before you turn the final version in. Draft papers may be emailed to me. **If you want me to read a draft, please give it to me no later than ten days before the paper is due.**

Testing Goals:

The exam questions will consist of short answer and longer essay questions. For both, be sure to 1) address all required parts of the question; 2) provide specific information (and avoid generalities); and 3) demonstrate knowledge of material in the reading and presented and discussed in class. What I'm looking for here is both some command of the factual information from the class and also some ability to use that information to construct an argument.

Recordings:

Since the university has requested it I am going to record all the class sessions so you can access them later. However, **I DO NOT WANT YOU TO USE THIS AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR COMING TO CLASS.** According to GWU policy, students are supposed to be in class in person. The recordings are being provided for students who might want to review a class, or who are ill or for some reason are prevented from coming to class in person.

To access the recordings, click on "GWU Lecture Capture" in the Course Menu (on the left side of the screen) under Blackboard. You'll see a list of recordings and you can click on the one for the class you want to watch. I have set it up to record the class automatically and recordings will magically appear under the Course Menu once a given class session is over (usually later that day but sometimes the next day).

Recordings can't be downloaded from Blackboard, only listened to. **YOU MAY NOT DOWNLOAD THE RECORDINGS OR CIRCULATE THEM IN ANY WAY.** I consider doing so the same as plagiarism and I will pursue all of the options open to me in terms of penalties if I find out anyone did that. It will also piss me off personally, and there are worse things than university sanctioned penalties. So just don't.

Housekeeping:

My office is Rm. 203 in 2112 G St. and you can reach me at extension is 4-6964. My mailbox is in the main anthropology department office, 2110 G St. My office hours are Wednesday and Friday 11-12:30, if you need to see me. As far as I know, the building should be accessible to students. However, if you get there

and your ID doesn't open the door, bang on the inner door. I will hear you and come down and let you in. I am only on campus on Wednesday and Friday, but you can also reach me by e-mail at sjohnsto@gwu.edu and I check my email frequently. I am also happy to meet with you online if you prefer. I have access to both WebEx and Zoom so it's easy to set up a meeting that way if you like. If you want to use this option send me an email and we can work out the details.

If you are having trouble with the course material or did not do well on the first exam, **I urge you to come and talk to me.** After a certain point in the semester, it will be too late to correct any errors in approach or help you understand the reading or the discussions. **DON'T PUT IT OFF AND ASSUME THAT SOMEHOW YOU WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE IT ALL UP. I DON'T DO EXTRA CREDIT, SO DON'T EVEN ASK.**

University policies

Academic Integrity

All students must practice academic integrity. This means doing your own work. When you use **the words or ideas of others in any written work in any way, you must:** 1) indicate the source of any ideas that are not your own using appropriate referencing forms; and 2) identify any direct quotations with quotations marks. **THE RULE IS THAT, IF IT IS NOT YOUR OWN IDEA OR COMMON KNOWLEDGE, YOU MUST PROVIDE A CITATION.** That includes both quoted material and general summaries or other references to the ideas of others. If you have any questions at all about what this means, ask me. Plagiarism, and all breaches of academic integrity (for example, the sale of lecture-notes from this class, or use of content from the internet as though it was your own), will be severely dealt with in accordance with the University's policies and procedures. If I have any suspicion that you might have plagiarized, I will run it through Safe Assign. For more information on The George Washington University's policies on academic integrity, please consult: <https://studentconduct.gwu.edu/academic-integrity>

Academic Integrity is an integral part of the educational process, and GW takes these matters very seriously. Violations of academic integrity occur when students fail to cite research sources properly, engage in unauthorized collaboration, falsify data, and in other ways outlined in the Code of Academic Integrity. Students accused of academic integrity violations should contact the Office of Academic Integrity to learn more about their rights and options in the process. Outcomes can range from failure of assignment to expulsion from the University, including a transcript notation. The Office of Academic Integrity maintains a permanent record of the violation.

More information is available from the Office of Academic Integrity at studentconduct.gwu.edu/academic-integrity. The University's "Guide of Academic Integrity in Online Learning Environments" is available at studentconduct.gwu.edu/guide-academic-integrity-online-learning-environments. Contact information: rights@gwu.edu or 202-994-6757.

