

## ANTH 1713: Amazonian Religion and Nature

Contact Hours: 45 Credits: 3

Instructor: Tod Swanson

### Course Description

The course examines Amazonian religious life as cultural way of engaging nature as human-like and alive. It thus explores cultural knowledge of water, weather, plant and animal life seeking to uncover underlying assumptions that constitute a systematic, if implicit, religious philosophy of nature. It also teaches students how to ask key questions and to carry out qualitative ethnographic research in the Cultural Anthropology and the Humanities. How do Amazonian people understand their relatedness to a natural world believed to be alive and human-like? How do they understand the hidden social lives of plants and animals. What is believed to cause new species to emerge or to become extinct? How are human emotions related to the seasonal cycle of rains? How is plant and animal ecology believed to serve as a model for understanding human society and vice versa. What aesthetic, emotional or religious practices were developed to create bonds of empathy or communication between human beings and the natural world.

### Learning Outcomes:

At the completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Give a basic description of Andean/Amazonian religious relation to land, plants and animals
- Analyze an Amazonian narratives on plant and animal origins to determine its underlying assumptions
- Articulate how relations to the land mediate relations to family.
- Describe Native thinking about the key emotions and patterns of behavior that hold a group of relatives together with their land or tear them apart.
- Describe Native practices of listening and speaking with the land or responding to the land.
- Articulate how nature works as a pattern for organizing Amazonian social life and conversely, how social life works as a model for understanding nature.
- Carry out simple qualitative research in Cultural Anthropology and the Humanities.
- Understand the aesthetics of Amazonian engagement of other species.
- Articulate how people came into a special relation to the forest and animals as they matured.
- Articulate patterns of similarity that distinguish Native stories of encounters with animals and their world

### Method of Instruction

This course is a field course which teaches students how to elicit and analyze indigenous knowledge of nature. Because Amazonian cultures are oral cultures their knowledge of nature has not been codified in texts but rather in origin stories, art, songs, prohibitions and patterns of speech for addressing nature. It is thus these materials which the course teaches students to analyze.

### Assignments and Grading Procedure

Grades reflect your performance on assignments and adherence to deadlines. Graded assignments will be available within 48 hours of the due date via the Gradebook. 3 tests for a total of 46% (Test 1: 15%; Test 2: 15%; Test 3: 16%). These tests are primarily multiple choice intended to measure comprehension and the ability to apply concepts learned from the assigned videos, readings and lectures.

4 essays of 400 words each that critically examine the readings, videos, or field engagement of indigenous culture. The essays are due by end of day each Friday and should be posted through that weeks forum on the discussion board. (11% each for a total of 44%)

### Bibliography:

Descola, Phillipe. In the Society of Nature: A Native Ecology in Amazonia. Cambridge University Press, 1996 [1986].

Muratorio, Blanca. The Life and Times of Grandfather Alonso: Culture and History in the Upper Amazon. Rutgers University Press, 1991.

Overing, Joanna and Alan Passes. The Anthropology of Love and Anger: The Aesthetics of Conviviality in Native Amazonia, Routledge Press, 2000.

Swanson, Tod. Singing to Estranged Relatives: Quichua Relations to Plants in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Journal of Religion and Culture, Vol 3.1 (2009) 36-65.

## Course Schedule

- June 29:
  - Arrive in Quito
- June 30:
  - Travel to Iyarina
- July 1:
  - 8:00 AM Breakfast
  - 9:00 AM Tour colonial Quito (founded 1535)
  - 12:00 Lunch At Hotel Real Audiencia
  - 1:PM Hike in the high altitude páramo polylepus forest.
  - 6:30 PM Arrive at Yanayacu Cloud forest Station
- July 2:
  - Introduction to the course
  - Swanson Lecture, Distinguishing Features shared across Native Traditions of the Americas
- July 3:
  - The Local Land as Object of Religious Emotion and Action.
  - Readings:
    - Swanson, "Lecture on Mountain of the Condor and Shared Body."
    - Joseph Bastien, "The Mountain Metaphor," from Mountain of the Condor, 37-50.
    - This Peruvian Farmer Grows Over 400 Varieties of Potatoes . This video illustrates what the culture of potato growing in a community like Kaata was like.
    - Paropata: Land of the Potato . This video helps to show the religious and cultural significance of potatoes in a place like Kaata.
    - Planting party in Sarhua. This video shows how the communities celebrated together as they planted their fields.
- July 4:
  - How the Relation to the Land is Mediated by Family Ties
  - Joseph Bastien, "Marriage and the Mountain," from Mountain of the Condor, 115-127.
  - José Maria Arguedas, "Isicha Puytu," from Singing Mountaineers: Songs and Tales of the Quechua People, 156-169.
  - Read Isicha Puytu as the story of a girl who comes from an ayllu like Mt Kaata.
  - Swanson Lecture on Isicha Puytu
- July 5:
  - Free afternoon
- July 6-7

