

Writing Religions and Cultures: Ethnographic Practice

Religion / Anthropology 699 Fall 2011

Tu 3:30 - 6:15 504 Hall of Languages

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Office hrs.: Th 12:30-1:30 or by appointment

Course description

This seminar explores a range of aims, strategies and genres for writing religion in multiple contexts of culture, history and politics. Because so many aspects of religious experience are ineffable, invisible and inexpressible, to chronicle and analyze such experiences poses particular challenges to academic analysis. Yet anthropologists, sociologists and religionists prolifically produce ethnographies of religion. Particular theoretical positions often inform and inspire ethnographic writings on religion; we attend to theory as a force not only shaping practice, but also evolving from it. A number of authors on this syllabus acknowledge their own identities altered in the field, whether in temporary experiments or permanent transformations. Others retain distance but grapple with its implications for their comprehension. If there is any commonality, it is an insistence on keeping in mind the conditions of knowledge as situated in social, political, economic, historical, hierarchical, colonial, familial circumstances and interpersonal relations.

The syllabus moves through various intersections of visible and invisible realms and powers. Some scholars simply limit description to tangible or documentable elements: ritual paraphernalia and action, oral and written texts, social and institutional networks, economic infrastructure, recorded historical developments and so forth. Others attempt to evoke just those aspects of human experience that defy words or reason – whether faith and conviction or the effective agency of spirits and sorcerers. Issues permeating the semester's readings include embodiment, emotion, ethics, identity, knowledge, power and well-being, as well as the nature of religious communication. This edition of 699 is particularly concerned with readability: how to transmit depth and complexity in lucid, flowing, engaging, accessible prose.

Some seminar sessions are designated "workshop" sessions; we will read Syracuse faculty and advanced graduate student writings and have a chance to discuss *with the authors* both the intimate engagements of fieldwork, and the process by which – after the fact -- a text emerges. In addition, we will have two guests (Anand Pandian, Anthropology, Johns Hopkins University and Corinne Dempsey, Religious Studies, Nazareth College) to discuss one of their recent publications with us.

Readings

Seven books containing required readings should be available at the University Bookstore. They have also been placed on 1-day reserve in Bird. In addition, a number of articles and book sections will be accessible either through Blackboard course reserves or Blackboard course documents. On the syllabus these appear with the author's last name, an abbreviated title, and PDF in parentheses.

Note our course site is

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Books

- Bender, Courtney. 2003. *Heaven's Kitchen: Living Religion at God's Love We Deliver*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Borneman, John and Abedallah Hammoudi, eds. 2009. *Being There: The Fieldwork Encounter and the Making of Truth*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Clark-Deces, Isabelle. 2008. *The Encounter Never Ends: A Return to the Field of Tamil Rituals*. State University of New York Press.
- Gustafsson, Mai Lan. 2009. *War and Shadows: The Haunting of Vietnam*. Cornell University Press.
- Jackson, Michael. 2011. *Life Within Limits: Well Being in a World of Want*. Duke University Press.
- Pandian, Anand. 2009. *Crooked stalks : Cultivating virtue in South India*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Turner, Edith 1992 *Experiencing Ritual: A New Interpretation of African Healing*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

suggested summer / escape reading:

Fieldwork: A Novel by Mischa Berlinski (Picador). This engrossing and enjoyable work of fiction raises a number of issues important to the course including the fuzzy boundary between fiction and ethnography and the perils of incorporation into other cultural and religious worlds. It attempts to penetrate the minds not only of a dedicated anthropologist but of dedicated Christian missionaries as well as describing the rituals of an imaginary Thai hill tribe and poking fun at academic trends. This is not required! But it would be lovely if some of us were ready to discuss this book at our first meeting. It can also serve as justifiable escape reading during the semester.