*The policy on academic integrity in this course is that if you commit a breach of academic integrity in any assignment or exam, you will receive a zero for that assignment or exam. This infraction will be reported to the University's Academic Integrity Council. You will be **clearly** notified by the instructor in person OR by email before the Council is informed.*

University policy on observance of religious holidays

In accordance with University policy, students should notify faculty during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance. For details and policy, see: provost.gwu.edu/policies-procedures-and-guidelines

Support for students outside the classroom

Writing Center

GW's Writing Center cultivates confident writers in the University community by facilitating collaborative, critical, and inclusive conversations at all stages of the writing process. Working alongside peer mentors, writers develop strategies to write independently in academic and public settings. Appointments can be booked online. See gwu.mywconline.

Academic Commons

Academic Commons provides tutoring and other academic support resources to students in many courses. Students can schedule virtual one-on-one appointments or attend virtual drop-in sessions. Students may schedule an appointment, review the tutoring schedule, or access other academic support resources at academiccommons.gwu.edu. For assistance contact academiccommons@gwu.edu.

Disability Support Services (DSS) 202-994-8250

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact [Disability Support Services](#) to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

Counseling and Psychological Services 202-994-5300

GW's Colonial Health Center offers counseling and psychological services, supporting mental health and personal development by collaborating directly with students to overcome challenges and difficulties that may interfere with academic, emotional, and personal success. healthcenter.gwu.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services

Safety and security

- In an emergency: call GWPD 202-994-6111 or 911
- For situation-specific actions: review the Emergency Response Handbook at safety.gwu.edu/emergency-response-handbook
- In an active violence situation: Get Out, Hide Out or Take Out. See go.gwu.edu/shooterprep
- Stay informed: safety.gwu.edu/stay-informed

Bias-Related Acts

Bias-related acts are characterized by some expression of hate or bias against a particular group, or towards and individual because of their membership (or perceived membership) in that group. Bias incidents may range from acts considered to be offensive to actions that cause harm.

There are several ways to report such an incident, which are listed here: <https://diversity.gwu.edu/how-report-bias-related-act>

Diversity and inclusion

I personally support the idea of diversity and inclusion, and I also will not tolerate insulting or problematic language in our discussions. For the former, if you feel there is some perspective missing in class or in our reading, please feel free to come and talk to me about it. I am always open to suggestions that will enhance our collective learning. For the latter, keep in mind that not being face-to-face with a person or group doesn't make that person or group any less a human being. Think about that when you make comments about others in the class or the peoples that we are discussing, whether in the past or in the present. I am always interested in trying to broaden my perspectives and to understand, and I hope that you will join me in this endeavor.

Paper Assignment

Religion, Myth, and Magic
Anth 2506

Fall 2022

Your paper for this class should be a comparison of your own experience of religion with **two** of the examples of religion from the readings for the class. That means **two different groups of people, not similarities and differences within one group**. I would like you to answer the following questions in the paper:

1. Of all of the readings for the class, which presents a religious tradition that seems the most foreign to you? What, specifically, about it makes it seem that way?
2. Of all of the readings for the class, which presents a religious tradition that seems the most familiar to you? What, specifically, about it makes it seem that way?

You may choose among most (but not all) of the class readings (both the various articles and the longer books). This includes articles you might not yet have read but will be reading later in the semester (i.e. you can read ahead!). The idea is to discuss one reading that is similar and one that is different, **not the similarities and differences in two readings**. There are only three rules about which readings you may choose:

1. You may not choose a reading about your own religious tradition as the familiar one. If you have a particular religious affiliation, it's no fair picking a reading about it and then saying that this is the one that is the most familiar! You must stay outside your own tradition, whatever it may be, for both readings.
2. You must choose a reading that was assigned for this class. If you are strongly compelled to use something from outside the course, you may make a case to me personally, **at least three weeks before the paper is due**.
3. You must talk about a specific culture, so focus on the readings with ethnographic content and avoid the more secular readings (e.g. baseball magic or yellow ribbon symbolism) and the more theoretical ones (e.g. the general discussion of ritual or religious specialists). That means you should be talking about the specific beliefs and practices of a particular culture and not, for example, the generally shared characteristics of shamanism. So for example, you can't identify things shared by all rituals, such as having a repetitive structure, because all rituals share this; it's not something you've identified for this specific example. Also note: shamans are a type of practitioner and are NOT confined to a single culture, so if you want to talk about this you'll have to link it to a specific culture.

