Anthropology 308
Magic Witchcraft Reason

Department of Anthropology, Rutgers University
Instructor: Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi
Class time: Tues. and Thurs. 2:00pm - 3:20pm
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Office: RAB 309, Hours: Friday 11:00am-13:00 on Zoom
Phone: (848) 9329629
Location of course: **RAB 209A, DC**

Credits: 3 Semester: Spring 2025

How can killing become defined as non-killing? How can the taking of life be distinguished from murder? This course explores the significance of sacrifice as a variation on the theme of death in ritual, religion, and modern formations such as the nation. In diverse social phenomena such as ritual exchange, initiation rites, sorcery attacks, witchcraft accusations, possession, renunciation, and national identification, sacrifice is either a rhetorical device or a deep structure of human symbolic action. Sacrifice is minimally defined as the establishment of a loss to constitute the sacred of a community. What is the value of sacrifice as an analytical concept? How is it connected to other forms of symbolic expression? When is it heralded and what does it express? The course will engage classic formative texts in anthropological theory, religion and ritual, as well as investigate various ethnographic examples in the contemporary world—initiation in Africa, nationalism in the United States, witchcraft in Indonesia, sorcery in Australia, penis theft in Nigeria, cannibalism in Mexico and South Asia--where magical procedures and sacrificial logics come into play, often connected to a search for immortality. In providing an introduction into magic and ritual technologies, students will hence also learn to identify and critically appraise the deployment of sacrifice and other ritual technologies as rhetoric, metaphor, or logic in non- or quasi-religious contexts.

Books for Purchase

Hubert, Henri, and **Marcel Mauss**. 1964. Sacrifice. It's Nature and Functions. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. ISBN 0-22635679-5
Available at: Rutgers University Bookstore, Gateway Transit Bldg-100 Somerset Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901. Phone: 732 867-0113 Fax: 732 249-3039

Movies
Jean Rouch, *LES MAÎTRES FOUS*
Pier Paolo Pasolini, *MEDEA, selection*
Helene Basu, *DRUGS AND PRAYERS*
Gilbert Herdt, *THE GUARDIANS OF THE FLUTES*
Lene Riefenstahl, *TRIUMPH DES WILLENS, selection*

Reading load: Approximately 100-150 pages/week (usually less than 100)

Course objectives:

To provide students with an introduction to theories of sacrifice and ritual procedures, which pay particular attention to symbolic form, by focusing on symbolic technologies such as surrogacy, abnegation, substitution, consecration, incorporation, externalization, mimesis, and identification cross-culturally. The students will learn to identify and apply, as well as critically appraise, sacrificial procedures in rhetoric and/or metaphor, in the structure of symbolic acts, or concrete violent acts and hence in contexts which lie outside the usual sphere of religion and ritual proper such as the juridico-political, nationalism, democratic form, gender and sexuality, and ethnic conflict.

To help students gain proficiency in the use of critical thinking skills in their assessment of analytical texts on violence, ritual, and religion, anthropological and ethnographic writing, psychoanalysis, history, myth analysis, political science, news reports, media, and documentary film.

To provide students with the training of reading and presentation skills, the use of central concepts and approaches to religion, society, and culture, and a comparative approach to cultural and social difference in the context of violence.

Readings: Readings will be at **RESV-DGLSS** Library Course Reserve Desk (for 2 hours) and/or on electronic reserve on **CANVAS**.

Course Requirements and Grading Criteria:

Class attendance is absolutely required and more than two absences in a semester will result in grade reduction. Students must complete *all* readings. Participation in class discussion and one written Question about the assigned readings which are to be handed to the instructor at the beginning of every week (typed with name and date!) will be integral to your grade. **Take Home Mid Term Essay Exam** (30%), 4-5 pages; **Take Home Final Essay Exam** (30%), 4-5 pages; **Class Participation** (30%); Questions (10%). There will be no extra-credit!

Students found cheating on exams, handing in exams containing plagiarized passages, or otherwise violating academic integrity policies will be turned in to the appropriate Dean for punishment. Please familiarize yourself, therefore, with the Rutgers academic integrity policy, posted online at http://ctaar.rutgers.edu/integrity/policy.html.

Students are expected to attend all classes; if you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/ to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me.

Week 1. Introduction (Thursday Jan. 21 – first class / Thurs 23)

Frazer, J.G. 1960[1906-1915]. Chapter XXIV, The Killing of the Divine King, pp 348-373, Chapter XXV, Temporary Kings, pp.373-381, and Chapter XXVI, Sacrifice of the King's Son, 381-386, and Chapter XXVII, Succession to the Soul. In *The Golden Bough*, abridged edition, Vol. I, London: Macmillan and Co. **[38 pages]**

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Smith, William Robertson. 1889. Lecture VII, pp. 244-268 and Lecture VIII, pp. 269-311, and from Lecture IX, pp. 294-333. In *Religion of the Semites*, London: Adam and Charles Black. **[105 pages]**

Recommended: Mizruchi, Susan L. 1998 Sacrificial Arts and Sciences. *In* The Science of Sacrifice. American Literature and Modern Social Theory, pp. 25-88; Carter Jeffrey (ed.). 2003 Understanding Religious Sacrifice: A Reader. London: Continuum, for selective readings on the others employed on this syllabus

Week 2. Sacrifice, origins (Tues 28/ Thurs 30)

Freud, Sigmund. 1950[1912/1913]. Chapter IV, The Return of Totemism in Childhood, pp. 100-161 (with special emphasis on sections 4-7, pp. 132-161). In *Totem and Taboo: Some points of agreement between the mental lives of savages and neurotics.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. [In case you use the older W.W. Norton & Company paperback, it is pp. 125-200, and sections 4-7 are on pages 164-200] **[61 pages]**

