

RELIGIOUS STUDIES 595.20-101

Ritual Studies

Winter 1999; 1-1:50 pm MWF (over 12 weeks)

3rd and 4th year course; 15-20 students

Instructor: Kathleen O'Grady

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Course Description: An examination of the various methodologies employed in the field of Ritual Studies. Theories of ritual and ethnographic practice by various thinkers will be included in our examination: Sigmund Freud, Émile Durkheim, Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner, Ronald Grimes, Barbara Myerhoff, Karen McCarthy Brown, Catherine Bell, Robbie Davis-Floyd, Lesley Northup and Nancy Lutkehaus.

Textbooks:

Ronald L. Grimes, *Readings in Ritual Studies*. Prentice Hall, 1996.

Karen McCarthy Brown, *Moma Lola: a Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. U of California Press, 1991.

Assorted handouts.

Requirements:

- Weekly writing assignments (3 pages).....35%
- Research Essay (10-12 pages)..... 40%
- Final Exam to be scheduled by the Registrar.....25%

Weekly Writing Assignments – 35% of final mark. This is an opportunity for you to engage in ritual and ethnographic observation and put the ritual theories that we will be discussing to the test. Each assignment requires a minimum of 3 written pages (5 maximum). Topics will be assigned in advance (see below). Each assignment should consist of a detailed description of a specific ritual action, with some interpretation and reflection; these weekly assignments should be informed by the regular course readings and lectures.

Material collected for the weekly writing assignment may be used as raw data for the research paper.

Writing Assignment Topics:

Assignment 1: Write about an event in your life that you consider to be a significant "rite of passage". Did this follow the progression for "rites of passage" as outlined in van Gennep?

Assignment 2: Attend a religious service of your choice, preferably a service from outside of your own religious community. Select a specific ritual from that service and write a detailed description of it from your perspective. Use the Grimes handout, "Mapping the Field of Ritual" (in Beginnings in Ritual Studies) to aid you in this description.

Assignment 3: Interview an individual from the religious community of Assignment #2 concerning the ritual you detailed in that assignment. Be sure to have the individual's permission for this interview (as content for a scholarly assignment). How do your observations compare with the ritual participant's comments? Consider handout by Gwen Gorzelsky, "Materialist Methods: Ethnography and Transformation" (in Voices and Visions) when conducting this assignment.

Assignment 4: Create a ritual of your own making to mark a significant action or event in your life. Comment on your reasons for structuring your ritual in a specific way. Was this ritual successful? Why/why not?

Research Paper -- 40% of final mark, due March 26th.

This assignment is to be based on a specific ritual from a religious tradition of your choice, informed by the ritual and ethnographic theories discussed in class and in the course texts. You are permitted and encouraged to write on a ritual or theorist that you have already examined in your weekly assignments, provided the essay *builds and reflects upon* the writing assignment already undertaken.

A research paper is a focused analysis of material obtained from any of a number of sources: course books, other academic books and monographs, personal interviews, personal observation, the Internet, magazines, newspapers and films. The paper must not merely summarize the position maintained by another, but present your own argument, opinions and reflections. Your argument must be amply supported by the data reviewed. This paper should be carefully structured and presented.

The paper must include a title page, endnotes or footnotes and a bibliography. The paper should be approximately 10-12 pages in length. Late papers will be penalized.

Please note: Plagiarism is easy to spot, and harshly penalized by the University. Don't be afraid to trust your own words and opinions.

Final Exam -- 25% of final mark, date and place to be announced.

The final exam is a formal test of what you have learned during the class lectures, guest lectures, films and assigned readings. The questions on the exam will be taken from discussions generated during class. I will indicate the types of questions that may be asked on the final exam during the last class. Textbooks and notebooks will not be allowed in the exam room.

COURSE SCHEDULE

General Organization:

Mondays and Wednesdays: Theoretical investigations.

Fridays: Discussion centred on Mama Lola and ethnographic practice.

Section I: The Origins of Ritual Studies

Week 1:

*Introduction: The Limits of Textual Studies in Religion: What is Missing?

*What does it mean to study "ritual"?

*General introduction to Vodou

Readings: "Epigraphs" and "Introduction", pp. ix-xv.

Ronald Grimes, "Ritual Criticism" (abridged), pp. 279-282.

Mama Lola, "Introduction", pp. 1-20.