Articles

- Atay, Tayfun. 2008. "Arriving in Nowhere Land: Studying an Islamic Sufi Order in London," in *Taking Sides: Ethics, Politics and Fieldwork in Anthropology*, edited by Heidi Armbruster and Anna Laerke, 45-64. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Bornstein, Erika. 2007. Harmonic Dissonance: Reflections on Dwelling in the Field. *Ethnos* 72(4): 483-508.
- Burdick, John. 2009. The Singing Voice and Racial Politics on the Brazilian Evangelical Music Scene. *Revista de Música Latinoamericana* 30 (1): 25-55.
- Cook, Joanna. 2010. "Ascetic Practice and Participant Observation, or, the Gift of Doubt in Field Experience," in *Emotions in the Field: The Psychology and Anthropology of Fieldwork Experience*, edited by James Davies and Dimitrina Spencer, 239-265. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Csordas, Thomas J. 2007. "Transmutation of Sensibilities: Empathy, Intuition, Revelation" in McLean, Athena, and Annette Leibing (Eds.), *The Shadow Side of Fieldwork: Exploring the Blurred Borders between Ethnography and Life*, edited by Athena McLean and Annette Leibing, 106-116. Malden MA: Blackwell.
- Dempsey, Corinne G. 2012 (in press). "Postscript: Unanticipated Adventures in Ritualized Ethnography," from *Bringing the Sacred Down to Earth: Adventures in Comparative Religion*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Engelke, Matthew. 2004. "'The Endless Conversation': Fieldwork, Writing, and the Marriage of Victor and Edith Turner," in *Significant Others: Interpersonal and Professional Commitments in Anthropology, History of Anthropology*, edited by Richard. Handler, 6-50. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

- Fisher, Gareth. 2010. Fieldwork on East Asian Buddhism: Toward a Person-Centered Approach. *Fieldwork in Religion* 5(2).
- Gardner, Katy. 1999. "Location and Relocation: Home, 'the Field' and Anthropological Ethics (Sylhet, Bangladesh)," in *Being There: Fieldwork in Anthropology*, edited by C.W. Watson, 49-73. London: Pluto Press.
- Gold, Ann Grodzins. 2001. Shared Blessings as Ethnographic Practice. *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 13(1):34-50.
- Gold, Ann Grodzins. 2011. "Sweetness and Light: the bright side of pluralism in a Rajasthan town." Unpublished conference paper.
- Grindal, Bruce T., and Frank A. Salamone (Eds.). 2006. *Bridges to Humanity: Narratives on Fieldwork and Friendship*. Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland (selected chapters by Narayan, McHugh, and Gottlieb & Graham).
- Hall, Airen. 2011. "Ancestors of Blood and Spirit: The Experience of Encountering the Dead" from *Experiencing Zion: Contemporary Pilgrimage in the Latter-day Saint Tradition* (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Religion, Syracuse).
- Harvey, Graham. 2004. "Performing and Constructing Research as Guesthood in the Study of Religions," in *Anthropologists in the Field*, edited by Lynne Hume and Jane Mulcock, 168-182. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Klepinger-Mathew, Laurah. 2011. "Yoga in our Blood, Yoga in our Land: Making Globalized Yoga Indian." Paper to be presented at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, November 2011.
- Lee, Jo and Tim Ingold. 2006. "Fieldwork on Foot: Perceiving, Routing, Socializing," in *Locating the Field: Space, Place and Context in Anthropology*, edited by Simon Coleman and Peter Collins, 67-86. Oxford UK: Berg.
- Matsutake Worlds Research Group. 2009. A new form of collaboration in cultural anthropology: Matsutake worlds. *American Ethnologist* 36:380-403.
- Narayan, Kirin. 2002. "The God of Doorways," in *Mementos, Artifacts, and Hallucinations from the Ethnographer's Tent*, edited by Ron Emoff and David Henderson, 61-79. New York: Routledge.
- Okely, Judith. 2010. "Fieldwork as Free Association and Free Passage," in *Ethnographic Practice in the Present*, edited by Marit Melhuus, Jon P. Mitchell, and Helena Wulff, 28-41. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Orsi, Robert A. 2006. "Have you ever prayed to Saint Jude?" Reflections on Fieldwork in Catholic Chicago," from *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*, 146-176. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 2007. "Ire in Ireland," in *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*, edited by Antonius C.G.M. Robben and Jeffrey A. Sluka, 202-215. Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Shulman, Angela Rudert. 2011. "Shakti's New Voice: A Female Guru" from *All-in-one Guru* (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Religion, Syracuse).
- Turner, Victor. 1968. "A Performance of Ihamba Analysed," from *The Drums of Affliction: A Study of Religious Processes among the Ndembu of Zambia*, 156-197. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Wadley, Susan S. 2000. From Sacred Cow Dung to Cow "Shit": Globalization and Local Religious Practices in Rural North India. *Journal of the Japanese Association for South Asian Studies* 12:1-28.
- Wilson, Nicole. 2011. Selected excerpt from *Negotiating Axes of Identity in Urban South India: The Sri Mangala Vinayagar Temple Group* (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Religion, Syracuse).