- Free Weekend
- July 8:
  - Origin stories: The transformation of humans into animals and the consequences for Amazonian religious practice.
  - Origin of the Agoutis
  - Origin of the Agouti
  - A man and a woman become wooly monkeys
  - A Man and a Woman Become Woodpeckers
  - Origin of the Hummingbird and the Caracara (Akangau)
- July 9:
  - Origin Stories continued:
  - Bélgica Dagua, "How an unwanted man became the spirit eye tree"
  - Bélgica Dagua, "Origin of the Wooly Monkeys."
  - The Origin of the Moon and the Iluku Bird
  - The Moon's Sister Follows Him to Become the Kingu Constellation This is another version or episode in the story of the moon and his sister. In this version the sister is left behind pregnant with their child. After the the brother become the moon and the sister is left behind she follows him downriver to the east carrying their child. When she reaches the ocean at the mouth of the Amazon she and the child follow the moon into the sky. The child becomes the evening star and the sister become the zig-zag kingu constellation that rises following the moon each evening.
- July 10:
  - "Killa" The Andean Amazonian understanding of fault (evil)
  - Tod Swanson. "Singing to Estranged Relatives: Runa (Quichua) Relations to Plants in the Ecuadorian Amazon." In Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture. Vol 3:1 2009. Pp. 36-65. "
  - "Squirrel Cuckoo: A bird that lies and sometimes tells the truth."
- July 11:
  - Adolescence as process of coming into relation with the land.
  - An Apinaye Man's Testimony
  - Swanson, "Relatives of the Living Forest: The Social Relation to Nature Underlying Ecological Action in Amazonian Kichwa Communities . Please read the whole article but focus your attention on the portion of the paper from page 5 on. In this article I examine how Amazonian Quichua come into a physical relation with the forest spirit owners of the animals.
- July 12:
  - Free afternoon
- July 13-14:
  - Free weekend. No class
- July 15:
  - Travel to Yasuni National Park
- July 16-July 19 Yasuni National Park
- July 20-21
  - Free weekend. No class

- July 22:
  - Religious Emotions in Amazonia: Compassion
  - Swanson Lecture "The Emotions of Compassion and Anger in the articles by Peter Gow, Elvira Belaunde and Elsje Lagrou
  - Peter Gow (2000), "Helplessness – the affective preconditions of Piro social life". In Joanna Overing and Alan Passes eds., *The Anthropology of Love and Anger: The Aesthetics of Conviviality in Native Amazonia*, pp 46-63. Routledge: London.
  - Elsie Lagrou, "Homesickness and the Cashinahua Self: A reflection on the embodied quality of relatedness
  - Swanson interview with Eulodia Dagua on Emotions and the Weather
  - Swanson interview with Eulodia Dagua, "Widowed toucans sing love songs." (YouTube video)
  - Swanson interview with Eulodia Dagua and Pedro Andi, "A Bird the Cries When People Die." (Video)
  - Carmen Andi and E. Dagua, "We Are To Talk to Him Nicely: Amazonian Quichua women harvest bark from a medicinal tree."
  - Vicuña Song in which a girl evokes sympathy for herself by pitying a vicuña
  - The Poor Alcalde: Salasaca Kichwa Story of the Origin of their Annual Fiesta
- July 23:
  - Religious Emotions in Amazonia: Compassion
  - Swanson Lecture "The Emotions of Compassion and Anger in the articles by Peter Gow, Elvira Belaunde and Elsje Lagrou
  - Peter Gow (2000), "Helplessness – the affective preconditions of Piro social life". In Joanna Overing and Alan Passes eds., *The Anthropology of Love and Anger: The Aesthetics of Conviviality in Native Amazonia*, pp 46-63. Routledge: London.
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  - Carmen Andi and E. Dagua, "We Are To Talk to Him Nicely: Amazonian Quichua women harvest bark from a medicinal tree."
  - Vicuña Song in which a girl evokes sympathy for herself by pitying a vicuña
  - The Poor Alcalde: Salasaca Kichwa Story of the Origin of their Annual Fiesta
- July 24:
  - Swanson lecture, The Economic Logic of Shamanism
- July 25:
  - Yawamana Story of the Origin of Ayawaska (animated video)
  - Visit to an Ayawaska Shaman
  - Reading Glenn H. Shephard. *Old and in the way: Jaguar transformation in Matsigenka*
- July 26:
  - Free afternoon

- July 27:
  - Travel to airport

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