Otherwise, all of the ethnographic readings are fair game, including those we might not yet have gotten to in the syllabus. If you use one of the readings where there is a lot of information on the non-religious aspects of the society, (e.g. the Kaluli), make sure that you focus on the religious aspects of their culture and not the more secular ones. If you have any doubt about whether you are using something appropriate for the paper, **ASK ME**.

So, just as an example, if I practice the religion of Econarcissism, in which we worship our own reflections in natural bodies of water through rituals that we create no more than an hour before they are carried out, I might identify Wicca as a similar religious tradition because it also has a highly creative approach to ritual, is rooted in the natural world, and is strongly oriented towards individual needs. By contrast, the Kaluli *gisaro* ritual might be foreign because it is highly structured, practiced with a group of people, and requires a

response by others as an important aspect of that ritual. My paper would then describe my own religious ideas and then compare each of these readings to it, describing how one is similar and the other different.

References:

You are not required to use any materials outside of these readings, but if you do, PLEASE PROVIDE ME WITH THE FULL CITATION INFORMATION. Remember, the rule is that anything that isn't common knowledge (or, in this paper, one of the two articles you are analyzing) must be cited. If the information is something you learned from some personal religious context, then note that; otherwise I will expect a citation. For example, "A bat mitzvah has to include the following..." requires a citation, while "I was taught in Hebrew school that a bat mitzvah should include..." or "All of the bat mitzvahs I have attended had the following..." do not. Citation is not necessary if you are talking about class readings, as long as it's clear what reading you are talking about (e.g. "In Conklin's discussion of the Wari'..."). **The only exception is that, if you use a direct quote, you should note the page number.** Finally, for citations, **you may not use footnotes.** I set the page limits with good reason, and footnotes mess up my assessment of how long the paper is. Instead, if you want, you can use endnotes, i.e. ones that appear at the end of the paper. However, it is perfectly possible to do this paper without any citations, and that's what I expect most of you will do.

Some things to consider:

- You should discuss how you think about religion or aspects of it (e.g. religious ritual). This may include your own personal religious beliefs, or it could be a more general discussion of how you think religion fits into society. If you do the latter, be sure to talk about your personal perspective and avoid talking about "American religion" or "religion in the U.S." as though it is a single, homogeneous phenomenon. "A lot of people I know talk about religion as the reason they behave morally" is fine, while "religion in America is about controlling people through fear" isn't (for several reasons, see below).
- You may use the formal definition of religion that I gave you **ONLY** if it conforms to what you already thought about religion before taking this course. What I'm interested in is how your own personal experience has made you think about religion. I already know what I think, I want to know what you think. Please do not just rehash class notes!
- If you do not have a particular religious affiliation or identity, there are several possible ways to approach the paper. If you were raised in a particular tradition but don't identify with it anymore, you can still use it as the basis of comparison. You can also talk about how you think religion works in society, in terms of some specific religious perspective (e.g. you can talk about Christianity in general) as long as you indicate the basis for what you are saying (e.g. "Christians are generally understood to believe in an afterlife based on whether they lived a good or bad life", or "religion in my experience seems to work mostly to explain things we don't understand"). Or, if you see the world from a scientific perspective, you can use a scientific belief system as the basis for comparison (spoilers—I will argue science is functionally equivalent to religion). The main thing is to have something specific to compare to the readings you've chosen.
- **Language matters.** This is an anthropology course so I expect you to take an anthropological perspective. Value judgments are permissible, if used **VERY** carefully. I'm not interested in hearing about whether or not you consider other cultures or religion itself to be valuable. However, if you chose a particular reading as being foreign to you because it contains elements which you have been taught are not appropriate, or are personally repugnant, or whatever, that's okay. Statements like "I was taught that eating people is not acceptable so I can't imagine doing it" are fine; "eating people is disgusting" or "only primitive people would eat other people" are not. In fact, you should avoid the word "primitive" altogether! Similarly, statements like "religion is the root of all violent conflict" is not only problematic, it is factually incorrect,

while “religion has sometimes been the reason given for violence” is fine. If you are unsure of how you should talk about religion in your paper, come and talk to me.