Responsibilities

seminar process All participants should be committed to faithful attendance and diligent reading of all required materials. Responsibility for commenting and raising questions on each week's syllabus readings, and posting your "talking points" on blackboard, is shared by all seminar members. In class you will have a chance to recapitulate your thoughts as discussion starters. *Posts must be submitted 24 hours before class meets -- by 3 pm on Mondays.*

writing Every student will pursue a research topic related to the course content, but independently conceived, and produce a substantial paper. This may be a critical study via secondary sources of any issue related to the ethnography of religion. Or it may involve limited fieldwork with a locally accessible religious group (broadly defined). The project will build, under the instructor's supervision, through stages of abstract (week 6), outline or preliminary draft with bibliography (week 10), oral presentation (weeks 10-15), and final product: about 20 pages due at the end of the semester.

speaking Beyond regular participation raising points and responding in our weekly conversations, each seminar member will give one coherent and succinct (about 10-minute) oral presentation – based on their individual writing before it is complete; this will allow you to discuss your ideas and benefit from group feedback.

<u>Week/Date</u>	<u>Topic/Readings</u>
	<i>introductory frameworks and issues (2 weeks)</i>
1 Tu 8/30	organization, introductions, opening questions, fictions of fieldwork
2 Tu 9/6	in defense of "being there" Borneman and Hammoudi, all
	<i>rituals revisited (2 weeks)</i>
3 Tu 9/13	certainties: writing visibility Turner, E. <i>Experiencing Ritual</i> (all); Turner, V. "A Performance of Ihamba Analysed" (PDF) Recommended: Engelke, "Endless Conversation . . ." (PDF)
4 Tu 9/20	doubts: rethinking fieldwork experience, faraway and close to home Clark-Deces, <i>Encounter Never Ends</i> (all); Orsi, "Have you ever prayed . . ." (PDF) •• <i>guidelines for research project distributed</i> ••
	<i>what makes good ethnographies? arts (and crafts) of description, reflection, interpretation (6 weeks)</i>
5 Tu 9/27	living religion in a cosmopolitan center Bender, <i>Heaven's Kitchen</i> (all)

6 Tu 10/4 *workshop one: Burdick, Gold, Wadley*
Burdick, Singing Voice; Gold, Sweetness and Light; Wadley, Sacred Cow
Dung (PDFs)
•• abstracts due for research projects ••

7 Tu 10/11 **NO CLASS ON TUESDAY THIS WEEK because:**

SPECIAL EVENT: On WEDNESDAY October 12 at 6 pm, in 441 HL: Corinne Dempsey, (Religious Studies, Nazareth College), SU Religion PhD alum, will join us for a discussion of a chapter from her latest book. Pizza will be served and we will welcome non-class members -- but only if they read the chapter: Dempsey, "Ritualized Ethnography" (PDF).
Please try to organize your schedules in order to attend.

8 Tu 10/18 Haunting, in Viet Nam
Gustafsson, *War and Shadows* (all)

9 Tu 10/25 Toiling, and ethical selfhood, in South India
Pandian, *Crooked Stalks* (all)
Guest: Anand Pandian (Anthropology, JHU) will join our seminar and respond to your questions

Note: Professor Pandian is also presenting a South Asia seminar this same day at 12:30 pm; details TBA

•student presentations will be slotted into weeks 10-15 •

10 Tu 11/1 Returning, to Sierra Leone
Jackson, *Life Within Limits* (all)
• outlines / preliminary drafts due in class •

thinking like a mushroom and other experiments in sustainable ethnographic practices (4 weeks)

11 Tu 11/8 Recent reflections on method, identity and knowledge
Atay, "Nowhere Land"; Fisher, "Person-Centered Approach"; Harvey, "Research as Guesthood"; Lee and Ingold, "Fieldwork on Foot"; Matsutake Worlds, "New Form of Collaboration"; Okely, "Fieldwork as Free Association" (PDFs)

12 T 11/15 *workshop two: Hall, Klepinger-Mathew, Shulman*
Klepinger-Mathew, "Yoga in Our Blood"; Shulman, "Shakti's New Voice"; Hall, "Ancestors of Blood and Spirit" (PDFs)

13 ***THANKSGIVING BREAK!***

14 Tu 11/29 Recent reflections on participation, friendship, ethics, aftermaths
Bornstein, "Harmonic Dissonance"; Cook, "Ascetic Practice"; Gardner, "Location and Relocation"; Gold, "Shared Blessings"; Scheper-Hughes, "Ire in Ireland"; Grindal and Salamone, *Bridges to Humanity* (3 selections) (PDFs)

15 Tu 12/6 *workshop three*: Nicole Wilson (3:30-4:15)
plus wrapping up
Wilson, *Negotiating Axes of Identity* (selected excerpt); Narayan, "God of Doorways" (PDFs)

•• Final papers will be due at noon on Thursday 15 December ••