

## **The SBL/AAR Study of Religion as an Analytical Discipline Workshop 2012**

### **The Analytical Handling of Norms and Values in the Study of Religion**

**Friday, November 16, 2:00 -6:00 pm, McCormick Place East-353A**

Analysis of academic norms for the study of religion focuses on construction of a secondary discourse that accomplishes the following: (a) treats all religious phenomena as primary sources, i.e. the object of study; (b) adheres to common academic practices in the humanities and social sciences, as appropriate for the research question under investigation; and (c) incorporates self-critical reflection on the problematic of scholarly, secondary discourse vis-a-vis the primary, intramural discourse of the people and practices studied. These three goals are necessary to adequately formulate the study of religion as a discipline of scholarship in alignment with the Humanities, Social Sciences and Sciences.

The readings and discussion questions for each segment of the SORAAAD workshop where designated, will be the basis for discussion during each segment of the workshop.

Registration (\$25) includes five sessions and an afternoon tea. Thanks to Equinox Publishing we have limited funds for subsidies for graduate students and adjunct instructors, to request a subsidy please contact [ipsita.chatterjea@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:ipsita.chatterjea@vanderbilt.edu).

**Introductions (2:00 -2:05)**

#### **Issue One: The Problem of “Genuine Religion” and Dominant Normative Claims**

(2:05-2:40 p.m.)

We work in a climate where analytical discussion has been shut down by the incapacity of some in our field to deal with behavior that does not fit somebody’s notion of orthodox, or are uncomfortable with the observed behavior in question. We routinely have to cope with attempts to homogenize or ignore distinctions in service of an apologetic agenda. How do we articulate an academic agenda for work that has no interest in merely documenting and reinforcing existing power structures?

**Speaker:** Sean McCloud and Katja Rakow

Readings for Sean McCloud and Katja Rakow's Segment.

1) JZ Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious." In Mark C. Taylor's *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*

2) Meredith McGuire, "Contested Meanings and Definitional Boundaries: Historicizing the Sociology of Religion." Chapter 2, in *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. Oxford University Press, 2008

**Issue Two: Analytical Research in the Eye of a Normative Claims Storm (2:45 -3:25 p.m.)**

Negotiating contestations over norms and values are a daily part of life for scholarship on historically marginalized populations: Race, GLTBQ studies, Sexuality, Class, Disability, or religious practices deemed marginal. What special pitfalls threaten your research when you, the people you study, or the specific issue you monitor is a hot button for any sort of academic or media debate about norms and values? Or how do you research selectively or periodically demonized populations? How do you talk about your findings and navigate the sometimes negative reception?

**Speakers:** Randall Styers and Monica Miller

Questions and Readings for Monica Miller's Segment.

(1) What is African American religion? According to scholar of religion Anthony B. Pinn, the study of African-American religion has concerned itself with two primary questions "what is black about black religion?" and "what is religious about black religion?" Historically, these queries speak to the inextricable link between identity and religion in the study of African American religion. Given such confluence, heuristics such as "the black experience" and guiding themes related to oppression and historical fixity under white supremacy have given shape to formative and emerging scholarship. As such, conflating "lived experience" with a notion of religion as "felt and lived" often means thin attention to questions of theory and method in the study of African American religion. How might we redescribe African American religion as something that takes serious historical context and discourse? What role should identity play in racialized religious articulations? How should the 'problem of history' be dealt with in this area of thought? Monica A. Coleman's "Must I Be Womanist?" highlights the perils and challenges of these quagmires from the area of womanist theology. As a case study, how might we make use of Coleman's concern raised in this essay to rethink the form, content, and study of African American religion as it relates to both theory and method?

<http://monicaacoleman.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Must-I-Be-Womanist-Entire.pdf>

(2) How do we study African American Religion? The field of African American religion has been primarily studied through historical, theological, and sociological approaches. However, I suggest that the theological approach has dominated this area of thought more often than not under a christian rubric that overly focuses on the black church. Beyond our titillation with the black church as the main organizing center of black thought and life, the (christian) theological hegemony of African American religion keeps questions of life, death, the prophetic, suffering, pain, evil, and the self lodged within and arrested to an over-glorified and nostalgic understanding of what African American religion is. Using Eddie Glaude's 2010 Huffington Post essay "The Black Church is Dead" as a case study and in light of question #1, how might we give thought to how the academic study of African American religion ought to be studied in ways that go beyond static identity constructions, limiting theological suppositions, and little attention to the pressing needs of both theory and method.