Grading criteria:

- You should do a fairly close and detailed analysis of the readings you have chosen in terms of how they fit or don't fit into what you think about religion. Here, I'm interested in specifics-- what exactly is it about these two readings that makes the religions seem familiar or foreign? Is it behaviors, or ideology, or what? I expect ethnographic detail here, not generalities. I will be looking for evidence that you actually read these sources and aren't just coasting on class notes.
- As noted above, general features shared by all religions and/or rituals aren't what I'm looking for. For example, all rituals are repetitive, so the fact that aspects of the rituals of two different cultures are repeated isn't a valid reason to identify those two rituals as similar. In the same way, all funerals deal with the dead, so you can't argue that there is something significantly the same because two funerals both deal with the dead. I'm looking for something deeper here.
- You should have a few points of comparison for each example, and not just one. Spending four pages talking about yourself and then a paragraph on each example isn't what I have in mind. You should spend about the same amount of time discussing your own ideas as you do each example.
- You should make the specific comparisons explicit. Don't just describe the two cultures' practices and then assume I know what you think is similar or different. Different people use different examples differently. For example, while it may be obvious to you why the *gisaro* is foreign, you need to spell it out for me. And don't just say it's different or similar—explain how, exactly. For example, “I was taught violence was wrong so I find the *gisaro* foreign” doesn't explain why. You need to spell out what specific aspects of the *gisaro* you see as violent and therefore why they seem odd.
- Grammar and organization count! While I don't expect you to be writing prize-winning prose, your grade will go down if there are large numbers of typos, grammatical errors, lapses in logic, etc. An A paper will not look like something you spat out the day it was due and clearly haven't read over since. If English is your second language, I would strongly encourage you either to write a draft (see below) or use the available writing support resources (see above). I have all kinds of sympathy for people who are writing papers in a second language, but ultimately it is your responsibility to see that you write in a way that I can understand.
- I also reserve the right to take inappropriate language (as described above) into account when I grade the paper. I don't want to make anyone paranoid, I just want you to think about issues of racism and ethnocentrism. I also think we all should learn how to talk about differences without being insulting. This is meant to encourage you to do so. Think about it this way—if you wouldn't say it to a member of that group if you were face to face then you probably should rephrase it when you write the paper.

Practical stuff:

The paper should be double-spaced, no shorter than five pages, and no longer than seven. Given the nature of the paper, it is also perfectly acceptable to write informally and in the first person. And please remember-- I have been using computers longer than most of you have been alive. I know all about large typefaces and large margins. Please give me some credit for intelligence.

If you want to discuss any details about this paper with me, please come to my office hours. Also, I would be happy to read a draft version of your paper, and make comments on it before you turn the final version in.

If you want to write a draft or an outline or something like that, please **email** it to me no later than ten days before the paper is due.

The paper is due **IN CLASS** on **NOVEMBER 11**. Papers turned in before the due date can be put in my mailbox in the anthropology department (2110 G St). It is open most days until 5:00, but if the anthropology department is closed there is a plastic bin on the outside of the department door and you can leave it in there (so please don't claim that you went to turn it in and you couldn't because the office was closed). **DO NOT PUT THE PAPER UNDER MY OFFICE DOOR**. There are too many ways this can go wrong. I will check my mailbox when I get back from class on the day the paper is due. If your paper wasn't turned in during class and isn't my mailbox, it will be considered late.

As noted above, I take plagiarism very seriously. I am a researcher, and like all researchers, I respect the right of people to own their own work. You should do the same. If I suspect that you might have used outside sources inappropriately, I will run your paper through Safe Assign, so be warned and don't be stupid.

Addendum: In case it needs to be said, anything you write remains private, between you and me!