

Religious Worlds of New York
Religion W4620

Spring 2016 Monday 2:10-4:00 80 Claremont – Room 201

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Office Hours Tuesdays 4:15-6 and Wednesdays 2-4 and by appointment
 by appointment

Aims and outcomes

This seminar has a set of interrelated, but in some ways rather different, goals. As follows:

- 1) Observing religion. Much work in the Religion Departments at Barnard and Columbia is text-based. We will read in this course too, but a major objective here is to “read experience.” We hope to develop the capability to observe religion as lived.
- 2) New York religion. We expect to learn something of the complex texture of religious life in New York City. We will accomplish this objective through readings and projects structured into the syllabus and through sustained exposure to projects of students’ own devising.
- 3) Urban/metropolitan religion. The argument is sometimes made that religion in dense urban spaces is characteristically very different from religion as it appears elsewhere. New York provides numerous ways to explore that idea, insofar as it encompasses a variety of ethnic and immigrant groups and individuals; generates new, complex, and hybrid forms of cultural life that are less possible in smaller populations; and is in places unusually “virtual” and transnational in its sense of itself.
- 4) Listening, observing, writing, speaking. We will investigate and practice the several aspects of the ethnographic process: close attention (to others and ourselves), jotting and note taking, and report writing. We will also provide feedback—at two stages—on the writing of a seminar paper.

Texts

The following texts are available for purchase at BookCulture and on reserve at Butler. Additional readings for the seminar will be posted on Courseworks.

Zain Abdullah, *Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola, A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. 3rd edition, Foreword by Claudine Michel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011 [originally 1991]).

Courtney Bender, *Heaven’s Kitchen: Living Religion at God’s Love We Deliver* (Chicago: University of

- Chicago Press, 2003).
- Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem*. 3rd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010 [originally 1985]).
- Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
- Robert Orsi, ed., *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

Seminar requirements

- Attendance and participation in class, including a class presentation
- Seminar paper
- Field work as described below

Fieldwork

Mapping the religious landscape: With partners, you will canvass an area of Morningside Heights for public displays of religion. This project will introduce you to the variety of ways that religion is manifest throughout daily life in the city, and (with any luck) expand your vision of religious life in New York. *Assignment: a visual map and a short written analysis.*

Initial religious investigation: A one-time visit to a Hindu temple (with the class in most cases). You will write field notes and a short field report based on your visit. Then you will read and reflect on the others' reports, generating reflections on the differences or similarities in field reports of the same events. This project will give you some excellent experience in the field.

Assignment: (a) Field notes (no page limit) and (b) written critique of the process (500-700 words).

"In-depth" religious encounter: You will select a religious community or site to visit individually on an ongoing basis throughout the term. Fieldwork in this community will be ongoing and should commence early in the term, and you should be able to make at a minimum four visits, ideally more. Your visits to this site or community and the field notes that you write will form the backbone of your seminar paper.

Assignment: Seminar paper (10-15 pages).

Grading and fine print

- Class participation and presentation: 30%
- Hinduism project (all components): 20%
- Seminar paper: 50%

Unless otherwise noted, all assignments are due at 5 p.m. Sunday afternoon, the day before class. As assignments will often form the basis of class discussion, we will expect that you will read at least half of your peers' postings prior to class. Late work will be accepted but will receive a lower grade.

Your own work

In this as in every other class you take, both in papers and on exams, it is expected that the work you submit will be your own. Please be careful to attribute to others thoughts that were originally theirs. There is no shame in being dependent on the work of others. We all are, and it is an honor, but you absolutely must cite your sources. On the other hand—perhaps by the same token—it is important to speak your own mind. We are interested both in your own thoughts and in the way you have assimilated the thoughts of others, and expect you to indicate the difference between one and the other. Plagiarized work will put you in danger of failing the course.

The following links are relevant:

<https://firstyear.barnard.edu/plagiarism/plagiarism>

<https://barnard.edu/dos/honorcode>

<https://www.college.columbia.edu/honorcode>

<https://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/academicintegrity>.

Please contact one of the instructors if any question arises in your mind.

COURSE SYLLABUS

January 25: Introductions

Readings (available in advance on Courseworks):

Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City" in *The Practice of Everyday Life*

Teju Cole, *Open City*, excerpt

February 1: Encounters

Assignment:

Mapping project

Readings:

Robert Orsi, "Crossing the City Line," (introduction to *Gods of the City*)

Martin Marty, "Religion," in Kenneth Jackson, ed., *Encyclopedia of New York*,

William H. Whyte, "The Sensory Street" in *City*

February 8: Field Work – Time, Space, Ethnographer

Readings:

Wolcott, *The Art of Fieldwork*, chapter 5

Emerson, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, chapters 1-3

Human Subjects Protection Training Course. Please follow the instructions and take the course on line:

http://www.columbia.edu/cu/compliance/docs/human_subjects_research/IRB_Review/

February 15: Hinduism in Queens—transnational religion in New York

Readings:

Joanne Waghorne, "The Hindu Gods in a Split-Level World: The Sri Siva-Visnu Temple in Suburban Washington, D.C.," in *Gods of the City*

J. S. Hawley, "Global Hinduism in Gotham"

R. Scott Hanson, *City of Gods: Religious Freedom, Immigration, and Pluralism in Flushing, Queens — New York City, 1645-2001* (New York: Fordham University Press, forthcoming), Chapter 3, pp. 63-106

Explore the temple website: <http://www.nyganeshtemple.org>.