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eddie-glaude-jr-phd/the-black-church-is-dead\\_b\\_473815.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eddie-glaude-jr-phd/the-black-church-is-dead_b_473815.html)

**Afternoon Tea** (3:25 - 4:10 p.m.)

Smoked Salmon with Cream Cheese, Cucumber with Watercress and Egg Salad Tea Sandwiches accompanied by Cookies, Scones, Whipped Butter, Assorted Jams and Hot Tea

**Issue Three: Human Rights and Researcher Responsibilities toward Threatened or Minority Populations** (4:10 - 4:45 p.m.)

Dealing with humans is different from dealing with texts, dead religious traditions, and people who do not talk back. How can scholars new to fieldwork deal with international governments, human rights organizations, and confront the US legal system? Critically, what are the researcher's role and ethical obligations, vis-à-vis "the people"? There is an ethical imperative to do no harm in the conduct of field research on minority religious traditions and traditions being persecuted by the government or larger population groups. How does publishing or the timing of publication effect individuals, communities and informants that welcomed a researcher with the understanding that such disclosures are for your ears or eyes only and that serious harm could ensue from the disclosure of esoteric knowledge. This is increasingly important as the majority of states are now controlled by people who have little understanding of or concern for indigenous religious rights.

**Speakers:** Robert Baum and Jorunn Buckley

**Issue Four: Falsifiability, Objectivity, Method, Theory and Norms (4:50 - 5:15 p.m.)**

How do we articulate our self-identification as Social Scientists, or critically engaged Humanities scholars always seeking theoretical challenges to methodologically derived findings? Last year, the point was raised that the Study of Religion is a modernist enterprise with “objectivity” as its goal; we need to talk about how the term is used in discussions about analysis. Even if we cannot have the sort of “Objectivity” with a capital “O” desired by some modern philosophers, does it necessarily follow that all claims to knowledge and modes of data acquisition are on the same level?

**Speakers:** Ipsita Chatterjea and Merinda Simmons

Readings for Merinda Simmons's segment

1) Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison. "The Image of Objectivity." *Representations* 40 (1992): 81-128. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/36401183/Daston-Galison-the-Image-of-Objectivity>

2) Peter Dear. "From Truth to Disinterestedness in the Seventeenth Century." *Social Studies of Science* 22.4 (Nov., 1992): 619-631.

<http://andler.dec.ens.fr/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/DearLight1.pdf>

3) Lorraine Daston. "Objectivity and the Escape from Perspective." *Social Studies of Science* 22.4

Readings for Ipsita Chatterjea's segment

1) Hans G. Kippenberg, *Violence as Worship: Religious Wars in the Age of Globalization*, "Introduction: Violence as Communal Religious Action" p.1-19

2) David Frankfurter, "The Satanic Ritual Abuse Panic as Religious-Studies Data" *Numen*, 2003, Vol. 50 p. 108-117

3) Bruce Lincoln *Gods and Demons, Priests and Scholars, Chapter "Anomaly Science and Religion"* p. 43-52

**Issue Five: A Research Ethics Policy in the Analytical Study of Religion (5:20-5:40 p.m.)**

Last year, Jens Kreinath (Wichita State University) observed that neither the AAR nor the SBL have a code of research ethics akin to AAA, APSA or ASA.

Premise for Debate: After discussing or affirming our institutional situation, should we recommend that researchers all the more explicitly pick the AAA, ASA or APSA standard and be explicit about the policy or code of conduct adopted and the integration of these concerns in our research?

The Ethics and Code of Conduct statements for the ASA, AAA, APSA, British Association for the Study of Religions and Oral History Association will be referenced for this discussion and are posted at: <https://sites.google.com/site/religiondisciplineworkshop/discussion>

**Business Meeting (5:40-6:00)**

**Presiding:** Randy Reed