

# **Introduction to the Anthropology of the Magical, Mystical and Unseen**

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Winter 2020

## Course Description

*“The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the disenchantment of the world” – Max Weber*

Egypt is a place where traditional spiritual healing methods that include ‘superstitious’ beliefs and rituals are still popular, in recent years new modalities like energy healing have also become popular and available. However, it’s very common for spiritual and other healing practitioners to be cast as ignorant and the practices as fraudulent. Despite this, today it is common that people are religiously observant, think of themselves as modern and cosmopolitan, and still practice yoga, have tarot readings and seek the help of a crystal healer. In that sense, there’s an extent of hybridization between what is believed to be the mystical and the modern when it comes to spiritual healing in contemporary Egypt. It can be said that this seeming contradiction has come about as a result of the enlightenment project, which had sought to put humans as masters of the world. It was perceived as an act of rationalist liberation that would help them improve their living conditions. The rise of the nation-state led to the colonization of not only policies and laws, but also the bodies and ideas of the colonized communities. Consequently, the enlightenment project resulted in the disenchantment of knowledge and the world became, and still is, a place where myths are viewed as the opposite of modernity.

## **Course Outline:**

### **Part One: The Craft of Anthropology**

#### Session 1 (December 21<sup>st</sup>)

What is Anthropology and how to conduct ethnographic fieldwork

Readings:

- Delaney, C and Kaspin, D. Chapter 1: Disorientation and Orientation in Investigating Culture: An Experiential Introduction to Anthropology. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated. 1-32
- Eriksen, Thomas H. 2010. "Anthropology: Comparison and Context" In Small Places, Large Issues: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology.
- Geertz, Clifford. 2000 [1973] "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in The Interpretation of Culture

#### Session 2 (December 28<sup>th</sup>)

Anthropology of Religion and Magic

Readings:

- Bowie, Fiona (2002) 'Theories and Controversies' (Chapter 1) The Anthropology of Religion. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers (Blackboard)
- Greenwood, S. (2000) Introduction in Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld: An Anthropology

□ Assignment: Fieldnote of something unexplainable that happened to you or someone you know (Due Saturday, January 2<sup>nd</sup>)

Recommended films:

- Living with the invisibles
- The witching Tree
- Seance reflections

### **Part Two: The Mystical and The Modern**

#### Session 3 (January 4<sup>th</sup>)

Rituals and Spirituality

Readings:

- Eriksen, Thomas H. 2010. 'Religion and Ritual' (Chapter 14) Small Places, Large Issues an Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology. 3rd ed. Anthropology, Culture, and Society. New York: Pluto Press.
- Sax, W, Quack, J and Weinhold, J. (2010). The Problem of Ritual Efficacy. Oxford University Press.

#### Session 4 (January 11<sup>th</sup>)

The Disenchantment of the World: The mystical and modern debate

Readings:

- Douglas, M. (2002). Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo. Florence, United Kingdom: Routledge. (pp. 1-7; 95-115)

- Levi-Strauss, C. (1962). The Savage Mind. (1-34)

□ Assignment: Interview assignment about an individuals' perception of rituals (Due Saturday, January 16<sup>th</sup>)

Recommended films:

- Gods and Satans
- The Man Who Made Witchcraft (Pagan Documentary)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M56-6XA3h2M>
- Witches fly there

### **Part Three: New Age and Modern Spiritualism**

Session 5 (January 18<sup>th</sup>)

What does the Future Hold? On Uncertainty

Readings:

- Chapter 17 - Existential uncertainty and religion in The Science of Religion, Spirituality, and Existentialism. 2020. Pages 243-259
- Deirdre Shaw and Jennifer Thomson. 2013. "Consuming Spirituality: The Pleasure of Uncertainty." European Journal of Marketing 47 (3-4): 557-573.

Session 6 (Sunday, January 24<sup>th</sup> - reschedule for Jan 25<sup>th</sup> holiday)

Spiritual and Alternative Healing: Spirituality as a Service.

Readings:

- Rindfleisch, J. (2005). Consuming the Self: New Age Spirituality as "Social Product" in Consumer Society. Consumption Markets and Culture.
- Redden, G. (2016). Revisiting the spiritual supermarket: does the commodification of spirituality necessarily devalue it? Culture and Religion, 17:2, 231-249.

□ Assignment: Reflection on the portrayal of magic in pop culture/social media. (Due and presented with creative project on Monday, February 1<sup>st</sup>)

Recommended films:

- (Un)Well
- Heal

### **Magic, Spirituality, and the Everyday: Presentations of creative projects**

Session 7 (Monday, February 1<sup>st</sup>)

Student presentations (creative project on how spirituality is included in people's everyday)