Week 3. Sacrifice: Symbolic Technologies (Tues. Feb. 4 /Thurs 6)

Hubert, Henri and Marcel Mauss. 1964[1899]. Sacrifice. It's Nature and Function. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (103 pages). **[103 pages]**

Week 4. Sacrifice: Controlling Experience (Tues. 11/ Thurs 13)

Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1956. Chapter IX, Spear Symbolism, pp. 231-247, and Chapter XI, The Meaning of Sacrifice, pp. 272-286. In *Nuer Religion*, New York: Oxford University Press **[30 pages]**

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Lienhardt, Godfrey. 1961. The Control of Experience: Symbolic Action. In *Divinity and Experience*, pp. 252-297 **[42 pages]**

Recommended: Bloch, Maurice. 1992. Chapter 1, Introduction, pp. 1-7, and Chapter 2, Initiation, pp. 8-23. *In* From Prey into Hunter. The Politics of Religious Experience. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [22 pages].

Week 5. Liminality (Tues.18 /Thurs 20)

Van Gennep, Arnold. 1961[1908]. Chapter II, The Territorial Passage. In *The Rites of Passage*, pp. 1-25. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. **[25 pages]**

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Turner, Victor. 1967. Chapter IV, Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*, pp. 93-111. In *The Forest of Symbols. Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. **[18 pages]**

Week 6. Society and Sacrifice (Tues. 25 /Thurs 27)

Durkheim, Émile. 2001[1912]. Chapter 7, The Origins of these Beliefs, pp. 153-182. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. A new translation by Carol Cosman. Oxford World's Classics. **[29 pages]**

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Marvin, C. & Ingle, D. W. 1999. In *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag*. New York: Cambridge University Press. TBA [pages]

MID TERM TAKE HOME EXAM

Week 7. Sacrifice and Devotion (Tues. 4th March/Thurs 6).

No class meeting...but please read!

Shulman, David. 1993. Chapter 1, Introduction, pp. 1-17, and Chapter 2, The Little Devotee according to Cekkilar, pp. 18-47. In *The Hungry God: Hindu Tales of Filicide and Devotion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. **[44 pages]**

Week 8. Sacrifice and Excess (Tues. 11 /Thurs 13)

Bataille, Georges. 1989[1967]. Part Two, Chapter III, Sacrifices and Wars of the Aztecs, pp 45-60, and Chapter IV, The Gift of Rivalry: "Potlatch," pp. 63-77. In *The Accursed Share*, Vol.1. New York: Zone Books. **[29 pages]**

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Bataille, Georges. 1989[1949]. Part One, Chapter III, Sacrifice, The Festival, and the Principles of the Sacred World, pp. 43-61; In *Theory of Religion*, New York: Zone Books. **[18 pages]**

SPRING RECESS FROM MARCH 15 – MARCH 23

Week 9. Magic, Sorcery and Society (Tues. 25/ Thurs 27)

Cannon, Walter B. 1942. '*Voodoo'* Death, pp. 367-373. In *Reader in Comparative Religion. An Anthropological Approach.* Edited by William A. Lessa and Even Z. Vogt. New York: Row, Peterson and Company. **[6 pages]**

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Warner, W. Lloyd. 1958[1937]. Chapter VII, Murngin Magic and Medicine, pp. 183-212 and Chapter VIII, A Sociological Interpretation of Magic, pp. 213-233. In *A Black Civilization*: *A Study of an Australian Tribe*. New York: Harper & Row. **[51 pages]**

Recommended: Mauss, Marcel. 1972[1950]. A General Theory of Magic. London: Routledge; E.E. Evans-Pritchard. 1976. Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Week 10. Body (Tues. April 1 /Thurs April 3)

Leenhardt, Maurice. 1947. "Verbum Mentis" and The Notion of the Body. *In* Do Kamo: Person and Myth in the Melanesian World [*Do Kamo: La personne et le mythe dans le monde mélanésien*], pp. 6-10 and 11-23 **[17 pages]**

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Leenhardt, Maurice. 1947. "The Living and the Dead" *In* Do Kamo: Person and Myth in the Melanesian World, pp. 24-42 **[18 pages]**

Week 11. Justice or Truth? (Tues. 8 / 10th)

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1963. The Sorcerer and his Magic, pp. 167-185. In *Structural Anthropology*. Translated by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf. New York: Basic Books **[18 pages]**

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Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1963. Chapter X, The Effectiveness of Symbols. In *Structural Anthropology*, pp.186-205. Translated by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf. New York: Basic Books **[19 pages]**

Week 12. Witch (Tues. 15/ Thursday 17)

Siegel, James T. 2006. Chapter 1, The Truth of Sorcery, pp. 29-52. In *Naming the Witch*. Stanford: Stanford University Press **[23 pages]**

Recommended: Geschiere, Peter. 1997[1995]. Chapter 1, Introduction: Witchcraft as Political Discourse, pp. 1-25, and Chapter 2, A Full Belly: The Maka and the Djambe, pp. 26-60. In *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

Week 13. Rumors (Tues. 22/Thursday 24)

Bonhomme, Julien. The Sex Thieves: The Anthropology of a Rumor, pp. 1-46.

Chicago: Hau Books **[46 pages]**

Week 14. Moods & Mass (Tues. 29 April/Thurs 1st of May)

Canetti, Elias. 1962[1960]. In *Crowds and Power*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, pp. TBA [pages]

Week 15. Conclusion and Exam (Monday May 4, last class)

TAKE HOME FINAL EXAM