Video clip: James Bond, "Live and Let Die" (Voodoo sequence at end)

This film clip is used to demonstrate the prejudicial views the West has concerning Vodou. It is contrasted with an informed lecture on Vodou.

Week 2:

*Émile Durkheim and the Functionalists

Readings: Durkheim, "Ritual, Magic, and the Sacred", pp. 188-193.

Robert Campany, "Xunzi and Durkheim as Theorists of Ritual Practice", pp. 86-103.

Mama Lola, "Chapter 1", pp. 21-34.

Richard Hodges, "The Quick and the Dead: The Souls of Man in Vodou Thought";
www.cnmat.berkeley.edu/~hodges/QandD.html

Week 3:

*Arnold van Gennep, liminality and "rites of passage"

Readings: van Genneep, "Territorial Passage", pp. 529-535.

[Optional: Crapanzano, "Circumcision", pp. 118-131.]

Film: El Sebou, Egyptian Birth Ritual, 27 min.

Handout: O'Grady, Kathleen, "Ritual Studies" (overview) from *Encyclopedia of Women and World Religion*. Serinity Young *et al.* (eds). NY: Macmillan, 1999.

Mama Lola, "Chapter 2", pp. 35-78.

Music: Rhythms of Rapture; Sacred Musics of Haitian Voodoo, Tracks 5+6

Week 4: February 1-5

*Freud and the repetition of ritual

Readings: Freud, "Obsessive Actions", pp. 212-217.

Erikson, "Development of Ritualization", pp. 201-211.

Mama Lola, "Chapter 3", pp. 79-92.

"The Loa"; www.arcana.com/voodoo/loa_list.html

Film: Umbanda

Assignment #1 Due

Week 5: February 8-12

*Mary Douglas on purity

*René Girard on sacrifice

Readings: Mary Douglas, "Dirt", pp. 159-169.

René Girard, "Violence and the Sacred", pp. 239-256.

[optional: Walter Burkert, "Function and Transformation of Ritual Killing", pp. 62-70]

Mama Lola, "Chapter 4", pp. 93-140.

Section II: Transforming Ritual Studies

Week 6:

*Ethnography

Readings: Mama Lola, "Chapter 5", pp. 141-154.

Mama Lola, "Chapter 6", pp. 155-202.

Ronald Grimes, "Mapping the Field of Ritual" in Beginnings in Ritual Studies (**for Assig. #2**)

Gwen Gorzelsky, "Materialist Methods: Ethnography and Transformation" (Voices and Visions) (**for Assig. #3**)

Film clip: Barbara Myerhoff, "In Her Own Time"

Week 7:

*Victor Turner's *communitas*

Readings: Victor Turner, "Liminality", pp. 511-519.

Victor Turner, "Symbols", pp. 520-528.

Mama Lola, "Chapter 7", pp. 203-218.

Assignment #2 Due

Week 8:

*Feminist critiques and methodologies

Readings: Carolyn Walker Bynum, "Women's Stories", pp. 71-85.

Joan Laird, "Women and Ritual in Family Therapy", pp. 353-367.

Film clip: Trance and Dance in Bali (Margaret Mead)

Handout: "A Separation Ritual", pp. 430-431 in Anthology of Sacred Texts by and About Women (**for Assig. #4**)

Mama Lola, "Chapter 8", pp. 219-258.

Assignment #3 Due

Week 9:

*Feminist critiques and methodologies

Readings: Elaine Combs-Schilling, "Etching Patriarchal Rule", pp. 104-117.

Diane Bell, "Women's Business", pp. 33-47.

Mama Lola, "Chapter 9", pp. 259-270.

Assignment #4 Due

Week 10:

* "Postmodern" strategies

Readings: Robbie Davis-Floyd, "Ritual in the Hospital", pp. 146-158.

[optional: Barbara Myerhoff, "Death in Due Time", pp. 393-411.]

Mama Lola, "Chapter 10", pp. 271-310.

Mama Lola, "Chapter 11", pp. 311-328.

Week 11:

* "Postmodern" strategies

Readings: David Kertzer, "Ritual, Politics, and Power", pp. 335-352.

Film clip: Nazi propaganda films

Catherine Bell, "Constructing Ritual", pp. 21-32.

Week 12:

Conclusion: Revisioning the Study of Religion

Readings: Mama Lola, "Chapter 12", pp. 329-382.