February 21: Class visits to the Ganesha temple on Bowne Street, Flushing, Queens

Our primary focus will be on the venerable (1977) Ganesha Temple in Flushing, more formally known as the Sri Maha Vallabha Ganapati Devasthanam or alternately as the Hindu Temple Society of North America.

Main Group: On Sunday, February 21, we will join in the most heavily attended celebration in a normal week, focusing on the *abbisheka* of the deity Ganesha, beginning at 11:00 a.m. Plan to arrive at the temple at 10:30 a.m. for an opportunity to visit other spaces within the temple complex before the service begins. You'll need to board the #1 train—for connections to the #7 at Times Square—at 9:15. Therefore, if you'd like to travel with the group, gather at the Barnard gate (Broadway and 117th) at 9:00 a.m. We're sorry for this: subway service on Sundays is slow. Travel to the last stop—Main Street, Flushing—and walk to the temple from there (ca. 20-25 minutes) or take the Q27 bus. Google directions at:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=new+york+ganesha+temple&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8>.

If that's impossible: We suggest the alternate time of Friday the 19th, departing at 5:30 so as to arrive at the temple at 6:30 or so, in preparation for the *abbisheka* of the goddess Mahalakshmi at 7:15. Or Saturday morning the 18th, at the same times posted for Sunday the 21st.

February 22: The Ganesha temple, continued

Assignment: Fieldnotes and field report from Bowne Street, due on the Courseworks Bulletin Board by 6 a.m. 2/22.

No new readings. But...

February 26 (Friday): Critical reflection

Following up on our discussion on the 22nd, please record a set of critical reflections on your temple field notes—cognitive processes, foci and themes, note-taking and writing strategies, perhaps contrasts with others', etc. These should be short—some 500-700 words—and double-spaced.

February 29: Fieldwork discussions

Readings:

Emerson, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* chapters 4-5

Robert Orsi, "Have You Ever Prayed to St. Jude?"

Gary Alan Fine, "Ten Lies of Ethnography"

March 7: Congregation and community: adaptations to the American urban context

Assignment: Field notes, analytical notes and "theme." Please post to Courseworks: Discussion Board.

Readings:

Jack Kugelmass. "Moses of the South Bronx" in *Gods of the City*.

Kenneth Guest, "Liminal Youth among Fuzhou Chinese Undocumented Workers"

Elta Smith and Courtney Bender, "The Creation of Urban Niche Religion: South Asian Taxi Drivers in New York City"

March 14: SPRING VACATION

March 21: Religion in Unexpected Places

Readings:

Joseph Sciorra, "We Go Where the Italians Live: Religious Processions as Ethnic and Territorial Markers in a Multi-Ethnic Brooklyn Neighborhood" in *Gods of the City*

Henry Goldschmidt, "The Voices of Jacob on the Streets of Brooklyn"

Edward R. Gray and Scott L. Thumma, "The Gospel Hour: Liminality, Identity and Religion in a Gay Bar"

March 28: Reading New York's Religious Worlds I

Reading:

Courtney Bender, *Heaven's Kitchen: Living Religion at God's Love We Deliver*

April 1: FRIDAY: Field notes and analytical writing due.

Please post on Courseworks: Discussion Board by midnight.

April 4: Reading New York's Religious Worlds II

Reading:

Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem*

Elizabeth McAlister, "The Madonna of 115 St. Revisited: Vodou and Haitian Catholicism in the Age of Transnationalism"

April 11: Reading New York's Religious Worlds III

Reading:

Karen Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*

April 18: Reading New York's Religious Worlds IV

Reading:

Zain Abdullah: *Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem*

April 25: Class presentations-I

Assignment: Seminar papers in draft.

Please post on Courseworks: Discussion Board by 5 p.m. on Sunday, April 24.

May 2: Class presentations-II

May 2: MONDAY EVENING: Class presentations-III

Grand finale. We will meet at Professor Hawley's apartment, 380 Riverside Drive 3H (entrance on 110th Street), 7-9 p.m. The home number is 212-749-9882, should you need it.

May 9: Final papers due.

Please post on Courseworks: Discussion Board by midnight.

